

Aesthetic Statement for *Chance*

We've talked in class about exploratory writing versus planned writing. I'm usually the latter, but this piece is the result of experimenting with the former. It began with a combo of the first couple of challenges to write from a bizarre experience and to also write from the perspective of a stranger that weirded you out. The plot that emerged was a surprise to me, and I wanted to capture that in the narrative itself. Ultimately, I think that was the major limiting factor with this piece too. In the initial draft, I sacrificed a lot of good story elements for the sake of setting up this twist-esque ending. During the first draft, I knew the plot wasn't coherent or logical but I just wanted to capitalize on that confusion. However, during revision, I found a more sensible purpose for these characters, namely that Chance is literally a personification of stochastic possibilities in life, true to his namesake. The narrator, initially a self-insert (they usually all start out this way, "write what you know" yadda yadda—I'm working on this!) can now function as a vague representation of uncertainty, anxiety, etc. and now has a more genuine, obvious turn of character that feels more satisfying. A shortcoming I couldn't think of a way to overcome is your criticism of "not letting the reader exist in this world." Most of the "action" of this piece is a logic puzzle rather than something literal and happening, so I couldn't overcome the need to be dialog-heavy. I felt interjecting too many worldly details was artificial and jarring to the flow, even if that does make the narrative feel static and isolated. Though, considering form=function, their encounter *is* static and isolated, outside of time, in a purgatory of sorts. Does this justify the boredom the reader probably feels? Well, they're the final consultant so that's up to them. Admittedly, I'm somewhat disappointed with my inability to make this feel more interesting, but I hope my skills become refined enough to develop a strategy to make this a more worthwhile read.

Chance

Nothing good comes from a tap on the window. Such a thought occurred to him as a tap on the driver's side glass jostled him from the aimless scrolling on his phone. *Fuck, did I piss this guy off somehow? Who the hell tries to talk to someone in their car? Why the hell am I even here in the first place? She's just causing me nothing but trouble lately.* He rolled down his window just enough to let sound trough.

"Uh, yeah?"

"Yeah, hey man, mind if I talk to you face-to-face?"

I'm about to get decked, aren't I? I guess I earned it. Pretty roundabout way for Karma to get its revenge but I guess it had to be one way or another. He slipped a pocket knife into his pants, unlocked the door, and stepped out apprehensively. The man appeared slightly unkempt to Tyler, sporting torn jeans, a faded sweatshirt that was fleshed more with pocket possessions than the mass of his torso, and a simple buzzed haircut.

"Heh, no need to be all jumpy dude I'm not gonna try anything funny, just trying to kill some time and you look like someone who's cool to smoke a little."

"I mean, I am, but that's an awfully bold assumption. I try to come off as pretty square."

"Haha, I just had...a hunch I guess. I come here to give my buddy a ride home a lot, so I know a good spot if you wanna follow." He gestured in the general direction of some woodland on the peripheral of the parking lot.

"Right, I'm just going to follow some rando into the woods. You may as well wear a sandwich board that says *I'm a serial killer.*"

The other guy chuckled, "yeah you gotta good point. Well there's a lotta people and cameras around here—even if I was some Zodiac killer I'd know better than to fish here. I ain't a cop or nothin', see?" He shook a baggie of pre-rolled joints like someone would shake some keys for a cat.

"That doesn't mean shit, undercovers can possess. Let me see you take a hit and then maybe I'll believe you." Nearly before he had finished the sentence, there was a lit joint being inhaled.

He torqued the guy's front away from the entrance of the building, "Christ, you idiot—I believe you."

The duo meandered for a few minutes into the foliage that framed the parking lot until they arrived at a decently secluded shed which they could use to obscure any view of them. The stranger perched himself against the shed and began fishing around in his overstuffed pockets. It looked as though the seams were about to give way from all the possibilities he must have been prepared for.

"You gotta name?" he asked, genuinely curious more than making conversation.

"Tyler," Tyler replied.

"Heh yeah you look like one. Here." He handed Tyler one of the joints he had jingled in front of him. "That's a great strain, man," he assured, "I think it's called Asynchronous."

"That doesn't matter much to me, I'm not a connoisseur or something," Tyler remarked. He roasted the tip enough for it to begin to smoke. He pressed it to his lips and only brought the smoke into his mouth, pretending to inhale. *Don't take candy from a stranger—doubly so for drugs.* He checked his phone to see if he was tardy from his obligations.

"She reply yet?" the stranger asked.

