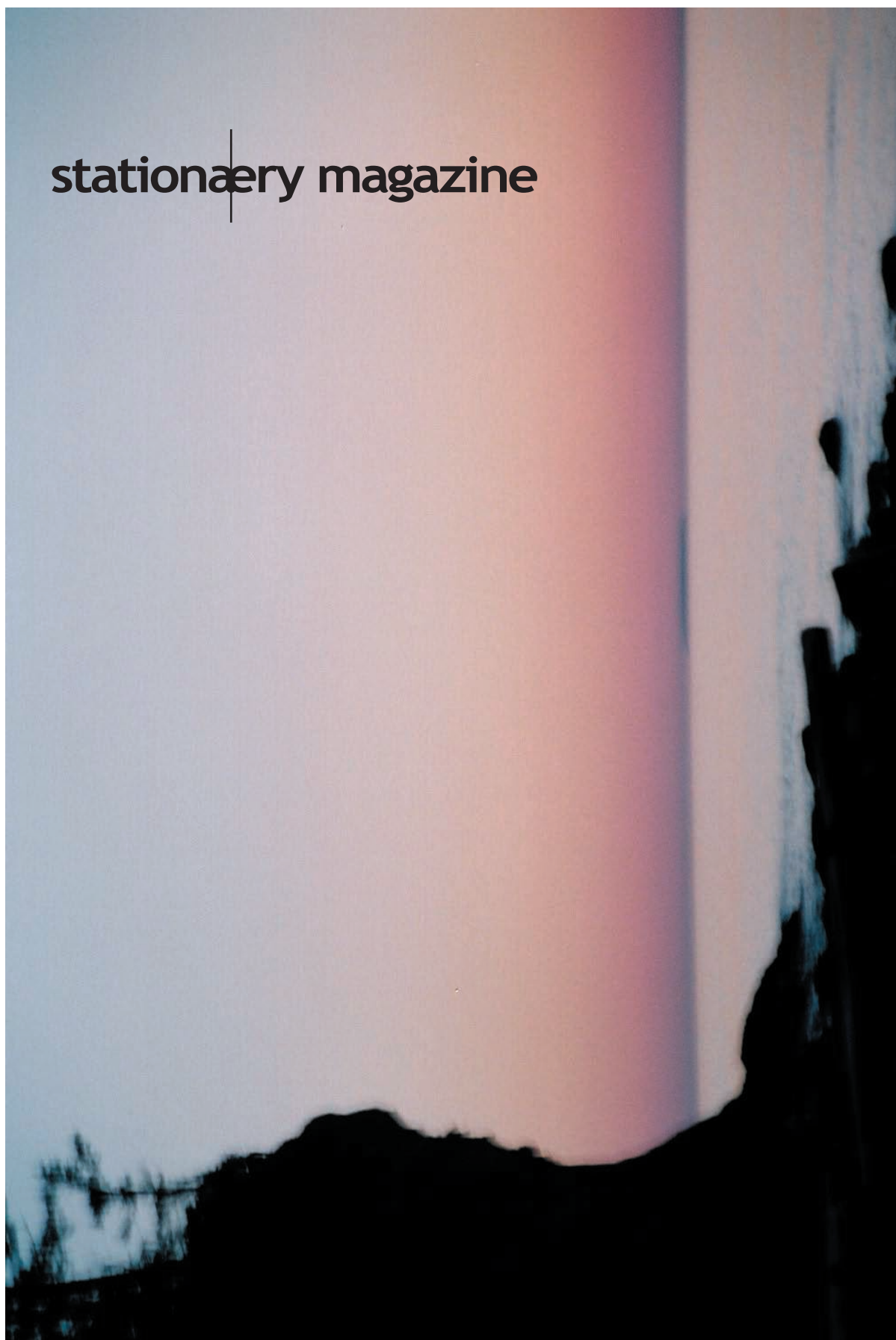
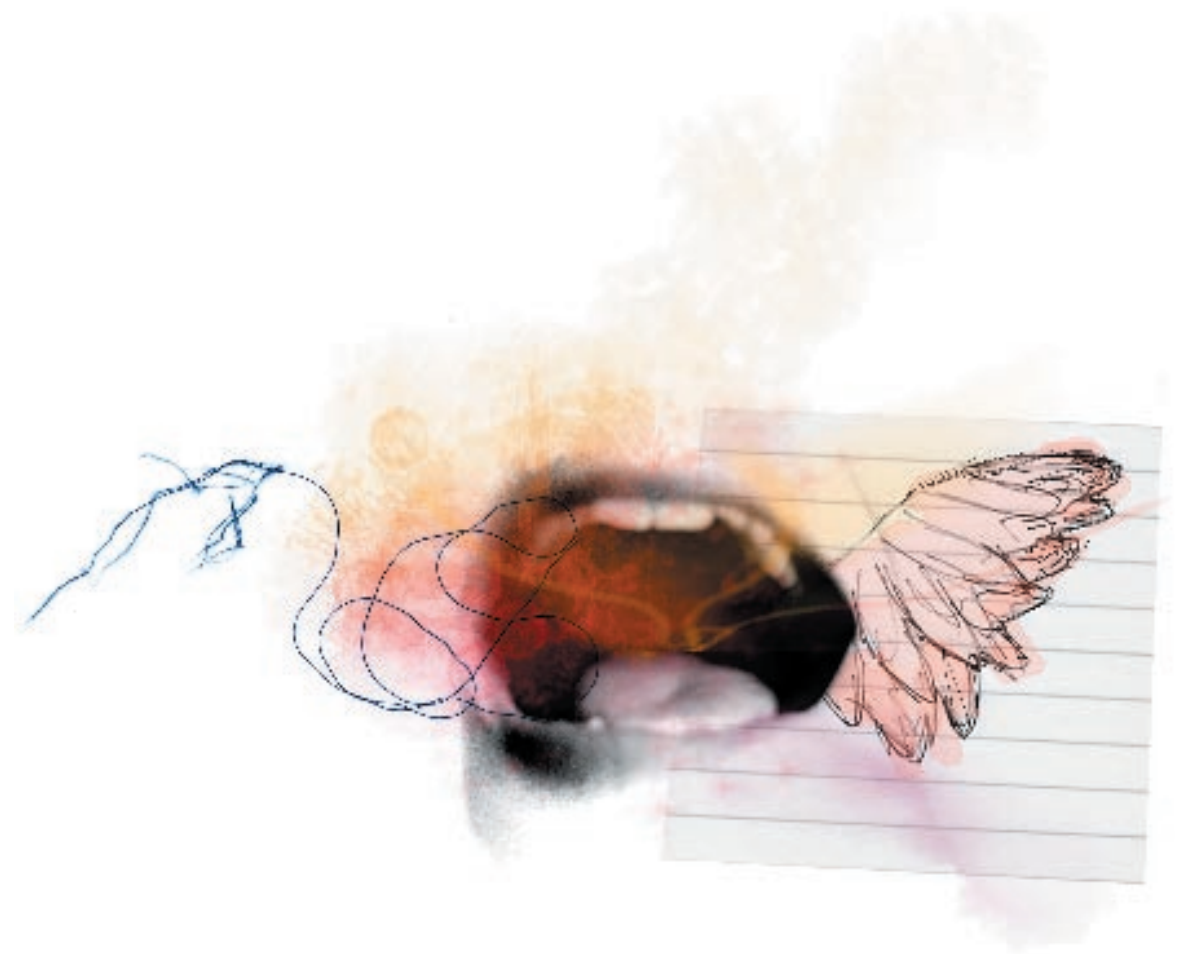


stationæry magazine





* infinite secrets

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Daniel Spitzberg and **Ilya Zaychik** are all of the following: nuts, bolts, (i.e., the editors), the muscles, l'couiers, writers, artists, apologists... Daniel dreams about the Warp of Wood of Old America, Beauty, Truth, and a mahogany Library... Ilya once printed out a piece of paper that said: "every hour doing something else could be time spent writing."

