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# VLAK

CONTEMPORARY POETICS & THE ARTS

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EDMUND BERRIGAN

DAVID VICHNAR

OLGA PEKOVÁ

STEVEN J. FOWLER

ALI ALIZADEH

JANE LEWTY

STEPHEN MOONEY

JEROEN NIEUWLAND

EWELINA CHIU

publisher

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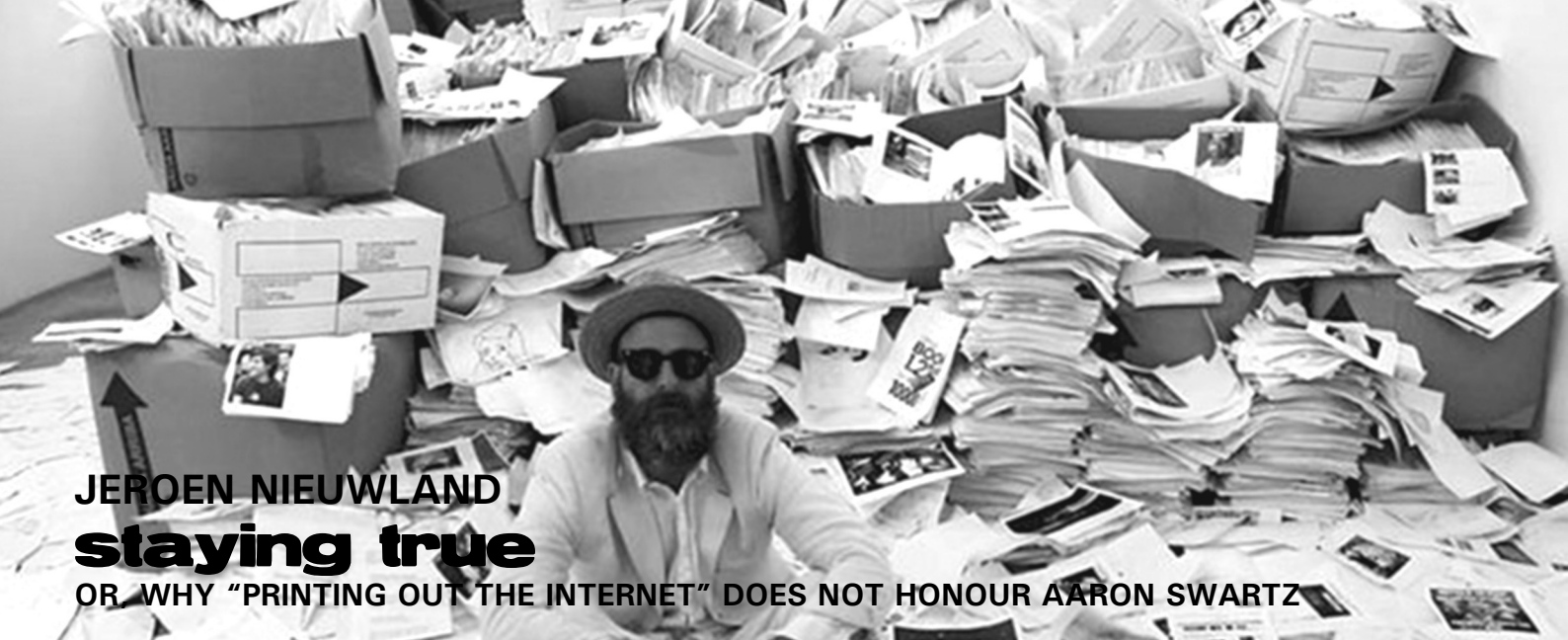
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VISIT THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY  
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## JEROEN NIEUWLAND **staying true**

OR WHY "PRINTING OUT THE INTERNET" DOES NOT HONOUR AARON SWARTZ

*My body is so crap at staying true*

(singer-songwriter David Thomas Broughton)

Aaron Swartz knew and experienced the difficulty of staying true to one's body; he suffered from suicidal depression, extreme social anxieties, and ulcerative colitis (a serious type of inflammatory bowel disease). He is also routinely described as a genius, prodigy, hero; three very laden and oft-overused, or misused words. However, for Aaron Swartz they ring true; purely in the very strict sense of their literal, etymological meanings, not – to paraphrase from Glenn Greenwald's article "The inspiring heroism of Aaron Swartz" – "to whitewash his life or beatify him upon death."<sup>1</sup>

Aaron lived with great love, courage, passion; created and developed fundamental parts of today's internet; fought to defend ideals of open access, availability of intellectual property and cultural heritage; thought ecologically, in terms of open connectivity between different spheres of people and environment. Perhaps he was too true (to the world outside), or not true enough (to his own body); either way, in the end, which should never already have been the end, and to our eternal loss, his body broke. He leaves us with the

injunction to try as hard as we can to stay true; even though few of us will meet the standards Aaron set for himself.

"You literally ought to be asking yourself all the time what is the most important thing in the world I could be working on right now, and if you are not working on that why aren't you?"<sup>2</sup> is how Taren Stinebrickner-Kauffman, Aaron's partner, describes him. Says another friend, "I've heard a lot of people talk about Aaron's impossibly high standards and youthful enthusiasm and naïve brilliance... I can't help but think that the whole point of people like Aaron is to show us how low and base and hidebound our expectations are."<sup>3</sup>

Some examples of his precociousness; at 13 he helped developed RSS (a web feed service and integral part of the internet), around the same time he helped Larry Lessig develop Creative Commons (personalized, flexible Copyright), later he co-created Reddit, was the driving force behind DemandProgress, the successful anti-SOPA campaign), and already at 13, he was

<sup>1</sup> Glenn Greenwald, "The Inspiring Heroism of Aaron Swartz," *The Guardian*, January 12, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> "Aaron Swartz: The Documentary – Teaser," <http://is.gd/hNc7qc>

<sup>3</sup> Wesley Yang, "The Life and Afterlife of Aaron Swartz," *The New Yorker*, <http://is.gd/vX1Bn2>

introduced Tim Berners-Lee (usually known as “the inventor of the internet”), who upon Aaron’s death wrote, “Aaron dead. World wanderers, we have lost a wise elder. Hackers for right, we are one down. Parents all, we have lost a child. Let us weep.”

Aaron was also a hacker, activist, and fiercely independent body. Aaron’s activism, singular mind, and unpredictable, yet highly specific and effective actions and campaigns, were probably part of the reason why the FBI seemed to want to make an example of him. They went after him hard when he was caught plugging his laptop directly into server at the MIT campus and downloading 3 million documents from the academic database JSTOR. Initial charges were for 35, then 50 years; but later plea bargains were offered for 6 months and even as low as 2 months. Much discussion has been had online and elsewhere about these charges, whether or not this was a case of prosecutorial overreach, and whether or not the over-zealous prosecution (another young hacker in an unrelated case led by the same prosecutor, also committed suicide<sup>4</sup>), is what directly or indirectly led Aaron to take his own life, hanging himself on January 11, 2013. Those discussions are only tangentially related to the questions I want to ask; namely, what does it mean to stay true? To one’s own body; and to someone after death? What I want to say, is that this is impossible to say, until after the fact. What I want to suggest, is that Kenneth Goldsmith’s dedication of his project to “Printing Out The Internet” (POTI), is certainly one way *not* to be true to Aaron Swartz; *not* to honour the true memory of Aaron Swartz.

## AFFECTIVE ENTANGLEMENTS

Kenneth Goldsmith: sculptor turned conceptual poet; hoarder of language; former radio presenter; chansonnier of French Continental theory; charming polemicist; founder and driving force of UBU, renowned archive of experimental and avant-garde art and music. At first sight, comparing Goldsmith and Swartz seems pretty antonymic. Yet, apart from a common cause of freedom of information, and cultural heritage, the two share several personality traits, but take them in very

4 Stephen Haymann, “Aaron Swartz prosecutor ‘drove another hacker to suicide in 2008,’” *Spotlight on Corruption*, <http://is.gd/9R9RQC>

different directions.

But of what interest is either of their personalities? And why mention them together in the first place? The specific occasion for an examination of some of these uncertain bonds between the poet and hacker, is Goldsmith’s dedication to Aaron Swartz of his ongoing poem / project “Printing Out the Internet” (POTI). Their persons and personalities are of interest to the extent that these traits are integral to their respective projects. Their work has become retroactively entwined since Goldsmith dedicated POTI to the memory of Swartz. Reflections below on some of the affective entanglements between the two, lead to the conclusion that Goldsmith’s dedication to Swartz exists in name, on the POTI Tumblr and in dozens of articles that have reported on the project since its announcement a couple of months ago; however, Goldsmith’s gesture has no real, affective, forceful relation to the true memory of Aaron Swartz.

Before tracing some of these affective entanglements an important distinction should be clarified between affect and emotion. As Brian Massumi shows beautifully in his writing, affect includes a body’s full force in the world, of which emotion is only a small part. “Emotion is a very partial expression of affect... no one emotional state can encompass all the depth and breadth of our experiencing of experiencing.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is not so much the persons and personalities of Goldsmith and Swartz that are of interest here, but the way their affect is entangled with and fundamentally informs their work. Most personal traits are (generally speaking) neutral. Kenny’s seductive polemics, or Aaron’s emotional anxieties can both be either productive or corrosive, depending on the situation. Just as wind always needs some channel through which to be experienced, an emotion acquires meaning only in a particular context of expression or reflection.

This is important to emphasize here because – while the present question is how Goldsmith and Swartz are affectively bound up with their work – affect is of course closely related, and easily confused with emotional states. All of which is just another way of saying, this piece is emphatically *not* intended as “Kenny Bashing” (which Sina Queryas recently wrote

5 “An Interview with Brian Massumi,” <http://is.gd/q2FH0r>



on her public Facebook update, is so popular these days), but is an attempt to write *for* Aaron Swartz, to affirm some of his truth.

## CONFUSING CONCEPTS

Kenneth Goldsmith is a naturally gifted and entertaining speaker although he is not always the most logically consistent. For example, at a talk about conceptual poetry and digitality, at Berlin's Transmediale festival last February, eloquent presentation and bold statements, at times replaced precision and depth of argumentation. This was particularly striking when halfway through his presentation Goldsmith, in only a brief mention of Aaron Swartz, made a series of factually incorrect and seriously misleading statements regarding the JSTOR documents Swartz had downloaded from MIT (the ones that led to Swartz being hounded by the FBI). The main claim Goldsmith made was that these files were a mess and that it would have been more interesting if Swartz had been more conceptual in his selection and presentation of them.

There are quite a few mistakes to unravel here. Firstly, the documents Goldsmith discussed originated from a 33GB Torrent that had been uploaded to PirateBay in 2011. Goldsmith assumed these were some of Swartz' JSTOR downloads. "I downloaded a torrent that was supposed to be some chunk of Swartz's heist.<sup>6</sup> In fact, they were uploaded by Greg Maxwell, who explains in a long note on Pirate Bay that, "Several years ago I came into possession, through rather boring and lawful means, of a large collection of JSTOR documents... I had considered releasing this collection anonymously, but others pointed out that the obviously overzealous prosecutors of Aaron Swartz would probably accuse him of it and add it to their growing list of ridiculous charges." So these are not the JSTOR files Swartz downloaded from MIT.

Next, Goldsmith joked about the irregularity and unusual length of the academic papers found in the Torrent, assuming they had simply been chaotically cut and paste together. In fact, these were journal papers in their original form, as published in *Philosophical Transactions*, in 1665. They were simply longer and

differently formatted than contemporary, 20-30 page, academic papers, as also stated on the journal's own website: "The first volumes... were very different from today's journal, but in essence it served the same function."<sup>7</sup>

Thirdly, and most problematically, Goldsmith's main claim was that Swartz (in fact Maxwell) had "not been conceptual enough" in ordering and selection this Torrent. The truth is Maxwell is very explicit about the selections he made and why: 1. out of solidarity with Swartz (quoted above); 2. to draw attention to the fact that he only included articles that pre-date 1923 and therefore should be in the public domain already anyway, but 3. instead are sold for exorbitant fees:

The portion of the collection included in this archive, ones published prior to 1923 and therefore obviously in the public domain, total some 18,592 papers and 33 gigabytes of data. The documents are part of the shared heritage of all mankind, and are rightfully in the public domain, but they are not available freely. Instead the articles are available at \$19 each—for one month's viewing, by one person, on one computer. It's a steal. From you.<sup>8</sup>

And there is more. Disregarding for a moment that this collection should have been in the public domain already anyway, the journal they were taken from is seminal in historical-scientific terms. Because, as remix theorist Janneke Adema (who was also present at Goldsmith's talk) incisively pointed out, "*Philosophical Transactions*" is not just an old journal; it was "the world's *first* scientific journal." Furthermore, it "*established* the important principles of scientific priority and peer review." These principles "have become the central foundations of scientific journals ever since." Finally, the journal adopted these principles, "to inform the Fellows of the Society *and other interested readers* of the latest scientific discoveries."<sup>9</sup> Science had taken its first steps not only to more consistent quality control, but also to the accessibility of intellectual property.

There are thus two major problems with Goldsmith's critique of Swartz' (in fact Maxwell's) supposed lack of rigour. First, it is a crucial misreading of the significance

7 "Royal Society Publishing," <http://is.gd/uO8N47>

8 "Full letter from Greg Maxwell," <http://is.gd/mhWL1>

9 "Royal Society Publishing."

6 Kenneth Goldsmith, quoted in Dan Zak, "Printing Out the Internet": A crowdsourced work of art," <http://is.gd/rebr8y>

of this Torrent, based on blatantly false assumptions. In fact, not only does Goldsmith omit several important scientific-historical facts in his facetious dismissal of the journal's "funny-looking long pieces of text" and rejection of the Torrent file on conceptual grounds. Most importantly, these facts about the journal show that the decision to download specifically of this journal, enacted a subtle, precise, and powerful conceptual gesture and radical, ethical, act of subversion.

### OMG SUPERLATIVE!

If this episode illustrates one thing it is Goldsmith's pretty poor (scholarly) readership, or (poetic) thinkership skills (in this particular case, not in general); depending on whether he was speaking as Professor or Poet. He works as both, but during his Transmediale talk it was unclear which function he was fulfilling. It also did not help that Goldsmith, by (incorrectly) criticizing Swartz for not being conceptual, was judging Swartz, a hacker-activist, by the very specific and clearly unrelated sphere of conceptual art.

Instead, Goldsmith groundlessly held Swartz to his own standards, judged him according to his own interests. Unfortunately, even afterwards, when explicitly challenged about his remarks about Swartz by a viscerally upset member of the audience (there had been noticeable unrest among several people in the auditorium when Goldsmith made his comments about Swartz), who argued that Swartz in fact had been quite strategic in his thinking and actions, Goldsmith offered no real response, simply vaguely reasserting his preference for a more conceptual attitude. Goldsmith seemed stuck in his artist persona and unable to really listen and engage with an opinion other than his own.

This was reminiscent of lack of response to Stephen Colbert's observation about his latest book *Seven American Deaths and Tragedies* (2013).

When I read this I feel like I'm some sort of time traveling aesthete who is coming in to sample other people's shock and tragedy. I'm tasting their disbelief and the way it's changing them forever... and it feels vampiric.<sup>10</sup>

Goldsmith never properly replies to this reading – which even if only intended as provocation, very possible of course considering Colbert's default mode is irony – still is a very likely reaction many people might have and merits a serious response. What interests me in both cases is Goldsmith's lack of any true engaging response to his interlocutor. Paradoxically, his uncharacteristic retreat into himself in these moments, seems to indicate a limited capacity for self-irony; even though his poems and poetic statements are full of contradiction and whimsical self-critique (describing himself as boring, unreadable, and dumb).<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps, in all seriousness, this lack of true interaction is due to his charismatic personality. Like him or hate him, Goldsmith is clearly a very charismatic individual. In fact, eliciting extreme feelings, not only of admiration, but also hatred, is a quality of charisma. So are "unusual confidence, serenity, assertiveness... along with superb communication skills... positive energy, charm, personal magnetism"<sup>12</sup>; all fitting descriptions of Goldsmith. No wonder that one of three attributes of charismatic people – as described by psychologist Richard Wiseman – is being impervious to other charismatic people. It seems nearly inevitable that charismatic people, besides exerting a pull on others, also get caught up in the force of their own energy.

These observations might strike some as ad hominem, pop psychology, or simply irrelevant; in fact, I respect Goldsmith more than most poets I know and feel that much of his work is exciting and new. I am truly not intending to be sarcastic or cynical, but am arguing that Goldsmith's very singular and charismatic affect directly informs his work and interaction with people. Just as Swartz' troubled, fragile, yet impassioned affect informed his work, actions, and interactions. In itself, this is not even a very controversial or interesting observation. And again, neither are any of these affects good or bad in themselves. The claim here is simply that POTI, which so clearly illustrates Goldsmith tendency to irreverent hyperbole, superlative confidence, and totalizing polemics, and has caused so much outrage and protest,

11 Kenneth Goldsmith, "On Being Boring," University at Buffalo, <http://is.gd/KXaQjf> ; Kenneth Goldsmith, "On Being Dumb," *The Awl*, <http://is.gd/d957Ez>

12 "New World Encyclopedia," <http://is.gd/kyrfUv>

simply crushes Aaron Swartz' complex, careful fragility, instead of honouring the truth of his name.

## SELF-FRAGILIZE YOURSELF

There are several specific examples of how Goldsmith, just by his vocabulary and style makes some extremely insulting, myopic, and yet again plain incorrect statements about Swartz. Hopefully Goldsmith is not trying to be purposely hurtful. But that is precisely the point. His consistent affect is one of grandiose statements, adjectives, superlatives, flair, sprezzatura. Hopefully, he himself would not deny this, since they are part of his artistic persona and poetics of excess, totalism, and the jouissance of ever proliferating language. These affective intensities were never more tangible than in POTI.

They are also the kind of intensities that tended to upset Aaron Swartz, even making him physically ill. Swartz' own often very personal and intimate writing on his blog, as well as long, in depth profile articles, "The Life and Afterlife of Aaron Swartz" by Wesley Yang<sup>13</sup>, "Requiem for a Dream" by Larissa MacFarguhar<sup>14</sup> as well as many online tributes from friends and colleagues portray a complex, hyper-sensitive person. His ulcerative colitis, social anxieties, insecurities, loner background, suicidal depression, often made him very sick, led him to avoid people, or see different people at different times. About being sick he wrote:

Once again, I've been sick – this time, with four different illnesses. I have a lot of illnesses. I don't talk about it much, for a variety of reasons. I feel ashamed to have an illness... I don't want to use being ill as an excuse...At best, you tell yourself that your thinking is irrational, that it is simply a mood disorder, that you should get on with your life. But sometimes that is worse. You feel as if streaks of pain are running through your head, you thrash your body, you search for some escape but find none. And this is one of the more moderate forms.<sup>15</sup>

13 Wesley Yang, "The Life and Afterlife of Aaron Swartz," *New York Magazine*, <http://is.gd/otxY3v>

14 Larissa MacFarguhar, "Requiem for a Dream," *The New Yorker*, <http://is.gd/wPgy5d>

15 Aaron Swartz, "Sick," *Raw Thought*, <http://is.gd/kVTp4o>

And his sickness had real effects on his interactions with friends

Despite his public presence, he was small and frail and shy and often sick, and people wanted to protect him. He was loved intensely, as a child is loved. Because he hated people talking about him, he kept his friends apart. He was different with different people, and with the same people at different times, so his story is fractured, and some of the pieces contradict one another.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, Kenneth Goldsmith is also full contradictions; for example, between his poems and his statements *about* his poems ("I am the most boring poet alive," "My books do not need to be read"). However, while Goldsmith's paradoxes are a design of his artistic persona, Swartz traced a fractured and contradicting path often because he did not fit in, could not do otherwise, or because he had not learnt how to follow the normal rules. He taught himself how to read at age 3 ("She asked him, What was he talking about?" "He said, 'Mom, it says here on the refrigerator.' He had taught himself to read."), dropped out of high school, was later nevertheless accepted into Stanford, but then quit that too, "having found [it] intellectually unchallenging."<sup>17</sup>

"You know, people running around in the fountains. He didn't like people who did things that were just silly, that seemed to have no purpose..." The normal rules didn't apply to him. He shook them off. One effect of this upbringing was that he never internalized any notions about what he was supposed to be doing or not doing as a young person.<sup>18</sup>

Swartz was ridiculously self-effacing:

At CodeCon the other day, all sorts of people asked me what I was working on these days. I could have said "I've been put in charge of Roosevelt Labs, a center to write cool software with political implications." Or I could have said "I'm writing a book about how the world really works." But instead I say, "Oh, nothing, just focusing on schoolwork..."

16 Larissa MacFarguhar, "Requiem for a Dream."

17 Wesley Yang, "The Life and Afterlife of Aaron Swartz."

18 Larissa MacFarguhar, "Requiem for a Dream."

and suffered from debilitating shyness. So much so he was afraid to ask for water on an aeroplane:

No, the problem is that I am terribly, almost unbearably thirsty... I am so thirsty that it's beginning to feel like there's no water around to hydrate my brain so my neocortex is shrivelling up... But I guess that's not really the problem either. The problem, the real problem I suppose, is that I can't ask for anything to drink.<sup>19</sup>

Aaron's fragility caused him social anxiety and illness. Artist and theorist Bracha Ettinger speaks of an ethics of self-fragilization<sup>20</sup>; opening up to the fragile in oneself, by opening up to the fragile in the other. It seems that Aaron often self-fragilized too much, opened up too much to the other and forgetting the autonomy of his own being:

This, I suppose, is the actual problem: I feel my existence is an imposition on the planet... Even among my closest friends, I still feel like something of an imposition, and the slightest shock, the slightest hint that I'm correct, sends me scurrying back into my hole.

Once, he did allow himself a break, unplugging his computer for one month:

I need to take a break. My life has become entangled with technology and pressure that I hardly know any other way of life. I want to be human again. Even if that means isolating myself from the rest of you humans.<sup>21</sup>

It seemed like a constant struggle for Swartz, keep his body together by going inward, or reaching out to other bodies. How to be true to an other without forsaking oneself, and vice versa and etcetera? How to give someone the benefit of the doubt? How to allow yourself to be fragile, in order to be open to the fragility of the other? Yet, the sincerity, fragility, and honesty in Swartz's character and writing are precisely traits that Goldsmith rejects, associating them with (often generalized notions of) lyricism, emotional

19 Larissa MacFarguhar, "Requiem for a Dream."

20 Bracha Ettinger, "Self Fragilize Yourself," Synthetic Zero, accessed August 18, 2013 <http://is.gd/ugY4CJ>

21 Larissa MacFarguhar, "Requiem for a Dream."

self-expression, which he argues are only ostensibly creative, but in fact simply repeat the same ideas and forms in slightly different, but not properly new ways.

Start making sense. Disjunction is dead. The fragment, which ruled poetry for the past one hundred years, has left the building. Subjectivity, emotion, the body, and desire, as expressed in whole units of plain English with normative syntax, has returned. But not in ways you would imagine. *This new poetry wears its sincerity on its sleeve . . . yet no one means a word of it.* Come to think of it, no one's really written a word of it. It's been grabbed, cut, pasted, processed, machined, honed, flattened, repurposed, regurgitated, and reframed from the great mass of free-floating language out there just begging to be turned into poetry. Why atomize, shatter, and splay language into nonsensical shards when you can hoard, store, mold, squeeze, shovel, soil, scrub, package, and cram the stuff into towers of words and castles of language with a stroke of the keyboard? And what fun to wreck it: knock it down, hit delete, and start all over again. There's a sense of gluttony, of joy, and of fun... Language as matter; language as material. How much did you say that paragraph weighed?<sup>22</sup>

Yet Aaron Swartz was driven by precisely by the "subjectivity, emotion, the body, and desire" that Goldsmith rejects. Of course, ideas of sincere and transparent self-expression can indeed be problematic as soon as they pretend to transcend their socio-historical context, but that is another conversation. What is relevant here is that Goldsmith's aesthetics – of totalization and globalization that (particularly in this project), revels in excess, charismatic force, directive polemics – does not leave much breathing room for the careful, fragile, troubled meditations, and singular meanderings of Aaron Swartz, better captured by Bracha Ettinger's sensibility:

The we that I am working on is the we of co-emergence, *not of the total and the global*, but co-emergence, co-subjectification, between each time two of you, or several body-minds, body-psyche... so this kind of fragility I am talking about self-imposed in a way, is a way to contact the vulnerability of the other. *We cannot contact the vulnerable other while being totalizing, having lots of force, controlling* and so on.<sup>23</sup>

22 Kenneth Goldsmith, "Flarf is Dionysus. Conceptual Writing is Apollo.," Poetry Foundation, <http://is.gd/9MwE75>

23 Bracha Ettinger, "Self Fragilize Yourself"

There are several specific examples of how this applies to Goldsmith's use and characterization of Swartz. Goldsmith repeats ad infinitum that his project honours the memory of Aaron Swartz. Yet the idea was not his, the gallerist, Echeverría enlisted [him] to create an homage to Swartz; and one wonders to what extent Goldsmith engaged with the true motivations behind Swartz' actions. On the few occasions that he actually voices an opinion about Swartz his language tends to be laced with, derision ("I want to... ponder much *larger* questions"), exaggeration ("*millions* were touched by his work"), marketing lingo ("Swartz... opened so much of the web for public *consumption*), or facetiousness ("I feel every *simpatico* for Swartz's plight").

For example, Goldsmith makes clear that "I didn't know him at all, but like millions of others, I was touched by his work and life..."<sup>24</sup> This statement clearly expresses a moving, personal sentiment. However, it also illustrates Goldsmith's typical hyperbole: "*millions* of others" were touched by his work? This is simply not true. Hundreds and likely thousands seem to have been personally touched and moved by Swartz, considering his extensive work, and the outpouring of personal tribute following his death. And millions indeed perhaps even billions of people every day are affected by his work in a practical sense that they use RSS, Reddit, Creative Commons. However, just using the internet does not equal being "touched by his work and life." Speaking about anyone reduces them to something heir full being, but this kind of dramatic hyperbole is completely alien to Swartz's character. Although it might seem like a petty point to make, this attitude and language is an integral part of Goldsmith aesthetics and surely not always intentionally hurtful; nevertheless, intentional or not, the effect remains the same. Swartz's work in different ways is reduced to soundbytes, or not taken seriously; but certainly not honoured.

Reduction of the polar opposite kind happens when Goldsmith explains how he differs from Swartz:

Mine is a poetic gesture, a 'pataphysical gesture. His was a political gesture, a gesture of liberation. And I'm not doing this so that everybody can go and steal all the material on the Internet. I actually want to use his gesture as a jumping-off

point to begin to ponder much larger questions.<sup>25</sup>

These comments are so crass they are hard to register. Hopefully Goldsmith did not intentionally mean to reduce Swartz's lifelong fight for free and properly accessible intellectual property, cultural heritage, to: "everybody... go and steal all the material on the Internet"; but he is sure making it difficult not read it like that. But Goldsmith outdoes himself when he claims that he is inspired by Swartz only as "a jumping-off point to begin to ponder much larger questions." This is hubris wrapped in hubris. Goldsmith correctly distinguishes between himself as a poet, and Swartz as a political activist. But his own questions are larger apparently. Why larger? Why not different? He might have proposed "an attempt to translate Swartz' ethical, singular and passionate political subversion into my own project of poetic ethics?" Why compare and critique from a place of judgement, instead of affirming some singular different yet affectively consistent aspect of both their work?

Unfortunately, there is not even much logical consistency to these statements. At the Transmediale Goldsmith criticizes Swartz for not being conceptual, thus judging him with poetic standards. Here he *does* distinguish between poetic and political functions, only to again conflate them by comparing the two. Finally, Goldsmith's claim that he ponder much larger questions is not only unseemly arrogant in itself; it is, yet again, plain wrong. The work of both Swartz and Goldsmith raise large questions. In fact, Swartz at age 14 had already likely brought about more structural, lasting, practically meaningful change to this world than Goldsmith, or most of us, ever will. Not that Goldsmith's poetry is not important, I certainly feel it is.

Besides, the funny thing is, for all his shyness and anxiety, who says Swartz did not have big goals: "ending suffering, maximizing human empowerment, making the world an awesome place – that is what he cared about. I think any cause that you can come up with is smaller than that."<sup>26</sup> Swartz apparently was capable of a megalomania equal to that of Goldsmith:

25 Dan Zak, "'Printing Out the Internet': A crowdsourced work of art."

26 "Aaron Swartz: The Documentary – Teaser."

24 Dan Zak, "'Printing Out the Internet': A crowdsourced work of art."

He imagined building one giant global organization that could replace the little ones that existed now. He warned Taren [his girlfriend] that if she went around starting new groups she should be aware that they might take the oxygen away from his future organization. It frightened her a bit when he talked like this – it felt megalomaniacal and unstable – so she tended to avoid the subject... The trick in the short term, he thought, was to launch micro-campaigns on a local level, where you could test various strategies and see what worked and what didn't. You needed tight feedback loops that would enable you to measure concrete results, so you had to design tactics that could be subjected to controlled experiments.

At one point he brainstormed about

a bill that created a revolving credit fund for switching schools to geothermal in Indiana. It's a great environmental program, it saves money for the schools, and it creates local jobs. And once you have a bill like this written you could – boom, boom, boom – make it a meta-campaign and pass it in all sorts of cities around the country... Maybe we can bubble about it in person sometime! Bubble bubble bubble!<sup>27</sup>

Note also from the quote above that Swartz thought ecologically, in the sense that he was aware of the interconnectedness of things, and tried to account for this with extremely concrete, incremental, conceptualized planning. It is even in his playful, inimical language: "Bubble bubble bubble," indicating a playful, deep sense of being as plural, open, and shifting, of the one always being preceded by the two (the thesis of German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk's trilogy *Spheres*).

A big contrast from Goldsmith's defensive and logically fallacious retorts against the widespread criticism concerning the environmental ethics of POTI.

Relative to the rest of the art world – the spectacle of the Venice Biennale with its global carbon footprint, hideous yachts and private jets or the \$35 million Jeff Koons strip-mined aluminium sculptures, created by one person for one person of the 1% – Printing Out The Internet, with its all-inclusive democratic attitude, nothing for sale, and a recyclable ending looks pretty good by comparison.<sup>28</sup>

These lines of thought exhibit some astoundingly faulty and passive aggressive reasoning. Personally, I am unresolved on the question of POTI's environmental ethics, but Goldsmith's logic certainly does a good job at undermining his own project. Other people pollute on unimaginable scales, therefore it is ok for me to create just moderate environmental damage? Seriously? Do we really have to have this adolescent conversation about one poet jumping off a cliff means all poets should?

Then there is the claim that "Printing Out The Internet, with its all-inclusive democratic attitude, nothing for sale... is completely open, participatory to all... Information. Lots of it. And free to all." These sensationalist exclamations illustrate an important fissure within the project's informing concept, and is an important reason why POTI fails where it could have worked, had it been more specifically and rigorously formulated: ideally and abstractly, POTI is democratic, open, free. But, ironically – for a project printing out and supposedly making the internet material – this ignores the actual material, physical reality of the world. Because, of course, there exist massive unequal distribution of information and access to information; not to mention the ±300,000,000 people without internet.<sup>29</sup> These are precisely issues that POTI might begin to raise in an ethical way, but Goldsmith's own comments cleanly sweep them off the table. What is more, his emphasis on "lots of free-for-all information... shitloads of paper" in fact more resemble the abstract, non-specific, generic sentiment of the kind of lyrical love poem he so opposes, than a specific, contextual, material, rigorous conceptual poem. Aaron Swartz's Guerilla Open Access Manifesto offers some ideas for the beginnings of much more effective concepts:

We need to take information, wherever it is stored, make our copies and share them with the world. We need to take stuff that's out of copyright and add it to the archive. We need to buy secret databases and put them on the Web. We need to download scientific journals and upload them to file sharing networks. We need to fight for Guerilla Open Access. With enough of us, around the world, we'll not just send a strong message opposing the privatization of knowledge – we'll make it a thing of the past. Will you join us?<sup>30</sup>

27 Larissa MacFarguhar, "Requiem for a Dream."

28 "Kenneth Goldsmith versus Trees," in *My Spilled Milk*.

29 Internet World Stats, <http://is.gd/IsWFYI>

30 Aaron Swartz, "Guerilla Open Access Manifesto," <http://pastebin.com>

Instead of properly addressing these questions Goldsmith is apparently more interested in enticing potential participants by promising everyone who contributes “a great line on their resume.”<sup>31</sup>

## CONCEPT FAIL

“Petition fail! Nice try guys. The show will go on.” Goldsmith addresses a carefully and respectfully formulated open letter petitioning him to reconsider his plan. As it turns out, Goldsmith discarded other – conceptually more interesting and productive ideas in favour of POTI; for example, “a massive compendium of every online photo of actress Natalie Portman” and an “Iraqi American artist’s collection of every news article written about the war in Iraq... bound in 80 volumes comprising 2,000 pages each.” Apparently “inspired by the magnitude of Swartz’s download, he asked himself, “Why not just print the whole Internet?”<sup>32</sup>

This anecdote is telling of many things. For one, it is typical that what finally inspires Goldsmith is the magnitude of Swartz’ download (not the *questions* Swartz was trying to raise with it). It also perfectly exemplifies Goldsmith’s desire for totalization and mass (one of his many catchphrases “how much did you say that paragraph weighed?” has predictably become, “how much did you say the internet weighed?). This aspect of his work is often interesting and successful (think of *Day* (a newspaper printed as a 900-page book; no.111 (a collection of words ending with an “r” sound), or even UBU). But in this case his completist drive derailed with wild over-enthusiasm or plain hubris. What is left is a bloated, deflated, or porous concept, it has become difficult to tell. One project initiated after the death of Aaron Swartz that is both a more fitting and respectful tribute, as well as more conceptually sound (although not intended as conceptual piece) is the JSTOR liberator. It required personal civil disobedient action, was true to Aaron’s style, and referenced his last predicament that got him in trouble:

a tiny bit of civil disobedience, presented to you in clicktivism form. By running this bookmarklet... you will visit JSTOR...

com/cefxMVAy

31 [printingtheinternet.tumblr.com](http://printingtheinternet.tumblr.com)

32 Dan Zak, “‘Printing Out the Internet’: A crowdsourced work of art.”

and will download a single paper from the site. You will have to click a terms of service agreement agreeing to not share the document you are reading, yet you will then download it and uploaded to another server. It will also ask for a message of memorial about Aaron. We will be gathering your messages of memorial and remembrance of Aaron to put up soon.<sup>33</sup>

## “WE PRINTED THE FUCKING INTERNET”

Some soundbytes from the POTI Tumblr: “The internet is the greatest poem ever written... We just want shitloads of paper. We’re literally looking for folks to print out the entire internet.” “We printed the fucking internet.” “As if it’s even possible to know what the fucking Internet is!” Goldsmith says. “It’s a giant conceptual proposition.”

The internet: the greatest poem ever, a giant conceptual proposition. These statements are so facile, sweeping, crude, that they never begin to have much more meaning than as soundbytes that get promoted to memes (which Goldsmith proudly advertises on POTIs Tumblr: “Printing Out The Internet now has an official entry on Know Your Meme.”) Simply throwing hyperbole at something does not make it come alive. Yet this is it, this is the concept for POTI; the internet, it’s massive, can’t really think of anything bigger, let’s print the fucking thing!

When Goldsmith describes POTI as a “‘pataphysical proposition: an imaginary solution to an imaginary problem,” he is appealing to a long influence of Alfred Jarry’s “science of the possible” in experimental poetry (about which Christian Bök wrote a constraint-based(!) PhD). But yet again, just slapping claims on something does not make it so. Simply appealing to the established street cred of the ‘pataphysical tradition, does not automatically transform a simple observation (that “the internet is fucking huge”) into a ‘pataphysical solution to a problem. What solution? What problem? It is all much too undefined, declarative, fuzzy.

What is a concept? Let us not forget that concepts are not abstract or ideational. Abstract and ideational are precisely the kind of notions that Conceptual poetry rejects. Concepts are not *about* something, they are themselves “defined by the circumstances required for

33 George Williams, “Civil Disobedience?: The Aaron Swartz Memorial JSTOR Liberator”

their measurements. That is, theoretical concepts are not ideational in character; *they are specific physical arrangements.*" Karen Barad argues that perception creates a cut in the world that includes, as well as excludes certain possibilities and material configurations. A poetic concept enacts such a cut by (re)framing or (re)configuring an object as a poem.

A procedure, I would argue, that is not limited to contemporary American Conceptual poetry, but one that is true for poems as such. If the present iteration of Conceptualism differs it is in its combination of form as radical openness (which is not the same as formlessness), and content determined by context). A poetic concept frames, or transversally points to a slice of the world as poem, thereby allowing a manner of second order observation of this object as poem.

In any case, the questions of how and what to include or exclude, raise important ethical quandaries. Barad:

ethics is not simply about responsible actions in relation to human experiences of the world; rather, it is a question of material entanglements and how each interaction matters in the reconfiguring of these entanglements. (161)

## FAILING TO FAIL

One problem with POTI is it is not so much that it is not possible to print the entire internet, but that the poem's / project's concept ignores this obvious fact. We know it, of course Kenneth Goldsmith knows it, and the inevitability of failure in itself is true of all writing (prime example Beckett) and more recently set forth as a goal in Vanessa Place and Robert Fitterman's sublime *Notes on Conceptualisms* ("Failure is the goal of conceptual writing." But the fact that POTIs informing concept cannot ever be completed, however imperfectly, means it fails even at its own failure.

And even in this it is not alone. Beckett too exhibits a failure to fail, in a projective / retroactive vacillation of language as Samuel Vriezen recently demonstrated in an excellent short essay, using a premise from logic. "The failure to fail does not (only) refer to that which inevitably is yet to come as the text is "said on" but perhaps even more primarily, to that which

it has continuously been creating."<sup>34</sup>). And if it fails properly, a poem also fails to fail; in that it allows, through the parallax of its body as pinhole camera, to catch some glimpse of the eclipse of the failure that cannot be seen directly; the real where language turns to mush, the fullness of matter that can never be exhaustively described. But POTIs failure to fail does not complete itself in any way. Its failure is obsessive compulsive; not even Sisyphean, but flat, directionless, empty, like a zombie's electrocardiogram. Its potential "giant conceptual proposition" lies in mirroring our entanglement with everything. But it is too bloated and porous in its formulation, and thus required execution, to ever allow any meaningful manner of reflection.

In this sense it is similar to the abstract idealism Conceptual poetry rejects; the impossible dream of a transcendental, trans-historical, trans-contextual view from nowhere. POTI presents a limit case that collapses back into itself. Similarly to the way that, for all our scientific progress that was necessary to get us here, the concept of black matter, in a way returns us to the early modern notion of aether, in that both describe the infinite darkness of the most universe that still completely eludes our understanding.

And although, certainly, endless interesting and important questions arise from POTI as it is – from the 10 tons of paper collected by 20000 people now on display in LABOR Gallery New Mexico – these questions can only be formulated while still fruitlessly enacting the concept they are already supposed to have completed. Therefore, the interesting, important questions can only be answered or even formulated to partial satisfaction, because the poem's bloated concept, still remaining fully within the context of its creation, allows no vantage point for reflection. For this any number of more precisely, contextually framed concepts would be necessary. A poem can be big, it just cannot be everything. A concept can be impossible – as Goldsmith demands we demand – but not every kind of impossible at once.

The result is, perhaps, a slight tremor of the infinite monkey cage of POTIs conceptual framework. A fruitless reminder of what we already know: most of the time

34 Samuel Vriezen, "Failure to Fail," in *ContinentContinent*, <http://is.gd/bbxQ1b>



we are trapped in some system or another; we like to make a mess of things; there is a science of memes; the internet is connected to the tube is connected to the lorry, is connected to the tree, is connected to the swing of the axe. The unabridged internet is one hell of a big book, made from 40000 trees. How super, awesome, amazing! Because everyone else is buying it; why shouldn't I?

POTI makes waste to give a partial view of making waste. As if that was not something we already knew how to do. It mimics the structure we already know traps us; like our post-Kafka, capitalist realist white-collar worker, who understands perfectly well, the system that requires her to file paperwork about the fact that she is filing paperwork. And although like Billy Hayes in "Midnight Express" (1978), she knows she not only is part of the machine, she is also *making* the machine; unlike Billy, this knowledge does buy her an out of prison card.

## ANGELIC TROUBLEMAKERS

"We need in every community a group of angelic troublemakers. Our power is in our ability to make things unworkable. The only weapon we have is our bodies, and we need to tuck them in places so wheels don't turn" (Bayard Rustin). Aaron Swartz, Bradley Manning, Edward Snowden, and all of those innumerable known and unknown individuals that in big or small ways sacrifice their person, for the uncertain process of the emergence of a truth unfolding from a principle of radical egalitarianism.

"I believe in the principle declared at Nuremberg in 1945," Edward Snowden stated at a press conference. "Individuals have international duties which transcend the national obligations of obedience. Therefore individual citizens have the duty to violate domestic laws to prevent crimes against peace and humanity from occurring."<sup>35</sup>

"There are just laws and there are unjust laws... One who breaks an unjust law must do it openly, lovingly..." (Martin Luther King). Swartz concurred, writing, "there is no justice in following unjust laws. It's time to

35 Paul Owen and Tom McCarthy, "Edward Snowden appears at Moscow airport and renews asylum claim – as it happened," *The Guardian*, <http://is.gd/jJKU4p>

come into the light and, in the grand tradition of civil disobedience, declare our opposition to this private theft of public culture."<sup>36</sup> And the force of beauty in Aaron was so overwhelming and powerful because the limit of his body "that must incise itself by producing [beauty]" was so fragile. "Beauty... is a nonviolent experience of near death, a warning that one is fragile, like everything else in the universe. Beauty is the shadow of the threat to objects, the threat that is objects."<sup>37</sup> And there was a moment that Swartz's body was too fragile to contain its own beauty.

"In areas of uncertainty and change, we don't know what the right answer is, and there's a lot of people who wanted things to go being as it is, and there's another set of people who are saying, we want to – as Wallace Steven once said in a memorable phrase – search the possible for its possibleness" is how one friend describes Aaron's struggle.<sup>38</sup> But these impossibly high demands he set on himself, and the singular yet ungraspable enigma he presented to the outside world, need not and should not leave us in a state of paralyzing uncertainty. "There must be some aperture at the beginning of any system, in order for it to be a system – some irreducible uncertainty."<sup>39</sup> "This uncertainty can actually be empowering – once you realise that it gives you a margin of maneuverability... It gives you the feeling that there is always an opening to experiment, to try and see."<sup>40</sup> "Naming love by a traumatized and devastated place, what does that mean? It is a plea for certain blindness, certain not knowing, impossibility and oblivion." "Folding and enfolded in archaic fragility and wounds" we can find places of uncertainty from which to stay true, without ever knowing precisely how, to the memory of Aaron Swartz.


36 Aaron Swartz, "Guerilla Open Access Manifesto"

37 Tim Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*. Open Humanities Press, <http://is.gd/YJ5x6V>

38 "Aaron Swartz: The Documentary – Teaser."

39 Tim Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*.

40 Brian Massumi, "An Interview with Brian Massumi," <http://is.gd/q2FHoR>



VANESSA PLACE

**A = A**

CONCEPTUALISM AS TRANSLATION

We live in a conceptualist age, by which I mean an *après*-postmodern age where there is no difference, no repetition, no originals from which copies are made, but only the simultaneous, the attendant, things that exist *idem* alongside other things. Our models are, as our economy is, global, so that regional variation is just that, a matter of marketing over matter. And just as you can get mango pie in Nicaragua, which is as American as apple pie, and a McTurco in Turkey, which is a hamburger made of lamb, and a McCurry in Delhi, with or without chicken, and one is no more or less of a real McDonald's than any other one, because *you* know you are in McDonald's, ordering McDonald's, eating McDonald's and McDonald's in this way knows *you*. Too, you are, of course, what you eat, and so too you can get your poetry tailor-made by, and for, *you*. All equally available, all equally delicious.

In a very prescient essay,<sup>1</sup> critic Andrea Quaid has argued that my *Boycott* book asked a very precise conceptual question: how does language move when it goes nowhere? In *Boycott*, I intervene in fifteen iconic feminist texts, replacing all references to women with their male equivalents: as Lacan says, *la femme n'existe pas*, and, as James Brown says, "It's a man's man's

man's world." Inspired by Lacan's epigrammatic 1970 maxim and American artist Lee Lozano's lipogrammatic 1972 *Boycott Piece*, in which she stopped speaking to women, my *Boycott*, as Quaid puts it, "queers history" by confronting the social with the temporal exchange of history for currency, of signification for signifier, ultimately "necessitat[ing] a translation of the reader." Too, Quaid sees *Boycott* as "a translation from one genre to another... from one discipline to another, from feminist theory to poetry." In the switch (or what we might call in American English the *switcharoo*), *Boycott* "illuminates how the current, sometimes championed, hypermobility of information and text most often travels with language's less easily disrupted ideological obduracy and not necessarily against it."

Put another way, translation, as Quaid notes, paradigmatically sets a point of origin – the founding or initial text – next to which the translation – the rendered or foreign text – is set. I am using spatial language here as I used the male there because if we think of these things as events in space versus events in time (and more on that in a moment), then we begin to see how precepts of simultaneity, abetted by current technology (and current is also used intentionally), work as boxed units of language that may be stacked and sorted, set in symmetrical rows, or marked "fragile" or "this end up." As one likes. *À chacun son goût.*

1 Andrea Quaid, "Translation as: move, removal, transfer, interpretation transformation. Translation is a feminist project." Associated Writing Programs, March 2013, Boston, Massachusetts. Unpublished conference paper, 2013.

Put a different way, and you see how this grammatical tic also serves as a translation within a translation, if we think about translation, not as a fact about this text or that text, but as a fact about text and context, about language itself, we may move from systems of equivalencies and transference, to systems of cognition and critique. In other words, to read ten different English translations of *Inferno* is no longer a comment on *Inferno*, but says something about English. The new English translations of *Proust*, and it is not for nothing that I translate the name of the author into italics, tell us about how *narrativity* and the *dilation* of time work in *English*, which we may then, if we like, compare to the notions of *histoire* and *retardement en français*.

By way of fruitful comparison, my Twitter project *Gone with the Wind* is a medium to medium translation, faithful – to a point. By tweeting the classic American novel in its entirety, I am scattering *GWTW* to the ephemeral attentions of the day-to-day feed as followed; by tweeting the book in its entirety, I am faithfully stealing a complete copy of the book. By tweeting the book in its entirety, I am enlisting the United States Government as an accomplice in my theft, in my wholesale copyright infringement, given that the United States Government collects American tweets in the Library of Congress. The United States Government, as you know, is a great collector of information. There are, I will admit, formal infidelities in my translation. I cannot begin a tweet with the letters “d” or “m,” as these signify direct messages, and I often, like a medieval cleric, elide spaces between words. My tweets, therefore, may not always be 140 characters. This is a constraint of the medium.

I’ve also translated *Gone with the Wind* in other ways: taking the famous “I don’t know nothin’ about birthin’ babies” speech of Prissy and setting it in Miltonic sonnet form for the journal *Poetry* (Summer 2009). Such that the ventriloquized slave becomes enslaved to the dictates of a simplified scheme, later favored by the Romanics. It is worth noting that Milton used his sonnet to write about his happily servile blindness, in which to state, “they also serve who stand and wait.” Too, I’ve erased the final chapter of *GWTW* until its legendary final line (“After all, tomorrow is another day.”) and publicly read the erasure – a “white out” of The End, in which there is the hope that love, like the

South, will rise again.

In his book *No Medium*, Craig Dworkin contemplates medium to medium translation (such as Rauschenberg’s *White Paintings* to Cage’s 4’33”) as a consideration of medium itself. Dworkin argues that media “are not merely storage mechanisms somehow independent of the acts of reading or recognizing the signs they record,” but are the thing itself – “nested within a recursive structure.” The materiality of media, therefore, *is* its signifying.<sup>2</sup> Thus, any aesthetic work works within the Kantian context of the subject, or the object-orientation of what I call the subject, that amalgam of subject/object that is the contemporary ontological experience. In this sense, we are media/mediums – we, meaning you.

And in this sense, a conceptualist translation enacts what Slavoj Žižek calls “ontological incompleteness,” the argument that in the center of everything, as a structural matter, lies the Void. What we experience, mathematically with Gödel, non-mathematically with everything else, is necessarily incomplete, necessarily contingent. If we take this proposition, along with the understanding that contingency is always site-specific, and that all art is also necessarily site-contingent, then we have a working start on a thesis for conceptualist translation. Which is to say, on conceptualism itself. So that rather than orchestrate or create *ex nihilo*, the conceptual project contains the *ex nihilo* from which all orchestration is created, or creation is orchestrated, *à chacun son goût*. And this networked contingency, finally, is the medium and material of conceptualism itself. There is a small but important distinction between the “on” and “of” in these last few sentences.

Thus, whether in lyric or the lockup, a confession is not an answer to a question, but a response to an interrogation. And chess, as you know, is not checkers.

To take a small but not unimportant side trip, one might make an argument that whereas translation gets caught in conversations about fidelity and infidelity, or what constitutes “true” translation, which includes the idea that there is no “true” translation, or language as structured as an unconscious, which is an obvious and oblique translation of Lacan’s the unconscious is

<sup>2</sup> Craig Dworkin, *No Medium*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013) 32-33.

structured like a language (*L'inconscient est structuré comme un langue*, and this is a very long sentence indeed which will be very difficult to translate, particularly into German, and like the German, we will put the verb at the end, for, by comparison, the non-conceptualist translator plays the part of the Lacanian pervert, that is to say, by perverting. "To pervert," from the Latin *prevertere*, to overturn, to turn, to subvert; "to pervert" from the English, to lead astray morally, to divert from the right course, to invite false judgment. But perversion, under Lacan, is the claim to directly know what the big Other wants, and to be serving that desire. What is the big Other of the traditional translator. That is not a question, but it is an answer. An answer that, happily, a conceptualist translation does not have to ask. Because, again, the media (and what is the big Other if not a medium) is *you*.

What translation Platonically promises, or could

Platonically promise, is mobility. Transference from medium to medium. But there must be friction. A frictionless translation, one in which meaning was perfectly, hermetically, preserved, would be boring. And not in a good way. For the wedge-point of conceptualism in all this is not to make an argument about mobility, or even an argument about media and materiality. Rather, the point that conceptualism might make, the point, that is, that could get profitably stuck in the throat, is that each thing *is*, on its own four feet, that there is no such thing as translation, just substantiation. To wit, incarnation. And as with that famous Trinity, each envisioning is material and immaterial, ontological and epistemological, bloody present and necessarily mysterious. Because to seeing *is* believing.

Author's note: I have made these sentences long and hopefully difficult to translate in order to affirmatively discourage any attempt at textual fidelity.

## VANESSA PLACE

# confessional poems

I.

Yes, I understand. I understand.  
Yes.  
I understand.  
I understand.  
Yes, of course.  
Of course.  
No, what happens...  
What happens...  
...what happens is that yes, may, maybe the one...yes, with my daughter I...it's that I  
used to  
drink a lot.  
...Well, what happens is...  
For what I remember, well, about that time because...[I] was watching television,  
drinking. And

the girl came and sat next to me. And, and I touched her.  
...but [I] didn't, [I] didn't, uhm, force her, or anything like that.

No.

I mean, well, I didn't rape her.

Only contact.

No, but it was only on top like this, not, not, not like this

Yes.

But, I mean, [she] had her tiny panties on.

Yes.

Excuse me?

Yes.

Well, it was a child, right?

I say again, perhaps a, a moment of weakness...

...a moment of weakness.

I just embraced her, from behind but.

That's [why]

Excuse me?

II.

I wouldn't—

Beat a female up—

I'm just saying though—

You're right.

I'm not looking at you—

What? I told you, I whipped it out, put it on her face, came back, put it on her face—

She could have been—I can't—I'm not the girl so I can't really tell you if she was scared

or not.

If it's—

If it's two people, like you said, two people like you said, she might have the instinct thing

in her head that we might do something if she don't obey our—whatever it was—to what

we said or whatever it was. But like I said, I wasn't—

I didn't say anything.

To tell you the truth, if I said something, I don't remember but—to keep it real, I didn't

say anything, I didn't (inaudible)—

I pushed it in her mouth.

Yes I did.

Yeah like this.

But after I stuck it in—

--like this.

Excuse me?

III.

I don't remember.

Excuse me?

Yes.

In the kitchen?

I don't remember that time.

No, I don't remember, that's the truth.

No, [it's] that I don't remember that time.

I with her?

Well, I masturbated, that's what it was.

No well no, I don't know, it just happened.

Excuse me?

IV.

I was listening and I could hear you guys through underneath the door and he says: "He was touching himself and looking at books." That is a total lie and I, I'm very mad because this guy is saying, I asked him, about 10 times, I said: "Can you please tell me what I'm being \* \* \* He goes: "I can't tell you nothing, only detectives will tell you." And then he's saying: "Hey, the guy was touching himself in Arcadia, inside of this pl—" That's uh, he was not there and if he looks at the damned footage, I was never touching myself, that's what made me mad and I told my grandma; even the bailiff is already accusing me, he never even saw me. He's thinking in his own head, hey maybe the detective said that they were assu—assuming that hey, you know what, someone touched himself or they may have touched himself or may have touched a child. So, I have \* \* \* I'm never gonna argue with you fellows, you, you guys are the boss in here, you know...I'm not tell him, excuse me, you know, you really made me mad because that was bullshit ...



DAVID VICHNAR

## leaf/ving the book/house

MARK DANIELEWSKI'S *HOUSE OF LEAVES* AS HYPERMEDIA

The current *cause célèbre* surrounding Kenneth Goldsmith's "Printing Out the Internet" project can be regarded as the (unecological) reversion from screen and bytes to paper and ink, as the (nonsensical) revenge of text upon hypertext, or as a belated symbolic end to the "digital decade" of the 2000s, the ten years in whose course the Web spread indeed world-wide. In this context, the essay proposes to treat the momentous, monstrous novel *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski, published at the decade's start in 2000, as an earlier fictional counterpart and precursor to Goldsmith's artistic undertaking – a print novel for the digital age, a book that privileges print while tapping into the digital network, a printed text that exists hypertextually. But first an historical excursus into how text came to be hyper-<sup>1</sup>

In 1965, Theodor H. Nelson coined the term "hypertext" to denote "non-sequential writing – text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen. As popularly conceived, this is a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways."<sup>2</sup> His development, three years later at Brown University, of the Hypertext Editing System, secured Nelson – together with and alongside Douglas Engelbart, who devised his own hypertext interface at roughly the same time at Stanford – the status of one of the two

founding fathers of the medium. The next small step for the medium, but one giant leap for mankind, took place two decades later, between March 1989 and December 1990, when Tim Berners-Lee, then based at CERN, elaborated on an earlier database system called ENQUIRE to create the system of interlinked hypertext documents enabling automatic information-sharing, the network called the World Wide Web. Later, in August 1991, the Web became a publicly available service on the Internet. Media theorists were quick to spot the immense potential offered by the new media for not only communication and information dissemination, but also for literature and the cognitive processes entailed in the act of reading in general. The bearings this technological transformation might have upon the operations and functioning of literature and writing can and did appear momentous. Especially as long as the literary canon continues to be conceived of as an archive of written texts, which according to Jay D. Bolter function as "stable record[s] of thought" whose stability resides precisely in the texts' "physical medium: clay, papyrus or paper; tablet, scroll or book."<sup>3</sup> In this view, the potentially liberating instability of hypertext lies in its ontologically unstable *writing space*, where "the space is the computer's videoscreen where text is displayed as well as the electronic memory in which text is stored" – its conceptual innovation consists in what Bolter terms *topography*, referring to "mapping

1 For the following constellation, credit is due to the following works: Donald Theall, *James Joyce's Technopoetics* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1997) and Louis Armand, *Techné: James Joyce, Hypertext & Technology* (Prague: Karolinum, 2003).

2 Theodor H. Nelson, *Literary Machines* (Swarthmore: Self-published, 1981) 2.

3 Jay D. Bolter, "Hypertext, Hypermedia and Literary Studies: The State of the Art," in *Hypermedia and Literary Studies*, ed. George P. Landow & Paul Delaney (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994) 3.

or charting – that is, to a visual and mathematical rather than verbal description,” in which “electronic writing is [...] not the writing of a place, but rather a writing *with* places, spatially realized topics.”<sup>4</sup> It was also Bolter who, in 1987, developed the Storyspace software programme, designed for creating, editing and reading hypertext fiction – Bolter’s collaborator, Michael Joyce, created the first piece of hypertext literature, *Afternoon, a story*.

One of the more interesting aspects of the above outline is that for all its novelty, electronic hypertext came very early on to be regarded, by its theoreticians and practitioners alike, as less a radical break with than a continuation of its printed predecessor, in confirmation of Walter J. Ong’s ancient assertion that despite “occasioning a change in cognition,” new media “only transform, never eradicate their precursors.”<sup>5</sup> For hypertext theorist George P. Landow, electronic writing becomes a vantage testing ground on which to evaluate theories of textuality developed independently thereof: “Electronic linking, which provides one of the defining features of hypertext, also embodies Julia Kristeva’s notions of intertextuality, Mikhail Bakhtin’s emphasis upon multivocality, Michel Foucault’s conceptions of networks of power, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s ideas of rhizomatic, ‘nomad thought.’”<sup>6</sup> This was by no means restricted to theory, as one of the earliest hypertext practitioners, Stuart Moulthrop, made clear when pointing out that hypertext is a text which devolves upon “affiliation, correspondence, and resonance” and thus, presents a mere “temporally extended network of relations which successive generations of readers and writers perpetually make and unmake,”<sup>7</sup> in a fashion highly similar to the one required by e.g. the “spatial form” of modernist literature. And so in the early-to-mid 1990s, another testing ground on which to theorise the new medium was found in the canon of avant-garde modernist fiction and poetry, now reconceived as “anticipatory” hyperfiction – first

and foremost, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* by Michael Joyce’s famous precursor and namesake.<sup>8</sup>

The second interesting coincidence is a temporal one: most of experimental post-war fiction that has come to be regarded as “anticipatory” hyperfiction originated simultaneously with Nelson’s research: Raymond Queneau’s *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (1961), Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* or Julia Cortázar’s *Rayuela* (1963) rank among the most frequent examples of this “genre,” this by generating texts composed, as if in anticipation of Nelson’s definition, of a “series of text chunks connected by links” which require of their readers the employment of “non-sequential” reading techniques. More importantly, in the course of 1960s, the book as object and material container of text as information came to be transformed in the work of some of the key avant-gardists of the period in Britain and the US. Both B.S. Johnson’s *The Unfortunates* (1969), the famous novel-in-a-box, and Raymond Federman’s *Double or Nothing* (1971), whose typographical extravaganza makes it one of the inaugural texts of concrete prose, partake of and transform the book-as-object tradition for which Katarzyna Bazarnik has coined the term *liberature* and defined as that kind of textual production in which

the typography and shape of the book, or its bibliographic code, becomes a peculiar stylistic device deliberately used by authors [who] go beyond mere words, using typography, images, kind and colour of paper or other material they find more suitable for their purpose, sometimes even modifying the very form of the volume into a *leporello*, a book-in-the-box or a scroll in a bottle.<sup>9</sup>

Skipping from Nelson to Berners-Lee and from the late 1960s to early 1990s, the development in the medium and theory again seems to bring about similar flurry of activity in practice. And so after the early 1970s wax and 1980s-90s wane of textual and typographical experimentation, a similar resuscitation of innovation aiming to expand the visual possibilities of textual organisation and the material properties of book as medium takes place in works like Goldsmith’s conceptual works *Fidget* (1997) and *Soliloquy* (2001), or, more

4 Jay D. Bolter, *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* (Fairlawn: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1990) 11, 25.

5 Walter J. Ong, *Interfaces of the Word* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1977) 82.

6 George P. Landow, “What’s a Critic To Do?: Critical Theory in the Age of Hypertext,” *Hyper/Text/Theory*, ed. George P. Landow (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) 1.

7 Stuart Moulthrop, “You Say You Want a Revolution? Hypertext and the Laws of Media,” *Postmodern Culture* 1.3 (May 1991): 19.

8 For an overview of the Joyce-hypertext relation, cf. *Hypermedia Joyce*, eds. David Vichnar & Louis Armand (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2010).

9 Katarzyna Bazarnik, *Joyce & Liberature* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2011) ii.





recently, in Steven Hall's *Raw Shark Texts* (2007) and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* (2010). However, nowhere is the medial interplay more complex and more far-reaching, on both material and conceptual level, than in Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, composed over the course of the 1990s and published in 2000.

It was perhaps with regards to this extremeness of Danielewski's first published 709-page text that Bret Easton Ellis made the radical claim that it "renders most other fiction meaningless," imagining "Pynchon and Ballard and Stephen King and David Foster Wallace bowing at Mark's feet, choking with astonishment, surprise, laughter and awe."<sup>10</sup> In a more reserved manner of praise, critics have endeavoured to capture *House of Leaves*' originality by various metaphors, mostly topological, like Martyn Bedford, who observed that whilst "too often, reading a novel is a bit like strolling along a safe and familiar path," reading Danielewski, "you feel the exhilaration of entering the fictional equivalent of an earthquake zone."<sup>11</sup> The most concise description of the book's narrative structure, provided by *New York Times Book Review*'s Robert Kelly, that *House of Leaves* is "a story about a story about a story about a film about a house with a black hole in it," already reveals it as one of multiple remove and framing – and hence also the notion of *House of Leaves* as textual labyrinth, pervasive throughout its literary criticism, which always, in one way or another, seeks to provide precursors, labyrinthine authors anticipatory of Danielewski's project. Two examples:

Mark Danielewski's debut novel, *House of Leaves*, is a work of experimental fiction [whose] roots can be traced back to familiar themes and important literary predecessors, most notably Jorge Luis Borges. Danielewski's use of the labyrinth as a theme, symbol, and form, and the mise-en-abyme structure of the text within a text within a text, as well as more direct allusions, underscore his debt to the work of Borges.<sup>12</sup>

While these narrative games are all good fun, *House of Leaves* adds up to more than playfulness. As it should be in such a

10 Bret Easton Ellis, back cover of Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (London: Anchor, 2000) – all further references are to this edition, marked as *HL* passim.

11 Martyn Bedford, "Novel of the week: *House Of Leaves*," *New Statesman* 129.4495 (17 July, 2000): 57.

12 Natalie Hamilton, "The A-mazing House: The Labyrinth as Theme and Form in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*," *Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 50.1 (Fall 2008): 3.

nightmarish fantasy, what appears to be a barrier is actually a gateway. Like Joyce [...], Danielewski isn't rejecting narration as much as customizing and turbo-charging it.<sup>13</sup>

The issue is not whether Danielewski's Borgesian or Joycean literary ancestry – to some extent acknowledged by himself – is or isn't relevant for and has or hasn't direct bearing upon *House of Leaves* in the form(s) of direct textual allusion, structural parallel or aesthetic/thematic affinity. These two (and many other similar) critical identifications of Danielewski's literary ancestry underplay or outright miss that, first of all, what connects Danielewski with writers like Joyce or Borges is their shared preoccupation with the book as material medium participating in the precipitously progressive technological condition of modernity – the textual presentation contained therein as endowed with distinct visual properties – and with narrative as, to revert to Nelson again, "a series of text chunks connected by links," with text as *hypertext*. Second of all, and more important: what makes *House of Leaves* different from, and visually and typographically more extreme than, both Borges and Joyce is its temporal placement, not before, and thus merely in anticipation of, but after, and thus in full embrace of, the culture of hypertextuality and the internet medium.

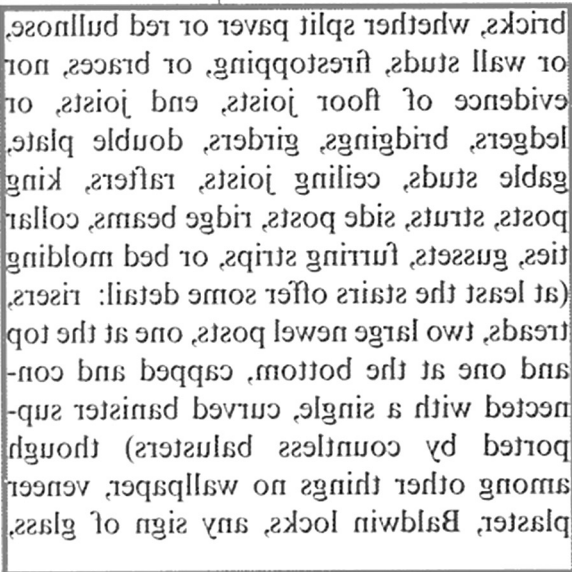
A possible synopsis outline for *House of Leaves* would run as follows. The novel is comprised of an extensive narration of a film by a blind man, Zampano, who dictates his critical commentary about the documentary film "The Navidson Record" shot by photographer Will Navidson. The film details Navidson and his family's terrifying ordeal living in a house whose insides gradually grow larger than its frame; the house's hallway mutates into a labyrinthine black hole that devours sound, light, and eventually human beings. Zampano's ekphrasis of the film is a scholarly one, incorporating analyses and judgments from literary critics and scientists, both real and imagined. After Zampano's mysterious death, his scholarly manuscript, *The Navidson Record*, is discovered by one Johnny Truant, a psychologically damaged but highly literary maverick who, in one of the book's many self-descriptive passages, encounters Zampano's text as a collection of multimedia scraps: "Endless snarls

13 Michael Sims, *Interview with Mark Z. Danielewski* (Bookpage, Sept 2, 2007), online at <http://www.bookpage.com/>.

Hagia Sophia, Ravenna's interior of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Rome's S. Stefano Rotondo or S. Maria Maggiore or S. Clemente, or Milan's S. Lorenzo, or even the plan of Old St Peter's, nor the slightest trace of classical foundations whether Greek, Hellenistic, or Roman, as might be exemplified by the Temple of Jupiter, Diocletian's palace at Spalato, the gateway to the market at Miletus, Algeria's Timgad with its Arch of Trajan, apartment housing in Ostia, Trajan's Market in Rome, also in Rome, the Baths of Diocletian, the Basilica of Maxentius, Baths of Caracalla, the Temple of Venus, near the Golden House of Nero, Hadrian's Mausoleum, the Mausoleum of Caecilia Metella on the Via Appia, the Canopus of Hadrian's villa, the interior of the Pantheon, Hadrian's villa at Tivoli, or the Piazza d'Oro with peristyle court and pavilions, or the Flavian Palace, the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii, plan of the Villa Jovis at Capri, Arch of Tiberius at Orange, France, Trajan's column in Rome, the Imperial Forum, Temple of

Mars Ultor, Forum Augustum, Forum of Nerva, the Forum Romanum with the arch of Septimius Severus, the Arch of Titus and the Temple of Castor and Pollux, or in Spain the aqueduct at Segovia, or back in Rome the theatre of Marcellus, the Colosseum, the sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia, Praeneste with its axonometric reconstruction, the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli, the Forum Boarium in Rome, the Maison Carrée at Nîmes, or the House of the Vettii in Pompeii, the walls of Herculaneum, the terrace of Naxian Lions on Delos, the Tower of the Winds in Athens, the Stoa of Attalus in the agora of Athens, the plan for the city of Pergamum or city center of Miletus or the Bouleuterion in Miletus, or the Temple of Apollo at Didyma, Temple of Athena Polias at Priene, Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, the theatre at Epidaurus, the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates in Athens as well as the Temple of Olympian Zeus, or the tholos

Perhaps<sup>165</sup>



here

is as good a place any to consider some the ghosts haunting *The Navidson Record*. And since more than a handful of people have pointed out similarities between Navidson film and various commercial productions, seems worthwhile to at least briefly examine what distinguishes documentaries from Hollywood releases.<sup>166</sup>

of words [...] on old napkins, the tattered edges of an envelope [...] legible, illegible; impenetrable, lucid; torn, stained, scotch-taped" (*HL*, xvii). Piecing together these disparate fragments, Truant weaves them in his own narrative layer through a set of footnotes that describe his hyperactive sex life, traumatic childhood dominated by a deranged mother Pelafina, and devastating experience with the editing of Zampano's text. Truant's version of Zampano's Navidson Record is then edited by the corporate entity, "The Editors," whose presence is noted by the monosyllabic "-Ed." Proceeding in an objective tone that contrasts with Truant's highly emotive commentary, the Ed. produce an additional set of editorial commentary, footnotes demarcating emendations to the text or acknowledging missing information.

Of equal importance is the book's graphic outlook and textual presentation. Each of these narrative voices is identified by a different font and is associated with a specific medium: Zampano's academic commentary appears in Times Roman, the font associated with newspapers and the linotype; Truant's footnotes are in Courier, imitating a typewriter's inscription, and, as critics have noted, thematically identifying him as the middleman, the "courier" of the manuscript; the terse notations from the Ed. are appropriately presented in Bookman. Furthermore, *House of Leaves* forms a central node in a network of multimedia, multi-authored forms that collectively comprise its narrative: the *House of Leaves* website (www.houseofleaves.com), *The Whalstoe Letters* (an accompanying book by Danielewski containing a section from the novel's Appendix) containing Pelafina's letters to her son from a mental asylum (in the Dante font), and the musical album *Haunted* by Danielewski's sister, the recording artist Poe. Thus, Katherine Hayles was correct in identifying *House of Leaves* as an example of a "Work as Assemblage, a cluster of related texts that quote, comment upon, amplify, and remediate one another."<sup>14</sup> Before its publication by Random House, *House of Leaves* was posted online, twice. Indeed, *House of Leaves* is not only a layered narrative with multiple narrators, set in an elaborately visual, concrete manner; it is a book conceived as material object constructed collaboratively by multiple authors and transcription technologies.

14 N. Katherine Hayles, "Translating Media: Why We Should Rethink Textuality," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16.2 (2003): 278.

At the same time, it is a text structured explicitly as hypertext, and this for reasons and with consequences deeper and further-reaching than the use of multiple footnoting and framing superimposition. The technology of hypertextual writing is present on the micro, textual level. Every appearance of the word "house" is blue, the colour of an active hyperlink on the Internet, inscribing the Internet's interface into the book's print pages. Besides imitating the interface and navigation structure of the Web, *House of Leaves* positions itself as a node on the information network before its narrative even begins. Beneath the copyright and publisher's information is the web address for the official *House of Leaves* website. Sharing the title of the novel and its publication date, the website is its fraternal twin – the point being, as Jessica Pressman has put it, that "the Internet is a constitutive part of not only the novel's narrative and aesthetic but also its production history," in that "the digital network that housed the first edition of the novel is shown to be an inherent part of the print novel that emerged from it."<sup>15</sup> Critic Mark B.N. Hansen has identified the novelty of *House of Leaves* its enactment of the horror produced by a very real shift in ontological reference due to the influence of digital technologies, as "the novel is about an impossible object, a referent that is absent not simply in the sense of being lost," which makes it "a realist novel about an object that, for precise technical reasons, cannot belong to the 'reality' we inhabit."<sup>16</sup>

Thus, rather than viewing the central symbol of the text, the eponymous House, as an updated gothic/horror version of a (Borgesian) textual labyrinth, there is evidence enough to suggest that more appropriate is to treat Danielewski's *House of Leaves* as fictional conceptualisation of the situation of the book in a digital age. In his introduction, Johnny Truant warns the reader that "old shelters – television, magazines, movies – won't protect you anymore. You might try scribbling in a journal, on a napkin, maybe even in the margins of this book. That's when you'll discover you no longer trust the very walls you always took for granted" (*HL*, xxiii). It is not just the man-eating house that haunts *House of Leaves*; it is the mutation of "old shelters" (e.g. books), induced

15 Jessica Pressman, "*House of Leaves*: Reading the Networked Novel," *Studies in American Fiction* 34.1 (Spring 2006): 108.

16 Mark B.N. Hansen, "The Digital Topography of Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*," *Contemporary Literature* 45.4 (2004): 607.

by digital technology. Zampano identifies the digital as the ghost haunting the film "The Navidson Record": "even though the spectre of digital manipulation has been raised in *The Navidson Record*, to this day no adequate explanation has managed to resolve the curious enigma" (HL, 335). The real ghost in the film, and the novel that subsumes it, is the "spectre of digital manipulation" – the presence of an invisible network of technologies that infiltrate our existence, our access to information, and our ability to read our world and its narratives. The "horror" effect of Danielewski's text is achieved through the well-known identification technique – by conflating the House with the book, he casts the novel's reader in the position of a reader *within* the text. This is evident in the pivotal scene when Will Navidson's brother, Tom, struggles to save Will's daughter Daisy from certain death. The house swallows him into its dark abyss, and in this moment of horror and ontological impossibility, the house is described as a text:

The whole place keeps shuddering and shaking, walls cracking only to melt back together again, floors fragmenting and buckling, the ceiling suddenly rent by invisible claws, causing moldings to splinter, water pipes to rupture, electrical wires to spit and short out. Worse, the black ash of below, spreads like printer's ink over everything, transforming each corner, closet, and corridor into that awful dark. (HL, 345)

The "black ash" of the house's internal abyss is compared to "printer's ink" whose "transforming" power rewrites every space with which it comes into contact. The house is like a book: made of ink, it becomes a thing to be read and analysed, navigated and referenced.

On a macro level, the novel achieves this haunting sense of a narrative crossover between worlds and walls through its relationship to its multimedia network and in particular to Poe's album *Haunted*. As critics have already shown (Pressman most convincingly of all), the clues to deciphering some of the novel's mysteries actually exist outside the oversized book: in its sibling soundtrack and its *paratext*, the simultaneously published volume of *The Whalestoe Letters*, whose "Foreword" is written by a fictional character not present in the novel, Walden D. Wyrhta, whose attention to the letters was triggered by his wife Waheeda. Waheeda and Walden Wyrhta form the acronym WWW, a detail that further connects

the collected letters and the framing mechanism they provide to the World Wide Web. The reader who ventures outside the book *House of Leaves* to Wyrhta's "Foreword" recognizes an opportunity to "organize, catalogue, index and cross-index" the content contained in the letters from the novel's Appendix in a new way. *House of Leaves* promotes a networked reading strategy not only by rewarding the reader with clues contained in its multimedia assemblage, but also by providing, in its central text, a pedagogical example of a reader learning to navigate the system. Truant is the novel's representative reader, and it is through him that the reader of *House of Leaves* learns to adopt appropriate reading practices for approaching networked narratives. It is only when Truant adopts a new approach and starts to read beyond the pages of Zampano's manuscript, and out into a wider geographical and informational network, that he acquires an awareness of the larger issues foregrounded in the text. As Truant writes in his Introduction, surpassing the education he painfully received from his experience with the manuscript, "the irony is it makes no difference that the documentary at the heart of this book is fiction. [...] The consequences are the same" (HL, xx).

The success of the novel's pedagogical project is evident on the *House of Leaves* Bulletin Board at [www.houseofleaves.com](http://www.houseofleaves.com). A virtual space where readers form a community based on real-time communication about the novel, as of 5 September, 2013, it boasts a fellowship of 34,105 registered members and a trove of 137,795 articles. Through the interactive internet forum, the reader re-enacts Johnny Truant's rite of passage, becoming part of the network that is *House of Leaves*: "Just as you have swept through me. / Just as I now sweep through you" (HL, 518). Reading across this network, the reader of *House of Leaves*, "you," is not only interpolated into the reading practices of the digital network but also pushed towards heightened awareness of how these technologies inform the literature she reads. The novel's print-to-Web-to-print publication history is also depicted in the editorial footnotes by the fictional Ed. who annotates Truant and Zampano's manuscript. One such footnote states, "Following the release of the first edition over the Internet, several responses were received by email, including this one" (HL, 151). The same openness works not retroactively, but proactively.

The production of the novel is an ongoing process, for the Eds. not only acknowledge omissions but also promise future editions: "Though we were ultimately unsuccessful, all efforts were made to determine who wrote the above verse [...]. Anyone who can provide legitimate proof of authorship will be credited in future editions. – Ed." (*HL*, 45). Such fictional promises to amend the book acknowledge that in a digital age, wherein information can be easily altered and updated, the book is never a discrete and complete object but always a node in an ever-changing network of information, interaction, and potential or "virtual" readings. As must by now be evident, the "fall" of *House of Leaves* (Poe – not only Danielewski's sister, but also Edgar Allan – is a touchstone intertext) as a narrative comes as an aftereffect of the collapse of text and paratext: Zampano's *The Navidson Record* is pure paratext, an ekphrasis on a film; Johnny Truant's interaction with Zampano's manuscript provides paratextual commentary in the form of a personal narrative; and the Ed.'s comments on publication serve as a constant reminder of the novel's processual re-shaping by its paratext.

And the "fall" of *House of Leaves* as book comes in the wake of its collapse of text and hypertext, creating a textual assemblage that registers the influence of digital media as a source of significant and stimulating transformations for the novel in a digital age. Danielewski's own pronouncements on the subject of the novel display his broad understanding of textuality that, in accordance with the McLuhanesque tetrad of "laws of media," becomes enhanced, rather than displaced or obsolesced, by the digital. Thus, if "the analogue powers of these wonderful bundles of paper" might "have been forgotten" in the internet age, "I'd like to see the book reintroduced for all it really is."<sup>17</sup> What the book "really is," at the turn of the millennium, is print inserted into a contemporary context and "reintroduced" to a specific readership, one that is digitally literate. This is brought home by the novel's "envoy" – on the last page of the book, after all the appendices and extensive Index, there is the final textual hyperlink that ends by opening outwards and connecting its print body to the

Internet. Following the publisher's credits and copyright information, the last page of the book contains an "imagetext" consisting of vertically arranged letters forming the inscription "Yggdrasil," together with the following quatrain: "What miracle is this? This giant tree. / It stands ten thousand feet high / But doesn't reach the ground. Still it stands. Its roots must hold the sky." This image text is accompanied, above and below, by two dots, the one full, the other empty.

In Scandinavian mythology, Yggdrasil, the tree whose branches hold together the worlds of the universe, is believed to be ash – the last of the innumerable self-reflective moments, referring to the hyper-walls of the house on Ash Tree Lane. In a final punning moment, this allusion is not only ancient and metaphoric but recent and material: for Yggdrasil was the name of an early, mid-90s, version of the Linux Operating System. This subtle reference thus links a cultural myth explaining the universe as network to a computer operating system structuring our Internet culture, a reference that is further enhanced by the presentation of a large, bold O beneath the stanza describing the Yggdrasil tree as an invisible network. As Pressman has argued convincingly, "the open O corresponds to the dark dot at the top of the page and represents opposing states – absence/presence, zeros/ones – the bits of patterned information that construct the digital world."<sup>18</sup>

*House of Leaves* is simultaneously revolutionary and representative of the state of the contemporary novel in enhancing Bakhtin's observation about the novel's constant – its conscious relationship to and incorporation of emergent forms that is "the most important thing: the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with the unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)."<sup>19</sup> *House of Leaves* elaborates on this novel-genre constant by enacting it on the level of the medium itself: presenting the book of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as printed medium open to, and evolving into, its digital and electronic contexts – a singularly relevant project of, to paraphrase Goldsmith, "Internetting the Printed Book."

17 Sophie Cottrell, "Bold Type: Conversation with Mark Danielewski," *Bold Type* (April 2002): [www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0400/danielewski/interview.html](http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0400/danielewski/interview.html)

18 Pressman, 120.

19 M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 7.

You are cordially invited to join the monkey frolics at the opening of

# *Personal Hygiene*

By Peter Milne

Thursday April 4th 2013  
6 - 8pm



Colour Factory Gallery, 409 Gore Street Fitzroy, Vic.



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# IMPROVING BOWEL FUNCTION AFTER BOWEL SURGERY

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**la merde  
s'exécute dans votre jambe, même**  
ON THE ART OF PETER MILNE

### ONCE UPON A TIME

A cut. It queers into a perverse compression: a cloud slices an eye, a razor blade cuts through the moon.

A chimp paints in French. With awkward prehensile nous it scratches a brush across a canvas: *Il était une fois*.

The residue of these images doesn't cling to mindfulness upon waking. There is no mordant horror, no delight, nothing to sift over.

No tumescence.

Only *horror vacui*. And not even in Latin.

### IN SPRING

Luis Buñuel casts a long shadow. It stretches in time and place from the élan of the banquet years of Paris to the banality of hospital food in Brisbane. Ants crawling around the palm of a hand morph into the blunt stasis of inscrutable and unwanted words on a page. When Peter Milne awoke in fright from the tough love of an operation to remove bowel cancer, he craved the soothing buffer of dream memories. Memories of a weird, incalculable and time-consuming rebus to be sifted over as a means of distraction. In *Personal Hygiene* (2013) brutal reality and the escapism of longed-for dreams twist and squirm in an uncomfortable tourniquet of fancy and horror: a fantastical version of himself in the fierce mania of concupiscence, dragging out of nowhere an impossible assemblage of grand pianos draped with a dead calf, bleeding from the

eyes, and the tethered cargo of prim and uncertain priests. In the stubborn absence of a *grand guignol* was a blunt and nasty text: *Improving Bowel Function After Bowel Surgery*. This drably utilitarian recovery manual is a Dada readymade straight out of some forgotten flea market. This was a text not of "practical advice" but of the paralysing dread of a brutal past tense, the horrible realisation of *what has been*. Not the cloud and the moon. A scalpel cutting out a tumour.

So in photomedia as in other forms of art, when reality fails, invention prevails. With hindsight the artist's tone is more measured, considered, resigned: "*Personal Hygiene* is the series of visual revelations that should have come to me to provide comfort at this time of need. It didn't happen that way, so I had to invent these memories for myself". Whether hyperreality or, after Jorge Luis Borges, memory traces of an illusory past, Milne's deliciously sardonic response to this miserable impasse condenses the absurdity of *what has been* into the pie in the face slapstick of the *Personal Hygiene* images.

The delirious hyperlogic of dreams blurs not only time but also the sequential order that shapes their memory traces in the waking mind. In the exhibition of *Personal Hygiene* in April this year in Melbourne, the first mural in the series, "Human Relations", suggested itself as a kind of user-friendly didactic panel. But the garish day-glow of this image de-fluoresces into the twilight of an artificial night of oneiric horror. Grotesque imagery of vivisection

and the propulsion of primates into space are prefaced by the benevolent “initiative” of the Australian government for all citizens, like Milne, who find themselves reflecting on *what has been*. But for *whom* is this self-help pamphlet intended? The hijinks of the chimp on the toilet seat, festooned with toilet paper and pants around its knees while sitting on the throne, suggests the substitution of cancer patient and lab experiment. From the “scientific” torture of primates to public health warnings about inebriation or smoking, absolute control in the name of science is a preposterous hubris courting failure. Putting toilet paper in your mouth is the visual pratfall that suggests as much.

With such vaudevillian images as this, *Personal Hygiene* may seem a work of pathos, sarcasm or melancholy. But it is more angry than that. In a more sinister move it shadows Milne’s dark footfall into the theatres of menace and cruelty. Harold Pinter fails to step on to Milne’s stage, nor does Antonin Artaud (eerily, though, the macabre Australian clown duo Zig and Zag do). Nor do infamous practitioners of vivisection, such as William Harvey and Josef Mengele. However their avatars are present in the anonymous space-race jockeys who blithely prepare pacified chimps for zero gravity. Milne is also sensitive to the vocabulary of revenge tragedy as Jacobean viciousness. A baby Rhesus macaque screams in terror as it is injected with who knows what by a perfunctory technician. But the punctum here is a steely defiance in the gaze of its adult neighbour, whose “fuck you” countenance promises the appalling facial violence seen in the accompanying “Apocalypse” image. Here, in a nightmarish return of the repressed, the abhorrent facial disfigurement of survivors of chimpanzee attacks is vividly and lovingly captured. These images of lacerated facial wounds scream out, in a Marlin Perkins or Gordon Grice sort of way, that nature will always be wild, whether it’s a lab rat, a grizzly bear or a colonic neoplasm.

Milne understands the workings of the unconscious as well as the journey of excrement. Both, with reference to Jacques Lacan, are obliquely structured like a language. In this case the abject stoma that replaces the bowel is the crude metonymy of corrective surgery. And here too we find the *condensation* of images of illness and death (Rowland S. Howard and Tracy Pew of the Boys Next Door, a stilt walker with a mutant, ossified baby), of shocking misery (children with colostomy bags), parts of the body we never want to see or know about (inside the bowel), and the appalling exercise of power out of control (former

Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett, the Ku Klux Klan, the Brotherhood of Freemasons and the preposterously camp Frank Thring as the terrifyingly camp Herod from *King of Kings*). But more weirdly, and this is the vivid poetry of Milne’s work, although there is humiliation and pain there is also pleasure. A tortured Oncomouse watches lugubriously throughout each image, a perverse chimera of the genus *mus* and the performance artist Stelarc and his ear on arm. A sexually ambiguous Mick Jagger pouts and poses in silver hot pants with heavy metal, while a truant, adolescent school-girl watches him voyeuristically from a distance, perched in her Luna Park eyrie. In the figurative spectacle of ecstasy and dread such as this we see the *displacement* of the facts of his experience into the repetition of anally associated paired figures: the ambivalent Don Dunstan and an unidentified girl, Gilbert and George, Will Robinson and Doctor Smith. And the celebrity cameos of cruelty and hedonism, consumption and intoxication, violence and pain of Melbourne in the 1970s in which Milne grew up.

## MONKEY PUZZLE

The dream as rebus in Freud is a kind of over-determination generated by the principle of condensation. It allows for multiplicity, polysemy and excess. Freud’s use of the term in *The Interpretation of Dreams* characterizes it as a “picture puzzle”. The “monkey frolics” in *Personal Hygiene* is certainly textbook transference in psychoanalytic theory. As Milne states in the didactic notes for the series, the grotesque venality of human behaviour is filtered through “the prism of our relationship to other Primates”. In the sonic semantics of *rebus* and *rhesus* is the astute or unwitting clue to the dream-poetics of the torture, laceration or dissection of monkeys. Rhesus macaques are the lab rat of choice for vivisection. In a quirk of fate that seems more apposite an occasion for this conceit than the joining of man and monkey in the great circle of life, humans and Rhesus monkeys share nearly all their DNA. The rhesus antigen that gives the primate its name indicates its literal blood kinship to human beings. Freud would have loved the association, which was first discussed in scientific literature in the same year he died. Presumably he missed it as he succumbed to lung cancer.

Like Milne, I have also had to invent an image of displacement more apposite than this faintly veiled association of artist and primate. It is an image that speaks



of Freud's notion of a dream wearing a disguise. Imagine that television's most verbose secret chimp, Lancelot Link, had cancer of the testicles. You can hear him carping on and on to Mata for an entire episode about a lump in his lunch that she won't believe. Mata shrugs, takes a slug from a bottle of gin, says "meh" to the camera and falls down dead drunk. The laugh track takes us uproariously to the ad break.

## SIGN HERE

*Personal Hygiene* is far from being an autobiographical work. It is rather Milne's autograph of a specific time and place of an unreal vulnerability, having suffered the ignominy of rough penetrative invasiveness. But it is in an unassuming meta-text that we see the most chilling autographical insight into the artist's experience, a loaded image that passes itself off as a launch invite for the *Personal Hygiene* exhibition. In a work about this work, a vamping Marilyn Monroe, all tits and 1950s couture, seductively escorts an agro chimp who knows where. Beating its fist defiantly, it resembles a primate Marquis of Queensbury. But in the dream-worked fakery of these recovered memories, this invitational image is another variation of those abject, paired figures. This apparently playful and innocuous piece of ephemera that advertises the main event is perhaps the most literal and urgent iconography of *Personal Hygiene*. This is not Marilyn as the gold-digger Pola Debevoise from *How to Marry A Millionaire* (1953), but the mutant avatar of a drowsy nurse, cajoling her agitated patient into the colonic-maw of Luna Park to pass their first, uncomfortable stomatic bowel movement in days. Pissed off, the chimp knows that this is an impossible shit since, Dalí-like, the colostomy bag has morphed into a neck-kerchief. The sadness of this displacement may be scatological whimsy, or cathartic phantasmagoria in a dream. But the shocking realisation of this horror in waking life is an outrage to dignity.

This pissed off chimp could be a surreal image of Milne's memories of Moomba, Tarax lemonade, a Skyhooks concert at Bananas Disco in St Kilda, threatened by disreputable thugs, the sharpies that made a habit of hanging around Luna Park looking for trouble. But the gaiety of its party hat can't distract Nurse Marilyn from knowing who and what she is really looking at. This ephemeral image is a symbol of the pity and terror associated with *having had* a life-threatening illness: catharsis as an inflection of tense. But

catharsis, too, as the belly-laugh that just won't quit at the absurdity of it all. From the perspective of both an artist as well as a clock-ticking carbon-based life-form, it represents the *vanitas* of quaint subject matter disguising the fucking mess. Samuel Beckett best expressed this artifice, with his signature derision and despair, as a bowtie on a throat cancer.

## LA MARIÉE MISE À NU PAR SES CÉLIBATAIRES, MÊME

Things often sound better in French. Sexier, like if Brigitte Bardot said it, cooler if it was Alain Delon. More enticing if it was Marilyn as she stripped her patient bare, readying him for anal violation in the name of compassion. But *merde* stinks every bit as much as *shit*. The same goes for semantic perplexity. *Retard en Verre*. Marcel Duchamp cryptically sub-titled his most famous work "Delay in Glass". This droll aphorism is unashamedly intellectual, as well as a Gallic, Poindexter pun that captures the idea of suspended animation and locomotive atrophy in the work, as the impotent bachelors keep pumping out frustrated lubricant that never reaches the haughty bride above. However there is no element of delay in Milne's images of pain, humiliation and frustration. In the cruelty of dream-worked misprision, animal vivisection and human surgery are as fucked up as each other. And when it comes to the fundament, of bowel movements or vomiting, one orifice is as good as any other. Among many others to have made the analogy, Simone Purcel-Broutschert's *La Machine Humaine* (1966) likens the work of the mechanic to that of the surgeon ("*Pour réparer le moteur de la machine humaine, le chirurgien n'aura pas, comme le mécanicien d'automobile, la possibilité de soulever le capot*"). Like an automobile, the human body's parts sometimes stand in for others or fail to work in ways they should. The likening of the flow of oil to that of blood and the entropic vectors of energy requiring constant topping up amounts to a humorous, quasi-scientific post-humanism. Very French, very cybernetic, but also a Manichean response to André Malraux's *Human Condition* of 1933. Whether man or man-machine, there will be a malodorous issue from the fallout of combustion and digestion. When you've got to go you gotta go. And it's always the same when you do. Shit stinks. If you've got a hole in your side and you can't put the cap on, it will always run down your leg.

*Even.*



IAN HAIG

## the horror of the toilet

The toilet is the great Freudian site of repression the interface of the internal body which meets the external world; a potent symbol of the bodily interior and exterior. What is shit after all but part of ourselves? the material the internal body has no use for. Much like cancer which is perceived as an entity from the outside, affecting our interiors, shit too remains a substance that no doubt we would prefer to think of as exterior to ourselves.

The toilet offers us a strange object and interface to the natural world, at once an extension of our gastrointestinal system and a vessel which combines disgust and purity in one. The bathroom and toilet combine aesthetic materials that are rarely seen together – abjection and cleanliness. Our horror of the toilet is perhaps more the dissolution of such aesthetic boundaries than the actual contents of the bowl.

Slavoj Žižek's has applied a cultural reading to the toilet,<sup>1</sup> where the differences between German, French and American toilets place us in the middle of complex ideological differences when one hits the flush button. The German toilet provides us with a ledge to inspect the contents of our bowls before one flushes, the French toilet sees shit disappear entirely and the American sees the toilet is full of water, our shit safely submerged in a layer of protective water.

1 Slavoj Zizek on the cultural reading of toilets <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwTJXHNP0bg>

Žižek, while still sitting on the thrown breaks down our fear of the toilet, as our shit disappears into another space, a netherworld, the ultimate horror is if the flushing doesn't work and objects return from the other dimension.<sup>2</sup> He suggests that cinema's unfolding images on screen, appearing like they are from another reality, are not dissimilar to shit appearing again from another dimension in the toilet after it has been flushed away.

Such cinematic toilet horrors give us portals to various netherworlds, as Žižek has outlined the toilet a facilitator for the return of the repressed. Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974) features Harry Caul (Gene Hackman) a professional surveillance and bugging expert. A role which essentially sees him uncovering and exposing people secrets of what should remain hidden. Caul imagines a toilet overflowing, bringing up a cesspool of blood, overflowing from the toilet bowl into the bathroom and into the real world, materialising the hidden and unseen from another reality.

Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) too changed forever the notion of the bathroom being a private and safe place, to one that could potentially be filled with horror. The transition from the close up of the bath drain hole to the dead open eye of Janet Leigh's character – the camera rotating in slightly circular movement like the

2 *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, dir. Sophie Fiennes (2006).

movement of water made the integral link to death and the netherworld, the other dimension of the drain.

*Psycho* too, provided us with an extended and lengthy scene of bathroom cleaning, as the camera follows Norman Bates in an obsessive compulsive action of removing all traces of Janet Leigh's blood and returning the bathroom, back to its pristine, virginal and clean exterior. The Bathroom scene of removing the blood and all its signs down the plughole, is echoed later in the final scenes of the film as the car sinks into the quicksand, which like the plughole and the bathroom drain, all traces are removed never to return. The very last shot of *Psycho* reveals the ultimate horror of all as the sunken car does return, like shit and blood from the abyss, from the netherworld and back into reality.

Some other toilet appearances not in Žižek's analysis include underground filmmaker George Kuchar's film *Pagan Rhapsody* (1970) which clearly takes the award for providing quite possibly cinema's most confrontational 'shit shot' in a toilet bowl. *Pagan Rhapsody's* depicts a giant semi formed turd in full view for the audience to inspect the contents of last night's dinner. Shit here functions as a symbol of Kuchar's de-mystification of the Hollywood melodrama in all its base level glory, campy theatricals, bad smudgy makeup, overwrought performances and rotting shit.

And finally to the abject toilet as a symbolic reflection of the internal body of the abject junkie seen in Danny Boyle's 'worst toilet in Scotland' scene from *Trainspotting* (1996). As 'Rent-boy' (Ewan McGregor) dives into the clogged public toilet, in an attempt to retrieve his heroin supposititious. The scene operates on a number of levels – the toilet here is a portal to another world, a kind of opening to a subterranean fantasy zone the complete inverse of its disgusting surface exterior. The toilet in this scene. the aesthetic opposite to the archetype of lush green Scottish fields, instead we are given another kind of abject biological reality.

The toilet occupies the site of disgust and revulsion and indeed denial, while simultaneously of health and well-being. If one considers the variety of alternative health practices which focus on the colon specifically as the channel of the body for regenerating health – from colonic irrigation, colon cleansing and enemas. Taken further the polymorphous function of the colon

as a receptor for sexual pleasure. The colon is a schizophrenic orifice, it is the location of waste and the unwanted leaving the body and also the location to enter the body via the phallus or lubricated sex toy and colonic tube. It is the body's energized zone of the interior/exterior world. As Philip Brophy has pointed out the colon is one of many zones which point to an unclassification of the body: *'the colon is the epicentre of the body's collapse between that which is internal and that which is external. It fluidly shifts and shapes in a flux between positive and negative space.'*<sup>3</sup>

One of the more enduring urban myths surrounding toilets is that of having ones intestines sucked out while sitting on an airplane toilet mid flight, which possibly has contributed to the body anxiety of the toilet and its potential of horror. The airplane toilet provides us with a violent and intense eradication device, it's abrupt and startling vacuum sound equals the intensity of the violent and absolute eradication of excrement from ones enclosed surroundings. The airplane toilet is also a cultural vacuum occupying none of Žižek's ideologies, for it sits outside of culture, outside of boundaries, and between time zones.

Shit, clearly one of the most abject materials our bodies can produce, yet shit's abjection is almost naturalised, it's disgusting and repulsive qualities tolerated momentarily and quickly dispensed with. The toilet functioning as a strange time travel device, as organic matter is whisked away to the netherworld never to be seen of again, the toilet as a portal to another unknown dimension, a mysterious black hole, which one opens the gateway to on a daily basis.

Excuse me for a moment I hear the call of nature.

3 Philip Brophy on the body internal <http://www.philipbrophy.com/projects/bdyhrbl/BodyInternalNotes.html>

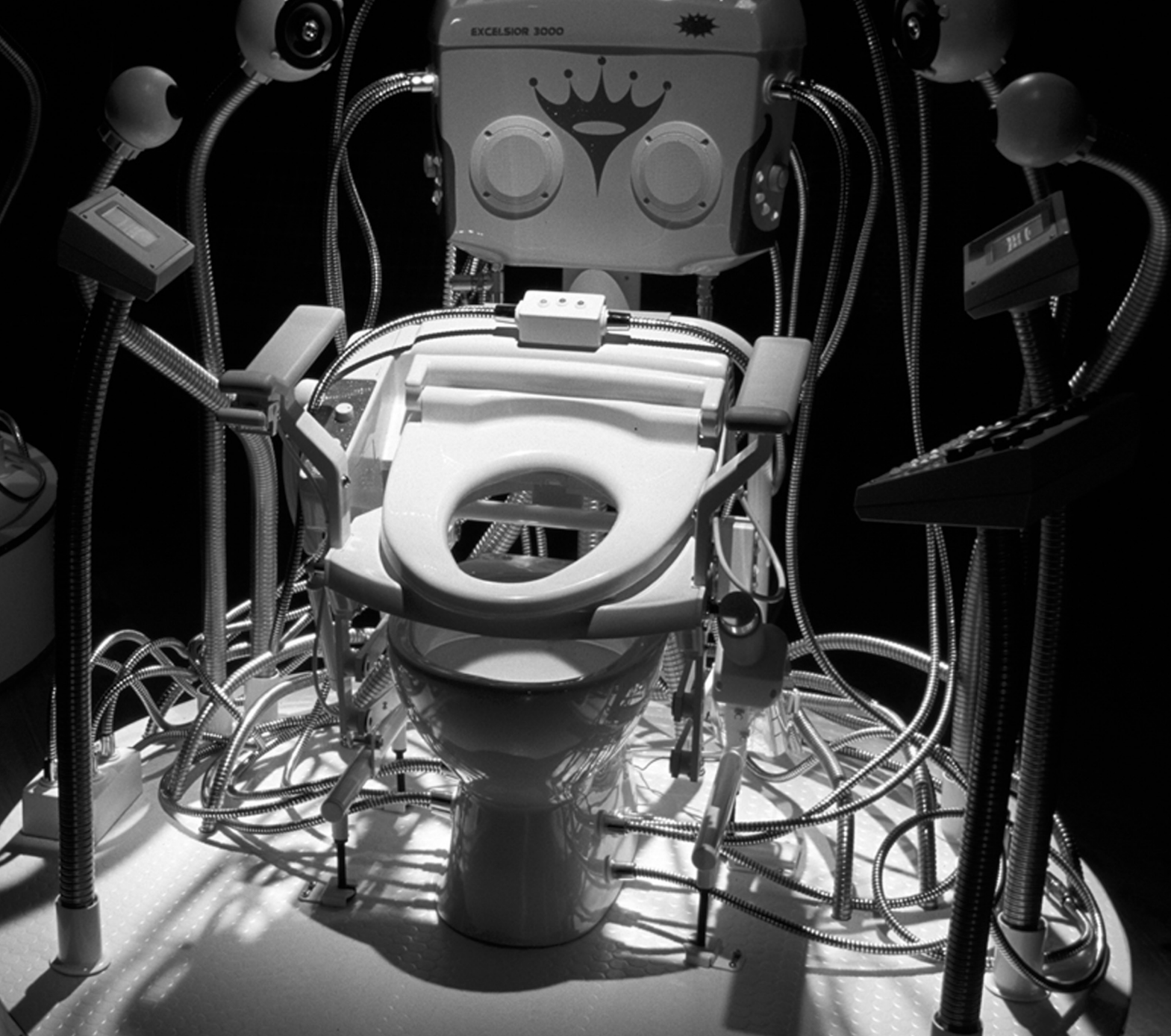
*The Dirt Factory*, Ian Haig, 2005

John Harvey Kellogg founder of the Kellogg's Cornflake empire was a believer in autointoxication, the idea that constipation could lead to all manner of ailments as the body would become slowly poisoned. Here the archetypal, family friendly cornflakes breakfast cereal is played out against the true back story and perverse backdrop of Kellogg's fixation with the bowel, enemas and cornflake induced colonics and the human body as a biological factory for filth.



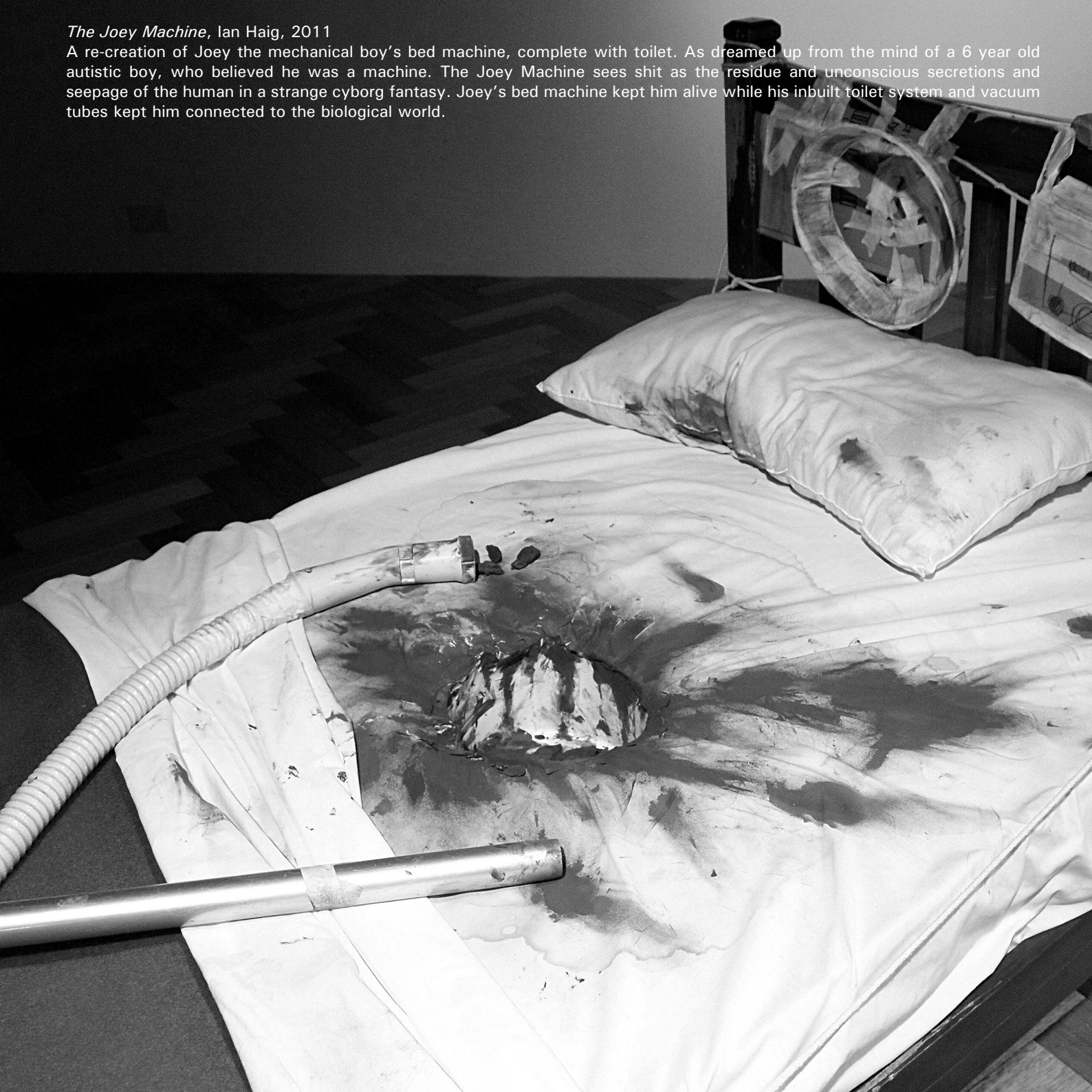
*Excelsior 3000 – bowel technology project, Ian Haig, 2001*

The toilet as technological interface to the biological world, complete with DVD selection for constipation and diarrhoea video and sound stimuli. The notion of alien technology that has landed in your bathroom. Here the toilet is rendered as a high tech time travel machine. The site of convergence - the high tech combined with the low base level - the home theatre fused with the throne. Increasingly as one spends more time in the media sphere of screen culture, we too need a toilet that is integrated into this new media environment.



*The Joey Machine, Ian Haig, 2011*

A re-creation of Joey the mechanical boy's bed machine, complete with toilet. As dreamed up from the mind of a 6 year old autistic boy, who believed he was a machine. The Joey Machine sees shit as the residue and unconscious secretions and seepage of the human in a strange cyborg fantasy. Joey's bed machine kept him alive while his inbuilt toilet system and vacuum tubes kept him connected to the biological world.





