Fall 2009

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Pathos Literary Magazine is a student publication under the Portland State University Publications Board. All staff members, writers and artists are Portland State students. Content is chosen anonymously by a student review committee. To submit your work for review, email pathos@pdx.edu. Our submission guidelines can be found on our website, pathoslitmag.wordpress.com. Pathos has an open staff policy. We welcome any PSU student who wishes to be involved with the magazine or the events we sponsor.

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VISUAL ART

Front Cover: Peter Gunther

Back Cover: Katelin Hirsch
Supporting the facts of our felt experience of the world can be a burdensome task for those who choose to express their human-ness in any artform of the spirit. It has been said that creativity and art in general are a way of honoring our lives, of honoring each other in a world that so often is driven to revel in the bread and circus of life’s modern spectacle - a spectacle that is often more reminiscent of a cold nightmare punctuated with political displays of resentment, anxious paranoia, and an absence of faith in anything unrelated to the boorish hedonism of personal interest.

In the past decade we have witnessed the inbuilt dangers of unchecked hubris and that dynamo of history called greed for possession that has left so many others in a necessary state of material lent. Nothing fails so many like success it seems. Such off-kilter societies tend to strip-mine the soul and leave in their wake inert bodies of polluted selves not inclined towards the world at large, not thinking well enough of their community to do it justice.

To follow this strand of thought a little further is to realize in some elemental sense that the disjointed psychic culture surrounding us is also at once the embrace of an interconnected reality, composed of many embodied slices of human experience. To deny this various wonder - sometimes sublime, sometimes monstrous - is to adopt a kind of despair towards not only the world at large but also towards the fine point of our own need to move transparently as a self through it, and to be at times lifted by it and when needed, to lift it. Even if all that means is to perform the simple act of being available to it as one would be available to a friend or lover. Harsh words, irreconcilable differences, and even the occasional fistfight may eventuate, but at least the din of the world will have your voice to accompany its shattering glasses and clattering masses.

I believe we are entering a new age of sorts for those who take seriously the world around them and are inventing innovative ways of arguing with it, looking it square in the eye, asking it to dance. People are more than just nostalgic for notions like the common good and public service in this world of predominant diversions such as ‘market forces,’ ‘historical relevancy,’ and ‘power economies.’ All true forces of authentic change and involvement begin with those who reflect on their world in a manner that pushes it to evolve its language, its habits, its being and becoming.

To so loosely quest upon such crushing ideas as above is strange in relation to a small publication such as Pathos, especially given this, our current issue, mostly devoted to the work of poets, which may seem to some a fool’s errand made flesh. But I stand firm in my belief that Poetry, properly understood, is one of the greatest and least employed weapons in service to the art of living. Poetry is a soft wind on the skin that, at its best, sneaks up behind you to hold a knife to your throat, if for nothing else than to give you something to think about on your walk home.

“Paper has in indeterminate value. You can print money on it, a deed on it, a will on it. But as soon as you put a poem on it it’s worth less than it was before. I think that’s its strength.” -Unknown
What is the relevance of art today? In the technologically saturated 21st century, more and more a direct product not of human creativity, but of electronic computation, where do painting, music, photography, writing, and all forms of old fashioned self expression fit in? Should we, as Plato infamously suggested, regard all art as imitation and mere play, not to be taken seriously? While I like to think that everyone laughs heartily at such nonsense like I do, it seems to be an insidiously widespread view these days, and one held not just by elitists like Plato. As we give over more and more to virtual representations of reality, we are substituting ether for matter, proving Plato right, and ringing in the death of genuine experience.

People today are more connected than ever before, to our family, friends, people around the world, bank accounts, governments, and media outlets. But all of these connections rely on another one – our connectedness to the devices that make it possible. How many times a day do we see people walking on the street, apparently talking to themselves, only to realize when they turn their head that they are speaking into a tiny in-ear telephone? Ten years ago, what would immediately make us think, “they’re fucking nuts”, now is commonplace, and instead signifies urbanity. But this intimate connection to the interweb, blagosphere, ubernet, or whatever you want to call it, cannot substitute for a connection to the real world, and I argue, undermines it. I saw someone the other day walking down a set of steep stairs, cell phone right in front of their face, texting away. They tripped and nearly fell headlong to the bottom. I couldn’t help but chuckle (not too loudly) and think that it would have served them right.

But I digress. What does this have to do with art? It’s all about connections. To create art is to forge relationships, both within the artist, and in the world at large. Within the artist, neural networks are firing and expanding, fostering catharsis and a sense of the self, along with its power and limitations, and its place in the universe. An artwork then is an extension of the artist, a projection onto the canvas of the cosmos, carrying a message with no definitively decipherable content, but with the potential nonetheless to reach into another’s chest, and rattle their innards. Art is communication, and its vagueness, its subjective character, is what differentiates it from technological correspondence.

To create a work of art, one needs to go within, reflecting on the image of the world as it has been burned into memory. One cannot substitute Facebook for a human face, or Twitter for a quid-pro-quo at a bar. The world, being tangible, will always have something over the quasi-sensibility

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**Do some art**

Joel Eisenhower

Stop stroking your device, and touch a canvas.

---

Preston Reed Jr. in the midst of a street performance.
of the eWorld. As we increasingly engage in strictly digital relationships with people, places, and things, we are losing something, and we are losing big. Cases in point: Guitar Hero, massively multiplayer online role-playing games such as Second Life and World of Warcraft, ePets, eDating. We are trading trees for pictures of trees, the rush and intensity of kissing lips for a complex series of ones and zeros.

But I am not opposed to technology. I am writing this on a laptop, periodically looking at my Facebook account via a WiFi network. I own a cell phone, and I probably check my email ten times a day. But I also play an actual guitar, write poetry about things I see in the world every day, engage in long philosophical discussions on my porch, and do yoga to reestablish my connection to my body, and its connection to everything else. I use technology to enhance art and life, not to replace it, to facilitate actual conversation, not to limit it to 140 character one-way bursts. It may seem like a fine line, and I may seem like a hypocrite, but the extent to which people are es-

All of the iPhones in the world can’t slap your consciousness around like a good poem. They might bring art to you very conveniently, but to worship the iPhone is to worship the bottle instead of the beer, the packaging instead of the present.

