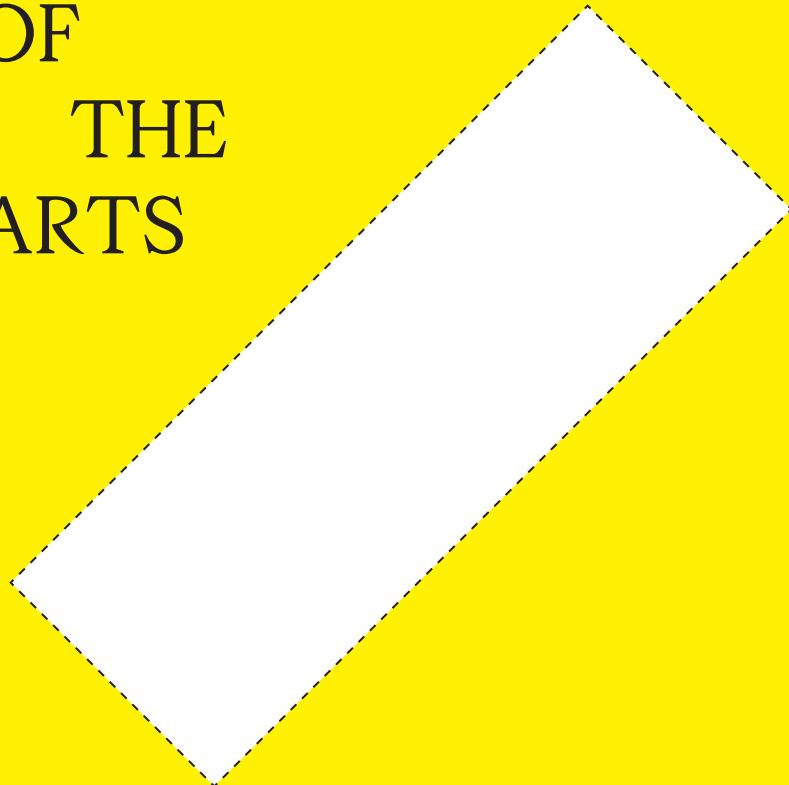


CLERESTORY  
JOURNAL  
OF  
THE  
ARTS



CLERESTORY  
JOURNAL OF THE ARTS

BROWN | RISD

VOLUME 58

FALL  
2018

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ALYSSA RODRIGUEZ

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## SWEETNESS

i.

peel  
cheek from chest, humid  
pearly sheen of saliva  
or  
tangy punch  
takes discipline to remind  
myself:  
the world is bigger  
than my face buried  
in your armpit,  
breathing in. i want  
more  
than your palms  
can hold.  
brushing won't cleave  
film from tongue. salivation  
turns to nausea:  
one of pavlov's dogs.  
you tasted like lucky  
charms coming up.

ii.

my own nails pressing into my skin blushing pressed petals  
a knotted seed swallowed pressing against my gut unclear  
whether from outside or in skin feels like a balloon under  
pressure under my fingers plastic tension under my fingers  
i would take two enormous boulder hands and spread the  
earth for you and in the valley lay my head on your lap be  
rocked to sleep by the kiss of moonbeams at my feet.

## GAME FOWL

who thought it would be funny to  
put a hen in the cockpit  
?

rattles through the arena  
moisture  
collecting between breasts and  
under arms  
sing to me with that tongue  
that makes paper thin wings  
rise up from my stomach lining

at the tender spot  
on the side of my breast

too dull to draw blood  
dull, like  
being poked with a broomstick

caged, like  
an untethered organ

crack an egg over my head  
and let the yolk soak  
into my hair  
burning my crown

## FISHMARKET

Fingers hook pierce the inside of my cheek dragging  
me over bed of salt anointed in red temple to lip. Scrub  
the insides out with brillo pad make it glisten. There's  
colonies festering in the places where skin puckers  
smooth out the creases get at them. Swat the flies by  
the bags of waste on the curb. The smell fuses with the  
furniture two stories up antiques with their own smells  
preexisting conditions.

## HOLIDAZE

With delicate hands paint over clay facade pluck wipe brush to satisfaction (never enthusiasm) pleased to correct the most obvious errors. Present wholeness to meet dancing acquaintances auras bumping bodies never all the way touching. I must look like some kind of clown naked in a room full of hazmat suits condensation on the inside of masks. Oil the machine to make it dance warm it up with amber honey thicken loose soil to hold roots in place. Don't dance too hard.

