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september 20 manifesto

rain is the anesthetic – dismal, and numbing
the sky today is vibrantly gray. living in inertia we grow
tired and frozen. we wear warm socks, dreaming
of indifference and how we would search out
even the slightest cracks, then grab hold and tear.
the rain is repetition, pounding our
out-stretched hands.
routine is ether.

all of this is murder for language.
halcyon means a nap on the couch, and
love is dating turned force of habit.
the rain repeats. we are anemic;
we smile with wan tenderness upon
catching someone’s eye in passing,
flashing hints of spirit
like a lighthouse, like a warning.

but somewhere inside us are water-proof matches.
the rain calls out the raspy sound of striking and
the eager phhffffffttt of flame.
today the rain repeats, but in season there will always be
the red and green of christmas wreaths. or summer nights,
when dad and i shared a beer on the deck, resplendent in the
waning waves of heat.

memory is a promise to the present
enticing us always to embrace entropy.
life will routinely gather, crest, then recede
and the rain will repeat with clatter against
connections, awakenings,
flames....

but then,
there will always be people who kiss our foreheads
while we sleep and there will
always be the words that
get under our fingernails like dirt,
tangible and gritty, a constant reminder to
exercise the daily option of epiphany.
beads and a picture of a pretty face

in a house on a saturday night
some dead flowers and a
bag of fertilizer share space.
spirituality is defined as
raising your arms and blinking so fast
you feel like you’re dreaming.
it’s almost as if walking is more of a
process than an act as you weave
through people who look more real
in their reflections in the glass
on the wall than as the piece of being
you stare at eyes half open mouth smiling.
somewhere doesn’t remember either
where you were going even though
every person could tell you it was
the song or the bathroom or the couch.
perhaps it was the door so you could
sleep to wake with the mystery of two
french words stuck in your head or ink on
your hand or the beat resounding in
your untied shoelaces.
Abercrombie  
Matt Stackowitz - Magazine on board
Sanctuary

The only thing my heart wishes for today is a cathedral. Tall, tall, tall, me stacked on me a hundred times. I want the wide, high space to eat me, to let me sit, soul naked, so I can think. Nothing but light and cold to touch me, nowhere to look but above, no posture to assume but hang my head on the small sturdy gallows of my shoulders. Nothing to do but weep.

Days and days have come my way, have pressed me into crying for sanctuary. All the moments I live in right now are jammed with thought and meaning, with necessity and feeling, frustration and then ... the next moment. There’s something about the cool thin air of a cathedral that sounds delicious to my lungs full of thick day-to-day to breathe. If I would draw it in from my spot on the hard wooden pew, I could close my eyes and fly with that strong helium to the corner of a ceiling arch. From up there, from down on my bit of bench, it’s all the same, it’s all the restoring I’m seeking. I know I’d come down into the day ready and unpressed.

I miss the cathedrals I’ve known in Europe’s wise old cities. I’m indulging in memories of the St. Vitas in Prague right now. Its expanse invites me to humble myself in the sight of the Lord, and the same dares me to run from one corner of the cavern to the other, laughing and screaming all the way. I remember the bright bold day I was there, September’s strength pressing from the outside against those cold stone walls. The day filtered through the sieve of the stained glass windows and fell on our faces, fell at our feet in more colors that I know names for. The air, thick with dust and damp, caught the colors on their way down. I wonder if my lungs still have bits of colored cathedral in them, even now.

They must, I infer from the way my chest aches to be in a place huge and humble and holy. Colored air, carved stone and impregnable silence are not enough to make my heart overflow, no matter how attuned to beauty I may be. It’s the holiness that beauty implies, the Presence those elements usher in that I am wanting. I came by awe and wonder easier in that place than anywhere else. I hold onto the hope that I can teach my soul to sing songs worthy of the St. Vitas while I am sitting on the front stoop of my house in mid-Michigan. I know my heart will learn, not because I am effective, but because I know that the Presence clings to hearts, not places.
I slip into the room, late
slide into bed
landing among millions of mites
bedding alive
with little arthropodic crablets
chomping away on the flakes of my dead skin.

(I think to myself how funny it is
that all of us,
the poor, the pious, the depraved, and royal blood
[that’s you]
sleeps each night amidst swarming colonies)

the ultimate witnesses, most intimate voyeurs, these mites.
The books they might author, the tales they could tell.
Imagine the multitudes of miniscule poets and shakespeares
doused in dandruff tequila
living and writing under the sheets of beds.
They cling to the linen with their pincers
recording, with literary objectivity our fevers, night talk,
tossing and turnings, and nightmares.
Who knows more of our secrets?

Their flake steaks marinate in our tearwater
their breakfast boils in our sweat
the winds of each passing breath play in their hair.
Familiar with every lover
with headsheets and hot water bottles
favorite snacks and favorite songs.
They have memorized the confessions, prayers, delirium
and that name that seeps out in our sleep.
Our babies are conceived and born in their midst.

But the mites do not betray us
and if they gossip, it is only among themselves
Perhaps they see an order in our messy bed-lives.
Perhaps they regard us as agents of the miraculous,
capable at any moment of
transcendence.
On nights like this when I sing in bed, the mites sing with me.
They are the chorus.
Their appetites are untamable, their hunger divine,
after all, they are what they eat.
From Studies of Light and Shadow

Holly Van Staalduninen - Color Print
From Studies of Light and Shadow
Holly Van Staalduin - Color Print
Notes on Racism

It is time for all of us to tell and to continue to tell each other the truth (in love) about racism in America as well as at Calvin. In human relations, the truth is hard to come by because most groups are deceived about themselves. Rationalization and the incessant search for scapegoats are the psychological cataracts that blind us to our individual and collective sins. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. so eloquently reminded us that "He who lives with untruth lives in spiritual slavery. Freedom is still the bonus we receive for knowing the truth." (1967:67). "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." (St. John 8:32).

Ever since the birth of our nation, white America has had a schizophrenic personality on the question of race. She has been torn between selves, a self in which she proudly professes the great principles of democracy and a self in which she sadly practiced the antithesis of democracy. What is the source of this schizophrenic personality? It lies in the "congenital deformity" of racism that has crippled America from its inception. The roots of racism are very deep in America. This does not imply that all white Americans are racists (far from it). Many white people have, through a deep moral compulsion, fought long and hard for racial justice. Nor am I implying that America or Calvin College have not made progress in their attempts to cure themselves of the disease of racism. However, for the good of America and Calvin College, it is necessary to refute the idea that the dominant ideology on both fronts is freedom and equality while racism is just an occasional departure from the norm on the part of a few citizens and/or students.

What is racism? In Racism and The Christian Understanding of Man (1965:9) Kelsey states that:
"Racism is a faith. It is a form of idolatry...In its early modern beginnings, racism was a justificatory device. It did not emerge as a faith. It arose as an ideological justification for the constellations of political and economic power which were pressed in colonialism and slavery. But gradually the idea of the superior race was heightened and deepened in meaning and value so that it pointed beyond the historical structures of relation, in which it emerged, to human existence itself."

In their book, Carmichael and Hamilton (1967:3-5) expand on the theme by stating that there are two types of racism, individual and institutional. According to Carmichael and Hamilton,
"The first consists of overt acts by individuals, which cause death, injury, or violent destruction of property...The second type is less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts...The sec-


ond type originates in the operation of established and respected forces in society, and thus receives far less public condemnation than the first type."

Institutional racism, especially as practiced at universities and colleges throughout America (Calvin included), relies on the active and pervasive operation of anti-black (and other minorities) attitudes and practices. A sense of superior group position prevails: whites (Dutch, Swedish, Irish, and so on) are "better" than non-whites; therefore non-whites (esp. Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans) should be subordinated to whites. This is a racist attitudes and it permeates the society, on both the individual and institutional level, covertly or overtly. (See Haymes' Race, Culture, and The City, 1995, and Massey and Denton's American Apartheid, 1993).

"Respectable individual" (also "politically correct") can absolve themselves from individual blame: they would never drag a minority behind a pick-up truck; they would never say, I am tired of seeing the growing number of non-whites at our college (students, faculty, staff). But they continue to perpetuate institutional racist policies. Any person and/or institutions that places dogma, beliefs, tradition, gradualism, etc. over modeling multiculturalism and non-gender/class/race bias is promoting racism [classism, sexism], knowingly or unknowingly. Thus, act of overt, individual racism may not typify the society/community, but institutional racism does – with the support of covert, individual attitudes of racism.
I know of no better way to conclude than to quote Charles Silberman, Crisis in Black and White (1964:9-10):
"What we are discovering, in short is that the United States - all of it, North as well as South, West as well as East - is a racist society in a sense and to a degree that we have refused so far to admit, much less face...the tragedy of race relations in the United States is that there is no American Dilemma. White Americans are not torn and tortured by the conflict between their devotion to the American creed and their actual behavior. They are upset by the current state of race relations, to be sure. But what troubles them is not that justice is being denied but their peace is being shattered and their business interrupted."

