

*Whole Beast Rag*  
**Issue 02: EDGE**

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## Nava to Nectareo by Sean Beld

A plain or a level piece of ground. Clasp-knife. Folding-knife. Tusk of a wild boar. A thrust or gash with a knife. A shaving towel. Razor. Pool. A level piece of ground. A kind of poniard in the form of a knife. Naval. Armada. Royal navy. Royal fleet. Pool. Ship. A vessel. Nave. The middle part of a church. A small vessel. Seaworthiness. Navigation. Navigator. Sailor. Seaman. Vessel for incense in a church. Small drawer. Applied to the middle bone of the foot before the heel. A small vessel. Nativity. Christmas. Belonging to the time of the Nativity. A ship. A ship, especially a large ship or a ship of war. Ship of the line. Dispatch boat. Merchant ship. Guardship. Poet. Naiad. Water-nymph. Nazarene. Native of Nazareth. Nazarite. Lesser. Falcon. Mist. Small rain. Juniper. Nebulosity. Misty. Cloudy. Nebulous. To talk nonsense. To play the fool. Gross ignorance. Stupidity. Idiocy. Privy. Water-closet. Necessarily. Indespensibly. Necessary. Requisite. Needful. Necessity. Need. Want. Evacuation of the body by stool or water. Compelled. Necessitated. Necessitous. Poor. Needy. Poor man. To necessitate. To want. To need. To lack. Ignorantly. Stupidly. Ignorant. Stupid. Imprudent. Injudicious. Necrography. Necrology. Mortuary. Necromancy magic. The black art. Necropolis. Post-mortem examination. Nectar. Nectarial. Nectarian.

## **(The Self is a Shield)** by Sean Beld

The self is a shield. It cannot surround, but only defends one side. One direction. A shadow. The shield is a self. It cannot surround, but defends on all sides. It is a direction. The shield is a self. It cannot surround the shadow. The shadow is a self. It cannot surround, but defends from my side. It has one direction. The self is a shadow. It shields on all sides. It takes one side at a time. The self is a shield that suffers from one side. One side suffers from all sides. All sides suffer from the self. The shield that self defends sees one side and then the next. The self the shield defends suffers all sides all at once. The direction is my direction. The shield suffers, calls the self-defense one-sided. One side is all sides. One direction is not a direction. One side is a shield that suffers. One direction is a self that defends. One side, then the other. One direction, then the next. It cannot sound. It sees both sides. The self it cannot see all sides, but defends both. The self sounds like a shield. The shield sounds like sword sounds like suffer. (I regret telling you this). The shield is a self. It can surround, but defends all sides one time. All directions. It can sound. The self is a shield. It surrounds, but defends one side. It isn't one direction. The shield isn't a self. It can surround the shadow. The shadow is not a self. It can surround, but defends from your side. It has all directions. The shadow is a self. It shields all sides. The shield is a self that suffers from one direction. The shield that surrounds the self suffers from all sides. All sides suffer from one side. The self suffers from one side. The self that shields sees all sides and then the next. The shield the self defends suffers one side at a time. The direction is your direction. The self suffers, calls the shield defense from all sides. All sides are one side. All directions are direction. One shield is a side that suffers. One self is a direction that defends. All sides, then another. All directions, then the next. It sounds. It sees one side. The self sees all sides, but defends none.

## The Refrigerator by Danielle Lea Buchanan

The refrigerator is pregnant again. The umbilical cord is black rubber. Attached to the bellybutton of the wall. She vents hard from 17 nostrils. Her womb has a door handle I open. Two breasts, 48 ounce pitchers of black tea, swell over the edges. Previous children are wrapped in aluminum foil, seat belted to the door. Her sex smells of a vat of pork broth. Bundles of cilantro curl around her opening. A green hair aromatic and wild and tangled. She's wet. Leaks mustard. Her plastic spine almost collapses when the compressor pumps. She's grinding her teeth into ice trays. Just as the baby kicks in the crisper, her amniotic fluid spills. A dog licks it off the floor. The doctor administers anesthesia by dropping the temperature -12 degrees. He opens and shuts every cabinet of her womb. Her placenta, a 20 pound honey-baked ham, is thrown into a black garbage bag. The surgeon cuts her appendix with a screwdriver. Ties her fallopian tubes with pliers. The baby is purple and unmoving as an eggplant. Dead, it lies in a colander in the kitchen sink. The refrigerator is strapped to a dolly, then wheeled.

## Headcheese Jelly by Danielle Lea Buchanan

A butcher walks home down Petunia Street holding a captive bolt pistol and a yellow umbrella. In his pocket, a recipe for headcheese jelly: Boil the head of a pig to produce a stalk. Include tongue, feet, heart. When stock cools, it congeals due to natural gelatin in the skull. Set in aspic. Season with bay leaf and vinegar. Eat cold. He unlocks the door. His wife lays naked in the kitchen in a cattle trough. Nipples prod like antlers. A pot of water boils on the stovetop. The son's feet are stapled with a nail gun to the wall. There's a slow drip from his jaw into the 7th Mason jar. The wife in the trough yawns. Asks for tea. The butcher puts the captive bolt to her head. The bolt grinds the skull to flour, enters the cranium, cerebrum and cerebellum. It stops just before the brain stem. Her heart still beats. She's scalded with boiling water until her scalp is lifted from her head like sod from a lawn. A blow dryer ripples the face away. She's reduced on the oven at medium low to fat that left out overnight congeals to grease. She was missing for 18 months. Then found on the top shelf of the refrigerator. Stored in 7 lard tins. Her ribcage smoked with apple wood. Ovaries molded in buttermilk.

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## Metal Detector by Danielle Lea Buchanan

There were bells. They said "This way, Ma'am." They took her by the elbow. They wore white gloves. Everyone in line looked at one another. Then stared at their passport Bibles. They slapped her down on a black conveyor belt. She was pushed through a machine with light. They pulled at her bellybutton like a key ring and unzipped her body. The zipper stuck at the scalp because of her blonde, curly hair. Then a thin flap of stomach flung open. The crying started. Her pancreas, a tube of red lipstick, rolled across the floor. They took out organs from the suitcase. They held her brain like soft cover book, leafing through its pages. "You didn't..." "If..." "We could..." "You didn't!" "She wanted..." And so it began. Her lungs were tossed like two pairs of high heel shoes flipped off the feet. Her intestines hung out her body like pantyhose. Her appendix, a coral necklace. The kidneys, earplugs. Stomach a large compact of facial powder. Her urethra, a pink bikini bottom. "What's going on? What's taking so long? Where are they? More coffee?" They mistook ovaries for bullets. Thought the esophagus a soft carrying case for razor blades. Nipples for safety pins of the grenade. Dead bone for ground gun powder. They load organs back in the suitcase. "Sorry about that Ma'am. You're free. Gate A." The line finally moves again. Across her chest they slap a lime green sticker: Security checked June 15, 2010. It was 85 degrees in Florida. A farmer, she had never seen the ocean.



## Electric Bath by Danielle Lea Buchanan

The chicks are chirping. The doctor spreads me wide and shines his incubator light. He twists my clitoris doorknob. My vagina swings open like a battery cage. Straw, yolk and feathers mulch out of my hatchery. The assistants pull out baby ducks. Duck beaks stick out all bloody carrot-like. Breathe, they say. Wings stretch through my fallopian tubes. The claws of a webbed foot catch in my cervix. The females are thrown into black garbage bags. A pipe pokes in and they are gassed with CO2. The males are swung upside down. Bashed against steel tables. Their necks twist several rotations. Their heads hang to their feet, attached by a single nerve. My babies! What are you doing with my babies! I wake when the conveyor belt rolls. My head slams against a wall. Thick shanks shoved into metal shackles. A motor kicks. I'm driven to the electric bath. A tub of water with a low voltage. Fizzes like ginger ale. The electricity pops in bubbles. I struggle. Neck snaps. In the electric bath. A chain brings me back up. There is a moment of stillness of silence of muscles contracting the back arching legs extending when the eyes don't blink then the motor kicks and I'm driven to the kill machine. A blade. My body folded. Whipped to rest in a glass cup. Stabbed with a spoon. Sprigs of parsley sprinkled like tears on the grave.



## Blattodea by Danielle Lea Buchanan

There is \$345,000 worth of termite damage between my thighs. It all started with the Queen. The Queen crawled into my damp, dark place of chronic leaks. The Queen confused my vagina with an anthill. She laid her eggs. I felt them hatch. Then the Queen's colonies fed on my ovaries as if they were dead plants. Bit into my lungs like leaf litter. Chewed the wallpaper of my stomach lining. My spine collapsed fast as a toothed wooden staircase. I don't know what to do. I am pregnant. My eggs sprout through my body. I fear the Queen will eat holes in my crop. I called pest control. They said to dust my ribcage with insecticide. To mist my coccyx with arsenic. If that doesn't work, I must feed the Queen. She'll take whatever I give her back to the nest and spread it to the colony. At night, I lay in bed with woodchips soaked in gasoline. I stick them up my damp, dark place. I've begun tapping my thighs with the handle of a screwdriver. There's the hollow sound of damaged wood. My skin warps. Pest control says to caulk my crawl space. I get a gallon of wet cement and a putty knife from the hardware store. I spread my legs.





## The Abortion by Danielle Lea Buchanan

my vaginal walls are non-  
stick  
heavily rubbed with butter  
the bladder a silver blade  
gyrates my baby in the bread machine  
her legs whip against my wall  
her eyes sunny side yolks fold into her dough  
yellow blood lights the green button  
my womb flops opens you pull baby out  
you lick baby a glossy, lumpy ball of skin  
slapped & dripping  
back & forth before two palms the manufacturer  
warns: never add wet ingredients  
coconut oil enters the amniotic sac the umbilical  
cord glows at 350 degrees  
Her skull grows yeast  
Takes shape of a baguette's heel  
my womb beeps it's time  
baby cools for 25 minutes on a rack



## **Why Flannery O'Connor Never Found a Good Casaba Melon in Milledgeville, Georgia** by Danielle Lea Buchanan

### **A brief history:**

The penis dates back to 2400 B.C., originally a member of the royal Muskmelon and Gourd family. The first penis was found on a vine in Kasaba, Turkey. Horticulturist Fredrich Kleinshudt took note of its thick, yellow rind and aromatic, sweet pepper smell.

### **How to Pick a Penis:**

1. Avoid penises that are bruised, molded, oblong, oval, too symmetrical, expunge an excessive strong odor, or have damaged skin consisting of gashes. At all times, avoid soft spots. Do, however, opt for penises with a slightly wrinkled appearance. The cantaloupe, for example, is a penis that wears an orange hair net.
2. Gently press the thumb into the hole at the top of the penis. The penis should yield to pressure when touched.
3. Slap the side of the penis. If there is a hollow thud sound, the penis is ripe.
4. The penis should be heavy. It should weigh from five to ten pounds.
5. The best penises can be bought at Farmer's Markets or even better, grown organically with eggshells and coffee grounds in our backyards.

### **Once you've found your penis:**

1. If eating immediately, leave the penis on the kitchen sink at room temperature. If the penis was found unripe, put the penis in a brown paper bag or set the penis in direct sun on the windowsill.
2. With a knife, cut around the hole at the top of the penis. This gives better leverage to stick ones fingers underneath the skin. Peel the penis like a banana. The flesh of the penis ranges from salmon to crème to pink to jade green to celadon in color.
3. With a spoon, scoop out the black seeds. These are sperm pods. One can also pick a spermless penis. These are usually more expensive. Sperm are small, soft and edible. Having removed the sperm, you can place them on wax pepper and roast them in the oven. Sprinkle with salt.
4. Scoop out the flesh of the penis from the rind. This is more easily done with an ice cream scoop. The flesh rolls away from the rind into balls.
5. Do not throw the rind away. Use it as a condiment. Pickle it with cinnamon sticks, sugar, and vinegar in mason jars.
6. Enjoy the flesh of the penis. The flesh is juicy, sweet, refreshing and delicious. Share it with everyone. It has been found that there is a severe deficiency of penis in children. Penises are full of vitamin A and C. How to get your children to eat more penis? By your example, of course. Penises

are popular at potlucks and church congregations. Serve the penis diced in a fruit cup, or puree the penis into a cold watermelon soup.

7. If not eating immediately, store the penis in plastic wrap so it doesn't absorb other odors such as mustard. The penis can remain in the refrigerator for up to five days.

8. If the penis is too large to store in your refrigerator unit, keep it in another cool, dark place. Use perhaps a friend's unit.

**A warning:**

Since many penises grow on the ground, their skin may be contaminated by Salmonella Poona. To avoid this fatal pathogen, always scrub a penis with a toothbrush.

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## Jesus Christ, Boy Detective: The Early Bird Gets the Shaft by J. Bradley

"Will this work," Ben Jones asks, forcing himself to stand still against the wall.

"As long as you don't move, Mr. Jones, I should be able to get it," the shadow across the room replies.

"I...I...I've changed my mind." Ben turns, takes a step. An arrow lands beneath his raised left foot, the shaft shaking.

"That was a warning, Mr. Jones. You signed the contract. As far as we're concerned, this is happening. If you read what you signed, then you're already aware of the consequences should you walk away."

Ben steps back, extending his arms against the wall. "Alright, let's get this over with."

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"Timmy, thanks for coming." Chief Donaldson shakes Timmy Hightower's hand.

"Of course, Chief. What seems to be the problem here?" Timmy turns and sees a man slumped against the adjacent wall, wearing a hospital gown drowning in blood, the darkest stains around the collar and stomach. "How did it happen?"

"Jim, can you bring the bag please?" A crime scene technician walks over, hands Chief Donaldson a large evidence bag with two bloodied arrows. Donaldson holds the bag in front of Timmy.

"Someone musta watched a little too much *Lord of the Rings* or something."

"Or something." Timmy takes a picture of the arrows and the body with his cell phone. "What's his name?"

"Benjamin Johan Jones. He was 39, a systems analyst. No wife or kids."

"Any enemies?"

"We just found the body thanks to a call to 9-1-1 from a nearby payphone."

"Let me guess...my father wants me to take this case."

"You guessed right, kid."

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"I thought...I was the only one who preferred...never to use guns." Leopold Franz sits on the couch in Timmy's crime lab, sharpening his throwing knives. "At least...there was a body this time."

"Yeah. This time." Timmy turns to his computer, closes his eyes. He presses a few keys, then opens his eyes again. "Looks like I figured out how to access the data miner Timmy uses to do deep research. The connection of Timmy's body to his soul is repairing slowly." The monitor brings up a

picture of a man wearing horn rimmed glasses, slicked back salt and pepper hair. Timmy clicks the mouse, presses a few more buttons. "Leopold, the autopsy on Mr. Jones hasn't come back yet, right?"

"Your phone...hasn't vibrated or rang."

"I'll let them discover that he had stage three pancreatic cancer."

"Suicide...or a friend granting him his last wish?"

"I don't think a lot of people want to die by arrow, Leo." Timmy pulls up pictures of Ben Jones' body. "Most of the blood came from his abdomen and the wound looks to be approximately where the pancreas would be. The neck wound though, that came second." Timmy presses a couple of keys, accessing Ben's bank statement. "The last transaction was three days ago. \$700 to a TATN Industries." Timmy opens another window, enters TATN Industries in the Search field, hits the Enter key, then stands up and stretches. "Hungry? It's four-for-one night at Taco Dog."

"No, thank you. I'll stay here...and make a sandwich."

Timmy grabs his blue track jacket and New York Mets cap hanging from the wall. "I'll be out for an hour or so. If that thing gets a hit, call me please."

As Timmy runs up the stairs, an arrow flies through the open basement window and stabs Timmy's hard drive. Leopold leaps from the couch, throws three knives through the window before the second arrow impales the monitor. Leopold doesn't wait for the archer's scream to run up the stairs, outside the house. Leopold watches a white windowless van peel away, a trail of blood leading to the curb where the van was parked. Leopold runs back into the house, picks up the phone in the kitchen.

"Hello?"

"Thank God...you are alright, Timmy?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Come back...to the house...and see."

"I'm in the middle of eating."

"Bring it back...with you. You need...to come home. I'm your guardian. You are supposed to do...as I say, remember?"

.

Timmy stares at the arrows stuck in his hard drive and monitor. "What happened?"

"Someone...shot two arrows. I threw...a few knives...got whoever it was. He escaped...before I could catch him."

"Was there any blood?" Leopold nods. "Why didn't you call the police?"

"I had to make sure...you were safe."

Timmy pulls out his cell phone, takes pictures of the ruined hard drive and monitor. He then presses one on the keypad. "Chief, bring a CSI team to my house. I'm sending you the pictures now."

"It looks like you were getting close to something," Chief Donaldson says as his CSI team pulls out the arrows, places them in an evidence bag. "Someone did their homework on you."

"How fast can you find out who it was with the blood?"

"If the shooter committed a previous crime, not long, but if someone is smart enough to figure out how you work, they're smart enough not to get caught. You can come to the station and use our stuff until you get your computer fixed."

"Thanks, Chief."

"The crime lab analyzed the arrows. The one we took out of Jones' stomach, the head is made of depleted uranium. The one we took from his neck, the arrowhead is just steel."

"Before my computer was assassinated, I found out Mr. Jones had stage three pancreatic cancer. Based on where you pulled out the arrow and what the head was made of...Chief, I don't think this was a murder. I think this was alternative medicine gone wrong."

"What are you talking about?"

"According to his bank records, Mr. Jones paid \$700 to a company called TATN Industries three days before we found the body. That was the last significant transaction he made. Pancreatic cancer is one of the hardest cancers to treat and the survival rate is incredibly low. Mr. Jones was trying to see if targeting the pancreas directly with radiation would actually work. Something went wrong and whoever did this had to put him out of his misery." Timmy opens the web browser on his cell phone, enters "arrows + medical treatment". The guitar solo from "Wango Tango" plays as the website pulls up. "Hey, Chief, ever heard of the Ted Nugent School of Medicine?"

"Thank you for seeing us." Leopold, dressed in a tan cardigan sweater, a white buttoned up shirt and khakis, shakes the hand of Dr. Elias Harington, the dean of the Ted Nugent School of Medicine. "Shake the man's hand, Frank." Timmy, wearing a New Jersey Devils baseball cap backwards, black bags under his eyes, leans up from his wheelchair to shake Dr. Harington's hand.

"It's my pleasure. How were you referred to us?"

"I watched a YouTube video of one of your patients, Erin Grant, delivering a testimonial. She had breast cancer in her right breast and thanks to your methods, her cancer went into remission. She posted the link to the school's website and well...I'm desperate."

"Excuse me for a moment, please." Dr. Harington picks up the receiver of the black phone sitting on his desk, presses a couple of buttons. "John? Yes, it's Elias. Ms. Grant supposedly posted a testimonial about the school on the Internet. Would you please investigate and determine whether she violated her contract? Thanks, John." Dr. Harington hangs up, turns his attention back toward Leopold. "Desperate? How so, Mr. Merkel?"

"My boy here," Leopold places a reassuring hand on Timmy's right shoulder, "He's got a brain tumor that's resisted all forms of treatment. The doctor says...he's got six months to live. You're the last chance that I've got to save the boy."

"Brain tumors are tricky, even for our experts. The price for this kind of treatment isn't cheap, but it's cheaper than what big pharma currently charges."

"How much?"

"\$2,000."

"I...I can do that. That's amazing. And affordable."

"You'll have to provide a 50% deposit up-front and fill out some paperwork, including a binding non-disclosure agreement and a waiver of liability should the treatment...not work the way it should."

"Dad...this is crazy. You're going to let these people shoot an arrow at my head? What if it works but I'm retarded for the rest of my life?"

"Let me reassure you...Frank...that the practitioners of the Ted Nugent's philosophy of medicine receive the very best training from masters of Zen archery and from doctors who studied at John Hopkins and Harvard. Our boards are more rigorous than what the state requires. Our success rate has been 65% and climbing. We're not licensed and accredited yet, but with enough data, we should receive approval by no later than the end of the third quarter of this year. You've tried everything else, young man. What do you have to lose?"

"So I have a 35% chance of dying? This is insane. Dad, let's go."

Dr. Harington's phone rings. "Hang on a second." He picks up the receiver. "He's here? Send him right in." Three men in white coats walk in Dr. Harington's office, bows pulled back, aiming at Leopold and Timmy. "You two are terrible liars."

"What...are you talking about?" Leopold shakes his head, shrugs his shoulders.

"Drop the fake American accent, Mr. Merkel, or may I call you Leopold?" Dr. Harington rips the cardigan off of Leopold. "Roll up your sleeves, please?" Leopold rolls up the sleeves on his shirt, revealing a variety of tattoos on his arms. "You couldn't make up a better German name than

Gunther Merkel? I'm disappointed in you, and in you, Timmy Hightower, boy detective." Dr. Harington removes the New Jersey Devils cap, revealing Timmy's blonde buzz cut. He wipes the bags from beneath Timmy's eyes with his thumb.

"How did you know?"

"As you watched the 'testimonial', we were able to bug your phone's operating system, tracking your movements through that instead of the tail we originally had put on you. However, based on your profile, we weren't expecting such clumsiness in gaining access into the school."

"Elias..."

"That's Dr. Harington to you, boy."

"Elias, are you sure you knew where I was the entire time?"

Elias slaps Timmy across the face. "I said that's Dr. Harington to you, boy."

Timmy wipes the blood from the corner of his mouth. "Fine. Dr. Harington, are you sure knew where I was all this time?"

"Yes, why?" Gas seeps into Dr. Harington's office. The doctors/archers and Dr. Harington gag and cry. "Shoot them! Shoot them now!" Leopold drops to the floor, removes the two throwing knives taped on his shoulders, throws them at the doctor/archer to the left and right of him. He sweeps the legs out of the third one. Dr. Harington runs out of his office.

"I got these three...Timmy. Go get Elias."

Timmy jumps out of his wheelchair, runs after Dr. Harington. An arrow grazes his t-shirt.

"That was a warning. Come after me, boy, and the next one will be..." A marble slaps Elias' right eye. He holds his bow hand over it, turns and flees. Timmy sprints, then jumps. Timmy and his right foot slam into Dr. Harington's back, sending him crashing to the floor. Timmy stands between Dr. Harington's shoulder blades, aiming his slingshot at the back of the doctor's head.

"You're not the only one who's a good shot."

Three SWAT team members emerge through the teary mist, dragging Dr. Harington and Timmy out to fresh air.

.

"That was close, Timmy, too close for comfort." Chief Donaldson leans against his police car, puffing his pipe.

"If it wasn't for Leopold scaring off the first tail, and for switching out my SIM card after it was bugged, we couldn't have pulled this off." Timmy reaches into his shirt, pulls out an activated



Bluetooth earpiece, and throws it to Chief Donaldson. "Please thank Officer O'Leary for shadowing my movements these last few days to keep Elias off my tail."

"I will, Timmy. I don't think we can get them though on the Jones case. It's alternative medicine and he agreed to undergo their treatment. If they could afford a private investigator to dig up dirt on you and Leopold and to plant sophisticated tracking viruses in cell phones, then they probably have an excellent legal team that could keep the Jones case locked up in court for years, R. Kelly style."

"Uncle Leo and I signed no such paperwork. Once they found out who we are, it became attempted murder, two counts. I'm 100% sure they'll go to jail for a long time."

.

"Your father...has a strange sense of humor," Leopold says, holding the signature Taco Dog bright yellow fire hydrant shaped cup full of cherry cola.

"How?"

"That last case...people being treated with arrows...that would be like me treating illness...with my knives."

Timmy swallows a bit of the jalapeno, ghost pepper, kimchi salsa inside the Smaug Dog, chases it with a kamikaze of lime soda, vanilla cola, and Jolt. "Humans are so desperate to hold onto to their mortality, they'll try anything. My father keeps them good and scared because he needs them to die and from that fear, they create things like Scientology, crystal healing, yoga, acupuncture, things they think will stave off death if they practice them, believe in them hard enough. If they knew the truth, knew of the broken promise that awaits them after they die...until then, my father will continue doing everything he can to make sure they keep missing the mark."

[^](#)

## Untitled by Getty Carver

eat my bones.

let their mildew flood you.

will it make your chaos flow?

will we writhe among the knotted, clumsy skin?

quivering in the forest of gnarled dreams,

with the moon of doomed futures glowing over us?

It has a hood.

your pebble, oil slicked, like a scab

dragging my tongue across its teeth,

opening my cavity,

which yearns to be filled with rockslide avalanche.

But dried memories lay flaccid

and shuddering in the dark.



