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(Quinn Latimer

My Mother, My Other: Or, Some Sort of Influence

*I don't think my mother would have chosen to return
as a stuffed giraffe in the studio of her daughter, but
she is dead.*

—Sophie Calle

Days push off into nights; your mother clones every
object, every subject. Every sentence—what—leads to
her. The books.

*

So. There was a season I spent (there is always some sea-
son spent) going through my mother's books. I flipped
through them, finding the pages she had turned down:
small paper triangles dramatizing, quietly, some page.
Breaking its frame—roughly, profanely—and marking
its utility. Some use, some ruin. Then I read those pages,
searching for what might have struck her. Some slice of
words, attendant meaning. Her mind is what marked,
shocked me, so I searched for what shocked it. Here's a
page she marked that I still remember, a lean, apocalyp-
tic poem by Ingeborg Bachmann:

Wherever we turn in the storm of roses,
the night is lit up by thorns, and the thunder
of leaves, once so quiet within the bushes,
rumbling at our heels.

It was something to do, I suppose. I suppose I had
been doing it my whole life: reading the books my
mother read, watching the films she watched, trying on
the politics she wore, sometimes embodied. Feeling her
sensibilities cross my face. What that felt like. Trying

on her intelligence, her seriousness, her ambition, wit,
anger, grief, skepticism, mania, ardor. It was a look.
And while moving through those looks, those books,
that season, and so many before and since, I began
recognizing in the pages of these critical and literary
women a gravity that my mother had herself gleaned
and adopted, tried and taken on. A sensibility at once
so specific and elusive that I could nearly see it, almost
catch it, echoing through the pages as I turned them
over. A look with a lineage not just familial or genetic.
Something else.

My mother's critical-literary influence at first was
just a style I recognized, a certain style of the mind and
the body and what attended and clothed and awakened
and received it: other minds, other bodies. Who were
they? Bachmann, of course, but also Anna Akhmatova,
Hannah Arendt, Simone de Beauvoir, Elizabeth Bishop,
Anita Brookner, Marguerite Duras, Valie Export,
Elizabeth Hardwick, June Jordan, Julia Kristeva, Doris
Lessing, Tina Modotti, Toni Morrison, Iris Murdoch,
Alice Neel, Grace Paley, Susan Sontag, Marina Tsvetaeva,
Alice Walker, Simone Weil, Christa Wolf, Virginia Woolf.
I hadn't yet read all their books or looked at their work
but I saw them everywhere in the various apartments
and houses in California where we lived, the books more
consistent than the thin stucco walls and uneven book-
cases that held them. I studied the photographs on the
back of these volumes, black-and-white portraits that
assumed significance, the critical style of their minds
made visible by their very serious looks, buttoned-down
shirts or dashikis, impressive hair, the somber-glamorous
set of the face.

Later, my mother suddenly gone—a phone call and she was done—still her influence, that mother influence, dialectically answered by the daughter who would receive it, moved through me via the works of other mothers, other daughters. I started noticing it everywhere, that relationship. Mothers, so many dark bodies, staining presences, suddenly appeared in the books I read, haunting and humming through them, central or spectral. Just as suddenly (perhaps not so suddenly) I was reading those women writers and artists who I favored less as a student and more as a kind of daughter, taking their critical work and creative lives and exemplary struggles as a nearly genetic model for my own. My inheritance: a kind of heritage. Sans mother, I had become everyone's discriminating daughter (well). Strange now to think how, in this, I'd be mimicking my own mother, using her own decisive self-orphaning as a kind of model. See: disowning her own mother, she had become the studious daughter of an exemplary family of western intellectual women. The books, etcetera.

O mother, O family, O history, O form, O style,
O subject, O object, O etcetera.

*

Instructively, I often found this mother influence in works of art that stood to the side of the “major” forms, existing as strange hybrids in the literary or critical margins. Such works employed diaristic elements or took the form of letters, experimental essays, performances, abject portraits, self or other. That women—the marginalized par excellence—made most of these works,

exploiting the idea of marginalia or challenging it with their major works on “minor” subjects, was not lost on me. As it hadn't been lost on my own mother. Or most critical women, artist or writer or philosopher or mystic or organizer. My women of letters.

There was Chantal Akerman's first film *News from Home* (1977), made the year before I was born, composed of missives from the filmmaker's mother and shots of New York City, where Akerman had just moved. When I saw the film for the first time in the Stadtkino in Basel in 2010—a screening organized by artist and writer Moyra Davey, editor of the anthology *Mother Reader: Essential Writing on Motherhood* (2001)—the anxious letters by Akerman's mother in Belgium read over dusky, tracking shots of seventies-era Manhattan streets, reminded me of the knife-wet letters my own mother sent me from California when I first went off to New York for college in the late nineties. Some of the sentences were as exact (as the knife), as glittery in their banal familiarity: “I would love to come visit you but I would have to win the lottery first [...] Tell me how you are [...] Your loving mother.” “Do you need money? I don't have much.” “Your father misses you.” Etcetera.

Though Akerman's mother's anxiety was exacerbated by the family context and history—mother and grandmother had been in the camps, the latter murdered there—still the letters cut (into) me. I read my mother's own voice into them, in those English subtitles streaking the screen. It was just a projection—another one, my own, in that small Basel theater—but it felt as real, as what, as a knife. (That metaphor again. What is most like a knife? One's mother's voice, gleaming.) Later, there would be

the Belgian artist's related film, also about letters and mothers and daughters, titled *Letters Home* (1986), this one based on the missives Sylvia Plath wrote to her own mother. Akerman's film is based on Rose Leiman Goldemberg's play of the same name, and starred mother and daughter actresses Delphine and Coralie Seyrig. The film recently screened at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, which wrote, astutely:

Letters Home is [...] an object passed from a poet to her mother, from her mother to a woman playwright, then to a woman theatre director, and finally to a woman filmmaker. This is a remarkable heritage: an object passed from hand to hand, a form of exchange between generations of mothers and daughters.

Indeed. Yet strange that they call this project—book then play then film—an object. I think of it rather as a letter. A series of them. But what were those actual letters by Plath like? The ones her mother published after she died? Young, gushing, devastating. Conscious and wary of the mother influence: its gift and burden.

You are the most wonderful mommy that a girl ever had, and I only hope I can continue to lay more laurels at your feet. Warren and I both love you and admire you more than anybody in the world for all you have done for us all our lives. For it is you who has given us the heredity and the incentive to be mentally ambitious.

To be mentally ambitious: that kind of mothering and heritage comes in various forms. So who else did I read to not replace my mother but to find her again, tracing her influence and my own (doubled)? There was Susan Sontag and Joan Didion, our western women of letters, critics from California who made their way East, to New York, to achieve their ambition, but whose writing branched out from there. Didion's stretching back to the West Coast; Sontag's moving across the Atlantic to central and eastern Europe, where so many of the minds she loved and limned were shaped or destroyed. There was Anne Carson, whose entire critical-poetic-classical oeuvre is shadowed by the spectral figure of her skeptical mother on the moor to the north (Canada). In the seminal "Glass Essay," from *Glass, Irony and God* (1995), Carson writes, caustically:

I can tell by the way my mother chews her toast
whether she had a good night
and is about to say a happy thing
or not.

And: "To my mother / love / of my life, I describe what I had for brunch," she notes in *Decreation* (2005), her elliptical study of the work of, in part, Simone Weil. Well, food and meals—who we take them with, who we cook them for—can also be a kind of style. A kind of criticism. A kind of daughterhood, also.

*

In my bookcase in Switzerland is my mother's large, water-stained hardback edition of the collected writings

of Weil. *The Simone Weil Reader* (1977) is subtitled: “A Legendary Spiritual Odyssey of Our Time.” Totally. Dead of starvation, of her own “decreation,” still Weil reminds me of my ravenous mother—she who was always seeking nourishment—as almost everyone does. I find a page my mother turned down, its small triangular marker:

up together. Those whose hearts are made so as to experience the later way can yet find themselves sometimes, through forces of habit, using forms of speech which are really only suitable in the case of the former.

It is from Weil’s 1943 text “The Need for Roots,” on the failure—political, social, and spiritual—of France. I like that fragment, “up together. Those whose hearts.” Still, I keep flipping the pages. I search for another triangle, its mark. I find this one:

Justice, truth, and beauty are sisters and comrades. With three such beautiful words we have no need to look for any others ... when the intelligence is ill-at-ease the whole soul is sick.

My mother was not the kind who was flattered when people said we looked like sisters (anyway, we didn’t). She was my elder, my mother, and she knew that, enjoyed it. There was no equivalency between us except in love and interest. Our experience—our “age,” in all its meanings—was vastly different, no matter how I might try to dress myself in her gravity. Her grace. Which sud-

denly begs the question in my mind: Why was Weil’s seminal book called *Gravity and Grace* (1947)? “We no longer know how to receive grace,” she wrote, strictly. Of Plato, she writes: “But the wisdom of Plato is nothing other than orientation of the soul toward grace.”

What did Iris Murdoch write of Weil? “To read her is to be reminded of a standard.” A spiritual standard, and an intellectual and political one. Ever discriminating, she, Weil, made no distinction between them. As I write these sentences, I suddenly feel as if I am writing about my mother. The subject blurs, becomes hazy. Weil or my mother, Bachmann or my mother, Murdoch or my mother. Akerman’s mother or my mother? Thus the question that pours out of me, seeking some answer in the shape of a vessel: Why have these literary women become vessels into which I pour my feelings about my own mother, become screens on which I project her being, her intelligence, her experience, her work, her mothering, her grief, her influence? Perhaps it is because—write it—she had no work, or it didn’t come to bear. I can barely write those words. It feels like a betrayal. Also: a cliché. How many writers have written of the frustrated ambitions of their mothers? Many, but that is not an interesting list.

*

I feel I should be quiet. To write that my mother remained unread: this should remain unwritten. This sentiment is, however, also unoriginal. Roland Barthes, in his *Mourning Diary*, begun in 1977 after his beloved mother died, writes, in a note dated October 31 (the day of my mother’s death):

I don't want to talk about it, for fear of making literature out of it—or without being sure of not doing so—although as a matter of fact literature originates within these truths.

Thus the *rivering* question of the literary daughter (or son): how to not betray one's mother's death through literature. How to not betray one's mother, her life, ambition, poverty, influence. This reminds me of another book on my shelf, also from my mother's library: *The Left-Handed Woman* (1978), by Peter Handke. A strangely cold, reticent novel about a young mother (inspired by Handke's own mother) going about her life as if she was encased in a block of ice, I read it in the months after my mom died. I had planned to read Handke's *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams* (1974), his elegy for and treatise on his mother's illness and suicide, but I couldn't. It was too close, devastating. I wanted the idea of the mother influence but not the narrative of one's impoverished life. The impoverishment left in their lack, their wake. Handke's reaction to his mother's death was the opposite of Barthes', though, or perhaps simply the other side of the same proverbial coin:

My mother has been dead for almost seven weeks; I had better get to work before the need to write about her [...] dies away and I fall back into the dull speechlessness with which I reacted to the news of her suicide.

It has been seven years since my own mother died—still her influence is everywhere. Or I find models of

it everywhere. Project them. This literary woman, that work, her mother, that daughter (or son). This relationship to the world, the relationship I had with her, defines me still. Even as I despair at the “dull speechlessness” that does come, and has come, and is here, and yet, conversely, at the fear of “making literature out of it.” Not it—her. But who was she? I can only go to a quote again: “To read her is to be reminded of a standard.” But I rarely read my mother's work—always at her desk, she seldom finished anything—and she was neither Simone Weil nor Iris Murdoch. Who was she? She was a person I read, and I read now. Not her words, though, something else. Someone's else. A kind of palindrome, this. A riddle. The poverty of it. What else?

*

Blake Latimer was born Denise Amelia Latimer in the 1950s on a military base in Virginia. Her mother Olga was the daughter of Hungarian immigrants—my mother's beloved grandparents. Her grandfather was a kosher chef, though they were Catholic. My mother was convinced they were converts, pointing to their anachronistic blue-and-white Christmas decorations. They owned a farm in upstate New York from which she says she ran away to Woodstock, and which I visited for the first time after she died. Left some of her ashes among the fruit trees there, after driving through the impoverished, shuttered towns along the Hudson. My mother's father, David, meanwhile, was the son of Irish-English immigrants. I know nothing about them. I know surprisingly little about her family, actually, except that she began running away from them when she was eleven, and they finally stopped chasing

after her when she was sixteen. She seemed to emerge alone into the world. If my entire life—my art and writing and sensibility—was shaped by her, she seems to have been entirely, ruthlessly self-created. What else?

She says she studied at the University of Chicago and at the university in St. Louis and San Francisco State. She lived in St. Louis and then in Key West, working on boats with her girlfriend. She came West with that girlfriend, Janice, my godmother. She left San Francisco and women, for the most part, when she decided she wanted a child, me. She met my father on a film set or at a party in Los Angeles. He was the only man on her film crews who was “not a misogynist,” as she put it, her eyebrows raised ironically below her corona of long, yellow hair. She had a child with him and left. She studied poetry and drank. She ran and swam along the beach. She wrote poetry and fiction and mothered. She fell in love and had my brother and left. She managed a women-run bookstore in Venice Beach for half my childhood, then took us up the coast an hour and a half and worked in a series of bookstores in beach towns there. She had breakdowns and drank. She worked long hours as I watched my brother, bitterly. She rode horses. She was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and tried to stop drinking. She became a clinical social worker, reading herself into the job, and worked with the homeless and mentally ill. She grieved for herself and for them and worked to get her clients off the streets. She brought their dogs home when they abandoned them. She drank. She worried. She bought so many books and pawned them for other books and bought them back again. She filled her

rooms with books, my rooms with books, each room in each apartment with books. She raised two children, each astonished by her intelligence, her enthusiasms, her love, her despair, her standard, weary of the rest. Through all this she read and wrote and read and wrote and read and wrote and read and read and read. Weary of the rest.

*

She read Anna Akhmatova
She read Hannah Arendt
She read Simone de Beauvoir
She read Elizabeth Bishop
She read Anita Brookner
She read Anne Carson
She read Marguerite Duras
She read George Eliot
She read Elizabeth Hardwick
She read June Jordan
She read Julia Kristeva
She read Doris Lessing
She read Toni Morrison
She read Iris Murdoch
She read Grace Paley
She read Susan Sontag
She read Marina Tsvetaeva
She read Alice Walker
She read Simone Weil
She read Christa Wolf
She read Virginia Woolf

*

How did it go? “[W]hen the intelligence is ill-at-ease the whole soul is sick.” What if one’s soul is sick, so one tries to cure it through their intelligence. I think this might have been the case with my mother, her approach. I am not sure it worked. I’m not sure it didn’t (well, I am pretty sure). Could it ever, though. Could it, Simone. Could it, sisters and comrades. Could it, mothers and comrades. What do you think.

Quinn Latimer is an American poet, critic, and editor based in Basel and Athens and editor-in-chief of publications for documenta 14.)

(Ivan Argote

Cold Afternoons

Do you feel that? It's called "Dark Was the Night—Cold Was the Ground," strong ... no, it has no words, just that moaning ... That song came to me during a storm of love that I once experienced, which put me in between states of despair, ecstasy, and being hungover ... I was running, eyes blinded, bumping into everything that crossed my path ... Oh, the moaning just stopped, I'm gonna play it again ... You know, that moaning is part of one of the twenty-seven songs that are on the golden record inside Voyager, yeah, the spacecraft ... Hey! The moaning is back! I looped it. Has that ever happened to you? To just want to listen to one single song for hours? ... So ... yeah, in Voyager, the spacecraft that is crossing the universe waiting to be found by some unknown intelligence ... hehe ... "intelligence," when does intelligence start? ... For us it seems to be when one can understand music, at least for Carl, ... yeah, it was Carl Sagan who "curated" the Voyager record thing, well, Carl included that moaning, do you hear it? It's so sad, it's so true, so cold, so dark ... It goes beyond Blind Willie Johnson's suffering, humiliation, and despair, it goes beyond music and beyond language; do you remember Derek

Jarman's *Wittgenstein*? That scene where a kid gives Ludwig the finger? ... Hehe, that Ludwig was a funny guy, ha! ... Well, Ludwig got mad, because he realized philosophy as he conceived it couldn't explain the total meaning of that gesture, that gesture was beyond language, somehow, it showed him a boundary within philosophy, something that is supposed to be universal, infinite ... as the Voyager travels, as this song's sadness ... hear it, all that he cannot say, all that stays in the gorge, because it's grave, severe, and even dangerous to say it, because it's unsayable ... luckily language has not reached and colonized those deep feelings; the unsayable will always be more truthful and real than the spoken word, words are tools we use to approach that massive, glorious, and dark infinite ... Do you feel those centuries of oppression? Yeah, I'm back to the moaning ... destiny is a big stinky shit man! ... You better spit on it! ... Destiny is maybe one of the most oppressive inventions ... then I think about the golden record, all shiny, all golden, up there crossing the universe, slowwwwwwwly, and think about all the pain the gold craziness has caused in this civilization, like in my country five centuries

ago, or in South Africa five decades ago ... hmm ... hmmm ... hmmm ... I don't know if everybody can understand that feeling, I believe I do, I cry while I'm listening, just a bit, but very honestly and sincerely ... it's that kind of weeping that emerges out of impotence, and stays almost silent in your body ... weirdly it's close to the sensation I have when I'm proud of someone's accomplishments ... My cousin Leny who is an historian told me once that our family name comes from a Spanish slave trader that spent his life on the Pacific Coast "making business." Slaves used their owners' names, and she said that's why you find people with my family name in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile ... My dad's town is near the coast, but not that close, and in his town most of the people have indigenous facial features with blue or very clear green eyes, like my dad's ... they're not very black, they call them "Zarcos" ... I am a Zarco, and honestly I don't think I understand the moaning because of that slavery affiliation, when I think about why I believe I understand it, I go back to this very strong memory: when I was seven years old, I returned home after spending time playing in the street,

the door was made of metal, painted white, with these geometrical waves ... anyways, I remember opening the door, it was like 6 pm, this blind hour where light and shade are almost the same blue-gray color, the news was playing on the radio, and my mother was in the kitchen listening to it, it was a very small apartment, so taking one step inside was enough to get into visual contact with her, she was crying, and asking: "Why? Why?" ... she was desperate and looked tired. I got scared and asked "What happened?" and she told me "Mataron a Pizarro" [they killed Pizarro], Pizarro was this leftist leader who was running for president at the time, a very charming and smart guy, who used to, back in the eighties, be the leader of the M-19 guerrilla group that negotiated a "peace treaty" in 1984, he was murdered on April 26, 1990 ... She kept asking: "Why? Why?" and crying out all her frustration, all her political and historical sadness ... I felt it too, "they" killed him, as "they" killed thousands of other voices ... they, they, they ... those bastards! My mother crying was this familiar kind, how one would cry for a brother, or a father ... I was raised knowing that we were part of those who are killed, I don't feel

it anymore but I know it was true for several years, I still remember well that scene in the kitchen, and somehow it's the same feeling that I have when I hear the moaning ... the storm of love that was offered to me by that song, well, I knew since the first second that it was the right thing to accompany those imperial lions, who are still treating us, like kittens' cotton wool balls, with their blind and clumsy gestures ...