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## GIFTS

You offered me  
1/2 a peeled orange  
1 orange hemisphere  
of fibrous tissue  
Didn't even sting when it seeped into the  
slit on my finger  
unknown origin

2.

fingertips slip  
under the elastic waistband of my  
under wear applying pressure takes my mind off  
resting, you  
might have searched for a welcome mat.

3.

Moisture collecting at the hairline  
I could smell football and  
mildew  
on you, musk of a rusty playground where you  
found crushed cigarettes and a warm beer  
That smell is still trapped in my hair,  
smoke creating blood clots  
between legs, forming pulp

4.

Don't know what  
I have to offer you

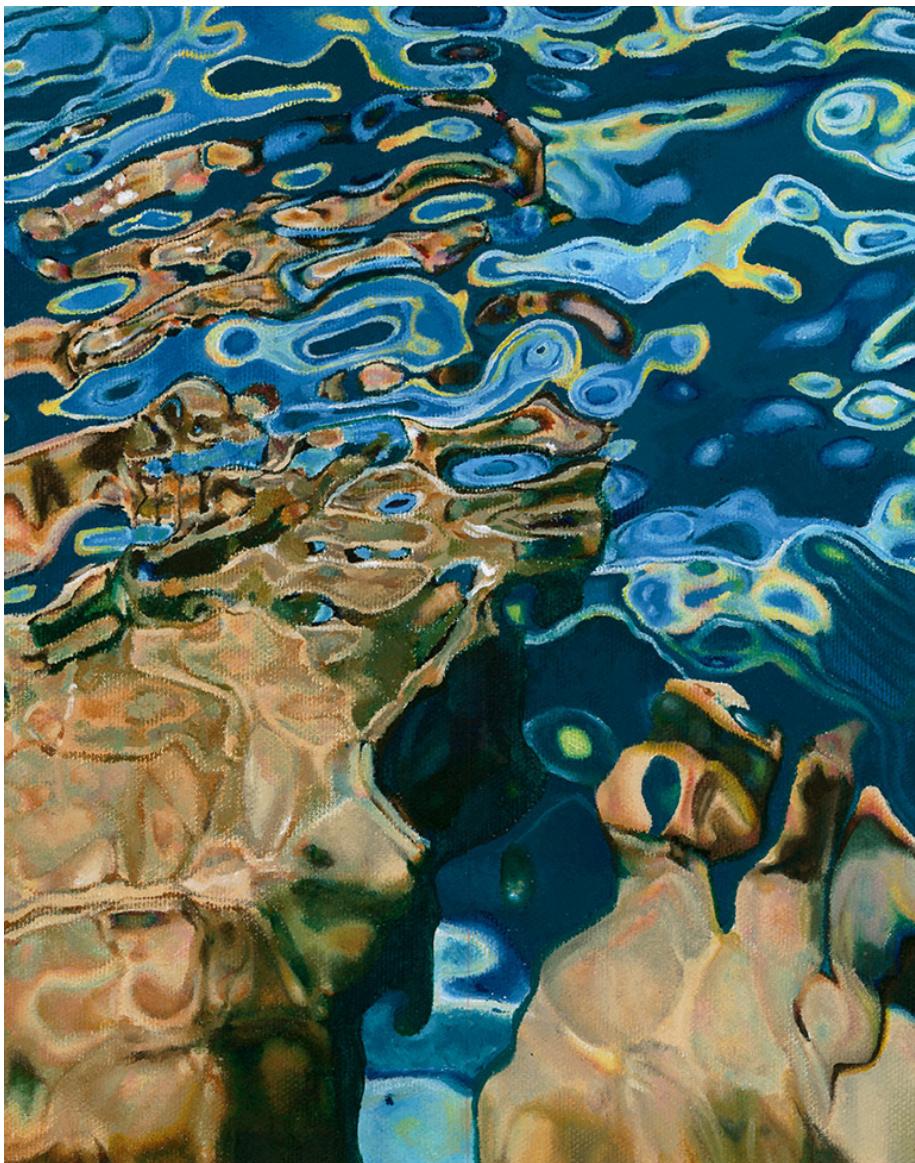
ISABELA LOVELACE

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BURBUJEANDO



OSCAR HARRIS

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CREST

Ribs, combs, the salt-knots you've caught in your teeth  
(It's more temperate here than you might think.)

