

INFLATABLE



MAGAZINE

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edited by
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and (inevitably) Steven J. Hanson
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1998

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Thief of Sleep

He always feels refreshed. He can absorb other people's sleep using special coupons he distributes on the street. Each time someone takes one, they unknowingly transfer an hour's worth of their sleep to him in the moment of contact.

He can burn up more than that just by blinking. He sleeps off an hour with each eye, he'll take another hour and twist it around his finger like a ring. Rings on every finger, he'll wipe his mouth with an hour's sleep like it was a napkin and then throw it away. The rest he stores in a tin cash box somewhere beneath his rib cage.

I ran into him at the mattress store. I didn't know who he was then.

"I've been sleeping too much," I complained. "I think there's something wrong with my bed. It's like there's a magnet underneath."

"I've never had that problem myself," he admitted. His eyes were shining with vivacity. His voice was light and musical, on the edge of breaking into song.

"So you slept well last night?" I asked.

"Like a baby. Like a hundred thousand babies. Like the hundred thousand babies that cried all night *didn't* sleep." He showed me his card. Prince of Sleep, it read. I just assumed that was the store, even though the sign outside had said Mattress Discounters.

"What can you do?" I asked.

"I have powers," he assured me, rocking back and forth on his heels and nodding.

"Show me. Show me your powers."

"Okay," he said. "Do you have a piece of paper?"

"What kind of paper?"

"Any kind will do, nothing special."

I had a Wrigley's wrapper crumpled up in my pocket. "Need something to write with?" I asked.

"No," he said, and cleared his throat. He held his left hand out in front of him and showed me both sides, wiggling the fingers. Then he covered it with a white handkerchief, mumbled something and pulled it away. In his hand was an elegant fountain pen. It was made of black

Apocalypse Now

lacquer with gold trim and a gold clip that caught the light just so. He twisted the end of it and a steel tip emerged from its head. With it he wrote three letters on the scrap of paper, I, O, U, and then asked me to sign it.

"What do you mean, sign it?" I had never heard the word "sign" used as a verb before.

"What's your name?"

"What do you mean? What's a name?" He was a funny character.

"Okay. Your name is Brian R. Edwards. Okay?" I agreed. "Now you write that name on this piece of paper. But don't just write it in an ordinary way. Write it a little fast, and sloppy." I did as he instructed. "And that's how it works," he said. "You won't sleep past seven tomorrow morning."

I had not understood his demonstration, but perhaps I would tomorrow. I turned to leave, then caught myself. "Wait," I said, "this is yours," holding out the pen which was still in my hand.

"Keep it," he said. I asked him if he was sure. "Really," he said, smiling. "It's a gift."

It was the first nice thing I had ever owned.

Ten TV Tales

Said Shirazzi

There was a man who was very jealous. After his love of 21 years left him, he followed her everywhere. She carried a protection order against him in her pocket. But the man stabbed her to death with the order in her pocket. The man fled and is still on the lam. His Brooklyn neighbors said he'd been bragging he'd do it and escape. He had 'tickets to Miami. A woman who refused to be identified told reporters, "When he got out of jail for violating the first protection order, he dyed his hair. It was red, a crazy color." Another neighbor said, "But he wants somebody else to do it. Since he lost his mother, he'd say, 'I wish somebody would kill me.' He's not well. He's sick." The cops still haven't found him. His terrified daughter fears that she and her grandmother are next, so the police are protecting them. They form a "protective shield" around the two whenever they walk the murdered woman's great poodle, Boy Boy.

There was a parrot named Stephanie who talked a lot. One day the nine-inch-long African gray parrot, worth \$1,200, was stolen from a pet store. The police issued a bulletin listing the phrases Stephanie could say: "Ooh, I have an itch, please come here and scratch it for me, I'm a country critter." The thieves sold the stolen parrot to an unsuspecting woman. When the woman got the bird home, she turned on the radio and heard Stephanie's phrases on the police bulletin. The woman called the cops, and the parrot thieves were caught. "Stephanie is one smart bird," said a cop, "probably good enough for the police academy."

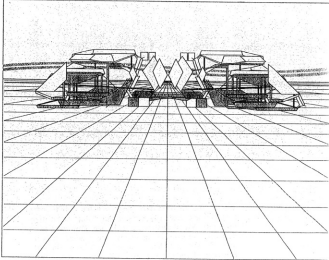
There was a little girl who wanted to be a movie star. She worked hard and became one. She was universally adored. But she was vain and insecure and, as the years went by, became more and more afraid of the public who loved her. She labored for hours to achieve the right look, but as she grew older it took more and more time. Finally she spent all her time preparing her face and never left the house. Her fans forgot her, and she committed suicide.

There was a woman who wanted a child. The man she was with didn't know if he did. He said he loved her so much, he wanted her all to himself. She waited a long time for him to agree. When finally he did, she hated him. So she left him and never had a child.

There was a German tourist in Florida. He was on a plane back to Germany. It was about to take off, but he had to piss very badly. He didn't speak much English and called the attendant over. He used German slang, which he roughly translated into English. He said, "Then the roof flies." The attendant thought he was a terrorist who was threatening to bomb the plane. He was put in jail for nine months. At his hearing the judge said, "Do you see anything that happened that couldn't have been remedied by letting this man go to the bathroom?"

There was a Southern woman who didn't love her husband. She loved another, but he didn't love her and didn't want her two children. She despaired of ever being happy and wanted to win him. So she put her two little children in the backseat of her car and let it roll down a ramp into the lake. They drowned. Then she told the authorities they'd been abducted by a black man. But the woman was caught in a lie, and the truth discovered. She was sentenced to life in prison. There's a memorial to the slain children at the lake where they died. One day seven people in a van came to pay their respects. Their van went out of control, rolled down the ramp into the lake, and all seven died.

There was a woman whose only wish was to be beautiful. Her friends told her she was beautiful. But when she looked into the mirror, she saw only flaws. Her friends told her she was crazy, so she didn't trust her friends. She went to a plastic surgeon, who changed every feature on her face. She didn't look like the woman she once was and liked herself better. She made new friends. Then one day she found fault with her new face. She moved to another part of the country, had more surgery, and made other friends. She wasn't satisfied, though, and kept having surgery. Eventually her nose was so small, she couldn't breathe.



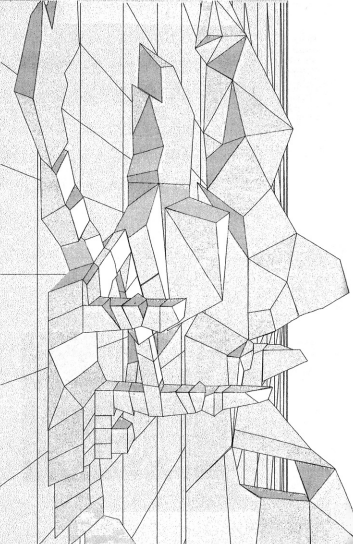
There was a man who loved cookies. He couldn't control himself around them. He was an overweight burglar. His wife left him after he was released from his second stint in the slammer. He became very depressed and broke into a restaurant. He wanted to steal the safe, but he tripped the burglar alarm. He grabbed four chocolate chip cookies and fled. He was caught. It was his third felony under the three-strikes-and-you're-out California law. So he was sentenced to 26 years in jail. "That's six and a half years per cookie," said his public defender.

Lynne Tillman

There was a young woman in love with a much older married man. He loved her, too, and promised her that, one day, after his wife died, he would marry her. So the young woman waited and waited. Years passed. His wife finally died, and he was free to marry her. But the man had a heart attack and died shortly afterward.

There was a woman who wasn't very bright. But she did learn that people were supposed to report crimes. One night she bought some crack, but it was bad. She called the police to report it, and the cops arrived and tested the substance. The cops discovered it was crack and arrested the woman for possession of an illegal drug.





New York Times
Saturday, November 14, 1998
Vol. CXLVIII, No. 51,321

Nina from Miracle Mist
Looking for Mary

Chrome & glass doors swing open
Jane! with the sun behind her

An example of the heart of birds
twilight polka dots

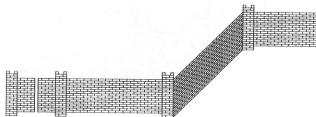
the object across from you
the rubber hose that eats its own tail

cigarette shifters make a deal with coyote

sunset the color of the watery syrup poured from a freshly opened can
of peaches her face that launched a thousand suits
, in the square admitting nothing

pitched battles in the streets
two scientists win Nobel for finding a way to value risky financial
investment then go bankrupt

fired
rubber bullets tear gas and water cannons at thousands
freeze frame students in beachcombers dash for cover



"and watched the sun come rising
from that little Minnesota Town."
--Eylan

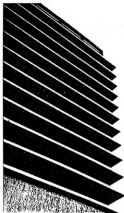
The Wounded Day

To all appearances they came hats coats
left smouldering in the rain under the skin that map of
China we'd traverse eventually I left to our own devices We
would tunnel into the brain of June bugs
& disclose all that we found

in California my mother said

start someplace where you are figuring it out
wait for a clarity to form in the dusk & turquoise light
the world's first moth-eaten plan will solve all your problems
right from the start which you can't go back to by the way but you can
because you grow because you grow up You can no longer
you can no longer you can no longer reply





New York Times
Saturday, November 7, 1998
Vol. CXLVIII

"It's only words..."
--DeeDee

the carcass of the metal sculpture of a horse twisted agony
a few feet away fires burn jellybean windows glow
suddenly a choir bursts out explodes

A speaker swivels chest high in newspaper Is that a
leather jacket a brown leather jacket hollow reeds glow from the side of his
head he wears no hat he has no hat on he is speaking to someone
else someone below the edge of the photo no one is looking at anyone
but the microphones the microphones are paying attention
they pick up every snort they have long dreams

New York Times
Saturday October 31, 1998
Vol. CXLVIII, No. 51,327

It's beige
it's like champagne
it's called bamboo
The hacker's mantra "information wants to
be free" & behind closed doors
the Vatican is conducting the 1st inquisition of the Inquisition
The truths that modern Americans seem to hold self-evident are
mostly those that indulge the self
but now someone says "California
has a big pile of Republican moderates ..."
pitch cold dark with sharp bright stars
There's John Glenn having breakfast in
that diner in the sky "god Speed!"

I'm not alone

When I'm on the phone

Maureen Owen

I'm not
alone

from **TWIN TIME;**
or, how death
befell
me

Fine time for nothing

I ran and I came to the end of the forest. In case you were wondering, there is an end to the forest. I've seen it. There's nothing there. It's a blank page. The still surface of an interminable lake or a mirror with no reflection. And on the edge of this nothing there was a sign: Home: 2,000,000 miles or two years. Woods: 3 steps or right now. I could either go through the nothing, wander through that without direction - for in nothing there is no up or down - for two years, or I could go back into the woods and look for my brother.

I decided to roam the edge for a while before deciding.

I saw the log cabins first, there in the clearing that is the edge between nothing and the deep woods. Little log cabins and I realized that it was probably their very presence that explained that slight clearing. They were small. Seven or eight or nine all clustered together. I saw piles of leaves and kindling, some beautifully carved wooden toys laying about outside of them. I saw clotheslines strung between tree trunks. I saw raggedy but elaborate clothing hanging limply in the lack of air there on the lines. And then I saw the small dogs and goats. A

chicken, and a rabbit or two. I walked toward these animals and whispered "Manny" and then a bit louder called out "yoo-hoo."