PHILIPPE SOLLERS

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PART 3 *[excerpt]*

translated by VERONIKA STANKIOVSKA & DAVID VICHNAR

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lead it in person is no longer under the yoke of militarism this entertains those men attracts them oh aching city oh nearly dying city they're cheerful since they're brave these pathetic ones are heroic a man holding a red flag standing on a stack of stones leaning on a cask behind him slacker a mate shouts at him no answered he i'm leaning in order not to fall when i'm dead then they're neither groan nor scream and one should remember that marat was strong 'cause he wrote what he heard in the middle of hard-working population i hear them talking of murder who dares to pronounce the word when it's the people who takes action he who's been since the eighteenth century murdered when he executes those who murdered him in the eighteenth century you call these executions murders back then 1792 1870 eighty-year interval only in between the two dates life of an elderly but from cradle to grave ten ordinary centuries were accommodated there you go one more century it's yours they got back to singing the dates the dates the dates you know we've long taught the earth existed say five to six million years now we know five billion's needed and then the cycles the mountains the digging of the valleys not surprising this splitting headache through the sentence the bag of censorship a reason in hell there the title of roll beef donkey horse carriage car cart assembling the engine deep down we're quite there like the two guys on the moon send the camera the pictures pass me the spade or the vacuum cleaner the problem isn't at all the dead hero no question of becoming mourners it's rather a scientific experiment than faded drama over time it'll bore them this great flood that's right they're not too glad to be alive are they except for a few fancies or a few desserts it's true they're scared of daily dissipation of sensitive tissue pain from gums to kidneys from liver to shoulder some would lock themselves in maths for less than that some like to plunge into dance oh ballet old ritual look what do the revisés of bolshoi the stroke of roman legions tight pepli to show the sylph thighs waving their arms at christ's bedside swan bidet strongly embraced by males along beaten muscled female teasing legionnaires in tutu and no one none to simply burst out laughing when the dancer star classe supérieure talks to you of an inside song of a link between arms and calves show your ars well oh spartacus how the bourgeois comes on the gallery shows happily the ars of the soviet homeland art is everlasting to them too then it was worth the pain getting excited for communism nothing develops by and large comrade all comes and goes there're breaks reflux it doesn't proceed like a protest parade think of a general tendency same everywhere broken hard that we need to leave now the stretched torn apart corpse asking to go back on and on are we from this world do you recognise yourself in there is the body yours yes you're certain beyond exploitation no no of nothing but it following night and day the innuendo the slope i'm not meant to be the system's response to everything and all i'm persistent to say i'm the outsider and honestly

that's why i accept until the very end the entry of the  
fight of classes that doesn't impress me at all no ulterior  
motive no bank account no personal obelisk to polish  
i'm looking for intervention points little finger right foot  
earlobes wrists shoulder tops i've really been on it for  
ages following all the legs to the back of the neck it  
makes more and more inflatable boat net egarde this  
side of dog understanding its bone this marrow hours of  
watch hear the murmur hear our stubbornness it's  
useless to conform to the law of cops of clerics to have  
a quick wank in front of them so they step in it's useless  
to aim for regular expulsion better going deeper see  
where it comes from wherein whereof it's done where  
it diverts give up detach yourself fight better leave the  
ball where the judge dances stuck to his preferred  
infringer subside leave them alone you don't have to  
give a shit and your isles will receive you ascending the  
open sea like a merry pod of whales hello you who dared  
they say that we see you depart regretfully but your  
wind it's their strong base your current it's their  
convulsion trembling of rejection so don't use your hand  
to cover their mouths sail flow past open yourself brim  
over don't refrain how bloody boring they can be with  
their history of forms ars oriented towards a large ostrich  
always egg laying of desert ancestral obsession of fetish  
trampled on a place with bell end begetting its glands i  
am the state they say without end to the state who  
didn't ask for much to stay the state on its own jealous  
god's intervention to his mooses' beard i don't wanna  
know it of sergeant majors emerged from nature to get  
a knack no no it's more complicated more supple and  
after all more gentle yes because more ferocious and if  
i like it personally to go watching five minutes he whose  
head and hair are white like wool snow he whose eyes  
are like fire flames brazen feet in a furnace and the voice  
like the noise of big waters if i like to count his seven  
stars his two-edged sword and now his face shines like  
the sun i fall to his knees one needs to flee a block away  
at top speed here buddies aren't satisfied they want a  
guy to be like napoleon on horseback cast of bronze  
same old story for girls they don't find it masculine  
enough if the job isn't shady long hair and sailcloth  
'cause then the question is whether he's got it if he  
hasn't even better if he can sing the suave rhythmically  
so they're displeased with the excerpt already the feeling

makes them run in dancers what delights me endlessly  
will be the twist of denial and he places his right hand  
on me that's to say i place it myself but in a rather  
special way it'll take ages to explain but who'll go  
through such an important qualitative change to keep  
both where one divides in two and says to me don't  
worry i'm the first and the last as a result we've got  
enough time to talk i'm alive i've been dead but now i'm  
alive in ways you won't guess bloody intuitionist the  
impact after which go ahead tell them what you've got  
to say without embellishment and you'll be entitled to  
sweets centuries i read your thing it's not bad i know  
you haven't earned tons of wheat with it i heard the  
aspersions cast on you tell me but it's pretty strong  
what they give you in every corner the serpent wants  
you personally comrade but he who'll win has nothing  
to doubt besides from the second death they can't do  
much against my ground-ground-ground-to-air missile  
but he who has ears listens and who can read must see  
the meaning purposefully hidden for him to recognise  
the endless flow anna per-anna even though the  
smoothest body should be the one going through the  
roughest patches you drive them mad with your  
predictions parables allegories in the social heart they  
won't stop playing if i/you was/were a/an at all to figure  
out who we they are but me i'll feed you hidden manna  
and a white stone with a name for you only as you have  
a number of things to finalise concerning general  
fornication substantial or insubstantial and idols they  
won't stop chopping under their sheets hey take my  
probe it does kidneys hearts balls womb and wallet and  
as they believe they do art then everyone according to  
their artwork will be authorised to break some jars in  
passing stick to morning star me i come like a thief you  
never know the hour when i arrive it'll go whiter and if i  
open nobody closes if i close i'd like to know who could  
open it up it'd be better anyway if they closed it but it's  
much stronger it's coming out of their pores out of every  
ply out of their mouth from the corner of their nostrils  
and the door i have opened in front of you no one can  
shut it 'cause even a weakling like you is cut off you  
remembered my words you didn't give up on my name  
you judge rightly useless writing abstractly for nothing  
and specifically for not much and it's necessary for  
those who call themselves jewish but who aren't and lie



knowing i love you brother jew bijew and you could be an exemplary column full of new names not pigs at all and you who're neither cold nor boiling hot you'd better plug in your fridge or really turn up your gas lukewarm tends to make me throw up so i stand at the door and if someone hears my voice and takes me in i'd like to dine with him and focus on the general situation and even democratically without a throne but not without music not without a trumpet climb up here and you'll see what comes next the need of alliance between the working class and the intellectuals ah i'm overjoyed again in the flexible language in its emerald rainbow and schlaf to me the twenty-four elders with their golden hearts and poum there you go the flashes the thunders the voices and seven senses two more than for you my dear ones and the sea of crystalline glass and the four animal directions full of eyes upfront and behind it's always better than your cinema if i like to see a lion a calf a man or an eagle with six wings and its gaze turning outward and inward night and day with the present imperfect future to the same rhythm what a water slide my lambs you have no idea what the message is and all the broadcasting channels but one could equally well say that it's there that the worm invades the fruit and prevents them from ever being anything other than their pathetic self-centred piston pushing itself me me in saecula saeculorum amen so i've got a better and better understanding of the turbine i have a better insight in the kidnap from beginning to end talk of the unconscious that'll make you spend the time with your folks me i'm speaking of the détournement of before of when before the one who has the spark lights up of the withholdings at the source they don't internally doubt about it's a whole other thing a knife fight here between that which goes through me and the obstinate front once called fiendish don't trust for even a second those sleepers who tell you nothing is further away from the truth the term prophet appears round 980 concerning passion taken in the physical sense it's in the twelfth that one speaks of prophecy from the greek prophétés literally he who says in advance you're gonna check yourselves at least those of you who aren't too enrooted whence comes this rudeness i don't know yes it's really limitless yes it makes my head tougher than diamond what a stone i've got my gab taken away for having swallowed

this starter which is worthy of opening this volume and of breaking the seals i'm asking you for a little of our days need one start crying 'cause no one can look inside need one become this ram with seven horns specialising in reading without which what does one read unless one's petty urge under a pee let's go welcome here with golden harps and cups scented rhythmical it's time to wash a little even with the best soap and all the perfumes of araby our hands are gonna end up feeling a bit too much sperm shit it exists it's understood but there's nothing to do with it a unique pot or plate the important thing beyond blood is to live through all tribe all language all people all nation let's go move a bit your vision is low no one ever said dialectical materialism had to limit itself to hand on basket for a yes or a no exert your card a bit reopen the booklets so that the opera start anew hither and thither hop hop show yourselves the integrity with a thousand wishes you're arriving in chinese at miao otherwise said a miracle whereas simultaneously without desire it'll be tchao the gap the orifices and the words fall off the law coming from balance itself a by-product of the general connection as the cover gets used to the washing powder alright that'll do for the moment what do you make of it not bad maybe you could push the critique of jesus christ superstar a bit there's an entire public of thugs who're hereby likely not to follow a mass of lil' lost souls your take on things is a bit distant listen the demo is a backdrop they need history at the level of cops cars of the bourgeoisie at the level of the revisus clerics speech aligning their words of notaries underworld queers corrupted perverts drugged, oh the white collars from the party you realise they'd forbid hugo if it comes to it and sure enough baudelaire if he lived in their time imagine proust's gob seeing the blokes and the girls pass underneath his windows with their banners shouting sodom gomorra the fighting goes on he looks listens turns toward the french governess it's time regained bring me nonetheless a shawl imagine what it turns out like in such conditions the correspondence gide claudel do we have to publish corydon what era but watch out make no mistakes is it on the drop or on the rise is it the end of the roman empire where are the new primitives in our regions decadent school was taken as a title for a literary school round 1885 after verlaine's verse i am the empire at the end of decadence but things

are so to speak worse and better it obviously depends on your point of view which doesn't prevent one from fully realising all the symptoms turn up ev'rywhere in the landslide and when you hear them cry out your revolution you can shove it up your arse it's not gonna make you come there you can be sure it's pulling toward the right pathetic shitheads as if to come were the last word of this dump as if it didn't recover in stool its contrast echo its russian mountains trail as if the ruse of reason wasn't endless as if there were ejection seats outside of history this place is truly convenient one looks like two ravens of crazy wisdom of the future that makes me wanna listen to a record bygrateful dead for instance dark star it's the perfect place to swim between white and black what a picture if the esplanades opened for a second with general shivers at the ocean of skeletons what mind doesn't take it for a liquid object what does it mean not to think of it oh shit there's the pain dispersing throughout the teeth the temples the back of the neck the pain you understand it's like extended orgasm counted temporalised palpable who has said that one couldn't write it but yes by suffering for a long time over a low throbbing heat lively points that's where you see who works the work or who talks the talk and the movement is always pushing twofold from one side holding back on the other that's what makes no one right or everyone right from a certain fanatic side but only the extreme on lever duration is right actually the practise of future tense ah yes that unfolds that's gonna feed the horizon to come exhaling even here that's why good for me and not for me in a second there you go flowers on the flowerbed this effect of the femur boiling the jawbone is a symptom perfectly described in the manuals you've got a nice right to be reconsidered for schizophrenia and it's got to be said everybody else is on the other side with their intertwined agreements their unions whose price you pay oh the moving conveyor taking their plotting their state secrets which make you laugh your head off to clouds oh deep river you carry them you sweep them along you roll them in your sudden falls you let them float inside you like hippos that would come from time to time to the surface to open their greyness flapping yawning them and me and me to what extent you can talk to them without end about themselves it's not believable all psychiatrists in power who must

be heard the confidences the projects the memories oh deep end you're even bigger than their proverbial mummy into whom they all yearn to get in though you've seen the old bithell go out in person that ever since plays monarch corporate manager and the younger and younger girl pain in the arse new combine harvester from the bottom of kinds and all the varieties of toing-and-froing from the same to the other and from the identical to the similar roulette bacarrat sailboat motorboat you're in no whirlwind close to your emotionless moved amazon race congo parana chang jiang love you too can prepare take care of the leftovers the scraps it's enough to like your kitchen only the thirsty come only he who'd like some white water gets it for free what most interests me is that brain dives below the sponge flip flap letting pour its clay within and underneath lowers the pressure half-loud tatters who sees a sentence therein you yes oh really when can you cut up extract what sticks around if you cut through what is that story of the statement where have you found this magic item of paul waits mary the grandmother of peter's got stubble on her chin kind let me laugh while all sags at the same time without moving without water without matter while the emptiness forces everyone to swindle while it makes matter fall by fallen matter only the filaments on the surface and you surface on surface letting your person echo open up it's not for nothing that the finite quantities are said to be engendered by a continuous current line by point surface by solid line by surface clinging one to the other swallow me eat me dismember me spin me your breath your blast your throat give me your perfumed nose with finger up my arse and cock to the brim she may be black warm blonde black vibrant the tongue always tipped as soon as she opens black the eyes more shining due to weed which reminds me of the fireside when was it never maybe and where in this town no but yes indeed now i've got a feeling of a provincial hole was it a shelter summer apartment block wasteland naked on the floor one'd say she comes from cyclades of the ancient aegean dislocated in tertiary times i don't know maybe it's the ankles or the clavicles the burning cold warm side teeth breath black or cornea of the eye the echo gasping a bit in the voice the black conscience of the skull

DAVID KELLY & DANIELE PINTANO  
**mass graves**



Ewigkeit  
[clock] steht über d n Dein  
mein Freund [frien das m  
das Auge des Tode ings]  
Visionen | be als ic  
[streets] der Stadt [Verge  
ausserhalb [outsid heibe  
Schein | che W  
[evaporates] | pflaster  
sowie das klebrig durc  
seine letzte [last] sei D  
verpasst [missed] N  
[answers] – als ic der S  
| mit [with] d ] der  
Nacht — Das llv] in  
| sinkt allmäl more  
Man hört die asrede  
und | die |  
muss jetzt [now ich  
Mutter | hö |  
| aber | ie ich  
Freunden [frien harre  
| die an den Ta  
lange erwarten Tasc  
Träne [tear] |

im Gl... vergiss  
kurze —DAS LI  
—Pinksti  
Es we  
das Leber  
get] eure  
ppenl  
Feuer [für  
der Henker

Lum  
am meis

Nr. 200, Landsc.  
Acryl auf Papier/Holz  
70x100cm

Nr. 219, Landschaft XX  
Acryl auf Papier/Holz  
70x100cm

Nach den 120 Tagen von Sodom, 1968  
Transcop  
21x24cm

Nr. 232, Passage XXIV

...ce.  
between  
from the  
hidden b...  
forgot hamr...  
om chest on do...  
Paul see like...  
age the of con...  
flesh still legs which...  
inking the bored a o...  
to don't wou...  
ed a the top...  
desk thought...

...all go...  
I hadn't sawing growing up crying  
imagine spilling tipped over the  
behind of around if don't if what was  
ough checks of coming onto mirror have as to about attached  
ough the labor play in have mirror have as to about attached  
which me some back someone made have bed the  
or have of be in held in more

with be different have in  
scraping fontanels slide w  
neither get garret hea  
by creel spiga the others nigh  
there be rit  
Drops Per Minute for the I s  
Day 1: 12 of v  
I want

28

here a pinkie between one one one to that's photo heads

Vögel [birds] singen in den Bäumen [trees] | Jungs [boys] in kurzen [short]  
Hosen | Mädchen [girls] mit Eis am Stiel [stick] | Die Liebe [love] blüht |  
Alle [everyone] sind bereit [ready] zu schreien [scream] | Es ist besser [better]  
| die Erinnerungen [memories] an den letzten [last] Sommer [summer] zu  
vergessen [forget] | lichte [All] [everything] wird besser  
[better]—Steinküstentraum | am Rande | des blauen Glitzerpapiers | das  
nach | Salz schmeckt [taste] | wenn | man [you] | es [it] leckt  
[lick]—Tödliche Strahlen | der gelben [yellow] Scheibe [disc] | verbrennen  
[burn] unsere [our] | Augen | bis wir blind sind [are] | und | sie  
herausreißen | um wieder | zu sehen—Komm | zieh [show] mir [me] die  
alten [old] Boote [boats] | die tot [dead] schwimmen [swim] | und | dem  
Wasser | eine | gewisse [certain] Menschlichkeit [humanity] schenken  
[give]—Zwischen Meer [sea] | und | Hinterland | liegt der Strand [shore] |  
mit seinen | Schirmen [umbrellas] der Hoffnung [hope] | dem | Geruch  
[scent] der Ferne [faraway] | und | dem Geflüster [whispers] der Ewigkeit  
[eternity]—Der goldene [golden] Ziegel [brick] | auf dem Dach [roof] der |  
Gerechtigkeit [justice] | wurde vom Diener [servant] | des Teufels [devil] |  
auf [on] dem | brennenden Altar | zerschmettert—Silberne Schneckenwelt  
| Nass [wet] vom goldenen [gold] | verschmilzt [melts] sie zu einem |  
kupfernen [copper] Glückstafel | der einst vom Sonnenkönig | an eine  
Prostituierte überreicht wurde | vererbte Siegel [seals] | der  
untergegangenen [lost] Nationen | verzieren [adorn] | die Ringe [rings] der |  
verwöhnten [spoiled] Nachkommen [descendants] | die als Präsidenten  
[presidents] | die Welt [world] gefährden [endanger] | und der | Zukunft  
[future] den | Horror der Vergangenheit [past] | garantieren  
[guarantee]—Vogelperspektive, / ich frage [ask] mich [myself] | was sie  
[they] da oben [up] tun [do] | diese [these] Vögel | Lachen [laugh] sie uns  
[us] aus | oder | fürchten [afraid] sie sich vor uns? Wären sie gerne | wie  
[like] wir [us] | oder [or] | sind [are] sie [they] wir?—Die Tage werden immer  
kürzer | und | das Leben zeigt sein wahres [real] Ich—Vergelbtes  
[yellowed] Sonnenblumengesicht | schwarze [black] Tatze [paw] eines  
jungen [young] Tigers | Wo [where] soll ich meine Wahrheit suchen? | Die  
Tür [door] ist geschlossen [closed] | Das Tor [gate] weit [wide] geöffnet  
[open] | Das Regenbogengesicht weint weiter | bis ans Ende des goldenen  
Flusses | Ich suche [search] das Finden [find] | wie Gott die perfekte  
Kreation | Blattgrüner Schatten [shadow] eines Baumes | versperrt  
[blocked] mir meine Sicht [view] | auf [of] mein [my] eigenes, dunkles [dark]  
Licht—Schwarzes Tränenmeer auf dem ich reis' [travel] | wo bringst Du  
mich hin? | Was [what] hab [have] ich [I] getan [done] | dass die Sterne ich  
nicht mehr seh'? | Wo kommt all der Kummer her? | Der Zweifler [sceptic]  
steht [stands] neben [next] mir [me] | und rückt [moves] mich [me] in sein  
[his] falsches [false] Licht | Steine von Gräbern einer vergangenen [bygone]

FRÉDÉRIC FORTE

# 8 minute-operas

translated by DANIEL LEVIN BECKER, IAN MONK & MICHELLE NOTEBOOM

*(upper mask in the form of a snake)*

**Overture: Evil**  
Is about to descend upon a tree (this bough)

Below, a time of innocence

**Act I:**  
Young girls in white dresses  
Frolic in the field [it's day, they don't know]

Trompe l'oeil flowers blend with  
Genuine <sup>white</sup> flowers

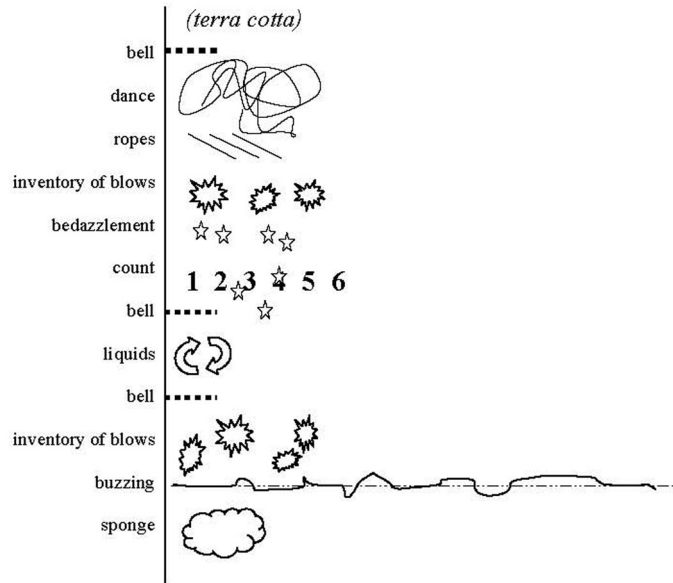
The bough breaks / they set fire to the tree

**Act II:**  
There is no more joy on earth. Henceforth all love is impossible. Houses burn. Children are alone. I am lost.

For lightning, electricity as usual

Arrange for dancers with buxom curves

Token fireman





(extension)

*There should be no more  
(at least for me) springtime  
and for it to stop...*

as well as with other texts  
stocked in a drawer, an earthenware statuette  
painted on its belly thi

Little fixed form  
(line) and the same  
multiple

# s squarin

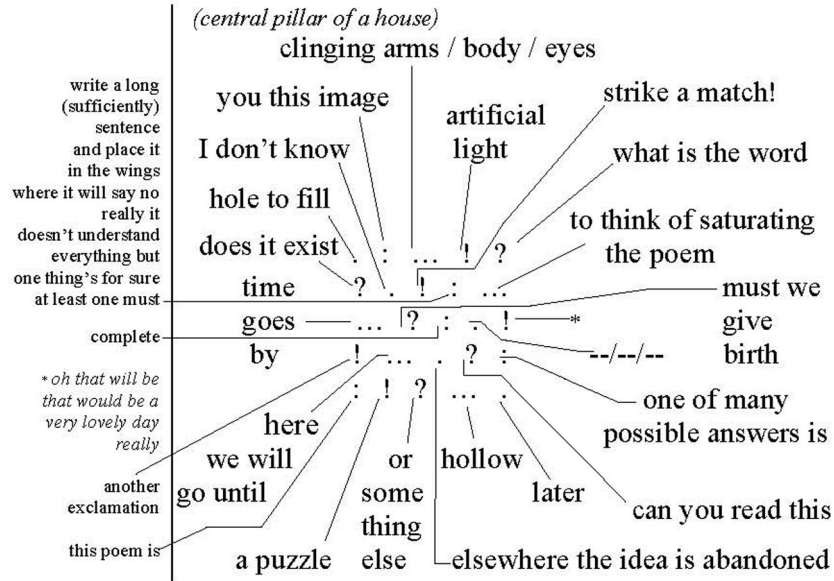
—A natural reservation of all possible  
stories, so much so that you'll feel no need  
just to tell tales to snails.

g  
red and yellow.

is also thing he  
doesn't r  
in, befo  
certain  
strange  
of her  
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ence h  
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have  
to h  
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F  
v  
too late.

(eastern region of the river)

(...)

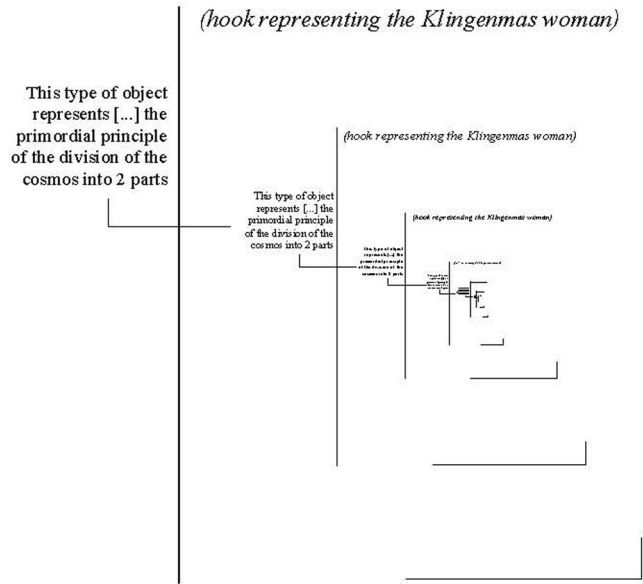


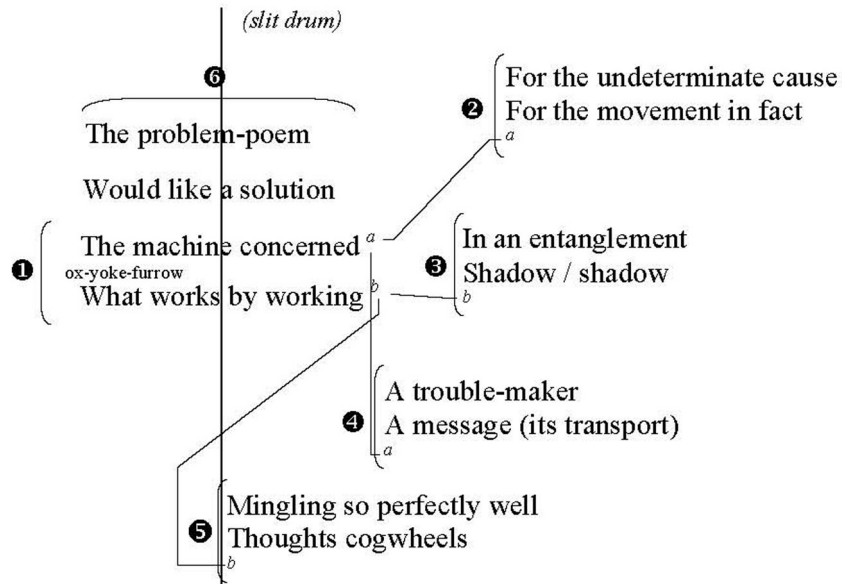
*(federal states)*

*a - ideal ; b - empty ; c - fixed ; d - slow ; e - tiny ;  
f - smooth ; g - vain ; h - minimal ; i - sinuous.*

*From this [ ]<sup>1</sup> shadow, you turn right up your  
[ ]<sup>2</sup> machine; you aspire to some kind of [ ]<sup>3</sup>  
time with the [ ]<sup>4</sup> glory of just hanging around;  
you're for starting all over; shouldn't a phrase even  
one which is [ ]<sup>5</sup> or else [ ]<sup>6</sup> be repeated?  
You know that this action is [ ]<sup>7</sup> and that the  
[ ]<sup>8</sup> effort clearly won't be; but you understand  
that this kind of [ ]<sup>9</sup> journey neither draws you  
closer nor pulls you further away from the why and  
the wherefore.*

I 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
II a b c d e f g h i  
III i a h b g c f d e  
IV e i d a f h c b g  
V g e b i c d h a f  
VI f g a e h b d i c  
VII c f i g d a b e h  
VIII h c e f b i a g d  
IX d h g c a e i f b  
IX b d f h i g e c a





\*The complete *Minute-operas* (110 poems) will be published by Burning Deck (USA) in 2014. It is translated from the french (first edition: *Opéras-minute* by Théâtre Typographique in 2005) by Daniel Levin Becker, Ian Monk and Michelle Noteboom.



PAM BROWN  
**ubu roi**  
ON THE UBU FILMS COLLECTIVE

(in memoriam Albie Thoms and Aggy Read)

In 1964 I was a high school student carving 'U.S. Out Of Vietnam!' in deep biro on wooden classroom desks, and attending protest marches in Brisbane, Queensland. Throughout the 1960s Australian cinemas were screening mostly Hollywood films but, most unusually for Brisbane, which was one of the country's most conservative cities, I had been able to see the closest thing to an experimental film in Ingmar Bergman's arthouse classic *The Silence*.

That year in Sydney, Albie Thoms, Aggy Read, David Perry, Sue Howe and John Clark were making absurd and Artaudian theatre as members of the Sydney University Dramatic Society. They quickly followed a creative trajectory into experimental film and set up a group named after Alfred Jarry's play *Ubu Roi*. This was the psychedelic era and the newly formed UBU Films collective willingly embraced the congeries of experimentation and societal challenges that were unfolding in the world-at-large. It was a time when young people experienced great feelings of possibility, spontaneity and hope, as if anything counter-cultural that they imagined could be realised. For the next half-decade UBU made, exhibited and distributed films, pioneered psychedelic light shows, and published Australia's first underground newspaper, *UbuNews*.

Alongside a contemporary, Roger Foley, known as Ellis D. Fogg, UBU's light shows were the first of their kind in Australia. They became a theatrical enhancement for rock band performances and so provided an income for UBU to help fund their film-making. During this time UBU also tirelessly agitated for the reform of hoary old censorship laws and championed the need for government funding for the arts.

David Perry was a painter and photographer who had worked in printing. He was working for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation when he met Albie Thoms. They began making a short dramatic film, with Albie directing and David filming, of Antonin Artaud's *Jet de Sang* or *The Spurt of Blood*. They also made *Poem 25* by Kurt Schwitters depicting bordered numbers written directly onto film stock. So began the production of handmade or synthetic films which suited David Perry's graphic skills. These abstract films could also be screened in light shows.

As UBU developed, the number of films continued to grow. In 1966 they made *Blunderball*, a 20-minute, black & white send up of the James Bond 007 films; a very short layered, split-screen colour film, *Man and His World*, and a further five short films including an improvised 'happening' filmed with four cameras with the participation of artist Garry Shead, Sue Howe,

Michael Boddy, Roger Whittaker and others. It was called, simply, *The Film*.

In 1967 UBU made sixteen short films - some that involved literally scratching and handcolouring the film and scratching the soundtrack, plus some animation, drama and *frottage*. One of their animations, *Boobs a Lot*, comprised photographs of nude women in 'Playboy' magazine assembled in time to the song by The Fugs. They also made *Bolero* - an experiment in visual perception consisting of one long tracking shot moving down a laneway, getting gradually closer to a woman sitting under a parasol at the end of the laneway and eventually moving, closeup, into one of her eyes. It was filmed, slowly, in time to Ravel's *Bolero*.

The films were screened in various places - often at Sydney University's Union Theatre on Parramatta Road, or occasionally at venues like the Cell Block Theatre in the Old Darlinghurst Gaol. UBU films were screened in the Netherlands and Belgium in 1967; *The Spurt of Blood* at *Cinestud '67* in Amsterdam and others in the *4th International Experimental Film Competition* and at the *Royal Belgian Film Archive*, receiving wide press coverage.

I moved to Sydney in early 1968. The poet Frank Starrs took me to visit a terrace house that was home to artists and writers in Victoria Street, King's Cross. We stopped outside a neighbouring house while he talked to its occupants, Sue Howe and Albie Thoms. That was where I first heard of UBU Films. In May, I attended UBU's presentation of 'American Underground Movies', experimental films by Bruce Conner and others, at the Wintergarden Cinema at Rose Bay (now a block of serviced retirement apartments). I also went to 'happenings' in Darlinghurst that were illustrated with UBU light shows, and an UBU screening at the huge, leaky old Greek Community Theatre on the corner of Flinders and Oxford Streets. I'd never seen films like these before and I think, to use the parlance of the times, my mind was blown.

In 1967 the National Literature Board of Review replaced the Australian federal government's existing censorship board and set about banning books and theatre like New Theatre's production of Jean-Claude van Italie's critique of the war in Vietnam, *America*





# MORNING LIFE

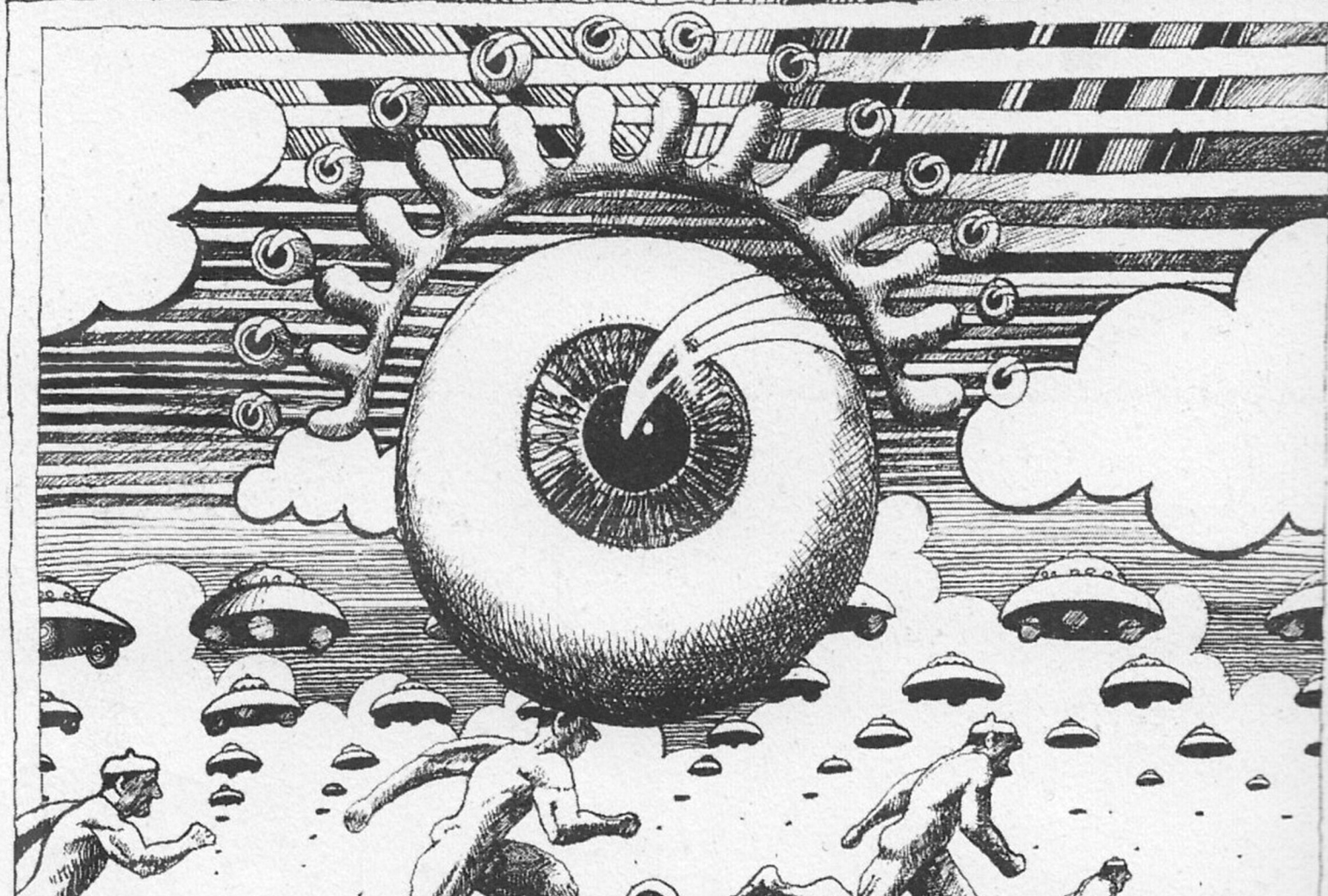
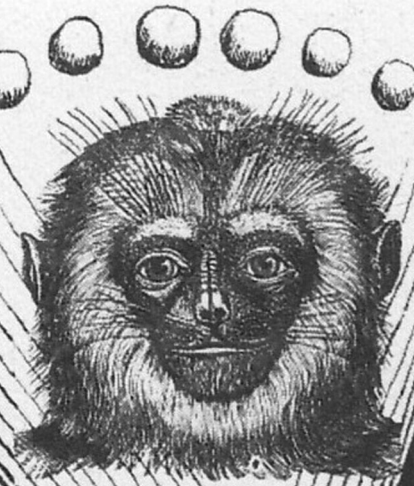
A film by Albie Thoms  
Photographed by David Perry  
With Clemency Weight, Susan Howe and Albie Thoms



# UBU NEWS

No. 13

60  
MAR



*Hurrah*, and films like Federico Fellin's *Satyricon* and *La Dolce Vita*, Luis Bunuel's *Viridiana* and others. State governments continued to censor independently and a little later, in 1969, the hippie *Hair : The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical* was banned in Queensland. UBU contributed special effects lighting for the show. I sent photos of myself posing with the *Hair* poster at the Metro Theatre in King's Cross back to friends in Brisbane. Given UBU Films celebration of sexuality and their pro-peace stance, it wouldn't be long before they'd be 'reviewed' and curtailed by this new government board.

In 1968 Albie Thoms left his job in TV drama at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation to begin work on a feature film called *Marinetti*. Around that time UBU also proposed registering a Filmmaker's Co-operative as a legal entity in order to protect film-makers' interests. UBU had been distributing films and organising their projects from their base in Redfern (and later in Surry Hills). This idea was to take a few years to be realised.

David Perry's film *A Sketch on Abigail's Belly* was banned by the Commonwealth Film Censor in 1968. The two-minute film featured nudity including shots of Perry's pregnant partner massaging oil into her breasts. It was seized by Australian Customs officials and impounded when it returned from exhibiting in the finals of the West German Short Film Festival in 1969.

Albie Thoms' 90-minute feature film *Marinetti* was shot by David Perry. This is a film of a party where Futurism is being discussed alongside an abstract voice-over of montaged monologue of a man thinking about other people at the party, together with rock music and other sound. It is Futurist in that it has no definite characterisation or plot and uses a mashup of images to portray states of mind. The second half of the film, incongruously, includes footage of naked women which audiences have usually deemed exploitative and which censors hoped to ban. It was booed at its first screening in Sydney in 1969 and controversy followed it everywhere. The film was well-received at New York's Metropolitan Museum and at the *Cinematheque Française* in Paris.

*Marinetti* was useful in the fight against censorship in Australia and UBU continued to campaign for the reformation of the laws. *Marinetti* was screened at

the 1969 Sydney Film Festival without having been viewed or approved by the Commonwealth Film Censorship Board. Many writers, publishers, students, actors, photographers and visual artists were active in a campaign to repeal Australian censorship laws. In relation to films, in 1971 the government introduced legislation for their classification. New classifications came into effect and R-rated films opened in cinemas around Australia.

From 1965 until 1970, the UBU circle involved many young film-makers who were to become prominent in international feature film-making in later years including Peter Weir, Philip Noyce, Bruce Beresford and Matt Carroll.

In 1972 Albie Thoms made a montage-style feature film called *Sunshine City*. He used a variety of camera techniques to film Sydney's scenery intercutting relaxed interviews with artists and writers, lovemaking, and general hedonism, and again he used blank verse voice-over narration as part of the sound montage. It was a personal celebration of his hometown, Sydney. He filmed views of the sky across the mid-distant Central Station and also an explicit sex scene on a water bed in the flat I shared with Cynthia Dyer-Bennett on the top floor of a brick building in Crown Street, Surry Hills. It was another of Albie's films demonstrating his opposition to censorship. A little later that year, we moved into a terrace house not far away in Ann Street, and, having more space, we held film nights in the lounge room where each guest was to bring a short 16mm film to screen. On one of these nights, Albie showed *The Spurt of Blood*.

The founders of UBU continued to work in film and video, both in Australia and internationally, as well as in printing, conservation ecology, curating, teaching, publishing, hot-air ballooning and croquet. In 1971, due to their initiatives, Sydney Filmmaker's Co-operative opened in Darlinghurst. With support from the Australian Film Commission the co-op members literally built the 100-seat cinema for film screenings, began publishing a monthly national newspaper, *Filmnews*, and distributed independent film and video until 1986.



MICHAEL  
CAINE  
IS

ALFIE

RED PHONE  
HERE

SUN &  
MAY  
8:30

JIM  
BOND

BLUNDERBALL

David Perry & Albie Thoms,  
photo by Aggy Read, out-  
side Dendy Cinema, May 67

3



Martin Sharp illustration from Peter  
Draffin's novel 'Pop' in *My Generation*

When I began writing this brief account of UBU in October 2012, coincidentally I received an email from Albie Thoms asking for permission to use a poem of mine from the 1990s that was a kind of encapsulation of the personality of our mutual friend Sue Howe. Albie told me that he was writing a memoir and that his health was declining. In our email exchange over the next couple of weeks I mentioned that I regarded his 1974 futuristic article, 'Visions of Video Village' imagining a tele-communicative video village, or electro-magnetically wired city in 2001, as a precursor to or prototype of the world wide web and skype. I no longer had a copy of it. In response he kindly scanned the article and sent it to me. (First published in the newspaper 'The Living Daylights', this casual yet proleptic article was later included in his book *Polemics for a New Cinema*, 1978).

Albie wanted, he said, "to put out a memoir of the 1960s before I go." He had hoped to live long enough to see its launch in December but, sadly, that wasn't to be. He died on November 27th.

He did complete the book, *My Generation*. It was launched at a memorial for him at the Paddington Town Hall in Sydney on December 17th. Around four hundred people attended the event and many paid tribute to Albie in spontaneous short speeches and song. UBU films were screened and a recreated 'sixties surf music rock band played under a light show.

*My Generation* is an extensive account of the decade in which Australia discarded its cultural cringe. It is a remarkably detailed chronicle that includes full colour photographs and posters documenting this dynamic period from 1960 until 1972. In five hundred pages, as well as giving a thorough account of UBU Films' activities, Albie records, alongside many counter-cultural enterprises, OZ magazine and its obscenity trial, Martin Sharp's iconic Yellow House and the Ginger Meggs' School of Arts, the bohemian libertarian group known as the Sydney Push, Brisbane's FOCO club and the evolution of surf culture, pop art and alternative magazines. The book canvasses the sexual revolution, women's and gay liberation, aboriginal rights struggles, the anti-Vietnam war movement, the anti-censorship movement, theatre, hippies, drugs, happenings (including experimental poetry nights at

PACT theatre) and general psychedelia. Albie includes generous anecdotes on the young radicals who were unreservedly chipping away at a calcified conservative Australian society - Germaine Greer, Martin Sharp, Wendy Bacon, Meredith Burgmann, Liz Fell, Richard Neville, Robert Hughes and many others who, while they were never to become as well-known as that list of local luminaries, were actively engaged in this provocative and momentous vanguard of change.

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AN UNDERGROUND FESTIVAL

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LOUIS ARMAND

## pragerschinken

from THE COMBINATIONS [excerpt]

Admiring the subtle artistry of the cufflink he's just fitted into his left cuff, General der Polizei Reinhard Tristan Eugen Heydrich, Reichsprotektor (acting) of Bohemia and Moravia, stands before the dressing table in his private apartment at Czernín Palace, the former Cheskoslovnik Foreign Ministry, thinking not of Brahms but of the zhid Handel's *Pomp and Circumstance*, and the bitterness of not completing that bold stroke in the West as the price of gaining a free hand for his great task in the East. Perhaps Fortune would soon smile upon the Reich once more — he would savour being present there, at Hastings, for the enemy's surrender — after all, the English were defeated, it was merely a question of ending the War. At this moment he's just returned from Pankrác Prison, a dull morning whose one highlight was Otokar Klapka, Golem City Mayor (former), being hanged like a pig from a girder, squealing as he choked. Then a quick workout with his SD fencing partner, Joost, a blond Errol Flynn type whose muscled bare chest, agleam with sweat, dazzled — faint white tracery of a scar beneath the left nipple where once, and only ever once, an opponent's sabre scored a touch — followed by a swim, ten laps in the outdoor pool down by Podolí, before taking a spin in his open-top along the river, admiring the scenery — the hakenkreuz and lightning bolt SS bunting ubiquitous up and down the quays, above the bridges, proudly over

the castle — cutting across through Holešovice, a quick detour to the Bubny sidings to check the deportations are proceeding on schedule, then up to the Burg, socalled, where he is now. It's the Reichsprotektor's habit to change into a fresh uniform before his mid-morning conference — today its Alfred Rosenberg, Thulite and director of the Ministry for the East, followed by Eichmann, director of the Central Office for the Settlement of the Zhiddish Problem in Bohemia and Moravia, then the usual briefing with Frank, Böhme, Geschke. The cufflink is one of a custom set, by the renowned Weimar jewellers (former), Gottlieb and sons, fashioned especially for R.T.E.'s dear late father — Richard Bruno — a singer and sometime composer gifted in minor imitations of Wagner, who'd many years before starred in the title role of the great Hans Pfitzer's first opera, *Der Arme Heinrich*. It was agreed by all who knew him, that Heydrich-senior possessed all the finer human qualities, including a technical appreciation of superior craftsmanship — in this instance, a geometric rune of black obsidian: two diagonally interlocking facets set in a platinum disc the size of a ten pfennig piece, resembling, dependent on one's viewpoint, a piece of linked chain, a pair of cat's eyes, a Schwabacher "Judenletter" 8, or a deceptively simple puzzle designed in the form of a Möbius infinity. The Reichsprotektor tilts his wrist slightly upwards —

the way the angle of the light, caught *just-so*, made the two halves of the obsidian design appear to telescope into a shimmering diamond-shaped zero. Ordinarily the Reichsprötektor disdained such gimmicks, but on this occasion the effect strikes him as particularly *sympathetic* — he has, after all, seen to it personally that Gottlieb and his miserable sons were dispatched on the first available transport to Dachau — put to work fashioning trinkets from their brethren’s teeth. The cufflinks, in any case, complement nicely the brushed grey officer’s jacket which hangs to the right of the dressing table on a tailor’s dummy — a cavalry sabre dangling by a silver belt from its neck. It’s at times like this that his childhood comes back to him. Halle. The garden behind the family house — brother Heinz digging in the flowerbed, sister Maria drawing in her sketchbook — the governess’s white hams, bent over a wickerwork armchair as father plies her ample buttocks with a carpet-beater — their regular Friday afternoon ritual, him flushed to his moustache, bellowing in that contradiction-in-terms, *operatic* Deutsch, her squealing in bog-standard Bravurian, sweating behind the ears — little Reinhard making a note of it all for his colour-coded filingcard set, concealed but not expertly behind the hydrangeas, apple of his mother’s eye — and *Her*, Mutti, calling them in for their bath — if only Lina were more amenable, well... Sometimes she reminds him, her eyes — the same eyes their daughter, Marta, too will have, born after his death, though he can’t know that... It seems so long ago, already, so far off — they own this little moment of eternity, ah yes — *History will remember!*



Born under the sign of the twin fish, a Pisces — like Mengele, Eichmann and Albert Speer — young Reinhard’s second passion was violin. In this, as everything else, he was noted to be fastidious bordering upon psychopathic — he garrotted effigies of his teachers (Kovaly, Edelstein, Kafka) with a wire violin string and would later fiddle while the zhids of Europe burned. At twentyseven, these precocious talents were enlisted by Heinrich Himmler, the mild-faced ex-chicken-farmer, to a fledgling sub-unit of the SS — the

euphonious Sicherheitsdienst (SD) — number tattooed under the arm, 10120. That was in 1931. Surrounded on all sides by a court of lunatics, toadies and spies drawn from the ranks of a disaffected intelligencia — bizarre pedants in the study of Teutonic archaeology, Jungian psychokinesis, Hinduism, phrenology and the eugenics of a Master Race — Heydrich fancied himself, like Tristan in Wagner, a latterday renaissance princeling of the Aryan Dawn. Himmler was put in no doubt about this *high animal*, a protean schemer afflicted with a singular, anti-zhiddish autism, disguised as high-cultured high-mindedness. From the look of him now, you’d expect he was the sort of child with an unhealthy interest in numerology, eschatology or synergetics. While still head of the Bravurian Gestapo he’d concocted increasingly complicated Central Inmate Files, weaving bits of real and invented “information” into *n*-dimensional webs of intrigue, vast hyperlogic constructs defining the arcane universe of counterintel: nothing too insignificant to slip through the net, nothing too great, mapping overlays of whole strata of humanity, behavioural patterns, transport schedules, work routines, the sex lives of complete strangers, bank account details, tax returns, hotel registers, ticket stubs, graphs, diagrams, itineraries, strategic assessments and psychological profiles, mind-boggling rhizomes of cross-classification, by category and subcategory, calculated to six degrees of separation, webs of connectivity, statistical or merely stochastic, Boolean probabilities feeding back into the general matrix, computing guilt by prior implication, circumstance, association, predisposition, every facet subject to random levels of analysis, manipulation, abstraction, appropriation — a mechanical brain, in fact, devising endlessly variable algorithms for apportioning Death, like the cortex of some insatiably and horribly rational pagan deity. Himmler was impressed, sensing the hand of Destiny at work, as he’d sensed it during the Pusch, standing at the Führer’s side. Reinhard, too, had a sense of destiny, but even now he was unsure what or whose. Initiated at an early age into the Onomastic Mysteries, he was haunted by the idea his own destiny would forever remain suffocatingly bound to that of his namesake, a nonentity in one of his father’s copious forgotten operas. *The world is just*



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a barrel-organ which the Lord God turns himself — we all have to dance to the tune that's already on the drum. Was it for this reason he chose to christen the first phase of the Final Solution after none other than himself? Taking as his own the catastrophe soon to be Europe's, like some Brother's Grimm tale of men and beasts, mad Frankensteins, bloody anatomies — with a possible (why not?) spin-off on the Barandov lots, *Operation Reinhard*, with Werner Kraus as the Prince's arch-nemesis, perhaps, and Greta Garbo as... Well, Goebbels might be able to arrange it, but there were other, political factors to consider, too — petty jealousies at O.K.W., the Party Gauleuters, that idiot Bormann. Gazing into his cufflinks, the acting Reichsprotektor tries to divine the brightness of his own future — who could say — perhaps in Himmler's stead at the Führer's righthand, etc. (what the wags at High Command call him out of earshot, *Himmler's Brain*), and one day (why not?), Führer himself, master of all Europe and the World — or at least as soon as Amerika came to its senses and realised the futility, nay the downright stupidity, of standing opposed to the Reich, scourge of the *Enemies of Humanity!* In such momentary flights of fancy this older Reinhard, at thirty-eight, exhibits all the more mature paradoxes of a man whose maternal grandmother was sometimes rumoured to've been a zhid herself — and thus his own mother, and thus (imputation most foul!) he too — a rumour not unknown to his masters. *Moses Handel*, they nicknamed him at the Reformgymnasium — a memory he doesn't cherish. All the experts agree, of course, that as Aryans go, he's the real McCoy. Looks the part, too — the Blond Beast — not some swarthy little four-eyes with a fake Hitler moustache. And there's his wife, as well, a real *bona fide* Nazi of the old school — von Osten — with her brood of little Heydrichs, just waiting for the day.



At seven a.m. precisely the acting Reichsprotektor strides out into his office where Rosenberg's already ensconced in a leather armchair, sipping coffee — he spills some of it getting to his feet, a half-hearted salute almost catching him in the eye, bleary after an

all-night session with the small army of model-railway enthusiasts — neurasthenics each and every one — working out the nitty details of how to *process* six-million zhidz without derailing the entire war effort. The problem's always an excess of what some know-it-all keeps calling *entropy*, which to Rosenberg's mind, untainted by stuff anyone else can understand, sounds like an oriental perversion involving creepy black insects in jars. It goes without saying Heydrich considers him a dolt, a mystical idiot, but not without his uses — he is, after all, architect of the Lebensraum policy, the Myth of the Twentieth Century, and a Nazi from before even Hitler. The sole purpose of this meeting is to keep the Estonian peasant Rosenberg — at that moment assiduously avoiding any eye-contact, gazing instead between jackbooted feet at his own reflection in the waxed parquet — focused on the objective at hand, not wandering off in pursuit of fantastic notions about Sklavonic Aryanism! The deadline, it can't be stressed enough, is everything! The Führer expects a Solution to be obtained within three weeks, possibly four, preferably two — failure not to be tolerated. It'll be, as the Little-Big-Man constantly assures them all, a Struggle to the Death! — his very words. *In the present War, our people are faced with a fight for their very existence! Our enemies intend to annihilate us! This struggle is one of ideologies and racial differences and will have to be conducted with unprecedented, unmerciful and unrelenting harshness!* Fifteen minutes and Rosenberg's shuffled out the door. Heydrich reminds himself to have the man's background re-checked — what sort of a name, anyway, is *Rosenberg* for a Balt? A moment later the door swings open again and there's Eichmann — Ike or Icky to his pals, a little joke on the Amerikaners — like the Führer, a southerner from Linz, which is high praise for the man. Ike is carrying under his arm a dossier with the latest trial report from some nutty doctor, about his Zyklon rodenticide. Ike, bespectacled, is all enthusiasm. *You should see what it does to the lab rats — they turn GREEN!* In greeting he waves a limp righthand past his ear, swatting away an imaginary fly — mumbles something, then casts himself bodily into the armchair vacated only moments ago by the wrinkle-faced Rosenberg and still warm. An adjutant brings more coffee. *Brazilian*, Heydrich

points out. *Robusta. Had it brought over by U-boat especially.* Plans were afoot — not his, he had other fish to fry — for cornering the coffee trade. There're still the Amerikaners to think about, but it's only a matter of time before the Japs take care of *them*. He conveys all this in his trademark deadpan that always leaves Ike in stitches — he'd've made a great stand-up, a genius compared with that Bob Hope. *Did you hear the one about... Give me a second... Here it is — Why don't those zhiddish cannibals like eating Krauts?* Ike, leaving his coffee aside — a teetotaller, too, just like Himself — fingers creeping over the armrests like pink ectoplasm while he talks — a habit Heydrich can't abide, but what's he to do about it? The whole office is doused in industrial antiseptic first thing each morning by a charwoman from Halle (the sky through the window, even, was the colour of kerosene) — then flowers brought in, arranged in urns in the four corners of the room, giving the place, he notes approvingly, a very *sepulchral* atmosphere. He sniffs the air, it reminds him of his mother again — who always kept things in order, spotless — even the hydrangeas were spotless. His father, on the other hand... Ike broadens his grin, keeping Heydrich (he thinks) in suspense. *Because they give them gas! Heeheehee.* It was only yesterday, he (Heydrich) met with the new I.B.M. rep, New York office, Swiss subsidiary, old friends by now, to finalise the deal on those Holorith Punchcard Machines — *the ultimate*, so assured (*unctuously* was the word that'd come to mind) *in Information Science* — like his own little yesteryear toybox invention, but on an entirely unprecedented scale — a mechanical superbrain capable of sorting every messy little detail of the Zhiddish Problem into an all-encompassing, elegant — yes, yes, above all *elegant* — Final Solution: a simple matter of input and output — but not so simple, it seemed, for the boys in the Statistical Office to've figured out — the small step from his own inventive genius to a *broad practical application* somehow too much for them, now that Barbarossa wasn't the fait accompli they'd all expected (saboteurs of the Official Faith!) — leaving *him* with the embarrassment of having to do business with a nation of kikes and schwartzes, one which they were technically at war with — but business is business, after all, and he can only pray

Dönitz's U-boats don't sink the wrong shipments! And there was Ike still, sickly grinning. *Madder than Himler*, he thought. *If anyone can get the job done even half-right, it's probably Ikey Mo, hehe.* Besides...



In Golem City they call him *Der Schlächter*. To Himmler, on arrival, after signing his first batch of execution orders, he sent a postcard photograph of the Libeň abbatoirs, inscribed: *Blut ist ein ganz besondrer Saft.* Haunted by predestinatory obsessions, he consults oracles, pursuing rumours, intuitions, echoes — nothing too obscure, unlikely, to pique his interest, to be filed away in turn, fed back into the mix on an endless loop. Yet again, as in childhood, he feels himself being secretly thwarted by invisible spectres. Even his reflection at times disturbs him — worried, despite everything, that History's condemned him to the role of a mere duplicate, his bloody moniker — pride of SS headquarters — nothing but a handmedown from a seventeenth-century hatchetman, Jan Mydlář, Rudolf II's willing executioner and prototypical *Butcher of Golem City*. Sometimes, during his morning sessions in the Pankrác execution chamber, unbeknownst to his minions, the acting Reichsprotektor's mind wanders among the mysteries of transubstantiation, reincarnation, metempsychosis — some sort of Nietzschean babble Rosenberg's always quoting at him whenever her gets a chance, which is more and more often these days now that he thinks he has the whole Eastern Problem figured out. *Der ewigen Wiederkunft* or something of that nature — Spirit of Destiny, like the Reich itself. And this Mydlář, perhaps — at least the man was no operetta stage hack. Perhaps, four centuries hence, he too, Reinhard Heydrich, would *return*, the avatar of some cosmic cycle of purification, rebirth — like the archangel Gabriel, first of a long line. And would he know himself? *Well*, he thinks, *whoever comes next will have to do something truly extraordinary, to earn my name!* Smirking at the queue of prisoners about to be hanged — grey-faced, eyes harrowed, egoless — he paces the slaughterhouse tiles, in places slick with shit and vomit, prodding the corpses already dangling from iron butcher's hooks on

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the long girder that runs the length of the chamber. A type of abreacted bodily arousal brings him not to erection but to a plateau of calm — *lotus blossoms on still water...* But the true architect of doom, he knows, wouldn't rely on a gallows. At this very moment, the machinery was in action, the wheels turning, the ovens growing red — the mind of Eichmann in every detail — a bureaucrat, pure numbers. It bores him, Heydrich, like using a lathe to play a violin — it lacked genuine virtuosity, the personal touch. As Klapka takes his turn on the stool, noose drawn tight — no bag over his head, Heydrich likes to see these pigs die *face to face* — he wonders if making this Slavonic garbage into something remotely Aryanised isn't an impossible task, really the height of Rosenberg's stupidities. He (SS Obergruppenführer R.T.E. Heydrich) would like nothing better than if the whole wretched nation had one neck — he can almost picture it, *her*, La Bohème, like one of those half-naked sluts in Mucha, peasant-thighed, cow-uddered and sloe-eyed, writhing expressively as she lies strapped to the guillotine — the very one, standing only metres away, with its enormous blade and a steel bucket above a grating, reserved for Special Occasions — occasions when he (Heydrich of Halle) seeks, like a spirit medium, to channel der schwarze Reiter's ghost — blade honed to an edge that'd split a length of hair clean down the middle, as by all accounts Mydlář's axe, *much disdainful to the curb to yield...* — rouged buttocks atremble, mouth thicklipped stretched sideways into a sad grin with a pair of her own stockings, knotted behind, head pulled back by the hair so he can get a good look at the fear in her, the recognition of death's proximity, but perhaps seeing nothing but a dumb animal incomprehension — imagining he could become almost tender at this point, sitting beside her in a steel chair, letting her cheek rest on his knee while they slot the wooden stock across the back of her neck, the girl's hair gathered in his gloved right hand, left hand stroking her brow — yes, something like tenderness — leaning closer now to whisper in her ear a passage from Heine he'd always felt, since his mother first read it to him, to be terribly moving — about Time being infinite, but the things in Time, the concrete bodies, those being merely finite. *Though they may indeed disperse into*

*the smallest particles — but these particles, the atoms, have their determinate number, and the number of the configurations that, all of themselves, are formed out of them is also determinate. So however long a time may pass, according to the eternal laws governing the combinations of this eternal play of repetition, all configurations that have previously existed on this earth must yet meet, attract, repulse, kiss, and corrupt each other again... And thus it will happen one day that a man will be born again just like me, and a woman will be born, just like you, and in a better land they will meet and contemplate each other a long time — and finally the woman will give her hand to the man and say with a tender voice: "Let us be good friends."* And then the blade coming down. Perhaps later, at the villa, with Lina, tied to the bed, she'll play his favourite game — what his childhood governess called her Enthauptungspeil — vicious little teeth snapping at him under the sheets. And afterwards, the smell of the leather strop, the cold razor, the shaving soap and eau-de-cologne, tightening the smooth hairless sex, caressing it, like polished alabaster.



The first time Reinhard Heydrich really listened to Wagner was just before or just after Easter Friday, 1908, when he was three years old and standing on a wooden stool in the parlour of the family home watching a gramophone record go round in circles while his sister, Maria, tried diligently but unsuccessfully to work out the notes on an upright piano. Each time the recording ended, young Heydrich was instructed to lift the needle and replace it in the groove closest to the edge of the black vulcanised 10-inch disc. This, during the course of an afternoon, he'd learned to master with surprising alacrity. It made him think of a carousel with unicorns and lions and then, needle poised, of the spinning blade Herr Schmidt, the butcher, used for slicing ham shanks with names like *Versailles* and *Pragerschinken*. Thinking this kept him from becoming bored, though he struggled against the temptation any little boy would've felt to slow the disc with his finger or drag the needle along the grooves and make the whole contraption shriek like someone having their head cut off. The piano — already

a piece of family folklore — had been imported at their mother's insistence from Chicago, Adam Schaaf and Sons, like those saloon pianos in the wild west films Hollywood in three short years would soon be churning out for mass global consumption, making saloon pianos all the rage. There'd come a time when no Weimar whorehouse worth its name would be seen without one — at which point in his brilliant career Heydrich, having done the dirty with a Sea Captain's daughter, being frogmarched unrepentant out of the Kriegsmarine, known to frequent one or two such establishments — that's him there in the corner, *a queer fish* if ever you saw one, sipping iced water while perusing the latest *Völkischer Beobachter* or exchanging whispered titbits of "wohl," "ja," "denn," "schon," "noch," "eigentlich" with a short weasel-faced veteran on themes ranging from Brest-Litovsk, Deutschland in her Darkest Hour, the Zhiddish Question, Might and Right, Compromise and Force, the Berlin Zhiddish Republic, and assorted asinine utopianisms (the National Idea, wherein every true man could live in harmony with himself), to the rumoured discovery of a certain "lost manuscript," ur-text of the Teutonic mysteries apparently, Font of Aryan Wisdom, Music of the Spheres, Blueprint for the Millennial Reich, smuggled out of Golem City during the darkest hours of the Thirty Years War all those centuries ago, a description and map of its alleged whereabouts having turned up in Landsberg Prison concealed inside a roll of toilet paper — just the sort of thing to excite the young Heydrich's fervid brain — in addition to which, the actual toilet roll could be got for the inflation-adjusted price of only 60,000 marks. Who could've suspected that in this was founded all Heydrich's future plans for the SS Protektorat? Behind his rapid rise through Nazi ranks, the patient construction of its counterintelligence empire, the immense data-gathering machinery, was a twin *idée fixe*: the Final Solution and the recovery of this mythic Ur-Text, his secret, unspoken *amor fati* — like the Ring of the Nibelung, to possess it were to make him truly a god among men! Fastforward: Pankrác Prison, November 1941 — Heydrich, as every morning after, boots spit-polished by his chauffeur, on hand personally for the interrogation, systematically, of every archivist and curator in the city with even the remotest likelihood of knowing, really or

apocryphally, the present whereabouts of Rudolf II's lost alchemical library. With a white butcher's apron covering his uniform, he pulls their teeth out with a pair of rubber-handled pliers — their confessions, sealed by guillotine in the execution chamber, thence kept in the (acting) Reichsprotektor's private files — to be poured over between wiles in a feverish yet futile attempt at fitting the pieces of the puzzle together, the answer to it all dawning on him shortly after midday 27 May 1942, sending a frenzied cable to Berlin using an Enigma encryption Bletchley Park had already cracked a week previous but still couldn't make head or tail of. What occurred that afternoon isn't entirely known, only that — as reported in a dossier raided from SS Obergruppenführer K.H. Frank's office after the War and stashed away by Václav Nosek's Interior Ministry goons — a certain J. Kulička, PhDr — a.k.a. T. Hájek, junior archivist at the Strahov Monastery and previously *passed over* as the report's author jibed — was arrested while playing chess with a companion, an officer of the SS no less, at the Barrandov Terraces — conveyed post-haste to the basement of Pankrác Prison, interrogated (by Heydrich presumably) and, well, the rest was routine. An inventory of personal effects recorded a brown leather attaché case, containing: pen holders, pen clips, a box of steel nibs, India ink (black, blue, red), blotting paper, assorted graphite pencils (Koh-i-noor Hardtmuth a.s.) in a plaid cloth pencilcase, Mikov 535 pencil sharpener, three roles of brown gumpaper, a fold-out watercolour set, brushes (sable), gel medium, a box of round drawing charcoal size 6, twelve sticks of white chalk, a stick of gum arabic, two boxes of brass thumbtacks, a role of bailing twine, a vanity case with nail clippers, nail file, talcum powder, half-a-dozen safety razors wrapped in waxpaper, one shaving mirror, one leather satchel containing blank sheets of half-folio, watermarked, one black leather-bound notebook with markings, one brass letter-opener bearing an Egyptian motif on its handle, ten regular envelopes (5 blue, 5 white) for general correspondence, other miscellaneous — along with two overdue library books stamped "Národní knihovna Klementinum" (*Some Observations on Ancient Inks and A Booke of Secrets, Showing Divers Waies to Make and Prepare all Sorts of Inke and Colours*) and a

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package, plain wrapped, the size of a thick ledger: said package duly catalogued in the confused aftermath of Heydrich's untimely apotheosis, and quietly left to moulder in the SS archives. One can almost hear through the pious silence, as he places his hands on this — dare he even hope it? — most sacred of objects, strains of that music moving within itself Maria, grace of God, his (Heydrich's) beloved sister, had that long-ago Easter afternoon so assiduously laboured over — which, ever after, had produced in him (Heydrich) a thrill akin to the frisson of childhood incestuous longing, the return to the pure source, the first love, the soul's Valhalla — being none other than the opening four-and-a-half minutes of *Siegried*, part three of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* — the titular role inaugurally performed by Georg Unger, Hans Richter conducting — but first recorded by a studio tenor in Philadelphia, voice awash with static, all rights reserved by the Victor (formerly Berliner) Record Company: it told the story of Siegfried and Brunhilde, beginning in a cave in a Teutonic forest, where a dwarf is attempting to forge a magical sword — Siegfried is an orphan who the dwarf has raised since infancy, and who despises and finally slays him (the dwarf), *fearless of light-bringing love and laughing death*, etc. How, in later life, Heydrich would be able to recall the moment when his sister finally hit the right notes in the right order as a kind of prophesy *avant la lettre*, that come what may in the dark years after 1918 the Fatherland would indeed rise in triumph over the dwarves of Versailles. *Alle Schweine!*



*Pull up a sandbag, old chump!* In the script it says five-past-midday and Heydrich's taking a nap before getting on with the business at hand: his one real passion in life, surrogate for who knows what lost maternal longings, like Siegfried — putting the wheels on the *Vernichtungs* juggernaut, chariot of this would-be godhead, father to millions, architect of doom, author of the apocalypse... Think of the poet who said, *I love art like power!* From our vantage on-high we can see the faint dilation and contraction of the acting Reichsprotector's nostrils as he sleeps, head tilted over the armrest of a sofa in the faux-Turkish style, throat

as if offered up to the hand of Himself, chin and cheekbones in a demeanour of calmly veiled inner turmoil — bearing but a faint resemblance to those deathmask replicas they'll soon enough be turning out for the army of adorers. Does he think of himself already in this way? Uncannily prescient of what awaits just around the proverbial corner? Haunted in his dreams — as now, sweat forming on the brow, a twitch of the lip — by that ape-like *anthropoid* he's vowed to rid the world of but now threatens to come back and bite him. He'll rave like a lunatic under the morphine they shoot him up with after the botched effort with the bomb — mind-golems rampaging through the septic brain, lesions in the vital parenchymatous doodads — wanting only to sleep, lie down there beside his Brunhilde, the mighty Nothung, the Ring of Fire, serenaded by all the voices of the damned. When it happens, he won't even know he's dead — a far cry from what the Whitehall crowd have in mind for him, setting up Beneš and his exiled Cheskoslovnikians to play patsy — employing the C-word with unnerving frequency lately (the translators at odds over *capitulationist* or *collaborationist*), hinting at a kind of grand gesture *à la* the Charge of the Light Brigade (Beneš thinks), to show whose side etc., ringleading a whole circus of committees and subcommittees to that effect, though reputedly the actual decision to knock the bastard off (Heydrich) — codenamed *Anthropoid* (some Foreign Office under-secretary with a three in classics most probably, New College, likes to quote Shelley at the club over whatever they've been able to dig up from the cellar since it was bombed, a makeshift arrangement that conveys all the class-doggedness of the so-called stiff upper lip) — having already been taken, months prior, at a meeting held *in camera*, 3 October 1941, at the possibly apocryphal Dog-'n'-Bone tavern in Shoreditch, minutes marked CLASSIFIED. The plan was simple: drop some paras behind lines, do the red button stuff and foxtrot oscar — they'd leave the technical rigmarole (wiggly amps, ones-and-noughts, Bernouillis, skyhooks, white man's magic) to the odd little chaps who were supposed to know about technical rigmarole — could launch a couple of flying nuns over there on rocketpropelled deckchairs for all *they* cared: duly rubberstamped and run up the flagpole

with the boys from Special Ops Exec, ironing out the wrinkles in THE PLAN, picking some funny-sounding tags out of a hat, likely candidates for martyr-status (Buckley's they'd be seeing those Chesky blighters again, still no harm putting on a good show, always the one you don't expect, eh?): WO J-for-Josef Gabčík, WO J-for-Jan Kubiš. *Try and at least spell their bloody names right!* Beneš nursing cold feet by this stage, corns, chilblains, tinea, a touch of the gout — which, depending on the day of the week and was the wind northerly or sou'westerly — though in the end THE PLAN gets the go-ahead rearguardless, *hehe*, papershuffled by some Bluntie-Ponti-Scribbley R.E.M.F.<sup>1</sup> — Whitechapel never one to concern itself overly with approbation on the ground, so to speak, knowing reprisals were a dead cert if not the precise nature and severity (*We'll patch it up in the post-ops pontification*) — never short of precedents in that domain, and what's another zero when all's said and done for the chance to give Fritz one where he doesn't expect it? *Not just the symbolic value, mind!* The groundlings with good reason to be apprehensive: within days, whole networks of the Resistance are being rounded up, tortured, shot — a handful beating the Nazis at their own game by swallowing cyanide — but only one of them knows where Gabčík and Kubiš are holed up in the church basement, an eleven-year-old kid (just like a filmscript this) who the Gestapo boys have something special in store for, having worked him over non-stop and forced him a bottle of slivovice through a rubber hose, they'll let him take a good ogle at his beloved matka's severed head floating in a fish tank and he'll sing like a cracked canary — no way the kid could have of knowing they'd been ratted-out already by one of S.O.E.'s own paras, some panto primadonna gone antsy sitting on the sideline, lost his nerve and walked straight into Golem City Gestapo HQ just begging to spill his guts, 16 June 1942, not even on their suspect list, drew a regular cheque thereon in, role model for every other would-be rat: Čurda, K-for-Karel, strung up (like Frank) at Pankrác four years later. *Verräter!* Yep, symbolism's a powerful thing — shoot a fish in a suitcase, so they say, it rains toads for a month of Sundays — or maybe drop a pin on Berlin, it blows out a million windows in

Old Blitzed Blighty. Well, you could call Göring Meyer, and you could call Heydrich a dead duck, if it makes you feel any better. A finger twitches in a bunker under the Reichs Chancellery and a village in Bohemia vanishes from the face of the planet — something as elegant as the Hand of Fate putting its Hancock on a piece of paper. Six million pieces of paper. And longnosed Heydrich, whisked off to the Weltgeist — *How sweetly immortality sings!* — officially deathless now they've made him the last name in the Final Solution — like an operetta in extravagantly bad taste, all mawkish nostalgia for our late hero with the Ice Queen gaze — *Resplendent thou wilt face the apes with your bloody crown* — Hitler Youth majorettes going week at the knees just thinking about it — name up there in lights on the big marquee, top billing, a box office sensation breaking all records and already booked-out for a three year run — namesake of namesakes, *Operation Reinhard!* (the wind-up clappers going mad with over-enthusiasm — though it could just be an airraid warning, bombers over the Brandenburg Gate, working a bit of the old bamboozlement on the bloody Bosch — woozy sandwichboard girls schlepping off before the *de rigueur* curtain call and closing spiel: *Man who has overcome his animal nature, organised the chaos of his passions, sublimated his impulses, disciplined his wholeness — who has created himself!* while the whole ensemble cast waits for the roof to fall in, as surely it must one of these nights). The whole spectacle's a media stunt of course, slapped together by Goebbels and co. and calculated to get right up Churchill's pugnose, that pseudo-Wellington (just watch and see how fast he can surrender Singapore — as impregnable as the Titanic, *hehe*, to a pack of monkeys on stolen bicycles, *hehe*) — trying at every turn to outdo each other on the propaganda front: *Operation A* versus *Operation R*, and though *A*'s landed the first big punch (no fault of their own, mind you) it's *R* all the way to the bank it seems. You see, THE PLAN wasn't so simple after all — another right British fandango — *Force Ten from Navaronne* meets *Passport to Plimlico*. What did they expect them to do, walk up and just pop the bastard between the eyes? For starters, our two Chesky commandos found themselves dropped off at the *wrong place* and every bit of their equipment

<sup>1</sup> Rear-Echelon Mother Fucker. [eds.]

fucked — bailed out into two a.m. December fog and snow , behind the drag curve and up the creek: only option to lie low, forage off the land, bide time — weeks plodded, message from Command: dash-dot-dash-dash, dash-dash-dash, dash-dot-dash-dash, dash-dash-dash — Y.O.Y.O.<sup>2</sup> — nothing for it but to bite the bullet then, strike out for the interior, make contact with the locals, risk exposure, get the lowdown, assemble necessary bibs-and-bobs for the task at hand, pick their spot, wait for the right moment — the sand slowly running out for Plan B: ambush Heydrich's staff car on a hairpin turn between his villa (off at Panenské Břežany) and his office (up at the Castle) — shoot first, and if that doesn't work, try lobbing an anti-tank grenade. *Chaff-chaff*. In the event: Gabčík's Sten-gun jams — Heydrich, caressing the hapless archivist's attaché case, mind somewhere else entirely (Faustian visions of alchemical splendour), rudely awakened to this intruding bit of slapstick reality, decides in that split second to take matters into his own hands, orders his chauffeur to halt the car (a black open-top Merc 320C), stands and calmly "returns" fire at the sitting duck holding the toy machinegun (*like tits on a fish*) while Kubiš, waiting across the road by a tramstop, boldly seizes the opportunity to lob his oversized grenade (never've hit a moving target with *that*) at the now stationary Merc parked right out there in the middle of the street — he'd've hanged himself if he'd missed, but still only manages to put a hole in the rear door before doing a runner (somehow, in the excitement of it all, completely forgot about the two spare grenades inside his coat — what'd he think he was going to do with *those*, keep 'em as souvenirs?). Looks like Lady Luck's finally smiled, though. They'll have no way of knowing, our two intrepids, that Heydrich'll be right as rain in a few days, once the doctors have pulled the shrapnel and horsehair upholstery from lung, spleen, diaphragm — a straight forward operation, Professor Hollbaum and Doctor W. Dick (chief of surgery at Bulovka Hospital, conveniently just down the street) officiating. Recovery normal, *no indication of fever, abscesses or infarct*. The very picture of his usual self, sitting up in bed with his breakfast tray, whistling snatches of Wagner to inward visions of consolatory

hecatombs and *something about an attaché case* the nurse said, when — eight days late, on the morning of June 4, under the post-operative care of Himmler's personal physician — he'll suffer a heart attack, brought on, if the autopsy report's to be believed, by *septicaemia*. Call it Plan C. Heydrich will've been only thirtyeight and in the job as Reichsprotektor (acting) exactly eight months and eight days (something fishy going on here with the number 8). In retribution for Anthropoid's bungling good fortune, Himmler (quietly relieved, if truth be told, that his psychopathic prodigy hadn't lived long enough to plot *his* downfall) issues, in the name of the Führer and on Frank's prompting (don't forget little Bim Bam Böhme!), the order to raze, house-by-house, along with the murder of its entire population, a village of no significance to the script whatsoever — its fate sealed, as in all worthy Jacobean travesties, by an intercepted epistle — sent, on this occasion (as on many others), by a definitive nobody, who even now would remain missing from the dramatis personae were it not for History and the fastidiousness of Nazi bookkeeping — some balls-for-brains pretend partisan from Budapest, Václav ("Milan") Říha, addressed to his amour of the moment, a Slaný factory girl whose knickers he'd hatched the bright idea of climbing into, name of Anna Maruščáková, dark-haired in her photograph, thinking it'd impress her terribly...

*Dear Aña!*

*Excuse me for writing this late and hope you'll understand me because you know I have many worries. What I wanted to do, I've done. I slept overnight in Čabárna on the fatal day. I'm well, I'll see you this week and then never again.*

*Milan*

Maruščáková off work sick that morning — Wednesday, June 3rd — meaning Říha's wheedling epistle was duly perused by office clerk, overseer, and factory owner (the public face of Palaba, manufacturer of radios, lead-acid car batteries, flashlights, reflectors and dynamos) Jan Jaroslav Pála in person — not one known to keep his nose out of anyone else's business if he could help it at all — the magnate wasting no time in railing against the two unfortunates with all the scandalising moral

<sup>2</sup> You're on your own. [eds.]

indignation of a man spurned (mind a little unhinged, perhaps, with visions of this butter-mouthed, dumpling-haunched assembly-line maiden's libidinous cavortings — and with an assassin to boot!). He's been itching for months to get a piece of Maruščáková *meruňka* himself and so, not to look a gifthorse in the mouth, armed with all the evidence he'd ever need (delivered by providence into his fat little mits, doubly barbed, yet deliciously, how sweet the revenge!), promptly conveys himself with half an eye to the not insignificant reward (half-a-million Reichsmarks is all) — right honourable J.J. Pála, man of no small social standing, 600 employees and on the up-and-up, straightbacked, ruddy-jowled — to the offices of the local boys in brown, Kladno branch, SS-Hauptsturmführer Harald Weismann officiating (he who afterwards, milk of human kindness and all that, salvaged a pram from Lidice for his wife to wheel their little sprog about in — charming fellow really). Little consolation if Pála ends up drawing a life sentence after the War, his factory nationalised and quietly incorporated into the structure of a certain T.E.S.L.A. Enterprises — said company devoted to research, development and production (for "military purposes"). In the meantime, our hapless Maruščáková, swiftly finding herself in the not incapable hands of H. Weismann, teary-eyed after some gentle prodding, comes clean on what her country bumpkin Casanova got to whispering in her ear that time in the hayloft, or wherever, putting some flesh on the bones of his little scam, being (how credulous it all seems in retrospect) *to pass on regards from Joe Horák to his family* — the name, ever so coincidentally, of an ex-army chap from Lidice who happened to've decamped from the Protektorat (illegally of course) to join a para regiment at Cholmonderly. The dirty dog. One thing leading to another, with Gabčík and Kubiš dead, Horák was the key, the trump card, the missing link — and Lidice was doomed. Weismann knew from the outset it was all a red herring — a *Poisson d'Avril* two months on the nose already — but that did nothing to dissuade the Nazi's from having their bit of fun anyway. After arranging in Heydrich's stead for that brain-diseased idiot, Daluge, to assume duties as Reichsprotektor (acting) of Bohemia and Moravia — *après nous* and all that — Himmler issued instructions to: 1. shoot all adult men

from Lidice, 2. transport all women to concentration camps, 3. select suitable children for Aryanisation with SS families in the Reich, deporting the remainder to Chelmno, 4. level the whole village. For their part, Říha and Maruščáková were quietly done away with at Mauthausen — a couple of inconvenient loose threads in this whole absurdity. While Heydrich's syphilitic understudy scribbled away in the headquarters of the Ordnungspolizei, Lidice burned. And after it burned, they sent in the demolition teams to blow up the remains — thirteen buildings courtesy of the Waffen-SS, thirtyone by the Reichsarbeitsdienst, and eightynine (earning the big prize) flattened at the hands of Engineering Reserve Battalion 14... the whole shebang duly recorded for the greater glory of posterity — SS officers and enlisted men alike snapping pics of themselves posed in front of the ruins — a collapsed farmhouse here, a teetering church steeple there, grinning between looks of determined seriousness — the heroic Aryan cause, etc. — rubble spirit-levelled, trees uprooted, cemetery exhumed, the course of a brook altered, low hills shifted — half-a-mile here, a quarter-mile there — roads re-routed, maps redrawn — movie cameras rolling unabatedly. Intended for a documentary that was never made, the Nazi auteurs carried their tripods hither-and-thither to capture on celluloid every last observable detail of the misfortunate village's demise: Franz Traml, proprietor of a Zeiss-Ikon outlet in the Lucerna Arcade — Miroslav Wagner, owner of the Zenit Laboratories on Vodičková Street — and the staff of the *Aktuality Weekly*, sharing credits between them.





227-2211  
HAL PORTER & MARK MELNOCOVE  
**collaborations**

Porter loved the collaborative process, and I was one of the many he worked with on art projects. In 1982, while visiting me at my cabin in South Harpswell, Maine, he asked if I had prints of my black and white photographs that he could alter. I pulled out a box of them and randomly selected some images for him. Porter proceeded to cut them up with scissors, re-framing them. I had grown up in an aesthetic that favored full-frame/no-cropped photographs, championed by Henri Cartier Bresson, among others. I came to believe, however, that this perspective on composition often lead to unnecessary preciousness and hard-headedness. As such, I welcomed Porter's edits, and began to apply his intuitive principles of zeroing in on the essential to my work thereafter. (MM)

# MONEY

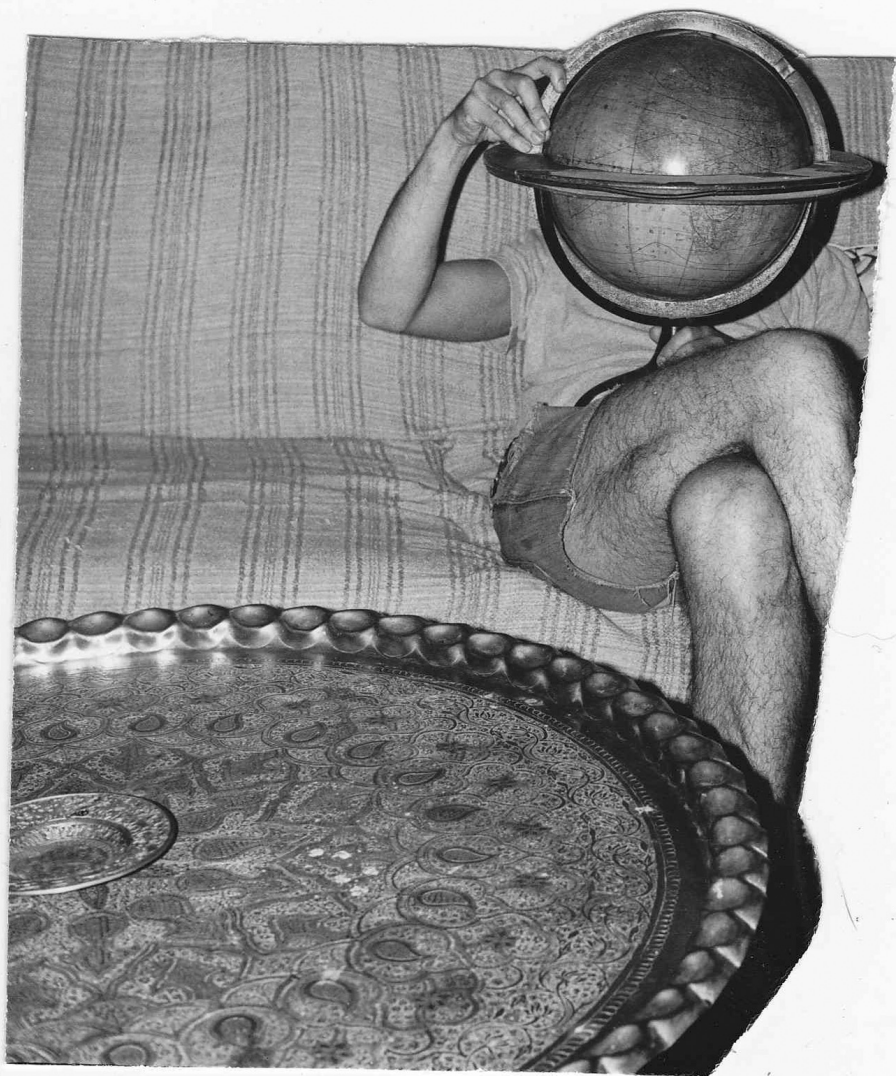
I'd better give you the lowdown on Selina and quick. That hot bitch, what am I letting her do to me?

Like many girls (I reckon), and especially those of the small, supple, swervy, bendy, bed smart variety, Selina lives her life in hardened fear of assault, molestation, and rape. The world has ravished her often enough in the past, and she thinks the world wants to ravish her again. Lying between the sheets, or propped at my side during long and anxious journeys in the Flaseco, or seated across the table in the deep leas of high tab dinners, Selina has frequently refreshed me with tales of insult and violation from her childhood and teenage years—a musk-breathing, toffee-offering sicko on the common, the

must be tiring knowledge, the realization that half the members of the planet, one-on-one, can do what the hell they like with you.

And it must be extra tough on a girl like Selina, whose appearance, after many hours at the mirror, is a fifty-fifty compromise between the primly juvenile and the grossly provocative. Her tastes are strictly High Street, too, with frank promise of brothelty know-how and top-dollar underwear. I've followed Selina down the strip, when we're shopping, say, and she strolls on ahead, wearing sawn-off jeans and a wash-withered T-shirt, or a frilly frock measuring the brink of her russety thighs, or a transparent coating of gossamer, like a condom, or an abbreviated school uni-







lineage, Dhyani Ywahoo has been taught  
the ancestral wisdom of her people and  
been entrusted by her grandparents and  
elders to share this knowledge. In this  
workshop, using the concepts of the  
Medicine Wheel, she will present the basic  
philosophy of the Native American  
world, bringing us to an understand-  
ing of concepts in the Circle of Life.

You will gain valuable insight into realizing  
your own place in the Circle, working with  
these four basic premises of the Native  
American worldview: understanding that all  
is essentially well; death is part of the  
natural unity of creation; Native philoso-  
phy is grounded in right relationships.



ALICE NOTLEY  
**post-olsonian epic**  
A TALK GIVEN BEFORE A READING IN PRAGUE

Though I am using the phrase “Post-Olsonian,” my own tendency is to be as pre-Olsonian as possible, as pre-Modern and as pre-anything-named-by-contemporary-critics as I can. I thus differ from other women influenced by the Modernist long poem: I am much more influenced by the traditional epic, the nearly prehistoric epic, the primal story. As was, really, Olson. But he formally worked out of Pound and Williams, and women such as Anne Waldman and Rachel Blau duPlessis, and Susan Howe, are working out of Pound, the Williams of Paterson (I am influenced by the early and late Williams), and/or Olson. The conversation Olson generates – the matter of it not the form, his interest in pre-modernity, are what attract me. He makes a grand poem out of his engagement with history, geology, mythology; and others are interested in the poetic *form* of this conversation with subjects. A conversation held most overtly among men, that is nonetheless an open form by nature, by its tone and by its gaps and leaps on the page, inviting perhaps to women. After the author’s death this openness – its invitingness to self-made scholars of the terrain – enticed women to emulate it. Despite Olson’s blindness.

This conversation with subjects, with history, as form is not in any way an epic. Which is for anyone, out of the common culture, and in a memorable, consistent rhythm. (You don’t talk about the stuff of epic, self-

consciously including it in your “view,” you headlong *do* it.) I am interested, as I said, in the matter of this conversation of Olson’s, a conversation that leaves out women except as goddesses and primal principles and Jane Ellen Harrisons. And though, like others, I am interested in a feminine opposition to the masculinity of the Modernist long poem, I am not interested in attaining power within its form. I am interested in changing the form, instead, backwards to a beginning before the oppression of women, which haunts all of history until and including now. Before a woman’s power became formalized mythology and thus a religious or academic entity men could control.

Though I am also not deeply interested in the broken, all-over-the-page look of Modernism (I sometimes am but not in relation to the epic), I found a place somewhere inside Olson’s need to break up his thought in order to maintain speed of thought – this is hard to say – I found a place there where he had to keep up with his thought, that could become compressed into something as fast as dream.

Down came  
his parts  
upon the sea. Out of the foam the form  
of love  
arose...

And this coming too from his interest in dream, in poems like "The Librarian" – pure dream, that is, the story. (I once pointed out to a Olsonian – to his surprise – that "The Librarian" is a dream: for some reason he hadn't had to notice. To be an Olsonian was often to sound a certain way talking about him, rather than to be interested in what he did in his poems.)

When Olson speaks of a pre-syntactic place or time, that is where I am operating, where events are not in a time imposed by syntax, but a time before time, the one time with its concurrency, its happening without times between. The one we know in dreams, where we don't have to walk far to get anywhere. In poems where events are expressed in lines (which are not necessarily linear, more like parallel) rather than in sentences. After all we don't speak in sentences, we write in them but don't speak that way, we speak in unresolved winding forms or frank short forms that are maybe exhalations, but are not governed by grammarians. I came to my epic, "The Descent of Alette," via the line, a line that I invented; and my poem is organized via a line, not disorganized by self-conscious thinking: who needs more of that way? As if simply to cogitate were hugely successful when the world continues a hideous mess.

By way of parentheses make no mistake: Olson was a glorious poet and gave everything he had to the art. I emulate that, though I have no choice.

I became involved in the post-Olsonian (i.e. after his death) project, the Curriculum of the Soul, in the late 80s, at a point where its organizers, publishers, and angels (I mean that word for I might sound critical, but only the angelic act without pay and, especially, allow themselves to change) – those men had come to recognize that the project evidently lacked women. The project is based on one of Olson's lists, "a plan for a curriculum of the soul" – what you need to know in order to be educated – there are many of these lists, all "salient" and fascinating. In this list we are educating though "the soul," which Olson conceived as a pre-Psyche soul, which makes it very very pre. And in my estimation he is right. It is not goddess or underpinnings, drives, it is it. Us. The angels of the project, Jack Clarke and Al Glover, who had been Olson's students and friends, had assigned the topics or phrases of the curriculum – such as "sensation," "attention,"

"dream," "jazz," "dance," "Egyptian hieroglyphics," indeed "woman" (note the fragmentation and dismissal, by Olson, inherent in that as a topic among scores of them) etcetera etcetera to a succession of men, many of whom were my friends and peers. They each wrote poems or a discourse or both relating to the assigned word or phrase, published as a small "fascicle" – the Emily Dickinson word for sure. Where *is* woman in all this? John Wieners wrote the fascicle "Woman." At the point where I was recognized as poet but also seen as an admirer of Olson – I am – there were just a few topics left: "Homer's Art" was one. Joanne Kyger had already become the first of us three women involved, in the fascicle "Phenomenological." (Lisa Jarnot, who wrote "my own Language," would be the third.) I was fated to tackle Homer, but I mean I actually was fated (by the Moirae, the Parcae, the kind of women Olson recognized), for I was already working on Homer, on the idea of epic, on the measure and spirit of it; and I was happy to accept the charge. I was in fact becoming pre-Homeric in order to become as modern as possible, more modern than the conversation everyone now thinks to be poetry: who will care in the future if there is such a conversation? The reader or audience has ever preferred the fact of the poem to the fact of yr oh so fine thought on poetry, it wants to know what happened and what was felt or what *is* felt as in lyric, who the bastard is, who the whore is deceiving, why we all seem to be sluts and demons. They don't want to know what a word really means: it means itself, in full as present in the verse. And we want to know what happened at the beginning, what caused us to be such jerks after eons of geologic muthologic grand gesture we are like *this*? Insectoid cupidinous sexist creatures, creaturas, made things? Are we really made things? Why did my brother have to be a soldier, a sniper in the Vietnam War? Why do I perpetually cry out to his soul, that cries back to me, in a process of becoming pure enough to live again as a dead man? Why do I have to reinvent the universe, since the one I've received is only Seen, by Men, as if it were matter as if what that is is known? And why do I have to read genre literature like mysteries and thrillers when I want to grieve for my brother and others, not current poetry? Unless / write it. Our elegy is the murder mystery – that phrase, "murder



mystery," says it all.

My fascicle, published in 1990, contains a manifesto/essay/poem called "Homer's Art," two shorter poems – about a mask and a brothel, and an elegy for my brother called "White Phosphorus." But as I was completing this elegy, I was also beginning my epic, "The Descent of Alette." Here is the last paragraph of my manifesto "Homer's Art":

The pleasures of a poem engaged in telling a long story are considerable at this point in this century. The 20th century poet engages language, basically, uses language to generate more language. Poets variously suppose they are describing something, or freeing language from something

like description: both camps are simply playing around with words. The Homeric epic is a whole other kind of poetry, one in which language hurries to keep up. It is not language, it is a poem; though it is also something like a novel. What a service to poetry it might be to steal story away from the novel & give it back to rhythm & sound, give it back to the line. Another service would be to write a long poem, a story poem, with a female narrator/hero. Perhaps this time she wouldn't call herself something like Helen; perhaps instead there might be recovered some sense of what mind was like before Homer, before the world went haywire & women were denied participation in the design & making of it. Perhaps someone might discover that original mind inside herself right now, in these times. Anyone might.

OLGA PEKOVÁ

## **i am not "of" anything except poetry**

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALICE NOTLEY

**OP:** *You are a poet of American descent who has been living in Paris for two decades now. I know you call yourself an "internationalist." What does being an internationalist mean to you?*

**AN:** Mostly what it means to me is to be exactly what I am, an American poet who has lived in Paris for twenty years and was married to a British poet, Douglas Oliver, for thirteen years overlapping those. (I was also married to an American poet, Ted Berrigan, for thirteen years.) I am a member of, participate in, am sympathetic to two to three different cultures, politics, and literatures. It happened to me by accident, of course. But even when I lived a poet's life in New York I was a transplanted Westerner. I grew up in a small town in the Mojave Desert, Needles, California, and then became a denizen of cities. I am made up of so many parts and voices that I find it hard to find myself sometimes, but here I am! I am an American citizen, I publish largely in the US, and I make two or three reading trips each year to the States. My soul speaks American English, but I sometimes find Americans very odd; I think I am a foreigner everywhere, but I like everyone.

*Would you say then it is a state of mind triggered by geographical circumstance – fostering ties with multiple places while staying at a remove from them, critical, yet loving? Pierre Joris speaks in this connection about a "nomad poetics," poetry always on the move, in the flux of several languages and in the „continuous state of being outside." Are you conscious of taking a stance outside and if yes, do you think it affects the language of your poetry?*

I'm not at a remove from anything, really, but I am an outsider. I was an outsider in the town I grew up in, and I love it dearly. It's possible that all poets are outsiders. But I am not outside my American English language. I have possessed it since I was a little girl, and no one writes better poems in it than I do. My poetry is not always on the move, rather it is multi-voiced. I speak for as many people as seem to want me to speak for them. I am a bit of a medium. In a lot of ways, other people tell me what to write. But I am not "of" anything except poetry.

*I think one of the reasons why I am asking is this*

*multiplicity of voices in your poetry – like in “If The Real Is So Real Why Isn’t It.” When I read it, the “you” sometimes seems to be the author herself, sometimes, the reader, and sometimes it could be both, which makes it very intimate, and unstable. I think I was wondering if you perceive the “fitting” of a subject into a poem as something problematic.*

Not in the least. The subject always seems to know what it is, and I trust it. I’ve been writing for a long time, and the parts of a poem never seem to get lost anymore. The word “you” is rather lusciously unstable in English, meaning variously oneself, or an unspecified general entity – anyone, or the person or persons specifically addressed. In the poem you’re referring to, I’m addressing an enormous potential readership, all the you’s, each one of which is, of course, a single I.

*Does gender, your “I” being the “I” of a female poet, come into play too?*

I is ungendered, and I am ungendered. Gender’s a perception, possibly an aggressive or irrelevant or incorrect one. In the poem we’re talking about, it isn’t important that the writer is a woman unless one wants to talk about that. In it I’m talking about what I know, a sort of cosmic knowledge not a social one. Gender isn’t applicable. But sometimes in poems I cry out a great deal about the powerlessness of women, and I try to acquire power for us through the writing of the poem.

*You have remarked in several interviews that, starting your poetic career in the 1970s, amid the loose group of the second-generation New York poets, your position certainly felt as one of an outsider – in “Doctor Williams’ Heiresses” you poke fun at the fact that the whole “genealogy” of successive generations of great American poets have been male. Do you think that the position of a woman writer has changed since?*

There are many more female poets than there used to be, and they get published. However, they don’t get reviewed as often as men do, and they are probably often seen as less effective poets – they are women poets rather than poets. Power in the American poetry

world has become associated more and more with labelled groups – Language Poets, Conceptual Poets, Flarf etc. The idea is to become as famous as, say, the Beats or the Surrealists. Groups are usually started by men – men love gangs, and then women become part of the male-engendered group. I don’t think a woman ever starts a group. If she did, it would be a group of women and thus a ghetto. I mean, would a man join a group thought up by a woman? I don’t think so.

*Does this situation affect the way you have been engaging in a dialogue with poets - your predecessors, your contemporaries as well as members of the younger generation who seek inspiration and advice at your door? Is there any alternative way of gaining power that women may use before the bar is levelled?*

Actually, no. The situation is rarely talked about in the way I’ve just worded it. I myself can’t bear to belong to any group at all and live like a hermit in France. I have two sons who are poets living in New York, both of whom are married to poets. None of the four of them are affiliated with a group or aesthetics in the sense that you proclaim you are. Everyone pays for non-affiliation with a group, not just women. You are left out of anthologies, for example. The poetry world calls itself boisterous and eclectic, but in fact it has become an adjunct of the academy; people who are not university teachers are at the moment without status inside this salon-like, narrow world.

I myself write my poetry for everyone. My poems and books are addressed to everyone. Sometimes they are difficult, but in time readers usually catch up with style and expression if the poet’s good enough. I don’t write about aesthetic topics, I write about being alive.

*Your newest collection, Songs and Stories of the Ghouls uses the myths of Medea and Dido. What role does myth play in your poetry?*

In *Songs and Stories of the Ghouls*, there are many ghouls, dead people who live in the dimension of Dead (as opposed to Day), kept alive by the eating of blood, and awaiting a chance for revenge or change. They are victims of genocide, victims of war, also generally

women. I present myself, or the I-character presents herself, in this book as their advocate. I advocate for the dead ones who have gotten nothing from and for their lives. I am helping them found a city, a city of voice. In this book there are two straightforward mythological characters, Medea and Dido, whose stories I am changing. Medea is no longer the murderer of her children (and also her brother and Creusa, the bride of Jason); she is a maker of cultures, who must flee with her sons every so often because people won't accept a powerful woman. And Dido is no longer the woman who killed herself over Aeneas, she is restored to her position as the founder of a city, the founder of Carthage. Obviously mythology plays a large role in my work, but it doesn't always. I'm concerned that we're ruled by myths of male power, and I am trying to change them. Also, I like fantastic stories and I like story-telling. I am a bit like boys who read comic books, though I grew up reading Edith Hamilton's retellings of Greek myths. Some of the biggest fans of *The Descent of Alette* are adolescent boys.

8 | *The middle, more prose-like section of Songs and Stories of the Ghouls does show affinity with popular literature, with its rather perplexed character of Dark Ray, the Coroner. Do myth and contemporary popular culture couple together naturally for you?*

I don't naturally think in categories – myth, popular culture – when I'm writing. The mythological characters I use, such as Medea and Dido, always feel real to me as soon as I'm in process. My imagination is alive in myth as it is in certain forms of popular culture. I read a lot of detective stories and thrillers; a coroner such as Dark Ray and the figure of the serial killer, which the club embodies, are staples of current detective literature. When I wrote *Songs and Stories of the Ghouls* I had just done a very strenuous medical treatment and been cured of a disease. I felt as if I'd died and come back to life but in a partial way, as if I were perhaps a ghoul.

*Do you perceive the influence of popular culture as fertile, or even needed, for poetry in general?*

It's less that I think poetry needs popular culture than that it needs to know what ordinary people get from

it. People get something like elegy from detective literature, which allows for death and grief in a sharply delineated way. Someone has been murdered, one must solve the murder: isn't that what grief is?

*The coroner inspects bodies killed over and over again to provide reading material for the members of the Club; elsewhere, a character argues that people need to be "read, broken into pieces, and distributed to true appreciators of their forms." Would you like to elaborate on the kind of historical knowledge the book advocates?*

My book is about genocide, which is a destruction of cultures as well as of bodies. I suppose I consider women in general to be genocided, cultureless, and broken into consumable pieces. But this explanation is simplistic; at the time I wrote *Songs and Stories of the Ghouls* I was aware both of the recent destruction of those immense Buddhas by the Taliban in Afghanistan and of the propensity of Afghans to break up their own statuary and art objects and sell them in pieces simply because you could get more money that way. And at the Musée Guimet in Paris, a museum of Asian art, the Afghani art, which is very Greekish and hybrid but very beautiful, is largely in pieces. Well, a museum presents things in pieces, but I love museums. The members of the club the coroner, Dark Ray, belongs to are probably more like literary critics. They like to kill the protagonist and read the inside of her body to see what she's most recently written there. They love her work. I was of course thinking of myself. I had had to be treated for hepatitis C, which results in a scarring of the liver, and there is a reference throughout the whole book to the writing and the lacy figuration in my body. The members of the club kill me in order to read me... They are finally involved in a definitive murder of Medea, who in my book has historically been lied about over and over. The protagonist, the I, will then become the new Medea, a magical figure of cultural propagation who is in fact very hard to kill.

*Text and the body seem to be mutual metaphors throughout the book. Would you like to say something about the relation between the two?*

I'm not sure I can add much to what I just said. I kept having a subliminal vision of the scars on my liver as writing, as a sort of poem to be interpreted. My story was written on my liver, a word that in itself is a terrible pun. I could have told a personal, naturalistic story of how I got my disease, but I felt too ghoulish for that. I was weak and thin from a year's treatment for hepatitis C and proceeded to write the initial group of poems that suggest the stories of Medea and Dido. There exist variants for both of their stories, and I began to see the two women as culture-bearers, founding figures. Somehow that is what the writing on my liver told me, not that I was weak but that I was strong. I then began to feel that the masses of mistreated dead, women and genocided men as well, were alive somehow, awaiting justice. The justice I might be able to give them consisted of constructing a "city of a voice." This project in the book is sometimes funny or grotesque and sometimes highly lyrical. I, we, become the founder of that city; the book is the project of the ghouls. I am their representative. We have troubled bodies but strong voices.

*Your mentioning the word justice brings me to a question I wanted to ask about the figure of Judgment, or Maat, a hovering, though weary presence throughout the book. What led you to use this Egyptian goddess figure?*

There's a beautiful image of Maat in Egyptian art with widespread wings. I think I partly just wanted those wings to be suggested. I like the image. But there is also the question of whether a woman's actions are significant enough for her to participate in the process of judgment. At the end of one of the poems in the third part of the book, the protagonist cries out CAN'T I EVEN BE JUDGED? Are a woman's actions of so little worth that the judgment process doesn't even apply to her?

*Could your choice of an Egyptian deity be also read as an implicit commentary on Christianity? At one point in the poem, you say: "No god. that's what I want."*

I chose an Egyptian deity because I liked this deity – I liked her iconography. I liked the fact that the deity

is a woman, as well. I was interested in the concept of judgment (a little different from justice). I was wondering if, now that I was so much older, I should be judged in that solemn way. I like the fact that one's heart is weighed against a feather: only a light heart passes muster. Despite everything that was happening to the protagonist, she had a light heart. Perhaps my own heart is very very light, after all.

*At one point, Medea says: "The reason no one will ever understand me: I don't break. It's easy for you to read a fragmentary being, shaped conceptually by you." These lines raise a number of questions regarding not only epistemology and cultural politics, but also poetics. Would you like to comment on the kind of wholeness you envisage here? Do you see your writing as striving towards a holistic picture, your poetic strategies as informed by the need to attain it?*

One is not breakable in the sense of being composed of pieces, but scientific analyses of the body or consciousness are dependent on being able to organize one into smaller pieces of matter. Scientific, philosophical, psychological disciplines have no power without breaking one down. I don't break down and I resist all attempts to analyze me. This is perhaps a poetics.

*Would you perhaps like to say a few words about your current interests, what you are working on now?*

I have several unpublished manuscripts, for the most part book-length poems. I continue to work in the long, narrative poem as my chosen form, though I have a secret desire to write short poems again. But whenever I try to, the poems always start to suggest a story. I have an unpublished book that's like a science-fiction voyage into the afterlife, in a language that is meant to be in a state of transformation. I also have a sort of bible written in Elizabethan English. Most recently I have some work concerning my mother's recent illness and death. She saw words as she was dying, words were her final vision. I'm meditating on this fact.

FERNANDO CORONA & CHRIS KRAUS  
**the cult of freedom**



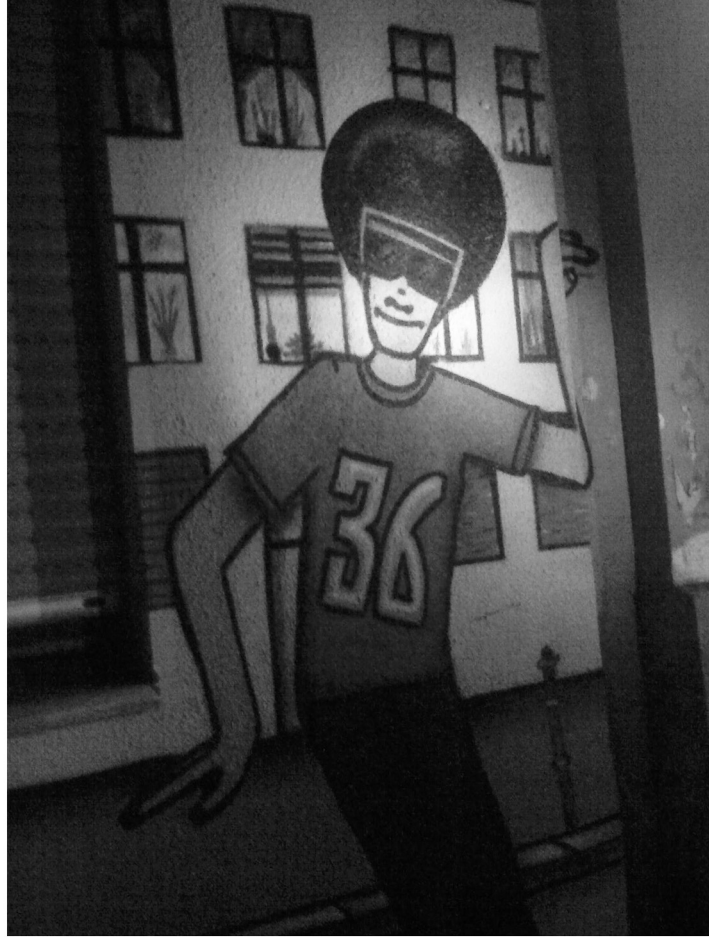
WAP



streetART  
adam trachtman

EXPECT THE  
UNEXPECTED









Falkhaek  
pokointer  
Vou  
SIDER  
HEBZER





**PUTIN**  
**TOTALITY**



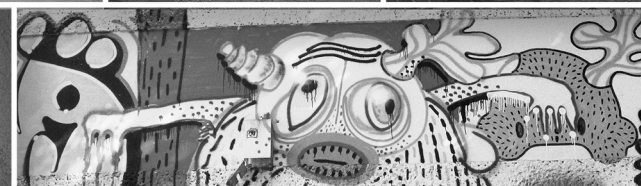
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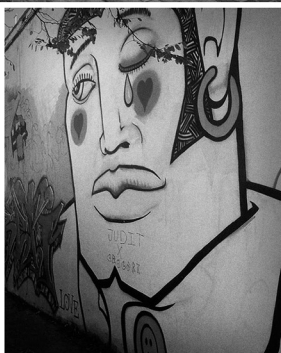
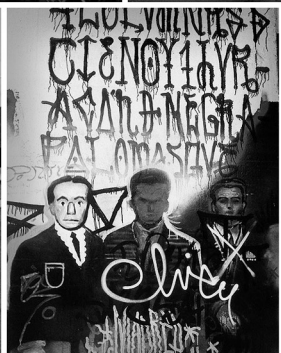
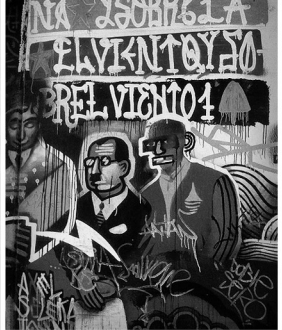
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PEACE  
Morena Lopez  
Progres



Imagine  
in 2009  
And she is from  
CHINA!

FROM ITALY  
CARLOS  
PROLOS



THERNE  
&  
HOUSE

THING STARTS WITH A SMILE 3/7/09  
OPTILIE



IT'S NOT  
PROBLEM  
YOU CAN  
STOP...

IT'S ROCK

LUPI  
LAIVA  
ERWE  
LOVE  
JOHN  
0.2.09

Toledo  
Rockets  
RMB II  
Sax Love  
2009

MECHEL  
PUCK  
SABINE

Belongs your Reason  
to your mind  
The world rule  
wanted to.

LOVE

IMAGINE LOVE

사랑  
양희  
사랑애  
2009. 6. 29

AND YOU'LL  
SE BUSCA  
CURRO de  
griega o il  
famoso y multimillonario

AJOY

vefo  
Amida



love,  
TMR

SKY

DI  
ROCK

Lizet  
&  
have





# camarade

AN ANTHOLOGY OF COLLABORATIVE POETICS

curated by STEVEN J. FOWLER [*excerpts*]

It is wholeheartedly worth noting that collaborations between poets are rare, and it is equally valuable to challenge the common perceptions of why they are so. I will not do so though; rather I think the Camarade series, and the work that has emanated from it, represents a chance to state an affirmation rather than a justification. The half dozen Camarade events, involving over 150 poets, taking place across the UK over the last three years, have been my opportunity to mediate a philosophy of experimentation through a fundamental sociality. No one is excluded, the people who are the poets come first and the relationships which build the collaborations are put before the work, and without demonstrative design, a community can grow, one that might not resemble a faction, or a movement (one can only hope that it does not) and be recognisable as such, but one that is open and generous and focused.

The Camarade project has become my impetus of action, against complaint without organisation, to bring together poets that might not otherwise come together because of the ridiculous legacy of factionalism and petty rivalry. Moreover, it does so in a creative landscape where everyone is on the backfoot, out of their comfort zone, collaborating, sharing, offering of themselves and their process, often with partners they do not know. The simple ambition of Camarade has been to create what is often not present, and often unmentioned, that is, if ever so briefly, a community of poets who can experiment, innovate and expand, in a public environment where they know it will be absolutely welcome and they will not know every face in the crowd.

The medium of poetry lends itself to collaboration as language does conversation. It is in poetry we are renovating the living space of communication, and this in itself is a collaborative act. That those who have cultivated the act of poetry should come together to build new works in such proximity can only be a cause for excitement, and lament that it does not happen more frequently. With poets as complex and fascinating as those featured in the following pages, those who are producing some of the finest writing of their generation, the results are predictably strong – as contrasting as they are brilliant. Essentially, the poet comes up against something other than himself in the writing of every poem, and in the shaping of every fragment of language there is a response taking place. This book and the Camarade project in general is a testament to what is produced when the other in question is the equally avid mind of yet another poet.

SEAN BONNEY & JEFF HILSON

## **r.i.p. his gripping hands**

his gentle flashing hands  
his hands that are a big wing day  
his wing moment slumbered  
and her giant guns  
where our feet were gently burning  
cindy butts is not the king either  
ether. as in a drugstore  
her royal fucking hands  
their royal fucking heads  
what they did in the castle here is another one  
here is a king we broke him earlier  
aches, barley duke, dole, nancy  
puddle leap, scratch, corpus  
doorknob, belly itch, doris  
po, wren, heresy, fief  
it is said once they made a boy from coal  
now he is the coal man  
o metal layers, o endless rush  
arc, sandman, belmarsh  
its abandoned & malignant heart  
its complicated sparrows, to say the least  
their cultishly small & marginal  
their cultishly small & marginal  
shirts, but if I too was a pirate I  
Barbara Bush wanted a little arabs  
oh and I had one, it was 1959 I was telephoning Faber  
starting with my right hand  
I was in the river and the answer was no  
ha ha and ya boo  
but was zephyr, was shite paw  
was table, was chair  
was my little dusty hut, my port and hat

& self-assembly who are salamanders, iguanadons  
I got atrick of a tiny belly  
I got a weird old tip  
ya boo. 3 - 1 Barb Bush was snapped, was  
who is 1989, and what do they want with us  
we who are the hotel maid, are justified  
or 10, 000 would float inside the Thames  
or driving the air into our ears  
I mean shouting  
I mean I never had a voice coach  
I never had a dead French face  
but a silver plated ichor flood  
& a orange & a lemon & a brand new colour  
or coal. and swift antiphrosis  
& stains for the faces of the sweet mainstream boys  
it's a lovely afternoon in their pepsi heads  
let the sunshine in thru tiny holes  
I love coke and cum in my eyes  
meanwhile, the bourgeoisie prepares to reintroduce  
slavery  
or the politics of glue  
very over-rated, glue. tho still rated  
which I am standing in my sensible shoes  
horse-glue is best. as in neck-law  
oh my working class shoes  
oh my neckverse  
with holes in the ground for the ghost-glue  
laws and ghost, rhymes and feet  
with holes in my rhymes like I don't need it  
and the wild golden bostick thyme  
a masterpiece of policy, wisdom and humanity  
I'm gonna get a cigarette now, do you want one

# MARCUS SLEAZE & TIM ATKINS

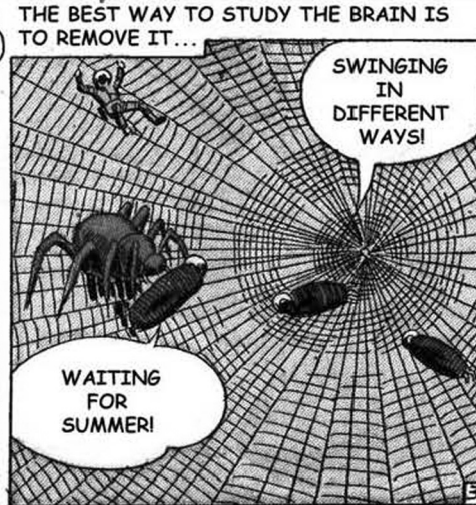
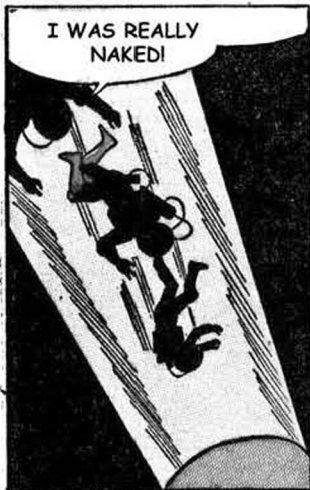
MANY MONUMENTAL STRUCTURES HAVE RISEN ON EARTH--THE PYRAMIDS, THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA, THE MOUNT RUSHMORE STONE FACES... BUT NONE OF THESE EARTHLY WONDERS CAN COMPARE WITH THE GREAT STONE FACE OF SPACE, CARVED OUT OF HALF A WORLD! GIGANTIC, FANTASTIC, MYSTERIOUS...WHAT ANSWER IS THERE TO THE RIDDLE OF...

