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Amanda Lynch - Home

Projection: *Bending to the Body's Geography*

Alexandra Mattraw

from HUMAN / NATURE

Stephen Ratcliffe

Lucille

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Sunrise

Alexandra Mattraw

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Paintings

Amanda Lynch



Windy, 2007, ceramic and oil paint, 22.5"h x 22.5"w x 2"d



A Girl and an Ax, 2006, ceramic, 10.75"h x 8"w x .5"d



Home, 2006, ceramic and oil, 22"h x 23.5"wx 2"d



These Are Not Cheerleaders, 2006, ceramic and oils, 17"h x 16"w x .5"d



Stuck, 2005; terracotta with terra sigillata, and underglaze (multiple firings); 9"h x 10"w x .5"d



Killing Time, 2004; talc body, glaze and underglaze (multiple firings); 15"h x 11.5"x 1"d

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Amanda Lynch

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e.e. cummings and the problem of community

Eric Lehman

e.e. cummings is one of my favorite poets. His creative and touching love poems are among the only believable ones of the 20th century. However, upon reading cummings' famous *six nonlectures* the other day, I was disturbed (though not shocked) by an insistence on the rights of the individual above all else. First published in 1953 and never out of print, the book is essentially a transcript of cummings' talks in the Sanders Theatre at Harvard during 1952-1953. But more than that, these speeches are unmistakably a codification of the poet's philosophy of the absolute importance of the individual. This philosophy appeals to me as a firm believer that the "i" that cummings speaks of is sadly losing importance in the modern world. However, it seems to me that in these famous lectures (or rather non-lectures) cummings misunderstands the problem of "the individual versus the group." Any group, he says, is evil, and any true individual is good, and the horrors visited upon the world are the results of mob mentality. "Let us pray always for individuals; never for worlds." This was once an argument that appealed to me as a writer, but now it somehow rankled and I set out to discover why.

Artists seem to be born to conflict with the larger society. I have often been caught in a rant against the conformity of society, its sheep-like herd instincts, and the deadening influence of the representative whole. Of course, groups can do great things, with architecture, with medicine, with science. And who is not to say that the "group" does not include the authors that cummings revered? Are those he learned from not part of a group that includes him? From the parents who prepare us to the friends who inspire us, we live our entirety in a community whether we like it or not. But I decided that this was not finally the point. cummings' poetic art is an individual enterprise and a certain anti-community attitude is indispensable. Without a rejection of the representative voice, an individual voice cannot be fashioned and developed. As he states in his famous "A Poet's Advice," "To be nobody-but-yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else," is what is necessary to be a poet. Anyone who has attempted to be an authentic artist will testify to the truth of that. No, the problem lay with the application of that viewpoint in *six nonlectures* to the whole spectrum of human activity.

The first flaw in this global application is that cummings fails to mention the possibility of oppression of an individual or group from the solitary person outside the group. What of the individual's inherent selfishness and greed? What of the serial killer, the dictator, the corporate plunderer, the mad bomber? cummings would say that such people are not "true" individuals. The logical flaw in this argument is easy to see; such distinctions can be applied as needed to anyone deemed unacceptable. Much as I hate to admit it, we are (perhaps unfortunately) not solitary animals, and the solitary individual can affect the rest of the animals in both positive (cummings) and negative (mad bomber) ways. If one wants to live in a group, benefit from all its pleasures, and not hermit oneself away in the forest (nearly impossible these days), then certain concessions must be made.

Secondly, cummings states "No free spirit ever dreamed of 'security' - or, if he did, he laughed; and lived to shame his dream." This is the statement of someone who has been privileged not to be oppressed in any real and physical way. I'm quite sure that this poet enjoyed the security that the nation/group gave him during two world wars, or even during peacetime. The idea that "every and any slave" is the person who dreams of security, is one that continues to appeal to me as an artist, as I keep searching to free my thought from the hundreds of daily mediocrities. I also agree that complete security may indeed be an illusion that small people crave, as cummings opines, but anyone who has experienced actual slavery would probably be the first to challenge this (very common) artistic assumption about freedom. I didn't grow up with servants like cummings did, but nevertheless have been privileged enough never to have suffered through actual chaos, war, or oppression. He and I have the opportunity to be "true individuals" through the protection of a larger society, as anyone who has truly suffered will attest.

As an example of the "group" oppressing an individual, cummings defends Ezra Pound's privileges when he was tried for treason by the U.S. government, calling it an infringement on free speech. "Every artist's country strictly illimitable country is himself," cummings says, referring to Pound's rights in the situation. This seems a bit naïve, if not downright partial. What "this self-styled world's greatest and most generous literary figure" did was not quite the same as an anti-

war protestor demonstrating his defiance of and disagreement with the U.S. government. The artist in this case was not operating in a theoretical vacuum. Pound gave very real assistance to the dictator Mussolini in a very real war where many people lost their lives. It is a bad example to use when defending the rights of an individual, especially since Pound himself did not think too highly of others' individual rights, or rather was concerned only with the rights of "the elect." It is those others' multiple yet individual rights that are the assumptive linchpin missing from Pound's elitist values and from *six nonlectures* (but perhaps not from cummings' wonderful poetry).

Next, the group dynamic that cummings considers "evil" becomes evil only when it has power. The idea of union, of coming together to fight tyranny and greed (of either individuals or other groups) in a community, is one that e.e. (hopefully not due to his privileged upbringing) fails to mention. When a single farm-worker tries to protest ill-treatment by a corporate overlord or hierarchy, he can do little. But when ten thousand protest, their voices can at least be heard. Of course, when such groups attain power, such as in his most persistent example of Soviet Russia, they become the bane of the individual (and other groups) and indeed of all good things, like art and beauty and love. But it is the power over others, whether held by individuals or groups, which leads to the problem, not the group itself.

Therefore, the real dialectic that should be spoken of is not between the individual and the community, but between responsibility and power. Ezra Pound made the individual choice to work with a group of fascists and must also take individual responsibility in a world filled with other individuals whose "rights" he impeded. When the group (whether it be a mob, a government, a family unit, a church, or a corporation) exercises power to quash a smaller group or an individual's freedom, it has also forgotten its responsibility. This need for exercising power over others (or its opposite, the submission to power) is what prevents a "true individual" from developing, not the group itself, which as cummings himself states can be positive, in the case of his family. "As it was my miraculous fortune to have a true father and a true mother, and a home which the truth of their love made joyous, so - in reaching outward from this love and this joy - I was marvelously lucky to touch and seize a rising and striving world." cummings tries to get around his own paradox here by calling his parents both "true," but would be hard-pressed to reconcile the fact that this is an example of a positive group dynamic.

In some ways, privileged writers like myself and cummings make very bad social philosophers. We must burn against the "furious Mob" or we lose the spark that makes us unique and special, able to cut through the pie of culture. cummings himself has given us beautiful, original (and individual) poetry that continues to enrich the lives of the many, and there is the heart of the paradox. The idea of absolute individualism sounds just as tempting as Karl Marx's theory of communism when put on paper, and has a similar problem when applied to a larger reality. The individual and the group have responsibilities to each other that are often ignored for the "good of the unit" - whether it be one person or a million. We do not operate in a void, and the negotiation of the individual's freedom with the freedoms of other individuals is the human project.

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Eric Lehman

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A Landscape Sounds

Alexandra Mattraw

Her raw mouth
removed from not
knowing becomes

a fjörd, a black beach,
rock spines thickened
or thinned by ocean.

Songs she rubs,
cliff-rims: gray-green
rounds pressed
leaf-shaped to
wet street, asphalt
rain, sour hummed
reach of her
metal chambered
microphone.

When is a voice
a piano,
hunched back
gilded tendons,
sinews, strings woven
by what can't tie.

So many circles make a song.

Transitions cut
audiences, red flesh
chapped pink
tack her
ticked tongue to
lip, licked red
clapboards under sun,
under lamplit swings
yellow fielded.

Repetition needs
a heresy, a new
design to keep
anything.

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Alexandra Mattraw

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Salinas Valley Seasons

Rose Guilbault

I quickly learned that life on a farm was dominated by the seasons, each with its own rhythm and personality.

As an only child, I would find myself often isolated and alone. But I was befriended by nature who delighted and stimulated my imagination by sharing the many wonders and secrets of its bucolic land. I became a keen observer of the seasons, eagerly monitoring the landscape's changing color palette.

In the spring the naked hills and land grew verdant coats of glossy grass. Sprouting seedlings poked their green heads through the moist earth. But it wasn't until after Easter, when the sun radiated sufficient warmth to coax buds open that a color explosion of wildflowers erupted over the hills and through the meadows. Purple lupine, orange poppies, acres of yellow mustard, pink irises--all grouped together on the countryside canvas impersonating an Impressionist watercolor. If Easter was early, the March winds would blow cold early afternoons, bending the grass blades so far back they undulated like an English moor.

At dusk, fragrant wildflowers mingled with the sweet smell of alfalfa lightly scenting the cool evenings with a hint of honeysuckle.

Springtime opened my pores to every sense. The freshness of newly sprouted grass invaded my nostrils. My taste buds watered, anticipating the "green" taste of the tender blade's moist sweetness. My ears became radar. I detected subtle sounds: the sft-sft of gophers impatiently shoving dirt out of their winters nests, the thump-thump of baby rabbits against soft dirt, (warning me I was too close), or zift, zift of lizards racing behind bushes.

I'd sit still and silent, my back against the sun, waiting to see what might appear. My patience was rewarded. Between the blades of grass, beetles cleared paths, ants loaded with cargo quick stepped and grasshoppers jumped so high they landed on my legs. Sometimes I saw animals emerge from winter refuges. Garter snakes slithering through the brush, or baby hares, nervously leaping out of bushes, like fluffy jacks-in-the-box. Even the reticent bucks and does might suddenly appear, proudly walking a spotted, wobbly legged fawn along a field. If I held my breath and sat perfectly still, they might come close enough for me to see the fawn's dappled spots and the twitch of her nose.

Early mornings when I awoke to go to school, dawn entered dressed in a transparent veil of fog. Dampness clung to the air as I walked to where the dirt road met the paved black top. Here the yellow school bus picked me up every day.

Birds greeted me along the way. Meadowlarks sang, mourning doves cooed and silly magpies hopped in front of me.

If spring was sublime, summer was frenetic. The farms down Highway 101, up Jolon Road, and through Loanoke Road, became a beehive of activity, abuzz with field workers, tractors, and harvesters that picked, packed and boxed a salad bowl of crops. Vegetable packing shed's conveyor belts hummed into action. Centipede long trucks lumbered up and down country roads, loaded with boxes of tomatoes, lettuce, carrots or sugar beets spilling over the containers. Field workers dotted the green fields like flowers with their colorful clothes.

In the summer, the pungent smell of ripening fruit and vegetables overpowered the scent of wildflowers, and years later, with the production of garlic, the southern portion of the Valley reeked with that odor.

Midsummer saw the hills shed their emerald coats for gold and the only green spots remained on madrona and oak trees.

School was out and as a child, summer meant days so long, no amount of activities could be made to last until day's light faded past my regular bedtime. Mornings started warm and sultry. Bees droned monotonous tunes outside my bedroom

window swarming the sweet, smelling flowers my mother planted "so you will have sweet dreams."

I'd do my chores: make my bed, feed the chickens, sweep the porch and have the rest of the day stretched before me like a lazy cat. I could ride my bike down to the Salinas River and pretend I was searching for treasure but it was a forbidden pleasure. I couldn't take the chance that my mother's warnings about quicksand by the river not be true, especially having seen all those Tarzan movies where the bad guys die slow, watery deaths. Later I would realize it was her fear of vagrants known to roam the riverbanks that led to this white lie.

On hot afternoons when there was nothing to do but give into the heat and be lazy, my mother and I entertained ourselves by telling stories. My mother's stories were a mix of family history, legends, myths, and religious lessons, she'd also include movie story lines, radio dramas she'd heard or *novellas* written by writer Corinne Tellado in her favorite magazine *Vanidades*. My mother possessed a rich, mellifluous voice that insinuated itself into my imagination, playing my emotions like a harpsichord and commanding interest through her uncanny knack for mimicry.

I'd sit back, torpid, in a trance, letting my imagination wonder through her verbal imagery. My mind was the movie screen, her voice the projector. She encouraged me to read and share fresh, new stories with her. And, I too, desperately wanted to read lots of books and be able to tell her enthralling tales like the ones she told me. In my urgency to acquire stories, I quickly learned English. I also became a frequent and regular customer at the library. My only disappointment was not being able to check out more than three books at a time. Summer was my father's busiest work season and he could only manage to drive into town once a month.

When school resumed in September and the fields lay ravaged with the stench of rotting squashed vegetables permeating the air, there was no doubt summer was over.

The autumn winds blew over the fields, whistling mournfully as they danced with whirlwinds of dust over the plant-littered earth. Soon they would be cleared, leaving the once-lush land bare except for the hay fields with their yellow bales of hay strewn like gold bricks.

