



Critical Reviews

Media Writing 2017

Table of Contents

Dominic Akena	9
Rachel Anne Bordignon	13
Lysle Hood	17
Tara Korkmaz	21
Ashleigh Larratt	25
Delphine Lewis	29
Kenneth McDonald	33
Natasha Ramoutar	39
Jessica Rodriguez Leon	43
Daniel Schrempf	49
Gregory Severin	53
Donovan Taplin	57
John Verhaeven	61
Acknowledgements	68



Photography: An Art Form Inherently Taken for Granted?

Dominic Akena

When people ask me what I want to do with my life, I always say I want to be a documentary filmmaker or a photographer or both. And almost every time I get asked this question, the usual reaction I get is, “That’s cool! That’s awesome, man.” But then immediately I will get a comment that usually follows this type of empty comment, “it must be tough to make money in this line of business though, eh? I mean don’t you have to be really talented to make it?” Great! I’m glad we addressed the elephant in the room, but it’s time to move on to the real problems.

In the history of art, photography and cinema have struggled to gain credibility when compared to other traditional forms such as painting, illustrations/drawing, and sculpture. And as a result, photographers are still regarded as lesser ‘artists.’ Following in the footsteps of some of photography’s giants, and referring to Paul Strand’s and Alfred Stieglitz’s discussion of the history and significance of the pictorial photography movement in the early 1900s, in this review I plan to offer my perspectives on why I believe that photographers ought to be awarded as much artistic credibility as any other art creators.

Most of the photographers and documentarians I have had the pleasure of interacting with claim that it is difficult to make a living from one’s work. In this short paper, I will focus my discussion on the reasons photographers hardly ever get credited with the status of “artists.” The reason why I am interested in rectifying this issue is that I do not want to be made to feel that my passion and interest in photography and cinema work represent a dream not worth following, and I hope that other emerging and future photographers do not feel oppressed by ideology about the artistic legitimacy of photography.

In his article in *Seven Arts*, August 1917, Strand writes:

“The interest in the mechanism and materials of photography as a new form of art began in 1842 when David Octavius Hill, a portrait painter and a member of the Royal Scottish Academy, received a commission to paint a large canvas on which were to appear the recognizable portraits of the well-known people. Faced with the difficult task he turned to photography to help him with his painting.”¹

Taking into considerations the different kinds of photographic practices available today, the problem society has with the art of photography has little to do with the making of the image. When I visited Martin Weinhold’s *Face to Face with Canada - A Nation at Work* on September 5th, 2017—a photography exhibition at the Ryerson Arts Space—it never occurred to me to judge his work based on the time frame he took to produce it, or the method he used to make the work. I was simply moved to admiration of his images. The black-and-white close-ups of the subjects he photographed at their working spaces across Canada were lustrous. The images were, without a doubt, astonishing. And what amazed me most was how Weinhold strategically made artistic choices that helped him turn a simple, borderline-boring, concept (to photograph regular Canadian people in their work spaces), into an inspiring project that truly represents and celebrates art in photography.

One of the prominent decisions that made his images riveting was Weinhold’s choice

to photograph and print his work in black & white. As Stieglitz argued, the only thing that matters, in the end,, is “what you have to say and how to say it. That the originality of a work of art refers to the originality of the thing expressed and the way it is expressed, whether it be poetry, painting, or photography.” (Stieglitz, 118). I felt that the use of black & white helped him eliminate some the elements that could be deemed distracted, and allowed for his subjects to appear more comfortable in their workspaces. Additionally, the strategic placement of subjects in the center of the frame looking directly at the camera inspires a moment of connection between the subject and the audience. I don’t know if he instructed his subjects not to smile, but I loved the genuine expression that each of them showed: It encouraged me to look directly into their eyes and learn about them and about the job they do. Overall, it was a privilege to view this installation, and I would encourage all my friends to see it.

¹Paul Strand, *Seven Arts* 1917, 140.



Disability in The Bad Batch

Rachel Anne Bordignon

I went to a screening of Amirpour's *The Bad Batch* at this year's TIFF and I can't stop thinking about it. The film has a unique post- (or pre-) apocalyptic environment for a coming of age tale, it subtly addresses racism and institutionalized power imbalances, and includes cannibals, vigilante justice and Keanu Reeves playing a cult leader [he is named "The Dream" in the safe zone of the wasteland he's created, which is called Comfort]. The inhabitants of Comfort are safe from outside dangers, but seemingly live for shallow hedonistic comforts that their safety brings (drugs, raves... complacency).

I wanted to know more about the film so I did some further research online and was shocked to find that it wasn't well received; it is currently sitting at a 44% rating on Rotten Tomatoes. The critics echo that the film's dialogue is too sparse, the characters are "unconvincing," and the film is shallow, incoherent, and devoid of emotional engagement. I strongly disagree with this, and think it's largely due to having the sensibilities of a city-dwelling, disabled, twenty something millennial, simultaneously dis-encharmed with and blasé about the current political climate. So, here's my take on *The Bad Batch*:

The film begins with a young woman (Arlen) being tattooed with an inmate number and sent in-to a wasteland that is fenced off from the rest of civilization. The entry sign reads a bold:

"WARNING: Beyond this fence is no longer the territory of Texas. That hereafter no person within the territory beyond this fence is a resident of The United States of America or shall be acknowledged, recognized, or governed by the laws and governing bodies therein. Good Luck."

While this scene sets a dramatic tone about the harsh realities that lie ahead for Arlen, the "Good Luck" on the sign made me chuckle. It sets the tone for viewers to look out for further tongue-in-cheek texts. I also think that the ironic use of good luck in a situation where Arlen is set up

for failure is a sentiment that's oddly relatable to people who are struggling with disability. Support I've sought is often held just slightly out of reach due to bureaucracy – the available "support" is usually a performative gesture, and it feels the same as this good luck reads.

An ominous soundtrack begins playing, empty water jugs litter the ground, Arlen hazily wanders forward and reads a dingy note from her pocket: "FIND THE DREAM. FIND COMFORT." I'm a little con-fused at this point, but intrigued. There is no verbal dialogue yet, but many texts appear on screen. A tat-too on Arlen's arm reads "suicide" in a recognizable baseball-styled font, and her baseball hat has large images of hands: one giving the middle finger and the other pointing at you. She's wearing beat-up Adidas, a well-worn American Apparel shirt and brightly-coloured, watermelon print shorts. I don't know who she is, but she's using the mirror of a trashed car in the middle of the desert to apply lipstick, and I like that. She's lost, rough around the edges and made an outcast. I feel like Arlen would be a friend of mine.

I'm already invested in Arlen, on the edge of my seat waiting for something to happen. Moments later, Arlen is being chased down by two unknown people, the screen flashes to black and reads: "The Bad Batch." Cut to the next scene and Arlen is bound and gagged. A shot of her tied hand focuses on the word "FEAR" tattooed across her knuckles. Her muffled screams are heard while the well-known 90s hit *All That She Wants* by Ace of Base is playing on the captor's radio. The film is less than ten minutes in and I'm experiencing nostalgia because of this pop music I grew up with, while Arlen's arm and leg are being sawed off by cannibals. This is a common verbal metaphor that's being presented visually, and the result is unsettling because it's both comical and horrifying: Arlen is looking for Comfort and she needs to let go of her fears, but it will "cost an arm and a leg." I'm nervously laughing.

Arlen manages to escape her captors and uses her skateboard as a mobility aid, lying on her back, steadily pushing along towards Comfort. The composition of this shot is pleasing, much like the entire film's set design, which has been carefully curated to bring the viewer into this seemingly depraved world. Next, Arlen is met by a wandering man who places her in his shopping cart and wheels her to the safety of Comfort. Comfort is filled with the misfits who found their way there; several of them are mentally and/or physically disabled.

A passing moment in the film where the social implications of disability, through aesthetic difference, is addressed when Arlen realizes (perhaps subconsciously) that she misses her arm: she admires a fashion model posed in a magazine, then suddenly cuts around the arm of the model and sticks it onto her mirror so she can pose in front of it. The cutout image of the arm is positioned to conceal the re-mainder of Arlen's limb. This unexpected vulnerability can easily be disregarded by a viewer, potentially being read as funny, random, absurd or possibly confusing... I'm embarrassed to admit that, for me, this private moment is relatable. This moment presents a very human desire for acceptance, and recognizes a complex aspect of physical disability: experiencing the emotional response to bodily difference that includes the conflicting feelings of pride and shame.

Representations that simultaneously present both the strength and vulnerability that come along with disability are important because they present us as complex, and thus, human. I'm not in support of any kind of crip-face, and to be clear, Suki Waterhouse (Arlen) is not a disabled person, but I'm willing to set that aside to discuss this film because it's one of the few where disability isn't used as some sort of cheap plot device. The average post-apocalyptic narrative doesn't allow for this kind of space for disabled people. Usually we are the ones who die first. Disabled people are

expected to sacrifice them-selves so that the people who are able can survive, because only they can guarantee success for the future of civilization. Post- apocalyptic narratives tend to bring out this ableist survival of the fittest mentality that eugenics were founded on. But in Amirpour's *The Bad Batch*, disabled people are present and humanized, considered worthy of the protection that Comfort provides.

The film is inherently political as it questions the status quo surrounding how we decide to treat the people around us, and who is considered human enough to be deemed worthy of fair treatment and support: who is a valued member of society, and who is a part of *The Bad Batch*? The fundamental difference between a run-of-the mill post-apocalyptic narrative and Amirpour's film is the inclusion and valuing of the role of caretaking. Several characters are driven by their role of caring for someone else.

Despite the chaotic world that they are forced into, the inhabitants of the wasteland form communities to help each other survive, because there is no other option. Disability is visually present and the adaptability derived from Arlen's experience with disability is showcased. Equal parts ingenious and humorous, Arlen retrieves a gun that she's stashed inside her prosthetic leg when it comes time to save the day in an odd twist of fate that has her caring for, and loving, her initial cannibal captor. Arlen ultimately decides that she doesn't want to reside in Comfort. She isn't fully understanding of the vastness of the outside wasteland, or the social rules, but through her journey she makes a loving connection with her initial captor and they take turns saving each other's lives. Comfort may be "safe," but the relationships formed between people there are utilitarian and based on a power structure, and Arlen decides that's no way to live. The dialogue is minimal, but there is a powerful message here that should not be ignored: we need compassion and each other to survive.



Bad Reputation: A Critique of Taylor Swift's *Look What You Made Me Do*

Lysle Hood

I spent this summer in a cabin in the woods. Although I did have the luxuries of lights and running water, I had no television, little access to the radio, and I certainly did not have WiFi. For most of the summer, I was blissfully unaware of the triumphs and tragedies going on in the world. It came as a surprise when, one afternoon, my car radio suddenly picked up a familiar station (my radio usually only landed on the local Christian-rock station or a French station from Quebec, neither of which I was particularly inclined to listen to). The host announced her intention to play Taylor Swift's new song, "Look What You Made Me Do" and I was, to my embarrassment, excited.

At the time, I would have considered myself a fan of Taylor Swift, though certainly not a so-called "Swiftie." I have always admired how Taylor Swift is a singer-songwriter-business-woman. But, for the record, I have never been to a Taylor Swift concert, nor do I own any of her records or merchandise. And I didn't even know she had released a new song.

What came out of the speakers was utterly perplexing. The techno-beat and the sound of Swift struggling to rap was nauseating. I started laughing. Having been in the wilderness for so long, I was convinced that the song was actually a parody; but unfortunately, I was wrong. A week later, when I found myself back in the city, I had the opportunity to watch the accompanying music video. My reaction was more of the same.

I do not consider myself a music-guru, nor do I know much about cinematography. I'm not going to bore you by analysing the song's musical composition. Let's face it: there's not much substance there anyway. Everyone already knows it's a bad song. What boggles my mind is that "Look What You Made Me Do" is regularly played on pop-radio. And in fact, within the first 24 hours of its release, the video garnered 43.2 million views. I can attribute this viewership, in part, to Swift's deliberately cryptic social media marketing strategy, in

which she deleted all her content and replaced her posts with videos of snakes. Yes, snakes.

Taylor Swift has long been known as someone who jumps at playing the victim. Even before the infamous 2009 incident in which Kanye West interrupted her VMA acceptance speech, Swift has been marketing herself as innocent, pure and feminine. Swift's fragile demeanour is marked by her wardrobe of white ballgowns, her fairy-tale music videos and her songs, which, more often than not, depict men who have wronged her. By all accounts, Swift rose to fame by carefully constructing this personal narrative. That is, until recently. When Kim Kardashian took to Snapchat to expose Swift for lying about her involvement in Kanye West's song, "Famous," it became utterly clear: Taylor Swift is a snake.

Swift is aware that her reputation as the sweet girl-next-door is fading. And her reaction is nothing short of petty. "Look What You Made Me Do" is the first release from Swift's new album, Reputation. As the name suggests, the album is Swift's attempt at rebranding her identity. As what, exactly? I am not entirely sure. The video, in what is apparently an attempt at satire, shows Swift dressed up as her former personas before she kills them all off. Swift also plays a zombie, which only serves to increase the cringe factor of the already cringe-worthy video.

I can respect and appreciate that Swift is striving to use this phase of her career to alter the public's perception of herself. However, she leaves behind every characteristic that once made her a successful and likeable celebrity, and she assumes the sole – and perhaps irreversible – persona of revenge-seeker.

These days, it is hard to keep track of the celebrities with whom Swift is feuding. Among them are Kanye West, Kim Kardashian and Katy Perry. She still presents herself as a victim to these various feuds, but, as the video suggests by the complexity of its pop-culture references, absolutely everything Swift produces is

intentional. Swift is, above all, a cunning business-woman. In the "Look What You Made Me Do" video, Swift impersonates Perry while holding a Grammy (for reference, Swift has 10 Grammys and Perry has none).

But here is the kicker: Swift's attempts to distance herself from her victim-playing reputation are negated by the lyrics of the song itself. The chorus of the song, which is simply, "look what you made me do" repeated eight times, does just that – blame someone else for her actions. Swift also positions herself as but a victim to the games, the stage and the role forced upon her by the addressee (probably West or Kardashian or Perry):

I don't like your little games

Don't like your tilted stage

The role you made me play

Of the fool, no, I don't like you.¹

It's time for Swift to actually take responsibility for herself instead of just feigning accountability. I find it problematic that Swift is using this song, and her platform as a multi-million-dollar star, to perpetuate the notion that it is entirely acceptable to use your perceived victimhood as a mechanism to achieve fame and fortune.

I also can't ignore Swift's latest court appearance. She recently sued David Mueller in a sexual assault case which involved Mueller groping Swift during a photo-op in 2013. Swift was awarded \$1USD. Yes, one dollar. The rhetoric from Swift's camp mainly emphasises that she pursued the case to call attention to sexual assault and to provide a framework for other victims to speak out against violence – and honestly, at least at the surface level, I think that's great. But I can't knock the feeling that Swift just might have been enticed by the (much-needed) good publicity and the perceived heroism. Plus, for a self-proclaimed feminist, Swift does spend a lot of time attacking

other women and demonizing men (see "Look What You Made Me Do" or any number of Swift's songs, for that matter). At the very least, it is a curious case.

Then there is the indisputable problem of her concert ticketing. If you are, for reasons beyond me, still inclined to attend Swift's upcoming concert, you'll have to jump through some hoops (read: dish out a lot of cash). Swift has partnered with Ticketmaster to create a rewards system that is the first of its kind. To unlock access to tickets, fans must visit the site daily and perform certain tasks. You will be prompted to pre-order Swift's album; however, buying the album once is not nearly enough. You will need to buy the album about a dozen times. Even then, you won't unlock access until you purchase an infamous "I <3 T.S." t-shirt, or a sweatshirt, or, of course, a snake ring. Then, you'll want to post on social media to gain an extra boost in points. Even if you do all this, your name will only get added to a list for tickets – that doesn't mean it will be at the top of said list, or that you will have first access to seating. Capitalism at its finest.

The entire ordeal makes me wish that I never left the cabin in the woods. Swift's white-woman-victimhood, frankly, doesn't do much for the feminist cause, but it certainly helps her capitalist agenda. And it is infuriating.

¹Lines 1-4



My Thoughts on Cold Literature

Tara Korkmaz

Years after Gao Xingjian's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, his remarks about Cold Literature¹ still sound refreshing. He shares how he survives in the climate of the literary world and how he keeps his sensitive mind safe from external elements. There is little doubt, according to Xingjian, that texts are bankable currencies in the heated market of politics and religion. The surplus of activism, cries for charity, and Internet authorship is leaving cold literature in the hot seat, as the fate of the author and artists, and their fulfillment of self-expression, become a matter of luck.

Xingjian's speech mirrors his views about the place of literature within the world's power dynamics. His cold literature respects the individual's freedom to decode the written text. In reality, peace, which is freedom from conflict, survives through art and literature. Cold literature is not the result of the author's ignorance about the conflicts of political culture. It is "an aesthetic based on human emotions" and far from the short-lived trends of a consumerist society. It does not bank on the politics of the time and it "does not become outdated." It allows for works with lasting impact, like the yearning for peace itself.

In describing the starting point of literature as "talking to oneself," Xingjian finds the use of language to communicate as "secondary." He unchains both the author and the reader from their obligations towards each other. The writer can deliver his ideas, and the reader can grasp what he understands. The author is free from pleasing the "masses" since there is no message or declaration in the author's mind when he speaks to himself. "Freedom in writing is not conferred and cannot be purchased but comes from an inner need in the writer himself."

The emphasis on the individual is not an advocacy for self-indulgence. It creates a "cold detachment" for the author's imagination, not for his concerns. An author who sides with competing forces in hopes for recognition and appreciation has little concern for humanity.

Global polarization stretches literature and art far from humanity, with twisting them around politics and religion.

Human nature, on the other hand, doesn't favor the idea of "universality". The only universal entity is a characteristic of the profit market. A consumerist society is a chain of supply and demand, which confines literature to being another commodity. Thus, Xingjian's cold literature appears as not cost-effective because it is not produced for its exchange value.

Xingjian often writes in his native language, but he cautiously warns "for a writer of the present to strive to emphasize a national culture is problematic." The connection between language and culture is characteristic of literature, but the author who steps out of the national boundaries of language can understand the "dilemmas of human existence."

Language is indeed a dilemma for those tossed around by global conflicts. They may never live anywhere long enough to grasp one language sufficiently. Translated literary works that is politically motivated evokes emotions that live and die in the wrong locations. Fragmented feelings of the fragmented bodies are the dilemma of today's society.

In the Internet era, individuals' thoughts spread through the worldwide web. Western-embraced individuality echoes in personal websites and blogs. The text "communicated" through the Internet, if not lost in the black hole of cyberspace, is caught in the web of SEO (Search Engine Optimization). The "utilitarian" nature of Internet text focuses on profit-making through search engine marketing and advertising. The "rarely known, little-known" content or the "very well known of the truth of the human world" do not generate audiences, the embedded marketable vocabulary does. Search engine companies prescribe, rank,

sell words, and phrases to comply with the market demand. Today, as the most-read text, the Internet language taints the individual experience with profit. In this way "the suicide of literature" is somewhat of an assisted one.

The harm to literature "strangled by society in its quest for spiritual salvation" further extends through the cries for the charity that normalizes itself in the weakness of human emotions. And just in order to make a living, the frail text bends towards one or the other side to collect more marketable currency. As a result, the demand for activism is another wholesale trade-off that keeps art and literature charged with polarization.

In the end, "cold detachment" becomes a way of breaking free from localized emotions and keeping safe from the seasonal changes that acclimates one's desire in the next trends. In nature, "cold literature" is the one that will "flee this environment to survive" and that's all one can hope.

¹Gao Xingjian's uses this term to describe his preferred style of writing "a literature of flight for one's life, literature that is not utilitarian, but a spiritual self-preservation in order to avoid being stifled by society."



Saltzman and Larratt: a Match Made in Heaven and Hell

Ashleigh Larratt

I am looking at another artist's work and spiritual journey, and comparing it to my own.

Recently, I was deeply moved by a YouTube video entitled *Awakening* that combines photography and spoken word by artist-turned-enlightenment-teacher (though he would never refer to himself as that) Robert Saltzman. I was touched because he is covering similar territory as I am—the intersection of art and spirituality.

The video features photographs that capture life intimately and immediately. Through his lens, ordinary people, places and things become extraordinary. The images are accompanied by soundbites of Saltzman talking about end-game truth and reality: "If I could see myself without that story, everything would be okay. But it's just scary."¹ *Awakening* reminded me of the videos I was making a decade ago. I would secretly record friends, family, lovers, slow their motion way down, and add a song that made me cry and some of my poetry as accompanying text. While I did not consciously believe in anything beyond the quantifiable, looking back at my work I see a person striving, like Saltzman, to become intimate with life.

This kind of intimacy between oneself and something unimaginable is how I now define spirituality.

But he isn't just a kindred spirit artistically. Saltzman continues, "I'm not criticizing the teachers. They have a role to play and the role is to keep you entertained so that you don't awaken. That's why people pay the money. They don't want to get into something really deep."² I get it. Recently it became clear that most of my spiritual practices, culminating in thousands of hours, including my own career as an energy healer, were keeping me asleep. Or rather, at some point, they weren't bringing me closer to who I wanted to become, as the human being. This video was a re-minder to continue standing on my own two feet, to stop looking to famous

teachers, or trying to help others attain a self-realization I haven't totally embodied. The key is to take Saltzman's re-minder of autonomy, without making him a new guru.

I feel my return to personal artistic practice is part of how my spirit wants to move. But for Saltzman, it was the opposite, which is when I started to get uncomfortable. "You don't know what will happen when you awaken. You don't know. In my case, I lost my art career. It was gone. It went away. I'm not sorry about that."³ My preliminary awakenings through yoga asana, occurring as my undergraduate degree concluded, also had me put the camera down (for the most part). But unlike Saltzman, I now feel like picking it up again is part of my path. And I don't want to worry that it's an egoic motivation or a spiritual trap.

I was speaking to a friend yesterday and we were agreeing how important a long-term, structured art project felt for me, offering spiritual protection, grounding, and a means to transcend the historical traumas that can still entrap me. Part of my direction is to explore why things happened the way they did: this seems crucial to my journey. I wanted to stop the video again when I heard Saltzman saying, "We actually don't know what any of this is. No one knows how any of this got here. None of it. We may call that not knowing God, but hanging a name on the incomprehensible does not make it real."⁴

Of course, no thought can ever be the truth. And there's also a channel of consciousness where 'nothing ever happened'... But that's also a load of hogwash: there is lots to do and learn, and this is where I now situate myself, both artistically and spiritually. I begin to dislodge Saltzman from my consciousness and as grace would have it, I was handed a new mirror in Joan Didion's words. "Had I been blessed with even limited access to my own mind there would have been no reason to write. I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and

what I fear."⁵ Those words could be my own.

Immediately after I saw the video I posted it to my Facebook page with the caption, "effin right". I got only five likes. When I asked my friend to comment on it, because she had liked it, she said she didn't actually watch it but was 'liking' my enthusiasm. Luckily, my new Facebook friend, Robert Saltzman himself, left a comment. "You've made me curious, so here I am :)." ⁶

Given my subsequent merry-go-round with all that is Robert Saltzman (I went on to explore his book *The Ten Thousand Things* and his frequent social media posts), I considered writing him to clarify some of my questions. I am curious why his art career fell apart. He does allude in his *Buddha at the Gas Pump* interview that he needed to 'get loaded' for every gallery opening. However, I'm holding off communicating with him directly, at least for now.

My final thoughts. Do I think he's a great photographer? Absolutely. Do I think he's an awake human, i.e. he is in this moment, as the moment? Yes. Do I think he's a bit of an asshole? Yes. And this final yes is the real gem I'm taking from my exposure to his work. He's reached his answer – now it's time to fully, firmly and unapologetically occupy my own speck of a life and figure out what's true for me.

¹Robert Saltzman, "Awakening". YouTube video, 9:17. Posted [July, 2017]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLGiPjFvcss>.

²Saltzman, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLGiPjFvcss>

³Ibid

⁴Saltzman, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLGiPjFvcss>

⁵Joan Didion, "Why I Write," New York Times Book Review, December 1976.

⁶Saltzman, Robert. "Ashleigh Meta Larratt." Facebook.com. <https://www.facebook.com/ashleigh.larratt> (accessed August 18 2017).



Don't Root for the Underdog

Delphine Lewis

Scott Hamilton Kennedy’s documentary film, *Food Evolution*, left me sympathizing for Monsanto as if it were a misunderstood child. Comparing data from leading scientists in the field of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) with arguments from leading anti-GMO activists in the United States, Kennedy’s film reveals the inaccuracies that fuel the battle against GMOs. *Food Evolution* presents a clear thesis: ignorance and propaganda expressed by sheltered anti-GMO activists affect the future of sustainable food production in developing countries. By the end of the film, my instinct to root for the underdog (anti-GMO) had been entirely disrupted. Supporting Monsanto felt wrong, yet I had somehow been convinced that it was right.

The anti-GMO movement has spread across the world, and thirty-eight countries now enforce GMO restrictions concerning cultivation and importation of GMO food products.¹ Yet, multiple leading GMO scientists interviewed in *Food Evolution* (such as Dennis Gonsalves, the co-inventor of the GE rainbow papaya), state that the anti-GMO movement works against the scientific consensus, which has concluded after 30 years of testing that GMOs do not present health risks for human beings.²

So, what is fueling the hate of GMOs? In large part, people are eager to despise and distrust Monsanto due to its history of manufacturing and selling dangerous chemicals such as PCBs and DDT. Perplexed by the debate, I investigated a highly dedicated anti-GMO activist group, Moms Across America. Influenced by environmental groups like Greenpeace, who claim that “GMO crops have no place in sustainable farming”³, Moms Across America insists upon food safety, but fails to recognize that access to genetically engineered (GE) seeds could save and better sustain the lives of billions of people.

In a convoluted rant about her mission to expose the toxicity of GMOs, Zen Honeycutt, the founder and director of Moms Across America, uses guilt tactics to encourage mothers to join

in her fight. While she attempts to “empower” mothers, her discourse is riddled with sexist stereotypes: “Moms are unstoppable, and our only special interest is our family. [...] Tell all those you care about—your yoga class, your women’s circle, your book club [...]”.⁴ Honeycutt even encourages mothers to test their breastmilk for toxicity, implying that they could be poisoning their children.

But as a millennial feminist, my image of the contemporary mother reaches far beyond feminine guilt and yoga classes.

And although I’m naturally inclined to support groups that challenge the power of huge corporations like Monsanto, I can’t help but label Moms Across America as an ill-informed group of American mothers who have the luxury to purchase only organic produce, and whose interests do not extend beyond their local, privileged communities.

The stakes are very high, and they are not only about profits for Monsanto, as some would claim. *Food Evolution* argues that GE seeds have the potential to eliminate starvation on a global scale by providing reliable agriculture, and in turn, lowering the cost of food. The anti-GMO movement directly affects the accessibility of GE seeds across the world, even when they are clearly necessary. Ugandan farmers and subsistence farmers are in desperate need of GE seeds to combat the Banana Xanthomonas Wilt, a devastating plant disease that has killed nearly half of the county’s banana crops. Uganda’s Bill 2012, which would allow, and monitor, the cultivation of genetically modified seeds in the country, has only recently been brought back to Parliament after having been tabled since 2013.⁵

It’s in my nature to be inclined to support the counter-current, to react against huge corporations, and to encourage vulnerable local economies. I struggle to accept that Monsanto offers a realistic and progressive solution for the future of sustainable food production in countries whose populations have suffered famine, drought, and plant diseases. But *Food Evolution* makes a strong case for Monsanto’s GMOs: as the film shows, the real underdogs who won’t be able to survive without genetically engineered seeds in the face of climate change and overpopulation are actually depending on them. Having grown up in Quebec, I’m highly aware that activism has become increasingly popular among millennials, no matter the cause. As a member of this generation, it is essential to be wary of the contradictory nature of blind activism, whose sole purpose often seems to be to keep North Americans at the center of attention in times of crisis.

¹Genetic Literacy Project, “Where are GMOs grown and banned,” Science Literacy Project, 2017, <https://gmo.geneticliteracyproject.org/FAQ/where-are-gmos-grown-and-banned/>

²Scott Hamilton Kennedy, *Food Evolution*, co-produced/written by Trace Sheehan (2017; New York: Black Valley Films in association with Boomdozer Inc., 2017), documentary film.

³Greenpeace Press Release, “Governments and citizens reject GMOs, Commission must follow—Greenpeace,” Greenpeace European Unit, March 27, 2017, <http://www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/en/News/2017/Governments-citizens-reject-GMOs-MON810-Bt11-1507/>

⁴Zen Honeycutt, “For the Freedom to Choose our Families’ Food,” Moms Across America, 2013, <http://www.momsacrossamerica.com/about>

⁵Olive Eyotaru, “Uganda: GMO Bill Back in Parliament After Three Years On Shelf,” All Africa, June 30, 2017, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201706300311.html>



Kenneth McDonald

Critical Review

Out of close to four hundred films at TIFF I could only afford to see one. Choosing what to watch was a difficult task for me, a notoriously indecisive person. But after scrolling through the many synopses and comparing cinema stats, I settled on *Submergence*. Regardless of the research, this selection was based solely on the film's director—Wim Wenders. His prolific career has amounted to almost forty films since 1970. And though I am not familiar with his entire oeuvre, my relationship with what I have seen feels intimate. And this intimacy has resulted in a trust: that Wenders will not let me down.

There are many ways to be submerged, and we never forget it throughout Wenders' film adaptation of J.M. Ledgard's novel. *Submergence* follows James, an MI6 agent who goes to Somalia to curb Jihadist terrorism, and Danny, a professor and bio-mathematician who dives to the deepest parts of the Greenland Sea to investigate the beginnings of life. Throughout the film Wenders contrasts Danny and James' brief romantic encounter with the subsequent darkness they both experience. James and Danny, we find out early in the film, are prepared to go as deep as they have to in order to follow what they believe.

The film opens with scenes of the ocean splashing against the camera lens as it sinks lower into a murky, dark-teal abyss. SUBMERGENCE flashes on the screen and already we know subtlety is not in play here. Throughout the film we then watch Danny and James submerge in all kinds of ways – to the depths of their work, the ocean, terrorist camps and of course love. Thematic subtext is necessary for a great movie. However, there is a fine line between appropriate and unmissable. This line may have been on Wenders' mind while making his most mainstream film to date. Perhaps he was reaching for a different audience with less visual literacy. It seems,

though, that Wenders tripped on that proverbial line, fell and submerged himself into an ocean of the obvious.

Beneath the themes, we have Danny and James, our gorgeous protagonists. Wenders does little to give a third dimension to these cardboard characters; cutouts from any novel in an airport gift shop could quite likely replace them. For example, Danny's life work is culminating in her approaching deep-sea dive. Her subsequent findings have the potential to impact the world's understanding of life itself. However, she almost throws it all away because she does not receive a text message from James. How contemporary! The unremarkable character development is thankfully salvaged by the performance of James McAvoy and Alicia Vikander. Their on-screen connection is believable and at times captivating. For a few moments while watching the unraveling of their passionate, though also pleasantly casual, intimacy, I would briefly slip into reverie.

The film's sweeping landscapes and compressed color palette also gives the film some buoyancy. Wenders tends to give great care to visual aesthetics, and thankfully he still prevails here. His shots bring us along from the ruggedly pristine coastline of the Faroe Islands to the visually idyllic Djibouti beaches. And as the camera pans from these powerful landscapes through various interior shots, the imprint of Wenders becomes felt. As an early painter and subsequent photographer, his consideration of composition and color seeps into his films. This has become a mark of his cinematic style, and is certainly found in *Submergence*. Many frames look photographic. Blues and yellows consistently speckle the scenes with a delightful subtlety. Then as the film progresses, complimentary reds become more prominent. That said, even with engaging performances and visual elegance, *Submergence* still left me unsatisfied.

I do recognize that this is all in the context of my (possibly unrealistic) expectations of Wenders as an auteur.

Paris, Texas is a masterpiece. Was Submergence disappointing because I expected another masterpiece? If I had no previous reference to the director, would I have still been disappointed?

I would say yes. The film looked good. And for a few brief moments I felt something and forgot I was in a dark room surrounded by strangers. In that way it was a success. However, I cannot say I was affected any more deeply than that. If *punctum* exists for cinema, *Submergence* certainly didn't have it. So, as I walked out of the theatre, having expended my one chance to experience TIFF's proclaimed greatness, I would be lying if I said I didn't feel a little let down.



Why I Am The Pretty Thing That Lives In The House Haunts Me

Natasha Ramoutar

Can you escape your past? The past of your parents? The past of humankind? From the narrative parallels between the protagonist Lily and the spectre Polly, to the more technical contrast of crisp modern film with grainy, vintage images, *I Am The Pretty Thing That Lives In The House* explores these questions in depth.

