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Dialogue

Staff and writers of Dialogue

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Dialogue
MAGAZINE
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Issue 1
Dear Readers,

In your hands you hold the first issue of this year’s Dialogue – thank you for giving it a bit of your precious time.

First and foremost, we wish to extend our sincerest gratitude and thanks to our volunteer staff for taking time out of their busy schedules to make this issue a reality. Without them, it would have remained a mere conception.

This is our first year working for Dialogue as co-editors, and we bring the magazine to you with a renewed resolution to showcase quality art and writing coming from within the Calvin community.

Our approach to Dialogue this year is a simple one; we are all about getting back to the basics. We wish to produce issues with a simple aesthetic that contain a pleasing balance of images and various written pieces.

What you will find within these pages are the voices of students, faculty, and alumni coming to you through various media. Take them seriously. Engage them conceptually. Grab a mug of coffee, tea, kombucha, beer, or anything else that may help you settle down and interact with the artworks and text found herein.

Read it.
View it.
Think about it.

And if it floats your boat, respond and further the artistic discussion with your own submission.

We are excited about putting together the issues to come, and thank you for giving us – and all who have submitted – your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Andrew Szobody & Mag Kim
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The Tunnel
Matthew Koh

The tunnel closes on its prey, stealthy as a panther. The sky is choked away, but it happens so gently, so peacefully, the heavens fall asleep before they realize they’ve been murdered. Then the tunnel dissolves the world, leaving puddles of memory for the bewildered to look into and see their own frantic eyes. Once the tunnel comes, there’s no turning back. The path, so steady, so sure before, melts behind. It’s just like a fairy tale, with enchantment revealed as anything but.

They say Antarctica is the coldest place in the world. They’re wrong. The temperatures there can drop below -80° centigrade, but can only ever touch the body. This tunnel chills the soul.

Sounds filter through the darkness, voices and songs that dance just out of reach. The sounds are loud, but they do nothing to unsettle the silence that fills the tunnel. The laughter makes the awful quiet worse.

When you’re caught by the tunnel, you feel a bit like Alice, falling down a rabbit hole with no return. But the land she found was bright and alive, even if deeply unsettling. And though all the creatures of Wonderland seem hellbent on making Alice miserable, at least that implies some level of care.

Your wonderland is dark and empty, enough to swallow the cosmos without the slightest change. And your wonderland is lonely—you scream into the nothingness just to hear the sound of a voice, even your own. You would take a hundred fold of Alice’s suffering for a tenth of the splendour of her adventure. Anything but the cold wrapping itself around you, pythonic, hugging the breath from your body.

Many Christian traditions call hell a place of fire where demons torment people day and night. That, you muse, would be nice.

~~~

“Serotonin” sounds so beautiful. The harsh “s” that greets the ear, but then drops quickly, juggling consonants before ending in barely a whisper.

“Dopamine” sounds like the son of Snow White’s dwarf. “Norepinephrine” looks as amusing to say as dopamine is to hear.

Serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. Beautiful and jolly. Sickeningly so.

Even “depression” sounds so innocent. Like waves licking the earth.

The irony is thick. I wish they had chosen words more appropriate to the disease. Words filled with sorrow and pain. Words that make people want to rip their hearts out.

Depression is something people have known for millennia, but never understood. Up until the twentieth century, most thought it a fleeting infliction, a brief spell when emotions overwhelmed individuals. If the depression persisted, this was generally thought to indicate a severe weakness on the part of the ailed.

In my home country of Malaysia, most people associate all mental diseases with insanity or some form of spiritual attack/possession. The latter is true of many religious Malaysians, including Christians. My former Pentecostal church’s counseling centre—run mostly by people with no serious training whatsoever—treated all its patients from this mindset. That we know of, at least one of the people who got the bajeezus
rayed out of them committed suicide. Did I mention these same Christians believed and preached that omitting suicide was a sure way to go to hell?

Modern science has a slightly more nuanced theory for the cause of depression. The reason, scientists believe, revolves around neurotransmitters: the aforementioned trinity of serotonin, dopamine, norepinephrine.

Neurotransmitters drift around the brain, slotting into gaps between synapses (nerve cells) and passing brain's chemical messages. Unfortunately, the neurotransmitters of the depressed are incredibly inactive. In the average depressed person, instead of these neurotransmitters floating between synapses, they can be found hiding in the tunnels of the brain.

At least, that's what scientists think. The best they can give the depressed is an educated guess for why their lives have been turned upside down. Then they suggest absurdly expensive medication, once more on the basis of a guess.

Scientists and psychiatrists are still unsure why people get depression. Genes seem to play a part. Otherwise cataclysmic or traumatic events may set the disease off. Or the depressed may have no clue whatsoever what happened.

An interesting symptom of depression was discovered through self and peer evaluation surveys distributed for psychological research. The participants were asked to compare themselves to their peers in several categories: empathy, judgment, skills, etc. Then they were to do the same for others taking the survey whom they knew well. The study found that a vast majority ranked themselves “above average” or better in most of the categories, which contrasted sharply with their less flattering peer reviews. This rule was generally true for all groups (race, gender, age, social-class, etc.)—except one.

The study found that the scores people suffering from depression gave themselves were an incredibly close match to those found in their peer evaluation. The study concluded that somehow depressed people are more intuitive and perceptive, having a more accurate view of themselves and the world than the general populace. Which might explain why so many artists suffer from depression.

The question some might ask is: does depression help people see the truth or does seeing the truth make people depressed?

But depressed people aren’t interested in that or any other chicken-or-the-egg question. They know the important thing is that both the chicken and the egg die eventually.

~~~

The tunnel is long. Very long. And you feel each and every step, every millimeter, weigh on you.

The worst part—the tunnel makes you think in stark terms, so there are many worst parts, but right now, as always, only one sticks out to you—is the loneliness. You have never felt loneliness like this. Ever. Even in the womb you could feel the warm beating of another person’s heart. Even when no one was around, you felt a part of the world. Even when the world abandoned you, you could still feel a sense of the transcendent. Now you feel nothing. The voices around you don’t seem to be in the same plane. You can yell and plead with God all you want, but God won’t answer.

For once in your life you know how desperately people need community. Now it’s too late.

Dialogue 3
Depression is a debilitating disease, taxing not just the body, but minds and hearts as well. Most other sicknesses may destroy people's health, but leave their dignity intact; even if an illness drags a people to their knees, no disease wins without a fight.

Depression robs people of the will to fight, the will to even care. It makes them apathetic observers to their own destruction, unwilling participants in their lives. Depression leaves people lying flat on their backs, staring at the ceiling, knowing how ridiculously simple it would be to lift their bodies, but still unable to do it. Most illnesses make people hate their bodies; depression makes you hate your entire being.

Depression is looking at something you love and feeling nothing at all.

Do you stop walking this tunnel? The thought tempts you. The tunnel gives no sign of ending, no reprieve. The end has become something of a myth to you, a goal which seems ever more fantastical the more you walk.

You're not sure if the sounds you hear are invitations from beyond or mockery from behind.
You are tired.
You are weak.
And the tunnel is growing smaller, pressing into your body.
Why not stop?

Contrary to popular opinion, depression doesn't make people want to die. Being depressed leaves people with too little energy to want anything.

Including life. The pain that dogs their every thought is unrelenting. It grows slowly, so much so people barely even notice their deteriorating conditions. When they do notice, it's too late. The chihuahua has grown and overshadows Cerberus; what once were nips on feet are bites that rip legs off with every step.

Depression doesn't make people feel dead. In some way they feel the most alive they ever have. Because whom do you notice more, the companion or the torturer?
Wouldn't you notice more, the companion or the torturer?
Wouldn't you want the pain to stop?
Wouldn't you, when walking down a busy road, consider how easy it would be to simply step off and welcome the blessed nothingness you hope the car will bring?
Wouldn't you measure buildings by whether they were tall enough to end your life or just short enough to simply leave your body broken and the pain untouched?
Wouldn't you, when holding a kitchen knife, wonder what would happen if your hand "slipped?"
They say if you slit your wrist while in a warm bath, it feels just like going to sleep.
Most people wake up to the promise of a new day. The same is true of the depressed, except for them the promise is sorrow and agony. Sleep, with its incoherent dreams, is the only respite.
Wouldn't it be nice to sleep with no danger of ever waking up again?

Every conversation the depressed have is a struggle.
“How are you?”
Tired. Weak.
Like shit.
Strained.
Crushed.
Hopeless.
Crippled.
Exhausted.
God forsaken.

“Fine,” you reply. Force a smile. It only takes two twitches. Two muscles to carry the world. “How are you?”

Sometimes they’re already gone. Sometimes you barely hear the “Good!” they toss over their shoulders. That suits you fine.

Today though, she’s stopped to talk to you.

“Good!” she says, then pauses, not really having meant her reply (who ever really does?). “I mean, I have this really big blister on my foot which really hurts.”

She slips off her sandal and raises her dirt stained foot. The blister looks like the fingernail of a pinky, pushed red into her skin. Wince for her sake.

“Ouch,” you say. Inject sympathy.

“I know! Plus Mark and I were planning to go downtown today, which is really going to suck if I have to walk on this all the time.”

“You wish you could go downtown. You wish you wanted to.

“And I have to pick up tickets for a concert...aaargh!” the last sound escapes from her lips like steam pressing through a kettle. “My life is so stressful.”

Smile. Just smile.

Depression makes the world seem like a T.V. show, played out on a hundred-and-twelve-inch plasma display. The colours are brighter than sunlight—the reds burn, the blues swish, the greens seem to grow. The sounds are clearer than the waters of a tropical paradise and loud like thunder. Your mind sinks back in its ethereal couch, munching the snacks of its imagination. The acting, you muse, is earnest but over-the-top; the plot is simply unrealistic. You gaze at each character, studying their quirks, unearthing their insecurities. You analyze and smirk, deconstruct with a grin, and you laugh, only rarely with them.

But depression doesn’t actually make the world into television. Your mind might be safe in its cerebral fortress, but your body is trapped in the insanity. And just when you’re done with the show and the characters, the people turn to you, looking through the plasma, their voices reaching across the void.

You want to be alone, but they surround you. The colours are blinding and the sounds are deafening. Your fortress of solitude implodes.

~~~
Irony is cruel.
Loneliness is the worst part about being depressed but all a depressed person wants to be is alone.
People don’t understand the depressed. Maybe even fear them.
The depressed challenge everything about a world constructed around the need to be happy, content, fulfilled. Most people, so wrapped-up in their own Jeffersonian pursuits cannot comprehend why the depressed don’t feel the same way about life. Surely, most people seem to think, if the depressed really wanted to be happy they could be.
Most people are wrong.
The worst part about being depressed is being surrounded by happiness, having it forced down your throat and smeared on your face, and not being able to feel it.
The worst part about depression is all the people who can’t seem to accept you as long as you’re not happy.