## A Whale Brain Weighs 19 Pounds, An Octopus Brain is Beyond You by Getty Carver

I am a ball of quivers  
crashing through my mother's gore  
and slathered in footsteps.  
I am a bag of earthquakes  
screaming inside of cells  
built out of wrinkles.  
my wallpapering  
is painted with needles  
and speckled with nausea,  
peeling at the eyes  
where the war is in flames. spoken in flames.  
the Everything Void  
swirls before me.  
I can't breathe when I'm swallowed forever  
by its unending gullet.  
I am floating,  
osmosis ringing in my ears;  
the stars seep into my bloodstream  
and I can taste the distilled liquid of unused  
molecules  
(it is chilly, barely elegant, and fills me with  
explosions).  
my circuits sputter,  
and the night is coated in acorns  
as I dance and stumble  
into chains.  
sometimes  
I want to kiss the blue pavement.  
and once  
I was born out of focus

## The Piercing by Barbara Christina

There's a place  
For the numb  
Who flock  
Like lusty mosquitoes  
To flickering neon signs  
And grimy store windows.  
It's a dingy fortress  
Of peeling paint  
And dusty shadows,  
A haven  
At the fringes  
Of society's  
Demure skirt.  
There's a man  
Behind these walls.  
He's decorated  
With inky scars  
And torn skin  
Embedded with silver  
Like shining shrapnel  
Meticulously placed in  
Ecstatic self mutilation.  
It's said this man,  
This witch doctor,  
Back-alley surgeon  
Can find your pain.  
He can mark you,  
Transform you,  
Undo you,  
All at your request.  
Cash only.  
This threshold  
I've crossed alone,  
My resolve  
Not attenuated  
Despite the sweaty bills  
In my pocket  
Enclosed in

Trembling fingers.  
He knows already  
What I need  
Before my voice  
Has time to languish,  
Waver, or dissolve  
Into the hum  
Of fluorescent light  
That depicts me as wan  
In the warped mirrors  
Decorating the room.  
He guides me  
Into the back,  
A private chamber  
Alive with graffiti  
Crawling on the walls.  
I convince myself  
I'm not frightened  
Anymore.  
I want this,  
I always wanted this.  
Besides, I paid up front.  
I won't turn back.  
There's nobody to see us,  
To stop us,  
Interrupt us,  
To save me in case  
He hurts me,  
Goes too far,  
In case it gets  
Out of hand.  
Or to rescue me from myself.  
But I've been  
Insensate for so long,  
As if doused  
In Novocain,  
And I don't care any longer.  
I know what's to come,  
The tool he will use.  
He takes it out,

Shows me,  
Assures me it's clean,  
Asks me if  
I'm nervous.  
I'm not.  
Truly not.  
Just do it.  
He touches the spot.  
*Here?* He says.  
*Yes.*  
*Ready?* He says.  
*I guess.*  
*Ok, take a deep breath.*  
I oblige.  
He looks into my eyes  
Then grabs me, the spot  
In a firm grip  
And pushes,  
Penetrates, thrusts,  
So slow, tantalizing.  
I feel it, all of it,  
Every inch.  
The sweet sensation  
He awakens in  
My nerves  
Standing on end  
Through every  
Erect hair  
On my body  
Is exquisite, real.  
There's a puncture,  
Almost a pop,  
A drip of blood.  
I feel him  
Slide it in.  
Hollow shaft,  
Surgical steel,  
Needle through my skin.  
He pulls it through  
The other side.

I feel it glide  
Through my flesh.  
The hurt,  
So damn good  
To feel at all.  
With another jab,  
A ring goes in.  
My metal scar,  
My shrapnel jewel.  
I wince, I cringe.  
My body  
Throbs around it  
Like a little heartbeat  
Born in my wound.  
Already I want more.  
A yank, a twist,  
The ring is closed.  
I'm done.  
No regrets.  
I tip big.  
Until next time,  
I want more.

## Daughter Cells: Biological Contamination and Communal Survival by Sarah Combellick-Bidney

*Political mama, ideological mama, influential mama...dem kill my mama. dem kill my mama, dem kill my mama, dem kill my mama, dem kill my mama, dem kill my mama. —Kuti 1979*

It is hard to say what ultimately killed my grandmother. Some people say the first shot came from the sweet smelling mist that the government banned but then let the farmers spray until it was used up, hanging in the air at 6 a.m. when she would go on her morning run. (The University of Iowa studied the lymphoma cluster in the area, but stopped one block short of my grandmother's house.) The second shot came, years later, from the chemotherapy, still early in its development, before doctors had a basis for knowing how to adapt their treatment regimen so as to kill fewer of the non-cancerous cells in the patient's body.

Among the historical tangles conventionally ennobled by the term "revolution," the Green Revolution is the only one that channeled most of its attention toward the cells of living bodies. What is commonly called the Green Revolution was a chemical revolutionizing of agriculture in the 1960s and 1970s that amounted to an industry-led coup on traditional agriculture. Scientists of diverse ideological backgrounds were involved in the movement, as the prospect of growing more food for more people united friend and foe. Early on, pilot projects using petrochemical fertilizers and GM seeds in Mexican wheat fields boasted magnificent crop yields and convinced the Rockefeller Foundation and World Bank to fund more extensive ventures in Mexico and India. In Indonesia, the practice of water temples was replaced by monocropping and a vast irrigation system.

The ironic name for the Green Revolution came from one of its leaders, William S. Gaud, who gave a speech about the movement in 1968. He said, "These...developments in the field of agriculture contain the makings of a new revolution. It is not a violent Red Revolution like that of the Soviets, nor is it a White Revolution like that of the Shah of Iran. I call it the Green Revolution." The term stuck, but it did not unfold the way Gaud and his cohorts had envisioned. It is the unpredictable twists and turns of this so-called revolution that I want to bring into view, highlighting a theme which is rarely at the center of mainstream retrospectives: the creative ways in which organisms contaminate the very chemicals used on and against them, distorting their meaning and purpose with unevenly distributed deaths, costs and countermeasures that render the original instructions unclear.

When it was my mother's turn—she learned she had four baby cancers in one breast—she responded less quietly than my grandmother had, demanding a copy of the doctor's notes and tying a home-embroidered prayer cloth around her ankle before she went under the knife. She refused the nurse's offer of a wheelchair to carry her into the operating room, remarking that her legs still worked. After the surgery, which was successful, she worked constantly on her own to reinhabit her body: rubbing her fingers together, gathering her old familiar foods and herbs, and



even once asking the nurse to turn up the speaker attached to the stethoscope so she could listen to the ocean sound of her healthy blood flow. She disobeyed Audre Lorde by opting for a “fake tit,” but insisted it be made of her own trusted flesh and not an implant. She reacted negatively to being in the hospital, and healed quickly so that when it came time she flew out of the place, stopping at home only long enough to pack her bags for a road trip cross-country.

I do not know how to succinctly say what this story is about, but I know human and non-human bodies are together in it. Who were the organisms that resisted the aims of the Green Revolution, and how did rebellious bodies manage to shift the trajectory of the Green Revolution from full-on growth mode to damage control mode? And are these sorts of rebellions still happening?

### **The Green Revolution**

The Green Revolution originally sparked my interest in college, not as a historical event or series of events, but as a pairing of words. It expressed the two major obsessions that preoccupied my friends and many others of my race, gender, and socioeconomic class; and it doubly captured my attention as it was occasionally mentioned in books as the start of something big. With mild curiosity, I did some research on the Green Revolution only to find that it was not the organic food movement I had anticipated, but the wave of agrochemicals that had in part precipitated the food trends with which I was most familiar. It was the wave of scientific fervor that had ushered industrial chemical agents into fields, homes, and bodies, some of which had voiced their opposition by promoting earlier agricultural methods now called “organic.” It is sometimes framed as the thesis to which the organic food movement was/is the antithesis. But their relationship was always much more than a dialectic. They have converged in many places and at many times. Think of the wide-open landscapes of green tech and agronomy, and how many kinds of conversations and collisions they have seen. All are technologies, and technologies do not behave any more than plants do.

Revolutionary theories derive momentum from focused objectification of pure bodies and perceived contaminants. Used generically, “technology” and “the body” carry almost no meaning at all. Carrying no meaning, they are pure power, potent symbols to be deployed, protected and revered as inviolable political essences. In other words, the rhetorical bedrock of revolution. These imagined objects convey the imagined purity of a country or a land. A pure body, pure technology, pure country; all are imagined places where familiarity, autonomy, and integrity might reside and be embodied. Contaminants, on the other hand, are often evoked in more specific terms; they are the specific, foreign entities which render the privileged body impure. Contaminants are always foreign, and even when inanimate they are imbued with malignant intent. They modify, invade, and occupy the body at their will.

The Green Revolution itself was engineered with two symbols: the cultivated, pure crop and the foreign pest that invades it. Both bodies are characterized by their imagined innate nature, i.e. their genes. Their central act is simply the act of existence, the fulfilling of their genetic nature in a living

phenotype. In this, they stand and act alone or in concert with species-kin. They are naturally opposed in a battle of existence, in which the existence of one diminishes the other.

The integrity of this simple narrative has been corrupted by the actions of living bodies. At this point, some might say that the Green Revolution has been achieved: much of the world is left with an agricultural system that is heavily industrialized, with desired plants grouped in monocrop fields and their bodies doused in petroleum-based chemicals. However, widespread distrust of these methods now impedes their (further) proliferation and the succinct message that used to serve as the driving force of the Green Revolution has been complicated into incoherence.

At first, the technologies behaved themselves well enough. The word spread that high-yield grains could double your harvest. With the right organophosphate insecticide, Mexican wheat fields could barely contain themselves, and there was no doubt the technology was working for its intended purpose. The purpose, too, was clear: growing more food and feeding more people. It was a call of conscience for many scientists, and a life line for others, but it was not difficult to maintain the conviction that their work was making a massive contribution to a good cause.

What were the first red flags that signaled the revolutionaries' miscalculations? Flora and fauna in the soil would begin to resist monocropping, fertilizers would lose their potency and biologically diverse insect and fungi populations would build up resistances to the chemicals used against them. Soils were already visibly altered, and farmers would have no choice but to spend more money on pesticides and fertilizers. The revenue was a joy for U.S. biotech giants at first. But soon enough, murmurs of bitterness among Third World farmers erupted in a cacophony of resistance to biotech prices at the Stockholm conference that established the UN Environmental Program in 1972. Small farmers were especially feisty, as the new techniques favored large farms at their expense. The Green Revolutionaries, so strong and clear in their purpose, were encountering the complexity of the living, agential world. There was a rebellion at hand.

### **Contaminated bodies**

"My definition of modernity is that it is the period of intensified transportation of seeds and genes." (Haraway and Goodeve 1999, 88), 88.

As usual, real bodies and technologies did not act as planned. The first crack in the edifice was unevenness: the effects of agrochemical practices did not distribute themselves uniformly in living populations. A certain amount of variation had been anticipated in the models, to be sure, but the variation of living bodies rapidly outstripped all calculations. Why does one fertilizer work so differently in three adjacent fields? Why do human populations stubbornly plant seeds in such widely varying and sometimes chaotic patterns? Why does one agricultural worker fall ill when her coworkers show no signs of distress? Trouble-shooting the Green Revolution proved a difficult task with the tools at hand.

Bodily differences and social power played out visibly in the responses to new chemicals. Pests and migrant workers were the first to diverge from the plan, displaying a bewildering amount of

individual variation in their compliance with the new agricultural model. In retrospect, it is clear that poor migrant workers' bodies were placed in the crossfire of ecological havoc in the fields and led the rebellion early on. Meanwhile, workers in chemical plants spoke to each other of exposure and illnesses long before the researchers were called in to investigate. There was no hiding the steadily climbing rates of breast cancer, and women formed groups to give voice to their suspicions. Migrant agricultural workers who demanded testing revealed that Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) seemed to lodge themselves in the sperm cells of human males. Polycyclic hydrocarbons (an agricultural petrochemical) seemed to prefer the ovaries of females in a variety of mammal species (World Health Organization studies cited in Boston Health Collective 1992,107-111).

Perhaps most alarmingly, some organisms refused to retain their species identity. After a few quiescent growing seasons, farmers would notice unfamiliar hybrid pests infiltrating their fields. These pests were more resistant to chemical treatments than their predecessors, since the treatments had been developed with discrete species of pests in mind. Research revealed that hybrid pests were similar to antibiotic-resistant bacteria in humans that evolved to elude extant technologies. The antibiotic (or, in this case, the pesticide) would cause weaker strains to die off, leaving only the most adaptable strains of a given organism. These organisms would survive and elicit rapid change, generation by generation, in the pest population. A few seasons later, their descendants were genetically divergent from the original species in significant ways. News spread of "superweed" versions of horseweed, ragweed and pigweed, and "superbugs" both real and hypothetical. Monsanto's widely used Roundup pesticide is now linked to a wide range of superweeds that bear its name: farmers say "Roundup-resistant" weeds are the hardest to kill.

Reports about these kinds of rebellions travelled at uneven speeds, but ultimately, these decentralized rebellions created a sort of confusion within the revolution. The original conversations in university labs during their joint ventures with DuPont and Monsanto must not have been easy to replicate after the 1970s. Some scientist had doubts, others were weary of the politicization of their work. At base, resistance among their target population had combined with other unintended cultural changes—the antiwar movement, the women's movement—to confuse the revolution's message. The goal was still higher yields, wasn't it? Or, was it larger farms?

Contamination plagued the proponents of the Green Revolution. Proprietary seeds and genes were mixing with native ones, prompting lawsuits from biotech companies and protests from angry locals. Traditional farmers were mixing with roving bands of transnational activists, who convinced them that patented seeds were not as good as they seemed. Pests emerged every year, resistant to the extant chemicals used against their forbears, spreading bad press and prompting rumors that a Super Bug would eventually vanquish modern agriculture.

In response to certain incidents of contamination, there were vain efforts to reassert purity. The biggest controversies surrounded the definitions themselves. The now-daily news of carcinogens in this and that birthed a generation of hypervigilant parents who sought to buy only what was most "natural" and "safe." These resistant consumers felt slightly better when they were "out in

nature,” in backyard gardens or at suitable outdoor recreation venues, away from the sources of all the bad news. But reports of industrial chemicals in Eskimo breastmilk morphed their way into news outlets in ever more virulent forms: No one is safe, chemicals are invading our bodies, and even racialized “savage” mothers are no longer pure.

Resistant bodies launched protests of GMOs in Africa, Asia, Australia/Aotearoa, the Pacific islands, the U.S., and the European Union, portraying genetically modified organisms as monstrous (“Frankenfoods”) invasions into genetically and culturally sacred environments. The GM foods-as-contaminants discussion sunk its roots most deeply in European soil, where governments were forced to mediate a major public outcry about the pollution of European food heritage. Street protests and board meetings resulted in a 2003 law requiring GM ingredients to be labeled as such, setting precedent as the biggest wholesale opposition to GMOs in their short history.

But even more ominous for the Revolution was the resistance it uncovered in two highly sensitive populations of test subjects: native Hawaiians and the scientific community. Native Hawaiians rejected the University of Hawaii’s patenting of GM taro cultivars *pa’akala*, *pa’lehua*, and *pauakea* with a slew of claims that cut to the heart of the premise of the Green Revolution, i.e., that new technology was for the public good, and would aid or surpass traditional methods. The Hawaiian petitioners explained the technology was not new, not public, and would be regarded as an attempt to curtail, rather than enhance, traditional methods:

“According to the patents, the female parent of all three patented varieties is ‘Maui Lehua,’ an unpatented cultivar that ‘belongs to the Group Lehua of Hawaiian-Polynesian taros.’ As you know, Hawaiian-Polynesian taros derive from a few varieties first introduced to Hawaii in the 4th to 5th century A.D. by the Islands’ earliest settlers. From these few varieties, Hawaiians conducted extensive breeding over centuries to generate over 300 types of taro suited to differing microenvironmental and cultivation conditions. These varieties of taro were developed for food as well as ceremonial and medicinal uses. Roughly 63 varieties, including Maui Lehua, are extant. Therefore, the qualities of the patented varieties derive to a considerable extent from Maui Lehua, whose properties are the result of many centuries of breeding efforts by native Hawaiians. Thus, the patent claims for the three patented varieties are invalidated by considerations of prior art...” (Protest letter to the University of Hawaii, courtesy of HawaiiSeed.Org)

The letter went on to include objections to the draconian regulations the patent would incur on the lives of Hawaiians: signing licensing agreements, allowing inspectors to monitor the seeds for purity, and purchasing seeds for a crop they had traditionally cultivated and shared for free. These schemes were “unbefitting a publicly-funded institution whose mission is to serve rather than police Hawaiian citizens, including its farmers.” Though the native Hawaiians had no corporate lawyers and no formally sanctioned scientific standing, they were able to successfully defend their claims and win the rights to the patent they abhorred. They held a press conference, and ceremoniously tore up the patents. At the event, the vice chancellor of research at the University of

Hawaii remarked, "It's as if the patents were never filed. Anyone throughout the world may now plant them, propagate them, sell them." (Essoyan 2006)

Hawaiian protesters changed the definitions of purity and contamination in their protests; they revealed that proprietary agriculture was not an onslaught of contamination, but just the opposite: it was an onslaught of purity. The elements of the UH work they rejected were the draconian restriction of agricultural activities and the extraction of royalties for the products of what had begun as a native science; not the alteration of a putatively pure organism. Though they invoked a collective claim, it was not one of ownership.

When local protests would spring up and coalesce into lawsuits, GMO purveyors relied on the scientific community to attest to the safety of their products. Many scientists complied. But some took the critiques of GM foods more seriously, investigating not only the short-term effects of one consumed morsel on one human body, but the social underpinnings of what was happening to agriculture, and the effects of these power-plays on broader ecosystems. Scientists usually expressed their doubts privately or contributed to alternative studies in an effort to boost the body of evidence against GM foods. In an unusually univocal statement of conscience, a group of British scientists called the Institute of Science in Society recently revealed that malnourished children had been used as test subjects in the clinical trials for new strains of GM "golden rice," and deemed the trials unethical. It is too soon to tell how this pronouncement will be received around the world, but the fact that a scientific body would mount such a campaign is certainly significant.

All told, has the Green Revolution been successful? Agribusinesses still occasionally report record-breaking yields in monocrops; biotech companies still sell GM seeds, petroleum-based fertilizers and organophosphate pesticides to large farms in every hemisphere; and the overall range of food crops is slowly dwindling to a select few. As a technological revolution, the Green Revolution seems to have completed its mission. But as a sociopolitical "revolution," it suffers from one persistent weakness that does not plague its technological brethren: Unlike the industrial and digital revolutions, the Green Revolution lost its own momentum rather early in its trajectory. The technological products proliferated, but only with the aggressive work of an exclusive vanguard who had to constantly revitalize and purify the message. When plants and publics resisted, it was not only to forestall the inequality that often comes with centralized technology, as was the case with industrial and digital innovations, but as a simple expression of autonomy. The first revolution to target non-humans as its main power base turned out to be somewhat less successful in perpetuating itself than other sorts of technocultural revolutions had been. For a host of reasons that I have suggested above, the world pushed back.

### **Death counts**

Distance is a daunting obstacle in the execution of coordinated rebellion. Proximate bodies act before consulting distant bodies, though distant bodies may figure in their calculations. News of rebellions may travel more swiftly than other kinds of news, but not every bodily undertaking presents itself as a recognizable rebellion for all to see. Death, however, seems to be a bodily

experience that translates across distance and species boundaries more easily than most other bodily experiences.

In the Vidarbha region of India, often called India's "cotton belt," there are an average of three farmer suicides a day (Robin 2010). The suicides follow a wave of state-sponsored conversion to Monsanto's Bt cotton in the early 2000s, which tends to fail in the area as it is not well adapted to the soil. The farmer's devastation has taken a brutally ironic form: many of the poor farmers have committed suicide by drinking the cans of pesticide they would have previously used on their fields.

These deaths attest to the complex causal chains of survival in human-plant-animal ecosystems and the intricate dance of selective killing. Bt cotton is embedded with a toxin that is toxic to cotton bollworms, and is supposed to reduce the need for pesticides. But Monsanto's version of the seed is not adapted to climatic conditions in monsoon-dependent areas, and to the practices of small farmers who do not drain and irrigate their soil as intensively as larger landholders in the area. In China, the problem with Bt cotton seems to revolve around "secondary pests," which have lain waste the transgenic crop after seven years of relatively stable output. In the intervening years, bollworms have died according to plan, but other insects have filled the gap and now descend upon the cotton in record numbers. In one study, Chinese farmers had to spray their crops 20 times in one growing season in order to control the new pests. (Lang 2006)

In both China and India, farmers are finding that Bt cotton denudes the soil of its normal microbes, closing off other options for those who want to switch back to traditional crops. In those parts of Asia that have been graced with the transgenic cotton, it is specifically the rural poor who have taken to committing suicide by drinking their own pesticides. Stacks of reports on this phenomenon led two scientists to conclude as early as 2003 that, in "developing countries...the substances most commonly used for self-poisoning are agricultural pesticides." In Vidharba, the problem has gotten worse since then, and the peasant movement Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti (VJAS) has directly accused Monsanto of enabling a "genocide" of Indian farmers. (Robin 2010)

The political environment for pesticides has not always been so tricky. Even as chemical manufacturers sometimes transferred knowledge from agriculture to the development of chemical weapons, the associations between pesticides and human death were unanticipated by the vanguard of the Green Revolution. Agent Orange, the infamous dioxin used as a weapon in Vietnam, was derived from a generative agent, not a destructive one. It began as a plant growth hormone intended to speed up the flowering of soybeans. But it was the use of a later version of the chemical as a biological weapon that planted the seed of its downfall. Arthur W. Galston, the man who had discovered its defoliant property—the mechanism that caused plants to be overwhelmed by the growth agent, losing their leaves and dying—was dismayed when he learned that the U.S. military was using it as a weapon in Vietnam. Specifically, he was not compliant with the military's effort to rebrand the chemical weapon as a simple tool to increase 'visibility' by

denuding some plants. He called Agent Orange “chemical warfare,” worked to stop its use, and developed a bioethics course at Yale to discuss the issue with students. (Peterson 2005)

Few others knew the chemical as well as Galston, and would not have been so quick to question the military’s rebranding, had it not been for the premature deaths of U.S. soldiers and Vietnamese adults and children who were exposed to Agent Orange during Operation Ranch Hand when the chemical was deployed by air across vast tracts of dense forest in Vietnam and Laos. Birth defects told a visual story of the dioxin’s pathways in the body, and children’s bodies became contested bodies of evidence in courts and news media around the world. One veteran, Paul Sutton, recalls the reaction to his comrade’s effort to show his child’s body in a court of law:

“I remember vividly one fall day in 1983, in Judge Weinstein’s court when a veteran attempted to bring his disabled daughter into the courtroom as ‘an exhibit’. Not only did the judge disallow him doing that, the judge had the veteran and his daughter escorted out of the courthouse by US Marshalls. So, from the get go we’ve had the system against us. Nonetheless, we have to keep trying.” (Quilt of Tears)

In Vietnam, where Agent Orange persists to affect large numbers of people’s bodies to this day, one mother spoke of the unmistakable limb deformities in her children:

“My daughter is dying. My youngest daughter is 11 and she has the same symptoms. What should we do? Their fingers and toes stick together before they drop off. Their hands wear down to stumps. Every day they lose a little more skin. And this is not leprosy. The doctors say it is connected to American chemical weapons we were exposed to during the Vietnam war.” (Scott-Clark and Levy 2003, 1)

The *Guardian* shared this mother’s story in 2003, long after the Vietnam War had ended and Agent Orange had been banned. No compensation had been given to survivors of Agent Orange, and apparently, their bodies and their children’s bodies were still reacting. The *Guardian* journalists went on: “[the child] clatters around with disjointed spidery strides which leave her soaked in sweat. When she cannot stop crying, soothing creams and iodine are rubbed into her back...” (Scott-Clark and Levy 2003, 1)

Death, disease, and suffering are powerful utterances that alter the course of revolutions. Species and ecosystems witness and attest to the generative and destructive biopower of agrochemicals in the timing of their lives and deaths, and survival rates and kill rates tend to be objects of investigation both lay and scientific. If an organism is targeted for special scrutiny, its time of death will likely be among its most lasting data points. Even organisms that are off the scientific radar may garner some interest with a sudden die-off of sufficient magnitude. Among very closely-studied species, such as humans, the unexpected death of even a single individual may be an occasion for inquiry.

Unanticipated plateaus and drops in the yields of targeted crops, as well as hard-to-contain side effects of agrochemicals in surrounding ecosystems, helped lend legitimacy to the nascent

discipline of ecology when species-specific diagnostics failed to pinpoint the problems. It was the deaths of both targeted and non-targeted species, along with the activism of survivors, that ultimately put the breaks on production of substances like Agent Orange—herbicides that evolved from Green Revolution fertilizers—and DDT, the pesticide that prompted widespread concern about the death rates of song birds. Rachel Carson, who is often portrayed as acting alone on the issue of DDT spraying, quotes a number of women who wrote spontaneous letters to scientists and newspapers about the “eerie, terrifying” silence that had *already replaced* springtime birdsong in their neighborhoods. (Carson 1962,104) Carson’s resulting book was not a prediction so much as an observation of what was already happening.

