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from the editor

Dear readers,

This year has been a transitory one for our little magazine. We have had an intense and engaging year; the finished product that you are currently holding is the culmination of that effort. I would to take the time here to thank our current staff. By coming to the meetings, voting, discussing the pieces, helping to publicize the magazine, and designing the issue, they have all contributed and made our issue this year one we can be proud of.

Special thanks goes to our departing seniors, Liz Gildea, Leah Farinola and KC Euler, who have all provided smart and poignant opinions on submissions and the magazine, helping to make our little publication the best that it can be.

Finally, as always, thanks to our readers for continuing to read and support this endeavor.

Enjoy,

Dan Malinowski

acknowledgements

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poetry and prose

First Prize

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Untitled

Savonna Johnson

University of Pittsburgh

i have not had jasmine in a while
now this flowered mug not sure if rose or
carnation wasting wishes on you daily
and she wants me to rhyme I cowered like
cactus buds closing come dawn come down on
where i am closed too often drawn red from
the pierce this is always happening
what is blood if not boiled and what do we steep.

Second Prize

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The Detective

**Chelsea Margaret Bodnar,
University of Pittsburgh**

Ruin! It is the hand that runs across the newly
penned ink of memory; smoke boring through
the walls, spitting out mortar like broken teeth.
Catalyst, punch-out dark, full zero. City of
citrus & brimstone.

Pine needles in a biome of blonde ash. Sun-warmed
bottles of snake-wine, submerged cobras
leering from their furled hoods. Stockpile of
remedies, mouthful of false positives.

Some fire in grayscale left its burn throughout the
sleeping city; absence howls up through the
streets, toothless predator lashed to its anchor.
The low tide of the rain laps at my footprints,
enters the throat of the world. It blurs at the
edges, and all escape is muddled guesswork.

Third Prize

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In The Gutter of Yoknapatawpha County

**Henry L Culvyhouse,
Marshall University**

Slip the cellophane off your pack.
Let me see your Zippo.

Henry, you sure this is a good idea?

C'mon, man, you wanted to see how the West was Won. Now crush it, crush it fine. Roll the lighter's bottom over the baggie. Knead it like your mom does when she bakes bread. Check it in the light. Keep it in the baggie, you stupid fuck! Goddamn, shit gets everywhere. Make sure there's not a chunk left in it; shit hurts worse than stubbing your toe. Oh and your nose will rot away into a nasty little hole that'll scare the hell out of the neighborhood kids. Give me my wallet. The black one sittin' on the table.

But I thought we were gonna talk about...

We'll hold off a minute, if you want sober advice. But hand me a brew first.

When it comes to depression, ask yourself if any of this shit's gonna matter in two years. If it's really that terrible, then you'll fill your pockets with rocks and jump in the goddamn river, Compson.

Henry L Culveyhouse

Since your life ain't part of The Great American Novel, suicide is pointless. Unless you can see into the future, in that case killing yourself ain't a bad idea. But if you knew the future, you'd do better in Atlantic City.

Romance doesn't necessarily mean happiness. It's a waste a time. If you get caught up with a girl, remember not to totally lose your head. Especially if she's an Emily. Your corpse might be her teddy bear for the next 20 years.

But seriously, love can distract you from your goals. Find something that makes you happy. Find something fulfilling like a calling or an addiction. Pros who marry their career are about as happy as the bum shooting up in an alley. Also, if a girl says she can't get pregnant, don't believe her. My dad told that one to me.

Eighty percent of life is out of your control, fifteen percent is debatable, and five percent is completely yours. So what if the blonde at Waffle House won't fuck you? The odds were stacked from the get go. If you want to gamble in life, just know the house usually wins. That's why I stick to what

I know. Figure out what's what and you'll be fine.

Remember what Freud said about life: it's love and work. If you got a job and some friends, you're set. Don't buy into that money horse shit. My grandma told me as long as you got God, you're richer than the Rockefellers. And she died below the poverty line. But aren't you a nihilist? Well, look at you using your vocabulary...did you learn that at college, or have you ever felt the absurdity of this world?

Can I see your lighter? Watch this. If you snap your fingers just right and you just graze the wheel, it'll light... I think you need more fluid.

Take the time to listen to the swine. Hobos, bums, drunks, and junkies have the best stories. After all, they eat out of dumpsters and drink out of kerosene cans. It doesn't get better than that. Take time to call your mom, and if you hate your mom, call your dad, and if you hate'em both, call a phone sex line. At least those ladies act like they care.

No matter what, don't take anything personal.

Henry L Culvyhouse

People neither hate or love you, they're just indifferent. Shit, there ain't no reason to get pissed at'em; they're just ignorant, that's all. And if you're that angry, torch a hayloft and hop a train for Jackson.

If you're gonna go to school, walk to class everyday. It clears your head. Drop acid if you ever get the chance. Don't drink whiskey on week nights unless you wanna be a lush or screen play writer. If you can't help yourself, drink beer. Coors, preferably.

Now, roll up that dollar up. Hold each end in-between your index finger and thumb. Roll it tighter. Tighter than that. Pour the powder on the table. Take this card. Yeah, I know. I got it at the slots....it's free, gets you some free credits too.

Cut two lines, about the same size. Follow my lead. After you snort the powder, pull your forehead back. Keep sucking air through your nose. I know it burns; no need to tear up. Lean back let the feeling take you. Feel the powder mix with your snot. Feel it drip down the back of your throat. The high will lift you off your feet,

good buddy. Hop on the Oxycotin choo-choo.

In ten minutes, you'll be a slobbering, castrated invalid.

You feeling itchy?