~~~

Even if you escape the tunnel, your reprieve is temporary.
The tunnel will return, swallowing you just as completely.
The line between hope and despair is thin enough for a virus to use as a tight-rope.
Do you keep walking, wondering which step will be your last?
Do you stop and let the tunnel consume you?
Only the smallest ember of your being cares anymore. And that flame is almost spent.

~~~

I spent the summer of 2009 in the tunnel.
Though the weather was colder than usual, it was still summer, which meant everyone around me was desperately engaged in proving how happy they were. Their smiles adorned the walls of my prison in hell.
It didn’t help that my grandmother had a heart-attack in Malaysia. It didn’t help that two weeks later one of my best friends died.
And it really didn’t help that no matter what I tried, I couldn’t feel God whatsoever.
With the help of more than three-thousand dollars worth of medication, I escaped the tunnel. But I still paid its toll.
Happiness is a drug my body can only tolerate in small doses before an almost allergic reaction kicks in and bloodies my eyes with grim reality.
And though I can taste the sweetness in life again, that doesn’t mean I don’t taste the bitterness.
I wish I didn’t have to see how cruel and depraved this world can be sometimes. I wish I wouldn’t look at people and dismiss so much of what they do and call it superficial. I wish I wasn’t right so often.
Though I am free of the tunnel for now, I know it will return. And no matter how brightly the sun burns over my head, the shadows it creates makes my heart stop.
The tunnel knows the scent of my blood now. It won’t stop hunting until I’m dead.
Before the Death
Jacob Eizenga

Sorry for your loss, Sorry for your loss
Sorry for the loss sorry at the.
Sorry, loss, for your, the. Sorry

for being. She was sorry for being
alive and I am sorry being
so sorry and so.
sorry, Sorry, SORRY.
at my own loss at her loss and at her
loss.

For her loss and my loss, I am.

In my sadness, I am sorry for being sad and my sorry sad self is sorry for being myself.

Sorry for your lass.

Sorry for the
last. I’m sorry I’m sorry and she was sorry always sorry always fucking sorry at the loss

of spilt, soy milk, split, vodka. Sorry for the fact we ever smiled and I am sorry.

Your, loss, your loss yourlossyourlossyour
last chance.

The Final Word
Jacob Eizenga

To be Abbadon
is to be abandoned and betrayed

By that elderly woman.
Taken care of. Sizing up her family photos.

She never seems to give up.

By this horribly disfigured five year old here.
Circling on his skateboard. That lopsided smile.

Even by the sting of one’s own tail.

When your pit was revealed for what it really is

Bottomless

they were released of their burden of ever having to drop.
Why I Want to be Asian
Mag G Kim

[Note: This piece is an imitation response to the feminist essay “Why I Want a Wife” by Judy Brady (Syfers) first published in 1971]

I belong to that classification of people known as Asians. I am an Asian.

Not altogether incidentally, I am Korean. Not long ago, a white friend of mine appeared on the scene fresh from a teaching job in Korea. He told me how much he missed it there and how “Asian” he became from his experience. As I practiced my piano one evening, I couldn’t help but think of what he said, and it occurred to me that I too, would like to be Asian. Why do I want to be Asian?

I want my academic life to prosper by receiving better grades in school which requires a much more rigorous studying schedule. I want to be Asian in order to develop the self-discipline to concentrate on my studies through years of my over-bearing parents living vicariously through me. I want to be Asian because I want professors to spend several minutes every class attempting to pronounce my name and figure out whether or not “Galaam” is my last name or the first half of my first name. Chances are, I don’t have a clue either because the Romanization of my language has changed its pronunciation into something unrecognizable to me.

I want to be Asian to better my social life. I want to be Asian so I can get rides anywhere because my friends are too terrified of getting in a car with me driving. This also means I would be saving money on maintenance for my Honda Civic. I want to be Asian so that every stranger I meet will be too intimidated to upset me for fear that I might demonstrate my advanced skills in the martial arts. Hopefully, their trepidation would also encourage them to buy me one or two beers—which should be more than enough to get me sufficiently hammered, if the bartender believes I am actually of age. I want to be Asian because other groups would accept me as their token minority friend. This means both parties would be exempt from being labeled as “racist” or “exclusive.” Most of all, I want to be Asian so I will be accepted by white communities for my cleanliness and being a model minority—hardworking, intelligent, inoffensive, and punctual.

My God, who wouldn’t want to be Asian?
Wisdom from Wykstra
the Logician
Kathleen O'Bannon
My inclination is this:
Be able to whip up on the page,
in Wykstra-Dictated format,
the Mindless Bird Cages for
ALL
of those Set III alpha-beta type problems we’ve
been working on this week.
Wykstra-Dictated format is just a Free-Variable
(Random Yokel) CP
followed IMMEDIATELY by the relevant IP.
Each cage should have all the devices:
arrow-heads pointing to a hook or tilda,
perch,
bird,
dropping,
and discharge.
There should be NO death-zone work within the
cages:
just the instant-karate no-think structure that
ALWAYS works
to kill or maim the meth-crazed street-attacker
death within 10 seconds.

{ maybe the lighting
is wrong }
Michelle Ratering
Sliding from periphery into prominence
— sharp, clear focus—
adjusted aperture,
slowed shutter speed,
capture the consistency in features pushed
forward
against life’s blurred background.
Shining through,
only eyes don’t blink.
Mouths tell pretty lies.
A Song for Mama
Janice Alleyne

The busy airport became a blur of color as the tears streaked down my face.

“How long will you be gone this time, Daddy?” A lump lodged itself in my throat as I waited for the dreaded answer.

“A year, Princess.” His half-hearted smile didn’t reach his eyes, the usual twinkle gone. “It won’t be so bad, you’ll see! I’ll call home as often as I can, and I’ll send letters and postcards. Not to mention all of those pretty dresses you wanted, remember? I’ll be home before you miss me!” He planted a kiss on my forehead. “This isn’t goodbye forever, Katie.”

Mama stepped out of the van and wrapped her arms around him. Her almond eyes sparkled with unshed tears as she whispered,

“Be safe,” and buried her face in his camouflage jacket.

“Daddy! Daddy! Don’t forget me!” Lydia shrieked her arms and legs flailing in her car seat.

“Of course not, Peanut! How could I?” He unfastened the buckle across her chest and swung the little girl into his arms. “You be a good little girl for Mama, and have a blast in pre-school this year!”

“Ok Daddy. I love you!” She clamped her tiny arms around his neck and kissed his tear-stained cheek.

He placed her back in the car seat, rumpled her platinum blonde hair, and reached for his suitcase.

“I love you all. Call you as soon as the plane lands in Iraq, Honey.” He kissed Mama one last time and headed off, his tan combat boots clicking against the pavement. Each footfall was a hammer in my ear, echoing his abrupt departure from my side.

The engine roared to life as Mama turned the key in the ignition and backed the Mazda out of the parking lot. I shrank into my leather seat and sulked. I wanted to scream, to cry, to carry on, but my tear ducts were dry. My eyes were puffy and red and numb. I just stared out the window and counted the lemon taxis as they sped by.

With the airport behind us now Mama fell to pieces. Her frail body trembled as she sobbed. Her knuckles whitened as she clenched the steering wheel for support. I tuned out her despair.

“Mama! What’s wrong?” concern darkened Lydia’s pale brown eyes. She looked truly troubled for the first time that day.

“Nothing sweetie, Mama’s just sad that Daddy is gone. I’ll be ok, I promise.” Her wavering voice drove nails through my heart. Yeah right!

“Would you feel better if I sang a song for you?” Lydia’s innocent question fed the angry flames already burning in the pit of my stomach. I snapped.

“Nobody wants to hear your stupid baby songs, Lydia. Now do us all a favor and shut up!” Tears stung the back of my eyes as I balled my fists in my lap. How could she sing at a time like this?

“Katherine Elizabeth Grey! How dare you take this sour attitude out on your little sister. You are 9 years old and it’s time you start acting like it!” Hideous red splotches dotted Mama’s face as she scolded me.
You are not the only one who’s hurting and you best remember that. Now, quit this poor-me whining and apologize to your sister!”

“Sorry.” I mumbled as I stared at the floor boards. Everything is always about Lydia!

“Yes, baby, I would love to hear a song.” A faint attempt at a smile touched Mama’s lips as she stole a fleeting glance at Lydia through the rear-view mirror.

Lydia’s thin voice filled the van as she began the first verse of “The Itsy Bitsy Spider.” I watched as Mama’s sad expression slowly melted into grateful cheer.

“Down came the rain and washed the spider out!” Mama joined in, the last traces of sorrow disappearing from her soft voice.

“Out came the sun and dried up all the rain.”

I rolled my eyes and returned my gaze to the road. Whatever Mom.

“So the Itsy Bitsy Spider went up the spout again!” Lydia squealed with delight. “Katie, sing with us!”

A broad smile shone on her little, round face as she looked at me expectantly.

I looked at Mama, then back at Lydia, sighed and shrugged my shoulders. Why not? “The Itsy Bitsy Spider went up the water spout!” I began weakly. Unsure.

“Down came the rain,” a slight smile played around the corners of my mouth as Mama and Lydia’s joyous voices rang in my ears.

“And washed the spider out!” It wasn’t the words.

“Out came the sun.” Or even Lydia’s ear-splitting, off-key shouts of glee.

“And dried up all the rain!” It was the sheer unselfish motivation behind the words.

“So the Itsy Bitsy Spider went up the spout again!”
Red
Erica Jensen

The bus rattles madly down the street
A collision would us all up in a bright red blaz­ing, I think
After all, everything is red here,
Communism, blood, and sunburn
Even the newspapers are red all over,
Though they are none the better for it.
The buses, though, are yellow,
So let us rush madly,
And I will lean out the window and

Come
Erica Jensen

Runner in the night,
Throw off your blindfold and your shackles
And run with me

Before the fire sinks cold into the ashes
Before the lanterns slip into the night
Come run with me.

The stars fling back the darkness
As they pace the night with us
They witness to the fire that thrills your weary bones,
And we are not alone.
Come. Perhaps get to work early today.
Railway stations—abandoned ones—ought to be the perfect place for poetry.
-Paul Willis, from “On Being and Becoming a Mountaineer”

Detroit’s Michigan Central Station is a vertical building with dirty olive skin. Almost entirely a skeleton, enough of the structure and debris still remains that one could say there’s yet some pickings left, though slim. Some cartilage remains, some tissue—the glass hanging from the corners of hundreds of windows like some torn and forgotten curtains. Of these windows, those that are missing all of their glass are in some way more complete. Absence as presence.

I came to the Station the Saturday morning after driving down from Grand Rapids for a Sufjan Stevens concert the night before. Sean was from Detroit and had explored the Station several times. So he led us: Jovon, Lacey, and myself. Jovon strode alongside Sean while Lacey and I more timidly followed. “Wow, that’s crazy,” Lacey said, looking out the car window as we approached the towering and (to us) ancient structure. I mumbled in agreement.

Of course, the Station is fenced in: barbwire and no trespassing. To get in we had to follow an adjacent road away from the train station to where it passed under the train tracks. The wall on one side of the underpass was paneled and, as if for our very purpose, one panel, farthest away from the station, was entirely missing. Our entrance was raised off the ground about chest-high and glared out blackly.