To put it another way, literally millions of white people (as well as others who blame the victim or subscribe to kill the messenger) actually believe there is no "American dilemma" (or, for that matter, no racism problem at Calvin College). There is a tendency not to see or work on the problem with a sense of urgency (see Tim. 4:1-8) if you live in a "balkanized" (everyone looks like you) community/city/nation/church/college. This is why we must never give up our quest to eliminate "balkanization" (racial isolation) in America (Calvin College included) and to remain steadfast and unmovable in our efforts "to be agents of shalom, models of shalom, witnesses to shalom."

Professor Bob Butler,
Director of Criminal Justice Program,
Calvin College
Double Vision
For Suzana

Metaphors for your eyes look too closed. Squint within the borders of this page, they blink past your brown in what they suppose and gaze blindly, but who sees you knows that behind your brown eyes music rages – metaphors for your eyes look too closed.

Definitions contrive, gesture, blow, off-tempo with your rhythmic engages – they blink past your brown in what they suppose.

Beyond your eyelids music overflows, outpaints equations, _sans_ phonic beiges; Metaphors for your eyes don’t dance – they doze:

they say a rose is . . . a rose is a . . . rose? But no roses are tired-out phrases! They blink while your browns outlast echoes.

Magic that your eyes could watch in repose? Miracle vision? Sight unto ages? Metaphors for your eyes look too closed. They blink past your brown in all they suppose.
Focus

Despite the glaring absence of evidence, I imagine Him nearly blind, like a newborn child confusing the moon with a ball.

Not that His eyes were bad, but just unable to focus, knowing that shadows here blend seamlessly into light. There is no gap. There is no edge to things. Even the vacant air we stare through is a manic dance of matter. And so the bleary world in colors swirled across the skin of His open eyes.

What He saw, with unparalleled clarity, were souls. Having known the hollows hidden among the aching husks which carry us, He poured Himself out, sloshing and pooling like rain, absorbed into these porous rocks.

As He stood there teaching on that shore, the crowd rippled, spread throughout the valley, a faint reflection of His own face. And when He had spoken: "The Kingdom of Heaven is near," His arm stretched out and people thought it was a blessing. And it was, in a way, as He reached and pressed His hand against the chilled sheet of sky.
Ryan Reed - Color Slide
The trees strangle in gravel
on Erie, somewhere between
Michigan and State Street.
Up between buildings a thin
strip of sky deepens with
textures of cloudy grays.
Light spills from locked doors
to rest with hard shadows on
the bodies of bums slumped
on rough stoops.

The city swells with the odd heat that
presses down under the weight
of the cold about to crack.

Under Lake Shore Drive
the pedestrian path stagnates with
the odor of piss and puke.
Our lungs fill and stretch,
bursting from the stench.

The sand compresses and spreads
with each step, crystals creaking.
Our four silhouettes fold at the edge
of the water, toes kissed by waves.
Black meets blacker out where
water meets sky. (To our backs
the city throbs orange.) But we
hear only the whispers of waves,
see only the glow of our cigarettes,
feel only the rush of wind
carrying water to cry on our faces.
Kyoto: In the Courtyard of the Temple of the Goddess of Love

The bell of time, still;
The gravestones, quiet as well:
Cicada music.
Cicada silence.
Night wind moves through the forest:
Bamboo sways and speaks.
**prescience**

hurl the spheres across the space,  
down, down to strike the  
green hard plain of existence.

contort and dance as in a vision  
feet poised, arms flashing  
about the battlefield.

see and foresee,  
the moves that will be made,  
the responses to be taken.

wrapped in invincibility,  
let fly the wound-up muscles  
of adrenaline performance.

move in a dream-fast world  
where actions and reactions  
play out in close-fought seconds.

paddle the spheres across the space,  
spin them unpredictably,  
dance through the flying realm of prescience.

(the only fate is twenty-one)
wind driven ripples of sand out on a beach in the middle of nowhere
with our backs turned facing out to a stormy choppy sea
crashing thrashing mashing rocks of the pier
beams from lighthouses cold red and overwhelming in the harbour
frigid fingernail moon waning waxing straining
to surface through blacky blue cloud ships
sailing in a second sea of sky:
two seas, one on top of the other and
you and me and the moon in the middle of nowhere
silent breathing and seeing
In which she ponders her ways.

The filthy streets fill my every pore with their grubby leaf residue. It could have been, and it was, crisp and clear three days ago. Now it appears punished for shining so brightly in such a painful world.

I’m such a sucker for environments. I feel like I’m in a place where a person should be having deep thoughts, I will them into existence. It’s all a part of making my life like a book, making my life how it’s supposed to be. And this is the point in which she branches out. In which the small town girl grows up. In which she learns the bus. In which she crumbles. Those are chapter titles. I see it as an old-fashioned children’s book.

Some days I relish looking like a tall little boy, with short messy hair and sweaters with sleeves too long. I bite my nails, too. I don’t have to be stylish or sophisticated or put-together. I look scared. Though sometimes I wish "vulnerable" wasn’t written on my forehead. But they all know I am. I’ll never know how many of them use it.

I find comfort in making myself small. Sitting in the bus stop, I cross my legs tightly and draw in my whole body with my book, so that I take up almost no space at all. If it weren’t so public, I would curl up into a ball. No one else understands what this does for me.

Sometimes I’m convinced myself so well that I’m small that all space around me seems huge. Especially the city.

But I can clench my teeth and little girl fears and stomp through the city streets indignantly. Nope, I’m not afraid. Time heals all panic.

I am waiting in the bus stop downtown. I realize that I am the only female, the only Caucasian, the only college student in the vicinity. The bus is supposed to come soon. I’ll be okay. I can learn from experience. I like experience.

When I look over at him, he is far too dangerously close to me. His face looks like wet leather and the eyes are lost inside skin so yellow, so yellow. Coughing. Voice verbally jagged like an exhaust pipe. The whole air seems to choke when he speaks.

"He got a white woman now? Sheeit."

I pull in my book a little closer.
"I never trust no white woman."

I read economic principles as if to save my life and the words blur and none of it means anything to me anymore. I forget that I'm in college and I'm taking classes and all of that. All that matters now is that the bus comes. All that matters now is that I survive this.

I stop looking over to watch people come and go. I no longer know who's sitting next to me. I just hear them talk about women and drugs. Everyone who joins the bus stop knows everyone sitting there.

"You there," he gestures to me with a hand that's holding a cookie. "You girl. I thought I told you to wait at home for me tonight." He laughs at his own
joke. I had just heard him tell it to another girl walking by, who didn’t even stop respond.

"It’s just a joke girl." I must look terrified.

"I know." Mumble, mumble. Don’t really remember what I say. Trying to make economics look fascinating.

"My granddaughter has a baby, I guess that’s how old I am.

But my daughter, she won’t talk to me. She won’t talk to me."

He talks over and over about his daughter. At least I think it’s the same man. I won’t look over to see, and all their voices sound like exhaust pipes.

The bus arrives after what seems like years, and I almost miss it. I leap to my feet and fling my bag behind me as I make it just in time for the over-crowded bus. Public transportation never seemed so safe, and just an hour earlier it felt like the most hostile thing on earth, as I push the wrong way on the door and embarrassed myself. I turn to look helplessly at the bus driver and saw all eyebrows raised at me. Stupid little girl, what is she doing? Stupid little lost girl. Doesn’t she know to learn about what she’s doing before she does it?

No, she doesn’t.

Stupid and brave.

Stomping through real world puddles proudly, without testing for depth.

But I know this is how I live my life. Some people know that they will always be cautious; I know that I will always intentionally put myself in situations in which I am lost. Emotionally, mentally, and environmentally. I always start out lost, with faint hopes that someday I will be not-so-lost.

How do I do this? How can I function like this, always placing myself in newness, always unfamiliar and out of place?

I think that’s why I have little boy hair. And why I tug on my sweater sleeves. I know that’s why I make myself small.

Maybe I’ll be so small that no one can touch me and know that they are
touching me.

The dreary day street grime caresses me without being conscious that it is touching me. The bus cradles me like an unknown tomb, and does not notice a new visitor. The oily black hand covered in cookie crumbs doesn’t just point at me, but digs inside of me in a dull, expository way. The city and its people grace every inch of me, and they will never be aware of this.