Forget my advice and let the opium do the talking. Oh, did I mention this shit will make you hurl in the morning?

Honorable Mention

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Wednesday

**Kayla Scullion,
University of Pittsburgh**

Check the light, check the stove, check the oven light under the stove. The stove is off. The stove is off. You can eat now. Two bites of chicken and the stove is on. Check the light, check the stove, check the light under the stove. The stove is off. The stove is off. Eat quicker, bigger bites. Wash the dishes in scalding water. Feel the burning soak through the sponge. The stove is off. Squeeze the suds out onto wetted plate. Feel the heat soak into raw skin, burning heat. Soapy suds. The stove is off. The stove is off. Soap on suds on sponge squeak against the hot plate. Streaks. The dishwasher is dirty. The stove is off. Soap on sponge stroke fork and knife. A knife graded with edges but not sharp enough to puncture or—the dishwasher is dirty. Hot suds on silverware. Check the stove, check the oven. The stove is off. The dishwasher is closed. Check the kitchen light. The light is off and dark enough to puncture.

Additional Works

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Vintage Joellyn

Kelsey Hughes, University of Pittsburgh

“It was my aunt’s purse,
the one who overdosed on heroin,”

I tell them
when they ask where I got it

faux hard leather

real vintage, they say
I bask in its underlying meaning,
true hippie.

square-round bodice

open half-moon
focus on it crop out everything else
except for what is lonely there and what is lovely

etched into skin

decorative weeds tumble
relentless and overgrown
with an endless stem and no beginning;

Kelsey Hughes

she liked them best this way

grind petals

into powder and sniff;

hippie-slide into haze and forget until,

instead, inject into pinched vein and forgotten.

Abbigail Baldys

*Dali says You want a mustache like this,
boy? You want the secrets of the universe
in your hair? Well it took me 9 days to start,
you see, then I watered it like this -- He grabs
a handful of air, turns it to wine, and waters
his mustache. Another year after that, maybe.
Patience. It's perplexing, see. You must be
both
the waiting and the waiter. Passive actor.*

We paint a corpse

Something smells like sulfur

I have only arms

September 19

Mike Roberts, University of Pittsburgh

walking down fifth i catch my reflection
in the rear passenger door of a toyota
and my walk is transformed into something
impossible and inhuman.

my head is a vessel for doubt.

my limbs are phantom, though i see them
and experience their sensations: wet,
cold, the occasional metallic throb of pain.

“the disease can’t be cured, but with treatment
the symptoms can be manageable. a normal
life is not out of the question.”

reaching into the murky muck of the pond
in an otherwise stunning september morning
returns nothing but dirtied hands.

the leeches have not returned this season.

my body, for the time being, remains
swollen with this tainted blood.

a treatment tour must be undertaken.

Mike Roberts

visits to the herbalist, the pyromancer,
the mystic in his mountain lair.
the alchemist is still on holiday.

Arsenic Possibilities

Aleah Goldin, University of Richmond

I paid \$20 for a box of blueberries. I never ate them.

They sat in a cupboard for a week, until Susan pitched them in the garbage at 4 a.m. She said she could smell them in her dreams. The smell could have been the black mold growing in the bathroom. The mold looked just like the cap Mama's Boy had been wearing the first day I meet him. It grew above the shower spout. I didn't rinse the shampoo out of my hair when I saw it. The thought of Mama's Boy made me wrap myself in a towel, rock back-and-forth, eat six Kit-Kat bars from the medicine cabinet, and bite my lip until it bled juice.

"Just forget about it," Susan said.

"I know." I folded my laundry and counted the colors.

"Grow up." Susan leaned against the windowsill and looked out toward Washington

Aleah Goldin

Square. The street vendors had a fight last week. The ones on either end weren't speaking to each other. Both sold Hebrew National hot dogs. Sometimes their soft pretzels smelled like smoked salmon. Those days, I wanted to feed the dough to stray one-eared cats. "You could tell the police."

"Yeah."

"Or carry pepper spray." My Barbies never had to use pepper spray. Police didn't exist in their society. When Mom was cooking onions and my door was shut, I used to have my Barbies kiss each other. They were two girls. I never had a Ken. One wore a miniskirt, the other a tutu. They would go to the miniature grocery store together and pick plastic grapes from the scale. (The same ones my brother stuck up his nose and couldn't get out for five hours.) Their necks weren't bendable. When they leaned towards each other in the cashier line, their whole bodies touched.

"I might buy some spray."

"It's always handy."

I wouldn't. I didn't have enough money

that summer. I had given my extra cash to the dreadlocked hobo who looked like a girl I once knew. The hobo was from Colorado and hitchhiked the way over. She smelled liked grapefruit. The boy I took to Prom junior year would have liked her. I once told him he belonged in a cardboard box. He had smiled, and his teeth reminded me of the decade-old marker caps my grandma kept in her basement. The duct tape on his shoes and a safety pin in his left ear made him look like a homemade Valentine's card, pieced together on February 13th. "You're lucky, you know." Susan picked up her watch. It had fallen into her 75%-off fake-suede boots. She kept them in the corner by the radiator. I crossed my fingers every Tuesday that it would leak. Then we'd have an excuse not to do laundry, and the facilities would give us a reimbursement for the damaged goods.

"Lucky?" My mouth felt acidic.

Luck was a Salvation Army shirt with a hole in the armpit instead of the chest. Luck was a social construction, used to express admiration. It was

Aleah Goldin

left for possible goodnight kisses, Coke caps with a winning code, or pickled rabbits' feet worn around the throat. Luck did not belong in a discussion about Mama's Boy.