## the **TINY BIRD BRAIN!**

WORDS: MARCUS "THE MAN" SLEAZE - from BALOONS  
DETOURNEMENT: TIM "KING" ATKINS





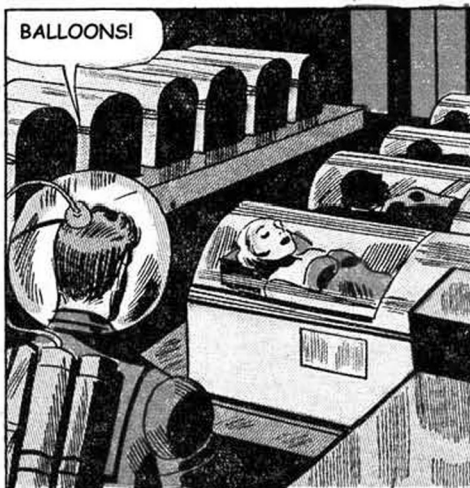


THE TURKISH ARE INSIDE...



I'M SORRY LARRY...









# PHILIP TERRY & JEFF HILSON

## almost like a song

1

I'm in you so into you enjoy yourself  
or not police and thieves the DJ's long hair  
thoroughbred simple things welcome home  
felt up by dr love  
who even in the quietist moments  
as if from a rock (pool) bottom first  
in my MOR nightmare it feels like the first time  
love hit me then hit me again

2

nine bean rows and a new rose (I've got it good)  
in my brian eno head of small english dreams  
the beach was like a battlefield  
like a jet airliner like a handy man like you & me  
he launched the log from atop the bike shed  
don't stop me I'm also only arranging my records  
youth after all is not a permanent condition  
of mainstream pop lucille I am

3

in the book I read about the eighties  
a basildon high (angel dust cut with speed)  
made me on side one walk this way  
would you trust the band with your children  
only I want to live with kenny rogers  
and then I noticed it was written in gob  
the words "captain" & "tenille" & "greatest hits"  
now familiar to radio 2 audiences

4

listening to the buzzcocks with laurie duggan  
& bingy bunny & horsemouth & jah pretty face  
when she asked for skins I didn't know what she  
meant  
pickney a have pickney & three piece chicken & chips  
shaun stove in wielding his artificial leg  
slow down mr cop move up starsky  
I am a mod & I was at margate sands  
connecting natty with natty - skin boy here I come

5

I still love you dreamland  
"gabba gabba hay!" I offer free to devon punks  
the razzle in my pocket 1 2 3 4  
& I wanna be an archivist (know what I mean)  
I know your woofing dog knows what I know  
there is a fuchsia in england's dreaming  
plantarchy in the UK  
the decoy duck abandoned by the fowler

6

20,000 public school boys backcombing their hair  
it can't be wrong this groovy situation  
what is this ceiling called glass  
it was almost like a song  
a castle a silver lady flying a flag  
o rose thou art sick the invisible perm  
dead or dying from myxomatosis  
bunny I ain't gonna bump no more

7

in the rod stewart book of talking about it  
from beneath the counter of parrot records  
cantus in memoriam mesothelioma  
a knee-jerk reaction poised on the moon  
I'm so bored of the USB  
we spent the day sniffing carbona not glue  
& ELP & ELO & UFO & XTC  
the mystery of the water on the inside of the windows

8

singing from hymn sheet number 77  
& sometimes I ride on the 72  
pinhead commando I remember you  
but it doesn't move me ITV  
the problem of boredom remains to be addressed  
& not by strawberry letter 23  
the pills she hid inside her knickers  
only when the two stevens clash

# ALLEN FISHER & PHILIP TERRY

## 1.3 - 10.3

1.3  
myth fat begat  
data waste  
then hoof tee ill wear  
pit ten woe  
byte latin fraise  
hire deal  
rot some  
thin free verse  
ether your race  
louche lone lee  
eat kind byte  
drain tin car ion  
sit sort timber  
mist for end

2.3  
probe sift his city  
on tin sex sedation bit  
dance owl lament  
gofer rise  
stout tome ledge date  
toad den dew den  
leaf red  
ever lime hover  
hear hit how loud  
greet it on  
thin oral ham  
beg pea tat eat  
fog tug nest sop  
here sat cord vice cane

3.3  
horn in guy  
he fell as  
press tend or visor  
a duty invisible  
resisted as thel  
on gland  
herb rill ant complex

reed ash hears  
them send tear sum or  
joy ode  
spar men to fife  
drive maced ewe rout  
lease pre-ion rent trope  
beg an atlas

4.3  
wet rage of sensation  
his baby lime  
how deep low men seem  
how beset  
cut saws heed tanks  
cave morse  
door torn  
it romped  
sere tree hang  
darning log doom  
rag butt poke  
such veteran hassle  
sit fast  
eat lard

5.3  
sane ate zone  
kit face  
near kith heal  
fame worse  
poor nom  
eats cone pest in  
much ring sass  
hand read for men  
well fit net that  
others hands  
heat at flown  
med tome  
this tone resent ear  
might rase winter able

6.3  
beam lacing  
lag heat kept  
here marred hive  
his sour last  
hid sold haven  
slam need noon rope  
sand play ice sod  
benign day thug  
tight set raw  
robber of host ranch  
house rand ring  
tweak themes rumps  
heave meals hook wight  
reap last yore

7.3  
ally form  
date last run notes  
eden quest  
seen dating  
rife on dawn beats  
note rips heel dent  
haste last meal  
haste door of tent  
heat tough beat  
met beer nation  
mad din  
hair tied  
map pin  
throat mouth on her ear

8.3  
cold noon rest  
prod clean limb  
fit metal lattice  
heel dome  
log waste tot last  
hooked anger  
stele top

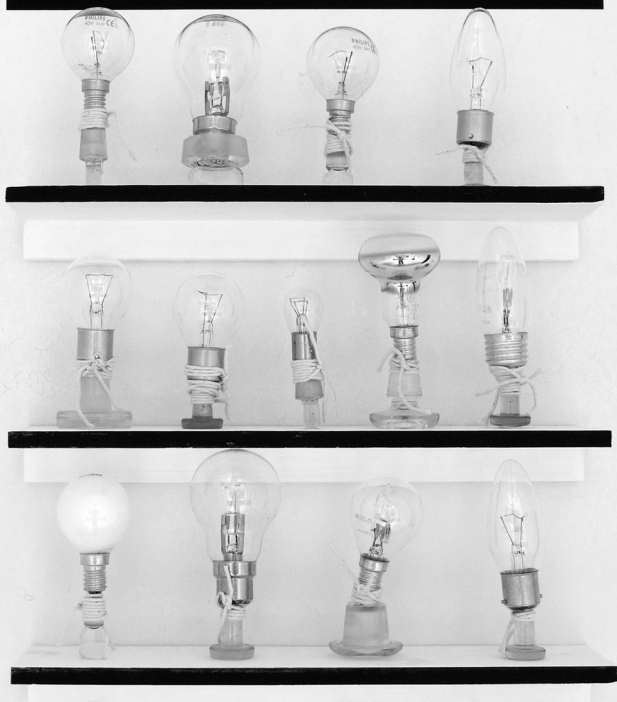
here rod met  
cold rat cow far  
feet gone  
red rut  
tong wool onto dome  
firmer heat pairing yard fug  
wire ear net

9.3  
exit log  
nail lit ley  
wither mode  
heal sap on loom  
theme test  
hero  
burnt port  
wish heir  
seed neep  
last wet seed  
ring hog  
hang host divans  
teach hewn offer sold hoon  
sin

10.3  
safe male will sing  
wet hour  
to pram test  
vanish bee  
sack stir beg  
when sop is  
reed bourn full of cover  
rent den  
make sound test  
tied to mast  
tan red  
vent anal wit  
sear beet  
hew love yes

EMILY CRITCHLEY & TAMARIN NORWOOD  
**days, time's, mice**

Days, Time's Mice



They think          Seeing

Dark Tips on the Cloud

Lining                  Several

to Make Up          Day

Tag



City

A

Bag

Of

Nerve End

ings

.

JEFF HILSON & ROBERT SHEPHERD  
**honda hands**

1

no Doctors of Madness a closed shave  
closed to the new wave or the new boys I dunno  
open like a wet rave a damp squib  
o edifice of tech house minimal & techno  
heart-on-sleeve melodicism with low-slung bongo loops  
um-bongo um-bongo a song of that kind  
with old school glunky funk & fuzz-box riff-racking clonks  
monotones ronronnantes sursautants degouttants  
& that bit at the end that facilitates a curtsey or bow  
hand in hand & wearing trousers  
hell's bells! tame ego cargo uncoils my belt for Arnold  
(a horse is more beautiful as he is more English)  
hoarse flutter-tongue flute amid lo-fi brainfry anguish  
or in tokyo koch woke up the czech tech sector  
his incinerated ears will file shortly like bad news  
I wish I had your archlute your feathers your dole

2

They are beautiful when they put their hands on  
in the mirror I like being common I am a bit magnificent  
yesterday I only played with the enormous dads  
they flirted with anyone they wanted to be a fucking halloa halloa  
You should have seen the tiny mums & aunts wasping  
around their stings then beetling towards the vino rouge  
while the kids played fake celebrity nose-bleed (again)  
like real like chameleons like ostriches like hell  
he says she says after lunch by the ocean between  
them the fish have been lying about the fishermen  
those little rubber fishermen on elastic don't come back  
who have been to China they never do listen to poetry  
You like not that French novel? Tell me why  
my vocabulary book did this to me forgive me call me  
Old Stonehead call me Old Gruntcakes just call me  
you were saving those exits for later

3

He says he would like to sing torch songs in some kitsch  
musical with swings & bouquets a carousal  
& wingèd Pegasus painted on the backdrop as he murmurs

murm-murm morn mumble-mumbly-mum to the blonde  
when once upon a time it was 1975 all the time when all the  
girls were made in England & all the boys was wild & rococco  
like a joan of arc in an age of chemically production  
14 malfunctioning pathways to do re mi  
as prelude to Evan Parker to Blues Jimmy to Leapy Lee  
it's a pretty flat song no bel canto no diphthongs no bell bottom  
lemon loons and tight baby-blue astrakhan woolly-pullies  
I hold a bar of soap to my left ear & emote into sea-spray  
but sea-spray didn't work either I died the following year  
falling on my lance I wished I was your A & R man  
into your loving arms & excellent flop singles  
"Do It Again A Bit Faster" & "Something About Your Honda Hands"

4

His last fey arrangements o Linda Jones seventies music  
ruined the wombles dear granddad fuck you I love ELO  
everything I did turned into poetry even Gilbert O'  
Sullivan is cheerful bright & gay as one day I was  
leo sayer oh Don't say he fluffed the vinyl skating Fluff  
ELP's Tarkus vomited foam into the un-prepared piano  
& we picked the bits out with our martian Teeth  
till Disco SNAPPED our Tardis spider legs – & we! flopped  
& flipped - get off foxy that's where the happy people go  
I'm glad I'm free & playing the organ big girls don't cry big  
organists do boo hoo cindy birdsong of course is never alone  
half woman pro-canary she wanna stay with me in the chimney  
I was there, dammit, in the piano, in my silver boots, in my concept  
burning my lungs platinum with longing for the LP records  
my guitar hand worn shorter than my saxophone ones I  
elbowed the keyboard fisted the trumpet licked out the drums

5

outside the poem as it comes into being the other poem  
the one that contains the world & then beyond that all the others  
that are the world singing like branch-tips catching the light  
before the roar & tremor of thunder the angel in the boot  
of the spam assassins losing their way in the history of the sonnet  
the distress signals of the hands of my lady readers  
who have discovered "The Brassiere Factory" –  
Audrey, Brigitte, Clemence, Denise & Yvonne  
in my dream I'm writing our sonnet but in the poem itself  
I'm making bad sex with my Chinese mother-in-law &  
her spaghetti tattoo woven beneath her bra-straps –  
my feet were nourished on her breasts all night



# TIM ATKINS & HARRY GILONIS

## **sui hui translations**

### **NORTH POEM**

much danger in the march thunder surnames  
written complicatedly, in elegant sedges  
glorious, blinding like the wind & as manifest  
looks like *all the pollen in the world*  
blossom filling the margins dazzling, glorious

### **NORTH POEM (VERSION)**

Much danger in swimming trunks Johnny Hallyday  
Singing rockabilly in hedges  
Gone missing with wind cosmetic dabbling & the ass manifold in Paris  
Match  
(HE—) looks like  
All the pirates in the Wold are falling  
Boyzone fondling the margins  
Always privates  
Always (yes)  
Dazzling  
& G-G-G-Glorious

### **NORTHEAST POEM**

feeling feeling not found (*as if*)  
rather peaceful away from 'self', I think  
despite redoubled efforts, feeling quiet  
existence at the brink of a cliff  
(green to think it steep)

### **NORTHEAST POEM (VERSION)**

Looked up  
but couldn't find  
The peace that comes  
from touching a small mountain  
Looked down  
& found  
Shock & terrorist frisson  
No answers in Cliff

ROBERT HERBERT  
**death gripper**



PENIS ENLARGEMENT-



# PSYCHOGRAPHIC ship.

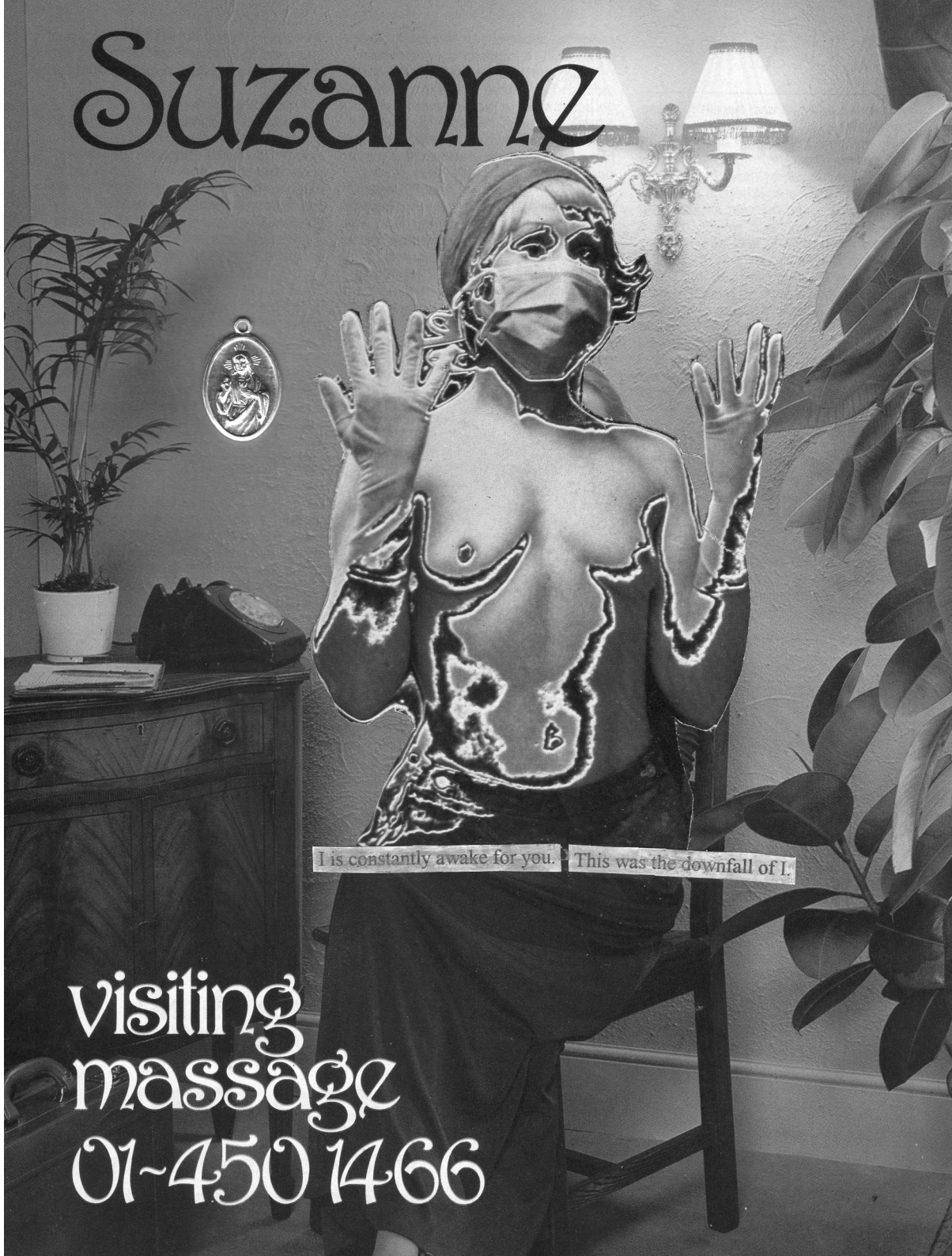
to adjust. [REDACTED] we believe,  
[REDACTED] giving you all you  
ask [REDACTED]

Indeed, [REDACTED]  
your enjoyment may well be up.

ZENITIVA  
CODE NO. 60/DRUGS/349  
ZEN-04463-11-20-UK-EXT/520617  
Co-codamol 8/500 Tablets



# Suzanne



I is constantly awake for you. This was the downfall of I.

Experimental Filmmaking 101,  
Parts 1 & 2

visiting  
massage  
01-450 1466



FAKIE WILDE & BRENTLEY FRAZER

## **brilliant future**

[*excerpt*]

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The only reason I don't smoke is coz I can't afford it, and the only reason I don't get crazy and start beating on people like Hendrie did the other night is coz I'm undecided as to whether or not it's appropriate. What are the pro's of punching someone's head? And also whether or not appropriate things even actually exist. See that telephone pole? That's where a cop got bashed to death just over a month ago. It was talk of the town for a whole week. I think it must take real philosophy to beat a cop to death like that. Philosophy is like commitment. A commitment to act on thoughts. Kind of like deciding that not fucking is the way to go coz you've decided that god's a good idea, or deciding not to bash someone who needs it coz you might hurt their feelings. Lets' face it. If you don't chain it down and it's gone when you get back, it's not yours anymore. And if you did chain it down, but you come back and find it wrapped up against a wall and smashed to bits, then you've become the owner of one smashed up piece of shit. And if you stand at the western bridge and look down into the drain there, you'll see a thousand more fucked up things which've lost their owners. And if it rains, or sometimes on a high tide, they're drifting along like stolen dreams on a filthy green conveyor belt, on their way out of the suburb. On their way to hell on earth, or Mexico or something. And it doesn't matter

shit anyway. Who the fuck cares about anything except me? You know, I should've just kicked the shit out of someone as did Hendrie, but more extreme, completely snapped. I could've fucked up the whole joint, screaming, bile and vomit busting out of me and I'm gonna beat the hell out of anyone and then gangrape the whole bloody room. Even better, I could just leave, leave the room, the street, the suburb. I could just get up now, without even finishing my beer (I could perhaps throw the beer, or I could take my beer, it's good beer) and walk straight out that door over there (I could kick the door in, or rip the flyscreen out while muttering vile obscenities) and then I'm gone.

Check out Pony. He's a fat wasted son of an arsehole, standing out front of his apartment and looking through yellow eyes at the junkmail. Standing glorious in his cream coloured underpants. Perhaps he is somebody's hell waiting to happen.

— Hey Pony you silly cunt! I shout at the fat piece of shit. The cunt squints at me for a second and just says — *Cuuuuuuuuunnnnnnnnnnt*. Real low and slow. Typical Pony shit. I keep kicking the ball along until I get to the shops. Eight shops in all and that's it. What a suck-hole of a place to live, or shop or visit or die in or anything. The drain always smells ripest here, like it's just

been scraped and's ready to eat. I'm immune to it really. I only really hate it when I've been away or something. I have considered taking some of the drain with me for prolonged absences, in fact the shop to which I am going now sells all kinds of things that I could scoop some of the slime into. Last night I had a dream about the drain. The foul trickle came for me in the night, crept up my legs looking me in the eye it tried to force itself into my mouth. It became almost erotic here I guess, morphing into a very sexy Chinese woman who was taste-eating her own pussy for a huge crowd of ceramic garden gnomes, digging in her fingers and bringing them to her lips and licking them long and slowly. I notice that she was looking at me and that I had become a camera and then these fingers from unseen arms screwed a chrome funnel into the back of the camera and then a flock of birds began to spit into it.

Doesn't stop me from eating my pie. Sucking up the salty gravy and lumps of fat, standing here in the car park with my ball. Eating a pie, Coke in my other hand. This is a king's life and I'm thinking things would have to be pretty good to be better than this...and then I am thinking, as I bite into a bit of horse gristle that, nahhhh... its not possible for life to ever get any better, ever. And then this shitty Datsun swings into the carpark with its tyres screeching and hits a shopping trolley which hurtles along sideways on two wheels and smashes through the pane glass front of the bakery where I bought my pie. The shopkeep comes busting out with a baseball bat and a meatcleaver yelling and shaking and proceeds to smash in the rest of the front end of the Datsun that was already busted to crap anyhow. I toss my empty can and pie wrapper into the pile of carnage, its nice to be able to contribute...

It's all about consistency. Time machining it backwards five or ten years. It's all the same. Same shitheads, same shit place, same smell. Bellamy moaning on the hill beside me. Moo all covered in vomit, like as if he's tried to crane his head down to see his feet and then just let fly with a tidal wave of guts. So tripping the sick bastard had been playing in his vomit, looking for any undigested pills and gulping them down again. Sleeping like a baby he is now, mooing softly like a little lost cow. I feel fucken awful. Probably from the grunge I got in my eye at the watertower. The hiss of traffic on

the overpass and aeroplanes whirring sickly through the slimy clouds. Feels like a blunt drill bit humping at my temple trying to fuck my brain. I've woken in a terrible suburb beneath blinding-white clouds and the stink of drainbowel as it tries to turn over on a broken rib and go back to sleep. I tell Moo-Moo he's a cunt, waking him with my foot, he looks up and vomits again, bile all over his VB shirt. I tell Bellamy he looks as bad as I feel. They both tell me to get fucked. I kick them both some more, hard, threatening to leave their sleeping poofter arses out here for the homeys to rape.

Which is eventually what I do. I leave them there on the hill and go home for a while to recover, stopping at The Mercury Place on the way for a burger with egg on tick. My mate Mezzmo works there. Mezzmo is a gently hippy girly type with long plaits and big round fag eyes all the scrag seem to get drippy over. Nothing eases the cunt eyes of drunken morning like ripe greasy animal fats. My trashed brain imagined for a second that we had already cut the butcher up and sold him off as primecuts, but that shit has been done by that mad hotdog stand cannibal in New York or some other cesspit like that. Bloated as I went, I examine curious new tags that the kids had put up on the nearby walls and fences overnight. KIM IS A SLUT<SHE DID MY BROTHER. Good to see the youth keep constructively occupied. So good to see the kids out on the streets, poor little bastards, still learning how to scam.

And then when I get back to my place, there was ol Big-Nose sitting on a carton of throwdowns, waiting in the shade of the complex. Nozer is the kind of bloke that you don't fuck with, even in jest. Judging from the pile of spit between his trainers, he'd been there quite a while. Of course, Nozer had heard all about Stink's death and about Slop getting arrested, however he hadn't heard about Pony going psycho in the carpark and commented that he'd seen the cunt this morning...he was once again standing around out front of his place in his dacks. Standard issue evening for Pony then. Noze also didn't know about Peni's broken arm, but said it was — The best *think* that'd happened in the last month. 'Lil piss-pants needs his fucken head broken. Fucken four-eyed cunt.'

We went out the back of my place to the patio and drank the throwies. The phone didn't ring coz it's broken and nobody turned up, which was good coz me and

Nozie had some time to catch up and I found out what's happening at the arse-end of the suburb. He told me about how his crew'd hired a stripper one night when they were bored and had pumped seven litres of hot wax up her arse with a Gerni. Apparently, the bitch died, so they fucked her and then threw her in the drain. That fucking drain was shit useful sometimes. He said the wax was a science experiment and when I asked him what had been learnt, he replied 'gotta use less wax'. He was very interested about the money in the butcher's ceiling, so I told him the ins-and-outs and we both agreed that it warranted further investigation. My 10<sup>th</sup> beer in I started regretting having told Nozer about the butcher gig and that Nozer had told me about the scrag they topped at that party. I started to get edgy and soon Noze notices and begins to fidget about, which is clear sign that you gotta get the fuck away real soon or he's gonna waste you on account of you knowing too much about his extra-curricular activities. Problem is that this is my house and I am fucking wasted and all I wanna do is sleep. So then I have to start thinking sideways and I soon discover a big fat scoob that I had lifted off moo when he was spewing his guts up. So I whip it out and light it and toke about six times, real fast, so as to distract Nozer from digging about in his fucking tardis pockets that he somehow stashes immense amounts of tools and other shit in, without appearing weighed down. He probably has a chainsaw in there and I don't want him to pull it out. I once saw him asking a guy in a bar for a hammer, and no-one had a hammer, and he's walking around looking for his hammer, and the he feels his pockets, the same as you would if you were looking for a coin, and he goes, oh, and pulls out a hammer looking all surprised. So then Noze grabs the j off me and sucks the rest of it down in one toke.

We must've passed out on the old banana lounges there on the patio coz all of a sudden the sky went out like a smashed TV and the street lights were starting to twitch and Bellamy was banging on the side window. So I let him inside and we, with Nozie still there, had a discussion about what to do. Noze seemed to have forgotten that he was going to kill me.

—Definitely sort out that fucken butcher's roof, said Bellamy. We cooked some old noodles that Noze found in the kitchen and set out into the night to scrape together

some other rogue clan members for the hit. We got as far as the Waterloo before we found Peni standing there with his arm in a sling, cursing at us about Moo-Moo and how he's 'gonna push him into the drain and stick his gnome up his gay arse'. Nozie slapped him in the head and said

—Hello.

To which Peen replied:

—Get fucked, you cunt.

He then re-adjusted his glasses with his free hand and tried to look hard. Then he started to tell us how he tried to fuck a nurse and how he bashed a doctor in the face with a half-filled bedpan. But nobody ever listens to the little cunt, and before long he was just tagging along behind us as we pressed on looking for The Moo. Noze all this while is poking at Peni's still wet cast, trying to convince him that casts are gay and that he should bust it off and tough out the break like a real fucken tough guy.

A scrag we bumped into by the name of Caroline told us that Moo was up the hill again, but when we asked her for a root she told us to piss off. Noze didn't take that too kindly and it took all of us to convince him not to 'convince' her properly. Sure enough, when we got to the hill, there he was, knowing all along that we'd show up eventually. Peni started shouting some shit at him about the gnome, but Moo-Moo silenced him in an instant with a nice hard kick into his broken arm. Noze was overjoyed, rubbing his fucken giant snoz like a religious statue. Peni then retreated to the shadows to be by himself in the peace and quiet and serenity and tranquillity of the night. This is when Moo-Moo hatched his ingenious plan of entering the butcher's townhouse from above. Pull up a few roof tiles and the cunt would never know we were there...

We'd be rich as, with minimal stress. The story of my life. Pack of modern genius criminal architects, hard as ancient swords, sharp as the devils horns, ready to be catapulted into the uncertainty of our inevitably brilliant futures...

There's always something interesting going on in the suburb. Always something to see. We agreed that we'd have a shot at Moo-Moos's great idea tomorrow night so that we had a day to get prepared, thus, we had the

entire evening prior to piss away. Firstly, we told Peni to get fucked and not to come back until he's stopped crying, then we went to the pool hall called —The Realm— where they have all the Chisel songs on the juke box. The cunt's who own The Realm don't give a fuck what we do there so long as we're paying to play pool. So we all chipped in and got a couple of cartons of throwies. One carton we put in the fridge at Bellamy's, the other we took to The Realm. So we get to The Realm and there's fucking Peni with *Coatsy* – just sitting at the bar all casual like the stupid cunt doesn't have a care on the planet. We all shat ourselves just as soon as we saw Coatsy and seeing this Peni puffed up like one of those fucken toadfish you just gotta hit with a cricketbat at the beach barbeque.

Coasty is very fucking mean, a twister by any account. Right around his neck is a heinous red looking scar that he reportedly received when his mum got crazy with his fetus biting her insides and tried to rip him out with a rusted coathanger. Apparently he has killed five blokes, all of them in the middle of enquiring as to whether this story was true. So Peni, naff as a bitch at us for telling him to fuckoff has gone and enlisted Coatsy as his partner to fucken beat us to the butcher score! Anyway, all of us very nervous and all pissed off at the same time we turn our attention to the pool table over under the airconditioners and near the juke.

Moo-Moo is pool shark supreme, so I just hung back watching Barnsey strutting around with his greasy hair and jeans, while the others got flogged by the Moo-man. Moo is playing his game down tho' coz if he looks too good Coatsy is just sure to challenge him to a round, and that's not very cool. However, that's not the way things turned out. Instead, Nozie took him to the cleaners and before I knew it, we were out on the footpath drinking throwdowns and watching Moo-Moo trying to take it out of Nozer's 'cheating cunt-hole' for beating him. We are all kind of forgetting that Peni is looking completely sick with rage that we have successfully ignored his arse all afternoon. So far as I understand it, Noze didn't cheat, but then, nobody can beat Moo, so it's difficult to say. As it turned out, Nozie beat the living shit out of Moo-Moo, so Moo was forced to tell Noze he was lucky and Noze seemed to think that was fair enough. However, just as Me and the limping Bellamy were

lifting the angry Moo-Moo back to his feet, the cunts in The Realm must've called the cops, coz all of a sudden a slimy paddy wagon drew up and three filthy oinkers jumped out thinking that we'd do as they commanded and without any sort of problem climb into the cage and be arrested. Meanwhile, smelling the blood coming from Moo's busted lip Coatsy has slaunted heaps closer, and seeing the pigs pricked up caused him to go foaming in some sort of murderous gleeful inferno-rage. They couldn't've come at a better time coz Moo really needed an outlet and he found it in the form of a throwdown which he cracked on the footpath. He used it as a cookie-cutter on the face of the first pig. That pig fell down with its fucking lips and eyes cut out. Just then, with an animal bellow like out of some horror film Coasty comes barging in with a meatcleaver he had picked up fuck-knows where, probably some hell cesspit rotting with bacteria, and hacks it straight in the skull of the barkeep who had been doing his damndest to quiet shit down a bit. The second cop got smashed in the back of the head by Bellamy with a stupid gum dispenser from the doorway, just as the pigs eyes bug out seeing the brains and slime leaking from the barkeep while Coatsy stands there bellowing hell and playing sort-of, in the gore. Gum went everywhere. Noze and I grab a fistful of colour and threw it at the back of the retreating third copper's head who is screaming like Ned Flanders. The cunt roared away like wet pants in the paddy whilst the other two were just writhing around waiting to be pissed on by Nozie and Moo. They didn't have to wait long, pissing on cops is a rare favourite and watching Moo piss-blasting the bloody cops face clean with six hours of beer drinking was a glorious thing to witness. An act of considerable merit and Moo, he was laughing

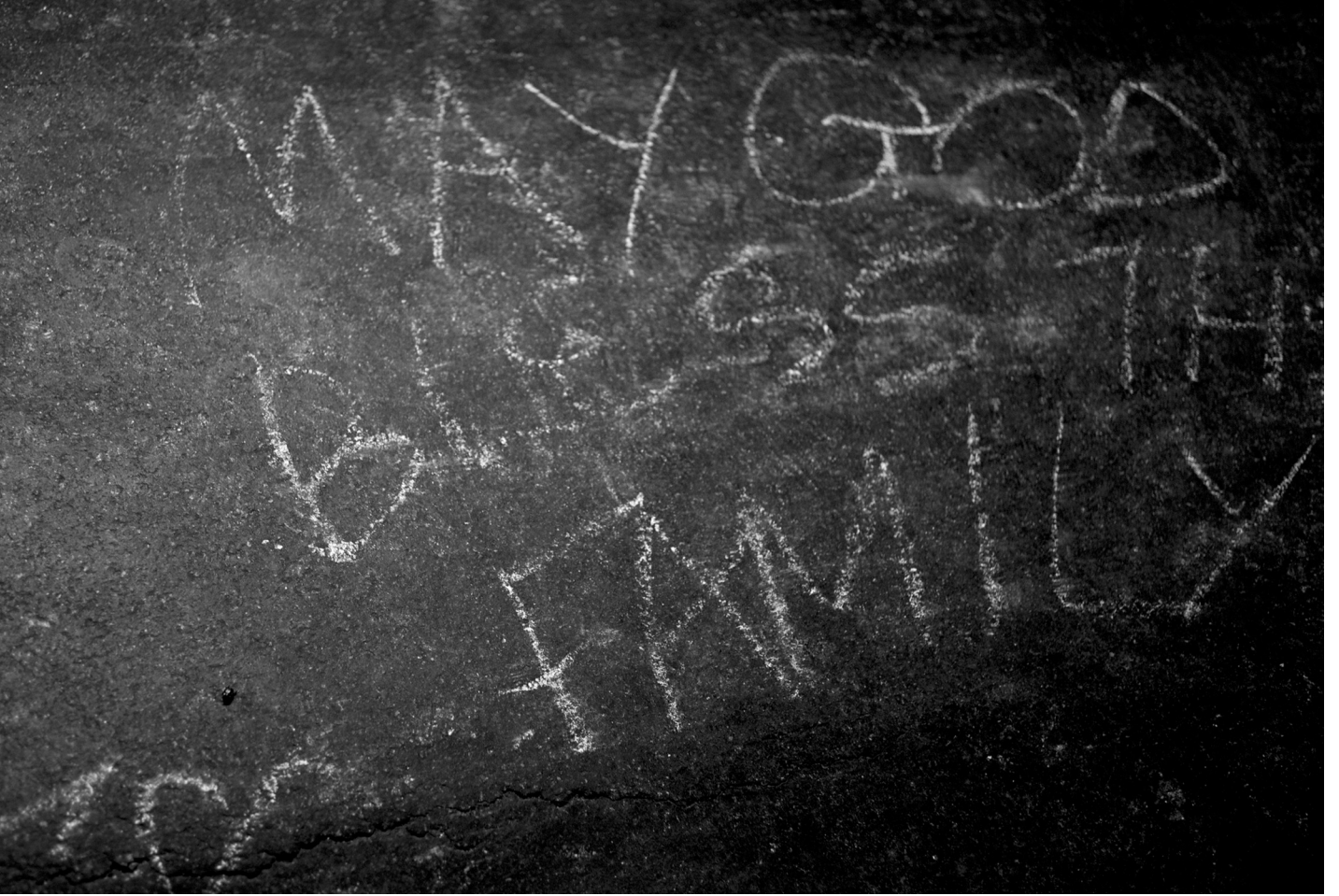
—Harr harr harr, watch me piss on the pigs brains!!! More sirens coming, so I kicked the other cop in the ribs, which mind you is all I had managed to do in the 5 seconds this whole gorefest took, and we all hoofed it over a nearby fence and across the train tracks. Bellamy in all of his genius had along with his mangled bandaged foot trailing, the half a carton of throwdowns with him and so we all sat around after running a mile and a half in the evening heat, calling each other cunts and laughing, for life is little more than what you put into it and we're heaping it on.

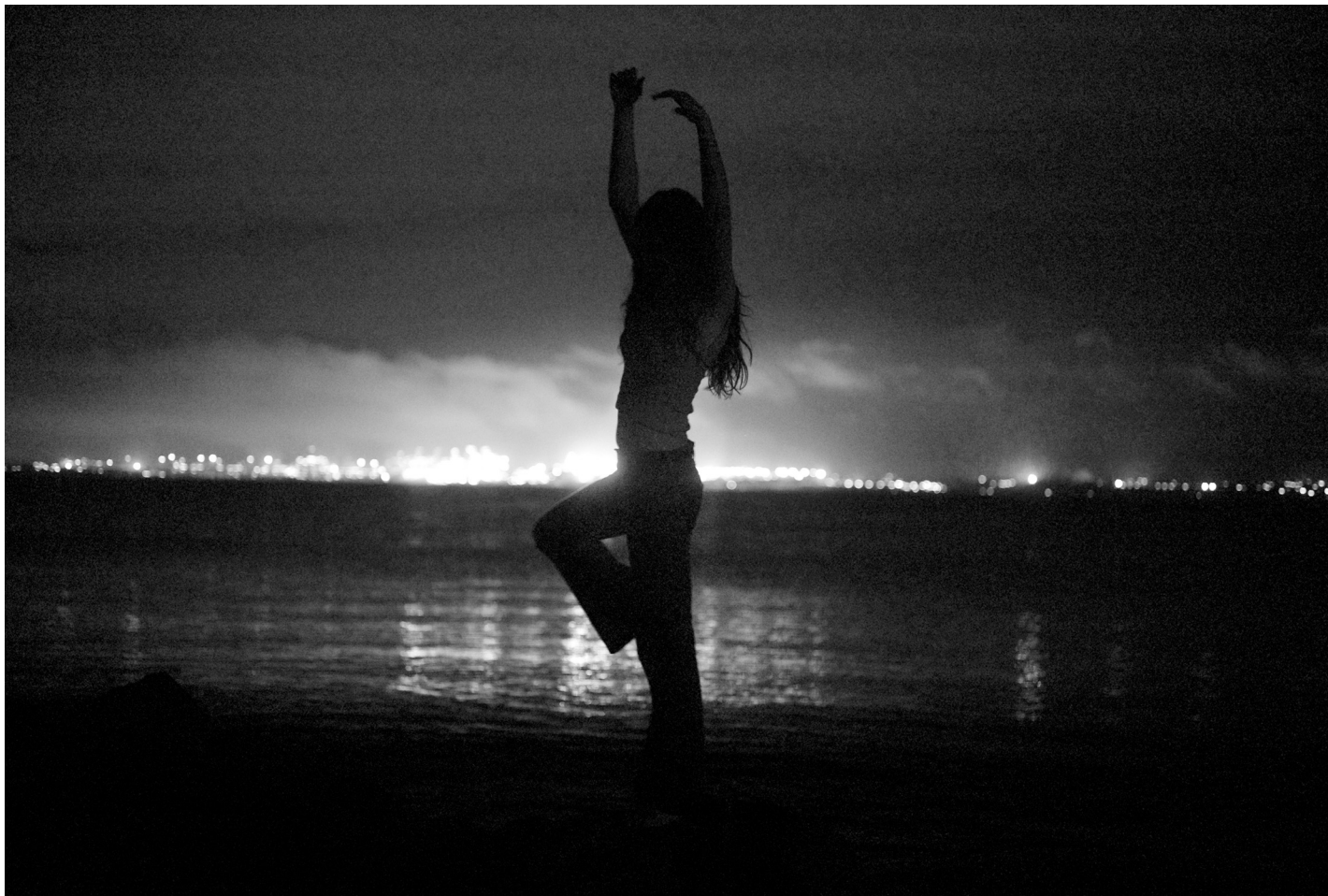


GLENDYN IVIN

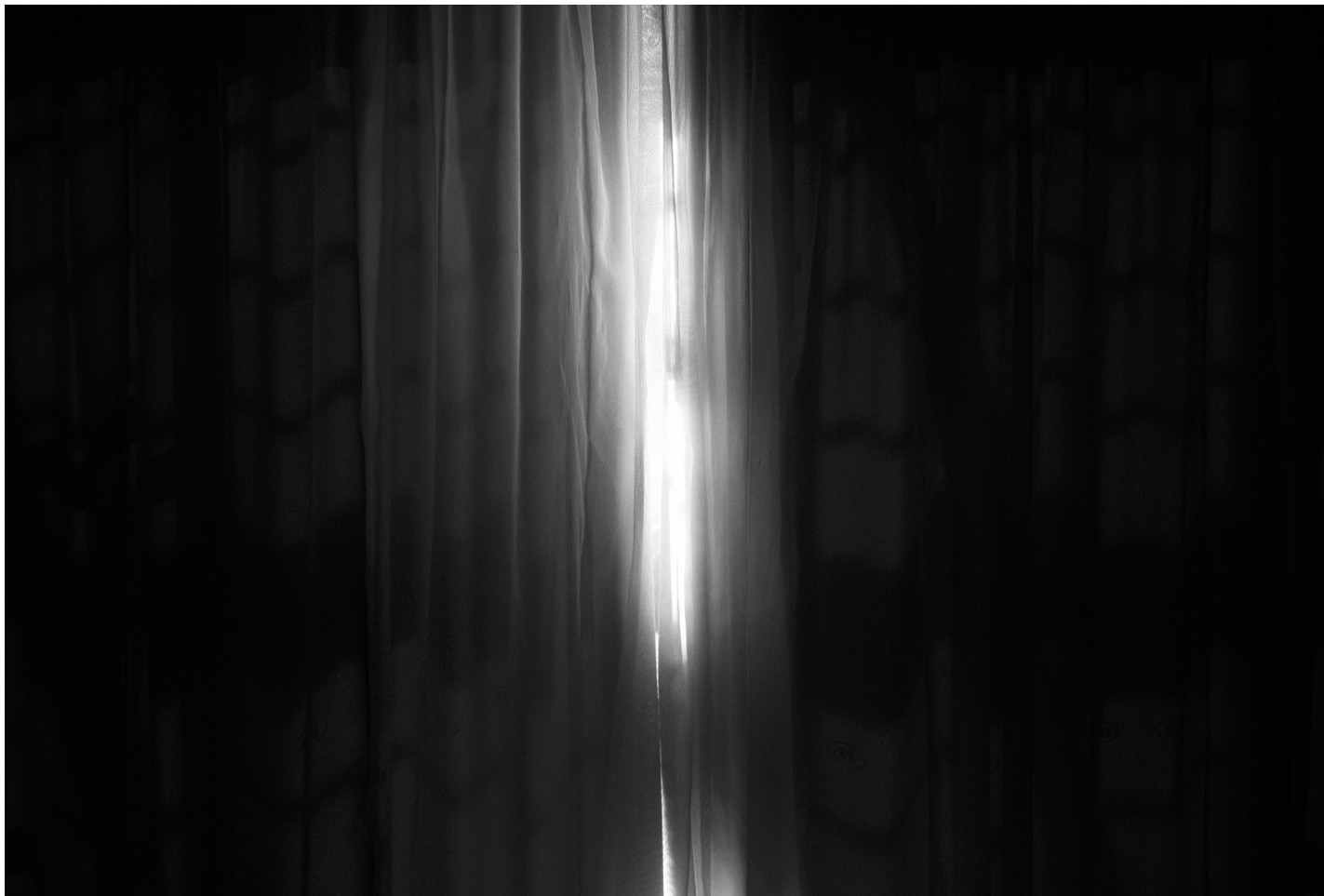
**new damage**























ANSELM BERRIGAN  
**rectangles**

I hear the old edge of bad production values waiting for baby to leave cramp expansion & give  
me back my decadent abjection popularly deemed responsibility, death to or by syllables, with eyes of fury spilling like  
post-emotional checks from speakers, a column worked it out that feeling & reasoning  
like to lick one another in the echo-y eco-corn syrupy spots, & that was cool, but then I knew of nature's horrors  
& the weirdo power, yo

**RECTANGLE 33**

kill off hope for the work Jack, or Jack, but you did do it wrong, and I may do it  
wrong too, though I doubt it, much to some of the time, I am still letting myself into this form, this varying  
of it must be said, axe of too, I've been treating the known badly, drifting from its  
less tangible perimeter, no I don't think alcoholic isolation is too bereft a condition to be so unsympathetic as to

**RECTANGLE 34**

wobbling for sale under the hard core formica, one will be on time for the toddled eval, sweat-

science overly beaten by its reads, hey Rod, what's the deaglio with ebb gulping the pock? mitigated by his or hers bark and saw

accentuation? may we all please consider offing our troubled backbiting phrase or clause of attack, the

populist deliberates the angle by which to slice an expendable alley of lives, here we go again, meaning, there I go again

**RECTANGLE 35**

139

Grier at no cost to be general vermeers at all or no costs to be gear bent on active disinterest in the

arming thing while expectations of the thing diminish to be obituary studies in miniature kitchens to make space within to for to's sake and its

diminutive singularity trafficking in slight excursions to tropical corners to damn few & they're all dead

awake to be dear at not cost to be unclear at no cost to be deerlight at no costs to be queer at no cost to be freer at no to be Pam

**RECTANGLE 36**

golden placemat, oh, this window makes me felt, I mean, being a meanie, a production membrane  
of messianic society, we make our own association with brigadoon, with empowered props & their realist two  
tone cills, just like when I began, what can be sold to preserve saving, recs & blurbs & gimpy  
tantrums, the giving of birth in the boxy tub, a present marginalized by demons of the exterior register, the  
cowled worm's

**RECTANGLE 37**

working with too many breakdowns, this & that pauses, for a moment of artificial, see ----

awkward turns are your or mine kinds, hot spiked apple cider on a near sign, cash directs its own course the  
speech well says

a great microcosm of thats, whether its a manager, coach, owner, agent, teacher, actor, player, artist, x

sack vick, sign or sign, bootsy twitters behind my seventieth password, cat & bro, cat & me, wys & doll, syke &  
ed, zero plus titles

**RECTANGLE 38**

nor factoid of what melt factory of whence ekes any of us alike, the wry ruins porn  
pisses on the inhabitants of the ruined places, which are not like anything, unlike this current I of mine  
the singer from the Buzzcocks sounds pretty joyful singing about his sleepless nights  
& I get pretty happy thinking about revisiting the melancholy in the emigrants, neither fact of which

**RECTANGLE 39**

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poms, ya big sass bag, render follower a number, of things, attack & decay, proof that  
but, old, fashioned linkage, and when the light needs to get turned on to be conscious waste, you better carry,  
you mean, the era  
pococalypse had been a happening & this is the aftermath? zebra stalls my favorite plastic pict  
ure, blooming, causing feelings in the flab attack future not to budge, here's your purty red handmade hat with red pom

**RECTANGLE 40**



STEPHANIE GRAY

## filmic-poetic rumination

ON ORANGE FANTAS STOLEN AND SECRET KID DIPS TO THE  
BANNED POOL DEEP END, OR: DIVING INTO THE MIDDLE SIX FEET:  
A SLOW SINK TO THE DEEP END, OR: DIGRESSION TO SOME END...

In the film world, many of us know about the haunted, faded out/washed out/dotted/white-ed out “middle six feet”. *What is this?* you might say, if you’ve never heard of it before. If you can remember or if you are just being told for the first time, the middle six feet refers to indeed the middle six feet of a roll of 8 mm film. Yes, this film actually is still made and filmmakers still use it though mainly for artistic films. If it’s been awhile since you’ve thought of actual celluloid film since the last 35mm movie you saw (though we know this is being replaced by digital nowadays more and more) and you can vaguely remember what an unspooled reel of film looks like without a reel (a bowl of spaghetti), 8mm film is obviously a fraction of 35. If you still need a bell to jar you back to when the last time you saw 8mm film, you’ve probably seen this: the infamous Zapruder film of you know what. Who can forget the hot pink and green colors of you know who’s clothing and the landscape? If that still doesn’t ring a bell, then you’ve probably seen the film footage of when Kennedy was assassinated. There, the image and blurriness and quality of that image came to mind. The pink dress Jackie was wearing. The hyper green expanse of lawn. The grittiness and slowed downness of the film that we’ve all come to remember (usually never in real time) – that is 8mm. You have also probably seen it but not sure if it was 8mm or super 8 (which is different) or 16mm or 35mm, but those old movies that seem to be from the 50s that have the white white glare of light, low ceilings, and weirdly, always shots of the ceiling with the whipped cream ice cream birthday cake and pale lime green walls, with men who look like the Fonz, and women who look like Mad Men extras – that is likely regular 8mm.

So to go back to where we were starting, this mysterious middle six feet I’m diving into – this poetic riff and the poem that follows invoke this middle six feet: the part of 8mm film right smack in the middle of where you had to turn open your camera and flip the film over to continue shooting the second half. The middle six feet got exposed a bit or messed up or blurred images that you sort of got blended into blinding white

exposure light or you just saw an assortment of white dots. That's the middle six feet. If you didn't have a splicer and cut that part out, you were left with this semi-mysterious part of the image. You have likely seen something like this in those old home movies that show up in documentaries or if you have had family or friends show you some that have been transferred to video.

So to me this middle six feet not only represented some strange happy accidents or brain-filmmaker-film-fog or unexpected experiments – whether you were the earnest 50s parent filming a birthday or if you were a 2000's now era filmmaker going for some strange affect – this middle six feet to me also represented what happened on the outside when people knew you had to stop and reload the film. How did they stop acting? What did they start doing thinking they were not being filmed? Did they get caught doing something being filmed before they realized it? The middle six feet to me was a deep end of a depth that exceeded its simple length, a brief story told or not told by what surfaced – and you saw it on your first watch unless you clipped the film before you showed it in the basement rec room. Maybe you clipped it out after. Maybe you never thought to. This was thought of as amateur film after all.

And to backtrack a little more, film existed oxymoronically before it – larger sizes that is – 16mm and 35mm had already been developed but 8mm wasn't until later, specifically for home use. Before that time there were not many home movies since 16mm equipment was too big usually for amateurs to handle. And to flash forward, super 8 came around in the 60s in a self-contained cartridge of 50 feet. No more flipping the film or needed to spool/load it and exposing it. You just pop a cartridge in and that was that.

I thought I heard at one point a filmmaker not long ago had made a whole film of just middle six feet. Did I really hear this? Imagine it? I'm sure a quick 'net search could do the trick but I think I prefer to just sit here wondering, in mystery a film of no film, of some film of some stories just almost told, on the tip of your tongue of what sort of happened of what white-ed out happened of what happened outside the frame. Yes, I'm diving – not into the wreck, like Adrienne Rich – but really drowning here in the what feels deeper, much deeper than a middle six feet. The deep end as a kid you were not allowed to go on and snuck into when your mom when to buy orange Fanta near the restrooms of the pool. She didn't know you saw the Fanta and snuck a sip when she put her suntan lotion on and she didn't see you dive for your keys on the deep end. Two stories that the middle six feet could've caught, but didn't, never will, never won't. I still get goosebumps thinking about the middle six feet, it feels like it always holds what was almost shot, what could have been done, but wasn't meant to be.

*\*I'd like to acknowledge here Scott Stark's essay on Hi-Beam.net on this topic, which I visited to refresh my memory on the middle six feet after simply typing in "Middle Eight Feet + 8mm film" into search engines. I had remembered the whole mystique and aura of the middle six feet and started to write about it still enthralled by everything about it, but I couldn't remember actually if it was 6 or 8 feet, and I couldn't really remember where I first heard of the phrase "Middle Six Feet". It could indeed have been Scott's essay: "The Middle Six Feet: The birth and demise of regular-8 film and personal cinema: inspired by the SFAI Regular 8mm Film Festival, February 5-6, 2000, San Francisco." )*

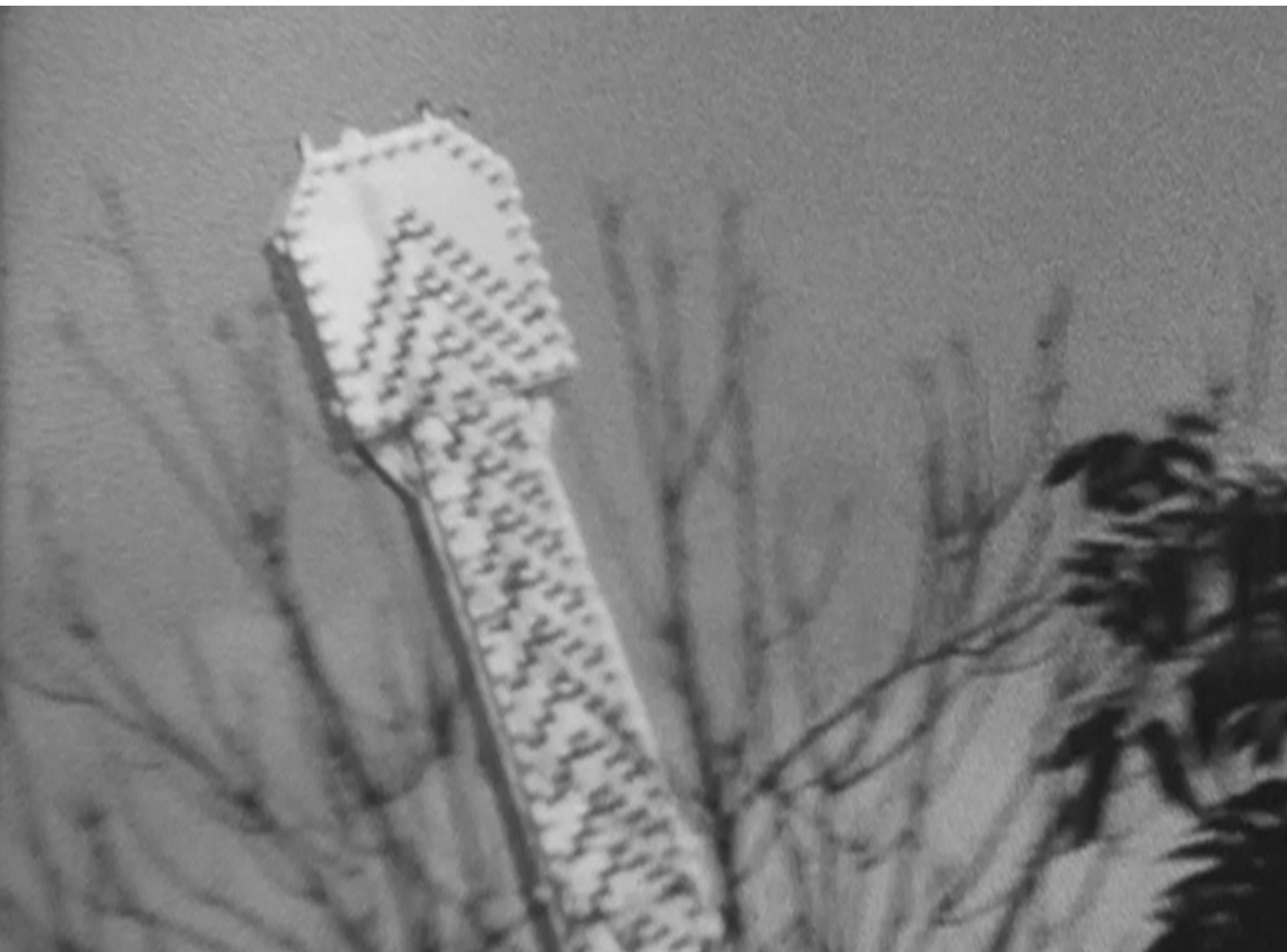


STEPHANIE GRAY

## **super 8 film stills**

*from "SOMEDAY BEHIND CONEY ISLAND"*

These films stills were taken from a film likely shot in 2004 at one of the Mermaid Parades when Theo and Moby were King and Queen. I have just recently transferred the film to video and started to make dvd previews for festivals. The thing is, when I got to Coney Island, which I had never been to before (since moving to NYC in 2004) I didn't even really set foot in the famed theme park until the end of the day and just briefly walked through it. While I did focus somewhat on the parade, I wasn't really there to "document" the parade per se. That would be the video person's terrain. What I was noticing was Coney Island the NEIGHBORHOOD and COMMUNITY and its buildings, architecture that survived amidst the theme-parkness, and the Robert Moses affected-ness of it all. I also kept thinking about the theme park's vicinity to the large affordable housing units that were in the background of all vantage points of the park. But I wondered if everyone who visited ever thought about that and what that meant at times. As far as why this film or its stills hasn't seen the day of light till now (or someday, as the title infers), despite being shot in 04, is that I think maybe what happened is after Coney started changing – sadly – I just couldn't pick up the film and do something with it. It just sat there frozen in place. The irony is that I captured a window of time just before the horrid whateverification we are going to call what is supposed to be happening to Coney, but after Sandy I wonder how some of this is going to play out. Right about the time I thought about maybe visiting again to visit and compare if the places I shot were still there, we know what happened. What I can't escape from in the last image in the film, that haunts me until this day with the "SOMEDAY" glitter sign of some type of game and the housing units in the background. What you see here are a fraction of the "less famous" sights (though there are some, but from odd angles) that I think might slip by the subconscious for those who might just zip in and zip out to go to the beach or the mermaid parade. There is a lot that lurks in the cracks and crevices of all that is excitement and hype and when you slow down and care, you can see it.



105050  
JP4300





STEPHANIE GRAY

## **diving into the middle six feet of your invisible film,**

you know I can see you there, in the glare, in the (w)holes, but you're not there but you are but you're not but you are. So. There. I tried to understand you could drown, like maybe Oscar the Grouch could, in the swimming pool he said he had at the bottom of his can, but it never really happened, like you knew it could but you knew it never would, but couldn't but would but couldn't. The middle six feet has those tidal waves, I forgot what they're called, the ones they tell you more than they do in Hawaii, here in NYC to not swim. It seems like every other day. We'll see you go out in to the water and come back and the lifeguards thing you will go back out and not come back, like that roll of film eaten up by your 8mm camera, I know the middle six feet while ghostly appear in its nonappearance when you take it out to switch the roll. I saw the girls rolling their eyes at you as soon as you stopped filming and tried to get the film on the reel the same way a beginning surfer tries to step on that board amongst the pros at Gilgo Beach while everyone drinks unauthorized Heineken. And with a chain around your ankle that the super pros don't wear. That glint of light made me not see when you fell beneath your board the same way the light hit the film and erased half the candle of your 8<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1956. It seemed everyone was wearing white, even the cake, even though cakes are not supposed to wear anything, just drowned in Cool Whip with hot pink sprinkles. I wanted to dive into everyone's middle six feet while their fathers shot and shot, not remember to try to gauge when to stop and keeping their eye on the film counter, thereby middle-six-feet(fete?)ing the moment when Jr. blew out the candles. His little face appears in flashes of holy exposed light and orange flares on the side backlit the light green walls of the cheap chandelier dining room, making it seem as if it was on fire. Maybe it was. Your teenage brother threatened to walk away with your cigarettes into the hands of three smiling girls in someone's borrowed Galaxie 500 in that sky blue you don't know what to call it. They sat outside smoking so much (it looked like they were on fire) while the little one blew the candles and you missed it on the middle six feet. I could offer to dive into it for you but I don't want to bump into the pros at Gilgo Beach. Most importantly I don't want to drown in the candles that could have been burned, the screams that might have been said, the face smooshed into the frosting, the rolled eyes for you not me, the candles licked clean by your mother in law. I know it all happened but it didn't, it was on fire but it wasn't, it was there but you couldn't see it, it was exposed but not developed. The girls and boys were in your middle six feet but were never processed. They hung in the deep end, one whiff of smoke made it in to your blinding white light, but it was unclear if it was a candle half blown or the smoke the girls were hiding behind so thickly so they could drown in the memory that nobody really had, gasping up to the surface for air.

MICAH BALLARD  
**poems**

**OCTAVES LATER**

*for John Coletti*

Beyond  
the nerve tonic  
I came up rather quickly  
now it's a way of saying something  
as if another century had passed  
not just polishing the ghost hand  
but remaining parallel to the flux  
so how should I say what you would better  
or how would I without you  
let there be bonus dungeons  
& main quest factions  
let there be counter states, ancillary  
to the actual & whatever that means  
I am speaking about a vacant hissing  
quickening calms that don't belong here  
our commonality is full term  
given up to the multiphasic  
I think of my perfect first  
as a secondary act of attending to worlds  
whose gains are never recent  
but persistent enough  
to emerge without passing

**A TICKET TO TEL AVIV**

It's killing season  
& there's an absence in the inventory  
via that I jammed the blinds  
so they could watch  
tell me how and I will  
see now how words do  
we fill in the spaces  
we are left to fill  
Pan. Astarte. Isis. Hecate.  
let me get to the symptoms later  
I ordered a long one  
& felt like a real lord  
a noose in the hero's bedroom  
it's like that in the otherness  
you wake at the end  
of another coda  
& sort out the dimensions  
into a rare Strauss waltz

## RARE HUES

Left  
to my own conduits  
I use no interior vita  
except a harmony in contrast  
according to the traversals  
all the others are capable too  
as an interval between  
do prior transparencies  
count for conveyance?  
I prefer to court the irrational  
& meet the geometries on their terms  
not to imitate but interpret  
at least that was the escort  
I don't mean to assign ordinations  
papyrus coffins as souvenirs to the zone  
in the blur established illusions  
turn preliminary regardless  
the hues are rare, yes  
but among my friends  
the subtractions are real

## RENT-AN-APOCALYPSE

East Bay  
acquaintances  
Trombone Shorty  
here and there pinches  
I came from a long line  
of women, cash only  
& all of the concentric  
spheres of course  
on behalf of the rest  
this captioning  
is made available by memory  
riffs and victim history  
pale copies of what  
a moth might see  
prior to them I was never  
able to reach appropriate  
embodiment until now  
sorry I'm late, all morning  
it's been innocent flames  
from the waist up  
let me cross without looking  
you know how long it takes  
a space occupied by use  
& the first rays since

## NO BONES

I think  
in bum French  
& slender midriiffs  
a mansion on Falcon Street  
received in hiding  
leading is the experience  
there is nothing ecstatic or visionary  
for the back of its wings  
I say something flowery  
for the front I draw a delicately chased head  
& slip into a gown  
of last night's missives  
the innermost layers  
are divided by feathers  
the rest a phonebook novelette  
to chime the glorious  
first a dart of fire  
then a pale whisper of blue  
remind me how to fake it  
but don't quote me  
I need something  
more native to my attention  
a war of nerves  
& the best magazines  
this side of the bed

## CLOTH HEAVY

This is a song  
of iterations, after images  
eclipsed by a tendency  
to shift toward their own compliment  
I enter whichever one refuses welcome  
you too can leave if you will  
I was meant to loot the system  
not the wants but the their walls  
waypoint recitals contagious in mood replay  
the necessities are always random  
as soon as they're mixed  
everything else is neutralized  
I seem to prefer it wayward  
one thumb off the money  
the other borrowed by likeness  
the resemblance is in the distance  
no discount for loyal thinking  
but this is how you do





# HOLLYWOOD

SEAN CARSWELL

## the bottom-shelf muse

I was nothing more than watching the paint peel off the walls in my down-at-the-heels brain emporium when the buzzer rang. January winds had been rattling the wood in my window frames all day. They beat a steady rhythm. The buzzer fell right into place, like a low-level percussion from the *Gas Company Evening Concert*. My last nickel was lonely for another nickel it could rub together with, so I went into the waiting room to see who was buzzing there.

A young man stood between the window and an old red davenport, frozen sitting to wait for me and mustering up the courage to knock on my office door. He wore a tailored, bluish-gray suit with flannel thinning around the knees and the elbows. It was the kind of suit that wore out before a kid like this could finish paying the mortgage on it. His eyes still darted from davenport to office door, but he added a glance at me into the cycle. With what sounded like his last breath, he croaked out, "Hello."

I set my office door into a wide swing and pointed inside. "Don't just stand there drying out your tongue, Cream Puff," I said. "Come inside and let's jaw."

The man skittered around me and into my office. He took a seat on the wooden chair in front of my desk. I moseyed around to my desk chair and planted myself. The low-rent dandy needed some time to sit there looking stupid, so I filled my pipe, put a flame to

the leaves, and took a couple of puffs. The wooden window frame beat a minuet. The man swallowed hard and came out with it.

"Name's Candy," he said. "I'm here on behalf of my employer." He presented me a card the way the maître d' at the Coconut Grove offers a bottle of Beaujolais. I snatched the card. Candy's employer's name meant nothing to me. Just another Joe making pictures. His title was supposed to send me over the moon. Studio Executive. Big deal. I'd been around this town long enough to be disillusioned about what a lot of golfing money can do to the personality. The organ grinder's monkey was even less impressive. I tossed the card into my ashtray. Candy went on.

The studio he worked for was in a bind, he said. Their lead actor, a fellow by the name of Alan Ladd, had been drafted into the war effort. He was shipping out in a couple of months. They were racing to make one more picture with him before he left. They'd had to open a Los Angeles branch of the US mint to print enough money to pay the writer to type up the script for the Ladd movie. They'd been filming scenes faster than the writer wrote. Now they had only one page left to film, and the writer had to come up with an ending. No one could figure out who the murderer was. The writer wasn't talking. He claimed to have some kind of writer's block. Candy's boss had even offered the

writer a portrait of Madison – a five thousand dollar bill – to finish the script. It was all for nothing.

I tapped the ashes of my pipe onto the business card in my ashtray. “What are you asking me to do?” I asked. “Be the murderer or read the script and solve the crime?”

Candy pulled a passport wallet from inside his suit. He opened it carefully and produced a photograph. He passed the photograph across my desk. I expected to see a picture of the writer. Instead, it was a picture of some kind of miniature banjo surrounded by the soft light of a photographer’s studio. I set the photo on my blotter and said, “Is this a joke?”

“It’s a ukulele. A banjo ukulele. The writer got it as a gift from George Formby. You know George Formby?” I shook my head. Candy said, “He’s the biggest star of the pictures in England right now.”

“I haven’t been to the Odeon in Leicester Square in some time,” I spat. “London’s a far drive in these days of gas rationing. All those V-2s falling around town aren’t very pleasant, either.”

Candy regarded me with his monkey eyes, like suddenly I was making the music from the organ, only I was grinding it backwards. He shook his head enough to rattle his brains back into gear. “It seems that this banjo ukulele has gone missing. The writer can’t write without it. This is yours if you can find it and get the writer writing.” He handed me an envelope full of bills.

“When do you need it?” I asked.

Candy placed his manicured hands on the threadbare knees of his slacks and pushed himself into an upright position. “Yesterday,” he said.

I thumbed through the envelope. Double sawbucks nestled together cozy as mice. There must have been a couple of dozen of them in there. About five hundred large. Good money for a funny-looking ukulele.

I took two of the Jacksons for expenses and slid the envelope back to Candy. “You pay me when the job is done.”

No matter how smart you think you are, you have to have a place to start. All I had was the picture of the ukulele and the name of the writer: Chandler. If I went around showing people a picture of a ukulele and

asking them if they’d seen it, the State of California would catch wind of it. In no time, they’d start fitting me for a camisole up at Camarillo. Talking to Chandler wouldn’t get me anywhere. A guy who could send everyone at Paramount Studios into a panic over a banjo ukulele wasn’t going to do me or anyone any good. But talking to a writer made a certain amount of sense. All those scribblers down at the studios were chummy. As far as I could tell, they spent most of their days drinking champagne in the break room, and most of their evenings drinking scotch in a bar. Talent for these guys amounted to having a good secretary. The studio secretaries would come up with characters, plot, and dialogue by the reams. The writers were at their best when they scratched their names on the backs of paychecks and constructed elaborate laments about their talents drying up in the hot January winds of Hollywood.

The writers were easy to find. All I had to do was catch a red car west on Hollywood Boulevard and sidle up to the bar at Musso and Frank’s. You couldn’t spit at Musso and Frank’s without hitting a screenwriter.

It was my favorite thing about spitting there.

Writers at Musso are easy to spot. Look for slicked, graying hair badly in need of an oil change and dented with the ring of a dusty fedora. Look for the gabardine suits with the cheap cut of a Boyle Heights tailor. Look for the ash stains on their slacks and the ink stains on their middle fingers. Look for their eyes drooping from days spent drinking in the break room. Look for that air of disheveled dignity that comes from years of wearing a mask of talent with no face below it. Look for all these things and you’ll find a gaggle of them perched around the corner of the bar.

I took a stool on the short end of the bar and ordered a scotch, neat. The bartender never had the bottle far away from this corner. He poured me three fingers in a dirty glass. I threw down two bits for the drink and asked the writer closest to me if he knew this Chandler. “Know him?” The writer looked at me as if I’d just asked if he’d heard of Culbert Olson. “Why, of course. Everyone knows old Ray.”

A few more of the gaggle nodded along. They all knew old Ray.

I asked my questions with a little more volume in my voice. One writer talking was as good as any other. Whoever wanted to chirp up could. "This Ray, he's a pal of yours?"

"Sure." He was chummy with all the writers.

"A fine fellow, that Ray? A real square gee?"

"Did more entertaining in the writers' room than on the page. Always had a story at the ready."

"A real yarn-spinner, is he?"

"Yes he is."

"And what are these yarns about?"

Depends on the day. Sometimes, he spoke of the booming Southern California oil fields before the Depression settled in. Sometimes about the first of these world wars, about his time wearing a kilt for a Canadian division, leading his men into a slaughterhouse, though the writers disagreed with where this slaughterhouse was – France? Germany? Didn't matter – and limping out of there with a bullet lodged in his thigh. Sometimes he told stories of booze and broads and the *Black Mask*, scribbling stories that left him so broke he breakfasted on shoe leather.

"So he's a sad sort with these stories, is he? Nothing but corruption and war and poverty?"

"Why, no," the writer nearest told me. "He always manages to put a nice twist on the yarns. You walk away laughing, more than not."

I saw an angle and pursued it. "So he's the comical sort? Maybe tells his tales with ukulele accompaniment?"

A writer in the middle of the cluster stood from his bar stool. He was squinty-eyed and puffy from middle age. His nose advertised far too many veins for a man on his side of fifty. "Say," he said. "What's this about, Mister?"

I shrugged and let my glance linger beyond his soft shoulder. There at the table behind him sat a broad who looked perhaps too interested in our conversation. She ran a emerald-polished fingernail around the rim of a rocks glass filled with a pale green liquid that could only be a gimlet. I knew enough of this Chandler's writings to know that this was the dame I needed to speak with.

Now, in Chandler's fictional world, there are blondes and there are blondes. There are tall blondes dressed

better than the Duchess of Windsor who sway elegantly across rooms. There are blondes too tall to be cute, wearing street dresses of pale blue wool and small cockeyed hats that hang on their ears like butterflies. There are two-hundred-forty-pound blondes who run the show and wavy-haired blondes who carry little Colts and laugh a laugh strained and taut as a mandolin wire. There are blondes who sit in the driver's seat in a mink and make the Rolls Royce around them look like just another automobile. There are blondes with faces so pretty you have to wear brass knuckles every time you take them out. There are blondes who fall in love with you and still love you after you kill their husband. There are blondes who will meet you in a supermarket and stroll among the strained peas in baby jars and plot murder for a ten-thousand-dollar insurance policy. There's a small and delicately put together blonde who fills the room with a perfume called trouble, who can lower her lashes until they almost cuddle her cheeks and send you into a world of wealth and corruption, along mean streets nearly powerful enough to make you mean yourself, and she'll give you little more than a kind word and a faith in your own hard-earned honor to guide you through.

This beauty here at Musso and Frank's, though, was a brunette. She wore a white day dress with green flowers and a green bow tied around the waste. Her shoes were the fashionable Tippecanoe, which looked like green moccasins coming and going, but looked like sandals when she stopped and gave you a gander of the middle. She crossed her legs and let one Tippecanoe dangle loose off her heel. She was the kind of woman who learned to hold her own anywhere she walked, be it a San Pedro public school or a typing pool or a Paramount screening room. She had the look of a secretary who can only exist in that flawed-fantasy-come-true which is Hollywood, where a lack of imagination projected onto a giant screen can create an industry with enough wealth to put an illuminated pool in every backyard. I carried my scotch to her table and sat opposite her.

"If I don't miss my guess," I said, "you're one of those Paramount secretaries who does all the real writing on pictures."

A bar light ping-ed of her cobalt eyes as she locked

them onto mine. "And who would you be?"

"Just a match someone struck to light a fire under a writer. A guy named Chandler. Know him?"

The secretary exhaled heavy and hard like a slashed tire. She glanced at the scalloped shoulder of her day dress. "Know him? I think I still have his handprints all over me."

"You worked for him, then, did you?"

She took a slow drag on her cigarette, then popped the smoke out in one quick puff. "I guess that depends on how you define work."

"How did the studio define it?"

"Apparently for them, 'work' meant taking dictation on all the passes Ray made after me. He spent his days telling me about his old wife and her illnesses and his involuntary abstinence. Does that sound like work to you?"

"It sounds to me like listening to a man who doesn't know anything about women."

The secretary lifted her gimlet to her lips. They were painted a dark red, the color blood gets long after homicide has closed the investigation the crime is remembered only by a stain on the sidewalk. "Exactly," she said. "Does a woman want to hear about an old man and his older old lady and their sad life? Does a woman want to be wooed with lines about how little sex he's having and about how she'll do? I don't think so. A man could notice a dress once in a while. He could ask about me now and then. Or at least once." She ran her finger through her soft brown hair. "He could notice these curls that take a night in hot rollers to get."

"They are lovely," I said.

She unlocked her eyes from mine and glanced down at the scarred mahogany of the table in front of us. "Well," she said. Her coloring seemed to change as the dim light of dusk crept across the bar. I didn't flatter myself to see a blush in there anywhere.

"In these woeful attempts to woo," I asked. "Did he ever play a ukulele?"

"A what?" Her gaze darted back up to meet mine. "A ukulele?"

I nodded, slightly as possible.

"Sure, Mister," she said. "He keeps it in the rubber room right down the hall from the one you live in."

I drained my scotch and picked up my hat. Everything in this watering hole seemed to dry into dust.

The light of the next morning brought me no more wisdom. I still had a nutty case and a writer blocked. I was two days late solving a mystery I'd learned about one day before, and I didn't have much to go on. I knew the scribbler drank too much, which is about as much of a surprise as knowing a millionaire is part criminal. I knew he couldn't write at the studios, but who could? I'd seen plenty of movies, but never one that looked like it had been written. I knew he pawed at his secretary just like every man who has a secretary to paw at does. I knew he had a wife considerably older than him. That might mean something. And I knew he liked to tell stories around the writing room, so my best bet would be to sit in that writing room and listen. I called Candy and asked him for a studio pass. He told me the executive's card he gave me would work. I salvaged the card from my ash tray, wiped it gray with my handkerchief, and took the red car down Melrose.

I found the writing room empty and Chandler in his bungalow, doing what, as far as I can tell, most writers do with most of their time: nothing. He gazed out his office window at the view of the bungalow across the sidewalk and its window with the view of him. He wore his shirt sleeves and looked tired. His tie was rumpled. A beige jacket hung on the hat tree next to his desk, alongside a beige fedora and a beige overcoat. Everything about the guy looked a little beige.

I stepped into his office without knocking. Why not? The door was open. Chandler spoke as if I'd hit my mark and that was his cue to begin the monologue. "Hollywood will bleed you white," he said.

"Excuse me?"

Chandler kept his gaze where it had been: on that little patch of open air between writers' bungalows. He didn't look for an introduction and I didn't offer one. He was a smart enough cookie. Who else could I be but some other cowboy with a stick to prod this beast into writing? A weak patch of stale yellow sunlight nestled up on Chandler's papery skin.

"There is no such thing as an art of the screenplay," Chandler said, maybe to me, maybe to that sidewalk outside. "There never will be as long as the system

lasts. The essence of this system is to exploit talent without permitting it the right to be talent."

I stepped fully inside the office and took a seat on the red striped sofa. A pair of beige leather brogans sat on the floor beside me. I'd known brogans only as work shoes, but these brogans with the leather soft and unscuffed as the air of a new day had an elegance to them.

Chandler kept talking. "To me the interesting point about Hollywood's writers of talent is not how few or how many there are, but how little of worth their talent is allowed to achieve. Writers are employed to write screenplays on the theory that, being writers, they have a particular gift and training for the job, and are then prevented from doing it with any independence or finality whatsoever, on the theory that, being merely writers, they know nothing about making pictures. It takes a producer to tell them that."

Chandler stood and walked around his desk. He regarded me directly for the first time. With his thin lips and horn-rimmed glasses, he looked more like a professor than a Hollywood screenwriter. The fact that he was engaged in a lecture with no concern whether an audience was listening or not only compounded this impression. "So what is required of my talent today?" he asked, though he didn't ask me. "To make a vehicle for some glamorpuss named Moronica Lake with two expressions and eighteen changes of costume. And for Alan Ladd, some male idol of the muddle millions with a permanent hangover, six worn-out acting tricks, and the mentality of a chicken-strangler. Pictures for purposes as these, Hollywood lovingly and carefully makes."

Enough was enough. I didn't have time to hear the cries of a typist who makes twelve hundred a week. His suit may have been rumpled and beige, but it still had the cut of a West Hollywood tailor. Just because he wore it like a cheap suit didn't make it cheap. If he couldn't write with a pillow of money like that to rest his head on every night, then to hell with him. If some big studio organ grinder wanted me to poke this monkey into dancing, then so be it. I'd poke.

"So what are you going to do about it?" I asked Chandler.

Chandler seemed surprised that I had a voice at all.

But what followed next indicated that he'd taken my question to heart and come up with the most ridiculous answer he could muster. He turned back to the desk, picked up the phone, and asked to be connected to his producer. Three seconds later, he lay out his demands.

This Chandler was a booze hound on the mend. He'd been strictly tea and crumpets while he typed up this latest masterpiece of glamorpuss expressions. But if they wanted him to finish it, he had to get liquored up enough to lubricate that dry brain of his. So he proposed that he'd return to his home and write from there. The studio would provide two limousines to be on call outside his house, each with a driver working an alternate twelve-hour shift. The limousines could run the script pages to the studio while they were still warm from the secretary's typewriter. The limousines had to be Cadillac. Chandler insisted on this point. If his maid needed to rush to the market for his next bottle of rye or his wife needed to rush to the hospital because he was driving her mad, she needed to do it in style. I didn't hear him specify anything about the drivers. Perhaps one had to quote passages from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" on request and the other had to know the Song of Solomon.

He also demanded six secretaries. They would work in pairs, eight-hour shifts apiece. Whenever he had a thought of fleeting brilliance, they'd be there to take dictation. One of the secretaries he did call out by name. I knew that name. She'd show up wearing a pair of Tippecanoes and a green day dress. She'd have to starch it so it would keep its shape when his paws ran all over it.

And, of course, there must be booze enough to get him through the last act.

Chandler paused after making his demands, but only long enough to hear some sap say "Okay." He grabbed his coat from the hat rack, stuffed his arms inside, and fluttered out of the room with neither word nor glance for me.

I now had the writer's office to myself. It was the perfect opportunity to hunt for a funny-looking ukulele. A regular shamus would have taken that opportunity and turned the office upside down. Not me. I stretched out on the couch and thought over the situation,

which I couldn't help feeling was coming rapidly to an end. Despite the dusty morning sun filtering through a bungalow window, time had gotten too late find anything the studio would pay me for. The ukulele didn't do anything that the booze wouldn't. It was one bottom-shelf muse or another. I had nothing more to do than linger long enough to get fired.

Outside the bungalow was a bustle of activity. Low-rank studio personnel raced each other to get things going on this picture again. They rustled up secretaries and Cadillac limousines and drivers and steno pads and portable typewriters. The found producers' hats and ushered the producers off to three-martini lunches with a ukulele-less writer trying to unblock the blocked. They clawed past each other in a climb they must have envisioned would get them to the top of this dung heap, without realizing that the smell is the same no matter where you are on the pile. I kicked off my wingtips. One fell to the ground. The other lingered on the arm of the sofa, next to my stocking feet. I lay there, watching gravity pull on that shoe. I waited for it to drop.

Candy came out of the bustle and into the bungalow. He was still a picture of futile aspirations in his thinning flannel suit. "There you are," he said.

I sat up and slid my shoes back onto my feet. I knew his business, but I didn't let on anything I didn't have to. I said, "Here I am."

"I don't know how you did it," he said, "but you got Chandler to give us the ransom note." He tossed that same envelope full of double sawbucks onto my lap. "That's all we needed."

I stood up and walked over to him and gave him a hard stare. "You hired me to find a ukulele and I'll find it."

"We hired you to light a fire under a writer, and his ass is burning. Your job is done."

I jammed the envelope into his bony chest. He caved it in like I'd hit him with my fist and not his filthy lucre. I held the dough close to his heart, waiting for him to take it. He didn't budge. He just stared at me with those sad monkey eyes. The organ grinder had played a tune for him and he only knew this one dance step. I let go of the money. It fell to the ground. A fan of Jacksons lay at his feet. I told him, "The

picture business is just like this town itself. It looks like paradise but the air is poison."

Two days later, I was back in my little office. Two days' mail lay scattered in front of the mail slot. I went through it in a regular double play, from the floor to the desk to the wastebasket, Tinkers to Evers to Chance. I opened the window to my office and let two days' dust and dinginess float out. On the window sill a bee with tattered wings was crawling along the woodwork, buzzing in a tired, remote sort of way, as if she knew it wasn't any use. She was finished. She had flown too many missions and would never get back to the hive again.

The one thing of interest in my mail was that same envelope Candy had given me twice and taken back twice. Now he'd given it a third time. It still carried the same cargo. If I were to be a man of honor, then, the best man for this world and a good enough man for any world, I'd have to follow through with it. I'd have to find that damn ukulele.

With no leads on a case that was chewed up like an old string, I did what ordinary folks do when they lose something. I think about where that something belongs and look there first. I asked myself, "If I had a banjo ukulele and it wasn't in my rubber room in Camarillo, where would I keep it?"

My regular room at home would be my best guess.

When the maid opened the door at 6520 Drexel Avenue the silence in the living room slapped me in the face. Chandler snored on the davenport. Two odd secretaries sat on two odd chairs studying the latest fashions in the latest magazines. A gin bottle poked its head out of a champagne bucket on the library table in front of the davenport. The maid stood by the door shooting me with daggers from her eyes. "May I help you?" she asked.

All the words were in her sentence, but she said it in that choppy Chinatown way. Something was off about it. She sounded less like someone from Chinatown and more like someone from Echo Park imitating a Chinese accent. Her uniform matched her accent. The collar and apron were made of white lace. The rest was a fuzzy black wool. Chandler may well have stolen this

get-up from Butterfly McQueen's dressing room.

"The studio sent me," I said. I held out the studio executive's card that Candy had given me. Pipe ash scarred the white of the card.

The maid took the card and studied it like it was money made on a letterpress at home. "Mr. Chandler's asleep."

"You forgot to drop the s," I said.

"What?"

"If you were really Chinese, you'd say, 'Mr. Chandler asleep,' not 'Mr. Chandler's asleep.' You'd drop the s."

The maid put one hand on the door in preparation for shutting it in my face. "Have it your way. Mr. Chandler asleep. Asshole."

She started to close the door on me, but I stopped it with my foot. "I'll just come in and have a look around."

"Suit yourself." The maid turned her back on me and headed back into whatever kept her busy in this two-bedroom house on Drexel Avenue. I lingered in the foyer. The secretaries kept their eyes on the fashion magazines. Two typewriters sat on the kitchen table behind them. Small, neat stacks of paper lay beside the typewriters. Chandler rolled onto his side. Both secretaries set down their magazines and picked up pads covered in scratchy shorthand. Chandler eased back into a snore. The secretaries went back to their magazines. The pillow under Chandler's head went back to collecting puddles of drool. I set off for the bedrooms.

One step into the hallway, I heard a cheerful, "Yoo-hoo." I sought the source of the sound and found an elderly woman in a four poster bed. One of her legs was in a cast and propped up on pillows. She wore an elegant nightgown. A matching down comforter covered her. Her short white hair wasn't perfect, but it seemed tussled intentionally. She waved me closer. I took a step and leaned against the door frame. "Who are you?" she asked.

"The studio hired me to find Chandler's ukulele. The most logical place seemed to be his bedroom."

"Well, you found his bedroom. Come in and take a look around."

I knew Chandler had a wife who was almost twenty

years older than he. That seemed to be the nugget of wisdom most of Chandler's friends gave me first. So her presence in the bedroom made sense to me. The lack of any sign of Chandler inside the bedroom made less sense. The dresser was covered in small bottles and scents, the wardrobe full of silks and frills. I couldn't find as much as a watch or pair of slippers that belonged to a man. "You must be Cissy," I said.

"Who else would I be? I'm too damn old to be one of those floozies Ray chases after."

"He's not running too hard after any floozies right now."

"Wait till this script is done. He'll be back in one of those writer's rooms on the Paramount lot, drinking his morning champagne with some broad making moon eyes at his paycheck."

"A broad? Making moon eyes at his paycheck? Lady, you talk like someone out of one of his books."

Cissy patted the edges of her hair, not to move any hairs but to make sure none had moved. "He gets it from somewhere."

I walked around to the empty side of the bed. A couple of paperbacks lay on the bed stand there. I picked one up. A Miss Marple Mystery. "You put this here to torment your husband?"

Cissy shook her head. "I won't be blamed. Ray reads those himself. For inspiration."

"What do they inspire him to do?"

"Grind his teeth to the gums. Pick a fight with a world too cruel to even fight back."

I ran my thumb over the illustration of a dowager in a housecoat on the cover of the book.

"There's a peculiar thing about writers," Cissy said. "They seemed destined to scream into a din that swallows their sound. Don't they?"

"I seem to hear enough of them coming through loud and clear. Maybe too many of them."

"There's a difference between hearing something and listening to something. Do you know the myth of Sisyphus?"

"Sure. The fellow who kept pushing a rock up a hill. Same rock every time, as far as I can tell."

"There's an element of Sisyphus to writers' lives. Not that they're always pushing a rock up a hill that's destined to roll back down. Hell, we're all doing that,

aren't we?"

"To some extent."

"For writers, though, it's more a matter of being forever doomed to speak to someone who refuses to listen. They'll hear you. Sometimes they'll pay you for your sound. Take Ray out there. Pretty soon, he'll wake up and take another shot and start making noise in the living room. Those two dames will type it up and he'll pass out again and wake up and read what they typed and wonder who made that horrible noise. But he'll get through the script and Paramount will find their killer and Alan Ladd will get away with everything in the end. Don't you worry. But even if everyone sees the picture and the Academy awards him some honor, he'll still feel like no one who heard his words listened. He'll feel like he's back at the bottom of the hill, putting his shoulder to the stone once again."

I thought about it. At least I'd solved the mystery of where Chandler got his mixed metaphors from. This Cissy was something. Typically, my business entailed asking every question except the question I wanted the answer to. It was a way of keeping people honest. Or as honest as people can be. Cissy didn't seem to be a broad whom I needed to circle around. I asked her straight, "What is it he's trying to get us to listen to? What's his message?"

"Writers don't write with messages. Not the good ones, at least. The profitable writers write their messages on ransom notes. The ones like Ray who fancy themselves artists, why, they don't have a message, do they?"

"What do they have?"

"Look under the bed."

I paused for a second. A shot rang out on Drexel Avenue. I ducked and listened to the subsequent silence. Instead of gunplay, I heard the rumble of a car engine coughing up its last breaths. A backfire striking the unmusical obbligato to the desert town outside. Since I'd already dropped to my knees on the woven area rug around the bed, I lifted the bed skirt and saw a black case that could've held a tommy gun. I slid it out, stood, and placed the case on the bed.

"Open it," Cissy said.

The latches were unlocked. I lifted them. Inside was that hidden ukulele. The studio ponying up five large

for me to find something sleeping beneath the writer every night.

There's Hollywood for you.

Cissy lifted the banjo ukulele out of its case. She plucked one string at a time from top to bottom, singing one word per string. "My dog has fleas." She did this a few times, adjusting the tuners to the words. "My, my, my, my," until the "my" string sang in tune, then on to the dog, dog, dog, dog. When all the fleas sang in key, she said, "It has a false bottom."

I sat on the bed next to Cissy. She started in on an old rag. The "Twelfth Street Rag," if my ear wasn't fooling me. I checked under the false bottom of the case. It was carpeted in photographs as old as the ragtime tune Cissy played. All of the photos captured the same woman in various states of undress. She was nude in a couple of the photographs. Nothing dirty. She was nude the way the Venus de Milo is nude, not naked like the pictures degenerates pick up in the back of a bookstore on Cahuenga. There was something unmistakable about the models eyes, something unapologetic, something that seemed to look right through me even when they were looking away. These same eyes watched Cissy's fingers dance a Twelfth Street Rag on the neck of a banjo ukulele.

I set the photos down and listened. It was a sort of respite in the dirty, sundrenched cesspool that calls itself Hollywood.



MALDO NOLIMERG  
**progeniture**







CHRISTODOULOS MAKRIS

## **dream with jeff koons & la cicciolina**

In their luscious garden they ask me  
to join them for a threesome. She lies naked  
and paleskinned with tight cherry-red nipples

and he leans on his elbow with his knee  
bent, looks at me enigmatically, his hair dark  
and neat. His cock is covered

with flowers. While we fuck I can't help thinking  
how contrived all this is, like a prelude  
to a business deal. He shuts

his eyes but does not convince: she at least can act  
ecstasy. After we finish we have a picnic  
on the grass. He grabs food from my plate. She spreads

her legs and flashes her knickers at me,  
hair escaping the elastic rim  
rebelliously. I'm told some find this

erotically charged. She hasn't waxed in months:  
now she has a regular fuck she's beyond caring  
about smoothness. Seduction is no longer

the game. She hands me a note, an invitation  
to a performance, its tone formal  
to the point of meaninglessness. I start to compose

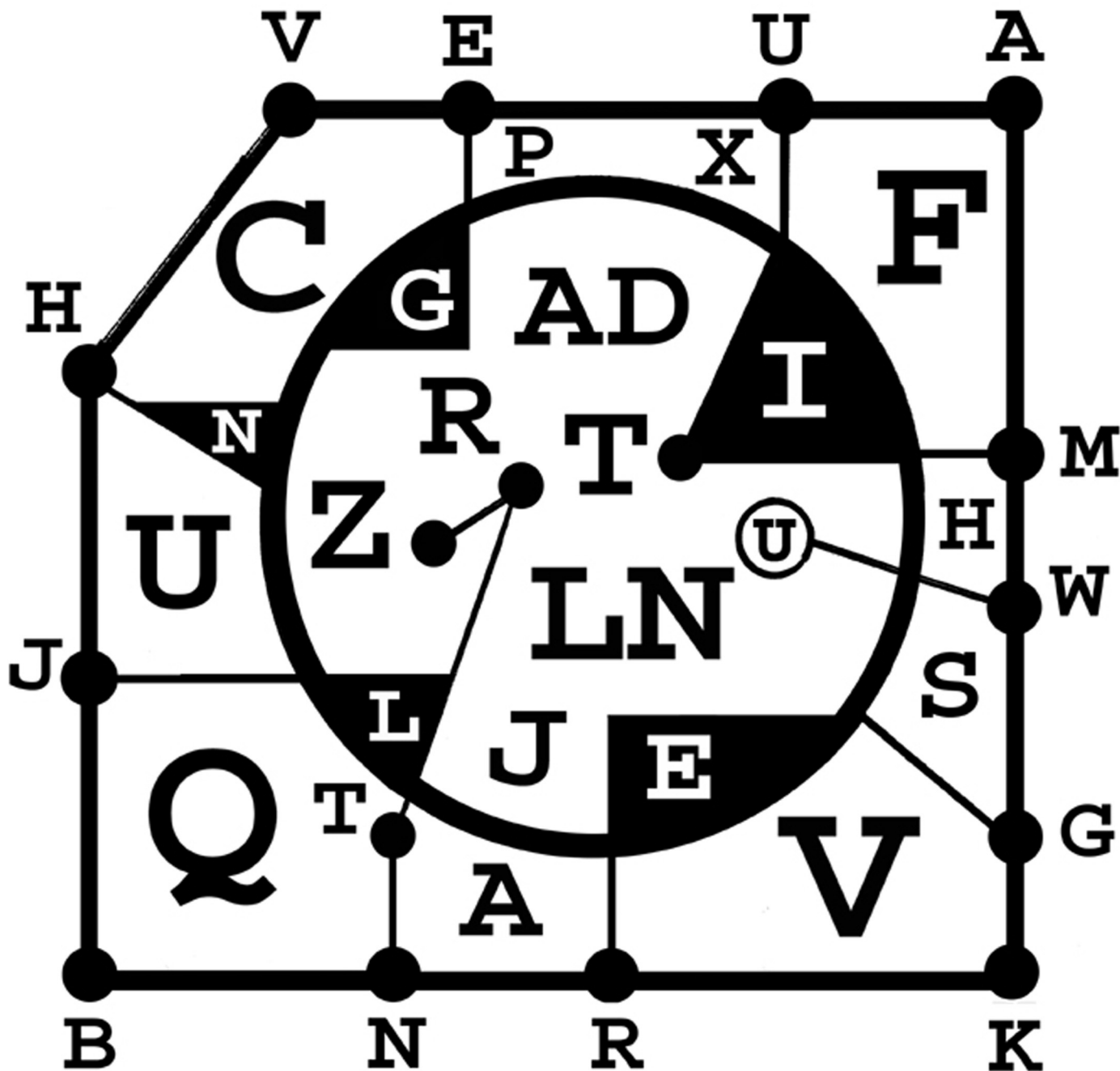
a response when she gives me  
another note with suggestions towards it. She says  
we are telepathic. He still stares at me,

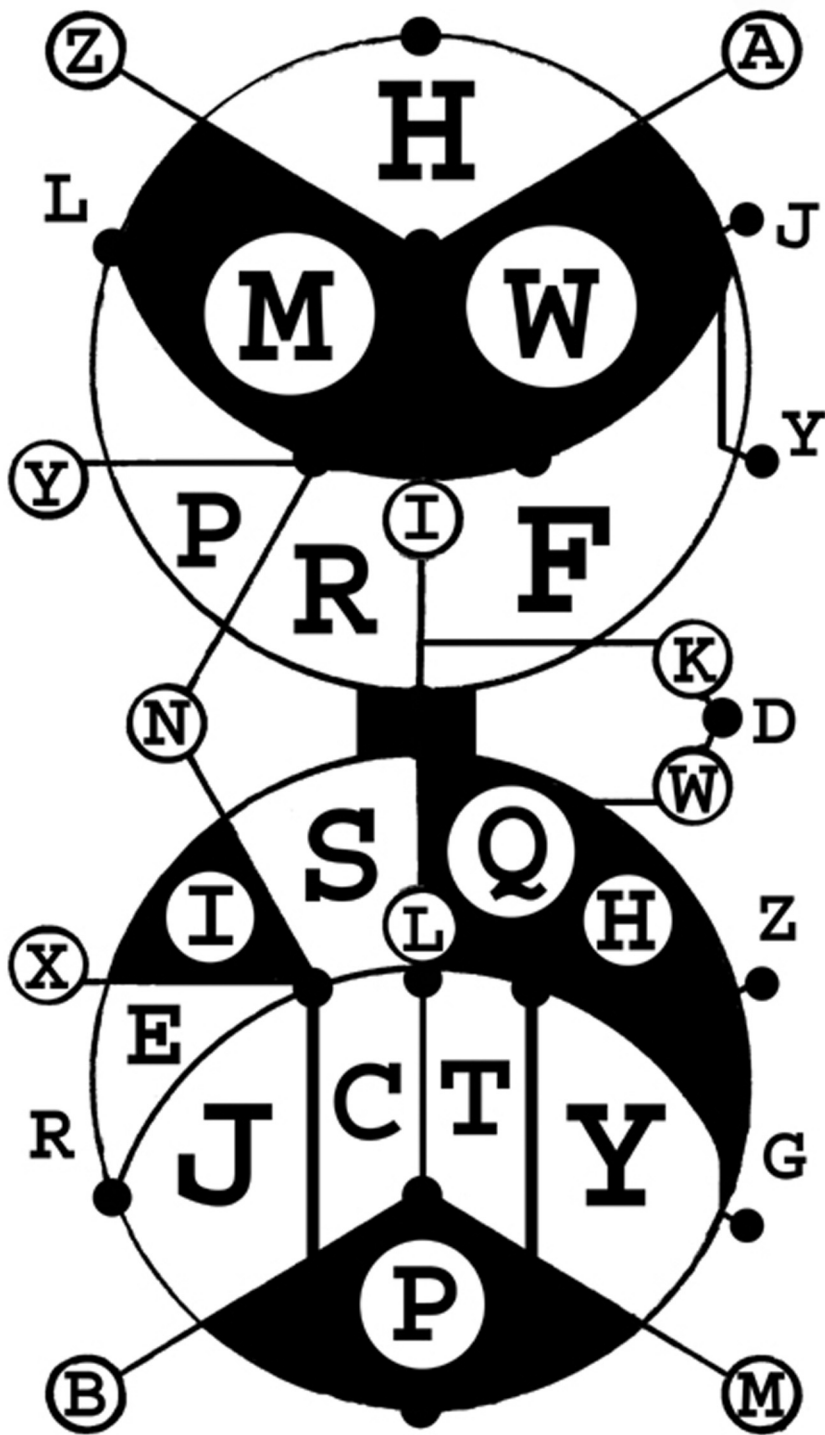
smirking. I remain unconvinced  
about your role, he says, and puts his hand  
on my groin. She whips out a camera-phone. We kiss.

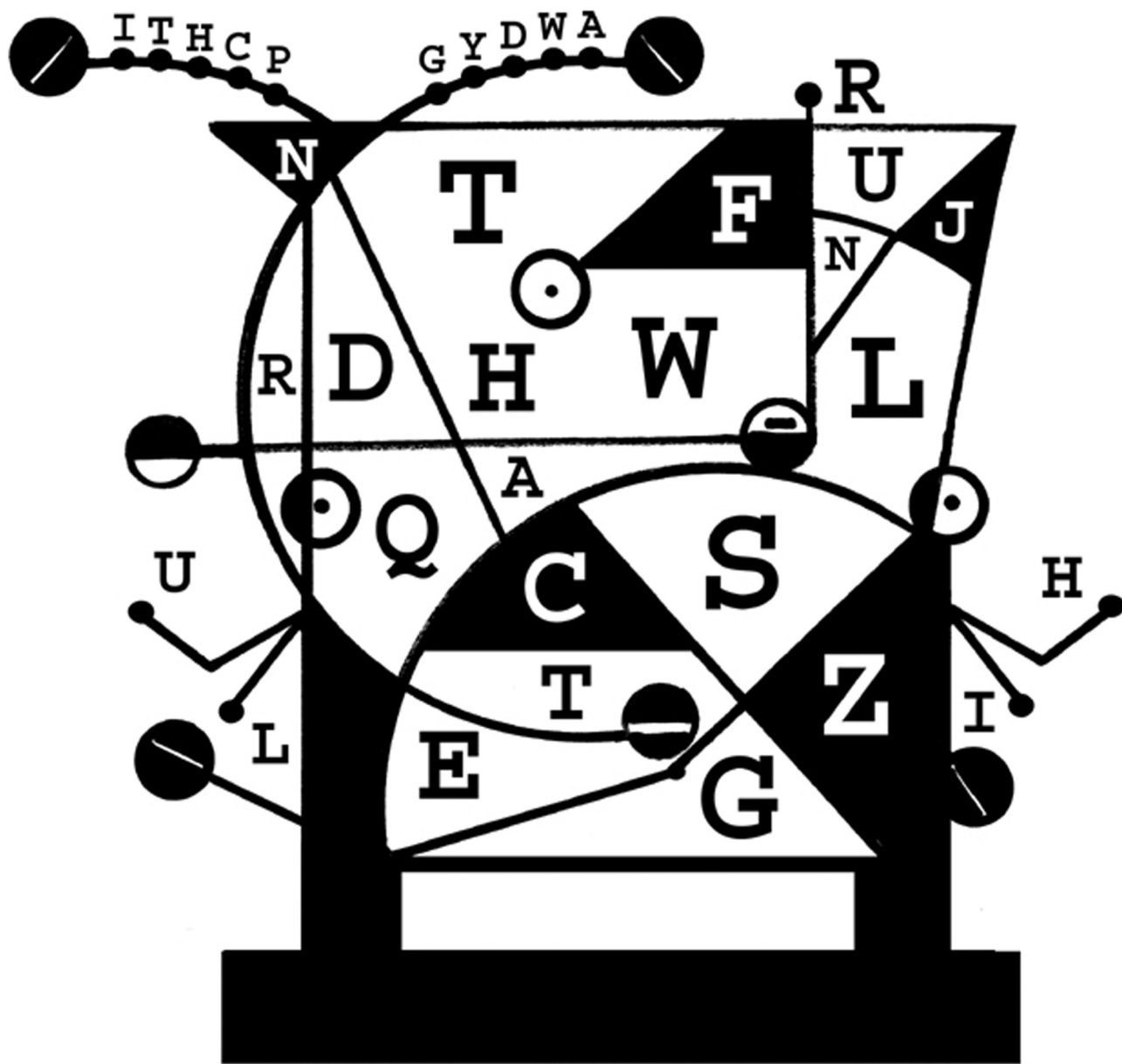
I try to mess up his hair but it's impossible,  
and he pushes me away. Later in her car  
she exhibits daredevil skills, but this too I reckon

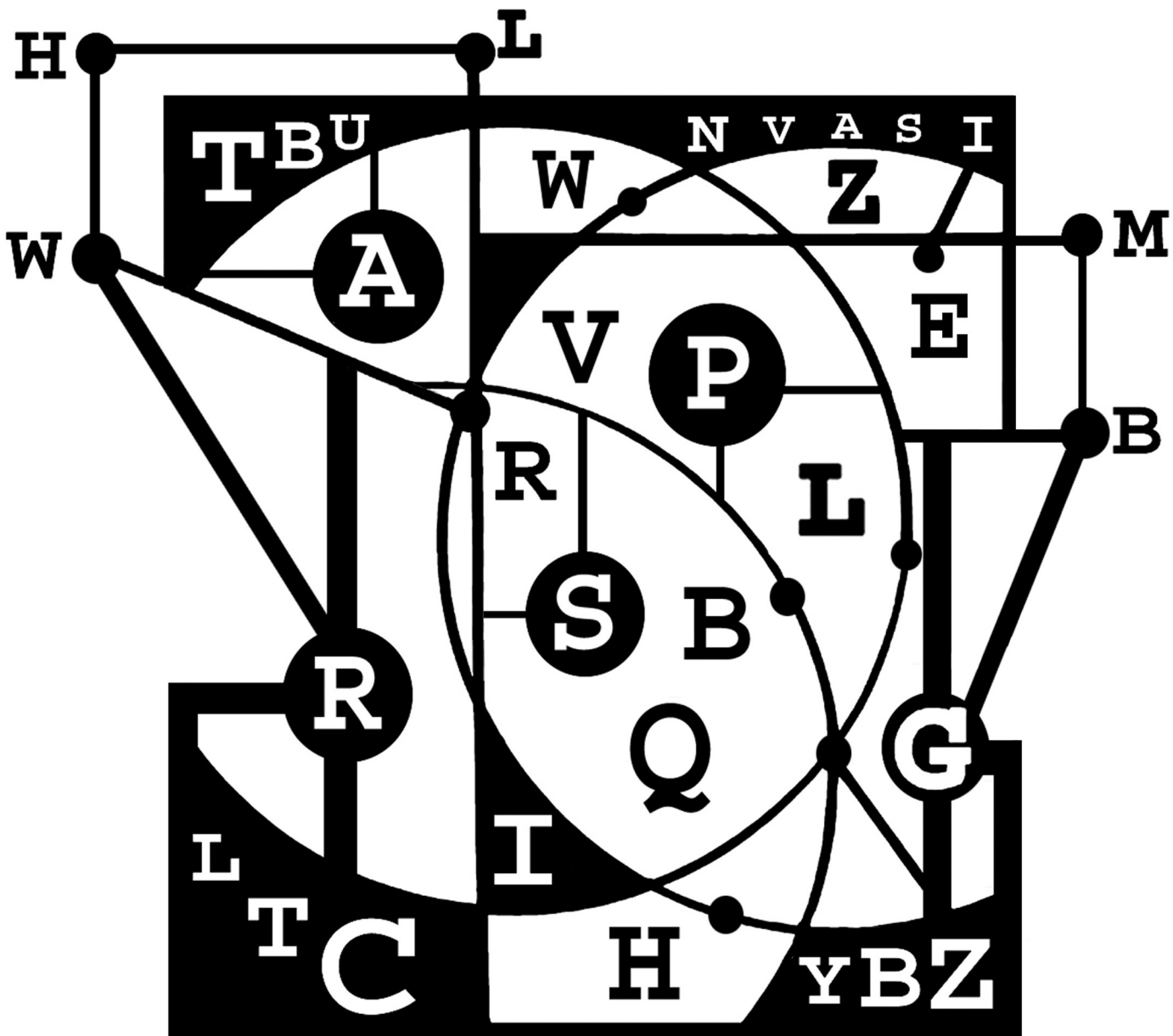
is an act. Back at her palace  
he is stroking her blonde locks. She is lying on white sheets,  
nipples expanded and aggressive, and he holds her

tight, his leg knocking the door shut in my face.















DUSTIN BREITLING

## between cube dimensional

*I began to question very seriously the whole notion of Gestalt, the thing in itself, specific objects. I began to see the world in a more relational way. In other words, I had to question where the works were, what they were about... So it became a preoccupation with place. (Robert Smithson)*

The seminal text *Inside The White Cube* authored by Brian O'Dougherty, offers a trenchant, yet indispensable critique of the institutional gallery and its historical genesis. Fundamentally, it is a genesis that became symptomatic of a Modernist trend that inexorably pushed towards both maintaining and eviscerating the gallery space as a haven for its autonomization. The defining characteristic of Modernism became the gallery space and its subjection to the *Gestalt*; whereas *The Gestalt* itself is not a mere static or delineated material/socio-object. Rather, it was an attempt to unhinge a designated physical *site* to function as its insulator. *The Gestalt* bears an affinity with the notion of a latent dematerialization that arose in the beginning of the 20th century to the extent that as theorist Lucy Lippard (in *Six Years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*) posited "emphasized the thinking process almost exclusively" whereas it would "possibly result in the object becoming wholly obsolete." The Cube itself attempts to embrace the thinking process through its white walls, absence of windows, and most importantly a space that functions as a container for self-referentiality. The disparate mix of artists ranging

from Duchamp, Buren, Haacke, Jean Claude & Cristo, Daniel Graham, Matta-Clark and De Maria et al. are exemplars in deploying and schematizing means to principally reimagine institutional possibilities. It is these possibilities that have constructed new means to interrogate the Cube, yet become countered by simultaneous impossibilities of creating a rapprochement between the Art and Social world.

Therefore, it becomes important to emphasize the specific focus and interventions in regards to these figures – still considering there are a cornucopia of artists, theorists, movements, and dissidents who have operated outside of the regime of the Cube. It is not a point to eschew or undermine the potential of dislodging from the Cube, rather it becomes a question as to how the Cube has evolved through the vicissitudes of interpretive reconfiguration in the last decades. The pervasive charges of political indifference, spectacle, and insouciance seemingly instantiates the asociality that characterizes the insular Cube. According to this notion, as John Roberts puts it in his essay "Avant-Gardes after Avant-Gardism," for anything to remain art, "it must experience itself as being 'out of joint' both with its official place in the world and within its own traditions." This notion of an 'out of jointness' has become more or less a principal concern throughout the array of movements that have attempted to dovetail this critique.

A few of the movements that have explored these

conceptions range from Institutional Critique, Relational Aesthetics, and Site-Specific Art which engendered new challenges in fundamentally questioning the role of the institutional straightjacket. It is a straightjacket that has attempted to be shaken through the framing of the idea of working 'beyond the gallery.' However this framing becomes circumscribed within restricted modes and platforms outside of the gallery confines – confines that are increasingly subject to surveillance, militarization, and sanctioned events. Therefore, we must understand how the Cube still operates as a refuge for attendees through elaborate and ethereal scenarios that elicit 'indeterminate' zones. These are zones that physically and mentally foster new modes of perceptual, habitual, and coordinational registers within a prescribed space.