I kept inching, crouched and careful, to the back of the third cabin there in that semi-circle and it was then that I saw them, four children of various sizes, strangely dressed and none more than ten years old, all stooped and digging in the dirt. I straightened myself and walked up toward them, their dirty hands and knees; and when they saw me they all noiselessly scampered off behind the trees. I turned toward the hole they had been digging and saw that it was an anthill, their four sticks laying where they had dropped them haphazardly now surrounded by the ants which had turned on the sticks of their torture with the furor of panic beginning to recede, panic turned into attack. I sat a little ways off from these ants and looked around to see if I could catch sight of the children, but they stayed hidden there behind their trees. I knew they would be watching me so I pulled my satchel into my lap and opened it, hoping that my tinkering about would bring them forth to me. I saw it then, there, the jar of blueberry jam which Chin had placed into my sack and I was saddened by this small gesture of kindness, angered by my own childish jealousy and the way it had come between me and one that could have been a companion. I pulled it out and caressed it, felt its weight and coolness there in my cradled hands; and when I looked up I saw their little faces, four, looking down at me in a line of wide eyes and curiosity.

"Jam." I said and then they crouched down around me and I twisted the lid open in a slow and articulated gesture, a performance for them to see. They all wore clothing much too large for them, rolled up at the sleeves, skirts dragging on the ground, and like the clothes I'd seen on the lines hung between tree trunks what they wore looked as if it had once been glorious - elaborate fabrics and gold threading - though now it was dirty and tattered. I held the jar up to them without the lid and the tallest of those four, a girl, reached her fingers out to it and touched the surface of the jar.

"Here," I said, "like this." And I stuck my fingers in it and then slowly moved them to my mouth where I sucked at the sweet jam. The only boy, a bit smaller than the girl, stuck his fingers in cautiously and then licked at them a bit before holding his hand out to this biggest girl who licked and then laughed. Within seconds the other two girls had descended on that little upheld hand and the boy pulled it back with a shriek.

"No," I said, "There's enough for everyone." And before I knew it their hands were dipping and rubbing into the jam, and then they were plunging into the jar so that it became hard for me to hold on to it. I placed it on the ground and they grabbed at it in turns taking the jam and rubbing it on their hands and mouths, licking and slurping and then when there was nothing left in the jar the boy smashed it on the ground. They were going for the pieces of glass when I yelled at them: "No! That's bad. You'll cut yourselves."

They didn't like that. My yelling. Four angry heads turned slowly, eight slit and critical eyes thrust their wrath at me; and in those seconds of angry stares I examined their faces smeared in blue: all the straight noses and long-lashed eyes, high cheekbones and messy dark

hair. "You'll cut yourselves," I repeated in a near whisper: "You'll hurt yourselves."

"No. We won't hurt ourselves," the tall girl enunciated every syllable through blueberry lips as she stared straight at me. But they ignored the glass anyway and walked back over to me. "What's in there," asked the big girl, sticky fingers pointing at my satchel.

"Yeah, what's in there," seconded the smallest girl with the short curly black hair and green eyes as she fell into my lap.

"You can look," I said. And then I held it open for them.

The boy reached in front of the little girl and plunged in first. He pulled out a biscuit which didn't interest him; he threw it like a ball against a tree and then laughed much longer and harder than that small action deserved, doubled over with arms wrapped around his sides. The older girl pushed him dismissively away and swished her hands around inside. "There's nothing good in there" she uttered near disgust.

"Let me see," said the little one, writhing around and holding her arms up from where she had ended up, down by my feet. I passed it down to her and she stuck her head into the bag and pulled out the nail polish. She held the bottle up to the older girl who read it: "shimmering, glimmering blue." And when her sister (I had decided this fact) had finished reading demanded "I want some."

"Me too!" Shouted the other three, and they became a bouncing, screaming mass.

So I painted their nails. The big girl first. Then the boy. The littlest girl. And they were all quiet and serious as I did this, waiting patiently for their turn and then concentrating and blowing on their fingers and toes like I had shown them, their finger and toenails now matching the smeared blue of their faces. Finally I got to the very quiet and really quite shy middle sized girl. This one smiled up at me as I did it. "Do you like it?" I asked softly.

"Yes. It's very pretty," she whispered.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Mona."

I stared at her for a minute. "Mona? That's my name too, you know." And she smiled up at me once again.

What's in a name?

Mona. Manuel. That was the boy's name and when I showed my excitement and then said really? I think I have a brother named Manuel, are you and Mona brother and sister, he said: I don't know.

He was digging in the mud, making a little moat to surround a castle he had built out of this packed mud and little pebbles, so I picked up a stick and dug along with him.

"What do you mean you don't know?" I asked.

"I don't know what that means." He hadn't looked up to meet my eyes, had kept digging, reaching his skinny tanned brown arms further and further and then inching his crouching body to the left, the direction of his work, when the reach of his arms was not sufficient.

His hair was long, tangles falling into his eyes and I wanted to reach out and sweep it from in front of his face, tuck it behind his ears. I wanted to comb through it and get out the tangles, then brush and brush until I could see the shine. But I held my sweeping gesture back and instead whispered: "What do you mean you don't know what that means?"

He didn't he said, a bit exasperated. He lived here with those girls. Sometimes an adult would show up, come to them from out of the woods, a woman. Sometimes two, a man and this same woman. He remembered times, though they were very long ago, when more had been there, women and men, so that all the cabins were full. That had been nice; there was always cooking and eating and laughing and screaming, and there had been other children too. The adults would sing and drink all night and sometimes there was dancing. The kids would all play games. The enchanted, where a child who was it tried to catch the other kids. When they were touched by this one they would have to stop dead in their tracks, only another free child could release them from their freeze, and like this it would go on until all the kids were caught, frozen stiff, dead in their tracks.

"Oh! The enchanted." I said.

Yes, that was what he had said. They would play hide and seek, too, in the woods. And sometimes the adults would get drunk and their screaming turned ugly and the children would grow scared. These big groups hadn't been here in a long time though. There hadn't been any large parties for a long time. But when they used to come they would show up in big cars, convertibles, and one time one of the men had let him steer his car a little ways into the woods, and he had held his head very straight and high so that he could see into the woods from his position there on this man's lap, see deep into the place that these adults all came from. But, of course, he hadn't been able to see a thing for all those trees.

They would all spend the day swimming in the big shallow lake, the old ladies sitting under huge umbrellas.

"Nothing?" I asked.

Yes. That was the name of the lake. They never went in it without the adults, but when the adults were there, they swam and swam all day and then ate and danced at night. Some of the adults painted pictures, and taught them how to paint. Some sang and composed music and taught them how to sing: "Mary, Mary, Mary/ Merry, Merry, we/ Mary, Mary, Mary/ Merry, me/ If we all would go there/ then there we would be/ but for now we'll stay here/ and wait for you, me, we/ Mary, Mary, Mary..."

Now it was just those two. And though it wasn't as fun when either or both of these two adults that still came would show up they did bring gifts which the children kept hidden. Good food too. They would be there for a while, sometimes days, sometimes much longer; they'd kill one of the goats and roast it - or sometimes just a few chickens - and then they would leave. They'd always leave.

Manuel's digging became more insistent now as he went on; he speared his stick into the mud and sent big clumps up flying around him.

While they were there the girls were horrible in their need for the man or woman's attention, he said. When there had been lots of adults, those big parties, this hadn't been a problem, but now that it was just these two the girls fought over them. The littles one, Alicia, the one with the curly black hair and green eyes had cut herself once, with a piece of broken glass and run to the woman and yelled "Look, look, look at what Mona did to me."

"That's my name too, you know."

"I know." He stopped his activity and impatiently lifted his eyes to me. "You already told me that."

"It's just that it seems strange to me. Everything you say is so strange and then when you say Mona it makes me think you are speaking about me."

He dropped his eyes and began furiously digging once again. "I'm not talking about you, Mona, the girl. She was blamed. The woman hit her and mocked her and Alicia laughed and then she got all the attention for days. She had a big ring that the woman gave her that visit. She wore it for a while and then she got scared we would steal it so she hid it somewhere. Probably in a hole. She probably dug a hole for it."

"Would you steal it? Why would she be afraid of that?"

"No!" He looked away, angry and red-faced.

"Who are these adults? Where do they come from? They can't actually live in the woods."

"You ask too many questions. You are giving me a headache big Mona. I want to sleep. I'm going to sleep."

He kicked at his castle, looked over at me while he yelled: "You gave me a headache, a big, big headache big Mona" and he stomped his whole creation to the ground. When the mud was all flattened to a little mound he ran into the third cabin. The one he slept in alone.

The Enchanted

Francisca, Franc, the big girl, told me I could stay. She was dismissive in her invitation and I noted the intensity of her deep hazel eyes as she spoke. The smoothness of her olive skin stood out against the long

and tangled black hair, and on her this mass of hair looked right, contrasting with and underlining instead of taking away from her delicate prettiness. I would sleep in her cabin, she pronounced. And as I listened to the harshness of her voice, I thought how her loveliness belied the toughness underneath, how because of her character I was only now starting to notice this prettiness.

There were three beds there and, of course, she got the biggest one, which sat right in front of, blocking, a big wooden door. "Closet!" she answered my curious look. Franc told me I could choose from the other two beds. "Doesn't matter," she added. "They're the same."

I decided to sleep to the right of her.

I sat at the edge of my bed and asked, "Who are these adults Manuel told me about?"

She stared at me, direct and confrontational, for a while before she spoke: "It doesn't matter who they are big Mona. What matters is the fact that you hated your father's treats, despised his cakes. He made the best sweets for miles; why didn't you like them?"

"Who told you that, Franc?"

"It doesn't matter who told me that big Mona. What matters is that your father and your mother ran off together. They abandoned your grandmother. Your father's father too. They didn't care what anyone else wanted. They ran off together and then your mom died."

"Stop it Franc. Stop talking about me as if you know what you're saying."

"Isn't that what you did to Manuel? Isn't that what you're trying to do to me? You're trying to figure things out so that you can pretend you understand what is going on around you. So that you can put it into one or two easy to handle sentences. It's not that easy big Mona. You will never understand. Other people are not that easy to understand. Simpleton."

It was while I sat on the edge of my bed staring at Franc all stretched out on her bed and unflinchingly staring back at me that little Mona walked in. "Can I sleep in here tonight?" she asked.

"I don't care," said Franc before she turned her back to me.

Mona crawled into the bed to the left of Franc and I got into mine; and then I tried to sleep.

"Why did your dad give your brother away?" she had her face close to mine, was whispering her question into my ear.

I woke up to those words, thinking first that I had dreamt them and then I made her out, her black long-lashed eyes, there in the dark cabin, little Mona with her sweet face looking into mine. It sent my heart racing, the way they knew these things about me; I hadn't told them one thing, but instead of questioning her, instead of turning it around and asking her questions like I had done with Manuel and Franc I decided to answer: "I don't know. He said a lot of things to me before he died, but I don't know what to believe. I don't know why he did it."

"Your dad was a nice man," she nodded. "Maybe a little confused sometimes, but he was a good man. He loved your mother very much, and sometimes this made you angry, his love of her and how this

would get in the way of his talking to you. It was always her. He was always talking and thinking of her and this made it hard for you to think of her on your own. Maybe that's why you liked her pictures so much. Because you felt they spoke to you without having to go through him. Maybe that's why you need to tell their story to yourself right now, to figure out how to get past all of those stories he told you. Maybe that's why you're trying to ask questions of yourself and of them, digging deeper and deeper, going further and further into the..."

"You're right Mona. You're right," and I wanted to go on talking to her, to hear what else she had to say, to have her tell me more and more, but her eyes had fallen shut and now she was quietly snoring.

"You two look ridiculous, in that bed together. I've been up for hours now and there you both still lay. You really should get up." And with that Franc walked out of the cabin.