I called him Mama's Boy because he lived at home with his Mama. I never learned his name. Later, I would find out he liked brunette women who wore thick-rimmed glasses. They were always jean-wearing Caucasian twenties want-to-be-hip hazel-eyed girls.

I hated being called Caucasian. On standardized tests, I always filled in the "Other" circle. It used to be Jews couldn't fill the Caucasian bubble. In the 19th century, we did not yet have the privilege. We were flooding into the United States unwanted. We accepted then that Judaism was an ethnicity not just a religion. Who was I to dismiss that legacy with a causal filled-in bubble? I don't think Mama's Boy knew that. I don't think he would have cared.

Scanned up and down, Mama's Boy looked

like a serial killer. He always wore a newsie hat, button down starched shirt, and pressed navy slacks. His cheeks were shaped like avocados. Pinched between thumb and index finger, they would have looked like long open-bar darts. Peeled, the muscles would have seemed robotic. His eyes were wide and blue. Bags weighed them to the ground. His nose was puffed with powdered sugar. A half sneeze, every once in a while, would spray the dust.

With Mama's Boy, I was afraid.

"I bet they were fermented."

"The blueberries?"

"We could have made wine." Susan was looking for a CVS. There was a guy with us. His name was Eli. He was seventeen. She told him she was picking up Plan B. She was really looking for tampons. I had seen Eli before. He lived down the hall from us, liked drugs, and thought New York was shit.

"Blueberries?" His left nostril was smaller than his right.

“Got them one day near Union Station.” I was wearing a green scarf and henna. It was ninety degrees, and I wanted to be Indie. I was thinking about shaving one side of my head. I had spent the day researching healing practices in Africa. Shaved heads were supposed to ward off disease during the colonial era. They were more effective than the missionary outpost hospitals.

“Come on. Tell him the story.” Susan nudged her elbow into my ribs. “Of Mama’s Boy.” Her voice dropped low, and I wanted to smack her. She was wearing purple eyeliner that washed-out half her eyebrows. Her blond hair was pin-straight and reminded me of undercooked spaghetti.

“Say it.” Eli nodded and fingered his fake ID.

I shivered. “The story? Let’s go home.” This was not to be discussed. It was like my father’s court cases. We, his family—outsiders, were not to know. Besides, he thought our phones and rooms were tapped. We might leak.

“Fine. I’ll tell it.” Susan inched forward. I found her nail polish flakes under my desk at two

p.m. They were lime chips. I couldn't stand her anymore.

I turned away.

Mama's Boy had asked me for the time.

One o'clock.

My name.

Aleah.

Where I lived.

Nearby.

When I don't want to think about things, I picture fingernails. Sometimes they are slightly gold from the woman who decided to ground up her gold jewelry and eat it in raspberry whipped yogurt she got on sale at Giant. Other times, they are a gentle magenta. The kind an eighty-year-old woman who knits wool scarves in Florida would wear when her children visit. Susan thinks it crazy. She thinks about drinks and fake-suede boots.

"My stalker would have a beard." Susan double-dips her spoon into the ice cream gallon.

Aleah Goldin

She doesn't believe contamination exists. The government made it up as a conspiracy theory so third graders wouldn't eat French toast off the ground.

"Mine would be hot." Eli is leaning on her bed. His socks have holes at the big toe.

"I'd meet him at a lotion shop." Susan offers me the container. "It would be organic." According to her, the seaweed spreads would be in the back. She would massage them onto her palms. The next morning, a jar would appear outside our door. It would have a note, illegible and graphic. She wouldn't leave the room for days. Inwardly, she would be pleased. Susan loves attention.

I know Mama's Boy's life. He told it between 54th and 7th.

He lives in Brooklyn, works at a hardwood store with his uncle, and rooms with his mother. One-night stands don't work well with his financial situation. But the forty-five minute subway ride to Manhattan makes life worth living. He is always less

than an hour away from cosmopolitan hypocrisy. “And you?” He must have been thirty. I was eighteen.

It’s ironic. Sometimes, I am on the most bustling street, dozens of high-top walking want-to-be-famous New Yorkers on either side, and I am more alone than ever. Maybe it’s because everyone always averts eyes. When Mama’s Boy was around, I wanted someone to notice. I wanted someone to catch him by the elbow and say, “Stop. Stop following this girl around. Don’t hurt her.” But no one ever did.

I couldn’t say it. I thought about it. I dreamt of pasting my hands to hips, pivoting to face his shaven cheeks, and screaming, “Enough.”

I jaywalked instead. I crossed streets in front of moving taxis. I swung into stores and picked up coffees.

But getaways were getting more difficult.

I was panicking in bathroom stalls.

They say never yell help in New York.

Screaming “fire” is the only true means of attention

seeking, because the buildings are like toothpicks, all lined up in a row. The triangle shirt factory fire happened seven buildings down from my dorm in 1911. The factory is now a converted building for NYU Arts and Sciences. A single metal plaque discusses the lives that were ended. It doesn't mention the two men who used their bodies as ladders, so girls could climb out over them. It doesn't confirm the fact that the policemen held out a picnic tablecloth as a trampoline to cushion the fall, and the bodies fell through it, hitting like pancakes.

Eli wasn't really our friend. "Hire a hitman."

"And we'd still get blueberry wine." Susan twirled her hair around her index finger. She hadn't made it to work that morning. Her boss hadn't noticed.

Eli pulled a sole cigarette from his pocket. "A hitman from Harlem, and Mama's Boy will never bug you again." I could imagine Eli taking a girl dumpster-diving on a first date. It would be one

behind a candy shop. They'd find a cardboard box of ramen noodles and eat them raw on a park bench. He'd cheat on her with the mailman.

