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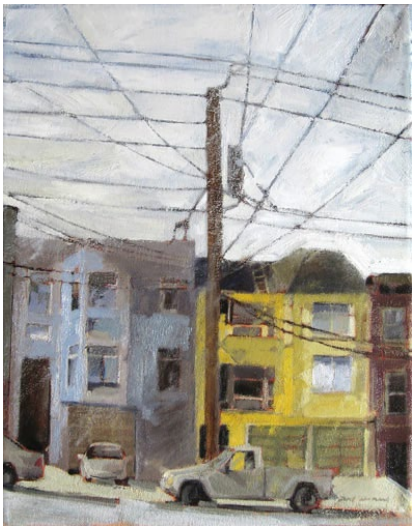
Issue 4: Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

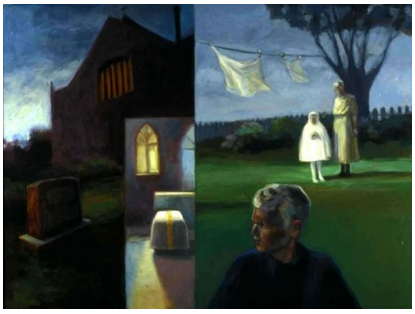
A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

features | poetry | essays | fiction | nonfiction | art



Paul Ferney - 17th & Judah



Mary Connelly - Communion

Issue 4 Contributors

Mysti Berry
David Booth
Meg Caven
Mary K. Connelly
Lana Dalberg
Sam DiFalco
Paul Ferney
Marie Fiala
Phyllis Gropp
Rob Halpern
Sophie Joe
Jason Kahler
Scott Malby
Laura Martinez
Nathaniel G. Moore
Christopher Mulrooney
Kenneth Pobo
Jesus Quintero
Francis Raven
Michelle Richmond
Ken Rodgers
Nina Schuyler
Casey S. Torstenson
Devin Walsh
Carly Anne West

Welcome

Welcome to Switchback—Issue #4—Subjectivity vs. Objectivity. This issue brings a rich and varied selection of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction that taps the dark/light polarities in contributors' psyches. In addition, students comment on the subjective/objective in the work of Junot Diaz, Joan Didion, and James Frey.

Check out the premier of our two new features: 1) Interviews. A poet/novelist, journalist/novelist, journalist/blogger, and an online journalist share their perspectives on writing fact or fiction. 2) Live Audio. Listen to the rich and varied voices of live audio from the May 2, 2006 Switchback Reading at the Lone Mountain Campus of the University of San Francisco. This audio features new work from Issue #3's contributors.

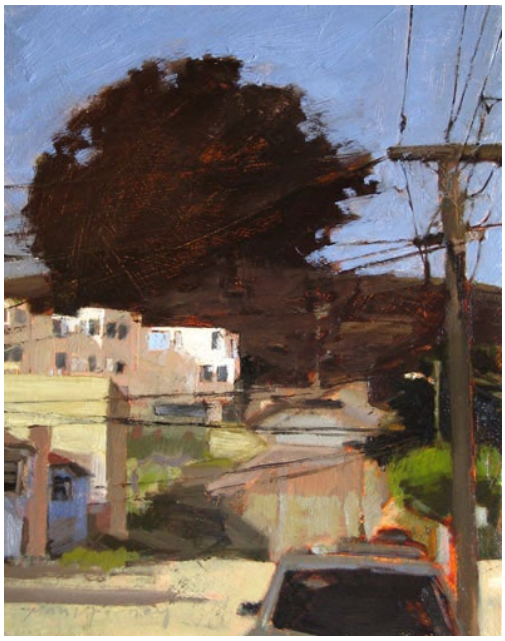
Some writers hold the perspective that a writer/artist not only has the opportunity but also a social obligation to their audience to be a "voice" and use their writing to tear down walls. Then, there are others who shun the idea of their work, and/or their representation of self or others in the public/private sphere, as being obligated to do anything. Add your perspectives to Issue #5: The Independent vs. The Representative Voice. See our call for submissions page.

After over two years of building this journal from concept to reality, the two founding editors of Switchback, Alex Davis, Poetry and Technical Editor and Rosita Nunes, Managing Editor, will be bidding their fond, but bleary farewells from the helm, watching and helping from the wings as their creative project continues to flourish on its own under a new and dedicated staff.

To our readers, your comments are always welcome. Peace Out.

— The Switchback Editorial Staff

Founding and Managing Editor
Rosita Nunes, a graduate of the USF MFA in Writing program, has always had a hand in startups, transitions and turnarounds. She has had many titles over the years: Board Member, Board Secretary, Executive Director, Development Director, Business Women's Expo Cofounder, Marketing Communications Consultant--but no title means more than this one. *Switchback* is a project to be proud of, thanks to a continuing flow of talent coming together to bring it life. Now that *Switchback* has grown beyond concept and fledgling project, she'll move on to her final revision of her young adult novel.



Paul Ferney - Sunset No. 2

Co-Founding Technical Editor
Alex Davis has an MFA in Writing from the University of San Francisco. He has poems forthcoming in *Five Fingers Review*. He has a tattoo with hidden meaning.

Assistants to the Managing Editor
Jennifer Marston is a first year MFA in Writing student at the University of San Francisco. She is Marketing and Special Projects Manager for *XLR8R Magazine* and writer for *Flavorpill*. She has been a reader for *Zoetrope* along with other projects.

Karen Boyden Phelps resides in the East Bay and hopes to soak up all the good literary mojo floating around the Bay Area through osmosis. At the moment, she works at *Diablo Magazine*. Her poems have been published in *Scribendi, Conceptions Southwest,* and *The Albion Review*. She's in her second year of the MFA program at USF, class of 2007.

Associate Editors:

Nathan Grover is a graduate of the MFA in Creative Writing at USF and has worked for *Switchback* reading prose and finding artwork since Issue #2. He also sings and plays guitar in the San Francisco indie rock band *Love is Chemicals*.

Marisela Treviño Orta holds an MFA in Writing from the University of San Francisco. A poet and playwright, her first play *Braided Sorrow* was read at the Bay Area Playwrights Festival in 2005 and will be read in August 2006 as part of the Ford Amphitheatre's Summer Reading Series in Los Angeles. In March 2006 Marisela participated in the 8th Annual Women's Will 24-HourPlayfest. For the festival her 10-Minute play *Watch Out For Falling Sky* was written, rehearsed and performed in less than one day. Her poetry has appeared in *Red River Review, Curbside Review, BorderSenses, Pomona Valley Review, Traverse, 26: A Journal of Poetry and Poetics* and *Double Room*. Her literary blog is http://www.xanga.com/mtorta.

Craig Perez is a graduate of the MFA in Writing program at USF. His work has appeared in *Watchword, Signal, Quercus* and the *Redlands Review*. His blog is www.blindelephant.blogspot.com.

Alika Tanaka moved from San Diego to San Francisco in 1995 and recently won first place in the Backwards City Review Fiction Contest. She fluctuates between short and long forms of fiction and how they work with her reoccurring dreams. She currently is finishing her MFA at the University of San Francisco.

Jay Thomas is a first-year student in the MFA program at USF, and assists the Technical Editor with putting *Switchback* online. His poems have appeared in *SPORE 2.0* and mipoesias.com.

Elizabeth Valente is starting her second year in the MFA program at USF. Originally from Maine, her interests (besides writing) include art, running, traveling, and devising ways to become permanently bi-coastal.

Faculty Advisors:

Stephen Beachy (Content Advisor) is the author of two novels, *The Whistling Song* and *Distortion*. His novellas, *Some Phantom* and *No Time Flat*, will be published by Suspect Thoughts Press in 2006. He has been teaching at USF since 1999. Check out his website: www.livingjelly.com.

Chris Brooks (Computer Services Advisor) is Assistant Professor of Computer Science. He received his BA/JBA from the University of Wisconsin, his MS from San Francisco State University in 1997, and his PhD from the University of Michigan in 2002. His areas of interest include multiagent systems, information economics, electronic commerce, and machine learning.

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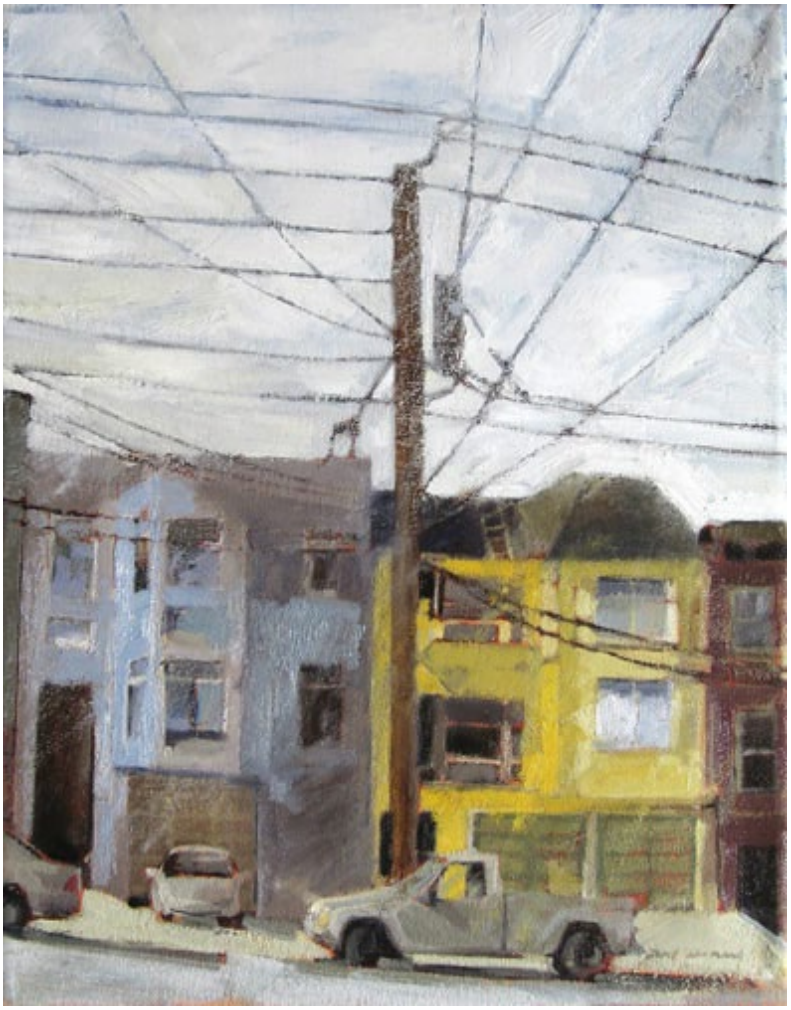
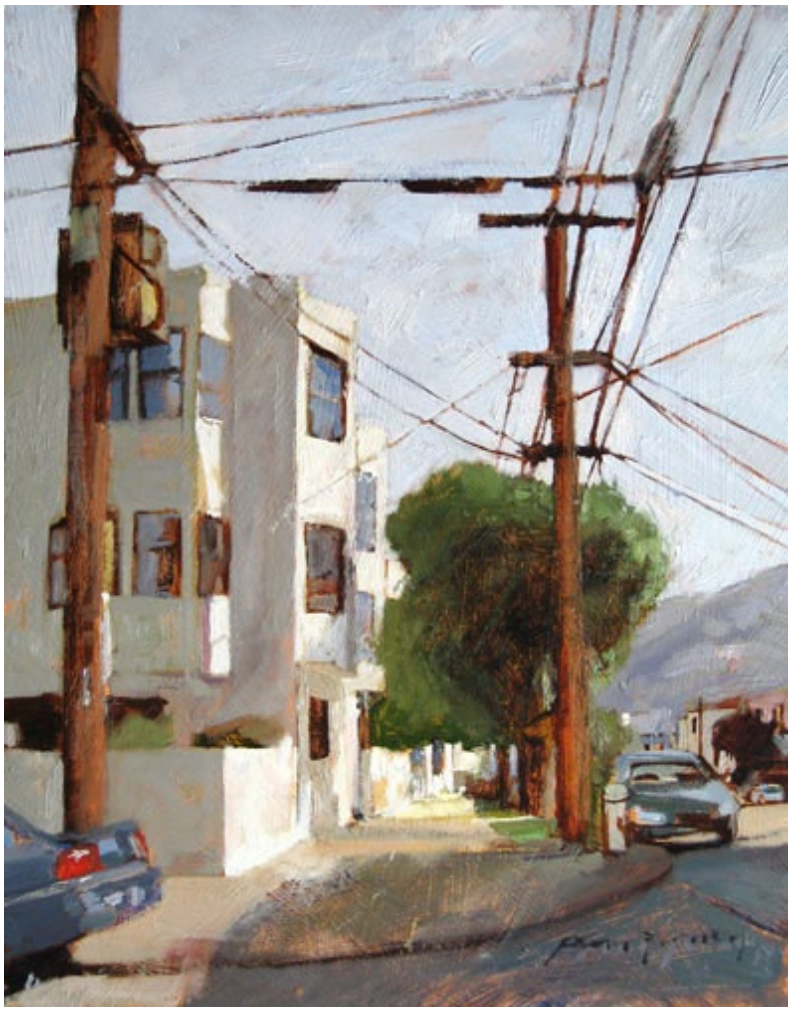
Paul Ferney

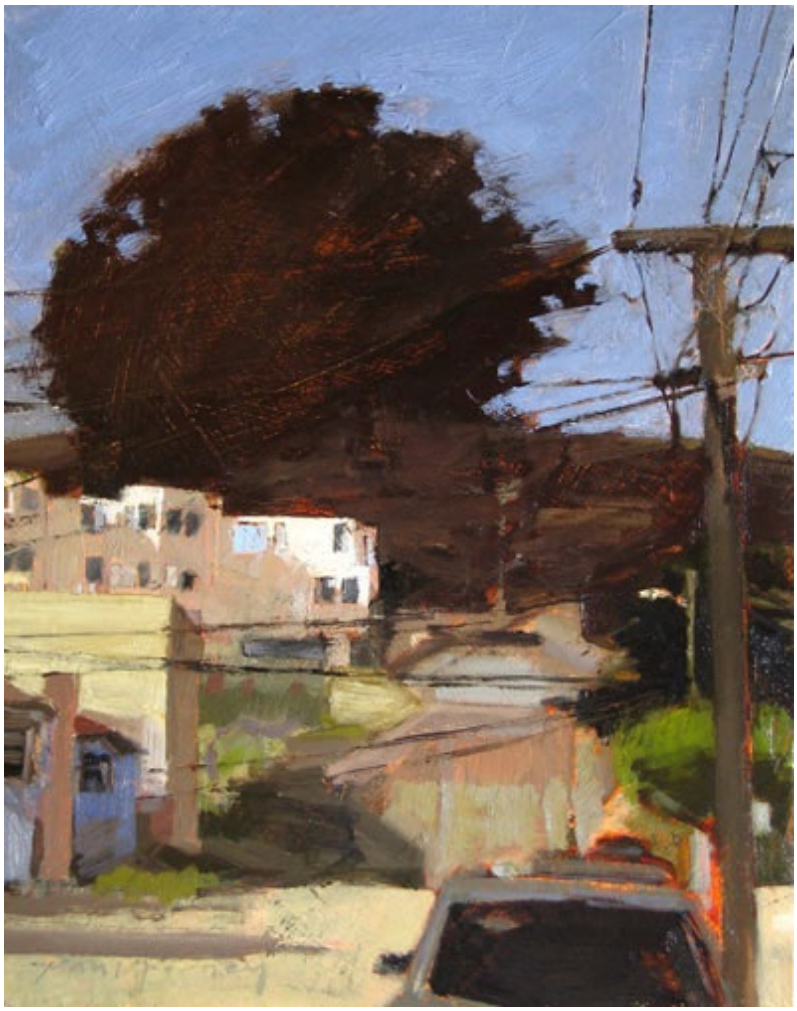
17th & Judah



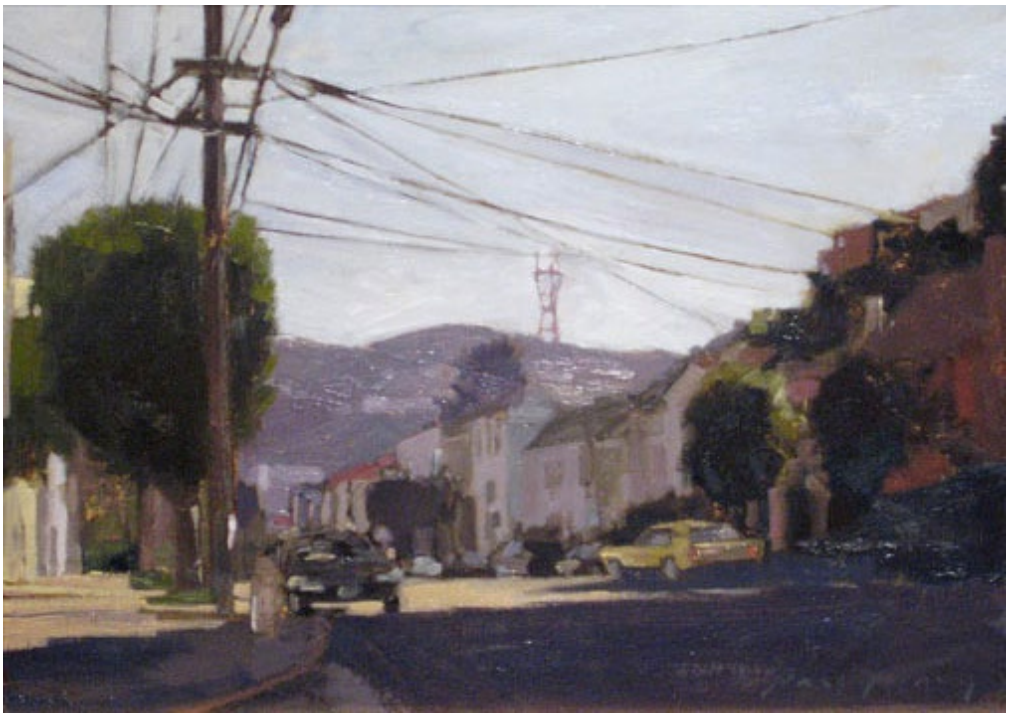
Living in the Sunset



Sunset No. 2



Sunset No. 3



Paul Ferney

Paul Ferney is a 30-year-old Utah native who received his BFA in art from Utah State University. He specializes in simplified vibrant landscapes and figurative oil paintings. After graduation, he worked as a graphic designer for an interactive marketing firm in Salt Lake City. He currently resides in San Francisco, where he divides his time between painting and working as the head designer for Esurance. Site: http://www.paulferney.com