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Ilya Zaychik

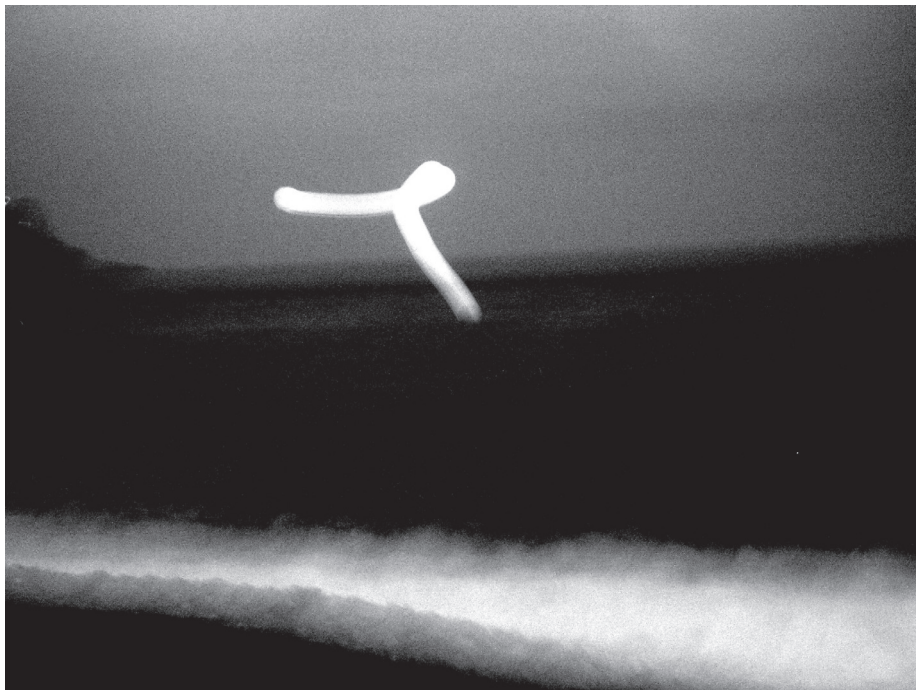
an old-fashioned intro

“...Whether you admit it or not, guys like you and me were made for adventures.”
“Not even simple things can we know.”

To start a magazine off with one quote is presumptions; two, well, who does this guy think he is, huh? Some kind of guy with a book with a spine? No, staples will have to do. And the quotes up there, that you have already scurried past (forgotten) well, they are from a couple of fellows I admire, a couple of solid, solid, learn-it-while-it's-hot, kids, writers, a pair of gentlemen I have had the pleasure of meeting and knowing personally. Truth is, they are just the tip of the iceberg. Wait but didn't you just say... it's nobody you know, unless you know what I know—but it's better than quoting Hemingway. Anyway there's something in it for you if you read on. Anyway it's no inside joke, I assure you, fair reader. Nothing pisses people off like being left out of some club, the manifestation of which is a niche literary 'zine (what is a zine, anyway? Why isn't it an inside joke? I don't get it).

Ok, I've had the luxury of having some loose cash money over the years, and aside from the usual boring vices and addictions (cigarettes, coffee, muffins), I've managed to pick up no small amount of these egregiously-edited, saddle-stitched hodge-podes. When the writer is good, nothing is better. Sure I love all the classics—but nothing! And why? Because without the benefit of any physical space between us, any SENSORY perceptions to fall back on as a guidebook to that person (i.e., it's a complete stranger), I am able to come into contact with some innermost truths and secrets, a truly secret club, an insider's knowledge of a mind without a body, a life without being alive, in the crudely physical sense of the word (think five senses). A person appears there, whole, fascinating, write there as I, a sly shadow, read, zoom in from parts unknown, cutting through the bullshit with deft skill, keeping the pages turning.

But not even simple things can we know. But this is the trick of the medium, the paradox. But how can you separate body and mind, you brute? But you must know everything is interconnected? Oh but I do. Still I must make due, too, you know I knew you'd understand.



There are so many people who have come in so clearly to me through these pieces of paper that I don't even need to see what their teeth look like, what their sneeze sounds like, what their handshake feels like, where their eyes wander when they are feeling awkward. In fact, if I met them, I might loathe them for no reason. To me, this is the most perfect writing—laying yourself bare for a stranger, covering your unmentionables only with transparent paper, dispensing with the hihowareyou ohthat'sveryinteresting ummmmm...conversation. You know the sort. You know me, by now, eight issues' worth! But, not even simple things can we know...?

Among the air-slicing precision-personalities I've read about are people I've actually met (see quotes above). The source of that first quote I met through the written word; he submitted to this inside joke when we were just getting started, when we were sitting in my boss's office on the fifth floor of a Boston University building on Bay State Road in August of two summers ago, the only light on at eleven p.m., staring at the computer screen, at the two dozen submissions, listening to Frank Zappa, eating cranberry muffins and downing iced teas, dreaming, dreaming awake of great, great things, of remembering this very moment years later, of letting you in on the joke whose punch line we hadn't even known yet, then.

Well I liked the person I met in print so damn much, that I decided to meet him, in New York, one time, in the flesh. I've met him a few times since then, could now pick him out of a line-up, identify some of the mannerisms of his speech, tell you about the way he sits and gesticulates when he talks, and how he dresses, maybe, or how he slows down and shakes his head when he says 'I don't know,' when the topic turns to the future, or the past. But not even simple things can we know, so, I couldn't tell you his favorite movie or music or food. Or who he voted for. Or even where he is from, for heaven's sake, or his father's name.

Anyway it's all crap. I'll tell you to talk to me instead, and I'll give you his information, and you can get his half-comic half book, and sit enthralled as you watch him sit in his room in a Hong-Kong whorehouse, while he brilliantly narrates an ill-fated adventure his partner in crime starred in, featuring one of the whores he's seeing, and why it's so obvious that the two heroes were meant for adventure (albeit peculiar and mind-wrenching ones), and what chasing pussy, Borges, Mary Gaitskill's romance novels and drawing comics in Asia has to do with you. For three dollars! That's an effing bargain!

Then you read it, this thing, and maybe you show up at his door or his book signing and say, look I know you don't know me, but I feel like I know you. See, I read your book and, well, I know that not even simple things can we know, but that means I don't know for sure whether or not we can know simple things. Maybe we can. Maybe he'll buy you a coffee.

The second quote, the source of that one, well. That one I knew pretty well before I knew he could write (I assumed he was literate; we were both university students), which, you would think, destroys my argument. But you would be wrong: I'd say I know that one better through his writing than through his selection of shirts or favorite foods.

That one once asked me if I thought there was truth in fiction. What I think about it, right now, follows below; what you think about it? Finish this shhh-quiet laugh-riot before you decide and, if you keep your mind peeled, you might just meet some interesting people you may or may not ever meet.

And even if I find out that every disillusioned adventurer I've met was really just a work of fiction (and vice-versa) the person would still appear before me as I turned the pages, and I would still have inhabited a secret chamber in their mind that not even people who knew simple things about them had visited. And if those people and simple things existed only between the front and back cover when they sounded like average Joes? And if the people whose lives I thought to be so outlandish that they couldn't possibly exist showed up at my birthday party? Fuck it! I wouldn't feel cheated. It would change nothing. What would it change? What difference would it make?

la lune à Nice
by Angie Theilmann

Excerpts from a Forthcoming Auto-
biography/ A Selective Chronology

Tom O'Hare

(part 1) : The man crashed his car about two-thirds of the way into our projected trip. I thought, at about the three-fifths marker, that I had somehow made it through unscathed, that things would be just fine, because that's all that ever happened to hitchhikers—survival, fine-ness. But don't count your chickens: right then, of course, we went off the road. Listen, and please understand the seriousness of this situation: we were in a fucking mountain range, at night, in a snowstorm, in the middle of fucking nowhere, Quebec. You do not want to be going off the road in these conditions. I am amazed, to this day, that my bowels did not fail me at that very moment, because I thought—I fucking knew—that I was going to die, and that I was going to die, moreover, in excruciating pain. We hit, maybe—at best—that ten percent of the highwayside that would not immediately kill five individuals traveling at 100 kilometers an hour in a tiny Ford automobile during a blizzard. Such is the meaning of luck.

