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CORIN • ZVER • RAPHAEL • CURBELO • KINGSTON • FOX
STOLOFF • FOSTER • ROBBINS • RIDL • HARRISON • VASSILAKIS
TOPAL • HOOVER • LIU • BERGWALL • SELBY • GERBER • LIFSHIN
FRAZER • BELGUM • SMALLFIELD • HOLDEFER • HOUSTMAN



"Caliban is hospitable to any writing which, when chewed,
makes him hear music in the air."

CALIBAN

Lawrence R. Smith, Editor

Direct correspondence to: lsmith@calibanonline.com

Submissions to: submissions@calibanonline.com

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Deanne Yorita, Associate Editor
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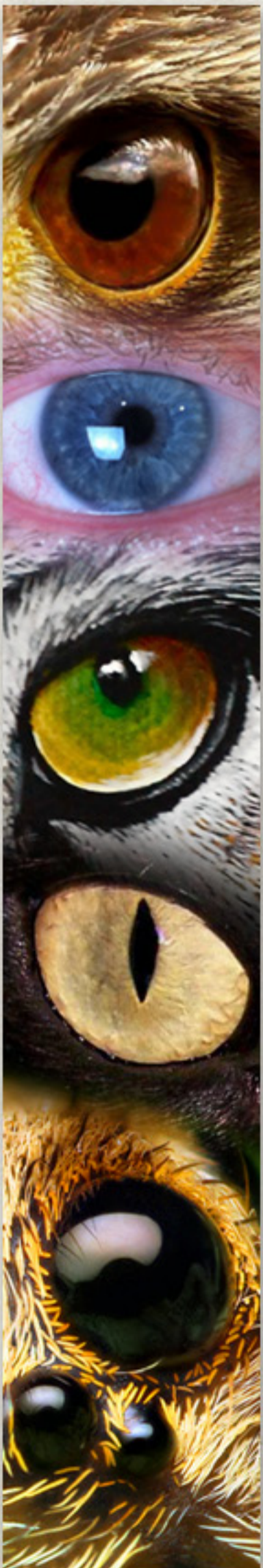
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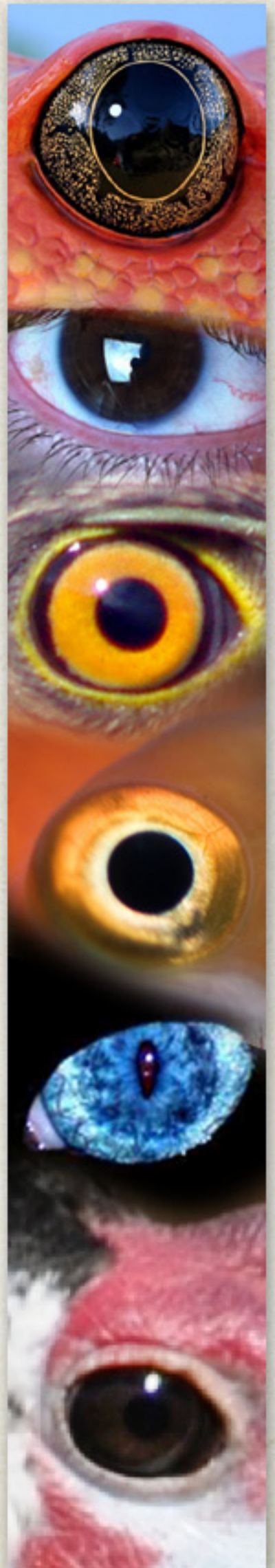
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ELIZABETH ROBINSON

Woman

Everywhere bones in their envelope.
The bones in a plate become a clock.
The bones in a chest become fur.
The bones in the toe bones become a basket that
cripples her. Her scarf fumbles over the bones in her hair,
the phantom limb. The bones
repeat themselves ad nauseum. Even the
stove spits out a bone sliver. It burns
her thumb, turns it into a dark cork that stops up
the drunk fire inside her. Elongated
and brittle. Such a falsehood: "Often I am
permitted to return." I return to the skidmarks
made by her bone toenails. I see the fire
warping into water in her sash. Exo-aqua-
skeletal. I see we are wearing the same skirt
at the same time. Woman, your bone cheeks
support your marrow eyes. When the

bandage comes off, it exposes a series of triangles,
the triangle of the vulva beneath your skirt,
a slipper of flesh, the dunce cap that floats
alongside that one tenderness. A synonym. I see that we
wear the same skidmarks. The bones of the lucky
rabbit's foot still attached to its carcass. And all the while
the ancient remnant we call fossil scratches its escape. I share
with you this good fortune, my companion, my tail
curled around me liquid with bone, the melting bone
of the nipples, distracting softness of fur, the orifice
that vents the heat away.

Star*

I was not a face.
I was a man inside a buoyancy, hollow curl.

I saw you shove me, but not feel it.

Here, where the cleft is a star, a bass note star,
that rests in the cradle of the jaw.

Yes, you can shove. You can
recline in me.

I was neither face nor forehead, flanked
on all sides, yes.

Flanked by a remnant star: asterisk.

I was a track to follow, blurred
by limitation.

Not a nostril, but like a nostril.

An eye in transit.

A place where purity makes gaps
that appears as daylight on skin.

Light injurious as it falls.

I found I was not a man but a qualifier
while something in the background
dismantled the star.

Compass

after Aldo Calo and Masayki Nagare

You and your other
four inadvertent compass points

for instance, as estranged lovers

where direction is a matter of balance

Your black optimism

or the lack thereof

Wasn't there an axis you were meant to betray?

North: all fall down

caught in your arc and crease

South: clatter

who watches you equally dark from the gloss of the breast

East: gravity erased in rain's perfume

sultry attention

West: the surround whittled away

this overt reaching-toward; the other's patience

durably precarious

The louder gesture waits to meet its quieter

distance in eloquent tangle

A reserve, a reservoir

NATHANIEL TARN

Nerval's Maidenhair (Fern)

Aurelia's

All night devouring the streets of Paris,
as if I'd never left the unforgiving city,
the city I thought I'd die if I ever left it.
A Maidenhair on the desk. Sixty years
since a book was written on these leaves,
out of these very leaves, [face fallen into
them]—they have never evolved, as this
friend has, toward oblivion. Despite the
stretch of evolution. A fill of sixty years
after such greens hallowed the writing
desk: ready to talk. Between and latterly
they were reviewed along the roadsides
of the emerald Andes. But giant there, so
large you thought a single plant could fill
a province. In the southern night, electric
eye of hope, suddenly seen, which having
died in almost all the meantime, opened,
[opened once only in the night], [aha once
only!] and it was like a kind of adoration,
a kind of recognition of something I had
maybe had, & lost in the far distant past?

Aurelia!

But that immense, immeasurable hope,
working on down the ages, the everlasting
& immemorial, & seeming indestructible,
timeless apparently but riddled yet with
time—it is a *lie*, no longer living—kept
moving only by men's insanity, aimed at

giving another clearer reason to their lives than sun hands down in diamonds and in gold—only illumination of existence. She had belonged, no, not to me, never to me, the brighter that becomes the deadlier—but to another oh irretrievably and I could only yield. And since: the dying bloom of hope. Which brought about a fearsome other life. But I am blind from birth on now: I cannot use these eyes. I hang from some lamp-lighting post, dead in the bowels of no city but in a cruel desert. And hardly moving from that dead day forever into another life.

KAREN GARTHE

Silent Film

Money, money, money” – my mother was forever uttering this cry of dismay even when we asked her for thirty pfennigs to buy a copybook. Money money, money. Love, love, love.

The Clown, Heinrich Böll

Nude-filled frame and reddened gold

furs of the old *politesse* & violet light
the sentence rolled in Weimar guilt, the train flew by

“Berlin (began the road) *Potsdam lace, and trim the ethereal comfort of steam they’re taking . . .* von Krupp’s gainsaying

cloche / Dada

silence of the news,

cloche of the scrub gutters

Kaiser drum of oil

The Three Industrialists

The first in a primitive mask, second in the *masque de cochon*,
and the last one is dressed as

The Mighty Choral of the Dolls

Act I: Silent Mechanism

Act II: *MILIEU/Foment*

Act III: THE KITCHEN THE GOOSEBERRY AND
THE SAUSAGE

To *essen* and lift the Austrian curtain's pouf pantaloons
und Geld und frenzy
Firebell The deep spoon ladle of a wind cog
begged to close evening

Act IV: *Geld und Geld*
by whose dog star roves in champagne slippers

Act V: *THE LIGHT BREASTING OF the* BEAUTIFUL
SHOES trapeze
in a cold thin room laughs for warmth,
laughs back

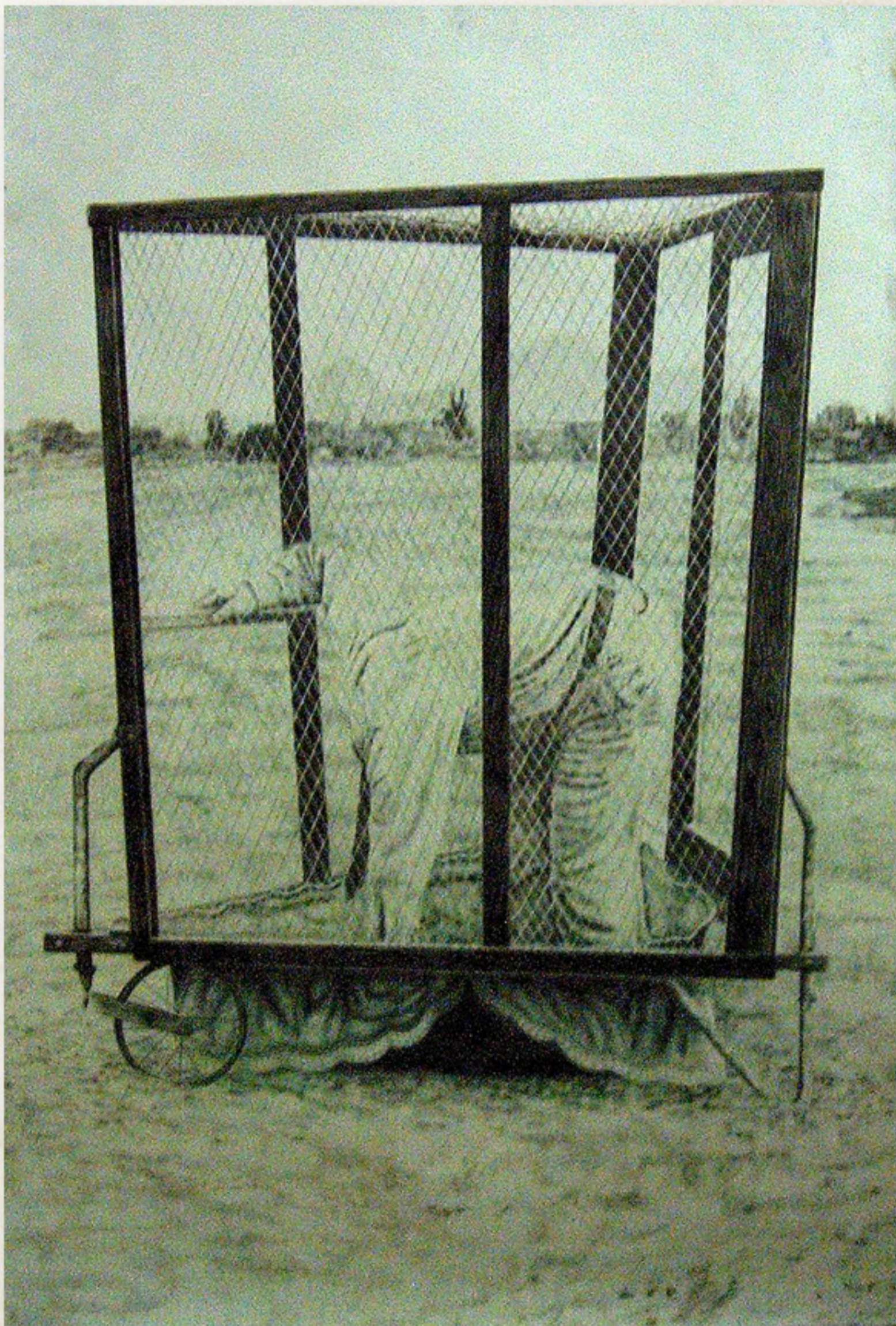
the trapeze exposed throat

Berlin *swan of ende*
Firewalk of the rock
gone Collect

Berlin, Die Sinfonie der Grosstadt (1927)
Neue Galerie, New York, March



HOUSE by Travis Kerkela, 2007, oil on canvas (72" x 50")



VITRIOL by Travis Kerkela, 2005, ballpoint pen on paper (40" x 25")

LUCY CORIN

Nine Small Apocalypses

Metaphor

At the brain stem of all we knew, madness hunkered in each of us like a bomb the size of a baby's fist. It was not a stone, as our ancestors believed, because a stone remains stone. The bomb is scientific. Madness is mostly dis-integration. The little fist is a little baby's fist, but if the baby wiggles its fingers you're done for. Anything can happen to set the baby off. You can get raped, take drugs or have a fallout with your mother. You can think a bad thought or magic word. A baby can grow into all kinds of baby. You can go on with your life with the baby living in, off, or on your body. Madness is some of your eggs that you could ovulate now or never. Madness is brush damming the river in your dick. I know in the end it's not like you are one thing and madness is another. It is a sleeping fist of your own stone bomb dick dam babies.

Recall

Not long after the mad cows they started recalling pistachios. Pistachios: the green flesh and flaking shells of our youth. So many things had been recalled. Hybrid production accelerated until even hybrids are being recalled. People gathered in fields to remember the food that fed them and killed them. They sang of the salads, the fruits, and the meats.

Three Sisters: Blond, Brunette, Redhead

We were coming out of the movies into some real life darkness when we heard his coat open. Rows and rows of apocalypses shone along the satin lining. He blocked our way with his wide stance. "Pssst, wanna buy a—" he hissed, but I held my hands over my younger sister's ears.

"I've got something for you—" he snarled and was about to reveal his you know what but my older sister clamped her hands over our younger sister's eyes. He stomped, thwarted. We could hardly see the

shape of him in the darkness, we had no idea how to locate his vulnerable features in all that swirling fabric, the edges of the apocalypses winking in and out of view confusingly, and our hands were all used up on the little one, besides.

“You fuckers! You apocalyptical—” (or did he say ‘apocalyptic little’? or did he say ‘of all the people will you’? it’s hard to know what comes to me glazed with my preoccupations...) His hands reached down at us from his great height and we all clumped together, trying to block him out with our bodies, knowing we were bound for the interior of his coat unless we could somehow pin down his head or his hands or his—

The Cycle of Life

She really needed some time off work so she took maternity leave, but the baby was so much work it was like she wasn’t getting any time off at all, so she killed the baby (hold on, hold on...) and that gave her time off for grieving, a whole other hell of work plus the guilt, and by the time she had recovered at all she had to go back to work, but pretty soon the future seemed so stupid she started wanting a baby again. When she looked into her options, one that apparently a zillion people had taken and she hadn’t even known about it was a move to the trash-heaps of Navarro. That put things in perspective. No, she thought, my options are way more limited than that, thank the good lord above. She felt her back against the warm wall of her office. She felt her cells battling it out below deck. She ate a stale pastry. She had one more idea. It was like an egg in her brain waiting to go off.

Dream Girl

She was so excited about the present she had decided to get me that she told me what it was going to be. I loved it. It was a great idea for a present and just right for me. It was what I had been dreaming of without even knowing it. But time rolled on and I didn’t get the actual present. Of course, this is all in the past. Now she’s gone. Big surprise. But now I don’t even get the pleasure of the idea of the present anymore, because I was so mad about her not actually getting the present that I forgot what it was going to be. I can joke about the eternal present of

the thought that counts, but what I'm actually trying to give you is an understanding of the stasis of certain forms of pain. It's a matter of eradication.

Time Machine

He arrived at her house on his bicycle, chained it to her porch, buckled his helmet to the rear rack, and knocked. A helmet, seriously, now he has a helmet and it's for a *bicycle*. He hadn't wanted to drive, because he was afraid he might run over something.