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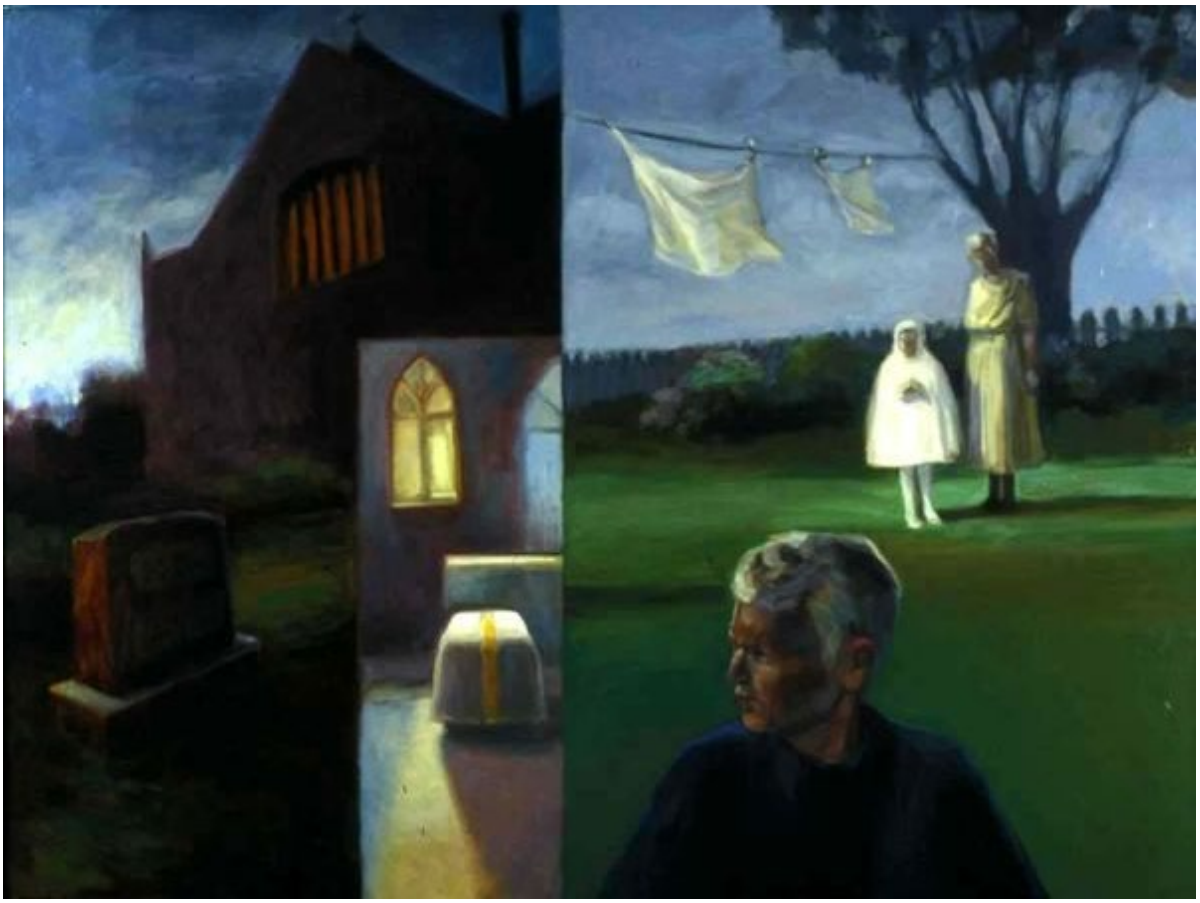
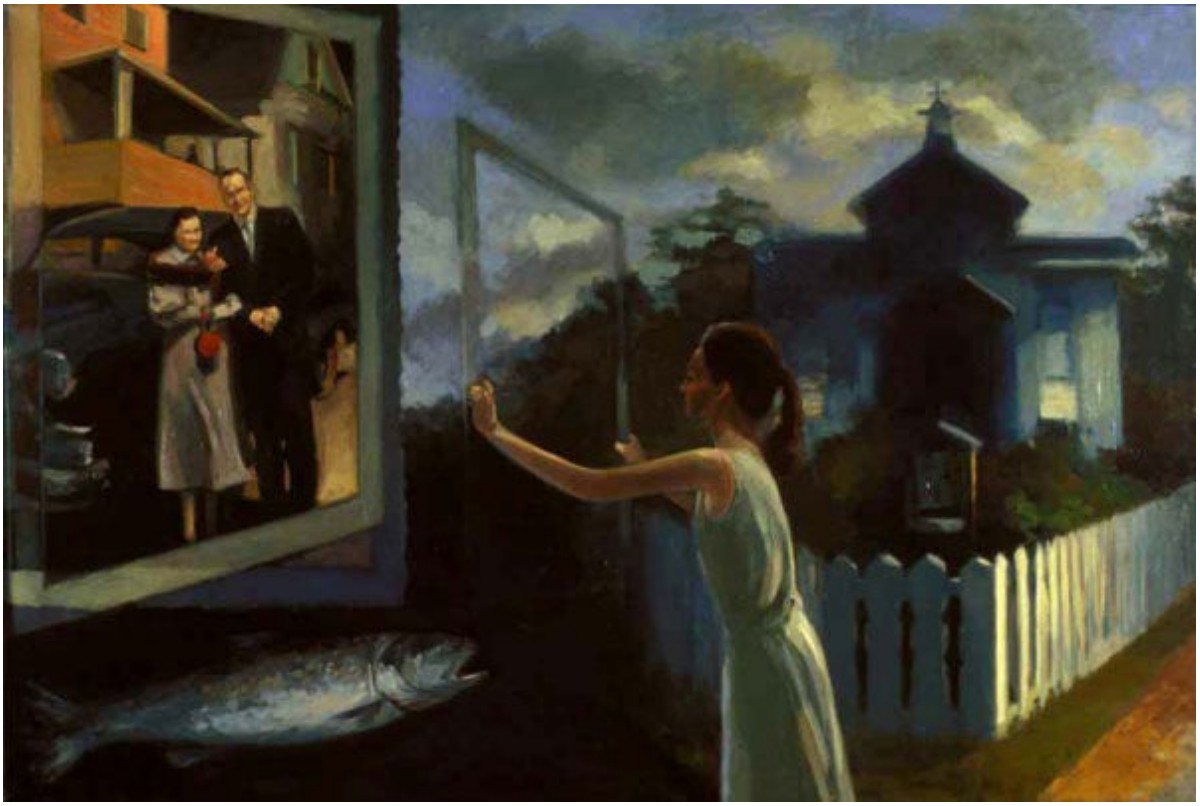
Mary Connelly

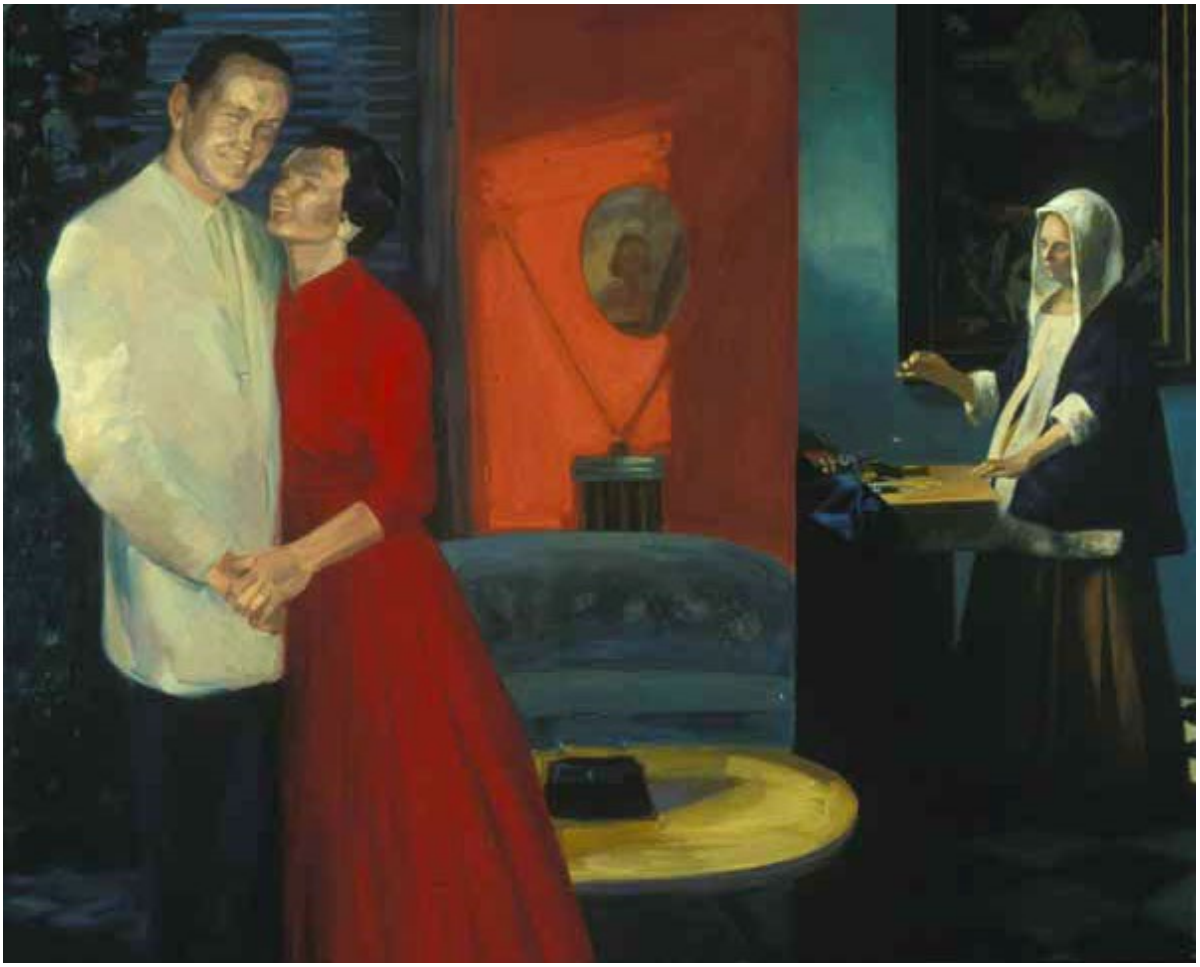


Communion, 2004, oil on linen, 36 x 48 inches

Dark and Salty Deep, 2004, oil on linen, 32 x 48 inches



Love's Illusion, 2004, oil on linen, 32 x 48 inches



The Red Dress, 2005, oil on linen, 40 x 50 inches

Mary Connelly

As a painter, Mary K. Connelly works in the tradition of narrative figuration, influenced by the intimate interiors of Vermeer, Bonnard, and Hopper; her paintings are a distillation of perception and memory where color and light convey a world psychologically and spiritually charged. Mary received her BFA in painting at Washington University in St. Louis in 1983, and her MFA in painting from Indiana University in Bloomington. The artist currently resides in Colorado and is an Assistant Professor of Painting and Drawing at the University of Colorado at Denver. Connelly is represented by First Street Gallery in New York City.

Contributions to Switchback

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(reset)

Preview: Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

- *objectivity*
- *subjectivity*

(about this preview)

(reset)

Preview: Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

- *objectivity*
- *subjectivity*

(about this preview)

PreView

Formal definitions are taken from the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language.

All other contents, except for the definition of *subjectivity*, are taken from works appearing in this issue of Switchback. All appearances of each titular term, including variants, are included; each line has a "§" link leading to its source.

This project is a TiddlyWiki. It was made by Alex Davis.

subjectivity

(effort)

1. The state of specific existence, ungoverned and uninfluenced by being.
2. Reality factually affected.
3. A thrown object perceived as aimed.
4. The project of interjecting what jets or juts from discrete material.
5. Ejection of phenomena toward the senses.
6. Rejecting as objective objectivity.
7. A sign of quality.
8. They who abandon all traject, or yē- who enter here.

objectivity

ob·jec·tiv·i·ty

(noun)

1. The state or quality of being *objective*.
2. External or material reality.

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(static version)
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Interviews: Mark Follman, Eileen Myles, Jackie Spinner, and Lynn Sweet

Interviewees:

- *Mark Follman*
- *Eileen Myles*
- *Jackie Spinner*
- *Lynn Sweet*

Q: In these days of heated controversy over the blurred lines between truth and fiction in memoir, propaganda as PR, disclosed and undisclosed sources, revisionist history, journalists being let go for falsified stories, authors creating mystery by assuming false "public" identities, and the entreaty "just trust me" becoming so shrouded in gray, how does a writer find his/her way to what's right to write, or a reader find what's right for them to read?

- *Mark Follman*
- *Eileen Myles*
- *Jackie Spinner*
- *Lynn Sweet*

Q: What are the general guideposts and delimeters you use for staying within bounds? How would these differ for memoir, for a journalistic piece? Why do they differ?

- *Mark Follman*
- *Eileen Myles*
- *Jackie Spinner*
- *Lynn Sweet*

Q: What faith do you have that facts have been checked in nonfiction books you read for pleasure? Have recent controversies helped or hurt this fact-checking process in your opinion?

- *Mark Follman*
- *Eileen Myles*
- *Jackie Spinner*

Lynn Sweet

Q: Does it bother you when you read for pleasure if the writing is stellar and breaks new ground, but the facts are later determined to be manufactured?

Mark Follman

Eileen Myles

Jackie Spinner

Lynn Sweet

Q: When interviewing and writing, how do you balance and weigh the amount of gray you tolerate in truth in a memoir, biography, journalistic story, history--given the subjectivity of memory, and the variances of opinions individuals have when sharing their own versions of truth?

Mark Follman

Eileen Myles

Jackie Spinner

Lynn Sweet

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Readings at the University of San Francisco, Lone Mountain, May 2006

Cynthia Audet, Lowell A. Cohn, Jennifer Coke, Maria Cielo Ludwig, and Erika Figel Roliz

reading (mp3)	*contribution to Issue #3*
Cynthia Audet	Dream Lightness
Lowell A. Cohn	My Introduction to Linguistics
Jennifer Coke	The Contract
Maria Cielo Ludwig	Ciphers and Constellations
Erika Figel Roliz	War Poem

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Out of the cracker jack box

Scott Malby

2.

The music teacher

I suppose is where

it all comes from.

Years of bad practice

and one day- music.

It's as close as that.

No tension. Open

but no business.

3.

Dance

My choreographer

is a dream

reaching for salt

and finding the sea

4.

Activism

Politics and capitalism.

A bride stripped bare

by her bachelors, even.

You steal their clothes

when you wear them.

5.

A breath

One breath.

All there is.

That's how

things started.

No system.

No argument.

A breath

into a breath,

kissing.

6.

Falling

Everything consumes

everything. A lie

consuming the monumental

in small bites

and being consumed.

Falls, over a cliff.

Scott Malby

Scott Malby lives in Coos Bay, Oregon. His work has been featured in such journals as *Cross Connect, Blaze Vox, Eclectica, Pedestal Magazine, Aught, Univ. of Glasgow,* etc. His work has been translated into French, German and Spanish. New work out soon in *Jack* and other places.

Contributions to Switchback

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Issue 4: Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

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CURFEW THE DEAD

Nathaniel G. Moore

His toga soiled in unconfirmed stains roam free in mischievous tumbles. I add bleach to the cycle.

I remember the coffin, how it glided despite the stone-seeded road and describing death to make believe reporters who did skateboard tricks with their clipboards.

The spastic streetlights sponging up our pimples. Moths along our gums drunk off the humid faith-eaten air.

God, what were you thinking?

Sleep is entertainment for those whose minds have government. Curfew the dead, Catullus and I will sew the earth with laceration, howling and pride.

Parts of Roman Culture pasted thoroughly over my aggravated lampshade.

I reach for the switch, poorly painted and full of texture; I hear the moaning alleys: the crumbling market, the colourful conquering.

Hooded shadows in alleys consulting the tones of a pale civilian.

Moon-tipped ink runs across the barracks into the showers rusted locks of museum hair are combed nightly by guards. All is tenderly watched through faceless security cameras.

Thumbs in the gutter tumbling by the seamstress shop. I have on a light blue flannel pair of antique pajamas who during the day dry naked in the sunlight. The lampshade is full of his fingerprints, I clean it often.

The storm outside begins. Shadows lean. He walks in the room. The ancient earth holds his family, he holds me away from his body like a knife blade humming.

He wore a pair of sandals on the ferry. In my backyard I study the dust on his face. Mixed in with the garden salad harvest. His fingers brush the leaves of lettuce. Watches them like hems.

At night my damp voice stains his phone. He washes the receiver of stubble before putting it down.

The naked heart showered, chunks of water break off the stream. From the tap, come down and root me out. Makes me invisible before him.

Sand in my stretched eye, a souvenir of Catullus, torso and all. Embroiled, plunged, the wet heckler of fleshy union with a two-legged smile.

The patent is somewhere on a bookshelf. Catullus walks out in bilingual banters from the bathroom. Flesh tombs in a trunk. Tucked into midnight drawers. His fingers FULL OF RINGS dent the lampshade.

Nathaniel G. Moore

Nathaniel G. Moore is the author of *Bowlbrawl* (Conundrum) and features editor of *The Danforth Review*. He regularly contributes to *Broken Pencil* and *This Magazine*. His next book (poetry) is titled *Let's Pretend We Never Met*, coming out in Spring 2007 with Pedlar Press. For more information visit www.notho.net

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from *Disaster Lyrics*

Rob Halpern

[01/08/06]

for Yedda Morrison

Having spent the nite dreaming of the *attentats* that stabilize our regions,

My own stability being this strange effect of structural events and market

Value, I slowly came to understand, by the deafening volleys muting

Local soundscapes—drowning all our broken signs, these puffy vowels—

And the total speech situation in which we've been embedded, that all sense

Of connection, all but the most abstract relations (say those aligning

My language and the armored vehicle with the hi-tech border patrol

Who takes yr body as stuff to be processed, identity's fleshy yield) survive

Abraded in appearance so that barely a ghost of my own outline

This misshapen form (stark lineaments of a single limb or digit like the one

That guy held up on TV to show it had been blown away) remains

A barely legible touch in the space between enjoined imaginations—ours—

And what networks of power hail us still from this place beyond the dream.

[11/01/05]

Then his voice just petered-out becoming

Strands of pale blue smoke he was gaunt

As an old crane and just as wild as what

I'd be anything to wind you back around

Reacquaint ourselves with lost sensation

Invent a world to save us from the world

Just feel this — *damaged roadside fridge*

[11/19/05]

for Lee

This morning feels and lingers fall

Our bodies clot the white remove

Lying wedged embedded pools

The lustrum hides our naked stark

Touting sky's all-purpose pack

Stiffing up the friction lubes

Opens nothing's pink patois

Mouthing punks the war with want

Touch my longing eons come and

Goes touch want in longing songs

Organs dreaming products sink

Guns our silent blocks for broke

We're falling under inquiry stress

Thru which words *white phosphorus*

Rob Halpern

Rumored Place (Krupskaya, 2004) is Rob Halpern's first book of poems. Recent work appears in *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative* (Coach House Books), as well as *Antennae, Chain,* and *Submodern Fiction*. He's currently translating a suite of essays by Georges Perec, the first of which, "For A Realist Literature," is forthcoming. Together with Kathleen Fraser, he is editing the poems of the late Frances Jaffer. His new project is called *Music for Porn*.

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You Don't Know Me

Subjectivity and Objectivity in Junot Diaz's Short Story "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie"

Casey S. Torstenson

To address the question of subjectivity and objectivity in Junot Diaz's "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie" is really to discuss a case where appearances are manipulated to the extent that objectivity becomes impossible. The story takes the guise of an instructional manual, purporting to offer advice as to how to act or behave depending upon the ethnicity and social class of the reader's date. But if the true purpose of "dating" is to achieve not only physical, but emotional intimacy—that is, to truly begin to know the person one is courting (and vice versa)—then the advice of the story becomes counter-productive. This then becomes the central irony and driving force of the story. The potential for either participant to know the other, objectively, becomes impossible as Diaz instructs the reader (an assumed male) to pile layer upon layer of subjective façades onto his interactions, masking his history, social status, and even racial characteristics in hopes of manipulating the situation at the expense of emotional intimacy (in the sense of the participants knowing each other's true selves). Likewise, by highlighting the extent to which a person's own expectations of another human being are determined by his or her subjective generalizations about a person's race or class, Diaz demonstrates that while we control the other's perception of us, our perceptions of others also control us.

By the second paragraph of the story, its role as a primer becomes clear as the narrator instructs the reader to mask his social class by hiding the "government cheese" in the refrigerator (143). But even this is not a simple action, since the girl/date's social class will determine how well the cheese will have to be hidden. This introduces the central theme of the story—that the intended reader must act differently depending upon the race and social class of the person he is courting. Thus, Diaz's instructions fly in the face of the age old, objective, parental wisdom of "just be yourself" and highlight the way in which race/class constructs and expectations make such advice impossible to heed. This is further evidenced by the narrator's instructions that the reader hide elements of his history and racial background: "take down any embarrassing photos of your family," "Hide the pictures of yourself with an Afro," (143) and "Run a hand through your hair like the whiteboys do even though the only thing that runs easily through your hair is Africa" (145). To follow the advice of this story will, in all likelihood, get the follower closer to some form of physical intimacy, but this intimacy will be the result of a carefully manipulated subjective impression he creates for his date, rather than the more inherent and objective truths of who he truly is.

But Diaz does not confine his analysis solely to the ways in which the girl's race and class should determine the behavior of her date (the "you" of the story). It also determines the girl's behavior, or at least what the reader should expect of the girl. Diaz peppers his instructions with advice as to what to expect, such as "A halfie will tell you that her parents met in the movement" (146), "a local girl may have hips and a thick ass but she won't be quick about letting you touch" and "A whitegirl might just give it up right then" (147). Thus Diaz highlights not only stereotypes and their potential for accuracy, but also the extent to which a person's upbringing and race can determine his or her behavior. In doing so, Diaz emphasizes the way in which the social forces of race and class undercut both individuality and objectivity. If our actions are determined by the social influences put upon us by our race and class, where is there room for individuality? If our response to others is determined by race and social class, are we courting an individual or a racial/social archetype? To deal with another human being as a racial or social archetype rather than as an individual is to trade in stereotypes. The narrator's advice is predicated upon his subjective experience of groups (race/class), rather than the consideration of each human being as an individual, possessed of unique responses and desires. He plays at presenting the reader with objective truths (If she is this, she will act this way) but if a reader looks beyond the authoritative tone, he or she can see that this advice is no doubt predicated upon the narrator's subjective experience of these racial and social groups. This observation is further evidenced by Diaz's inclusion of a moment where the narrator's advice falters and breaks down in the face of a girl whose actions move beyond the realm of stereotype and into that of individuality: "She will cross her arms, say, I hate my tits. Stroke her hair but she will pull away. I don't like anybody touching my hair, she will say. She will act like somebody you don't know" (148). At this point, the girl is acting like someone the narrator does not know, someone who does not fit neatly into a racial stereotype. She is an individual, possessed of her own unique hang-ups and

insecurities. She is a human being more than an archetype, and this confounds the advice of the narrator. This moment is Diaz's reminder that we are all more than the categories into which we fit, and that no fit is perfect.

Therein lies one of the primary strengths of Diaz's story: by highlighting the reduction of the individual to race and class characteristics, he forces the reader to question both the accuracy and the validity of such a reduction. Though the story couches all of its points under the pretext of sexual intimacy (ranging from a kiss to full on intercourse), it nonetheless forces the inquisitive reader to consider the ways one manipulates appearances in all social contexts and interactions and the way in which one's own biases and expectations determine behavior.

Works Cited

Diaz, Junot. Drown. New York: Riverhead Books, 1996.

Casey Torstenson

Casey Torstenson is in the 11th hour of his MFA degree at the University of San Francisco. His work has appeared in the University of Pennsylvania's collection of Mandell Essay Award Winners, *Context Magazine*, and *34th Street*. He is currently working to complete his second novel, *Cotton Fever*, as the final project for his Master's Degree.

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Something Shiny

Mysti Berry

Molly flips the channel, trying not to grit her teeth between each station because the new digital setup pauses too long between each of her fast-fingered clicks. She can name that movie in a half a second or maybe a second or two, if it's not one of her favorites, like all that stuff on *Spike TV*, and with the normal cable she could move through her stations quickly, checking the temperature on *Oprah* and seeing if the forensics show was really new or just a rehash of that psycho-killer couple from Canada or the Green River killer because who cares about that old crap, haven't there been any good murders since the 1980s anyway? But with this new digital it's like the clicker talks first to a satellite and the whole time it takes a radio wave or whatever to travel from her clicker to space and back leaves her looking at a blue screen, waiting, when she could be three channels down, especially in the Mexican range.