The film opens with Lily Saylor, a timid and jumpy nurse, arriving at the home of Iris Blum, an ailing, elderly writer with memory problems. Iris is a famous horror novelist who successfully published thirteen novels. When Iris begins to refer to Lily as “Polly”, the main character of her horror novel *The Lady In The Walls*, Lily sets out to read the book. She doesn’t make it far, becoming too scared when she discovers the main framing device—that Polly communicated this story to Iris.

Since this film was recommended to me by a good friend, who is also a horror fanatic and English literature student, many aspects of the film instantly struck me as gothic. First is the way the space of the film is set up, with the home being large and spacious, and the estate being the only home for miles. The setting is quite disconnected from modern amenities, forcing Lily into a space of the past as she complains about the lack of wireless phones and a working television set. Another is the mostly female cast, as Victorian Gothic literature in particular often traced a woman’s descents into madness. Last is the title of the novel about Polly, which directly calls back to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper*, a gothic feminist short story that centered around a woman’s deteriorating physical and mental health as she becomes haunted by women inside the pattern of her wallpaper.

But *I Am The Pretty Thing That Lives In The House* is not just another gothic story. Although it works within this framework, it expands it in several ways. Similar to the central figure in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Lily becomes more and more plagued by paranoia and hallucinations

the longer she stays in Polly’s decaying house. When mold, generated by Polly, begins to grow on the wall, Lily incorrectly believes it has spread to her skin and clothes. Likewise, while attempting to make a phone call to a friend, Polly yanks on the cord, sending the phone flying back and startling Lily. Whenever Lily attempts to engage with any technology in the home, such as the television set or the phone, or to reassure herself of her training in modern medicine, acknowledging that the anxiety and paranoia aren’t real, Polly is there to seep into and disrupt her semblance of normality.

While watching this movie, I began to feel uneasy, as I recognized Lily’s situation as comparable to my own. For many first-generation Canadians, especially those whose parents were from war-torn or poor countries, growing up can sometimes be an emotionally unstable experience. In a recent article by April Dembosky, “Just Like My Mother: How We Inherit Our Parents’ Traits and Tragedies”, Dembosky uses the story of My-Linh Le and her Vietnamese parents to illustrate how Le has literally internalized her mother’s hardships, causing her own mental health issues. The article also mentions that trauma can be inherited through genes. I believe this assertion can be taken a step further:

in addition to inheriting our parents’ pasts, we grow up inheriting social cues of the present world: how to perform as your gender, or how to express or hide your emotions, to name just a few.

Although Polly’s plight is not at all similar to Lily’s experience, Lily is forced to inherit and accept it. Much like any of us, she must navigate the past even if she doesn’t want to.

Horror movies tend to receive low ratings, as the genre is often said to have poor character

development, simplistic plots, and rely on cheap scares. *I Am The Pretty Thing That Lives In the House* scored as no exception, receiving low ratings on both IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes. While the plot is simplistic at first glance, the character development is superb and the movie uses excellent camera work and storytelling to leave the viewer with a long-lasting chill up their spine.

I Am The Pretty Thing That Lives In The House will not scare you in traditional ways. It will not throw jump scares at you with shrieking monsters. It will not shock you with copious amounts of blood and gore. The real scare of this movie is in its subtext: Lily’s slow descent into panic, a descent that is all too familiar.



Nightgowns: A Dream About Gender

Jessica Rodriguez Leon

I went to a gay club in a small, Cuban fishing town this summer. To be honest, it wasn't much of a club. It was an outdoors banquet hall located next to the beach, a relic of an affluent Cuba, like most structures on the island. A few tables and chairs were set up next to a small stage. The place may not have looked like a club, but it was definitely gay. Queer life, queer love engulfed the petite room. Fifty-something of us danced along to the hottest Latinx tracks and chain-smoked in anticipation of the drag show. It was a long, yet worthwhile wait.

The drag queens were beautiful, humorous, and passionate. It was here, in a country where visibility can be deadly, that I felt the revolutionary power of queer communities for the first time in my life.

I think about that night often. When I watched *Nightgowns*, I thought about it instantly, although in many ways *Nightgowns*, a Brooklyn-based, monthly drag show, is nothing like the Cuban drag show I attended. It is the creative child of the bold and beautiful Sasha Velour, winner of Season 9 of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. The performances featured in the show are theatrical, magnetic, and most importantly, queer. First launched in August 2015 and held in Brooklyn bar, Bizarre Bushwick, the event has now moved to the much larger music venue, National Sawdust. The show is a celebration of the diverse Brooklyn drag scene, and each performance is a testament to this. Authentic self-expression fuels each performance, and this is what unites the two drag shows for me: the fearless representations of queer artistry and the emphasis on building a visible queer community. I watched a pivotal performance – the first to take place at National Sawdust on April 2017. The stage and the audience seemed to triple in size. *Nightgowns* and the Cuban drag show I witnessed may greatly differ, yet they

both make the same compelling statement to audiences.

Nightgowns is difficult to categorize, just as Sasha Velour is difficult to categorize. Her drag style is inspired by many sources – queer and feminist theory, pop culture, villains and monsters. Her existence stands as a foil to the archetype of the hyper-feminized style of drag that has become popular with mainstream audiences. With *Nightgowns*, Velour continues to invite diverse interpretations of drag. She is conscious of the importance of highlighting drag's full potential: "Any form of drag isn't complete unless it's diverse and showcases a variety of performers. There needs to be space for the voices of trans, non-binary, and performers of colour."¹ In addition to being a celebration, the show is also about queer activism. Various performances are by local activists; the show raises funds for local queer organizations, such as the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, which provides legal aid to low-income, POC, transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming people. Ultimately, *Nightgowns* is a champion of the queer community. It creates a space of possibility, as Velour pushes the revolutionary aspects of drag to centre stage.

Interestingly, the nightgown largely belongs to the realm of the private. It is donned for bed, and thus is a part of a (gendered) bedtime ritual. This ritual is comprised of stripping down and accepting vulnerability. Each night, the body is laden with ghostly imprints leftover from the day costumes. Colour and definition are washed off the face. Stripping myself for bed, I am fully aware of my crude exterior, my true exterior. Yet the nightgown also communicates glamour: comfort aside, it is undeniably a thing of beauty. In its most common iteration it is silky smooth and bold in colour. It drapes us in femininity and sensuality, even in our unbecoming. It reminds us that in –even our most private moments we are part of a larger spectacle. It reminds us that our gender performance does not require spectators.



Top to Bottom: Vigor Mortis performs Mad World, Pearl Harbor unpacks her cultural baggage, Sasha Velour stuns audience with her projections.

Glamour and unbecoming are both employed and deconstructed in the theatrical performances of *Nightgowns*. Throughout the show, Velour and company intertwine contrary elements: the personal is political, the private is public, the unsightly is visible. Invoking the theme of *possibility*, Velour proclaims drag to be a “a dream about gender.” *Nightgowns* is most successful in its ability to champion complexity. It embraces intersectionality within the queer community. It welcomes a wide range of aesthetics. It invites the performer to interpret a drag performance as they wish. As a result, the show has a whimsical feel to it, and the audience is pulled into a lull as they witness these dreams about gender.

Poetics dominate the performance of actress, singer, activist, and dancer Francesca. She begins the performance with a spoken word poem aptly titled “G.E.N.D.A.” The poem addresses New York’s Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act, which would incorporate gender expression as a protected class in various state laws. It illustrates the struggle of the transgender community in New York by revealing staggering statistics. She recounts the discrimination she has endured in the workplace as a gender-nonconforming individual. She then continues her poetic performance, this time letting her body speak. She kicks, she twists, she rises, she falls. Béla Bartók’s *The Miraculous Mandarin* coupled with a harsh, red light create a sense of anxiety, an anxiety tied to gender performance.

Gender is a crucial element in many *Nightgowns* performances. Yet, I found the performance of trans drag king, Vigor Mortis, to be particularly touching in its treatment of this theme. I’m consumed by his troubled gaze from the very second the spotlight exposes him. Michael Andrews’ *Mad World* begins to play and my mood instantly darkens. Mortis is wearing a bright pink dress and tulle bow on his head. He is lip syncing to the song, all the while gazing at the audience in a desperate call for help. This

performance feels more like a nightmare than a dream. He then removes the bow, and slowly, the dress is gone, as well. Mortis bares himself for the audience. All he is left with is white boxer briefs. On his chest, the word “BOY.” The image produced is raw, personal. Once again, gender is a source of anxiety; yet that final image Mortis produces is a testament to its potential to be liberating.

Pearl Harbor, poet and public intellectual, moves beyond gender to examine the intricacies of our identities. She often addresses the audience through text – poetry, questions, requests for applause. The text she uses is playful in a number of ways – the fonts, colours, and capitalization are as unstable as her identity. She brings a suitcase along with her, and begins to *literally* unpack her “cultural baggage.” Her performance is heavy, yet she lightens it with her humorous techniques. She questions her citizenship status while lip syncing along to a bubbly cover of The Cure’s *Friday I’m In Love*. Then an interruption: a threatening voice demands the name of the first president of the United States and images from her United States visa application are projected behind her while she assembles a microphone, topped with a corn husk. Now begins the second half of her act; it is a lip sync to The Eurythmics’ *Here Comes the Rain Again*. She’s captivating to watch, a synth-pop star making love to every inch of the stage.

Each *Nightgowns* performance feels like a confession. Each is alluring in bewildering ways. I am still haunted by glamour ghoul Severely Mame’s dramatic lip sync to Bauhaus’ *Bela Lugosi is Dead*. I am warmed by the nostalgic, touching tribute Scarlet Envy performs for her father. I am intrigued by Hysteé Lauder’s alien-esque performance to a mashup of Patrick Bateman’s monologue from *American Psycho* and Björk’s *Venus As a Boy*. I am struck by Velour’s visually striking, closing performance of Annie Lenox’s *Love Song for a Vampire*, in which she masterfully employs projections

and props. Each performance is enchanting and diverse. *Nightgowns* actively seeks to complicate interpretations of gender and drag performances. It seeks to uncover multiplicities and highlight individuality, all the while building a strong queer community.

Velour has high hopes for *Nightgowns*. She envisions it as a travelling circus and non-profit organization all at once.² This devotion to give voice to queer communities everywhere is what makes the show revolutionary. As the reigning queen of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, Velour has all eyes on her. She has the means to achieve her dreams for *Nightgowns* and she’s been hailed by many as “the future of drag” because of her artistry and intersectional approach. Both attributes are displayed by all of the performers featured in *Nightgowns*. Still, I do not see *Nightgowns* as the future of drag. It’s the now. These drag performers do not belong to some tentative future, they are here today. *Nightgowns* is about infusing the world with possibility and creating revolutionary communities, and it does this by showcasing the artistic genius of diverse drag performers out there right now. In that Cuban gay club, the drag queens are pioneers setting the stage ablaze for the possible futures to come, but they too are the present of drag, and they too, must be witnessed today.

¹Rachel Grace Almeida, “Drag queen Sasha Velour is America’s next superstar,” *Dazed*, 2017, <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/36527/1/drag-queen-sasha-velour-is-americas-next-drag-superstar-interview>

²Joey Guerra, ‘Drag Race’ winner Sasha Velour says ‘there’s always room for a bit of silliness,’ *Chron*, 2017 <http://www.chron.com/entertainment/tv/article/Drag-Race-winner-Sasha-Velour-says-there-s-11247809.php>



The Audience & The Audience

Daniel Schrempf

An opportunity to push someone into a pool is a hard thing to pass up. At the heart of it, I feel it's rarely malicious, but there is such a satisfaction in temporarily disorientating another person. This mischievous inclination seems to be a defining characteristic in all of my favourite filmmakers, but recently, Ruben Östlund created the best example I've ever come across. His most recent film *The Square* isn't a mind-bending trip like Kubrick's *2001*; it's not a choppy ride on a time machine like Nolan's *Memento*; and it's not whiplash from a Shyamalan twist. In short, it's not a kaleidoscope, but that doesn't make it any less perplexing.

The story follows a museum curator and his team as they attempt to open a new exhibit. It is garnished beautifully with small rants appealing to – and validating the opinions of – anyone who remotely understands the fickle nature of publicly-funded art, decisions made by committee, or any form of customer service work. These anecdotes line the edge around the obvious question at the centre of the film: whether art is intrinsically valuable or worthless, and how impossibly difficult it can be to discern the difference between the two. After properly digesting the many episodic iterations of this argument, you are left with another question: at what point (and under what conditions) are you willing to trust a stranger?

There is no scene more potent than Terry Notary's performance art piece (or, as it will inevitably become called, *the gorilla scene*). The scene opens during an event for several dozen art dignitaries, all of whom seem dressed in proportion to their pride in being invited. Notary's character – a performance artist – is then presented to the audience. Despite very obviously being a shirtless man strapped with fore-arm stilts, he is just as obviously lacking any trace of humanity. The performance is introduced by a brief voice over narration which, despite speaking of animal survival in the wild, is dismissed by the audience as an anticipated

pretentious preamble. Then the mood changes. The following scene – while undoubtedly long – feels significantly longer. The artist makes his rounds between the rows of delighted patrons who, as time goes on, turn to captive statues. As the last burst of nervous laughter fades, a man is driven from the event cursing. Then the curator stands and applauds the performance. The crowd joins him in intense relief as if waking up from a nightmare. This relief is broken almost immediately by another bellow from the artist, returning the audience to the hell which they had momentarily left. The scene finishes with tables of paralytics, completely unable to help the screaming woman who has been pinned to the ground by a performer who, at this point, has completely crossed the threshold from inspired artist to uncontrollable animal. Mercifully the patrons make the transition into animals themselves and rush the artist, beating him into submission.

I say mercifully because, as a viewer of the film, your agony is as real as that of the characters. You ask the same questions.

Even with a near-complete lack of dialogue, both fictional and real audiences are wondering, is this real? We've been pushed into a pool, and for all our collective trying, no one knows which way is up.

This is not a new result for performance art; in fact, it could be argued that most performance art plants a variation of this question in viewers' minds. What makes this scene exceptional is it has been fed back through the machine twice. Not only do we react to the performer, but also to the audience reacting to the performer, even though it is clearly understood that this film is fictional. Furthermore, this is done without gratuitous effects (buildings don't collapse into themselves) or jarring reveals (the characters don't wake up from a dream).

The situation is never addressed again in the film; it makes its point purely through razor-sharp execution. In the traditional sense of storytelling, nothing is truly solved in the film. But to ask what the point is misses the point entirely. Mastery of performance art, then, has everything to do with the ability to articulate examples rather than the delivery of clear conclusions. The tricky part is successfully achieving this without alienating the audience. In other words, if you're going to push someone in a pool, it's funny if you know the pool is shallow and they can stand up, it's criminal if you know it's a diving tank and you know they can't swim.

Östlund's *The Square* is the shallow pool, deep enough to disorient but not disturb. It is an ambitious and measured foray into a difficult topic to pin down. His melancholic – borderline-cynical – eye for human experience comes across sympathetic and understanding. It is rare to take a concept and present it in such a pedestrian way without completely gutting the concept itself. Östlund pushed me into a pool, and I'm anything but mad about it.



Fifty Thousand Dollars

Gregory Severin

The AIMIA/AGO Photography Prize began in 2007, aiming to “recognize the best in Canadian and international contemporary photography”.¹ The prize was originally formed in partnership with Aeroplan (a travel rewards company), and has a unique selection process that moves from the international to national stage. An affiliated selection of curators, critics, and artists from around the world each submit their choice of two artists. These candidates then move to a three-person jury, led by a curator from the Art Gallery of Ontario.² This jury chooses a shortlist of four artists.³ The viewers choose the winner. And the winner receives fifty thousand dollars.

Liz Johnson Artur, a Ghanaian-Russian photographer, has been documenting black communities since 1991, with her ongoing project Black Balloon Archive being her entry in this year’s AIMIA/AGO Photography Prize. Black Balloon Archive is built from Johnson Artur’s personal collection, and is made up of subtle compositions of people, by themselves or with others, within communities or groups, in the light or in the night, further contextualized by the presence of traditional African masks interspersed through the images. The near-perfect simplicity of her images drew me in. I voted for her, and my vote will help determine if she wins fifty thousand dollars.

Viewers are judges. Whether or not they externalize their opinion through speech or writing, and whether they form an “actual” opinion or not, they have judged the work, both in their thoughts and actions.

Whether or not they externalize their opinion through speech or writing, and whether they form an “actual” opinion or not, they have judged the work, both in their thoughts and actions. Walking away from a work, after spending an absolutely minute amount of time with it, is judgement. Taking a prohibited cell

phone self-portrait with it, as two young women did during my visit to this show, is judgement. And normally, judgement that involves fifty thousand dollars is reserved strictly for Judges (with a capital J), or “real” critics; those who are published, highly educated, and have “taste-making” ability.

It is strange to place upon the viewer at least partial-onus for what, to many, looks like a year’s salary. Maybe it is the familiar setting of an art exhibition that makes this show approachable. Perhaps if before entering, the implications of voting were actively and clearly explained, how each vote helps determine which artist will win fifty thousand dollars, people would approach it differently. At the very least, they would be informed of a certain duty. When I voted, it came from a participatory impulse; I did not fully understand its importance. This lack of clarity is the core of the show’s problems, as the viewer’s transformation from judge to Judge occurs silently. And this ability of the viewer, a true Judge, to forgo the voting process, only further complicates the understanding of what this show wants to achieve. If its Judges do not vote, the show does not work. And as the gallery cannot make the viewer cast their vote, there is a sense of hesitance, making the importance of actively choosing an artist to win, seem less serious, less immediate. If the conditions of attendance were made clear, then viewers would be incapable to attend the AIMIA prize as merely a dose of culture. And with fifty thousand dollars on the line, it could not be more pertinent.

The AIMIA/AGO Photography Prize does not know what it wants. The serious implications of voting are ineffectively communicated. Its Judges walk the floor talking, taking selfies, casually skimming over images. All this, when they are the only ones who can choose who will win fifty thousand dollars.

¹ Art & Science, “AIMIA | AGO Photography Prize,” History of the Prize, , accessed September 19, 2017, <https://www.aimiaagophotographyprize.com/history>.

² Art & Science, “AIMIA | AGO Photography Prize,” About the AIMIA | AGO Photography Prize, accessed October 10, 2017, <https://www.aimiaagophotographyprize.com/about>.

³ Ibid



Wind River: A Film Review

Donovan Taplin

Hypothermia is a horrifying way to die, but it is not the cold's fault.

We often frame unforgiving landscapes and seascapes as villains. Every devastating hurricane is assigned a human name. Human names become euphemisms for natural disasters and their resultant tragedies: Katrina, Irma, Harvey.

But Shakespeare got it right: it is human characters which make a landscape chaotic. In *Macbeth*, dreadful weather underlines the play's dark tone and the treacherous, brutal, and macabre interactions of its characters. Recall the witches who ask: "When shall we three meet again / In thunder, lightning, or in rain?" This is a fascinating question, as the witches themselves can control the weather. They create a landscape of mischief, not the weather itself.

Nature is not evil or benevolent. Nature is indifferent. I would go further and say indifferent is still too anthropomorphic a term to describe nature, for indifference again implies emotional options and a choice. Nature simply is.

In 2012, when my home province was shocked by the death of a young man who perished after walking nineteen kilometers during a wintry night, I knew some journalists were telling the wrong story. Burton Winters was a fourteen-year-old boy riding his snowmobile near his home in Makkovik, Labrador. Makkovik is an isolated, sub-arctic community populated mostly by Inuit people. After his snowmobile got stuck in the ice, the boy walked for hours until freezing to death. Reports on the tragedy consistently made Labrador's climate the antagonist. With references to frigid temperatures, remoteness, wind, ice, and snow, one might construe a deliberately cruel environment ought to stand trial for murdering the boy. But this belied the event's human dimensions. In the years since his death, community members from Burton's hometown called for an inquiry. They believe government

systems failed Burton Winters. It took two days for search and rescue teams to start looking for the boy. It was a "bureaucratic blizzard" which cost Burton his life. Labrador's frozen land is not itself evil, but, as Newfoundland's Premier Kathy Dunderdale would later admit, the government's response to a child lost on the tundra was a "moral failure."

When I recently watched the film *Wind River*, I couldn't help but think of Burton Winters. When considering tragedy in a place like Makkovik – one marred by violent colonialism – to point fingers at a wintry landscape is scapegoating at its most desperate and most vacant. Though the desolate Wyoming landscape is an undeniable character in Tyler Sheridan's *Wind River*, his rejection of nature as an antagonist is the film's most responsible and intelligent decision. *Wind River*, which takes place on the periphery of the real-life Wind River Reservation, not only refuses to portray space as inherently evil but goes so far as to ask its viewers to consider their own role – or their share in a collective responsibility – in creating a place which is dangerous and unjust.

Wind River follows the death of a young Indigenous woman on the Wind River Reservation. The first character introduced in the film is not the woman but indeed the landscape. A static, wide-angle opening shot of a cold iridescent moon over an endless snowy terrain could just as easily be a painting until the audience sees a small figure rushing across the barren terrain. Later, her body is discovered by a ranger. She died from her lungs bursting due to inhaling sub-zero air for so long. She had run for miles barefoot.

The film traces the investigation of the woman's death, by an ill-equipped FBI agent from Las Vegas, who, working with the ranger who discovered the woman's body and the local Tribal Police Chief, is tasked with solving the crime. The FBI agent's relationship – or lack thereof – to the landscape tempers the film's overarching social messages.

The FBI agent arrives without even a winter coat and must borrow one from the closet of the ranger's deceased daughter, who had died in the frozen landscape under suspicious circumstances not long before the events of the film. The FBI agent comes to embody the role of the white-settler audience member: ignorant, even dismissive, desiring to assert superiority without cause. She is quickly advised "this is not the land of backup, this is the land of you're on your own" by the Tribal Police Chief, and later "luck doesn't live out here, luck lives in the cities" by the ranger.

Wind River dedicates worthwhile time to the FBI agent's snowmobile ride to the victim's body. The ride is her, and our, introduction to the Wind River Reservation. The sequence is lengthy and features punishing crunches of snow and loud mechanical roars parallel to wide-shots of disorienting blizzard conditions. By the time she arrives at the body, so too has Sheridan's audience: the landscape of the Wind River Reservation and the lived experiences of those who inhabit it are bound to unnerve you, and, more importantly, make you question the tacit and active roles settlers have played in maligning traditional transformations of space into place. Traditional territories become "Indian Reservations," a snowy field the site of murder.

In *Wind River*, the unforgiving landscape is not portrayed as inherently villainous, or inherently sacred, but instead is a space made meaningful by social actors.

Another scene in the film shows a group of Indigenous men around a flaming metal barrel outside their trailer, with a tattered American Flag flying upside down. Their distress signal is an expression of generations of neglect and oppression toward their people and the place they inhabit. In *Wind River*, Sheridan

effectively utilizes imagery of the Wyoming landscape, and the ways residents of the Wind River Reservation express themselves within that context, to activate a critical thought in his audience.

For Sheridan, tragedy is not the fault of a challenging land, but the fault of those who alter its meaning by disrupting peoples' relationship to the land they inhabit. In other words, it was not the land that killed anyone, but the men who sent people running over it, and the systems who failed to save those people.



Public Problems

John Verhaeven

I hate most murals, especially urban murals. I drive, bus, bike and walk across the west end of this city regularly and let me tell you, there are some hideous examples.

In Toronto, we are subjected to an unmeasured collection of human figures, and landscape scenery distorted by poor execution and obscured by avian grit and overlaid scrawls of egotistical “tag” graffiti. Located primarily on concrete underpasses or construction hoarding, these pictorial collages make little attempt to live up to the most basic precept of urban improvement - to bring life to a dead space.

North Toronto artist and illustrator Adrian Hayles’ mural at the corner of Weston Road and Eglinton Avenue, titled simply *Mount Dennis*, is no exception to this long list of public, graphic failures. The mural on the construction hoarding at the future site of the Mount Dennis LRT station is an attempt by the provincial transit agency Metrolinx to distract the community from the ugly scar that has been created by this massive construction project. The mural was co-sponsored by the PATCH Project, who involved a local high school art class in the process.

Mr. Hayles does possess the unique ability to make the mundane mystical. His website boasts several projects that have successfully transformed our concrete jungle.

For example, his op-art inspired *Island Mural* on the traffic island at the intersection of Oakwood and Vaughn depicts two fishing boats moored to the actual concrete park benches. He surrounds the benches with graphical representations of water that lap up against the other upraised structures in the parkette: the garden bed, the water fountain and even the city trash bin. The combination of blues and oranges is vibrant. It makes the concrete look wet.

But back at Eglinton and Weston, Mr. Hayles’ mural fails to connect, regarding both content (too broad) and scale (too small).

This is not the first time a public artwork has been despised in our neighbourhood, and as development increases, it will not be the last.

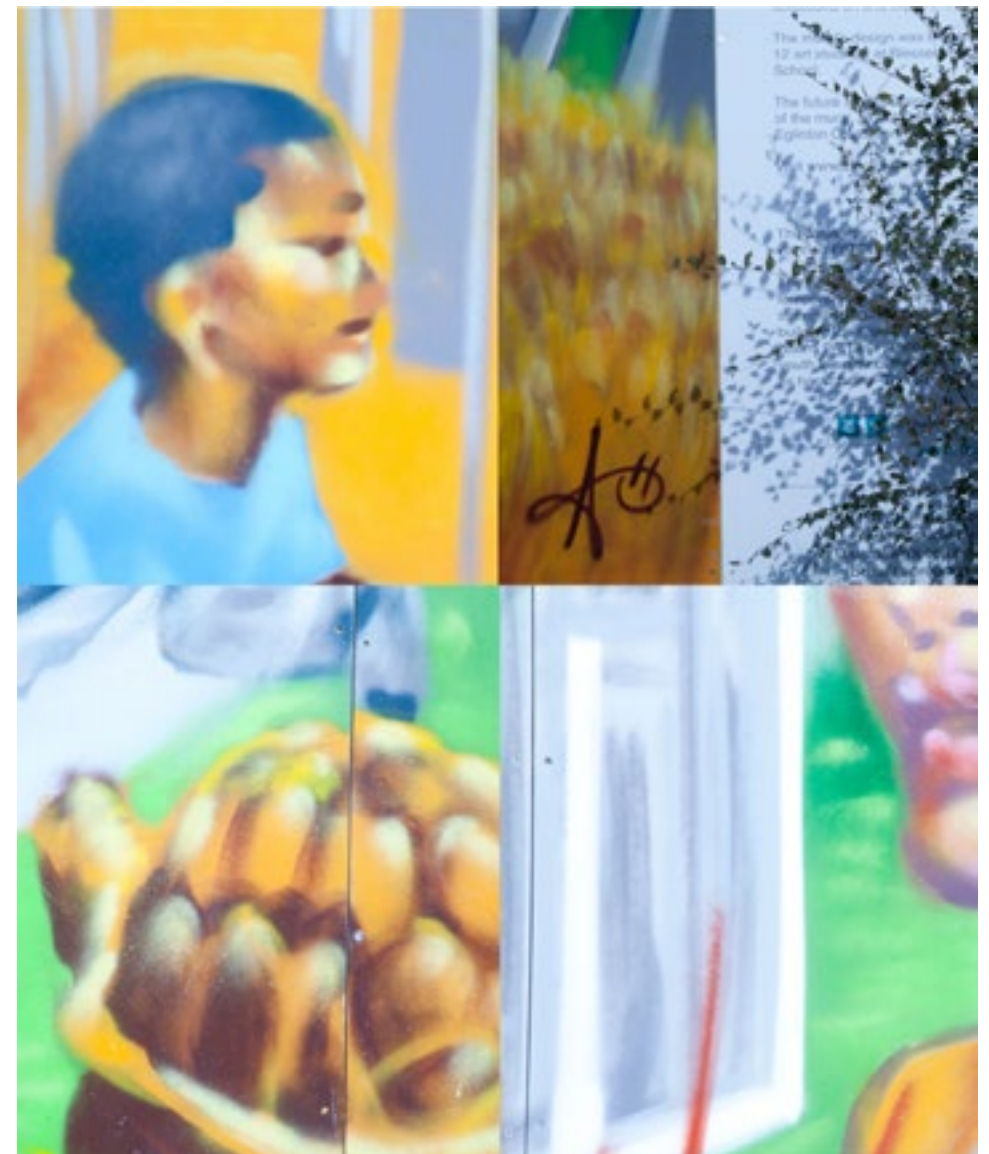
For a bit of context, I wanted to look at a larger-scale and very different public artwork that was installed four years ago, just down the road at Weston Road and Dennis Avenue.

Nyctophilia means “Love of Night” or “Love of Darkness,” depending on which local newspaper you refer to, the *Toronto Star* or the *Toronto Sun*. The work consists of 36 variably-coloured street lamps, and artists Christian Giroux and Daniel Young describe it as a “modulated cloud of light.” The LED lights sit at various heights, clustered across eleven 32-foot-high concrete light posts. The lights can be programmed to change colour regularly.

Nyctophilia has its detractors. The aforementioned *Toronto* dailies seemed to take much glee in presenting indignant and confused residents saying things such as, “They say it is art ... I just don’t get it” and “It’s just confusion. What were they thinking?”.

There is no shortage of perturbed arm-crossed residents willing to have their picture taken while spouting their common-sense politics and condemning the latest municipal spending debacle: one such is Jeannette Mesarosh, the angry resident featured in the *Sun’s* take.

And “It may be art, but it is plug-ugly and conceived by 40-watt bulbs, in our opinion,” the *Star* concluded.



Personally, I love *Nyctophilia*. Any evening that I drive or walk past it, I think of how delightful it is.

Hmm. So now what do I make of my negative response to Adrian Hayles' mural *Mount Dennis*?

How different am I from Jeannette Mesarosh, the woman staring indignantly into the *Sun* photographer's lens? Whose opinions should we listen to when it comes to these matters of public art?

I went by the traffic island at the corner of Oakwood and Vaughn Road to see Hayles' *Island Mural*, the one that I was originally so attracted to from his website. The water motif that covered most of the ground is gone, worn away by rain and street cleaning, I assume. But the metal palm tree is still there. In a short time, it has been reduced to more of an abandoned island rather than an inhabited one.

Things rarely end up looking and functioning exactly as conceptualized in art projects. This rule goes double for public art.

Even though *Mount Dennis* is garbage to my eyes, perhaps its true value is to someone else. Any one of those high school students, for example, who engaged in this project, may have found it to be positive and life-affirming. Surely their positive experience outweighs my personal aesthetic preferences. I can accept that.

I will, however, continue to mutter to myself every time I have to pass it on the way to the bus stop.

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Why I Photograph

Dominic Akena



When I pick up a camera I don't just to photograph what I see, I photograph things, places, and people, to help me learn to see the world better.

I pick up a camera and photograph things to help me remember and reflect on the moments I never want to forget. I photograph things because I own a camera, I know how to aim it at things and press the button.

I photograph things because it gives me the power to freeze a moment in time, in regard to the fact that everything changes by the seconds and nothing is ever the same as it was in the moment they appears.

My desire to use a camera to engage with the world around me began as a silly childhood dreams.

I included this images because I want to write about it in more detail later. I took this picture of my nephews three years when I went back to visit my family in Uganda. It's been ten years since I left home and everything has changed. I photographed my nephews because they reminded me of how I used to wake up early and play outside, in nature, from sunrise to night- fall.

When I was very young I used to play outside all the time. I would build my own kingdom and palace, and everything I put in my palace was under my control. I felt immune to distractions.

Sometimes I would stop to respond to my mother calling my name. Other times I would just stop to look at the plane passing by in the sky. It was always a challenge to see the actual plane, because it is always so bright up in the sky, and the plane go so high. Sometimes the plane even looks smaller than a hummingbird. But every time I stare intensely in the endless sea of the blue sky, from the minute I hear the airplane to the minute it disappears; I always wonder what it might feel like to fly up so high.

But that dream seemed too far out of my imagination, to think that I could be flying so high someday. Now every time I fly home I look down, wave and smile at the "little Dom" as I imagine my young self standing on the ground looking up. And I'd whisper to myself "I am sitting in the plane and I'm flying so high."

I haven't made anything that I am happy with, and I still don't know what that work will be for me. But I am learning to be my own artist. I want to make my own statements, to create my own memories, and to engage and change the world around me in ways I only know how to. I have lost my sense of self. I feel consumed by the fear of being irrelevant, and the biggest art work I want to make will be the one that make stop questioning my purpose in life. For now I just want to dance the happiness up and down.



Some Thoughts on Art at the Moment

Lysle Hood

I love to paint. I love to dance. I love to sing. I love to sculpt. I love to photograph. And I love to write. But my paintings are not hanging from gallery walls. You will never see me on Broadway. I do not even own a camera. And although I feel an innate inclination to write, I am rarely satisfied with the results. Perhaps I am not one of these things, but all of them. All at once.

A challenge I face as an artist is accepting that I am, indeed, an artist. I often feel as if I am not doing justice to my art unless I am actively creating, or unless my work is recognized or praised. If I am not painting, am I still a painter? If no one reads my poem, am I still a poet? It occurs to me that being an artist is, above anything else, a mentality. The best part about embracing that mentality, I think, is having the ability—or, better yet, the desire—to approach all situations creatively.