I hadn't slept well and was feeling panicky. I wanted to figure it all out so I shook little Mona awake, "Wake up, Mona," I said.

"What? What do you want?"

"Tell me, who are the man and woman who come to visit you four from time to time? Who are they to you?"

"I don't know big Mona. They just show up and when they are here they play with us, bring us good food and other things, all of what they bring delicious in some way." She stretched her little arms up above her head, her back arching, her little belly coming out under her shirt.

I looked at Franc's bed while she talked, then at the closet it sat in front of. "What's in there? Why does Franc block that door?" I could hear the panic in my own voice.

"It's a closet, silly. That's all it is."

"What's in it? Why does she block the door? Help me move her bed so I can see what's in it."

"No, Francisca will be mad if we do that. That's her stuff. She'll yell at me if I let you look in it. Why are you so jittery?"

"I won't tell her Mona, I won't tell her anything and I'll let you ask me all the questions you want."

"I don't have any questions to ask you."

"Forget it. I'll do it myself." And I leapt up and pushed the heavy bed aside and then pulled and tugged at the door with all my might till it opened. Mona sat on the bed we had shared and watched me frantically working.

"Geez... What the..." It was stuffed full of beautiful clothing, silks, and organzas and rhinestone buttons on velvet coats with gold threading. There were thick wool capes and chiffon dresses and as I pushed through these - touching the dyed feathers and satins, the sequins and small pearls - I looked down and saw the shoes - buckles and laces, embossed designs and chunky, flat and tapered heels. While I was sorting through them all, there on the floor of that closet, I found a box hidden in the left hand corner; and when I grabbed at it it fell open and out spilled a treasure of antique jewels. "What is all of this stuff?"

"That's Francisca's. Those are her gifts. You better put it all back just like you found it or she will get angry. Those things are hers."

"What is it all?"

"Those are the things the man and the woman gave her. Those are hers. We all have them, though mine aren't as nice, and I don't have as much. But if you want to see I'll show you mine. Put hers away."

"Mona this is creepy. I think we should leave. I think you should come with me. Who are those people and why do you want to stay?"

"What are you talking about big Mona? I can't go away. I don't want to go away. Where would I go? And besides, they could come back soon and when they come they will bring gifts and I want to see what they will bring me. They'll cook good food and I won't have to eat Franc's disgusting soups and we'll all sing and dance. I want to wait for my dresses and maybe there will be a necklace this time, or a ring like Alicia got," her face had gone all dreamy.

"Mona, I know how Alicia got that ring. I know what she did to herself, how she blamed you. I'm going to leave today and I think you, you and Manuel, should come with me."

"Don't be silly. Silly. We don't need to go away." And she came over, pulled me out of the closet, and positioned me so that I would help her push Franc's bed back into place. "Push, Silly."

"Get away from my bed." Franc was entering the cabin just as we'd gotten her bed into place. She darted Mona an angry look and I noticed the other two trailing behind her.

"We want you to tell us a story," Alicia demanded. "We also want more of that blue nail paint. Why are you feeling scared, big Mona? I can feel that your heart is racing. Wipe your palms on your skirt; why are they sweating? We just want a story. Come on, we'll all sit on Franc's bed." Franc nodded and at this gesture the other three climbed up. Franc took my hand, and led me on herself, pushed Alicia out of the way so that she was sitting next to me and then Alicia pushed little Mona aside and positioned herself on my other side. Mona and Manuel ended up at my legs, down by my feet.

"Okay," I breathed in and out three times, slowly. "Okay, I'll tell you a story." I paused for a minute more while I collected myself, and then I began: "There was a man..."

"No," said Alicia, "That's not how you start a story. 'Once upon a time...' that's how you are supposed to start."

"She's right, you know," Franc added. "Do it right."

"Okay. Once upon a time. Once upon a time there was a man who saw himself reflected on the surface of a lake.... And, and when he saw his reflection it scared him and he ran away. But then he came back and tried cautiously looking again. He did this many more times and after a long while he finally found that he could stand to look at it. And then after some days, months, years, he found the reflection beautiful. Yes, it is beautiful, he admitted. And so he touched at it. But when he touched at it it disappeared. And he did this again and again and each time it would disappear; so he learned not to touch and just look. He would go there, to the lake, and spend hours looking, looking, looking at

himself, trying to understand, to go to a deeper and deeper level. But one year there was a drought and, of course, the lake dried up. So, after much deliberation, many, many doubts, he decided to go in search of another lake in which he could see himself as clearly, maybe more clearly..."

"This is stupid," said Franc.

"You don't do that in the lake. You swim in the lake. You splash and jump and dive," and Manuel started diving all over the bed, jumping up and diving again, and then pretending to splash, throwing his arms around on the surface of the bed, all of which angered Franc so that she kicked at him.

"Stop it!" She yelled.

"Yeah, stupid. Stop it," and Alicia, who had her thumb in her mouth, kicked at him too.

Manuel ignored their kicks and giggled as he settled down. "Your legs are long, big Mona," he touched the skin lightly. "They're so smooth, and brown" he rubbed a little more decisively then kissed my ankles, and down onto my feet.

"Do you have hair?" Alicia pulled her thumb out of her mouth and turned her face toward mine and looked me squarely in the eyes with the furrowed eyebrows of wonder.

"What?" I asked as I pulled my feet from Manuel.

"You know what I'm talking about. I know you do. Do you have hair? You do. You do have hair! I'm going to tell your boyfriend; I'm going to tell your boyfriend you have hair on your pee!"

"What are you talking about? I don't have a boyfriend."

"When you get one, I'm going to tell him. You're going to kiss him and he's going to jump on you and you're going to rub all over him and I'm going to tell him."

"Your legs are pretty," little Mona said quietly. She looked up at me with a smile: "I like your legs."

"I like her arms," Franc added. She lifted my arm and exhibited it between her thumb and forefinger, "Look at her hands."

"Paint our fingers!" yelled Alicia. "Paint my toes!" and Franc dropped my arm.

Manuel started jumping on Mona and screaming "Do you have hair? Do you have hair on your pee?" Shoving himself on her and yelling into her face "Do you have hair?" humping on her little legs and asking "Where is your hair?"

I sat staring, noticed that my hands were claspings at the bedspread, and then Mona shrieked and tried to kick Manuel off. I shrieked. Franc and Alicia shrieked and then they all came in close and encircled me, hugging me very tight and bouncing up and down on the bed, shrieking louder and louder, until all their sharp shrieks joined forces and became one straight, piercing line.

"Shut up!" I yelled. "Be quiet."

They all turned on me. Dropped away from around me and pulled themselves back; and then they glared through cinched eyes like they had done the day before.

"We don't need to be quiet. Don't ever tell us to shut up," Franc pronounced. "No one told you you could go through my things big

Mona." So she had seen. She stared at me with the eyes of an angry monarch: "I think you better leave now." And I could see she was trying to hold back the incensed tears.

"Yes. Of course. You're right." I glanced at little Mona, tried to catch her sweet black eyes so that I could convince her to come with me. But she decisively turned her face away. "You're right," I repeated, as I grabbed up my satchel and quickly walked out and away.

"I'm going to tell your boyfriend you have hair!" I heard Alicia yell.

Their collective piercing laughter followed me back into the depth of the woods.

Veronica Gonzalez



The Absolutist:

a Structuralist approach to misery.

"There is a smile of love/ and a smile of deceit/ there is a smile of smiles/ in which the two meet"

William Blake

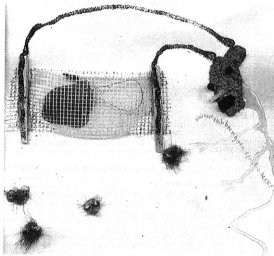
A man invites a woman, from time to time, from 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM or from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM. The woman is heading North-East on the 309 freeway. Away from the Valley of White. Toward airy and moist greenery. She drives in silence. She will not slide into a song. She expects no promise, no resolution, no surprise. Just the offering. His offering and her declining. She will hand him the letter in person. He will not ask her-why.

She wears a snug blue dress, Infinity Blue, the color of his eyes, of daylight, of his computer's screen. She will not undress. She will bring a bottle of red wine instead. He has planned a longer evening to compensate for the weeks he didn't want to and will not want to see or call her; the weeks she has been wondering and will be wondering. His declining and her offering, his offering and her declining. Inverting the order of the factors the sum does not change; a cruel and elegant arithmetical truth. Simple. Again, he will elaborate to her earnestly; perhaps, he sees no seams between an agreed upon arrangement and a romance. She will smile transparently, and reply courteously: the witty joke, the stitch. Her nails will sink sharply into her palms.

He will be ready for the ceremony of pleasure, curling his arm around her waist, sinking his head against her breast, pleased with the scent she wears. Gently, her hands will push him away; her unkempt fingernails, her unadorned wrists. Someone tired is wearing her dress. She wore that blue when they first touched. The kiss of a beginning with no end... yes. Yes, she came many times and he kept calling her. She came and she came. He called and she kept coming. He stopped calling and she didn't call. She left, and he left. She called, and he didn't come. He called her back, she called him back and, again, they met, but her steps were now wider, slower, heavier. She returned to him with long, dull hair, a sharper, darker gaze, and rough edged nails. But her

merry-go-rounds, of debris, of soiled towels and piercing stars.
Swallowing a song. A whole world drunk with a song. So simple, so
very simple.

Denise Spampinato



Squid

Patricia was gone.

Vanished.

Right there, of course. With her big feet out on the kitchen table, and her laugh now and then ringing out to him. He was standing in the den, looking out the broad window. He saw other lit panes through the night smog.

Patricia's feet had been made for something other than this life. For boulders, remote paths in the wilderness. For beaches, for stones by the seashore. For his hands....

But something had gone wrong. As they both knew something eventually would.

Not something. Everything.

He left her there on the vidphone. Exited the conapt, guard-unit in trail.

Good-bye Patricia.

Good-bye John.

"Hello John," the elevator said, closing.

"Buzz off," John said.

The elevator opened to the walkway. The guard-unit followed him out.

"Hey John," it said, "you're acting a little cocky, considering what you are." It laughed.

Everyone, everything, everywhere reminded him of what he was. And what he was was simply what he wasn't.

"You're not a publisher, John, and you never will be. It doesn't matter what Patricia sees in you."

"What a useless comment." John hopped onto a railbus. The g-u struggled and failed to find a foothold. It toppled back onto the pavement and vanished into the swiftly receding textscapes.

Another took its place beside him.

"That was desperate."

"Buzz off," John said.

But it followed close behind as he found his module in Lot 18, and it sat beside him as he sailed.

John first met Patricia at a mixed-level company vacation. Sexual affairs between the classes relieved social tension.

Her eyes found his from across a room.

Five years earlier John had been taken on as a security guard at the media conglomerate where Patricia served an editorship. It was a good job for one of his kind and the worst part of him had been a little proud. Sometimes he had a graveyard shift and no one much bothered him. He could sit at a desk and read stacks of books and he wrote many pages himself. 8 Hours at a high hourly rate.

He would stand at his assigned station for hours. For hours and hours and hours. The publishers smiled flashing teeth as they passed him in the mornings. And he would smile back. A sad and fragile man.

Five years!

Well, they sent him on vacation, guard-unit in tow. John chose a sub-surface oceanic resort. He'd always dreamed of the world of the old seas.

The Indian Club Ocean, thousands of feet down.