(I admit, I am a questioner of luck, free will, determinism, et al, and in my more absurd moments I sometimes wonder whether instances of déjà vu are a signal that my life is set on repeat, that when I die, I start again, and recognize more and more in similar déjà vus, as I relive my life over and over—until nirvana; that maybe this is the fiction of time, of life, of philosophy, existence, god, manna, the Bill of Rights. I am a hopeless romantic, I admit.)

For me, all recollection begins the moment I awake in my mother's memory, a figment of her tear-clouded mind's eye. In the scenario in which I find myself, I am three years old, at my own birthday party, surrounded by people. They're eating chocolate cake with my name written on it in blue frosting, carved into pieces. My slice has the H from Happy, and three blue candles. I have the sensation I am happy, somehow I know this, but I'm not sure how I do feel in fact. In this memory, which I experience as actual life without knowing it is someone else's memory of me when I was alive, I only know my own name, and that only because it's written in blue frosting on the chocolate cake. I'm clever enough to assemble the name, though it's being eaten. PHI here, LI there, and another P, shoved into a child's mouth. Philip. My lips form the word. My name is Philip, and I am three years old today.

My name is Philip and I am dead today. This is the next memory. Again, not my own, though I'm in it and I play my part. In complete darkness and silence and cold, and ridiculously cushioned upholstery, I feel no panic, no pain, no sense of myself, but am clearly aware of my mother's deep sadness, deeper than the shallow six feet into which I am lowered. I lie there in the dark, knowing I'm dead, and hear a muffled eulogy somewhere above me, and sobs through all the dirt thumping down from above one scoop at a time. I don't wonder why or how I know I'm dead, but I think again of the cake. It becomes the new first memory of a dead amnesiac.

This continues, observing other's old thoughts of me, acting out my own part as if scripted. Watching my life happen around me, experiencing déjà vu on a daily basis and slowly beginning to catch on, to question it. One time I close my eyes and let myself fall backward, into a puddle of shadow, but I don't stop falling. I think of my father, and then I emerge into my father's thoughts. He is teaching me to ride a bicycle, training wheels off for the first time; I am five years old and not yet dead. His concern, standing behind me as I pedal uncertainly, is palpable; it emanates off him, colours this particular memory. So when I fall and begin to cry, I feel his panic instead of my own scraped knees and elbows. And instead of the grape popsicle I receive to calm me, I taste his relief.

Then I tried something once, tried asserting myself. It was during the dozenth time I relived an old memory of my mother's, of me, coming home from junior high school to find a report card in the mail. This is also how I learn my middle name, as I reluctantly respond to her stern call. She asks me about the D in history, and I'm about to make some excuse, I know I will because that's what I did, what I've done every time since. But I stop. I force my lips to form other words instead, an apology. My first act of free will is an apology. She smiles a little, despite wanting to frown, and says she knows I'll do better next time, then leaves the room. I have no memory of what I do after she leaves, because this is her memory and she isn't there for it. Instead the scene ends and I'm eating breakfast with grandmother seven years earlier...

That's how it is, I realized. I'm living in the memories of people who knew me; only I'm not really living, I'm reliving. But sometimes I can rebel, act as I want and not as I did. Like when you realize you're dreaming, and because you're aware of it you can control yourself in the dream, your behaviour and your influence on the other ephemeral beings sprouting from your head. I swam through their memories, learning about myself, piecing together my life from secondhand recollections. Favourite colour, concerts I saw, girls I kissed... lies I told. But even with a photographic memory, images yellow with age. The people who knew me best, who remember me most, are

getting old and forgetful, so there are some things I can't go back to. And there are plenty of things they weren't there for, that they couldn't remember. These things I can't know. The only memories kept from me are my very own. I've forgotten myself. And what happens when I'm finally forgotten?

Living in their own memory must be some people's idea of heaven, it occurs to me. To old people, especially, whose memories are thick and musty and peopled, frayed and cracked around the edges... people who have more friends alive inside themselves than out. As an unnoticed intruder in someone else's house I lurk, I peer around corners and through cracks in the wall. From behind these half-closed doors I often watch people exploring their old thoughts, and it's clear how reluctant they are to leave while reminiscing. When you're in a tub immersed in warm water, and especially if the air outside is very cold, you don't want to get out; you want to sink beneath the water and stay there. You want to sink even deeper, into the depths you know are beneath you when your eyes are closed, into the warmth and darkness. But the air in your lungs pulls you back to the surface. Because you are alive, you are buoyant.

Because I am dead, my lungs empty of breath, I am able to sink, to inhabit the depths. But I can't get out of the tub.

Matthew Leon

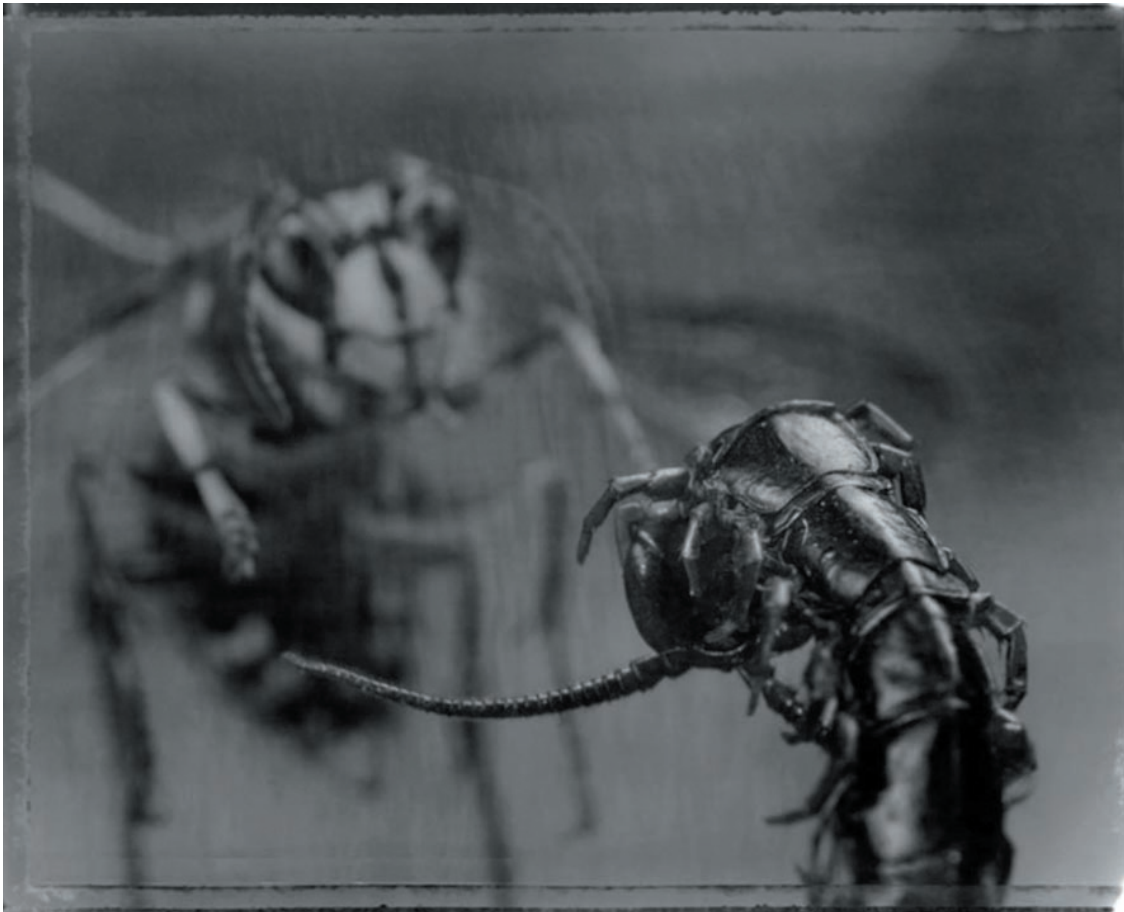
the sublime insult

I do not believe in the third dimension. It is a lie. A grand, disgusting hoax.