We are connecting our bodies, minds, and arguably, our souls, to the vast matrix of digital networks. Wirelessly and invisibly encompassing our planet, they are facilitating our move away from the real. In Plato’s metaphor of the cave, we have broken from our bindings, but instead of seeing the world for what it really is, we are running headlong at the wall where the shadows are dancing.

To create art is to forge relationships, both within the artist, and in the world at large. Within the artist, neural networks are firing and expanding, fostering catharsis and a sense of the self, along with its power and limitations, and its place in the universe.

2 WEEKS LATER
I am reading my own article now, over and over, and I have come to the conclusion that it is shit.
Then, feeling guilty for feeling lousy, I have backed off, beaten down the harshest critic, and said, no, no, it just needs tweaking.

But now am I am sure it is shit. It is such shit that I have decided that you should forget all that. I was under Plato’s spell, lost in the forms. What I meant to say is:

Don’t forget that beauty is right in front of you. Art, the attempt the capture the beautiful, is not just noble. It is the thing that humans do when they are growing. The act of creation is what makes us grow in the first place, and art is the act of creation in its finest form.

2 weeks later
I am reading my own article now, over and over, and I have come to the conclusion that it is shit.

Then, feeling guilty for feeling lousy, I have backed off, beaten down the harshest critic, and said, no, no, it just needs tweaking.

Ah! I’ve done it again! Missed the point!
Shit! Okay, here it goes, I promise this is it.

Just get out there, feel the thrill of the air around you, feel the whole fucking Earth under you. Don’t get lost in the land of the unreal.

Do some art. Drench yourself in paint and dry hump a white wall. Pick up a guitar, strum it as hard as you can stand, and then belt some vocals from the primal places in your mind.

Explore. The world may be an oyster, but the mind is a blue whale.
And maybe it comes down to that:

TECHNOLOGY vs THE BLUE WHALE 🐳
December 9, 7:30 p.m.
St. Johns Booksellers,
8622 N Lombard St

Carlos Reyes the bard of County Clare, Ireland, and Portland poet, who was a finalist in the Oregon Book Awards, will be reading from his work.

December 9, 7:30 p.m.
Powell’s Main Store

Writer Donald Miller who grew up in Houston, Texas and left home at 21 years of age to travel across America until he ran out of money in Portland, Oregon, where he lives today, reads from his recent creative memoir A Million Miles in a Thousand Years.

December 12, 2:00 p.m.
Northwest Library,
2300 NW Thurman

Indigo Editing, the creators of the Sledgehammer Writing Contest, invite you to hone your writerly muscles in a 36-minute variation on the annual 36-hour story competition. Participants will be given writing prompts, which must be used to produce a short story within 36 minutes of start time. The winner will receive a copy of Ink-Filled Page, a St. Johns Booksellers gift certificate and a Moleskine mini-journal.

January 5, 7:30
Schitzer Concert Hall

Outspoken and controversial journalist and literary critic Christopher Hitchens will be speaking. His books include God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything (2008) and the bestseller No One Left To Lie To: The Values of the Worst Family (1999).

January 11, 6:30 p.m.
Reed College

Poet and assistant professor of poetry at Indiana University in Bloomington, and also teacher in Drew University’s low-residency MFA program in poetry, Ross Gay will be reading from his book Against Which, a finalist for Foreword Magazine’s poetry book of the year.

January 18, 6:30 p.m.
Reed College

Novelist and short story writer Jon Raymond, author of The Half-Life and Barnes & Noble’s Discover Great New Writers pick for Spring 2009, will be reading.

January 25, 6:30 p.m.
Reed College

Internationally known novelist and writer Joanne Greenberg, whose second novel I Never Promised You a Rose Garden (1964), is considered a classic literary representation of recovery from schizophrenia, and was translated into numerous languages, and made into a movie, will be reading her work.

February 4, 4:00 p.m.
Lewis and Clark College Council Chambers, Templeton

Poet, essayist, translator, and cultural critic Lewis Hyde, author of The Gift, a groundbreaking study of creativity and an exploration of the meaning of art and the imagination in a market driven society, will be discussing these cultural issues.

February 20, 7 p.m.
Newport Visual Arts Center
Newton, Oregon

Marc Acito, a would-be actor who ended up a writer, and debuted with his novel How I Paid for College: A Novel of Sex, Theft, Friendship and Musical Theater, which won the Oregon Book Awards’ Ken Kesey Award for the Novel, will be reading.
The Long Night
Cassie Ridgway

I must have had a crazy night with that eunuch, because I no longer have any time or money. Since, the eunuch has disappeared into my memories of last night’s lights, and the bass resounding within me. Infinitely vague. Infinitely dream-like. I remember the night club, the shwanky martinis, and doing lines in the bathroom. My good, good friend, the eunuch, was the one who bought all the cocaine because I had mentioned that I was low on time. “We’ll be up all night!” said my friend, the eunuch, “the night is for desire!” Everybody was enamored with my friend’s freedom. The eunuch that gave us all the night of our lives. Because I never had truly lived before these forgotten clips. Although, I am so very, very out of time. And money, too, I spent all my money. I wish I could remember who my friend, the eunuch, went home with last night.
A Sense of Extreme Disappointment, Weston Lyon
You throw your keys
on the floor.
Your Oxford dress,
the floor.
Opaque tights.
Floor.

You lay on your bed
and I, with you.

Fold yourself
to surround me.
Return to your position
in the womb,
but this time
conform into me.
Mold your body
into my body.
Return to the curling of toes
and the acute degree of our knees
bent.
Lock into me
like drawings
of loops and links.

A steady relay
of heartbeats and breathing, softly
amidst cotton sheets
and summer air.

Your breasts. My back.

Oneness
in this newfound mess,
a tangle
of warmth and skin.

A body-to-body sweetdom.
Rotating Elvis Heads

Christina Struyk-Bonn

Sounds from the alley unsettle me: beer bottles tossed and kicked, drunken murmurs, the heavy clank of the dumpster lid dropped into place. I hear the sounds through the walls, the apartment walls where my roommate and I are managers. Part of our job, I remind myself, is to remove all vagrancy from the alleyway and add a modicum of respectability to our apartment slum. Our contract is for a year — I won’t make it; I’ve never been the bad guy, the slum lord, the collector of rent and distributor of fines. My roommate is better at this job, better at dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s, better at listening to her elders and following orders.