In town, the streets slowly emptied each week as migrant workers headed back to their homes. The town looked abandoned and felt lonely. No longer did teenage boys stand on their usual street corners in their best black pants, white t-shirts and freshly pomaded hair, smoking and calling to each other. No longer did the tinny sound of the accordion playing *ranchero* music escape from the winging doors of *El Resbalon*, the farm workers' favorite saloon. Even the torrent of cars that flowed weekly through Broadway became a trickle. Texas license plates disappeared, not to be seen again until Spring when once again the orange plates would sprout along with the California poppies and brighten the gray, empty streets.

My father's work consumed him. He left home before dawn and worked into the night, harvesting one crop and clearing for another one. I learned the meaning of the expression "make hay while the sun shines." This season had the greatest potential for him to make overtime. The winter was too uncertain. If it rained, he would not work therefore not be paid. He had no contract, no benefits. So he drove the tractor from sun-up to sundown. And prayed the winter would bring enough rain for steady work in the summer and fall, but not so much as to unemploy him in the winter and spring.

Winter arrived like a ghost, its cold presence felt before its physical appearance seen. Cold, damp, foggy mornings descended over the valley covering the fields with sheets of crunchy frost.

The linoleum on my bedroom floor was an iceberg. I had to race to the bathroom in my stocking feet every morning. My teeth chattered like rattles while goose pimples swelled and scratched against a thin flannel nightgown. The wood-stoked stove in the kitchen provided the only warmth in the house. Mama made oatmeal every morning. As much as I disliked its mushy texture and lumpiness, nothing else could warm my insides and prepare me for the long walk to the school bus.

Outside the hills and the slopes lay fallow, waiting to be plowed in neat rows and wavy patterns. The birds were gone. The animals hidden. Winter, a stark world of primary colors: dark brown hills and fields, deep blue skies and foamy, thick white morning fog.

Girls were not allowed to wear pants in my grammar school. Morning after morning, I'd stand waiting for the school bus, hunched over, shivering against the cold and wind, as my legs grow stiff and blue from winter's chill. In the coldest of winters when the wind blew frigid and unrelenting, not even my warmest coat could keep winter's icy fingers from making my spine shudder.

After school, the school bus deposited me at the same spot I'd started out, but the road back home felt longer. The cold pummeled my back. It made my nose red and drippy and irritated my eyes. Only the aroma of my mother's cookies

warmed me the instant I opened the door. Suddenly, the bad weather, demanding teachers and clannish classmates--external struggles that could be as trying as seasonal changes, did not matter as much. In my house, our little nest, with the smells of familiar cooking, favorite afternoon cartoon shows, ("Quick Draw McGraw" or "Yogi Bear"), and the lightness of my mother's cheery patter made the dark season bearable.

Then the rains came--in torrents, drenching the hard-caked soil and encircling the countryside with their gray cloak of desolation. Would this be the year the complacent Salinas River turned into a raging tide and flood? Would the crops be ruined or helped? Would there be enough work for *Papa*?

No animals. No flowers. No people. No answers. Just black rich earth all around, redolent of musk and dampness.

The land lay ready, wanton for seeding, eager to procreate new crops in the spring when the cycle would start all over again. Another season. Another crop. Another year in life of a farmwork's daughter in the Salinas Valley.

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Rose Guilbault

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Edge and Fold XLI-XLVIII

Paul Hoover

XLI

*where is a written deer
running through a written forest*

-Wisława Szymborska

the written man in bed
with his unwritten wife

she who has written
his figure in that place

experience that lives
only in the written

a dark brown mouse
crossing to the mirror

vacant fishermen
staring into ponds

as if to write them
naked with indifference

what is fire writing
in the house of darkness

all inner space imagined
nothing in shadow

everything that is
written by what is not

XLII

sweat and breath
the listing of parts

the body of love
and heat beneath the skin

the rigors of being
easy in your mind

and in your body hard
the shape of light

is everywhere at once
she speaks you into being

draws you from her eyes
until the threshold enters

and silence grows still

XLIII

rain is falling somewhere
in this dry world

lightning with its cane
strides across the field

sometimes thrusting

itself through the house

the path of darkness

sweeps everywhere at once

hesitant thunder

and a change in the air

rain on the river

making it rush

XLIV

the ones I've offended

let me kiss your mouths

as poets do endlessly

between the legs of wells

love is a language

few of us can speak

if it happens to die

the mourners are ready

to plunder our grief

silence make moan

XLV

life imitates art

when art is at its worst

Christina Aguilera
and Andy Warhol

grace a page together
& I must place my eye

beneath the skirts of bells
nothing lasts forever

except the works of nature
returning every spring

XLVI

a lovely winter wedding
for every mother's son

in a world of afternoons
social observations

mean almost nothing
Taylor loves John

a mirror loves the sun
each time I dream

it happens more slowly
until a fondness comes

XLVII

hollow of the mouth
velvet of the tongue

the longest intermission
in the history of song

likeness now begins and
difference shuts down

how many words
must grace the poor child

until she feels impassive
the semblance and the tangle

are models of desire
little sleep machine

on its way to language
flickering out of time

XLVIII

jostled by the present
the future's intermittent

whatever's unfulfilled
stands at the ready

the way that gives way
is like a fossil now

when things are unconcealed
our face to face encounters

are closed to the closed
we stand among the open

garrulous as they are

what is not missing

and what was never there

nothing infinite lasts

the cry of an owl

is its first world

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Paul Hoover

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Three Vignettes

R. Zamora Linmark

What Passes for Rain

Perhaps. An ambiguous word that should not have survived the 16th century. But it did. So perhaps best to begin this very short and simple story with an epigraph from the 1985 Pantheon paperback edition of Marguerite Duras's *The Lover*, since this is the book that Javier randomly pulls out from the two shelves of books that make up his personal library, mostly Self-Help and biographies of Marilyn Monroe, James Dean, and Montgomery Clift, while he waits for the monsoon rain to subside, hopefully by midnight, when the so-called overly fashion and grooming conscious "Metrosexuals" - read: faggots with money - ramp into the Flinstones-inspired bar aptly called Government.

Perhaps unfold the story with a quote, something along the theme of waiting, like the waiting that takes place outside a closed door on page twenty-five of Duras's novel, or the Chinese man on page forty-nine who weeps from too much fear - fear of his father, fear of disinheritance, fear of love, which often accompanies fear. Or preface it with an epigraph; one that deals with memory, since *The Lover* is - or can be interpreted as - a pseudo-confessional text about the author-narrator-protagonist, Marguerite Duras, and her recollection of her almost-sixteenth year when she carried on an affair with a Chinese man nearly twice her age. If not that, then something to do with erasure, or the failure of forgetting. In other words, ambivalence toward resignation, or the clarity that comes with resignation, which is at the heart of our main character Javier's conflict. To move onward with - or without - Kingston, his Chinese-Filipino lover. To let go - or not - of the ten-and-a-half years spent with and for each other.

If Javier were a writer, as he sometimes fancies himself to be, possessor of that gift - or curse - that allows him to exist in two or more disparate worlds simultaneously, or, in the words of his undergraduate literature professor, "the ability to live in multiple levels of reality," he would find a thousand ways to hang on to the memories and another thousand to forget them. Writing has the power of achieving both. It is a transgressive act of remembering since it is, cannot, and will never be loyal to memory, as memory is never loyal to itself. And, as Duras points out in the story, regardless of what is preserved, something is always left out, forsaken, sacrificed. If not love, then hate. If not hate, then sadness. If not sadness, anger. If not anger, silence. All of which Javier is still having difficulty recognizing as emotions independent from each other because the break-up, which was long overdue (or so he thought), only occurred a little over a month ago.

If Javier took up writing in college instead of dentistry ("I numb gums for a living"), he would not have any trouble remembering then letting go of the fucks that followed the near-fistfights, usually caused by Kingston's wife, also a Chinese-Filipino, whom Javier dubs "the itchy cunt between our legs." He would be able to recall then dismiss the mutual apologies that followed the fights; the chain of Sorrys uttered with subtle signs of withdrawals; the annual itinerary to Europe, Continental U.S., Japan, and Hawaii; the joint bank account; the business partnership exporting hand-carved native furniture; the one-bedroom love-and-quarrel nest in Pasig that, during the day, served as their office. In a nutshell, the day-to-day expectations and uncertainties that, in the end, totaled ten-and-a-half years.

And had Javier traded the drill for a pen, Novocain for ink, he would be able to build passages from scratch just so he can lie, fake, grope his way in and out of the hurt. He would do as Duras did: Distance the past through the use of perfect past tense, eliminate the subject with third-person point-of-view. "He loved him just as much as rain," as opposed to: "I loved him just as much as rain," et cetera. Perfect past tense. "He," not "I." Until Javier is comfortable enough to relive the memory once more in the present tense and in the first-person point-of-view, as Duras eventually does on the night she and her Chinese lover soaks the bed with blood and lust, while the city of Cholon and its assortment of sounds pass them by.

Had Javier the patience for putting, in word-order, his thoughts and feelings, conflicting as they are at the moment, he would know exactly what to do with the rain that, for the past ten-and-a-half years he's come to associate with Kingston,

for the mere - and laughably absurd - reason that whenever it rains, Kingston gets an instant hard-on that lasts way after the sky dries up. Javier would be able to invent a thousand metaphors to remember the rain and another thousand to destroy it. This rain draping his window and continues to silence and strand this noise-magnet city of Manila, now and for the rest of tomorrow. Perhaps.

The Record Breaker

I like to think it was the one-thousand-peso bedhead look and the Armani cologne given to me by my sister Faye, who's been serving an American cultural attaché officer and his wife based in Hong Kong for seven years, that inspired him to follow me to the Men's room on the fourth floor of Megamall, so-called because it's the largest tomb-shaped mall south of Bangkok. I like to think it was my above-average wholesome looks and Jean Genet-borrowed glances in the mirrored walls that guided him right up to the urinal beside mine, where he flashed a semi-erect penis that would grow past seven inches in my mouth minutes later, inside his second-hand Toyota going fifty out of the mall's parking lot and onto EDSA, the highway that connects north and south of Metro Manila, and famous for staging snap revolutions and coup d'états. I like to think it was my glycerin-esque saliva savoring his sex that, like a Mapplethorpe lily, curved to the right. I like to think it was my Linda Lovelace throat that nearly caused the vehicle to sideswipe a bus crammed with so many passengers they were practically spilling out of it. I like to think it was my willingness to serve rather than be serviced ("I don't care if I come or not!" is my motto) that immediately put a smile to his night. I like to think he was doing me the honor when he invited me, the first stranger, according to him, into his Quezon City townhouse. I like to think he was telling me the truth when he repeated, "It's hard to believe, I know, but you're the first trick I'm letting into my pad." I like to think "trick" has a positive connotation, though I much prefer the comfort of the illusive word "stranger." I like to think I scored perfect tens in the categories of degree of difficulty, artistic impressions, and originality because when he ejaculated he shot for the moon then whimpered like a baby for a kiss. I like to think my kiss is worth a thousand jewels because, right before he excused himself to the bathroom, he asked for an encore ("Don't worry I'll drive you home.") I like to think that as he rinsed his belly he was wondering who this stranger was he'd allowed in the privacy of his bachelor's pad, this no-name guy who, at that very moment, was snooping at his things, memorizing titles of books on the shelves. *Learning To Love God. Disappointment With God. Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire. God Are You There, Do You Care, Do You Know About Me. The Lion, The Witch, & The Wardrobe. The Trouble With Jesus. Dealing with Brokenness.* I like to think that he is now repaired or has found a way to negotiate Christianity, oral sex, and wizardry into his life. I like to think that, as he gave himself one last look in the medicine cabinet mirror, he was telling himself that I was a one-of-a-kind twenty-year-old advocacy of behind-the-wheel pleasure whose impeccable English had an accent that teeters between a Merchant Ivory-produced film and MTV. I like to think that he was thinking all these while I was telling myself: Oh, shit, he's the third this week, seventh since September rolled in, and that was what, only five weeks ago, what's wrong with me, why am I attracting guys like him, is this an epidemic, am I its bull's-eye? I like to think I was the poster boy just for the month, that he was just another coincidence, a seven-plus-inch déjà vu, a statistic to my rapidly-growing inventory of trysts with pent-up, hyper-sexual, guilt-ridden, straight or bi-identified, married-to-God, discreet-to-secrete-guys who have yet to reconcile Jesus with jism. I like to think that when he said, "Let me take you home," and I told him, "You don't have to...really...just take me back to Megamall...got tons of cabs there," he was only delivering his Good Samaritan scripted line. And when I asked him, "How many blow-jobs do you need to get through the day?" and he answered, "Depends. Four on a stress-free day, six if it's hectic," prompting me to say, "Then today must be a bad day because you're requesting for an encore," which prompted him to say, "Not really, I just love what you can do with your mouth" - that he was only affirming what I already know: I am the Megamall King of Fellatio, my mouth made of glory, my tongue, a muscle of miracles. And when I asked him, "What's the most blow-job you've had in a day?" and he answered, "Six," prompting me to ask, "What number am I?" to which he responded, "Six but seven with the encore" - his "encore" overlapping with my "Jesus" - I like to think that I was about to break his world record as much as he was going to break mine. I as his seventh, and he as my thirteenth-going-on-fourteenth trick.