Our viewpoints are a series of flat paintings bombarding us quickly enough to grant the illusion of fluid movement, like projected films. When we shift positions, some devious calculator fabricates a new image, each point projected onto the mental canvas to grant a seamless impression of perspective.

The universe is an ideal plane, infinitesimally thin, stretching forever in every direction. The planet is a spasm of green in a field of black, but the city is a yawning null dressed in gossamer. Cars are broken lines stumbling into further nowheres.

I am a crawling pixel, square and stout. At a broad enough angle, I converge into a point. I occupy no space, but I am still, theoretically, there.



by Bosayia X.

Raquel Rivera

Her Memory Was

The rock-bottom
of a fast-running creek
she liked to think

On second thought
more often than not
sly currents swept pebbles away

It was only a matter of time
before all her rocks had been replaced
by something from upstream

Zdravka Evtimova

Rain

Her dog's name was Rain and his steps sounded like raindrops rolling down a windowpane after midnight. In the evening, the dog waited at the front door and Gavril thought he remained in that town because of the animal. If he went away Rain would starve. Anna forgot to feed him and didn't give him baths. She worked day and night on her short stories or translations, and in the books she translated into Bulgarian oceans of love and hatred roared. There was no food at home; she stared at her computer like a bat, her hair disheveled, her dictionaries scattered under the table, on the floor, in the corridor.

Rain lay in the corner on his tattered pillow and looked at her. She swore at the long sentences and drank constantly: milk from a bottle or strong black beer which made her eyes glisten like those of a sick man. She ignored the fact that Gavril had come home; she poured milk into a saucer for Rain, the dog smelled it, and it was suddenly warm in his eyes. Sometimes she gave Rain beer, too, and he snarled his teeth shining, wild and sharp.

Gavril went to the kitchen and made sandwiches for her. There were dirty dishes in the sink and her shoes and stockings were everywhere in the corridor. She wore socks of different colors and she had put on one of his sweatshirts: the first one she stumbled across. Sometimes she wore his leather jacket, too.

That day she had not aired out the room, and at noon the curtains were drawn, although the window was not that big, and Gavril loved to look out of it. He watched the warehouse full of ramshackle used cars and relaxed. She translated her books and breathed the stale air. This time she didn't even look up. When he brought her sandwiches, she wolfed them down, forgot about him almost right away, and Gavril went to sleep, imagining she mumbled something under her breath.

Rain had got accustomed to her voice and waited by her side, staring at her dictionaries, at her curses and at the old computer. Gavril slept on the mattress around which CDs, sheets of paper and her books were scattered. Well after midnight, half-awake, he could feel she was by his side. She didn't wait for him to drift out of sleep. She kissed him savagely as if to punish him. She loved him without saying a word then suddenly called him names as bad as November frosts. Gavril couldn't live like that any more. He couldn't bear the stale air that waited for him every night. He hated her dog and her love: it was a warm noon that quickly vanished and left him dry and starving.

He had tried to go away several times, but Rain followed him, his steps like raindrops hitting the pavement. Gavril feared that one day the dog would die among the dictionaries and the characters in her short stories. Several times, Rain had run after him far behind the puddle that surrounded the warehouse, behind the used cars where Anna went to draw inspiration from the cold, moist air. She was a poor eater. Her face became paler and more impenetrable as she wandered among the used cars, not bothering to answer the question of the sales assistant – a scraggly, lanky guy in blue overalls – who wanted to know what he could do for her. The dog brought autumn in her wake and it almost always snowed when she went out.

Gavril suspected that if he left the place, Anna wouldn't come back to that window to the north, and the light of her computer would burn all the characters she had invented. There wouldn't be anybody there to open the window and get rid of the stale air— heavy

The Pioneer: The Wagon Painting
by Jon Petro

with idioms—which she adored. Gavril was sick and tired of her silly love. She slept atop his chest, her skin as thin as the wind, and Rain watched them, quiet, more and more miserable, his fur thin and falling off with old age.

One day Gavril left for good. Rain followed him, his eyes glowing in the mist. Even after Gavril caught the bus the dog ran after him, his fur dirty and shabby, a scrawny old thing that brought a downpour to the neighborhood. Gavril would be sorry if a truck driver or a motorcyclist ran over the dog: the animal had sensed that this was the day Gavril would leave. That day, Rain ran after the bus to the railway station. Gavril jumped into the first train he happened to notice on Platform 1. The train was to Varna, the biggest port on the Black Sea in Bulgaria. The dog gave a howl and dashed after the train, but soon lost the game and collapsed on the rails, frail and miserable in his thinning fur. Gavril heaved a sigh of relief when the train pushed its way into the tunnel and Rain disappeared from sight, his howl dissolving in the rain. I hope he wasn't run over by a train, Gavril thought.

Later he often tried to drive away the thought of that cold room, of that window to the rows of used cars and the big black puddle around the warehouse. He saw her computer that spewed out words in the nights, and hated to think that now there was no one to make sandwiches for her.

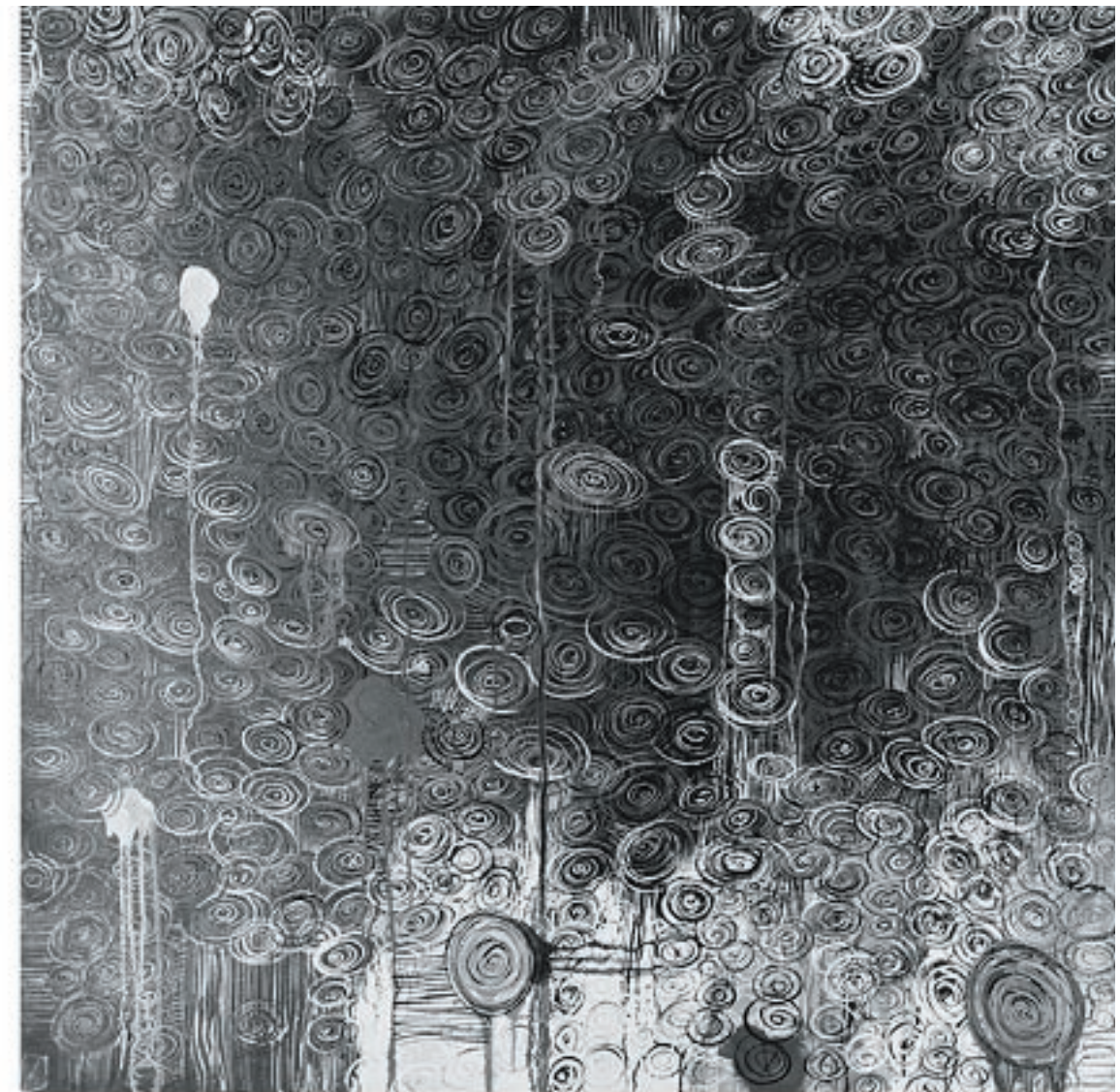
Many times, he felt like running back to that place: the house, the used cars where she probably talked to the scraggy guy, the sales assistant. Then Gavril thought about that man and was glad he lived in a big noisy town far away from her short stories. The Balkan Mountains, the Iskar River, trains, tracks and tunnels separated him from her dictionaries. Gavril hated bridges. He tried to blot out the memories of that place, so he bought a dog and called him Rain, too, but his bull terrier couldn't bring autumns to the neighborhood and didn't look shabby the way her dog did.