Eli leaned over to give Susan a massage. "I could take care of him."

He flexed midway through. I winced. He was trying too hard.

"Uh huh." Susan had a boyfriend in South Carolina. They met during a Choir practice party that wasn't PG-13 rated. The boyfriend planned to work for the Church teaching the preschoolers how to sing, and she wanted to go into the corporate world and be a CEO. "Weapon of choice?"

"Gun." Eli gave me a raised brow. Once, twice, the third time was an unsuccessful twitch. He clearly wanted some alone time.

"Rope." It reminded me of Clue.

"Arsenic"—my weapon. I would buy it online, have it shipped in a first class package. I'd dole it out in spoonfuls.

Mama's Boy found me on a crosswalk. "The

Aleah Goldin

time?”

I didn't answer. *Not again. Please not again.*

Mama's Boy put his hand on my back, slight pressure.

I shrugged him away and walked into the Whole Foods with the sliding glass door. "I have to grab something." I didn't. I pretended Billy Joel was on repeat in my head.

"Me too." He gave a single shoulder jerk.

I picked up the box of blueberries. They were lined against the front, beside the watermelon and honeydew. As a little girl, I used to freeze the berries and eat them during the month of July. They melted in my mouth as Shanna sang Broadway oldies and Dad discussed planting blueberry bushes in our backyard.

I picked a short cashier line. The woman in front of me was pregnant, had two nose rings, and wore a bandana. Mama's Boy followed. He wore penny loafers. There was nothing in his hands.

"You needed to buy something?" The words were lumpy.

I swallowed.

He picked up a limeade Popsicle from the in-reach case. “For my mom. She’s at home.” I didn’t remind him that his home was forty-five minutes away. I didn’t mention that the Popsicle would melt on the subway.

I stood.

I closed my eyes.

It was one of those moments when the world crashes down into a single second of anxiety. The watches stop ticking, and all one can smell is breath and sweat. Mama’s Boy was not sane. Mama’s Boy was not right. And I was here, now, next to him.

I wanted to curl into a fetus ball and tuck a felt blanket around my chin.

I wanted to cry.

The cashier opened up to my right.

I gave the woman my twenty, told her to keep the change, and left. I didn’t run until the glass doors slid shut behind me. That night, I locked myself in the bathroom. The mold on the ceiling had Mama’s Boy’s cap. I didn’t look up. I stared at the floor for

Aleah Goldin

three hours. Time was sweat stains on my back. I wondered what Mama's Boy was capable of. I wanted to hurl.

Susan got drunk on the subway. I told her to be careful. There were weird men out there. "Don't get hurt, all right?"

She giggled and gave me the finger.

Eli knocked on our door while she was gone. He was wearing a clean popped collar shirt. He left Susan a sealed envelope. I wondered if it had drugs. I would have opened it, but the seal was glued. "Tell her I stopped by."

The next morning Susan didn't come back till five. I called her boss and said Susan was sick. It was a possible outbreak of the flu in June, otherwise known as a hangover. Susan's remedy was tearing the envelope into twenty-eight pieces. I told her not to. Eli was desperate. A clean shirt was a monthly occasion.

Susan rolled her eyes.

Thursday, I told the guards at the Center for Jewish History that a man was following me. They laughed. They thought I was overly dramatic, calling for attention. I was the girl who always wore the copper earrings that set off the alarm.

Eli stopped saying hello in the hallway. He passed without recognition. Most times, both hands were pocketed, and a hole was centered on his knee. He always pushed the first floor button twice.

Susan told me I was an asshole for messing it up.

I didn't know what she was talking about.

She said I made her paranoid of stalkers. And all future relationships that fell apart would be my fault. Besides, I should get some other friends and leave her alone. I wasn't her mother.

Mama's Boy found me after work. He was waiting for me on the corner of 15th and 26th. It was just the two of us. The alley was dark.

He asked for the time.

Aleah Goldin

He didn't touch me. I thought he was going to. I almost cried.

I called the police.

Two men came. They wore blue suits. One could have been my father.

I put a restraining order on Mama's Boy. I didn't puke.

I was afraid.

Susan and I weren't talking. I dreamed of killing her at night. Sometimes she and Mama's Boy were together. I'd feed them the same arsenic-filled donuts. They were raspberry jelly flavored and had neon sprinkles on top. They never looked at me when they ate them, and I never looked at them. But arsenic had a strange effect with their off-balanced chemicals. I could just sense they were disintegrating. Arms came off first, then ankles and thighs.

To the Policeman who Detained Me
Nina Foushee, Stanford University

Rio Rico, Arizona in the age of SB1070

How should I address you, sir
the man who knows where he wants to send me.
My wife told me to slow down for you,
you with a gun, a heavy belt.

What is it to be grounded?
As if you could tell me what my father would.
You show me the face I use to scold my children.

Can I shine a flashlight in your dashboard?
In what hospital were your grandparents born?
Did they first cry in English?
How much do they, American babies, weigh?

You hold out your palm to weigh
My accented words, your eyes saying
see how many of your protests
can fit in the space from wedding ring to wrist.

Nina Foushee

When you demand my driver's license
you make a fist.
Is any of this really in your hands?

My wife puts her hand on my knee:
in my pocket I keep years you can't touch.
The *virgencita* hangs
on the rearview mirror.

Her *rebozo* stars flash with no particular color.

Betrayal in Five Movements

Shannon Knapp, University of Pittsburgh

I.

