



# ***MEDIA WRITING***

2014





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2014

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Produced in course CD8340-Media Writing, Winter Term, 2014  
Ryerson University, MFA Documentary Media



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## IDENTITY | PERSONAL STATEMENT

What I want to say here is that literature can only be the voice of the individual and this has always been so. Once literature is contrived as the hymn of the nation, the flag of the race, the mouthpiece of a political party or the voice of a class or group, it... loses what is inherent in literature, ceases to be literature, and becomes a substitute for power and profit.

In order that literature safeguard the reason for its own existence and not become the tool of politics it must return to the voice of the individual...

## TIME | CRITICAL REVIEW

Literature transcends ideology, national boundaries and racial consciousness in the same way as the individual's existence basically transcends this or that -ism... Literature is a universal observation of the dilemmas of human existence and nothing is taboo. Restrictions on literature are always externally imposed...

However, literature is neither an embellishment for authority or a socially fashionable item, it has its own criterion of merit: its aesthetic quality.

## PLACE | EXTENDED NARRATIVE

What is important is to live in the present, to stop being hoodwinked, to cast off delusions, to look clearly at this moment and at the same time to scrutinize the self...

To subvert is not the aim of literature, its value lies in discovering and revealing what is rarely known, little known, thought to be known but in fact not very well known of the truth of the human world. It would seem that truth is the unassailable and most basic quality of literature.

The writer writes what he wants without concern for recompense not only to affirm his self but to challenge society. This challenge is not pretence... It is only when the feelings of the writer as an individual are dispersed in the work that his feelings will withstand the ravages of time...

-From Gao Xingjian, *The Case for Literature / Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech*, 2000

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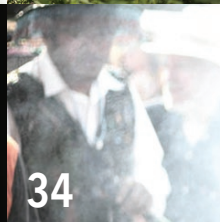
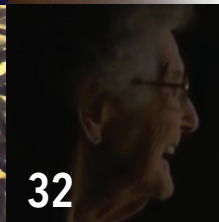
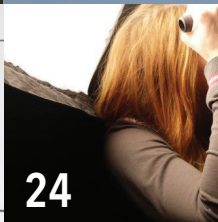
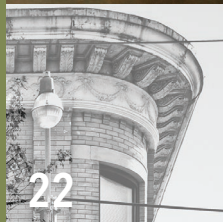
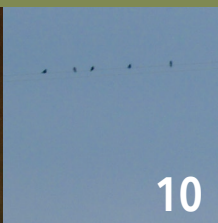
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# THE SPACE IN BETWEEN

Miya Akiyama

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Art. It is so deeply woven into my sense of self that it is difficult to define and extract its presence. It has played a part in so much of my life that it has become knitted into the very threads of my being. Being raised by a painter and an actor, my surroundings have fostered



an appetite for the arts and instilled the belief that this passion can be a way of life. I have been taught to value creation and expression, and to seize the moments when these values can be relished. I have always had some form of artistic outlet within reach, whether visual or performance-based, helping to satisfy a need within.

At first it was the violin. I was taken immediately. My talent for music landed me in a school for the arts, which in turn strengthened my interest in dance, drama and the visual arts. This environment of arts and academics afforded me opportunities to travel and perform, have my works shown in galleries, and collaborate with notable artists. While inspiring and motivating, this exposure in my adolescence was also deceptive, for I felt this level of artistic intensity was the norm.

Upon graduating, I ventured into a world of academics and abandoned the arts. Never having experienced a world without art, it would take me a number of years before I was able to identify the void. These years were spent engrossed in issues of social justice, equity and an interest in culture and cultural difference. My newfound passions led me to major in equity studies, travel widely, and work for a number of non-for-profit organizations. Through all of this, I began to take notice of the way worlds collided and



created “spaces in-between.” The byproducts of diversity and difference, these are also the sites of harmony and balance. Like gaps in the sidewalk, it is the disconnections that create little worlds in and of themselves. These suspended spaces resonate with me. Being of mixed background, I occupy more than one space, and it is from this perspective that I create and explore. My fascination with the stories that exist in these spaces is what has propelled me back into the arts, and into this next chapter of my life.

Entering the Documentary Media program, I wished to rekindle my love of the arts and enhance my abilities to express my findings through film and new media. In this program, I am working towards using the power of imagery as a device to address issues of social inequity. The accessible nature of film and digital

Opposite *Morning in Luang Prabang* (Photo: Nadeem Chopra, 2012);  
Above *In the Window* (Photo: Miya Akiyama, 2012).

media pairs well with my studies. At the same time, its malleability makes it the ideal medium to express individualized beliefs and concerns. I am intrigued by film’s connection to realism, and the dissonance between the realities of film and our lived experiences.

The individual interpretation inherent in art provides the perfect ground to sow seeds that will grow things that are fresh and new. It is this assurance of difference that I am drawn to. The ability to see things anew is a great gift, and one that I hope to be able to offer. I am driven to find what is just and aspire to make work that will incite change. It is the transformative powers of art that I wish to harness.



# WHEN WE PRACTICE LISTENING

Kathryn Atkinson

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The quote I would like to use to define my artistic vision is one I found on a bag of Yogi Tea: “When we practice listening, we become intuitive.” It perfectly captures what documentary artists should aspire to, the beautiful and undervalued art of listening. When we truly listen, we are able to better understand the stories others are trying to tell and thus represent them as authentically as possible. In the pursuit of true storytelling, I have four goals to guide my documentary practice: create understanding, produce accessible media, share the human experience and contribute to concrete social change.

The artistic vision I have for my work stems from my background in anthropology and ethnography. Four years of studying anthropology taught me how powerful and transformative storytelling can be. To tell a truthful story, it is critical to incite discussion. A film that has the ability to cause debates or encourage conversation can lead to a better understanding of a person, topic or situation.

One of the greatest advances in documentary has been the increasing accessibility of the form. The Internet has allowed documentary to flourish and made content available to a large group of people who previously may not have participated in viewing. Not only is the physical accessibility of documentary critical, the

form itself is much more reachable to a wider audience than academic and other forms of expression.

I aim to share the human experience. I believe that when we realize there are more similarities than differences between us, we are on a path towards working for one another instead of against. Films can bring people together and break down walls of difference; they allow for people to feel connected as opposed to isolated.

What I wish to accomplish most with my art is concrete social change: to challenge society and put forward action for social justice. As an activist-minded person with great hopes of creating change, I believe that documentary can do just that.

The current project I am working on is a documentary film about alternative ways to live in a dissatisfying, disempowering society of rampant capitalism/consumerism. Critiquing society and introducing other ways to live has the potential to empower people. The participants I am interviewing all come from a place of discontent with mainstream culture and seek lifestyles that are sustainable. I aim to create a film that critiques our current system and offers ways of living outside it.

The documentary films I aspire to produce in my lifetime are ones that embody true listening, that have meaning and purpose, and can cause change. I intend to



further develop my ability to listen, and through this, I hope to bring truthfulness to my films. Intuition is defined as our ability to understand something instantly and I believe that intuition is what makes good documentary.

Los Isletas, Lake Nicaragua (Photo: Kathryn Atkinson, 2012).

# CURIOSITY AND EMPATHY

Gesilayefa Azorbo

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I am fascinated by the fact that most people consider their lives mundane, but that spending any amount of time in conversation with someone—anyone at all—always reveals a rich inner life and a complex personal journey. My aim is to explore these day-to-day realities of other people's lives, through a variety of topical filters, in order to peel back the layers of experience that every individual has to offer the world. I use my work to step out of my own lived experiences and perceive the world through other people's perspectives. My goal is to be able to effectively share these alternate viewpoints with diverse audiences via whichever medium seems right for any given project, in order to provoke a response, be it curiosity or empathy, or any other number of reactions personal to the individual viewer.

When I talk about my work, I am referring to a multidisciplinary approach to creative output. I identify myself as a writer and an image-maker, with the latter term encompassing my background as a photographer, as well as my current study of film-making. It took me a long time to define myself as an "artist," only coming to terms with including that as part of my identity within the last year, when I began to submit fine art photography pieces to exhibitions.

I tend to be quite image-driven in my writing, both in the turns of phrase I use and in my sources of inspiration. This is a trait that lends itself well to my other creative outlets of photography and more recently, film/video. With all of my creative work, I like to look for the details in the bigger picture. This often comes down to focusing on the elements that make up the core of the story. For instance, a steady camera shot of the framed metalwork in a biology professor's office that indicates his underlying passion for blacksmithing; a written description of the rapid hand movements, while speaking, of a person more accustomed to speaking in sign language than verbally; a sunlit snapshot of a pile of old photographs that are the sole remaining link to a mother's homeland, left years before.

Unlike many visual artists, I tend not to work in sets of images, pre-planned around a theme. Whether or not that becomes a style I use later on is still an open option, but so far, much of what I have done has revolved around shooting candid moments that come to hold deeper meaning for me. Often, I will go out into the world and walk around, taking several photographs as I wander, and it's usually only when I come back and sift through hundreds of digital images



Above *Shadow and Smoke*, A fine art photography piece included in a black and white-themed art show in Kensington Market (Photo: Gesilayefa Azorbo, 2013) Below *Shine a Light* (Photo: Gesilayefa Azorbo, 2013).



that I find the ones that are most compelling to me.

With my photography, I like to frame in a way that draws attention to specific elements—a casually elegant hand holding a cigarette; a distinct, brooding face in a crowd—and with my writing, I try to look for the precise words that will encapsulate and reinforce the story I am trying to tell about the person or situation I am observing. I am noticing, with my first attempts at filmmaking, that this mindset is coming through as well, where I linger on static shots that emphasize the smaller details of a scene.

I also find that I don't want my voice to be heard

when I am shooting. I want the audience to be completely captivated by the subject of my piece. In my video projects so far, I have tried to shoot and edit in ways that allow the viewer to interact solely with the subjects on screen, without the interruption of the filmmaker's audible voice or physical presence. I feel like the reason I am compelled to create in this way is because of a desire to put the viewer in the position of sitting across from the subject, almost engaging in a discussion across time and space, without the mediation of myself as a third wheel.

When it comes to method, I am still learning. I am taking everything that I have absorbed consciously or unconsciously as a lifelong media consumer, and I am merging it with the critical discourse I am engaged in as an academic. I am finding my way towards a method and a voice that is true to myself, whatever form that may end up taking.

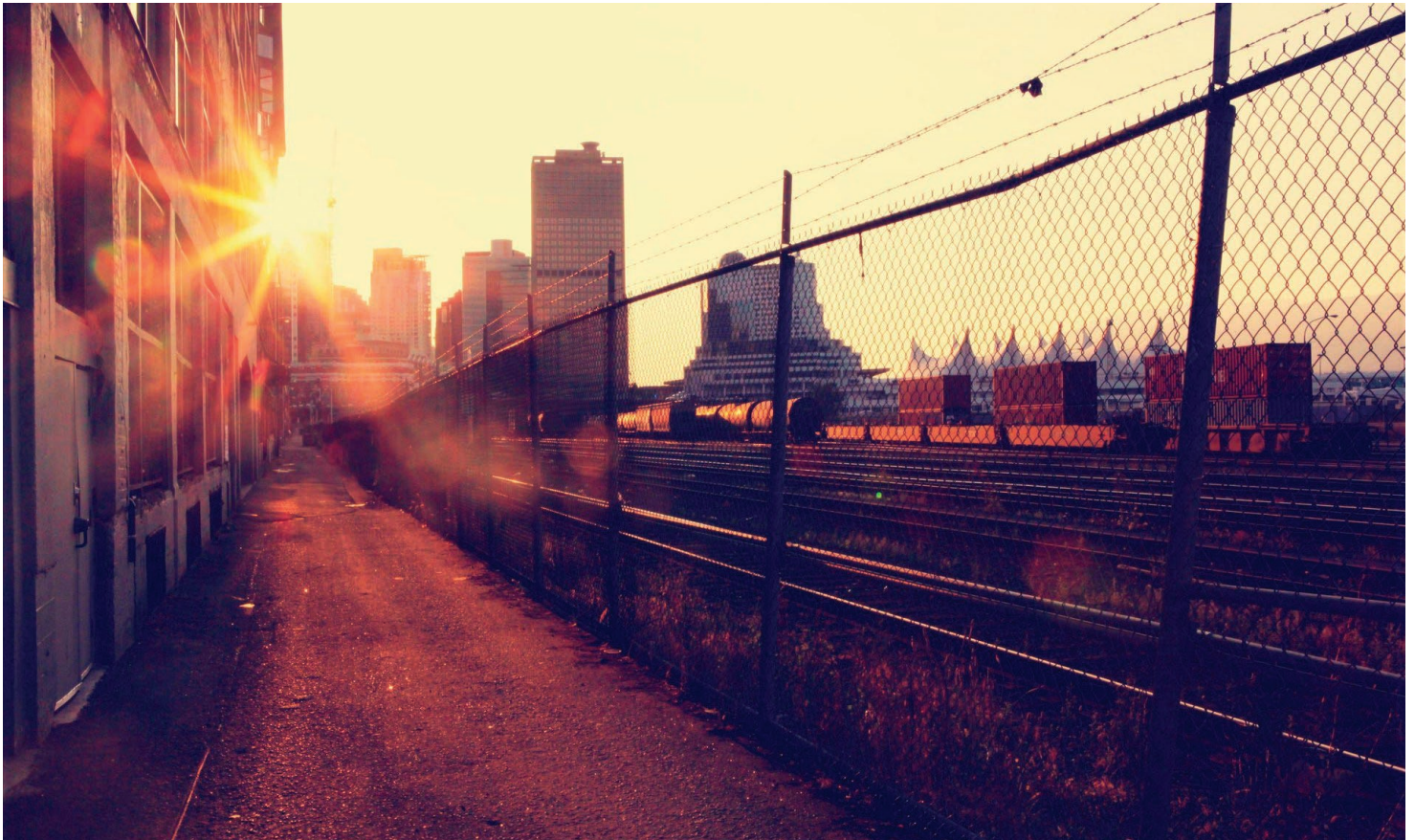
Ultimately, what I'd like people to take away from my work is a sense of having inhabited another person's experience. I'd like to promote a shared understanding between people, based on the fact that most of us tend to see each other on a very superficial level, until we're made privy to each other's secrets, past influences and desires. Through my work, using various modes of expression, I want to bring the audience an increased awareness of how other people live, and hopefully through this, create an atmosphere of greater empathy for, and acceptance of, the myriad differences present in all of us.



# *ALLEYWAY AMBLINGS*

Vivian Belik

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There is a network of alleyways in my hometown of Winnipeg that is littered with broken bottles, spray-painted fences and discarded mattresses. Like an archeologist, I travel these corridors sifting through the forgotten pieces from people's lives. There is much that can be learned from what we overlook and throw away.

I am drawn to these juxtapositions, between beauty and order and what is considered ugly and undesirable. In my work, I strive to put myself in uncomfortable situations in order to learn what is unfamiliar.

Communities are fascinating places because they are a culmination of diverse groups and ideas and a macrocosm of the best and worst qualities we find in humans. In cities, we find well-manicured neighborhoods adjacent to ones that are crumbling and ghettoized. As an artist, I am constantly questioning how it is that we create and justify these separations. The desire to unravel the layers of inequality in society is what initially pushed me towards journalism and now to documentary film. The approach I often take with my work is multifaceted; I aim to produce creative pieces that are also political and thought-provoking in nature. I aspire to do this by blending historical and present-day images to create a more thorough and textured account of whatever event or topic I'm working on.

I have long been focused on the intricacies within urban areas but these divisions also exist between

urban and rural zones. Having recently lived in the Yukon for several years, I have experienced what it is like to live in an isolated location. There is an idea that beyond the borders of a city, life ceases to exist. Rural communities in Canada are like the back alleyways of our nation. They are the segments of society that we have disposed of and forgotten about, and yet they are crucial to keeping our country alive.

My present interest in exploring the rural community of Dauphin, Manitoba through the medium of documentary film is fuelled by this motivation to explore what is overlooked in our current culture. By the same token, I want to investigate how a community that managed to unlock the secret to eliminating poverty in the 70s, is again mired in economic difficulty. Why as a society do we unlearn and forget those lessons that are seemingly so valuable?

I remember being asked by a friend many years ago, why it is I liked walking through alleyways so much. "I don't know," I said. "I think it's because it allows me to see a different side of a city." Looking back, I think what I really meant is that it allows me to see a different side of myself, one that is more empathic and understanding of others. It is this sense of discovery and awakening that I hope to share through my work.

Opposite Back-alley sunset (Photo: Paul Anders, 2007).

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*"I am drawn to these juxtapositions, between beauty and order and what is considered ugly and undesirable."*

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# EXPLORATION AND EXPRESSION

Siobhan Brannigan

Art, in itself, is an attempt to bring order out of chaos.  
*-Stephen Sondheim*

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Self-discovery through art has become an acknowledged form of therapy. Art therapy is a way to explore and interact with one's innermost feelings and through this, learn how to interpret something one may not know how to discuss or put into words. This form of therapy can go beyond self-discovery and become a tool to communicate with others who may not be sure how to present their position or feelings on a very personal subject. This is what photography has become to me, as I have developed my own strategies, coping mechanisms and connections throughout the years. It is my own form of art therapy and allows me to express my personal issues and questions. This assists me in exploring my environment, psyche and memory.

Now that I have been including other people as the subjects of my work, rather than only myself, it has allowed me to focus on the process itself as part of my therapy. The steps required to reach my final product have become a coping mechanism. As I interact with my subjects, I discuss the ideas, history and goals that we each share. For me, the process of getting to the final stage can be just as important as the finished product. A photography project, much like writing an essay, has many stages to completion. There is the idea, the brainstorming and research, the preliminary

photographing until you have reached a satisfactory visual direction, and then finally the editing process. Working through all of these stages helps me to develop greater confidence in the final product. This allows me to properly direct and understand my concept and interpretation, and produce a piece of work that lets others see and recognize my position and story.

My work has always had an emphasis on identity and mental health. In attempting to come to terms with my own issues and questions, I explore the possibility of similar stories and experiences amongst those around me. My own struggles with depression and anxiety have made me realize that the discourse on mental illness is not a very open one. I was always encouraged by my family and friends to discuss my circumstances, whether it was in a positive light or not. The more I talked openly about my problems with those around me, the more I began to realize how uncomfortable it made some of them feel. I recognized that it was either because they did not yet know how to talk about their own situation, or just could not understand mine. With that knowledge, I have sought out like-minded people. I find and talk to people who are comfortable discussing their own journeys towards acceptance and understanding. By documenting





individuals with whom I have something in common, whether it is a question or situation, it allows me to create a self-reflection, without being physically present in the final product. I am able to highlight emotions, strengths and questions that surround the topics discussed, through the creation of visual narratives about the subjects at hand. Photography has the ability to be a tool, a creator, a product, and a producer of a story, all in one medium.

My memory contains some of my deepest struggles, but photography has allowed me to explore and come to terms with many of these questions and frustrations. It has permitted me to view the world both in a negative and positive light, which shows the incredible capacity of it as a tool to emphasize one's own expression and position.

Left *What Do You Keep From Others?* (Photo: Siobhan Brannigan, 2011);  
Below *A Positive From A Negative: Émilie* (Photo: Siobhan Brannigan, 2013).



# DEATH BOARDS & PHOTOGRAPHS

Giulia Ciampini

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On the mountain with my camera (Photo: Giulia Ciampini, 2013).

There are moments in life that are so brief, and so simple, but so full of liveliness and joy. They feel inconsequential at the time, but throw them all together and

they usually represent the happiest moments of your life. Years ago, for my nonna's funeral, I was given the task of creating a large bulletin board full of photographs of her life's happiest moments. I travelled to each family member and was given the gift of a few photographs and so many unexpected stories. I hadn't known that after her first stroke, in trying to help her regain functionality of her hands, the doctor requested she repeat a familiar motion with Play-Doh and she made enough Play-Doh gnocchi for everyone in the hospital. When my now deceased uncle was a teenager, he planted a marijuana plant in my nonna's garden, and she fertilized it and helped it grow to an astronomical size, not realizing what it was. She was selfless, loving and always surrounding by family and friends, and I never came across a photograph of her where she wasn't beaming. It was a lovely tribute to an even lovelier woman

and forced me to reflect on the power of photographs.

My father was our family's documentarian, his photographs were simple and sweet, and he caught many exuberant moments on film. I would spend hours devouring the photos in his albums, often stealing my

favourites and hiding them away for myself, much to my entire family's chagrin. Photographs were relics and I loved collecting them. When I was old enough, my dad let me carry around his 35mm film camera and take pictures of everything and everyone that mattered most to me. If photography is an expression of love and self (and it is), my photographs show that I cared most about Easter bunnies and bums during my formative years.

Around the time when I was four or five years old, my father stopped taking pictures. Like many Europeans who immigrated to Canada in the 1950s, carrying only dreams of wealth and prosperity, he had an unobtainable vision of what life should be like; when his real life didn't live up to these unrealistic expectations, he retreated into himself. Perhaps his photography became painful because it was physical evidence of the banality of his life. He entered what would be a lifelong depression, and instead of using art to help him cope with his anxieties, as many artists would, he abandoned his craft altogether. As I child, I took this personally. We connected through photography and much of my sense of family, personal history and self-identify was created from his pictures. Photographs are evidence of a life lived and for years I felt that much of my childhood "didn't exist" because it wasn't captured on film.

Photography gives us a way to preserve the important events and people in our lives, and it speaks to the best and most generous part of our human nature—the desire to share what we find beautiful, interesting and meaningful with others. However, it is also our personal narrative, a timeline of our lives filled with the faces and places we love. We all try to make sense of the world around us, and our place in it. A writer needs to write to see her soul; an artist needs to paint, to draw, to dance, to understand the beauty of their existence. A photographer needs to explore with camera in hand to connect with themselves and their world. The process of photography can make life comprehensible and can

reveal the beauty and order in what sometimes feels like a landscape of chaos. Although every photographer creates from a unique perspective—given our different cultural, sexual, economic, social, political, gender, age and life experiences—the process of creating personal works helps an artist understand their inner self. Furthermore, the act of sharing a body of work gives the artist a voice and allows them to stand up for what they believe in, creating community identity, fostering social support and enabling communication.

Though I have always turned to writing to understand the world around me, I feel as though I live my most authentic life when I have a camera in hand. I'm never really comfortable speaking out loud. I find it difficult to articulate my thoughts when I can't physically see them. Both writing and photography allow me the time and visual language to do what I cannot with speech. On rare occasions, my experience with photography has even been transcendent. If I'm able to create a photograph that reflects exactly what I'm feeling or captures my subject perfectly, it is a moment of pure, rapturous pleasure.

Photography also gives the strange gift of foresight for those willing to live life with the end in mind. Sometimes, I pretend that it is the future, I've just died, and as the family's historian, I am tasked with creating the bulletin board of memories for my funeral; I call it a "death board." It's a strange notion, but it gets me thinking: How do I want to be remembered? What legacy would I like to leave behind? What matters most to me? What experiences and adventures would I wish I had? Who were my people? What would I have done differently? Then I come back to the present, thankful to have a bit more time, and try to live the life that I would most like to see in the pictures on my death board—full of life, adventurous, loved, surrounded by golden-hearted people and with as many dogs as I can have. It may be morbid, but life is precious and how much time do we really get to become our truest selves?

# ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER

Michèle Pearson Clarke

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It did not occur to me that I should be an artist until my mother died. Grief has a funny way of helping you find what you have been looking for, even as you are losing everything you have ever found. My mother's life was 66 years long and for her that was both long enough and not really that long at all. My mother lived with pancreatic cancer for 14 years and she died on August 18, 2011. I had 38 years' worth of her and for me that will never be long enough.

All that I am and all that I make is because of those 38 years. The presence and the absence of my relationship with my mother have given shape to me and to my work. My practice starts with her because she loved art. She shared this love with me in that generous manner

that allows you to take from someone, and make a thing yours, in such a charmed way that you both end up with abundance. My practice starts with her because she was so terribly curious and interested in everything. I could not fail to understand that meaning lay everywhere and value was always at hand, and together we saw the beauty consistently available for the taking. My practice starts with her because she saw me as I am, even before I knew who I was to become. She saw my black queer self right into my current existence.

The experience of being seen is what I pursue from behind my camera. Through my grief, I've come to realize that my mother saw me because she loved me unconditionally, and that is a powerful privilege that

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*“My practice starts with her because she saw me as I am, even before I knew who I was to become.”*

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has shaped my black queer life in significant ways. Until her death, I had not known fear the way I know it now. I had not known “you can’t do that.” I have only been familiar with confidence to try, appetite for risk and comfort with vulnerability. I have known nothing but strength and visibility in allowing myself to embrace vulnerability, and my photography and video work is an attempt to create and document such experiences.

In *Black Men and Me* (2006), that meant reflecting on my masculinity in relationship to straight black men’s perceptions of my identity; in *It’s Good To Be Needed* (2013-), that meant photographing queer women who are estranged ex-partners, holding hands with each other; and in *Every West Indian Roti Shop* (2013-), that meant contemplating roti shops as places that produce

a queer tension between a yearning for home and an unresolved yearning for belonging at home. I am interested in exploring such personal and political moments of ambiguity and discomfort, particularly as they occur for people like me—we who are not seen to exist and are most in need of being seen.

Junot Diaz describes having a deep desire to make mirrors in his writing, so that people like him might finally see themselves reflected back at the cultural level. As he points out, it’s not that monsters don’t have reflections in mirrors; it’s that if we don’t see ourselves we can be turned into monsters. Let that then be my mother’s legacy. Let me be so fortunate as to make a mirror or two with my camera, or at least let me be so fortunate as to spend the years that I have left trying.

# THING[S]

Karin Culliton

In between the here and the there

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I recently read something about the artist Jasper Johns, and how his work recognizes we are all caught in time, between what we have experienced and what we have not. I have experienced a great deal that has lead me to this moment in my life, which I imagine will be a turning point when I look back on it. For now I am simply caught in the moment, so I don't yet know where it will lead. I think when I look back on this time though, it might be the point when I start to call myself an artist.



I know my future will be full of words and pictures though because language has always interested me, and making pictures in some form or another has always been a part of who I am. But honestly, I don't want to have to decide and state what my work is or is not. Isn't that what attracts people to become artists? Is it not the freedom to choose and change and choose again? Having the ability to work on a project about a decomposing bird one week, and environmental opposites the next, is what makes me want to get up in the morning.

Before choosing art, I spent a long time trying to figure out what my "thing" could be. I've worked as an editor, an accountant, a graphic designer, a marketing assistant, a bartender, a child-care worker, a house painter, a restaurant owner, a cashier, a career counselor (with no irony!), a waitress, a secretary, a clothing salesperson and an art director. I meandered a lot and couldn't commit to anything fully. I was restless.

I thought for a while about becoming a writer and went to journalism school for a nanosecond. I also went to school (at different times) for marketing, furniture upholstery, advertising sales, English, political science, web design and creative writing. I dropped out of most of these courses after I realized they also weren't my "thing." Once I hit my late twenties, and ended up fired



for the second time in a row, I began to realize that I might be a detriment to myself (I'm a late bloomer) and it might be time to pick something and stick to it.

Anyone might look at this past list of (non-)accomplishments and call them a waste of a life. I spent a few years doing the same thing, regretting my past. I wondered if I would ever find one "thing" that would stick, one "thing" that would make me want to learn all I could and then become the best "that" possible. For a while I thought it might be working as a designer of magazines, which was something I stuck with for over ten years. I really liked my job at the time, but I never loved it. When the industry shifted and I was laid off, I took it as a sign to go back to school and study art, which was something I had always wanted to do.

Up until my decision to return to school, I had spent 20 years toiling away at one job or another, slowly circling art, while always studying and learning on my own. It was only when I turned 40 that I finally got the guts to apply

Opposite *Scattered Starling* (Photo: Karin Culliton, 2011); Above (L-R) *Complementary Antonyms1-3* A visual exploration of the language of opposites (Photos: Karin Culliton, 2012).

to art school. The first few years in school were difficult; art intimidated me. One Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours later and art still intimidates me, but in a different way. I think that's a good thing though, because it means I'll never be complacent about it or take it for granted.

Ultimately, learning itself is what truly interests me. I never want to stop learning. As one of my professors once said to me when I was amazed at how much there still was to know in the world, "I know, isn't it great?" I'm a hunter of information, constantly looking for another side and never presupposing anything. Pursuing an MFA in Documentary Media makes sense when I look back on my life. It is the perfect marriage between art and information—my two loves. My "thing" will never be singular. There is just too much out there for me to just choose one.



# FINDING BALANCE

Chantal Dignard

An exploration of my purpose, my process  
and how being an artist brings me balance

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I am both a documentary filmmaker and a music video producer, and working in these different mediums serves to nurture and develop very diverse aspects of myself. The creation of documentary work allows me to cultivate my voice as a social activist, and will eventually lead to positive social changes. Producing music videos has fostered my love for music and given me the chance to explore my creativity as a videographer.

I think that people are significantly shaped and influenced by art. The nostalgia triggered by hearing an old favourite song, the excitement of reading a new book, the opinions formed about an issue based on a film and the curiosity raised by an interesting piece of theatre: these are all examples of art making us into the people we are. I want people to be affected on some level by my work and for it to drive other artists to start or to continue making work. I believe that the key to this is to make work that has personal significance to me, while being relatable to others. An example of this is a documentary installation I did last year on my experiences growing up home-schooled. One of the most rewarding pieces of feedback I received was from a colleague of my professor, who said that it was his favourite part of the exhibit as he had been home-schooled and could relate to it. Personally, I find that connecting with an audience

is one of the most important and rewarding aspects of making work.

I want my documentary work to inspire people to take action against social injustice and to make them more aware of social issues. I am currently working on a documentary video for my thesis that looks at the negative impact the changing Health Canada regulations will have on medical marijuana users. The reason I chose to pursue documentary rather than any other genre of film is for its potential to drive positive change. I hope to do so through exposing social issues and inequities in order to spread awareness and motivate people to strive for progress. I also want to give a voice to those who have socially significant stories to tell, but have been ignored. Many of the people I have interviewed for my thesis are sick or injured, or part of a low-income household and they lack the means to make their voices heard in a significant manner. One of the most empowering things I can do as a documentary artist is provide people an outlet for stories that they might not otherwise get a forum to express.

Creating music videos allows me to express my love for music in an artistic manner. I find it very rewarding to work on pieces that are musical, as I enjoy being able to enhance the experience of listening to a song through



Top to Bottom Filming an interview (Photo: Al Graham, 2014); Documentary installation (Photo: Chantal Dignard, 2013); On set (Photo: Christine Shu, 2012).



the addition of a visual element. I also love being able to create a more meaningful connection between a musician and their audience. I attempt to work on songs that I find inspiring or moving on some level, so that some of the viewers will find inspiration in what I have created.

The creation of art is an important process to me, as it nurtures who I am by allowing me to express myself. In addition to working with video, I also dabble in writing and photography; all of these creative outlets help me to grow as a person. Expressing myself through art has proved to be a powerful and effective way to heal from painful situations and to keep myself motivated during difficult times. Although I have high hopes for what I can accomplish through my art as a finished product, the very act of making it is therapeutic and makes me a more balanced and secure person. I feel that I am currently in a process of enormous growth as an artist, as moving to Toronto and starting an MFA has allowed me to be exposed to so many inspiring artists and pieces of work. It is almost overwhelming trying to decide where I want to go next. I feel that I am currently at the perfect stage to experiment and discover in more depth who I am as an artist. Right now, having fun in the creation of my work, continuing to grow and expand as an artist and making meaningful work is what is most important to me.

# ***GUT***

Briar Gorton

Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there  
is no path and leave a trail. -*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

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I used the Emerson quote (left) in my high school yearbook and it has most certainly stood the test of time. My life and work can really be understood by one word—gut. I had an invaluable lesson in 1999 to trust my gut, and I have never looked back since. It has told me when to go, how to get there and when to leave. Sometimes not all at once, but I can accredit my gut with some of the best moments in my life. I have always had a deep fascination with documentaries, but my life’s trajectory would never lead anyone to believe this is where I would end up.

I finished my BA at the University of British Columbia in 2006, and decided to leave the west coast in order to join the airline industry as a flight attendant in Toronto, while simultaneously pursuing my interest in design. I balanced attending Ryerson for Design Management while flying full-time. Being a flight attendant is a very condensed and fast look at the human experience. In such small and compact bursts of time, I was exposed to thousands of people from all over the world. It was one of the most transformative times for me in my personal growth, and still informs me in the way that I see the world today.

From the airlines, I was given the opportunity to join a large design firm. It is here that I began to learn intricate lessons about colour and form. It was an amazing education in aspects of composition, visual communication and environmental design. I went on to work as a general manager for an Austrian photography company by combining my hobbyist enthusiasm for photography with other skill sets I had picked up along the way. I became (happily) frozen in time for a four-year period, no longer using digital technology to capture my images, but rather the preferred method of the company—film. I was given no boundaries when taking photos, and there was a true freedom in the photographs I took during that time. I was encouraged to “forget all the rules” and take photos as I saw fit.



Opposite *Cowgirl* in Osoyoos, B.C.; Top *Niagara Falls* (Photos: Briar Gorton, 2012); Above *William* (Photo: Briar Gorton, 2011).

Through a combination of events, an opportunity arose to pursue my Masters in Documentary Media. In a sense, I believe all these “crooked, dotted-line” experiences had been leading me to this moment. I had already been telling stories up until this point; they were just brand stories. I hope that my future documentary work will have my past experiences echoed in them.

Armed by the grace of my parents to pursue an MFA over an MBA, my gut will lead the way!

# DIFFERENT SPEEDS OF FISH

Zile Liepins

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"I hate photographers! They don't MAKE anything!"

This is a theme my friend Josh and I debate. He goes on to specify that, okay, photographers have their place in the world, but they should know what it is. He compares it to fishing: you caught the fish and it is a great fish, good for you. But you did not make the fish. That is precisely how I feel about my pictures. I'm fishing and framing. Whenever I try to stage a photograph, it feels forced and doesn't look right. It has to be caught. But I disagree with Josh: there is creation involved in the process of catching a shot.

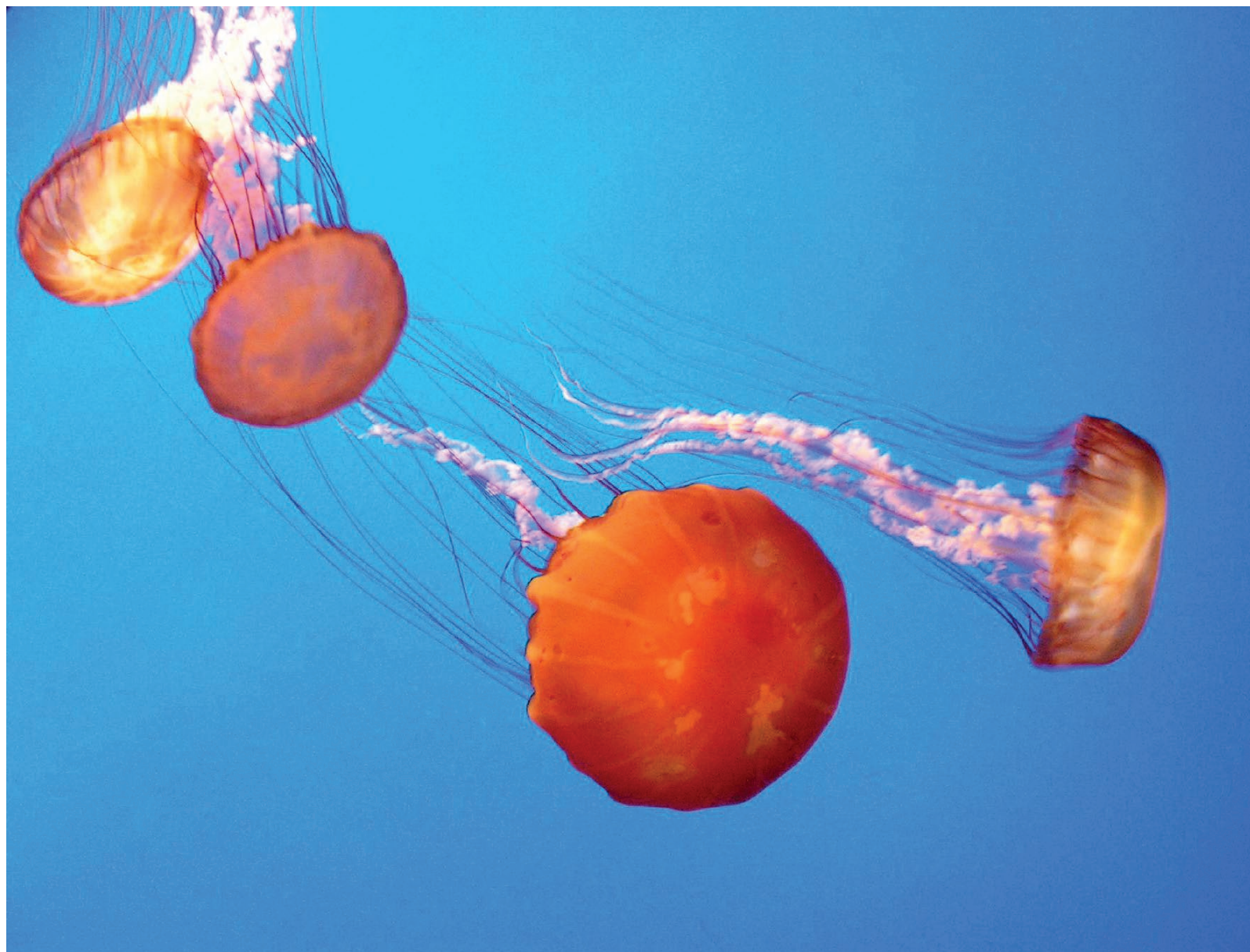
Good photography has very little to do with the equipment. Anyone can press a button. The art is very distant from the tool; the art is a human quality, the ability to connect. Understanding, sincerity and respect, allow us to gain trust, access stories and create resonant images. When you do get close, you need a good eye. It's an instinct; you have to identify the right moment while pulling composition and framing together. Once this work is done, the click is just the capture.

Sometimes, something happens and I don't have a camera with me. The images I didn't catch still exist in my mind: the old fisherman holding wild orange lilies the same colour as the salmon on his t-shirt, wearing

a "Gone Fishing" cap; the ragged burgundy, white and burgundy flag towel draped over the dishwasher at the Latvian bar in Toronto; the day Latvia was tied with Canada in Olympic hockey for an hour. These moments announce themselves to me, and I catch them from the corner of my eye, camera on hand or not. When I "lose" a photograph, I mourn it. I remember it as vividly as any valuable object I have lost. During a period in my life when I tried to distance myself from applying significance to objects, I found that I took more pictures. I didn't want to spend or buy, so I spent on film and acquired images.

An image lives in the world and is captured in our minds. A camera is a tool with which to document and share it. Words are another tool. Both let us express our personal view of a moment in our world. In photography, the time in which to catch the moment is limited, while words work with memory to let us recapture images from the past. These devices let us capture an image more than once, in different light or from a different angle, representing the same image in multiple ways.

Some people have always known what they want to be when they grow up. Others never find out. I feel fortunate that I have always known. As a child my answer







was always: an artist. I've never wavered. When I envision that memory, I see an illustration of a palette, like clip art: a hand-held wooden palette with perfect circles in primary colours. I also see post-its. I would dig them out of my mother's purse during church and draw. Now I use them to mark my favourite pages in art books. My parents put me in an array of classes, but I knew what I wanted. I asked for art classes. What we need, what we are, emerges.

Yet within that definitive goal, I have been jumping around and have yet to settle. Sometimes I worry that I do too much to do anything right. I speak three languages but haven't mastered any of them. I have lived in four countries but don't feel at home anywhere. I've done a lot of things but don't have anything tangible to show for it. I've been a print-maker, a painter, an illustrator, a graphic designer and a photographer. I question if I have chosen photography; if this is what I want to be. I've taken different paths and cut them short, and only now do I see that they weren't mutually exclusive and I don't have to choose. I can bring it all together; the message is what lies at the core of the medium. I can take pictures with words, paint photographs, and photograph paintings. The unwavering direction is storytelling.