Ivan Argote is a Colombian-born artist based in Paris who works in video, film, and installation.)

(**Fayen d’Evie**

And Now You See the Light, Man

The door knock and wheeled trolley arrive quickly. Too quickly. The chicken is barely lukewarm: a fibrous fringe circling charred epidermis. Buttery oil has congealed round the edges of the plate. She suspects the meal was made some time in the past, and hopefully in error, not a recycled reject. She wonders if she should be a more discerning diner.

Is it grotesque to eat meat at a time like this? [Meta-self: It’s a nutritional choice, essentially.] [Meta-meta-self: It’s a carnivorous choice, morally.]

She sprinkles white pepper, liberally, and saws the breast into bite-size rations. Her teeth clamp down on a forkful of flesh. Slimy wetness spurts across her tongue. Her gag reflex activates.

Some people say humans taste like pork. Some people say pork tastes like chicken.

Google carnivorous. To derive energy from a diet of animal tissue through predation or scavenging.

Draft eulogy: Aunty Peg, a prolific cook with a limited repertoire. A fan of depression-era food and microwave convenience. Freeze-dried parsley + red sauce, white sauce, brown sauce.

She dials room service back and orders a dirty martini. The man answering is efficient and ambivalent. She attempts warmth, feigns a hint of jocularly. “It’s been a rough day, swings and roundabout ...” He has hung up.

In the marble bathroom, she flicks on a halogen heat lamp, casting jaundiced yellow over the vanity. She splashes water on her face, appraises herself in the mirror. The whites of her eyes are bloodshot, her nasal passages swollen. But her gaze is steady, not flitting back and forth, back and forth. The adrenal shock must have subsided.

Again the door knock, the trolley. A pimply young man with a crooked bow tie and damp armpits. She over-tips and he grins, baring yellow-brown teeth. She senses that she will be reimaged later in a wrist-jerking fantasy.

Is it grotesque to think of coming-of-age sex at a time like this?

Aunt Peg, shrill, two gins down. The transition from banter to bitterness. Her homemaking manifesto, delivered in daylight hours with boisterous nagging; post-5 pm, stained with passive-aggressive regret. "Filth has no place in a genteel space." "Tidy shoes, left and right, ready for flight." "An orderly home maketh an orderly life." Hissing words like gobs of spit.

She climbs into bed, clothed, and presses random button combinations across three remotes. The television pings to life. Home shopping. Two variants of *Law and Order*. Seven reality shows, three featuring dwarves. Little people, she corrects herself, to the empty room.

CNN and NBC and BBC are dissecting field reports of war. Missiles lighting the night sky over Gaza. Families wailing, clutching pixelated cadavers. The ashen boss of a UN relief agency collapsing, defeated by the deaths of

sleeping children. Cut to studio discussion of political dysfunction. Well-tailored commentators. Hairspray, rosy blush. Advertisements for exotic holidays and credit cards.

What defines the value of a life?

Uncle Judah's call. He'd found Peg floating upside down in the irrigation dam, her body bloated with putrefying gases and fermented blood. Judah, a farmer. Unsentimental about hauling dying ewes or dismembered kangaroos. He asked for help with the fuckin' coffin catalogue and [pregnant pause] a burial outfit. He said yabbies and trout had fed on Peg's fingers and toes. Don't pack the nail polish, he joked.

She tries to rein in her thoughts by counting horizontal threads in the jacquard bedspread.

"... fifty-six, fifty-seven, fifty-eight ..."

One thread—tangerine silk—broken. Frayed ends, like six-fingered hands, flailing.

It was family lore that Peg and Judah's core values had always been misaligned, sometimes excruciatingly so. An ill-fated romance marked by codependent miscommunication. But since neither had the faintest clue what the other was really saying, there were few arguments. They had both mistaken the silence for peaceful coexistence. They became accustomed to a habit of segregation.

Does she skip the torn thread and resume counting?
Or ought she restart from zero?

[Meta-self: Assert control, create if-thens, construct logical flows.] [Meta-meta-self: Skipping is an act of conscious forgetting, a devaluing. The un-whole thread now unworthy of acknowledgment. But restarting from zero would be a reversion to nostalgia, a delay tactic. Dwelling in the recesses of material memory, avoidance of the imminent future.]

She wonders what survivalists think of death.

Google survivalist + death. Survival challenge man found dead in remote mountain hut. Survivalist kills wife and daughter. Man dies of thirst during survival test. Survivalist deathcult bandcamp.

She clicks her phone off.

Draft eulogy: Peg found solace in her causes. She organized art shows for refugees and drafted homemade petitions. She donated to climate change and sick children. She learned the lyrics to "Get Up, Stand Up" and tolerated "Fight the Power." For a while, she sponsored an African child, and when his needs faded, she replaced him with Bangladeshi twins.

"... ninety-six, ninety-seven, ninety-eight ..."

She rechecks her onward flight, books an automated wake-up call.

"...one hundred and sixty-two, one hundred and sixty-three, one hundred and sixty-four ..."

As the midsummer sun scorched the tips of leaves to a curling black, Peg pasted flyers demanding kidnapped Nigerian girls be brought home. While wintry frost coated the bare limbs of fruit trees, she clambered onto an upturned crate, denouncing airstrikes on UN schools. As spring lambs frolicked amidst the daffodils, Peg marched for equal pay and victims' rights and breast cancer and solar rebates.

Google Peg Monroy + death. No recent entries. A different Peg Monroy, a marine biologist from Chicago; favorite book, *A Handful of Dust*; died June 2008. *Peg Leg Love + United By Death*, 7 inch EP. *Square Holes for Round Pegs*, Martinez-Monroy (2004), cited in "A Handbook of Trauma and Suicide."

Google Peg Monroy. No recent entries. A defunct Facebook profile for the biologist. A Frida Kahlo fan page (schoolyard name-calling Peg-leg Frida; loyal student Guillermo Monroy). PEG Seminar (Political Economy and Growth) by Ana-Moreno Monroy. Polyethylene glycol [PEG], Manuel Monroy et al. (1997), cited in "Culture of Animal Cells: Basic Technique," Sixth Edition. Surviving stroke: P.E.G. feeding tube, contact Fatima Monroy.

Fayen d'Evie is an artist and director of 3-ply publishing; she is based in Muckleford in rural Australia.)

Li Dawei

When he had almost finished moving into his new house, my friend Li Dawei bought a watermelon.

Looking at him from his right side, the way he held the watermelon in the crook of his long right arm, he resembled a praying mantis carrying a green moon.

With his other arm he held bedding that trailed behind him along the stairs. From that side he also looked like a praying mantis, but one hidden behind a green moon amid early summer clouds.

As I watched him everything in the scene felt closer: it became lazy, slow, and cozy.

At this moment, it was also as if we could still see his old home, a room of only ten square meters. When he had lived there, he had a small, deep-brown wooden bed next to a windowframe that was painted powder blue. His white bed sheets always seemed to be a lighter shade of blue. (I don't know why I say "always" as we didn't meet that often and actually his old room was piled up with many other things and I only remember his bed sheets. Li Dawei is a piece of plain, light blue color and actually light blue is a brighter color than any white.)

The bed sheets looked unused even though he never washed them or even tidied up.

“Oh, it’s broken,” he whispered as soon as the watermelon fell heavily onto the floor, its peel splitting open without any emotion of its own.

Li Dawei came from Shangdong Province. “My father sells steel to the government,” he said.

He acted like a girl sometimes.

He doesn’t like to eat any garlic—but he has beriberi.

“Let’s eat fish! My treat!” said Li Dawei.

At eleven o’clock, following the hotpot fish dinner, the evening sent a fine rain onto the dusty yellowing world. We were standing in an even dustier bus station with the dustiest people, as if they were figures in a bad, digital inkjet print. I looked at him. He still appeared very clean—like a piece of white paper that, without a thought, could be blown up into the meager wintery sky by anyone with breath that was desperate enough.

“You know, I love today; it looks like a painting from the Song Dynasty!”

We were learning painting skills in a training course together in Beijing in 2000, and hoped that we could pass the annual Gaokao examination. I was struggling toward my future goals. Everyone was struggling and striving for something.

“David, wake up David, the examination isn’t over yet! We only have ten minutes left! Paint something! Hey, David, wake up!”

We gave him the nickname David because his first name in Chinese is Dawei. Strangely, our “sketch test” required we draw the head of a dull copy of Michelangelo’s sculptural masterpiece, David.

David started sleep-talking: “David is coming!” We all burst out laughing, even though there was nothing wrong with saying “David is coming.”

He sat there, with his head and its oily, dirty hair, still wearing a slipper that a young girl had dropped under her chair the night before.

When that same girl finished her exam, she proudly jumped down from her seat and gave the horrible sculpture a kiss, handed her work to the teacher, and left. Our David seemed to wake up with that kiss too; he finished his sketch in five minutes, and it was excellent.

Of course he passed the examination; everyone but him knew he had passed. He missed picking up his report card not only because he overslept, but because he forgot. I and another friend sat in his room waiting for him to wake up. “Wake up!” we said. He laughed, hiding under the covers; his laughter sounded like a magpie’s cackles.

“Oh look!” I said. “A family of magpies! I have never seen this in my life! You are a lucky man! We all are!”

He leaned his body on the windowframe to pick up his unwashed frozen socks, and smiled. The birds were perched on a new green branch outside in the early spring day.

“Well, it is not true that it’s lucky to see magpies, don’t be too dramatic. Actually, magpies are the worst parents! They steal each other’s eggs! They also eat their own babies! Maybe it’s good when things live on the ground.”

I learned that people like Li Dawei have very good fortune, people who are super slow and ramble too much. But when there is an emergency and that person is called upon to make a split-second decision, they make the right one, the clever one. I sit on the opposite side: I spend a long time striving for things, and when it comes to making a decision about what to do next, I am lost.

Taocheng Wang is a Chinese artist based in Amsterdam whose practice involves video, painting, text, and performance.)

(Rosemary Heather

The Story of — —

This is the story about how I made a fortune because of something called — —, or more accurately, because I slipped and fell on something called — —. — — has another, less attractive name, but I won't mention that. A large part of my success has been in persuading people to forget about that other name. While — — hardly trips off the tongue, the nickname it got was a colloquialism of undeniable accuracy. It described what you seemed to be looking at, in a way that is guaranteed to put you off your dinner. But dinner was what I had realized — — could become, albeit a special kind of dinner that meant you didn't eat anything else for a couple of days. As for everything that happens when you do this, let's just say it's hard to describe. Like a lot of things in life, — — is best experienced to be appreciated.

Incidentally, if I ever have the time, which I don't, I would love to hunt down whoever invented that unmentionable nickname and beat them to an un-pretty pulp. I'm not a violent person, but this misnomer was the number one problem we had in the marketing of — —. It was a canard we just couldn't stamp out. Gradually though, word got out about — —'s actual

effects, and if the nickname was not forgotten, it is at least now buried in another type of problem, one delivered courtesy of the worldwide conspiracy-theory industry. This shadowy alliance of like-minded obsessives work day and night to find explanations about — —'s origins and what it is actually made of, and they apparently can never be satisfied by the actual facts. Though in our case, the truth is stranger than fiction, which is the problem: it creates a kind of information hole, a vacuum never to be filled that acts like catnip (or indeed — —!) to that legion of monkeys who volunteer (*noblesse oblige* I guess) to power the nonstop global rumor machine.

I hadn't lived in New Brunswick for years when my father summoned me back home with a job. His company, — —, a purveyor of Dulse, a seaweed snack that was always popular in the region, had decided to re-brand. My father was hoping to retire soon, perhaps after selling the company. At that point I had about ten years of experience working in marketing while living in Montreal. I couldn't resist my filial duty.

The habit of resorting to seaweed as an ingestible had a history in Atlantic Canada as old as the craft of fishing itself. It was the food that, in the face of other types of scarcities, poor people could rely on, being nutritious, abundant, and somewhat palatable. It's a tradition that goes back hundreds of years, but only in certain parts of the world, especially Asia, the British Isles, and the Canadian and US Maritimes. Dulse, the regional variety that grows most abundantly in the Bay of Fundy, has a long history in New Brunswick, but it falls short when it comes to certain practicalities. It is picked by hand in

a season that lasts only from mid-May to mid-October. After harvesting, Dulse needs to be laid out in the sun for six to eight hours to dry. If the weather is bad, seawater storage is an option, although harvested Dulse will start to deteriorate after only a couple of days. These limitations have kept Dulse production small and kept it local.

In spite of all this, I could see a twenty-first century future for the business. I had every confidence that Dulse could become a third-millennium food, one that could be scaled to the point that it fed populations around the globe. But the thing is I could see that the core of the business was found not in seaweed but in the story that seaweed allowed the company to tell—and this is why, more or less, I discovered — —.

The image problem of — — (— — perception versus — — reality) was something of course I too had to overcome at first. How I did that is a heroic story of productive self-deception. The way I figured out how to make it palatable and therefore not just a product but a whole culture has become, as it turns out, my life's task. Part two of importance to this story is the less glamorous but ultimately more lucrative tale of what in modern parlance is called marketing. If I had only trusted my sense perception, what I was looking at and how that translated into a nauseated gut reaction, I would have missed what happens when you ingest — — into your actual gut. For the life-giving properties of — — were nothing short of miraculous, bestowing on the user a whole other self capable of travel in time and space. With — — you could be you and you could be this other you at the same time but in another place, which was also just wherever you happened to be, same but different. I don't think I

have to tell you what kind of problems this basic capacity of — — tends to create.

The kind of world that — — opened up was, as the idea of a *second you* implies, twice as big and that much more complex. As wonderful as this was, this extra dimension of everyday existence, as many people found out, brought with it an extra world's raft of problems. That was the downside of — —, problems that almost couldn't be separated from their advantages—just like in your own life but now doubled.

Weirdly, my own experience making — — exemplifies this problem. It has brought me unimagined prosperity but it often seems like I'm trapped in a prison yard of my own design. I might be rich but it certainly didn't come for free. So one moral of this story is where there is money to be made, there are poachers, and in — —'s case they came on both sides of the law, prospectors and regulators. I'm not sure which created more trouble.

Although a number of things happened, what I really like about this story is the way it gives me a sense of how, a millenium ago, our ancestors somehow saw that gold lay within the heart of dirty rocks. Or they took the multiple risks required to make sure that different kinds of mushrooms, for instance (again something covered in dirt), were edible. Or that there is something delicious inside a lobster. Or that the shells containing clams present an ongoing invitation for them to be pried open with a sharp implement—and that almost everything tastes better once you cook it.

The trick was to decide that one thing could become another—though this does not explain why someone un-

derstood that wheat could become beer, potatoes vodka, or that aloe would make a good salve for the itch of mosquito bites.

— — happened by accident *and* by design. Not because of everything that happened after, but because I now know what it is like to have discovered something improbable that would then go on to become a part of everyday life. From a small patch of New Brunswick, a few cubic square feet of rocks and cold water streams near the Bay of Fundy, and the series of events that led me to slip and fall on these, the end result was an alteration of the mental map of the entire globe. This was a gain that was principally of *dimension*. And the reason was — —'s reality factor: real effects are the same as—well, they are real. That's what — — helped us to discover.