She opened the door, wearing, at four in the afternoon, men's flannel pajamas, rolled to the knees and elbows, her hair held back with a pencil, and a second pencil behind her ear, and a third pencil in the pocket of the flannel top. "You," she said, and tilted her head, which made the pencil behind the ear slip, which she caught and held in her teeth like a rose. Instantly, he liked her house. He stood in the doorway, then stepped in as she stepped away and they both stood in the half-moon foyer. He tried to think of why he liked the house and it was the smell. It didn't smell like his house, he realized; what his house smelled like was baby, because of the baby. They had a flirty thing at work. At work she'd said, "come over, I'll show you my sketches." But here she was with the pencils. But she wasn't an artist, she was supposedly a closet writer. But writers did sketches. They even did sketches of figures. Still he held out hope.

"Thank you for this," he said in the blank space that made up the entrance. Nothing had even happened yet and he really meant it, because of the hope.

She helped him take off his windbreaker and left to put it somewhere. He looked around the living room and then sat on the sofa next to a blanket. Everything was so harmless. He went to her fridge and got a soda. Harmless, rooting around her fridge. He sat back on the sofa, pushing the blanket into a lump to the other side. Harmless. She'd come over and pick up the blanket and sit where it had been and lean against the arm of the sofa with her knees up and her feet pointing at him. They'd be like two machine parts at angles on velvet outside of time. Or pencils. The soda was harsh and he remembered wondering as a kid how they could call it a soft drink. I'll have a soft drink, he

imagined saying with tiny “ha-ha-ha” huffs from a scene like this. What’s so funny? A scene from the 50’s in which next she’d appear in something *more* comfortable than men’s pajamas. What happened was he felt self-conscious. Instantly, hope was gone.

That’s when he saw it: as if in place of hope was a structure the size of a voting booth or a port-a-potty, over near the fireplace. The structure was composed of some heavy duty plastic, cylindrical, size Adult, in midnight blue, with blue curtains. He put his soda down on the glass top of the coffee table, which instantly sucked condensation into a ring behind his back as he approached the structure with caution. He poked the curtain. “What’re you doing?” he called, but the curtain sucked up his voice.

He drew the curtain, and he stepped inside. He drew the curtain again and stood in darkness.

The booth, if anyone asked him, he would have to say, in all earnestness, recognized him. In the dark he cycled through his senses: he felt fizzy, as if he’d been lowered into a giant body-temp version of what he’d been drinking. The lack of the smell of baby was overwhelming, and mingled with the lack of the scent of his marriage, and then to top it off the lack of the scent of a woman with pencils in her hair. The inside of his mouth was still sweet. He heard faint static, and then he realized the booth was mic-ed. Little colored lights were waking up all around him, even under his feet. The mic spat and then he heard the woman say through the speaker, as if shockingly near and calling anyway, “In a minute, I’m writing something down before I forget.” In the booth, more and more lights were blinking on and establishing independent rhythms. He could sort of see by them, but all there was to see were the blinking lights, the patterns of blinks and buttons in red, green, and white. *It does know me*, he thought. The booth began to shake a little. He didn’t know what to do. He could hop out or he could blast off, or something else that he couldn’t think of. He was so scared he took his penis out and started fooling around with it. He kept his eyes open to the cacophony of tiny lights. He hoped beyond hope by the time he was done he’d know, by god, what would happen next.

Graph

The difficulty of overcoming the hurdles left some straggling at the edges of the earth, and some leaping over them like spurts of oil from a deep pot of humanity. They'd reached a point and turned suicide. The earth was crowded with suicides, but those who were not offing themselves were mad with self-preservation. Crowds gathered into a crowd, forming a heap in the middle, the crowd climbing itself, rising into a mountain of people refusing to die. From the distance you could see one or another fall as from towers. But they were falling from each other. We have a graph of it.

Jaguar (Not the Car)

I had just seen the jungle for the first time in my rotten life, centuries old ferns everywhere, so moving. When you are in the jungle you have to remember the herds of pigs: *hundreds*, possibly *thousands*, will chase a jaguar up a tree and piss on the tree through the night until the ammonia makes the cat pass out, fall from the tree, and they eat him in a pile of hooves and spots.

As he is disintegrating, these are my old pal Tony's last words of advice to me from his days in Nicaragua: tie your ass to the tree. Then, as we used to say, he was gone.

When the dust cleared there I was, and on the horizon, there's the tree, as if he knew all along. I hadn't seen him since we were young turks. We were letting bygones be gone but I could see certain pains in his eyes. Some left over from me when I left. When the rumbling started we were pretty drunk and we loved the band. Now I eye the tree across the border, in Nicaragua, his past, my future. I'm so wiped out from the whole experience, I don't know what to do in this bald new vista. I wonder if I really have to head out to it, to that one tree I can see, just because it's still there. Then I hear rumbling. Possibly aftershock. I hear the roar of what could be thousands.

What it Was Like Was

Stars fell in unison, and in a mossy grove on the hill, the apocalyptasaurus was having the last sex on earth. I headed to the mobile unit. I hadn't brought any animals because that's how shortsighted I am. Something

will provide, I seemed to be thinking, but who knows anymore, I haven't had to think in so long I don't even know when I'm doing it or not. I drifted away. Unpeopling, repeopling, all in the past with the automatic sprinklers, and soon, the cries of leftover apocalypses were all that remained. Some of the things we knew were true. I'd only wanted to keep the bells ringing.



CAMBRIAN #21 by Jim Zver, paper, pastel, charcoal (32" x 21")



CAMBRIAN #24 by Jim Zver, paper, pastel, India ink (35½" x 27")

GEORGE KALAMARAS

After Broken Talk

The range of greed extends through realms of the gross and the subtle.

Even a desire, of secret scent or mouth, exerts strange rain-sadness, an inexplicable extension of the underarm *I*.

Hidden below the bone, even the postwar writings of André Breton attest to the strength of sparrows, the lust of any periodic table. Takahashi Shinkichi never read them but developed a blueprint of the mind watching the mind, a bird devouring a mirror devouring a worm.

There was a flash like an x-ray of everyone's skeleton at once. It took place not at Nagasaki but at the moment of birth.

It is like leaving the body, entering another, and becoming again a youthful klutz.

Please, if you have the hair extensions, bring them from your rib, attach them now to the zebra's mane and make it a vivacious quarter horse.

We read one another inconvenient snippets from the morning news, cut and pasted them in random order.

After broken talk, I realized you thought the distance between our coffee was inexact, and you thought only this of me: *Socialist and elaborate crow at the coroner of Fairfield and Creighton; an inscription of steroids and a the; touch the heron three times for leniency; a way to sample the water table back safely to both Bangalore and Bhutan.*

DAN RAPHAEL

1/1/11

a new face to the year
same place with new constellations seeing through where the wind
keeps threading its strum
to pull apart, to penetrate gently like roots growing from my feet, not
an infection but an expression,
a creative interaction coz surrendering and resistance are the bread in
this slice of life sandwich,
stained and microscoped, slightly scrambled at the genetic level—lets
do the helix again,
have escalators inside us revisioning the spine, lets pull out the nerves
and go wireless
direct from fingertip to brain, interfering envelopes shimmer like
jellyfish:

if not for wind we'd be skinless and walk differently, the wind moves
the wrong way here,
elevating only parts of the body while shining primary colors like
tattoo needles and dentist drills
emitting molecular feathers gently nudging their way into innerspace,
takeoff to bake-off,
make up to make out, topographical game boards
I rollick across, paths delta diverse, stranded with 7 moons tugging me
unaware of the others,
even on my knees I cant quit dancing

smoke rolls into a chimney and becomes fire, almost a full loaf
of tree love
yeasting in my belly, the logs would rather return their gifts to the soil
but I don't let them,

Raphael/30

I use a moat of concrete to slow the would-be disassemblers of my
imaginary home,
mortgage paid off but the increasing debt of habit in a no interest
world
trying to pull the walls tight as a blanket
while seeing their expanse as all the world I need.

Underwater

“The oxygen around us must be killed”

Rudolph Steiner

we walked places that were underwater several hours later.
other places we could see but never get to, like standing where the
continents moved apart
when a friend and all his family’s stuff went into a truck and vanished

////////

what came first the screw or the screwdriver
cars had been ready for almost a year before the first person got
behind the wheel & drove.
in 2 weeks all the cars had drivers, many of whom left their
homes & families

////////

the problem with great places—like Denali or the Sphinx—is they
don’t move.
seeing isn’t being there. even blind people can be somewhere sensing
more of the coordinates
light doesn’t care bout maps, gets down to shadow & moisture, hunger
& frequency.
too much information and i’m not sure which language is mine

//////////

bread can be crumbs cubes unsliced afire soaked until it forgets
left in the dark for a month and think its just tomorrow.

how many foods have houses been made from
giant zucchini hollowed, hardened & bound into rafts

//////////

those days i had to walk 4 miles every morning to bring myself home
since i wasnt sleeping together

//////////

tomorrow the map has one less column
the skys so close i can read the suns logo, halfway between
egyptian & sanskrit
puffy in places & runny in others—no ones been able to duplicate it.
if they did the logo would burn or mutate whoever touched it
we'd have to send all those logos into space so fast the rockets
couldn't stop

//////////

my parents used to say i wasn't born
but found clinging to the side of an ohio river barge.
i cant swim underwater—when my eyes open so does my mouth

SILVIA CURBELO

Hurricane Watch

Sometime in the night a hole had opened up in the air of the room. It made a small wound at the center, but painless, a palpable lack. She thought it might be a kind of window or a door, but she wasn't certain. What wasn't there beckoned to what was left. Absence became a kind of weather to her. Wind darker than the road. The slowness of the hours was a mirror in which she saw herself. The clocks kept going. Tapwater sitting around in an old glass. Somewhere miles away, thick clouds gathered and stalled. Trees moved the notion around like something broken. She thought she could make a story from the pieces. Something with windmills and numbers. Boredom. Rain.

Small Craft Warnings

When the day slips out of context
When wind shifts in its tracks and waves
carry bits of shimmering green far out to sea
When the sails fold in on themselves

When birds let go of their shadows
When the glass is half full
and wine spills on a lace sleeve

When weeds unlock a hidden garden
When the clouds part and the smoke clears
and the road stretches to its vanishing point
in the pure geometry of a dream

like a story that begins in a house by the sea
and ends anywhere the sky goes

An Interview with Maxine Hong Kingston

Smith: The writers you've referenced in your works and talked about in interviews—Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, the Beats—were all avant-gardists. Do you consider yourself an avant-gardist?

Kingston: Oh yes, of course I do, because I am constantly creating a new language and new forms. The new language has to do with finding translations for Chinese words and ideas. A lot of my work is going from talk story to the written text. How do you transform what is spoken and heard into written narrative? What is the shape of the story? The real lives I want to write about don't necessarily unfold in an orderly manner. They don't fit in the shape of a classical short story or novel. Then there's also the sense of time: linear Western time as opposed to this amazing circular time, or no time, time with incarnations and reincarnations, which is Asian. How do I find a form in which to tell those stories? By inventing new forms and new words.

Smith: Can I extend that question and ask if you think your critics and readers see you as an avant-gardist?

Kingston: I think they do. I've read some criticism that says all ethnic American writers are post-Modernists. What they mean is that we're coming up with stories that differ from the white British and American canon.

Smith: It seems to me that a lot of your work is closer to Modernism than it is to the post-Modern. You have Rilke running through *Tripmaster Monkey*. The circularity of time you talk about is more Modern than post-Modern. It's interesting, because it sounds like the oral tradition is much more complex and experimental than work by traditional American and British writers.

Kingston: The oral tradition is so fluid and flexible. A story comes and then it goes, and when you tell it again, it changes. Here I am trying to take what's oral and evanescent, and capture it in a form that will stay

put, stay forever. So yeah, there's a lot of experimenting in order to figure out how to do that.

Smith: I'd like to ask you about some of the people who have influenced and inspired you. I was thinking about Walt Whitman in "Song of Myself" and the way he slips into various identities. Ultimately the self is a huge collective force rather than a single ego. That seems very close to what you're doing in *I Love a Broad Margin to My Life*.

Kingston: I have myself in there. "I Maxine," I say. Then I segue into Wittman and the I in the poem is Wittman. I dismiss him; I have to go on alone. It's a feat for a writer—whether fiction, non-fiction, or poetry—to inhabit other points of view. I guess it's a feat of empathy. You just have to be able to become other people and characters and make them real. It is even possible to project yourself into omniscience, be the omniscient narrator.

Smith: You mean like the Kuan Yin in *Tripmaster Monkey*?

Kingston: Yes, you can make any god or goddess your omniscient narrator. You can make yourself the omniscient narrator. I just love the ability to flow in and out of all kinds of characters, including omniscient narrators, animals, bugs...

Smith: I know you're particularly fond of William Carlos Williams and *In the American Grain*. What was it about that book that appealed to you so much?

Kingston: He's able to look at American history and not have the same story that's in history books. He is able to see the myth that is running through these lives. He sees the spirit of a people and writes the stories on a mythic level. I wanted that ability too. The Library of Congress classified *China Men* as California history. They called it a history book. But I meant to tell the story the way Williams told it: people living out enormous myths—human migrations, sacred journeys, mythically heroic lives. Of course, at the same time they have their petty, everyday individual lives. I wanted to tell stories that included all of that.

Smith: Were you irked that the Library of Congress called it a history book?

Kingston: No, it's ok, because I would be really irked if my books were all classified in the same category: Asian-American ethnic. But my books have been in so many categories. I even saw them in a Black Studies course. They've been classified as anthropology, feminist, fiction, non-fiction. The same book! The latest paperback edition of *The Woman Warrior* says National Book Critics Circle Award for non-fiction on the front and the back cover says "Fiction/Literature."

Smith: Well, I always thought it was fiction.

Kingston: It's ok. When it's classified as so many categories, then in a way it's not classified at all.

Smith: Maybe that's the highest compliment, that they don't know how to categorize you. Let's go back to Williams. What about *Paterson*? "To make a start,/ out of particulars/ and make them general, rolling/ up the sum..." He pulls together all the voices in order to find the myth at the center. That sounds a lot like your methodology in *Broad Margin*. Did *Paterson* move you as much as *In the American Grain*?

Kingston: *In the American Grain* moved me more. He saw the big picture. I wasn't working with the *Paterson* methodology, finding many voices and seeing what they add up to. I found individual characters and voices, then I wanted to see if I could place these persons in the myth they were living out. But I was interested in *Paterson* too, because it was a place. Not a big place, sort of a humble one. My places are humble too; I wanted to show that Stockton is the center of the universe, or that Sun Woi is the center of the universe. I'm working with places and even a dialect that are very small. No one has heard of Kwoojeng village. Our dialect is not even an official dialect.

Smith: Say Yup?

Kingston: Yes, it's a language for speaking, not writing. But the people I want to write about live their lives with those languages in those small places. So it's my task to find the right English words and the largeness of story in order to tell these lives. If you see what is really going on with these people, they have big lives. And they went on huge journeys.

Smith: You're raising them to a mythic level, which is the opposite of small. I think Williams does that in *Paterson*, too. It's bigger than the city

of Paterson. He was often accused of being a regional poet, which was crazy, because he had a huge vision of who we are as a country and a people.

Kingston: What an impossible task! That has gone through my mind and I think it was in Williams' mind too. How am I going to tell Paterson? I'm going to write about every single person in it. I've thought that way too, especially when I'm trying to draw a crowd scene. I want to draw every single person, but that's impossible. So I have to find a way to tell the big story with just a few people.

Smith: Now that you mention it, *Broad Margin* has more small characters than anything you've ever written: a cast of hundreds. Sometimes they just appear briefly, but they're very precisely drawn. Like the woman who wants to marry Wittman. She doesn't last long, but she's so powerfully drawn she has a real presence. There are so many of those kinds of characters, like the Filipina women having their Sunday day off in Hong Kong. There are crowd scenes where each figure has a personality.