Most all of my work is colourful. My paintings demand vibrant hues, and my poetry often uses colour in place of emotion. I think this attraction translates into my day-to-day life, too, for I consistently find myself being drawn to colourful clothing and décor. I once painted my bedroom bright yellow and orange. Surrounding oneself with colour is, for me, if not the most effective form of expression, the second-most valuable way to summon inspiration.

My most valuable source of inspiration? Movement. I can sit at a desk with a blank notebook for hours, but as soon as I get up and start walking, the words begin percolating. Sometimes, as I move, ideas present themselves to me and disappear so quickly that I am unable to write them down. I will often wake up, after a midnight walk on a quiet night, to snippets of poems and stories that I've texted to myself. Sometimes the ideas that emerge from movement are complete nonsense. Sometimes, they aren't.

The content of my art is not concrete; however, I do find, perhaps only by coincidence, that most of my work deals with themes of nostalgia and snap-shot. For the most part, I do not start a project with a definitive idea of what I want to create. Instead, I let my art dictate how it wants to materialize. My only goal is to allow my art autonomy. Usually, characters in a story know themselves better than I do—and they aren't shy to tell me. Similarly, I can completely finish and retire a painting only to have it implore me to strike a bold brush straight across its front. Spontaneity—like space, colour and movement—is imperative to authentic expression. At its best, my art is organic and abstract. And, if I am to be so lucky, just a little bit wild.



The Truth About My Art

Tara Korkmaz



Top: *Dancing in the Seaweeds' Belly*, 2017, performance, video Projection, photographic collage, dimension variable.

Bottom: *Intervention with Brown Eyed Barbie Doll*, 2014, Doll, Sand and Acrylic Medium, Site-Specific.

As an artist with a passion for change, my concern is more about re-envisioning constructed realities than telling the “truth”. Time-based media such as film and photography help artists capture images of society that defy the historical processes of boundary-setting. The mobile nature of such media, and their reproducibility, enables art to engage with issues of time, both literally and conceptually. The artistic discipline does not define the artist; my work responds to society as a whole and welcomes all media.

In the digital age of creativity, information supremacy and robotic forces, it is not the job of the artist to just make things. Artists must engage in the critical thinking in order to conceptualize on the matters that are sometimes difficult to express with written or spoken language. The artists create artistic objects that reflect on society and its impact on the body. They deconstruct established meanings and cultivate concepts utilizing all relevant media. They cannot limit themselves to a specific discipline, a particular concept or a predefined space.

Compartmentalizing artists into one or another discipline only serves the institutionalization of art. Artistic freedom demands a form of anarchy, since established measures do not help the artist but those who seek financial gain from art. Power-seeking bodies can gain cultural dominance by exploiting art, which is rooted in society and in its nature.

Art that moves horizontally across platforms responds to the curvature of the culture and spreads stronger roots, which disrupts the implementation of vertical, restrictive processes.

In an era of anonymity and excess, the urge for recognition drives artists to work with competitive and materialistic goals. Established orders that operate through hierarchy and hegemony impel artists to become single-minded, with the promise to become the “best” and the “finest.” This vertical climb deteriorates the weft of artistic fabric and leaves not much to wrap around. Such an approach only serves a system that endorses limited visions. It repositions passionate artists from being a skillful thinkers to being a skillful workers, oiling the economic engine that moves the market. Artists need not possess the best in technique to create art. They deserve access to all sorts of exchanges, in order to work through any discipline that gives form to their ideas.

My interest in time-based media is as intense as my passion for painting, sculpture or anything else I do. It speeds up my imagination to move beyond gallery walls and towards mobile projects, with nomadic qualities that can take shape in different places. It also allows for some freedom in shifting time and space, which is important to the making and unmaking of the contemporary body as it shifts the cultural discourse.

As time adds itself to art as another dimension, the trajectory of an artwork changes with each new installation. Realities are social constructs that practice the politics of space and time. Artists working in time-based media can only virtualize a reality that was already assembled. Their version of events, no matter how honest, is neither real nor truthful. And frankly, too much emphasis on the truth is the job of the con artist.



Untitled

Ashleigh Larratt

Because my life has unfolded from two threads – spiritual awakening and psychological healing – making art helps me weave these two confusing journeys into one, orients me within a larger whole, and gives me a distinct voice. Video art was my first form of therapy and it lit up my path of self-inquiry. My first exhibited work was the film that celebrated my life, one to show at my funeral.

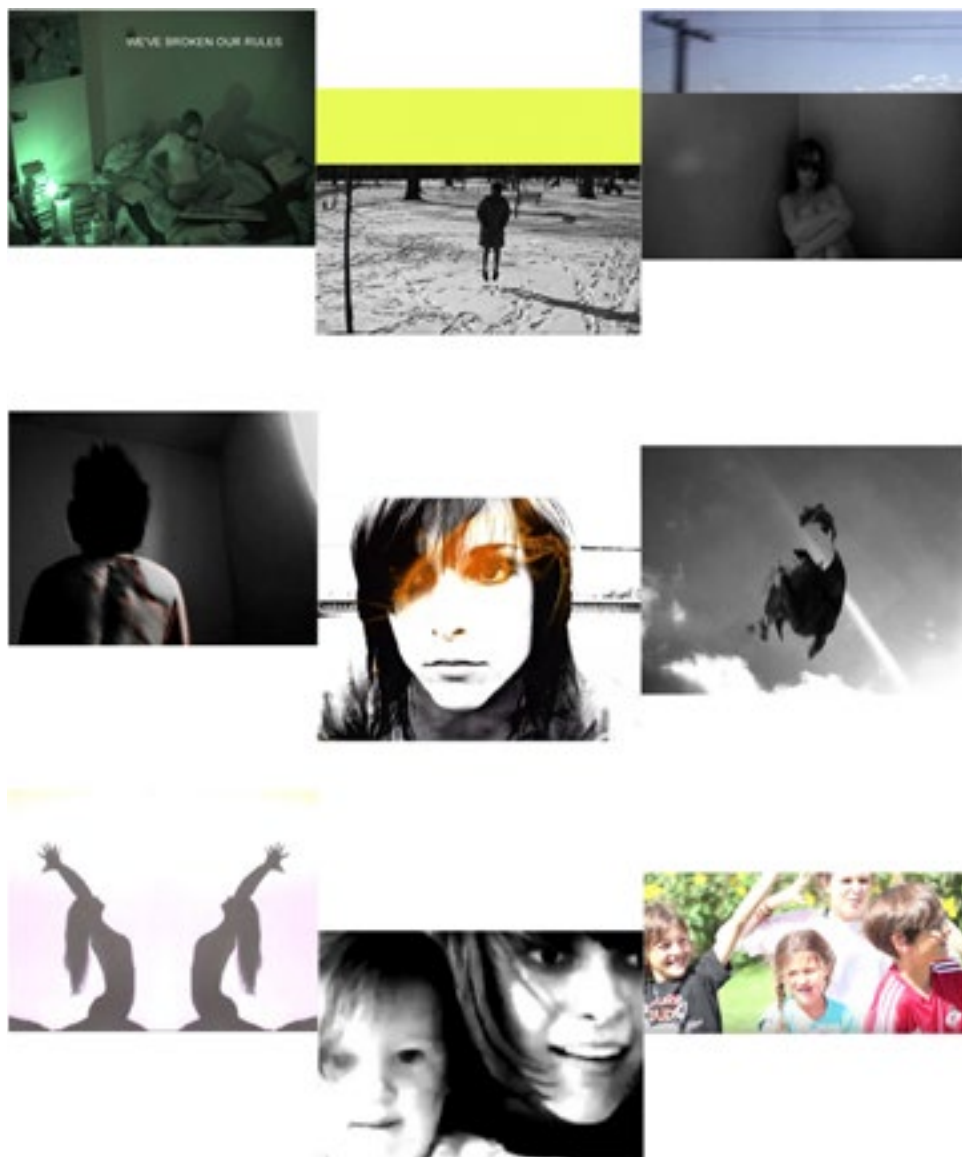
My first yoga class was a revelation. Lying in relaxation it struck me that this was the first time I was not afraid of being killed, or harming myself. I was beginning to see the terror I had been carrying my entire life. By exorcising parts of myself through into video works, I saw on the screen an Ashleigh that was no longer. I became less attached and felt better.

Then my focus shifted to showing other people's journeys. My world and my practice wasn't just about me anymore, I was seeing the beauty in others.

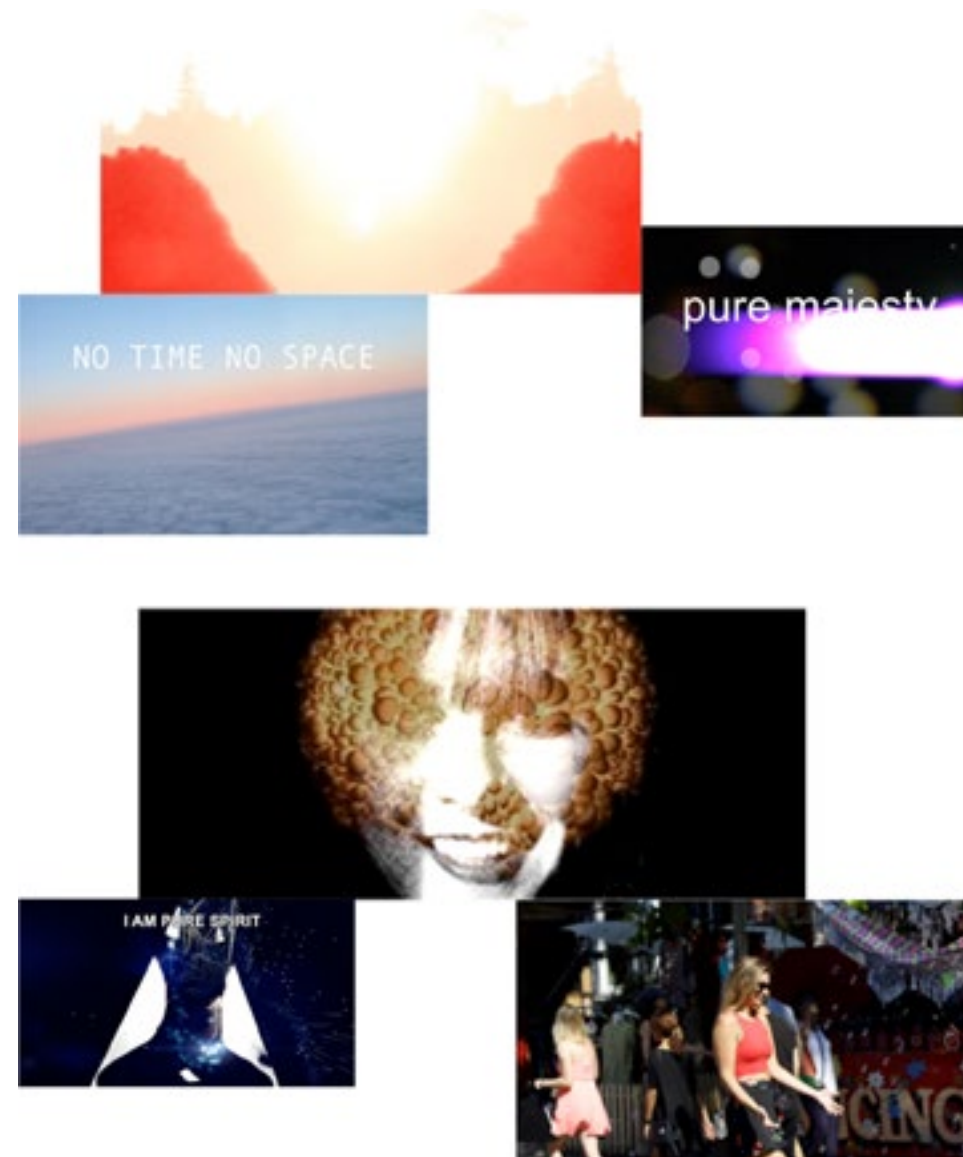
New work arose from a place of wholeness, inspired by conversations with enlightened teachers.

My current project, *LETTERS FROM MY FUTURE SELF*, continues this exploration of con-sciousness, from my own centre, while integrating my therapeutic insights into my work.

I believe I am doing what mystical artists did long ago, but now with video, expressing the sublime journey of being human in all places and times, especially when the ego has been brutalized. I shape and combine moving images, words, and sound, to explore the journey of the self, to overcome trauma and doubt, and to find intrinsic wholeness. My work is autobiographical, but because of my themes, hopefully helpful for others too.



From Top to Bottom:
Show It At My Fucking Funeral, 2006, video stills *Off*, 2008, video still.
They're All, 2008, video still. *Pair*, 2009, video still.
Space, 2009, video still. *Celebrating Joy*, 2011, video still. *Bija Party*, 2014, video still.



From Top to Bottom:
I was thinking about our conversation about airplanes, 2016, video still. *Feeling healing*, 2016, video still. *What kind of amazing?*, 2016, video still.
You told me I'd forget but also that I'd remember, 2017, video stills. *A love letter to Toronto*, 2017, video still.



Delphine Lewis

Personal Statement



Three years after graduation, I returned to my high school to meet Sasha. My sister was sixteen, an in-between age that I had only recently overcome, but could still remember vividly. My intention was to re-investigate teenage experience by photographing her at school and at home.

She leaped up onto the windowsill near the bathrooms on the 3rd floor, just as I used to do before class. Sasha leaned back onto her left arm and slouched forward, waiting, as I carefully loaded the film into my camera. I looked up: “Don’t move”. She stared at me with an indecipherable adolescent expression– the perfect photograph.

This was the first time that I had worked with a family member, and it was the last time I wouldn’t be completely transparent with my subjects. A silver gelatin fibre print of our first photograph hangs on my wall, an image of the origin of my photographic practice, but also of its new beginning.

As I continued to work with my sister that year, I realized that our interactions had become more interesting than our images. We had taken the time to speak to each other, and for the first time, I understood that we were both struggling with similar unexplainable emotional anxieties.

The final project became a video in which I used poetry to describe our parallel experiences from my point of view. And because of the vulnerability that I had revealed in this work, I couldn’t bring myself to share it with my sister.

I depend on the participation of my family members to explore notions of heritage, identity, the individual within the family unit, and sisterhood in my work. We are five main collaborators: three sisters, including myself, and two parents. As the photographer, I am acutely aware of the predisposed and subjective image I have of my family members. In order to respect their emotional boundaries, I consistently remind myself that, despite sharing intimate bonds, their experiences do not belong to me.

My work is a collaboration between family members and photographer, between private and public life, between my artistic aesthetic and the comfort of my subjects, and between reality and the posed photograph. It attempts to reveal that, even within close-knit family units, each person carries unique experiences.



Kenneth McDonald

Personal Statement



My mom divorced my alcoholic father when I was eleven. I went to a speech therapist the year after. She told my mom I hardly spoke and wouldn't say more than I had to: mostly yes and no answers. 'Your son doesn't speak much,' she said, 'so his speech is lazy.' I suppose my survival tactic in a tumultuous household was silence. If I couldn't be heard I wouldn't be seen. Instead I turned to music. This became my voice and my interpreter. I could express myself, without needing to say a word. A few years later I found photography, which became an extension of my eyes. And several years after that I found carpentry, which became an extension of my body and my hands.

Today I do not have trouble with speech. In fact, I have taken great pains to refine my diction and overcome the discomfort of expressing my opinion. That said, I still use music, carpentry and photography as extensions of myself, to communicate things I have found difficult to say. I use these extensions as limbs, to reach outside of myself, to find some kind of truth. But maybe nothing is true. Or what's true is changing. Or maybe truth is simply found in the act of reaching.

A palmist read my hand when I was twenty. She told me I was a chameleon. If unchecked, this could be a dangerous trait, she said. One can lose their identity when they continually adapt to their surroundings. My art is a means to curb this and not lose myself.

I try, I fail, I pull and I expand. I throw and something sticks, and it feels perfect. But the feeling is fleeting. And so I throw again, repeatedly, until something else happens.

It can be aggravating and exhausting. But when I don't make art, I feel anxious and alone. I become the unchecked chameleon, forgetting whom I am, disappearing into the world. I become my eleven-year-old-self – isolated.

So I make art. It's messy, but it's necessary. Without it I'm lost. My work has allowed me to reach outside and try to find something true. And if I'm lucky, my reaching may extend out and touch someone else, and speak to their loneliness.



Building Bridges

Natasha Ramoutar

My first paid publication, titled *In Between*, was about living in a cultural limbo; not quite fitting into Indo-Guyanese nor Canadian culture. For a very long time, I refused to write anything about my cultural identity. I told everyone that I didn't want to be an "ethnic" or niche writer, but the truth was I was afraid. The idea of writing about being Indo-Guyanese was frightening because I was worried about being inauthentic.

While I could handle criticism about my poetry or fiction, non-fiction placed me in a vulnerable position. I never fit the stereotype of the Indo-Guyanese-Canadian girl, who is typically sociable and extroverted. If writing is about relating to others, I was worried that my work wasn't valuable because I didn't fit this mold. I wanted so badly to be this person that I wasn't, going to fetes instead of reading books, to talk in fierce slangs and accents instead of my own soft voice.

Beyond not fitting in with being Indo-Guyanese in a Canadian setting, I didn't feel a connection to my mother's homeland. The Guyana that we visited as children was not the Guyana that she and my father told us about. My parents always described it a warm and welcoming home. When we visited, it felt frightening - everyone could tell we were from "out-away" by our clothes, accents, and mannerisms.

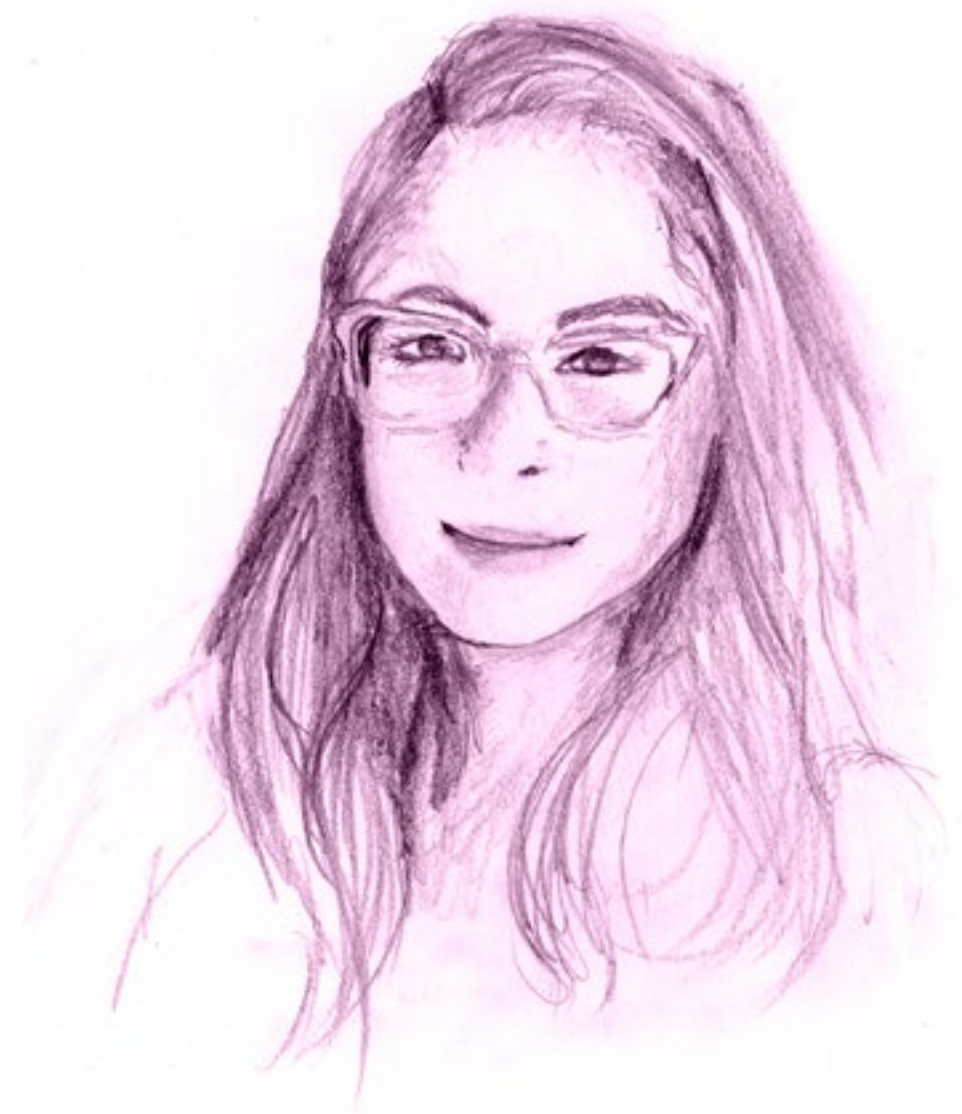
The homeland that my parents talked about wasn't my homeland, even though I so desperately wanted it to be. I tried to wear sundresses and got mosquito bites. I tried to enjoy the hot weather, but my hair frizzed and my skin baked.

Even further than that, I couldn't trace back this lineage to the one that I knew we had in India. We were so far removed that we didn't even speak the language. I took Bollywood and Kathak dance growing up, the one thin thread connecting me to Indian culture. My dance teacher used to choreograph certain dances to reflect the lyrics. One time, she asked me if I knew what "mohabbatein" meant. Of course I didn't know that it meant love.

It wasn't until a class assignment in my university writing class that I began to explore my identity the only way I know how - through snapshots and fragments. I would write short pieces outlining a memory or a sentiment, exploring that limbo space that I had once thought was empty. It was through freewriting that I was able to articulate these ideas, allowing my thoughts to flow onto the page without the self-criticism of not fitting in.

The first polished poem that resulted from these new strategies, entitled *On Reading*, was a childhood memory of my grandmother. Through Guyanese sweets and food as an extension of my grandmother, I discovered a fondness towards my heritage. I was able to build a bridge over this space and draw connections between my literal love of reading and her ability to read people. This piece later served as a jumping-off point for the rest of the poetry collection, allowing me to explore my Indo-Guyanese heritage through my family, via comparison and associations, rather than viewing this heritage in simpler terms.

The narrative that I have created is not linear or clean. This writing is as fragmented as my identity. It exists only in that space between one way of being or another, but somehow bridges them both.



Home and the Places I've Lived

Jessica Rodriguez Leon

When I was nine, I eagerly boarded an airplane for the first time. Aside from the novelty of the experience, I was elated by the feeling that I was on my way home. It's strange to admit I felt that way about a place I'd never seen, but Canada was where my family would finally be together. It was where I would belong. I arrived on a typical, dull winter day.

The lifeless trees and colourless architecture were immediately alienating, and suddenly, I knew I had been wrong. This was no home.

When I was fourteen, I returned to Cuba for the first time. Once again, I was driven by the feeling that I was on my way home. This time, it felt more important to know that I belonged somewhere. In Canada, I existed on the periphery. I could not call myself Canadian; but with my return to Cuba I found that I could not call myself Cuban, either. The second I stepped out into that humid Havana airport, I knew this place was no longer home. Subsequent returns to this airport would follow the same pattern. I anticipated a feeling that would never come.

*"this land was a new rhythm that i did not pick up easily
i struggled with the beat of this new, unknown routine
until one day, i woke up and no longer felt so strange
is this how you know that you're finally home?"*

18 langden

Home is a complicated thing. It's a term loaded with meaning, and yet it lacks any clarity. I've longed for home for many years. I came to understand home through my writing. I came to understand it as a place where my disjointed identities can co-exist. I am not Canadian, I am not Cuban. I am a hybrid, owning the pieces that fit and discarding the ones that don't. Today, I know that I will never find that one place I

belong because I belong to multiplicities. Like the idea of home, I too, am ambiguous.

I think of writing as time travel. Sometimes, I go far into the past and pick up perplexing pieces I left behind. Other times, I thrust myself into a dark future to plant seeds I hope will take. When I write, I feel an overwhelming sense of possibility. Everything—even home—is possible. I muster temporary homes for my outcast thoughts. I house feelings that would be dissipated without interpretation. I reinterpret definitions on my own terms and complicate them further. I define the narrative that then defines me.

In *Lived In*, a poetry zine, I traverse through time and space to explore all the places I've referred to as home, no matter how loosely. There's a poem for the townhouse where I became a Canadian citizen, one for the house where I spent my childhood summers, and one for my leopard Jansport backpack which once held all my personal belongings as I aimlessly travelled through the city of Toronto. Altogether, there are seventeen poems dedicated to each address I've inhabited. Each poem recounts a memory, a feeling, a desire, or a fear I've come to associate with a physical space in which I've resided.

*"i think of you when my skin stings in the winter
i think of you when i scald myself with hot water
i think of you when i can think of nothing else
and, i think, i do not like thinking about you at all"*

124 mccauley

Each poem represents a conversation with myself. Writing is a communicative ritual. The words come after I interrogate myself. My poetry is confessional, it is personal; sometimes, it feels like a secret I'm finally ready to share with myself. When I write, I bridge together puzzle pieces that do not appear to fit. I validate my existence; I validate the lived experience of those like me whose identities are rooted in

dislocation. I write for myself, but I write for others, too. When I write, I create space for a voice to which I've finally ascribed value, and this voice isn't mine alone.

In *Lived In*, I see myself grow up. I dig up all my inconsistencies and embrace them in a way I could not before. I think about the nine year old me. I think about the fourteen year old me. I think about how full my life has been, and how empty it has felt. I think about how perfect I wanted each home to be. I think about how some of these homes exist only as memories, lost to a world of constant motion. At twenty-five years old, I am no longer searching for home. I am no longer interested in existing in one place. I romanticized the idea of home for too long. Now, I want to be as scattered as my thoughts.

Every time I sit down to write, I ready myself to become someone new. I reflect on the person I have become and the choices I have made. I welcome the person that will be born out of this realization. Home is a muse that I summon, not something that summons me. My thoughts often end up in an imaginary airport, where they are free to come and go. Airports are where I've felt happiness and sadness, and everything in between. This is where my mind gravitates when I write. Sometimes the airport is humid, sometimes the airport is cold, but always it is a place of discovery. The airport is a starting point to get everywhere and anywhere, and that's where writing takes me.

*"i repurpose you without purpose
as i wander through streets and
bounce through rooms
trying to find space
where i can
live in"*

leopard jansport



(In Parentheses)

Daniel Schrempf



There is only one book I've started that I haven't finished. Despite being the worst piece of writing I've ever come across, the remaining fourteen unfinished chapters still nag me, six years later. I grew up being told to put things away when I was done with them, and I never found a convincing reason why I should do otherwise. I haven't gotten into coding, but I think it would be a great fit because if there's anything that I know how to do, it's to make sure my brackets are closed.

So naturally, my work follows the same rule book. My need to complete may be compulsive, but I don't feel that it's an affliction. As much as I feel the need to finish what I start, I've learned to leverage it for my own benefit. I found out that I thrive on risk and stress, and that I usually surprise myself.

I developed an understanding of delayed gratification early, and hung on to the point where it very nearly turned into asceticism. Once I figured out the principle, I unconsciously turned it into a game. I realized that my best work has been fueled on only the most essential amount of time, sleep, or – annoyingly – financial margin. I came across a poem by Bukowski that refuses to leave me: “if you're going to create you're going to create... air and light and time and space have nothing to do with it and don't create anything except maybe a longer life to find new excuses for.”² But instead of focussing on creating regardless of the situation, I ended up manufacturing restrictive circumstances. Finding the strength of a limited supply became the focus of my practice, and it was this thinking that drew me to photography.

There is a wonderful, intrinsic efficiency to photography. Take a photo of someone and from that point on it only increases in value. Look back at it in an hour and it brings back the feelings of the day; look back at it in a month and it brings on early stages of nostalgia; look back at it in a year and it might bring you to tears. You aren't mining anything either. It's often said that you take a picture, but the moment doesn't

result in a net loss. It's the closest thing to cheating the second law of thermodynamics; the subject of the photo remains the same, and yet something new emerges.

You can't create anything more valuable with anything less than you can with a photograph.

But the personal stunting wasn't the end in itself, injecting a healthy amount of stress was merely the scaffolding. This framework is still present in my work as a way to produce the maximum amount I'm capable of. Not only for the reasons I explained above, but because through this process I've discovered that I can surprise myself. I enjoy empty hands knowing that in a week's, or month's, or year's time, I will be holding something I've never seen before. This addiction has gotten to the point where I feel an intense responsibility for my ideas; an obligation to make real everything I have the misfortune to imagine. And while it does feel unfortunate – like biking around a corner to find a hill you weren't aware of – I've trained myself to focus on the exhilarating feeling of the downhill slope instead.

I hope this isn't just for my own sake. If I am remembered for only one thing, I hope it would be for being a deft communicator. I make the work I do not just for the sake of tying up loose ends, closing all my brackets, or compartmentalizing life in my head: it is ultimately so I can put it on public display, to communicate an idea as clearly as possible, to better understand someone else. In that statement right there, that's when I feel the term *artist* adheres most strongly to my life and work.

²Charles Bukowski, *The Last Night of the Earth Poems* (New York, NY: Ecco, 2002), 58.



Gregory Severin

Personal Statement



Growing up, there were good photos and bad photos. No manner of in-between. Everything was judged by the completeness of the frame. Maybe good or bad is too harsh; good or silent would be more accurate. My father was my teacher and critic. He wasn't trained visually and he wasn't severe. But he taught about visual sense, how a photograph made you feel when you looked at it. If there was something there, there would be a "Good". And if not, silence. Or a "Yeah..." or "This one's okay...". But they were all the same answer really, and I learned that quickly. I liked to say the photo "had it", if it carried that intangible quality that drew you in, if it was Good. And when it was Good, it was like finding beauty.

I am interested in photographs, documents of a moment, creating these intangibles. Stopping a moment, something that happened, and witnessing the beauty of it, being frozen by its indefinable qualities, is what I am drawn to. I am not chained to titles. They are like tattoos; they are self-limiting. I would rather "make photographs" than be a "Photographer". I want to look past myself, and create images that belong to themselves. Visual self-sustenance is the ultimate goal.

The photographer must strive to create images that live on their own. Any method of extensive explanation or justification made works to undermine its very being. The artist should not speak for the image. The subject should not speak for it.

And in that self-evidence, the photo becomes a remnant of a moment and the relationships within that moment. This is the connective tissue, the rope that ties maker and subject together. And it should absolutely not have to be spoken for.

**Only the image should speak
for itself**

But it is a tall order to create images that live on their own. It is even harder when the subject is part of you. The sport rituals I remember as a child, the militant-like hurrahs and shouts before the game began, were always accompanied by a feeling of nervous sickness. It took many years, over a decade, for those feelings to subside. And shortly afterwards, I was done with sports. But in those years, the people around me each had some sort of ritual that primed a mental and physical state. Some people sat in silence and others were loud and obnoxious. Some turned to music or prayed. Some had seemingly no moment of transition at all, showing up loose and very much unchanged. These moments stuck with me for many years, blending in my memory as one moment before one game.

The movement from comfort to competition is a stark one. There is something, a rare thing, which happens in the eyes of the competitor. It is a look that doesn't exist in everyday life. These rituals are some of the only places it still lives, and it is worth capturing. Being present in these moments, with a camera prepared, working silently at or below their eye level, is the method of choice. When you are on the street, people understand the implications of a camera. They will be immortalized, to an extent. However, this zone, where their eyes are set to look past the moment itself, is a place not easily shakeable. And that is the whole point. This is where being set on automatic is the desired mode. Don't think. Fall into position and do your job. This is a moment built for photography. And when athletes are listening to music or stretching, that stillness remains, locked in their eyes. With their eyes perfectly still, these images can connect these subjects together, through capturing the stillness of these rituals.

These images are made of love for that process and an intimate knowledge of it. And as they stand on their own, I'll let them speak.



I Was Born in 2015: A Short Statement on Art and Humanity

Donovan Taplin

I don't fear being an artist so much as I fear its prologues: depression and shame.

Mary Roach said as much about death, suggesting death “presents like a holiday on the beach” after one endures the stages leading up to it. The same is true about my journey toward becoming an artist. And it was that journey which made me re-think how I understand humanity.

The idea occurred to me during one of those rare moments when a student perks up during a lecture, jettisoned out of comatose because they can feel their mind expanding: ah-ha! It was my third year as an undergraduate student. My professor – in a course about religion and art – proposed that humanity was born not a quarter-million years ago as some scientists believe, but instead was born on the day our artistic engine was sparked, as recently as thirty thousand years ago, in the Chauvet Cave in France. Screening Werner Herzog's “Cave of Forgotten Dreams”, the professor argued that humanity as we know it began when we entered an era when the necessities of life (food, shelter, and security) were reasonably met, and we could start to create art. At the time, the prehistoric art preserved in the Chauvet Cave was considered among the oldest examples of artwork in the world. Since then, artwork found in an Indonesian cave may demonstrate humanity – if counting from our first artistic endeavours – could be even forty thousand years old.