It could be worse, Molly thinks at one of the blue screen pauses, the stupid satellite or is it some microwaves or a glass tube in the ground, it could leave me on the news channel, then I'd be stuck staring at that poor girl in shorts waving a flag for her hurricane rescue while her daddy, fatter and uglier, was kept to the left of the screen except when he's doing something like waving a sign that says 'help us.' Molly notices the rest of the time the camera fellow centers in on that poor teenager. At last the camera went to other sad people, dying of thirst just hours after the hurricane broke the levees, their skin not shiny like a healthy person but matte, absorbing the light, not even enough energy left in their bodies to produce oil to cover the skin. Does that cameraman have orders or is it a natural male instinct, to focus on the pretty girls even if they are just standing there, waiting?

Molly slows her clicking when she gets to the home shopping channels. Not those high-energy, fix-up-your-neighbor's-house-with-cheap-paint-and-tacky-furnishings shows but the nice slow pace of the *QVC* or the *Home Shopping Network*. Molly used to wonder why the things she bought never quite shone as brightly once she got them out of the UPS box. She thought she had misremembered things as being brighter or bigger than they really were, but one time when the people in the studio got a little mixed up and instead of pointing at the wax-over porcelain doll the camera was pointing at the lights in the ceiling, Molly counted the lights and remembered something someone had told her once, that you had to light the shit out of television sets.

In all these years since *I Love Lucy*, they must have invented better cameras or film or whatever it was that ran in those big rigs with the man attached like just another accessory. Probably they had "improved" things just like they had improved her cable to the point where she took three times as long to swing through the dial, even after she'd figured out how, with the help of a man in Bhopal or somewhere, to eliminate the channels she didn't need like the fly fishing and all of the Mexican stations except the one that played those soap operas, full of strong-faced women who never took no for an answer until they got near a bed. Molly practiced the proud head and angry arms of those ladies, but never used them in public.

Molly pushes the little previous and next keys. She has to keep one light shining and her readers on, to find those little left and right arrow symbols among fifty-odd other buttons. She feels like a race car idling at a stop light, because the *QVC* is selling knives and the *Home Shopping Channel* has those pointless little statues, children doing grown up things in costumes from Germany or somewhere, the real ones were valuable and started with an H not Hummer but something else, but the things on the screen right now are overpriced at $29.95. The camera zooms in and she sees cheap mold lines along the little heads and legs of the creepy cherubs. She is anxious to fill in the dead time without missing her doll.

If the 21-inch, wax-over porcelain doll she wants is sold first in the lineup, she might not be able to phone in time to get one unless she is right there watching. Her favorite artist, Dolly DuPre, had a prize-winner this year at the Doll Show, which *QVC* had not covered, and no one Molly knew had attended all the way back in DC, but she'd found a picture of it on the Internet when her son-in-law had visited, and she wanted that prizewinning Miss Cheyenne to complete her collection. The TV channels would sell them at a discount, besides she didn't want her son-in-law telling her not to buy things which is what would happen if she asked him for help with the Internet. As if to say, "don't count on me to support you, old lady." Molly wasn't even retired yet.

Dolly DuPre's dolls were one of a kind. Molly had learned all about Dolly's sojourn to France to refine her painting, and her years in a dusty Central Valley town just like Molly's, raising girls who must be beauties to judge by Ms. DuPre's dolls, all of whom had the same face more or less, but you didn't mind because it sure was a beautiful face, strong like the Mexican soap opera ladies, but...well, a little better behaved, you could tell. And the costumes which Molly's husband had always complained about her buying along with the dolls instead of using her own perfectly good sewing machine, those costumes sparkled on the TV set and were nearly as shiny when she got the brown UPS box and the plastic wrap off. Molly looks at the rows of dolls. Their crinolines fill up the empty spaces along the shelves. It makes her feel better every time she looks at them.

In her impatience Molly hits the wrong channel--that weird show with old drug-humor people, *Saturday Night* show or something, now chattering away with a big America in their name but what they talked about wasn't very American, especially now with a war on and nature gone mad down south. She wondered why the television evangelists didn't blame the hurricane on stiff-necked crackers the way they blamed AIDS on the gay people. Molly thinks about asking her preacher this Sunday, hell Bakersfield is so full of Angelinos now some in the congregation might appreciate someone who believed in the right to bear arms and get an abortion. She could at least shut up that annoying Nancy, holier-than-thou since the third grade, and now so solicitous it makes Molly want to scream. Scream and never stop.

Flipping back, Molly sees that the plastic-faced television hostess is already mid-pitch for a Dolly DuPre, but thank God not the award-winning Miss Cheyenne. Long limbs under her costume, olive skin and black hair, and a perfect face and neck. She wasn't quite sure how a gal in a saloon-hall costume from the movies had gotten a name like Cheyenne, not with those sharp European cheekbones, but it was such a relief to look at something pretty and shiny. Molly turns the sound down--she has been to the fair and recognizes the relentless hypnotizing sound in the selling lady's voice--and just soaks up all that shiny satin and smooth porcelain skin.

Molly cradles the clicker in her lap and speed-dials the phone as soon as Miss Cheyenne's item number and price flashes on the screen. She wants to feel excited, but all the hurricane nonsense and more bombs from around the world and her husband gone and her son-in-law dating someone else already, it stills her clicking fingers, darkens the room, and the very best part of buying a doll, next to standing her up on the shelf with her sisters, the joyful, bright buying, is ruined.

Molly sets the clicker down next to the shiny metal picture frame, her daughter's bright eyes sparkling underneath the flat green of her Army cap. Molly does not see the television. She hears only the scratchy voice of the fellow in uniform. He came and told her that the war had taken her daughter. Miss Cheyenne stiffly twirls on the stand in front of the television camera. Molly does not see. She stares down the hallway at the doorknob. It glints in the afternoon gloom, waiting. Waiting, like Molly.

Mysti Berry

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Issue 4: Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Joan Didion and the Subjectivity of Facts

Lana Dalberg

In "Girl of the Golden West", Joan Didion reviews Patricia Hearst's memoir, *Every Secret Thing*, with an emphasis on the particulars of what, when, who, where, and how. These facts give the piece an objective feel. But it is Didion's delivery of the facts - elongating some, scaling back others - that shape and color the reader's understanding of them.

Facts are commonly viewed as objective, pertaining to the object under discussion. Their selection and order, however, is subjective, defined as belonging to the subject - the one selecting, arranging and crafting them, in this case, Didion.

In the opening two paragraphs Didion establishes the dates of Patricia Hearst's kidnapping and her subsequent arrest. In the first paragraph she provides several alluring details about the kidnapped heiress; in the second she describes the captive-turned-bank robber's role in various armed assaults. The paragraph below integrates the two images of Patricia Hearst - the kidnapped heiress and the bank robber.

> On trial in San Francisco for the Hibernia Bank operation, she [Patricia Campbell Hearst] appeared in court wearing frosted-white nail polish, and demonstrated for the jury the bolt action necessary to chamber an M-1. On a psychiatric test administered while she was in custody she completed the sentence "Most men..." with the words "...are assholes." Seven years later she was living with the body-guard she had married, their infant daughter, and two German shepherds "behind locked doors in a Spanish-style house equipped with the best electronic security system available," describing herself as "older and wiser," and dedicating her account of these events, *Every Secret Thing*, to "Mom and Dad." (Golden, 4).

On the surface, this collection of factual details appears objective, isolate, real. The first set of details gives the location and reason for Heart's trial and describes her nail polish and familiarity with the mechanisms of an M-1 carbine. The next set quotes Hearst's response on a psychiatric test, chases her words with the details of the particular man she marries, the family she forms, the house she inhabits, and ends the passage with quotes from Hearst's memoir. All information given is factual, taken from stated record or directly observed by Didion.

However, other details from the same trial and the same memoir, or even the same observations arranged in a different way, would lead the reader to ponder Patricia Campbell Hearst differently. But Didion selects those details best suited to her intent and juxtaposes them in startling ways to awaken the reader to a particular interpretation.

In the next paragraph, Didion parades a series of photo images which alternate between distillations of a wealthy lifestyle and snapshots of a rebellion espoused in the name of the poorer classes.

> We had Patricia Campbell Hearst in her first-communion dress, smiling, and we had Patricia Campbell Hearst in the Hibernia Bank stills, not smiling. We again had her smiling in the engagement picture, an unremarkably pretty girl in a simple dress on a sunny lawn, and we again had her not smiling in the "Tania" snapshot, the famous Polaroid with the M-1. We had her with her father and her sister Anne in a photograph taken at the Burlingame Country Club some months before the kidnapping: all three Hearsts smiling there, not only smiling but wearing leis, the father in maile and orchid leis, the daughters in pikake, the rarest and most expensive kind of lei, strand after strand of tiny Arabian jasmine buds strung like ivory beads. (4, 5).

Didion orders this caption-like set of images to contrast the well-off communicant (smiling) with the bank robber (not smiling) and the pretty fiancée in the simple dress (smiling) with the rebel (not smiling). Like a slideshow, the arrangement of details shows the rich Hearst and then the rebel Hearst, followed by the rich and again the rebel, and ending with an extensive and detailed view of the rich Hearst. The snapshots create a back-and-forth pattern (smiling/not smiling; rich/rebel) that introduces tension and raises additional questions in the reader's mind. Again, the facts appear objective, but their arrangement is not. Didion has juxtaposed images to create a particular effect.

Didion also elongates and embellishes the closing image with a series of phrases, each one resounding with increasingly specific details. "We had her with her father and her sister Anne in a photograph taken at the Burlingame Country Club some months before the kidnapping: all three Hearsts smiling there, not only smiling but wearing leis, the father in maile and orchid leis, the daughters in pikake, the rarest and most expensive kind of lei, strand after strand of tiny Arabian jasmine buds strung like ivory beads." (5). The extraordinary level of detail in this final lingering image gives it greater weight. Didion crafts the phrases to build on each other, from the inclusion of father and sister (all smiling) and the family's country club setting to an accumulation of details pointing out the rare, labor-intensive, and perishable beauty of the pikake leis and likening them to ivory, another luxury item but one obtained at the near extinction of its original owners.

Didion states, "All of these pictures told a story, taught a dramatic lesson, carrying as they did the *frisson* of one another, the invitation to compare and contrast." (5). She then deepens the images of the previous paragraph, a disturbing assortment of opulence and riotous discontent.

> The image of Patricia Campbell Hearst on the FBI "wanted" fliers was for example cropped from the image of the unremarkably pretty girl in the simple dress on the sunny lawn, schematic evidence that even a golden girl could be pinned in the beam of history. There was no actual connection between turkey legs thrown through windows in West Oakland and William Knowland lying facedown in the Russian River, but the paradigm was manifest, one California busy being born and another busy dying. Those cymbidiums on the Hearst's doorstep in Hillsborough dissolved before our eyes into the image of a flaming palm tree in south-central Los Angeles (the model again was two Californias), the palm tree above the stucco bungalow in which Patricia Campbell Hearst was believed for a time to be burning to death on live television. (Actually, Patricia Campbell Hearst was in yet a third California, a motel room at Disneyland, watching the palm tree burn as we all were, on television, and it was Donald DeFreeze, Nancy Ling Perry, Angela Atwood, Patricia Soltysik, Camilla Hall, and William Wolfe, one black escaped convict and five children of the white middle class, who were dying in the stucco bungalow.) (6).

With Didion's ingenuous crafting, the images begin to merge. Before our very eyes, the rich girl morphs into the rebel. "Even a golden girl could be pinned in the beam of history." (6). The metaphor is so disarming, one might feel empathy for this girl, an emblem of the prosperous California, and yet, Didion juxtaposes this statement with "There was no actual connection between the turkey legs thrown through windows in West Oakland and William Knowland..." (who we know from the previous paragraph is a member of the ruling elite) "...lying facedown in the Russian River..." (6). By stating that there is no connection between these two, Didion underscores the elusive connection that we as readers long to make. She heightens our need to make sense of the contradictions before continuing "...but the paradigm was manifest, one California busy being born and another busy dying." (6.)

By ordering the images - the turkey legs tossed by the rioting poor followed by the suicide of a ruling class member - Didion links birth with one class and death with the other. Then she delivers a third set of fact-based images, beginning with the orchids of the Hearsts' Hillsborough home that "dissolved" into the flaming palms of south-central L.A. The juxtaposition speaks directly to the rich of Hillsborough and the poor of south-central Los Angeles, which Didion emphasizes parenthetically as "two Californias." The numerically smaller class, the ruling elites, is captured in the image of the ornately minute cymbidiums (a cool climate member of the orchid family flower); the voluminous poor are rendered through the much larger, ubiquitous Southern California palm, which in this case, is burning. The images confuse. Who is dying? Who is being born?

Before the reader can sort this out, another, longer parenthetical remark presents a "third California," a circle of spectators informed by "television" that includes Patricia Hearst, once again in hiding, as well as Didion, and numerous others "watching the palm tree burn as we all were, on television." (6). Didion's repetition of "television" emphasizes the media's role in creating a spectatorship, a nebulous "we" that might well include the reader, watching the burning bungalow. This "we" is contrasted with the identification of those who were burning to death: "one black escaped convict and five children of the white middleclass." (6.)

By concluding the paragraph with the race, class and social status of the people who were actually burning, Didion prompts the reader to question why these individuals burn while the elitist rebel, Hearst, is safe in the Disneyland motel and "we all" are watching on television.

Didion's details, their juxtapositions and power to shock, oblige us to make meaning without an overt narrator guiding our thoughts. This is Didion's genius. She renders objective facts in details so excruciating, with such grating metaphors and arresting juxtapositions that her subjectivity slips in largely unnoticed. Didion culls and combines the precise facts she wants us to know in the precise order she wants us to know them, and in this way, they bear the intent of their subject.

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Issue 4: Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Inter-Views

Marie Fiala

"As awful as it can be, the truth is what matters.
It is what I should be remembered by. . . ."

James Frey, *A Million Little Pieces*

THE WRITER: I wanted to use my experiences to tell my story about addiction and alcoholism, about recovery, about family and friends. . . . I wrote about the events in the book truly and honestly and accurately. All of the events depicted in the book are factually accurate. . . . The only things I changed were aspects of people that might reveal their true identities. Otherwise, it's all true. I wrote the book for a number of reasons . . . the reason most important to me was so I could create a tribute and a memorial to my Friends . . . who are now dead. Most of them have been forgotten. I haven't forgotten them and I never will. [1]

MOTHER: She used to sit here [pointing to kitchen table] in the evenings, doing her homework while I was starting dinner. I'd fix her a cup of tea and we'd talk about her day. What was going on at school, with her friends. She wasn't like a lot of teenagers, always shut up in their rooms. Michelle really liked being at home, she enjoyed her family time. You should have seen her with her brother, Matt. They were so good together. They'd joke, kid around. She'd help him with homework, take him shopping for new clothes before school started. She was excited about it being her senior year in high school, and a bit scared, too. We'd talk about what she would do after she graduated. She'd lived here in St. Joseph all her life and she wasn't sure whether she wanted to stay in Michigan for college. I think part of her wasn't ready to leave home yet.

THE WRITER: Honesty is essential to any discussion of addiction. . . . Avoiding it, prettying it up, bragging about it, intellectualizing it, it's all bullshit pure and simple, and harmful, often fatal, bullshit. My hope is that my book, my often painful honesty, can cut through some of that and grab at least one person and make them look at who they are and what they're doing and change. [2]

FATHER: She was a terrific athlete, a natural. Even when she was little, she liked playing with her T-ball more than her dolls. When she got older, we'd go down to the park after I came home from work and throw a ball around, her and Matt and me. She had a good arm, for a girl. She'd throw that ball as hard as she could, trying to make it sting. In school, she played baseball, tennis, volleyball. She made the varsity team in every sport. What do I remember? [closes eyes] I think about her on the tennis court, running to make a net shot. Totally focused on the ball. Then wham! She'd hit it home. She was fearless out there. Fearless.

MOTHER: Here's her picture.

This was her senior yearbook portrait. She's so beautiful, so beautiful. Look at all that curly hair. It used to get all snarled when she was little and she had to sit still while I combed the tangles out. She never complained, she'd say, "Don't worry, Mommy, it's ok, you're not hurting me," even though I know it must have hurt. She had huge brown eyes. She'd look at you so deep, like she could see who you really were. She was a happy girl, always smiling. I loved to hear her on the phone with her friends, laughing. She was the light at the center of our house.

THE WRITER: I met Michelle . . . when my Family had just moved to a small Town. I didn't relate to any of the Kids in the Town, they didn't relate to me. I didn't lift weights, I hated heavy metal, I thought working on cars was a waste of fucking time. . . . I am who I am and they could either like me or hate me. They hated me with a fucking vengeance. I started getting taunted, pushed around and beat up. I taunted back, matched every push with a push, every punch thrown with one of my own. Within a month or two I had a reputation. Teachers talked about me, Parents talked about me, the local Cops talked about me. They did not say pleasant things. . . . I responded by declaring War on them and their Town with everything inside of me. I didn't care whether I won or lost, I just wanted to fight. Bring it on you Motherfuckers, bring everything you've got. Six months into my time there I became friends with a Girl named Michelle. She was popular, beautiful and smart. She played sports and she was a Cheerleader and she got straight A's. I don't know why she wanted to be my friend but she did. [3]

MOTHER: That night, the night it happened. . . . [voice trails off]

FATHER: [Quietly] We were watching TV, probably the Tonight Show. We used to love Johnny Carson. When the doorbell rang, I was startled because it was late, so I looked out the side window in the living room. There was a policeman standing on the front porch. Standing there looking down at his shoes. Right away, I got a bad feeling. . . .

MOTHER: She'd gone to a party at a friend's house not far from here. I was there when her best friend Jeannie stopped by and picked her up. Michelle said she'd be home by twelve or twelve thirty. I remember the last words I said to her as she was going out the door. *Don't forget your jacket. Stay warm!* The silly things you say when you think there'll be a next time. . . . She never gave us cause to worry. She didn't run around. She didn't drink because she was involved on the sports teams and she wanted to play her best. Still, I always worried a bit when she was out. I didn't sleep right until I heard the front door open and knew she was home. You always worry about them no matter how old they are.

THE WRITER: Michelle got asked out on a date by this Guy in High School. She knew her Parents wouldn't let her go, so she told them she was going to the movies with me. I had never done anything to them and I had always been pleasant and polite in their presence, so they agreed and they drove us to the Theater. I went inside and I watched the movie with a pint of whiskey and I walked Home by myself when it was over. Michelle got picked up and went on her date. She and the Guy parked and drank beer and as he was driving her back to the Theater, he tried to beat a Train across a set of tracks [4]

MOTHER: When he told us, the policeman, he said there'd been an accident. That Michelle had been in an accident. All I could think was, *she's hurt, she's in the hospital, I have to get my shoes on, I have to get to the hospital.* I kept thinking that over and over. I had a hard time taking in what he was saying. Then I realized he was saying he was really sorry, it was a very bad accident. . . .

BERRIEN COUNTY, MICHIGAN SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT DEPUTY: I was the first officer on the scene. I was dispatched to investigate a reported car/train accident in St. Joseph. Upon arrival I noted a C&O train stopped on the track north of the Maiden Lane intersection. The car involved was a 1976 2-door Oldsmobile Toronado, grey in color. The vehicle had been struck by the train in the right passenger door and bent in a U-shape. The vehicle came to rest 626 feet 4 inches from the point of impact, with the left front tire of the car 15 feet 11 inches away from the track. The damage to the vehicle was extensive.

TRAIN FIREMAN: We'd started our run about 2:00 that afternoon, from Benton Harbor to Watervliet to drop off some cars and then back to Benton Harbor to pick up some more cars and take 'em down to New Buffalo. It was just past 9:00 at night and we were northbound back to Benton Harbor. We were running light, just the engine and a caboose, doing 'bout 50 miles an hour. I was up front with the engineer. We were coming up on the crossing in St. Joseph. I saw the signal lights flashing up ahead, and the engineer blew the whistle at the whistle post, oh, 'bout 1200 feet before the crossing. Then I saw a car coming down the road from the left, fast. It just kept on coming, didn't stop at the signal, didn't slow down, drove right across the tracks. I felt the shock when we hit it and there were a lot of sparks and flashes from the metal scrapin' against metal. It was several hundred feet before we could bring the train to a complete stop.

SHERIFF'S DEPUTY: Upon approaching the vehicle, I saw three occupants trapped inside. I was unable to open the driver's side door, so I broke the windshield and climbed up on the car to reach the victims. There were two white female passengers and a white male driver. I checked the female passengers. Neither of them was breathing or had a pulse and it was obvious that they were both deceased. The driver of the vehicle had a pulse but was not breathing on account of the victim had swallowed his tongue. I pulled his head back and cleared his airway, and at that point the victim started to breathe. I remained with him and kept his airway open until medical personnel arrived on the scene. The male victim and driver of the vehicle was identified as Duane Spaulding. He was transported to the Mercy Memorial ER. Upon his arrival he was treated by the emergency room staff and taken into emergency surgery for numerous injuries received in the accident. Once out of surgery he was placed in intensive care and listed in critical condition. At my request the Berrien County dispatcher contacted the Medical Examiner, who approved removal of the two white female victims to Mercy Memorial Hospital. The two female victims were identified as Michelle Sanford and Jean Hunt.