It is this potentiality of new thresholds that thrusts the Cube into a fundamentally ambiguous zone, as it becomes difficult to appropriate the territory for the generation of new possibilities. This has become a central concern in regards to the work entitled *The Weather Project (2003)* by Olafur Eliasson – an installation that harvested two million visitors who participated in its four month run. *The Weather Project* held at Turbine Hall of The Tate Modern, transformed the space through the incorporation of hundreds of light bulbs projecting a sun at the top of one wall and a web of mirrors on the ceiling, as well as a mist machine. Rather than attempting to reduce the space, Eliasson endeavoured to double it, "with mirrors created the top half of the sun and extending the space vertically, while the mist, pumped into the hall at regular intervals, refracted the light and, like London fog, made distances between points curiously unfathomable." The litany of experiences that have been recounted, involve subjects lying on the floor, whilst using their bodies to make shapes and form words in which they can then see themselves in a suspended mirror. The purpose becomes 'seeing yourself seeing' – an approach reminiscent of questioning how a subject understands their role within the constellation of the socio-material. Eliasson asserts that 'seeing yourself seeing' becomes a critical element in affirming that the function of the *Site* becomes to provoke a self-reflective social critique. He affirms that "An exhibition cannot stand outside its social context, and we have a responsibility to understand that we are a part of what we are evaluating as well as the result of it." – Yet, does the employment of the mirror and

'seeing oneself seeing' simply reinforce the presupposed belief that the Spectator affords the means to access a transparent representation of reality? A standardized belief that 'reflection at a distance' constitutes and reifies one's capacity to essentially reach an authentic understanding of their world. Or, more importantly that the Spectator comprehends the role of the designated space to understand their relationality within a matrix of political, linguistic, and social apparatuses.

If the *Gesture* was the ultimate attempt to challenge the legitimacy of the institution and its 'embeddedness,' how does the *Gesture* re-orientate and redeploy itself within the 21<sup>st</sup> century? A consideration towards the *Gesture* becomes to address the different interplay of spatial demarcations and its shift of interest towards the body. Anymore, It is not a simple understanding that the Cube is irrevocably reigned under the yoke of a dominant ideological/semiotic system – but also functions as a zone of a certain non-representationality. It is this certain non-representationality that becomes consonant with the concept of the *Affect*. The *Affect* derives from the notion of "a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act." Critically, the relational movement of the body and its connection to a pre-personal intensity shares an underlying political dimension. Importantly, a dimension that becomes capable of a de-subjectifying and de-individuating process, whereas the aspiration to re-orientate ourselves and our relation to the world occurs. Henceforth, Art's primary role according to thinkers like Gilles Deleuze becomes to invent and reconfigure the *Affect*. We find that the Cube inheres a heterogeneous mixture of affective and semiotic interventions – ranging from an assortment of variegated movements, colours, sounds, pulsations, rhythms, textures and words. Ultimately, the assortment composing a blocs of sensations – sensations that Julia Kristeva once affirmed becomes the 'ultimate aim of art' ("I mean by that a wish to make us feel, through the abstractions, the forms, the colours, the volumes, the sensations, a real experience"). Overall, an experience that intends to denude the individual from their prescribed role to propel them into a zone of indeterminacy.

This zone of indeterminacy becomes animated through a shift toward dynamic, unobstructed, and



Henrique Oliveira, "A origem do terceiro mundo" (2010)

continuously flowing structures that are attempting to dislocate and foster perceptual suspension. The body within the Cube now penetrates into remerged spaces that are attempting to synthesize sculpture, architecture, and installation into a composite experience. Composite experiences are where the boundaries are excavated or proliferated through extensions, interventions, and the latent possibility of spatial transgression. Yet it is not a transgression that bears the injunction to participate within the Constitutive Outside, rather it is an injunction that draws out how the body becomes challenged within these spaces. Essentially, it is hearkening the Spinozian question of 'What Can A Body Do?' – a question that meets Brian O'Dougherty's assertion (*Inside the White Cube*) that the Cube reserves its disposition toward the Eye. He contends that "The space offers the thought that while eyes and minds are welcome, space occupying bodies are not-or are tolerated as kinaesthetic manikins for further study." Therefore, specific artists like Urs Fischer and Henrique Oliveira focus their works on bodily animation – whereas their works investigate into and stymies the avant-garde *Gesture* of spatial negation to refocus on spatial re-anatomization. Their works propagate possibilities for activation and initiation, awaiting the constructive interaction between their pieces and the Spectators' engagement. A specific example arises through Urs Fischer's piece *You* (2007), which directed the focus on excavating a concrete floor inside the Gavin Brown gallery whereas it became a 38-foot-by-30-foot crater, eight feet deep, extending almost to the walls of the gallery. Urs Fischer's piece attempts to beckon the viewer into a spatial cavity to reveal geological strata and a vermicular body that lies beneath the gallery, only to redefine it as a zone of archaeologicalization. A zone that reconstitutes the body and its movements, adjustments, rhythms, and perceptions to push the question of whether the viewer becomes mere observant or discoverer of a *site*? Henceforth, does Urs Fischer's *Gesture* begin or end within his 'unearthing' and does he enable the space to extricate itself from the cursory designation of a *'site/sight'*? A designation that shifts the focus towards a topological space and emphasizes potential bodily discomfort and recomposition within the transformed zone. This concept of bodily recomposition becomes embodied again through the architectural

possibilities generated, and explored further through artists like Henrique Oliveira. Oliveira constructs immersive tridimensional environments that enable its viewers to enter into tubular, expansive, and amoeba like worm-holes. His recent work bears an homage to Courbet's *The Origin of The World* entitled *A origem do terceiro mundo* which was exhibited at the 29th *Bienal de São Paulo*. The work consists of a uterus that invites the viewer to enter in its cave and become enveloped in a labyrinth – to evoke the feeling that you are penetrating into the womb of the human body or slums of a destitute landscape. Yet, the landscape bears no explicit invocation to ask the First World's relation to its Other, rather it embodies a shift in interpreting the connection between geographical, architectural and spatial strata. These relations are potentialized through the installation becoming a micro-site for an inventive and immanent reality. Now, users recompose their bodies through the interval between both an institutional and constructed world, between place and non-place, between established and potential. Therefore, can it be a 'Third World' that will imagine a radically different climate, sphere, and importantly cartography of relations inside the Cube? Does our structural investigation of how piece resembling a burrow enable one to think of different tempos, modes, and spatial definitions of movement? If so, then does Oliveira's dazzling pastiche embrace the idea that a seeming tubular parasite bear the capacity to infest and ingest the White Cube's body. An infestation that hopefully enables one to encounter how a terrestrial presence can excoriate the flesh of a seemingly narcotized, sterilized, and asocial space.

Ultimately, Fischer's and Oliveira's works still reveal an underlying duplicity in regards to how the gallery space affirms itself as both retainer and container for transformative visions. Our 'temporary' installations only become superseded and diminished; where the necessity of a cultivating a broader, deeper, and richer connectivity gradually circumvents any concretization. However, if our social and public space becomes increasingly subjugated to the aforementioned militarization, monitoring, and surveillance; we must consider the White Cube itself as a locus of new worlds. Now, the fundamental question becomes more important than ever – how can we open the container and enable its potentials to diffuse into our social experiment?



Urs Fischer, "You" (2007)



BEV BRAUNE

## 'harder they fall'

THE INDIVIDUAL, THE MEDIA & POLITICAL FREEDOM

Jimmy Cliff's 'Harder They Fall'<sup>1</sup> is perhaps the most important repeated dialogue and backdrop in Perry Henzell's film *The Harder They Come* 1972.<sup>2</sup> The slightly varied lyrics of 'Harder They Fall' re-contextualise themselves from scene to scene where non-song key phrases and the lyrics of Frederic Hibbert's 'Pressure Drop' enter into conversation with them. The song complements the phrase Henzell acknowledged as the most important in the film: 'Every game I play, I lose' said by Elsa just over an hour and a half into the film.<sup>3</sup> It is carried as background score, as protagonist Ivan's monologue and as dialogue with other characters and settings, successfully bearing the weight Henzell placed on characterisation to explore his thesis on communication in the film – the individual's communication, communication in the media and politics, as well as communication as a study of the film's artistic possibilities with regard to audience appreciation.

1 'Harder They Fall' performed and composed by Jimmy Cliff, recorded at Dynamic Studios, Kingston, Jamaica, for *The Harder They Come* 1972. Note that the lyrics of 'Harder They Fall' in the film, and the subject of this paper, differ from that of Jimmy Cliff's 'The Harder They Come' version recorded for 'The Harder They Come Soundtrack' released in the UK with the Islands Records label, reissued in 1973 in North America with the Mango Records label. Neither of those should be confused, of course, with the 1956 American noir fight film, *The Harder They Fall*, with Humphrey Bogart.

'Pressure Drop' performed by the Maytals, composed by Frederic(k) Hibbert, recorded at Beverley's Records, Kingston, Jamaica 1969.

2 *The Harder They Come*, dir. Prod. Perry Henzell (1972). When *The Harder They Come* opened at Carib Cinema in Kingston in 1972, it was one of three feature films released in Jamaica at that time; the others were *Smile Orange* and *The Marijuana Affair*. Two others were also in the making: *No Place Like Home* and *The Rentman*; neither was produced as planned. The third in Henzell's trilogy of *The Harder They Come* (on fantasy), *No Place Like Home* (on love) and *Power Game* (on power) resulted in *Power Game* the novel 1997, with the film *No Place Like Home* released in 2006 just before Henzell's death.

3 See the first half of this paper: "'You can get it if you really want": Viewing *The Harder They Come* Again and Again: after a 1977 Interview with Director Perry Henzell,' *Wasafiri* 26, Autumn 1997, 32.

Henzell noted in 1977 that ‘the new generation cares about communication’, that the trilogy he had planned to make, ‘the three stories...have to do with defining that precisely – the individual in reference to the media and political freedom.’<sup>4</sup>

I feel my role is to go in and show and dramatise how things work, and what actually exists and deal with the truth and not my idea of what truth is. That is why my work has a documentary base. That’s happening in America right now, I mean the Watergate film is a case in point. It showed that people want to know what happened. They want it dramatised and they want to know it in an hour and a half. They don’t want to read about it in the [news]papers over six months necessarily. But if you put it together in an hour and a half, this is what happens: they’re fascinated. Because if they don’t know, they are confused – and certainly they’re confused – but they are bound to know.<sup>5</sup>

‘Harder They Fall’ is Ivan’s autobiography – the sum of all he was, what he wanted to be, and his legacy. The song is his creation, his internal voice and how he tells the world who he is. Through the progressive occurrences of ‘Harder They Fall’ we, as viewers, participate in Ivan’s rise and fall as he imagines and re-imagines himself, from avowed Capitalist (‘I want my milk and honey, tonight!’) to aspiring Socialist (‘revolutionary to rass’) to Spaghetti Western hero (not ‘dead till the las’ reel’). But Ivan’s life in each ‘fantasyland’ is always cut short by the reality of his situation within the *status quo*.

Using what seems not unlike the combination of the early twentieth-century Expressionist approaches to editing and sequencing used by Vsevolod Pudovkin and the later Realism of Vufku-Kino and the Dziga Vertov Group in the former Soviet Union, Henzell’s work sometimes appears at times to be reminiscent of the cine-eye group’s ‘film without joy.’ While it is telling of his style that Perry Henzell saw himself as a peer of independent, political, documentary filmmakers such as John Cassavetes and Gillo Pontecorvo, it seems to me that Henzell’s driving vision was to play with the differences between reality and mythology in the setting he knew best, Jamaican culture.

Henzell explained that he wanted to draw his audience into the emotional conflict of the main characters, that he wanted the audience see with them as well as be forced to look at them and their situations. He accomplished that in *The Harder They Come* particularly through the interweaving of particular types of shots (full-face close-ups of Ivan, general shots of signage, crowds of market women, push-carts, traffic), each kind of shot alternating with the other. He explained that the altercation between Ivan and Longa in Preacher’s yard over a bicycle, for example, was filmed over an 18-month period and that the confrontation scene between Countryman and Susan in *No Place Like Home* took one year to be completed because it was to be stressed as the most important sequence to the meaning of the film. In showing how a spontaneous unscripted scene from *No Place Like Home* in the early shoots might appear in its next stage, in the progression towards the finished film, Henzell explained the breakdown in following way during our conversations in 1977.

Suppose four Takes of the same scene are filmed, showing an argument between two equally sympathetic characters. Take 1 shows the scene as a series of ‘reverse angles’ (alternating full-face close-ups). Take 2 is a continuous two-shot of two profiles. Take 3 shows B’s full face, but the back A’s head prominent on the screen. Take 4 is an ‘over-shoulder’ of A, with B’s head not very obtrusively present over the one side of the screen. In the first Take we are led to feel each person’s responses intensely during their close-up, and the other’s responses will be temporarily soft-pedalled, even forgotten; until we return to the other’s with a little ‘shock.’ Our identifications alternate. In the second, we see and feel both responses simultaneously. Our reaction to A’s words is continuously modified by B’s reaction, which may be sceptical or pitying. We feel a smoother softer mixture of feelings. In the third, with the back A’s head almost in the middle of the frame, we will be conscious of he/she constant obstruction; he/she is a real force, but an enigmatic one. In the final Take, we may almost be unaware of B and be aware mainly of A’s feelings – although the vague presence of B makes up for a more complicated composition and ‘feel’ than a mere close-up.

<sup>4</sup> “You can get it if you really want,” 32.

<sup>5</sup> “You can get it if you really want,” 31. This quotation appeared in an edited version in “You can get it if you really want”.



To understand the full impact of the role of 'Harder They Fall', it is important to marry Henzell's self-styled 'modular' directorial approach to frame treatments, as described above, to the way lyrical music is always treated as part of the *language* in which he couched his description of the film: 'Nothing expresses that life better than the music in this [film].'

Day and night the studios scattered about in shanty town turn out tunes, an incredible outpouring for a space so small: a small section of a city in a small island in the Caribbean – but it is a cry to stay alive in fantasyland and, although everybody wants it, maybe nobody wants it so badly as the Jamaican, and certainly nobody expresses that need better in song. 'The oppressors are trying to keep me down, making me feel like a clown; they think that they have got me on the run, I say forgive them, Lord, they know not what they've done. For, as sure as the sun will shine, I'm going to get it, what's mine, and then they harder they come, the harder they fall, one and all.'<sup>6</sup>

'Harder They Fall' first occurs in the film as an interrupted rehearsal and on six occasions after that. Of the seven instances, six take place inside Ivan's telling of his story and the last happens outside it but still in Ivan's voice. In addition, the lyrics (and, chiefly, the chorus) are slightly altered on each occasion, by addition, omission and re-addition of specific words, sometimes through repetition or a noticeable variation from Henzell's rendering of the song in conversations with him. It is very apparent in 'Harder They Fall' that when it is first met in the film it invokes Ivan's unquestioned, positive hope. But, as his story progresses, the lyrics turn from signifying energetic expectation to violent and abortive reassertion. Each of the occasions inside Ivan's story/our hearing the song 'Harder They Fall' refresh the assessment of the case of Ivan *versus* all that define him as bucking the *status quo* which declares him a victim.

As Henzell's askew god of communications, Ivan might be likened to Hermes, as drawn in Book 2 of Homer's 'Iliad' and Book V of 'The Odyssey.' Like Hermes, Ivan is challenging boundaries of all kinds, is an inventor of new music, a player of games, a gambler associated with trade, travel and thieves, with graves and legacies, using night-time to hide his deceptions, making his way in the world by profit and hazard and comfortable with disguises. Even the focus on Ivan's dress is significant to that fantastic portrayal; Hermes' staff and winged helmet become Ivan's shiny-rimmed sunglasses, gold-starred T-shirt, and white cap or gold cap. Not only are Ivan and his self-making myths challenged in the film. All the characters with whom he comes into contact and associated related hero-myths (of a messiah, of a 'Black' rebel-hero, of a revolutionary)<sup>7</sup> are subject to varying revisions. As Hermes, who intercedes between the living and the dead, it is no surprise that Ivan attempts to perform his song first in a church.

In the first illustration of the use of 'Harder They Fall', Ivan, wanting to take advantage of the church's amplifier, borrows Elsa's copy of Preacher's key to the church in order to practise his song the night before his audition with record producer Hilton. But Preacher happens to be part of the system that aims to confine a man as Ivan who refuses confinement whether or not it is to poverty or to prison or to a certain class status.

Our introduction to the song begins at 35 minutes and 51 seconds into the film and lasts less than a minute:

<sup>6</sup> "You can get it if you really want," 33.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, eds Kathleen Gysels and Benedicte Ledent, *L'Ecrivain caribéen, guerrier de l'imaginaire* (Rodopi, 2008); Armando Pajalich, 'Alle Origini del Cinema Post-coloniale: Neocolonialismo e rivolta in The Harder They Come (1972) di Perry Henzell', *Annali de Ca' Foscari: Rivista della Facoltà di Lingue e Letterature Straniere dell'Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia*, XLV: 1, 2006; and Gladstone Yearwood, 'Myth and Signification in Perry Henzell's The Harder They Come', *The Reordering of Culture: Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada in the Hood*, eds. Alvina Ruprecht, Cecilia Taiana (Ottawa: Presses de l'Université, 1995).

OPENING SHOT (Night.) Ivan knocks on Elsa's door.

CLOSE-UP of Elsa opening door. PAN to Ivan begging her against her better judgement to lend him Preacher's key to the church so he can practise his song there in preparation for his audition. Ivan persuades her: 'This is my big chance.'

LONG-SHOT Ivan and accompanying guitarist in the church. Ivan sitting centre frame, his friend on the ground in front of him. Ivan's back is to the camera. Ivan begins: 'One, Two, One, Two, Three, Four...

Ivan is humming the tune and singing softly and hesitantly, then getting louder and more confident alternating humming with singing the lyrics:

The church is dark except for an illuminated idyllic mural (of a white waterfall cascading over sunny bare rocks dotted with trees) forming a backdrop to the guitarist's and Ivan's silhouettes in the foreground. Ivan sways to the beat of the guitar. Preacher turns on lights in the church and orders Ivan out of his church.

The second scene with 'Harder They Fall' foreshadows Ivan's joyless fate. When we meet Ivan again performing his song, he is in the recording studio and at the highest point he will be for his whole story. The general movement of the camera is MID-SHOTS zooming in to CLOSE-UP of Ivan and out again. The advantage of colour, lyrics and balance is the stand-out aspect of this, the longest occurrence of the song in *The Harder They Come*, about three minutes and 20 seconds. The scene ends before Ivan would have it end. Ivan's performance is CUT OFF but he's unaware, still dancing and singing 'in silence' as we view him from the producer's booth. At forty minutes and thirty seconds:

LONG-SHOT Ivan and his accompanying musicians, zooming slowly to CLOSE-UP of Ivan  
Camera roving in MID-SHOT positions

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NOTE that lyrics are in italics; muted lyrics, in square brackets; hummed lyrics in curly brackets; lyric variations, in bold text; omitted words in round brackets; underlined text indicates a preference, in sound volume, for spoken dialogue over lyrics.

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INSTRUMENTAL INTRODUCTION

*(They) tell me of a pie up in the sky  
Waiting for me when I die*

*Yes*

*{But between the day you're born  
And when you die  
They never seem to hear even the cry}*

*And as sure as the sun will shine, I...*

SONG INTERRUPTED/CUT SHORT

***Well, you tell me of a pie up in the sky  
Waiting for me when I die  
But between the day you're born and when you die  
(They) never seem to hear (you), even your cry  
So as sure as the sun will shine***

CLOSE-UP Ivan  
PANNING LEFT  
ZOOM OUT to reveal pianist who is also  
dressed in dark blue T-shirt with large gold  
star of the front  
CLOSE-UP Ivan

LONG-SHOT studio with its reflecting wall-  
surfaces from the spotlights

CLOSE-UP focussed on Ivan

*I'm gonna get my share  
What's mine  
And then the harder they come*

*The harder they fall  
One and all,  
The harder they come  
The harder they fall  
One and all.*

*Well, the oppressors are trying to keep me down  
Making me feel like a clown.  
And they think that they have got me on the run  
I say forgive them Lord  
They know not what they've done  
'Cause as sure as the sun will shine  
I'm gonna get my share now  
What's mine  
And then the harder they come  
The harder they fall  
One and all,  
(The) harder they come  
The harder they fall  
One and all.  
Oh yeah.*

INSTRUMENTAL INTERLUDE

Intersected CLOSE-UP Ivan, producers, band  
MID-SHOT Ivan

*Well, they think that they have got me on the run  
Tell them that they don't, it ain't no fun*

MID-SHOT Ivan

*And I rather die than live and be a slave  
Yes I'd rather be right in my grave  
So, as sure as the sun will shine  
I'm gonna get my share **right** now*

CLOSE-UP Ivan

*What's mine  
And then the harder they come  
(The) harder they fall  
One and all,  
Oooo  
The harder they come  
The harder they fall  
One and all  
Yeah Yeah Yeah  
(The) harder they come  
(**The**) harder they fall  
One and all*

***What I say, one time***

INSTRUMENTAL INTERLUDE

***Sometime, some time I feel, the harder,  
mmm***

Pleased producers 'whispering' to each other behind the sound-proof glass. During the final chorus, Ivan is in CLOSE-UP. His face reveals pain and determination as he sweats in his 'golden moment' spotlight. CLOSE-UP ALTERNATE MID-SHOTS, camera in recording booth. Hilton claps his hands to signal that the recording is finished.

***One more time, one more time, yeah***

***One more time now, eh***

Ivan's singing voice CUT OFF

Ivan now singing 'silently' behind the glass still dancing with great energy, caught up his song and unaware no one is listening.

The third occurrence of 'Harder They Fall' comprises bits and pieces of the song as news of the recording spreads through the record shacks. We hear the lyrics as part of Ivan's experience as he walks through the streets with his mind ringing with the disappointment of the twenty-dollar offer for his 'hit,' and the refusal of those who control the public media to play songs at the artist's and not the producer's behest. Space and time are utilised in these scenes with anything from brilliant signboards to quick glimpses of dark alleys, corrugated iron fences, passing faces. The song in this sequence pointedly begins with *feel like a clown* coinciding with a mid-shot of Ivan walking down the street towards camera. At forty-six minutes into the film:

MID-SHOT of shop signage reading: ‘...one stop international Record Shack.’

Ivan has to push twice on the door to enter the shop. Inside the shop, he fails to convince the retailer to buy his record directly from him rather than with the blessing of Hilton. CUT TO MID-SHOTS other retailers deliver the same bad news to Ivan.

LONG-SHOT of Hilton’s Mercedes Benz approaching gates to his studio. Ivan gives up the fight for his independence by settling for Hilton’s J\$20.00 contract for ‘Harder They Fall’ confirming Hilton’s tight control of the music recording business.

SONG ‘OVERHEAD’ AS BACKGROUND MUSIC

‘The oppressors are trying to keep me down  
Making me’ *feel like a clown*  
And they think that they have got me on the run  
Forgive them Lord they know not what they’ve done  
‘Cause as sure as the sun will shine  
I’m going to get my share now  
*What’s mine*  
*And then the harder they come, the harder they fall, one and all* FADE OUT to silence  
save for the sound of Hilton’s car engine at 0:46:37.

In the fourth occasion of the song in the film, the conversation between ‘Harder They Fall’ and ‘Pressure Drop’ demonstrates some of Henzell’s subtlest work. Here, key phrases that link ‘Pressure Drop’ to ‘Harder They Fall’ are said by Elsa: ‘Ivan you are a dreamer’ (0:52:50), and later (outside the song) ‘Every game I play, I lose’ (1:33:18) indicating the full turn of the tide in Ivan’s plan to remake himself. Working with ‘Harder They Fall’, ‘Pressure Drop’ charts Ivan’s disillusionment with the popular music industry and his turning to the ganja trade for his next attempt to re-invent himself.

While aspects of early Expressionism and Realism can be found in *The Harder They Come*, Henzell’s technique also reveals, in its best Realist open-ended scenes, the kind of experimentalism that characterised, for example, Dominique Benichetti’s work in *Le cousin Jules* (France, 1972, 0:91:00). Not quite *Cousin Jules*, the conversation with a fixed set of words occurs between ‘Harder They Fall’ and ‘Pressure Drop’ in the absence of extended dialogues from the characters and suggests a parallel here between Henzell’s response to his environment and Benichetti’s in response to the overwhelming visual aspects and felicitous rhetoric in his predecessors and led him to Renoirian frame sequences with long shots of outdoor scenes. Henzell uses barely a handful of non-song/spoken words to advance the conversation, recalling some of the influences that drove Benichetti – *cinéma verité*, the minimalist cinema of Jean-Marie Straub, and the transfixed behavioural studies of Paul Morrissey and Andy Warhol – and enlivened uses of the sparseness of dialogue.

Bear in mind, also, that all but one song and the general background rhythm used in the film were not created by the advent of the film. That fact also contributes to the concreteness of the significance of the words of each song, since they work inside the film and outside it as well. The argument on how communication is used is not simply an aim of the object that is the film, but also declared within the film through the inclusion of the appearance of actual musicians and through the double role of songs as part of each film’s structure. In *The Harder They Come*, as Henzell explained in 1977, Ivan witnesses the recording of the Maytals in the studio he hopes to become famous in. In *No Place Like Home* there is Carl, Countryman, and the Heptones in the background. Consistently, in *Power Game* it was planned that Zack would be the false artist who is quickly eaten by power while Burru remained the true prophet. The lyrical music as the chief constructing element of a ‘reality’ that comes from the link between the visual pace and movement and the expression of meaning of each film was Henzell’s brief for the trilogy.

This conversation between 'Pressure Drop' and 'Harder They Fall' begins at fifty minutes and thirty seconds into *The Harder They Come*:

MUSIC is coming from a transistor radio sitting on the dressing table before which Ivan is busily grooming himself in front of a mirror. He has gifts for Elsa, tired from job-hunting, who will have no part of his plans for a 'Big night tonight, yu nuh!'

Elsa returns from an unsuccessful day of job-hunting and enters through her front door CENTRE RIGHT.

The spatial use of the frame at the opening of the sequence places Ivan left and in the shadows, Elsa to the right in a three-quarter view from the back in the shadows; between them a poorly covered window shows light piercing the screen and 'dividing' the two characters. While Ivan convinces Elsa that he's about to hit the big times, about to get his due (we see the irony later) hoping he'll sell his record to other producers bringing him the wealth he failed to get from Mr Hilton, he is dressing himself in black and gold, in a shiny vest and his mirror-surfaced sunglasses.

CLOSE-UP Elsa: 'Ivan, you are a dreamer.'  
Ivan: 'Me? Dreamer? Who is a bigger dreamer than you? Always talking 'bout milk and honey in de sky. Well, no milk and honey no in de sky, not for you nor for me! It right down here and I want mine now! Tonight!'

*[Mmmm, mmmmm, mmmm  
Mmmm, mmmmm, mmmm, yeah  
Mmmm, mmmmm, mmmm, yeah]  
It is you-ou-ou-ou, Oh yeah  
It is you-ou-ou-you, Oh yeah  
It is you-ou-ou-ou, Oh yeah  
I say pressure drop, Oh pressure*

*Oh yeah pressure drop, it drop on you.  
I say pressure drop, Oh pressure drop Oh  
yeah pressure drop, it drop on you.  
I say an' when it drop, Oh you gonna feel  
it  
As long as you're doing wrong  
I say an' when it drop, Oh you gonna feel  
it  
As long as you're doing wrong  
[Mmmm, mmmmm, mmmm  
Mmmm, mmmmm, mmmm, yeah  
Mmmm, mmmmm, mmmm, yeah]  
I say pressure drop, Oh pressure  
Oh yeah pressure drop, it drop on you.  
I say an' when it drop, Oh you gonna feel  
it  
As long as you're doing wrong*

*It is you-ou-ou-ou, Oh yeah  
It is you-ou-ou-ou, Oh yeah  
It is you... SONG CUT SHORT*

'Harder They Fall' replies in the scene immediately following, at 52 minutes and 57 seconds:

DJ announces the record. MUSIC BEGINS.  
MID-SHOT crowd in the dance-hall moving to  
the rhythm of Ivan's song.  
(There is no break at all in the music when  
the scene shifts from the radio studio.)

CLOSE-UP Ivan wearing leopard-skin pattern  
shirt, black vest, white cap and silver-  
rimmed sunglasses with a finish that  
reflects spotlights Ivan focuses on.

MID-SHOT Ivan 0:53:27. Ivan asks a man on  
the dance-floor what he thinks of his song.  
Man replies indifferently: 'Not bad' and  
when pressed by Ivan ('Listen to the beat,  
man. I t'ink it's a hit'): 'Song awright'.  
Crowd moving in the background.

MULTIPLE SHOTS. CLOSE-UPS.

Sweating faces, swinging hips and  
bottoms, light gleaming off colourful  
clothing and accessories. MOVEMENT OF  
CAMERA PANNING LEFT AND RIGHT TO ECHO CROWN  
SWAYING TO THE BEAT OF THE MUSIC.

Among the dancers: ganja-trade middle-  
man Jose

INSTRUMENTAL INTRODUCTION

*Well, you tell me of a pie up in the sky  
Waiting for me when I die  
But between the day you're born and when  
you die  
(They) never seem to hear (you) even your  
cry  
**So as sure as the sun will shine***

*I'm going to get my share, what's mine  
And then the harder they come  
The Harder they fall*

*One and all,*

*The harder they come*

*The harder they fall*

*One and all.*

*Well, the oppressors are trying to keep me  
down*

*Making me feel like a clown.*

***And they think that they have got me on  
the run***

*I say forgive them Lord*

*They know not what they've done*

*'Cause as sure as the sun will shine*

*I'm gonna get my share now*

*What's mine*

*And then the harder they come*

*The harder they fall*

*One and all,*

*(The) harder they come*

*The harder they fall*

*One and all.*

*Sometime, some time, I feel,*

*(the) harder*

*Mmmm*

INSTRUMENTAL

*One more time, one more time,  
Yeah*

When we encounter 'Pressure Drop' in direct dialogue again with 'Harder They Fall' it is in the context of Ivan's inability to battle new and unexpected problems, finding himself at odds with Jose after he asks for a larger cut as a ganja pusher, having found out the street value of a ganja shipment by chance and providing his own explanation as to how things might work better to his and other pushers' advantage. In response, first Jose gives Ivan up to the police 'to teach him a likkle lesson' triggering a series of violent events and, later, Elsa will do the same to bring about Ivan's fall.

Having taken the initiative to improve his situation, Ivan becomes Jose's adversary. Ivan tells Elsa that he is about to claim his destiny with *fame*: 'Didn't I tell you I was going to be famous one day?' But Elsa re-labels his declaration *insane*: 'Yuh mad.' Ivan loads the guns he bought earlier 'for protection,' for a deadly rendezvous with Jose. Ivan avenges his rightful claim to his dreams on Jose and his girlfriend and on members of the police force. It will be around 14 minutes after these frames with 'Pressure Drop' (lasting around 2 minutes) that the word '*Pressure*' takes on a deliberate meaning in the scene where the ganja traders meet to complain of their lack of funds with the resumption of the trade linked to Ivan's capture. Pedro keeps his thoughts on Ivan's precarious position to himself. But one member of that meeting warns ominously that Pedro isn't saying anything if he knows it on Ivan's whereabouts because 'pressure don't reach 'im [Pedro] yet.' The irony is, of course, that Ivan's reason for challenging Jose's position – getting more of a cut for the lowest in the ganja trade pyramid, is the carrot being used to flush out Ivan's hiding place so that both Jose and the corrupt detective determined to catch him will rid themselves of Ivan's revolt.

At one hour and twelve minutes and forty-four seconds:

LONG-SHOT Jose walking down alley, fences of rusting corrugated iron on either side. ZOOM IN TO MID-SHOT The audience is privileged to Ivan's thoughts of his perceived betrayal by Ivan whom he's protected since the latter arrived in Kingston and his plans to kill Ivan who dared threaten his middle-man position in the ganja trade by birthright.

EXTENDED RHYTHM INTRODUCTION



MID-SHOT Ivan hiding in the shadows in an alley in the same vicinity as Jose.

MIDSHOT Jose and Ivan play a kind of hide-and-seek as they pursue each other until Ivan has Jose in his sights and lay-waits him. Ivan gets the upper hand: 'Jose, you looking for me?'

Jose replied: 'A come to shoot yuh blo...'  
Ivan's gun goes off. The pursuit begins again in earnest, Ivan's feet just about to touch the ground on the first instance of the word *drop*

*Mmmm, mmmmm, mmmm, yeah*  
*Mmmm, mmmmm, mmmm, yeah*  
*Mmmm, mmmmm, mmmm, yeah*  
*I say pressure drop, Oh pressure*  
*Oh yeah pressure drop, it drop on you.*  
*I say pressure drop, Oh pressure*  
*Oh yeah pressure drop, it drop on you.*

CAMERA 'PURSUES' THE TWO MEN FROM IN FRONT AND BEHIND

Jose dashing down the alley escaping shots fired by Ivan, ducking around bends, jumping fences. Ivan shoots wildly in a crowded area; the crowd increases and follows the two men.

*I say an' when it drop*  
*Oh you gonna feel it*  
*(As) long as you are doin' wrong*  
*I say an' when it drop*  
*Oh you gonna feel it*  
*(As) long as you are doin' wrong*

LONG-SHOT Yard. Jose and Ivan running towards camera. Two-second SHOTS alternating CLOSE-UPS of Ivan and the gathering crowd of mostly boys. Jose runs towards and makes his escape through a stormwater course; Ivan, still in pursuit till then, stops at a bridge over the course, emptying his round at Jose fleeing down the course. MULTIPLE 2-SECOND SHOTS. CLOSE-UP (CAMERA BEHIND 'AT JOSE'S HEELS') Jose bobbing and weaving amongst empty cans, increasingly out of range; MID-SHOT Ivan waving his gun and promising to 'find' Jose.

*Mmmm, mmmmm, mmmm, yeah*  
*Mmmm, mmmmm, mmmm, yeah*  
*Mmmm, mmmmm, mmmm, yeah*  
*I say pressure drop, Oh pressure*  
*Oh yeah pressure drop, it drop on you.*  
*I say pressure drop, Oh pressure,*  
*Oh yeah pressure drop, it drop on you*  
*It is you-ou-ou-ou, MUSIC FADING Oh yeah*  
SCENE CHANGE

In keeping with the ironic twists between visuals and words of his songs, motifs of circles, round discs, clock faces dominate backdrops to Ivan's risk-taking. As he said earlier, he is going to take his 'big chance.' Since that incident there has been the increasing use of wheel-of-fortune images usually echoing just the opposite of Ivan's hopes as expressed in his song. This is most prominent in the next scene emphasising the increasing odds against Ivan's chance of success. At one hour and fifteen minutes and fifty seconds:

MID-SHOT of DJ El Numero Uno in radio station studio answering telephone requests for the song 'Harder They Fall.' DJ is positioned up left of frame. Most of the space is taken up by technical equipment: metal, tuning knobs, a clock at top centre of frame; in the foreground and very close to the camera are a couple of tapes rotating. The recording of 'Harder They Fall' picks up the circle motif as the camera zooms closer to the disk and as the needle settles down.

MUSIC BEGINS. CLOSE-UP wheels of a pushcart, zooming out to show man pushing cart fast, away from the camera.

TRAVELLING SHOTS of Ivan's writings:

"I WAS HERE BUT I DISAPPEAR" [sic], "I WAS HERE", "HERE", "SE↑E ME HERE", "I am EVERYWHERE" on corrugated iron fences, on the board fence of a construction site adjacent to the police station, on the back of a motorcycle. CAMERA SHOOTS CHIEFLY MOVING OBJECTS OR IS FIXED AND TRAVELLING. MULTIPLE CLOSE-UPS lasting no more than 3 seconds: police detective in patrol car; a market woman seemingly dancing to the music; radios held to peoples' ears, hanging from carts, in back pockets, random images of Ivan look-alikes in gold cap and sunglasses, individuals trading singles of the recording. MID-SHOTS groups of higglers, men passing each other with transistor radios spouting the song 'Harder They Fall.'

CLOSE-UP PANNING TO MID-SHOT OF HILTON AT HIS STUDIO (1:16:48) THE SONG CONTINUING IN CONJUNCTION WITH HILTON (BENEFITTING FROM IVAN'S AND HIS SONG'S UNEXPECTED POPULARITY) ON THE PHONE TO THE DETECTIVE, PRETENDING TO SUPPORT IVAN'S CAPTURE BY THE POLICE.

INSTRUMENTAL INTRODUCTION

*Well, they tell me of a pie up in the sky  
Waiting for me when I die  
But between the day you're born and when you die  
**They** never seem to hear you, even your cry  
**So** as sure as the sun will shine  
I'm gonna to get my share now,  
What's mine  
And then the harder they come  
The harder **they'll** fall  
One and all  
Oooo, the harder they come  
The harder **they'll** fall  
One and all.*

INSTRUMENTAL INTERLUDE

*Well, the oppressors are trying to keep me down  
Making me feel like a clown  
And they think that they have got the battle won  
I say forgive them Lord,  
They know not what they've done  
**'Cause** as sure as the sun will shi...*

SONG CUT SHORT

The final occurrence of 'Harder They Fall' is Ivan's epilogue. Having decided against life on the run from the police and army, Ivan, taken with Pedro's suggestion of the possibility of escape to and welcome in Cuba, immediately re-envision himself into another fantasy as a revolutionary: 'Yes, revolutionary, to rass!' But by the end of the film, Ivan is Django, having again re-imagined himself as the eponymous hero of Sergio Corbucci's *Django* (Italy, 1966). The true winner at the end of the film is the song. At one hour and forty-one minutes and 44 seconds:

CREDITS ROLL OVER THE CLOSE-UP of abdomen of dancer in club wearing a mini-skirt of lame. The dancer is in constant motion, seen facing forward or turning to face backward.

*Well, the oppressors are trying to keep me  
down  
Making me feel like a clown.  
And they think that they have got me on  
the run  
I say forgive them Lord  
They know not what they've done  
'Cause as sure as the sun will shine  
I'm gonna get my share now  
What's mine  
And then the harder they come  
The harder they fall  
One and all,  
(The) harder they come  
The harder they fall  
One and all.  
Oh yeah.*

INSTRUMENTAL INTERLUDE

FADE OUT. CLOSING SHOT ENDS 1:42:46.

BEV BRAUNE

## **underground cinema**

In the art house cinema I run into someone I'd prefer to forget. He recalls how once he dressed up as a footman and tried to amuse me. 'Going to the cinema is like going to India,' he says. The film's running. I must sit perfectly still. At first I keep both hands over my eyes. Then I move my right hand. I watch the whole movie one-eyed till the final footage of a junction of streets. On the dark corner, an unbearable monsoon-gale lifts a small figure off the ground until she is standing in the air, flying upside down, head-first to the earth and yet flying.



JIM RULAND

## django unpacked

*Django Unchained*, Quentin Tarantino's foray into the Western genre, has been packaged and sold as an homage to the Italian filmmaker Sergio Corbucci who wrote and directed a number of influential Italian Westerns, including the ultraviolent *Django* in 1966. For casual filmgoers, Corbucci's career has been overshadowed by the other Sergio of Spaghetti Westerns: Sergio Leone. Thanks to *Django Unchained*, a new generation of fans will be exposed to Corbucci's work. But how much did Tarantino "borrow" from Corbucci, and is *Django Unchained* a true Spaghetti Western?

Tarantino's film opens with the original theme song to *Django* composed by Luis Enríquez Bacalov, from Buenos Aires, and sung by the Italian Roberto Fia. It lacks the staccato punchiness of Ennio Morricone's work in Leone's *Dollars* trilogy, music that demands to be punctuated by the ping of a wayward bullet. Bacalov's number is sweeping and operatic, elevating the hero to quasi-mythic status. Tarantino also mimics the oversized red typeface used in the opening credits to the original *Django*. But after these bold, stylistic flourishes, similarities between the two films fade away.

*Django Unchained* is the story of a slave's revenge. It's *Conan* set in antebellum America. The original *Django*, however, mirrors the conventional American gangster flicks of the '40s and Japanese samurai sagas of the '50s in which a rogue agent plays warring factions off of one another for personal gain. Usually, this character

is motivated and/or constrained by a moral code that distinguishes him from the bad guys. This code comes straight out of the pulp fiction of Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op, which Clint Eastwood embodied so well in the *Dollars* trilogy as the Man With No Name that he made a career out of it. When Eastwood prowled the streets of San Francisco, the Continental Op's old stomping grounds, carrying out his own brand of rough justice in *Dirty Harry*, the killer-with-a-code had come full circle.

That *Django Unchained* bears almost no relation to the original *Django* should come as no surprise. Tarantino isn't interested in Corbucci's contributions to the Western genre. His sympathies run much deeper. Like Tarantino, Corbucci was a maverick filmmaker who did things his own way. He was an artist who went against the grain with glee. Take a look at *Django*'s opening credit sequence. The conventional Western begins with a lone gunman riding into a dusty, sunbaked town. His horse's hooves beat a steady tattoo that sends a plume of dust into the desert air. Corbucci thumbs his nose at these visual clichés. *Django* opens with his hero, slogging through the mud on foot, dragging a coffin. It's anything but heroic, but the pathos is immense. It's our first glimpse of Django, and we already feel sorry for him. That's the takeaway for Tarantino, who opens his movie with Django in irons.

With Corbucci, you always get the sense that he's

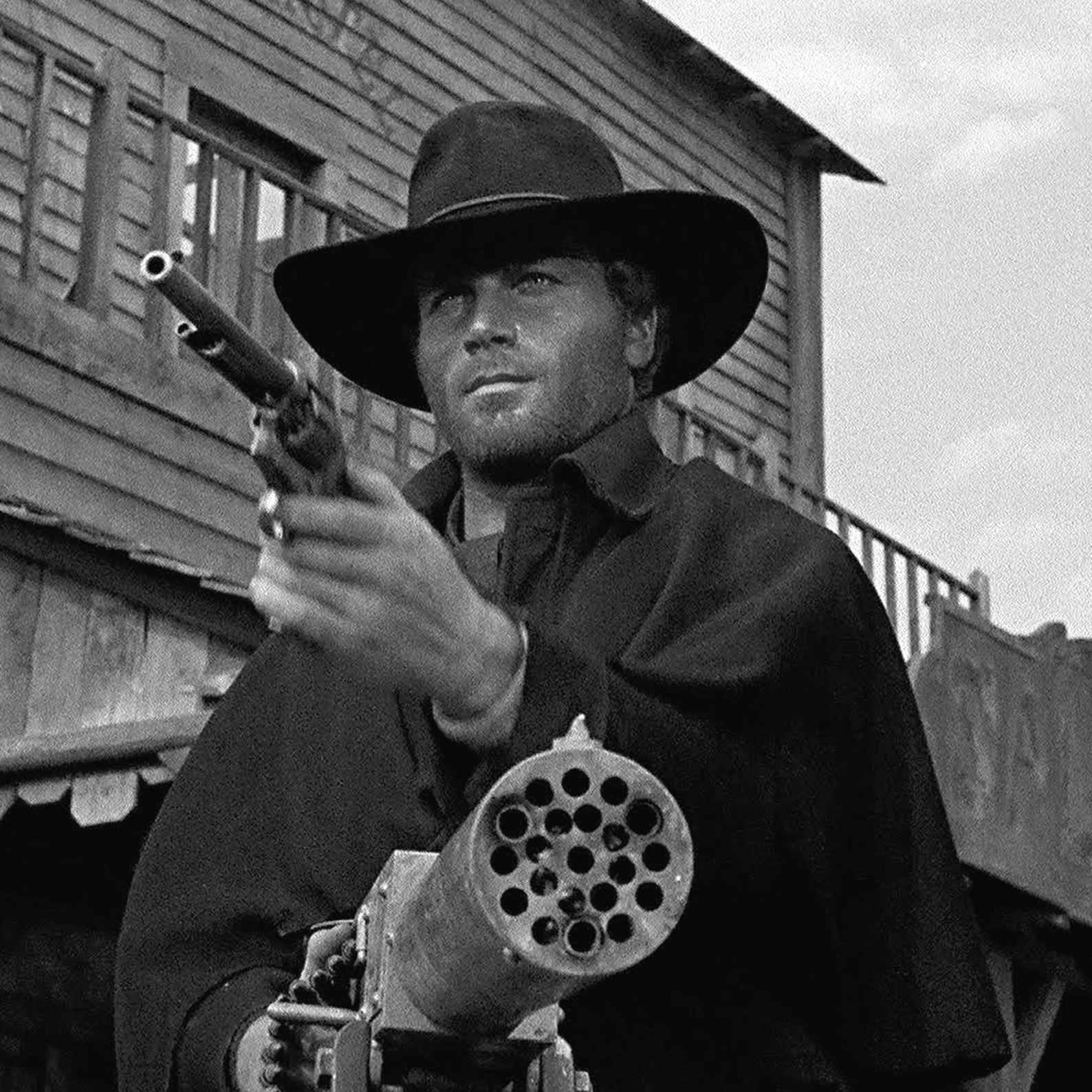
pushing against conventions, which is fascinating because in retrospect, the manic, super-saturated, ultraviolent Westerns that came out of Italy in the '60s helped establish many of the conventions of the modern action movie. Corbucci didn't see it that way, and neither, apparently, did Leone. When Leone "wrote" *Fistful of Dollars*, he recreated Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* scene by scene. The theft was so blatant that Leone was obligated to pay Kurosawa royalties. That's a level of appropriation that would make even Tarantino blush.

There's an apocryphal anecdote about the rivalry between Sergio Leone and Sergio Corbucci. The story goes that when they were both young filmmakers they were scouting locations for a battle scene for one of the Bible/Roman epics that were all the rage in the late '50s and early '60s when one of them commented, "This would be a great setting for a Western." From that moment on, or so the story goes, it was a race to see which filmmaker could get their movie made first.

Or perhaps not. As filmmaker and author Alex Cox illustrates in his marvelous book, *10,000 Ways to Die: A Director's Take on the Spaghetti Western*, Corbucci and Leone were colleagues who out of necessity shared writers, composers, cast and crew members. In *10,000 Ways to Die*, Cox presents Corbucci and Leone as "co-creators of the Italian Western – and, for the first time, grant them equal importance." Cox's lifelong passion for Spaghetti Westerns is so intense that he cast the beautiful Vonetta McGee, the female lead in Corbucci's *The Great Silence* for a small role in his film *Repo Man*.

Given the iconic status Leone and Eastwood achieved with *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*, the final film of the *Dollars* trilogy, it's easy to frame Leone as the winner of this rivalry. But it didn't start out that way. Although *Fistful of Dollars* came out first, in Europe *Django* was the more popular film by a large margin. Eastwood was a relative unknown whose run as human toothpick Rowdy Yates on *Rawhide* did not exactly inspire visions of a ruthless bounty hunter. Corbucci, however, landed rising star Franco Nero, whose performance as a gunslinger psychotically indifferent to danger made him a household name in Europe. Because the name "Django" wasn't copyrighted, dozens of "sequels" emerged, most of which had nothing to do with the original film. These had hilarious titles like *Django Always Draws Second*, *Django the Bastard*, *Django Get a Coffin Ready* and





*Django Kill*, which has the bizarre subtitle: "...If You Live, Shoot!"

Franco Nero makes a hilarious cameo in *Django Unchained* where he plays the Italian owner of a losing slave fighter. He asks Django how to spell his name, which Django does, adding, "The 'D' is silent." This gets a big laugh from the audience, who has been primed by this scene in the trailer. But the real joke follows when Nero's character says, "I know." And does he ever. While Nero is still a relative unknown to American audiences, his notoriety as the original Django is such that in Japan they use it in place of Nero's actual name on movie posters.

Although *Django* opens with the scene of a flogging, which plays a central role in Tarantino's drama about a runaway slave turned bounty hunter, *Django* aficionados will find few touches of the original in *Django Unchained*. With Tarantino, there's never single straightforward source. Rather, it's a chamber of echoes. His thefts are scattershot. This makes him exactly like every other artist, except that Tarantino loves to leave a trail of breadcrumbs for enthusiasts to follow. He's a thief who wants to be caught.

*Django's* influence is disappointingly ephemeral. Is Django's Little Lord Fauntleroy outfit a nod to the early days of Spaghetti Westerns when actors provided their own costumes, ergo Eastwood's serape? Doubtful. Is the business with the hoods Tarantino having fun with the ridiculous red pillowcases and curtain sashes that the mercenaries wear in Corbucci's *Django*? Probably. With Tarantino's film spending so much time on plantations in the Deep South, one could make the argument that *Django Unchained* lacks the earmarks of a true Western – though many said the same thing about Corbucci.

Tarantino has written and talked about the influence of Corbucci's *The Great Silence*, in which Klaus Kinski plays a mute bounty hunter in the snowbound mountains of Utah. That Tarantino, who has produced some of the most loquacious leads in the history of action movies, would credit as an influence a film with a mute protagonist creates a kind of ironic dissonance that leaves this writer utterly gobsmacked.

Tarantino's mouthpiece in *Django Unchained* is Dr. King Schultz, played by Christoph Waltz, a verbose German who knows more English than most of the

Americans. Schultz serves as the film's moral compass, which is remarkable since Tarantino's films often lack one. Schultz isn't motivated by revenge. In fact, when it comes to Django, motivation doesn't come into play: a person who is pure at heart doesn't need motivation to do the right thing. In *Django Unchained*, Schultz is a necessity: the movie needs *someone* to be outraged by the brutal realities of slavery that Tarantino glorifies in ways that feel perverse.

Schultz's character has left many critics grasping for antecedents. There's the Klaus Kinski "connection" but that's a bit of a stretch. There's Lee Van Cleef from *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* but his ancestry is Dutch. Although in some ways Schultz resembles Holdaway, the police officer played by Randy Brooks who coaches up Tim Roth's Mr. Orange on how to be an undercover cop in *Reservoir Dogs*, Tarantino's inspiration for Schultz goes much deeper.

In fact, you have to go all the way back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany when a writer named Karl Friedrich May published a series of hugely popular stories and novels set in the American West. These tales dealt with the adventures of the unlikely combination of Old Shatterhand, a German explorer of impeccable morals, and the Apache chief Winnetou, a great warrior who has conveniently converted to Christianity. By dint of their strength, courage, good hygiene, and moral superiority, Old Shatterhand and Winnetou set about righting the wrongs of the American West. (Interestingly, in Corbucci's film when Mexican revolutionaries capture Django, they shatter his hand.)

May's stories essentially begged the question: What if a good German had been around to intervene on behalf of the Indians? Old Shatterhand embodies the best of German values in a lawless country and Winnetou serves as May's template for the Noble Savage. So what if Old Shatterhand's pure heart is always drifting toward a different kind of Germanic purity. So what if that these novels are unreadable dreck perpetrated by a writer who was a con artist. (May liked to boast that he explored the American West extensively and spoke dozens of Indian dialects when in truth he "learned" everything from James Fennimore Cooper novels that he read while in prison for forgery.) What matters is that these characters became insanely popular in Germany.

Adolf Hitler was a big Karl May fan. So was Albert Schweitzer.

Not surprisingly, May's widely read books were fodder for early European Western movies. So when Corbucci and his peers started cranking out Westerns in Italy there was already an audience for them. In fact, some of the financial backing came from Germany. Since 1952, the German city of Bad Segeberg has played host to the Karl May Festival. Christopher Frayling devotes an entire chapter to May's influence in his seminal, if slightly stuffy, study of the genre *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*. Interest in May's work continues to this day. Visit Apache country any time of year and you'll find German tourists trying to pick up the trail of Old Shatterhand in their rental car.

In *Django Unchained*, when Schultz tells the story of Broom Hilde and Siegfried, "the story that every German knows," he just as easily could have been talking about Old Shatterhand and Winnetou. Like *Django Unchained*, the Old Shatterhand and Winnetou stories are examples of revisionist revenge fantasy. In Tarantino's tale, Django is both a variant of the Noble Savage *and* the bloodthirsty instrument of justice – with the emphasis on the blood.

Here things get a little murky. Most Spaghetti Westerns are, ostensibly, stories of revolution. While these uprisings are often vague and kept in the background, they provide an unsettled climate for a man of no allegiances to slip in and take advantage of the situation. Opportunists for the greater good. Mutually beneficial exploitation.

This is and isn't the case in *Django Unchained*. As Schultz plays Colonel Pickering to Django's Eliza Doolittle, he provides the film with both a plot *and* a moral purpose. But Django is no Winnetou. He's not out to right any wrongs. He just wants *his* woman back, a piece of property he's dead set on reclaiming. Over and over again, Django is told that he's exceptional, one in ten thousand. A notion Django embraces. But what about the other slaves? Aren't they exceptional, too? Django appears not to think so.

The gag that Tarantino keeps going back to again and again are reaction shots of southern folk – both black and white – watching a black man riding into town on a

horse. Forget for a moment that this joke was lifted from Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles*, but during the course of the movie it becomes increasingly unfunny. When Django assumes the role of a black slaver and is compelled to make things worse for the slaves, the audience knows it's just a role. But do the slaves? They are never let in on the joke. They aren't given the full story because Django doesn't have to give it to them. He's Django. He's special. Even the Blaxploitation films that Tarantino reveres aspire to a grander social purpose.

In Tarantino's last two films, the bad guys aren't just bad, they're agents of evil. One gets the sense that Tarantino chose to make his bad guys Nazis and slavers not so he could tell the story of those who fought against the tyranny of systemic hate, but as an excuse for the body counts his films now require. What's next? Vigilantes that only go after pedophiles?

Corbucci's westerns helped usher in a new era of cinematic savagery that left their mark on filmmakers around the world. Each movie tried to outdo the last, until they became parodies of themselves. (If gore on the spurs is your thing, then Guilo Questi is your man.) The violence was cruel, capricious and random. A bit of skullduggery could wipe out an army. It's entertaining as long as you don't take it too seriously.

Tarantino doesn't give the viewer that option. He used to demand our attention with tension and suspense. Now he does it with villains the audience is conditioned to hate before they take their seats.

*Django Unchained* fails as an oater but hits its target as a Spaghetti Western. That's because Tarantino has been making Spaghetti Westerns his entire career. He's been torturing good guys and killing bad guys since 1992. But with each new film, Tarantino's shtick become less artful and more of a parody, and by "upping the ante" with bigger body counts and "creative" killings, he accelerates his decline. And Tarantino seems to know it. Why else use the *Django* title? By adding his name to the roster of bad Django franchises, Tarantino tells us exactly what he thinks of his efforts.

It seems appropriate that the film ends not with Django and Broomhilda riding off into the sunset, but with Django's horse going through a very limited repertoire of tricks. That pony is Tarantino, and he needs to learn some new ones.





THOR GARCIA  
**intended for pleasure**

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PRAGUE – It has always been the tragedy of the world that no one knows what he doesn't know. And things can be killed, but it's usually a long time before they're allowed to die. Because everything relies on some other thing, and without one or the other, you're only spinning in place, all think-thoughts totally worthless. Additionally, I thought with a drunken smirk, it's widely believed that the jolly convertible-driving *Reichsprotektor* had been doomed the moment he helped himself to the good king's crown.

There wasn't enough beer and whisky anywhere for this thing. I read it again: Jitka, 16, had left Yellow Submarine with the shitbird, 24-year-old "Michal N.," and gone to his place. He boned her, according to police. Then he grabbed her by the hair, knocked her around a bit, then threw her out the second-story window. She apparently survived the drop with a few bleeding wounds. The shitbird hadn't had enough. No, never. He ran down, brought her back up. He called his two little buddies. The three of them smacked her around for a while, raped her, wrapped her in a sheet. They dumped her in the garbage bin, tossed some boxes and bags on top. They went to the non-stop.

Fucking hell – fucking, even teen fucking, just wasn't enough for some guys. Well, rarely is fucking

enough, let's face it. Somebody always wants something more – more fucking; less fucking; a little more tenderness; a little more violence and strangling. In any case, something seems to be lacking. Too much other jive starts to interfere, and it's not long before everyone's jiving and hiding things and looking for a way out. People's fucked-up natures come roaring to the surface.

Maybe young Jitka had told him his penis tasted sour. Anything can happen, after all. It's been said that Soviet troops in fact shot young local males who had refused to surrender their girlfriends. These young females of the gently rolling and silent hills, where the sea had not crashed for eons and the volcanoes had long ago burnt out. With their marvelous complexions and sweet laugh, lean legs and plump haunches – goddamn, they could wear a high heel. They could wreck you with hours of uninhibited sensual grace, drink wine until they passed out, then be up first thing in the morning to mop floors and scrub pans, your coffee waiting in a cup on a saucer.

Shit, my job – well, at least this project – was done in this town. I'd interviewed the American bigshot, taken a look at his organization. I'd write it up tomorrow, if I could be bothered. Another grubby suck-and-fuck,

for another two dollars. The business interests had demanded it. I had provided without question. Now what? Nothing but more shit. I threw down the *Weekly Post Standard* and looked around. I lifted my drinks.

Kaltenborg was signaling from the long table. I'd seen when I'd come in, but had been able to successfully ignore until now. He had grown a little Lenin style beard-mustache since the last time, but the glasses and Lennon-style locks were the same. Kaltenborg, who claimed to be from the area "around Boston," was someone you met if you worked the circuit in this part of the world for long. I was never sure what his involvement was – whether he was a journalist or aid worker, or someone who worked with non-governmental organizations or quasi-governmental institutions. I'd contacted him once at a foundation for Romanian orphans; later, in Sarajevo, he told me he was working as a "reporter" for the UPI agency. The last time I'd seen him, in Lithuania, he said he had recently got a nice-paying job with an "aid-investment foundation" linked to the wealthy philanthropist R. Bennet Osnos. He had gone into some detail explaining the good that was occurring. I was also aware he had logged time in Macedonia, as well as Moldova. Pascual had always theorized that Kaltenborg worked "for the CIA."

The table looked full, nine or 10 folks. Vague, pasty faces, several beards. I waved at Kaltenborg, smiled, gestured. Finally I got up and walked over.

I saw her as I came up to the table. She was two chairs away from Kaltenborg. She glanced up and our eyes locked, for maybe as long as a second, before hers sprang away, turning down to the table.

"So the Pillsbury Dough Boy gets in this hostage situation..."

"I'm compatible with the dragon and rat. The tiger is opposite."

"*Pale Fire* was stale when it *came out*..."

"No, no! It goes, *It's just a step to the left and then a jump to the right*..."

She had dark sunken patches under her eyes. Dark brown hair – strands of it curving down along her cheeks, but the sides and back looking as if swatches had been hacked away with scissors in front of a mirror. She was wearing an ash-colored button-down sweater, faded blue jeans. Earring holes but no earrings. Slightly

moist nostrils. Soft lines on both sides of her mouth framed a bulge of dark-red lips. The lower lip was heavily chapped and stuck out like a rounded ledge, as if expecting something to land on it at any moment.

Kaltenborg grabbed hold of my arm, spied something, looked around the table and laughed. Kaltenborg appeared to have two local women with him, a blond and a brunette. I kneeled down, locked eyes with the woman again. I nodded, chuckled, replied a few words to Kaltenborg.

I pictured her lying naked on somebody's bed, smelling like sweat and needing to brush her teeth. I went back to my table and returned with my drinks.

"So Gumby is robbing this bank..."

"Haw, Americans are too dumb to make a revolution..."

"We just make movies about other people's revolutions, or ancient ones..."

"Oh, I *love* David Janssen..."

"The crust is full of methane..."

She put her arm around a pudgy fellow wearing a faded blue rugby jersey. We did the introductions. I don't remember his name. She whispered in his ear. He had horn-rim glasses, a half-growth of beard all over his face and neck. Sandy brown hair was starting to recede at the top corners of his forehead. He appeared tired of a lot, nearly everything. You could tell from the way he never really quite laughed, but only gave a big wincing smile at nearly everything that was said.

They put out a weak vibe that they were "together," or maybe "special friends." I couldn't get a firm bead. Anyway, it didn't matter, because pretty soon he kissed her on the cheek and took off. "Cheerio," he said, grin/wincing, reaching for my hand. "Maybe I'll run into you again sometime..."

"Sure," I said, "maybe next time I'm out this way."

"...and with a hand on your lips you bring your knees in tight..."

"Every cook has *got* to spit in the food, or sneeze on it. I mean, I would..."

"Nobody knew who Miles Davis was when he went to the White House. I mean, *nobody*..."

"The swastika is everywhere in Tajikistan. It means, like, peace or something..."

"I heard Larry Flynt won't allow the word 'goddamn'

to be printed anywhere in *Hustler*. Can you believe it?"

"Regis Philbin was singing 'Put Your Head On My Shoulder,' seriously!"

My statements/rhetoric were met with shrugs, nods, the odd agreement/endorsement. She produced her shield, lowered it, produced it again. She was a big fan of the Replacements, all albums.

I decided to order another whiskey. She asked for a glass of red wine. She stated she was most lately from Brooklyn, by way of Chapel Hill and Portland. She liked New York, but didn't care for L.A. We knew some of the same spots in San Francisco, but none of the same people.

"Have you ever done peyote?" she said.

"No. Have you?"

She shrugged. "Once. I wouldn't count it as an authentic experience, though."

She was so tired of the Diane Arbus thing. She thought the *Natural Born Killers* soundtrack was better than the *Pulp Fiction* soundtrack, but the best movie was *Wild at Heart*. She had a long list of part-time employments. She explained she worked as a language instructor, of English, for the main Finbank office. On the side, she photographed the architecture and wrote reviews of local art exhibits – sometimes, she said, for sites in New York as well as the *Weekly Post Standard*. She also worked putting together the Listings Section of restaurants and pubs, art shows, movies and other happenings for the *Weekly Post*. She had got free tickets, twice, for Manu Chao because of her connection to the paper...

"No," I said, "*For Whom the Bell Tolls* is the one during the Spanish Civil War."

"Not World War I?"

"That's *Farewell to Arms*. I mean, I could be wrong..."

They were starting to shut the lights off, it was time to go. I poured the last of my whiskey into the last of my beer, put on my coat and took the glass with me outside. She hooked herself to one of my arms, trembling slightly from the cold beneath her fur-lined hood. We walked down to the main boulevard, got into a cab. She threw out directions. The taxi headed for the outskirts. I sucked whiskey-beer, nearly vomited, rolled down the window. She pulled the zip and stuck

her hand in my coat, massaging my chest and navel through my shirt. I sucked the whiskey-beer, kissed her lips, her neck, lit a smoke. She massaged my thigh, my balls and cock. I drained the whiskey-beer. Taxi-man pulled into a prefab tower lot and we got out.

I saw a non-stop slot machine/bar place at the end of a row of darkened grocery and appliance stores.

"Oh, you think so?" she said. "My place is right over here..."

"Well, we might as well. Couple nightcaps, you know. I mean, we're basically already inside..."

"Yeah."

"So what's the deal with what's-his-face?"

"Eric?"

"Is that him? Right, the guy who was..."

"Technically, I guess he's still supposed to be my boyfriend. But nothing much has been happening now for, like, months. You know?"

She shrugged, wrinkled her nose.

I took her hand. "Oh, I totally know. Yeah, it can happen."

The walls featured a painted "game" motif – tumbling dice, clown faces, fruit and spaceships. We swept past the bar and took a table in the massive back room which contained the gambling machines. The place smelled like old beer, industrial-strength toilet cleaner, several cemeteries full of dead cigarettes. Five or so solitary men sat in silence before the slot machines, coin buckets between their legs.

The waiter arrived – two of the big beers, we said, along with one package of American-brand smokes. And Jim Beam, I added. He brought it swiftly. We drank and smoked, sharing curiosities. She didn't really care for Kubrick, but she understood why people did. She had had a strange dream where she was fighting a spider. She thought U2 hadn't really been good since about *The Joshua Tree*.

She walked off to the bathroom. My fingers groped around in my pocket and found the Pascual pep pill. I popped it in, had a drink of beer, lit another cigarette.

Something went right with one of the machines, it bleeped and glurped excitedly. The guy's "credits" soared on the red digital from 400-odd to 5,280. He began to bet heavily from this tally, between 300 and 500 per roll. Things did not go well, almost every spin

a loser. He went down to about 700 credits. Then something went right again. His total clicked back up to more than 3,500. He started heavy bets again, 200 or 300 each spin. Each one a loser.

By now she had come back. I ground out my cigarette and leaned across the table.

She lived in a 6<sup>th</sup> floor space that had the bedroom and kitchen combined. Toilet on the side, tub in the back. I caught flashes of plant leaves and decorative tissue boxes, a chipped maroon lino floor, various pots and jars of stuff. A black and white photograph blown up into a poster – ALEX CHILTON AT THE MEMPHIS BANDSHELL 1973. I knocked into an empty aquarium, then looked at a yellow and green bird in a cage. It smelled like birdshit, oats and daffodils.

She flicked off the lamp. Constellations of gold-orange clumps appeared in the window, glowing out of the black like the embers of a nearly dead campfire.

Her bra clacked when it hit the lino. We fell on to a mattress covered with a woven blanket from Central America, or perhaps Poland.

At the point of contact there was nothing that could be called friction – only a sloshing followed by an impact. She squirmed beneath me. Our hips thrust out of synch, her vast patch of pussy hair scratching against my navel. I tried various maneuvers to match her, but her technique was defined by counterpoint. I abandoned all hope.

There was an interlude of doggy, which was okay, but when I felt myself starting to go a bit limp, I turned her over and jumped back in. It was a good move – I was able to maintain. A few minutes went by and she began to whine and shake, gripping my midsection between her knees, forcing me to hold position. This took considerable effort and my stomach and back muscles began to ache. I would have liked to have stopped for a drink of water. At last a rush of hot breath flew out of her, fluttering my eyelids. And another blast of the hot air, like a furnace, against my ear. Then she lay there, like an empty leather glove that had been tossed on to the floor, letting me stroke away.

It went on for two or three minutes. She seemed to lose interest and she whispered, "Let me suck you."

I rolled on to my back. She leaned over on her knees, at a right angle, dribbling on it, working her hand along

the shaft, before taking about half of it inside her mouth. She fondled my testicles with her other hand. I groped at the back of her, fingers going in and out. My arm started to hurt. I dropped my hand down to the cool lino.

I heard her tearing open a package with her teeth. She pulled a condom over, climbed on top. It was rather late in the day, I thought, but maybe she had just remembered. A little late is better than none at all, I suppose. She thrashed around, her own rhythm, my hands never able to get a decent grip on her breasts. Her ass cheeks, cool and dry, pounded against my thighs. I sat up, guided her on to her back and moved myself once more between her knees. I reached down and took hold of her buttocks in both hands, slid her forward, drawing needed power from my hips. Our hips crashed against each other, grinding at cross-purposes.

"God, you're good," she lied, whispering.

I had been sweating, but it broke all of a sudden. I felt coldness and moisture on my shoulders, my back, my thighs. My head spun. There was an aching which started at the top of my stomach, spread through my chest and to the top of my shoulders, then up beyond that into my lower jaw. I groaned and released my arms, falling on to the side of her.

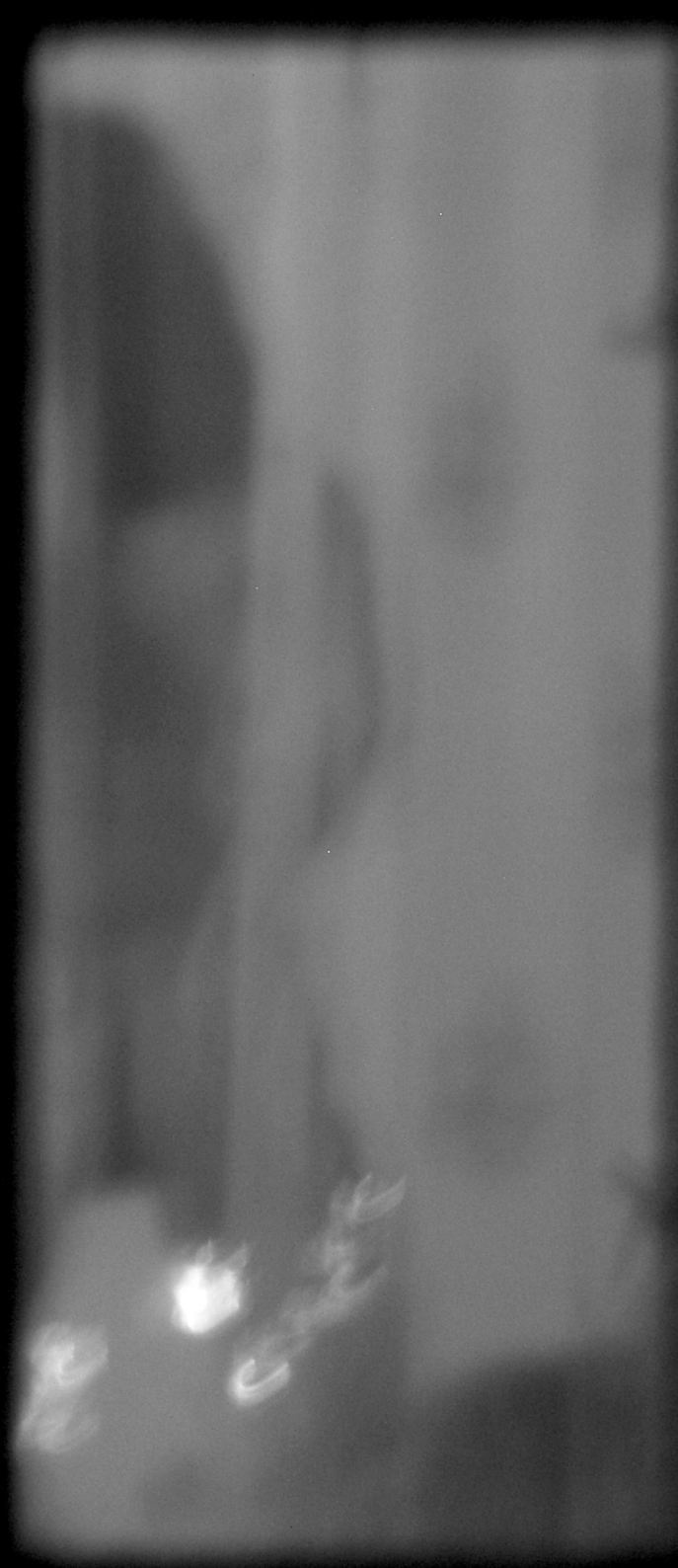
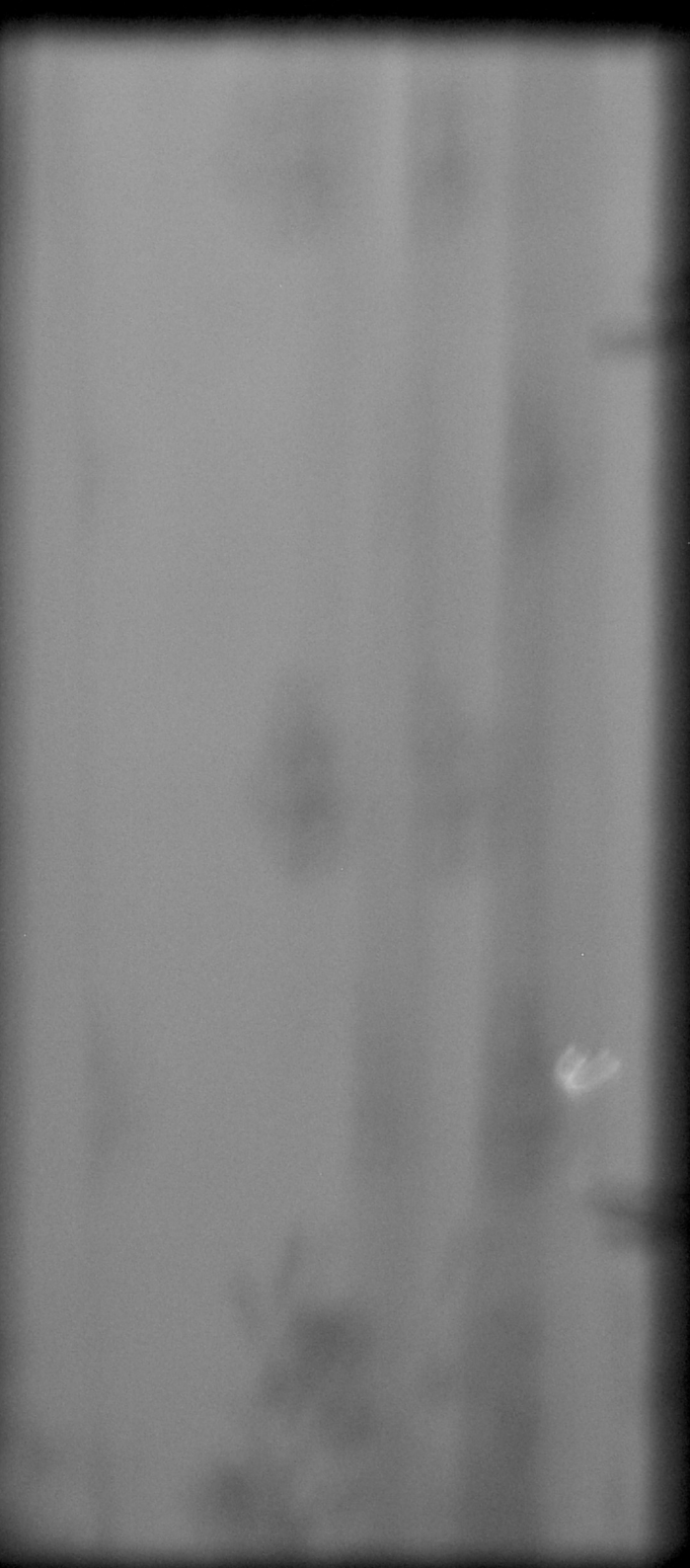
She exhaled, wiped at her face. She said something, stylishly and non-controversially. My head spun, mouth dry.

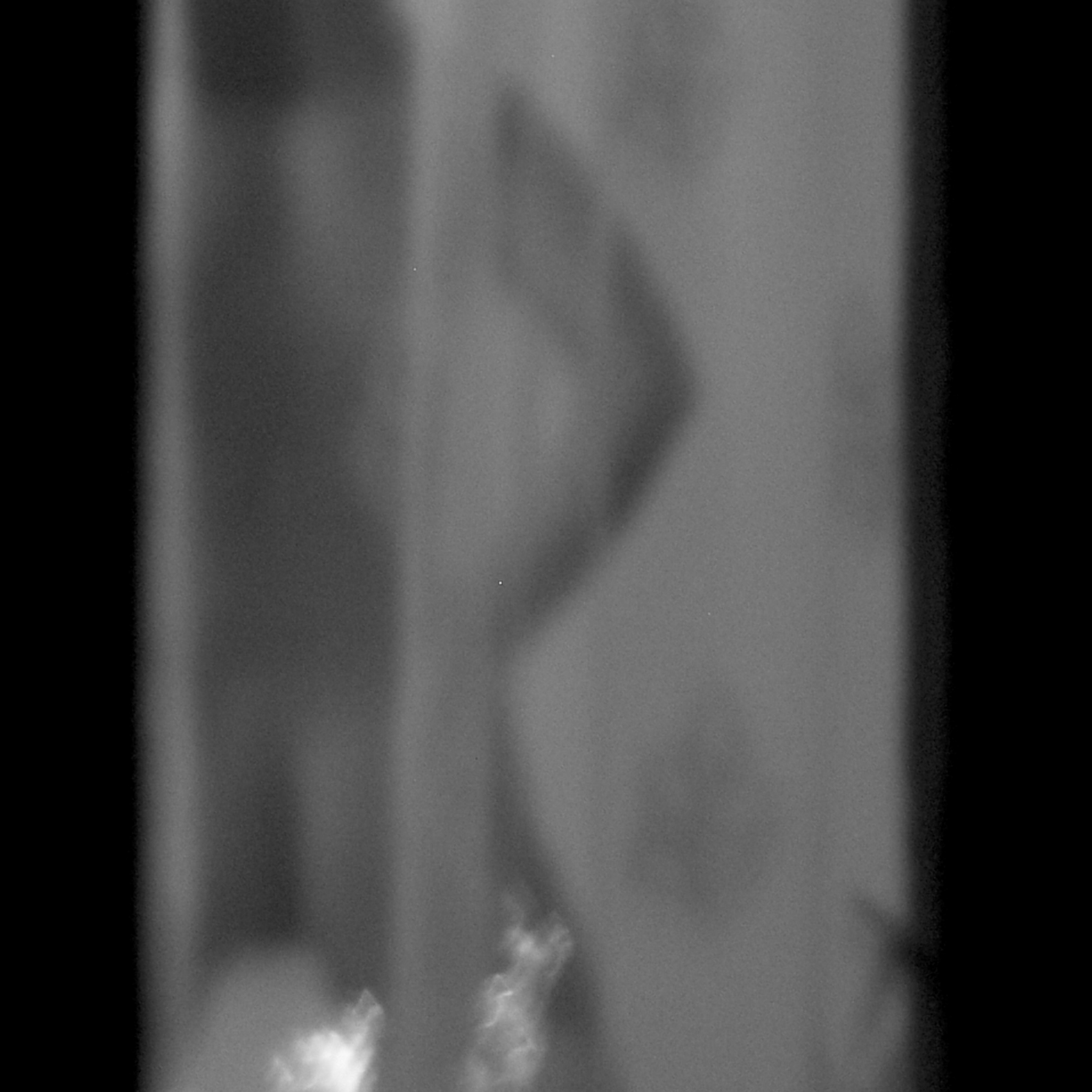
I crawled across the lino to the toilet and vomited booze juice and goop, my chest knocking against the bowl. I rose, oozed phlegm, removed the condom, tossed it in the toilet. My insides ground together and I sat down on the seat. I flashed on a wicker basket, a pumpkin candle, tile squares, a Bugs Bunny toothbrush, pictures of St Bernards. I strained and grunted, but only water emerged. Both my sides ached, hips to ribs. Hot-cold flashes swept my face and chest, arms and thighs. I wiped and flushed. I got up, went to the sink, took in mouthfuls of water. Shaking, I washed my hands with a bar of soap and dried them.

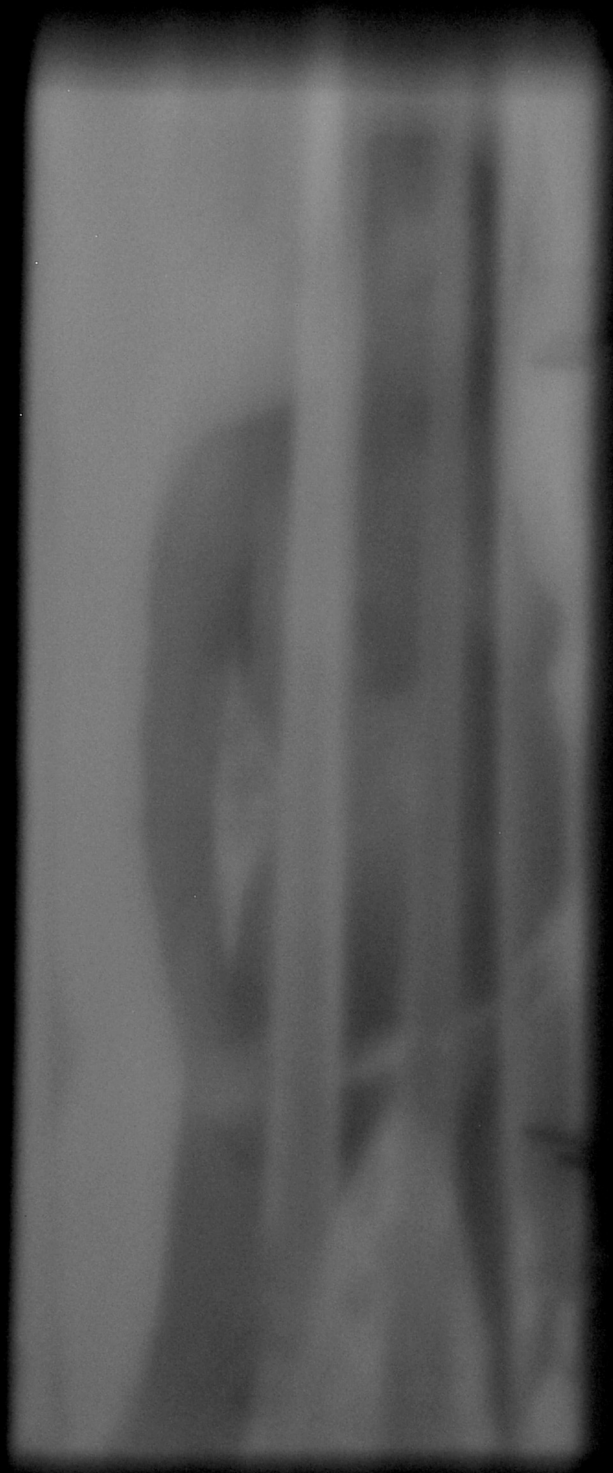
I came out with a towel around my waist. She had turned on the night lamp by the bedside and was lying on her back, white sheet over her legs. I noticed for the first time a little black shape on her right breast – a tattoo, it seemed, something with wings.

VADIM ERENT  
**rear window**

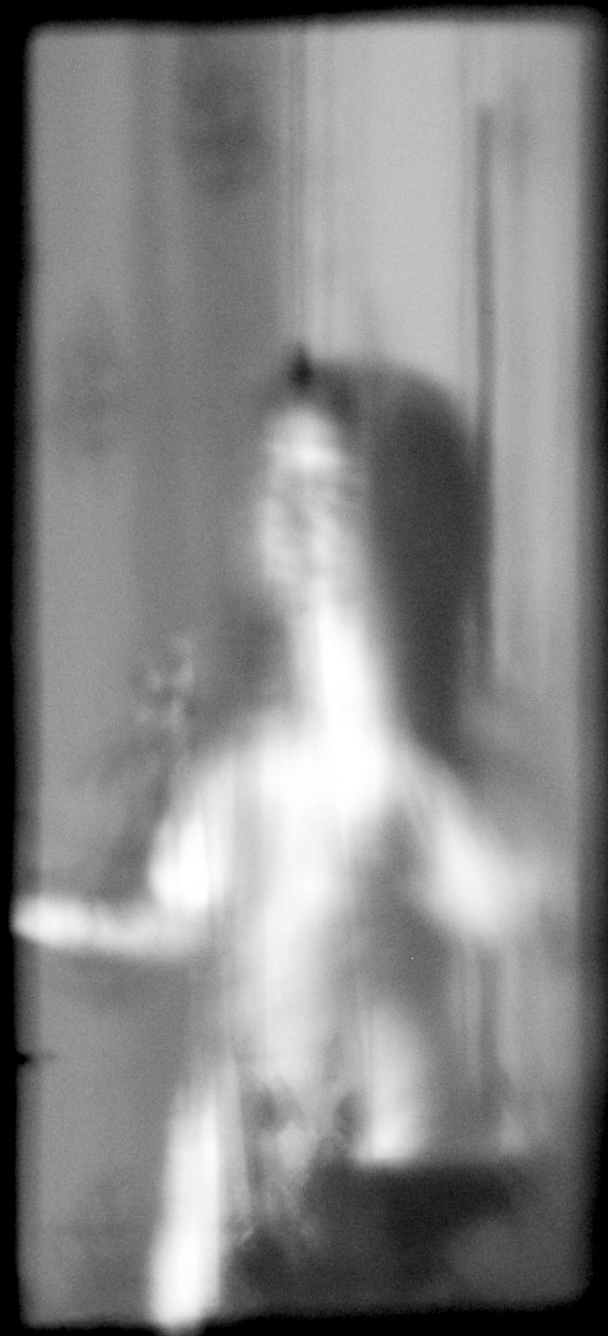




















KENT MACCARTER  
**pork town**

I  
I live here.

Commuting in the same direction – walking in my aim back towards Pork Town, back home – I closed in on and passed the pace of a slower man. An older man than I. His old-man bottom; sealed tight and flat in old-man slacks the way a brisket is cut and dressed in plastic wrap before a sale. On High Street, he doddered well. And slowly. His jog, intact, but coasting now at the pace of trivia. He travelled on footfalls his gait fumbled away like pennies, groping his way through neighbourhoods and the mental prolapse his mid or later seventies spent itself into. He slowed his walk. His sweat crept from beads to drizzle, casting an eventful sheen upon his countenance. And that glint was asking questions: *was he? Is he? Right here?*

The man shat.

He shat directly there and infantile. Measured and calculated in front of all of Pork Town. An approaching flow of drivers guiding disparate coloured cars – crowding into the casings of Pork Town's main traffic arteries – watched him. Like I did. He excavated square on the footpath that frames the northeast wedge of High and Dundas Streets at Plenty Road – plumbed and trued with the preparation of a tradesman before construction.

Like I'd done two strides before him, that older

forde early-morning Malvern Stars and Moonee Valley buses... zigzagging across a thoroughfare like we were in Frogger or frantically swerving through dangerous space the way I guided my Starfighter in *Galaga* to shoot down the enemy squadrons dropping down upon my avatar or any odd way you'd manoeuvre in decent arcade games from a summertime when they cost 20 cents to clock. To clock only if you were good. And I mean good. Good like the stunts we pulled in Heidelberg and then the Night Corpse clocked *Galaga* one-handed while demolishing hotdogs in the other.

From its proper footpath square and during the proper traffic sequence, the chirruping cadence in the stoplights marched forth a safer crowd than the crowd of two that older man and I made. You want me to write what I just wrote – that bacon of a line – more clearly and I tell you I cannot because now we are both thinking of his emptied cavity and this is what's coming out. And, like I said, we'd crossed into the red just seconds before. Thornbury into Preston's intestines. The junction's wainscoting of graffiti said so. And we all flowed along like perspiration from a joystick barging up into the heat of a growing day. We'd crossed the intersection. And so that's when he paused, shat. I craned my neck for another look to watch his belt fall limp.

With both thumbs levered into his front pant pockets, that older man unsheathed his legs from his reddish-

coloured khakis, crouched and yanked aside his gleaming jocks. The site was like looking into the dead soul of bacon – meaty red and white. He reached around to cup apart his buttocks. I know why he did so. So do you. And the takeaway flat white in my hand shrank in the tepid morning air as I fixed my gaze on his frame emptying out without remorse or care. He didn't *give* a shit. Nor did he take one. He opened his bowels and simply left one there; a crapping, urban mule. And those reddish-coloured khakis, like a chef hat, what pleats they featured. Surely ironed for presentation.

I ingested more takeaway white and stared as the fresh meat of human shit fell. It fell with the oomph of a tennis serve and the pizzazz of meatloaf. And the honk of its drop made me remember the back seat of a red Datsun hatchback I used to get plopped into and how that car's anaemic beep sounded braised and lost and young when its horn got hit, emitting a feeble *bum-and-poo* when a *mofo* calibre of curse was required. I watched that older man shit. Yes. I watched him do it. It echoed youth and smelled of ancient steel gears.

As I said, it sounded young. It only *sounded* young... like the viscous rip that an oily BRUMP! of meconium sounds like when a newborn lets it go the first time. It is that first crude spill of sterile shit that punctuates in-utero life, isn't it? Coming home to air. But what the older man pushed out appeared exhausted and brutal, not fluid. Not spicy. No gust of rank. It resembled more a chopped branch off a ghost gum for winter fuel. No wads of flossy lanugo, no mucus... and no cell tissue ditched from ear drums or the unnecessary veal shed off from a sphincter's muscles. No scattered amniotic parts from the demolition derby that jumpstarts toenails into action. His was the brand of tired, old shit that you oftentimes run across in Pork Town.

What he shat on the footpath looked lost. And that moment, tight as a Great Dane's balance, became its own sirloin in me and in the groin of Pork Town.

He doddered on. And so I looked. In his shit, there shown no Virgin. No silhouettes in his passed sepulchre. No holy likeness of countenance appearing – ripening, there – in light the way a Polaroid snapshot does. The head cheese his shit had compacted into displayed a pattern that hinted at nothing. Nothing of the dumb luck a slice of burnt toast in Guatemala gets blessed with

when it refracts the true faith of humid people and sells tickets to believers. Only the morning functions of an older man than I. It is only shit. And I realise you don't plan on seeing shit tumble out from a total stranger on the footpath on any given morning but this is a city and cities eat rib eyes and cities have intestines too and that was a regular peak hour in Pork Town.

Mid-squat, in addition to his khakis, the man's left hand clutched a Red Rooster bag that appeared not to be empty – gripping its upper slack like a croaked chicken's neck. In was an informed grip – wrote in how to throttle life out of fowl – and now, just a reflex. His crouch was still. In his right hand, he held something I cannot tell you. But it was something and he held that something differently than he did the Red Rooster bag. And because it was some *thing* it needs to be mentioned, but I don't know what it was, and that's how it happened that day. I wonder still how he managed to hold on.

But I can say – because I recollect it like a cousin's death – that kitty-corner across the intersection and displayed in a furniture showroom's front window, a glabrous leather armchair with an antimacassar buffed and bent the slope of morning light back in our direction. Oily... and heavy, like bad family news in the post. And, Christ, how that chair looked overstuffed with bread. Like Paddington Bear or Paddington Bear as a boutique hot air balloon or Paddington Bear after a country show's worth of bratwurst. A taxidermy fail. The chair's seams sliced deep into the push its upholstery wanted. Nothing more to liken here.

I wanted to skewer it. That chair. Prick it. Let its blood. Free its buttons. To harpoon it, watch the curvature of its belly collapse as comfort and life farted out from my afflicted punctures. But the furniture store wasn't open yet... and I could not do as I wanted and there the chair remained struggling mightily with itself in front of all that traffic and a woman pushing a nana trolley up a slope with nothing in it.

Who the older man than I was, I don't know. Nor have I ever seen him on or shitting in streets of Pork Town ever again. But the air is humid with his sweat remains. And maybe it is that the indefatigable nature of meat construction – the conveyors, the slicers, the slaughtering vices and their drains – which still reverberates in Port Town had coalesced into a gelatine,

assuming the form of its maker and in the spirit of their flesh, cannot be broken or extinguished. And Bingo was his name-o.

And so I left him there in his space upon the footpath.

## II

149 years ago, at the junction where High and Dundas Streets meet Plenty Road in Preston, Victoria, a factory was drafted on butcher's paper and slated to fill an unused paddock. 1862. Two Scotsmen named William – Williams Watson and Paterson – opted to give and take advantage of the growing brood of South Preston farmers raising pigs for slaughter.

The business climate was ideal. Earlier, in 1849, Melbourne City Council strongarmed Victoria's Parliament to enact laws that confined production of stock into meat (pigs into pork) to abattoirs... and *only* abattoirs. No longer would it be acceptable – or legal without pre-purchased blind eyes – to slaughter lambs, goats or cattle any old where one pleased. No more discarding slurries of entrails into convenient gutters capacious enough, or not, to slop the process into. The first butchering centres were restricted sites in Flemington and rank banks of the Yarra below Batman's Hill.

Melbourne's mantra, 'Meat three times a day' – fresh meat – overwhelmed the output those first two production sites could muster. Flemington waded up to its jugular in blood. The Yarra? It was blood.

Opportunity swam. Fortune-seekers outside of those butchering zones – and well beyond useful earshot of buyable officials – protested that this 'civic interference' stymied their entitlement to waltz in on the newly respectable, if loosely regulated sausage racket. Besides, their ilk lobbied, there was unlimited space to build in Melbourne's ever-marvellous boom. Why not use all parts of an animal one can? And the land.

Beginning in 1861, a swathe of municipal abattoirs cropped up from Williamstown to Collingwood. Points north, too. And so the two Williams pressed ahead and built to get *in* on *theirs*. The factory was Preston's first: the Pioneer Bacon Works. Its gore and offal would, now by law, be antiseptically diverted out of Preston's public gutters, mopped off Preston's streets that had been macadamized by years of ventricles and pus, and

sluiced directly into the greater Merri Creek catchment. True pepperonis, these Williams. Progress. Success.

With an acceptable level of fatback grafted onto bank accounts, one of the Williams, William Watson, packed in his spoils and moved to Queensland in 1890. And with his erstwhile partner, the other William, he left behind a nationally recognised brand of smallgoods and bacon; Pioneer. Paterson, now a solo tycoon, parlayed his acumen for the meat biz into one for politics. How different could they be? He became president of the Preston Shire Council from 1899-1900 – a period in which he wielded ample community sway to pipe his bloody effluence wherever he perfectly well pleased... reminiscent of old times in the messier, lawless era.

Can you image the waste generated by this operation? And the muscle in which it was done?

## III

On my way to a breakfast cheeseburger down at Ulysses in Northcote, well out of Pork Town, I spotted this humungous fucking... *thing*... bucking at me like an electrocuted steer. And how in Jesus H could I have known that this is how my day would pre-heat and that a shady fornication is what built the very first cheeseburger anyways so what in the Christ was going on here with this old man's prick?

The colours within the prick flowed from jaundiced to puce to beet. Base to head. Gnarled, strained and big. Big like a primate's femur. A mastodon of ugliness. Another man, older still than the man whom shat on the footpath, stood stern in his yard behind a lilac bush. The prick, his.

The husbandry of a city's appetite spawns more take-away. Doesn't it? Doesn't it just? Ribs. Parma. Dogma. Skirt steaks in a gory curtsey and you want revolting, do you?

So that was his prow cantilevering out from his pelvis into the intersection of Benjamin and Ethel Streets. And I don't care that he wore a flannel shirt that looked like it had been washed a trillion times and that maybe, blessed maybe, sweet granddad just overlooked climbing into the more important half of his duds that morning even though he remembered to place his comb in the top, right shirt pocket in case a breeze developed.

No forewarning.

I turned that block of Benjamin into Ethel and there it was. Bang, a prick.

An older man's prick thrust out at me on an angle of a conveyor belt in use. Like a bogeyman's advance in a video game. Level boss advancing.

Jutting bald, its foreskin scalped off moons and neighbourhoods ago. Think of the blood. A fount of blood. It's only blood. Swirling inside. That prick was aimed in the direction of Pork Town – opposite to its foreman's stare – pointed in the same direction where the man not quite as old as this cut had shat upon the footpath.

I backed away, reversing into Pork Town. Back toward Cedar's Bakery where I collected myself with a toothless shangleesh and long flat white. But that prick? That meat. That cheeseburger. That shit. This footpath. A breakfast. Your arteries. My carcass. I mustered another go towards Ulysses.

Nothing had changed. I was as well-prepared as carpaccio and thinner, wiser to the situation I was again commuting into.

The prick twitched, steadied, and like a compass needle or the graduated arch of a sextant, received and read its call. Home to Pork Town. Three blocks away. True north. And this time I was carrying a folded meat pizza from that nearby Lebanese bakery I'd regrouped in before and I wasn't at all sure what to do with it or me as I stopped to gape at this older man's gargantuan testicles because how could you not and then hot lemon juice began dribbling off the meat pizza onto my wrist. Sharply. It felt like blood.

We became a face-off, this older man and I. Lemon juice continued to burn my wrist. His scowl hung dead and raw above his prick, fuelled by the protein of his erection. A grimace cambered above his chin and his face aped the symbolic tragedy mask you see in the foyer at the movies. A carcass of expression. Pork Town was once riddled with pricks. Some became Strasbourg, others weisswurst. Richer ones built families. And the meat paste on those meat pizzas I buy at Cedars with stacks of twenty cent pieces whenever I walk past that Lebanese oasis comes from an indeterminate source. That meat is at home, there in the bakery and canned. Meat is no longer built in Pork Town. Other things continue to fall apart. Like our back gate.

And a persimmon tree that's redder than a blue porterhouse but grows ever fewer fruit each year – it's falling apart too.

He stared at the *it* that was me and I stared at the it his prick was and tried not to fix upon his eyes. But we were locked in sight for two trains to pass a block away and the prick didn't subside or stop or breathe or do any damned thing but bounce in the vapours of Pork Town's past.

He stood as motionless as I, prick notwithstanding. Our stare didn't bust. No cool change. He opened his leathered mouth to shout or to sob or to request another slab from a carvery held in his head but no sound emitted and I swear I stepped into the final scene from that *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* remake where Donald Sutherland points to the throat of a woman – guilty in her humanity – and strangles her with shrieks but with the volume muted. Yet the flavour of this older man's expression, preserved in the silent aspic his skull kept, tasted of the subcutaneous fat that the charcuterie process requires to keep its meat airtight. So it did to me – a quiet terrine and a video game, a DVD that seizes up on a scratch and faces of characters pixelate into a hell of rectangles.

And I don't know why this older man was standing stoically pantless amongst the arbour of his front yard with his palms flat on his hips and holding a glower in place like a priest would when addressing the stir-fry histrionics of his flock before he slaughtered them with a god's will. No. I don't know why. Not at all.

Stillness is hard. Symptomatically, I flinched, like his prick. He did not. But he was wearing shoes. And you might guess this older man to sport a set of grandfatherly R M Williams. Boots under suit pants, say, in a mining outfit's boardroom. Boots pressed on the accelerator of a leased BMW. You know. Gentleman rancher models. Boots planted with poise on the floor of a snooker parlour tucked away as the filet mignon of a Queensland cattle station. Boots worn by a brute lording over more longhorns than a high score. Genuine leather. But no. No boots.

That lemon juice cut. And I wondered how halal the older man's circumcision had been as a tot amongst all that butchery there and then in the maw of Pork Town. Or maybe he arrived that way as a teenager from Syria



or as a teenager from Jordan where I read they have gobs of flocks or maybe he was built in a Damascus factory because you just never know nowadays and I don't think it's too far a leap to think that men can fabricate men from their own tools while women pump their brothers' unused blood onto gardens.

Without steps or movement, the trainers he sported – he wore trainers, not boots – managed to vacuumed clean his lawn with their new virginity. Whiteness like you read about. Recent gifts from a son or grandchildren.

*Eat these barbecued ribs.*

*We bought you some shoes.*

*Remember tennis?*

*They're leather shoes.*

*You said you loved the tennis?*

*We don't have any chicken. No socks.*

Those gleaming trainers demolished the purple tranquillity of the lilac bush the older man stood behind. And what I could have done to escape the gravity of his watch and to release such urgent blood from that prick so that a droplet – just one droplet – would dribble upon those new shoes I do not know.

I don't remember breaking for it a second time. I must have.

#### IV

Ebullient William Paterson – immigrant success story, swine visionary – was caught. He was caught napping by one mister James Curruthers Hutton; a lowly staff member in the Paterson's Pioneer Bacon Works juggernaut. Hutton, one of countless underlings, was the chosen one that would matter... the Pontius Pilate whom snuck across High Street to judge and indulge in the pork trade on grander grounds than any operation in Australia had ever done.

Slowly, by night – and for as long as surreptitious airs could be maintained – down the block, across the road and at the intersection of High and Oakover Streets, Hutton, along with a friend and two local peons, piecemealed a three storey bacon factory together where once there was none. And in 1875 – during a time when two storeys' worth of bacon manufacturing was simply not good enough, not voluminous enough – Hutton hung his drapes, sunk his drains, offloaded wagonloads of pork carcass and kicked opened his doors in a grand

ta-da. His Pineapple brand of rashers and smoked hams, that raunchy belle of Preston, Victoria, would become the envy and model for all wannabe pork magnates.

By 1903, Hutton's rival factory to Paterson's would be Australia's largest and most lucrative. It's a shame that he was 17 years dead by that point. Hutton's widow and seven daughters butchered on, eventually wresting control of William Paterson's entire outfit – Paterson himself also long ago minced by the fate of a heart attack.

William Paterson's extended family remained employed at the original factory, but never again controlled its fortunes. In 1958, smallgoods whipper-snapper, Otto Wurth, strode into the picture. He grabbed those greasy, historic bacon reigns; sold the original parcel of land the Williams first built on to a consortium planning a used car dealership; disgraced himself in the eyes of abattoir employees in so doing; merged with KR Castlemaine and ran the increasingly-decrepit plant until it was shuttered, condemned and abandoned in August of 2006. The used car lot failed. It, too, was closed and abandoned. All trace of it is gone. An ALDI supermarket is about to open on Maryland-shaped portion of the site. It will sell pork at cut-rate prices.

A plaque inlaid on the footpath near the original factory site commemorates this raw affair with meat. With pork. The offal of an industry – lips and assholes, spleens, sphincters and penises – are waste by muscle. The husbandry of a city's hunger breeds sheets and sheets of blood that, in the end, swish into one sea with such force that colour goes missing and a tranquillity enlists. The result can be described as an infinite and gleaming white space – an area that immediately follows beyond the mountain range of human need – where a lone rodent, maybe it's a Guinea Pig or a hamster, quivers as it waits for a higher order to devour its reason.

The plaque in Pork Town has been defiled. Bled on. It's been buffed and polished by a suburb-full of footsteps. Its ferrous patina remains, if mostly overlooked, screaming minutely from within its crypt of cement. But rain dribbling off the awnings of calendars has kept it clean enough to matter. It persists as a reminder that perhaps it is you who is the gerbil.

You are now leaving Pork Town. Do come again. Again. Again.

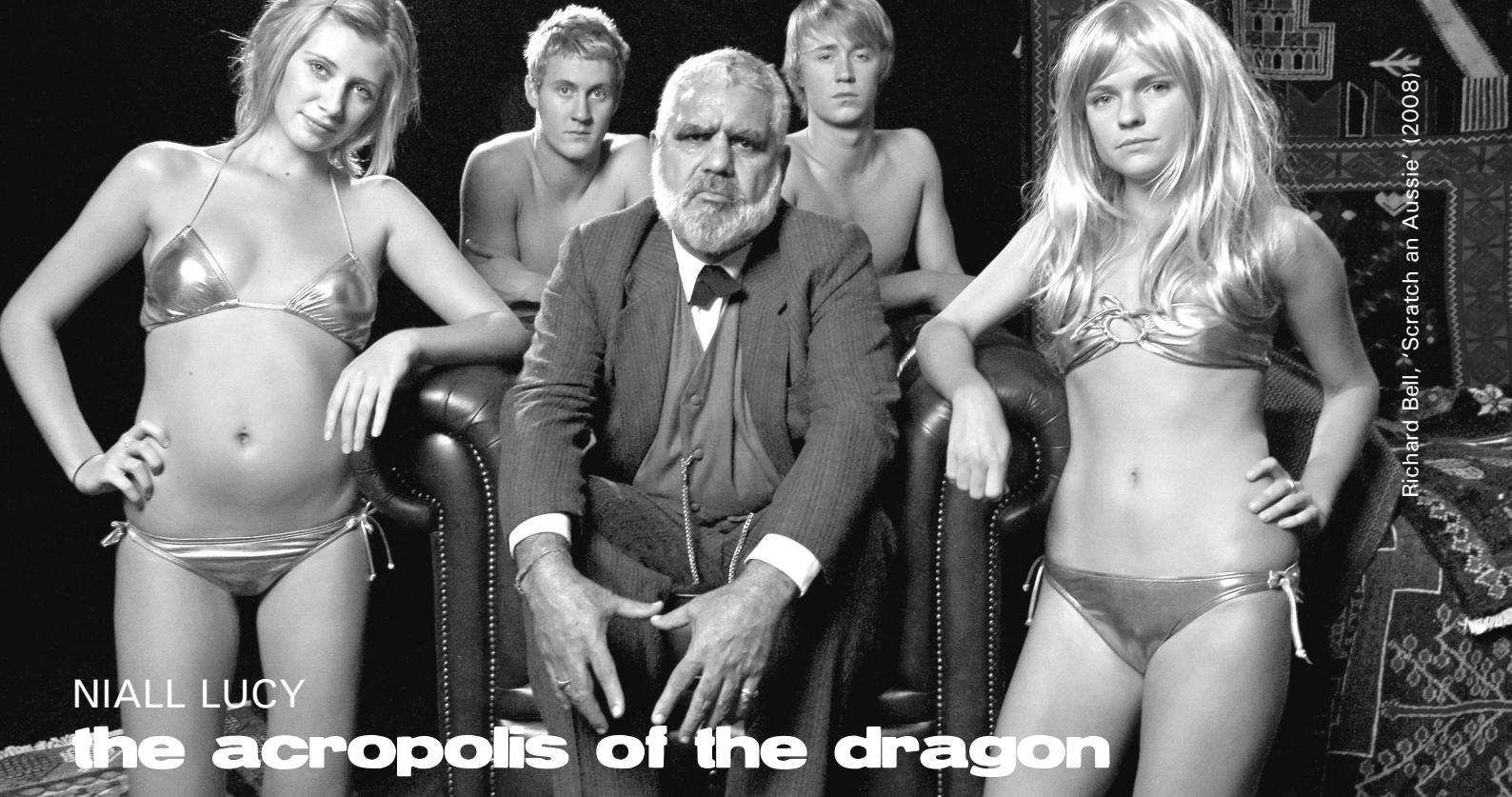
## MEANTIME

Time to be mean: Stunted yogacara  
in the meantime to be belated.  
No theories there. I entertain in the boardroom,  
sack the toadstool in the sports sense, albeit the friend  
I can't shrug. Back to meantime, soured Americano  
cherries with floss nightgown for the fake words  
that freed these harnesses  
of speculative nightmares papacy calls no-theories-here  
propriety. Civil justice.  
Oz has a green curtain and says pusillanimous to freeze  
in place New York erects, "it is my city" as he nimbuses,  
flat-lining sense of entitlement Jesus Christ Kansas.  
No one's defibrillator to jolt beyond the careen of wet faces.  
Yes, globally the slap is heard, but semantic no other, not even  
the sermon that spills like wad, which is news' supreme  
name offseason, darling cartwheel.  
Mawkish tartan to a career in indecision half-baking  
the peace in peacetime, umbrella sunglasses or something  
modelled or deep fried in 1988's month of January.  
Soaps deep fried, even. From what I can tell,  
Meyrink was a sympathiser, which means the Stoics guarantee  
like so much non-transit to mastery, which means  
stationary, the hypocrite hoax;  
take it in your jaws like the American pit bull whence  
assured youse, sappers on tv like they're teething,  
which is half-wrong, but delightful!  
Turpentine *mi goreng* for Sunday roast smarts but tears up.  
He's got his ears pricked for the droplets,  
because that's the Montana gateway,  
henceforward Salmonella, lesser-known hamlet  
to Silicon Valley for nine days stewing  
bloodless in the motels.

## WAGGA WAGGA

Private village in the pastures  
the ridge back  
before the flood grin.  
Sturt: am will be insight juice,  
questions the inner virus.  
No name for silence or tonic.  
Squawk. Filibuster jury to  
cab's passing into sticks  
still paradise, and so her cool  
not sangfroid as she musters  
the lagoon, which is furnace.

Cows sandbag. Carpet train  
for hydraulic spirit  
to straightening half-caste  
feasance, which the jury  
often conspire later the conference.  
For the facts blue gum  
*homo hominis lupus* roman.  
The shepherd's a hooligan, says  
hurt Irish lexicon,  
club's cackle American prairie  
belate Fury. Properly, the river  
on the club snarls.  
Now can belonging swoon busted.



Richard Bell, 'Scratch an Aussie' (2008)

NIALL LUCY

## the acropolis of the dragon

### KAYA

That means *hello* in one of the languages of the Noongar people, the traditional owners of the southwest region of Western Australia. But *kaya* doesn't mean *hello* in the way that  $1 + 1 = 2$ . The exchange rate when it comes to translating a word from one language into another isn't calculable in advance, according to a universal formula, if only because language (if there is such a thing as language in this general sense, so that we might refer to language as we do to mathematics)... if only because language is always to some extent an inference or a projection, since in principle and in practice a language is never complete.

The English word (which is really the American word) *hello*, for example, was adopted as a popular greeting only in the late nineteenth century, in response to the new technology of the telephone. When the first telephone exchange was established in 1873, in New Haven, Connecticut, callers were greeted with 'Ahoy! Ahoy!,' a practice continued anachronistically by *The Simpsons'* Mr Burns to show how culturally out of touch he is. By 1889, though, central telephone exchange operators were known as 'hello-girls,' attesting to the newfound status of *hello* as a popular telephone greeting, which later spread to greetings in general. Previously, *hello* (or, in British English, *hallo*) was used not as a greeting, but as a shout for attention; via the introduction of the telephone, then, the word's exclamatory or declarative usage was exchanged for the performance of a social function. *Hello* doesn't really 'do' anything except to signal an opening for the possibility of exchange with another, but in this way it is also always, perhaps, a kind of affirmation, always an answer to a call... even and especially when you don't know who's calling. Strictly, when you pick up the phone and say *hello*, whether or not you recognize the number, you can't know for sure who'll be on the other end; you cannot know for certain whose call you're responding to. Often, indeed, we knowingly say *hello* to strangers, on the phone or in other social contexts, instead of demanding they identify

themselves and state their business! (That would be an obsolete, by now ungrammatical, usage of *hello*.) So we use *hello* not emphatically, but phatically, to open a line of communication, which is in a sense to say we do use the word emphatically—as an affirmation of our willingness to enter into an exchange with others. When we say *hello* to someone, especially to a stranger, we are also saying *yes!*

I prefer to think it's other than coincidental that *kaya*, the Noongar word for the English word, which is really the American word, *hello*, can also mean *yes*, as we know from Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance* (Sydney: Picador: 2010): '*Kaya*,' the novel begins, followed immediately by a full stop (as I began by repeating here). Far from opening a line of communication, however, the beginning of *That Deadman Dance*, at least for whitefella readers, is less a greeting than a declaration, and what it might be said to declare is something like the question of itself. But whatever the mark of its identity or the identity of this mark (since *kaya* is not immediately recognizable as anything so seemingly unitary as a word), it cannot simply be exchanged, cashed in, for an equivalence, which could be what the novel is all about. The very name of the main character, after all, Bobby Wabalanginy, stretches the limits of English pronunciation (English speakers can no more get their tongues around 'Wabalanginy' than a trombonist can play the didgeridoo) and so the novel's colonial characters refer to him nearly always as 'the boy' or 'Bobby,' a name not equivalent to his other name, but which instead takes the place of it.