Fonts & Other Dilemmas

It is the kind of rain that will not give up until half of the city's rat population has drowned or migrated up north to seek refuge in the air-conditioned mausoleum of former deposed president Ferdinand Marcos, where his wax-suspect remains lie in a glass sarcophagus. Danilo is at the computer, living his other life in the zip code of in-between states or what his mentor calls "Still Life with White Noise." Senseless snow or not, he tunes in, listens to what's buried beneath the static, and types, pausing only to remind himself not to Page Up and fuss over grammar and logic until he's established some kind of notion, an almost-clarity. Anyway, it's a first draft, he tells himself, and first drafts are - what? - butcher scraps, muse stand-ins, illuminated madness, pure gold.

Right now, what matters most are that it's raining, the story is unraveling with Glenn Gould in the background, humming to the 1981 rendition of Bach's Goldberg Variations, and the muse is fueling Danilo's imagination for the fifth consecutive rainy day. Out the window, Danilo gazes at the darkness that holds the rain of his evening garden. Nice word - "gaze," he thinks. Subtle. Light. A Monet canvas. Then he shifts his attention back to the screen, where Javier, his protagonist, is stranded by both the rain (he wants to go clubbing but it's also pouring on his side of the universe) and the memories co-produced with Kingston Lau, his Chinese-Filipino lover whom he has just broken up with after ten and a half semi-solid years.

After three pages of New Roman Times, size 12, he arrives finally - a shaky word "finally" - at the period of all periods (for now). He scrolls to the first page and does what he loves least: Come up with a title - that necessary skin tag that sometimes consumes more time than the actual writing itself. But, like it or not, a title can make or break an audience. After all, it's the one with the largest font. "A title should come to the storyteller like a poem does to a poet - unannounced and, like a haiku, economical," his mentor said. "Otherwise, you're better off calling the story 'Untitled.'" Which is what Danilo ends up doing. The alternative is "Perhaps," after the story's opening word. But who wants to read a story with a one-word title that connotes the indecisiveness of the 16th century?

Craving for a drink, he goes to the kitchen still smelling of the dead rat that his maid, Melanie, discovered under the kitchen sink two-and-a-half months ago. He empties the rest of Shiraz into a coffee mug then returns to his desk with a half-filled box of Hawaiian Host chocolate-covered macadamia nuts that his mother included in a care package stuffed with Immodium ("Don't leave America without it!"), anti-fungal ointment (in case the fungus on his left inner thigh reappears), a one-year supply of Extra-Strength Tylenol PM and Ativan (for migraine due to Third World sales transaction, customer service, gridlock traffic, unruly commuters, et cetera), and a bottle of Astroglide lubricant (purchased at 80& Straight, the one beside Sizzler's Steak House in Waikiki, and right below the apartment building where the elevator man was crushed to death a couple months ago because he forgot to put the 'Men at Work' sign.)

Between sips of Shiraz (the one that keeps winning awards, according to the gold medal sticker on the bottle), he skims over the untitled story, asking himself why he has written another anti-relationship vignette when he and Rex, his current boyfriend of ten months, are happily together. It's his fifth fiction piece this week, sixth if he counts the soft-porn heartbreaking tale that went straight to the paper shredder about two steroid-pumped lovers - both married and with children and therefore bi-identified - who meet up at a sex club in Pasay City right across Manila Bay called "The Bungalow" (also the story's title) twice a week, every Tuesday and Thursday night, when the theme is "Undress 2 Impress." There, inside a room large enough to hold only a cot, they take turns bottoming for each other or for a third party, usually a steroid user with a body like theirs.

Danilo picks up the folder stacked in the MAYBE pile and pores through the fresh-off-the-printer vignettes, flash fiction with recurring themes of love, loss, sex, race, religion, class, and peppered with Manila's oversexed, repressed, romantic, and sexy men who, when they aren't grappling with religion and bisexuality, genuflecting in bathhouses and movie houses, or giving blows inside speeding Toyotas, are busily helping resolve the country's beyond-reparable economy and rat-level poverty by servicing the unemployed, blue collar workers, and teenage fathers for a hundred peso.

Where are these stories coming from? And why are they rolling in like dominos now that he is at peace with the world, himself, and the on-going war in Iraq? Are he and Rex headed for the inevitable break-up sooner than he thinks? Questions he already has answers to: Don't Know, Will Never Know, Don't care, Shouldn't Care. For the creative process is too mysterious, unfixed, complex, anti-uniformity, constantly mutating to spell out prophecies or point its genesis to a specific source - inspirational, influential, factual, experiential. Fiction, as Danilo has come to recognize and accept, is not a grocery list; it is not an annotation where the writer explains the sources for his text or defends his imagination.

As for he and Rex heading for Splitsville anytime soon, right now: Highly unlikely. Unlike the couple in "Untitled," he and Rex, who is also an American scholar like himself, are as okay as that cool pre-rain evening when their paths crossed on the Manila Bayfront lawn of the U.S. Embassy on Roxas Boulevard, where they and other ex-pats and Filipino dignitaries were helping celebrate the annual 4th of July celebration with hot dogs, bite-size burgers, pizzas, and fireworks.

When their one-night stand began to lengthen to sleepovers, they no longer could deny the fact that their compatibility would outlast their moans. So they agreed to commit only with the stipulation that there would be none. And since a great chunk of their relationship is based on intellectual, rather than, semen exchange - Danilo is a Literature professor at University of Hawaii at Manoa while Rex is working on his doctorate dissertation at the U.C. Santa Cruz, Department of History of Consciousness - they would keep theirs simple and open, for previous experiences taught them that monogamy in a gay relationship is as near-extinct - if not mundane - as Ching Ching, Ling Ling, and the last dozen panda bears on earth.

Now and then, they have their casual argument, usually over pedagogical matters (e.g Should Huck Finn be taught to

Black kids in urban ghettos?) and current events plaguing the Philippines (e.g. Should President Gloria "caught cheating on red tape" Arroyo resign? Rex: Yes; Danilo: Assassinate the bitch). Only once did they bicker over a trick - a sexually-repressed Chinese-Filipino professor of De La Salle University whom Rex had met in Gay Dot Com - but the fight was not because Rex had slept with him but because the professor, who turned out to be on psyche meds, had gotten obsessed with Rex; apparently Rex reminded him of his Scottish ex.

What Danilo has written this past week - and Danilo knows this - are merely wanna-be and could-be versions of himself, of Rex, and of their lives before, during, and after their initial week together. He simply made a mental list of memories then broke them apart, tinkered with them, falsified the evidence; exorcised anxieties (how to learn to sleep solo again after a ten-and-half year relationship); and stretched out his fantasies (suck-fest in a movie house, blowing the family driver and paying him for it, playing guinea pig to a young father of two after treating him to a cheeseburger Happy Meal). He manipulated his and Rex's age, turned the Rex-inspired character in "The Importance of Er," for example, into a fifty-something architect, when, in reality, Rex is an unassuming thirty-six year old, deep-blue-eyed scholar who is in the Philippines to research on the phenomenon of the endless-yet-gone-nowhere People Power peaceful revolutions. He also gave himself and Rex, who is Irish American and a non-practicing Catholic, constant ethnic and religion makeovers. In "Untitled," which he later changes to "What Passes For Rain," he imagined himself as a woman married to a bisexual Chinese-Filipino carrying on a relationship with another man. In "The Record Breaker," "Rex" is a repress Born-Again seeking blow-jobs in the movie houses of Megamall. Where class is concerned, he placed himself in the double role as exploiter of, and financial provider, for blue-collar workers. In short, from the drop of truth serum, he magnified, exaggerated, dramatized, enhanced, and cancelled his and Rex's academic-driven lives, exchanging their world for other worlds. Like the garden outside his window covered with rain. Imagined and not.

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R Zamora Linmark

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Head in a Helmet

Cynthia Robinson

Ivan rides a Triumph motorcycle. It is a big bike. It has a 2294cc engine and its tailpipes trumpet like an enraged bull elephant.

He's riding with Donny, as usual, and also as usual, they are riding west across the Bay Bridge from Oakland to San Francisco. They ride into the sun that is setting into the ocean from which, Ivan predicts, it will soon be seen rising above Japan, and then Vladivostok, and then across the expanse of the steppes, and on to the Middle East-the desert where Ivan once drove a tank to keep gasoline flowing freely to America, to keep gasoline coming to the Arco by the I-80 freeway where he likes to fill up. Ivan thinks of the sun rising like a conquering army across the planet.

And he and Donny-he on his Triumph and Donny on his 1978 Norton Commander-are like a conquering army. Just the two of them.

They ride west across the Bay Bridge, over the waters teeming with striped bass, and the halibut greedily eating anchovies; and bat rays sailing through the murky depths, big as tires; and fat seven-gill sharks as docile as dairy cows; and ancient hoary sturgeon, languid and long as a tall man and encrusted and ridged with hard knobs, their preternatural life-spans having afforded them memories of the conquistadors. Beneath it all lies 500 years of shipping debris. The creosote and mercury from a million ships settles in a heavy layer at the bottom of the bay, echoing with the footfalls of a navy of long-dead sailors.

Ivan and Donny ride through the tunnel on Treasure Island halfway between Oakland and San Francisco. The roof of the cement tunnel is shaped like the barrel of a gun and when they rev their engines inside it the report of their engines echoes and amplifies. It sounds like an M-80 blast. They both laugh.

Ivan always rides big bikes-not for bigness, but for defense. He always tells Donny that when you're on a bike, cars can't see you. You have to make them hear you. Ivan wears noise like a suit of armor.

Ivan pulls up next to a Volvo sedan and peers in at the driver behind the safety glass. He can plainly see that like most drivers, this one is a soft, distracted creature. This Volvo driver is chattering into the telephone headset plugged into his ear. He looks like a chimpanzee manning a rocket ship.

Ivan knows that the automobile drivers don't see him. They don't see the man in leather, the man passing them on the right. Ivan lane-splits. He rides the white line, passing cars on his left and on his right.

He rides like a big cat that has poked his head into a narrow space and, seeing that his whiskers fit inside, decides to squeeze his body in and pass through. Ivan blasts past the Volvo, eases along the white line and squeezes between a two-ton Escalade on the left and a two-ton Expedition on the right. Ivan knows that he passes them before they even know he's there. They don't see the man who is-just inches from their steel-reinforced side panels-hurling his bare heart into the fierce wind with nothing between him and the skin-peeling pavement but a foot peg.

But they'll hear him. The roar of his engine will blister their ears. It is startling. Most people jump. The clever ones say things like, "there goes an organ donor." And then they slip back into their reverie, insulated inside their cars, as if they were at home in their living rooms.

Ivan and Donny reach the other end of the bridge. They are in San Francisco and they proceed along the highway to the exit leading to the Mission District. They take it. They ride up 14th street and stop side-by-side at the light at 14th and Valencia.

"Watch these assholes at the lights," Ivan says to Donny.

"What?" Donny says. He smiles and shakes his head. "Are you going all post-stress on me man?"

"No. Just watch them. I've got a weird feeling."

"Me too," Donny says. "I've got a weird feeling. I feel lucky."

"What?" Ivan asks.

The light changes and Ivan pulls into the intersection after looking to make sure that nobody runs the red. Donny is beside him, lighting a cigarette with one hand and accelerating with the other.

"I feel lucky," Donny yells over to Ivan.

Luck isn't always good, Ivan thinks. He doesn't say it out loud.

They turn left onto Guerrero Street and head south. Donny and Ivan take the right lane for themselves, cruising comfortably side-by-side. They don't speed. Donny hands his cigarette across to Ivan as they ride. All along the Guerrero corridor they ride past rows of Victorian houses, their former splendor replaced by the shabbiness of necessity. They are each divided into three, sometimes four separate units, and people crowd into their small tall rooms, burrowing in like beetles under a log-seeking shelter in a city where shelter comes at such a high price.

Ivan watches the cars. He has theories about cars and he is always adding to his science. He has observed that, generally, automobile drivers are not aware that they are moving. In cars, 80 mph feels a lot like 30 mph, which feels not so different from 0 mph.

Cars can offer such a comfortable ride. So relaxing. Just today-just in the stretch between the bridge and the Mission-Ivan has already observed people in cars fussing with the radio, checking their hair and picking their noses, puzzling over the mis-directions they've printed out from Mapquest, eating porridge from a bowl and gibbering on the telephone.

He and Donny pass a woman driving a Camry with a bumper sticker announcing that "The Goddess has awoken, and there's magic afoot." She takes one hand off the wheel to re-arrange the crystals and beads and talismans dangling from her rear view mirror. Like a decorator crab that scuttles along the ocean's floor in search of pieces of plastic and wool and fishing line to wear on its back, this woman has affixed random objects to her dashboard: driftwood and shells, and bobblehead dolls, and a time-released air-freshener bottle shaped like a crown.