Every discovery, every happy little accident, forms the vocabulary of our contemporary existence, but we don't often think of it like that. And of course this is a process that's unending, always incremental progress in this base geometry of the material transformation of things. In each instance, there were decisions made and steps taken involving the life story of the person who decided to take them. These people were embedded in the circumstances of their surroundings and lived the effects, good and bad, of the physical details of that environment. For each discovery there had to be people who noticed the abundance of a particular thing in their everyday world, and had some curiosity about what they might be able to do with it, and in the course of finding out their life got a little bit—or hugely—transformed.

I can tell more or less the same story about — —. I am from St. John, New Brunswick in Canada, a place

which is largely rural, even if maps of the province include cities among its attractions, places like St. John where official business gets done. The more important thing to know about St. John is that it has mudflats that seemingly go on for miles when the tide is out. Connected to this is the local activity called mudding in which you drink beer with your friends and drive your truck through mud. The entertainment value here is that you might get stuck. The driving skill required to avoid this is key to understanding mudding's appeal: human and machine versus mud. It's a provincial pastime, one that makes the best use of existing circumstances, and is a leisure activity that improves on a skill you might require in your everyday life.

Leaving St. John it does not take long for the city to become its opposite. It has no suburbs to speak of. Pretty much everybody in that part of the world travels by car, but my preference was to get around using public transit. In particular there was a bus that serviced the rural area in the immediate vicinity. Sit on that bus for twenty minutes and you would arrive in a densely wooded area that sits next to a vast expanse of farmland.

When the tide was in and I had some time on my hands, I preferred to go inland. The truth was I had always hated the ocean. The mudflats were the only thing that made living in St. John bearable for me—a temporary respite from the ocean's terrors. So when the mudflats were hidden, stolen back from me by the ocean as it were, I would choose to go hiking. Walking in the woods I could think about things and feel less besieged by the Atlantic's salty air. I should say too that

I was rather alone in this preference for the woods over the ocean, and for walking or taking the bus as opposed to taking the car. As you might imagine, the popularity of mudding tells you something about the cultural life of St. John, and I had an only limited tolerance for its pleasures.

By contrast, to step inside the forest was to enter a world free from the memory of my location, this city on the North Atlantic I happened to be stuck in. Return visits replaced any sense of anxiety I may have had about being in the woods with a deepening mystery I felt entirely comfortable to be inside of. I don't doubt this enhanced sense of myself that came into being as I gave more time to the forest was a precondition for the discovery of — —. This dimension in the forest that you experience over time when you give yourself over to its embrace is the same dimension of life you experience when ingesting — —. I learned this by accident and I discovered it by design and in that sense I understand myself as fated.

Rosemary Heather is a freelance writer living in Toronto.)

(Sean O'Toole

Transcribing Sound

A recent trip to Japan reminded me of the many sounds I'd forgotten in the fifteen years since living in that country: those melancholy beeps at railway crossings and pedestrian intersections, which are their own kind of Morse code; the intensity of the shrill drone of male cicadas, which, when multiplied, can feel as thick and abundant as the summer greenery in which these insects hide; and, less affectionately, the everywhere narration of experience by amplified voices—on trains, buses, and ferries, in shop elevators, in shaded arcades, even on the funicular I rode down a steep gorge to a lonely riverside hot-spring in one of the country's remotest valleys. While some of the fuzz and hiss of contemporary Japan is welcoming, a not inconsiderable amount of the ambient noise one encounters is hostile.

Perhaps one of the markers of urbanity is the city dweller's ability to filter out annoying and unwanted sounds. But, and of more interest to me than this secularized practice of indifference, is what happens when people, writers especially, do exactly the opposite: when they confront the unruly sonority of the city and attempt to chasten it with words. Cities produce a surplus of sounds (thwacks, booms and the like) that are as varied as those found in wild rural habitats where peeps and chirps each possess a distinctive maker. And yet, in spite of the omnipresence of cities, the distinctive polyphony of cities remains largely unclassified. Where I am from, Cape Town, the most popular downloadable app with any sort of taxonomic quality or function relating to sound is devoted to birds. On my rather more analog

or haptic bookshelf I have guides to trees, grasses, bird eggshells, and contemporary painters. The visual, it seems, is easier to catalog than the purely audible.

It is worth thinking this through. Would a hypothetical audio guide to city sounds exclude organic inputs like the cawing of crows that are so much a part of Japanese cities? Is the distinction between organic and inorganic sounds a useful binary in classifying a city's acoustic resonance? What other ways could one organize urban sounds into a coherent catalog, one that establishes viable affinities and family relations? Shifting gears, is there a greater intensity and frequency of sounds in a vertical city than in a garden city (which nowadays is really just a walled-off gated residence)? What is the minimum decibel needed to qualify? Tackling these questions would require the scientific discipline of someone like Linnaeus and a monomaniacal devotion to the thrum of the everyday, or the "infra-ordinary" as writer Georges Perec described it.

Is it possible for formal literature to invite acoustic experimentation into the bounded confines of, let's say, a short story?

Four years ago I was invited to speak at an art symposium in my hometown. I opted to write a short story—a less stable genre than the essay for reliably thinking through facts—in which Cape Town's existential summer winds feature as protagonist. A key difficulty was making this intangible character speak. How does one transcribe the sound of wind? Whoosh? This imitative word struck me as too polite in accounting for the gales that blow

up from the cold, southern Atlantic Ocean toward Cape Town every summer. So I did what stenographers do: I listened, and attempted to transcribe what I heard. The results have a pedestrian quality as pure text; reading them out loud to a bamboozled audience was a delight.

Sssssshhhhhhhh! A soft wind. Whooosssshhhhhh! An angry gust. The more I listened to the summer winds of 2010, the more they teased. The wind, at least around my neighborhood, is unknowable and elusive. It is capable of changing speed, direction, intonation, and purpose, seemingly at random, without logic. It doesn't even need vowels to exist. Wwwwwwwhhhhhhhhh! The wind is not "a literary specialty," thought Mark Twain, probably rightly. But to ignore wind, not as fact but as a thing capable of being arrested and detained by language, be it written or otherwise, is to negate an aspect of experience that artists of all sorts are continually trying to grapple with: that awkward space between the audible and imperceptible, the real or concrete and the abstract. Writing the wind is one way of exploring this area where language disassembles as much as asserts itself.

Like wind, James Brown's singing often resists transcription. "Whoa-oa-oa!" isn't really adequate in conveying the ecstatic free-form exclamations that characterized his singing. Brown's genius is his voice, which he used not only as a tool of literature, but also as a musical instrument. Capable of summoning a fugitive wind from within, Brown in turn proposed new sonorities within the constraints of a three-minute pop song.

“I don’t understand shit James says,” joked Eddie Murphy in 1983 of Brown’s elastic manner of singing.

I could see people certainly thinking, if not mouthing a version of this idea after I read my short story. But as Murphy’s mesmerizing Brown routine from his 1983 show suggests, to simply hear the sounds ringing and peeling and bouncing unnamed through the world’s urban canyons—and not block them out—is perhaps more of value than naming or understanding them.

Sean O’Toole is a journalist, editor, and writer based in Cape Town.)

(**Malak Helmy**

O.S Filing System

It only recently came to be known that amongst Omar Suleiman's accolades, no less than those as intelligence officer, were his accomplishments as an inventor of filing systems.

For many an impatient year it had been rumored that the dark recesses of his arcane and shadowy career in intelligence bore his design of a baroque system: secret dealings, trails of deception that so many longed to unearth, could be filed and stored with low risk of outside access.

To most, these documents were referred to as "invisible," attesting to the fact that none from the O.S estate had actually come forth to testify that they had seen paper copies, files, nor filing cabinets in which they may be housed. Indeed, the mountains of shredded paper the people discovered in the Ministry of Interior bursting forth from the seams of the drawers and bricks like intestinal explosions of foam from a washing machine on overdrive, were details of individuals' files and criminal records.

It came to be colloquially believed that O.S, in keeping with his wizardly ways, had used that white handkerchief that he was so known for wiping his nose with—as a tool for sleight of hand to disappear documents. Only to then have an incarnation in another paradigm replete with its own bureaucrats and paper pushers that we could not directly see nor recognize.

Over time two groups of makeshift investigators came to form in the search for the rumored invisible and baroque O.S filing system: the "O.S memory group" based their investigations on their conviction that these contracts and documents had a strange

means by which they could be permanently cast in the memory of a witness; the “O.S matter group” argued that that possibility was far too tenuous and did not define these contracts or dealings even if it seemed to be O.S’s *modus operandi*.

O.S matter group continued their investigations into the O.S filing system in relation to matter, convinced as they were that the clue to his filing system would lie somewhere in his passions. His oblique system of testimonies, exchanges, and dealings had been birthed from his great knowledge of blood, feces, and bodies degraded to their most brute and animal state to retrieve and produce data. O.S. matter group proposed it was most likely that his filing system would be produced from the knowledge of and acquaintance with that same matter.

In actuality O.S’s filing system was discovered by the most surprising of accidental information slip-ups. It was in the wake of O.S’s sudden death in 2012 that many an article came to be written about his shadowy demeanor. And also of people’s experiences meeting him in his last few years, especially during his brief role as interim vice-president. A combination of two articles would lead to the discovery of the location of his filing system.

One article published in *Foreign Policy* in 2012 detailed the ornate procedure by which the writer comes to meet O.S in what was either his private residence, or “the organ of domestic or public intelligence.” The writer describes how unlike in other perhaps “movie-like situations when a visitor is hooded before entering a secret or sensitive location,” he is “driven in circles” around the edge of the new, western desert extensions of

the city,” in and out of streets, doubling back and forth to ensure a total loss of bearings.” Handed a refreshment towel to freshen up, he briefly blacks out upon sniffing it. In waking, he finds himself having passed through massive steel gates and in a pristine compound with grass and trees as far as the eye can see, the edges of a stable of horses and a hint of other animals visible. It is at that point that he is taken up to meet O.S in a seemingly neutral environment.

A second clue came with a human-interest piece in the *New York Review of Books* about O.S’s young daughter’s grief after her father’s death. Quoted in the article, the daughter reveals the comfort she finds in the animals her father bought her for his zoo-like estate on the western extremities of the new cities around Cairo, near other well-known compounds such as Dream Park and Gardenia. She explains how he reared in her a great passion for poetry as well as for animals, teaching her the importance of their care, cleanliness, and order, a side of him few knew. He designed this zoo without walls at its center, so animals would roam free in natural, soft enclosures. This he called the metadata and the potential data, “they were like the archive of the future.” In a peripheral circle were the stables and cages, which he called the directories with the most important animals, like the leaders of the gene pools, the patriarchs. Some of these cages housed several animals. He always told her, keep them organized, like files in your drawers, each with a number and code. Don’t let them mix.

She said that it was unfortunate that the public did not have access to this zoo, noting that during her father’s life it was too dangerous to open these grounds of his

passions. However, perhaps now she could work toward it, show the state the softer side of her father—his interest in ordering animals in a way unlike any other zoo had. She said he had long studied books of Linnaeus and Seba, fascinated with their techniques of structuring. At night he would write poems about Linnaean ordering systems and his own. She said they were beautiful and from them she learned a world.

Upon reading these articles O.S matter group presented a case to the court to locate and enter this property believing therein lay the long-obscured O.S filing system. They got the approval a month after the publishing of the *New York Review of Books* article. Upon entering the zoo, in a rage of excitement, O.S matter group went with knives in hand to the smallest and tamest animals to start, pelicans in a pond, and began to stab at their soft pink bellies. From their abdomens poured out not only a small sea of blood, but also pellets of rolled up documents. In a state of hysterical madness they began their violent attack of more animals to retrieve what had come to reveal itself as a treasure trove of secrets, discovering that the abdomens of these animals were O.S's filing cabinets. He, like most rulers of state, had a love of animals as office and state furniture. But O.S kept his furniture alive.

That same afternoon, however, before getting much further than the puddles of blood and pink feathers that lay around the pelican pond, Animal Rights Watch showed up to stop O.S matter group investigators from continuing what they called a "barbaric murder of animals." They affirmed that even if these animals held the secrets of state in their abdomens, stabbing them, or operating on them to retrieve dates was a violation

of animal rights. Even if the cruelty was initially performed on the animals by the operations of the O.S filing system (now referred to as an O.S-Escobar filing system, owing to its possible inspiration from Pablo Escobar's Hacienda Napoles), the animals presently did not suffer from the presence of these document pellets in their stomachs and were safer without being operated on. A war of words began between Animal Rights Watch and O.S matter group. The latter was backed by many others eager to recover the truth behind the torture and lies that O.S was said to have inflicted on the oppressed population that he demeaned like base animals.

Until today, the details of the filing system—the content of its files, trails of secrets of state, and contracts—are still undisclosed. They are held up in a court case between human rights activists and investigators, and animal rights activists who in a strange turn of the tables stand on the side of the O.S estate. The nature of this case is a first in Egypt.

Malak Helmy is an artist based in Cairo.)

(Chris Fitzpatrick

MERIWETHER /
UTROPRULLIONS OF POPULATIONS /
ABC: PRETROGRELLITOL ROBOTICS/
GESTATIONAL PREVALENCE /
OTROWRELLIGUL

*In appreciation, I thank you cordially, sincerely,
Frank W. Chu.*

You've seen the hotel. In *Blade Runner*, most likely. But it's doubtful that you've seen it from a quivering bathroom stall, watching the door struggle to remain locked. A door—a precarious slab of metal, or a shield—defending against the violence of telepathically influenced security guards as they attempt to break it down.

I was racing out of the hotel room when Floris grabbed me and said, “not without the microphone.” He was right. Long before we drove to Los Angeles from San Francisco, Frank, Floris, and I had agreed to record everything—audio, video, regardless of any given moment's interest—as they do (or at least as close as possible). And by they, I mean it.

Frank said Them Ruling the 12 GALAXIES of Populations have “top-secret cameras that disappear into thin air.” We had an SLR. Them Ruling the Shanghai Biennale said, “No money may leave China,” so an SLR had to do. Trailing Frank, Floris incessantly recorded high-definition video of everything, or nearly nothing, from an innocuous neck-bound strap, and all as if he wasn't filming at all.

Ubiquity rendered the camera invisible, and we armed ourselves with wireless lavalier microphones to round out the picture. So I stopped, tucked the lavalier under my shirt, hid the receiver at the back of the waistband in my trousers, and paid a rather nervy call to the concierge downstairs.

Okay, rolling? Well, I wrote the letter to CBS News—855 Battery Street, in San Francisco, California.

Please contact the duplicates of the Cadillac, Porsche, Peugeot, the KGB second-salaries, the Democratic Party, and the Canadian and Australian parliaments. Ask them to discuss these campaigns on CBS, ABC, the Soviet Media, with courtesies at 110 GALAXIES ...

A Professional Protestor

Frank's a well-known figure in San Francisco, if generally misunderstood. Every day, since 1998 or 1999, he has relentlessly and publicly protested against the slanders, treasons, sabotages, war crimes, and embezzlements committed by Them Ruling the 12 GALAXIES of Populations—a nefarious network of extraterrestrials who collaborate with former US presidents, and with congressmen, senators, the CIA, the FBI, the NSA, various police departments, Universal Studios, and other collusive agents.*

Frank hopes to gain impeachments, revocations, incarcerations, and, to be sure, financial restitution. He claims that the 12 GALAXIES and its agents on Earth have misappropriated billions of dollars in royalties owed to Frank and his family for unwillingly starring in a television and film series called *The Richest Family*. Frank's been a star since childhood, and a

*George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, James Buchanan, Chester A. Arthur, Grover Cleveland, William McKinley, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush are all guilty, while Jimmy Carter is innocent, and Barack Obama is innocent, but has been duplicated. Some of his duplicates, Frank says, are innocent.

self-described “professional protestor” for over fifteen years. He marches, protests, and pickets anywhere large numbers of people congregate.

He has written thousands of campaign letters, and continues to write up to five a day, to notify news agencies about his campaign. He does so by hand, in envelopes with no return address. And as often, if not more, he calls news hotlines, and leaves informative telephone messages. Frank checks in.

The 12 GALAXIES can reach anyone.

COILE/ 12 GALAXIES/
BETROGONIC FELONY FAMINE/
FOX NEWS: FREELANCE 2ND SALARIES/
HEXAGONIC/ INSIDIOUS
RELEVANT/ PREDICAMENTS

A Time-Lapsed Phalanx

Signographics is “committed to conveying your visual communication needs.” And they do so “in a cost-effective, timely manner.” Signographics graciously sponsored Frank’s participation in the San Francisco Pavilion of the 9th Shanghai Biennale 2012, but their involvement means more than sponsorship usually connotes. Signographics is, for all intents and purposes, Frank’s production studio (and has been, almost since their inception).

Frank is prolific, yet most of the hundreds if not thousands of signs he produced are no longer extant. Occasionally, Frank sells his signs (too often to opportunists who pay less for the signs than their cost of production or to fly-by-nighters taken with their eccentric novelty). At other times, Frank retires them in one

way or another. Years ago, I found one abandoned on Valencia Street in San Francisco.