### Year of the Jellyfish

I've moved around, going where I'm carried, and it's gone well. Many of the best things I've done seem to have simply come to me. I often find myself in surreal situations and I can't believe my luck; I wonder, how did I get here? Yet I know I've always made the first nudge and worked hard to bridge gaps.

It took two unremarkable minutes, on the sunny terrace of Café Étoile Manquante in the Marais, for me to decide I wanted to move to Paris, and six months of stubborn determination to make it happen. Then I introduced myself to the Ambassador of Latvia at a reception. Two months later, he gave me a dream job



# “You can pray to win the lottery, but you have to buy the ticket first.”

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that I wasn't qualified for. A year after that, I was in Jacques Chirac's private presidential airplane thinking: “How did I get here?”

You can pray to win the lottery, but you have to buy the ticket first.

Every New Year, my family gathers for an appropriated German tradition around molten lead. Bars of lead melt into shiny quicksilver in a cast iron spoon in the fireplace, which we plunk with a swift turn of the wrist into a bucket of cold water. The shape of hardened lead that emerges is interpreted into something identifiable, and we read our fortune through its symbolism. Two thousand fourteen was undoubtedly a jellyfish. No discussion.

I googled jellyfish symbolism and was met with myself. Understanding the value of floating rather than swimming, the jellyfish floats with the currents of the ocean, but not without a goal. The jellyfish listens to the universe and takes things in stride; it knows how to use powers of intention.

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I did a couple of gallery shows years ago. Once, I was so terrified, I couldn't pull through. I questioned my ideas and hated what I made. I took it so to heart that I snuck into the gallery the day before the opening and changed my art. I priced it at “best offer.”

I was put off by the exclusive nature of the gallery space. I envisioned the same group of people moving from white box to white box like a school of fish, drink-

ing wine and talking to each other, facing inwards, away from the art. My mother urged me to learn computer arts but I was stubborn. No, I wanted to be a “real” artist. Then I picked up a book called *Hand to Eye*. It was essentially art as illustration. Illustration had changed; far from line drawings and caricatures, it was painting, drawing, collage and photomontage. It was art, but it was reaching a different audience, an audience that didn't always ask to see it. This new form of illustration was being used in posters, creative advertising, newspapers and journals. Everyone takes the subway, walks the street or reads the paper; infusing these areas with art brings it to a broader range of viewers. This revelation led me to pursue work as a graphic designer. Galleries are nice. But how will you reach the world outside? I want my work to communicate beyond walls. In (my) life after design, documentary allows me to combine my inner world with the world out there, to connect my personal affinity to art, with society.

My sister says that I go to the eye of the storm when others are fleeing. A protest, a political or economic climate, or simply an actual storm... I yearn to be where things are happening, to live a life that feels like living, and to contribute in any way, big or small, that I can. I want to be connected to the issues that concern my community and the world. I won't be a doctor or a politician, but I want to do my part with my creative talents. I hope that I can use my visual language to express a meaningful message.

# TABLE FOR ONE

Anna MacLean

Come on you raver, you seer of visions, come on  
you painter, you piper, you prisoner, shine! -*Pink Floyd*

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## The Beginning

Upon looking back at my formative years, I can now see that the artistic beast was already stirring; I just didn't know it. I, of course, assumed it was simply puberty, but the yearning for justice and the reckless hilarity of it all hasn't really passed. The artists that drew me in during those early years were ones that would evoke similar audience reactions as the artists I admire now in my later, more film-obsessed years. Tori Amos and Frank Zappa were two of my idols, and I loved them for the same reasons that I love my current filmic idols, Agnes Varda, Chris Marker and Errol Morris (to name a few). They have recklessly disowned any sort of structure of "the ordinary" and sculpted unique works through the use of fairly common art forms—music, film, textiles, visuals, etc. But their approach, their use of time, the careful way they anticipate audience response, are all masterfully controlled and deliriously original. Their works are a reflection of themselves, but because artists are philosophers by nature, their work is also about the simple absurdity and deeply complex experience of being human. It is around these ideals that I strive to build my practice as a documentary filmmaker. Of course, although these idealistic visions of masterpiece are always evolving,

I do believe I can simplify my intentions at this point fairly succinctly.

When making a documentary film, there are two artistic expressions that I try to focus on:

1. The relationships formed with a film's chosen subjects are a reflection of the relationships the filmmaker thinks people ought to have from human to human. A director has an extraordinary amount of control over another person's voice, and they must hold themselves to the same standards that they expect from the people in society that represent *their* voice. One of my main concerns in my work, and in day-to-day living, is the misuse of power and control, so it's very important to me to make my use of power and control as close to ideal as I possibly can. I deeply believe that beyond our artistic expressions, our relationships are our legacies.

2. When a story is told, it is a calculated philosophic statement about what the filmmaker believes to be right and wrong. As artists, we make space for ourselves to say exactly what it is we think should be said to a limitless and timeless audience. Our presentation of "truth" informs the audience not of a factual truth, but rather of a value system that we believe ought to be heard. Each film one makes is a new chance to reassess and refine



one's own moral compass, and what you choose to send out into the world will inform the audience of your deeper truths and ideals. I want to be as hyperaware of the messages I send as humanly possible. I want to craft them in a way that is fiercely critical of injustice, jubilant towards bravery, and lovingly gentle towards trauma.

I watch an artist like Ai Wei Wei, and I see his humanistic, humorous and fiery perspectives. What makes his artistic voice so powerful is his creative approach to his own viewpoints. He lets his life reflect his art and he does so in the name of justice. So many people in power will lie, cheat, murder and steal, and there is no reason for anyone to stop, unless we—the masses—say something. Ai Wei Wei puts himself in a position that highlights what he thinks is the right way to live. In turn, the audience questions their way of living, and has an opportunity to renew themselves and adopt a higher level of compassion.



Top Jean Burton; Above (L-R) Gerry Matier, Mario Gregorio and Jim Mann  
(Film Stills: *In Her Shoes*, Anna MacLean, 2011).

### The Continuation

My intent is to be the things I see in artists who moved me to make a change in who I was; to be true to my love of the wild/wacky/absurd and say the things I feel need saying in the most humanly and impactful way possible; to grow with the people I work with, and put myself in a position where I can be accountable for telling a universal truth that not only celebrates the beauty in who we are, but also mocks and shames the ugly that so often prevails.

# THE STORIES WE TELL

Juan Pablo Pinto Mendoza

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The need to communicate is what makes us human. A desire to tell our stories is what keeps societies together. The passion to create stories that transmit both the personal and the collective is what characterizes the individual. Language is an essential tool to share the true meaning of being. The language that I am referring to is not just verbal, but is also transmitted through visual and spiritual symbols. It is through interacting with and translating these symbols that I see myself not only fulfilling my role as an artist, but also as a human being.

In a way, it is hard for me to call myself an artist and even more so to conceptualize my work as art, as it entails an attempt to define parts of myself that I have yet to put together. The idea of being a maker, creator and re-creator is something that I spend little time contemplating. But I think that it has something to do with the idea of overcoming my fears. I travel because I fear the (static, linear, nonmoving) existence. I engage in the visual arts because I fear memory. I listen because I fear absence.

My academic background is in political science and cultural studies, and even though I enjoyed that learning environment, I feel that it constrained my artistic voice. The limitations of the medium of choice and the narrative form restricted my capacity to create.

On the other hand, this academic foundation helped me grow intellectually and allowed me to discover different theories and voices that changed the way I see the world and what is around me. I decided to pursue documentary media because as a visual narrative form, it allows me to integrate my academic knowledge, artistic perspective, life experiences and creativity into a particular interpretation of my reality. In my current project, for example, I am investigating the narratives that native-born and immigrant residents of Canada create and reproduce about snow, and how this affects their understanding of what it means to be Canadian or live in Canada. This project brings together my theoretical knowledge about discourse analysis and collective memory; my personal experience of migrating to Canada, learning about snow and “becoming” Canadian; and my artistic drive to explore how snowy landscapes are interpreted by and shape the lives of people in varying ways.

Growing up in Colombia, I was exposed to *cuent-erías*, a form of oral narrative that has shaped me as a storyteller. Although I do not express myself through oral narration, I incorporate the structure of this artistic genre into my work. While this is a fictional narrative form, it speaks about the real, and with it I represent a version of truth about what is around me. Moving





regularly as a child because of my father's job, and the experience of migrating to Canada, caused me to become fascinated with the idea of changes and transitions. My work thus deals with questions of memory, belonging, community and place. I try to link individual and collective understandings of who belongs, what people view as right or wrong and how people understand their community, to political, cultural and historical legacies transmitted through cultural symbols. Therefore, I attempt to integrate the idea of truth, in terms of individual perspective and the evolution of collective memory through space and time.

Left *Dos*; Below *Old Wisdom* (Photos: Juan Pablo Pinto Mendoza, 2012).





# THE EXPOSED

Adira Rotstein

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In the spring of 2013, I completed the first installment of my self-published comic book, *The Exposed*. Although the book failed to garner much attention, it taught me a great deal about what it takes to create a comic book, including penciling, inking, distribution and the demands of writing a story that needs to be told solely through captions and speech bubbles.

The storyline of *The Exposed* concerns a city called Los Perditos. The entire fortune and industry of the city was built on the mining of a metal with unique properties that only existed in that place. Later, it is determined that the metal is in fact alien in origin. Unfortunately, the Los Perditos residents who have had contact with the metal begin to develop “exposure disease,” which causes strange mutations in their bodies and minds. Exposure disease begins with disfigurement, leading to insanity and eventually death. Victims of exposure disease are furious with the Reign Corporation, which once made all its money off the metal and now controls most of the businesses in the town, including the police force (which is run under a private contract), and news outlets. The Reign family is building condos and knocking down the only apartments in town that will rent to Exposed people. The main character, Caddy

Woodlin, is a young artist and teaching assistant with exposure disease, who becomes involved with the Exposed Rights Organization (ERO). Through the organization, she is disguised well enough to pass as normal and get a job at Reign Corp., so she can extract secrets from the company that the ERO wishes to use to bring the company down. As Caddy infiltrates the company, she comes to discover a terrible secret about the metal that the Reign Corporation fortune is built on, and at the same time becomes involved in a love relationship with the adopted son of the Reign family. As Reign Corp. seeks to renew its involvement in mining the noxious metal, the ERO decides it’s time to use violent force to bring Reign Corp. to its knees, and they want Caddy to be the tool with which they exact their revenge.

I really wanted to write this story because of my interest in *Batman* and *V for Vendetta*. Although I liked both these comics and the movies, I always felt a major piece of those stories was missing; mainly, a true portrait of how corporate practices and pressures distort the nature of a city and affect the experience of life within it. If you look into the past of any major Fortune 500 company today that is older than 50 years old, you can usually find a long litany of



ethically questionable business practices, with many occurring in the recent past. There are also many business practices still in use that are not technically illegal, but are morally unethical in terms of a lack of proper concern and compassion for individuals. To me, someone like *Batman's* Bruce Wayne, who

is in charge of such a rich corporation in a city with a serious crime problem (increased crime always being statistically linked to high levels of poverty), would most likely be a villain rather than a hero, in a real-life scenario. When you look at *Batman*, it is apparent that all the villains are characterized as



“insane” or “freakish” individuals existing on the fringes of Gotham city’s society. The conflation of insanity and freakishness with criminal behavior and violence has a disturbing subtext.

The other major influence on my comic book was the experience of watching *V for Vendetta*. There were many things I liked about this film, but I did regret the fact that the main character, Evie, was really a pawn throughout the whole story. She kept getting

trapped and abused by different forces, never in complete command of her own destiny or truly acting on her own initiative. Also, as in most stories, V, the scarred, masked revolutionary who kidnapped her, was male and Evie, the innocent kidnapping victim, was beautiful and female. I feel like in movies, the female characters always have to be thin and beautiful and more innocent than the male characters. I wanted to turn this trope on its head, so the female character



“I actually find the idea of human-alien-squid-creature hybrids kind of fascinating and delightful.”

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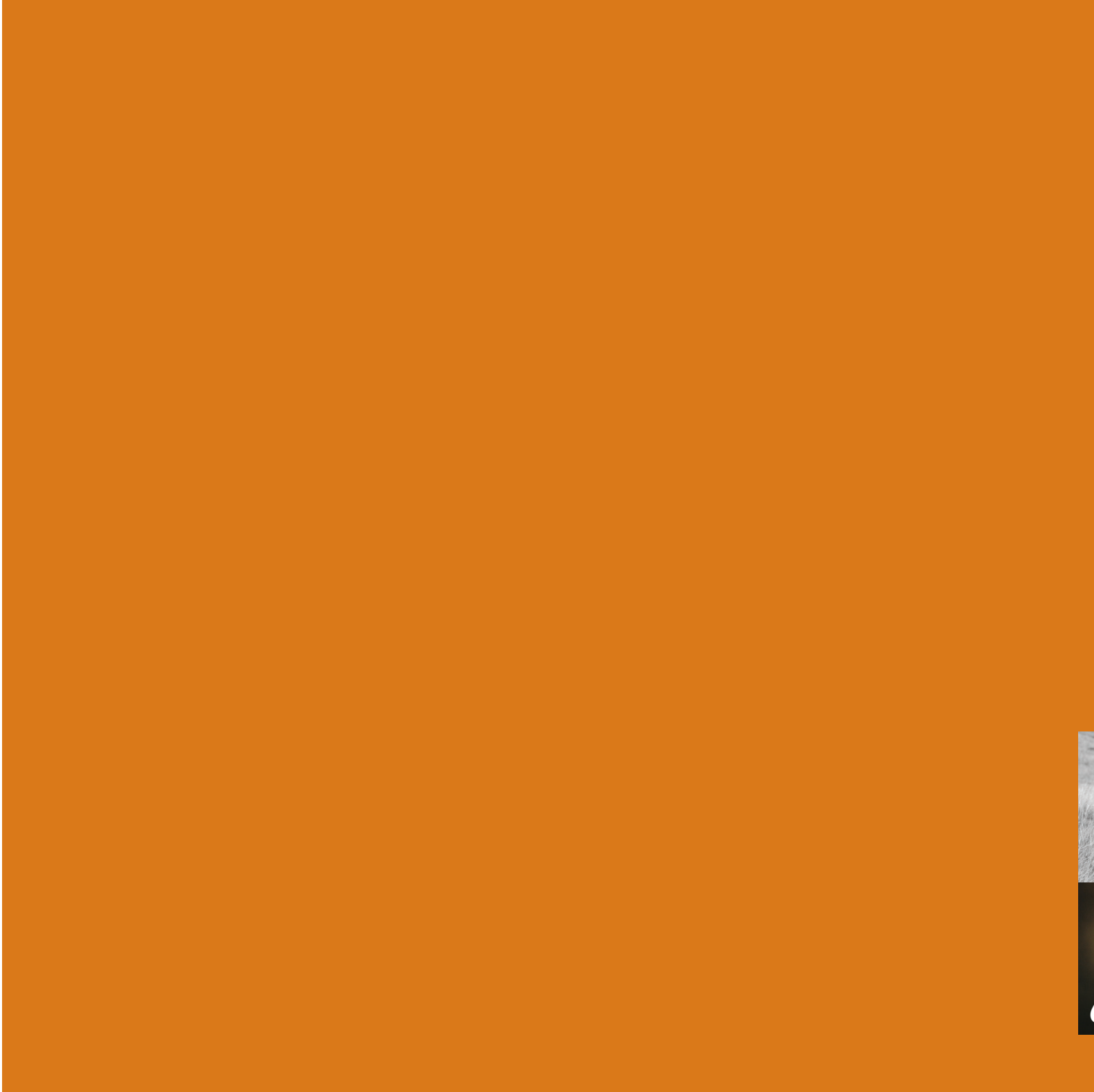
of Caddy in *The Exposed* is a mutant and a disenfranchised member of society, while the man she falls in love with is the handsome adopted son of Rupert Reign, the major power broker in the city.

One of the things that disappointed me in *V for Vendetta* was when the parliament buildings were blown up. The tacit endorsement of violence as a positive way of creating social change is not something I buy into. It was an exciting scene visually in the film, but I felt like once again, the character of Evie was manipulated into doing it. I wanted to create a story where Caddy is given a genuine choice between a violent option and a peaceable option, and we see that despite the ERO's justifications, the violent option would only lead to more violence. It was important to me that Caddy find a way to subvert the plans of the corporation without resorting to violence.

Another influence on my work was the writing of H.P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft's work is usually characterized as horror, but personally, I find the situations he presents more fascinating and attractive than horrifying. Much of his work has to do with hybrid biology, like humans mixing with aliens, transplanting organs or mingling with supernatural creatures. In the context of his work, I think it is meant to be disgusting and terrifying, but I find

the concept of hybridization quite thrilling and his work on organ transplantation rather predictive for the current state of medical biology in the modern world. After all, today organ donation is commonplace, as is interspecies hybridization through genetic modification. In his work, Lovecraft was possibly trying to create some allegories for the idea of interracial love (see *The Horror at Red Hook*), but I actually find the idea of human-alien-squid-creature hybrids kind of fascinating and delightful, and I love drawing half-human monsters, especially of the squid variety. I love sea creatures (another of his pet horrors), and all the weird denizens of the deep, so I put some of that aesthetic into the story as well. All the people who undergo the exposure mutation develop semi-aquatic-looking appendages or modifications. The results, I thought, were quite interesting from a visual standpoint and allowed for a lot of creative exploration.

What I want people to understand about my art is that even if it does not look completely professional, the ideas behind it are of good quality and the character designs are unique compared to other materials out there. I think the wide nature of my artistic influences creates an unusual blend of disparate elements from recent history and pop culture.





# TIME

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# THE ROAD TO NOWHERE

Miya Akiyama

Exhibition, 2014

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*The Road to Nowhere* takes us on a journey across the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, the Ukraine and Russia, mapping the migratory path of photographer Ian Willms' Mennonite roots. Retracing their travels, Willms photographs sites of former settlement, evacuation and death, but these images are more than an homage to his ancestry. Willms foregoes colour for black-and-white photography, denouncing ideas of progress and development, and returning to stylistically classical elements that draw us into the past.

The exhibition opens with a mapped route of the migration taken by the Mennonites, displaying the exhaustive expanse that they voyaged. Moving through the gallery, the photographs illuminate the remoteness of the landscape. The show is hung with a minimalist aesthetic. Starkly contrasting black-and-white photographs are mounted within simple black frames and evenly spaced along the white walls. The images stand alone, without any titles or text, imitating the minimalism that is captured within the photographs themselves.

These photographs are ethereal and emotive, and they operate as portals back in time. Long-perspective shots guide our gaze down roadways, leaving us in search of a final destination. Single figures are centered off in the distance, inviting us to find out more but revealing little

about their identities. This is not a matter of displaying the Mennonites as a people, but rather of using photographs to emotive their lived experiences. Mimicking the ambiguous future of the Mennonites, these images leave an ominous and haunting sense of the unknown.

As I travelled through the exhibition towards the end of the gallery, I was taken by a particular grouping of four images. Although human presence is seldom featured in this exhibition, these last four photographs use the individual as their focal point. Willms uses an array of angles, lighting and framing to ensure that the identity of these individuals is concealed. Other than a distant view of an elderly man, we are unable to see the faces of those photographed, and instead are left to connect with silhouettes and masked faces. This element of hidden identity stays in accordance with the major underpinnings of the Mennonite experience.

As both a religious and an ethnic identity, the struggle to identify a coherent Mennonite identity is constant. Willms illustrates this disjointed sense of self by using anonymous figures to personify the seclusion and confusion suffered by these people. He uses the figures to contrast progress with tradition, showing us how the Mennonites' uncertain existence operates between two worlds.



The Mennonites' commitment to peace and passivity forced them to flee from countless settlements. Five centuries later, it appears that Willms still has an element of the Mennonites' unsettledness built into his identity. Motivated by his persistent sense of disconnection, his photographs invite us to join his search for settlement. In contrast to his ancestors' exile, Willms seems to take his time and move across the land in a calm and meditative fashion. The images appear so still and so lifeless, as if to comment on the endlessness of the journey.

In Willms' *Why We Walk* (2012) exhibition, he similarly documented the historical violence suffered by the Mennonites, using images of modern day Mennonite communities to parallel the historic struggles endured by this culture. Several of those images are used in *The Road to Nowhere*, perhaps highlighting the site of

From the series *The Road to Nowhere* (Photo: Ian Willms, 2012-2013).

his initial interest in developing this personal and reflective piece. While both exhibitions speak to the oppression of the Mennonite experience, *The Road to Nowhere* presents isolation, abandonment and nomadism from a personal perspective. Images of expansive wild space, sparse of human form and devoid of great connection, situate the audience in a state of solitude.

In keeping with Willm's other works, *The Road to Nowhere* represents the stories of a people disempowered by societal changes made in the name of "progress" and "development." That which has been lost cannot be captured, but Willms' images ensure that the essence is kept alive. As if to bring an end to the eternal persecutions, his photographs revive the ghostly stories of his kin and breathe life into their intangible history.

# PLOT AGAINST TIME

Kathryn Atkinson

Exhibition, 2013-2014

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David Rokeby challenges conceptions of memory, linear time and sound at the Stratford Gallery in the exhibit, *Plot Against Time* (November 21, 2013-February 2, 2014). A Toronto-based artist, Rokeby has been an innovator in new media since 1982. He is a globally recognized, award-winning creator with such accomplishments as the Petro-Canada Award for Media Arts in 1991 and the BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) Award for Interactive Art in 2000. The Stratford Gallery exhibition consists of four pieces: an interactive sound installation, a chromogenic colour print featuring a cityscape with overlays of letters and numbers, and two projected video installations—both constantly moving—redefining time and memory. While the gallery exhibit is both minimal and thought-provoking, it is quite different from Rokeby's extensive online gallery and does little to demonstrate the capacity of Rokeby's work.

Upon entering the gallery, the piece that invites the viewer in is *From Memory One*. This chromogenic colour print consists of vivid letters and numbers over a cityscape created with computer software, emphasizing the name of the exhibit itself. The room to the left holds *Murmurscape 1 and 2*, a single-channel video work in which letters, numbers and the static image of a cityscape merge into a moving collage. If you watch long

enough, the letters and photos blur out the entirety of the piece while the cityscape pushes forward to visibility. In the same space, on the wall opposite is *Machine for Taking Time (boul. St. Laurent)*, a video work composited using computer software. A camera was placed at the top of a building facing a café for over a year and “an archive of 750,000 still images of the city of Montréal captured over one year”<sup>1</sup> is used to document the passing of time. Rokeby uses special video software to stitch together the images, so that no matter how long you watch, you will not see the same image twice. The piece questions how we perceive time and transformation in a non-linear way. To the right of the entrance is *Minimal Object (with time on your hands)*, an interactive sound installation. When the viewer walks up to the stretched, grey canvas square placed on the wall, sound is produced as the viewer moves. A device that sits above the piece tracks the movement of the viewer. Rokeby links sound, spatiality and movement to create an experience that allows the viewer to truly participate in the *Plot Against Time* exhibit.

Visiting Rokeby's exhibit in a gallery setting leaves the viewer to interpret his work, as the descriptions are minimal and simplistic. If a viewer were to attend this show with no background knowledge of Rokeby, they



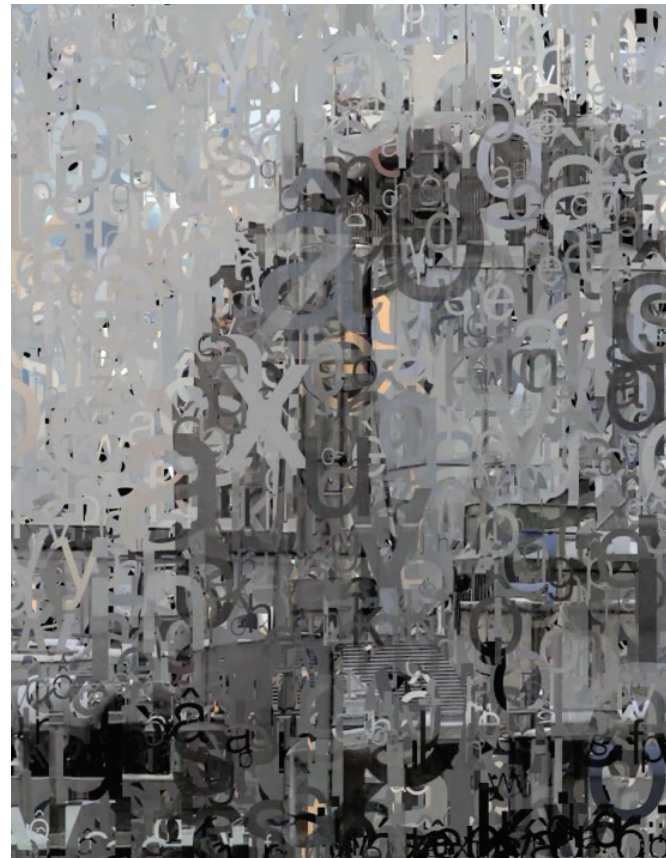
would not understand his importance as a new media artist. The exhibit is confusing and linking together the pieces becomes quite a challenge. Perhaps if it contained more works reflecting the title, *Plot Against Time*, the exhibit would have more continuity. Although this particular exhibit is lacking, it allows for a more dynamic experience with the collection itself, and the more time spent in front of each piece creates a greater understanding of the artist's intentions.

Rokeby has a vast online presence, in terms of posting his pieces along with descriptions, and this offers an entirely different experience of his work. With each piece, he describes the purpose and meaning which gives the viewer a deeper comprehension of his goals. His work is almost more suited to an online gallery. The dense descriptions coupled with each piece make the experience of viewing his work online more dynamic, as if the artist were taking the viewer on a guided tour.

For the viewer to have a whole and complete experience of Rokeby's work, a visit to the physical gallery and online gallery are both necessary. Where one offers interactivity and a viewer's uninterrupted interpretation of the work, the other contributes perspective on the artist's purpose and a deeper knowledge of the pieces themselves. The experience of *Murmurscape 1 and 2* and *Machine for Taking Time* (boul. St. Laurent) is entirely different when the pieces are projected onto a huge wall in a large space as opposed to on a computer screen. The viewer is engulfed in the work without the distractions of the outside world, while the online version offers a less encompassing, yet more descriptive experience. The online gallery offers many other pieces left out of the Stratford Gallery exhibit. These other works link together a more comprehensive experience of Rokeby's intentions in examining time, memory and space through creating his own computer software. Ultimately, both are valuable experiences and although the online and physical exhibits are entirely able to function sepa-

ately, in conjunction they offer an enriched and diverse experience of David Rokeby's work.

In leaving *Plot Against Time*, the viewer attempts to link together all of the pieces to the title itself. The concepts of architectural plotting and changing perceptions of time play off each other, and Rokeby succeeds in making the viewer think deeply on how each piece is connected.



*Murmurscape 2 (Montreal)* (Installation: David Rokeby, 2010).



# BECAUSE I LOVE YOU/ A QUIET DESPERATION

Gesilayefa Azorbo

Play, 2014

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*Because I Love You/A Quiet Desperation* is the title of a 35-minute theatrical performance piece that was conceived and crafted by Kenyan-born, Toronto-based playwright Mumbi Tindyebwa, during an intense two-week workshop at St. Lawrence Hall in downtown Toronto. The play was then presented as part of a Black History Month showcase in the same location on February 25, 2014.

St. Lawrence Hall is a heritage site with historical connections to the 19<sup>th</sup> century slavery abolitionist movement in Canada; it was used as a meeting place to discuss aiding slaves in their passage from America to freedom in Canada along the Underground Railroad.<sup>i</sup>

The physical site's connection to the problematic history of western contact with people of African descent is particularly apt given the subject matter of *Because I Love You*, centred as it is on the modern question of foreign adoptions. Specifically, the play looks at westerners adopting babies from African orphanages, children who—the play's creator reveals in a Q&A afterwards—are not always necessarily orphans, but may have been given up out of economic or other necessity by their parents.

The play is structured as an abstract, nonlinear narrative, examining the historical encounters of African mothers with the west, interlaced with another African mother's present-day encounter with the post-colonial,

modern west through foreign adoption; the play is seen through her perspective and experience as an “other.” For all its brevity, this performance was a visceral, gut-wrenching experience.

There are a handful of characters: three white women representing distinct facets of the western, pre- and post-colonial gaze; and four black women representing an array of African mother figures through the ages, from a fertility goddess figure, to the Southern “mammy” raising several generations of the same family, to the modern character experiencing contact with the west through foreign adoption, involuntarily surrendering her child to a better life in western hands.

Staged in the long, high-ceilinged meeting hall, with the audience seated on either side of the main stage, the production uses a mixture of dance, haunting songs and fragmented poetic dialogue to tell its story. This is all overlaid by a fully enveloping sound design that includes primeval vocal echoes layered over the singers' voices and recorded snippets of authentic-sounding news reports rattling off grim statistics of African deaths and the high numbers of HIV/AIDS orphans. Additional sound bites reflect contentious, high-profile foreign adoptions, with specific reference to pop singer Madonna's disputed adoption of a little boy from Malawi a few years ago.



Segments are linked by subtle changes in lighting and staging that move the audience's attention all around the room, as the play jumps from a harrowing, confrontational scene in the antebellum South between a "mammy" figure and the domineering woman of the house, to a vibrant, young African mother-to-be. The latter's performance features wildly expressive dances that turn from ecstatic and celebratory to defensive, as she fights against shadowy, accusatory figures whose fragmented

*Because I Love You/A Quiet Desperation* performance at the St. Lawrence Hall, February 25, 2014 (Photo: Gesilayefa Azorbo, 2014).

chants imply shame and disgust at her daring to assume care for her child.

Another highly charged scene has the three western mothers in a high-noon face-off stance against the African mothers trying to convince them that handing over their dark babies is presumably for their own good.



*Because I Love You/A Quiet Desperation* performance at the St. Lawrence Hall, February 25, 2014 (Photos: Gesilayefa Azorbo, 2014).

The three western mothers are quite distinct: one, a bright-eyed, idealistic young woman opening her arms hopefully to each of the African mothers, but spurned each time; another, a wild dancing figure who seems to have lost a child (or perhaps the ability to have one) and literally carries the expression of her grief in a ragged bundle that she cradles while seeking new hope; and the third, an imperious, demanding, domineering figure who does not ask, but rather demands the handing over of the baby to be “saved.”

As a performance art piece, *Because I Love You* is an uncomfortable, thought-provoking, intensely felt immersive experience. I find that when it comes to art, the things that move me the most tend to be music and dance, so I found myself in a state of almost visceral dislike for the character of the imperious white mother by the time the performance concluded, which I attribute to the sheer talent she and the other performers brought to the piece. As one of the audience members exclaimed, when talking to the actress during the Q&A afterwards, “I really hated your character. But that’s a good thing!”

When viewed as a performative documentary piece, *Because I Love You* functions as a bold, unflinching portrayal of the power dynamics inherent in the very question of African-to-western foreign adoptions, and touches on the historical memory and accompanying trauma that has characterized much of western/African relations.

The play situates itself at a point in current history where the events of the past (in relation specifically to African women’s encounter with the west) are generally considered to be just that, in the past. However, it pointedly draws attention to the fact that the reverberations of history continue to be felt in disparate—if not overtly acknowledged—ways, from the post-colonial state of

“As a performance art piece,  
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many African countries (implied in the grim tone of the news reports) to the current predicament of the ethics of foreign adoption out of Africa.

This sense of history repeatedly and vividly remembered, complete with traumatic memory and its long-lasting effect, is depicted quite uniquely in this piece. In fact, the idea that the very location chosen to create and stage the performance was such a pivotal part of the actual history being referenced in the work, serves to ground the piece, while giving weight to the modern trauma being played out within the building's walls.

*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* is a collection of essays by various analysts and critics dealing with how and why traumatic personal or historical events often have a warping effect on the memory of the victims. Editor Cathy Caruth talks about the ways in which literature and other art forms allow access to forms of traumatic events that are otherwise inaccessible to the victim's conscious mind, or difficult to explain to people who have not experienced the same trauma.

For instance, when talking about the intrusive effects of the vivid past on survivors suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Caruth notes, “While the images of traumatic re-enactment remain absolutely accurate and precise, they are largely inaccessible to conscious recall and control... in its repeated imposition as both image and amnesia, the trauma thus seems to

evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence.”<sup>ii</sup>

In a sense, the visceral nature of this performance mimics that intrusive effect of severe trauma in order to cut across dialogue to the heart of meaning. In doing so, it draws the viewer's attention to the documentary truth at hand, that of “the African mother's encounter in the western world, both in the historical context and in the modern reality of foreign adoption.”<sup>iii</sup>

As a performative documentary piece, it does not deal with one specific story, but rather a collective history, and by doing away with a rigid narrative form and dealing in the currency of emotion, *Because I Love You* forces a new understanding of the subject matter. As Bill Nichols notes, “performative films give added emphasis to the subjective qualities of experience and memory that depart from factual recounting.”<sup>iv</sup>

This is a story of the “other,” the often misunderstood and misrepresented figure of the African mother, but told from various character viewpoints that are still somehow all “her” perspective. Through the various theatrical devices—dramatic lighting, immersive sound design and staging, and haunting melodies and lyrics—the performance becomes a primal experience that nonetheless draws attention to the under examined effects of foreign adoption on the real, lived experiences and traumas of the mothers left behind.



# GETTING THE BLUES FROM COCKSUCKER BLUES

Vivian Belik

Film, 1972

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When *Cocksucker Blues* played January 17<sup>th</sup> at the TIFF Lightbox, it was the first time it had been screened in Toronto since 1984. The theatre was packed with Rolling Stones fans, Robert Frank admirers and others who were just curious to see this underground film on the big screen. More than 40 years later, the film still has plenty of shock value.

The cinéma vérité documentary, shot on black-and-white 16mm film intercut with sections of colour, is gritty and revealing. Director Robert Frank—renowned for his photo series, *The Americans*, and for a cover shot of the Rolling Stones' album, *Exile on Main Street*—had been asked by the band to film a documentary of their 1972 tour through the United States. What the band wanted was a poetic documentary of the tour. What they got instead was a provocative and unglamorous portrayal of life on the road.

The film features a plethora of backstage party scenes in which the musicians, roadies and groupies are openly having sex and doing drugs. Female fans have their clothes forcefully ripped off; leadman Mick Jagger prepares to masturbate on camera; and in one infamous scene, a naked woman is splattered with semen.

The film exposes the banality of rock and roll tours.

There are endless shots of the band waiting in hotels and dressing rooms, getting their hair and makeup done and having mundane conversations with one another. After one show we see Keith Richards gradually collapse into the willing arms of a fan as he waits for his entourage to finish partying in a locker room. A scene in which Mick Jagger orders a basket of fruit from room service stands out as one of the more candid moments in a film that otherwise shows the members of the Rolling Stones going through the motions of a tour.

Watching the film 40 years after it was made is arguably different than it would have been to watch it when it was released in 1972. At that time, the film was likely a novel look into the lives of the Rolling Stones but today it merely demystifies the iconic band. Frank, who was older than the members of the Rolling Stones, admitted years later that he thought the group was overrated, a perspective that shines throughout the film. Even the concert footage in *Cocksucker Blues* isn't particularly memorable save for a sequence of the band singing a passionate rendition of *Midnight Rambler* on a stage drenched in red light.

This is not to say the film is not at all worth watching. As a historical record of the rock 'n' roll scene in the



early 70s, the film is intriguing. It offers Rolling Stones fans, in particular, a rare, backstage look at the members of the band. And then there are plenty of famous cameos in the film that are fun to spot including Andy Warhol, Truman Capote and Tina Turner. However, the film still sags a bit under the weight of its own hype.

Canadian music magazine *Exclaim*, gives the film a 10 out of 10 while *GridTO* rates it a 9. In a strange legal stipulation meant to limit the number of viewings of the film (and ultimately protect the band's image), *Cocksucker Blues* is only allowed five screenings a year. The rareness of the film begs the question of whether it has been valorized simply for its obscurity. How else does one explain the excessively positive reviews of a documentary that on a

*Cocksucker Blues* (Film Still: Courtesy of TIFF).

closer look is a somewhat shallow portrayal of a legendary band? Even from a technical perspective, the film doesn't stand out on its own. The sound quality is poor and many of the vérité shots are shaky and not well composed. Frank was reputed to have discovered a light leak in the magazine of his camera partway through the shoot and rather than change the magazine he continued to film anyway.

In an ironic way, a film that was meant to diminish the appeal of a superstar band actually elevated its reputation and allure. There may be a few interesting scenes sprinkled throughout the film but overall it remains a flimsy portrait of a larger-than-life band.

# ROBERT BURLEY'S THE DISAPPEARANCE OF DARKNESS

Siobhan Brannigan

Exhibition, 2014

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Robert Burley's series, *The Disappearance of Darkness*, is one of the featured exhibitions running January 22 to April 13, 2014 at the Ryerson Image Centre in Toronto. This exhibit successfully manages the balance of fine art and documentary, as Burley explores his coming to terms with the loss of a tool of his trade. Burley's reflection on his substantial experience in the field of photography, and the influence of his architecture photography practice, both take form within the photographs in the show. His exhibit mostly consists of large format, colour photographs of monolithic, windowless structures that physically fill the gallery space with their demanding size. We see photographs of structures—now destroyed—in which prints and various film types were manufactured, as well as some small details of items left behind or forgotten inside these shuttered darkrooms and abandoned offices.

This exhibit is on display with a series of other works by Phil Bergerson, Pierre Tremblay and Elisa Gilmour. All of these artists explore and document specific moments in history. Each exhibit offers a view of moments we might otherwise miss, whether a store window or the simple gestures of an individual. As you walk through the gallery space, you get an incredible sense of

the process of Burley's experience as well as the process of film production itself. Besides the large prints, we also see Polaroids that help us understand what else has been used in the early processes of documenting with film. Burley includes a video near the entrance to the gallery that allows you to witness the destruction of one of the buildings. This had a strong impact on many viewing the exhibit. The video allows you to see how the loss of film included the loss of everything that was physical surrounding it. The buildings could not be repurposed as many others are today. These physical losses represented the end of this long existing form of media and show how quickly our use of photography has changed.

*The Disappearance of Darkness* explores the loss of a medium—analogue film. Photography grew as a trade and a profession with the use of film, and over the past decade we have seen it disappear. As we enter the digital age, we see a shift in access to these materials, mainly the decline of it. This has deeply affected those working in the industry as they went through a dramatic and profound switch into the digital age. The shift brings conflicting emotions to the observer as new technology has a greater ability to record and can create new opportunities, but it is also concerning that the authenticity of photography





will be questioned even more heavily by those who view it. The photographs in the exhibit reveal the moments of the end of this process of change. Within some of these photographs, we see those items that we became accustomed to in our everyday life—whether as photographers or otherwise—that have now been taken away. As

*Darkroom. Building 3, Kodak Canada, Toronto, (Photo: Robert Burley, 2005).*

I watched people experience the exhibit for the first time on opening night, it became clear that at least one image in the show resonated personally with each viewer.

Burley's photographic record of the decline in





*“This exhibition is a beautiful and at the same time, sad documentation of the end of an era.”*

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analogue photography has been shown across various mediums, from the gallery space to a book, and even in digital forms through interviews and an online presence. Having the photographic prints mounted within the space of the gallery allows the viewer to experience them in the very form that he documented disappearing. This way of showing the work is very effective and definitely appealed to me when viewing the work. By sharing it across various platforms and thus making the work highly accessible, Burley has guaranteed that many people will be able to see these documents and begin to understand the change in the photography industry.

