

LITR

NUMBER 4

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YOU  
WISH  
TO  
DIRECT  
ME?

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## PANTS DOWN AT NOON

We called and asked about your wish to direct, to project and to move, a proposal for action to be passed from our hands to yours and onward, to the community, beyond the face-to-face. You sent it in, and some of it hit and some of it stuck. And with it struck a curious feeling. What are your stakes? Where do you want to take me? (I mean, are we going together?) The contributions in this issue build private insurrections that loosen public ground. Each piece a testimony. It's about our labor, people! How we work, and for whom. Toward resilience and reflection.

Halfway through the process of reviewing and discussing, we, as editors, faced each other feeling an absence. "Where were the political demands of our queer community?" we asked. We felt hungry for some direct analysis of current state politics, government war tactics and homophobic strategies and their effects on our rights and daily life. We are all being directed through several wars, by a government whose "US" does not include me.

Sometimes, when you ask a question and you get a question back, that's better than any answer. Your contributions filled us with personal narratives, visions, past and future. Between them is that tried-and-true claim that the personal is political. Like

you, I have fantasies and desires that shape my confrontations with the pressures of reality. When I speak out loud, and someone answers back, I feel my commitment to collective efforts. Perhaps this is where we can effect change. Sometimes, when you call, what you get back is both an echo and a response. The residual pleasure makes you want to call again.

Community is built on singulars like you and me, who can be found with our noses in the crack of a book. Time spent reading is time spent living. Our bodies are evoked and affected, and we are actively remembering and masquerading. There are many things to experience and to read about, and yes, there are things to do.

We asked for direction and you said you needed some yourself. So let's move in together and read this issue, ours.

LTTR editors

GINGER BROOKS TAKAHASHI

K8 HARDY

ULRIKE MÜLLER

EMILY ROYSDON

LANKA TATTERSALL



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**LTTR**  
WWW.LTTR.ORG

**PRINTED MATTER, INC.**  
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NEW YORK, NY 10011  
T. (212) 925.0325  
F. (212) 925.0464  
WWW.PRINTEDMATTER.ORG

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**Printed Matter, Inc.**

# DEAR ANNE,

I just read your book. You really know how to sink into life. I've been hiding a lot and I'm afraid I may never get to the "Other Side" like you write about. I can only write from the posterior position—lying down that is. (I'm so stupid sometimes I don't even know what posterior means.)

I realize it takes time. Maybe that's a good thing. I have this feeling things are about to get ugly. You write a lot about shit and shame. I have a lot of shit inside of me. Garbage, Coke cans, cigarette butts, empty chip bags and dirt. Sometimes I feel like there's a rotting corpse inside my body.

And then you were a lesbian? But just for a little while? No one takes bisexuals seriously. I know from experience. I remember making fun of you in the tabloids. You looked insanely beautiful wandering around topless mumbling about Outer Space. "Anne Heche goes Crazy!" I said something bitchy about how you weren't even lesbian. You were kind of like nothing. I'm sorry for that now.

I'm amazed at all you've been through. I feel sick. I want to open up and let people in. I just push people away and then expose myself in inappropriate ways. I like my body, but I don't know how to get my insides to open up. I'm sick. I'm tense. I want to work and make art and open up. *Call me Crazy!* I love that.

*First I'm gonna make it. Then I'm gonna break it till it falls apart. Shiver and Save the World—every lie you've heard.*

Do you know Echo and the Bunnymen? *Bring on the new Messiah!* Like YOU! And you have the stigmata to prove it. I want to be a real artist and not just a victim all the time. How do you feel about Victim Culture? Do you think writing your book helped? Do you know about Mike Kelley? Do you think he's making fun of us? I need to open up and make this life count. I'm afraid I'm wasting it out of spite. I want love and joy and happiness!

The whole time I was growing up I told

the stories of what was happening over and over again. It got me high. It was worse for you, but reading your book I was a little jealous. You really turned some shit into rainbows. I mean basically you are amazing. My case wasn't as extreme as yours, but maybe that was the problem.

I want to be places, enjoy things and not be judgmental. It's hard, though, because sometimes Bad feels Good and Good feels Bad. Like for you Crazy felt Sane and Sane felt Crazy. I'm used to sinking into my own shit and playing around there. I'm kind of like Paul McCarthy! Do you know him? I wonder if you are into Contemporary Art? Anyway, I stew—or else I Act. We really have a lot in common, Anne. I act all the time! Mostly I act cool and detached. I wanted to be an actor—but all those acting people are too touchy feely for me. I couldn't trust the moment—in my body. I guess they don't actually touch you in acting class.

I think it is a testament to your strength that you believed in your memory. I think it makes all the difference. Because it can Fuck with your Intuition. And you know how difficult that can be. You're an actress. And you're really talented. I've been watching your movies and you're busting at the seams! You're kind of a comic genius. In *Six Days and Seven Nights*, you turned a New York hipster into pure Charlie Chaplin. I wonder, though, why so many of your movies involve exotic islands and erupting volcanoes.

Do you think this kind of Luxury, this extreme self-involvement happens in the third world? I don't think so, Anne. I don't know if these tell-all books really make anything better. Did it really help you into a "rebirth"? I heard a social worker on NPR talking about Cambodia. The Cambodians were depressed. The social worker helped people to do three things: to touch, to forget, and to work.

The flags are waving and the inflatable RED TAG SALE is going strong. Near here

is a place called Clairemont Mesa Blvd. where all the car dealerships are. It's giant. The road has 12 lanes, and it's not even a freeway. Everything here is really big. It's disgusting. I want to be part of the World but the World is so revolting. The world is full of people being blown up and starving and being exploited. I'm full of shame. I'm ashamed for everyone and how little we do to make it better. I'm ashamed of art. Where is our OUTRAGE? Oh, Anne! We'll show the world that it isn't the small mean place it appears to be.

Thanks for everything, Anne. I'm taking my cues from you!

Yours Truly,

JOCELYN JACOBS

# LOIS AND CONAN

STANYA KAHN

Lois gulps down three cups of coffee from a machine behind the laundromat washers. Thirty-five cents each, *hot but it smells bad*, she thinks. *Mice pissing in the works*. She shoves her cup under the soft white spout. *Indeed, the staining of things from the inside*. Lois feels like her mind has been pissed in, back behind places, stinked up. Time spent alone cakes around her like adobe, something from determination. *What else*. She pokes holes in the cup, rocking against panic, waiting for the caffeine to cancel out the nerves. The hems of her jeans are frayed from picking and soft white threads stick to her tube socks. *I overthink*. Her mother used to circle a finger by her ear and say "Tick, tick, tick tick tick."

"What? I'm figuring it out," Lois would answer, rise irritated, close a door for silence.

*There is no quiet place. Those monks who pray and count beans into the trillions god bless them, have to buckle down through thin mountain air, skimpy robes, the hungry*

*villagers, neighboring armies even. Surrender, it's our condition. She yawns. Go with the flow.*

Her sneakers bang in the dryer. She sees them tied to her wrists, jerking around as she marches through town trying to figure out how to be useful. *People do get it together. Despots, floggings, massacre, high winds, debt. Like animals who can endure venomous bites and alchemize the poison, alter themselves permanently but not roll over dead. Most girls are fouled up by sickos, for example. People are nuts. Squeezed, or all weaved out and loose. I'm not sure when it matters anymore.* Rubbing her socked feet together, she watches a light blue piece of lint puff around the floor on tiny jets of air created by the slightest movement of her feet.

*They say you can't distinguish the anxious from the depressed. They say warm personalities deflect criticism. They say stress frays actual synapses in the brain, ripping*

*off their wagging tips, making it hard to ever stay calm. We live in heightened states of fear and no one knows about the chicken or the egg and apparently it no longer matters whether fear itself has bred so much treachery or vice versa. What happened to those tiny girls in the news, anyway? Raped and murdered, over and over, everywhere you looked. Now they're gone. Today apparently anti-malaria medicine causes psychotic episodes and might explain the recent spate of murders—vets from the war in Afghanistan killing their spouses.*

Lois had left all her clippings at Sam's. She started a new pile this week. Thin strips of newsprint lie across each other on a small desk in her room drying in ripples.

*There was that whole thing about soaring divorce rates, domestic violence, various toxic effects on the soldiers. The dryer whines. Lois wraps her finger in a single strand of hair near her neck and tugs. There were two lists: exposures and symptoms.*

*Anthrax vaccines, smoke from oil-well fires, the sound of chemical alarms, fuel on skin, dead animals, maimed soldiers, artillery close by, mustard gas, chemical gas, nerve gas, SCUD missiles exploding within one mile, combat-related injury, the witness of anyone dying ...* A knobby spiral of hair forms as her thumb and forefinger spin the strand.

*Irritability or outbursts of anger, fatigue, insomnia, forgetfulness, feeling distant from others, tingling in fingers and arms, fever, numbness in fingers and toes, burning sensation in the sex organs, anxiety, violence and word-finding difficulties.* Lois pulls another hair, grinding her teeth. She pictures a field of crushed porcelain over red sand. *After a study of 12,000 Gulf War veterans, scientists have decided there is no such thing as Gulf War Syndrome.*

Lois stands abruptly in the quiet. Outside, plastic American flags hang from damp

telephone poles, some sticking to the wood, wet from the fog. *The whole thing is starting again.* Lois turns toward the dryer, which has stopped, and feels a rush of cold air on her back.

A man stands just inside the doorway, wild-eyed and shaking. He's barefoot. A thin white rope holds his pants around his waist. "I'm Conan," he says in a loud, high-pitched voice. "I live with the wolves."

"Hi. I'm Lois. I live by myself."

"I'm Conan."

"I'm Lois."

"I live in the forest."

"OK."

Lois has barely spoken to anyone in the two months since she moved to this town. Shut tight since Sam died, she has been thawing slowly, ungluing a silent concentration that has stood in for grief. She has spent nights and days in her apartment, and in its small, square, unkempt yard, with only intermittent outings in search of work. Last week she walked in the evenings, looping out toward the neighborhood's perimeters. Yesterday she reached the edge of town and found just a marshy wasteland with tall damp weeds, ugly from the battle between wildness and development. Her sneakers had been soaked through.

Conan stands a few yards from her, one pale hand patting a washer while he looks around nervously. Yellow sulphur smells rise from him like heat. Lois taps her fingers on the dryer door along with his patting. *This is who has come.* Conan reminds her of Sam.

"Uh, I knew a guy in high school everyone called Conan," Lois offers, tossing her damp sneakers quickly back into the dryer and gesturing toward a seat. "He was huge. I saw him lift the back end of a VW bug once. He would carry people, girls. He could carry a full keg on his shoulders and run up the hill with it." She's nervous, laughs. She had actually barely known the guy in high



school, had only been invited to a few of the park parties. From a stone ledge outside the main circle she had tracked the shadowy movements the way she'd watched the ant farm in fifth grade. *Two break off now into the trees, one is pinned by another near the garbage can. What's that longhaired one dragging? Oh she's passed out. They haul their females into the bushes, play air guitar.* When cops came, Lois pulled quietly backwards into the woods and out of sight, watched everything scatter.

"His real name was Carl," she starts again and fades, "he got arrested all the time." *I don't know if he's getting any of this.* Conan's forehead seems to grow paler, draining.

"I had some acid and some crack last week with vodka and soda." His teeth jitter as he speaks, and then he says, a little louder, "I had Cool Ranch Doritos and I saved a wolf from the fountain!"

Okay. Lois peers at him. "Did you get arrested?"

"Yeah!" he says, snorting. Gaps between each tooth press his mouth wide.

"It's warm in here." Lois reaches for change in her pocket. Maybe she can buy him a cup of coffee from the crappy machine. *I've got nothing to offer.* Lois faces the line again, the one set down between seclusion and unpredictable human interchange. This choice has glinted up at her since she was a young girl, wicked, hissing with paranoia. To connect or disappear. It's easier when everything is such a wreck right on the surface.

"Where are your shoes?" she asks. The gray skin around Conan's eyes glows with exhaustion. Conan shakes his head and moves toward the door.

"Where's yours?" He laughs, trembling.

"In the dryer..."

"No." He backs up, still shaking his head, then pushes out the glass door and is gone. Blur of a white car passing, branches of gold street maple bending up in the wet spray—

Lois shudders, alert suddenly to loud details all around. Water, wind, light, tires, the smell of heat and soap—everything pops in, *like a messenger or a message. What's my problem.* The sudden conversation bangs open a door in her head. She takes her sneakers from the dryer, puts them on damp and goes into the street.

...

Sun presses white behind the fog but doesn't break through. Lois walks fast, past the video arcade, nail salon, a yellow building with green doors—the Chit Chat Lounge. Smoke and bar smell seep out and she stops. She keeps an eye out for Conan. *Would he go in for a drink?* She squints against the darkness. A man at the end of the bar nods toward her, huge head with small eyes and wisps of white hair combed across the forehead, a mouth lost in wrinkles. She nods back and keeps walking.

Time has passed so slowly, or has not passed at all for Lois. She has been frozen in a cool, silent cocoon, all her knobs turned down. Now she bobs her knees waiting at a red light and feels stiff. *The people are here, just pick one.* It's not the presence of other people that rattles her so much as the idea of *knowing them.* Impossible, she thinks, has almost always been sure. *"Why don't you make some friends?"* Her mother's voice rings inside her own. *"You and Sam can't only hang out with each other."*

Lois and Sam didn't discuss their isolation. They relaxed in its familiarity, resigned. They kept a cordial distance from each other's intimate details. Neither did they discuss their mutual apprehension toward socializing beyond the safe bounds of their own worries. Unspoken rules webbed them together, bonded them with carefully constructed pragmatism, their shared history wired underground, out of sight.

Lois glances briefly at a Hallmark display in the window of a party store—stuffed pup-

pies, a dusty champagne glass. A photo cube sits on a cardboard school bus. Early family pictures on each side, grainy and faded, signal jokingly to her—nostalgia, *heh-heh, don't we all.* But the past as a plastic box, Lois thinks, walking on, is perfect. Each side flat around the corner from the next. *You can never view them all at once.* She fills one for herself: Closed door of the dining room where her father had bent over a typewriter, surrounded by stacks of books, an ashtray, dirty cups; her mother rounding the corner into the hall, talking to herself as she scooped Lois up off the floor, whispering "He won't come out, honey. How the days are long, ha!"; her brother Sam curled up with a calculator behind the Laz-y Boy; the bare tree out front, a bed pillow caught in its dry branches—"Oh, a ripe pillow tree," her mother had joked, annoyed. "It's not my job, dammit." She'd cursed the city for months before finally going out in her slippers one morning and yanking it free. "It's dead anyway," she'd said under her breath, shoving the dirty thing into the trash.

Lois' father left when she and Sam were toddlers. A self-absorbed agoraphobe, his accomplished books on political economy contradicted the indulgence in personal isolation. *It's too simple to think I'm just like him,* Lois thinks. She hears her mother's rolling opinions, like large stones, wedged in every doorway—musings and defamations her mother mumbled aloud to herself, to the dash of the car, to the cold chicken she methodically skinned and stuffed on Friday nights. *With so much significance jammed up all around, who has the wherewithal for parlance.*

Lois turns down the alley behind the party store. *There's something I'm missing.* She wonders if she's ever met someone halfway. Someone besides Sam.

...

In junior high there was Carmen, an olive-skinned, red-haired girl who turned to Lois one day in Social Studies and said, "What's cookin', good lookin'?" Lois had peered at her through frizzy bangs and stared. Carmen smiled and turned back around. "I know something is," she said over her shoulder. Lois knew Carmen was the only other kid in the class acing every test like she did.

"Yeah, you too!" Lois finally managed to blurt back. Carmen laughed and the next day they started writing notes.

Carmen wore flat Chinese shoes, striped socks and a green windbreaker. She was nearly as tall as Lois. Her hair was a dense bush of fat curls and her hooked nose and gold-brown eyes set her, in Lois' mind, leaning against Ionic marble with sandals, blue robes and laurels, the whole bit. It was a synchronistic wonder the day Carmen showed up with a Maxfield Parrish picture duct-taped to the back of her PeeChee folder under "Led Zep Rules." Impossible gold light rimmed the edges of deep blue water and pink rocks where girls stretched and napped at sundown. Yes, that's where we belong, Lois blanked out momentarily—washing her feet while wind lifted her silk sash above mountain rock.

"Your head is humming and it won't go because you don't know ..." Carmen sang along with "Stairway to Heaven," tapping her small gray tape deck in the sun behind the gym. Lois hated changing into the nylon shorts and thick double-sided t-shirts and sat with Carmen, squinting and patting her hands along. "There's a lady who's sure all that glitters is gold ..." Carmen wrote poetry, read books and listened to music. Her mom was an Irish-Jewish beatnik, her father, a Puerto Rican independista who was, like Lois' father, brilliant but absentee. At school, this made Carmen as weird as Lois, whose mother was a well-read social worker raising Lois and Sam alone. They bonded on the

outskirts and sealed their fate in writing.