At the time of its construction, Michigan Central was the tallest rail station in the world. The General Waiting Room was built to be a cathedral-like space inspired by the Roman bathhouse. Neoclassic architecture, of the Beaux-Arts Classical style. Doric and arched. The Station is composed of two parts: the train station itself and the 18-story tower. In some ways it looks more like a New York City hotel with its fleets of layered windows once rising with order and style.

But Michigan Central is not in New York City. This station towers alone, miles from downtown. And on that overcast and dreary day, backed by the hazy Detroit skyline, it seemed to me some premonitory and apocalyptic gatekeeper to the ruined world. A world, I thought, wholly other to me. Estranged and alien.

Standing just inside the entryway we peered around. Under the train tracks, the concrete cavern was ink black. We saw to double-back down through the hollow towards the station. Black such that the few points of light seemed the negative to the dark’s positive. To the left, towards the station, was a long stretch of dark that ended, like a tunnel, in a spot of daylight. On the right, the shorter wall of this rectangular
cavern ended in a corner opposite us that also bled a white light. Glancing again to the left we stayed to our right. Maybe because it was closer, maybe because we were uncertain. Maybe because, with no flashlights, all we had to light the way was the blinding flash of our two cameras.

The floor was littered and covered in smudge—some mixture of dirt and dampness not quite mud. I could make out little. A shoe, some cans. Wires hung from the ceiling and lightly touched our heads. The feeling of darkness was all around us. As we drew nearer to the lighted corner a jagged, crumbling doorway lighted an overturned baby carriage. The doorway opened out onto a pile of rubble, some grass, and the nearby road. We hurried out to look for another way in.

From the outside you can see graffiti, the crude and the artful. Some of it is illegible; some of it is clear but cryptic. A language of another world. The higher you look the more awed you are: fifteen stories up, out a broken window, and on the side of a ledge someone skillfully sprayed their design. Daredevil art.

There are websites dedicated to “forgotten Detroit” and photographers who post the abandoned world through their eyes. Inside the station they document the vandalism and the art. The self-proclaimed “burnouts” who have profoundly sprayed: “you only live once so live it high.” In some rooms the brightly colored tags overlap in a wild, neon mosaic. It’s not all unskilled. One of the higher floors houses rooms of detailed work. Cartoonishly disturbing creatures out of some demonic nightmare and floor-to-ceiling skulls baring their teeth in a crazed smile.

I wouldn’t know about most of this if it weren’t for these adventure-photographers. I never made it in as far as they did. My unanswered question is this: documentation or intrusion? Art or violence? Theodore Adorno, at the very idea of Holocaust poetry, said that “to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric.” Hold the wound open. Don’t compensate for it. Besides, in this station, they already have their art.

“Hope” is scrawled in white over some of the tags. And isn’t art supposed to glimpse hope? Create, describe, or point to another, better world. But this mad gallery rises up through the floors and breaks out onto the open flat roof, hundreds of feet up, and where can you go from there? A smokestack, jutting up as the spire of some industrial church, is half-painted in brilliant design and signature.

Earlier, I asked Sean, “People actually live in there?”

He replied, “Ya, off and on. Sometimes the cops go in and arrest some people. Mostly druggies.”

“That’s crazy,” I replied.

“Some people from my church have gone in to try and help,” he said. “They take a van with food and water. One time, on one of the floors, they found a dead body. It was frozen.”
Safe suburbia. That’s all I ever knew. The homeless we had were few and not that bad off. And they were white, like me and most of my town. And even if there were more and in worse conditions, I never saw them. Lacey was also from Fort Collins. But Sean’s family regularly took in the needy and the poor. And Jovon, well, his dad was a poor pastor at a poor church to a poor and homeless congregation. Was that why they seemed more at home in such a place?

We couldn’t find another way in so we returned to the cavern. Sean and Jovon said they would scout it out and report back to us if they had found a way through. They headed off for the far light and Lacey and I kept watch outside. “I don’t know, Lander,” she said, “but I just don’t feel right about this.” “Yea,” I said, hesitantly. I was nervous too. Still I wanted the adventure.

It took them awhile, but eventually Sean and Jovon returned saying they’d made it through. Lacey and I hopped back up into the darkness. She spoke up again, saying, “It’s not that I’m scared, guys, I just have a really bad feeling about this.” There was more than fear in her words, something else. I was jittery but also eager. We could see the light we had to make it to. Sean urged us on and Jovon joined him in leading us.

Lacey and I hung back momentarily but I picked myself up and set off blindly. We hugged the left side to avoid whatever mess of debris cluttered in the middle. There was also some sort of mangled structure we had to go around. I don’t think it was more than ten steps before I fell. In among the ruin. And that was as far as I got.

The night before, Sufjan had sung in haunting and sometimes manic lyric what later seemed foretold:

“But it’s a running wild
These are the premonitions of believers . . .

When it dies, when it dies
It rots . . .

For what you see is
Not fantasy . . .
The gorgeous mess of
Your face impressed us
Imposed in all its art”

The hole I fell in. One step and then there was nothing there. If I hadn’t caught myself on the concrete edge I would have landed hard in a watery hole deeper than I was tall. And I probably would have slammed my face against the edge because the opening wasn’t much bigger than me. Smash that ruin into
Hearing me shout, Sean spun around and snapped a blinding flash in my direction. I scrambled out as quickly as I could. My left side hurt and my leg hurt and I had cut my hand. Pulling up my pant leg a thick trickle of blood ran down my leg into my sock from the divot in my shin. “Train station entrance fee,” Sean joked.

We gave up and went no further. In a moment I had dangled just above ruin and rot. This world. Its people. What reason would they have to believe God lives, and what reason I that he dies?

Later, back at school, I shared my adventure with some friends, which sparked their own stories of Detroit’s ruins. Youth leaders who headed into some of the worse areas only to find an elderly woman, wheel-chaired, who “buried” her dogs in black garbage bags in the backyard shed. They found three dogs: from the freshly dead, to the rotting body, to a simple heap of bones. I wrote a poem about it for class. Even included the bit about the ghetto’s mountainous trash pile—the filthy grave of a murdered woman.

Of others, could I repent their sins, lament their wounds? Had I fallen further would not I be spraying some cry for help out the window of an upper story window? For someone to see. Tattoo the skin that holds you in here.

Near the front of the building someone has scrawled in charcoal, “Time doesn’t exist. Clocks do!!” Time is merely imposed, a human construct. No real thing. Outside of time, the Michigan Central Station seems a world to itself and those who live there. Those outside seem only to impose.
Rebecca Hiemstra, *Portrait of Vati*, Acrylic
Sean VandenBrink, *Italian Street*, Charcoal, 91.44 x 121.92 cm
Jo-Ann Van Reeuwyk, *Nave*, Fiber, 30.48 x 60.96 cm

Jo-Ann Van Reeuwyk, *Shroud*, Fiber, 35.56 x 60.96 cm
Where in our lives and spaces do we find glimpses of Sacred Space?
Ashleigh VandeKopple, *Red Composition*, Digital Photograph

Alice Keyes, *Lock*, Digital Photograph
Hannah Abma, *Untitled*, Oil on Canvas
Stephen Clark, *Untitled*, Latex on Paper

Stephen Clark, *Untitled*, Latex on Paper
Andrew Szobody, Oil, Woodblock Print
Adam Wolpa, *Cumberland*, Pencils and Ink on Rives Lightweight

This drawing is part of a series, made in the summer of 2009, after returning from a two-week tour of the American earthworks of Smithson, Heizer, DeMaria, and Holt, and before the two-week exhibition and performance of my project, The Gem Mine.
Bjorn Sparrman, *Oden*, Oil on Board

Bjorn Sparrman, *Run Run*, Oil on Board
Bjorn Sparrman, *Sit Next to Me*, Oil on Board

Liesje Brouwer, *Waiting into the Water*, Ceramic
Kyria Osterhouse, *Fragile/Hibernation*
Black Sharpie, Gouache, Gold Leaf Paint Pen on Watercolor Paper

Dialogue 29
The Selby
Emily Helmus & Kerry Aarnoutse, The Selby, Mixed Media
ANDREW AND ASHLEY—
co-founders of the mountain moss society store—at their home/store

WHAT IS IT LIKE WORKING/LIVING WITH YOUR BROTHER?

The first months were a nightmare. On more than one occasion I wanted to strangle Ashley with a pillow as he talked in his sleep. Though I suppose Ashley isn’t totally to blame—moving from downtown Seattle to a single-room yurt in the woods with your younger brother is a huge adjustment. Yeah, this whole ‘living simply’ thing isn’t easy. Andrew is generally easy to get along with, though. He’s also great at identifying any new plant we find and all the uses of it. We make a great team. Hey Andrew, you spelled occasion wrong. [no I didn’t]

WHY DO YOU LIVE THE WAY YOU DO, IN SUITS?

We decided together to move/change our life-styles simply because we were burned-out. Seattle is a wonderful, green city but running a business in an urban setting felt un.rewarding and monotonous. Basically, we no longer wanted to “buy a car to drive to work to pay for the car”.

We also believe that living simply isn’t about buying new stuff for a new lifestyle. So when we moved to the woods, we kept what we needed and got rid of what we didn’t. Most people who think about two guys who move to the woods would wear plaid, flannel shirts, heavy duty boots, and wool socks, like smartwools or something. We wear suits because that’s what we have.
WHERE DO YOU GET THE INFO FOR YOUR PAMPHLETS?

We've been living here for two years now, so we know a lot about the area. When we moved here, we brought with us many identification manuals, everything from plant and fungus to wildlife. We also brought books telling about the ways to use these. Much of the info came from the books, but we also share our own experiences, too.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE FOREST DELICACY?

MAPLE SYRUP!!
There's nothing like sweet syrup on an autumn eve.

1. Drill a hole 3" from the ground about 2" into the trunk with a slight upward slope so the sap flows out of the hole. Make sure the hole is on the sunniest side of the tree.
2. Insert the spile and hang a bucket from the hook.
3. Cover the bucket to prevent pest predation and rainwater dilution. Be sure to check bucket at least twice daily.
4. Boil the sap over a wood fire as high as you can manage. The syrup is done when it looks oily as it boils. The temperature at this point should be between 104° and 106°.
Like a Forest in Heat
Kevin Moralez

In the back of my closet, packed between slacks and soccer jerseys, is a shirt I haven’t worn since June. On that last occasion, its 50% cotton fibers were subjected to the sounds and scents of a Michigan summer. They throbbed in time with living room sound systems. They warmed to the glare of a punishing sun and swelled slightly in the humidity. At night, they breathed in the cool air and absorbed the last of the warm stickiness that clung to the bend of my elbows. Now they’re hanging loosely on a plastic hook, the bottom seam draped over a stack of underwear and socks. Almost flag-like.

Our bodies are continually regenerating themselves, replenishing their stock of cells in a steady stream of brand new organelles. The cells of our stomach lining are subjected to the harshest treatment. They hardly last five days, just one acid workweek. Epidermic cells are next to go. Approximately every two weeks, the outermost layer of skin is made anew. The red blood cells caroming through our veins are longer lived but clock out after only four months. Our livers and bones are the hardiest, each withstanding a little over fifteen years of hard, life-giving labor. By the time we reach our prime twenties, we’ll have been several different sizes, protected by thousands of different skins, powered by hundreds of different bloods. Hardly the same person at all, were it not for our electric brains’ capacity for storing memories, a notoriously mischievous system when it comes to accurate retrieval.