By presenting it in many ways over the past year, we are able to get more of an in-depth context to the work. Burley opens his book with a personal essay that provides the reader with a greater understanding of his own process of dealing with and understanding his loss, and at the same time confirms the precision and thoughtfulness evident in his work. It allows the viewer to begin to understand the nature of the process behind the work. For instance, Burley began to shoot large format film for the series because he saw it as the only way to get the photographs he wanted, without appealing to the sentimental and nostalgic value of using that process. He discussed the little details we may not otherwise pick up on and the power these hold. He describes the spectacle of people documenting the demolitions with digital accessories and as a result, viewing reality from behind their screens without being cognizant of their

resultant detachment from reality. Also, by listening to Burley speak during the Kodak Lecture Series about what brought him to this stage in his career, we gain a better understanding about how significant this medium was to him in his career; how throughout the process of creating this series, he discovered that he could no longer continue to rely on just this technology into the future; and how this finally brought about his acknowledgment and acceptance of the new and available digital tools and technologies.

This exhibition is a beautiful and at the same time, sad documentation of the end of an era. As I grew up in a time of change with the integration of digital media into mainstream photography, I was not as heavily affected by this change in practice. I learned the process and skills of photography through analogue, but with my exposure to digital devices in everyday life, it did not seem like a big effort to transition over. Burley has clearly shown his knowledge and awareness of the transition through this series. With that you see the dedication to detail that is apparent in every photograph and collectively we see an ode to his practice. Robert Burley has once again successfully demonstrated his first-class abilities as a fine art photographer and a documentarian.

*Opposite (Clockwise from top left) Implosions of Buildings 65 and 69, Kodak Park, Rochester, New York (Photo: Robert Burley, 2007); The Disappearance of Darkness installation view Ryerson Image Centre (Photo: Ben Freedman, 2014); Interior of Building W3, Polaroid, Waltham, Massachusetts (Photo: Robert Burley, 2007); The Disappearance of Darkness installation view Ryerson Image Centre (Photo: Ben Freedman, 2014).*

# HAPPY

Giulia Ciampini

Film, 2011

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Slow down for just a moment and think about what you want most. Take out a pen and paper and write down your thoughts. What are you chasing and why? Do you want a great job? A wonderful partner? A bigger house? A better car? Happiness? What is it you desire at your core?

Most, if not all, individuals seek happiness. But what is happiness and how can it be best obtained? In his 2011 documentary, *Happy*, writer and director Roko Belic journeys across the globe seeking answers to the question: what makes people happy? He was inspired to create this film after reading an article in *The New York Times* entitled “A New Measure of Well-Being From a Happy Little Kingdom.”<sup>i</sup> He wanted to investigate why the U.S., though the world’s wealthiest country, ranked nowhere near the top of a global survey on happiness when we’ve been socialized to believe the key to happiness is obtaining extrinsic rewards such as money, financial success and social status. This film is particularly timely because depression is projected to reach second place in contributions to the global burden of disease by the year 2020.<sup>ii</sup> A whole new field of psychology, called positive psychology, came into existence in the 1990s to address the issue of happiness.

To determine the true basis of happiness, Belic interviewed people from all walks of life in 14 different

countries, along with a number of top psychologists in the field, including Ed Diener, professor of psychology at the University of Illinois; Richard Davidson, professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin's Lab of Affective Neuroscience; and Sonja Lyubomirsky, professor of psychology at the University of California, Riverside and author of *The How of Happiness*.

At the beginning of the film, Belic shares some of his findings with us. In his research, he found that 50 percent of the difference in our happiness levels is determined by our genes, referred to as an individual's genetic set range of happiness; 40 per cent is determined by our intentional behaviors, the things we do to enrich our lives; and only 10 per cent is determined by our circumstances such as our job, social status, health and income. For example, the difference in happiness between someone earning \$5,000 a year and \$50,000 is dramatic. But a person earning \$5 million a year is only slightly happier than a person earning \$50,000. Once basic survival needs and comforts are met, income accounts for little.

Through personal accounts and the real-life stories of people around the world, Belic goes on to show that intrinsic rewards, such as personal growth, physical activity, compassion, cooperation, connectedness and community, are the key components of happiness. For example, the film begins with the story of an impoverished rickshaw driver in India who, despite difficult living conditions and a lack of material wealth, is

jubilant because he lives in a tight-knit community and has children who treasure him. The film also makes the argument that it is not freedom from adversity that allows us to be happy, but rather that it is our ability to deal with that adversity that is paramount. Belic supports this argument with the story of an American beauty queen named Melissa Moody who "had it all" until she was run over by a car. The accident was so traumatic that she required over 30 extremely painful facial reconstructive surgeries. Not only did she have to deal with this intense physical pain, but she also began to have visions of herself as a little girl being sexually abused and strangled by her own father, memories she had repressed. Furthermore, her husband became an alcoholic and left her during the time of her hospitalization. Though the process of physical and emotional healing was long and arduous, she claimed to be in a much better and happier place in her life than she had been previously because she was able to grow through the trauma.

Our pursuit of happiness is based on what we understand about happiness, and our current understanding is limited and misguided. Happiness is a skill, a verb, something we can practice and hone over time. This film is especially pertinent because it holds a magnifying glass up to the things we have been taught will make us happy, and it helps us to move in the direction of the things that will make for a more enriched and satisfied life.

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*"Happiness is a skill, a verb,  
something we can practice  
and hone over time."*

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# WHAT WAS WILL BE

Michèle Pearson Clarke

Exhibition, 2014

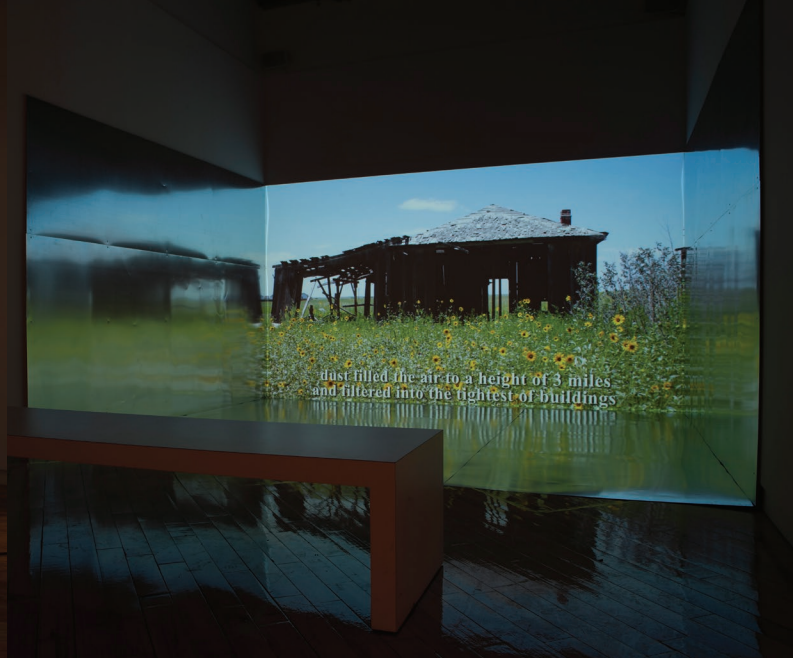
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While 60 percent of Canadians believe that climate change is real and that we humans are to blame, only three in ten believe that the increased flooding, devastating storms and widespread drought of recent years are *definitely* the result of climate change. Even though recent summer floods and winter ice storms have transformed natural disasters from something that you see on the news to something that you see outside your door, this denial persists. At Gallery 44's *What Was Will Be*, Kristie MacDonald and Christina Battle bring natural disasters into the gallery via two persuasive media installations. On view from January 10 until February 15, 2014, the exhibition effectively confronts us all, deniers and believers alike, with ongoing questions about what we consider to be the natural order of things.

With *Mechanisms for Correcting the Past* (2013), MacDonald plays with subject and landscape, recontextualizing and reorienting found photographs of houses turned on their sides by tornadoes, floods and other unknown environmental catastrophes. By rotating her images to return the structures to a horizontal plane, MacDonald simultaneously reasserts a sense of order while also creating an uncanny confusion within each frame. The series features two 12" by 12" digital photographs alongside two others, one 22" by 18" and the other

22" by 22" in size. These four black-and-white prints are hung together in a row with one image projected on a separate wall to the right by the custom-built *Machine for Correcting the Past* (2013). This simple but captivating device is perched in the centre of the main gallery space, endlessly labouring away at its Sisyphean remedial task. In this piece, MacDonald has modified a table to provide a platform that raises and lowers a projector as an elliptical wheel turns beneath it, alternately tilting and straightening both the archival image and the toppled house depicted within it.

The photographs all depict simple wooden structures that seem to have gently been set askew, particularly in the largest print, *Morehead Kentucky Flash Flood* (2013). MacDonald's pivoting gesture is at its most subtle and successful here, and at first glance it is difficult to ascertain who exactly has committed the error: nature or the artist. MacDonald's construction forces a closer, contemplative look at the wreckage that is present, despite the serenity of the image. The repeated raising and lowering of the mechanized projector similarly requires a detailed examination, and as the house stutters upright and then awry and then upright again, the staccato motion indicates the disconnection between our current environmental reality and public perception.



We can spin it however we want, MacDonald seems to suggest, but we ignore the past at our peril.

Alongside MacDonald's images, Christina Battle unearths archival text to bring us an equally compelling installation, drawn from her ongoing series, *Mapping the Prairies Through Disaster* (2012-2014), and here tucked into a separate darkened space within the gallery. In *dearfield, colorado* (2012), Battle combines new video documentation of dilapidated buildings and overgrown fields with captions taken from firsthand accounts of prairie dust storms in the 1930s. Together, these reflect on the fate of an early twentieth-century African-American settlement, destroyed by extreme drought during the Great Depression. Both MacDonald and Battle eschew wall labels, but Battle cleverly includes a photograph of a historical marker, hung just outside the installation, to provide the necessary context and to mark the work as a commemorative site.

Located within the Dust Bowl, Dearfield was founded in 1910, peaked at a population of 700 in 1921 and was reduced to a single resident by 1946. Upon entering the installation, Battle shows us what

Above (L-R) *Mechanisms for Correcting the Past*, Kristie MacDonald, 2013; *dearfield, colorado*, Christina Battle, 2012 (Photos: Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography, 2014).

remains by projecting 14 slow, still scenes of derelict structures on the far wall. The images range in length from 10-15 seconds and the relics are all set against the clear, blue skies of a sunny day. The accompanying texts reference electricity in the air and the metallic nature of the sky. Battle brings this charge to the video projection by covering the floor and surrounding walls with aluminum and filling the room with the sound of sferics: broadband electromagnetic impulses generated by lightning strikes and emanating from two small speakers placed in a corner. Birds chirp, butterflies flit about the ruins and black-eyed susans tremble slightly in the wind, all blurrily reflected in the metal, much like the history and memory of this forgotten place. Battle ends her elegy with a transport truck speeding past this abandoned town, reminding us that although natural disasters may befall any of us, we do not all have an equal chance at survival and recovery. Or indeed, at history.

# GETTING SCHOOLED

Karin Culliton

Exhibitions, 2013-2014

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Artspace Youngplace opened the doors of its newly renovated building last year with two inaugural exhibitions, *Unarchive* and *Stairmasters*, featuring the work of nine local artists. Curated by Heather Nicol, the exhibition *Unarchive* makes use of the former school's rich archives to play with nostalgia and history, whereas *Stairmasters* considers the building itself, engaging the architecture as a stage.

Artspace Youngplace is the latest project by Artspace, the organization behind Wychwood Barns as well as other artist-centered projects in Toronto. The former school sat empty for more than a decade before Artspace bought the building in 2010. After completing a \$17 million transformation of the century-old school, the building officially opened on November 20, 2013. Six contemporary artists were commissioned to complete original works for the *Unarchive* exhibit, and were given access to the archival collection of the Givins/Shaw School.

Upon entering the space you are greeted with a trophy case. Here Nicol starts off *Unarchive* with an interesting twist on the familiar. Of the many trophies, not one individual trophy is the clear standout; they are stacked beside and on top of each other, creating the look of one large silver sculpture. Lit only from behind, the

trophy sculpture forces our eye to the exterior pinnacle of the case, where homemade trophies are displayed. These trophies were created by grade four and five students to complement the archival trophies, and play with ideas about what should be inside or outside a vitrine.

Also on the first floor, student letters to their Members of Parliament challenge the historical record of their school's namesake, Colonel James Givins. Currently a plaque at the school only gives credit to a "small band of Indians," who worked alongside Givins, but the students request that equal credit be given to the actual tribe, the Mississauga of the New Credit First Nation. Taking steps to update history, the students call into question memory and fact, a theme that *Unarchive* continues throughout its three levels.

On the second floor, Dave Dymant's piece, *Students Draw Scenes From Movies Which Were Filmed at Their School*, does exactly as the title suggests. Students were asked to create pencil drawings of scenes they found interesting in movies filmed in the halls and classrooms of the shuttered school. Framed similarly and exhibited in a grid pattern on the wall suggesting film cells, the illustrations give the viewer an idea of just how often this building was used as a "school." Our memories might recall scenes of hallways teeming with life, but





Dyment's exhibit confronts us with the fact that those scenes were constructed, and during regular school hours, this building sat mostly empty for over a decade.

The third floor hallway features *The Nature of the Victory*, a photographic series by Lee Henderson. Beautiful yet haunting black-and-white photos of school trophies emote both reverence and sadness as they are relegated to dusty floors and empty rooms. Victories that were once so important to us are now forgotten.

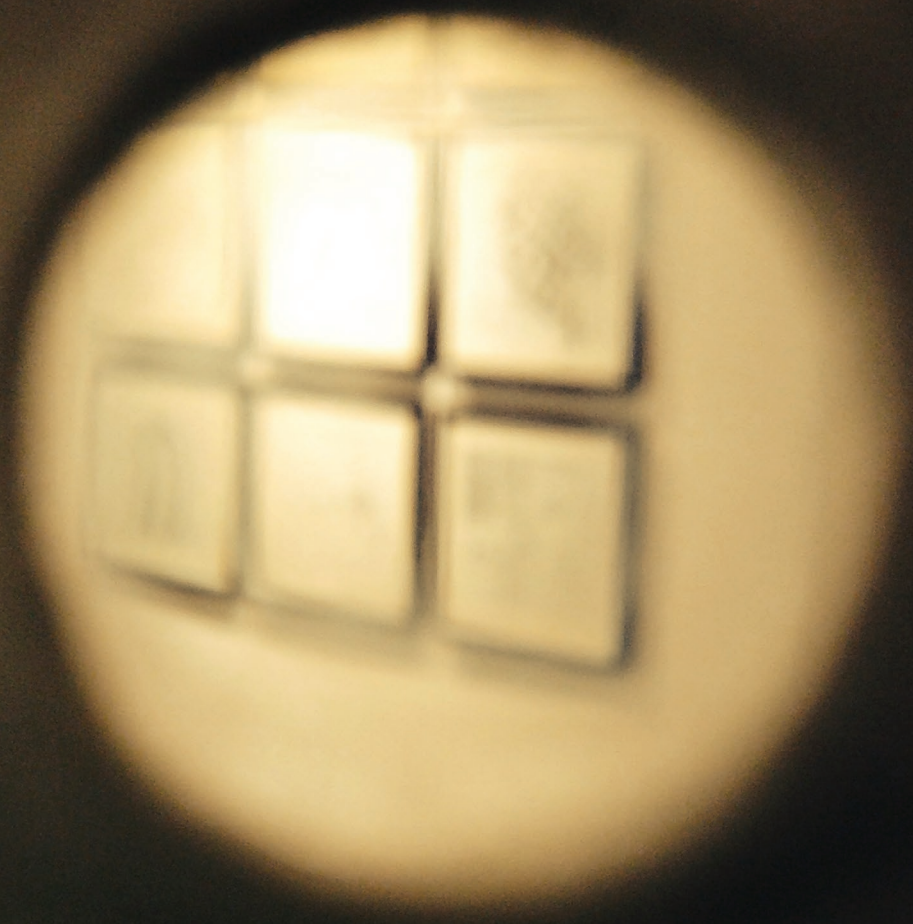
In large bold letters on the wall, Ian Carr-Harris' *Do We Like It!* repeats the old school's chant in a typeface

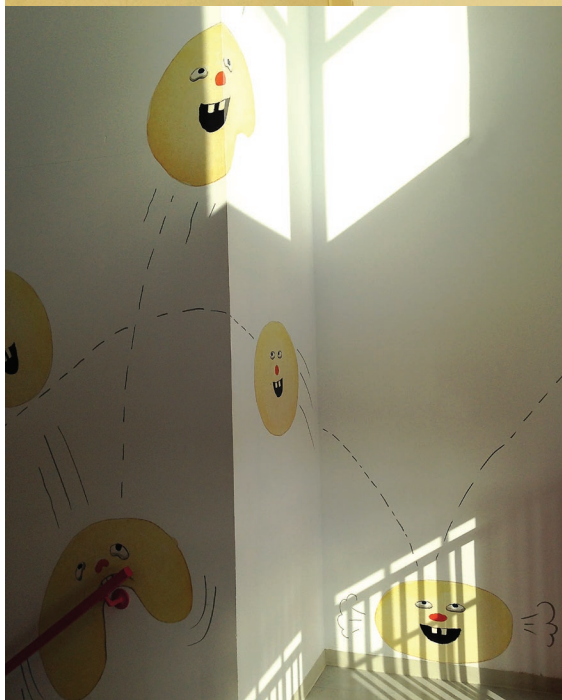
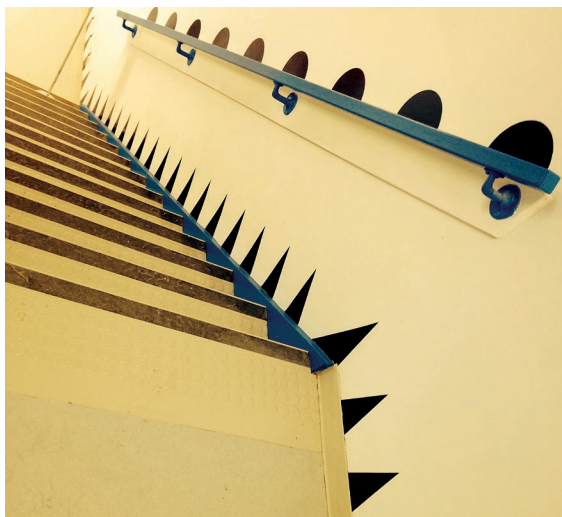
Exterior of Artscape Youngplace on Shaw Street, Toronto (Photo: Karin Culliton, 2014).

meant to teach cursive writing. The chant is easy to hear in our heads—staccato and loud—as the font breaks up the words in a mechanical way, giving pauses where pauses were sure to exist. Those chants that became second nature for us to repeat, like the national anthem or the “Our Father,” are laid out in such a way by Carr-Harris as to remind us of just how we learned them in the first place.

Throughout the exhibit, Jessica Vallentin explores how we view the artwork with *From Nothing to Something*,







Opposite Through the lens of one of Jennifer Vallentin's viewfinders; Top Melissa Fisher's acrylic cutouts accentuate the architecture of the stairwell Bottom Seth Scriber's Oukee Oukee bounces down the stairwell (Photos: Karin Culliton, 2014).

and Back Again. By placing arrows on the floor, Vallentin directs us to look through her original viewfinders made of ceramic. By interacting with the other artists' works, Vallentin asks us to zero in on a specific aspect of each work through an imperfect lens. The resulting fuzzy view creates a feeling of memory, which can be myopic and wrong.

Connecting each of the floors are the stairwells. *Stairmasters* features works by Debbie Adams, Melissa Fisher and Seth Scriber. Using the in-between (yet connective) spaces of the stairwells, each of these artists uses vinyl to whimsically explore signage. Adams' *Flash* uses images from flashcards of the 1950s, but plays with language and image to have us question what we see and what we read. Scriber's *Oukee Oukee's Trip* follows a ball on its journey as it becomes more battered and bruised as it descends, seemingly bouncing off the architectural features in the stairwell. Scriber's lighthearted exhibit is also fun to view when ascending, as Oukee Oukee gets better the further up the stairs you go. Melissa Fisher's *lately I've just been trying to find balance* also uses the architecture, but in a formal and structured way, drawing attention to the doors as well as empty spaces by using only black cut-outs of geometric shapes.

Overall, *Unarchive* and *Stairmasters* invite us to experience the show as we experienced school: walking through the halls, going up and down the stairs, looking at which friends of ours had their art on the wall. It invites us to pay attention to the little things like patterns on the floor or cracks in the wall, at a time when our world was very small and encompassed school and home and back again. We revisit memories by opening up the past in order to question, feel, reminisce and remember—and then we can look forward.

# COCKSUCKER BLUES

Chantal Dignard

Film, 1972

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I went into *Cocksucker Blues* at the TIFF Bell Lightbox on January 17, 2014 with an open mind about what to expect, an appreciation for both Robert Frank and the Rolling Stones and excitement over the fact I was seeing something with such limited viewing opportunity. The technical attributes, the editing choices regarding content, and the immersive experience of watching it in a theatre were the three things that most resonated with me after the film had ended.

The technical quality (or lack thereof) was one of the most prominent aspects of this film. Although outstanding technical quality is not a trait traditionally associated with documentary films, the extremely shaky shots in this piece were still jarring. I was definitely expecting more from the film on a technical level due to my past experiences with Frank's works. The unstable camera movements partially served the feel of the film, as they added to the "behind the scenes" atmosphere Frank managed to create. They made it feel somewhat like a home movie and added a layer of authenticity. However, this authenticity could have been produced simply through having some handheld shots scattered throughout the film. There was no need to fill the piece with shots that had a quality similar to footage I took in my first year of film school. The poor sound quality was also distracting and made it unclear what was happening at

certain points. Yet this worked in a sense, as the confusion generated through the distorted sound mirrored the chaos that was usually present in the film.

The content and editing choices in this film were extremely bold and thus served to make the film into such a memorable piece. The scenes range from drug use to nudity and Frank does not shy away from showing potentially offensive or distasteful material. In fact, many of the scenes that contain explicit material are dragged on seemingly longer than they need to be. This is an effective technique as it has the impact of making the viewer slightly uncomfortable, which they would likely be in many of the situations being portrayed. Several of the situations were awkward in nature and unusual to see in a documentary setting, especially in the 1970s. It is edited in a raw and unapologetic fashion, which serves to engulf the viewer in the rock star lifestyle of The Rolling Stones. Viewers are not allowed to quickly move on from scenes that may be discomfiting or offensive; rather they are immersed in them as they are given a generous amount of time to unfold.

*Cocksucker Blues* can only be screened publicly five times a year due to a settlement that took place back in 1972, after The Rolling Stones sued Frank in an attempt to prevent the distribution of the film. Therefore there





Mick Jagger backstage (Film Still: *Cocksucker Blues*, 1972).

was an exclusive feeling that came with being able to attend the event. This definitely heightened the excitement and served to make the screening feel like a much bigger deal than it normally would have been.

The atmosphere reflected the rarity of the event and anticipation could be felt in the room before the piece started. While the film was playing, there was an intense silence and a seriousness that made it obvious no one in the theatre wanted to miss a second of it. There seemed to be an unspoken acknowledgement that most people in the room would not get the opportunity to watch the film in a theatre again. The iconic status of the film added a layer of uniqueness to the collective experience being shared with everyone else in the theatre.

It is unusual that a documentary film is able to fill a theatre and remain widely discussed in the arts community over forty years after its release. The legal issues and controversy that surrounded the film when it was released, along with the limited screenings provide a surface explanation for its enduring popularity over four decades later.

The fame of The Rolling Stones and Frank's reputation as a filmmaker and photographer also played significant roles in maintaining the film's status. However, I would argue that the style of the film also played an important part in keeping it relevant throughout the years. *Cocksucker Blues* is presented in a style that is similar to the reality television that is so prominent today. Many of these programs have attracted mass audiences due to their attempts at portraying "reality," often in a constructed or heavily manipulated manner. Frank managed to capture a much more genuine version of reality through his extensive access while filming and the band's comfort with the camera. Although the style of the film was groundbreaking when it was released, it presents modern-day audiences with an authentic and more realistic version of the format they are used to viewing. Therefore, Frank's ability to capture the rock star lifestyle in a raw and real manner has contributed to the film's continued iconic status.



# SPINNING PLATES

Briar Gorton

Film, 2012

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*Spinning Plates* is a documentary about three very different types of restaurants and the people behind them. A 150-year-old diner, a family start-up Mexican restaurant, and a world-class molecular restaurant find their stories interwoven by a shared passion of food. The characters behind the restaurants are as different as the restaurants themselves. At times, it is difficult to see what exactly the common thread is, if any, between such differing restaurants. The documentary shows the realities of restaurant ownership: the good, the bad and the ugly. But most importantly, it shows why the chefs continue to return to the kitchen despite all of this.<sup>i</sup> It is the common themes of “food as a gathering place” or “food is family” that ties the three together in the end.

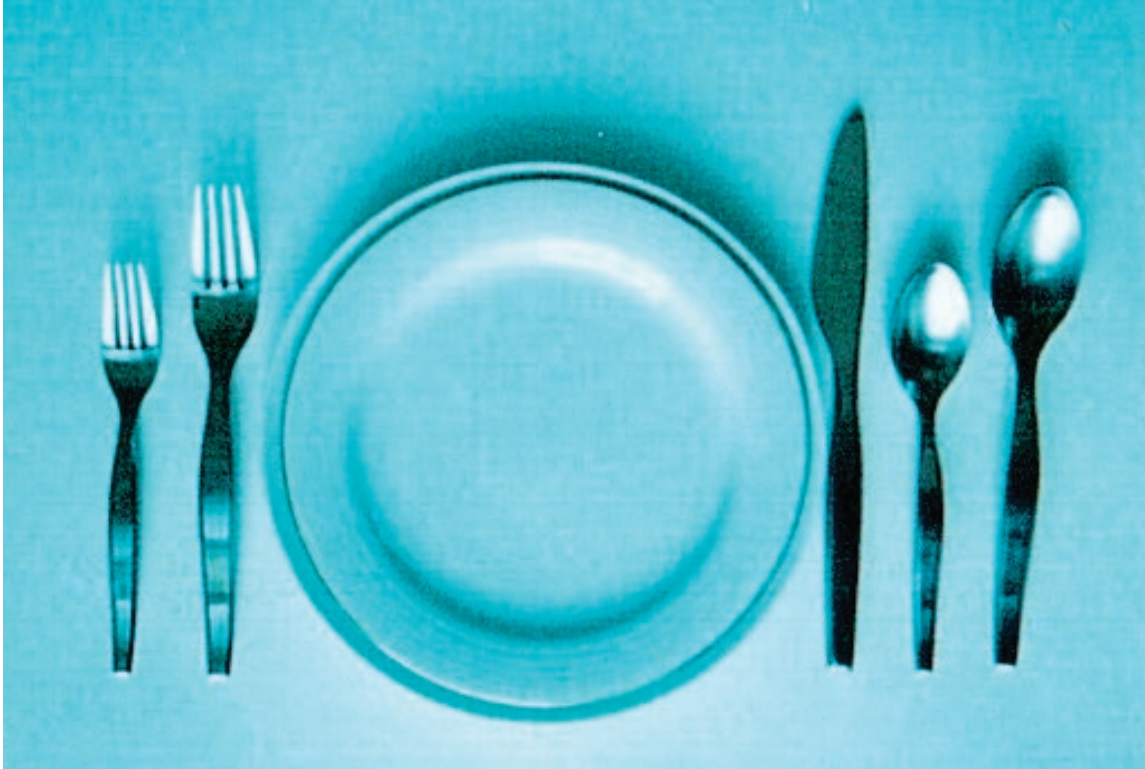
The film starts out with all the obligatory close-ups of meals being prepared to satisfy the expectations of

those in the foodie circles. It could have continued (for the entire length) just that way, but director Joseph Levy goes a few steps further to include the realities of running a restaurant and the effect this has on the personal lives of those involved. His approach with his subjects is to save the reveal for as long as possible, and then gently remind the audience, that unlike the glitz and glamour shown on the Food Network, “restaurant owners are real human beings.”<sup>iii</sup> The tenacity that is needed is what really shines through for each of them. The film could be criticized for underplaying a burnt-down restaurant, a family facing foreclosure, and lastly a chef’s diagnoses with tongue cancer (of all things), and it does little to actually address the current state of the highly volatile restaurant landscape in America. But this is not a documentary made to expose the financial realities facing the food industry

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*“The documentary shows the realities of restaurant ownership: the good, the bad and the ugly.”*

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in the U.S. Levy's careful choice of direction in this film is made to please, and certainly has been created to "cater" to a mass market. Ultimately, it is Levy's way of forcing the hand of "uplifting, crowd-pleasing arcs"<sup>iii</sup> that completes the crowd-pleasing movie package.

It is hard to decide if there is an actual message in this film; some critics say "you begin to question Levy's point altogether."<sup>iv</sup> In fact, Levy focuses on one of the key factors in the food industry: hard work (perhaps one of the most overlooked aspects with the en masse of reality television). *Spinning Plates* can be appreciated as one of the first food films to give such depth and background to its characters and the hard work that is needed to run a restaurant. Reality television has almost hypnotized a generation into forgetting just how much work is needed in real time to be a successful restaurant owner. Unlike the quick edits of television, a top chef cannot be born from simply showing up one day. It takes long hours and much sacrifice to become one.

*Plate* (Photo: Briar Gorton, 2014).

The compression of the food industry into 30-minute to 1-hour segments has certainly skewed perceptions of the actual realities. Perhaps the documentary is a reflection of Levy's own time at the Food Network, and his desire to create a complete picture and reveal the truths that can be found beyond the small-screen kitchen. It is only outside of the television limitations where he can successfully accomplish such a task.

*Spinning Plates* neatly packages together a tale of three restaurateurs, and their ongoing struggles to make their restaurants a reality. It is one of the first films to serve as a reminder of what the food business is really about—a lot of hard work and determination by the people that are in it. It is a refreshing look into a world where little credit is given to those who give up so much; it also serves as a reminder that a restaurant is, at the end of the day, a business.

# LES MISÉRABLES

Tariq Kieran

Play, 2013-2014

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Walking into the Princess of Wales theatre, the general excitement was palpable. There was a buzz in the air about the show as the audience was being seated. Then came the gasp—a collective gasp—as the orchestra dove into the first notes, followed by mesmerized silence as the show started in earnest.

Needless to say, this is not what I was expecting for a show that had its world premiere 29 years ago in London's West End, and has been in constant production around the world for the entirety of that time. *Les Misérables* is a musical that most Toronto theatre audiences are very familiar with. If you didn't catch one of the long-running original productions or international tours, then it's likely you've seen the 10th anniversary concert production that airs annually on public broadcasting stations. Or perhaps you've seen the 25th anniversary concert? Then of course there was the 2012 film adaptation, with its marketing blitz and constant performance clips during that year's award season. At the very least, you've heard some of the piece's most popular songs on talent shows, even if you're not much of a theatre fan. The point is that for the past near-30 years, this show has been nearly inescapable.

The musical *Les Misérables* itself and its score have both been reviewed to death already. There is nothing

left to add there. The question really is what accounted for the audience's enthusiasm and, more importantly, how did the show manage the varied expectations the audience was clearly bringing to this viewing?

To answer the first part of that question, one must look at the themes *Les Misérables* deals with: the law versus the people, class struggles, identity, personal growth, spirituality, love, life, and then finally death, loss and hope. These themes are as relevant as they ever were. It is no wonder audiences are still interested.

As to audience expectations, this production manages them well with a few notable changes. One of the most prominent deviations is the absence of the original production's turntable and the staging that accompanied that design. By ditching that approach, co-directors Laurence Connor and James Powell were able to create less stylized performances, especially noticeable in the revolutionary student scenes. In fact, the staging for this old musical generally felt remarkably fresh and vibrant. Projections inspired by Victor Hugo's original ink-wash drawings helped to balance out stage scenery that, on its own, captured the grimy and at times claustrophobic world that these characters would have lived in.

No musical can succeed though, without a strong cast, and a revival should have a cast that can stand up



*Les Misérables* (Photo: Matthew Murphy, 2013).

against the roles' originators. The show's lead, Ramin Karimloo, said during an interview on *Show People* that "once you start honouring your truth, there is no pressure" to compete with predecessors. That sense of truth is something that he manages to imbue in his Valjean. Karimloo convinces as the menacing ex-con in his early scenes, manages to subtly age and develop his character as the show's timeline moves on, and is able to perfectly contrast those early scenes with his ability to bring depth to the saint-like character that Valjean becomes by the musical's finale. In fact, Colm Wilkinson, the role's originator who had been acclaimed as the definitive Valjean, told the *Toronto Star*, "When I see [Karimloo] play Jean Valjean onstage, I forget that I ever did it."<sup>ii</sup> Musically, Ramin Karimloo is also a perfect fit for this production. He might not be able to match Wilkinson's delicate angelic tones, but the natural grit of Karimloo's voice allows the actor to bring a little more realism to

the score. He balances that with perfect technique, managing the score's musical lines and vocally soaring when needed. Thankfully, Karimloo's performance lacked the excessive back phrasing of Hugh Jackman's film version of Valjean.

The show's featured characters generally benefitted from the changes in design and direction. As the young romantic leads, Samantha Hill (Cosette) and Perry Sherman (Marius) were able to bring a more naturally awkward chemis-

try than previously seen. Hill, in particular, introduced a welcome playfulness as the prim and proper Cosette. Melissa O'Neil was able to tap into Eponine's internal struggle even in smaller scenes, well before performing her big solo: audience favourite *On My Own*.

There were a few misfires. Mark Uhre's Enjolras lacked the charisma that the student revolutionary leader requires. Genevieve Leclerc's Fantine had an interesting edge, but lost the warmth that allows audiences to connect with the character. Earl Carpenter was solid as Javert, yet paled compared to Karimloo's intensity during their scenes together.

Despite the few misses, the audience—many in tears—roared with applause after the finale and leapt to their feet when Karimloo took his bow. It was apparent that not only did the production succeed; it likely surpassed many of the audience members' expectations.

Next for *Les Misérables*? After Toronto, a full-scale Broadway revival with Ramin Karimloo in the lead. No doubt New York audiences are in for quite a ride.



# LIGHT MY FIRE

Zile Liepins

Light My Fire: Some propositions about portraits and photography  
Part II: We are not ourselves we are always ourselves

Exhibition, 2013-2014

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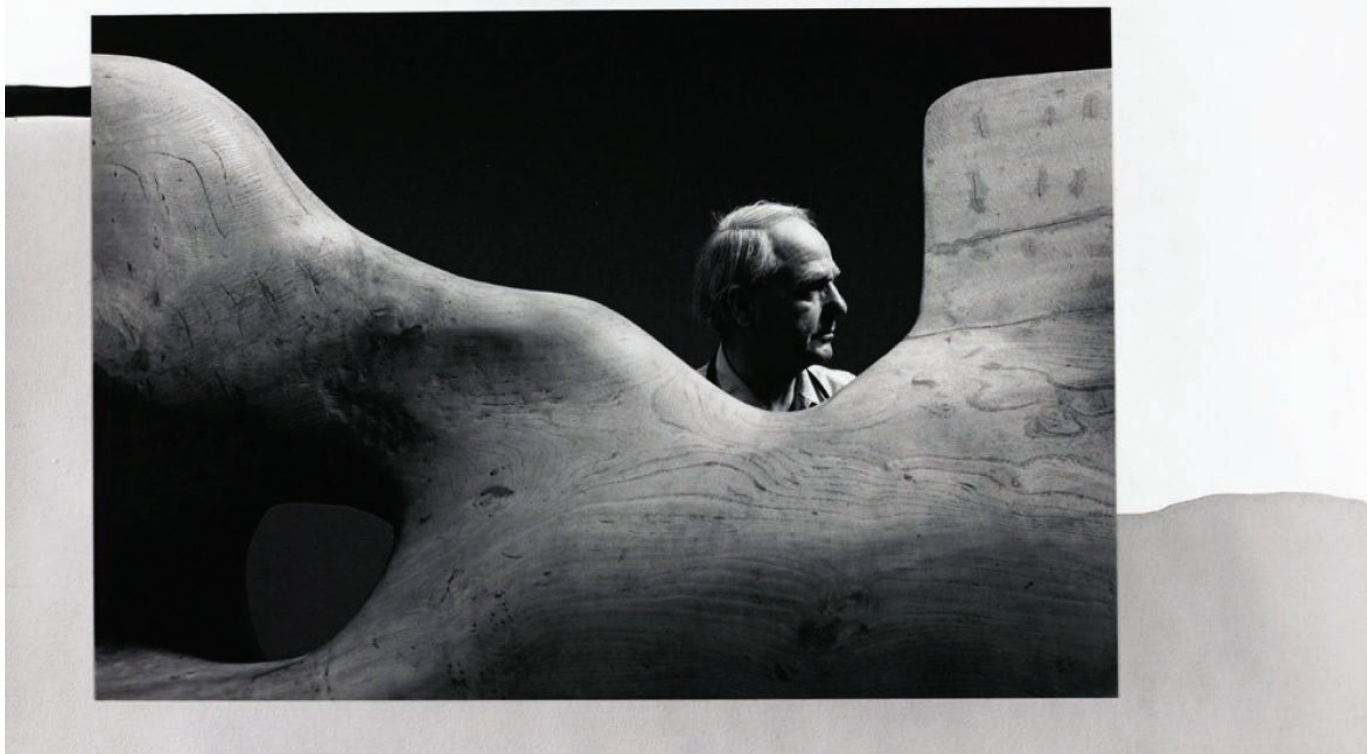


The Art Gallery of Ontario brought the first photograph into its permanent collection in 1977. It was a portrait—Henry Moore's profile framed by the swell of one of his own monumental pieces—captured by Arnold Newman. Since this acquisition, the number of photographs

housed at the AGO has grown to over 50,000. In Part II of *Light My Fire: Some Propositions about Portraits and Photography*, curator Sophie Hackett has gathered and showcased works spanning 150 years by photographers including Robert Mapplethorpe, Cindy Sherman, Spring Hurlbut, Kristan Horton, Robert Frank, Man Ray, Hannah Hoch, Andre Kertesz, Barbara Kruger, Walker Evans, Tess Boudreau and Ida Kar. It is an impressive presentation, highlighting Canadian as well as international artists, the famous and the unknown, the young, the old and the dead. Many works are on view for the first time.

The exhibit is divided into three parts: *Light My Fire* has its own room of introduction, followed by *We Are Not Ourselves* and *We Are Always Ourselves*. *We Are Not Ourselves* explores photo manipulation to inspire emotion or feeling, while *We Are Always Ourselves* brings focus to descriptive photographs of people in the street and in the studio.

As we enter the first room of the exhibit, low-lit and painted in a rich aubergine hue, we are confronted with *Octavius* by Canadian Kristan Horton. The piece presents the question that will be examined throughout the space—what is a portrait? A dictionary tells us that a portrait is a painting, drawing or photograph



of a person that often only includes the person's head and shoulders. *Octavius* offers us the traditional portrait silhouette we are familiar with, but challenges our expectations through the representation of the face. By layering different images on top of one another, features become blurry and fluid, and ultimately indiscernable—we have no way of knowing who this is. This image tells us that what we are about to see may be a collection of portraits, but not as we are used to seeing them.

The curator didn't go as far as starting us off with Spring Hurlbut's *Mary #1*, an image of a non-descript smattering of pebbles and sand. If we are familiar with Hurlbut's *Deuil* series, we know that we are in fact looking at human bones and ashes, giving the simple image

Opposite *Pictures/Self Portrait*, gelatin silver print (Photo: Robert Mapplethorpe, 1977, Art Gallery of Ontario); Above British abstract sculptor Henry Moore poses for a portrait June 25, 1966 in Much Hadham, England (Photo: Arnold Newman, Art Gallery of Ontario).

all its meaning. An exploration of death and reconciliation, Hurlbut's series was created as she processed the passing of her partner Arnaud Maggs. A real portrait of a person in a physical state we rarely witness, it is both troubling and moving to face. As a representation of an individual and a personal exploration of grieving, this mound of "dirt" couldn't be more intimate.

In Robert Mapplethorpe's diptych *Pictures/Self Portrait* from 1977, we see two almost identical images side by side. A hand is holding a pen, having written the word "pictures" on a square piece of white paper.



*Maquette for Suzy Lake as Bill Vazan, gelatin silver prints*  
(Photo: Suzy Lake, 1974, Art Gallery of Ontario).