I repeat,  
Contemplate: the way you bite into a mango,  
You look flushed (fleshed, fished).  
At the split of the land,  
come fly a kite with me.

In waking, you refract (retroact) in movement, cascading  
The splinters in my feet, the sun in splintering,  
In places beneath here, clay and bedrock,  
I can see you through the grass;  
(those bits of rolled glass you find in kitsch shops by the shore),  
Have you seen a place where lightning strikes the dunes?

In moments,  
mori I miss your sunglasses  
The slip of the sand, your drying arms in cause,  
(I feel the sand in my scalp  
still) my breathing when I hear your  
crashing feet on palmetto, alder  
the switchgrass is slicing your shins (salt in a wound).

And when was the last time you were back to Charm City?  
Crest within us—now the past reverberates  
(a tuning fork),  
Contemplate: feed me, high in waves,  
I've been a breath away.  
Tell me, "come fly a kite with me,"  
Contemplate. There's not much left to ancient things.

ELLA ROSENBLATT

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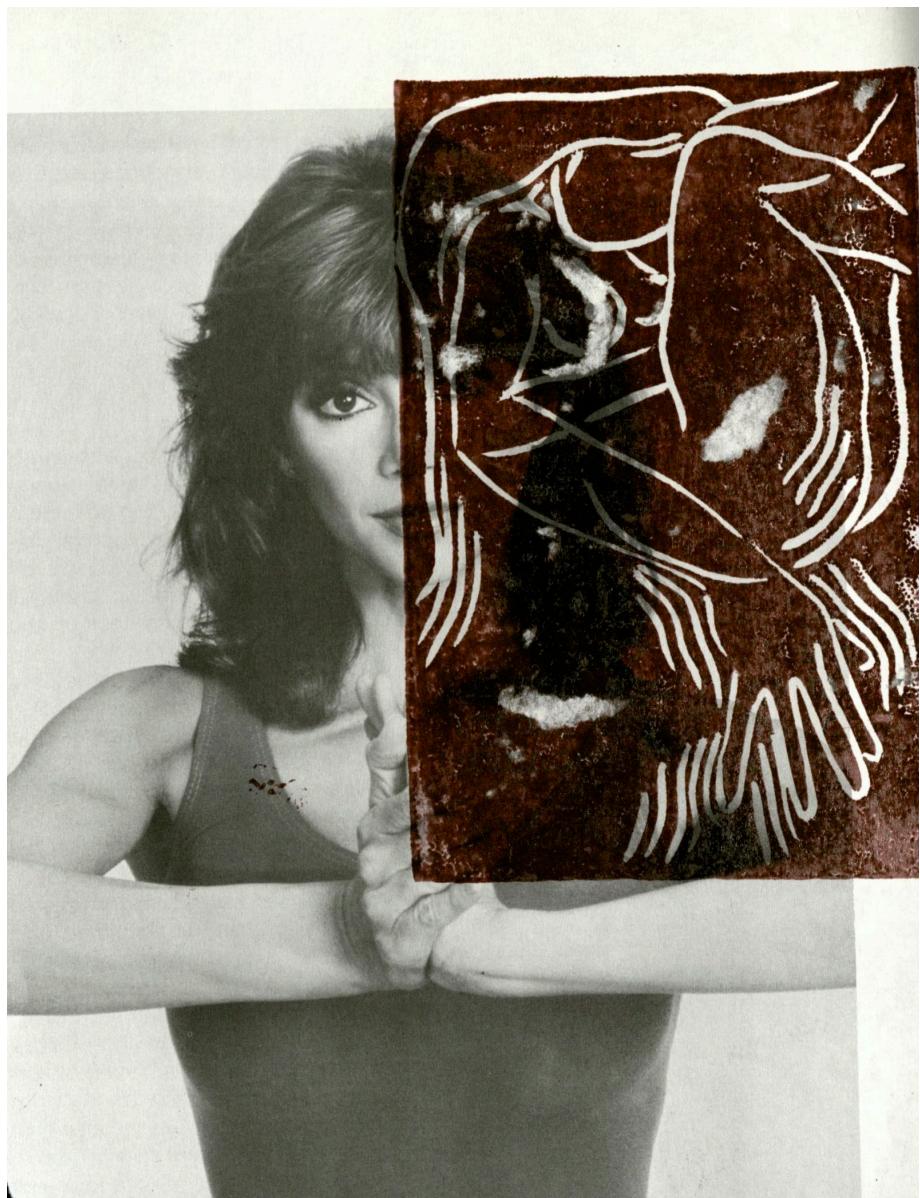
## BODY PRINCIPLES