The lecture challenged my assumptions about how old my species is, and, more profoundly, how old I am. I came to believe that just as humankind was not born some quarter-million years ago but instead on the day our artistic engine was sparked, an individual is taken into humanity not the day they first emerge from the womb, but the day their artistry begins. Some people are born at the age of 9. Some people are born at 99. We are not doomed to lose our creativity as children, nor, I would argue, are

we innately born into our artistic selves. Just as our prehistoric ancestors had to wait to be fully realized as artists, so too does the individual. In fact, my own creativity and artistry were stifled until adulthood. I had to live a while longer to be born.

Before I was Born - Queerdom:

There are three things about me you need to know at this point:

1. I'm queer
2. I've always been queer
3. I used to be unable to say numbers 1 and 2

The first time I saw the word it was in graffiti on the side of a movie rental shop. It was 1999, six years before we got marriage equality. Every Friday my parents and I would walk to a plaza not far from our small apartment and rent two or three movies which we would watch together over the course of the weekend.

Shielding my eyes from graffiti in the neighbourhood was a daily affair for my mother. “Don't look at that”, “Don't read that.”

On the side of the shop, in fat neon-green letters, there was a new piece of graffiti. “QUEER,” it said. I had never heard the term and barely knew how to say it.

“What does that mean?” I asked my mother.

“Um.” She was never nervous, always quick on her feet and confident when she spoke. “Well, it's uh – it's a bad word,” she told me. “You don't need to worry about it.”

If only she knew how much I would toil over it. She must have had some idea.

My mother hates my favourite photograph of her. She is twenty-three, perhaps twenty-four in the picture, around the same time I was born. She has one elbow on a table in front of her near a pack of playing cards. There's a cigarette pinched between her fingers, a towel wrapped atop her head to dry her hair, and the

widest most jubilant smile. I had to smuggle the picture, hid for years in a closet, out of my parent’s house when I moved for university.

If I close my eyes, that’s how I imagine her in my earliest years. It’s no surprise then my first time doing drag – at age four – I came into my parents’ bedroom one morning with a towel wrapped around me, chest-down, and another on my head. I was told never to dress like that again; it was for girls only.

Alexander Steinberg, a visual artist and drag queen known by the stage persona “Sasha Velour”, stated that “drag is the art of the queer imagination.” I had tapped into this idea then, so long ago mimicking my mother. But it was snuffed out. Would my mother ever have guessed some nineteen years later I would come to Ryerson University intent on making drag culture a central theme of my major research project?

I didn’t tap into my queer imagination again until at least 2006, when I started junior high school. I was a reader. Enough that when I got into a fight with my parents, I would quote authors I was reading, and they would yell back in frustration, “all the answers aren’t in some book!” My grandmother was a reader too. She often gave me books once she finished them. Finding a plastic bag ripping apart from the weight of books in my parent’s porch was a normal occurrence. It was strange then when one day she left behind just a single, small, red novel. It was “The Picture of Dorian Gray” by Oscar Wilde and had been initially published in 1890. Stranger still, she had written inside the book:

*October 20th, 2006
For my grandson who loves to read.
Enjoy someday.
Love Nan*

“Someday.” This was the first time she left me a book I apparently could not read that very day. I opened it and began.

In the centre of the room, clamped to an upright easel, stood the full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty.

As the painter looked at the gracious and comely form he had so skillfully mirrored in his art, a smile of pleasure passed across his face, and seemed about to linger there. But he suddenly started up, and, closing his eyes, placed his fingers upon the lids, as though he sought to imprison within his brain some curious dream from which he might awake.

Those passages can be found within just the first two pages of the book. I felt something while reading it. Something I had not tapped-into since wearing a towel around my head and body. This was queer art. It was subtle, but it was there. I couldn’t put my feelings into words; I couldn’t articulate it to others or even myself. While reading select passages in Wilde’s novel, I first admitted to myself: “I like boys but I can’t tell anyone.” And, when being more audacious: “I want to tell stories like this someday.”

Xavier Dolan, a young film director sometimes heralded as Canada’s next great auteur, has spoken about how his upbringing and his own art – often imbued with themes of queerness – was something he grew into. Dolan too had to wait to be born, to come into his humanity through artistic growth.

Dolan once said: “It had long dawned on me that I wasn’t like the other boys, and loved them more than we love friends. That was clear. What was also clear was that I didn’t want to be gay, and couldn’t be gay. Not there, not then.”

Dolan, perhaps like myself, succumbed in those early years to the insidious misplaced guilt of lying by omission and of performing each day to fit in.

For people of diverse gender and sexual identities, the first art we create is often fake art. Our first art is our performances designed to give the outward appearance of conformity.

Internally, suppressed wars rage on. Though I couldn’t phrase it like that as a child, I felt its dense, crushing weight.

Reading Oscar Wilde – a man eventually imprisoned for his homosexuality – was the earliest spark of my artistic engine, and of the potential for my spirit to break through to the surface. But I had to wait a while longer to be born.

Before I was Born - Depression:

Once, I woke up wet when I was ten. I felt shame, then despondency.

My family had just moved. It was our fifth home. They had bought the house in 2004 for twelve thousand dollars cash. I remember the stack of hundreds and thousands laid on my grandmother’s kitchen counter next to a bag of onions and a carton of molasses. I had never seen so much money. My mind could not reconcile a sum so noteworthy sitting next to our groceries. That much belonged in a vault, I thought, or a sleek metal suitcase with a lock code. My parents must be rich. It wasn’t until years later when I told someone from the city about the price tag of our house and was met with incredulity and then a guttural laugh that I realized I should keep it a secret.

I had not wet the bed. We hadn’t assessed quite how bad the house was. It was the first significant rainfall since we moved in and enough rain was coming through our roof and our ceiling to wake me up. Not surprisingly, a twelve-thousand-dollar house does not come with much of a roof.

There are three other things you need to know at this point:

1. Bell Island, Newfoundland, is a hard place to live
2. Bell Island is a harder place to live if you’re gay
3. Bell Island is harder yet again if you have my last name

Like Dolan, I knew I couldn’t be gay in my hometown. It’s a two by six-mile island with fewer than three thousand people. In 2006, more than fifty-percent of people under the age of nineteen lived in poverty.

During a recent visit to the Art Gallery of Ontario, I read a quote attributed to film director Guillermo Del Toro: “The underground of the city is like what’s underground in people. Beneath the surface, it’s boiling with monsters.” But in my hometown, it was on the surface too. Since our iron ore mine closed in 1966, our population has declined precipitously. Around the community, a series of massive mural projects depicting our mining heritage decays more and more each year. The deterioration of the only public art in the town runs parallel to the decline of the spirits of its people. Elders in the community have grieved the loss of entire generations of artists because of worsening socio-economic circumstances and a loss of the town’s cultural fibre.

My family - “The Taplins” - were known for being rough, sometimes criminally so, and for their profession. My father was – and still is – a third-generation janitor. We hate that word. He is a third-generation custodian. My grandfather and great-grandfather both held the same job, cleaning local schools for nearly one hundred years combined.

As I grew and began to leave the community for the first time, I had two stories I had to hide: I was gay, and my family had nothing, and I came from nowhere. After years of hiding those two stories, I earned a third story which needed to be classified as top secret: I had depression.

In that cave of hidden stories, like the caves in Chauvet, my humanity, my art, was also born.

Since I was Born:

To lose your creativity might be to die slowly, but to gain your creativity is to live lifetimes all at once.

By now, you may have wondered what kind of artist I claim to be. A sculptor? A musician? A writer? A dancer?

In 2015, when I was perhaps deepest in my cave, so deep I was unsure if I would ever emerge, I was asked to speak at a conference. I had spoken at many meetings by then, about different experiences, such as traveling to the Arctic and Antarctic during high school. The organizer of the conference wanted me to retire my old act. He was a dear friend who knew I enjoyed oral storytelling, and who knew I was struggling.

He knew I was in my forgotten cave and I was simultaneously working with a counsellor to gain the tools necessary to provide myself with a foundation from which I could begin to pursue my passions. My friend asked if I would speak at his conference about mental health. Never was I so afraid. I could not talk about mental health without confronting my small-town upbringing, my queerness, and the severity of my depression. Yet, through considerable help from others, I accepted his speaking offer. I began to draw on those cave walls.

While the designation of “storyteller” might be analogous to faun or magic pixie elsewhere, in Newfoundland it is a real badge of honour, and a legitimate, respected job title. Storytellers are pillars of their communities. Newfoundland’s only university - Memorial University - is one of few in the world where you can earn a B.A and up to a Ph.D. in Folklore. As an undergraduate student, I studied Folklore. When asked what that was, I often responded: “I’m getting a degree in storytelling.” Oral storytelling is my art form. My heart is fullest when telling a story. That is why it represents my art and my humanity.

As the conference approached, I prepared my stories. My art up to that point had been toothless. As a child, I imagined myself a prince marrying a princess. As an adult, I told competent albeit dispassionate stories about climate change and policy. My art, my humanity, had yet to be born: my art, my humanity, my stories, were destined to be about place, queerness, vulnerability, and depression.

On the stage in 2015, and on many stages to follow as a speaker, I began to show my cave drawings, and say the words: “I’m gay,” “I have struggled with depression,” “I come from a rock in the ocean.”

That same year, for the first time, I told another young man the most powerful story ever told, “I love you.”

My early years were crucial, and I don’t intend to erase them, deny their existence, or otherwise suggest I had no humanity then. I wouldn’t be who I am without them. I spent twenty years gaining the tools to tell my story in preparation for the great leap of the past three years. Storyteller is a title I now embrace, and an artform I practice each day. Where the core elements of my art – queerness, and depression – were formerly hidden, they are now imbued in most stories I tell.

Through gaining my artistic spark, my humanity was born. I was born in 2015.



Stack vs. Strew

John Verhaeven



Jacob's Hardware is a holy place. At the corner of Queen and Cameron, storeowner Larry Krupski has achieved a perfect union between the stacked and the strewn.

Shopping here is a religious experience. It also requires much patience.

Some people are natural stackers, whereas others prefer to strew their objects. Stackers tend to be annoyingly hierarchical people whereas strewers tend to be messy individuals, occupying more than their fair share of space, tables, and floors full of their spread.

How objects are placed in the world changes how we see. It's not enough to merely look at my work. A lengthy process of sorting and re-sorting is necessary. On the surface, I may appear lost, jumping disciplines and industries. However, I find myself doing one of two things regularly: spreading content out for examination, or stacking material neatly to create relationships.

STACK

"It's Canons with one 'n' not two." My radio co-host said. Our new weekly program Loose Canons had just been picked up by 100.5 FM Vancouver's Co-op Radio, and I had mistakenly used its homonym in the program guide, destroying the intended pun. "It makes less sense now," he persisted. Nevertheless, Loose Cannons went on to mix words and music over terrestrial broadcast every Friday night for the next five years. The spelling mistake in the program guide was corrected in year two.

Loose Canons was an act of stacking; layering random bits of original writing with both live and prerecorded music. Guest interviews, poetry readings and the occasional large-cast radio play left us at times literally stacking performers into the small radio studio.

STREW

The Cavern was a small basement theatre accessed through the laneway between Commercial Drive and Britannia Community Centre.

It was a converted storage space for the Vancouver Fringe Festival and the director, a baby boomer, had named it. The Beatles never played there.

In this Cavern, I produced 72 new short plays over six years. These were written and performed by independent theatre artists struggling to find their voice in an era when the slashing of arts funding was trendy, leaving only a few with privileged access to the established stages in town.

This was an act of strewing. Performances were laid out one after the other for scrutiny, like a buffet. The inquisitive and supportive audience was left to judge which scripts had merit and which scripts should be scrapped. Discussion and input, initiated by this strewn mode of presentation, were the artists' rewards. The theatre series became known as "The Stands."

Back at Jacob's Hardware, Larry Krupski is taking his sweet time custom-threading a piece of pipe I ordered for a video project, but I don't mind. I pass the time wandering up and down Larry's claustrophobic, highly stacked aisles. I rummage through the electrical fittings strewn across a lower shelf. This is helpful because I can clearly see the different sizes available. As I'm making a mental note for a future project, Larry grumbles that my pipe is ready. I pay and go.



Extended Narratives

Media Writing 2017

Table of Contents

Dominic Akena	9
Rachel Anne Bordignon	17
Lysle Hood	25
Tara Korkmaz	33
Ashleigh Larratt	47
Delphine Lewis	55
Kenneth McDonald	63
Natasha Ramoutar	71
Jessica Rodriguez Leon	79
Daniel Schrempf	87
Gregory Severin	99
Donovan Taplin	107
John Verhaeven	117
Acknowledgements	124



Finding Normalcy in Anticipating the Things to Come.

Dominic Akena



Dominic Akena

June 24, 2016 ·

Today I received an anonymous letter from a Palestinian high school student, I spoke to this student's class a few weeks ago over Skype and weeks later I received a very surprising letter. I was just blown away when I read it! Take a read at what the letter said.

Dear Dom,

Hope that my letter finds you in the best of everything. We haven't met or known each other in person but you and me have more in common with this world than you think.

Today I write to you to tell you how immensely you and your story have inspired me. It was so powerful that was both upsetting and uplifting to me. The way you have dealt with this unbearable suffering building a better life in a troubled part of the world with your music, is encouraging to me. Life sometimes can be mean to absorb the bleak and harsh reality that you and we have lived in, but if you decide to look at the brighter side of life, as you did, then that reality becomes the reason to inspire others, to be the lime light for the dwellers of twilight zone.

I am sure it wasn't easy for you to overcome your childhood nightmares but yet you decide to smile and wake up every day with hope of finding your lost brother, as if it's me hoping to live in a free Palestine far from wars and killings. Although we aren't children of war but we do live in a war zone, struggling for a better living. War hasn't killed our zeal for living, and if one day I am asked "What is hope?" then my answer would be "Dom". It's you who portrays the best state of hope in Uganda, from young to old. You have brought me a wonderful aspect of human existence and inspiration to live. And showed how music, a bit of hope, can be transformed into balm of Gilead.

"The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places" Hemingway wrote to Arms. And now I write to you to tell you beyond the shadow of a doubt that you are strong.

Surprised, awoken, and inspired by this student who didn't know me but felt compelled to write me a letter all the way from Palestine. It got me thinking to try to write yet another **letter** to my father. But, like the place I come from, my father too has vanished from the face of the earth without a trace. No letters, addresses, postcards, or photographs - only old memories. No one seems to know anything about us anymore. I stopped writing letters to my God(s). It's been ten years since I fell asleep and woke up a hero in my people's future. The most irritating but also kind of interesting thing about living in two different worlds at the same time is how easy it is to lose the ability to control the inevitable gradual loss of the memory of each place. As it happens quite often, it's almost like witnessing the early morning fog that you see in the horizon in one minute that's gone in the next. That's how it slips away from you; gradually at first, and then everything disappears all at once. I could tell you a little bit more about who I was and the place I come from, but the truth is I'd have to paint you an old image of a place I used to know.

My name is Dominic R. Akena and I am 23 years old. I was born on February 15th, 1994, in a remote village called Patongo located in the northern region of Uganda, East Africa. Growing up in my village as a child I was truly in peace. I loved to play my handmade xylophone, football (European football), and several games with my brothers and childhood friends. Every morning my father would give me a ride to school on his bicycle. On the way to school we would have conversations about music, sports, and what I wanted to accomplish at school by the end of each term. We were a happy family of seven, my father, my mom, my two brothers, two sisters and me.

I always knew that something was not right with our country as I heard the evening news on the radio from time to time. As rumors about the guerilla rebel groups circulated around the village, all hell broke loose as quickly as

a child can change his/her mind in one night. The war broke the peaceful living in the village when the conflict between the government and the guerrilla rebels that had been going on for several years came closer to my home. On July 1st 2001, the rebels attacked my village burning down our houses. They also slaughtered and stole our livestock, killed men, raped women, and abducted many children in one night. Fortunately my family and I managed to escape the attack that night. But in fear of the rebels we were forced to leave our house and sleep in the bush uncomfortably with the wilds for several years after the first rebel attack. We hid and slept in the jungle for three years; my brothers and I got tired of hiding. In August 2005, in the wet season when rainfall was heaviest, my brother and I got tired of sleeping outside in the rain. Seeking comfort and safety, Okello and I along with 130 other children went to sleep in the school. We thought we would be safe in the classrooms that had lockable steel (welded metal) doors and windows. In our sleep we heard the footsteps of rebels, it must have been around midnight and the footsteps sounded like a thunderstorm approaching. In this moment I knew something was wrong, my heart began to race while my body shook uncontrollably. It was pitch black in the room but I could feel and hear the fear in all the children as the rebel members broke in through the door, windows, and rounded us up on the floor as slaves. Many children were screaming and shaking like leaves on trees as the rebels stripped us of our clothing, shoes, and tied us all together like a chain of bicycles and marched us out into the dark silent night. We walked all night and all day the next day in the burning sun. The hot sand on our bare feet felt like we were stepping on fire and we didn't know where we were being taken, or how long it would take us to get there. I was too afraid to look directly eye-to-eye with any of the abductees, or the rebels because they would beat us when we looked into their eyes; they took that as challenge to their authority. They were ruthless violent men who cared

about nothing but killing and brainwashing the abductees by inflicting as much as they could on us. While I couldn't properly count, or tell how many rebel men surrounded us, 24 hours after our abduction the main leader decided to split the group into two. The groups each had 65 abducted children, including my brother and I. I knew this because I could hear the rebels counting us out loud while we were seated on the ground with our heads tucked between our knees looking down at the ground. My brother and I were put in separate groups, and one day later the main leader announced that my brother's group would leave the camp to go East that afternoon and my group was to go North in the morning. That was the last time I saw my brother.

My group finally arrived at another rebel camp about 50km north of my village. I didn't know exactly where we were, but our rebel leader announced that the camp was in close proximity to another village called Kalongo. When we arrived at this camp it was full of strange people doing all sorts strange things. That evening I learned that we were abducted to become soldiers as our group leader announced his plan to begin training us how to shoot guns and be a **"strong soldier"** in one week. In the meantime were treated like slaves to break our spirits. I was 9 years old at the time and the idea of me becoming a soldier was beyond terrifying. But above all other reasons I simply did not want to be a soldier of any kind, and on this day I knew that I had to get away. Life in the camp wasn't easy and neither was escaping as we were still tied up together and beaten when we didn't obey. We were forbidden food, water, shoes or clothing. One week after the abduction they began training us to become child soldiers and I bid my time to avoid being killed as I was looking forward to escaping. It felt nearly impossible for me as a child to remain strong and not give up on my hope to escape

One night, about six months after we finished training I finally decided that it was my time to leave the chaos of the camp. We were to begin our journey to meet and receive blessings from Joseph Kony, the supreme leader of the National Resistance Army (LRA) rebel groups. It was said that Kony lived under some powerful mountain in South Sudan, and that our journey to go see him would take several months of walking. On the first day of the journey we walked about 50 km before settling at a camp to rest our feet and eat. After the first day everyone was tired, my feet hurt from the blister I got from walking on elephant grass and thorny bushes completely barefoot. After walking some 50 km North of the first camp, we finally arrive at the next camp to take a break for the day. Immediately after we arrived I made up my mind that I wasn't going to continue walking with the group the next day. I waited until everyone was sleeping and snoring like a broken truck. At around 3:00 in the morning, right before the dawn broke I got up quietly and slowly took a few steps away, avoiding making any alarming noises from dry leaves and dead trees. For the sake of safety, I grabbed automatic weapons and ran deep into the bush towards the opposite direction from where we were meant to proceed the next day. I didn't stop running until I was extremely exhausted the next day. I slept on top of the tangled tree whose vines formed a bed high above the ground like a hammock suspended in mid-air. After leaving the rebel group I completely lost my bearing of where I was. Starving for food and water, I came across a small flowing seasonal creek and jumped into the water to cool down my temperature. It was here that I took my bayonet, speared and ate my first raw fish. I wish I had known how to prepare sushi because I would have avoided all the disgusting parts of the fish I shouldn't have eaten that made me sick to my stomach.

I had no real sense of time and dates, but for what felt like a week I wandered through forests so thick and dark you could almost see

stars during bright day times. I was completely lost, scared and I prayed and cried everyday as I continued to walk on my own. For days I wandered in the endless field of the African savannah with no sign of people or villages. My shoes and my guns were so heavy that I felt too weak to carry them, but I didn't want to leave the weapons because I wouldn't be able to protect myself if something attacked me. And sure enough, five days later, extremely weak and tired and moving slowly I was startled and frightened by heavy breathing that sounded like a strong wind blowing through tree leaves. I couldn't see it but I could hear the breathing. First, I saw the paws, and then I saw its face with its tongue in its mouth wide open and breathing heavily. Being frightened and quite frankly on the verge of shitting myself, I stepped back on a dead tree branch that snapped twice as loud as a fourth of July firecracker. The lion stood up and stared right at me, looking up he seemed a thousand times bigger than me. I tried to sneak backward behind the tree trunk but nothing would stop him from charging at me. I raised my automatic gun and randomly opened fire like a flamethrower on the trenches of a World War I battlefield. My hands were shaking on my gun and I thought my life was going to end as the lion leapt towards me with his long wide-open claws. As the lion fell to its death at my feet I dropped everything, began to run and never looked back. **Disoriented** and still completely unfamiliar with my surroundings I was in the Kidepu National Park. A non-occupied part of Northern Uganda that the government marked as a wildlife reserve and "National Park." I remember learning about Kidepu National Park from a history book taught to us in primary school. It is located about 250km North of my village and no one goes there.

Out of breath and still struggling to process the event that nearly ended my life I decided to get smart and started to follow the direction of the sun as I walked back to my village. I remembered that the sun always rises in the East and sets in

the West. I began to walk towards the sunset. I walked for three more days after the lion attack; living and surviving on mangoes, oranges, and many other wild fruits until I finally arrived at an abandoned village. I was a frightening sight to many people; however, one senior man who refused to evacuate the village saw through my anger and fear. Trusting the man, I let him lead me to the government military base nearby where I was treated as an escaped child soldier. The commander of the base, who was a kind and knowledgeable man, recognized that I was kidnapped and forced to become child soldier. After feeding and clothing me, the commander asked about where my family lived and decided to take me in his military truck back to my family one month after the old man brought me to the base. As I drove into my village, the village people as well as my family members weren't expecting me to be alive or to ever come home. My mother came out of her hut and we both started crying in each other's arms. Life would never be the same; upon my return, I learned that the rebels had killed my father. And brother, I still don't know what happened to him. Although my home was still there, with my father and brother gone we were no longer seven and happily living in our family; our lives were about to start over again.

The one thing that this experience taught me is to believe in miracles. To believe in the impossible, and believe that everything for happens for reasons we don't understand sometimes. Two years after I returned from captivity I left home and moved to Canada on a study permit to attend the Appleby College High School in Oakville, Ontario. I arrived in Canada on September 4th, 2008. After graduating from Appleby College on June 22nd, 2012, I pursued my undergraduate studies at Franklin & Marshall College in the United States. On August 16th, 2017, I returned to Toronto to pursue a MFA graduate degree in Documentary Media at Ryerson University. It's been almost ten years since I left my village to

come to Canada in 2008. I don't visit as much as I want to because I can't afford the airfare to pay for the 20+ hours I have to fly whenever I get the opportunity to visit my family in Uganda. The last time I visited my family in Uganda was in the summer of 2013. Next month, December 17th, 2017, I'm going back home for the first time in almost four years. I am excited and anxious to go home, but also nervous to embrace the things that I know for sure changed after all these times I've been here. My grandma passed away in 2016, and I didn't get to say goodbye to her so I know for sure that is going to be hard to process when I reach home.

I am **anxious** to go home because every time I visit my family after being away for so long it reminds me of the time I escaped the rebel captivity and returned to my family. It ignites both excitement and sadness at the same time, a part of me manifests the excitement of being home, and the other part still misses my father, my brother, and now my grandmother because I know that none of them will be able to show up home again. So now every time I think about my missing family members when I visit home I read the letter I received from the Palestinian stranger who seems to know me more than I know myself. It is **oddly comforting**.



This is Not a Eulogy

Rachel Anne Bordignon

Preface

Being as sick as I am is a scary place.

You can't think too much about the future
because a lot of the time things are stuck just
as they are...
or at least it feels that way.

Growing up I was taught that everything in life
is earned,
and the world doesn't owe you anything
so always be thankful.

I was taught that if I worked hard enough
I could achieve anything I set my heart on,
and I believed it.

It doesn't quite work that way with the illness
I have.

You can put all of your time, money and effort,
into frantically searching for something to
work.
You can cut out all of the bad,
and still

you will be left with a painful void.
You can be this exemplary model of how a sick
person *should* act,
to be considered worthy of empathy, or
compassion,
or being treated as a human,
because you are spending all of your aching
moments,
the way you 'ought to be.'

But it's still there,
and you're still alone in this place,
Desperately holding out hope.

The little moments of joy
have grown distant and fuzzy.
I was happier when I thought I was dying.

I've never met a person with chronic illness who hasn't contemplated suicide, and I am no exception. These thoughts started when I was fourteen, and I know that I'm capable of slipping back into that place if I'm not mindful...

Because having a condition that most doctors (and people) haven't even heard of messes with your psyche in ways that are difficult to explain. Ever heard of Ehlers Danlos Syndrome (EDS)? Neither had I.

I spent the greater part of my youth in hospital beds and doctors' stuffy waiting rooms. I'm now in my mid-twenties and not much has changed, except that I've developed an aversion to the washed-out blue and murky yellow-green tones that seem to be reserved for those spaces. And now I know that I have multiple illnesses, but the one at the root of it all is EDS.

Living was harder to deal with before I received my diagnosis because it was isolating; all of the young people around me were focused on going to school, and travelling, and going to their favourite band's shows. I knew that I felt like I was dying, every movement was exhausting, but my doctor said that it was "normal for a teenage girl" to feel that way. I felt like an alien, and I didn't have any prescribed, or personally researched, methods of alleviating my rapidly-growing list of symptoms.

I didn't realize that there were other people out there who shared this experience. How could I? Social media wasn't really a thing the way it is now and I was already sick, sleeping away most of my days.

I managed to go to the University of Toronto and barely made it through my reduced course load. Halfway through my degree I stumbled into an equity studies class and loved the insight it gave me about the ways we address disability and illness. I was fortunate enough to have mentors there who versed me in disability studies and provided insights that were foundational for my personal growth. They encouraged the class to get involved with the community, and I wanted

so badly to attend the events for disabled artists and speakers where they presented their PhD works in progress... but during that time, it was all that I could do to even make it to class. I was still isolated, even in a space where I felt I should belong the most.

I often daydreamed of a world where my bed had a steering wheel, and all I would have to do was ride it into the streets so that I could also go out and attend these events! I laugh about that reoccurring fantasy now because in hindsight it was so clear that what I really needed was a mobility aid—so that I could go out into the world without becoming violently ill from standing —but most doctors (mine included) think of using a mobility aid as the worst thing for a young person, an absolute last resort, to be avoided at all costs. So instead, I spent most of my teenage years lying in bed, alone.

It was only a couple of years ago that I found a community of other young sick people online. I started communicating with some of them, and began to realize that we share a lot of experiences. Some of these people are my closest friends.

Now I have a lot of young people reach out to me because most of the content I create online is centered around my personal experience with disability: young teens (and other young adults) tell me that they relate to what I share. w

Other sick people have told me that they were happy to have found my videos online because they were also feeling isolated, and aside from that of activists, we don't have much media representation that addresses disability as commonplace. When I say this, I mean healthy representation, where we are valued as equally human, and lead fulfilling lives. There are some individuals and communities who use hashtags online to create disvis (disability visibility). These people actively push against the tired narratives surrounding disability: examples include #babewithamobilityaid, #cpunk, #thefutureisaccessible and #disabledandcute.

I started to find this online community of badass, unapologetic, young, sick and disabled people through #CripplePunk. Finding that movement, I decided I would post a picture of myself with my cane. I was nervous. Most of the friends I went to high school with didn't know that I started using a mobility aid—and due to my own internalized ableism, I tried my hardest to only use it “when I absolutely had to.” But I was ready to say “fuck it,” in defiance: “fuck it” to all of the dominant images of disability I was used to seeing; to the eternally sad, self-loathing, given-up and frumpy; to the voice that said “why bother, no one could possibly befriend or love me, because being disabled must mean I'm undesirable....” And so, there I stood, leaning against my bedroom wall, holding my cane while wearing my trendiest black mini dress, thigh high socks and leather jacket. I took a picture using my shitty webcam and hit post. I was tired of hating myself, so instead I vowed to start hating everyone who gave me dirty looks. #CripplePunk started a fire in my belly that still burns strong.

I immediately started receiving messages from other young women thanking me, because seeing my picture made them feel more comfortable and confident using their canes. I felt happy that I was able to make even the smallest positive impact for other people who were sharing similar self-doubts. I also felt like a bit of a fraud because, at that time, I wasn't even fully confident about using my cane. I was, and still am, unlearning the feelings of shame surrounding disability.

I wasn't naive enough to think that one image was sufficient. And the last thing I wanted was to create some other sort of beauty standard for disabled women. I'm tall and thin, white, and flash the results of years of braces with every smile. These privileges are not lost on me. I already see myself in magazines, minus a mobility aid or two.

So I started making content that was more personal and revealing of the nuances of being

disabled. I wanted the young people who saw the image of me standing there, seemingly invincible, to know that I'm not representing some sort of end goal. I'm not “there yet,” and in all fairness, I don't think anyone is.

I will probably continue to struggle with periods of suicidal thoughts for the rest of my life. It comes with the territory of being sick, constantly dealing with pain, never knowing what new symptom will happen, and when or how to deal with it; and with the need to spend the majority of my spare moments trying to research and access care. I'm at a point where doctors in Canada cannot provide the treatments I need, so my mom sold her house so that I can access medical care that might help me in NYC... but that's a whole other demoralizing story. I'm trying to be kind to myself for needing more rest than the average human. But because we live in a neoliberal culture that leaves no room for disabled people to be considered valuable or worthy of love under those standards, untying those knots is a continual process, and in part of that process there arrives the question that all of us sick people eventually get stuck on for a bit too long: is this living thing really worth it?

It's enough to make one of those ‘Eat, Pray, Love’ types roll their eyes and tell me everyone has their own struggles and that all pain is relative. Which is true—but also, I kind of want to tell those people to go fuck themselves, you know?

Because I'm here struggling to get out of bed most days, and on top of that, I will have to call in advance to the coffee shop I want to go to—to make sure they are accessible if I can't do stairs that day—and all I wanted to do in the first place was relax, and not have an existential crisis about needing to call the god-damned coffee shop just to drink a matcha whateverthefuck latte that I can't really afford anyway.

Oh, you're “accessible”? But the washroom is down a couple flights of stairs?... but the McDonald's across the street has an accessible washroom “if I really need it?” Fuck you too.

Can you imagine telling your date that you need to be right back because you've got to go across the street to the McDicks to pee? Because unlike the majority of people, you have to spend a decent amount of time just looking for places where you can exist comfortably? It's not sexy. There's usually no second date after that one.

So if you've ever wondered why your wheelchair-using friend (if you have one) is declining drinks, not eating all day and fainting from the dehydration, now you know...

And I say if you have one, because it's this kind of structural inaccessibility that keeps us at home. No one wants to have to find the elevator attendant every time they want to switch floors at The Great Hall:

Been there, done that—not into raising my hand like a god-damned child to ask permission to use the tiny elevator down the narrow corridor that's filled with trash bags. Hell no.

Inaccessibility and that kind of accessibility gate-keeping is so awkward that I would rather stay in than have to have that demeaning experience. And if we're being forced to stay in (when we're not too sick to go out), then you are not even going to be used to seeing disabled people around, let alone socializing with us!

A lot of able-bodied people tell me that I'm the first [visibly, physically] disabled person that they've met and interacted with. I think that's why so many of them have stared at me apprehensively at first (yes, I noticed) or don't even read me as a disabled person. I can't count the number of times complete strangers have asked me if my scooter is “a choice thing” or if I “really need it.” Like yeah dude, I totally just got bored with walking one day... so, here I am.

If you ask us ridiculous questions, we will give you ridiculous answers and laugh about it behind your back... or to your face.

I laugh off a lot of this stuff because I've had to develop a sense of humor about how weird my life can be, but if I smoke enough weed I'm right back there in existential dread about it all over again. It's a fine line, really.

I never realized that what I do is considered activism until people told me. But it wasn't something that I really had a choice about: creating art and disability-centered content is necessary for me because it's how I make sense of all of this... and because there's not enough of it out there that's for us, created by us.

Living with a chronic condition is objectively difficult enough due to the physical experience of pain. Negative social elements are unnecessary added stressors. And doctors whose socialization can't be removed from our cultural context—which refuses to acknowledge youth and disability or illness as possibilities—deny us care. (And not everyone is fortunate enough to have their mother sell her home to secure their future medical coverage and experimental treatments.)