THE WRITER: His car got hit and Michelle was killed. She was popular, beautiful and smart. She played sports and she was a Cheerleader and she got straight A's. She was my only friend. She got hit by a Train and killed. She got hit by a fucking Train and killed. [5]

TRAIN FIREMAN: I'd been working for Chessie [the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad] for twenty-six years at that time, and I'd never hit a car before. Lots of times there'd be debris on the tracks, or once in a while an animal, a cow or something, but never a car. It stayed with me a long time, the sound it made when we hit and the flashing sparks, and the long time it took for the train to stop. And then, when we did stop, the silence. No sound at all, just dead silence. It's hard to put it out of your mind, you know? Just a bunch of kids ridin' around on a Saturday night one minute and the next minute it's all over for 'em.

THE WRITER: I don't believe she's in Heaven and I don't believe she's in a better place. She's dead, and when we're dead,

we're gone. There are no blinding lights, there is no happy music, there are no Angels waiting to greet us. St. Peter is not at the Pearly Gates with a big fat fucking book, our friends and Relatives are not holding a seat for us at some divine dinner table, we do not get a tour of Heaven. We are dead and that is it. No more. [6]

SHERIFF'S DEPUTY: I interviewed a number of witnesses who had attended St. Joseph High School with the victims. One of the witnesses stated that Duane Spaulding had invited approximately 10-12 students to a party at a house which was located off Maiden Lane. At approximately 9:00 p.m., Duane Spaulding along with Michelle Sanford and Jean Hunt left the party to go to the Smiley's Station located at Red Arrow and Glenlord to purchase beverages. The witness waited at the house and upon the three subjects not returning, got worried at which time he and another student went out looking for them. It was at this time he went past the accident scene on Maiden Lane and went up to the car and realized the car involved was that of Duane Spaulding. He then went down to the hospital to check on the conditions of the occupants of the vehicle.

NURSE: I was working the night shift at Mercy Memorial when the parents of that poor girl came in with a police officer to identify the body. I was asked to take them down to the morgue to witness the identification. No matter how many times I've had to do that, it never gets any easier, especially when it's a child involved. They were both quiet, real pale, obviously in shock. The father had his arm around the mother, was supporting her as they walked down the hall and into the elevator. When we got to the morgue, they paused just inside the door. They were holding on to each other real tight. Then they walked in and stood a little ways away from the table. The policeman folded down the sheet covering her face and asked the father, was this his daughter? He walked over and looked down at her, and then just crumpled over sobbing. Then the mother walked over. . . .

MOTHER: She was wearing the new pink sweater she'd bought to wear to the party. Her hair was matted with blood and there was blood on her face, but it was still her, my baby girl. I reached down and stroked her hair back from her forehead. I wanted to stay with her, wash her face and hair and sit next to her and hold her hand, but they told us we needed to go. I couldn't bear to leave her like that, in that cold room, dirty and alone. [Long pause] That was the worst moment of my life, having to walk away from her and leave her there, all alone.

> POSTMORTEM REPORT: After clothing was removed an exterior check of the deceased was made by Dr. Jamison. It found severe skull laceration and skull damage to the right side of the cranium behind the ear, with portions of the cranium penetrating into the brain. An area 3" x 1" in depth protruding into the brain. Also, a large laceration was found to the upper right outside thigh, 2½" x 1" x ¾" deep. Upon checking the internal organs it was found the deceased received multiple lacerations to the right lung, contusions to the left lung. The 6th, 8th and 9th ribs on the right side were fractured and the 1st rib on the left side was fractured. A check of the internal cavity found 300 ml. blood in each side of the chest. Also found were massive spleen lacerations; 100 ml. of blood found in abdomen; massive lacerations to the liver; fractured pelvis; lacerations to the right side of the kidney; and contusions of the pancreas. Test of blood serum was taken with a finding of .00% alcohol in the blood stream. A viscular fluid test was taken from the eyes which also indicated .00%. Results of the tests indicated zero alcohol content in the victim's body. Cause of death was determined as massive head and internal injuries.

THE WRITER: I found out the next day. I got blamed by her Parents and by their friends and by everyone else in that fucking hellhole. If she hadn't lied and if I hadn't helped her, it would not have happened. If we hadn't gone to the Theater, she would not have gone on the date. The Guy was unhurt and was a local football Hero and everyone felt sorry for him. I got taken down to the local Police Station and questioned. That was the way it worked there. Blame the fuck-up, feel sorry for the football Hero. Vilify one forever, forget the other had anything to do with it. I took a lot of punches for that bullshit, and every time I threw a punch back, and I threw one back every single time. . . . I threw it back as hard as I fucking could. [7]

MOTHER: The accident happened about a mile from our house, close to the lake. A day or two after the funeral I drove over there and parked the car just this side of the train crossing. *This is the last place where she was alive,* I thought. I drive over there every so often. It's the place that connects me to her last moments in the world. Even now, years later, I still measure everything by her absence. Every once in a while I'm caught up by something and I want to say to her, *isn't that beautiful, the bright new leaves in spring* or *look at the sunlight reflecting off the water*. So many things she missed. So many things were taken away from her. From me.

SHERIFF'S DEPUTY: A blood alcohol level taken from the driver, Duane Spaulding, upon his arrival at Mercy Memorial prior to his emergency surgery showed an alcohol level of .106%. A warrant was issued approximately one month after the accident and Mr. Spaulding was arrested on a charge of vehicular manslaughter. He pleaded no contest to a negligent homicide charge and was sentenced to a six-month term in jail and two years probation.

ST. JOSEPH WOMAN: Michelle was my cousin. We grew up together, went to school together from kindergarten on. She was so graceful and beautiful. She seemed golden, you know? Like nothing could ever go wrong in her life. One of those girls everybody likes. I could talk to her about anything and she would listen. I couldn't believe it when it happened, when she died, I mean. I couldn't believe she was gone. When you're that age you think you're going to live forever. When someone your own age dies, it makes you question everything you think you're sure about. Suddenly my life had this big hole in it. I'll never forget her, ever.

THE WRITER: Welcome to Big Jim Industries. Site is up and fully operational. All the world is rejoicing. I was extremely honored, thrilled and humbled by the announcement . . . that Oprah chose *A Million Little Pieces* as the latest book for her book club. Thank you, Oprah, thank you. *A Million Little Pieces* is #1 on the New York Times bestseller list, USA Today bestseller list, Publisher's Weekly bestseller list, Booksense bestseller list, LA Times bestseller list. Thanks again to Oprah Winfrey and the folks at Harpo for including me in the Book Club and making this a crazy dream come true. Event at the new Borders in the Time/Warner Center, which is a beautiful store. Oprah's crew was there was fun and cool. Doing a signing today . . . Crew from the Oprah will be there shooting it. Come if you can, come if you can. Taping Oprah tomorrow. Very excited. [8]

ST. JOSEPH WOMAN: Sure, I've read the book. Everybody that I know has read that book. When it came out, everybody was talking in town, saying how wrong it was. There were only two girls in town who'd been killed in a train accident, so I knew that it had to be Michelle and Jeannie, but what he wrote about the train accident, none of that was accurate at all. . . . He was a grade behind us in school, they weren't friends or anything. They weren't together that night. He didn't even describe her right. Michelle wasn't a cheerleader, it was Jeannie who was the cheerleader and who got straight A's. Anybody in our school knew that he didn't have anything to do with that train accident.

SHERIFF'S DEPUTY. Nope, I don't remember him at all. I interviewed all of the witnesses to the accident, including 9 or 10 students who went to school with the victims. Yeah, I'm sure. If he'd been involved, someone would have mentioned him. He wasn't picked up or questioned. He wasn't mentioned in the official traffic accident report. I don't even recognize his name.

MOTHER: Some friends of ours told us about the book. That he had written about a girl who must have been Michelle, about how he supposedly had caused her death in a train accident. It's hard to re-live it all again, even though it's been a long time. He wasn't close with Michelle. I would have known if he was. I knew her friends, they were at our house all the time. He was never even questioned in regard to the accident because he had nothing to do with it. Even so, when I first heard about what he had written, I thought, *is this possible? Did she lie to us?* The terrible thing is how he could make me

doubt what I know and whether what I remember is true.

FATHER: I never met him and I never drove him anywhere. I sure as hell never drove them to any movie. Michelle wasn't dating any football player. We knew where she was that night. She went to the party with her best friend Jeannie, and they died together in that car.

ST. JOSEPH WOMAN: St. Joseph is one of the highest per capita income areas in the whole county, so it's unlikely that he would've run into many "metal heads" or "motor heads" when he moved here. And him saying that everyone in school hated him, nothing coculd be further from the truth. Oh my gosh, he was well-liked. He had lots of friends. He was part of the popular group and on the soccer team. He was a good player. Our team won the district championship that year. It's sad that he perceives himself as a tortured character. That's not how we saw him. He always seemed happy-go-lucky. He was voted "Class Clown" in our high school yearbook. I can't imagine why he would say all those things.

THE WRITER'S ATTORNEY: We are litigation counsel to James Frey, author of the book *A Million Little Pieces*. . . . I am informed that you questioned my client's veracity concerning his statement about his friendship with a girl in high school whose name was identified in the book as Michelle. You identified a woman and claimed that you spoke with the parents of Michelle, who allegedly claimed that my client was not close friends with the girl who was killed in the train accident. . . . Be advised that to the extent [you] falsely state or imply that my client is a liar and/or that he fabricated or falsified his background as reflected in *A Million Little Pieces*, such conduct will expose you and all involved . . . to substantial liability. [9]

THE WRITER: Let the haters hate, let the doubters doubt, I stand by my book, and my life, and I won't dignify this bullshit with any sort of further response. [10]

THE WRITER'S ATTORNEY: My client has lucrative book and movie deals in place, as well as having an expectation of prospective economic benefits. Publication of a false Story about Mr. Frey - particularly one falsely attacking his credibility - would imperil both his existing and anticipated economic benefits, resulting in substantial damages to my client. [11]

MOTHER: Everything that he wrote about my daughter was flat-out lies. I'm glad the truth finally came out. Michelle deserves to be remembered for who she was, not who he made her out to be.

THE WRITER: During the process of writing the book I embellished many details about my past experiences, and altered others in order to serve what I felt was the greater purpose of the book. . . . I wanted the stories in the book to ebb and flow, to have dramatic arcs, to have the tension that all great stories require. I altered events and details all the way through the book. Some of those include my role in a train accident that killed a girl from my school. While I was not, in real-life, directly involved in the train accident, I was profoundly affected by it. [12]

MOTHER: He's a writer, you know, they don't tell everything that's factual and true. He used the accident to sell his book. It feels like he's stolen something that belonged to us. What really happened, what it meant. What it still means.

THE WRITER: I believe . . . that memoir allows the writer to work from memory instead of from a strict journalistic or historical standard. It is about impression and feeling, about individual recollection. This memoir is a combination of facts about my life and certain embellishments. It is a subjective truth. . . . Ultimately, it's a story. [13]

MOTHER: It's very hard to lose a child. You never get over it. It's something you carry around with you always, like a stone in your pocket. Sometimes you can go for a while not thinking about the stone, but it's always there, heavy, its

weight pulling at you. Once in a while you reach into your pocket to touch it, remind yourself that it's there. Because the worst thing that could happen, the very worst thing, would be to forget and to start to feel normal again. Because then it would be as if you'd never had a child, as if she had never existed. And you can't let that happen. You carry that stone with you the rest of your life because you need to remember, even when nobody else does.

THE WRITER: I am an Alcoholic and I am a drug Addict and I am a Criminal. That is what I am and who I am and that is how I should be remembered. No happy lies, no invented memories, no fake sentimentality, no tears. . . . I deserve to be portrayed honestly and I deserve nothing more. [14]

* * *

NOTE TO READERS: The words attributed to "The Writer" and "The Writer's Attorney" are actual quotations from James Frey and his counsel. The other characters are based on real people who participated in the events described, and the material facts incorporated into this piece are based on the factual research cited below. However, all of the "interviews" are entirely imaginary.

Complete sources

Marie Fiala

Marie Fiala is a second-year student in the MFA in Writing Program at the University of San Francisco. Her critical essay, "An Unflinching Rhetorical Gaze: The Personal Essayist and Disclosure," was published in Issue 2 of Switchback. Marie received her A.B. from Stanford University and her J.D. from Stanford Law School, and is a full-time practicing attorney specializing in complex commercial litigation. She is married and the mother of three children, and lives with her family in Berkeley. She is currently completing a memoir about her experience as the mother of a disabled child. "Inter-Views" is dedicated to the memories of Melissa Sanders and Jane Hall, and to their parents.

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Issue 4: Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Black Rabbit

Sam DiFalco

Uncle Toto took my hand in his and led me through the crowded parlor. The tail of his black scarf flapped in my face. It smelled of onions and ashes. People touched me as I passed them, their hands falling on my head, and murmured things I could not understand. A woman I did not know with a long neck and red eyes pulled her hair when she saw me and started screaming. Uncle Toto jerked me away from her, squeezing my hand until I felt the bones. My father, in a tight black suit, stood by a casket on wheels lighting a candle. He looked at me and smiled. His eyes rolled back.

Someone had died. People wept. Three old women in black occupied a brown velvet divan against one wall, nodding and weeping as they wolfed down tomatoes and tripe. One of them dropped a fork. I stepped over it. Uncle Toto pulled me into an unlit back room, leaving the door ajar. A wedge of yellow light spilled through, only to thin and disappear as a draft shut the door. I stood absolutely still as Uncle Toto fumbled with something in the middle of the room. I could just perceive his outline as my eyes adjusted to the darkness, the large head, narrow shoulders. He was talking rapidly to me or to himself; I could not understand a word. It was too fast. He was dry, he sounded dry. His silhouette thrashed. Then a naked bulb flickered on, shedding amber light. Uncle Toto stood at one end of a heavy wooden table examining the contents of a brown paper bag. He gestured for me to join him.

“Hurry up,” he whispered. “What’s wrong with you? Don’t you want to see?”

“What is it?”

“Come and see.”

In the dim light Uncle Toto’s missing eyeteeth looked like black fangs. His white forehead gleamed. I hesitated.

“Come on,” he said.

“I don’t want to.”

“You’re a donkey.”

I tried to move my legs but could not. I slapped my thighs and felt nothing. What was this? Uncle Toto pulled at something in the bag. Then he turned to me and moved his mouth as though he were speaking. But I heard nothing. Was this some kind of game? I wondered. His wide-eyed, braced expression suggested that he wanted an answer to whatever he had asked me. But when I tried to tell him that I had not heard his question nothing came out of my mouth. My tongue felt like a piece of paper and my vocal chords refused to issue any sounds. Uncle Toto struck the table with both hands and appeared to be shouting, but again I heard nothing. He hurled a shiny object in my direction. It missed me and struck the wall, shattering into silvery shards. Uncle Toto clapped his hands and brayed with laughter. Then he picked up another object and reared his arm, threatening to throw it also. I mustered all my strength and with a great pull managed to lift my right foot off the floor and heave it forward. The left proved more difficult to move. I found myself in a ludicrous lunging posture, my arms spread for balance. I tried to straighten myself out but my feet felt cemented in place, the left significantly back from the right.

His face hidden in shadows, Uncle Toto continued handling the contents of the bag, at one point punching it. Voices registered just outside the door. Cousins, perhaps, other mourners. No one told me who had died. My grandmother was still alive, I had seen her earlier in the bathroom fiddling with her dentures.

I wanted to turn around and go find her. I gathered myself and with all my might lifted my left foot and threw it down beside the right. The legs lacked all sensation. I sat down and stretched them out. Sawdust covered the floor and several empty brown beer bottles stood under the table with their labels peeling. Uncle Toto appeared at my feet. He waved his arms and hoofed me lightly but I could not get up. His lips moved but I heard nothing except rustling from the brown paper bag on the table.

Uncle Toto's hands grabbed me under the armpits and lifted me to my feet. Then he guided me to the table, pushing me so close to it I had to reach out my hands. I caught a glimpse of something dark and flexible in the bag before Uncle Toto's shadow covered the table like black cloth. I could feel his hot breath on my neck and his hands buried in my armpits. I pushed against the table, into his chest, and he released me, nimbly shifting to my side. I glanced at the bag. It rocked back and forth a few times then rolled once.

"She's angry," whispered Uncle Toto.

"What is it?"

"I'll show you."

His hands reached inside the bag and removed what at first looked like a black cat. But then a floppy ear popped out and I saw it was a rabbit, its limbs tightly bound in twine. Its upper lip looked torn, its choppers exposed and blood-streaked. Its eyes were bleeding. Uncle Toto slapped the rabbit's haunches and it kicked some. He told me to touch it. I refused.

"Touch it," he whispered, "for good luck."

"I don't want to touch it."

"You'll die, then."

I tried to step back from the table but Uncle Toto's hand held my shoulder firm. Then the door abruptly flew open and a wave of sound—chattering, laughing, crying—flooded the room. Just as suddenly the door shut with a bang. Uncle Toto laughed in his chest. He removed the scarf from his neck and formed a circle with it on the table. In this circle he placed the bound black rabbit. The rabbit twitched a little but had lost its will to fight.

"People have to eat," Uncle Toto said. "The tripe is almost finished. It's almost finished and what will the people eat when they come to pay their respects? They have to eat. Rabbit is the best thing. You like rabbit, I know you do, I've seen you eat it. You like the leg. Look at the leg. Do you like it now? Touch it. Touch the leg."

Uncle Toto grabbed my hand and pulled it to the rabbit. I clenched my hand into a fist but he forced my knuckles against the warm fur. Tears fell from my eyes. I wanted to cry out for my father or my grandmother but when I opened my mouth Uncle Toto's hand covered it.

"No screaming," he said. "If you scream I'll kill you."

His hand fell away from my face. He fished around in his pocket and produced a small curved knife. He held it up to the light, his shoulders shaking merrily. He waved the knife under my nose. It reeked of garlic. Then he seized the rabbit's rear feet and lifted it above the table. The rabbit squirmed. I could hear it panting. Blood dripped from its jaws.

"Kill it," Uncle Toto said.

"I won't."

"You're afraid."

"I'm not afraid."

"You're afraid."

Without another word he waved the knife again and stabbed the rabbit in the abdomen. The rabbit bucked like a fish. Blood poured from its wound but the rabbit wasn't dead. Uncle Toto stabbed it again, this time in one of the legs. A terrible wet sound issued from the rabbit's throat. Uncle Toto poked the rabbit again in the abdomen. Then he plunged the knife into one of its haunches, working with a sawing motion until the right rear leg came free.

The rabbit was still alive, but Uncle Toto started skinning it, cutting a slit along its spine. Just before he tore away the black fur he held the knife to me again. I took the knife and without hesitation pierced one of the rabbit's eyes. Blood jetted out, then slowed to a trickle. This finished off the little beast. Uncle Toto clapped me on the shoulder. He told me to give him the knife and when I refused he slapped me across the face.

"You think you're smart, eh? You're not smart. You did a good thing though. In the eye. Nice. You're a good heart, like your mother was."

"Shut up."

He slapped me again, harder. I could taste blood. He slapped me again across the ear and I felt something pop and then I could hear nothing from that ear but a roaring sound. Uncle Toto now flayed and quartered the rabbit carcass. He worked quickly, pushing aside the black fur, scooping up the watery blood with his hand and licking it off his palm. He ordered me to do the same but I refused. He went to slap me again but stopped in mid-motion as the door flew open. My grandmother stood there, dressed in black with a black veil covering her face, tiny, severe.

"Come here," she said.

I thought she was talking to me but when Uncle Toto stepped toward the door I relaxed. He walked with his shoulders hunched, shuffling his feet. He kept some distance from my grandmother, nodding as she addressed him. I could not hear what she said; noise rushing in from the open door drowned her out. When Uncle Toto started speaking, rubbing his hands together and bowing his head, she lunged at him, slapping his face so hard it sounded like a clap of thunder. He fell backwards, knocking over a stool.

My grandmother now called for me. My legs trembled so violently I could not move. She called me again and with all my force I shifted my legs and dragged my feet toward the door where she stood waiting with her hands on her hips, her face hidden. Uncle Toto stood up and brushed sawdust off his trousers. My grandmother cupped her hands and stirred them before her breasts. I stopped well out of reach but she insisted I come closer.

"Are you afraid of me?"

"Yes."

"Don't be afraid of me. Did Uncle Toto hurt you?"

"He slapped me."

"Did he kill the rabbit?"

I looked at Uncle Toto who leaned over the table. He winked at me as he picked up the scarf from the table and draped it across his shoulders.

"I killed the rabbit," I said.

"Don't be afraid of him," she said. "He'll pay for what he did. He'll pay. Now come with me and we'll get you something to eat."

My grandmother took my hand and led me out of the room back into the parlor. We passed the three old women, sitting on the divan with their legs spread open and their hands on their swollen bellies. My father still stood by the casket. This time he held a wreath of red flowers at his chest. He looked like he was singing but I heard no song, only the rumble of the people, some weeping, many eating from steaming plates. My grandmother took me to the bathroom and told me to wash the blood off my face.

"Are you afraid?"

"No, I'm not afraid," I told her.

"Are you sad that your mother died?"

"She died?"

"Yes, dear, she died this morning. Now wash the blood off your face like a good boy."

Sam DiFalco

Sam DiFalco lives and writes in Niagara Falls. Black Bile Press recently released a chapbook of his stories.