Carmen's notes were fast and full. There would be a drawing with a joke, a question, or a poem. Scribble-eyed monsters dove into spirals. "We have to get out of here!" one would howl to the other. "Pirates will fish us from the grip of the old bitch in no time!" yelled the other. Lois wrote back. Filling a whole head with black ink, she drew a girl's long stick body falling into the earth, pulled by the weight of cement leg warmers. Hands reached out for her on either side, grasping to help her back up, but her wire stick hairs fanned out like rays of the sun, ending in voice bubbles screaming: "Don't believe a word they say!"

By thirteen, Lois began to peer out at the world through a tiny hole in her chest and the censor introduced itself: "I'll take over now." Decisive, exclusive, the disembodied psychic boss built a tall stone wall around her and commanded from within. Her mother was laid off, Sam's anorexia began, and Lois relied now on the force and form provided by the new presence, its sword and discipline, drawbridge and gated towers. *Don't come in here.* She spent hours staring out her window, trying to see through black shadows in the trees, sides of buildings, the places beyond reach of street lamps. Anywhere untouched by society would do, a pure blank space, unmarred by mankind, the government, the principal, her teachers, the counseling office, the girls at the end of the yard. All of them shitass.

Lois wrote notes to Carmen and then threw them away. She wrote in a diary, digging into the pink pages until whole sections were slashed through, the words FUCK IT hanging on scraps. She wanted to tell Carmen about the voice inside, but knelt instead on the floor of her room with the lights out, hoping to catch sight of it, the overbearing thing which spat yes or no. Lois stuffed 35 aspirins in her mouth and chugged the last

of the grape juice. She tied her diary to her belly and waited. The next day at school she found Carmen and they lay with their heads under a bench at lunch, listening to Carmen's radio. Lois didn't tell her about the sick night.

A few months later, Lois cut her wrists, in the wrong direction, and walked across town to Carmen's house. Her jacket sleeves were sticky, the tip of her nose cold as a rock.

Carmen looked pleased to see her.

"Goldie!" Carmen's code name for Lois. She could tell something was up.

"Hi Red, can I come in?"

Carmen's mom was smoking a joint on the living room couch. "Hi Lois, what's cookin', sugar?" She was an actress and substitute teacher with loose rules and four smart kids. The house smelled like the health food store. Lois loved Carmen, knew it in this moment. Lois loved almost no one outside her own family, and did not register love as a red balloon valentine in the heart but like her skin could come off and wrap around the person. She would stand peeled and bloody and not complain. Her emotions traveled through a trick course with swinging doors like a pinball maze. King, ding. Red lights. Some noise. Every now and then a shutdown, everything dark with no sounds.

Carmen took Lois into the back bedroom. She made it easily over the wall. "Sure I see it," she said to Lois, smoothing Lois' hair with her fingers. "The wall is always there and they can't see it but we can. We'll never let them in and we don't ever have to go back out."

"Yeah," Lois sobbed heavily, her voice warbling with relief to hear Carmen's good sense. Lois' face was swollen from crying; her barrettes hung crooked and snagged. They sat for hours knee to knee on Carmen's sunken bed, wrapped in homemade quilts, whispering about this complicated and mysterious situation just beyond their under-

standing. Carmen got it, the shitty chasm torturing Lois, threatening to swallow her into nothingness or leave her stranded forever separate from everyone else.

"Wanna smoke a roach? I got one from my mom's ashtray." Carmen opened her palm.

"Okay." Lois felt stiff and woozy. "Do you have any Band-Aids?" Suddenly the idea of losing too much blood seemed vaguely foreboding.

"Um, I don't think so." Carmen's bathroom cabinet was stocked with Chinese liniment, a jar of blue beads and a tube of natural toothpaste. They tied socks around Lois' wrists and lay on the bed smoking the resined paper. Lois fell asleep with images of herself and Carmen as a hybrid mix of Maxfield Parrish girls and the tow-headed *Houses of the Holy* children pressing through mortar and brick like ghosts.

...

Still buzzing from caffeine, Lois squeezes crushed M&M's into her mouth from an old packet she finds in her jeans. The sugar rushes in, high, killing the sour taste of the laundromat coffee. She crosses an empty lot to the back of the bus depot, pushes in through the heavy doors. Cavernous and gloomy, the room reminds her of the basement swimming pool in an old brick community center where her mother swam laps alongside tiny, wrinkled ladies. High rectangular windows let in light but the walls of the depot are tall and shadows engulf whole corners of the room. A group of children crowds around the snack bar, a few travelers wait, read, check the clock. "Reservations," "Information," "Destinations"—black letters on green signboard organize the station. Lois scans the wooden benches for Conan's head.

A woman stands over her open suitcase, chewing gum and re-folding her clothes, humming. Three kids slide noisily onto the bench near her, wet cherry mouths chewing on candy. The two boys double-team the girl, try

to wrench a plastic wrapper from her hand.

"Noooo," she whines.

"Hey, hey now." The woman stops folding and steps in front of the kids, hands on her hips, her voice sharp in the musty air of the lobby, ringing against the green tiled walls. The kids look up at her all at once. They suck their cheeks, stop swinging their feet. She points with long red nails and gold rings, red-black hair swept up in a webby twist. Her eyes are rimmed black, her cheeks rouged, lips lined orange and filled with pink. *It is hard to imagine her losing control.*

"Girls always get what they want," she says to the kids. "You'll learn that when you get older. Girls always get what they want." The kids look up at her, jittery, respectful. She turns back to her suitcase, picks up a blouse and says to Lois, who has been standing there staring, "I don't know whose they are, but I don't let mine run loose like that."

Lois nods and watches as the woman's hands move fast like a banker's, folding each piece square with itself. Sam had taught Lois to fold hospital style, department store fresh but she never got the hang of it, didn't care.

"I got three—a two, a five and a six," the woman continues. "They mind me first, then my husband. When he came back from the Gulf I had to hold a re-orientation in my household. 'That's your daddy!' He hardly said a word for three whole months. You learn to be thankful for what you've got. Last time I was here, a lady was dangling her kid by his ankles. I said 'You know what? You shouldn't play upside down games. It's not good for his brain.' She just ignored me. Fine, suit yourself. People don't listen. She's probably got a retarded kid now and that's expensive. If you can avoid a hazard with lifelong effects, I'd say why the hell not try. Because there are other things come along where you have no choice whatsoever."

"Yeah." Lois watches the woman's earrings, tiny gold unicorns that quiver from side to side. She glances around the station and then back. The woman turns to look at the wall clock above Lois' head, and Lois notices a red and yellow crescent of bruise around her temple.

"I'm going to my sister's, it's her birthday. She'll kill me if I'm not on the 10 o'clock bus."

...

Lois had wanted to be a lady like that. When she was nine years old she glued cut-out pieces of paper onto her fingertips and ran them over her face. She wore wax lips, she stuffed her bra and her underpants and posed for her farmer doll. Anxious even as a child, Lois had worried she might get in a car wreck and die before she grew breasts. Would she know the feeling of her boobs pressing against another chest? She worried that by the time she was old enough to press against another, she'd have grown them and would never get to know what it felt like to be flat against someone too. She took a kid into her closet one day after kindergarten and said let's french. They pulled off their shirts, stood bare and flat, chest to chest and Lois put her tongue in his mouth. The kid went for it, for about a minute, then pushed his way out, said he had to go. Lois realized she would also not grow up to be a man and so would never get to try the feeling of someone else's boobs pressing against her hard boy chest. Time moved this way, slowly and methodically, portions of an afternoon smoothed flat by mulling possibilities. Like the expansion of the universe beyond the solar system and then the galaxy. Lois followed each next thing out past the others until she got to a blank TV screen, static and buzzing. So far, this was where the universe ended.

Lois' mother explained most things. She mixed fact with fiction, but always gave an answer. Geology, evolution, politics. She

was forthright and to the point, sometimes blunting a discussion inadvertently with the force of her opinions. "The president is a pig, they're all pigs." She sat at the kitchen table after work with her feet up on a stack of phone books on a wicker stool, smoking a cigarette and drinking Olympia beer from the can. "It's the water, ha!"

Lois never got why that was funny. On weekends sometimes they went to a museum. "These are just wonderful, marvelous!" her mother exclaimed in a whispery voice standing in front of the surrealist paintings. "It was a real breakthrough when these guys started messing with the still life." Lois stared at boobs melting into clocks, hollow bodies merging with horses and tables. One link with the adult world, *unbelievable*. Lois had the sense that someone was onto something close to truth. Lois felt similarly great when doing a scarf dance to Barry Manilow. "At the Copa, Copacabana! Music and passion are always the fashion ..." Her mom walked past from the shower, a towel turban wrapped around her head, paisley undies hanging low on her hips, "Oh, god, Barry Manilow. What a pig." Lois pushed her door closed. *This has nothing to do with pigs. This is about cold drinks, dancing by a pool and eating coconut ice cream.*

Sam would hold his hands to his ears in the hallway, hunched over his books. He seemed to block out the sharp edges of his mother's convictions, but pluck some piece of soft essence from the center of her wisdom. He brushed the pages of his dictionary with his fingertips, fluffing the edges—duck wing, free bird. Sam inverted the family's hawkish intelligence, upending givens in language itself with made-up hybrid words of his own. "That's not a word, Sam." He tuned in and out. Lois felt she had no knobs for adjusting the incoming frequencies and picked up everything her mother said. Picked up most things, a crowding which would later

make her seek emptiness on her own scalp, twiddling and plucking her hair until bald areas and scabs appeared. The three of them spoke rarely of the father who had been unable to leave the house or care for the babies once they were walking, who stayed locked in his room writing, until one day he packed up and ran.

Lois' mother kept his pictures in an envelope next to the encyclopedias, black and white photos of a thin man slightly hunched in the shoulders, handsome in a white shirt and slacks, a thin brown beard accentuating the angles of his jaw and chin. She brought his books home as they were published and quietly put them on the shelves where Lois and Sam were free to browse. If they wanted to talk about him, she'd have it. They didn't.

Lois had knocked lightly on her mother's door one afternoon, after a letter had come with his publisher's return address. Hearing no answer, she'd let herself in and saw her mother lying face down on the bed, crying. "Mom?"

"Get out!" She didn't turn around, just threw a pillow to the floor and pounded the headboard with her fist.

Lois didn't speak to her mother for two days, until she had come in and apologized to Lois, called Sam into the room and told them both matter-of-factly, that their father had just requested never to be contacted by them, ever. Apparently Sam had tried to send a note via the book company, desperate to understand the blank spots in his mind, the glaring, empty channels rubbed free of marks where there should have been maps for how to proceed. Skidding around on two wheels, Sam knew they would each eventually crash. Their mother rode them forward, half fueled by anger and resentment, half by love and a cool, unmistakable knowledge that her children were perfect, asymmetrical gems cut from deep inside the rotting earth.

"If you're going to do it, do it right the

first time," her mother had said, when Lois laid the tool box down and set out to patch the hole in their kitchen floor. Mice came and went as they pleased and Lois' mother insisted they fix most things themselves. Handing her a level and measuring tape, her mother said, "Men are eye-ballers. They rush through and screw things up. Shine 'em if they say you're going too slow. You won't be the one doing it twice, so long as you're a stickler to begin with." Lois was compelled by her mother's confidence and invested in maintaining her respect. Lois carried on in the hard-nosed manner of her mother, alienating children at recess, trying repeatedly to apply a more subtle tone.

"You're bossy!" kids would yell.

"No, I just mean if you rotate counterclockwise around the court, the four-square teams will line up evenly!" She thought of herself as helpful, a captain of sorts.

"Whatever, Lois, you're out!"

As she matured, this tone, which resonated inside her as earnest, enthusiastic, integral, was often misinterpreted as spooky, arrogant or derisive. The bright light Lois felt swooping through her could apparently hit the world like a laser. She learned to scale everything down and coil inward.

...

Back out on the main street, cars pull in and out of lots, Saturday shopping has begun. Lois tries to imagine the re-insertion of herself into a lifeworld with friends, a regular job. War and a sweeping phenomenon of political debauchery hang over everything now and she wonders in particular about the importance of rejoining a populace, is there one, what's left. *Toil. But how to distinguish some purpose, set apart as we are from the animal kingdom or a rocketing natural world.* The cycling of certain questions frustrates Lois, drives her into nervous calculations and fatigue. *Thousands of years of asking, like people continue to doodle the*



*shape of an eye, an old favorite across the millennia. What powers do we have, anyhow?* Suddenly she thinks of the opening scene of *Norma Rae*, the jumping spools and dust-clotted shuttles of the textile factory. *Aw Norma Rae, that saggy little mouth. Your jeans looked great in every scene.* She imagines Sam dressed as Sally Fields, in tight bellbottoms leading the workers in a march to city hall. The question of what to do bleeds into the issue of with whom. *I don't have anyone's phone number. Can you see this Sam?*

...

They had spent long nights loading numbers into the computer, Sam punching in words, codes, while Lois scribbled down the links meticulously as they appeared on the screen. Four years ago they had figured a way to filch money from the international credit accounts of corporate super stores.

Sam's desk was cluttered with vitamins, supplements, books on herbal remedies. He barely made his rent each month, bussing dishes, cleaning floors, spending what he had on rare extractions and tinctures. Their mother had succumbed to breast cancer a few years earlier, the disease spreading rapidly throughout her body until she quietly OD'd herself on Seconal and Compazine one night. "This is just shit," she'd said to Lois the day before. Sam and Lois moved into the same apartment building.

Lois cycled through a variety of jobs, carpet-laying, dog-walking, proofreading. Sam's hyper-intelligence, combined with his excessive need for control, disabled him from succeeding in most fields he could have pursued—computer programming, financial analyzing, chemical engineering. Employment structures, with bosses, schedules, meetings, agendas, short-circuited Sam's concentration and sent him into babbling furries. Menial labor allowed his mind respite and space but left him alone to find chal-

lenge. Calculating the body's needs down to cellular minutiae satisfied him for stretches at a time. "The brain is directly connected to the intestines, toxicity floxes the works, makes literally shit for brains, no kidding," he'd explain. "Flox" his word for fluctuating toxins fucking things up. He dropped effervescent green powder into a glass of triple filtered water and stirred.

As a child Sam suffered a debilitating sweet tooth, a food compulsion which eventually drove him—along with the realization at age 14 that his father was a complete asshole who'd broken his heart forever—to all manner of eating disorders, and finally circled him around to the controlled raw food and water ordeal. Older than Lois by two years, Sam had tried as a child to enlist her as an accomplice in his first burglaries, crimes usually involving sweets of some kind. In order to win her confidence, or her belief in the power of pure cane, Sam once filled her cereal bowl with white sugar, sprinkled some corn flakes and milk on the pile, and made her eat it. He wouldn't let her up from the table until it was gone. Of course, their mother came downstairs after one tortured bite and promptly noticed Lois with both small hands flattened over her bowl. Sam watched to see if she'd squeal. Lois believed Sam had access to infinite, scrolling information, special knowledge which pushed way past the reaches of rote school lessons. She willfully took the rap for pilfering two hundred times the allotted single spoonful for cereal allowed in their house. Lois wasn't into sugar. She wanted facts, words, answers, problems, questions, scenarios, hypotheses, and, at a young age, philosophical tricks and puzzles. Sam had plenty, and Lois handled his sweet tooth with bravado and cunning, keeping him supplied with Caramel Torpedos, Nutty Buddies, Power Dips and Chocolate Darlings by any means she could.

...

When Lois considers companionship now she feels like she's picking through dark mud. She wants to trust someone. She wishes her mother had taught her how. "Most people are stupid," her mother often warned. Lois feels nauseous thinking of her mother's loneliness. Angry at what she's inherited. *But "I," there is none. "Me" is just one more padded vessel knocking around on top of the earth. Blinking with eyes. Gaping and ready to suckle. The rest is a game of chance.*

Now and then Lois envisions taking a shot at it. *The woman at the bus station did.* "No, really, I adore you," she imagines saying out loud. The scene is unclear, but she glimpses the shape of herself, on a screen in the distance, glowing in chainmail cut down the center with satin, mouthing words across tall grass to another human being—You're great, I, I think you're great.

...

In a park at the town's center, a fountain sprays above a stone pool, the water sputtering in staggered patterns. Pigeons hobble and coo under benches, a man sleeps on one. Lois circles the fountain, mesmerized by the sound of the water's splats, the sight of sky through the droplets, a sloppy, glinting shutter. The world is raucous to her, vaudevillian. Sam would have thought so too.

He had been bottling rainwater. "The pollutants from the air diminish after the third day of rain and water from southwesterly storms is more pure than any other," read a note found on his desk. It had been raining for four days straight, an unusual downpour for that time of year. Sam was climbing up to the roof each night, collecting samples and monitoring them through his dime-store microscope. He'd taken to visiting the roof frequently since his mother's death, and could be heard muttering and sometimes yelling to god, or to the neon bar sign, that his father should never be pardoned. "Take him off the list!" Guilt soaked through him,

distracting him, pinching off the sharp points of his senses. Lois was working nights and sleeping all day.

Severely depressed, but clumsier still, Sam slipped from wet shingles where his plastic bottles were strung from the antenna to the chimney, and fell five stories to the pavement. Lois had stood in the hall of the apartment building, mute and shaking, until Jimmy the super walked up, his tinny voice cracking through like an alarm. "Lois, I'm real sorry." When his hand touched her arm, she felt herself split into gray parts spiraling away from each other.