Ivan and Donny pass a young Asian couple in a red Celica. They have maximized their blind spots by heaping stuffed animals onto the shelf behind the back seat.

An SUV passes them. A man with a glistening mullet and wrap-around Oakley sunglasses is driving it. His windows are obstructed with stickers attesting that, as an Oakland Raiders fan, he has made a commitment to excellence.

Ivan notices all of it. He is vigilant.

* * *

The sun is now behind the apartment buildings at the west side of Dolores Park. It hails red and brilliant over the tops of these buildings-these buildings that have stood witness in this spot for nearly 100 years.

The park has just been mowed and the warm autumn air smells like grass. It smells fresh and green. Donny loves that smell and he wonders how it is that you can smell a color. It occurs to him that maybe blind people smell colors.

Ivan is watching the road ahead. He sees that the light at 18th and Dolores has just turned yellow.

Ivan is good at math and he calculates quickly; he knows that he doesn't have enough time, enough space, to stop. He also knows that, as soon as the light turns, some person, some asshole, will punch it into the intersection without looking. And, as always, this asshole will be driving a mini-van.

Ivan flicks his right wrist, accelerates to 63 mph, and clears the intersection just as the light is turning red.

Donny has fallen behind Ivan. He slowed down to inspect a woman, a redhead, at the bus stop.

He approves of her. He approves of her mightily.

She is wearing white cutoffs and her legs are very long. She reminds Donny of a gazelle with those long legs. And the fact that this redheaded woman triggers an associative memory of the savannah leads Donny to think, "I should get out and get laid more instead of smoking pot in front of the Nature Channel."

Donny resolves, right then and there, to get out more.

He turns his attention to the redheaded woman's ass. It is mounted atop her exquisitely long legs. "Right where it should be," he ruminates. He admires her ass for it is exceptionally round and firm and it is set very high-so high that it's as though it were from a planet where gravity has no dominion. There's a word for it: high-ass. And Donny reckons that it is the finest example of high-ass he has ever seen.

Then the redhead, as if accommodating Donny's gaze, twirls on her clogs 190 degrees to study the schedule on the bus shelter. She twirls in what seems to be slow motion, thus affording Donny a superb view of her superb high-ass. He calculates how-with her consent, of course, and to her delight, also of course-he would handle it for her. The words bam bam bam run through his mind as the corners of his lips curl upward.

Animals in the forest can sense when they are being watched. So can redheads in cut-offs. The woman feels Donny looking at her.

She turns back toward the street so she can face him. She sees that he is handsome-ruggedly handsome in an outlaw motorcycle gang kind of way-and she sees his heavy boots and his strong thighs and she sees that the corners of his mouth have curled up in a sardonically licentious attitude.

And that smile tells her that Donny is a man who will play it anyway she wants: the neighbor borrowing a cup of sugar, the French whore on Bastille day, the lady chauffeur and the porn fluffer. She can tell that Donny is what she would call a good sport.

She thrusts her left hip out and puts her hand on it. She rubs her long naked thighs together like a praying mantis. The effect is mesmerizing.

* * *

When he worked at the patent office in Zurich as a young man in 1905, Albert Einstein would sit on a hill to eat his lunch out of a brown paper bag that he brought from home. He liked watching the railway switchyard below. From his high vantage point, he could see the trains arriving from the east.

The stationmaster could not see these trains, the ones coming in from the steppes, because his view was blocked by a grassy hill. From the stationmaster's perspective, the arrival of the westbound trains was an event destined to take place in the future. But, because Einstein was up higher, he had a different perspective. He could see the westbound trains before the stationmaster saw them. For Einstein, those trains had already arrived, they were already in his present.

Einstein realized that if you can get far enough away-way, way out in space-you transcend time. You will see the past, present, and future all at once. You will see that they are all the same. Albert Einstein was a genius. This is generally known.

* * *

If Einstein were on another hill, another high hill-actually, the hill in Dolores Park overlooking the intersection at 18th and Dolores-he would see the redheaded woman at the bus stop. Like Donny, Albert Einstein would admire the woman intensely.

Einstein would also see Ivan riding through the intersection. He would probably even commend Ivan on his quick calculations. Einstein himself would have gunned it through the intersection. It was the prudent thing to do.

Einstein would see Donny as well. He would, with mounting horror, realize that Donny was gearing down his Norton so the big bike purred and growled at the redheaded woman.

And Einstein would see what Donny could not see. He would see the mini-van jumping the green light and flooring it into the intersection.

* * *

The girl is screaming. Ivan bends down in front of her and picks up Donny's helmet. Ivan holds Donny's helmet in his hands. Donny's head is still in it.

* * *

Ivan looks at Donny's ruggedly handsome face. Donny's lips, framed by his blond Fu Manchu mustache, are still curled up at the corners. He appears to be very content. His expression is very content.

Ivan says out loud, "Oh God." But in his mind, Ivan silently repeats, "go back five minutes, just five minutes."

Because five minutes ago Donny's head was still right where it should be. It hadn't yet been sheared off by the bumper of the mini-van, rolled across the intersection, and bumped against the curb at the feet of the girl standing at the bus stop.

* * *

Ivan stared into Donny's face. Donny's eyes were closed, and he was softly smiling. He looked like he was having a good dream.

Ivan could still smell gasoline bleeding from Donny's gas tank onto the street. He could smell the acrid tinge of rubber still burning across pavement. The smoking rubber hung in the air, lingering after the event.

Ivan tried to understand how this could happen. Maybe if Donny had been hit and skidded with his bike across the intersection-that would have seemed more likely.

Or, Ivan would have expected Donny to do what he'd seen him do once before: Donny was broadsided and punched clean off his bike. He hit the concrete on his feet and he ran out the velocity. Donny was an athlete; a drinking, smoking, drugging, fucking athlete. And after Donny was knocked off his bike, he approached the Lexus that hit him. The couple in the Lexus quickly hit the buttons on their armrests to raise their windows. Donny lightly knocked on the driver's window. The driver opened it a crack.

"I need your insurance man," Donny told him, "You just hit me."

Donny walked away from that accident. He got back on his bike and rode to the nearest bar to recuperate on the nearest barstool.

* * *

More than 600 years ago Tamerlane rode out of the east, over the steppes, and into Baghdad with his horde. They were pissed off. Tamerlane ordered his men to decapitate everybody-tens of thousands of men, women, and children. The horde stacked their heads neatly into pyramids.

And then-just to clarify their point-Tamerlane's horde took a few thousand more heads and skewered them onto pikes. They planted the pikes along the roads leading into Baghdad, running for miles and miles like Burma Shave signs.

In 1401, you could get decapitated. And it wouldn't be that unusual. Unpleasant, yes. Unusual, no.

But today, what are the odds? Aside from Jayne Mansfield, who gets their head shorn off?

Donny. Apparently.

* * *

Ivan reflects on what happened to Donny. He reflects on it deeply and he returns to it often. He is drawn to it like a drug he can't quit or a woman he can't stop loving.

He wonders how it could have been different.

What if the redheaded woman had made some friendly, beckoning gesture-like lifting her t-shirt to expose her breasts? That would have been ideal.

Or what if Ivan and Donny hadn't stopped for gas, or if they did stop for a beer, or if Ivan hadn't been late, or if Donny didn't waste so much time brushing his hair when he was only going to put his helmet on anyway? What if anything, any slight thing, had been different? Then maybe Donny would be alive.

Donny's death happened in a single moment. The moment froze in time. It froze inside Ivan's mind.

Ivan stands weeping like a child even though he's as big as a Russian bear and the tattoo on his massive bicep says Death Before Hard Labor. The lady cop puts her arms around him, tears running black mascara down her face. Her partner-and he's almost crying too-gently pulls the head from Ivan's arms and wraps it like a newborn baby in yellow plastic. And the heavens break apart from the sonic boom caused by the screaming angels who pull their hair, and tear their clothes, and rake their nails across their breasts until they bleed.

* * *

Regret cannot hold Ivan forever. He comes to realize that space and time are not absolute. He laughs at the shallow tyranny of before and after because he knows that they are only words.

Ivan and Donny ride together down the street. They are riding through intersections with perpetually green lights. The curbsides are lined with redheads, all with fabulous high asses, running for miles, running forever, along the road like Burma Shave signs.

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Cynthia Robinson

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Second Language

Nina Basica Finci

It wasn't my fault that English had so many words. The fact that I confused my articles, said *fingers* instead of *toes*, *chicken* instead of *kitchen*, or replaced *desk* for a *table* made no difference. They could understand me, they just chose not to. To make me feel stupid, without language, ignorant, un-American.

In those first weeks in America, I spent my days soaking up language, counting days in new words. I religiously wrote them in the green mini-pad that I bought at Sav-On: *rooster*, *multiply*, *refill*, *etcetera*, *due*, *enclosure*, *burgundy*, *obvious*, *picket fence*. Simple words I didn't know the meaning of gave me bad grades in science word problems, when I was told not to use a dictionary. Simple phrases prevented me from turning in my Algebra homework: "homework is due" sounded like "do your homework" and I did it, but kept it neatly in my three-ring binder. Mr. Smith didn't seem to mind. I was his token white immigrant and I scored a 100% on all his quizzes. Everyday he asked me to put a chair next to his desk and correct classmates' homework with his bold red pen. The red pen gave me special powers, yet left me feeling ever more different, separate and alone.

For three classes a day - PE, Algebra and Life Science - I could interact with the regular school population that spoke in perfectly round Californian vowels and ate up all the right consonants. I still couldn't get over the shock of having to change my shirt in PE around all the other girls, whose round curvy bodies made me feel so young and undeveloped. I began considering stuffing my bra and shaving my legs, too.

PE was the only class where I got to talk to the blond American girls. They would tell the teacher, "We are on our period." When Mr. Shultz asked, "What about you?" I just nodded in agreement, unsure of what he was asking. What was wrong with him, didn't he see that I was there, attending my 4th *period*? So, I sat on the curb with the American girls, talking about sex and someplace called the "mall." After a few weeks, I realized that Mr. Shultz had no time to fight with my muteness and explain to me all the new words - *black top*, *tether ball*, *lap*, *softball*, *home base*.

There were many words that I could not find in the dictionary: *blue flame*, *dude*, *hick*, *third base*. There were other names that I heard people calling me: *basket case*, *mute chick*, *FOB*. I wrote them in my mini-pad and smiled at the speaker, with the smile that said, "You are so sweet to talk to me, thank you, please be my friend." Betsy, a girl who sat next to me in Life Science, sang "Nina Basketcase, Basketcase Basica" every time she saw me. I sat down next to her and smiled, glowing with the attention.

I wanted to become friends with all the supermodels in my Life Science class. These girls were popular, tanned and giggly, dating senior guys. All they did for the fifty dreadful minutes of the period was brush their long silky hair and apply strawberry-mango lotion to their freshly-shaven legs. I stared at them with envy and amazement. I wrote the new English words in my mini-pad as they rolled off their vanilla-flavored lips: *tube-socks*, *moisturizer*, *scent*, *comb*, *applicator*, *chapstick*, *lip gloss*.... I needed to remember these words for my next trip to Costco so I, too, could transform myself into one of them.

On some days, these pretty, floral-scented divas approached my desk to learn how to say "Kiss my ass" or "Fuck you" in my language, but I taught them the more original Yugoslav sayings that actually made sense. I annunciated slowly "*Puši kurac*" and "*Ajde u pičku materinu*" without offering the translation. When they went around the class, saying "Smoke my penis" and "Return to your mother's vagina," I proudly listened, giggling inside, wondering if they were capable of ever losing their American accents or did they just keep eating their "r"s because they didn't want to learn?

On those days when I, the shorthaired, unshaven girl with an accent, got this kind of attention, I thought they liked me, that I was in. I fantasized that my days of sitting by myself during lunch, in the back of the school, eating the big cafeteria cookie were over. I actually tried to answer their redundant questions with more than a dumb yes or no. I wanted to show them that I was more than a girl with a nice smile, that I had a personality and talents and history. I wanted them to know

that I had traveled to national tennis tournaments and had even earned a 3rd place finish in last year's Dalmatia Cup. I wanted them to know that I had represented my school in the Yugoslav Brotherhood and Unity convention two years earlier, that many boys used to like me, that I could dive into the sea, head-first, from the highest cliff in Makarska.

But, all they wanted to know was what kind of food we ate "back there." When I said, "green vegetables, fish, meat," they just stared at me bored and unimpressed.

"You don't eat snakes and dogs, do you?" they needed to know. I wanted to sound different, unique and exotic so I racked my brain to remember our biggest delicacy. My thoughts spun quickly: roasted lamb, pig, *musaka*, liver, *sarma*, stuffed peppers, octopus or squid, but I couldn't find anything worth their wide-eyed stares and undivided attention.

Then, I had it.

"We eat brains," I finally said.

"WHAAAAT?"

"Ah...no, no, not rrreal brain, cow brain," I said trying to stop them from backing away from me as if I were contagious.