I once accused my sister of forgetting that a mutual friend had died, only to discover upon further discussion that the death had only occurred in a dream. We live, the brain remembers, goofy hijinks ensue.

At the peak of August’s heat, I moved from Michigan to Shanghai. After nearly two months of living far from Benjamin and Wealthy, Burton and Breton, Division and Diamond, I noticed that shirt back there. It sat quietly in my suitcase, jostled busily through airports and bus stops, and now hangs equally stoic in my closet. The rest of my sparse wardrobe has the feel of being pummeled by a Chinese laundry robot. My other clothes are marked by a new life: flecks of unremovable black mushroom sauce on a sleeve, a slight scent of morning traffic, of sweat stemming from a suddenly rice-based diet. It may be my imagination as much as it may be my memory, but this shirt still smells like Michigan.
The Catch
Lander Hultin

Someone is pounding at your door saying he must see you. Calling you by name.

You open in bewilderment to a homeless, out of breath kid who, by the name of God

needs your help. It’s the war sword he needs. Your grandfather’s that you’ve always kept hidden

behind the china closet. You don’t know how he knows, or how you could trust his urgency

or how, standing on your porch balancing a new axis through your midriff, you are grateful

to have believed him.

Losing Sleep Anymore
Lander Hultin

Nights pining next to her you slosh acid around your stomach

and sweat the weight of your next move.

Then, I see you standing at the toilet a hand on the counter the other holding the front of your pants down.

But you aren’t peeing as you sidestare the mirror,

just standing there.
He stood on the edge of the sidewalk, shoulders sagging, looking dazedly in front of him. Raindrops splashed about his feet, plastered his hair to his forehead, and glazed like crystals on the bottle he clutched in his left hand. The ground about him shone from the streetlights; he stood alone in the iridescence like an actor on a stage. The night was dark and it was hard to see anything beyond the lights; human forms shuffled about like shadows and light from the streetlamps reflected off windowpanes and doorknobs. Everything glinted from the rain and looked smooth and shiny in the blackness, as if the world had just undergone a dismal re-birth.

He shivered in his spotlight, his frail drooping form a stark contrast to the lamp pole he leaned against. From the darkness emerged the slow-moving shape of a taxicab; the man leaning against the lamppost awoke from his reverie and raised his hand toward the light – it hovered above him with a ghost-like paleness.

Gliding smoothly up to the curb, the cab came to a slow stop in front of the man, who dropped his hand, wrapped his fitted black jacket more tightly around him, and climbed into the car. Once inside he stomped his Louis Vuitton oxfords on the car floor, brushed the raindrops off his sleeve, and shut the door.

The taxi driver turned in his seat and looked pleasantly over his shoulder at the man. Cracking a warm, wide smile he asked, “Where to?”

The man simply stared at the driver for a minute – at his round, balding head and full gray mustache. “Brockam” he muttered. The driver’s face flattened out and glanced down at the bottle the man still clutched by his side. “Brockam’s a ways out...” his voice trailed off uncertainly.

Thrusting his hand into his coat pocket, the man rummaged clumsily around before pulling out a wad of bills that he tossed at the bald driver. “Brockam” he repeated slowly, pronouncing the word so clearly that the driver felt more at ease and, with a last glance toward the bottle, turned back toward the wheel and pulled away from the curb. The passenger slouched in his seat and leaned his head far back and to the side so he could see the lamppost, standing straight and alone now in its own light by the road. He kept his eyes on it until the taxi rounded a bend and he could see it no more.

Then for a few minutes he slept. Or rather, he tried, but his body remained tense, and he could not seem to let his thoughts go. He tilted his head back and shut his eyes as he breathed in the clean smell of the cab and listened to the falling of raindrops on the windows and the swoosh, swoosh of the wipers against the windshield.

Opening his eyes, he stared out the window of the cab – at the streetlights going by, and at the reflection of the streetlights on the other side of the road in the same window. He thought of how similar they looked -- he could hardly tell them apart.

Feeling rested and comfortable, the passenger now examined the inside of the taxi. The upholstery was all leather, and though it had visibly been well used for quite some time, it was well kept and smelled...
the products used to clean it. On the dashboard lay a couple of papers. From the rear view mirror hung a crucifix that sparkled and swung back and forth with the movement of the car -- sometimes forming a perfect diagonal as the driver made a long, smooth turn.

Between swigs from his bottle, the passenger began glancing as discreetly as possible at the face in the rear view mirror. The smiling creases around the eyes, the bushy, unkempt eyebrows and the bulbous nose. He began to imagine, as he often liked to, where the driver came from, where he lived and with whom. What kind of childhood he had had. Whether or not his parents were still living.

Thinking about such things conjured up images in the passenger’s mind, images of a two-story brick house with a flowerbed on either side of the steps leading up to the white porch. A trail of mossy flagstones ed around the back of the house where a young boy stood tossing stones into an old well. At these memories the passenger shook his head violently.

“Why the crucifix?” he asked suddenly.

The eyes in the mirror jumped up to meet the passenger’s, “What?”

“The Crucifix, hanging there from the rear view mirror -- why is it there?”

The passenger could tell by the deepening of the wrinkles around the eyes in the mirror that the driver smiled. A large hand left the steering wheel and touched the crucifix affectionately.

“Oh, you know,” said the driver after a pause, “It’s just there, to remind me.... and for good luck.” He winked into the mirror.

The passenger made a face as if what he was drinking had turned sour in his mouth, “Good luck,” He said, “Never did me much good. And I’ve seen plenty of it.” He gestured at his expensive clothes. The driver said nothing.

As if angered at the driver’s silence the passenger took another drink from the bottle and continued, “I left home at 18. Ran away more like. That was a long time ago...never seen any of them since.” Still the driver remained silent, but the eyes in the mirror took on an interested and caring air, like that of a father.

“Don’t feel bad for me.” The passenger ordered, “It was much better like this.” He held the bottle up in front of him and with squinted eyes watched the streetlights distort and glide through it. The driver clenched his jaw above his slight double chin and looked perplexed, but said nothing.

“If I hadn’t left,” continued the passenger with a slur, “Who knows where I’d be now? Who knows?” The Man’s eyes danced about scanning the air in front of him, as if he were trying to see all the possible paths he could have taken laid out before him. All the possible permutations his life could have offered. He leaned forward and looked straight into the mirror for the first time, “Where are you from?” The driver seemed taken aback.

“I’m from right back there.” He said, gesturing with his head in the direction the taxi had come from. “In fact,” he continued with a smile, “I was born a matter of blocks from where I picked you up.”

“Really?” The passenger looked into the mirror without seeing anything for a moment and asked, “How long have you been a taxi driver?”

Again the eyes smiled. “Oh, about twenty years,” the driver said, “I know this area like I know my own face. I like to say there isn’t a crack in the asphalt anywhere that I don’t know about.” He chuckled to
“And you like this?” The passenger seemed puzzled.
“Like what?”
The passenger did not respond, but produced a cap from his pocket, placed it on the bottle and screwed it on tightly.
“I don’t know anyplace that well,” he muttered, letting his gaze drift out the window. Then suddenly, “Here!” he cried, “Turn here.”
“But Brockam’s not for a few—”
“It’s not quite in Brockam. This will take us straight to it.”
A moment of silence. “To what, may I ask?” said the driver.
“Just a house,” replied the passenger, “One of the places I’ve lived in.”
The road the taxi had turned off on was much narrower than the one previous, and wound up and down over hills and side to side through pine trees that were lit up strangely in the headlights. Looking out above the trees, the passenger noticed a dull glow in the sky; morning was near. Sighing lengthily, he settled back in his seat and squeezed his eyes shut. His slender fingers drummed on the headrest next to him and made a hollow sound.
“How much farther?” Inquired the driver.
“Not far,” replied the passenger, “Not far.”
“Gaps began to open in the facade of trees where driveways wound their way from the road, which began to climb steadily. A comfortable silence settled in the cab; the driver rested his hands tiredly on the wheel and the passenger cradled the capped bottle between his legs. The car rounded a bend, and a lake opened up to their left, shimmering slightly in the growing day.
“Pretty country out here,” said the driver.
Staring out the window, the passenger nodded almost imperceptibly. “It’s not far now, maybe a mile,” he said.

After a minute, the driver slowed down a little, and as they approached yet another gravel driveway the passenger tapped the driver on the shoulder and directed him to stop. The house was not visible from the road, and for what seemed a long time the passenger simply stared out to where the driveway disappeared around a bend.

Leather creaked as the driver turned in his seat, “Sir?”
The passenger looked at him with a start, “Ah, yes. Well, I’ll be getting out,” and, clutching his bottle, he opened the door.
The driver frowned, “Shall I wait here?”
For a moment it seemed as if the question had gone unnoticed, but the man turned around with a confused look on his face, “Well, yes, I suppose,” he spluttered, “Yes, I shouldn’t be gone long.” Then he turned and stumbled down the driveway, his shoes crunching against the pale gravel.
The early morning air was cold and grabbed at the man’s face as he continued down the drive. Keeping his elbows tight against his body for warmth, the man unscrewed the cap to his bottle. With a single,
ng swig he finished what remained of its contents. His legs moved jerkily onward, and he strained his neck forward and squinted his eyes against the wind.

A strange form appeared, silhouetted against the murky morning light, looking like a giant, grotesque insect. The man peered at it uncertainly for a second. A backhoe. He stumbled around it and continued on. He was approaching the place where he knew the house was -- he cared for little else and felt his steps quicken. His eyes searched for the familiar outline that would at any moment appear. Then he saw it: the closest corner of the house materialized and began moving toward him. He was almost running now, and when he stopped abruptly he almost fell. The corner he had caught sight of was the only corner standing; it disintegrated into piles of nothingness mere feet from where it began. As he slowly stepped closer the man made out piles of smashed brick, wood, drywall, and other materials lying about the yard. For a long time he stood and stared blankly around him. In one of the piles he recognized the large kitchen sink beside which he used to stand clutching his mother's skirt; it was lying on its side, half buried in dirt and pieces of splintered wood. More tractors stood silent in the gloom, as if poised and ready to strike. The man began moving about, examining everything cautiously, like a lost child. His pace quickened and soon he was running from pile of rubbish to worthless pile; his hand white from clutching the empty bottle, and his breath came in gasps. Tripping over a board, he fell and scraped his knuckles. He heard the sound of cloth tearing as he rose but he gave it no thought and continued to run in desperate circles. His foot met something hard and hollow sounding that gave way beneath his weight. He felt a rush and clawed at the air. Something hit his chin and snapped his jaw shut.