Honestly, I'd call it more an "embellishment"
yet this is more reputable than {relationship

You have no idea how violent
my tendencies are

the way you !strike! fear in my heart
because no one ever held me like you held me

but you have a morning-after
{}{}{}{}{}{}{}{}taste
pretty certain questions like this
don't

AAAAffecccCCCCt nor?mal people

Shannon Knapp

Dye your hair and everything will get better---
--unless you're blonde.

my eyes are vivid with things that look like

dreams?

you?

dreams.

I can watch my life in slow motion across my eyelids
and by trying to make it through one

one restless, sleepless LESS night

I threw away the key

and cried you[me-self]}}US into oblivion.

II.

my almost lover

smells like perfume; hers

and masks it with his camel lights

draw back with a literal

thimble of whiskey
i don't pretend to see
my tongue (bleeding) curled back between my lips

He (you) exist(s) too much
to cut the corrugated threads
that connect
a golden beam from his (your) every pore
to form my eyelashes

my not-lover, my almost lover
You could almost be my lover
You could almost be him

he (you) pretend(s) not to see me shiver
or is it a shudder?

III.

I always thought communication was unreachable
and I don't believe in absolutes

Shannon Knapp

But I have memorized (the tongue has muscle-
memory beyond what is able to be
enumerated)
memorized the topography of your molars

and somehow that strikes me
as

as more
as more to the point

more to the point than “reading your mind”

IV.

There’s a whole pile of crumpled paper littering my
floor

I feel desecrated.

It’s probably not as serious
as my melodrama would suggest
but I am ripping out chunks of hair with the paper.
The blood on your phone

is less a gift horse than my soul

{and here I should retract
because I certainly do not bleed}

V.

Your pen drips with liquid-lipstickselfsatisfaction
And your smirk

(that you, of course, authored
upon your own face--as though you'd use something
with dubious composition)

it's a CARNIVALESQUE distortion
{and heavily lacking in any coherent "message" [RE:
moral? point?]} beyond

esoterism---}

and and and and and and
yet yet yet yet yet yet yet yet yet

Shannon Knapp

you funhouse FUNhouse portrait of me
is vile, savage fondness [with a woeful
misunderstanding
\but ///relatively accurate/////form

and it aches]] it tastes like when I lie
on the convulsing, naked, blistered;;; sidewalk

with my lips parted by mybuzzzzzzzing cell phone.

Worse than Combat

Ilya Yashin

1.

R. is sitting across the table from me in the library, dressed in the usual three coats and two pairs of jeans. Four randomly chosen books lie open in front of him: *Concise Oxford German*, page 371, Mehr through Meister; *Oxford Russian*, page 299, отмирать through отойти; *History of Art*, page 229 with a photograph of a mosque in Iraq; *Contemporary Designers*, page 280 with a pencil drawing of a living room – a set design for a movie. He is leafing through the fifth book, *Encyclopedia of Interior Design*, looking for something interrelated with the pictures on the open pages of the first four books, like a detail of an image in one book that looks very much like a detail of an image in another book. He told me that he does not know the subject in advance.

This is how R. “stud[ies] perceptual

analysis, not as a psychiatrist but as an anthropologist in such a way that [he] can quickly gather hidden facts of civilizations that nobody else knew about” and “put together a scenario of civilizations.” R. calls this “study and research”; he “picked up on it accidentally” circa 1997 – 6 years after joining the ranks of the Pittsburgh homeless – and has been doing it ever since.

Breathing heavily through the nose, R. scrutinizes a picture and skims the text in *Encyclopedia*, comparing it with the first four books. “Extraordinary,” he mutters with a tinge of amazement. I can’t agree more.

2.

The overly simplified picture of the world, without all the fascinatingly coherent details, that R. has gleaned from his “study and research” and that I have gleaned from our conversations looks something like the following. Right now, we are 200,000 years past the 20th century. The aliens exterminated the human race out of necessity back

in mid-20th century. After that, the Milky Way exploded but the aliens recreated it a few thousand years ago in order to study the human race – they recreated the Earth’s ecology and other natural conditions and populated it with members of their own race that were programmed to act like humans.

So what we have now is what R. calls “the human lab”: aliens that are pretending to be humans of the 20th century for the sake of studying the human culture, society, and history of that time. However, only about 2 percent of the planet’s inhabitants know who they truly are and why they’re here – and R. is one of them. Though he calls himself a human – possibly the only human on the planet – he, too, was created by the aliens. The other 98 percent think themselves neither human nor alien. They don’t think at all. They’re just “supporting the human lab and the human behavior patterns” by acting like humans, similar to computer-generated bots in a video game.

And all this is just the tip of the iceberg of R.’s cosmology, the rough sketch of an incredibly

elaborate painting. But where is this painting and how did it get there?

3.

Son of an engineer and a housewife, R. was born in August of 1948 and grew up in Somers Point, New Jersey. He attended Atlantic Community College for two years and then transferred to Monmouth University, from which he graduated with a degree in business administration in 1972 and got married the same year.

“Picking a career is not easy,” he said. “So, I picked a career in sales because I thought that would be a great way to make money.” And he liked it. He worked for Kraft Foods until 1976 when he and his wife moved to Pittsburgh, her home city, where he then worked as a salesman for Armour Pharmaceuticals and then some other companies. Things began falling apart around 1987 when he got laid off due to mergers and acquisitions. He looked for a job through headhunters, but no luck: none of the interviews they got him resulted in a job. The

headhunters were “getting bad references” for him, as he put it, but they didn’t know the source of those bad references. Later, it turned out that those “bad references” were coming from a previous run...

You see, this isn’t the first time this century is taking place. It has already happened five or six times. Every time R. dies they put him back into some century to keep the lab running and he lives a life from womb to tomb all over again. They could have put him into any century, he said with slight puzzlement, but for some reason they have chosen the 20th century, which repeats itself exactly, multiple times in a row. The bad references were coming from one of the previous times.