Christy Phillips
The Squirrel

So I’m lying there on the grass, pinned flat on my back, with this squirrel between my legs. He has a nut in his mouth. I’m a little worried, unsure if I’m dreaming or awake. The sun is rising in the blue sky, and the grass is cool. It must be one of those big crunchy walnuts, selected from last fall’s hidden stash, because his cheeks bulge out, fixing his face with a crooked, puffy grin. I can’t decide if the effect is comical or menacing.

I had been walking innocently enough through the broad park, until this monster dropped from the spreading oak as I passed underneath. Distracted by the gray blur, I tripped on a root. That’s when he took advantage of his opportunity. I tried to defend myself with my backpack, but only succeeded in scattering my books across the dewy lawn. Now he’s got me pinned.

Silence.

"W-well, what do you w-want with me?"

"Kekalt mgmorph."

"You – You’ve got me down, what are you going to do next...? Look, I’m ah, a little uncomfortable with you down there. I want to have children...You seem like a nice squirrel, not one of those mean ones that drop nuts on people’s heads...or rip theirs out... Really, I want to get married some day, I’m telling ya, have a wife, two boys, a daughter, a swimming pool out back. Come on, let me up, like a good little squirrel."

The beady eyes stare, unblinking.

"Awright, awright; I’m sorry for all the peanut butter coated sleeping pills I fed to your little relatives last year out in the woods behind our back fence. I-I hope none of them suffered, if that’s what you want to hear. Forgive me, Father Squirrel, for all the times I’ve lured your children in with the promise of bread crumbs, then chased them until they pooped." I tried to cross myself, but he stopped me with a hostile twitch of his head. "I won’t worry you anymore, I promise. In fact, I’ll put nuts out for you every winter, I’ll let you nest in our attic, I won’t chase you off my mom’s birdfeeder anymore, I’ll..."

"Kekalt mgmorph."

"You’re a little Freudian slip come alive, aren’t you? That’s it, you’re a little... hallucination of the Freud I’ve been reading, some of that mumbo jumbo about the repressed male subconscious and phallic fascination, and all that, right? Should’ve
known better than to read that textbook right before bed, and on
a stomach full of mom’s strawberry shortcake. ‘You’ll find Freud a
little challenging, maybe even disturbing,’ the teacher says. ‘Oh,’ I
quip, ‘like any psychologist is gonna bother me.’ Idiot. I knew I
never should have signed up for that AP psychology class. Which,
by the way, I’m gonna be late for, if you don’t let me... Okay,
Okay, I won’t try to get up, just keep your little paws to yourself,
alright? Who do you think you are to keep me here like this any-
way?”

"Kekalt mgmorph."

"Look, I’m sick and tired of this. Take that damn nut out of
your mouth, will ya? You’re pissing me off with that mumbling and
that silly ass grin of yours." Before he could stop me, I whipped
out my hand and squeezed his puffy grin until the walnut popped
out. "Now talk, you little bastard."

“Check out my mouth.”

Silence.

“You triflin’...sleazy...dirty rotten SOB. I’ve been laying here
all this time thinking you’re gonna take a bite out of my balls and
all you want to say is, ‘check out my mouth,’?! I swear, I oughta
break your neck, I oughta pull out your little tongue, I oughta
pound you into the ground, I oughta...”

“Check out my mouth. Didn’t it look funny with that walnut in
there?”

And he scampered away into the oak tree.

I brushed myself off and gathered my books, and wished the
dew hadn’t left wet spots on my butt and my back. Or I woke up;
I’m not sure which.

Totally weird.
Suburban Landscapes

Paul Birza - Color Prints
Joy

Our front porch is a room, roof sagging, walled by gray siding on the west side and a small white fence around the rest. The porch stairs stretch to the sidewalk. Surrounding the fence are oddly sheared bushes where people toss chip foils and brown paper-bagged bottles as they pass down the sidewalk. Every other week or so a man will ask to have the bottles for deposit money, and I gladly let him.

The highlight of the porch, where I sit right now, is the porch swing. Along one of the fences the swing backs up to weeds that grow just taller than the fence. On that swing four people sit and swing, high, now higher, one person gets sick, gets off. Now we swing higher and now the chain creaks and breaks. This has never happened before. Bryan fixes it and carves his initials into the wood of the seat, B.S. Here, on the porch, life sometimes works in slow motion. Slowly I see my legs rise and drop; my hand push against the chain; the wall, stairs, and sidewalk swivel and gloss as my head turns.

I am well studied in the art of suicide: what works, what doesn’t. I’m not quite sure when I transitioned from obsession to attempts. It was inevitable, though. Like the way someone who’s obsessed with guns will someday kill with one. Or the way someone obsessed with her body image will have an eating disorder. Obsessions can rarely be contained by knowledge only. While I was contemplating different forms of suicide for years (quicker ways, quieter ways, cooler ways) I was hurting myself. I’d knife my abdomen, gouge my arms and legs, yank my hair. The physical pain released emotions with no other outlet. Then, at some hazy point, I must have thought if I could just take a little more physical pain, then I would be done with emotions. That is suicide.

Real suicide is never those screaming sorts of attempts, those "cries for help". Not the bottles of aspirin or the shallowly cut wrists. Real suicide waits with a sharp butcher knife under a pool of water (which numbs the skin and makes it easier to slice). Real suicide chases the bottle of Midiron with a bottle of anti-freeze. I would work so hard only to have someone rescue me. Only someone who has her stomach pumped, who has had blood drained back into her body after working so hard to drain it out, who has woken up and wondered why the hell she is still alive can understand the kind of hatred rescue can bring.

Sometimes I wonder why I don’t sit on the back porch. It’s picturesque, rustic and exposed to the sky. It emerges from the midst of our jungle-gar-
den, almost like we don’t live in a conservative Midwest town. The back porch is secluded. Out front I can sit on the swing and take in so many things around me, but in back I have only what I set up for myself. No surprises, no gifts. On the front porch I watch the cars pass down the street, I can wait in excited anticipation for roommates and friends to arrive. On the front porch I listen to the birds who nest in cracks of the porch roof. Out on the front porch I watch snow sparkle and settle without the worries of getting wet or the troubles of driving in it. I can watch my breath whiten and fade out; I can smell the rain or the season. The front porch gives me a transitional break from my house to work or school.

People who have never considered suicide can’t understand it. Half the people who have thought about suicide can’t understand it. Suicide decides that whatever death holds, it can’t be worse than life. This is unnatural. Most people would prefer to be unhappy rather than leap into something unknown. This means that whatever is going on inside of a depressed person is much worse than simple unhappiness. Scientists say it’s chemical. They like to do that: give reasons and definitions to the unexplainable. Make it natural. They may be right. All I know is that it all starts with a feeling of restlessness, of unhappiness, of a need for change. But change is hard when you don’t have the energy to get out of bed. If you do, your still brain goes with you. It’s a fear of your own existence. It’s boredom. It’s a feeling that even if your death does matter, you won’t be around to deal with it. Its exhaustion and fear of having to deal with real life. It’s a loneliness that nature, humanity, deity can’t fill. It’s a loneliness caused by retracting from yourself, by letting something else control you. Loneliness caused by no longer placing yourself within the world, but apart and below. A solitary onlooker of society, too busy with internal battles and defeat to participate in humanity.

But what causes these feelings? I don’t know. I felt this way because I always had. Because as a child I had no friends. Because my parents were still children when I was born. Because I have no memory of ever being joyful. Because I felt strong feeling of guilt over things I could not explain when I went to bed each night. Because I never quite fit in. Because my memories made me nauseous. Because I knew all people are easily replaced. Because I thought about myself too much. Because, too, I have only ever known rejection, never affirmation or respect or love or acceptance.

Was I always rejected? No, but factual truth doesn’t matter. Rejection is what I remember, what is true to me. This I had no choice over. Maybe that’s what’s chemical: the inability to filter reality and equally weigh good and bad.
The porch is one of the first places where I felt like I belonged. It wasn't just the porch itself, but the house, the neighborhood, the town. I think that most people would not see this as odd, since I live down the street from crack dealers and the house where a man was murdered 6 months ago, and across the street from a large stone church. I think that the absurd compilation of this town is what draws me to it. The town really doesn't make any sense. One side of our street is the ghetto, but this side is a kind of detached mix of twenty-somethings, and one block over is a shady-treed cobblestone cul-de-sac for the trendy. From my porch I can watch all of it, enjoy all of it.

