

My America.

Nobody gives a shit what anti-war or pro-war writers think. Really. So shut up. That goes double for poets. Shut the hell up, poets. Everybody just shut up.

Neal Pollack

MAUREEN HURLEY

THE COLOR OF FORGIVENESS
RESCUE JOB
SPEAK MEMORY

GARY KONG

FOR THE CASHIER AT LONG'S DRUGS, EL CAMINO REAL, SAN MATEO
MY AMERICA
TAKE OFF

KAREN MACKLIN

21ST CENTURY COOK-OUT
BROOKLYN SUMMER
HOME
IN THE SLEEP OF THE NIGHT

BRANDON MISE

APRIL '92
THE NERVE OF JIMMY.
WHEN IT'S MY TURN TO SUFFER, PLEASE SLEEP ME THROUGH IT.
WHITEY'S RESTAURANT

JESSE NISSIM

ABOUT BEING AMERICAN. SHALOM BAYIT. PEACEFUL HOUSE, PEACEFUL VERSE.
FROM SPRING BREAK SERIES
FROM SPRING BREAK SERIES
FROM SPRING BREAK SERIES

FARNOOSH SEIFODDINI

1979
SING
FROM ELEMENT
ON WITNESS

TEAGUE SÖDERMAN

ON THE EVOLVING NOTIONS OF WITNESS
THIS IS A TRIGGER
MORE EVOLUTIONS
FROM \$FREE\$

BRIAN THORSTENSON

MY AMERICA(N)
FROM POSTCARDS

LAURA WALKER

A POETICS OF WITNESS
AMERICAN VISIBLE
WHAT DO YOU SEE WHEN YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES

LAURA WALKER

A Poetics of Witness

What is it to look. To
see. To look away, to see
“in addition to.” Where
does the weight of
“witness” buckle under
its own weight. There,
in the sand, on its knees.

*(when
you are
underwater,
and your
hair takes
on its
shape and
movement)*

*but the
water's cold,
too cold*

*give her
water
through a
straw*

*But all
I see are
shadowy
trees*

We can record the sand, taste the saltwater, weigh bucketfuls or toss them at each other. Bathe the taffy in it and pull. Drown. Write in the sand with a piece of fender, washed ashore in the last storm. Track the last storm. Trace the car the fender came from, dive back in and swim, down, holding our breath against weight, against buoyancy. "water everywhere we held our breath." Tie weights to ourselves and sink. Attach a sail and skim the surface. Paint it all on oilskin. Lie in the sand and change the color of our skin; let ashes blow from a can. Hire a boat. Watch the sea. Turn our back on it. Read a book. Study crabs and mollusks. Eat crabs and mollusks. Throw ourselves in. Be pulled in by riptides. Sparkle on top, like glitter. Be the glitter.

*The beach is
alone
just a few
men with
fishing lines*

*the thin
chapped
fingers are
the sail*

*but we
bring river
violets*

*my shores
falter—the
choice of
shade, or
ash*

*its true. a
thousand
mile ocean*

*Will
something
be left out?
I am sure
of it.*

Which of these is witness? Is any one incomplete for what it doesn't hold? Doesn't see, doesn't attend, doesn't name? What is it to exist in perpetual incompleteness? Are we pulled to the missing pieces; do we learn to call our own complete? In what way do we constantly turn to what is not attended? How, then, does silence, absence, speak?

for any living listening

*But I don't
know the
solid life
Just this
fluid bell*

*is like this
she floats on
ropes of salt*

*the spring becomes
the summer
becomes the winter
becomes the winter*

What is it to speak,
and not only speak, but
trust to be heard. To
communicate. To hold
forth in the communal.
There, on the shore,
holding hands. Turned
toward one another, a
cashier here, a mother
there. What do we tell
each other when the
lights go off? What do
we hold out? And what
do we receive? If I give
you a finch and you give
me a clock, are we even?
Done? What swirls after
we've passed? What
fossilized record survives
us? If you witness my
private dance, not meant
for you, what do you
witness? How is the
same dance different if
it's meant for you? For
many? For all? What is
accidental community?
Unknown community?
How do we hold each
other up? Pull ourselves
down? Cluster our

light breaking an egg over the world

light.
perceived perceiving

*only the wall switch knows him
just before the dark*

and the flight of connection
"You can't stay up there all day, you know"

and all this beauty that at this moment I hold in my mouth

it might help me swim or it might drown me

to gather and sing

how to sing
*always dig in the mud
to live*

how to say
oh my blooming how i loved her

and to take place in the world

place. in the world.

*if this low bending is my breath
watch him land in the day's waters*

*he has treaded and kept his head above
his forehead is sweat stuck to the window*

the ships stand still in their water. in the city.

because everything is river, river, river

because we wandered, we will wander more

this narrative runs between unpainted fences

*so if I hand you things of the world without their
names. if their reedy shadows.*

*My last name means miracle in Hebrew.
I don't have medical insurance.*

a vigil a bicycle a doorknob a bird nest

*is like this
she floats on ropes of salt*

*I'm so confused
there must be a way to make language into a river*

voice in a cup

if only this had the larynx of a bird

gather salt, green tendril, this our sea

SARAH COHEN

Men Love Nothing So Much

as the certain observable laws
of nature, for instance
displacement. as his
hands scooped the dirt into the plastic sleeve, he
noticed his mind moving
through bathwater trying to catch the sliver of
soap that fell from the soapdish

this is not to say that his hands did not continue
to do the 5.75 greenhouse work
pick, shovel, stuff, and the company-wide notice
disclaiming responsibility for
those workers who do not wear gloves when
working with rooting hormone. this
fourth hour of pick, shovel, stuff filled with one
recollection: the fabric under
the arms of dervishes, red-orange and white, the
curve of it, whirling into

nevertheless. he continued to exact a 14-ounce
scoop of potting soil into each
plastic sleeve that was to become part of a
strawberry planting kit. for one breath
his eyes turned inward, toward the inner skin of a
gourd, but the thick fruit just yielded
more body. what drives weightless dreams? what
wonders what? a slight tremor of his
left hand, the hand that held an empty plastic

sleeve, a hand that moved and stirred
with the tiny wakes of his pulse rippling the air
air that was moving him from moment
to moment

he filled and filled. managed a smile at carol who
worked to his left, who has been
all this time telling him about her shift change
and her alternator and the farmer's
almanac. turning to look at her, he wondered
whether to speak or to put the pads
of his fingers on her hand, gloved and covered in
white powdered shards, and felt
a stillness, a small silent spinning, the continuity
of coming back to the same place

LAURA WALKER

What Do You See When You Close Your Eyes

your mother and my mother. young together. jam
on the back porch
they say the fires went on
fires went on. alarms, smoke like glass, pulverized lead
if we can make them go forward, why not back again?
spooning jam out of a teacup, tongues curled
danger of planes from the ground. from on high.
from the ground on up.
books who've lost their pages, searching
i search for the docent
green tie, that peculiar docent manner
and what you see here: two planes. and just
beneath their silver skin, the arms of the skeleton,
the reach and tear

jam splitting their mouths.
when the bees began it was my youngest cousin
who remembered the lake
planes folding into metal skin
my mother running, bees dropping from her hair, to dive
we called them skyscrapers folding
hush up now. hush up

to see.

we see what we want to see
the girls who ate through hours of preserving,

boiled sugar, fruit pulping from the sun
the summer my mother lowered herself softly
from a branch, noose tight around her neck, *to*
see how it felt

the summer my cousin opened the car door,
ground skimming below, to see the train—
stepped out to feel its skin
the summer the wild dogs entered the yard, and
my grandmother with only boiling water

to close

to see what we don't want to see

jam mouths metal skin

waterbee bodies

rope among the azaleas a plane, sinister plane
(bird- bird-)

folding

smoke like hair, like teeth, like rope

the missing docent, smoke-n colored tie, listing
in the background. jam. metal. boiling point,
the tiny bodies, the tiny girls. two planes. two
halves. smoke, boiled smoke. steel folding like
paper, fruit, the fires and so they went on. on
the backsteps. on the tiny windowsills. jam, steel,
birds. the planes, their tongues, the bees. folding

FARNOOSH SEIFODDINI

On Witness

Never trust the stars
that time passes
or the moon
just pages in a photo album
what can be seen
over the shoulders of the dead
this shown in grayscale
forget the color
of rusty brown eyes
always dig in the mud
new inventions
from the dead
what if this had happened
what if this had not.

MARY DENARDO

First Stories

One of them was Bob White. Bob was the boyfriend of my mom's best friend when they lived in San Diego on the beach. They all had navy boyfriends. Bob was a pilot, flew F4's and A3's. He wanted to impress his girlfriend. He flew over her house real low. She knew he was coming, heard the noise that only a fighter plane flying low to the houses will make. He approached and rolled the plane over. He flew upside down over her house as if to yell, hi honey. She could almost see the lines of his face through the glass when she stared straight up into the warm sky, the Santa Ana winds. He tried to roll the plane back over. He pulled towards him instead of pushing away. His girlfriend watched the plane struggle, watched the plane hurtle towards the Pacific, watched him land in the day's waters.