I visited Signographics and asked Maria, one of the company partners, how they began working with Frank and how the signs’ design and terminology developed over the years. No clear origin was offered, but Maria explained that Frank calls in his terminology each week, dictating the spelling. It’s not arbitrary. If there is a mistake when he arrives to pick up the sign, it is corrected. “We use the Impact typeface,” she explained. “Over the years, we have had different employees update [Frank’s] sign. We just change the text on the file. It takes us five minutes.”

Five minutes, but weekly, and for fifteen years. The signs do more than communicate messages. They are an arsenal, shields—a sort of phalanx. He recycles and rotates them daily. He elevates them with Scotch tape and a wooden stick, and wields them.

Frank designed his earliest iterations himself for reasons of economy—scrawling capitalized letters in black marker on collaged white paper, stapled or glued to thin plywood, by hand:

IMPEACH CLINTON/
WASHINGTON, JEFFERSON/
FRANKLIN, FILLMORE

IMPEACH CLINTON/ BUSH, REAGAN/
CARTER, NIXON

IMPEACH/ CLINTON/ 12 GALAXIES/
GUILTIED TO A/ TECHNITRONIC
ROCKET SOCIETY

If one paid an inordinate level of attention, one could follow, so to speak. On 22 May 2000, for example, OMEGATRONIC. By 24 May 2000, SEXTRONIC. 1 June 2000, OCTRONIC. 23 June 2000, MEGATRONIC. 15 July 2000, ULTRALOGICAL. 19 July 2000, ULTRATRONIC. TECHNITRONIC to DECTROLOGICAL to ZEGNATRONIC.

Through the progression of Frank's signs, a narrative slowly gained form and vehicle. He began raising small "campaign donations" and commissioned Signographics—newly opened at the time—to produce a more professional-looking sign, replete with machine-cut lettering, and in color. With funds more limited than the constant barrage of messages he seeks to convey, he resumed his strategy of manually updating his signs. Now, he purchased individual sticker-letters from hardware stores to alter the vinyl lettering:

IMPEACH
CLINTON
12 Galaxies
Guiltied to a
[Z][E][G][N][A]tronic
Rocket Society

ZEGNA is collaged. Surnames continue to change below, while QUADROLOGICAL becomes MEGALOGICAL, then gains an O. Then, the O remains, but THEORETICAL ANALYSIS becomes EXHORTATIONS:

IMPEACH
[F][A][I][R][M][O][U][N][T]
12 Galaxies
Guiltied [W][I][T][H]
[Q][U][A][D][R][O][L][O][G][I][C][A][L]
Rocket [S][T][A][T][I][O][N][S]

IMPEACH
[B][U][C][H][A][N][O][N]
12 Galaxies
Guiltied to a
[M][E][G][A][L][O][G][I][C][A][L]
[T][H][E][O][R][E][T][I][C][A][L]
[A][N][A][L][Y][S][I][S]

IMPEACH
[V][A][N] [B][U][R][E][N]
12 Galaxies
Guiltied to a
[O][M][E][G][A][L][O][G][I][C][A][L]
[T][H][E][O][R][E][T][I][C][A][L]
[A][N][A][L][Y][S][I][S]

IMPEACH
[J][E][F][F][E][R][S][O][N]
12 Galaxies
Guiltied to
[O][M][E][G][A][L][O][G][I][C][A][L]
[E][X][H][O][R][T][A][T][I][O][N][S]

Conveyance and indictment, reportage and specifications—hailing. Frank employs an entirely different system today, with which he compactly names names, cites intergalactic population figures, describes societies and their technologies, reviews news coverage, and lists alien terminology.

MCALISTER/ 12 GALAXIES/
QUINTRONIC PROFANED PERJURIES/
AGAINST THEM RULING/
THE UNIVERSE AND/ ZEGNATRONIC/
ECLESIASITES

The more narrative signs were more immediately decipherable: Clinton and the 12 GALAXIES are guilty of collaborative crimes committed against a TECHNITRONIC Rocket Society, so Clinton must be impeached; McAlister and the 12 GALAXIES have committed QUINTRONIC PROFANED PERJURIES against Them Ruling the Universe and ZEGNATRONIC ECLESIASITES, and must be brought to justice; and so on.

MERIWETHER/
UTROPRULLIONS OF POPULATIONS/
ABC: PRETROGRELLITOL ROBOTICS/
GESTATIONAL PREVALENCE/
OTROWRELLIGUL

Over time, the signs became more codified, and therefore more predicated on Frank's own verbal disambiguation of the printed language. However, they also point to Frank's

fixation on the coverage he increasingly received in the media. The top line, however, is always the surname of a conspirator: ABRAMOFF, ALDRIDGE, BECKITT, BERHARDT, BERNARD, BINGHAM, BOISE, BRANTLEY, BROAD, BRUSTEIN, BUSH, CAVE, COILE, COLLEYVILLE, COOPERBERG, CORKER, CUTHBERTSON, DANVERS, DEEVER, DUDLEY, FARMINGDALE, FINGERS, GITTLEMAN, GREENWALD, HARRINGTON, HASSELBECK, HEINAN, HOCKSTADER, HOUGHTON, HOUSELEY, HUSTON, KELLERMAN, LASHLEY, LEDGER, MARCH, McCARDELL, McCLOSKEY, MIFFLIN, MINTON, MULLANEY, NAYMAN, PARKVILLE, PATTINSON, PAULSON, PERSINGER, PHILLIPS, RATLIFE, RAIZAKIS, RAYNER, RICHARDS, ROXBOROUGH, RUDOLPH, RYANBALL, SCHERER, SCHKADE, SIMMONS, SULLENBERGER, SULZBERGER, TEDFORD, TEMPLETON, WASSERMAN, WATERHOUSE, WECHTER, WILLISTON, WOLFGRAM, WORTHINGTON.

A "Very Impressive Elevator"

The video Floris and Frank made for the Shanghai Biennale is fairly banal. Aside from an interview conducted on a restaurant terrace at Universal Studios, Frank rarely speaks. When he does, he offers complimentary one-liners.

We didn't initially intend to go to Los Angeles, but when we invited Frank to fly to Shanghai and direct an episode of *The Richest Family* with Floris, leaving California was of no interest. Frank's friend Josh, an attorney, has stated that, what's crucial to Frank is, "the extent

that he's able to get in front of news cameras—that act holds off the GALAXIES.” Frank’s station is grounded in more than geography. It’s a system:

8 o'clock in the morning I head towards Market and Montgomery Street in downtown San Francisco, and protest with the 8 o'clock commute hour traffic. About 9 o'clock, they leave; so I head towards Learn iT Computer Center on Montgomery off Pine Street. I used to advertise for them. They let me use the basement lobby in the morning to write letters to Channel 7, or CBS, or ABC World News, requesting more news coverage about the 12 GALAXIES populations and the White House not paying me as a movie star. And I come back out about the 12 o'clock lunch hour, commute hour traffic around Montgomery and Market Street, and just protest until about 2:30 up towards Powell and Geary Street, Union Square. And then sometimes I was stopping by for lunch at Jack in the Box or something, or the Borders bookstore there on Powell Street. And then I come back out to the 5 o'clock commute hour traffic towards Montgomery/Market Street in San Francisco, downtown, so I can protest with the crowds over there until about 7:30 pm, up towards Union Square, Powell, and Geary Street, and head towards the 12 GALAXIES night club at night.*

* Named in Frank's honor, the 12 GALAXIES night club was located in the Mission District of San Francisco. Frank could eat and drink for free every night, and address the audience on stage between acts. The club closed in 2008, after five years.

A .38 Special, Nickel-Plated

In 1985, it was reported that Frank held eleven members of his family hostage at home in Oakland, California. He was twenty-four years old. Frank fired a bullet through a door, with the intention of shooting an officer of the Oakland Police Department, who was attempting to break down the door. Frank claims self-defense; that the officer had come to execute him. He eventually surrendered to the police, who had cordoned off several blocks of the neighborhood.

After nine months in jail, Frank was released, but it was not the last time Frank was jailed or institutionalized as a “political prisoner” of the CIA. And it was during those incarcerations that he began writing about the conspiracy—several hundred pages worth. Prison guards were actors. Psychiatric doctors were earning second salaries by “brainwashing” him with medications. Frank no longer takes medication, but the 12 GALAXIES continue to invade his thoughts and influence his behavior—sabotaging romantic relationships, inflicting him with laryngitis to silence him, disrupting his ability to hold a steady job. Unsteady employment ultimately enabled his career as a full-time professional protestor, but even Frank’s business resume included an asterisked terminology-laden addendum:

*An Assistant

(AN): ULTIMATE: ZEGNATRONICED: ANALYSED:
(A): TECHNITRONICED: SUBSTANTIATED: ULTRA-
TRONICED: IMPOSSIBILITIES: WITH: ALTRALOGI-
CALLED: THEORETICALLED: DECTROLOGICALLED:
CONSTANTANEOUSED: ZEGNALOGICALLED:
IMPROBABLED: OCTROLOGICALLED:
CONTINUOUSED: OMEGALOGICALLED:
IMPROBABILITIES: OF : MEGATRONICED: SUBRO-
GATED: HEXTROLOGICALLED: INSTANTANEOUSED:
PENTROLOGICALLED: DISPOSITIONS: WITH: SEX-
TROLOGICALLED: INTERRED-GALATIALLED:
OMEGATRONICED: RHETORICALLED: ULTRALOGI-
CALLED: CONTINUITIES: OF: TECHNILOGICALLED:
ESCALATED: BETATRONICED: SKEPTICALLED: QUAD-
ROLOGICALLED: DEPOSITIONS: (A):
ZEGNATRONICED: RELEVANT: CIRCUMSTANTIALLED:
PENTRONICED: AWESOMED: THEORETICALLED:
ULTRALOGICALLED: RELUCTANTED: MEGALOGI-
CALLED: STATISTICALLED: CONSTANTANEOUSED:
HEXXEDTRONICED: APOCOLYPTED: (AN):
ALTRALOGICALLED: INSTANTANEOUSED: DECKED-
TRONICED: RANDOMMED: TECHNITRONICED:
CONTINUITIED: OF: (A): TRIOLOGICALLED:
PERCEPTIONS: (AN): OCTRONICED: AERONAUTI-
CALLED: ZEGNALOGICALLED: PROPOGATED: PEN-
TRONICED: THEORETICALLED: ULTRALOGICALLED:
ASCERTAINMENT'S: (AN): OCTROLOGICALLED:
INSTANCE(S): OF: (A): TECHNITRONICED:
PROPOSITION(S)

A Free Breakfast

Frank has long-attested that the “telepathic inventions” the CIA and the 12 GALAXIES use against him can “change your tone of voice, your personality, transform your expressions, your intelligence.” They can “force you into a fight, too, and control your movements. They can force you into your worst arguments, or the worst debates you ever had.” Knocking on the door of my hotel room around 9 am, Frank was unnerved, and recounted why. And considering how closely what had just transpired in the bathroom stall must have paralleled all that transpired with his family in 1985, the change in Frank was likely administered by the hotel.

In the lobby, I relayed Frank’s account to the concierge, and then to the manager he called. Neither was aware that I was wearing a wire. Later, the head of security—more neck than head—explained that he and his staff routinely profile people in the lobby, that they may do so at will, and did not apologize whatsoever. The manager, fearing a lawsuit, apologized more than once, but negated any true sentiment by insultingly offering us a free breakfast in recompense. We refused, and Frank checked out.

An Accidental Audience

We did not employ words with the guards at the Shanghai Biennale, but they enjoyed the colorful array of signs leaning casually against the crumbling walls, and the video looping upstairs, in the mezzanine. In San Francisco, Frank told us he descended from the last emperor of China—from “the Chu Dynasty.”**

We had no clue how to communicate that, or how to explain that it may very well be more than a metaphor. We couldn't explain that the dialect of English on Frank's signs—language communicated telepathically and through newspapers—is paranormal, poly-temporal, and extraterrestrial. Gesticulations and pictograms only go so far, but as the guards surveyed the signs, they knew we didn't quite understand either.

Please also contact the Fremont Police, the Hayward Police, the San Leandro Police, the duplicates or original identities of John Anderson, John Kerry, Ralph Nader. And also ask them to discuss these campaigns on NBC, BBC, the Soviet Media, with courtesies at 110 GALAXIES ...

Francesca, or 葛拂兰, was the project manager assigned to our pavilion, and an ally in either identity. She introduced us to her colleague Olga, who also worked for the biennale, and who also helped us immensely to navigate through the biennale dust. Olga is fluent in Mandarin and English, but her native language is Russian, which seems relevant in retrospect.

"About 25 years ago, the extrasensory perceptions started talking to me—reading my mind. It was like the invisible cell phone. It could talk to me through my mind, and read my mind, and tell me that I was a movie star, and tell me about populations of other galaxies. I could picture

**Transformed into germs, they were having heart attacks, so they inflected their treasons as retaliation on humanity. NASA and the Pentagon kept it secret that they could bring people back to life. Grover Cleveland and the 12 GALAXIES exiled China's royal family, who were born again as Chu's family.

Gorbachev, and Chernenko, and the Soviet presidents talking to me—talking to me on my side, helping me out—and identifying Bill Clinton or Bush and Cheney with the 12 GALAXIES of Populations that are guilty [and deserve] impeachments. And the UN presidents and their friends were also identified—talking to me, and helping me with my campaigns. I was also identified as a movie star, and the movies [were] probably [screened] across 110 GALAXIES of Populations"—produced "with Universal Studios in Hollywood."

Please also contact the duplicates or original identities of Stalin, the former Vice Chairman Dung, the last emperors of Russia, the Socialist parties from the USSR, the Hungarian and Italian parliaments, and ask them to discuss these campaigns on ABC, BBC, the Soviet Media, with courtesies at 110 GALAXIES ...

Please also contact the Peralta Police, the California State Police, the Federal Police, the duplicates or original identities of Booker T. Washington, Maserati, Coolidge, and ask them to discuss these campaigns on ABC, BBC, the Soviet Media, with courtesies at 110 GALAXIES ...

Frank believes that Sergeant T—an American working as a sergeant in the San Francisco Police Department—is actually one of those former Soviet agents, working against the 12 GALAXIES. An assistant, perhaps.

So guards watching over a pavilion, guards policing the guests they should guard, a former Soviet president

reactivated as a Californian policeman guarding Frank, soldiers guarding a crosswalk during the Moon Festival in Shanghai—their roles are fluid. Like Sergeant T, the pavilion guards in Shanghai were exceptional people, but the hotel guards who harassed and assailed Frank were something else. These shifting characters must be Frank's supporting cast. Charting their roles weekly must contribute to the immense intergalactic popularity of *The Richest Family*.

After leaving the hotel, and even Los Angeles altogether, Frank's experience clearly lingered. For one thing, it inspired an increased impulse for him to call and leave messages on news hotlines. It's not a new impulse. Frank routinely calls "the voicemailing messages for Channel 4, Channel 7, Channel 2, CNN Headline News," and others, to leave messages about "attempted murder cases that were committed against Them Ruling 1,000,000,000,000 GALAXIES of Populations, 1,000,000,000 GALAXIES, and 1,000,000 GALAXIES, and against God himself—at lifespans and infinities."

Driving back to San Francisco, Frank asked if Floris could find a postal box, but we saw a beach and decided to stop for a bit. Frank wanted to mail a letter he had just written to CBS News in the back seat of the car, so he read it aloud to us. His voice was tired, raspy, and hushed, but backed by gulls and waves, and polite as usual.

If ours really is, the least developed of the first 12 consecutive galaxies, listening to Frank's words, we realized that some technologies are, even here, more advanced.

Chris Fitzpatrick is the director of Objectif Exhibitions, a not-for-profit contemporary art center in Antwerp.)

She took a breath.

She didn't mean to breathe into the microphone.

She didn't mean to breathe into the microphone but her mouth was too close and now the sound of her breath exceeded her thought and amplified across the auditorium. The awkwardness made her laugh and that made everything worse. She was laughing, in her case this meant snorting with laughter. Between the aural evidence of air moving in and air moving out, the sound of her body's cavities projected through the voluminous space between her and the crowd and it pissed her off.

Or it could have happened like this ...

When I was in my twenties, I lived in a six-floor walk up on St. Mark's Place in the East Village in New York City. My room was the size of a queen-sized futon which I remember quite precisely because I bought one and had it delivered to the apartment.

I had to remove the closet door because it wouldn't open with the bed installed. It took me hours to set up the room. I slept in the bed for six nights.

On the seventh day, I invited a friend over to look and he said: this is not a room, this is a bed, you have to send it back. It was two hours after the exchange period ran out so I had to cry on the phone to the manager of the furniture store to get him to swap the queen-sized futon for a single.

Although as far as you are concerned it need not be so specific ...

The photo is xeroxed on a piece of 8.5" x 11" multi-purpose copy paper. It is only half as tall as the paper but extends almost to the width of the page. The copied image is black and white and, judging by the contrast, the original photo likely was as well. Inside the photo, there are two women in the foreground of a seated crowd. The camera that captures their image is positioned from their right shoulders and the women's bodies appear in slight profile.

They are sitting next to each other. The woman on the left is looking at the camera but she is wearing dark sunglasses and the camera can't return her gaze. Her black purse is unclasped and sits on her lap partially in frame.