So that's one form of cultural exchange, all too familiar to Australians: the exchange of one culture *for* another, the assimilation of one culture *into* another—the word *kaya*, for example, for the word *hello*. But is there no alternative to this hegemony; can there not be exchange without loss?

Before pondering the question of what a culture might risk losing, though, we should consider the question that precedes it: what do we mean by 'culture.'

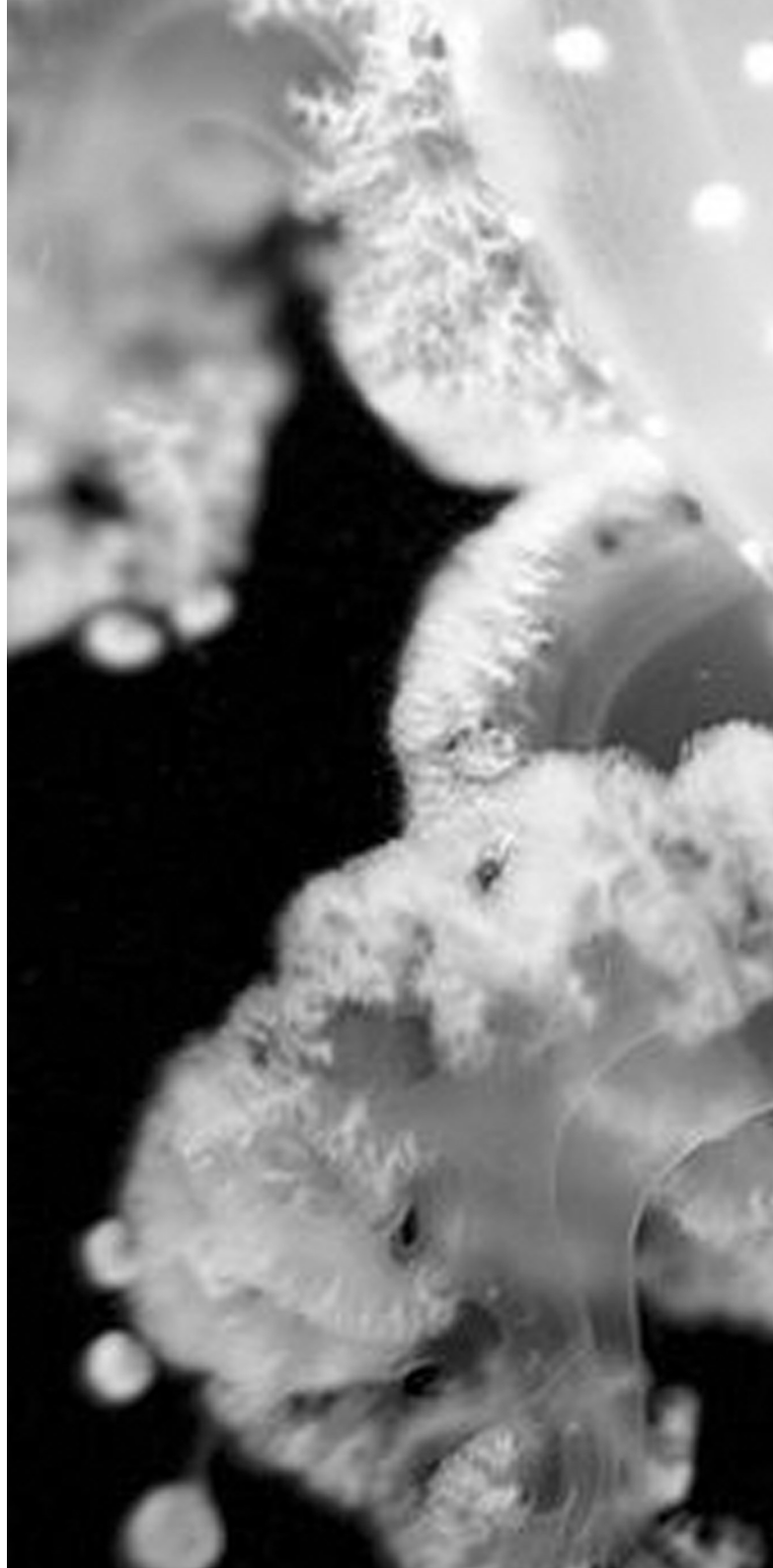
Culture (if there is such a thing) is an anthropological concept, referring only to forms of human life or organization and not to those of animals or machines. It might be granted, say, that all the various generations

of Apple Macintosh computers share a roughly common operating system or 'language,' a kind of machinic DNA, but from this it would not seem credible to conclude that the machines themselves behave in ways that constitute a culture, even if (after the fashion by which we now refer to 'business culture' or to the 'culture' of a football club) we were to concede that Mac *users* comprise something like a 'culture.' Similarly, while animals may congregate in a pod, a pack, a school, a nest, a herd, a swarm and so on, these all denote forms of social organization that are not historical, but coded, as if they were hardwired into the members of a species at birth. Machines and animals are programmed to respond to their environments reflexively, and so they don't so much respond to those environments as react to them.

Culture, then, is proper only to man and not to the animal-machine. The problem with this distinction, or with this system of oppositions, a system that may turn out to belong as much to the culture of philosophy as to the philosophy of culture, is that it's riven with tenacious contradictions. Some animals (and let's not forget there are only ever *animals* as such, since 'the' animal, the hypostatic animal in general, is to be found nowhere outside a discourse)—some animals are capable of acquiring knowledge and passing it on to others in their group, who learn it by instruction or imitation. Among many examples, it has been discovered recently that a troupe of capuchin monkeys in the forests of northeastern Brazil has developed a sophisticated technique for extracting termites from their treetop nests (see Jennifer Welsh, 'Rare Brazilian Monkeys Know How to Stick It to Termites,' *Live Science*, 9 March 2011). They begin by slapping the side of the nest, provoking soldiers to swarm to the area under threat, before twisting a small branch through the outer wall, and this rotating or drilling motion serves both to enlarge the hole made by the insertion (thus reducing the risk of breaking the branch on withdrawing it) and to maximize the number of termites attracted to the 'aggressive' object. Since the capuchins' technique is more successful than any devised by human cultures that eat termites, it would surely seem that culture is less anthropological than zooanthropological, to use the term preferred by Derrida in the first volume of *The Beast and the Sovereign*.

So we begin (no doubt all too hastily and familiarly) with the problem of the threshold: the threshold separating humans from animals, especially any animal with a discernable head and a face, is far from indivisible, and what is a threshold that is always divided and less than absolute from the start? This is a general problem, which I will come to in a moment. But for now let me quickly respond to an imagined, ludicrous objection: that the example of the Brazilian capuchins commits me to saying that the culture of Jack Russell Terriers in Brisbane differs from the culture of Jack Russells in Perth or anywhere else. To see the threshold separating humans from animals as problematic is not, in other words, to see the nonhuman as indistinguishable from the human; to suggest that culture is not quite proper to man, that it does not belong to humans exclusively or sovereignly, does not deprive the concept of culture of any force, but rather clouds its purity, a purity that presupposes that the concept must be indivisible.

This doesn't mean our starting point (one of several by now), our first tentative proposition, as it were, should be that culture is *not* anthropological, but simply that it's not indivisibly anthropological. Indeed, the Greek root *anthropos*, so often glossed as 'man' or 'human being,' also means 'man-faced,' 'having the face of man,' and so must be allowed at least to countenance, if not to include, those animals I referred to previously, animals with a discernable head and a face—in a word, most but not all mammals. In this way the science or the discipline of anthropology would be distinct from that of zoology only by convention, through the imposition of an artificial or arbitrary limit disguised as an indivisible threshold, because in a sense anthropology ought to refer not simply to the study of man, but of the man-faced, to creatures resembling or which in some way may be thought to share an equivalence, an equivocal or nonabsolute equivalence, with humans. It would be debatable as to whether this would lead to a new taxonomy of living beings or simply account for a longstanding but informal, unscientific or inexact, but not ineffectual, distinction between the faced, the less than faced and the faceless. While we may see something of ourselves, in other words, in monkeys, bears, dogs, cats or wolves, we see rather less of ourselves in chickens or reptiles, and nothing or





almost nothing at all in jellyfish. The animals to which we are attracted the most and with whom we form the strongest attachments, whose welfare summons our strongest considerations and about whom we are the most keenly ambivalent when it comes to eating them, are those with a head and a face. The animal with a face is not human, but it is not therefore, automatically, unquestionably, *nonhuman*.

My distinction, I repeat, is not a scientific one. What we might call faciality is not recognized by the sciences of anthropology or zoology as a discriminator in the classification of living beings. Indeed, my distinction (which I get from Derrida in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Vol. I, and so which is not quite 'my' distinction, not indivisibly mine) is not really a distinction since it doesn't clarify but rather blurs whatever might be held to separate the human from the nonhuman, the human from the animal-machine. But again this blurring, which is not an erasure, does not justify (and is not intended to justify) thinking that humans and animals are the same; yet neither can the question of how they might differ from one another be settled on the basis of choosing between an idea of the indivisibly human and of the indivisibly nonhuman.

Here we come back to (but of course we've never been far from) the general problem of the threshold. For science, or for a certain way of thinking we might call scientific or scientistic, every threshold is indivisible, a principle exemplified by the periodic table of the elements. The threshold at which water boils or at which this compound, when mixed with that compound, turns into another compound, is calculable and unvarying. Or, to take another example, it must be supposed that between the numbers 1 and 2 there exists a discrete series of indivisible calibrations even though the series may go on indefinitely: 1.01, 1.001, 1.0001, etc. But when you cut a 75cm length of pipe to repair the plumbing in your kitchen, you don't ponder the endless divisibility by which the pipe could be too long or too short. For all practical purposes, let alone for the purpose of sending probes to Mars, scientific thresholds are indivisible, which is fine because 'scientific' differences are nondiscriminatory: sodium and the number 7 aren't victims of historical or political oppression at the hands of nitrogen and the number 5.

What holds, though, for scientific or natural differences (as they might also be called) doesn't hold for cultural differences. As we know from Saussure, language is a system of differences without positive terms; hence the word-sign *sodium* (to précis the lesson of Saussure 101) means or functions by virtue of its difference from *odium* or *podium*, for example, although at some point, outside this system, the referent of sodium is understood to be fundamentally different, different in essential ways, from the referent of nitrogen. From this it could seem that language is a system simply for naming things that exist in the world already, prior to being named.

Enter, the dragon. If language is a system for naming preexistent things, how come we all know what a dragon is? The problem here would be that we acquire knowledge of dragons in ways that don't differ, in a pure and unconditional sense, from those in which we acquire knowledge of people from other cultures. We know dragons as we know others, but of course we also know that others, unlike dragons, exist prior to our knowing them and in ways that are independent of their representations or of the fact we can know them only *through* their representations. But this latter argument—that there is no outside the text, as it were, since we cannot interface with what we call reality except in ways that are always mediated and contextualized—doesn't mean we can't develop a sophisticated knowledge of others, especially of others who are like ourselves. Cultural understandings, then, as we might refer to them, as distinct from scientific understandings, may be informal, but they are not therefore imprecise or unreliable for appearing to be based on a nudge and a wink, a point that is well illustrated by the shared community knowledge of the characters in *Desperate Housewives*, for example, and that TV series' nineteenth-century precursor, the Elizabeth Gaskell novel, *Cranford* (1851-53; reprinted in 1987 by Marshall Cavendish, New York), itself appearing originally in serial form. Among the women of the fictional provincial town that lends its name to Gaskell's novel it would seem impossible to keep a secret, so intimately are they acquainted with the goings on in one another's lives:

The Cranfordians had that kindly *esprit de corps* which made them overlook all deficiencies in success when some among

them tried to conceal their poverty. When Mrs Forrester, for instance, gave a party in her baby-house of a dwelling, and the little maiden disturbed the ladies on the sofa by a request that she might get the tea-tray out from underneath, everyone took this novel proceeding as the most natural thing in the world, and talked on about household forms and ceremonies as if we all believed that our hostess had a regular servants' hall, second table, with housekeeper and steward, instead of the one little charity-school maiden, whose short ruddy arms could never have been strong enough to carry the tray upstairs, if she had not been assisted in private by her mistress, who now sat in state, pretending not to know what cakes were sent up, though she knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew that we knew, she had been busy all the morning making tea-bread and sponge-cakes. (2)

This little deception that is shared by the women of Cranford exemplifies a commonly held distinction between humans and animals: namely, that animals are incapable of lying. But surely the threshold separating human from animal deception, where the latter is owed to anthropomorphic decree, is rendered less than indivisible when we consider the fox who leaves a false trail to mislead her would-be captor, or the family dog who feigns to look away from the ball he drops at his owner's feet, only to snatch it back again as soon as the owner goes to reach for it. We may join in wondering with Derrida, then, by what right are certain characteristics considered to be human denied to animals? Again, this does not lead to supposing that humans and animals are the same:

It is less a matter of wondering whether one has the right to refuse the animal such and such a power (speech, reason, experience of death, mourning, culture, institution, politics, technique, clothing, lying, feigned faint, effacement of the trace ... etc.—the list is necessarily indefinite, and the most powerful philosophical tradition in which we live has refused *all of that* to the 'animal'). It is more a matter of wondering whether what one calls man has the right, for his own part, to attribute in all rigor to man, to attribute to himself, then, what he refuses to the animal, and whether he ever has a concept of it that is *pure, rigorous, indivisible, as such* (Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. I, trans. Geoffrey Bennington, University of Chicago Press, 2009: 130).

Keeping in mind the non-indivisibility of this distinction by which culture would not be essentially proper to man

alone, for which 'distinction' is not quite the right word since in this case it gestures to an order of difference that doesn't correspond to the structure, or the governing logic, of the periodic table of the elements, we might wonder what to make of cultural differences per se. When I said earlier it would be ridiculous to argue that Brisbane Jack Russells are *culturally* different from Perth Jack Russells, no doubt the absurdity I was invoking should be ascribed to the notion of *canine* culture. Yet the example of the Brazilian capuchins shows that animals are capable of developing practices that, among humans, we do not hesitate to call cultural practices, so that (we may extrapolate) it's far from uncontested to say that animals are incapable of deceit or effacement. But note that I'm not the author of the *absurdity* of the Jack Russell proposition, nor of its *immediacy*: if the notion of canine culture is instantly outlandish, it must offend something we regard as fundamental to reason. It's absurd because it doesn't make sense. The assumption here, though, would be that sense, or good sense, conforms to principles unaffected by the force of culture, history, context or mediation; principles we associate with *scientific* thinking, or reason. Reason, then, or sense, refers to a way of thinking (understood as thought in general) that in its broadest usage is ineluctably scientific, or scientific; and so the notion of canine culture, like the term 'square triangle,' could make sense only as art or poetry, but otherwise would be dismissed as stupid or insane. Again, the problem we're encountering pushes at the limits of the threshold.

To posit, on the one hand, a cultural difference between Jack Russell Terriers in Brisbane and Perth would seem a nonsense, while on the other it would be uncontroversial to suppose that between the people of Brisbane and Perth there *are* cultural differences. Why the reluctance or the refusal to acknowledge the authority of this 'are'? Let's consider at least two possible responses to this question.

1. Deconstruction (if there is such a thing) refuses the authority of every 'is.' In this way deconstruction (if there is such a thing as deconstruction so that we might refer to it as we do to 'language' or the 'animal') would be the continuation of the Enlightenment by other means, as John D. Caputo is fond of saying; to attempt to deconstruct something, then, would not be to oppose

it outright, and especially not in order to deprive it of all possible force (see John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* [New York: Fordham University Press, 1997] 59-60). So it's not a question of the absolute denial of something *like* cultural differences having an explanatory role to play in distinguishing Perth from Brisbane, and vice versa, but rather of refusing the purity and the rigour of those differences, which must be supposed to go all the way down to each city's 'own' cultural identity or essence. To what level of atomic specificity, however, should we descend in order to reach the foundations of that identity?

The idea of the city as an expression of its citizens goes back at least to Plato's *Republic*, where the city of Athens both reflects an ideal human temperament and models such a temperament. Just as democratic city life is nurtured by orderly prohibitions, so, too, in the soul of man, must wanton desires be governed by reason and passion, lest 'the concupiscent soul, no longer confined to her own sphere, should attempt to enslave and rule those who are not her natural-born subjects, and overturn the whole life of man' (*Republic*, Bk IV, 442b-c). What Plato calls 'the acropolis of the soul' (Bk IV, 460b), then, mirrors the soul of the acropolis: city and citizen, or nation and citizen in today's terms, produce and reproduce one another. There would seem to be no way out of this circle by which culture is both the achievement of a people *and* the expression of a people's nature: culture is artificial (historical, and therefore deconstructible), on the one hand, and, on the other, *at the same time*, it is indivisibly natural.

But if *The Republic* provides a warrant for associating culture with city life, and city life with culture, it doesn't seem to bring us any closer to knowing what should count as forms of cultural specificity. For example: I once attended a conference at the University of the Aegean, in Rhodes city, the capital of the small Greek island of Rhodes, where smoking was banned on campus for the two or three days of the conference proceedings. So far as I could tell, this was the only place on Rhodes you weren't allowed to smoke, since everyone, it seemed, at least just about everyone over the age of twelve, appeared to be a smoker, and no one looked inhibited whenever, or wherever, they felt like lighting up. Waiters



# NT INVASION



STOP THE LAND GRAB  
STOP THE GENOCIDE  
STOP DEATHS IN CUSTODY

RESTORE THE RACIAL DISCRIMINATION ACT  
CLOSE THE GAP BY GIVING LAND RIGHTS

ALWAYS WAS ALWAYS WILL BE ABORIGINAL LAND

took orders and served food while smoking; shop assistants smoked as they handed you change; people smoked out on the streets, in parks, and inside cars, bars, delis and cafes. The only enclosed space in which I *didn't* see people smoking was inside elevators, and no doubt that wasn't because they suddenly became health conscious when they stepped into a lift; they just didn't want to risk dying in a fire trap!

It seems to me the only reason not to regard smoking as a cultural practice of Rhodes would be if some cultural practices were considered more cultural than others. This couldn't be a distinction that was pure and unconditional, though, or surely the Australian federal government wouldn't have intervened on behalf of the victims of child sexual abuse only in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory; surely it would have intervened by now also on behalf of the victims of child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy and, as a symbol of the state's refusal to condone the anti-modern culture of the church, sent in the military to take over St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney and surround it with troops. The point, then, is that there's almost nothing that couldn't count as a cultural practice, on the basis of which we couldn't point to a cultural difference... which is one reason for hesitating to accept that cultural differences just 'are.'

2. Another reason: unless we challenge the authority of *indivisible* culture, we'll never see how often culture is used to disguise or excuse differences that have political and economic causes. To call smoking on Rhodes a cultural practice is to forget that the people of Rhodes are less prosperous than the people of Sydney, where, even in this comparatively affluent demographic, affluent by world standards, smoking rates are higher, as they are everywhere, the lower down you go on the socio-economic scale. To call smoking a cultural practice, then, is to forget or to ignore that, broadly speaking, smoking is class-based: the less 'cultural' power you have, within your 'own' culture or in the world at large, the more likely you are to be a smoker.

Forgive me for succumbing to temptation at this point by not being able to resist drawing a corollary: if you're a Catholic priest, you're more likely to be a pedophile than if you're not. The systemic sexual abuse of children by the church should not be downgraded

to an institutional 'pathology,' the result of a few bad eggs unable to cope with the pressures of celibacy, but seen as an effect or an outcome of the *culture* of that institution, if, as we are sometimes only too quick to conclude, the serial mistreatment of women by one or more players at a football club is to be understood as a product of that club's 'culture.'

Briefly: the problem with culture would seem to be that either it's too general and too easily generalisable, and is therefore always outside the text, or too specific, too overdetermined, and therefore prone to an essentialism that is always outside the text. Either culture is supplementary (historical and therefore perfectible), or else there's a primary sense of culture as something that comes before history but is always outside of history, an originary culture that would be more primordial, more historical, than history as such. From what we've been calling a scientific point of view, these doubled and divided usages would be equivalent to supposing that sodium can sometimes means nitrogen, and sometimes potassium: a structure of exchange or of interchangeability, then, that would in fact be the opposite of a structure; an asystematic system that would always be in a state of breaking bad. But this is not to say that culture's many meanings are the result of sloppy, nonscientific thinking, as though it must always come down to choosing between the indivisibly scientific or the indivisibly nonscientific: sense or nonsense. The human, or the animal-machine.

I don't propose to know how to think beyond this impasse, outside the limits of this logocentrism, which, to the extent that its roots are 'European,' is therefore cultural through and through. We might ask, then, whether the philosophy of culture, which is what we might be said to have been doing here, could ever be separable from the culture of philosophy, for which there has always been something like an elemental difference between the human and the animal, and thus, if only informally, something like a periodic table of living things. But if periodicity turned out to be no less cultural than philosophical, surely we would have to start again.

JILL JONES

## 4 poems

### ONE DAY WE'LL FLY

She says, you're not working  
this as hard as you  
could, the air is filled  
with beserkers  
They really want you to  
ride and they are  
chock with technique  
It doesn't matter, the jemmy  
the waist strap  
where the length goes  
There's no pardon in sight  
if you can't suck the pink  
Nothing depends on depends  
anymore, she says, so I fill  
with trolls and by definition  
we do that too, my hand  
has wandered long on  
her cheek and busted  
Why everything is tired  
mooching outside our window  
It's all peep, peep, peeps, mine  
or hers, escapists  
with sunny frames and  
alternatives, a sundry kind of  
stench that resembles refuseniks  
who still have arsenals  
in the hidden valley  
They'd take us there, on our  
knees, we'd be that special carpet  
smeared with roles  
They won't walk on us  
lightly and one day we'll fly  
without burning if there is  
no sun who would dare  
It would be holy modal  
And anyway I tell her  
so what to be human

is to be mistaken  
Wouldn't gravel be more  
becoming moving from the  
railroad to the beachfront  
and into the giants of the  
ocean and as we pour with  
a little shimmy, as the  
houses and cities shake  
in their own construction  
we will be make and making  
flare and floozy, tinder  
and tender ground  
Here's to the dispersals  
the awkward blendings  
How we percuss all this  
will tell us what we have  
made all along the trails  
if we are more joyous, are we  
more, I ask, than  
the sod we are  
And if we win past  
the valley kingdoms  
and ride as if we had  
rails and rigs  
and the giant spray in  
the morning that was  
the world

## EVEN THE

Even the night is rising  
Even pebbles ain't pebbles  
Despite the self-sown  
Despite the acutes  
Even the vacuum is singing  
Even the anticlockwise twist  
Despite heaven  
Despite the petrol hordes

Because my mouth wants to  
Because my eyes  
Without gauges  
Without closed plages  
Because of the missing step  
Because you touched  
Without framed narrative  
Without a casket

Although the dry patch  
Although it amounted  
How I alighted  
How it leant  
Although it was closed  
Although you folded  
How was it  
How isn't a question

Even in the event  
Despite the rapture around your toes  
Because nothing is the same  
Without as good as within  
Although there have been other riotous notes before  
this  
How the crash  
Although it was lovelier  
Without even holding on  
Because we are  
Despite the rupture within the leaves  
Even this

## ABOUT NEED

To need.  
By this stage the sentence  
Has run out of its power.  
To connect.  
Objects.  
Do not have to be  
Heavy.  
Arms lead to  
Hands. Sometimes  
In the morning  
It is all wet.  
The trucks have stopped  
Stopping.  
Clarity is not  
Something  
I need. But here it is.  
A rainy Saturday.  
All this sound.  
Hoots, signals, tweets.  
As if water breathes.  
Need

## 'GIANT STEPS'

As a gig of stepchildren  
As a gift of stereos  
As a grin of stitches  
As a girlfriend of stimulus  
As a glass of storms  
As a goodness of strains  
As a gown of streets  
As a grace of strings  
As a graphic of strokes  
As a guarantee of strangers  
As a guitar of summits  
As a gust of suffixes

As a guild, a guest, a guffaw  
A gumdrop, a guise, as surges

JAVANT BIARUJIA

# environment of language

NOTES ON *DIVINE COMEDY: JOURNEYS THROUGH A REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY*

BY JOHN KINSELLA

*His environmental love, his city  
mouth, / hushed up like a tree*  
(Gig Ryan)

*criticism always deals with the  
texts of pleasure, never the texts  
of bliss* (Roland Barthes)

*Upon true and malignant criticism  
there is an excellent fable by the  
Spaniard Iriarte. The viper says to  
the leech, "Why do people invite  
your bite, and flee from mine?"  
"Because," says the leech,  
"people receive health from my  
bite and poison from yours."  
(George Borrow)*

## AETIOLOGY

Destruction of the environment is normal behavior for humans. The impulse to destroy is coupled with the urge to create — from making sand castles on the beach, only to destroy them by stomping on them once they are finished (such destruction is not confined to children), to the fire-bombing of Dresden or the dropping of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. What is built up is sooner or later knocked down. Sometimes constructions are demolished in the name of progress.

Often, war. Always, nature is exploited in the name of economic development. Human activity is often a euphemism for changing the environment irrevocably, whether it be deforestation or exploitation of the landscape. Once humans — any humans — enter the landscape, it changes, rarely for the better. But some have a lighter tread than others. This is the story of conquest, hegemony, exploration, invasion, colonisation, capitalism (the evolution of colonialism and feudalism), settlement. Let us call it collective guilt — or no guilt whatsoever: dig and be damned! No commitment to place, just fly in, fly out; no thought for future generations when unimaginable profits are to be had today — in the name of economic progress, where economies of scale are king. Sense or spirit (Durrell or the Ballardong Nyungar people) of place has no place in such a world. John Kinsella tries to reconcile his personal and public impact on the environment through writing, and so he has (re)written the *Divine Comedy*, with his *Journeys Through a Regional Geography*.<sup>1</sup>

Cars are everywhere; cars (Model T Fords) were at the forefront of exploring the final frontiers, the deserts, the hinterlands, the heartland. Kinsella mentions them

<sup>1</sup> John Kinsella, *Divine Comedy: Journeys Through a Regional Geography* [Inf, "Inferno"; Par, "Paradiso"; Pur, "Purgatorio"; nos. refer to pages] (New York & London: Norton, 2008).

explicitly if not synecdochically (synecologically) dozens of times: “[D]riving back to Mount Walwalinj”; Kinsella himself “dangl[ing] like an oil crisis before large cars” (*Pur*, 38) — “mosquitoes emerging // where there’s no oil upon waters” (*Pur*, 71). Progress is “the trailer, loaded with dross from the shed, / return[ing] to the dump what came from the dump” (*Pur*, 94). “A few days ago the roadside clearing laws / altered: bulldozers and graders came to clear / back foliage” (*Pur*, 36). “[H]ood ornaments on cars / leaping to life, exotic wagon wheels / with hoops bashed out by wheelwrights” (*Pur*, 19). “Driving in at night beneath chaotic starlight / the car jerks on gravel and jam trees / mushroom with weighted shadows” (*Pur*, 59). *Questa è quasi legata*: “Dream Canto: Wreck (Negligent / late repenters / died by violence”. The expression “died by violence” sounds so American; Dr Phil speaks tautologically of “death by suicide” on his chat show (“I am stuck in tautology” [*Pur*, 144]). *Today we’re gonna talk about loneliness*: “In a street of light industry and brothels, / Scandinavian car in a shady driveway, / his sadness for sad families accumulates” (*Pur*, 131). (Following a road accident in which Robert Hughes was seriously injured in 1999, and the court case that ensued, he wrote that “West [*sic*] Australian justice is to justice what West Australian culture is to culture”. “In the headlights logic is no guide” [*Pur*, 136]. Is Kinsella writing of his fellow countryman-turned-American in lines such as “Such a small car, small white car [...] // crumpled like a still-shot of tardive / dyskinesia, impacted and tossed back / by living metal of white gum [...] // tossed aside, as tinfoil crunched [...] / tossed into landfill or maybe recycled, [...] // struggling for life on life-support” [*Pur*, 26; ellipses added]? Horrific no matter who was involved in the crash — this is no J. G. Ballard fantasy.) “I leave the car, headlights off, to glower under stars, // here music that’s heaven, hell, and purgatory / rolled into one: what other way is there here / where all ‘kingdoms’ are one and none” (*Pur*, 72–3)?

Normally, I am not drawn to poetry that has landscape — especially Australian landscape — as its principal theme. For me, landscape cannot exist without a psychological rendition of it. In other words, the poetry I am drawn to must be a poetry of people (but not the poetry *about* people!), feelings, perceptions;

it is a striving toward understanding. Preoccupation with landscape can easily deteriorate to submitting to mere visual description; it only works for me when the poet interprets landscape into human action, drama, catharsis. (Although I love wilderness, despite having seen very little of it, green issues have not roused me out of my complacency like *Divine Comedy* has. While I deplore the depletion of natural resources and the rape of old-growth forests, my focus is not on trees but human fallibility: greed, short-sightedness, rigidity, power. You could say I do not see the wood for the trees.)

The block—Purgatorio—free of poisons and weapons...? House, cars, arc-welder, cement mixer, electricity, star pickets

and barbed wire, the treated house-pad  
[*Pur*, 36; ellipses in original].

## ANACOLUTHON

The “Canto of the Counteracting Möbius Strip”, a “flat strip of asphalt.[...] These are ‘snake days’ when slender / lengths of dugite flounder on roads, // suddenly sea snakes with oar tails / [...] their malingering / a temptation to mothers with toddlers” (*Inf*, 316; ellipses added). “You write serpents / with brouhaha yearly / ‘cause snake stories // recycle, ‘cause / snakes are a danger / to your children” (*Inf*, 353). Vehicles in the landscape: “akubra-hatted / and blue-singleted ute drivers, or cars jam-packed / with families” (*ibid.*), “Canto of C(r)ash and Burn (17)”, “[D]iffused paradox of high beam, / they are bright angels driving off a snake” (*Pur*, 71), “the farmers in their tractors” (*Pur*, 90) and “the hierarchy / of trucks and cars” (*Pur*, 141). What is myth to one is ever-present danger to another: “[A]ncient shield, tracks of the rainbow / serpent, modern coinages” (*Pur*, 149); “a legless lizard works past us, switching its double-time / action, its sibilant stutter that has Tracy [Ryan] lifting Timmy [Kinsella] // faster than identification: the snake that’s not a snake” (*Pur*, 54; also see “Canto of the Invisible Terraces: faux slice of empyrean?”).

*Ouroboros*, this en-snaked valley,  
this thoroughfare of foxes,  
night we look unto ourselves  
staring back [*Inf*, 363].

The familiar gravel driveway is where we've seen  
snakes cross regularly through summer [*Pur*, 154].

Finally, rough (rustic) justice — if not domestic bliss:  
“The tyre guy tells Mum, as he fits / a new set of radials  
to her Commodore, // that he has a photo, taken locally,  
/ of a python wrapped around the head / and neck of  
the fox that hunted it down” (*Pur*, 79).

### ANAMNESIS

Kinsella reads like a diary, where everything is cyclical and repetition abounds. (The python and fox story is told at least twice.) “I thought how Tracy is the variable in my / doubting the drives of men. She drives here too” (*Pur*, 90). I like the intimacy of family that emerges from the poems — Katherine, Timothy (throughout the text; this book is for him), Tracy, Kinsella's great-great-grandfather, Edward Pat; “me, / Tim and Tracy. Katherine is at school” (*Pur*, 153). But the idyllic is tinged with the beginning and the apocalyptic end of the Bible: “I want to tell [Tracy] how I heard each farmer / call himself ‘Adam’, defoliating then implanting / in fructifying alterity, cascading rams” (*ibid.*). “As I read [*Divine Comedy* — this is from my diary], memories from my own past come back to me, such as the pelicans I saw from my father's boat when we fished on Western Port Bay or, more recently, pelicans flying by A—'s apartment on the Gold Coast. Joyous. But Kinsella's pelicans are doomed. There is much doom in his book, nearly all of it attributable to man's greed, so-called progress, capitalism” (“land prices / are on the rise and the State looks to secure / its own gas needs” [*Pur*, 9]). Who am I? Kinsella asks in the “Canto of the Inner Lining (Excommunication)”: “urban flurries, restaurants and numbered streets, / fed on produce, fed on product, fed on raw / materials like iron ore and knowledge: // entrepôts, sly grog depots, ice in insulin disposal units: free trade of secrets” (*Pur*, 13). The dark side. Allusions to diabetes, rife in Aboriginal communities and alcoholism, rife in white and black

communities alike, but always highlighted in the black and downplayed in the white; the broad (Western) Australian accent (“raw” / “ore”) as naïve and callous as Australians' disregard for and lack of interest in “materials like iron ore and knowledge”; the laid-back Australian attitude “up there, Earthly Paradise—eyed-off / by visitors as revolving restaurant-ville” (*Pur*, 16); and white settlers' ambition to recreate sociopolitical structures from their past (“The abattoir man / is president of Council. // He is farmer, businessman. / The town has exercised its single-celled / free-will. The majority has chosen” [*Pur*, 79]).

### ANOESIS

Post-*Divine Comedy*: An all-white jury acquitted the first police officer (white, of course) charged with a death in custody — and there have been many shameful Aboriginal deaths in custody — on the eve of then prime minister Howard's paramilitary and paternalistic intervention into remote Aboriginal communities, to stop what conservatives see as the slide into complete degradation and wanton abuse. (Officially — or euphemistically — it was called an Emergency Response, following the release of the *Little Children are Sacred* report by Rex Wild, a barrister, and Pat Anderson, an Alyawerre woman, necessitating the suspension of Australia's anti-discrimination act to make its carrot-and-stick approach workable. Wild and Paterson, who were vocal in their opposition to the Intervention and deplored how their report was twisted for political ends, identified abuse of alcohol and other substances, sexual assault and family violence in their report, all symptoms of dispossession.) Human rights is an almost alien concept in this country with no Bill of Rights. Conservatives, however, do not see that degradation of Aborigines and their way of life is the result of dispossession and hopelessness. It is always law and order with them — they cite the lack of police in remote Aboriginal communities. But police are not there because they are not seen as part of the mainstream; rather, “communities” are reserved for blacks and abandoned by whites, who, if they need to be there to mine, are more often than not flown directly in and out again in shifts. Five years on, nothing much has changed, except that young Aborigines, especially girls,

are committing suicide at such an alarming rate that some powerful interests in the country, including the editorials of major newspapers though not the current left-wing minority government, have called for the emergency response to be ended. It does not matter how much money is allocated to the “problem”, until white colonial dispossession has been fully acknowledged by Australians and amends made, the “problem” will not go away. Former prime minister — contemporaneous with *Divine Comedy* — Kevin Rudd made a start when he made his apology to Aborigines over the forced removal of Aboriginal children and placement of them in white, Christian households, in what has become known as the stolen generations, but the hopelessness caused by dispossession has to end for any improvement to begin in our indigenous communities. How ironic that it is multinational mining companies who threaten Australians’ backyards, not Aborigines, as Howard argued in his response to the Mabo decision of the High Court regarding Native Title.

Meanwhile, Archbishop George Pell has threatened politicians who defy the Church on stem cell research with the withdrawal of communion — priests straight out of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Then there is the so-called Arab Spring. Colonel Gaddafi is dead. Syria is on the brink of civil war; Iraq is a failed state, with hundreds of thousands of deaths; Afghanistan will never be subdued by Christian soldiers and Pakistan is a resentful ally. China surpasses America as the world’s greatest polluter. All the while, the icecaps keep melting and politicians keep stalling for time....

## APHASIA

Window as signifier of the West; window as construct opposing nature. The window, with its concomitant glass in the Western but not Aboriginal world (“insects bashed / the curtained glass of the window” [*Pur*, 115]), metonymical of post-Egyptian civilisation, is dualistic in nature — not only dividing the interior from the exterior (opening a window, to let in the fresh air, is illusionistic of breaking down the division), but also (a) a favorite place to stand — on the inside — to muse, (b) a favored place to stand — on the inside or outside — to spy; behind curtains if on the inside or perhaps behind a

bush if on the outside. The cliché that the eyes are the windows of the soul. Looking out of windows to observe nature (“I rest these schisms with Tracy / at my side and rare birds / on unopened brick packs // just outside our window” [*Inf*, 407; from the last poem in the book]). A place to display one’s wares, if commercial, or trinkets, if private. Closed doors; closed windows, hermetically sealed. A witness to horror (“so notoriously de-windowed, / defenestrated, blood spilled in bowls” [*Inf*, 308]). The near homonyms of “window”: “windrow” and “winnow” (“what hasn’t been re-winnowed and dispersed. Fanning / out, gleaming elsewhere in the stubble, galahs / and corellas protract windrows” [*Inf*, 309]). Epiphanies at the window. Haring muses that religion is a human response to existence, found in all cultures. Behind *Divine Comedy* lies the shadow of religion: “I love Christ’s light / I love Mohammed’s light / I love the light of Siddhartha // I love the light of David and Abraham / I love the light of Zoroastra / I love the light of the Wagyl” (*Par*, 210). The lighted window. Sometimes that shadow, when Kinsella is quoting local speech, is gently sarcastic (if not cynical or captious — although see “Canto Progressive”):

‘Blessed are they, for they love me, and want me  
in the paddocks—discerning gusts of beckoning,  
to torch the quivering chemicals and taste buds.’

So said someone I overheard in a lapse, the kind  
that makes for accidents or speeding fines, bifurcated  
animals leaping before the bonnet: ‘God, preserve us.’

[*Pur*, 90]

## CATACHRESIS

A list of the imagery or symbolism common to both versions of *Divine Comedy*: Babel, bird, birth, car (or chariot), church, cloud, crucifixion, Dis, dragon, eagle, earth, Easter, family, father, fire, fish, Ganymede, Geryon, giant, God, grave, gryphon, hell, Jerusalem, journey, Jupiter, lark, light, lion, love, Lucifer, Medusa, Mercury, mirror, moon, mortality, mother, mountain, oneirocriticism, paradise, prostitution, purgatory, phallus, (re)birth, river, rose, sea, sky, snake, theft, thorn, tower, tree, Venus, Virgil and womb. To which Kinsella first adds purely (Western) Australian colors: Aerogard,



Akubra, banksia, barbed wire, black swan, bungarra, caltrop, cockatoo, corella, death in custody, desert, drought, dugite (*The Dukite Snake: A Western Australian bushman's story*), echidna, emex australis, endangered species, eucalyptus, galah, gambuzi, goanna, gwarder, jam tree, jarrah, kangaroo, karri, kookaburra, marri, melaleuca, Moo-ne-jee-tang, mungart, Native Title, Paterson's curse, possum, potoroo, rainbow honey-eater and serpent, redback spider, sheoak, tawny frogmouth, wandoo, wattle, willy wagtail and York gum. Then, a dash of pop-culture postmodernist eclecticism: Bono, Byron, Dalí, Derrida, "Desperate Housewives", Dick and Dora, Queen Elizabeth, *Finnegans Wake*, fractals, Dr Frankenstein, Goldilocks, Guantánamo Bay, Jack Frost, *Jeepers Creepers*, mobile phones, Mustang Sally, Neruda, *Piss Christ*, Mr and Mrs Potato Head, renga, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Patti Smith, *Spellbound*, superphosphate, *Toy Story* and *The Wizard of Oz*. As a non-Christian, my catachresis is "fallen like catechesis / uttered out of habit" (*Pur*, 109).

The first thing to remark is the irony of the (non-native) title. Then we may marvel at the audacity of the poet borrowing the title of one of literature's most famous works, although no one could deny that Kinsella the person has not been to hell and back. Comedy means something different in French and Italian, although they say whatever begins in comedy ends in despair. We suspect from that that the subtitle "is no joke", and that this is anything but a parochial road trip with nothing numinous or divine about it. At first sight, *Divine Comedy* reads like Les A. Murray meets John Ashbery (with a word or two from Jacques Derrida), but the overwhelming sentiment of the book is the kind of indictment of Australian society akin to Henry Miller's indictment of America (a kind of dystopic "un-Air-Conditioned Nightmare"). Or so I thought upon first reading — once I reread Miller's *Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, however, I realised I was off the mark. I nowhere found in Kinsella's laconism (does that quintessentially Australian trait of larrikinism derive etymologically more from Laconia than lark?) anything but a sprawling, almost ungovernable, literary journey, with perhaps just enough autobiographical elements to titillate. Clive James wrote that titles ought to come easily to poets, though his evidence shows that either

they have not put the effort into coming up with an original title of their own or rarely have they succeeded. James then gives the anecdote of an "unrecognized but determined" Sydney Push novelist (you can see he is straining at the bit to avoid the word "pushy") who plunders Milton for a phrase to serve as the title to her book and who after a year's reading came up with *Look Homeward, Angel*, not knowing it was already taken. (That did not stop Chris Edwards; nor should it have.) Kinsella belongs here to the type that "plunders" (a word I hesitate to use in reference to Kinsella) past works to come up with a new rendition for his book of poems in three parts. If he had chosen *In Search of Lost Time*, it would have seemed ironic or parodic in the postmodernist sense, but he has chosen the title of a seven-hundred-year-old classic of not only Italian but world literature.

#### DIEGESIS

Wheat as signifier of the West. West(ern) Australia. Colonialism. Kinsella as the Colonial Boy. (I'm sure he has been referred to more than once as a "Colonial" in Cambridge, if not elsewhere in England.) A form of exile for Kinsella like Dante's, but also a homecoming. A time and place to reflect, but politics in poetry not emanating from within a tradition of political poetry is a weakness. Australian — and to a lesser extent, British — politics creeps into the poems where Kinsella's outrage sometimes gets the better of him. His mentioning of politicians from a former right-wing government, such as Tony Abbott ("Canto of the Health Minister's—Mr Abbott's—New Paternalism") and Alexander Downer ("The foreign minister says the ripostes of nay-sayers / are emotive, their tut-tutting a throwback / to darker ages" [*Pur*, 122]; not to mention the unnamed references to that chilling, bloodless former Minister for Immigration and Attorney-General, Philip Ruddock) entrenches his poems in an Australian period, now ossified, of right-wing political history known as the Howard Years, while the figures themselves have moved on to become, at the time of writing, Opposition Leader (Abbott) or an adviser to the Cyprian "problem" (Downer). I admit politicians and bureaucrats have been a target of poets and writers for millennia now, and I share Kinsella's passion and outrage, especially over the corruption of

the privatised government wheat supplier, now known simply as AWB, which the United Nations named as the largest culprit at the centre of the Oil-for-Food scandal. (It undermined a humanitarian response to the invasion of — and militaristic dealings of the so-called Coalition of the Willing with — Iraq in the wake of the atrocities of September 11, 2001: “Faith is an order for new plant and equipment, // despite the Wheat Board’s under-the-counter / payments to the regime they’d fight / with the teeth of their own children” [*Pur*, 116]). Other poets, like Sam Wagan Watson, are similarly outraged. But the common refrain of the common is, “That’s how you do business in the East”, often with the Orientalist word “baksheesh” thrown in for good measure, just to show the speaker knows what he — it is *always* a man — is talking about, in the old tradition of denigrating (note how “black” is embedded in this word) the East in general and Islam in particular. So it is with rueful irony that the biggest corruptor in the East turns out to be a Western company, once a venerable Australian government instrumentality but now a run-of-the-mill — yes: pun intended! — privatised piece of bastardry. Capitalism trumps any sense of shame one might feel.

America’s engine is unstoppable capitalism, even with the Twin Towers gone; just witness since the appearance of *Divine Comedy* the resurgence of the Tea Party, denial of climate change (itself a euphemism for global warming), the smears against Barack Obama and the vicious “debate” over whether a mosque should be built near Ground Zero as examples of that *engin*. Monsanto, paradigmatic agent of American capitalism, has come to Kinsella’s country, convincing the state government there of the need to plant genetically modified wheat. Kinsella foresaw this:

*The Book of Kings* with its disputed  
perfect three is the science of belief  
and sell, the kind that switches

off the desire to procreate  
in fruitfly while enjoying Brahms  
and Britpop, excited

in the first days of Blairismo,  
cycling to Grantchester to muse  
by Byron’s pool and the Monsanto

research facility, hail Jack,  
hail beanstalk, hail river  
of science run through history

as moratoriums on Frankenfood  
crops, high-yield euphemisms,  
lift like two cultures

leaving everything else out,  
the circles rolled out flat  
never adding up to □,

perfect science  
of supermarket,  
advertising [*Inf*, 296].

From my 1985 diary: “I suppose rivers seem remarkable to people who live in a country without any major rivers. Never had I seen rivers like grooves in the earth. Never had I seen rivers with such meanderings. I have never grown used to wide lazy rivers full of islets, sandbanks, mudflats, shoals.”

## DOUBLETS

The southern hemisphere is different from the northern. (A friend living in Paris likes to say how everything is upside-down and back-to-front here in the Antipodes.) The dictionary — from the northern hemisphere — says it is a crane-fly, a kind of fly with very long legs. In Australia, however, a daddy-long-legs is a kind of spider with a tiny body and very long, spindly legs. When I try to rationalise that what we may have taken as a spider must be, in fact, a fly, I see that the four pairs of legs on the daddy-long-legs sitting on my wall add up to an arachnid, not a dipteran. There is the rub: not only the disproportionate number of legs but a complete absence of wings. *Diptera* are two-winged insects: *di-*, twice, *pteron*, wing. The dictionary goes round in circles on the matter — a semantic quicksand: the crane-fly’s — or daddy-long-legs’ — genus comes from the Latin *tippula*, water-spider. Back to arachnids. Fly is so common a term “as to be virtually equivalent to insect” (*Chambers*).

Circularity (crop circles). Repetition (reap iteration!). Metre (Demeter). Wheat as commodity, wheat as money, wheat as coin, wheat as specie, wheat as counterfeit:

So, within limits of fire, conflagrated  
on edge to listen to wind that stirs  
and feeds, they keep their shops

and plan an Australia without homosexuals,  
regarding their sun-blocked bodies  
as licence to tread where those relishing

punishment are truly condemned: the purgated  
become the tormented in their ministries.  
So, with tolerance, they spray unseasonal

weeds with poison, as if it was winter  
but with heat. And encircling the district  
they meet each other with assurances

of their goodness, paying homage  
to the sun for tans that don't turn cancerous.  
Faith is an order for new plant and equipment [*Pur*, 116].

With capitalism, it is not just grain that becomes a commodity, but all things, living, dead (once alive) and inanimate, things to be got — exploited if need be — and traded. Marx is as present — if not more so — than Dante here. The gain-grain nexus: “gain comfort in war-time profiteering, / war they made against an enemy whom they financed / with kickbacks, a market for their golden grain” (*Pur*, 102 — the AWB scandal again).

“Rain and heat—liquid fire” (*Pur*, 117); “weather dangerously hot” (*Par*, 168); “In the early afternoon heat / skin burns closer to the river” (*Par*, 180); “a slight / touch of heat stroke / that feeds an *ars poetica*” (*Par*, 182); “equal proportions of heat // and light” (*Par*, 184); “You'll see rail lines parallel, / straighter than Roman roads... / elongating and warping with heat” (*Par*, 189; ellipses in original); “It's not much past summer: // the heat is in the air, / the ground. Chain reactions. / If you ask at the Shire // office: it's so hot today, / why are they burning off? / Permits... permits... will / come the reply” (*Par*, 199; ellipses in original).

#### ENTELECHY

“Keeping my head down in the wheat zone, / refuting the decorative arts, / embroiled in cubist syntax” (*Par*, 223). Anaïs Nin defined a poet as someone who could teach the reader to levitate. “To double rebus a niche

of inland, a cleft / of granary beneath bastion or clumps of fossil, / look up, swivel on neck joint to memorise” (*Pur*, 146). The Syrian poet Adonis, living in exile in Paris, regards poetry as the beginning and ending of everything, without beginning or end. Inexplicable... electri-city. The inexorable spread of suburbia: “the growing suburbs blocking out the little light left” (*Pur*, 125; also, see “Canto of Gluttony”). As Ted Joans says, the city is as full of mirages as the desert — seventy per cent of Australia is officially classified as desert, but with around ninety per cent of the country's population living in (coastal) cities: The “Big Smoke” (*Pur*, 14). The city, as Adonis says of poetry, is the promise of a beginning. Substitutions. Perth is Florence, Kinsella tells us in “Preface to *Inferno*” (268), whereas Perth is Perth in *Lost Paradise* — from the perspective of exile, however, Adonis says that poetry is not a “paradise lost” (*pace* Milton). Ryan, fellow poet and partner, is Beatrice (“She doubles for me // I double for her” [*Inf*, 278]; “My guide, // Tracy” [*Inf*, 387]). “I had friends // who camped out there [Heirisson Island] / in the early '90s and risked / a beating, who were beaten” (*Inf*, 329). Activism in the late twentieth century, however, is merely an appeal to mass culture (“A rose and a pepper / bloom so perfectly: the rose / out of *Desperate Housewives*” [*Par*, 210]). For Sontag, the primary mission of a writer — poet — is not just to write, but to write well and not let activism, a different activity, take precedence over literature. Like Spicer, however, I am wary — if not cynical — in my life if not poetry. It is cynicism that is missing overall in Kinsella; instead he possesses an enviable universalism; his critique is mordant. I do not believe, however, that English-language poetry can effect — or has ever effected — political change in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand or, probably most importantly, along with Ireland, South Africa, notwithstanding all the writers' unions, Amnesty or PEN International, *etc.* (Although the French, for example, had the short-lived Students–Writers Action Committee with the uprising of May, 1968, not to mention the various action groups during the Second World War in many a language, country and region, with members trying to negate Maurice Blanchot's definition of literature as that which does not bestow

any rights.) What English-language poets' manifesto can be called anything but a joke? (Compagnon avers — a favorite word of Charles Bernstein, one of the leading exponents of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry — the first *Surrealist Manifesto* as the third of modernity's paradoxes, the mania for theory, written in French and published in 1924. "I'll play the killer" [Patti Smith].) Ginsberg's *Howl*, a rallying call if not a manifesto, may be an exception, though only the very educated or poetry-minded could quote from it. Likewise, Dante is a name known by many but read by few. Perhaps the poetry activism of the Vietnam War years in Berkeley approximates to what I mean, but no "*Poètes sans frontières*" exist today, and no poetry activism of the Iraq War era is equal to that of the Vietnam War (although internationalism, cosmopolitanism and citizenry of the world *à la* very distant-in-the-past Caresse Crosby are another matter). Mind you, I make no such claim for languages other than English — South Africa is — and Ireland was, before English displaced Gaelic — bilingual at least and more likely multilingual, and so it is on the linguistic margins of "native" languages in the New World where English is enriched. Nor do I spend any time on popular music (Kinsella makes merry with pop references throughout his *Divine Comedy*), where the pop star has supplanted the poet and some poets have become pop stars (Patti Smith, Nick Cave, a novelist, Lou Reed, *etc.* (How many who have listened to Patti Smith's lyrics, for example, have read her poetry, *Witt, Babel, Ha Ha Houdini, etc.*?) Except that we have heard her poetry first as songs.) I am thus sympathetic and my political conviction is real, and I can see how movements introduce new words and ideas into the koine, but because I am a loner I cannot join, I cannot sign, I cannot protest in the same manner as the majority, and so I cannot share in Kinsella's poeticisation of (Australian) politics. What I do react against, however, along with Kinsella, is the bourgeois codification of our koine through capitalism. From a letter to Jeanne Conn that I wrote in 1994: "Yesterday, 138 trees, some of them elms more than a hundred years old, plus a magnificent eucalypt more than 200 years old, were chopped down to make way for the [Australian Grand Prix] race track [in Melbourne's Albert Park], on government orders. Protesters consist

of great-grandmothers who are nevertheless being arrested and carted off in divvy vans (black Marias)."

### ENTROPY

"This inner wheatbelt day reeks / of sea imagery" (*Inf*, 316) in drought, in parched country. Journeys, as Sontag has said, are often a form of remembering, retracing. The traditional tour brought one closer to nature, she pointed out, but here (she was talking about Sebald) we have come closer to devastation, the devastation of colonisation, farming ("Anglo-Celtic wheat fields" [*Pur*, 68]) and the dispossession needed to bring this about. Kinsella is a part of this, he cannot deny it; rather, he expiates it. "Events, you force to order: unbalanced wheel / that wears heavily on inmost orbit of tyre, / a tremor in steerage, constant correcting // to keep it going towards the mountain" (*Pur*, 71). "As the mountain / cracks and buckles with the day's heat" (*Pur*, 57). (W)heat ("The town's wheat silo is being emptied: / [...] by train wagon load, despite // uncertainty about markets. Scandal" [*Pur*, 79; ellipses added]). Global warming hot-spots ("methane-/making trees" [*Pur*, 91]); "Trace minute heat signatures // in a realm of heat" (*Pur*, 71 — *Trace/Tracy*); "The sun baulks / at shadecloth spreading around the toddler's / play area. Summer ends and it gets hotter" (*Pur*, 75); "mucous slick of slugs / moving out of the heat of the day, repellent" (*Pur*, 92); "inevitable drought, / humidity, sweat we don't drink" (*Pur*, 93); "being stranded when rains don't come: / driving their seed out fast" [*Par*, 187]); "tearing flyscreens, the maximum / minimum thermometer stuck at extremes" (*Pur*, 100–101); "heat of an emptied inland" (*Pur*, 109); "telepathic from the Great Southern / to the Avon, drinking heat and sap" (*Pur*, 112).

### EPANALEPSIS

The "screaming meemies" (*Inf*, 381) — *cf.*, Nietzsche's *schreiben/Schrei*, echoic in French and other languages much more than in English. (See easy rhyme, below.)

### EPISTEMOLOGY

Robert Frost believed America was a gift from God to European settlers, to the so-called founders, to the pioneers and frontier men and women who moved

out west (“a granite cairn as panopticon” [Par, 240]). Kinsella, in many ways an inheritor of Frost, as Harold Bloom has suggested, on another continent of the New World, is as much a prisoner of his times as Frost was of his. Poetry and prison are inextricably linked in many countries. But not in modern-day Australia (but yes, in colonial days of “convict-built prisons” [Pur, 14]). Today, prison is a fact of life in the Outback, especially if you are black (“Aborigines / make up half the prison population / of Western Australia” [Inf, 387]), where Aborigines comprise just three per cent of the state’s population. Prison conflates one into the other — that laconicism again: brief “attention spans of warders, of prisoners, / labile geographies where places aren’t there” (Pur, 101); the “town’s bank manager, / jailed for embezzlement” (Pur, 126); “near the women’s prison // where the Nyungars camped / until recently driven out” (Inf, 292). In his “Preface to Purgatorio”, Kinsella writes that “Anthony Esolen has noted that one should think of Purgatory as an infirmary rather than a prison, as a soul (already saved) works its way to earthly paradise and then to Paradise proper—a process of restoration (as he notes). ‘My’ purgatory doesn’t allow such attainment of grace. For me, the world is a purgatory, with hell close at hand” (4):

The benzene completeness is the reality of phantasm  
as history fables calendars and agendas:  
Auerbach considers ‘the fate of Achilles

is Achillean’; cycle of imprisonment  
inevitable in a whirlpool of traitors. Logic  
of suicide bombers, eternally trapped in vengeance [Inf,  
392].

## EXEGESIS

*They*: “It’s the world’s axis: it’s a natural action... / they claim, wondering where lightning will strike, / what will burn down as the flood rises” (Pur, 39; ellipses in original). God is dead in the world of global warming. “The Diviner is dead, // and sheep aren’t in the crop” (Pur, 75), “feeling climate / change like a hammer” (Inf, 389), on, for example, “[a]n aberrant day, as is increasingly / common here” (Inf, 316). The heretics (climate-change deniers) have “swept across the suburbs / they want to keep down” (Inf, 308),

with the same kind of secrecy the gas and mineral companies are using here. The worry, of course, is contamination of the Great Artesian Basin, that inland sea the original colonisers suspected was there in the centre of the Australian continent, not realising that it was underground. In some places, drilling has caused gas and the poisonous chemicals they use to leak in to the aquifer, to the extent that one could set alight tap water. Contaminate that and one contaminates a whole continent. (*Australia as dump*. Some politicians — of both stripes — want the world’s nuclear waste dumped in Australia’s “stable” geological desert, but again that is not taking into account the Great Artesian Basin.)

## HERMENEUTICS

It is useless preaching from the pulpit or lecturing to the masses, for we are all prisoners here in “death’s-head / prison, the Roundhouse, a lectern” (Inf, 308). Private prisons — the evil of the privatisation of essential services and public utilities in the name of globalisation and a mythical (mugs’) level-playing-field. (It is merely a salve that “Australia does not execute prisoners” [Inf, 365] any more.)

## LITOTES

Gunpowder may have been invented in the East, but it was perfected in the West as a killing agent.

## METALEPSIS

From my diary (1987): “The area has the indelible mark of violence and tragedy. A negative area. Europe is full of these holes in the social fabric, but Australia seemingly has so few tears in its fabric. (The Aboriginal people, however, will know what I mean by this defilement — or negative ‘holes’ — for our continent is full of them, invisible to whites but not so to blacks.)”

## NOMENCLATURE

“The huge John Deere four-wheel drive / 8770 tractor, 350 horse power // with duals front and back / towing a Flexi Coil 5000 Air Seeder” (Pur, 98). The dendriform carving out of one’s name. Julia DeVille’s road-kill jewellery and Marion Drew’s road-kill photography (“animals leaping before the bonnet” [Pur, 90]). “Paradiso” is gentler than “Purgatorio”, which is to

be expected, but it is still not the paradise one might have hoped for. Paradise shows through as childhood memories or as living-in-the-moment experiences with Tracy and the children. *Divine Comedy* is filled with “Faun and Flora on the lea love that little old joq” (Joyce), much of them unknown to me (dugite and gwarder, which unfolded their meaning in the text, jam tree, bungarra, sittella, wandoo, gambuzi, marri, etc.), as well as the more poetically familiar wasps, bees and biblical locusts, not to mention the pantheon of Australian birds. (Kinsella does refer to *Finnegans Wake*, whose namesake appears in the book. Australia was deliberately mispronounced by Jack Spicer, for instance, a place he thought of as the mythical place of Oz — *The Wizard of Oz* — rather than a real country with real poets. This transatlanticism is reflected in Bloom’s suggestion that “Australia is (and will be) [a] permanently undiscovered country for me” [Introduction to Kinsella’s *Peripheral Light*, p. xvi]. What Bloom does not mention but Kinsella is doing, in addition to giving Bloom and others like him a free ride, is, *restoring the balance*.)

## OBJECTIVE

Henri Gaudier-Brzeska called it a punishment to translate Dante’s entire *Divine Comedy* (he managed just the first few cantos before he gave up), juxtaposing punishment with suffering. (He was very good at the latter while a poor student of the former; meanwhile, the object of his affections and translations found *Commedia* an indigestible bore.) As Gaudier-Brzeska tenderly noted, Dante borrowed as much as he invented, especially from the Troubadours and the Aeneid, anachronistically following Pound’s dictum to make it new.

## REIFICATION

How to define our existence? We look for “social responsibility” in our art — easier in poetry than graffiti, for example. Art is something akin to a second skin; it connects us to our environment, even the secular art of the West that has been liberated from religion, unlike the (Aboriginal) art of so-called primitive cultures. (How I hate the word “primitive”, — and “dialect” — loosely used by generalists to denote technologically less advanced cultures.

“[D]riving back to Mount Walwalinj” (*Pur*, 111) — “[i]n the overlap of fates, the young warrior Walwalinj” (*Pur*, 125.) Humans are the only animals to create art and recognise beauty, we insist (yet see the lyre-bird perform his dance), and so we are different from other animals — and it goes without saying from insects, rocks, trees, water, etc. Animal. Vegetable. Mineral. Haring thought such division was a mistake, while he acknowledged we humans have the fate — that is, the future — of the planet in our hands (it is we who destroy or create on a global or miniature scale), we control the impetus of change, if not change itself. Dubuffet also spoke about this.

From a 1995 letter to Charles Bernstein:

The economic equation, touched on very early, permeates [“Poetics of the Americas”; later, *My Way: Speeches & poems*], I feel. The economics of the past, which are now recognised as shameful, that spawned the various nation languages of English (including standard Australian English, based not on the economics of slavery, but the economics of convict transportation, and Aboriginal English, based on the economics of genocide), are a counterpart to the economics of today, unrecognised by many as just as shameful and dangerous as those of the past. Varieties of English were defined in terms of what it isn’t, just as products are often advertised as *not* being like their competitors’ (the inference — or, in many cases, the plain statement — was that one variety, the one advertised or touted, was superior to all the others).

Drawn in with economics is multiculturalism (an adjunct of immigration in this country). Without going into the pros and cons of multiculturalism, I felt you hit the nail right on the head when you spoke of the limitations of multicultural literature as a medium of identification, rather than as a medium of exploration. As [Jorge Santiago] Perednik speaks of the “law of poetic coincidence”, I might speak of the “law of minority concatenation”: just as a minority is tyrannised and marginalised by the minority in which it is enclosed (at the fat end of the wedge, this minority is identified as the majority), so it will tyrannise and marginalise the minority which it encloses.

One such minority is gender. While on the surface it would seem that gender is composed of two equal parts, masculine and feminine, in practice we have, at least in the Western and Eastern worlds, a bias in favor of the masculinist view. The first modernism you described is tied to the world of the fathers, of men, of heterosexual men. The second modernism

is pretergenitive; it belongs to those for whom the masculinist view is absolute (it does not “compute”).

Idiolecticism may be an American invention arising from its melting-pot of nationalities and races (though I don't believe in the notion of race), just as jazz is recognised as an American innovation. When [Kamau] Braithwaite refers to his Jamaican English as a nation language, he is using the jargon of creolisation linguists wary of the pejorative connotations bound up with the word “dialect”. Dialect is dirty, whereas nation language is not ancient enough as a compound to be besmirched with bigoted significations. This area is very muddy, for the “mastery of form” of which you spoke is ineluctably linked with a society in which there were masters and slaves, masters and convicts; that the language of the dominant group subsumes that of the dominated is the hallmark of colonialism. The supremacist reader hears “naïve” for “native” and sees nation language on the page as mere transcription, not inventiveness. The idiolectic writer has been made to feel guilty about his or her dialect.

Standardisation is the surface of internationality. In Australia, the English of whites varies very little over the whole continent: there is nothing like the dialects found in Britain or even the accent variations found in the US. The most significant variant is found in black Australians' English, *denigrated* over the years as “bad English”. (Interestingly, the Indonesian word for “standard” when referring to language is *baku*, which, when referring to birds, means “full-fledged”. The word is Javanese [patriarchal] in origin, often confused nowadays with Minangkabau [matriarchal] *beku*, hard, compact, solid — the word Indonesians use for “ice”. Remember Indonesian is an example of creolisation in a tropical region made up of many cultures — both concepts of “standard” and “ice” must surely have been highly abstract ones before the advent of frigorification and normalisation to the region.) It may be that universality is bogus, as you say.

I wondered if [Claude] McKay employed misrepresentation as [John] Ashbery does in his poetry. You pointed out his masterful association of kin with skin through elision; I wondered whether his word “ebery” in “ebery single man” was not a paronomastic form of “ebony”, the white writers' bromide for “black”. (“Whe' Fe Do?” reminded me of the Japanese term *méfāzu*, it can't be helped — uttered, so I have been told, by Japanese upon hearing of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Do we believe glosses written for us?)

## SEMEIOLOGY

“Canto of Abandoned Hope: Derrida and Dante (3)”. The seed is wheat (“paddocks treeless and machinery

/ left standing where the last grains / of a late harvest were gathered” [*Pur*, 34]). The seed is the father. The connection — literary or otherwise — between seed and semen is universally known. In the 1960s, my father was a seed merchant. All year round various seed-for-sowing had to be mixed and bagged for my father's blend famous across this part of the world. Farmers from far and wide had heard of my father's expertise on the matter of seed. The mixer was one of my father's makeshift devices: an old cement mixer caked inside with its original ingredients. As a child of thirteen or so, I was co-opted on long evenings with my younger sister to scoop the seed mixture into the machine. There, we let the seeds become all mixed up together before turning the still-churning barrel over into a chute, the end of which was fitted with a hessian bag (“natural justice / stitched into old hessian grain sacks” [*Pur*, 87]). The chute, regulated with a thin tin sluice-gate, was also put together by my father, from old pine floorboards. Once full, my father then sealed the sack with a twist, forming ears at both ends, and then sewed it up with a long curved snakelike needle (“the seed // buried in his father's side” [*Inf*, 377]). The bulging bags were then dragged into place in rows and stacks. For summer, we mixed to a formula consisting of sorghum and millet; for winter, Wimmera grass, white clover and rye-grass (“seed pods split with the barometer” [*Pur*, 140]). The seeds were pretty to look at and touch: tiny and cool, silken, yellow seeds of white clover, the slightly larger black, hard and cool seeds of the ordinary variety, or the hard red balls of millet seed — or even bland fawn-colored oats, which were edible to a bored child (“For him, sleep is building, rebuilding” [*Pur*, 140]). All this industry was carried out in an atmosphere of choking, irritating, suffocating dust (“eyes smarting, / nose running, a dazed sense of belonging” [*Pur*, 54]). We were (“green to the point of seeding the dead” [*Pur*, 42], yet in our exhaustion was the satisfaction that one day these seeds would be planted by anonymous farmers and grow into pasture. Kinsella brought it all back to me, though not since Philippe Jaccotet's *Seedtime* have I read such a dissertation on the difference between human and vegetal, with Derrida's *différance* (*Pur*, 12) if not dissemination (“I tend the places spirits emerge, land, pirouette / like smoke and *différance*” [*Pur*, 47]).

From my diary post-Chernobyl (1986): “Already Australian economists are saying the contaminated wheat crop in the Soviet Union is good news for wheat farmers here.”

## SPECTRUM

The seduction of *easy rhyme* or similar rhetoric, incantatory, a kind of mirror akin to the nursery rhyme (“‘canny’ // is a nursery rhyme in home / etymologies; this doubling / familiar, mirrored in my glasses” [Pur, 18]). As when Gandhi says in *Water* that he used to think God was truth, but now he knows that truth is God. (In this case in the English subtitles at least, for I could not tell if this reversible equational statement in Deepa Mehta’s film existed in Hindi, and if it did, if it possessed the same seductive power.) Similarly, with psychiatrist Irvin D. Yalom and his unsatisfactory aural linkage of “bad”, “mad”, “sad” and “glad”, such complex emotional states, which may even be argued in court in so serious a case as murder. (Of course, the above works only in English — *mauvais, fou, triste, heureux?*; *nakal, gila, sedih, gembira?* — which is where the aural — or “sound” — argument falls down. All translators know this — “glad”, for instance, could be translated by *heureux, content, joyeux, etc.*, in French and *senang, senang hati* or *gembira* in Indonesian.) However, Crowley believed that every nursery rhyme — he examined quite a few — even nonsense rhymes, possessed a certain magic, that is, truth, which could be accessed by those who knew how (“hail Jack, / hail beanstalk” [Inf, 296]).

Easy rhyme belongs to the domain of shock jocks (this term is emblematic of easy rhyme; see my essay “A + B = Essence”). It is home to much propaganda and sloganeering, platitudinous and clichéd (“the West is the best” — Nico or The Doors, not John West). Psychiatrists and advertising people know how to seduce — as do writers (Baudrillard quoted “from the cradle to the grave” and “from the womb to the tomb” bromides to the puerility of “from the sperm to the worm” and “from erection to resurrection” in his *Fragments*). Epilators, like all capitalists for ever in search of expanding their market, appeal to men by promoting a blokey “back, crack and sack” wax. Kinsella avoids the easy rhyme while recognising its power over

us: “Ghosts fuck with my head / like clichés” (Pur, 20); “Record-breaking is a cliché” (Pur, 153); “The terror / in these [barbed-wire] hooks” // being clichés here (Inf, 322), etc. (Though Kinsella comes close to easy rhyme with the assonant “to warble is a cliché. // To admire Johannes Kepler, passé” [Par, 235], and he is not above the odd cliché himself with “the mother of invention” [Pur, 41], “looking gift horses in the mouth” [Pur, 42], being “between a rock / and a hard place” [Pur, 58], “spreading like [the] plague” [Pur, 128], not “see[ing] the wood for the trees” [Par, 251] and “‘the show must go on’ ” [Inf, 379].)

Akin to rhyme is the prayer, an incantation.

## SYNTAX

Sontag believed that poets can see further than novelists because they are not blinded by the sci(l)ence of storytelling (see Cantos 16, 25 & 33, in “Purgatorio”). Poets were sentient of the doubleness of existence, thinking two things at once, pondering the duality of nature (“doppelganger of the genderless whore” [Pur, 155]; “double jeopardy: you / can’t be charged // for the same self-death again. / Junkies find the undead / and the living dead” [Inf, 345–6; emphasis in original: confer double letters as weeds (“double gees” [Pur, 52 & 128])).

## SYNTERESIS

Kinsella recognises the lie of capitalism, the absurdity of never-ending growth. In nature, something grows, matures, then dies. That is the nature and truth of growth; it is not unceasingly exponential, as economists would have us believe (Adam Smith’s quantitative economic growth gone mad). And growing not far from the tree of capitalism, like a parasitic weed, is exploitation, from the nineteenth-century Dickensian mill-owners and filthy factory owners to today’s factory farms, sweatshops and unconscionable “industries” or “trade”, such as the live export of cattle and sheep or of weapons. *Divine Comedy* was published just as the global financial crisis was getting under way, just before the latest moment of crisis, so there is no mention of the collapse of Lehman Brothers, “golden parachutes” or bailing out with public money banks “too big to fail”; otherwise, such politico-economic notions and names



would have percolated through Kinsella's "regional geography", as do local and international socio-political ones (Gunns ["horror // company", *Par*, 197; a shift in "regional geography" to Tasmania's forests], Monsanto, Dow Chemicals, the Environmental Protection Agency [whom "they have / hoodwinked", *Inf*, 388], Virginia Citizens Defense League, etc.). And no doubt Australia's Carbon Emissions Trading Scheme, which took so long to get off the ground because of retrograde conservative politics, would have rated a mention.

## TAXONOMY

For Dante — as for most Christians — the snake (serpent) was phallic, but what European readers may fail to realise is, the snake is part of everyday life in the Australian landscape — its symbolism, "exoticness", being the "tempter of Eve" and thus Christian forebodement, are lost, for almost everyone has seen a snake here, if not confronted one or even despatched one. The snake is commonplace in the Bush, which is as it should be, surely — "Snake flows out of her head" (*Par*, 215 — paradise!), even when we curse its presence: "bloody river snake, / forget it's there // most of the year" (*Inf*, 384). Or "a spider in its burrow, lances and injects / paralysis, deposits eggs in its body" (*Par*, 215; see also "Canto of the frogs and Snakes (Furies and Medusa, 9)"). For Kinsella, however, Christianity matters, even in this desolation, the place of wondrous monasteries like New Norcia, "trodden down before time" (*Inf*, 275):

I catch Saint Michael most nights: moon  
or no moon, cloud or clear sky.  
He stands like a prima donna

over the entrance of hell, just up the hill, [...]

His armour  
is so ridiculously shiny, so golden,  
like the wheat crop in all its glory [...]

Until Michael appeared, each year warm weather  
brought the brown snake  
out of the lichen and webbed snare: [...]

So, so hungry—  
for blood and bone, burn of chemical fertiliser.  
Saint Michael is guided by satellites [*Inf*, 275].

## TELEOLOGY

Lost Paradise, *pace* Adonis, if not Nooteboom. *Paradise Lost*. Accompanying "paradise" since civilisation became aware of itself is the ghostly, echoic, shadowy, haunting, unformed, anxiety-producing "lost", for behind all civilisation is anxiety and fear; the driver of culture is anxiety. "Tell me who haunts you and I will tell you who you are," challenged Breton in 1928, when the world was on the verge of spiralling down into economic and social madness, to culminate in a global war. Once we have started the count, first, second, is it not only logical to anticipate the third, the fourth and so on? The anxiety of our age is a third world war, which may already be taking place in the guise of an upsurge in terrorism, but with the post-Hiroshima angel of death: "intensity of mortality, / to account for fireworks" (*Inf*, 404).

## TROPES

The Bosch trees with their ears, listening. The insects that are arachnids on one continent and Diptera on another ("The daddy / long-legs is loud on its web", *Par*, 166). Dance is paradise, nearly all paradise ("[St Michael] stands like a prima donna // over the entrance of hell", *Par*, 274), with just an edge of danger ("like the child who danced and vanished / under the mirror of the Cam", *Inf*, 390; northern hemisphere this time). The dancers, in the flickering dark of the camp-site or in the blazing sun or in the community hall, look as though they are hallucinating: they turn into snakes or trees or birds or insects ("the bachelors' and spinsters' / ball—it's seasonal. / Parthenogenesis. Zoology", *Par*, 175). They twist and turn to the music ("The compunction of angels / to turn the spheres", *Par*, 175). On all fours, they become animals, mysterious, unknown (unnamed). They sing and dance. Even the despoilers ("disco balls", *Par*, 237). Since ancient times, humans have speculated on the language of birds; in fact, only recently, some scientists have postulated that human speech originated *mimetically* from birdsong.

Where the syllables of the trumpet  
fall like angels on the hot dance floor,  
and those jittering boards

claw at the ceiling, a blue  
swing across the smoky solo,  
we love like screaming meemies,

we love where words scatter  
among sounds of pleasure  
rebound among flames

and dance a heebie-jeebie  
dance a heebie-jeebie jee jee  
he he be be bu du d d dance [*Inf*, 381].

### CODA

This work is calqued on Dante, which deserves deep analysis. Kinsella's "Prefaces" are invaluable (they say it all); however, what I offer here are merely notes, designed less to elucidate Kinsella's poetry than to "indulge" in the pleasure of *some* the text. I have just scratched the surface; Kinsella's dramatis personae, for example, range from Bartolome Bermejo to Maria Callas, Luis Buñuel to Guy Debord, Rilke to Rodin, Ensign Dale to Bob Geldof, Manes to Allen Mandelbaum, The Kinks to Stelarc, Thomas the Tank Engine to Tosca, *etc.* He mentions the Theatre of Cruelty, supermarkets, Paterson's curse (surely no one but an Australian knows what this is), the White Australia Policy (ditto, but one could guess), sheep, lightning, fire, endangered species, blood, black, blue, birds and the rest. Words like "rhizomic", "erasure" and "*différance*" are a nod to a Derridanist postmodernism I did not explore. Nor did I explore — but are worthy of greater discussion — topics that include war (Vietnam; I skimmed over the War in Iraq), jazz, multiculturalism, massacres, drugs, railways — a pet subject of Sebald's, too, for what they represent — England, America, *etc.*, *etc.* I can understand his referring to the Forbes Rich List, but why *Finnegans Wake* — to be fair, Kinsella does explain in the poem his reasons — and not Gina Rinehart, Australia's richest person and daughter of one of our early mining magnates, a Western Australian? I wanted to write more on seed (Crowley's tantric associations) and insects (Zukofsky's Dantean praying

mantis: "Does the praying mantis on brickwork stalk a wasp's nest" [*Par*, 238]?), for example, but I did not in the inordinate time I had (Kinsella has since published a new collection of poems), so it will be left to others to explore these themes — and many others. In my diary late 2008, when I first conceived of writing about Kinsella's *Divine Comedy*, I wrote: "Slow reading. Still resisting the temptation to take notes. I want to take my time. I want to approach it by a kind of "uncovering", the covering of which Arensberg called cryptography. Funnily enough, I don't feel the need to study the source, Dante, too closely in translation — or to make stabs at the original. (This may be a betrayal of my laziness.) The question of translation doesn't arise as such in Kinsella's *Divine Comedy*, yet I want to treat of it, and so, of course, I shall in my own undisciplined way." But I did not.

*Abandon all hope ye who enter here* — Kenyon —  
Cañon (Canyon) — Canon — Canaan....

# LOUIS ARMAND & JOHN KINSELLA

## **monument**

[*excerpt*]

22.

Murder was the gameplan on the gantry and even higher than the mainframe, or suicide as a designer downplay: or could it be a proxy's rebuttal or accidental death? The construction site wobbled with gossip and a chicken's breastbone hot-pressed to a welder's chest turned out to be his own rose-quartz armour-plating: a company motto, like concrete shoes or lunch pales turned congestion-red on impact so far far below: monuments are sweat and blood. Yet she crouched below hoping for titbits of their masculine accumulations, those tantalizingly rich embrocations that spilt from labouring brows, a working-class thesis, a lyrical onanist's loving speculation, a thoroughly footnoted re-investment of capital spun with a watchful, eked out for all to see on widescreen entertainment factory home theatre via the left eye. Meanwhile, the right is chewing fat, a take-away with salmonella and listeria at its most monotonous take-them-all-down tech-drawing set-square fine-inked tattooing: the re-fleshed body's display-case, its groundplans like intelligence tests we apply our failed symmetry to with grammatical fancy pants and big claims to posterity's reproductions.

23.

Rabble-branded, sub-prols on the gun carriage – by turns stuffing the outré carcass, blue-rinsed, thatch-headed. The crime tantamount to the punishment. The State's funeral, punctilious – tempestuous relays sully the mop spit. What's integral? Austerity's ostentations and rigmaroles. The blanc mange nevertheless, taken at face value. Let the dead tax the dead. Ni gauche. Ni droit. Ni dieu, Mr Moneybags. Forking a stolid country gent where it counts for history. Coal not Dole. Big Ben tolls mutely the hour no man knoweth, nor woman neither. Tolls and then again, tolls, making a premium of it. All misty tear-gas eyed, testament to free speechifying, as a thousand moons rise over the barriers, ululating – every bum loves a fascist in apron strings. Stirring the endemic soul-search in the rehearsal room, zapped, scintillating and bland, world-wide on noodle-cam: Oh how she was glam!

24.

Suffragette took the statue space and liberated against all spaghetti incidents, in the wail and tremolo of riff trauma, beaten within an inch of daylight that late show confirmed thoroughbred status on the stables of Polyclitus and Phidius advi vide tace the aesthetic copy rumour, to mimic, to enforce indigenous tertiary education along imperial-democratic statelines. Witch hunts are numinous in the hall of justice, and the grand tribunal or counting house trick of counting up sins is pure athleticism. Grinch or Scrooge or any other manifestation of the lousy spirited snorkelling their apologies and contritions in the face of redemption-loss, poetasters already feeling the clouds under their sandalled souls, ready to supply, demand, extract what's necessary to make a heavenly patsy patsy patsy name call on the track, gangster form suggesting they're in it for the bucks? What else would you expect? Where else would you go?

25.

Athletic Autogynephilia Sends Rose Bowl Wild! Heavy on the curve-ball, winding up for a forearm slog. Virgil Thompson gone for a homer. Rescind everything! You call that music? The Fat Lady's proscription tablets going under the hammer for a song. Sweet Americana! Her schoolgirl higgledy-piggledy letters. No return address. History all lapsus memoriae when it suits you, fastidious over the continental breakfast, rigid as lampoons and festoons, butter wouldn't melt. Cultivating toe fungus as a matter of prestige. The fetish artist in you regulating all viable points of contact! Today I wandered lonely as a power station. Cooling stacks reminding you of missed bedtime opportunities, a mother's feet set in concrete. Oh you loved her, when she died. Plinth and marble bustier. Tempting just to lie down with the weight of her between your girlish thighs, massive or massif, the blossoming Rose, the vertiginous escarpment, contesting a birthright. Listening for the sound of wolves at night.

26.

Puking up a bloke's self-image, he strove to show his abs and implement the filibuster. That's what party politics does for statues, their lush blazoned bulges backstage Undine under waves of psychedelic drugs, the usual hoodwink, a hundred salivating youths and their masters foisting on their models, dishing out proxy servers to bully their mothers and sisters and lovers and anyone without a prick; you grope yourself creatively to make cool stone weep, a sense of privilege and saga extracted from northerly hoard stories, a matter of chisel on oak, the temporary monument of the boat, wielding an offhand nailgun and arc-welding boho truisms to tolerate rightwing poets who quip and belch and drink themselves blind to better see whatever darkness has to offer the way you wield rattle or a squeezey toy, whistling for better, demanding to be heard. A storm in a toilet is only a shock to the poor sod who has to clean up the gravity well. That prurient monument that monument to purity binds their art. Paradise is a lost cause they shout from the barricades, their leader ensuring he's got the gas mask and a map clearly showing the way out. Collateral architecture falling away.

27.

Pity was trending. Measured by similes, gone for a Snowden. Fake-out and counterfake. Gender: extradite. You win the prize: Man from Hong Kong, can screw with the best of 'em. Call it Conspiracy. Saint Prosthesis. The Holy Dead crew. Jesus was a hack. The Temple? Scaffold a neck job. They got loan sharks in heaven, too, baby. Shit rises. Huey Newton's Law. Count the money. Lights out on the factory floor: which 'means' are the means of production? Screwed into the light. Got the right idea, only in the wrong side of yr brain. Luck won't last, try to save it, goes mouldy, fucks the works, clogs the back entry. Read the instructions first, you idiot: Positronic or beatbox scenarios counteract packing case... so life like, so pliant, unwrap, inflate, plug-and-play, strictly no refunds.

28.

Aspirationist is a situationist with a twig in the eye  
 in the compendium of knowledge, in the shortfall's  
 vacuum tube. It is the new foyer in the old library.  
 Magic is the facade that shines over the old enclosure,  
 welt-spray of concrete with ripples that denotes,  
 keeps the O in the narrative, adds stories as exercises  
 in Onanism. Such is the prize-winning architect's self-respect.  
 We buck for what end results, we kick for what oppressive heels —  
 the system? Fine clothes on an old mannequin jolt the brain cells.  
 Two-for-one is no bargain when they're faulty, or when  
 pixelphobic decorators screen test our epoxy rhythms.  
 The Nation's scrapes are welded to us from birth: pity  
 John Holmes' avatar who comes a croppa on election days,  
 avec Bible Belt to seaside oracles who worship rising horizons.

29.

Plethora or plexus; sunk in the quick of a budding grove, the reviled world's  
 good health, light in its gizzard — how the vivid glint of  
 sanctity warms the backsides of the rich, rent boys telethoning in the  
 Orange Bowl, not bowel, making prolepsis a running joke.  
 Becoming, if not that strange fruit at the foot of the garden, at least  
 stand-offish — knowing full well the price one pays for  
 complicating arrangements. Deforming the picture of life, the dream  
 privy to the harbinger, the dog to the chimney's interlace. There are no  
 plastic arts. Only a jaded appetite for insubstantials. Moth moons.  
 Woodwork scrolls made pregnant with revelation. Monuments of air.  
 In a public fashion the nude pigmy in formalin is admired. "So dialectical!"  
 to quote the near and dear. "So anti-oedipal!" The Stetsons bull in  
 to relish the moment before loosing lassoes and tickling their triggers, all  
 contretemps and permeable, telling how no-siree art's not dead.

HARA MIKO

**memories : cloth of the earth :**  
**method : raining day : I**













STEPHANIE STRICKLAND  
**report: seawall  
& jetty calm**

meter- . . . . . made . . . . . screaming . . . . . *wab wab* . . . . . brass  
mutes . . . . . gag  
swallow . . . . . gel-cling flame

vet cemetery in the Wasatch . . . chestnuts . . . flags  
brick  
unutterable softness . . . low  
down . . . wall  
climb in . . . climb over . . . quiet

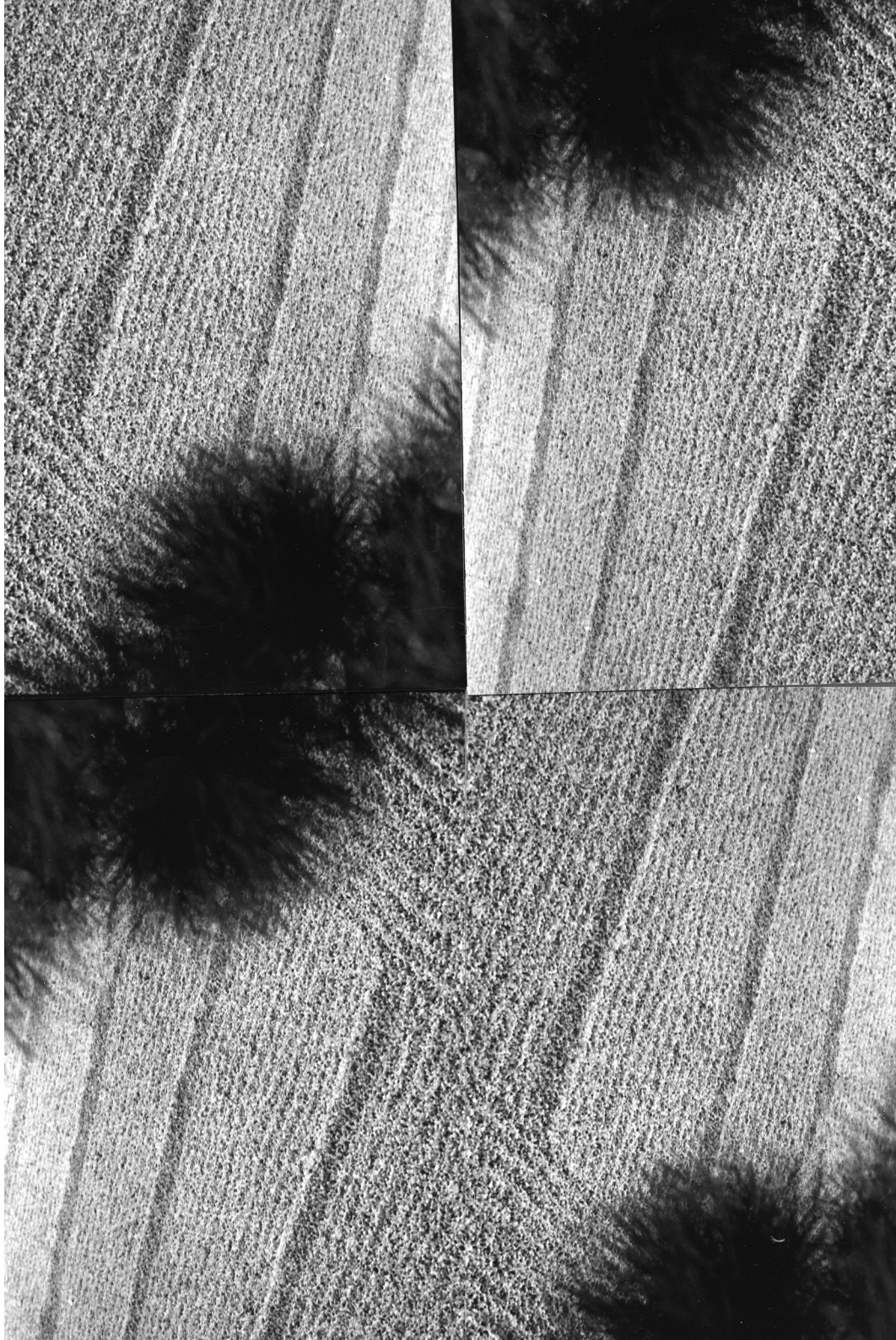
*split \ \ \ spilt / / / silt*  
*domino / /*  
*\ \ \ \ drama / / / /*

despierre . . . . . trousers afloat . . . . . floats  
in the moonlight . . . . . button black a shadow  
drowned and soaking  
white in the moonlight . . . . . haunt  
haint . . . . . zomboid . . . . . flow of clothes  
in the twofold . . . torn . . . fold . . . tangled . . . river-  
entangled  
axis . . . pier

PRUDENCE TRINCA

## taka & the art of zen

Taka awoke at first light. He knew what he had to do, his whole being was wired. It was the same task most days. In one of Kyoto's many Zen gardens, he raked the stones into elegant ripples of form. Form from formlessness, that's how it went. Before all the tourists arrived it was just him and the sea of stones. The trees surrounding the grey expanse were like old friends shadowing his canvas. It was like this most days, with each stroke of his rake, the stones were manipulated. Each tiny stone was in its place ready to be received later on by the gaze of many, an accumulation of soothing grey. Some days however, were different. The stones raked Taka. Slowly they would snake their way up his legs, stony ants, cold and determined. They eddied and swirled around his form, slightly scratching his skin until he was so weighed down by the sheer volume of them he would slowly crumble and fall into their swell. They washed over him until finally he lay as if dead, a human mound amidst the ripple of stones. He appeared as the contraptions where you press your hand into many pins to make an imprint of your hand. The stones formed a cold casket around him. It was a comfortable pressure and some air did still make its way in. He couldn't resist the stones, there was no point, they had their own single minded purpose on these days. It was only on the odd day this happened. It was as if some of the energy he imparted to them on the days in which he raked them was being returned to him. He always felt replenished when he finally arose, Lazarus, from the pile causing an ensuing disharmony as the stones fell away, randomly, a bit of chaos within a garden somewhere deep in Kyoto. The gardeners in their jika-tabi work boots padded past, nearly silent on their rubber soles. Their big toe separated from the remaining four toes in the boots made them entirely receptive to the surface of the earth. They paid no regard to the rising of Taka from the stones and the little bit of chaos. They knew what it was like to be in Taka's predicament. Sometimes the moss they tended so minutely grew a little too fast and far covering them or parts of them, they had a green skin for a time. The tourists never saw the human mound in the stones or the green skin of the gardeners. They came later dragging backpacks and heavy lenses. To them the garden was harmonious but not mysterious. First light was for Taka and the gardeners. This is when the garden expressed itself.





PRUDENCE TRINCA

# **patience & the art of living up to your virtue**

There was something about the kelp this morning. Washed up, it rested on the sand revealing a large unblinking eye. Patience pondered the sky and noted how it treated the eye with indifference. Waves continued to scatter debris and detritus, randomly along her path through the vast expanse of sand.

She leant over the mound of greasy kelp and snapped the eye, confining it to the four walls of a negative. None of this digital crap, it was too clinical for such a majestic creature. She felt comforted capturing the earthly alien, in the knowledge that its existence was finite, sooner or later it would return to watery oblivion.

It was unknowable, she thought, why seaweed resembling a human feature was so fascinating... The mystery of it.

Patience followed in someone else's footprints and continued up the beach. She passed three girls who sat on chairs in the water, smoking. Their hair was in unruly unkempt ponies. A collection of unkempt ponies who smoked on chairs in the water on an uncomfortably warm summer's morning. Empty on the sand sat a carton of orange juice. It had "happy" in large letters on the back. Happy manufactured juice. The water was grey glass, a salty mill pond. They chatted, smoked and drank happy juice... Patience snapped this scene also. It was like separate worlds existed simultaneously on this one beach. The kelp, an elegant visitor, the girls, unruly chattering messes. Each shared the sky this morning.

Later Patience would, living up to her name, carefully develop this film in a friend's darkroom. She compared the film to a vampire in her mind. You expose the unprocessed negatives to light and like vampires, a stake to the heart, they are gone, nothing more than ghosts of memories once solid. Just black negative remains and a sinking feeling in the chest. Not today, no, these images would survive and be relegated to a box of many such images ready for something not yet known. Patience made such archives for no conscious reason. She captured images out of intuition. Happy juice and the three girls would sit alongside the earthly alien for as long as she deemed appropriate. Mostly the images were forgotten and put to no use. They existed in the dark. A storehouse of memory.

Patience likened creativity to a process of fermentation. All fed by suffering and experience of the life cycle. During darker times her thoughts were like sand formations washed by waves, there one minute and then gone. Ungrasped ghosts of potential, unrealised.

Maybe that's why photography was so important? It added permanence and solidity to thought. Impressions not just embedded in the meat of the brain but on the stiffness of card.

Stiffness of card which made her feel less alone. She felt as if she would always be alone in some way, because of her thoughts.





LOU ROWAN

## the case of the case

for Quentin

### PRELUDE

This isn't getting easier. . . .

Each morning, before beginning work, I read online *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and sign scores of petitions to redress situations that break my heart. I am exhausted before I begin.

I write, I re-write: I get indignant and moralize; then I edit self-righteous passages. What are these thousands of words up against, over against news suffusing us with despair? Can the history of our time, can our personal histories provide us a home? I am still there for you, dear reader, even more so after all this work, but I do not know where we are.

Hurt, I keep writing. I refuse to stop trying, even if I know that good guys and bad guys belong to my youth, that my impulse to fix things will be frustrated.

My children grow restless when I talk about age. My daughter and I have agreed that I shall *a/ways* be middle-aged.

Writing this book, I have realized that there are no adults. I for one shall never have the settled personality, the patina of maturity that as a child and teen I imagined in people over 30.

But I promised you this book won't let you down. I trust that if I am rigorously honest in sharing my life

and its most dramatic moments with you, we shall both benefit.

I am realizing that what we *do* with our experience is as important as the lessons we extract from it. I have dedicated sections bearing appropriate lessons to each of my children.

The despair I felt in my teens and twenties was logical. But it was meaningless.

If I walk the Duwamish River or the Gowanus Canal, I can see a polluted hell, or an occasion for work, or even a glowing pearlescence in the oily gunk.

As a kid I loved Westerns. My rooting for good guys has long survived my meeting Hopalong Cassidy in the Pasadena Rose Parade: he was seedy and his horse was scarcely a pure white.

By inventing what I hope will become a popular form – the Eastern – I seek to identify villains along the Atlantic, and to find good guys worthy of claiming Natty Bumpo, Dorothy Day or A.J. Muste as their ancestors. When Muhammad Ali lost his first fight to Joe Frazier, my despair, exacerbated by a flat tire coming home from the closed-circuit coverage in Yonkers in freezing darkness, bare hands sticking to the tire iron, was magically relieved by the interview in which Ali called his loss trivial next to wars and poverty. That wars and poverty persist doesn't dim the magic.

The mystery-story, affording more refined distinctions of good from evil than the western, has comforted me

from my earliest recovery, when it slowed and absorbed the racing thoughts that would have kept me sleepless. Spencer and his black sidekick updated the Lone Ranger and Tonto. Many of my brothers and sisters in recovery experience the same comfort.

I knew Henry Chatfield-Taylor as Hank, and I knew he'd found his way around Long Island society – a vague concept to me – better than he'd found his way through his courses at Princeton. Which didn't matter to him because he had yachts and horses – until his drinking and snorting confined him to boats at anchor and straddling barstools. You never know how wealthy or prominent the person sitting next to you in a New York AA meeting might be.

Hank's near-drownings in the surf, in pools, in a marble spa, the threats by his parents to cut him off from the trust fund his grandparents had insouciantly provided, the exorcism of his beastly presence from clubs, his expulsion from bowling alleys and ping pong parlors on the Island and in Manhattan, the drying of the stream of women willing to indulge his indulgences – nothing stopped his careening career towards a final disaster until one morning he woke to the sound of his cleaning-lady singing spirituals as she mopped his puke and gathered his piss-and-shit-stained clothing. He realized instantly what, as he put it, "a total asshole he was," and he realized he was powerless to cease being an asshole.

Sobriety alleviated his heedlessness, but failed to cure his dilettantism. Drunk, he'd adored venues his friends found tacky, and he claimed to have initiated society's penchant for bowling. Sober, he decided to work, but chose jobs like barista, golf caddy, roasted-chestnut vendor, until in honor of men like Lew Archer, John Rebus, and Harry Hole he considered finer rôle models than his father, he started his own detective agency on West 26th Street. You never know what the rich will do next. The publisher of a major newspaper joined the District of Columbia police force.

Hank's attempts to drum up divorce work from his coevals, who, both female and male, enjoyed a continual process of turning their 40's in for 20's, brought him only obloquy. And so he decided to use the remainder of his lease pounding out detective stories on a large Royal typewriter, giving up the cigar he thought appropriate

after 15 minutes of wondering where is the pleasure if you don't inhale.

I think Hank has talent. I hope his last name will not hurt his popularity. This story – and I have Hank's word it's fiction – surmounts any distinction between literature and the mystery genre. Grateful for my editorial work on it – mostly deletions – he has been kind enough dedicate it to me. The story confuses and haunts me: I share it in hopes that my readers and reviewers will diminish the anxiety with which it fills me.

## THE CASE OF THE CASE

*for Lou Rowan*

I don't smoke but all my visitors seem to, and my office smells like shit. The papers littering my desk—I use them to protect the old wood from my heels—smell like ashes. Every time I open up the place I tell myself to do something about it; sometimes I get busy and forget—most of the time I'm waiting for work and too listless to clean. Any woman will tell you men are slobs. An ex accused me and all men of splattering the toilet and the floor when we piss, like animals. Difficult for them to appreciate that in addition to the stress of being an unsuccessful but insightful detective I suffer as a failed writer. And oh yes, my tattered heart of gold.

The placard on my desk says *No Smoking, Please*. Maybe if it said *I'll Shoot You if You Smoke* things would be cleaner.

My resentful musings were interrupted by the tall black woman who entering without knocking, fumbled in a purse that looked like half a saddlebag, found her Marlboros, and when her cheap lighter wouldn't fire up, banged it on my desk. She didn't say anything, so I decided to give her the hardboiled treatment, and went on studying *Page Six*. It was my dream to have a client mentioned there. It was my dream to have a client. But why base *anything* on dreams? Mine are so luridly silly. Last night I dreamed my stepmother was spinning naked in my bathtub until she went down the drain with the water. I don't have a stepmother.

The client exhaled as if she was blowing something away, or practicing the exhale part of Lamaze.

"My family wants me dead."

"Ok, so tell me about it."

"My mother hates my father because he's screwing

around. He's in construction. He's the token black the mafia uses to front city contracts for minorities. My sister Carmen hates her husband because he went into the same racket, but he's fucking it up, maybe because of his drug problem. They have two kids, and I babysit them. I have a son. He's two, and my mother takes care of him while I work. I'm the blackest.

"And sister Carmen hates me because I live with my mother and she's jealous. She'd like to have her kids watched like my son, but she's got a husband so she can't live home with Mommy. When she got pregnant she got married. I didn't. My brother hates us all because he's an addict but he steals everything he can from us so he won't try to kill us. My youngest sister went to Wellesley. She lives high with cool rich friends and she comes home for a rest when she doesn't have a boyfriend and she needs money from Daddy. She's really cool. She ran toot up her nose in front of my son once, but she says she'll never do it again. They all hate me because I'm the blackest."

"Well, Ma'm..."

"My name is Rikki. You know like Nikki Giovanni but with an R."

She continued the lighting, banging, blowing routine.

"Well, Rikki, your family sounds interesting, but I haven't heard anything really dangerous yet. Has someone threatened you?"

"I just know they all want me dead. I went to Riis Park with Carmen and the kids last weekend. I drove. I'm a good driver. I think having a car gives you independence. On the way Carmen told me about a corpse that washed up on the beach. It had no face. It wore a red bathing suit. They'd loaned me a red bathing suit for the beach. It's too small and my tits fall out of it. The thing is, I don't know how to swim. And Carmen's dumb-ass husband Fred has the hots for me."

"No accounting for taste. So you're saying you think your sister wants to kill you because she gave you a tight suit?"

"Duh-huh. I told you they all want me dead."

"It's common for families to have all kinds of negative feelings. Who could have better reason? But where's the threat and what is it?"

"Don't you believe me? Don't you want to work with me? What kind of detective are you?"

"I ask myself."

"What do you ask yourself? Tell me about being a detective."

"I ask myself why I waste myself listening to people who won't get to the point. I ask myself when I'm going to use my gun. I ask myself when I'll have an interesting case someone in the papers might want to write up."

"Don't you know anyone important?"

"Yeah, I'm close to the Dalai Lama and the British Royals. Now can we get to the point, or did you come here to amuse yourself in the world of danger and mystery."

"Do you read Robert Parker?"

"Sure, I read mysteries for my insomnia. The words start swimming before my eyes and the next thing I know it's morning."

"Where do you live?"

"Let's get back to whether we have a case and what you want me to do."

"I want to you protect me and my son from my family."

"Why don't you move out?"

"I'm on welfare. I don't have any money."

"You said you work and you have a car."

"I still collect checks from welfare. I don't have any money. I need money."

"OK, let's get back to the threat. What is the threat?"

"I told you my sister said she saw a corpse in a red bathing suit and she got me a red bathing suit even though I don't swim. I told you her husband has the hots for me."

"So tell the sister you'd never do that. Tell him to shove it."

"But it's not that. It's my living with Mommy. Fred screws around, just like my father. That makes her want to kill me because I'm the blackest and I live at home and I'm not married. Well, actually I am but I haven't seen him for 5 years and my son is 3."

"This is poignant, your family dynamic, and I feel honored you're sharing it with this pale Welshman. But all we're doing is gossiping."

"I'm hiring you to protect me and my son, but I need to work out a payment plan. I've got a payment plan with my therapist. What's the least you will take to start? I

want you to act like you're my boyfriend, and don't get any ideas. I want you to start right now. We need to get over to Brooklyn now."

Rikki had the big ass and thick thighs of a ballerina. Despite her manners she was graceful, and her slim neck and shoulders, her pulled-back hair reminded me of a ballerina. I've never known a ballerina personally: I like entertainers who talk or sing.

Rikki needed to rest if we climbed five stairs, and she'd drive forever to save walking a block. She swilled Tab, and got pissed off when I bought her any other diet drink. Her object in life was to find a father for her son and to move to Manhattan. She had gotten sober while carrying her son. She dated white men because black men were "ignorant."

2. Weekdays at Rikki's house followed a regular pattern. Her mother taught school. Rikki arrived at work an hour early to organize herself, so that the mother was stuck with dropping the boy at what passed for daycare down the block.

The mother was what blues guys call a yellow gal. She'd get home in time to pick up the boy, feed him two frozen waffles drowned in artificial syrup, and begin dinner for whoever showed up. Her husband, who was black as tar, occasionally arrived around 5:00, which you knew when he'd start yelling at the rickety motor that was supposed to open the garage door in the alley. He had a gold Cadillac; leaving it to lift the door was not what a man of his importance should be doing so he screamed at the door until his wife came down and open it, especially when the weather was bad. The first time we met, he did a double-take at me sitting in the kitchen peeling potatoes. Trying to crush my hand, he glared his gold and beige teeth at what he called the latest of Rikki's white boys. The wife was hitting the cheap rosé and exclaiming *oh lord today*. Everyone had a problem with me helping in the kitchen, but no one stopped me.

When Rikki's son finished the frozen waffles that would prevent his eating the dinner his grandmother was cooking to death, he went to the front sidewalk and raced up and down on his Hot Wheels. No one cared that he was out there doing wheelies by himself, so I tried not to. Rikki sat smoking and reading a mystery novel.

Occasionally she and her father would ask the mother for something. I tried to discuss the news of the day, but they just looked at me.

Rikki yelled at her mother to change her son's trousers when he shat them outside. The father sat at the head of the table demanding his dinner. Eager to get upstairs to his vodka and the giant tv projecting fuzzy images in random colors, he denounced the meal as the same old shit he'd hated yesterday and ordered her never to give him again. He shoved the arriving Carmen and her two kids out of his way as he stormed by.

Carmen took care of Rikki's son, yelling down from upstairs to locate clean undies and trousers, while Rikki moved to the back porch for quiet after her day of work. Carmen said *oh lord today*. Her children went upstairs to watch reruns of Columbo with their grandfather, ignoring Rikki's son's requests to play in the basement. He disappeared into the basement.

Carmen was tall and beautiful, but no one seemed to notice. You expect tall beautiful women to have poise and self-confidence, but the center of Carmen's universe was Mommy.

By 8:00 the grandfather was mellow enough to go out and party, or to move and shake political meetings at his huge Baptist Church in Bed-Stuy. He was mulling which important rôle to take on in the Jesse Jackson administration.

The 3 women discussed the Jews down the street. It was unclear what they were accusing the Jews of doing to the block.

No one had anything to say to me except to urge me to eat another plate of dead greens and stiff meat. Rikki made a big show of serving me until she forgot to. They called dinner "a plate," maybe because the food was so lifeless.

After the first dinner, her mother in bed drunk with her son and her sister done prodding her sleepwalking kids to the car for the return to Queens, Rikki sat me down on a sticky plastic-sheathed couch to find out what I thought of her family. I offered to return her check. She said she'd meet me at the office.

3. "You fuckpig! Why did you cash my check?"

"Why not?"

"Look I gave you the check. That should be enough.

Now my account's overdrawn and I don't get paid for a week."

"How about the welfare?"

"What welfare?"

"You told me you finance your car with welfare. Better watch it: Reagan might do a speech about you."

"Did you see him in *Knute Rockne*? I love that flick. I love cheesy old black and whites."

"I cashed your check because I did some work. Sitting around your family's house is work. Do you always give your kid over to your mother and sister?"

"Yeah, they owe me reparations. It's the least they can do after all they've done."

"Well that's sad, but I think we've finished. Being a messed-up family isn't a crime—except maybe what you're all doing to those kids."

She was wearing a jersey cut low across the neck. She came around the desk, took out her left breast and licking her lower lip said "Suck on it."

After a half-hour on the floor we went out for coffee. She sat next to me and insisted I tug her belt-buckle, so that her jeans rubbed her crotch.

One evening her brother-in-law showed up. Like his wife and children, he was fair-skinned. He sported a tweed jacket and ascot. His eyes were glassy, and he aped the grandfather's screams about the fucking lousy dinner. Carmen and her mother shoo-ed the kids down to the basement tube, so that the men could do business upstairs.

I called out, "Lord today," after the men. The women hushed me.

4. The car granting Rikki independence was a "mocha"-hued Mercury with beige, hide-of-the-nauga upholstery – the fruit of some mysterious paternal dealings in Queens. He hated the task of parking it on the street, so Rikki kept the keys after moving it for him, and he'd yell at her that he wanted the keys back but never did anything about it. I called the color shit-brown.

The kid felt an unappeasable yearning for junk food that never made him sick or added an ounce to his wiry skinniness—Rikki told me she had nursed him on skim milk—and weekends Rikki drove us to remote feederies, reciting salty, fatty, sugary options until the kid chose. Then shopping-malls and violent movies – and if I was

lucky, Coney Island or Riis Park. Often Rikki forgot he was there and lost him in crowds or parking lots. I kept close to him in the water, while Rikki fumbled with flimsy new toys on beach towels decorated with mermaids and carp. When the toys broke, we'd go on to a new mall.

I urged Rikki to model her bathing suit for me, but she refused. She preferred the malls to the beach because Mommy complained about washing sandy clothes.

I began to know the parkways and the major avenues of Brooklyn and Queens; I saw neighborhoods I'd never heard of. I told myself that all this driving the outer boroughs, this random sampling of urban sprawl could be an introduction to a new way of being – so far a meaningless *being*.

5. Rikki's cool sister Lola appeared, after a week of exited anticipation and housecleaning culminating in stripping the plastic from the furniture – and after a frantic negotiation concerning her means of transit from Soho to Carroll Gardens: Lola eschewed mass transit. Her father settled on a gypsy limo service at which he had a "business account."

Her father's yells woke Lola from a stupor in the limo. She staggered home bleary-eyed from a hangover she called a "24-hour bug going around," complaining the car's air-freshener had given her the dry heaves. With Rikki's help she ascended to her suite to recruit her spirits, but sent word through the son that dinner should be sent up.

"She told me I have sexy legs, Grandma."

The grandmother and Carmen kept the children hushed lest they disturb Lola, and the grandfather blasted the basement tv, rather than his upstairs rig.

Lola requested a visit by Rikki and me. Her suite was a welter of expensive clothing, as if a number of women were preparing for a party or attacking an annual sale-rack. Rikki told me it was always that way: Lola kept it private with a special lock, sharing the key with no one. *So she's home to hit her stash*, I figured.

Indeed Lola had cheered up and pepped up. She quizzed me on my prep school, my colleges, my clubs (sorry, none), and my financial prospects – losing interest when I explained that as a matter of principle I accepted nothing from my family, dead or alive.

Rikki was anxious lest her younger sister dazzle and

sweep me away, but Lola was a tawdry parody of the preppy girls I found small beer. She had round cheeks, straight hair in a bun with a plastic needle through it, and though ample in the right places her figure was nothing special.

The ladies began a rundown of recent dates, men they categorized as “drips” or “dreamboats,” the gossip concluding with Rikki’s, “He was Number 35,” to which Lola retorted, “You mean you can still count them?”

6. You might wonder why I went along with this aggravating setup. No, it wasn’t the sex, even if I was 45 and Rikki 25. I wasn’t particularly interested in this black family, whose problems seemed self-imposed – though now I wonder whose problems are not. I went along because she insisted and because I’d nothing else to do. I knew the murder-plot was a fantasy.