Six months before, at 2:00 a.m. on our first evening in the building, we heard a knock on the door of our apartment. Pulling on sweats and sweatshirts, we opened the door a crack and squinted into the revealing light of the hallway. A welcome band stood on our doorstep, a native Portland band made up of a hurdy-gurdy, a harmonica, a ukulele and a bassoon. The four band members stomped their feet, nodded their heads, blasted their unrecognizable tune, and left. In the morning we tried to recall their faces, the shapes of their bodies, but all we could agree on was an aura: haze, smoke, noise.

When we first moved to this city, the city of roses where flowers bloom virtually all year round and even winter is green, we were astonished that we could live for free in a ninety-year-old building that looked like a worn Taj Mahal. We were recent college graduates from a small Midwestern college - my roommate a business major, me, English. We were good for each other. She kept me grounded, pulled me back into reality. I kept her impulsive, willing to take risks and accept a job we knew nothing about. The position appeared easy, the requirements minimal: collect rent and stock the communal bathrooms with toilet paper. “Amazing city,” my roommate said as we refilled toilet-paper holders and organized our paperwork into manila folders. Our bosses informed us that they didn’t want drugs and I are managers. Part of our job was to control Kim, the maintenance man. We were instructed to confiscate his hurdy-gurdy, fine him for defamation and hold his hand as he cried in our apartment. Half the time we didn’t understand what he was saying. He would grab his natural dreadlocks with both hands, tug them violently, and jump up and down on the couch in the lobby while shrieking swear words I didn’t dare think, let alone speak. He had residual hallucinatory trips from all the acid he dropped during the 70’s and 80’s. We were scared to ask him to change a lightbulb. What if he electrocuted himself and lost whatever bodily control he still had?

Vick and I smoked pot with him once in the ancient lobby of the building. After sinking into the flea-infested couch, allowing our shoulders to relax, our guards to slip, our smiles to lengthen, Kim squeezed between us, stretched his pungent arms around our shoulders, and asked if we wanted to see his card. “Sure,” we breathed, shrugged. From his wallet, he produced a laminated card, a certification that made us nod and murmur, “ah.”

Kim is a card carrying member of the paranoid schizophrenic club. We like him; we are scared of him. He brushes his dreadlocks out of his face and smiles at us with the grin of the unselfconscious — a smile full of fuzzy teeth, unfilled gaps, and brown roots.

It might be time to break our agreement, renege on our contract, leave these duties incomplete. I’m not used to going against my word, but after again screwing up the paperwork and getting verbally abraded, I sit in the park and lean back against the bench. I close my eyes and feel the sun soaking through my eyelids. The air smells of cherry blossoms, lilacs and blooming clematis. I need a message — some signal that will indicate whether I stick with free rent and an apartment full of...
Two women sit on a nearby bench. One woman has her head in the other woman’s lap. The woman lying on the bench is crying, shakily crying. I know that feeling – the stomach knotted, throat clenched, chest aching cry that exhausts. The other woman smoothes the sobbing woman’s hair, hums quietly, murmurs, soothes.

One of our tenants ambles through the park. He’s nocturnal, mostly, but on this day has crept out of his den to air his beard. He’s probably in his thirties, but it’s hard to tell; his body is so layered with clothing, he might be a yeti. Once, when I came home from waitressing at one o’clock in the morning, I passed him and two other tenants in the lobby. They hunkered around a game board and spoke to each other in falsettos. The sign on his apartment door says, “Abort the child within.”

I need something more. I need The Church of Elvis and all of its clichéd wisdom, the fortunes it claims to predict. I leave the park, the two women on the bench, the tenant with the hair-infested face and amble down to the church. Night descends, its blurring darkness softening the effects of the bizarre. I pass a woman in black leather. She is holding a leash. The leash is attached to the studded leather neckband of a man who is wearing handcuffs, a leather thong, and Birkenstocks.

A couple stands in front of me at The Church of Elvis getting married. They drop coins into the slot and out pop the plastic rings. They put them on, smile at each other, walk away holding hands. The Church of Elvis is often accompanied by the resident Portland Elvis. He currently stands next to the glass display. He is singing Elvis songs while strumming a three-stringed guitar. The Portland Elvis looks emaciated, his graying, sequined suit hanging limply from his shoulders. He smells of fermentation. He can’t sing. I drop a dollar into his guitar case. Underneath the fraying pant cuffs of his suit he wears Nikes.

I press my face against the glass display of The Church, adding my nose smudge to the hundreds already there, and stare at the display made up of rotating Elvis photos and a whole lot of other items that have nothing to do with The King. It’s an art display really, with a minimum of Elvis and a whole lot of kitsch. Various buttons are available for pushing. Quietly, reverently, I ask the rotating Elvis heads if I should quit my job, leave behind the trivialities of apartment management, branch out. After I pop in a quarter, they sing to me,

“I’m all shook up.”

I encountered a man here once, also an Elvis admirer, who claimed that most of downtown Portland was owned by the Russian mafia. He said this with a thick Eastern European accent while staring at the rotating pictures of Elvis. I worried that he hadn’t noticed me standing near him, wasn’t talking to me, and would have to kill me for discovering the mafia’s secret. I slipped away before he could accuse me of eavesdropping.

When I get back to the apartment building, the front door is wide open and Kim is rushing in and out of the building carrying fish-tanks full of marijuana plants. He deposits these into the back of a green Gremlin that has gone on as many trips as he has, and looks about as reliable.

“He’s been fired,” says my roommate, chewing on a long strand of her brown hair. She leans against the hummingbird wallpaper in the lobby of our apartment building. “He called up the slumlords and screamed obscenities at them. He doesn’t know where he’s going.”