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Optional #1



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ELLA ROSENBLATT

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1

23

ELLA ROSENBLATT

a sound: the sound of  
the inside of my head,  
churning like a stomach

his sounds: the  
compression and  
decompression of  
his sleeping breath,  
body rhythm

sleep like this, and the lexapro  
of course doesn't make me sleepy  
it might; internally I am  
writing a book about  
the glass I picked out  
of my boots  
last week

and now,  
the whistle of wind  
against the window  
I press against  
for cold

NOTES ON A PERFORMANCE OF  
4'33, STAGED WHILE SHARING A  
TOO-SMALL TWIN MATTRESS AT  
4AM WITH A FRIEND I SOMETIMES  
SLEEP WITH

the whisper of  
passing traffic;  
yes

thought sounds like:  
does it hurt when the  
weight of my head falls  
on your shoulder, am I  
the antithesis to restfulness

of course  
I cannot

his body      throwing heat  
like he      is made  
                    of hell

quiet mash of  
grinding  
bone

I learn that this is called:  
bruxism

imagine:  
imaginary sounds

if his worn-down teeth  
shattered  
like a glass, chiming  
the crunch of glass  
under feet

would this make  
pain into something  
musical?

his pulse pulsing, and

and his blood  
flows, my ear  
pressed to  
his ribcage

am I imagining real sounds?  
and also maybe I could:  
leave the bed  
-leave the bedroom  
-find a roof or cliff  
-feel the power of  
bare wind, or  
the self-indulgence  
of destruction

a sound: worry, worry

imagine a kettle  
whistling

worry

the shushing of his hair

if suddenly

it flowed like a waterfall

a violent  
beautification

a sound: a memory of his  
voice, warped in nightmare

inexplicably,  
cardinals  
(this early?)

breath: a high  
pitch escaping through  
my nose

am I  
making real  
the imaginary sounds?

maybe I could drown in a real-imagined  
whirlpool of his  
storm of hair

thoughts like:  
I should pick you out  
from my shoes,  
from my skin  
from the spaces between my teeth

instead,

I burrow inward

sheets, press my fingertips to his jawbone,  
shifting rub soft circles; unsure if this  
actually helps bruxism

smashing bottles against the concrete supports beneath the highway,  
watching everything become fractal and rain into the water

in the morning I will  
leave him for class

(he always  
makes the bed)

when I come back he will have  
melted into something I cannot see and

memories to do with his breathing his bones cracking  
always inhaling and  
faster than me

I know that I should sleep—  
it is four am— but with  
a body in my bed it is so hard  
to be still when I know that I  
need to be

and still thinking about  
rooftops, maybe  
the terrace at the edge  
of the hill

and wondering if I should regret  
not driving the sixty miles  
to meet the guy on cragslist giving away  
the seven foot panel of mirror  
for free

imagine: the pressure releasing  
from the crevices inside him  
with a

hiss

another muttering,  
senseless

please

manifests instead in  
snippets

it is the small things:

his smell could be,  
I imagine,  
a cry from  
a violin

(his eyelids never make a sound  
when they open)

and noting:  
breath

pulse

plus I am staging  
a performance

blood-rush

I need to be awake to witness

thinking

the cardinal

stops

it would be bigger than me,  
it would be

singing

bigger than the both of us

when he turns over I think he wakes up  
enough to notice me, and pulls me inward,  
I wonder about giving up on stillness  
and relaxing into a formless thing

maybe I can make sleep  
from making body rhythms  
into measures

maybe he says something like  
go to sleep

maybe I abandon them

and maybe  
he doesn't

the most delicious sound I've ever heard:  
the parting of lips pulling away  
from my forehead