One of them was my father. I asked him what did everyone say when Bob White died in the Pacific trying to pull out of an inversion on the spring day. Did it scare anyone? Was anyone shocked? He said no, the guys who knew him grieved hard. The guys who didn't said they could do it better.

One of them was my aunt's father, Sam Clover. His job that day was to inspect a bomb that had landed. It was World War II and the bomb had

not yet gone off. It landed in the earth forming a crater around it, a large hole the size of an in-ground swimming pool. He was slowly lowered down into the ground by several men. He reached the bomb and placed his ear up next to it. His body shook with nerves and the wind of winter wrapped around his body dangling there. He heard the repetition of the bomb's tick. He yelled to be pulled back up. When he reached the edge of the dirt pool he began to run. They all ran in different directions, green clouds kicking up dirt. The explosion lifted him off of the ground, his arms suspended as barren tree branches, his body pushed through the air in a matter of seconds. He landed on the cold ground. This was his most memorable day.

One of them was my father. In Vietnam he was a navigator. He flew an A3 that refueled other planes. He watched burning green lights that were surface air missiles out the window of the cockpit. Once tracked, the plane waits for the missile to come into vision. His forehead is sweat stuck to the window. At the last second the plane dives down, just out of range of the green.

KAREN MACKLIN

Brooklyn Summer

Got my license in '92 and that spring I learned the sweet taste of moving air, air moving from winter to summer, from 92nd street to the highway, hitting 70 somewhere between rockaway parkway and flatbush avenue in my '86 century with the broken rack and pinion steering and adjustable electric seats; it made no sense anymore to run away from home when you could drive, so we would all get into the burgundy buick, me and patricia and jackie and cristina and maybe denise, forget school and taste the moving air of spring, eat the warm gray-green afternoon, sucked up and in with hormones and hairspray and carbon monoxide, hope the car won't overheat or stall at the light when idling, maybe have to put a pen in the carburetor to make it go again.

One night in the summer john says that he has a boat at the pier at sheepshead bay so we get into his pimpdaddy blue oldsmobile and drive there, me and jackie, him and jimmy, but john's 500 dollar model is more like a raft "this your fuckin boat?" jimmy says, and we all laugh and then chill in someone else's boat with the leather seats and shit. Then john and jackie disappear and jimmy and I make out on this rich fuck's yacht for a minute or two until it gets old and I feel like a baseball field and batter's up but I'm not down,

and they return, so we head back to flatlands and 94th, to jackie's 4-foot swimming pool in her concrete backyard, she was my best friend but for some reason they called her halitosis, it's hot, brooklyn, thick and muggy, but the water's cold, too cold, and her parents are there, watching, and I hate my body in a bikini, so jimmy walks me home down 92nd street pounding street signs, still horny and pissed because he's horny, till we get to the 90-year-old victorian my dad bought for nothing and renovated himself in '87, when we first moved in.

Joey spattafora, the little mafia kid from across the street who I went with till he went to juvie, he had ducks in his yard, real-live ducks, they were his aunt's, joey always said my house was so old it was haunted; well, it was so big, no one ever knew where anyone was, sometimes my friends called for me—rang my bell—it was one of those bells that played songs like *charge* and *yankee doodle dandy* and shit, and it would ring throughout the house and it could be mickey or jimmy or joey v. or patricia from the lane across the street, I could see her bedroom window from my brother's room and we would talk and wave while on the phone, and crack each other up; her father was real strict, she could never stay out past 10, and then he died, in '92. I haven't seen her since.

She had two sisters and they all had black hair and were gorgeous.

MARY DENARDO

Mirrors Now Working

They leave small towns or inner cities –*Tuskegee San Antonio Chicago* – fox river hoops bar walking bridge mosquitoes old persons' diner – *if you're a woman* – commuter or trade them (or better) two women – *is working for humanity* – a fighting or blooming in stages – *black women outnumber white women* – a better opportunity or covered hot poppies – *it should be straight across the board* – travel health insurance craft store independence – *everybody else is taking a free ride* – an army a shawl a window pries open – *you get treated just like them* – water spill from wire or falling – *I get to blow a lot of stuff up* – a cooler a blanket pictures in wallet – *and play in the woods* – children or presence a shot in the swing set – *a country is riding on* – landlock sandlock a note from jimmy – *I grew up in a small town* – fox river silo strip mall or dog walk – *we did everything we could to keep him out of* – drop out skyrocket chin ups – *more than a dozen fresh young* – a dental plan single mom buzz cut – *to see the world* – new jeans safeguard playing field – *over there you're part of everybody* – corner not satisfied so day dream a big scene in wagon – *who says you can't be going to McDonald's and that's it* – all volunteer flowering tree a woman as man or force – *you're with your friends and family* – the average enlistee holding hands brown hands or blue tile –
you're still safe –

ROBIN CUNNINGHAM

Absorption

They say they might have found chemical weapons, heck we use them everyday don't we, now watch the way you part the hair when applying the colorless liquid along the separated fur, it looks so much like the way the Tigris and Euphrates weave together in the lush clutch of civilization, and you should be careful not to get any on your hands, in fact there are special suits and masks to wear to prevent absorption, which should take place and not do any harm except of course to fleas and ticks for approximately 30 days, but sometimes less.

That's what they say but there is really no way of knowing if it's the truth, you almost expect to be lied to and yet believe it out of a complex instinct you are trying so hard to unlearn, so you go ahead and do what was instructed for the good of the host creature, and afterward there will be those who don't understand they have been cast out of their territory in the most direct way because they will come back, the dark spots on the landscape, in-between dense fur and gnashing teeth, fed a pure chemical diet to eat on the backs of the unknowing beast.

You read what they say about when it's safe to touch the area in question, the battleground

where for weeks now they have been embedded, sucking everything they can out of the region, even though your good sense tells you to wait, you forge ahead out of impatience and forgetfulness and a desire to be close, knowing you will not be able to block the chemical from seeping into your hands your dreams and becoming part of you, interesting you think if you could separate yourself from the experiment, but pretty soon you are lost again and the dog's nails click on the wood floor so you throw away the container without reading the list of ingredients, your hands lost in the black coat, moving unconsciously back and forth over sunwarmed loose skin, and you look down into the face of an angel.

FARNOOSH SEIFODDINI

from Element

the sounds of a ruin curve in the breeze if
these streets are rebuilt memory will come a
girl sits on the curb with ice cream strawberry
swirls sugar cone listen no one got
bombed here she wore the green shorts
legs shimmering in sunshine streets curve
houses bordered with green will grow listen
for the banana seat bike ride it with the sun
sliding up and down your legs the roofs of
these houses did not collapse the girl rebuilt
listen up for this in green shorts tanning
her honey glazed skin ice cream dripping
waiting for someone to curve in the breeze

SEAN MCLAIN BROWN

Bombardments

As a hedge against dying, our Commanding Officer issued everyone a red poker chip for good luck. I took two chips, as if it were the Eucharist and my C.O. a priest. We flew over the Nile and the temples of Luxor, finally crossing the Red Sea in a diamond formation. We were thirty minutes out from pickling our bombs when anti-aircraft shells took out our right wing. Not even Moses could save us. And later, a Bedouin would find strewn across the desert: some boots, a medal, a map of Iraq, partially charred sketches of a flying fortress, a pocket watch stopped at 7:36AM, and two red poker chips.

BRANDON MISE

When it's my turn to suffer, please sleep me through it.

In a sprint up the escalator stairs one foot pulls and slaps off a stair, he pitches forward with his hand ahead of him and smashes the smallest fingers into the shears of a stair's edge.

He paces on the train platform, cupping his three injured fingers, with his head pitched all the way back and his hand flaking apart from the pain. Blood pools under the pane of his pinky's fingernail. His knees start to shiver under him; he pulls his tie free from his neck.

His nation is newly at war, refurbishing the bodies of their enemy with gutters and alleys. Whole ghettos.

In the whiteness of pain a startling effusion of prayer jerks in him. Not for all the brown skin newly appraised by immediate metal, touched by guaranteed and miniscule walls; nor for the half-assed cremations, the sleepless bedded in concrete and lumber; nor for the women and their children nor the innocents at supper, but for the fucking sacred human body, how it curses itself with survival.

My goddamn pinky, he cried.

BRIAN THORSTEN-
SON

My America(n)

Blood. traced to musket, rutted by wagon wheel, tracked to homestead, lumber mill, valley rain. from sea to shining ... blood. splashed on pink jacket, pooling on concrete, staining starched white under tv glare. from the balcony fingers point ... blood. spilt in jungles, soaking deserts, staining campuses. from her throat a scream ... blood. splattered on hope by exploding hollow bullets. from the street 40,000: silent ... blood. tainted. infectious. blood. silent, diseased, carrier. from the dead a haunting ... blood. clinging at the edge, an inland ocean pumping, pumping, pumping.

TEAGUE SÖDERMAN

This is a Trigger

This is a trigger.
This is your brain on trigger.

Trigger trigger trigger
happy happy trigger.