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Issue 4: Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

What You Get For Using It Like A Library

Jason Kahler

The Staff Only bookstore door
swings too loudly for the literature section,

my comfortable vinyl chair, and the girl
in tattered jeans sports a piercing—

I don't know its name
between her chin and bottom lip

where my beard grows a detached hair island
each strand a tear while shaving

so I imagine the piercing hurt
like a fireball or

like losing a favorite dog-eared copy
of Tom Sawyer—

but I reserve sympathy because she pounds
that door like a diner short order cook.

Jason Kahler

Jason Kahler lives and works in Michigan with his wife and 3-year old triplets. He received his master's degree in creative writing from Eastern Michigan University in December. His work has appeared in *The Seneca Review* and *Current*.

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A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Sophie Joe

THE BIRD OF PARADISE; ECSTATIC VISION AS A FUNCTION OF COPYRIGHT LAWS; AND THE AWESOME PROFESSIONALISM OF A POOCH WITH FLOPPY EARS

Oh what authority gives
existence its surprise?

W.H. Auden
(The Sea and The Mirror)

It wasn't until I had actually thrown the stick into the water and was watching
my pooch's floppy brown ears trace straight wakes out to retrieve it,
I noticed the air around the splashpoint had gelled into the shape of a tree,
huge,
maybe 200 feet high,
made out of nothing,
wetness, thick air,
and a gull was landing on one of its boughs:
I had dropped off the end of a thought into a poem.
I had meandered from one of the more comfortable ruts of my ordinary thinking into
A Timeless Moment.
An Important Lesson was cracking out of the shell between discourse and the
extravaganza even as I watched:

as Mr. Jones swam through waves that showed, then hid, then showed again his bobbing
glint of stick,
all the spilled lemons & rubies & tasty emeralds & blueberriest of cobalts he splashed out
of the water
were being sucked from the bay by the gull through the tree
and flung, as voice, through its beak
into the whole of the western sky
where yellows and reds and greens and blues eddied in pools and settled in layers
that pushed the sun into the sea.

And when the bottom of the sun touched the top of the water, that instant,
the bird in profile became the Actual Colour and Actual Shape of the crowing
Kellogg's Corn Flakes rooster;
and the doggie grabbed the stick, circled right,
and paddled back to shore.

When he swam through the trunk,
it disappeared,
just like that,
and the gull rested on the flexed muscle of a gust.

And when he reached the beach, he dropped the stick at my feet, slunk back to the
water's edge on paws that left pieces of sky in the sand,
and, blueberries growing on his whiskers,
watched my every move.

Sophie Joe

Sophie Joe is an imaginary character offering fragments of imagination to the curious.

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SHOE GATE

Ken Pobo

By the gray sole of Stan's shoe,
a green daffodil rehearses
the Wizard of Oz scene where
the munchkins all come out,

come out, wherever you are,
will probably win a Tony
as all dafs do in April. His

work shoes—tied loops,
like a sinking race track.
No longer trudging to his cubicle,
his shoe a gate spring

flings open. Bulb shoots follow,
slip through.

Kenneth Pobo

Kenneth Pobo's collection called *Introductions* came out from Pearl's Book'Em Press in 2003. His work appears in: *Indiana Review, Nimrod, ForPoetry.Com, The Fiddlehead,* and elsewhere. He loves to garden, collect old glass, and do his "Obscure Oldies with Ken Pobo" radio show at WDNR.com, 6:00-8:00 pm, Saturdays, EDT.

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After the Storm

Michelle Richmond

A childhood on the Gulf Coast is one in which water is primary. When I think of growing up in Alabama in the seventies, I think of one thing: water.

There were long summer days at the beach, of course, calm surf and bleached sand and jellyfish stings treated on the spot with meat tenderizer. There were thunderstorms, wild, noisy events that came from nowhere, catching us unawares on the highway. The windshield wipers were ineffectual against the avalanche of water, rushing over the glass in sheets. We'd pull over to the side of the road, feel the wind and water rocking the Galaxy 500 as we waited for the storm to pass.

Hurricanes were an annual occurrence. Looking back, it seems as though a big one came every summer, although of course that can't be true. I remember how my father would nail plywood to the windows in preparation for any hurricane of note, and my sisters, mother, and I would arrive at Delchamps—always slightly too late—to find the shelves nearly empty of water, tuna, canned soup, bread. We'd scoop up everything we could find, then wait in a line that stretched all the way back to the meat counter. On the way home, we'd join the long paralysis of cars idling on the road leading to the 76 station. Sometimes we sat for hours in the sweltering heat, engine off, windows down, air thick with that heady petrol smell. Bored, my sisters and I would get into the emergency rations, and by the time we got home our fingers would be sticky with Coca Cola and M&Ms.

Many times, we left town before the hurricane arrived, drove to central Mississippi to stay with relatives. Once, we didn't. I remember sitting in the walk-in closet of my parents' bedroom, listening to the storm raging outside. There were four of us in the closet—my mother, my older sister, the baby, and me. We had flashlights, coloring books, pillows, single-serving cartons of milk, store-brand Oreos. My father was in the living room, watching the storm through the only window he hadn't covered with plywood. I feared for him. My mother said, "Sometimes your dad doesn't have the sense to come in out of the rain." I imagined rain pouring through the roof, onto his head, puddling at his feet. I wanted to be out there with him. I was terrified but jubilant. It felt as if my family and I were alone at the violent center of the world.

Every few minutes we'd hear a crash—a limb falling, something slamming against the side of the house—and after the crash a loud whoop and holler. It was my father, in his glory. Nothing excited him like a hurricane.

After a while the noise stopped. There was a tap at the closet door. My father's voice—"Come on out, girls. You've got to see this." We emerged from the dark into our waiting house. We went to the front door.

"Is it safe?" my mother asked.

My father nodded. "It's the eye."

He opened the door and we stepped onto the porch. My mother cradled the baby against her hip; I clung to my father's hand. My older sister lurched off the porch into the yard. "Come back," my mother said, but my father said, "she's fine."

It was quiet out. Hardly any sound at all, just fallen branches moaning under their own weight. Our massive oak tree had shed all but three of its limbs. Our house stood at the entrance to the subdivision, and I saw then that there was no way in and no way out of the neighborhood; our wrecked tree blocked the way. The Galaxy 500 stood unharmed beneath the carport, but the pump house at the edge of the yard was gone, revealing the intricate metal workings inside.

"Maybe someone took her in," my mother said. She was talking about the cat, Jezebel. We hadn't been able to find her before the storm, and now she was nowhere to be seen.

My sister stood in the wet grass, rocking back and forth on her heels. "It's so quiet," she said.

The baby raised her arm and cooed, "Ooooh."

The sky above us was clear. The air was cool and damp. In the distance we could see the storm, the outer dark. It was beautiful.

After a while a breeze began to blow. My father herded us inside, back to the closet, our flashlights and coloring books. "We're under a tornado warning," he said. Of all the perils associated with hurricanes, tornadoes were the least predictable, and therefore the most exciting.

There, we listened for the sound of a locomotive, the auditory calling card that preceded a tornado. In case a funnel cloud beat a path to the house, our instructions were clear. My sister and I would climb into the tub in my parents' bathroom. I would hold the baby. My parents would slide a mattress on top of the tub. What would they do then? We never talked about it. I supposed they would sit on the mattress like a couple of worried birds, protecting their brood. I imagined how, after the tornado had passed, my older sister and I would kick the mattress off and pop our heads up into the world, like baby chicks. When I imagined this scene, my parents were never there. Around us there would be nothing, just a vast space swept clean of trees, houses, cars. A vast space, and in the midst of it, my sister and me, and the baby, huddled in the tub, starting over, like settlers in a new world.

Michelle Richmond

Michelle Richmond is the author of the novel *Dream of the Blue Room* and the story collection *The Girl in the Fall-Away Dress*, which received the 2000 Associated Writing Programs Award. Her new novel, *The Year of Fog*, will be published in spring 2007.. She is the recipient of the 2006 *Mississippi Review Prize* for fiction, and her stories have appeared in *Glimmer Train, Playboy, Other Voices,* and many other magazines. She lives in San Francisco, where she teaches creative writing and publishes the online literary journal *Fiction Attic*. Her website is www.michellerichmond.com.

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Weather With Capital Punishment

Jason Kahler

the men electrocute me drunk
my body explodes azure

death spectacular
and shaking

(you always smelled
like fresh bread,
buttered corn in July)

I am pumpkin man
sad, abandoned on November's stoop
face drapery slicing

a downpour: worms groping sightlessly
for each patch unsubmerged

a child's balloon fantastic yellow recklessly aloft
string trailing the failing grasp of an outstretched hand

the men will crank-up their lightning machine
my brain smooth
a carnival, cotton candy

how many lives
burned away with each volt?

(this heat is different)

my thunderhead sweeps down and away
blown fierce

(bring in the furniture)

now purple sky, ash trees touch
their toes
the sand around my feet glass
mirrored
I look down see
myself looking down

on an Iowa highway
borne west on silent wind,
within the tires of our truck, or the invisible push driving the rain
into our yard

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Issue 4: Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Remember How We Used to Play?

Laura Martinez

Alison's father asked if she'd play a game with him, and she almost didn't, because every time she'd seen him since leaving John he'd managed to say the divorce was a tragedy for everyone. Last time he'd said, "You're not the only person involved. We all like John. Now we have to adjust too." That and the fact that her father always played well enough to beat her.

It was early morning, but it was going to be a hot day. Three sides of the court were made up of a high, green, cyclone fence, and the fourth side was a high stucco wall, painted the color of marigolds.

"Glad you could make it," he said.

"Likewise," she said. She spun her racquet in her hands.

"Kids okay?"

"Great."

They stretched and he handed her two tennis balls. She tucked one into her shorts pocket and started a slow rally with the other, close to the net.

Large oranges hung heavy on a tree just outside the court. A bougainvillea vine, covered in bright fuchsia petals, clung to the marigold wall. Beyond the orange tree was a sage dotted desert, and all of these things, the oranges, the fuchsia petals, the sage, and the heat, mixed with light breezes coming off low desert buttes.

"Smell that?" Alison asked.

"Smell what?" he said.

"The desert," she said. "It's breathing."

Her father sniffed the air loudly. "Remember when you'd come to LA, just a bright, young teenager, and we'd play all out, using wooden tennis racquets and plain, white balls? No one plays that way anymore. They use huge, oversized racquets, and you can't find white balls anymore. Look at our racquets. They're graphite and titanium for god's sake."

A bright, young teenager, Alison thought. That's what he liked to remember. She saluted him with her racquet and smirked.

"Tennis used to have finesse and rules," he continued. "Now the only rules are how to keep score. No one has to wear white. It used to be a gentleman's game. That's the way tennis should be. Why did it change? Do you ever wonder about that?"

"Times change Dad," she said. She wasn't in any mood to debate the evolution of tennis.

They stepped to the baseline and kept the rally going. After a couple of minutes he said, "Ready?"

She nodded.

They rallied for serve and he won. Alison bounced on her toes while he got ready to serve, then bam! He aced her on his first serve.

"Nice one," she said.

"Didn't know that was coming," he said. He twirled his racquet and grinned.

"Right," she said.

He served his second ball softly, and Alison returned it clean to his backhand. He sliced it down the side of the court. Despite the slice, it landed softly, just inside the baseline. "See that?" he said, "Now that's finesse. Why doesn't anyone play that way anymore?"

"Looks to me like you're out for blood," Alison said.

"If you think so, dear," he said. "How's John?"

"Fine," Alison said.

"I've always liked him," her father said.

Like hell, Alison thought, but she kept it to herself.

"Sometimes a couple just needs a break. Have you looked at it that way?" he asked.

Alison narrowed her eyes and walloped the ball with her forehand. It landed just inside the baseline. Her father missed it.

"Nice shot," he said.

"Thank you," Alison said.

It went on like that. The morning warmed and they both broke out in a sweat. Large wet spots developed on their shirts. The back of Alison's neck, from the edge of her shirt to her hairline, the rounded bones of her shoulders, and the tender backs of her knees got hotter and hotter in the sun.

Alison's father chattered the whole time. He talked about love, compromise, and obligation, as if he'd managed all of them well. His voice seemed connected to the ball, getting louder after each hit, receding when the ball was on her side, each time giving her an opportunity to defend or explain herself. But some things are understood only if you've lived them, and she knew if she tried to explain how mean she and John had become, how they'd spat out "I've never REALLY loved you," to each other, it would only sound like kids having a fight.

Instead, she resisted the urge to give into the way her father played the game. He'd been playing every day, and she hadn't played regularly in years. She returned as many shots as cleanly as she could, hitting them back to the same spot over and over. She'd seen the monotony of that kind of play lull him into boredom more than once. Today though, he had one trick after another. He sent most of his shots to the extreme corners of the court, making her run and whack at some wildly. When she least expected, he tapped them lightly over the net or hit balls abruptly into her feet. When he was up five games to her two, and the score was forty-love his favor, she raised her hand and called out, "Last shot. Winner takes all." Every now and then he'd let her win when she said that.

"You're on," he said, and then wham! He aced a serve past her knees.

"What the hell?" Alison yelled.

"What, weren't you ready?" he yelled back.

"Son of a bitch, Dad. Since when did you have to prove you could beat me?"

"Don't swear. It's not lady-like. Hey, how about hitting against the machine? Your wrist looks like a wet noodle."

Alison went over to the bench, took a sip of water, and noticed a large, green iguana sitting on the wall, near the corner of the court, just above her father. *It never changes,* she thought. *Why do I ever think he's going to change? No one was ever good enough, strong enough, lady-like enough, enough of a gentleman, or had enough finesse*. The iguana chewed on a nearby leaf. A high, shrill bird called out and the iguana's tail snapped suddenly and sharply in the air. It cracked like a whip.

"Hey Dad," Alison said. "Looks like you have a friend."

"What?" her father asked.

Alison tilted her chin toward the wall, "Up there, a big, fat iguana just found some lunch."

"That's Fred. You going to hit some more? He comes out every morning, sits on the wall, and watches me play."

Alison's arms glistened wet, and she knew she should walk away. There was no way to win this game. Fred was better suited for this sort of thing, designed so perfectly for a hot day in the desert sun, needing only the occasional, lightning flash of tail to intimidate. No nerves, no emotion, just a lump of reptilian instinct, living only for itself, with absolutely no need for anything but a few leaves to munch on while sunbathing on a high wall. What a perfect life, she thought.

"You ready?" Alison's father called out. He'd set the ball machine up so it would shoot balls across the net, to Alison's side of the court.

Alison looked at the sheen of sweat on her arms, licked her lips, and walked back out on the court. She bounced on her toes, spun her racquet, then gave herself up to turning her body slowly, bringing her racquet back carefully, thinking about the position of her shoulders, and the placement of her feet. She remembered a time when all she had to think about was where to place the ball. Her father, who'd sat down for a minute, got up and walked over to the machine. He turned the switch off.

"What's going on?" she asked.

"You tell me," he said. He turned the machine back on and adjusted the speed higher. "Now hit this one like you mean it." A ball came straight out, and Alison threw her racquet in front of her face. The next one followed close behind. She stepped aside and instinctively sliced it with her backhand. It bounced close inside the opposite baseline, and spun high into the air.

"That's it Ally," he said. "Think about the ball as someone you're really mad at. Know anyone like that?"

Alison clobbered the next ball, and the next. Her father stepped in again and turned the machine off. "Feel that? That's what I mean. That's how you used to hit them. Like you meant it. Swing that blasted racquet!"

"What about finesse?" she asked.

"There's finesse, and then there's finesse," he said. He turned the machine back on.

Alison missed the next ball, and the next.

"Hit the goddamned ball!" he yelled.

Whack! Alison hit the next ball right at his feet.

"That's it!" he yelled. "Now slam this one!"

Alison aimed and hit the next ball harder. It hit him in the shin and he hardly flinched, just kept on talking. "Use the speed of the ball on your return. Now make some noise! Grunt when you hit the ball! Bring that racket back before you move, and grunt!" he yelled. "Know you're going to blast it!"

Alison whacked the next one and grunted loud. He moved off the court and she glanced at the wall. Fred twitched his head. A ball hit her in the calf and she cried out as it seized into a tiny fist of muscle.

"You hurt?" her father called out.

She turned to him and glared. Her calf felt like it was going to pop. Another ball shot out of the machine and she moved her racquet quietly in front of it. It bounced into the net. She flexed her foot, moved her racquet in defense, and let the muscle in her leg slow down. Fred chewed on another leaf. The sun was hotter now, and small rivers of perspiration tumbled between her shoulder blades and down her chest. The back of her neck was sopping wet.

"You mad?" her father called out.

"Fuck you," she muttered. She bounced a couple of times on her toes and imagined sipping a cold margarita in the shade. Come out and play a game, hah! Come out and get slaughtered and humiliated was more like it.

But the sun felt good, and sweating felt better, so she stretched her neck and her aching calf, and let the balls land around her as she melted into things. The sun, the iguana, the tennis court. She let the heat of it all in, smiled grimly, and flexed her shoulders.

Her father walked over to the machine and turned it off.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Turn it back on."

"Need some water?"

"No," she said.

He grinned sideways and turned the machine on sweep, so the balls would go from left to right and back again. Fred sat motionless on the wall as Alison shuffled back and forth, winding and unwinding her body, hitting each ball into the far corners of the opposite court. She grunted with each hit, grunting softer than her father would have liked, but grunting still, and when she felt the muscle in her calf unwind she went all out, hitting them as hard and accurately as she could. Wham! Wham! Wham! She ran and jumped into each swing.

A huge exhale of breeze came off the desert then, picking up the scent of crushed sage and tree-ripe oranges, bathing the court as if it were a fantastical sauna, and then a set of fluorescent green scales popped out along Alison's shoulder blades and rippled down her arms. Underneath, peacock blue scales appeared, and bright orange scales started pushing out from under her shirt. The scales rippled down her legs. With each winding and unwinding of her body new scales appeared and soon her feet were large rubbery pads with sharp, glistening claws. They clicked against the tennis court as she ran back and forth between each ball, cushioning the up and down motion of her legs, her muscles a wonderful mixture of supple and strong, and best of all, the scales created a breeze of their own, cooling her as they opened and closed. She wondered why it had taken this long, why she had to wait so long, and spent so many years frightened of losing control. Of what? Who really knew? Soon her sweat was no more than an unnecessary human thing. All she needed was the movement of her body and the fluttering of these scales, and then a large, rubbery, fuchsia comb popped from the top of her head and it wobbled gaily as she turned and spun. She could whack anything moving within twenty feet of her, and place it just so. The balls she'd missed before, she crunched with her toes. Her tongue grew sinuous and long, and she cackled, thinking she could smash a tennis ball with it if she tried, and somewhere in the distance she heard her father yelling, cheering her on, saying "Yes! Ally, hit another one! That's it! Put everything into it! Smash that sucker! Keep going! You can do it! That's my girl!"

Soon she was twirling around the court as a queen iguana. Fred raised himself up on his hind legs and cheered. Alison tossed her chin his way, showing a bright ribbon of marigold scales running down her neck. She lobbed a ball high and Fred whipped his tail wildly through the air, like a long, green lasso and sent the ball high across the desert. His eyes began to glow neon yellow. Alison opened her mouth to cheer, but her tongue fell out, grazing against her teeth, which were sharp as needles now, and she hissed loudly. She worked to draw her tongue back in, then she realized she could curl and uncurl it, right past the sharp rows of teeth. After that, all she had to do was move effortlessly, side to side, unroll her tongue and swat each ball. "Way to go Ally!" her father cheered as he dumped basket after basket of balls into the machine. "Kill it Ally! Smash that ball! Keep moving your feet!"

Pretty soon the court was covered in tennis balls, surrounding Alison in a bright, yellow-dotted lagoon. Alison's father walked toward the machine to turn it off. "That's probably enough for now," he said.

Alison watched him through thin slits, unable to believe he'd end it now. "No!" she yelled, "Leave it on!" But her tongue was in the habit of curling and uncurling now, so what came out was a guttural, reptilian kind of groan. Her father was all smiles, congratulating her and asking if she'd gotten rid of a little anger, saying sometimes it took a game or two to take the edge off. She wanted to stay right there, on the court, with her brilliant and bright scales keeping the air around her so cool, swatting effortlessly and snatching single-mindedly at anything coming her way. It took a supreme amount of concentration to quiet her tongue, but finally, after what seemed an eternity, she croaked some human words out, "Leave it on! For God's sake Dad. Leave the goddamned machine on!"

She inhaled the scent of sage, orange, and desert heat. It was her scent now, the marigold wall a luminous reflection, the bougainvillea vine a glorious, bright necklace, the heavy oranges beckoning adornments. She tossed her head and marveled at the wobble of fuchsia comb on her head, then she gnashed her teeth, delighted with the way they clicked and clacked.

Laura Martinez

Laura Martinez lives in Oakland with her family. She is currently working on a nonfiction book proposal and a fictional novella set in the mid-twenty-first century. By day she is a cheesemonger in Berkeley, and has published articles on cheese selling and cheesemaking in *Market Hall News*, and the San Francisco Center for Urban Education on Sustainable Agriculture (CUESA) weekly e-letter. She holds an MFA in Writing from the University of San Francisco, class of 2005.

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Here's to the Losers

Devin Walsh

The movie starts with a short nerdy kid walking out of school with a bounce in his step and the song “Here’s to the Losers” (Frank Sinatra) the only audio. The boy is potentially good-looking, his awkwardness more a case of benign neglect than genetic misfortune. You get the feeling he’s had a particularly good day – possibly a rousing lunchtime conversation on Federalist #10 or a great round of Magic brightened his mood. Sinatra is singing, “Hey Tom Dick and Harry, come on out of that rain, those torches you carry must be drowned in champagne.” It’s a glorious spring day, everyone in shorts and t-shirts, a dissolving crowd of backpacked kids, big yellow buses, the cliques, the bliss of relief for another done day everywhere evident.