My roommate and I walk to our own apartment. We’re too young for this job. We had normal childhoods, stable family lives, a minimum of drugs, and a college education. We’re learning fast, though. We’ve dug the yellow pages out of a communal toilet, we’ve mopped feces off of a bathroom wall, we’ve cleaned out the refrigerator of one of our tenants who was hauled away by the police and found a row of fingernails carefully preserved on the bottom shelf of the fridge. The slumlords hired us for our naivety and malleability, but because of our naivety and malleability, we side with the derelict, deranged, certified schizophrenics more than with the woman and daughter slumlords who are scared to step foot in the apartment building they own. We know what is occurring as we transition to adulthood in this city – we’ve seen the signs. We don’t need any more advice. It is time.

Abort the child within.
Free feet, leech free only recently;  
slinky snake evaluating coagulating blood. One foot surrounded  
by my body and a car, and then, the most  
beautiful place I have ever been.  
A muddy path zigs as mist comes together  
into infrequent droplets on our faces. Comfortable in flip-flops,  
not taking note of tiny stowaways. Tropical tree trunks  
corkscrew through each other as elephant-trunk vines  
waterfall from branches coated with frisbee leaves.  
Nowhere near the bottom a clearing, frames brilliant,  
shamrock-green, tree-laden mountain faces settled by blue mist.  
A string river streams far below, taking my eyes and stomach  
through the cliffs and out of view. Damp, lung-kissing air expands  
our chests as we try to capture everything in existence on our lenses.  
When we return to the shitty station wagon, new in the seventies  
with its creamy drab paint, the color of nothing good,  
we discover our new friends. Unfortunately, it is a bad relationship,  
and they stay squirming in the mud as we drive deeper into the tropics.
He gave the impression of a Tasmanian devil whose fearsome claws and fangs had been replaced with the winsome characteristics of a startled ferret.

Untitled, Corbin Becker
An Explanation of  
Mag Big: 2nd Attempt  
Cassie Ridgway

1. Splendor in the yellow sweet  
dripping peach. Perfect, momentary.  
Soil down, and up  
white silhouettes—bugs through beams.  

2. Whispering, “please, oh please” to air  
or something fear cannot unbind  
and if it hears a desperate plea, it is listening.  

3. Intoxication because in the moments before  
hitting the water  
Icarus smiles at the sun.  

4. Animal love.  

5. The song that understands and how it seduces  
over and over  
until it is a lover we cannot be with any longer.  

6. A lighthouse casting a shivering slice  
through undulating fog;  
the mariner catching it in a glass sphere.  

7. Pages and pages of crumbling yellowed words  
my grandmother at eighteen  
believes in crackling radio broadcasts.  

8. The lover, how he stretches, and in his slumber  
rests his hand upon the breast. 

9. When dying words are unselfish,  
such as,  
“try to be happy,” or “smile, my love.”  

10. When trees creak  
like whale songs,  
it becomes certain that without ears  
the forest is still a symphony.  

11. Awaking to snow  
how it covers churning streets with impenetrable silence  
and we play, for the first time in years.  

12. The painter, how he cannot stop  
with birds and feathers  
plumage plucked from the wing of an osprey.  
He considers himself from birds eye view.

Now becomes tempered by certain impermanence. Still, his dreams are a Grecian urn preserving her.
and when lushlips love and pucker
against cheeks in the dark and
only speckles of luz
sprawl (cast on the wallsfacescarpet—
plush)

and then globefingers clench, tingle
upon
knees under shiny tabletops in coffee
joints (with canopies and ambience that
i and you like)

when tiny glittereyes and giant
oceaneyes
connect curious amongst oval
asheyes and under covers wrinkled-
warmth. (i make my resolution and you
are resolved)

then her spider fingers claw crinkles in
your shirt and you let her ebony hair fan
across your face and make sounds in the
muggy black
(and when you sprawl your spider
fingers across my thigh in the morning
don’t ask me how i slept)
I. At the humid southern diner:
“You want some hash browns or grits or biscuits
with yo’ eegs?”
asked the beautiful voluptuous woman
with the cherry chocolate skin and
round olive eyes

II. They got roots, deep deep roots
grabbing ahold of the moist fertile soil,
a town by the water, a town with
a history, three-hundred years written,
a town with family found in neighbors,
and shop owners who say, “good mornin’”
to the visitors, to the foreigners,
while sweeping their store front,
there are no strangers here

III. And the storm waters erased it all:
floating photographs of swirls of color,
a dresser, a bible, a pillow
encased in grandma’s cotton,
a memory, the pearl-white wedding china,
a mistake, a glazed gold wedding band,
floating, floating, drowning, falling, decaying
crumbling, tearing, screaming—
a cat, thirteen years old,
pumping its paws in the salty liquid filth,
a 75-year old man, white hair and chocolate skin,
a cane floating out the door, no car, no money, no escape—
a gun, two guns, soldiers in army fatigues,
the poor become refugees, not citizens,
they pillage because they are starving,
they wail and punch because they are hopeless,
30,000 crammed inside a dome,
sleeping bags, torn wet blankets, misery misery
violence and rape in the crowds
there is no safety here where humanity has been
stripped away, it drowned back in the house
with the pets, with the history, with the normalcy