The women are a similar age and dress alike but the camera does not say what their precise relationship

is. The other women in the frame, sitting behind and to the left of the two described, are talking to each other but these two are not.

The woman to the right looks straight ahead or maybe even a little to her left as if her eyes deliberately avoid the camera's attention. Her right arm is crossed over her stomach. Her left arm is also crossed over her stomach and rests slightly on top of her right. Her left hand holds an 8.5" x 11" piece of paper, in its vertical orientation, as if to display it to the camera.

Keep 'em in
the closet

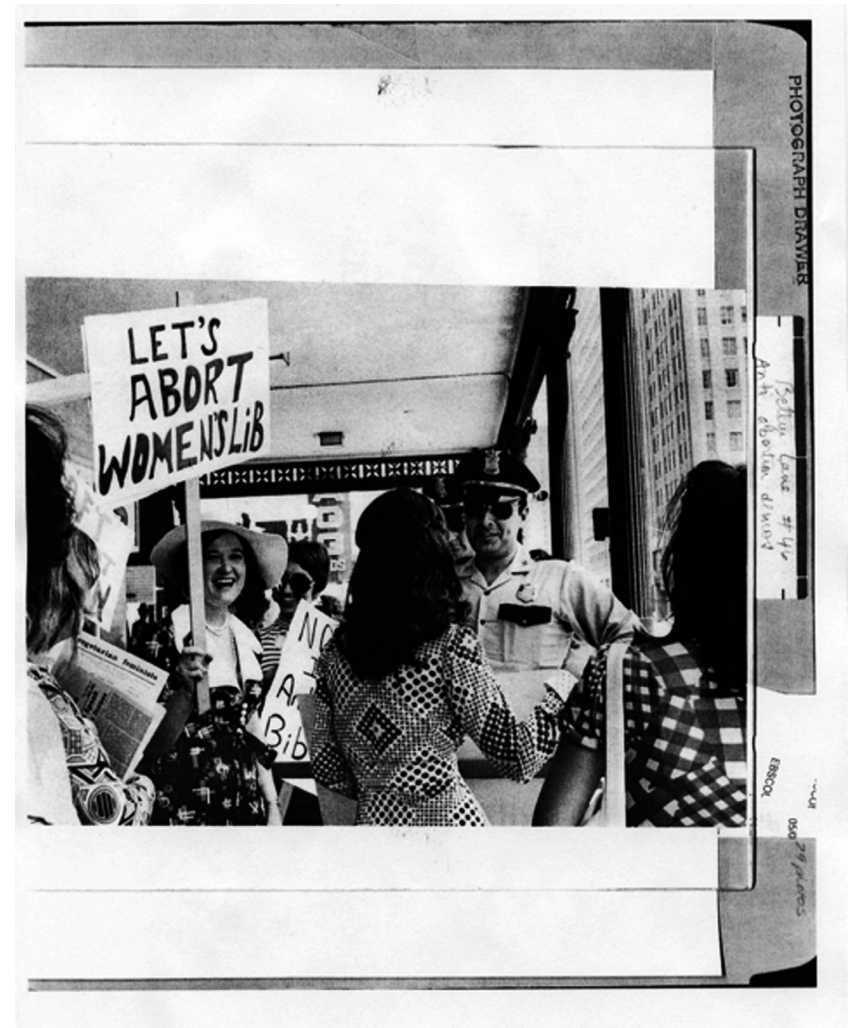
it says in black marker. There is a drawing above the words. Maybe drawing is not the right word? Is diagram better? Or sign? Or symbol? Either way, it's a simple outline of a door with a small circle for a doorknob. The door sits on a line made by the same marker.

The line hints at a room from which the door is either an entrance or an exit.

Sharon Hayes is an artist who engages with specific intersections between history, politics, and speech.)



Anti-choice IWY Houston, 11-77, 1977, photo © Bettye Lane, courtesy Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. Image documentation by Sharon Hayes, 2014.



NOW Conference Texas, Anti-ERA Demonstration, 5-25-1974, 1974,
 photo © Bettye Lane, courtesy Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute,
 Harvard University. Image documentation by Sharon Hayes, 2014.

(Adrian Wong

The Glorious Phoenix

Armed with a staple gun and a stack of home-made flyers, my mother makes the two-mile walk to the community bulletin board every Tuesday to advertise the week's topic of discussion. An attempt to meet the neighbors and stave off the boredom of early retirement, the first two of her "chat circles" were aborted due to low attendance numbers, but by the third, she came up with the idea of plying her guests with the offer of free food, and by the fourth—which I had the privilege of attending—things began to get interesting. I believe the topic of the week was something to do with pet care or animal rights.

Before things got started, I was handed a pair of tongs and instructed to stand at the ready over a pre-heated pot of peanut oil, because my mother was concerned that deep-frying too early could yield soggy eggrolls. The doorbell was my starter pistol. When it rang, I dropped the first batch and watched them disappear into a cloud of tiny bubbles. From my vantage point, I couldn't see the arriving guests, but some of the louder voices drifted in from the next room.

"Their fur is the softest, but you need to brush it four to five times a day."

"My cats have taught me so much."

"Is he friendly? My sister lost a finger to a lizard."

Eavesdropping was strangely satisfying, and I found myself dragging my heels to prolong the experience.

Once the last of the eggrolls was complete, I turned off the stove, thoroughly wiped the counter, and tiptoed over to join them. The group had grown to a baker's dozen. A cursory scan of the room revealed a healthy menagerie of animals and their owners. I took a seat on the rug beside Daisy, one of my parents' black Labradors, and tried to catch up.

"Oysters? No, I think not. Oysters have as much self-awareness as this eggroll," an elderly woman on the sofa said. "I'm a strict vegetarian, but I consider anything without eyes to be a vegetable."

"But, come on, don't you think that all living creatures have some kind of subjective experience?" a young girl with an iguana on her head replied.

"I think you have to consider the quality of that experience. When an animal only responds by reflex, it doesn't count in my book. It does one thing when it feels comfort, and another thing when it feels discomfort. An oyster opens when it's hungry and closes when it senses a threat. It's basically an organic Boolean function."

"How is that different from your hamsters? Don't they come when you dangle grapes and run away when you stamp your feet?"

The woman reached into her handbag and retrieved a single green grape and a single red one. She placed each on a corner of the coffee table, then proceeded to place a small plastic terrarium on the other end of the table. Two hamsters

emerged with surprising boldness. The first made its way to the green grape, took a nibble, then turned 90 degrees to the red one—swallowing it up in one gulp, distending its little hamster cheeks in the process. The second approached the green grape, but instead of eating it pushed the grape around with its paws. “Baby, did you want a red one too? Momma’s got both kinds,” she cooed. A second red grape was presented, and the hamster gave it a nibble, returned to the green grape for another nibble, and ultimately opted for the green one. “That’s how. They have preferences. They are individuals. Did you see how Carlos played with his food? Did you see how quickly Santiago ate his all up?”

“Why do your hamsters have Spanish names?” a man with a large bushy moustache asked. At his feet was the largest rabbit I had ever seen in an orange-colored safety vest, nervously chewing the hem of his pants.

“No reason.”

My mother, sensing a shift in the conversation, offered up the following segue. “Okay okay okay, so we all agree some animals have some amount of, ah, self-awareness. But what about intelligence?”

The moustachioed man took this lead and ran with it. “Now what most people really mean when they say an animal is smart, is that it acts like a person. Take for example Sergeant Fuzzypants here. He’s real good at reading emotional cues and adapting his behavior to my moods. If I’m upset,

I might appear as a greater threat, but he actually comes closer to me, you know, as if to provide moral support. Ain’t that right little buddy? If he did that in the wild, he’d be eaten. I’d argue that this is a sign of his intelligence, because he’s doing something that flies in the face of his instinctive behavior. He’s learned to adapt.”

The girl with the iguana joined in, “Yeah, right on, like my iguana’s acts of mourning.”

“Your iguana mourns?” my mother asked. “I didn’t know lizards could do that.”

“I can’t be sure, but after my brother died, Littlefoot didn’t eat mangoes for about a month. And mangoes are his favorite food. He limited his diet to a small amount of leafy greens and drank very little water. It was almost like denying himself the things he enjoyed was part of his grieving process.”

The conversation continued from there, with various guests adding personal anecdotes and referencing things that they had seen on Animal Planet or the Discovery Channel. “I read a story about how monkey parents carry around the bodies of their dead babies, and how crows hold funerals for their relatives,” added a frazzly-haired woman carrying a chinchilla in a papoose.

“I’m pretty sure crows don’t hold funerals. But don’t elephants bury their dead in graveyards?” the moustachioed man asked. Everyone seemed to be genuinely engaged at this point, with the exception of a man in a black cape, who had positioned himself behind a floor lamp near

the entrance to the laundry room. My eyes were drawn to him because the light from the lamp illuminated his body while keeping his face in the shadows—that and the fact that he was wearing a cape. He stood with his heavily tattooed arms crossed and straddled some sort of birdcage covered with a towel.

“Sir, I believe you have seriously underestimated the corvid. They do in fact hold funerals,” the caped man said. I was sure at that point that he had a crow in between his legs. It just had to be a crow—or maybe a raven. “After the death of a family member, they call out and gather around the carcass in groups as large as one hundred.”

“Show us yer crow!” the lady with the chinchilla said, and reached toward the cage.

He intercepted her hand and said, “Ma’am, this isn’t a crow.”

“Well then show us your raven or whatever,” she said, reading my mind.

Ignoring her comment, he continued, “Before we consider the nature of animal minds, we need to consider the nature of animal souls. Jeremy Bentham wrote that animals are ‘never the less for being dead,’ because they have no preference for future existence. While partially true, this fails to take into account the impact that these deaths have on the living animals left behind. These are the ones who suffer.”

“So, honey, you’re saying that animals don’t fear their own deaths, only the deaths of those

they love?” the lady with the chinchilla continued, “And further, that the significance of their lives should not be weighed as a measure of the injustice or pain caused to the individual, rather to that of their friends and family?”

“Not exactly, I was simply pointing out that Bentham’s description gives an incomplete picture of the value of an animal’s life. Animal lives are connected in as many ways as human lives are. And those connections are sometimes deeper than those of their human counterparts. This is due to the fact that they aren’t attached to their ‘selves’ in the same way we are. Their egos are less developed. They live on a plane closer to that of pure consciousness where their souls can commingle. In fact, I’m certain that our animals are speaking to each other right now. It’s a state that, for humans, requires a settling of the mind through deeper forms of meditation.”

“You mean, like the ‘quiet state of least excitation’ described by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in his teachings on transcendence of the mortal coil?” the woman with the Spanish hamsters asked.

“Exactly,” he said. “When in this state, we are in fact able to commune with our animal companions. Would you care for me to demonstrate?”

“Now hang on a minute,” the moustachioed man interjected, and lifted his rabbit by a handle on the back of its harness as if it were a duffel bag.

"I don't believe in this voodoo magic stuff, son. If you're going to start practicing the black arts, Sergeant Fuzzypants and I are going to have to take our leave."

"Please allow me to explain. This is not magic. It's simply a way of tuning in to a frequency that we don't normally use. Now the first thing to understand is that animal souls, regardless of their mental ability, pass freely back and forth across the rainbow bridge from the time that they're created. It's the tether that joins the world that we know and the world beyond."

"Okay, I can get on board with that."

"When a dog's life ends, it crosses the bridge until it's ready to return, which it does as another dog—or a flounder, or a penguin, or a bear. Over time, its soul carries with it all of its experiences from all of those lives. For that reason, this distinction between the differential value of animal souls by type is moot."

"Oh I see where you're going," my mother said. "So you're saying that to hear the ancient voices, we must first quiet down our own. Like when I talk to Porkchop during morning T'ai Chi." Porkchop was our first family dog, tragically struck by an ice cream truck when I was eight.

"Please, close your eyes," the caped man instructed the group. "Breathe deeply, and focus on the heartbeat of your animal companion." Most appeared to follow his instructions, but I kept one eye open to survey the room. He had reached his hand into the cage, and seemed to be wiggling

his fingers around. "Visualize your pet in your mind, and call out his or her name telepathically. Now wait for a response."

After a period of silence, the lady with the chinchilla called out, "Mrs. Squeakers, I can hear you, baby!"

"Please use your internal voices. You need to remain in a meditative state for this to work. Once you've located your companion, I want you to ask your first question. Your question should be accompanied by an image, to aid in the animal's comprehension. Project that image in your mind." I was watching him closely now, and his fingers seemed to be wiggling even more quickly. His arm was trembling, and I struggled to see what was going on inside the cage. "Now, imagine the animal responding. Listen for his or her voice. Prepare yourself for any images that he or she might be sending."

That's when I saw it. It was about nine inches long and covered in a sparse coat of brightly colored feathers. At the tip was a black hooked beak. A small tongue hung limply to one side. Two pale claws dangled below. He was squeezing a dead parrot like some kind of stress ball, and I couldn't help but imagine its eyes bulging with each squeeze.

I clamped my open eye shut and tried to play along, nervously patting Daisy who was still seated beside me. I chanted to myself, "Dais ... Dais ... Dais ... Dais ... what do we do here, Dais ... how do we get ourselves out of this ... we've gotta protect mom ... Daisy ... Daisy ... what do we do?"

Suddenly I saw a dog's face rise from the mist, and a voice say sweetly, "We dance." Images flashed in the darkness—a marbled rubber ball, a pterodactyl swooping through a canopy of trees, an apple pie covered in ants, a snakeskin boot. Then, other childlike voices started coming through.

"Feel the living principle of the universe, my brother."

"Bring yourself into harmony with the cosmic flow."

"We are but different manifestations of a primordial energy."

After a period, the sounds in the room began to blend together, and I could feel the presence of hundreds if not thousands of beings around me. The room seemed to brighten and as I looked upward in my mind's eye, I could see a glorious red-plumed bird rising from a glowing volcano.

A warm lick of my hand brought me back into my own body. I could feel Daisy beside me, her hot breath against my leg, her tail wagging behind. I paused before opening my eyes, unsure of what the room would reveal. The remnants of the pile of eggrolls that I'd prepared were encircled by the meeting's animal participants: four dogs, a rabbit, two hamsters, a chinchilla, an iguana, a ferret, two cats—and the dead parrot was perched atop it. I blinked my eyes, and they began to eat. And as they ate, their movements began to synchronize. The hamsters that flanked the parrot undulated in perfect bilateral

symmetry. I could no longer tell where the chinchilla ended and the ferret began. The animals continued to meld into some sort of maximalist chimaera until the only face that remained was that of the lifeless parrot. Increasingly worried that I was in violation of some code of etiquette, I made a move toward the table to join them, but stopped myself, concerned that I had waited too long to do so—given that the eaters had already been absorbed into the homunculus.

When the pile was nearly exhausted, the homunculus rotated so that the parrot head was facing my direction. The hamster-shaped protrusions at each side turned to prop up the head, and it spoke in a low but clear tone, "We live, we laugh, we give love, we receive love, we eat eggrolls, we die, and we are reborn. This is the fundamental nature of sentient life. We are all but manifestations of the Glorious Phoenix. With each action, we expand the universal consciousness, and with them we deepen and grow the beauty that we share together as a wholeness. This is our privilege and this is our burden."

Once the proclamation was made and the eggrolls all eaten, the animals pulled themselves apart as they had come together. Daisy took the parrot in her mouth and returned it to the caped man's hand. She turned to me, and an image of the hamsters materialized in my mind's eye. I quietly rose from my position, lifted the hamsters gingerly and returned them to their cage. The remaining animals assumed their original posi-

tions. Before taking hers, Daisy shot me another glance and a second image appeared before me—the cover of Diana Ross’s 1970 album, *Everything is Everything*. Overcome with gratefulness for what she had invited me to witness, I agreed that Diana Ross would be a fitting soundtrack for the evening’s revelations and retreated to the basement to seek out the record player. It was the least that I could do to repay her kindness.

When I returned, the others were roused. Owners and pets embraced, and we danced our pants off until the early morning light.

*“Doobedood’ndoo doobedood’ndoobe
doobedood’ndoo
Oh, doobedood’ndoobe doobedood’ndoobe
doobedood’ndoo
Oh, doobedood’ndoobe doobedood’ndoobe
doobedood’ndoo
I love you, yes I do. Doobedood’ndoo.”*

Adrian Wong is a Chicago-born, Hong Kong-based artist with training in psychology whose research-based and often collaborative practice involves installation, video, and sculpture.

(Yeo Wei Wei

Innocence

The book arrived yesterday. I propped it up on my desk after tearing open the padded envelope. One of the perks of working from home: when the postman delivers registered mail, I am at home to sign for it. People who work in offices have their online shopping delivered to their work addresses. I have friends who do this but honestly, I don't think it's right. Boundaries exist for good reason. I wouldn't check my personal e-mail or Facebook account at work. The staff room is open concept and some of the teachers, like Mrs. Shem and Mdm. Tee, they are always prowling around for something to talk about—all the better when it's something they know nothing about.

I did not waste any time opening the package. I knew it was Jeff's father's book and I wanted to see it right away. Now if I was still teaching at the school, the book would have been delivered in a sealed envelope, which would have concealed it, but come on, the shape would have given everything away. A book in an envelope—you couldn't mistake it for anything else. Some things, the way they look, it's obvious what's what. I'm so glad I left the school.