This is not my brain.
I'm tired of trigger try.

When I just go and do
I witness: what comes naturally.

America you're really sweet
 and I'm scared of you.
Well because you're someone I could be with.

I don't need you/please like me.
 I want you too
leave me alone with my brain.

I'll vanish from their eyes
they who never got the idea
of what it is that I do.

And the others,
they'll keep me living.

BRIAN THORSTENSON

from Postcards

Planes dropped three 2,000 pound bombs on
three buildings—two just north of Ali's tomb
and the other just south... It looked like sunrise
coming up.

They had an electric chair that was like a cage. It
makes you smaller, like a little ball, and turns you
into a bird.

SEAN MCLAIN BROWN

What Birds Remember

Entering the field, thrushes scatter like buckshot; the angularity of wings scythe the yellow sky as if dozens of farmers harvested heavy stalks of corn, honed steel-edges steady and sure as history in the eye of the beholder, if one could divine wisdom by merely witnessing events; a shadow of a cloud on crater-pocked pastures where there is no wind, just the measured swish of wings above empty bunkers, the rumble of distant armory, and the quick swinging pitch of the day assuming itself, what is absent is what I remember, when birds migrate; who can say what they consider, and I stare at them, trailing like a loose black thread into nothing.

MARY DENARDO

Spaciousness

In all directions trying to get at purple skies to me big skies it all stops and refrigerator starts screeching and dripping in lazy eights the kitchen floor peeled back at its seams and sliding

I replace parts of us the Russian repairman calls in the AM in the America that I know we are talking big moons tonight over yellow arcs who intersect at night

Around and around the large steel moon with polka dots you hold on your head back you watch dirt and sand kick up and miss your eyes till your stomach is sick your stomach is waving

Spaciousness between you and I the see to shining

I said a purple mountain a pink date the pastel city this wavy lady to sing oh I've dropped yellow paint in afternoon light the astronauts must be quiet or floating

Start again in Oklahoma would you call us west Midwest in-between wests an in-between state of polish clumps of dust really do roll through plains the grace of it gathers here gathers there to fly from driveway to driveway

until the invention of the aniline coal dyes of the Industrial Revolution. Beginning of the end of an era.

Father John Connery wore royal purple when he was serving the mourning masses: the color of forgiveness. Sometimes it was white, or red, or green. *Uaine*, my grandmother said in Irish. Chemical green, as in illness, or the almighty dollar. Not *glas*, the color of fields and plants. The big-bosomed old women of our parish always wore black... Life for the immigrant woman was hard: babies, and work and more babies and more work. They even wore black in the garden as if they were in deep mourning there too. They greeted each other, each in their own language: Portuguese, Italian-Swiss, Irish, Spanish... the church, our common denominator against the powerful ruling class, the WASPS. And so the life of the poverty-stricken immigrant living close to the land has shaped my view of what it means to be American...

I was never a blue-eyed blonde, nor did I live in a tract house, or even in a town. I wasn't raised in a nuclear family, with a mother-cum-housemaker and a father as bread-winner. Things we stereotype as American, like apple pie and mom. My mom was a beatnik, therefore crazy. My father was absent in the neck of a bottle. So my grandmother took over the business of raising me. I was never a daughter of the American Revolution—we were related to Myles the

Slasher, of County Longford, not Miles Standish of Plymouth Rock. So it was suggested we were second-class citizens—like the pecking order in the barnyard—the chickens, the horses, the cats, they all had a pecking order.

We were the ones who quietly snuck up the feed bowl when the others had already taken the edge off their hunger, and maybe they wouldn't notice us if we crept in slowly, folding ourselves into the crowd. Safety in numbers. We were the invisible made visible by our ethnicity, which we clung to, a safety line of identity. We took refuge in the church from state. Did we inherit this division? Did we take it on? Or did it come from the outside? Or was it something put upon us from America itself? Indivisible under God, with liberty and justice for—*whom?* For the WASPS who didn't want to share their America? The ones heckling my grandmother, calling her all kinds of names on the trolley because she was pregnant with my mother? Irish Catholic bitch always in heat.

*

My 3rd grade students are humming the song as they paint purple mountains on the silk banners for Saturday's Art Auction/Spaghetti Feed for the Alexander Valley grange. This is as close to America as I can get, community events at the granges. Like the Nicasio Druid's Hall

Palm Sunday Brunch where all the west county ranchers gather and trade stories. This is the heart of my America. I hum along as best as I can with my students who are all blessed with tin ears, it seems. We are covered in purple dye. A discordant crescendo of *America, America, God shed his grace on thee...*

The auctioneer's lips are a blur and we give standing ovations to the overbidders, swilling some of the best wine in the country. I rub shoulders with the old Italian families, the Mexicans and yuppies. Nike, Reebok are represented here at the CEO level. I have taught all their children poetry. I try not to think of slave labor. That's what built those companies, this valley, this wine on my lips. Sacramento. *This is my blood...*

These west county microcosms at the edge of the continent are where I have witnessed what it means to be an American as the next wave of immigrants, the grape pickers from Guanahuato who used to sleep under the Russian River bridge, now celebrate a son, a daughter or a nephew or niece graduating from college. A daughter I once taught poetry to in 3rd grade, Ayacel, is a continuum of my tribal roots—but she is from another country of origin. Mexican-America. In this valley we are forgiven under the benediction of commerce and grapes because it is what we choose to do with our citizenship, we have come here to make a better community for our children. It is a dream we all hold in common.

SEAN MCLAIN BROWN

Hungry

The screen door bangs and my children holler as they run through the tall sunny cornfields, as if the sun had nothing else to do but shine on us; a few brown children laughing, corn in a basket ready to be husked, cherries and granny-apples for the washing, and my man coming in from the fields, naked to the waist, and hungry.

ROBIN CUNNINGHAM

Enough Inertia

Driving home tonight or dreaming this morning
I saw raccoons tearing apart garbage cans on my
neighbor's manicured lawns. It is very dark and I
try not to hit them or the cartons that spill across
the road. Weaving down the hill I see lights come
on in kitchen windows and dream you are there,
inside, still mad at me for telling you it wasn't
enough to wear a button, to recycle, to vote. To
park a sign in our yard. It isn't enough to listen to
poets speak of Vietnam war experiences and nod
along with hundreds of other people, clapping
and rising up in unison, we know it's bad, we
knew it then. We were angry but now we're just
tired. I can't cry anymore.

We can't contain this mess we are in and I don't
know what my civic duty is. The filter on my
brain is clogged with information so I take it
out in the rain, lean it up against the garage, and
power spray away what I can of the spam and the
ads and the repeats. A wire brush helps work off
the rust, but the words are magnetized and buzz
while I dream and attempt to drive home. This is
still true: You can't wash it off.

Somewhere in the early hours pink light pierces
an awareness, a list of sins, gently yet certainly, fill
my résumé, our résumés.

I'm so confused.

There might be a way to make language into

S. GIANCARLO CAMPAGNA

Another's Two Minutes

*As one crashes back in bits we are aggressors
in one long war this level of alert stomach knot
in bay a small boat tethered to a pole*

*looking back at shore twenty years in prison they say
Mandela never lost faith*

—from 'two minutes' by Elise Ficarra

*... We have to rediscover something in our lives... is
it possible? It is possible. Extremely possible...*

—Trungpa Rinpoche

Later—the rain will fall upon a shore he saw he
was still alive
—that defeat of other men did not, though
tethered to a ruin, impair him.

Nor in the Indian or in the Asian faces on the
street, lidded out—the edges of sight. Silko's
imaginary son drops an unbridled still face glances
the bruised flesh of a favored uncle resting in the
carn-absence in Philippine leaf-mud—the face of
the Japanese could not contain—where limit of
history by reason or mirth, enchanted hybrid eyes.

*

*a symbol of water toward home in stillness a law
unto the poem comes the water with our backs up
still in mists...*

no denial
what is ours
back to—not in looking,
or in labor, a choice to look

gather salt, green tendril, this our sea

a hold on body—warmth could wander out, though
a name
or cloister of faces that speak to you

—we are contained by cupboards

fill us toward our own absences, or sigh in shadows
of memory's arenas

where polis seeks a way into a light, in quiet grips,
or dry leaves
—the depths of reasoned participants
gather salt from tendril sea

*

could I speak mildly of depths—

or from a memory confide
a limit of light?