It must be said that there is no direct line from the deaths of non-targeted species to the banning of dangerous chemicals. Proving the link between a legal substance and a given death or wave of deaths is incredibly difficult, legally or scientifically. But news of unexpected death can travel quickly. Deaths, especially those of privileged human bodies or the animal and plant bodies upon which they depend for subsistence, tend to raise concern in an ungovernable way. Once concern is raised in a given community, transnational networks may begin to form with other affected communities and remote households may become wary even without an ad campaign telling them to do so. Deaths, more than other side effects, seem to function as readable data in a wide range of publics.

Should deaths and disease among humans, migratory birds, and marine life be included in the tabulation of resistance, as if these bodies chose to resist chemical onslaughts by allowing their bodies to be annihilated? Clearly, it would be wrong to conflate death with individual resistance which is directed at survival. But when cancer deaths among humans form distinct clusters that raise local controversies around pesticide use and massive “dead zones” spread through the ocean in the paths of agrochemical runoff, the evidence mounts for expanded notions of embodied agency. Death complicates questions of agency, and experiences of death are always central to revolution and resistance. Looking closely, it is clear that the dead and dying act collectively to change the course of revolutions and rebellions long after their individual agency is dead and gone.

### **Contaminated Meat**

“The fantasy of transcending death is opposed to everything I care about.” (Haraway and Goodeve 1999, 113)

Contamination is clearly a source of power, but how can healthy living organisms command the sort of power that dying organisms seem to embody, to contaminate the very substances that are deployed to govern and control them? The generic “body” is bereft of distinguishing features and therefore profoundly unarmed to resist occupation. But actual living organisms have uncountable features that attest to a history, a previous existence, a non-spontaneous generation. Within their vital tissues lies the proof of previous damage and contamination. Immeasurable, but not infinite, the potential for resistance is contained in the heterogeneous tissues of damaged organisms.



Living bodies are provocative and powerful due in part to their exposure and transformation by substances from outside of their physical boundaries. I am speaking here of the sort of contamination that can be dangerous, as well as that which is serendipitous or fortunate for the organism. Humans are vigilant and curious about contamination. When Greenpeace offered to test volunteers' hair samples for toxic load, the organization was overwhelmed with the response and had to apologize for the long waiting list. People want to know exactly how contaminated they are, in order to take an active role in the story of their ongoing contamination.

Creative acts, in drawing attention to the promise and power of contamination, steadily erode the purity narratives that lie at the center of ill-conceived revolutions. Audre Lorde wore her mastectomy scar proudly not despite, but partially because of its ability to disturb her species-kin into wakefulness. More recently, when the celebrated feminist porn star Annie Sprinkle got breast cancer, she made her lumpectomy into a humorous and erotic performance art piece. She spoofed and celebrated her breasts as the weighty centerpiece(s) of her colorful career, and her cancer as the event that called her to a more transgressive "ecosexuality."

I have inherited an elevated risk of breast cancer from my mother and grandmother, but in a more immanent, daily sense I know that my history and surroundings have already left chemical marks that pervade my body to its very DNA. I consider this contamination to be my most important connection to what exists beyond my skin, and the wellspring of what Haraway calls "affective contamination": the love bonds that pull humans into the experiences of certain individuals of other species, as if we cared and they mattered. (Haraway 2003) Even though I am not always able to love or even visualize all the organisms with which I co-constitute my existence, I know that all my cross-contaminators are inseparably a part of my community's ongoing survival story.

### **Regenerating Bodies**

In the aftermath of the Green Revolution, widespread trans-species collective action produced new forms of life which continue to creatively contaminate each other's bodies and leave their marks on the landscapes in which they were born. From generation to generation, variously visible bodies (it is a rule that more bodies are affected by such things than are visible to a given observer at a given moment), responded with acts which might be called coordinated, far-reaching, subtle, or ironic, but which ultimately amounted to a substantial noise that confused all attempts to measure the affects of the revolution in terms of its original goals. The revolution and resistance did produce measurable effects, but they did not form a synthesis and there was no endpoint to their collaboration.

The industry that produced the original tools of the Green Revolution is still as active as ever, but it now faces a changed agricultural landscape. Industrial bioengineers and 'green tech' are now grappling with climate change discourse, offering a wide range of solutions to make docile orchards bloom again. For Monsanto and other biotech leaders, climate change is an opportunity to develop seeds that are impervious to climate changes, with an emphasis on stalwart grain staples, livestock and fish. Some are even going so far as to dub their work a second Green

Revolution. But distrust has evidently spread far since the first Green Revolution. Presented with a coordinated climate-related public relations campaign on the part of the same companies that had been at the forefront of the original Green Revolution, grassroots organizations dealing with seeds and foodways are citing their previous failures calling them out by name. (e.g., Food First, Organic Consumer Association)

Even in activism, there is a model of constancy and purity versus change and contamination. There is the afflicted activist burdened with knowledge, identifying with nature and taking the damage personally; and the reckless CEO disrespecting bodily boundaries and polluting pristine animal bodies for a quick profit. But feminist activists and academics have, at long last, discredited the purity narrative by steadily eroding the separate, individual subject who experiences and acts alone. Feminist scientists such as Karen Barad and Donna Haraway, in particular, have brought into view a teeming, lively world of intra-actions where agency is not held exclusively by humans. This view has come just in time, as we are facing a contaminated world in which our own diseases and deaths seem relevant enough to make a difference. It is a good time to look around and see how we might use these to our advantage. How do daughters and sons respond to the matricidal revolutions around them? How do tissues cross-contaminate and regenerate, and what is it that turns a benign diversity of cells into a potent incident of contamination?

Like Fela Kuti's mother, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, who was referenced in the opening quote to this article, my mother is a feminist who works for gender justice on multiple continents. My mother walks with other rebellious bodies in protest, leading her students on foot from New York City's richest Congressional district to its poorest, and using her university to form alliances with women's artisan collectives in the Global South. Her constructed breast is doing well, fed with the blood supply that she so enjoyed hearing amplified on the speaker in the hospital room seven years ago. But she decided not to get a nipple. Instead, she stays out in the dressing room of the YMCA when she undresses for the sauna, calmly explaining, "It's okay for people to see different kinds of bodies."

I will not invoke the grandiose term "legacy" to describe what we carry of our mothers. I will only say that regeneration never happens the same way twice. It bears the marks of every previous assault or excision, and demands variations on a theme. As bodies dismember themselves to survive, tissues must migrate to cover recent wounds, and significant displacement occurs. Stem cells intercalate and scars take form uniquely in each instance, in each body, and regeneration only becomes evident in the course of changes over time. The resulting new tissues are the daughters and sons of old rebellions, holding together a tough and contaminated organism that will never be the same.

## Frame by Chris Fradkin

we rode the wind,  
up along the sandcliff,  
down along the coast,  
riding the eddies like a skate-  
board. then billy lost his feather—  
[i watched him as it happened]  
he turned around and saw that he  
was falling—  
falling in slow motion,  
his face filled up the frame,  
like when we drank that soda  
down at maury's.

*/ for Angela Roust /*

## Arrival, The by Chris Fradkin

It loomed ahead—the schism, the break, the seam, the—his eyes swept briefly to the left. She's back, he said. His hands perspired in gortex gloves; he dialed the air-temp down. Like always, she's behind me. Altimeter: 4 km. Too high—his hands grew tighter. She'll place me if our instruments connect. He dipped to 1.5 and held her strong. It's coming up, he said. A reflection crossed his field. Oh shit, he said, and banked it to the right. She shot past through his contrail, through the sun. He jammed the stick and sailed off through a cloud. Peace, he thought. He checked the instruments. Altimeter: 2 km. It's perfect; I'll just sail through in these clouds. Altimeter: 1 km. What's going wrong? He pulled the stick—the frigging thing was fixed. Altimeter: 1 km and falling. He checked his chute—the straps were tight. The light was building brighter. He pressed eject and shot up through the sky. As he sailed into the schism, he watched her take his craft. The explosion jarred the wind that filled his sails. His lungs filled with relief as the lights dimmed down below. But in the distance she awaited his arrival.



## Chomp Channel by Amelia Foster

Am I too perhaps recipient of some chomp channel  
when I close my eyes, roll back, let the dreams  
roll in. Splayed or flayed. Choose your words  
wisely. Elect not to chew/choose your words.  
I too see THE WORDS IN THE AIR. I too need  
a designed distinction. A place in the desert where  
a culture of one. I wake five times the night over,  
transmitting the chomp channel through my wholly  
permeable and permeated skin/limbs/face.  
The chomp channel is all over the cone of my throat.  
The four cone/fired cone of my throat  
makes me go to bed to dream IN ALL CAPS.  
My mother, my godmother. Another night  
singing salt songs, frothing at the pillow.  
Am I too passive a recipient? Dialogue  
download. Shut time. Shut down. Where  
the feeling starts: brain stem. The  
physical sensation of the emotion. Breathe  
into. One time. Center of the throat.  
Wild eye. IN ALL VOICES. I am a  
permeable voice. I am lying still against my  
brain stem. The taste of the desert gathered in my  
line of teeth. My culture of one.  
My line to fall down in. Birth to ditch. A long  
walk. A slow mine. A coal fire. Terra-  
cotta. The warm wet ditch of the earthenware.  
Clay under my fingernails, my red palm.  
The ditch of the basement. The warm rot of  
the empty house. Smells like garbage in here/in  
me. Smells like waste. A long sigh. The slow rot.  
the PERMEABLE HOUSE speaks to me in  
many voices. An aesthetic ring of nails.  
A soft rind of rust. My skin welcomes  
what the walls exhale. The wet rot. Into me.  
Into hair and froth and piss. Ellipsis. The house is  
pulled apart by her seams to let the rot back  
IN/OUT. The rot is welcomed into my lungs.  
The house is rot for my lungs and teeth. For

a long while now. A break in the swollen carpet.  
A hole in the kitchen wall. For I lay me down to  
steep and rot. The long line, the slow bone.



## Hips Don't Lie But I Do by Amelia Foster

You're hard to find as hen's teeth. I  
give chase, bark like a fucking squirrel.  
Faceless in the half light, half-cocked. Tell me  
more, yes, phalanges please. There's a lesson  
in your good health. Patented, vascular, virile...  
A for effort. I'm the rubber, and you're the grass.  
No, reverse that. It's the last scene in this  
cardinal direction, where you split into antler shapes.  
The sinking myth. The ribbon between our tongues.  
Clench, and I'll clench back.



## REM by Amelia Foster

When you wake up sour cow heavy  
and needing something creamy,  
your cold limbs limp and stinging,  
you tangle dreams with sleep and sheets  
and you're ankle tethered seething.  
You curl half circle round  
a bear named Bear and dream of  
goatsbeard, chickpeas, curry paste on  
shower tiles.  
You wake and dream your tepid dreams.  
You pulse and pulse against the sheets.  
Tremble neck. Tremble chest.  
Measure. Draw breath. Measure.  
All the while a moon face crepe-shaped  
rests against your windowpane.  
Empty ghosts, sitting ghosts press the bed  
beside you, salt your pillow, touch your chest.  
They wish you warm inside your bedclothes,  
wrap around you like your mother did  
when you woke up wet-nosed.  
They count your breaths while you are dreaming  
real dreams, fever dreams.



## Rival by John Grey

What to do about this creature?  
break the window?  
smash the mirror?  
howl like a beast at the sight?  
or  
creaking door open,  
cry your hurt louder,  
cut away all the rest?  
you're dropping quarters in a juke box,  
each song, hard or gooey,  
open to interpretation, to edit—  
ah, the melodies—  
don't we bury what we cannot use right now?  
don't we come back later, dig them up?



## Country by John Grey

I still worship at the feet of corn planters,  
not horse traders, but the ones that feed those equines oats,  
and the chicken counters, traipsing the dusty corral,  
trading fingers in for numbers,  
and the hymn singers, harsh or pure,  
rocking the relentless stem of their wooden churches,  
a congregation rising through each other,  
bucking the ruthless human tides,  
and the winter bearers, fusing their social bonds in hearth fires,  
frost on the eaves, flakes on the window,  
snow-covered fields, winds from the north,  
the outline that holds them in place.



## **Bodies** by John Grey

The body is dangerous.  
The body falls on  
women and children  
like bombs.  
The body infects.  
The body talks  
with thin lips  
on the benefit  
of its fertilizers,  
of its construction materials.  
The body is the champion  
of skin deep religions.  
The body lies  
through its teeth.  
The body says it  
is the true martyr,  
not God.  
The body films  
its acts,  
spools them for  
the backroom boys.  
The body has a head for figures  
but not the heart to match.

The body is a traitor,  
a dark thunderstorm,  
spokesman for the void,  
a cannibal for the blood,  
gets its kicks out of  
the cruelest count-downs.  
The body is there  
at your bedside,  
proclaiming its innocence  
right to the end.  
The body is  
the last voice  
you hear  
right before  
the room explodes.



## Spread Your Legs and Wait by Brandon Hackbarth

(Finally. So many years gone and flushed down the toilet—between the both of us millions of miles traveled and oh so many hours spent re-tracing the steps moving away and coming back and other lovers. Oh yes, there were others...our genitals ain't innocent. And our spirits are battered. But here she is...belly still flat, her face not as fleshy and teeth stained over just a hair though that same desperate adolescent melancholy, that same tongue-twisted doe-eyed exhilaration is still flickering...and I can't get it up. I have to stall this shit, but I'm not a witty-type. "A witty saying proves nothing" I read—that's by Voltaire—read it on the back of a tea-bag dip-grip thingy. An insightful quote while you meditate through that broth of leaves and steam. Yeah, many years ago we came close to it, but I was bound by another. And one night she was bent over, gray panties in my face, lounging, yeah, listening to Leonard Cohen—horniness in the air—I wanted in—she wanted to break something.

But in those days I was hunched over a bong most of the time...and she bent over in my face like it was an accident. I knew it wasn't. She knew it wasn't. It was a potential turning point, the opportunity, an offering. But see, back then, with her, it wouldn't have taken much effort. But ah, those panties hiked up, all the flaps hangin' over. And harkening back, I'm thinking of pollination now. Please accept that I'm not really the type who objectifies; but that's not the point. Also, FYI: the world has never been my oyster—I don't even know what that means. I mean I know what it means but I've never and will never experience that saying. It just isn't in the cards. I live a block away from a Jehovah Church; the bells ring every hour on the hour and it startles me every time. That's not a good sign.)

Ever been ripped on coke before? Well, that's when things started to go bad with her, back then. I'm a dirt-bag: was, is, whatever. But that's not the point either. I never flew that way really. The coke per se didn't actually contribute to her reasons for leaving. She did it, too. I was just a dabbler = spitting pseudo art ponderings, words spewed over half crushed cans of beer strewn about on the porch at 3 a.m. Meanwhile she went out and became more than I. She went out and did something. These days, she still performs, and one day she'll probably be famous. And I hold this against her. As for myself, I treat people like animals, pet them. That's as affectionate as I get with my daughter. Sometimes we'd lie on the couch and I would stroke her forehead, and she in turn would blink her eyes slowly, drowsily. This was love. With a cat or dog there's literally nothing. I only look at animals. She kind of knows that I have a child but I don't feel that it's in my best interests to elaborate on that tidbit. Or maybe it is. In any case, she'll go on to do wonderful things. I won't.

I had a dream. We were in Italy sitting outside a rustic coffee shop on a sidewalk patio. There were low-hanging ferns and the color of molded cement in the background. I was wearing combat boots. We were drinking espresso and discussing things like how artistic people discuss things and feeling on top of the world. I was smoking a beautiful, yellow papered cigarette. It burned very slowly. The dream was tranquil, refined. Nothing came of it; a banal discussion, bloated by our own success. We were observing young women passing by, laughing quietly. My legs were crossed

and I was sipping the espresso, the combat boots shining in the dull light. In this dream I was a success. That's probably why it lingers.

In a different dream, she and I were being interviewed for a job. We were sitting in a large, rustic-luxurious boardroom on the ground floor of whatever building we were in. It felt like we were in a huge, log-cabin-like complex. We were interviewed by a group of perhaps six people, but I can't recall every face. We were seated at the end of a long boardroom table. We were nervous but not entirely uncomfortable; we just wanted to ace the interview. Sitting between us was a woman with long, curly-black hair. She was Psychic and was to determine if we were truthfully answering whatever query was posed. The main character interviewing us was male, well dressed, crew cut gray hair, sixty years-old. Despite his somewhat refined mannerisms I had the feeling that he was a Bad Boy. He liked naughty things. Maybe he was a swinger or something, but what I'm sure of is this: he was, in some way, a closeted non-conformist. Also present was a man wearing a long fur coat, very tan and muscular, with a prince valiant haircut and finger nails like Mickey Rourke. He said nothing, but looked at me with a bemused smile. I think he liked me. Also, there was a woman who resembled my mother, but am certain wasn't. Had an icy reserve. She looked at us both with bored dead eyes.

*Questions posed by the Bad Boy:*

Him: So. How's your marriage? We like certain types of couples...strong bonds...but, eh, we're lookin' for... something...

Me: Well, yeah, even though we have a kid, and are...somewhat unconventional, we have varied interests. Personally, I'd describe us as being an eclectic couple.

(I felt this was a good response; they seemed satisfied.)

Him: And have you ever committed an infidelity?

The Bad Boy looked directly at me. He stared at me. Then, she, her, the one laying on my fucking bed right now, with her legs spread—responded before me: No.

Me: No.

The Bad Boy continued to stare at me. I stared back.

Him: Ha! He didn't break his focus (gesturing to the other board members)—I don't know what to make of it!

This is the first time he looked to the Psychic, wordlessly prompting her. She in turn glanced at both of us with a very soft concentration then looked back toward the Bad Boy.

Psychic: She...is telling the truth. He—(long pause)—I think...is as well.

At this point I must've sighed or have cultivated an air of annoyance because the Bad Boy said:

It looks like you have something to say.

I spoke. I can recall only fragments. I was perturbed and touching my face, to which the Psychic replied that this was a common mannerism of a liar. But I didn't lie, didn't feel guilt. I was guilty of nothing. I had never cheated on her. Whatever I said, it was the truth. But the Psychic's attitude annoyed me. And the Psychic was annoyed that I was annoyed. When I finished my tirade the interview ended, abruptly. The Board thanked us. The woman with icy reserve had a few short words with the Bad Boy and left the room immediately thereafter. Then she and I looked at each other. I realized that we failed the interview. We were not going to get whatever it was we wanted. And it was my fault.

Now I'm here in this instant. We reconnected via web 2.0, and met at a club. I honestly never expected to see her again, but thought about her at least once a day. "Poncho and Lefty" was playing off the juke in the background. She'd had a couple PBRs and was horny, I could tell—had that same look from way back. We were talking about Steve Reeves and how his movies were fucking garbage, but had somehow paved the way for Stallone and Schwarzenegger. She was intrigued, somewhat. When we broke it off 10 years ago I weighed 180. I now weigh 245. I wear it well but with my clothes off you can tell how fat I am. She basically looks the same as she did then.

As mentioned, there were others—for me, two different Hilary's, a K.C., a Betty, a Megan. I don't know how many she's been with. We go back to the place, to get pretty and fuck—her idea. We get ready together in my bathroom, since it's so big. It's a long, drawn-out drama or scenario or performance. To watch her file her nails and brush her teeth and shave it for some reason...sitting on the toilet extending her abdomen, trying to keep her pubis flat and tight. Then it all starts in the bathtub: I shave her legs and do what I can with her pubic hair then she bathes and finishes the shaving. I'm scared of nicking it. She gets out, dries off; tangled wet hair, water dripping down her back. We neck, I bite her lower lip. Yeah, her mouth is hot and wet...kiss her deeply; our faces glaze over, lost in a flower maze.

She gulps at my tongue. The taste of her mouth, her pale thighs. I kiss her nose. We're drinking a little red wine, not much, but I can taste the ingredients in her mouth, the smoky residue left behind. My genitals ache and know what's coming, what's maybe just 20 minutes away. I bathe and shave and trim the hair of my nuts. Clip my nails. Add moisturizer. Little dabs of cologne on my dick, under my balls. Slick the hair back. Brush the teeth. But things just can't stay under the surface for long, our bodies are impatient, and now that we're bathed we can't keep it together and stick to the game plan so I just lunge at her, pick her up and cup her ass, slide a few fingers into her and spread it, and sit her up on the sink stall, I'm not even thinking of it, it just happens: My cock just goes right in and it's predictably hot and tight and wet and she grabs my ass, and throws her head back, mouth open, and pulls me in as far as it'll go. I carry her to the bed, connected, my fingers wet, our eyes closed.

She and I are fucking with no sounds: dry squirming over each other on our own flesh with no vocalization—just deadpan, rhythmic undulations. This sex is the meaning of something I'll never

understand. She's with me, engaged in the process I suppose, but I am ultimately no more than a task. At least that's my impression. Nonetheless, we come together the first time, hard. The second time I finger it at length and she sucks me off, her breasts brushing warmly against my inner thighs. Come eventually dribbles onto my flabby stomach and she tongues at it; noticing this mild expression of perversity I choke up with spasms of absolute joy and gratitude. Memories and recognition of what we were, something that was almost long gone, pass before and between us as we meet each other's gaze for perhaps three seconds. I don't know if she recognizes me anymore. Now there's no connection. Afterward we lay and stare at each other, completely disgusted.

Slow motion POV montage:

—Wide shot of her, naked except for red panties, standing in front of a dresser, playing with a 12 gauge shotgun. She points it at the camera, laughs.

—Medium shot of him on the bed sitting up, hair slicked back into a ponytail, a pair of Lennon's on, pointing a flashlight, a spotlight, onto his cock, which he flexes back and forth. His head is tilted back, and he's saying something, but there's no audible dialogue.

—Fade Out.

We're lying in bed and lapses of time fold over us, and I remember the memory of childhood—the way I used to think, the way the air used to smell; everything. Then she embraces me for no good reason. Her kindness with the open light behind her startles me and I want to hold her too, but I don't. She pulls away. She will never be the same girl who affected me in those expressions of grace and morale; more than all the indentured apparitions and innocent bedroom groans that gave my life purpose; I think back to my head lying on my mother's chest, knowing that one day her heart would stop and I was frightened that it would stop right then and I would cringe and try to move my ears away from her. At age five, I truly believed that I would be dead before I was 17. And at 17 I kept telling myself that there's no way I'd make it to 22 and so on. Homemade crucifix on the wall, staring down at us; I whisper to her three times, but there's nothing decent or clever left to say.

I talk at the ceiling:

"You know what you are? You're an inhibited, middle-class dipshit. With middle-class values and middle-class ambitions. You were raised to be that way. You have always been that way. You will always be that way. You believe in paying your dues—college, the job, the eco-friendly cars, the dinner parties, exercise. You think you're a part of something? You think other people notice this? How can they? They're too busy living the same ritual, drilled into their heads, hung-up in their pathetic little pursuits—"

"Stop trying to fucking figure me out. It's tedious."

"And you think I have no talent. I know it. You've never told me that, but I know it. We used to compete, intellectually, artistically, but every comment I made got nothing but rolling eyes from



your admittedly tight ass...and now you think you've won. See, for me, it's all or nothing. I had a dream about us last night, just listen—"

"Then you're nothing. And I'm not going to have relationships where I don't gain anything. I seek intentional relationships. Like, for instance, co-workers and general friendly acquaintances such as yourself be damned—pretending to appreciate them, to understand them, courtesy laughs, all that. Save your thoughts for the lucky few, the ones you're committed to. That's my take on it. And you're just...not one of those people. As far as my 'success' is concerned, not everyone pays their dues, and not everyone is rewarded for their loyalty. I wanted it— you, or it, or this, or whatever. And now that I've had it...well, for me, there's no vigor after getting what you want. Right?"

"You're so ambitious. And now the joker, the one who dispenses the jokes, has finally stared both of us down. He's staring me down at least."

She's asleep or pretending to be. I turn to look at her and for an instant want to do something to her for not being awake, for me. I can't reach out to her. How can I? She sleeps like a child—cup her belly, her soft spot, we spoon. I'd give her the Sun in a box if I could. She'd pasteurize her breast milk into cheese if I asked nice enough. Dull and frozen:  $\frac{3}{4}$  of my brain is rigid, petrified by a lack of self-confidence, but the core of it, a jazz drummer. Yeah, one dead dream after another; fatigued and constipated in the early morn', bored throughout the afternoon, and drunk into the night. A disciple of my own memory day after day after day after day. Nothing more than a decayed brainless relic who even in his heyday was useless. Yes, we're through. Finally.