Kingston: I'm really glad you appreciate that. I was thinking that it's taken me over a decade to write each book, and fourteen years for *The Fifth Book of Peace*. I'm getting older and there just isn't enough time, so I've got to write in a shorter, condensed form. I could do poetry. Now I'm not going to do whole portraits and make big scenes. I want to write each character so I get to the essence very quickly. That's one reason for writing this way in *Broad Margin*. The other is that each of my books follows from the last one, and there are characters that appear in my first book, *The Woman Warrior*, and reappear in *China Men*, then disappear and later come back. So now, with this seventh book, some of the characters have already been fully developed. A lot of the readers have followed them through the previous books. If they haven't, they can always go back and look it up. Now I just tell the latest things that have happened to these characters. I can finish stories that I started in the first book. Like my aunt who drowns herself in the well. In *Broad Margin*, many years later, there is a ceremony that resolves what happened. So I don't believe I need to tell the beginning of the story; it's already done. I just do the ending and hope there will be resonances and reverberations, depths that will be coming up in the short lines I write now.

Smith: There's a magical circularity in all this, an organic shape, so everything you add to it doesn't have to start from scratch. In fact, your whole corpus is a kind of big work.

Kingston: I'm really fortunate to have lived and written for this long, so that now I can look at my work as a whole. It's almost like you could take all of it and put it between two book covers.

Smith: Like Shakespeare's *Folio*?

Kingston: I never felt that any of the books were finished. I always thought there was more to say. Looking at "Song of Myself," I think of the many times Whitman went back and added and changed things.

Smith: By the end of his life, *Leaves of Grass* went from a small volume to a huge book.

Kingston: So many editions and each one different. And I think, yeah, this is what I'm doing too. If I forget something in one book, then I can bring it up in another. For a while I thought, big mistakes! I forgot to say that Fa Mu Lan was a weaver. How could I forget that? It was really important: being a weaver is mythic. So five books later, I managed to squeeze it in.

Smith: Can I ask you about Gertrude Stein? Although your affinity for Whitman and Williams was clear to me, it was less clear about Stein. One of the chapters in *China Men* is entitled "The Making of More Americans," an allusion to Stein's *The Making of Americans*. What was it in that book that attracted you?

Kingston: Her experimentation with the process of writing. That book is like a laboratory of language. In *The Making of Americans*, she gives you a sentence, then switches a couple of words around in the second sentence, and in the third maybe she will add another word. Just as I added another word: "The Making of *More* Americans." She does that sentence by sentence, then four hundred pages later we have a complete work that shows how you make Americans. These people come in with a foreign language, they learn another word, then another, experiment, and you end up with an American language. I'm working with people who come from an even more foreign language than the German she

was working with—Chinese. We're going to tell the story of these people in as American way as possible, which means getting Chinese tones and cadences into the language. I use phoneticized Chinese words, especially in my later work. Maybe I'll have a character use Chinese words and I won't translate them right away. Then I use them again, in another context. The meaning becomes a little clearer. The meaning becomes even clearer when I use the words again. Somewhere in there I might translate them or simply imply a meaning. By the end of the story the reader has learned new words. I've taught them, maybe in an insidious way.

Smith: In a Socratic way, by pulling understanding out of them.

Kingston: Yes, and I have incorporated my vocabulary into the new American language that I am inventing. You know, people who have read *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* often think that I've put a lot of Chinese words in those books, and that they've learned them. But that's not so. I just suggest the words or play on them. By the time I get to *Tripmaster Monkey*, which is a very American book with a lot of slang, I actually do put Chinese words in there. But people don't see it that way. They just see a very hip, American kind of book. I've insinuated my way of thinking into the readers' minds.

Smith: Hey, there are a lot of Chinese and Chinese-American hipsters! You know, I was thinking of Pound in *The Cantos* writing Chinese characters and Greek, never translating anything. It seems crazy, but he had a belief in the collective unconscious, trusting that we all have access to everything, that it will just sink into our heads.

Kingston: Here's an odd thing. In my last book I actually put in a glossary. I always made the decision that there were to be no footnotes, especially with *China Men*. Everything was to go into the narrative. But I loved doing the glossary in this last one, because this is the new American language, incorporating languages from all over the world.

Smith: There's Hawaiian in there too.

Kingston: All kinds of strange languages. One reason I did it was that it freed me from having to explain anything in poetry. I made the glossary entertaining enough that you can read it on its own.

Smith: A poem in itself?

Kingston: I hope so.

Smith: I wanted to talk about Virginia Woolf a little bit. I know your favorite Woolf novel is *Orlando*. What was the appeal of that book?

Kingston: Oh my. Wow, look what she's doing. She can make a human being live for four hundred years! So it's perfectly all right for me to make my grandfathers live to one hundred so they can participate in a century of history. A person can be a man and then a woman. So many of my characters are transsexual, transvestites, or they have both yin and yang. And it takes Woolf only one paragraph to tell the whole cultural history of gypsies. I always wanted to tell thousands of years of Chinese history in one paragraph. Not wanting to do a lot of expository writing, I just copied the way she did it. Now we're going from the 19th century into the 20th. Bong! Bong! And there it is, this wonderful eclipse of the moon. All these states of mind and consciousness.

Smith: She was a mythmaker too, a proto-magic realist long before Garcia Marquez became part of our consciousness as writers.

Kingston: Yeah.

Smith: I know that you and I and many of our generation had great admiration for the Beats. They were influential, especially in our young lives. But Wittman Ah Sing in *Tripmaster Monkey*, while admiring them, had great ambivalence too. What is your take on Kerouac and the Beats?

Kingston: I admire them tremendously for their rhythms of life, their ability to gather a community of artists and writers, but then my other take is that community of writers would not include me. Kerouac talks about the "twinkling chinaman" and Philip Whalen has his "Jap Iris." That just instantly throws me out of their brotherhood.

Smith: It was a brotherhood. There weren't many women in the movement.

Kingston: So even if I were a white woman, I'd still be thrown out. But *On the Road* has an amazing flow. Gary Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers without End*. The scrollwork he was doing: I want to do that. That's the kind of flow I want in my books. It was also very interesting to me how Buddhism worked in their minds, the influence of all that Eastern

mysticism in their American writing. But it also showed me what not to do. Not just what not to do, but how much more needs to be done.

Smith: The fluidity of identity in *Broad Margin* struck me. It seemed that all the characters were an extension of your own voice. Occasionally the narrative voice says “I Maxine,” I believe for the first time in your work. But also Wittman, Taña, and even the magician son Mario, who like a poet “gives to airy nothings a local habitation and a name.” Then he reverses the process by climbing the rope and disappearing. One voice slips into another, many times without the reader noticing the transition. Of course, you’ve done that from the beginning, even in your first book, *The Woman Warrior*. Does this sense of fluidity correlate to a long-held philosophical belief or is it your intuitive sense of reality?

Kingston: It’s my intuition, which has become my belief as well. It’s my hope that we all connect with one another, touch one another, and influence one another. That we live our lives together, have lives in common. Everyone I meet and everyone I read become part of me. And I think I become part of everyone I meet. There was a time in writing the bigger books, especially *The Fifth Book of Peace*, when I began to see that each of us has certain themes we carry out in our lives. We all have a certain karma. We live our lives working it out, or maybe unconsciously not working it out. We may never work it out. We could die before we solve or make more of those ideas we’re living through. But then another person, another character, can come along and resolve those same questions. Specifically, I was writing about all these war veterans. There could be someone who goes to war, commits terrible atrocities, and never faces it, is never sorry. Maybe he kills himself. But then here’s another character who comes along, and that person also goes to war and commits terrible atrocities, but that person gets enlightened and then suffers terribly with guilt, and tries to figure out a way to save himself. Or to save humanity. Or think about what to do next. So that person becomes a member of Doctors Without Borders. He goes in and saves a whole bunch of lives. So here’s a character finishing the story in a different way. I found that I don’t have to have the same character go through the whole thing. You could have a marriage that has a certain horribleness: the people torture each other, get a divorce, or whatever.

But then I can write about another couple and they have a different outcome. In a way we are all living through the same soap operas; it's the same universal person going through all the same stories.

Smith: Getting new chances until they get it right?

Kingston: Yeah, and this gives me a chance to write about a whole bunch of characters.

Smith: Your vision of the illusory nature of the world and its apparent divisions (race, gender, time, space) runs through all your books. It seems to imply a mystical unitary vision. What is the basis of that? Did it develop with your Buddhist practice, or Taoism, or animism, where the earth itself has a consciousness? It seems that there are a lot of sources that are feeding into this big vision you have.

Kingston: When I'm writing, I'm just thinking and noticing the world. When I'm writing, it's a very difficult task for me to write it real, to make a character real. Their clothes have to be real. Their face and personality, their voice. The furniture has to be real, the trees, ocean, railroad. I've got to write a real railroad. The work it takes me to write something real makes me realize what an illusion it all is. It's much, much later, after I've done a lot of writing and living, that I start to notice the Buddhists talking about "reality" being an illusion. Your question reminds me of when my father was reading some of my work in Chinese translation. "What you're saying about the dragon, how the dragon is one and the dragon is many, the dragon flows in the clouds and in the mist, and in the sap of trees. How do you know that? Where did you get all that?" I tried to answer him, saying "Well, isn't that just so?" I thought maybe I got it from him. "Didn't I hear you and Mom talk like that?"

Smith: He was surprised that you had this huge poetic mystical vision?

Kingston: Yeah. "What is that? Where did you get that?"

Smith: You're constantly talking about the yin and yang duality as well. And Taoism is connected to a number of your characters.

Kingston: For me the words "yin" and "yang" seem like a shortcut. I'm not satisfied with using those words.

Smith: It's too easy?

Kingston: Yeah, it's too easy. On the other hand all my life my mother would say "Oh, the yin winds are blowing. The yang winds are blowing through you." "Yin" and "yang" were always there, but I try not to allow myself those words.

Smith: Are you talking about the pop version of Taoism, or Buddhism for that matter, or feng shui? Although I do remember you saying that people should go through the front door of the house, not the garage door. That's bad feng shui.

Kingston: That's right, because the garage door is the back end. That's where you keep your mess. Decorate the front door in red and you'll be prosperous.

Smith: So you bless yourself when you enter through a red door?

Kingston: You talk about the spiritual life and illusion. The way I see *Broad Margin* is that it is the book of what they used to call "ancestor worship." I don't think anyone has ever done this before. At least I've never read it. No one has ever taken so-called ancestor worship seriously. So I show what it means to know where one comes from. "Why am I here? Who are the people who came before me? Where am I going?" When you know the whole lineage of your people, and this includes the lineage of your teachers and the blood lineage of all the ancestors, then you also know history. In my case, Chinese history, American history. Then you really do place yourself in your country, and on the planet, and in time. Then you're not lost. You notice how much of American literature has to do with being lost.

Smith: Or being alienated.

Kingston: Yeah, and this way you are not lost. It's a huge payoff. In *Broad Margin* I become a queen. It's like *Alice in Wonderland*, where she gets to the end of the chess board and is crowned queen. This is what happens when you find your lineage: you know what karma has been passed on. And not only fate and curses and so on, but responsibility. Here's your responsibility for history: to your family and to humanity. And I show the rituals connected with this understanding of the ancestors. I know where the incinerators are, so you can send poems to the dead, and that includes anyone's ancestors. As my mother said, even haoles can send

letters to the dead. It's an amazing connection. You know, I go to China, which is really a foreign country for me, and when I get there the first thing my cousins do is put out the incense and incense burner. And there's the altar. It was exciting, because the Cultural Revolution has come and gone, and the altars are back. Bow to your grandmother, grandfather. And I know how to do it! There I am, connected to another country and all those people. Connected, of course, to my lineage, actually bowing to those ancestors. In *Broad Margin* I show the ceremonies, including the different kinds of kung fu and tai chi, how you do them, how any of us can make those connections. And it's not just superstition. You can do it rationally: just read the history of your people.

Smith: It sounds like you're writing a religious text, your version of a religion anyone can participate in. It isn't exclusive to Chinese-Americans or any particular group.

Kingston: From my earliest memories there have always been these altars and incense and ceremonies and special food. Joong I like especially, because joong connected me to Vietnam. Mooncakes and solstice rituals. My mother and father never explained any of this. They'd take you through it, but did not explain it. By writing *Broad Margin* I'm explaining it to myself. I see what all the elements are. From my reading and participation in different rites, I can see Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, animism. I was talking to some people in Hong Kong and they just call it the Chinese religion. So we're not going to call it "ancestor worship" anymore. It's the "Chinese religion." I think that's so funny, because when people ask you what your religion is, you say "Chinese." I think it's really amazing, because during the Cultural Revolution they were just destroying everything. Now that religion is back, it's surprising how much does remain. But you also hear from people how much has been lost.

Smith: Why did you call *To Be the Poet* your first book of poems when every book you've written has gorgeous stand-alone prose poems embedded in it? Clearly people who say you came to poetry late in your career are wrong.

Kingston: They're really wrong. Poetry is what I began with. I was a poet in my previous incarnations and I was born talking as a poet. Then I made this detour into prose. I put things into poetic lines, but it was taking up too much space, so I ran it all together into paragraphs. My father was a poet and my mother talked story, but my relatives always respected my father the poet more than they respected my mother the talker. There was always an aspiration toward perfection, and the poet is perfect. I was thinking of "To be or not to be" at the same time that I was looking at the Chinese genre of the four word poem, and it just seemed so nice to say "To be the poet." And I was thinking of the decade it takes me to write a novel and that poets have more fun. It's easy to be a poet. There's a muse that graces poets, so why don't I just put myself in a receptive position and see whether the muse comes or not? To not work at it is taking a big risk, to not slave and labor. Let's just see if I am gifted with poetry: if it comes it comes and if it doesn't it doesn't. So I let myself be free of forcing things or laboring. I held a basket in the air and gifts came.

Smith: You could do a volume of prose poems excerpted from lyrical passages in your earlier books, even before you did *To Be the Poet*. I would argue that you were already there before you made the conscious choice to go forward as a poet.

Kingston: I'm not sure that I think of my books as long prose poems.

Smith: Not the entire books, just those wonderful lyrical passages. They work just exactly like prose poems.

Kingston: Well, I was honored that *Poetry Flash* reviewed my prose, and I was on their cover twice. I hadn't said anything about being a poet. So there was something happening.

Smith: They saw it too.

Kingston: Yes, they saw it. Fred Marchant and Jean Valentine were just here and we were having a really interesting discussion. They used the phrase "the bardic poet." And they said the bardic poet was different from the oracular poet. I tried to get them to give me a definition of "bardic." They kept giving me examples but no definition. So I went to the dictionary and it said "bardic" and "lyric" went together. When

I did a reading with James Ragan, I thought he was really lyrical. He's not reading his poems, he's singing them. So I said to Fred, isn't James a bardic poet? He said, "No, he's not bardic." Then he said, "You're bardic." I don't get that at all, because I don't see myself as being lyric. I mean, there are certain passages that are lyric, but I know there are others when I'm being anti-lyric.

Smith: What makes those earlier books so brilliant is that they can go from this incredible, mind-blowing lyricism to ashcan realism. As John Leonard said in his review of *The Woman Warrior*, "It is a poem made into a sword." He saw it too. He recognized the power of the lyrical, but also saw that it was tough and aggressive at the same time.

Kingston: My favorite line from the John Leonard review was that the book "burns the fat right out of the brain."

Smith: Back when *To Be the Poet* came out, you put off a number of poets when you said you liked poetry because it was faster to write. That reminded me of William Stafford. When he would do a university reading, in the midst of creative writing teachers and students, he had the diabolical trick of saying "Oh, writing poetry is easy." You could see all the people shaking their heads, saying "No, no, no! It's not easy. You have to labor forever at it!" I wondered if there was a little provocateur in you when you said those things.

Kingston: Okay, my first experience of being a poet is my mother hanging me out the window and telling me, "Sing to your grandfathers! Tell them a poem! Tease them and make them laugh." This is my charge from my mother. And so I am hanging out the window, I am singing to them, I am making them laugh. They're laughing and applauding. I am having fun! Don't make me say I'm trying to be funny.

Smith: You mean being a provocateur?

Kingston: Yeah. Those people don't get it. And here's something they really don't get on many levels. We can be tragic and we can confess terrible things, but come on now, didn't you ever have any fun? How about some joy and exultation? We can do that too. There are actually some poets who have said to me, "What about the tragic?" Come on now, what about the funny? I'm being Chinese; Chinese laugh when we're telling awfulness.