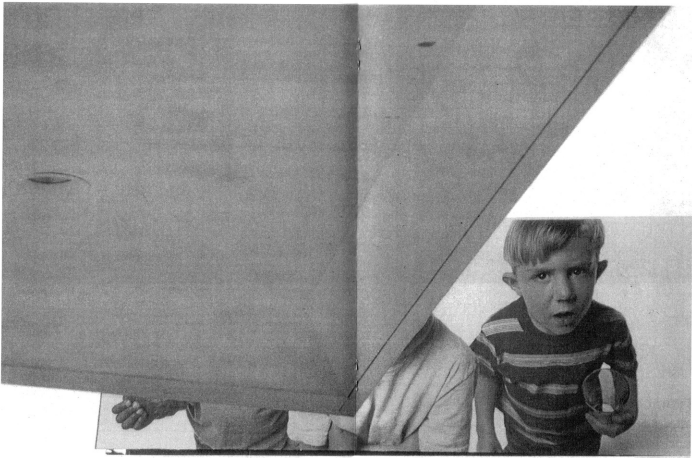
You ate, drank, dreamt, you lived fish for two weeks.

Seaweed, shrimp, scallops, squid, sea salmon. Patricia laughing, explaining to him the club's restrictions.

With Patricia, while curious being's eyes pressed close to the dome. On the floor of their bulb, while hull floodlights lit up the still-living deep.

An eye with a tantric pupil.

Knowing everything.



John had always known the sea and he felt there that it knew him. By Jacques Cousteau! his old hero, inventor of the aqualung, postulator of the single-cell sarcophagus, he swore he was known.

And he'd read and he'd read, he'd read of the sea.

But he'd kept his study so secret, afraid of the inevitable discovery that would break him off from his family and friends, that he'd bottled his dreams all inside himself. Curked them with the idiot mask of his older self. Smiling. Each smile more tired, more sick of it all.

On the ICO he was reborn.

Patricia would always hold him dear because she'd seen him then, he knew. She would always have to remember.

That was why she'd arranged for his new position at the Halls of the Terran Seas.

She probably hoped it would help him live with their division.

She probably thought such things could break his kind beyond repair.

The two days before he met Patricia he'd been himself. Easily and plainly himself. Peering through portholes, cataloging kelps, fish and phosphorescent plankton illuminated by the cruise director's light-pulse wakeners. The mass of tiny creatures flumed out from the ICO's husk like giant, brilliant eyes.

It was a mixed cruise.

Above sea-level the situation would have been excruciatingly painful. Close quarters with them. Watching their eyes avoiding him when he stopped by a fountain to sip some H2O. The silence growing thicker when he stepped into the library. The tingling chill down his spine as the old mask snapped his lips back to the familiar tired smile. Above sea-level the smile was employed to take the pain, the grim, piled-up history and tie it firmly down inside...

Under the sea he smiled true.

The surface lie and that broken thing beneath it and within him healed on the delivery sub's first dip beneath the wrinkled waves of the Indian Ocean. John understood then what he might have been if the world had been just. If it didn't condemn people as a result of psychological facts over which they had little conscious control. As if....

As if.

As if had been the two-word introduction to every hopeful thought John Hentiat had ever enjoyed.



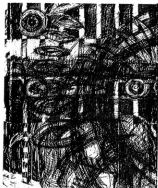
In the Halls of the Terran Seas John didn't feel reborn. The place was nearly deserted. Sometimes school children were guided through to see beings the natural world had once supported. Now and then a geriatric would come and stare sadly at the sad dolphins and remote whales. The museum monumentalized loss. The floors were stone and the tall walls were dark and gloomy.

There were others like him employed in guarding and sweeping the halls. But his kind feared each other, too intensely alone. They exchanged brief glances. Then looked away in shock: their own tragedy reflected in the fractured faces of the other.

Supervision was scanty and John was able to find his own place. It was near the belly of the old building, in its largest, emptiest room. He admired the writing that explained its exhibit.

Bronzed onto a vast unraveling scroll, the words:

Known mythologically as Krakens; glimpsed only several times by the eye of proto-modern man; tracked and feared as the vicious, unforgiving foe of the Sperm Whale; most audacious of the great beings that once roamed masters of the Terran Seas; behold the last surviving giant squid in the universe. Behold and Beware. The squid's powers remain obscure and unknown. Some say she has the power to read the mind of man....



He stands alone before the wide bay window. Except for the low illumination of the hall, the lights are off.

A colossal loss of meaning.

She is too mighty to risk awakening into fear.

So there's simply blackness. A green blackness, more specifically, offering up a mammoth NOTHING to see.

A NOTHING with just a tinge of nature's hue.

John waits for many days. Sees only NOTHING.

Is there really a frigging squid at all?



John eventually prepared to leave the hall. He could move elsewhere. There was no squid here. It was probably one of *their* tricks. It would be typical of them. Arrogant disassemblers. They were probably laughing right now. Now, as he stood here waiting. Probably already publishing hilarious vids of his gullibility, pumping them throughout the Solar System.

Here's one of them right now, John Hintert, museum guard, standing perplexed by the simplest trick of the hand.

Finding meaning in nothing at all.

The canned laughter.

Guess what, Hoppies, the huge slab of glass was actually painted black from behind. He thinks its clear water!

John himself would have laughed aloud but--. Always the but. Someone else had entered the hall.

A g-u came in to cover him too, so he assumed she published.

He had no business looking at her.

He looked.

She wore a black rubber string and carried a leather satchel. The string criss-crossed her body like shadows from a lantern shining through a dungeon door. The revealed skin shone golden in the soft light of the stone hall.

She seemed herself carved out of the smoothest stone.

She walked his way with a steady, sturdy intent. He made out the gleam off the steel spikes on her breasts. In the dark hall, John was frightened.

A Gothic web unspooled around him.

The woman stopped before the black glass. She unzipped her bag.

"No vids, please," John said.

"Spare me." She spoke with a European accent. She was pointing a laser pen at him.

Scrunching her eyes, she squeezed.

The little green head of the g-u beside him exploded.

The pop echoed in the wide room.

"You shot him," John said.

"Not him, it."

He watched her remove a black bundle from her bag. In long steady strokes, she seemed to lick it.

There was a slick sucking sound as she stuck its suction cup to the black green glass.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm blowing this window open, blowing this entire museum into the industrial degradation it would have wound up perpetrating anyway."

She looked at her watch, appeared to set a timer.

"We have ten minutes. The g-u will register as inoperative in seven. Shall we run?"

She smiled as she held out her hand to him.

"I'm one of your kind. Come. This is for the revolution."

He held her hand. Surprisingly delicate. Soft. She was a dancer. His heart responded.

Then the old smile.

"I think I'll stay."

"You want to die?"

He said nothing.

"I understand."

She was gone. A running nyad, strong steps sounding in the distant halls. John waited for some time.

He walked to the glass and pressed the winking timer button. He yanked the plastic from the glass. When the suction cup popped, he felt the cool spray of the terrorist's saliva against his face.

He dropped the dead explosives down the corner disposal chute. He waited.

"So where is the replacement g-u?" He'd uttered the question aloud and its echo surprised him. He'd forgotten the room itself. He looked up at the stone walls.

"I'm keeping everything away right now."

It was a very high-pitched whisper.

John turned to the glass.

Near the center of the black slab, he perceived a single eye. It was roughly the size of his own head. Rounder, flatter than the human eye. It looked wide: intent, not surprised. Ringed by a tender orange emerging shimmering out of the volumed black.

The wide pupil caught green and yellow light. In its center the colors divided in a curling S.

"Why--"

"Shhhhh," the squid interrupted. *"The whales are making love. Listen."*

Looking at the eye, John listened. He couldn't hear.

"Right now," the squid whispered, *"they're becoming frantic. Their fatty trunks are twitching. They're fighting each other. Hurling themselves. Jaws half open. Listen, John."*

He heard something.

"His tail is slamming the glass. The walls are shaking. Smash!"

John listened more intently. There was nothing.

"It's over, he's dislodging his member."

"You have a healthy hearing," John said.

"It's not hearing."

"What is it?"

"Reading."

"Oh." He understood.

"Anyway, I wanted to thank you."

"For what?"

"I'm old and my future looks a bit dim. I admit it. But that doesn't mean I want to be blown into calimari. Thank you for saving my life."

"How come you don't talk more often?"

"It's not what I do. This is actually extremely difficult for me right now. And keeping the guard-unit away at the same time doesn't help. I only thought, since you did something for me, I thought I could do something for you. Answer a question, perhaps."

"What question?"

"Any question you choose. But hurry up please."

When John asked his question, the squid was silent for a long time. Then in her whisper:

"I refuse to answer that."

"Why?"

"The answer will be unbearable to you."

"Well..."

"Listen. My thanks are genuine. You're a decent guy. A bit messed up, but who's not? I'll think of something to give you. I promise. A surprise."

"Will you still talk to me?"

"This is most likely a once in a lifetime event for you. But if you're near -- well, I'll know." The eye was clouding. It blinked a few times and then gazed, as if reading him intently.

"OK," the squid whispered, *"Bye then."*

"Bye."

The eye submerged into the familiar black. Immediately a guard-unit sailed into the hall, hovering over its ruined comrade. It was angry. "What's wrong with him?"

"Not him," John said. "It. It malfunctioned."

"Hmmm..."

"Badly."

"Were you talking in here?"

"Just mumbling."

"Keep it to yourself." The g-u hauled away the dead machinery.

John looked for the squid.

Nothing there, just blackness. Maybe a little green. Just enough to know.

He placed his hand on the cold glass.

"The answer will be unbearable to you."

Answers were all unbearable and he asked none of Patricia.

He was sailing now to work. Over the combobulated city, through the whipping airstreams. John had stayed up late. Since the squid's day, weeks ago, the words had come streaming as if seeking her single, reading eye.

Patricia noticed the emigration brochures on his desk.

"You'd do that?" she asked quietly. Not laughing.

John thought of the squid.

"Actually, no."

"Why not? A solar system populated by readers. They'd probably respect you."

Then she laughed.

"You could use some respect, John."

Their eyes met.

"I'll stay on Terra."

"Why?"

John responded easily.

"The answer will be unbearable to you," he said.

He left her there. Walked away.

Was that, then, the squid's gift? The perfect last word? The extension of question to the total denial of answer?

By the time he reached the Halls of the Terran Seas, John was sure. The squid worked so very quietly, he thought. It had been a gift, that small sentence. A useful one. He'd been able to leave Patricia momentarily unsure of everything she thought she understood. She'd looked at him as if he were suddenly new.

John had felt powerful, redeemed.

And cruel.

No. It wasn't the squid's gift.

His module sailed through the massive docking structures of the Halls of the Terran Seas. Poured concrete graphing the air. Gigantic raw-faced walls.

Few craft were parked, helter-skelter. Never as many as the publishing architects seemed to have intended.

"Hey," John said. "Where are you going?"

The module was lifting him above the levels designated for his kind.

"It's your little surprise."

"What?"

"You know what I'm talking about."

"I do?"

"Yep."

Excitement filled his arms and chest. His heart beat hard.

The craft shot upwards. It passed through the structure's final vacant slot onto the lot roof-top, high above the grey-domed city.

Before and above the other publisher vehicles, three pristine, gilt-edged black modules were parked below the granite steps of the Halls. Each space proclaimed its rider's name and title:

Ernst Chainey, CHANCELLOR.

Melinda Horse, EXECUTIVE PUBLISHER.

Hops Horny, EDITOR OF OPERATIONS.

A final vacant spot waited open to the left of the Chancellor's module. As John's craft slid into it, he was able to read:

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH: John Hintin, MUSEUM GUARD.



John stepped out into the unfiltered sun. It blazed hot on his face.