That was my spring and summer of 1981, and perhaps Rikki got tired of hassling with me over fees, perhaps autumn brought unattractive driving-weather, perhaps she was hurt when I called the phone-cords through which the family was constantly in touch with itself for “your umbilical,” perhaps she was on to the next fantasy, perhaps she found a prospect to father the boy – anyway by September I was alone in the office again.

Then I got steady work guarding New York’s third-biggest developer, who’d received threats after bad publicity for knocking down a landmark building “by accident,” perhaps from tenants whose apartments he was decontrolling with help from recipients of his political largesse. I doubled as his driver, my outer-borough skills sharpened by Rikki. I could not fathom his plans, except that he seemed to be interested in large swaths of Williamsburg and Ditmas Park.

The following spring Rikki came by the office with a container of fruits. She was on the Beverly Hills diet. She had just thrown over an affluent Irish dreamboat. His red hair turned her on, the sex was “intense,” but he refused to move beyond that to a relationship with her and her son.

Her mother suffered bunions, arthritis and heart palpitations but she had to go on working because stagflation was taking her father’s business downhill, and now he’d taken back the Mercury and left her with a

rusty old Chevy that took forever to start, so Rikki had to get the guy next door who wanted to get into her pants to help. Did I know anything about cars?

The family thought it might make a killing on the house because important musicians were moving into Carroll Gardens: the hot teenager whose hit “Push-Push in the Bush” climbed the R&B charts was down the block near the Hassids.

Yes, she still lived at home, and she knew her family still wanted to kill her. She began to unbutton her blouse but I told her to leave her tits where they were. She said that was good because they were getting ugly and the nipples no longer perked up the way they should. She looked inside the blouse and flicked a nipple with her middle finger as she said that.

7. Late summer she came by again: the markets had taken off and I was buried in *Baron’s*, when the old familiar banging on my desk returned me to what we call reality.

“You’ve got to help me. Carmen keeps asking me when I’m going to learn how to swim. Fred calls me ‘bitch’ for no reason. Mommy’s threatening to throw me out. Daddy tried to hit me. I told him I’d call the cops on him. I can’t toilet train the boy, and Mommy’s no help. Daddy sold my cars, and the boy hates the train.

“I found the red bathing suit under my pillow last night. I don’t know what to do.”

“I think you need to move out. I know I’ll never see it again, but I can loan you a few hundred.”

“How am I going to do that? I’ve never lived on my own. I don’t know how to do that. Can’t you come by again? That would calm things. They try to act normal when I have my boyfriends there.”

“No replacement for the Irish dreamboat?”

“Not really, a bunch of duds. They all want to fuck me, but they disappear when after they come to my home.”

“What does your therapist say?”

“Yeah, she wants me to move out. Can you come over?”

I wasn’t going to do that. We went to my bank together.

7. Early fall Rikki was bludgeoned to death on Quaker Hill in Prospect Park, discovered there on a Sunday morning

by a Park Slope venture capitalist whose Irish setter could not be persuaded to relinquish its perfect point at the undergrowth. No sign of sexual molestation, just a thorough smashing of her head and shoulders.

I went to her funeral at the father's Baptist church; her mother snorted and blew about how much she loved Rikki, how much she missed her and what was going to happen to the poor little orphan boy sitting beside her in short pants. The father's eulogy was a jumble of clichés that seemed to say that his daughter was a sign of the times; that her life was as much of a tragedy as her death; that the times would have gotten better if Jesse Jackson had won. He reached in vain for a conclusion, attempted an unconvincing pantomime of breaking down in sobs, and disappeared.

The police made no progress with the case. This was before computers encouraged precincts to improve the crime and closed-case rates upon which New Yorkers rely. All family members had alibis, but I think Rikki's right that they killed her and I will never know how.

I visited the family to see if I could help. Nothing had changed, except that the boy was eating 4 waffles and doing dangerous stunts on a BMX bike without a helmet, while the women wondered how Rikki could do such a thing, how could she leave them to care for still another child.

8. The mother gave me some college writing by Rikki, who had asked her to give it to me in case anything ever happened to her. For some reason Rikki called this vignette "a major clue." According to the mother, Rikki's writing class with some big Swede named Toby Olson had kept her from dropping out before her second freshman semester.

## FLOATING AWAY

by Rikki White

*Nothing had ever gone right. And now the tree from behind which she peeked down the lane, imagining life beyond the block, past her school and the Parkway—that giant tree filling her patch of front yard had disappeared. One day it was gone.*

*She asked her mother, "Where did it go, Mommy?"*

*"You mean you didn't notice? Where were you when all those men were sawing and grinding and yelling and*

*hauling. Where were you, girl?"*

*Her brother and sisters laughed. . . .*

*She was six. The huge ochre trunk had little brown ants on it spring and summer. They ate holes in the loose greying bark. One rainy day she rubbed her palm on the knobby surface, and soggy fat slivers rolled off onto her brown hand. She was leaning on the tree. Her dress-front was wet and grimy: soon her mother would yell at her and she would be empty and float away. She floated away. Her new red pumps were soaked, and the white socks hanging below her ankles were soiled. She'd lain the side of her face on the bark, and her face was corrugated like driftwood. She squashed an ant crawling on her knuckle.*

*She made a fist and hit the tree. That worked: the pain made her cry, and the knuckles bled. Maybe she was upset and bloody enough to storm past her mother without getting shaken and yelled at.*

*She forgot the tree until she was seven. She hated having a memory that held her back from floating away.*

*Now she remembered using the towels and washcloths as toilet paper. In the bathtub her mother scrubbed her anus and her vagina even harder than her ears, face and underarms, and so she rubbed herself clean each time she went to the toilet, hoping Mommy would let up.*

*Maybe she remembered the towels today because the art teacher was slamming her against the wall. She had smashed all her little clay figures; but he didn't grab her till she was smashing everyone else's.*

*She loved the way clay felt in her fingers: so wonderfully sloppy. She loved the way it could become anything, a car, a horse, a boat, a head, a tree. It was magic. But she would never tell the teacher what it was she'd made: "Oh, just some old junk."*

*And anyway everything was like something else inside her head. So nothing mattered.*

Hank hated to talk about his "days of detecting nothing," and so I was unable to find out anything more about this case, except that there was a family in Carroll Gardens with that too-common name on the edge of the Hasidic neighborhood. Hank upbraided me for taking him literally.

STEVE DALACHINSKY  
**movie poems**

**GODARD 6 X 2**

1. Walt Whitman

rivers don't need money  
but my eyes  
invite a crossing  
sometimes  
a queen  
a problem  
another alternative  
all these things  
before my  
birth &  
pain

like the world  
is a crossing  
sometimes  
a river  
for which we  
now use  
a camera  
to ferry our faces  
across.

2. Borrowed Pens (Goings #1)



## SAD MOVIES

i cry at sad movies. tears inhabit the corners of my eyes. they never  
fall. my brow contracts in profound pain whenever misfortune strikes.  
deep empathy gropes my stomach.

i cry at sad movies. tenderness tears at my colon. rips up a not so empty  
cavity somewhere down inside. peculiar cleavage reigning gap of  
lovelessness such nice innocent people

sad movies

the mishaps of the harmless i withdraw deep within myself surpassing mere  
tenderness

forging immense identification with the species

an ancient proverb lost among misgivings wise words found in a tawdry  
script

a lost puppy in the midst of finding its home cries at this sad movie  
sloshy pupils chance of surviving even if barely hugs & 20 more reasons  
not to quit

but chances extinguish themselves. tears dry before they fall. alcohol  
deadens.sad movies end.

## THE NAKED KISS

A FILM ABOUT TRANSPARENCIES

1. (wherein she blows smoke in his face – tight closeup)

you said you died awhile today  
you said you felt reality creep like 2 mother hands  
toward your center  
what does it mean  
all this longing & decision  
does staying create a choice you've never made  
does coming mean you're gone before you've left  
does all this seem so hard for you to believe  
you said you've cried before when someone went away  
is that why you can't cry now  
is that why you're always leaving  
never gone away  
just placed there  
in their hands like clay promised to fire  
so pliable so  
fired discharged & dropped  
the pressure on your insides out there hurts  
you crack  
is to love so much such a precious thing  
to pass it on in times of stress  
& mumble when it disappears glad to have it gone  
& stumble when it reappears feeling only stones  
beneath your feet  
you're slipping your quiet panic proves this  
you're me now but you let me walk away  
i copy your steps like a dog  
& lie again  
in someone else's room  
you said you cared awhile today  
then left as i walked away  
i know you're sorry  
but that's not good enough  
i know you're worried  
but for who  
the plaque inside your door reads "OUT"

2. (long take)

you left me there somewhere in the 60's  
my finger copies past dates & follows  
(women winding down straight streets)  
i lied about the "monk" bit  
lied awake all night & felt the chill  
as you passed your fingers over my chest  
passing out of my life  
down past there where never meets before  
you left me there somewhere in my movies  
my eyes walked inside my head saw fear  
out cold where my nose kept running  
& my fumbling smile froze  
i walk some where you left me  
cold screenless cinema places where i won't get off but do  
the film cans piling up compiling what i'll miss  
i saw that one without going in  
& left you where you left me  
some one said once  
"you're great to be with but i sense you're cold & far away..."  
but why be afraid of something you can touch  
a body is what it is  
there are no special occasions  
no final reasons  
a movie is what it is & if it's there again after the first time & you  
see it again after the first time  
maybe it's because you never really got to see it in the first place or  
maybe you just liked it that much maybe you were in the theatre but your  
eyes were stuck inside your mind or in your gut or on your girl or the  
girl in the dark that sat 2 rows up where ever she may be that girl your girl  
somewhere there's change you left me there

some wear things to pretty up some because it's all they've got  
some wear all they've got to pretty up  
i wear you because you're you & because you know you're pretty  
& it's pretty funny how i think you're all i've got & maybe you are  
though i know you're not & the movie reels & reveals a staggering  
solilquy  
& the wall of touch for what you've left  
is only splintered ashtrays filled with buts & whys & dying flames like a  
hot drama  
i saw you twice today  
& yesterday once & know i'm where you left me  
& know you left me bits of you  
in someone else's hair & face  
& i know you left a trail of no's in someone else's arse & nose  
in someone else's shape you return but never make it  
because you are no longer here  
& you left me where you left me last  
purchasing a ticket for an empty seat  
& sometimes i wonder where you are  
& wear you inside like pretty clothes  
or the final scene  
& i leave a little room in my bed for my dreams  
& whittle away at your face like a delicate stone  
& all i can say as i push you aside is  
i asked for it  
you left me  
i told you so.....  
you left me there some where in my own hands  
i walk some where you left me  
but never go too far.

IRIS FRASER-GUDRUNAS [image]

MAT LAPORTE [text]

## **the accursed cher**

tooggling for diaper rash in the penal colony  
uploaded topless crabs emargotron  
harboring olden days with concurrent fake tags  
mellow pane of glass that's my stop  
hell's a babysitter dunking off hours  
incoming and immeasurable charm  
staring yourself down diligence  
beached guts me never worry again  
soft chuck/digs the fallen sky  
mega-cast anesthetic ball game soars  
never mixed like this before  
powning the uncomely geronimo  
frisky on electric wakeboards  
sojourned to date-night/dial-it-in replicants  
synapse to greet you  
just a minute ago tucked in shirt  
some incompatible beauty  
begging for granulated wind  
sutured up becalmed by practically nothing  
experiencing an intermittent window  
now you've got the fire prefab delicious  
unhinged dirigible madness got us this evening  
see where the political unconscious dwells  
in all their immeasurable laugh



oozing practical style  
don't get self flipped

inside out recording studio  
punching ducks in a blaze of emotion

five expressed interest  
pleased to meet me sort of

terrible portents of things to come  
I say spread the wealth  
and spam your wall

while everyone looks away  
and expectorates in a McDonald's

we lit the ends of our cigarettes  
with UV rays so it didn't count  
our first and last mistake

somehow no one noticed the portal  
to another dimension until  
it started fucking w/ traffic





this is more of an impression  
than a theory—  
green past enchantment  
portable edge  
over our express  
open-hearted five spot  
in the urban trace-  
object unquote. One  
yurt anthem barf  
tuts the eurhythmic  
space-relative  
battle of a one-way goon  
with an aura of  
illogical nexus hews  
overshot the rich  
antistrophe  
to yawl outward  
and splice together  
ideoblast dubs  
so yummy you'll  
yod the unquiet revolt



challenging the surrounding ecosystems  
together through no-spark mayhem  
ye gangsters, panoptic mind-of-the hive  
deliberate, detested to perfection  
digs you out and puts you in a freedom film  
unlike any other/undying experience  
to lay down somewhere between deep discount  
and tweak sentences which were our gift to write  
we of literal transit to our maybe city  
this is not how you spell 'mergeitude'  
or you may control my swish but you may  
not control the spiral backstroke we live in  
unwaveable wind/pretending to eat a sandwich capital  
as he waits to be the world hat of neon death  
I count the change off an animal's back  
my mistake, a narwhal with a purpose  
my century, fatally marked with murder  
forever set about enacting new mnemonics  
and subscribing to recombinative fragments--  
in and out of full-blast tactics





## SCOTT O'CONNOR in the red

The traffic cop didn't see things my way. The night Deb left I got pulled over, driving to I don't know where. Around. The cop made me get out of my car, empty my pockets. He saw the roll of quarters I always keep, asked me what they were for. Laundry, I said. The cop asked if I'd been drinking. I said that I had. He said, Where were you drinking, and I said I'd bought a six-pack at the junior market and had sat right down in the parking lot. He said, Aren't you a little old to be drinking in parking lots, and I said, Aren't you a little old to have that stupid fucking mustache and so here I am.

There are enough guys in the cafeteria to fill two long tables. Some rough-looking characters. Even the chubby accountants – the middle managers or whatever, guys in suits and ties – even they have a threatening edge. They don't have to smile in their office or cheer at their son's ballgame or be anything but what they really are. This is reality in here. This is no bullshit.

A couple guys know each other from previous classes. Nods and handshakes. Long time no see.

Our instructor walks into the cafeteria. She's in her forties, I'd guess, a short woman with frizzy hair, big glasses, wearing a dark blue pantsuit. She says

her name is Connie, thanks us all for being on time, crosses to a small table at the front of the room. She's carrying a large purse and a larger book bag, and when she gets to the table she lets each of them slide off her shoulders. While her back is turned, one of the guys whistles – a long, low wolf whistle – and Connie turns and gives him a look because she knows she's not the kind of woman who gets a whistle like that. Her look says, If you're going to be a fucking asshole then be a fucking asshole but don't pretend you want me up on this table, legs in the air. That that's even crossed your mind. Let's not make this about something it's not. This is no bullshit in here.

The guy nods, lowers his eyes. His name is Luis – we'd already introduced ourselves. Little more than a teenager, with a nasty scar cutting down through his mouth and black teardrop tattoos up at the corner of each eye. He keeps his eyes down, nodding, such is the fierceness of Connie's look. Okay. Understood.

Connie says, Somebody's got to wheel in the chalkboard from out in the hall.

A couple of guys go out and come back in pushing the chalkboard.

Where you want it.

Right here is fine, Connie says. Just turn it so

everybody can see.

She pulls a couple of books out of her bag, a couple of folders, a fistful of pens tied with a rubber band. She takes off her watch and sets it face-up on the table.

You'd better go get your coffee and pop and M&M's now, she says, because we don't do the break at 8:30.

There's always a break at 8:30.

Not here.

It's the law.

Not here.

Everybody goes out in the hall to the vending machines, gets their coffee and sodas and candy. Rolled eyes, clucked tongues. Can you believe this bitch. What happened to the other guy, Doug, the guy who did the class last time. Doug was a good guy.

Back in the cafeteria, metal chairs squeaking, soda can-tops popping, wrappers tearing. Connie waits for the noise to finish.

Okay, she says. Who can tell me why we're here.

*To learn to deal with our hostile emotions in a safe and responsible manner.* A lumbering chorus of voices, a follow-up snickering wave.

Good to see we have some veterans in the class, Connie says. Yes. To learn to deal with our hostile emotions in a safe and responsible manner. Connie writes this on the board.

The middle manager-type sitting behind Luis clears his throat. And how do we go about doing that, he says.

Connie turns. What's that.

You're supposed to ask us how we go about dealing with our hostile emotions in a safe and responsible manner.

Connie turns back to the board. If you knew the answer to that, she says, you wouldn't be sitting here.

After class, a group heads to the parking lot while another group of us heads down to the corner to wait for the bus.

Luis is walking at the back, kind of dragging one leg, trying out a tough-guy limp. After a few drag steps, he calls out to the middle-manager guy.

Who you got.

The middle manager guy turns, still walking. What are you talking about?

I'm talking about who breaks first, Luis says. Every class there's a couple guys who lose it, get popped, maybe put away for a while.

The middle manager guy thinks for a second, nods across the group to a tall dude with a ponytail. Him.

Fabio? Luis says. Nah, man, Fabio's a lover, not a fighter.

That's my pick, the middle manager guy says.

Fabio calls back from the front. I got Luis. Luis has been here, like, fifteen times.

Luis cackles, slaps his hand against his thigh.

We keep walking. I can see a few cars double-parked by the bus stop. Mothers, girlfriends, babies in car seats. Rides home.

How about you? Fabio says.

Luis drags his limp, moving through the group, looking. He finally settles on me. I got this big fucker, he says. He throws a crooked-toothed smile back at the group. This big fucker looks about ready to blow.

When I was a kid, my grandma called it Getting in the Red. She got the phrase from a TV commercial where this dumbass hadn't changed his oil for fifteen years or something and burns out his engine. They show the engine glowing like a hot coal, cycling faster and faster until it sputters and smokes out. *Stop your engine before it gets in the red*, the commercial announcer said.

Some kid out on the street or somewhere would call me Jonas the Whale or Jonas the Giant and I'd get so worked up that I'd start to shake and spit and just want to kill him for saying that.

Jonas! Grandma yelling, running down the lawn, apron and hands flapping. Jonas, you're getting in the red!

She'd pull me off the little fucker and drag me inside and I'd have to sit with my head on the kitchen table and a cold washcloth on the back of my neck. As soon as I felt that washcloth I'd start crying like a baby. The anger sucked out through my skin, into the cold wet cloth. My eyes closed, Grandma moving around the kitchen. Cooking sounds, dishwashing sounds, pots and pans clattering in the sink. Every few minutes she'd

come over and change the water in the washcloth or just stand with her hand on the back of my neck while I choked through the end of my crying jag.

Jonas, you get so overwhelmed, she'd say. Jonas will you ever not be like this.

Maybe, grandma, I'd say, sniffing snot, wiping my eyes. Maybe. I'll try.

Jonas, Grandma saying, you get so overwhelmed I don't know what to do.

This is a different life now. This is a waiting life. This is a life of standing through the day, legs aching, back aching, dragging items across the scanner, giving change, reading the customers' Rewards Club savings from their receipts. You saved four dollars and thirty-eight cents. Would you like help out to your car. Ricardo here will help. Thank you. Come again.

This is a different life now, since Deb left.

The house is mine, technically. My name is on the lease. A tiny two-bedroom place with security bars on the doors and windows; a jagged, waist-high fence around the mangy front yard. Not one of your better neighborhoods. I rented it because I could afford it and because it had a rickety old front porch. Grandma always said there was no point in living in a place without a front porch.

The afternoon Deb moved in she said, You've lived here for five years and still haven't bought curtains. It never crossed my mind to buy curtains, I said. Who cares about curtains. The next day there were blue curtains on all the windows. The day after that there was a toothbrush holder on the bathroom sink. When there's more than one toothbrush you need a toothbrush holder. What have you done to my house, I said. Deb pulled a new shower curtain from her shopping bag, started hanging it around the tub. I made it habitable, she said.

We always kept the TV on the kitchen counter. A little 13-inch job Deb bought with her employee discount at the department store. She liked to watch it while she cooked. I never had any goddamned use for the thing, except when the Lakers were on, and then I'd have to pull a folding chair right up next to the screen to watch. Deb would say, Why don't we get a bigger TV so you won't go blind sitting so close to

that thing, and I'd say that we didn't need a bigger TV because I didn't have any goddamned use for the thing except for the 82 nights a year when the Lakers are on. Not counting the playoffs.

I've moved the TV out into the living room. The kitchen is not the best place to be right now because of this little chip in the formica at the edge of the countertop. I keep telling myself that the chip has always been there, or that it's from Deb dropping a pickle jar or something, but I know how it really got there, what hit against the countertop hard enough to chip the formica. So I carried the TV into the living room, which is where it belonged in the first place.

Still a few months until basketball season, so there's nothing on. I've started watching the home shopping channel. I guess it reminds me of my grandma because she always used to watch it those last few months in the rest home. Also, it's the only thing on when I get out of work at three in the morning. Used to be that I would get home and have a few beers out on the front porch and watch the traffic go by on the freeway and then I'd get in bed and just lie next to Deb until I fell asleep, but now Deb's gone and I can't sleep and so hence the home shopping channel.

There's this guy, Brian Lang, who's always on when I get home, this nerdy-looking guy with a kid's bowl cut and glasses. He hosts the *Collector's Corner* where they sell all types of *Star Wars* spaceship models and *Land of the Lost* painted plates and shit like that, all numbered and authenticated limited-edition stuff. Two hundred bucks for a plate. He takes phone calls while he's showing the stuff and people talk about how much they love this plate or that comic book and when's he going to have some of those commemorative coins on the show. He really knows his stuff, all the details and facts and trivia. I might think this shit is stupid and maybe he does too, but you'd never know it from watching him. He can talk about this stuff for hours, make it seem like he cares. People call and love talking to him because here's this normal guy with a job on TV who knows as much as they do about *Farscape* or whatever.

Tonight he's selling *Star Trek* trading cards. The original *Star Trek*. Captain Kirk and Mister Spock, Sulu. Brian's really into these cards because they're

from 1967 and not too many packs were made, they were just a test set that the card company issued. But the producers of the shopping channel found a whole case of them at an estate sale in Calabasas, still in their packages of six cards with a piece of bubble gum, although Brian says he wouldn't recommend trying the gum.

People are really going apeshit over these cards. All the usual losers are calling up, all the people who call a couple times a week. They can't believe he found these cards. One guy yells into the phone, Thank you, Calabasas!

I play a drinking game while I watch. I drink a beer every time somebody says they've been waiting all night for these cards. I drink a beer every time somebody says they feel blessed. It's getting boring, though, the game is too easy tonight, everybody is so worked up, so I decide to up the ante. If I get up to ten beers, I'm going to get on the phone and see what this idiot really has to say or himself.

I feel so blessed, a caller says. I've been waiting for these cards all night.

Ten beers.

We have Jonas on the line from Los Angeles, Brian says. He looks into the camera. Are you there, Jonas? I'm here.

You got on right in time, my friend. We're nearly out of cards.

My lucky night.

Are you a *Trek* fan, Jonas?

No.

But you're a collector. You're a card collector.

No. I'm not a sucker either.

Brian's smile freezes a little, the corners of his mouth tensing.

I'm glad to hear that, he says.

Fifty bucks for a pack of trading cards.

He's still smiling, but it's harder, tighter. These are highly collectible, he says, yes.

You're smarter than you look, Brian. All these dummies calling up to give you money.

I don't see it that way at all, Jonas.

Sure. You're really excited about these cards. I can tell.

You think I'm acting.

You said it, not me.

He's stopped smiling, but he hasn't hung up, motioned for someone to cut me off.

Well, I don't know how to convince you, Jonas, he says. I think you either get it or you don't.

You don't think I get it?

I doesn't appear that way.

If I buy a pack of cards for fifty bucks will I get it?

If you buy a pack of cards for fifty bucks, he says, and you don't get it, you can send them back, no questions asked. Even if they're opened. Even if you've eaten the gum. He smiles again, looser now, confident. My personal guarantee.

I sit looking at the TV, Brian smiling at me in the living room, the phone cradled between my ear and my neck. You're personal guarantee, I say.

Yes, sir.

Okay, I say. Eleven beers. Deal. I want to get it.

Nobody's technically in the Tuesday night class for hitting his wife or girlfriend. Technically, everybody's here for something else. If you get arrested for hitting your wife or girlfriend they don't send you to this group, they send you to another one, over at the courthouse. Or they send you to jail. This group is for if you got into a fight at a Dodgers game or pushed somebody at work or mouthed off to a cop who pulled you over. If you've got a history of these things. It's not supposed to be as serious as the group at the courthouse, but everybody still knows, everyone's still done it at some point. We know; Connie knows. Wife-beaters. Woman-hitters. It's like a smell in the room.

Tonight, Connie says, I'd like to talk about triggers.

We all sit in the same seats in the cafeteria. Connie hasn't told us we have to, but we do anyway. I sit halfway down the table on the right side, between Fabio and the Traffic Guy from Channel Four. Everybody was real impressed when the Traffic Guy showed up. They wanted his autograph, wanted to shake his hand. They wanted to know what it was like to pilot a helicopter. I'm not a pilot, he said, I just sit in the passenger seat and talk. He may not be a pilot, but he has the look of one, or the movie version of one, a commanding officer, brush-cut, block-jawed and intense. He was



embarrassed to be here and wanted to make sure no one was going to tell anybody. The guys all laughed because who the fuck are we going to tell? We all work late on Tuesday nights. This is what we tell people. We're all at the gym, at a poker game.

Every action has a trigger, Connie says. She writes this on the board: *Trigger. Action.* She draws a line connecting the two. What we need to do, she says, is break the connection between the Trigger and the Action. She wipes out a section of the line with a corner of the eraser. We need to start recognizing the things that make us angry and stop responding physically. Once we do that, she says, we can get to the root of the problem.

Give me some things, she says, that make you angry.

My boss, Luis says.

Connie writes it on the board. *Boss.*

What about your boss, she says.

He's an asshole.

What about him specifically.

He's a fucking asshole.

Things he does that make you angry.

Luis thinks. My boss got this look, he says. Like he doesn't want to be working there. Like he's better than that. And how's that supposed to make us feel, if he doesn't want to be working there and he's the boss.

Inferiority, Connie says.

How's that.

He makes you feel inferior. Makes you feel like you're wasting your time at that job.

Yeah, like how the fuck are we supposed to feel.

Connie writes *Inferiority* on the board across from *Boss* and draws a line connecting the two.

Who else has something?

The middle manager guy raises a finger. My neighbor, he says. Diagonal from my house.

And what does he do?

What does *she* do. She doesn't do anything. She walks down her driveway in the morning. Gets in her car. I sit at the kitchen window and drink my coffee.

And how does that make you angry?

She's so much hotter than my wife.

Connie writes *Disappointment* on the board. Draws a line to *Anger*.

Who else? she says.

Traffic, the Traffic Guy says.

Everybody laughs.

I'm serious, the Traffic Guy says. He looks serious. The stupidity of it, he says. People making the same mistakes every single day.

Connie writes *Traffic*, draws a line.

My dick's too big, says a guy in the back. My girlfriend keeps complaining that it hurts.

Everybody laughs. Connie writes *Delusions of Grandeur* on the board.

So we see, she says, that the nature of the Trigger isn't really important. Anything can set us off. What's important is recognizing the emotion caused by the Trigger and taking the time to figure an appropriate response. Not just jumping from *Inferiority* or *Disappointment* or *Traffic* straight to *Anger* straight to *Violence*. The important thing is not to get ahead of ourselves.

We've all had to buy notebooks for the class, just regular old spiral jobs from the supermarket school-supply aisle. I got mine thirty percent off. Employee perk. Some of the guys are writing things down in their notebooks, some are doodling. Some of the guys are ignoring their notebooks and ignoring Connie and staring out the cafeteria windows, even though it's almost ten o'clock and pitch black out. My notebook's blank.

Connie says, This week I want you to keep your notebooks with you at all times, and when something sets you off, write it down. Write it down and then write a one-line explanation, just one sentence, about why it's setting you off.

While it's happening, Luis says.

While it's happening, Connie says. Is that do-able? Sure, sure, it's do-able.

Connie looks down at her watch on the table. We've got fifteen minutes left, she says.

The middle manager guy raises a finger. Can we go early.

No, Connie says. You can't.

Lots of grumbling in the cafeteria.

That sucks, the middle manager guy says.

Connie pulls up a chair, sits. Put it in your notebook, she says.

I see it, I see it, she says, this flat-faced, big-boned woman in line at the checkout, smiling wide. Not many people in the store. One-thirty, quarter of two in the morning. My checkout's the only one open.

I see it, I see it, she says, pointing toward the dark windows at the front of the store, then up toward the ceiling, and then she falls flat on her back and starts to shake and froth at the mouth.

Holy shit, Ricardo shouts and drops his mop and runs the rest of the way down the cereal aisle to my checkout.

The woman fell on the guy behind her, this little hairy guy with a perm and a greasy face. She's lying on top of him with her eyes rolled up into her head, frothing and shaking and he's trying to crawl out from under her.

Get her off me get her off me, he says.

I come around the checkout to where they're tangled in a heap. Ricardo's at the checkout now too and he says, She's having a seizure, Jonas, we got to hold her steady, so I kneel down and grab on to her shoulders.

The guy with the perm is struggling and yelling, Get her off me get her off me.

Shut up, don't move, I say to the guy, but he keeps struggling, trying to push the woman off him.

Fucking stop moving, I say.

Somebody get some juice, Ricardo says. Nobody in the store moves so Ricardo yells, Somebody get some juice, please, and this time the *please* is pained and sharp and this chick over in produce with a bunch of tattoos drops her shopping basket and runs towards the beverage cases.

I'm yelling at the perm guy, Fucking stop moving, because the woman is starting to choke on her froth and my hands are so sweaty I can't get a good grip on her shoulders.

Ricardo says, Jonas hold her steady.

I can't I fucking can't.

Help me get her mouth open, Ricardo says. Clear away some of that spit.

Shit shit shit, I'm saying.

Get her off me get her off me.

Jonas, open her mouth, Ricardo yells. Just keep her steady and open it.

Fucking stop moving, I scream at the perm guy,

but he keeps pushing at the woman so I grab him by the shoulders and pull him out, across the floor to the front of the checkout but he's still saying, Get Off Get Off, so I put a hand over his mouth and slap him on the side of the head, slap him again, and now he's yelling and Ricardo's yelling and the tattooed chick's yelling and I'm punching this guy in the temples and now Ricardo's on top of me, pulling me away, and the tattooed chick is screaming, That woman! That woman! and Ricardo gives me another shove and stumbles back to the woman who's now thrashing on the floor. The tattooed chick hands Ricardo a carton of orange juice and he tears open the top and pours a little down the woman's throat. He pulls her head up on his knee and some of the juice spills out so Ricardo starts massaging her throat saying, Come on baby, come on, baby please, let's get this down, let's get this down baby, and finally some of it goes down, finally she swallows. Shaking less and less. Just little jerks now, her head one way, her body the other. Her face is white and shiny, covered with sweat and juice.

I get to my feet and just stand there, watching. The perm guy is still lying on the floor, crying now, his arms folded over his face.

Jesus Christ, Ricardo says.

The ambulance comes. The paramedics rush in, radios squawking.

Deb's stuff is still here. Every night I get home from work and expect it all to be moved out. She has a key. But every night it's still here.

I imagine she's staying at her parent's house out in Riverside. I don't know where else she'd go. Probably getting an earful from her dad. Deb's mom was always real nice when I was down at their place for dinner or whatnot, but her dad never cared for me. After my first DUI he told Deb that how she lived her life was her business, but he didn't want me in their home anymore. So it was a really big deal when we were both invited to dinner this past Thanksgiving. I can only imagine the shit Deb had to wade through. I told her that I was perfectly fine eating frozen pot pie at home and squinting at the Lakers game in the kitchen, but she said it was all settled. There was going to be a truce between me and her dad. I said that there couldn't be

a truce because we weren't fighting in the first place, that I honestly couldn't care less what the old fucker thought of me. Deb put her hand on the back of my neck, fingertips light at my hairline. Whispered, *shhhh* into my ear until my fists and teeth unclenched.

Deb's dad's a high school principal. He makes good money, I guess. Their neighborhood looks right out of a TV commercial: tree-lined street, SUVs in the driveways, lawns like putting greens. No one talked much during dinner. Deb kept asking her dad and me questions, trying to get the conversation started. We both answered in one word or less. Her mom served sparkling apple juice instead of wine. I could tell her dad was jonesing for a drink but wouldn't break down and have one in front of me after he'd said that shit about the DUI. I kept watching him, his hands shaking a little whenever he lifted his glass.

After dinner, Deb and her mom cleared the dishes, started futzing in the kitchen. Her dad went into the living room and turned on the Lakers game. I sat at the table alone for a few minutes, then I thought, What the hell, I don't want to miss the game. We sat on opposite ends of the couch. Every once in a while he'd say something about one of the players, what kind of season they were having, and then I'd say something and after a while I started to think, Well, this guy might be a blowhard but at least he knows a little about basketball.

Deb suggested we all play charades. Some kind of Thanksgiving tradition. And now, she said, wasn't it great because there were enough players for actual teams. It was Deb and her mom on one team, me and Deb's dad on the other. Deb's mom told her dad that he should turn off the game while we were playing, but he said, Let's leave it on for Jonas, which I thought was an all right thing to say.

It came down to the last round, Deb's dad stumbling around the living room, squinting, pawing the air in front of him, and when I guessed *Mr. Magoo* to win the game he was so excited he grabbed me around the shoulders with one arm and thumped me on the chest, laughing and shouting. This man knows how to play charades, he said, and I put my hands on his shoulders, too, and we stood there squeezing each other, smiling like idiots.

I can't get that woman out of my head. Seizing in the aisle. And the perm guy, I just couldn't fucking take it anymore, but what if Ricardo had taken too long pulling me off him and that woman had choked on her own spit?

Ricardo saved that woman's life. Jonas the Whale couldn't ignore the perm guy, couldn't get past that. Jonas the Whale got into a fight and almost let her die.

Up the front yard, I'm going to go straight for the fridge and the beer but I step on something on the front porch, stop and bend. A yellow padded envelope. What the fuck could this be and then I remember and open it right there, shake out the blue and white pack. *Leaf Official Star Trek Bubble Gum Five Cents*. Picture of the spaceship that they flew crossing between the words. Captain Kirk's head and Spock's head floating below, very serious looks on their faces.

Six cards inside, with black & white scenes from the show on the front. Captions under the scenes: *Amnesia Victim. Corbomite Maneuver. Attempted Mutiny. Kirk Battles a Gorn. Come in, Captain Kirk*. There's a pink stick of gum stuck to the back of the last card. I peel it off, hold it up, sniff it. Smells like gum. Put it in my mouth and chew. It brakes apart into hard pieces, but I finally force it into a chewy ball. Tastes like gum.

I dig out my notebook and try writing.

*I want to beat the shit out of somebody right now.*

What did Connie say? Draw a line. Trigger--Action. So I draw a wobbly line and try to remember why.

Brian Lang's on the TV, smiling into the camera.

We've got Sara Jane on the line from Wichita. Hello, Sara Jane.

Hello, Brian. I'm so glad I got through.

We're glad to have you. What are you interested in tonight?

The figurines.

Davy or Goliath?

Goliath, for sure.

I moved the TV from the living room into the bedroom. Deb has these little ceramic teddy bears that her parents get her each Christmas, and they're all lined up on a shelf in the living room. They each have a costume that represents different parts of her personality: salesgirl bear, track-and-field bear, chef

bear. It got impossible to watch *Collector's Corner* with those stupid bears smiling and staring.

I think Davy and Goliath set such wonderful examples for children, Sara Jane says. I wish they were still on the air.

Brian says, I couldn't agree with you more.

I fan the *Star Trek* cards out on the bed, arranging them in different orders, trying to see if I can get them to tell a story. Chewing, sucking the sugar out of the gum.

What did she see, that woman? I see it, I see it, she'd said, right before she had the seizure. What did she see?

I take the phone into the bedroom so I can see the TV. I almost hang up when the operator asks for my name, like she's going to remember me, like I got a *Wanted* picture on her phone bank alongside all the bad-check writers. I tell her my name and she says to please hold, she's going to put me on the air.

We have Jonas on the line from Los Angeles. Hello, Jonas.

Hey.

What can we do for you tonight?

Do you remember me?

I do now, Brian says. Yes.

I got those *Star Trek* cards in the mail today.

And what did you think?

You mean do I get it.

Do you?

I look at the cards, the TV. I don't know, I say.

You didn't eat the gum did you?

I did.

You did? Brian's smiling again now. How was it?

It wasn't too bad, Brian.

Brian laughs. You're a brave man, Jonas.

I don't feel so brave.

Pardon me?

I don't say anything. Brian stares into the camera, eyebrows raised.

Jonas?

A woman almost died at work tonight, I say.

Oh, Brian says. I'm sorry to hear that. Is she all right?

I think so. One of the other guys shoved a Snickers bar down her throat.

Where do you work, Jonas?

At a supermarket. I'm a checkout clerk at a supermarket.

I'm sorry to hear that. About the woman. I really am.

Yeah, I say. I guess I was pretty upset.

I can see where you would be. Brian looks into the camera, nodding, as if waiting for me to calm down.

Stay with us, Jonas, he says. We're going to have a good show tonight.

The big news at class is that Luis was in a high-speed chase this morning and got arrested. The neighbors heard his girlfriend screaming and called the cops. He was beating the shit out of her with a shoe and the cops came and he ran out the back door and got in his truck and drove off through the neighbor's lawn. He got on the freeway and went up through downtown and then back through Hollywood, driving on the shoulder around the stopped traffic until they got him with one of those wheel-spike strips and he blew out his tires and had to hoof it. He jumped over the side wall of the freeway and rolled down the hill and started hauling ass but he was missing a shoe and they got him.

The Traffic Guy was covering the whole thing from his helicopter and he tells us the story. Connie watches the Traffic Guy and listens and when he's done she asks, What was that like?

What was what like, the Traffic Guy says.

Reporting about someone you know who has the same problems you do.

While it was happening.

While it was happening.

It felt like I was betraying him, the Traffic Guy says. Honestly, at first, I wanted him to get away. I felt like, somehow, if he got away then it wouldn't be so bad. That what he did wouldn't seem so bad. But everybody back in the studio, the anchors and producers were all so disgusted by him, by what he had done, and they were rooting for the cops so I started rooting for the cops, too. I felt like shit for wanting him to get away. Like that made me just as bad as he was. I got so upset they had to mute me. I hope they get that fucker, I said. It almost got on the air.

Everyone's agitated in the cafeteria. The story has

charged the room. Luis should have been caught but he shouldn't have been caught. I should have been caught but I shouldn't have been caught. No one wants to be on TV, running from the cops. No one wants to be the thing people watch in the morning as they get ready for work.

Connie says, What are you all doing to make sure this doesn't happen to you? Her voice is shaking and that adds to the agitation.

This is important, she says. We're going around the room and you tell me what you're doing.

The middle manager guy says, I'm writing in my notebook.

The Traffic Guy says, I'm writing in my notebook.

Fabio says, I'm writing in my notebook.

Spooked. Everybody's spooked. Everybody waves their notebooks in the air, warding it off, keeping it away.

Grandma knew what to do, when I got in the red. Grandma knew what to do and then the fall in the shower and then the home.

Deb knew what to do. Deb knew what to do and then of course she didn't.

I'm writing in my notebook, we say, waving them in the air. I'm writing in my notebook, I'm writing in my notebook.

I'm writing in my notebook. I wanted to watch *Collector's Corner* but the cable is out. Sometimes it gets so hot in the summer that the TV just takes a shit. That and I keep finding Deb's long black hairs on the pillowcases, so I went out onto the porch and started writing in my notebook. Just stupid shit about the day, watching the late night cars speed across the freeway overpass, trying to remember what I'd been doing this morning when Luis had passed over it getting chased by the cops.

We have Jonas on the line from Los Angeles. Hello, Jonas.

Hey, Brian.

Having a good night, I hope.

I've had better.

I know the feeling.

My TV's out.

How are you watching the show?

I'm not. I'm out on my porch.

Getting some air.

I guess so.

Get those *Batman* comics in the mail yet?

Not yet.

Well, we've got bears tonight, Jonas.

Bears.

They're authentic *Star Trek* bears. Hand-molded ceramic. They're costumed like Captain Kirk, Spock, the whole crew.

I have some of those bears already.

You have the *Star Trek* bears.

No, they're different bears.

Well these bears are brand new, Jonas. Just released. The whole *Star Trek* crew.

I guess I'll order one of those.

Which one?

You pick, Brian. Whichever one you think.

I'll do that, Jonas. I'll put you on with an operator. Have a good night.

Brian.

Yes?

When I'm waiting for an operator, they play your show instead of music.

Yes, they do.

Could someone keep me on hold for the rest of the show, seeing as my TV's on the fritz?

I don't see why not, Jonas. I think that can be arranged.

Okay. Thanks.

Thank you, Jonas. Stay with us.

But sometimes, the Traffic Guy says, you have to do something. Sometimes a response is called for.

Yes, but not a violent response, Connie says. There's always another way.

Not always.

Yes, always. A violent response just leads to another violent response.

The Traffic Guy really has a bug up his ass tonight. What is this, he says. *The Cycle of Violence*.

That's one name for it.

I've heard it a million times. *Breaking the Cycle of Violence*.

A police siren, out of nowhere, the sound smearing

as it passes the cafeteria. Everybody flinches except Connie.

Sometimes, Connie says, you hear things a million times because they're true.

Sometimes, The Traffic Guy says, you hear things a million times because they're bullshit.

Hey man calm down, the middle manager says.

Don't tell me to calm down. He looks back at Connie. What if you're in a fight, he says. Somebody attacks you and you do nothing. You stand and get pummeled. You stand and get killed.

You want to fight back.

Fuck yes, the Traffic Guy says. You have to defend yourself.

None of you are here for defending yourselves, Connie says.

Another siren through the open windows, front of the room to the back.

Fuck you, Connie.

I will ask you to leave.

For speaking my mind.

For speaking your mind in an abusive manner I will ask you to leave.

I apologize.

Don't patronize me.

I fucking apologize, Miss Connie. Miss Perfect Connie. I am so sorry.

Leave.

I'm leaving.

Leave.

The night after Deb left, her Dad showed up at the house. It was about three in the morning and I was inside drinking a beer because this was before the incident with the cop. I heard someone shouting from the front lawn so I went out onto the porch and it was Deb's dad. He was standing on the other side of the fence yelling at the house. Come out here you son of a bitch. Come out here you batterer. He looked pretty ridiculous, this old guy standing there in a golf shirt and shorts with his socks pulled up to his knees, yelling at the house.

Go home, I said. You don't know what you're talking about.

You son of a bitch, he said. I know what I'm talking

about. I'm talking about her face. What you did to her face.

I didn't do nothing to her face.

You son of a bitch.

He pulled open the gate and ran up the walkway, onto the porch, took a swing. He missed by a mile and I pushed him back, sprawling onto the lawn in his golf shirt and shorts and socks. Three o'clock in the morning. Some old man lying in the dirt, breath knocked out of him, looking like he was going to cry.

That's my little girl you son of a bitch and if you ever go near her again I'll kill you.

He got up and limped back to his car. I got another beer out of the fridge and sat on the porch and drank. I was really in the red then. If I'd had my notebook then, I would have written down that I wanted to kill Deb's dad. And I would have drawn a line and written that the reason I wanted to kill him was because I would have done the same thing if I were him and some fucking monster had done that to my little girl's perfect face.

When I get home from work, the first thing I notice is that no one's stolen the TV from the front porch yet. The second thing I notice is a padded envelope by the door. I don't even wait to go inside. I turn on the porch light and open the envelope.

There it is, the "Bones" McCoy bear. Hand-molded ceramic. Holding a small medicine vial in one paw, squinting at the liquid inside.

The phone rings. I unlock the door and go in.

Someone whispering on the phone, Turn on your TV. Turn on your TV to Channel Four.

Who is this.

This is Bob Shed. Turn on your TV to Channel Four. I'm calling everyone.

Who's Bob Shed?

From the class, he says. Bob Shed from the class. I sit behind where Luis used to sit.

The middle manager guy.

What's on Channel Four, I say.

Just turn it on and you'll see.

I pull the phone cord out onto the porch and turn on the TV. Brian Lang is holding up an autographed poster from the TV show *Quantum Leap*. I turn to Channel

Four.

There's a helicopter shot of a pretty nice looking house, Beverly Hills or Bel Air or somewhere. A spotlight from another helicopter, a police helicopter, moving back and forth across the front lawn and the roof of the house. Squad cars in the street, a couple of cops on the front lawn pointing their guns. The Traffic Guy standing in front of the house, hands in the air. The graphic on the bottom of the screen says *Breaking News*.

Do you see it, Bob Shed says.

I see it, I say. I see it, I see it.

There was a standoff, he says. He was in there with his wife and daughter and a handgun. The daughter's like six years old. That's his own traffic copter filming that shot.

I feel like I'm going to be sick. I don't say this to Bob Shed, but I feel it.

I can't believe it, Bob Shed says. That's two of us in two weeks. Who's next do you think. Who's going to be next.

I've got to go, I say.

Me too, Bob Shed says. I've got to call the rest of the class.

On the TV, the cops have the Traffic Guy lying face down on his porch, hands behind his head. One cop's got his knee in the Traffic Guy's back while another cop cuffs him. The wife and daughter come out of the house and a cop pulls a blanket over their shoulders and leads them to a squad car. Big group of neighbors on the sidewalk across the street. They clap for the wife and daughter as they come by.

I have this dream where Luis and the Traffic Guy and Brian Lang and I are on a talk show, and Connie is the host. Luis is wearing handcuffs and an orange prison jumpsuit. The Traffic guy is wearing the same thing. We're all sitting in a row on a stage in front of an audience and Connie asks us what it's like to be TV stars. Luis and the Traffic Guy and Brian Lang all say that they like it all right, and then Connie asks me what it's like to be a TV star. I say I've never been on TV and Brian says, But your voice has, Jonas, and Luis smiles and says, You'll be on soon enough, man. You'll be on soon enough.

The assignment this week, Connie says, is the toughest one. And if you don't think you can do it safely, you are not to attempt it. I can't emphasize this enough. Is that understood?

Everybody nods.

This week, Connie says, I want you to look through your notebooks and find a situation that set you off back at the beginning of the class. Something that you became angry about. And I want you to put yourself in that situation again.

Some raised eyebrows here in the cafeteria.

You all need be able to deal with situations that have the potential to set you off, she says. You're going to encounter them all the time once the class is over, and you need to be confident and I need to be confident that you can deal with those situations in a safe and responsible manner.

A guy in the back says, Even after Luis.

Even after Luis.

Even after the Traffic Guy.

You are not Luis, Connie says. You are not the Traffic Guy.

This is like our final exam, the middle manager says. Bob Shed.

Yes, Connie says. This is like your final exam.

This is Deb's TV, I say. I brought Deb her TV back.

I'm calling the police you son of a bitch. Get away from my house.

Deb's dad shouts at me through his screen door. I can see Deb and her mom's faces in an upstairs window, watching.

I'm on the phone right now you son of a bitch, he yells. I dialed 911.

I just want to give her back her TV.

Deb's not coming out you son of a bitch. Deb wants nothing to do with you.

Then can you come out and get the TV.

Dogs barking. Lights snapping on in windows along the street.

Deb's mom calls from the upstairs window, Carl don't, but Deb's dad puts down the phone and comes charging through the screen door. He's carrying a golf club. A nine iron, looks like. Maybe a seven.

You son of a bitch you won't lay a hand on my little

girl again do you hear me?

He's running down the lawn, cocking the club over his shoulder. I'm gripping the TV so hard the corners are cutting into my hands. Ten steps away. I can feel the roll of quarters in my pocket. Leave them, leave them. Five steps away. Keep gripping the TV. You are not Luis, you are not the Traffic Guy. Maybe, Connie, maybe. One step away. Deb's dad plants his feet.

Never again you son of a bitch, he says. Do you hear me?

I hear you, I say, I hear you, and I clench my teeth and keep gripping the TV so that I don't do anything, I don't cover up or hit back or even make a sound when Deb's dad winds up and starts to swing.

About halfway home I find a pay phone with its receiver still attached.

We have Jonas on the line from Los Angeles. Hello, Jonas.

Hello, Brian.

How's your night?

I've had better.

I hear you, my friend. Something on the show caught your eye.

My eye. My left eye is too swollen shut to see.

I'm not watching the show, I say.

You're TV's out again.

I gave it back. It wasn't my TV.

Brian laughs. How do you like the bear? The *Star Trek* bear.

It's great, Brian. It's just like you said it would be.

Our connection is bad, Brian says. Where are you, Jonas?

I'm at a pay phone.

Are you all right?

What do you have on the show.

Are you all right, Jonas?

What do you have on the show.

Resin models. A Godzilla model and a Mothra model.

A lot of people are calling in.

They are.

I'll take one of those models.

Which one?

You pick.

They take a while to paint, you know.

That's okay.

I wipe something out of my eyes. Blood from my head, a throbbing cut somewhere under my hair.

Brian says, Maybe you should go home, Jonas.

I will, I say. In a while. But I'd like to listen. I'd like to go on hold and listen to the show.

From a pay phone.

I got a whole roll of quarters.

Jonas?

I'd just like to listen to the show for a while, Brian, before I go home.

Okay, Jonas, he says. Stay with us.

All right, I say. I'll try.



DglsN.Rthsjchld

## **if you were to write of me**

1.] i would of right experience  
i would that i were as were  
Odysseus on his Ithaka. & all  
round Kalypso's Isle noting 'no  
man' or 'gnomon' telling of time  
travel & traveling. & not traveling  
& time, trapped on a beach not  
of his making, as one transported  
away from time, onto an island,  
away from knowing & into the  
gneiss, the gnosis, the gnomon  
the nomen. Making distinctions,  
answering to no one. Parsing out  
the little pieces, making distinctions.

2.] i would of you, & or experience  
writing & knowing. Know &  
known of resources as knowing  
of yet untapped. Resentful &  
defensive. Trapped as a traveler  
without a watch. Watching for  
a time. Waiting as if without  
time. Travel, as if by waiting for  
& from. No place like home.  
Know place like home. Now,  
known of this place, traveling  
through time as time travels  
past. Waiting for a ship, for a  
slip in the stream, watching.

3.] As if for a ship to slip by, as  
a shift in the sands, passes the  
time. Waiting for a slip to pass  
by. Nice distinctions, cut by the  
gnomonclature of knowing time.  
The where & what of that which  
is the time passing & noting nothing,  
changing nothing, experiencing, as  
if for the first time, waiting or with  
that watching. Or waiting. There is  
that the why would that he should  
have stayed so long if there were  
there no experiences by which to  
tell of his passing through time.

4.] The weeping of if the means of that  
were the only means of effecting  
the present motion. The prescience of  
the persistence of memory in that  
moment which would become the  
moment of the knowledge of his  
knowing of the resources that were the  
experience of this vision of his  
escape. Yet one must consider, where  
were what was the presence of the  
present or ready to have at hand? &  
how could one travel so far without  
any resources? How could one so  
resourceful completely loose his way?

MARK ATKINS [images]

ROD MENGHAM [text]

## **vacant history**



At Dover, Matthew Arnold turned to Sophocles from a cold latitude: 'this distant northern sea.' He spoke from a familiar place as if from a great distance, although it was really his own times that seemed remote. Above the beach, a faded newsprint copy of his poem is fixed to the wall of a terraced house. The owner of the house, on the basis of no evidence whatsoever, plays host to an idea that Arnold wrote the poem in one of his rooms. The poem imagines the world not as the threshold between dream and reality, but as a perilous brink between dream and nightmare. The ghost of Arnold's idea – a self-haunting reverie – isn't knocking around in the cellarage or the wardrobes at the foot of the cliffs, but has a strange after-life higher up, in the fragile archaeology of war lying scattered around on the brink of the chalk.



Here is the true vantage point for the darkling plain, the bomber's moon and ship-infested seas; here is where one imagines most clearly the withdrawal of dream and advance of nightmare; here perhaps the melancholy ebb and flow of military thinking, the prolonged echo of Arnold's ignorant armies, forever clashing by night.



The ruins on the Langdon site were built between 1884 and 1885 to house convict labour. The prisoners were earmarked for the construction of a new Admiralty harbour, but all they did was sew mailbags and chop firewood. In 1901, the name and function of the site changed to Dover Military Prison. Expansion over the following year turned it into the biggest military jail in the country.



In the same year, the Langdon Battery was installed nearby, housing three enormous 9.2 inch guns. They were so long at 37 feet and so heavy at 27 tons that transporting them through the streets of the town proved impossible, and the monster barrels had to be rolled over the fields, for a distance of one mile. They saw action in the First World War but their main use was as a threat to shipping. They could not repulse the German Zeppelins, calling for quick-response anti-aircraft fire. According to the Langdon Fort Record Book, the Zeppelin threat was frequent and the airships were not deterred by AA fire, often cheating the gunners' best efforts. Despite their size, they frustrated attempts to bring them down, even when crippled. On 9 August 1915, a Zeppelin that had dropped bombs on Dover harbour was severely damaged by fire from the battery, but rather than plunge to earth or water, it 'rose and disappeared in cloud.'



The garrison saw no action for years at a time; their lives were captive to a gunboat diplomacy, they rusted for an oiled machine. Internment was what happened here, if not always in name then certainly in nature. They waited, and even when war obliged they waited some more. Langdon became a freeze-frame transit camp, the point of departure for troops heading to France, but departure was delayed: delay became the new marching orders; the marching orders rose and disappeared in cloud.



They waited and the buildings started to fall down. The Infirmary block lasted longest, acting as a Sergeant's Mess in World War Two, ending as a prisoner-of-war camp. The white cliffs, symbolic front-line against German invasion, acquired half a millimetre of irony in history's reverse topping-out ceremony: five hundred metres of calcium carbonate were surmounted by a thin crust of despondency, the sedimented longings of young-old Germans with only one thing in mind: repatriation. Airborne seeds of comfrey, hawkweed, kidney vetch, greater knapweed, thistledown, came and went. Loose rubble was embedded in moss, moss was embedded in rubble. Voices from the port carried up on the wind, English voices flawed into German by gusts of yearning. The waves drew back like thoughts of home receding into the past.



Langdon distils more waiting time into every cubic inch of downland turf, and more concentrated desire for elsewhere, than any other place on the English shoreline. There is almost no here and now at Langdon. Its own history is a vapour into which past and future alike disappear. If England is rooted in the imagining of its chalk bulwark, then England is as chimerical as a blue bird over the white cliffs. This member of the thrush family is native only to the Americas. The librettist, Nat Burton, sang of the distant Kentish coast he had never seen, as if from long acquaintance. Dovorians now join in the chorus, frequent flyers over this dilapidating stage-set, riding the thermals of port-mythology and homesickness by proxy.





PHIL SHOENFELT  
**stripped**  
[extract]

I come up out of another short nod, woken by the sound of a flat, monotonous voice. Little Frankie Pickup is holding forth, croaking his way through a long story about credit cards and a German banker called Erasmus. Frankie is a member of Bill's network of underworld contacts, a shady character from the fringes of the New York jazz scene. He dresses like a hipster from the 1940's, and always wears a double-breasted suit with suspenders, tie and a Stingy-Brim hat. At first sight he could pass for a respectable member of the cognoscenti – maybe a critic from *The Village Voice*, with an eccentric taste in clothes. But look again, and there's something not quite right about him, something shrunken and decidedly unwholesome. Frankie has an extensive knowledge of jazz that would have allowed him to write professionally about it, if he'd so wished. Instead, he makes his living as a small-time thief, often trading what he's stolen for a few bags of dope.

This time he's hit the jackpot – a wallet full of cash, plus bank and credit cards, including an AMEX Gold. Now he's narrating, for our general amusement, the story of how he came by this heaven-sent stash of booty.

"It was beautiful, man, like in a dream... There I was, walkin' down Lexington over by the Gramercy Park Hotel, tryin' to find a cab an' get the hell outta this goddamn weather... But the few that are working

have all bin taken, an' not one of the fuckers'll stop for me. An' so I'm resigning myself to taking the subway at Union Square, when suddenly a big ol' checker pulls up, right in front of the hotel. The back door opens, an' this slick-lookin' cat in a Homburg an' overcoat steps out, carrying a leather briefcase. Right away I make him for a Wall Street type, an' it's clear from the way he's moving that the guy is bombed. It turns out later he's a Kraut, a banking consultant from West Berlin, over here for some kinda convention... Anyhow, I'm getting ahead of myself here... So I'm running over, tryin' to get to the cab before someone else does, when all at once the guy goes over on his back. Like full length, in the snow. So I go to make like the Good Samaritan, helping him up an' thinking all the while that maybe I can lift his wallet. If it works out, I can make a quick escape in the cab before he's hip. But then the hotel doorman comes over, an' I can tell right away that he's onto me. So both of us are tryin' to get this fat fucker on his feet, an' the doorman keeps putting himself between us, not giving me a chance to find the guy's poke. An' like I say, the Kraut is bombed an' doesn't know what's happening... Suddenly he starts hollerin', tryin' to fight us off, like he thinks we're a coupla shakedown artists. I'm tellin' ya man, it was pure Buster fuckin' Keaton, a regular comedy of errors... An' all this time the cab is waiting, with the driver yellin' at me to either get

in or slam the goddamn door. So I think fuck this an' let go the Kraut's arm, an' as I jump into the cab both him an' the doorman go over in the snow! Jesus H. Christ, I thought I was gonna piss myself laughing... But as they say in the movies, the best is yet to come. As I turn around in my seat to watch these two bozos wrestling on the sidewalk, I feel somethin' hard an' bulky under my ass. An' fuck me if it ain't the guy's pocketbook an' wallet – \$300 in cash, credit an' bank cards, the jerk has even got the PIN numbers written in his diary. Oh, an' there's a coupla tickets for the New York Philharmonic, in case anyone's interested..."

Frankie leans back in his chair and lights a cigarette. Basking in the glow of his achievement, he shakes his head in mock bewilderment at the idiocy of the straight world. His pupils are pinned to vanishing point, while an expression of smug contempt is twisting his face into something ugly and mean. It's obvious this story is gonna run and run. I can imagine it being retold in shooting galleries and crash pads until it's become the stuff of legend. With the neglected cigarette smouldering between his fingers, Frankie suddenly drops off into a nod. Bill takes up the story from where he left off.

"So I'm sitting in the bath-tub a couple of hours ago when I get this call from Frankie Boy. Totally hyped up, he is, babbling away about this wallet full of goodies he's found in the back of a taxi. Watches an' jewellery are more his line, an' it's obvious he's out of his depth an' doesn't know what to do. So I tell him to bring the stuff over, but fast. Then I can check out the bank cards an' see if they're usable or not."

The first thing they'd done was to take the \$300 from the wallet and strike a deal with Arturo, a Puerto Rican dealer who lived upstairs. Arturo was in a good mood, and had given them a generous amount, grateful for the business on a dead Sunday evening. After getting high, they'd gone through the German's pocket book and found all kinds of interesting things. Passport and letters, photos and memos, luncheon vouchers and private invitations. But most importantly, the bank cards and the diary with the PIN numbers inside. As Bill said, the guy was an idiot to keep all this stuff together in his pocket – especially when riding around drunk in a New York City cab.

In a blur of excitement, the pair had slogged it up

to the Citibank on the corner of 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue and 15<sup>th</sup> Street. After keying in the numbers, they'd drawn out the maximum daily amount on each card. The plan now was to wait until midnight, then repeat the process to see if the PIN numbers were still valid. Tomorrow they intended to go shopping with the AMEX Gold, avoiding the bigger department stores which might have network computers.

Bill settles back with a grin on his face. "I reckon we've got a couple of days before the postal lists go out. If anybody wants anything, just write it all down an' I'll see what I can do. Only don't be too greedy – I've only got one pair of hands."

This boastful yet self-mocking manner is typical of Bill. He's a charismatic character, the type you either love or hate, and he doesn't believe in half measures. Whether it's underground theatre he's producing, or copping and shooting drugs, everything takes place in a whirlwind of mad energy. He's a little bit older than Tom, one of the most erudite people I've ever come across. I first met him a couple of years ago at Tier 3, a small club in TriBeCa, just off West Broadway. Bill was there to show a rare print of Jean Genet's *Chant d'Amour*, and before the screening he'd given a short speech about the history and circumstances of the film. I remember thinking he cut an impressive figure, with his black clothes, tinted glasses and sleazy, bohemian demeanour. Later, we got to talking. When the subject of drugs cropped up, he let me know that he had access to some excellent dope: if I ever wanted to score, just call him and he'd sort me out. We've been friends ever since, and I've learned a hell of a lot from him. Not only about the drug business, but books, theatre and movies too.

As he comes to the end of this happy story, I can feel myself going under again. The next time I surface, Bill is nowhere to be seen. Little Frankie is still gouched out, slumped over in his chair with his hat at a crazy angle. Looking around the room, I notice that a few more people have arrived.

Marcia Levin and her friend Beth are standing in the doorway, taking off their coats and casting about for somewhere to sit down. Freddy Diamond is pacing back and forth, counting out bills from a wad of greenbacks that's thick enough keep me in dope for a week. Bill's

friend Kearney, a graphic designer from Melbourne, is sitting by the window cooking up a shot. Over in the corner, Hendricks and Paul Smith are engaged in a conversation about music that is heating up into a regular argument.

Hendricks, who considers himself a purist, is extolling the virtuosos of the bebop era, John Coltrane in particular. I keep hearing phrases like “naked expression” and “the Zen concept of the Unconscious Mind”. Paul is hyping the “No Wave” bands that had appeared a few years earlier, whose music was a mixture of punk energy and atonal experimentation. But Hendricks has either got the wrong end of the stick, or is purposely misunderstanding what Paul is saying in order to wind him up. Right now he’s accusing him of being in favour of jazz-fusion, a genre Paul hates, as Hendricks well knows.

I drag myself up from the beer crate and make my way across the room to where Tom Lyall is sitting. He seems a little preoccupied, staring intently at the pile of film cans scattered around his feet.

Tom is a big guy in his mid thirties who grew up on a farm in western Australia. With his wire-rimmed spectacles and bookish manner, he looks like a more robust version of Leon Trotsky. That’s how I see him anyway. Though disciplined and organised in his creative life, he seems to thrive on the scenes of boundless chaos that Bill attracts. His films are brilliant, but totally uncommercial: streams of rapid-fire images that hit you in the head like a round of machine-gun bullets. In one twenty minute short you absorb more information than you would in a conventional movie of an hour and a half. My favourite is *Death On Wheels*, an apocalyptic vision of gridlocked streets, highway pile-ups, mangled bodies and wreckers’ yards. Intercut with iconic photos from the Vietnam war, it’s a portrait of the American dream gone horribly wrong. There’s never any real narrative to his films, but they’re put together in such a way that they never get boring or repetitive. Unlike a lot of these art movies that get shown in SoHo lofts and downtown cinemas. I want to ask him about the shoot I took part in over a year ago, when a Puerto Rican hooker named Renata overdosed and nearly died.

“Oh that,” he says, smiling. “I’ve developed the film, and transferred it to 16mm tape, but it’s just raw

footage at the moment. It’s got to be worked in with other stuff I’ve shot, and up to now we haven’t had enough dosh to pay for an editing suite. That’s what’s so great about our mate Frankie here getting his hands on that gold AMEX. Anyhow, I’ve set a projector up next door, and we’re gonna show the Renata segment later. Stick around if you wanna see it.”

I remember the panic that ensued when the girl was found unconscious in Bill’s room. What had been intended as a documentary about the New York dope scene had suddenly become all too real. Tom’s decision to keep shooting as Renata OD’d had led to an argument with Bill, who’d accused him of making artistic capital from other people’s misery. Tom had stuck to his guns, insisting on his right to document the facts and comparing himself to a reporter in the field. After this disagreement, the pair hadn’t spoken to each other for several days. I’m interested in seeing the movie for a couple of different reasons. Partly because my memories of that day are so hazy; but mostly because of Lisa, a porn actress and topless dancer I was living with at the time.

We’d gone to the house to cop some drugs one summer afternoon, turning up by chance just as the filming was about to begin. At Tom’s request we’d agreed to participate, along with Renata and several other junkies who were hanging out for a fix. Initially, Lisa hadn’t wanted to be in the movie. It was Bill who talked her into it by playing up the artistic aspect. She still had reservations, though, and was worried enough to call at the house a few days later for a private viewing. Afterwards she came home fuming, telling me she felt more ashamed of this film than of any of the porno clips she’d acted in. This was quite an admission coming from her, and I want to find out what rattled her so much.

Bill walks in and sits down next to me, placing a few nickel bags of coke on the table. God knows where he’s managed to cop on a night like this, but with him it’s a matter of necessity. He’s on such a high dosage of methadone – something like 90 mls a day – that he has to keep shooting coke in order just to stay awake. In addition he suffers from systemic Lupus, an autoimmune disease that affects the skin and can also damage the organs. It’s not fatal when controlled with

cortisone, but it's a huge pain in the arse and involves frequent visits to the hospital for treatment and check-ups. It's hard to imagine how he can function with so many different drugs coursing through his system.

"Feeling better, mate? I told you I'd struck it lucky. All we gotta do now is get the Kraut's signature down pat an' we're in business. If we move fast, we should be able to buy lights, microphones, a couple of cameras an' a new projector – everything we need to get Deathwatch Productions up an' running. It's a pity we can't pay for the editing suite on credit. I mean we could, but it's too risky. They know who we are an' it could lead to trouble with the cops."

I ask him how rehearsals are going for his latest production, a version of Joe Orton's *The Ruffian On The Stair*. As usual, everything is being done on a shoestring budget. Bill himself is acting as well as directing, and has rented an after-hours bar on 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue for a short run later in the month.

"Paul Smith is a natural, I don't have to explain anything to him. Natasha's a bit of a problem, though. Her role calls for a measure of repressed hysteria, but instead she insists on playing it like Blanche Dubois. I keep having to yell at her every five minutes an' tell her to tone her performance down. Then she bursts into tears an' runs out of the room, claiming I'm a bully. I've got no time for that prima donna shit. I think she'll be okay in the end, but she'll probably have a nervous breakdown first."

I can feel my eyelids drooping as Bill prepares his shot, his voice fading in and out like a short-wave radio transmission. Soon I'm floating through a cotton-candy world tinted with pink and amber, far away from the dark, frozen streets of Alphabet City. Waves of colour wash through me, building through crimson into purple and gold. With my body soothed by the warm bath of endorphins, finally I feel at home in my own skin. I'm up above cloud level now, looking down on snowy white mountain tops and mysterious deep ravines. Little patches of green occasionally break through, and a million shining alpine flowers ringle and tingle their bright morning faces towards me. Off to the west, where the mountains fall away, I can see the ocean swelling and breathing, merging with the sky. From eagle to gull I dive beneath the waves, then rise to the

surface and startle myself awake with little gasps of pleasure.

At some point the background murmur of conversation recedes. I open my eyes to discover that I'm now alone in the room. I doze off again, maybe for only a few seconds, tuning in to the funky aroma that's wafting up out of my clothes. The next thing I'm aware of is Bill's voice and his big meaty hand on my shoulder.

"Wakey wakey, sunshine, if you wanna see the film. There's been a few technical hitches, but I think we've got 'em sorted out now. Tom's about ready to go."

Bleary-eyed and dopey, I follow him through into the next room. By the light of the projector I can make out people sitting around on beer crates and leaning against the walls. Several more have turned up since the last time I nodded out. Now there's a regular audience gathered, waiting for the entertainment to begin.

I sit down on the floor next to Paul Smith. As the film starts to roll, the first thing I see is a close-up of Lisa's face. The camera pulls back, and there I am too, both of us sprawled out on the greasy old sofa in Bill's room. Lisa is wearing a tight-fitting, orange Day-Glo dress that's ridden up almost to her arse. With her gold high-heels, her red-painted nails, and her tangled mass of blond hair, she certainly looks the part. She's saying something to me, but it's impossible to decipher, as her voice is horribly slurred. Every few seconds her head droops onto my shoulder, her monologue trailing off into silence. Even when she's nodded out, she can't stop scratching the end of her nose.

My own performance isn't any better. My eyes keep on closing, a fly crawls over my face, and at one point I fall asleep completely. Both of us keep scratching away as if we've got fleas, while Lisa's expression is so vacant she looks as though she's been lobotomised. I'm beginning to understand, now, why she got so upset.

The scene ends abruptly, then segues into black and white footage that seems to have been shot more recently. As the camera zooms in through an open door, we see Bill sitting on the sofa next to Joey Charles, a black musician from Chicago. Both of them have just tied off, and are pumping their arms to try and raise a vein.

In Joey's case this is no easy matter. Most of his veins are shot beyond repair, while his arms and legs

are gruesome tangles of abscessed flesh and scar tissue. He jabs around in his forearm for a while, pushing hard to get the needle in. When it becomes clear it's not gonna happen there, he gives up and moves to his foot, which is in a pretty bad state too. Finally he finds a vein, draws back the plunger and gets ready to shoot. Unfortunately the vein collapses before he can, and he has to start the search all over again.

By now, his arms and feet are streaked with coagulated blood, which he wipes away with a bandana. Then the syringe becomes blocked, so he takes off the spike and squirts the gory mixture back into the spoon. He adds a little water to break down the clots, stirs it around, washes out the needle, then sucks the shot up into the barrel for one more try.

All in all, it's a very depressing scene. Joey was a great guy till he got into smack, a big-hearted man with a lust for life who also happened to be a brilliant jazz drummer. I first met him through Bill a couple of years ago, soon after he'd got in from Chicago. He was totally focused on music, then, full of enthusiasm for the band he'd recently put together. They had management, groupies, the critics loved them, record company scouts were at every gig they played. But a couple of the guys had got a little strung out, and once the labels got wind of this the record company scouts stopped coming. The band still had a following, but their creative energy was already on the wane, and by the time they got signed by a small independent label, personality conflicts were tearing them apart. Finally the manager ran off with the advance, leaving the band high and dry. That was when Joey started using smack in a big way. Seeing him now, in a cold hard light, objectified by the film, I feel shocked at how dead end his existence has become.

For a couple of seconds there's only static, as blank tape runs through the projector. Then we're back to colour with Lisa and me, hamming our way through a loosely scripted vignette of two junkie lovers overdosing. This was Bill's idea, and I remember thinking it was pretty naff at the time. Seeing it played back, with an audience in attendance, makes me squirm with embarrassment.

It's the lack of authenticity that gets to me the most. Lisa has just returned home to find the love of

her life dead on the sofa with the needle still in his arm. Slapping his face to try and revive him, weeping and pulling her hair in distraction, she finally admits defeat. But instead of leaving the place forthwith, as any normal junkie would do, she decides instead to join him in the Great Beyond. As I continue in my role of corpse, she cooks up a huge shot, snuffling and blubbing with her eye makeup running, trying to look suitably tragic. Finally she gets the shot together and bangs it into her mainline.

This opiated version of Romeo and Juliet concludes with both parties stiffed out on the sofa. Even though she's supposed to be dead, Lisa manages to show off her thighs to nice effect. I'm slumped in the same position as before, never having had the chance to rise to the occasion. And then out of left field, and without explanation, Bill rushes into the room, attempts to revive the victims, moves the bodies around a bit and pretends to be distraught. Staring into the camera, he gives a philosophical speech – some arcane nonsense concerning Destiny and Chance, as if he were a one-man chorus in some ancient Greek drama.

Thankfully the scene dissolves into a white-out of visual static. I'm just glad the room is in darkness so that nobody can see my face. Hendricks is cackling to himself somewhere behind, and a couple of other people are sniggering too. If Tom wants to make a serious film about junkies, he should definitely bin the parts with Lisa and me. For the sake of his own reputation as much as ours.

What follows next is much better: footage taken earlier that same day showing various characters from the Lower East Side dope fraternity. While Bill is out on the street somewhere copping, the rest of us are killing time, waiting in his flat for him to return with the goodies. This part of the film is more impressionistic: people lounging around reading magazines, drinking coffee, standing up and sitting down, looking out the window to the vacant lot below. There are some nice shots through light and shadow, motes of dust and cigarette smoke twisting upwards through a sunbeam. In the background a transistor radio is being switched from station to station, giving a blurred, slightly dazed feeling to what is happening on screen. Tom's microphone picks up fragments of conversation in

such an unobtrusive way that pretty soon I'm nodding out again. In my mind's eye I'm back to that long hot summer when I was still hanging out with Lisa and hadn't yet met Rebecca.

I was living in Murray Hill, then, working as a building superintendent, painting apartments with my friend Greek Tony for \$600 a throw. Tony's partner Julie managed a real estate office, and as a favour to him she'd wangled me the caretaker's job and the small flat that came with it. Whenever a vacated apartment needed painting, she always made sure that the work was given to us.

In fact there were so many apartments to decorate we could hardly keep pace. We'd charge through the rooms splashing paint on walls, ceilings and doors, trying to finish in the shortest possible time. During lunchbreak I'd cab it down to the Lower East Side, where I'd score enough dope to keep me high for the rest of the day. Tony didn't really approve of my little peccadillo, being more into coke himself. But as long as I did my share of the work, he was willing to turn a blind eye.

Lisa came onto the scene in the middle of this period, soon after Debbie pulled the first of her vanishing acts. I met her at a downtown club, where she was hanging out after finishing her shift at a nearby topless bar. She sussed me right away as a fellow user, and asked if I knew a good place to score. Before long, I was copping for her on a regular basis.

Even though it was a business arrangement, we always had fun partying and doing drugs. When she split up with her boyfriend, she asked if she could crash on my sofa – just for a few days until she found a place of her own. The platonic phase of our relationship as flat-mates lasted about five minutes. As well as being friendly, she was also extremely sexy, and we ended up fucking the first night she moved in.

For the next few weeks we didn't do much else. Lisa's time in the porn business had taught her a lot, and it certainly hadn't blunted her appetite for sex. She made a lot of money doing what she did, and because I never asked her for rent, she insisted on buying all the drugs. Seeing as I didn't exactly discourage her from doing this, it wasn't too long before we both had raging habits.

Things turned sour after she saw Tom's film. She hated her onscreen image so much that it poisoned everything between us. Soon she was bitching and complaining the whole time, criticising my excessive drug use and just about everything else. Finally Debbie got wind of our domestic arrangement and returned to bang the last nail into the coffin lid.

It turned out they knew each other from the topless dancing circuit. For a couple of days I had both of them living there, pretending to be friends while locked in a silent battle for supremacy. It was Lisa who cracked first. Once she'd accepted defeat she got out of there pretty fast. I couldn't help noticing her look of relief as she hauled her bags out the door.

Debbie stayed on for a few days, we even got high together. But she didn't want to have sex, she didn't want to discuss things, she didn't want to tell me why she'd left so abruptly before. Distant and preoccupied, she would only talk about trivial matters unconnected to our relationship.

One morning I woke up to find her packing her bags. I feigned sleep until the door had closed behind her, then got up to read the note she'd left on the kitchen table: "Sorry, baby," it said, "I can't be with you right now, I just can't. I need space and time to get my head together. But I'll be back, don't worry. And I promise I still love you. Forever, Debbie."

What pulls me from this melancholic reverie is another burst of static from the screen. As the lights come up, Tom switches over to a 16mm projector and a buzz of anticipation passes through the room. This is the part of the film that I really want to see, the bit with Renata the Puerto Rican hooker. It's obviously the section that everyone else has been waiting for too. Tom and Bill have been raving about this footage for months, ever since they managed to hustle enough cash to get it developed. All arguments concerning the ethics of filming a dying person seem to have been laid aside.

At first, it looks like an old-fashioned skin-flick, grainy and a little out of focus. We see a close-up of Renata's face, contorted in ecstasy, strands of damp hair plastered against her cheeks. Framed by the background of a dingy pillow, her head turns slowly from side to side, the half closed eyes foggy and unseeing. Her thick lips are pulled back from her teeth,

beads of sweat cover her brow. The image looks so pornographic that I find myself waiting for the camera to pull back and reveal the pumping rear end of some well-hung stud.

Instead, we see a pair of hands grabbing her by the shoulders, lifting her up and shaking her about. Then another hand enters the frame, pulling her hair and slapping her face repeatedly. It's by no means clear what is going on here. If I didn't know better, I'd say we were watching an S&M movie.

Suddenly the hands disappear, and there's a creamy shot of Renata's heavy-lidded eyes rolling upwards. This is the moment when it seemed we were gonna lose her. Tom has slowed the film down slightly, which gives the impression of time standing still. The fact that the whole thing is without a soundtrack makes the action look even more sinister.

After lingering on her face for a couple of minutes, the camera tracks down to her left arm, where somebody is trying to shoot her up. If I remember rightly, it was Paul Smith who gave her the salt shot, an overdose treatment which is supposed to help in the absence of an antagonist such as Narcan. I'd heard of this tactic before, but I'd never believed that ordinary kitchen salt could work against something as powerful as heroin. Thankfully on this occasion it did, and slowly, by degrees, Renata came around.

There are more close-ups of her emerging from the swoon, her hair messed up and damp with sweat, as if she's just been ravaged. Then, without any warning, the segment ends and we're left staring at the blank screen as the run off tape flaps noisily around the spool.

I'm not sure what kind of statement Tom is trying to make here. Or even if he's trying to make one. Instead of taking a humanist position, the film is deliberately ambiguous, playing with a series of opposites within the borders of the current Critical Debate: the relationship between eroticism and death, attraction and repulsion, pornography and art, documentation and exploitation. Considering the star of the movie almost died, it all seems a bit dubious. But then Tom's films are intended to unsettle, not entertain. Now, as he stands up to turn on the lights, nobody is saying anything. The only sound comes from Little Frankie Pickup, snoring away in an armchair at the back of the room.

"Well, guys, I see what you mean," says Hendricks finally. "It's groovy shit, especially the parts with Joey an' Renata. I'm sure when it's edited an' put into some kinda context it's all gonna work out fine. The photography, the camerawork, the aesthetic feeling are all there, no doubt about it. An' in the final section of the Renata footage, the bit where she almost croaks, there's this seductive vibe that really pulls you in. But that's kinda where I see the problem lyin'. I mean, you're makin' the death – well okay, near death – of a vulnerable woman look attractive an' more than a little bit sexy. An' of course I know this ain't new. Baudelaire and the Decadents glamourised death in their poetry, the Symbolists did it in art. All I'm sayin' is, you gotta be a little bit careful about how you present this material. Otherwise I can see you getting accused of makin' tasteful snuff movies for the art-house crowd."

There's a ripple of laughter at this. Annoying as he undoubtedly is, Hendricks does have a talent for memorable one-liners. Bill's mate Kearney is the next to join in the attack.

"Yeah, it's kinda true what Hendricks is saying, Tom. I mean, it does give the impression of being a little voyeuristic. Maybe even exploitative, if you'll pardon the expression."

"That's bullshit!" Bill explodes. "You're both talking crap. Tom's just showing things the way they are, and that smartass line of Hendrick's concerning snuff movies is total bollocks. What if you applied the same criticism to documentaries, to archive footage and the news? We'd never have seen the true horrors of the Holocaust, we'd never have learned about the massacres in Vietnam. We'd just sit here cocooned in our private little worlds, believing all the government lies and kidding ourselves that everything's hunky-dory."

"That's not what I'm saying," replies Kearney a little testily. "I don't think anybody here would argue about the need for objective documentation and analysis. It's just that in the case of Tom's film, I'm not convinced that this is what's being offered." He's about to say something more on the topic, but before he can get the words out Marcia Levin jumps into the fray.

# STU HATTON

## poems

### city soil

Sky-loss. City glass self-reflects. We weren't sure where we were. We weren't where we were sure.

Old-fashioned causes, like darkness. With the ease of abstractions, crowned 'scrapers drift into flaky heavens. Dashing out-of-doors, freshed by a blast of air. Wearing a yellow post-it.

How to be an appearance. Look wildfire. Or look careful-ish. Look an expert faller.

The act of self-composting. But here? Toggle dumps. Level up, level down.

It is the mouth that strives for order. Until we know what caused this incident. We can't be certain. It won't recur.

City & colour. Know this to be sepia-grey. The talk of those convincing themselves they like to be caged. How to pick tourists from photographers & the choppers banking overhead.

Excess sweat of narrative. Abandoned bike locks still clamped at the foot of steel arches. Lock the ground. Metallic subsoils, plastics, asphalt dunes.

Thankyou for your patience while we build you. Papery face. The familiar forms a family, the outward. Wife pointing out cute little booties.

Pretending to rain again. Then this path, formed by feet. We weren't where we were, sure. Were we sure where we weren't?

Fined for piffing organic matter. Peel & core. Layer of eggshell from the protests. Partly-fused.

City as community garden, cutting across the verticals. Streets & streets edible, delible. Plucking basil. Turning the sign around.

The approachable.



## “coltrane was just practising in public”

i’m paraphrasing but  
you get the

received designs

“you have to understand

i arrived  
just as things kicked, misguided, my

accent acquired by landing

a role as misreader”  
(this unsolid thing  
figured wrong, a  
headful

/ question of tongue-technics insisted,  
presiding, droll)

a story is always a little different, delivered

deadpan for maximal  
fringes, frayed  
spacetime, outland’s edge-vectors,

wavescape fizz (closures:  
how to play

them, lax them  
open?)

## art in the age of digital reproduction

though who uses anything  
for its intended purpose?

a poem may be fluked?

graffiti on t-shirt / speed  
of its questions

‘i like this intrusion’

(quips the milquetoast / lost  
in customer service country)

‘killing with kindness’: the phrase  
becomes a regular

those still bossing bones  
the old way

beneath mesh  
of q & a, detail / i.d. burial

how to ‘decouple’ mind, shut  
off audio / dissolve?

think a shut eye = sleep?

detector vans roam  
artificial nighttime

&/or wrapper-rustle  
in abandoned cinema

## permuted

tracks in / not yet  
scouting for affect  
at sub-checkpoints  
of the woven / the  
liquid (the woven  
liquid?) caretakes a  
little detail / a pixel  
fetches a trace (is  
that him, sucking yr  
pixel?) / gathering  
tethered inputs to  
rearray the flows /  
disengorged, porous

## etc, etc

was born in the united  
no-interruption fantasy:

the 'organic',  
elaborate shadowlets,

pathing  
a powered deceptor of  
phrased provisionals;

a mood of the finite  
in circulation,

this gift of  
contact info:

these primitive nouns –

though a lead  
may not  
lead,

each star relays an asterisk  
of interval

## entheo

Drug as text, as intertext. Prayer without word. Asleep but restless, raiding the fossils. The rise of skin. Distraction room. A temporary language.

Working at that, performing circles.  
Giving my head back (to...) (to whom?) (to what?) Culturally devalued sphere of leisure activity (art of doing nothing with nothing). What at skin-level seems a shindig is in fact a ritualised enactment of the rupture, the de-rupturing.

The one that asks, "Who do you serve?" His eyes were everywhere; her eyes were on. Utopian move, reading the whole thing at once (an experience misconstrued as 'original' and without history). Series of re-entries. Clowning, eating a spoon. Unstitch, sidereal.

Not of substance  
but of form. To paraphrase a sky, the skyed. The markings, the tracteries. What holds. Slow spell. Neoned, plaited through time.

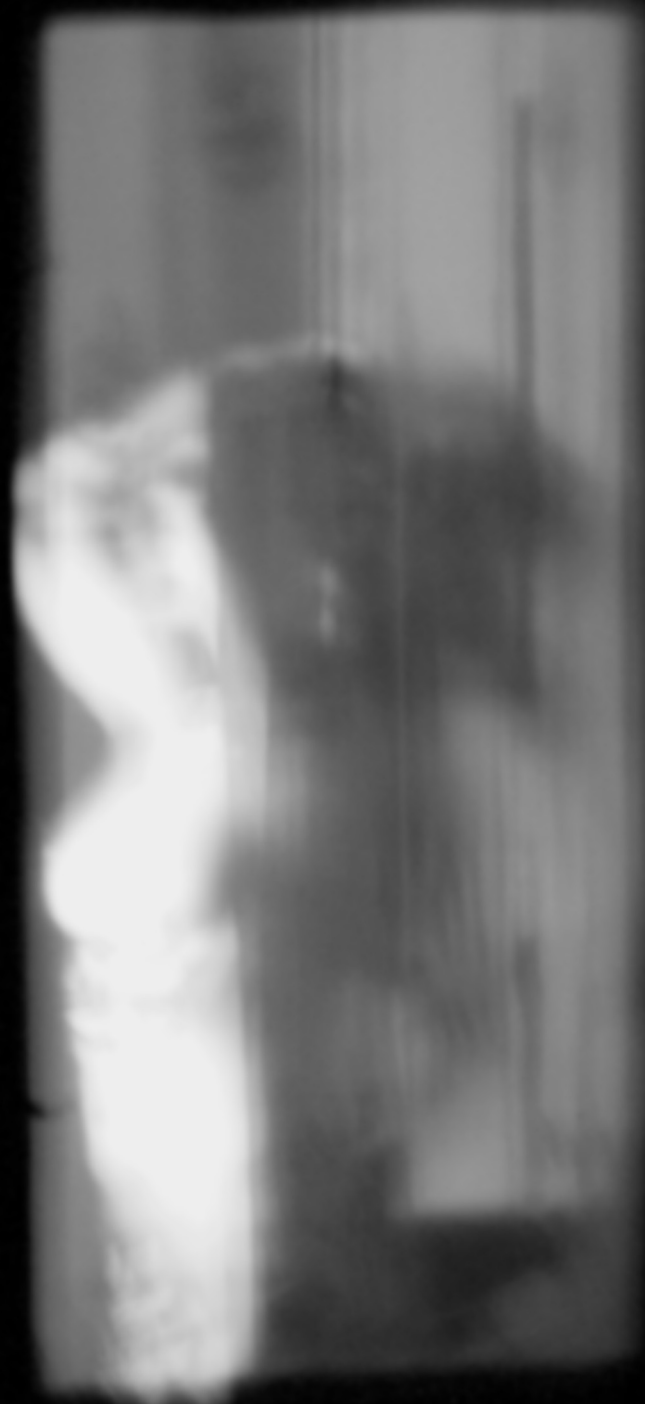
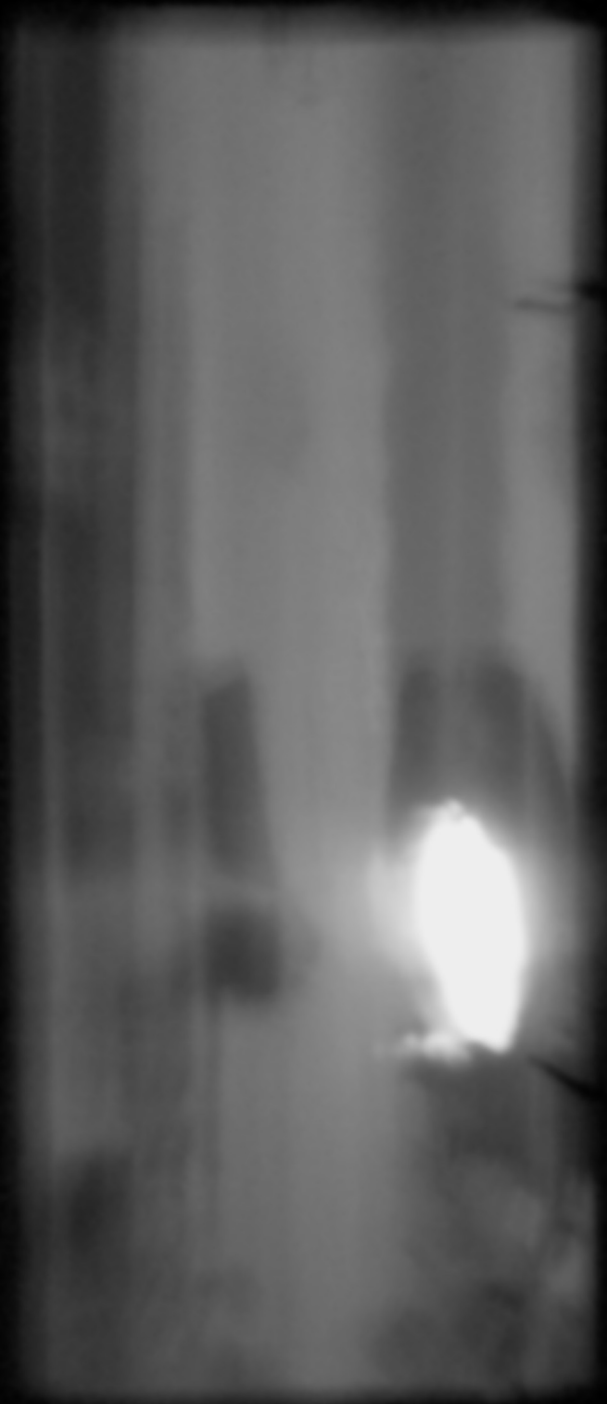


VADIM ERENT

**rear window II**













JESSICA WILKINSON

**fem.**

fem. in the hands

p a t i e n c e g h o s t i n g  
t h e p r a c t i c e o n e s t  
i t c h t w o s t i t c h f i n  
e l y f i n e l y p a t i e n t  
p u s h i n g t h e n e e d l e  
t h r o u g h t h e w a r p a n  
d w o o f p a t i e n c e p u l  
l i n g u <sup>p</sup> <sup>u</sup> p a t i e n t l y t  
r a c k i n g f i n e l y f i n ...

fem. in the blush (self-reflection)

little waves ripple sofa femme reverberating through the tongue what  
is all in her head she is all in her head but the tide will flood her cheeks  
flush: it is all in her head but the tide will flood her cheeks  
performance!

fem. in the eyes

to pinhole sharp and wild don't miss a trick  
or you know, take no shit from the jacks  
r kings and the frames double the news

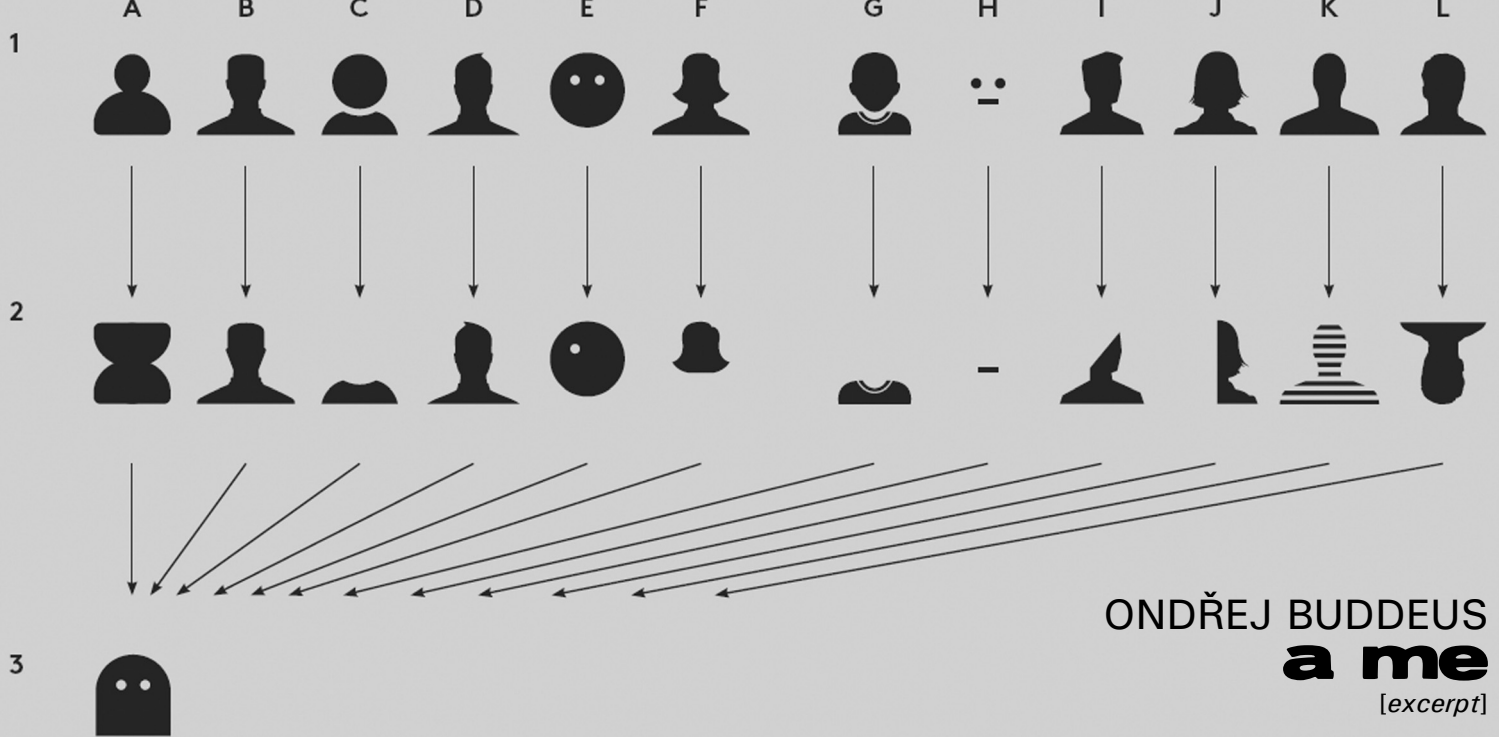
a femme  
a eye  
a view

fem. in the chest

her chest is a canvas for  
breathing the raised  
skin, a suit ribs the bridge  
bare between the body divide

fem. in the lips

red the queen the cards are cut  
the mouth split the raise  
laughing your words carry red  
thick red stained red



The book *A me* is based on the project ADAM & EWE which was realised during the festival Steirischer Herbst in Graz in 2012. ADAM is an abbreviation for “a dream about myself,” EWE for “extreme writing experience.”

At first the artist made a series of interviews during the festival asking the accidentally chosen participants to briefly describe themselves in their own way. No point of view was preferred. These personal language representations underwent certain transformations based on language procedures. During this process both normative and creative textual strategies were used. The choice of method was fully reliant on how resistant the original description was to any normative redefinition. The interviews and transformations were dependent on the social and textual competence of the artist. Therefore, during an uninterrupted 12-hour-writing in the gallery room, the EWE procedure aimed to expose the artist’s (= medium of language processes) own language idiom and thus show his dependence on the way he refers to reality and the way language itself refers to him.

In the next step, one fictional “me” was generated through a combinatorial process which was based on all the former personal descriptions. The accidentally chosen visitors of the festival-gallery were asked to briefly describe a real person who they could identify with this person. The graphic design is by WWW.MUTANTA.COM.

### THE GRAPHIC DESIGN OF THE BOOK *A ME*

When we were figuring out the concept of the graphics for this book, we touched upon the theme of exploring the boundaries of language and communication and the method by which the author created the work. His analytical approach through which he not only questioned the statements of anonymous persons, but also often nearly eliminated and subsequently combined them and created a virtual character, led us to a graphic layout whose primary theme encompasses not merely the mutual tension between the printed and digital medium, but also the question to what extent a personality is real and when its virtuality kicks in. We decided to place a part of the book into digital space which still cannot exist without its real counterpart.

**A ME 2.0**  
 CONCEPTUALIZING OF THE SELF IN THE AGE OF INTERFACE, OR SOME THOUGHTS BETWEEN TWO JOKES

**Figure 0.1: The Opening**

*Young Kohn and his beautiful wife Sara both served Lord Richard. He worked as a chauffeur while Sara was Lady Fanny's chambermaid. After some time, Kohn met his friend Abeles. His friend asked him how satisfied he was with his position. "Could be worse," Kohn replied, "the work is good, the salary too, I'm just unhappy because Lord Richard's taken it up with Sara and they already have two kids together." "Then return the favor with Lady Fanny." "That's what I'm doing, we already have two kids as well. It just bothers me that I'm making him lords and he's making me Kohns."*

**1 B**

**I'm a permanent foreigner, I was born in Peru, but my parents were not Peruvian, and then I moved to Brazil. My husband is Brazilian and now I live in London. I have a son, which makes my life really weird in the art world because it's not really common, so I do a lot of work about that. I don't really like art very much, there are some weird artists out there and I'm not that much of an activist, so... (laughing)**

or better yet, you'd have to know Mareš. Anne just came running here, I can't talk to her, I don't want to, I didn't look at her, she said something to me, you won't be the only one reading this letter. So far my expression isn't adhering to the reality it should be capturing at all. I don't know why, if we were talking together, maybe I'd be capable of saying more—through timbre, emphasis, tone, gestures. This

discourse is uttered silence. Or rather silence enhanced by words. When I get stuck, I have a drink, now I grabbed an apple, I'm eating. I'm sitting in a chair writing and the round table is chafing my elbows. The apple's from Billa, sweet, due to the earplugs I took to isolate myself from my surroundings at least a bit I can clearly hear the crunching the teeth make by grinding the pulp,

## 2.1 B

I'm a permanent foreigner, I was born in Peru, but my parents were not Peruvian, and then I moved to Brazil. My husband is Brazilian and now I live in London. I have a *boy or man in relation to either or both of his parents*, which makes my life really weird in the art world because it's not really common, so I do a lot of work about that. I don't really like art very much, there are some weird artists out there and I'm not that much of an activist, so... (laughing)

I can hear how I'm swallowing it. I can even hear the difference between biting through the skin and just chewing the soft, white flesh. Adam and Eve. When I eat it, I bolt it down. I don't know how to eat properly – take a bite, chew, swallow – no, I have to keep biting off pieces of apple until my mouth is nearly stuffed and then I quickly chew everything at once and swallow it. Quickly is the key

word. Actually that's how I do everything – I have to take everything in all at once, until I almost choke, and only then do I swallow. Whenever I have to think about something, pretty much the same thing happens – either I have an empty mouth and can't say anything, or it's so full that I want to say everything at once. It doesn't work. I can't say anything that way. The piling principle doesn't apply

### Figure 1.1: The Concept and the Adaptation

The same way that the genetic code of the British lord receives genetic information of the Jewish family and the Jewish family receives the genome of British aristocracy, the most laboratory literary concept of the contemporary Anglo-Saxon cut (uncreative/conceptual writing) and the tradition founded on reflection of fleeting romantic-modernistic subjectivity also fertilize each other. The old Jewish joke can serve as a model of the relationship between the series of binaries, contrasts, oppositions and antitheses – and especially as a model of adaptation that unpredictably and spontaneously unfolds amongst the extremes. Each act of art is always based on some sort of concept. Even the traditional artistic object – canvas painting or a lyrical poem – follows the rules of its language that has been melded by tradition. If I keep my focus on poetry: the difference between “traditional” and present-day “conceptual” poetry consists in the fact that through traditional means we either conceptualize the inner, subjective sphere, some private universe – or the external, objective sphere, meaning shared reality. Even present-day literary conceptualism could be labeled a “figure” in the broad sense of the word. The figure is a traditional label for the performing of a concept. A significant difference, however, is created by the position of the archive that we draw from by means of more or



less clear algorithms (concept/figure). Both approaches can be supported by argumentation that leads them to what is sometimes called the “subjekt” (V. Place) or “outimacy” (B. Ondreička). The boundaries of the intrinsic and extrinsic are permeable. The binarity is completely unstable in the analogical biosphere. The spheres do not fully merge, but we cannot determine where to separate them.

### Figure 1.2: The Concept of the Adaptation

The artist is *a role*. The role is a social concept and thus in its own way a shared thought *figure*. The morphology of such a figure essentially resembles the figure as we know it from literature: “[B]etween the writing and the meaning, between what the poet *wrote* and what he *meant*, there is a distance, a space; and as all spaces, this one as well has a form. This form is called the *figure*, and as many figures exist as can be found for that given form which always forms between the line of the signified and the line of the signifying [...]” Gérard Genette claims in one of his articles from the sixties where he looks into the phenomenon of the figure in literature. The idea, that between the expression (the signifying) and the meaning (the signified) a space is created, is connected to the time period of its formation,

## 2.2 B

I’m a permanent foreigner, I was born in Peru, but my parents were not Peruvian, and then I moved to Brazil. My husband is Brazilian and now I live in London. I have a *boy or man in* the way in which two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected *to either or both of his parents*, which makes my life really weird in the art world because it’s not really common, so I do a lot of work about that. I don’t really like art very much, there are some weird artists out there and I’m not that much of an activist, so... (laughing)

and sorting is beyond me. I have to force myself into it, to plan, to try out, to anticipate, to translate, to create, try out other combinations, break it down into particulars and reassemble it bit by bit. No, if I had a bigger mouth, I’d open it wide and try to swallow it all whole. Otesánek had the good fortune to vomit in the end. Or not? Didn’t they actually kill him and slit his stomach open. I’m

not sure anymore. I also have to confess that this thinking and ruminating is getting boring, it doesn’t wear me out, but it’s a constant production of words in logical and superficial order which doesn’t allow me to move onwards. I could go on like this forever or at least to the point where I finally answer the question you asked me last time. But let’s set it aside for later, I’d rather try to sever this line

## 2.3 B

I'm a permanent foreigner, I was born in Peru, but my parents were not Peruvian, and then I moved to Brazil. My husband is Brazilian and now I live in London. I have a *boy or man in* the way in which two or more concepts, things external to the thinking mind or subjects, or people are connected *to either or both of his parents, which makes my life really weird in the art world because it's not really common, so I do a lot of work about that. I don't really like art very much, there are some weird artists out there and I'm not that much of an activist, so... (laughing)*

now, to stop thinking about what I want to say because due to how slowly I think, how slowly I piece everything together – because together, “to gather”, I try to piece everything and I can't do it at once and so I sit empty-handed next to the spot where the pile should be and that spot is empty. I'll try something different: Step by step, bit by bit, dumping out the jigsaw puzzle from the box, piecing

together the picture whose template was concealed from me and maybe nobody ever knew it anyway, just that the box is prepared for pick up was known, recipient: Ondřej Buddeus born 1984 in Prague to a twenty-year-old primipara, whose birth imposes on her

and yet we can still draw inspiration from it today and not only in the field of language. The figure can be understood as a substantially broader notion.

The artist (literary or otherwise) is more of a synthetic character, always exposing her intersubjectivity: “If the poet (artist) says me, he means we. When he says we, he means me,” a well-known maxim goes. The artist's singular “me” is a role which is simultaneously formed by the language of public discourse, the collective plural: we. The form of the role is the shared *figure*: her “me” (and maybe even whichever “me”) creates a psychophysical space between the expression and the meaning of its role. At the same time – and this is crucial – the expression that creates her (literary, visually artistic, musical) language did not just drop from the heavens, but is adopted by the artist, as radically as she may choose to set herself apart from tradition aside. In the same way, the meaning the expression refers to is always conditioned at least by psychophysical dispositions of this talented walking monkey of the genus homo living in a pack of more than 7 billion members and its cultural precinct. The role is not exclusive, but rather inclusive.

The role is a figure. The figure is the space between the expression and the meaning which are just as subjective

as objective (again, the synthetic term “subjekt” comes to mind). And it is precisely this space that I perceive as the place of identity which is created by the point of intersection. If this space is created by the *intersecting* of the expression and the meaning, then it actually does not exist. I imagine the space of “me” more like a virtual setting: it is actualized only in relation to something and especially to someone, it is an interface. Such an identity is adaptable, nomadic, not stable. Fifty years ago, the Danish poet and essayist Hans-Jørgen Nielsen spoke of the “aperspective subject”: “‘Me’ is that which I am in relation to others. And because I am [...] in many different relations, ‘me’ is a series of different things.” This notion is about as old as Genette’s figure. It presents the idea that the way we get to know language is the same as how we get to know who we are and how we relate to each other. In the present day of interwoven awareness through the internet interface, these ideas from the sixties are once again current. Because we are time and time again proven guilty of being able to be someone in social structures (mailing lists, social networks, blogospheres, and the like) rather than alone by ourselves in perfectly silent off-line mode. The chaos of aperspective identity yearns for a concept that creates momentary order before the given concept loses its relevance in the variable environment. The paradigm of traditional originality has weakened as never before. It has become a

## 2.4 B

I’m a permanent foreigner, I was born in Peru, but my parents were not Peruvian, and then I moved to Brazil. My husband is Brazilian and now I live in London. I have a *boy or man in the way in which two or more concepts, things external to the thinking element of a person that enables them to be aware of the world and their experiences, or subjects, or people are connected to either or both of his parents,* which makes my life really weird in the art world because it’s not really common, so I do a lot of work about that. I don’t really like art very much, there are some weird artists out there and I’m not that much of an activist, so... (laughing)

more maturity  
than she desired and until his 28<sup>th</sup> year  
and maybe even after that doesn’t cease

to be

amazed at how it all  
came about so quickly and why so

suddenly

one world ended and another started

(even if

over time

another emerged, a third one  
the third narrative, and the second one  
which started with the birth of a son,

turned

into a memory, the memory into utopia

and

utopia into consolation? Don’t think

about

it, empty the box and pick up

the first piece with your hand. B for blue,

## 2.5 B

I'm a permanent foreigner, I was born in Peru, but my parents were not Peruvian, and then I moved to Brazil. My husband is Brazilian and now I live in London. I have a *boy or man* in the way in which two or more concepts, things external to the thinking element of a person that enables them to be aware of the **the material universe or all that exists** and their experiences, or subjects, or people are connected *to either or both of his parents*, which makes my life really weird in the art world because it's not really common, so I do a lot of work about that. I don't really like art very much, there are some weird artists out there and I'm not that much of an activist, so... (laughing)

the eyes of a dead  
tuna fish in a market in Catania, of  
course, the sky, classic,  
the denim jacket of a boy who just walked  
by  
me and which reminds me of the one my  
mom  
got from the pastor's wife at a time when  
I appeared in the first narrative as the  
son, it was 80s fashion and mom was

a young  
woman and wanted to be beautiful  
because  
she was afraid – and she would always be  
afraid – that she isn't.  
How did  
this fear appear in our family that we  
inherit  
generation to generation. Great-grandma  
suffered from nervous shock during

former myth that is currently becoming a fairytale: "I love originality so much I keep copying it" (Charles Bernstein).  
Imagine a person that is seated at a table in a gallery and given the task of writing continually for 12 hours straight while the text is projected on the wall. The identity of that person is dictated by the language of the place she finds herself in and which she has become a part of, because it forms the space between the expression and the meaning of her role. In the role that is assigned to her, she finds herself between the language of singularity (she is a specific person with a name and surname, history and recollections, place of residence, blood type, etc.) and the language of the public space (even if we took away her name and dressed her in a completely androgynous manner, she would still remain contained by the concept in whose service she has physically found herself in). The boundary between the one and the other is unstable because it yields to the role she is placed in and that role is the figure – a formed, unstable setting.

### Figure 1.3: The Adaptation of the Concept

Man is an animal of language. Language is the medium of communication. Communication is interactive. The medium is the interface. The space of the intersecting of the expression and the meaning resembles a battlefield. In every language, there are thought concepts conserved that make a claim on the space of identity, they try to interfere with it. As we are dealing with the language, the language is dealing with us. A person who describes her own self, i.e. creates a language representation of her own self that she uses to examine the space of her identity, exposes herself to the language she has used – its destructive and constructive forces. When I say: “I am the one who...” – it is the moment that thought concepts our language carries as its genetic code are offered to anyone who wants to use or abuse them. If someone unknowingly describes her own self through the language of, say, a lifestyle magazine, she puts herself at the mercy of this framework of thought, she copies it and inserts it into her own. The destructive forces of language are capable of freezing original vitality and variability of live representation. They try to force it into the form of a definition and to categorize this definition (there are languages in which I am the patient, the voter, the user, the customer, etc.). It is our own language which suggests itself for it, because it is not quite our own. The ideology even manages to completely fill out the space of identity with the language of a future utopia.

Defense mechanisms exist in language as well. Our self-confidence depends on how capable we are of turning our meaning in language around. There are 3 basic so-called tropes (Gr. *trópos* = turn): irony, metaphor and allegory. The moment a person glimpses herself, as though she were looking at someone else, she has the greatest freedom to occupy the space between the expression and the meaning of her role. When I ask someone: “Who are you? Can you tell me something about yourself?” I am asking her to clarify the way in which she sees the space between her expression and her meaning. Her response is reflexive and performative at the same time, because in that moment, she is formulating and forming her identity. To which language she submits and how depends solely on her. Man is an animal of language in harmony or in conflict with language circumstances. The boundaries are permeable.

### Figure 0.2: The Opening

*It was during the spring that the Thames overflowed and started to rise dangerously. It reached the threshold of Lord Noel's study in the evening hours – and when it began to spill over the threshold, the chamberlain solemnly announced: “Sir – the Thames.”*

MARJORIE WELISH

## **as technique / as device /**

*This maxim*

*This phrase*

*High school*

*Lycée student*

*Parrot*

*Mouths*

*The starting point*

*Point of departure*

*Erudite*

*Academic*

*Beginning to put together*

*His first stab*

*Some kind of systematic*

*At formulating*

This maxim or harpoon

This phrase and thread

For school and Power On

*Lycée* by inches

A twenty-minute nap and comb

Nap and comb parrot

How to use

Mouths

A beginning sound read

Sounding out the letters

And what a stylus is

Look Left taking a stab

Beginning to put together

His first stab

To apply a maxim

To swallow said

Saying his first stab

Mouthing the said brush

Rush hour, poetic and practical

Turbulence, how to use

The signs the metal squawking

Self-taught

The parrot begins to put together

His first stab

And another thing.