The man opened his eyes and blinked. He was hanging into an old well -- the well he used to toss stones into endlessly, waiting to hear them hit the dry bottom with a mirthless sound. His elbows rested on the worn ledge that encircled the well, his chin ground against the rough surface of red bricks. Grimacing with pain, the man began pushing up with his toes, using the cracks in the brickwork for leverage, and -- after a struggle -- managed to pull himself out of the well. Gasping for breath, he fell on his back and stared at the light increasing above the trees on the horizon, feeling the blood tingle and coagulate on his chin. After awhile he slowly stood and staggered aimlessly away from the site into the trees. He wound his way upward into the hills, breathing hard, and stumbling faster and faster through the underbrush as if with sheer physical effort he could erase his thoughts. A branch clawed at his face, ripping the fresh scab on his chin and making the blood flow again. The man gave it no mind. The trees around him vanished suddenly; he stood on a small, grassy ledge overlooking the surrounding territory. Hearing a faint sound, he turned and looked back toward where he had come. The construction crew had arrived, and now the tractors moved about like many yellow dung beetles, clearing the debris and destroying what little was left of the old house. Soon there would be no trace of what had stood there. The man turned away and continued up into the hills.
Silence or Cries
Kathleen O'Bannon

The nightingale kept up his song
Long, long into the lonely night,
But strangely stopped before the dawn,
And all the world seemed to subside.

No siren rang, nor midnight cry--
But still the stillness broke my sleep.
The sky stared with its full-moon eye
And frightened-- but, I dared not weep.

Some dread to hear the dying sighs
Of those who see the bitter end...
Although-- the horror herein lies:
To live, and stand amidst the dead.

Where--where!-- is pretty Nightingale?
I won't look through the window-glass--
I won't peel back the curtain-veil
And see why all has stilled at last.

Obligation
Kathleen O'Bannon

I looked into my neighbor’s face
And cast a shadow thereupon,
As if those eyes shone with disgrace
And sunlight let them gleam and flaunt.

And yet-- to my distress!-- I looked,
And there the darkness held me tight.
That shadow cast, that light I took,
Had blackened all what once was light.

What use had hate? I never knew.
When I had broken out from love,
Love broke away and fled from view,
And I forgot the joys thereof.
The five of us walked down a long hallway in complete silence. An official led us to our designated room. At the door, she gave us a fleeting smile that tried to be reassuring, but quickly faded; she understood comfort was the last thing on our minds. She whispered good luck and walked back down the empty hall. The door creaked open to a bespectacled woman with frizzy, gray hair on top of which a lime-green, plastic top hat rested. She welcomed us into a cold, bare room. Surrounding a junk-covered table were chairs assigned with numbers.

"Is that all of you?" a young, portly man in googly-eye glasses asked. "Small team."

"Yes."

"Okay then," said another man sporting overalls covered with buttons. "Let’s get started."

So began this Grand Inquisition. It was our Spontaneous problem at Odyssey of the Mind World Finals. Though my team and I were seasoned veterans, a Division III high school team, I still fervently gnawed my nails. We were nervous, but had prepared for this all year. Worst of all, this terrifying situation was voluntary: we signed up for this; we knew what we were getting into. Almost. It was Spontaneous.

Spontaneity. In O.M., the highest of virtues. Yet great works of art almost always require a gestation period. Before Michelangelo began a sculpture, he envisioned the artwork latent in the block of marble. He pondered for days, just him and the marble. He then picked up a chisel. Says Michelangelo, “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.” He makes it seem simple and elegant, this inherent creativity.

I’m lousy with a chisel. For seven years, however, I refined my skills. My team members and I imagined solutions for six months of the school year. We faced deadlines, performances, setbacks, drama. But we chiseled. We saw the angel waiting to be freed. Our problem, our block of marble, was Odyssey of the Mind.

Odyssey of the Mind, commonly called O.M. by those of us are familiar with it, is a creative problem-solving competition for kindergartners through college students with separate divisions according to age. The O.M. organization concocts five problems each year. Each team, ranging from five to seven students, creates an original performance and attempts to solve its problem within the allotted eight minutes per skit. Teams perform first at the Regional competition, then the top three teams in the division and problem go to State, and the top two teams from there go on to the much sought-after World Competition. This particular year, my team had earned a spot at Worlds at the University of Maryland.

Each problem has its own twist. In Vehicular, students must build a vehicle that transports items or team members from area to area as the rest of the team performs. Technical demands teams build contraptions that accomplish specific goals, whether it’s pressing a number of buttons, flinging items from area to area, or turning an item like clay into a particular shape. Classics requires the team to retell a classic using creative methods—from King Arthur to Greek tragedies to historical persons of the team’s choosing, each story will vary between teams in any given year. Structure is usually considered the most difficult problem:
teams build a structure out of Balsa wood to withstand added weight up to a 1,000+ lbs. Finally, Theatrical, like Classics, is more dramatic than the other problems. The performances are usually free-form, often funny, and limited by few restrictions—the skit itself is the primary focus.

Then there’s the Spontaneous problem. It is the second and most feared component of O.M. No team knows going into it what their specific problem will be, but each team practices religiously hoping for near-perfect preparation. There are three possible kinds of Spontaneous problems: Verbal, Hands-on, and Verbal Hands-on (a hybrid form of the previous two, and pretty self-explanatory).

Verbal simply tells the team to think of creative responses in succession without passing—any Omer (as we O.M. competitors call ourselves) knows the routine: “You may not skip your turn, or repeat, or pass. If one member of the team is stuck, the team is stuck.” The judges deliver the line in monotone. They know it, we know it; it is superfluous in O.M. Yet breaking this rule is a big no-no; hefty penalty points will be added to the final score.

Hands-on requires the team to build a structure that accomplishes a certain goal, usually to withstand weight or reach a certain height. The building materials are almost always a lump of Play-doh, toothpicks, paper, paperclips, spaghetti, marshmallows, and string—your everyday, run-of-the-mill stuff.

Back in the sparse room with the idiotically-dressed judges, my team and I sat looking at the items on our table, avoiding eye-contact with the judges. The adults think that dressing as they do eases the tension for the teams. It does not. It only gives an added element of absurdity to an already-hostile room. The lady judge picked up a piece of paper and coughed to clear her throat of phlegm.

Each heartbeat in the room quickened.

“Before you are 40 pieces of spaghetti, 15 pieces of elbow macaroni, 25 miniature marshmallows, 10 toothpicks, 4 straws, and 5 adhesive mailing labels.

The team’s problem is to make a structure in 7 minutes with 2 minutes to test it. The structure will be scored on height and strength. You may talk to your team members at any time. You may use only the materials given to you. The structure must rest on the surface of the table. It may not lean against a wall or be supported by anything else.

Once your structure is finished, you will place the container on top of it. It will then be measured from the surface of the table to the top of the container. It must measure at least 8 inches high to receive score. Once your structure is measured, you will begin placing weights in the container one at a time. A weight must be held for 3 seconds to count for score. You will be finished when your structure breaks, you have used all the weights, or time ends.”

Hands-on. I hated Hands-on. I was no engineer, I was a writer, a poet, an actor—the ideal Verbal competitor. At least Michelangelo could work with his medium of choice; I was stuck with Hands-on. I think Jesus would have added another clause to the Seven Woes, reserving a special place for Hands-on Spontaneous judges, if the Pharisees weren’t so cheesed off by his first seven.

Time began.

“Kayla and Ryan, you two start tearing apart the marshmallows and roll them into sticky balls,” said Carissa. “Jenna, Jake, start arranging the spaghetti and macaroni so we can get the structure going. I’ll put
e toothpicks through the straws like a ladder and connect them with the labels for reinforcement.” The
am often designates one person to be the foreman for our makeshift construction.

And so our project was underway.

Teamwork as a virtue is always simpler than in praxis. When told to accomplish a task, five creative
people will almost always butt heads. We each had an idea of how to solve the problem, and we wanted
our individual ideas to trump the others. Communication is a vital component here. By talking things out,
we negotiate, we make trades, we sacrifice. Michelangelo could do whatever he wished with his block of
marble—he flew solo.

The team, however, is everything. The team functions as one body, one mind—a zany church of cre-
ativity. We’d worked together all year on our skit. We were proud of it. We were proud of each other. Henry
Ford said of teamwork: “Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is
success.” We embodied togetherness. Heck, we were the artsy, geeky version of Remember the Titans! All
of my best friends were on an O.M. team at one time or another, and we look back on those years with the
nostalgia usually reserved for a class reunion for sexagenarians.

So what if this Spontaneous problem felled us? We’d made it this far on teamwork and resilience. We
sacrificed our afternoons, our weekends—not to mention our popularity—but we kept coming back. It was
the team, not the thrill of the competition, that captivated us. We didn’t need total freedom to make indi-
vidual projects; what we needed was each other, our collective brainstorm, our shared encouragement and
collaboration.

What we needed was to finish the darn tower.

“Two minutes remaining,” a judge said. As if we needed the reminder.

“Shoot! Ok, reinforce the base!” I said. “We’re running out of time.”

Kayla chimed in, “If we build a leg to angle and support the tower, that might fix it from leaning and
collapsing.” She was our go-to science gal, our master of physics. Her plan, of course, saved us. We franti-
cally put the finishing touches on our makeshift spire just as the timekeeper judge told us time was up.

We immediately withdrew our hands and stood back from the table. The judges pulled out their rulers
and began to measure. They had us place weights on our tower and added points for each weight. Ryan and
I placed more weights with surgical precision onto the tower’s platform. The whole team held our breaths
and awaited the judges’ final tally.
Humulus Lupulus
Ben Dixon
Fangs foaming the lupine vines
hunger to hold the stool sitter's
tongue in snarled bite. They
stew in the circular woods
brewing their fermented fury
leering with libation in their eyes.
They creep out the tap when
the moon rises. A liquid howl of hops.

Wild Glory
Ben Dixon
When John the Baptist died they put
his head on a platter. They took
the dish straight to Herod's daughter.

Now we feast on the day of his
demise. The head sits on the church
table wild glory in his eyes.

Watch that wild glory flame while you
feast. And remember that wild glory
out in the desert of the streets.