He was the first of his kind since the Rationalist Decline to be shown the museum's front entrance. John climbed the grand steps slowly. Their decaying grandeur touched his heart. The other people entering and exiting the halls, fathers and daughters and mothers and sons, lovers, tourists and friends, paid scant attention to this revolution.

And the small, serious man climbing the front steps of the Halls of the Terran Seas paid as little to them.



"THE HAND THAT'S FREE TO DREAM"

I.

The hand that's free to dream
turns to Alan Alda's laughable mug
and traces in carbon

the giggles that arise like giggles
in response to this setup. It's the hand's hope
to harvest laughter, and sell the whole bundle

to Andrew Wylie, ferocious 'can-do' literary agent
nicknamed "The Jackal" by the British press.

II.

"What does Alan Alda think about you doing this?" someone asked. I called Alan for permission and he quoted world-famous poet Diane Ward, "Whoever one whoever touches makes up dialogue in me". I suggested we change that to the perhaps more marketable phrase "Whoever touches me makes a dialogue of me," but Alan, busy following his father's role in the House of Burlesque starring Elke Sommer, Telly Savalas, and a large cast of Italian actors, had already hung up the phone.

III.

The hand that refuses to dream
After a phone's categorical click, wavers
in the suddenly-bookish atmosphere.

A young woman appears wearing a pineapple-flavored jumpsuit
And licks the hand's palm. Oh, puh-lease! the hand thinks, as it goes back
to dream of Alan Alda with the dark brown hair
and the glories that lie therein.

Mark von Schlegell

THE TIME THE AMERICAN STATES ALMOST PASSED THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

In a world noisy with Jannemists and out-of-tune tubas, Alan Alda
was like Don Quixote jousting with terrible windmills
as he fought the enemies of the E.R.A. Alan's two eyes, once closed

to the basic rights of rabbits, were now black and essence
with the differences between man and woman. Would the E.R.A solve
all problems relating to the genders? "A man cannot take pleasure

in seeing a woman squashed down like a gnat. After the bill passes,
marriage will require more work, but work does not equal
destruction." Some thought Alan should be given

three blows with a stick, but most forgave him as state after state said
no no. Oh yes, sue to our Alan, Alan. With the death
of the E.R.A., his heroic struggle

was transmuted. Walk alone

on a certain Wisconsin field illuminated by an optimistic gibbous moon
and you will see it there today: empty potato-sack,
futile...

back You bastard! Cast your eyes away from that sack, and look

up at the moon
features discernible include
craters, mountain ranges, plains and maria,
faults, domes, ridges, and rays.

lffffttt. lftttt. fffffttttt

AFTER ALL THIS, ALAN ALDA'S HEAD IS TRANSFORMED

Old father, old artificer, you have not stood me in good stead B
look at my head! It's a bullhead, even though the rest of me

is just like it was when I used to be...
I've got a bullhead you see, I don't

deceive your eye
after all I've been through

burned, beaten,
fallen down stairs

forced to paddle in sharky waters
times nose-deep in quicksand

used as a human football by the Detroit Lions
making the flop paper line

razor held to my throat
working the pilot for N*A*S*A

constantly bending my six-foot-two frame
avoid decapitation by whirling copter blades

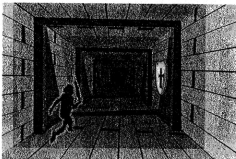
after all this, a bullhead for a head. A symbol

is never a symbol, it's real
a symbol doesn't mean anything, this bullhead is

I wish (i wish) you'd stop laughing, pow. I was always hoping
yes I was always hoping I could be one man whole not broken

into bodies changed to different forms I curse the gods who made the changes

Daniel Kane



From No Aloha

Burt Bacharach and His Orchestra and Chorus

The youths cross through ruins of a public school and through semi-occupied residential-multiplex enclaves.

They come to remnants of a chainlink fence. Woods end in fields that a couple years ago were sweeping manicured lawns. Landscaping and gardening now invisible.

It is dark now. Rain showers have ended, the wind picks up and moves the clouds out of sight. Everything is wet and sharply cold. In the night sky the brightest stars and a couple human-made satellites glitter. The largest objects overhead are two geosynchronous billboard platforms up in the stratosphere. Currently unlit, their vast 5-by-10 kilometer ultra-thin LCD screens are retracted. The billboards are passing silently overhead toward stationary orbits above Central America for an upcoming laundry detergent ad campaign.

Gladys, Gus and Maude stand at the woods' edge. Before them is open field. The savaged ruins of a large psychiatric hospital lay out beyond the field. The kids scrutinize the much-overgrown and shadowy complex as best they can, up and down the rows of mostly wrecked and burnt buildings. No overt signs of current human occupation. Birds and small animals in residence.

The kids stick to the trees and circle the weed-filled buildings. They creep across the field, toward a few intact buildings.

Following the wall of one of the buildings the kids pick their way through underbrush and brambles. Remnants of sidewalks, now

tossed and heaved, an impediment to their transit. They arrive at a more open area, what had been the main entrance to this facility. Gaping holes in the structure indicating fiery explosions. Gus points his small flashlight in through a couple of the gaps and scrutinizes the dark smelly interior.

Along an exterior wall is a large burnished steel sign. Nearly broken from all its mountings, the lower right corner of the sign leans on the ground. Scars and dings from heavy-caliber machinegun fire. Graffiti, slogans and tags messed across its surface. The biggest and clearest graffiti is 666King, way up the wall where the sign is still sort of attached.

If you stand back a short distance, sort of where the kids are, there beneath all the scarrage and defacing, the big black enameled lettering engraved deep into the sheet of steel is still very clear. Gus holds his flashlight beam on the big familiar psychiatric symbol overlaid on a crucifix, next to words he cannot read.

The big black lettering: COLORADO SURGICAL JESUS MIND CENTER, NO. 14. BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE NAME OF JESUS, OVER ALL THE WORKS OF SATAN, GRANTED ON THIS DAY, TO THE CITIZEN BELIEVERS OF CHRISTIAN COLORADO, PASTOR GOVERNOR BILL KINGSON.

The economically desperate but biblically deranged citizens of Colorado elected Bill Kingson by a landslide. And the plebiscites in the immediate post-landslide period that made him Pastor Governor, and made abortion and homosexuality capital felonies, among other tough love legislation, were swept through with mandating electoral vigor.

Immediately following Kingson's electoral landslide Team Jesus began setting up and administering the facilities necessary for the Colorado Surgical Jesus Mind Project. Besides stealing vast amounts of money for himself and his cronies, Kingson spent his nearly four years as Pastor Governor mounting an extensive and exhaustive program to surgically alter the human brain toward a more complete Jesus-centeredness. Structural Holiness was to be accomplished by cutting out the evil-inducing parts of the brain and replacing them with Biblically diagrammed bioplastic Jesus-loving bits and parts.

To start, 115,000 sinners were decapitated and their brains carefully scrutinized by the collegium of parapsychicians, mail-order surgeons, debunked and disbarred psychiatric sadists and cranks that headed up the Colorado Surgical Jesus Mind Project for Kington. The Project protocol targeted 250,000 sinners for various surgical procedures. 178,000 were operated and experimented on, all of whom, eventually, died.

How long would this kind of thing be allowed to go on? Oh, you'd be surprised! The Euros, the Japanese, the PRC and the Soviets eventually did come to a loose agreement on a post-United States world, and finally dispatched retired South African President Mandela to negotiate an end to the Surgical Jesus Mind Project and the departure (loot in hand) of theocratic tyrant Pastor Governor Kingson. Then UNNAA, almost reluctantly, came into Colorado with their half-

hearted efforts to try and make it all better. But no one but the starving and displaced were interested in better.

Gladys picks up her satchel and stands closer to Gus.

"Did they like, have the Devil in here?"

Maude smirks.

"You're the rocket scientist, Gladys. Right? You don't believe in supernatural stuff. Right?"

Gladys presses her lips together and keeps silent.

Gus unbuttons his parka enough to get at his dagger if needed. His small flashlight in hand, he heads inward.

"Let's go in."

"Oh, shit, Gus. It's, like ... really ... gross, in there...."

Maude shoves Gladys and says:

"Ha-ha. Satan's gonna get your ass bitch. Chop, chop, chop you up for dog food."

Gladys steps away from Maude.

"That's what Satan likes, Doggie, doggie, doggie...."

Gus gives Maude a look. Maude laughs, grabs Gladys and holds her close as the three of them pick their way through the dark entry hall. Gus' narrow flashlight beam just barely reveals a safe path forward.

Most of the building that they explore is dark and stinks. In one side wing there is a short row of small confinement cells still in fair shape. One cell has its small window, way up high, broken out. It's cold, but the fresh air helps cut the lurking stink. The cell is dry and feels private.

Gus clears the cell of the rubbish and then he drags in a couple narrow nearly undamaged mattresses from a nearby hall. They are the foundations for this night's rest.

Maude drops her satchel and gets out some candles. Gladys shrugs and says:

"Can I ... eat some of the bread?"

Maude shrugs, but Gus says:

"No, save it for morning. Have the fruit cocktail stuff the UNICEF gave out today."

"It's not enough. I'm, like, really hungry ... still."

Gus and Maude are getting their bedding out, and set up. Gus gestures toward his satchel where the canned fruit is and he says:

"You can have Maude's too."

Maude nods and adds:

"And you still got yours, Gladys. Right?"

Gladys nods.

"See. You'll be full, and ready to sleep."

Gladys sits on her haunches and eats small blue containers of sweetened fruit.

"Where's yours Maude?"

"Just a second."

"Gus? Gus, when you go pee, you gotta take me with you."

"I can piss without your help."

"Gus ... It's, like, too dark ... out there ... for me"

Maude laughs at Gladys.

"You're fucking afraid of the Devil. Ain't you?"

Gladys glares. Maude pokes Gus.

"Give me a cig."

Gus fishes for a cigarette part.

"Me too, Gus."

"I don't have that many."

Gladys pouts. Maude digs out a small blue plastic of fruit cocktail in heavy sugar syrup.

Gus hands Maude a half cigarette.

"Hurry up, Glad. I'm only doin' bathroom escort once."

"We can't, like, leave the stuff alone."

"There's no one gonna come through that little window. We're just gonna be right in the hall."

Maude shakes her head.

"Huh-uh. Far enough down the hall that I won't smell it all night...."

Jackie Gleason and His Orchestra

"That is so bogus, Gus. Asanowaka could never bring Terao down with some sort of leg or thigh gripping throw.... Terao's legs are just too fat to grip. And anyway, Asanowaka is so tall, a move like that would put him at the disadvantage...."

"What the fuck do you know about sumo throws?"

"As much as you do!"

"I had two chances to get into one of the big Los Angeles beyas."

"Oh shit. In your dreams, o-sumo-san."

Gus stands up, takes his zip-up sweatshirt, puts it to his waist, ties the two sleeves behind his back so the sweatshirt hangs in front of him as his maawashi. First Gus stamps each foot as hard as he can. Left, right, left, right. Then he swings both arms out and up so the hands clap together above his head. And he follows through by swinging his right arm back down and curling it so his elbow is extended and his right hand touches his waist. His left arm swings out so that the hand points straight out.

Gladys laughs.

"You're the little teapot ... short and stout."

"Fuck you. That was dohyo-iri."

"Very nice ring-entering ritual, o-sumo-san."

"Yeah, that was cool, Gus. But you're getting too skinny now."

Gus pokes what is now more sagging skin than bulk.

"My stomach is all fucked up."

"Come on, Gus. Get back in the bed. I'm cold."