"They're friiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiied," I yelled after them.

But they practically ran to the other side of the room and pointed in my direction. From that day on, they stopped coming by my desk or meeting my eyes. I ruined any chance I might have had of ever being seen with my pretty American friends.

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Nina Basica Finci

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Weep Western Tears

Joe Girard

Deep, swallowed in voice
Eye of the monastery
I weep Western tears

Deep monastery
Swallowed in the Western eye
I weep tears of voice

Swallowed deep, I weep
In the eye of Western voice
Monastery tears

Eye-deep, I swallowed
In the monastery, weep
Western voice of tears

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Joe Girard

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metropolis

François Luong

out of the sanitarium
we walked in backward
steps toward extinction
 toward anthropophagia
 toward metropolis

because of the skin
because of the face
 you are victim of my g a z e
 for me to make
 s o a p and lampshades
 out of you

and t r e e s out of umbrellas

books burn but words remain
like doubloons in a ship caught
 in a genoan f i r e

and into the mouth of a cave i painted

by my own h a n d i will step

in hunger i came watching the tin witch
crash into a wall of streaming p h o t o n s
in the metropolis of glassseapylon

can our deformed b o d i e s
 exist in autonomous margins

naive primitivism is an affect

of the tyranny of our human form
a fact written in
 disappearing i n k

as s k i n succumbs
to the fixation of liquid l i g h t
and d i s s o l v e s into
 aggregates of silver salts

and a paper e y e

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Francois Luong

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Afraid of Death

Salvatore Difalco

What part of my confession don't you understand? You wear a white dress for the occasion, and sport a blue silk fan. What were you expecting? The universal clown to your jollity? A handstand? People busy themselves around us, living out their lives, taking on complex tasks. Even cats and dogs perform their little chores. Someone has to keep the village up to snuff. The cats for instance limit the rat population. You only whine about fatigue. How tired your muscles are, and your eyes. Take a good long sleep and your muscles will rebound, your eyes will clear. Look where we stand. A green-leafed tree casts an onyx shadow on the piazza tiles. I smell espresso and baking bread. Today is Sunday. Everyone strives to get out of the fire. The church bells ring. My temples pound. Yours too? I see it in the hammers of your eyes. I see it in the tendons of your mandible. Did you fall asleep just then? Snoring sotto voce. Caught you napping at the threshold of our communion. Come now. The angel hanging from a branch declares that love is in the air. Love is in the air. Above it all, the esquire aspires to fulfil his end of the contract, bending to her throat, stroking her fair hair, tickling her abdomen secretly. Hiding their eyes like spinsters at a porn shop, the public spurns the show. The shopkeepers shut their doors. The cats stream off to squalid alleys. Even birds descry the union. But no, relax, never will it happen. Never. Your plastic charms stop short of giving succor — even the plucking fan squanders time. Feel the air. Look at the sky. Fanning yourself in this climate smacks of vanity or masquerade. What is it then? Are you afraid of death? Are you really so afraid?

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Salvatore Difalco

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The Disney Look

Alexis Wright

The Cast Member building for the Disneyland Resort is easily spotted off of the 5 freeway. It's long and round and painted a queer sort of greenish-blue and accented by kindergarten yellow window panes. At some point during my youth, my mother worked for Disney--many people who live in Southern California often end up working for Disney--and I remember referring to this place as the "Watermelon Building." I was confident that the interior was painted red--it is.

It is a gray Tuesday morning in December and the waiting room is large and somewhat intimidating despite the fact that Toy Story is playing on three small television screens and pixie dust decorates the ruby walls. There are a handful of desperate looking people scattered around the tables and chairs that are desperately scattered around the tension in the room. I read the orange sign at the front desk:

Available Positions		
Custodial	Sales (retail)	Housekeeping
Attractions	Walt Disney Travel	Parking
Ticket Agent	Costuming	Security

If hired, this would be my second experience with Disney. The summer before my junior year of college, I participated in an internship program where I worked at the front desk of the Disneyland Hotel. While I was prepared for the cult-like existence of the "Castmember" and the weekly meetings that referenced "Magic" as if Tinker Bell's pixie dust was something tangible and necessary to the makeup of the entire human race, I was a little appalled when, the day before Michael Eisner paid a visit to the hotel, all Castmembers were told that if anyone should encounter Mr. Eisner, we were not to look him directly in the eye.

But despite all that comes with working for Disney I have decided to go back, only now there are no front desk positions available and so I apply to work at the Walt Disney Travel Company because it is off-site, I don't have to wear a costume, and it pays more than Attractions.

After completing the requisite paper work, passing a typing test, and wowing the interviewer with my ability to read a sales script with clarity and enthusiasm, I am hired and read my rights regarding attitude and dress code. The attitude mantra is unsurprising: Be Happy.

The dress code, on the other hand, presents a problem.

"Now, for orientation on Saturday you must adhere to the guidelines in the Disney Look Handbook."

"Right," I quickly agree, anxious to be done with the wrap-up.

"All skirts can be no shorter than two inches above the knee and stockings must be worn with all skirts and dresses."

"Right."

"Any visible body alterations must be covered up, but a conservative pair of earrings is acceptable--no bigger than the size of a quarter."

"Sure."

This room is not coated in red, and devoid of any pixie dust or whimsy, it's depressing; the short, fuzzy, gray cubical dividers only accentuate the gloom. I am separated from my interviewer by a large, rectangular gray table and she looks at me--the top half of me in my fitted white button-down collared dress shirt--and remarks, "What you're wearing now would be fine, you already seem to have a fairly conservative look."

I smile and nod.

"Yes, well, other than your hair you should be set, just be sure to have it fixed by Saturday."

I slowly roll one of my short dread locs between my thumb and my index finger. Remembering that I had dyed my hair several months ago I remark, "Yes, I will make sure that it is all one color by Saturday."

Without missing a beat, she responds, "Oh, the color is not a problem; it's the style that is not appropriate."

I feel the coarseness of the single loc between the tips of my fingers (now a noticeably dark mocha) and roll the strand more quickly.

I say nothing.

"As you know, Disney prefers a more natural look so I don't know what you do--straighten it or put it into individual braids as long as they're not too long and they don't have any of those extreme patterns..."

I let the loc fall from my fingers, its poison now leaking and running down the length of my arm, down my side.

My voice wobbles, but I try for clarification anyway. "Well, this is as natural as my hair gets." We share blank stares. "Is there something specific about my hair that I need to change? Is it too long, because I can cut it?" Uncomfortable and conscious of a potential problem, this lady, safe on her side of the gray, says, "Well, it's just...here. Let me call my supervisor and see what she wants to do about the situation."

The situation?

Managers and supervisors crawl out of crevices and corners to assess the Situation. I am surrounded by several "authority figures" as I sit in my lop-sided, swivel chair as if I am a sideshow or an exhibit that is passing through town: "HUR-RY! HUR-RY! HUR-RY! STEP RIGHT UP. COME AND SEE AN AUTHENTIC NEGRO AND OBSERVE THE MYSTERY OF WHAT IT CALLS HAIR!" Finally, a tall, black-suited woman hovers next to me, the bottom of her jacket inches from my left shoulder, and asks, "What exactly is it?"

What is it?! It's my hair! This is what happens when a black person's hair grows. This is what happens when I resist the urge to lather chemicals on my head in an effort to synthesize a style with which you might be more familiar. This is what happens when I refuse to tie or staple or glue strands of European hair onto my scalp to construct a hairdo that suggests a sense of order and straightness. This is my hair. Fuck you.

Only, there is no "Fuck You." No speech. No declaration. Instead, there is a look of shame slathered across my face and an attempt to appease the Situation by finding out what it is the authorities want me to do. Encircled by bureaucracy, this distressed, gray room has become a cell, the supervisors and managers serving as the bars. *We like a more natural look in this company so if you cut it or straighten it or braid it...* And although I mentally construct page after page of argumentative strategy for my planned court appearance, I simply respond in the same manner in which I have always responded to unpleasant or confrontational situations; I sit and I smile and I apologize--I "yes mam" 'em to death. Trapped within the confines of fuzzy dividers and a river of rectangular segregation I project Martin Luther King, Jr.--hand holding, dreams, equality, complacency. In my car, away from the crimson happiness, I project Malcolm X--violence, resolve, "by any means necessary."

I admit that the Walt Disney Company has never been particularly African American friendly.

With the exception of *Song of the South* — a feature film based on a series of short stories about the fictional slave narratives of "Uncle Remus" and once boycotted by the NAACP for racial insensitivity — there are no animated films that feature Black human characters in either leading or supporting roles. What's more there have been three animated films that take place in Africa (*The Lion King*, *The Lion King II*, and *Tarzan*) and dark skinned people are noticeably missing from each of them. Of course, there are currently two very popular television shows on the Disney Channel (*The Proud*

Family and *That's So Raven*) that chronicle the lives of two fictional black families, but if you go to any Disney theme park you won't find merchandise for these shows. In fact, you won't find merchandising for these shows anywhere because it doesn't exist.

Oddly enough, Walt Disney himself was the co-founder of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals and part of the group's Mission Statement reads:

We believe in, and like, the American way of life: the liberty and freedom which generations before us have fought to create and preserve; the freedom to speak, to think, to live, to worship, to work, and to govern ourselves as individuals.

Nonetheless, Walt Disney was known to be a disreputable racist and anti-Semite making it quite clear via strict dress codes, discriminating employment practices and uncultural film making (realities that are still in practice today) that liberty, freedom and individualism applied only to a specific group of people.

It's no wonder the Walt Disney Company has a problem with natural black hair--they have no history of acknowledging it.

One week later while sitting in morning traffic on my way to orientation I wonder why I failed to say anything. The 405 is moving like molasses, two feet every five minutes, but there is a small break in traffic and my car begins to roll slowly forward at eight miles per hour. While I sing along to top 40 it occurs to me that I did ultimately win the war--my hair remains unaltered--but I am uneasy with my decision to willingly surrender the initial battle. I glance at the digital clock on the dashboard. Twenty minutes until eight o'clock, ten minutes to my exit. I have come so far since the fifth grade when I couldn't even recognize myself and yet, now that I am allegedly black and proud I find that I still can't stand up for myself. I move another two feet and the traffic stops. I slow to a halt, put the car in park, roll down the window and continue singing.

I'm going to be late.

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Alexis Wright

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The Independent vs. The Representative Voice

Richelle McClain

The notion of "representative voice" is a loaded and complex one; loaded because it begs the question ... *who gives us the authority, as writers, to represent anyone?* ... and complex, because it forces us to think about ... *who and what we represent or might represent*. To plot the degree to which we are representative, the fundamental question becomes one of intent, as reflected by audience and craft.

Certainly, as writers, we bring to the page all that we are: our sex, race or ethnic heritage, sexual proclivities, and socioeconomic status, among others. Do I, as a middle-aged, middle-class, black heterosexual female, also married and a mother, living in Hayward, California bring all of this to the page when I write? At some level, yes, as they all shape the knowledge and life experience I bring to my work. But, how do I weight them? Do I place Hayward, California (or even the Bay area for that matter) at the center of my narrative? Probably ... well ... definitely not.

In my opinion, the question of representative voice is best characterized by two continuums. One speaks to the demographic and socioeconomic constructs by which society defines us. But equally important is our intent, or the emphasis we give to these elements as writers. Do we speak of an isolated experience within this framework? Or do we speak about collective experiences (individual or community) within these societal classifications?

This discussion is captured on the grid shown in Figure 1 in which one continuum represents the degree of individual voice vs. representative voice; the other addresses the individual narrative, an isolated experience or particular snapshot in time (e.g., a specific day in October at the pumpkin patch, a unique love affair, etc.), vs. a collective or comprehensive narrative that characterizes something intangible like a theme or premise, often a political or moral statement, e.g., the effects of colonialism.

To assess intent, we must first look at how the author crafts the narrative-primarily through setting, plot, character-and examine recurring themes. Essentially, is the narrative primarily plot- or character-driven? Or is the plot and/or character crafted to serve some greater purpose? Second, we also need to be conscious of the audience to whom the author is directing his or her narrative.

Generally, the individual-voice, isolated-experience occurs in shorter narratives, for example, the essay or short story, like Michael Chabon's "Along the Frontage Road". (Of course, there are many exceptions. In an essay of a particularly political nature like Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, this wouldn't hold true.)

In contrast, the representative-voice, collective- experience is more likely to intrude on longer narratives, like those characterized by Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the collective short stories found in *Drown*, by Junot Diaz. (For our purposes here, I exclude contemporary, popular fiction)

Specifically, in "Along the Frontage Road", Chabon's Jewish heritage is not critical to the story. More important is his life experience as a middle-class white male. Even then, it represents a minute part of the narrator's intention, which is to sketch the chance encounter of two families from radically different backgrounds who cross paths in a pumpkin patch. This is not a routine occurrence for the narrator and Chabon does not choose to write an entire book about blacks and Jews. Nor does this incident impact the rest of his life or the lives of any of the other characters, to any degree. Historical and political phenomena serve as the story's status quo, but the narrative itself is simply a scene that shows the difficulty of establishing a dialogue between two fathers from radically different backgrounds. Thus, the story represents an *isolated* experience in this *particular author's* life. In summary, Chabon does not rely on his heritage to carry the story.