While the composition is the same in both images, the hands are in different states of dress—one is wearing the crisp shirt of an office worker, while the other wears just a studded leather bracelet. *Of Myself* (1989) by Sarah Charlesworth demands attention with its size and colour; a bright block of red with black accents,

the piece appears abstract from afar. Upon closer examination we see body organs and artifacts floating as if in dead air. Robert Frank's *Mabou* is a self-portrait through personal items: we can make out household objects, frames, a plant... the image is dark and low-contrast. New details emerge the longer we view it, altering its meaning but ultimately melting together for a united portrait. These portraits without faces are offset by more traditional pieces such as *Sioux Child on Cradleboard* from 1871.

This room has been designated under the broader title, *Light My Fire*. It remains unclear what this title intends to tell us in regard to photography. Most of us connect the words "Light My Fire" with the 1967 cult classic song by the Doors of the same name. Is this choice meant to spark renewed attention to old works? Does a show curated from archives so imply dusting off old photographs, that a punchy name is needed to draw in the viewer? *Light My Fire*, Part II opened with *Ai Wei Wei: According to What?* and *David Bowie is*, as well as the AIMIA Photography Prize finalists' exhibit. It seems as if the AGO was making a deliberate statement with its "hip" fall programming; the current, more classical *The Great Upheaval: Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Collection, 1910-1918* almost feels like an apology for all the noise to the ladies who lunch in the members' lounge. Additionally, work on display for the first time is "advertised" with orange stickers stating

"First Time On View" as bright as any "New!" label you might find on a product at the supermarket.

The opening image of Part I of *Light My Fire* was Paul Graham's *Untitled*, a picture of a woman smoking, bathed in an orange light as vibrant as the cherry of her cigarette. A literal interpretation of the title to open the show, it does little to inform the meaning of the series. In an online interview with Sophie Hackett, she manages to talk about the title and the works categorized under it without telling us anything: "In *Light My Fire*, they range in scale, in colour, in material, but each of them is a very deliberated almost self-conscious representation, they are pictures of people and we can highlight the decision that each of the makers has made in their creation... A second iteration of *Light My Fire*, a sense of a pictorial intensity coming through in different works..."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps she herself is unclear about what connects the exhibition title to the work and is uncomfortable trying to defend it. While the theme of this collection remains unclear, it is interesting and satisfying in its diversity, and opens the viewer's mind about what a portrait can be.

In the following room, *We Are Never Ourselves* examines photo-manipulation. It is the smallest collection of the three, and the least engaging. Cecil Beaton and Suzy Lake provide us with a look at the concept "photoshopped" before Photoshop. In Beaton's *Greta Garbo* from 1952, Garbo's neck contour looks cut

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*"It remains unclear what this title intends to tell us in regard to photography."*

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# “Seeing the artist’s face in the photographs of Boudreau feels like a privileged look behind the scenes.”

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out with scissors while her skin is dewy and her hair highlighted. In *Maquette for Suzy Lake as Bill Vazan*, Lake brings us through her transformation into Vazan by marking alterations with a pen.

Traditional forms are repurposed in *Political Caricature* and the tintype *Girl with long hair* from the 1870s. Both appear to be calling cards, but upon closer examination we see that the infant featured in one has Lincoln’s face pasted unto it and the girl posing for the camera in the other is facing the wrong way, such that we see only her long blonde hair.

Andre Kertesz and Duane Michals mutate the human form, creating eerie but beautiful figures in black-and-white. *Esztergom, Hungary* by Kertesz is a representation of a man swimming, but his shortened arms are spaghetti thin and his head seems to be missing. In Michals’ *Joseph Cornell*, the black silhouette of a man’s profile becomes ghostly as it is reduced to a wispy swaying figure.

In the third room, we delve into *We Are Always Ourselves*: a collection of mostly portrait series divided into street and studio photography. We see how environment informs the way we read a likeness. In Leon Levinstein’s series of untitled photographs taken in the 1960s and 70s, the subject never looks right at the camera—the face may even be cut off—but each photo is tinged with blurry, gritty city dirt. Michel Lambeth’s images of Toronto in the 1950s and 60s are portraits of people, but also a portrait of our city in a different time.

Both Tess Boudreau and Ida Kar capture known artists in their work environments. An artist expresses who he or she is through art. Toronto-born Boudreau reveals the faces of artists we have come to know through their work: Joyce Wieland, Paterson Ewen, Kazuo Nakamura, Jack Bush, Tony Onley and Rita Letendre all pose with art of their own creation. Artists’ work represents them—we know their paintings before we know their faces. Seeing the artist’s face in the photographs of Boudreau feels like a privileged look behind the scenes.

*Light My Fire* provides a twist on what we’ve already seen—every image that is displayed carries a detail that makes it unexpected. We know Man Ray for his surrealist work, but we are shown traditional portraits of Albert and Mildred Lewin. We think we are looking at a calling card, but on closer viewing, the subject is facing the wrong way. The same is true for what may at first appear to be the most classic and predictable selections. Many visitors pass the glass display case of tintypes with no more than a quick glance. Like the primitive tools or rocks and minerals that we have become immune to from countless childhood visits to the museum, these images are dismissed as a necessary but dull representation of a part of the history of photography. Yet upon closer examination, we see that this particular selection has been curated for oddities and signs of the human touch. A large number of the tintypes reveal the bizarre practices around photographing infants. At the dawn of photography,



exposures were long and keeping a child still required special tricks. A common practice was to have the mother hold the child in her lap. In order to disguise the parent, she was draped in a black cloth or fabrics similar to curtains or wallpaper. The figure is far from invisible, creating a comical and eerie effect. Other portraits have been modified by the human hand, painting a pair of feet blue, or blacking out an entire figure with ink.

Another image easy to pass by is the wet collodian, glass-plate negative, *Empress Maria Alexandrovna, wife of Tsar Alexander II*, by Charles Negre. The negative shows us precisely what is missing in the portrait of a regal royal we are accustomed to seeing. In the negative, we



Left *Octavius*, inkjet print (Photo: Kristan Horton, 2012, Art Gallery of Ontario); Above Portrait of a young girl, around 1859, ambrotype, tinted (Rodney H. Dewey, Art Gallery of Ontario).

see the work of the image-maker; we see the dust and scratches, and we are reminded that this is a document of a true moment between the photographer and the subject. Suddenly we are made to picture the queen sitting uncomfortably in the studio just like any other mortal, and we can almost envision the failed shot with eyes closed or awkward expression that may have come before or after this frame. Far from the impersonal painted portraits of rich and powerful men and women across time, which we have viewed to a point of fatigue, the negative brings the experience back into reality and to the photographer in his darkroom.

*Light My Fire* provides a refreshing and engaging viewing of a wide variety of work. Each image opens a world of knowledge and deliberation about a photographer, a time, a practice, or simply a printing technique, that the viewer can choose to delve into or leave alone. While the collection is considered, the message remains vague. The three titles work successfully as groupings or reflections rather than propositions; they provide a thoughtful survey rather than a statement that expresses an opinion.

# NIGHTMARE DREAM

Anna MacLean

Play, 2013

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*Nightmare Dream* was first conceived as the 2011 SummerWorks show, *Dancing To A White Boy Song*. Since then, playwright Motion and director Mumbi Tindyebwa Otu have developed a more complex portrayal of the struggle to delve beyond the simple African history presented to us in both popular culture and academia.

*Nightmare Dream* takes on an immersive form, involving aspects of surreal theatre that harken back to the likes of *Marat/Sade*; but instead of a play within a play, it is a dream within a play. The small audience of 25 feels not like they are in the seating area of a theatre, but rather as though they themselves are experiencing a sort of dream. Walking the line between experience and observance, the non-chronological format allows for a more personal interpretation, involving the audience at a level that is somewhat unusual for a standard staged play. This is not the beginning of immersive theatre by any means. The success of the New York City production of *Sleep No More* in 2012 has surged life back into the immersive/surreal theatre structure, inspiring form-bending approaches on an international level. *Nightmare Dream* expertly calls upon these immersive techniques to enhance and texturize the overall experience, leaving the audience solemn and spellbound.

On the eve of embarking on a journey to Africa to bury his father, Simon (Peter Bailey) falls into a nightmare/

dream that desperately attempts to reconcile his white-washed Canadian life as a PhD student with his African roots. The play begins as Simon stoically descends from a stairway into the Victorian Parlor room of Toronto's Historic Campbell House, seemingly distressed and unaware of the audience's presence. He is in a robe that suggests he has been sleeping, and his impassioned diatribe soon informs us that it is more likely that he has not yet wakened and remains asleep, in a dream. The lights have dimmed and distant noises reminiscent of song and conflict are audible from another room. Having little to no explanation of the format, the audience has no choice but to engage and question their own sense of reality, their own sense of self-propriety. By the time Simon leads us out of the parlour and into the darkened basement, the relationship between the audience and players has been established and we understand that this Victorian House, steeped as it is in white privilege, not only represents the idea of home, but also of Simon's idea of himself and it is perhaps a portrayal of Canada and the Western world in general.

When the audience enters the basement quarters, the tone changes. This room feels secret, and somewhat hidden. There is a sense of shame and Simon is confronted with what appears to be his father's tomb. A young African dancer moves wildly about the stage. He



is a manifestation of Simon's guilt; of the African Simon could be. The interactions between Simon and this child of Africa become the backbone of Simon's emotional arc throughout the story. The dancing is stark, heated, reckless and free. There is so much subtext in the set design, costume, movement, dialogue and music; the audience hears what is not being said and sees what is not being shown. Most importantly, the use of silence, stillness, and reflection gives the audience a chance to feel what has been, and *what is* being felt.

Each room we follow Simon into has a different feel, a reflexive tone that gently makes room for the audience to understand the complexities of Simon's struggles, and gives us time to reflect on our own. We figuratively and literally accompany Simon through his battle with identity, the clash between Africa and Europe that ultimately resulted in slavery, and the revolution to reclaim the African's Africa. We witness Simon's transformation and the underlying question

*Performance of Nightmare Dreamscape (Obsidian Theatre Company, 2014).*

bears repeating: what is your name?

*Nightmare/Dream* is a scripted piece that presumably does not change from one performance to the next, yet it exudes a documentary-esque feel as it demonstrates the very relevant struggle involved in coming to terms with our collective histories. While the form expressed is more of a personal narrative, it does not have the feel of a staged show. It gives us instead a poetic essay in a performative form. The play uses a variety of techniques to encourage the audience to brush the dust off of our own roots and take a closer look at the responsibilities we carry. In these ways, Tindyebwa Otu and her partner Motion have reframed the stage setting to create a unique fusion of performance and personal poetic essay that juggles the weight of guilt and shame with the beauty of hope for a better future.



# MEMORY, PAIN AND CONFLICT: MOUTHS OF ASH

Juan Pablo Pinto

Exhibition, 2011

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Juan Manuel Echavarría's video installation, *Mouths of Ash*, addresses and represents the voice of the voiceless: the forgotten ones, the people who become numbers on the long list of victims from the 50-plus years of conflict in Colombia. This piece, as well as most of Echavarría's work, focuses on bringing recognition and attention to the impact of this conflict at both the individual and community level in Colombian society. It also functions as a critique of the armed conflict, the brutality it generates, and the lack of acknowledgement and support given to the victims.

It is important here to note the long history of violence experienced within Colombian society. Colombia has been immersed in internal conflict for over 50 years. Multiple facets characterize the prolonged war. While those weighing in from outside of Colombia often emphasize the role of narco-trafficking, it must be noted that there are also many other groups party to this on-going conflict: the state, the army, paramilitary groups and guerrilla groups. Putting questions of responsibility aside, it is indisputable that the conflict has had the greatest impact on those who have less: the poor, the rural and the marginalized. Because of this, many artists, scholars, activists and journalists have been working to find alternatives to the conflict and its repercussions. Juan Manuel Echavarría is one such artist, and he

dedicates most of his work to the question of memory and conflict in Colombia. His work often contrasts the beauty he finds with the horror of the conflict to shock the viewer and leave a lasting impression.

*Mouths of Ash* was produced between 2003 and 2004, and the installation is 18 minutes and 15 seconds in length. Echavarría uses an oral narrative structure to represent each subject's account, and the work incorporates the oral accounts of seven victims of the conflict. These narratives are expressed through songs written by the subjects. The rhythm and tempo of each song draws the audience into the unique individual emotions expressed by the different subjects. There is a constant sound of a river in the background of every song. This gives a sense of continuity to the narrative storyline presented by the artist. In these songs, the subjects share their recollections and descriptions of how the conflict has affected them, as well as their lamentations, suffering and pain.

The songs also express the victims' reactions to the political issues that aggravate their situations such as the forceful displacement process, and the lack of support they receive from the government. The use of songs brings a different dynamic to their stories. It seems to make the pain bearable so that the subjects are able to sing rather than tell their stories. This demonstrates a creative



Top to Bottom Rafael Moreno, Luzmila Palacio, Domingo Mena  
(Photos: Juan Manuel Echavarría, 2003-2004).



approach to storytelling. The stories would not have the same emotional and sensory impact on the audience had Echavarría used an interview format, instead of choosing to have the respondents communicate through song.

Throughout the piece, Echavarría maintains a constant close-up on the subjects' faces in order to generate an emotional connection. This perspective creates a sense of intimacy between the subjects and the audience. It also creates a sense of validity and truthfulness in the narrators' accounts. Close-up shots of the face also help to intensify the different emotions that are visible on the participants' faces, turning their involuntary facial expressions into moving portraits of moments when the participants are narrating painful matters.

Through this video installation, Echavarría deconstructs the discourse of victimization that is typically found in Colombia. Rather than being "victims" whose suffering Colombian society has naturalized and ignored, the artist allows us to see the subjects as empowered authors of their own stories through song. Echavarría also creates a space in which we, as the audience, can feel close to those affected by the conflict. This sense of closeness and the reformulation of victimhood present us with an alternative account of memory in Colombia. Through its reception internationally, the film also works to create wider awareness of the complexity of the Colombian conflict.

One might think that *Mouths of Ash* has little relevance to a person without previous knowledge of the Colombian conflict, or who only knows one side of the problem. However, in this piece Echavarría also tries to question the viewer's knowledge of Colombia as he explores the different sides of the conflict. Thus the work speaks not only to those with knowledge of, or experience with the Colombian conflict, but seeks to share with its audience a deeper understanding of the complexity of human suffering and human resilience.

# ABOVE

Adira Rotstein

Book, 2012

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*Above* by Leah Bobet is a slipstream novel that uses elements of science fiction and urban fantasy to depict a community of outcasts living beneath the streets of Toronto. A significant motif in the story is what happens to people when society casts them off. Most of the characters in the story, even those living secretly in normal Toronto society, do not fit the specific mold of what people are supposed to look and act like in the city. The narrator and main character, Matthew, is the son of two mutants who came down to Safe, which is a secret underground community. Everyone in this small society has a function and is valued for what they contribute. Many of the people who live in Safe were experimented on Above or locked up by people who were afraid of them because they were different. However, the further we get into the story, the more it becomes apparent that the main threat to Safe is not from the world Above, but from a member of the community that was rejected by Safe and cast out. It becomes clear that even among the members of Safe who should know what it feels like to be an outcast, it is possible to ignore the needs of a member of their society. This happens to Corner, the former lover of their leader Atticus, who then takes revenge on the community.

In the beginning Matthew views his world as a primarily binary one, where Above=scary, while Safe=pro-

tection. But the people in Safe, despite all that they have suffered, are not completely free from selfish motives. Even Corner, who at first seems completely evil and selfish, gains the reader's sympathy as Matthew comes to realize that Atticus twisted the truth about Corner's original crime, due to his pride. In the end what drives Corner to murder is being completely alone, cast out even by the outcasts for something sie was not responsible for (Corner is an intersex person who does not identify with either gender). The idea the author is trying to convey here is that when our society does not take responsibility or care for its own members, it ends up hurting society and people who are marginalized and desperate may lash out. Also, there is a theme suggesting that a member of society's duty is to protect and enhance that society. Despite his youth, Matthew feels that duty the strongest of any of the characters, which is why he is elected leader of Safe in the end. One of the interesting things about Corner's story is that it is clear hir future could have easily gone in many other directions, if it was not for the actions of certain characters and societal constructs that sought to impose one type of nature on hir. One of the things that moved me so much about this book was the depiction of Corner and the idea that sie could do so many things when sie was accepted as part of the Safe community for

a time, but then the experience of rejection caused that potential to be wasted and turned to destruction.

Another interesting motif in the book is the idea that in societies that are bound up by fear, one fear can give birth to another. The mutants who live in Safe were previously confined at the Lakeshore Hospital because of society's fear of them. When they escape and create Safe, their leader teaches all the children who are born there to fear the world Above. In the end, the fear he instills in Safe's children ends up harming them, by making them too scared to flee to Above when they are in danger. I think as a tool for raising consciousness about the effects of marginalization on vulnerable people in our community, *Above* is very effective. There are characters with mental illness and physical disabilities in Safe, but also people with visual mutations like gills, scales or lion's feet that cannot "pass" above. Matthew's experience of "passing" as normal, to other characters who are not from Safe, serves as a visual metaphor for how people with unseen disabilities like mental illness suffer in society. Matthew, who can hide the freakish parts of himself from the runaway kids he takes shelter with, experiences what it is like to hold down a job and survive, all the while feeling the strain of having to "pass" as normal, and afraid that if someone finds out, they would fire him or reject him. This sort of thing is a reality for thousands of people with mental illness who have to try to "pass" in the world every day just to survive and make money for themselves. It helps the reader understand the pressure of trying to hide something about yourself on a daily basis.

One of the interesting things the author does in the text is create a variant on Standard English that the denizens of "Safe" speak to each other. Sometimes this works and is beautiful and poetic. Other times it feels forced and slightly awkward. Matthew, the narrator, often uses the word "ain't" although at other times he uses complex words that show that he is not uneducated. Another example is instead of saying "the doors have broken hinges," Matthew

says the "doors are hinge-broken." He also repeats certain phrases frequently like the idea of sneaking up on someone "heel-toe" instead of just "tip-toe." Another interesting thing in the book is how the author shows that the marginalized group of "Freaks" in Safe has changed the meaning of certain words. This also separates them from the world Above and the way people Above speak. Whether this is realistic (would their language separate so much in 20 years time?) is open to debate, but thematically it works. For example calling the underground world "Safe" (in contrast to what people from regular Toronto would think) and calling the normal city "Above" gives it an allusion of strangeness and untouchability. The words "Monster" and "Beast" are not insults in the Safe community, but rather ways they refer to each other. These are insulting words that they've reclaimed in Safe and made their own in defiance of how people Above refer to them. Some people in Safe have two names: one they used in their former life Above and one they adopted upon coming to Safe. Similarly, some of the runaway kids in Bee's apartment have regular names from before they ran away and names they adopted after to reflect certain traits that they think make them seem tough on the street. The names are indicators of the separation between the time when they belonged to society and the time when they stepped outside it to form their own communities. For some characters this is a positive transition, while for others it is negative.

*Above* is an effective piece of fiction writing when it comes to raising consciousness about the plight of people who are marginalized and outcast from society in Toronto, and what effect this has on both society and the outcast people themselves. I would also highly recommend it for the inclusion of an intersex character who is complex and interesting and does not fit into a stereotypical mode. Moreover, it is an interesting meditation on the intentional use of language to create community and separation between societies, even when one society is technically living within another society.



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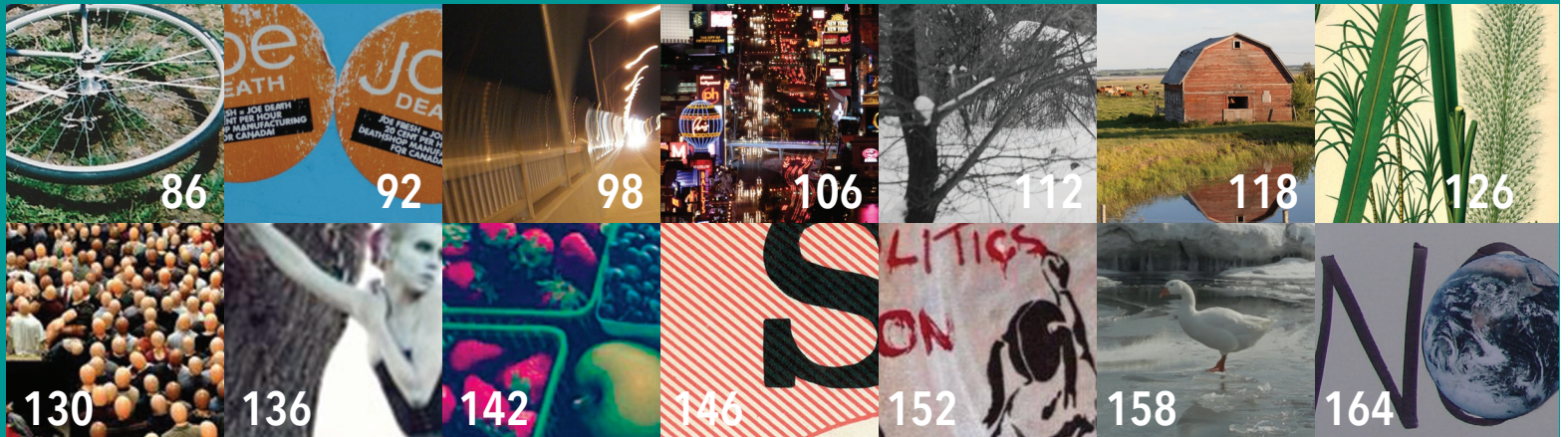
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# PEDAL POWERED PROGRESS

Miya Akiyama

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“Nothing compares to the simple pleasure of riding a bike.” -*John F. Kennedy*

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Pink rims, clacking beads, streamers flapping: my banana seat bicycle was my ticket to freedom. Presented to me at the impressionable age of seven, it was love at first sight. This would be my trusty steed. Perched atop this pink beauty I felt invincible. I spent many summer days peddling feverishly through the streets with nowhere to be and a world to explore. I can remember the way my little legs would spin wildly as I would barrel downhill towards the “40 sign” that marked my childhood limits. The exhilaration that I felt back then was like no other.

These were the days when scraped knees and the scent of sweat and grime were a sign of a day well spent. My bicycle and I would take off after breakfast and pedal away the day, coming home only to eat and sleep. I would travel in a pack with neighbourhood kids, all of whom had decked out their bikes in some fashion to build the character and identity of their two-wheeled companions. Our connection to our bicycles was unlike the kind you create as you age. It was gilded with a sort of magic wherein we brought life to our bikes, and they regifted it to us.

This bond, though so precious in its time, would quickly fade. Like so many other childhood wonders it would become a distant memory. Despite my hunger for freedom as an angst-ridden teen I rid myself of one of the greatest tools for liberation. Denouncing the bicycle as foolish and lame, it would be almost a decade before I rediscovered the joys of cycling. Only able to scoff at its primitive nature, I could not see the genius in its simplicity.

My bicycle story isn't all that unique. For many of us, the bicycle has strong associations with childhood play, the outdoors and the sense of freedom that so many of us long for. It is symbolic of a younger time, where its simplicity in form mirrored that of our lifestyles. Propelled merely by willfulness, the bicycle was an extension of our desires. If we wished to see a friend, it would get us there. A journey to the beach was just a smooth ride away. But as we age, the complications of life can obscure the simple joys. Amongst the hustle and bustle it is easy to forgo self-propulsion for motorized alternatives. The temptations to pass over the bicycle are ever-present. Nevertheless, the two-wheeled companion that we once so valiantly trusted can still provide us with the same access to ease that we remember.

For me, getting back on the bike was an uphill battle. Saddled on a rusty cruiser, the effortlessness I had



once known was gone. Although they say you never forget how to ride a bike, I undoubtedly was missing some key components. A stroke of luck would force my hand and push me to pursue bike riding, but it would take a couple of grueling months before my youthful vigour would return. With that said, the transformation was astounding. In a matter of months I went from naysayer to zealot. I was hooked.

Looking back, I can't believe the amount of time I wasted thinking I was too cool for bikes. Despite having the skills to ride and access to a bicycle, the barriers triumphed.

In an attempt to better understand my abandonment of the bicycle, I decided to talk to some of

*Snooze in the grass (Photo: Charles FreeWheels, 2013).*

Toronto's urban youth. Hoping to connect over a shared adolescent perception of the bicycle, I was pleasantly surprised by my discovery. The disconnection I was looking to identify wasn't there. Instead, without wavering commitment, the bicycle had made a seamless transition from toy to tool in their lives. As they had grown up, their relationships with their bicycles had stayed strong, accounting for a new wave of youth on bikes.

Identifying the benefits of bicycling early in life, these youth have embraced this object and breathed new life into something once perceived as outdated.





Bikes in the park (Photo: Charles FreeWheels, 2013).

In part, this movement is representative of a greater shift in the way that the bicycle is perceived. No longer limited to those who are looking for an affordable alternative to driving or taking public transit, the bicycle has become a symbol of healthy living, progress and style. As popular culture adopts the bicycle, the incentive for youth to do the same rises and the cycle

begins. The increase in bicycle popularity has enticed more youth to ride, making the bicycle hip and cool. As stated by Timothy, a grade 12 student at St. Patrick Catholic Secondary School.

“Now I can just hang with my friends, and get from point A to point B with ease. Throughout the summer I didn’t even take the TTC, so I think it’s a great form of transportation and a way to go with the future. I love

my bike. I built it myself. My bike is my partner and I use it a lot.”

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Regardless of what came first, there is a movement taking place. Similar to my childhood experience with bikes, youth are taking to the streets in packs, only this time they are using their bicycles for mobility and with pride. Representative of a shifting mentality, the number of youth using bicycles as their primary mode of transportation is on the rise. In Toronto, it is estimated that the number of commutes made by bicycle have doubled in the last decade. In 2009, the City of Toronto conducted a Toronto Cycling Study that revealed bicycle commuters are riding longer distances and more frequently, with about 36 percent of residents in the city’s core using cycling for day-to-day uses.

The increased presence of cyclists is hopefully evidence of a turn for the better. The general awareness of cyclists—who they are, and what they need—will rise. Previously associated with extreme affluence or poverty, the bicycle’s popularity has permeated into a wide cross-section of society, making it the trendy way to go. Riding in style is easier than ever before with the advent of fixed gears, track bikes, fat bikes and many more. In many ways, putting your own spin on your bike has become just as important as riding it. A mix of style and function, the bicycle is the new hot thing.

Sadly, the rising number of Toronto cyclists has not

yet brought about change from city officials. Our city has failed to implement the changes and policies it claims will improve the conditions for cyclists in Toronto, despite the developments outlined in the Toronto Bike Plan. While initially proposed to introduce nearly 500 kilometres of bike lanes, the implementation has fallen short, marking just over 100 kilometres across the city. Increased cycling infrastructure is only one barrier to getting people on bikes, but the diminished sense of safety, feasibility and attractiveness has an undeniable impact. Yet, if we look to the Toronto Bike Plan, there is hope in knowing that the benefits of cycling are being recognized and commended.

As noted in the City of Toronto’s Bike Plan:

- Every auto trip converted to bicycle contributes to improvement of air quality and a reduction of greenhouse gases.
- Regular physical activity improves health and fitness and lowers health care costs.
- Fewer motorized trips mean less traffic congestion and stress.
- Cycling puts people in touch with their neighbourhoods making things safer for everyone.

Prioritizing sustainable living, green initiatives and a general concern for a better future, the younger generations of Torontonians are turning to the bicycle. The necessity of moving away from combustion engine mobility is inevitable. In an attempt to reduce traffic

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*“Representative of a shifting mentality, the number of youth using bicycles as their primary mode of transportation is on the rise.”*

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# *“Providing increased access, independence and empowerment, the bicycle can be much greater than mobility.”*

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congestion, greenhouse gases and stresses to city infrastructure, the bicycle is an obvious alternative. With that said, for a city like Toronto where the car holds an air of privilege and power, the shifting mentality is only reflective of a small demographic, and may prove difficult to permeate the masses.

In order to better integrate the bicycle into our lives we will need to alter how we think about “alternative” modes of transportation. Cycling needs to be seen as a leading option rather than a substitute or deviant method. This will affect our approach to cycling issues and the force with which we tackle them. With the youth of Toronto as our inspiration, popularizing cycling within the general public may not be as much of a stretch as it has seemed in the past. Nevertheless, the momentum being built up by the younger generation must be nurtured and sustained if it is going to prevail against our historical reliance on cars.

Promoting cycling in schools, work or in other established institutions has proven to be a practical route towards improving the bond between bicycles and the public. This past year, the Toronto District School Board adopted the *TDSB Charter for Active, Safe and Sustainable Transportation*, which requires schools to encourage students to walk, bike or use other means of mobility to get to school. As a result, the number of students biking to school grew, demonstrating the potential for bike use if promoted en masse. By using role models or incentive programs the bicycle may garner appeal in new circles.

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“My parents never bought me a bike because I was already making my own money with a job when I decided to bike more often. A counsellor from my church decided to give me her bike just because it was left in her storage just aging. This was one of the very best gifts I received.” -*Jessica*, age 17

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Bridging the gap between childhood riders and middle-aged fitness freaks, today’s youth are bringing about change. The typical demographic of city cyclists is shifting, changing the face of cycling culture and bringing about new considerations and concerns. The need for better infrastructure, awareness and education are at the forefront of the issue, but there are also issues unique to this younger generation.

In order to propel and sustain the momentum garnered by these young cyclists, we must get these youth of today advocating for change for tomorrow. Their fresh take on the possibilities inherent to cycling are not only inspiring, but also contain a hopefulness and optimism that is lost with age. Providing increased access, independence and empowerment, the bicycle can be much greater than mobility. This is something that their young minds can see.

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“I started riding with groups and it was a totally different experience and a good one too. I now feel safer and more confident on the road. I now ride my bike to my



school and most places. It feels nice to know I'm taking a step forward for this city to grow greener and into a beautiful place." -Sangyal, age 16

As the next wave of cyclists take to the street, we can feel good in knowing that their actions are informed and intentional. These emerging leaders will establish new priorities and direct the changing future of our city. Feet on their pedals and steering the way, it will be interesting to see where these youngsters will take us.

#### Afterword

The quotations from youth were gathered during two weeks of interview sessions with participants of Charlie's FreeWheels, the Central Commerce Cycling

*Ferry to Wards Island (Photo: Miya Akiyama, 2013).*

Club, and students from Rose Avenue Public School. These were conducted to research the shifting state of cycling in Toronto, and to highlight the growing presence of youth cyclists. I interviewed more than a dozen youth about their relationship to cycling and their experiences riding in Toronto with emphasis on their choice of bicycles as their primary mode of transportation. The research revealed that an overwhelming number of youth are using bicycles, with nearly half of the student body at Central Commerce indicating they use their bicycle at least once a week. This younger generation sees the benefits of riding bikes and is hopeful about the changes it can bring.

EXTENDED NARRATIVE

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# CONSUMING LIFE

Kathryn Atkinson

Pacification through Buying

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You want a hot body? You want a Bugatti?  
You want a Maserati? You better work bitch.  
You want a Lamborghini? Sip martinis?  
Look hot in a bikini? You better work bitch.  
You wanna live fancy? Live in a big mansion?  
Party in France?  
You better work bitch, you better work bitch  
You better work bitch, you better work bitch  
Now get to work bitch!  
Now get to work bitch!  
-Britney Spears, *Work Bitch* (2013)

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Buy a brand-new car or another designer bag, maybe another leather sofa, go on, you have worked for it, you deserve it! The mental climate we live in right now is one where the media constantly tells us that we are not good enough, so we buy more to try to fix ourselves and end up more anxious, stressed and depressed. We see the lifestyles of the rich and famous and we attempt to emulate them. We assume they lead lives of happiness and fulfillment. This perpetuates a system of disconnect from one another and the natural world. Not only is life as a hyper-consumer unsatisfying for those who have the option to take part in it, it is exploitative of those who are unable to—those who make shirts for pennies a day and those who suffer physical harm in an attempt to earn a living in a system that is built to work against them. The poisoned water systems, the wars, the suffering and the mental illness is all a part of a system that works for none of us.

Consumer first, human second  
The media (advertising, movies, music videos) is especially successful at making us feel lesser than. When I am exposed to mainstream media, I often walk away feeling like I need to change. And what other option is there than to better oneself through the act of buying. Fix your teeth, change your clothes, better your love

life and do it all on credit. As long as we are kept feeling inadequate, and as a result depressed and/or anxious, this system will be maintained.

I have a very personal experience with fulfilling my role as a consumer. As a teenager, I had an addiction to shopping that was rooted in my deep insecurities and adolescent search for approval. In moving out of this space, I found solace in social activism in my undergraduate university years. Drifting away from the need to consume, I felt perfectly comfortable not buying, turning to re-using and up-cycling instead. I felt satisfaction with the shift of focus from me to others, from my appearance and social acceptance to my place on the outskirts in a constant state of protest. In leaving the university world and in turn my social justice activism, I pushed into the working world and I became part of the system I tried so hard to fight against. And so, to supplement my discontent with myself and my life, I once again attempted to buy happiness.

My grandmother used to tell me stories of when she was a child. Her parents were working-class Irish immigrants and she was one of seven children. During the Depression, when she was very young, she would sell newspapers and her other siblings would chip in to contribute to the family income. She repeatedly told me a story of her most cherished item, a five-dollar red snowsuit, she had saved for. The vibrant and beautiful memory of this snowsuit lingered in her mind for her whole life. I think of this often, especially when I watch my four-year-old niece engrossed in her iPhone, ignoring the world around her. I am scared for future generations. A U.K. report conducted by UNICEF concluded that around the world parents are working more and attempting to supplement their absence by buying things for their children.<sup>i</sup> The study suggests that children would rather have quality time with their parents

*Opposite Joe Death. A reaction (Photo: Kathryn Atkinson, 2014).*



# “What we are told is that we are never good enough, but that perfection can be attained.”

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than the gifts purchased for them. The more we work, the more we buy, the less we get to spend time with loved ones and the more unhappy we are. It all seems fairly straightforward.

What we are told is that we are never good enough, but that perfection can be attained. With the right car, the right clothes, the right gym membership, happiness is within arm's reach. The media tells us that the “cure-all” for life is the attainment of goods. I feel deeply embedded in this system, and I am no longer my true self. Rather, I am a commodified version. I am what I buy. I am defined by my consumption.

“It is human exploitation”  
“But, it was on sale!”

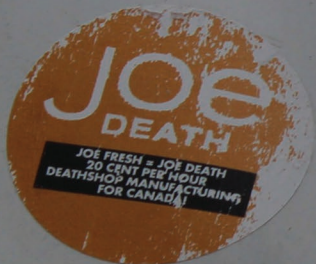
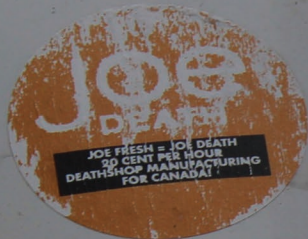
More often than not, consumers justify their purchases even when they know it is morally questionable. Why is this? Perhaps because the very thought of having one's buying freedom restricted is unthinkable. I remember the uproar in my small town when cancer-causing lawn pesticides were banned. Somehow people felt liberated by sneaking around the new law and using “natural” pesticides that slipped under the restriction. Even though people are exploited every day in the manufacture of Western goods, we feel disempowered to do anything about it. Companies that exploit poverty are the most celebrated and profitable.

The most recent event that sparked major commo-

tion over human exploitation in the clothing industry was the Rana Plaza factory collapse in the Dhaka suburb of Savar, Bangladesh. The death of 1,127 people brought issues of worker exploitation to the forefront in Western politics.<sup>ii</sup> The collapse of Rana Plaza is considered to be the worst disaster ever to take place in the global garment industry. It put a spotlight on companies that outsource their manufacturing in the so-called “developing world.” Joe Fresh was one of the companies found to be involved, yet representatives expressed shock and disbelief over the catastrophe. How does a company not know or visit the factories where their products are made? This is a huge part of the fast fashion world. Buy the cheapest material, hire the cheapest labour and do it in a country where the laws are lax. Then, spit out the product as fast as possible.

The business model for many companies is to get people in their stores and purchase their products as frequently as possible. This throwaway business model is used by a multitude of stores such as Joe Fresh, Old Navy, H&M and Forever 21. Elizabeth L. Cline discusses these issues in her book, *Over-dressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*. Cline claims that the average price of clothing has decreased significantly, resulting in the “buying and hoarding of twenty billion garments per year as a nation” in America.<sup>iii</sup> She is adamant that

*Opposite Joe Death. A reaction (Photo: Kathryn Atkinson, 2014).*







*Joe Death. A reaction (Photos: Kathryn Atkinson, 2014).*

the disposable clothing model is completely unsustainable as it generates mass amounts of waste and pollution throughout the production/post-production process.

Clothes are simply one of many things that we have come to think of as disposable, and one of the many venues for exploitation. Marcus Bleasdale, a photographer for National Geographic, documented irrefutable evidence of child labour in Congo, in camps that extract tin, tungsten and tantalum.<sup>iv</sup> All of those minerals are used to create electronic products. As it is often cheaper to purchase a new product than to get a broken one fixed, the rate at which people dispose of electronics is increasing without thought of the social or environmental repercussions. But why buy a brand new jumbo-screen television when you have a working television at home? Why buy a new luxury automobile when you have a perfectly good car in your driveway? Why get the newest iPhone when yours does the job? Who are the people making these products? What toxins are they dealing with on a daily basis? What is the environmental toll of shipping and disposal? And what is it all for?

### Unsustainable Consumption

“Approximately 1.7 billion people worldwide now belong to the ‘consumer class’—the group of people characterized by diets of highly processed food, desire for bigger houses, more and bigger cars, higher levels of debt and lifestyles devoted to the accumulation of non-essential goods.”

—Hillary Mayell, *National Geographic News*

The rate of buying, using and disposing of goods is rapidly increasing and the environment simply cannot sustain it. The Worldwatch Institute annual report, *State of the World*, discusses the issues of hyper-consumption.<sup>vi</sup> The more cars there are on the road and the more meat

being consumed, the more pollution and so on. Globalization has spread the message around the world that buying equals happiness. The idealized Western way to live is celebrated via movies, advertising and music videos. We all seem so happy, don't we? A satisfied Coca-Cola drinker, a radiant Cover-Girl, a macho BMW driver can be seen in almost every country. If every country lives as unsustainably as the Western world, we are in for a huge problem. China is already experiencing severe environmental problems with its booming industry and growing prosperity. Hyper-consumption is spreading.

Annie Leonard's internet film sensation *The Story of Stuff* claims, "We have too much stuff, and too much of it is toxic."<sup>vii</sup> She offers five stages of consumer driven economy: extraction, production, distribution, consumption and disposal. At all stages of the process, there is severe environmental degradation. How do we escape from the culture of "stuff"? How do we break free from "lifestyles devoted to the accumulation of non-essential goods"?

Disempowered to create social change,  
but empowered to shop

"Autoerotic...I just love that term...maybe Western individuals are autoerotic? Infatuated with their own ego, body and image as their only source of pleasure."  
-Adbusters

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Hyper-consumption is constant, never-ending  
and cyclical. The advertising industry is so successful in

establishing a need where need was not there before. In terms of the fashion industry, the concept of "season" is completely constructed: what is "in" and what is "out"? How did it become acceptable to discard clothing so quickly? Why is it necessary to grab the newest iPhone every time one comes out?

We live in a society that celebrates the individual above all else. I feel as though we are Veruca Salt from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* singing, "I want the world I want the whole world...don't care how, I want it now." Accumulation is celebrated. Those with a surplus of wealth are praised.

We are bombarded by images of immense wealth, luxury and self-indulgence juxtaposed with severe poverty, revolution and conflict. The mentality of working hard to accumulate is alive and well. Britney Spears, Miley Cyrus, Beyoncé are all symbols of desired status and emblems of the decay of society. They flaunt their accumulated goods and tell others that their lifestyle is attainable to all. Living life as if nothing else is important but oneself is reckless narcissism.

We are pacified. Pacified by shopping and by the media and as long as we are led to believe that we are disempowered, we will be. We are people who camp out to buy things, who break down doors to Walmart on Black Friday and who purchase clothes from a company that was linked to the death of 1,127 people.