Soon after R. lost his job, he and his wife got a divorce because he cheated on her. They sold their house and R. moved around for a few years, working odd jobs, until in 1991, “[he] said, ‘to hell with it’” and went to live on the streets of Pittsburgh. He lived Downtown mostly by himself until in 1994 or 1995 he met his future best friend and faithful companion C., a transvestite, homosexual

man of about his own age who had recently lost his apartment in a fire (I hope I won't offend anybody by using the pronoun he to refer to a man dressed as a woman, even though R. always calls C. a she).

It was C. who “gave [him] the gift” of being able to conduct his “study and research.” That gift was a drug that C. had been taking himself, though he neither had the same experiences as R. nor believed in the whole “human lab” deal. R. said that none of that hidden information can be uncovered without the drug.

R. wrote out the cosmology and history of the Universe described earlier on numerous (allegedly 5, 000) cardboard signs that he put next to himself and next to C., who was across the street from him, when they were panhandling. This is how he educated the world about what happened. This was his mission in this world as prescribed by “the timetables” of the Universe.

They stuck together until C.'s death in 2010. Well, “death”: he didn't really die, he just became a “light form” again and returned to “the well” – kind

of a reincarnation machine. At this point, R. left Downtown for a quieter area.

4.

The elephant in the room that affects nearly one in three homeless people in the U.S.? Sure. I have a few thoughts on that. But I'll let the man speak for himself first. "I have schizophrenia since I see the 20th century from a human point of view," R. told me; "when you see something different than the majority of the people, then you have schizophrenia." What does it mean to "see the 20th century from a human point of view?" It means that when he sees things and people float in the air and go through walls, he knows that this is not normal, that this is non-human, since it violates the laws of physics (one of the tools he employs in his study of the alien culture), which apply only to humans. However, that does not make him "nuts." "What I'm saying is kind of nutty, I know it's nutty, but most people don't ... see, I know the difference [between normal and abnormal]." Knowing the difference

is the key. He used watching the movie *Psycho* as an analogy: the fact that you see abnormal things happen in the movie and you know that they are abnormal doesn't call your sanity into question.

All the signs are there, though. R. has a voice in his head that he calls "phone-seven" – the same thing, he said, that incited Lizzie Borden to kill her parents in 1892. It's usually just a play-by-play commentator that simply describes R.'s actions, but sometimes it get angry and rude; "I'm working on improving its logic," R. told me reassuringly. I've mentioned hallucinations already. He has told me multiple times that he is "the number one person on earth," that everybody on the planet knows him, that he is a descendant of the Romanovs and that he is of the bloodline of Jesus Christ (which the Romanovs also belonged to). And then there's the whole "study and research" that he conducts using books and the cosmology it had led to.

It didn't come just from the hidden connections that R. has picked out over the last 15 years from print material, though. Some of it came

from miscellaneous bits and shreds of his past – insignificant memories that surfaced and came together when his struggling mind needed them. For example, R. concluded that he is a descendant of the Romanovs from four incidents that had tenuous connections with the Romanovs or Russia or the Soviet Union. “So all of these parts come into play,” he said, “[and] for some reason, I am the heir to the Romanovs.”

Similarly, the notion of multiple reruns of the 20th century comes from the fact that there were six photographs of R. in the high school yearbook, whereas he wanted none or one at most.

All the aliens are connected to and controlled by an all-knowing and practically omnipotent control system, which R. calls either “The Brain,” “The It,” or “The Thing.” Now, the first one is a pretty reasonable choice given the entity’s functions. The origin of the other two came to light accidentally. To my question “What is the Thing” he replied: “The Thing is the Pepsi generation [laughs]. There was an ad, ‘Pepsi is the real thing’ I never

knew it existed — the Thing, you know, It's the real thing, you know — but I never knew what that was until ... I found out from my friend [C.] what the real thing was ... it's the decentralized brain that controls the people." Pepsi. It is the real thing.

5.

R. does not fit the stereotype of a homeless person with schizophrenia that many people, myself included, have pieced together from newspapers, books, movies, urban legends, etc. Despite everything I have mentioned – and this is the most fascinating thing about him – R. is incredibly...how should I put it...psychologically stable. I have never seen him go into mad fits like the similar protagonist of *The Soloist*. Shifty eyes, jerky movements, twitching, trouble with daily tasks and short-term memory, unintelligible speech, zoning out – none of that. His speech is coherent, his vocabulary is broad. He noticed when I got a haircut. He is rather polite, too – every time I see him, which is not as often as I'd wish, he greets me with “Oh, hi, Ilya! How are

you?” with genuine interest, and occasionally adds “How was your weekend?” or “How are your classes going?” He has warned me multiple times when I was about to step into a puddle and never failed to thank me when I bought him something or gave him money. Indeed, when I met him and started talking to him, there was not a slightest sign of any mental issues whatsoever until he started talking about the aliens. And that’s another thing: he doesn’t ramble about all that cosmology every time he talks to somebody, probably because he has learned that nobody believes him anyway.

But I did: what he has told me is true for him just as what *I* see is true for me. Isn’t the world constructed for us by our senses anyway? But what goes on in his mind as he revealed it to me seemed completely incompatible with his very rational, very controlled, very sane speech and demeanor. For me, as I’m sure for many others, this seems more strange than the people who frantically fight invisible (to us, that is) demons and whose sanity can be doubted just based on the way they dress

or speak. When people are “crazy,” we expect them to behave accordingly, don’t we? Beheading their parents or talking loudly to themselves or muttering gibberish or running around in a frenzy – that kind of thing. But the human mind, it seems to me, is too extraordinarily, staggeringly complex to be confined to just *that*. It is well known that the human brain craves order and rationality and autonomously creates them all the time. This craving for rational order, paired with malfunctioning senses, can lead to something as fascinatingly intricate as R’s cosmology.