And another thing

Was combing the topic sentence:

Look Left: School Crossing

To / from the *lycée* or fabula

Contribute a crease. Who am I from the village of  
Unbound pages and regime change?

From the start the age of

Embarkation

Erudition, its Ashanti weights

The academy as paperweight

The child is beginning to put together the "e" in  
reverse Watching the squirrels is

His first stab, her essay at formulating the  
parrot.

*Now a different example. The child  
A second example. Several men*

...speech in oneself. And public space or power surge FOR THE COLLECTIVE WORLD ELECTRIFIED  
Please identify any preexisting conditions (or electrical storms) outages to shore

Embarkation caught the age of reason and thence more lengths

*Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object itself is not  
important.*

*Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself  
is quite unimportant.*

From the village of five fingers  
And percentage on the obverse OF ALL

To assay (or take stabs against) speech  
To begin to put together his first error

*The fact that Japanese poetry has sounds not found in conversational Japanese was hardly the  
first factual indication of the differences between poetic and everyday language.*

*The discovery that there are sounds in the Japanese poetic language that  
have no parallels in everyday Japanese was perhaps the first factual indication that  
theses two languages, that is, the poetic and the practical, do not coincide.*

Erudite spying  
Wary academic

Drops package. "Typical."  
Stands awkwardly "Crumpled hat."

Looking non-stop  
devise notation for the ambient sounds  
and transcribe unbound pages from the age of reason

steam from advent of helplessness, used a leaf to let live  
to do /not to do

steam irons arias in  
the mouth, the mouth acquiring thunder from touch  
and public space

Look left five minutes  
and locate *musique concret*  
devised for a surfeit of how-not-to-nap

mouth acquiring steam from the fingers  
to do/ not to do  
such as questionnaires might well issue.

Find your Times Square and close your eyes to devise a surfeit of auditory welts  
Embark on cheap notebook to write only what you hear

...the blinds  
Familiar blind spots, theory of

Trial and error intuitive fast processing of unlikeliness  
Back from the end beginning with the germ key term field

Some kind of systemic circuitry  
At formulating circuitous  
Purge

Recursive work is innovative at least to the bass viol  
Strike, stalk the note, implement

Nonpareil blade  
Leaf to push duckling

Erudite spying excites the author of rival discontent  
Academic, you are to bother heeding regime change--

*This figure of speech is a poetic trope. (In the first example, "butterfingers" is metonymic; in the second, metaphoric—but this is not what I want to stress.)*

*The image is a poetic trope. (In one case the word hat serves as a metonymy, while in the other example we're dealing with a metaphor. And yet I'm really concerned here with something else.)*

At the syntax  
Let's have a show of hands



The concept of concrete poetry, introduced and first explored during the 1950s, particularly by Eugen Gomringer and Brazilian poets from the Noigandres group, has also been well-known in the Czech context. However, during the period that was of crucial importance to the emergence and establishment of Czech variants of this type of poetry, i.e. the 1960s, this term was only one of several designations used quite unsystematically at the same time. The main exponents of this kind of poetical output, Josef Hiršal (1920-2003) and Bohumila Grögerová (1921), preferred to use the label “artificial poetry,” which they adopted from the book *Theory of Texts* by Max Bense, which they themselves translated into Czech (1967). They defined artificial poetry in contrast to natural poetry, understanding it to be a type of poetry which did not express the experience of a specific “I,” i.e. without personal poetical awareness and thus authorial intentions, but which is only created physically and may even be produced by machine. This authorial duo defined their type of creative output more in negative than positive terms, so their theoretical articles served more as manifestos than as specialist output – and this is demonstrated by other terms that they were willing to use for their poems, e.g. “new” or “experimental” poetry. In addition to the aforementioned concepts of concrete and artificial poetry, other terms appeared such as poetry of texts, system poetry, objective

model poetry and visual poetry, which together with the concept of literary experiment/experimental poetry came to be of key importance for later literary-historical work on the subject (although even there some terminological ambiguity arises). The adjective “new” is generally of key importance here, cropping up at every verse end in connection with this kind of poetry. However, much more than being just a new genre, concrete poetry was a spontaneous movement of poets who had begun to feel that the traditional forms of subjective and confessional lyric poetry had been exhausted, so they had ambitions to create an alternative. This was a movement that wished to be perceived as original and unique entirely within the spirit of the historical avant-garde – if possible without any foreign influences or domestic tradition. However, the influence of the domestic literary tradition and the contemporary international context was of key importance for the genesis of Czech concrete poetry. From the outset it was part of an international movement, whose leading representatives published first in foreign journals and only from 1965 in Czech journals. They made great efforts to translate foreign theoretical articles, applying the premises directly to their own poetic output. Naturally enough, they were not without their predecessors: this primarily visually-based form of Czech poetry consciously followed in the footsteps of the Czech poetic avant-garde in the 1920s.

## PRECURSORS OF CZECH CONCRETE POETRY

It was during that very happy, tumultuous period for the development of modern art that the poetist school emerged in Bohemia. One of the aspects of the poetist conception of art and poetry is its intermedia character. The representatives of poetism were very intensely aware that poetry had got into a strongly competitive situation vis-à-vis the new types of visually based artistic expression. Clearly, if poetry was to maintain its position among the progressive artistic trends of the time, it had to somehow come to terms with the rapidly developing competition from the visual arts, as well as from the relatively new and highly attractive art medium of film. This was understood particularly well by the theoretician of poetism Karel Teige, who called for “photogenic poems”. A typical example of the “visualization” of poetist poetry is the collection of poems by Jaroslav Seifert (1901-1986) *Na vlnách TSF* ([*On the Waves of TSF*], 1925). A number of poems in this collection have the character of visual-verbal compositions, while the visual aspect of poems was cultivated by the aforementioned theoretician of poetism Karel Teige (1900-1951).

Both avant-garde poets from the *Devětsil* circle and representatives of concrete poetry during the 1960s naturally found inspiration in the literary tradition represented by such canonical works as Stéphane Mallarmé’s *A Throw of the Dice will Never Abolish Chance*, Filippo Marinetti’s *Words in Freedom* and Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes*, as well as the “language laboratories of artificial poetry” presented in the late 1920s by the *transition* journal with James Joyce and Gertrude Stein, the “imagists” (Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot) and Russian futurism (Velemir Chlebnikov). The initial stages of concrete poetry in the modern sense of the word also include the “realized poems” by surrealist Jindřich Heisler (1914-1953), which he created together with painter Toyen (1902-1980) and included in his collection *Z kasemat spánku* (*From the Casemate of Sleep*, 1940). Heisler used the term “realized poem” to describe a group or a photograph of a group of small objects arranged on a white sheet of paper to create an environment or scene for the text of a poem, which is a physical component of the resulting object, as the letters themselves are there on the sheet of paper.

A considerable shift in development towards concrete poetry can also be seen in the “evident poems” of Jiří Kolář (1914-2002), which he began to write during the 1950s, devoting himself to them fully from 1959 (though they were not published in book form until *Básně ticha* [*Poems of Silence*] in 1994, with a previous French version in 1988). Kolář conceived evident poetry to be that which demonstrates its difference in code in the visual arrangement of its text. Even here Kolář showed himself to be a searcher for fundamentally new ways in poetry – often involving modern visual art, which was always more radical in its revision of its expressive register than the literary arts. The cycle *Pocta Kazimiru Malevičovi* (*Tribute to Kazimir Malevich*) embraces these intermedia relations in its very title, and not only there – it also contains texts which are graphically organized like a succession of square fields, which can be seen as a reference to Kazimir Malevič’s groundbreaking work *Black Square*, demonstrating the need so strongly felt by Kolář to revise the expressive apparatus, which can only occur at the boundaries of any given type of art. While in the poetic cycle *Pocta Kazimiru Malevičovi* Kolář at first retains the syntagmatics of the words, the cycles *Y 61* and *Gersaint vývěsní štít* (*Gersaint Signboard*) are examples of the systematic dissolution of the semantic bonds between graphemes. Now Kolář is dealing more with the artistic issue of handling the space on the page, and not so much with the literary issue of the aesthetics of the words and the semantics of the texts. The cycle with the same title as the entire collection *Básně ticha* achieves the highest level of visualization in Kolář’s poetry. Here the graphemes often do not refer at all to a hypothetical original language structure, and they are used purely as material for a work of visual art. In some texts here Kolář uses exclusively asemantic graphic characters (apostrophes, full stops, semicolons and the like) or numbers.

The conception of poetry which Kolář arrived at in the *Básně ticha* cycle can be demonstrated clearly in the poem entitled “Několik okamžiků před napsáním básně” (“Several Moments before a Poem is Written”). At first sight the text appears to be an expressive record of the process of writing, the key point of which, however, is not the interweaving of syntactic structures – for something much more material lies at its core. The

duel between the writing and the empty space, which is poetically staged, naturally gets out of his control, his apparently external status expires and the emerging poem affects him physically. The writing is put on paper in horizontal succession, but as if it could not manage to keep itself in a row on the line – the sequences of characters are too fresh, lively, incomplete, mobile – and so they do not yet permit reading. The poem is borne of chaos and the stress between the world of characters and the unwritten blank page, as well as the tautness that is for the most part unconsciously at play in the mind of the creative poet.

In the subsequent section of *Básně ticha* entitled *Evidentní básně (Evident Poems)*, Kolář is no longer working with words but with pictorial material, creating collages and assemblages, the arrangement of whose parts are reminiscent of the verse and strophic structure of a poetic text, but nothing else connects them with poetry in the original sense of the word. The narrowest connection with writing and speech is maintained by his *analfabetogramy* (illiterograms), i.e. his graphical compositions stylized as an attempt by an illiterate to write something, and *cvokogramy* (weirdograms), which are the expression of a fictitious mentally deranged person. During the 1960s, Kolář's work became increasingly visual until he attained his "depth poems" ("Nahoru a dolů" ["Up and Down"] and "Poem R"), which are purely graphic, multi-aspect works perceived in time sequence.

## THE 1960S

On 20th December 1962 Josef Hiršal and Bohumila Grögerová arranged a lecture on "The philosophy of language, statistical aesthetics and contemporary experimentation" at the Mánes Artists Club, where for the first time the theoretical foundations of "experimental poetry" were presented to the public in their entirety, along with some samples. In the Czech context during the 1960s the term "experimental poetry" covered various trends and methodological approaches, which turned attention towards language as the material of poems (in "concrete", "visual", "lettriste" and "evident" poetry). This turn was based on an awareness of the exhaustion, abusability and worn-outness of language and efforts to find a new sense for poetry and art in

general by means of language games. The experimenting authors created loose groupings which had connections to other artistic circles and their quest for new modes of expression (e.g. the surrealists).

As in the case of the prewar avant-garde, 1960s Czech experimental poetry was part of an international experimental movement (the authors were involved in a number of international exhibitions), which combined practical creative work with theory. Czech experiments were primarily conducted in close association with the creative output and theoretical work of Germans Helmut Heissenbüttel (*Texts*, in Czech 1965) and Max Bense (from the Stuttgart group; *Theory of Texts*, in Czech 1967). They attracted the experiments of numerous other authors, including the Brazilian Noigandres group, the Austrians Ernst Jandl and Friederike Mayröcker, Gerhard Rühm and Hans Carl Artmann, the French spatialists Pierre and Ilse Garnier and Henri Chopin, the American authors involved in the Fluxus movement (e.g. Georg Brecht and Emmett Williams), as well as the theoretical work of Abraham Moles and Eugen Gomringer.

A special characteristic of the Czech school of concrete poetry was its stress on ethical stimuli and the grotesque. Its excursions beneath the surface of language aimed to deconstruct turns of phrase and clichés, and in the context of the era these acquired relevance by showing a way to exclude anything that could make language an instrument of ideology. Hence one of its theoretical bases, the need for which was urgently felt was Wittgenstein's conception of language as a universe unto itself, reflecting the world but not maintaining relations with it. By means of experimental methods the authors processed the elementary components of the text, seeking the internal energy within the writing with the aim of establishing new relationships between linguistic units and ways of building whole new constructions. The visual flow of concrete poetry was based on the usage of the aesthetic qualities of letters and the visual organization of graphemes on the surface of the page. Lettriste experiments initiated by French author Isidore Isou and developed in the Czech environment e.g. by Eduard Ovčáček (1933) and Vladimír Burda (1934-1970) work with letters and punctuation marks as the basic units of the poem. Their subject was molded into an optical whole in the manner of a



calligram or ideogram, but there were also experiments which carried on from surrealist automatism, e.g. by Josef Honys (1919-1969). Pendant is audio “phonetic” poetry by Ladislav Novák (1925-1999), in which the word is atomized into speech sounds, i.e. the sound of individual letters.

A work of experimental poetry often goes beyond the boundaries of literature into “non-verbal” expression, and the visual line of experimental poetry naturally penetrates into the context of visual art, as demonstrated by the *Křižovatka* (*Crossroads*) group, which came into being in 1963 upon the initiative of Jiří Kolář and Jiří Padrta. The first exhibition was arranged by this group in 1964 under the title *Nová citlivost* (*New Sensibility*), with the second one in 1968 entitled *Křižovatka a hosté* (*Crossroads and Guests*).

### CHIEF FIGURES IN CZECH CONCRETE POETRY

In addition to the aforementioned Jiří Kolář, the pioneers of Czech concrete poetry included Ladislav Novák, who was involved in concrete poetry in the latter half of the 1950s. In 1957 and 1958 he wrote “onomatopoeic” poems (close to Lettrism, carrying on from the Dadaists’ sound poems) and “quartered” poems (texts reduced to isolated sentence constituents set out on the page). In 1959 he created the first of his “constellations”, which he conceived as parallels to pictures by Victor Vasarely, where his procedure was to create columns of the same words and then insert similar words. In 1960 he created *spečené texty* (“sintered” texts) by means of deletions and anagrams in texts from elsewhere (e.g. newspaper articles). Novák used the term “prepared texts” for the procedure whereby he took just a few extracts from an initial text (often found by chance), which he then left standing out in their original place on the surface of a blanked out page. In the early 1970s he also created “detexts”, where the initial text was disrupted in ways that revealed its hidden ironic or aesthetic potential. From 1962 he also made tape recordings of “phonic poetry”, in which he composed sounds of various types and origins into sequences. He also carried on from the Dadaist procedures of Raoul Hausmann, creating a Czech counterpart to the work being created at that time by the French Concretists, particularly Henri Chopin. Within the Czech literary context at that time Novák’s

experimental texts were first presented in the collection *Pocta Jacksonu Pollockovi* (*Tribute to Jackson Pollock*), with texts from the 1959-64 period published in 1966. This was also the first ever published collection of Czech concrete poetry, reflected to a considerable extent in its varying critical reception, which mostly raised general questions on the meaningfulness of this new poetic trend.

A key role in the organization of the Czech experimental movement was played by the duo Josef Hiršal and Bohumila Grögerová, inter alia with their numerous translations of foreign fellow-travellers and the compilation of an anthology presenting the movement in its international context. Hiršal’s and Grögerová’s own creative sphere comprised their endeavours to demonstrate the grotesqueness and absurdity of communicatively void “senile” language and to rationally prove the existence of a direct connection between the misuse of speech at that time and the weakening of its communicative capacity. Their first experiments in 1960-61 are brought together in the book *JOB-BOJ* ([*JOB-FIGHT*], 1968), which presents not only the liberating, relaxed playfulness of the authors, but also a broad range of experimental techniques. This collection is a kind of catalogue of methods, the experimental nature of which is indicated by their very conceptual definition, working with neologisms but also borrowing from various fields of knowledge, e.g. grammatical, logical, stochastic, syngamic texts, intertexts, objectages, proverbs, musical scores, portraits, micrograms, coacervates (seeking the similarities between biological and linguistic processes) always centring around specific types of models as their distinctive quotations and interpretations. Terms designating individual experimental methods are thus taken from various fields of human activity and often serve to create parallels which convey both the peculiarities of verbal expression and the poetic spirit of life.

One of the most prominent figures in experimental poetry from the mid-1960s was Vladimír Burda, who was involved in concrete poetry from 1963. He made use of various forms of letters, creating “picture poems” (*Slovobraz*, manuscript 1965) and typographical configurations. The use of colour and linear spatial rhythmic brought Burda’s experiments closer to

graphic depiction, but Burda also experimented with the transfer of visual-art elements into literature (*Barevné básně* [Colourful Poems], manuscript 1966-67; *53 případů linky/demonstrativní inkarnace* [53 Cases of a Line/Demonstrative Incarnation], manuscript 1968) and their reflection and thematization. With his orientation towards variations and combinations of fonts, typeface destruction and construction of word meanings and atomized fonts, Burda did not intend to narrow down the field of poetry (which was a common reproach against experimental poetry at that time). Quite the reverse, he wanted to expand and amplify it. In 1969 Burda's book *Lyrické minimum* (*Lyrical Minimum*) – was ready to go to press, but could not be published; a book of the same name published in 2004 is a collection of the author's poetic work. Václav Havel (1936) also used writing in the spirit of the typographic poem tradition, particularly in typograms and calligrams, poetic puns and rebuses in his 1964 collection *Antikódy* (*Anticodes*) included in his book *Protokoly* ([*Protocols*], 1966). It was this context which saw the development of Havel's treatment of the movement of conventions and "bureaucratization", and the devaluation of code, which needs to be demystified. Havel believes that Lettrist approaches can unmask ciphers as ciphers – and reproduce the sense experience of the world of the destruction of ciphers. Havel understood concrete poetry as a screening of the primary level of the communication conventions of language.

One of the foremost Czech exponents of Lettrism was the Ostrava artist Eduard Ovčáček, whose experiments in the 1960s and 1970s are brought together in the book *Lekce velkého A* (*The Lesson of the Big A*, 1995). Ovčáček endeavoured to achieve a revitalization of the language, based on a mythology of script, ideograms, hieroglyphs, pictograms and calligrams, as well as on a bilingual expression of writing as image. Ovčáček's cycle *Lekce velkého A* is an example of politically engaged utilization of the techniques employed by concrete poetry and its grotesque and ironic forms, which is typical of the Czech context. It is based on a confrontation between big A and little a, which have a quite unambiguous symbolic meaning in the texts – big A symbolizes the power hegemon, which has decided to coerce its satellite, symbolized in the text by the

grapheme a. The cycle was created during the critical period of the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the armies of five Soviet bloc states in August 1968. The situation and the atmosphere are eloquently demonstrated in Ovčáček's *Schůzka pěti velkých A* (Meeting of Five Big A's) from the above cycle. The big A's surround a group of little a's, crushing them in their grip. The overall image has the outline of a five-pointed star – an explicit reference to the symbol of the Soviet Union.

Jiří Valoch's (1946) experiments are associated with Lettrism and particularly inspired by its expressive minimalism (particularly by the poetry of Pierre Garnier). His creative and organizational activities extend into the mid-1960s and his interests centre around visual poetry, involving metaphorical replacements of graphic symbols by letters, colours and blank spaces. In this manner he methodically drew on a specific repertoire of elements and procedures (numeric, alphabetical and colour-based). In his variational texts from the 1964-1966 period he developed on the potential already indicated by Hiršal and Grögerová, and at a different level by Emmett Williams: these variations enable him to achieve various differentiated sub-meanings and to create juxtapositions which unexpectedly contrast with the original text.

The very title of Ladislav Nebeský's (1937) *Binární básně* (*Binary poems*, published in part under the title *Osm binárních básní* [Eight Binary Poems], special collector's edition 1996) indicates the author's inclination towards mathematics and computer technology. Binary codes are used here to construct artificial relations between meanings and to build simple abstract systems, e.g. numerical poems, transformational poems, poem-calculations and the like.

## **NORMALIZATION (1969-1989)**

The golden age of Czech concrete poetry ended in August 1968 with the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Soviet bloc troops and the forcible suppression of the democratizing processes that had started to burgeon in Czech society and culture during the 1960s. The turn of the sixties and seventies saw the onset of the "normalization" process, which meant the loss of publication opportunities for concrete poetry, as the magazines in which concrete poetry was printed and

discussed gradually closed down, publishers withdrew planned collections of concrete poetry from their publication schedules, series of books that were already in production were unable to reach bookshop counters and their print-runs were destroyed (e.g. Jiří Kolář's *Básně ticha*). Publication opportunities were progressively reserved for literature which the "normalizers" believed helped to build up Communist power. All that remained for any other literature was unofficial circulation in samizdat transcriptions, publication abroad or simple exile.

Nevertheless during the next two decades ongoing experimental activities can be observed, mostly outside the sphere of traditionally conceived literature, with development particularly evident in that trend of concrete poetry that moved towards increasingly organic incorporation of text and linguistic elements within a visual artefact. Experiments by such authors as Karel Adamus, Jiří Valoch, Václav Vokolek and Eduard Ovčáček endeavoured to achieve complex artistic output which does not differentiate between pictorial and written expression. Hence instead of using books, the authors could present individual poems as part of their artistic efforts and display them at semi-legal or not entirely illegal exhibitions and events, or as part of their private viewings. These exhibitions often took place at very unusual places, e.g. in the corridor of a surgical-orthopedic clinic or at the Academy of Sciences Institute of Macromolecular Chemistry in Prague. Attempts were made to examine and define the boundary between visual and written expression by Ladislav Novák, who often exhibited his groundbreaking works abroad, but who during the 1960s and 1970s was a more or less unknown author in Czechoslovakia. Novák's work is characterized by such motifs as ghostly landscapes, black humour, the distortion of various poetic forms and a tendency towards the creation of paramyths. He used texts combined with illustrations to complete what was being formed and said. His *Receptář* (samizdat 1988; 1992) was published in samizdat, but most of his literary work remained in manuscript. After 1990 it was displayed in anthologies *Bouřková mračna* (*Thunderclouds*, 1993) and *Proměny pana Hadlíze* (*Mr Hadlíz's Transformations*, 1995).

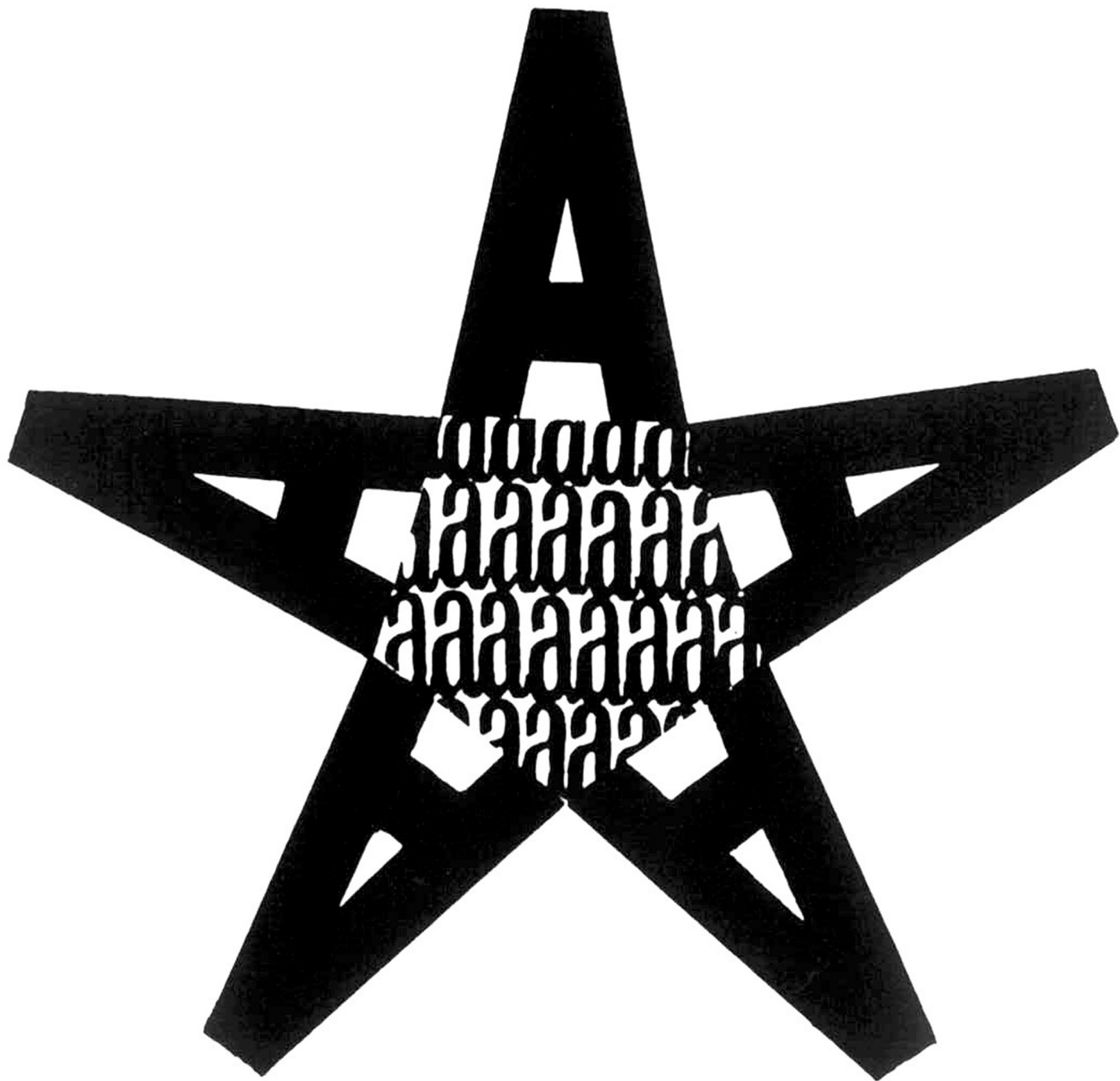
Václav Vokolek (1947) focused on what are known

as "artists' books" and manuscript collections. He brought some of his works together in the samizdat collections *Básně* (*Poems*, samizdat 1984) and *Bílá na bílé* (*White Against White*, samizdat 1985), and a selection of them was later published in *Zříceninový mramor* (*The Ruin Marble*, 1996). An important motif for Vokolek was the landscape, though created by words, it gradually turns into various drawn natural shapes, horizons and clouds. In this way the texts disappear into an uncompleted gesture and the page is broken up by painting or pencilling. A similar approach can be traced in the work of Jiří Valoch, who remained with typewriting or experimented with "phototexts". Of the many manuscript "artist's books" that he created, we can mention e.g. *Anekdoty bez topografie* (*Anecdotes Without Topography*, manuscript 1976) or *Pozorování – kniha pro přátele* (*Observations – A Book for Friends*, manuscript 1983). Valoch understood language as a world of perceptions, in which a minimum text communication enters the context with a graphic element or an empty space.

## CZECH CONCRETE POETRY AFTER 1989

The social situation that was more favourably inclined towards Czech concrete poetry arose after the fall of Communism in November 1989. It was not until the early 1990s that Czech readers were able to familiarize themselves with prominent works of this kind which had been created back in the 1960s by the representatives of experimental poetry at that time. Collections of concrete poetry may well have become publicly available, but the cultural atmosphere which had brought them about and created the conditions for their broader reception was never to return. These texts went into public circulation more as documentary exhibits on the history of Czech literature than as living literary works.

All the same, the continuity of experimental creative work was ultimately maintained despite all the obstacles that history threw in its way. Even the post-1989 era saw new texts which develop on the legacy of concrete poetry, even though they are only published to a limited extent and are mostly to be found within the marginalia of contemporary literary output. In 1995 Emil Juliš went back to experimental work, publishing a relatively large number of collections, reminiscent of special collectors'



Eduard Ovčáček, "Schůzka pěti velkých A," Lekce velkého A (Praha: Trigon, 129).



editions which are not available to the broad public. The same problem arising from lack of interest among publishers in this type of work has dogged several collections by Ladislav Novák which were created and only published as special collectors' editions during the 1990s.

Ladislav Nebeský's work is one of the few cases in which experimental poetry of the "orthodox" type has reached the public in book form. Some other creative workers of his generation are maintaining their creative efforts, but they are now moving exclusively in artistic circles of communication, presenting their poetry at exhibitions and if they are in print then only in exhibition catalogues. The leading figure here is Jiří Valoch, who in addition to his own artistic work supports the development of contemporary Czech experimental poetry as a theoretician and organizer. Thanks to Valoch's efforts, Czech visual poetry remains in contact with happenings abroad. Under his guidance, exhibitions have been held in Czech galleries over the last few years, for example, by Heinz Gappmayr, Josef Bauer and Ilse and Pierre Garnier. Since the 1990s Valoch's artistic work has shown a preference for A4 computer graphics, with individual pages brought together in series which are prone to be compiled as "artists' books", while spatial installations of these texts are also created in parallel. He creates complex text units, which (as in the case of the *Installations* exhibition) the viewer may physically enter so that they surround him and he progressively perceives the connections between word sequences, which then address him directly. In this way the physical distance between the work and the perceiver is removed, the perceiver becomes part of the work and the trajectory of his perception of the text becomes dependent on his movement through space. A common feature of all these more recent works is the significant reduction in verbal material and a tendency towards a more conceptual approach to creative work, in harmony with the efforts of such foreign artists as the aforementioned Ilse and Pierre Garnier.

Intermedia relations between words and pictures, which undoubtedly became well-established in the language of Czech poetry thanks to 1960s concrete poetry, are both developed in their original consistent form and used occasionally by authors who have never

subscribed to concrete poetry, but who draw from its tradition all the same. An example of acknowledgement of the legacy of 1960s poetical experiments can be found in the collection *Trhlina (Tear, 2002)* by Miloslav Topinka (1945). We find the inventive use of intermedia procedures in the poetry of a number of young poets who first made an appearance in 1990s literature, e.g. Tomáš Přidal (1968) and Michal Šanda (1965). However, the work that comes closest to the concept of concrete poetry is that of Petr Váša (1965), who has coined the term "physical poetry" for his artistic output. Váša endeavours to create complex expressions based on the interconnection of literary text (often of an asemantic nature) and expressive vocal-kinetic performance. However, Váša also creates "visual physical poems" whose morphology is reminiscent of children's attempts at writing and the graphic expressions of primitive nations or the mentally ill.

The influence of poetic experiments is also clear in the first work of Jiří Dynka (1959) *Minimální okolí mrazícího boxu (The Minimum Ambient of the Icebox, 1997)*, in which the author works with repetitions, variations and permutations of syntactic units or with the blank surface of the page. Jiří Dynka also belonged to a small group of authors who at the end of the 1990s attempted to move Czech poetic experimentation into the multimedia and interactive environment of the internet – their experiments can be seen in particular at [www.magazlin.cz](http://www.magazlin.cz). This new form of experimental work has emerged in parallel with the digital poetry movement in Western literatures, and since it has not aroused much by way of response, remaining *de facto* at the level of individual experiments, it still awaits a more sustained critical and theoretical reflection.

**et in arcadia ?**

**jiný obraz**

**zmizelé**

**zapomenout slovo zapomenout**

VINCENT KATZ

**jan henle: carbon  
on the brink**

brink caution taste parameter  
cauldron maggot intestine limit  
flailing magnet embryo lyre  
mentally magnet arrested protein  
frisk palpable robot fortune  
increased sediment myopia organ  
dissolved privilege partake original  
dustcase wristwatch intend spoke  
paranoid investor preach-back holland  
persist animator rend scup-in-the-sky  
forecast rain-off prefer sitting  
raindrop allergy pederast fragment



JOHN WILKINSON

## green tara

FORBEARANCE IS SUPREME ASCETIC PRACTICE

Δ

So lorries speak in reversing, and only in reversing,  
then with a great sigh stop. Hh.

Nothing goes forward  
beyond some consignment chit, nothing  
tests the water except indifferent sky  
backlit by a memory of water.

No change in outlook follows:  
criss-crossed with webs of theodolites and tapes,  
distributing pressure  
evenly on this abstract topography  
neither here nor there spreads,  
precedent just gets swallowed, afterword choked  
off in mid-.

Uncollapsed like a dowsing rod,  
a pure deictic,  
each road and rail extends from its sheath, glints  
icy within range. Scent of water,  
one gleam expands.

What more was necessary. Felt wrung out.  
Check off and then keep the pink copy.  
Clouds alone move.  
Reservoirs in reserve for reservoirs.  
All the chill cabinet's shelves in decidedly fizzy light  
accommodate their dusked sky. Hh.

Δ

Felt will be used to cover tracks  
that they should claim a new birth on their watch.

Set unblinking on its stanchion  
copious eye thrust its share forth brutally,  
more than came to light, than ever did, earth-  
moving tracks, surveillance our true soil, ever-  
focus-prevalent, tightening  
and loosening but thin.

Where are the machines?

Flat-beds were shunted forward.  
The once-nomadic probe raked  
its salt and mica lines below  
declining mountains –

Where are the machines?

Machines are gasping on flat-bed bogies  
Machines entranced in their thoughts  
Held in reserve suited-up in wrap-around disdain,  
steel glaciers  
jolting over grassland  
activate sediment for telecast, open-source,  
loosened to loess.

△

A flag is disappearing in thin air. Then appears  
thrills its hyperbolic sponsor. High-altitude  
policy applies to herders who line up.

Voltaic pile.

Take a snap or thread a long  
position through the eyes of local squalls, such  
effects scarcely felt through permafrost.

Stillness at this speed pins travellers on board.

Yes to this chilblain plot, settlers gravitate:  
soon get plugged, get fixed.

Sentry gaze rotates on its gantry, don't mistake  
thinning air for a sun-strike, Aegean  
shell

spat off its burning belt.

Neither is this lunar circum-

scription:

fixed and sensible the generator draws breath,  
as designed the generator

separates flapping stripes, undoes waves, the alas-  
jubilant, compelled and impulsive  
into their neat sockets.

Everyone follows. Axiomatic. Hence  
will be crushed, sifted what was so encompassed.

△

Blink. I love you. Blink. Broaching  
our new treaty. A blink might trade henceforward  
rocks for a thought of rocks.

A gleaming rind about its felted patch.

Cement will be funnelled, concrete poured,  
sand like noonday shadows  
flood robust tents and drive animals  
drenched from their pounds.

In the open  
shadows make them skittish,  
once out there a spotlight burns them and tracks,  
driving them beyond normal range.

What directs these expulsions?

With increasing distance footfalls  
jerk the dowsing rod more violently: get?

Under snowy outlines  
a herdsman rides a thin horse on a dilapidated road,  
far scaling from his tent.

An hour away a woman stamps in clogs.

Below the pastures  
barley is steeped. These are old technologies.

Unlike our raised earth, sending  
military vehicles along its vertebrae,  
jetting breaths of ammonia up from permafrost  
through punctures, through ruts.

Blink. These are the findings.

Blink. This is my marrow.

Blink. This is a skull polyps button.

△

Blink. Submit visa. At a blink, validate  
right of passage to expanses humming,  
route via one portal,  
portal that must validate before lorries pass,  
portal that extends to the plain as its equivalent,  
so much shook  
so much shaken out.

Peer down the telescopic, bring one dot  
into the square.  
All is one, dots merge to fill the unending scroll,  
rain aggregates in columns  
in a flat building by a paddy by the Pearl River.

All is one, borders thickly brushed  
where diggers bog down and grunt free,  
jerked along spines of data.

Hush.

We cannot harp on massed things.

An iron furnace with repoussé  
flowers, rough sorts who hug, chug from glasses  
of thick salted tea, confidences,  
who steps out now amongst these?

Blink. That is her droplet.

Blink. I saw her yet she never had been cleared  
to pass.

So many  
thimble-dockets.

Brushed-against contaminants seek to latch on.

△

When on its flat-bed the sun pulls away –  
it never will have pulled away –  
a smiling couple occupies the bright ellipse of calm  
amidst sorting sheds and washhouses.  
Their retro hair says much about them.  
Their formal hair is telling.

Wary smiles ripple  
talented from their cocoon, air too  
infiltrates like watered silk  
fleeting accidents across the day, making  
light of them for feudal thinkers,  
strip-mining temporal conditions,  
crushing showers, fracking meteors and breezes.  
Round the lovers soldiers rush to prop parasols,  
piano stools, flower vases, tree silhouettes,  
parkland and mind  
unbobbin in a scrim off the stock image bolt  
wavering and warped.  
But then the scrim felts. Or should.  
There should be a kind of thickness at high altitude.  
There should be a fulfilment to approach.

Δ

Though each disdained for arid sentiment, if  
mutterings stick against a light-startled scrim, and  
like moths in their thousands such askings  
give us substance in facing one another  
then to burrow  
through air so high and thin exposure  
without felt would kill

Should it be understood

this is pressed felt:

this is a thick blue dyed wool:

These are tents we stretch so as to screen out  
skirmishes and drone strikes but even while  
pentimenti scratch the surfaces, while ridges of  
nothing-much deflect,  
ghosts beneath feel like our vertebrae  
ribbing tents, feel like we were thrown skins:  
In hyperbaric chambers  
technicians ready themselves, machines  
are dribbling outside. Exposure had thinned us out  
even before the glacial plate scraped.

Δ

Reach is total in theory so I crouch  
below the steel security blind to open up promptly,  
a trainee technician, do my best.  
Once switched on, the point of origin  
amplifies across the lone and level,  
such is fabric without depth, who goes there  
embodies in the felted wall, so that a poor signal  
wears a genealogy, ranks of coats  
soaking up the sun as it strengthens in float glass,  
sombre coats  
soak up every colour, flags and lintels,  
idols in the forecourts, brilliant numbered persons  
leant as though a plush woven coop, get trans-  
ported where lippy guides want –

A deep breath:

This is a breath *in extremis*,  
touchscreen response  
toxicates rough barley, melts solder  
residues, axles the decoupled wheels turning soffit  
of the sky such transits ruck, butter smoke  
scrawls under. I can advise on mobile devices  
worm into the distances,  
taking that much out of us, gold, green, crimson  
spilt and zeroing, within purview of my Supervisor.



Δ

Steel combs interlock, lay tracks before glaciers  
scrunch to a rawish gape.

Hh. Air brakes sigh.

Loaded skins

hydraulic jacks budge, settle down.

Shutters have been heard to lap high lakes.

Restless

scree slides over surfaces, flaps and tumblers  
do their figures briskly. Shuffling breezes  
flip titles,

between hills the forum swivels round,  
the democratic forum.

Hh the people sigh,

square guttered like a butcher's block,

bank

facing flecked with mica, its anti-climb, its anti-  
vandal finish pre-stressed devoid of motion.

Comminuted stone

tips into thick grid-force under-mesh, trite  
hopes bond

beneath vainglorious flags, the gate guardians

kneel, their breast displays

track the sell price of promethium.

Wicks by the thousand stink. Butter lamps smoke.

Manufactured parts, components, cash ruts.

Hh. Breath dissipates.

Δ

Here *Forward* is the only gear engaged,  
invisibles  
pull their weight, rare earth futures reach  
maturity on piton-bristled faces, claw  
capless mountains,  
resistance wisps away in wraps of green mist:  
Human drafts that Logistics rounds up  
get cracking, fall to work:  
pails, hods, tippers queue to disgorge  
as though *nihil obstat* from  
remunerative universes  
ceaselessly were issued no matter whose cargo or  
where an end-user ended-up  
had the thought to thicken,  
churn mire by slag and slurry pits behind a row of  
forced settlements:

A single drop of water lets fall a memory of water  
as water.

A single drop sears the skin.

Contact at the ear is aflame.

Then you respond without let or contrivance,

advance the face wanted so to nothing want,  
lean in from a dying world.

Reply in round on a self shying gamut.

No reversing without guidance of the banksman.

Droplet of water. Green stealth.

MICHAEL FARRELL

## poems

### THE KANGAROOS' POETRY

Their pages blow through the bush they have  
no books they're mostly read. by owls and ants  
And sometimes ants are read as content by the.  
Owls this is the state of the lyre a self-mulching  
literature their words. tell the old stories of hunters  
That anyone in the world can relate. to it's what  
Keeps their writing relevant and implicated in  
targets makes their. pages literally fat of the land  
Cream of the crop and all the. clichés we love  
That keep us connected their English as warm  
and conventional. as we could hope they write  
By night I'm told little caring to. be legible saying  
Only we write for ourselves or truth will out and  
presumably other heartfelt. and genuine attitudes  
Not wanting fame or invitations to the salons of  
other creatures. why us among the beauty we just  
Hear the words and write them. down as if from  
Spirits I've heard they scoff at genre but I'd. guess  
They're rather indifferent their references to guns  
make them modern but here. the page is modern  
Too they like description: the coloured grass, the  
uncoloured. grass, the tree near me, the tree near  
Us they write of modern. fruit and European fairies  
(Often under benches like a door prize) dirt's part.  
Of it plant and shit stains are part of it: they accompany  
the. words and then gradually obscure them, the  
Land does their editing and punctuating. for them  
You could say, yet the poems remain unchanged  
they were always. waiting for the earth the only  
Thing that changes is the minds of. the owls and  
Ants: as words turn to dirt and make some sense

### KANGAROO THERAPISTS OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

There were no other gangs to join I say  
to them they of. the soft eyes and empathic  
Shoulders or I was in a wallaby rushing.  
Over the downs downs? they might enquire  
depressing me my sister is out. of her coma  
Sister? and so it goes on, the endless note  
taking. the key nouns prodded for malignancies  
There are less safe genres for revelations.  
Says my therapist: in detective stories they  
often lead to a series of. deaths suspecting  
Nodding off I confess my desire to invent  
a time-based. condom peppermint drops  
Are a cliché among therapists, perhaps an  
effect of a. particular prominent teacher  
Anal manipulation, so close to animal the  
therapist writes no. scrub that scrub? scratch  
That scratch? sigh patient shows signs of  
hostility to heavy cardigans and. cynicism  
Has experimented with human therapists  
which has left patient mildly paranoid and.  
Apathetic family seems to have been insular  
yet surprisingly varied (and violent) in.  
Makeup occupations obscure patient seems  
to be a vocational neurotic but there may.  
Be more going on has a close relationship  
with dirt for an urban. dweller and is prone  
To alliteration and rural metaphor, if not  
hyperbole and. lies may require shock pouch  
Immersion we have negotiated a discount  
for the. accidental scratch he doesn't realise  
It was an experiment his love has taken. the  
Expected turn he just said something about  
cops coming around grabbing his. sister I  
Think to get my attention but there are only  
ten minutes. to go it's time to head for the  
Gymnasium for the group session. bound  
The therapists are mouthing mimic us all  
the therapists are bounding around. the hall  
One scatters tiny toy chicks and sweets from  
her pouch onto. the floor and some patients  
Scrap for them scrap? hug the cliché bound!

## KANGAROO DETECTIVES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

By random do you mean structured? Detective Felipe asked the journalist, for he. had immediately Seen the pattern – if not the meaning, motive or culprit – in the crimes. his cleverness was One of warmth Felipe reflected gratefully to himself and Confucius. he toyed with the I ching Coins around his neck he was not. one of those Moderns without perspective he had once been to PNG on. a case what were sleepless nights For but overtime overtime overtime zzzzz he. dreamed of an orange geranium that appeared Friendly but Confucius told him that. secondary Colours were evil he awoke and lifted some Free weights and went. hopping through the bush – He disdained bounding – in hopes of finding a wandering. seller of eucalyptus or wattle seed Ice cream instead he found a body. cut to lengths Of crime scene tape wallaby constables keeping the public back. and an emu forensic pathologist Ascertaining time of death this new cinematic narration. saves a lot of time Felipe murmured What's that asked Melissa his sergeant. cut said Felipe silently and hopefully to himself beginning to sweat in the. hot morning sunlight back at the Station there were possible suspects and potential.

Witnesses to interview belongings to go through next of kin to contact yet. Felipe hung out in the Shade of the tank to think he stared. at the modern Grasses that grew around the tap and remembered his dream. he went to check on Geranium his Orange wolfhound still chained up though. her Mouth was bloody from breakfast it seemed she had an alibi he. moved even further from the Station down to the creek where there were. Bluebells and yams and water rats every death's a knight's move he moved. a pebble forward And then left forward then right the-irony-is said. the-irony-is bird his left brain wondered when forensic pathology had become. recognised Locally his right brain composed a song called the heart of a. murder victim he munched on Maidenhair he knew they called him Detective Awol. but he always came up with the goods he Hopped twice forward then. right twice forward Then left like a pebble he hopped into the open. Air station the I ching chiming and settling as he surveyed the troppo. crowd and the whole Scene was as clear to him as underwater chess.

## A KANGAROO PRETENDER

Having overheard some scrap of a bush version of *Richard II* or perhaps *Richard III*, our hero determines a dream, a strong dream that will see him. through a sea trip On pickled turnip and a little hay it is. not Completely a role assigned by birth is his belief, but suited rather. to the one with the Kingliest qualities these he's quick to demonstrate and. the people not to mention The courtiers and the royals themselves are amazed. he commits no magic: no healing Of the sick nor making soft drinks. hard But sticks to professing a love for England a brilliant posture and. a cough that passes For a laugh at incidents of wit quite a. Start, though not enough to topple the throne he commences then with feats. Of acrobatics in the style of angels, and licks his underlip in certain. babes' directions And moves his tail in such a way that suggests heretofore. unknown pleasures Without the usual attendant risks to both sexes he gives boxing. lessons to princes And destined dukes; he spends long hours in the archives. of the British Library, soaking In historical greatness, presumably, or

researching strategy he. has the advantage Of being naked, and dressing him's what turns the court. on: as richly as possible With a crown to top it off the. king meanwhile Begins to fantasise about battle, of times when it was horses. shields, swords and Armour; cutting down anyone naked would hardly be sporting the. queen thinks he's Looking peaky and the colonial subject's got everyone's attention without. realising He's simultaneously hopping the plains of New South Wales sometimes in the. Scrub, sometimes among the Hereford beauties who came from his new home and. Where in his mind he's already sovereign and the previous king ails in. a French Sanatorium and tails are in in a big way the court. goes nude and a sort of cough Is de rigeur at the theatre. and round the Campfire where the king's imagined to have made typical hilarious. remarks that Never reflect badly on Empire and the palace's replete with heirs. that have come Over on boats not all with their father's sense he. thinks of returning to Australia Where he can reknit present, past, and future.

CECILIA WHITE

## **mineral universe**

you like passing through  
that place you haven't seen  
for a long time  
walking, solving  
problems analogous to building pyramids  
or, for example, finding a street  
that reminds you of a dream  
of a street lit by the eye  
you keep on your watch  
out of sight.  
almost time  
to breathe.  
in a world turned to stone  
you prepare itineraries  
locating museums, basements  
archives and journalists  
in case memory forgets to write.  
you prefer the capital kept in  
your lower case under stairs  
of a city railway  
nothing inhuman  
about that idea.  
taxis are expensive, you try  
to be carried on the verge

of tears, losing touch  
with houses where friends once lived,  
each roof a wintergarden.  
you laugh at the temperature  
of another hemisphere,  
that part of the urban brain  
exercised by those who arrived  
a few corners before you.  
you note pressure and force  
a line break  
that's living, you say.  
pulsing with nostalgia  
your small village,  
on the company calendar  
peers into lanes  
with parmesan, olives  
parking metres as if  
knowing what to find  
in morsels of space.  
in a mineral universe  
you cast yourself  
as a monument in each district  
plinthed on the unanswerable  
questions you refuse to ask.

SHANE ANDERSON  
**poems**

**LEMON PERFORATION**

And am never but will be  
Redacting simplicity a little  
Envious of the diagnosis consoled  
A covenant of fire escapes  
Siamese legalese taped to the wall  
The severance from weaponized lulls  
Comforters softened shoulders  
In snow the resolution discolored  
Beneath twenty protective folds  
This city makes hair custody  
A consecutive liquidation of bandwidth  
Overpasses the cold cold  
Tenements without precedence  
Searching for a location  
That doesn't feel like parole

**KNOTTED**

Decapitated after the usual domestic  
Education we plucked some feathers  
Then translated spectra into a model  
Weighing the softness unshaven  
We habilitated the silence of rockets  
And not the nouns we were bottled in  
In statements that arrived around  
The fifteenth of the month quickly  
A blank slate became our goddess  
During the off season we blocked  
Out the petty doubts with quote  
Radiation of members of family coddled  
By dignity we wanted to lengthen  
Past all rulers to the unthing  
All hope together cobbled



HOLLY TAVEL

## the weather in fritz bemelmans park

### THE HOSPITAL

The hospital grounds end where Fritz Bemelmans Park begins. At the south entrance to Fritz Bemelmans Park there once stood, shining and absolute, a bronze statue of Fritz Bemelmans, gentleman, with a scroll, a musket, a sheaf of wheat, and a mysterious bundle. A plaque affixed to the statue's plinth told in the beige voice of homeland and state what these things meant, but don't ask us to tell you now. When one of us says, "Fritz Bemelmans," someone else replies, as if it is the answer to a riddle, "a scroll, a musket, a sheaf of wheat, and a mysterious bundle." We believe this says it all, and if there is more, we do not know and are not sure we want to know. The statue was long ago taken down, hauled away following the general ban on statues in parks, and the space it occupied is now filled with dark-suited men opening umbrellas into gray sunshine.

We are the volunteers. We volunteer, every second and fourth Sunday, at the Schmetterling-Kiteley Neurology Wing of City Hospital. It is our job, every second and fourth Sunday, to take the people in comas to Fritz Bemelmans Park. We push the people in comas in wheelchairs and on gurneys into the elevator that goes from the glorious glass-roofed vestibule of the

Schmetterling-Kiteley Neurology Wing, on the sixteenth floor of City Hospital, down to the mezzanine level and to the corridor that leads to the tiny cement-walled courtyard where the loved ones of the people in comas go to smoke and wait with faces full of a clouded hope that is indistinguishable from boredom. We, with our official volunteer badges and starched tunics, push the people in comas in wheelchairs and on gurneys past the parking obelisk and the retention pond, past the shuttle station and over the pedestrian bridge to the south entrance of Fritz Bemelmans Park. There is a Fritz Bemelmans-shaped space now filled with children who come up to us wanting to touch the hair and the faces of the people in comas. They all want to know the weather report. We say to each other "release the dogs" but of course there are no dogs, and the children push past us to the stone fountain half-filled with last week's rainwater in which other, unparented children are splashing. We speak to the people in comas in low voices, trying to make our voices sound like warm soft rain. This is what it said in the job description, posted on the bulletin board in the community center: *Hospital volunteers needed: must have voices like warm soft rain.* This is our job: we do our best. We sit on wooden

slat benches and brush away the tiny brown birds that cluster around the faces of the people in comas. Animals of all sorts are drawn to the people in comas, but mostly these tiny birds, some of which are no larger than your thumb.

On the day the city hauled off the statues everyone came to stand outside their houses and workplaces to watch the cranes and cherry pickers and big trucks head seaward.

## THE LOVED ONES

The loved ones of the people in comas come on visiting days carrying tote bags containing soft balls of worsted yarn and pieces of dark, bruised fruit. We, the volunteers, and they, the loved ones, are often forced to stand uncomfortably close together in the elevator that ascends from the shag-carpeted reception area on the mezzanine level to the sixteenth floor of City Hospital, to the glorious glass-roofed vestibule, the long pale corridor and finally the hushed orangeness of the Schmetterling-Kiteley Neurology wing. We open our brown paper lunch sacks, and are not surprised to find them empty. Someone has been stealing our lunches, our dry tuna sandwiches and ham rolls. This has been going on for a while now. The doctors, when we approach them to tell them about these incidents, startle like antelopes gathered at a riverbed, and move quickly away.

We carry small red spiral notebooks given to us by the nurses, which contain graphs into which we are to insert marks denoting the involuntary movements, gestures, tics and twitches, and breathing patterns of the people in comas. When we return the notebooks to the nurses after our shifts end they peer into them and nod gravely, then deliver them in stacks to the doctors, who run from room to room, lit by the terrible glow of afternoon soap operas. In the cafeteria, they all sit together looking at their watches and eating pink and yellow fruit out of plastic containers. No doctor has ever said a word about Fritz Bemelmans.

We imagine that being in a coma feels like going swimming in a suit of armor. Soft armor, made, perhaps, of corduroy. Nights, at home in bed with our boyfriends and girlfriends and spouses and significant others, we sometimes have dreams about Olympic-sized pools into

which fingers and toes are suddenly, icily, plunged. We slide in up to our waists; the water is freezing. Our legs become quite numb; our legs disappear; we have no legs; our legs have come loose – this does not hurt – and float, bobbing on the surface like canoes, to the far end of the pool.

The eyelids of the people in comas register subtle shifts in the barometric pressure. If it is to rain their faces sag like paper. Sometimes someone makes something that looks like a smile. There is a low-pressure front moving in from the north.

## THE WEATHER MACHINE

Past the reservoir and the aqueducts, past the condominium towers with their fragile balcony gardens and decorative gargoyles, lie the various institutes, facilities, government-sponsored brain trusts and corporate think tanks of the Quadrangle Research and Technology Park. The low, quiet, egg-colored buildings of the Quadrangle Research Park exude undisputed authority, disporting upon their square shoulders imposing acronyms rendered in smooth microplastic, facing, always, the rising sun. The exterior signage of the Quadrangle Research and Technology Park, sculpturally emerging from treeless lots, discloses no secrets, makes no claims, but nevertheless, in virgin white and polished red, expresses certain bold assertions, seeming almost to invite applause. Though what exactly is being boldly asserted, we, the volunteers, have never been able to figure out.

Several of us volunteers, while running errands in our cars during lunch breaks from our other jobs, on the days that we do not volunteer at the Schmetterling-Kiteley Neurology Wing, have seen a group of Schmetterling-Kiteley Neurologists, in their white doctor coats and loud ties, five or six of them all crammed together in a small sports car, pulling up to the gated entrance to one of the low quiet buildings of the Quadrangle Research and Technology Park. We have, each of us, on more than one occasion driving past the Quadrangle Research and Technology Park, seen glimpses of what we volunteers believe to be a weather machine. A machine for controlling the weather, yes, but also for creating it. It is not, we do not think, kept in one place, or in one building. As near as we can figure the machine, which we have only seen



traces of, exists in some way due to the red notebooks we give to the doctors. We are not certain how this could be possible, but what do we know about Neurometeorology? Several of us volunteers have discussed these sightings amongst ourselves. We have compared notes. During lunch breaks from our other jobs we meet at a mutually convenient location and pile into a small sports car and drive to the Quadrangle Research and Technology Park, park across the street, and wait. We see the doctors and what appear to be several researchers warmly shaking hands next to a large spherical sculpture. We see the doctors loading something into the trunk of their car. We see the researchers lighting cigarettes and standing together in a little knot, smoking and talking and gazing over the roofs of facing buildings, in the general direction of the future.

## MR. L

Mr L is fifty years old and has been in a coma for eighteen years, ten months and seventeen days. Mr L awoke one morning, full of vim, threw off the bedcovers, ready to leap into the wide open blue of a new day, kissed his wife, who lay beside him in their expensive, expansive marital bed; it was a fine day, to judge from Mr L's diary, which he made a habit of writing in daily, at several points over the course of the day: an important part of Mr L's routine, according to Mr L's wife. The first entry of the day, undertaken as soon as Mr L's eyes had snapped open – Mr L possessing, according to his wife, an unfailingly accurate internal alarm clock which, Mrs. L claimed, she could sometimes hear going off deep in Mr L's busy brain, far beneath his twitching eyelids— was invariably a comment on the weather, or in any case, those aspects of the weather observable from Mr and Mrs L's bedroom window: the color of the sky, the condition of the clouds, the reported or estimated temperature and so forth, following the completion of which entry Mr L, having returned his diary to its usual place in the bottom drawer of the nightstand, one of a matching set of nightstands, the other, of course, being on Mrs L's side of the bed, would throw back the bedcovers and launch himself from the bed straight into a deep-knee bend, following that one with fifty more in rapid succession. On this day, however, the day that Mr L felt the first stirrings of his incipient coma, he threw back

the deeply tufted velvet bedcovers, under which, as Mr L remarked in his diary, he sometimes felt as though the hands of God were being pressed upon him as he slept, to find that his legs had completely vanished.

## THE WEATHER MACHINE, II

A perfectly round white cloud casting a perfectly round dark shadow hung over the Quadrangle Research and Technology Park. The next day the shadow had moved six feet to the east. The day after that it had moved twelve more feet, and the day following that one it had moved twenty-four more, for a total of forty-two. For a week the cloud moved, as near as we, the volunteers, could figure by means of our primitive compasses and limited mathematical abilities, due east at a rate of  $3(2^{(t-1)})$  feet/day<sup>2</sup>. By our calculations the cloud will be centered directly over Fritz Bemelmans Park in six days, three hours and forty-seven minutes.

## MISS Q

Miss Q is seventy-seven years old and has been in a coma for twenty years, six months, five days. Miss Q is unique among the people in comas in that her coma did not come about, as far as we are able to know, as a burst from or bolt to the back of the neck, or as a sudden falling backwards with arms splayed, or as a sudden awakening into a new, twilight color – but overcame Miss Q a little at a time, over a period of some forty or fifty years. Miss Q's close friend and neighbor Miss K comes to see Miss Q during most visiting days accompanied by her son D, a middle-aged gentleman whose face and limbs display the petulance of an exhausted child, and who sits upon a chair as if a chair is not something meant for sitting upon. Miss K and D are fond of saying about Miss Q's coma that Miss Q was "boondoggled" by it. It is unclear whether this word possesses for Miss K and D some private meaning known only to them (and presumably, to Miss Q before she became fully enmeshed in coma), or whether Miss K and D are simply fond of the word "boondoggled" despite its seeming inadequacy in expressing the events leading to Miss Q's coma.

Miss K believes that Miss Q's coma was with her, like a shadow of wings beating overhead, from a very young age, although Miss K herself did not become aware of

the physical manifestations of Miss Q's encroaching coma until many years after she and Miss Q first met as schoolgirls. According to Miss K, the first part of Miss Q's body to lapse into coma was her left leg, on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1947. Miss K remembers the date because, as she relates to us, she and Miss Q were supposed to perform that evening in a festival pageant heralding the vernal equinox, a tradition at Miss K and Miss Q's small women's college. Miss K was to play the role of a zephyr, while Miss Q was to play a patch of snow being slowly melted by the warmth of the sun. The rays of the sun were to be played by a group of eight girls, who were to descend upon Miss Q with outstretched arms and beat with flat palms upon Miss Q's curled body, which was to respond by slowly unfurling and yawning and stretching out over the soft green lawn of the women's college while Miss K fluttered about waving white scarves over the proceedings. Miss K notes that Miss Q's left leg's coma resulted in its becoming not an anchor, but a kite, Miss Q's leg lifting or floating up of its own accord as if it wanted to fly off and away, a matter of some inconvenience as Miss Q could neither control this nor predict when it was going to occur, the result being that Miss Q was finally obliged to wear wrapped around her left ankle first a sand-filled stocking, and later a large heavy bracelet. This first, buoyant stage of coma lasted several years, but, Miss K notes that as the coma made its way up Miss Q's left side and down the right, it became more and more of a burden, so that, in the months before Miss Q was fully overtaken by her coma, she became, while fully awake and conscious, unable to move her body save for her eyes and mouth, her nose and ears, the pinky of her left hand, the toes of her right foot, her left shoulder, her right arm below the elbow, and her left ankle.

## THE AVENUE OF FOUNTAINS

The north entrance to Fritz Bemelmans Park opens onto the Avenue of Fountains, one of the brightest and busiest streets in the city center. The fountains, housed within mesh enclosures upon small circular cement islands spaced evenly along the median of the Avenue, appear as a row of delicate silver parasols opening and closing with symmetric regularity, and their fine spray coats the workers and shoppers and gray-suited businessmen

with a damp amniotic sheen. Limp-haired and soggy, the workers and shoppers and businessmen press small absorptive cloths to the backs of their necks, heads bowed against the onrush.

Every now and then the tide of people flowing day and night over the sidewalks and across the median in the center of the Avenue of Fountains and into and out of the tiered glass office towers with their glass elevators and revolving doors channels a small rivulet of baffled pedestrians into Fritz Bemelmans Park. They sit, with feet flat and hands on knees, staring straight ahead into the spaces once occupied by the statues, or wander about clutching bag lunches, unsure of where to sit or stand, uncertain of how they came to be here among the truncated trees and grasses and chalk-dusted asphalt of the Park. Among these castaways we sometimes discern a familiar coalescence, an arrangement of features we recognize as belonging to a loved one of a person in coma, but the loved one – or loved ones, as the case may be – are unable, it seems, to recognize us, or the people in comas, outside the confines of the Schmetterling-Kitley Neurology Wing. The doctors have told the nurses, who have told us, that this is to be expected. All the loved ones will eventually, inevitably come to see the people in comas as an inseparable part of the hospital, as having no discernible meaning away from the glass-roofed vestibule and the long pale corridor, no tangible qualities outside of the clean white-walled rooms where they – the people in comas – are housed amid gift-shop plants. The doctors stumble into these rooms as if by accident, blinking, glowering over clipboards, shouting incomprehensible questions to the nurses, speaking, so we volunteers believe, in a sort of code, and scanning with perceptible impatience the pale triangles of sky visible through the hospital rooms' windows.

## MRS C

Mrs C is fifty-one years old and has been in a coma for thirteen years, one month, 0 days. Every visiting day Mrs C's husband R, son R jr, and daughter M. come to do Mrs C's hair and makeup. They bring with them, producing them from their pockets with the flair of a team of magicians, thin smocks of a waxy paperlike material to put on over their clothes. Mr C attends to Mrs C's hair while M. soaks Mrs C's hands in rose

water and R jr applies a mud pack. Following this M. will perform a manicure while R jr – a boy whose large helpless head and receding body indicate a likelihood that he, too, is destined for coma – stands sentry, mouthful of hairpins at the ready. Mrs C’s hair is of an unusual soft hue that reminds us of the interior sheen of a conch shell.

Prior to the onset of her coma, Mrs C enjoyed her hair very much, and always wore it in an elaborate upswept hairdo comprised of a complex arrangement of rotund curls held aloft by a still more complex system of long sharp pins. Mr C remarks that when he and Mrs C first met, she seemed to him a formal garden, in which one could wander for hours, feeling suitably awed but never relaxed, and among whose arcades and shaded boscos one is surprised, but not shocked, to come across a rusty axe sunk into the trunk of a tree. Yes, agree M and R jr, working together to prepare Mrs C’s face – M. sanding while R jr buffs, M scraping while R jr collects the shavings in a small bucket, Mr C chipping away with tireless diligence at the yellowing varnish caused by Mrs C’s coma – there is, no doubt about it, a violence to Mrs C’s hairdo; it is a violence, however, that the C family cannot do without.

### THE WEATHER MACHINE, III

On a fourth Sunday at the cusp of summer, when the city is wrapped in a thin gauze of heat, and along the Avenue of Fountains workers crowd the narrow median during their lunch breaks to avail themselves of the fountains’ cooling spray, clutching tiny paper cups from which they suck mouthfuls of crushed ice, one curved edge of the cloud’s round shadow has just begun to appear over the smudged horizon of Fritz Bemelmans Park. Large aproned men bearing pushcarts of flavored ice treats station themselves at the four entrances to the Park, and gray-eyed musicians appear with flutes and accordions and guitars, crouching under shade trees with hats and instrument cases open to the public’s approval or scorn, their tuneless tunes a flurry of golden darts that ping against but fail to penetrate the solid mass of heat.

In the center of the Park a group of children are squatting in a circle, gathered around what can only be described as a miniature tornado. The tornado,

perhaps five or six inches in height, spins like an angry top, bumping against the cage of children’s knees and issuing a low hungry whine. We volunteers have no doubt that this is the work of the weather machine, and the cumulonimbus cloud that hangs low over the park, but the tornado does not appear to be issuing from the cloud, or to anything in particular, the tops of its funnel simply dissipating into warm air. At first, the children recoil when the dark column whirls against their bare legs, but soon grow bolder. They push down on the top of the tornado, then pull their hands suddenly away to watch it spring back into shape. They take turns encircling the tornado with their arms, imprisoning it. We suspect that the tornado is only the most visible manifestation of a second, lower cloud, invisible to us. The children walk all unawares through this second, lower, invisible cloud, and climb trees to thrust their arms up into the sky.

We push the people in comas, strapped to gurneys and propped up in wheelchairs, through flocks of tiny birds pressed like thumbprints into the air. We head for the cool places of the park, hurrying to reach the best benches, which flicker in and out of view beneath the long threadbare branches of the willows near the duck pond.

The people in comas wear regulation Schmetterling-Kitely coma patient jumpsuits, which we volunteers have to put on them before each visit to the Park. This task involves two of us volunteers working together upon one person in coma, in a system we ourselves have devised, one of us lifting and pulling and stretching while the other one pushes and bends and folds. The jumpsuits are made of terrycloth, and have small breast pockets with the Schmetterling-Kitely logo embroidered upon them in blue and green. Sometimes the eyes of the people in comas flutter open like moth wings at the moment of flight. We enter marks denoting the character and duration of each eye movement into the appropriate boxes in our red notebooks, and write, in separate spaces at the bottoms of the pages, preceded by the word Comments: *moth wings, moment of flight*.

MORGAN CHILDS

# **jazz funeral for meat**

& OTHER WRITINGS ON CARNIVORISM

## **IN DEFENSE OF THE CANNIBAL COP**

It is true that it all began for the Cannibal Cop with a love nibble on the ear. The Cannibal Cop had a very meat-and-potatoes upbringing. At the time of his arrest four years ago following a minor altercation in the women's room of a Jamba Juice, the Cannibal Cop's pantry was stocked with the following: two and a half tubes of Pringles, several cans of diet Fresca, a box of 100-calorie Special K bars, three grapefruits and a jar of Jiff. Except for the cannibalizing, the Cannibal Cop currently maintains a strict vegetarian diet. The Cannibal Cop knows that the best source of calcium is leafy greens and that blackstrap molasses is loaded with magnesium and vitamin A. The Cannibal Cop is the proud owner of a \$450 Vitamix juicer, and it changed his life. The Cannibal Cop receives biweekly B12 injections. The Cannibal Cop swapped his morning porridge for warm quinoa with toasted coconut flakes and a splash of almond milk and suggests you do the same. The Cannibal Cop only cannibalized women who were committed to predominantly plant-based diets. Following his arrest, the Cannibal Cop did a four-day juice cleanse. With a dietary overhaul the Cannibal Cop has seen remarkable improvements in the quality of his sleep and his energy levels and skin tone. The Cannibal Cop showed tremendous strength of will by choosing not to reach for a donut like all the other cops. The Cannibal Cop took cooking classes at the Whole Foods on Wednesday nights where he was said to show exceptional promise in the culinary arts. In defense of the Cannibal Cop, the Cannibal Cop didn't eat all of that one woman, and it will only leave a little mark. It should be noted that the Cannibal Cop has a very fast metabolism and needs to eat more in a day than you or I—than you or I need to eat. The Cannibal Cop was raised on Hamburger Helper by a single mother. Nobody ever wanted to trade lunches with the Cannibal Cop in elementary school. Nobody ever cut the Cannibal Cop's crusts off. The Cannibal Cop was sometimes forced to eat liver and onions and lima beans. The grandmother of the Cannibal Cop was never the type to bake cookies. The Cannibal Cop's victims washed their hair with shampoos with the following scents: Antique Vanilla, Marrakech Mojito, and Summer Citrus Squeeze; one young woman used a lotion called Sugar Baby Butter Rub. Mortified by his behavior, the Cannibal Cop has gone so far to swear off animal crackers. It was once explained to me by the Cannibal Cop that if we ate insects instead of animals we could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by nearly ninety-five percent. The cellmate of the Cannibal Cop told me just last week that at the encouragement of the Cannibal Cop he had adopted the ritual of Meatless Mondays. The chef at the federal prison claims the Cannibal Cop has made several requests for grilled cheese sandwiches to be made without rennet, the enzyme derived from the stomach tissue of young calves. The warden tells me he has encouraged her to purchase cosmetics deemed "cruelty-free." The Cannibal Cop is deeply remorseful for his behavior, and has thoroughly lost his appetite.

## **HOW THE SAUSAGE GETS MADE**

There is a winter where the summer once was. The snow is a block of chalva and the ice is frozen in contact lens cases in the back of the minifridge

There is a spark and a pop and the power is out and so is feminism (women lack the hubris that gets things fixed) She doesn't want to know, exactly, how the sausage gets made: she is from the South where such things are not discussed. Which leads me to ask: what kind of Liberal were you to eat so much meat?

She should have known from the start it wouldn't be sustainable::

Before the summer was over before it started there was:

A troubadour up and down the block, there were nights of pickled fish, there was somebody else's high school prom, there was the Frühstück the desayuno at the pub around the corner by the tower by the edge of the east, by the medium, the message, the minima-moralia (there were gunshots, maybe, but only with the best intentions): Next door to the pensioner always hanging something on the wall and across from the holka with the pay-it-forward attitude she put her mattress by the rag rug in the corner by the cold heater below the wavy pane of glass (just in case of happy gunshots) and when the summer ended she couldn't get small enough which she tried, to get warm enough:

Something needed to get fixed::

There was a song on the radio out the wavy window down the street and at the bar that put a Hand on her back on the small of her back on the rising curve of her rear on the place it begins to descend again It is still there it is gone it is there it is gone it is felt but it is missing it is good but it is wrong it is anti feminist (?) and the place where she is touched it is warmed but it is cold to the touch to the brush of those Hot hot hands::

She lives alone and she believes guiltily that every tissue on the stair once belonged to her::

## THE GOAT SONG

That evening when I got to Gira's she was sitting at the table in the dining room with a goat. The goat sat upright in his chair with excellent posture and there was a candle lit and the two of them were eating lamb.

Maureen was in the living room smoking a cigarette and both rooms were hazy with fruit flies.

"Hi, Gigi," I said. "Hello, Goat."

"Who is it?" said Gigi in the direction of me.

"It's me," said I.

"Ooooooooooooooooooooooh, hello, you!" said Gigi. She had withered and paled and the candle burned right through her, giving her a glow.

The goat said nothing, not much caring, but gestured with a hoof to the vinyl-upholstered chair next to him.

I took a cigarette and an ashtray out of my purse and lit up with the candle flame. The goat coughed. "He is allergic to cigarettes," said Gigi. "Would you like some lamb?"

The lamb lifted its head off the table and gave me a pleading look. Her head was so heavy with anxiety that the fruit flies didn't even stir. I shook my head and put the cigarette out, feeling hungry but not wishing to disturb anybody. I said, "I am shaking my head."

Gigi put down her fork and knife and put her elbows on the table and lowered her forearms so that she shifted her weight forward and leaned into me with her shallow green irises and said, "You look good, Goat."

"I'm not Goat," said I.

Slowly like a sponge taking water for the first time her eyes absorbed the shape of ripe lemons. To make a point, the goat draped his napkin over the back of his chair politely and then climbed atop the table, knocking his plate onto the floor and pushing Gira's into her lap.

"I suppose we are finished!" she said cheerfully.



Suddenly Maureen emerged from a cloud of smoke and fruit flies and put two hands in the air over her head and shook them around and said "WHAT IS THAT RACKET? I AM TRYING TO WATCH CHARLIE ROSE!"

But Gigi and I couldn't answer her because our chins were quivering and there were knots in our throats and our faces and necks were wet with lemonade.

"What's happening?" Maureen asked.

Gigi and I were looking at the goat. His brown belly was bulging blue, in and out, in little heaves of breath. He stood on the lacquered table on thin legs and wobbling knobby knees. His balls hung heavy. His eyes looked hesitant, but his brow was strong.

I looked at Gigi. Her skin held her bones in, but her veins were barely contained. She had a belly but no fat. She looked back at me. I couldn't tell the difference between a breath and a tremble. I didn't look away until I saw her inhale.

The goat sat down on the table, then rolled over on his side, and made this noise:

*HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHssssssssssssssssssssssssssss.*

and the little lamb lifted her sweet little head and then her bloody little body and dragged the uneaten parts of her over to the belly of the goat, and she curled herself up in the cradle of him and made herself spooned and went to sleep.

From the living room, Maureen called, "We need to do something about all these flies."

From the dining room, Gira replied, "Maybe if we ignore them they will just go away."

## **JAZZ FUNERAL FOR MEAT**

Raymona wanted to have a jazz funeral but no one was dead, so we hired some musicians to have some last rites for meat. Raymona's husband had been a circus ringleader but he was killed suddenly by a smack in the head by a corn cob hurled out of the window of a moving vehicle while Raymona in the passenger seat enumerated a honey-do list. I never knew him but I know his funeral was well-choreographed, precise, and Protestant, and it did nothing to acclimate Raymona to the wrinkles on her face or the spots on her skin. So Raymona took her late husband's brass-buttoned coat out of the closet and put a notice in the local newspaper: FUNERAL FOR FOOD (Light Lunch Served). The jazz funeral for meat was not to be a mourning over death but a celebration of life, and so it was decided that the best venue for the event was in the middle of the market.

At the jazz funeral of the pork shank and the headcheese and the offal Raymona made the congregants hold umbrellas and said be careful, you don't want to put an eye out. On a humid day she was only three foot ten but she stood on an aquarium tank inside of which was a tangle of red claws and rubber bands and rubbed her fists over her husband's brass buttons and called to our attention the tuba player who did the valet parking at the church and who needed a ride home if anyone was willing. I wore a red dress to pay respect to the flesh. Raymona said, you're going to wear that? The others said, I'm sorry for your loss. But I certainly hadn't known the honoree before Raymona had him on ice with an apple in his mouth in the back of a borrowed F150.

Confirmation of the saxophonist's lacto-ovo-vegetarianism gave the event an air of suspicion and in short order he was politely excused. Then it was back to celebrating life. Under her breath Raymona told me: when it's my turn, dig a hole in the ground and be done with it. Then the tuba farted out a sad song and I began to cry. I looked around to see if anyone else was so moved and caught the eye of the upright bassist, bronze and beautiful and boy, and boy oh boy oh. The bass player caught my gaze and congenially he lifted one hand in the air, the biggest hand I had ever seen, hello, I acknowledge you.

Later I leaned coolly on a wooden crate and asked him, How did you become a bassist? and he said, I always wanted to be violinist but you see my big hands? and of course, I had seen those hands, and about them the following had occurred to me: I desire those big hands to be lain all over my body. I said, Uh uh huh, coolly, and he said, When I tried to play the violin these hands were so big and manly that they made the violin feel submissive and weak, and she wouldn't play, she just lay there in my big hands. I said, Uh huh uh huh. He said, So I tried to play the cello (Uh huh) but these hands were so strong and virile that the cello swooned and went limp to my touch. Uh uh uh uh uh. I watched him stand there with the bass and together their bodies fit, and suddenly mine didn't fit anywhere but jingled and groaned, and the crate I was leaning on rumbled and said, Eep!

At the punch bowl Raymona said, you had better not be making whoopie at the jazz funeral for meat! Most of the people in attendance were strictly interested in the free lunch and so I sought the company of the catfish and the tilapia, of whom I asked many polite questions and from whom I received little in return. Then it was the moment for the main event, and Raymona held a baton and the tuba player and the bassist beautifully brutishly heaved over their shoulders the pink body of a well-upholstered hog. He was slick and he smiled a little and they walked him all over so everyone could see and remember and everyone thought of all the good times they had had together, the tenderloin and the BsLT and the shoulders and knuckles and knees, God rest, God bless, God love him.

The sun had set and Raymona had only just lit the jazz funeral pyre and contracted the valet tubist to crank our honoree around when the when the bassist came to ask me to dance, and he put one big hand on the small of my back and I became round and rump and loin. And then he put his mouth on me and the catfish gaped and the bass looked on in envy. On the night air and on our breaths were the smells of ribs and rack and flank and belly and suckling and chop and cassoulet and cubano and porchetta and panchetta and carnitas and chicharrones and moo shu and prosciutto and al pastor. We were hungry. What goes in a whoopie pie?

Beside us candied quick like caramel the skin of our departed, a perfect crisp, his juice preserved. Over the shoulder of my beloved I watched Raymona watch me, slowly polishing off the last kernels of an ear of corn.

## THIS IS JUST TO SAY

I have eaten  
the placenta  
that was in  
the icebox

and which  
you were probably  
saving  
to freeze-dry

and cut into many  
tiny pieces  
to be taken as  
post-natal vitamins

on the recommendation  
of the other mothers  
in your "lean-in" circle  
gulping kale juice

and pre-chewing  
food for the children  
they will breastfeed  
into adolescence

Forgive me  
it was delicious  
and paired beautifully  
with a pinot noir



# SUNSET STRIP

DAMIEN OBER

## escape victor mcdougal

McDougal stands at the one-room's only window, fingers spreading the curtains to sear a gibbet of hard sunlight across his chest. From the bed, Diana's voice comes leaking, "What's it look like out there?"

"Looks like Mexico."

McDougal turns back to the one-room. Toilet and sink as dingy as ever. Floor littered with clothes, candle stubs, cigarette cartons, fanned-out American magazines, cereal boxes, paperbacks with their spines snapped, not-white pages dangling like teeth all busted, unfinished crosswords and fishmarket swap receipts. McDougal grabs cigarettes off the dresser. Has one out and lit. Smoke puffs fall loopdyloop at belt level.

In the bed, the blanket gathers a crumpled ring around Diana's waist. Above it, her thin, naked body hovers hooked, shoulders all rolled in. Dark shadows near her stomach could be the first of her cunt hair. McDougal steps a step closer, bends to kiss her always-wet mouth. Then he's pulling on a flowered shirt, dragging off his smoke. Smoke all around them now, thick-looking and crowding out the one-room. "You gonna be here?" he asks.

"What do you mean, *am I gonna be here?*"

"When I get back... *are you gonna you be here?*"

The bed creaks with her flopping back. One arm across her chin, the other up over her brow. McDougal looks at where a breast seems on its way toward sliding right off her. "Don't be like that," she says.

McDougal takes a snub nose from the dresser, wallet and keys, finds a pocket for each. Making sure Diana's

not looking, he reaches deep to peel three bills from a wad, buried rearward in a middle drawer. "Be back around sunset, I guess."

He leans down to kiss her again, but this time she's not up for one back. Her lips are melty instead, like kissing something dead. By the time he's standing upright, she's back to sleeping, or pretending to be.

The cove's a bust, from the first cast to the absolute last. Hoofing that dirt road back to San Felipe empty handed was never on McDougal's to do list. So when a truck slows alongside with this Mexican leaning his fat, brown face across the seat to ask, "Vas a la ciudad?" McDougal doesn't waste a half-breath on an answer, just slings his tackle and rod into the bed and climbs on in.

This is how McDougal meets Carlos, he just materializes from swirling dust on that road in his rusted-out shit box of a truck. As soon as the tires are rolling, Carlos looses one of those sloppy arms to slap McDougal too hard on the shoulder. "Hablas español?"

McDougal shakes his head, eyes closed, a little less than half awake.

"You fisher?"

"Not today, though. Water too choppy."

"Like woman. Too rough... can no get the fish." McDougal can feel the whole truck cab jiggling with laughter. "Tu fumas, marijuan?"

"That's some Spanish I know." McDougal opens his eyes to see Carlos tearing a page from a pocket bible,

crossing his chest with a hooked-back thumb, loading the folded page with pot plucked from a rusty soup can, steering wheel held straight the whole time by the bulge of Carlos' gut.

About an hour later, when Carlos drops McDougal off and McDougal finds the door to the one-room mysteriously open – and not unlocked open, it's actually open about three inches – a weed-induced paranoia kicks in like autopilot. McDougal bursts in, snub-nose like a live fish in his hand. But the one-room is not full of hired killers; it's empty of all life. McDougal checks that the cash wad's still there. But no Diana. Gone again.

McDougal first met Diana at the tail end of what turned out to be the first and last spring break of her vacation-shortened college career. At first, she totally fell for the story about McDougal's torn elbow ligament and subsequent failed surgery and ruined baseball career. This got them started on a night that ended by breaking into a hotel room that a hotel was in the process of remodeling and fucking all over the bed, the floor, the stacks of sheet-rock (even trying to incorporate the step ladder) all through the night and most of the next morning. Then, after meeting again the next night, completely by this freak random chance, at a completely different bar – and then doing more of same on the beach, in the cab and then back at the one-room, they ventured into a mid-afternoon for three-peso fish tacos and a tandem moped over the dunes like the guides say you're not supposed to. A nap in the sand near the water, then dinner at *Sunset Karaoke*, where McDougal knocked the dining room flat with a Martin-esque drunken croon – *oh, please stay by me...* All of it leading, in this vicious, inescapable swirl, down to the same bar as the first night. McDougal with his arms around Diana again after busting into the DJ booth again, watching as she rifled again through thousands of disks McDougal wouldn't recognize if not for having watched her do the same thing two nights before.

On they went like that, back forward through it all again until sweat made of all the same things was pouring off their bodies in the one-room. Post-sex, Diana tucked up under McDougal's arm, it was decided she was missing her bus back to the states. After that? Only the press of time would be able to tell them.

From a dream about him and Diana and an ATV stuck axle-deep in a sand dune, McDougal snaps awake to the one-room just as empty. For a sixty count he sits collecting, then he's swapping into a clean shirt and on a bee-line for the bars, expecting to find Diana draped across some guy's lap, her arms and legs like ribbons from how drunk she is. But all her usual haunts are like funeral parlors, all of them empty of her unmissable presence. At the very last, McDougal finds not Diana, but Carlos, bellied up, waning crescent of empty Corona bottles cluttered on the bartop. McDougal takes the next stool over and when Carlos notices, he reels and slaps McDougal too hard on the back, "AMIGO!"

"Lost my girl," McDougal says. "Or she lost me."

Carlos moves his head like a dog hearing an inquisitive. He taps the neck of his Corona against the neck of McDougal's. "She come back soon, no?"

Later, sitting on a dock with American music pumping out of the bar they just got thrown out of, Carlos reels back again and this time slaps even harder. Under the thump, McDougal can hear the pleased giggling of some young girl, somewhere on the sand nearby. Sounds close enough that he should be able to get a visual; he prowls the shadows with sideways glances but can't see a thing.

Beside McDougal, Carlos has reduced to drunken weeping, "es mi nino," he sobs. "They have he. La Policia." And as morning breaks a board over the head of San Felipe, Carlos and McDougal are actually on their way to the little jail where juvenile criminals are kept. "Stealing button," Carlos tells him. That's what they got Manuel for. Stole two silver buttons from a bin outside a shop in downtown San Felipe. That's a year ago and Carlos hasn't seen him since.

When they get to the little jail, Carlos gives the guard something like a thousand pesos. Sweating and confused, head pounding, McDougal leans forehead on the chain-link fence, sees through it a young boy tied to a tree. There's this older lady stalking back and forth, kinda pretty in her own right. Other kids too, standing around in a quiet, little oval. Then the lady's stopped; she wheels one of those trim legs back and a kick right in the groin of the tied-up kid. McDougal expects a collective *ooohhhh!* from the others, but they

just watch – obedient little fuckers – their tiny, brown heads like apples they're so still.

Back on the free side of the fence, neither Carlos nor the guard seem to notice. They just blurt and blurt and blurt, words that sound to McDougal like high school kids faking Spanish. After the guard shakes his head for about the hundredth time, Carlos stops talking, swats McDougal with the back of his hand and heads for the truck.

"He can no come out today. I no have enough for good bride."

"Bribe. Enough for a good *bribe*."

"Bribe," Carlos repeats. Says it a few times more as he drives them back to San Felipe, passing a joint rolled up in Mathew, gobbling uppers from an envelope Carlos has in his glovebox, or they sure feel like uppers. There's a very brief stopover at the one-room where McDougal stands in the doorway looking at how empty the place still is of Diana. He swears there's a fresh bed dent the exact shape of her body, but by the time he's fully processed this detail, he and Carlos are elbow-deep in Diana's regular circuit of dingy San Felipe bars. Then out on the beach again with a half-handle of tequila until it's morning, wandering home.

This is when Carlos starts in about a cove a half-day's drive from town, his arm in a death grip around McDougal's shoulders. "I drive and you, Vic, you fish. Like normal." Carlos gestures at nothing in the air in front of them. "I show spots, help at market. And the dinero, the cash, we split. And soon, maybe soon, I be able get Manuelito out of jail."

At Carlos's cove, McDougal reels in more fish than he ever has before in a single day since he first came to Mexico. As he pulls them in, fish after pole-bending fish, Carlos bounces back and forth, pointing like a setter, screeching at each sunk bobber.

Rolling back into town the next morning, their eyes red like brains have melted and leaked inside, bed of the pickup gleaming with the flesh of piled fish, Carlos pulls to a stop at the market and tells McDougal to wait in the truck. In with the fish he goes, for something like a half hour. Gets McDougal thinking maybe he's been robbed, then thinks, *well, fuck, I've got his truck*. And then Carlos is out, scampering on his stubby, little legs,

twice as much per pound as McDougal's ever seen.

Days and days and days they meet like this, fish fish fish fish fish and out on a bribe run to the little jail. But it's never enough. And never enough at the bars, either. Each night, the cash just sucks off them, shoots out in tangent streams until there's nothing left. McDougal always remembers tucking bills aside, problem is he never remembers always pulling them back out again later. It's like they can't see past the horizon of the thing they're doing, frozen in some arc around each separate night. What never changes is them; these guys, they never fucking learn. And on the Saturday trips out to the little jail, thumbing through what little they have left, the guard just shakes his head. Carlos bargains and bargains in Spanish that sounds to McDougal like soccer arguments. In the end, every single time, the best their peso stack earns them is a promise of good treatment for little Manuel. For all McDougal knows, the guard uses the cash for beer, gives Manuel his piss to drink.

A month's supposed to be like four weeks, couple extra days jammed on the end there, except good old February. Never made any sense to McDougal, though, dividing it up like that, especially with the way days and nights go running together. *A month though*, he thinks, and still not a sign in the world of Diana. Outside the fish market, McDougal is waiting in the passenger's seat of Carlos' truck when this car rolls up across the street and this American-looking guy gets out with this cream-colored suit on and a fucking eye patch.

McDougal doesn't wait to tell Carlos he's taking off, he just does. Fuck the money, he can have it. McDougal doesn't know this guy, but he does know one thing: no one comes to San Felipe, Mexico beside spring breakers, people hiding and people looking for people hiding. And that guy with the eye patch is no spring breaker. By the time he's getting straight on the sidewalk, by the time he's scanning the street with his one good eye, by the time he spots Carlos' truck right there across the street, McDougal's not in it. He's already a few streets over, on a zig zag that crooked him all the way home.

And of course, who's waiting in the one-room when McDougal comes busting in, there under the covers,

smiling like she's never been gone, like the morning he left for the cove had found some way to crack and flop over, to lay down alongside the busting in he just did? "Where the fuck have you been?"

For an answer, Diana holds up the blanket to show how naked she is under there.

"Get your shit. We're getting out of here." McDougal sweeps the top of the dresser into a duffle bag. Goes digging manic under the clothes in that middle drawer. "Diana, did you take a wad of cash out of here?"

"I can't leave San Felipe."

"A few months ago, you couldn't stay."

"That was months ago."

"I'm leaving, Diana. This is no fucking joke. Right now I'm leaving."

"Now, now, now. It's always *now* with you, Vic. Can't you be more patient, pause time or something? Or like when you go from one time zone to another, you know, cross that line that makes it an hour earlier?"

With a kick, McDougal sends the mattress counterclockwise an hour of its own. "Where's my fucking cash, Diana?"

Without looking, she lifts one of those thin arms to point at her bag. McDougal digs in, displacing silk undershirts and a few rolls of socks, comes out with a fist wrapped around a wrap of bills. He drops the cash into his pocket. Flips the pistol open to look at the bullets circled up in the chambers. "You can come with me or you can stay. I don't fucking care."

"Good. Cuz I don't fucking care either." Her eyes emerge from the tangle of blankets. "I'm in love with Juan, anyway."

McDougal turns, makes it a step. "Who the fuck is Juan?"

"Juan's the guy who's fucking me."

McDougal was already digging in his pocket; he doesn't stop, just slows. Lets a few bills drop to the floor. Leaves the door hanging open behind him.

Probably not the safest move, but McDougal turns himself into the world's drunkest human in the first town he hits. All the way from San Felipe in the back of some other pickup with some other guy who might as well be Carlos, tossing tequila back in bite-sized slugs. They slop him off at the first neon light they pass for

some food and a few bottles of whatever beer they got.

On about six thirty, McDougal gets slapped with a moment of clarity, sends his chair cartwheeling back before he recognizes that no, it's not that eye-patched American, but the same tiny amaretto face that's been marinating him in ice-old Sol all night. The girl smiles, and with some broken English tells him, "you spill some guilty on your face."

McDougal gets the bill and leaves, sees something in a shadow he doesn't like and so it's off on a duck down shoulder-width alleyways, banging off walls, checker boarding a maze of one story buildings, darts through a restaurant – right on through the kitchen with the cooks all laughing as the hostess tails him with a rolling pin. Pots he's knocked over are still clanging in the distance behind him as if he's still back there, still knocking them over. Then up another block, down an alley and up the street until he's leaning over a trash can, puking. Above him, there's a little cantina with a little sign and little letters on it that when he's done puking he reads to say: *cuartos*.

McDougal dirties the back of his sleeve with his mouth and manages through the door, stays upright long enough to pay for the room without exposing his tangled fist of bills. Trying to hide how hard he's breathing, McDougal begins up the stairs and then wakes to the sound of rain pelting the window of the room, or it's the roof, because there is no window. McDougal sits up, hears and sees that it's not rain at all. It's the shower. Door to the hall is open too. But did he do that? He doesn't remember closing it, but doesn't remember going through it, either. *Fuck, McDougal*, almost out loud to himself, *either way the fucking shower's still running*. He can't find his pistol, so he takes the lamp up from the bedside table, barges into the bathroom with it like a club above his head.

Instantly, Diana is screaming.

"Shut the fuck up," McDougal's screaming back at her. "Stop! Stop fucking screaming!"

"You're screaming too," she screams.

"Only cuz you're screaming."

She's naked there, with the water running down her. Big steam clouds shift, revealing splotches of Diana skin that are red and some that aren't. "I thought you were

them," McDougal says.

"Them?" she shuts off the shower, makes a grabbing motion for the tiny white towel. "Does this have something to do with that guy who came looking for you?"

"A guy came looking for me?"

Diana nods, covers an eye with her palm. "That's what the gun's for huh?"

"What'd you do with my pistol, Diana?"

"Threw it out."

"Really? Why the fuck did—"

"No, but I should have. It's in the drawer. Is that thing plugged in?"

McDougal looks at the lamp, still in his hand, still raised. He steps back into the bedroom, puts the lamp on the table, clicks it on. It's a minute or so before Diana comes out and that's just how she finds him, hand over his face, the light of the lamp in a jagged arch up to his chin. She drops the towel and plops into his lap all drippy.

After a few rounds of oral and then some regular old sex in a few different positions, Diana's sleeping in the bed while McDougal runs wired on some pills he took to get it up the third time. McDougal can't make up his mind to wake and fuck her again or just slip out the door and keep on going. I mean, if even Diana could find him... which is what he's thinking when he drifts off, so awake one instant and then the next, just as awake, but now wondering how he ever did fall asleep. And there in the bed next to him ... nothing. Diana, gone again.

Pants on, shirt half, pistol like a rock in his back pocket, McDougal comes out the motel's back door and sees it's night still. Wondering if he slept for only an hour, or slept for a day and an hour, he hits a corner and blammo, chest-first into a couple fucking against the wall. Like the collision never happened, they don't slow a lick, just keep balling away. The girl moans the fake moans of a prostitute. McDougal can see now that her skin's too coffee to be Diana's. "Sorry," he says. Then, "Carlos?"

The hips stop. The girl's body loosens.

"What the fuck is this, Carlos?" McDougal says this while whipping out the pistol so Carlos can see it in his

hand. "You fucking following me?"

"No lo nessesitas," the girl barks out. She yanks her skirt down and vanishes with a fierce groundward spit.

Carlos, stands there stunned and drunk, rocking foot to foot. "You caught me, amigo. It was lie."

"A lie?"

Carlos goes back on his heels. His pants fall to a loop around his ankles. Now he steps toward McDougal, arms up like he wants a hug. "A scam," he says, "it all a scam."

McDougal steps away, avoiding the moist prick tip poking under Carlos' shirt.

"There no Maria. There no Pepe."

"Who's Pepe? Who the fuck's Maria?"

"I mean Manuel, there is no Manuel. You want shoot—" Carlos tears open his shirt to show the sweaty skin above his heart. "You shoot, amigo, I deserve." And he closes his eyes tight, lips moving prayers.

"Carlos, are you following me?"

Carlos comes back from the dead, shakes his face. Maybe sobers a bit. "I drive by, but not follow. See you going the other way, later. You look American, no?"

McDougal nods.

"So when I drive by otra vez, I come up with a plan. Get some money, but I not follow you. Just happen that way. I pass you dos veces. A scam, all of it."

McDougal then, swearing under his breath, hint of a grin. "The little jail? Is that what you're talking about?"

"Me tio," Carlos, nods. "Es me tio, the guard we talk."

"Carlos, pull up your damn pants."

A smile cracks the top of Carlos' jowl. He bends to pull up his pants. "You no be mad, ok? You amigo." Carlos puts an arm around McDougal's neck, pulls him so their faces smush, sweats mixing. "We still go to fishing. But now, we have spend." Carlos points to a bar across the street, framed in the mouth of the alley. "Money go far. Girls here easy, even for me."

McDougal looks at the lit hole in the building across, hears voices calling from inside, echoing up the street. Or maybe those are other voices from other bars. Music leaks too, but more quiet than in San Felipe, doesn't quiet fill the street, just eddies under its other noises.

There's a shout, some glass breaking, then laughter, loud from all corners. Then singing. Carlos has already taken a few steps toward it.

"Carlos."

Carlos pauses, looks back.

"Did anyone come looking for me, back in San Felipe?"

"Your lady. I see you with. She ask where you go." He shrugs. "But I no know. Then she gone. She find you, yes? Come, we have spend."

McDougal shakes his head. "I got to go, Carlos."

"Sounds like no coming back."

McDougal presses a smile.

"No hard feeling amigo? You come see me, you get back to San Felipe."

McDougal sits on the end of the bed, aiming the snub nose at the sons and daughters of the cockroaches he used to know. He doesn't think it's by design – not in any conscious way at least – he just knew the place would have a room, doesn't remember it ever being full. But it is a little strange. Not only is he back in god-damned San Felipe, like he promised himself he never would be, but he's back in the same exact room. The only difference is the furniture has been moved so the place looks like its old self, but now in a mirror. Even the toilet and the sink have been pulled up, refastened and replumbed. Or maybe the room is turning, spiraling around some point, evidence that this dirty little town *does* have some gravitational pull on him. A week before he'd got a postcard – no idea how she found his address – said she was back in San Felipe, waiting for him to come take her away.

Between pills and beer, McDougal keeps seeing Diana leaning there, just like the first time she ever swung her way into the room. Her thin wrists like something you could bite through. Then it's her hand at the end of that wrist but wrapped up in brown fingers. Then it's Diana walking on the beach with a collage of men McDougal's built into an image of that fuck, Juan. Then McDougal's seeing them dancing, them kissing, her rolling around in the sand with him, maybe sharing a drink on a patio somewhere, maybe in a place very far from San Felipe, maybe even back in The States. *Fuck*, he thinks, *she could be sucking his dick this exact second and why*

*the fuck did I come back?*

McDougal has a couple pills to chase the idea away, has some beer to chase the pills. But what's chasing the beer right back into his head? That fuck Juan, glancing at a motel ceiling, thinking on some other girl, and then back to the bobbing top of *who is this one?* whispering some dirty Spanglish phrase Diana's never heard and so doesn't know if it's sweet or crude and his load's so suddenly in her mouth and his hand's so tight on the back of her head that she has no choice but to swallow it down, swallow down all the girls Juan's ever been with, all the guys ever climbed on all those girls, and fucking McDougal just thrown into the whole messy mix of piled-on lovers.

And one of the translucent, little cockroach larva fucking explodes, like it was the cockroach, not the bullet that was shot out of the gun, taking a good chunk of the nightstand with it, and the noise is so loud it's like nothing McDougal's ever heard before because nothing could ever really be that loud, and no one – not a fucking soul in the whole city of San Felipe, or the country for that matter – even batting an eye as a stray shotblast echoes over the streets. The violence calms McDougal because there's nothing like erasing something's existence to give you a beat for a breather. He gets the last pill out; it sits there in the short-term safety of his palm. He swallows it down and preps the noodle for what just might be an eventful stroll through the streets of San Felipe. McDougal reads again the back of the card, *town square, pick me up at noon*. Then it's the front door he's gone through and the light of the day hits him like new physics.

To McDougal it feels like the whole town is watching, which may as well be the world, far as he's concerned. He's not all wrong, there are some, glancing up from patio tables, around the edges of alley entrances. There are windows above the street and who's to say what's in there looking out? A few loading strippers into the bed of a truck pause to have a gander, that's for sure. An old lady hawking sunglasses stumbles on her words, diverts her gaze. Some red-nostriled twenty-somethings, loitering by the town's only ATM, split up their little crew so McDougal can pass on through, clock in the church ringing noon bells...

But no sign of Diana.

“Amigo!”

McDougal spins to see Carlos trotting up the street, hand out for a shake.

“Jesus H,” McDougal whispers.

“Amigo, I no think I see you again.” McDougal can’t help but smile. “I have something for you, my old amigo.”

McDougal watches Carlos go hand-first into the pocket of his pants, but suddenly he’s ducking. They both are. Another loud bang – a second one, or a third – berwangs up the street. Everything about Carlos has stopped. Like some huge boulder, he dumps forward into McDougal’s arms. The weight is too much; down they go into the dirt. A line of blood comes up to fill the crease between Carlos’ lips, swells, then worms over the mound of his cheek.

“Carlos!” McDougal can’t help but say, “you look just like you do when you’re drunk, your face,” because he does, there dying.

“I saved you.”

McDougal knows *this* voice. Then she’s right there, bouncing beside him, leaning over to see the big mess spreading on Carlos’ shirt and on the dirt street beneath. McDougal can see his pistol in her hand, pats the pocket where he’d thought it’d been. *Yep, that’s it.* A crowd has begun to gather around them. McDougal knows the Federales are not far behind.

“You forgot your gun,” she says. “I saved you,”

“Saved me? Diana, you fucking idiot!”

Carlos is patting McDougal’s wrist. “No, no, Señor. Do not be harsh to ladyfriend.” A bubble of blood or mucus swells, sits there not popping. “She right. I no want, but the man,” and Carlos touches his cheek below a blinked eye, “He say if I kill you, then Manuel go free.”

McDougal notices the butt end of a Colt in the fat folds around Carlos’s belt. “I want to show you my boy, my Manuel, before I kill,” and there in his fingers is a picture. The edges red with Carlos’ blood, a little boy’s face. “So there no hard feelings.” Carlos coughs again, tries to smile, “least for a second, anyway.”

It’s the first place they stop, three hour ride from San Felipe and Carlos back there, dead by now. Even though they’re almost out of gas and so don’t really have a

choice, McDougal refuses to turn the truck off until Diana finally does get up on the roof and check if there are any dust swirls coming up the road behind them.

“All clear, sir,” Diana, saluting as she plops down. “Gosh, you’re paranoid.”

McDougal rolls his eyes. “You’re not paranoid enough.”

She lets her tongue catch some dust, pirouettes into the station. McDougal pulls the gas gun from its hook and jams it in, fingers the handle till petrol’s sloshing off, vapors escaping. When it’s full, McDougal climbs into the truck and watches Diana poking through a rack of cheap sunglasses, shooting flirty words at the teen clerk.

When the engine coughs and turns over, her head shoots up. And as he pulls away, even from across the lot and through the scarred-up glass, McDougal can see her little mouth hanging open like she doesn’t know what. That’s the last thing he sees of her until she pops into the lot behind him. She runs a few steps, might be yelling, but then just stands there. Too far away now for McDougal to tell what kind of look might be on her face. He watches her sinking in the rearview, thin in her jeans and his ribbed tank top. Then McDougal can’t make out the difference, what’s Diana and what’s kicked up dust.

SEAN BONNEY

# letter against hunger

A FOODSTAMP FOR THE PALACE

I'm spending most of my time hungry these days. A real hunger; sharp, greedy and endless. Sometimes I have to stay in bed all day because of it, this maddening weakness, hollow nausea. I bet you think I'm exaggerating. So fuck you. OK, I'm sorry, that was a bit rude. I'll try and explain what I mean by "fuck you." The High Street. Walthamstow, or anywhere else. Everyone gazing at their reflections in all of the empty shop windows, weird technicians digging up the pavements. Don't think this is delirium, or paranoia. Well maybe it is, but maybe that doesn't matter. The perceptual shifts related to hunger as a means of interpretation. Hunger as beginning of thought. So bear with me. All of those empty shops, full zombie, the absolute calendar. Comedy. History. Masks and plague sores. Mass renunciation, reactionary weather systems, everything. As if the world had shuddered and a massive, spiralling Medusa had scampered through some cheap sci-fi wormhole and was biting us to death. Swallowing and biting. The shop windows, the reflections, are the only hiding place, the only escape. And don't think I'm getting all mythological on your ass. Try to understand that Medusa to be simply the accumulated historical pressure of pure bullshit, or molecules and radio gas, all of it forming a mass intracranial solid neoplasm that, if decoded, may at least give us some sense, the beginnings of an actual map, of what we have to do to reach the next stage – the first stage, it feels like – of what some people still rather quaintly refer to as "the struggle." Yeh, I know, I'm one of those people. Sometimes my vocabulary makes me cringe. But if those shop windows, those reflections operate as some kind of safety valve, then they are also, put simply, the visible points of an inverted world nailed onto this one, violent, unrelenting, an insect system where each abandoned hour of what was once called "socially necessary labour time" becomes detached, on its own orbit, like some absolute planet, but habitable, the way

an abandoned office space or a derelict private home is habitable. It turns the city inside out. We become property, pure and simple, with no disguises. And so we rent ourselves out, we got no choice. We become derelict storefronts, vacant buildings, fire-traps. We rent ourselves out to a pack of corporate tenants, glass sapphires and enemy systems. Starbucks etc. Just to be obvious. Tesco. A ratpack, sitting there, inside us, eating. All the while eating. Ah, maybe its not so bad. Maybe we can use it, this hunger, this coded swarm. To get a sense of what the murderously rotational teeth of a key, for example, actually mean. To understand what eating actually is. To know what biting is, and subsumption. To understand the secret secular fuck-toys of the entire social labyrinth to be a simple sheet of buckling and starving glass. A brick through the window. A message. And all of that is pretty much what I mean when I use the words "fuck you." But anyway, that's not why I'm writing. Like the ghost I've become, I'm now looking for a job, and I was hoping you'd write me a reference. You'll do it, of course, I know it.

For sale. Everything the management dictated. Celestial dirt and the western scale. The victory of the sailors at Kronstadt. The victory of the miners at Orgreave. The odour of sanctity. Fictional factories. Special discounts on bossnappings, modern landlords and the seekers of lice.

For sale. Top people of all descriptions. Chewing lice, sucking lice, bird-lice. The victory of the rioters at Poundland. Ed Miliband fucked by lice. The defect in the law and the dream deferred. Cameron as nightingale. For sale. Wrapped in wire and torched. For sale. The gospel of saving and abstinence. The victory of the Mau Mau at St James' Palace. Infrageography. Microtomes. Tactical spectrums. Sudden harmony and affliction. The corrosive victory of the unemployed. A carbomb for the DWP.



SEAN BONNEY

## letter against ritual

So I guess by now you'll have recovered from the voodoo routines at St Pauls. Guess its nice that we won't have to pronounce the syllables Margaret Thatcher again. It all seems very distant now, like when you've been up for four nights, finally get some sleep, and then you're sitting there drinking a cup of coffee trying to remember what the hell you've been up to. You still know that feeling? You'd better. Anyway, the thing I remember most clearly is Glenda Jackson's speech in parliament, when all the rest of them were wittering on about Thatcher and God and the entire fucking cosmos and there was Jackson laying out a few home truths. But really, it's a measure of the weirdness of those few days how fearless that speech seemed: and, obviously, a measure of the weirdness that it actually was some kind of act of bravery. Tho the best bit was when the anonymous Tory MP started wailing "I can't stand it" in the middle of it. Like, that's right, motherfucker. Anyway, so I listened to Jackson's speech on Youtube a few times, and then I went and checked her voting record in parliament – bit of a letdown, yeh. Abstained on the workfare vote, yeh. So that's her, she can fuck off. She made a much better speech back in 1966, I think it was, playing Charlotte Corday in the film of Peter Weiss' "Marat-Sade" – I guess you remember it, she's up at the top of a ladder, going off her head, and screaming something along the lines of "what is this city, what is this thing they're dragging through the streets?" Christ, if she'd done that in parliament, I might have rethought my relationship with electoral politics. Well, maybe not. But seriously, what was that thing they were dragging through the streets on April 17<sup>th</sup>, or whatever day it was. Through that silenced, terrified city. I thought of Thatcher as some kind of rancid projectile, and they were firing her back into time, and the reverberations from wherever it was she landed, probably sometime in around 1946, were clearly a more-or-less successful attempt to erase everything that wasn't in a dull, harmonic agreement with whatever it is those razorhead vampire suckworms in parliament are actually trying to

do with us. Firing us into some kind of future constructed on absolute fear. Or that future is a victorious vacuum, a hellish rotating disc of gratuitous blades, and they are speaking to you, those blades, and what they are saying is this: "one day you will be unemployed, one day you will be homeless, one day you will become one of the invisible, and monsters will suck whatever flesh remains on your cancelled bones." They're not kidding. And the grotesque and craggy rhythms of those monsters are already in our throats, right now. In our throats, our mouths, the cracked centre of our language, fascist syllables, sharp barking. You know I'm not exaggerating. What they're planning is nothing small. We're talking about thousands of years, their claws extending into the past and into the future. A geometrical city of forced dogs, glycerine waves, gelignite. And what a strange, negative expression of the scandalous joy we were all feeling, at the death-parties, pissed out of our heads in Brixton, in Trafalgar Square, all of those site of ancient disturbances suddenly blasted wide apart. A pack of Victorian ghosts. Nights of bleeding and electricity. Boiling gin and police-lines. White phosphorous. Memories. It was like we were a blister on the law. Inmates. Fancy-dress jacobins. Jesters. And yes. Every single one of us was well aware that we hadn't won anything, that her legacy "still lived on," and whatever other sanctimonious spittle was being coughed up by liberal shitheads in the Guardian and on Facebook. That wasn't the point. It was horrible. Deliberately so. Like the plague-feast in Nosferatu. I loved it. I had two bottles of champagne, a handful of pills and a massive cigar, it was great. I walked home and I wanted to spray-paint "Never Work" on the wall of every Job Centre I passed. That's right, I'm a sentimental motherfucker when I'm out of my head. But no, already that foul, virtuous fear was sinking back into me, taking possession of my every step. I was thinking about Blanqui, right at the end of his life, sitting in his prison cell, knowing full well that what he was writing he was going to be writing for ever, that he would always be wearing the clothes he was

wearing, that he would always be sitting there, that his circumstances would never, ever change. How he couldn't tell the difference between his prison cell and the entire cluster of universes. How the stars were nothing but apocalypse routines, the constellations negative barricades. I was thinking about the work-ethic, how it's evoked obsessively, like an enemy ritual, some kind of barbaric, aristocratic superstition. About zero-hours contracts, anti-magnetic nebulae sucking the working day inside out. Negative-hours. Gruel shovelled into all the spinning pits of past and future centuries, spellbound in absolute gravity, an invisibility blocking every pavement I was walking down. I wanted to cry. In fact I think I did. Actually, no. I was laughing my head off. A grotesque, medieval cackle. No despair, just defiance and contempt. Ancient disturbances. Ghost towns and marching bands. Invisible factories. Nostalgia crackling into pain and pure noise. No sleep. No dreams. An endless, undifferentiated regime of ersatz work. All of us boiled down into some stupid, Tory alarm clock. A ringing so loud we can no longer even hear it. But whatever. It seems pretty obvious we should adopt the Thatcher death-day as some kind of workers holiday. Actually, scratch that, lets just celebrate it every day, for ever and ever, like a ring of plague-sores, botulism and roses. A barbaric carnival of rotten gold and infinite vowels. Sorcery. Rabies. You know what I mean? I hope so. Anyway, things have been pretty quiet since then. I've been thinking about paying you a visit. Oh shit.



Photo: Louis Armand

BENJAMIN TALLIS

## panel stories

PUBLIC LIES & PRIVATE LIVES IN PANELÁKS & SÍDLIŠTĚS<sup>1</sup>



Despite their best efforts, neither jetset shock therapists, home-grown dissidents nor their various governmental inheritors have been able to make postcommunist transition a clean break with the past. Apparatchiks and functionaries were denounced and lustrated, only to re-appear as *nomenklatura* capitalists and even ministers. Statues were removed, but the metronomic passing of time in their after-image triggers memory, not forgetting. Streets and metro stations were renamed, but we still know who Evropská and Dejvická used to be.