"No, not yet—" Tyler paused. He gave a tense and puzzled look towards his new "pal," but he seemed not to notice, looking deeply into the clouds. *Okay I think it's time to leave.* He started a few steps away from the guy.

"Well thanks, but I gotta—"

"They won't be done for another 15 minutes or so, dude."

"...What?"

“I mean, it’s just a hunch.”

A slight breeze rustled the leaves of the surrounding flora, but it sounded like radio static. Tyler’s head was hot from confusion. He folded out the pocket knife he brought and held it pointed.

“Who the hell are you?”

“Whoa! Take it easy man, I’m just messing around!”

“No, it’s more than that. What do you know about me?” Tyler pinned the stranger’s shoulder to the shed and pressed the blade to his chest. The knife shook from his nervous grip.

“Chill, dude, chill. I’ll tell you everything—just chill.” His arms were lifted in surrender like antennas to heaven, though they resembled clock hands in their lankiness. Tyler eased up, surprised at himself.

“Alright, you’re not gonna take me for serious but it’s the truth. We’ve met before. Not just before, but, like, less than an hour ago. It was a *different* you, but still you, I dunno how else to explain it. You’re not the only one, I see dupes of people all the time. I see ‘em at different businesses, different places—it’s usually small stuff like they have a different job or haircut or something.”

“Whoa, whoa, backup. What? *What?* You expect me to believe this?!”

“No man, I told you you wouldn’t get it. Look, I can prove it. You messed around and got in trouble at your school and now you have to take summer classes, and you don’t even know what you wanna study. You’re here waiting for your ladyfriend and her kid niece to get done swimming.”

What the fuck? The static of the leaves got louder, and Tyler felt lightheaded. He rubbed his forehead as it throbbed. It probably wasn’t helping that he accidentally inhaled a little bit of the grass.

“Yeah...yeah, that’s exactly right. Just...how?”

“Honest, dude. I told you I met you, or like a version of you I guess.”

"This has to be a joke. You're just a stoner who's doped off his ass."

"Heh, I wish that were the case bud. It happens whether I'm sober or not. You know how weird it is to just deal with seeing dupes everywhere?"

Tyler leaned against a tree, buckling from nausea. He checked his phone for some semblance of reality, but it didn't have any bars.

He probed further, "When? Where did we meet? What was I doing?"

"I was just at the liquor store before coming here. You know the one by the campgrounds with the playground out front? You were there with a chick and a little girl, and they were playing on the swings. You seemed pretty bored so I asked if you wanted to smoke, and you were way more chill. You told me all that stuff about you while we were killing time. Even gave me your number so we could hang."

To say this was surreal would be an understatement. Every fiber of Tyler incredulous. He thought he was uncertain of life before, but this was an entirely different magnitude.

He still searched for some logical footing, "Am I the first person you've told this to?"

"Nah, but I guess you're the first person who's taken me for real. Normally when I tell people I've seen them doing something else they're like *no way dude*. Plus, you're the first *new* copy I've seen. This has been happening to me since I was a kid, but it's always been the same couple dozen folks for years. But now there's you. I don't really get it, so I figured I'd talk to you here since I didn't expect you would turn up again as a copy."

"Is there something in common between all the people you see doubles of? Have you ever stopped seeing anyone?"

"Hmm...now that you mention, yeah I think there's a few people who've stopped popping up. I'm not really sure what caused it, it's pretty weird that there can be new ones. Maybe it's cuz you're, like, confused?"

"Who the hell wouldn't be confused about this!?"

"No, no, like confused about *you*. Who you are, what you want. You know, *you*. Every time I see a doppelganger, it's not crazy differences, you know? That's why it's so confusing. I'll have a conversation with one, then see them somewhere else and they don't know who I am anymore. It's hard to tell what's real and what's...less real?"

"Well, then what's different about me compared to...*me*?"

"Well, seems like you're really uncertain about what you want, dude. The other you didn't look like he was too hot for...uh, *your* jee-ef. Kinda felt like he—you—were gonna dip on her. I mean, I've known you for like an hour tops so I don't know anything about your biz, but I think you're just anxious about change in your life. You have a lot of good stuff going for you. She seems happy with you. Take it from me, don't let your inner wacko mess up what's good. Just take some time and really think about what you think you oughta do instead of just going with the motions. You only get one chance to do stuff."

Tyler slumped down and sat against the shed. The sickliness seemed to be waning, but now there was numbness in his head.

"Can't believe I'm hearing this from you of all people."

"Heh, like a blind-future seer kind of deal, right? Ha. Yeah, life can be funny like that sometimes. In fact, my life's never not funny." He extended a hand towards Tyler and helped him up.