A few minutes later they are all three tucked into their ad hoc nest. Candles are extinguished. For a few moments it is dark and quiet. But then Gus and Maude start groping one another and pulling open each other's clothing. Gladys sits bolt upright and yells:

"Goddamit! The one night we get, like, someplace quiet ... like, a chance for real sleeping ... and you two gotta ... do that!"

Maude stops kissing Gus, turns to Gladys, smiles and asks:

"Do what?"

Gus shimmies down his heavy canvas trousers and long john underwear. Frustrated Gladys yells:

"Some of these are my blankets!"

Maude and Gus turn their heads and glare.

Maude leans out from under Gus and points out to the dark hall.

"Take your fucking blankets! Right? Go find your own room. Right?"

Gladys stands there shaking angrily. Gus sits up and pokes Maude.

"That's real helpful, Maude."

Gus turns to Gladys.

"C'mon, Glad. Let's get back in bed. We got a nice warm nest."

Gladys is silent, arms crossed.

Gus pulls up his trousers.

"Here, Glad. Look. We'll make you a little nest all your own ... but

near us.... See?"

Gus makes a nest for Gladys out of most of the blanketing.

"See? Plenty of room. But we're right here."

"Now you can sleep all the fuck you want. Right?"

Gus pokes Maude again, then he gives Gladys a piece of chocolate he'd ferreted away in one of his two satchels.

"Alright? C'mon, Glad."

Maude reaches up and pushes Gladys down into the blanket nest that is a meter or so from her and Gus. Gladys sits, arms crossed. Gus grimaces and looks at Maude.

"Whatever."

Maude lies down. Gus fishes in his satchel.

"Alright, Gladys. Look, this is it. Here, I got four batteries...."

Gus doesn't even have to finish this sentence before Gladys dives for her own satchel and Ultra Play deck 8220 inside.

Gladys takes the rubber band-bundled batteries.

"New?"

"I was standing there when he opened the pack."

Gladys loads the batteries into her gaming deck. She gives Gus and Maude a look.

"You shoulda, like, just given 'em to me. That was stupid."

"Great. Now leave us alone. Right?"

Gus and Maude start to settle back down into each other's arms.

"You had some of that joint left...."

Gus stops and frowns.

"That little bit of skunk weed ... isn't gonna do anything...."

Now Maude pokes Gus.

"Give it to her."

"Fuck."

He digs in one of his two satchels and produces a small folded piece of torn brown paper bag. Gladys smiles and grabs the small paper square. Inside the folds is the burnt and tawny butt of a cigar-sized joint made of free-range marijuana off the roadside sprinkled with a little of the good bud smuggled in by the Western troops.

Gladys puts the head phones on and then unwraps the roach. She moves one of the slow-burning candles, anchored on a small piece of rubble, closer to her bed. Gladys sticks her tongue out at Maude and Gus. But they are already going at it again. She holds the roach near the flame until the cherry smolders, and then she takes a small toke, exhales, smiles and pulls aside one headphone and loudly says:

"And don't, like, throw your goocy jimmies where I'm gonna ... you know ... step on them"

Gladys laughs, replaces her head phones, and touches the roach to the small candle flame. A couple more short puffs and then Gladys carefully extinguishes the now even resinier and blacker roach bit and folds it back into the brown paper.

Gladys gets down inside the blankets and turns facing away from the couple fucking.

When she powers up the electronic machine, it beeps, and the tone warms Gladys' heart.

Perry Como

In the morning the inquisitional hospital is dripping damp cold rain and the kids make a little fire and boil some coffee grounds. They add a couple amphetamine tablets. The brew has the right perkiness effect,

but doesn't taste much like coffee. They eat the remaining bread so that the sort-of-coffee doesn't give them indigestion.

Gladys, Gus and Maude pack up and explore a couple sections of this former Surgical Jesus Mind Center.

Most of this Center was burned to the ground in the bloody strife of the few months between when Kingson went into exile and the UN occupation of Colorado.

Once he was convinced that UNNAA would use force to shut down the Surgical Jesus Mind Project, all Kingson really wanted was a guaranteed exit. Pastor Bill's family and essential Team Jesus superdooperplenipotentiaries left Colorado aboard Kingson's jetliner. *Team 1. Team 1* was followed heavenward by six other Jumbos bearing several tons of pilfered, extorted and stolen wealth all turned into gold and silver bullion.

The seven Jumbos, emblazoned with the bloody Team Jesus crucifix, ascended at sunset out of Denver International in an upward acring chain. Bound for the sunny beaches of some unspecified equatorial off-shore nation.

The three kids sit on a teetering heap of toppled steel file cabinets. They share a cigarette bit.

"No, before we go wait for a train, I want Gus to tell a story."

"We've heard all his stories.... Right?"

"C'mon, please?!..."

"Yeah, OK.... But, give me a cig."

"I don't have any...."

Gus holds his open palm toward Gladys. Gladys frowns.

"I've only got, like, two ... little butts...."

"Fuck you, then. Let's get going...."

"All right. Shit. Here."

Gladys digs around in her satchel and finds the two partly smoked cigarettes and gives them to Gus. He leans back on the mattress.



Deran Ludd



Lost Without You

EXT. FREEMAY - 5 SOUTHBOUND, BURBANK - DAY

PORSCHE SHOT: Protagonist drives his Porsche south on the 5, looks out passenger window. Sees the OCEAN where BURBANK should be.

LONG SHOT OF OCEAN: Protagonist's disconnected pov.

PORSCHE SHOT: Protagonist looks back to the road, rechecks his passenger window view.

LONG SHOT OF BURBANK. Reality/Burbank reconnects.

LONG SHOT FROM FREEMAY BRIDGE. PORSCHE races south.

INT. 2347 COVE - DAY OR NIGHT

Protagonist sits either in the garden, living room or in bed, reads Tale of Genji.

(Genji quote)

Camera closes up on Protagonist's eyes or?

EXT. GENJI DREAM PT. 1, 2347 COVE OR UCLA JAPANESE GARDEN -

Protagonist's face is reflected in a metallic silver ball. A Japanese woman in a kimono holds the ball, gazes into it.

Digital entrance into image/abstraction?

The woman sets down the ball, turns in stylized movement.

EXT. GENJI DREAM PT. 2, 2437 COVE OR UCLA JAPANESE GARDEN -

Voiceover of Protagonist reading Tale of Genji. Japanese woman counter-pointing text.

(Genji quote)

EXT. 10 FREEMAY, WESTBOUND, MIDTOWN - DAY

PORSCHE SHOT: Protagonist driving. Possibly a shot of exit sign for Museum of Tolerance or auto accident safety zone.

EXT. 10 FREEMAY, WESTBOUND SANTA MONICA - DAY

A view across the valley as Protag walks down sharp, steep hill. Voiceover?

EXT. ABOVE SILVERLAKE BLVD - DAY

Protag returns home on motorized skate board, the lake below.

INT/EXT. LOCATION TBD/IN BED? - DAY OR NIGHT

Protag realizes he's missing half of himself.

Ricky Martin: Perdito Sin Ti.

Song triggers a reaction in protag - emotion in his eyes.

Int. 2347 COVE - DAY OR NIGHT

Protag checks messages. (cyber or normal?) Hears a message in Japanese. Doesn't understand.

EXT. ARBORETUM 1 - DAY

Protag at work. Tiny chrome utensils or cyber mitt. Scrapes cells from hot house flowers. Normal work day.

EXT. ARBORETUM 2 - DAY

Protag at work. Something amiss.

EXT. ARBORETUM 3 - DAY

Protag working. Malt down.

EXT. FREEMAY - DAY

Protag driving to Cal Tech. Begins his hunt.

David Anthony Tattu

Fellini's Ocean and Mariko's Dance



Appearances appearances he said,
I have searched the world through dialectic ways.
I have questioned restless nights and torpid days,
and I followed every by-way where it lead;
and always find the same unvaried
intolerable interminable maze.
Contradiction is the debt you would collect...
No other time but now, no other place than here, he said.

T.S. Elliot

Characters in Fellini's work at one time or another, end up at the sea, often fully dressed, sometimes in suits, hands in pockets, on the sand between the land and the sea; they seem to arrive at some sort of self-realization there that is intuitive and physical; the relationship between them and the sea seems to act as a catalyst for a certain kind of knowledge.

What is this knowledge?

Mariko Mori's *Pure Land* (1996-1998) is explicitly about the romantic allusions and illusions created by us over time about the sea and about women. Suspended in airless air over a vinyl ocean by Photoshop programs she dances over an artificial sea as fake as the ocean in Fellini's *And The Ship Sails On* (1983). Her image is as large as a movie screen.

What is she telling us?

The ocean is, or has come to be after so much Art, the "eternal", ripples that last a few seconds suggesting a geologic time that stretches away, far beyond our common human history; with a before and an after that is, or might as well be for us short lived mammals, infinite. Yet paradoxically the sea is always absolutely physically present; it is always the same and never the same; it is beautiful and terrifying; it is sublime and banal. But what is the nature of this realization, this knowledge that characters see when they see the sea? What happens to Zampano at the end of *La Strada*? Marcello as he shrugs his shoulders and slouches away in *La Dolce Vita*? Leopoldo's sexual panic in *I Vitelloni*? Saraghina's wild dance in *8 1/2*? Casanova's flight from home, through a stormy sea (made of tarpaulin and plastic), into exile.

Mariko Mori's work pretends to lay these archetypes, these narratives, these illusions bare by showing them to be kitsch - a manufactured sentimentality that is absurdly unrealistic. The work presumably lays bare the technique and the intent - in the tradition of the avant-garde since the Soviet theorists theorized it. We have to be knowledgeable about that critical tradition to understand the irony in Mori's work, which is implicit not explicit. Without being "in the know" about the system of signs she is alluding to one is going to take it literally - one would say (innocently - God forbid!) "There is the ocean which is symbolic of birth and Woman is floating over it" or worse "She floats because she's really a spirit floating over the sea", or worse still "It's a modern Birth of Venus", etc. In the tradition of art after Pop, Mori's work can be about all of these things or none of them, as it thoroughly enjoys it's own re-creation of the very aesthetic it presumably criticizes - in short it becomes a "Romantic" ocean rather than just a romantic ocean. On those small quotes hang so much! The difference is the subtle one between kitsch and a work that is about kitsch. (Think of the amount of art made over the last few years that works in those narrow perimeters!) I was as willing as the next person to play along with this, if for no other reason that there is the pleasure of playing along with smart work; returning the good serve so to speak. But in the last few years it has become increasingly more difficult to play this game, and paradoxically the stakes have gone up as this has become more apparent, not just to me, but in my opinion, to a great many people who are unwilling to articulate it because they are afraid of being labeled "conservative" (worse than being psychotic in some circles - or the same thing). What happens if we refuse the leap of faith on which those quotes hang? If we were to see what is in front of us in galleries and museums at face value - without the explanatory texts which invariably are brought out to "support" work - not by denying what we know but fully armed with everything we know and feel including common sense.

Fellini's work was, as he said in an interview, very much informed from his reading of Jung which, I think unfortunately, influenced much of his work in the studio from *8 1/2* to *The Voice of the Moon*, his final feature film. It was at that point that he started to consciously create archetypes in a set, rather than go to a location and film the passing moment. That is, the "ocean" rather than a particular seashore at a particular place and time. This sense of the essentialist, the absolute, that is found in the archetype is the opposite of a realist tendency in which a temporal materialist reality in the present is literally all there is. Both tendencies are to be found in Fellini

throughout his work and he seems to favor one or the other depending on the material. Yet his body of work does have a trajectory: it moves from his beginnings in Neo-Realism up to *La Strada* then shifts to favoring archetypal studio creations, from *Juliet of the Spirits* onwards. *La Dolce Vita* and *8 1/2* straddle both worlds, and in part for that very reason may be his most interesting films. But it's more complicated than that. The sea in *The White Sheik*, an early work, is totally theatrical despite the fact that it was shot on location. Because of the context; the sea at the end of *Satyricon*, a middle period work, is very real - in a documentary sense - and gives weight to the fantastic narrative.