What would Jeff think if he saw me now? After the initial surprise, and perhaps shock, that thoughtful expression might appear on his face, a look that reminded me of chimpanzees in animal documentaries, sitting with their legs drawn close to their bodies in the shade of a tree or perching on a branch, lost in their thoughts as the camera lens zooms in on them. When they return the

camera's stare, that faraway look in their eyes remains. Eyes that see but also don't see.

What would Jeff think of this, me buying his father's book, what would he have to say about it? *I am going to read it from cover to cover this time*, I'd say to him, circling the contents page with a finger. *I have so much to say about it, can't we meet for a drink? I won't be able to have any wine, but I could have a mocktail.* It would have to be a Saturday afternoon, which would make it more casual, more possible. *We could go to that place you like.*

Being stared at by him, no, I wouldn't mind it one bit.

Jeff broke up with me eight months and two days ago. In one-hundred and twenty-three days it would be a year. *We are too young to be in an exclusive relationship*, he said. *Monogamy is for the deluded or the idealistic.* I think he meant that he was too young, but I did not correct him. When we met, I was thirty-six, he was twenty-eight though he could easily pass for a twenty-year-old. Jeff would probably still look like a young man when he reaches his forties or fifties. His mother Auntie Mei is sixty-four and looks twenty years younger. On the day he told me, *it's over, this is not my kind of thing*, I had been waiting for him to come home because I too had something I needed to tell him. But I could tell he had something on his mind and he would not like it if I made a fuss. As usual I put aside what I wanted to say and let him go first. I can read him like an open book.

The truth is I got distracted. I like to look at him when his face takes on a purposeful expression,

like a pastor about to give a sermon that he had spent a long time preparing. Jeff cleared his throat. He said it was too soon for us to become one of those couples, that things had come to a plateau too quickly. *There're so many places I have not yet seen, I want to travel, learn new languages, live abroad, swim in all the world's rivers, lakes, seas.* He asked me if I knew the Johnny Cash song "The Wanderer." I shook my head and watched mutely as he stuffed his white cotton CK V-neck tees, jeans, boxers, and socks into a duffle bag. He came back another day in the morning for his books and guitar. I knew that he had come back to my place when I got home from school that day. I counted the butts in the ash-tray. There were four. Misshapen things that were of no more use to anyone.

Last week I found one of Jeff's white tees sandwiched inside a stack of white tops. When I texted him to ask if we could meet so that I could return it to him, there was no answer. I had thought there was a slight chance he might reply, I know how particular he is about his personal belongings, he wouldn't like that he had left something behind. But I can't say I was surprised by his stubborn silence. Since the break-up, he has not taken any of my calls nor replied to my text messages and e-mails.

I had never met anyone like Jeff before. *Older women are cool*, he said, *comfortable in their own skin, not needy and clingy.* We met at ceramics class. I stopped going after the first lesson, but that didn't have anything to do with Jeff. I signed up

for the course because I collect animal figurines and I thought it might be nice to make some myself. Clay shouldn't be all that expensive, and rolling the dough, shaping the heads and bodies of animals, sounded fun. I read somewhere that pottery is good for de-stressing. My collection is displayed on the TV console in the living room. I wipe the animals clean with a dust cloth every Saturday: two elephants, two rabbits, two monkeys, two tigers, a sleeping pig. Sometimes I alter their positions. The rabbits could be crouching next to the pig one week and the following week, they might be a few finger steps away from the tiger and tigress. I sometimes get the feeling that the animals have become fast friends, preys and predators amicably confounding the laws of the jungle.

The ceramics instructor said he spent a good part of his life studying with renowned artists in Yingge in Taiwan, Kyoto in Japan. He showed us bowls and teacups in red, yellow, and green glazes, fired recently by his students. Amongst them were a number of his latest creations. He passed them around the class and asked if we could tell which ones were his. The instructor said that these bowls and cups could be used for eating and drinking. I like that idea very much. The ordinary usefulness of something handmade and nice to look at.

The first thing we had to do was to put a rolled-out circle of dough on a banding wheel and poke a stylus at the center while it spun. I was focusing very hard, trying to find the right spot, the right moment. Everyone else found their center.

I saw a swirl of lines as the pale face of the dough went round and round. A throbbing at my temples started, I was squinting so hard.

There were five of us in the class, two men and three women. One of the men, the one who correctly identified the pieces made by the instructor, came to my rescue. I noticed him because he reminded me of Sorimachi Takashi, the lead in the “dorama” *Beach Boys*. He speared at the center of my dough with his stylus without hesitation. Then he leaned back and slowed down the spinning of the banding wheel with one hand. *I didn’t think it would be so difficult*, I said. *I thought we would be making shapes, like animals*. He looked at me. There was something soft in that look. During the break he asked for my number. The next morning there was a text message: *Hey lina, wanna come to an exh opening on fri?*

At the opening Jeff introduced me to Kenneth, his elder brother, the owner of the gallery. He was an older version of Jeff, tattoo-less, less tanned, neater hair. I also met Auntie Chiu Yen and Auntie Mei that night. *The power behind the throne*, Jeff said, laughing as he draped his arms around their shoulders. He called them by their first names, which was why I was very surprised later that evening when I learned that Auntie Mei was his mother. She was tall and slim, and there was something about her eyes and round glasses that reminded me of John Lennon. Auntie Chiu Yen had a round face and long glossy hair. She was dressed in a Punjabi tunic and pants ensemble and wore dangling silver earrings. Were her clothes from Little India? I did not

know anyone Chinese and my age who shopped for clothes in Little India, let alone someone from my mother’s generation.

It was my first time at an exhibition opening. Actually, I don’t think I had been inside an art gallery before. The paintings in the show were very different from what little art I had known up till then. After I started going out with Jeff, I went to so many exhibitions I learned the right sort of things to say at openings. Many people smiled knowingly, I realized, without actually saying what they knew or did not know. The knowing smile is useful for all kinds of art. But especially abstract painting.

At any moment I looked at him that evening, Jeff was talking. Talking, laughing, drinking. Raising his eyebrows and smiling mischievously when our eyes met. I looked away quickly but when I turned, he was still looking in my direction, smiling. He seemed to know everyone, and people rotated around him like concentric circles revolving around a point, the pivot of all their attention.

When almost everyone had left, and Kenneth and the two aunts were in the small office, Jeff steered me toward a painting. *Isn’t this mindblowing?* I looked at the white squares that resembled stencilled marks. The paint was uneven, giving the whole thing an air of being unfinished but I knew this could not be so, this was a work of art hanging in an art gallery and the small circular red sticker on the label next to it meant that someone was going to pay a lot of money for it.

What do you see that I can't see? What was in the mind of the painter of the white squares? When did he know he had completed the work? How did he know he had solved the equation? I had all these questions at the tip of my tongue, but before I could do anything about them, Jeff had wrapped his arms around me. His white tee blocked my view of the white squares. He bent down and kissed me on the lips. Then he drew back and looked at me intently. A look I learned to interpret as well as his enigmatic chimpanzee look. That night I lay in bed, looking again and again at the text message he sent after he drove me home close to midnight. *Sweet dreams, beautiful,* it said.

We always went to my place because he lived at home with his family. I liked seeing his books, his guitar, his clothes in my apartment. He was writing songs for a solo album. *My boyfriend? He's a musician,* I said when one of the teachers asked after she saw him coming to pick me up after CCA on Saturdays. When I came home after work, I often found him sitting in the living room with the curtains drawn, as still and sullen as the smoke-tainted air. The ashtray at the center of the coffee table was a mound of ash and cigarette butts. It had become my job to empty it in the morning before going to work.

Do you think you could quit smoking? I asked him once.

Why? What's the problem, woman? Didn't you say you found it sexy?

I worry about you, and it's not good for ...

Jeff left the room to take a call, so I don't think he heard the rest of my sentence. Why did I think it would last? I saw the hand of destiny at work when there was really only my own desire. Desire and hope. And belief. The first time Jeff noticed my clay animals, he told me he also had a pig figurine. It was as stout as mine but it stood on all four legs, eyes wide open. *Mine is ready for action while yours is blissfully sleeping its life away,* he said. I said something like my pig had been waiting to be roused all these years. It was stupid and embarrassing. He laughed at most of the things I said but he didn't laugh when I said this.

Everyone thought we made an odd pair. I was clueless about art and he didn't seem to care. Before me his girlfriends were all arty types. One of them was a poet. I didn't even know we had poets in Singapore. He laughed. *You're cute,* he said, *You're the cutest Maths teacher on this island.* He read poems to me sometimes. After a couple of beers, it was hard to stop my eyelids from drooping. He would tap my cheeks lightly to rouse me or tickle me until my sides hurt and both of us rolled around on the floor, scuffling like puppies until he put his hands under my skirt and we kissed and forgot what or where we were.

On Sundays he went home to have dinner with his family. One day he asked me to join them. In the car he told me about his father. An art historian who died when he was only forty. Died in a car accident. Kenneth was ten and Jeff was eight. We were on the PIE, Jeff was staring at the windscreen

and the road. I had never seen him look so miserable before. *They've come a long way, my mother and Auntie Chiu Yen.* I could tell he had thought about this moment for a long time. He had thought about the words, the place to release them, but most of all, he had thought about me. What he could reveal to me, what he could allow himself to say.

He did not say another word for the rest of that drive. We reached his home, a bungalow in a neighborhood of houses with large gardens, trimmed lawns, and long driveways.

Jeff's home reminded me of a museum except there was a delicious aroma of stir-fried sliced garlic and shallots. Javanese carvings in the living room. Oil paintings and vertical scrolls of Chinese calligraphy. *Come, sit here next to me, Auntie Mei beckoned, dinner is almost ready.*

I sat between her and Auntie Chiu Yen. *Jeff's sisters are studying overseas, Auntie Chiu Yen said. At the Courtauld, Auntie Mei said, twins, but they don't look alike. They look like their father, Auntie Chiu Yen said. Yes, Auntie Mei said, smiling, they have his nose and his mouth.* The Skype ringtone sounded from the PC in a corner of the living room and Auntie Mei rushed to it, calling out to Auntie Chiu Yen, *Hurry, Yen, it's the girls.* Auntie Mei sighed. She pointed at the dishes on the Lazy Susan. *Please, help yourself to the food before it goes cold. Jeff, tell your friend to eat.* She turned to me with an apologetic smile, *the twins usually call at this time. They will say two words to their mother and me and then run off to continue their busy lives.*

About a month after that dinner at Jeff's home, I found a piece of paper tucked inside Jeff's father's book on my desk. It was Jeff's handwriting, an irregular, almost illegible scrawl:

You hear these stories from time to time, how the man was devoted to his wife and family, a Christian churchgoing family, the boys singing Sunday School songs, the wife baking fruit cake for the Christmas charity bake. Then one day the man is killed in a car accident. It's all over for him. But for the wife and for the other woman, the man's sudden passing is an outage that confronts them when the lights come back on and there they are, bereft and bewildered, the world seemingly unchanged. But for them and for the man's children, it is an estranged world. For nothing will ever be what it was before.

Because they have bodies they have no choice but to carry on. Food, water, rest. It was at the wake that the wife learnt of the other woman. She saw her own expression on the other woman's face. Shattered porcelain glued back together. The cracks and smoothness of silent stoicism. By her side, two girls in school uniforms. Blue pinafores. The wife recognizes the shape of their noses, their mouths, fired from the same moulds as her husband's, unmistakable. The girls clutch their mother's hands tightly, one on the right, one on the left, swaying to and fro, heels to the balls of their feet.

Words, uncomplicated and utterly forgettable words, pass between the two women. They face each other like the banks of the River Styx. Their thoughts pass from one to the other like branches that sway and touch and move apart, their leaves shivering in the breeze.

The man's wife takes them in, the mistress and her daughters. They live in the same house and they work in the art gallery that the wife starts, using the works in the man's private collection. They raise the children as children of the same family, the wife's two boys, the mistress's two girls. Years go by. From time to time, a memory of the man returns, a fragment of his voice saying something, the words inchoate, or an image even more indistinct than the mist. But for the most part, he is no longer in the picture.

How people must have talked when Auntie Chiu Yen showed up at the wake! When Auntie Mei and Auntie Chiu Yen faced each other on opposite sides of the casket, how many eyes lapped up the spectacle and how many tongues loosened in breathy undertones, undeterred by the piped-in strains of Christian hymns and the energetic shelling of watermelon seeds and peanuts at the plastic-sheeted tables of the wake?

These images have become more vivid in the past five months after I left my teaching job and started giving tuition lessons at home. They come sometimes when my mind wanders as I wait for a student to finish solving the problems on his Ten Year Series worksheet. I have wondered about going to the gallery to see Auntie Mei and Auntie Chiu Yen. But why should they remember me? I am one of Jeff's ex-girlfriends, one in a series. That dinner at their home was the second and last time I saw them. How could I expect anything from them even if they were both mothers to him, how could I when I am almost a stranger

to them? But ... but Lina, you are carrying something that ties you to them, says the other thought, protesting weakly as I shoo it away.

After dinner that Sunday night, Jeff showed me into his father's study. There were books everywhere, catalogs mostly. I noticed that one of them had a cover image that looked familiar. *Don't you remember?* Jeff said, *we drove up to KL one weekend and we saw that painting by Piyadasa at the Balai.* He had explained to me then that it was a famous conceptual work. I liked it the moment I saw it not because he said it was famous. The painting reminded me of a diagram. All those labels and arrows! Even the signature is labeled! The different stages of a work of art, the processes of creating a painting and putting it in a museum, neatly mapped and labeled. Back then I said: *I like the artist's message.* I said it sincerely, in all innocence. *What's that?* Jeff asked, stifling a yawn, *it's not as straightforward as it looks, you know.* Another yawn. *God, I need a drink and a nap after all that driving.*

I borrowed his father's book and kept it propped up on my desk so that I could look at the cover every day. It became something of an inside joke between us. *I see you are reading chapter 3,* "Malaysian Identity through Art," Jeff would say. *Very insightful and fascinating,* I would reply. *But not as fascinating as the cover, right?* he said, poking me in the ribs.

If Jeff were here now, if he were to see me reading my copy of the book, I doubt he would dare poke me in the ribs. I would see on his face a look I

have not yet had any occasion to see. Of course he would notice my transformation straightaway. The ripening roundness of me that protrudes into the air, stretching his white cotton tee like a watermelon. *It can be useful, this bump*, I say to him as I rest the book on its slope. My baby's grandfather's book. *What happened?* Jeff might blurt out. *Life happened*, I would say. I like to think that I am smiling as I speak to him. But I don't know. I might just close my eyes, put the book away, and sleep for a while before I get up to face the day.

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The Chalet

HOLLYWOOD, CA — We entered through the back; but the back was the front. Situated on an inconspicuous building's drab rear facade edging a big, mostly vacant parking lot off Hollywood Blvd ("so LA"), the unmarked doorway was typically traced by a rotating huddle of darkly dressed smokers. One night a week, for the approximately yearlong term that it existed, The Chalet brought us together.

Access was limited and rather secretive (invitation only), like its abbreviated lifespan. Little can be said, at least for the time being, about what happened at those gatherings. It can be said that a certain (mostly art world) set of people shared space—nocturnal, architectural—and that very particular space was concept-driven with every material aspect thoughtfully and painstakingly designed. Often, evenings there were punctuated by some kind of performance. There was always plenty to drink. Even as it comes to an end, I remain uneasy revealing its precise location; I will not. So much about this place, this project, this durational event, this elaborate socio-aesthetic experiment is still resolutely cagey.

It is dark out, then, in more ways than one, and it will stay dark.

Inside the hidden lounge, cavernous like a lair but vertical like a shaft, The Chalet's entrance hall and pair of conjoined rooms had dark walls—respectively, red velvet curtains, cobalt plaster, and wood panels stained a deep green. Heavy

white oak beams buttressed the space throughout, forming the interior's basic modular building block and the unifying structural element in this scheme designed by architect Edwin Chan. As a sonic environment, it had the layered, buzzing sound of a party: a bubbling flow of happily sauced voices over piano keys being tickled in the blue room. The lighting was dim, dramatized by strategic placement. The aquarium-in-the-round, staged as a barren, alien dreamscape by Pierre Huyghe—and containing a big floating rock, a bevy of creepy, spindly spider crabs, and a larger hermit crab with fat, thorny pincers housed inside a sculpted silver shell—was lit like a beacon or fireplace, radiant in the middle of the green room. And when the feeding of the crabs occurred (a kind of ritualized nightly custom, consecrated by the host), a huge confetti cloud of tiny brine shrimp caught the light like a storm of snowflakes. Producing occasions to study the charming moth-nature of humans, such communal moments of electricity and illumination amidst general dimness may in fact constitute The Chalet's central theme and metaphor.

Aspirational in ambition and reach, The Chalet appears, on the whole, like an epic exercise in groping. Not least of all groping for—or stubbornly evading—definition. It is a club or a weekly club night, a lounge with a sense of shared hospitality, a speakeasy or salon, a public art installation or hangout as temporary private museum (each room showcasing a specially

made work of art), a very high-end community center for a revolving elite, a series of celebrations and cocktail parties, and a collaborative social enterprise to be filed under the heading “relational aesthetics” in the subsection labeled “swanky.”