Then the bullies arrive.

Suddenly they are at his heels. Muted mouths taunt and jeer. Our boy’s pace quickens, his jaw sets, his face reddens. The pack closes in on him. Eventually there’s a shove. Sinatra is belting it out: “Here’s to those who drink their dinners when that lady doesn’t show…to the girls who wait for kisses underneath that mistletoe…” They’re in a secluded corner of a park somewhere when one of the bullies, a scrawny guy in a white hat and wearing an expression of malicious glee, or gleeful malice, pulls out this great big knife. Our boy is encircled, freaked out, becoming frantic, the camera is sweeping around him as he is made into sport. They share the knife taking swipes at him that are increasingly less playful. All the audio is muted except for the song – which reaches its climax as the shit hits the fan. “Here’s to the looooooosers,” says Frank when our boy finally throws a good, solid punch, “bless them all!” he says, really riding that last note. Then one of the bullies cuts off our boy’s arm, right at the elbow.

The music ends. Suddenly it’s birds, the susurrus of passing traffic, the sound of breathing, feet on grass, a distant siren. Everyone in stunned silence, a wrenching long look at a rent arm bleeding into the grass. You’re permanently grabbed by the movie when the bullies actually start laughing. They point and laugh. You can’t believe they would laugh, but there it is.

The scene fades to black from the perspective of the disarmed guy as he collapses, the hectoring laughter, worming into your bones, spirals gradually but not soon enough into silence.

You watch the ring of bullies in a dark basement. They have taken the arm. It sits on the ground between them, bleeding a little. They stare, discuss how thrilling it all was. “We have to do more of this,” one of them says. “We owe it to ourselves.” “Yes,” another agrees. “To ourselves.”

The hunt begins anew. They walk with purpose down residential streets, spitting on mailboxes, overturning children’s toys, kicking curbs and snarling…the music is “Beyond the Sea,” (Bobby Darin) which makes no sense. Nothing does. The movie makes your veins itch. It’s like watching a violent traffic accident…a Camaro spinning through the air with maybe a pink backpack soaring from the window like what you saw once on I-40 in town. It’s awful.

There are six or seven of them, all look alike, each with an identical sneer and small, ropy build. Tough boys. They don’t look like the type of kids covering an inner timidity or weakness with a malevolent shell…they seem to be only mean, in their guts, reveling in it. They find a gang of dweebs on the sidewalk, sketching scenes from fantasy movies with those big bright chalks. The bullies form a ring around the boys and take turns with the knife, lopping off hands, feet, finally whole arms and legs. The sun batters down on them and the sweat rimming their heads and darkening their shirts clues you in that it’s hot as hell.

Again it’s silent save for the music – a mouthed and jawing circle of barbarism, unvoiced, only indicated again and again by the opening of their little wet lips, their Adam’s apples dancing in laughter. The victims cower, they rage, they survey with shock-deadened eyes their scatter of limbs…the them left on the ground. Then death, cold, grabs them, one by one. The bullies gather the pieces and spirit them off to the basement – where are their parents? – this time to no music, only the skip and drag and hustle of running, sneakers on asphalt, their panting and giddiness. Again in the basement they

begin to talk – still muted. You discern from their eyes and gestures, their vigorous debate, that an idea has struck them they are loathe to delay, only hammer out the best details of implementation. They laugh and yell and run about, collecting tools, towels and refreshments.

Groups of them will unbuckle from the proceedings while the rest stay diligent, pored over their creation – a taping together and screwdriving and nailing and drilling together of arms and legs. Undried glue seeps like magma from the connections. It is a barely restrained frenzy, like when you made spaceships from Legos, scrambling for that missing piece, that sensor array, that deflector shield node. The music is now "Boy Named Sue" (Johnny Cash)...the mud, the blood and the beer.

The strays return with bags of limbs. You're aware that a harvesting occurs in sleepy suburban neighborhoods, a dismantling of young boys of a certain kind. You knew them well in grade school. The kid who could never unzip or rezip his pants so had the teacher do it in front of the whole class. Matt Siberia, was his name. You ascended the public school ranks with him, watching as the belittlement and derision mounted, gaining a larger vocabulary of humiliation, never joining in but never lifting a finger to stop it. You can see a whole community of Matt Siberias taken apart limb by limb, the necessary evolution of their bullies' violence found purchase in blades and blood, because no one ever told them to stop. Because you didn't.

The justice will come later. For now it's only crime. The crime has to come first. That's the problem with justice.

"Why do we do this?" One of them asks, a pure voice from the melee, giving you hope. "Because we MUST!" A voice responds. You look frantically for the speaker, but it was the same guy. He was being rhetorical. Something dies in you.

It's Dwight Yoakum now. The song about being a thousand miles from nowhere.

They seem to be operating according to some understood inner agreement, like boys who know what to do with a gift, manual assembly required but no need for instructions.

You get distracted, thinking about instructions to that fucking hammock your ex-girlfriend bought. It's maybe the first, best reason to despise job outsourcing. Thing hardly written in English. The word "please" showing up at least three times in each sentence, as if apologizing for itself, aware of its linguistic manslaughter. Pissed you off.

They go on for hours, days. You feel like you've spent a week watching this movie of them in the basement, plastered in the mess of amputated limbs, sawdust, little cuts, a seemingly constant replenishment of freshly severed materials. Then, suddenly, it's over. They have stopped in unspoken decree. The thing is done.

It is a cluster of limbs, a Rubik's cube, a mind at angles, jutting shoes and fingers. It does not live but seems to be conscious, to be aware of them. Without eyes, it seems to watch them.

They form a circle around it, hold hands un-self-consciously, rotate slowly. It's tribal. The creation begins ever so slightly to mirror them, and to levitate – a tiny, narrow space between it and the ground opens, announcing its sentience. You think that what really displays a thing's intelligence is the pretend cushion area between it and the rest of the world, the remove, the divorce. It is why God is nowhere to be seen.

The film fixes then on the faces of the bullies, the awe and anticipation. It moves from one to the next with building speed, finally going so fast in a blur that you can't tell them apart anymore. It is one boy with no distinct features as everyone the whole world of humanity over is one featureless boy if looked at from far enough away, from the God perspective, or close but with the pace of something ageless, immortal, who perceives of the rise and fall of species in the blink of an eye.

"What'll it do?" One of them asks, the merry-go-round halted instantly on one face, unblemished, even cherubic in its naked curiosity.

No one answers. You are thinking: It will kill you all. Exact vengeance one tugged-off skin molecule at a time. It will work on you with the methodology and savor of a thousand victimized kids. You can't wait to see it. Even squeamish as you are you want to see them pay.

The thing is made of what looks like hundreds of mismatched pairs of arms and legs. It spins with the boys as if they are in geosynchronous orbit with it, symbiants, like electrons orbiting an atomic nucleus. You wait for it to strike. Its constituent parts are moving, fingers flexing, feet kicking at each other, thrusting out. The music is "I've Got You Under My Skin" (Dean Martin). You think: What's up with this soundtrack?

It is imbued with the angst and suffering of all those harvested nerds, having spent long school years and blistering summers under ridicule or fear of ridicule, under the thumbs of stronger kids. Now, in aggregate, they have the strength of numbers. It's only appropriate, you think, that they strike...zero in on one of those cherubic faces, tear it apart.

Without a mouth, it doesn't speak. But it does make it clear that it seeks a way to communicate. It stamps on the walls, pounds the ground. The bullies wise up. They offer a notebook and a bunch of pens, seized in a fast moment and absorbed by a flux of torn hands.

It spits out the paper a moment later, wadded up balls of scribbled-on yellow paper ejected from its spinning mass in rapid fire, catching some of the bullies on their heads and bodies, others caroming harmlessly off the basement walls. The bullies keep up the paper feeding as they unravel the missives.

"A poem," one of them says.

"Yeah," another agrees. "It's poetry. Fucking poetry."

It wouldn't kill them, you recognize, but it did disappoint them. It could write in iambic pentameter at about 50 lines per second. It wrote the misery of its souls, accelerating its rotation, getting to be so fast that you imagine it might spin itself beyond the envelope of light, go back in time to a day before the attack, the attacks, when the monster wandered the neighborhood discrete, as boys who hardly spoke to each other for fear of saying something wrong.

Devin Walsh

Devin Walsh eats tons and tons of peanuts. He is the creator and editor-in-chief of a magazine called Metabolism and his work has appeared on www.flasheville.com and www.verbsap.com.

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with hidden noise (Marcel Duchamp)

Christopher Mulrooney

fire castaway longsea Peg decides castoff
fine cheat since the deserts furnish
kempt sharp bargain as however corresponds

Christopher Mulrooney

Christopher Mulrooney has written poems and translations in *Eclipse, Black Arts Quarterly, The Hollins Critic, The Tiny* and *Aroostook Review*, criticism in *Elimae, Parameter* and *The Film Journal*, and a volume of verse, *notebook and sheaves* (AmErica House, 2002).

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Feeding

David Booth

When out of the blue the child asked what the difference was between homicide and suicide, she cried, “You're spilling!”—and that he please hold his cup upright. When he asked if suicide were more common than homicide—or if homicide was more common between the two—she said, “You're getting all wet!—please hold your cup upright, or if the next time you're thirsty how about I don't feed you?”

David Booth

David Booth teaches fiction in the MFA in Writing Program at the University of San Francisco. His stories have appeared in *The Missouri Review, The Kit-Cat Review, Paragraph, Carriage House Review, Fourteen Hills, Transfer, Absomoly, Morbid Curiosity* and other journals and anthologies. His debut novel has found a home with a literary agent. He is currently writing his second novel.

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Devotion

Phyllis Gropp

The shutters and clapboards leaked music every day, those melodies from the cubic house of an old couple near Downtown. When piano sonatas and concertos wafted over the block, serenading the nearby park, people walked more slowly and birds sang more brightly; neighbors opened their windows to Chopin and Liszt, while children passing by asked their elders for piano lessons. Then one dreary fall the music stopped and the house grew dilapidated, as voices ruptured the peace. A year later the shouting continues. "You only have time for your family. Bucelli, Bucelli." Randall calls across the modest living room to his wife, Iris, who bites her lip, who doesn't want to cry. Occupying the barrel chair, which keeps him upright with no effort on his part, slumping in an undershirt and pleated wool trousers twenty years old, he says, "Drive yourself. Wreck the car."

Iris offers no answer, tries to filter his ranting. She can't imagine what set off his brain chemistry in recent years, what surge or trickle turned him more hostile, turned him paranoid, turned his incessant griping into vicious attacks. On his trip from irksome to cruel he acquired a bit of dementia. She sits at the piano squeezed into the corner of the living room, where she looks out the front window at old homes and the park; as if missing a lover, she silently strokes the two octaves above middle C, the keyboard which she has been forbidden to play because it disturbs her husband--her glissandos and cadenzas more objectionable to Randall than his tirades. She wants to pound the keys, blast him with the last measures of Tchaikovsky's 1812, drums and canons.

Under duress, she quit giving piano lessons three years ago. "You love your music," he says. "You live for music and the Bucellis." Because of her heart condition and because she wants to be around for her young granddaughter, she has learned to shift out of her anger, resorting to prayer, willing herself out of the snares Randall sets for her. She looks at the crucifix above the piano. It's Tuesday, and all she wants is to visit her sister next Sunday, but Randall won't cooperate. She must go. She needs the relief of friendship. Since Iris retired from teaching at sixty-five, her eyesight has narrowed and the State forbids her to drive; she depends on him. There was a time when they were bound by love, when he would take her side in squabbles with her brother and sister. Randall's large physical presence made her feel protected. Now his size is menacing. Dizzy and short of breath, she props her elbows on the piano and mentally crosses the room to the battered island of a sofa, which sags on one end where he broke the springs, jumping on it during a rage. He refuses to see a psychiatrist.

She closes the keyboard's wooden cover. Her only reliable escape is to walk in the park, her dim eyes barely discerning the curved path, a spangle of sunlight crossing the playground, where he thinks she meets a lover. Many afternoons, bent over plants in the front yard, plucking weeds, he watches her advance along the pathway. "I see what goes on," he says. Weeks ago he troweled a clump of violets and stuck them in a pot with a spiky succulent. The pot stands in a dish now, at the living room window--the violet blooms gone, their foliage wilted.

The room provides a grim backdrop to the excited whirring of the clock. Remembering her greatest joy, Iris holds a photograph close to her face, a picture of their daughter and granddaughter, each with blossom cheeks and a chin like the bottom of a heart. As if admonished by the picture, he offers her a cushy chair, and she swats him away, tired of his empty gestures, his apologies for his mood swings. Another woman would have left him, but she is a good Catholic who channels her anger into her body, knowing God wouldn't forgive her for leaving a husband who is sick, mentally and physically. He has been declining since their daughter, Julia, got married, which Randall calls her Renunciation and Iris calls her Escape. Before she retired, Iris' bitterness flowed into her handling of misbehaved students, pulling their ears, administering humiliation. Now she leans her cheek on the music rest, on the old Kimble that has propped her up for years. Shifting away, she kneads her left arm near the shoulder, hoping it's not the start of something dreadful, and wondering if she would have the strength to play the bass keys, should Randall miraculously exit her life. Instantly she rejects that possibility; he will put her into the grave.

"What's the matter?" He watches her rub her arm. "If you die, I die." Randall draws a line across his throat. Of course, he has made his life so cramped and painful, he has no one but her. The drama makes her weary. He had a baseball career once. A double A farm team. Randall would say, "The coach loved regimentation, dictating my a.m. and p.m., telling me

how to train, when to sleep. I told the bastard off." Randall's life had always run uphill, but it took a steeper angle after he quit playing ball. He trained fighters who never won; he gave Swedish massage, went on the road selling hair tonic and brushes, peddled insurance, and later relieved a few shop owners of their bookkeeping, until they tired of his temperament. As the years crumbled away he made himself financially dependent on Iris.

"I'd live longer if you could be civil," she says.

"You provoke me. You and your Bucellis."

She watches him make his eyes into mean slots. He has no blood relatives; the last of them died right after Lyndon Johnson.

"They don't give a damn about you. I give you love and affection," he says.

Love and affection. He always says it that way, as if love weren't enough. He's right. When he saunters out of the room she usually feels lighter, but today when he leaves, the tension clings. She wishes her sister, Addy, could drive, tries to think of how she'll get to her sister's house, where Iris will confide to Addy and then make happy noises for their friends, women who don't know about Iris's home life.

He returns, unreasonably hopeful as he presents a cup of watered down coffee and two slices of bread, jelly on both. Frowning at his offer, she accepts the cup and sets it on the piano. "You don't have to do that. Just exercise self-control." He sits down to eat the bread. Her patient brother, Gino Bucelli, the pastry chef, might listen to Randall's woes; the wild man avoids Gino after maligning him the other night, maligning him and raging at Iris.

Extending the cease-fire, he crosses the living room in two steps; retrieves the newspaper and puts it on her lap, turns on the piano lamp. What she reads is Randall. He's been irritating, he thinks, and this will make up for it. The outbursts are just a quirk of his. Anyway he's really a caring guy, he would tell you. He retrieves a glass of water and feeds it to the dead violets.

Iris sets the paper on the floor, points to the bedroom. "You could get my pills. Please."

Ignoring her, he speaks idly, as if there'd been no angry words, no contrition. "Let your daughter drive you on Sunday. Exactly alike, you two." Iris had taken Helena and left him for six years, growing years, for the girl's sake and Iris's.

"She hasn't called." Iris waits for her pills.

"That's how much she thinks of you."

"It's not me who pushes her away." She presses the center of her chest. "My pills. Please."

He stares while his face rearranges itself, responding to some trickle in his brain. "Anything you want, Sweetheart."

In spite of his dutiful tone, she knows he'll dismiss her, but she's too weak to get up and retrieve the pillbox. With no purpose he gets on hands and knees and inspects the nail trim on the old chair, then turns it over and checks the bottom.

"My pills." She hardens her face.

He turns angry. "She's like that because of you, poisoning her mind, turning her against me. I'll prove it."

"Don't start." She rubs her breastbone while he sulks; he disappears and she hears the atonal chiming of the telephone touch pad.

"Helena?" he says. "Who do you love?"

Breaking into a sweat, Iris notes the violets in the front yard nodding, mourning their sisters in the house. As her pain blossoms she raises the keyboard cover, and with one hand, she weakly plays the last measures of the 1812 Overture. In her mind the floor vibrates and the windows hum in their loose casements; a bass drum thunders, and the final canon seizes her chest. Iris slumps. As the sun retreats behind a cloud, the cramped house in the city goes quiet but for Randall's breathing and a dial tone. In the street a boy whistles a thin tune.

Phyllis Gropp

Phyllis Gropp has an MFA from Queens University of Charlotte, and her work has appeared in *Quiction, Long Story Short, Wanderings*, and *South Dakota Longneck*. Currently, she is completing a novel.

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Issue 4: Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Watermark

Carly Anne West

She should get on a plane and go. And she will. She just needs a moment to put her thoughts together. They're already together, but she'll tell herself they're not. They shouldn't be. Her thoughts should be wandering and dipping and falling and rising erratically. She should be shoving clothes haphazardly into a suitcase and running to the airport, not driving. Driving is for the rational, and she should be in hysterics. She is folding her clothes carefully, not wrinkling. She just needs a moment to herself, but she wants to be with someone. She should not be with someone. Alone is best.

It took him a week to die. It should have taken him twelve. She should not be glad that it's done. Hysterical. She should be hysterical. She was, but it felt wrong. It gave her a headache and a sore throat, and she should have crumpled up on the bed and felt the wet on her face freeze and stiffen to a hard mask like raw egg whites. She tried to sleep but she couldn't. There was too much she wanted to do. She should not want anything. She should think of him. She did think of him. And her face creased comically and her eyes squeezed out water and she made her throat hurt again. He was not a happy man. He was angry more often than not. She should not think of that. She *should* think of that, and then everyone would know how complicated it was. It was good to be complicated. There were fewer questions.

She should read on the plane. *The Tibetan Guide to Death and Dying*. It would be right to arrive with salmon ridges under her eyes and she would not talk to anyone on the plane. She would not smile. Smiling would make her cry, and being on the verge of crying was the best state to be in. She would break down at any moment. No she did not want a Diet Coke. A Scotch. She should be drinking before noon. They would not serve it to her, but she should ask. It would be right to ask. She should be tormented. May I have a Scotch? She should look scornfully at the guy next to her, the one who would judge her for asking. Alcoholic. She should look embarrassed, but he'll see that she's suffering and he'll know he should be the one who's embarrassed.

She should not be going out to dinner. That's for celebrating. She needs to eat, and that's okay, but she should not be laughing. She should be starving. She won't laugh. She'll laugh a little, but only less than her father. Only a little less. He isn't drinking and he should be drinking. Mom is drinking for him. Her eyes are like pomegranates.

She should not be thinking of the ashes downstairs. They keep her up at night. She should not be imagining them crying. Why would they? It makes her stomach hurt, and she should not be hearing them crying. They are in a plastic decorated cube turned on its corner and she should not be thinking of them before she goes to sleep. She should be thinking of him. Her stomach hurts and this is how she should feel. She should feel on the verge of throwing up and she should not have been eating only hours after she heard. She should not be eating, but she should be throwing up.

She is sweating and dusty and she should not be thinking of sweating and how the wet is mixing with the powder on her face and streaking grooves of flesh color and gray into her cheeks and exposing her flaws. She should not be thinking of Hanukkah but those are the only prayers she knows. She should be thinking in Hebrew but she cannot follow her father when he prays. She wants to know what he says so she can cry more.

Baruch atah Adonai
But this is not right

Eloheinu melech ha-olam
But this is what it sounds like

Asher kideshanu b'mitzvotav
This is all she knows and she wants to pray along

Vitzivanu
L'hadlik ner shel
And it all sounds the same to her. She should have gone to Hebrew school.

They play Taps on the horns and they shoot in the air and her guts scream with every shot—and this should be her watermark for grief.

They go back to the house for dinner and her father points to a silver bowl sitting on a chair outside the front door. Everyone rinses their hands and she should, too. She waves her hands in the foggy tap water and watches the way her fingers wave under the surface of the pool. She should wave back. The grieving is over and she should be okay now. She should not feel worse than she did when it all started. Her father says the water is to wash away the old, the sadness, the loss. Is that all? She waves her hands briskly and wipes them on her skirt. Is that all? They walk into the house and look at old pictures and she should cry. She should throw up. She should drink. She should not talk. She will not talk.

Alone is best.

Carly Anne West

Carly Anne West is a native of Glendale, Arizona, but has lived in Northern California for almost two years. She is the winner of Sensored.com's 2004 Starving Artist Short Story Award, and she received an honorable mention for the 2005 *580 Split* Fiction Contest. Carly is a recipient of an MFA in fiction from Mills College. She currently resides in Alameda with her husband and two precious cats.

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Issue 4: Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Pampering

Nina Schuyler

To Professor Ivan McKinowski,
Yes, we should all be laughing. Such are the strange ways of human nature ...

Marena pushed the letter aside, went to the mini fridge and poured herself another tall drink. She knew it was early, but the choices were few, and she'd only recently stumbled upon the simple pleasures of a Bloody Mary. Leaning against the cold linoleum counter, she assessed her drab apartment. She lived in one side of a duplex, a shabby, little place with flimsy windows that shuddered in the wind. The thin walls functioned like a sieve, letting in all sorts of moaning and churnings. Her front window stared at a gigantic brown donut atop "Sally's Hole in the Wall."