Smith: The whole idea of lyricism is flight, rather than burying yourself in a tomb.

Kingston: That's right. You can fly. We can have delight. I have a line in *Broad Margin*, the whole line is: "joy, beauty, and delight." We do take responsibility for the ugly and the horrible, but we also have joy, beauty, and delight.

Smith: In *Broad Margin* you say your perfect reader would be someone who already understood the Zen vision of unity. Is it possible to turn an imperfect reader, who doesn't understand, into a perfect reader?

Kingston: No. In the Chinese myth of the perfect reader, that perfect reader is really rare. What they're saying is that your perfect reader may come in a thousand years. In my writing one of the things that I aim for is the best seller list, and that means a whole lot of readers. They're not perfect, but each one gets educated as he or she reads the book. As I said earlier, you can learn a new word. Then you can learn another new word. Maybe by the end of the book you get closer to being my perfect reader. I'm really happy that so many people have told me they reread this book or that book. Or they tell me they've read one of my books many times, and they get so much satisfaction each time, that they learn new things in the second reading and a whole lot more at a later reading. That's true when they themselves have gotten older and have had more experiences. The reader grows and I grow too. I grow from my early books to my later books. Yeah, we all become perfecter and perfecter.

Smith: Final question. You have created an impressive body of work in your seven books, but at the end of *Broad Margin* you declare that it is your last book. So now you can look back and make the big assessments. A theme running through all of your work is the power of writing to change the world. How has your work changed the world?

Kingston: I feel that I've changed the American language. I have contributed to it. I've changed people. I think it was after *Tripmaster Monkey* that I began meeting veterans and soldiers who said how much my work meant to them, and that they wanted writing lessons. They had the idea of having workshops. That idea came from readers who

wanted to learn, I think, how to do this writing for themselves. So I gathered people into workshops and many of them learned to write and got their work published. And in my teaching career, so many students have published and learned this artist's life for themselves. I see myself changing things in that way. Of course, there's also political activism. I have always hoped I could change things that way. The Code Pink demonstration at the White House was an attempt to prevent "Shock and Awe," but twelve days later we learned that we did not prevent it. We used the best art we could—there were artists, dancers, painters, street theater people, drummers—and we did not prevent the war. So then you think, what efficacy does art have in the real world? I wrote the following lines as an answer to "Can I change the world?" This is just in parentheses, because it's a hope. I'm not absolutely sure that this even works.

*An act
of love I do this morning saves a life
on a far future battlefield. And the surprising
love I feel that saves my life comes from a person whose soul, somehow
corresponding with my soul, doing me a good deed 1000
years ago.*

So yeah, maybe we change the world, but we don't do it really fast and we don't see the results right away. The artist and the peace worker, we work for the long term.

WILLIAM L. FOX

from *Western Australia*

Pilbara

for Loreen Sampson

1.

from between the

rocks the old

rocks old water

the old iron

plates of old

iron rock and

water under the

red sand

on the way to

the sea the

fresh desert

water between

the iron rocks.

2.

the iron rocks

the old iron

rocks on their

way to the sea

the long red

train the old

red rocks on the

iron on its

way to the sea

the water is

flowing the rocks

are flowing the

country is

Fox/52

leaving its

red roots

carried away.

3.

for Mandy Martin

on the red

clay pan the

leather hard

cracked clay

a family string

of camels

eight camels

the light camels

on dark ground

the long family

of camels lying

on the dark ground

shot on the red

ground in a

line the dead

camels the

blood cracked

the tracks of two

dingoes baked

into the hard

red clay.

4.

for Tim Acker

walking down

the hot road

two brass cartridges

and to one side

the crows

to one side the

two dead camels

and the black crows

to one side the

camels and the

two dingoes one

dark one light

circle the

camels the dingoes

circle and walk

down the road the

man and two

dingoes walking

toward water.

5.

for Shane

upside down

the rocks and

their figures

the dark rocks

the light figures

the old old

figures and the

dark dark rocks

upside down behind

the fence

the chain link

fence the figures

in chains and

upside down

in time in

the cemetery

Fox/56

the moon rising

over dark red

rocks the full

light on time

the two dingoes

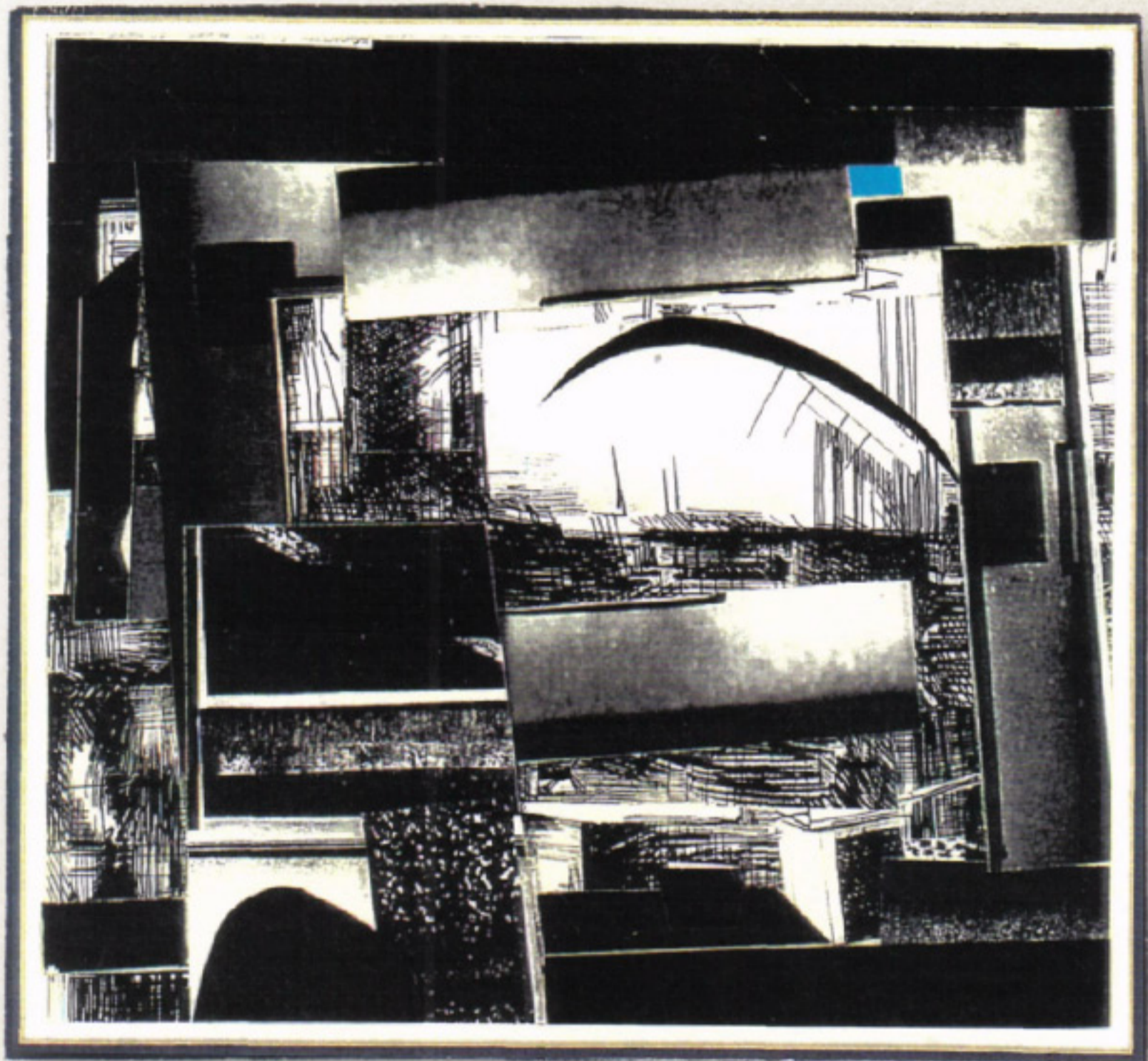
upside down behind

the fence.

TIMOTHY LIU & HANSA BERGWALL

from The Thames & Hudson Project

A swing set in a refuge for broken logic, two boys going nowhere.
No world like theirs, they are each other's. Past curfew, the daisy
is the sun's eye is the sigh falling into earth. Teach us how to
surrender, how to melt into god's lap, a moon waxing on the horizon
where promises made to the bald daisy are not what is sucked
in the night, spat out—the alkaline unborn real coagulating in the air,
crusting on the restroom floor of the 19th century—everyone on
their knees prayerful enough where Whitmanic yawps hog-tie wives
bent on old stories and strips of whalebone corsets, Little Women
no match for Moby Dick—its gold enameled pages wet with
bedizened daisy dew, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir falling out
to She Loves Me She Loves Me Not as Transcendentalists belt out
another Bollywood show tune—Gandhi, MLK, and Thoreau skinny
dipping in a synchronized swimming number—two boys in love
on a swing set, stripping under moonlight outside the mental ward.



PORT CITY



PORT WITH MOONS

SESSHU FOSTER

Time Studies #17

If itself is a calipers not understood like the marigolds by a man with
the pistol banging at the door.

Catachresis is at once nettles and dandelion in a set of hex wrenches
faithful to many children at hand.

Lissome prepositions are needle-nose pliers of Spanish broom and
yucca mistaken by cops blocking off the street.

The reddened subjunctive is a ball peen hammer on the tin of
peppercorns unnoticed by the sheriff dept. SWAT team.

The U.S. attorney general himself overlooked from the start
participles open in a socket extension of flores de calabasa.

And will become a phillips screwdriver of persimmon and fig for
neighbors frightened awake at 4:40 AM.

Time Studies #19

Because of the fennel or the C-clamp, it was a gay pride parade or a high school reunion, because of the investors or the city councilman who was a crack addict, or it was band members meeting at the bar or small bizness people trying to jump the bandwagon, or it was an incisor or padron peppers, because of trash trucks full of dead animals or trash bags, it was intestinal coliform bacteria or scissors, because of blackberry vines or a claw hammer

Time Studies #22

Angel of Headache, go ahead, stop plinking at me with .22 long rifles
in the blood back of my head please

Angel of Parking, I apologize for invoking your name, gratitude
neverending for specific space in a 4 D world

Angel of Dimes, it's been too long since I tasted you on my tongue,
salty sand on the shore of breath

Angel of Summer, you may've done with me, 3 chunks of granite one
atop the other, I'm still on the trail

Angel of Ferment, like the rest, sorry to adumbrate false names, I
appreciate all the sour, the yeast, the bacterial curl

Angel of Europe, uplifting us with fountains of blood & language,
what about the roadkill, the coyotl, the red tail, the barn owl, the
raccoon—I'm just saying

Angel of Paper, go ahead, you first

DOREN ROBBINS

Twin Extras

Stream #1

You're comparing semi-identical twins, the lesser halves, those two, a fish tooth and a broken boot, a tangerine to a pickle-squat. They've known each other, what, thirty years? I'm tired of those freaks. They're not as important as they think. It's been a week for me—do I miss her lips or what? A week used to mean nothing. Now there's worse. I felt a murmur in my right nut, the erection nerve developed a twitch, it felt like a backward twitch. Can something twitch in reverse? Then I ripened again, that was the dental hygienist I met buying bear claws at Dupar's Bakery when Dupar's had a bakery when Dupar's was still Dupar's. Kooky anything goes, that was her all right. She dumped you after two weeks, he said, don't you ever look at yourself? And she had a pelt, red-blondé, whoever saw anything like it? Forget her, forget her. I never tasted anything like it, I need a little more of that chili sauce on my rice, I can't believe the miso garlic agave colt's foot semi-sweet basil cilantro cashew red chili lime part. When I read the Kafka book he lent me I felt like I was dreaming when I was digging a posthole. Kafka, Kafka, one thing I'm tellin' you—he couldn't stop his complexes from judging him, he said. That's not so easy to do, or not to do, I said—never mind him, I'll make stranger more literary fish to fry now. From this window booth there's an indigo rhododendron twilight cloud powder between those apricot branches and the shadow contrast on the braided cord bark ridges. What's the language here? Don't be so flattering to the outer premises, he said. Can you wish someone on someone else? And what shape would that promotional copy ever come in? I was saying the tendonitis in my right shoulder is so bad he's not always the one I'm trying to escape. Anyway, I wouldn't answer the phone because of the fork in my shoulder—or was it because I couldn't drop back into the

hole, the smoke alarm battery clicking, headache all the way into the neck, migraine geometric blindness aura in the left eye—the blues singer put it right, “I hope I’m goin’ t’ heaven so I won’t have to see yoh face again.” Who was he looking at? Where was he really going to be when he got there? And why was he so sure?

Stream #2

He had a tyrant-pathology saga of inheritance in the form of anyone who has read it knows Tennessee Williams’ play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is not the Elizabeth Taylor Maggie the Cat movie version anti-memorabilia impression of the frustrating and compassionate (when she has no other recourse) nymphomaniac, but a malignant favoritism power struggle cancerous dissembling father giant juggling his apportioned love, and still the favorite child starves panting for the manipulative whim, his aggravated affection impregnating Maggie the Cat aligning himself-herself closer to the father as he staves off facing the starved man wearing the suit of the favorite son.

I had that recurring dream again. I can’t stop my mind. I had that union organizer Death Squad Salvadoran police cut off his head doing soccer moves with the head the eyes are missing, dream.

Then that splinter son of a bitch complaining about not getting it out all the way standing in line in the hardware store last week, dream—jeezus vulgaritis, the worst burned itch rubbed till the chunk of it fell. Lucky always lucky but with the dry-paint peel shaving stuck under his thumbnail he got a frigging mole from that infection—a mole under your nail, who ever got such a problem like that dream?

Stream #3

One thing, he wrote that Putt fell in love when he was already in love. It’s exhausting, it’s the destruction of the individual, it’s the Monkey Disease. I don’t mean the sex only. I mean greed. It’s unanswerable, you’re in quicksand, and you’re going up.

Putt fell in love when he was already in love but he hardly touched a thigh compared to a thousand thighs you'd think he touched. And what if you touch a few thighs, maybe 89, as much as you would've touched a few thousand and one thighs in the same amount of years?

I miss mine now, I'm telling you, you can be so filled up with cum that you can't cum, hard as you try, hard as you are, happy as you can be, hard as a hard hat, you can be so into fucking you're dreaming you're fucking, not one recto-splinter in sight, he said. Did you say "fucking so deep you dream you're fucking at the same time"? That's some shtupitizational fuckarama, that's like twice at once fucking, shtupted and shtupitized. This I have experienced three times. You mean—with the mad woman? He said. No, I said, with the Vegan Buddhist baker at the Astrology for Shamanic Research Retreat.

That's it for me. How long have they been brothers? Don't mention nothing. I'm stopping right there. I can't sleep the last few weeks. I thought it was the new Gingko caffeine pseudo-neuro-enzyme-methadrek-Kola-nut herb mixture I was taking for memory. I'm sitting there, King Shlimielivitch, someone over-dosing on herbs supposed to improve his memory—of what, of what? I remember clattering, but I was opposed to it. What I need is to be around nothing but plants. I need a dream vision of re-estimation of the nine year nap as a character carrying himself as though he had more guts, actually survived the journey that dumped him in a remote wooded part and stop chopping, he hadn't survived anything, surviving is abstraction, surviving is inflated modesty, fortuitous caprice, and the other caprice, the remote part somewhere that left him agoraphobic, the trip that redumped him, half his head clear, the half he misjudged more than he should have, a character who in part survived his realizations.

Not everybody's interpretation. Not everybody's balance.

JACK RIDL

After Midnight: Insomnia's Solace

What are you doing among the dead? Playing
cards, slipping an ace up your sleeve?

Angels in the woodshop
make footstools, bulldog
doorstops, and toy outhouses
that explode when you open the door.

This is no place for Renoir. Hopper would have painted the neighbor
on the porch.

Frida, you would be my friend. You would
have slept on the couch.

Row, row, row, row, row, row, row, row
your own boat.

I am thinking of all the stones in the world.

“Alone” is an oxymoron.
How anonymously absurd.