IV. “All right hun, here’s yo’ coffee and eegs,”
her whole being curved into a smile
and she meandered back to the kitchen,
laughing and swaying her arms—
the storm obliterated her home, she never
got to say goodbye to her neighbors—
the little girl with the pink barrettes
and her young mother,
the aging couple who would sit on the porch
fanning themselves with love—
she prayed every day for them,
she thanked God for her brown
pin-striped uniform,
for the air in her lungs,
and for the will to keep her chin
above the rising water of
poverty racism failed government gentrification
the storm took away the houses,
the infrastructure, the culture,
it stole the lives of children, of elderly—
but underneath the wreckage and decay,
underneath the ominous spray-painted
circle-slashes on building walls,
lived the ancient trees of its people,
the spirit of generations of
new-orleaners, grounded,
rooted deep into the earth,
in wisdom and faith,
in openess, open open openness,
with love and prayers
and music and song—
this little light of mine,
I’m gonna let it shine,
This little light of mine,
I’m gonna let it shine,
This little light of mine,
I’m gonna let it shine,
Let it shine let it shine let it shine
My mother’s dark curls brushed away from the delicate planes of her face. She wore a coy smile of youth, leaning against a new white Chrysler, which was not theirs because her family did not own a refrigerator. The war had begun; the fear of its green uniforms and combat boots raging from door to door in Saigon. It is 1980, two years before she boarded a brown paper bag of a boat someone had set into the water with paper cranes to sail in the South China Sea. Two hundred people in the chest of what once was an oak tree. Men with a string of gold their mothers had sewn into the waistline of their shorts. Women crying into their hands full of rosaries. Nothing on their backs but for one white shirt. Some of them crossing into Cambodia, the Phillipines, Thailand, Hong Kong. In Malaysia, she met my father. His shaggy hair and handlebar mustache were enough for her to turn her light off so no one—including him—from outside can see she was home. One day, she was squatting over a dead fish, talking to it with a rusty butcherknife in her hand while apologizing for claiming its head for herself. Earlier that day, my father had gone into the deepest corner of the rain forest, searching for his soul in the orchid roots he beared to my mother’s feet. I want to wash your feet for the rest of your life, were the words he said to her in that one silent motion. These were the words from the crescent moons beneath his finger tips that put together the broken city they had abandoned. What was left at one end of the horizon now met to begin with another.
I know for a fact that we humans have sick little minds, hearts, and souls. I found this out at an early age when lying was amusing and a person dying was hilarious and often fairly pleasurable. You always feel better about laughing at serious injury because the word “injury” almost always infers that the victim will heal. I laughed pretty hard when Beth Gunderson broke her arm after she lost her “knee-pit grip” on the monkey bars (her words, not mine). Her bone was sticking out and I remember thinking it was quite horrid, but at the same time I found that bone more attractive than anything else happening on the playground.

But this carries over to my adult life. In fact, just yesterday I was walking down Lovejoy following a biker when she suddenly fell to the ground. She did that fall where you hit the ground twice – one on the initial impact, and another off of the ricochet from the first. Her bounce reminded me of when I would throw my G.I. Joe’s down my grandmother’s stairs. Stiff and quick. Her helmet flew off but her embarrassment adrenaline kicked in and she was on the sidewalk before I could get any words out. She was wearing a dress and I stared at her as I passed. She was bleeding all down her leg. I thought about pulling over but just then her friend peddled back to her with concern. Thank God. Helping people is so awkward. I’m glad she had a friend because I was already laughing and it would be bad to be trying to catch my breath from laughter while cleaning the blood off her leg. Who am I kidding? I would never clean the blood off of her leg, that’s gross.

Growing up as a boy, I’ve come to understand that destruction is built in us. I share these stories with the women in my life and they look at me as if I pushed the old man who fell as he was going to receive blessed communion, which I didn’t.

Did I want to? Different story. But I know that when I was a child, my sister would make something look pretty and I would want to kill it. Maybe that’s the difference between Mars and Venus.

As a young boy matures, he realizes it is socially inappropriate to push old women or kick Dad in the balls. “Why?” I would ask my mom. “We just don’t,” she would say. What the fuck does that mean?

So Jr. High is basically about testing your boundaries. And one thing you learn as you mature is that you can destroy people’s comfort or livelihood instead of their physical makeup. You learn pranks. Instead of kicking Dad in the jollies, you take all of his socks. Instead of knocking over grandma, you water down her milk and see if she even notices. That old hag’s taste buds must be dead.

You always feel better about laughing at serious injury because the word “injury” almost always infers that the victim will heal.

You learn how to TP. You can’t blow up the house (you just don’t), so you make it a pain in the ass for everyone. I think TP-ing is an innate desire grafted into little children. I never had to be told what it was, I just knew what to do when I was looking at a pillar-filled house armed with a roll of toilet paper. Brilliant.
It was me, Alex Cassidy, Adam Mealey, Russell Goodwin, and Clark Henarie. We had seen this house before. In fact, it was on a walk home one day that we all decided that that Friday night we would bombard this poor sap’s house with stuff we whip our butts with.

The next thing I know, it’s Friday night and there I am in front of this stranger’s house. We begin the massacre. Nothing of much substance to laugh about at first, but I think it was when Adam Mealey put the TP around the Gargoyle’s pelvic region that I let out a giggle. In the middle of my demonic chuckle I heard a door latch. The door was opening and I heard God say, “What the hell are you little shit’s doing?” This wasn’t God. This was in fact a very angry man standing in his doorway...

...with a shotgun.

Because I was concentrating so hard on the fact that this guy had the power of life and death in his right hand, I really couldn’t answer the very pertinent question he was asking. What the hell WAS I doing? I really could not think of a good answer. I guess I was putting toilet paper all over his house, but that would really make me sound weird. I wish I had a better explanation for it.

“You better run fast,” he somewhat shouted. Good advice. We ran. Hard. But our little 8th grade legs had only made it about ten yards before he yelled again, “Actually wait! I want all your names and phone numbers. You little shits.” This was a classic trick amongst parents in my neighborhood. They always wanted first and last names with our phone numbers. The impending threat was that they would “let our parents know about the trouble” we were making. I believe I provided fake names and fake phone numbers to about 25 different adults in the Portland Metro area.

But before I could say, “My name is Eugene Balls,” Alex and Adam just booked it. This went against anything we had ever done as a group. Ducks fly together! What were they thinking? I didn’t think at all, I just ran with them and all of a sudden we were all running.

That sprint was the most terrifying sprint of my life. I was waiting for a bullet to hit me in the ass. I remember briefly thinking, as I heard him load his gun, that it would be kind of cool to get shot right then. Or maybe if Adam got shot...that would be better. If he got shot then I could carry him and tell a great story. Everyone would tell about the time they TP’d their principal and I can just whip out the trump card of TP stories. “We were running and next thing I know, Adam is on the ground, bullet right in his leg.” Actually, I think if I were to ever tell a story like that, I would eliminate all of the “there was’s”, and just use nouns with prepositional phrases. “Adam. On the ground. Bullet in his leg. I’m next to him, freakin’ out.”

But I was totally ready to get hit. What would mom think? She’d better sue. Cash for everyone and a rich guy in jail, we all win right? I started to think about how my dad once said that anyone who ever hurt me would get, “two fists up the tailpipe,” and while I was never sure what that meant, I was pretty sure he was beckoning revenge. In the middle of this thought, the man fired his gun with a weak pffft. There was no affect on us or our environment. We looked back in wonder.