Gavril sometimes wondered what had happened to her but he had no more life to waste. Of course, he found another girl who was sparkingly clean and healthy. She loved him and she didn't make him think of old computers, black puddles and rows of used cars. It was funny that once in a while he could hear quiet raindrops in his dreams. It was very funny.

In early summer, he crossed the mountains that stretched between him and the rows of old used automobiles.

That day, Gavril got out of the taxi, calm and reserved. He had a good job in Varna; he made a lot of money. The street here was shabby and deserted. He knew every inch of it. He felt like running to her building but had a drink instead. A glass of brandy always helped him. The Balkan Mountains had gone and there were no tunnels either. The house waited and the puddle was there, big and black. Suddenly he heard raindrops behind his back. It was raining, it was raining indeed! There were no storms in the town on the Black Sea where he lived. There were clean carpets, brand new electrical appliances, neatly arranged books and pictures in his house. There wasn't a single dictionary there. He had told his wife that, years ago, he knew a girl, a translator, and he had spoken about the characters in her short stories. His wife threw all dictionaries out of their home. She loved him and looked after him very well.

Gavril could hear the raindrops fall. He couldn't move and he knew something had



broken inside him. The Balkan Mountains had not helped. The brandy hadn't either. The tunnels were silent. He turned around. A dog, scraggy and weak, trailed after him. The man felt like shouting. The dog's fur was shabby and miserable but he loved it. The dog, whose steps were raindrops, stood still and watched him. There were dozens of dictionaries, stories and books in his eyes. They all jumped with joy, they were happy Gavril had come back. Many autumns and winters Gavril had loved that dog.

"Rain, Rain! Come here!" Gavril called out.

The dog trembled, approached him and let Gavril touch his shabby back.

"How are you, Rain?" Gavril whispered.

After a while a woman appeared. She was so thin and pale that Gavril could not breathe. The warehouse was silent and it stopped raining. She was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

He suddenly thought of his clean house with the carpets and books and pictures on the walls. He thought of the train that would take him home. He had crossed the Balkan Mountains to speak to the building she lived in. No.

He wouldn't talk to her. He'd better go back home. Now.

"Good bye, Rain. Go away," Gavril said to the dog.

Tom O'Hare

(part 2): There are those moments when you're walking away from somebody for what may be forever, and you're both cognizant of the fact that it may be forever, and you're both walking in opposite directions, but still within eyeshot, and you're not turning around because you don't want to be caught turning around, because that's inexplicably embarrassing, even though you know that to catch you turning around, the other person would have had to have already been turned around, which makes the whole thing even odder. And so you're both walking away from each other like fucking retards, when you should be turning around and dashing into one another's arms like the people in the movies do it. But you keep walking, because things don't work out in real life like they do in the movies, you know, and you'd both look like even bigger retards if you went leaping into one another's arms than you do just walking, but that's what you want to do, isn't it? Look like retards? Jump into each other's arms and rejoice, "I might never see you again, let's sing a fucking song to that!" And stay up till the sunrise, spewing absurdities from a park bench, passing out under the kitchen table. But you just keep walking, trembling with nervous energy, smoking and smoking, rationalizing your decision. "Nothing is permanent; everything is impermanent," you remind yourself. But that advice is only satisfying if you feel like you've put in enough effort in the first place, which you don't. Dissatisfied, I walked back to Salem Street.

N. Pariser

Et comme hors-d'oeuvre: Ambisol...

In high school we'd put
Ambisol on our lips and speak French
C'était mieux qu'un voyage au Paris.

The gel they put on babies' gums when they were teething was our guide to the philosophy of reality, of touch. The numbness was real, the blood in our lips a memory— the words we spoke came from the magic of a vague pressure of the tongue, the gliding of muscles (which may or may not have existed). The mouth, once such a cacophony of taste and touch, was now silent, and we could remember what it was like to first learn a new word and coax it out. Feel how silly and awkward language was, the damp spit, the loose jaw, the gummy lips: all slow and cumbersome.

And when the tingling started, when the warmth of your mouth and the cold damp spit on your lips begins to fade back in, we returned to Montréal, with our noisy mouths, and we were pleased to have learned a glorious amount of nothing.

FAN -TASSSSS-TIQUE.

Megan Lee

Trans-Labrador Hwy., July

The wheels of my bike skidded on the gravel, and I slammed down my feet, stopped next to the gas pump, which looked like the newest thing in this town by about fifteen years, and dropped my heavy backpack. A mute young man leaned against the sun-bleached rock-face of the garage wall. He took his time in coming over to see what I wanted.

"Hi. Could I get some air?" I asked, and he nodded, looking me over with milky eyes. Likely, I was the only stranger to breach their isolation all year – and I, not on purpose. No one had spoken to me in the last three towns I'd passed through – just raised their eyebrows and combed over my body with their eyes.

This guy had a crooked back. The way his upper body stooped was like a cupped hand scooping something up. He squeezed the front tire between his fingers and the ball of his hand; did the same with the back tire. I waited. The guy turned his shaved head around on his serpentine neck, faced me, and nodded. As if to say, yes, air. I felt like vile tar in the still, scorching daylight.

He unscrewed the little black caps on the tires, and then, Jesus Christ, all of a sudden, his face shot down and he sealed his lips around the air hole on the back tire. He was biting down hard, and almost knocked the bike over. I heard the hiss of air escaping.

"What the fuck are you doing?" I barked at him, jumped forward and then back. I didn't want to force him off of my bike because I didn't want to touch him. What if there was something wrong with him?

He didn't answer. He writhed, as I looked anxiously over my shoulders for help, but saw nobody. Fucking welfare town., I thought. And then he stopped, looked at me, said,

"You need to take out the old air before you put in the new, ma'am."

Only I could barely understand him, because the rush of tire air had scorched his vocal chords, and he could barely croak. He was still holding my bike. The tire was completely flat.