Every sick person I know has contemplated suicide. They've also been denied access to adequate care at one point or another because their doctor decided that their debilitating symptoms were “normal for a young person, just growing pains.” I also have had this experience, and that's when I started contemplating suicide. This abstract concept of a society that doesn't care for you is one thing (which sucks by making you feel worthless); but it gets harder when your access to medical care is limited by this same dynamic (additionally making you feel even more worthless.)

And then there's the aching question of... well, what medical care, exactly? We're all (EDS-ers) fucked because we consider ourselves lucky if we get chosen to be used as medical guinea pigs, lining up to get our skulls opened and spinal cords reattached because they think it will hopefully help with something. They fuse

our spines here and remove pieces of our skulls there. It's made some friends of mine better, it's made some worse. I've even heard of some cases where it was extremely beneficial, but only temporarily, and then they were worse off. This information is all shared through word of mouth; there's no medical journal published with the statistics or findings yet. And while this may sound absolutely horrifying to you, I remember crying with joy when I found out that I might be a candidate for this experimental neurosurgery. Because it was something to try, and after trying for years you slowly start running out of options while your symptoms continue to sporadically appear and worsen. I was practically leaping onto the operating table, scalpel in hand...

Instead, they regularly pump me full of chemicals and one doctor, upon meeting me, warns me about how the long-term effects of ketamine are an unknown: "It can cause serious memory loss! I strongly advise against this." I laugh and let him know that I think that the prospect of memory loss is one of ketamine's major selling points. He was not impressed. Neither was I. Why should I be concerned with potential problems when this drug is the difference (for me) between being able to move or writhing in pain in bed? And what future? I can only be the best I can be, right here, right now.

Sick people hope for better futures that are so far from our reality, we don't even know what to hope for. We don't know what existing without fighting for it at every corner would even be like.

When I was fourteen I made a suicide pact with myself: promising that unless things were "significantly better" with my health by the time my twenty-fifth birthday rolled around, it would be okay to move on. Ten years of attempting

to improve my health would be a reasonable amount of time to declare that I had given it my best shot, and simply can't live this way anymore. I had to learn to accept that being sick means there will be moments of uncertainty, unwanted vulnerability, shame, and exhaustion. I had to learn to accept that there is no "cure," and instead, to hold value in working with my body, as opposed to fighting against it.

I had to learn that not every doctor will have answers, because unlike what most doctors want you to believe, they are not infallible. Their lack of knowledge about complex health conditions does not necessarily mean absolutely nothing can be done to improve my overall well-being. I had to learn that my life is going to be a process of trial and error, and experiencing frustration in response to a lack of adequate and timely care is reasonable, and human. I had to learn the hard way that there are people in this world who take advantage of the desperation that only another sick person can know; it is not in a doctor's best interest to have their number one, repeat clients, become less reliant on their (failing) suggestions and services. Our system needs an overhaul where the size of their paycheck is reflective of the results of their implemented regimens and treatments – our wellness needs to be incentivized. I had to learn to ask more questions, do my own research and be wary of promises or ultimatums. I had to learn that this is my life, and I will have to take the ups and downs as they come. Most importantly, I had to learn that acceptance is not the same as giving up; I can be at peace while my fire still burns strong.

I continue actively unlearning the idea that is entrenched in our dominant narratives: that being sick somehow means my life is not worth living, or that it's already over. I am not dead yet.

The narratives surrounding disability are toxic and evoke fear; I don't think it is by coincidence that so many of us have paused at the question of whether or not life is worth it when this is the story that is relayed to us most often, alongside a broken system that offers limited support at best.

For all of these reasons, and so many more, I've been here, writing all night, struggling with my thoughts as the sun slowly rises. My face is gritty from my constant breaks for tears, and I'm enraged and devastated because our community has just lost another person.

Tai connected so many of us to each other and to our self-acceptance. Tai was the creator of CripplePunk, the movement that allowed me the space I needed to lean against my bedroom wall and say: "fuck you, I'm disabled and I'm sick and I'm okay," and take that picture that led me to where I am now. And every time this happens it gets a little harder to swallow, because it's so close to home, because none of us are an exception. Tai's legacy continues to flourish through the cacophony of disabled voices, and signs, and writing, that roar our collective "fuck you," because we all worked so hard against so much to get to the point where that became a possibility.

There were countless nights of uncontrollable sobbing behind your back, before we could laugh in your face.

When you're disabled and you openly exist as a happy human, and you laugh in the face of adversity, and you wear something that's considered trendy while—gasp—kissing your partner in public, people will stare at you. They will question whether or not you are "actually ill" because you're young and you're beautiful, and you have nice hair, and you're enviably stylish and you unapologetically dance and smoke and raise all hell. Don't let those fucks deny you a good hair day and your manicure because they aren't used to people like us occupying that kind of space. Don't let their interrogations

make you fear happiness. Don't let them rob you of your laughter. You can be sick, and fighting, and struggling, and miserable, and be genuinely happy that you're still here.

This is not a eulogy,

it's a refusal,

it's a "fuck you,"

it's staring right back in defiance...

Laughing in the face of ignorance and fear.

They just haven't seen enough of us yet.



All the Jobs I Took Off My Resume

Lysle Hood

Target; Summer 2013

I pity those who have not had the pleasure of shopping in an American Target store. It is a modern miracle that you can buy home décor, a laptop, pimple cream, fresh groceries and the cutest clothes all in the same place. And don't even start with me about how Walmart is the same thing: Target is not tacky! Don't fight me on this. In fact, Target remains my number one destination for swimwear, but that's besides the point. Finding products that solve problems you didn't even know you had is, in a word, life-changing. Target Canada, however, is a different story. But I did not find this out until it was much too late.

When Target opened in Canada, I was thrilled. Of course, the promise of a luxurious shopping extravaganza piqued my interest, but also, I had just graduated from high school and was in desperate need of a job before starting university. This would not be my first job, but with just my fresh high school diploma, I was not in possession of a particularly plush set of employable skills. I was hired in Target's clothing department. This did not thrill me. Somehow, being a cashier sounded more prestigious than folding clothing discards in the fitting room. Nevertheless, I put on khaki pants and a red shirt—neither of which is in my colour wheel—and went to work.

Shopping at Target is a lot more fun than working there. Despite my internal protest, I was issued a walkie-talkie. I'm not talking a cute walkie-talkie either—like the discreet kind that you clip onto your shirt that has a little ear piece and a thin wire ala the secret service—no, these were jumbo, black, clip-onto-your-waistband-and-make-your-pants-fall-down walkie-talkies. And they didn't really serve any purpose other than to render employees on high alert, even when on break or in the washroom. Though I had perfected the art of avoiding customers, I received many a sympathetic look when I was made, on several occasions, to whip out the walkie-talkie and field interrogation by Tracy,

my manager. Tracy was a large woman with an even larger attitude. And she mistook her job as soft goods manager for drill sergeant. Her commitment to her job was probably a good thing. But I once caught Tracy in the home goods department organizing shelves on her day off. And once, as I was folding clothes in the children's department, a customer who hadn't noticed me turned to her husband and said, "I would kill myself if I had to work here." I turned around and told her that I was contemplating doing just that.

However, everything else was but a mild inconvenience compared to the dreaded team huddles. To my absolute horror, everyday, two or three times a day, employees were called over the walkie-talkies and instructed to meet in a circle and perform team-building exercises like dancing, singing, stretching and other generally degrading activities. The corporate office mandated these huddles. There is not a single doubt in my mind that this form of veiled torture is a tactic to keep subordinates submissive and unaware of their autonomy.

You have not felt true embarrassment until you are made to do the hokey pokey in the middle of a department store for minimum wage while customers look on, giggling.

Luckily, I was, along with a few like-minded co-workers, privy to a secret room in the back of the warehouse which was perfect for hiding from huddles. Our revolution was small. But mighty.

Working at Target, I was keenly aware, perhaps for the first time, of my privilege. I was a young white girl from the suburbs who drove her parents' car to work and spent her paycheck on makeup and burritos. Many, if not most, of the women I worked with were immigrants older than I who—because Target Canada denied

employees full-time hours—had to work several jobs to support their families. Many nights, after closing the store, I would drive co-workers home because the busses weren't running on time. I do not keep in touch with any of the friends I made while working at Target, although sometimes I wish I had. I wonder where they are now. When Target's expansion into Canada failed miserably and the company was forced to shut the doors to its 133 stores, the ex-CEO's compensation package was USD\$61 million (CAD\$76.25 million). The severance package for all 17,600 employees was a combined USD\$56 million (CAD\$70 million).

It is as if Target came to Canada, took down all the Zellers signs and slapped a big ol' red bullseye on every store. Actually, I am convinced that is exactly what happened. Canadian Target was Zellers-brand for twice the price and half the quality. No wonder it didn't work out. Canadians aren't that stupid.

By a stroke of bad luck (or, perhaps, good fortune) I contracted mono after about two months of working at Target. I saw this as my opportunity to quit and I promptly took it.

The Golf Course; Summer 2014

I do not golf. My family doesn't golf. My friends don't golf. To this day, I am not entirely sure how I ended up working at the golf course, let alone as a greenskeeper. It was the summer after my first year of university and I needed to make cash fast. I had not yet capitalized on the wonderfully lucrative world of restaurant serving, so I found myself in blue cargo shorts and a grey polo with a whipper-snipper and a lawnmower in tow.

My athletic abilities at the time were minimal. I did not even own a sports bra. I had certainly never worked a manual labour job and I could not tell you the difference between a green and a tee and a fairway. In my first few weeks at the course, it was not abnormal for me to nearly hit

golfers with my golf cart or get lost between the 8th and the 9th holes. But I learned quickly.

Of course, my first priority was fashion. Once, fed up after a sweaty day of raking leaves in the rain, I went home and spray-painted my company earmuffs a bright, glittery, metallic pink. I was cheekily proud of myself for bringing such an elegant touch of glamour to an otherwise unglamorous job. By the end of the summer, I had taught myself to drive a stick shift, to drive with a trailer and to start a shoddy engine on the first pull. And I looked pretty dang good doing it.

There were ten seasonal workers, all students: three girls, seven boys. Then there were a bunch of lifers. Mostly men but not exclusively. Like the older couple who had been working at the course since their teens. Bertha always called her husband Daddy. I never figured out his real name.

Despite my apparent inability to wake up before noon before this job, I got out of bed at three in the morning all summer. I worked nine-hour days—12 days on, two days off. I made \$12.00 an hour. I thought I was rich. But the boys in the same position were making \$12.50 an hour. I was not entirely keen about this. Admittedly, all of the male students were enrolled in golf-related college courses. Still, I was undeniably faster and better at greens mowing and bunker raking and I regularly had to help them finish their work.

One day, while the group of us were out cutting grass in a ditch by the road, our supervisor told us to display a giant bright-orange sign that read "MEN AT WORK." I have never been a social justice warrior, but I have also never felt so strong an urge to rectify justice. I could, perhaps, have also been influenced by my desire to take on a creative project instead of clip wet ditch-grass. In what remains one of my more brilliant plans, I took electrical tape to the sign and altered its message to read "WO/MEN AT WORK." One lifer expressed his distaste for

my new sign, but no one else objected. In fact, we received many encouraging honks from drivers for the rest of the afternoon.

After that summer, I never returned to the golf course. Not because I had an entirely horrible experience—in reality, my time there was entertaining and challenging and I cooked up a pretty sweet farmer's tan—but because I had no desire to become a lifer. Just let it be known: I could still mow perfect stripes in your backyard with my eyes closed.

The Member's Club; Summer 2017

Despite having never played golf, I always had visions of being a cart girl at a private golf course. I must have figured out that cart girls make oodles in tips, because the notion of driving around in a golf cart wielding overpriced beverages for rich, thirsty, middle-aged white men in ill-fitting plaid golf shorts seemed like the most extravagant of summer jobs. So, when I found an online posting for a cart girl at one of the most prestigious courses in Muskoka, I was picking out cute little golf skirts and pink polos before I even applied. I had a working knowledge of the golf game and I knew my way around your basic cocktail list. I was ready to fund my education by looking cute and smiling fake.

The smile didn't last long.

The cart in question, which I had once perceived as a symbol of elitism and financial freedom, was nothing more than a rumbling, diesel-fueled hot-dog wagon equipped with a tacky green-and-white-striped awning and a mis-sized spare tire.

And, as it turns out, being a cart girl is a highly competitive job. So much so that the girls who worked at the club regularly got into

Facebook arguments about who was going to take the cart out on any given day. The remaining workers stayed inside the lounge and served sandwich lunches and fountain pop to members who had arrived with time to spare before their tee-off. The lounge, with its brown carpet and thousand-year-old leather chairs, was almost as unappealing as its manager. Joe was a grotesque man with Cheeto-stained fingertips, a cigarette-pack in his front pocket and his ass-crack on permanent display. When his staff made a mistake, such as charging a member the wrong price for their meal, Joe required her to pay the difference out of her own pocket. Which, by the way, is totally illegal. I once witnessed a co-worker fork over more than \$150 after she accidentally entered the wrong member number on her customer's bill.

On my third day I was scheduled to work in the half-way house, which was essentially a little shack in the middle of the course that served snacks and drinks. Virtually no members came to the hut that day. So, I was stuck in the snack shack with no washroom, no WiFi, a bag of stale chips and a giant dock spider the size of my palm, which I lost track of half-an-hour into my shift. I did, however, find a crappy old young-adult novel on a cupboard shelf behind a rotting pack of oranges. So, I read *Twilight* and I calculated the accumulation of my \$9.90/hour paycheck as the minutes ticked by. Half an hour before close—by this time, I had seriously contemplated peeing my pants but had relieved myself in the bushes behind the 8th green—a group of golfers came by and requested cheeseburgers. I selected what most closely resembled cheeseburgers from the fridge and brought them outside to the barbeque. I knew for certain that I had not received the proper certification to cook food. In fact, I had received no training whatsoever. I had actually never even started a gas-barbeque; however, I had witnessed people singe their eyebrows off on more than one occasion. I felt so defeated that I contemplated quitting right then and there.

But, with faux calmness, I turn the gas lever and I assumed a dramatic but necessary position of safety by crouching down and shielding my head with my arm. I pressed start. It was at this very moment that I asked myself, what am I doing with my life? I was 22 years old, about the start my master’s degree and essentially working at McDonalds for less than minimum wage. I wanted to cry. Instead, I served four semi-cooked cheeseburgers to four elite golfers for a combined \$0.50 tip. Unlike my dignity, my eyebrows remained unscathed.

After two weeks of working at The Member’s Club, I quit. I genuinely could not afford to make so little money. I never did get to be a cart girl.

The Dock; Summer 2017

If you ever find yourself in the vicinity of The Dock Restaurant in Muskoka, don’t go there. Most of the online reviews will tell you the same. My younger sister and I both took serving jobs at The Dock in the summer of 2017. By this time, I had experience as a restaurant server and bartender. I was pretty good at it, too.

The Dock could be something special, but it’s not. It is a combination restaurant-marina that is located both right off the highway and right on the lake, the only restaurant or marina for miles. They get a lot of traffic; the problem is, they don’t really know who their clients are. It was a conflicting experience to wait on a table of locals who smelled so bad that I had to hold my breath and stand at least three feet away, and then turn right around to wait on a table of wealthy yachters who ordered bottle service. The Dock’s food-stained menus, which contained pictures and expired newspaper advertisements, looked like they hadn’t been updated since the 1950s. Which would not necessarily be so jarring if it was done so ironically, but the ancient menus really contrasted with the iPads (which were a serious pain) that servers were required to use at tables to place orders. Plus, The Dock was

a pub that marketed its food as healthy; on tacky television screens inside the restaurant, they ran advertisements explaining that they didn’t use deep fryers. I don’t know anyone who comes to a pub for pub food and is pleased that their meal won’t be fried. And here’s an insider tip: even though The Dock doesn’t have deep fryers, they buy their stock from suppliers pre-deep-fried.

Rick owned The Dock and the marina and he lived with his wife and grown children in an apartment above the restaurant. Rick was technology-obsessed. He had (probably intentionally) conjured an Orwellian vibe by installing cameras every five feet in the restaurant. I would not be surprised to learn that there were cameras in the washrooms. Rick loved his cameras and his iPads and he spent most of his time sitting at table 11 observing the security tapes on his phone. He was also known to loudly reprimand servers in front of customers when he did not receive enough extra ice in his iced tea, or dill sauce on the side of his fish and chips. Once, as I was serving Rick’s table, he snatched the iPad right out of my hand to ensure that I had specified “no onion” on his burger. Which, of course, I had specified. He also stole my water-bottle when I accidentally left it on the server’s stand during one of my breaks. Rick was, to be perfectly clear, a tyrant.

One day, two charging cables for the iPad docking station went missing from Rick’s office. For the record, these cables were about two inches in length and almost certainly from the dollar store. When Rick discovered that these cords were missing, he marched through the kitchen, flung open the swinging doors to the restaurant and started screaming at the servers, accusing us of stealing from the company. Why anyone would want to steal a crappy charging cord is beyond my scope of knowledge. Rick ensured that he yelled at each server, individually accusing them of theft. When it was my turn, I kept a straight-face

and blinked dramatically. I felt this reaction exemplified an appropriate balance between “you can’t scare me” and “I need this job.”

Although, in hindsight, I wish I had made a counter-accusation by asking him if he was enjoying his expensive, hot-pink, insulated, second-hand water-bottle.

When Rick was finished interrogating each server, he retreated, presumably satisfied with himself, to the office and then quietly left. We didn’t see him for the rest of the day. However, we were sure to be on our best behaviour because Rick was, without a doubt, watching our every move on his cameras. At the end of that shift, when we were closing the restaurant, the servers headed to the office to return our iPads. We found a giant sign taped the door which read, “To whoever took Rick’s iPad chargers: I consider this theft. Return the chargers to me IN PERSON immediately. Do not make me review hundreds of hours of video footage to find out who did this (and I WILL find out).” I have never before been so stricken by disbelief. I was, to be completely honest, also concerned about this man’s mental well-being, seeing as he genuinely thought this sign a completely acceptable and justified way to communicate with employees. About two weeks later, a co-worker and I found the cables on the ground behind Rick’s desk. Rick never addressed the incident again.

Toward the end of the summer, I heard a rumor that The Dock had been withholding the staff’s tips. For reference, withholding tips from servers is a violation of the law. I took it upon myself to launch my own internal investigation. I spent about a week asking co-workers about their experiences with their tips and concluded that the rumors had to be true. It was not until I confronted Rick that I verified said rumors. One day, in the most casual-tone I could possibly

muster, I asked him how much money The Dock deducts from the tips. Rick told me 10%. The dude isn’t smart.

By this time in my mismatched adventure of a career, I was feeling particularly righteous. And, I think, rightfully so. I had worked enough good jobs to know that I didn’t have to be taken advantage of by authority. I also felt I had a responsibility to the younger, seasonal workers – most of the kitchen staff was in high school and the servers were all university students – who didn’t know their rights, or if they did, didn’t know how to exercise them. I called the Ontario Ministry of Labour. After the ministry encouraged me to file a claim, I sent a formal letter to The Dock indicating my intent to resign should they not issue me my remaining tips. In what is one of the larger mysteries in my life, Rick thought my letter had come from my lawyer. He responded with an e-mail in a threatening tone (and riddled with spelling errors) accusing me of falsifying my evidence against the restaurant.

I honestly cannot fathom how grown adults can feel it perfectly acceptable to take advantage of and to exploit the labour of young workers and students. It is appalling. A few months ago, I filed my claim. I am currently awaiting the ministry’s reply.

Except for Target, names of people and locations have been changed.



Do Not

Read Instructions

Tara Korkmaz

Today is the day!

I have all the necessary documents. Two color photos that are taken by a commercial photographer; against a white background, professionally printed on plain, high-quality photographic paper that show a full front view of my face and top of my shoulders, reflecting my natural skin tone and showing my neutral facial expression, **no smiling, mouth closed** and looking straight at the camera, with **eyes open and clearly visible**.

I have fulfilled all the eligibility requirements to apply for a Canadian passport. It is going to be a pivotal moment in my life to finally own a passport that I can carry in my hand when I am in the airport, and not feel like I have to hide it in my purse.

The application is in front of me, looking very legal and authoritative:

[Read Instructions](#)

Anxious to start, I have been holding on to a pen for quite some time. Every application that I've completed so far to get to this one flashes in front of me. I have printed two copies of all forms just in case I make a mistake. At first glance, it all seems straightforward. I keep a copy of every form that I complete and always take an extra picture. For my first-ever Canadian

passport, I need to complete the **Adult**

General Passport Application for Canadians 16 years of age or over applying in Canada or from the USA

Why is it that Canada always positions itself beside the USA? Good question; I think it is more because the USA wants to be everywhere. The fact is that I am a Canadian citizen now regardless of where I come from or where I am applying.

I must be meticulous not to make any mistakes. I hear that even a small error on the application will delay the issuing process for months. I have already waited so long and counted the moments to gather 1095 days of residence, the time needed to qualify for this document. Who

calculates these numbers? Why do 1095 days make a citizen, and not 1094? Sometimes even 1095 months doesn't feel enough. For me though, now is the time. I need this passport to fly, far and high. It will give me wings, expansive and efficient wings.

The third line of the application starts with a **Warning**:

Any false or misleading statement with respect to this application and any supporting document, including the concealment of any material fact, may result in the refusal to issue a passport, the revocation of a currently valid passport, or the refusal of passport services, and may be grounds for criminal prosecution. Your application will not be processed if you fail to complete all of the required sections of this form and/or refuse to consent to the exchange or disclosure of any personal information required for the delivery of passport services.

After this minor threat comes the instruction on how to fill in the blanks:

Type or print in CAPITAL LETTERS using black or dark blue ink.

I think of using a black pen. That makes my document neater. It might make it stand out. Whoever is going to review it will be less apathetic. I am not sure if this changes anything; maybe less tension on the paper leads to less pressure in the mind? I want the immigration officer to be the least agitated possible. At the airport, they usually appear very calm then all of sudden they deny someone entry. It is because something stirs up their mind.

As I squeeze my black pen in my hand, another line breaks the page:

Personal Information (see Instructions, section H)

This one is not a warning, but I have to read section H before I can start writing anything. I search for section H and I find it on page 5 of 7.

Section H is about names, **Surname and given name(s) to appear in passport**

"I have to use my maiden name." I imagine, "In case I need to travel back home."

I read once in one of those online quizzes that your name says a lot about you. That's very true in this case, but it seems to be more about the last name. Last names are so geographical, even political. They can instantly give away nationality, status, and language and in some cases, even gender.

There is an emphasis on last names in this form.

Surname (last name)

I write down my last name. It is asking me again

Surname (last name) at birth I write "same". One more time;

Former surname (last name)

I have no former last name. The name I always had is my father's last name and I am keeping it. It's better that way in case I go back home. In some countries, the husband is the legal guardian of his wife, yet there is no pressure to accept the husband's last name. It is interesting that the underlying logic behind this casual freedom is the negation of equal rights. The son's wife is never an equal member of the family, sadly enough.

On the right-hand side, in an embedded column and on a separate row, with noticeably irrelevant size, a tiny suitcase appears, asking for travel date.



I have plenty of travel dates in my mind. All of them are missed occasions and missed flights or times I was stopped and refused entry at the border: all the wedding invitations that I ignored, and those that I didn't want to attend. How many funerals did I miss? Including my grandparents' and my father's.

Whoever designed this page might not know a packed suitcase does not always end up on a trip. Some people are packed all their lives and can't go anywhere. The subject of a suitcase comes with its own baggage.

This little suitcase cannot take me to any of places that I want to visit in the future. It just evokes enormous heartbreak in me, the many times that I was invited to see my relatives, now scattered around the world, and I couldn't go because of visa restrictions or I didn't bother because of the complexity of the process.

Together, last name and date of birth make for strong source codes that institutions use with other data to create executable methods of governing people. A last name without a birthday is of no use for identification.

Place of birth

I get worried every time I see this question! If my last name doesn't reveal where I was born, they are asking me anyway. I write down where I was born and I think it doesn't matter what color pen I use. The immigration officer will now see red. Being born in a place of conflict means growing up and still feeling like a naked infant, barefoot and vulnerable. Crossing a border feels that way each time.

I still think colors work magic. My first complete set of paints and brushes was a gift from my father's friend. I was just a child. I drew a lot. I painted a lot too, with colored pencils. Flowers, birds and butterflies were my favorites. The painting set did its magic. It gave me the gift of art. I began exploring with oil and watercolors. An American man was the first person who encouraged me to make art. He was kind in a sincere way.

My father had many American friends and some British ones. He spoke English with them, mostly about work. Back then Americans were our friends. We gave them oil and bought military equipment from them to be able to defend our country in case of foreign threats and wars. They knew it was coming.

The application asks for **city**
and **country** of birth
and **Prov./Terr./State (if applicable).**

Should I write demolished? Should I write bombed and burned? Should I write invaded?
Should I say ask UNESCO about all that? Or should I write beautiful, ancient places with a thousand years of rich history and culture? I just fill in the blanks with the relevant geographical information. Next it asks for **Date of birth**

I was born on Canada Day. I only found out about the significance of my birth date when the immigration officer in the airport asked if I knew what an important day it was. I didn't know. I was embarrassed and scared. I should have known, but I was more worried about being judged for not knowing. At the same time, I felt special. In an indescribable way and just for that moment I felt I was born in the wrong place. At least the date felt right. The officer stamped my

passport, stretched his arm towards me, looked me in the eye and said: "Welcome to Canada."
I felt special again. That was seven years ago.

I place an **X** in front of 'Female' when I respond to the question about **Sex**.

Here comes the racialized question about **Natural eye colour**, one that I always asked myself. Why aren't my eyes green like my mother's, hazel like my grandmother's or gray like my great-grandmother's? I write **Brown** as I think about my father's eyes. He died with his eyes open. They were brown.

Over fifty percent of the world population has brown eyes and in Canada the majority of second-class citizens are brown-eyed people. Second-class citizens are immigrants and refugees, whose citizenship can be revoked if they commit a crime. The first-class citizens; however, can commit all the crimes in the world and they remain Canadian.

The USA goes as far as asking for hair color in their passport application. Whose hair color is real these days? Such a waste of application space! I am thinking about the Americans again.

Height (cm/in) This question is also crime-related. It is relevant to identification of criminals. Mug shots also include height measurements. Only if my doctor asks about my height I am okay with that. Regardless, I am short. Shorter than average, Canadian average. I write my height in centimeters. It just sounds taller.

The question of **Current home address** takes me back home.

This time I am thinking about the home that we moved to in a different city when we had to leave our real home. I see my mother sitting in the living room waiting for us to arrive from school. Beautiful golden-color tea was waiting in crystal tea glasses with the afternoon sun shining right through. Mom said, "I just poured them." My father had already started sipping his tea. Something felt different. My brother attacked the cookies and was about to run out of the room. My father said, "Wait!" I sit down and reach for my tea. My brother sits beside me on the couch arm. Father said, "I am going to retire." Instant sadness crawled into my heart. My brother asked, "We are not moving back?" He was smart, my brother. Indeed, he was gifted.

Father told us that he was going to retire and we wouldn't move back to where we used to live because he didn't think the war was going to end anytime soon. He did not want to put himself and us in more danger with traveling back and forth two thousand kilometers every two weeks. There were no airplanes flying anymore, and the roads were unsafe, structurally and also because of explosives and war debris. We were refugees of war in our homeland.

I don't want to count in how many different cities, countries, and continents I have lived. I don't recall how many addresses I have changed, but I know none of them were home.

I write my **Mailing address** and complete the **province** and

Postal code with **Telephone** for **(daytime)** and **(other)** plus my **Email address**.

One more **declaration** with an embedded **Warning**

—I solemnly declare that I am a Canadian citizen, that the photos enclosed are unaltered and a true likeness of me, that all of the statements made and the information provided in this application, as well as any supporting documents, are true. I declare that I have read and understood the Warning at the top of this page and the Privacy Notice Statement (see section M). I consent to the collection, use and disclosure of my personal information by the Passport Program, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, other federal government institutions, Government of Canada offices abroad and third party entities as outlined in the Privacy Notice Statement in the Instructions.

It is a warning about the understanding of the previous warning, and I consent to the collection, use, and disclosure of my personal information that is natural for anyone's qualification for international border crossing. Is this information even personal anymore? I doubt it. Once I sign this form, my information belongs to the government. That is the deal. I am a Canadian citizen. I belong to Canada, and Canada belongs to all its citizens. It's just that it doesn't feel like that most of the time.

Declaration of Guarantor (see Instructions, section I)

- ② **Note:** You must complete and sign all **three (3)** pages of this application form before requesting that your guarantor complete and sign this section.

This section asks about my guarantor, someone who provides a Statement about me and likeness of my photographs. Likeness?

Declaration—I solemnly declare that I have known the applicant identified above personally for at least **two (2)** years. I have signed the back of **one (1)** photo to certify that the image is a true likeness of the applicant. If applicable, I have signed and dated a copy of each document to support the applicant's identity to confirm that I have seen the original(s). I declare that I have read and understood the **Warning** at the top of this page and the Privacy Notice Statement (see section M). I consent to the collection, use and disclosure of my personal information by the Passport Program, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, other federal government institutions, Government of Canada offices abroad and third party entities as outlined in the Privacy Notice Statement in the Instructions.

Again, warning, consent, and all that stuff. I have to complete and sign the application before presenting it to the guarantor who must be a Canadian citizen as well. Only people who belong to Canada can vouch for new Canadians. It makes sense. It is important to know people who are Canadian citizens. It helps with integration and adaptation into the society, but it is not a cure for isolation that roots itself in migration, slowly and steadily. Displaced people are disposed to being misplaced and lost despite having a fixed address.

Once we were forced to move, the entire universe became an option to be our second home. Father told us that he is thinking about moving us to Canada. Somehow, he lost his love for the USA and figured out that Canada was better for us. Already most of our relatives moved to the USA. Their work experiences in the oil field made it easy to find work. No one knew exactly what Canada was but my father knew a lot about everything. He was educated. Every night my sister and I talked about snow and icebergs. We saw them in the movies. It never snowed on our island, and it only rained very little sometimes in the winter.

I guess my father wanted to be as far as possible from the war and what was coming after that. My brother left the country first. It was urgent in his case. Soon he would be drafted, and that would have been the end of him and for sure the end of my mother.

I left one year after my brother, but I couldn't join him when I left because we had no idea where he was. We just knew he was alive.

My little sister was too young. She stayed behind with my parents waiting for father's retirement to happen. I didn't see her for fourteen years.

I stayed in Europe. I was to wait there until my brother settled in Canada. It took my brother two years to arrive in Canada. By that time, I started a new life in Europe. I was going to university and emerging as an artist with a bright future. This new place and its contradictions with my old motifs pushed me to abstraction. The palm trees burnt in war became obscure fragments of paintings that started to appear in small exhibitions beside my collages and installations.

Solitude, yearning and hardship nurtured my imagination and hope kept me going.

[Read Instructions](#)

(3) (Previous Canadian Travel Document (see Instructions, section J))

This does not apply to me.

(4) Proof of Canadian Citizenship (see Instructions, section L)

Since I was **born outside of Canada** I am providing my Certificate of Citizenship's number and date of issue.

(5) Documents to Support Identity (see Instructions, section K)

The documents to support identity cannot be the same as documents provided in the previous section, and they have to be two. I enter my driver's license number, the expiry date and name as it appears on the document. I also have my immigration certificate that I can use.

I wonder what people without a driver's license would do? Some have another passport from the country of their origin. I sign and date the document.

(6) Period of Validity (see Instructions, section C)

I place an **X** in front of 5 years, and I think, who knows who will be alive in ten years. My Canadian passport will be valid for five years. I cannot decide for ten years validity. That's a

lifetime, ten years. I learned to only think for now and the next day. When one lives so many years with uncertainty, the future becomes just a dream. I think about the future sometimes, but I never plan anything major. To be able to have something for ten years, I have never experience that. I start with five years for my passport.

(7)

Additional Personal Information

So far, this application is interested in where I live or what kind of work I do. Being able to work and having a place to live is essential to being Canadian: two fundamental human rights that don't sit well with capitalism and its idea of economic freedom. Most people do work here but those who don't work much are unjustifiably richer.

My father worked many hours on the oil rigs, but we weren't poor. He only came home every two weeks. On the Island, we lived in a wide and spacious bungalow with a shiny metal roof. Our rooms had large windows opening to my mother's garden. The grass was what she grew nicely, and it stayed green all year around. The heat was relentless in killing any other plants besides cacti and bushes. In winter, we could grow some flowers that lasted until early spring, and that was it. We had two palm trees, a male and a female. My mother used to help them with pollination every spring if the winds didn't arrive in time. They gave so many dates – enough for the entire year. The palm trees appeared often in my paintings. Our garden smelled of the sea, sand, and sun and the seagulls were the usual guests. When war broke, we left the house for them and took nothing.

A Addresses in the last two (2) years?