I knew something was wrong with me when I was eight years old. My parents brought me to see counselors, and I would tell them nothing really, and then say, "well, fix me." It never worked. By junior and senior year I wallowed in depression. I wore all black and rarely spoke, sat in the corner and wrote. I enjoyed the melodrama of this. But that was only when I felt good enough to leave the house. Many days I locked myself in my bedroom, saying, "Sick," or, "Homework," to my mother. I had always managed to get good grades, so my parents never had reason to question me. In my room I was free to hurt myself...contemplate suicide...attempt it.

College was hard. I no longer could enjoy any part of being depressed. I couldn't show it off, because no one cared. So now my depression made me angry. It made me violent, it made me mean. This was the first time I made the choice to see a counselor. I didn't go so that I could get better, I went so that someone would care. So that I had someone who would see my scars. Needless to say, it didn't help.

Then, halfway into my sophomore year my depression and anger (which I later found out were caused by both bipolar disorder and borderline personality disorder) made it impossible for me to cope with daily life. I would lay on the couch day and night, staring at the walls, then clean furiously until my fingers bled. I knew I had to change something, but I didn't have the energy until a friend came over during one of my rages. I threw an ashtray at his head, and watched in horror as the glass shattered against the wall. I called a psychiatrist immediately.

Now eleven people scatter comfortably around the edges of the porch. Six of them live here with me. They are my closest friends, our love is visible in the small things we do for each other, whether it is wrapping someone in a blanket when she is sick or getting a glass of water for someone who has had too much to drink. In the far front corner of the porch I am spooning marinated vegetables from the foil packet on the Weber and sending the plates around. We drink cheap bottled beer. I listen to the conversation around me,
hearing speech not often heard. We are all fairly educated people, but come from uneducated places, and the beer only increases the accents. Here is New Jersey, here Midwest countryside, here the valleys of Minnesota, and I speak generations of Chicago. I can hear someone say, "Da problem wid aart of recen yeers is dad it fails to communicade anything but aart idself." The vowels are hard and drawn out, the consonants slightly slurred, and 'years' comes out with a sort of Doppler effect, like a Saturday Night Live character. Another Chicago. And then she says, "Bring dem matches over here, yo." and no one flinches for grammar.

I sit in my corner seat and take it in. These are the people I love. I want to cry for the things I put them through over the years. These are the people who saved my bleeding body, the people who tried to draw me out when I cried, the people I threw things at and screamed at on my worst days.

For two years I took medication and went to counseling. It was hard. It was hard to make myself go, hard to find the money, hard to tell people, hard to talk about the things I needed to talk about. But it worked, in a way. My problems didn’t magically disappear, but I understood who I wanted to be -- who I could be, if I could only fight off the masks of depression. But even then I didn’t get it. I understood that I could be happy, but not why I should be happy. I didn’t understand joy.

The problems ended up being different than I had thought. I had thought that changing the way I looked at things would be hard, but it wasn’t. I thought being diagnosed with two frightening mental disorders would be difficult, but it wasn’t. What was hard was finding out who I was. At first I tried to seem strong and independent, when in truth I was just scared and lonely. I still am. I miss my depression and suicidal tendencies. I don’t want them back, but it’s hard to go on without them; they are all I know. I am forced to discover myself without masks. I don’t always like what I see, and these things make me want to run back to the comfortable so that I don’t have to be a real person. I don’t always want to face the challenge of changing or accepting myself. Of being wrong. I am afraid to accept so many things about myself. I am afraid to accept that I am beautiful and talented, that I can be loved, that I am. All these things set new standards for me, goals that take work to achieve. In my past the only goals I had were to stay alive for the week, the month, and maybe someday not worry about that.

Sunday mornings our porch becomes my chapel. It never meant to be, but at 10 a.m. I will go out and clean up from Saturday night, unshowered and sweating beer. The sounds of the church choir, and the birds, and the creaking of the house breeze over to the swing where I take a break and light a cigarette. I think of Emily Dickinson’s poem about choosing to worship God
from her back yard instead of the church. I wish I could remember the words. Maybe it’s a misplaced memory, but I think she talks about how she prefers to simply take life in and praise God for that. I couldn’t agree more. Life is the gift I have (one I sometimes feel I hardly deserve after all I’ve done) and I will sit on this porch and mentally cry out my hallelujahs to God for it.

I don’t exactly know when I first discovered joy, but I am constantly rediscovering it. I think that joy stems out of love, and I need to practice love first among many things. I need to seek out the beauty of what God had created for us and share it with others. I need to focus on small gifts like snow and work, and be more blind to the downfalls of these things. I need to be less cynical. To have less shame. I need to tell other people I look up to them. I need to tell people I love them. I need to tell people they have beautiful eyes, a beautiful smile, that they are good listeners. I need to wake up every morning and praise God for the air I get to breathe. This is joy.

I could never say it isn’t work, or that it ever won’t be work, but it is worth it. I continue to add more challenges to myself, to work on finding peace, patience, self-control. I continue to work out the things I see that I don’t like in myself. And I continue to every day fight the desire to stay curled up in my bed and drop out of the world again. I continue these challenges because quitting means death.
Dave Van Noord - Mixed Media
Jetsmoke

the jet
describes its dream-like arc
of medium-thinness,
doubtful whiteness,
across a darkening sky
still blue in remembrance of a true sky.
it tops two stars
but may never reach them.

(the glories of man are exhaust,
exhaled in sputtering coughs of greatness)

the man in moon
has clear eyes
longing for company
that will never come.

a planet,
bright innocent light
in deepening night
is home for a thousand wishes.

and if i was to offer
one wish to that brave beginning
let it be
that when i
feel the thrusters rumble,
observe the horizon line’s advance across the earth
amidst a flourish of sunbeams
set my feet upon the moon
or a planet
or two stars,
and soar weightlessly
it will be more than virtual flight,
the achievements of my life more than jetsmoke.
Dave Van Noord - Mixed Media
Dave Van Noord - Mixed Media
You ease yourself back into the big backed chair in the
apartment where at one o'clock in the afternoon a light
must be on in order to read the paper. Yes, ease your-
self into it, light up a cigar, or a cigarette, or if you don’t
smoke, then have some tea, and calm down. Try to
focus on where a window might be put in to get some
light, but don’t take yourself seriously. All the while,
remind yourself of the fact that you’ll never get around to
it, and each time grin a little. When you get to imagining
all sorts of elaborate windows, huge round sea-ship win-
dows, tall castle windows with cupolas built around
them, it will be time to laugh. At first just let out a light
chuckle- you couldn’t possibly afford a window like that.
Think of the small apartment with a window like that in it,
imagine how it would be. Think of the time your brother
told you that dropping out of high school to marry her
was a bad idea, and how you almost joined the Navy.
Think about your job and your wife who left, and how
everything might be visible from the window you’re think-
ing of.

Breath deeply and smile. Hear the children playing
in the street below, and listen to the sounds of dust on
their clothes. Try to feel your brothers’ presence in the
room like a very slight increase in temperature, and try to
feel your wife, wherever she is. Imagine her stopping for
one small instant what she is doing and thinking of you.
Then try to hear the roar of the surf on a Navy boat, a
small raft in which you are fleeing the enemy. Try to
make out the island ahead, but you can’t. All you can
see is the dark, dark night, and the occasional bursting
of flares in the sky. Your companions are silent as the
tiny craft whistles atop the waves, and the crashing
sound of it becomes a redundant monotony. Fall asleep.

If you don’t fall asleep, it will be time for the next
cigar, cigarette, or cup of tea. Get it and stand, facing
the wall. With a penetrating glare, stare at the spot
where you imagined the window. Sip your tea, smoke,
and create the window again, the landscape behind it,
the pane, the curtains. Except this time have the cur-
tains blowing in a faint breeze because the window is
open. And without hesitation, leap through.
The United States government has control of satellites which can zoom in on an object as small as a pencil from where they float out in space.