Tyler conceded, "Maybe we can hang again sometime."

"Heh, sure man, I'll hit you up next time I'm nearby."

As they walked back to the lot, Tyler's pocket buzzed after finally getting signal. He read the message with a new fondness.

Kayla: Hey we're in the car, where are you? Also, mind if we stop to get some booze on the way home? :) One of my friends is in town for...

Another buzz quickly followed.

924-188-1429: heyyy its Chance lol lets hang again soon!



Honestly at this point she could just say “we’re at the rec” and I would know the drill. But she always garnishes things, from her scrapbooks to her outfits. Nothing was complete without cute animal 1 stickers and some orange-gemmed jewelry. But that’s one of the things I love about her.

Sure thing, see you kids
soon

Seeing her and her kid niece will be a nice break from homework. I messed around too much and ended up having to take summer classes to graduate at the same time as my friends, but at least I still 2 have enough free time to spend time with her. Naturally, with a kid who’s under ten you never know when exactly they’ll get tired of something. Even worse, you can’t expect them to be patient, so I leave a little early just to keep everyone happy; I can just goof around on the phone while I wait. But I guess playing bubble shooter while reclined in the driver’s seat is a crime because that seemed to provoke some guy. I was just minding my own business when a he emerges from an adjacent car in the parking lot and knocks on my window. I roll it down.

“You got a problem, bud?” I look around, trying to figure out what might have put him off.

“Can’t say that I do,” I reply, hoping things wouldn’t escalate. 3

“Smooth guy, huh? Why don’t you step out here where we can talk like men.”

Summary of Comments on annotated-Chance.pdf

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T Number: 1 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 9802000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM
Nice start. Good characterization

T Number: 2 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 9802000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM
Very odd verb tense shifts here--you need to really look at how this story functions and decide whether this is present tense or past tense, first person or third.

T Number: 3 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 9802000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM
Was there some big thing that happened? Your reader would be more confused by the fact that this comes out of the blue.

The smart thing to do here would be to roll the window up, but I play along—I'm curious what his problem is. I open the door and step out cautiously and slowly to keep things docile. Then he pats my shoulder in an endearing way.

"Heh, good man. Rising in the face of uncertainty. That's good shit. Tells me a lot about your character. Most people would have locked the doors."

"Heh, yeah," I reply, unsure of what else to say. I was honestly expecting to get decked, but I've never been punched before so I was curious what it was like. That may seem stupid, but this was a well supervised area and I could have easily gotten some legal compensation. Plus, then I'd get some smooches and back-scratches from Kayla out of sympathy. I've taken Intro to Economics: the marginal benefit outweighed the marginal cost here. That's what the economists call *rational*.

"You smoke?" he asked.

"Depends on what's burning."

"Anything that does, your choice."

"What kind of herb you got?"

"Rocky Mountain Dew, Cali Skater Skunk, Freddy Mercury's Double Dutch Silver Haze..." He goes on naming strands. I only asked to feign interest and gain a moment to mull over exactly what was happening, so I'll just repeat the first one he said. Don't get me wrong, I'm no stranger to a good high, I'm just not a citizen of the culture. Was this guy just looking for a smoking buddy? Pretty odd way to make friends if you ask me. Getting a better look at him only raised more questions: skinny, holed-up jeans, an over-sized, tattered black hoody, a buzz cut do, and a short, unkempt neckbeard. I guess he would satisfy what you might expect a stereotypical stoner to look like if it were the 90's. Oh, it looks like he's done listing his inventory.

"The 'Dew' one sounds good. Got a piece?"

"Do I have a piece? Get a load of this guy. Course I got a fuckin' piece."

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T Number: 1 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 9802000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM
Is this what this character was really thinking at that time? Seems way too calm after this...

T Number: 2 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 9802000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM
So far, we are spending so much time interior to the material that it is hard to find a place to 'stand.'

"Just asking."

[1]

"Good man, I respect a guy who's prepared. M'kay, follow me. I know a spot where we won't get spotted."

Naturally I'm a little hesitant, but I estimate they won't be done swimming for around another twenty minutes or so, and this shouldn't take much longer than ten. I follow him behind one of the storage sheds near the edge of the property which was still mostly wooded. Once we're sufficiently out of sight, he starts sifting through his overfilled hoody pocket.

"Heh, I forgot. We don't even need a piece," he remarks, holding up a handful of joints. Not sure how you forget something like that, so I guess this must be some pretty good stuff. He was kind enough to offer one of them just for me so we didn't have to share. We took a few puffs and let the atmosphere [2] settle in. It was cloudy like it'd probably rain later, but it was still pretty warm and kind of peaceful out by the woods. He hadn't talked for a while so I figured I'd use the opportunity for an interview.