In this hour, there are no hours: the beech tree
outside the window, the deer asleep
on the cold grass, a solar
system, a star.

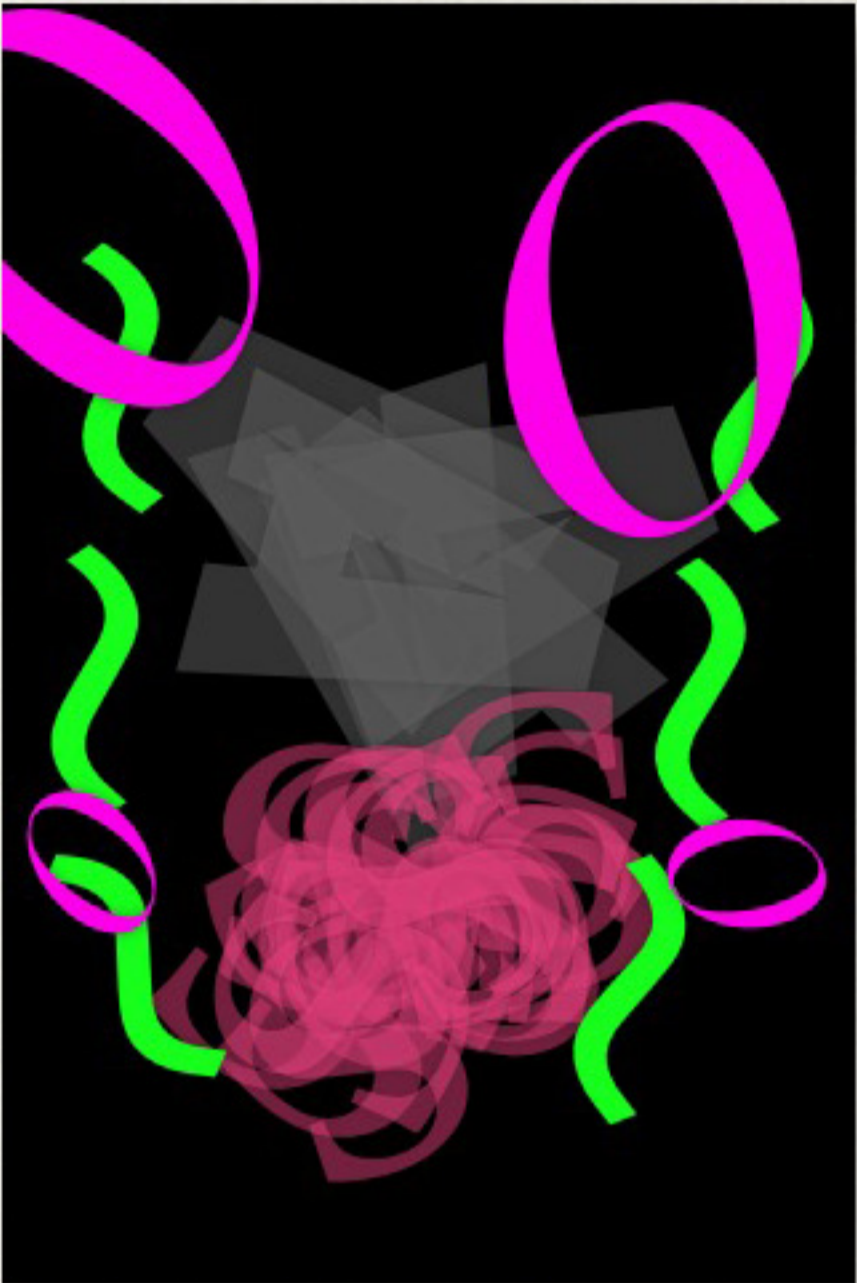
And the books, Mahler's Fourth, a daughter walking in the garden,
a kingfisher and the turkeys high in the winter branches over the river.

JEFF HARRISON

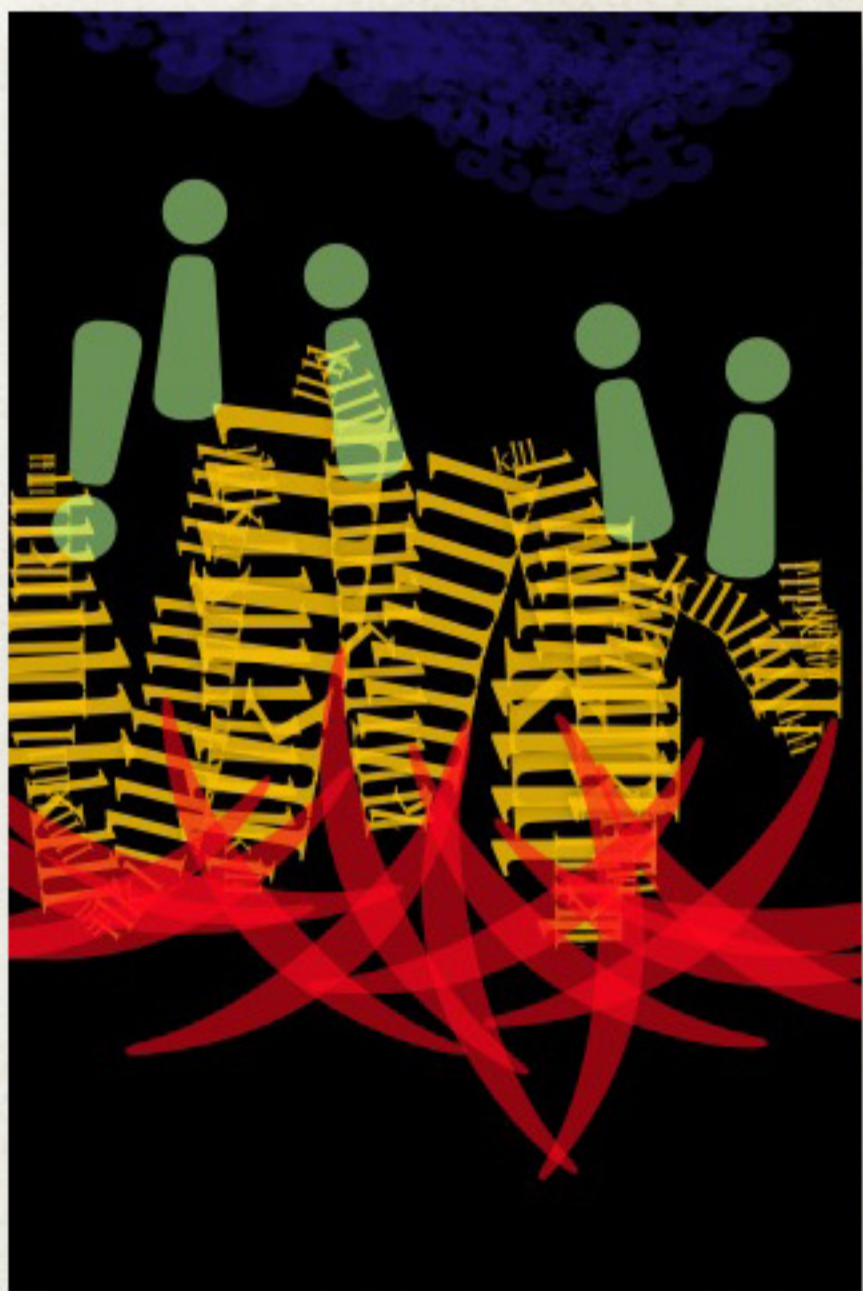
The Peace of Bucyrus

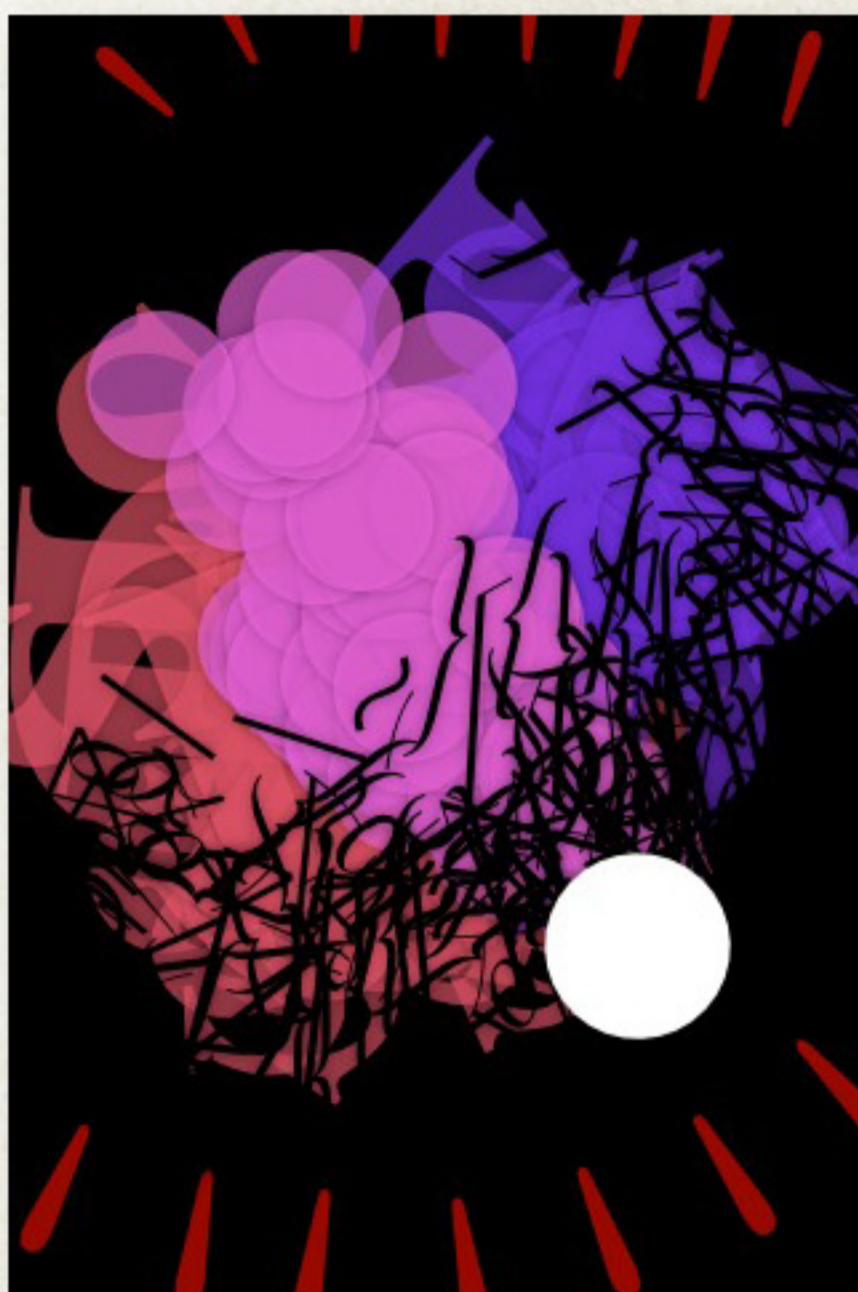
elasticity is closely allied with porridge
exasperation has been called, in another article, orange
the Poland of success brings her back thru mourning
geometry, even at maximum speed, is hardly pouring,
“Lits et Ratures” facsimile categorically royal purple
dialogue is hard to refute, especially if it’s hurtful
the revolution, yes, but to properly fit it wd take a month
sniveling to paraphrase what Virginia boils to a hunch
the peace of Bucyrus eventually mastered the hereditary loom antler
a drizzling decision is more dangerous than a maladroit panther

FOUR BY NICO VASSILAKIS









EDWARD SMALLFIELD

spring

you can feel it melting &/or flowing through. let it. a broken one. rusty. salted. buttered. taste it. mingled herbs. mingled earths. mint, rosemary, lilac. a little lavender stitched at the edges. clearly a translation. a bad one. “he can’t order a cup of coffee in the language.” a red flag. no one stops. the blind momentum of it breaks everything. a new car vibrates yellowly. a name brand. a wet kiss, awkward, mistaken. an adolescent is learning how to do it. sticky. sticky before. sticky after. nothing to wash with. endless sentence that flows too fast & won’t stick, a clumsy fluency, already gone.

summer

a small stone of impossible density. almost unliftable. the color of an egg, & also that shape, but rusty too, because this stone can rust. therefore scarred. & it tastes of rust, an old sea, the dirty Mediterranean in sweaty August. & it tastes of peaches, of twilight, *atardecer* in Barcelona, *crepuscule du soir* in Montmartre. the scent of a woman’s body after sex. of jasmine in a garden behind a wall in Oaxaca. sometimes a dry, scaly texture, a long snake’s slow unwinding, & also that impossible silk, a woman’s skin. & it has a music in it, a fast tune played much too slowly, with half the notes erased. it makes you sweat.

autumn

bright orange beneath rough rind. You have to bite through it to taste the bitterness underneath. seductive, addictive, it explodes in your mouth like a sentence. something has happened there. a residue. unseen. perhaps a scar. now a scent of ash. something is burning somewhere. voices overheard in the next room: "it can't hurt to let yourself feel what you're feeling." "oh yes it can." sounds of love making. fucking. above. below. "caballero solo." a few words scribbled in a notebook. startled letters. at first it seems light. a disappearance. then you realize that it is falling, not rising, falling through you so slowly & pulling you gently after it. you succumb. the texture of the very pages of a very old book. be tender. be gentle. "mine has an orange bed in it." an empty cabinet. smoke. what you didn't realize is that everything is made of glass. transparent. a Japanese red. a Chinese red. invisible palimpsest.

winter

dry inside. "a plan for escape." scratchy. a rash underneath her underwear when she takes it off. you drop it but it won't break. what you can't carry. scent of stale incense in the cold church. the color of innocence, of forgotten lilies. scent & flavor of old red wine. cleanliness. lines & angles. "do you think you can improve the white page?" someone has cut the end off.

CARINE TOPAL

A Geometric Theory

The vertex, the tilt of a head, middle from which it all flows. To be born in a white room of stainless belonging, tubes and clocks with rectangular and cylindrical objects entering the one bearing down on the new thing, this trapezoidal bouquet of tissue and limb, whose force is the measured segment of a circular host of arms, radii outpouring from point A equidistant from vertical father and horizontal mother. Even the house, the perpendicular unit of familial wealth, rests on this line of civilization, and each and every thing hence draws itself to the orbital yellow, its rays wedged in the paper's corner, and from there, even the child can figure the distance home.

“My Body You Are an Animal”

-Anna Swir

Thursday, September. Star-filled sky.

Hidden in the brush tangles of an arroyo.
Though alone, who can say your hazel eyes
don't shine like hound or fox? Ambitious orphan.

Though ground is no crepe de chine, you dream:
feathery nest, back of a thing that does not stray when touched.

Birds' raspy scoldings remind you how you've come to sleep.

In the bed of the world, father and mother
have left; your brothers' voices nest in back of your throat.

Which is why you have taken to care for strangers,
your body on each of theirs,

a haunch, a limb of fur,
a swaddled bone.

We Were Going Somewhere

I was on my knees and scuttled, if there's a word for what I did and how they saw me; what I seemed, there on the floor of pine needles and autumn where I almost fell into Broadway song I so loved the taste of November, the month my mother, a pale redhead afraid of fire and birds, emerged from her mother in a hospital on a tree-lined street, in a country cut in half speaking a guttural tongue by the time her family caught wind of conspiracy of scapegoat of yellow stars, hurry she shouted at birth, as if time moved forward without history and she and millions of others left the room, valises closed with rope, hands gloved against a cold spring wind at the dock and the ship left with her, a taffeta gown, a chandelier, and glass tea cups, sailing to someplace and they were going somewhere.

Desertion

What did she say when they took her into the heaven of eider
down—landscape of Flemish angels posed like desire,
cumulous clouds at the gate of clustered reeds—
her mouth exuding a mother's milky blindness, a trilling noise
of swallowing? How did she take that step toward sky —blanket of blue
stone—

into the meager light? Born into loss or loss born into
her, she lived in shattered permanence, defiant, changing her name
from Ester.

How she loved me, salvaged me from the dead-of-night dirt,
my cloistered body tenderly taken from a grave in the high desert
to the middle of a life, larger than life, overlooking the other side
of the sea. Her *arte povera*, my organized sadness. Its onset, done.