T.S. Eliot wrote about the importance of mind and heart working in symbiosis. I guess I agree with him, but in my own experience those particular organs never quite seem to fall into rhythm with each other. The heart thumps in my chest, tugging and pushing me through a day. Meanwhile, thoughts perch high up in the stratosphere like hecklers in the bleachers, telling me to give up. The world is round and all paths return upon themselves again. From a hole in my mother to a hole in the ground, from dust to dust. Fortunately enough, passion is stubborn and presses forward despite the slow diminishment of resources around it.¹

“May it be sudden, whatever You plan for us; may man’s mind Be blind to the future. Let him hope on in his fears.” -Heloise (from a letter written to Peter Abelard)

I have become two people: the cold floating eye of the satellite surveying the scene², and the blind creature who struggles beneath the weight of observations transmitted from somewhere far away. I haven’t found the happy medium which Eliot prescribes. What I have found is a line of scrimmage, where the two surge up against each other again and again.³ Surprisingly enough, I found it in the same place Eliot did: writing poetry.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Did I just say I had a bird’s-eye view? Did I just claim to be passionate? Lots of times I don’t care enough to force either of those and instead I just trudge around with some vague sort of disdain or admiration for the moments as they flutter by me. For the most part, I’m ignorant of how the world around me works. As far as I’m concerned, cars may as well run on magic. Blood pumps through my veins, chlorophyll pumps through trees; yet whatever chugs along at the bottom of these things, animating them, remains a mystery. Philosophy. Physics. Poetry. Even these human tools are fueled by engines which, in the end analysis, we don’t understand.⁴ Either we continue to search for the elusive foundation on which things rest, or we ‘conclude’ by admitting ignorance.⁵

¹ St. John of the Cross wrote uplifting poetry from the dark, urine-saturated recesses of a prison cell.
² In all fairness, satellites can’t be called weightless, only less weighty.
³ The event horizon is the perimeter of a black hole from which no light escapes, where all illu
"That’s just the way it is." When my parents said it, I was sure they were either hiding a really good explanation or they just hadn’t thought about it enough. Only now am I beginning to realize how sacred certain ignorance is. The inability to express something is the best compliment you can give it.⁶

Plato took this fence around the limits of knowledge to mean that there was a world beyond our own in which everything was ideal, rather than the ragged scraps which surround us here. In Plato’s Great Beyond a square, drawn out, would conform to its definition perfectly, busses would arrive and depart on time, and all manner of things would be well. Now, obviously, I don’t know anything about the realm beyond and how it might look; whether or not it’ll be just a pristine, punctual, well-lit version of our own. I do know that what I love, fearfully, about THIS place are its rough edges. Maybe its my own crookedness, but I don’t want the ‘other world’ to be a pared-down, optimally functioning counterpart to our own. Maybe we shouldn’t look for the world beyond at all, but at this one instead.⁷ If the lives which we have are not complete, it might not be our place to put them together. Earth seems exhaustive, filled to the brink. Even the vast, thinly-populated stretches of the

minution is caught up in the self-referential force of an almost infinite gravity. However, it has been proven that the interaction of molecules along the border of the black hole cannot help but produce light anyway. (This process is called Hawking radiation).

⁴ When I’m immersed in words and ideas, it’s easy to get distanced from the reality of physical life. The page is an object, but it can become unreal and untextured.

I easily become distanced from my surroundings, cut off from the nudity (of cracks, bulges, angles, strings, etc., etc.) of that which is around me and in me.

A woman opens the door and walks across the room. I say this, I see this, and yet it is a poor sketch of what is actually happening. Muscles are tensing up and letting go. The floor is creaking, slightly sinking and slightly bouncing back beneath her feet. Her feet shift within shoes and are worn at with each movement. The chemicals in her brain are swimming and spinning in ways I can’t imagine. And yet, even if I keep all of this in mind as I watch, I’m ignoring the window behind her and the street beyond it. I’m not looking at the air close enough to see the wind pools of wind within it.

People at parties ask questions like “what do you do?” We seem to have it in our minds that its possible to classify others in simple terms (career, hair or skin color, political stance, cola preference, reaction to stimuli in a particular instance) and the worst part is that we let ourselves fit into these stereotypes. Sometimes we work our asses off to get into a mold.

The danger with words is that they’re symbolic. A symbol is not a mirror. It will always neglect certain things, even wonderful ones. The best that words can do is to turn you away from them, ready. Words aren’t there to express silence, but to enrich the silence which follows them. If words keep you inside of them, they are lies (even if they are true, their actions mislead).

⁵ Or we do both.

⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein ends his Tractatus with the words “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.” Poetry, when it’s good, agrees with him. Poetry doesn’t try to describe what is beyond us. It points mutely, longingly, toward it.

⁷ Among the least conspicuous sins is the lust for heaven. For centuries, people have dreamed of pearly white spires by which all the shit and toil of earth could be swallowed up. It was, in part,
universe are filled with atoms. All things tilt. All things fall together, leaning on one another. But when the tree you propped your elbow on dies, what then? What does EVERYTHING have to prop itself up?

[In Jonathan Edwards’ most famous sermon he imagines us as a spider dangling from God’s hand, above a fire. We are connected to God’s hand by an invisible thread, and this communion is what makes us whole. Grace is the invisible part of the world. All things are explained and made complete through it, yet it can only be seen as the wind is seen.]

I’m obsessed with appearances, with tangibility. I use words because they’re the appearance of thought, the cryogenic chamber where meaning is stored in transit between two souls. But meaning is excruciating, and many times I just allow myself to become flimsy enough to float along on its surface. It’s tempting to chime in with the Romantics and use Keats’ phrase, that “Beauty is Truth; Truth, Beauty / That is all . . . ye need to know.” The thing is, I can’t buy into that, and I don’t think Keats did either, in the end. It’s more of a coping mechanism than a genuine approach to life. By attending to the superficial, it neglects our insides. Truth can be beautiful but it’s never only that. Beauty is a commercial. It can lead to either truth or error, but most often it only leads back to itself. It breeds quilts stitched with quaint aphorisms, condominium developments on scenic mountain vistas, and generally consumes any portion of truth that’s thrown to it like fast-food. What I’m talking about here (in case you were wondering) isn’t just physical superficiality. In school we are given a whirlwind tour of Humanity’s Greatest Hits but denied the time to live inside and grapple with the ideas presented. You can’t walk along and pick up “truths” like a kid picks flowers from the roadside. There is no mental filing cabinet in which to store the “truths” you’ve accumulated. Truth has to be participated in if it’s going to be Truth.

this type of mindset which led Marx to call religion “the opiate of the masses.” We are not here to leave. One of the basic rules of running a business is that you don’t order more of something unless you know what you’ve already got.

8 Cute. Cuddly planets. My pal the solar system. But don’t forget why we huddle together: because it’s COLD.

9 In his sermon on the mount, Jesus says “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” People usually take this to mean that the “pure of heart” are going to heaven. But maybe Jesus is saying that it’s only the grimy lenses of our own hearts that inhibit us from seeing God now and everywhere.

10 As I write this I skim my fingers back, and forth along my lips (one of the most condensed clusters of nerves in the human body). I bite my nails. Tap my feet. Roll a cigarette between forefinger and thumb. I require sensory overload at almost all times to keep me from floating away. When you’re nearly always stimulated, the absence of stimulation becomes even more vivid. Silence is always in the eye of some hurricane.

11 Math equations, as we usually learn them, are lower-cased truths, not upper-cased ones.
It's annoying that all the really great things are impossible to capture with words. "Truths are illusions about which it has been forgotten that they are illusions, worn-out metaphors without sensory impact, coins which have lost their image and now can be used only as metal and no longer as coins."\textsuperscript{12} We can't fit in words.\textsuperscript{13} Our souls cannot breathe inside of them for too long.

\begin{equation}
1 \times 1 = 1.
\end{equation}
The smallest integer. The thin line from zero, holding on. I've tried to gather myself together, to become whole, I've tried. To build my ragged scraps into a new element. From lead to gold.

"if two lie down together they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?"
Eccles. 4:11

The \textit{mandelbrot set} is a group of numbers which, when programmed into a computer, yields an infinitely intricate pattern. Picture a tree: its branches come out from the trunk, each resembling the larger tree. Now imagine that the branches keep jutting off, getting smaller and smaller an infinite number of times. You can zoom in on any part and it'll be almost the same as looking at the entire thing. The mandelbrot set is a metaphor for why we can use metaphors and why we can grasp pieces of God even in our depravity. \begin{equation}1 \times 1 = 1\end{equation}, but the smallest piece of the world is intimately tied to the whole.
\textsuperscript{12} Nietzsche. "On Truth and Lying."

\textsuperscript{13} RELIEF

Here, spread out lingering across the wintry page; brittle stumps of shade in which I never seem to fit.

Something is in me which clatters between these dingy bars (a pinball bouncing through the pegs of a machine) whatever they might mean. However red the ‘blood’ may seem it's only ink, and when it spills the page stays dry, and what is lost was never yours to begin with.

The characters are here, set down, propped up, a forest of bodies for us to move among. And always, past these fragile silhouettes,* a field of white extends. But if its calm and steady light, or only vacant space I couldn't say.