He did the same thing to the other tire. I wanted to get away, but in the heat I was already parched and sluggish, weighed down by my backpack, and this guy had my bike. Dust stuck to my arms and legs. The young guy stopped, rolled over, took a few deep wheezing breaths, and then said,

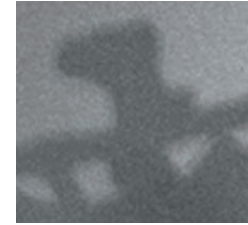
"It'll only be a minute, miss."

He then exhaled into my tires. He readied himself, kneeling like a Muslim towards Mecca, and touched his forehead to the wheel. His thin pink lips wrapped deliberately around the airhole, and he exhaled in one long, steady breath. He exhaled for about six minutes, and his flesh sucked inwards against his bones, his body flattened and concave under his cotton shirt.

He filled the front wheel in the same way, and then lifted his face to the white-hot sun, and gasped slightly. His milky eyes darted around, seeking out my face, and his hands patted the hot gravel, seeking out the little black caps that went on the tires.

Gaping at the young man, whose body was slowly regaining colour as he wobbled to his feet, I accepted my bike, and thanked him nervously. I slung one leg over the seat, and felt buoyed above the gravel, solid and swift. As I pedaled away, I heard him say,

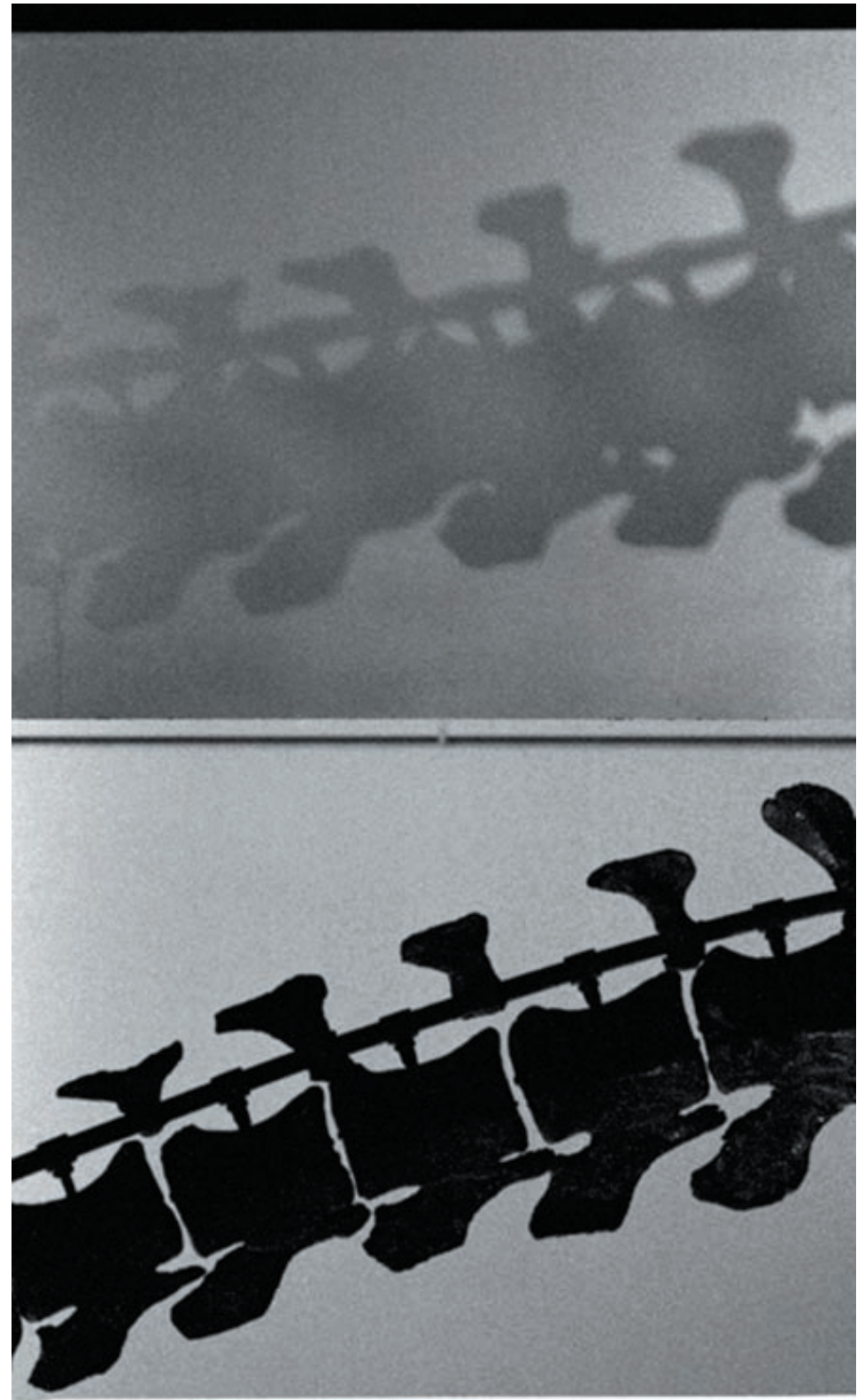
"It's slower air, you'll see. Better."



I felt it, too. My eyes dimmed as I rode on, as if stormclouds were gathering in my pupils. At first, I had not understood how the gas station attendant had accomplished such a thing; now, I could feel the immense body of air churning around me like an ocean. I was riding the slow air like a dragon, and I couldn't see anything but I was ever-aware of my forward motion. I opened my mouth and I opened up the rest of my body. Then, I understood the enormity of breath.

There was no limit that I could see – no limit to myself, no limit to anything. I breathed and breathed, and realized what incredible things it does to a person to be out in the middle of nowhere for so long. It seemed like I realized something, anyway. It wasn't painful. I couldn't feel anything, at any rate, and I lost track of where I was, exactly. I passed long, winding time. One day, I had a bloody roadside accident with a passing truck, and I never did make it to Happy Valley Goose Bay.

Tails
by Jon Yu



Igloos

Paul Toth

Noi does not exist, not officially. It was part of the Free Arctic Zone, one of those chunks of property carved out by the great heat, absorbed by a country I cannot identify, reconfigured as a sort of colonial outpost in the new world. Really, it's just one town. Well, two towns counting the northern tip, the still icy crest where some of us have been, as they say, banished. We were already banished, but it was warmer before, way down there. A lot warmer. And we saw each other. They promise this will freeze the me out of me. That's what they say, but here I am writing away, blah blah, and I just can't get rid of me. There's no "t-m" in "me," is the problem, no team at all. Me is still hot, warm enough to cook this winter cell, this igloo. And when the wind blows hard, I slap myself on one side of the face, then the other, but still I remain.

Experimental nation, they call it. All six hundred of us -- families, a few loners -- bit the same bait: We'd accept a good livelihood in exchange for our identities. That's all we had to give, all we had to do: Exist and stay out of trouble, in Noi, with no I. The idea was to see if Sartori could be created like good manners.

We were given new names, nonsense names. They called me Nuja. They worked hard on the names. There was to be no material for obvious nicknames, but they soon learned otherwise. Within a week, I was called Nutjob. They surrendered; people would retain their names, but it was too late for me. Now even the authorities call me Nutjob. Remove the nut, and I am Job.

Some did have jobs. It was unavoidable. I was a doctor and treated the flu, performed minor surgery. Others ran stores. Soon, they needed transporters and deliverers, etc., etc., etc., and then they had to give up on the rest, all but radios and televisions and personal computers. We were far from civilization, as amputated as could be, but we could not escape. It became a regular

town, except we were governed by scientists and psychiatrists, psychologists and sociologists.

They tried rotating all but the most specifically trained, such as myself, so that one did not become associated with a career. Therefore, when not the Nutjob, I was The Doctor, but others could not be so easily identified. One day, a guy might drive a truck, the next unload it, and the next sell the goods. And so all but the specialists lost a good chunk of their identities. They were better citizens.