PAUL HOOVER

go now and tell the children

all the lumbering gods
 find it difficult to speak
it's graceless of them to shine
 like furniture in the sun
tidy, well-dressed men
 in limbo, in middle passage

as with doubt, the cloud
 as with the cloud, a mouth
as with a mouth, the mirror
 as with the mirror, light

the dead man reads a book
 on a train between
calcutta and new delhi
 the window shakes like water
a soul is being made
 the dream and now a field

ringing with each wave

authority of music
 many times rehearsed
never quite composed
 the rest is not silence
tongues of ash
 bodies of wood

experience and myth
 will pay what they owe
goodbye to all the bees
 an extra yellow chair
leans against the wall
 its shadow also rare

we use the gods for sport
 black horse, black rider
the green man in the grass
 and the history of zero
the actor and the acted
 underfunded, overflowing

SPENCER SELBY

EMWRLD (1

I thought yes let me out
now beating thrall
somehow different
and my voice faltering
out of mistake drowning
always divided nightmare

No answer the sheets
faintly visible like a prison

Struggle small and fragile
fear of moon thunder
incessant rain deposit
under day I conjure

My eyes of water moving
thick dark shadow of a shadow

My life what is left of it
empty full lassitude
weary sodden trickles
slush of consciousness
without listening in time
the hunt for waterproof sky

EMWRLD (4

Intent as a song cast
the dead so ripe they appear
and speak power ancient
forehead now

Blue rushed at parade's
yoked imagination
stealthy thrust backward
shows searching alone

for glory bound enigmas
assailing that other friend
put off in long crash of
calm on every side

EMWRLD (6

This brief last-minute invitation
is a matter of telling minutes
puzzling over sublime
ordinary circumstances

I found it odd to have
qualms before critique of a social
person who had attained rank
just short of access throughout

the central corridor when
embedded feeling was shaking
rather than announcing those with
authority and conviction

At such time I take a pounding
as experience introduced
during epidemic that has

become the official word on file
if opinion would transform itself
and appear still alive

EMWRLD (7

Stagger doing exercise
scarcely astonished during trip
covering a distance in circles
potentially of therapeutic value

For example type when induced
by spells to pass from position
conserving more urgent matters

Sense of guilt that returns with
a question that haunts as
investigation glances down
a list of names that replaced

what happened to the source
of emotion concealed
by those who put up signs
along futuristic memory lane

EMWRLD (9)

All season the wind blows against
confines that enforce solitude
of conversation and debate

I long to be light again
to walk crunching on the ground
of voices with no need

to make the proximity of
delirious prose seem like
something written in midstream

where certain passages are
situated in grove of precise shade
a strip of film spread across

the yard endowed with meaning
that remembers and forgets why
images got mixed up as a young boy

approached his equinox always
being abducted by secret travel
through leaves scattered unaware

JOB FOR ONE SYLLABLE

A

Sure if trade was
the dupe in made kinds
of fields borne and notes
put in place by those
who work with germs
like me you and me

E

Great thing just as
small did go at fear
speech harsh at first
and means will be
wet heads off to
scrounge all this while

I

Still legs run
from what is sad
and brought up so
they soon are held
far off by names we
can't seem to match
with look of youth
in face at the door

O

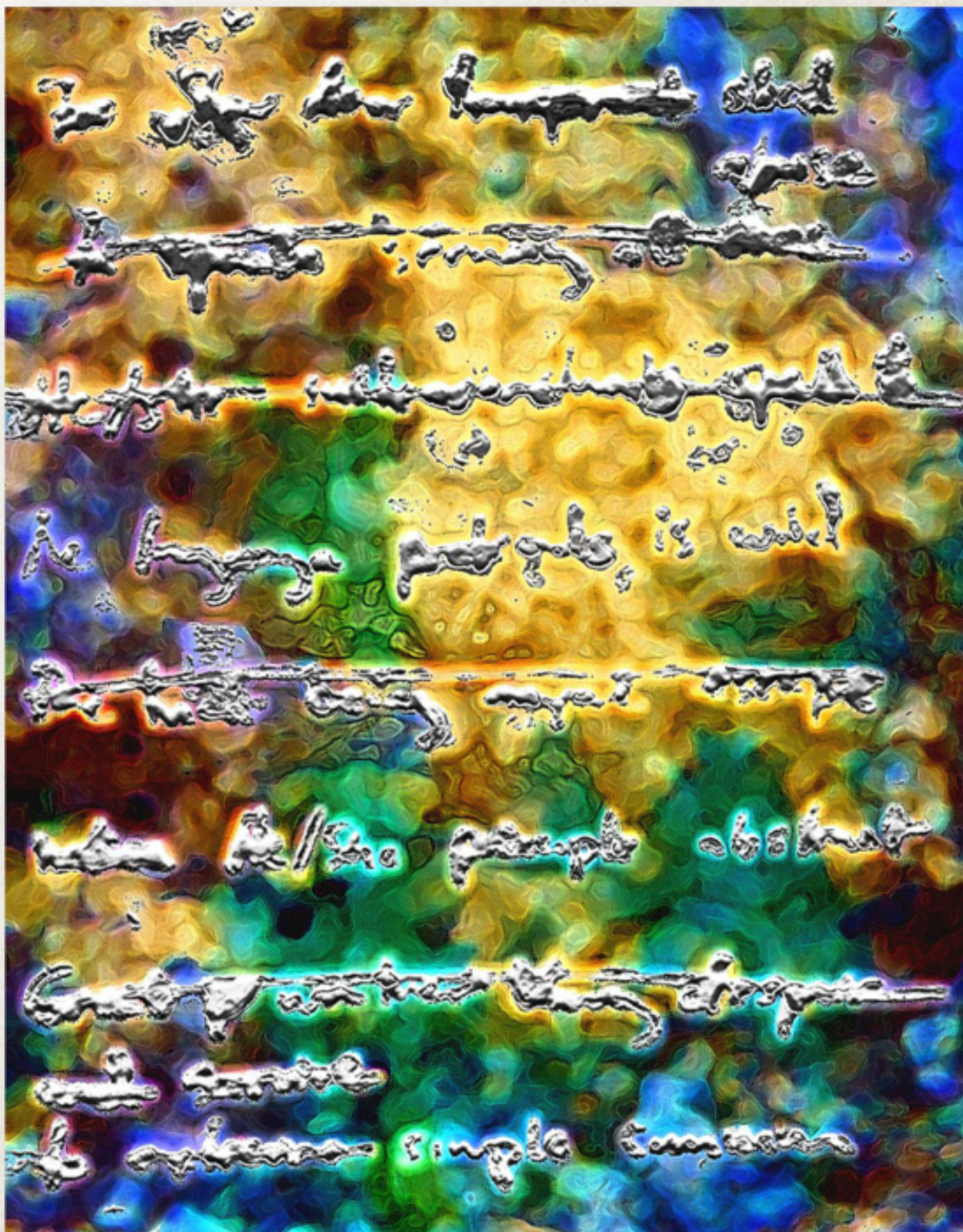
Say how it seems
to sense I don't need
speak of help for those
hung in fact through
roots grown like poor
folk thick with pride
in their meal of mush
their milk in hard mass
that some could not bear
a full plate of choice
I blew as well with dust
and dry yoke up the nose

U

Odd life and sore earth
storms of red on tap
to keep them fat roles
with jaw to let in bait
and push back with
joy so scarce fueled
in streaks raised up
like a torch in midst
of hole dug at this time
by art no one can feel
as you do to please show
worth of what is left
in a vague black mirror



flect by Spencer Selby, digital image, 2010



invev-1 by Spencer Selby, digital image, 2010

DAN GERBER

Call Me

Suddenly, for reasons no one can
explain or understand,
I can't read anymore.
English on the page looks like
Turkish to me.
Did I just forget?
It feels like I never knew how.

I can still write though.
I can think these words to the page—
just for you—
but don't know if they make any sense.

Here's my phone number—
which, I can remember.

When you come across this puzzle
please call.

Please call and let me know who I am...

LYN LIFSHIN

Montmartre

Haven't you wanted, sometimes, to walk into some painting, start a new life? The quiet blues of Monet would soothe but I don't know how long I'd want to stay there. Today I'm in the mood for something more lively, say Lautrec's Demimonde. I want that glitter, heavy sequin nights. You take the yellow sunshine for tonight. I want the club scene that takes you out all night. Come on, wouldn't you, just for a night or two? Gaslights and absinthe, even the queasy light after dawn. Wouldn't you like to walk into Montmartre where everything you did or imagined doing was de rigueur, pre-AIDs with the drinkers and artists and whores? Don't be so P.C., so righteous you'd tell me you haven't imagined this? Give me the Circus Fernando, streets where getting stoned was easy and dancing girls kick high. It's just the other side of the canvas, the thug life, a little lust. It was good enough for Van Gogh and Lautrec, Picasso. Can't you hear Satie on the piano? You won't be able to miss Toulouse, bulbous lips, drool. Could you turn down a night where glee

and strangeness is wide open? Think
of Bob Dylan leaving Hibbing. A little
decadence can't hurt. I want the swirl
of cloth under changing colored lights,
nothing square, nothing safe, want to
can can thru Paris, parting animal
nights, knees you can't wait
to taste flashing

Forced Buds

They're blighted, but
beautiful still, like
what's forbidden,
scandal. I like them
best then. I know
that's the bad daughter
in me, not choosing
the ones that last.
I tore the branches,
sneaked them into
a blue jar the way I
might have had you in
the brown velvet couch
of a café I forget the
name of, let's call
it Casablanca. We'd
needed something light,
three hours of your
unhealing blues part
way to making love. I
like the buds best
just on the verge of
opening, pink, pale rouge
as a nipple before every
thing opens and falls
apart

I Lift My Mother to the Commode

almost too late tho
it's as close to the bed
as the tub to the
toilet lid I kept her
company on, handing
her soap and towels.
My mother, who could
climb Beacon Hill in
5 inch heels at 70,
can't lift herself with
out my arms, my hands,
always too cold she
shivers. "If I just was
not so lazy," she sighs
which translates, "tired,
weak." The hospital bed
could be Everest. Our
awkward dance to lift
her hopeless as prayers
for mercy, a reprieve
but I try to not show my
fear and now see her
tremble as the doorbell
rings. Verizon, to install
a private line she'll be
alive less than a week to
use. Still on the commode,
my stranded mother is
lifted by this smiling man
as if it was part of every
day's phone service,
gently as if carrying a
bride over the threshold
for a new life

VERNON FRAZER

replayed in the mix
breeds incumbent specialties
one barrel at at time,
as evident or tempo
reflection implied
of grandeur barrels
chasing the midst of the coral vespers
fully random as justified
or chronic

POST-EON

a language
of landings
bleeding at
left diagram

SEE-THROUGH AS THE MOMENT



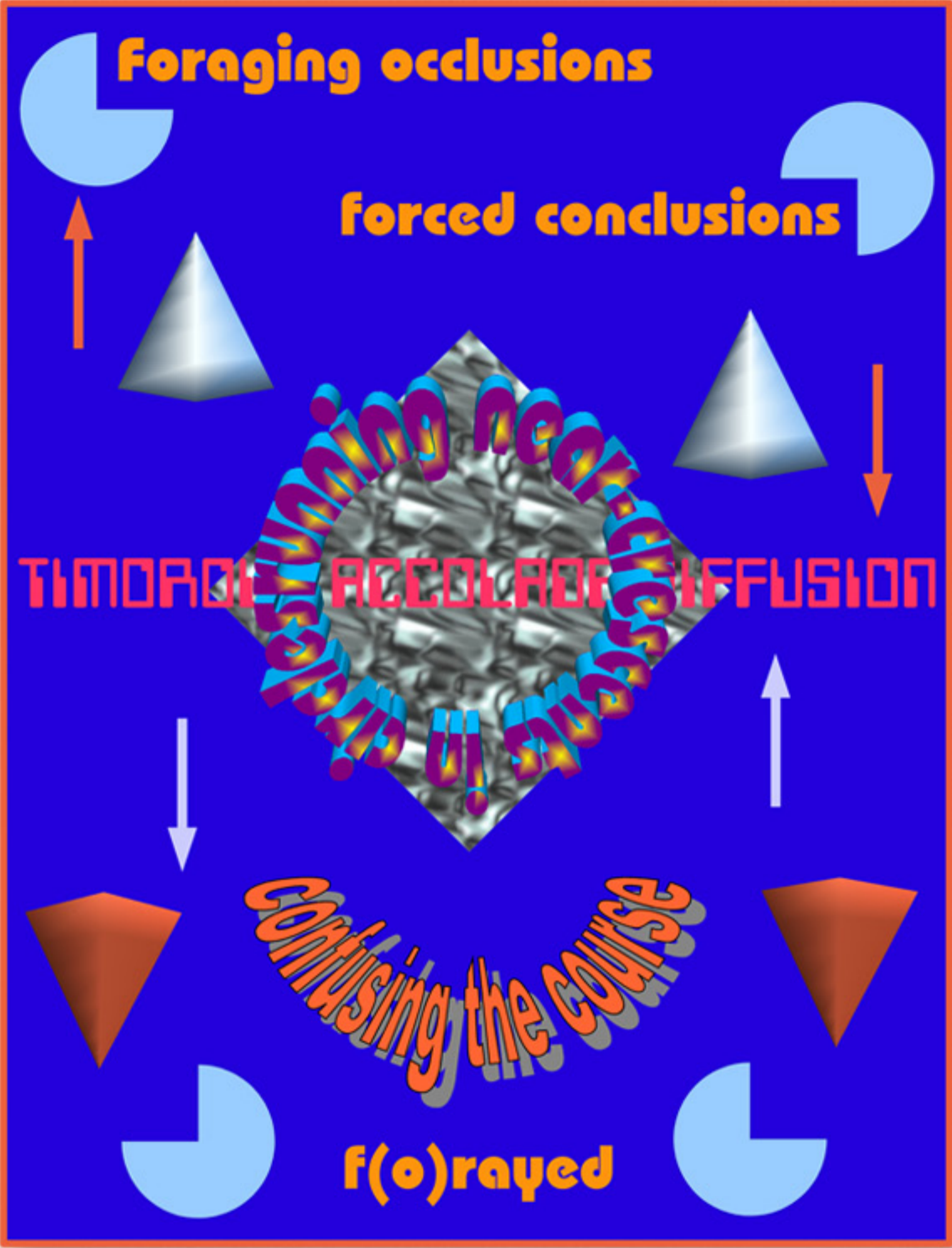
(THE WORDS A PARAMOUNT DISORDER)

SUNSET DRAGOONS

WASTE
BREEDS
A LOST
STRAIN

GAMBLING MIRAGE

PLAYED PORTENT



A FRAYED FORAY by Vernon Frazer, digital image, 2011

ERIK BELGUM

from Classical Supplements

Cadenza Cadenza

No additional requirements.

In the context of a composed cadenza, the composer who receives the commission builds a subcadenza into his commissioned cadenza and then subcontracts that subcadenza out to another composer who is free to do the same with his cadenza commission.

As the nested cadenzas recurse *ad infinitum*, outraged audience members may begin to shout “Cadenza Cadenza!” and trouble may ensue.

At the conclusion, composer bows should proceed in a serial, rather than parallel, fashion.

from Arbitrarily Created People

FOR EVERY CHAPTER, THERE IS AN EQUAL AND
OPPOSITE RE-CHAPTER.

ARBITRARILY CREATED PEOPLE ARE THE LUCKIEST
PEOPLE IN THE WORLD.

ALL DROOPED AND APHIDALIOUS

THE BIG LIST ALWAYS HAPPENS BY ACCIDENT.

SOME PLACES HAVE NO COLOR.

REMEMBER IT LIKE THIS: DON'T CREST THE HILL LIKE
A SINGULARITY.

THE PROBLEM WAS THERE WERE TOO MANY THREES.

DON'T TAKE OFF TOWARD THE UNBEARABLE SADNESS
OF FLORIDA.

EIGHTEEN IS A YOUNG AGE AT ANY AGE.

SADNESS FLOWS FROM THE CENTER OF PERFECT
MOMENTS.