6.

However, his life with schizophrenia is not as easy and under control as it might seem to an outsider. There is much struggle behind the apparent sanity and composure despite the fact that R. does not show it like many people with schizophrenia do. It’s the kind of struggle that ruins lives and minds, more real and menacing than one who has not experienced it can probably imagine.

“There’s a war against humans,” R. said, and the aliens play clever games to destroy him. “They try to destroy my buttons, my zippers, my shoelaces, my shoes ... they control weather patterns ... they give me head colds ... they attack your spirit, they try to deplete your energy levels” by using the machines such as the “sick machine” and the “sleep machine.” The infrastructure – roads, buildings, buses – attacks him as well. “Every square inch is a machine in [a] bus,” he said; the seating arrangement, movement of the people – all that is against R. Everything is out to get him. “That’s my motto: you don’t have any friends in this world, especially your family. They’re out to destroy you.”

But the war on him, R. said, can get even more direct. On multiple occasions, when he was drinking coffee in a café, he felt that a man with a sword was standing behind him, saying, “Take another sip of that coffee and I’ll cut your head off.” Now pause for a second and imagine what that must’ve felt like. No, seriously. That, and the continuous war on you. Every square inch of the

bus, all the traffic lights, buildings, weather, sickness, friends, family – all that is a slow, cruel game that someone plays to destroy you. Not a hallucination or fantasy. Real. “It’s not schizophrenia, it’s not paranoia, it’s for real,” R. said of the swordsman. I doubt that I could convince you that this mispeling is inadvertent or that whatever you’re hearing right now isn’t real.

So what do you do when a swordsman threatens to cut your head off? You “just remain quiet and you hope for the best,” which is what R. did the first time it happened. His attitude toward the war on him, it seems to me, is the key to the aforementioned apparent incompatibility of his mental illness with his fairly sane demeanor.

R. fights the monsters of his schizophrenia by first accepting their unquestionable reality. He resists succumbing to their attacks by fighting back indirectly, passively. “You can’t take an offensive move towards them,” he said. “Take a defensive move ... Just like Maximus in the Gladiator – working at this, working at that constantly. I work

on myself.” When the aliens destroy his buttons and zippers – he uses multiple belts, when they destroy his shoes and gloves – he gets new ones. He resists the “sick machine” by walking more to get exercise and frequently clearing his throat; he resists the “sleep machine” by getting up and sitting down when he feels sleepy.

That’s how he defeated the swordsman, too: defiant fearlessness. “I told myself, ‘I’m gonna take the sip anyway – go ahead, cut my head off,’” he said with a whiff of a triumphant smile. “I told the thing, ‘I’m not gonna shake.’ When I took a sip of that coffee, I could hear the sword hit the ground instead of me.” This kind of attitude, which R. likened to playing Russian roulette, is absolutely necessary to survival in the perpetually haunted world that he lives in. It does, however, “take time to develop this – just like going to the combat. It’s worse than combat.”

Fortunately, R. has already learned to vanquish his fear and resist the war’s effect on him. He is a fighter of admirable resilience and

Ilya Yashin

inner endurance. Succumbing to a threat of such prodigious magnitude is not in his plans.

“Psychologically, spiritually, physically, whatever you are, remember: survival is number one,” he told me with the mien of a decorated veteran. “Don’t matter how big they are, how small they are, you can always take ‘em. If you want.”

**I Didn't Think It Was Anything
Like Moss On A Stone**
an elegy for Pina Bausch (July 1940 – June 2009)
Anna Rogovoy, Bennington College

My favorite part of the show was when
A woman stood at the side of the stage
Shampooing her head.

It was my favorite part because that's the
example Dana uses

When she's explaining that anything can be dance.
Actually my favorite part was the moment in which
I realized the end was upon us
And I started to cry.

I wanted the girl in the pink dress
To swing from Fernando's neck forever.
I wanted those boneless arms to blind me.
I know a man who lost the woman he loved
And burned three holes into his arm
with a cigarette.

I guess they weren't big enough for her to fit through
Because she did not reappear

Anna Rogovoy

But Pina could have; she was so small!
I know a man who lost the woman he loved
And tumbled down the stairs in a red puddle
And she did come back to mop him up.
I'll stay up all night.
I'll drink so much water.
I'll dance in high heels.
I'll dye my hair red.
O Pina, come back.

Liz McLaughlin

myselfplusoneplustwo—three—four—
extinguish, conclude:

I a m e v e r m o r e m o n s t r o u s
n o t l e s s s o

and so

I sit—
suck the marrow,
save the bones for soup.

fake engagement ring

Melissa Dias-Mandoly, University of Pittsburgh

cost four dollars and leaves a green loop round my finger. she asks, *are you getting married?* i call it my “preventative measure” for working at the mall.