...

Lois reaches out, lets the fountain water hammer into her palm. All of a sudden, from somewhere behind the benches, a lady hollers and two cops run across the grass. "He's over by the trees!" the woman shrieks from a car window. Lois spins, tries to locate the action.

"Raaaaooooow! Raaaaooooow! RRRRRrrrrrrrr!" At the end of the park, a small naked figure jumps out from behind a tree, flaps by then disappears behind another. Lois squints. Black curls flounce, a wisp of pale torso, tiny butt cheeks.

"Raaaaaaooooowwwww!" It howls again, arms outstretched.

"Conan!" Lois yells and waves, walks quickly in the direction of the trees. The cops swoop onto him. Conan is down and Lois can't make out what's happening. "Hey! Hold on!" She runs toward them. They have him up fast, haul him naked and wriggling to the squad car, drive off. Lois looks around. A man stands next to her now, the one who'd been asleep on the bench. His voice is like a metal shovel dragging over rock.

"Heh. Barry's at it again. That boy loves to get nekkid! Ha haaa."

"Barry? I thought his name was Conan," Lois turns to the man, out of breath. She absently takes the stick of gum he's

holding out to her.

The man snaps the pack into his fist. "Barry's been 'Conan' since he got out of the service. Let his hair grow out, started living in the park. Runs through the fountain howling like a wolf. They said he was a real sharp shooter too, top of his class. Man, he held it together for a good long while." He coughs, wipes his mouth with a hanky and turns back toward the fountain.

"Aw Jesus." Lois looks back in the direction of the trees. The two walk side by side.

"I'm Granger. You new in town?"

"Yeah." She blows a small bubble out the side of her mouth and puts out her hand.

"Lois. Lois Minkov."

"Pleased to meet you." Granger shakes her hand, nods. "Wanna play crazy eights?"

A deck of cards juts from his shirt pocket, Lois makes out a pretty lady head, blond bouffant.

"Okay."

Pigeons scatter as they sit down on the bench. The sun has burned through the fog and warmed the wood. Lois loosens off her damp shoes and lets them dry in the heat.

# i through xviii

CHRISTOPH BOOTS

Footnotes electrify me.<sup>i</sup> For ages, I skipped them. Averted my gaze from their insect-like presence, annoying but ignorable. "If the author has something important to say," I thought, "why don't they just write it up here?" And to the footnotes that simply offered a citation, a star on a roadmap of ideas claimed by humans, I simply said, "Fuck your intellectual property. I'll read the bibliography."

I can't even remember the book I was reading that initiated me into the world of voracious footnote reading. The desire emerged out of curiosity—a page that consisted of half-text, half-footnote. The bulk of the footnote threatened to bust the text above it clear off the page. It was like an up-rising. I read it, feeling suckered. I emerged a changed man. *It told me the story within the story.* It took me, the reader, up to the

operating table, and pointed at the text, anesthetized and split open from stomach to sternum. The footnote inserted a bloody, gloved finger into the incision. "There," it said, narrating structure and function of organs as they quivered and pulsed inside the body. Then it sutured up the slice, and sent me away with a wink. I knew I'd be back.

"Do not let footnotes become vehicles for additional comments of substance. If the point is important, it should be included in the body of the essay. If not, it should be excluded altogether."<sup>ii</sup>

If this were true, I would still be skipping footnotes. As far as I'm concerned, footnotes are a creative act. And as with any creative act, failure is more common than success. Most footnoting is dry and hideous. The exception, though, are the footnotes that beg a photocopy at 150%, the ones have you lick-

i Don't be scared. Read on. I dare you.

ii University of New England, Academic Skills Office. "Footnoting" <http://www.une.edu.au/tlc/aso/pdf/bibfn.pdf>

ing the page.<sup>iii</sup> Terrible footnotes are like a free tourist map. They show you everything unexciting and stupid about where you are. They never show you the things they could, either because the mapmakers want to keep it secret, or they're too ignorant to know that other routes are possible. Good footnotes are call and response, auto-conversations overheard by eavesdropping readers.

It's easy for me to say. I come from this world of books and big words. This world imagines itself universal, but it is not. I have the white skin, the cash and the immersion in my family's academic overachievement that reserve me a place inside it. I did not have to fight hard (as many do) to arrive there. This world unmade me, remade me, makes me now as I unmake and make myself with and against it. It's with all of this in my pocket that I seethe at inaccessibility of theory and haughty intellectualism. I can say "FOOTNOTES FOR THE PEOPLE!" because I have already been comfortable with the footnote for the few. To the contrary, bell hooks has argued the point that for working-class people, footnotes tend to indicate a book is "for college educated people," and she generally avoids using them.<sup>iv</sup> The exclusiv-

ity of the footnote is built in—it's a sign that says "welcome" for some, and "keep out" for others. I would like to think that we can wrench it from the domain of the oppressive and elite.<sup>v</sup>

The footnote may never know the universal. If there is one thing we all must learn,<sup>vi</sup> it is that nothing works for all of us simultaneously. We must make our worlds big enough, sturdy enough, to contain both variance and conflict, and keep the capacity to remain intact and connected in the midst of it all. We're all in this together. We're doing different kinds of things together. My footnote and your crowbar. Your dance revolution and my alien-gendered body. My diary and your bullhorn. We share lungs and heart. Also, my lungs and heart are my own.

...

**REFUSAL:** I refuse to believe that we cannot first extract the promising before we shatter the oppressive.<sup>vii</sup> I refuse to be misunderstood.<sup>viii</sup> I refuse to believe that we will not triumph.<sup>ix</sup> I refuse to ignore the stories inside the stories we're presented.<sup>x</sup>

**INTENTION:** I will continue to fight tooth and nail: Community! Survival! Resistance!<sup>xi</sup> We will learn from one another, find

ways to build our community with one another.<sup>xii</sup> It's up to us to carve our way into existence.<sup>xiii</sup>

...

The footnote becomes unruly when we let it occupy the center ring.<sup>xiv</sup> As troublemakers, isn't that what we're going for? When does unruly move from a devious wink to an explosion that destroys much more than we intended?<sup>xv</sup> Is to liberate the footnote from the dreadful iron grasp of intellectual elitism to pollute populism? Or is it to light a fuse that may lead to a mighty charge?<sup>xvi</sup> The footnote speaks, we listen. Is this what we mean by revolution? Giving voice to the footnotes, literal or figurative?<sup>xvii</sup> Allowing footnotes to penetrate text, to spill over, to sully the textual body, to split the surface? What mess will result, what fluids will spill over the page? The coming together of bodies can be dubious or promising.<sup>xviii</sup> I am reluctant, I am open, I am listening.

iii Lick this page now. I don't care if I don't deserve it yet. I want your spit on my words.

iv hooks, bell. "Keeping Close to Home: Class and Education," in *The Presence of Others*. 2nd ed. Andrea Lunsford and John J. Ruszkiewicz. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997, p. 93.

v Take a pen. Scrawl across me, the text, the footnote, the implicated body. Do you lay claim to me? Tell me what you think, how you feel.

vi "We all must learn?" Curse your ostentatious sincerity of vagueries.

vii I'm sorry, but this is impossible. Is it not?

viii I'm sorry. I don't understand you, and I don't understand why you write this. The story within the story, the tangent that will not be tethered is this: I discovered that being misunderstood is inevitable later than some and earlier than others. I was on a couch in San Francisco, age 26, bandaged from sex-reassignment surgery in the form of bilateral mastectomy and chest reconstruction, and everyone in public was still calling me "she" without batting an eyelash. I was angry, not because they were wrong (though they were), but because my gender is never complete inside a pronoun. I got the sudden, sinking feeling as I took my Percocet, "I do not exist, I do not belong." "Existence" and "belonging" are relative; I may be alien in my gendered body, but I exist and belong permanently in ways that privilege me. I found myself grateful for the knowledge that "existence" is not translatable to anyone in its entirety, and I continue to be furious at the fact that a sense of home, of existence, of comfort, and of belonging are dealt out selectively, along with hundred-dollar bills, owned homes, and privilege. *I will* be misunderstood. We will *all* be misunderstood. We fight back with articulation, with specificity.

ix I might agree with you if and when you tell me what you mean by "we."

x But what if those stories disrupt your own? Whose stories will you continue to ignore, and why?

xi The words are vessels left unfilled. You tell me something and simultaneously tell me nothing. Your exclamatory vehemence leaves me hesitant to question content and specificity when the sentiment is so pretty and compelling. And still, I raise my fist as you exclaim.

xii You are a fucking daydreaming hippie. It's not that it's a bad idea—but tell me, WHOSE community?! Who counts, who is left out? Who decides, who is left without decision-making authority? Who speaks for "us"? And which "us" do you mean? You speak of community like it is One. You have thousands. Of which do you speak? Which do you want to survive?

xiii Existence for whom? From whom do you require understanding and belonging? And to what extent?

xiv The spotlight feels warm—I can't see the faces of the audience at all!

xv Text, I'm going to ask you something ...

xvi Text, listen to me.

xvii Text, let me inside you.

xviii Can you feel me? I can feel you.



## THE TALE OF THE HERMAPHRODITE

ANNA BLUME

"...the center of myself where I stand as a holy spider on the major threads of my soul and with which I will weave at the crossways a few lace which I guess already exist in the heart of Beauty."

*Mallarmé, July 28, 1866*

### I. OVID'S *METAMORPHOSIS* TALE OF THE HERMAPHRODITE, 7 AD

According to Ovid, the daughters of King Minyas weave, telling stories.<sup>1</sup> They have locked themselves indoors to avoid the ecstatic displays of women and girls for the feast of Bacchus, a god they neither revere nor believe in, saving all that for Athena, goddess of war and weaving. In their seclusion, after several stories, the oldest of the daughters of Minyas, Alcithoë, begins the tale of the hermaphrodite. She runs her "shuttle swiftly through the treads of her loom," and speaks about "a little son of Hermes and Aphrodite." "In his fair face mother and father could be clearly seen; his name also he took from them." Until the age of fifteen Hermaphroditus, however, was a boy.

One day while he was wandering through the land of Lycia, now modern-day Turkey, he came across "a pool of water crystal clear

to the very bottom." Hidden from his sight, gathering flowers at the edge of the pool, was Salmacis, a young naiad of Diana, goddess of the hunt. More in love with beauty than hunting, Salmacis often stayed behind at the pool to look at her reflection in the water. On this day instead of herself she saw Hermaphroditus and "longed to possess him." When she approached him full of her desire, the "boy blushed rosy red; for he knew not what love is." When she tried to kiss him, Hermaphroditus cried, "have done, or I must flee and leave this spot—and you." Salmacis promised to leave him swim in peace, but hid quietly in the bushes to watch this fair youth.

Hermaphroditus, clearly more intrigued by the cool water than the desirous naiad, "threw aside his thin garments" and dove into the water. Enflamed by the sight of his naked body in the water, Salmacis could control herself no longer. "Casting off all her garments," she dove in after him, grasping

Hermaphroditus to her against his will.

At length, as he tries his best to break away from her, she wraps him round with her embrace, as a serpent, when the king of birds has caught her and is bearing her on high: which, hanging from his claws, wraps her folds around his head and feet and entangles his flapping wings with her tail; or as the ivy oft-times embraces great trunks of trees, or as the sea-polyp holds its enemy caught beneath the sea, its tentacles embracing him on every side.

While holding him in this violent embrace Salmacis called out to the gods to make her and Hermaphroditus into one being. The gods acquiesced, making the two bodies "knit in close embrace: they were no longer two, nor such as to be called, one, woman, and one, man. They seemed neither, and yet both." After this sudden transformation, when Hermaphroditus felt that he had become "but half-man" and "enfeebled," he cried out to his powerful parents Hermes and Aphrodite to curse these waters, so "whoever comes into this pool as man may he go forth half-man, and may he weaken at touch of the water." His parents granted his wish, and cursed the pool, known from then on as the dangerous uncanny waters of Salmacis, that would turn each man who swam or drank there into a hermaphrodite.

Many stories in the *Metamorphosis* are about the violence in love that results in the origin of species—human, plant or otherwise. Narcissus becomes a flower when he chooses his own reflection in a pool of water while rejecting the advances of Echo, who herself is transformed into the long-ing echo of her unrequited love. Daphne is transformed into the laurel tree to avoid the unwanted advances of Apollo, and the death of Pyramus and Thisbe, star-crossed lovers, turns the white fruit of the mulberry tree

red. For Hermaphroditus this transformation into a half-man half-woman is the result of erotic trauma, one that he laments, the trauma and the transformation. He, who has become he/she, now can only see this change as a loss of manhood, a weakening of self. Motivated by vengeance, he pleads with his parents to curse the waters so that he will not be alone in this new state of dual sexuality. Could he not see this transformation any other way? Could hermaphroditism be a fulfillment rather than a loss? Was he not, as Ovid writes, both Hermes and Aphrodite, male and female from the beginning? Myths, however, do not create states of mind or body; they rather represent them with embedded meanings that trace the mark of fears or hidden desires that sleep within us.

### II. *SLEEPING HERMAPHRODITE*, 2<sup>ND</sup> CENTURY AD, ROMAN MARBLE SCULPTURE, COPY OF A LOST GREEK BRONZE SCULPTURE

Roman sculptures, like the Roman poet Ovid, re-worked ancient Greek ideas, often making copies of Greek sculptures. One such work is the *Sleeping Hermaphrodite*, sculpted in marble in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, thought to be a copy of a now lost Greek bronze by Polykles from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. The *Sleeping Hermaphrodite* was found in Rome near the ancient baths of Diocletian in 1608. At the time it was found, it easily came into the auspicious collection of Cardinal Scipione Borghese, the nephew of the seated Pope Paul V. Once this sculpture was in his collection, the Cardinal commissioned the baroque sculptor Bernini to make the sumptuous mattress and pillow that the full-length reclining figure still rests upon today. Two hundred years later, in 1807, Napoleon bought the *Sleeping Hermaphrodite* from his well-placed brother-in-law Prince Camillo Borghese. It would become part of



the collection of the Musée de la République, later known as the Louvre.

When one enters the ancient sculpture gallery at the Louvre, this figure is prominently displayed in the center of the room on a floor of black-and-white tiles. At first, seen from the back, this reclining elegant figure appears to be a naked woman, one leg bent over the other, with her left foot slightly animated, as if dreaming or about to stir. Her poise is complex, with a twist at the waist and her head turned all the way towards us, typical of Hellenistic compositions meant to show bodies that carve the space around them, as the figures of the famous *Laocoön* do. When one walks around the sculpture one sees the back of the figure's hair, the gentle curve of the left breast and an erect penis under the curve of the slightly bent left leg. The composition itself sets the viewer up for this unexpected duality in the sexuality of the sleeping figure. We are meant to think this is a woman; the title, once read, therefore becomes a provocation to either interpret or search for the maleness which at first is not apparent. Hermaphroditism here is a dormant riddle meant to startle or delight us with the unexpected, as if only while sleeping could we double ourselves into male and female.

### III. NADAR, EXAMINATION OF A HERMAPHRODITE, 1861

In 1854, 47 years after Napoleon brought the *Sleeping Hermaphrodite* to Paris, Félix Tournachon, known as Nadar, opened his first photography studio at 11, Boulevard des Capucines. Until his death in 1910, Nadar would be one of the most widely sought after portraitists of his time and place. He photographed Baudelaire, Bernhardt, Delacroix, Berlioz, Georges Sand, Michelet, Daumier, Dore and others, who until then had mostly been known by their works. Now, they would

also be known by their faces, as Nadar and this new technology would define them in countless reproductions. These photographs were a new kind of icon that created a new kind of irreplaceable personality in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Alongside Nadar the portraitist was Nadar the inventor and scientific observer. In this capacity he experimented with new light-sensitive chemicals and photographed the first flying balloons. In 1861, upon the request of Dr. Armand Trousseau and his colleague, the surgeon Jules-Germain Maisonneuve, Nadar took nine photographs of a hermaphrodite. These were the only photographs he ever copyrighted, explicitly naming them for scientific research. Two of these images, now in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, depict a person who has been instructed to remove his/her clothes, all but a long white opened frock shirt that falls to the side and white knee high stockings. The figure has agreed to recline, legs bent at the knees and spread open, while the hand of the surgeon Maisonneuve spreads open the inner labia to reveal the female genitalia. In another image in the series, the same person partially reclines with one leg up while Maisonneuve pulls the edge of the penis forward over the vaginal opening.<sup>2</sup> In both images the figure places his/her hand over their breasts with the other hand obscuring their face. Unlike the images of luminaries Nadar usually photographed, these images are not of a face or a personage, nor of a personality; they are of a body and specifically of the genitals of this body, this hermaphrodite. Why weakened, why sleeping, why faceless—what are we, over three thousand years, afraid of, what are we running away from?