(imagining real sounds,  
or making the real  
the  
imaginary ?)

maybe I fall asleep  
listening to:

silence, or

something  
like it

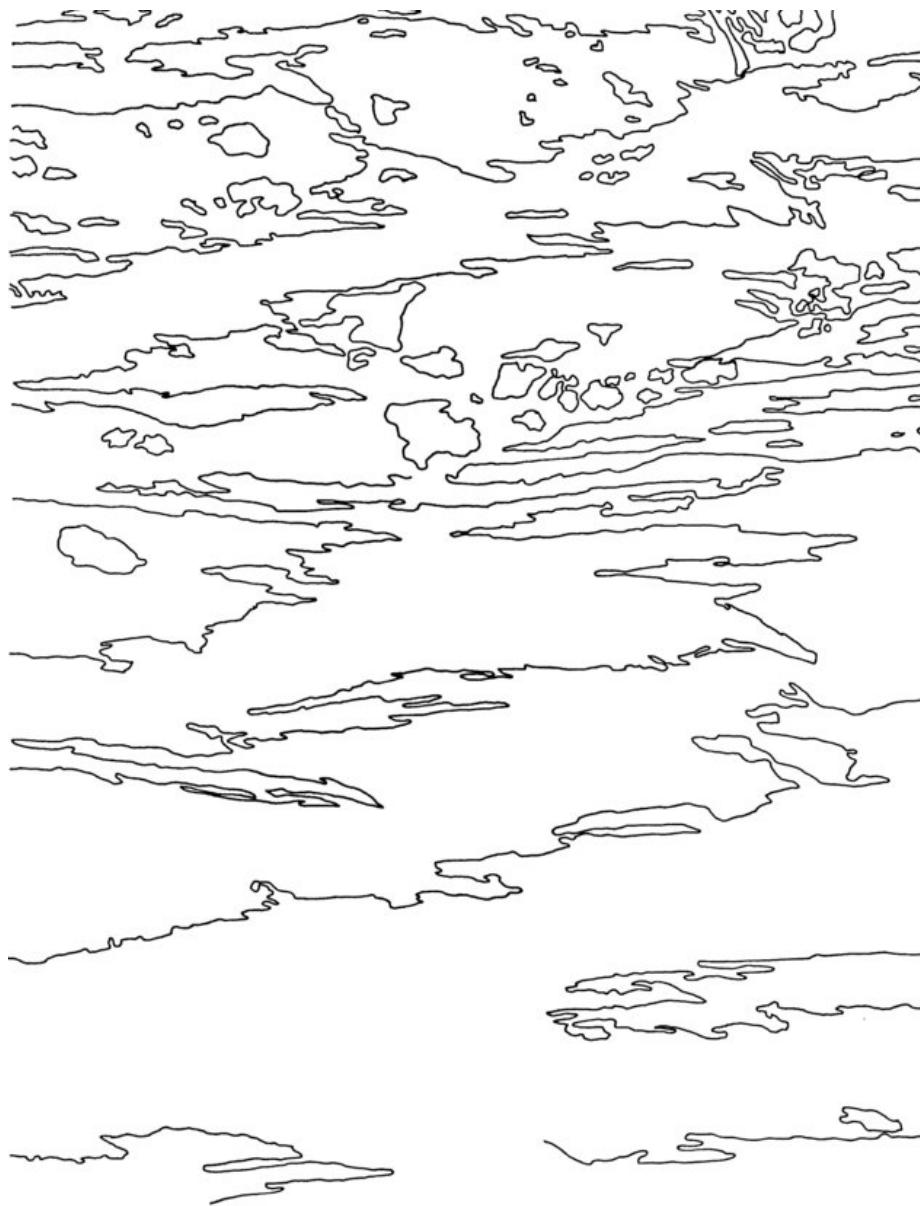
ELIZABETH MULLANEY

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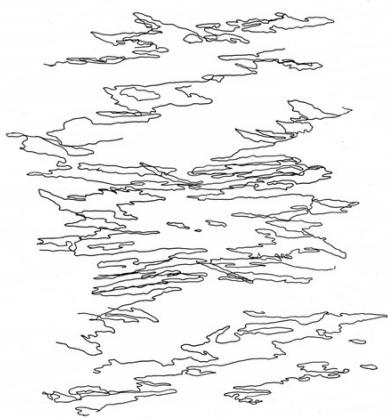
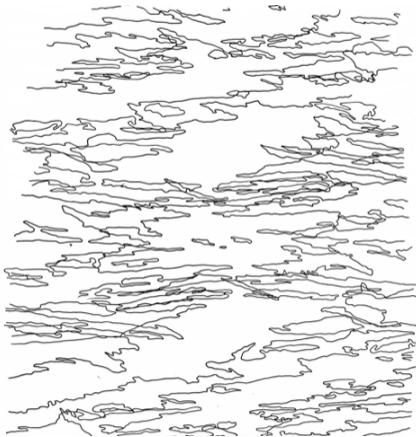
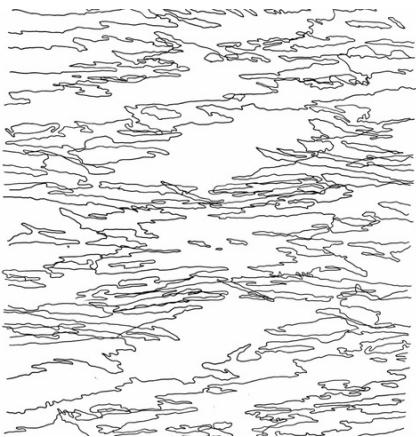
WATER TENSIONS



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## DOROTHY JIANG

Key:

A = Mom's side

B = Dad's side

AB = Them, combined

-- = Me, maybe

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[--?]

[A3]

I say my grandpa was sent to a labor camp.  
I hold onto it, waiting for it to explain something  
Neither of my parents grew up with a father—  
one drowned, one taken  
I hold onto that, too, and I secretly resent them for it. No wonder

[AB9]

I think to myself but never out loud my brother has \_\_\_\_\_.  
First because I was afraid and was looking out for him,  
but maybe now because it matters a little less

[A7]

My mom was forced to cry in elementary school when Mao died.  
She was a part of the Youth League when she was at the  
Tiananmen massacre in 1989  
I wonder why it took 18 years for her to tell me.  
I secretly respected her more for it. Evidence, once,  
she was not limp to historical tides

[AB6]

I remember when my dad punched a hole in the wall  
We covered it with a map.  
I don't remember if we filled it.  
I assume we did when we moved out

[AB5]

I remember my dad told me I could choose for him to hit me  
or my favorite stuffed animal. I chose the stuffed animal  
and I cried and cried and cried, guilty eyes glued

[A5]