And so, the question begs to be asked, how do we escape this system?

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*"We live in a society  
that celebrates the individual  
above all else."*

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# THIRD CULTURE KIDS AND THE PARADOX OF HOME

Gesilayefa Azorbo

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“A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background.”

-David C. Pollock, *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds*

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“You know you’re a Third Culture Kid when

1. You can curse convincingly in at least five different languages.
2. To everyone’s confusion, your accent changes depending on who you’re talking to.
3. And you often slip foreign slang into your English by mistake, which makes you unintelligible to most people.
4. You’re really good at calculating time differences, because you have to do it every time you call your parents.
6. You start getting birthday wishes several hours before your birthday, from your friends farther east than you...
8. You have a love-hate relationship with the question “Where are you from?”
9. You run into your elementary school friends in

unlikely countries at unlikely times.

10. You’ve spent an absurd and probably unhealthy amount of time on airplane.

13. And your circle of best friends is as politically, racially, and religiously diverse as the United Nations.

16. You’ve had the most rigorous sensitivity training of all: real life.

19. You’re a food snob because you’ve sampled the best and most authentic of every possible cuisine.

21. You don’t call it “home.” You call it “passport country.”

22. You often find yourself singing along to songs in languages you don’t speak or understand.

27. And, no matter how many you say, good-byes never get easier.

28. But the constant flow of new friends more than made up for it.

30. You know better than anyone else that “home” isn’t a place, it’s the people in it.”

-BuzzFeed.com, *31 Signs You’re a Third Culture Kid*

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TCK Sign #21

You don’t call it “home.” You call it “passport country.”

Hello, my name is Gesilayefa Azorbo, and I am a Third Culture Kid.

[Points to name tag.]



I was born in Nigeria and when I was five years old, I moved across the continent with my mother and siblings to Kenya, in East Africa, and then back across to Nigeria when I was 12, and then over to Canada when I was almost 19. As TCKs go, I'm pretty stable. My friend Fowzia Duale Virtue has travelled to 15 countries and lived on three continents, but until recently, I'd never spent more than seven years of my life in any one place. It's been eight years in Toronto so far, and it's beginning to feel weird.

This restlessness is apparently normal. *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds* is a groundbreaking book which examines the unique experiences of kids such as military brats, missionary kids and the children of foreign service workers or

Self portrait (Photo: Gesilayefa Azorbo, 2013).

international businesspeople, who grew up immersed in more than one culture. The authors, David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken, speak to this idea of rootlessness and restlessness in their profiles of several third culture kids.

"In the end, many TCKs develop a migratory instinct that controls their lives. Along with their chronic rootlessness is a feeling of restlessness: 'Here, where I am today, is temporary. But as soon as I finish my schooling, get a job, or purchase a home, I'll settle down.' Somehow the settling down never quite happens. The present is never enough—something always seems lacking. An unre-



*Top City Bus* (Photo: Gesilayefa Azorbo, 2009); *Above Lost in a New City* (Photo: Gesilayefa Azorbo, 2011).

alistic attachment to the past, or a persistent expectation that the next place will finally be home, can lead to this inner restlessness that keeps the TCK always moving.”<sup>ii</sup>

The authors note that for many kids who grow up in a cross-cultural environment, often times the only

stable thing is themselves; parents may be posted to different countries while they grow up in faraway boarding schools, or friends may change every two years as they are uprooted from assignment to assignment.

“Some TCKs who have gone through multiple moves or whose parents are in an intercultural marriage have interacted closely with four or more cultures. Mobility is normal for the third culture experience. Either the TCKs themselves or those around them are constantly coming or going. The people in their lives are always changing, and the backdrop of physical surroundings may often fluctuate as well.”<sup>iii</sup>

### TCK Sign #8

You have a love-hate relationship with the question “Where are you from?”

To be fair, my TCK experience involved less relocating and more time spent in a culture that was not the one I was born into. My formative years were spent in Braeburn, an international British-run school in Nairobi, surrounded by the multinational kids of the expatriate

community in Kenya. This was followed by a tricky adolescence navigating culture shock when I returned to Nigeria for high school. Call it, *Mean Girls: African Edition*. When I moved to Canada at the age of 18 and three quarters, my fluent, accentless English left employers and acquaintances in shock that I'd only been in the country for a matter of months.

While growing up surrounded by people from every corner of the globe, the question “where are you from?” was one I'd ask and get asked as a means of sharing vital cultural information. It was like swapping Cadbury's chocolate eclairs for strong peppermint *tom-tom* sweets from a summer vacation in Nigeria. “Here's what I've got, what have you got?”

But as I got older, starting around the time I returned to live in Nigeria in my early teens, the question “where are you from?” became a bit more complex as most people expected to hear a straight answer. It could be Lagos. Or Hamilton. Scarborough, maybe. India. Vancouver or Australia. Maybe Edmonton. Or Germany. But for me, when someone asks me where I'm from, I hesitate.

Business student and TCK Dominic Wong articulates it perfectly when he says, “for many of us, it's very hard to define exactly where ‘home’ is. Oftentimes, we dread the question, ‘where are you from?’ because it requires an elaborate story instead of a simple answer. ‘Home’ is usually a moveable concept.”<sup>iii</sup>

He goes on to discuss the ways in which social media has allowed TCKs to thrive in a widespread global community of friends, but even Facebook still asks, “What's your hometown?”

Well, Mr. Zuckerberg, if you have a few minutes...

I, like my fellow expatriate kids who grew up in Nairobi, grew up globalized. I listened to Britpop, boy bands, grunge rock, contemporary African pop and Afro-jazz. I watched CNN and BBC alongside the Kenyan Television Network, the Kenyan Broadcasting Corporation and the Nigerian Television Authority. In terms

of books, arguably the most formative element for me, it was the UK-based Red House Book Club offerings, Enid Blyton's The Famous Five series, Francine Pascal's Sweet Valley High, R.L. Stine, Stephen King, Isaac Asimov, Charles Dickens and Robert Frost, next to the classics of the African Writers Series: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and J.P. Clark.

For me grilled meat on a stick is either *nyama choma* (Kenya) or *suya* (Nigeria). Or, lately, kebabs in Toronto, via the Middle East!

Any one of these mementos, tastes, aromas, even a few bars of a song that marked my adolescence or the sight of a book that was a childhood favourite, instantly evokes a wistful longing for home. But home is never so much a “where” as it is a “when.” My sense of home has always been fragmented along the lines of what stage in my life I am thinking about. Because home has always been a shifting concept for me, different memory triggers lead to different places I think of as home.

Writer and incessant traveller Pico Iyer—in the TED Talk “Where Is Home?”—notes that those he calls multicultural kids “have one home associated with their parents, but another associated with their partners, a third maybe connected with the place they happen to be, a fourth connected to the place they dream of being, and many more, besides. And their whole lives will be spent taking pieces of many different places and putting them together into a stained glass whole. Home for them is really a work in progress.”<sup>iv</sup>

## TCK Sign #16

You've had the most rigorous sensitivity training of all: real life.

Growing up, the multiplicity of my cultural experiences was normal to me. I have childhood memories of living in Nairobi, watching out of a car window as solitary Maasai warriors with their long braids, colourful beads and elongated earlobes held their bows and arrows and strode down busy city streets alongside hurrying,



suit-clad civil servants. This was normal.

Of the roughly 20 kids in my primary school classes, it was something of a rarity for a nationality to be duplicated, and my entirely secular school celebrated Diwali and Christmas with equal fervour. Included in the curriculum was a subject on religious education where textbook-based lessons on Buddhism, Catholicism, Judaism and Sikhism were peppered with show-and-tell style presentations from kids who brought everyday religious items from home to show us how they were used in daily practice. This was normal.

Strolling through a Nigerian marketplace, I listened to people haggle and exclaim in Hausa, in Yoruba, in Igbo and vernacular pidgin English,

sometimes all at the same vendor. This was normal.

In present-day suburban Toronto I'm keying into the elements of what I consider normal in other people's lives around me. Listening, for example, as a friend describes her Ghanaian father's conversation with another Ghanaian man, both speaking in fluent Italian. This is normal. Talking to a Jamaican-born friend in a Toronto café about anime and the manga comics he draws while he explains the finer points of the Japanese written language, which he has taught himself in order to better enjoy the country's pop culture. This is normal.

Once, when I was still back home in one of the many places I call "home," I saw a young white guy in a marketplace in Jos, Northern Nigeria. He was fully decked out in the casual, long, flowing *jalabiya* commonly worn by just about everyone in the north and I experienced a sense of shocked recognition. *Hey there, TCK. I see you.*

Below *Uncertain Path* (Photo: Gesilayefa Azorbo, 2009); Opposite *Open Road* (Photo: Gesilayefa Azorbo, 2010).





## TCK Sign #2

You often find yourself singing along to songs in languages you don't speak or understand.

Contrary to expectations, I don't speak five languages. In fact, I only speak English, the language my parents spoke to my siblings and I growing up. I did grow up outside my own culture which might explain this monolingualism—English being the predominant language spoken where I grew up—but lots of TCKs are multilingual, so this aspect could easily render me an outsider even in this community of outsiders.

But not to say that's a bad thing. As a person accustomed to embracing the "neither/nor" binary of my own experience, this is familiar territory. For most of my life I've only ever known this exclusion, this aura of unbelonging. As a result, I'm most comfortable as an outsider and observer, dipping in and out of cultures and languages with a sense of wonder and curiosity.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term *dilettante* as "applied more or less depreciatively to one who interests himself in an art or science merely as a pastime and without serious aim or study ('a mere dilettante')."⁹⁷ When I first heard this term I thought, "Yeah, that sounds like me. A little bit here, a little bit there." It's become second nature for me to pick up the slang, phrasing and local lingo from Nairobi to Kaduna to Scarborough and then some. A verbal chameleon, I have to actively suppress a tendency to mirror the verbal tics and accents of whomever I'm speaking with at any given moment.

Although I only speak English, I absent-mindedly count in French, I say goodbye in Japanese and occasionally Italian and say hello in Hawaiian in an ironic-turned-serious way. I know how to greet elders in Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, can tell you what goodnight is in my paternal grandmother's tongue Ijò, and how to say "That was good!" in Gaelic. I do this not because I lived

in all the places where these languages are spoken, but because I grew up hearing multiple languages spoken around me, and in turn, I find myself compulsively seeking out phrases and terms in other languages simply on the basis of how much the sound appeals to me.

I'm beginning to discover that holding onto these small linguistic tokens is my own way of keeping myself grounded in a familiar place, no matter where I actually find myself. I grew up assuming that home should ideally be your parents' birthplace, or the place they call home. However, in my estimate, that place can feel like just another transit point. Home for me is the country where I was born, but it is also the country where I spent my formative years and where I began to discover myself. However, it feels inappropriate to just leave it at that.

I, of all people, know that home is less a place than it is a notion—a feeling or an idea of belonging cobbled together from a lifetime of divergent experiences. As Pico Iyer notes, “for more and more of us, home has really less to do with a piece of soil than, you could say, with a piece of soul.”<sup>vi</sup>

Pollock and Van Reken talk about this act of the creation and solidifying of an identity in a TCK's formative years from many disparate cultural points of contact when they note, “although the length of time needed for someone to become a true TCK can't be precisely defined, the time *when* it happens can. It must occur during the developmental years—from birth to 18 years of age. We recognize that a cross-cultural experience affects adults as well as children. The difference for a TCK, however, is that this cross-cultural experience occurs during the years when that child's sense of identity, relationships with others and view of the world are being formed in the most basic ways. While parents may change careers and become former international businesspeople, former missionaries, former military personnel or former foreign service workers, no one is ever a former third culture kid. TCKs simply move on

to being adult third culture kids because their lives grow out of the roots planted in and watered by the third culture experience.”<sup>vii</sup>

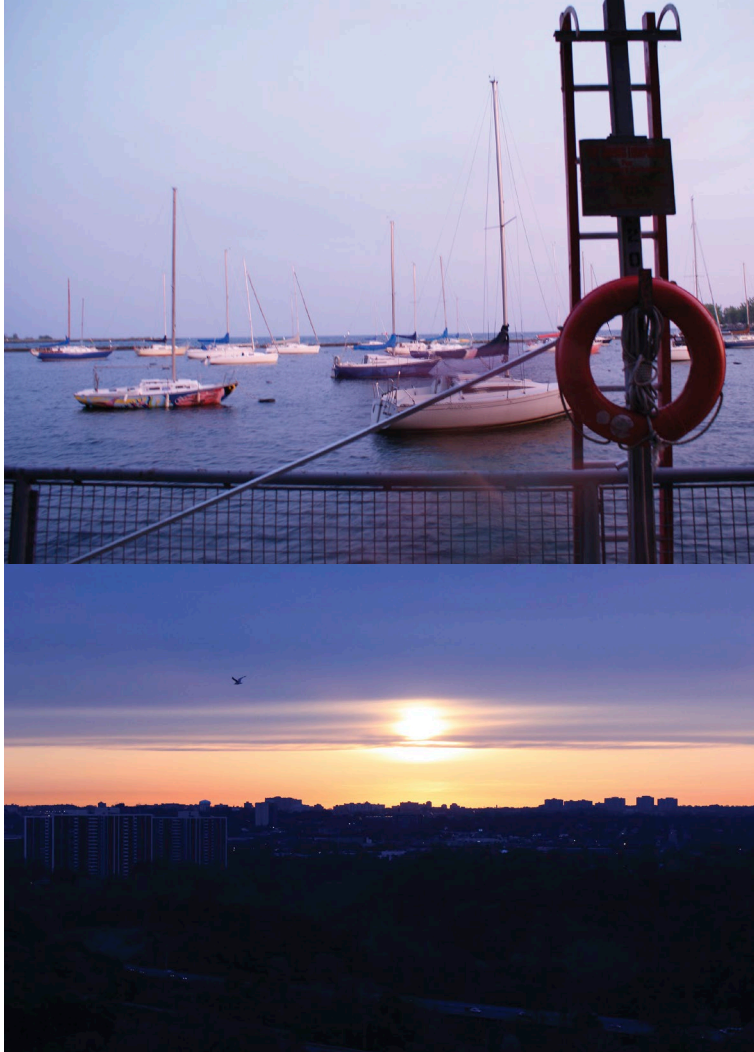
In Alice Wu's article, “Global Nomads: Cultural Bridges for the New Millennium,” she includes interviews with TCKs who share common experiences, one of which is a chameleon-like tendency to adapt quickly and easily to new environments: “I've always blended in so fast. Even a lot of people thought I was American right away... When I was in Kuwait, people would never think I was not Kuwaiti, when I was in England, I was easily an Englishman. I've always blended in very quickly in any culture I've been in contact with,”<sup>viii</sup> says Azeez, a subject from Kuwait.

From one standpoint, this makes TCKs very good at any role that involves cross-cultural communication. But on the flip side, it becomes a little isolating when you realize that your version of normal will always be considered exotic by anyone who grew up in a single culture, and this can sometimes form barriers to fulfilling relationships.

Lynn, another of the interviewees in Wu's article, notes the moment she realized she didn't belong to the culture she considered home, “I guess I always took it for granted that I would come back here for college; we came back every summer and I considered myself American, my parents were from here, it was just kind of assumed. Then when I got here it was a big adjustment identity thing: I didn't feel American, I didn't understand a lot of American culture, I didn't understand my American roommate, or her friends or anything that most people were obsessed about, and I quickly realized that I wasn't that American at all.”<sup>ix</sup>

This statement is very familiar to me. As a Nigerian-born, Kenyan-raised person with distinctly anglophile sensibilities, my transition back into Nigerian culture in my early teens was often jarring. I constantly came up against people's ideas of what I should be like versus what I was actually like given my markedly different upbringing.





Left *Sail Away* (Photo: Gesilayefa Azorbo, 2012); Below *Sunrise* (Photo: Gesilayefa Azorbo, 2013).

### TCK Sign #30

You know better than anyone else that “home” isn’t a place, it’s the people in it.

The most relatable people in my life are my siblings and the international kids we went to school with in Nairobi, who are now scattered across the globe in places like Greece, New York, the U.K., Australia and Canada, and for some, even back in Nairobi. As chameleon-like as we are, people often assume we are native to wherever we find ourselves. However, I’ve found that this sense of

home first materializes when we discover in each other a shared experience outside of our parents’ experiences. A new, blended version of what home means for us.

This shared experience is one that is growing ever more common as the world becomes increasingly and exponentially more globalized. “Nowadays,” Iyer points out in his TED Talk, “at least some of us can choose our sense of home, create our sense of community, fashion our sense of self, and in so doing maybe step a little beyond some of the black-and-white divisions of our grandparents’ age. No coincidence that the president of the strongest nation on Earth is half-Kenyan, partly raised in Indonesia and has a Chinese-Canadian brother-in-law. If you took the whole population of Canada, the whole population of Australia, then the whole population of Australia again and the whole population of Canada again and doubled that number, you would still have fewer people than belong to this great floating tribe. And the number of us who live outside the old nation-state categories is increasing so quickly, by 64 million just in the last 12 years. Soon there will be more of us than there are Americans. Already, we represent the fifth-largest nation on Earth. And in Canada’s largest city, Toronto, the average resident today is what used to be called a foreigner, somebody born in a different country. Where you come from now is much less important than where you’re going. More and more of us are rooted in the future or the present tense as much as in the past. And home, we know, is not just the place where you happen to be born. It’s the place where you become yourself.”<sup>x</sup>

So maybe there’s a reason why so many Braeburners, regardless of their actual place of birth, put “Nairobi” in the “what’s your hometown?” box on Facebook. Maybe it all starts when we encounter those who share our sense of home.



# CITY OF VICE

Vivian Belik

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Rising from the middle of the windswept desert of northeastern Nevada is one of America's greatest displays of artifice: Las Vegas. Travellers flying into the city for the first time will quickly spot the Las Vegas Strip cleaving the sun-baked earth like a mountain range. Glittering hotel buildings climb sixty stories into the sky along a six-lane, traffic-snarled boulevard. From 5,000 feet in the air the city is all gold, gaudy and larger than life.

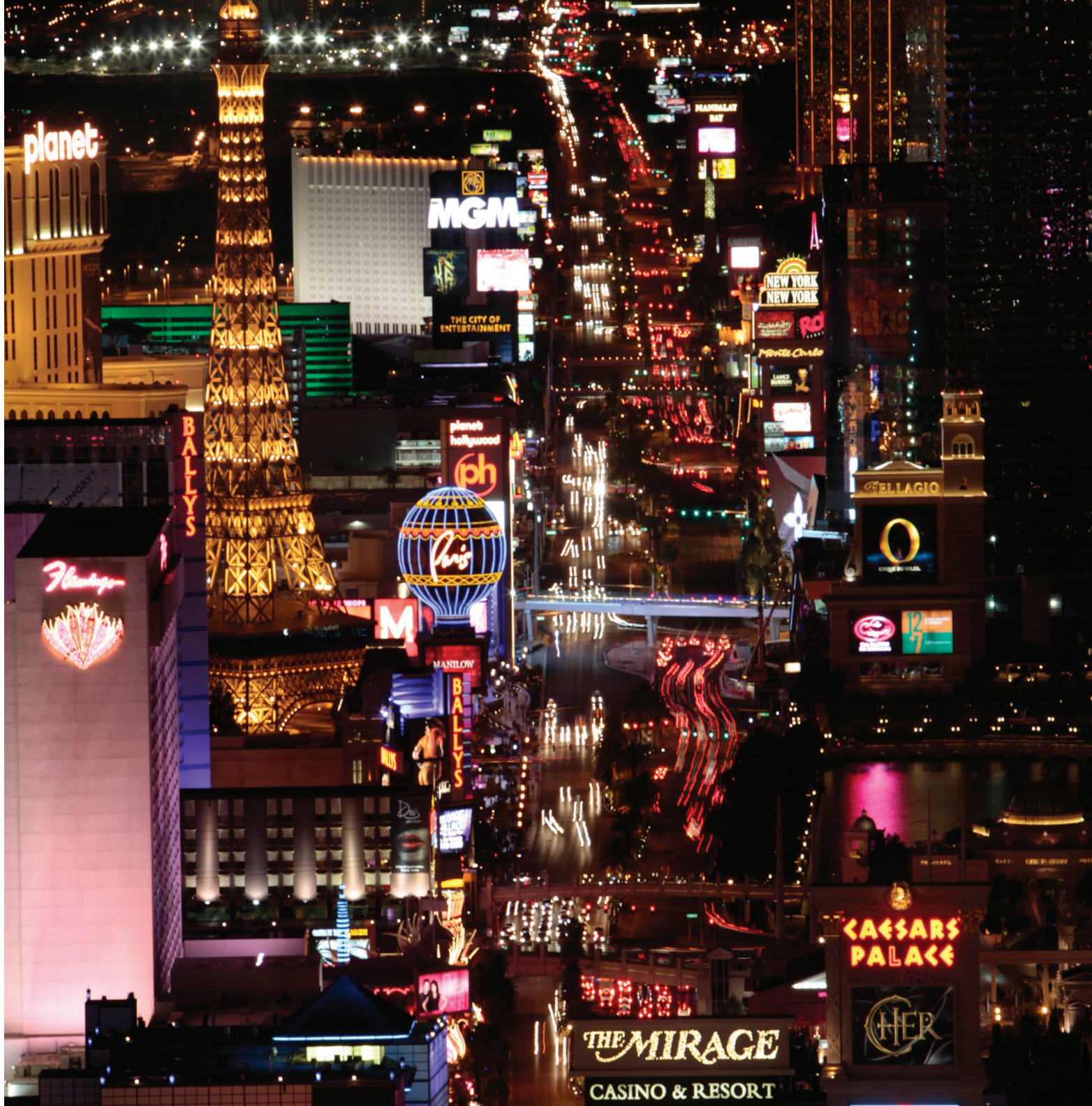
It wasn't long ago, however, that Las Vegas was a small blemish on the map. Spanish explorer Rafael Rivera came across an oasis of wild grasses and water in 1829, dubbing the area Las Vegas, or "the meadows." The Anasazi and Paiute Indians had been living in this desert valley for thousands of years, living off berries, plants and hunted tortoises, lizards and rabbits. In 1855, lured by stories of an abundance of water, a group of Mormons chose Las Vegas as the site to build a fort half-way between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles. The fort was abandoned several years later and it wasn't until the late 1800s that the area was again visited by outsiders who were surveying for minerals and agricultural land.

Today, just about everyone in Las Vegas is on the hunt for something whether it's money, sex or simply a good time. On the Las Vegas Strip you can find parents balancing bouncing babies on their shoulders alongside college "spring breakers" crushing beers on the sidewalk. Women in white wedding gowns teeter next to nearly naked dancers. And people clad in Prada shoes stride overtop of homeless teenagers begging for money on the boulevard.

Nothing is quite real in Las Vegas, a fact the city seems to celebrate. Never been to the Eiffel Tower in Paris or boated down the canals of Venice? No problem, you can climb into a replica of a Venetian gondola and cruise through the Grand Canal Mall gazing at shops and restaurants along the way. When you're tired of that, you can sip a drink in a covered indoor square with vaulted ceilings that have been painted and lit to look like the overhead sky. After you've checked out the Venetian Casino you can saunter next door to the Paris Hotel's 460 foot Eiffel Tower overlooking Las Vegas Boulevard, a half-sized replica of the real thing.

"Replicas of The Arc de Triomphe, the Paris Opera House, the Hôtel de Ville, and the Louvre, along with an Around the World in Eighty Days balloon marquee are magnifique!," the Paris Hotel website exclaims. These

Opposite Las Vegas at night (Photo: Courtesy of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority).





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great landmarks have been reduced to gingerbread models of themselves and yet they remain major attractions on the Strip. Is there a need to recast these monuments in a North American light, surrounded by palm trees and giant billboards so that they're more palatable? Perhaps this is the mark of a ruling nation, one that needs to see itself reflected in every other country's achievements. Of course New York, New York, a hotel with a faux New York skyline, is proof that even American monuments are up for ridicule in Las Vegas.

In its rush to expand and market itself to tourists, Las Vegas now represents the most hollow parts of America: greed, excess, lust and artificiality. It is a city that has become easy to despise. And yet there is something that remains fascinating about a place that has been able to invent itself so quickly and effectively. In its glittery, flamboyant attire, Las Vegas has become a city that's hard to ignore. But under all the sequins there is a darkness that shadows the multitude of colours and sounds that has made Las Vegas so famous. This is particularly true if you consider the city's sex industry, gambling empire and the surrounding desert landscape.

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A walk down the Las Vegas Strip will turn up love in all its strange manifestations, from the dancing stripper that accompanies your steak dinner to the drive-thru wedding on a motorcycle.

Love has long been synonymous with Las Vegas. In 1911, the same year the city was officially incorporated, the state of Nevada loosened its divorce laws, making Las Vegas a mecca for quickie divorces. "Dude ranches" were opened overnight, housing unhappily married people looking to break the knot. State laws insisted that people had to live in Las Vegas for six weeks before they could get divorced, making these ranches the eventual forerunners to Las Vegas's sprawling strip hotels. Today, in addition to the many wedding chapels

on the Strip, there is a plethora of billboards advertising divorce services. Here, hearts are simultaneously seized and broken by love.

A regular sight on the Strip are the numerous promoters that advertise the services of escorts and dancers in the middle of the day. They stand on the sidewalk palming handbills of busty, scantily clad women who will appear "straight to your hotel room." Many of them wear bright yellow shirts with "Orgasm Clinic" written in large, cartoonish letters. It's a bizarre contradiction: the promoters with their absurd t-shirts and the sexy escorts advertised on the handbills. By the end of the night, the sidewalk is littered with pictures of women.

If women aren't appearing at your hotel door, shimmying down a pole or using their bodies to advertise something on the Strip, they're at one of the many legal brothels or "ranches" in the counties surrounding Las Vegas. These brothels appeared around the same time miners rushed to Nevada in the late 1800s in search of silver and gold. "The influx of literal gold diggers hoping to strike it rich resulted in three men for every woman, which perhaps inevitably, spawned a meretricious saloon society of miners, hustlers, railroad builders, cowboys and brothel prostitutes."<sup>3</sup> Brothels have been tolerated since Nevada's statehood in 1864. At that time, cities had the power to regulate whether they wanted prostitution and how it should be licensed. Further restrictions were put in place in 1881 to ban brothels from setting up near busy streets and schools. Today, half of Nevada's counties allow prostitution. There are about 18 legal brothels operating in the state, many of which have outlandish names like the Chicken Ranch, the Shady Lady Ranch and the most absurd, the Alien Cathouse which is located in Area 51, a supposed site for UFOs. A statute in Nevada's laws bars prostitution in any county with more than 400,000 people, and so the densely populated Las Vegas area, perhaps surprisingly, has no brothels.

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Even before Clark County became heavily populated, Las Vegas was already trying to shut down its sex trade. During WWII the U.S. army demanded that the city close its red light district on Fremont Street because soldiers from the nearby army base were focusing too much of their time and money on prostitutes.<sup>ii</sup> But several years after prostitution was banned, women were still plying their trade in some of the clubs and hotels in Las Vegas. A corrupt police service that regularly received “gifts” from brothel owners allowed these operations to thrive well into the 50s. In 1971, prostitution was officially legalized again in Nevada. What this meant for brothel owners is that they could no longer be closed on a whim and that they had the same rights as any other business. It also meant counties could fatten their coffers by levying licensing fees and property taxes on brothel owners. The sex industry in Nevada now represents a multimillion dollar industry.

Much of the wealth that is made each day in Las Vegas is no doubt in large part because of women. “Whether you’re making beds for [men] or in the bed with ’em. This town has been built on the backs of women,” says a Riviera casino worker.<sup>iii</sup> Even the women who aren’t directly working in the Vegas sex industry end up getting implicated in that business. “Women who don’t work the gritty jobs that fuel the Sin City coffers, from professors to waitresses, from business women to cleaning ladies, from poor women to suburban wives, are always subject to the undressing assumption that they might be, or must have been, an entirely different kind of working woman.”

Visitors who are curious to step beyond the boundaries of the Las Vegas Strip may venture to nearby attractions like the Grand Canyon or the Hoover Dam. A car ride out of the city provides expansive views of the desert, which is dotted by Joshua trees and red rock formations. But as you approach one of the world’s

largest dams, a tall concrete barrier blocks the view of thousands of litres of water pouring through the mouth of the dam. Like many things in America, you have to pay to see the goods. But this doesn’t stop nearly 1 million visitors a year from shelling out money to see this attraction.

The Hoover Dam towers over the thundering, emerald green Colorado River. Standing at 221 metres high, the dam is twice the height of the Statue of Liberty and almost four times as wide. The curved concrete dam holds back 10 trillion gallons of water, enough to cover the state of Connecticut with 10 feet of water. After spending days in the artificial lights of Las Vegas even the Hoover Dam feels natural. But a closer look reveals that there is little that is untamed in the nearby region of Sin City. The highways leading into the city are strewn with plastic wrappers, beer cans and newspapers, and billboards block out much of the desert landscape. Long, winding suburbs with endless rows of stucco houses unfurl themselves far into the desert. And to the northwest of Las Vegas is the barren missile testing site that used to send large mushroom clouds over the Nevada skyline.

With a bevy of cheap daily flights to Las Vegas, many people choose to fly here with the intention of hiking and camping in nearby Utah or Arizona. The city has capitalized on these travellers knowing that many of them will stay a day or two in Vegas to take in the amusement park atmosphere.

Arriving at the Las Vegas airport, one is immediately hit with gambling fever. Rows of slot machines line the arrival and departure lounges, wooing the uninitiated with their whirring reels and jingle-jangle music. Las Vegas takes every opportunity to swindle its visitors of money and they do it in creative and outlandish ways. The Wynn Hotel and Casino tempts tourists with an elaborate indoor garden installation that includes a merry-go-round and exotic plants. Paris Hotel





has dancing women that leap and twirl above the craps tables in tight, revealing costumes. Circus Circus lures customers with a full roster of acrobatic performers that fling themselves on trapezes and tie themselves in knots with aerial silks. And then there is the surefire method used by almost all of the casinos on the Strip: free drinks to anyone who is gambling, an invitation that coaxes the most hesitant gambler.

Entering one of these casinos is like walking into a parallel universe. There are no clocks on any of the walls and fresh oxygen is pumped into the space to keep people awake. Patrons can freely smoke indoors and even children are allowed in the casino as long as they don't gamble. There's no last call for drinks and the casino never officially closes. There is the perception that you are your own free agent here, but in truth the environment has been coolly calculated to profit as much money as possible from each customer. Every card is counted and there are hundreds of electronic "eyes" watching you from the ceiling.

Gambling has long been intertwined with the beginnings of Sin City. Nevada became the last state in the West to outlaw gambling in 1910. But this didn't stop the roulette wheel from spinning. The state was so reliant on the profits it received from railroad travellers who went to Reno to gamble that the government turned a blind eye. Underground gaming joints sprouted up with patrons whispering a secret password to gain entrance. Even police were known to have gambled in these back rooms. It wasn't until 1931, however, that the state officially struck down its gambling laws as a way to encourage tourism to the area. This was thanks in part to Chicago mob boss, Al Capone, who allegedly sent his associates to Reno and Las Vegas to persuade government officials to overturn the law.<sup>iv</sup> Gambling would eventually help buoy the economy of Las Vegas, protecting it from the economic depression that spread throughout the rest

Opposite Dancers in front of the famous Las Vegas sign (Photo: Courtesy of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority).

of America in the 30s.

Today gambling has become a billion-dollar industry in Las Vegas. Casino magnates like Sheldon Adelson are flush with wealth and often buy the support of politicians as a way to maintain their gambling empires. Adelson, who is considered one of the richest people in the world, has recently been courted by dozens of Republican candidates looking for presidential nominations. One thing Adelson is hoping the bootlicking candidates will do if elected is ban online gambling in the United States, a burgeoning industry that's eating into his casino profits. Candidates have been lining up at his Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas begging for million-dollar handouts. Meanwhile, a few steps from the hotel entrance are the real needy: homeless adults and youth who panhandle in the hopes of buying some dinner. They've all become players in this bizarre spectacle in Las Vegas.

Back on the Strip, two lovers quarrel loudly on the street corner about the \$500 that was squandered at the casino. It's clear they've indulged in too many complimentary drinks. A crew of breakdancers do backflips and handstands on the sidewalk to a crowd of cheering fans who stuff dollar bills in their hats. A bachelorette party of young 20-somethings runs past in matching tank tops and the obligatory white tulle for the bride-to-be. And a pickup truck rumbles down the Strip with billboards advertising escorts. This is the Las Vegas of today. No longer an outpost on the edge of the desert, Las Vegas is a kaleidoscopic, profit-making machine. This Legoland of hotels, strip clubs and casinos both repels and amazes. It is a mirror to America's values of materialism and greed that also seems to tell the story of a teetering empire on the verge of consuming itself.



EXTENDED NARRATIVE

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# ***FINDING HAPPINESS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS***

Siobhan Brannigan

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*Am I happy? Will I be happy? Can I be happy?*

"To be happy I need to think about feeling good, feeling bad, and feeling right."<sup>i</sup> Achieving happiness is one of the ultimate goals of most individuals. It is to be reached through perfection, success, relationships and having control over your life. Or so people think. Many believe they cannot be happy without these outside factors, but in fact, we control how much we allow ourselves to be happy. At a certain point in our lives, we need to focus on accepting situations beyond our control and being happy in the present moment. This is especially hard with those, like myself, who struggle with mental health problems. In cases of mental illness, happiness seems to be on the backburner and difficult to reach. The immediate focus is simply making it through the day. More often than not, people associate mental illness with sadness and setbacks which definitely do occur more often in these circumstances. However, this does not mean that an individual does not have the capacity to be happy. Happiness comes from the innate ability to go beyond being content and to embrace circumstances. Happiness is more than the absence of unhappiness. It is what is appreciated and embraced in a positive way. Happiness does not necessarily mean that you are happy with every little thing in your life, but that you are satisfied overall.

As someone who has had their fair share of mental health problems and traumatic experiences, it should come as no surprise that I just want to be happy and experience positive emotions more than negative emotions. It has taken a great deal of time and effort, but slowly, through various experiences, I have begun to accept that I cannot control everything. This helps me accept and realize those things that I am fortunate to have. I have not had an easy time, but I am pursuing what I am interested in and enjoying it in the process. This has helped me realize I can be happy despite it all. I can continually grow and move forward without

waiting forever to become happy. Acceptance, strength and success have created joy in the moment. If I focus on trying to find happiness, I will miss the wonderful experiences that are happening around me. I often realize there were happy moments looking back, so why would I not try and experience them as they happen? The group of friends known as "The Buried Life" has been very inspiring to me in regards to the "live in the moment lifestyle." Their book, *What Do You Want To Do Before You Die?*, sums up an approach I have been trying to adapt to: "Life doesn't work perfectly, and it never will. It could work better sure, but don't bank on happiness as a prize so far down the road that you forget the joy of right now."<sup>ii</sup>

The journey to finding personal happiness for me has been, and continues to be, an ongoing process. I have been through a mix of traumatic experiences and setbacks since childhood. These included my mother becoming seriously disabled when I was really young, taking on responsibilities beyond my years, issues with siblings, other family members having serious health problems and the list unfortunately goes on. It sometimes seems to me that one bad thing happens after another just to keep me on my toes. These experiences have taught me to seek out what I can appreciate about life. Not everything has been bad and I try to focus on the positive and good things that I have been privileged to experience. Some of the positives include all the support I could ask for from many people, good and very strong relationships with my family and wonderful friends. I have also had the opportunity to pursue my education in the direction I wanted. From this, I have determined happiness coincides with gratefulness. A sense of gratefulness is something that I have always been aware of even in dealing with trying circumstances. I am grateful that

*Opposite Secret Garden (Photo: Siobhan Brannigan, 2011).*



everything, as bad as some of it has been, has led me to where I am today. I have been able to get beyond these challenges and move towards the positive outlook I generally hold today.

There is no one formula for happiness. That needs to be understood. Happiness is not determined by someone else's standards. Some people are happy with situations others may not be, and it all depends on what is appreciated by whom. As Fredrick Koenig said, "We tend to forget that happiness doesn't come as a result of getting something we don't have, but rather of recognizing and appreciating what we do have." Many people say happiness is not obtained through achieving goals, but by the process to get there. However, many still behave as if it were the former.

Mental illness has become much more visible in recent years, with more and more people finally beginning to feel comfortable having an open discussion about this issue. The stigma about mental illness implies that those people are broken, unable to break free of the restraints that is their mental illness. That is not true. Yes, mental illness takes its toll on individuals and it can include very serious lows that I have both witnessed and experienced, but it is not like that 100 percent of the time. So how does one find happiness while dealing with mental illness? Well, it takes many different steps and scenarios on the way to doing so. It is not easy to find and it is not always apparent, but with effort and struggle people can learn to adapt and promote a positive change. This includes things like acceptance, making mistakes, reassurance, and seeking support.

The first thing one must do is become accepting of the situation. We do not always get a choice in what happens to us, but we do for the most part control our emotions and hope we react appropriately to the circumstances. We must work out what we need to get out of the situation and work towards changing that. By accepting our mental illness and overall

wellbeing, we eliminate limitations. "Waiting to be happy limits our brain's potential for success whereas cultivating positive brains makes us more motivated, efficient, resilient, creative and productive, which drives performance upward."<sup>iii</sup> As I moved forward with my education and other pursuits, I realized that I needed to accept that I would have to work hard to move beyond what I originally perceived as my limits. I had to realize that I was in control of where I could go, and if I wanted to pursue my passion it was up to me. Yes, depression and anxiety has presented difficulties at certain points, such as procrastination, no energy, and hopelessness, but I want more than anything to be happy. And the process of my work now makes me happy. I have realized I must enjoy getting to my goals to really appreciate the work it took to get there. Everything is significant and I think that is the biggest problem people have accepting: no one wants their mental illness to define them. It does not need to do so.

Next, what really goes along with acceptance is realizing we all make mistakes. We are humans, mental illness or not, and we sometimes will not make the best choices. Mistakes are a learning experience as one cannot be perfect. Perfectionism is a problem I often encounter. I want to produce my best work possible, but I need to remind myself that to do that I need to make mistakes along the way. The world is not black and white, and we spend a majority of our time trying to strike a balance within this grey area. This is not an overnight adjustment. It is hard to embrace our imperfections, but it happens. I know I am a procrastinator who likes to have everything perfect, which is not a mix that works. I need to try and find balance and part of that is through the mistakes I make. Sometimes I do not learn from my mistakes

*Opposite Secret Garden (Photo: Siobhan Brannigan, 2011).*







*Secret Garden* (Photo: Siobhan Brannigan, 2011).

as I should, but I have still been educated through my mistakes and have wound up much more at peace with myself through this growth. Our self-acceptance helps us become happy in what we do. Sometimes good enough is good enough.

As we accept who we are, we must reassure ourselves that we are here for a reason. That is essential. Mental illness affects one in five Canadians<sup>iv</sup> and most of these people are still able to manage their day-to-day activities. If we believe we have a purpose in life, it makes it easier to embrace the various challenges we face. Self-acceptance, self-motivation and focus helps us understand ourselves and what we want out of life. If we make a conscious effort to be self-aware, “there’s no doubt that increased happiness and life satisfaction, as well as a greater willingness to persist on difficult tasks, can be considered great benefits of having positive self-regard.”<sup>v</sup> How we see ourselves and what we do as a result helps shape our experience. As happiness is a mental state, this is a major factor in how we experience our surroundings. If we make a conscious effort to have an open mind, or a positive attitude towards circumstances we do not have the ability to control, we become more self-reliant and resilient.