“Are you going to church tomorrow?” This is a question I hear often as a student at a Christian college in the Midwest. The inquiry often comes up on a late Saturday night, sometimes at one o’clock in the morning when my friends and I have just finished a Meg Ryan movie marathon, so tired that we are considering sleeping on the couch amidst blue-jean-clad friends and forgotten popcorn kernels.

I could probably count on my fingers and toes that number of times I have missed a Sunday morning worship service. For clarification’s sake: just because I am physically in church does not mean I am fully engaged—I might be making lists in my head, or comparing my singing voice to the person’s beside me. Still, I was simply taught that there were very few excuses to not go to church on Sunday morning. Life-threatening sickness, perhaps. And although I grew up with a pastor as a father, my mother is partially to blame. She was the one who vetoed softball leagues with games on Sundays and the ever-popular Saturday night sleepover. Travel was another worthy excuse to miss church.

Twice every year my family of five and our yellow lab, Chipper, piled into the tired red minivan and drove south, bound for the mountains of south Georgia and the homeland of ninety-nine percent of our extended family. We drove for two days, often leaving on Saturday mornings. When Sunday dawned, we climbed into the car early after a continental breakfast at a well-trusted, dog-friendly Best Western in Lexington, Virginia. In the car, my father led us in hymns and responsive prayers. He read from a small leather Bible, calling the service, “Town and Country Presbyterian Church,” because we drove a Chrysler Town and Country.

Now I attend a church that has 4,000 weekly attendees. A strip-mall that was once stocked with clothing stores and peppered with shoppers is now hollowed out, gutted, and virtually empty on all days of the week but one. Where women once agonized over the size of their jeans, children now color pictures of a cartoon Jesus and eat animal crackers from Dixie cups. Babies are coaxed not to cry, for fear of their cries interrupting a service where thousands are seated, surrounding a small stage with one standing speaker. It didn’t occur to me until my second year going to Mars Hill Bible Church that I could also count on my fingers and toes the number of times that I have been “to church” in a traditional church building. One with intentional architecture, stained glass, a rose window and an organ.

I recently brought my boyfriend to my home church with me for the first time. He was finally meeting my parents and seeing my hometown; the experience made me feel both young and old at the same time. I had told him about Trinity Presbyterian many a time. I had told him about Peter, the kid I baby-sat, who made me a valentine and mailed it to me at college; and how everyone knew that the post-service coffee was made entirely too strong, but no one had the guts to say anything to the woman who had been in charge of it for years. It wasn’t until we were getting in my car on that Sunday in June that I remembered to mention our building.

“Oh, yeah,” I began, reaching for my seat belt, “We meet in a gym.”
Cody looked at me, taken aback.
“Huh? You mean, for the summer?”
I smiled, and replied, “Nope, always. We always have. We tried to get our own building. Found a location, raised money and everything, but it fell through. This just works for us.”

It really wasn’t just a gym, it was a private Catholic girls school in the area. The School of the Holy Child. Children’s Church met in the Cafeteria. As a young girl, I arrived early with my mother and we shoved lunch tables across the tile floor so that we could set up three rows of twenty chairs each. On a good Sunday, they would fill with bright-eyed boys in collars and little ladies in dresses ready to sing: “Hide it under a bushel? No! I’m gonna let it shine...”

Those were the Town and Country minivan days, when that was our only car and when my parents hated Sunday mornings. For a day of worship, it began with a lot of yelling.

“Get up! This is the last time I am asking you Abigail, for crying out loud. Andrew, you better believe that I’ll leave you here if you aren’t ready to go in five minutes. Your father is preaching. Safe to say his presence there is more important than yours.”

We kids knew our father was preaching. He’d been talking to us about it all week, sitting down at the dinner table and updating us on his research as he reached for the green beans.

No matter what state of mind my mother was in when she tried to wake us all up, she always turned to me before exiting the house,

“Do I look okay?” she would ask.

I would tell my mother she looked great, because she always did—while my siblings and I ate warm cinnamon rolls wrapped in paper towels in the car on the way to church. We walked in with sticky fingers. Rushing leads to tradition. It was going to church that taught my brother and I to have polite conversations with adults. Because we were the pastor’s kids, everyone knew our names. We were greeted before church, after church, and during the passing of the peace. I don’t know how long a standard “greet those around you” assignment is set to last. Probably an average of one to two minutes. I clocked it at Mars Hill last week and it was no longer than 30 seconds. But here, it’s more like seven. We have entire conversations.

“Caroline, I meant to ask you if you could come baby-sit Alexandra next week...”

“Hey Mike! How did your hockey game go last night? Sorry I couldn’t make it.”

“Hey, look! The Brunners just walked in. I must go hug Mary right now. They haven’t been here in months”

And, of course, I had time to walk across the sanctuary, give her a hug and a hello, and return to my seat. Meanwhile, my father had made it halfway down the center isle, shaking the hands of the lucky few on the center ends of their row. I doubt he ever meets newcomers during this time. If he did, it would take longer. And anyway, newcomers always sit in the back.

My brother and I were often addressed by people whose names escaped us. My father, on the other hand, could remember the name of the man who cream-cheesed his bagel at the Dockside Deli six weeks ago.

“Hello, Caroline!” an elderly woman would say, “How are your ballet lessons going?”
“Good!” I would reply, looking her straight in the eyes, and not rocking back on my heels, just like my mother taught me.

After going to Trinity for years, I came to love those who had been going as long as I had, even the women with whom I barely spoke, and the older men who coughed inappropriately loud during the prayers. Not only did I see them when they were looking their best for God, but I knew about their pains and trials—to a certain extent at least. My parents would talk in hushed tones about Rachel, who was pregnant, not married, and nineteen. They spoke about her family; how they were doing; and prayed for the young mother, suddenly thrust into a world she did not expect to enter for years to come. My siblings and I were rusted with this information and it never left our house. Two years ago, when Justin, who was fourteen at the time, was sent off to Utah, I was one of the first to know about it. His absence was first realized by his friends who turned to his family for answers. “He had some trouble with authority. He needs some time to realize how to be a part of a family.”

He was smoking weed and lying to his parents. I didn’t see him for two years. When I did see him again, at church, he was standing under the back basketball hoop. It occurs to me now that gyms don’t really have a front or a back, but this one did for us. I hugged him and told him he looked great.

Worshipping in a gym is something I am not aware of now. But to an outsider, it must look strange; we sing between navy blue banners with iron-on white felt letters. We lift our eyes to high hoops and recess-lighting. Our best shoes are reflected in the gleam of the squeaky wooden flooring, and the back walls are padded with foam coated in bright red plastic. Broad lines painted on the floor connect friends, newcomers, and families. Afterwards, the place where we once sat reverently becomes a space where toddlers make friends and the Youth Group plays basketball. Even elders shoot three-pointers. Older brothers push younger sisters on carts containing stacked folding-chairs. No parents tell their children not to run. That’s what these places are built for. In the summer months, windows open to a busy highway and dusty plastic fans line the isles, surrounding us as we fan our foreheads with folded bulletins.

My father is an excellent preacher. Every now and then he will preach sermons that will bounce off the rim. Sometimes he only hits the backboard. Most of the time, though, you can hear the swish as his words go straight to the heart of the congregation. Daddy preaches from the free-throw line. And when he shoots, he scores.

For nine months, The School of the Holy Child was under construction. The lobby was being renovated. The kind of renovation that only a private Catholic school in the suburbs of New York could afford. We moved, and suddenly church was in a church—a cathedral on a college campus. We graduated. When we sang, our voices echoed and there were cushioned platforms under every seat so that we could kneel during prayer if we wanted to. It was dark in there; sunlight entered only through heavily stained glass.

I think a few people really came to like worshiping there, my Daddy especially. He loved kneeling. He relished the tradition that automatically came with the cathedral. I liked exploring the empty rooms with my brother after the service. There was also garden outside where I often walked with Zach, who was in 9th grade, (a year older than me), and had beautiful brown eyes. It was poetic, but I was thirteen and I wanted to go home.
It doesn’t matter if my family is on a road trip, on a vacation, or visiting family, if my father sees a church we stop the car. We get out and look around. I have seen beautiful buildings. Places where you can’t help but think; God is here. This place is holy. It’s all a trick, though. It’s the smell. The humidity. The light. The stained glass.

The gym of the School of the Holy Child is not holy. I remember the year that my brother brought a super ball to church everyday so that we could bounce it off the high-reaching blank walls when the service was over. Why not? There was nothing to damage. But still, I fell in love with God there. And we, the church, fell in love with each other.

In my first college art class, we visited an exhibition in a gallery on campus. Across multiple tables, the artist had set up airy sculptures made of twig, twine, cotton, netting, lace and other natural objects that were bent to form shapes. The shapes almost looked like containers, homemade baskets that were too flimsy to hold anything of substance. The title of the exhibition was titled Sanctuary. If you look up sanctuary in a dictionary, you find words like sacred and holy. You also see refuge. Another word that comes up is private. Nothing about windows, ceilings, or the amount of people. A sanctuary is a place, everything else is an adjective. But those sculptures were empty. My sanctuary is only a sanctuary when it is full.

One last tradition. On Christmas Eve, we have a service at 4:00 in the afternoon. It is one of lessons and carols, in which elders and deacons and anyone who can stand and read in front of a crowd reads the Christmas story, directly from the King James Version of the Bible. Interspersed among the readings are carols. “It Came Upon A Midnight Clear,” “Joy to the World,” “The First Noel.” Before we begin our last carol, we process—walk to the front of the room—and take a small white candle from a box of many. We light it off the stout, pearly one that ceremoniously stands in the middle of the advent wreath. We return to our seats, but remain standing with candles lit, lights off.

Then we sing Silent Night. Silent night, holy night. And this time I can’t deny the holiness, as it slowly fills the gymnasium, and this little light of mine shines with the many little lights around me, it shines for them and for our Savior.
If’s by Fortune’s play
Ae Hee Lee

If I swore to you a promise and by fortune’s play I forget,
beckon me on my words, dear, with a truthful voice,
Before regret comes crawling at me and gnawing my sleep.

For I do not hope to become one of those innocent people
Who scribble words on the air and have them be lightly blown away
With a blushless laugh, and dismissing merrily the hopeful scraps.