I am talking about my address from two decades ago. In my mind, I still live there. I keep going back and relive being there. That was my fixed address and its still fixed in my head. It was safe. It was home.

B Occupation in the last two (2) years (check all that apply):

I have been maintaining a fulltime employment for the last five years while waiting for my citizenship application to be approved. I was building my Canadian identity. Employment, housing, and networking: I was busy doing all that.

There hasn't been much time for me to make any meaningful art anymore. I paint when I have

time, but it does not give me taxable income. It looked good on my citizen application for me to be a tax-paying person. It shows that I am not "scum." Gisele Freund writes in her autobiography, "the scum of the world are people who are not welcome in their own country." She said that seventy years ago but the views about the displaced people and refugees haven't improved much. Technology, science and everything else advance rapidly with time but prejudice and cruelty are not going anywhere anytime soon.

I place an **X** in front of ☐ was employed (full- or part-time)
☐ Ongoing occupation?

These tiny blue boxes are distracting. I don't even know what ongoing occupation means.

C Mother's maiden name

I came to realize that a mother's maiden name is important Canada, at least for security reasons; it is a secure and unique password. Where I was born a mother's maiden name stays a mother's last name forever, even after getting married. It has not much use.

8 References

Provide the following information for **two (2)** persons who are neither your relatives, nor your guarantor; are 18 years of age or over; and who have known you for at least **two (2)** years. They must agree to have their contact information provided as they may be contacted to confirm your identity. Visit Canada.ca/passport for more information on the Passport Program's definition of a relative.

Here are two more people to confirm my identity. They cannot be my relatives. Does this form know what identity is? I am beginning to doubt the level of intelligence of this document, or perhaps there is something wrong with this language. I am sure it wants my references to identify me.

I enter the information for two of my neighbors. They can identify me; they are very conflicted about my identity. The way I dress, the way I eat or drink, my opinions and my feelings and a lot of other things about me are not what they expected. They have told me on several occasions that what they think about people coming from my country is not what they see in me. But then, they haven't traveled much around the world beyond the Sunwing destinations, and most of what they know is coming from the news and Hollywood movies. When people are painted with judgment, it is hard to erase that. My neighbors can identify me. They have a clear and colorful picture of me.

9 Emergency Contact Information (optional)

I want to write my brother's name for this section. I think of his busy life, his meetings, his travels and his two small children. I think about the hassles of being an emergency contact person and enter my sister's information. She can deal with situations like that. She is a physician now. My sister was the last person from our family to arrive in Canada. My mother arrived before her.


It took a while for my father's early retirement dream to become a reality. By that time my brother and I had left the country. The war was a few years in the making with no hope for peace anytime soon. My father did not want us to stay in the country and wait for the bureaucratic train to arrive with his release papers. There was war, demonstrations, and uncertainty. Whoever had a passport and could get out would do so.

There was one last trip my father had to make back south to sign some papers, bring a back few boxes, and maybe say farewell to his colleagues. My mother and sister counted the days for him to come back and start planning for migrating to Canada. Due to war, a one-day trip would take three to four days at that time. Travelling a thousand-kilometer distance, with all the airplanes grounded, became a long and agonizing bus trip back and forth.

My father never made it back.

On the road to return home, the bus crashed just outside of the city. My father was taken to the nearby hospital and died six hours later from internal bleeding. By the time he was identified, only my uncle had arrived at his side. He just said my name and my brother's name a few times, took a torturous breath and stared at the ceiling.

My father is the only member of our family who stayed behind.

 We recommend that you provide the name of someone who would **not** normally travel with you. This information is helpful if you have an accident or become ill while travelling.



Ashleigh Larratt

Extended Narrative

On April 16 2011, I was meditating by the lake and I heard a voice saying, “It’s all love, trying to figure out that it’s all love.” I became that Love. I listened for an eternity, and then looked down to see these two stones, shaped as an infinity symbol and a heart. This has been the most impactful event of my life.

To this day I am not exactly sure what happened. I know that before this moment, I rarely escaped the confines of my own mind, and after this moment I began a process which is still con-tinuing – striving to relate to the world from the deep truth I had realized.

The weeks following that event are stranger than science fiction. Concepts that I had an in-tellectual fascination with—parallel realities, wormholes, higher dimensions and the beings that in-habited them, past and future lives of myself and others seemed to be lived experiences. I felt myself as the ecstatic, energetic fabric of the universe, spontaneously chanting mantras and being thrown into yoga postures I had never been able to do. I began reading spiritual texts, amazed that they were describing something real. The kingdom of heaven was within. I laughed and cried at the realization that my true nature had always been and would always be, despite external circumstances.

To be clear, this opening didn’t come out of nowhere. I had been teaching yoga professionally for a few years and was already a Reiki master. But I didn’t really believe the deeper meaning of what I was doing. Those practices were just new age modalities that kept my head above water and my other self-destructive impulses at bay.

I had found what I had been unknowingly searching for my entire life.

Because of these new realizations I was encouraged to begin helping others in a

more spir-itual capacity. Although I offered a lot, because my own process was not complete, and because I didn’t understand my new sensitivities, the work I did with others eventually came at a great cost to my body, mind and spirit. My access to other dimensions was greater than my ability to make sense of them. Despite learning many energetic protection techniques, I still found myself taking on others’ material. After years of seeing many clients a week for energetic bodywork, I developed strange physical problems. I became so open to other planes of reality that functioning in my day-to-day life was hard. Once, I came out of teaching a Reiki course feeling like I could fall through a crack in the universe. Another time, during a long chanting meditation, looking at others, I didn’t know whether it was them or myself making the sounds. These byproducts of non-dual awareness were terrifying, because I wasn’t totally in my body, and I still had parts of myself holding on for dear life.

But there is a guiding grace to awakening, and eventually I found myself being pulled out of outwardly spiritual activities and back into the physical world of human relationships and life goals. It was uncomfortable, and also important. I realized I had been using spiritual practices and ideas to avoid setting boundaries, uncomfortable feelings, and even moving forward with my life. My understanding of non-dual reality, or my ability to leave my body or zoom into someone else’s story, while deeply insightful and often healing, was apparently not going to easily pay my bills or resolve my lingering psychological holdings. A part of me thought that if I just spent enough time in the brightest light, my life would magically re-organize itself.

After one particular mystical experience, where I saw the many levels of emptiness beyond what I had previously known, and subsequently felt incredible confusion as to how to eat lunch, I made an internal pledge that I would no longer go up for the light anymore.



The light must come down to me and help my life.

Coming down was much harder than going up. That morning on the rocks, the aperture of my consciousness exploded open, but I hadn't landed. As I began to understand embodiment, meridians in my legs tangibly flowing like rivers into the centre of the earth, more that was divided within me was illuminated. It wasn't pretty. They say you repress memories because if you were to live through them you could die. But after a certain point, if you don't feel the old feelings, your life will be locked down by PTSD forever. For me, the thoughts and images passing through were so horrendous that they forced a surrender. I just couldn't give them any energy. I focused with all my might on the ground of being, and treated everything else like a passing car. The fragments integrated from the perspective of wholeness instead of from that of an ego negotiating a narrative.

I focused on what was now and what I wanted. I traded mudras for barbell weights, chanting Sanskrit for classical singing lessons. I kept my eyes open during spiritual practices to stay in this dimension. I kept a daily schedule and balanced my diet. I took a sabbatical from energy healing and so much external guidance, and began connecting to what I now know as my future self. I wrote down her guidance in the form of letters.

I can access her because in the eternal now, all time is happening simultaneously. Although she holds wisdom from my ideal future and has a sort of omniscience, she appears as I am today except more vital. She is compassionate, courageous and wise. Once I see her clearly, (and often I can't do this until I forgive myself for something, or reconcile some contradiction holding me back), I tell her my current concerns. Her response is often surprising and always rings deeply true. What she expresses feels like it comes from the best part of me, one I often forget. She suggests what help to seek,

what relationships to foster, and what worldly actions are important. She is not an external guru but simply my wondrous, perfected self, reaching back in time, teaching me how to move, from truth.

It felt like a battle all of my life between illusion and infinity, but especially in my 33rd year. I had an image of two horses running up the sides of a triangular mountain, racing to reach the peak first. Not trying was the key to staying inside myself, but of course I kept trying. I think I wanted to experience my own absence.

Hearing and obeying what came through was the most difficult thing I ever did.

The core instruction from my future self was to not run away from this moment. Then life could be my teacher. I could slowly pick up all the lost puzzle pieces of my life. I knew it was a good thing that the world was telling me conflicting things. I knew this was forcing me to listen to the wiser part of myself.

Every day I performed an act of devotion to my future self, so I could feel close to her. I pretended that my body was her body, and I adorned it and I worshiped it. I was making myself into a character who won through living from the inside out. At that time, my personality was barely together, not because I had properly transcended it but because it had been smashed into pieces. My awakening happened in a horror movie. I was relearning all the developmental stages I had skipped growing up. I was healing myself with the same sincerity and creativity I had previously used with others.

I spoke with one of my mentors, Jac, who supported my deepest insights that a worship of my phenomenal life would allow a purity to download itself. It meant so much to me that she confirmed all of my secret practices that seemed so superficial: doing one nice thing

for myself a day, merging with my future self energetically, as if colouring her over top of me. I was noticing an in-tegration of divinity with humanity. My pull towards outwardly spiritual things lessened. For me, looking for god in spiritual practice was keeping her away. Every moment was becoming a spiritu-al moment. Every face could be a portal to heaven.

As I kept the boundary around my life strong, less scary images and feelings passed through my awareness. Jac suggested that many of things that had surfaced post-awakening weren't even my material, and that because of my openness the harsher energies of other dimen-sions were latching onto my story for resolution. But regardless, the solution was the same: keep creating a boundary around me, the Ashleigh character, and connect to presence through my heart chakra, at least until those other dimensions knew they couldn't access me. She suggested I could find the same beauty I did on the rocks through my own heart chakra. And when I would find it there, nothing could interfere. It was amazing that a world-renowned spiritual teacher would mirror my intuitions.

Jac told me that my work with the future self was how I was learning to move from love, as love, which was exactly what I heard beaming down from the sky six years ago. This was the completion of a process, but also the beginning of an entirely new way of life. Although that first awakening seemed like all there was, I now see I was just getting my toe in the door of reality.

There is a definite switch in orientation which is slowly stabilizing. Life is not so much about heal-ing myself or finding myself, but about being myself and seeing that same beauty everywhere.

The romantic poet John Keats said something about this I understand now, “Beauty is truth, truth beauty -- that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”



With Alice

Delphine Lewis

The air is thick with the smell of Thanksgiving. Alice and I have been tasked with baking the apple crumble. I don't know my way around her kitchen, so I dictate the ingredients while she weaves around her parents, finding what's needed in various cupboards and drawers. Reunited around the mixing bowl, we slice apples, mix cinnamon with lemon juice and brown sugar, grind oats and nuts to make flour, then carefully layer them into a baking dish. We slide it in the oven.

Task completed, we both look at the clock. We still have time before dinner: "Want to grab your camera? I'll show you how to load film." Alice smiles, which makes me smile. She runs upstairs to grab her equipment and meets me outside, still drenched in the smell of apples and pumpkin.

We walk slowly against the wind toward my apartment, one block away. I've promised her a couple of rolls of expired black and white film. She's eager to learn to use her grandfather's analog camera, and I'm eager to know more about her and her work.

We climb three flights of stairs to my apartment. It's a mess, so I apologize. She doesn't mind and confesses that her room might even be messier. I often forget that I'm talking to a teenager. She walks around the 300 square feet and says, "This is all I would need. Just enough space for me, and enough space to do my work. Something cozy." I look back at her as I pull film out from the only drawer in my half-size fridge. I sort through the black and white rolls, eventually finding a few that aren't too old: "They've been in the fridge for a while, but we'll see how they turn out." She nods and slips the film into her pockets as we make our way to the door. This time, we exit through the fire escape, a steep metal staircase spanning three floors

on the left side of the building. She doesn't flinch, but most people do.

She's taking me to a park nearby. It's late afternoon and still warm. We sit at the last picnic table in the sun to go over the basics: ISO, shutter speed, aperture and depth of field. She's heard it all before, but wants a reminder. I show her how to load a roll of film, then pass the camera over so she can try. It's not difficult, and she does it with ease. I tell her the story of my first roll: "I had gone to the countryside for the weekend and had taken what— I thought would be— amazing images. But as it turned out, my roll hadn't caught, and I hadn't recorded anything." We both laugh, knowing that it wouldn't happen this time.

Camera around her neck, Alice is ready to shoot. We decide to walk around the neighbourhood so that she can practice.

We're both looking for images, scanning left, right, up, and down. We pass decrepit houses, and she starts taking pictures. While I encourage her to explore my medium, I can't stop thinking about her work.

The first time I encountered it was in her parents' basement, where my dad and I were staying for a few days while we searched for an apartment in Toronto. A large-scale self-portrait drawing hung on the wall: an honest image of herself, void of insecurity, self-doubt or self-consciousness, rebelling against the three emotions I typically associate with female mid-adolescence.

The more I spend time with her, the more I begin to understand the complexity of her work: girlhood, womanhood, and feminism. The more we speak, the more I begin to realize that she's closer to who I am today than to who I was at her age, eight years ago. She's now



Ackerman, Alice. 2017, 35mm black and white photographs.

Ackerman, Alice. 2017, 35mm black and white photographs.

part way through her roll. We turn left into an alleyway, where Alice takes a photograph of a broken window and the driveway across from it. I also take a photo of the broken window with my phone, then one of her taking a photo. As I follow her back up the alley, I think about how I was also fifteen when I developed a serious interest in analog photography. Spotting a car wash, we cross the street. There's a blue Mini-Cooper in the parking lot next to a rotting sign. Alice snaps a photo.

Just as we pass a diner, Alice asks, "Can you tell me more about the project? You've told me before, but let's go over it again." A few weeks ago she had agreed to collaborate with me on a photography series, in which we would explore her artistic practice as a mid-adolescent who's interested in exploring subject matter that is more commonly associated with womanhood. I tell her more about how I imagine our project's beginnings, and she tells me she's excited about it, and that it will be interesting for her to have a documentation of her evolving work over the course of the next year.

From fifteen to sixteen, a lot is bound to change.

It's getting close to dinner time, the sun is setting, and we both need to change out of our clothes that are still sprinkled with flour and caramelized sugar. Alice has the last quarter of her roll to shoot. She photographs flowers, a fire escape, vines growing on houses, and a small fan left at the end of her neighbour's driveway labelled, "Broken. Take for parts." We laugh, wondering which parts could be salvaged from a Cool Works fan. Just before we get to her house, she takes her last image: a sad-looking gargoyle. We part ways, and I head to my apartment to clean up.

I walk one block to my apartment and jog up the three flights of stairs once again. While I change my clothes, wash my face, and attempt to tame my hair that's been knotted by the wind I keep thinking about our project. Twenty minutes later, I head back to her house with a list of questions I'd like to ask her, and with vivid visualizations of the images we could create together.



Kenneth McDonald

Extended Narrative

It may have finally happened.

I read these words in an email from my best friend in Vancouver. Nothing else was written. Attached was a picture with a letter in it. The top left of the letter had the recognizable red and blue RE/MAX logo. I knew exactly what this meant the moment I opened it. The house is about to be sold.

Bryce and I lived there for six years. It was a house with cheap stucco and roof tiles nailed to the front steps, and it had been divided into four apartment units in 1983 by our Chinese landlord. Lum wore sunglasses and a hat, day or night, spoke very little English (especially when we needed something from him) and collected rent from us every month, in cash. There were rats and squirrels living in the walls as well as an on-again-off-again relationship with cockroaches. For two winters, the heat wasn't turned on. And the electrical panel in the basement was like everything else in house – temperamental and not up to code. We lived on the top floor, which would be drenched in natural light on a sunny day. We paid very little rent. We called it 'The Palace.'

I left this house five months ago, to move to Toronto. And it wasn't until the email from Bryce that I began considering the significance of The Palace. It was my home. And like a petri dish, it was a vessel for my growth. The six years I spent there felt like a germination period. It was during this time that the seed of my current identity was planted, and eventually flourished.

Now my home of more than half a decade is soon to be rubble and debris, lost in the municipal disposal system.

It makes me think of how this has happened twice before. And I think of who I have become because of these homes, and who I might have been had I lived elsewhere.

"Are you moving in next week?" I read on my phone. The text was from Lisa Dudeck, my soon-

to-be roommate in 2011. "August rent will be due and I need to know if I should find someone else." Lisa was a German architect who moved to Canada to re-evaluate her life. After a few months in Vancouver, she gave up her design career to pursue her newfound dream of opening a yoga studio. She had discovered this apartment through couchsurfing.com, and after crashing for a few days, she ended up renting the couch on a weekly basis. She slept there for six months. Then, when the second of the two bedrooms became vacant she changed from sofa to mattress. Lisa was there for five months before I arrived.

The first room would be mine. I was taking it over from Vadim Mugerma, a Russian adventurer who had the spirit of an eleven-year-old. He was leaving, indefinitely, to backpack through Europe with his girlfriend. He said he might be back, but that I could take the room for as long as I needed it. If he returned, and I was still in his room, he said he'd be happy to sleep on the couch. That was the way things were – fluid, relaxed and unpredictable.

"Yes!" I wrote back to Lisa, "I'll be there on Tuesday."

When Lum would pick up our rent money he would come and cut the lawn. The cedar shrubbery lining the sidewalk was heavily overgrown. The branches arched off the trunk and were supported by silvery, bent one-by-twos. The fence was so rotten that the only way it was still standing was because of the support given by the English ivy that weaved through the chain-link. Hung off one of the rotting posts, on rusted hinges, was the hefty metal gate. You had to lift it up as you opened it, otherwise it dragged along the cracked concrete of the walkway. A few steps past the gate and you were at a set of stairs up to our apartment door, which opened to another set of stairs that led to our living room. On the way, you would be met with the faint smell of cigarettes from Ben Schumacher's apartment below.

As he smoked, Ben tended to listen to Infowars, loudly. He moved into his apartment seventeen years ago from Winnipeg and hasn't lived anywhere else since. For several decades he supported himself as a sign painter. His specialty was seasonal murals on grocery store windows – cartoonish elves dancing and holly boughs wrapping around the words MERRY CHRISTMAS is what I imagined when he told me this. However, he slowly phased out his painting and began buying electronics (radios, amplifiers, generators, etc.), and selling them at the Vancouver Flea Market. Like the rest of the tenants, Ben is a traditional hustler and lives a meekly subterranean life. Wafts of stale cigarettes would linger in his apartment, like from the fabric seats of your chain-smoking aunt's car, and the aroma would inevitably maneuver its way through the house ventilation into our hallways.

The walls in The Palace were made of lath and plaster, and had running cracks from general aging and lack of upkeep. Some areas where the damage was particularly bad, the plaster had chipped off, exposing the horizontal fir strips. Half a year after I took Vadim's room, Bryce moved in and Lisa moved back to the couch. She was working less and happy to have fewer expenses. Bryce and I proudly took on the duty of painting the apartment. With our recent idolization of Wayne White, we bought bold colors, like baby blue, carnation pink, mint green and Crayola yellow. On more than one occasion, our kitchen was aptly compared to Pee-Wee's Playhouse.

Beyond the corky aesthetic, the new paint was a hinging period for the apartment. One month later, Lisa took a bus to the Yukon to experience the Northern Lights. Other than the occasional visit, she had moved out. We also received word from Vadim that he got married and was living in a van with his new bride in Slovenia. Now it was just Bryce and I. And of course Frank, Bryce's one-year-old Jack Russell-Whippet mutt

from Idaho. With a feeling of new ownership, we stripped the existing furniture and miscellaneous ephemera from the apartment's previous renters and squatters, creating a blank space for us to curate. The closet, which was filled with musty suitcases and bent coat hangers, was gutted and became our darkroom. We set a Leitz Focomat enlarger on a piece of cut up plywood and placed the chemical baths on one of the shelves. The room was so small that when the door was closed, you could only take one short step in either direction. After a week of experimental failures, our prints started to turn out, and soon the wall's plaster holes started to disappear behind black-and-white nudes and portraits of our friends.

My phone rang one day. It was from my grandparents in Hope. They have lived there for twenty years, in a quaint house canopied by fir trees. Curving through their front yard there's a creek, which is protected by the Ministry of Environment's Fish Protection Act due to the salmon that spawn up it every year. Ken Wotherspoon, my grandfather whose name I bear, is a retired United Church minister – though he still fills in for occasional services at the local church. He's said you're never truly retired when you work for God.

"You play piano, right?" he asked on the phone. He told me the congregation was about to give away their Heintzman upright. I was at the top of the list to receive it. Shirley, my grandmother, told me that her choir friends thought I was a "respectable young man"; mostly, I believe, because of my recent appearance at the post-church coffee hour. I smiled and carried on a conversation, so I suppose I'm respectable. "I'll come to pick it up next week!" I told my namesake. He replied that he'd have a group of strapping young men to load the mini-beast into my truck. The following Sunday afternoon I rolled up to the church and found him waiting on the lawn with a small group of gentlemen from the tenor section in their early seventies.



After much sweat and swearing, the Heintzman sat regally in the southwest corner of our living room. And now, from the paint to the piano, The Palace felt like home. We'd lived there for a year and every room felt like our own. We were proud to have people over, though most of the time it was just the three of us. Frank would walk from room to room checking in on us throughout the day. Bryce played in bands, wrote and put on plays, paced from the kitchen to the living room preparing for auditions, and would regularly sit in the bathtub for hours. I wrote and recorded music, built furniture, wrote about nothing and would lay out picture frames on the floor to visualize upcoming exhibitions. We both printed pictures like mad and watched movies and smoked on the front steps, talking and smoking or sitting in silence and thinking about whatever seemed important. We felt comfortable to be there and comfortable to be ourselves.

For some years before ending up here I had bounced around a few residences. They were mostly just containers for my stuff and myself.

A coldness tends to linger in places where you can't completely be yourself, where you think before you act and where you feel it necessary to leave on part of the armor that you wear out in the world.

However, I'm lucky enough to have had the warmth of the home where I grew up. This is in large part due to my mother, who has always taken great care to create this feeling of comfort.

The first house was blue. I lived there for eleven years. It had three floors and sat on just less than an acre of grass and dirt. I remember a garden wrapping around the property, half of which was a partially-tended-to sprawl of rhododendrons, sword ferns and miscellaneous

species of trees; the other half was overgrown with impenetrable thorny blackberry bushes. The memories there are sparse and, in all honesty, mostly unreliable, although there is a rooted feeling of security, spread like a groundcover over these years. Who I am now is largely influenced by this first formative decade of my life. And if I reverse-engineer my mind – taking my current disposition, mixing it with my memories and projecting it onto my past – I see a happy home.

Throughout these early years, my neighborhood became more desirable to live in. Because of the zoning, you could build large estates and still live within the city limits. And as Vancouver gained more wealth and population density, affluence trickled into my childhood streets. The Gervins, our neighbors to the south, wanted to buy our little blue house so they could demolish it and groom the land for an equestrian ring. My mom said no. So they bought the more valuable property across the street from us and offered her a trade. Six months later, I watched the blue wood splinter and turn into a pile of useless and unwanted trash.

For the move, we walked most of our belongings across the street and slowly started to settle in. Talking about it recently, my mom says it was the most difficult move she's ever had. It sure felt like an adventure at eleven years old. But the excitement of the new situation soon evaporated as I felt the chill of a new and unfamiliar place to live. And watching the safest place I'd known until that point disappear in front of me was haunting. It was like my memories were being dragged through cold water. However, at some point things began to change. Distress was replaced by nostalgia, and my relationship to the new place began to grow. The transition was not memorable – probably because it was too gradual to be recognized – but at some point, I began to warm up to the new house. It started to feel more like home than the blue house ever did.

It was a horseshoe-shaped bungalow with a sprawling back yard and a one-hundred-year-old weeping willow in the northeast corner of the property. My brother and I inhabited the south wing of the house and it felt like freedom; we had our own rooms, our own space, and what felt like our own lives. If the blue house represented my formative years, the bungalow certainly represents my experimental years. Eleven to twenty is a short amount of time, but a significant period in one's life. Thinking about the number of different people I tried to be is dizzying. And through all of this shape-shifting, my room was my refuge, which was necessary. I changed the layout almost monthly. My bed, desk, and ever-changing personal possessions were like pawns in a chess game against myself, moving around the floor with precise strategy and true insignificance – though the simple act of doing it was meaningful enough.

I had moved away and would return to my south wing refuge for summers, eventually leaving the bungalow for good. A few years later I got news of the house. The word of the sale came with celebration. The modest dwellings that once dominated the neighborhood's landscape had quickly become mere speckled accents among the new mansions. As a result, the neighborhood's market value had soared. And with the offer my mom received for the house, she could retire comfortably at the age of fifty-three.

The selling was also a symbolic moment: the bungalow was an anchor for the family, and as it was pulled up we could all go our separate ways without resistance.

My brother, sister, mother and I could weightlessly move on to the next phase of our lives.

One year later I drove by the property and saw nothing. The bungalow was gone. The property

was just a patch of leveled gravel, preparing to hold the incoming estate. Even the weeping willow had vanished. Then I turned around to see an Andalusian horse galloping in circles on a patch of finer, more eloquently groomed gravel. As I stood on the street, I realized I was standing in the middle of my past. On both sides of me were pieces of land that had at one time held my two childhood homes. Eighty meters in either direction was where I spent the majority of my youth. Knowing that I was supposed to feel a wave of sentiment I told myself that I was sad. But, in all honesty, I wasn't. More than anything I felt kinda hungry and just wanted to go home for dinner.

"False alarm," Bryce told me on the phone the next day. "Lum says he's not selling." The RE/MAX letter was nothing more than a directly addressed promotional flyer. For the moment, Lum seems to still be happy collecting an envelope of cash every month. Yet, as I think about it I realize it may be more than that. I recently found out that his wife died almost a decade ago. Cutting the lawn and picking up the rent is what he knows. Without this, he likely would feel lost and more alone. Nevertheless, I know that it's only a matter of time before he either changes his mind or is reunited with his wife, and with that, The Palace will quickly join the ever-growing heap of demolished buildings in Vancouver. To me though, it has already happened. The Palace's roofing tiles and smoke-stained lath has already joined the debris of the blue house and the bungalow. And they all lie there together, in pieces and stillness.



Some Ghost of Me From Long Ago

Natasha Ramoutar

It starts with dizziness, as though the ground has begun to shake below me, one hot July evening earlier this year. Looking through the glass doors from the balcony, I can only see the people I don't know at this party, all compacted inside the tiny apartment. A heat rises from my stomach and spreads through my body, accompanied by an onset of nausea. This doesn't make sense. I've only had one drink. I run to the bathroom and hang my head, waiting for the nausea to do its worst, but the feeling never peaks, only simmers at an uncomfortable temperature.

Rushing out of the bathroom, I fumble with my shoes, feeling as if all eyes at the party are on me; the girl allegedly puking in the bathroom an hour in. Better than the girl who's losing her mind. My friend Hiba comes over, but I tell her I need to go downstairs, practically clawing at the door. I feel so guilty pulling her from the party because I had initially begged her to come with me, not wanting to go alone. When we get downstairs, comfortably seated on the couch, I turn to her. Through deep breaths I tell her: "Hiba, I think I'm having a panic attack."

I've always been a bit of an anxious girl. Growing up, I was a shy and self-conscious child. Through practice, especially during my teenage years, I learned that I'm a planner and I like to have control over myself and my situations. For the most part, my planning often mitigates my fears and these self-conscious feelings. Worried about a test? Study for it. Think you'll never get published? Pitch at least 3 articles a week. I can create a solution for everything. This is largely the reason why—when the panic attacks began happening in the summer— I didn't believe they were serious.

There were two things that triggered my anxiety and panic attacks. The first was cramped spaces. Back in April of this year, I went to see UK grime artist Skepta at REBEL, an artist with a rowdy fanbase. While my friend and I were initially front and center, the crowd constantly pushed forward, pressing us skin to skin with

other viewers. The pushes came in waves, and after the third I ran out to the bar where there was minimally more space. I began to associate tight spaces with that situation. Naturally, the overfilled apartment was the initial catalyst of my discomfort at the party. But normally I could bring myself back to sense by reminding myself where I was, which brings me to the second thing: people and judgement.

Since I am a planner, I often didn't worry about this in other settings. I could prepare for job interviews and presentations. Hell, I often went overconfidently into those spaces, with an inflated belief in myself. But parties? Especially a party where I didn't know half the people there?

It was as if it brought out some ghost of me from long ago, little Natasha, all shy and self-conscious, worried that someone would call her out for being a fake at the party. Not dancing. Not drinking enough. Not fun.

This was enough to set me off into a nausea-inducing, body-on-fire, can't-even-breathe panic attack. But it wasn't serious, I rationalized to myself, because people have panic attacks for things that are worse - for deaths in the family, and being assaulted, and surviving wars. Not for being worried about being judged. Although I was shy, I never had social anxiety growing up, so why would I have it now? The next party would be fine, I told myself.

The next party, just a few weeks later, was not fine. It was better than the first - I didn't almost throw up again - but I had a new physical reaction. I began to shiver violently, and the dizziness became worse. I played it off as though I had a cold and went home early, but knew the truth: this problem wasn't going away on its own.

It only got worse from there. It seeped into my everyday life and became an engulfing presence. I was constantly worried about when the next panic attack would be, which was often. I frequently left work early because I was physically sick and throwing up in the bathroom. I would feel like I couldn't breathe on the subway. Completing my undergraduate degree close to home at the University of Toronto Scarborough, I had the privilege of driving to school, so getting into a packed subway car was something new - and frightening - to me.

It hit me hardest when I was at the orientation for the Master of Professional Communication class of 2017-2018 in August. After a cramped subway ride during rush hour, I sat fidgeting in a room of 23 students I had never met before. As we did our obligatory and anxiety-inducing icebreakers, I found myself wondering what I was going to say. I was sitting in a room of seasoned professionals, from paralegals to instructional designers, and multiple-degree academics. I felt it rise in me again - the same feeling of uneasiness, a nausea that kept me from eating, dizziness that impeded my focus, a shattering self-doubt. How the hell was I going to make it through this year?

I started seeing the counsellor at Ryerson during my first week of classes in September. I had tried to see a counsellor earlier, sneaking away in a fit of anxiety from my Master program orientation, hoping that none of my classmates would see me slip into the counselling office. When I arrived at the office, unnoticed by my peers, I was told they couldn't officially see me until the first day of classes, until my fees were invoiced to me and I was officially registered.

My doctor had prescribed medication since the panic attacks were daily, but I hated taking it. For some people, it works well. It makes them feel some semblance of normal again, regulates them back to an easy stability. Mine made me feel tired and numb, like some sort of husk. My body wasn't adjusting to it well, and I wasn't interested in trying other types.

When I finally did get into individual counselling, the counsellor recommended a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) group. For anyone with anxiety, a group setting seemed like a death sentence. Still, I was desperate and willing to try anything.

The psychiatrist leading the CBT group was kind and had a welcoming air about him. He was the type of person to put everyone at ease in the room - a necessary quality for a group like this. What surprised me was the familiarity of the material in the group. A friend had told me to think of this group session as an anxiety tutorial to practice mitigation skills every week. What I hadn't expected was that I had inadvertently taken the course before.

I am a martial artist. Being a physically small woman in martial arts means that you constantly have the odds stacked against you. Muay Thai, the sport I trained in, was a very masculine space. Likewise, everyone in the gym was physically bigger than me. Walking in as a 112-lb. woman, I was constantly having to fight my way up the ladder. When I started the sport in September 2014, I was lucky to be surrounded by coaches and training partners who treated me as an equal and respected my hard work. They believed in me when I said that I wanted to fight 2 years later, in the summer of 2016.

But I didn't always believe in myself. Training for a fight is as much a mental game as it is a physical challenge. My teammate Zeyna, who is also a recreational therapist, noticed that I was burning out quickly. I was constantly upset. She often caught me crying in the changeroom after training. After explaining everything to her - telling her that I didn't feel like I deserved to participate in an exhibition match with my friends cheering me on, that I didn't think I was training hard enough - she gave me a worksheet that focused on ANTs: Automatic Negative Thoughts.

During the second meeting of the CBT group this year, we discussed how to write a thought

record. I looked at the sheet and saw a column with those familiar letters: ANT.

A feeling welled up in my throat, for once not because of the anxiety. For the first time in a long time, I felt like I had control over something. Like my mental health issue wasn't insurmountable. Like I had some glimmer of hope.

"When you injure your body, the surrounding area flares up," my physiotherapist told me one day while treating my thumb injury. "It's the body's way of protecting itself. And if you leave it untreated and you don't rest it, then it gets worse."

While I was struggling with my anxiety problem, I also had a chronic thumb injury. Just as with the counselling situation, I wasn't able to see my physiotherapist until I was back in school. My father's insurance would only cover me while I was a student, and I wasn't making enough at my job prior to school to pay for treatment. September onwards was a time for treatment - both mentally with counselling, and physically with physiotherapy.