He was pumping his rifle.

What a rookie. We all spent the whole night running back to my house, howling in boyish laughter, exchanging perspectives on the beautiful destruction we had caused.

I believe I provided fake names and fake phone numbers to about 25 different adults in the Portland Metro area.
Fadeaway

Matthew Sixsmith

A raven soared high above the steep hills across a sky streaked with whispers of cloud. The clouds stretched in parallel sets from the northwest defining the blue in the autumn sky. Glowing tops of slender redwoods marked the eastern horizon as the sun dropped into the canyon forest to the west. Gliding on broad wings, the raven turned its head to look down at a small clearing in the redwoods on top of a hill. An island in a dark green expanse.

The raven recognized a tight set of rectangular structures connected by small rivers of lifeless black rock as a pattern it saw everywhere. Only a few structures here, and five smooth, black rivers converging at the center. Tidy patches of plants the raven knew as food covered the rest of the clearing, but it flew on. Soon the raven would be at the creek mouth, pulling at bull kelp washed in from the last storm to find the sand crabs and dead smelts waiting on the beach. Before turning its black eyes ahead to the sea, the raven noticed a man carrying a small sphere entering the large building at the edge of the clearing.

Joe looked to the sky and knew instinctively that a storm was coming. Herringbone clouds from the northwest today meant the storm would be here sometime late tomorrow. They were heading out to the Banks tomorrow before dawn. It would be a rough week. He pulled the heavy metal door open and before entering the gym, he noticed a raven flying west, high over the redwoods into the fading sun.

Rudi kept the keys now that Joe couldn’t make it all the time. A game was in progress when Joe walked into the gym. Usual suspects.

Levi takes a pass on the wing and knives to the hoop. He always takes the most direct path to the basket. His lanky form coils for an instant before he bursts to the rim, but Gianni is there and jumps straight up, chest to chest with Levi, both of them straining hard and reaching high to the old redwood beams overhead. Levi grunts at the impact, but he’s got long arms and he releases the six-foot runner just over the tips of Gianni’s fingers and falls on his back. If he can get there, Gianni will challenge every drive to the hoop. He can’t help it. They have faced each other in the lane hundreds of times, going back to some forgotten afternoon at Brookhaven Middle School when Levi showed up the first day after transferring from St. Patrick’s. The ball clangs on the iron behind the rim, bounces off the glass and once more off the side of the ring. For once, Gino has boxed out and he grabs the rebound, looking downcourt for the long outlet pass he loves.

“Call it man!” Javier’s pissed about a hard foul last time down the court that knocked his glasses off and made the middle finger he tapes every week swell with pain. It’s hard to type with a sprained finger, and since he moved to the city and took a job hawking mortgages, he’s been doing a lot of typing.

“Naw it was clean.” Levi never calls fouls. He drives in to Santa Rosa every day now, hitting traffic exactly a half mile from the office, where he slumps on the wheel for twenty minutes and blankly suffers The Bob and Tom Show. Gianni’s back started to twinge six months ago, and though the pain puzzles him, it doesn’t keep him from the job site in Windsor, where he’s framing up a new Petco on part of the old Guadigni farm.

Joe sits on the dark wooden bleachers, leaning back and taking in the gym. The hardwood parquait is old and wavy, long overdue to be refinished. There’s a hole at half court on the far sideline caused by a forgotten delinquent who unscrewed the steel socket cover and rolled it down Bohemian Highway. The walls are tiled halfway to the huge, old-growth beams that span the width of the gym and bear the weight and the settling years. Caged lights hang down from the ceiling and shine on the yellow oak floor to bathe it all in a warm glow that feels like home to Joe.

He can remember nearly every shot and every pass here, and on stormy days in the wheelhouse of the trawler, Joe replays them in his mind. His eyes trace the arc of the three point line, the smaller arch forming the top of the key, the short foul line that closes the semi-circle and the straight lines that run at right angles into the baseline. From there he follows the boundary until it closes the rectangle which protects this sacred space. He knows every spot on the court, especially his spots. Sitting on the bleachers, he visualizes his crossovers, fakes, and shots, just like Coach Kartlick.
taught him fifteen years ago when he was a freshman at Analy High School. Rudi knocks down a fourteen-foot jump shot from the baseline to end the game. Rudi’s girlfriend took the kids tonight, so he’ll get to play till the end. He drove the moving van straight from work. The ball is tucked under Gino’s arm as he and Rudi walk over to the water fountain. Gino wipes his face with the bottom of his thin, faded Frank Zappa t-shirt, and Rudi points to the spot on the baseline. “Sometimes I wish it all came as natural as this shot.”

Gino squints back at Rudi, then looks away. “Me too.”

After a long drink, they all head outside and lean on the metal railing, looking up at the trees. Everybody sees the hard red wad of gum in the basin of the porcelain fountain as they twist the chrome knob and slurp the cold water piped in from the works on Dutch Bill Creek, but no one cleans it out. It is of this place now.

“Let’s get a breeze in there, fellas. Whadaya say?” Gino says, skipping a pass to Rudy.

Joe shrugs his shoulders and grins as he snatches the ball from Rudy and dribbles over to the key. “You ready to lose?”

“Let’s shoot for teams.” Zeke saunters in and heads to the loose group milling around the foul line. It’s a model of efficiency. You make it, you’re on. If not, tough shit. No cumbersome democracy, no squawking debate. No bullshit. Zeke makes his foul shot and smiles. He’ll be guarding Joe. Or trying.

“Zeke lit it up back in the day,” Gianni once confided to his team, while they sat out back waiting for next game on the spring night Zeke reappeared at the Y. “For real.”

Zeke was the man in Sebastopol before Joe. A senior when Joe was a freshman. All conference. Something had happened to Zeke. Everyone that knew him back then, just said that something was off now. Zeke claimed to have been attacked by a mountain lion, but no one believed him. It was one of the things about small towns. Truth had a way of mutating like a virus.