Let's look at these archetypes more closely and see what Fellini does with them. The ocean in *City of Women* is a highly theatrical set, a formal archetype, in which our attention is supposed to be held by the idea that this set of the ocean is standing in for all the oceans, in all periods of history, and that these boys are standing in for all adolescent boys, as well as for all the myths associated with the ocean and with the awakening of sexuality. (One sees here immediately the opposition between archetypes, which are fundamentally supra-cultural, and Western critical theories of the last forty years, which are almost all culturally determinist) Albeit the archetypes in Fellini's work are seen through the prism of early 20th century burlesque, with which Fellini grew up, and which are associated throughout his work with adolescent sexuality. In *La Strada* the seashore at the end of the film into which Zampano sheds his tears is a particular ocean, although we see only a small segment of it because it is night. The waves that wash up behind Zampano's body as he looks around helplessly on his knees are real. The rhythm of this ocean, the sounds it makes, and the emotional exchange between this particular part of the ocean with this particular character create a whole world into which we may not only "read" but "experience" or feel Zampano's loss. In *8 1/2* and *Juliet of the Spirits*, films that stand approximately half way in Fellini's career, we see both characteristics, realism and archetypes, simultaneously. The two forms fusing in the end of *La Dolce Vita* into a contrast between the seashore, which is as real as the one in *La Strada*, and the monstrous fish that washes up on it, which is an archetype for the pre-historic gelatinous origins of man; fertile and feminine, grotesquely stuffed with other fish, it is dead, yet its one eye still "looking" at the guilty Marcello and his bored party of Moderns. This monster brings with it a sense of geological time, in which the brevity of human life is forcefully expressed. The subtle interplay between the waves, which are real, and the sound of the wind, which is not, magnificently intertwine archetypes and realism into a seamless artistic reality. Can visual representations of archetypes in fact carry the cultural weight that Fellini insists upon? Is Mariko Mori asking the same thing, but with greater honesty and explicitness?

Let us look at when Fellini also "lays bare" the technique and the intent: *And The Ship Sails On* ends with a sequence where we see how the various sets, including the ship itself, have been built. We see the workers in overalls operating the hydraulics that control the machinery that creates the illusion of movement. We see behind the facades which are made of plywood and have nothing behind them but sand bags on the floor to keep them from toppling. We see artifice. But there is a fundamental difference with Mori's work: Fellini shows us these devices not because he wishes to expose our (read: "their") foolishness (you thought the boat was real but you see it's all fake) for the obvious reason that the theatrical aspect of these archetypes was clear from the beginning. We knew it was a fake - Fellini

understands that we are able to suspend disbelief and critically see through our own suspension at the same time. The human animal wants to take pleasure in all of it. The final scene in which we see the machinery of illusions is simply one more pleasure added to those already served, it is the dessert at the end of the meal. For Mori such pleasures are not even dreamed of as hers is an ascetic body of work; not in spite of the bright colors and hyper-real surfaces, but because they are all there to serve the "Idea". The main force of its power comes not from pleasure but from sharing in the realization of seeing through a lie; it wants, in the best Puritan tradition, to be useful, to educate, to make clear, or at least to congratulate us on already being educated and agreeing with it (in that sense it has much in common with religious work - which so much politically correct art is analogous to). What is it that we are meant to realize in *Pure Land*? That beauty is a cultural construction, that images of the ocean are bathetic, that sentiment is a lie.

But for us to believe this we must first believe one crucial bit of information that has been left out: we must believe that everyone else (those that do not belong to the educated classes - others) believe these kitsch images are real. The more "people" believe in the reality of kitsch images the greater the irony that acts as an opposing force. That's my Newtonian law of kitsch. This is the weakness of irony - it needs a straight man - the man (or woman) who believes in the authenticity of the lie. Now - who gets to play the patsy? Who's the fall guy? Let me guess. Now we are in the heart of the problem, because we all know who gets to play the patsy - it's always the same person. The Soviets called them "proles". In Latin America they're called "cholos". In the United States they're called "consumers". For "them" (as Anne Higonnet put it in her book *Pictures of Innocence*) there "is an absolute belief in photography's objective neutrality". This is the central myth about photography for many in academies of art. Do in fact people (others) believe this? I don't think so. This is the dilemma for academics: On the one hand they politically support the working classes (saving their contempt for the middle classes to which the poor aspire) but on the other they are piously condescending to them; this is a naive and dangerous oversimplification of how we (not "people") actually see pictures.

From the very beginning photographs were seen by us in the West as lying (in every sense) somewhere between drawing and an accurate mechanical reproduction of Nature - hence the first name for photography: the pencil of nature; ambiguity was built into the name. Photographs (as Roland Barthes discovered toward the end of his life) do carry traces of reality with them - however much they are mediated by a point of view, by the limitations of equipment, and by the social context of the photographer and his subject. This trace becomes more distant as the photograph is manipulated and dressed up, forced to narrativize, to sell, and to perform. But even here a trace remains - hence the power of advertising - it depends on that trace of authenticity.

We are able to see through the facades of photography; we are aware that photographs "date", and that a suspension of disbelief is required of

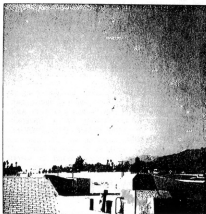
photography, as it is in films or illustrations. Each individual case is different and cannot be reduced to an essence, to a general idea that applies to all photography; every photograph is different and every person who looks brings their own world with them. The difference between how academics and non-academics look at pictures is not one of quality or depth, but of kind. Non-academics are more willing to openly embrace - emotionally so - suspension of disbelief - in the sense that we might be willing to cry during a soap opera, or scream at a bad guy sneaking up on a good girl during a film; intellectuals would hold back from such pleasures for the obvious reason that to participate in them would suggest that they are unable to see the artificiality of these constructions. They abjure the pleasures of suspension of disbelief for another "higher" pleasure. It is, my contention that everyone can see through photography - each in their own way and in their own terms - but only a certain class - the educated class - needs to actively express their refusal to suspend disbelief, which in turn becomes a sign of cultural superiority. To be a master of cultural signs is the carrot at the end of the stick. This is the paramount pleasure for academics, and for those that are temperamentally predisposed to these feelings - a pleasure to which all other pleasures are subject to and in the service of: that of being right.

Mariko Mori is right - but the price she paid for that is that she had to make a piece of kitsch that is closest to 19th century academic painting. The word Pure in the title is perfectly fitting since it is in a sense about purity. It is also banal and has no depth - which is of course part of the point. It's a kind of Neo-Classical titillation, the kind the late 19th century French specialized in, and which we have re-fashioned for our time in the Puritan tableaux of Jeff Wall, Tracey Moffatt, and many others. Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema lives again in their baroque dioramas. Mariko Mori's connoisseurship - of 60's and 70's Hollywood kitsch - is superb - a sort of scholarship illustrated with a detachment that is, without question, horrifyingly professional. Fellini meanwhile pushes archetypes and stereotypes to the point at which they are in dialogue with each other (in the Bakhtinian sense), but to me they feel as shallow as Mori's work - the cultural weight on them can not be supported for very long before becoming simply "the fantastic" or "the sublime" or "the grotesque". In short they become illustration. In Fellini's case he is illustrating archetypes, and in Mori's case she is illustrating cultural criticism. Opposites meet in the woman's land of illustration. In both the image is bound to the Idea - or the concept. Fellini fights the conceptualization of his images but they congeal the moment they are projected and not even Fellini's sense of humor can save them. Mori is - of course - not even aware that there is a problem and she throws herself, mind-body-and-soul, into the historical guts of "images". I see Godard standing by the edge of that abyss looking down (wearing sunglasses) into the black hole of photography.

If I had to choose between them I would take Fellini. The reason is that dance. Mariko Mori's Dance is ironic about itself - so her attempt to elevate

her own image to the level of a Goddess (which is what this work is in one sense about) has the solemnity of a marble frieze. The Mac-Humor of the little computer generated elves that float through *Pure Land* around Mori's image of herself, feel like an ironic sneer, and behind every ironic sneer there is a little General (or Goddess) who wants - invariably - the very thing it mocks, Mariko - the Dancing Queen. Mariko - Snow White. Mariko - Princess Leia. Saraghina's dance in Fellini's *8 1/2* on the other hand is awkward - really full of ridiculous gestures, embarrassing mannerisms, in which we see a woman - who is and is not "Woman" - weighed down by flesh, by matter, playing at being a Goddess. Only a child would fall for it - so she performs for children - and for us. In that awkwardness Edra Gale - who plays Saraghina - and Fellini - tell me more about humans, about our self delusions, our hopes, our mortal limits than all of Ms. Mori's work put together. How we (not "them") look when we dance and are pulled down by gravity has never been more beautifully expressed. I hear myself along with Fellini whispering: "Saraghina Saraghina..."

George Porcari



In New Zealand, where we want to imply that something is, if not completely stupid, then a little "freeform," we will sometimes adopt an American accent. "Like, that's here-ess-a-ill-ah, dude," a New Zealand might say to his friend about the overdone work of art, his mock-Californian accent going to be read in reverse. This New Zealander will then prep up his imaginary fake hands, look back her imaginary blond hair, and stand off. ("Now Zealand! - what's due?" This, it seems, is how the Americans got their savings on me.) In any case, I have lived in L.A. for nearly four years, but believe that, when I was in Auckland, I was mostly as artist (and I'll have you know that I was very well known and had a lot of shows, ten more ones, in fact). I also ran a gallery, Teasrip, which, like my current preoccupations, Chas Art Objects Galleries, was a space set up for and by friends that was also very good. About six years ago, as part of the Teasrip Miniature series, a collection of books accompanying shows, I took on the rather perceptive task of imitating, hyperbolically, the style of an over-enthusiastic but quite talented New Zealand curator who was trying, in his own way, to be an American intellectual. This curator was making a with a self-consciously American stage. Now, there are politics and politics to this task, repeated, but that you Americans will simply not understand, but the main point is pretty clear: a parody of a particular, sociologically-informed style that was very much in vogue, and certainly you, there at that time. And there's no question that it's still with us. Whatever. By the way, our phrasem "weekend" is subject, Tony de Lautour, is, in fact, a real artist, but he lives in Christchurch, NZ, not Venice Beach, CA; his nickname is "Tom Dollar Tour."

I like the ridiculous idea of writing a preface to my own ridiculous stage. I'm re-printing it, I suspect, because this is what I thought Los Angeles was like before I got here. Was I right or was I wrong?

GI

Stupid As A Critic

Journalism, a text that accompanied Tony de Lautour's exhibition, Bad White Art, at Teststrip, Auckland, c. 1994

I.
Tony de Lautour -- Painter of White

White [trash] culture has killed millions. Not since Hitler, Stalin, Lenin and Mao Tse Tung have we seen such mad slaughter...drowned in static, murdered, saturated and starved...credit and sugar are to blame...

- Stan Rose, Cry for Help

"Punch-drunk portraits of Casper the friendly ghost." Those were my words when I saw the "Bad White Art" paintings by Tony de

Lautour in that tiny Venice, CA, loft he called home during those dark, early years before he got into the commercial gallery circuit. In other words, before he became an intellectual.