What struck me about those words was that they mimicked my anxiety's progression as well.

I had had precursors to the anxiety attacks, benchmarks of stress. Most of my friends graduated in June 2016, but I had taken an extra co-op work term and spent that summer studying and trying to finish my degree. I had two majors: English Literature and Film, where I learned many of the skills that I use as a writer today, and French, a colossal waste of my time. Finishing my courses in August, I then spent all of September desperately trying to find work, sending out job applications into the dark abyss of online job portals. Like many recent

graduates, I began to get discouraged and desperate for employment.

I finally landed on a position at my alma mater in October, a casual contract position working as an administrative assistant. It was a boring job at its core. While I got a chance to work on special projects with the marketing team with social media outreach and copy editing, the scope of my role was scheduling and front desk reception.

It soon became apparent that I had been hired to fill a gap in a horribly understaffed department. My supervisor constantly berated me while giving me an unmanageable amount of work. She offered to help me if I needed, then told me my tasks were within the scope of my job description when I asked for assistance. I began to get sick frequently, but didn't have the time or money to take days off. Concerned colleagues would ask me why I was at work if I was sick, but I feigned that it wasn't as bad as it sounded. Taking a day off meant that I wouldn't have money for antibiotics or my graduate school applications, which were all due in December. Suffer today to improve tomorrow became a motto.

Furthermore, the office had the environment of a high school - grown adults had loyalties, held grudges, and would talk behind others' backs. When I tried to tell anyone about my supervisor's behaviour, they excused it: this was her first time supervising, she was young, everyone has too much work and it's trickling down on all of us. I began to feel like my experiences weren't valid, that I wasn't a good worker, and that I had no allies where I worked. I know now that casual contracts in higher education institutions are commonplace and that these feelings are numerous among

Anxiety and panic attacks - as terrible as they were - were just my body's way of trying to keep me safe

people my age, but at the time I felt like the lone rower on a sinking ship.

Every time I got a wave of nausea, I physically had to leave an area and isolate myself. These attacks meant I was forced to rest even though I had refused to take time off in December. And like it or not, my anxiety prompted me to self-reflect and get my priorities in order.

It forced me to face my fears by placing them at the forefront of my mind endlessly.

Thought records became a tool I utilized frequently to pull myself out of anxiety before I got in too deep, one that I used mostly with success. But after a month of group counselling, I found myself staying after the group was finished, recounting in tears a time when it didn't work to the psychologist.

A few weeks prior, I had gone to see a person who was very important in my life. While he recounted a story about a party he had gone to, my body assaulted me with a violent panic attack, and I spent the next ten minutes in the bathroom dry heaving. Naturally, the automatic thought that came up in every subsequent time seeing him was "I'm going to have a panic attack." I could find no evidence against it. This was a person who was supposed to represent a safe space in my life, and yet who inadvertently set off my panic attacks. I was worried it would never stop, and that I would need to cut him out of my life.

What the psychologist taught me was that sometimes you would have a panic attack, and there was no way to stop it. Some of his clients had said they instead would greet it head on with their own personal mantras - "bring it on" or "just try me."

It took some trial and error. I had been reading Growth Mindset by Carol Dweck, a book with focuses on reframing obstacles as surmountable challenges in your mind. The next time I felt that wave of nausea, I clenched my hands, took a deep breath, and thought the words "thank you" in my mind. I thought of how

my body was trying to protect itself. I accepted that it was happening. And sure enough, the wave of nausea passed.

Anxiety is not a great, productive force in everyone's life. It can literally cause people to be bedridden for days, isolate them from their friends and family, and prevent them from seeking joy. For me, reframing it in my mind as something that could potentially be productive and helpful, it was something I could rationalize and accept. It was a narrative I could cling to, no matter how twisted it seemed.

I really do believe in the personal as a metaphor for the universal. When I began having panic attacks, the first thing I did was contact friends and ask about their experiences and how they coped. I learned about grounding - the process of returning to the present moment - with all five senses. One friend taught me about tapping radial points and feeling my toes in my shoes. Another advised peppermint oil for smell and mints or gum for taste. Audio and visual cues took me the longest to adjust to. For me, visual grounding wasn't counting objects in the room or naming shapes. It was seeing my closest friends nearby and hearing their voices. The greatest grounding tool for me wasn't objects or sensations - it was connecting with those I loved most.

The second thing I did was flock to entertainment and popular culture. I read memoir pieces by Camilla Gibb and Joan Didion, trying to see how my heroes had coped with their turbulent times. I searched for online articles about panic attacks in Buzzfeed, Minds Matter Magazine, and Teen Vogue. I scoured the web for every celebrity that ever admitted to having anxiety and panic attacks.

These activities made me feel less like the gothic women of horror losing their minds - the depictions I had grown up with and internalized - and more like a regular human being.

I was terribly afraid to write about my mental health issues because acknowledging them makes them more real. My fear of writing about my anxiety is why it was so important that I undertook this project; it is real for me, just as it is real for so many others.

Recently in my last individual counselling appointment for the semester, I confided in my counsellor that I was afraid of being back in that dark, deep hole as I was in August. When she asked why, I told her that although most days feel "normal" now, there are days where I feel deeply melancholy or nervous. Those days feel like precursors again, like peering off the edge of the cliff. Like one slip would send me back into a place I had fought to get out of. Her response was to pose a question to me: was I that same person that I was back in August?

The answer is a definitive no. I still have anxiety and still get panic attacks, but I now know how to manage them. She described my grounding tools and support network as safety nets, something that can catch me even if I do slip.

As I find myself at a turning point once more, one of seasons, semesters, and years, I am looking forward optimistically. I am hoping for the best, but bracing for the worst - that's all I can do.



Last Days in Havana

Jessica Rodriguez Leon

This entire trip has been a mess. Since moving to Canada, my family has only returned to Cuba three times. Each vacation is riddled with unnecessary visits to extended family, neighbours, and sometimes even strangers. Leaving my childhood apartment always leads to being accosted by senior citizens who remember not only my name, but every detail of my kindergarten report card. I was very social as a child. I was once an unofficial member of the neighbourhood's *Comité de Defensa de la Revolución*, or CDR as it is most commonly known. CDRs are neighbourhood committees throughout the country that act as community watchdogs. In the late 1970s, the CDR accused my father of being unpatriotic for listening to rock 'n' roll music he picked up from a Miami radio station. My father was not around when I was growing up, and I didn't understand what the CDR did until I left the island.

I am weary, walking alone around my own home upon every return. I feel hyper-visible when all I want is to blend in. This trip solidifies the impossibility of this wish – before anyone even hears my accent, the way I carry myself gives me away.

We spent the last week and a half in Villa Clara, the province where most of my family members live. We were constantly in motion in an effort to spend time with both sides of the family. Most of the trip is spent in our rental car, driving back and forth between Santa Clara and Caibarién. We spend our days hiding from the sun, drinking cheap beers, and of course, walking the streets I had wandered many times as a child. I am an avid walker and I prefer to stroll through a city to uncover its euphoric treasures, no matter how miniscule.

Walking in Cuba feels perplexing; I feel completely enamoured and devastatingly estranged. Each spot I visit is hooded in nostalgia for me - so many things look different, so many things look the same.

In Caibarién, I regularly stalk the street of my grandmother's house, and become appalled each time I witness the heavy decay it has suffered since her death. These towns are where I would spend summer vacations, so I'm recognized less. Although in Caibarién, various people pretend to mistake me for my mother, which grows old quickly. I smile politely and tell my mother about it each time it happens, to make her smile.

We haven't seen much of Havana at this point. We spent the first two days of the trip in the city, but the Tropical Depression that plagued the city for the duration of our trip deters my parents from moving. The only thing that gets them out of our tiny apartment are required visits and cheap alcohol. My partner, John, joined us just days before we moved on to Havana. It's his first time in Cuba, and I want him to see the country in its full complexity. Much as I want to see the country in its full complexity. Most of the trip has been structured around family time, but in Havana we have planned for a few days of exploration. Rather, I have planned our days. I *know* my family. I know the chaos that erupts whenever we are all in one room. My parents have led our Cuba trips twice before. Each time we argued more than anything else. The four of us are extremely sensitive people who really know how to get under each other's skin. We're also all quite different. This leads to many disagreements. Travelling back to Cuba, we become more high-strung than ever. The smallest tic can set any of us off.

I plan this trip in an attempt to avoid fighting. I crafted a foolproof itinerary, consulting John, my parents, and my brother before finalizing it. No one expressed concern until we arrived in the country, when suddenly my parents refused to acknowledge I had planned anything at all. Months after, while on the phone with my mother, she tells me the trip was a mess due to our lack of planning. I remind her that I had written a detailed itinerary for the trip. She pauses briefly, and tells me that the next trip will go smoother if we put together a plan. I change the subject.

The car ride into Havana is gruesome. We make a pit stop in Santa Clara to grab lunch and order my favourite food, Cuban street pizza. I ask my cousin, Kirian, where I can get good pizza in the neighbourhood. She gives a couple of suggestions, but we have trouble finding them. My father was raised in this town, and pride keeps him from asking anyone outside the family for directions. I wonder if for him Santa Clara feels like Havana does for me – whimsical childhood homes to which we no longer belong. We end up grabbing pizzas that are barely cooked. I am the only person who finishes their pizza, blinded by hunger and conscious of the long car ride ahead. When we finally get on the road, my father drives like someone who should never have access to car keys. He is swerving from lane to lane like he’s enjoyed one too many beers. This is his tactic to avoid massive potholes and protect the precious rental car, the most expensive part of this trip. We are stopped twice by police officers. The second officer says he wants to check the trunk. I light a cigarette to calm my nerves. In that trunk, we are smuggling lobsters and other crustacean delicacies that family members in Caibarién caught in for us. In Cuba, these types of goods can only be sold by the state. The officer is either negligent or indifferent because he fails to say anything about our contraband, and we continue on our way.

When we arrive in the city, I am excited to be staying at an AirBnB with John and my brother, Miguel. The first few days, my parents, grandfather, Miguel and I had all crammed into our old apartment, a two-room space with a double bed and a sofa. My father usually took the floor, which may explain his sour mood whenever we are back home. With John in the mix, we decide more beds are in order. The AirBnB is perfect – it is a short walk to the apartment, it is away from my parents, and it is air conditioned. We take our time getting ready each morning. No matter how late we think we are, my parents are always in pyjamas when we reach the apartment.

It’s an emotional trip for everyone, but my father is clearly still struggling with my grandmother’s death. This is our first time back since she passed away, and most mornings, I find him rummaging through her things without purpose. Afraid to lose his father, too, he gives lengthy advice about diet and medication to my grandfather, Pipo. My grandfather is visibly annoyed by this, but my father never quite gets the hint. To my surprise, he voices his frustration to me. For a long time, my father single-handedly fed and clothed most of his family members. They may leave him out of inside jokes and juicy gossip from time to time, but no one ever speaks poorly of him. I laugh and give Pipo a hug. I can’t respond with anything beyond, “I know,” because my grandfather is close to deaf and it’s impossible to not hear anything louder than a whisper in this apartment. Once again, we are stuck in this cramped space for most of the day. The rain and my parents’ hesitation to leave the apartment keeps us stalled.

We repeat the same pattern for the next couple of days: John, Miguel, and I explore the local area in the morning, we buy breakfast and head to the apartment, we wait hours for my parents to get ready, we all squeeze into the precious rental car and walk the streets of Habana Vieja. This part of the city is beautiful, but it’s

also a tourist-heavy area. I’m not sure why, but my parents don’t understand my desire to immerse myself in the streets of Havana. They lived their adult lives in this city, but I only got to experience a sliver of it. The Havana I knew was the Havana my mother and I traversed on foot and by public transit. We never went far and we usually had a similar route. There was no getting lost. There was no exploration. Maybe it’s because of programs like CDRs, but my mother was always paranoid rumours would spread if she was seen having fun without her husband. Cue my lackluster childhood. Growing up, my father was a ghostly figure. Before his visit when I was seven years old, he was merely the man who interrupted my birthday parties with a phone call. I know the two as a unit, and as always, she refuses to leave his side. It’s only later that I realize my parents’ aversion to discovering Havana is discovering that they don’t know Havana, either.

So, we are all lost. Most of us are “home,” yet it doesn’t feel that way at all. I want to embrace the dislocation. I want to locate myself in a brand-new space.

I want to locate myself in a brand-new space. On our final day in the country, I recruit Miguel and John for a walking trip of Havana. No one else wishes to join. The three of us start by walking around my neighbourhood, Vedado. It’s important for me to show John this place. With each step, I recount blurry memories to him and Miguel. We end up close to the Cementerio de Cristóbal Colón. In my youth, I believed this was the biggest cemetery in the world. It was certainly bigger than the Cementerio Chino, which was also steps away from my home. The bright yellow and white columns of Cristóbal Colón are striking. It accompanies us for most of the walk. As a child, I would visit my godmother’s grave and become captivated with

the beauty of the intricate gravestones. During my last visit, I was apathetic to its aesthetics as my I watched my grandmother lowered into the ground.

At noon, we arrive at Universidad de la Habana where two students flock over to us right away and offer to give us a tour of the campus. Esteban, a history major, shows us the faculty where Fidel Castro studied, and tells us a detailed story about the role students played in the Cuban Revolution. We end up at a bar close to the university, a place where Esteban claimed Fidel Castro was once a regular. He orders a round of Negróns, claiming it is the true Cuban cocktail. Esteban’s friend, Lily, then asks us for money to buy us discounted rum and cigars from the university shop; she says we can’t go in with her because we don’t have student cards. We are all certain this is a scam, but I still gave her the money in appreciation for her time. We finish our cocktails hastily, this is our last day and we are packing it with as much as we can. It feels like forever before Lily returns. She enters right before we decide to ditch Esteban completely. She brings us two bottles of Rum Legendario, and we thank them for their time and make our escape.

We head towards Coppelia, a once-popular ice cream parlour. Coppelia was on the way to my cousins’ house when I was small, and I would beg my mother for ice cream each time we passed by it. When we get to the checkout, they only have two flavours of ice cream and pure disdain for us. I scooped my chocolate ice cream is disappointment. I really wanted strawberry; it tastes like pure sugar goodness. The ice cream isn’t great, but it doesn’t matter because it fills a craving anyway. After dessert, we decide to get actual food and head to a *paladar* for lunch.

Paladares are privately owned restaurants that serve homemade Cuban food. They were legitimized by the government in the early 1990s, when Cuba was forced to make reforms

during the Special Crisis that followed the fall of the Soviet Union. Today, *paladares* are redefining Cuban cuisine, while staying true to the staples. They are just a taste of how much Cuba has changed since I left, and how important it is for me to meet the Cuba of today. At this point of the trip, we have eaten at fantastic places. Doña Eutimia, a popular *paladar* in Habana Vieja, served black beans that might have topped my late grandmother's mouth-watering recipe. That day we got drenched while exploring Habana Vieja and ran to the restaurant to make our reservation. The first bite I took made up for a few drops of rain. Today, we are visiting another popular *paladar*, San Cristobal, whose claim to fame is that the Obamas ate there during their visit to Cuba. The inside of the *paladar* screams of luxury, contrasting with the impoverished area in which it is located. When I order my meal, the waiter is sure to tell me that Michelle Obama has made the same selection.

After our meal, we decide to continue our search for a contemporary art gallery that I had read about prior to the trip. All I knew was that it was called El Ojo del Ciclón and that it was in Habana Vieja, yet no matter how closely we perused the area we had failed to spot it. I kept asking locals who worked around the area if they knew about it, but everyone was equally confused. I began to think it was made up, or permanently closed. This was our lucky day, or maybe it was the day we weren't bogged down by the stress of my parents. Nevertheless, we found it. The gallery is the workshop of numerous Cuban artists. The works are all very surreal - from the sculptures to the photographs, they feel alien and Cuban all at once. In many ways, they remind me of the Cuban ingenuity I see everywhere we go on the island. Everything in Cuba is broken. Everything is held together by ambitious concoctions. The level of resourcefulness is astounding, but when your main source of income is from tips, you have to do anything to keep those beautiful, ancient cars on the road. Cuban creativity

thrives in this space, and I am glad to witness some of the underground art scene of Havana.

When we are done at the gallery, we spend a few hours drinking mojitos at an empty bar while waiting for my parents to pick us up. They refuse to trust that we will be fine getting home on our own. As usual, they are over an hour late and full of excuses as to why. We rush back out of the apartment as soon as we are dropped off. We head to Parque Almendares; staying true to our Cuban tradition, we chain-smoke heavily while watching a group of teenagers practicing martial arts. We're off to another *paladar* for dinner. La Rosa serves good quality food at an affordable price, so the place is packed when we arrive. We sit outside as we wait for a table. As our impatience grows, the lights go. We had almost gone a full two weeks in Cuba without experiencing a blackout. The outage brings out the worst in everyone. My father is refusing to talk to anyone. My mother is complaining to anyone that will listen. And my grandfather looks like he would like to be anywhere but here. The area becomes crowded as the entire staff ducks out for a smoke.

While John and I are sitting in the park across the restaurant a local man approaches us. Even in total darkness, we stood out to him. He begins to speak in broken English to us, and for some reason he knows Margaret Atwood's middle name. It's the first thing that comes to mind when we mention we are from Canada. He went on to tell us a number of convoluted stories, returning not once but twice with another tale. Miguel, John and I start walking, trying anything to escape the dreadful atmosphere outside of La Rosa. In the end, we wait for over two hours, and the electricity never returns. Hungry, exhausted, and bitter about our forthcoming departure, I insist that we find a different place to eat. I ask one of the waiters outside where I can find the nearest *paladar*. He recommends a place nearby, but he's not certain that they are open, or that they have power.

We rush over to the other *paladar*, and it doesn't take us long to realize the blackout had been concentrated to the area we had been in. Havana is lit everywhere else. The quality of this *paladar* is not as great our original choice, but the atmosphere is beautiful. It is located in the owner's beautiful rooftop patio. Although they are closing soon, we are treated as distinguished guests. The mood grows brighter. I feel full after my meal, but I am most overcome by the emptiness that comes with leaving. It's a short walk back, so I take my time walking home. I hold back tears as I walk by my daycare and primary school, and I nearly break down when I enter my grandfather's apartment, the home I had grown up in. We take our time with goodbyes and stuff the car with our luggage. By the time we get in the rental car to head to the airport I am a mess.



Lossless

Daniel Schrempf

The spring of 2015 saw the creation of my largest collection of negatives to date, and the subsequent, almost immediate, mothballing of the same. A long-planned trip to Iceland and Norway with my sister Meaghan had just finished, in an abrupt, hollow silence. This was far from what I expected getting back would feel like. It was just like leaving a concert and coming back home, the silence amplifies the ringing in your ears. And a couple of years later, my ears have yet to stop ringing.

In the years leading up to the trip, we referred to it simply as *Iceland*. We were so in love with the idea that we were on a first-name basis with the country. It was never just “an Iceland tour,” it wasn’t just “a vacation,” and it certainly wasn’t just “a fun trip.” It stung to hear others talk about it in those terms. The sheer mass of idealism involved with this trip compacted the idea under its own weight. The idea of *Iceland* absorbed and condensed every particle of social media, every helpful piece of advice, and every other trip taken by friends. It was dense, it was sacrosanct. This pre-emptive memory sat up on a shelf, growing steadily. We took it down every once in a while, rolled it over in our hands, added another layer, and put it back. It was never out of sight.

We knew that the shelf life of *Iceland* wasn’t infinite. So when we saw an opportunity to force it into reality in early 2015, we went for it. My sister Meaghan had spent the previous year living Sweden but was on her way back to Canada. She figured it wouldn’t cost much more to take her time coming home. My cousin Matt, who was living in Oslo, was also willing to put us up for a few days. And, since it was early spring and the tourism cycle of Iceland was still spooling up, it wasn’t going to get much cheaper than it would be in June. We were within financial striking distance, and we went for it.

The itinerary started with the purchase of a notebook worthy of *Iceland* and the date, May 28, 2015. I would leave Alberta, Meaghan

would leave Sweden and we would meet up in Norway. The plan was to spend some time with our cousin, have him show us around Oslo, and head to Iceland on the first of June. We had a couple of Airbnbs booked around the island and a rental car to connect the dots, but we kept the specifics pretty loose. Meaghan had some friends in Iceland, so we were counting on some local insight to give us a more defined direction once we got there. We gave ourselves 10 days and then had a flight back to Norway. After a quick reprise with our cousin, we would head back home to Alberta. So that was set, we added another layer to *Iceland*, and started counting down the days.

I knew this was going to be primarily a photo trip for me. I was just starting to settle into a rhythm shooting analogue black & white film. I started to catalogue what I was going to bring, and what was missing. When I’m fully wrapped up in something, I have a hard time believing that anyone could feel any differently. So, one of the biggest gaps in my gear was a camera for my sister. Not because she had asked for one, but because I felt she didn’t need to. I started trawling through the internet, and eventually I found a small Pentax: a K1000 with a wide, 24mm lens. The faux leather around the body had been peeled down to nothing by the nervous fingernails of a previous owner; it was predictably mended by some duct tape. At the time I bought it, it was fine, but after a couple of days, I realized it wasn’t nearly good enough. The duct tape was removed, the adhesive thinner came out, and the Pentax eventually met the acceptable standard. I put it up on the shelf, I put in another film order, and I reclined back into the idea of *Iceland*.

This is how most of the prep work was for me: subtle corrections of marginal impact. I wasn’t meticulously packing, I was obsessively curating. *Iceland* was an exhibit and everything that touched it needed a rationale. And it was fun. So much fun that when the day actually came to board my flight, I almost didn’t feel

ready. I still felt like there was so much in the collection that hadn't made it into the gallery yet. It wasn't perfect yet.

I was still in this state a few hours later, staring down at the clouds over the Atlantic, sitting next to another anonymous photographer. Silent. Not daring to take a photo out of a plane window. Not only out of fear of ridicule from my seat mate, but also because of the preciousness of each frame.

I started to realize that my calves were going to get tired, standing on my tip-toes to reach the top shelf where I'd stored my expectations.

But I had more than enough hours up in the air to acclimate to my own expectations. Once I was comfortable, though, I left the conversation with myself, and took the photo anyway. Behind my own back.

It was this sort of self-imposed optimism that I deployed in the first few days of the trip. I knew myself well enough to know my propensity to self-sabotage. Despite being tired from the flight, confused by the rail system, which were all compounded by not being able to speak a single word in Norwegian, I made it to my cousin's place with a smile made mandatory and an attitude to match.

Matt and his fiancé Thu Huong took me out for dinner while we waited for Meaghan to arrive. It was a beautiful day: sunny, warm, and cloudless; but especially by Norway's standards. Norway was just leaving a particularly wet and cold spring and this was truly the first day of the new year where you could be outside because you wanted to. Meaghan arrived late. We went to the train station to pick her up and we met a particularly drained version of my sister. She had told me she hadn't slept much by text, but now I saw it. She was leaving friends who she may never see again, so sleeping hadn't been

at the top of the priority list. Travelling itself is exhausting enough, travelling while sleep deprived was evidently worse. Matt, Meaghan, and myself all understood this, so we were in bed as soon as we got back to the apartment.

I was talking myself through this trip the same way you talk yourself through a first date. Hyper-aware of what you're doing, how much time you're spending on certain things, how you're neglecting others, and lying when necessary to smooth over the edges. I spent the next few days telling myself that Oslo was just base camp, it was an adjustment period. It didn't feel how I expected it to, how it was supposed to. The light was different. Nothing was wrong, but I was expecting to feel a very specific way and I wasn't. But, it was just base camp.

I was taking photos for the same reason, to just push through it. I figured that whatever I was feeling wouldn't show up on the emulsion. I began using my camera as a way of capturing what I thought was supposed to be there, what Barthes calls perfect illusions. I was taking photos out of obligation. Obligation to myself, and obligation to anyone who knew I was travelling. Our *Iceland* was forged out of material others had dug out of the ground; now that I was at the entrance of the mine, I felt I had to go down and pay back what I owed.

At this point, I started wondering who this trip was for. Was it for me? Was it for my sister? Was it for other people? A kind of buyer's remorse started to set in. I had thought that finally getting to Iceland would be the hard slap to the side of the computer that we needed. I thought that it would reset everything. Unsurprisingly, brute force worked just as well for our trip as it does for tech.

We landed in Reykjavik on June first and we left on the eleventh. It was spring, 64 degrees north, and the unit of a day hardly felt like a useful measure. The sun never really set. It dipped below the horizon, but was never truly gone. It was like a nosy house guest. Despite



being in the kitchen, it still picked up every bit of gossip in the living room. Ten days felt less like a week and more like an unending day with a couple of naps. There was never a proper stop. The days interwove so naturally that it was hard to find a seam to tear them apart. This – and a couple of other setbacks – meant that we didn't really leave Reykjavik until the fifth.

If there was a day that I could single out, it was June 6th. Meaghan's birthday. We had driven through the bright night and into the Westfjords, a small town called Þingeyri. In spite of the rough roads, the drive was great. The sun set for hours and hours as we crested ridge after ridge in our little Toyota Yaris. But those were hours that we hadn't budgeted, and we were tired. And when we crossed the halfway mark of the trip the next morning, I realized that I was all out of synthetic optimism. I wasn't playing games anymore. I was done trying to usher our idea of *Iceland* into reality. I was drained, we both were. We were trapped in an odd brand of Stockholm syndrome, where we were our own captors. We spent most of that day stuck in an Airbnb, staring out of the window at a vacant gas station. Hardly speaking, not doing much more than sleeping.

The thing we'd molded hadn't survived the kiln. Now that it had started to flake away, it was hard to avoid picking at it. The first snag in the surface that caught my fingernails was realizing that I was still in Iceland. My expectations had fallen from the top shelf – shattering – and it was a tough mess to ignore, but our flight home wasn't leaving for another five days. So even though this was a particularly tough day, I didn't want to discount the rest of the trip. At the time, I just tried to accept that it was a classic problem of unrealistic expectations. The rest of the trip went according to our itinerary, some high points and some low points, but we were both pretty happy to see it end. I wrote the last line in the journal: "So, I guess that's it. Iceland is over." We were exhausted.

Until I got angry. It was two days later and the

next layer had dissolved with proper rest and proper food. I was livid. I felt cheated and I flipped over every table within reach in an attempt to find the cowering salesman that wronged me. I had done the work, hadn't I? I stepped so far outside my comfort zone, hadn't I? I was inhaling bargain-bin millennial entitlement, and I knew it. So I turned over table after table. It was the rental car company's fault, it was the Airbnb's hosts' fault, it was tourists, it was Meaghan's school in Sweden, and then it was her friends. But then I got to Meaghan.

When I realized that I couldn't go after her – and that's not to say there weren't attempts – I went silent. Instead I started drafting a short-list of answers to diffuse the obvious questions. There were more than enough people who wanted to know about the trip, and I realized I would need some talking points to guide myself through it. I genuinely wanted to tell people about everything that was good, but my conversations had an unfinished basement. I was happy to let people in, but I wasn't about to give tours downstairs.

That said, being asked about the trip wasn't near as bad as being asked about the photos. It was the same story, though. I took more than enough digital shots – colour shots – to satisfy anyone who wanted to see them. But I kept the analogue shots in the basement. The digital colour shots, the perfect illusions, didn't have a wide enough focal length to catch the mind of the photographer in the frame. And in the frames where they did, there was usually a mountain or steaming sulphur pit to lead the eye away. The black & whites didn't, so I was careful with them. They'd caught everything.

The Pentax had caught everything and some. I hadn't fixed it as well as I thought I had. Four months later, as I took the negatives out of the drying cabinet, I saw the burn marks through the negatives.





Outside and inside the Airbnb in Akureyri

There was a hole that the duct tape had covered much better than the vinyl I had replaced it with. But I treated the wounds properly; there was still some dignity left in them. I arranged them in sleeves, made a note of the date, and closed the binder. It took another two years before I opened up that three-ringed morgue again.

I went back to the shots I took first. My Nikon wasn't flawless, but it was light-tight. I had applied for funding for this trip through my university and, even though I didn't receive the award, I still wanted to try to put an exhibit together. So that fall I rented a space in the University of Lethbridge, spent a day in the darkroom printing, and came up with a selection I was happy to show. That was the first time I tried to title the work. I took some advice my cousin Matt had given me the last night we were in Oslo. He was in the middle of his PhD and was in the middle of some heavy data analysis himself. He suggested I take a cold, scientific approach to my negatives: find keywords, try searching for similarities, listen to what the images were telling me. On that basis, I came up with the title: *Lossless*.

At the time, it worked. Sort of. I found a lot of images that were so ordinary, they just happened to be in a glamorized location. People caught midway through their daily routine, their grocery runs, their pigeon-feeding, mowing their lawns. I dug a little deeper into Iceland and was at least able to recognize the ordinariness of everything. I had sensationalized a far-off destination, but people still live there and they still needed to eat. I even tacked the worn-out shoes I'd worn throughout the trip to the wall. It seemed like it fit. It was all about never missing a single detail. I printed the shots with a filed-out negative carrier; there wasn't anything that was thrown away. So *Lossless* worked.

But it was also incredibly boring. I took the exhibit as a notch in my CV, and nothing more. The prints went into a box, the negatives went back in the binder. It was anticlimactic, but so

was the trip. I figured it was just time to move on. There wasn't anything left.

But *Iceland* was still up on the shelf. Disintegrating. When I picked it up again in the winter of 2016, the next layer of dust fell away. I had prepped much differently than Meaghan. I was dying to get out of Alberta and she really didn't want to leave Sweden. I knew the ingredients of her situation as best as I could: a sunless winter, a less than optimal diet, and a group of people she grew to love that she may never see again. So even if depression wasn't already slowing her down, those sticks between the spokes were enough to toss her. The weather of Iceland and the burden of decision-making really wasn't helping things either. What took me by surprise was realizing how depressed I was during the trip, something I hadn't seriously considered before. I was trying to escape. I was running for a place that felt so radically different from where I was, and I wanted to see it with the person I felt understood me the most. But she never came.

We were working against each other in an environment that was working against both of us.

We weren't really happy with the place we found ourselves in, but we felt we absolutely had to. We certainly didn't want to bring anyone else into this mess. So, when I started transcribing that journal in the late summer of 2017, I was reminded of the great bits I'd forgotten – I even realized that there was much more good in it than I thought – but mostly, I realized the disparity between our expectations and reality. Even more worryingly, I realized the disparity between our experience of the trip and the perception of our friends and family. As I write this, that is the deepest I've been able to drill down into *Iceland*.

Even at that, it is still tough to figure out how it happened. I find it so interesting to take myself through the time before the trip; to

try and recover the fragments that built the original idea. I remember the details, I recall the emotions, but the picture is gone. Not repressed, but replaced. The rough sketches that your mind throws together are in pencil. Once you get your pens out and trace the lines that are supposed to be there, you erase everything that isn't. You don't fully get those memories back.

It's like first impressions. When you first met your best friend, or were first introduced to a character in a book, there's a feeling that you can remember, but it no longer has anything to do with that person or character. The first words they said, the first thing they did, drew a complete sketch.

But whether or not it was an accurate rendering, time eventually drew over the original. Your mind only has so much storage space.

It's now the winter of 2017. I've gone grave-robbing and I've found that the scarred negatives and the multiple exposures tell a more accurate, more interesting, story than the clean frames could. In these frames, something is always missing, or obscured, or changed by its conjoined twin. Even though they are so surreal, at times indiscernible, they are a far more accurate representation of that time. A shockingly good representation of that time. In spite of my attempts to hide it, the camera caught everything. It just took time to see it. It was just a process of peeling back the layers, giving equal value to every minute piece. Looking close enough and long enough to see it evolve. So now, in spite of being thrown together in an afternoon in 2015, the title *Lossless* sticks better than ever.





Making Faces

Gregory Severin

When I moved here, I took a flight from my hometown, landed, and waited in baggage claim. Luggage flowed lazily down the conveyor belt. Standing there in anticipation of my duffels, especially one bag that would never come, I heard a pair of familiar voices. Friends of mine from university had booked the same flight, and were also moving to Toronto for more school. Beyond the usual questions of reacquaintance, they casually and jokingly mentioned that when you move to a new place, you see people who aren't there.

In the weeks after my arrival, I thought I saw someone I knew. Keying only on the face, I see a friend from my hometown. Or a parent of a friend. Or a guy who used to work at the grocery. And this would usually be fine. Except they're all here, instead of being three thousand, four hundred, and seventy-eight kilometres west. And slightly north. I pay no attention to what would be their trademark movements. I don't look for a slight hunch, or a musical step, or a way of walking that belongs only to them. I key only on their face. And even though I wouldn't mind a chat, it's not likely, because I just moved here, the city's huge, and I don't yet know anyone.

I think of the times this happened, even at home.