"So, is this how you meet people?"

"Nah...I mean, it's not how I want to anyway. I just seen some shit."

"Like what?"

"It's hard to describe, dude. Like, I just see the same people over and over."

"...What? I hate to break it to you, but that's kind of how relationships work." He laughed like he knew I wouldn't get it, and stretched. His lanky arms are angled contortedly as they were displaying the time.

"No you don't get it. Like, I see these people again and again. Everywhere I go. Different towns, [3]

different businesses, it's the same people. Same faces, same haircuts, just different clothes, doing different jobs. It's fucking weird. Anyway, I just started seeing you around, but you're the first one that's been, like, new. Like, the first person who I haven't always seen. I mean, I still see other people that I

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[T] Number: 1 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 98020000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM

Yes, this is all happening a bit too easily, I think?

[T] Number: 2 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 98020000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM

This character is really hard to tack down--he seems hyper aware of his surroundings, but unperturbed, and hyper aware of a bad situation, but still willing to go on with it; you have to be careful that the mystery here is believable or your reader will abandon it.

[T] Number: 3 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 98020000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM

Cool premise, but this is coming very late--we have been spinning our wheels up to here, it seems.

never see again, but there's just these coupla people I see *everywhere*. You're the first doppelganger of you that I've seen, so I wanted to talk to you and see if it'd stop you from popping up everywhere."

What the fuck? Literally, what is this guy smoking? This *must* be some good shit. I decide not to take any more hits. This is interesting.

"Where did you see the first copy of me?"

"I was just at the liquor store in the next town over about an hour ago to get some stuff for me and my buddy. I'm waiting for him to get off lifeguard duty. I saw you with some chick and a little girl. We managed to have the same kind of talk then while you watched the kid and let the girl pick out drinks inside. Course, at the time, I didn't think you were one of them. I knew you were a copy cuz you're 1 wearing different clothes and there's no way you coulda left after I did and beat me here with traffic how it was."

Man, what!? That's not something you could make up. That's too much to be a coincidence.

I pried a little more, "What did the chick look like?"

"Shortish black hair, skinny jeans, some emo-band t-shirt."

"And the little girl?"

"Blonde I think? Didn't really pay that close attention man, I just thought you were randos."

That sounds pretty accurate. What the hell? I haven't been to a liquor store in months. I haven't even been with those two today. He kept taking hits nonchalantly. 2

"Most people don't buy it," he continued, coughing a few times, "you're the first one to take me kinda seriously." He laughed while inhaling to keep in the smoke, resulting in eerie, guttural yelps.

"I mean, I'm here waiting for my girlfriend and her niece. Your description sounds like them. There's no way you could know what they look like, and we haven't even seen each other today. And I definitely wouldn't bring a kid to a liquor store."

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Number: 1 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 9802000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM
Internal dialogue as org

Number: 2 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 9802000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM
awk

“See? Dude, fuckin’ ay. I’ve just gotten used to it. It’s just a weird thing that happens to me,
[1]

nothing particularly bad or whatever, just like ghosts of people or something I see everywhere. Like some
Sixth Sense shit almost.”

No, no, that’s not good enough. You can’t just be used to that.

“Am I the first copy you’ve tried interacting with?”

“Well, not exactly. A lotta the time they’re employees at places so I have to talk to them.

Sometimes I’ll be like ‘Yo, do we know each other?’ just to see what they say, but they always deny
everything.”

By now I had discreetly dropped the joint to the dirt.

“Does this only happen when you’re baked?”

“Heh, nah man. I mean, if we’re being real then I’m usually not sober. But I know for sure it
happens regardless what [I’m rolling. It’s just a fact of life for me, dude. Like blue sky and green grass, I just
[2]
see copies of people. It’s no biggie.”

“Well, this is weirding me out. Look, let me give you my number. The next time you see a copy of
me, ask for his and send it to me so I can try to meet him. Maybe that will dispel whatever weird voodoo
shit you’ve got going on, or maybe I’ll just figure out there’s some statistical anomaly.”

He laughed, “Yeah maybe man. Sure thing, sec.” He fishes into the sack on his stomach and pulls
out his phone after excess fumbling, and looking up to indicate he’s ready for a transmission.