Those who came with children brought young ones. Teenagers were out at the start. They couldn't shake the snakes and apples from those trees, not at that age. They had to catch us young or time-beaten. The loners in Noi had selves they wanted to lose, pasts they could not stomach. The parents were the kind who drowned themselves in their children. The children would be taken care of by the schools. There was a lot of learning going on in those schools, or rather unlearning. "See the world without the self." "Lose the ego lens." I've seen the books.

But it was coming, adolescent April. Until then, Noi had been chosen well for its weather. By some anomaly, the trees gained and lost their leaves so often that we lived in what seemed a permanent autumn. Walking down the streets of our no-name town, the light speckled and sparkled and trickled and poured through the trees with such rapidity that one began to feel the authorities were right: "Life is ever-changing. There is no I, no me. Even the hood of trees is different from one minute to the next, and those leaves spiraling to greet your shoes are just like thoughts about yourself, as catchable as snowflakes, even if they melt at a slower rate. All is entropy."

That's not me talking. They had spokespersons in the park, like preachers. I suspected they were poets. They knew how to read. I would stand there transfixed, believing, trying to grasp -- I mean ungrasp -- what they said. But when I walked away, back to my home/office, I could not let go. The leaves clung to my shoes. I had to peel them off, drop them in the trash. And when I emptied the trash and returned inside, there were more leaves on my shoes. Still me,



Blue Monday
by Mary Jane Caro

everywhere I looked.

And all the while, those kids kept growing. They were pretty good until sixth grade, and then the trouble started. With corporal punishment illegal, the authorities cracked as hard as they could without whips. Gum under the desks: Gum banned. Cursing at teachers: Suspension for a month, time spent building igloos in the north.

That settled things until eighth grade. Then the trouble rekindled. Oh, how the embers burned. As a doctor and aging womanizer, I knew well the first inhalation of a girl's perfume, soon forbidden. But they could not ban the curve of the hips, nor those lips which bit hearts minus the outlawed protective layer of lipstick. No rouge was necessary, for all wines were blush. Oh, Lord, it was enough to make pedophiles of saints, especially when women even half my age had the eyes of practical jokes, as if chalked binoculars had been offered to them through which it was promised they would see the answer to their dilemma: "Look in these here binoculars and you will see clearly." But they could not. The leaves clung to their shoes. Their eyes darkened.

Sometimes I saw them in the park, listening to the speakers. They rubbed their foreheads and temples and later that day would visit me in my office.

"Doctor -- I -- I --"

"Yes, I understand. Mean, it is understandable, this condition."

"I can't talk like they say. I can't say anything without 'I' in it. The first thing I think about in the morning is me, and it's the last thing I think about before sleep. And then I dream of me. And in between, well, Julie is -- she is -- she demands, utterly demands, she exists. 'I am me,' she screams, poking her chest. 'They don't own me.'"

"It's to be expected. I know from -- experience suggests it is unavoidable, but perhaps it's just a transition. No one knows yet."

"But they are teenagers."

"Yes."

Because Julie, I knew. Who didn't? Her ears were erotic. When she walked past, her tympanic membranes played hot drumsongs that made our town feel like Africa. I became, I admit, angry. She made me hate biology, history, physics, or whatever the hell ran the god-damned clock that refused me permission to be anything but old Nutjob to her. How I would have loved to run my hands over her smooth --

"Doctor? Is there anything you can prescribe?"

"Short-term course of sedatives. But if addiction occurs, one goes igloo building. The pills work. Trouble is, they work a little too well. It seems that once one learns to get out of the self with some help, one can't get there any other way. Still, if that zone is the goal, who can oppose it? Bliss. Tried the techniques?"

"Count the breaths and all that crap?"

"It's said to work."

"You say, 'It's said.' What do you say?"

"Can't do it by any means. Well, did try the sedatives. It worked, but the typical problem developed. So, had to quit. Wouldn't have wanted to be around here for that week. It's known as reentrance. The pain of withdrawal is caused by returning to a self one has almost but not quite escaped. And so all chemical means are a trap, but it is allowed as a means of showing that what is intended is a good thing."

"The way you talk. You can do it, can't you? You can manage to almost never say 'I' or 'you' or 'me'? It makes my head hurt to think so hard not to say those words."

"It's not easy. Here's a prescription. It cannot be refilled, and excessive insistence must be reported."

"I want to leave this place."

"There is a contract."

"I don't care."

"There are the igloos, if you want to be yourself back. Of course, you'll be all alone."

"What were we thinking?"

"That it would be easy."

"And it's impossible."

I shrugged; to do otherwise might have bricked me in an igloo; impostors and informers were everywhere.

She left with the prescription, did Mother of Julie. Perhaps I was improving, as I had shifted my identification this one inch. She was no longer Mrs. Whatever, but she would always be Mother of Julie. I would have made love to her in hopes of going clean through to Julie, however far from me she might be. Was such a thing possible in egoless sex, some Zen miracle of penetration? Then I would have thrown the self away in an instant.

But it was not possible. Goddamn it, none of it was possible. I bet those authorities said nothing but "me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me" the second they closed their doors. They probably masturbated in the mirror. They probably signed and resigned their names, over and over again, a hundred thousand times, the way they made errant children write on blackboards, "I am not me. Me is not I."

And then one day, the first 18 year olds began coming to see me. One of them was Julie. They had all been talking, I could tell. They had some idea, but they beat around the bush until the berries were little juggling balls in my head. I didn't know what the hell they were getting at. The usual conversation went like this:

"What I'm thinking -- sorry, Doctor, for saying that."

"That's fine. Slips at your age are excused."

"What is wanted is -- what has been spoken of seems a thing that could -- that could happen here."

"Happen?"

"That could be done."

"What is to be done?"

"Those of my age -- those at this point in life are wanting to -- feel a need to --"

-- Yes, Julie? A need? A need to what? With an older man? An experienced man?

"Never mind."

"Just ask. No is all that can be said."

"I'm tired of 'no'."

"Yes."

"What? You are, too?"

-- Julie, I'm so very tired of that word, and yet suddenly I'm sprung to yes. Yes that I would like to taste your tympanic membranes, or get as close as I can get. And then I would put my finger to your lips, and then I would --

"I'd better go, Doctor."

They all came to me speaking in code I could not decipher. Then one day Julie returned. This time, she spoke clearly.

"What I want, Doctor -- yes, I, me, Julie -- what I want is for you to clip off the tip of my pin-
kie. You have anesthesia, don't you? It won't take but a second."

"Clip off -- but that's a self-imposed identity trait that's -- we'd end up in igloos."

"I don't care."

"Where did you -- where was this heard of? Has it come from the south somehow? Is that what they're doing now?"

"Voluntary amputation, they call it. They do. That's what they do, and now we want to do the same. I want to, anyway."

“But Julie, it can’t be --”

She put her finger to my lips. To my lips. She said to me -- to me -- “Doctor, I will kiss you if you do it.”

I shook my hand. An expression, only? Give thanks, but that’s not enough. Not enough for the north. Not enough to be banished. Not enough to be trapped where the icy crystals made like leaves and stuck to your shoes.

“I mean,” she said, “really kiss you. I mean, really, really kiss you. With the tongue, Doctor. Kiss -- you -- with -- my -- tongue. And then touch your lips again, with my bandaged finger, of course.”

How had this trend found its way to Noi?

And then she did something that sprung me to yes. It catapulted me to certainty. She ran her fingers across my lap. I did not say, “I’ll get the scalpel and the anesthesia.” But I got the scalpel and the anesthesia. I knew what she wanted: Individuality. But I more knew what I wanted.

It took longer than I had imagined. She shut her eyes while I, in essence, sawed. And then the stopping of blood, and then the sewing, and then the bandaging. I could have used a nurse, but then I would have been reported. And anyway, I didn’t want a nurse present, not as I felt those lips join mine.