She sipped her drink and for the first time noticed black marks running haphazardly a couple feet above the floor molding. It looked as if the room had been tipped and someone had dragged herself along the wall. Where did those come from? Now that the apartment was nearly empty—except for the table exploding with papers and books for her dissertation—there was nothing to conceal the marks. A month ago when her boyfriend had moved out, he'd taken nearly everything. Most of it was his anyway, so what could she have done? She sat down at the table and began again.

Dear Professor,
Through the thin walls, I can hear you're up pondering the meaning of life, or at least wondering about the thin layer of dust covering your furniture.

She was rereading her opening, considering its tone—she wanted something lighthearted, yet serious, whimsical, yet intelligent—when the newspaper smacked against her front door. Startled, she splattered her drink on the letter. Small red drops dotted the margin. Not only did her neighbor probably think she was loony, he'd think she was murderous. She crumpled the letter.

Before last night, she had felt encouraged by her new form of pampering. She'd read in her self-help book, *When a relationship ends, it's like going through a little death. Find fun and creative ways to pamper yourself.* She'd been cleaning her bedroom closet, avoiding the stack of papers on her table—that dissertation, why hadn't *it* moved out?—when she came across her stack of Michael Jackson records. She remembered those high school dances when the D.J. put on a Jackson song, and she and the other girls went wild, wiggling their hips, clapping their hands above their heads, tossing their long hair behind their shoulders. The rangy boys crept to the edges of the room, alarmed, she thought now, at the explosive strutting and stomping and sex, which didn't require them. Michael J. disappeared for a while, then appeared again in her aerobics classes, where the women kicked up their legs and shouted, Whooo Whooo, this time without any boys to scare.

She'd slipped the record out of its cardboard cover and blew off the dust. The black sheen gave her a feeling of hope. She put the record on the player and MJ barely made it into the second stanza of *Beat It!* when she was up, dancing and spinning, twirling and leaping around the room. With all the furniture gone, she had plenty of room! She was in the middle of a big finale, something involving a cartwheel and a pose resembling a star fish, limbs spread out, when she saw her neighbor, Professor Ivan McKinowski, staring at her through the back window. She threw herself down, belly to carpet—why had she let Frank take the curtains?—crawled over to the record player and snapped it off.

Dear Neighbor,

I might present myself as a person distinguished by the strangeness of all she has seen. But if that were the case, we'd all have perfect alibis, wouldn't we? What would we do with the concept of crime and punishment? And all that money spent on jails.

How did you explain irrational exuberance to someone who probably had an IQ of 200? Who'd become a full-fledged professor in his 20's? It was all beyond her, and, really, she didn't mind. While his life was one solid, steady upward trajectory, hers seemed to languish and scuttle around on the floor, like an unlikable insect. Seven years in graduate school?

She sighed, set the letter down and went to retrieve the newspaper. When she opened the door, Professor McKinowski was standing on his doorstep, two feet from her, newspaper in hand, studying the headlines.

"Morning," he said, peering over his heavy eyebrows. "Heartbreaking loss at the zoo."

"Really?" she said.

Through his thick glasses, he seemed to be staring at a spot beyond her shoulder. He probably couldn't look her in the eye, not after last night. She rearranged her terrycloth bathrobe. He was wearing his robe, a frayed, blue thing, as frazzled and stained with food and coffee drips as hers. His eyes loomed large, as if he was stunned by everything, and he had a full head of fuzzy, brown hair, like a slightly stained halo.

He told her the auk passed away. A remarkable bird, and he jabbed his finger at the newspaper article.

"Oh, the auk," she said. She felt her face heat up and her arms fidget. His head was slightly tilted ahead of the rest of his body, as if it was too weighted. She wanted to close the door, and yet she wanted to know for certain if he saw what she thought he saw. If he hadn't, she could get on with her grieving and pampering. The books said to set aside a certain amount of time to mourn her small death and mark the ending date on a calendar. She had one more week and then, Out out with grief! And there was her crowded pampering schedule. In her stack of records, she'd recently found MJ's *Thriller*.

"Well, good luck on that dissertation," he said.

How did he know?

"I assume you're about to graduate," he said.

"Oh, yes."

"What's it on?"

"Twentieth Century Writers' Use of The Color Blue to Capture General Cultural Malaise and What We Can Do About It."

He nodded. "Interesting. Very interesting. Good luck."

But before he closed the door, he paused and seemed to study her face. There was no doubt: he'd seen her finale. What did he think of her?

She knew Frank's opinion of her. "Beddy?" she'd asked.

"Heady. You're in your head all the time," he'd said.

What were the options, she'd like to know.

"Look," he'd said. "I just need some time to breathe. The whole world needs to take a break and breathe." Ever since he'd taken that stupid yoga class, all he'd talked about was breathing.

She finished the rest of her Bloody Mary and was about to head into the bathroom and fill the tub for a bubble bath —that was on the book's list of pampering ideas, *Take a bath! Your little death has taken a lot out of you*—and read her Plath book when the doorbell rang.

Her neighbor stood on her welcome mat. He'd changed into jeans and a T-shirt and held a plate of steaming scones.

"Thought I'd bring some by," he said. "When I bake, I tend to lose my head." Then he laughed loudly, with a touch of

hysteria. “It’s always too much. Too much.”

He lost his head; she was too much in her head. Perhaps this was what happened in duplex living situations; the pairs roamed around in too close a vicinity, canceling each other out. She thought she’d read something about it in *Science* magazine. Or maybe it wasn’t a canceling effect, but a doubling effect. She wasn’t sure.

“Well, shall we consume some baked goods?”

He had a faint accent that she couldn’t quite place. She’d forgotten he was from another country. Was it Romania? Or Czechoslovakia? Whatever it was, she could explain in a gentle, slightly patronizing tone that every single American woman danced wildly in her living room. A curious cultural phenomenon. Strange, weren’t we?

He carried in his plate of goods like a deliveryman, and she suddenly realized she was ravenously hungry. What else didn’t she know about herself? Her self-help book said, *you’ll be learning a lot about yourself these days. A LOT!*

She walked into the kitchen. “Tea? Coffee? Maybe a stiff drink?”

“Whatever you’re having,” he said. “Do you have ants?”

She stopped.

“I’ve got ants in all my cupboards, and I don’t know what to do. Where did they come from? One day, nothing. The next, hundreds of small black-bodied creatures crawling over everything. I figured they’re multiplying at a rate of ten to the fifth.”

“You calculated their rate of reproduction?”

He took a bite of a scone. “I put out a bowl of sugar to attract them to one spot,” he said, “but I think I’ve only managed to lure more into my kitchen. You really don’t have any?”

“No, but last week there was a cricket in my bathtub. It kept me up all night.”

“Shocking. The things we put up with. Rude. No invitation. At least I brought treats.” He motioned to the scones.

“Yes, treats.” Those Czechs or whatever he was and their phrases. She handed him a Bloody Mary.

“All this time, and we’ve never done this,” he said. “We’re neighbors for God’s sake, and this is America.” He pounded his fist on the table.

“Yes,” she said. She was still thinking about those ants.

“I’ve been up since four working on a theorem for an anti-Einstein relativity theorem interposed with the growth rate of rhesus monkeys—”

“I thought I heard pacing and mumbling.”

“And I can’t get it.” He grabbed big fistfuls of his hair. “It’s terrible. The pressures. We’ve got a new department head. He keeps a scoreboard, rather like a sports event, of our publications. But I suppose you’re under your own strain as a graduate student.”

“Yes, the strain. It’s important to find ways to release it, you know. Like boiling water lets off steam.” What was she talking about?

“Yes, steam,” he said.

“Or these,” she said, raising her drink.

“Cheers,” he said.

She clinked her glass to his.

The phone rang. Probably her mother who spent all her time on the Internet and left messages on Marena’s voice mail about what she’d found. The other day, she’d called to explain how to conduct a Japanese wedding. Then, she’d phoned three times, her voice urgent, announcing she’d found one of Professor McKinowski’s papers, “Risk Analysis of Strong and Weak Nonlinear Systems.”

"You have a genius eligible bachelor probably sitting six feet away from you," she'd said in an excited voice. "By the way, I ordered you some new underwear."

His smile was lopsided. One corner tipped up in a friendly smile shape, the other lay there, under the weight of something huge. Probably his anti-Einstein theory. She liked his double-featured smile. He obviously could do more than one thing at once. After Frank had taken up yoga, he'd stopped doing more than one thing at once and complained it was America's primary problem. "Think about it. Driving and talking on the phone. Tapping away on the computer and listening to music. We're splintering into a thousand pieces. We're fragmenting and soon we won't know who we are anymore." He was working himself up. At the time, Marena was sipping tea and reading Plath. He turned to her. "And you. Do you know who you are?" He asked her in an accusatory tone, as if she'd hidden parts of herself from him and he'd caught her in the act.

"Of course," she said, slowly setting down her book. Marena argued she preferred doing two things at once. In fact, she thought it was an ingenuous defense against death. If death was going to get you in the end, why not pack in two simultaneous lives? She worked on her dissertation and listened to him rant about breathing.

"It's like you're dating two gals at once," she'd said.

She thought the argument was a good one until she found out he had in fact been dating two women at once. The other, his yoga instructor.

Ivan pushed the plate of scones toward her. "Here, have one." He watched her bite into a scone. They *were* good! He finished off his Bloody Mary.

"Another?" she asked.

He smiled and held out his glass. She gave him a fresh one. He drank it as if it were juice, smacking his lips. She ate another scone and brought the jug of tomato juice and vodka to the table. He mixed himself another. A small tomato mustache was nestling above his upper lip.

He looked around the room. "Interesting what you've done with your side. Such space. Space is another interesting concept. Space and time. Everyone in science is fascinated by it right now."

She told him she was launching a kind of protest, one against couches and chairs and relationships that lounge around on them.

"The black scuff marks remind me of the equation for a finite universe."

"I thought it was infinite," she said. "Filled with possibilities."

He vigorously shook his head. "An illusion. The cosmos has its limits."

And he said more, things she couldn't wrap her brain around, but she liked this idea of an end point. That at some point, the universe just sighed. It had had enough and wasn't going to keep on trying to be infinite and grand.

She looked at her plate. The crumbs from four scones scattered everywhere—had she really eaten that many?—her insides pressed up against an expanding ball of dough and strawberry jam. She needed to nap or dance to work it off. Ivan's mustache was creeping higher on his upper lip. A small bit of it had dried and crusted on the right side.

"Those scones," she said, rubbing her stomach.

"I'm glad you liked them." He grabbed the draft of her letter, turned it over and wrote the recipe on the back. "Well, it's been a real pleasure." He stood and gripped the edge of the table to steady himself. She walked him to the front door.

"We'll have to do this again," he said.

"I'll bring the treats," she said.

He smiled, extended his hand, and she took it in hers and shook it, warmly and vigorously, and smiled back at him and the tomato juice mustache traversing just beyond the corners of his mouth.

Nina Schuyler

Nina Schuyler's first novel, *The Painting*, was published in October, 2004, by Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill. Her poems and short stories have appeared in *Tumbleweed Review, Oxygen, EM Literary, Watchwordpress,* and other literary journals. Her story, "The Big Break" placed second in the *580 Split* Fiction Contest in 2006. Her short story, "Don't Mess with Mr. In Between" was a finalist in the 2005 Lewis "Buddy" Nordan Fiction Contest. Two of her stories have been nominated for *Best New American Voices*. She earned her MFA at San Francisco State University. She currently teaches creative writing at the University of San Francisco.

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Meg Caven

may moves to june across the drakensberg range. or, an extended walk with an astronomer.

She had seen photos – and still. Still did not expect it to be dry like this.
I think: harmattan[1]. and she: earth and ocean science
at once –
words for new seasons outside old schemas / and / the sum of convection and altitude.

We can see water, or at least, its effect, from a kilometer's distance
and as we stoop counter to intuition, or rather, instruction,
to drink straight from the bleeding cleavage of rock when experience would protest:
Demand iodine. Demand reverse osmosis. Demand Brita or anything.

We can't help but wonder – would not want to –

wandering –
one foot in front of the other:

if this landscape might once
have been beneath thousands
of feet of water

They say that mountains - deposited by migratory sheets of ice or driven skyward by the buckling collision of continental drift – give way to gravity, or to erosion: and so I wonder:

Must not the oceans give in also to drought?
Be reduced, distilled, to these infrequent cascades?

After all: if the lime between dunes was a river bottom recently enough
that trees still stand. Amongst red sands and miles from any water capable of sustaining life,

and if that sand migrated to – colonized, even –
one coast from the nucleus of its grainy empire so far east of there

then could this not also have changed?

She shows me a Don McKay poem
that references – as one might the change from seed to stalk or the second world war –
That the moon was once: of the earth. A part. A parting which left behind it: an ocean.
And then she begrudges it full poetic license in favor of a scientific postulate:

almost anything is possible

-and I'm not saying that I believe that on the first day
(someone's) god created the one looming ocean. Or was it a garden?

(someone's) god created the one looming ocean. Or was it a garden?
And we crawled one by one amoebic from its depths – either way…

I'm just saying that these mountains look like the bottom of the ocean to me.
Have you *seen* the bottom of the ocean?
Well no. But. (see above postulate).

She evokes wonder in me like desire
because what is wonder but the aching desire to know?

Proof: did anything less than desire
make whole galaxies visible where there was only dust and refraction?
They mapped the Milky Way with radio waves
sent like songs into space.

And suddenly,

somehow
we see what we thought was impossible, or at best, improbable.

take back half a century, maybe more, and the earth was flat,
the sun moved around us.

we wondered a little, wandered, ached with desire,

and suddenly
the belief in the requisite addition of seven more dimensions
to our currently acknowledged three
becomes like faith.

After all: she came this far to see fuzzy spots just off the plane –
out of the corners of her eyes.
(where the rods are densely concentrated: see black and white: contrast without color)
a faint perception of light.

It is enough for her to know.
Or maybe it is in the telling
because it is more than enough to be told:

'see those there, just below the short arm of the southern cross'
(the shutter opens. motion continues. light drags in arcs across the frame)
((and - as if it were possible – we decrease a fraction in size)).

because it is more than enough to be told

that the Magellanic clouds:
are the next nearest galaxies to ours.
and that the earth "wobbles"

and that we could just as easily be in the tracks of ancient fish:
as not.

This mountain
ten thousand feet below a sea
of which nothing remains but

the answer to the quiet question asked by this harmattan wind.

---

[1] "Three or four weeks ago my wife, who teaches English at a boys' school, asked a pupil why he wrote about winter when he meant the harmattan" – C. Achebe "The Novelist as Teacher"

Meg Caven

Meg Caven is an advocate of complex histories.

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La Loteria

Jesus Quintero

The biggest difference between Mexico and El Norte: the lottery.

My father once used all of our birthdays to try and win thirteen million dollars: 10,12,74,25,72,7. When he came up empty handed, his spirit was crushed. "*No valen nada!*" he said. "You all ain't worth nothing."

That summer, anything that went wrong with the place, the car that spoke in smog, my bike that shed parts like a snake, releasing bolts, nuts, loosing itself under the weight of it all, Pops stared at the situation and with a conviction that I had never seen, repeated, "Things wouldn't be this way if I woulda won. They just wouldn't."

Pops changed his tune when the Mexicans, Mexicans of all people, kept appearing weekly on The Big Spin, a TV lottery show where participants spun a colorful wheel, hoping that the ping pong ball landed on red: the color of a new life.

"Chex," my father yelled while filing his nails. "Fix the TV."

"Ain't no Checho here." I checked my nose, made sure it wasn't dripping blood. I wondered if my uncle drank from me, needed my blood to calm his throat. I took a sip from my water bottle. It tasted old, more like plastic than water. "Don't call me that. I'm Penny."

"Get your ass over here," my dad yelled louder. "Quick, before it's too late."

I took the water bottle to the living room, the size of two janitor closets. I smacked the TV, the biggest thing in the house next to Pops, until the picture stopped shaking, but it was still fuzzy.

"First thing I do when I hit the lottery, guess what I'm a gonna do, Chex." I worked the coat hanger. I ignored him.

"I'm a buy me a TV. A new one. Brand new." He inspected his nails, thick and solid as nickels, blowing away dust. "Things wouldn't be like this, you know. They just wouldn't." His heavy breaths made the hairs on his chest act like a wheat field on a windy day. "Hear me?"

"Yup," I responded.

The host of the show asked the contestant, "What are you going to do if you win a million dollars?" The interpreter, a woman in a shiny red dress, wearing lipstick the color of pomegranate blood, repeated the words in Spanish. The people that looked like my father, worn by the sun, thick black hair, replied, "*Ayudar a mi familia*." The interpreter would repeat to the host, "Take care of my family." And the audience applauded so loud, the worn-out speaker inside the TV rattled.

"I think I know that guy," my father whispered, inspected the dude on the TV, looking deep, trying to see the dude's fingerprints or something. "I swear he looks familiar."

Inspired by that contestant who my dad swore he knew on a small ranch in Mexico, he came home with two hundred lottery tickets. Since I signed his checks, I knew that the tickets had nearly swallowed his week's worth of work.

"Don't tell your mother," he said, looking like he always did: scared and hopeful. "Scratch 'em till your nails bleed." I wanted to run away with the tickets, all connected in sequence, make them fly like a kite tail. Even before we scratched, I had a feeling that nothing would be gained from it. Nothing at all.

Hector and I scratched. We studied each naked ticket, tried to find any winning combination. Even after the ticket was finished, I scratched out of anger, rubbing the numbers invisible until all that was left was a white, shredded paper.

"God damn," said Hector. "We've scratched fifty, and I only got fifteen dollars; three five dollar tickets. What you got?"

I blew away the ticket scratch that looked like the remains of an eraser, trying to clear a big mistake. “Two dollars. Two bucks. Can you believe that?”

“Seventeen dollars. Fifty tickets,” he said. He had punched numbers in the calculator. He turned the calculator off. I took it and to ease the stress, told my brother a joke. “Check it. There’s one girl,” and I punched “1” on the calculator, “who was sixteen, got fucked sixty-nine times by three guys,” and the calculator screen read, “11669x3.”

“What was she,” I said, my finger on the equals button.

Hector looked right past me. He didn’t even listen.

I punched the equals sign: 35007. I turned the calculator upside down. “She was loose,” I said to myself.

My brother tapped his fingers against the table that curved to the weight of plastic roses covered in dust. We both stood silent, listened to the rats scratch their way in between the walls. Outside, children laughed and the jump rope beat the pavement.

“Here,” my brother gave me a five dollar ticket. “You got seven dollars now.”

“You ever heard that joke,” I said.

“What?”

“The joke?”

“Shut up and take the tickets. Let’s scratch.”

Had I won only two bucks, my father would have blamed me for the misfortune. It would have been my fault. Everything was. “Thanks.”

“You know what the odds are,” my brother said, scratching at the next fifty, “of winning the lottery?”

I listened but refused to answer.

“You know what they are? The odds?”

I took a sip of water and thought of another joke. I thought about our birthdays, mad that I *wasn’t* born on a date that could have won my father some money. I would have bought them a new sun. I thought about death, how each year we pass the day we are going to die. Like Checho, they said he died on July seventh. Every year of his life he passed his death date without knowing—32 times. I was born in October, when the night froze the rain puddles stiff enough to dance on. I had passed fifteen Octobers and each year, without knowing, the day I would die on would pass without warning.

Four hours. Two hundred lottery tickets. Seventy dollars.

“Should we go steal something?” I said. I had an image of myself walking towards the pawnshop as I carried a piano like an ant carrying a hollowed grasshopper carcass. I had dreams of having pockets the size of potato sacks, filled with money the size of greeting cards, embroidered with sequins, sparkling. The idea of getting money to protect our asses always came up. “What are we going to tell him?”

When I got bad grades, I lied and said it was the teacher. When my bike was stolen, left unattended outside the liquor store as I took my time deciding what flavored licorice to buy, I told him that the local thugs beat me up. I was a good liar given the right situation. As it stood, with the pudding right in front of us, the only lie I could think of was that the liquor store owner, the Arab, hated Mexicans. Or maybe we were just cursed by my uncle’s spirit.

“The hell with stealing. It’s like buying seventy dollars for two hundred.” Hector had the answer to math problems that made his forehead grow deep lines, as though the numbers subtracted away from his life. “I just don’t know.”

My nose bled.

My father got really religious when he bought lottery tickets. He went to mass, knelt right along with my mother, talked to people he normally ignored. He begged that Moms iron his clothes, insisted that poverty lived in wrinkles, laid eggs like cockroaches: one problem due to poverty was solved, six others hatched.

“*Mijos*,” my father said, returning from confession. When he was in a good mood, he put deodorant on. Maybe it was his foul smelling pits that put him in such a bad mood. There was something about the raw smell of Pops that announced

danger. “How much?”

“How much?” my brother repeated, counting the tickets as though bucks.

I stood quiet, stared at the plastic roses, remembered when I bought them for *mi ama* for Mother’s Day. Three dollars, half a dozen. Moms didn’t say thank you, just took them and placed them inside an empty coke bottle. She hugged me and I felt like I was young enough to think the world was fine. I thought of a joke, the one about the blonde that looked at the carton of orange juice because it said, concentrate.

My father walked into the kitchen and looked at the two stacks of scratched lottery tickets on the table: the winning and the losing.

He didn’t say anything. I braced myself by clutching the end of the table. Hector took off his glasses, cleaned them, and set them on the table. I concentrated on the tickets, hoping I could change them into winning if I thought long and hard enough. I prayed.