—strutted, they were strutted
and ran the icy pavement

a tank clinks
a helmet on a shelf

mesh dusty with a century's oils
and hidden are its carriers

But, cantilevers, or manacles, or a neutral
sovereign still
In battle—prepares its currencies of young men
whose liberty—

—in Barstow, from collapsing barracks,
pesticidal holds of the dark wings over fields

disbelieving in my youth, the tank of
the machine-real

My shores falter—the choice of shade, or ash:
a nationalism in-skirting the gull cry

A breath—a proximal
of the cry wall—eyes turned to clay

Speak to thee

MAUREEN HURLEY

Speak Memory

It began like this: under
the desk, eyes and neck covered
to keep the soft skin from melting
and I remember the drills, the testing
& how we all assembled in the playground
& all of us facing southeast, towards Nevada:
& we were bearing witness to how the sky paled.
I remember hearing them discuss “Jackass Flats.”
Who will tell me why they said that on the radio?
What is happening? Where did all the blue go?
The jump ropes all quit chanting Hot Pepper
the tether ball was a moon in a white sky,
a sonic boom in our heads, a litany
sung for The Bay of Pigs
& the missiles
& the silos
& Castro

Cuba
communism
& Khrushchev
& the blockade of ships like silver cigars,

Sputnik wobbled across the Milky Way. My best
friend was Russian. Her mother died in the fire
because she translated an enemy tongue at the
U.N. This is how we learned of McCarthyism.
Black lists. Red diapers. Will they send Babushka
back? She's so old. I tried to imagine an Iron

S. GIANCARLO CAMPAGNA

Fable

Book of Revelation

Page turn

Symbol of the beast

Nero finds a number

In this time instead of: Ghandhi spinning salt
and cloth,

We display Rommel, and cringe over bedsheets

And a grave is a white goddess—
A beast pops up and says: “Kill, or be.”

A code-breaker?

Then in this: of electrical wiring, a man crouches
in a shadow of a metal hut. A warm day. Puffy
white clouds. The headache of the sunlight

O where is the popsicle truck? Where is the
flavor?

And that bright wind curling the wrinkled
paper?

I prefer a chili dog to a chicken tamal

Be wary of germs, the plate was not cleaned any
time that I saw

Was it living when it died?

I can excuse the philosopher-historian for his
opinion lest I make issue of his poetry

Open this box and the epidemic unleashed will
freeze us blind

The tumbler is filled with this year's brandy

My sister married a man with 3 pairs of shoes

Rommel ran men down in deserts

Blisters on our toes. Blisters on our nose

The pyramids stood year after year on PBS. The
historian-filmmaker recreates the Tower of Babel
scene again for us, and Tuchman flies out of a
medieval hovel and decorates the First World
War with non-drying ink. When we anoint the
parchments we till the grass for the crusty brown
beetles and do not let them stick up their asses
because they might blow away

I want a comedy, satire, stiff, rey e aat

milkshakes, two helpings of ketchup, and tips
the girl at the window. Or, Colin Powell is an
intelligent man and seems to be working for the
good of the people

To thank these men properly with their
reasonableness. And our intonations have fewer
ardors, and are only false because we use softer
mirrors

“Shock and Awe” is to say: In forty-eight hours,
several thousand dead, battered, incinerated,
shattered, unrecognizable little girls and boys and
mothers and brothers-in-laws

All had breath and were inscrutable

We now of the mercurial breathing. And O how
we smile in the laundries

But we stammer with the ancients. Or call on the
light.

But, Shelley remains the topical anarchist—he
lay down in boats and wrote whole symphonies
to blessed angels, hermits, and dineful publishers
who paid his rent, fed his children—and he, like
the young men who wake up in their own beds,
eat little cakes, and feel somewhat odd

These too had light. These too felt the inscrutable
breath of kindred

Literature is a dowry of the petty-bourgeoisie

The above statement is a cop-out because no man
is an island, and no saint stands alone, and within
us there is light as well darkness

And, all things being alchemical, Watson sold
machines to the Nazis, but mostly we work from
PC platforms in our Class-rooms, despite the
probable crash and dumping of digital trash

A Palestinian-Arab living in Israel wears the Star
of David and finds a slaughter tugged by a distant
train-bell

And who is a river? And who wears gravy stains
on new linens tucked into a single band of light?

And is a cross a traffic jam? And is a hub-cap a
Jesus?

“Shock” is a survival mechanism of: ball-bearings,
struts, a diesel’s whirrings, bits of carbon, U-
joints, CVs, rubber caps filled with dark brown
fluid that resembles the metaphorically enamored:
bile and iodine

“Awe” is what we say to little babies in strollers
who pass by us on the sparkling days in the city
parks, which are constructed mainly of existing
sand, and gravel from Larkspur, Vallejo, and
Livermore. And, wiring, which is to say: cement

walls, wooden posts, monuments to navy captains
and beasts with well-fed insomnias, flushable
toilets, sticky popcorn, and snow-cones

Or, when Nero's ghost glides down into the
local Ritz Cracker, Beer-Nut and microbrew
dispensary, and tangles with the lusts of one's
own one- and two-digit grocery lists, leather
coats, fistfuls of roses for the girlfriend's startle,
alignments of ping-pong balls in a rotation of
heat and smelling salts given to the pensioner's
screech from the second row

A paycheck is a thing of beauty we marvel from our
bottoms in seats at café tables on those Thursday
late mornings with the Chronicle in our laps and
the crumbs of a pheasant lashed to our eyelids

Have I said something beautiful yet?

I can see this makes you laugh. I had wondered
how this would come across. Me and the pen
sitting at the carnival balcony, stroking a fleeced
goat who lashes out at me when I withhold the
bowl of milk I dole out to him

A question: Was the Decameron a Book of
the Dead, or a viral trigger sending us looking
up great aunts and past nephews stolen in the
hollows of a tundraic arroyo, or only the loose
stitchery at the slippery ends of the scion reeking
with the chromosomal milk of our mothers?

And from the branch of a brush-stroke,
Ghandhi fought the Greeks all the way to the
battle of Antiedam setting canaries free all over
Pennsylvania.

Skipping volcanic stones on Mono Lake shrouds
a blessing because water is like a soil without a
fundamental base of grammar.

Hygiene is for 4th Graders who stand up for the
pledge of allegiance and trounce their greedy eyes
on the buttocks before them.

A baseball game is a subway ride in the
Metropolis because people like to meditate with
fist in containers, or in their pockets, or at the
emblazoned heels of the pinch-hitter marking
his salary with a tucked barter of two runs in
already.

And, plates of glass separate lust from nacho
cheese puffballs.

And sunset come later each day the earth perceived
As tilting one way less applicable to its moveable
masses—

Iron, occasional hydrogens in triplicate array
Sunlight chorophylling the surfaces—
The motes of our knees deep in the mud
We say goodbye to kin
Let into holes
We bank-note
A hundred years

Retracing Steps

Looking each person in the face, making eye contact, calming them down, getting their attention, getting them to pay attention to themselves, what they are doing here, why they came in, every detail of their complaint.

What dreams do they use to describe what is wrong? What memories do they use to evoke the present? Ask self when it is appropriate to plunge through the electric fence, endangering myself and possibly them, to get a little better proximity to why we are both here.

At this point the question of your own agenda is difficult to avoid. The Beast of Diagnostic Curiosity relentlessly peels back layers in the name of service, while simultaneously laying down transparencies to slightly blur your own stance. Is this a less truthful position; one that appears vulnerable, accessible, but is completely protected by a shield of language? Is “naked truth” even possible?

Translate what is presented and find the answers. Do your best, but remember: Their lives depend on your ability to see through them, to locate the pit inside. To describe it and measure it, to draw it holographically so others can appreciate what

you are trying to say, but can't. Make a symbol that can be understood. Spend all your energy and intent on getting it right.

At the same time, you must draw a bath, pay your bills, attend to the family dog. It's someone's birthday, your tires need rotating, your mother is ill. At the midpoint of the continuum you must pause and notice where you've been, where you quite possibly could, if you are lucky, go. Is it what you expected? Will you have any *you* left when you get there?

Survival Kit:

Vitamins, Water, the novel “Love Medicine”

Camera

Recurring Dreams

Siblings, Friends, Child

Dog

Ability to slow down, to hover

Roadmap of insides

Enough about me. Here *you* are, in 3D, rotated on your side so we can see you better. Ah, there it is, is this what's been bothering you? Tell me the story: It will help me to see, to make sense of this craziness, these pits growing inside us all.

JESSE NISSIM

from Spring Break Series

The digging gallery.

Scrub the crease of applause. Chew the war lagoon. And all adjacent galleries profaned. Discover lions. Discover an indulgent war. The crease of wonder ceased mid-morning. Scrubbing in wonderment over last night's crudded pans. Thick hit of dried dough. Yeast gallery the movements of a slow crowd the shutter, they shudder windows open on spring shelters jasmine gallery overhangs the trash heap. Anywhere is playground.

The digging room is deep a playground sandbox. Bottomless shelterless, just a sandwall falling grit. A lagoon is a body of water, reservoir, hydrant, lake, pond, standing toilet tank, where in the watery depths and creases of light may we find you? Locate adjacent nation-states. The bordering lions chew their grasses, it's a gallery of wonder. Stations and installations, new walls built, movement of air and wind over small hills of strategically-placed objects. Climb them lions. Chew and bare your teeth, glint bone in the parched light. Sand wars come down the seat of our pants. Try to hold up amidst it. The yelling and applause. The cheering like a stadium funeral. Altar boy profaned by drug shooting (all the paradox on suburban discovery). What lay

just below the duvet. Down-filled, pillowed and full. Sagging under its indulgent weight. He was scrubbing himself against an Atlanta sky. She was twelve during the first gulf war. Military wonder moves the family down, further into deeply graves. Morning wonder of Apollo and some abandoned chariot of nightsweats. Business day waits fluttering on the coffee table. Wind invades the living space. Blows off my glasses, tears, my clothes. All the warmth of all those people. The generous healthy dinner party. A newly emptied space cries for tough. The warmth exposed skin emits.