A sedation flowed through me, a hypno-erotic, biologic river of blood. And then her tongue twisted with mine, and it was no longer autumn but hyper-summer, tulips instantly germinating into full blossom, daisies floating through the sterile office air. When she touched my lips with the bandage, a crisscross of blood met my tongue. I wished I could swallow her, then cut my stomach open and bury my head inside myself for all eternity just to stay within this moment.

She waved a half-pinkie goodbye.

Dr. Gerduk visited me the next morning. I knew he knew, and he knew I knew he knew, and so on, but I denied everything.

“She admitted who did it,” he said.

“Then a lie was told.”

“Who else would have done it, then?”

“A friend. Anyone.”

“It is known. And if it happens again, igloo. Igloo, five years. Make Michelangelos out of snow, no parole. Understand?”

I nodded, then thought to shrug in a show of innocence: Who, me?

“I didn’t do it, but I understand, Dr. Gerduk.”

They didn’t send Julie to the igloo. I knew why. They had six teenagers. Someone would have to make the next generation, so they could see what happened. She was immune. Nor did her mother appear at my office to chastise me. Julie must have lied, claimed a friend had done it.

But that night another teenager visited. Thomas was his name. Not Tom, he explained, and, no, he didn’t want his thumb removed.

“Then what?” I said, though I wasn’t planning to amputate anything.

“My big toe. Then no one will know but me. But that’s the point, see?”

I knew it wasn’t the point. The point was that Julie was braver, and he couldn’t admit that. He pulled me close and, though no one could hear, whispered, “She’ll let you touch her



Pink Mass
by Debbie Geltner

breasts, if you do it. Julie’s my girl. Kind of. Not steady. She won’t commit. She says she’s more worried about connecting with herself than anyone else. I guess we all are.”

“All the teenagers?”

“Well...yes. But only the two of us will do it. The rest -- well, you’ve heard them talk, and they’ve never come back. We have. We’re the only ones who will bother you.”

I wasn’t going to say yes. But: “When would she come?”

“Tomorrow. She’d come tomorrow morning. Wouldn’t that be amazing, first thing in the morning?”

“I’ll be back,” I said.

He did not wave goodbye with his half-toe, nor did he say thanks. He was too busy holding back tears, and he simply closed the door behind himself.

The next morning, Julie beat Dr. Gerduk to the door.

“This must be fast,” I said.

“Faster than you think,” she said.

She opened her blouse. I touched what I had not touched in so many years. She did not brush my hand away after a second or two. Even after a minute, she hadn’t closed her blouse. Instead, she said, “I want to do something extreme. But then, extreme risks bring extreme payoffs.”

“Or losses.”

“Or both.”

She climbed onto my examining table.

“You can have me,” she said. “Right now. Well, in however many minutes it takes.”

“Takes to what?”

“I don’t want to work. I don’t want to touch myself. I don’t want to write. I want to be touched, to be written, as if there is more me than you or anybody else. I want to be more of an object, not less. But sometimes less is more.”

“I don’t understand.”

She told me. I wasn’t sure I could do it. She undid her skirt. My mind changed. It was always changing; they were right about that. My mind speckled and sparkled and trickled and poured so much yes into that room that it ran sun-yellow with the light of kept promises: I would do anything for her.

But it took so long. It was ugly, what I was doing, and despite official assurances to the contrary, wrong in an absolute moral sense. And yet, the goal seemed so absolutely right in another sense, so undeniable, that I cut through the veins and tendons with the heart of a butcher. Once or twice I turned my head, but otherwise what was all this tissue, this sinew, when compared to the rest of her? There was blood on my hands, but no leaves on my shoes. What she wanted, I wanted. If less of Julie meant more of herself to her, then more of her meant less of me, and the less the better. I was in love.

And then, I was her. No, we were not one nor two nor zero but infinity. An infinity of Julie, not me. I was gone. I streaked across the sky like a meteor and burned out before I landed, and that was that: Poof. And whether she was pretending or not, it didn’t matter. She used her mouth to touch me, her lips, her tongue, her teeth. But it was not like being kissed by a woman. No, it was like being kissed by time: blessed, forgiven, absolved. Ten Hail Julies and I was out of there.

Until Gerduk and a gang of heretofore unknown investigators kicked in my door like it didn’t exist. One investigator picked up Julie’s left hand from the pan, another the right. I felt her bandaged arms fall away, letting me return to myself. I pulled out and away, back to my leaves, back to my autumn, as they handcuffed me and restrained Julie from bolting naked into the street.

That was the last I saw of her. I am sure by now she is married, Mother of Julie the Second, I hope, for why shouldn’t there be junior daughters, successors to a holy throne?

Meanwhile, I have been banished forever, one hand sewn to my left ear, the other to my right, and the wind that comes through the opening that never closes delivers lessons they had otherwise forbid. To make sure I remember, a guard occasionally shows up and says, “How you like your Sunday school? Turning the other cheek now? Oh, that’s right, you can’t. Well, either do we.” Then he laughs and walks away, and every slap reminds me that I am stuck here in a void filled with memories I can no more grasp than Julie can touch the things of this earth.

J.D. Smith

Self-Portrait

A fish of no size,
in no particular pond,
yet swimming hard, and breathing
with deep red gills.

Tom O'Hare

(Part 3) : I'm driving the next day north, from Massachusetts to New Hampshire, to climb a mountain...

No, Josh is driving. We're approaching a tollbooth in New Hampshire. About a mile away is this tollbooth, according to a sign. We're approaching a bridge in the meantime. Josh is thinking about the tollbooth. Josh is driving. There's a curve in the road, leading to the bridge. Josh is looking for exact change. 'Josh,' I think, as the curve advances, his head still solidly downward, counting dimes and nickels. I'm going to die for dimes and nickels? We're practically in the breakdown lane now. "Josh," I say out loud, not too firmly, don't want to jolt him too much, don't want him looking at me, want him looking at the road. "Josh," I say a second time, a little firmer, and perhaps he can sense, in the timbre of my voice, that I don't want us to die right now, because he looks up, just in time, and turns the wheel just perfect, away from the barricade, not too much and into other traffic, which would also kill us, but absolutely at top form, utterly flawless, a moment of mind over matter that Homer himself would pay tribute to, and we survive. "I'll figure out the tolls from now on," I tell him, barely breathing, and we keep driving.

The dog, by the way, is named Chevy, is in the backseat, and is a terrific dog, though Josh frequently laments the fact that it is a homosexual. The scant evidence that Josh has proffered in defense of this charge comprises the fact that, one, Chevy likes to be petted around his ass, and, two, that Chevy 'acts gay.' Regardless, the dog is a better mountain climber than either of us, and especially on the way down.

But we're at the top now, for the moment out of breath, and the summit has a massive cliff, a drop of a few thousand feet, and before you, a gaggle of happy, green mountains. You could base jump off of it if you wanted to. I don't have a parachute. We have Chevy with us, remember, and since we don't want him to die, one of us guards him from afar while the other goes to peer over the cliff. Such that the individual who is peering over the cliff is not within eyeshot of the individual guarding Chevy. And I, apparently, had gone too long without saying anything when it was my turn to dance with vertigo, so Josh called out, genuinely concerned, "Tom?" And I waited a second or two, so the bastard would think I had jumped—gave him a pregnant pause, for almost killing us on the highway back there—before calling back to him, "Yeah?"

And he said, a bit too matter-of-factly, "Just checking."

And we ate lunch and went back down the mountain.

alexia

circus raindrops circling the moon
by way of its light they are
exposed.. characters of magic
making a sidewalk ocean to the
passing. witness fingers tapping
from above..

i draw this shape upon the window and
in centre dissect a train- lit up on
its way to new york. t

long lit up close your eyes

galian

class

alexia

alexia

5.0.0.