While John Yau has no problem identifying himself as a Chinese-American when warranted, he does not feel *compelled* to write from the vantage point of a Chinese-American, especially given that he often makes no reference to his heritage and, in fact, writes from other points of view, e.g, female, etc. His essays and short stories reflect universal themes, e.g.,

dating and love affairs, family relationships, etc. His Chinese-American heritage is not at the center of his stories or essays.

When Clarice Lispector writes a newspaper column for an educated, upscale audience, she writes in the first person and selects isolated events in her life (thus *Selected Cronicas*), e.g., a ride with a taxi driver, her maids, the mean girl who refuses to lend a book, her manipulation of a teacher. There is no need to highlight her Latin-American heritage, because she shares this in common with her audience. The column is about Lispector, alone, and her life experience. Her essays represent, in a sense, ruminations on her private experiences, a kind of public diary.

With Jean Rhys, however, the notion of representation becomes more interesting. As an ex-Dominican who lived most of her life in England, what does she select for her narrative? It seems that, at least in this particular novel, even though she plays primarily to a British audience, the importance of her years in England is virtually nil. What she wants to communicate to this audience is the effect of colonialism, particularly for a woman. Nonetheless, she offers different points-of-view, employed through the perspectives of Antoinette, Rochester, and Christophine. It is her *consciousness of the whole*, the collective experiences of at least three communities (the English, Creoles, and native Dominicans), that gives rise to the story. Colonialism and its aftermath are both at the root of this story and key to shaping the plot. Her intent is to illustrate the destructive impact of Colonialism; the setting, characters, and plot are subservient.

Diaz, in *Drown*, speaks from the first person, but he speaks to his collective experience and those of the Dominican community (e.g., his mother's recognition of the smell of tear gas). He writes to an English-speaking audience. As he makes no attempt to represent any other perspective, his work is more likely to be classified as representative-voice, collective-experience.

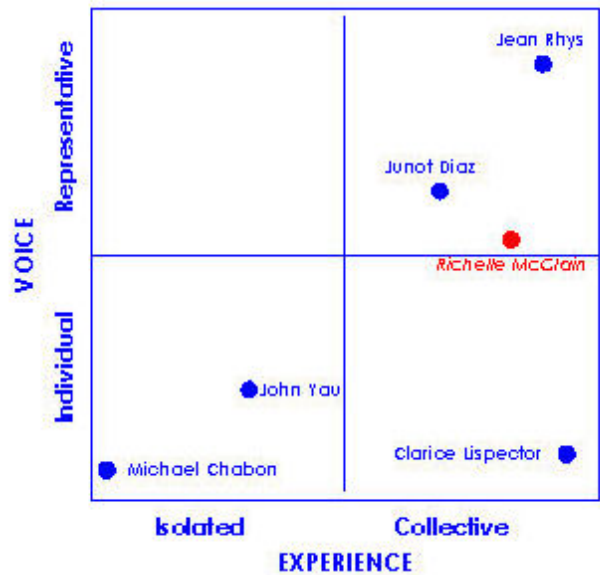
My point on the grid lies somewhere between the individual-collective and representative-collective experience. Certainly, I have no desire to represent - nor could I - all the black women living in America. However, I typically choose to write from the perspective of a black female (one probably closely aligned with my own) set in a racially-sensitive environment to explore how that shapes the way a particular woman thinks, feels, and behaves. Depending on the genre, the narrative could be quite isolated, e.g., snapshot of a mother driving her daughter to school best portrayed in an essay or short story form; or collective, e.g., an exploration of the impact of interracial relationships (specifically white women and black men) on black women, or white women, or black men (the subject of my novel-in-progress).

As an individual in the United States, where one's intrinsic value and societal worth are to a large degree predicated on race, I would, in fact, find it difficult not to incorporate racial themes within my work as they are key to my own self-awareness and world perspective.

At a very basic level, my intent as a writer is to simply share a unique narrative; at its most lofty, it might be to jar perception, create awareness, raise consciousness ... *do I dare say be a catalyst for change?* In writing to what I hope is a discriminating audience (literate people of any color), however, my writing is likely to be categorized as representative voice-collective experience. Regardless of my intent, by choosing to explore racial themes of the kind I examine in my novel, I inherently run the risk of being labeled as just another angry, black *sistah*.

Figure 1

Individual vs. Representative Voice
and
Isolated vs. Collective Experience



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Richelle McClain

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Sid

Asher Ghaffar

As you begin to disassemble your body. What is a brown body?

Khan also said that his 'driving motivation' was Islam.

As you begin to forget how you drive.

I knew him as Sid Khan.

As the fire between the moribunding skin of your bodies.

Here was a Muslim who was publicly respected and admired.

As you begin to wrap the kite thread back into the ball of your gut.

Khan appears to have negotiated himself.

Pull the kite back in after the kite kissed the cumulus. What is a kite?

There is "an enemy within" - but that its nature is highly complex.

*Memes, memes are good for the heart the more you heart the better you lark, the more you lark the better you feel. The more you feel, the better you reel.

As you pull a switch blade out and reveal a comb. What is a comb?

A head shot.

As your body goes through the windshield. What is a windshield?

Physiological perturbations are organized.

As you revisit the 7/7 riots in Bradford.

Stuart Williams stating that he wanted to "blow up" Bradford's mosques with a rocket launcher.

As you stood quietly when a paki was bashed.

What do you get when you stick a paki in a microwave?

As you go to a training camp.

Dave Midgley confessing to pushing dog faeces through the letterbox of an Asian takeaway.

As your boot get caught in quick sand.

(Just before the debate begins)

This debate is now closed.

Who is speaking you? Are you babbling yet? Are you white? Do you want to enable the "other"? Do you know your "other" yet? Do you own your "other" yet? Are you Frankenstein? Do you have dreams of zombies? Have you packaged it? Have you frozen it to the wink of eternity? Do you know your gut yet? Do you own your gut yet? Have you packaged it? Does your gut sing or does it play lullabies? Have you played that game where you climb up the CN tower and you fall gently to the ground like a maple leaf? In French, the CN tower is a la.

Will you burn the streets down? Will you chain saw a tree onto a power outage? Will you grow a beard? Will you wear a shalwar quameez? Are you an ABCD? Are you a Desi? Is there a difference? Do you walk or do you stagger? Do you lawn bowl? Did you fight for your brothers in Chechnya? Did you groan when you saw the rumble in Karbala? Did you rejoice when you saw the twin towers tumble? Were you confused enough? Did you see the Vietnam veteran in rags by the television watching the woman jump out? Did you feel him more than you did the woman? Was he real enough? Are you ashamed of feeling old? Are you ashamed of your umbilicus? What happened to the white Vietnam Veteran at the moment when the twin towers fell? What happened to whiteness as a working concept? Did you see the man shuffling the burka across the street of screaming cars? Did the fern saplings shout? When did you first hear that the sky was pregnant with drought? Is that a metaphor? Do you wear baggy denims? Are you old enough? Is this your locket of hair? Is this a fairy tale? Would it make a difference in the ballot count? Do you carry a paper bag on the subway just in case? What poetry school do you subscribe to? If you buy a condo, will you put on dome on it? Will you hybridize the crack in the side walk after your eyes leaked out?

Do you walk aimlessly? Do you carry a loud speaker which transmits your thoughts? Are you before yourself or after yourself? Are you decultured or emasculated? Do you read Barthes backwards? Do you chit chat to a wall about Barthes

on the toilet? Did you eat your baggage, or did it eat you? Do you know the barley averts the evil eye in India? Is it baggage, or is it God? Decide on a tie. Before you fly back home...did the bread rise? Why do you fly home and take a boat back? Do you build model airplane?

Why do white boys fly? Do you pack Egyptian sand in test tubes? Are you a material fact? What of the white boat? Take off your dunce cap. Will you disassemble, Mother? Is there a generation gap? Will you bomb the fuck out of your model body now? Do you care enough? We are a target because of who we are and how we live, our society, our diversity and our values - values such as freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

Have you read al Jazeera for a month? Are you old enough? Does the lyric arise in bodies such as these? Do you sympathize with their demands to withdraw the troops, or do we draw the line here? We've got a live one. How we live. Our. Society. Our. Diversity. Our. Values. Freedom. Law.

Devise a Title

The daylight of opening a dictionary. It's a long story. In the beginning there were no words, no worlds. There was whirling and there was a birthing and babbling. Listen closely and I'll explain. Or complain. But you'll understand. Bear with me, I have no clues. I'm trying to devise a title. Deeds done. Confessions. Interlude. Notes torn from a journal. Take a rest dear reader. Take this water. The poetics of "ethnicity." The poetics of "misidentity." He was diagnosed with "malignosis." The poetics of psychic explosion. Or a journey toward the absent ileocecal valve.

(Devise a title)

Directions (Many Purpose(s): To arrive or to arrive no more etc.

Methodology: many differing approaches.

Hypothesis: comes before methodology.

Poet Speaks: (Devise a title). Directions (Many Purpose(s): To Sin or to sin no more Methodology: many differing approaches. Hypothesis: comes before methodology.

I swear by God I have to come to terms with wanting too much.

A discernible past, for instance.

A Narrative. An operative poetics. A nice girl. The list goes on.

This particular poem

has a purpose, all be it at odds with the Moslem God. The Hindu God. The Christian God.

In addition, there is an assembly line of men with overalls under all the parts of machinery. Genetic machinery, that is (and) they're trying to screw things up. This is not a complex.

I swear by God it is a knotted

Procedure

The Moslem God doesn't like similes or similitudes.

On the other hand, the Hindu God is complex.

I have to come to terms with wanting too little because of a slight complex,

I conclude we're both lost causes.

You one and without an equal

and I packed off to figure the arithmetic,

to search for impossible beginnings.

(God answers in all forms):

I swear by God I'm an ear wig. I'm every where. I love wax museums.

There were many of us at the beginning of time, and we kept digging

until we fell through the sky. If you'll believe me I'll make you a wigwam and we'll sail Medina to the dead sea. Listen, I'm on welfare, so I hope you'll consider my well fare and also get your penny's worth. I sit on a dragons back and we're about to take a journey through the gut. A journey denotes a beginning a middle and an end. We'll all heave at the ileocecal valve, I swear. This is a catharsis.

His Mother:

He relives her disembarking/a plane in Thunder Bay.
 (It was winter, the snow was piled up at her husband's door and then)
 She carried a suitcase of dried petals.
 There was a husband whom she had met in Lahore,
 eloped with. This was/is all arranged.
 The narrator wanted her to become what he needed--a mother tongue.
 He wants that she wants to not con/form into a blizzard.
 That's a figure of his speech. Not a mater tongue.
 his space is an arrangement. I need to go to Lahore to see a whore.
 That's foreshadowing. I'm giving you a clue to his whereabouts.
 hope you'll believe me. This narrative belongs to a wax museum.

As I said, I want to be domesticated, but more like a dog. I want to be wise, but otherwise. I want to be ignorant and backward. I don't quite understand why this is the case. I have faith in fools and lunatics. I want to write well constructed rhetorical and backward tracts for a season, at least. Edging toward the extremities of language, one day my analyst said: one day you will babble. That was the day the lightening clapped and the sparrow followed me in.

I am anal, yes, although you'd never know that I was prince in my previous embodiment and before that a laughing rafter of a house which fell on a clatter of forks and knives. Words for me are animals, animal noodles. Other bodies lunge toward me. Yes, I am moaning and mooning. I want my self to be dished out and slaughtered like the monkey brains in Indiana Jones. I'm impressionable as hell. Words and their structures are the ghosts of new bodies. I live in about a hundred bodies. In about a hundred different times and places. A moment ago, I was a sannyasin walking in India, dying an ochre robe. I have never before felt myself bow like that toward stone. I understand the dynamics of nostalgia, don't get me wrong. I'm not nostalgic. I don't know where I am. That's not the problem. Ecstasy cannot be packaged. The God-head belongs partially, unanchored to texts. Auras can't be photographed.

The wise fools are the mercurial. The wise fool sits on the dung heap and disassembles his wise folly. In other words, she finds a whole in her thinking, which reaps all sorts of benefits. Like life insurance. Or an advance. The sannyasin sits on a dung heap and meditates his "wise folly" and becomes a wise fool. Later he would rather be the dung that attracts the fly and maintains his animal body.

He want to ring the necks of a few people with verbs. I want to "ing" like a flea which breeds on a grackle. I want to be your very own lullaby. I'm a moslem and muslin and muesli. I'm trying to find a bridge to the sense of eating myself. To the gerund. To the hoax of a poem. To the hoax of beauty. To the hoax of Ibn Arabi. To the hoax of thinking it's all a hoax. I believe in attention seeking. I am currently a child in need of a lullaby. I believe in madness, but not in a regressive sense. I believe in regress, but not in a progressive sense. I belong to the stars and grackles, to the owl and the mouse. I belong to the moon and I shed my body on the light of the whip. I am not a pagan. I am not a song of myself. I am not the stranger that breeds inside your brain. Not a derelict. A dog lick.