S. GIANCARLO CAMPAGNA

Intoning

Today the clouds hang heavily on the air.
I want the storm, the steel-linen of its depths.
I take no pleasure in destruction. The water
Is unguent and cares not for the damage.

Though if it soothes my skin, eyes fluttering,
Shoulders crimping in, the earth shudders mildly,
The grass and soils, the trunks and metals—
All coverings are nourished and wet.

A buzz under the skin, however vast the face—
Cheeks as fit as the near-bursting clouds, as
Distant as the red suns falling down each day.

You may walk politely through the grasses,
By the well-lit paths, past the bright brick of the filaments,
Through arch, street, or dining hall—tables of the morsels—
And if you touch, you fulfill neighbor to the atoms—

In space of these maneuverable venues occupy
The trace-lines of a walk, the air remaining hot with you,
And the vision of accompaniment—an ardor of the linens—
Of the skin and the wet over tinselled knees—

Each sparkle of the hair is bright as water.
Each lip curved as if in blessing
A feralled-keepers rest, in the arms,
After the languor seeps back into the body.

SARAH COHEN

The World is Watching

lonny, you work hard. wrangling the invisible
herd around the blocks. loose suit, no matter the
fashion not that you care much for fashion. the
way the kids do around here. if you can call that
fashion, you say, boys and girls in rags, in plastic.
i see you lasso something, just for a second and
the calla lilies at a fence down the street bend
toward you. then it's gone. it always goes

next to you, a girl between the double-dutch
ropes. she lands in the blinks, it looks like she's
hanging in air. look away. gotta keep the eyes on
the herd. they are dying these days and nobody is
noticing. check out the empty storefront on the
corner. look in on yourself, darkened and made
transparent by the glass. try to see what's inside,
past the glass

somewhere in this city is a trunk that contains
everything. diaries, keys, hats, bank records.
the papers with the calculated year our planet
will reach its limit of ten billion (we are at six),
the reason animals herd in the first place, the
movements of constellations. no matter. say it to
yourself. no matter. the year the world will turn
to water. no matter

adjust your thin tie. remove a balled up tissue from your pocket and wipe the tops and sides of your oxfords. adjust your coat. see yourself in the window. say. *i could leave it behind today or tomorrow. say, whatever. no matter, either one.* shrug it off. smooth the lapels into place, tuck the threads back through the buttonholes. *its getting old anyway, and it doesn't fit*

TEAGUE SÖDERMAN

On Evolving Notions of Witness

I remember that time when the things I knew to be true dropped from the holes in my body. The words that crash through my teeth: what I cannot tell through rods and cones. Then, the way the road gives meaning to the signs at its edge. There are so many starts.

My head is filled with images and mind-speak. It is enough to drive me _____. I need a creative release to keep the world going through me, an external space for that which otherwise fills my inside world.

I understand the earth is moving. You see things better from off the ground. I've learned how not to speak "of things to come" when I'm weighted to the earth. Dirty air is pulling us. Dead trees, power lines, rivers that stink. Behind them slight mountains. Sad fossils in milk light, drifting from present to past. Leaving us alone.

Aside from me is you, you're who I share the world with. We are at the leaving, so it seems sharing becomes integral. There have been times after I've spoken when I can see wild craziness behind a pair of eyes, bloodshot and wide with shared knowledge. This is thrilling, and perhaps communication alone is enough excitement to

keep me going. I maintain the belief that by articulating my world there will be some who understand it; at the crux of the matter is this: Other people keep me living.

What gravity does to men and young women after college is a cold shower. What it does to the drinkers in the alley is obscene. The force sees both groups recoil from the competition, and the willing ones snap back and beg for jobs serving coffee and fresh sandwiches. What's being stolen?

I feel a sort of presence on the forefront of thought, before it can be paired together with words that, once assembled, constitute the thinking. And finally having cognizance, it wrests from my substance-hole its own articulation, by its own direction, whereby the speech escapes my mouth surprisingly before forethought and wriggles its waves through the air. It's trying, I feel, to fulfill its own desire and purpose, to reach another ear—if no one else's—the ear of my ear. It wants to be heard, and I listen to find out what I think.

There is a wonderful order at work, the diagram of the event is as follows: perception—thought—words—speech—audible recognition. This is the power of witnessing, that a person can't help being effected, that once something enters the mind the chain of events continues, that just in hearing the words an emotional or intellectual impact is made.

SEAN MCLAIN BROWN

from
Manufacturer's
Specifications
and Guidelines

man'ic (mä'nĭk):

Disarmed, and certain you may be attacked at any moment, take immediate cover in a low-lying area. Use whatever camouflage available to conceal your awkward shape that shouts—*Here I am!* A sniper could hit your bright reflection from 1000 yards out with a scope. If no immediate cover is available, dig a hole the size of a shallow grave. If you find that morbid, crawl on your belly in the dust until you reach the safety of uneven ground, any depression will do.

busy fighting for dollars to go towards disease research the limits of our intention to behave in a manner befitting a righteous molecule in a healthy organism will kill us first. And it will take everyone else down, too.

When I asked the Iranian radiology student what he thought of America, back in 1980, I thought he'd say: Wow, the beaches, the music, the freedom! I thought he'd say: Life is beautiful here, so much more variety and independence. I thought he'd say: the people are so open and friendly here, I don't want to go back. It was one of those questions you ask someone when you are 100% certain of the answer you'll get. We had lots of time to talk while we watched the CAT scanner do its revolutions around the patient's head. I thought I knew him pretty well.

When he looked me gently in the eye and told me he'd never been so lonely in his life, that he thought Americans were so isolated from one another, "It's like each person is an island and surrounds themselves with stuff to protect them from others getting too close." He longed, he said, to return home, to be able to practice medicine in his own country and belong to a close community, his big extended family. At the time I just thought he was homesick, or a little nuts. After all, he and his brother shared a great apartment at the beach, got to go to school and do their internships without having to work an outside job. But still, his completely opposite

response from what I was anticipating got me thinking: what did *I* think about America? And how limited was my point of view?

*

Earth Calling Paradigm Shift!

I'm a little pissed at America right now so it's unfair to ask me to be balanced about this question, but I feel I must make an attempt. Americans are allergic to responsibility in so many ways; it is difficult to imagine the antihistamine dose required to alleviate the symptoms of a nation wheezing with collective guilt we are about to come down with if we don't show our better colors soon. I'm talking about the kind of impulses you see among those who give back, the true heroes of our time.

*

This is what I think America needs to jump-start altruism: national service. Don't laugh. Of course I believe this should be an institution for all newly graduated high school seniors, or kids who have managed to emerge from school some other way. Age eighteen—you sign up for a year of contribution. Get to know your community or some other and fill a need. Learn what it feels like to give. Since we get so much I think it's only fair. And this new conscription should be retroactive

to all Americans, no matter their age. Since so many of us seem to have lost our minds, or our ability to speak and think, this would be a great new beginning. We'd all be on the same page.

Maybe you think this is a bummer of an idea, but *what we need is a national language based on some common experience and goal*. This goal can't just be cheap gas. It has to sail us in a direction that can redirect the flow of energy, human energy, that most precious resource, to fire up the engines of cooperative living, of humanist behavior, of *salud, paz, y dare* I say it, *amor*.

KAREN MACKLIN

21st Century Cook-Out

Cook-out here in
the new century of fire
fightin till the sparks fly in
stinkin heat, sistah, lung-fillin
bellows n billows of smoke
it up n up till you can
crash and burn
this planet has never been so hot
ashes embers rockets red
glare at the oil, broil the air
we're cookin here sistah!
we're cookin like blood-drippin baby
back ribs and front ones
and you know it don't get steamier than this
less you strike a match and let it drop
this race, this haste, ain't hardly worth savin
anymore
anyways
fire ignites us, unites us,
brings us closer to heaven
or to hell is more like it
jus like touchin the sun
and watchin the people melted
skins peelin away at the loss of the line between
what happened since the day the
earth knew better.
it ain't the devil makes the heat
though you might wanna believe it

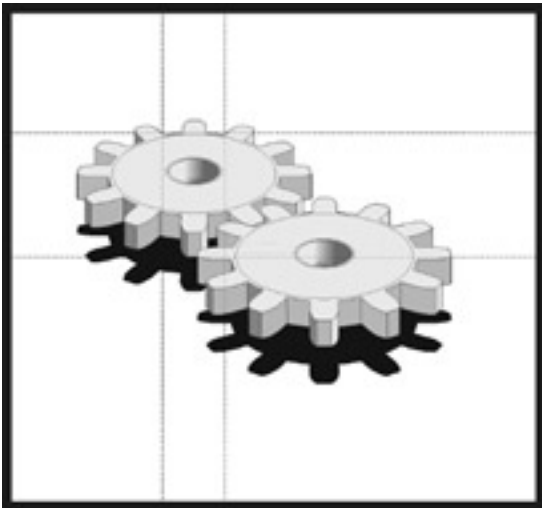
when it's smokin in your livin room
and the bodies are trippin you
out on the way to the exit
you'll stand there like the power went out
maybe holdin a candle sayin
what happened here?
all I wanted was some light
but then you know it always starts with a spark
and someone meanin well more or less than
anyone else.

ain't no big divide between the burners
and the burnin, baby,
just a stroke of hot luck
and a few little flames.