Rather I bid to be ashamed and bow my head in utter mortification
Heading immediately to the rosy trail I said I was to be.
Because to cherish all the words that graze my quiet lips,
and to catch and dedicate all fleeting graces to you is what I wish.
Twenty-one. That’s how old I am, or was I guess, depending on when you see this. I was born into a fog of Floridian humidity like my brothers before and after me. It clung to us long after we moved north into the valleys of eastern Pennsylvania. Not much later, we migrated again, settling amongst the cornfields of northern Indiana. It was there that the latter part of my adolescence was spent, growing with the crops among snows of cottonwood. Eventually I began to spend only my summers there, the rest of the year spent in the molding mitten of Michigan, sobering up some youthful spirit I’ve yet to abandon.

Like clockwork, the bug had struck me again. Having moved enough as a kid, I’d become acquainted, and even enamored with leaving, people and cities. But even more so, I’d acquired an uncanny hunger for the road, manifested in the later part of the last school year in an eleven-hour-straight drive through the night from Kansas City, followed by a day trip to Chicago the next day. This, coupled with a strange thirty-minute bout of amnesia I had a few weeks later, made me ready to drive fast, and more importantly, anywhere. It was only fitting that at the time, my dad had been planning for himself, my two brothers, and I to carve a sideways-western-shaped “U” into the American landscape. Having never been further west than South Dakota, I began to romanticize it, not only for its opportunity, but its distance.

In our own brand of “Manifest Destiny,” with an emphasis on the first three letters, we were bound for the pacific. For the next ten days and over five-thousand miles, Navajo Dad, Jordan, Matt, and I would be sailors of the cement, captains of the concrete, and on the road once more.

We pulled out early on a Sunday morning before the sun even had a chance to rise. Our left-side tires gridlocked with the double yellow as we sped southwest.

St. Louis first; only fitting that the city to which Lewis and Clark returned was the one from which we began blazing our trail west. We left Illinois and Missouri behind without a thought, knowing we’d come back to them later. Soon came Oklahoma, and in Oklahoma it rained. The only reprieve from the downpour came as we blinked beneath overpasses, making our way to Texas.

Texas greeted us with open arms of hospitality in the early afternoon. Under its big sky we drove, the only inhabitants cattle—gazing and grazing—and the occasional cowboy. Soon the sun snuck further west, beyond the barren rim of landscape and into the distance; we set up our tent beneath a sliver of a moon that hung above us in the purple night.

In the morning, we packed camp and found our way back to the highway. Texas and its vacant plains of endless possibility crawled underneath an early morning fog and out of our sight. We left them altogether and sank below the flattops of New Mexico. Gripping tightly to 66, we made our way across as flattops morphed into monstrous mounds of slated red rock. There we began to pass the last of a lost breed, hitchhikers, wanting to go anywhere and everywhere, just to be moving, like the lone clouds that had wandered into the big western sky and swam alone.

Every city we passed through was unique and interesting in its own right, but every time we left, it felt customary. The unnameable and indescribable greatness that I knew was far west didn’t reside in any of them and I couldn’t stand the thought of their confinement. We kept on.

New Mexico passed and soon Arizona greeted us, teeming with dust devils. We weaved in and out of the countryside sewing a seam of exhaust that eventually led us to Flagstaff and an overnight stay in a teepee; my Dad felt at home.

It was still dark the next morning when we piled into the car amongst our luggage and set off for a slight detour north to the Grand Canyon. Even more than existing as a natural wonder, that great big
Round in the heart of America served to remind me how small humans really are. Jordan and I, like any young souls, stood on the edge of it whenever we could. It was beautiful, but eventually we left, having more road to follow.

Back south, we headed towards the Pacific once again. Western Arizona, a massive stretch of land, populated by scattered mountains and iron giants feeding power lines across the prairie. Every dotted line in the middle of the road a countdown towards the California border.

We passed the state line somewhere near the brink of the Mojave. We had reached what in my mind had become the promised land and my heart jumped at the thought of what was to come. We soon overtook the train that was racing us westward; we were Los Angeles bound.

Over the past few years LA had become to me what the New World must have been to explorers in the 15th century, a foreign and far-away land endowed with possibility. As of late, I’d grown tired of the university and its coffee laced conversations of thought, practice, and textbook quotations. Everyone there was confused, including me. In some animalistic attempt at identity, re-appropriation and regurgitation ran amant in a strange rebirth of unoriginality. I wasn’t anymore innocent than everybody else, even this was influenced by Kerouac and others of his kind. College and I had offered each other our best, and for some reason couldn’t get along. Most importantly I wanted to be up and doing and going and seeing, all senses and passion. I had five months left. These were my thoughts as we rushed by fossils of freights and their generation of riders gone-by in the desert of southern California.

That night, the city of Twenty-nine Palms appeared like a mirage from the parched ground around us. Strangely this, fit as that night my dreams were filled with mirages and ghosts of things gone by, things that I knew in consciousness were far gone from any road I was on now. In the morning we drove and left mirages behind.

Wrinkled mountains were brooding in the distance, their snowcaps on and western wisdom in tow. At the base of these, a bivouac of windmills were waving us on with a circular and continual “go”. The mouth of the road widened and soon became laden with palm trees. More and more cars joined us, all racing to he same place and maybe even the same thought, which was either running away from something or to it.

We hit LA, caked in smog, this the first of my moments of realism, but we had finally arrived. Walk of fame, “Hollywood” sign, buildings, restaurants; we saw all the sights. We cruised around the purported promised land, and in all honesty, it was a city just like any other. I stood in the streets, miles from where I tarted, not sure what to think. My jewel of the West was a rock like all the rest.

We navigated the city streets to Venice Beach on our way out. That mad place brought some redemption from my bout with realism, and boy is that place mad. A carnival of raw human spirit. Mankind minus the hang-ups. An African poet told me all I needed to know about LA though: “nothing here is free”. I could’ve stayed longer, mostly for the thought that at the moment I left I knew I’d be missing out on something. But, we had more road ahead, and I would have gone mad myself.

Riding the highway up the coast we’d reached the end of America, where red, white, blue, and Whitman’s tan-faced children fall into the pacific. North. Swaying and bending with the coastal road like the receding waves below.

At a rocky shore right off of the highway we stopped to at least touch the Pacific. I stood on sea-washed stones and let the pacific spit its foam in my direction.

On the way to San Francisco our car crawled through, and then crested over, mountains into a modern El Dorado. Buried deep in wine country, where the fluorescence of Hollywood can’t reach, is some form of God’s land. The occasional pumpjack repeatedly bowing in reverence to the land and for the first time I felt confined to the car. The amber sun sparked a flame of uncertainty and promise as it caught the rolling golden hills on fire, pecked at itself in the Pacific, and retreated below the horizon. I felt warm for the first time in awhile. That night I slept on the floor of a cabin and promised myself I’d visit again.

The next day we made San Fran, a city of smells. We crept through the cascading housing districts and
made our way to the Golden Gate Bridge, where we stood humbly before bending eastward.

At a stop near the border of California, I received some sage and simple advice from a homeless man to whom we’d just given carrots and water. In the midst of his talk concerning his trip to Mars, the size of Venus women, Betsy Ross, and the goose who guarded his boots, he assumed the role of General Custer. As he stood near the Little Bighorn River and gazed at the army of Lakota and Cheyenne natives about to descend upon him, he called upon a memory of something his mother had said to him: “Custer! You’re gonna have days when you’re standing there and you ask yourself, ‘Where’d all these fucking Indians come from?’” With that, we left California.

Nevada found us beneath the beginnings of snow-kissed Rockies, where rivers and railroads snake alongside one another through boughs of firs. The wooden tracks, supporting themselves and the memories of woodsmen and miners gone-by, against the mountainside; the whole of the place was filled with some golden God-breathed light.

We stopped for the night in Reno and our car spent the whole next day consuming the Great Basin. Utah and the Salt Flats came at the same time, the mountains looking like out-of-place islands, swimming in their own reflection. Trains groaned in the opposite direction until we arrived at Salt Lake City, kneeling at the feet of the surrounding mountains.

The sun rose and saw us to Wyoming where we sloped into Lyman and arrived at a cabin. We spent the night playing poker with pennies and matches until Jordan and I decided to sneak through a broken fence into a horse corral. We hopped over a creek that ran through a line of trees and came out into a field of horses. Too afraid to fully approach them, we were standing at a distance making noises that we guessed would get their attention. We began inching slowly towards them until I came to a standstill in a staring contest with a big white horse. This, for me, a weird parallel to Kerouac’s white horse. I thought I saw someone coming from the owner’s house, and we quickly retreated over and under and back into the cabin. We spent the rest of the night goofing on my dad; the next day was Fathers Day.

We headed into Colorado and ate lunch at a diner. Afterwards, we began moving deeper and deeper into the Rockies, crouching in the attic of America. The mountains peered into the clouds while below, fly-fisherman fished. The smell of pine was all the while present. I think all of our hearts settled there for a moment, somewhere in a riverbed in Colorado.

We spent that night outside of Denver, a city, about which the only thing I have to say, is there are way too many rabbits in Denver. Matt, Jordan, and I discovered this exploring a creepy parking garage behind where we were staying, everything playing out in front of a silhouetted backdrop of the receding Rockies.

The first half of the next day, some pit had resolved to settle itself in my stomach. We began heading to North Platte Nebraska where a piece of my dad’s Indian heritage resided. Back in Missouri again, we stepped out of the car and into a heat, thick and palpable, like that of Florida to which I’ve become so fond. This, I’ve thought, because it brings about memories of some prenatal peace that is only attainable before birth and can only be faintly called upon when existing in this strange atmospheric womb.

We stayed the night in St. Joseph with some friends of mine, one of them a road buddy from the previous year. We said goodbye to them, their recently born child, (to whom I’m some form of non-religious godfather), and their dog that night, knowing we’d be undertaking our last day of driving before any of them, or even the sun, had woken.

In the morning I scribbled them a note promising I’d see them again soon. From there we cut through rain and down the road. We crossed Illinois and soon peered once again across the cornfields of Indiana, and I began feeling something I’d felt before.