* Treetops jutting off of the horizonline, their branches sprawling crisscross, cutting the sky into segments which (if you hold your eyes just right) rest between the darkness like stained glass.
With them we bury people. With them we build shallow images of Truth and proceed to worship these as Truth itself.\(^{14}\)

The illusion of completion may be the most dangerous one we have. We’ve got to expect less from words and ideas. Then we can finally start to accomplish something genuine.\(^{15}\)

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14 Words swarm around Truth as flies around a light, obscuring it in patches. When they draw near enough they get scorched and die.

15 Words swarm around Truth as flies around a light.

Moses saw God on Mount Sinai and his life was spared. When he returned again to the crowd at the mountain’s base, his face was still shining with the residue of that meeting.

I AM THAT I AM

and the bush burning, and the desert rolled out as parchment beneath his smoldering feet.
He went back to the distant city and the glazed eyes of men baked into their bodies. The flies igniting mid-air,
he stood in gleaming chambers where his voice, stuttered, burnt to ashes in the Pharaoh’s crackling ears.
And with the dust stirred into chirping swarms, the rivers pumping blood through arid soil, he realized
how restless were the shapes of things; unsteady, flickering, like embers strewn across a mind.
His life: a shadow in a field of glaring light,
a corpse of coal, compressed, held helpless, being drawn along the boundless blazing white: longing for the Word, the wound cut through a searing fog.

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16 The rolling feet of Caterpillars\(^{\circ}\) crunch through piles of granite rubbish, remains of the church. It’s being demolished, making room for a new strip mall. Still, a small group of stragglers paces
fluent in creeds and theological justifications instead of icons. The only religious pictures I was raised with were those idyllic scenes of white-robed Anglo-Jesus posing in various lush pastures. This man’s feet were dust-proof, he never needed to have them cleaned. Not even in the pictures where he’s about to have them cleaned. He stays with me. His portrait still pops up nearly every time I read or think about Jesus, standing between us with the sheep’s eyes and the placid, acne-free face of a made-up corpse.)

Often, it seems like human beings have got the Midas-touch in reverse: everything we touch turns to shit.

(We discover the secrets of the atom and use them to annihilate Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Medical science advances by leaps and bounds, and we use it to perform abortions more safely and euthanasia more painlessly. We create computers and then subordinate ourselves to them.)

There’s always something on television. I don’t want to be alone. I change my surroundings frantically to keep me entertained, to keep me docile, to keep from changing myself. We live alongside each other, irreparably separated. Distance grows between us like an organism: an intricate system of parts, interconnected, from which no piece can be taken without tearing up the whole system. The organism breeds, and multiplies with each selfish act, each time we neglect to see others as equal to ourselves. Buddhism locates the root of our alienation in self-consciousness, and thereby sidesteps the problem by withdrawing from the world. But I don’t want to be extinguished, I don’t want nirvana. I don’t want to just learn to live around the holes, I want them to be filled. Yet who around anxiously, whispering, waiting for the next swing of the wrecking ball. Enameled eyes stare out at them through chipped paint, harboring either resentment or pity. Or hope. The wrecking ball swings. The wall collapses. The Holy Place. The crowd rushes in through a thick fog of debris, clambering and coughing, digging and prying at the rubble with their fingers. The concrete mist settles down on a dusty chalice, a crucifix with a Christ on it, some brass stuff, tarnished. The invisible world remains invisible.

Standing through the liturgy, I’ve got to fight the urge to just run up and break through the damn wall. Of course it wouldn’t do any good except maybe for being therapeutic. There’s nothing back there that I want, just more stuff and some priests who are probably wondering the same things I am. The wall is a symbol, the church layout is a symbol, the liturgy is a symbol . . .

As usual, the only real wall I have to break is myself.

which, from what I hear, pretty much dominate Israel’s landscape.

We speak of computers as “intelligent,” as contracting “viruses,” as having “memory.” “The fundamental metaphorical message of the computer, in short, is that we are machines-thinking machines, to be sure, but machines nonetheless.” (Neil Postman. Technopoly.) We separate ourselves into groups of functions: the girl at the Wendy’s drive-thru hands out our food, the news anchor gives us our view of the street outside, the preacher hands out opinions. see Michael Behe, Darwin’s Black Box.
can blame the Buddhists’ reaction? How many times have you seen something pure?21 We are given bread and wine, but never enough to get rid of our hunger or quench our thirst.

I sit here alone, writing, and I don’t know if I can offer you anything but pretty images or insurmountable questions, or perhaps a strange brand of hope which slices its wrists sideways so the blood will clot.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

“You cannot go from door to door convincing everybody.
No one can say, ‘See, look into my mind.’”
Qu Yuan, “On Encountering Sorrow.”

Most often, I walk away from conversations with a sense of dissatisfaction. I want the impossible; I want the dams to break, for all the trivial pretensions between us to drop down around our feet like molted skin. A life amidst others amasses so many masks that its hard to see each other. Listening to any one person is like watching a crowd of faces weave in and out of each other. It’s hard to know whether souls are somewhere beyond each of our wardrobes or portioned out among the pieces. I don’t know how to give myself to someone (or if I ever do, even by accident). Instead, I walk away feeling as if I’ve left myself hanging somewhere in the space between us.22 I can widen my nerve endings to funnel in feelings, but I can’t heave my heart into my throat.23

We are so close. We never step anywhere that someone else hasn’t stepped already. The world contracts around us. The days shrivel up beneath our feet. We piss in the same toilets. We share the sunsets, the blizzards, the way hot and cold can sometimes feel exactly the same. At night, in neighboring houses, we stay up staring at our empty walls. Hypnotized. Unable to sleep.24

21 Dear God,

“I lift up my eyes to you . . .
As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master . . .
till he shows us his mercy.” (Psalm 132). Every day I climb in behind my eyes and walk through Your creation. No matter how much of myself I give away, I am still with me. You gave me a soul, thrown somewhere between my body and You, but separating me from both. I am tired. Too tired to phrase my life into a question. Too tired to care what the answer will be. Please, please, pray for me.

22 Like clothes, strung out on a line, which no one will wear because they’ve shrunk.

23 Fragment of a definition: “A poet is an unhappy being whose heart is torn by secret sufferings, but whose lips are so strangely formed that when the sighs and cries escape them, they sound like beautiful music.” (Kierkegaard, Either/Or.)

24 Dear God,

I have fallen between the cracks in Your hands.
When I try to talk about love it seems like a joke. Like Michelangelo trying to paint God on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. My truest prayers are yelps. Words seem too civilized a currency with which to transact the business of the heart. Sometimes when I’m out walking the smallest thing will knock me into a mute and terrified laughter. The lump in my throat has become a fixture. Still, I don’t know if I’d even have to use both hands to count the times I’ve truly experienced joy. I feel a lust for God continually, but it’s selfish. The more I try to grab, the more it slips away. Joy is a longing, yes, but it’s a longing more fulfilling than anything I’ve ever actually "had." And now, in its wake, I want to level out my life, to cut out all the senseless, noisy trash until the moments of joy become longer and longer, spilling out over my life and soaking it straight through. I want the Garden. I want fruit so ripe its just juice with skin. I want to take leisurely walks with God and just stare at Him, smitten. I want everything to be so pure that it has to be written with Capital Letters.

We ask for ecstasy. We are given pain. We desire a Truth that we can hold onto but receive instead a bunch of metaphors which grasp and fumble vaguely toward the sky. What we want is food. What we have is hunger. 

Love: It’s night but you can’t tell, taking the orange line out to Coney Island. And as you enter Brooklyn and the train rises from underground on a scaffold of elevated tracks and past a blur of bricks and << silence. a lit kitchen window where a woman, lonely, tired, leans her face against the frigid glass << more bricks.

The world is a galaxy of these lights, our loves, of hidden stars burning along on the ground. Some physicists say it’s a proof against the ∞ of our universe that we only see a few stars and not a sky full of them. Here, loves shines through our curtains, worn in spots. But there . . .

In order to arrive at what you are not
You must go through the way in which you are not.

(Eliot, Burnt Norton)

I'm paralyzed by possibilities. As I sit here infinite crowds of them converge in a moment and dismantle themselves. I keep on sitting.

Love is a blatant waste of potential. You are required to give away your freedom, the only thing that’s really yours. You narrow down the panorama of your vision to a single point. And then what? The strangest thing happens. It’s as if you are squeezed through a pinhole into another world, where you discover that all your life you’d been looking at the real world through a mirror (1 Corinthians 13:12). You aren’t yours anymore. You never were.