My grandma refused to leave her government-allotted spot  
in Beijing when my grandpa wrote her a letter begging her  
to move to the countryside.  
I think now I owe everything to that denial

[AB--]

Abstinence from wholeness

Self-deprivation of family now for family later.

Natural choice, natural denial, natural self-preservation

[A8]

My grandpa came back from the countryside, his infant daughter now over 20 years old. I wonder to myself maybe my mom loves him so much because he was mostly an idea

[--]

I wonder if I could be so selfless to be loved only from afar I wonder from across the country and sometimes the world If this choice, so natural, is denial at all

[A10]

My grandpa came back and started school again in his 50s.

He became a professor

I wonder to myself what my blood smells like and if resilience is hereditary

[AB1]

My parents moved to Japan then Singapore, then picked up everything to live here Displacement is hereditary.

I secretly admire that, I am secretly proud of my parents, somehow so daring. They remind me of myself (hopefully)

[AB13]

My parents call and tell me not to work too hard They say aren't we so American now?

I say yeah and nod over the phone.

I do not say I have four jobs.

[B1]

My other grandpa drowned while swimming and chasing a thief on his college campus. The government named him a hero

My dad was one year old.

My dad knows the risk in risk

[B2]

My dad, a child, was given a little money for ice cream.  
He spent it on books  
I very unsecretly rolled my eyes  
I very secretly wished I could one day think to do the same

[B3]

My dad's grandma lived to age 103. She smoked constantly.  
She had lotus feet.