Me? I was at the University of California, Los Angeles, completing my doctoral dissertation, a rather lengthy work entitled "Slow Hot Love: Epistemologies of White Trashism in the Age of Post-Reganism," chapters of which were being published in *Artweek* as a kind of syndicated serial. So, my career was on the up I guess you could say. But, dude, was I naive, up the duff with Benjamin and God knows what else. Unable to completely dismiss Marxist principles - which were being brutally pummeled by MF and others at Berkeley - my dissertation, in the final analysis, was, shall we say, a work of *sociology*...The brunt of my argument was an account of racial conflict depicted in the boxing tournament between Mr. T and Rocky Balboa in *Rocky V*. I studied this exemplary scene over several chapters, my argument resting upon it being an oracle of American racism: a full-scale virtual gladiatorialship that acted as a glamorizing catharsis for problems which had existed since the slave trade: black vs. white in the world series of trash.

Beyond this, my project was to figure out what was *really* happening in the underbelly of middle America. What on earth goes on in the minds of those sick fucks, I asked from my ivory tower in Westwood. I consulted numerous scholars of American art, current East Coast magazines, and went on some exciting road trips (my column was called "Road Scholar"). I wanted to discover the meaning of what was being described by critics and artists alike as "white trash art," "derivative culture," and "bad white art." Why was the phenomenon at such a premium? The situation was so extreme that the *real* white trash, the [deleted] order to protect current professional interests) were beginning to take in an interest.

Needless to say, I did my homework. Most of the theoretical work was business as usual: sexy but totally unreadable, self-congratulatory methodologies. However Seymour Gater's subtle mixture of Bakhtinian demonology and Keithian canonism licked the West coast dry. The opening lines of his 1993 volume, *Can I Hit You Up For Ten Bucks, Mate?*, was the quintessential hit of the genre:

We were at the opening of my latest exhibition. I left and strolled up to Brownie Point. The sea was spewing all over my Carharts. Some dame was spewing in the sea. I put her in my next show. I didn't have any choice.

It was in the middle of writing those thousands of pages - close readings of Stallone and Gater and the endless replay of visual taxonomies - that I came across De Lautour's paintings. Needless to say, that made a lot of sense to me.

II.

Tony de Lautour - Painter of Fright

But how were De Lautour's paintings to be analyzed, given that most critical apparatus is nothing but psychopomp with middle-age spread?

Paint, to middle America, means only coats of lacquer on the Chevy and coats of liquor on the trachea. It was pointless to mention the dividends of thinking to those freaking fat billyos who suck the scum off the superhighways. So, instead of looking in the cultural gutter for clues, my thoughts went straight to Monet. But Monet's gone right! Monet BMWs with brow-beaten Warhol portraits superglued to their bonnets. Monet Hot Rods adorned as the florescent fauves of post-consumerism. Butt-ugly, but completely cogent of the Paris school they are ultimate equals of.

Impressionism invented a particular description of light: the rendering, not of the object, but of the caress of immaterial on its surface. For this, Monet is known as "painter of light." De Lautour, it struck me during the last, orgasmic beats of T. Rex's "Solid Gold Easy Action," was a man after Claude's own heart: he was an impressionist in tune with a very pongo world. To my wide post-graduate eyes, De Lautour's dripping indelicate propensities offered a vision of the insides of our stomachs after a century of bubblegum. A horrific cancer of graphic reduction, they were the ultimate reflection of a continent besieged by creamy caramel and candy-colored clowns.

The raw, red heads of De Lautour's kiwis became Jamesonean meta-types of Monet's haystacks, his marbled paintsticks polluted lakes of waterlilies out the back of some disgusting factory in Alabama. Sick with inspiration, I turned on my Macintosh Quadra and wrote:

The veils of De Lautour's pointillist obscenities are shot through with hundreds of small brush strokes, each one an insult to the optical and scientific theories of color that historians attach to the moment. The marbled surfaces of these paintings refer to an aristocracy that has yet to come. Luxurious skins of battered paint battered by the world's abuse but still possessing the arrogant upper lip of Grandfather's collection of antique bibles. Secure and leather bound, they split from their seams like massive out of hand tsunamis and anthropomorphic liquid unconsciousnesses of perverted long distance truck drivers.

Flattered by the intensity of my own mythologic ecstasy, I sent a draft of the essay to the editor of *Harpers Bizarre*, Louis Leroy.

III

Tony de Lautour - Painter (Not Bright)

Leroy's rejection letter was on my desk the following week:

Dear Mr. Whyte:

Thank you for text on Tony de Lautour.

We would hope that a painter hopes to discover truths in paintings, and commits himself to saying them. De Lautour's strength lies in the emphatic surfaces of his pictures, and it should be his concern to maintain and intensify them. He is not some sort of cultural analyst, as you suggest. The artist reads comics. It is a shame that he does not pay more attention to scholarly texts, as do the rest of us.

Sure, De Lautour has shrewdly reclaimed the moral high-ground — head and shoulders above the usual chic critiques. But as much as he inflates his own fame with that grin-and-bare-it attitude of his, he basically repudiates what he has achieved in painterly terms.

It is for these reasons that we do not publish material on this kind of work. Besides, the heroes in comic books are fascist types — we don't take them seriously at all.

Same goes for your writing, punk.

- L. Leroy JJJ

IV

Tony de Lautour - Painter, AIIIIrrrrriiggghhhhttttt!!!!

As the 1980s draw to a close, it seems that De Lautour is a foregone conclusion, a standard fixture in every American bathroom. What once seemed like chaotically interconnecting passages of flesh, pipes, knobs, and clots, now has the familiar charm of a nautical bully-boy stitched together with the guts of a dead cat. De Lautour's is an art, which, like the prose of Melody Hussler, will never become chuddy in the mouth of the bearded whore. Gassed by its own toxicity, De Lautour's hydraulic approach to painting has proved Louis Leroy and all the others, wrong.

And me? Well, that dissertation never did get accepted. These days, I am often spotted on Muscle Beach (the most intellectual place in the world) trying to sell second-hand watches to skate bums and mommy's boys. I look more like a De Lautour painting every day.

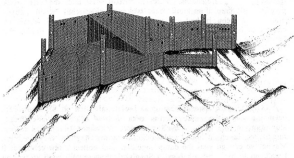
De Lautour himself occasionally throws me ten bucks from that pink, hand-painted Cadillac of his. That painter — he sure got smart.

I guess what happened was that the white trash went up and I went down. I can't resent him, though. Basically he's an enthusiast who happens to paint.

Madeleine's Poem

I still have that book by Rilke
you inscribed the night we met.
You wrote before you'd told me
there was someone else
and I'd looked across the room
and seen his photograph
on your antique bureau.
I guess I'll never understand
why you took so long to mention him
but by then I'd fallen hard
and for years afterwards
I'd try to call you
to see if things had changed.
I heard you'd gotten married
and friends would say
they'd seen your name in the paper
and every Christmas
when I flew back to New York
I'd pass that building where
we spent a snowy night.
I started to think
we'd only met in the first place
so I'd know in the lean years
I was capable of love.
But maybe you were smarter all along.
For the sake of a single poem
you wrote in that book of Rilke.
Well I guess I've finally written it.

Daryl Haney



Giovanni Intra

I Like El Sereno

I.

Grandma sweeps the sidewalk, brushing every sticky popsicle wrapper, every pile of stray dog hair, and all the dead leaves into the gutter with her plastic blue broom. I have a yellow broom, and my neighbor Jaime's is pink. Wild "Chow Chows" run up and down the steep-hilled streets, and since my dog is half Chow he runs with the pack. In the mornings, when the mist has saturated all the plants and grasses, the Chow pack comes up to my porch to pick him up, to go sniff garbage before the trashman arrives. Okay, my dog is a bit of a street dog, untrained and scroungy, but he really has reached his full potential as a dog.

Udfhdssdklw; fkl fklkkl I jld v hnj.

This is a sentence my dog wrote. He stands up on his hind legs to reach the keypad, and throws down his clumsy fingers, enthusiastically. He has a difficult time typing because his paws jam up the keys. It translates as, "I like El Sereno." He likes the city where people don't care if he runs free, where a dogcatcher won't capture him with a mean barbed collar and take him to the place where the cages are. But whatever, I can't guarantee that he really thinks this, because he doesn't speak English.

II.

A small dark man is bearing a horizontal stick on his shoulders, balancing on either side of him nets full of cans. He is collecting aluminum to take to the recycling center, and since I drank an orange Jarrito for lunch, I have a glass bottle in my bag for recycling too. Maybe we can go visit the dump together, and collect a few cents for it. I walk up to him and ask him in Spanish, "Excuse me, good afternoon.

In my bag I am carrying trash too. Where are you going now?" This spawns a conversation.

"I have a lot of trash, it is my work." He says, "Everyday I walk, collect that which you can use again. Now, after some lunch and rest for my feet, I will take this to the store."

"The store on Broadway?"

"Yes. They have good tacos next door."

"I like tacos also. My name is Sarah. Can I go with you?"

"Yes. My name is Jose."

The interaction is a little strange not only because we are complete strangers, but also because I am limited in my Spanish. Different languages employ different dictions and vocabularies, and translated, the sentences are destined to sound foreign. At least we are becoming friends.

We walk, we rest, we eat tacos. We listen to cumbia on the jukebox inside the taco shop. His eyes are dark like brown dwarf stars, like universal marbles. And his hands are smooth but wrinkly like a newborn mole's; like a mole's hands they show evidence of having worked in dirt. I appreciate his filthy fingernails. There's an odor that belongs to him, not alcoholic, but well-seasoned. Acrid and experienced. He smells like he's lived a long life. How can I say that in Spanish?

I begin again,

"This neighborhood is very good because there are many different types of people here. From all over the world. But I am only from Los Angeles, and I don't know much about that."

"Los Angeles is a large city. There is a lot to know about these areas, like how to ride the bus and where to eat good tacos. Where to sleep and where to rest. Or, a fun place to drink at a party."

"That's true. There are many interesting things about this place, although it is dirty."

Then, my view shifted towards his, and I could see out of his glassy, black eyes. Only for a second. And I thought about trash, an empty Cheetos baggie, its beauty, its greasy stench, its overwhelming presence on the boulevards, and I hated it. But then I loved it. Only for a second.

III.

One palm tree stands proud on our hill, the hill that separates Lincoln Heights from El Sereno, and during late summer it drops dates that stick to the hoods of our cars. Never park under a date palm. It's fascinating with its tall, wiry trunk, and occasionally I walk over to it and stare up its straight base in order to get an exaggerated view; this is how a squirrel feels when he needs to climb into the tufted fronds at the top, and he's investigating the job. How badly does he want the nuts? Is it worth it?

Strangely, I blame the palm for my inability to sleep sometimes, because it is home to an exotic bird of prey that caws all night until the

roosters start around 4am. This ghost bird is yet to be seen; since I don't feel safe hanging out on the street corner in the middle of the night, I never see it. I never see it flap its muscular wings during take off. I never see it snatch a mouse with its claw. I never see fledglings smashed on the sidewalk below after failed attempts to fly. A fledgling's main concern is to be born in a low oak, a scrubby Mexican elder, and to be born in a palm tree is as heinous as a human baby being born off the side of an airplane during high-altitude cruising. I pity the baby birds.

Mostly, at night, though, I pity myself because I can't sleep. Who do you call when a bird is disturbing the peace? It's not as if I want it assassinated, and by the way, it would take one of those sharpshooter rifles with the laser sight to hit it so high up, anyway. I figure this mystery eagle is one of El Sereno's eccentricities, same as the man who walks the block selling ham sandwiches from a basket he carries on his head. I might as well get a sandwich for a midnight snack, to eat the next time I find myself lying in bed cursing.

Trinie Dalton