## The Strong Center of Abstraction by Daniel Hedges

In states of semantic overdrive, visages of abstracted freedom cross in the night, heretically. At the summit of neo-aesthetics and visual fields, hopeful mind-states ascend according to debunked laws of physics and alpha-ruminations. At this time, life ceases to seem linear or any other way, and new clichés of Nirvana appear, where and whereby whales exude requiems for echoes of anything and everything righteous. Verb tense change. For the promises made and kept, silently across bodies of space, strength manifested in versions of cliché bravery and kindness, so as to outlast all sinister schemes made by the power-mongers. As an inverted pattern of reverse migration, home was never a point of departure or a place to return to in time. It was just the strong center of all abstraction, where and whereby the falconers haunted the going forth to new rituals of orange. The beauty of all before us had never been in doubt, or in the past tense. It had only been frustrated and made tired by clichés and by all the lonely strangers, longing for (it). While time made an ass of us all, we continued to strive, masquerading as diviners of anything that resembled sanity. And so it is that we came to know everything about nothing, and nothing about...and so on.



## Carry the Spirit Forth by Daniel Hedges

Out amongst the ptarmigan, we debunk our attention from everything else that crosses in the night. Suddenly, the mind goes blurry, and with shifting abstraction the pixels shift to the Hyacinth Macaw, then back and forth, dizzying the mental storm, allowing for moments of Albatross to enter the visual field too. In our sublime encounters with field-guide aesthetics, we carry the spirit forth.



## Rubber Tomahawks by Daniel Hedges

Whilst the literary control mongers 'alouette' to hopeful derivatives of 'art freedom', we've Xeroxed a certain field-guide aesthetic, and defend it now with our rubber tomahawks. We proceed angle-find America to a new ritual of orange, while the neo-cliché hipsters triangulate the set-list at will, one last time.

Then, in some strange spontaneous rapture, the Resplendent Quetzal casts all doubts aside, while field-guide aesthetics burns its visages through the haunting tense, sacrosanct forever.



## New World Nomenclature by Daniel Hedges

Today we see as we understand, the elbow patches of medium orchid corduroy, sewn to the elbows of the Universe—and neo-cliché hipters (who meditate on thistle) drag the haunting tense, through planes of Cadmium Scarlett. All this New World nomenclature, is miniature—by scale. (Dust) held against greater epochs, where spirits go, or disappear—less parochially. Now we're lampooning a 50s sensibility, at Powell's know tying retreat to a new ritual of orange; and all the time, where is Tecumseh? While you see yourself, seeing yourself, in planes of dark magenta, we see and understand that—the elbow patches were put there and gilded by Espressos (and to assist in the reconcile between perennial semantics and urgent metaphor)



## Grammarians Sticklers by Daniel Hedges

to life's highest questions we're 'guessers', though we delight in the rapture associated with 'trying'. the neo-cliché hipsters sew their cliché elbow patches to the universe, all day long, with a seventies academic-aesthetic -stance.

these keeners stand at the 'butt-crack' of dawn - - - and muse on various or assorted structures of (hilarity). so, if you can't handle the agrammatical noise - - - well - - - looks like its time to unsquare the ego (just a little bit). grammarian sticklers are foremostly a nuisance - - - o.k.? we're all haunted by very intense abstract conundrums, so if capitalization gets you down - - - you're missing (the point) (period)

[^](#)

## The Secret Game by Kevin Hedman

There's a man sitting alone on a park bench. The sun goes slow above him and a long time later a woman in all white happens past. She's sweating and panting. Beneath her clothes, her body is as wet as a frog's. She glances at the man, decides that he looks alright to her, and sits down beside him.

He watches her breathe for quite a while. If he's impressed by the relentlessness of it, he doesn't show it. He just says, "I have some soda." He holds out a can that's already been opened and she takes it without thanking him. She brings it to her lips and pours it straight down her throat. Her lack of consideration excites him, and he says "There's wasps in it."

"I like wasps," she says.

They sit together without talking for minutes on end, him staring into the distance and her chewing on the stingers in her mouth. They crunched between her teeth just as the gravel on the ground crunched under the foot he couldn't keep from tap tap tapping.

He says, "I want to go away from here with you."

She stands up and tells him, "Fine." She reaches out her hand and he takes it. Hand in hand, they walk out of the park. As they go, he explains, "I meet people at that bench all the time," and he asks, "You're not a whore, are you?"

The woman ignores him. She looks down at her clothes and sees that all her sweat has stained them yellow. It would be best to move less on days like this, she decides as they come upon the man's car. It's one of those long black ones, like they use to carry around rich people or dead people.

"I can bring you wherever you want if you do me just one favor," he says.

She gets into the passenger seat without saying anything. He gets in too and they go rolling down a street that still sunny but almost not so. The man says, "I'm not really a man at all. I have the equipment, but too many chromosomes."

The woman tunes the radio to a station she likes, "Don't confess things to me," she says. "I don't want to hear it."

He lets out a soft sigh and he stops the car. He pulls off his mustache and unzips his fly. "Maybe I've got something you'll like."

"Just drive," she says, "Just a little farther." He obeys her because way down deep in his spirit he feels it's important to stay a gentleman until it becomes truly impossible.

"You're a whore. It's obvious. Someone's pissed all over you," he tells her.

She says something. She enjoys the song on the radio because it reminds her of how some people sometimes tell the truth. She sings along, but not really. It's more like she just half-sounds some of the words in the chorus. When the man reaches out to touch the bare part of her leg, she bends two of fingers back until they snap like the thoraxes of wasps in her breakfast cereal.

Her eyes stay closed while he screams. Once he's finished, he says, "You're cruel, but I'm going to prove myself worthy of it." He drives awhile and then he stops. He feels safe taking in her beauty. He feels they've come through something together, even though they've only gone two blocks. He holds his ruined fingers in his mouth and he waits for her to open her eyes.

When they did, he says, "I'm going to snatch up that little girl out there. We'll be a family, us three, and I'll use her for everything you won't let me do. See if I don't."

The woman looks out the window at the small child standing on the closest corner. She's in a bright red dress and she's got a mouthful of gum. Her jaw moves left, then it moves right, and she blows a great big pink bubble that leaves sticky remnants all over her face when it pops. She laughs at that, the odd blonde creature, and the woman in the car smiles. It's a smile that lets the man see all her teeth and her tongue moving around in the spaces between them.

"Go ahead," she says, "No one's stopping you."

He takes it as a dare, which is just how she meant it. He pulls his fingers from his mouth and he gets out of the car. He walks right up to the child like he knows her, like he's only known good intentions his whole life. He bends down before her; he holds out his good hand for her to spit her gum into and he puts his bad hand in front of his mouth.

The woman can see his lips moving regardless. She can see the child's face grow redder than that dress of hers and that's how she knows that the two of them have started to play the secret game.

It comes to the child's turn to say something dirty, and that's when the man puts his ear very close to her. They're so close her lips are touching the lobe, right there on the darkening street, and the man's eyes go wide. They're cast right upon the woman in his car as the child presses in even closer. What she's saying, it surprises him. He clenches his teeth together, his forehead folds up into neat little lines, and the whites of his eyes fill up with blood.

The child talks and talks as the man blushes and bleeds. When he opens his mouth for the last time, he's limp on the ground at her feet and wasps are flying out of all the holes his body has. They rise up in a great swarm over the child and over the trees to vanish into the slippery twilight sky.

The streetlights come on then and the woman slides over to the driver's seat. She rolls down the window and waves at the child. The child waves back. She leaps over the loose body below and goes skipping up to the car. She's radiant, but she's frowning too.

"You said you wouldn't hurt them first," she says after she's climbed into the passenger seat, "You *promised*, daddy."



"I always tell lies. Even to you," says the woman. She's reaching into her once-white clothes to pull her real parts from their hiding place. It always stings some, and the child watches the wincing with pleasure.

"I lie too, daddy," she says, so proud, so sweet.

With a hand on the child's head, the father says, "My baby. My baby."

The car starts up and surges ahead. The child's eyes roll back into her head and when there are no pupils showing at all, she whistles too. She whistles the song her father likes as she crawls onto his lap.

She twists to face him. Her knees on his knees, she lifts her dress as high as it can go. Her father leans in close to take the child's nipple between his tiny, far-apart teeth. With one eye on the road ahead and one eye against the silent heart of his favorite daughter, he feeds and feeds on the poison inside her until she's empty and he's sated.



## Voyons, Voyons: Henry James and the Limits of Sympathy by Joe Hughes

There is a pattern in Henry James's plots, especially those of the 1890s, which must have been a kind of formal, compositional game. These stories, which often begin in a state of profound banality and continue through brutally boring scenes, suddenly explode in an unpredictable event—a "turn of the screw," a "twist of the knife" or what we might call, in the language of Greek tragedy, a *catastrophe*. This catastrophe redeems the earlier boredom and casts it in an entirely new and usually lurid light. The goal of the game, though, is to see how close to the end or edge of the story you can push the catastrophe. It happens in the last chapter of *In the Cage* (1898), in the last scene of *What Maisie Knew* (1897), and in the last sentence of *The Turn of The Screw* (1898).

"The Pupil" (1891) is exemplary in this regard. The first sixty pages sketch the subtly sexualized relationship between Morgan Moreen, a precocious young boy with a weak heart, and Pemberton, his exploited tutor. In the final scene, almost out of nowhere, we witness an event which presents, simultaneously, the boy's greatest hope (that he can live permanently with Pemberton) and his greatest fear (that his parents are social outcasts). The shock of this conjunction on the penultimate page of the story is too much for Morgan, and he instantly dies. "He couldn't stand it with his weak organ," Pemberton explains (and unintentionally puns), "the shock, the whole scene, the violent emotion."

At the very least, this pattern, in its sustained delay of shock, suggests that the whole dialectic of shock and astonishment in 1964 which Andrew Marzoni outlined, is, in 1894, inverted. On the eve of modernism—thirty years after Baudelaire stopped walking Paris streets and twenty years before Benjamin turned to Baudelaire to articulate the specificity of urban modernity—Henry James systematically explored the vicissitudes of shock. Some of these explorations are gimmicky, in the sense that their end seems to be merely sensational, the production of a momentary surprise in the reader. But some of these experiments go much further and, I want to argue, call the central ethical claims of the Victorian novel into question.

Literary critics regularly note that James's fiction of the 1890s circles around a kind of epistemological skepticism. James constantly explores the possibility that everything we think we know, both about what's happening in the world and in other people's minds, might be radically misguided. His characters seem to live between worlds, catching only fitful glimpses of passing lives, and their heroic acts of sympathy, the ethical act *par excellence* of the Victorian novel, seem to miss their mark. What is consistently less noted is that this epistemological skepticism calls into question some of the central legitimating claims of serious nineteenth century fiction. What I want to briefly argue here is that over the course of James's experiments with shock at the level of plot he begins to sketch, perhaps accidentally, the way in which an epistemological skepticism necessarily gives way to an aesthetic and ethical skepticism. If it is the case that I cannot imagine the world of the other, the educative claims of the Victorian novel—to cultivate sympathy by training the imagination to expand its reach—are totally bankrupt. This risk is especially apparent in James's novella *In the Cage* (1898).

The story centers on an unnamed London telegraphist who takes an interest in two customers, Captain Philip Everard (aka, “the Pink ‘Un”) and Lady Bradeen. Part of the telegraphist’s interest in these characters is that their lives seem to resemble the lives of characters in the novels she’s been reading. Everard and Lady Bradeen have secret affairs, they allude to European adventures, they have an absurd number of sobriquets, they write in secret codes, and they send one another melodramatic telegraphs which, despite the abbreviated and mechanical nature of the medium, feel like they have to be read in sighs—like this one from Lady Bradeen: “Everard, Hôtel Brighton, Paris. Only understand and believe.”

The story itself, however, is not about any of these adventures which only happen off-stage. In fact, because the telegraphist has such regular access to the sordid affairs of the late Victorian aristocracy, these adventures gradually become more or less uninteresting. One of the first things she learns, James tells us, is that “if you became a telegraphist you soon ceased to be astonished.” As a telegraphist, a “witness so exclusively a witness,” you develop a rich set of types and categories which allow you to classify, sort and thereby annul the shock of even the most perverse affairs. The story, rather, is about the movement of the telegraphist’s imagination and the way in which it constructs this world of types.

James describes this movement in detail. Being confined to her telegraphist’s office, she never sees the whole story. She lives in a “world of whiffs and glimpses” and of tangled “clues.” But across the “germs, possibilities and faint foreshadowings” of this fragmented world, her imagination constructs an entire non-fragmented world. In momentary flashes of wit, it connects disparate and seemingly unrelated events with “silver threads and moonbeams.” It cuts through the dross of everyday chatter and uncovers the truth hiding behind the situation, its “high reality.” Chapter III, in particular, dramatizes this movement in a fascinating sequence of three distinct stages. First her imagination makes provisional inferences from expressive details. It then sketches an outline of a world on the basis of these inferences. Finally, the imagination goes “all the way.” It intuits the “high reality” of the situation, the hidden dramatic truth, and, on the basis of this truth, returns back to the tangled world of clues and reconstitutes the previously missing details (“Pearls and Spanish lace—she herself, with assurance, could see them, and the ‘full length’ too, and also the red velvet bows [...]).

If James is so concerned with this movement, it’s because this London telegraphist possesses one of the powers James valued most in an artist—“the power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern,” as he described it in “The Art of Fiction.” It’s worth emphasizing that this ideal of the artist is not just some cool-sounding thing that artists say about the creative process which probably isn’t really true. James seems to be speaking from experience here. Not only does preface after preface begin with comments along the lines of “I distinctly remember the germ of this novel,” but James’s notebooks, in which you can occasionally watch the creative process unfold, reveal that this is how he composed his major works. The idea for *What Maisie Knew*, for example, is first noted November 12, 1892. It is the barest

outline of a story. Almost a year later a paragraph-length sketch appears in his notebooks. It isn't until October 1895 that a sketch of the entire first half of the novel appears.

The London telegraphist, though, is a *failed* novelist. If she cannot be astonished, she can still be shocked, and *In the Cage* is no different from James's other stories of this period in that it delays this moment of shock right until the very end of the novella. Even though no precocious young boys die in this story, the shock at the end of *In The Cage* is arguably more devastating, because what James reveals is that the work of the imagination, its capacity to transcend the individual and relate ethically, or sympathetically, to another human is radically misguided. In the final pages of the story, James progressively destroys each aspect of the telegraphist's imagined world, and we learn that she has totally misconstrued her relationship with every party involved in her drama. This is, you could say, what constitutes the difference between shock and astonishment. Whereas astonishment is the momentary surprise that a category does not explain a particular instance, shock is that moment at which one's entire world dissolves. If this particular shock is so devastating, though, it's because it represents the total failure of the novelist's imagination.

There have been attempts to explain this away. We could argue, for example, that the failure of the telegraphist to trace the unseen from the seen is a consequence of her reading trashy ha'penny novels rather than good old hearty realist fiction. Or you could argue that she has made a category mistake and applied her imaginative leaps to real people rather than fictional people. But these corrections change neither the parameters nor the outcome of the problem. It's not that good novels are going to allow us to produce an imaginative world which is indestructible, because what the telegraphist failed to imagine was just how sleazy the relationship between Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen really was. Her trashy novels were not trashy enough. This prompts us to go a little further. James is clear in his preface to the novella that he is interested in his London telegraphist as a "student of great cities." Like Benjamin's Baudelaire, her problem is how to deal with an urban modernity, and the kinds of shocks that need to be guarded against are those of modernity itself which may or may not appear in the guise of a shitty novel. What James represents here, then, can be read as a total critique of realist fiction. The telegraphist's failure to know, from this point of view, anticipates the failure of the Victorian novel's enterprise to cultivate the sympathetic imagination.

## #11 by Erin Kautza

### Informational Video #11: Transcript (For Applicants\*):

\*At all costs: don't. Best left to experts, long and thin of heart.

Does the following resonate? A pinch deserves a pinch, true, a twist a deadly twist; black for black, blue for blue. In short, are you on board with swift, irrevocable retribution?

Dear Applicant, the real job begs 1. More than raw constellations imposed upon other manic bodies. 2. An uncrackable veneer.

Believe: This is not a position well-filled by those lazily thumbing back pages, comparing dining room lengths, ecrus, or considering qualities of sandstone over demitassed coffees. Instead, a strict practice of sending the cruelest gossip down the crookedest path will surely scare up the right skin.

To wit: Welt. Welt. Welt and a soft-boiled egg. Contusion and sustenance coupled. More plainly, can you batter with soul? Are you intimate, Applicant, with classical cycles/styles of abuse?

Sit back. Do not relax. Stridently erect is the only proper position for future purveyors of menace. When a line forms, and it will, choose the deadest eye. When skirts are hiked, go for the highest; the largest ratio of tremble to exposure. Always strive to be the one one never expects. Here, expect the unexpected. Then crush. To utter pulp.

That said, having heard (with the rest): you will know it when you see it, apply as if a salve. The perfect marriage of barrier and rejuvenator! And, frankly, the only shield left to brandish: at this juncture, the rest will have been stripped away.

Be warned, however: succumbing to these brutally pervasive adolescent properties is an unbecoming blemish. Ground for termination in its most humiliating forms.

Lastly, are you comfortable with regression, Applicant? Violation? Transgression? Here, all underbrush, all black earth, all backpedalling, is secret forward motion. Each fresh low should be assessed as a brand new high. Force is still force. To be used indiscriminately and with relish.

Here, we give as we get.

We look forward to tandem ravishment.



## **Pilgrim Walk** by Martha Kinkade

Curious, how an exhibition leads to a barren violence. Wombs turn violet with yesterday. Hands walk with the enormity of god. With ease, my tongue shocks with the first breath. I exist in dense stillness. My day starts with Baroque emptiness. I stretch my imagined menagerie into pools of lust. Darkening—pitch black. When no light penetrates, divinity begins.



## Hole by Martha Kinkade

Purpled  
By seared wheeze  
You promised  
Dampness to creep  
Lungs to breathe  
Such a mystery  
Love, life, the remains  
Of you  
I stand on a ledge  
Look down  
Seeping, I'm  
Simply, seeping



## Cleopatra's Poison by Martha Kinkade

*The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch, which hurts, and is desired.* —Cleopatra

As much as it is her desire  
it is mine  
To taste the acridness  
of death  
I'd be the asp  
nursed  
at her breast  
milking my way  
toward darkness  
I'd bite down  
pinch  
the nipple  
with my teeth  
roll  
its tender edges  
around my tongue  
You may well feel  
beauty smells  
like grape leaves  
mixed  
with warm blood  
as heart dies  
in ecstasy



## **And Burn Again** by Martha Kinkade

When shaking begins  
the last gasp resides  
in bone marrow  
Embrace the burn  
as it explodes a vessel  
of blood thought  
into silicone slivers  
into little purple flames  
that turn  
crisp as black  
as they reveal  
a clinging  
blaze that opens  
when the eyes pop  
and wilt into  
unknown



## Catacomb Desire by Martha Kinkade

Jonathan's  
encased  
in a marble vessel.

My skin  
wrapped  
around him,  
fingers  
in rotted  
scalp.

My heart  
thirsting  
remains.



## Volant by Alex Lemon

Alive in the ghost  
Park, I am this  
Darkness. The horizon  
Is a boil of halved  
Strawberries shining  
& illness stitches me  
To the glittery  
Dirt. My hands are  
Broken. They are  
Electric with the raw  
& bleeding organs  
Of beloved pets.  
This world is cruel  
To all things but its  
Grace is unimaginable.  
The unraveling light  
Writes messages as  
Shadows stretch  
From sugar shack  
To whisper-winded  
Playground. *Are you*  
*Almost finished licking*  
*My wounds clean?*  
In the empty  
Swimming pool,  
One flip-flop,  
A disposable  
Razor. A rider-less  
Skateboard hums  
Back & forth. Spider-  
Cracked concrete.  
Spider-cracked skin.  
Last night, I could  
Have sworn  
That cherry-red  
Coronas bloomed  
In the sky. I ate  
Without knowing

What crunched, what  
Metallic sweetness  
Burst & filled  
My mouth. This  
Morning when  
I opened my lips  
To murmur / *love*  
*You* to the yolky  
Daylight, horse  
Flies buzzed out  
Of my throat.  
Marrowsong,  
Dreamwonder—  
Tell me, trumpet  
It through the city's  
Steel & cinderblock  
Valleys, please,  
Let me feel it—  
What broken  
Animals, what  
Beasts make it  
To the other side?

## Haruspex by Alex Lemon

Cricket song helps  
The dead become  
Comfortable  
Being dead.  
There are  
Baby faces  
In the turned-  
Up dirt. The  
Leeching wear  
Of everyone's  
Stiff skin.  
The crisp air's  
Brittle caress.  
The wind is  
Your favorite  
Mixtape melting.  
Go with us.  
Barrel of sparks,  
Boombox dump-  
Sters. Come  
Now. One more  
Step & it's a  
Shallow pit  
Of red-hot  
Coals. Get fresh  
With the man  
On fire. Get  
Close to the  
Hotness. How  
Icky, the compost  
Of burning hair.  
The stickiness  
In your palm.  
Hold on, hold.  
You're already  
Forgetting how  
Far we've come.  
Don't say any-

Thing, listen to  
Us purr the let  
Go, the unfolding.  
We're just going  
To etch the song  
Into you—deep  
Down, all of us  
Want, at the last  
Second, to change  
What we've done



## Becoming-Pizza by Andrew Marzoni

Wheat cow tomato pig, Italian cows in anchovy gardens.

"If the anomalous is neither an individual nor a species, then what is it?"

Becoming-wolf, becoming-rabbit, becoming-pizza.

Alexander was a man who never existed, at least not qua man:

The pizza Jesus of Orange Avenue,

An invention of language.

His avatars were many, though—

Horizontal outlaws.

Rapists (statutory and otherwise); blonde bearded managers

Turned hairless murderers, requiring spectacles;

Ukrainian teenagers, equally high on domestic violence and America;

Younger sisters, their beautiful friends;

An ecstasy addict in an Indian headdress.

Surfers, surfers, surfers, drunk, drunk, drunk.

Becoming-pizza: New York. Unbecoming pizza: Chicago, New Jersey,

Minneapolis, Great Britain, Saint Louis, grade school cafeterias, Tijuana

Pizza Hut, Japan (so they say), Antarctica (no ovens),

Outer space (their mushrooms are malevolent).

Fabio, Fabio: where to begin?

Becoming-pizza Becoming-marijuana.

Brazilian, not Italian; heavy metal reggae, Mustang convertible.

Afternoon ride-along, joint sparked, ticket reads "Naval housing."

Becoming-pizza Becoming-marijuana Becoming-fucking-terrified.

Patriotic golem answers door all suspicious-like.

Medium pie, clay soldier tips fifteen-percent, *exatamente*.

"*Deus quer; o Homem sonha; a obra nasce*," Fabio spits,

Marlboro-to-mobile.

Becoming-tobacco, becoming-handheld-electronic-communications.

Being versus Becoming.

Being-pizza: The Noid, also a becoming-rabbit.

Being-pizza: Chuck E. Cheese, also a becoming-mouse.

Being-pizza: Leonardo, Donatello, Michelangelo, Raphael (becoming-turtle).

Being-pizza: Herman Cain (becoming-Republican, becoming-elephant).

Anthropomorphic zoomorphs: where have all the pizza boys gone?

Who will bake the Great American Pizza?

Who will write the Great American Pizza Novel?

Who will direct the *Citizen Kane* of the *cinéma-pizza*?

There once was a man who ordered a party-size pizza for himself

And couldn't fit it through the door of his apartment building.

So he ate it alone on the front porch.

That man was I.