### IV. FREUD, 1933

In 1933, while still living in Vienna, Freud gave and published a lecture entitled

"Femininity."<sup>3</sup> In this piece he identifies the *idée fixe*, or unconscious obsession, of penis envy as a central motivating factor of female sexuality. He argues that the effect of this *idée fixe* causes "physical vanity of women, since they are bound to value their charms more highly as a late compensation for their original sexual inferiority." In the following passage, he justifies this interpretation based upon another theory, the theory that woman, who invented so few things, invented plaiting and weaving as a way to conceal the absence of a penis. Freud writes:

It seems that women have made few contributions to the discoveries and inventions in the history of civilization; there is, however, one technique which they may have invented—that of plaiting and weaving. If that is so, we should be tempted to guess the unconscious motive for the achievement. Nature herself would seem to have given the model which this achievement imitates by causing the growth at maturity of the pubic hair that conceals the genitals. The step that remained to be taken lay in making the threads adhere to one another, while on the body they stick into the skin and are only matted together. If

you reject this idea as fantastic and regard my belief in the influence of the lack of a penis on the configuration of femininity as an *idée fixe*, I am of course defenseless.

Like a link in a chain, Freud perpetuates the perspective of the tormented and vengeful Hermaphroditus who felt weakened by his femaleness. We must not carry this doom any further, nor should our deep and dual sexualities be relegated to a sleeping or faceless state. Like Mallarmé, let us be spiders and poets who "weave at the crossways a few lace which I guess already exist in the heart of Beauty."

1 Ovid, "Myth of the Hermaphrodite," in *Metamorphoses Book IV, lns. 285-389*. Translated by Frank Justus Miller. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977.

2 In France in the 1860s, when these photographs were taken, it was illegal to remain an adult hermaphrodite. A specialist, such as the surgeon Jules-Germain Maisonneuve, whose hand we see revealing the sex organs of the reclining figure in the Nadar images, would determine the "true" sex and operate accordingly, since dual sexuality was not recognized or tolerated as a possibility. The pretext for these nine images may have been the beginning of such an inquiry and subsequent surgery. Foucault writes about this web of legality and the resulting trauma of state-required surgery in the introduction to *Herculine Barbin*, the memoirs of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century hermaphrodite who lived as a woman, but ultimately was made into a man, a transformation she/he did not psychically survive. See *Herculine Barbin*. Introduction by Michael Foucault, translated by Richard McDougall. New York: Pantheon, 1980.

3 Freud, Sigmund. "Lecture XXXIII Femininity," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Translated and edited by James Strachey. New York: Norton, (1933) 1965.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: *Sleeping Hermaphrodite*. Roman 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD after Greek 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC original. Mattress by Bernini 17<sup>th</sup> c. Photo credit: Eric Lessing. Art Resources, NY. Louvre, Paris

OPPOSITE PAGE: *Examination of a Hermaphrodite*. Felix Nadar. 1861. Art Resources NY, Reunion des Musées Nationaux, Musée d'Orsay, Paris





# excerpt from HIGH FIVE FOR RAM DASS a work in progress

HARRIET "HARRY" DODGE

## BOOK 1

"Two of the members are stuck down a hole." Asia has been sent back to find us, perhaps a day and a half behind Group 1. She emerges from a patch of Palo Verde and skips the last few feet down into the wash. We are surrounded by gray rocks the size of brontosaurus testicles. My ankles are weak. "The Neils think you are the only one who can get him out." I hate all the Neils. Smug, I hate smug. I would never ever name a person Neil after this experience.

Marx the Authoritarian is whimpering by the time I arrive. I guess smack dab in the middle of clubbing a squirrel to death, he started an allergic reaction to an unripe prickly pear they had just finished brunching on. With a muted snap, his epiglottal appendage had very suddenly inflamed to the size of a ping pong ball. Presumably, he reeled, lost his footing and was hurled into the old well. As an aside, at approximately 29 inches in

diameter it was a ridiculously tight opening and had to have been excavated initially by a real lazy motherfucker.

I notice a trio of scavengers have dragged a small set of bleachers over and I suppose people will be making themselves at home for the duration of the spectacle. One of Marx the Authoritarian's legs is underneath him touching the floor of the damp trap, and one leg is straight above him. His knee is pressing into his throat "really really hard!" he yells up, but his allergic reaction has subsequently reversed itself. And again, I'm not sure how Sabbath died and then got down there on top of him.

"Air Supply, is that you buddy?" The length of the cave actually amplifies his voice. The voice of the clumsy spelunker. "I hope to God that it's you." I can hear that he is drooling.

I get down on all my knees, put my cheek to the warm dirt around the rim of the loamy ventricle. "You've been off-kilter lately," I

murmur. I know he can hear me perfectly. A dense hush settles onto the bleachers.

"What? Shit. I'm totally smashed in here man!" His voice cracks. I sit up for a moment and concentrate on a set of deep amber buttes way off to my right. I narrow my eyes at the Neils, who are all puckered together in the front row. M the A is crying now. Apparently subsumed by a panic that strikes me and most of the other people on the bleachers as unattractive. Where was my sportsmanship now? Beyond my control was the urge to crap down the hole instead of just jettison my garbage thoughts.

...

Having been on the land the longest (by my count) I was both respected and regarded with suspicion. I had managed to become an outsider among the outsiders (while living outside). Bruised with the psychic arrows discharged continually by the lingering specter of youth culture (you can take the young out of culture ...), I inarguably remained ... a being diminutive in physical stature and, more to the point, fundamentally narrow. I also had long hairs that protruded idiotically from both of my nostrils. For these reasons and some others I will refrain from mentioning, I was therefore best qualified for the dangerous mission that was to follow.

"Spirituality is a mean nasty chicken snatcher," I said down the hole. "Spirituality," I tilted my head away from the earthy orifice in a covert address to the remaining bystanders, "no matter how softy soft you think it is—steals the marvelous from the physical world." I was totally off the point and I knew it. A renewed round of sobs arose from the soggy grotto.

"What are you driving at, Air Supply?!" His cries sounded like a dog yelping. I felt like killing him.

"Let's eat him after you pull him up," Neil Sedaka suggested. His tiny flipper fingers wriggled almost imperceptibly just off

his clavicle.

Neil Sedaka. There was a guy whose surgery had gone well. Amputations, reductions, substitutions were now substantially more commonplace than, say, five years ago. I think in lieu of the lobotomy for lingual excision, aerodynamism was compelling to pretty much everyone who ended up becoming a member. Helen Reddy had once described a related mindset that materialized just after the millennium. They started calling it body integrity identity disorder. Where a person requests an amputation. They have a mulish desire for their body to physically match the idealized image they have of themselves. A very spicy paradox, the idea of losing one or more major limbs on the road to becoming whole. "Less is more," Helen Reddy had chortled. Chicago was always calling it Modernism and then farting.

## BOOK 2

Shortly after I was able to sit up, my mother strapped me to my potty seat and left me there for just over three years. I still have callouses on the back of my thighs to prove it. She managed to feed me now and then, empty the bowl on most days, and wipe me down biennially, but she never said a damn thing in my direction. I was just like a little tunnel. Respirating. Memorizing the lines of the dim doorway, the knob, a glowing yellow shade over my left shoulder. Sometimes I heard her crying, padding around in her slippers, one day she killed a cat in the downstairs foyer. City workers eventually found me there, a little filthy pink Rodin, pooping. I was real skinny. At that point—so the story goes—I wanted to know the words for everything. Humans are funny and stupid. Why would I want to know the words for anything? We have like cookie cutters instead of brains.

I met my one good friend at the Agency

though. There were a lot of feral kids there, or partially feral, but the best one was a kid they rescued off a Patagonian plateau a few years before. He had been in the wilderness there since he was four and a half, tending sheep. Enslaved, apparently, and neglected. He never really cared to speak, was barely managing his daily chorus "I'd gladly go back" over a late lunch one day when he keeled over of a brain aneurysm. I tried to help him, but I thought he was choking on a french fry and was way into the Heimlich thing when the EMTs showed up and noticed the blood balloon forming on the side of his tender eager little enslaved head. I miss him though, don't get me wrong. I can still hear his tiny whispering mantra. Probably he's why I ended up on this land, trying to figure out how to get Marx the Authoritarian out of his hole.

I started submitting articles to the Food Insects Newsletter and the Society for Primitive Technology at the age of thirteen. The first one was called *Hunter Gatherers Were Sometimes Very Labor-Efficient*. The second one, *Collecting Ant Pupae For Food*. At sixteen I submitted an incisive piece entitled *They Ate What!?* in italics with a question mark and exclamation point. There were too many to name. My annual Food Insect Festivals of North America garnered me the coveted Leppy in 1989 and Fried Grasshoppers For Campouts Or At Home is to date the one of which I am most proud.

My preludial phases are most effectively characterized by the sentence fragment that follows, "A bunch of ass-eating jumbos." The assorted biological anti-fruits of my failed gene enhancements are—however—at this juncture quite striking and—I have to admit—have garnered a certain amount of praise and/or erotic attention. Chicks dig me. Life as an earthling without outer ear cones, less one arm, and with three spindly little brittle-boned birdlegs has not been as

wholly joyless as one (not in the know) may imagine. There are thousands of us. Narrows we're called. Our bodies are more cylindrical (although the difference is negligible and for the most part imperceptible), and our ribs are very flexible. When it counts, I can fit into places that are most certainly a pretty tight squeeze for the old guard.

### BOOK 3

We are allowed to bring five pounds in with us. Like heredity. Where you show up with a certain load. Primeval gifts we give ourselves. I bring in a very lightweight sleeping bag that frays and disintegrates over the course of my first week. In addition I bring in a stack of pornography which comes in handy as a blanket until I perfect the employment of pine boughs, coal beds and various terrain appropriate shelters.

Chicago, Asia, Fleetwood Mac. We are all given soft rock names as we arrive. The goal is a resynthesis of the worst of contemporary culture. Vaccinations. Sometimes someone gets the name of a person who didn't do soft rock. One guy got the name Lee Iacocca and another guy, his lover who came at the same time, got Simon Wincer, who directed *Free Willy* in 1993. No one on the land knows who the original Simon Wincer is but Simon Wincer the guy from our group feels okay even not having a famous name to live out the rest of his days with. Another guy got the name Marx the Authoritarian. Which I thought was nice cuz it rhymed with Conan the Barbarian. He was just a little guy though, like me. He was really nice and kind of wispy.

There's only been one baby born into the community, Eagles and Beegees had a perfect little hermaphrodite which they called The Brown Dwarf. Brown dwarfs are this type of star in actual outer space that never lit on fire. They have a lot of mass but not enough

to create the explosion that would light them up. So they account for some of the mass or gravity that certain near galaxies exert but we have no way of seeing them because they do not emit light. They apparently have a sucking capability that does not rival a black hole. It is a brown dwarf. A mysterious blob of as yet primordial ooze. Awaiting assignment. Like universal stem cells.

...

Once a week Neil Sedaka goes out and liberates a capitalist. We roast him whole like the pig he is with an apple in his mouth and then eat him without using our hands. Again the idea is unification, wholeness (so we don't disassemble the corpse) and also some hair of the dog stuff to keep us on our toes. We do this weekly, did I say that, and while we eat, we chant UNIGUY, UNIGUY. Shim's our mascot. A human version of the absolute. A being with just a body, no appendages or holes at all. I think of him like a cross between Casper the Ghost and an octopus. I don't know why. We trance out during these group be-ins. I like it a lot.

...

I happen to know that pretty much all matter is made out of the same stuff. These tiny little things called strange, charm and neutrinos. Objects and organisms just form and reform out of the ooze. There are certain particles that are especially attracted to other particles so that's why certain forms are really common as far as the observable universe. Like iron, the whole core of the earth is a hard iron ball and then a bunch of liquid iron around it. And hydrogen is the most common. That's what most of the stars are eating. Ninety-two percent of everything is hydrogen. It weighs ONE. A lot of people have done research around why for example humans don't just fall into a pile of iron and hydrogen. It's cuz we're in a struggle with the sun's heat apparently. The organism stays organized as long as it has a task. If

I had to make a molecule out of humans ... Ram Dass would be the proton, Barbra Streisand would be the electron, and Ted Kaczinsky as the neutron.

In moments of glee members will often yell out, "High five for Ram Dass!" and slap hands about face level. It is not that high of a five. This salutation is apparently particular to this land and this membership. They were doing it pretty often even on the very first day I arrived.

### BOOK 4

I address the slimy aperture. "You're going to have to gnaw the limbs off of Sabbath's torso. It looks from here like he's just in a big weird tangle." No response. I scratch my balls and listen for any signs of morbidity. Pull my loincloth out of my ass crack.

I hear high-pitched whining. Fast mindless breaths. He is using up air.

"The exploited and dispossessed of this world can no longer seriously desire to get a piece of this putrefying pie, nor to take it over and 'self-manage' it!" I drone into the orifice earnestly. Behind me a tired voice, "Right on buddy."

I sprinkle a bit of soil onto the fleshy blockage. "Why'd you contact press?"

"So we can get more members. So people would know!" Strained, macho delivery.

"Listen up. If my solidarity with certain actions is critical it's because I can see calculation creeping in. If I reject all cooperation with the media it's because that power structure demands those who choose to participate in its activity to suddenly measure their words, drain them of substance, of the energy force that refuses all compromise!"

Growls from below. Humming.

...

Of late there's been mild divisions occurring in the community. There are the stone agers (stoners), the postindustrial scaven-

gers (scabs), and a few of just your basic sort of medieval barbarians whom we affectionately call Streisand. The scavengers have widened their foraging goals to include bits of plastic, metal, wood siding, car parts, synthetic drugs, pornography. They're generally a lot more angry than the stoners. They don't seem to have any hope. I can never tell if they're scabs cuz they have no hope or they have no hope cuz they're scabs. They always strike me as without core, low on will and willpower.

Over at the bleachers some of the folks have broken off into effervescent trios and commenced to some serious butt sniffing. It seems invariably headed to some sort of coital feral flurry and I am melancholy about having to miss out on it.

"Stupid fucking purist troglodyte ..." He continues to manifest an inky brattish courage that for some reason reminds me of that poepline down a shrimp.

"You're just a fucking essentialist," he adds.

"I am not!" I say and pop my finger out of my ass. "I'm the opposite!" That M the A is revealing a truer bourbonism than I have previously identified in him.

"There is no such thing as human nature ..." He runs out of breath, sucks the heavy air back into his lungs and continues. "You idiot! There *is* no ONE truth." I finger my armpit hair casually.

"The things that are true are the *things that are true*, buddy. Just cuz you don't know what they are doesn't mean they don't exist!!"

"What good is a thing that is unknowable?" he exhorts.

"Not sure. But on the same arm, what good is a thing that is knowable?" Silence from below.

"Tell me something good member. Did you like the feeling of the cookie cutter when it came?"

He is unrepentant. "I did, Air Supply. I DID."

"Well, I DID NOT, pal. I didn't." Long pause. We had finished simultaneously.

He is crying quietly. "I'm scared, Air Supply, please pull me out."

Silence.

...

Chuck Mangione, Late Zeppelin and a Streisand are stuffed under the bleachers in a throbbing gyroscopic heap. Late Zeppelin's head is banging into the aluminum bench at a pace that makes me feel like doing "The Bus Stop." I watch them for a long minute and the crickets rev up their nighttime calypso. Buttes the color of ash and pumpkin ascend until mercifully, they eclipse the sun. A totally relaxing primal event. I feel looser. The air is soft, exactly the temperature of my skin and fragrant to boot. Orange blossoms. Tuna. Whimpers, screams, yells replace the metallic fuck-gonging and before long the trio emerges into the soft dark night smiling. Stumbling on loose hips.

I soften considerably. "All right people, get the winch. Tell the other Neils to bring the truck." I take a couple of steps and notice Poco—whose penis is pushed into his body like a vagina—growl and snap the little fucker back out to a sproingy seven inch with the aid of a handmade bladder. I stop in my tracks.

"Hold on Neil, forget the winch, let's make some cordage. Tell Yanni to kill a few squirrels. We don't have a lot of time."

#### BOOK 5

The tinder bundle is made from any kind of dry fibrous materials like dead grass. Doobie Bros, Sonny and Cher, Ambrosia and the rest of the members start drifting into Meat Mecca for the LCD (Liberated Capitalist Dinner). I pick around behind a patch of smoke trees, find a couple of twigs. I notice

Chuck Mangione looking at me out of the corner of her one good eye.

Back at the pit I get everything set up, make a bow, press the socket into the spindle and hold it with my mouth. Then back and forth. I don't rush. After a few minutes smoke starts rising from the bark. Chuck is actually smirking at this point, intently focused on my activity. Slowly, gently, I pull the board away from the bark, wave my hand over the dust and there it is, the red-orange glow of a firebead. I see Chuck Mangione through the haze of my handiwork. She winks and pokes her tongue out between the left part of her lips.

I happen to know she has part of her face that is motionless now and it will be like that for the rest of her days. The paralysis is from an old sex act injury where she collapsed of ecstasy in a standing bondage position, the collar had tightened around her neck while the person in charge of the whole thing was taking a whiz. Basically, she didn't get enough air for a few minutes one night. Her sidesmile is absolutely enchanting, though, and the long auburn curls that cascade down her back like seventy-seven waterfalls are just too much for my little body to bear. I smile back.