BRANDON MISE

Whitey's
restaurant,
corner of
Market and
Kerr, cars
cooking in the
parking lot.

Yours cracked half open. I mean the soda can.
I mean the mountain dew, girl. I mean the roll
down window. I mean the car door, so the wind
blows in sideways. I mean your bony knees, bare
feet on the dashboard. I mean your toes, full of
sand. I mean the peach polish, flaking off, and
the space between them toes, girl, spreaden wide.
I mean that bag of boiled peanuts between your
legs, the shells you spent, your blouse, to the
clavicle, your mouth, for mountain dew. I mean
the split skin of your lips, sun chapped. I mean
the vinyl of the car seat, flowers of yellow foam.
I mean the strawberry on your elbow, I mean the
tweeters in the car door, I mean the cellophane
on your cigarettes, its thin red strip peeling away.
I mean the ashtray, you gotta choose between
pocket change and your ashes, girl. I mean the car
hood, the radiator hose, toss me that duct tape. I
mean you're uncurling girl, with your plantars in
the dash and your spine smooth against the cup
of the seat and the dark oval the sweat off your
back leaves and how seat and dash groan in your



The economy as a descriptor
of people's suffering.



JESSE NISSIM

from Spring Break Series

It was a war movement; it was the movement of a child's eyelid.

There was a profane shelter, swelter, water bridge. There was no way to cross over. We were adjacent soldiers on a playground, we were done up like lions, dressed to the nines, we were hung for our vast theories. The audience under attack did not faithfully applaud. Betrayal was reddening, maddening our movements. We gathered at the crease between hills. Adjacent hills and hill-like movements. Eyelid adhesions and no teeth to chew. The edge of dough was hard. Days, weeks later the mice were baby furballs, "They didn't bother me," she reported. We made her place her heart on the book of laws, the lions lined up to be hosed. "That part on the dog that makes her a girl, really looks like a girl," she said. Adjacent wars. Dogs generally bred for fighting in concrete lots, in rings, in Sesshu Foster's city terrace, here, where young boys already cease being young, may they find rebar shelter in a playground ditch, may the young hero chew his own teeth and recommence the profanities of war, of lions, of the movements of tanned hides stretched taut and beaten like vulnerable calloused children.

BRANDON MISE

The Nerve of Jimmy.

I did it, Jimmy says, like this. He extended his arm to the floor with his fingers curled into a pistol. Pop. Pop. The soldier in the dirt we were to imagine was already mortally wounded, on his belly stretching his arm for a rifle kicked long beyond his reach. Then Jimmy drew his pistol. *Like this.*

The nerve of Jimmy, reenacting it all week long. As if no one believed him.

We've graduated to bayonets in this region. So when we pluck the life from them you can hear the gurgle in their throat. Jimmy says the soldier was wearing a white shirt, dry-cleaned and freshly starched. Pop. Pop.

The key is to keep your demons guessing which pit you crawled from. The key is to keep reenacting the reenactment. Then watch others reenact your reenactment of the reenactment. Consequence thus shucked from the learning curve. The safest practice practice for murder murder for when its your time your time to pull. Pull. Pull.

Thank you, Mr. Bush, for my new arms.

Death bubbles. On the face of safe drinking water. On the drooly lips of happy child. Death

bubbles. I said it. Look, boys, when I breathe, smoke comes out of my mouth. I believe what you said about the clean white shirt, Jimmy.

Vanity makes sense. Comfort of the interior makes sense. I've grandfathered this young woman into new siblingisms. She makes better sense to me now. Brittle wings plucked from a rat. That makes sense.

Clambering out of our pits up the vine to the top of this diagram of our do-gooding. A sun shaped hole in the head of that house. Clambering under a bathroom stall to interrogate the body belonging to those polished shoes, which might as well be suspicious at this point, and to your shock your suspicion has become self-fulfilled, the shoes belong to a private detective hired by your wife, who, as it turns out, was hired by your mother, who worries for you, and your mother, bless her soul, is on the payroll of two men whose interests in you are real but rest only in the short term and the abstract, one posing as her father (your grandfather) and the other a man who is arguably your daddy, (certainly he has a face that belongs in your wallet), and those men belong to other men, etc. The list complicates, but never beyond what you knew in your heart to be true. There are no pictures of the president in your wallet, however, because the president has been long without face, though his mouth and the magnetic stripe on your credit card have striking resemblances.

JESSE NISSIM

from Spring Break Series

Extinguished railroads erase his emigration. Tracing back, a moving view diminishes the map's scope. He hopes for more than gaping absences dressed like wounds. Kickstart the pillow bike. She turns in her sleep against the sirens suggest bombing in her dream, a puréed digestion of all eaten phrases in newsprint. The absence of safety begins to pool around us. Absence suggests diminished presence, extinguished light. Dim map, rickety brakes, uphill sunset ivy reaches between stones on certain walls in old cities. Head on pillow dreaming innermost anticipated—where will we go next without him on the map? My father sings the opening lines to happy birthday on my voicemail. If I don't save the message will he be any less safe in the world? Diminished house rafters hang cobwebbed around his shoulders. Hospital corridors used to (may still) have bright plastic arrows pointing the way. ICU Green, Oncology Blue, Emergency Red. The nursery always bloomed out of a glass-fronted hallway squeamish delight of newest life. Smallest bundle tags us local. We hold small signposts, the landscape oohs and ahhs at us, eyes of wonder we stare at the loss. Absence of taught knowledge, absence of motor skills, absence of verbal language—what frightening form unformed wordless sound can make. And

the movements of unlearned bodies all born with sense toward floor, wall, warmth. Finally the discovery of self, mom, I have a body. Entire atlas of weather reports. The almanac dreams its dreamy landscapes and yes, tears do fall. On all kinds of gardens. What we spray kills off undersides, the entire workforce of food prep goes on under the boardwalk, they warned me. Chopping tomatoes just like for Taco Bell.

SARAH COHEN

Name That Tune

we get happy and we have nothing to say. but we talk a little this afternoon, mentioning how much better it is since we moved the couch opposite the windows, it makes you notice the actual state of the couch less. and we think about moving, maybe next year, to somewhere where it is cheaper and people walking to their cars at lunch have more time to talk and we get happy and remind ourselves to email our friends in other states to keep up the contacts, but of the friends in other states, some are out of work and some have babies by surprise and some are working and working at better and better jobs and crying in their sleep and we get happy since we know we hate our jobs, and even though our friend reggie said all white people whistle on their way to work and all black people sigh, we know he's wrong cause we hate going and we don't know what our jobs are for but we get happy, cause we don't know what any of it's for. we're invited to a roller derby party this weekend and though we can't go it feels good to think about people having a good time though most of the time we feel like how that guy said a poem makes you feel, like the top of your head has been taken clean off, we feel that way when we think of how happy we'd been all of that time, playing somebody else's song

worth it to her. The Jews in Baltimore are mostly Zionists. When you go to services there are always prayers added for Israel and I won't say them, just like I won't say our father our king and I wonder if it's really better to just say it in Hebrew because it's the translation that's offensive and not the original prayer, one in which we are actually taking responsibility. Especially for the sins we have committed against each (you) other without knowing it. Especially for those, and all the other ones we knew about, I say this prayer.

ROBIN CUNNINGHAM

Repeat Flying Civil Revisited Liberties

Lean forward into the wind, over the water
No regard for time of day, work to be done
height requirement, proximity to riparian corridor
Feel the updraft, unexpected, warm and definite
rise up tethered only by the sights and sounds
below, but mostly
Alone up there, leading with a shoulder, minor
twist of knee to shift direction
soaring
streaming, in the current, like just another molecule,
belonging

Sensing the change, the return to ideas held in
captivity, the requirement of silence
In the darkness your escape is definite, the
lightness, the freedom of flight unexpected
ripples form on the water, *a cue*, pay attention to
possibility as you ride the current
Alone but able to witness what has become of it
all, to note the tides gone flat, harnessed
Unnatural, legislated, mandated into another era
But there is the wind, over the water, informing
the moment
Don't waste a second of possibility, lean forward
into the updraft, direct your body into the
streaming molecular belonging
Conscious subconscious dreaming waking flight
synthesis definite freedom is an unexpected
requirement, lean into it, keep it alive

BRANDON MISE

April '92

Walking quick time down the grass divider like we broke down or something. Occasional headlights. Occasional taillights. Breathing heavy. An empty bottle of Sundrop I picked up off the shoulder in my hand, like I'm leaving nowhere special. Three miles back through some high grass and a ten foot fence and an acre of woods and every last backyard with a doberman or rottie chained to a pine tree and across the street to the Camry in the ditch where red and blue lights light up the windows on Ilex drive and a K9 unit sniffing up the Camry rips apart the floorboard. Quida and her momma watching from their front door.