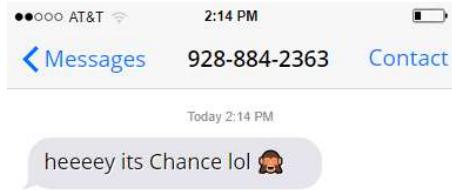
“Seven two oh, five nine three, eight eight six two.”

“Alrighty, just sent a text to make sure I got it right.” I felt a buzz in my pocket, so I checked to
make sure it wasn’t Kayla wondering where I was.

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[T] Number: 1 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 9802000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM
Internal dialogue of the character is really negatively impacting the flow of narrative.

[T] Number: 2 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 9802000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM
I am beginning to wonder why we are getting this story from this person, rather than the person who actually sees the doppelgangers?
Hopefully it is for a reason.



"Yeah I got it." I realized I never asked his name, but now I don't need to.

[1]

"Nice, sometimes I have hearing troubles." I'm sure that's not the only sensory deficiency he suffers. He shoots me a big smile. It wasn't pretty, but it wasn't as gross as I was expecting.

I reply, "Heh, yeah, happens."

"You think this will work?"

"Work?" I don't even know what you're on. I'm sure you're just seeing shit."

"Well yeah, that's what I've been saying!"

"No, dumbass, I mean you *think* you're seeing shit."

He starts to casually pace around a small radius.

"Yeah, I really wanna believe that man. But if you can't trust your own eyes, your own ears, nose, tongue, what the fuck can you? It's scary, dude. How am I supposed to operate if I can't even judge what's real? What if I'm seeing some real [2] fucked up shit and I ignore it 'cuz I think it's just my mind? What if it *is* just my mind and I try to do something and end up just acting crazy? It's scary man. It's like I'm walking a tightrope between reality and a dream."

I didn't think I'd be able to sympathize with this guy. I thought he was just fucking with me, but the sincerity in his dopey voice whined some genuine concern. But, if he was really that worried wouldn't he sober up? Well, I guess if it still happens when he's sober then it doesn't make a difference whether he quits or not. I don't know what other shit this guy does, though. Is he some kind of junkie? He looks at least averagely healthy, so I guess if he is it isn't bad. Fuck, and I just gave him my number. That's probably gonna come back to bite me.

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[T] Number: 1 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 9802000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM
He speaks like this to a new acquaintance?

[T] Number: 2 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 9802000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM
Again, the internal 'allknowing dude' is getting in the way of your story.

"So this has been happening your entire life?" I asked.

"Yeah, more or less. I first caught on when I was in middle school, and it's pretty much been happening ever since."

"Have you noticed anything affecting how frequent you see them?"

He leaned against the wall of the shed since this chat was dragging on longer than either of us had probably planned, "I don't know man, I don't pay that close attention. I just accept it. I'm not some kinda scientist or mathicist. I just do as I please. We all got weird shit that we can't really talk about that we just deal with in life, right? I didn't mean to spook you or anything, I was just experimentin'." He chuckled.

"You only accept it because you think you can't do anything about it. I mean, the fact we're even talking about this implies you don't just accept it."

"Dude, you can accept something and still want to know how it works or why it is."

"You haven't found any patterns?"

"Nah. It's just like, the same twenty or thirty people. They don't even keep the same name, but man I swear they are the same people. When they have friends or family with them they're always the same too. I don't really get it. Maybe the Fed is fucking with me, maybe it's how God gets his sick kicks. I try not to let it faze me too much."

"Well I can tell you I'm not knowingly apart of any sort of conspiracy."

"Yeah, that's what I figured. Maybe you're all getting kidnapped by aliens and getting your memories replaced, who the hell knows man. It's no biggie, I just deal with it. That's all anyone can really do when facing some supernatural shit."

"I guess that's true. I've had a paranormal experience, but nothing like this. Still can't come up with a practical explanation for it, and sometimes I wonder if it actually even happened or not."

T Number: 1 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 9802000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM
This part seems to really take the momentum down, losing power.

“Well, imagine if you’re whole life was like that, dude. That’s me. Is it real, or a dream? What’s [2]

even real? Drugs already make you wonder this shit, but it’s even worse for me.”

“Yeah, I can only imagine.”

“...Well, thanks for smoking with me man. We should probably get back.”

“No problem, thanks for sharing.”

We both start back towards the parking lot. He had an oddly brisk pace and put a lot of distance between us. My phone buzzed a moment afterward, and I reached into my pocket to check it.



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Number: 1 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 9802000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM
This ending is not quite earned yet....

Number: 2 Author: Seth Tucker Subject: 9802000000004758 Date: 4/22/2018 12:20:27 PM
Dialogue as exposition doesn't tend to work as much as scene and situation.