Something’s wrong. When my body aches, it means something’s got to be healed. When my stomach rumbles it means I need to eat. But when I search the house there’s no medicine in the cabinets, there’s no food in the pantry . . . and the doors are locked . . . something is definitely wrong.
If a pigeon leaves its nest at 1 o’clock in the morning, travelling west (and supposing that [1] the bird has never left before except on brief missions for scraps to fortify or decorate its home, [2] it never intended to go as far as it has, except that it wondered what the odd, feathery flaps stuck to its sides were meant for and got a little carried away, [3] its cold outside, and the wind confusing, and still [4] the air, although its only air, will hold the pigeon up), what next?
a homecoming, of sorts

God and the devil are fighting in sleet,
the falling half-frozen promise of snow hearts.
whiter than somewhere in Ecclesiastes,
i stopped with wonder in this stutter-shake fear of beauty,
carried from here to trembling in the divine phrasing.

beauty is the battleground. i push your hair
back from the coming silver of ice in your eyes before
a light snow, or sleety tears that await you when
the theodicy of storm is inexplicably antagonist.
you sit in arctic silence,
clinging to the broken tryst devotionals
and catch-phrase prayers, these
wash me and i will be whiter than snow
flakes in a blizzard.

and it comes to nothing. We read the Bible with specious power like Kruschev pounding his shc
against the table, resounding thuds fading in the reality of Who will bury who.
the clamor of this presumption is a sacrament of snow-blindness --
it hampers the convergence of prayer and beauty, an epithet against
the oblique awareness that God comes to us,
not us to Him.

but there are degrees of playful and prayerful;
God and the devil are fighting there, and the battlefield is
a moment of impetus. say why or nothing, but always
bet on aspiration --

like how my street is framed by trees which make a
tunnel of outstretched limbs. at night there
are always the lights, the firefly streetlights,
as i drive towards the end of the tunnel
where i live.

Mike Buma
INTERVIEW WITH MYSELF

How does it happen?
   Like this.
You flip a switch and then the room
is there. It's hard to say just how.
You find a way beyond yourself,
as a girl, deaf, drags her finger
round a record's grooves to understand
the music.
   Now you're stretching it.
Why do you blow things out of proportion?

Our skins were sewn so tight we barely fit
inside. It seems like they're designed to fail;
the organs swell and break, the eyes leak, all things
conspire to drag us away, trembling
from our insulation.

80% of the human body
fell from a cloud. Yet still you plot your steps
carefully -- a stale cup of water,
filled above the rim, refusing to spill.

You'd have me drain myself, to give, and give.
Well that's a pretty thought for anyone
who's sitting in a room alone, but...
   I guess, but...
what about words, these crumpled prayers I throw
   Are you sure
they don't stack up, becoming bunkers, blocking
the fire of other people's voices?

How would I know. Sometimes, sure. What's your point?

Words are just objects. They can bust. They can
be broken. Don't take them too seriously.
And when your thoughts are clogged with mute obscurities
like "meaning" or "existence," remember
that every day you let the air slip from your lips
and trust it to be there when you breathe in.
God, Guns and Rock n’ Roll.
Ted Nugent.

'The Nuge' is the kind of man that Hollywood tends to gloss over. But the fact is that Ted is a backbone of these United States. Some might say the heart and soul of this wayward nation. Nugent, in this provocative, illuminating, marvelous and stimulating book, tells us what’s up. Taking the rocker credo (Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll) and contextualizing it to the climate of a less fan-based audience, he replaces sex and drugs with God and guns. And believe me, his sharp witted, vibrant assessment of the deity and weapons based on the principle of a projectile propelled by an exploding charge, well, it only confirms what this reporter has known all along: Ted is the man.

"Life starts at point A and ends at point B. Kick maximum ass!" These opening lines may strike the average reader as less than inspiring, but take a closer look: "Kick maximum ass..." Here is the point of departure for the wave of optimism and self-respect that is Ted’s book. This engrossing and involving book is filled with vivid detail and unforgettable scenes painted in epic colors and led by a voice of such integrity and intelligence that it’s sheer force and power left me breathless and gasping for more.

Ken Wilber.

Wow. After reading this I didn’t have any more questions. One often wonders - what is the point? To all those who wonder, this is your book. In our fast developing world filled with relativisms, aphorisms and otherwise distasteful options, someone has gone and put the pieces back together again. Amen.

On the other hand, you might be the kind of person who finds something repellent in a title like this. Who does this guy think he is - trying to make everything coherent? Maybe you’re naturally put off by someone taking the time to offer an understanding of everything - well, a theory. To you I recommend the following: In order to rid us earthlings of yet another unsatisfactory gesture in futility, buy the book. Yes you heard me, buy it... then carefully tear out one page. Viola! No more theory! Go return the book, thereby retaining the mystery of the universe.
**Bridesmaid Boot Camp**

It is a proud day when a young lady Knight slips into her first bridesmaid dress. She stands in front of a sell-out CRC crowd, proudly displaying a mish-mash of tiny material, tule, sequins. It is a rite of passage in this, John Calvin's institution. It is also a means of weeding out the beauties from the beasts. To ensure that one is not only a beauty, but also the most desirable bridesmaid, she must go through a bridesmaid's boot camp of sorts. Many enter this camp; only a few leave worthy of being called the best of the best. Follow these simple steps to ensure that you are one of them. The first step to your first-rate bridesmaid image is not get a good run in every day. The usual early morning jog is acceptable, but it does nothing for your image around campus; there is no one around to see how cute you look in your spandex pants and matching Adidas sports bra. For the more image-concious woman, there is a different approach: run after any good-looking male that will give you the time of day. Chase him down the path while he’s walking to class. Follow him to his car or dorm. Go get him, girl! Using this method will give you a good start on your workout, and assure other boot-campers that you are tough competition. Your platform shoes and stretch-denim flare legs may not be conducive to this activity. Maybe your hour or hair preparation will go all to hell with the wind running through it. You may find yourself laying prostrate on the path a few times, forcing Campus Safety to send one of their glorified golf carts for you. But you’d be surprised what these little wind sprints can do for your thighs.

Take at least three PE classes every semester. You can either register for all three sections of jogging; take walking cycling and aerobics; or (this is my recommendation) take swimming, cycling, and new games. The coach will tell you to wear a Speedo to the swimming class. Wear your teeny bikini instead. That way, not only will you get a total body workout; you will also be able to pinpoint problem areas to work on before beach time rolls around. Nothing reveals flaws like six inches of lycra-spandex. New games holds no aerobic benefits in and of itself. You will, however, burn several hundred calories each class period musing at the fact that the professors expect you to associate with freshman and enjoy doing it, all while throwing an overgrown beach ball around the track field. If you do find yourself actually enjoying any of these activities, do not let anyone know it. It could ruin your bridesmaid image, leaving you the laughing stock of the summer.

Join the “Knight Club’ and follow the basketball team religiously. Wear a thick, wool cable knit sweater to the games. The sauna effect created in the student section will be enhanced by your choice of apparel, not only helping
you sweat some extra pounds off, but allowing you to look cute in the process. Once you are at the game, wave to every friend you have ever made during your Calvin career; it gives your arms a good workout, while proving to everyone within a thirty-yard radius that you are extremely well liked. On campus, if you see any of the players around, run after them and give them a big hug. Giggle in a high-pitched fluttery manner and stroke their arms. It burns calories.

Go to the “BOB” every Friday and Saturday night and shake your groove thayng. Make sure to visit all five floors, altering your dance moves appropriately to coincide with the music of each floor. Who needs a stairmaster with the “BOB” so close? It is of utmost importance that you dress appropriately for this workout, as not being sufficiently cute may leave you no one with which to shake your thayng, causing the entire evening to lose its aerobic effect. I recommend tight leather pants, a nearly see-through halter and strappy sandals.

Do not eat at Johnny’s. I do not recommend eating at Johnny’s under normal circumstances, but during this crucial time it is of utmost importance to stay away. If you must dine at this establishment, your best option is to feast on the Saltines next to the soup, and head to the condiment table for dessert. Stay away from the nachos. Make sure that while eating, you stare down your nose at the souls who are so misguided as to eat a full meal here. Keep and keen eye open for others who may be in bridesmaid bootcamp. Glare at them; it lets them know that you mean business.

Many bridesmaid bootcampers drink bottled water to help them get fit and trim. Take it one step further. Go on a Calvin bottled water diet. Partake solely in this delicious blend of hydrogen and oxygen. Not only is the refreshing beverage free of fat and calories, it is offered in our very own book store and is the only bottled water approved by Synod. And clear matches everything.