I was in the crossroads of America once again, and I figure it’s called that for a reason. The road that led west had treated us well, and at the same time proven me wrong. I stood confused, blinking an infantile blink into a setting Midwestern sun, knowing that more roads existed, and hoping that someday, one would lead home.
What Came First the Chicken or the Egg?
Gabriel Kruis
Seeds sans sunlight
eggs without roosters
no chickens come:

Early bird
bantam swagger
the cock comes first.

What Can’t We See?
Gabriel Kruis
Seeds in concrete
icicles on the eaves
thaw, roots, root hairs

Bridge & waterway
stories of Earth, harp vibrations
the plump rats run.

Puddles ripple down tracks
white stalactites & cracks
in metro plaster.

Can You Tell Me How to Get to Sesame Street?
Gabriel Kruis
Garbage wafting leads
alert noses, and big, bird
turds reveal the nest.

Count neck bites, cookies
crunched, follow ABCs sung
and mah nà mah nàs.

Imagination,
brought to you by the letter I:
Snuffleupagus
Dreams of Earth
Amanda Hayes

I remember the day
That it crystallized in my mind:
Wilderness, unadulterated:

Exception.

Until that day,
(Although I hadn’t known)
My Little House dreams still hovered,
Jumbled around the mumbled snatch,
“Go West, Young Man,”

Behind my head.

Tragedy, I groaned,
Tragedy of adventure,
Tragedy of the Commons (Lawn).
What once was shrouded, treed
We now share with seven billion,

Mystery consumed.

And my dreams to tread the newborn skin of snow
Crunch beautifully in the ear
Only to the one who can ignore
The other six billion,
Nine hundred ninety-nine million,
Nine hundred ninety-nine thousand,
Nine hundred ninety-nine

Dreamers.

by a fishing line
Leah Sienkowski

there are some things that need closure.
that speak for an ending lest hanging in the air forever
wondering when your lungs will burst.
but in these current circumstances we
wait and struggle like a fish with a hook in its mouth. won­
dering
which way is the water and if justice exists in the air
and if maybe if the fisherman would detach our punctured lips
and think to pierce a different more deserving fish--then we
could return
to our regular waters,
slightly sore but mostly unphased.
This household understands no calm beyond Sunday afternoon. Along with three of the six children, the parents pause for much-needed afternoon naps in between church services. The two oldest daughters enjoy a youth group excursion. The oldest son stays awake to watch the Detroit Lions lose. This weekly ritual offers a three-hour respite to a house that otherwise experiences nothing but bedlam. At 4:38, seven minutes before the usual recommencement of chaos, something changes. The mother’s scream redefines blood-curdling and prematurely terminates the peace. Cries for an ambulance rattle the foundations of the ge-old house. The father rushes his youngest son down the stairs. He sets the motionless body of his son on the counter. At this point, a mannequin knows more life than the boy. Unable to support himself, the son is held upright by his father while the father calls an ambulance. The eldest brother takes his youngest brother’s cold, blue palm in his hand. He convinces himself the faint pulse he feels isn’t a lie. The unconscious boy’s blue eyes have now disappeared into his head. Vomit sputters from his opened mouth, and his clothes reek of stale urine. Shortly, emergency services arrive. A stretcher, oxygen mask, and various other medical gadgets overwhelm the boy’s body, completing his helpless state. The dad and mom chase their son to the hospital. The boy lays still in an ambulance, oblivious to the chaos surrounding him, while the oldest brother sits on the stairs, cries uncertainly, and attempts a prayer.
Heart X (Poisoned)
Robert Cumming

A telephone’s interrupted ring
Unravels pretty panic
In wave, in flood, in_____.
The open mouth revealing Civil war.
Trying find a fine twine to unwind
Your hair from this
Mess.
Climb my limbs.
Take them.
Please! Please!
Let me die for all of your
broken glass
Spilling spilling spilling
This snarled mosaic from your
Sick to the stomach
Wheel of a head.

She screaming
Help me,
I don’t know.

I don’t know.

I don’t know. But
Help me
Can’t be said without
Don’t touch me.

We’re not being honest with our words.
This missing
Communication
Tries to fit
Between
An authentic stutter.
We’re never close enough
To put out the fire when
We’re both burning,
Buckets in hand.
When Cage entered Harvard University’s anechoic chamber in 1951, he was surprised to hear two distinct sounds. Both originated from within. One—the higher-pitched of the dyad—turned out to be the electrical humming of his nervous system. The other tone—relatively lower in pitch—was produced by the movement of blood through his circulatory system. He would say later in reference to the experience, “Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue after my death. One need not car about the future of music.”

A strange Gethsemane this Gethsemane transposed.

There, in the dark of the studio, the twisted olive grove given way to acoustic foam and thick, double-paned glass, a face is turned towards the ceiling and hands are wringing. There, the negative space and silence (the immense pressure of emptiness!) push fist-wise against empty eardrums.

It’s October 1971 and a mind is roiling: chronic insomnia, depression, anxiety, despair—a fetid brew indeed and one that will ultimately prove lethal. For the moment, though, Drake, sitting alone, voice and guitar: two consecutive midnight recording sessions is all it takes to produce the record. A feeble lamp twice lit, twice snuffed.

But unlike the story told in the Christian gospels, there are no disciples dozing a little further down he mount. No willing spirits or bodies weak. Certainly there are no angelic bucket teams passing peace of mind down heavenly ladders or radiant helpers precipitating out of higher spheres to ‘just be there for’ a ruddled, 20th Century soul. And where Christ was able, perhaps, to draw some whisper of comfort from heightened awareness of the Big Picture or from a clearer sense of his part in the Grand Story-Arc or from insider knowledge of God’s intentions for that Great Tapestry of Existence, here-and-now is defined precisely by the dearth of such transcendental import and, therefore, by the very dissolution of the sort of meaningful trajectory that might take the edge off things.

Just the cup that cannot (or will not) be taken away; just the lyre and plaintive melodies resisting the weight of entropy with sound waves bound for no place in particular.

Zoom out if you can and see the cell entire teetering on the brink of annihilation. November 25, 1974, the whole thing plunges into the Abyss. The culprit: an amitriptyline overdose. 26 years old. The ast echoes in the body’s bell, the nerves and blood, muted forever by friction and heat.

Yet the first track isn’t all savage dissonance and desperate poundings against the coffin lid, is it? Nor are the lyrics the heavenward vituperations or acerbic blasphemies you might expect from someone who’s losing his will to live. Somehow, Drake’s is a lambent melancholy, a hurt transfigured or electrostatically charged—charged maybe by memories and years rubbing against each other.

Yes, the sound of the first chord is that of a magnetic ember glowing after whirling tape reels. Hear field lines radiate from the tonal center. Hear sweat fall like drops of blood; the gentle taps of fingernails against loose, down-tuned strings. Drops and taps form a diamond-encrusted shell around the other vibrations. A thawing world.
Hear the first of eleven short prayers glisten over the twin drones in your own ears:

Where we might expect a baleful, autumnal dirge, we get instead, ‘Pink Moon’—an elusive but celebratory panegyric to incipient spring.1 The descending, accelerating figure in the piano evokes March’s first rivulets of sun-coaxed melt water sliding off the terminus of February’s glacier. The voice, also falling, is the quickening permafrost that soaks deeper and deeper into the earth, deeper until it meets the aquifer hundreds of feet down. “Pink, pink, pink, pink, pink moon.” Streams gather strength and combine to form rivers, rivers that won’t stop until the sea.

Consider for a moment the texture of the voice itself: clear and cool, but warming infinitesimally. It is a graphene streamer unrolled steadily from a meter-wide ream by a team of gliding fowl. As listeners, we can’t help but latch on to such a gentle and consistent tone. It becomes a living, breathing vehicle to carry us over, through and under the remarkably varied terrains woven by that single, acoustic guitar. The shifting interaction between these musical entities is wherein lies the record’s most compelling formal drama.

Sometimes, as in many portions of the record’s bluesiest track, ‘Free Ride,’ the vocal part and guitar are essentially parallel. Drake’s fingers are building a pizzicato stairway for Drake’s voice to climb up and down on. When he sings, “Here me calling / won’t you give me / a free ride?” the two parts move together as if conjoined. Other times, things are more hierarchical, and the sensation is much more transcendental. In these instances, the voice soars high above landscapes to get a better view. ‘Which Will’ is one such track. You can see the curvature of the earth from the view afforded by these lofty heights. Naturally, big questions are asked of the world below. “Which will you go for? / Which will you love? ... Which will you dance for? Which makes you shine?”

When, however, the music does turn bitter—and it does from time to time—the voice is dominated, abused and even drowned by the guitar. ‘Parasite’ is the bizarre sound of Drake chaining his own voice to a carousel of his guitar’s devising and spinning his voice around and around until it blacks-out from dizziness and delirious paroxysms of self-loathing. “And changing a rope for a size too small / people all get hung. / Take a look and see me coming through. / I am the parasite who travels two by two.” The album hits rock bottom when the ground (guitar) buries the figure (voice).

There are still other times when the voice seems to disregard the guitar’s designs entirely. This is the case with the album’s seventh track, ‘Know,’ in which the singing cuts through especially sparse instrumentation like a Kingfisher diving down through the surface of a lake. It’s as if to say, “Know I that love you / Know that I don’t care.”

And perhaps most interesting of all, is the relationship between the voice and guitar in ‘Horn,’ the fifth track. Here, though Drake never actually sings, his voice, paradoxically, attains a sort of omnipresence. The guitar, missing the voice perhaps, splits in two. One part, the lower of the two, sits like a kettledrum on a single tone which is re-attacked over and over. The other, higher part rings over top like a solemn descant to the tempo geological time. Maybe this is what Aaron Copeland would have heard if he ever entered Cage’s cage of silence: sandstone arches and a French horn. A final effect here is that somehow you feel like you are haunting the sonic environment like Drake’s silent voice is, like you’ve been given the opportunity to

1 ‘Pink Moon’ was the name given by the Algonquians to the first full moon after the vernal equinox.
dwell the voice’s expansive neural net. Is this how Drake felt as he played without sinning?

Lastly, the final track, in true canonical fashion, is a sort of revelation. ‘From the Morning’ is the gem Drake’s been holding onto in secret this whole time, the golden light that kept Pink Moon from being an album populated exclusively by ‘Parasites.’ We’ve skipped over April, May, June and find ourselves lying in a timeless corner of late July where day and night alternate so rapidly they’ve become the same thing. Now it is Drake’s voice leading the charge and the guitars that follow, fractured into three distinct parts: low, arcing breaths, mid-range pirouettes and summer debris floating in the high strings, bits of leaves tossed about by the warm gusts of wind pushed out in front of the rushing mass and by the cool gusts filling in the rake behind. “And now we rise / And we are everywhere / And now we rise from the ground.”

Does the mind veer so severely at the end? Does the thought of our own impending demise become so unbearable at the end of life that one is unable to stare death head-on?

Have angels come after all?

Are vectors necessarily preferable to circles?

Is this surrender?

(Not my will, but thine…)

A strange Gethsemane, indeed, and the music never stops.

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