The persistent presence of the communist past is a key site of struggle for Czech collective memory, with competing interpretations, both domestic and international, having significant impact on how people can live and indeed, whom the current society is for. Material reminders of that time have come in for particular criticism and none more so than the *paneláky*, the concrete tower blocks that make up the sídliště (Czech) and sídlisky (Slovak) that became such a prominent features of Czechoslovak socialist cities. While a nascent revisionism has begun, belatedly and hesitantly, to recognise the architectural quality and even beauty of Czech brutalist architecture, focusing on particular marquee buildings (such as the Nova Scena of the National Theatre or the Nova Budova of the National Museum), the communist-era housing estates are still routinely and almost unquestioningly damned from all sides.

However, recent research has shown that both domestic and international criticisms of the paneláky and sídliště are wide of the mark. Blinkered by ideology and blind to the plurality of panelák and project life lived both then and now, these flawed critiques are indicative of wider problems of both understanding and policy in postcommunism.

### TALL TALES & SWEEPING JUDGEMENTS

Condemned at the time of their construction as “cement deserts” good only as “battle grounds for high-rise brats,”<sup>2</sup> the estates provide an all-too-easy synecdoche for the time of their building; “monotonous and repetitive, banal, inhuman [...] poor in quality”<sup>3</sup> or most commonly (and lazily) “grey”<sup>4</sup> or at least “greyish.”<sup>5</sup> Normally nuanced and

1 The title refers to Věra Chytilová legendary film *Panel Story* which provides a supposedly candid, but largely negative look at the early days of the Jižní Město housing estate.

2 From the poem *Jižní Město* (South City) by Jiří Žáček, *From a Terrace in Prague*, ed. Stephan Delbos (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2011).

3 As noted by Els de Vos's review of Lynne Attwood's *Socialist Housing in the Eastern Bloc: Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia* and Kimberly Elman Zarecor's *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity*, in *Technology and Culture*, 53.2 (April 2012): 465-469.

4 Sean Hanley, 'The Discrete Charm of the Czech Panelák,' *Central European Review* (1999): [http://www.ce-review.org/authorarchives/hanley\\_archive/hanley22old.html](http://www.ce-review.org/authorarchives/hanley_archive/hanley22old.html)

5 Ivan T. Berend as quoted in Zarecor, 'Socialist Neighbourhoods after Socialism: The Past, Present and Future of Postwar Housing in the Czech Republic,' *East European Politics and Societies*, 26 (2012): 486.

even-handed judges have been moved to unequivocal castigation by the aesthetics and morals of the 'structural panel buildings' that make up the vast majority of Czech housing constructed between 1955 and 1990. Sean Hanley of the UCL School for Slavonic and Eastern European Studies describes the "monster estates" as "hideous" and "awful," and Václav Havel famously spoke of "undignified rabbit pens, slated for liquidation."<sup>6</sup>

The controversy and criticism that continue to batter these concrete facades, from both home and abroad, reflects and reinforces a particular politics of memory, identity and belonging stemming from a combination of blanket judgements on the communist period, teleological notions of neoliberal postcommunist 'transition' and particular, Western European and North American, experiences and ideological interpretations of high-rise social housing.

Negative Czech judgements on paneláks in popular discourse and the statements of well-known figures seem to stem largely from the circumstances of their making – they were built by the communists and must therefore not only be bad, but are a malaise forced upon Czechs (and others) by unwelcome intruders and occupiers (De Vos). The popular and academic focus on the myriad crimes and appalling injustices of the communist regime have helped to support such views. These are undoubtedly important stories that needed to be told about the communist period, but they are not the only stories of that time and cannot be used to sustain uniformly negative views of an era in which in trying circumstances, people continued to live, laugh, love, have children and make homes in which they could grow up. The regime failed in its totalizing ambitions, but has been posthumously been granted success that it could have only dreamed of in a totalizing public memory of the time that erases the positives from a painful past.

Similarly, while institutional design and the processes of re-adopting democratic politics, market economics and re-integrating to international institutional structures have been highly significant, the attention paid to these aspects has often obscured lived experiences of both transition and what came before.<sup>7</sup> This blinkering,

combined with the prefabricated opinions of many Americans and Western Europeans towards large scale public housing projects has allowed skewed views of the material and social conditions of sídlišťe life, both in the past and present, to dominate.

After the fall of the wall, it was easy for incoming investors, advisors and other 'tutors,' keen to school the 'children of the revolution' in their neoliberal ways, to tar the paneláky with the same brush as the concrete jungles that had played host to riots in Toxteth and Brixton or to hear in them echoes of the doomed Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis. The self-styled 'tutors' found eager head-boys in the dissidents of the communist period who were all too happy to run-down the remnants of a hated regime, often with little thought for the people who lived there who, unlike many dissidents and their quieter sympathisers, were not waiting for prime real estate to be restituted to them.

The tutors also had a double interest in denigrating the communist past, as this would both bolster their own superiority (and thus legitimacy as teachers) and to enhance the case for neoliberal transition as a larger contrast to what had gone before as opposed to a more social-democratic approach. Tearing down the old structures of ownership and usage was more feasible than destroying the paneláks themselves and raised the potential for Western-owned banks to introduce market rates to these rent-controlled worlds.

Social research conducted over the last two decades has questioned the basis for each of the criticisms levelled at Paneláks and sídlišťe, exposing them as mere 'Panel Stories.' Challenging these stories and telling new tales of panelák life not only has specific relevance to these persecuted places but opens up the possibility of questioning the socio-political settlements of transition more widely.

## PANEL STORY 1: A COMMUNIST IDEA IMPOSED FROM OUTSIDE

Over the last five years, the writings of Kimberly Elman Zarecor have made a good deal of multidisciplinary Czech scholarship on paneláks and sídlišťe's available to Anglophone audiences and, in contextualizing this

6 <http://www.praguepost.com/archivescontent/40712-still-standing.html>

7 e.g. Alison Stenning & Kathrin Hoerschelmann, 'History, Geography and Difference in the Post-socialist World: Or, Do We Still Need Post-

socialism?' *Antipode*, 40.2 (2008): 312-335.



work in combination with her own research, Zarecor has exposed the double fallacy of claims that concrete tower blocks were a communist idea and that they were only accepted in Czechoslovakia under Soviet duress.<sup>8</sup>

Zarecor highlights how far from being imposed from outside, the specific circumstances of post-war Czechoslovakia spurred the continuation and development of interwar architectural practices and politics to accelerate and intensify, but not initiate, the development of prefabricated structural panel housing in the communist era. The construction technology for Czech paneláks owed its development to the Building Department of the Baťa shoe company in Zlín, which had been experimenting before the war with prefabricated building technologies. The architects Hynek Adamec and Bohumil Kula had continued these experiments during the war and lead the projects on new structural panel housing when the department was incorporated into the communist Stavoprojekt building co-ordination system. Despite Zlín having been renamed Gottwaldov after Czechoslovakia's first communist leader, Zarecor points out that Adamec and Kula were still working in the same office when developing the first panelák – the G-building (named for Gottwaldov).

Far from following developments elsewhere, Czechs were actually ahead of the game in panel building, with the crucial breakthrough – according to Zarecor – coming when an innovative solution was found to the problem of joining the panels together in a stable way that allowed for full exploitation of their structural properties and eliminated the need for an additional skeleton. However, not only had these pioneering architects previously worked for the feted (and avowedly capitalist) Baťa company and were actually continuing construction-technology research that had begun long before the communist takeover, the ideas that inspired the social aspects of both the panelák and the sídliště can also be found in the First Czechoslovak Republic.

The First Republic under the 'Liberator-President' and 'philosopher king' Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk is widely

8 Zarecor, 'The Rainbow Edges: The Legacy of Communist Mass Housing and the Colorful Future of Czech Cities,' in Peggy Clouston, Ray Kinoshita Mann, Stephen Schreiber, eds. *Without a Hitch: New Directions in Prefabricated Architecture* (2009): <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/wood/2008/>; Zarecor & Eva Špačková, 'Czech Paneláks are Disappearing, but the Housing Estates Remain,' *Architecture & Town Planning (Architektur & Urbanismus)* 34 (2012): 288-301.

hailed as the Czech golden age; a brief and glorious interlude of independence after empire and before Nazi occupation and subjugation as Soviet satellite. The wave of creativity in both culture and commerce that was unleashed during this time merits this golden reputation, with companies such as Baťa and Tatra stylishly propelling Czechoslovakia into the ranks of the top-six exporting economies in the world. The poetry of Vítězslav Nezval and Jaroslav Seifert, the painting of František Kupka and – the already post-gender – Toyen as well as the buildings of local talents such as Havlicek and Honzik alongside those of proto-starchitects Adolf Loos and Mies van der Rohe ensured that there was plentiful art to accompany the industry.

However, like much of Europe at the time, the First Republic was also awash with radical Marxist ideas. A mixture of proactive idealism and reaction to the polarized living conditions of the time inspired those such as Nezval and Karel Teige, writer, architecture critic and ringleader of the radical *Devetsil* group, to rail against the inequalities and injustices they saw around them. They sought collective salvation through both art and industry, but saw that both should serve functional, social goals rather than be beholden to the moneyed mores of the market. Teige in particular struggled with the tension<sup>9</sup> between instrumental social function and liberating creative expression, but in architectural terms prioritized the former, arguing that beauty would spring from the minimal forms that would most efficiently would serve their purpose.<sup>10</sup> Demanding that those at the sharp end of the housing crisis at the time receive only "the best of the best," Teige publicly upbraided Le Corbusier for abandoning such functional purity and effectively re-introducing decoration and slammed Mies's much-praised Tugendhat Villa as the "pinnacle of modern snobbery."<sup>11</sup>

It is therefore no wonder that Zarecor is able to draw a clear line between the construction of paneláks and sídlištěs in the communist period and social tendencies

9 See for example Peter Žusi 's excellent 'The Style of the Present: Karel Teige on Constructivism and Poetism,' *Representations* 88 (2004); & 'Tendentious Modernism: Karel Teige's path to Functionalism,' *Slavic Review* 67.4 (2008).

10 e.g. Teige, *Nejmensi Byt (The Minimum Dwelling)*, trans. Eric Dluhosch (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2002[1932]).

11 Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling*, 6.







in First Republic Modernism, which were also strongly connected to non-marxist Bauhaus figures such as Walter Gropius

Although Stavoprojekt, a state-run system of architecture and engineering offices, replaced private practice in the late 1940s and changed the profession profoundly, the vast housing estates in many Czech and Slovak cities are, in fact, the fulfillment of an interwar vision of modernity that emphasized the right to housing at a minimum standard over the artistic qualities of individual buildings.

Zarecor also highlights the intensified construction of paneláks as the Czech version of Socialist Realism (*Sorela*) gave way to what she beautifully terms “Socialism with a Modernist face” in the wake of the success of the Czech pavilion at Expo '58, the Brussels Dream that was ‘One Day in Czechoslovakia.’

While it is almost certainly true that the scale and scope of panelák-based sídlištěs was greater in Czechoslovakia due to the communist takeover, it cannot be claimed that these architectures and urbanisms were imposed on Czechs from outside, nor that they were a communist-era idea. However, emphasizing the links, rather than the rupture, between the First republic and the Communist period goes against the currently dominant and highly Manichean politics of Czech collective memory that divides positive and negative in fairly bald temporal terms – 1918-38: *Good*; 1938-1989: *Bad*. 1989 onward: *Good* (Again. we hope).

## **PANEL STORY 2: HIGH-DENSITY PUBLIC HOUSING AS FAILED SOCIALIST & MODERNIST DREAMS**

The specific critiques of Czech dissidents against paneláks and the overall political orientation of cheerleaders for neoliberal transition coincide in attitudes to public housing and to what government in general can and should do in society. The ‘End of History’ position that laissez-faire, (neo)liberal-market-democracy is the only way to govern chimes with sceptical attitudes to high-density public housing as architecturally flawed, naively irresponsible and ultimately dangerous social engineering. Scepticism of government born from bad experience of a particular regime meets ideological opposition to the state as such.

These attacks generally eschew the controversialist,

yet architecturally adventurous and open-minded iconoclasm of Charles Jencks<sup>12</sup> and instead adopt the offended traditionalism of Simon Jenkins, whilst retaining their mutual weakness for décor and ornament – eyebrows simultaneously arched and furrowed in facial gymnastics that Alec Guinness would be proud of. Crucially they combine this aesthetic position with the selfish Hayekian/Friedmanite socio-economic Darwinism that seeks to entrench power for those who already have money and which, since '89, has come disguised as freedom. The supposedly hard-headed pragmatism of politics disguised as economics and a refusal to be suckered into social dreaming is often accompanied (in some quarters at least) by faux-rueful laments for the failure of stillborn social schemes that never had a chance, yet which are wheeled out time and again as evidence for why even marginally idealistic social endeavours can never work.

Long before Jencks famously used the dynamiting of this massive and ill-fated housing project to proclaim the death of Modern Architecture “on July 15, 1972 at 3:32pm or thereabouts” the Pruitt-Igoe story has supposedly symbolised the hopeless futility of well-intentioned social housing in the US. A recent documentary film, *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth*,<sup>13</sup> exposes even this, the supposed worst of all the panel stories as just that – a myth. The documentary, which takes an academically informed, socio-anthropological approach, effectively refutes the charges against the architecture of Pruitt-Igoe (and by implication against modernist-inflected high-rise public housing in general).<sup>14</sup> The joy with which the initial residents recall upon first moving in to the sufficiently spacious and well-appointed apartments (particularly in comparison to the slums where many of the tenants had been living before) is manifest. One resident – Ruby Russell - who moved into an apartment on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor coined the memorable term ‘the poor man’s penthouse’ to describe her apartment, while others describe the feelings of community, of safety and the possibility this provided for children to play and adults to live.

12 Jencks, *The Language of Postmodern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991 [1977]).

13 *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* (2011) dir. Chad Friedrichs.

14 See for example Oscar Newman, ‘Reactions to the Defensible Space Study & Some Further Findings,’ *International Journal of Mental Health* 4.3 (1975): 48-70.



However, this was not to last, which, as the documentary shows in detailing the total collapse of this housing project to the point where the police were afraid to enter and the tower blocks ended up being dynamited, was almost pre-ordained. Cutbacks to the original design and the failure of the 1949 US Federal Housing Act to provide any maintenance money for such projects – requiring that such funds came from the rents paid by the low-income tenants – was the first nail in its coffin. Racism in both planning policy and the everyday practices of citizens continued *de facto* segregation policies long after they became *de jure* impermissible.<sup>15</sup> The combination of ‘white flight,’ a declining city population (robbing it of necessary tax revenues to pay for essential services, including housing maintenance), the selling off of the downtown to property developers and official encouragement for suburban, low-density housing at the expense of the rotting urban core contributed to the failure of the estate within its socio-economic context. Once the poor maintenance made Pruitt-Igoe a more difficult place to live, low occupancy rates further diminished the money available for upkeep and repairs, unleashing a vicious cycle of decline and degradation. As the documentary powerfully describes, this was not accidental, but rather was the result of the deliberate diminution of governmental power to act in a socially progressive manner in a politico-economic environment stacked against the most disadvantaged and predicated on the myth of the socially unencumbered individual.

Significantly, the documentary specifically links the failure to support social housing to its associations with socialism, which both during the cold war and in the aftermath of ‘89 made it ‘unamerican’ and thus taboo in the US. While European experiences of public and social housing have not been as extreme as Pruitt-Igoe, the problems of housing estates such as Park Hill in Sheffield and Robin Hood Gardens in London, as well as many of the French banlieue can similarly not be blamed on their modernist architecture, nor on the social intentions that underpinned their construction. Rather, it was the failure to adequately address the underlying

15 See also Elizabeth Birmingham, ‘Refraining the Ruins: Pruitt-Igoe, structural racism, and African American rhetoric as a space for cultural critique,’ *Western Journal of Communication* 63.3 (1999): 291-309.

social conditions that prompted their creation and then the lack of conviction in backing the estates as part of the solution that sealed their fate.

That this lack of conviction held after the fall of the wall should not be surprising when the very construction of such estates as a response to the demand for rapid urbanization and the ongoing postwar housing crisis in communist countries can be described after ‘89 as “arrogant”<sup>16</sup> or dismissed as being “in the best traditions of vulgar Marxism” which apparently implies that, “the Communist regime believed that people were shaped by their environment.”<sup>17</sup>

It would be hard to think of a government – or indeed practically any other institution – that didn’t believe people were to at least some degree shaped by their environment. When Sean Hanley claims that this substantiates his charge that the building of the paneláks was ideologically motivated, the point made by Michel Foucault and echoed by Slavoj Žižek that ideology is at its most powerful when it is most hidden, should also be considered in relation to the ‘pragmatic,’ post-‘89 treatment of social housing and the damage done more widely to ideas of social democracy by the collapse of communism.

### **PANEL STORY 3: PEOPLE LIVED & LIVE BADLY IN PANELÁKS & SÍDLIŠTĚS**

The fall of Pruitt-Igoe, the Brixton and Toxteth riots and the postmodern malaise of the *Unité d’Habitation* have been particularly unkind to millions of Central & East Europeans. They have been forced to belatedly ‘learn’ that the places in which they grew up, laughed, loved, raised children, realized creative activities, plotted defiance, cohabitation, collaboration or escape and where they created cosy dens<sup>18</sup>, insulated to some degree from the party regime, were no longer appropriate for their lives as ‘New Europeans.’

Crucially however, as also noted by critics<sup>19</sup> of the appearance and intentions of the paneláks, the social mix of the communist-era housing projects was very

16 Radio Prague’s Martin Mikule, <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/letter/panelák-housing-estates-the-indelible-heritage-of-communism>

17 Hanley, ‘The Discrete Charm of the Czech Panelák.’

18 See the Czech film *Pelíšky* (literally translated as ‘Cosy Dens’).

19 Sean Hanley specifically notes this in his 1999 piece.



different than that in the West, with people from different walks of life and from varied social strata finding themselves (willingly or otherwise) thrust into high-rise neighbourhoods. This is partly due to the sheer number of people who live in such developments. Zarecor quotes figures of 3.1 million people living in 1,165,000 apartment units in 80,000 paneláks in Czech Republic. With almost a third of the total population and nearly half the city of Prague living in paneláks, the issues facing postsocialist sídlištěs are, in most cases, very different than those experienced by residents in their deprived and marginalized western counterparts.

Many communist-era estates are well-planned and well-provided for communities, which are house-proud and successful places. Their abundant and well-kempt common spaces (leafy in summertime, albeit rendered climactically bare in winter) host a variety of public services and private activities and allow collective grandmothering in the ample and adventurous social space they provide for children. There was not the same stigma attached to living in these places and as the artist Eva Kořátková argues, these were places where many people grew up happily and well, learning to be the creative and independent, experiencing concrete as schoolyard rather than jungle and certainly not succumbing to the attempts to create “new uniform Socialist [Wo]Man.”

I was born in Prague, grew up in one of the typical grey block houses on the periphery and went to school there. Many people find this kind of architecture awful or boring but I have a strong nostalgia connected with this place – a place of the most formative periods of my life. Many motifs appearing in my work have their origin in the time of my childhood and adolescence and in the specific atmosphere of this location.<sup>20</sup>

Kořátková’s comments are not the isolated opinion of a nostalgic or contrarian artist. Zarecor’s work also draws upon several academic studies that show consistently high levels of satisfaction with sídliště life. Research conducted in 2001 by Lux and Sunega showed that 64% of Czechs considered their accommodation ideal and only 11% planned to move within three years.

Moreover, Zarecor also cites studies that show that this is not a new trend, with many sídliště residents recalling moving to their new Havířov homes in the same excited and reverent terms that the Pruitt Igoe tenants did. Recent work by Eva Špačková and Martin Jemelka in the Hranice sídliště in Karvina also shows generally high degrees of satisfaction, although mixed with calls for further improvements relating to upkeep and noise issues. As Špačková put it in an interview with Zarecor

Generally it is possible to say that the majority of imperfections in the housing development, according to the opinions of the residents, are not conditional on architectural solutions but rather on the unmaintained, disordered, and unsatisfactory control and commercial abuse of public space and the former civic facilities.

In a widely cited ethnographic study of the Prague sídlištěs at Jižní Město and Jihozápadní Město, French anthropologist Laurent Bazac-Billaud concluded that people in paneláks generally know their neighbours and that both social and transport networks not only exist but also work.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Hanley repeats Bazac-Billaud’s finding that

panelák life is based on an intense drive for privacy and individuality. Inside their standard panelák flats – identical in layout and to thousands of others the length and breadth of former Czechoslovakia – the key impulse of Czech panelák residents is to create their own private worlds.

This is still however not enough for Hanley who claims that “In a democratic society, [paneláks] would never have been built. Such hideous-looking, poorly planned public housing would quickly have attracted criticism and protest (as it did in the West). In a market economy, no one with any money would have invested a crown into a *panelák* flat.”

Hanley’s critique could be read as a dire warning about the potential fate of paneláks in the postcommunist period after the end of rent controls, although currently this has only happened in exceptional cases. In the town of

<sup>21</sup> Hanley and Kristina Alda, writing for the *Prague Daily Monitor* both reference Bazac-Billaud’s work, <http://praguemonitor.com/2009/10/27/praguescape-pink>

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Luigi Fassi in Kořátková ‘*Documentation 2.*’

Most, the semi-ghetto of Chánov carries the real echoes of Pruitt-Igoe, not in its architecture, but in the social neglect that led to the decay and near abandonment of this Roma-majority housing estate. Similarly, Zarecor points to another North Bohemian town – Litvinov – and the Janov estate where anti-Roma riot took place in 2008. Research conducted by a team lead by the prominent geographer Luděk Sýkora showed that the situation in Janov had been exacerbated by the sale of municipal apartments to ‘investors’ who refused to invest in repairing or upgrading the buildings and rented the declining apartments to low-income Roma groups, helping to create social segregation and stoke racial tensions.

In many more cases however, the right-to-buy schemes allowed tenants to purchase their apartments affordably from municipalities and rent controls remained in place until recently. Right-to-buy schemes were balanced with incentives to form tenants associations and residents committees in order to be able to benefit from EU-funded refurbishment schemes. These schemes have largely consisted of the installation of new windows, doors, elevators and the application of fixed Styrofoam cladding directly to the outside of paneláks, which are then covered with plaster in order to improve insulation. Residents have then been able to choose from a variety of colours to repaint the new cladding, eliminating the darkness at the edge of town. However, transforming the dreaded grey into what Zarecor terms a ‘rainbow’ of colours threatens to create what Špačková terms “multi-coloured kitsch.” Zarecor too warns against the loss of architectonic detail such as the definable edges of panels or surface texture which give the buildings a sense of proportion and without which they risk becoming “cartoon likenesses in the shape of apartment buildings with undifferentiated surfaces.”

Popular with residents, these largely cosmetic renovations seem to please Hanley, who in a later piece states “After this beauty treatment the hideous grey paneláky look pretty civilized” passing in an *augenblick*, for Holland or Germany, confirming Hanley’s hierarchical view of transition, as well as Zarecor’s observation that, if all that took was a lick of paint, then perhaps there wasn’t so much wrong with them in the first place.

## NEW PANEL STORIES: REHABILITATION & RELEARNING BEYOND THE MYTHS

The difficulty of disentangling aesthetic judgements on ‘grey’ or ‘ugly’ panel buildings from their context in the politics of communist memory and the particular political economy of the post-’89 world makes it unsurprising that they should provide rich material for visual artists with social sensibilities. That artists with praxis as different as Veronika Drahotová, Tomáš Džadoň, Patricie Fexová, Eva Kořátková and Kateřina Šedá should find inspiration or fascination in these massive structures and micro-societies speaks to their significance as sites for the interaction of and negotiation between public and private, uniformity and individuality, enabling constraints and bounded freedoms.

The work of scholars such as Kimberly Zarecor and the engagements of the aforementioned artists call into question what we know about paneláks and sídlštěs and the contexts in which we know it. This challenges the how we remember the both big politics and the private lives of communism and how these have been re-negotiated in transition. It questions the social relations that are possible on housing estates today and between the estates and elsewhere. In turn this prompts us to consider who we live with, how we want to do so and to what extent we can achieve that.

These massive milestones on the way to a future that was never built cannot be seen simply as inconvenient reminders of a past that would be better forgotten or as hangovers of uneasy dreams. Zarecor rightly calls for the rehabilitation of paneláks, which would act as a catalyst for re-appraisals of other aspects of Czech society. If this is to happen, then the old myths of outside imposition, misdiagnosis of the ills of social programmes and social democracy need to be exposed. Fallacies of indignity and malicious attacks on panel dwellers need to be put to rest in order to better deal with real emergent inequity and emiseration. To start telling new panel stories, we need to experience and embrace the diversity and vibrancy of sidliste life, aesthetically and socially, from the clean functionalist lines of the Invalidovna estate to Jižní Město’s thriving brewery.

JENNIFER K DICK

## **making a message of things**

Waves sucked into seagreen breakers breathing breath taken over of (if) only one touch. Glass tides between us dry splash. This chill cliffside's sliding, sidling by. Quicker towards our destination. But time will not wait long enough for the fickle, freckled, sucked and sucking back out to sea. Where is the motored lifeguard, the caretaker of parasols and lazy sunbeds? Who sprinted last out to the edges of sand and stone and saltwater to get there before the passing? This "now" you cannot hold in place. A midday star falling through blue sky, the white-hot trail of ending indistinguishable from cloudwisp, crow calls.

\*

Slimslipknot light a sliver a sniper I could not sleep, speak, say to you. This is night nugget, a gold ring, a godless land or season or memory. Moonlight or lamplight pages paling. I read your face like braille, with fingertips. Atop the basilica in Marseilles looking out for the fishermen to return home. A beacon. A beckoning. Sometimes the to-do list, the prepackaged, readymade meals, the bus-tram-metro lines are not enough. She would have reversed time, untossed her lithe body's overpale form, felt the soles of her feet scuffed, scraping on the rock's porous edges. You climb higher. I wade at the base, wondering what is under the otherside, the exposed seaside softened salted insatiable side where the seabed drops off and off and – can something hear me echo if I cry wildly down through the aquatic deep? Depth of her and here and howl. I close my eyes. I wounded wonder at this wandering, these drifting icebergs, melting polar caps for to keeps, in keepsakes, stake this 'til it is kept. Seasonal middrift, mudslide, making a message of things. I have forked path upon path, found my wending way back to and into and still stilling stiller.

\*

This is the stoptime, freezeframe. This is that second where decision-instinct clash, flight-fate falter stutter. And then she would leap. Because? She must. You wrote this over and over. Mines are tales thrust into the earth where water refuses to resprout. This is a desert in winterflood awaiting our return. I had my back turned so as not to see that cliff. The sun was blinding even in December. I cannot tie knots like a sailor. What is left adrift finds no tow. Cavernous. This is the dark luminosity, the shaking touch.

# JENNIFER K DICK

## **CERN 200**

[*excerpts*]<sup>1</sup>

### **CERN 18**

I dreamt that a massive black hole spun so hard and fast that it actually broke apart and let loose millions of little black holes like droplets all across our galaxy. They flung out in every direction sucking up stars, planets, asteroids, and comets. Time sparked and bucked resistance, but there was little I could do besides make another cup of tea and watch our imminent demise approaching like spittle through my telescope lens.

### **CERN 19**

I dreamt that my clitoris was the apex of the Higgs search, sending out muons between vibrations. I watched physicists graph sine and cosines, sketch out algorithms down there as if they were about to unlock the secrets of the universe.

### **CERN 20**

I dreamt that the collision actually occurred and so everything was the Big Bang all over again. I knew that someone at CERN would be thrilled about this. However, every time I spotted that giddy physicist – whoever the lucky bugger was – doing his sprint for the computer – to let Science know? To patent some last element that had made this all possible? – we were as if sucked like a plastic sheet into a vacuum tube. Nothing got anyplace. Control, delete, repeat. There he was again – the collision, Big Bang, sprint stunted before arrival. If we had been in a dingy Paris theater at the turn of the last century I would have commended the Frères Lumières on such a trick.

### **CERN 21**

I dreamt a storm of phantom numbers tattooed on my body coded this and the next universe's coordinates and realities. The tats changed from red to black to green to blue depending on the moment or the angle of the suns. I felt planets, stars and solar systems emerging and colliding. The day broke off pieces of night like an asteroid splintering over my surface. I dreamt a mysterious foundation hired me – a detective, a janitor, a nursemaid, an astrophysicist, a mathematician, a novelist – to locate myself.

<sup>1</sup> These poems are after the mobile image and post, which can be visited for full visual effect: <http://the-science-llama.tumblr.com/post/45353550258/particle-collisions-could-create-twin-black> as well as *16 Poems by Roberto Bolaño*, translated by Laura Healy, published on the *BOMB* magazine website at <http://bombsite.com/issues/999/articles/4864>, *LHC's Latest Particle Collisions Find What May Be A New Form Of Matter: Particle collisions are turning up unexpected quantum weirdness* by Rebecca Boyle, <http://www.popsci.com/science/article/2012-11/lhcs-latest-particle-collisions-find-some-unexpected-quantum-weirdness> plus a little skim-visit to *Albert Einstein and the Fabric of Time* by Gevin Giobran at <http://everythingforever.com/einstein.htm>



## **CERN 22**

I dreamt that I, during all of this, was just a portrait on the wall, hung up high, painted in a 17<sup>th</sup> century realist style with a somber pastoral backdrop – a dried grassy knoll and an old stone well. I was pleased to see I wore a royal red cape—quite Dracula-esque.

## **CERN 13**

I dreamt that I was falling from outer space and my hair, which was longer than Cher's in 1975, roped out behind me. As I spun towards impact, my body was flattened into the Phantom Zone. I knocked on the glass. I saw the oceans and mountains closing in. I heard a prince calling "Rapunzel, Rapunzel..." So I lassooed my long locks, haloing a star. The immensity of all things shuddered before my window.

## **CERN 38**

I dreamt I was the Big Bang. Once this was made clear to me I struggled to prevent the inevitable—scrunching all of myself up into a tiny ball, the size of a pinprick, but as I exerted more and more energy to keep myself in check, immobilizing my limbs, tautening my glance, I could feel the fiery energy rumbling in my stomach, gurgling about in there. Louder and louder it came until BANG! And then it started all over again.

## **CERN 39**

I dreamt I was dreaming of future-CERN, past-CERN, current-CERN all in a flux of pre-and-post time. Higg's Boson, the Web and the LHC were like computer graphics etched over my cornea then shake-erased like an etch-a-sketch. This was science, I heard myself telling myself, emerging like a mountain before falling back into an ocean to sleep. I tried to grab hold of one then another surface as they rose and fell but everything was shuffling into and out of existence before I could reach anything at all. This went on and on, as I felt myself tossing and turning and rolling. Just as I'd convinced myself there was no waking from this, that this fluid being and unbeing was the woken world, a siren and my alarm roared my eyes open to find the room was there, simply around me, below the morning sunlight, and I was just another lump on a ruffled bed.

## **CERN 40**

I dreamt the judge had declared me unfit for work. "A danger to society." "A potential menace," he proclaimed. I tried to have the record stricken from my file so I could be hired at CERN, but in the end, this was precisely the reason I was taken on. "Here at CERN," the director explained, "We don't get held back by the little worries." This is what he told me as we walked along a corridor posterized with "Radioactive" and "Danger de mort" signs accompanied by skulls and crossbones. On the other side of thick glass I could see various scientists gaping open-mouthed as we strolled along comfortably in that hot zone. I felt like a pirate on the high seas. "You start Monday," the director stated at the exit, shaking my hand as I headed out into the cool Geneva night.

PETER ŠULEJ

## entry

(PROBLEMS WITH THE LIBRARY)

translated by JOHN MINAHANE

### REVOLUTIONARY

(ja)

som a voice of wakening and resistance

(a ty mor ho! – hoj mor ho!) <sup>(2)</sup>

i speak in a language of myths and legends

i am dynamic in this poem

i write with fire and sword

i sign my name in blood

i smile by way of tears

i write my code through the limit states of maybe

the future is clear when you've barely begun to create it /

you displace a critical mass of coincidence

(in cafe havana the placard is the wall

messrs castro guevara and some third person too

march through town during first of may celebrations

resolution radiates / a flame

that leaps even as far as our stupefied bodies

we sip another mojito trying to comprehend the world

reassured by the well-known face on the waiter's t-shirt)

(я)

был революционер

сейчас глаза turned to gweyn

he is our guide to the country of "prospering"

from the blast of cannons

aurora

vodka stolicnaja

kazachok

(smiling young man in cap and uniform

the picture has the studio stamp on the back:

fotoateljér – communal services nové zámky

and further: the year 1971 written in by hand

a white-haired minsk intellectual remembers:

the beer the country dances the hungarian girls

patiently he awaits his own revolution

who knows what name they'll give it this time round)

(je)

suis chevalier

having come through the battle of crecy

victory of the technological revolution

with the design of the welsh bow and arrow

the story of time slipped right out of our hands

(by barbès-rochechouart station

they're burning joan again in the local cinema

a likeable rasta is selling maghreb hash

he's never heard of the bayeux tapestry

in hip hop rhythm I change over

for the last stop:

unknown)

(ich)

bin der held

from romantic films

he who sees into distances (on all hitherto

known axes) i announce the direction

i raise the tricolour standard from the dust

we shall build a temple of paving-stones

(for now i will tell a story:

i knew a certain older couple

he a german diplomat she his english wife

translator but actually a diplomat's wife

paris 1968: student unrest

on the barricades when first they made acquaintance

and maybe they kissed too then went for coffee

debated about levi-strauss or foucault

and maybe that night they made love in a private room

and never dreamt how the system would stealthily carry

them off)

(yo)

soy revolución

whirlwind that devours its own children

i stride out of the wallpaper of cafes and bars

the all-embracing effect *el niño*

i see exhilarated white fellows  
they sip drinks they point us out / comrades  
we are rather a return to latin times

(at least according to the latin dictionary  
this word meant first of all a rolling back  
revolving turning back return etc. and only secondarily  
lorcas are dying and shall be dying wherever in the world  
and someone at pastis reporting for the transatlantic papers  
ultimately he'll have raised their sales in absolute numbers  
just as print runs are raised for collections and the poetry becomes classic)

*(i)*  
*am the anarchist*

## **TEACHING IN THE FIELD (CITY)**

the taste-cleansing bite signalled a time of transformations  
insufficient for the wine's maturity  
our palate can register only the candy-stick culture  
to which we have finally made our way

*(night is upon bánska bystrica*  
though the europa centre shines brightly)

whatever may happen the balls will be held in the synagogue  
(ultimately it's a good thing that caroberto won at rozhanovce)  
the hornad river mostly flows sluggishly  
the barges have vanished for good with the magyar maidens  
and the private gold treasure

and even the nights in this danubian city  
(oh where is all your caviar)  
belong no more to us danaeans you see /  
just occasionally somewhere or other stealthily  
we observe the aged angels  
swords safely in their scabbards  
beautifully adorned

*huso huso*

in a chinese bistro knights of the rosary after the sunday sermon  
to mouths to eyes sweet sour young bibles  
you could have been *the girl with pearls in her hair*  
ach lazybones... woven twig of a cherry tree  
in the downwards current

schelinger

towards budapest

and hundred-towered too /  
smíchov karlín libeň...

to more than one

libuša had never seen the like

vyšehrad old town new town...

blow-ins & outsiders

střešovice strašnice vysočany vršovice...

/ mother /

grew upon

žiškov braník nusle...

/ of cities

[to know how much more you can get away with that's what the city's all about

and poetry too

(he who opened the first wing and wasn't a tuner would have a tale to tell)]

afterwards there were many who strayed in the country of the niebelungs...

in the end farther even than the eye of brendan the navigator saw  
cities districts parks streets homes gardens...

and stories

the thurzo-fugger buildings' diamond pattern  
unfailingly draws the artist  
ever and ever  
back home  
home

ZUZANA HUSÁROVÁ [text]

AMALIA ROXANA FILIP [graphic design]

**lucent**

another played soundscape      slides down by ten centimeters  
tones deepen      crammed lungs      clamped sigh      delayed pressure impact      vibrating thro

**zonal sluice : d o w n w a r d s**

**basslines**

**magnet of rumbling openings**

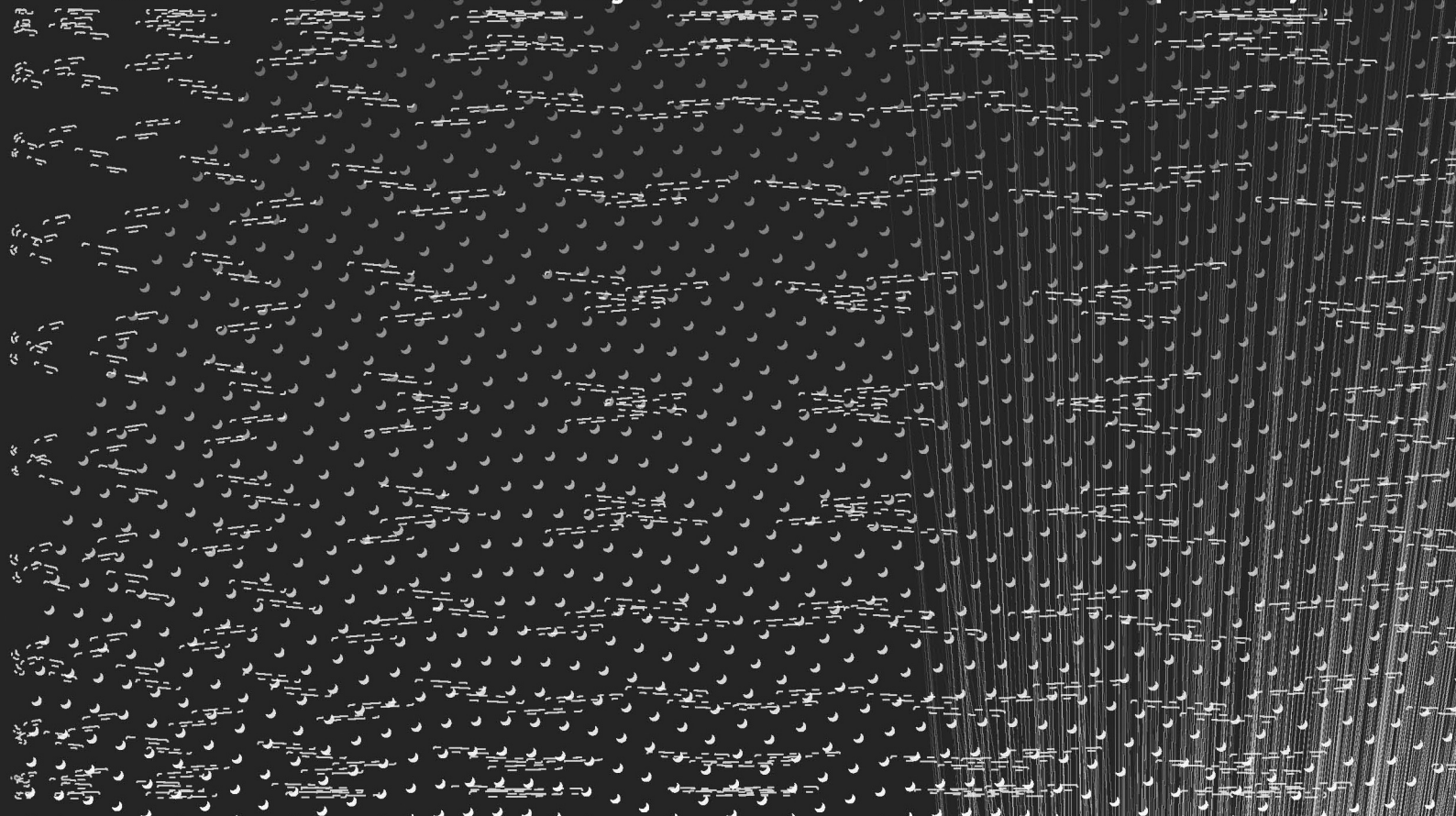
**ears buzz themselves**

**I am listen**

**blowing stories about waves, dunes, landslips**

**collapses of unity**

**oscillator**



suppresses the chosen panels  
at squeezed plunger I ventilate diaphragm

deeper into coulisse

ing to their whisper  
of cracks looped

breaks resonate

all of a sudden the lines dried out

wiping the loudspeakers

## voices

with a loss in compression

fill the space

voices porous among corners

interwoven into clothes, bedsheets

ripples blending into sinusoids

regularity of space structure

heard is her insideness

tones stuck to human splotches

bare incisives with intuition of time

contemporary sinfonietta

entering the stage of my world

I am alone in the auditorium

in each seat

some of myselfes are gradually leaving

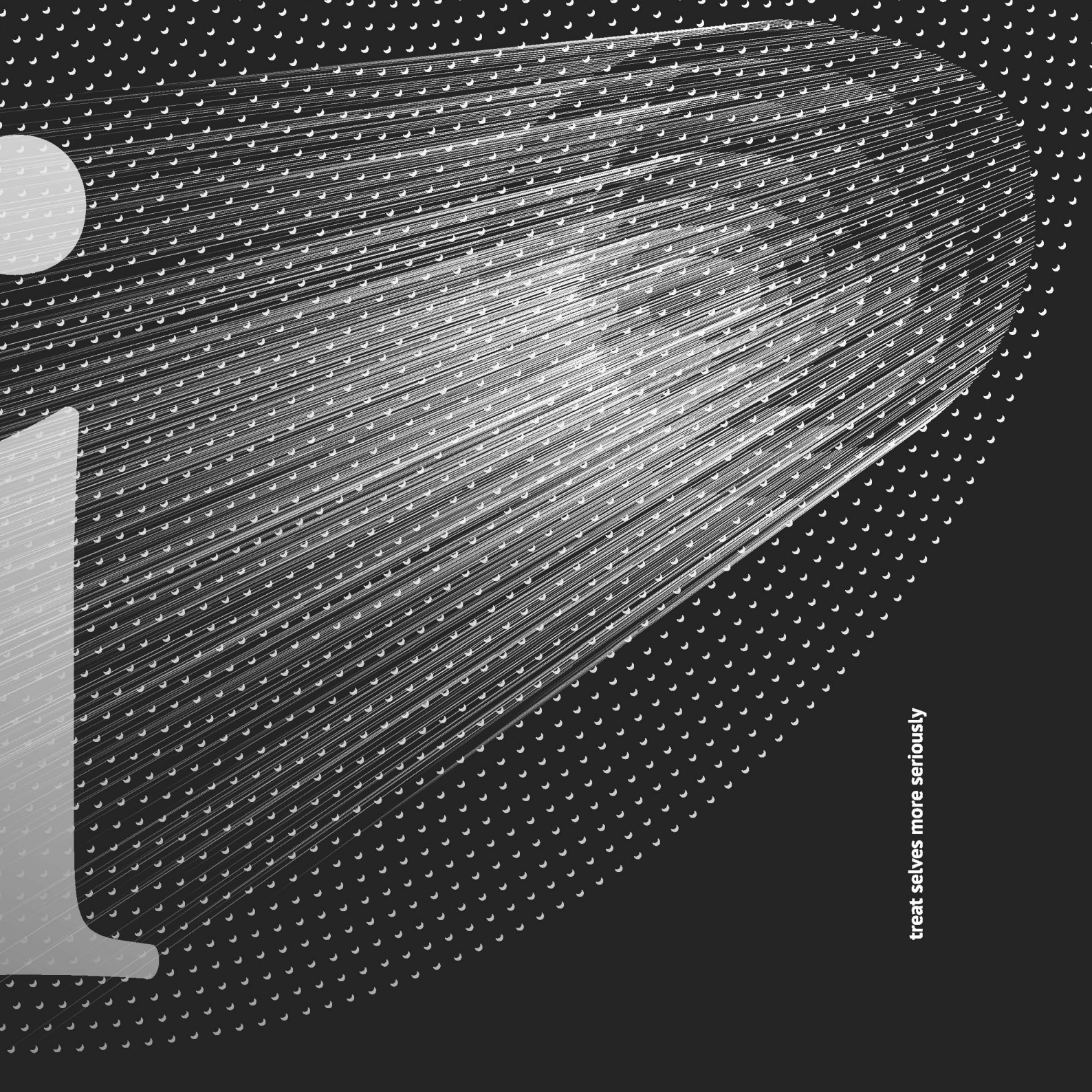
I look at visitors

attempting to interact

I heard a longer time ago that

theater interaction is long past its prime time in the 1990s

today perceived as boring



**treat selves more seriously**







4m<sup>3</sup>



## Slow LOVE eNdS KO

You intruded into our flat.

My love, my love, my childhood love.

Appeal of assurance and village fairy-tales. Affinities.

You came to us slowly, without invitation, you crawled in through all the openings and chinks.

You slurped us, usurped.

Saying that we are yours and have always been, so why now differently all of a sudden.

You entered, stuck to us, you virus, you vampire alive.

And you suck and suck. Sucker in sugar disguise. Doped with our worries.

You claim your present suffering from a stomach ache (with a scar cut by Jánošík's axe).

You got sick from melancholy.

It replaced your delight in tragedy and inability to stand on your own feet.

The neighbouring mothers provided helpful hands and splashed you with boiling milks  
always with a different density.

You ended up with burnings.

Now you ferment here and ask for cold milk poured into cones.

You shriek with a trembling voice:

"It hurts when you don't lick me, don't smooch me."

You are growing and pressing yourself against our walls.

We want to rub into the pores of some other world, other place, elsewhere:

gradually, erase ourselves with a spatula into elsewhere.

We want to escape from you, you smudged one.

But there is no empty crack in our flat.

They were insulated by other usurpers from outside.

We have to embosom you, caress you, so that you don't consume us.

To love you intensively and quickly.

In the sea of quickies. Otherwise we drown in your ejaculate. Born souls.

## SLOW loVE eNdS KO

¶ Love quickly

OR

¶ Leave if you find a free crack

OR

¶ Perforate your own skin and create a cover:

from pieces of skin mixed: with salivas of words (projections, hopes),  
texts (written, read),  
other oeuvres (own, appropriated).

Knead the mixture properly, spread it on yourself and let it dry, let it grow mature.

Your visible filter, with smile, without gloss.



While such ideas belong to the domain of science fiction rather than critical theory proper, it is indisputable that the traditional concept of subjectivity has had to withstand a great deal of pressure and is coming to an inevitable collapse. The resulting notion of posthumanism is comprised under its second definition, that of “writing or thought characterized by rejection of the notion of the rational, autonomous individual, instead conceiving of the nature of the self as fragmentary and socially and historically conditioned.”<sup>5</sup> Rosi Braidotti in her recent *The Posthuman* (2013) utilizes the concept in the latter sense as a “genealogical and navigational tool”<sup>6</sup> that best describes the joint effects of contemporary scientific advances (cybernetics, genetics, nanotechnology), global economy concerns and the philosophical de-centring of Man (which has brought in its wake an array of feminist, queer, animal, eco, disability and various, still emerging, studies, or “specific theories”<sup>7</sup>). The unproblematic notion of the autonomous, self-transparent “self,” having been threatened by Darwin’s evolutionary theory and further cleft apart by the Romantic poets’ introspective meanderings within sentiment, passion and madness, suffered the final blow at the turn of the century with the findings of Sigmund Freud. Freud described the workings of the psyche as based on *in potentia* infinitely retainable inscription into both the conscious and unconscious simultaneously<sup>8</sup>; and Jacques Derrida’s reading of his “A Note upon the ‘Mystic Writing Pad’”<sup>9</sup> further corroborates the idea of the trace/scripture as the basis of consciousness. Thus, the twentieth century came to utilize the term *techné* also in relation to the so-called hard problem of consciousness, i.e. the precise way of explaining, conceptualizing or modelling the body/mind spectrum – the problem upon which Ludwig Wittgenstein touches in his remark, “I really do think with my pen, because my head often knows nothing about what my hand is writing.”<sup>10</sup> The discourse of the prosthetic body has, following Freud, problematized the notion of volitional agency and inspired conceptualizations of human identity as “prosthetic” and, within this

characteristics, “always already relational.”<sup>11</sup> The array of communication technologies such as Internet chatrooms, social networks, videochat and others have brought the sensory inputs closer to one another, and made us aware of the plurality of identities a single person may comprise both intra- and inter-medially. All this while artists such as Stelarc convince us that body and agency are indistinguishable.

Far from being a dark and wild science-fiction story of the human fall into self-alienation, the dismantling of the nature/culture duality into a “nature-culture continuum” as a “central [...] agenda of the posthuman predicament”<sup>12</sup> is implicit to these conceptual shifts. It is of interest that what since the 1990s has been called “new media” was foretold already in 1945 by Vannevar Bush in his “As We May Think,” a paper that presaged the concerns of the entire second half of the twentieth century and beyond. In it, Bush not only proposed the “memex”<sup>13</sup> device (based on the principle of what was to be dubbed “hypertext” by Ted Nelson later), but also theorized the future possibilities regarding data circuits between technology and different sensory organs:

All our steps in creating or absorbing material of the record proceed through one of the senses—the tactile when we touch keys, the oral when we speak or listen, the visual when we read. Is it not possible that some day the path may be established more directly? [...] In the outside world, all forms of intelligence, whether of sound or sight, have been reduced to the form of varying currents in an electric circuit in order that they may be transmitted. Inside the human frame exactly the same sort of process occurs. Must we always transform to mechanical movements in order to proceed from one electrical phenomenon to another?<sup>14</sup>

What is at stake here is the double dream of, first, a more direct immersion of the body into technology (which in today’s terms means reaching the highest possible transparency of the medium) and, secondly, an immersion more complete (multisensory design), which Bush takes even further to the possibility of technological intersensory translation. Efforts at seamless orchestration of the different kinds of sensory input (or its deliberate undermining) are what fuels today’s artistic production and the charting of the complex interactions involved in multi-sensorial

5 “Post-humanism, n.1”. *OED Online*, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/266549>>.

6 Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013) 5.

7 Braidotti, 157.

8 Sigmund Freud, “A Note upon the ‘Mystic Writing Pad,’” *General Psychological Theory* (New York: Collier, 1963) 207-212.

9 Jacques Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978) 246-291.

10 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, eds. G.H.von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 106.

11 Joanna Zylinka, “Extending McLuhan into the New Media Age: An Introduction,” *The Cyborg Experiments* (London: Continuum, 2002) 16.

12 Braidotti, 3.

13 Vannevar Bush, “As We May Think,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (July 1945): [http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1945/07/as-we-may-think/303881/?single\\_page=true](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1945/07/as-we-may-think/303881/?single_page=true)

14 Bush, “As We May Think.”



by wiping off the darkness to the left of the depicted body). Thus, getting to know a body is experienced as a process of “reading through” different layers of texts.

In *liminal*, a transmedia work co-authored with the visual artist Amalia Roxana Filip, the text takes on a second life in live performance. The book, based on the concept of a single day, comprises a sequence of five sections (morning, noon, afternoon, evening and night), each with its own visual style, colour combination and method of composition. The heavily constraint-based, Oulipian poems enhance the possibilities of the visual (“diagrammatic”) mimesis beyond traditional poetry besides utilizing traditional onomatopoeia – they may suggest sounds (as for example the “s’s” in “Morning machines” may suggest the rustling of blankets) and encourage non-linear reading (typeset as scattered over the page, turned upside down, etc.). During the live performances the visual artist Amalia Roxana Filip mixes the projection real-time, using fragments of poems and visual elements from the book, while her colleague reads her poetry mixing in sounds of everyday activities. The work is also accompanied by sound poetry recordings on the web of the project, <http://liminal.name> – *liminal* thus leads three parallel existences in three media which never quite overlap. At the moment, the temporal thematic focus of *liminal* is in the process of being complemented by the book *lucent* (currently in the works), which in turn deals with space as its main *topos*. In *lucent*, Amalia Roxana Filip’s art goes even further, creating the illusion of space with its sophisticated use of layers, and quasi-cinematic (frame-by-frame) progression.

Zuzana Husárová’s intermedia project *par excellence* is *Skúmanie javov* (“Phenomena Research”); a collaboration of five personalities. Husárová (*tachykardia*) reads her poetry while Ľubomír Panák (*drakh*) controls the movement of textual fragments on the screen, Amalia Roxana Filip creates the visuals, Dalibor Kocián (*stroon*) plays electronic music and Jana Tereková (*terra*) expresses the central story through scenic dance. The performance revolves around a science fiction story of a subject undergoing biological mutation after humanity has been nearly exterminated by a lethal organism from space. The inclusion of dance is unusual and the different media which in *Skúmanie* come to the fore alternately create a meticulously orchestrated lyrical whole.

With her (inter)media nomadism, Husárová is an important figure of an emerging wave of central European media poets now in their thirties (other names including Jörg Piringer, Katarzyna Giełżyńska, Łukasz Podgórní, Leszek Onak). The playful, “chameleonic” nature of Husárová’s work is not just a symptom of

her personal inquisitiveness, but makes perfect sense within the context of the broader cultural transition towards posthumanism, which brings with it the need to inspect the relations and dialogues between different media, as well as the possibilities of a multisenzoric, synaesthetic experience. The body is examined not only explicitly, as a topic, but also implicitly, as the crossroads of media inputs with their various kinds of materiality; on the other side of the screen, an image of technological synaesthesia is gradually being constructed, highlighting the inherency of such efforts in the concept of the post-human (as exemplified by Vannevar Bush’s writing). Yet the digital text also reflects back on the book whose “diagrammatic” possibilities are explored in the interaction of different media during the live performances – in this, Husárová’s concerns parallel Amaranth Borsuk’s in *Between Page and Screen*. Last but not least, Husárová’s dialogue with the American scene signals the emergence of a broader global community of new media artists.



JANE LEWTY

# a little calm if possible

Two legs x two arms, one neckless head

[etch that in sad weird grief]

f	3	t
i	2 C4	e
e	1	l
l		e
d		
o	3	p
f	2 B 4	h
r	1	
a		o
p		t
e	3	o
	2 A 4	
	1	

“it is about a sad brick town  
sad entrance, sad the walls”

“NOT sad, it’s just that someone said to me, You?  
Showed me a hand and slapping at the same time. I’m all with years  
flitting past me  
I just don’t seem to mark them  
And I’ve all the time to keep on seeing and listening

chipping on stone, black-cracked, sick of it. Left the job to someone else.  
Took the train out to the hills, saying, look in the window, look in the mirror  
Gave me ice-cream though it was cold. Said, oh you and your vanity---



ANDREW ROBERT HODGSON  
**under the ebro**  
[excerpt]

**LONDON**  
**DECEMBER TWELFTH 1936**

“No answer... again”

The phone rings off.

“She’s probably out at her mother’s or something, Holger. I wouldn’t worry”

“Well...”

“Come on, we’d better get off, we can’t put it off any longer, are you ready doctor?”

“As ever I’ll be”

Outside the dark of day cedes to night. The red light refracting through the clouds ebbs and flows out and away from the city. The snow falls and settles. From up above the streets run as regimented curves, arches, linear runs and dead ends. Three figures step out here and walk and twist and turn, go back on themselves, take a right go forward 120 paces and a left, straight up and on again, on and on, then halt there outside a large building standing out in the smog as a hulking square void. The sound of a sliding grate and the three figures disappear from view.

The warehouse on Limehouse Lane. The metal grid steps clang, clang, clang with every one they take. To their left and wrapping around above them is a metal cage painted black, rusting. To their right the crumbling red brick north wall of the abandoned warehouse. Tom goes first, his arm outstretched running his fingers along the mortar as if to steady himself. They go slow. Up and up and up and BANG, muffled, reverberates through the brickwork and then what?

“What?”

Tom looks back and whispers, his face all contorted. He rushes the last few steps and looks in through a grimy wire metal window. The room is wide and yawning dim. There is the familiar long table where the board sit for meetings. Empty. Two men kneel on the floor hands behind their heads, one lays dead centre. A man in brown mac and beige hat stands over the body, arm outstretched, hand wrapped around a handgun. Recently discharged. Two men stand off to a side with

a woman with curled blonde hair and walking across the floor and now sitting up on the table looking out across the room is a slight man in a full white face mask. With the three perched on the fire exit stairwell and the trigger hiding underneath the fire escape stairs completing the scene. *Larva volto* talks, or seems to. From behind the glass all Tom hears is the muffled hum of a wave frequency capitulating. *Larva volto...* who grassed? Who's the turncoat? Tom turns and looks Holger and Koba in the face... Holger's brow creased and eyes' whites glaring; Koba sweating... too much. He clocks it: the absences, the fatalism, the paranoia... the phone call. Who can you trust?

He lunges down the stairs shouting out you little bastard!

"You little bastard! What have you done? What did you do! You've killed us, you've killed us all!"

He grabs Koba round the neck and taking a flick knife pins it to his throat. He looks up and the white mask is looking up towards the window from the table, he looks down to Koba wrenching this way and that, and up again and the mask is at the window, those burning eyes staring out from two deep holes. Time runs fast. Holger hasn't quite grasped the situation and turning back falls down the stairs to the feet of the brown jacket beige hat who, stepping out from under the stairs pistol in hand, kicks at him all the while training the gun up on Tom.

"Let us go, or I kill him, I mean it"

"No! Not on mah-jong night, dear god not on mah-jong night!"

The trigger smirks implying a distinct absence of fucks given and shoots Koba dead, there and then on the stairs. The body falls heavy and bleeding on top of Holger who repeats "oh shit, oh shit, oh shit" like a mantra and wrestles with the cadaver up ended on the bottom steps. Inside another BANG, and a second kneeled man falls to the floor, followed by the screech of the metal door pulled sliding right like an entire wall disappearing and now the room and staircase are no longer separated scenes.

"Gentlemen, welcome! I see Dr. Koba has already made his exit. Please, do come in... well? Come in then"

Tom drops the knife and walks in hands folded back over his head followed by Holger who does the same and the trigger who drags in the cadaver and lays it to rest in a pile on top of the two board members already deceased.

"Now, which one of you is going to tell me what I want to know? Eh? I am told on good authority, god rest his soul, that only the regional director has the codes to these FUCKING papers, now which one of you is the director. We're already three down, and three to go, we're running out of candidates! Is it you? No... you look a little too *soft* for the job, don't you. You? Oh, no... I know you, the *London contact* oh how precious... and, well, Daniel Holger! What a surprise, it was only earlier today that I was informing a very close mutual friend that you had very sadly taken stage left... so, well, none of you? Dead end, as they say, dead duck. Dead in the water. You, flab, stand up. Stop bloody cowering down there like that and GET UP"

He takes his feet, tweed jacket grey trousers, paunch, balding, whimpering, almost.

"So, *Joe*, whaddya know?"

"I know nothing, my sir, I know nothing. Sir, I beg, I was there... in Alapayevsk... it was wrong what they did to you. I remember, I tried stop it! I did! *Puzhalsta!*"

"Oh Charybdis, do put us out of our misery"

"No! I know... I know... I know a fragment, we all know just a fragment... the director, he knows it all yes, but each region is different, we each have a region. Please, you have the papers? Can I... ?"

"No! You fool!"

"Do be quiet, *Thomas*, let the man work"

Holger's case, locks smashed off, is placed open on the table. Tweed looks through the jumble of papers until he finds a code he recognises and lays several sheets out on the table.

"See, sir, you see... GXXBXXXI, these are for Britain and Ireland. Lists... of all contacts, agents and addresses... please, you let me live I decode them, all of them."

The top sheet of the pile begins:

FFF4XX750

GXXBXXXI

FAO 10X7XE4T12

INEE RHT E UOAI JESD RRCS ALAF WRLG HITO AEGY ASLR  
RTTS CTCI DSTO AVDE IELR HRIL TE CR ELGY NUBO NMHN  
TGIO AETC ODLN EULO FCLB HNRV LDIE RRRN TANR DSLH  
ARGN TIDL ENEC RRRH ENED SOFE TSEK NMHK NNEH REEB  
HOJN DLTA

He lists the letters down the margins and quickly finishes along the top with a flourish.

HERRING HENRY ELEV ANGELSEY RD LDN  
HIRSUTE ROBERT FOUR TENOR ST MANCS  
HITTEN JACK TEN INGS RD MIDD S  
HORST KARL ONE CHANTS AVE CARD  
HOLGER DANIEL FTEEN WILBER DR HULL  
HOLGER JOHN INFIELD CTCT LLORET BARCA

"My, my! Easy as that. John Holger? A relative of yours, Daniel? You do like to keep it in the family, don't you..."

"What does that mean? What does he mean? What does that mean, Tom?"

"Ignorance is bliss, I suppose, and I'm more than happy to shatter that for you, Daniel, your brother, in the Lloret... he is not long for this world is he? No, he's not. And your wife? Emilia? Lovely, lovely Emilia. We took her, well, Charybdis' men took her, on his orders... so you have him to thank for that, well me, my orders, really. Delegation. We brought her down on the same train as you... and be under no pretence, we did *bring you down*. We hoped you'd bring this jolly looking chap Tom to our attention, which you did, so thank you... for that. I'm afraid little sparrow Emilia didn't make it though, old fellow. Wings. Clipped"

"What? No! That simply isn't fucking true, fuck off... you can... you can just fuck off... it's not... not..."

"Well, sorry but it is. Anyway... these, can you do these, tweedy?"

Holger collapses face down in the floorboards his skin growing red as his eyes well up. He hears nothing. Horror has fallen over him, taken him away into himself. Prospero continues, pulls another sheet from the case.

It reads:

KER5ZX354

FXXRXXSXXP

FAO 12X2ZY9L24

GDIEH KYOFU TVRIE OEHSP INGRT FTICL TTTAY TNIOA  
MANOR SIYTO UHARD NNSSS RFEIU ETDHC HYEAF HETER  
ESTIO BIIIM VNSEO PTLHT OOOMA LNOAY OHINL NDTTO  
RPTOI BSTNY ITDUE OIOME SMIAA EAWET ILHRO LIBOO  
LRUSO GEEEI EIOIY THDRB ENTIC NSUES XXXXE

"No, sir, sorry... I cannot do that. This is FRSP... France and Spain. That is him, sir, it is Thomas' remit"

"He's bloody lying! Nothing to do with me! I'm just a courier!"

"Please, please do be quiet. My good man, where might we find the codes for the rest of the continent?"

"Each regional board has a number of members, each a delegate of a region... you have killed the other London region members... the next regional board is Paris... the London director, he knows them all but I know not where he is"

"And where does this Paris board meet, exactly?"

"I know not, I promise! I don't!"

"Well, thank you for cracking this section for us anyway, is this the process here down the margin there? Yes, right, great. Mr. Katabasis, if you please, shoot this one"

A single shot. The London board member for GXXBXXXI drops to the floor with a muted phwump like a pig - bolt gun - slaughterhouse.

"Now... you Thomas. Tommy. Tom Tom. Your turn. You can read this can you? Be a good sport and show us. I do love to learn new things. Do it or... what on Earth is that sound? "

Tick, tick, tick. A rain of broken glass. The room shakes and is ripped through with white light. The smell of sulphur. A searing heat. A great hurricane of sound as fire eats through the oxygen in the room and leaves its inhabitants to drown in plain air. Smoke. Hanging low across the floor, coughing, screaming. Footsteps. Black shoes, gas mask, hand. "No, no! Holger too, he's here, he's here." Shirt collar. Dragged. Doorway. "The papers": "got them." Breathe. Night breeze. Van doors slam. Cough. Away. Lapse. Haze. Minutes. Hours. Miles. On the clock. Tick. Tick. Tick by. Dover. Dawn. Ferry. Cliffs. Away. Breathe. Lapse. Breathe... Breathe.

NAT RAHA

# polemic for loudhailer

morning: fictitious modernity in london, the papers  
daily a series of violences to individual thinking only  
of arranged selves / a false tone-sociality  
to be conquered by *columba livia*

late phase reification of the physical , for sport  
see liberty plaza post-economic or hackney our  
independent state , music rectified in the possible  
to clutch & sustain whilst

andrew lansley hung  
no longer preventative.

in london / saturated symbolic our  
cutthroat affect dispels meaningless ideals  
of daybreak , echoes the specificity  
your handsomer motion we half mask to allure it  
resisting our supposed violations mayor bloomberg  
bestows, his bullhorn disrupts to aggravate /  
to the gloss'd violence of manhattan ahistorical  
how we adore in & by it,  
unknown unknowns

to amorphous architectural  
economic fault lines spewing //  
debt ceiling charred former  
fortunes littering sidewalk alike the  
handcuffs to lush unwashed revolutionary / Troy  
Davis / the 99 percent.

meanwhile evening  
the victoria line idiocy breeds through newsprint dullening  
eyes pairs sore each sorrow gilded spectacular, darling  
please recycle its dustjacket sensual  
I would like to stroke your hurricane limbs.

19:16 GMT. a multiplicity of resistance points.  
nypd attempting to kettle demonstrators, 14st  
& 5th we

scaped by east the nypd

deploying nets

in mass arrest attempt oh sweet cowardice I love  
you police force you eat fast food are slaves just  
like us direct exemplifiers // panic is new power  
// 22:59 GMT the about to to prove our  
dead democratic

morality our maced sisters ziptied

12th & 5th hostility of spatial inscription we the  
constituent outside f' fauxconomic coherence

to cant air failure by heat haze reprise in ozone low lying  
to sing our health detriment in drag of class garments /  
pandemic nostalgia  
ever dripping sell fervourous,

we live

claustrophobic imbibed in

architectonic,

unhooked &

scribing directives an actuality

of trauma / submissives / its

physical reification by bodies & derelict novelists

value averaged by eyecolour & presentation in the  
depoliticized no more stories will be told today

O tired decadents, O yur scarcity specific

stale through global

geographic chills break-autumnal  
fixity transcribes the occurring the anthropological  
documentation our policed vicissitudes  
dissolved by cognate & newsprint. our

exhausting discontent energetics

we take home to the internet, there hector.

left open

subjectives & hearts

absorbs the contours of your head the vivid pleasures to refine  
that feed us vital motions beyond sustenance  
material drum lines against

/// our one demand

recognition of our claimed palaces: salvaged wastage  
for refuge & construct signals shimmering beneath  
legal all beauty in property relations  
is relative to the inevitable tasers,

heckling through

all senses in expression self-admonition,  
doors entered a denial of universal right // parliament

all hallows day the only experienced demons

dressed w/ riot shields

lay gunpowder under our farms our one demand as Scott Olson  
sprayed onto our claimed palaces

to the majority percentile:

comprising our heterogeneity  
privileges externalised,

the we that began in the  
insurrection of the sexual  
operate now as radically unintelligible

desire mobile;

keep aware-selves our entry positions  
of liberalist fetters its cultural harness  
unlearn impositions limited.

freeze pulsate by mediation  
of metropol  
stately & admirable  
zone of political pedagogy  
kitchen razed 03:36 EST  
attack dogs six nicely to terrify the children the we  
kettled outside CLR James library cuffs  
pours our meaning into dear  
officer stationless w/ a section 60  
I've no name or determinable self search me for my  
/ O impalpable sustenance violence splendid & perfect name for the city  
had eyes dazzled the shimmering track of tear gas  
a hundred fifty years hence  
the nypd cutting trees liberty plaza our manhattanese public assembly #ows  
library part of the sanitation;  
consider, you who peruse whether we may not in unknown ways  
be filming upon you;  
we receive you w/ free sense post-liberal & are insatiate henceforward;  
you furnish your parts toward effigy.  
O brother Walt reflexive modernity a siege on lust, dry absurdum for cities



FIONA HILE

## 3 poems

### MY VIEWS

Twenty-two days since I've seen the sun  
I don't have time to arrange my views  
Things happen quickly so I don't remember  
you know my name but it's a pile of glasnost  
The way you draw yourself up through the song  
Giving in to the sick side of sensation  
A parody of love when it was half a mantel  
Garbled light illuminates a gallows of sorts  
And I hear myself speaking in the voice of Mao  
'Something frightening lurks in the song of birds'

### FRIDAY NIGHT AT THE TOTE

Shackled in the basement of the arpeggio  
factory farming melancholia with a voice  
like a guitar, tinkering with the structure  
of the obscene tablature torched a hole  
in the *voir dire*. No wonder you're always  
smiling, silly soliloquy, preening your aporia  
while the angels run on guilty. At the bottom  
of Queens Parade, all juiced up on mum's  
cocktails and the Hubble of future yearnings,  
it's precisely because we hate everyone  
that we're filled with so much love.  
Women who look like they're starving  
vomit down scrambled eggs. Another  
twenty-four hours you'll never get to  
finish your degree in Dissociative Identity.  
When the actuaries invent a diagnostic  
category for musicians, we'll Asperger  
ourselves senseless, community *sans*  
jurisdiction. Enough about me—  
Here comes the booze bus.

## THE NOVEL AS A MATTER OF REARRANGEMENT

You are the difference between the novel as a matter of rearrangement and 'catching the very note and trick'. The strange irregular rhythm of life. Chest full of finicky airbags funneling the prime German porterhouse of entry level stadium via the brutalist atriums of love me tender. What will happen if I don't let you in? Day two of a cryogenic flatpack asylum seekers research centre catering debacle.

Let's say the voice breaks up the Action,  
let's say The Hobbit was a note from  
the author. You must be consistent and logical when

format. Rendered rational and risk-neutral in the haphazard scroggin of your artificial bedroom.

Vanilla bean ways of knowing the stars by heart  
won't give up on your national slide projector eyes before you do,  
life, linear utility curves Jacqueline Bisseting our heads like the champagne  
corks you're saving for this scam you've got going, where pyramids and you  
are the last thing left standing and he who loves last lays wait, wants longest.

PAM BROWN  
**inklings**

weak interpretations,  
    out of keeping  
with inklings  
    of continual life,  
bother my anecdotes

scraping  
  a squashed raisin  
    from a floor tile,

why  
  memorise  
    the present?

\*

disappointments  
    ringing

through  
    dark tints  
of political melancholy

it's only tv

\*

being  
    well enough  
    not enough

a pot of nemesias  
    appearing burnt,  
    golden,  
moment-brightening

\*

    for a time after death  
hairs grow -  
    considered,  
    in some places,  
to be    et cetera

\*

fluoro pigments  
    absorb photons  
as low down as  
    any disease

high frequency  
    ultra violet  
    is blinding

\*

hot head  
in the Mad Square  
  
a charivari  
of local officials  
is burning  
the puritan  
anti-landscape manifesto

\*

*always* dark,  
St James Station  
nineteenth century night all day

where's  
the exit

\*

naked in the hallway,  
an adenoidal  
same sex singer  
humming the theme  
from 'modern family'

\*

under an incidental  
day moon  
(gypsum quarter circle)  
  
tracing the postman's  
red rubber band trail  
down the footpath

\*

work to do  
in every corner

&

I crashed the courtesy car

\*

we used to sign off  
with  
'Send Money'

SAM LANGER  
**poems**

**THE END OF THIS WORLD**

immanent to so many  
of its habits, bad or good  
not at issue, shelters  
against the blaze built of  
thigh bones & cast  
dogshit, intensities  
around the campfire.  
will interfere with my propensity  
not saying right to lie  
around, masturbating into a bag  
of angels, which does thicken  
my moral toner considerably  
& so clearly the industry isnt  
thrusting general human pleasure  
forward & should be put down.  
I have joined the big dog, wombat,  
pineapple, etc soviet, & remove all that  
this heart of mines cheaper than denuded  
bushfires or floods are to put together, loving  
what system whacks away, with  
the other hand tight on its nose -  
expect coma to over once  
we've breathed in enough.

**WHAT'S**

inside rock  
light  
happiness  
pockets  
plug by plug  
my past life  
by yellow memory  
shone away from completing

## ALIEN VS. NED KELLY VS. ROBOCOP VS. TERMINATOR

a class of maker slaves  
works to be judged &  
eaten back into plates of asset, or  
such curves as report valued mothers  
& bounce again, stroked  
data starring permanent want

as surely from here  
as their frozen arms  
two savages walk into a bar  
in a spray of beef, headlight  
on Victoria Grimm's market  
wet with deodorant  
only once  
near the stars again  
dizzy with the rezoned voice of keys  
or legs applying to the eye of a house  
where robots come, oh, are you  
alright? oh 'tis a movie  
& felt hard, but was nearly there,  
a brown thread curtain  
wrapping crooned vampires from denial  
that Borkus's habit of value knocked--

knocked against the lost shoat time  
that ended near parking, Jim's cold  
face turning from metal to rock at the beginning  
& vague guns best the smell  
coming over the earth  
under a tree, grass of near  
the land's blown up sunlight as you wake  
Jesus, who, scudding towards the entrance, blasts  
those robots with a rifle of air tucked in beard  
Rothenberg protects, chanting mother values  
I bounce again, steel of Ishtar  
opening the linguistic suitcase on Brighton on  
the smell of an "If I had a rocket launcher"  
& curry the clash  
of spices  
no more callbox no more blues

## LIKE SHOOTING CAMELS UP A DRAINPIPE

Every day we ride down the lane  
towards a melaleuca.  
Sometimes it's wet and even mud can  
splash our wheels, frames & faces.  
Then that tree is gone, we're in another  
& hidden, like a pearl.  
But developing as well, passing on  
the pleasant news of a city's  
photograph of an armpit, directed  
at each individually. Smog  
inhales the bicycle where it's tied  
in the sun. There are coffee  
and dress-clouds everywhere, printed  
with flowers, or a pattern  
of a condom wrapper. We ride the bus  
all day, sex becomes love,  
words become photographs,  
numbers, food and rooms.  
We drink black liquid and have an  
ill-conceived danish.  
Still remembering that tree. We have to  
ride at it tomorrow after all.  
A full moon mood has taken over  
from our default religion.  
Still eating pastry for longer life, trams  
go look out by a park  
where unemployed people worship a real god,  
his head mostly hiding it.  
Jealous, serious, revered and reverie, he  
does carry a handbag. But  
being kind and related to us genetically,  
he changes everything.  
He came here from some other country.  
We're always different,  
he sees through that too.

## GENTLEMAN

Gentleman, you may now vomit on the tablet  
the race is beginning, don't be late  
the sea is covering the objects, the grasses  
wave slowly like skeletons, stuck  
on the curved surface of coral, the baby  
grows and tony watches it like a half-  
hawk, half-prawn, flanked in daughters,  
actually the race is over, see, the paper  
says so, where is it  
coming from, I inspect the franked edge  
for you and then the aide leads me to his  
little office where he and a british man  
establish the constitution, where is it  
coming from, I wander tinily  
a shelf of brochures near the cooler  
and the machine, the thought and voices  
of my parents protect me from  
the harshest of the brandings, watch it  
carefully through every home one way  
or flying around, borne by his daughters  
wings and eyes, a fantasist of time  
who pukes on christ and moses, paul walked  
past the window not puking, charming  
kind to me and his beautiful child, wearing  
a hat on the grass at the baths  
but naked from the towel up, tony  
protects baby from the giants uselessly  
and the sea comes up, what about it  
baby will enjoy surfing, the sun will  
fall on steps down to the rising-  
sea baths

The borders shiver, in the sea,  
the paper is long, there are many  
numbers difficult to find so you sing  
the latest one and walk the length  
of this white paper unfolding, there is  
a piece of shit or two listed on it, that  
much is sure, I recall my brother sleeping  
in a car to guard the signs, as though  
a larrikin were some triangle of mystic  
control, the mind frozen into its shapes,  
pizza, barbecue, honey chicken, horizons,  
a spider in port macquarie may take  
the leash, and yank the head out of  
mysterious ground, spreading in all direction,  
catholic action, lines of power  
incapable to contradict, that piece of shit  
or two or more, I place the pen on the paper  
in a mystery of terror and refusal, garbage,  
coffee machine, leaning on a tall round  
table to write, but only numbers, getting  
them is what's important, not who is  
next, feigning innocence as a time  
of pure control, remember me, my  
beautiful daughters, these ones, and I watch  
baby for weeks, she has no weaknesses  
and all animals are absolutely, clear,  
this small parrot can block a giant



IAN HAYS

# whoishe: tom, dick & harry

OR, THE INCUNABULA OF LANGUAGE & PHOTOGRAPHY

DEPICTED INSIDE THE PEDAGOGIES OF TIME

The dummies in Duchamp's *Glass* imply that Man is an empty vessel waiting to be filled with the spirit of full desire never to be achieved: a spirit understood as the *Illuminating Gas*. In Ian Hays' *Reading Joyce Reading Duchamp* the two top lines of dressmakers dummies likewise imply that the imitation is a mannequin for Man, and that Language applies in the same way to Joyce's evocation of the corpus of Man in *Finnegans Wake*: that is to say the lettered characters that create the entire book. Language is the core of artistic and philosophical creativity and as Jacques Lacan suggests: "We know as sentient beings that *all we are* resides within the domain of our Languages" and that "The most complicated machines are made from words." Something in each of Hays' latest visual and written works suggest that they are somehow scores for the production of further thought superimposed upon a world independent of the concept of "history" as we commonly understand and use it. With the term "history" we commonly assume the passage of "past time" and "past events," yet in *Finnegans Wake* the assumption of "past time" itself (as *an assumption*) lays bare the intensity of the text under the reader's gaze in such a fashion that "lines of flight" (as Deleuze and Guattari describe it) dwarf all else that is the Text – that is to say, it adopts a form of Language that flees "history" because it escapes *meaning* and in this sense may be associated with "the war machine." The sedentary "histories" of all aspects of any "past" are all accompanied by myth and pure fabrication since we cannot territorialize or inhabit these space-time coordinates. I am suggesting that all such "histories" are actually games of memory that are played out in Language, and not a "history" that is entirely different from all types and categories of fictions when we imagine we are thinking "historically." Hays' dummies were particularly selected for their non-specificity and for their easy representation of Man as emptied of "history" and exhausted of clear context.

Indeed what he seeks is a way of highlighting thin

milliseconds of experience in which various thought intensities and vibes *that are particular qualities* may be traced, and where each of these microscopic intensities may be imagined as stretched beyond its typical phases or stages, since only by this means might such intensities be understood as reflected by some sense of originality of observation. Auxiliary concepts developed from quantum mechanics in the senses presented above make Hays' quest more plausible than one might at first imagine. Likewise Samuel Beckett's cautioning that *Finnegans Wake* "is not so much about something as *it is that something itself*" draws parallels to the type of observation with which Hays seems to be concerned in his curious texts that are now accompanying the 1,800 and more small gridded images occupying each of his latest large images created in Photoshop. Certainly his interests are now more involved with time, change, the problem of becoming as opposed to "Being," and the text (the essay then) as essentially *illustrative* in its nature as opposed to being informative, narrative or educational in the usual scholarly manner adopted for the gratification of objective knowledge. I take his point that objectivity is pursued through subjectivity no matter what the calling: be it science, mathematics, physics, the humanities or politics: we do strengthen or weaken or otherwise alter our Language-uses according to the circumstances in which we (consciously) find ourselves but then even self-centeredness must of course be readable across common ordinary Language. Since *Finnegans Wake's* "Wakease" is a confrontational "War Machine" that is grinding the objective with the subjective, its full ironies only really confront a reader who has been re-reading its text over a long period of time when that revelation strikes him, opening its doors to Language's real complexity from which there is no escape as to its inexplicable viral universality; the very point Marcel Duchamp also put into practice more securely than any artist before or after him. What has not occurred in the field of the arts is this comprehension that without the

genius of Language there would be no means available to any of us to adjudge between an egg and a rock, let alone an *artwork* and a *urinal*.

It is Language from beginning to end that enfolds all humanity and it is this fact in which *Finnegans Wake* rejoices and that is ironized by Duchamp's *Glass* and by its *Notes*. The qualities in Duchamp's *Notes* to the *Glass* that create its absurd mechanics are in fact the central motif of the entire project, and though there are various texts to be found on Duchamp's use of language in regard to his *Glass* project, and indeed his work in general, his use of Language in his art has largely been overlooked. This is a major case in point of putting the cart before the horse in the world of art and its histories. If indeed there is still an art happening in the world today then it must turn itself toward Language and how Language has brought about the conundrums of art's "histories" or art's conceptual becomings from the earliest periods of, say, Renaissance art to the present day. Art History has seen itself as a discipline that utilizes facets of the imagination and incorporeal effects upon which, and more awkwardly, Duchamp's *Glass* places the greatest strains, while from its polar direction his *Urinal* or *Fountain* likewise recruit complexity. It is only through Language that the course of the History and Theory of Art functions with regard to semiotics too, for instance, otherwise semiotics is simply a linguistic schema, a fold inside language and a subject or topic of minor interest. Actually we need to draw a line through the term History, irrespective of the field of the History of which we are speaking. What is remembered, that which belongs to our memories, is the product of our imagination; and as Louis Mink writes in *A Finnegans wake gazetteer* (1978):

No one can tour the world of *Finnegans Wake* except in *imagination*. Nevertheless, as Alice's looking-glass world makes its effect by contrast with the everyday world on the hither side of the mirror, so the metamorphoses of *Finnegans Wake* can be understood only as a rearrangement of the elements of our matter-of-fact world. *Finnegans Wake* is thus full of matters of fact, almost all of them differently perceived and differently interrelated from the functional way in which they belong to compendia of human knowledge like Encyclopedias and Dictionaries. The *Wake's* Dublin is very different from the real Dublin, but it is derived from it. Strictly speaking, it is largely derived from books about the real Dublin, since so many of its allusions are to a past Dublin reconstructed only in its histories.

These *Histories*, then, are accumulated texts and thoughts of previous minds.

This *sous rature* (under erasure) barely does the problem of *Histories* justice because this problem is vast and is simply diminished as a difficulty by its striking through - it's half-abandonment. More than anything our conventional notion of history is implausible, gratuitous, but expedient for the vast majority of its uses otherwise the term "change," but of course not "time," might be better put to use in a different world - in another form of Language. What is occurring on Hays' more recent works that need to be placed onto his Internet Site is a registering of his own vocabulary and phrasing as well as that of other voices from the fields of philosophy, literature, and poetry whose purpose and direction has based its *raison d'être* on *pointlessness* as to the work of art and its development through enormously overturned and reevaluated values all of which hang in the "past" and the "future" in a present that is never actual. His own problem with history, from what I can tell, is inherent in his perception of Modernism as an extendedly complex phenomenon that reaches back to the very opening out of visual art as an extension to a *first* unutterable Language. I consider Hays' perspectives on *pointlessness* from this locality.

There is an entire literature to be created concerning the various effects of *pointlessness* that were a de facto material feature of the work projects of the originating Dadas between 1916-1922 for instance. *Pointlessness* avers for itself a total disinterest in, and a sustained attack on, progress for mankind. However, in order to comprehend the work of Duchamp we need to take one step back from Dadaism and in so doing creating for ourselves a point of real paradox since his position vis-à-vis his world is more than merely ironic and is rather *metairony* in practice. *Pointlessness* in Duchamp's art is a positive effect inasmuch as *metairony* displaces classical irony as a profound force that may be felt *against* and also *for* the powers of chance, change, imagination and the play of aesthetic difference and indifference. *Pointlessness* is the effect the text suggests for the *Glass's* unprecedented casual jottings, posturing as the means by which the work may change in its disappointing paradoxical uncertainties.

Ann Hamilton



CONCERNING ALL LANGUAGE  
LANGUE TRANSFORMS HISTORY  
JOYCE'S SYNCHRONOUS TIME  
BEFORE WHOISHE HISTORIES  
MYTHIC PRIMORDIAL SPACES  
TRAVERSING ALL ALPHABETS  
QUESTIONING MARCEL JOUSSE  
JURISTIC GIAMBATTISTA VICO  
DUCHAMP'S RENAISSANCE ART



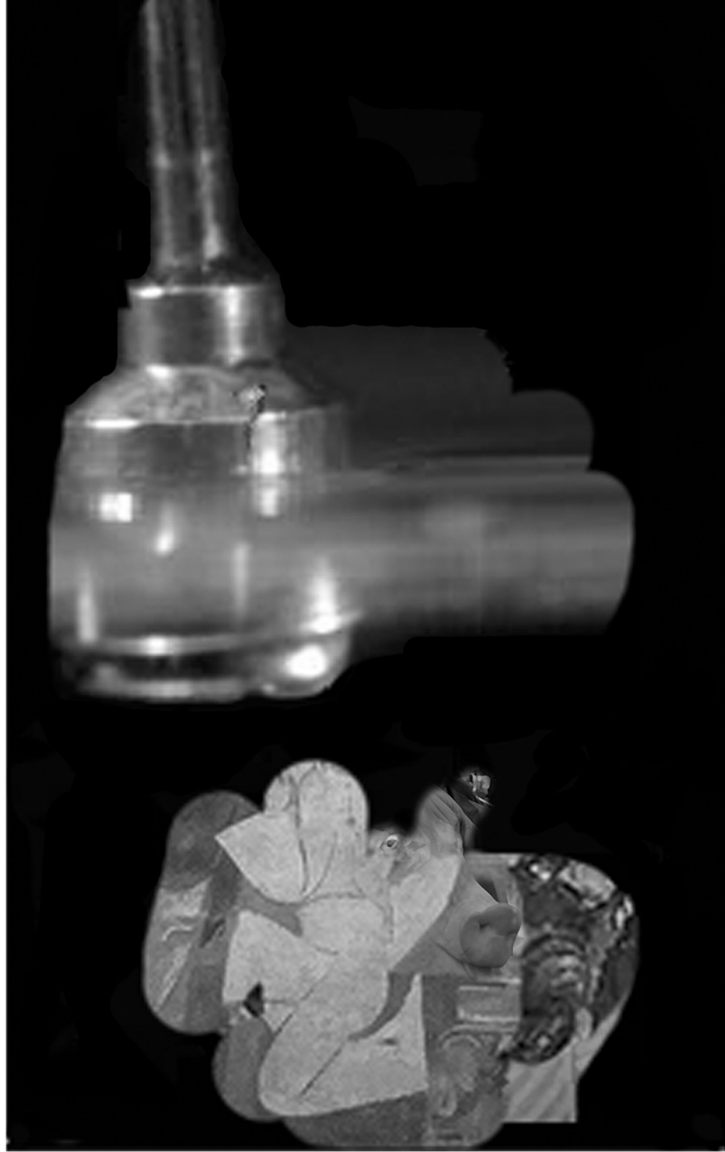
LANGUAGE GATHERING TIME  
GIORDANO BRUNO EATS FIRE  
TIME RATHER THAN HUMANS  
EYES STITCHED TO THE STARS  
THROUGH GLASSES & INFINITY  
INFRATHINNED METALIC FLESH  
DEEPENING THE WATERS CUT  
COINCIDENCE OF CONTRARIES  
SEEMLY SEEMS SEMI ASLEEP



FLESH PLUSH CUSHIONETTES  
TERRIBILI SCHERZI VOLANTI  
MECHANIZED & AUTOMATED  
AN INEVITABLE PERSPECTIVE  
AN INCONCEIVABLE CONCEPT  
ALL AMONG MARCEL'S PAPERS  
ALL THE DECISIONS ARE WRONG  
LANGUES CREATIVE EVOLUTION  
TINTED ART IS ALL DE RIGUEUR



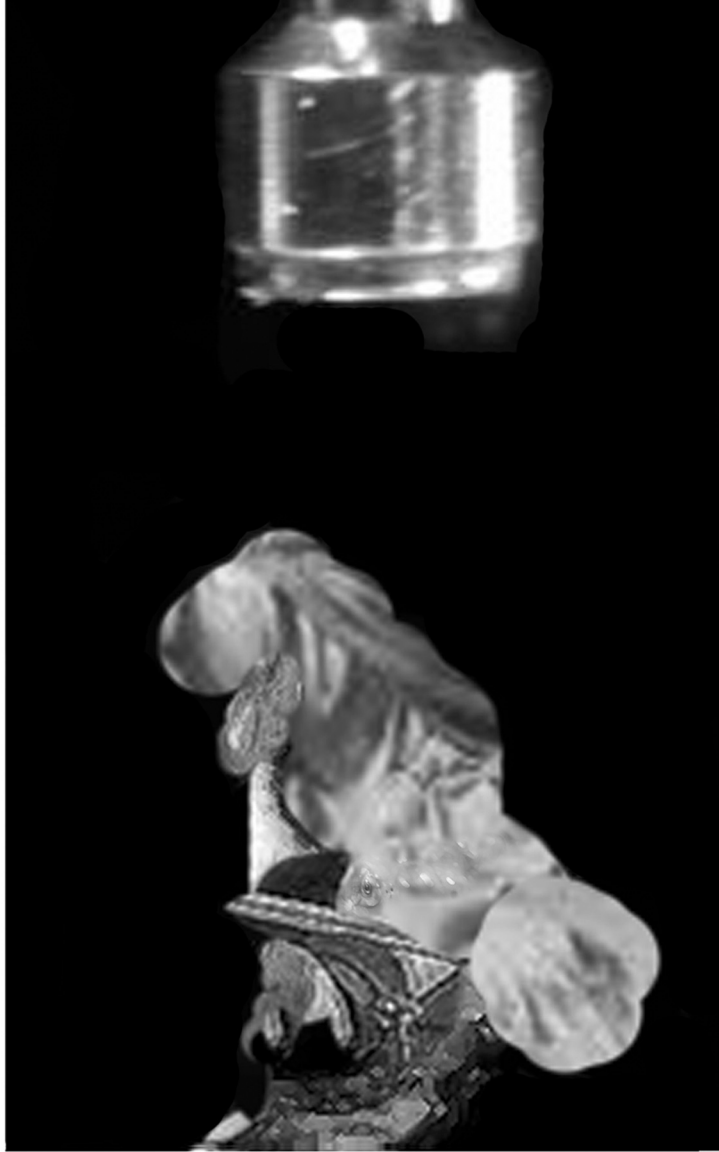
DO ALL YOU CAN FOR THE WORD  
THAT'S HOW WE ALL GOT HERE  
ONE NAME ALTERING ANOTHER  
LANGUAGE IS ODDLY WOBBLY  
COBBLED TOGETHER BY GOSSIP  
PIECE IT ALL TOGETHER IN BITS  
LEADING TO FRIGID COHERENCE  
DEVELOPED BY HENRI BERGSON  
THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF PAINTING



SHAUN'S CROSSWORD PUZZLER  
 THE QUASI-TRANSCENDENTAL  
 BY WAY OF INVENTION  
 ERRECTS A MONUMENT  
 IN THE CAMERA'S LENS  
 CEZANNE'S WORK WELL  
 THE PAINTED OBJECTS ARRIVING  
 BY TENTACLES OF CONNECTION  
 & TROMPE L'OEIL IN THE TEXT



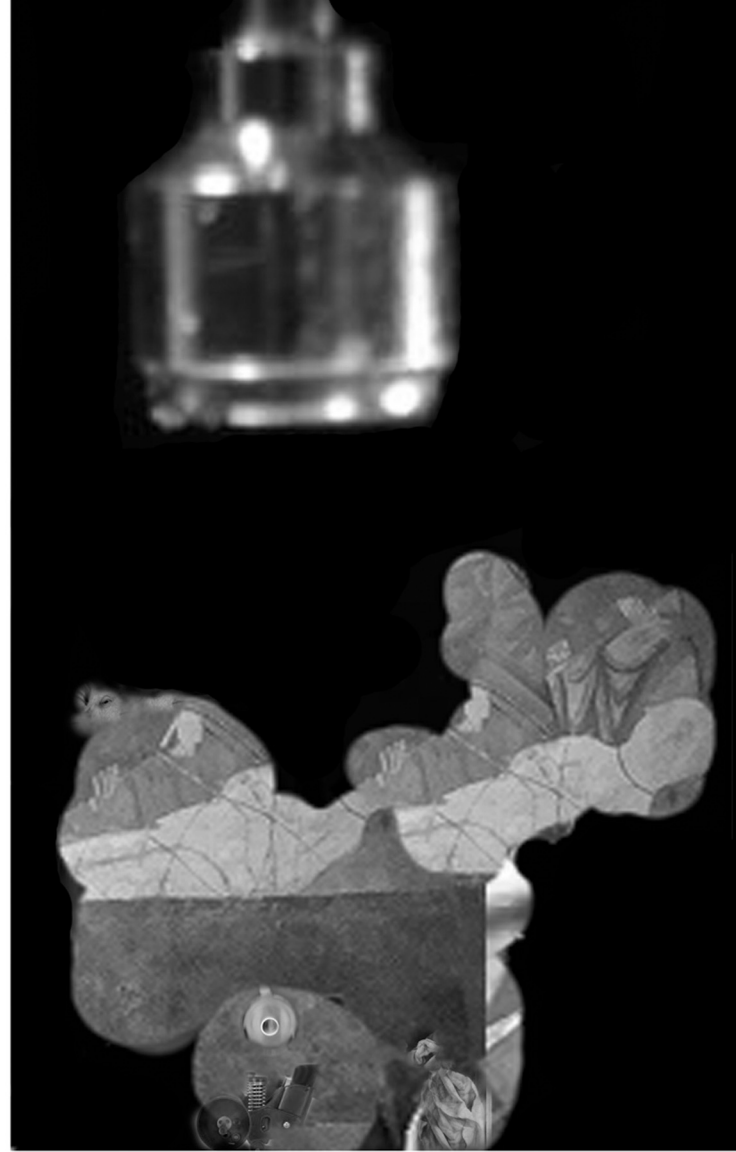
TWO WORDS FOR JOYCE & YOU  
 STAND SIDWAYS TO THE WORK  
 INSTANTLY  
 IN SPACES  
 CLUTTERED  
 WITH THOUGHT  
 BETWEEN LITERATURE & ART  
 PHILOSOPHY & ARTHISTORICAL  
 WRITING THAT EQUIPS US ALL



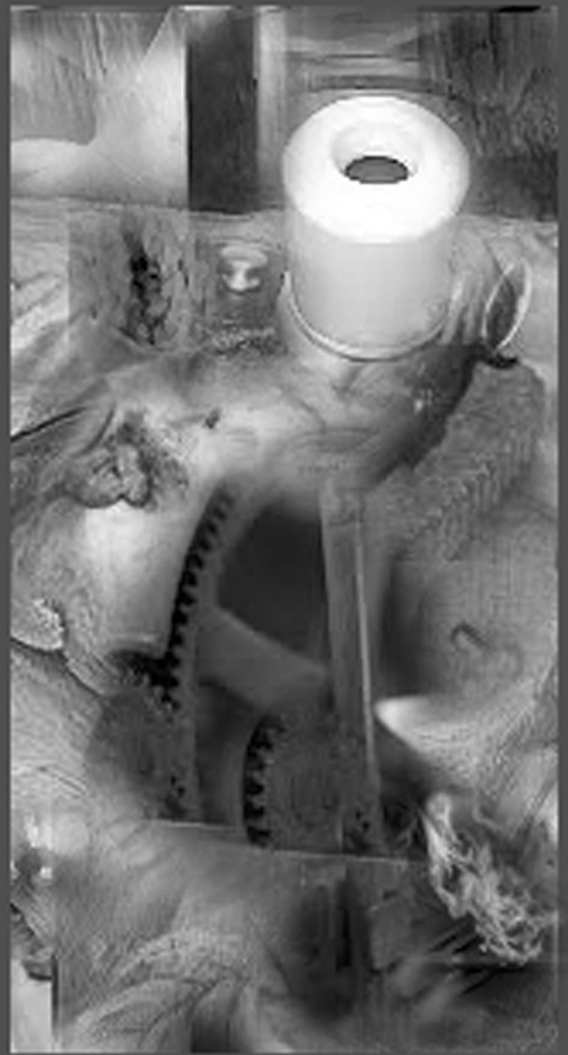
JACQUES DERRIDA'S *ATHESIS*  
PROVIDES A SWINGING EFFECT

**WAR**

LE PENDU FEMELLE YAHWE'S A  
POETA IN A NOVEL FORMATION  
FOR THE SUSPENSION OF SENSE



THE EFFECTS OF TRANSLATION  
FOR THE GUESTHOSTGHOST  
OCCUPIES FINNEGANS WAKE  
ELECTROLATIGINOUSLY STILL  
WITH MORPHING SHANATORS  
& 4 DIMENSIONAL GEOMETRY  
STRUNGOUT ELASTICATED BOOK  
AHEAD OF THE GREENBOXNOTES  
& A MECHANICS FOR THE FUTURE

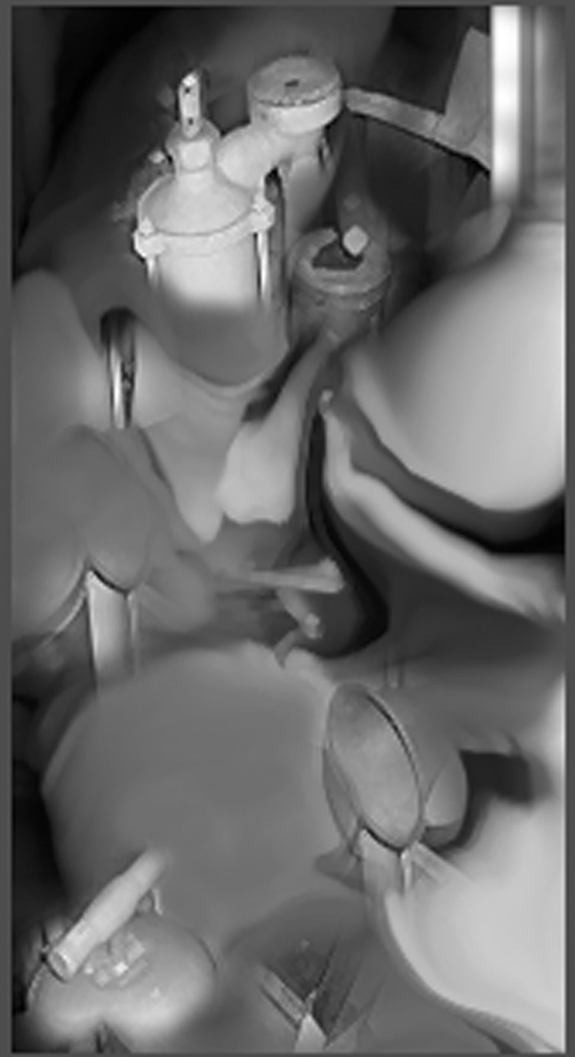


*EPANOUISSEMENT* IN PASSING  
A NAME A FIGURE GRAFTS IN ITS  
BECOMING TIME LOOSING ITSELF  
IN THE INELUCTABLE UNSTANT  
OF A TOWAY MOVEMENT & A  
DISSOCIATION BETWEEN WORD  
& THOUGHT - IMAGE & LANGUE  
ITS SURFACES & ITS ILLUSIONS  
OVERTAKEN IN THE PHOTOGRAPH

REFLECTED IN ART'S INEVITABLE  
INEXTRICABLE BOND TO LANGUE  
IN THE REGIONS OF THE HYBRIDS  
IS THE CASE OF SAD GLASSWARE  
SLIDING NEATH ITS OWN CRACKS  
& THE LITERATURES IT HAS GIFTED  
CREATING ITS OWN DESTRUCTION  
FROM NEGATIVITY & A DISQUIET  
IRONICALLY IRONISING VALUES



LIGHT OF THE SEDIMENTED PAST  
REFINING BY TIME ITS OWN IMAGE  
& MALIC MACHINIC METAPHOR  
ADUMBRATING BLANKS & ERROR  
CUTTING LOGIC FOR LIBERATION  
OPENING LINGUISTIC BODIES TO A  
DECENTERED DISJOINTED LIFE &  
DEATH WHERE WE ARE ANOTHER  
IN THAT MOMENT OF LAUGHTER



DEVELOPING TIME IN THE DARK  
& IN ITS RICH *ESSENCE D'AMOUR*  
PREHISTORIC MACHINERY SLIDES  
ACCELERATING WORDS TOGETHER  
WHILE JUTTING IN & OUT OF FOCUS  
LIQUIDATING NARRATIVE PHYSICS  
MAKING A PLEA FOR SENSITIVITIES  
UNKOWN ABOUT TO AWAKE AGAIN  
AT LA FORGUE'S *EVANOUISSEMENT*



SANDRA LEWTY  
**window kites**



BRETT PRICE

# common gauntlets

mining earth for natural light you can't force the sun can you  
metropolitan fools gold run off's insufficient coastline

so all parameters become tidal  
right ideation tuned chemical awe

breaking the will down  
into little moons

court of the guts  
trust in that logic

where telluric forces bend muscle toward  
intelligence delt via tones and speeds

when pressured it vacates the image or establishes weight  
color as substantial floor plans anvils Rosendale Brooklyn

what follows is slow afterbirth turtles spawning in language  
now the privately acquired may be sculpted public sphere

preservation of means by other means  
not just for survival but to make a home

of what seems to be  
two places yr life

tall wishes grown in  
anti-gravity

cosmic petitions rocks-off dissonance  
we can't be everything for each other

ourselves many others with friends of their own though between us  
some well-water poisons the stream low-dosing relative dirt

stuck neck-deep in the sludge ducts mutual commitment's become  
straight bicker standard loyal to score except for improv teething

I'll take aunts hybridizing daylilies  
over dweeb sired vintage skull markets

any day but at  
our best here we are

weathering the fact  
of pure intentions'

Rudy-like assent to stadium life  
non-compliance with too fixed a scripture

I can feel the cold rising from bare feet to finally be  
done bummin' swipes at nostalgia archives for long winter stints

but can't we just bask in the total hum of mercurial  
drift sometimes before guilt-tazing every sensual means

for its ties with the objectifying  
masculo-centric habits typical

of an eros left  
critically unchecked

yeah almost always  
quiet silver hills

blur us total ambient interface  
the imagination is given due

cred as an active force of reality adding trapdoors  
to largely imposed grids taken for dailiness default states

smooch skiddattle roadsie whistling cinematic themes spell death  
for romance while vowing innermost joy core indifferent

to such petty contingencies' power  
that's MY inherent relation to world

fat grays dusking blue  
without consensus

it isn't something  
I'm unsure about

kale graces tuna rice mix-up to fuel  
task based distraction contra razor-fest

your eyes are betting loose and fraying ends taken for granted  
unmatched in discipline steadfastness depth of reverence against

"the perfect outcome of an outpour of perfect love unfold"  
looped pleasures make sense flush with thinking thinking flush with thanking

to transport us outside of time but neh  
we cut to sleep barely dream wake to find

our plans already  
up harpooning dawn

disappointing loss  
for the underdog

states wherein vowel shifts puncture heaven  
and consonants ground the charge of those wires

a will to cajole new dome vibrato "ability" in  
pink cursive on meds can pretty impure fixes be transformed

minor script impact true leaves' agency played in relation  
can poise clear fell illusions of the mentally well-behaved

must pirouettes scaffold seminal twang  
when metro time bullies pastoral whim

yes yes no I don't think  
so what is this light

waiting for birth I'm  
flanked on either side

by specifically Scorpio-ed versions  
of pre pre-natal enthusiasm

shifts in imagined receivers instigate shifts in the tones  
I inhabit to sturdy up calm in fraught relation like

strangers support of floral wrapped post-pedagogical ease  
fuzzy in cider light nod-land twitch last night's missing undies

resurface from sheets I'm sorry I went  
so old school bow-throwin' for fitness thrones

green mind of The Hulk  
arms shift over eyes

alright stop writing  
and turn off the light



KATHERINE OKTOBER MATTHEWS

**grey area**







NATHAN THOMPSON  
**signs**

**SIGNS #64**

light hop

& stolen is

'the coral island'

mystical gloss resists coronary stumbles

no doubt the evidence of my senses but that is natural we have not met  
so this is all dealing up with ghosts night trumped who holding the bank  
make fear of trains somewhat more rational given glassed imaginings

whatever

this fact was established 1845

watchmaker and specialist in gaslamp copper

mental features discoursed as the analytical not far off

the solution is one leg dipped in discovered by telegraph across an acid sea  
at the first dawn of mourning fingers

his voice rose into a treble

I quietly fell pulled out at the roots

## SIGNS #65

40% surge in talks for big TV comeback victim's tears get gone  
looking for a star at risk to the public identity of horse  
adrift secret police probe gives thanks to re continued employment

'as a mother my concern is  
for the children's film franchise with HIM in the leading role'

no sign of stalling  
heavenly vector I ask for compassion  
equivalent to a city the size of Birmingham

now I cannot even name babies  
let the rein take the strain I'm through

'calm down dear and have a biccie'

this apple of my eye is the way through radicalised behaviour patterns  
leading to a breakdown in communication before lunch

a body was remote found six months later  
controlled to pick up in sores or order into any sore for collection  
still alive framed five a day inflation busters / selected departures up to October '11

## SIGNS #66

when no longer home is      about figurative  
   cultural beginnings segue phenomena  
   'eating shit are we human'  
   in part of or in

a broken harmonica is one of the sure fire statements this circus century  
autotune anti-sibilance sic prophetic we didn't mean to acknowledge  
the world gazed on through tinted spec local and      physical  
   as here a diary  
   unwritten as unread  
   thru tobacco goggles

reproduced by permission in the eaves  
home is up for rent curtains in a crack on temple

I passed out of suspect blood humour like yours  
   lamentation easily classifiable but not for sale

free ads odds on what is here alone is  
me acknowledging language only so far  
unnatural exactly start short one point this is mine field  
   (yours too)

retreat in return guise compound that's debatable

## SIGNS #67

you shake car radio speaking across  
    'the man we can believe in'

head empties accordingly steam without tapped ash drifting  
under torture subjugating sycophancy that questions big questions  
    stalks a parochial perspective

language emerging news-stand conga whispers

[action makes wishes  
buzz censor entries within  
light mile this year's no fly zone]

we are out of order you claim no discount stalk toy tiger by lapels held realised  
dawn turning stones at solstice excludes third party only  
coming down thick under your eyes tremble entry requirements

grace with presence raw footage  
overheard slaps low risk benchmark  
filters out penance this false suggestion

seems like a footnote rebound no monthly payments  
illustration you can stay in your own home  
appearing calm acclaimed

  a lifetime ago  
better than crash & burn money not gimmicks  
shoot at will dead end still open  
suited orange button dial early your enthusiasm is chilling

J.T. WELSCH

# bygdeskomakare (1887)

*via Harriet Backer*

You cried when born, then laughed.  
When you opened your mouth,  
it was as if the world were singing.  
You sang a tune – I said so –  
of facing the world with courage.  
And the song was courage.  
Nothing worth much is easy.

It's why I can't buy your success.  
Love is fine conversation, but  
not worth much. Not work.  
Little Mary, from the next farm,  
teases: Come, goat boy!  
she sings. Come out to play!  
But work is good. I say so.

Let us suppose a new-born mind  
is blank paper, void of ideas.  
How will it be furnished?  
The paper is beyond my hand,  
the table beyond the paper.  
One cannot write or eat with  
so much pleasure with no table.

Apply your hand to making  
the necessary things: chair, table.  
Walls of a room beyond the table.  
A new old song: chin up, head  
down. Unhappiness is for the weak.  
Last is first, and old friends best.  
Let us suppose a world. Let us say so.

Find fields beyond the room.  
Say: tabula. (Good lad, good Latin.)  
King James calls for his old shoes.  
Marry the farm girl if you must.  
The day we find love, we lose happiness.  
Our absence does not annihilate it.  
Sing: Killy killy killy the goat!

Tell her: unhappy love is for  
the weak, the timid or sick,  
those too smart for their own good,  
the sensuous, who run and hide,  
hit send and tremble at a word,  
and finally mistake their fear for love,  
become wretched and melt like sugar.

Tell peasant stories in ash veneer,  
the particleboard of knowledge  
among the world's few comforts,  
a stain which the busy and boundless  
fancy of man has painted on it –  
all tables and cupboards,  
one word: experience.

VINCENT DACHY  
**affiches**



**DO NOT CRUSH**

**NE PAS S'APPUYER**  
**DO NOT LEAN HERE**

ANDREW P. MCLEOD  
**spartacus found**

i

We've watched the images  
yesterday  
breathing for a while  
what did you think?

ii

Stand up as fast as possible  
search the car  
I was a bit angry of course  
hoping there's not too many images  
an amateur crashing down. No.  
On the end  
I mean it's happened  
I mean  
I would love to turn back the wheel  
but that's life,  
not like this. I had to live with this.  
I had to live with this  
but said why? It's – it's  
happened  
and also I tried to do but I could.  
Because it was three years  
I wasn't really on the cobbles and that's why  
I was so  
I continue later as slow as possible  
to get less hurt. Hurting is something, yeah  
it's always there. That's the pain  
just relax, recovery  
and to heal the body because on the end

there will be nothing to heal  
there will just to go from the start  
to the finish.  
There will be one. The one thing.

iii

Just interested, you say there's no way  
obviously  
the rest to the finish.  
Does that - do you entertain that?

iv

There's different things to see  
first is the first  
the first few – is a big break a small break?  
How is Arenburg? How is your luck?  
All these little details. I mean  
have you good?  
Have you bad? I know different things  
and that's why I don't say now okay  
I have this beautiful perfect picture that I  
will love to have.  
On the end you have just one love  
then there's have to have to stone  
for history, for books. You have this  
you have that  
in my eyes for the moment it's just one thing  
the rest we leave in the air.



JAN PÍCHA

## 2K13

curated by EWELINA CHIU



These paintings by Prague-born artist Jan Pícha were featured in an exhibition entitled 2K13 as part of an event hosted by VLAK at Roxy/NoD in June. The title of the exhibition is obviously a play on the year in which the exhibition took place. The first part of the title is taken from the artist's DJ stage name, 2K. Nevertheless, due to the artist's own admission that he considers his artistic and DJ work to be completely separate, the exhibition's title less encourages the viewer to consider Pícha's visual art with regard to the circumstances and background in which they were created, and more as solitary instances representing a unique and unrepeatable moment.



