There are women with bad judgement getting married every day. These woefully misguided souls often select bridesmaid dresses more hideous than June Hammersma’s calendar appearance selection. Remember, it is not your fault. You are merely a victim of their fashion mistake. Your job is to see to it that you make those layers of frills and bows work for you. The more nauseating the dress, the harder you must work to look good in it. And looking good is a necessity.
The Middle Road

For all the interest about the 2000 elections, we have yet to move beyond the most immediate electoral problems: hanging "Chads", squads of lawyers, public relation tactics, and press conference after press conference full of American flags. But what happens after the dust from the election mess settles down, and we move on with more mundane governmental problems such as foreign aid and agricultural subsidies? The question that we should be getting agitated about is what path is the President and Congress going to take over the next four years. This is not your ordinary Dialogue article, but this is no ordinary time; and we must fully consider and influence our government on the matters that face us. This short piece will examine some worthwhile issues that the Congress should take up, and close with some advice to both the Republican and Democrat Parties.

The Situation on January 21, 2000

First we should look at what the situation will be in Washington the day after the President is sworn into office. I assume, even being a Democrat, that George Bush will be the President and Dick Cheney, provided he adds a doctor to his staff, will be the Vice President. When the two men look out the White House windows, they will see at the end of the mall the United States Capitol, which will make or break their administration. The House of Representatives will have 221 Republicans, 212 Democrats and two Independents. This is a House that has seen brutal partisanship since Newt Gingrinch’s manhunt of Speaker Jim Wright in 1989, and the feelings between the two sides are clearly not of mutual affection. In the Senate, the chamber will be equally split; fifty Democrats and fifty Republicans will be sitting in the first balanced Senate since 1881. The Senate has seen better days in terms of bipartisanship and well written legislation. Also, it will be filled with celebrities, such as former First Lady Hillary Clinton, that will certainly keep the cameras and talking heads interested in the world’s greatest deliberative body. With this situation, what on earth should Congress and President do? In Washington we will have a President that received a minority of the popular vote, and a split Congress.

It’s the Bipartisanship, stupid!

What we should expect, and hope for, is an increase of bipartisanship. The two parties are so equally matched, that there is no real way to ensure the passage of any piece of legislation without them working together. Bipartisanship is also an issue with the American public today; people have indicated that they are sick of the two sides’ inability to compromise and work issues out. Bipartisanship has worked previously in American history; as shown from 1946 to 1964, when the moderates in both parties effectively controlled Congress. They preserved the New Deal program that conservative Republicans like Robert Taft despised, and helped mold the prosper-
ousy nation that we have today. This was the age of Senators like Albert Gore Sr. and
Prescott Bush, two senators who worked with both parties and kept politics civilized.
The 107th Congress and the Bush Administration would be well to remember a previ­
ous Bush and govern from the middle.

How to do this? First, the Bush Administration would need to make real and sin­
cere gestures of bipartisanship. Remember on the campaign trail how Bush always
talked about his meeting with Democrat Congresspersons when he was governor of
Texas? Well, he can at least try to do the same thing with the Democrats in
Washington. By putting Democrats in his Cabinet, such as Bill Bradley as head of
Health and Human Services, Bush can make a clear sign to Democrats that he is willing
to work with them. A bold, but unlikely to be taken, move that Bush should consider is
selecting a Democrat to be Attorney General. Critics of Bush would be unable to claim
that his Attorney General was a Republican hack and this action would certainly paint
him as a consensus builder. Surely, having Democrats in a Republican White House
would be taken well by the American public.

In Congress, moderates from both sides should seek leadership roles and work
together. It seems that since the Speakership of Newt Gingrinch that compromise has
been a dirty word, but now it is necessary if either side wants to have anything passed.
There are many pressing issues that await this Congress, but constant partisan bicker­
ing on ideological lines won’t get anything done, and history agrees. There have been
only two times since the Great Depression that Congress has been dominated by one party's ideological position; at the height of the New Deal in 1937 and after Barry Goldwater and the Republican Party were crushed in the 1964 presidential election. In both cases, the liberal vision held both the nation and Congress sway; in both the House and the Senate, the Democrats controlled the situation with a two to one margin, giving their agenda clear sailing. In 2000, there is no dominance by one political ideology or the other; America is divided between conservative mantra and liberal dreams. Today Congresspersons must work together on issues in a calm, respectful manner that displays evidence of Christian virtue. We certainly cannot expect for Barney Frank and Dick Armey to agree on gay rights; nor can we expect Hillary Clinton and Trent Lott to be on the same side in respect to welfare. But they may work together on the issues in a fashion that doesn't trample the minority party and stir up resentment. Rather than calling each other names, Frank and Armey can agree to disagree on certain issues, and focus on economic legislation that they both favor. Clinton and Lott must both work to eliminate the partial birth abortion ban that they both are against, and seek to find ways to reduce the national abortion rate, such as encouraging adoption efforts and increasing the education and awareness of sexually active teenagers.

There is a great deal of legislation that persons from both parties can work together on, and ensure that well written laws are created. Moderation is clearly the road for both parties to follow, and compromise will certainly carry everyone a long way.

Advice for the GOP: Moderation, Big Time

The Republican Party is clearly caught in a tough spot. At last they have control of all three branches of government, but control is held by the slimmest of margins. Certainly, the public will be expecting a lot from Bush, since he ran on a theme to "change the way we do things in Washington and return respect and dignity in government." Another thing that Bush needs to watch out for is the 2002 elections. Traditionally, the party in control of the White House loses seats in Congress in an off year election, and that just might cost the Republicans their majority. So what does Dubya do?

First, he needs to be moderate. He shouldn't appear to be the puppet of the Religious Right or the American Enterprise Institute. He will be surrounded by the best that the Republican Party has, but he must take their views and put them into his own words. As the President, people (even this cynical Democrat) will respect him, if not always agree. He will speak for all Americans, not just his own party.

He ought to attach himself to the McCain-Feingold Campaign Finance Reform Act, and tell Trent Lott that the game is up on that issue. This is an issue that will only gain more strength as time goes by, and Trent should just cut his losses and help return the Republicans to their Reformist roots. If he helps John McCain get legislation through, he will certainly save some party seats in 2002, and give less credence
to the belief that Republicans are only a party of conservatives. McCain will certainly help Bush get some bills passed; or at least be less likely to run against him in 2004.

Finally, Supreme Court appointments are important. Bush will certainly get to appoint two new Justices to the Supreme Court in his first term. Remember when Old Man Bush selected Clarence Thomas and got tabloid TV for his efforts? Pick a justice that people will remember you for when you are six feet under the earth. Choosing a Hispanic as a justice will certainly earn kudos from all sides, and will ensure Dubya a nice photo in every history book fifty years from now.

Advice for the Democrats: Hang in there

Even though the Democrats seem to have woken up to a bad dream, the situation is not all that bad. Republicans are in control of the Presidency and Congress, but this is something that can be remedied in four years.

First, remember that there is an election in 2002. As noted above, the Dems stand to gain seats, maybe enough to regain control. In the Senate, the Republicans have twenty seats to defend; you only have fourteen. Add to this that there are two ‘dead men walking’ in the persons of Strom Thurmond and Jesse Helms, there could be a majority as soon as one of those two has passed into the great beyond. With the election of 2002 in mind, Democrats ought to make sure the party act in a unified manner, and run the agenda for the center. Fill some of the leadership roles with moderate, even conservative Democrats, to steal issues (from the Republicans) and appear to be more than a party of liberals. They ought to be dignified with the Republicans, but if they start trampling, make sure to make them pay. Big Time.

Democrats should also start thinking ahead towards the 2004 presidential election. Who should be the standard bearer? Al Gore will be busy inventing new things in Carthage Tennessee, so don’t look towards him. Hillary Clinton would be too divisive, and after all she did promise New York that she was going to serve a full term before looking for better pickings. A good bet for the party would be Gray Davis, the governor of California. History tells us that another Californian governor proved to be quite electable: Ronald Reagan. Davis is a middle of the road moderate that has gained extremely high marks from everyone in California, with the exception of Arnold Schwarzenegger, who plans to run for governor in 2002 (as a Republican, not a Kennedy). Surely, Davis would be a good pick to thump George Bush with and return Democrats to the White House.

Finally, remembering to stoke resentment among core supporters by reminding them how they "were robbed" in 2000 will alone increase Democratic turnout for the next three elections. Also, mailing practice ballots to all Democrats will help ensure that every vote counts.
Pic. 5 From Reflection Series
Justin Van Genderen - Silver Gelatin Print
Community is in large part a dialogue, and for a lively dialogue to occur, there must be lively differences. To insist upon conformity as a condition of acceptance and as a criterion of membership in the community, will ultimately destroy the dialogue upon which genuine community is based and which is its lifeblood. It will create strangers where there might have been neighbors, because they will have nothing to discuss.

-Julia Corbett