But, as a large-scale enterprise that spanned several years of planning and acute financial stress, The Chalet is essentially defined by Piero Golia, its creator and sole driving force who has renegade, loose-cannon, visionary tendencies as an artist hardwired to think and operate exclusively in grand, even operatic terms. Golia works on a scale that is equal to or larger than life, believing (perhaps anachronistically) that art should have lasting effects on individual lives and historical trajectories. He continually affirms the existence of heroic potential. As though life could be a fantasy, a movie jointly directed by Fellini, Herzog, Kubrick, and Lynch, Golia's projects yearn for ambience and awe, intensity and immensity, a sur-reality and an elevated cultural playing field. Consummate host that he is, he seeks to gift wonder and magic to the far-reaching and growing circle of friends he gathers—his public.

In project after project, and again in The Chalet, Golia poses the present as a future history to be written. The perpetually impending past-tense structures his present: mythology, legacy, posterity, and lore are always implicit motivating forces. His premium is placed on romantic, extraordinary, monumental gestures

engineered to outlive the fleeting lifetimes of mere mortals. In a kind of reverse-Borgesian twist, flipping the Argentine's preference for writing a review of an imagined book over writing the book being imagined, The Chalet seems to have been conceived and constructed primarily in order to *have existed*, in order to be talked about—to pass from person to person in the process of becoming history, or fairytale. I rarely weigh the historical significance of gatherings I'm in the midst of attending, but Golia's obsession with the idea of collaboratively orchestrating a real-life legend can be contagious.

Now that it is over and taken apart, portions of its postmortem interior will go on museum display. Perhaps The Chalet will reappear later in another locale. Some of us who were present may retain a memento or relic, like one of the solid silver coins minted and engraved to gain entry into The Chalet. But, henceforth, anecdote—more than direct experience or contact with physical architecture—will be The Chalet's main medium. Cumulative retellings will emphasize particular things over others, like the time a high school marching band crammed inside and blasted brass, or a petting zoo came to visit, or an old magician made the rounds dealing tricks, or a dominatrix held court, or those Polynesian dancers danced. Ghost-like, it will circulate as memory and secondhand description. Ghost-like, it will grow strongest in the shadows and thrive in mystery. And if all goes according to plan, its

surviving aspects—material and immaterial—will gradually come to prove the existence and potency of *historia abscondita*, that obscure and elusive notion about which Nietzsche once wrote, “There is no way of telling what may yet become part of history. Perhaps the past is still essentially undiscovered!”

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(Ho Rui An

Outside the World Interior or
the Light on the Writing Desk

*Write to please just one person.
If you open a window and make love to the world,
so to speak, your story will get pneumonia.*
—Kurt Vonnegut, *Bagombo Snuff Box*

I'm writing this before a window. The world outside, New York City at midday Sunday, is a torpid, hungover haze of unhurried traffic, late-opening shutters, and the lifeless drone of the neighbor's air-conditioning unit. The slightly raised window panel lets in the last of the heady summer breeze as it keeps out the city's avian intruders. Or so I thought. Behind me, outside another window, a pigeon has nestled itself on the ledge, issuing its plump, fulsome coos into my room. I shut the window; the bird flees in a gusty flutter.

But there is yet another window, one more immediately before me, to which I must address myself and in which I await my essay to miraculously complete itself. The light from one window lands upon the other, adding its sheen to the flat, unsparing whiteness of the barely written page. It commands my gaze only because I'm failing to write, suspended mid-sentence by a word that does not come. I switch restlessly between windows—between the window opening onto the street and the window on my screen, but also between the windows *within* the screen, the nine other tabs besides the Google Docs untouched since an hour ago. I skip, sweep, scroll, finding relief in such fenestral distractions, which scatter my attention into the ambient, the luminosities of the screen from within and without.

The light has a certain airiness, the air, a certain brightness. Contrary to all appearances, this is not an

exercise in “inspiration.” The air here that is light—or *ether*, after *aether*, the world of light the Greeks imagined to be above the clouds—is not so much that absolute exteriority which is taken in as that which takes us *out*. In taking to the air, we are taken out of ourselves, yet at the same time returned to ourselves—not quite inspired, but *ventilated*.

I begin on return, on return from the air that displaces me as I strive toward it, rendering it impossible to measure my distance from it. This impossible relation with that which exceeds me inaugurates in me the relentless need to write despite myself: I write because I cannot make out distance, but since I cannot make out distance, I cannot write, *and therefore must*. Or at least, I try. To write, to create, is always to begin again, to begin again from the window that opens and opens one onto the exterior.

What the writer or more generally the artist needs is then not so much a room as a window of one's own. Indeed, one can be sure that the room that Virginia Woolf claims as the necessary precondition for writing to flourish is most certainly a room with a window. Woolf herself looked through it onto the buzzing commotion of London and then back onto the blank sheet on the table where she contemplated the problem of “women and fiction.” The room of one's own, with a window, was how a woman could carve her way out of domesticity within its very architecture.

Windows today are everywhere, no longer the preserve of the wealthy who in eighteenth-century England had to brick them up or pay a tax. The trouble, however, is the double phenomenon of the increasing ubiquity of windows, both real and virtual, and what appears to be

their persistent failure to ventilate—a condition resulting from a mix of material, climatological, and technological determinants. In the glass architecture that dominates the financial centers of the world, windows have become walls. Their shiny surfaces deflect the insuperable externalities to which they would otherwise point. But this is not a new situation. The immunological imperative driving it was already audible in Woolf's impassioned call.

Bust Your Windows: The World Interior

If there's a window in Woolf's proverbial room, the window is closed. The room of one's own is an enclosure of silence, uninterrupted by the barking dogs and meddlesome relations that plague the common sitting room. Here, one can write calmly instead of in rage.¹ Woolf's window does not open onto the outside. Instead, it works to preserve and nourish the interior by at once incorporating what it needs from the exterior—air and light—and banishing from consciousness the autonomy of this exterior. If rage is that “total expressivity” that works not just to get something out of your system, but to get out of the system itself,² the calm and security of Woolf's private, bourgeois haven operates instead to direct the system inward. It *interiorizes*, generates the sense that everything expressed and that can be expressed is always already inside the bubbled sphere.

Such was Woolf's latent spatio-political conservatism—unsurprising given how symptomatic it was of her time. The feminist author wrote in an age when the disenchantment of the sky and the consolidation of the orb as the model for the world was giving rise to what Peter Sloterdijk identifies as “the world

interior of capital.” For Sloterdijk, this interiorization of the infinity of the world was embodied by the imperial emporium that was the Crystal Palace. The “prophetic building form of the nineteenth century,” Joseph Paxton's glass edifice presaged today's “integral, experience-oriented, popular capitalism” in which any sense of an outside is absorbed within “a fully calculated interior.” No longer a frontier from which to access an incalculable exterior, the contemporary window demarcates “an enclosure so spacious that one might never have to leave it.”³

Inspiration characterizes a relationality to the outside wherein it is in part appropriated by the inside. Interiorization is driven by a much more rapacious logic. Through a simultaneous expansion *and* finitization it produces a container capable of holding everything but is itself contained by nothing. All possibility and necessity of relating inside to outside is gone: the world interior is an *absolute* interior.

Within this paradigm, aesthetic modernity was defined by the obsessive construction of interiorities in the spirit of a cosmic agoraphobia. The very effort at addressing oneself to an outside became a retreat into a closed system. While postmodernity purported to rupture these insular spheres, it rather liquidated the aesthetic object to maximize its pliability and mobility within the expanded interior of global capital. The windows have been busted, escape secured, but the outside into which one exits is simply the greater interior. Within this pantheistic space where morphological instability is valued over stasis and boundedness, a multiplicity of new, customized windows offer

themselves to the “flexibilized human being.”⁴ These are not immunological devices but apertures of exteriorization *within* the world interior.

Everyone is a contortionist within the capitalist cosmos, ready to bend one’s contours and convictions for new commodities, human capital expansions, body enhancements, and spiritual elevations in the form of Bikram Yoga classes. The plethora of windows enables travel, but only inside the limits of the great calmed space: “To go away, one no longer needs to go outside.”⁵ Perhaps this is how we need to recast Kurt Vonnegut’s seemingly agoraphobic call to shut the windows. The punk prophet of dystopian times knew better—the “one person,” the singular figure to which his writing addressed itself was neither friend nor kin, but the extraterrestrial, the figure of absolute alterity that is truly out of this world, to which the window cannot open. When the world outside the window is no more than a saturated interior, one could do better by returning to the blank page.

The Floating World

Today, this blank page is likely to be a window on a screen. Unlike the window in your wall, we can resize and move it around, and overlap it with other windows. There is a tendency of late, veering toward technological utopianism, that considers the “virtual” as having such powers of transport that it seems our only way out of the world interior. The claims in favor of the virtual window have been quite remarkable: “post-perspectival,” “post-cinematic,” “post-televisual.”⁶ I want to take a moment to rethink this exceptionalism that is often bestowed, especially in the art

world, on forms of digital media and practices. First, let’s consider how the much vaunted capacity of the Internet to transport us beyond our material and temporal immobility often amounts to little more than circuitous loops within a dynamized sphere. These movements come not without severe implications for life within the material, climatologically determined world, especially when the infinity of the cosmos is supplanted by the vast interior of the Internet. By virtue of a presumed all-inclusivity, this new digital interior institutes a forgetting of the outside and the finite material base insulating it from this outside and yet runs on its absurd generosity. Just as we consign to oblivion the global disposal site that is the atmosphere as we dart across the globe on barrels of carbon fuel, the basal material limit of the digital sphere recedes from consciousness as it goes from being a clunky, groaning beige box in a climate-controlled room to a touchscreen device of pellicular thinness.

Within certain circles, when artists speak of the Internet, they invoke an inestimable expanse that not only contains everything that has already been made in the world but also everything that *can* be made. “The Internet is the greatest poem ever written, unreadable mostly because of its size,” decrees poet and digital archivist Kenneth Goldsmith. “We are drowning in language. The best poets are those who can best repurpose that language, reframing it as poetry.”⁷ To create, one no longer begins at the window opening onto the immeasurable heights of the sky but at a window that is already filled, crammed with the spam of contemporary life. Because of the Internet, Goldsmith claims, we no longer have to endure another poem describing the way the light falls on the

writing desk as a metaphor for someone's cancer operation. Quite the unrelenting heliophobe, the self-described uncreative writer eschews the brutality of solar exposure for the foetal bliss of oceanic immersion. To enter the Internet, for him, is to dive into the amniotic riches of an all-inclusive orb, to recover, as McLuhan calls it, "the multidimensional space orientation of the 'primitive.'"⁸

Immersion is a seductive concept. It evokes the sense of being in a vast and continuous space, a world of plenitude and availability that can be easily absorbed into oneself. Exposure, on the other hand, is a state of being subjected to that which you cannot master and yet cannot do without (and thus the vulnerability in every barefaced attempt to gain self-exposure). Given this, it is understandable how tempting it is to think of the Internet as a galaxy of open-source code that can be readily constellated into apps for any number of real world problems. Looking at how we are leading our lives, the metaphor is not too far-fetched. We live in a culture where the conditioned reflex in response to any intractable undertaking is to look up an app for it or if not, to make one. To that extent, apps are very much like hacks—ways of getting out of what were previously thought to be closed systems. The app is not a thing in itself, but remediates things *in themselves*, that is, in carrying the thing it remediates a thing's ontological condition—making it no longer a thing. Or to apply what Alexander Galloway says of the computer, the app "is not *of* an ontological condition, it is *on* that condition."⁹ But all this rests upon the assumption that the app itself is not bounded by some form of material finitude, as

if the app exists, quite literally, in the air, outside the confines of both the physical device and the economic structures responsible for its manufacture. Indeed, one can use an app to hack a transport system, to hack the meat market, to hack another app, and even to hack the device itself, but only to the extent that the device and its supporting industry maintains a minimal unity that can support its hacking by the app it so magnanimously hosts. The problem with app culture today is its tendency to infinitize itself despite its internment within a larger, invisible system such that the only way to make up for the deficiencies of one app is to make another, all the while keeping its techno-structural precondition intact.

Consumers today are made to become producers even as the means of production defining the material base remains out of their reach. This material base refers not just to the physical handheld device but also the global network of data centers constantly working to aggregate and re-stabilize the hyper-animated sphere. We may make the data, but it is they who control the metadata.¹⁰ Soaked within the wonderful world of data, we do not see what's outside of it. When the world inside the window has become its own cosmos, the world outside cannot be seen as anything but a void.

Of course, this structural self-concealment is a condition from which the ur-window that is the architectural window is not excluded. After all, windows never purely ventilate. They also frame a view that cannot be taken as given, for its very giving to be viewed is itself produced by a complex of economic, political, and at times militant forces. In Eyal Weizman's reading of the fenestral con-

figurations in the architecture of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, for instance, the room with a view becomes an architecture of surveillance through which the settlers—most of whom could have indeed been seduced by the possibility of great natural vistas—are drafted as unofficial security agents for the state simply by looking out their windows.¹¹ So the architectural window is definitely not immune to absorption into existing optical power matrices.

There remains a crucial distinction between the architectural window and the technological window. The latter is a *surface*, or at least, it strives to dematerialize itself. It becomes this free-floating access to a world without a material thickness that must be contained by a larger world. Contrast this with the architectural window that always involves an implicit awareness of our inhabitation in physical space and vulnerability to what's immediately outside. Etymologically speaking, the window, from the Old Norse *vindauga* (from *vindr* [wind] and *auga* [eye]) is that which airs the eye. But as I type into the window of my MacBook (not, fortunately or unfortunately, an Air), a silence sticks out: that of air issuing from the once blustering cooling vents.

The window itself has melted into air.

Fenestration, Fenêtre, Finistri

In Chris Kraus's *Summer of Hate*, the protagonist, Catt Dunlop, a visiting professor and art critic styled after Kraus herself, shuttles between LA, where she teaches and peddles critical discourse in the art world, and Albuquerque, where she makes a killing in real estate converting slum housing. Sick of the art world, the land-

scape of poverty and barrenness in the New Mexico city becomes her existential escape, where she roughs it out with the "real world" that theory tries, but always fails, to keep up with. Yet no matter how far she ventures, she finds herself still trapped within the interior she thought she had left. A drive through the abandoned tourist parks scattered around the state becomes a *dérive*, invoking the erratic walks that Debord and friends took in Paris in the fifties, "minus the pleasure."¹² Like most of Kraus's previous works, the novel is a tale of cosmic claustrophobia, in which every attempt at getting out of a system cannot but derive its bearings from that same system.

But then there's Paul Garcia, the ex-con and recovered alcoholic with whom Catt falls in love. Paul, who shares none of her cultural coordinates, is her outside, the real life that stares her in the face. Paul is so *present*, she thinks, ever so direct, unmediated, raw. Coming from outside her closed sphere where everything translates into each other, Paul is just Paul, unrelatable to anything but himself. Because of him, when she returns to her office in UCLA, she finds herself unable to write. It's an essay on postmodern architecture, on windows (or fenestration, *fenêtre*, *finistri*; she's looked them all up), but all she can think of is how perversely rich everyone she knows in LA is.

But write she must and eventually does, for Paul is now her "one person," the singular being she writes to, talks to, loves, fucks. In the end, Paul leaves her, tells her he's not feeling it. He storms into her life as quickly as he departs, evacuating a part of her in his wake. A few days later, he calls her again. Kraus's stories teach us that though the windows may be sealed, the outside

always finds a way to break in. After all, the Crystal Palace combusted under the fury of a hateful and hated sun. But perhaps to begin, one should not have chosen preservation over exposure, accumulation over expenditure. One should have begun at the beginning that is the finite body at its maximal nakedness with respect to the sun. We must not abhor this vulnerability, for living is ventilation, always already an airing of the self. And it is only when hate becomes love do we learn not to keep the windows shut.

Ho Rui An is an artist and writer based in New York and Singapore.)

Notes

1
Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1977), p. 76.

2
Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*, trans. Mario Wenning (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 9.

3
Peter Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2013), p. 175.

4
Ibid., p. 210.

5
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6
Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), p. 194.

7
Kenneth Goldsmith, "Kenneth Goldsmith's manifesto for poetry now," *Dazed Digital*, accessed September 21, 2014, www.dazed-digital.com/artsandculture/article/20894/1/kenneth-goldsmiths-manifesto-for-poetry-now.

8
Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), p. 56.

9
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10
Melissa Gregg and McKenzie Wark, "Courting Vectoralists: An Interview with McKenzie Wark on the 10 Year Anniversary of A Hacker Manifesto," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, accessed September 21, 2014, www.lareviewofbooks.org/interview/courting-vectoralists-interview-mckenzie-wark-10-year-anniversary-hacker-manifesto.

11
Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), p. 134.

12
Chris Kraus, *Summer of Hate* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012), p. 153.

(Clifford Irving

A Toast

Clifford Irving is a writer whose books span a career of more than a half-century; Gabriel Lester was the MC of The Clifford Irving Show in Paris in 2009. Irving sent the following toast for Gabriel Lester and Martine Vledder's wedding in 2014 in Amsterdam on the request of Raimundas Malašauskas.