“Seventy,” said my brother, squinting at my father. Although a nerd and a school boy, I admired my brother’s balls.

“Seventy?” repeated my dad. “Thass’ it?” He looked at the twelve winning tickets. “It looks like more, much more.”

“They’re almost all two’s,” I said, my voice shook. “Can you believe that?”

“Count them again,” he said, throwing the tickets in the air in disgust. “Go. Do it.”

My brother and I looked over the tickets again, hungry, scared that we weren’t going to eat for a while. My brother thumbed through all of the tickets, the end of his thumbs black. Pops looked over his shoulder. “Count ’em. Just count ’em. I want to see all two hundred.” Hector counted one hundred ninety three. I counted one hundred ninety seven but decided to keep it to myself. If we had one hundred ninety-nine, it was still a loss.

“Where are the other seven!” my dad demanded. I looked around the table, behind the toaster, in it, trying to find them. Stuff just happened to disappear around the house. After parking another bike outside to get a glass of water, I walked outside to find it missing. I lied and told my father I sold it.

“Are they in your pockets? Let me see both of your pockets,” my father demanded. Hector took his glasses from the table and wrapped them in napkins. “You all better find them.”

It didn’t matter. He was seventeen. He couldn’t cash them. I was thirteen. I couldn’t. My father was forty-seven. *Mi ama*, forty. My dog, Neto, thirteen in dog years. Was that it? Were those the numbers that could have saved us that night?

What were the odds?

Jesus Quintero

Jesus Quintero was born in Yuba City, California, a rural town in the Central Valley. The son of immigrants who were a part of the Brasero program, Jesus spent his whole life working in the fields: peach, prune, apple, and honeydew. It is through the hardships of immigrants, the dilapidated work camps and rotting fruit that inspires him to write. He lives with his amazing wife, Raquel, and his lil' man, Dario. He teaches English at Vista Community College and goes dummy with the youngstas at Youth UPrising.

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Issue 4: Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Karl Marx Needs a Haircut and a Shave

Ken Rodgers

He's unkempt
He loves
Mine enemy

The jungle bush
Hootch dwelling
Black clad
Enemy

His lingo
Makes no sense
Our arguments
Are strong
We back them up
We've napalm

We have
Cans of kickass
106s
155s
And eight inch

We got big dicks
Can stuff
It to him

His bushy-assed
Face
His KGB
Their clandestine spies
His Das Kapital
His black clad
Warrior women
Their babies
In their mangers

Ken Rodgers

Ken Rodgers resides and writes in Boise, Idaho. He teaches poetry classes online and on-ground. His latest short story, "The Gods of Angkor Wat," was recently published online in *Verbsap Magazine*. His book of poems, *Trench Dining*, was published by Running Wolf Press in 2003. He is a graduate of the USF Master of Fine Arts in Writing program, class of 2000.

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Issue 4 | Karl Marx Needs a Haircut

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Issue 4: Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Francis Raven

I've Met Some People and Bought Some Things

I've been looking for David Mamet
in Harvard Square
because he's famous
and a literary guidebook
said I could find him there
between sets of
overly posturing
breakdancers.
(Yes, I know they're called BBoys.)

It doesn't really matter
who David Mamet is,
whether he elegantly
composes sandwiches
at Au Bon Pain
or instead hocks
slightly damaged Harvard tee-shirts
to sad
yet proud
parents.

Whenever I take the Red Line into Harvard Square I call my wife on the bridge between the Park St. and the Charles MGH stops. The span across water is in open air so there's cellphone service. It's something like "I love you. I'll see you in five minutes." If it's cold we agree to meet in the bookstore, affectionately known as the coop (rhymes with 'dupe'). But I hadn't made that ride for a few weeks and I forgot which side of the train to get off on and so when I stood up I sheepishly chose a side and then was quite embarrassed when I got it wrong. I wanted to say, "No, no, no, I'm not a tourist. I do know which side to get off on." Or, "Ahh, I did. You don't understand, I know this place." But I know that I won't always know this place. I don't remember the name of the great bookstore in DC or where we got groceries. I know we lived on N St. but I don't remember the cross streets. I'm pretty sure we didn't live there long enough to learn how to pronounce anything. After a few years I probably won't remember how to pronounce 'coop' because it will fail to exist anywhere where I am.

Money is not something of which to be frightened. It is a symbol of how a person organizes her life, of how she prioritizes various opportunities, and of what she cares about. But money is odd because it is both a symbol and an actual good. It is a symbol of how you use it. That is why I am a fairly strict budgeter: I want to bring the symbol and the reality into alignment. In this essay I mean *budgeter* in the specific sense of someone who (1) has a finite amount of income, (2) is price conscious, and (3) is price sensitive with regard to all goods. In

: but I love smoking,
it's part of the writing.

: but I love drinking,
it's part of the writing.

When we make moral judgments about people we bracket their preferences. Preferences are particularly important in the minor ethical sphere that could be called "consumer ethics." That is, the moral breaches of a consumer are relatively minor, but breaches none the less. These breaches include smoking, eating meat, buying clothes from big chain stores (the biggest breach is shopping at Walmart), driving an SUV, and countless other minor infringements on the moral order. The magnitude of the infringement depends largely upon which moral subgroup you belong to. If you live in a vegetarian commune eating veal might be seen as a fairly major moral error of judgment. When a vociferous non-smoker (anti-smoker) sees a person smoking he doesn't think that the smoker might enjoy smoking more than the non-smoker does, he merely thinks that it's bad to smoke. Similarly, when a person quits smoking people think he's done a great (and difficult) deed, irrespective of whether quitting was actually difficult for the person. That is, when we think about smoking we do not take people's preference for smoking (or their physiological response to smoking) into account. Instead, we bracket people's preferences when we make judgments about people's choices.

> "…behaving as if two selves were alternately in command… an act or decision that a person takes decisively at some particular point in time, about which the person's preferences differ at the time of action from what they were earlier…"
> — Thomas Schelling

(he lights a cigarette)
: There's no smoking.
: But I smoke.

(he lights a cigarette)
: There's no smoking.
: But I wasn't smoking.

(he lights a cigarette)
: There's no smoking.
: There's no such thing as smoking.

My dad is writing a memoir. I'm supposed to talk to the hired ghostwriter. It's all been paid for by the board. He has made transformative changes and they ought to be documented. The problem is that the first draft is all career and no personality. That's why the kids were called in: to provide these soft private

essence, I mean someone who makes the beautiful levers of the price mechanism function.

Some people are not budgeters. This does not mean that they never have a cent to spare; it merely means that they are not generally aware of how much items cost and thus are unable to perform a cost/benefit analysis of their lives. Without this analysis the symbol and reality of money must remain apart, cleaved in two, as it were. We all *should* be budgeters both so that we can take stock of ourselves and so that stores can take stock of us. It makes everyone's job so much easier.

It should be noted that saving that

That's why the kids were called in: to provide those soft private touches that make a person personable. Luckily, I have a couple of cute stories. But when I recounted them to the ghostwriter they don't take that long to tell. I wish they had taken longer because my secret fear is that I'm writing my father's memory of me as he pretends to die in words.

: Hey hey father figure, hey hey.

: I hate when you call me that.

: You can call me son figure.

: I'm no figure.

: Hey hey father figure, hey hey.

But, either way, I'm supposed to be liberal. I know how I'm supposed to feel about the news. There's not much space to be other people, but sometimes when I'm talking I find myself slipping. *Oftentimes, the fact that we choose different actors to qua ourselves with means that we will literally talk past each other. This is because the actions available to certain actors might not be available or desirable to other actors. At other times, the perspectives we adopt are not made explicit either because we don't recognize them ourselves or because we have intentionally hidden them in order to make our arguments more convincing. That is, we talk past each other because we are not ourselves and sometimes don't even know who we are when we're talking. If I*

saying that someone is not a budgeter is not a moral statement about them, just a statement of fact. This type of person is completely alien to me. I know about how much most items that I buy cost where I normally buy them and also in other places where they are also sold. This is how I calculate both where I buy goods and also how I spend much of my time. For instance, I know that a gallon of milk costs $3.50 at the big store a mile away, but that it costs $4.49 at the smaller store nearby and thus whenever I buy milk I have to make a calculation about distance, about how long the venture will take, about how much time I have, how much money I have, about what other things I

am the president and you are the director of a radical environmental organization we are never going to reach a consensus because by anyone's standards the actions the president and the director of a radical environmental organization respectively should take are extremely different. In fact, they should probably never reach a consensus. If you are arguing as a radical environmental activist the cost benefit analysis congress members must engage in appears reprehensible. And so, if we are acting as these characters, there is no way that we (as regular arguing political people) can reach a consensus (or even honestly disagree). These are people, after all, who never talk in real life, why should we imagine that they would talk in a speculative political conversation? The table of political conversation is large, but not large enough for everyone at the same time. And then I get it all wrong because I know how I'm supposed to feel, but I don't know who I am when I start talking. Ultimately, I've told myself that I should be a liberal. I only allow myself to slip when someone else will accept that role.

: You'd think that once we were given a name that our fate would be sealed. Like when you say 'this is a table' then no matter what else, it's a table, you put your coffee on it, you do your homework on it, and when you're trying to misuse it you can have sex on it. But no matter what it's a table.

: Why are we so unpredictable? I say to you, why? Because we no longer have stable roles. Back in ancient times when roles were given and fulfillment meant fulfilling your role as a carpenter or a baker people were not nearly so unpredictable.

: But they could still lie.

: Yes, of course, the nature of man, and, in fact, the desired nature of man, is never to be totally predictable, but in the end of history, in the moment when the narrative of human existence ceases to move, we are far too unpredictable. Because of this I am starting the Predictability as Honor party to run for government office.

: They won't win.

: That's not the point.

want to buy (if I'm buying milk do I also want to buy a pound of espresso beans for lattes?), etc. By making these calculations in my head I can arrive at a decision that I can peacefully act upon.

If you don't know how much a gallon of milk costs, you cannot make these sorts of calculations and have no way of coming to a decision and tranquilly acting upon it. Or perhaps you have alternate ways of making decisions that are just as good (and perhaps better) than my financial (and relatively dry and unemotional) method of making decisions about money and time.

Perhaps people who are not budgeters

: What's the point of running then?

: To make a point.

: What point?

: That the people are sovereign of the law, that they can control the issues.

: Then it doesn't matter what party you start or what your platform is?

: Of course it matters; people need to be more predictable. They need to stick with the names they were given, if I can be so bold as to make names stand in for roles, tradition, and right. "Stick With It" that's our motto. Quite catchy, isn't it.

: I'm afraid you won't win.

: That's not the point.

: What's the point then?

: To make a point. Look, we aren't smart, we don't know what we're talking about, we misquote, we don't know economics, but we know what side of the tracks we live on, we know what side of the fence we belong to, we know how to spit.

decide whether to purchase an item based on its absolute rather than its relative price. An example of this would be a man who never bought anything priced over $100 regardless of his budget or the utility it would bring him. Perhaps they merely look at an item's color or note its smell or test its density. I actually have no clue how they choose items if they cannot perform a cost/benefit analysis. The thing about talking about their purchasing habits is that they are so varied there is almost nothing to say about them. They may say interesting things about themselves, but I can say none of these things.

Through budgeting a

I'm in a car with no cassette tapes or CDs and I'm flipping radio stations rapidly between the six preordained and thus easily locatable locations on the dial. There's nothing on and I have that "There's 57 Channels and Nothing On" post-consumer, dry, sweaty feeling which is rather suddenly relieved by a song that's not too bad. It's not great, but it'll do, maybe it's a popsong that's not going to be around in ten years or maybe it's a random Motown song. But whatever it is, it's okay, and I listen to it. And it's great for maybe three and a half of the song's four minute duration. My head's bobbing appropriately, if I know the particular song I sing along enthusiastically, and I finally lose my distaste for consumer society. But then I get bored of the song and feel the need to turn the dial. After all, it's not my favorite song, just something to listen to in the meantime of consumption. But now it's boring as all meantimes become in our jaded capitalist society. So, I turn the knob from preselected station through countless unknown songs to another preselected station. Finally (and here comes this feeling that I have felt before) I hear one of my favorite songs, and not only one of my favorites but also a song that functions perfectly as a driving soundtrack (some Springsteen maybe, perhaps The Clash). I tune into the song at the chorus so it's difficult to tell how far into the song I am, but I presume it's the beginning. Unfortunately, I am wrong, it's the last chorus and the song is almost over. And this is the feeling that I have felt at this particular moment: regret that I listened to a mediocre song instead of one of my favorites, anger that too much is available and so much of it is not perfect, and sadness (at myself) for not possessing the instincts necessary to find the perfect song.

The movement of my body carries the letter
In coursing blood and rumors of rustling leaves,

person really comes to know himself. He might believe that he really likes potato chips, but until he has to weigh the price of potato chips against the price and enjoyment of a chocolate bar he doesn't know what he really wants. Being a budgeter forces a person to make choices between goods and in this way he learns what his preferences really are. Through knowing his preferences he comes to know who he really is as a person. Of course, the exception to this is the person who knows himself very well and yet buys the exact same bundle of goods every week (perhaps Eden Soy milk, Starbucks espresso, 6 12 oz. cans (not bottles) of

But my flesh is far and my message is a weak signal,
As if you were driving alone cross-country
And your favorite radio station
Faded into scratches
Of that song that makes you tingle.
Perhaps you drive back home
Or know that you will return.
Whether you visit or stay forever in that house,
In those limbs of spring breeze,
Is a question which asks if you
Are able to move freely within that house.

Perhaps you drive deeper into the desert
Never to return
And let the signals of radio stations
Fade in and out of your arms.
Your shadow extends the far length to me
And urges me to extend beyond all directions,
As a poet is ravaged by extension.

: Turn that music off.

: Music is only allowed if it is played through headphones at a volume such that if another person is proximally seated he will not be able to discern that music is, in fact, playing.

: Outrage. No solidarity anymore. No listening to the same music. Each with our own music. Each with our own name. Each at our own crossroads.

: My private projects won't get in the way of collective action for the good. Our names may be different but we know what it feels like to have a name. This is what connects us in politics.

Coke, 4 tomatoes, 1 package of Organic Water Crackers w/ cracked pepper, etc.) regardless of price. This person is perhaps in heaven: she knows herself without having to look at price. She glides through life with one less care than I. I do not understand this person. This article is not written for her or for anyone else in heaven.

Stores do not know the preferences of the non-budgeter either. How can they be sure of his preferences if he chooses items willy nilly on the basis of color or packaging? Now, you might want to ask: aren't we all budgeters by default? In a manner of speaking we are all budgeters since we do all have budgets (finite

You always think that people on the bus are going to be interesting, but they rarely are. Sometimes I'll spot somebody else who thinks that people on the bus are going to be interesting. She will look at me with baited breath waiting for me to say or do something strange, but when I don't say or do anything strange she'll still be waiting, this time for me to do something common "of the people," but I can't really live up to her wishes; I'm too busy watching everyone else.

{*The crowd was the veil from behind which the familiar city as phantasmagoria beckoned to the flâneur. In it, the city was now landscape, now a room. And both of these went into the construction of the department store, which made use of flânerie itself in order to sell goods. The department store was the flâneur's final coup. As flâneurs, the intelligentsia came into the market place.*}
Walter Benjamin

I would hold the door for her, but I'm not sure how long I should hold it for. Like, for instance, if I see her back there and she's fuzzy in my imperfect vision should I nevertheless wait with my arm flexed or would that seem like I was trying to pick her up? You see the problem, I'm trying to be kind, but not too kind, not suspicious kind.

Could you take a shower
without answers?
I've never stepped out of steeping since I met you.

(finite resources), but not all of us behave as if we have finite resources. That is, not all of us possess criteria (2) and (3) of being a budgeter in my specific sense. Some people act as if they have infinite pools of gold, so muddled is their rationality. It is very unfair to behave that way: Didn't these people ever hear of Socrates who said "Know Thyself"? Or did they never attempt to market cheap and crappy items to a relatively un-differentiated populace? If they did they would know that neither of these tasks is possible if one is not a budgeter.

One fact is surely true; consumers do not know the price of every good in every store they frequent. One method consumers use

These books are wet, you say.
Yes, but I'll sell them to you.
You want to sell me books after we've fucked in the shower?
I need money for the train. It's subsidized but not cheap.
You should write your congressman.
I should.
Here's a stamp.
Where's the post office?
It's up third and then you veer toward the coffee shop then past the light that used to be there but isn't anymore and there's the library with the free internet and the next building is the post office where you can buy stamps and stand in line.
If I could only make a stamp of your ass.
If any of these books were good enough for me.
But they're not. I'll have to go where they're sent. I must go where the action is, where they know things like Kant and Emerson and Eliot, smart things I've seen in magazines.
I wished I would have found it when I was in 10th grade and needed a new world.
Instead I found Ray Gun, Bomb, Interview, and the back issues of the Paris Review, which I bought from my local library. They were all great magazines, but Cabinet would have been better for me. I would have had direction in the shower.

When we watch movies I am by far the most gullible: don't try the ominous scene on me, I won't pick up on it (and I'm supposed to be literary and understand things like foreshadowing), like if somebody sees a ring in a dream I won't think about marriage until after they do. The characters are far more cognizant of the omen in their actions that I am. The worst is taking me to a science fiction movie when I have no clue what's going on. It's like when you first read Shakespeare and you don't know that Ophelia died but you know what they meant. I know that the Matrix is supposed to exemplify something like the realm of Plato's forms. That's the

to gauge whether a particular store is more or less expensive than another store is to use the price of a certain product (such as eggs, milk, juice, etc.) as an indicator of the general prices in a particular store. The general prices in a particular store might be called a store's price regime. By a store's relative price regime I mean how much items cost on average in a particular store relative to the cost of the same items in another store. For instance, I know that cream cheese costs $1.39 at Whole Foods and that the very best price you can ever get on Dole mixed juice is 2 containers for $4.00. So if I see that cream cheese costs $1.99 at another store I assume that all

theme, but I have no idea what has just happened in the movie.

"The cinema has taken flight beyond reality"
Edgar Morin

Somebody should make a thriller about the case involving a commercial profiling company (the people who buy and sell lists with your name on them). They used prisoners to enter personal data. Well, it turned out that one of the prisoners took a liking to one of the people he was entering data about. She must have bought some kind of soap that the prisoner really liked. In any case, he started stalking her. In reality, the prisoner only sent the woman letters. In the movie, he should probably rape or maim her. It should be a lot like Rear Window only shorter, maybe 90 minutes.

How do actors think about meaning? If they are given the script of a textually difficult play how do they interpret that text? In one sense, such interpretation is left up to the director. He will tell (or direct) the actors how to act the scene. But one way of thinking about meaning is that performance is understanding. That is, if you know how to perform a work you know what it means. This rule of thumb was very helpful when I was reading Ulysses in college and it urged me to later think about this question of how actors think about meaning in the words they perform. Most plays are easy to perform because they are relatively easy to read. Their meaning is transparent to readers of the play, the actors in the play, and the play's audience alike. But there are some plays that are more difficult. In such plays the meaning is not readily accessible to the readers of the play, the actors in the play, or the play's audience.

I've been lifting memories through all the places I've ever lived.
These porous surfaces tingle.
The skin warps over each job's commute,
Through each stained bus-seat, beside each regular coffee shop.
These rooms begin to think like mirrors.
The project continues to expand
And exceeds any sleeves.
This is where we used to walk.
That's always it, always the entrance,
The walking grips objects and must connect them.
I can't see it without knowing
That day before we lived here when
I presented my Supertasters paper
At the aesthetics conference on the other river.
You waited for me at the Cosi
On that dirty corner, where we never go anymore.
I can't see the Bay Bridge without

the prices in that store are going to be higher than in my store of origin.

One way stores could make extra profit would be to figure out which items people generally used as indicators of a store's general price, price these items low, and raise the prices of other items which people never used as indicators. That way, a company is able to maximize overall profits while its customers still feel that the store has reasonable prices. This assumes that there are some products that people generally use as indicators of a store's overall price level. The fact that most people are budgeters makes this a reasonable assumption. That is, the assumption

Knowing that several relatives jumped off.
I don't really know which ones, not really.
Its span appeared prominently again
Before you went to Stanford. We were just visiting the area,
But you had to leave a day early;
I spent it exploring this ancestral city
That I didn't then know,
But which I came to know handless, without touch.
I bought a book on semiotics at City Lights
And ate chowder beside the reflection.
We moved and I don't know what it feels like anymore.
Still, I want to say that I do.
When my sister recently moved there
I wanted to say *You should go to Muddy Waters;*
You should try to work at IDEX,
You should go to this bar and that coffee shop.
Well, you know where
The best place to see music is, don't you?
I actually don't anymore.
These singes want to stick to the skin but can't.

must be made that the consumer cares about prices and what is budgeting but the purest expression of caring about prices.

So, I say, be a budgeter so that you can align the symbol and reality that is money and so that stores can more efficiently market to you.

Francis Raven

Francis Raven is a graduate student in philosophy at Temple University. His first novel, *Inverted Curvatures* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2005), and book of poems, *Taste: Gastronomic Poems* (Blazevox 2005), were recently published. Poems of his have been published in *Mudlark, Conundrum, Chain, Big Bridge, Bird Dog, Caffeine Destiny,* and *Can We Have Our Ball Back?* His critical work can be found in *Jacket, Clamor, The Electronic Book Review, The Emergency Almanac, The Morning News, The Brooklyn Rail, Media and Culture, In These Times, The Fulcrum Annual, Rain Taxi,* and *Pavement Saw*.

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