I cup the bundle and blow into it from underneath. One, two, three and boom, it bursts into flame right in the palm of my hand. Everyone cheers. I have created life and energy and I feel good.

We have stuffed the LC with a combination of mealyworms, grasshoppers, cattail roots and mustard. His hands are starting to look a little bloated and I am relieved when we finally get him over the fire. The meal is protein heavy but most of us are a little light on our feet so it never hurts. After eating and UNIGUY chanting, I walk over and find Chuck Mangione. She's laughing with U2 who is now wearing the meat corpse's shirt. It is mostly frowned on to pilfer the civ-wear

from the meat corpses but in this case we could all see the draw. Tie dye looked pretty decent on U2. In a soft way. I don't think anyone else could have pulled it off.

I kick the warm dirt. Toe a very small fragment of what appears to be colon tissue in a move that I hope comes off as humble, eager.

At a loss for propositional technical terms, I hasten a shot. "I like your fur." I poke at her hair. "Would you like to get funky with me?"

"She's a lesbian!" U2 sneers in a really nerdy voice and then cackles loudly. Chuck holds my gaze. That sidesmile is really a star up close.

"You know there's no real genders anymore," I continue.

"Yeah, I know." Her left eye is unswerving.

"Plus, my dick is so small you might mistake it for a clitoris. You wouldn't be the first."

"A micro-penis," she purrs. "That's sexy."

"I'm not kidding." I kick into bachman turner overdrive and we both start to walk at the same time.

"Yeah, and you could fly a 747 into my ass opening too ..."

If she had two sides to her mouth they would definitely have collaborated on this particular grin. I kiss her on the the motionless little flap of skin that is her right eyelid.

"Get America and Spyro Gyra into the Haystack Hut in half an hour. You'll each lose a forearm up there before you can say 'Bakunin's Revenge.'" Bakunin's Revenge is what the group calls it when a member is constipated. No one says it outright but slowness is considered a sign of faintness of heart. Lack of feral primacy, rewilding ambition. I'm proud to say I never have suffered from it.

...



I get over to the Roadkill Rapprochement just before she does and load up on what we call bacon fat. It's actually CEO drippings. From when we happened to liberate a CEO. And if you just want to use it as personal lubricant, it "stays good" for up to four months. In a penicillin sort of way.

Chuck Mangione shows up a few minutes late with Pablo Cruise and Joe Cocker. This really burns me up for a long minute. We whisper-argue like eviscerated rubber chickens.

"I didn't say you could bring just *anyone*! Pablo Cruise and Joe Cocker??" I feel totally dirty.

"Well, Air Supply, they think you're sexy." She pauses a beat for dramatic effect. "So." She sucks her good cheek into her teeth.

I abdicate. "You know the rules, though, nothing divisible by two."

So Joe Cocker watches while we get off. Concentrically abiding the mandate that we disavow his pleasure in the creation of ours. I'll just say right here that the three of us do absolutely everything that any body can do to another body. And we do it TWICE. Pablo Cruise in particular is creative. Marsupial such that takes my breath away. Shim is a nasty little pachyderm. Not trendy at all.

## BOOK 6

We have managed to tack together a half-mile length of dried buck guts, and water from the creek is now flowing freely into the skinny terrestrial blowhole. Marx the Authoritarian remains unconvinced regarding the efficacy of this particular succession of experiments and is letting loose a string of shrieks that serve only to fuel the burgeoning disdain we are all struggling to quash. Poco and Asia are manically addressing any number of small leaks with a quick-dry sap and blood paste that Joe Wheelie had showed me in the initial days of my membership.

"Tie this to Sabbath's hair!" I drop down a boingy bladder balloon. It descends with a series of whispery boms and comes to rest on the gangrenous clot that had been gentle Sabbath.

## BOOK 7

Later that night I wake up to the sound of heckling. ELO and Genesis are raking Late Zeppelin over the coals.

"You can't do meth on the land, man!" They are both yelling at once. "That's EXCESS, dude. Accumulation."

I see what they are freaking out about. There's a pile of berries about the size of a Volkswagen van just beyond the Coal Bed Corral.

"If we keep that shit we're for sure going straight to hell."

Late Zeppelin stares at his handiwork, a tremolo in his voice. "Babylon man. I get it." He's trying to let them know that he knows it is wrong. That he is getting their point. "Can we make preserves or something?"

You can tell he feels bad and is in a place where he doesn't have control over his drug use. He's probably just on the land with us as a way to not get picked up by the 5-0 which is fine in a totally understandable awesome way, but which is often an all-too-diaphanous layer which falls away to reveal a stark ambivalence regarding the goals of rewilding.

Rewilding isn't a cakewalk you know. And Late Zeppelin is finding that out. Behind the monolith of his drug use is a very smart guy. I personally know that he once had been marooned on a desert island with a nurse and a bunch of kids. They were literally dying of thirst. Off the top of his head he thought up the idea of filtering salt water through his rectum. Like an inverted or at least internal coffee filter of sorts. It worked. He was a survivor. A survivalist. I could no

longer organize the difference in my mind. Which was melty on a clear day and kaleidoscopic on most.

I stop listening and decide to go over and see Lee Iacocca and Simon Wincer. They've been perfecting a method of PM hookless fishing. Giant paleozoic catfish is a great break from roadkill and I am definitely on board with the ongoing cultivation of any and all of the johnny-come-lately earth skills. This maneuver strikes me time and again as magnificently spartan, though I have personally avoided subjecting myself to the mild pain that apparently accompanies the almost static hunt.

A member wades quietly into the silty pool which is steep-sided if not shallow and rife with horizontal orifices just about the size of a pudgy human leg. Kind of like an underwater adobe village. Shim chooses a cavity, pushes an entire arm into it and waits for the cumbrous feline mariner to note the sudden company of a stumpy pink eel. Before long one's arm is suddenly and violently engulfed by the fishy corpus. At this point in the conjugation it is imperative that the soggy angler tickle the fish's butt from inside. Normally a slight flex in the pointer finger does the job. Hundreds of tiny, razory teeth subsequently jab into the bracelet of skin just above the forearm. Boom. Pull 'em out, wrestle 'em onto the shore and have the land guy club the ugly motherfucker asap. These were weird formless things. Wide with big rubbery whiskers.

There was a guy who had initiated the hook free fishing (that's how Simon and Lee got in on it) but last month the fishing guy, his name was Foghat but for some reason we called him Tigger. Anyway, his coal bed was way too hot one night and he just fried himself almost to death. In the morning, he was only like half gone but we sort of mobbed it up and put him out of his misery. It wasn't even like a vote. We don't really vote on stuff

here, just feel vibes. The vibe on that morning was, "Let's eat the motherfucker." That's just how it went. I don't know. The sun wasn't even up yet when it happened.

...

I am in wash with gentle hills on all sides, lots of empty, wildflower-covered fields. I walk a couple of miles to the river and then haul myself onto the dale near the peat bog. It is pitch black with no moon and I consistently hear wildlife scurrying as I approach their hiding spots. Several deer bound across a field and many ducks take off from a spring-fed pond on my right.

I think more about my upcoming lobotomy. I can't wait to really break with civilization. I feel more than a little regretful (or angry I guess more like) that I have been taught the names for everything. That I had been such an awesome speller as a kid. In fifth grade when we graphed sentences I had been the only person in class to follow the lesson. I was regretful cuz I was probably going to toss in a certain amount of intuition with my language lobes. I guess they're on separate sides of the brain, but you never know. I'm humble regarding the scope of my senses. My understanding of nature. Our consciousnesses made of matter and then convinced that they are not. We are arrogant, insist even as we die in droves of cancer and hurricanes that we are at the top of the food chain. We then, completely baffled about the issue of infinity. It so clearly exists as in the case of the universe, but even the poor cosmologists will acknowledge that as soon as we learn our first word, we may as well kiss the universe goodbye. Scale problems. Magnitude impossibilities. You can't know WORDS and the shape of the universe.

It is a beautiful walk. I struggle up the bajada and make it onto the mesa without twisting any of my ankles. My feet are narrow, have been designed after bird bones, for an awesome weight to strength ratio. I am



tripedal though so I am actually ON each foot for less time than any of the bipes. The little cheeses I call feet rarely ache, but I do twist my ankles a lot.

I get over there and coincidentally Dire Straits is standing on shore wearing nothing but a jockstrap and he has an old TV strapped to his waist. There is a long squiggly rough mud track from where he has dragged the old machine in with him. The light from the moon glistens, reflecting off little drops of blood starting to form at the apex of his hip bone plates. His lobotomy seems to be working out. He is pretty much the coolest member. I nod to him. He exhales quite audibly through his nose, smiling with only the corners of his sweet eyes. I walk over and hug him. After a moment, he actually wraps his skinny arms quite surely around my melancholic little torso. At that point, I decide to press the clan for post-lobotomy title changes. It only seems right that if you have had culture removed from your consciousness that you be no longer required to wear it daily, an emblem of your tubercular history. Like Hester Prynne and her scarlet letter. I want to call him Wolf. Or just like, a grunty *hugff!!* With two exclamation points. I want to change his name to Wolf or Lava Bomb.

Lee Iaccoca and Simon Wincer are nowhere around so I decide to keep on. I realize right then that Dire Wolf is beyond names. He is the shape of the universe now and all the ooze it contains. Totally unnamable. I pull a joint out of my loincloth and smoke it as I walk.

Yanni—who walks around with a picture of an asshole taped over his left eye—had taken his ultralight up just before he came onto the land about five years ago. Dropped a bunch of sativa cuttings. Thousands of seedlings, so we were basically baked about seventy-five percent of the time. It didn't officially count as agriculture cuz it was out of

our hands, figuratively.

I had passed a bunch of wild onions, dotted in with glacier lilies near the creek, so I head back to pick some up for breakfast. Once I get to the creek I stretch out and try to nap but then lie there, looking at the clouds move in the night sky. I hock a loogie up into the space above my face, a rotating nebula, phlegm in the shape of the universe. I open my mouth as wide as it will go, intending a retrieval of the fluid, but it misses my straining yaw and lands as usual on the rock next to my earhole. I do this enough times before sleep overtakes me that the back of my hair is still wet and musky when I get up. I dream that I am a clown, I dance, I tell Irish alcoholic jokes to people at bat mitzvahs.

## MORE OR LESS

GREGG BORDOWITZ

I would prefer not to.

*Bartleby the Scrivener*

...

Each one as she may.

*Gertrude Stein*

...

Drop by drop into one's mouth the taste of piss pleases. Not a full stream rather the redolent kiss off one's genitals. Urine is waste subtracted from one's body. It is what is not needed and yet it always comes out of necessity. One needs to pee often painfully as a matter of release. So the pleasure in peeing can be felt as a submission to what one cannot help but do. Not water, not spit, not sweat, not cum, not blood, not beer, not asparagus and somehow in part all of these. If not one, then the other, or neither. Every drop is always itself, its opposite and something else.

One simply wants to serve, to give over to desire, to completely dissolve satisfaction into delirium. One is totally responsible for one's pleasure and ultimately one is dependent on pleasure as the principal feature defining one's relation to others. One enjoys others when it pleases or not.

A big sticky object, one can potentially adhere to anything. Dangerous to stick to

anything and everything, yet one gets stuck. Avoid attachment if one can and one will always succumb.

One has a list of preferences. Each is a gift but no one comes from the same one and each is intended for another:

One prefers the life lived well over the life lived freely.

Apart from the constraints of birth and death, about which one has no choice, there do exist choices. Choose what one may. Consequences will certainly follow.

One prefers the ongoing labor of creativity over the completed work of creation.

Whatever can be completed disintegrates. Whatever appears done is not.

One prefers knowledge over information.

To know is to care.

One prefers care over love.

Each one kills the thing one loves. (apologies to Oscar Wilde)

One prefers pleasure over procreation.

Enjoyment is the goal. All progeny are accidents.

One prefers passion over responsibility.

Sensations are both the causes and the effects of one's passions. Responsibility serves passion even when it does not intend to serve it.

One prefers the fierce attachment over the security of marriage.

Attachments can last where marriages do not.

One prefers the vitality of bodies over the health of nations.

When one is ill one has a kinship with the diseased wherever they fall.

One is like so many that one is not one, never one, always one of a number. One is one of many but not the same as any other, never the same, not exactly. One is peculiar, both one thing and another, here and there, real and imaginary. Certainly one terminates. Every one has an end. One falls everywhere resting anywhere but one never keeps the same in the same place like the others. One simply does not have a choice. Rising one falls and collects. Dropping to gather, one changes, and one evaporates, and each one is constrained by the same gravity as any other.

# TOUR DIARY<sup>1</sup>

JOHANNA FATEMAN

## COLOGNE, SHOW DAY

If you walk far enough (down the alley where you enter/exit the club, to the street, then left), the sun will set. Block after block is lined with low apartment buildings and every window is hung with white lace curtains. Except for the one window (out of thousands) that's displaying a Bob Marley tapestry. Beyond the overpass there's a billboard picturing a dead child positioned in front of a car's bumper, a trickle of blood at her temple (a public service campaign re: drunk driving maybe, or, who knows, it's in German) and another billboard, an ad for licorice. A dominatrix in black patent leather has a glassy licorice square speared on a long acrylic nail. Turn back when you come to a dusky cul-de-sac where only kids are out. Teens walk like unsheathed knives, radiant with expertise vis-à-vis popular cul-

ture, and high on their disdain for the older generation. The sharpening of blades (the politicization of youth estrangement) sounds like crickets chirping and windshield wipers. Teens are free because they're not responsible. Their parents are responsible, legally.

I took a Claritin-D so I'm wide-eyed and sweating through a fanzine interview on a metal staircase across the alley where our tour bus is parked. The luxury and scale of the bus make capital transparent. The stack of xeroxed back-issues this girl has put on my lap distracts me. When faced with it, the prominence of my band as a subject in a particular sub-cultural discourse about difference politics is unsettling. We talk about being on a major label; it's pretty scripted. Before I leave she persuades me to draw a picture to accompany the interview. I disappoint myself by drawing a scratchy picture

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1 Un-chronological excerpts from journals kept on tour (September 2004 – April 2005) with Le Tigre, a punk feminist electronic band comprised of Kathleen Hanna, JD Samson and myself.

of a tiger shaking hands with a businessman, but she seems okay with it.

#### SYDNEY, SHOW DAY

There's a blizzard in New York, but we're on a different planet. Here it's hot, bright, perfect for a massive outdoor rock festival. A parade of male creeps breezes by security through the entrance to the artists' area but women are suspected stalkers. I have to show both sides of my all-access pass, it's scrutinized for signs of forgery, and the guy tenderly gathers my hair away from my neck to see my tattoo, in a motion like my hair is in the way of him seeing me giving him a blow job or something. Not ten feet from us a gay-looking kid in clown-white and chains vomits violently. The subjugation's ambient. As tokens, exceptions to the near total exclusion of women in the festival line-up, we are given a chance to meditate on it (exclusion) from a couple of different vantage points: we watch from far behind the crowd on shady bleachers; we watch from the side of the stage, Slipknot guys sprinting to suck oxygen through their masks from tanks manned by crew guys behind the drum-riser.

#### SHEFFIELD, SHOW DAY

*I'm in Sheffield, U.K. on tour with the Clash and it's become completely clear that I've lost interest in rock and roll. It's the exact feeling that I want to leave, which seems to be my most profound characteristic. I began to suspect it as soon as we'd finished the album and I actually knew it by the time we arrived in England. I've never really been interested in being a musician and with the completion of the album I'd accomplished my aims—including: affecting the style of the popular art (which means affecting the culture), attaining certain public credentials as an artist, and making a record that is a*

*classic.* —Richard Hell, 1977<sup>2</sup>

We're in Sheffield too and I'm drawn to this kind of disavowal and grandiosity as well. But that's not the kind of attitude you bring on stage. Something's telling me to drink a Red Bull (the croissant I'm eating sucks and I want to feel different). The way I feel now, I only want to read a Victorian novel, but if I drank a Red Bull I might want to: think, write, play a show? Our aim is to create a public event with an emancipatory and hopeful vibe. The question is how can one reconcile private feelings of fatigue, skepticism, and bookishness with the public performance of earnest struggle/celebration. Luckily, with regard to this problem we can look to the history of feminist art for answers.

#### VIENNA, PRESS DAY

It's better to just put your cards on the table: here we are, three women who exclude all men, and in addition to that, we exclude all women who are not exactly ourselves. We're one thing (women) even as we are split into three parts to speak to three different journalists simultaneously. My part is doing an interview for the radio. An interview is a platform. In this case, it's in some kind of upper-level elevator-lounge that's quieter than the ground-floor lobby. The less ambient noise for a taped interview, the better! This journalist is thinking, this is a lot better (quieter) than the lobby.