“Had a grow operation up in the coast range, south of Mendocino. I was walking back to my camp from the garden in the dark. Motherfucker must’ve been stalking me. I never saw or heard shit. All of a sudden something knocks my ass into the duff, hard. I can’t breathe and there’s claws ripping my back and teeth in my neck. Then it bites my fucking skull. Motherfucker bit my head, man. It’s clampin down like a vise and it feels like my eye’s gonna pop. I just started swinging and screaming and clawing back. Then it was gone and I was bloody. I saw the tracks, man. I’d been seein’em for weeks.”

He was grinning and his eyes were wide and crazy. He held up his limp and ragged left arm. “That’s why I can’t go left, man.”

He pulled his old tye-dye over his head and stretched his back. Huge scars on his neck, and running down his back. A scar down the right side of his face which touches his eye. They could be from a car accident like some folks say, or from a double-crossed drug dealer’s knife as another story goes, but the long, parallel scars and Zeke’s crazy grin suggested a wildness bigger than the gym, bigger than town gossip, bigger than car accidents and drug dealers.

“Where’s Arturo? Haven’t seen him in weeks.” Big Joe stretches out on the bottom row of the bleachers. He is old and crafty, and as usual, slicked with sweat. Big Joe’s hard to guard for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the reluctance...
to touch his soaked tank top or his great, hairy arms. His long legs cause the side-striped polyester warm-ups to swish as they carry his barrel chest up and down the court. Big Joe wears rec specs and the glare from the top of his bare head can sometimes blind an opponent just enough to allow him to poke the ball away. Big Joe coached some of these guys when they were kids and his bearded smile seems to bring out the best in everyone’s game.

Gianni’s anxious to get the next game going, but he always loves to talk story. “I heard he had to let his cousin go. Business is shit. He’s doing all the landscaping himself now. Workin his ass off. Gabriella’s working graveyard at the gas station in Forestville, so he’s got the kids at night.”

Gino shakes his head. “Damn.”

“Five point guards, baby. Run ‘n gun. That’s what I’m talkin about!” Flannagan’s pumped having just finished a swill of grape Mad Dog. He makes an ugly foul shot and the teams are set. Joe strokes a three and his team will start with the ball.

Levi slices down the lane on the first possession and seemingly trapped on the baseline, he flicks a no-look to Big Joe for a wide open layup. A bad start for the short guys. Gianni runs it back and its clear he’s playing mad. Dreads flying he takes it to the rim, right back at Levi.

Outside its dark and the patient wind is picking up momentum, swirling the rubber squeak of their shoes, the thud of leather on wood, the clang of iron, the swish of net, and the disembodied pleas of “Look up!”, “Outside!” and “Pick right!” into the moonless night. But the round clock high on the wall hasn’t worked in a decade. Time is an invention that doesn’t exist in this gym.

Up and down the court. The passes are crisp, the cuts are decisive, the picks are determined. Skin is left on the court in the pursuit of loose balls. More of their blood ingrained in the oak floors. It’s an inspired performance for the point guards, but in the end, tonight is Joe’s night. He can’t miss. Shot after shot, the net snaps and whooshes upward with the backspin. It’s beautiful to watch him dance, and this game everyone gets caught watching Joe. A half-spin and behind-the-back pass to Rudi for an easy hook. He breaks Gino’s ankles with a nasty crossover then coasts into the lane and pulls up abruptly on a dime and drains a sweet twelve-foot jumper, leaving Gino to grab the floor once more, just like in high school. Loping down the court on a breakaway, Joe casually spots up five feet beyond the three point arc and snaps an effortless shot which spins through the air, in its own perfect arc, finally touching the last cotton threads at the bottom of the net. Game point.

Flannagan calls a timeout and huddles his team. He’s beet red, panting out the Mad Dog, and sweating out the forty of Old English he finished on the drive here. His pale gut hangs over the white kitchen uniform pants from the Underwood Bar and Grill where he might still dishdog.

“Think about it.” Puzzled faces look across the huddle thinking about it. Flannagan’s overflowing with whiskey wisdom and drunken Irish logic.

“What the fuck are you talkin about Flannagan?” Gunther glares with a set Okie jaw. He grew up on a farm in the central valley outside Fresno, where they went to school together, graffitied vacant buildings together, and went to juvie together. Then they moved north together. Gunther’s only bailed Flannagan out of jail once this year. He’s finally got his shit together.

Flannagan winks at Gunther and pats Zeke on the ass. Before breaking the huddle with a clap, he looks around at everyone. “I’m just sayin, let’s stop this motherfucker.”

Gino throws the inbound pass to Flannagan and he swings it around the outside to Zeke. He takes the pass, grins at Joe and dribbles right, lowering his shoulder into him and driving. Before the betrayal of motion, Joe knows from the slight twitch of Zeke’s eye that he has decided to go left, and he picks it clean from the bad hand. Joe is off running down court, but Zeke recovers. They are matching strides like a scrimmage long ago at Analy when Zeke realized the kid was good. Zeke has regained position and pushes Joe way out on the baseline away from the hoop. Joe stops suddenly, but Zeke is still with him. Then, a slight head fake and Zeke’s in the air, Joe fading backward with the ball spinning off fingers, thicker now and callused from dragging in the gill nets, but still tuned to the leather. His wrist snaps a
follow-through, and he falls backward onto the old floor one more time. Swish. He just smiles, shakes his head, and shrugs. A lucky man discovers his purpose in life. Tonight Joe is reminded that he was meant to play basketball. ... 

The game is over, but they linger. Rudi turns out the lights and some of them drive away. They secretly dream of the game all week, and they never want it to end. Time may not exist in the gym, but outside it is eroding them. Their lives are becoming complicated, sometimes keeping them from coming. Zeke has gone back to the hills where he may live in a cave with mountain lions. Gunther is driving Flanny to a toga party. They meet at this gym built by the CCC in the thirties every Tuesday, and on the court they know each other as well as they’ve ever known anyone. When they leave, they return to other lives.

It’s a beautiful, starry night outside and the breeze feels good on their sweat-slicked bodies as they mill around. They begin to wander as a group, towards the reddish glow of the moon rising through the redwoods on the hill, east of town. Past the post office, past the firehouse built with Indiana brick, past Occidental Hardware that Gianni’s uncle owns, past the war monument where three-fourths of the names, all the way back to the Spanish-American War, are Facendini’s and Gonnella’s. They head to the Union Hotel.