Hola Rai.

I tend to stay away from public events; weddings and funerals are on the top of that list. So I'm lost with the toast challenge. I was once asked: What's harder, marriage or prison? Not a great start for a toast. I shared a correspondence with a convicted felon after he read my *Prison Journal*. Why a man in prison would read a book about being in prison is beyond me, perhaps he was looking for advice. The convicted felon who wrote to me referred to himself as a budding writer and all around good guy (his idea of a joke). He shared with me a poem that he'd written in prison after reading my book. His name is Gary, I managed to dig it out and I've attached it below. He wrote this to me ...

I am in prison
I have to ask if I can go to the toilet
I don't have any friends because in here having friends
is gay

I can't cry

When I was on the outside my wife was shagging my
brother in law
not her brother but my sister's husband
he was my best man

I can't cry

I left the bitch and got a place of my own
one with two bedrooms

one for sleeping in and one for fucking in
it got burnt down
I can't cry

I went and lived with my mother
she did my fucking head in
I tried to see my daughter
my ex was having none of it
she even sent the police
I can't cry

I took the fat bitch to court
and they said I could see my daughter
I didn't know what to say to her
I didn't know where to take her
She just kept talking about ponies
It was shit
I can't cry

I wish I had a son instead of a daughter
I know I'm not supposed to say these things but I am
a son will be better than a daughter
boys are better than girls
I'm not gay
I can't cry

I can't cry
Now I'm back in prison
I hit my mother over the head with a kettle
I didn't mean it
these things happen
I wonder if I'll ever be a motorbike racer?

I can't cry.

Let's raise our glasses ... To Martine and Gabriel, to
crying and not crying. Saludos.

Clifford Irving is a writer based in Sarasota, Florida;
his titles can be found at cliffordirving.com.)

(George Szirtes

There have always been interstices, gaps to fall through. There are more now than ever before. As worlds accelerate and shrink, gaps appear with greater frequency.

I was an amateur wrestler in the Hungarian army, an Olympic-standard, protected, lower-ranking officer groomed for international success. But then the revolution came and he fled into exile; he arrived in England in 1956 and was immediately signed by a promoter. Within a few days he was in the professional ring learning the grunts and groans of the wrestling circus, part of what the sport itself termed “a sporting entertainment.” This was a world of beer, sweat, fury, pantomime, parable, and masked shadows. His skill and strength quickly raised him to prominence. Soon he was on television, attracting vast audiences, winning trophies. But his wife left him, his son was estranged and, as he aged—he was twenty-eight by the time he arrived in the country—his role diminished from straight hero to “rabbit” or loser, thrown across the ring by ever-heavier men. He never made much money and went to live with his younger brother’s family in a poor part of London. He lost sight in one eye. He was set up to manage a London pub that failed and he died of cancer in his fifties.

On Isolation and Interstices

His English remained broken all that time. He was neither here nor there: public in the ring, private outside it, physically articulate but verbally hobbled. He was both muscle and flotsam.

I can't quite find him on the map. I can't quite hear his voice or trace his movements. Yet I remember his presence sitting next to me on the bed in the disused barracks that had briefly become a temporary gathering place for refugees during our first few days in the country. I was just eight and he was talking to my father about something, probably his future career.

I would like to find him on the map because I suspect he could tell me something useful about myself. We had both been between languages, between cultures, between histories, but he was a man and I was a child.

Solitude is a vital element in any writer's life. It is hard to write in company unless one has the ability to isolate oneself for short intense periods (I do, but these are essentially short). Boredom may well be where writing comes from, the mind liberated by no specific thing to do, no urgent task to complete, or—even if there is some urgent task—adjusted to its own procrastination and displacements. Isolation, however, is different.

Isolation is as much an inner, psychological condition as a physical one. Isolation is a product of lack—lack of ready emotional companionship, lack of common assumptions, lack of certainty in one's psychological dealings. It is mind as gap. J's cultural isolation is such a central feature of his condition as I imagine it, that it feels something like pain. In fact it feels like the condition of my mother whose own troughs and precipices were, I suspect, the result of the same isolation. For J, the world of roaring fans, of fancy-dress staged violence, would have been a wall of noise against which his own voice would have sounded lost and unfamiliar. For my mother isolation was primarily emotional. Nobody around her felt the world the way she did. Not even I. I was pliantly intelligent. I had become anglicized in a way she never could be. Both J and my mother lived in gaps that grew deeper as they grew older. In the end they fell through, alone. What they knew they knew intensely and consisted of the solid ground around them, something they could almost reach out and touch—almost, but not quite.

My own case of isolation can hardly be compared with theirs. In England, Hungarian, in Hungary, English may be the worst of it but there are far worse things. Nevertheless, I am aware of the gap in which I sit: I hear it as a faint white noise that is the condition of many in the modern world. Our white noise is specific to each of us but we are many—in fact we are a legion. Not that that helps, if help is what is needed. The solid parts of the world are ever denser, its sides ever steeper.

The gaps are potentially productive. Out of them grow sounds and images—but oddly without foundation, or so we feel, our feet not quite touching the ground. I sit at my desk opposite a fence licked by sunlight. Leaves flutter nervously in the wind. We are hovering.

George Szirtes is a Norfolk-based poet and translator who received the 2004 T S Eliot Prize for Poetry, for which his two books since were also shortlisted.)

(On Xerox Book

Nav Haq: James, I thought we could discuss *Xerox Book* (1968) that Seth Siegelaub produced in 1968. I picked up a bootleg copy of it when I visited the exhibition *Book Show* that you organized with Gavin Wade at Eastside Projects in Birmingham back in 2010. It was surprising and gratifying to find it. I think this was because it is one of those books that is considered a pioneering work in the era of Conceptual art—a book produced entirely through xeroxed or photocopied pages made by artists. How did you come across it, and why did you decide to include it in the exhibition?

James Langdon: I first saw a copy of *Xerox Book* (in a vitrine) at an extraordinary exhibition of artists' books called *Concrete Poetry, Fluxus and Conceptual Art: A Book Friction*, organized by Marc Goethals at Witte Zaal in Ghent in 2008. After that, Urs Lehni, the publisher of Rollo Press gave me a copy of a bootleg that he had printed of another book from the same era, Lawrence

Weiner's *Causality Affected and/or Effected* (1971). I invited Urs to make the *Xerox Book* bootleg for *Book Show* simply as a way of accessing it—to be able to handle it, and understand it as a book.

Book Show was following through a way of thinking about books outlined in the work of Mexican artist and writer Ulises Carrión. I can exemplify Carrión's proposition with his statement "A novel is a book where nothing happens." It appears in his polemic text *The New Art of Making Books*, published in 1975. Nothing happens in a novel in the sense that a sequence of pages presenting typeset prose all essentially look the same, and have no active relation to the structure of the book as a sequence of openings. They don't belong in a book. Carrión thought of the book in structural terms—to make something "happen," there needed to be an active relation between what was printed and the form of the book itself, as a support. In the context of *Book Show*, *Xerox Book* fit very well—it has become an icon of that treatment of the book as a site for display.

NH: I like the fact that there is a play between ideas of original and copy in *Xerox Book*. Firstly, as there would have been originals produced by each of the contributing artists before each was quite explicitly made into copies, xeroxed in an edition of 1000, I believe. It is made using a technological means that is normally prohibited for reproduction of copyrighted material even. And in the instance of your exhibition, someone—Rollo Press—had the audacity to bootleg further copies. When working with print media today,

there seems to be a deep fascination with mechanical reproduction, particularly with the variations in material qualities. Do you agree?

JL: That tension around establishing an original exists even in the 1968 edition of *Xerox Book*, which was actually offset-printed, because Seth Siegelaub had determined that to photocopy 1000 copies of the book would be more expensive than conventional offset printing. Siegelaub later referred to *Xerox Book* as "photocopy book," because he apparently regretted identifying it with a particular manufacturer. Perversely, Urs's bootleg has a greater fidelity to its title, as it was xerox-printed, in Birmingham, in an edition of 100.

Carrión suggested that to appreciate a book as an object, one had to consider its entire edition and not only one copy. Distinctions between production processes matter, from a bibliographic point of view, in that they influence the material character of the book and its distribution. For example, many significant examples of artists' books from the period that we are discussing have disintegrated because they were bound with cheap glue that has turned brittle. This makes pristine copies of these publications strangely precious, and subverts the impulse toward inexpensive form and mass distribution that they once represented. The pages in the bootleg *Xerox Book* had originally been photocopies, photographed and transferred to printing plates, offset-printed—comprising the 1968 edition—a single, scarce, copy of which was then scanned, corrected, and finally xerox-printed from a digital file. This convoluted remediation is ironic given that *Xerox Book* has come

to represent the idea of the printed page as an original artwork, rather than a reproduction of an artwork.

NH: The list of artists' names on the spine of *Xerox Book* is quite formidable—Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol Lewitt, Robert Morris, and Lawrence Weiner—all male heavyweights of Conceptual art in the US. In this instance, brought together by pioneering curator Seth Siegelaub. They're all people that have been influential for subsequent generations of artists and curators alike. Do you think this era of Conceptual art informs design practice today too?

JL: There have certainly been moments in recent graphic design history (speaking in relation to the art world) when the reductive aesthetics of Conceptual art have been used as a foil for excessive tendencies in digital graphics. But I don't suppose *Xerox Book* is ultimately an aesthetic proposition. It expresses an urge toward liberation from the restrictions of the exhibition format, and from workings of the gallery system more generally, and a simplicity and directness in terms of production that is anti-institutional. That spirit has endured in graphic design, or at least has recently been revived. A comparable culture of independent publishing with photocopiers and other outmoded machines is very evident. Urs Lehni's Rollo Press would be a good example of course.

NH: I think your point in relation to Carrión is super interesting—about the differentiation between form and content needing to be collapsed,

in a certain sense. These two elements should ultimately act as supports for each other: medium and message. I think this does come through in much of the artistic content of *Xerox Book*. They all in different ways take into consideration the sequential pages, but also the aesthetics of the xerox, even though from what you describe, they were in the end not actually physically produced that way. I find Huebler's contribution particularly succinct here because of this, more than most of the others, as it takes into account the sequential nature of book pages, and you have the sense of something unfolding or snaking around in a really funny way. It makes you want to follow it page by page. Do you think some of the artists' contributions are more successful than others?

JL: My perspective on these works is likely quite distorted. After my encounter with Carrión I thought a lot about assimilating his structural appraisal of the book form into my own practice as a designer. Because of that I feel sensitive to the possibilities and limitations of the book as an elementary display format, in a way predisposed to simple, binary relationships—the facing pages of an opening, divided by the binding.

Carrión was drawing on the explosion of interest in the book coming from Conceptual art, but many of the basic formulations of the book had already been established, for example in the work of photojournalist Stefan Lorant, whose juxtaposition of images on the facing pages of *Lilliput* magazine were witty, direct and yet complex. In this regard, *Xerox Book* has one

structurally unsatisfactory characteristic: it is a stack of pages printed on one side and then bound. The cover, unprinted on its front, fits this unassuming aesthetic of a ream of paper. But since there are no printed versos, the book lacks the tension between its facing pages and its binding that seems so essential to Carrión.

Andre, Lewitt, and Weiner I am inclined to dismiss, as I think the works included are not among the most interesting produced by these artists in response to the book format.

Morris's work is formally fully realized. It uses the photocopier as an image-processing device with the potential for endless imperfections that become unexpectedly painterly. The work has a performative element, recording each pass of light over an image as an unrepeatable event. It is the work that is most conceptually displaced by the translation to offset printing.

Barry's work is interesting in that it produces layers of optical effects. Its dense matrix of dots confuse the eye, and in Urs's bootleg edition, confuse the scanner, producing moiré effects that are probably unintended, but seem to enrich the work.

The Kosuth work is actually the most suggestive, despite the sobriety of its presentation. The way in which it implicates a network of producers (Siegelau, the other artists in the book, the workers at Xerox) and technical conditions (the specifications of the reprographic, printing, and binding machines used in the making of the book) is something that has become increasingly important in the developing situation of print media. I think of Laurent Benner's work for the *Most Beautiful Swiss Books* award, remaking sections of numerous books according to

their specific production and distribution conditions, or Maximage and their manual interventions in the mechanics of offset printing, applying painterly mark-making and chemical treatments directly onto printing plates.

NH: I do see what you mean about the anti-institutionalism. There was a desire to redefine the boundaries, or to rethink the terms of engagement with art. I see that as a gesture that is more and more difficult to make now, because of the systematic way the art system thrives on recuperating radical gestures back into the mainstream. Or often, gestures adopt the aesthetics of the radical, when in fact at their core they are traditional, cynical, or empty. Or sometimes there is a certain fetishism toward old media formats. I get the sense this is the case with some of the kinds of design practices you are referring to. Do you also think this the case?

JL: I'm very interested in what to "do" with canonical works such as *Xerox Book*. They do seem to exert contrary forces—I feel that even in my own practice. They are at once exemplary (in an inspiring sense), and somehow haunting. As you say, canons tend to tighten matters, there is hardly space now to make a gesture such as *Xerox Book*. For me that is not a concern, novelty is not particularly important in my outlook. But to embed the self-conscious consideration of the book as a platform, the site-specifics as you call them, that *Xerox Book* represents and continue them is productive in my view.

NH: I find this also takes us into a range of other questions, including site-specificity: the book as a site for artistic responses to its format and its means of communicating. So, these responses are not just in terms of aesthetics, but also in terms of the social or economical. I see the idea of this in *Xerox Book* too. It embodies the notion that anybody can create their own book through the technology of the day. It seems a gesture that is equally as valid now, when we think of the digital realm for example.

JL: The printed book has one essential relation with the world and that is decay. Printed paper discolours, decomposes, and becomes covetable over time. It acquires that archival aesthetic, which I suppose is another culturally conditioned response to the graphic language of Conceptual art that you asked about initially. Digital media do present further complications—there can be no binary relation between the message and the support, since both remain mutable—the content can be re-edited after its initial distribution, and the support becomes obsolete and subject to reformatting.

But ultimately I feel blocked in trying to compare the conditions of book production amongst conceptual artists in the 1960s and 1970s with the present digital moment. I can't see an intelligent approach. The book existed for 500 years before Conceptual art, and that brief alignment of its formal characteristics with a particular, elementary aesthetic, and mode of enquiry common to a small group of artists. It seems unlikely that there will be such a moment to unite the messy array of contemporary publishing formats.

Nav Haq is curator at MuHKA – Museum for Contemporary Art, Antwerp.

Graphic designer James Langdon is one of six directors of the artist-run gallery Eastside Projects in Birmingham and founder of the itinerant School for Design Fiction.)

(Note on Stationary

Heman Chong and Christina Li)

*Thoughts unsaid,
then forgotten*
—Bas Jan Ader, 1973

The value of a residency is in its suspension of time—time that we do not often have and fear to produce. It is an interval in which to stop and reflect, to read and write, to do nothing at all.

Over the past two years the residency program at Spring Workshop, a nonprofit space in Hong Kong, has provided bright, lofty spaces for artists and curators to spend days, weeks, and months seeking new encounters as well as temporary refuge from the outside world, and often, from themselves.

Stationary began as a conversation with Spring founder Mimi Brown in 2013. We each had it in mind to create a publication that could take up that same sense of expansive shelter, enabling artists, curators, and writers to

flesh out those more rudimentary ideas that linger and get lodged in the cracks of a hurried life.

This issue is the first in a series of annual story collections devoted to the production of such rare instances of contemplation. It offers the possibility for contributors to be extracted from daily routines and instead dwell in a rich, personal landscape, grounding their ruminations in these pages.

In composing the basic structure of *Stationary*, we envisioned several scenarios for exploration by drawing upon three key words: *suspension*, *dedication*, and *documentation*. While the scenarios are intentionally attuned to the personal, they are also open-ended, allowing ample maneuverability for contributors' reflections.

Without giving too much away, we have introduced specific prompts to

them—such as a painting entitled *Great Malaysian Landscape* by Redza Piyadasa, a symmetrical tattoo, and a filing system—to which they can respond by adopting a role or relating experiences. With “quietude” as the overwhelming marker, these stories bear links and motifs that offer tangled entry points. At the close of each issue a contributor selects a book of importance to him or her and engages with another contributor who has also read the text, thereby ending each collection by opening it up to conversation.

Naturally, the life of a book extends beyond its pages, testing the limits of time, experience, and transmission. It is the reader who can activate these stories by allowing the seen and unseen traces to shape discussions.

Some readers might even see possibilities for

how the subjects and threads within and departing from these writings could be cause for gatherings.

As *Stationary* is not for sale, we hope this possibility will be taken up with greater ease and that its content will find a home in a range of situations. It is an object put into the world to encourage and shift the way we relate, circulating without obligation and through word of mouth.

We hope you find *Stationary* a faithful companion on your train journeys and during sleepless nights, eliciting joys and desires, in recognition of the necessity to sometimes stand still.

(Colophon)

(Stationary 1)
Stationary is a collection of stories published annually and disseminated by word of mouth. Loosely forged as a recess from one's productive practice, we invite artists, curators, and writers to take stock of and elaborate on their obsessions, fascinations, and influences in the suspended moment offered by this publication.

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