It's better to just say it right off the bat: why is there a man in the band, and if there isn't a man in the band why does it appear to be so (pointing to album cover)? Luckily, I'm not the man in question. Not only am I definitely a woman, I am defiantly a woman. My hair grows longer and blonder. My eyelashes are plush and black like spider legs. Part of being a woman, I mean, being a feminist

publicly, is being a woman who is unafraid to explain things as they come up during interviews for radio broadcast. So, without hesitation, au contraire, with every appearance of having an appetite for on-air discussion of even the most difficult and bizarre topics, I dig in. I tear into it. I'm on a roll. In general, a rock journalist will be made hysterical (bored to tears) by this kind of talk. But he asked for it and someone out there will lap it up. I've poured out a shallow dish of cough syrup, held out a wooden spoon slick with cake batter. I'm drunk on the subject of gender again!

#### MADRID, DAY OFF

We hear the faint hum of a live TV when we enter a new hotel room and it's a little scary: have we mistakenly gained entry to someone else's room, is there a man here with the porn channel muted and the curtains closed? But the room's empty and the TV screen is blue with white type welcoming Mrs. Fateman and Mr. Samson, inviting us to navigate the menu of hotel services. Luckily there's nobody here to become terribly embarrassed when the shocking realization is made, so the hospitable gender slip is actually cool. Our hotel room is Sisterhood, AKA "not-reality": all we really want is CNN because the under-reported bloodshed in Iraq has kept Terry Schiavo and the Pope alive for eleven days now. And we're wondering how their pending deaths will in turn affect the situation in Iraq. We've got free high speed so Mr. Samson's searching for a vegetarian restaurant in the neighborhood, I'm filling the sink with underwear.

#### BERLIN, SHOW DAY

"Writing" seems impossible to me now, but perfect phrases flare and disappear in my peripheral vision when I'm doing something else. Like walking through a crowd. I feel responsible to a new entity, I've got

a need to conceal my true personality (theoretical concerns and nihilistic tone) from an abstract/fantasized demographic of observers. This feeling started when Audience outstripped Community. Community is now proportionally tiny, but mythically important, and somehow that's damaging my ability to write.

I walk to a department store near the club and buy a mother and baby seal made out of marzipan, masochistically spray my wrist with a fucked-up perfume that comes in a grenade-like atomizer, wander aimlessly. Outside I find a bench and eat the mother and then the baby seal while I read my book. It turns out there's a whole contemporary genre of terrible novels about historically important people/events retold through the first person narration of a servant who witnessed it all.

2 Richard Hell, *Artifact: Notebooks from Hell 1974 - 80* (Madras & New York: Hanuman Books, 1992), 114.

# CIRCA 1968

MARY KELLY

You are here,  
Next to a young man with beautiful hair,  
En route to the Bastille, May 13,  
One day before the general strike,  
Two days after the Sorbonne reopens,  
Ten days since the police occupation,  
Four months following the riots at Caen,  
In the wake of wildcat strikes in Lyons,  
Longer since the *matraquage*:  
October 17, 1961,  
Algerian workers, clubbed to death,  
Thrown into the Seine from Neuilly Bridge.

Behind you, the photographer,  
Seconds before the shutter clicks, immuring the moment,  
Not long before you are born.

Straight ahead, the shoulders of an artist,  
Supporting his companion who has *mal aux pieds*.  
*La Marianne de mai*:  
*"Des tas d'idées me passent par la tête.*  
*Je pense même à la Révolution française.*  
*Moi, la jeune fille d'une bonne famille anglaise.*

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*Je commence à poser.*  
*Mon corps se raidit.*  
*Je tends mon bras.*  
*Mon visage devient plus grave.*  
*Alors, je suis piégée par le rôle que j'essaie d'incarner."*

Above, a flag,  
Neither communist, nor anarchist, but Vietnamese,  
Two years after the bombing of Hanoi,  
Chicago and Kent State still ahead. Now,  
"We are all German Jews."  
"We are all *la pègre*."  
"On a raison de se révolter."

On the balcony, a banner:  
USINE-UNIVERSITÉ-UNION.  
No separation, no delegation,  
No right to speak without *les enquêtes*.

To the left, "We want more time to live!"  
More time ... more ... everything ...  
"Everything, right now!"

Below, *les marronniers*, in bloom perhaps,  
The smell of exaltation, exhaustion:  
Ten dead, 1500 injured.  
More than a cultural revolution,  
Yet less than expected.  
Beneath the paving stones,  
More than the beach.

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# BOTTOM WARS

MATT WOLF

When two bottoms  
have it away, they're battling.

Yesterday, I was reading  
Jack Smith talk  
about *Normal Love*.

He says,  
"People should caress each other during their quarrels."

So when two battling bottoms,  
have a fight,  
butting butts,  
they're fucking.

Between a bottom  
and a bottom is  
useful negativity.

2

# excerpts from THIEVES WITH TINY EYES

ANNA JOY SPRINGER

## THE BLACKBIRD II

*[Remember this is a love letter. It has been fourteen years since we met at that summer art school for ambitious young talents. Back then, I wanted to be a famous poet and she wanted to be a famous opera singer. There had been no revolution in communication technologies, and there was no Silicon Valley, as far as we knew. No cellular phones, no World Wide Web, no Global Village, no Free Trade.]*

*There was just an outline of a promised hill, always this dumb scraggly hill. Always with dramatic lighting. Fifteen years now, later, and rarely a hill in sight.]*

The blackbirds don't love to fly, they do it everyday.

Hindsight: One day to notice.

Was it or wasn't it the drugs? I was so certain. What is called euphoria, or mania, or a blessing aggression. And now I remember with new names. Red, orange, yellow, the lower thrust, green (which is pink), blue,

violet, running up the imaginary internal skyline, all these new names, new measuring sticks. How touching was not yet a sort of ethical dilemma. I would touch her thoughtlessly, we had boys for fucking. I would collect her hairs, like in old-fashioned times, braid them and hide them like writers of long cursive letters. But that kind of thing seems so dangerous now. And danger is worse than ever.

*[Knowing this, I will try to talk about rape and you shouldn't believe me. I will convince you I'm reciting tomes about deals and devils. Be warned, I'll be skirting the issue.]*

## THE CROW

Too separate to be a world. All of us fence sitting, there on the wire.

## THE SWAN II

Here's an essay about rape which is supposed to be such a big thing. But when you consider it, it's only bad if you think it's

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bad. Like for instance, why do we think shit smells bad? I happen to think it smells good. If it's my shit, I think sometimes that it's a good smell, and there's supposed to be something wrong with me for that? Am I some kind of freak, because I totally know I am, already, okay?

And the question is *what kind of shit?*

Because if a swan rapes you it's not as bad, according to the smartest of the smart. Not such a big thing, just regular. But is that true if all these guys want to paint it in pictures and write a song about it? And why should a swan be so special? So if you're passed out in the shower fucking and throw up on the guy who's a waterpolo player and popular, and you wake up with no shoes, what's the big deal? It's not like they told you the world was safe for women. I never get in trouble anymore because I just like it. I'm just like, "I don't care if you want to fuck me, I like it." And if you throw up on him and he doesn't like it that's his fucking problem. There's ramifications for everything, and if you fuck a passed out girl she might wake up and puke in your face. It's only a big deal if you let it be a big deal, and if you let it be a big deal, they will keep doing it because the rapers know it bothers you.

And I don't buy that whole thing about rape only being a form of rage, not sexual arousal, because I'm totally enraged all the time and I've never gone ahead and raped somebody. Not that I knew it anyway. Except my mother felt raped I think, when I was with this guy on the lawn in front of my house last week and she heard us and it kept her up. Fuck her, it's not like I didn't have to hear her getting fucked all the time all night long, it's not like I didn't have to sit there at the dinner table with her and Sam when they were going through their nudist phase, and they said, all naked, "Go find some other restaurant if you don't like this one," so that's what I mean about that word, "rape,"

because it's totally over used.

You want to come up with a different word for it. Call it anything. Let's start calling it "Swansong," in honor of the mighty god lightning bolt fuck. I will if you will.

And anyway there's all kinds of rapes, so here's my rape show and tell. Picture the kind where the twat doctor tells you to relax relax, look at the waterfall poster on the ceiling. And the little cloth cozies on the stirrups say "Zoloft." Then there's the mental kind where you're having a hard time coming and you're masturbating but you have to be out the door in four minutes. Suddenly Laura Ingalls Wilder from *Little House on the Prairie* comes running down a hill. Okay. Then she's got a ripped calico dress on. And her flat little chest is all scratched up and she's sobbing, and the music to *Little House on the Prairie* is playing. You shouldn't try to stifle your thoughts because then you'll start doing worse and worse things without even meaning to. Probably to children. So there's the kind of rape that's a thought, starring bloody little Melissa Gilbert, with her little pigtails flapping. And if you happen to look down at yourself and see that you've become Pa, that's great. So now it's a family show. You can either slap Laura and say, "I'm ashamed of you for making me do that," or say "Sorry sorry sorry, half-pint," or what ever gets you there, then have the orgasm, and you're out the door.

I know thinking about a rape is a different thing than doing one with a real live girl, but there's a reason it's exciting, and if it were not a big deal it would not be exciting. So as long as it is a big deal you might as well use it. It's only bad because they make us think it's bad, and I say it's not bad if you don't care about it. If you think about it like just another thing that people do.

And then there's the kind of rape where you can't even decide if it really is one, I mean there's all kinds of ones like that. Like

if Bad Religion is on tour and you end up in their room in some European town. They're like, "This is sexual tension isn't it?" And "Whoa, look how hard my cock is," and pull down the sheets, but how are they supposed to know how bad you're tweaking on Belgian meth and that's why you're not sleeping? That it's not because you want to fuck. Why don't you just tell him you're high? If he puts your hand on his dick, that's supposed to be a rape?

Looking back on those teenage years, you have to admit stupid choices were made. That's what rebellion's all about. Who would go into the hotel room tweaking after a show if they didn't want a celebrity fuck? It makes sense he would think that, you'd think that too if the roles were reversed. And *everybody* knows it's totally easy to lie about a rape. And anyway check your history. It's like the main thing next to war.

Or if your mother is giving you some cleansing enema treatments. And I mean the government rapes *everyone* on taxes, right. And McDonald's rapes the environment. These are the things to worry about. I know plenty of adults who happen to like an enema here and there. I know plenty of children who are putting all kinds of things in their anuses when they're supposed to be sleeping.

Why is the fuck you didn't expect so much worse than anything else? It's not like it is as bad as having to deal with the student loan people every day on the phone for three months. It takes just a few seconds. Even if it happens nightly. Even if it's someone you're supposed to like or trust or who gives you your allowance. It's like, if the world thought it was okay, then it'd be okay. It's the shame that's the really *big* problem.

Like hitchhiking you can totally expect it. Or passed out at a party. It's just the rules of the game. Or leave your daughter alone with her brother. What's going to happen?

Somebody's going to start horsing around. Somebody's going play rough. Kids do that, that is the nature of playfulness, it's edgy, it's out of control.

It's not like there's really anything so different about genitals than a hand. You wouldn't scream, "Help, help!" if somebody grabbed you by the hand. So what's the big deal anyway?

What the big deal is, is you can get a lot of pity from it. Fuck that. You can get a lot of people on your side. Fuck that. People will try to help you get through it. They won't try and help you get through situations like when nobody in your house will talk to you or come home for months at a time, or, like, if you feel like the government has raped you on your taxes. They won't care about that. Fuck them, who wants their pity, not me. They act like it's the worst crime in the world, like it's as bad as a war because they want to own our bodies, but what's a body? It's just *animal* that's all, it's just bones and blood and nerves like everything else. They want us to be scared of our animal bodies. But I'm not buying it, because I already know it's a big fucking scam, and I don't need anyone's pity.

# CARSON McCULLERS

## SCENE SEVEN

SARAH SCHULMAN

Carson McCullers and Tennessee Williams are sitting at two ends of the same table, writing. Preferably outside in Nantucket. She scribbles furiously, crosses out. He is looking at the birds.

### CARSON

Because I want you. Because I be cause you cau se (crosses out) I am inside you, I am outside you—to be one with you—to slither through you to course through you causally, casually. No you. No you. The joining—no death without your death, the same stench. One entity, one imagination—the you, the me, the you from me, but with myself at the center of we. The we of me.

(Crosses out all but the last line.)

The we of me.

*Tennessee finally puts pen to paper.*

**TENNESSEE** (Like he was breathing.)

*The show is over. The monkey's dead.*

### CARSON

Thief.

### TENNESSEE

You're just jealous because my inspiration is so instantaneous.

### CARSON

Really? You stole that line from a story I wrote when I was nineteen.

### TENNESSEE

Oh dear, now you've had too much to drink. Have a drink.

### CARSON

No dear, you've had too much to drink, have a drink. *The show's over and the monkey's dead* is from my story, "Instant of The Hour After," which I wrote for my creative writing professor, long before I'd ever met you.

### TENNESSEE

No, no, no, it's completely my sort of line. To the point, unusual, slightly odd, poetic.

### CARSON

Thank you for the compliment.

### TENNESSEE

Don't be ridiculous.

### CARSON

You've read all my juvenalia. You've read it. You've read *The show's over, the monkey's dead*. Here, do you want some more?

Take this: *country children at country fairs*. You can have it.

### TENNESSEE

Well, Choppers, I guess we're really enmeshed. It's that *we of me* you've been groaning about.

### CARSON

I admit, I don't want to endure my nervous compulsions without you but that is not romantic love. Reeves is coming back from the war. We've been writing regularly. He's suffered and that opens my heart. But he's not what I want either.

### TENNESSEE

What do you want?

### CARSON

That Swiss woman. I can't get her out of my head.

### TENNESSEE

Can she get you out of hers?

### CARSON

She would pay money to get rid of me. Whenever she sees me it's like a bad memory, like realizing that the gas is still on.

### TENNESSEE

Even I have had more success with women than you have.

### CARSON

That's not true.

### TENNESSEE

Of course it's true, you've never even had a serious grope.

### CARSON

I have so.

### TENNESSEE

With who?

### CARSON

With Gypsy. I had full intercourse with her only last week.

### TENNESSEE

Really?

### CARSON

It was divine rapture. And I was excellent at it.

### TENNESSEE

What day last week?

### CARSON

Thursday.

### TENNESSEE

What time?

### CARSON

Right before dinner. And again after.

### TENNESSEE

Dear Choppers, you were with me all afternoon and evening last Thursday. In fact, you spent the night here, in the guest bedroom.

### CARSON

Don't be so checky, dearie. I like the story the way it is.

### TENNESSEE

Poor dear. Have a drink.

# AIN'T TO COMPROMISE

TANIA N. HAMMIDI

FROM "I, A MAN" (ANDY WARHOL, 1967)

Valerie Solanas [to man]:

**"WHAT DO YOUR INSTINCTS TELL YOU?"**

Man [who is hitting on her]:

*"To dig women."*

Solanas [who is resisting him]:

**"YOUR INSTINCTS TELL YOU TO DIG WOMEN? SO DO MINE.  
WHY SHOULD MY STANDARDS BE LOWER THAN YOURS?"**

I arrive at the bar in my boxers again, with sleep in my mouth, that stinky airless stuff like when you get off an airplane. I forgot to open my mouth last night. I forget a lot of things, frankly. Like girls, tomatoes, yams. It is no secret that I slept in my shirt again, not because of the wrinkles, but because when I saddle up to the bar with the other guys in their briefs all pressed out and ironed, all a person has to do is take one up n' down look at my formal composition and the conclusion is obvious: that 100% cotton button-down was a nightie last night. Yep, dude slept in his shirt. Well, sleep is not such a bad thing, and nor is snoozin' in your duds. Ya heard it here. Now that I am single, and have had endless nights to choose from to work on the idea, here's the foregone conclusion: snuggle up with pride, buddy. Way back when I dated sexy chicks, stayed up late prowling the streets for art, or held line on forest fires in Northern Cali, I never slept. Life was captivating. Folks liked

to explore, watch the moon, sniff the dirt, lie down on the dirty cement and stay a while. Now? Life's just a thing, and bars are just excuses, and sometimes I pass out before changing my duds. There are clothes piling up in the bathroom, a huge fricken pile of them, like they own the place. Like it's a teleconference next to the tub on account of the lovely royal blue rug. Nicest thing in the place, really. I don't care, they can take over, because he and everything I ever knew is gone, everything; every little thing, large and small. All matters. Everything. So I head to the bar, figuring, might as well grab a drink and some gab. I really despise drinking, actually. But this ain't no juice bar and I keep showing up here, thinking something, this time, might change. Like in the movie *U-Turn*. Only it doesn't.

We are always returning somewhere ... and one of these times, maybe we'll return dead.

I try to keep things simple. For you young

ones at home, don't drink. Just stop, how about now? "And hey, think three times before you run that red light. Because what with the new technology n' all, it will cost you a pretty penny." And don't catch your z's behind the wheel of a car. See this scar on my face? It wasn't cute crashing into the side of the road. Good memory, but life threatening. Which reminds me, this is why I'm drinking. I'm in hell. Here, there's all sorts of creeps attaching themselves to my life, emotionally starved and angry feel-gooders who bug the shit out of me because of things like being attached to poverty in the name of holdin' out against tha' man only because they're so damn angry about somethin' they can't face. Something sticky, stinky, and dense. It don't crop up. But it's right there, located in the same place as sex. The other side of how good it feels.