... They will sit at the thick red-wood bar, lean back on the stools into adze-hewn posts, drinking the familiar scenery of the old bar until Michelle brings them their beers. They will talk about the Warriors and wonder how long Baron Davis can carry the team. They will put quarters in the old jukebox and listen to Otis Redding, Janis Joplin, and Hank Williams.

After a couple pints, Joe will call his ex-wife and leave to pick up the boy. He’ll drive up the steep hill and down the long gravel driveway through the apple orchard to the farmhouse his great, great grandfather built from redwoods he felled with an ax and his hands. He’ll climb up the porch steps across the sagging floor and into the house with his limp four-year-old son draped across his arms and dreaming of salamanders.

Tomorrow morning, Javier will be back in Oakland, tapping his pencil eraser on the formica top of his desk, waiting in futility for the phone to ring. Levi will be stuck in traffic again. Gino will be shoveling compost, Gianni will be humping 2x4’s, and Joe will be slipping the thick hemp bowline off the cleat on the end of the mossy dock out at Bodega Bay. His boat will slide out to sea through the channel past Bodega Head into a silver dawn to hunt for Humboldt squid off of the Cordell Banks.

... They will never see Joe Facendini again. His boat will never make it back from the Banks. They will hit the storm 90 miles off the coast and that’s the last the Coast Guard will hear.

It happens a lot more often than you’d think. Fisherman go out to sea, and sometimes they don’t return. Clutching the helm as the wind rages and the waves pummels, his eyes straining hard ahead through the black, battering rain, maybe Joe thought of the game, and smiled at that last, sweet fadeaway from the baseline. Joe’s son will not captain the boat his grandfather gave to his dad. It rests now on a ledge, hundreds of feet below, waiting for the next ice age to bring it once again into the sun.

... In this moment though, they are all still together at the Union, still laughing, still drinking beer, still listening to Hank Williams, still shaking their heads at Joe’s last game. The raven has roosted, the forest is dark, and the lights are out in the gym. Rudi locked the doors, but Joe’s old, leather ball still sits in the corner where it rolled across the gently sloping parquait floor and came to rest.

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Mama’s Little One

Peter Gunther

My Mama shure likes misters. I like misters too, but not as much as Mama does. Most of the time when the misters come over to see Mama and find me they yell, “Ah spitlagoon, I didn’t know you was someone’s mama!,” an they doublefoot an start to walk out the door. But then Mama tells them, “Nothin’ to worry about, he’s juss a little turd that hasn’t got flushed yet.” But Mama doesn’t really want to flush me, she juss doesn’t like me around when she’s about to play with misters, so she trash talks to shoo me off and labels me a Turdchild.

Mama wants me to be instead more like France or a belly button, ‘cause belly buttons don’t get cleaned often and don’t need to, ‘cause belly buttons are natural portals to your insides, and they give your stomach an ear to the world, ‘cause belly buttons, they ARE an ear to the world. See, when we were made 20 million years ago we kept getting punched in the stomach by the Wildings on account we juss couldn’t hear nothin’ except things near our forwardheads; so eventhually mr. god juss pitied us an he decided to give us an ear on our stomach so we could dodge the Wildings’ punches and listen to what we were truly hungering for.

When that happened we finally stopped getting picked on by saber-toothed tigers and Dodo birds, and that’s when the first road was really built.

I suppose since ‘cause of that, my Mama wants me to be more like belly buttons and places like France instead of juss a Turdchild, so she can play with misters without a stink.

Shoo-wee.
She was a stripper then.
4 months on the pole,
8 months off the needle
with a love for living
known only to those who’ve stopped using.
For the sober mind of the user can still see
the lines
between the colors and travel,
between the layers of the atmosphere,
and knows that we take this thing far too
seriously, indeed.

So, for her, freedom came on the pole,
and when she got home, she would spray-
paint
her walls with friends and anyone
who visited.

Even if you weren’t an artist she would
hand you a can.

“Over on that corner,” she’d say.
“But I’m not an artist,” I lied.
I noticed she responded only to affirmative
statements.

She shows off her collection of 1960s
Playboys.
“The female form is so beautiful,” she says.
She prided herself; she didn’t shave her
pubic hair regularly:
“like the ’60s pin up girls,”
like the August ’69 issue Cincinnati Kid.

“I’m from Cincinnati,” I said…

She was like a calm room in a tornado.
You just waited for the roof to come down
on her.
But it didn’t.
It never did.
Perhaps she was on to something
on that pole.
i could see the contrast of two shades of skin in the side view mirror that reflected movement in the backseat, and I wondered…

…where does one find a warm lap to lay on and eyelashes to blink against

i allowed myself to lower my seat and drift off to the rhythmic static pings of shoegazing guitars and xylophones, and I questioned

the effect of music on the soul and how it sings loudly to some and whispers to the rest

i awoke to the thin edge of the seatbelt bisecting my nose, and my eyelids spread to reveal tattered evergreens, giving me a sensation

of tranquility and eerie euphoria because the sun still shone and its rays sparkled through these last pillars of nature

the girl in the driver’s seat said they were ugly, unscenic i remembered she called the swallowing buildings and people with shapeless eyes and mouths

home.
Want Parallels Need

Kuulei Misech

My body longs for distance and safety.

We imagine ourselves in alternate universes, parallel to each other,
because we crave the distance from the God-awfulness we’ve come to
know but still long for the safety of familiarity abreast us.

In more than one way I think you are my parallel universe
and our bodies stretched against each other
have begun communicating secrets while we sleep
so that when we wake we’ve become a little less individual without our knowing.

And what is that?
The quietness of our own secrets
resting comfortably within someone else too,
without our knowing?

I think that’s what they call trust
MELODY is DEFINED:

CLICK.

theoretically, ART: the Compromise WITH COLOR, the OBSESSION with the Surreal
nothing continues after yourself
LET ALONE IN Life

The long road ends
PRECISELY WHERE The TRAVELER STARTED,
ONE must GET AWAY
THE ESCAPE TO EXPERIENCE TO REMEMBER times WHEN YOU HAPPENED
MY SEASON

pathos

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