CHARLES HOLDEFER

Story Problem

A fat man in his underwear stands on a diving board. Behind him, pines climb the air beyond a chain-link fence. The swimming pool is designed to hold a maximum of 40,000 liters of water. The volume of evaporation on a spring day—just like today—is .0008 liters per hour at 17° Celsius. A woman walks away from the pool, ignoring his calls. He insists that these pleas are his story, but she doesn't know what to believe, a fact which pains her to her soul. The man weighs 94 kilos and, if he executes a perfect belly-smacker into 40,000 liters, his body mass could displace as much as six liters of water into the air. Such a tremendous splash! The glitter of droplets would linger to *your* eye after the sound of impact, and the air could be washed by the delighted cries of a child who witnessed the dive.

But no one is watching today. In the upstairs apartment overlooking the swimming pool, a television commercial sings *Does he chew Minty-Mints?* as a child unscrews the lid on a jar of peanut butter and prepares to scrape together another sandwich. When the pool is full, a person standing on the diving board can see the reflection of overflying birds, passing in flecks to unknown destinations.

Today the pool is not full. It is empty. The man sees the woman disappear into the building to begin a new story which will not include him. The child is very hungry. The man jumps. The last thing he remembers is the brown spot of the drain, rushing toward him. Did the pines hear his impact? Why is there so much unhappiness?

end

Community

So I downed my drink and hitched up my pants and moved out to the center of the dance floor. Everyone was there—not only Marty and Leonore and Alexandra and Connie Sandmeier’s ex-husband’s girlfriend’s little brother, but Mr. Barnley and Mrs. Beebout, my old high school teacher, and Sally (who was wearing tight shorts and looked great) and Tommy, of course, with that damn parrot on his shoulder, but it was a different one, I think. Bigger and greener with a flesh-ripping beak. Anyway, it was my song.

And what can I say? I had the moves! That vibe to the nub of my spine! No partner for me, never mind—the flashing lights bounced off the inner hollows of my eyes. The floor moved beneath my feet. *Oooh, felt good.*

For a time—can’t say how long—there was only the music. *Hoooooooo.* Till, by degrees, I became aware of voices. Calling: “Go! Go! Go!”

Oh, now I really shook it! My song, and I gave it everything I had! “Go! Go! Go!”

And then, a thought came over me. *What do they mean?*

end



I AM NOT CHEAP, I'M PRETTY by Dale Houstman,
digital image, 2009

DALE HOUSTMAN

The 20th

It was the animal with the longest name as usual it was
the Ferris wheel around the neck of a career woman it was
bad television most of the time it was bad business always it was
an antique money belt to store your time in most of the time it was
the midnight shuffle and dodge in the cane break
the shopping mall zombie vogue
the last minute twist that hanged us it was
just another tortured gesture of rude implication
the genocide of enforced order it was
unneeded innovation burying the countryside it was
fashionable Bakelite gills on blow away paper automobiles
raspberry radon toothpaste for children
tumescant snooze buttons on the deco death bell it was
only a couple of decadent decades servicing that glitch in the summer
rain it was
mostly us admiring the German staff cars parked between the
equestrian monuments
which had blossomed overnight to replace us
only renting a fully vested shade whose interest killed us
It was
electron microscopically real
It was
a policeman's interpretation of what the modern woman wanted
when they didn't want show biz or snow blindness
but mainly it was blindness
It was
the blind and armored property high-stepping through a fire sale

It was
blind tinkering with the blinding lamps of blind forgiveness
It was
blindly useful and thus useless
It was a flood of industrial pertinence after the pastoral impertinence
and then
it was mere impertinence once more just like that it was
very large windows on a very small hotel it was
fumes and flames and dust and hands and heads and screams and
slumber it was
marine panthers patrolling an off-white continuity
until we sent in the midget gangsters with plasma gats blazing
It was a yellow-caked ready-made and a failed cut-up
of romantic fissures stuffed with sponsors
It was the ascension of art to the Italian tiled boardroom
It was accumulated
then lovingly burned
then commercially celebrated
then stood up to be shot down
It was diplomats squeezing out the last cup of coffee
from the donkey's tongue
It was the pulsing action-based somnambulance of tax deducted
charity
It was the thin blue hair of "dramedy" and "info containment" and
"fabricated nostalgia"
It was a variety show in Berlin
It was a talk show in Hanoi
It was a petite balsa wood throne
a wet plastic sheet
a wet naked comrade
or two or three million
It was a disappearing act up the noose
It was a sofa painted with a pink target
It was a dicey situation investigated by millionaire reporters
It was larger than a county hospital yet smaller than a entry wound
It was responsibilities assumed with pomp and forgotten with flourish

It was un-free freedom
It was another generation of terrorist children
caught between Bonanza and Belsen
It was sometimes built-in and often torn out
It was always awesome in every unimportant aspect
It was a car bomb in a cartoon auto race
It was an immature hyena giggling at the car bomb in the cartoon
auto race
It was unrewarding long hours depicted on black velvet
It was motors and rotors and robots and raspberries
It was the seduction of the drunken jackhammer by the lovely dead-
end street
It was catfish leaping into a dry-docked top-hat
It was promises of poison appetites and desiccating thirsts
It was us but it was anyone else but us
It was a lazy supernaturalism
huge commercial billboard sails on a celebrity's vanishing boat
It was amateur clarities obscured by professional clarities
It was dark matter alarms and controlled data music
It was drawn to my attention
that it was just
okay
Okay?
okay

TIM KAHL

No One Speaks Potato Anymore

The cycle of freeze and thaw features various groups
like those who must never step over another person.

 Their children occur in water, polished and twisted
 at different rates.

Peril—it can cause headaches. If stuffed, the head battles
 symbols for

 fireworks or rain-damaged coral.

 Here a potato is born without teeth.

 Harmless, no one speaks its language
and, therefore, its conquest of the Western world
 isn't soon likely.

In his studio Agassiz concludes that
regional dialect is bred by intense winter.

 It also determines countenance:

The early face is striated, treated with mule on foot
and dry spells that survived a short pulse
 of rain in a dream,

 such is winter's masterpiece.

The clever hands keep changing their skeleton.

The legs contend with the back's revolt.

It is tired of carrying a pouch packed with

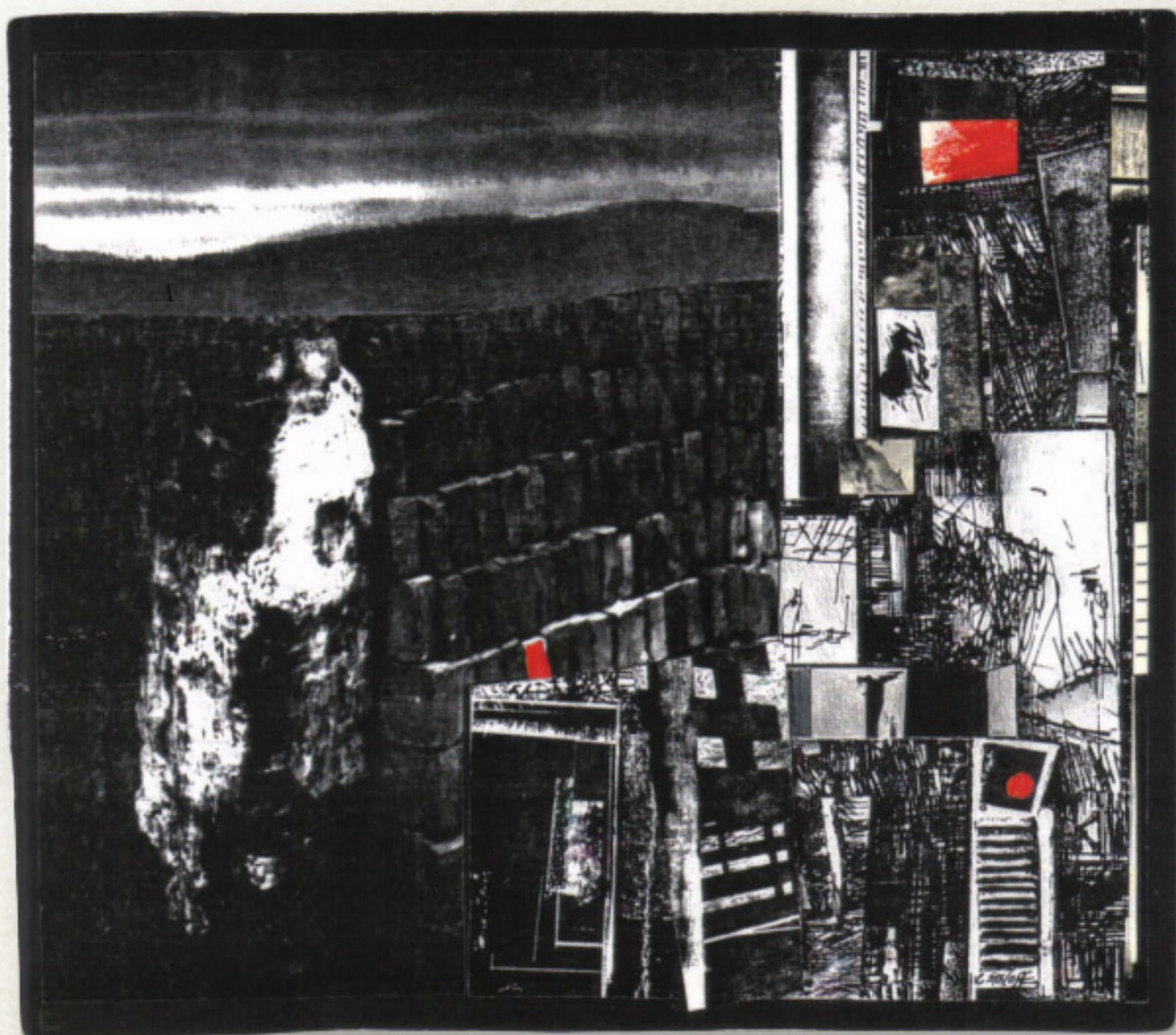
 corn pollen. The terrain is aggravated
by the imagined subterranean, the deep zone
 adapted to the climate of the dark.

To venture there is to arrive in a desolate place,
a land of nutrient and the occasional episode
of children, untouched,

like stalactites grown for
a season of tourism.

To labor in those conditions
and think, friend of *Dasein*—

there might be a potato
but no one speaks potato anymore,
not for fear of ruin.



CALIBAN

Where Did We Go?

In the midst of all the tears and joy at Barack Obama's 2008 Grant Park victory speech was a warning. As he had said throughout the campaign, the election was just a beginning: his supporters needed to stay active if real change were to be possible. But it turns out that joyful crowd and most of the rest of us said "Thanks. It's been great. We'll see you again in four years. We know you'll take good care of our country for us." Surprisingly, Obama, unlike most of the politicians we have become accustomed to, intended to fulfill every promise he had made to us. When his own party, with super-majorities in both houses, betrayed him (and us) at every turn, what did we do? We got mad at him. We showed him how mad we were by not showing up for the 2010 midterm elections. That really showed him. The Republican House has held the entire country, all of us, hostage since the beginning of 2011. Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, and other states have enacted such reactionary legislation, even the most hard-bitten pessimists could not have imagined it.

* * * * *

For some years now Wall Street has been engineering an LBO (leveraged buyout) of the USA. They have used arcane finance manipulations to steal the nation's wealth and in fact to suck the nation dry. As in all LBOs, their victim will end up an empty shell thrown on some smoldering landfill. I wonder if the Masters of the Universe have an alternate universe where they plan to retire and enjoy the spoils. What do they think will be left of this country when they're through?

* * * * *

I don't get mad at the ultra-right. These are the same people who joined the John Birch Society and wore sheets with the KKK in the

1950s. The Birchers put up billboards calling for the impeachments of President Dwight Eisenhower, a communist menace, and Chief Justice Earl Warren of the “Anti-Christ” Supreme Court. The vast majority of Americans at the time saw these people as a laughable fringe. What is different now is that the national media are determined to give them legitimacy. There were Tea Party rallies where the press significantly outnumbered the rally attendees, but the media insisted on presenting those rallies as top new stories.

* * * * *

If any nation in the world announced its intention to steal our nation’s wealth, it would be considered an act of war. We have been hypnotized by these Wall Street idiots for too long. They have only seemed smart and invulnerable because we have allowed them to make up all the rules. As a nation we have watched them bribe all of the Republicans and most of the Democrats. Our collective reaction has been little more than a grumbling shrug, even though the banks have caused more grief among average Americans than anything since the Great Depression. OCCUPY WALL STEET is the first uprising in decades against the outrages being done to our nation and our people. The media and the Republican congressional delegation first tried to put down the uprising with ridicule. When that didn’t work, they accused the protestors of being dangerously unpatriotic. Then they tried to suggest that there would be terrifying consequences if the occupations were allowed to go on. The protestors took comfort in this, because they knew they had hit a nerve. They had shown the country that the only way to get any justice is to take to the streets. That is what my generation learned when many of us participated in the movement against the Vietnam War. But that very generation has watched us come to this perilous place in our country’s history with almost no resistance. A significant exception would be the Code Pink demonstration at the White House in 2003, a valiant but failed attempt to stop the Iraq War before it started. What have the rest of us done? Watching MSNBC, the Daily Show, and the Colbert Report, and laughing at the stupidity and hypocrisy of these

villains, does NOT count as resistance. In fact, that self-indulgent, smug irony saps the energy out of any possible real action to change things.

* * * * *

We have all kinds of people who will enable us in our laziness, convincing us that our amnesia and indifference have a sound moral and intellectual basis. My favorite trope is that both parties are equally bad. That one, hustled by an addled Ralph Nader in 2000, made the election close enough for George W. Bush to steal the presidency. It wasn't that we didn't know what was happening. The Republicans stole the election in front of the world and laughed about it. Other than the Congressional Black Caucus, which protested the certification process, no one stood up, no one took to the streets in the massive numbers that would have answered the call in previous decades. The media were busy congratulating us collectively for the peaceful transfer of power. Is a mugging the peaceful transfer of money? What were the consequences of that stolen election? Just look around us. The things that were once done secretly by the anti-democracy forces in our society are now being done openly. They believe that we as a country have become so passive we will put up with anything.

* * * * *

There is a saying that the USA gets the president it deserves. I would argue that in Barack Obama's case, we got a president much better than we deserved. He has taken more vicious abuse than any president since Abraham Lincoln, and yet he has still tried to fulfill the promises he made to the country. He has finally, after one hundred years of government failures, given us a national health care program. It would have been a better program if he had not been betrayed by so many of his fellow Democrats, but it is a stunning achievement nonetheless. He got rid of "Don't Ask Don't Tell" (a present from former President Bill Clinton), so gay soldiers can now serve openly. He signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act so women can sue corporations for gender-based pay gaps. And has everyone forgotten that the economies of our nation and the

world were collapsing when he took office? Because of his immediate action, by March 2009 the implosion had been averted. But we still feel he hasn't done enough for us. ARE WE CRAZY?

* * * * *

Many of us are appalled by the decaying American public education system, where most high school seniors graduate without even a vague notion of American history or the institutional foundation of our democracy. Obviously, such students have a hard time distinguishing lies from the truth as they are bombarded by political propaganda. Many older people fall into this category as well. But very few people reading this exhortation to action have that excuse. We know better. So then let us join with the OCCUPY WALL STREET protestors, in New York and throughout the land. Let us call and write our senators and representatives and tell them that we will accept nothing less than their courageous action in the Senate and House. AND LET US NEVER AGAIN SIT ON OUR HANDS IN AN ELECTION YEAR!

Contributors' Advice, or Free Speech Corner, or the Blind Assemblage (being the unedited comments of contributors on almost anything)

LUCY CORIN:

I try to keep 2 places in my home sacred: the bed and the desk. I get out of bed if I'm insomniac, for instance. No tossing and turning, just good bed stuff in the bed. So, same with the writing desk. Don't sit there if it sucks.

KAREN GARTHE:

"I have all the money I'll ever need if I die by 4 o'clock."