One of the biggest attributes linked to happiness is relationships or social interactions. Our own self-motivation can take us to a certain point, and we need guidance and support for the rest. Our whole lives revolve around our interaction with people in the world. From our relationships with family and friends to acquaintances and colleagues, and even the strangers of brief interactions, there is significance to all of them. Whether you help benefit them or vice versa, every interaction is part of your life. As we go through life, we learn to recognize who is there to help and who is there to hurt. As we look for happiness,

# “We must strive for the greatest possible outcome and be happy with the journey.”

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we must learn to filter out those who do not want to help us towards our successful future. If we cannot determine who is bringing us down, how can we be happy in our mindset? Surround yourself with those who seek to learn and grow with you. If you continue to keep the people who only seek to benefit off of you, you will not be able to manage your own happiness for fear of damaging theirs. Luckily, I have been fortunate enough to have lots of positive (for the most part) people in my life. My relationships aren't characterized by give and take, but instead by support and encouragement from each party. If I did not have the encouragement I did, I would not have pursued an education in the arts, and then have continued beyond that to complete my thesis, *A Positive From A Negative*. My thesis has no guarantee to be a success or lead me anywhere after school. My passion is fueled by the support of those around me, and it has helped me get to this point.

Success can be found through happiness. What we thought was necessary, to achieve and provide ourselves with happiness is actually obtained through the process. When we try to change our mindset we must look to go beyond what we think is possible. *The Happiness Advantage* encourages us to aim high: “If all you strive for is diminishing the bad, you'll only attain the average and you'll miss out entirely on the opportunity to exceed the average.”<sup>vi</sup> We must strive for the greatest possible outcome and be happy with the journey. If we settle for

mediocrity, then we will not experience the elated emotions that are so gratifying and that come to us when we successfully take the steps towards our highest goals.

Sometimes we are not as pleased as we could be with the final results, but we must acknowledge that we have done our best and that the journey towards our achievement was both exciting and beneficial to our wellbeing. Primo Levi, author of *Survival in Auschwitz*, wrote, “sooner or later in life everyone discovers that perfect happiness is unrealizable, but there are few who pause to consider the antithesis: that perfect unhappiness is equally unattainable.”

Overall, to achieve happiness we must first and foremost enjoy life. It is a cliché, but we have one life to live, and if we do not do it the way we really want to, what is the point? Life is about experiences. There will always be extremes of good and bad events, but they are steps that contribute to our character. If we want happiness we have to really focus on a positive mindset. It is not as simple as saying, “I'm a happy person;” your mental capacity and focus controls your emotions and attitude. It takes time, it takes adjustment and most of all, it takes effort. The main point to remember is that happiness is possible, even if you are dealing with a serious physical or mental illness. It has taken a long time for me to get to a place of hope and understanding, but now that I am here, I have realized that I have in fact found happiness even while dealing with mental illness.



# ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Giulia Ciampini

"I always wonder why the birds stay in the same place when they can fly anywhere on the earth. Then I ask myself the same question." -Harun Yahya

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I finally got a call back. As the woman spoke, I remembered the interview. When they asked why I thought I'd be great for this position, I said because my sense of smell was terrible so the stench of formaldehyde wouldn't bother me. The four medical doctors and the woman from human resources laughed. A little joke to ease the tension, then I told them confidently that I earned 98 percent in my fourth-year human anatomy class, I'd been volunteering in a pathology lab with the assistant head of the pathology department for the past year and I'd been doing professional development courses on the side that relate to the position directly. They smiled, looked at each other and nodded with approval. The woman from human resources said, "they thought you were wonderful; a ray of sunshine and very intelligent, but they chose someone with more experience so they would have to spend less time training him." That was it. My heart dropped to my knees. How can I get more experience if I can't get a job without that experience? An Honours Bachelors of Science, a Masters of Science in education, a teaching certificate, good grades and good schools. I did everything I was supposed to and yet nothing. What do I do now? Is this even what I want?

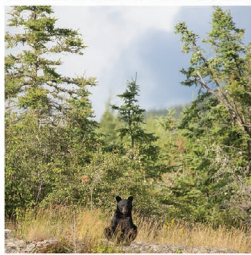
In a bookstore that feels as much like home as my little suburban bungalow, I'm sitting on a faded red

carpet, surrounded by dancing words and wild stories, searching for books that resonate with me. The stack I have piled beside me teeters as I flip through the books I've found, reading random passages in search of something. Then I find it, that one passage that strikes a chord, "Sometimes, you find yourself in the middle of nowhere and sometimes, in the middle of nowhere, you find yourself." I know I'm lost. I can feel it. It's November, I've just turned 28 and at some point I've made a wrong turn and wandered away from myself. Some mornings, I wake up with the feeling that I'm doing it wrong. Other days, I feel like my life is on hold, like I'm waiting... waiting for whatever is next. I often wonder what I'm doing with my life and if others do the same. My husband's smiling face peeks around the corner of the shelf, bringing me back to reality. When I'm upset, he'll take me to bookstores; that's how I know he's a keeper.

He knows he'll find me in the photography section and is so excited to show me what he's discovered. He puts a book of maps of Canada in front of me and exclaims, "We should go on a road trip across Canada!"

*Opposite All the small moments that make up one long journey (Photos: Giulia Ciampini, 2013).*







I laugh as he continues, “It will be great, and we’ll just get in the car and drive. I’ll pack the grill and you can take pictures.” I love when he bribes me with picture-taking opportunities. His finger traces the imaginary route from Ontario to British Columbia. “You have a wedding to photograph in British Columbia this summer, right? Don’t take a plane, let’s drive. After that, take some time off. We’ll go north and see the Northern Lights and drive the Dempster Highway.” My first thought was: “Absolutely not, that’s crazy! We couldn’t take the time off work, we have bills to pay and besides who would take care of our little beagle, Meatball? And our house?”

On a whim, we buy Canadian travel books, and on our way home we pick up two orders of penne alla vodka from Folco’s, my favorite Italian restaurant. It’s cold outside, so we make a fire and spend the night looking through our books, dreaming of some grand adventure. The more we talk about it, the more it seems like a great idea. If not now, when? When I finally land a “real” job? When we have children? When our parents are old or ill and need our care? Life, like entropy, tends to become more chaotic and complex. And more than anything, I need some time to stop and figure it all out.

It’s a frigid winter, and in a confused state, I apply to Ryerson’s Masters of Fine Arts in Documentary

Media program. As passionate as I am about biological sciences, I always come back to photography. Between being a photographer on international exchange projects in Cuba, working on our school newspapers, doing night school photography classes and starting my own little wedding photography company, there is something about photography that sustains me in ways that nothing else does.

I’m at the bookstore again in the spring, but this time looking for a journal for our trip. We decided to jump in! I haven’t written in a diary in years, but I used to really enjoy it. We’ve planned to go for three weeks in July of 2013 and will be traveling from Markham, Ontario to Vancouver, British Columbia, then all the way up to the most northern point of Canada in the west, Tuktoyaktuk, North West Territories. It will be 19,000 kilometres in about 25 days and I couldn’t be more excited to go.

Day 1: July 22, 2013

I am exhausted. On Friday I photographed a 15-hour wedding and on Saturday I photographed another 13-hour wedding. When I work a wedding, I wake up the next morning feeling like a zombie. Working back-to-back weddings on sweltering hot days in July makes me feel like I’ve been run over by a Mack Truck. I got home at 1 a.m. on Saturday night and remember

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*“It will be 19,000 kilometres  
in about 25 days  
and I couldn’t be  
more excited to go”*

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Gerry, my husband, waking me up at 4 a.m. excited to go. I'm pretty sure he packed me in the car with a pillow and the rest of our gear, because the next thing I remember was being in White River, Ontario, about 1,100 kilometres from home, stopping at Subway to get subs for dinner. I checked my emails and already one bride was asking when she would get to see photographs from her big day. The prospect of no work, no emails, no phone, no school and no responsibilities for three weeks is exciting. I need this. Everyone needs it, especially nowadays, and at least once in a while. We spend too much time in front of screens—computers, televisions, phones, iPads—always connected, but never really feeling a genuine connection. I miss nature, being outdoors and exploring. I'm so sick of the city life and a four-hour daily commute in traffic. I can't wait to see some animals.

#### Day 3: July 25, 2013

After encountering a playful red fox by the side of the highway, we stopped at a small diner that smelled like a cottage and was full of farmers. The vegetarian options on the road have been limited. I've been eating nothing but egg sandwiches and fish burgers, but the small town cafes and diners make a mean cup of coffee. The internet situation has been really frustrating and so slow. We'll get to our motels around 10 p.m. each night and it gives me just enough time to charge batteries, download and back up the day's photographs, and shower. Then I pass out. Everyone told me the prairies were dull but they are breathtaking. There is a sense of peace and community here. We drove by a postcard horse farm and when I got out of the car to take pictures, the farmer invited us over to pet her horses and play with her dogs. One town over, we came across that woman's mother in the grocery store and she offered us a place to stay if we needed one. I thought that only happened in sitcoms.

#### Day 5: July 27, 2013

I feel as though I'm doing the work of a teenager—trying to figure out who I am and where I fit into the world. But the first time I did this, I did it the way society told me to do it. Do well in school, go to a good school, get a good education, find a good job, find a good man, get married, buy a house, have a kid or two, get a bigger house and more cars. If you look a certain way, dress a certain way and live a certain way, you'll find happiness. But that wasn't right. I don't care about designer clothes or fancy cars; I don't even drive. I don't want kids, I prefer hockey skates to high heels and I love our little bungalow. I felt like I took a wrong turn and was chasing the wrong things. This time, I'm chasing the feeling of happiness, chasing dreams, chasing a life I should be living and I'm so much more content. I'm not waiting for the promised happiness of the future; I'm seeking the things that bring me happiness today. I'm not discounting the importance of work, being productive or being a contributing member of society. Work is very important, but I don't think it's enough to work for money or status. You spend at least 40 hours a week and most of your best energy at work, so it is important to choose a career that not only pays the bills but also fuels your soul. Maybe that's easier said than done, but it's an important ideal to strive for. Why do we feel like we waste time? It's because we do things that are not congruent with ourselves. If we are doing what we love, not a moment is wasted.

#### Day 7: July 29, 2013

Yesterday's wedding was absolutely beautiful. I met Melissa playing hockey almost a decade ago; she was a feisty goalie who would play three or four games a night. She moved to B.C. a few years back, but when she got engaged she asked that I come down to photograph her wedding. One of my favorite things about weddings is hearing the story about how the couple met and fell





Our journey (Photo: CAA Map Software, 2013).

in love. She met her new wife playing hockey, which is exactly how Gerald and I met eight years ago. They got married on the gorgeous campus of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. My second favorite thing about photographing weddings is when you actually sense a deep and genuine connection between the two getting married. It's surprisingly rare and when it's palpable, it makes the entire day fly by.

We're on our way north now. From Vancouver, we'll be taking Highway 97 north all the way to Prince George. At that point, we'll take Highway 37 to the border between British Columbia and the Yukon. Our first stop will be the capital, Whitehorse. I'm really excited to go north. I hear there is something about it that burrows into your soul and stays there.

Day 11: August 2, 2013

There is a German word, *Fernweh*, which describes someone who craves travel or is homesick for a place they've never been. That's how I feel right now. I cannot believe how beautiful Canada is. I can't believe how many animals we've seen already and it's only

been 10 days. We wake up at 4:30 a.m. every morning, check out of our motel and drive as the sun comes up, the hours wild animals are most active. I don't think I could do this trip with anyone else, because anytime we see anything fascinating, Gerald will pull the car over and we'll take time to videotape and record what's caught our eye. I was hoping to see wolves, but they are so elusive. But we've seen beaver, caribou, grizzly bears, moose, bison, peregrine falcons, porcupines, raccoons, red foxes, deer, black bears, Dall sheep and mountain goats.

Day 12: August 3, 2013

Being outdoors reminds me of how much I miss being outdoors. I wasn't aware of how disconnected I've been from nature. This trip has been such a beautiful escape, a real chance to wander and roam. We saw a mother black bear eating red berries with her two cubs and asked a bison for directions. Last night, we spent the night at Muktuk Adventures, located on Takhini River 40 kilometres north of Whitehorse. I've never felt so at home, so quickly, in a place so far from home. I've loved wolves since I was a little girl. Huskies, as a result, have always been one of my favorite breed of dog; they are sometimes so wolf-like and wild. It's magic to be around them. One of the things that I wanted to do most during our adventure across Canada was be around dogs. Ger and I rented a small wood cabin for a night and were able to snuggle next to one of the most affectionate huskies, Nutmeg. The owner of the establishment was Frank Turner, the Yukon Quest sled-dog racing champion. He was full of stories of life in the great white North, living off the land and dog mushing which he has been doing for over 30 years. He laughed as he exclaimed, "One time I drove my sled without glasses and went to grab a dog bootie off the trail only to discover it was a turd." In the background were 125 huskies, all laying quietly, and then something riled one up and

every single dog got excited! The energy of the place is palpable. If I could, I'd love to make my way back there and spend a few weeks really photographing it.

#### Day 13: August 4, 2013

I've been reading guide books about the Dempster Highway—the only public road in Canada that crosses the Arctic Circle. The highway construction began in 1958 and was completed in 1979. It goes from Yukon's Dawson City to Inuvik in the Northwest Territories, two degrees north of the Arctic Circle. For most of that length, the land it crosses bears no sign of human passage or presence: no side roads, no houses and no telephone or power poles. There is only one hotel and service station, Eagle Plains at Mile 229, just 35 kilometres south of the Arctic Circle. The road surface is entirely gravel, sitting on top of permafrost and weathering temperatures that can vary as much as 142 degrees. Before the Dempster was built, the only way into Canada's Western Arctic was by bush plane or winter dog sled. When we ask the locals about the road, they tell us to buy two spare tires and drive with extreme caution because the shale rocks are brutal on the cars. I hope we don't pop a tire and become bear appetizers. I'm excited to walk through Tombstone National Park and dip my feet into the Arctic Ocean.

#### Day 14: August 5th, 2013

There is something really strange about the Dempster Highway. In Saskatchewan we started playing this game when we were bored, where we would wave and smile to people in the cars that passed us and count how many people would wave back. In the big cities, few individuals maintained eye contact, but we got a lot of skeptical stares. In the prairies, more people played along. On the Dempster Highway, all 735 kilometres, everyone we passed smiled and waved back. I think it was the harshness of the land. We

stopped to help three people whose tires had blown on the gravel roads. We also encountered a couple that was cycling to Inuvik, towing their two little children in the attached child carrier. For lunch, we stopped at Eagle Plains. After we ordered eggs sandwiches, I wandered through the motel hallways. It was a creepy place; the walls were covered in pictures of famous Canadian criminals from the turn of the century. Too much isolation in a place like that could easily make people crazy, but on the plus side, trucker showers only cost \$3. From there, we continued north to the Arctic Circle waypoint at Wright Pass, the continental divide and the border between Yukon and Northwest Territories. As the latitude increased, the trees got smaller and the sky got bigger. At around 8 p.m., we got off the highway and drove up a small mountain of shale rock to see what we thought would be a glorious sunset. We met two men at the top, Ryan and Jady, sitting on a couch they had built out of oversized rocks with their feet resting on a matching rock table. They called it "Bedrock Inn" and they were tossing smaller rocks into cans positioned 5 metres away. They invited us to join them and Gerald took out his grill and made hot chocolate and macaroni and cheese for everyone. We sat with them talking and eating and playing rock can until nearly 3 a.m. It is so easy to lose track of time when the sun never sets. We slept in our car that night.

#### Day 15: August 6, 2013

We spent last night in a sled dog kennel just outside of Inuvik, and I begged the owner to let me snuggle with one of her huskies for the night. He was no Nutmeg. I couldn't even coax him onto the bed to warm my knee groove as Meatball does; he slept soundly on the floor. It never really felt like we went to sleep because it didn't really get dark outside. Twenty hours of daylight is a truly unique experience. The next morning, we took the smallest plane I have ever seen, only six seats,

to Tuktoyakuk! From fall to late spring, the Mackenzie River becomes an ice road that elongates the Dempster route to tiny Tuktoyaktuk on the Arctic shore about 130 kilometres north of Inuvik, but in the summer the only way there is by plane. The 40-minute flight to Tuk took us low over innumerable blue lakes and barren green-brown tundra. The pilot even let Gerald fly for a few minutes. I have never been so terrified in my life. After landing and kissing the ground, we boarded a small tour bus and explored the town with a guide. Ninety percent of Tuk's population of about 1,000 is Inuvialuit, meaning "original people" of the western Arctic. Most of the houses are weathered wood with tin roofs; many have dog sleds and a dozen huskies chained in the back. I was expecting to see more people walking around but the town was desolate. Our guide showed us the shed where she smoked fish for the winter. After a tour of the town and the beach, we dipped our feet in the frigid Arctic Ocean! I can't believe we made it there!

Day 16: August 7, 2013

On our way back down, and just after our first tire burst, we came across a town called Watson Lake in the Yukon. In it lives a strange forest of signs. There are 77,000 signs there currently and these signs come from everywhere in the world. The tradition began in 1942, during the Alaska Highway project, when a U.S. soldier named Carl K. Lindley spent time in Watson Lake recovering from an injury. He was desperately homesick, so he put up a sign from his hometown of Danville, Illinois, to remind himself of a place he loved. The idea caught on and people continued to leave their mark in the form of hometown signs. With their own signs, they exclaimed, "I did this, I was there. I lived." It's the same reason we take pictures, for proof of our own existence. Gerald and I didn't bring a sign from home but we bought one in Dawson City and wrote on it: 77,001.

Day 17: August 7, 2013

I'm sitting at the top of the world, watching clouds play tag. I've just ascended, in a rickety red glass box, 2,277 metres above sea level up the Jasper Tramway, the longest and highest guided aerial tramway in Canada. I look down from the perch and I can literally count six mountain ranges below me. I can see glacial-fed lakes, the Athabasca River and the town of Jasper. It is terrifying and breathtaking. It's gorgeous and I know my photographs aren't doing it justice. I can't seem to turn off my brain. I've been thinking a lot about the purpose of life and why we are here. I don't think we live to uncover a purpose that's preordained. I think we live to create meaning in our life. I also think we're here to figure out how to love perfectly and entirely—first ourselves, and then others. If you can show yourself unconditional and true compassion, empathy, respect, love and kindness, you can do that for others.

Day 20: August 10, 2013

The last few days have been a blur. We celebrated our four-year wedding anniversary two days ago by doing a white-water rafting tour down the Athabasca River. Of all the ways I don't want to die, drowning is on the top of the list. I'm not much of a swimmer and I didn't think I'd enjoy being tossed around in a dinky plastic boat through wild rapids, but I did. It was exhilarating. I felt so alive! From Athabasca Falls, we drove through Icefields Parkway and we were compelled to hike as far as we could. Then we went to Northern Lights Wildlife Wolf Center in Golden, British Columbia, to hike with wolves. We went on an hour-and-a-half hike in the mountains with two wolves named Maya and Wiley. One jumped on my shoulders with paws as large as saucepans. That was a waking dream.

Sometimes you need to step outside, get some air and remind yourself of who you are and where you

*“I don’t know where my life  
will take me but I love this  
moment right now.”*

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want to be. I haven’t really been paying attention. I didn’t notice how much I was avoiding my feelings and emotions. I don’t think it’s just me. I feel like so many people will do anything to avoid difficult feelings and voids, but without them, we really can’t come to know ourselves. They are really helpful guides. Drugs, alcohol, shopping, television, food, partying and sex are used to numb, avoid and escape life. But it’s important to feel your feelings and listen to yourself. If I am bored, I will turn on my TV, computer or go on my phone. But what if I embraced that boredom and didn’t go for the quick fix? I would have to connect myself to others or activities to remedy that feeling. I could read, paint, write, play hockey, do photography, go climbing, try snowboarding and be outdoors. I’d feel fulfilled, relieved of my boredom and more authentically me, instead of feeling like my life is disappearing as I sit in front of screens. You know when you are doing things that feel right. You feel like you are on the right track. I think happiness is when what you think, what you say and what you do are in harmony.

We will be home in about 550 kilometres! I miss Meatball like crazy and can’t wait to hug her. I want to sleep in my own bed again.

Day 25: August 15, 2013

We’re home! What an amazing trip! We are finally

home to our little beagle and our bed! I swear I left the house neater than this. I have a lot of editing to catch up on and a lot of shoots coming up, but I wanted to take the day off and spend some time relaxing in our backyard. Fall is coming and I feel like summer just flew by. Gerald is gardening and I’m reading a photography book about how to shoot with more soul. Meatball is running through the garden trying to get the attention of our young neighbors. I don’t know where my life will take me, but I love this moment right now. This morning I went to Michaels, the Arts and Craft Superstore, and bought a Project Life Kit, a way to document your life and give value to your experiences and your journey. I’m going to write, draw, take pictures, paint, find inspirations and start keeping track of whatever makes me happiest. Only 13 days until my MFA program starts. I’m so glad I applied to this program and was accepted. I’m looking forward to it. In the fall of 2014, we are planning another road trip throughout Eastern Canada. I don’t know where we’ll go yet, but to spend some time outdoors to explore, document life and live more adventurously with a camera in hand is enough.

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“And above all, watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places. Those who don’t believe in magic will never find it.” -Roald Dahl



# RUM IS FOR FUNERALS

Michèle Pearson Clarke

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When my grandfather died, we buried him at sea. Not the efficiency of cremation and the splendor of scattered ashes for him—oh no! This charming and confounding man who was never a sea captain nor even a sailor, chose formality and his own inimitable brand of propriety one last time. We, all miniature versions of him despite our varying levels of resistance, met his high standards one last time and did the thing right. A licensed skipper was procured, a sturdy boat was chartered and his body was carefully enshrouded and enclosed in a weighted wire cage. We sailed from Antigua toward his beloved birthplace, Dominica, until we reached the requisite deep waters where this commanding man would be laid to rest. We shared a few memories, shed a few tears and, most importantly, knocked back a few in his honour. It was rum punch in the glasses that we raised—his constant companion, rum punch—the only foreseeable aspect of observing his death as a family. It was always to be so: knowing that we would one day toast him at his own wake, with one sour, two sweet, three strong, four weak, was like knowing that water is wet.

We come to know rum early in Trinidad and I imagine it must be the same on all the other mounds of dirt in the Caribbean Sea. The Scots have their whisky, the French have their wine and we have our rum. Rum seeps

from every island pore; you smell it on every island breath. It fuels love and lust and money and murder. It blesses, it heals, it consoles. Rum fuels life before it marks death.

Rum and I made our acquaintance when I was 12 or so, scrounging up enough money with friends to buy a cheap bottle, burning our throats, puffing out our chests and grinning like jackasses the entire time. The first pour went straight onto the ground for our ancestors before we slowly polished off the bottle, capful by capful. It felt like we had grabbed adulthood by the scruff of the neck, so we could stare it straight in the face to see who would blink first. Getting drunk for the first time was intoxicating in every which way, and it certainly went well enough that there was no reason not to repeat the experience. Rum and coke held my attention at first, only to be outfoxed by the superior rum and ginger ale, a temporary preoccupation eventually usurped by rum and portugal (tangerine) juice. Bess drink. But once a year, when we went to the daylong preliminary round of the Panorama steelpan competition, only rum punch would suffice. Not quite my grandfather's rum punch, but close enough to feel a connection to him, something so rarely felt.

The word “punch” comes from the Hindi word “panch,”

Opposite Franz Eugen Kohler, *Saccharum officinarum* L, 1897. (Courtesy Missouri Botanical Garden).



*Saccharum officinarum* L.



meaning five. The five ingredients—alcohol, sugar, lemon, water and tea or spices—have remained much the same for the past four hundred years. In the early seventeenth century, the brew travelled from India to England and then onward from England to its Caribbean colonies, where rum replaced brandy and lime replaced lemon. The rum came from sugar cane, brought to the Caribbean by Christopher Columbus, the region's first ambassador of colonization. The people who made the sugar and made the rum came from Africa, captured and transported as slave labour to run the Caribbean sugar machine. One colonial movement begat another.

There is some peculiar comfort in picturing slavery as an American phenomenon. But of the 11 million Africans who survived crossing the Atlantic, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database indicates that less than 500,000 were shipped to North America. The rest were delivered to European plantation owners in Brazil and the Caribbean to meet the colossal labour demands of mass sugar cane cultivation and sugar production. Commercial rum making is an endeavour born from the waste of the sugar industry—converting sugar cane into sugar generates enormous amounts of cane juice and molasses, and these are the raw materials that are distilled into rum. The manufacture and export of these two commodities created a profitable system of triangular trade (more movement), conceivably the modern world's first taste of globalization. Slaves were used to produce sugar and molasses in the Caribbean; molasses was sent to the New England colonies where it was used to make rum; New Englanders dispatched their rum to the west coast of Africa in exchange for slaves; and finally, slaves were brought to the New World and sold for molasses, a currency which they, in turn, would begin producing themselves, ensuring the cycle continued. Round and round we go—rum, sugar and slavery—a forever-connected triangle, the defining shape of the Caribbean.

When you find evidence that you have ancestors who were slaves, it is a pivotal moment. There is the before

knowing and there is the after knowing. In between is like hearing nails scraped down a blackboard except the nails are history and the blackboard is you. With my black skin, it's not so much that it came as a surprise, but yet somehow it was still a strangely jarring discovery. The confirmation came in the form of my great-grandfather's autobiographical manuscript, brought from Dominica to Canada after my great-aunt died. My family's slave history was mapped out in one single sentence on the first page: "My Father was a son of one named Jean Boye who assumed the surname of Charles from his master, he being the son of a slave who was born in Africa." Doing the math, my great-great-great-great-great grandfather was a slave brought from Africa and my great-great-great-great grandfather was born into slavery, becoming the first John (Jean) Charles in the family. My uncle—the fifth John Charles—provided further verification upon having his DNA tested for genealogical clues. The results link us all with the Balanta people of Guinea-Bissau, a small country on the west coast of Africa. The Balanta means "those who resist," and with rage and sadness and pride, there is no denying history—we are all here because of sugar.

The tourist who arrives in Dominica (or any one of this string of islands that serve as "beach" destinations), jetlagged and thawing out from colder climes, is inevitably greeted by rum punch. The welcome drink of choice at every Caribbean hotel verifies that vacation has indeed commenced, that temporary escape has indubitably been achieved. Clever tourist. But there is nothing new to see here. Rum has been supplying escape routes for centuries. Even before plantation owners began distillation, slaves prepared their own rough concoctions from fermented sugar cane juice as pathways to oblivion. Early colonist efforts were equally harsh but effective; a visitor to Barbados in 1651 clearly stated the circumstances: "The chief fuddling they make in the island is Rumbullion, alias Kill-Divil, and this is made of sugar cane distilled, a hot, hellish, and terrible liquor." These grim qualities were little

deterrent, and both planters and slaves were equally adept at drinking excessively. While the slaves made do with ordinary rum, the planters soon moved on to serving rum punch, its exotic ingredients signifying wealth and status. With this elixir, they drunkenly subdued the demons incurred by colonial Caribbean life; for slaves, drunkenness provided a fleeting escape from the terrible conditions of slave society. Recognizing this, most planters plied their slaves with weekly rations of rum, exploiting their coping strategy to keep them passive and under control. In response, some slaves used inebriation as a “petit marronage,” an act of resistance involving a temporary form of escape from labour on the estate. Clever slave.

Cavalier Antigua Rum was my grandfather’s preferred brand, and he bought it by the case. Every island has its own distinct style of making rum, and Caribbean rums vary based on historical patterns and local proclivities. Cavalier is a light-bodied rum, best suited to mixed drinks. Cavalier is also best suited to Antiguan. As a Trinidadian pre-teen, once we decided it was time to fire one, only one rum would do: Vat 19 Rum, the self-proclaimed “spirit of Trinidad and Tobago.” Such nationalism spills from every rum bottle, and the line between marketing campaigns and patriotism is blurry. Caribbean rum bottle labels predominantly display symbols of national identity, but images of plantation life, seafaring ships and white sailors or pirates are common too. Perhaps there is no need to conceal the monstrous realities of the past when colonial ideologies remain so firmly entrenched.

The most expensive rum in the world carries a price tag of US\$25,000. Created in 2012 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Trinidad’s independence from Britain, Legacy by Angostura is a blend of seven rare, aged rums presented in a specially designed crystal and silver decanter. Though premium rum is not a recent invention, the 20 bottles of Legacy stand at the apex of a new wave of rum gentrification. Whisky, vodka and even tequila have all enjoyed a luxury makeover over the past decade,

and now rum is undergoing a reinvention of its own. Distillers are increasingly producing premium-aged sipping rums—with the emphasis on fine raw materials and artisanal practices—and bartenders are newly enamoured with mixing these high-end rums into pricy craft cocktails. The consequent boost in Caribbean rum tourism has made hot destinations of distillery tours, rum-themed cruises and rum festivals; connoisseurs eagerly travelling South to experience the birthplace of rum. Long perceived as a crude, cheap liquor and the barbarian’s drink of choice, rum is neatly sidestepping its provenance for its new consumers who seem to appreciate the encouragement to forget.

I never knew my grandfather as well as I would have liked. He was one those men who was warm and generous with outsiders, but less so with those of us closer to him. He loved to entertain and always took great pride in having rum punch readily available for visitors. When he visited us, first in Trinidad and then later here in Canada, he would whip up a batch at the slightest social provocation. He would pour freely while regaling friends and neighbours with adventurous tales plucked from his distinguished career as a medical doctor with the World Health Organization, signifying his status in multiple ways. As Caribbean people, we are still yoked to colonization, yet his rum punch hospitality explicitly manifested the complexities of a Caribbean family’s migration from slavery to the black elite in four generations. I didn’t understand then all the ways that his rum punch connected me to my history, but I am forever in debt to this knowing.

Late last year, a stylish rum bar opened at the top of my street. I’m not sure what my grandfather would have made of it, but I know that I cannot bring myself to pay a visit. There is no more forgetting for me and collective memory is in the way. The distance between “here” and “there” remains, and where I come from, this remains too—scotch is for business, champagne is for weddings and rum is for funerals.



# WOMEN, SCHWOMEN

Karin Culliton

A look at women's [lack of]  
meaningful presence in film

As a person who lives in the world, you must have run into a few women. It's hard not to since they make up 51 percent of the population. Women are everywhere! Women give birth to us, set our broken bones in the emergency room, deliver our mail, encourage us when we are scared, teach us our ABCs in school, build our roads, eat in our restaurants, write our news, and... well, you get the picture. They do stuff, lots of stuff.

But if aliens were to stream Netflix from outer space, they would not see women represented in these same numbers. They might think that males outnumber females two to one, because that is the breakdown when it comes to film protagonists (unless they're watching sexually explicit material, then they'd find two times more women than men on-screen). Incredibly, Geena Davis' Institute on Gender in Media found that even in crowd scenes, where no one is speaking, women only make up 17 percent of people on camera.

In 1985, comic book artist Alison Bechdel drew a now-famous strip for her comic, *Dykes to Watch Out For*. The strip, titled "The Rule," poked fun at how poorly women were represented in film by showing two characters trying to find a movie to watch that could fulfill three simple criteria. Now nicknamed the "Bechdel Test," the criteria required the film to answer





yes to the following three questions: does the movie have two named women, do these women talk to each other and do they talk to each other about something other than a man?

While the test began as a joke in order to make fun of the fact that there were so few movies with significant female characters in them, the test has since become important in media studies. It is also frequently used by film critics (especially during award season) in order to see how the current year's films measure up to the previous years.

Opposite The Bechdel Test evolved from a comic strip called *Dykes to Watch Out For* (Illustration: Lisa Bechdel, 1985), Above Hollywood is full of male dummies (Photo: Alex Wain, 2014).

The Bechdel Test doesn't determine the quality or popularity of a film, nor does it conclude whether or not a film is feminist. It is, at its core, a simple test to see if the movies think women actually exist. It is probably the absolute lowest we can set the bar for women's presence in movies, to say nothing of their *meaningful* presence.



On one end of the Bechdel Test scale, we have obvious shoo-ins. Here we find the so-called “chick flicks” with all-female casts like *The Help*, which was nominated in 2012 for a Best Picture Oscar, or 2004’s *Mean Girls*. Somewhere in the middle are movies that pass, but only because of an insignificant interaction. This is where *American Hustle* would fall, which passed only because of a single scene where Jennifer Lawrence’s character discusses nail polish with a minor character. At the failing end of the scale, there are some surprising films, like *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part II*. Despite many strong female characters in the film, none of them have an actual conversation with each other (because no, Mrs. Weasley calling Bellatrix Lestrange a “bitch” doesn’t count). And lastly, there are the not-so-shocking films that fail. To find an example of this type of film, just think of any action movie and it will most likely fail the test.

It is important that any discussion of the Bechdel Test isn’t just about women’s presence in film, but is a critique of Hollywood itself. It is with films like *American Hustle* that the ridiculousness of what constitutes “women’s presence” is most evident. Should we really be lauding a film for including a snippet of dialogue between two women about beauty products? The test should be a conversation starter, not a final checkmark. We should also be able to discuss and include a film like *Gravity*. It only has two characters, but since one of them is male, it fails the test. Nonetheless, it features a very strong woman character in its lead, with Sandra Bullock on-screen a lot more than George Clooney.

The reason the test has become so important in recent years is because it highlights an ongoing and serious problem in the entertainment industry. Part of that problem is the reluctance for the powers-that-be in Hollywood (a.k.a., the old white men) to green-light projects with strong and interesting women. The almighty dollar’s bottom line has always been

cited as the reason. In 2007, after a few movies with women protagonists performed poorly, the president of production at Warner Bros, Jeff Robinov, was quoted as saying, “We are no longer doing movies with women in the lead.”<sup>i</sup> As women’s rights attorney Gloria Allred noted after hearing what Robinov said, “When movies with men as the lead fail, no one says we’ll stop making movies with men in the lead.”<sup>ii</sup> It’s an interesting point. It seems ludicrous to suggest the male actors are to blame, but we are so easily asked to think it’s the woman’s fault when the reverse happens, to the point that the head of a major studio can announce it publicly in the media without impunity (and by “without impunity,” I mean he is still employed in Hollywood).

The next part of the problem with Hollywood shows up in a very recent survey, and proves this bottom line defense excuse may be just that, an excuse. Nate Silver, an American statistician and editor-in-chief of ESPN’s fivethirtyeight.com, analyzed the ticket sales for 1,615 films released since 1990, categorizing them on the basis of whether they passed or failed the Bechdel Test. What Silver found was that the total median gross return on investment for a film that passed the test was \$2.68 for each dollar spent. Compare this to the \$2.45 gross return for films that failed the test and you have a pretty convincing argument if you ever get a meeting with Jeff Robinov. Silver stated, “We found that the data doesn’t appear to support the persistent Hollywood belief that films featuring women do worse at the box office. Instead, we found evidence that films that feature meaningful interactions between women may in fact have a better return on investment overall than films that don’t.” This is a huge revelation for an industry that has spent years leaving women to play long-suffering girlfriends, nameless hookers with hearts of gold and silent, yet smiling waitresses.

These box office numbers might have something to do with who is buying the movie tickets. In 2012, females age 12 and above made up 51 percent of movie-goers. This isn't new, females have comprised between 50 and 51 percent of the ticket-buying audience for several years now.<sup>iii</sup> Also, according to the news website Vocativ, of the fifty top-grossing films of 2013 roughly half passed the Bechdel Test. Vocativ's criteria for passing was stricter than the original Bechdel Test, because they differentiated between strongly passing and dubiously passing (which would include films like *American Hustle*). The films that passed earned a total of \$4.22 billion in the U.S., while the ones that failed earned \$2.66 billion. Perhaps someone like Jeff Rubinov might consider these two sets of statistics, and realize how many more women would buy tickets if there were more interesting women on-screen.

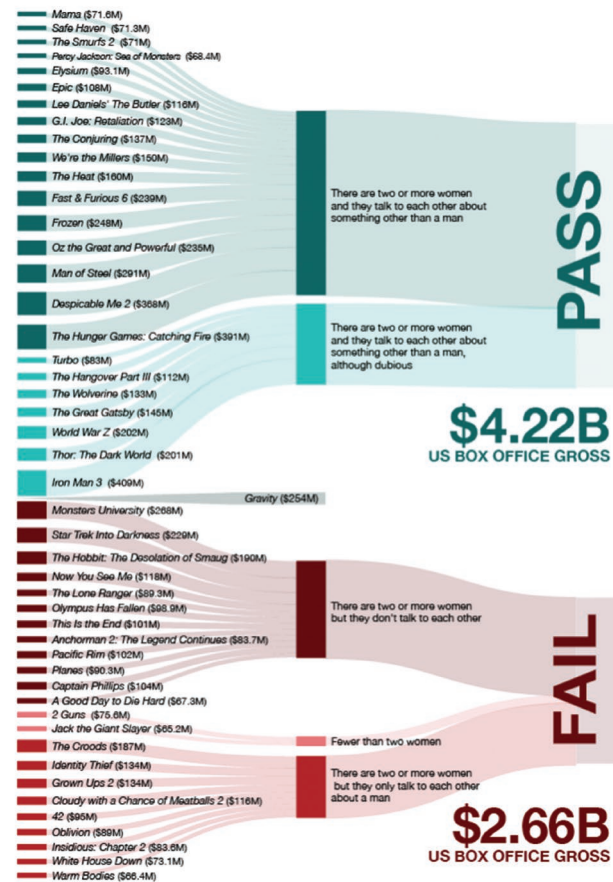
So that brings us to the next part of the problem: if Hollywood claims women don't make money at the box office and that is not only false, but the reverse is seen to be true, then what we're left with is this: Hollywood is sexist. And it seems there is a problem with the entire system, not just the final product.

Stacy Smith, a professor at the University of Southern California, did a study to compare on-screen portrayals with behind-the-scenes employment. She found that when men dominate the creative process, the final product is a more male-dominated film. So, basically, if more women wrote and directed movies, we'd have more interesting women doing more interesting things on-screen. Of the fifty top-grossing films of 2013 listed to the right, not one was solely directed by a woman (only *Frozen* was co-directed by a male/female team). In 2012, just nine percent of the directors of the 250 top-grossing films in the U.S. were women, which is up four percent from 2011. Also, a study conducted by the Women's Media Center found that women accounted for only 23 percent of behind-

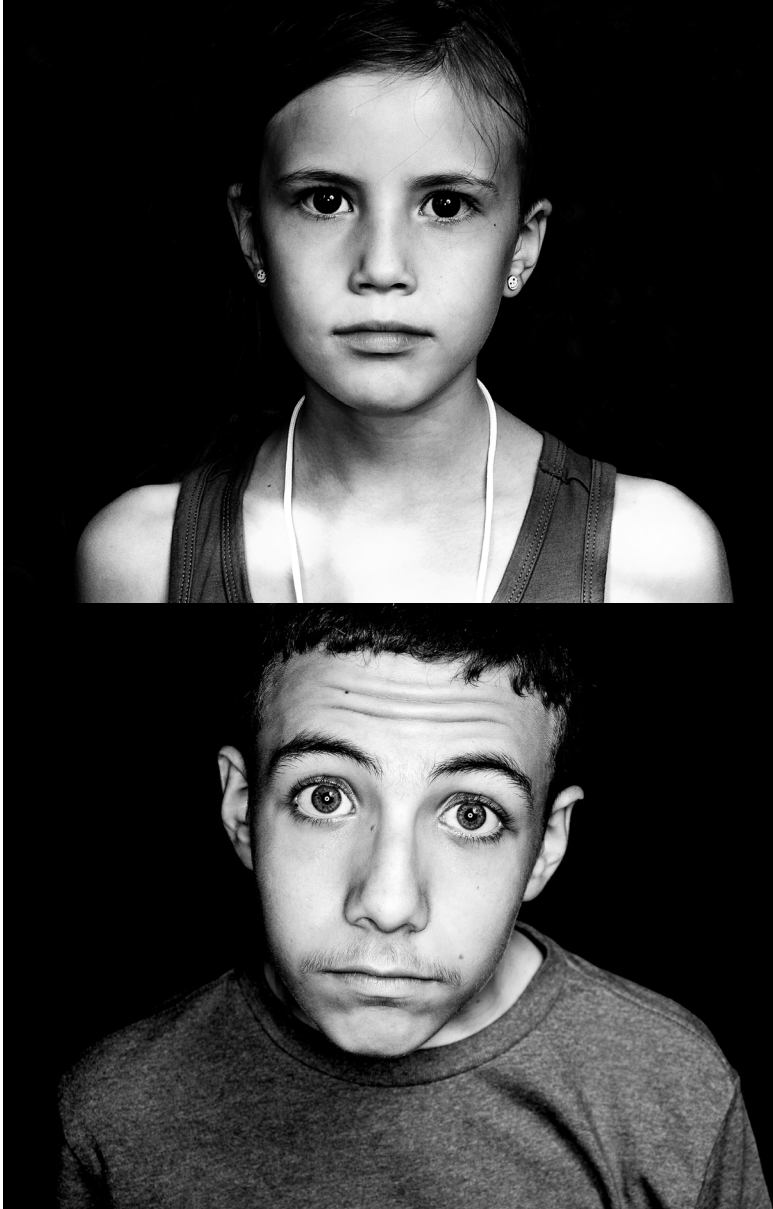
the-scenes workers (directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, cinematographers, etc.) employed on narrative features.