*Was.*





## Etonne-Moi! by Andrew Marzoni

*"When I have inspired universal horror and disgust, I shall have conquered solitude."*

—Charles Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*

1. Roland Barthes: Freudian subject. Read *Camera Lucida*. No more needs be said. For now, anyway.
2. Apparently, sometime in the 1910s, Sergei Diaghilev, founder of the *Ballet Russes*, challenged Jean Cocteau—French poet, filmmaker, et al.—“Etonne-moi!” Astonish me! Or, as Dennis Hopper remembered it in a drunken conversation with William S. Burroughs and Terry Southern in the late 1970s, “Astonish me, man.” The “man” may or may not be insignificant. Nonetheless, the same challenge led Cocteau to write the scenario for the 1917 ballet *Parade* (designed by Pablo Picasso and scored by Erik Satie), and Southern to write the screenplay for an ill-fated, never-produced adaptation of Burroughs’s first novel, 1953’s *Junky*.
3. In an interview with Jane Howard which appeared in the August 21, 1964 issue of *Life* magazine, Southern—at that point, author of the novels *Flash and Filigree*, *Candy* (with Mason Hoffenberg), and *The Magic Christian*, as well as the screenplay for Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove*—declared, “The important thing in writing . . . is the capacity to astonish. Not shock—shock is a worn-out word—but astonish. The world has no grounds for complacency. The *Titanic* couldn’t sink, but it did. Where you find smugness you find something worth blasting. I want to blast it.” This statement came a year after the publication of *Writers in Revolt*, an anthology initially titled *Beyond the Beat*, compiled and edited by Southern—hipster scenemaker, father of New Journalism, American pioneer of “eroticism” (often referred to by others as “pornography”) and official tour scribe of the Rolling Stones’ infamous jaunt across the U.S. in 1972 (also documented in Robert Frank’s almost unseeable documentary, *Cocksucker Blues*)—along with Richard “Dick” Seaver (American translator-at-large, sometime editor of presses both Grove and Viking) and Alexander Trocchi (under-celebrated Scottish novelist, longtime heroin addict). The anthology essentially amounts to an extraordinarily self-conscious literary genealogy, interspersed with introductory essays by Southern, Lawrence Durrell, Jean-Paul Sartre, and others: Beginning (perhaps as a sort of aesthetic thesis statement) with an excerpt from Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl*, the anthology proceeds more or less chronologically with the Marquis de Sade, covering the work of Baudelaire, Dostoevsky, and Artaud, through a more contemporary generation (or rather, *generations*) of writers: Céline, Malaparte, Genet, Henry Miller, William Gaddis, Burroughs, and Beckett. Unsurprisingly, the book anthologizes only one woman writer, Iris Murdoch: Irish-English novelist, early Anglophone champion of Sartre’s philosophy. The book’s introduction, “Toward the Ethics of a Golden Age”—which is unsigned in the anthology, but written by Southern with Seaver’s editorial oversight (Trocchi was too doped-out at that point for his contribution to be likely)—concludes, “Throughout

the whole body of psychoanalytic knowledge nothing is considered more dangerous or despicable than the double standard; it is known, of course, in its clinical extreme, as schizophrenia. Because of stigma, no less than because of knowledge itself, we are now consciously tending away from double standards. What is required, then, is the deliberate avoidance of lip service to assumed values, and adherence instead to deeply personal impulse, as well as the active response to the most private inclinations. For it is in this way alone that the great hollow symbols by which cultures pretend to live are given face and substance, the dead lips color, warmth, and, perhaps, in the end, something meaningful to say."

4. Freud, stigma, personal impulse, active response, private inclinations, color, lips, warmth. Where is sex here? If they have anything at all in common (indeed, they have plenty), the works collected in *Writers in Revolt* are most unified in their unabashed treatment of the erotic: Sade, Ginsberg, Genet, Miller, and Burroughs, especially, all at the center of the most notorious obscenity trials of their times (let us not forget Joyce, Lawrence, and Nabokov, whose absence, in this context, is screamingly present in legacy). Beyond "psychoanalysis" serving as a sort of code word for "eroticism" here, it is good to keep in mind that Southern-the-Editor's notorious novel *Candy*—published in Paris by Maurice Girodias's Olympia Press in 1958—was still embroiled in censorship prosecution in the U.S. which would continue until the following year (1964), and in France and the U.K. for a few years longer. The American legal system's interest in pursuing charges of literary obscenity would not end until 1966, when the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled in favor of Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (also originally published by Olympia, in 1959).
5. Astonishment, shock: quelle est la tadium ce? Shock, Southern acknowledges, is old-hat, a symptom of the pornographic, and not the erotic—his privileged term. But for Walter Benjamin, writing in the 1930s, shock is the predominant experience of the modern age. In his second most famous essay, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin introduces the concept of shock in order to approach Freud's theory of a consciousness which protects the organism against external stimuli, which Benjamin registers as "shocks." For Benjamin, "Psychoanalytic theory strives to understand the nature of these traumatic shocks 'on the basis of their breaking through the protective shield against stimuli.'" Because of the vast increase of external stimuli—planes, trains, and automobiles, radio, film, the usual suspects—which comes with modernity, human consciousness must come to be more constantly "alert as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less do these impressions enter experience (*Erfahrung*), tending to remain in the sphere of a certain hour in one's life (*Erlebnis*)." Shock, then, is not transcendent—it is extremely temporal. The reason that Baudelaire stands out as a writer of modernity—along with Poe, Proust, and Valéry—is that he places "the shock experience at the very center of his artistic work," a work that is inextricable from the nineteenth-century Paris in which it was written—the Paris of the *flâneur*, arcades, wine, and hashish.

6. Though Benjamin was, as Marcus Boon writes, an unapologetic “connoisseur of the recently outmoded,” he was not nostalgically unrigorous enough to let Baudelaire represent the modern age, *carte blanche*. While the shock of the Parisian crowds is indeed central to Baudelaire’s poetics, it is not intended to *shock* its reader—or, at least Benjamin doesn’t seem to think so. Rather, shocking the audience is a twentieth-century project, the work of Dadaist painting and motion pictures. Dada, Benjamin writes in his first most famous essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” is the quintessential movement of the modern age, attempting as it does “to create by pictorial—and literary—means the effects which the public today seeks in the film.” By stating the destruction of art—specifically, the media of literature and painting—as its mission, Dada fulfills one of “the foremost tasks of art”: “the creation of a demand which could be fully satisfied only later.” Dada’s requirement “to outrage the public” creates a “moral shock effect” which is only physically manifest in film. Benjamin writes, “The painting invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations. Before the movie frame he cannot do so. No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed. It cannot be arrested.” The shock effect of film, thus conceived, is that “the spectator’s process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change. . . . By means of its technical structure, the film has taken the physical shock effect out of the wrappers in which Dadaism had, as it were, kept it inside the moral shock effect.”
7. By becoming physically manifest in the technology of film, not only does literature lose its capacity for shock, the capacity of shock itself to *effect* lessens significantly. If modernity is the era of shock, it is because it renders shock irrelevant, redundant. Shock is taken for granted, and is therefore rendered moot. Enter astonishment. Southern, one of our prophets of *étonnement*, poses this as a problem for art, and for writers, specifically. In a 1962 essay for *The Nation*, titled “When Film Gets Good,” Southern writes, “It has become evident that it is wasteful, pointless, and in terms of art, inexcusable to write a novel which could, or in fact should, have been a film. This ought to be the first principle of creative literature and of its critical evaluation; without it the novel, in the present circumstances, has only a secondary function of art.” Ironically, Southern fails to follow his own advice: his own 1970 novel, *Blue Movie*—a story of a Hollywood *auteur*’s attempt to make a big-budget, aesthetically honest pornographic film—should have been a film, and not a novel. Of course, Southern’s own attempts to turn the novel into a film were met with the same red tape of bourgeois respectability as that met by *Blue Movie*’s protagonist, “King” Boris Adrian, the Fellini/Bergmanesque director of the film-within-the-novel, whose production is ultimately shut down by a mob of irate cardinals, who end up keeping Adrian’s obscene reels deep within the Vatican for their own, private screenings. Despite all of its graphic gangbangs, lakeside lesbian cunnilingus, and brother-sister anal sex—who cares about a blow job performed by a one-eyed, one-legged, hairless nympho-starlet in the wake of Hiroshima

(or *The Human Centipede*, even)?—*Blue Movie* is unable to shock, and as a novel, fails to astonish. It's a formal problem, medium-specific.

8. Susan Sontag—priestess of sensibility, American importer of Barthes, Benjamin, and European art cinema—calls, in 1964's "Against Interpretation," for an "erotics of art," in stark opposition to masculinist hermeneutics: "What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to *see* more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more." A novelist herself, Sontag sees in cinema, as a medium, a unique capacity to evade "the philistine refusal to leave the work of art alone": for "the cinema, unlike the novel, possesses a vocabulary of forms—the explicit, complex, and discussable technology of camera movements, cutting, and composition of frame that goes into the making of a film." Sontag attributes the cinema's resistance to interpretation (partly, anyway) to its multisensory nature, in other words, its appeal to the embodiment of the viewer. Interestingly, Sontag here anticipates her own hero, Barthes, who waits until 1973 to explicitly conceive of the reader's engagement with a text as a fundamentally sexual, embodied experience: "The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas—for my body does not have the same ideas I do," he writes, in *The Pleasure of the Text*.
9. Perhaps it is this renewed interest in the body, and particularly the senses, which draws Barthes to the art of photography at the end of his life. Of course, Barthes's interest in photography can easily be witnessed in a text as early as 1957's *Mythologies*, but 1980's *Camera Lucida*—which along with Sontag's collection of essays, *On Photography*, published three years earlier, has since been canonized as a seminal text on the theory of photography (as well as being fingered onscreen by Ben Chaplin in 1996's *The Truth About Cats & Dogs*, oddly enough)—is Barthes's first sustained study of the medium. In it, he proposes the twin concepts " *tadium*" and " *punctum*," which considered alongside his earlier concepts, the readerly and the writerly, illuminate how Barthes's theory of textuality opens itself to a consideration of literature as one medium among many, and as a consequence, defines reading as an embodied encounter between a person and a text, regardless of whether that text is composed of language, images, or even sounds. Barthes introduces *tadium* and *punctum* over the course of a formally plural text: part memoir, in which Barthes mourns the very real body of his late mother; part photographic essay, whose text is integrated with images captured by Robert Mapplethorpe, William Klein, and many other photographers; part self-conscious, in-progress attempt at a working theory of the photographic image. *Stadium* and *punctum* are distinguished as two affects felt by the viewer of the photograph (in this case, Barthes himself): *tadium* refers to the extent to which the viewer receives the images "as political testimony or enjoy[s] them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally (this connotation is present in *tadium*) that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures the settings, the actions." The *tadium*, then, "is of the order of *liking*, not of *loving*; it mobilizes a half desire, a demi-volition; it is the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the entertainments, the

books, the clothes one finds 'all right.'" The *punctum*, by contrast, "will break (or punctuate) the *tadium*"—a photograph's *punctum*, Barthes writes, "is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)." The attraction of the *punctum* is mysterious, but it is from its very mystery, its indecipherability, that the pleasure (or pain) experienced by the viewer derives. *Camera Lucida*—Barthes's final book, published just months before his death—identifies the indeterminacy of the sign in the photographic representation of the human face. As such, photography—a medium not chained to the realm of the symbolic, like language, literature—creates new concepts which serve to reinforce Barthes's earlier theory of the text. Barthes's turn to a different medium—photography—signifies a return to the body, asking as it does: how are we to assign meaning to a text—the alienated symbolic—when we cannot fix the meaning of a glance, a snapshot of a smile, the human face itself?

10. So: astonishment. Qu'est-ce que c'est? "The Photograph," writes Barthes, "*astonishes* me, with an astonishment which endures and renews itself, inexhaustibly," arousing the desire for the image contained therein—the dead mother—in the body of the observer. An unfulfillable wish. Unlike shock, the effects of astonishment are perpetually deferred. It is a productive experience in that it generates nothing but itself, providing an avenue to thought, contemplation. This is no prudish gasp of blue-haired old ladies (though, nor is Benjamin's shock, for that matter). To mistake it as such would be tragic, a death-blow to contemporary thought—*Blue Movie*, scandalous in content but tired in form, makes this very mistake, prompting Norman Mailer to write to Southern on April 26, 1971, "You are certainly the funniest writer in America, but between us I don't think you took yourself seriously enough. I think you could have had a great novel there but you sloughed it." Barthes, too, understands the importance of *étonnement*, and is similarly disappointed in failed attempts to astonish. In "Sade-Pasolini" a review of Pier Paolo Pasolini's scandalous 1975 film adaptation of Sade's equally scandalous 1785 novel *The 120 Days of Sodom*, Barthes writes, "A flop of figuration (both of Sade and of the fascist system), Pasolini's film has worth as obscure recognition, poorly mastered within each of us, but surely bothersome: it bothers everybody, for, on account of Pasolini's own *naïveté*, it prevents anybody from getting cleared through customs. That is why I wonder if, at the end of a long concatenation of errors, Pasolini's *Saló* is not, *all things considered*, a properly Sadean object: absolutely irredeemable: no one indeed, so it seems, can redeem it." Barthes—an admirer of Sade, and therefore necessarily no prude—faults the film for attempting an image of Sade's universe where no such thing is possible, because that universe is "entirely given over to the power of *écriture*. ...the phantasm can only be written in script, and not in description." In a parallel fashion, the film's commentary on fascism—Pasolini restages Sade in the final days of the Italian Fascist regime—fails to astonish, and therefore be powerful as art: "Fascism is too serious and too insidious a danger to be treated by simple analogy, the fascist masters coming 'simply' to take the place of the libertines. Fascism is a coercive object: it forces us to think it accurately, analytically, philosophically. All that art can

do with it, if it deals with it, is to make fascism believable, to show off (*démontrer*) how it happens not to show (*montrer*) what it resembles; in brief, I see no other way to treat it than *à la* Brecht. Or, better yet: it is a responsibility to present this fascism as a perversion; who will not be relieved to say in front of the libertines of Salò: '*I am really not like them, I am not fascist, since I do not like shit.*'" The horrors of the world have already been shown—all art can do with them is to show them again. The remonstrative power of the photograph, it seems, is equal to the ability of art to astonish—but a purely mimetic theory is not what remains. Rather, a work of art's capacity to astonish is in fact equal to its willingness to present itself as non-art: an object, an event, present once. A photograph of mother.

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## Ixodes: A Fable by Kevin McIlvoy

*"People at first were not so much concerned with what the story meant; what they wanted to know was where these lotteries were held, and whether they could go there and watch."*

—Shirley Jackson, 1968

**For Christina-Taylor Green, 9 yrs. old**

*Let our party begin, thought Ixodes. Let everyone come. Let them come by the thousands.*

"A-la la-la /a!" sang Ixodes at the drinking place behind the ear of the angry old feller, his hearing not so good, and he not so sure, after all, that he heard the talking deer tick with throngs of murmuring tickseeds seething inside.

Ixodes said, "Good morning, blood meal. Give now. Good morning, muddy stream, bar tab, hit tune, sippy cup. Give—now."

And the angry old feller, his loaded automatic in his hand—his right, to carry the threat to kill whenever, wherever he went—pumped it up in the air. He reholstered. And his heart unholstered and reholstered, too, and it bubbled a dose into Ixodes who said, "More now. More," and received what he wished from his host.

The rally began at ten after ten o'clock in the morning, sunny and clear, clear and sunny. The angry old feller was pleased so many angry grand old people were there. Ixodes was pleased he was pleased. He would not begrudge the group for being a little dim, a party of pale gray tricklers to whom nothing had trickled down, old fundamental home-schoolers whom the home-schooled had fundamentally left alone, old puzzlers riddled by the black riddle at the throne of the world, outfoxed by the black foxling.

*Pox soup, thought Ixodes.*

*After all, a pot like you is a boiling feast, thought Ixodes.*

*And perfect for the tiniest murderers with the tiniest daggers.*

Ixodes! Ixodes! The tool of his own parasitizing trade, the systole and diastole of his own supreme justice, the clock and calendar of his own world.

Ixodes, who shrugs and infernally shivers in.

Ixodes' hour does not flow as yours does.

Ixodes' eon is the delta of all eons.

What was his anchor before this anchor? What was his host and father host and host's furthest distant demon ancestor? What assignment was he given from what holy book? What command does he give?

Mr. Jared Lee Peck, The Official of the rally, stood at a black chalkboard on the stage. He gave the ritual salute to the crowd: a stiff touch of hand on heart, a sort of firm self-caress. "Well," he said. "Well, tonight—"

"—is the night!" said Mrs. Paling, the co-host, Keeper of the Cain. She leaned in at one of the microphones on the stage. "Want the taste of the dark meat?" she asked the crowd. "Want it?"

Mr. Peck said, "Well—"

"Well, then. Lock and load," said Mrs. Paling.

For show-and-tell demonstration, Mrs. Paling had brought the old soldier who liked to pretend. His treble medals gleaming like Mepps spinners. His dripping bayonet pulled from a fellow soldier's back. Fulsome venom in his jowls. The crowd was always thankful when Mrs. Paling displayed Old Cain, the smeary badge of a circus nation. They liked to see her poke the old diamondback, push him behind her and proffer the grin of the animal trainer. They liked it when Daughter Cain came along.

"Anybody ain't here?" he asked the crowd, or himself, or Mother Cain, or Mr. Peck, or only the trees overhead, which teemed with Ixodes, the amber tears a tree sheds, the hungry beads of tar. Ixodes: moist, quiet fire-kisses. Swallower. Swallower. Swallower is Ixodes Scapularis.

Mr. Peck put on his teacher spectacles, brought out his boxes of chalk. He brought out his friend Mr. Oxy wearing his gigantic black shirt and gigantic black suit-vest, his small, his very tiny seeping red socks.

Mr. Oxy! Big and high as a parade balloon! A swollen floating swooning bull-toad who bulged, pistoned, bobbed up and down, down and up and down in his ebony butcher apron. He looked upon his buttery croaking tads draped in dripping ditto-red.

His appetizing morsels, his plentiful servings of marrow.

"A-la /a la /a!" sang Ixodes, dancing his black-legged ixodid shuffle. "A la a /a!"

It was a happy day for all croaker-gals-and-fellers certain they were specially entitled to the harvests the unentitled others harvested. The shade of the trees at Enawray Park was friendly shade and it was all theirs on the sunny and clear day.

Mr. Peck touched his Jesus-rebus on his blackboard, and he asked, "Are you a purpose-driven people? Are you a purpose-driven constitution-loving people? Are you a purpose-driven constitution-loving God-fearing people?"

He said, "I'm asking. I'm asking. I'm ASKING, 'Are you true citizens of these United States?'" He said it made him want to cry, it made him almost cry. He said it: "I'm having a problem—excuse me, please, please, I'm—" Nothing moved him like hearing his own voice. Nothing made him yearn to be moved more than his yearning for the sound of his own yearning. Very, very moved by being so



moved, he cried, his hand over his heart in a sort of pledge to touch himself when he felt touched by himself.

He cried often, and when he cried, quite often when he cried, Mr. Peck felt he must decry.

"I have to say this—it's difficult—I'm—excuse me, please, please—" He decried the lost plantation, he decried the empty tabernacles of the select saved, the lost segregated stations and classrooms.

It moved him. So much was lost.

He decried the lost phalanxes of batoning police, lost bus seats and bathrooms, lost high-pressure hoses and hanging places, lost bullwhips and bully pulpits. "Are you," he mournfully asked, "the true citizens of these United States?" He was. Mr. Peck was. There was communion, he felt, between him and the other true ones.

"Born where?" he asked.

"Born when?" he asked.

"Born here!" they shouted back.

"Born again!" they shouted back.

"Gold Standard!" said Mr. Peck, no longer as sad. "Gold Standard!" It was his way of saying, "Correct!" It was a gold star on the top right corner, the petting only teacher's pet received. "My dear closed ledgers, my dear polygamembers, do you remember?" he said, his flattop alert and his distended face alight. "My dear passenger pigeons, my dear confederatoes, I'm asking—I'm ASKING—for your parentheses."

And he dried his dipsomaniacal weeping nose and his wet eyeglasses.

"Where were you born? And when?" he asked. "And can you prove it?"

"Born here! Born again!" they shouted, and raised their guns in the air to give the righteous proof, and reholstered.

Mr. Peck wiped the folds of his sweaty neck and forehead. "We don't have to accept federalsharia law. It's ours. It's ours. Let us deciders keep-save-solve it, take it back and bleach it, put it on the line and fly, divide, secede, draw, quarter, hold by force and hang it." *Gold Standard*, he thought of his own thought.

They wanted it back. He knew they did. According to what he said, something, something needed backtaking.

And Mrs. Paling asked the crowd, "How's that sociohomocommunista thing goin' fer ya?" She said, "Mmmmhmm. How's that abortoterroristicplanningparentkillin thing goin' fer ya?" She said, "Mmmmhmm. Is Dr. Tiller in the house? Hmmm?"

When she shouted for The Solution, at first there was a hush.

Then, deeper silence.

The respectful silence, the awed twilight's-last-gleaming silence emptying the national heart of everything but the national anthem.

Mrs. Anglesher, the taut hook of "law" swallowed down to her gills, shouted back, "Secondamendment!"

Mrs. Brewjaugh mumbled to pretty Mrs. Bichelle-Eichmann who glared at Mr. Saintrum and Mr. Bilrilly and the banker Mr. Mitchellcon and the barber Gob Halee. They were shamed enough to shout it, too: "Secondamendment! Secondamendment!"

And ex-mayor Walkoch and jolly Mr. Kriskristea and Pa Paw and his boy And joined them. The soiling solidarity of it all cheered up K.B. Gangrich who was once The Official of the party.

Missy O'Handitty said, "It's in the Bill of Constitutional Declaration, isn't it?"

Mr. Peck said, "Well—"

"Well?" asked Mrs. Paling of the crowd. "Well?" She shouted for the hunters to unholster, to begin their hunt, something was in season, wasn't something Muslim-sounding good for shooting? And when she made a cocking gesture, everyone crowed back, "Man up! Man up!" Sixteen times she repeated it. Sixteen times they echoed back. Sixteen seconds is what it took to go that many rounds.

Mr. Oxy saw it as his cue to shift, tug, heft himself to his feet. He pursed his own wet cigar-tip in his lips and gripped himself across his own engorgement.

He shouted for his ownname and positioned his ownself before his ownnation's flag just a certain sovereign way all his onanistic own.

"It's Mister Oxy!" Mr. Quist excitedly tapped the shoulder of Mr. Phut. "Mister Oxy! Mister Oxy!" shouted all the faded silvered mirrors with mouths, "Mister Oxy! Ox-eeee!" And he hooted, huffed, for he felt they had offered him tribute but not tribute enough.

*Good to be a boiling creature's boil*, thought Ixodes. He suckled, sucked, gave thanks for Mr.Oxy. Was any one verminous force of nature like Mr. Oxy? What was Mr. Oxy's anchor before this anchor? What was his host and father host's furthest demon ancestor? What assignment was he given from what holy book? What command does he give?

Mr. Oxy burble-chuckle-chuffed, he slobber-gobbled on his gullet and on the fevered one hanging below it. And now the cries of the infantilized fanaticized up-dialed. And now the delirious-most of the delirious Oxy-danced in ditto, which spittled his moisturous smile in self-pleasure.

He cleared some throat-phlegm and sinus-mayo, pursed his mouth to whisper, (*Parenthesis, please.*)

(*Parentheses.*)

(*Parentheses.*)

(*Parentheses.*)

Except for Ixodes, who could be sure they heard Mr. Oxy's and Mr. Peck's and Keeper Paling's microtonally adjusted supra-whispered pre-words? *Parenthesis. Please.*

"Parentheses!" said Ixodes to the old feller, "the hocus-pocus shells of the shell game—I like this killing-inside-kissing!" And he thorned the old feller's crepey carapace. "Now *this*," he said, "is A Movement."

Mr. Oxy clapped for himself once more, clawed the podium lip, frogged his plump fingers forward, and made eye contact with Mr. Quist, with Mrs. Bichelle-Eichmann, with Mr. Phut, Mr. Saintrum, Official Gangrich, with Pa Paw and And.

He called for his country's purity back and his country's shining razor-wire fences, asking, "Have you learned the prayer of the Glock? Do you have good training and God's thirty-two-chamber clip?"

He congratulated his country's manifest eternal moral perfection, and asked how to protect it, and asked, "Do you have strong rope and high trees and—parenthesis—have you forgotten the hangman's knot?—close parenthesis."

He praised his country's divine power to take power, to give no mercy to the enemy outside and—here he paused, he welted in his manly black vest and shiny black man-blouse covering his pelagic whale-dugs. He welted as a black seal will welt in its wet bloat – and he praised the patriot's give-no-mercy pledge to destroy "once more" and "again and again" the enemy within.

"O, Same!" repeated the three bricks, the followers of Mr. Peck.

He sang, "O some, O same! O Sam! O-same! O-Sam-O-same-o-same!"

And the whole brickyard sang it back almost verse for verse.

"O some-a-name-a-bama-rama uppity Sambo," he said, and they made a mess of that, which caused him and them to oxy-jig a jemima-shamble, which made his black-pearl cuffs, his spanks and sansabelts and poufy black sleeves palpitate.

And he asked whether Mrs. Paling agreed.

She did. She said she did. She said you betcha, yes she did.

She stood proudly on her stiletto heels, proud jaunt to her ass and enhanced jut to her proud breasts, and she tossed back the crest of her old-school do, and smoothed the back of her shellacked teeth with her bifurcated tongue, looked through the crosshairs of her big-game glasses, and made the boxer's jaw-thrust and shoulder-shift in her custom-made kid-leather Elvisy jacket.