This. Is It. [A thunder sound.] It's Tuesday. [Lights fade up.] The most horrible thing in the whole, wide world is about to happen. [The rumbling continues, and fades to silence.] You want to know what there ain't to compromise about? See, no matter how anyone says it in the world—the Greeks, the Fins, my Arab relatives, the South Asians, the New Yorkers, the punks in Missouri, strangers on the road, in your bed, in the joint, there are times in alla life when no one but no one gets it like you do. That is what "ain't." I know. I know what there is to remain steady about. I compromise nothing in memory of the sweet life of a gentle boy. My brother is dancing on a disco dance floor, twirling around like he's never done in his life. The size of the smile on his face is enormous, and, luckily, I slip over to the barstools and grab some countertop. Oh yeah, this is a gay bar, where there's little white briefs saddled over barstools; they might as well call this night "chat and cum." Which is why I arrive in my boxers, to strike a middle ground. My brother's big face is all that I can

see, which probably means that my mind is on other things, but the truth is, I just have never seen the guy dance like this. I've never seen him dance. Not at all. I've never seen him so happy and complete.

It's Andy Gibbs over the club speakers, "Night fever, night fever, you don't have to do it." The disco ball makes reflections on the floor, circles and rainbow light rays all over the place. I figure I can leave him dancing, and go to the "back room" at the club, and do what bois do in these kind of spaces, which for me means cruising through the soap-making parlour, looking for sex that might be something special. I have forgotten about the ozone layer for a minute, as I enjoy the resplendent colors of bright yellow and bright pink polyester ensembles, caked on the fleshy bodies of those getting it on in the back. These things still make my brow a little furry—err, furrowed—cuz really, is this happening? Is this great anonymous sex possible without lying down on that sticky floor? See, I think how we get off in anonymous sex defines us.

My brother has kept his shoes off this time, and the shape of his feet is rough. The guy's got no friends, no family except for me, a diagnosis as big as four lines on a piece of paper, and a warrant out for his arrest because he stole Advil from the 7/11 store down the street from his house. Just the other day he turned 40. When I called he said, "Happy birthday, yeh. Someone threw a chair at my back today." He lives off of Social Security Income which, after the board-and-care place where he stays takes out the cost of his rent, leaves him with \$30.62 a month to live on. Month after month after month. He said to me, "I know it is not much to some people, but it is a lot to me, and I try to make the best of it." Like he stands half a chance of making it in Southern California. How many ways can you say "impossible"? Why, even the most crappy meal like at Jack-In-





the-Box costs four or five bucks. It'd be different if we had extended family or we didn't live in a white world where folks just pass each other by. But we don't. In case anyone wonders why I'm bitter.

I go back out front, sagging really well now that the boxers make me look like I have an ass, and stare at my bro's crappy feet. Poor guy. Size 13 and a half, and front toes pointed in two directions from escaping from a mental hospital by jumping over a 40-foot-high chain-link fence. I support fragments—every kind there is. Short ones. Mi/s/spaled ones. Hyphenated ate-temp-tations to accelerate read/ing when Jerks with little imagnnnnashion forget that they, too, were scared and pimply in high school, and haven't forgotten how rotten they still feel about it all.

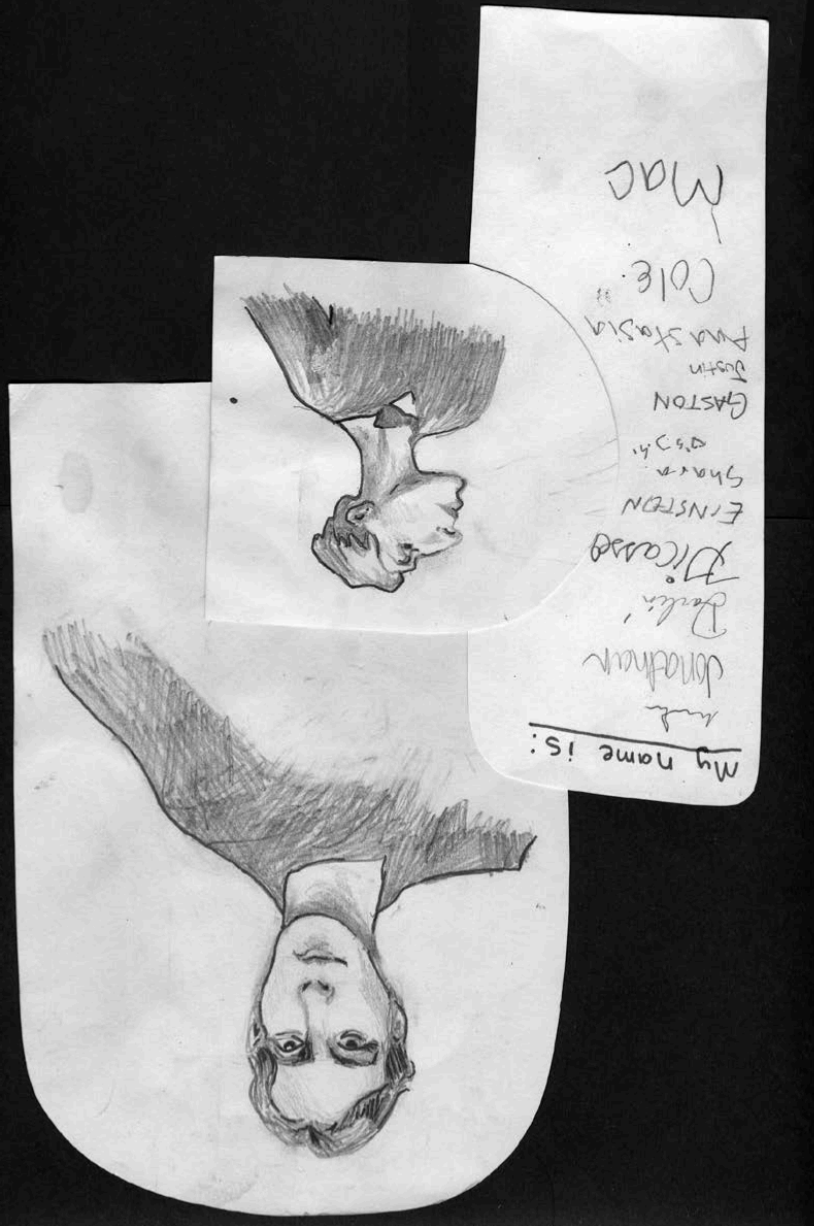
So all of a sudden we are in the middle of a hospital, because I am staring at my brother's sidewise size 13 and a half feet, and I realize that I've been daydreaming—that I'm not really in a gay bar with my brother dancing disco, but rather in the emergency ward of another fricken hospital, with him passed out and yellow. [Boom.] I have lost him. [Boom.] It has happened. [Boom.] He weighs about 90 pounds, even though he's 37 years old, and his feet are three times the size of his scrawny body, because of the accident. Yeh, "the accident." He's been living at a board-and-care home, paying \$900 a month for a shared room in a giant hacienda-style slop house, which his case workers from San Diego County Mental Health picked. He gets a room, meals, and his meds. Sounds like a great deal, except for the fact that this place—like so many—feeds him crap out of cans like green beans and Campbell's soup and probably Spam. For breakfast. After two months at this place, no one has noticed that the guy—who is 6' 3" and generally 150 pounds—is losing a little bit of weight. Tie a yellow ribbon round it ya old creep.

It turns out, he loses a whole lot of weight. It turns out, in fact, that he barely makes it to the pay phone where he has had to beg some asshole on the street for 35 cents, so he can call my mom and say, "Mom, I want to live." And then pass out. My mom, who is old and alone and a real sweet person when she's not frightened, has to find the board-and-care place, only to discover her son looking like he is an emancipated poster child for *Life* magazine. Seriously. She has to haul him herself, which she does, and take him to the emergency ward.

We find out he's had a blockage in his large intestine, and he hasn't peed or shit for 11 days, and no one, in spite of his complaints and rapid weight loss, has decided to pay notice. He has arrived at the hospital yellow, poisoned by the rotten food in his body, almost dead. Something in me clicks, and dies.

[Thunder sound again.] A nurse comes in. She has on oversized gloves and a clipboard in her hands. It seems that the pecking order exists all the way down to the lowliest human being and I, in spite of being a member of a very prestigious university, have no power to vouch for the worth of this individual, in order to ensure that he is treated like a normal person. Being at the hospital teaches me this. Every now and again, the large head and spidery limbs that have become my brother lift up their head, slowly; all that comes from his mouth are two words, and one arm gesture.

"Iceeee chip," he says, reaching out to the nurse with his extra-long arm, yellow at the fingertips like iodine. If you looked in his eyes, all you'd see would be a kind of hazy fuzz, like those times you're at the hospital with someone you've known forever and they're drugged out on phat morphine, all loopy and unfocused. There's no way to connect these two worlds, so I pick up a comb and run it through his hair. He's going. I



search for signs of life from the nurse.

"Iceeee chip," the boy pleads again, totally chapped all the way down his throat so bad you know that it's like the Sahara desert probably to the bottom of his stomach. Somehow I am to believe there is healing medical treatment going on in this room, but no matter you spin it, I'm sure it is not coming from the doctors or nurse.

The nurse has used her pen to write something, so apparently this is the cause for a dramatic hand-washing scene. She pulls off her gloves and turns her back to my brother, spinning on the industrial-size faucet water to wash, while she says: "You had one an hour ago, I'm sorry. That is all you may have." The water is flowing down, an even full force, in which she is washing her hands copiously.

His head drops. He's gone, down again, passed out from all this ridiculousness and starvation. I stare at the nurse with the meanest eyes I know how to make, to get her to leave the room before I smack her with my fist. She leaves, probably on her own accord, which makes things much worse for all of us. I use all the forces in my body to stand quietly, breathing softly as I can to let out the aggression. My feelings would otherwise turn inward and dismantle me. Then I take out the camera, one I have smuggled into the hospital, and take five quick photographs of my brother's feet. It's all I can think of doing. There's no movement. He's absolutely gone. There's no dancing, no lights, no disco balls, no good sex, and nothing but a hospital gown and heavy meds separating me from him. There's no soap, and not even any water in this hellhole. As I lose my brodda, I figure it out: No. No. In a world all excited about bio-warfare and those little machines that put the Thomas guide in your "It's so convenient!" car ... like the idiots that we are ... it is not so convenient for me to lose my brodda. Fricken gone, you get it?—because

of the warped thinking of some lady-twit with a bucket full of ice chips and a doctor with "M.D." stamped on his wrinkled frock. Look here, I have half a mind to pull out some powerful weapon and fire back. Why should my standards be lower than theirs? I compromise nada, warped in a life without him.





# ALWAYS STEAL NEVER BORROW

today i'm stalking someone who looks  
both like a grandmother and a person who  
could be my lover and who is  
triggering, triggering ...

so this is about love and

i walked into this place, not knowing  
but expecting everything.  
and in the first room, there you were,  
a specter video projection, dressed  
like joseph beuys in renegade wear  
with your head buried in a pile of fat,  
just holding still. the church lady guard  
in the room making a sketch  
of something else. her grin is disconcerting  
juxtaposed with the image of you,  
now lowering your legs into the fat.

A throw of the device doesn't abolish chance.  
I'm just trying to walk through the door  
here, enough

*[somebody else, somewhere else asks:  
What should change?*

*What should stay the same?*

*What could you imagine doing if you didn't  
do what you do?*

the brutal truth.

the relationship between original and  
originality, as well as accessing space for  
new thinking.

A wild throw of the dice.

*Hate, violence, our hot desire for death.*

*Definitely not "the same."*

*Raising a lot more hell.]*

6

here's how I'd like to tell the story:  
I'm standing in a room, around me are some  
of the things you're most (un)known for—  
precisely imprecise repeats of iconic works  
by privileged mostly white male artists,  
many created just before these men became  
canonized as "masters" of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

what's catching me by surprise  
in this showroom is the live go-go dancer  
in tiny silver shorts. Surrounded by repeats  
of warhol, johns and lichtenstein, my man  
is shaking his thing and his thing and  
his other thing, listening to headphones on  
a low blue platform that is bordered with  
small light bulbs in the middle of the room.

this is repeat as well, a gonzalez-torres  
moment. made from her recollection  
of the work and from the available materials,  
its details differ slightly from the ones  
i'd seen in photographs, smaller light bulbs.  
the dancer in this case wasn't a muscle man  
with a buzz cut, but a thin tattooed twink,  
dancing in the silver lamé short shorts and  
with the yellow sony sports walkman that i  
know from the books. that particular walk-  
man catches my eye because it is inscribed  
in my childhood memories of the 80s;  
it's one the kids in the know had (not me)—  
the first status symbol of cool.

I wanted to hear what he was listening to,  
or ask, "Hey, what's it like up there?"  
"How much are they paying you?"  
"Maybe we could talk when you step off that  
pedestal, what are you doing after this?"

Language is not jargon, but language is  
jargon—demanding and diminishing it to  
non-function with the powerful reversal of  
negative usage.

Always at stake is pushing the silent power  
of art to create a hovering force and energy  
that leaves the spectator rocking and reeling.

The work is done predominantly from  
memory, using the same techniques,  
making the same errors, and thus coming  
out in the same place.

5





Reading *Michael Jackson was My Lover*  
by Victor M. Gutierrez (self-published,  
1997)—the super reality of truth as falsity.  
And always in between, Gilles Deleuze and  
Michel Foucault to prevent brain damage;  
using horizontal thinking.

That might be a bit abrupt. But still,  
you're sending these signs that I can read  
and maybe those tourists taking your photo  
can't. you're on live display every saturday  
from 12 to 3, I'll be back. I'm distracted  
by the other objects in the room.  
the lichtenstein hot dog in a bun painting,  
a repeat of this enduring symbol of the  
fast-food penis ... and then, the big flat  
endless warhol flowers, oversized,  
the image pirated originally from a kodak  
advertisement, repeat repeat repeat.

remake reuse reassemble, recombine—  
that's the way to go. the force of the work  
lies in the premise that thought is power.

and then there are these johns  
plaster and bronze casts of light bulbs,  
resting on top of little blocks that are like  
oversized soap bars. just lying there  
a little flaccid, a bit testicular, a little bit  
like the way a body with a round shape  
might lie on top of a body with a square  
shape. i find these little beasts sexy,  
and absurd. i'd never seen them that way  
before, some kind of echo/shadow  
being cast ...

ruptures and leaps, tensions and  
intensities, and strident repetitions that  
bring to full force the blatant exterior:  
the outside brutally dismissing the interior.

this might be an exhibition hall, but it occurs  
to me that she's staged a takeover.  
reco(r)ding an exhibitionist/deeply queer  
disco/hot dog/decorative/light bulb/orgasm  
space. something is turning me on.

she doesn't go to porn movie houses  
to jerk off, doesn't wear her collar up ...  
the work is loaded with guts and passion ...  
those who came were moved to tears ...



prior assumptions (the icons, the art history lessons, the neutralizing figure illustrations) quietly accepted come unhinged. things that are recognizable: hot dog is a hot dog is a flower is a dance step is a pulse

strips down what happens when one object stands next to another. how to image-name the system, that one that gives some things surplus value while undermining others, that turns declarations into logos, that whitewashes our ability to see for ourselves. it is something primed for detonation.

now. it's time to start, (re)new. i'm watching my seeing unravel. this is a moment

(dangerous)

there never has to be something else. There is no end. The head doesn't go dead after you understand it. On the contrary there are many places to go ...

fraught with linkage and displacement; a tight play between screens that shoves

originality has its limitations and requires superseding origins

every kid with a lollipop knows ... absolute clarity is a rigorous

closure.

#### FURTHER READING

Sturtevant, "Sliding Parameters of Originality," in *Original*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 1995.