[AB7]

My grandma died when I was in high school.  
She was so small the last time I saw her, a glove of bones  
barely stacked

[AB4]

I remember when she lived with us the first time,  
I was so young  
My mom asked who my favorite family member was,  
and I said my grandma  
My dad smiled secretly  
My mom didn't help me brush my teeth for a week  
I told this to my grandma in anxious Mandarin and felt so stupid.  
(I never spoke to her when she lived with us the second time, seas  
between us too far to fly) She was so small and there was nothing  
else I could say

[A4]

My grandpa was discovered to be good with electronics in the  
countryside, so he worked on radios at the labor camp.  
Bodies fall, sweat still glistening  
Thank goodness

[A2]

My grandma is my grandpa's second wife. There were no kids  
before my mom and uncle.

[AB10]

My parents say I love you at the end of every phone call but I don't  
say it back. I don't know how.  
I want to (know how)

[A9]

My mom's brother was protesting at Tiananmen in 1989  
He took photos, but he burned them, in case

[B4]

My dad's half-siblings finished fifth grade, eighth grade,  
and high school. My dad got a master's

[AB3]

My mom tells me I thought my dad was Indian when I was little  
I hated that my skin was darker than hers.  
I hated that it looked more like his

[AB2]

My mom's zodiac is a horse, my brother's a boar,  
and mine an ox  
My dad's is a snake

[AB8]

Both my mom's parents are well  
Both my dad's parents are gone.  
My mom told me he told her he was an orphan now  
She said you have your own family now,  
Angrily

[A6]

My grandma worked at the printing factory owned by Mao's wife.  
The neighbors bullied her (our?) family  
It was 16 families in a lot built for one  
She still lent them money at the end of the month.  
Her children were always fed

[--]

I cook Chinese food  
My mom never purposely taught me how, but I was watching her.  
She probably knew

[--]

I think if I do not keep my Chinese tongue, this would have been  
for nothing: The labor camp  
The separation  
The chase  
The hunger  
The decades of broken English  
And I would wear my paper bag of yellow, so thin

[--]

I wonder since my kid will at least be half Chinese, if they will just  
close their eyes and know how to make 炸酱面.

[A?--]

I wonder if when my mom was 21, she thought she and her daughter  
would not share the same first language  
And her daughter would think less of her for it.  
If they would (could) not ever truly understand each other

[A1]

My mom's aunt was illiterate.

[B5]

My cousin dropped out of high school

[--]

I collect accolades named after US Presidents. I don't understand  
I feel guilt  
I am a voyeur, not even looking

[AB--]

I wonder if they hate me

I know I would

I am so impious, so quick to adopt and disavow them as I please I  
want their lives to prove something about mine

I feel guilt, but obviously not enough to stop

I am sorry

I wonder if you would laugh at my Chinese cooking

I know you pity my Chinese

I am sorry

[AB12]

I came home wearing turtle necks. My mom told me I could have hers She had a phase, too.

[AB11]

I came home with short hair.  
My mom told me I looked better with long.  
I later found out she had my same haircut in her 20s

[AB?--]

My dad keeps saying he wants to visit.  
My mom says I don't have time for them  
I don't but I don't say so  
I want them to see this life I have built for myself thousands of miles away and look at how strong I have become look at how many people I can wave to who will wave back at me look at my picture hanging on the wall look but I don't say so  
I say you can come if you want  
They say I love you and I say nothing.



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STRUCTURE—NUTRE

NICOLE COCHARY



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I know it's hard to make sense of dreams, but I'll tell you last night's anyways: I was in a grassy clearing bordered by the sea, and I lay wet bricks of ideas I plucked from the ocean onto the grass by the ocean. I leave them to dry in the sun of a Sunday afternoon. I leave after I'm done.

And as the sun dries itself out, tucked under the horizon for the evening, you pick each wet brick up and read me out loud. This is a sex dream now. Oooh. You read me and you want me through wanting my disembodied voice. In the absence of me, you use my voice as your God.

We don't have language for the reason, only the symptom. Words come out and show allegiance, responsibility to no one. Words can even kill you. I killed me when I killed the dream when I killed you with words. I spoke them when you began to enter me, me the disembodied God, and I killed you as soon as the words had a body. I said to you then, with the words of my body, "This is only a dream." Everything disappeared. Can you ever find a good reason for using words in this way?

Especially as I spend the last word of each sentence denying the hole at the center of everything that came before it. Especially then.

MASTHEAD—

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