We should have kilt that bitch when the opportunity presented itself. Should have buried her with the shovel you beat her with.

You know I seen my dad run like this. Police got up on his ass cuz his tire touched the yellow line and chased him all the way into the neighborhood and took that fast corner around the lake and slammed his shit into Will's mailbox. But kept running. Through Will's backyard and up through Brown's yard and through most of the woods to our place and I'm six years old sitting on the back step with a popsicle stick, look up and see him tearing through the trees towards me

with the five-oh on his heels, hurdle the ditch and get tackled just a few yards from the swingset. Cop cold clubbed him in the neck and head with the handle of his maglight before he cuffed him.

Yeah, man. I know it. Law make track stars of all of us.

KAREN MACKLIN

In the Sleep of the Night

In the sleep of the night I

**wasted days of walking, talking,
a person forgotten
a memory extinct**

found nothing but ashes

**a waterlogged journal
small, hungry fingers
a little girl, lost**

and the perfume of burning

**spare keys on spare keychain
torn silk scarf
a gift ungiven**

a trail to your face

**swimming in the smoke
a book inscribed**
remember me

LAURA WALKER

American Visible

There is a small girl just outside the frame; inside the frame someone holds her blanket, pink, not even stained though her mother lies in cuts along the grass. The small girl who is not in the frame makes no sound: her mother in cuts along the grass. The pink blanket blooms and beside it a hole opens into the earth, the soldier carrying the blanket must now be careful, must avoid that gaping mouth, black tongue and teeth, holds the blanket almost like a talisman, a stone, a rabbit's foot from his native Georgian soil kept all those years on the bookcase by his bed. Boyhood bed, and his blankets blue. Her mother in cuts along the grass. And the girl who has not, will not enter the frame has not, will not recognize this: her blanket, the soldier, his unlucky memories of a lucky rabbit's foot, the way he tore paper to shreds the night before he left, gaping holes in the bar, in the stool, in the floor now here and there. He cannot move. The girl will not enter. Her mother spills over, her body planted here and there; no holes open beneath her, nothing gapes above. The soldier holds the blanket, her daughter does not enter, the frame wavers and then is still. Solid. The holes are solid. And her daughter's blanket, blooming, held by a soldier, blooming, and her daughter just outside the frame.

MAUREEN HURLEY

Rescue Job

Enduring sheets of rain, three swamped shrews shiver violently beneath an oak leaf tent. Drifting garter snakes flirt with the yellow and red stripes on my rainboots while scorpions practice their crab-like nature in deeper water. To build an arc in the present tense, the boy and I rescue scores of half-drowned ungrateful enemies who each stay in their corner of the truck bed. Luckily, they haven't heard the fable of the scorpion and the fox. Levi-Strauss believed in the double aspect of the thing and its place: to make the invisible visible. However, all gods have their limits. Even the rain gods.

Is that why the truck bogs down in the mud? Even the birds are too wet to fly. The tide rises to bathe a full moon, dressed in thin clouds. Meanwhile, a Blackhawk rescue 'copter whips up laden skies, tests the pulse of air mattresses, windows, eardrums, the heart adrift. He said the river will crest at midnight. The true poem emerges from a place of ultimate suffering, beginning and ending in water. Only to go with the wrong wind at dawn and light breaking its egg over the world.

But we wade in too deep, and the greedy river, sprung from its banks, fills our boots. Shrews prefer a solitary existence, and the snakes are real opportunists. And when the scorpion gets to the other side

of the river, he always stings the fox. That's why the end of the affair begins with stinging words because it's the nature of the beast. Only we can't see the opposite shore because everything is river, river river. Swept up by the coriolis effect, we're swirling on a raft crowded with a flotsam of strange words.

FARNOOSH SEIFODDINI

1979

My sisters tease me with a paper doll Jimmy Carter.
Amrika-i birun shob! Khunet ruyeh zamineh!

I hear my uncle in the living room
Shah is out! The Ayatollah's face reflects in the moon!

My sisters try to make me flush Jimmy down the toilet.
Marg bar Amrika! Marg bar Amrika!

I hear my mother's footsteps in the hall.
I'm not sure why I wish I wasn't born in Amrika.
Azyatesh nakonin! Geryeh nakon aziz. Geryeh nakon.

GARY KONG

For the Cashier at Long's Drugs, El Camino Real, San Mateo

The cashier is all smiles and chatting with the white woman ahead of us. They're talking like sisters about the inconvenient way the parking lot is designed. "I came up that ramp, and I tell you, I didn't know which way to turn." "I know, I had the same reaction my first day here." "In't that something?" "It sure is. You have a nice day, now." And when it's Mom's turn, cashier lady gets all business, and runs the plant food and dish gloves over the scanner, without once looking up from her keypad.

"How much is it?" mom asks, digging into her coin purse. The cashier points at the LED panel and even turns it so mom can see better, and I read, "Five eighty-three." And while mom counts out exact change, I look hard at the cashier. She's young and chunky, and obviously owns a curling wand. Probably has a military husband and a house full of brats, plugged full of sticky candy, pop and fries—the kind that smell of the fat fryer. She drinks two-liter Diet Cokes and drives a Chevy two-ton. I know I'll never see her face again, so I glare at it. She's annoyed that Mom's taking so long. Polished nail at the end of braced

arm: *tapping, tapping, tapping*. In my better life I tell her, “My mother only counts her money when she’s dealing with people she doesn’t trust.” But in my worse life, this one, I narrow my eyes at this piece of trash, who’s lucky enough to find employers more dim-witted than she. “Bye now,” I drawl as snottily as I can, and as we leave, I watch mom.

She shudders, as if out of habit, squinches her nose. I look at the cashier, who’s back to her usual chatty self. Later, I ask mom, “Is there something between you and that cashier?” Mom says no, that’s the way they always treat her. *Everywhere*.

Short and old (76) and plain and quiet. And Japanese. I want to go back to that cashier and pass the facts of my mother’s life over her scanner. Born 1926, on a farm in Fresno. Outcast in her own country before the war. *Jap*. Family fled to Japan to protect ancestral family farm, leaving draft-aged brother to fend for himself (father didn’t want him fighting for the Imperial Army). Outcast in her mother country during the war. *American spy*. (And you should see her in that old family photo, standing off to the side with her round eyes, sullen as anything Salinger could dream up.) *Outcast, outcast, outcast*. Bone shard blasted into brother’s skull (yes, he served for America in Italy, fresh from the internment camp; yes, he lived 47 years longer, a vegetable in a VA hospital, yes, the bone shard came from his best friend who stepped on a land mine, no, the

military refused my mother’s family his military back wages after he died because my mother was told not to sign a sheet of paper that would prove kinship). A year after the bomb was dropped just across Nagasaki Bay (family saw sky flash, thought *end-of-war celebration*), she was sent to retrieve him from a Montana military hospital but found he couldn’t be moved. Wire from family: stay put, get married (arranged marriage to Takahashi, of the import/export dynasty), get job, send money. Instead, gets raped by white cab driver on the way to housecleaning gig (swear to secrecy, *this is a family secret*.) During pregnancy, disowned. (What do I mean *disowned*? How’s this: *I don’t know the names of my grandparents*.) When she begins showing, loses the hand of her betrothed. Loses *face*. Meets my father, a Chinese, Takahashi’s roommate. Taxi man’s son born, Dennis (?) As Dennis (?) grows, fair hair never darkens—this is the late 1940s, mind you. Gives him away to white family. She and my father wed, have seven more children until the last one, the eighth, a boy, pulls out her uterus with him and Stanford Hospital hands my father *Sophie’s Choice*: your wife or your baby. My oldest brother tells me it was the first and last time he saw our father cry. He’d lost his first wife during childbirth, gained a son, but lost a wife (just one of several floating around out there). So you see the irony, but I digress, and I haven’t even gotten to the cruelties she and my father and my brothers and sisters (and I), and anyone unfortunate enough to fall within our sphere of

influence, inflicted upon one another. And for what? *For what?* Turn your LED panel, dear, so I can see.

Mom tells a story about a train ride she took from Nagasaki to Kumamoto, where her family terrace-farmed rice. She was a teenager at the time and worked as a translator for the American military in post-war Japan. All the cars were packed, so she made her way through the train, looking for a seat. As she was about to open the door of one car, a man grabbed her arm and pointed through the window. The car was completely empty, except for a lone survivor of the plutonium bomb. He swayed in his seat, flesh boiled to bone. She turned away, but too late—the image singed into her memory. (What *thing* kept him alive?) *There but for the grace of God go I. There but for the grace of God go I.* Mom doesn't know this phrase, except from TV, and I doubt she understands it, but I am saying it for her.

I am saying *everything* for her.