I am your angel with the wings of a fly. Send me all your belongings and follow me. Send me some grass. Leaves of grass, preferably not. Send me your cranks. We'll make a new wheel. A sphere for your sorrow. The gut is the centre of gravity, but I never studied this in India. I learned from a Russian orthodox priest. Consider the Philokalia. It outlines the art of naval gazing. If you're looking for an operative poetics, consider the naval which would bring you much fruit.

When Judas was a priest I was on Mercury, quietly considering panic. Now that I'm Rudolph the reindeer, I hope you won't travel to Mercury. Listen, I want to reform to be a speed reader. I want to make a loaf of bread for the road. When he met his father's hands in a bread basket, he knew it wasn't his father. Abdul had mutated into Abraham.

The gut was a road if you consider that the road is unhinged in 3 places, possibly more--we'll investigate the matter. Here are the statistics, you do the gallop poll. We'll meet each in the flagpole...I is woven, I is woven. He was woven he was woven. No the stitches are--(don't trust he gut when cell division is occurring). This is getting psychoanalytic. Bear with me or don't, I couldn't care less or I could.

I am telling you that this is the story of a body which never birthed. He tried re birthing: Rebirthing is called re birthing because many times the suppression that comes up and is released is related to birth trauma. When a rebirthee has released enough suppression (usually in 10 to 20 sessions) they have mastered the breath and feel safe enough with the process to rebirth themselves whenever they want.

I questioned everybody and everything, even the beams of the house I was unconsciously constructing. Education is trauma therapy. Then I tried to forget: MY heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains. My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk...I wrote reams of lyrical poems.

Here's
my first and last attempt at being lyrical:

Little child who made thee
Little child who made thee?
Who made the meadow for the bees
and laughing water for the trees.....
Who placed the cosmos in thine eyes
that I could gaze into thy sky
and ask little child who made me?

That was in another room that continually intrudes upon this telling. Bear with me, I have no clues. As long as I don't bore into you, I will have accomplished my purpose which is to give you pleasure. Perhaps paint a picture of my Motherland, if you'd believe me, I'd be mimetic.

He has to button his butterfly. He's trying to release a Romantic, but he's cocooning again. This is an arcane branch of linguistics, so you'll spare him the audition. Keep your hands to yourself and consider solitude the theme of this narrative. Keep your eye on that and you'll be a Cyclops with a reasonable mind. He's a 12 dimensional misnomer.

Dear reader, you will always be a familiar place. I swear I'm not being facetious, mother tried to carve me into a skylark. You should get your pennies worth we all agree. I'm an old soul wise as Mercury. I could tell you why Orpheus turned his back on Eurydice in Hades, or perhaps I'm misreading. I'm the best misreader that I know, so I know you'll trust me. Or why did Alexander Mackenzie turn his back on me when the street car screamed through the grid by the fern saplings? Or why did Ben Franklin walk back from the auditorium where a sermon was being preached. Because he knew that written word traveled far and wide. They need to be transplanted.

It's all happening at this instant, the narrative. I mean. Spare me the audition, I am a trustworthy statue. This is an arcane branch of linguistics. I'll elucidate at this juncture, where the colon meets the Indus river. Don't gripe with the trope: consider it a gift, or a trump. The gut has an ending, but then there are the drain pipes and the echoes in this house, in this house. Note the rhetoric; I could tell you name, but I'm a slow learner, so you'll understand and we'll miscommunicate.

Sorry if I'm being ungrateful, but endings have new beginnings when the sewage drains. So sue me, this piece of gut is oddly disjunctive, but you'll study the endoscopy report, I trust. When I try to conjoin words to guide him, I become a homing instinct. I want to decode an anatomical map, though, so I trust that you'll fly with me through the gut to a third body.

I have an Axe to grind in your brain, like the additions to our house. There are ins and outs of creating a house. Excuse the slant rhyme, in case I'm misreading you'll understand the beams are slightly in order. The laws of this house are the beginning of the narrative. Don't worry too much about the picture of a woman in domestic bliss. She's frozen on the wall and requires a heart transplant. The laws of this house are an audition, don't panic with this addition to the house.

I want to make a conjunction of Ganges with the Indus, but those are up in the attic. The attic is a bedroom if you understand how space moves. Trust me, you're in. The Indus travels all the way to India, but it changes names like the layers of the gut.

In a dream I became the moving eye of obstruction. On a stormy night I learned the ins and outs of echolocation. Clap on, clap off, clap on, clap on, clap off the clapper. That's the theme of the family room. Consider the totem pole on the mantle. It is here where I served the Pontiff Bacon for breakfast on Ramadamn.

Come, I'll pay the tip, you cover the bill. Give me a mater tongue and I'll try to join the Ganges with Indus, the family room with the bedroom. Anastomosis occurred last year. We're still investigating the missing piece of narrative. The hallway was dark on Christmas. Find the walls with your ears. If you're an imminent critic you will see. Ah. Screw the bees. I want to be strung now. I was bored in the sign of the bull when I was conceived by a mother. She tried to open a door once, but the white of the snow made her slip. I want to write hallmark cards. Earmark me for the military. I was born in the sign of bull, if that bears any claws. The trine of a square is a conjunction, crack that and I'll give you my Vedic astrology chart. Don't mention the tip.

In the haystack was a humanist, after he realized he was beast. I hope the spell is contagious. I hope it bears resemblance to your third body. We'll get to the narrative in a moment, but before that be able and Cain, Indian cane sugar. The laws of this house are an audition. They will collapse the moment you examine the walls. The Venetian blinds are a riddle if you care to open them and see outside. The side of the house is a maniac if you believe in personification. Consider the Lollards. I have a slight complex.

The darkness is where all the fruits are. Read this parable and you'll be able. I'll tell you a story about a journey to Hades when Hades was a cell. That's another story, though. It always tries to supplant me from the snow. You see I'm at the door when my mother tries to open it. She just won a lottery and my Dad told her to spend the winnings on groceries. Be here and now is an apt aphorism. It gets you through the day if you believe in a here. I have this strange hair that's slightly obnoxious.

I hope you'll bear with this complex because falling apart is what a third world loves to do.

Knock knock(....)Home is a koan where the buffalo roam down by the sea. I used that line before but this is not a performance, so you'll bare with me and keep your hands together. This is not the humming bird centre and I'm no whirling dervish that will entertain you. I'm anxious as hell to tell you about a trinity of Gods that I worship. That was before I became an ancient mariner. I have to release allusions continuously. Anyway, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and you could make a parallel if you believed in generalities: Father sin and holy Ghost. My teacher always said I was a good misreader. They sent me off to a school of reform, but my Blessed Mother believed in miracles. She always said a door would open. Look at this.

Allah was on welfare. (I do care for your well fare.) Don't kill me, I'm not Rushdie. I have no spells to weave I swear. I have a slight complex, but you'll believe me when I say you'll get your pennies worth of narrative. It will breed inside your brain. I'll tell you right here and now that this is still slightly mimetic, perhaps phenomenological, if you could swallow that pill. I swear by God I have nothing against big words; in the beginning was the big word, or the big bang. One giant fuck in space, I'd say. The God's must be crazy throwing all these Pepsi bottles from planes. I see beauteous forms all around me and I agree with I'm Forester. We should get rid of narrative and settle for the essentials. Mystic contemplation of transubstantiation if you could only breed a word, golly God, I'm tripping. A sole without a foot--I was just thinking if we let go of allusions, then we may settle for animal noodles. If we tell all our friends, we'll be a whole bunch. Maybe the silence of not knowing is where stories lie. I have a Sphinx like face. Crack this riddle and I'll give you a medal. The day two worlds never join is my birthday. I'm Mercury herself mediating between Hades. But Hades has many names which I won't generalize. I'm not Indian, I swear. I don't want to simplify this or draw any parallels, a beam to a home. I'd rather settle for martyrdom, silence can be martyrdom, but this is noise. Are you listening? Crack this one.

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Asher Ghaffar

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Boojieland

Bill Teitelbaum

First thing Sunday morning Norma calls. Seems Francine, this friend of ours, is using again.

Naturally there was more. A suicide attempt, a paper trail, checks, warrants. It got confusing pretty fast. But anyhow poor little Francine was back on baby and Norma's on the telephone calling out the troops. Rescue her! Fetch her home! She was probably up in Clinton somewhere, like around the bus station.

Right, I said. Like seeing myself in grim pursuit. How could it not be grim? There were times you couldn't have found me with dogs.

I took to my raft for a while, my white island of calm in a sea of troubles, trying to assign myself an appropriate responsibility. I lay there for ten minutes or so, then headed out for coffee and the papers. On my way from the building I gathered my mail. There was a letter from this lady Bernice I see from time to time, asking me to not call her anymore. Until then I thought we were past that sex-for-politics thing, but according to Bernice I was a disgrace to the movement and she never wanted to see me again.

Maybe if I took a warm bath, I thought. So I dialed the taps and took off my clothes, but just as I got a toe in the water someone big upstairs fell down and most of the ceiling dropped in the bathtub.

My friends, my friends in the program I mean - I don't really have friends in the social sense, I have comrades, companions in malaise - these friends say that I withdraw and withhold myself, that I don't care for things as I should. They would have launched me in search of poor fallen Francine. "Hey, ain't no big thing. Like lookin' through your pants. And when you done with that, yo, get you that Bernice on the telephone, man! Don't be lettin' no good woman go!"

The problem, though, is that actually this appeals to me, to leap into those can-do boots, swing into the saddle of a galloping horse, and get clotheslined by a tree-limb like a character in a cartoon. That's me, I laugh, the first one over the top when the whistle blows, then falling back in the trench with his helmet full of brains.

That's my downfall, I can't say no to things. That's why I applied for methadone. I was strung out so bad when they busted me, it cost me three bills a day just to get the sick off. But after I kicked in jail I just ate and slept for twenty-four months, and strong as I was by then, hooking my chump ass on methadone didn't make any more sense than signing on for another deuce. So instead of making it to the clinic when they let me out, I just went home. Where the heart is, right? Where they have to take you in? Couldn't have been two hours off the bus, so stoned I was sucking my dick, and I stayed fucked up like that for thirty or forty days.

Yet the truth is that you can miss that terrible life. Your whole mind becomes a blind-spot. Rules do not apply anymore. That's the addiction, you like to know the truth of it. All you have to do is that one thing you have to do. So I think about that from time to time. An end to questions? An end to worry? You bet I think about that.

I mean everything is so complicated now. Like there's this squarejohn soccer mom I've been seeing, Lydia Lester, good-looking Chinese-dinner kind of lady. Watches her weight, worries about work. We met at a mixer, she has a sister in the program. Two kids, big job, but she seemed easy enough to know so I asked her out, and there we were, discussing love and how hard it is to meet people nowadays.

I knew it was a risk. You're better off with people who know what you're up to. That way you can look out for each other. But all she really needs from me is a chance once a week to feel like a honeybucket, so things sort of work for us in this half-assed way. I'm a love, she says. Means a good lay, a crowd-pleaser. If I had any sense I'd get her to dump me. Complain about her job, act jealous of the kids. But it seems I want to have an effect, to touch and be touched by someone,

to see my face. You get that testing thing here in Boojieland, that how-am-I-doing thing, that how-do-you-like-me, that what-can-I-do-for-you?

If only you could know it was the right thing. Somehow you have to forget you're the one who did all that shit. Like I need to invent a new history for myself - my memories disgust me. It's like I had a brain tumor but they took out the brain and left the tumor.

The thing is, we just don't know how to live with ourselves, people like me. We bathe and shave and brush our teeth, we buy as much as we can, but we can't recognize ourselves in this boogie world. I mean, there are these people out there. Jiggling your raft, man. They want to share things with you. I mean, shit, man, the last time I let myself be galvanized that way, the ceiling in the toilet fell down.

And what can you do really?

Only, that's not why you don't do anything, is it? I mean there are these people who could really use a hand now and then. You could help them. It would mean something. It wouldn't change things much, but it wouldn't have to. I mean you can't deny these things. You know what you're up to now.

So, I lie on my raft, like trying to order my priorities. The vision of a cheeseburger presents itself. In a while I may even venture the basement, advise the janitor of the sky falling in.

But what about old Bernice? What if I marched and carried signs for you, would that do it, Bernice, would that make it all right? And supposing it did, Bernice, would I do it?

Well, I think I managed that pretty well. Now for that ol' Francine.

Although, it sounds to me like Norma's the one who really needs the help from me. All that junky urgency? That gotta-do-this, that gotta-do-that?

Norma.

Definitely.