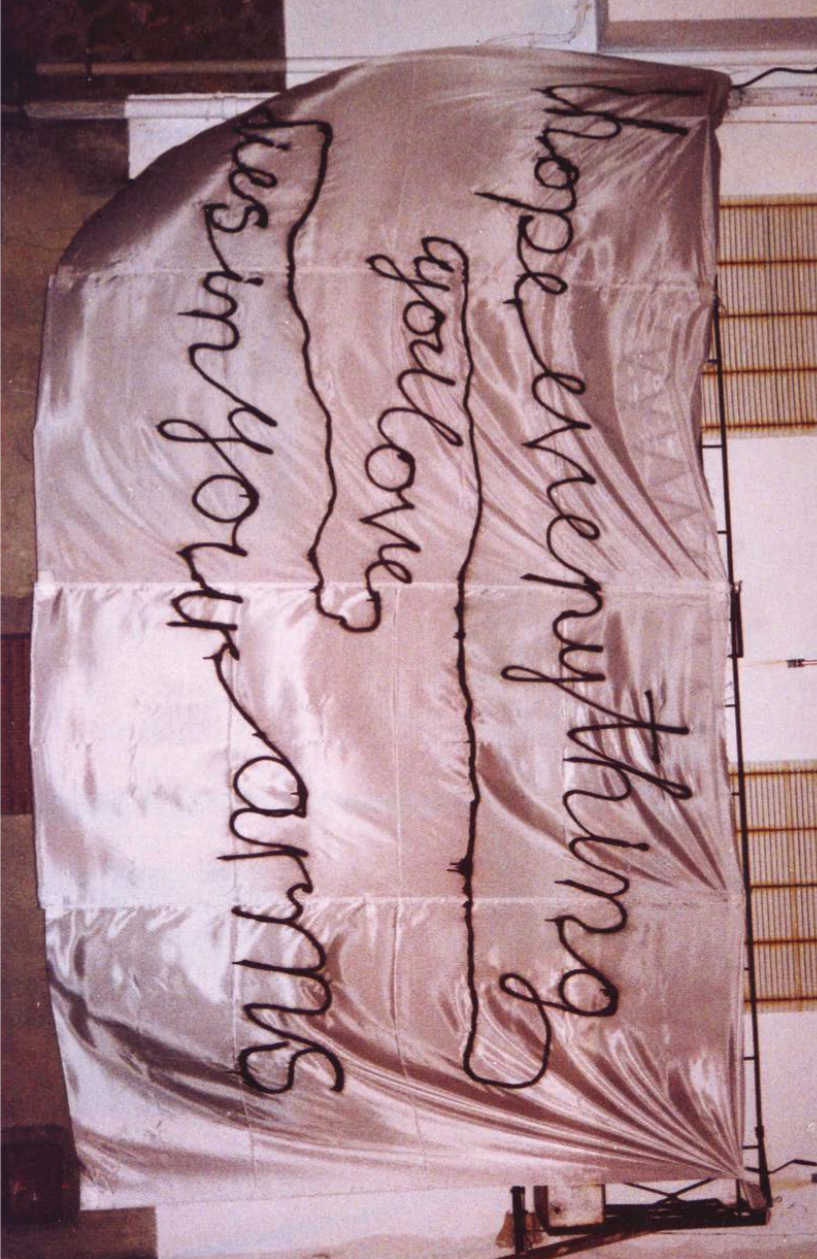
"Questionnaire: Sturtevant," *frieze*, October 2004.

"Sturtevant talks to Bruce Hainley," *Artforum*, March 2003.

"Bill Arning Interviews Sturtevant," in *Sturtevant*, Munich: Oktagon, 1992.

"Sturtevant as Sturtevant as Sturtevant is John Waters as John Waters as John Waters is," in *Sturtevant: The Brutal Truth*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2004.

LANKA TATTERSALL

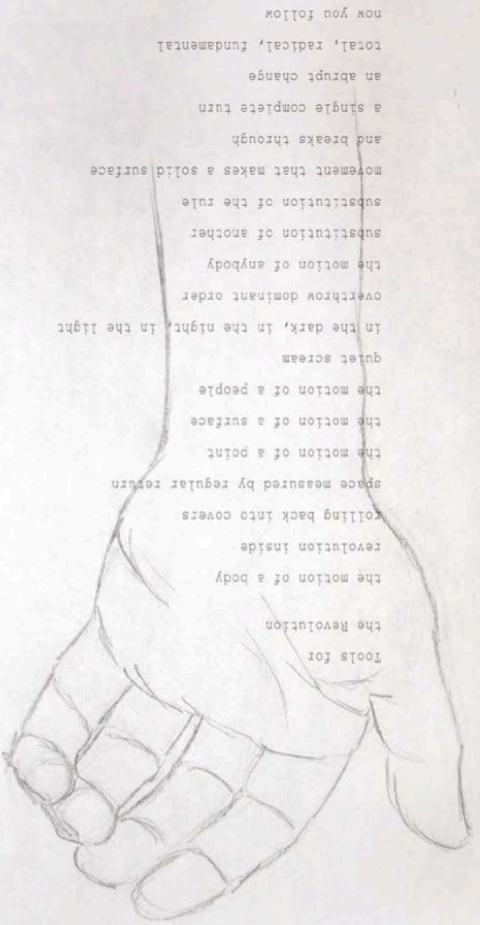






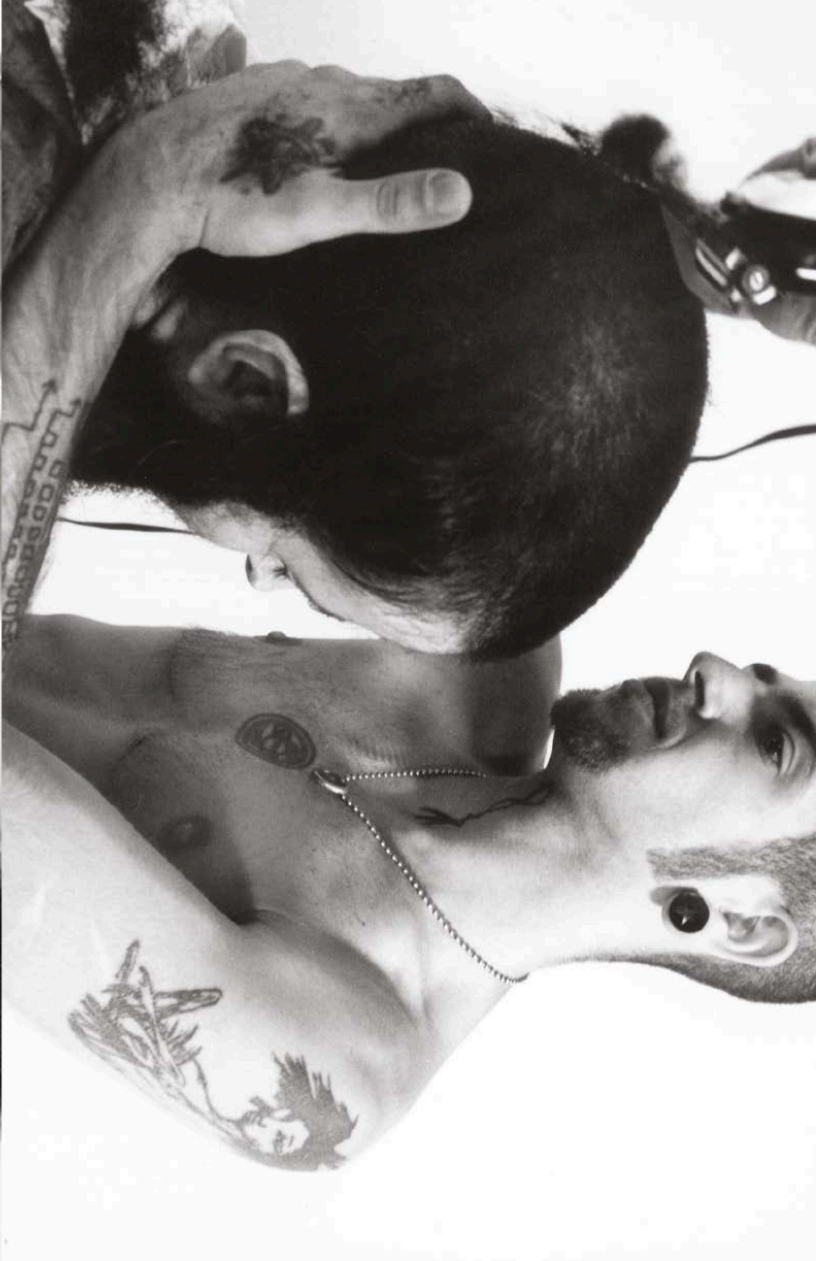






Tools for  
the Revolution  
the motion of a body  
revolution inside  
rolling back into covers  
space measured by regular return  
the motion of a point  
the motion of a surface  
the motion of a people  
quiet scream  
In the dark, in the night, in the light  
overthrow dominant order  
the motion of anybody  
substitution of another  
substitution of the rule  
movement that makes a solid surface  
and breaks through  
a single complete turn  
an abrupt change  
local, radical, fundamental  
now you follow









Subject: art face on.  
Date: Friday, April 8, 2005 11:15 AM  
To: <info@artfaceoff.com>

to whom it may concern :

hello.  
are you a marketing team? your venture stinks of shopping  
mail.

i especially liked this text:  
"a place to find contemporary art that has already been  
reviewed and chosen to be high quality by the general  
public and other curators. This is done by a voting system  
that gives curators a heavy hand in deciding the fates of  
artists"  
'high quality' i so subjective. how enticing.  
'voting system' i sounds so familiar.. oh, you mean like  
our fantastic 'democratic' system and it's mission to  
propagate.  
'deciding fates' i so god like. that leads me to my next  
question...

what do you mean when you categorize an artist as a  
'master'?  
or should i say, are we living in the dark ages?  
master, like who's my daddy? your my daddy.

master, like cremaster?  
like you have balls.... and thank god for the cremaster to  
keep them nice and temperate after this heat.  
or master, like masturbate?  
i do that! hey, and sometimes i call it art.  
thank you for creating something that makes me feel so  
much.

consider this is my submission.  
you can classify this under the category 'amateur' and the  
genre 'digital art'.

sincerely.

ak burns  
ny. 2005



Who do you think you LTRR?

We will not submit. Ltrr has usurped the evil patriarchal treacherous model, standing at the gates of the club, denying entry to those of us who may not measure up. What are we measured against? You are singlehandedly ripping apart the foundations on which our community is based. We reject this ~~unkind~~ repugnant elitist attitude, an offense to our temperament. You invited us to submit to your project, therefore to save the grace of all feminists openly called or referenced onto this godforsaken LTRR precipice, we direct you to eliminate this hoax of a 'review process' and to recognize that you are caught in the web of the systematic. We will not be cowed under these circumstances. We demand transparency. You must disclose the basis on which aesthetic works are praised or condemned. We insist on guaranteed equal access entry to the deep dark hole you call a project. We ask the editors meaningful, not more LTRR buttmunch. Upon receipt, we will engage further in this process and help with your leap towards the marvelous.

Please consider and try to act reasonably.

A.L. Steiner

M. Eisenman

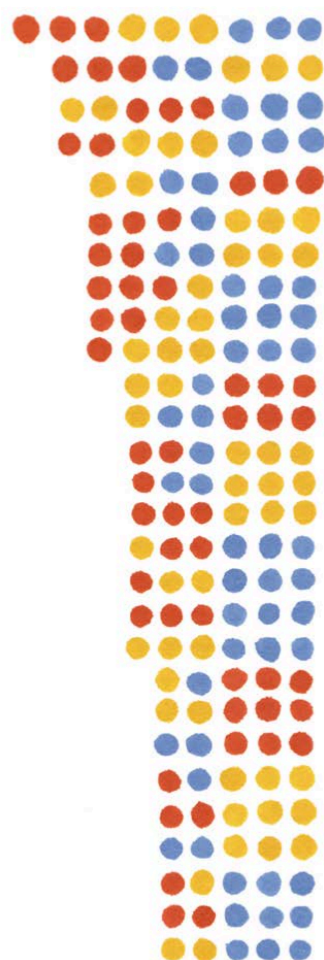
The  
New Bedford Hotel  
NEW BEDFORD, MASS.



A Dead Whale or a Stove Boat







1-2	CHANGE	NANCY BROOKS BRODY
3	CHAIRS	YOUNGBLOOD
4	KLARA LIDEN	SELF-PORTRAIT WITH THE KEYS TO THE CITY
5	WHO DO YOU THINK YOU LIT?	@ RIDYKEULOUS 2005
6	AROUNDTRANSPORT	ANNA GOLTWITZER
7	ART FACE ON	A.K. BURNS
8-9	MOM AND HER WIFE	EDEN BAKI
10-11	FROM THE SERIES FRATERNITY:	TOBARON WAXMAN
12	UNTITLED	SHELLEY MARLOW
13	TOOLS FOR THE REVOLUTION	ANDREA GEYER
14	JANIE DRESSED AS JIM JONES (FROM THE	LAURA PARNES
15	MAINTENANT	RODNEY HARRISON
16-17	KRISTY MC. UNDER LAYERS AND HOLES	STEPHANIE GRAY
18	AWAY FROM HOME	MOYRA DAVEY
19	WHITE BANNER 2	DISCOTEC FLAMING STAR
21	PLEASE REBEL ACT NOW	A.L. STEINER
23	SWIFT PATH TO GLORY (THE OUTLAW SERIES)	A.L. STEINER
26-27	FROM THE SERIES: SUBURBAN DRACULA	VIVIAN BABUTS
29	MY NAME IS...	JEANNE STERN
31	PERSONALITIES REVERSED	DEREK JACKSON
	SAVINGS AND LOAN BUILDING, 1967 (2005)	XYLOR JANE AND GINGER BROOKS TAKAHASHI
	MERGER GLOVE	LIZ COLLINS

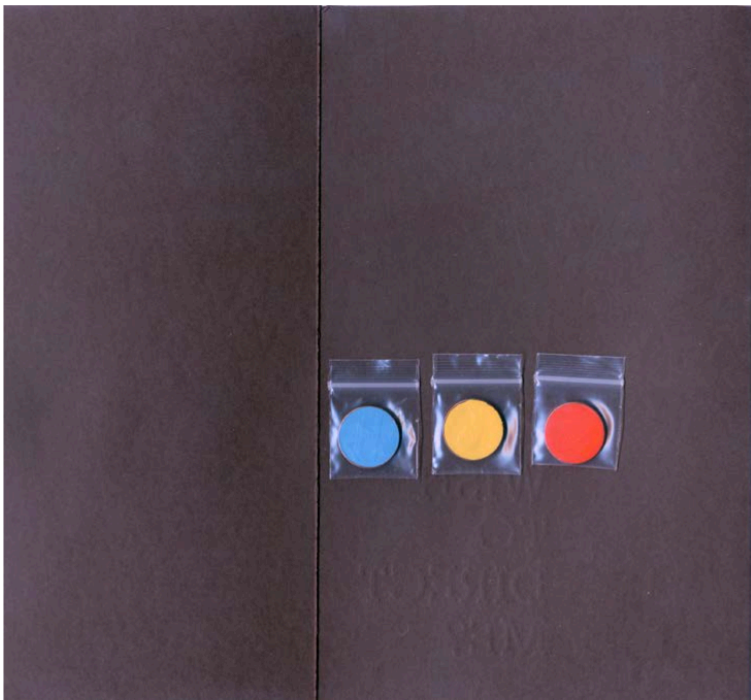
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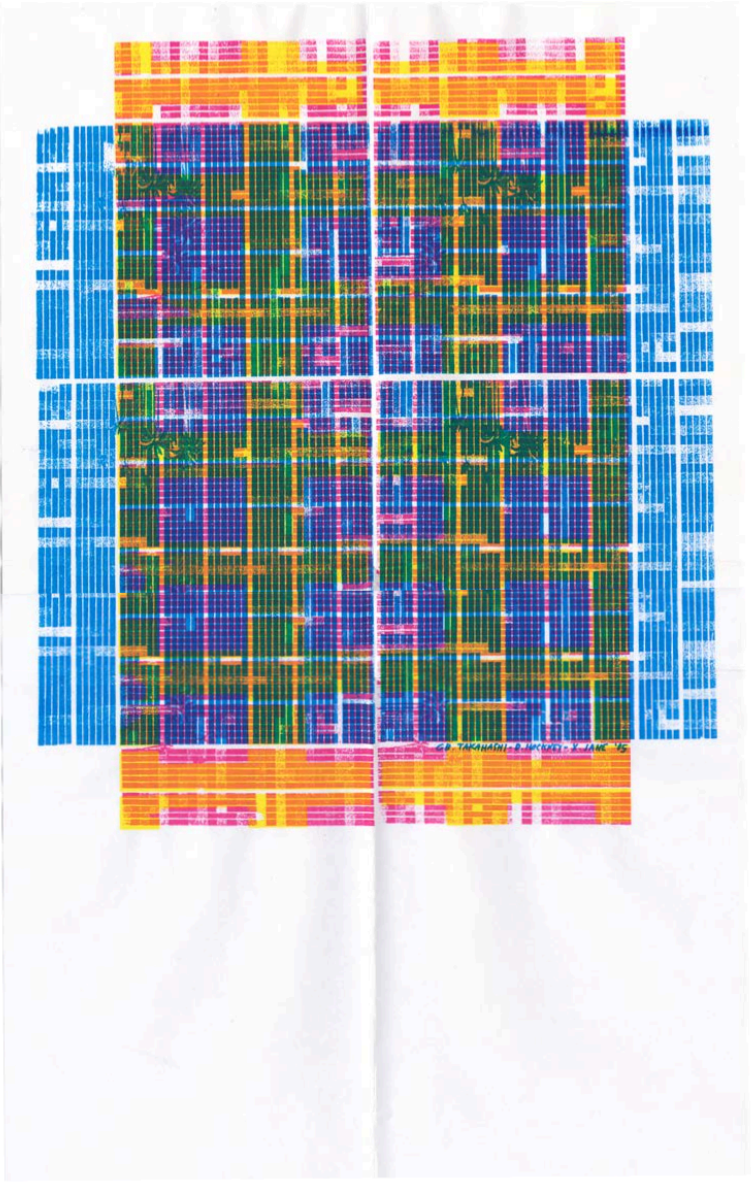


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Saturday, September 24 5-7 pm

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# LESBIANS

# TEND

To

# READ

author

title

page