So with men in most of the power positions, how are they choosing to represent women on-screen? Sadly, females accounted for only 33 percent of all characters in the 100 top-grossing films of 2011. While

Fifty top-grossing films of 2013 according to the Bechdel Test  
(Graphic: Courtesy of Vocativ.com, 2014).







Top to Bottom Sloane, aged 10 and Max, aged 14, two good reasons for change (Photos: Karin Culliton, 2013).

that number is up five percent since 2002, the number of female protagonists actually declined from 16 percent to 11 percent over the same time period. These female characters are also younger than their male counterparts, and less likely to be portrayed as leaders of any kind.

So what does all this mean? Do we know, as Walt Hickey states in his article on [fivethirtyeight.com](http://fivethirtyeight.com), “that on one level or another, there’s an inherent gender bias in the movie business”? Since we should be smart enough to realize that there really aren’t twice as many men in the world, and that most women talk about more than men and nail polish, then can’t we ignore the problem? Is it as silly as having to explain to people that pigs really don’t talk? I mean, no one argues about the sun rising, since we all know it will, so why argue about a system we all know is biased and sexist? Personally, I have two good reasons why knowing the facts is not enough and changes are needed.

First, I have my 11-year-old daughter, Sloane. Sloane is whip-smart and acutely aware. She is funny, caring and very strong. But she is on the cusp of being a teenager, when all these things will be challenged because of the daily images that surround her and her friends. Since I told Sloane about the Bechdel Test three months ago, she has observed every film we’ve watched to see if it passes the test. Even if I’ve forgotten to look for it, she’ll announce its rating at the end of the film, reminding me of just how carefully she’s watching what is in front of her. *Frozen* has become her favourite film of all time. I don’t think it’s an accident since the relationship story in the film is between two very strong, independent and smart sisters. Prior to *Frozen*, *My Neighbour Totoro*, a film that also features two sisters, was her favourite (Totoro is a 1988 ani-

“I don’t want my children to stop questioning what they see versus what they know.”

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mated film by Hayao Miyazaki, a director and writer known for his stories about complex and real female characters). I’ve been to enough Halloween parties over the years to realize there aren’t many options for our girls on-screen aside from princesses.

The second reason is my 14-year-old son, Max. Changes to the film industry are necessary for boys like Max for different reasons than why I want them for my daughter. In many ways, Max is not your typical 14-year-old boy—he’s very aware and sensitive, and has been known to not only sit through episodes of *My Little Pony* or a Barbie film with his sister, but to actually enjoy doing so. But in many ways he is also a very typical 14-year-old boy—he loves violent video games and has a BB gun he likes to shoot cans with at his grandparents’ cottage. He doesn’t need any more reinforcement from the media that boys seem to be valued more for being forceful and aggressive; there is enough of that already. It shouldn’t be necessary for me to have conversations with my son, after watching a movie rated PG, about how women should be truly valued compared to what we just watched on-screen.

As Amy Bleakly, who studied women’s representation in film over a 50-year period, notes, “Movie-going youth—the largest consumers of movies per capita—who are repeatedly exposed to portrayals of women as sexual and men as violent may internalize these portrayals.”<sup>ix</sup> After a while, with enough exposure, these violent or sexual images just become what is true in films and people stop

questioning them. I don’t want my children to stop questioning what they see versus what they know.

This year, the Woody Allen film *Blue Jasmine*, which passed the Bechdel Test, featured Cate Blanchett and Sally Hawkins as two sisters. *Blue Jasmine* is a good example of the type of film that flies in the face of most norms. It is expected that a film with two women at its centre wouldn’t do well, but the film managed to earn \$100 million at the box office. Also, the movie was made with only \$18 million, which means *Blue Jasmine*’s total median gross return was more than double the average of a film that fails the Bechdel Test, according to Silver’s research.

Blanchett won a Best Actress Oscar for her portrayal of the complicated and self-absorbed Jasmine. In her acceptance speech she eloquently stated, “[There are] those in the industry who are foolishly clinging to the idea that female films with women in the centre are niche experiences. They are not. Audiences want to see them and in fact they earn money.” That is not to say that the whole argument for a successful film lies in its box office numbers. Economics isn’t everything and we shouldn’t judge films about women with this lone statistic. And when we analyze the data, we see the Bechdel Test has its own failings when it comes to finding how well women are represented in film, but it’s a good start because at the very least it means we’re looking. There is a long way yet to go though. As Blanchett said, “the world is round, people.” Time to start representing it.

# THE WAY WE REMEMBER

Chantal Dignard

One always fails to speak of the thing one loves  
-Roland Barthes

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Photography is a medium capable of capturing and preserving our most significant and meaningful moments. Photographs are often viewed as items that are able to keep our memories intact and provide a link to our past. However, their potential to be misinterpreted, manipulated and seen out of context can hinder this role. In some cases, photos may actually interfere with or alter our personal and collective memories rather than keep them safe. The nostalgia, awareness and emotions that can be evoked through looking at old photographs makes them powerful tools with the capacity to bring us back in time and remind us of moments in the past we forgot existed.

The ability of photographs to bring us psychologically back in time can make them major influences in how we perceive death and handle grief. Roland Barthes links photography and death in his book, *Camera Lucida*. He examines how we interact with photos of the dead and the ways in which this impacts our perception of death. These concepts and ideas are now more intriguing to me than ever due to the fact I have been coping with the recent passing of two of my friends. The grieving process has been extremely difficult and painful,

*Gates of Autumn* (Photo: Igor Zenin).

and I am interested in how it has been affected by the presence of photographs. The rise of social media has made photos much more widely accessible and easy to share. Currently, when someone passes away we can (in many cases) easily access hundreds or even thousands of photographs of them. This affects not only the grieving process of individuals, but also the collective memory of a deceased person.

Through photography, we are able to freeze moments we experience, ranging from the mundane to the life changing. Many see the act of taking photos as a way to build our personal and family histories. The cameraphone and other advances in technology have led to trends of documenting the ordinary and routine. As a society we now tend to document seemingly insignificant parts of our lives such as what we eat, the clothes we wear, trips to the gym, haircuts, school projects and the average activities that fill our daily lives. We document major events in much greater depth, including weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, family vacations and holidays. The practice of documenting our lives through images is seen as a way to hold on to special moments and share both our significant and everyday stories with others.

Despite the fact photos can easily be manipulated through editing, taken out of context or fail to accurately represent their subjects, they are still widely accepted as being able to portray truth. Because of this, it is frequently assumed that photographs hold the truth about our past. They are seen as a way of protecting our memories as they capture them in a manner that makes them immortal. Photos provide a tangible link between our present situation and our past memories. Nevertheless, when considering photographs' relationship to our memories, it is important to keep in mind their capacity to be misinterpreted, manipulated and viewed out of context. The various ways they can stray from accurately representing the truth may hinder the role we have assigned them, that of keeping our memories intact. In

fact, photographs can interfere with or alter our memories rather than protecting them.

We often allow images to be interpreters of our memories rather than visual representations of our past. If we can't fully remember the explicit details surrounding a photo relevant to our lives, our mind will fill in the blanks. "Sometimes, when your eyes see something that your heart can't explain, your mind makes up a new history to make sense of it all."<sup>i</sup> Therefore, our relationship with images may allow us to recreate the details in our memories that we lose overtime. This recreation can lead to us having false memories or memories that vary drastically from our past realities. A study done by Kimberly Wade, Maryanne Garry, J. Don Read and D. Stephen Lindsay found that edited photos could cause false memories. Twenty participants took part in the study and the results were published in 2002. An interviewer showed each participant four photographs from their childhood. Three of the photos were of authentic situations, but the fourth was an image of the subject with one or more family members pasted into a prototype photo of a hot air balloon. This was a completely false childhood experience. Researchers confirmed with an adult family member of each participant that they had never taken a hot air balloon ride. The process involved interviewing each person taking part in the study three times over a 7-16 day period regarding their memories of the situations portrayed in each of the four photographs. Despite the fact that one of the events was entirely constructed, several of the study participants were able to "remember" details relating to the planted event. "In short, at the end of the three interview sessions, a total of 10 (50 percent) subjects recalled the false event either partially or clearly—claiming to remember at least some details of a hot air balloon ride during childhood."<sup>ii</sup> The results of this study reveal that photos are capable of playing an immense role in the way we remember events and occurrences. Because it is possible for images



to be manipulated or taken out of context, they may be able to alter our personal memories.

The capability of misinterpreted photographs to interfere with memories extends to collective memory. Manipulated images can lead to false memories amongst individuals as well as society collectively. When an image becomes an iconic representation of an event, it affects how society as a whole remembers that experience. If an iconic image is not given proper context, it may interfere with collective memory as a result. An example of this is the “Kissing Sailor” photograph taken by Alfred Eisenstaedt in Times Square on August 14, 1945, minutes after World War II officially ended. The photo is of a sailor kissing a nurse on the street in front of a crowd of celebrating citizens. Within popular culture the photograph became a symbol of “victory, young love and the American dream.”<sup>iii</sup> However, the two subjects featured in the photo were not a couple, and the nurse (Greta Friedman) did not even want to be kissed. “It wasn’t my choice to be kissed,” Greta explained. “The guy just came over and grabbed me!”<sup>iv</sup> Thus, the iconic image being interpreted out of context by a mass audience led to a distorted collective memory of the moment that was captured. Like the hot air balloon images, false context caused false memories. Photographs are capable of hampering the accurate portrayal of past events and experiences on a large scale when they become iconic and have an influence over so many people.

Although photographs are able to lead to false memories, they also have the power to evoke nostalgia, awareness and emotions from their viewers. They are powerful tools capable of bringing us mentally back to real situations and assisting us in remembering our experiences accurately. While photos may lead to inaccurate or fabricated memories, they can also make truthful memories more concrete or keep the details of a situation intact in history. Photographs may remind us of moments in our past we forgot existed. Looking

through old photos can be extremely evocative and cause a viewer to remember a situation or event they had pushed to the back of their mind. The affect of this may range from inspiring to traumatic.

Though there are some parts of our past we would rather not remember, bringing certain memories to the surface is often a precious gift. We go through experiences that do not seem significant at the time, or even stand out in our memory, but being brought back to the occasion mentally through a photograph, produces immense joy. Looking back at old photographs can provide perspective and reveal who and what makes us truly happy. We may view an image of an event that felt inconsequential at the time, and recognize how genuinely content we were in the moment the photo was taken. Seeing our former selves as satisfied and cheerful can bring comfort and inspiration into our present lives. However, reminiscing about happy times in our past can also be painful if the experience is so far removed from our current lives, it is out of reach. Photographs document our past and therefore may produce tormenting nostalgia. Each image represents a time we can never go back to, an experience we can never relive and a version of ourselves we will never exactly be again. Photographs always show us a younger and more innocent version of ourselves. This nostalgia will be much stronger if we are photographed with something tangible we cannot get back. This may include being photographed with an ex-lover or with a loved one who has passed away and we have physically lost forever.

The fact that photographs can trigger us to travel back in time emotionally and mentally allows them to have a significant influence over how we handle loss. Photography affects the way we perceive the concept of death and our own morality. Roland Barthes argues that looking at photos of those who have passed away reveals death as an invariable aspect of the human future. “[H]e is going to die. I read at the same time: This will be and

# *“The grieving process is complex, painful and different for everybody.”*

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this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future.”<sup>v</sup> Barthes’ experience of looking through photographs of his mother after she died, played a major role in developing his opinions regarding photography’s relationship to death. “In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott’s psychotic patient, over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.”<sup>vi</sup> Barthes suggests that photographs deal with time in a manner that forces us to face death as an inevitable event. He claims that photographs of the past contain, “a defeat of Time”<sup>vii</sup> and reveal, “that is dead and that is going to die.”<sup>viii</sup> Therefore, Barthes hints that carefully examining photographs of someone who has died is a reminder of our own impending demise.

Not only can photographs help us better understand death, they also have the capability to impact the way we grieve someone after they pass away. The grieving process is complex, painful and different for everybody. There are numerous factors that affect the way we grieve and how we experience loss. Photographs may serve to put a situation into perspective for family members and friends of someone who has recently passed away. Images of someone who has died may make the loss easier to deal with, or in some cases more difficult to handle, but in all cases, photographs will

influence the way we remember someone we’ve lost.

Remembering someone’s presence after they die is a key aspect of our grief, as it is their absence that causes us to mourn. Due to the fact that every person is unique in how they heal, as are the circumstances surrounding each death, the way images influence grieving will vary vastly depending on the individual. If someone dies in an accident unexpectedly, then the photographs that link them to the manner they died may be triggering for their loved ones. For example, if a person were to die in a car accident, it may be trauma inducing for those they leave behind to see images of them in or around a vehicle. If someone feels guilt related to the state of their relationship with an individual before they died, then viewing photographs of them may hinder their healing. Photographs failing to live up to, or that accurately portray a person, may be a cause of frustration to those mourning. Negative responses to photographs of the dead may stem from a number of underlying issues including guilt, the context of the photos themselves or denial. However, everyone responds to grief differently, and for some it may just be too painful to face a tangible reminder of what that person once meant to them.

Images of the dead evoke a lot of memories, and this can be detrimental to the grieving process. But photographs can also be a source of comfort, a link to those we have lost and a precious gift inspiring us to move forward. Their capacity to mentally bring us back to the moment they were taken makes them a unique

link to those who have died. They can make a moment from the past so clear in our mind that it feels like we have those brief few seconds of history back with the person we've lost. A visual image reveals what the person looked like at the time the photo was taken, but it can also stimulate us to remember what they said when it was taken, what their voice sounded like and other details we might otherwise lose. The idea of starting to forget details about someone you've lost can be terrifying and extremely painful. Photographs help to keep these details intact. Personally, I find that photographs bring me comfort and are generally welcome reminders of the person I've lost. I feel that each image is an irreplaceable gift, a piece of themselves they've left behind. It brings me joy and peace to be able to look through old photos and reflect on the time I spent with the person.

Looking at any photograph of a person I have loved and lost usually evokes some type of emotional response. However, there are definitely varying levels of response, which depend on my relationship to the photo I am viewing. If I am connected to an image in some way, then it will likely be more significant to my grieving and memory process. Barthes refers to the emotional impact caused by certain photos as the *punctum*: "A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)."<sup>ix</sup> Therefore it is the *punctum* of a photograph that causes it to resonate emotionally. I find that I have the lowest emotional response to images that portray the person I've lost in a context

that is unfamiliar. For example, photographs that show them doing something out of character or with people I don't know, generally serve to make me feel alienated from their memory. This is especially true of photographs that were taken before I knew the person. I feel a much stronger connection to photographs that capture an event that I was present at, as I'm aware of the context the photograph was taken in. I have the deepest emotional reaction to photos that I took of the person or that include both of us regardless of the quality of the image. This past winter, I took two photos with my cellphone of my friend boosting my car, just two weeks before he died. He was wearing winter clothes and not facing the camera, so you could barely tell who was in the picture, even if you knew him. A few days after he died, I was looking through photos on Facebook. I definitely felt an emotional response to them; especially in the ones where he was smiling, because that was exactly how I remembered him. But none of them really resonated with me in the same way as the two I had taken myself. Even though his face was not visible in the pictures from my cellphone, looking at them brought me straight back to the moments they were taken. They made me feel as though I had permanently captured that instant and could never lose that experience with him. Because of the existence of those two images, that experience is usually what I think of first when I remember him. I definitely feel like photographs impact my grieving process in a positive manner.

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*"Photographs may remind  
us of moments in our past  
we forgot existed."*

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Regardless of how photographs of someone you have lost impact you, the recent rise of social media has made them much more prominent. In the past, after someone died, the only photos you would have of that person would be those you had taken yourself, or those you acquired copies of from family members or friends of the deceased. Social media, especially Facebook, has drastically increased the amount of photographs of a person we have access to, even after they have died. Facebook also allows us to access the photos more easily and quickly than we ever could in the past. In some situations this can be a source of instant solace. This past fall, I received a text while I was sleeping, informing me that one of my friends whom I had not spoken to in close to a year had died. I ended up reading it at four in the morning, and felt very shocked and alone with the information. Looking through all of his photos on Facebook in the middle of the night felt like the only thing that could keep me sane at that point in time. Having access to these images was significant because they helped me find out what had gone on in his life since we had last talked. It was also very comforting to be able to access all of the pictures of us together in one simple online location. In the mental state I was in that night, it might have been too much to try and find the photos I wanted to look at. Having them in one spot definitely made it easier to access the memories I wanted to revisit.

Social media does not only affect our own grieving process, it contributes to the collective memory of someone who has died. Before social media, generally the only people who would have access to hundreds of photos of someone were their family and close friends. Social media allows all of an individual's Facebook friends to see all of their photos if a profile is set to public. Thus, after a person dies, their photos on Facebook may become part of the collective memory people have of that person. Facebook is a forum where people may post anywhere from hundreds to thousands of images which have the poten-

tial to influence the collective memory of an individual after they die. Although the access to these images can be comforting, it can also be problematic. After an individual dies, they obviously have no control over how they are perceived or remembered. In the past, the majority of the moments captured by a camera would remain private for loved ones to enjoy. However, Facebook allows their images to be shared, commented on and viewed in a public manner long after they have any control over them. When someone dies, their Facebook friends can still add photos to their profile and nothing can really be done if they are taken out of context. If someone were to die suddenly, with images on their profile that they felt misrepresented them or they had planned on taking down for some reason, these images would be a permanent part of their online identity. This means that social media can lead to collective memories of a person that are not necessarily accurate or do not portray them in a manner they would want to be remembered.

In some situations, photography can be a problematic method of capturing moments due to its ability to interfere with memory and its potential to create false memories. However, the capacity of photos to bring us emotionally and mentally back in time can be a precious experience. The fact that images have such an influence over our memories is what makes them powerful factors in the grieving process. While I can understand that they may be detrimental to healing for some by evoking pain, I find that they are extremely therapeutic when I am dealing with grief. When someone close to you dies, they leave behind a certain type of emptiness and your memories of them. Personally, anything that brings me closer to those memories and helps to keep them alive is a positive thing. When I lose someone, I often find myself clinging to photos of that person that resonate on an emotional level. I think this is because some part of me believes that if I can keep the memories of that person alive, I won't completely lose them.



# A FARMER'S MARKET

Briar Gorton

Remembering the farmer, remembering food

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It's 9:38 a.m. and I awake to the beginning rhythms of my Saturday morning. My first thought is how much time remains before the market ends. I am thinking about what I have left in my fridge, and what vendors I will go see. Two and a half hours to go to the market, and grab my groceries for the week. I have been doing this for many years now, maybe over five years—I can't be sure. I recently wondered what it was about this market, and what draws me back week after week. With the rise of farmers' markets in urban centres, there is an abundance of options to choose from. Yet, week after week I return to the same place at the same time. I suppose it is the closest thing I have found that reflects my birthplace of Vancouver, and the market surrounds me with the things I miss about the city that I grew up in.

The Evergreen Brickworks is located on a large piece of land which was previously a brick manufacturing yard. It is apparently an unending spread of large and lush evergreens and small ponds, nestled quietly just on the east side of Toronto, and a place most neighbouring people have yet to see. Even after all these years, I am still discovering new things on the property. Not only does the main building at the Evergreen Brickworks house the farmers' market, but there are trails that I walk with my dog that stretch on

for (what seems like) miles. It feels like my own secret garden, and a magical space that exists with no signs of concern for the city on its borders. As I approach the market, I have already planned out my purchases for the day and know who I will talk to. I have joined my Saturday community.

The market is set up in blocks—and it often feels like a weekend visit with your neighbours. Everyone has the same location, and as creatures of habit, the expectation is to see vendors in their same location. There is something about the familiar that adds to the overall experience of entering this space. It is the small tidbits of information that you get from vendors that help you begin to piece together a picture of what their life might be like outside of the market. For Christmas, the cheese lady suggested I try the water buffalo cheese. It was something that I had never heard of, and it ended up not only being good, but a great conversation starter at the party I took it to. A few weeks later, in January, she told me that it would be a slow month ahead, but she was looking forward to the break. I imagined her in that instant, milking her gigantic water buffalo all year long, and finally getting a break

*Opposite The Haul* (Photo: Briar Gorton, 2014).







*Watermelon Radish (Photo: Briar Gorton, 2012).*

I have stored inside my head of waking to the rooster, and stomping around in the mud, and caring for the various farm animals? I digress.

The city can be an overwhelming place for those who are not used to the pace, and the rushed interactions or lack of. The market moves at a different pace, and unlike a regular grocery, conversation flows between consumers and farmers. There are all kinds of questions that I address to the vendors—What is this? How do I use this? How much longer will this be in season? Can you recommend something? It is the type of banter that seems almost lost in the modern world. A discussion that can be carried between two people, and sharing information directly. There is merit and value that I am sure the farmers also feel when they interact directly with their customers, and both parties learn from each other.

Growing up, I lived in an area which had a large population of fruit farmers, so I had a small understanding of when certain berries were available and when they were not. As far as the rest of the food circle, I was quite naive about what time of the year things could be purchased. The major grocery chains seemed to sedate me into thinking that everything should be available at all times of the year. The reality is that food happens in cycles, and to eat locally does mean going without certain products during the year. The market has really educated me in this respect, and this has come from seeing the produce change over the course of the season. It is an education that few of us think of now, but I believe an important one in order to help sustain local farming. Buying local food and supporting the local economy has implications on many levels. It alleviates the carbon footprint from food travelling mass distances. I have always been

from that job for a few weeks. I am equally amused by such stories as I am somewhat envious. What would it be like to live that life? Is it all the romantic notions

shocked to read in grocery stores where produce originates from, and can't imagine the distances it went to in order to arrive before its own expiry.

It was around 2005 that the number of urban farmers' markets began to rise in Toronto. There was a push from many different organizations for farmers to consider giving up their cash crops for a different style of farming—that is, traditional farming involving multiple types of fruit or vegetables. This would mean, that for the first time (in perhaps a long time) farmers would be responsible for their own marketing. They would now connect directly with their consumers and not with their middle-man brokers. The incentive seems quite obvious for the farmer in terms of cash sales, on time payment, and (most importantly) price control. The present and future farmers' markets dictate that in order to survive, value-added goods should be on hand. These include baked goods, cheese, sausage, honey-based beauty products and more. Farmers must find different ways of presenting the same product for different uses by their consumers.

As someone who believes in the power of the consumer, it goes without saying that I apply this to my years frequenting the farmers' market. The amount of monetary investment that I have put in is not equal to the education that I have received from it. Something so fundamental as the seasonability of food is a conversation often lost over the attention-grabbing technologies of our time. For a long time, there was a distance between myself and food which I hardly even noticed existed. It was in my return to the market, that I found myself finally taking the time to contemplate something that I interacted daily with. I am closer to the process now, and feel that my relationship with food has developed as a result of these encounters with the farmers. My learning has also encompassed sharing the (lifelong) journey with others. Food is about remembering, and remembering our sense of self in the process.





# NEEDING THINGS

Zile Liepins

The Life and Times of my Great-Uncle “John”

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I owe my existence to the Royal York Hotel. But this story isn't about me.

My grandmother's brother John is the last of his generation in our family. There are no grandparents left. He was the first, and he is the last. He came to Canada alone in 1947, and sponsored my grandparents' immigration a few years later. He is ninety-nine years old. He grew up in the country, in Latvia. “Here I am eighteen. I waited for eighteen, and as soon as the clock struck eighteen I needed a passport. I was so crazy on independence that I needed a passport right away.” After high school he went to military school and fell into the war. “Military school was for defense, not attack.” After surviving an injury he took a job as the manager of Luna, a posh restaurant across from the National Opera in Riga. He fraternized with opera singers and ballet dancers. The site is a MacDonald's now. With the Soviets poised to re-occupy Latvia in 1944, he answered a call for immigrant farmers to work in Canada. He wasn't really a farmer, but it was a free trip, held against the promise to stay at the job for at least a year. He debarked in Halifax and set off by train with the ultimate destination of a

livestock farm in London, Ontario. He already knew he didn't want to work with livestock. He had heard it was hard work and that he'd have to get up at three in the morning. He thought chickens might be okay.

He also had his sights set on the city. When the train passed through a larger town, he tried to take in as much as he could. It was pitch-dark night when he passed through Montreal, so I'm not from there. It was day when he stopped in Toronto, so I'm from here. When the group stopped in Union station for a couple of hours, he skipped breakfast to have a look around. He saw the Royal York Hotel across the street, and that was all it took. This was where he wanted to be. He told the handlers that he was a poultry farmer; as it happened, Lady Eaton needed one right away. He was the only one pulled from the London-bound train and sent to the Eaton farm in King City just outside of Toronto, now the grounds of Seneca College. After a little over a year there he was transferred to the Eaton's downtown store. He eventually moved on to a job in the kitchen at the Scarboro Golf and Country Club. He worked his way up to manager, and that's when the fun began. He started making ice sculptures and organized ballet productions on the golf course. “One day I was was reading the paper and I see ‘Ballet at White House’ and a photograph. And

*Opposite Family Archive Slides and menus given to me by my great-uncle.*



# SUGGESTION DU JOUR

MENU à 52 f. plus service 15 0/0

AVOCAT à la BRETONNE

SAUTÉ d'AGNEAU aux PRIMEURS

TARTE aux FRUITS

1/2 MUSCADET

## ENTRÉES

## LE PLAT DU JOUR

SAUTÉ d'AGNEAU aux PRIMEURS 19

"A showplace of the world"

Moulin Rouge

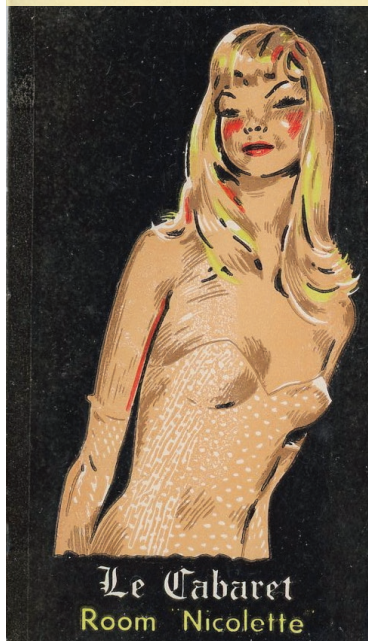
Frank Sennels

RESERVATIONS  
HOLLYWOOD 6-3333

PLAN YOUR NEXT  
BANQUET OR PRIVATE PARTY  
AT

Frank Sennels

Moulin Rouge



Le Cabaret  
Room Nicolette

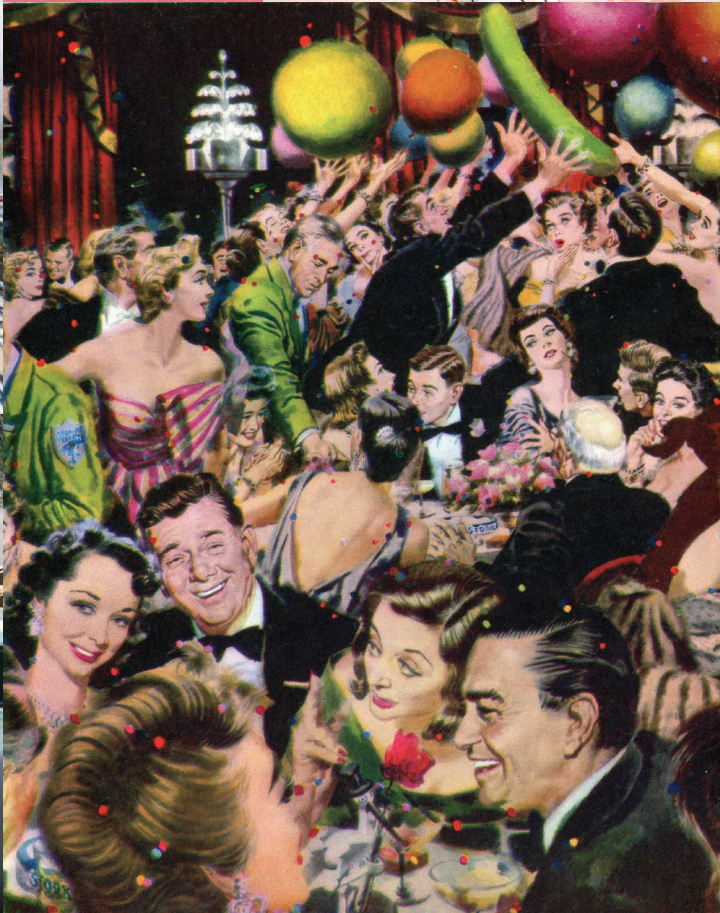


Chez "Maxim's"

L'air de Paris

Dance

Honolulu





I thought, we have a much better lawn for dancing at the Scarboro Club. So I started my own ballet productions.” Eventually he was asked to be the Manager of the Toronto Club—an elite club for men in downtown Toronto. He’s met the Queen, Princess Anne and Prince Philip. John shows me a self-portrait, he’s in a bushy fur coat and hat, like I’ve never seen him wear. “Trudeau. Trudeau was invited to a lunch at the Club. He put his fur coat and hat in my office. While he was at lunch I thought: I can make a picture. I called a friend to take the shot, and I had Trudeau’s fur coat and hat on.”

He lives alone and still wears a suit and tie every day. As a child I thought his apartment was the height of elegance. Aperitifs were served in the study, a room decorated with framed photographs: John with royalty, ice sculptures at the center of an impressive buffet and portraits of former opera singer girlfriends. A glass case houses his silver spoon collection. Individually lit oil paintings of racehorses line the walls of the hallway and dining room. He served us six-course meals he prepared himself—he was once featured in an issue of *House and Garden*, a full-colour spread with a large photograph of him presenting “The Perfect Salad.” He served fish on gold-bordered china with fish painted on it, and poured us coffee and tea from antique silver sets. I was mesmerized by the crystal chandeliers. We tripped on wall-to-wall Persian carpets on our way to the red and gold wallpapered guest bathroom. I couldn’t imagine anything more decadent.

Of course now I gain perspective - his home is a time capsule and a monument to pomp. His apartment is on the 26th floor of a 44-story high-rise overlooking the Don Valley parkway. The space is modestly sized, hot and stifling. We pay almost the same rent. He lives in one of the most culturally diverse neighbourhoods in Toronto. He recently wondered aloud if there is a better meal than the chicken dinner at “Chicken Palace” (*Swiss Chalet*) and he buys us shawls from the Indian discount

mall across the street. I am more comfortable in his reality than in the fantasy; I feel better at the Indian mall than in his home, but these details reveal inconsistencies with image he’s been promoting.

He is in good health. When he gets a cold he thinks he’s dying. He refuses to use a walker out of pride, instead holding onto things like curtains and sliding doors for “support.” But, at ninety-nine, he has started to accept that he is “getting old.” As he awaits death, his main concern is his things. Where will his things go? Neither my sister nor I have “proper” homes of our own—what will happen to his chandeliers, silvers and Persian rugs? If I had my license, “you could have taken my Cadillac!” Yes, he gives us things. Sometimes they are nice things. Sometimes it’s expired butter, size 9 men’s shoes from the 60s and pictures he’s salvaged from the trash. Because our homes don’t look like his, he assumes we live in squalor. He has asked me if I feel ashamed, going out the way I do, and has said that my hair looks like a bird’s nest. At Christmas he expressed his surprise that I had made the Brussels sprouts, mashed potatoes and peas, because “based on how you look and act, you’re probably not capable of anything.” He’s been a Canadian Opera Company and National Ballet subscriber for 60 years. Once when I accompanied him, I did a test. I put on a vintage polka dot dress, red lipstick and set my hair in pulled back, proper waves. He couldn’t have been more pleased with me. He said I was a different woman and for the first time he wanted to join me in my walk around the lobby at intermission. It can be exhausting to go retro for him every time—I’m rarely in the mood for pretending—but he’s happier when I do, and we get along better.

He never married and has no children. He confessed to me once, at the Eaton Centre food court over soup, that there were two women he could have married; one he wanted to and one he didn’t. His

sister died fifteen years ago. All of his friends are gone. Finally, he has turned to us. He has *had* to turn to us; my mother, my sister and me. Only in these past years has a relationship begun to form and we have started to get a glimpse of the man behind the image. He has built his identity with objects and rituals—things that reflect what he deems to be class, elegance and worth.

He passed his driver's test the last time he took it, when he was ninety-seven, but decided nonetheless it was time to quit driving. He asked my mother and I to look into selling his car, a 2001 Cadillac. We hadn't gotten far with our research when he let us know he had already sold it himself. During a taxi ride, he got into a conversation with the driver, who was looking for a car. They met in the parking garage of his apartment building the following day, the cab driver with his entire Muslim family in tow, wearing turbans and hijabs, and my great-uncle in his suit and tie. John sold him the car; the cabbie paid in cash. Done deal. I have already inherited his ceramic white and gold poodle; two wrought-iron, antique baroque-style candlesticks, rewired to accommodate flame-shaped bulbs on a dimmer; a Persian rug and a framed drawing of the racehorse Gallopin with a large stain on it. I wear the outdated gold bracelets he's given me over the years every day. But I value the numerous slides and menus from his travels more than any of these things. And above everything, I value his photo albums, letters and stories, and those are the most difficult to get to.

He doesn't see the value of materially worthless things, and my family and I have to be stealth to get to them. To get my hands on his slides and menus, I had to convince him that I could use them in my work as a graphic designer. A possibility of financial gain gave them worth in his eyes. I know he has kept every letter he received from his mother, and I am terrified he will throw them out. "Who would be interested in these? They are nothing. She wasn't the president." He doesn't

seem to understand that his mother is also my mother's grandmother and my great-grandmother, or that our history is shared and our ancestry is common. Whenever I am in his apartment I look out for the letters with light panic, just to make sure they are still there. I feel I have a right to these stories. He is holding our family history hostage and giving us potato salad instead.

Slowly, he has begun to give us things he cares about, and I see that it pains him a little. He's had no trouble gifting us his expired butter and torn towels, but now he's also passed on his dreamy Leica, complete with lenses, filter, light meters and original receipts and manuals, and some antique silverware. Often this is followed up with a phone call that sounds like regret—"but you won't even use it. You don't even have a real place to live." I am not vying for any of his material possessions, but the gifting process reveals how he sees me. The recent motivation to find new homes for his precious possessions must stem from the panic of imagining a time when he won't be there to provide for them. He knows that we'll be the people cleaning out his apartment, and he is determined to take care of it first. I am sure that the thought of us going through his things without his control terrifies him.

Each parting has its process. He will call me and tell me he wants to give me the chairs in the front hall, or that he is ready to give me his menus. I arrive at his apartment and the ritual begins. We go into his bedroom where he has everything laid out on the gold quilted bedspread. One by one, he lifts objects and tells me their stories. I try on vests, men's shoes, straw hats and robes. He unties the stack of menus and begins to tell me of his travels. I spot an illustrated menu from *Chez Maxim's* in Paris from the 1960s and I can't contain my awe: "Wow, this should be framed." He looks at it again, and takes it back. He's not ready to part with it anymore, not yet. I don't know if he doesn't want to give me what is good, or if my wanting it triggers the same wanting in him.





FOUNDED 1912

BEEF GOULASH WITH NOODLES ..  
KEY WING, POTATO OR VEGETABLE ..  
KEY LEG, VEGETABLE OR POTATOES ..  
BEEF, POTATO AND VEGETABLE ..  
CHICKEN LIVER SAUTE, POTATO AND VEG ..  
TENDERLOIN STEAK, POTATO OR VEG ..  
CHICKEN IN POT . . . . 2.45 BOILED BEEF ..  
BEEF HASH WITH POACHED EGG ..  
PASTA WITH KASHA ..  
STEAK OF BEEF, POTATO AND VEGETABLE ..  
FLANKEN, POTATO AND VEGETABLE ..  
PORK CUTLET, POTATO AND VEGETABLE ..  
TENDERLOIN STEAK, ONIONS, VEGETABLE ..  
BROILED LIVER STEAK, ONIONS, POTATO, V ..  
LIVER SAUTE, VEGETABLE AND POTATO ..  
STEAK WITH ONIONS, VEGETABLE AN ..

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Family Archive Menus given to me by my great-uncle.

In any case, he wants to keep that one a little longer. He keeps the best menus a few more months. Then he decides that the chairs won't fit in the car, which of course they do, and how will we carry them to the elevator? Well, with our hands. This can go on for hours. If I gently try to rush him, he gets upset and confused and shuts down the visit. Every object has its story and its goodbye. It took me a while to understand that he is letting go of the identity he spent his life constructing, and leaving it in the hands of the only people he has left; people living a lifestyle that he can't understand. I wonder how much time he spends with his things when he is alone. Holding an object, lost in thought, remembering where it came from and worrying about where it will end up.

I used to move a lot. It started to feel like I was living in airports and out of boxes. During my sixth time packing up my life, I'd had it. I couldn't believe I was sitting alone in a box (apartment) putting things into different boxes, to put into another box (storage), to take out of boxes later. I was spending days with *things* and *boxes*, days I could have been spending with the people I loved and was leaving. It felt like borderline hoarder behavior, and I vowed not to get wrapped up in *things* again. Those items are still in storage, and like my great-uncle, it has taken multiple waves of forgetting and moving on to un-attach myself. Four years after packing up, I still revisit that storage unit every year, and each year I throw out a little more. I find more things to dispose of each time, that I wasn't ready to part with the year before. I know that in ten years it will be all gone, but I can't get rid of it all in one go. I just can't. I live lighter now. I try not to acquire too many things I'd be sad to lose.

As John ages and lets go of his possessions, he tells more stories about his childhood, before he

acquired airs. But while he holds on to his past, he tries to stay in tune with the present. He bought a digital camera and a cellphone. He hasn't figured out deleting; he still brings the camera to the lab and prints out every picture. He chastises me for not teaching him how to use the cellphone, although I've tried multiple times. Last Easter at my mother's house, he told us stories about the war. He told us where he was when he got shrapnel in his leg, and about the time he hid in the woods for days. Abruptly he switched gears and said to my mother, "Astrida—what is this 'iPad'?" To help explain, we pulled out and demonstrated a laptop. We opened *Google Earth* and I took him to the places in his stories. We travelled to the town where he grew up, Palsmane, and traced the roads to his house. There was no *Street View* that far out in the country, but he recognized the bend around his farm, and the river nearby. My mother asked him what he wanted in his coffee. He waved her away; he was too excited and amazed. "Not now. More important things are happening here." We had travelled a hundred years in a couple of hours—from stories about World War I on horseback in the country, to satellite images of the location of the events, via Internet in 2013.

Entering the personal space of a person who has recently died is strange. I can only compare it to a deafening silence, or wading through a dense invisible mass—the room is thick with presence. Mundane daily tools have become relics. It's hard to pick them up and it feels wrong to move them. How long is the life of an object? How much time until a personal object goes "cold"? When does it stop being a tool and start being a relic? When we inherit an item and incorporate it into our routines, it takes on a new life and its previous meaning gets rolled into the identity we create for ourselves. Why is an object—a piece of furniture or a great shirt—so much better with a good story behind it? We

know, rationally, that these things are just materials—wood, metal, cotton. But I like that my men's vests came from my great-uncle and not a vintage shop. His things have come to represent his life, in mine. When he dies, his material identity will be scattered among my mother, my sister and myself, the memories associated with them spread between the three of us. The silvers, carpets and horses that made him who he was will find some small place in our space.