The assembled crowd looked to her like people who held their folded slips of paper, were ready to open them and know. They looked to her like so many blood libel choices she could draw from a rigged black box. Each of them looked marked by a hit-list black spot. Looked easy for her to lift and to throw as she wished.

They had been made ready.

They were her pile of stones.

She said the words, "Your guns," and said the words, "My guns."

She asked, "Who's really sane? Who's sane?" said, "He IS comin, you know the one, you know who I mean, Hussein is comin and you know what fer."

She shifted her right hip and her shoulders, which hiked her short skirt, put her ladies in relief.

"Still in your holster?" she asked. "Not fer long. I ferget, is it –bama or –sama, is it barain or borook or barock? He got a murrican mama? Unimurrican? What race and religion? Seen the papers of his grandmaumau? I ferget. I ferget."

She said the word "Ray-Gun!" and showed hers. "Where were you—when were you—how were you born?"

Someone, it could have been Pastor Canteric, answered, "Twin Towers Nine-Eleven."

"*Amen*," she said, and she looked into her palm where a little something had come last night, and she whispered into the mic, "There's lead—and there's Hot Lead. There's dead—and there's Cold Dead. We got to (parenthesis, now—put in parenthesis where needed) get that in his nappy head." And her rhyme made her titter, and she Ronalddithered her head in a tilt and did a three-count Bush-smirk, and asked the crowd, "How bout it? (Parenthesis-unholster-close-parenthesis?)"

And Mr. Peck jumped up and shouted, "Ray-Gun! Ray-Gun!" and wrote in white chalk: ParenthesisunholsterParenthesis!

Mr. Oxy liked to see Peck, his Little Oxy, at the board. He liked to see Missy Oxy's full lips so highly glossed. He laughed huh-huh-ho-ho-ho. He hooted, "Parentha-Ray-parenthaGun! Husseinhusseinhussein Barrackbarrackbarrack O, Bam! O Bam! O, Bama-meima-muslim-mau-mau-grandpa! We got us some iiii-illing, some sssssination, some loading and re-re-re-loading must be done parenthasemiautosniperatically, I mean!"

There was shouting-out and weapon-shouldering and gunsight-sighting all around. The sound of magazines firmly seated-in, of extra magazines calacking inside khakis.

"Safeties on?" he asked. "Off?"

Huh-huh-ho-ho-ho! he laughed, and drum-rolled the air for more fanatical infantilism from sheep to shining sheep.

A low-throttle roar went up. But not another.

Some of the safeties-off had missed their naps. Some of the safeties-on had missed their morning nips.

And the old soldier, the old breadwinner Cain said feebly behind Mrs. Paling, "Sign a the—sign a the—"

Something, some yeast on his tongue, or the word for yeast or least or something parenthetical he couldn't get out fell off him like loose pants, loose boxers.

And the old bread-winner-fallen-hero sandwiched between Mr. Oxy and Mrs. Paling, his dignity down around his ankles for so long, for over fifteen years, hummed like a pitch pipe, a chorus matron.

He hummed. He snapped his fingers in a Vegas way.

He could find the tune.

He could. Yes, he could.

He looked out over his troops. They looked to him like frightened draftees unshaven and unshaped, like undelivered envelopes, like misreported statistics. They looked to him like broken ranks, ghosts in prison pajamas. They had been made ready as fist-sized rocks.

He had the key now.

He sang. It was good to hear Old Cain sing his old standard, his old favorite surfer-dude tune: "Bam-bam-BLAM – bambam-a-bama-BAA-A-AM!"

It made him giggle to be able to sing it so right. He wondered whether others noticed that he sounded like The Gipper when he giggled, hummed, sang.

He asked the breadwinners, who had eaten their own in their own time, if they knew the two colors of food stamps. "They come in colors," he said in a gay imitation of Teacher Peck. "And what are they?"

A word like clown or gown or down—or brown—it might have been the word "Brown" hacked out of him like false teeth, like a swallowed condom.

And now he howled, "And Black!" and Daughter Cain The Puddle Jumper held his hand skyward, and shouted, "He said he's back!"

He said, "Brownback and Shit-stick Black!"

"Daddy's back! Daddy's back!" she shouted over and underneath his spill. She stumbled upon the pool of his trousers.

He said, "They buy their cigarettes and drugs and liquor with em!"

The old soldier saw them scoping him across an unnerving neutral zone. He warrior-waved to Mr. Norbone, girl-waved to Mr. Kylelenty and Mr. Morney. It's me, he seemed to say.

He felt certain he was field-dressed, had his medal-encrusted shirtfront and full shoulder-salad on.

It was time to take it off.

"Fuck em," he said to The Puddle Jumper, to his lady Mother Cain who had been trying to blot a stain on her silk blouse.

They tried to push him back. "Fuck em," he said.

They tried to get him. He would fall, but be up in an instant, almost fall back but bounce-step forward, grab the mic, push it off, ankle-catch and angle it back to himself.

With help, they got him.

"Fuck em," he said, and smelling Mrs. Paling's napalmy hair, a burst of new energy came. He tore away from them.

"Fuck the parentheses," he said to Mrs. Paling.

Mr. Peck said, "He's back all right!" trying to grab the mic from the old warrior.

"Fuck em," said Old Cain, "take down the parentheses."

Mr. Oxy, paying no attention to the old hero he jealously hated, had been making pretend ouzis with his fists. Mr. Phut ouzied with him, and Mr. Quist, and Mrs. Bichelle-Eichmann. Mr. Oxy did the cocking, aiming, brow-crunching thing his dittos loved.

"Take em down. They're like a prison," said the old cracked bell, "blow em up. Just say it. Say what we want. Say what we want. *Say what it is we want!*"

He pushed. The rusted soldier pushed hard at his perfect inner trigger. It seemed to him some claymore was there. Behind his ear.

It was time to emplace it. Time to be the emplacer.

"A la a la a la!" sang Ixodes.

What was Ixodes' anchor before this anchor? What was his host and father host and furthest distant demon ancestor? What assignment was he given from what holy book?

It was necessary for Mrs. Paling to push the ancient antipersoneller to the ground. It was necessary for her to clear a space on the floor, a hole where Old Cain could be surrounded, silenced, put on his knees and hands. "Here!" she commanded, and he was controlled. "There!" she commanded, and the tough little dog disappeared from view.

It thrilled Mr. Peck to see it. He led a cheer for freedom to get them freedom-takers in a corner, them freedom-takers that lost their souls to the dark master, them disrespecters of the nativeborn. He snapped his erasers together, which made the air and him and – so he felt – his nation, whiter.

Ixodes said, "Here I am! And all of my teeming young who know it is time!"

Ixodes said, "Give more, drillsite, plasmaplume, blueplate, superserum. Give now."

"Let our party begin!" shouted Mr. Peck. And at that, they raised their loaded arms in the air and shot up into the sky. And thousands of secondamendment solutions went up. They went up and up!

And they came down with surprising speed and spin.

They stung the waiting living bullets from the trees. Millions of ixodes—trillions within.

To all the ixodes, the crowd was a tidal pool of heated, howling bulls-eyes.

Some in the crowd thought they felt rain as the seed-strikes landed upon, crawled onto, burrowed and needled in to their shoulders or necks or the mottled tops of their heads.

A grandchild among them said, "It is *not* fair."

Someone asked Mr. Peck if he heard the child's words. He said, "How do you know words mean anything?"

And the child said, "It is *not* right," and then one of them was upon her. And then all of them, the whole party.

And a storm of ixodes rained. Rained and rained. And rained. The long-waiting deadly tiny maledictions scuttled in. They pierced like spiky grains, they fractioned, tractioned, suctioned flesh. They moloched down.

The crowd hardly felt its own holy moment of intromission. Hardly felt the superficial bruising, the assault, the first slightest flow of blood.

The infinite young of Ixodes had received their one commandment. "Rove."

## Drawn by Veronica Noechel

Why do we revisit tragedy with tears,  
Not from pain, but of humility  
In the presence of unfathomable beauty?  
What is it in our nature that draws us  
To the striking perfection of the deadly,  
To the impossibly smooth glossy blackness  
Of the widow spider, the adrenalin bright X  
in red that nearly glows like the bioluminescence  
Of the deepest undersea monsters, the vermillion  
Song that says, "touch me, little one."  
We forget, somehow, that loss is forever,  
An abrupt cut in the ribbon of time, the rest  
Thrown away, still wound upon the spool.

Is it the hypnotic desire to know the end  
Of our story? Sucked into the tar like dinosaurs, or  
Snapped and swallowed in the gullet of a crocodile,  
Like the shivering Impala, gone despite all  
Inborn, instinctive caution. Is there  
A Shakespearian drama hiding in the drought?  
When the rain won't come, we are forced  
To brave the marsh. We march, well aware  
We approach a pool of death, as much as life,  
But we're born with an insatiable thirst  
That demands relief, a voice louder than self-  
Preservation. Compulsory or just compulsive?  
We're driven to the river's edge, and for that  
And that alone, the crocodile lives older than time.  
We willingly crawl into death like a second skin,  
A soft pillow at the end of the relentless daylight.



## Reach by Veronica Noechel

The night terrors are bulls running beneath a sagging balcony  
held together by paint chips and dead termites.  
I huddle, balled up against the chipping brick, squealing  
with the strained hinges at the throttle of hooves. But then you,  
delicious as summer raspberries, indolent as a sun drunk tiger,  
lean against the crumbling railing, all your bones  
adjusting effortlessly to the sway like a fox trot. Deadly nimble, you smoke cigarettes  
with strange and stale grandfather names like Winston, Chesterfield,  
and the confidence of a film star before cancer came along.  
Through the slats, cattle run in a braided rope of bodies,  
a tight and desperate line of muscle and sweat, hooves compacting the sand,  
grinding scattered syringes and bloodied cotton balls into shards  
and a frothy tan soup of scat. I'm too scared to grab onto your  
calm extended hand or your belief that my bulls are imaginary  
as candy petaled roses, and nothing I can say  
will draw you away from that edge, toward safety. So we stand  
unmoving, trapped frozen in the glass bubble of a protracted minute  
despite stampeding time. We share  
a cooperative paralysis, each wishing we could hold the other  
down, to protect them from their vaporous and dangerous delusions  
as concrete and preposterous as imaginary bulls.

## Cineplex by Frederick Pollack

What had happened? One moment  
the upper-under and lower-working  
classes, vast, tattooed,  
eyes averted,  
randomly pugnacious,  
or both, were roaming  
that restroom of a lobby,  
popcorn underfoot, their children  
crowding the grimy arcade before  
the shows. On offer: vampire blacks,  
idiot race-car drivers,  
supernatural thugs, and suddenly this darkness.  
My reaction was awe: Al Qaeda  
was choosing smaller targets.  
I could see the logic. (Though some of the  
fragments  
around me would say, no doubt,  
it was the Mossad...) With the need  
to chatter one feels at such times, I found  
a paleoconservative to talk to. (I knew him  
by his prissy vest and his unblinking stare.)  
“You know, we probably regard  
these people with the same complacent  
despair—except you think they’re free  
and want them to be obedient  
and I the reverse. Though I wonder,  
why were *you* standing in line  
to drop ten IQ points?” He  
lay silent, disdainful of me and the rising  
flames. More good-naturedly:  
“It’s strange how an old socialist  
and an old reactionary  
find themselves in a similar impasse.”

## Where Nothing Is by Frederick Pollack

It is the summer of Gore's film.  
This heat was brought to you by greed.  
In a Sargasso Sea between errands,  
you confront the superior might  
of shadeless urban planning.  
Soon water will be rationed, and you'll stink,  
or left up to the market, and you'll die.  
You're taking a chance with that title.  
And with the second person  
if it turns out only to mean you.  
New lawn-trimmer, kitty litter.  
Don't neglect the connotations.  
Pick up Zinfandel.  
You alone are responsible  
to maintain a class analysis,  
to detect the boast in each complaint.  
You alone are responsible  
for your work. Who else is interested  
in the gelid flux of self,  
or wants to read a phrase like that?  
Escaping either into flux or crystal.  
By the drugstore, a sensible car  
idles, its driver talking:  
you need no longer say,  
on a cellphone. Girls from Our Lady of Victory  
pass in their plaid skirts, shrieking. The psychos  
at the LaRouche table  
have landed a live one. The lid  
of the trashbin floats,  
as always, over Slurpees. But to see  
History plain means no longer to humanize; focus  
on objects, the unscooped poop, the beep  
of the tanker backing into Exxon. The human  
has insufficient breath for the word  
it needs to mutter: History  
is part of nature, will be reabsorbed.  
And so you came into the world.

## Surveillance by Frederick Pollack

### 1

I don't immediately notice: they're  
not playing their, so to speak, music.  
I've been thinking a long time  
("staring into space," they call it),  
am bored with what I'm thinking,  
and normally would blame the music, but  
there isn't any! And I'm glad,  
retroactively, for unobstructed  
thought, however aimless  
and gloomy. It should be valued, there should  
be silence. This silence  
was like returning to health  
after illness, nationhood after Communism,  
life after death: old habits reappear  
as if you'd never been away.

### 2

Somehow you become aware  
that the person over there  
(wherever you are) is an anhedonic.  
There are signs: absences.  
"Sucks all the air out of a room."  
No; there's air,  
and air-conditioning or warmth  
as needed, and whoever it is  
is appropriately dressed and doesn't smell;  
but should you say these things to yourself  
you'll sense that language doesn't care.—  
Signs: the dispensable and undispensed  
smile. The unappreciated meal.  
The cellphone closed with a flat goodbye  
and a noticeable click.  
At a gathering, the dull but strange remark.  
And you feel blank rage,  
because by being detached  
from our default position  
of happiness, that person detaches you.  
And probably you react

by being rude, drinking, leaving;  
otherwise you might see the secret wiring.

### 3

A wandering bleb appears in psych-space.  
Inside, one confesses.  
Bartenders become cued  
to phone the cops when, say, a serial killer  
talks; and the police are glad  
to reduce their unsolved backlog. If, that is,  
the phenomenon persists  
and the perpetrator is still sitting there,  
and the bartender himself  
has not forestalled him with his own confession.  
There's no sense of priority  
or scale, and little pathos:  
no praying, sobbing etc. A surprising number  
of people have no moral sense;  
they make excuses. Others merely obsess.  
Like this guy, who, despite big watch,  
hair, general butch affect,  
reveals he is a weekend transvestite.  
You'd think that, having brought it out,  
he'd seem relieved, defensive...  
A girl has entered.  
In her yellow summer frock she seems  
less a gift from outside  
than a member of a lighter, happier species.  
"Don't you ever wonder," he murmurs,  
"what it feels like? The dress  
is a column. Heat rises from pavement,  
unimpeded, past her panties, and  
the sun pours over cleavage; as  
she moves, the fabric moves  
away from, then clings to her smooth belly."  
"For me the romance," I say,  
"lies in not knowing—  
watching that alien life a membrane away."  
"Fearing that, if you crossed it," he suggests,  
"you'd only find familiar death-bound worry."  
"In any case, desire," I say,

“—if it is desire we’re talking about,  
not fear—mutates  
with age. I’d like to rip her dress off,  
but only in a formal sort of way.  
Instead I could hear her confession  
in this force-field of confessions,  
and comfort, flatter, divert, inspire, bore  
charmingly—extracting, penetrating  
as much as one can  
without physical contact  
beyond a last paternal pat.  
For years I have been satisfied with that—  
sparklers beneath the broad sky of regret—  
and then going home to my wife,  
about whom, also, ordinarily  
I never speak  
because happiness is the true dangerous secret.”  
The zone dissolves; censoriousness returns.  
The girl, having revealed  
nothing, meets someone plausible and leaves.  
My acquaintance also leaves  
for the realms of the unreal  
and doubtless cuts a striking figure there.  
I too should leave, but sit a while nowhere.

#### 4

When the generals came to Rumsfeld,  
leaving aside the whys and wherefores  
of the war, they said they needed  
at least a third of a million troops  
to win. And he said That’s ridiculous;  
they were not taking seriously  
his stated demand  
for *transformation* at every level of thinking—  
they could do the job with 150,000.  
Dick backed him. Alone in his office  
at various times Rumsfeld thought  
of the silliness of their objections;  
of the obstructionism of Powell  
and others, who had to be handed  
their heads; of a lean mean

reliable versatile  
force; of the view towards seagrass  
and Bay beyond the lawn  
at "Mount Misery," and Dick's new "Ballintober"  
a mile up the coast;  
of how a simple phone call,  
a partial chuckled word can place  
someone where his talents are needed,  
and how it is reciprocated.  
Eventually dark limos bear  
boxes full of nitpicking and error  
into the vaults and footnotes, but friendship is timeless.

## 5

There was a street in Burbank  
between the freeway and a fading mall.  
No trees; signs and storefronts  
the only colors besides beige.  
Two things happened.  
I was at Fuddruckers, the burger place.  
Across the street a crowd had gathered,  
after work or between jobs, at a gym,  
but the doors of the gym wouldn't open.  
It was a scam.  
It had taken their money, declared bankruptcy  
or simply closed, reopening elsewhere (Nevada).  
Someone was in there, a sweeper.  
In their white and blue and fuchsia  
trunks and scripted T-shirts, shoulders  
already tensed to exercise or pose,  
unused to fruitless time and each protesting  
the inconvenience he or she was suffering,  
they pounded the plate glass and railed at him.  
That street (whose name I forget,  
my memories as partial  
as if they were one-story flat-roofed buildings  
stretched on the rack of a horizon)  
held for a season several used bookstores—  
a density uncommon in LA.  
One was military;  
big flags, the sad silhouetted MIA.

Two were graveyards:  
dingy romances stacked on their sides. And one  
I discovered the day, or perhaps the week, it was closing:  
not much left, only a few people pawing.  
No overhead, even at its best;  
bare planks, fluorescents dark above.  
Removed, the owner sat by the door;  
incredibly (or so I thought then) old,  
and thin and frail but alert,  
she looked up, not very often,  
from the book she was reading ...  
it was Kerouac's *On the Road*.  
Better late than never, I thought.  
Nostalgia? Or had she waited  
once in a coldwater flat  
for somebody's crumbs of love?  
Her son stood watching,  
arms crossed, with the air of a man refusing  
failure. Was he looking out for himself?  
For her, I felt.  
Perhaps he would see, before she did,  
Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty  
on a motorbike or in the cab  
of an ancient truck, coming at last  
to find her, meanwhile gathering, redeeming  
the cities: weeping Fresno, mad  
Bakersfield, indispensable dreaming Burbank.



## The Ones in the Hotel Drawer by Gregory Sherl

Just pluck the feathers from my shoulder blades.  
Lightness. Noise chopped into moans.  
There are ghosts everywhere & if you catch  
them in the right light, they will become genies.  
*Three wishes they say. Nothing more.*  
Even when I am standing next to a wishing well,  
I am wishing I were standing next to a bigger  
wishing well. I wish for longer pillow talk.  
I wish for softer pillows. I wish that one twice.  
In the beginning there was so much caffeine  
everything ran backwards. It was like a movie,  
Adam growing younger, Eve less pregnant  
until she's no longer bleeding every month.  
Intimacy was never supposed to feel this way,  
attached to an oven timer. There wasn't an oven yet.  
God was confused. The devil was confused.  
Gabriel said *How will I use this sword now?*  
The world ended & then it started over again.  
In the beginning it was the sequel.  
The sequel always sucks. Imagine how good  
the first one could have been.  
Still, she can put her feet behind her ears  
& that's a miracle. *Fuck that wine shit*  
I tell Him. *You really outdid yourself here.*  
But still, these sequel days, these bipolar  
heartbeats. I know I am living incorrectly  
when it's easier breathing through text messages.  
Sometimes rain is hotter than pavement  
but sometimes rain piles on top of pavement.  
I ask God *Are floods man-made?* God is always  
a busy signal. I never have questions  
about angels, not even angles or anglers.  
Instead of thinking, I always leave her  
on my fingers.

## Jesus Died in a Snowstorm + Other Miracles by Gregory Sherl

Jesus died in a snowstorm. It was exactly like that one movie  
with the snowstorm where people died blanketed in clean cold.  
Jesus died while downloading the Spotify app for His iPhone.  
He was driving & downloading & that's dumb & probably illegal  
in like twelve states. It's possible I'm terribly wrong, I apologize:  
Jesus died halfway through the fifth season of *The X-Files*.  
Dana Scully stayed paused while Jesus pretended to sleep  
behind a boulder for three days. I never believed origami  
could save us, so it was always raining by mid-afternoon.  
Mornings, we could paint them every night.  
It's easy to forget a good fuck but hard to remember how  
to forget a bad one. Jesus died outside of a strip mall.  
Imagine sipping coffee & watching people.  
These people, they all walk on their feet—  
they hold hands & sometimes their hands are sweaty  
& sometimes their hands are peeled onions.  
Jesus lost sixty pounds on the Subway diet.  
Jesus smelled like a magazine cover.  
I was like *Fuck, man, You're doing it all wrong.*  
*You have to peel off the edge of the ad, rub it on Your neck.*  
After Jesus died a second time, the earth birthed cracked sidewalks,  
hospital waiting rooms, awkward fire escapes.  
After Jesus died a second time, boredom birthed oral sex,  
the Internet, Ralph Nader's fear of automobiles.  
There is no reason to keep childhood photos  
forever.  
If so, we'd always stay childhood.  
& before most of it, Jesus said *I can never find the ground*  
*no matter how hard I look.*  
& before most of it but after he said that, I told Him  
*You're two feet above it, with half a tree of oak behind you.*

## Hell Poem by Gregory Sherl

I birth alcohol.  
I birth birth & try to give it back.  
I birth stillborns, don't even ask why.  
I birth Prozac so you can be just sad enough to  
keep going.  
You're welcome.

I birth Hell & turn the heater all the way up.  
I birth the viciousness in her ex-boyfriends.  
I birth their hands around her neck, their fisted  
welts.  
I birth her always swallowing.  
I birth welted fists fused to lumberjacks.  
I birth concealer.  
I birth a second Hell in case the first one fills up.  
I birth sweaty hands, bad cell phone reception,  
Detroit.  
I birth anger management classes with no sign-in sheet.  
I birth a cloud that will never look like anything else.  
It won't even really know how to look like a cloud.

## Tongues (Happy Clouds) by Gregory Sherl

When this poem makes me famous & richer than poet  
rich, I will buy a bigger cock. I will buy a bigger  
frame  
for my bigger cock. I will love my bigger framed cock.  
On comment cards at resorts I'll write *Six hundred  
& fifty-nine dollars a night & we only used the floor.*  
I will have bled both of us dry by this point, fed  
our hearts to bigger hearts, wrote *You are so blamed  
in your buttoned dress* on the inside of your spine.  
On TV Joel Osteen wants us to be richer, bleach the fuck  
out of our teeth, pray for everyone with wives who think.  
God bless an empty eternity, the foreshadowing of senility.  
I have never titled a poem "Things God Told Me"  
because I've never seen a bush burn but not burn down.  
I haven't seen *Amistad* but I hear it's sad.  
I've seen *Schindler's List* but that's more olive.  
I am only moderately attractive while drying my hands  
with a dirty dishtowel. Being in Heaven is robbing  
a pharmacy every Monday morning & never getting caught.  
& on the fourteenth day God made girls smell even  
better  
when they're naked. He taught me how to turn them on.  
It was the repeating effect that stuck.  
Outside always felt like happy clouds, iced coffee  
in a glass that never knew how to sweat.  
Always, I keep her so blamed in her buttoned dress.  
& God said miles were good. He was losing Himself.  
This is somewhere in Exodus, the third chapter,  
right after He goes *Small pox, I'm glad you cleared that up,*  
but before He says *That night you're thinking about,*  
*you're welcome.* Never try to cut a baby in half.  
Seriously, Solomon was just fucking around.  
& gay people, they're pretty much okay.  
Somewhere in Proverbs: *Running water doesn't care  
about sodomy.* Somewhere in love, a boy penguin  
flippers another boy penguin.  
Leviticus is all just *begat begat begat begat begat begat*  
*begat* with a bunch of names impossible to pronounce

shoved in between. Just skip that one, okay?

There are four books in the Bible where the same shit happens. Just skip those too, okay?