I was filling up at an Esso, wearing a cap that had the New York Mets logo planted firmly on the front. I had my beard grown out; I think I was wearing a grey sweater. A youngish man in the same aesthetic age range as myself a couple bays over, excited, started going "No way! NO WAY! MAN!" I turned to him, not considering he was even talking to me, and looked. He stopped, and his body loosened. "Oh, sorry. I thought you were a buddy I hadn't seen in forever." I smiled and nodded and drove away.

They got their luggage. We politely finished our conversation about seeing people who weren't there, and then we said goodbye.

The one bag containing my passport and social insurance number never showed. In panic, I waited five days for it to surface.

Why do people think they know us, or we know people? I think we like familiarity. Another answer lies in the way we look at people who aren't people. An ice-cream shop on Vancouver Island kept a fake person outside their doors. It was up the hill and near the beach where we used to camp as a family in my childhood years. Ice cream at the top of the hill was always a worthy reason to get in the van and drive, but I had to prepare in a mental space occupied by flavours—Chocolate. Bubblegum. Vanilla. Pistachio— and fear, of a dummy of an old woman that sat near the door. I never got a good look at her, because I sprinted past, as fast as a fat kid could. Or I would walk with one of my older siblings beside me, protecting me against a threat that would never materialize. The dummy would never come to life, or grab me. But I had an active imagination, and constantly thought there were vampires in the basement of my childhood home. Fearing the dummy of an old woman was a lateral move.

I knew she wasn't real, but why did I act so fearful? Why do we think people, or things, are what they are not? I like to think it's similar to the idea of sleight of hand, like the idea of simple card tricks. Not magic proper, just the idea of misdirection, where our minds fill in the blanks, or the gaps that aren't really there. As a kid my father would do the old disappearing dollar trick, the one where a loonie (or in his case, his wedding band) would be sitting in the palm of his hand, only to disappear when closing his palm, and have the ring emerge from my ear. As a kid, I thought the ring made it into my ear at some point without knowing.

The space where my mind was while following the ring with my eyes is the same as my experience with the dummy. It's same as the man who thought he knew me while I was pumping regular unleaded into the back right

side of a Subaru. When I thought I saw someone I knew on the street, it was like pulling the ring out of my own ear. There's a certain amount of short-circuiting that occurs, unintentionally. When your guard is down, and the mind is elsewhere, what seems to make sense really does, at least for a few quick moments.

The split second glance is not only relevant in these little vignettes, or in the passing moments of everyday experience. It is the first step in the process of seeing.

The idea of this process can be applied to all things seen, art included. But art is not typically heralded as a magic show of illusion, and it's not always an issue. In some respects, yes, with maybe a Renaissance genius mastering trompe-l'œil to the point where a fly looks like it's sitting on a wall, on a canvas, in a gallery. Maybe those could be viewed as the original illusions? And what about in photography? Portraiture has lived large in photographic space since its inception. Photography can be defined through its ability to capture scenes in two dimensions, slivers of time lasting forever on paper, or a screen. But people have been breaking photographs for quite some time. Even Stalin had decent success in airbrushing Trotsky out of revolutionary Soviet photographs.¹ Not much of a surprise for such a regime, but the point is that it happened long before it was convenient to do so.

Digital imaging is the real instrument of this ability. Thinking about the ways I consider image-making on a day-to-day basis, I am still caught off guard by how "normal" advertising images look. When YouTube first arrived, I remember seeing the time-lapse videos of a model's portrait being turned from a photograph into a piece of advertising, where it seemed every feature of her face had been moved around, enlarged, or reduced. That

was a potent memory of digital deception. The ideas of beauty that are seen and then cooked in our minds through constant exposure are due to the advertisers' desire to sell things. But they occur through a mental sleight-of-hand, where gaps are formed through glances, which we quickly understand as "normal" because there's no time for analysis. The quickest way to memory, for this pair of jeans, or this car, or this tube of toothpaste with 90% greater tooth-whitening action, is to move the operation from consideration to a pure reaction. We understand images of people when they partially meet all the requirements. Eyes, nose, mouth, ears, hair, they all check out, but when the skin is free of texture, and hair is impossibly gold, then questions grow. Namely, is that a real person? Is this person on a billboard smiling down at me any more real than a cartoon? Fortunately for them, you've already sped past going 120. Their work is done, and at this point, there's really no difference between a cartoon character, and inventing an image of a human with a process closer to assembling a jigsaw puzzle than pressing a shutter.

I think much of an illusion lies in the details. Not so much in bone or skeletal structure, but a lot in the eyes, the way people twitch or shuffle from foot to foot, or carry themselves with a posture that is neither great nor terrible but just slightly bad. To shamelessly shoehorn in an old idea, it is our imperfections that make us human. Or in this case, non-human.

While models' faces reimagined through Photoshop do not fail the fakery test of instinct, they are a rather controlled example. American artist Nancy Burson brings these ideas of fake faces closer to original artistic methods that exist to raise a point, not sell lotion. Her work, Human Race Machine was designed to morph your own face with the stereotypical features of other traces. Burson says its goal is to "produce an empathetic response in all who used it."² Her series of silver prints include images like Warhead I from 1982, where she

compiles images of world leaders who have nuclear capability, based on their percentage of the worldwide nuclear arsenal; Reagan 55%, Brezhnev 45%, Thatcher less than 1%, Mitterand less than 1%, Deng less than 1%.³ The rest include portraits of contrast, such as compilations of both male and female celebrities, or the animalistic composites Lion/Lamb and Cog and Dat. Works like Aged Barbie comment on ideas of beauty, expectation, and how these are inevitably broken by the forces of nature.

Nancy Burson's work draws me in. A simple work, like Cog and Dat, does not betray my glance. It actually forces my eyes to return to it again, and consider what is happening in the image. Because even though the photographs are static, there is a discernible sense of motion within them. I begin to see the transition between cat and dog. I can follow the shapes of different world leaders within Warhead I, each portrait smiling to the side. There is a familiarity of things we already know in Burson's composites. And although the process can be a major attraction to her work, the concept of compositing does not solely legitimize it. The images alone earn a reaction of feeling and connection. They don't set off the internal alarm that warns me I am looking at images of people who don't exist. But it is instead a gradual process of realization prompted by the image itself. The way these composites somehow retain a realistic nature, and do not strike a strange chord, is evidently at the crux of how Burson executes commenting on concepts of race, power, and social status. These images stand on their own merits and evoke a feeling, albeit not a beautiful one. Her work is a testament to the human hand as manipulator, and how this can be done artistically.

Images like these, whether originally or entirely human, or neither, have been made or manipulated by a real person: humanity is present at the door. Nancy Burson forms a loop in her work, where the digital element

and moment of its manipulation makes a point about humanity itself, and how it is shaped by political and sociological, but also human, forces.

I recently saw some photos by Nvidia, a computer graphics company. I read the headline, and dropped my eyes to the images beneath. At first they looked like portraits from a red carpet event. My eyes return for a second round. And they still looked real, nothing seemed out of place. The images themselves were celebrity portraits, but of people I had never before seen. And I again I read the title: "All of these faces are fake celebrities spawned by AI".⁴

As I understand it, these images were the product of an artificial intelligence that puts pictures through a sort of double distillation process, in order to create people who do not exist. The human connects the computer to a pool of celebrity images, where it trains to pull the images together to create fake faces. The second level of the artificial intelligence checks the new faces, to make sure they look "real."⁵ It's a guess-and-check process, with both sides essentially conversing with one another.

The fruits of this labour are new human faces, portraits of people who have never existed. It is easy to critique and say the nose of that one fake celebrity is very Julia Roberts, or that jaw is from Bruce Willis, but people's features have obviously never totally defined them. Once these elements have been recombined in the blender that is the GAN (General Adversarial Network)⁶ these new faces exist digitally. The issue with this is that they look real, and it wasn't a human who made it so. The tool has been allowed to use itself, and has begun to create the people who designed it.

I thought about my quick reactions to these images, how they relied on mere glances. Did the portrait only meet me halfway, or was there a presence to the picture. Do they hold the intangible marker of a good image? Do they evoke feeling?

I looked again. I studied one these faces. And then another. I looked for flaws. And then I waited for the images to come to me.

There was no feeling. No evocation. They said nothing, but were less than silent. The faces were off, and only radiated a sense of strangeness that was non-threatening, and only casually present.

Arrangement in photographs is integral to how and what they elicit. I looked at these faces, and they looked as if someone who had never seen a human in real life was tasked with visualizing a person from only description. This answered a question I continued to ask myself: what is the difference between active manipulation of photographs, as in the case of Burson, and this supposedly passive rebuilding of faces that the AI has undertaken? The answer lies in that it is not manipulating, but merely arranging what the image of a person looks like, from second-hand photographic information. It is not an artistic distortion, but a blind guess, where the computer talks itself through the process with the language of ones and zeroes.

And that is why the images worked at first glance. They operate on a quick deception, on a sleight of hand, and fall apart under just a little bit of scrutiny. Their life span is the sub-second peek provided by a FaceBook feed. They are not images of fake people, but images of images.

I used to think these pictures hinted at a larger problem. I was nervous this was a step towards losing representation of ourselves, where unprecedented control has been unnecessarily given away. And in that unknowing gift of control, we begin to lose a little; both of ourselves, and how we control our representation.

But it's not quite there yet. Instead, it emphasizes the distance non-human image making has to go. Even if Artificial Intelligences learn to "see" for themselves, that is still a far cry from the human experience. Composite artists like Nancy Burson still engage with their

work at a human level that does not attempt to draw away from humanity. Rather, her hand as a manipulator uses human and natural elements in unique ways to discuss issues of these elements themselves. And in that, the images still hold an undeniable magnetism, where I recognize the humanity present in their production, and that comes through naturally in the work. The same cannot be said for the AI images. At the very least, they show us that the "it" factor, the intangibility that draws us out of ourselves and into a relationship with the human-made image, is ever elusive and might never be achievable.

¹Lourie, Richard. "Photo Ops for Uncle Joe." *The New York Times*. Accessed December 02, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/11/09/reviews/971109.09louriet.html>

²"Interview: Artist Nancy Burson with Associate Curator Pauline Vermare." *Public, Private, Secret*. Accessed December 02, 2017. <https://www.publicprivatesecret.org/articles-essays-interviews/interview-artist-nancy-burson-with-associate-curator-pauline-vermare>

³"Composite Silver Prints." Nancy Burson. Accessed December 02, 2017. <http://nancyburson.com/composite-silver-prints/>

⁴Vincent, James. "All of these faces are fake celebrities spawned by AI." *The Verge*. October 30, 2017. Accessed December 02, 2017. <https://www.theverge.com/2017/10/30/16569402/ai-generate-fake-faces-celebs-nvidia-gan>

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*



To Watch Her Woods Fill Up with Snow

Donovan Taplin

Donovan, 2011

“Who knit you?” If a Newfoundlander asks you this question, they are asking where are you from? To what family and community do you belong? It is a phrase often triggered by evidence of accomplishment or skullduggery. The question, sometimes rhetorical, confers pride or shame on your origins due to something you’ve done. “Who knit you?” had been the incredulous response of a cab driver when I said I was traveling to St. John’s to compete for a \$100,000 scholarship.

I laughed.

“You’re from the island?” Bell Island, the driver meant.

“I am.”

“Parents’ name?”

“Taplin.”

“Don’t know that one.”

Of course he didn’t.

“Well good for you, buddy.”

Before I left my house that morning, my parents had given me forty dollars. I hated asking for money. Christmas was barely a month away. I had four dollars for the cab from my parents’ house to the boat. Eight dollars for the cab ride to the university where my interview was taking place. Eight dollars for the trip back to the boat and four dollars for the cab ride from the boat back to my parent’s house. That left me sixteen bucks in case the boat was delayed, so I could walk to a restaurant and get something to eat.

When I arrived at the interview, I knew right away the other finalists were from the city.

As a kid, when I would leave my island hometown to compete against other sports teams or drama clubs, you could often tell Bell Islanders apart by their shoes. Our shoes were red, like the iron ore found throughout the island, and often muddy. We had no sidewalks, after all. When the exciting annual occasion

of getting new shoes would come, to ask your parents for white sneakers was audacious. They would be fit for the garbage in no time. On this day, my black dress shoes were shiny. Scuffed, a little dusted, but polished and, overall, clean.

As I looked over the other finalists, a tape started to play in my head: “I’m not good enough.”

They looked like they were twenty-five. Their clothes fit so well. They got to try them on before they bought them. My clothes were from a catalogue.

“I’m not good enough.”

One could only assume from all the perfect smiles that the students had enjoyed orthodontic braces. If I won this scholarship, I’d finally be able to get braces for myself. My teeth were too big for my mouth.

“I’m not good enough.”

I bet their parents coached them on the drive in. My parents couldn’t drive me to the interview because they had never owned a car, and even if they did, they wouldn’t have been able to give me insight into university life or scholarly endeavour. In fact, besides my school teachers and my doctor, I didn’t personally know anyone who had gone to university.

“I’m not good enough.”

“Donovan Taplin, we’re ready for you.”

They called me from the waiting area where the finalists were held and brought me into a separate room to be interviewed by a panel of judges. It was time.

I knew my strategy. You are competing against the best and brightest, I told myself. You must show the judges you are extraordinary. You must ignore the change in your pocket; you must ignore your ill-fitted suit. You must rise above Bell Island.

The strategy worked well, I thought, until the judges asked me a question which shattered my

approach. When they asked the question, my face started to burn as though steam had been escaping through ten thousand tiny pores from my cheeks to my forehead. My sobbing began with a pang that rose from my chest and up my throat, until it crested at my tonsils. I was crying like a baby. I was having a breakdown in the middle of the interview. I could not answer the judge's question. I had fallen into a black hole of memories, of memories that were not even my own: my parents' memories, their parents' memories, and my community's memories. I was too afraid to tell the truth.

Marie, 1964

My grandparents watched Bell Island decay from a boom town of more than fifteen thousand working people, to a locus of scarcity and fatalism with fewer than three thousand residents. Many of their children were of the first generation of Bell Islanders born after the demise of the town's famous mining industry.

Marie is among the oldest of my mother's fourteen siblings. With Bell Island's iron ore mine waning and the community spiraling downward, my grandparents had moved to downtown Cambridge, Ontario, hoping to find employment in textile factories. Their stay was short-lived, and they would return to Bell Island with less than they had on the day they left.

In 1964, the beatings were unusually severe. My grandmother – or Nan, as she would be known by for so many – had just had her tenth child. She had her first when was seventeen in 1948. Ten later, their house was still only 900 square feet in size.

My grandfather turned violent every time he was drunk, which was now every day. When Nan was defeated, Marie was often the next target, as she had been for so many years and would remain so for at least a few more years until she was able to move out on her own.

It was 1964 when the universe handed them an opportunity. For once, the house was quiet. My grandfather had drunk himself into a stupor. After launching every insult imaginable at Nan, at the kids, at the world, he eventually tired himself and fled to the bathroom. All her children were in bed.

Nan had been reading for some time when the sheer silence of the house became unnerving. She stood up and checked on each child. All was well. As Nan walked by the bathroom, she noticed the door was slightly ajar.

She entered the room, put the toilet cover down, and sat. She stared at my grandfather for several minutes. He had fallen asleep, drunk in the bathtub. The water line in the tub was above his mouth and to his nostrils. My grandfather, "that stupid drunk bastard," as Nan was surely thinking, was going to drown himself.

Nan had a choice. She could simply leave the room, turn off the lights, and go to sleep. In the morning, it would all be over. Nan did not make a single whimper as she cried. Would this qualify as murder, she wondered? Breath. Is this act of indifference more violent than his daily viciousness toward her and her children?

Breath.

She pulled the bathtub stopper and was back to reading her book by the time she heard him gasping.

Marie, who had woken up that night and watched the scene unfold from the crack in the bathroom door, would share this story with my mother decades later. Marie lamented how Nan could have – should have – protected herself from decades of unnumbered beatings, rape, and capricious torment. Nan and her children would have been saved from the scourge of abuse, its trauma and despair.

If he had died, four children would never know life at all, including my mother. If I could time-travel back to that bathroom and be the

phantom force which guided her hand away from the plug, would I? Could I give up my life and that of my brother, my mother, uncles, and aunts, so to save the most angelic heart I've ever known from cruelty and imprisonment?

Marie had come up with a firm answer to this question: yes. When asked about the decision herself, Nan would say she did not regret it. She would note how much was lost to her husband, and how she was not about to lose her humanity to him too.

Jim, 1970

My uncle Jim saved my grandmother's life when he was just a few months old.

Nan had struck her nadir. Now living back on Bell Island, and with more children in her house, more mouths to feed, more wounds to heal, she ran away in the middle of the night. But there was nowhere for her to go. Nan headed for the woods a couple of kilometers from her home. Taking shelter on a mossy outcrop near a lake, she would swim out each day intending never to swim back. This lasted for three days until, she would later claim, she heard baby Jim crying and returned home.

When Virginia Woolf filled her pockets with stones and walked into a river, her suicide note remarked: "Dearest, [...] you have given me the greatest possible happiness." I'd like to think my grandmother's note would have read "Fuck you. Sincerely, Maggie." Where Woolf had a husband for empathetic refuge when facing the abyss mental illness can be, my grandmother had a man whose very origin point was that abyss, who stared out at her from the darkness. If for "much of history Anonymous was a woman," my grandmother verged on a defiant retort to the person(s) who stole her voice.

Her suicide was to be not an act of cowardice but radicalness, a dire but powerful act of speech in the face of a silencing patriarchy - is there any other kind? - a sign not of weakness as stigma would have one believe, but her depression's denouement.

She never wrote such a letter. Nan's silent battle continued for decades longer.

Cordelia, 1977

One of my mother's earliest memories is of watching her younger sister wash my grandmother's feet. It was the summer before Cordelia, the fourteenth and final child, was starting Kindergarten, my mother headed for Grade One. Nan had brought them to a lake not far from their house to swim and play with the other families who would undoubtedly be there on a bright August day. Dirt covered my Nan's feet from playing with them in the muddy perimeter of the lake. Cordelia took a plastic bowl they had brought and poured water over my Nan's feet, then dried them off with a towel.

When Cordelia was born, the doctors told my grandmother if she had any more children, it might cost her life and that of the baby. They offered to complete a surgical procedure right then to prevent future pregnancies. My grandfather lost control. He ordered Nan to leave the hospital and challenged the doctor who dared suggest the procedure. But Nan was adamant. For the first time, with the help of hospital staff, she contacted the local police station and had my grandfather removed from the hospital.

She paid for it in spades when she returned home. However, this was a turning point. My

grandfather was scared: Nan had got him put in cuffs for the first time. Though the beatings persisted, they were less brutal now, and less frequent.

In a climate of shame and agony, Nan had put her tormentor on notice: she had found the courage to speak out.

Tabitha, 1985

When she would hear her mother getting hit at night, she sometimes would force herself to believe it was thunder. Boom. Boom. Boom. It was a futile exercise, of course, though when it was raining and windy, the delusion lasted slightly longer.

Aristotle proposed the first theory of thunder. He believed it was the result of the collision of clouds. It's always cloudy in Newfoundland. I wish my mother had been aware of this theory as a child. I can imagine my mother clinging to Aristotle's idea when she yearned for solace by gazing out her window while the world around her was in chaos. Wouldn't it be lovely if all those noises could be explained away by the collision of grey titans in the sky? But no. The clash of the titans was just outside her bedroom.

Though she saw it since she was so young, and would see it until she was herself a woman, she never became inured to violence. My mother's mindfulness of her upbringing became a point of pride and personal philosophy, one she would share with her kids by saying "because I got hit when I was little doesn't mean I'll hit my kids. That's some excuse for bad parents doin' the same old same old. It means the opposite. I should fuckin' know better."

She concedes her pacifistic parenting style is not solely from her own critical faculties, but at least partly because of the dissonance between her father's violent disposition and her mother's capacity to express gentleness and empathy even while thumb-shaped bruises

ran up and down her arms. When thinking of her parents, my mother, like Blake, saw both a tiger and a lamb, and when paralyzed by the cold eyes of her father, she surely wondered, did he who made the Lamb make thee?

The night it all ended my mother woke-up to the "Boom. Boom. Boom." It was three o'clock in the morning. She ignored the sound for as long as possible, but it was different this time. It was weaker than usual as if it was coming from next door. She stood up, waking Cordelia. They were teenagers now. Only a handful of her siblings lived at home, almost all of them had left Bell Island years prior, some before she was even born.

The sound was coming from Nan who was outside of the house, wearing only a pink nightdress, barefoot, hitting the exterior of their brother's bedroom with a leather boot. She wanted him to come outside. Jim eventually got out of bed and went to Nan. She told him they were leaving and he had to get his siblings out of bed and out of the house.

When he opened the door to my mother and her sister's room, they were already up and dressed. Jim whispered the plan to them. They were to pack nothing. They were going to sneak out, all of them, and walk to a family friend's house where Nan had made arrangements for all of them to stay.

They heard windows opening and shutting. It was my grandfather. He had woken up and was going room to room calling outside. "Maggie" he roared. "You get the fuck back in here."

Jim was nearly a grown man then. He was taller and heavier than his father. He walked into the kitchen, my mother and aunt following behind. He picked up a wooden broom and cracked it in half over his knee. The splintering sound jolted my grandfather who had his head stuck out of the kitchen window. He struck his head as he pulled himself into the kitchen.

"We're leaving." Jim spit the words.

Jim lunged toward his father with the stick to demonstrate his willingness to engage him.

My grandmother came back in the house then. In the light of the kitchen, they could see their mother was garnishing fresh swelling in her face.

Jim poked the broom handle forward and back like a lion tamer. Nan pleaded with them to stop. She pleaded with Jim not to stab his father. All the children were awake now.

He dropped the broom handle. My grandfather seized him immediately by the throat and lifted him off the floor.

Nan wailed as she ran back out of the house. Distracted once again, Jim was able to push his father forcefully to the ground where he landed headfirst against the cupboards. They all left then, Cordelia and my mother first, out the door and toward my grandmother.

They found her where their street hit an intersection. Behind a light pole and some trees, Nan was hiding, lying down on the ground, shivering in her pink nightdress.

Her hoarse voice struggled to tell them, "I'm gunna go to sleep right here. I'm so tired."

My mother took her shoes from her feet and put them on my grandmother. They got her up, and they walked to the house of my grandmother's friend. When they arrived, and all got inside, her friend's husband spoke calmly about shooting my grandfather. But Nan ruled it out.

In the years that would follow, my grandfather would quit drinking, found the local Alcoholics Anonymous chapter, the local food bank, and became a marathon runner for cancer research. He sent priests, politicians, and other respected community members to my grandmother to convince her to come back to him.

She never did. After that night, she would never again step foot inside his house.

Cordelia, 2009

Nan was singing to herself as she cleaned. She had been baking, and the aroma was wafting through the house. Nan was an octogenarian now, but it was May, and she still felt obliged to partake in spring cleaning. She turned up the dial on the radio. Elvis Presley was playing, her favourite.

Some hours later, Cordelia returned home to find my grandmother sitting on the couch watching game shows. The house was spotless. There were fresh baked goods on the kitchen counter. They both smiled from ear to ear.

Cordelia sat next to Nan and rested her head on Nan's shoulder. The smells reminded her of Christmas. She thought about how Nan, a single mother relying on welfare, would invite people who were mostly strangers into the house and give them each a brown bag of vegetables and fruits and candies during the holidays. She recalled a boy who would steal something every time my grandmother invited him into the house, and though Nan was aware of it, she continued to invite him back.

Cordelia noticed then her mother's feet were black.

"Dear lord, Mom, what were you into cleanin' to get your feet that dirty?"

Nan shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

Cordelia retrieved a plastic bucket and filled it with warm water and soap and placed the bucket at my grandmother's feet. She winced as she lifted her legs to get her feet in the bucket. It was only after multiple attempts that Nan succeeded. With a small cloth, Cordelia began to wipe off her mother's feet and the lower parts of her legs. But the discoloration was not going away. Her feet were not black; they were a dark purple.

It was not long after that a dozen brothers and sisters, and two dozen more grandchildren and great-grandchildren had gathered at the

hospital. A heart attack, a blood clot, and a surgery later, Nan was gone.

She had two funerals. One in Cambridge, Ontario and one on Bell Island, Newfoundland. Both had standing room only. When her children made funeral arrangements, they opted for her gravestone to carry the inscription: “Life’s work, well done.” Though she had never held a job in her eighty years, such an epitaph proved remarkably appropriate.

Donovan, 2011

For most of my formative years, my grandmother lived with me. When I was born, my parents were just twenty-two years old. Nan became one of my parents, my mentor, and my best friend. She would teach me how to ride a bike, how to read, how to celebrate, how to care for others.

On my parents’ mantle sits a photo of my grandmother on her wedding day. She is beautiful but alone in the photograph. It wasn’t until I was a teenager that I thought to ask why Nan and my grandfather – who had died of leukemia when I was just a small child – were not together in the photograph. My mother explained to me that in the original picture my grandfather has his arm around Nan but they asked someone to crop him out of the photo. I was bewildered. Why on earth would you do that?

When my mother started to tell me stories about her family’s past, and my Nan’s life, I was in a state of disbelief. Surely someone who had endured such horrific experiences would have grown to be bitter, and tired, and cruel in their old age. Nan’s character was utterly antithetical. She wore colorful outfits, and curled her thin white hair, and wore fake pearls, and read mystery novels, and loved to bake and go for walks and people-watch with me at the mall. She was my guardian angel, my storyteller, my accomplice.

When, in 2011, I was interviewed for that \$100,000 scholarship, it was my Nan who I was thinking of when I started to cry. Every second I cried in that interview, the judges grew increasingly mystified. They had expected more from me. I had founded a community radio station; I was a United Nations delegate, I traveled on youth expeditions to the Arctic and Antarctic. I led social justice projects around the de-stigmatization of impoverished youth in my community. But now, I was crying like a baby.

In my mind, I walked downstairs to my grandmother’s bedroom. There, on her nightstand, sat a photograph of a man she idolized, her uncle, Albert. Albert, who was born with one leg shorter than the other, worked for fifty years in Bell Island’s iron ore mine.

The photograph of Uncle Albert was one my grandmother carried with her for decades. It was unique not only because it was old, but because the picture had a filmic sensibility, as though Uncle Albert was a notable man whose career was worthy of documentation.

I was startled when, as a junior high student, I walked into a museum to find the photograph of Uncle Albert on display. The photograph was by Yousuf Karsh. When many of us imagine icons like Hemingway, Einstein, Churchill, Hepburn, Elizabeth II, or MLK, a Karsh portrait might serve as a reference point for our memory. Karsh came to Bell Island in the forties to photograph our miners. Somehow, Karsh’s portrait of her Uncle Albert ended up in my grandmother’s possession.

While Albert did not have the fame, wealth, or reputation like Karsh’s other subjects, he possessed a dignity, and an ordinary courage, worth immortalizing. I thought my grandmother too maintained this resiliency, dignity, and wholeheartedness which solidified her position with the greats.

I sniffed back my tears and prepared to answer the judges’ question. I could not forget about my ill-fitted suit or the change in my pocket, nor was I there to rise above Bell Island, my family, or myself. I did not need to tell them an extraordinary story, but one of ordinary courage.

They repeated the question.

“If you could have lunch, with one person, dead or alive, who would it be?”

Not Hemingway, Einstein, or MLK.

“If I could have lunch, with one person, dead or alive, it would be my Nan. The lady who knit me.”



Out To Sea

John Verhaeven

July 10. 5:26am

Alone, in the production trailer. The radio emits a short digital beep.

And then:

“Mayday. Mayday. Is there anyone at Festival Command?”

One of the tall ships was radioing in. I replied:

“Copy. This is Command. Go ahead.”

“We have a small vessel on approach that appears to be taking on water. They are attempting to get to us but not sure they’ll make it. It’s a 14’ aluminum on board are one male and a dog. He says he’s looking for some work.”

“What?”

“Street guy, I guess. I don’t think it’s his boat. We may need Coast Guard here.”

“Roger that.”

May 30. 9:07am

“Red, right, returning.” The instructor asked us to repeat it.

My dream job started in a classroom on a Saturday morning at Lord Tweedsmuir Elementary School in New Westminster. I was there with Ann and Randall.

Ann was the Executive Director of the upcoming SeaVancouver Festival; a citywide, all-encompassing celebration of Vancouver’s waterfront. The highlight was to be the appearance of 13 international tall ships, which would be available for tours while they sat anchored in the harbour over the 12-day event.

Randall was her second-in-command. He was tall, and considerate. He used to shoot short videos of his cat and show them to us at work most mornings. This was 5 years before Facebook and Instagram. He seemed friendly.

It was the first day of Power Squadron, the powerboat operator’s safety course. As

senior staff we were required to drive across Vancouver’s three busy harbours for both logistics and public relations purposes.

The class of about 14 in unison reluctantly vocalized: “Red, right, returning.”

“This means that the position of the red buoy should be on the right side of the boat when returning from sea, or heading upstream or toward the origin.”

July 4. 11:20am

Theresa sat inside the 14-foot plastic lifeboat with a typewriter on her lap.

Despite using two oversized anchors and being in shallow water, the small vessel was pitching back and forth more than was comfortable. It was raining, hard.

It was the opening performance for the site-specific production of Lifeboat, an adaptation of the 1944 Hitchcock film. The boat was our set.

The show was being performed within SeaVancouver’s Site 4. The actors were on the water, the audience in bleachers on the shore. We were waiting on Toby, one of the four actors who just popped a button off his coat. He had run back to the costume tent. On top of my other duties, I had also been contracted separately as producer of Lifeboat.

It was 5 minutes to show time and the bleachers, like all of the festival sites, were mostly empty.

June 17. 9:20am

I had not met Will before. He was honest, together, and with just a hint of business savvy. I was turning my back on our regular electrician and this was a contract 5 times the size of any of our usual events, but at Randall’s encouragement, I gave the contract to Will.

“Amazing. This will be great.” Will let his facade slip and seemed genuinely happy.

July 8. 12:45pm

Randall burst in, angry. He grabbed the PA system that I was supposed to deliver to his press event. He slammed the gear out the door of the production trailer and into the back of his truck. He did not say a word.

I had lost track of time.

July 9. 7:25am

I ran quickly up the wooden stairs of the Gastown office building. In Ann’s office, I noticed the plastic folder of contractor cheques. Mine, my theatre company’s, Noah’s, Will’s – all of them. 21 in total. Signed and ready; waiting for deposit.

I considered it. Taking my cheques and cashing them right away.

July 3. 6:45am

I arrived at Site 4, Vanier Beach to find the front panel of the 500 Kw generator buried in the sand 150 meters away from where it should have been. As I got closer, I realized the whole unit had been stripped for its copper and it was now rendered useless, powerless. I’d have to call Will and let him know.

July 13. 8:45am

I drove my station wagon over the curb and onto the east-most festival site at False Creek. Other than a small crew removing the temporary rental tents, the place was abandoned.

About 500 meters down the asphalt site that once served as part of the Molson Indy racetrack, I spotted Noah, who was single-handedly hauling 8’ by 10’ steel fencing panels to a central area. I got closer.

He was re-building the fence panels to create a compound around a pile of stuff assembled in the centre. As I pulled up, he was placing a chain and padlock on his fence.

“No one’s getting paid, you know,” he said. Noah was the owner of Apex, the tent rental company. When it was all said and done he would be out \$163,000.

“I’m keeping this as compensation.” He pointed to the pile inside the fence compound. It was about \$4000 worth of beer, wine and spirits. The bar manager who was in charge of returning any unused product to the liquor board had stopped showing up for work a few days back, assumedly to cut his own losses.

Aug 2. 2:45pm

I was smoking a joint with Caleb on the southwest end of Trout Lake Park later that summer, and was filling him in on recent events. I realized I hadn’t seen any of my friends for weeks.

The park is in the east end of Vancouver and far from the festival sites. It happens to be where we held many early rehearsals for Lifeboat.

As I concluded recounting the events which ends with the festival declaring bankruptcy, he passed me the jazz cigarette.

“That sucks, Johnny.” He said. He paused. “Should we get coffee?”

July 12. 10:35pm

The headlining band for the last night of the festival was local rock legend Trooper. I wasn’t a fan but was grateful that they had started with “We’re Here For A Good Time,” as it pleased the crowd and that may increase alcohol sales.

Minutes later my radio lit up. It was Jackie calling me to the dock at Site 2.

Kat, Jackie’s partner in business and in life was drunk.

“She can’t drive the boat. She’s hammered.” Jackie, who usually showed some sign of being embarrassed by proxy, was stone-faced.

“Fuck you!” Kat yelled at no one in particular. “This is so fucked.”

I wasn’t sure, but I think she was referring to our impending financial ruin. That meant that word had gotten out.

At this point, I was the only one on the dock qualified to drive the boat and return it to the rental dock on Granville Island.

As Ra McGuire belted out “We’re here for a good time, not a long time...” for the second time that very evening, I navigated the rental boat down the channel in the opposite direction from the concert.

Since I was heading downstream or technically out to sea, the learned phrase “red, right, returning” didn’t apply. I hummed along as the concert faded out of earshot, being sure to keep the green buoys on my right.