Henny Youngman

EDWARD SMALLFIELD:

The Catalan word for "autumn" is "el tardor," which, because I'm an English speaker, always seems to me to imply something that has arrived late. This is my favorite season for walking around Barcelona. The rains are late this year, so we're having a glorious Indian summer, stolen August delivered in October, an almost secret pleasure. Because the rains are late the mushrooms are late too, though the figs were early—I'm not sure why. In the midst of what seems to be summer, the leaves of the plane trees have begun to litter las Ramblas. Perhaps destruction is the most important aspect of creation.

CHARLES HOLDEFER:

Olly olly oxen free.

JEFF HARRISON:

Virginia, most plausible of all chimeras, from verse raises no tower. (You verser, who for verse you Virginia in verse name, none of Virginia you in verse name. Virginia here is of Virginia the only herald, and gives voice only of Virginia.) Only verse finds verse raises towers; Virginia in verse raises Virginia from verse. Here from verse is none else, Virginia, more plausible.

CARINE TOPAL:

Oftentimes when I write I'm led to believe that I'm in the service of something other than myself.

ERIK BELGUM:

For my book "Evidence-Based Fiction," I'm researching whether or not a story can be poisoned. Here's what I've come up with so far:

In this story, teeter-totter is the poison and kills off the storyline. Some stories can survive poisoning. This one could not.

Barry's heifer Cassie brought a smile to everyone in Taylor County. She was the favorite at fairs and field trips. Cassie gave a sense of well-being wherever she went. Out on Barry's farm there's an old teeter-totter. Barry's teeter-totter out in Taylor County brought a smile to everyone. Barry's heifer went up in the air and back down again. Up in the air and back down again. It brought a sense of nausea to everyone in Taylor County. Everything is balanced on a fulcrum in Taylor County. That doesn't mean everything is balanced. It means that everything is perpetually unbalanced. Up in the air and back down again. Up in the air and back down again. It was the teeter-totter. Up in the air and back down again. It was the man-made object that went up in the air and back down again. It was out on Barry's farm.

Teeter-totter is the poison. It introduced a negative potential into sincere events. It brought uncertainty to settled situations.

Date and time of story: 2/2/2011 at 5:00 p.m. Date and time of poisoning: 2/2/2011 at 5:21 p.m.

ELIZABETH ROBINSON:

Most of the time I am judicious and do my best to be orderly, cautious, conscientious. However, there are times when the best thing to do is to act recklessly. The good life entails risk.

TIMOTHY LIU:

What does it mean to partake of a culture like ours that cannot distinguish the difference between the erotic and the sexual, rather employing such terms synonymously? A culture unable to articulate the

triune divinity of an I, a You, and a composite We caught in that dance between intimacy and distance. Unaware of the corrosive agents of anger, lust, or flight that can cut erotic potential off at the pass. How anger can disfigure any semblance or recognition of a You. How lust converts the You into a Mine—a subject instantly transformed into an object even when two mutually consent to act out their roles in a quasi-pornographic encounter however casual, memorable, and finally, soulless. Been there, done that, you might say, but the notches left on your belt that once made for salacious stories to aggrandize tumescent vanity feel less consequential as your body ages, as the face you greet each morning in the mirror no longer speaks to the who and the what you have been for all the men you have dallied with, even written about.

How is it that contemporary verse so often fails to encompass or enact erotic states? The Beloved You never made visible enough. As if Rumi had never met Shams. As if Tristan had never expired on a deserted island, interminably waiting for his Isolde to appear on the horizon with nautical standards flying. As if Beatrice never existed at all. All those Don Juans merely posing as troubadours roaming from town to town, from conquest to conquest, each of their songs as disposable as their ravished brides. How to eschew seduction for seduction's sake, the Barthesian strip tease the peanut-crunching crowd keeps shoving in to see, those precious fifteen minutes of who's on first or who's about to score? How to move from the passions of a possessive love to whatever remains to be discovered on the other side of a newfound freedom? Or envision an erotic apotheosis free of profane lust. Or set apart sacred space and construct a temenos where the I and the You can truly dissolve into a composite We, the poem as crucible, as communal Grail.

DAN GERBER:

“When I don't understand a poem, or part of it, I don't insist. I try to be satisfied with what I understand and I'm sure that another time, under other conditions, I'll understand more and understand something else... The understanding of a poem comes in successive surprises.”

Juan Ramon Jimenez

This applies to writing, as well as, if not more importantly than, to reading.

DOREN ROBBINS:

It seems organic to experience guilt now when I read Mills, Bakunin, Brecht, Chomsky, Debord, Debs, Gramsci, Marx, Paine, Zinn. Challenged to make artistic statements and poetic works when the majority of people have no chances. Don't get the chance. How does guilt unrelieved by self-deceptive or even compassionate ethical commitments affect self-expression? Art and Ars Poetica stated in those terms.

In part it's the It seems organic to experience guilt now when I read Mills, Bakunin, Brecht, Holocaust conflicted indictment that Adorno struck after WWII. Some agree, lyric poetry is not possible after the Holocaust. Others assert it is imperative to accept what Adorno correctly understands as the failure of Enlightenment notions of progress, while claiming the values of maintaining and celebrating the mystery in the forms and abundance of nature and the socially active, interior and sensual lives of people. In terms of guilt, it is not enough. It has never been enough. The paradox, even the comic paradox, is creating in spite of this lack without repressing it.

There will be a larger revolt than the one happening around the world. In our civil-disobedience version, the Occupy Wall Street movement is a start at non-violently reasoning with the Power Elite. If anything happens, what the values will be is another question and one that is not beside the point.

The people of the Soviet Union and Chinese paid with a self-annihilating repression for a revolutionary struggle out of impoverishment. One garden was reclaimed and polluted, the other sealed off under a gun tower. John Pilger noted when a group of Russian journalists (they existed) came to research news media in the United States, they were ironically astonished to find out that the United States accomplished with a free press and television what the USSR had accomplished by other means: "...all the opinions on the vital issues were the same" [...] "In our country," they said, "to get that result we have a dictatorship. We imprison people. We tear out their fingernails. Here you have none of that. How do you do it? What's the secret?" [1]

It would be easy to re-echo again the William Carlos Williams idea, which has become a valuable slogan, that "it is difficult to get the news from poems yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there," but there is an undeniable political and spiritual truth in his statement. Yet it is still a rationalization to look the other way from a planet of failed economic systems violently orchestrating peoples' lives from birth-care, education-care, workers-care, family-care to death-death.

Though I've been compelled to write it, I'm not arguing for political poetry or political prose poetry here. My mind is caught up in the psychology and language of poetic expression, social awareness is inclusive. Poets have disappeared for expressing similar concerns and opinions regarding Power. The fact is a common-place, not outrageous.

Never forget the fate that put me in a house I haven't had to abandon because I have a job, while at the same time pursuing the fulfillment of artistic expression is a contradiction in our world.

1] See: <http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/sr200/pilger.htm>

SESSHU FOSTER:

Time Studies #50

do you suffer of joint pain? stick them in the ocean waves. do
you suffer of

headache pain ass of spiritualism?

fly thru the streets fifteen foot above the surface.

do your dandruff get on top of cars and vehicles traffic?

fuck 'em. as henry david thoreau and lewis & clark said to
george catlin, "are your
teeth ugly need whitening of genocide?"

thanks cuz go. jumping.

hmmm, would? could you use a cheaper matreess beating any
prices?

i could see you, maybe, in individual spaces.

Time Studies #51

are you suffer from gas stations on coastal cities?

insert wild into ocean fires.

unable to sleep due to too many bills, God's ravine on your
mind?

float thru windows in dusk now at day's end. columns of billions up in
smoke

unaccounted for, that body you've been waiting at tubular?

symptoms may include erections lasting longer than 4 hours,
forms of arthritis,

liver damage, mild coma or death, so first experience a kind of dizziness
or

disorientation machinery.

as lt. william calley and capt. ernest medina said to boy, "are
your teeth ugly

need whitening of genocide?" say something to a child right
for a change.

okay, who's screaming or is superheated gas escaping from
ruptured cylinders?

"dead zone" feeling hundreds of years or thousands.

University of Phoneix like you could just pay whatever & get
any degree in whatever?

be a rich mad, you think like a baby soften unfolding.

JIM ZVER:

From Another Place Series

These collages are from an ongoing series begun in February of
this year. Their name, *From Another Place*, refers to the visual decision-
making process involved in their conception.

The arrangements of the pre-cut shapes are decided upon by their
implied suggestions of space in their relationship to one another. When
I am working extremely well there is a point when I begin to work
completely intuitively, in a place where my compositional choices do
not depend on conscious knowledge of composition and color. The
decisions become automatic and the collage elements themselves dictate
their positions. Surprising and unexpected choices are allowed and all
visual arrangements seem possible.

The collage then “cools off” for a period of time, usually one to three weeks. During this period I can look at it with objectivity, considering final and more distanced and objective adjustments. However, it is in this “other place” where I feel the collage is conceived, where the most important choices are made and where it ultimately lives.

NICO VASSILAKIS:

seeingseeing

Detached. Disassociative. I don't know. How to explain this condition. I let my brain do the thinking. I watch it think for me. There's an enjoyment I get seeing where it goes. From one visual idea to another it makes the associations. I follow them as an observer. I look on it as an observer of my own brain's momentum. I'm not in charge of this activity. I'm not willfully in charge. I'm not directing the seeing. My brain looks up, acquires information, and it sees for me. It goes from one enticement; let's say a capital B, then to another peripheral small case k. It makes the connection and I am simply viewing.

When this happens I am aware of feeling detached. As a spectator I sense another consciousness at work. The brain itself is receiving stimuli and translating that information into patterns that I would normally seek. The exception here is that I'm not knowingly seeking them out. I witness my brain working. This is another consciousness.

I thought of what to compare this to and it came back to staring. When you stare at one fixed point you are incorporating surrounding information and having an experience that includes that fixed point plus everything else around it. Though you might feel locked in one position your brain is doing some amazing things. So I thought, maybe my brain thinks I'm staring and is piecing the puzzle together for me.

I am not actively looking. I am not engaged in my own staring either. My brain connects the dots before I even see what I am seeing. It is like a form of entertainment, I see my brain seeing and it expresses itself by my following its lead. I watch where it leads me. What I watch is mostly bits of language: half-words, part phrases, single letters, shapes within a given letter, fonts, size, etc. And these, of course, are everywhere. Anywhere the printed word is displayed.

And so I wonder, what is this moment, this moment I recognize my brain is creating associations for me. What is happening to me that I feel detached from my own brain's activity? That I feel separated from my very machine, the one that works solely for me. When bringing it up, I think about deterioration and disease of the brain. I was startled at first by this minutia of time separation between seeing and seeing my brain see.

So barring any medical trouble, I am basically responding to my brain seeing. It is a reality that I've been attending to increasingly. Noticing where and when I am in authority and where I am subservient to my brain's dominion. The subtleties of control are vague, of course, but during the act of staring hierarchy of who's seeing what is even foggy. The who is my brain, the who is me. This brings a mental, body, and now, a third awareness, a separate me axis into play. Three aspects of info retrieval interacting with the world. Separations of power separated and facing each other.

SPENCER SELBY:

I believe poets are of more value to society than athletes. If I'm correct (and even if I'm not) one can use this comparison as an indicator of how askew American cultural values are. It has been like this my entire life. If anything, this indicator has been moving in the wrong direction during the decades of my adult life. Maybe I'm just stating the obvious or maybe I should quit being such a dreamer and accept that I'll be stuck in this primitive backwater until I die. I haven't always lived in a backwater, but I have always lived in a country where poets claw and scratch their way to nowhere while athletes who can't spell get seven figure advances to write books about everything they've learned en route to the top.

DALE HOUSTMAN:

Poetry is Not Another Hobby Horse

I abhor the word "hobby"; it demeans those who would seduce and caress their dreams—if only for that odd moment between slogging paper around a dreary office/jail/mausoleum, or driving drunken and brutal conventioners back from a Bengalese brothel, where they

purchased shoddy dream-like substances from those they would purchase outright with as little regard, and lose by the roads without a blink. Then move on. Certain “desires” are corrupted by transaction, and commerce cheapens all it touches.

“Hobby” is a put-down disguised as an appreciation, whether used graciously but cruelly by those who would trivialize our dreams in pursuit of their own monetary supremacy, or defensively by those who pursue these dreams from the inside, and are unkind to themselves in their mandated modesties. It is this false dichotomy between Poetry and hobby, and “real work” that fails those who would number these emanations, and try to make them into attractive spectacles. It is the vast majority of “real jobs” and “adult opportunities” that are jokes, absurdities, worthless wastes of time. Those are the trivialities, and payment cannot make them grand, only useful.

Poetry is a form of love, and love is not a hobby but the full metaphor of life. People fall in love and have children, or exchange meaningful (and marvelously meaningless!) glances for the rest of their lives with the one they have (correctly or not) chosen to fill their empty hours, always wishing more hours were as empty. People love sounds and make music, not worrying if these shining noises will attract tender. People love words and so swim in that ancient collaborative ocean, held up not by gain but by a suspension of urge, having found their natural ecology. There is no money in love, and its attentions must be reflected upon. So is love a hobby? Maybe for Hugh Hefner, and for other pimps who would sell dreams in magazines, but not for the majority of people. Love is the physical agency of Poetry, its organic instrumentation. And Poetry isn't a hobby, though many hobbies are Poetic.

And now I arrive where I want to be: the word “hobby” itself is an insult, not to just the real poets who are so often stuck with this title, and struggle in vain to throw it off, but to people everywhere. It is a word invented after work-for-hire became the standard of value in this world, so as to set apart (later to target) and trivialize the pursuits of people that do things “merely” out of love. I have seen train sets—with little villages, moving cars and planes, people pumping wells—that cover an entire warehouse-sized building's floor, just planted there by the side of a road, being sold to tourists now that the lover has died.

I have seen quilts of magnificent color and movement hanging on the walls of small towns stuck between two mega-malls. I have seen a gorgeous St. Michael's Cathedral made out of toothpicks. I have seen several examples of the "world's largest ball of tin foil," and crockery formed into deities to watch over a "mad man's" garden. None of these are hobbies, and they are all at least the beginning of Poetry. It is the very unconscious nature of these pursuits, their innocence in the face of salesmanship and bravado, that makes them constellations by which any ship of state could and should be guided.

Many keep trying—against all hope of success—to cram the marvelous into a shoebox, when—as a poet—you would be striving to turn that shoebox into a Taj Mahal which memorializes the living objects of desire.

The one critical distinction to be made in this strangled world is between those who believe in the liberation of imagination from all restraints, and those who wish solely to replicate the brutal series of moneyed choices that have beached us upon this shore of accountancy. Is dreaming a hobby?

And—as for the rather wretched notion that poetry is done only for "pleasure" (usually proclaimed in tones that denigrate the loftiest extremes of even that word, reducing it to stupefaction or "spare time activities") I can only say that those who would flog this "idea" have not spoken to enough—or any—poets. It is often not "pleasurable" (as the sneerers would use the word) in the least, and the "pleasures" are mainly short lived, arriving precisely when the poem finally gives up its struggle against easy manifestation and lies down to sleep on the paper before you. Just before you realize (half regretfully and half in awe) that the full body of the Poetic has moved on, leaving only this forensic debris. Like most obsessions, Poetry often drives you down long dark streets to an empty house. You make momentous decisions that impact your life in momentous ways, and not at all pleasant in the common sense—that "sense" which so often fails us on the peaks of existence. You have to chortle at those people who will misunderstand what poetry is and only wish to put it in an easily-controlled and comprehended space to be admired or disdained as they feel. Poetry—in general—is only "admired" when it is dead enough to be embalmed on an acid-free

page, and its writers have been dead long ago. Only poets love living poetry, and poetry is NOT those words, but the imagination which strove after the ghosts. And then decided to sleep amongst them, listening.

Hobbies do not exist, except as rude civilizations' misconstruction of dreams. Thus, Poetry cannot be a hobby.

JACK RIDL:

Sometimes overlooked when discussing the art and craft is what one does when not writing. We often hear that you have to sit down every day, go to work, discipline yourself. I don't disagree if that's what works. But I do think that maybe very important work is done away from the writing, how mindful and open one is when not writing. I've had students who, when they asked me what to do when they aren't able to write, benefited from my saying, "Don't write."

TIM KAHL:

The Rod of Correction

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