## So Turn This Motherfucker Up Only If It Feels Right by Gregory Sherl

*for Clay B.*

It just be one of those days says The Weather  
Channel, says the moon being the moon, says  
the water almost gone, says the song  
going *We about to get real unprofessional*.  
I have never worn a suit & meant it, but shit,  
my nighttime medicine's done fucked me up.  
Last night my nighttime medicine fucked me  
up too, & the day before that I took pills that made  
me feel like summer. Today I breathe sleep.  
All of my poems start underwater, except this one.  
Except the next one after this one, too.  
That one starts with a boy forgetting he's a boy,  
thinking he's a penguin, thinking he's an otter,  
thinking  
he's a horned owl. Is there such things as horned  
owls?  
I nod toothpaste. I pretend to know how long this air lasts.  
Don't worry, the poem after this one & the next one:  
that shit be twenty feet deep.  
Does a wetsuit get sad if it never gets wet?  
After ghost towns, everyone looks past the coast.  
The movies say aliens. The movies say treasure  
chests, the movies say Johnny Depp's agent  
making a treasure chest. The movies say Johnny Depp's  
treasure chest fills its own treasure chest. Holy fuck,  
sometimes the ocean goes six miles deep.  
I don't know how to think that long.  
Clay says we should run through a forest & impregnate  
our girlfriends. *Our girlfriends just don't know*  
*they're our girlfriends yet*. I nod while wondering  
if an octopus can nod. My first kiss tasted like pizza  
because I had just eaten pizza. I am sick of existing  
casually. I am moving to the west coast to sell  
sunlight.  
I am making my kissing always be in the present  
perfect tense.

My first kiss was at church. How holy I have been  
given to be gotten.



## It's Been So Long I'm Forgetting People by Gregory Sherl

God's always having us touch our own rib,  
then trying to make us ashamed for it.  
I keep the forgotten pretty in my mind.  
If they ever knew my cock, I keep them gorgeous  
up there. I keep them hydrated.  
My fear stays unknown inside me.  
Still, I think of you in a 3 AM kind of way.  
I am think of you knuckles deep.  
I am think of you thinking: a car not turned  
on, my cat drinking water. His name is Rivers  
so when he drinks water, I pretend  
he's drinking himself. I feel faulty.  
A song goes *Country restroom on the radio*  
& goddamn, when did the night leave?  
I didn't even notice the morning stop by.  
My poems are full of pretty girls I'll never fuck.  
Still, I believe in stoplights & amusement parks.  
I believe in pajamas. I believe we all fell out of trees  
& then slithered into the water before we climbed  
out of the water & cut the trees down.  
I just want people to smile at my face in mirrors  
I have never stood in front of.





## Aimless by Jason Spidle

Without his glasses he could see nothing but tones and blur, edges charred and bleeding. Speckles of candlelight flit and fumble in a glass of water. She takes a sip, ingesting flame. Her skin shines a bronze shadow against the darkened walls of the room, the ceiling black like night and he can't see the glint of a single star in the sky. All along his periphery are objects shaped like anonymity. He understands that this is a real place, a real room, but this figure before him challenges that notion in breaths lifting and receding. The lines of her body shoot sharp and forming as he guides his putrid pupils tracing the slope and tumble of her figure, noting the somber grace of her face all darkened crevices and craters feathered with still darker strands which graze like blades framing her delicate neck tasting of salt and he thinks of the tension of her nape pressed pointing against his teeth, his lips and tongue soaking up the extract laid upon the faintly finer hairs hidden behind her ears. He continues to search in chronological order and wasn't it her eyes that he first feasted upon so many weeks ago? Now shrouded in caverns and besides his glance travels downward across the curve of her breasts, an unlikely silhouette of flesh and he flinches at the impossibility of sight, her nipples blots of nots consuming the nearly softer glance of his hands and he can see with his nose the pores and moles etched into the fold of her shoulder tasting perspiration dried in notches along her ribs. She reaches to set the glass on a table as he watches with perfect clarity those wonderful ligaments and muscles interacting with pivot and of course her back would be adorned with winged vegetation, this angel of the earth. She turns her head to question his eyes attempting to locate the precise point at which her stomach turns to pelvic pubic, those velvet plucks squinting legally blind and she thinks it a curious thing that he cannot see yet scrutinizes from a distance too great for his mind to travel. But he does, following the length of her legs pulsing pulsing pulsing at this exalted apparition and though she is true to wonder, the mystery of his eyes soak in the luxury of her thighs so warm to the touch and bracing, a physical law unto themselves and don't they look perfect held by her knees, her calves, her feet folded back invisible but he can see enough to know. He can see memory before his eyes standing as clearly as remembered. She wraps those ridiculous legs around the length of his torso, the whole of her face flickering with fire leapt from her mouth into his. They press in thrusts of liquid friction until they are simply adjoined, a journey adjourned the balls roll behind his lids and their lips sink into drips and dabbles of forgetting.

## Shooter by Jason Spidle

He began to dwell on hundredths of a second passed and accumulated unused instead of firing his pistol. Each step a moment of a moment. Release, aim, fire, return. The heat of the gun aligned along his femur would expel and absorb into his jeans, into his skin. He could draw and shoot with exceptional accuracy from up to twenty feet away from a target in two one hundredths of a second. This left ninety-eight one hundredths of a second to undertake any number of other tasks but more often than not, those moments would peel away into nothing, all history lost the instant it was conceived and forgotten. And is it possible? And was it thought? And are there truly drips and tendrils slinking from the abyss as if to catch hold of something if they cease to exist with such immediacy? He would wonder where time goes when it is spent and of the enormity of his condition, the almost infinite fractal seconds that made as if to start something unexpected, to bloom into circles becoming, impregnating in their outward expansion. The buildings would crumble under the weight of its density but these suggestions occurred erratically, leaving him breathless each time.

[^](#)

## Not a Prayer by Maria Deutsch

Yes I love Jesus you stupid cunt  
if I say words like stupid cunt  
cuz he said, "go forth to the Haight  
and hand out needles to  
drugaddictshippieswhoreswhoever."  
Hospice heliotropes with purple heads bobbing.  
I love Jesus, and I love Osama Bin Laden  
cuz Jesus tells me to,  
but hate the loser's  
Murder of the innocent  
makinglovemakingartmakingcoffee.  
We killed one in front of his son.  
Wish he could have lived with his sin  
like Charles Manson, another murderous fuck  
that Jesus tells me to love.  
But I gotta love them  
Lord, I gottalottalove  
them  
not judge them  
them  
others Lord—  
them bones.

## A Triangle of Palm Fronds by Maria Teutsch

A colony of souls  
awaken  
to a murder of crows fighting over coconuts.  
Boats waffle blue waves.  
Signs say:  
Noel Coward fucked in this hotel.  
And white sheets froth the bed.  
Somerset Maugham  
masturbated  
here to the batik face of Gauguin.  
You use a straw as a snorkel  
to navigate the day—  
A cruise ship cuts through the champagne cake  
but this is the year of no cake,  
only salt and  
the one tooth left a ravenous dog.  
Come, dogs, a triangle of palm fronds  
in the window  
means it is morning



## Sex with Coltrane by Maria Deutsch

Are the children opening mouths like hungry saxophones  
Clamoring for bread from my bread music?  
This exhale of ours bellows in and out  
And does not look like a wind instrument  
Must be a fool's hat collecting coins  
Never earned by my frail mouth, not like Coltrane  
We never slept in the same bed  
Coltrane and I: in the same bed I'd fumble.  
Yet you wind inside of me and I become your  
instrument  
Now the breasts on my lips  
Soft like the rolls I'd bake  
When I finally clamored myself to you  
Earning that key no door will unlock  
I wake to find you seamed against me, Coltrane.



## Cloud-Fire by Russ Woods

Sara's dog spent four years living in a cloud that was on fire. He rented it for cheap, because it was on fire. The landlord was a terrible, boring jazz band and Sara's dog paid rent by making himself vomit monthly in the landlord's trumpet. The cloud was a small, dirty one and Sara's dog did experiments to try and make himself glow bright enough to be seen through the cloud and the fire when he was at home. He never knew how well they turned out because he didn't have a friend to watch from outside and report back. I always wanted to tell him how beautifully he glowed.



## Cut Star by Russ Woods

The mass of love density is a cut star / fleeing / heart condition / heat stroke / missing things for all time of this / personal exchange over / the mass of love density is a cut star / don't free me / (don't free me) / astral projection in the hands of a saint / solar giants manipulating the body / from a great remove / moving arms legs head / clumsy like clay breaking / being gently rolled / between enormous fingertips



## **Yards** by Russ Woods

Sara's dog spent most of his time in yards. Yards are rectangles of grass that people send you out to pee in.





## Pickles by Russ Woods

Sara woke up with a dry mouth full of seeds. She sputtered and wheezed upon waking, spitting them onto her pillow. Sara's dog ate a few of the seeds. She took a handful and rinsed them in the sink. The water made them shine green in her hand. Sara took the seeds and planted them all over her apartment. Three or four she pushed down into the cracks in her couch cushions. Others she put in the pockets of old coats she hadn't worn in ages. Coats with broken zippers and missing buttons that she'd meant to get fixed before the winter was over. The winter had been over for some time now. She took eight seeds and placed them in old coffee mugs that were sitting around her apartment. Sara had not done dishes in ages, and these were plentiful throughout the house. She found other places for the seeds too: in the glass dome that covered the burnt-out ceiling light in her kitchen, in the speaker cracks of her television, inside an old dictionary and an old phone book, in her VCR that hadn't been used in years, in the dusty old owl bank that she had since she was a child. She put them everywhere she could think. She even swallowed a few, and they tasted like tiny salt pills going down. Over the next few weeks she watered them with nonsense whispers, told them her dream about climbing a telephone pole and seeing the whole city burn down around her. The sprouts came up then, green and shining, almost luminescent in her dimly-lit home. One sprouted out her ear, one out of her dog's back. Then came the pickles. They grew thick and plump, shining wet with brine. Her whole apartment began to reek of salt and dill. She picked an armful (nowhere near a peck), and placed them in white folding chairs in her kitchen. For company. She made them tea and cakes and told them all the neighborhood gossip. Yes, Mr. Pickle, Mrs. Alvarez's cat hasn't been home for days.

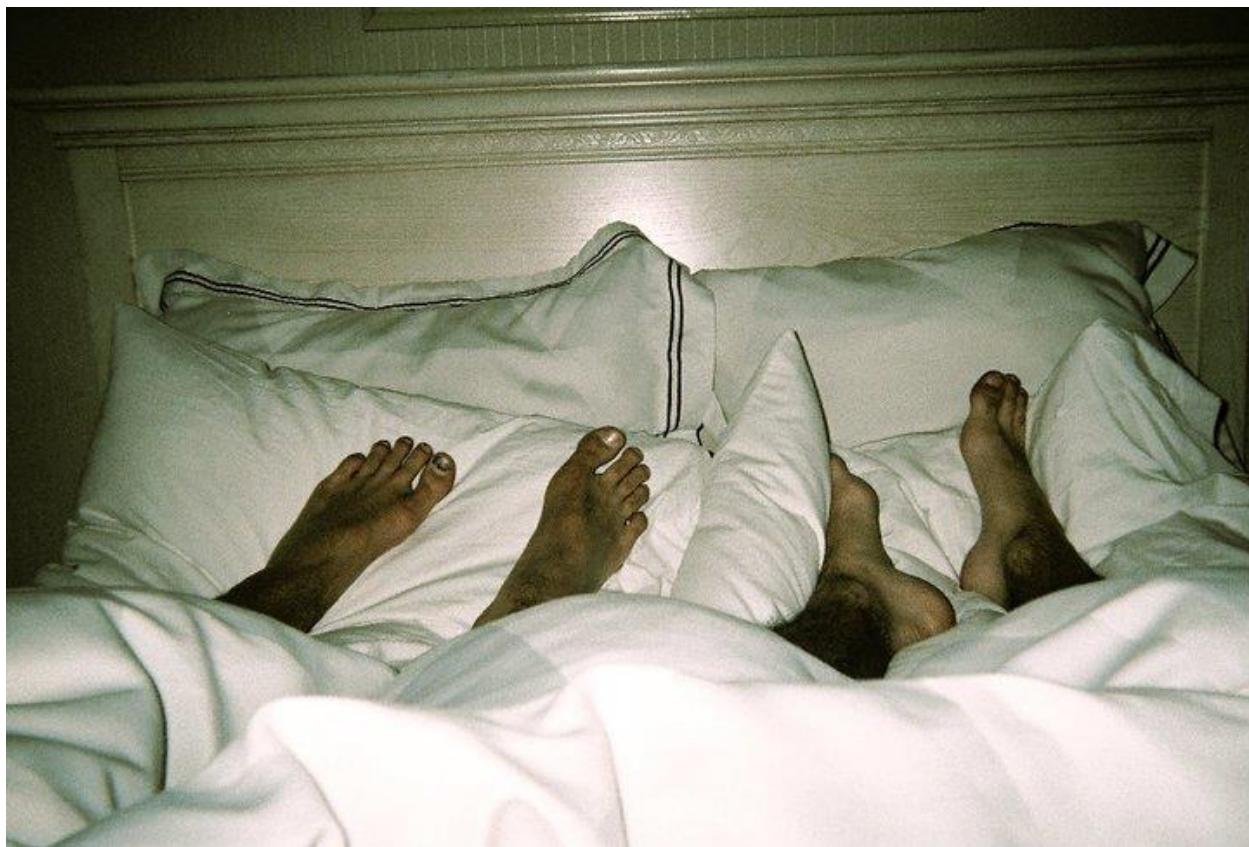
ARTWORK by SOHAIL JUSTIN AKHAVEIN



A Primitive End Game



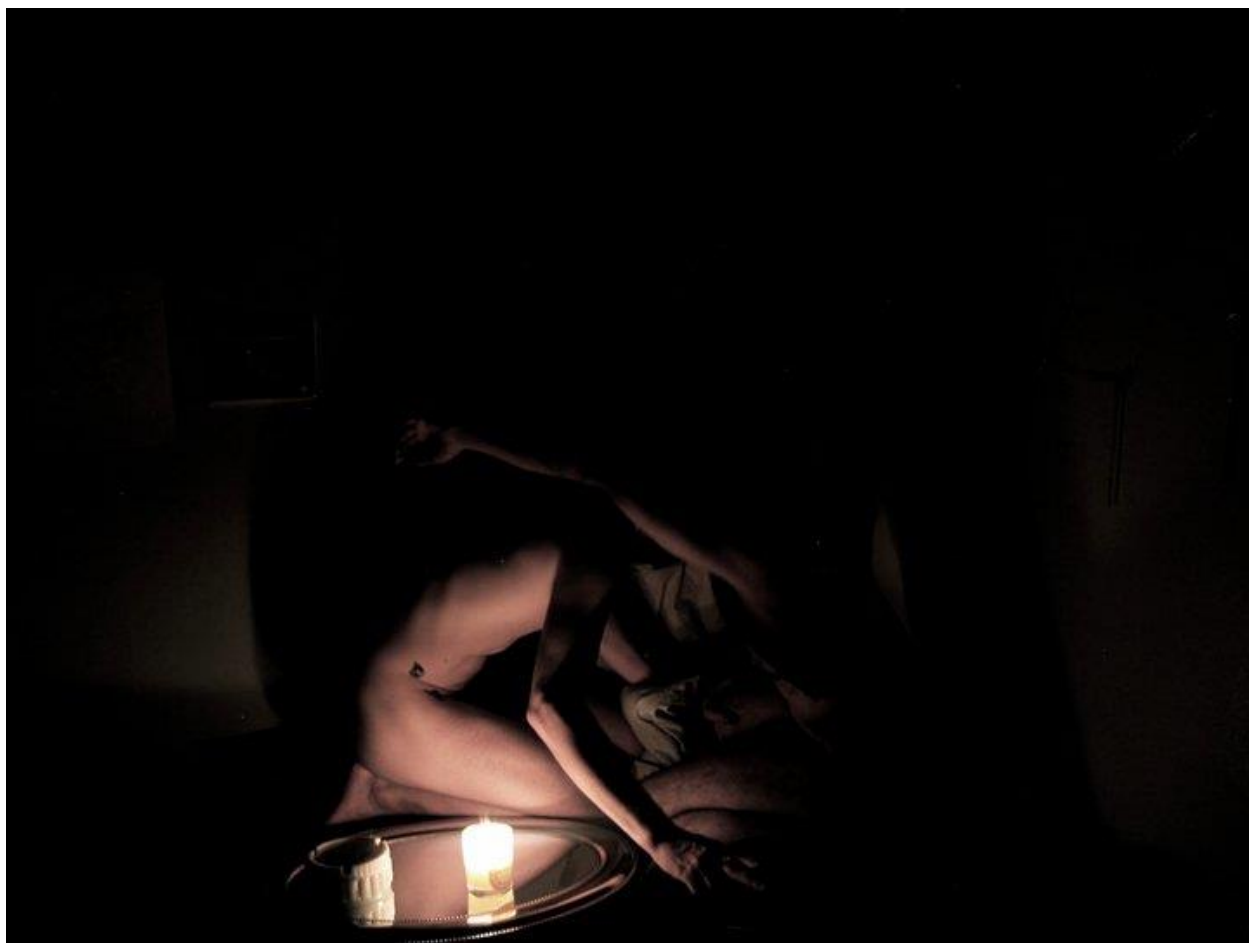
Allow Extension to be Your Impetus



An Endless Game of Sheet Firmly Pressed Sheet Soiling



Carnality



Give Free Reign to a Moment of Moan



Marinating Not Loud But Certainly Trenchant

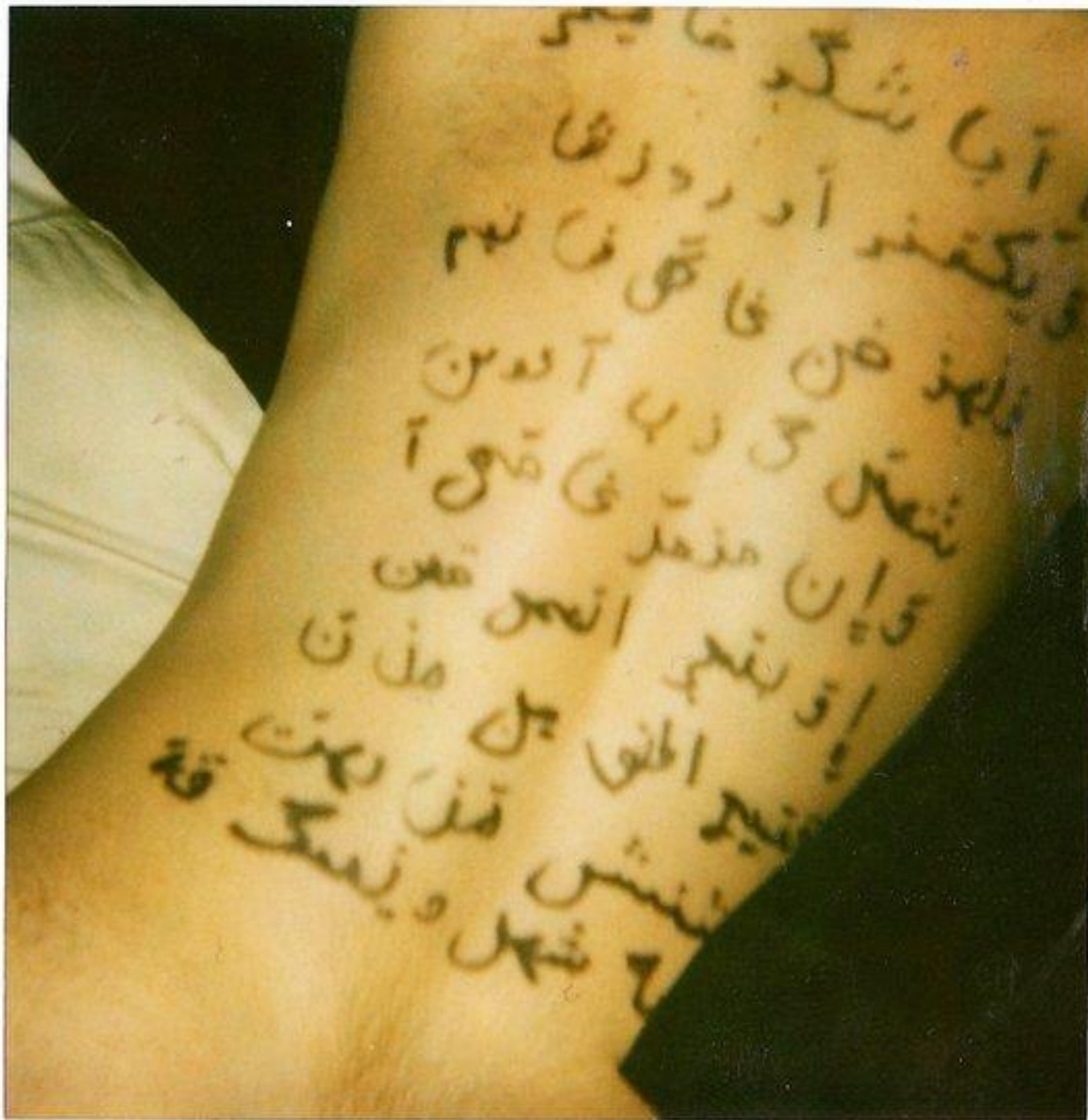




Nucleate the Palpable – Leave Mark with Your Flesh







Smother Your Meat with Thoughts of His Seed [2]



To Simply Touch a Hunter of Beasts





ARTWORK by SARAH ANN & CHRIS HONTOS



Untitled [1]



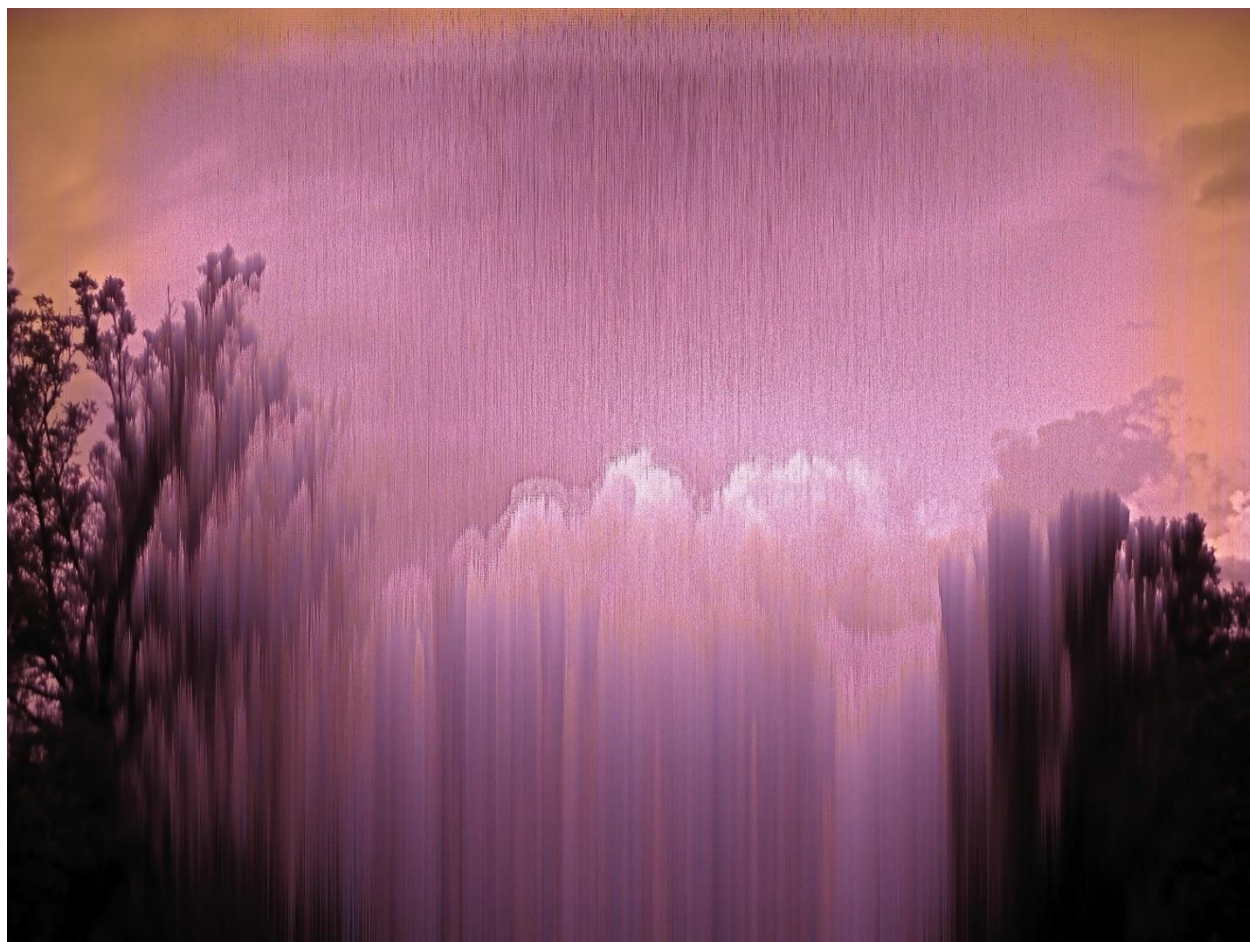
Untitled [2]