If a house is a shell without its contents, and decorating a house makes it a home, what is a person without his or her decorations—clothing and personal accessories? We are born naked and leave the earth alone. Everything we've acquired along the way was just helping us on our ride. Humans use objects to express their personalities, and to make spaces their own. Humans give life to objects through use, by attaching stories to them. Using an item that belonged to someone we cared about can bring meaning to a special day, or every day, in an assumption that we believe that object somehow carries the energy of the deceased. Or, if the object serves as a reminder of its previous owner, it is a way to keep them near. The memory of who we loved is added to the composite identity that we form for ourselves with objects.

Objects carry stories, but people tell them. I've always regretted not recording my grandmother's voice. I had the intent but following through meant admitting that we were running out of time. In November we celebrated my great-uncle's ninety-ninth birthday as we celebrate all of his birthdays—with martinis and dinner at the Royal York Hotel. Despite his youthfulness, he is almost a hundred years old. I don't know what I am waiting for. I called him and asked him if we could meet, if he could tell me stories about his youth. He said: "I can't talk right now, I am very busy. I have plans with a guy on Saturday, but maybe Sunday, call me end of week."

# THE SMALL MATTER OF MANAGING INCOME

Anna MacLean

How To Make Money in this Mixed Up, Muckled Up , Shook Up World

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So, you've decided that you finally want to become a functioning member of society. Yes, you can see it now. White picket fences, a shiny, stainless steel kitchen with kitschy Navajo artwork and, oh look, there's Beatrix, that loveable scoundrel of a golden doodle you recently picked up at the local organic dog breeder! This is perfect. You're in tip-top yoga shape and that handy lifesaver—the Vitamix—should be delivered to your back door any day now. Things are really settling into place and this Christmas is going to be smashing now that you can pay for your own plane ticket home, and your parents won't be mentioning anything about “wasted potential” and the like.

But wait. How? You hate the man. You've lived your entire life up to this point mocking from afar the conniving assholes brazenly rolling around Parliament and Canadian big business. In fact, your opposition to the oppressive-but-shall-not-be-named political-economical structure you never voted for has been your *raison d'être* since somewhere in early 2000 when you first realized you had an adultish brain. It was all about anger in your late teens, promiscuity in your early twenties and apathy in your late twenties. Now in your thirties, with your biological clock ticking exponentially louder day after day in your weakening ear, it is your

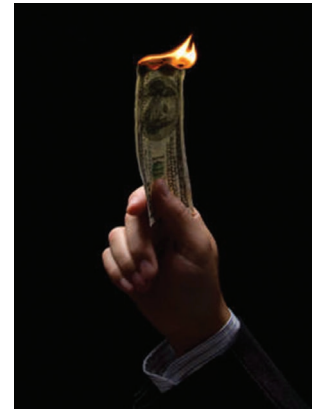
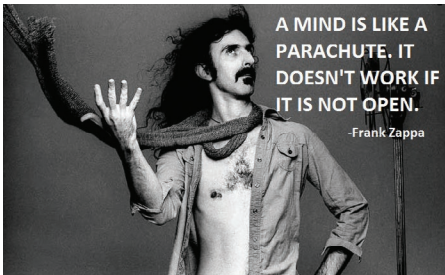
fiery determination to make marks—any marks—on society before you wither away into the winter of your years, forever lost in the purgatory of senility.

But the looming question towers over you like a cold granite rockface, darkening the land with its omnipresent shadow. How could one possibly engage in the financial sector without feeling the sting of shame when one realizes they have contradicted a lifetime's worth of impassioned arguments? Your value system is like a beautifully crafted gemstone, forged into existence by every single one of the unique experiences that have molded you into the stunning person you are. There is nothing else like it in the universe, and to abandon it for a million-dollar home in the rolling hills of Rosedale seems like a tragic consolation prize for the loss of something so deeply personal. This brings us to the question and the lifeblood of this chapter: how to thrive in a political and financial economy that makes you want to light fire and spit upon the houses of the people that run this system.

I am here to tell you that there may be a way, gentle reader.

The first step is often the hardest. Being an anarchist shrouded in sheep's clothing is no easy road. It is riddled with feelings of guilt, spontaneous rushes of





### Bush Urges Nation To Be Quiet For A Minute While He Tries To Think

NEWS • Politics • Bush Administration • Government • George W. Bush • War For The White House • ISSUE 42-35 • Aug 30, 2008



*“It is of utmost importance that you remain in a state of constant awareness of why you believe what you believe.”*

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blinding rage and at times, you will find yourself seduced by that ever-tempting siren song of wealth and power. It is of utmost importance that you remain in a state of constant awareness of why you believe what you believe. That is why I would suggest that even before you begin your journey, you must provide for yourself a safe haven filled with reminders of the people, things, and events that inspired you to build a life defying moral turpitude. This safe haven will always be there for you, and building on it will provide you with a sense of stability and direction. Impervious to the pressures and wild emotion of the outside world, this is where you define the sacred.

Now we come to the small matter of finding a job. The job market is difficult to navigate based on the gross injustice that has culminated out of years of free market misuse by big businesses and corporations protected by the government. It may be invigorating to remind yourself that at one time, the lawmakers had ideals too. It was widely believed that the age of technology would allow the common man access to truth and ultimately, freedom.

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“What was achieved was unprecedented scientific and technical progress, and eventually, the subordination of all other values to those of a world market that treats everything, including people and their labour and their lives and their deaths, as a commodity. The unachieved positive utopia became, instead, the global system of late

capitalism wherein all that exists becomes quantifiable—not simply because it can be reduced to a statistical fact, but also because it has been reduced to a commodity.”

*-Alan Sekula*

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The hope for our democratic society was honourable, something crucial to remember during the dark times when every bit of light touches is lining some wealthy, selfish prick's pocket. Frustrating, isn't it? Alas, we are not to revel in this. It simply exists to remind us that there are more like us out there that vehemently despise the ruling class.

Now, you're probably asking, “Okay, I get it, the world is awful, but it isn't. And I have to get a job. But what job?” This is important because despite your indescribable resentment and seething hatred of the dollar symbol, you need to make at least enough to find yourself in the highest tax bracket. Only then will you find yourself in a position that allows you to spend money frivolously, and it is only when frivolous spending is possible that you can effect change. You gotta go up to get down.

Two things are imperative when it comes to choosing your new job:

1. You must make six figures. If you cannot make six figures, you must be in a position of growth, where you will eventually make six figures within an understandable amount of allotted time.

2. Your profit must not come from an unfair business practice such as outsourcing labour, taxpayers money, etc.

This is hard because it negates the possibility of any sort of government job because taking money directly from taxpayers simply cannot align with your anarchist beliefs. That would simply be wrong. Like flying a kite at night, or wearing white after Labour Day. At the same time, we simply won't pocket enough coin selling energy crystals at jam band shows and fruit markets. Trust me, I've tried.

The most obvious choice is to own your own business that caters to a very specific section of the wealthy—the most philosophically unmotivated.

With your own business, you will be able to start making the subversive moves that push ahead your unconventional political agenda while still making profit with the money formerly belonging to this specific section of the population: the elite by proxy, or the ones simply too concerned with keeping up with the Jones' to notice any sort of revolutionary tactics. These people will become your first army. They won't by any means be your strongest, most efficient, or most interesting, but they will be your first, and that always counts for something.



To get into a position of business ownership, you will inevitably have to spend 6-12 months in an insufferable job working underneath a variety of insuffer-

able people in order to get yourself into a position of guaranteed success. You can choose any yuppie company that will relate to your product or service. You need not worry over ethical business practices at this point as this is not a long-term position. Your resume and references will be lies, and in order to guarantee yourself the job, you will be best off having read *The Secret* and answering all interview questions as though you were the author of that painfully typical manifesto for the lost. Once you get hired in the junior marketing department of whatever company that relates to your market, this is when the real work begins. Think of it as a game of *Survivor* but the competitions are much less obvious, and it most likely will not take place on a tropical island. And unfortunately, Jeff Probst will not likely be there to offer emotional advice. But you can pocket a million dollars if you play your cards right.

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"I also had short stints as a window dresser and a jewellery salesman and—the worst one—I sold *Collier's Encyclopedias* door to door. That was truly wretched, but at least I got an inside look at how that shit is truly done." -Frank Zappa

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The most integral part of your work in this "fake" position is to trick the people above you into thinking that you are smart enough to get the job done, but not smart enough to understand the broad reach of the cutting claws of our present-day capitalist market. This typically requires you to keep yourself at a bit of a distance. You want your coworkers and higher-ups to believe you are a competent and trustworthy worker, but it won't hurt if your grip on reality comes into question every now and then. They'll feel a little sorry for you, and that will work in your favour. Above all, you want them to feel good around you, so keep things light, fun, and never ever reveal the fact that you have a long-term plan that involves berating everything involved in



the environment they have surrounded themselves with. It's useful to create some sort of fictional drama that would be typical to an ordinary person who has fallen victim to political apathy. Maybe your most recent lover just won't commit, or your roommate is cheating on his girlfriend and you just don't know how to handle the lies, etc. Coworkers like to think they know a little bit more about you than the rest of the crew, because the entire construction of the labour market is a competition and any facet of "being ahead" will give people a sense of accomplishment.

As you climb the social ladder in your fake job, you are going to start meeting people that are pulling in the type of paycheque you have been dreaming about.

Do not get swayed at this juncture  
Too often the well-meaning anarchist takes the bait and becomes another tragic pawn of the horrible people at the helm of the "free" market. Your job is to learn everything you can about who they are marketing to, how they communicate with their buyers, and what—if any—cost-effective strategies they use that don't take advantage of the little guy. You will begin to smell the sickly sweet smell of government tax breaks wafting down from the rafters. These will be yours one day, but not if you stand still. You must work your way through these mostly banal people and make them trust you. You need to know what they know. How? There is a two-pronged approach: Ego and Love.

#### Ego

"When the philosopher's argument becomes tedious, complicated, and opaque, it is usually a sign that he is attempting to prove as true to the intellect what is plainly false to common sense. But men of intellect will believe anything—if it appeals to their ego, their vanity, their sense of self-importance."—*Edward Abbey*

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This is where the game play gets fun. You can be as wildly creative as your beautiful brain can dream of to make these people like you. Appeal to their ego in as many different ways possible. Make them feel smart by being slightly bumbling. Seek out their guidance. Subtly degrade anyone they feel threatened by. Acknowledge their virility, their leadership skills, their intuitive ability to understand the bigger picture. Make them laugh, but more importantly, make them think they make *you* laugh. You must always appear to be 80 percent of the person they are. If victorious in these subtle mind/emotion jigsaws, you will walk the golden road to complete trust. These upper-echelon marketing gurus will mama-bird you your market and provide you with the weapons and ammunition you need when you go rogue and begin selling your own meaningless product or service.

#### Love

There are a few reasons that love needs to come into play in this model. If you constantly look at the world through the lens of resentment, you will find yourself in a position where you no longer feel the need to shower, get out of bed, do laundry, or involve yourself in those everyday activities considered "normal" or "appropriate." It's really important to genuinely find a reason to love the people you consort with on a day-to-day basis in order to have the strength to carry on. This life is a marathon, not a sprint. Furthermore, it is the system you hate, and yes, there are people that bind you in the system, but they are not of your concern, and they are not usually seen on the front lines. This is a war against the abuse of humanity, so you must avoid abusing humanity at all costs. And let's face it: if you didn't believe in people to begin with, then the state of the world would probably not light the flame of rage and anger in your sweet heart.

Before you know it, you will be raking in the dollars,

and you won't know what to do with your supple earnings. However, that fire in your belly needs to be fed. No longer can you live the yuppie life of downward dogs and hazelnut lattes alone. No, you need more. And where you allocate your money will really start to make you feel like the ever-loving anarchist wild child you were born to be.

It's a freedom you were born to have.

What you spend your money on will reflect the value system that you believe to be ideal. This is a constantly

evolving set of ideas that gently reform themselves based on your experiences in the outside world. They will tell you how to use that money to best serve your earthly fantasies. But that is another chapter altogether.

The world is your oyster.

And thus concludes this section of my ongoing manifesto for those of you with big hearts, loud mouths, and a sneaking suspicion that life is better than we think it is.

Stay tuned for more.



# SNOWSCAPES

Juan Pablo Pinto Mendoza

Memoirs of a life in Canada

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When I try to remember when my fascination with snow started, the images that come to my mind are those of my first winter in Canada, which I remember as if it was yesterday. Christie Pits, the park across the street from where I used to live, was forcibly reclaimed by nature when a soft blanket of snow covered every inch of the park. The snow fell as if it was dancing freely in the air. But in reality it was pouring down, a diligent march led by a conqueror's intention.

All the landscape changes were surreal. I began to feel the snow landing gently on my face and hands. I wanted to experience this "thing" that I had only seen in movies. I decided to walk in the park, but every step I took was heavier than the previous one. And how can I forget the noise produced by my shoes, that unfamiliar squishy, crunchy sound with every step I took?

Regaining a sense of reality, I realized that I was not equipped to withstand a cold winter with the outfit that I had on. I felt a contradiction between my physical reactions, my feeling toward snow and the way my brain interpreted it. While I knew that it was clearly cold, at one point I felt as if it was burning my skin. My hands became red, and I could not feel my toes anymore. Not long after that, the burning turned into numbness and then pain.

The harsh cold weather and that beautiful snow landscape created my imaginary image of Canada: a "snowscape." The drastic weather, along with my culture and language shock, at first led me to develop a negative perspective of Canada. But at the same time, that very snowscape allowed me to see that there is beauty within winter. I realized that there was something exotic about the Canadian landscape that made it easier to deal with the negative aspects of the winter season.

I can only see the snowscapes from the "other" point of view. I can only experience Canadian winter as a Colombian. Snowscapes are exotic because they are something that I don't have in my country. You may think that an exotic landscape should be in a tropical country, or at least somewhere with a temperate climate all year long. But I come from a region in Colombia where the summers are hot and the winters are rainy, but still hot. In contrast to this, Canada does seem exotic to me; the environment, the landscape and the pure whiteness of Canadian snowscapes have a magical feel.

In reflecting on my perception of snowscapes as exotic, I became curious about how landscapes are experienced and perceived differently across populations, and further, how discourses about these landscapes capture aspects of individual and collective memory





and identity. I began my exploration by looking at how winter and snow are captured by different artistic works. In *Picture of Light* for example, Canadian filmmaker Peter Mettler shares with us his search for the northern lights. Throughout the film he explores the beauty, harshness and abstraction of the northern environment. The film also presents the interaction that the people of Churchill, Manitoba, have with their landscape. Mettler claims that the Inuit have 170 words to describe snow and ice.<sup>1</sup> The idea of having many different ways to name these elements makes me realize the kind of relationship the Inuit have with their land. By naming the different characteristics of snow and ice, the Inuit have taken control over these harsh elements in order to

*The Lake* (Photo: Juan Pablo Pinto Mendoza, 2014).

be able to live with them. But how are the people in the urban cities coping with these same factors?

In cities such as Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Vancouver and others, the relationship with winter, snow and ice is different, and so are the landscapes that winter creates. It is possible to say that the geographical conditions in urban environments are different and not so extreme. But also the population and landscapes are different. This makes the relationship with winter and snow different too; when the snow falls, the city is in charge of salting the streets and highways. Cars and people help transform the snow into muddy, salty slush.

The white landscape quickly turns into brown. The context changes the form, and thus the perception of the landscape also changes.

Climate is not just a physical and geographical marker, it also translates into memory, behaviour and identity.<sup>ii</sup> Victor Rabinovitch argues that landscapes offer “material cues to the sounds, smells, and sights that tell us we are at home.”<sup>iii</sup> In a sense, this allows us to interpret climate both in terms of its physical dimensions and cultural meaning.<sup>iv</sup> Much of this meaning is captured in discourses about snow that circulate in Canadian society.

One can argue that the weather itself is a discourse that flows across the different Canadian spheres. Discourse about the weather is reproduced by the government, organizations, the media and through everyday interactions between those who are Canadian-born and immigrants. Through discourse, power and knowledge

are joined together; within different contexts certain enunciations are either allowed or forbidden, the same knowledge can be used for contrary purposes and different people can get away with saying different things.<sup>v</sup> Notions and images of weather themselves are used to define and disseminate messages of what it means to be Canadian. Such discourses are thus inherently political as they are used to delimit a specific Canadian identity.

Discourse can transmit, produce and reinforce power just as it can be used as a tool for resistance, undermining, exposing and thwarting dominant powers.<sup>vi</sup> Foucault argues that discourse is relational, “a series of discontinuous segments.” And, while he discouraged the division of discourse into dominant/dominated or accepted/excluded,<sup>vii</sup> he recognized that different discourses are formed on the basis of different tactical strategies and aims and hold different relations to force and can ensure different effects of power and knowledge.<sup>viii</sup>







Beyond everyday influences of weather, idealized notions of winter, snow and “the North” are built into Canadian national identity and reflected in film, literature, painting and advertising.<sup>ix</sup> This process was exemplified in the Canadian advertisements for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia. The chosen Canadian Olympic slogan was “#WeAreWinter,” and it was placed all around cities, in bus stops, subway stations, as well as being spread through television and online media.

Within the Canadian context, it is possible to think of portrayals and discussions of snow as a type of discourse both reinforcing a particular form of national identity and bolstering a particular image of Canada for those outside the country. These conversations about snow may affect how Canadian citizens think of themselves and their country, but they are also projected outside the country and can thus influence the expectations and attitudes of immigrants arriving in Canada.

*Opposite I Am At Home; Above Out Of The Window* (Photos: Juan Pablo Pinto Mendoza, 2014).

Immigrants’ discourses about snow may in turn act to challenge official discourses by presenting an alternative understanding and set of perspectives.

Winter is a large part of the Canadian identity. “The weather insinuates itself into almost every facet of Canadian life. It affects what you eat, what you wear, how you feel and even what you do.”<sup>x</sup> The weather, especially in winter, influences our everyday activities. It becomes almost an essential aspect of our social interactions. People complain, start small talk or fill uncomfortable silences with a comment about the weather. Many Canadian-born people have childhood memories related to snow: playing outside, skiing, playing hockey or skating. The strong relationship with environment that they develop through their upbringing becomes a





*Portrait of Toronto in Winter* (Photo: Juan Pablo Pinto Mendoza, 2014).

part of their cultural identity and collective memory. The idea of cyclical, seasonal change is internalized from a young age.

On the other hand, the process of adapting to the climate is challenging for many immigrants to Canada. Acclimatizing to Canada means not only a cultural adjustment for immigrants, but also a physical one, so it is not surprising that in the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, 16 percent of new immigrants reported that adjusting to weather is the greatest difficulty they faced upon arrival, and 27 percent said the weather is what they dislike most about Canada.<sup>xi</sup> Furthermore, the Canadian Mental Health Association<sup>xii</sup> lists the physical environment as one of the top five principal factors negatively influencing immigrants' mental health.

This is reflected in the way many resources for

immigrants seem to talk of snow and winter as something that may be “scary,” “terrifying,” “challenging,” “dark,” “extreme,” “isolating,” “difficult” and “violent,” or as something that may limit social interaction and in some cases lead to mental health disorders.<sup>xiii</sup> It is worth questioning then, whether the discourse about snow that is presented to immigrants before they travel to Canada or when they first arrive, colours how they come to view and experience snow. From the outset, learning how to deal with the environment becomes a priority, as opposed to learning how to enjoy it. Only a few of the resources given to immigrants relay the message that winter can be fun if you prepare properly.<sup>xiv</sup>

A person's relationship with weather can also act as a form of cultural capital,<sup>xv</sup> differentiating Canadian-born residents from immigrants. We use the weather as a tool for accessing different spheres. The everyday conversation is an example of this. The weather may

allow us to talk to a stranger in a way not otherwise possible. Living through the Canadian winter becomes common ground upon which to compare the weather with previous seasons, or different places. It becomes a tool for social interaction, leaving some immigrants without this experience at a disadvantage.

People, for example, may show off their knowledge and experience with the snow and cold like badges of honour. “Ah this? This is nothing,” they may boast, “Don’t you remember the storm six years ago? Now that was a real storm.” There is a sense that real Canadians are tough Canadians, unfazed by winter. Hence, if asked, “Aren’t you cold in that light jacket?” one might answer, “Naw, man, I’m Canadian.” Teenagers may grow up trying to wear the least amount of winter clothing so as to embody this rugged, resilient ideal. Little pieces of information about how to deal with winter that are accumulated over time serve to distinguish Canadians: “You should have worn layers!”, “No, you need to pump your brakes!”, “Sunny does not mean warm!” Familiarizing one’s self with and gaining the language to talk about weather is thus one fundamental way in which immigrants can start to feel more Canadian and develop a sense of belonging in Canada.<sup>xvi</sup> Despite the fact that people of different social backgrounds may experience climate differently, there is still a physical relation established with the weather. Snow falls every winter, and the landscape changes every season; native-born or immigrant, this is a reality we all have to deal with.

When I reflect on my own identity within the Canadian context, I see and feel a struggle in the way I define and identify myself. I was born and raised in Colombia but I have also lived in Canada for the last 10 years. In a sense, I consider myself Colombian, as I have a certain set of values and cultural traits that are specific to that country. But I have also lived long enough in Canada to be able to internalize elements of Canadian identity, culture and values. Yet, I do not feel fully Canadian, as I haven’t mastered the

language completely and there are cultural spheres that I cannot access even after having been here this long. At the same time, I no longer feel fully Colombian either. I can relate to other Colombians who are in the same situation as me, living abroad long enough to create a hybrid identity. But, the times that I have returned to Colombia have given me the opportunity to see how much I have internalized Canadian culture and values.

Zygmunt Bauman argues that it is possible to begin to think and feel that everywhere can be “home,” but it is difficult to accept that nowhere is where we are truly at home.<sup>xvii</sup> I now feel like an alien in both Colombian and Canadian society, although I also know that I have significant access to both. It is possible for me to think that my interest in snow lies in a search for a deeper connection to Canada, where I have appropriated a fundamental aspect of Canadian culture and identity, namely winter and snow, and made it my own. I have given it my own meaning and symbolism to create my personal Canadian/Colombian identity.

Although winter in Canada is harsh, I have come to find that there is a certain romanticism to this season. There is nothing more peaceful for me than to see the snow falling, and to witness the dramatic changes in the landscape which become extraordinary in a matter of hours. But what people see when they look out at a snowscape is infused with their own life experiences, memories and values. Snowscapes thus exist beyond the physical; they capture aspects of identity, nationhood and culture. My own identity as Canadian has been, and continues to be, shaped by different discourses around winter and snow. While of course, part of this happened through the process of familiarizing myself with the linguistic and cultural aspects of Canada, now more than ever, I am trying to nurture my relationship with this country by overcoming ominous interpretations of winter as harsh and isolating and developing a more positive relationship with the snow and cold.

# ADVENTURES IN IMMIGRATION

Adira Rotstein

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If I could recommend anything to someone starting out in life it is this: travel. Travel even when you can't afford it, even if you can't go far, get out of your town and get out of your city because it really is the only way to understand the world.

I have lived in three countries, (Canada, the U.S. and the U.K.), and nine cities. Someday I hope to experience life in a few more. I can't express enough how important it is to live in more than one place. It gives you perspective. If you never leave, your environment comes to seem like the only environment that could possibly exist. If you never befriend people from outside your own area, it is easy to become afraid of outsiders or to believe whatever people say about them.

After childhood, I lived in numerous American cities. Then I lived in Toronto for several years before I began moving around again. I noticed the longer I stayed in this city, seeing the same sights over and over again, the more I never really saw them at all. Most frustrating of all are people who never leave the city for any extended amount of time and who refuse to comprehend that things as they are here are not the way they have to be; that there are other functional ways of dealing with issues. I also discovered how things I never thought about before, that were just part of the daily

fabric of my surroundings, would shock or amuse people who came from other places. Just as things shocked me about the way of life in each new city I visited, those things seemed completely unremarkable to people living there. It is easy to buy into the idea that just because things have always been done a certain way here, that is the only way possible. Travelling made me see how diverse solutions can be applied to similar problems.

One of the major differences I experienced when I was working in the United Kingdom had to do with how the U.K. operates as part of the European Union, in contrast to how Canada operates as part of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Economically, the world has changed greatly due to the prevalence of high-speed communication networks and fast and affordable options for shipping goods. No country in the world today fulfills its need for goods and services solely through what it can produce on its own. Within these unions, goods can be freely traded by corporations which leads to increased efficiency. Trade flows at high speeds creating a global marketplace where different countries specialize in the production of different goods and services. However, one element of our increasingly globalized marketplace is routinely ignored in most applications of trade agreements. That element is the



# PASSPORTS TO ADVENTURE



ability of individual humans, rather than just corporations, to freely trade their labour on the open market.

Currently in Canada, our primary trade agreement, NAFTA, does not allow its citizens freedom of movement, one of the basic four freedoms guaranteed under the European Union. There is also no freedom of movement between the U.K. and Canada, even though the physical trappings of our monetary system, government and constitution constantly refer to the British monarchy, as well as having pictures of the British queen in all our government buildings. I find it ironic that the direct descendants of people who fought for Britain in WWII are now barred from free immigration to that country, while the descendants of people who tried to bomb them in WWII are allowed to settle there unencumbered. I personally have nothing against citizens of any country, and do not believe people should be held accountable for the actions of their ancestors. However, this does seem terribly unfair, especially to descendants of Canadian veterans who were injured or lost their lives fighting for Britain.

Freedom of movement for a citizen of an EU member country means that that a citizen has the right to freely travel, reside and work in any other country within the EU. Strangely enough, this idea is rarely in the Canadian press or brought up before the Canadian government. Part of the reason the press largely ignores this issue is that freedom of movement mostly interests younger generations of Canadians, like those who go on the Student Work Abroad Program (SWAP) attend American universities and secure short-term Youth Mobility scheme visas to other countries. Canadian universities are much cheaper than those in the States, and many Canadians who would not be able to attend university in outside of Canada can go to university on government loans. However, there is no connection between what the universities teach and what jobs are actually available in Canada. There is little oversight of university training programs by the government, leaving

many young, well-educated Canadians with no place to practice their profession within Canada.

Within Canada, different provinces are so protective of their individual fiefdoms that despite the claims of the Ontario College of Teachers, provinces within in Canada like British Columbia, refuse to acknowledge Bachelor of Education degrees attained from universities in other Canadian provinces. Thus, a teacher that graduated from Ontario would have to recertify in a number of courses to qualify as an acceptable teacher candidate in B.C. This makes little sense when you consider that the U.K. requires no additional certification despite vast differences between the British and Canadian educational systems.

Job shortages in certain professions in Canada are not universal. I went on a Youth Mobility Scheme visa to England, where miraculously there were jobs for me. Unfortunately, this visa is only good for two years. You can reapply when your visa runs out, but once you are over 30, you can no longer apply. Is this not ageism? I was 30 when I just squeaked in to get my visa.

These sorts of visas are not the same as the unrestricted free movement given to EU citizens. They are dependent on you having a job lined up in the country you are travelling to. Also, you have to have \$5,000 CAD in the bank just to apply. When you are working overseas, employers know you are only temporarily allowed in the country from your documentation, and temporary workers are legally allowed to be paid less than residents, both in the U.K. and the U.S. That leaves you desperate to get a green card or a permanent work visa, a process which requires an employer in the country to hire you. However, the laws stipulate that the employer first has to advertise a job to people within the country and not have anyone take it, thereby showing that they need to hire a foreign person. Even if an employer cannot find anyone from their own country to hire for the position and decides to hire a foreign worker, they will need to fill out all the paperwork, hire

lawyers and wait a long time for the worker's visa to come through. Most employers couldn't be bothered.

I often stayed in shared accommodations in the U.K. and met friends from all over Europe. For a year I lived with two fellows from Portugal. Portugal is a small country with an excellent education system, but without the same kind of employment opportunities available to well educated individuals in other, larger countries in the EU with greater populations. Instead of stewing in frustration in their home country and underutilizing their education, they came to the U.K. and worked in their chosen fields. This did not mean they abandoned Portugal. In fact, due to their increased income, they probably spent more money in Portugal after moving to the U.K. than they did before, buying property for their families and returning home frequently for long vacations. In addition, they had employment, so their government was not required to spend money to support them through welfare. Canada is not the only country with a small population that has trouble facilitating full employment. This isn't a problem for a young EU graduate however, as he or she would be free to immigrate to any prospective EU country to find work.

I have often talked to fellow unemployed and under-employed Canadians in my age bracket and what astonishes me is the acceptance of the subpar opportunities available through the employment situation here. Everyone assumes that, for example, because teachers cannot find jobs here, that it is like that all over. That is certainly not the case. There are many unemployed professionals in Canada who would instantly find work if they were allowed to move freely. As it stands, the NAFTA free trade agreement gives no additional rights to individual human beings to move in an unrestricted fashion, only corporations. Companies are given unrestrained mobility, while many individuals are trapped in their respective countries unable to use skills badly needed elsewhere.

Until I moved to the U.K. I always assumed that it was that way everywhere else.

What astonished me about the young people I met in London was how upwardly mobile they were, even at my age. Many owned their own homes or apartments, which, with the astronomically high price of real estate in London, seemed completely remarkable to me. Everyone seemed to have a job in accordance with their education, unlike Toronto, where most people I know have to settle for low paying work they are vastly overqualified for, while struggling to pay back their student loans on minimum wages. Other people I knew who were born in London moved to other countries in the EU when their companies moved or opened new branches in other countries.

The workforce of my generation is far more mobile than any previous generation in history. It's not just a matter of being adventurous and free spirited. We have to be that way in order to be competitive and survive. Yet the laws we live by rarely reflect this reality. In fact, the one thing that has always struck me when comparing my immigration journey to that of my colleagues is the sheer arbitrariness of the process. It is based on birth rather than skill or one's actual usefulness to the country one is intending to go to. In practice, it often has nothing to do with hard work or giving talented people an even break. It has everything to do with marriages bought for money and entire industries reaping increased profits by using underpaid, illegal workers. As long as income and opportunity inequalities exist around the world, people are going to want to immigrate. This trend will never fade until economic opportunities are available to everybody. The restrictions only serve to nourish an unregulated underground economy that strips people of their rights and turns people into criminals merely for seeking better opportunities.

In Canada, if a company leaves for another country, more often than not they leave their entire workforce behind unemployed. This causes no penalties for the company, even though the Canadian government will





inevitably end up having to pay to help out the newly unemployed citizens left behind. When companies leave Canada it usually means they are moving to places with cheaper labour and fewer regulations to protect workers.

Observing life in the U.K. and other European countries I saw how free movement clearly allows individuals to increase control over their own lives and make responsible decisions for their future. It helped regulate unemployment, because there are always a surplus of certain types of skilled workers in one geographic region and deficits in others. By opening up the employment market, the workers were properly distributed to the areas where they were needed. When a country is stuck with too many workers in one skill area and not enough in others it can cause tremendous social problems. Everyone knows that large groups of

unemployed young people are never good for a country's stability and social fabric.

If people who speak different languages and come from cultures that were at war with each other, even in the recent past, now move back and forth freely throughout Europe, why should such difficulties exist between the U.S., Canada and the U.K.? With Canada and the U.S. being so similar in language, religion and culture, at least superficially, it seems ridiculous that such a policy is not in effect here.

I had never considered freedom of movement to be one of the main freedoms people should receive in a trade agreement before I travelled to Europe. No one in Canada ever seems to talk about it or be aware that this is a possibility. All the problems with rising unemployment, lack of affordable housing and issues with com-

panies leaving Canada or being taken over by American corporations are always seen solely in national terms. But in a globalized world they are not national problems and require us to look beyond national solutions.

The original free trade agreement (FTA), which was between the U.S. and Canada did incorporate more freedom of movement. Politicians talked about their expressed interest in extending the agreement to eventually include a European Union-like policy, but once Mexico was included in NAFTA, freedom of movement was wiped off the decision table. A major problem with making NAFTA a freedom of movement pact is the large economic imbalance between the U.S., Canada and Mexico when it comes to workers' wages.

Another blow towards freedom of movement occurred with the September 11 attacks and heightened American concerns about security. This led to tightened border controls to stop terrorism. However, what American politicians and citizens were really afraid of was a sudden influx of Mexicans. Economically, a person from Mexico can make far better money in the US with exactly the same skills, so many continue to come to the US through legal and illegal means in search of a better life. The federal government even built a giant wall to keep Mexicans out. This is light years away from the approach in the European Union where walls are being broken down rather than being built.

Even with the wall, there are still many undocumented Mexican immigrants in the Southwestern United States. As a result of their precarious status, many employers get away with paying them substandard wages and treating them poorly. As they cannot complain for fear of being deported, they have to put up with illegal working conditions. Officials are sometimes bribed to keep their noses out of companies who employ these workers. In the meantime, children may go to school for years and not realize they are "illegal" until it comes time for them to get a driver's license or go to university which

they cannot legally do without proper documentation.

From my experience in Los Angeles, I can attest to the fact that there are also many undocumented Canadians in the United States, especially in the entertainment and music industries. These industries flourish in Los Angeles and New York to a degree unheard of in any city in Canada drawing in many perspective entertainers. The degree of difficulty in finding economic success and full-time employment in these precarious industries is made more difficult for entertainers who live in Canada where the local entertainment and music industries are poorly developed in comparison to the United States. Many Canadian actors, musicians and other entertainers still take the traditional route of 1960s and 70s Canadian troubadours by going to L.A. or New York to "make it." However, now they are faced with the added wrinkle of having to work under the table for cash unless they have special government permissions. They also live in danger of being deported, and the penalties for said crime, including not being allowed into the U.S. for many years, are much more severe. This allows for abuse of undocumented Canadians in the entertainment industry in the U.S. and Canadians being relegated to less savory aspects of the entertainment business where people are less fussy about visa issues, such as in the pornographic industry.

A major stumbling block to creating a free trade union that provides for the individual rather than gigantic corporations looking for new markets and cheaper labour are the massive inequalities between the U.S. and its two trading partners in NAFTA. While the EU states are fairly well balanced in terms of quality of life, wages and population numbers, the NAFTA countries are wildly unequal. Canada will always lose out to the US due to its tiny population of 35 million in comparison to the U.S.'s over 317 million people and Mexico's 118 million.

The population and economic strength of the U.S. combined with the powerful transnational corporations that are centered in the U.S. that help control its

government policy through campaign donations make that country by far the most powerful in the trade agreement. There is nothing either Canada or Mexico can effectively do to block them. This is very different from the EU where there are many countries. Even if one of the countries that is stronger economically and has a greater population, like Germany or France, wishes to pursue a course that the majority of the other countries do not agree on, if enough other countries disagree they can effectively block legislation by working together. When the trading partners are so unequal and the two countries that might group together to block the US have so little in common linguistically, geographically, culturally and economically, there is no way to uphold checks and balances in trading.

Contrary to what Canadians believe, most Americans would actually welcome freedom of movement between the U.S. and Canada, even though it is currently not on the agenda for either country's government. This is most likely because of fears from nationalists, especially those in Quebec, and for older generations of Canadian politicians not directly affected by the youth unemployment crisis.

My own personal perspective on these issues has been greatly affected by the nature of my family and upbringing. Since the first half of the 20th century my family has lived close to the U.S.-Canada border. People went between the two countries in accordance with the flow of available jobs which is how many of my cousins ended up in California in the 1950s. The first of my family members that came from overseas faced great discrimination in Canada, but once they were here, movement between the U.S. and Canada proceeded freely without restriction. Due to the length of the border and lack of efficient technology to police it, there were no real obstacles to crossing back and forth. With no computers to quickly analyze documentation and catalogue citizens, most people did not even have passports

unless they were born outside North America.

However, the past three decades have seen a growing concern on the part of some Americans about people coming into the country and a distasteful streak of smug Canadian prejudice against Americans.

When I was small, I learned from my parents that the most important indicators of a person's potential for success in work and in life are how hard one tries, and how much work you're willing to put into something. When I went to the U.S. to take my MFA at the prestigious University of Southern California film school I was determined to work my hardest and to make back all the fees my family was paying for me as an 'international student' (this, despite the fact that I lived in the U.S. for most of my childhood, had three American siblings and a father who'd obtained American citizenship after my birth). I applied for a U.S. citizenship before I left hoping my documentation would catch up by the time I graduated and allow me to work freely in California when I was done with my film education.

For people who wonder why illegal aliens do not simply immigrate legally I can tell you that the obstacles to legal immigration, even for someone with a documented American parent, no criminal background and a professional college degree are huge. I had to wait 12 years for my application to be processed even though the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization service quoted me wait times of only two to five years when I first applied. Unfortunately, due to the length of time my application took to process I was eventually disqualified during the final step, because by that time my father no longer had a residence in the U.S. (even though he resided there at the start of the process). The sheer arbitrary nature of this refusal and the amount of time, work and money it took to process the application up to the point of refusal are clear indicators to me that however the system is working now, it is not accessible to the majority of prospective immigrants from NAFTA countries. There is no real



*“There is no real freedom of movement available to Canadians to the U.S., even if they clearly have documented American ties.”*

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freedom of movement available to Canadians to the U.S., even if they clearly have documented American ties. The same is true with the U.K., despite a common language and heritage and all the lip service we have to give to the Queen. Canada currently stands alone with no helpful way to release the growing numbers of unemployed and employable Canadians who could easily find happiness and success elsewhere.

What is most unfortunate is that the economic reasons I sought to leave Canada in the first place have only intensified with the passage of years. In the particular case of teachers, there are still many universities in Canada pumping out students with teaching degrees despite the fact that there is a surplus of unemployed teachers. Even if the universities did not train a single teacher for years there would be a surplus.

The entertainment industry in Canada has a similar problem. There are many college and university degree programs to train students in film, but few actual opportunities to use their skills in the Canadian job market. Further compounding the problem is that funding for locally produced Canadian content is not a big money-maker for the Canadian film industry. Most Canadian production facilities make their money from American productions that film in Canada on Canadian sound stages or use Canadian editing services. While this is good for some Canadians, the main creative heads are

all brought in from the U.S. including the screenwriters, directors and principal actors. Canadians are relegated to the second tier jobs, basically second-class citizen in film productions in our own country. Currently only 11 percent of screenwriters who belong to the Canadian Screenwriter's Guild (and this does not account for the many screenwriters in Canada who are unaffiliated with the guild and work on more fringe productions) actually make most of their income through screenwriting. Most have high levels of education, post-secondary or more, but only a tiny percentage make over \$40,000 a year and of those, a significant majority live in Los Angeles<sup>1</sup>

What I plan to do when I get out of university at Ryerson is unclear, but I know that there are jobs outside Canada that I am well qualified for, but unable to access due to arbitrary trade and immigration restrictions that will probably continue to be an aggravation. I truly believe that we need to get a conversation started about the NAFTA laws that severely restrict the freedom of individuals to sell their labour in a similar manner to corporations sell their products and services between countries. Although we have all grown up believing this is the only way trade agreements and employment can work, my experience in the U.K. has shown me that the European model could afford a better example, and also relieve some of the current unemployment pressures experienced by young workers in Canadian cities.

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Zile Liepins

"It was BOOM. We were walking through a row of houses; a long line of soldiers. A few airplanes were flying overhead, so we were paying attention. We had our eyes on the planes and had often seen bombs dropping. This time we didn't see anything, it was a sudden blast. I yelled "DOWN" and then threw myself to the ground. That's what you do—you drop down, without knowing what will happen to you, and look up later and hope that everything is alright. When I got up I didn't feel anything at first. I was looking at a map, and I saw blood dripping on it from my face. I didn't feel anything else. I wanted to

I wanted to look closer, but the girls wouldn't let me out of the station. I don't

My name was Imants. People asked me my name and I said, "Imants". There was just one guy at the farm that called me "Imanto". No one else knew my name. And then I just decided; my middle name is Janis – so I said John. And the next day, everyone knew my name. Everyone called me John. I stayed a little over a year. They said if I stayed longer than a year they would transfer me downtown, to the store. There they put me with the chickens again; in the poultry section of the Eaton's food department."

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