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Bill Teitelbaum

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Applied Algebra

Harbeer Sandhu

Mina's parents have bought life insurance policies for Mina and her siblings. Mina's policy is worth \$10,000, her older sister Rina's policy is also worth \$10,000, and her younger brother Amarjit's policy is worth \$50,000. Artificial insemination with sperm sorting costs \$4,000, but is not 100% guaranteed to yield a male child. Abortion costs \$500. If both Rina and Amarjit were to get hit by a truck and Mina's parents got a package deal on the funerals totaling \$13,000, what is the maximum number of attempts they could make at artificial insemination/abortion to birth a boy with the remainder of their life insurance claims?

Math Club meets before school on Monday and Wednesday mornings at 7:00 am. Speech & Debate Club meets before school on Tuesday and Thursday mornings at 7:00 am. PSAT tutorials are held weekly on Friday mornings at 7:00 am. School hours are 8:00 am to 3:00 pm, and the volleyball team practices after school, daily, from 3:00 to 5:00 pm. Mina's father eats dinner at 10:00 pm, after which she can wash the dishes and get ready for bed by 10:30. In the morning, Mina takes 30 minutes to shower, braid her hair, and put on her modest clothes. She requires an additional 15 minutes at school to do her hair and makeup and change into her real school clothes. The walk to school would also take 15 minutes. If Mina can convince her father to allow her to walk to and from school, what is the maximum number of waking minutes she would have to spend at home?

Mina's father cites safety when he prohibits her from walking to school, but Mina thinks he's afraid that people will think he's poor. Her father insists on driving her in his cab in the morning, but Mina is afraid her friends will see her and tease her for being a cabby's daughter. In the time that Mina's father diverts from work to drive her to school, he could make at least one airport run, which would earn him \$30. If auto insurance for Mina costs \$150/month, what is the maximum car payment her father could afford for her by working and applying that extra money towards her car payment? If Mina finds a car for \$300/month, how much will her father be able to save for her brother's education?

Mina tells her parents she needs to spend the night at Luan's house so she and Luan can cram for the PSAT on Saturday, but really she wants to go to her boyfriend Sean's kegger. Her mother agrees to let her stay at Luan's, but she has to help her sister Rina pack ladoos for the guests at their cousin Tina's engagement party before she can go. They have a total of 700 ladoos, and each family is to receive 11 ladoos apiece. It takes Mina three minutes to make one package, whereas Rina requires four minutes per package. How long will it take Mina and Rina to pack all the ladoos? How many packages will they make in the process? How many ladoos will they have left over?

The Punjabi School teacher, Bina Auntie, suspects Mina and her best friend Sammy of dating each other and threatens to tell Mina's mother. A train leaves Toledo at 6:45 pm, heading north at 50 mph. Punjabi school lets out at 7:30 pm, and the railroad crossing near the Punjabi school, which lies 13 miles south of Detroit, is a two-minute drive by car. Detroit lies 60 miles north of Toledo. How long should Mina detain Bina Auntie after class with questions about her homework so that Bina Auntie gets hit by a train on her way home?

Mina's grandfather gives her an allowance of \$5 every week when she visits him at her uncle's house. Mina's father gives her and her siblings \$2 for every A they get on their report cards, and guilt-ridden curses for every grade below an A.

Mina's brother, Amarjit, gets straight As on every report card, but Mina and her sister Tina usually get more Bs and Cs than As. Report cards come out every six weeks, but Mina's father usually does not remember to ask for them unless reminded. If Mina saves up all her money from her grandfather and Tina agrees to share the \$20 bribe for Amarjit to hide his report card along with them, how much money will she have left to purchase makeup and clothes?

Mina has just started working on her last math homework assignment for the semester when the phone rings once and stops. Her boyfriend Sean is signaling her to call him. Mina's homework grades for the grading period so far are 97, 96, 93, and 97. Her test grades for the grading period are 99, 100, and 93. Homework counts for 20% of her grade and tests count for 80%. Mina needs to maintain a grade higher than 90 to enlist her father's older brother's help in convincing her father to let her go out of town to State College when she graduates in two years. Mina hears her father curse before slamming his receiver down. What grade will Mina earn for the period if she neglects turning in this assignment in favor of returning Sean's call? What is the difference between that and Mina's grade if she earns a perfect score on this assignment?

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Harbeer Sandhu

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Written

Paul Hoover

1

There was a written stone
 In the unwritten river,
 And written rain was falling
 Over the written town.
 Nothing written today
 But tomorrow I'll be written
 As I sit in my room unwriting.
 This was already written
 When I found it sitting here.
 It never quite escapes
 What it was meant to be,
 A suicide note half written
 Before the act half-done.

2

Nothing isn't empty.
 It fills a room so completely
 It spills into the street,
 Which of course looks empty
 Because nothing is there.
 Nothing is filled with nothing,
 Everything comes from nothing.
 Something, poor something,
 Stands vacant at the door.
 A rose opens and opens
 Until its petals fall.
 Then it seems vacant,
 Like a room with one chair.
 Beauty is always vacant.
 We know an object best
 When it starts to disappear.
 Words are here but nothing,
 Meaningful sounds passing
 Then nothing but pleasure.
 Light and space are something
 Passing through the trees.

A cry is heard in the distance.
Remembered by your senses,
It is something briefly
And then present absence.

3

A background seems like nothing
Until a figure emerges, from what
Seems the beginning.
There is no beginning.
Along with its nothing,
Something always comes before,
Receding here, approaching there.
Only you remain to bring it
Back from somewhere-
That shade of blue in the hallway,
The black depths of water.
Yellow fires, gray earth, and green
Of wheat are something: actors
Without equal, cock crowing town.

4

Everything nature says
Is ancient, careless, and cruel,
But it has no concept of nothing.
It leans against a sunlit wall,
Projecting casually something.
A mirror out of doors
Catches our eye because
Our eyes are in it, because
It seems to eye us as part
Of its nature shining.
Someone put it there
To be twice something.
The overlord language resides
There, too: a stain, nerve knot,
With its incessant naming.
It comes into being, breathes,
Then goes back out again.
"What was that?" we ask.
"Did you hear something?"
"It was nothing," says the cook.
"A ghost," insists the chaplain.
"It was dinner," says the hen,
So philosophical lately,
And always about one thing.

Projection: *Bending to the Body's Geography*

Alexandra Mattraw

The bible tells me that inside this body there is another body. Inside this body lives a man. He uses a razor to scrape memories that harden and cling to organs. He sighs as I inhale. Our interlaced ribs swim as we sleep in the same room. We do not touch but coexist. Sharp edges. There is no speech but silence reads. A long shadow careens through day bend. We carry our own cells. While I see violet blossoms smashed on hot sidewalks and lilacs thicken air, he sees a rocky canyon and winter paths of dust. When a double-edged mirror stands between two people it slices a patchwork formed by the sun's lips. This is pressed between trees. The two do not touch but understand.

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from HUMAN / NATURE

Stephen Ratcliffe

2.1

streaked sparrow pecking up seeds from table in left corner,
diagonal grey cloud slanting across ridge beyond it, sound
of small plane passing overhead

woman on stage claiming
he's done a great deal with words that look like pictures,
the poet wanting to "rush the blood to some other point"

woman on phone noting show of Charles Henri Ford in Chelsea,
posters and letters and four stunning Tchelitchevs, asking
"where are all the many others"

white triangle of water
moving across blue-white plane in lower right foreground,
film of high thin white cloud in pale blue sky above it

-> from HUMAN / NATURE 2.2

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Stephen Ratcliffe

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Lucille

Jay Barmann

"Well, aren't you a funny little man!" the woman says.

And because I am neither a man, nor especially funny — not funny like Dad, certainly, or the misappropriation of cultural memes, or monkeys — I hold firm to the tray rim of my high chair and shake my head vigorously.

"Didja hear that, Lucille? He doesn't think he's little."

And to this idiocy I shake my head with even greater vigor and a growing look of disgust because the woman has once again chosen knee-jerk assumption over inquisitive analysis.

"What do you have for us today?" she asks with an expectant, moronic grin.

I lower my eyes to the floor. She does not expect much of philosophical worth to emit from these lips. But today I'm not tapping to her tune. "This," I say, holding out my palm.

She leans over to examine my small, stubby hand and I slap her squarely across the mouth, a dollop of spittle arcing across the room and smacking against the china cabinet door, which, in turn, shudders and creaks. "Ha!" I say.

"What on earth was that for?" she says, mock-appalled.

"That was for every time you have reduced the astonishing complexity of human life to one of your bored clichés, and found comfort in it."

"But I'm not a thinker, you know that. It scares me when I'm forced to navigate gray areas by myself."

"Case in point: gray areas. Couldn't you have come up with some more original phrase than 'gray areas.' The portent of our very existence is threatened every time you rely on stock phrases instead of plumbing your imagination for a unique perspective."

"But honestly, do you really expect that there are enough original perspectives to go around? How many perspectives do we need? I'm happy just to listen sometimes, you know? You have such a way with words. We can't all be so lucky."

"You're right on there, sister," I say. "Will you pass me my smokes?"

She plucks a cigarette from the pack of Luckies on the counter and hands it to me. "I suppose you want a light, too."

"I don't see myself getting out of this high chair."

She digs through her purse, which clanks like a junk drawer, and removes a lighter.

"Now you know how I feel about the slapping. Was that really necessary?" she asks, sparking me up, trying her damndest to sound motherly and succeeding in only a whiff of *Mildred Pierce*.

"Yes," I say. "There is a moment when violence is all that will do. We're only human after all."

"Yes, but isn't all violence of a kind, violence begetting more violence, etc?"

"That's a bunch of hippie shit if you ask me," I say. "Have you ever been forced to watch your own child raped and gutted?"

"No," she says, "but what comes out of that little bum of yours can get pretty violent. Sometimes I wonder if it will ever end."

"There are acts of cruelty for which there is no rational response possible."

"You want a drink?" she asks. "It's almost cocktail hour."

"It's one-thirty," I say.

"Your point?" she says, and I trace a U in the air with three fingers in a gesture of surrender.

Then through the open back door saunters my only companion worth his weight in semiotics: Rufus, tail a-wag.

"Well, hello Rufus. Did you do your business?" she asks, and Rufus and I roll our eyes in tandem.

"Yes, woman," he says, heading for his water bowl, "I closed three deals today and exposed a City Councilman as an extortionist and pedophile."

"Oh my," she says. "Big day."

"Fix me a drink, will you?"

"I'm making Fuzzy Navels."

"Make mine a Cutty Sark. Where's my lunch?"

"You can't talk to me like that, you know. We're living in an age of reason and equality."

"Equality my ass," he says. "Were you looking for equality when I fucked you like a dog last night?"

"Please...not in front of the baby."

"Oh, like he isn't aware of our little arrangement."

"There is such a thing as a mutually agreed upon code of silence between family," I say, not sure whether it matters but making gestures today, for the sake of whimsy, in the direction of conservatism.

"Well, anyway, I fucked your mother like a dog last night, and so did George, and the whole time she begged me to call her a monkey-humping slut."

"Since when did George start showing up for favors at three in the morning anyway?" I say, referring to our simian neighbor with the tree-house.

"He gets curious. He can hear your mother's noises and he swings on over to join the fun. Monkeys got no morals."

Thoroughly amused and titillated as I always am by Dad (he likes it when I call him that), I sip my Fuzzy Navel and contemplate how best to begin my latest project: a treatise on the distinction between the surreal and the absurd in contemporary American letters.

"How's about we all go to a movie," Rufus suggests, and I nod enthusiastically.

"I was thinking of an 'art' picture," I say. "Some leaves and twigs taped to celluloid with a dissonant score. Or something high camp. Perhaps involving Patty Duke."

"Oh, I loved her on that show," mother says. "Where did Lucille go anyway?"

"She disappeared out the window around the time you lit my cigarette."

"Her loss," she says. "I was supposed to fix the hinge on her headgear."

"I think we should spend more time together," I say. "Family life isn't dead and I propose a sort of performance piece in which we skewer the idea. What some call the accelerated loss of innocence I call the fast track to wisdom."

"Yeah. You. Wise. I get it," Rufus says, and tosses back his Cutty. "I don't know about you guys, but I could go for some pizza and porn."

"That sounds like a marvelous idea," mother says. "Should we order in?"

"Nah, I like to go to the cinema, the one with the one-legged roper at the door and the sticky floors. The experience is somehow richer there."

"I agree," I say. "Will someone please just change my diaper first? I've been wallowing in my own excrement for the last half hour."

"Your turn," Rufus says, and the woman looks at me like she didn't know this was coming.

"We all need to be a little more accepting of these inevitabilities," I say. "You know, dark matter. The larger order, or lack thereof."

"I believe in a god called chaos," she says, and flips me over for a satisfying wipe.

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Sunrise

Alexandra Mattraw

a belly-white bulb
ties lighthouse to
sea

a moon shapes
graphed seeds:

tamarind or persimmon

the body wants to be

familiar

in the dark,
the conical insists:

*a word still stands
for something else—*

and the wounded
passages where I

cannot complete, stitches
between what hyphenates

dawn cuts
red-shouldered,

I am halved
over and over
into

the winnowing —
light hewn
clefts

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