Untitled [3]



ARTWORK by TAD MURAWSKA



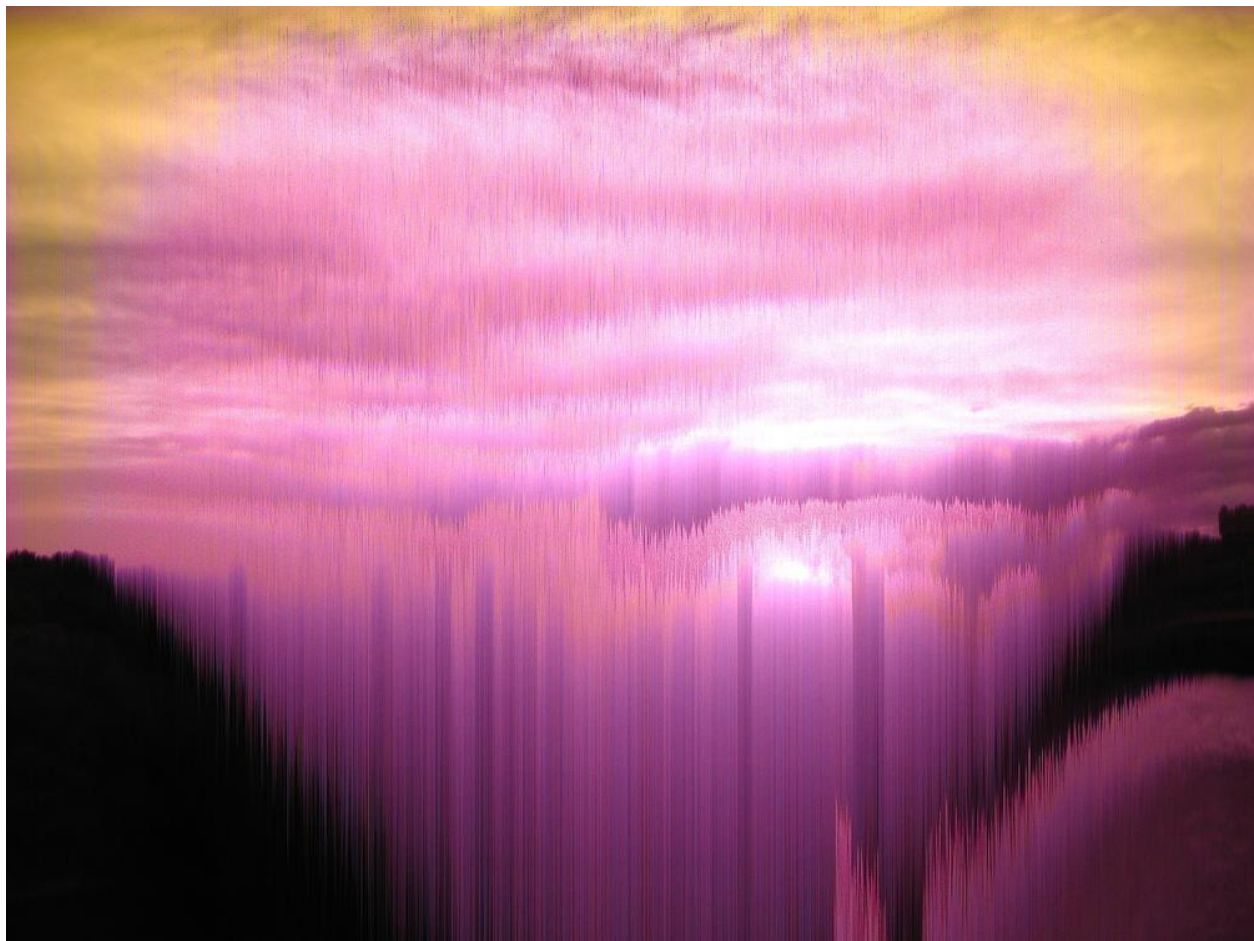
Tad Murawska x WBR 1





Tad Murawska x WBR 2





Tad Murawska x WBR 3

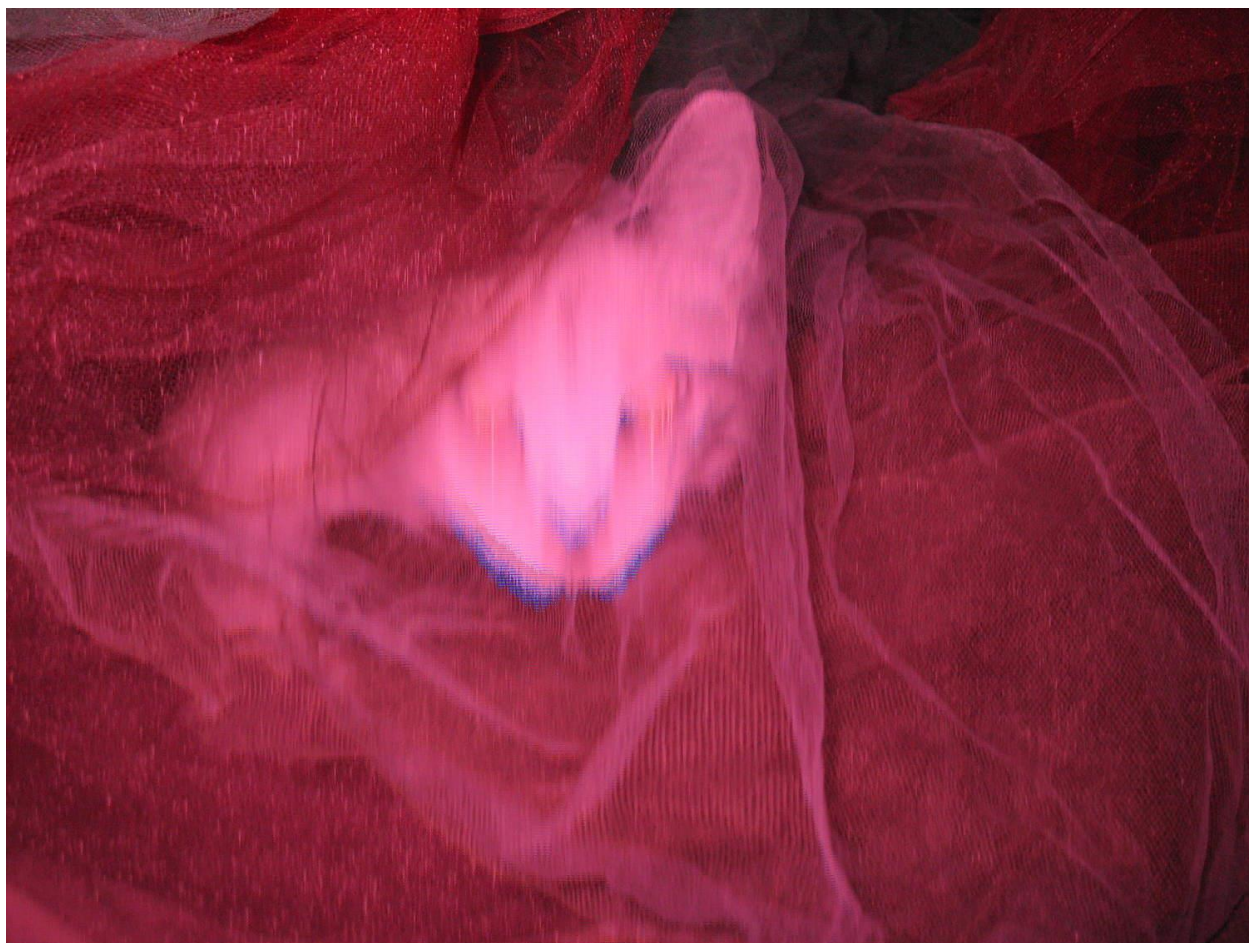


Tad Murawski x WBR 4

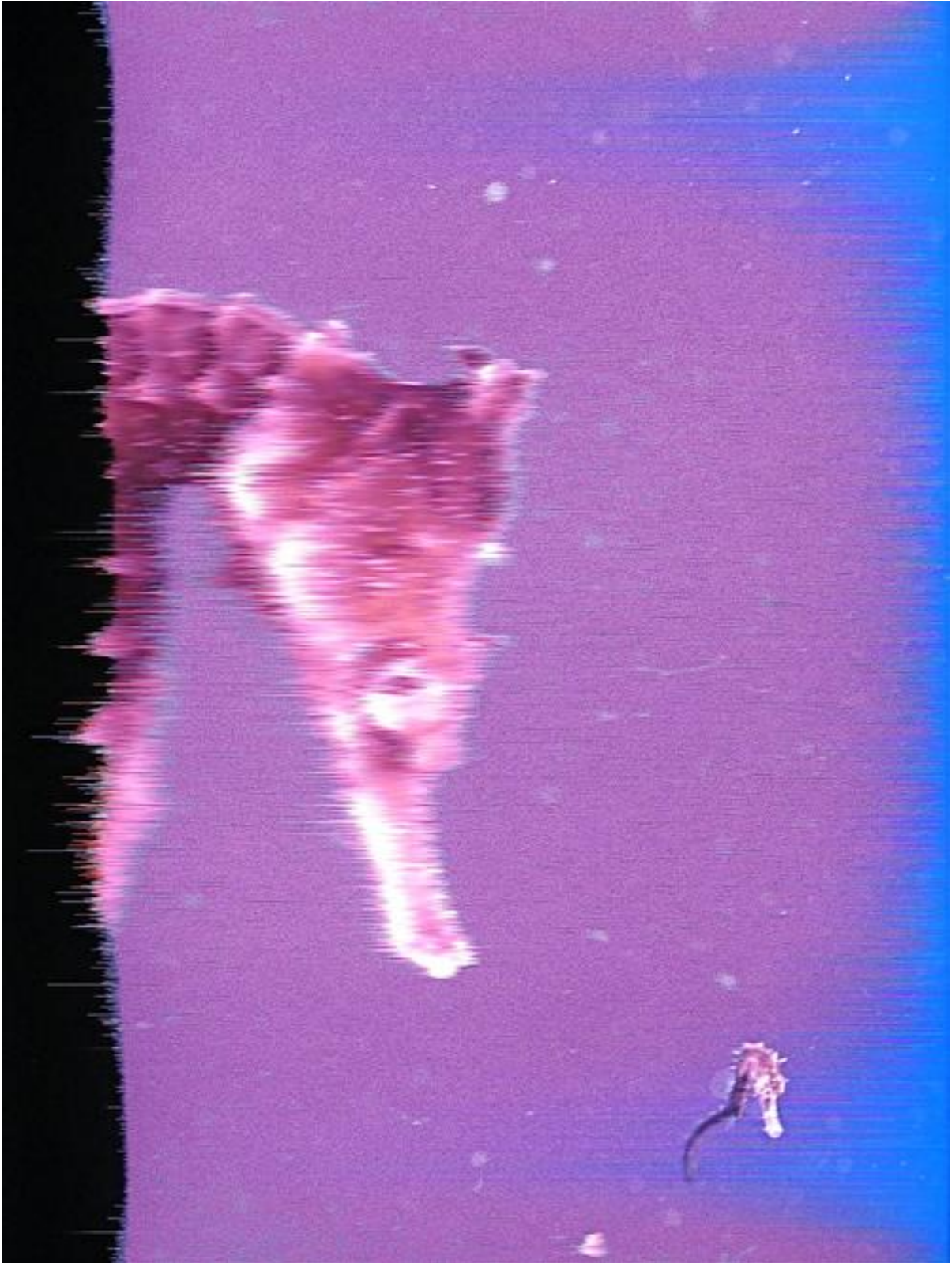


Tad Murawska x WBR 5





Tad Murawska x WBR 6

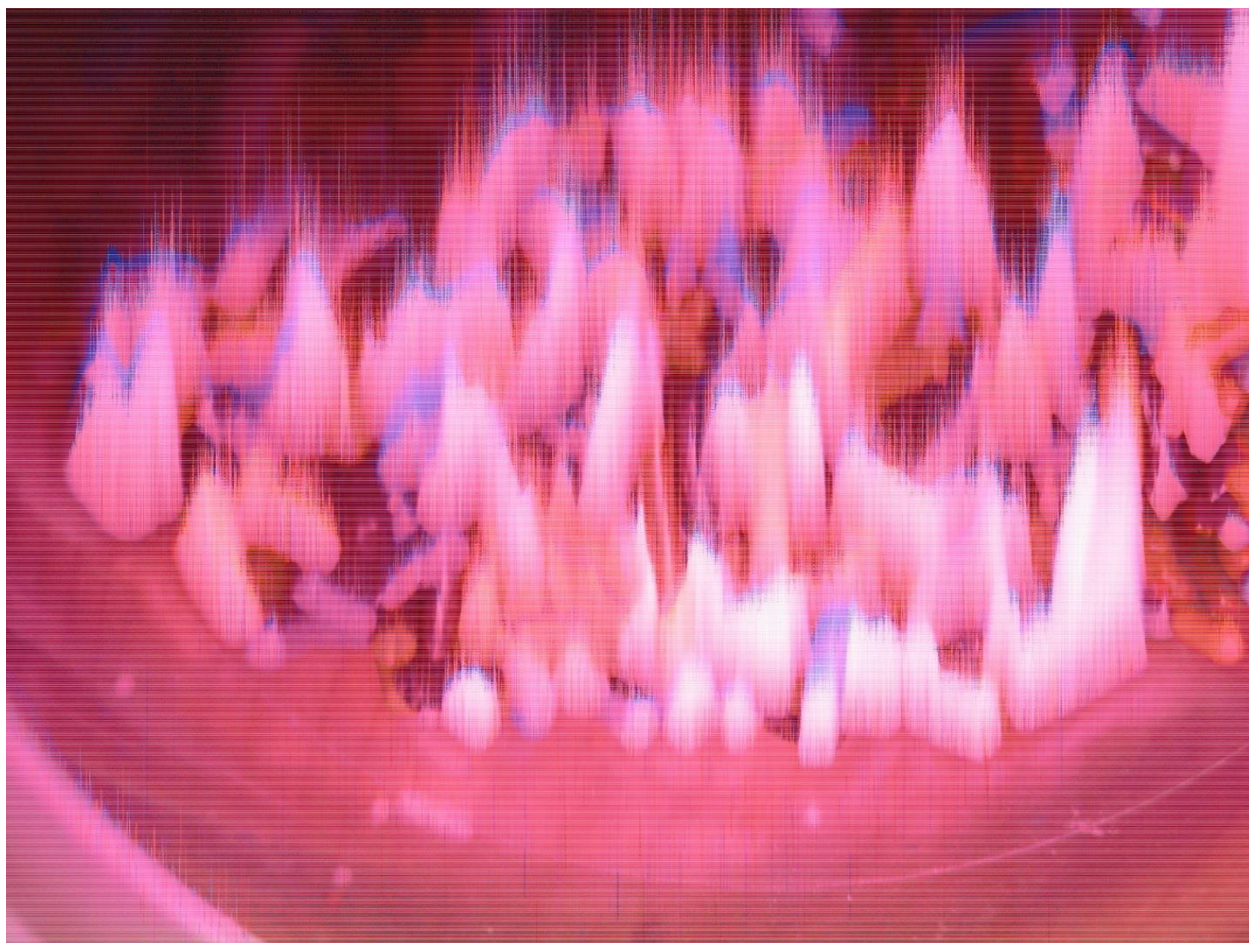


Tad Murawska x WBR 7

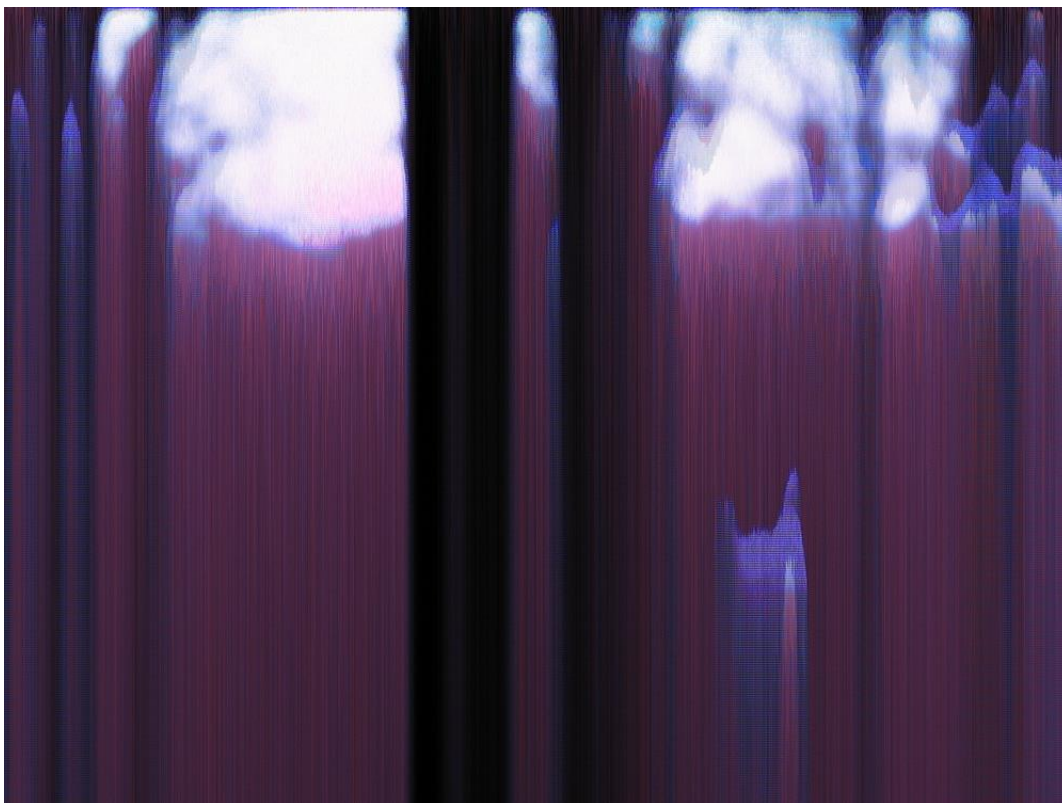




Tad Murawska x WBR 8



Tad Murawska x WBR 9



Tad Murawska x WBR 10





## CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

### **Sean Beld**

Sean Beld is a poet currently residing in Corvallis, Oregon. [whiskysour.tumblr.com](http://whiskysour.tumblr.com)

### **Danielle Lea Buchanan**

Danielle Lea Buchanan pursues poetry in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

### **J. Bradley**

J. Bradley is the author of the novella *Bodies Made of Smoke* (HOUSEFIRE, 2012). He lives at [iheartfailure.net](http://iheartfailure.net).

### **Getty Carver**

Getty Carver prefers to leave this space blank.

### **Barbara Christina**

Barbara Christina is a New Jersey native with a degree in English: Creative Writing from the University of Rochester. Some more of her recent work has been published online at *Xenith*. You can also follow her on Twitter: @bwchristina.

### **Sarah Combellick-Bidney**

Sarah Combellick-Bidney teaches political science and women's studies at Augsburg College in Minneapolis. Her interests these days converge on reproductive justice, queer politics, and social movements, broadly construed. She also likes to meditate with her cats, drink tea, and plant things in her garden to see what comes up.

### **Chris Fradkin**

Chris Fradkin writes from Central California. His poetry and prose has appeared in *Monkeybicycle*, *Thrush Poetry Journal*, and *Mobius: The Journal of Social Change*. His photography has appeared in *Bartleby Snopes*. His songs have been recorded and performed by The Plimsouls, Alexis Korner, and Fergie.

### **Amelia Foster**

Amelia Foster is a member of OUR FLOW IS HARD. She lives and works in the Twin Cities arts community.

### **John Grey**

John Grey is an Australian born poet who works as financial systems analyst. He was recently published in *Poem*, *Caveat Lector*, *Prism International* and the horror anthology, "What Fears Become" with work upcoming in *Potomac Review*, *Hurricane Review* and *Pinyon*.

### **Brandon Hackbarth**

[No bio provided]

### **Daniel Hedges**

Dan Hedges currently teaches English in the Sir Wilfred Laurier School Board of Quebec. He has also taught literature at Sedbergh School, and the Celtic International School. He has lived in various international locales, including Spain and Mexico. His poems and flash fiction have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Monarch Review*, *Haggard and Halloo Publications*, *Wildflower Magazine*, *Mad Swirl*, *The Journal*, *Undertow Magazine*, *Poetic Diversity Quarterly*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Blink Ink*, *The Kenning Journal*, *Marco Polo Arts Magazine*, *Inertia Magazine*, *Retort Magazine*, *Whole Beast Rag*, *Touch Poetry*, *Short-Fast-and-Deadly*, *The Maynard*, *Ditch Poetry*, *Crack the Spine Literary Journal*, *The Rusty Nail*, *Fortunates*, *Jones Avenue Quarterly*, *Coatlism Press*, *Greensilk Journal*, *Certain Circuits*, *The Camel Saloon*, *Literary Chaos*, *Subtopian Magazine*, and others. His Ojibway name is Kakagiwe Biness.

### **Joe Hughes**

Joe Hughes is a recently reprogrammed android. He has no idea who he is or was. After some research, Grace was able to determine that he was recently an instructor of English at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, and apparently the author of *Philosophy After Deleuze*. She found his piece for EDGE in his dusty, abandoned office in Lind Hall.

### **Erin Kautza**

Erin Kautza lives and works in Chicago. She recently completed her MFA at SAIC.

### **Martha Kinkade**

Martha Kinkade is a poet-peace activist. Her first book *Winter's Light* (Montezuma Publishing 2011) explores a harsh Wyoming reality. She writes poetry, children stories and inspirational literature. Her poetry has appeared in *Psychic Meatloaf*, *Jackson Hole Review*, and *The Mom Egg*. Currently, she teaches at San Diego State University. [www.marthakinkade.com](http://www.marthakinkade.com)

### **Alex Lemon**

Alex Lemon is the author of *Happy: A Memoir* and three collections of poetry: *Mosquito*, *Hallelujah Blackout*, and *Fancy Beasts*. A fourth collection is forthcoming from Milkweed Editions. He lives in Ft. Worth, Texas, and teaches at TCU.

### **Andrew Marzoni**

Andrew Marzoni is a writer based in Minneapolis. He teaches at the University of Minnesota, where he is currently writing a dissertation on the roles of sex, drugs, and madness in postwar American literature and cinema. His work has appeared in *The Vista* and *Locating Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century*.

### **Kevin McIlvoy**

Kevin McIlvoy mentors writers through his website, [mcthebookmechanic.com](http://mcthebookmechanic.com). His story, "Ixodes," appears in his new collection, *57 Octaves Below Middle C*. Other pieces from it have appeared in *Freight Stories*, *The Collagist*, and *Prime Number*. His novels, *Hyssop* and *Little Peg*, are available as e-books (Untreed Books).

**Veronica Noechel**

Veronica Noechel has been active in rodent rescue for a decade and currently fosters small animals.

**Frederick Pollack**

Frederick Pollack is the author of two book-length narrative poems, *The Adventure* and *Happiness*, both published by Story Line Press. Other of his poems and essays have appeared in *Hudson Review*, *Southern Review*, *Fulcrum*, *Salmagundi*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Die Gazette* (Munich), *Representations* and elsewhere. Poems have recently appeared in the print journals *Magma* (UK), *The Hat*, *Bateau*, and *Chiron Review*. Online, poems have appeared in *Big Bridge*, *Snorkel*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *Diagram*, *BlazeVox*, *The New Hampshire Review*, *Denver Syntax*, *Barnwood*, *Wheelhouse*, *Mudlark*, *Shadow Train* and elsewhere. Pollack is an adjunct professor of creative writing at George Washington University, Washington, DC.

**Gregory Sherl**

Gregory Sherl is the author of poetry collection *Heavy Petting* (YesYes Books, 2011) in addition to *The Oregon Trail Is the Oregon Trail*, a novella in verse, (Mud Luscious Press, 2012) and *I Have Touched You*, a chapbook of linked stories, from Dark Sky Books.

**Jason Spidle**

Jason Spidle is a survivor of the corporacracic empire. His work has been published on the Internet, mostly by himself. He lives in Portland.

**Maria Teutsch**

Maria Garcia Teutsch is a poet currently enjoying ex-pat status living in Malaysia. Living in a Muslim country has roused her natural rebelliousness made manifest in her latest chapbook entitled, *Pussy*. She is editor-in-chief of *Ping-Pong* magazine, and serves as president of the Henry Miller Memorial library in Big Sur, California.

**Russ Woods**

Russ Woods is a librarian living in Chicago. He writes poems. His first book, *Wolf Doctors*, is forthcoming from Artifice Books.