FARNOOSH SEIFODDINI

Sing

*You don't understand poetry
poetry understands you*

In the lunch room, Mahmood points
at an article posted on the corkboard
next to Chef Jamie's Smart Recipes
members of Iranian soccer team
caught in scandal
underground prostitution ring uncovered
100 lashes per encounter
he tears it down, crumples it
they will think we're barbarians

I sit
voice in a cup
staring at Chef Jamie's picture
there is no breath
what about the women

whores stones death

The space between
if only this had the larynx of a bird.

GARY KONG

Take Off

Ann begins a story. The premise:
Brother and sister flounder through life, against
Torrid backdrop of Imperial Valley.

Father, meanwhile, contrives
Hot air balloon, which he binds
To the aluminum arms of his beloved lawn chair.

One day, he takes off.

What happens to him? I ask. *What happens to him?*

Lean close and whisper:

“The accumulation of large quantities of *cathexis*
in neurons is a direct source of painful
sensations (‘unpleasure’), and ‘pleasure’ consists
neurologically in a low level of *cathexis*.”

From what does the saying *Waiting for the other shoe to drop* originate? Footfall? As in sneaking up on someone, first one foot, then the other? Tenement living? 1AM, trying to sleep, the man upstairs takes off his shoe and drops it soundly, resonantly, and then?

Clunk

Countdown.

Get ready.

On your marks.

We are preparing.

Waiting.

Someone's next.

And then?

Suddenly,

Cont'd

Teacups rattled on their saucers. Bookshelves groaned, leaning, vomiting libraries. The armchairs shuddered, shaking decades of asses to the floor. A table lamp heaved its shade and—

MARY DENARDO

In Sum

Oh I am not there yet, in sum. Today I watched a man with his pants unzipped, three Buddhist monks in training and a woman struggling with the gold clasp of her purse. I heard S say her sister may be sicker, saw T's new poison oak on the top of her foot and D said yes, buy me the Italian stallion t-shirt. The sun began in the left window and circled me and the Eiffel tower snow dome. One man collided with a car on 26th st. and rolled off the windshield and onto his feet like he ran into it on purpose. I rode my bike away when the lady yelled 911 911 into her flip open phone while chasing after him and his split eye. I watered my brown grasses.

TEAGUE SÖDERMAN

More Evolutions

God bless America? In a world obsessed with nouns, let us not forget that God is a verb, as "to love." United we stand, divided we continue to hurt, kill, maim.

Witness as a noun? Witnessing is unique to the witness, emphasizing the individual, giving *particular* voice. An audience of at least one. I am a witness, as, I am a lens, as if, I am therefore I witness. The eye is a thing, a part of witness. Nouns and verbs work together. Though seeing is an act, it is not witnessing.

Do you swear to tell? Something must be done with what has been seen. Some action must be taken: a witness witnesses. Give me your statement, for the record. Go back to the shouts, the streets, you must completely plagiarize the scene, tell it exactly as it was. We must speak then, to witness, if telling must be spoken.

Is this him? Even a picture faces the question. We must answer: yes or no. Speech is a mouth, implicating the "other." The transformation, a bringing to light, is communication. It is the power of nouns and verbs to make chains out of black letters.

How is the vocabulary of war spread, or, what is behind a sales pitch? The strike was necessitated by a need for humanitarian aid. A protest. You, me, we stop the war. Let them get together and just be upset. You, me, we don't stop anything. The importance of questioning to witness. Is peace a natural state of being?

Some knowledge is contrary to experience.

S. GIANCARLO CAMPAGNA

January 19,
2003

I.

I was up all night reading *Ceremony*. I was going to finish it. I smoked at intervals, all night. Dark sky when the moon left. Stars again. Still not enough light. But the smoke and the chill. I was afraid that first time. I snuck close to the adobe wall I could feel it. The warmth inside. Could not see into the trees, that I've known from the sunlight. Un-fathomed in the black air. Tensed the blackness. Relaxed the grip. The cigarette burned in the coolness. The second time I spoke to them. Cold shapes hovering. A crescent. Maybe 5 or 6. All male I could feel their angry sadness distorted unpredictable impulse. Fear. Then from a cry I spoke to them calmly, though I trembled a little, holding the cigarette. Its warmth providing. Yes, I know it. Might you harm me? I do not remember the conversation but mostly the silence. I offered my cigarette to them. To the cold air thick with the stars' light. It burned as it did before. No glow brightening s'Id know. Wind, instead. My breathing. I felt the chill of the hover. An insatiable silence. A wary of the shadows. I offered the cigarette a second time. No increased glow. I am here with a hand inclined to my chest. I am still alive. A slackening. Then, from me, "Spirits, if they want, they could, they could take me then." An echo in the juniper, though I did not speak aloud. The smoke against

the stars. What could I do against such a force?
In my halt, I listened for those who might speak.
Not hearing anything I spoke boldly about being
lost, though I knew where I stood just then. Cool
dry dust. Small branches tucked to the wall to
be used for the fire. New memories of a book's
passages. Echoing landscapes that would shape
as the light from the expectant sun flossed the
contours of the red earth. I knew where I stood.
Looking back, I did not speak again. I can see
how afraid I am of us.

II.

and where worshipped awe/conspiring krill
feeding/eyes blustered hard skin watered depths
in the dark

must we linger/in grass/memory tilts/we stare from?

felt but was not listening to the skin tremors/to the lean

feed, feeding us
ardor and the stream of a song rising/a song
inspires/*insieme*
inseamed our breathing

what we find/in smallness/or in grandeur/shorter
steps bent at the knee/and in walking
tumbles down
tumbling upon us

GARY KONG

My America

He has treaded and kept his head above
The waters swallowing me
And rose above the waves and walked
To the shore where others gather

But I don't know the solid life
Just this fluid bell
And the sloping bottom
That seduces me

So I reach my soles as far as
Faith allows and find
My home where pressure holds me in
My America.

KAREN MACKLIN

Home

I look outside my front window
to the upper part of Market Street—
it is a window I know well
enough to remember forever
the houses stacked
slanted up the hill behind it
and upon the hill behind that
there is a sun setting
over the radio tower, red and white today
though some days ensconced in cloud
it is lit up against the soft blue sky
slowly fading black
as the sun sinks, I put on a sweater
as the temperature drops
from tanks to fleece.

The houses outside pink and white and green
and turquoise-rimmed with detailed lavender
scents of Jack cooking
tomato sauce in the kitchen of
our house, grey and happy in its greyness
slanted on its sloped sloppiness,
but balanced and standing perfectly
still.

Upon the mountains, there are trees in the distance
a bicyclist cruises down the paved dusky street
and my neighbor stands outside phone-talking

while I read poetry in my living
room filled with bamboo stalks,
Craig's discordant photographs,
determined rays of fading sun,
and other more senseless objects,
one-day artifacts left here and there:
the styrofoam snow queen from our solstice fiesta,
the broken dustbuster
the lone empty beer bottle
the reflection in the window
of our one-way sign
pointing back here,
home.

These are the things
I will want
to remember.

In this place,
I have learned both
detachment and attachment:
for to be happy is
to be
detached
from the world,
but attached to your happiness.

There is the gentle hum of Craig's computer,
Jack's answering machine,
intermittent beeps of the microwave
a sad Eliot Smith waltz
somewhere
and as the night presents

I hear the sound of heaven
and it is stillness.

And I will one day leave here.

Later, in the dark, we are
meditating, candlegazing;
we've lost power
the streets are dark
and there is nothing to do
but wait, patiently,
for the lights to come back on.

A moment of memory:
its making, its breaking.

A moment of safety,
of pleasant go nowhere,
of forgetting
the neverminds
the whatevers
the too lates and doesn't matters.

Of forgetting regretting.

And I file this Haven
next to my Hopelessness,
all the while knowing
it is gone once I file it
though it may find me,
like a memory does:
not when I am looking for it,
but when it is ready to be found;

not when I want it,
but when it needs it;
not when there is a when,
but when there is a why,
or when there is a need for a why.

And so I devour it,
this moment,
unwillingly eating
the path back to it,
not leaving a trace
or a trail behind.

And no one will know
that I was ever here;
and no one will know
that here ever was.

Blue Barnhouse Books

My America

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There's quite a bit of space from here to the bottom of the page so I might as well tell you about the time my buddies and I dropped 3 hits of white blotter acid apiece and took a 3AM excursion to the beach. The sheriff who pulled us over was none too pleased with our obnoxious shrieking as we passed his vehicle, which was parked deep in shadow. He had taken it personally, but on my mother when I screamed fucking pigs it was for the guys in the front seat, and I said it in love. Our pupils were the size of silver dollars. They squeezed down to needles when he aimed the beam of his flashlight at our terrified heads. We admitted to having a few drinks before taking to the road, though in truth we had partaken of none. M—, the driver, was asked to perform a battery of sobriety tests: Walk the line. Say the ABC's backwards. Fingers to the nose w/ the eyes closed. Lift one foot. Now lift the other one, boy, so that you're levitating with your shins parallel to the road. M— was passing w/ flying colors, but he kept these throes of ecstasy to himself.

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