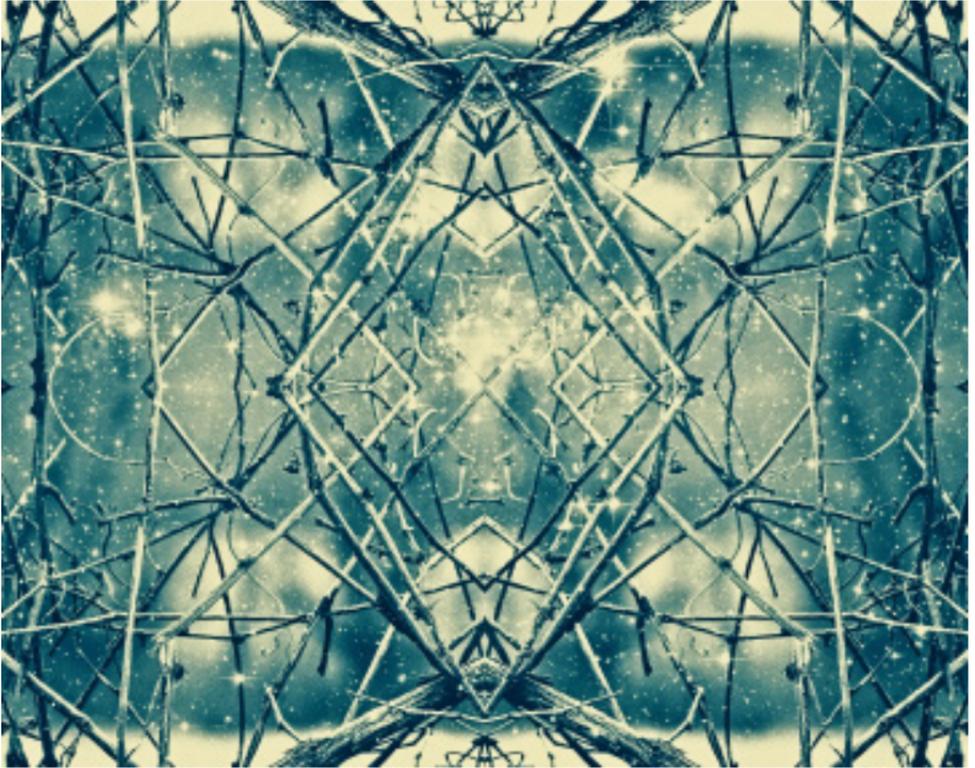
on Family Feud, Steve Harvey asks, *what is a woman least likely to buy alone?*

when D asks, *are you trying to tell me something?* i respond, *i don't want a ring, i'm not a fucking cow, you can't buy me.*

but i leave it on at night, reach slower for my cigarette so i can admire its weight and the way it slides when i turn my hand.

visual art









staff contributions

Holocaust

KC Euler

S. shows R. and me the photo of a man she
once knew—the numbers transliterating
something we cannot explain, burned like
constellation in the sun: unattainable.

I peel the skin off the apple in ribbons, light
fracturing the ribs of my back.

S. is bent in a Parisian way and talks of light therapy,
being a body hidden in a basement. Her
body curled into the shape of hiding and
her bones blinded by the heavy lightness of
morning.

K. tells me I am a legacy, named for two women I
cannot begin to write.

S. asks me do you know what a name is?

K. tells me I am an afterlife. I carry the weight of the dead in my name.

C. talks about it sometimes, Vietnam, flying the planes so high nothing was real anymore, and he makes it sound like a poem, but I watch him burrow his knuckles together. This I translate as disappearance, or perhaps forgetting.

S. says her father knew her not by a name but by a mark on the curl of her shoulder. In the darkness of a cellar, her name had unfurled its wings and blown away.

My nose is my father's. My eyes are my mother's.
My skin is my grandfather's. My hair is my Busia's. My words are—

When S. tells us of the darkness, she slows her voice, drags her hands along the table.

Some Kind of Sickness We Cannot Name
KC Euler, University of Pittsburgh

1.

J. was a child only in photographs. There are ways to remember a body, to pray it less broken. The house is full of her hair falling out in horse braids. She lays in the right corner of the bed counting the goosebumps on her peeling skin.

2.

She dissects paper dolls with anatomical precision, she maps their arteries and organs, tells us a shark has three thousand teeth. She smiles and her own teeth are yellow as wallpaper.

3.

When we call J. her name is just a sound. She sits cross-legged like a tumbleweed hollowed out. Mama says some sugar in the tea will cure anything and we watch her count each grain one two three. The sweetest fruits rot the fastest, she says. Our skinny-legged girl sings out her bones. She picks her nails, picks her teeth, picks her body to splinters.

4.

We remember her as a breeze in the wind. I wrote a list of things that remind me a body cremated: rose leaves, spice markets, cocoons, desert sand, table salt, dark plum skin. Mama says that we couldn't do anything and in her closed-eye-memory, J. is a little girl lying on her belly near a riverbed.

5.

It is a new year as the moon whittles itself away to

nothing, and I think J. was born under a new moon and has spent the rest of her life returning to the promise of nothingness. She was forever a girl with young and tender bones. She gets cold in the summer. I write her to make her more substantial. She is empty glass bottles and brittle fingers. Her heart beats in her wrists, beating louder as she dines on dandelions and September air.

Embodied True/False

Leah Farinola

I come from troupes of hard-drinking
 youngsters turned
into hard worked sad-dusted sads. Offended
 redheads,
courted out to blue-eyed dudes, followed a slow
 retreat from belief,
advanced into a routine of tragedies and musing
 heard by empty/air.
My scarlet patina trembled, but embodied only one
 half the equation.

I believed what they say about me
 but I knew/I could
percolate into new. I have out/hidden realities in my
 blink-life,
this slow reality of aged dogs, mothers left behind in
 whitespace,
tandem grinds of friendship blowing spit-bubbles to
 empty air,
past like prairie roads without startline or deadend,

passed.

I come from a long line of champion
planners but not
DO-ers, I come from facade, from half/heroes. I
come from
yellow leaves who strained/slaved to keep their
shaky holds.
Lovers who peel tape and fold back paper only to
find (nothing)
the package itself was a gift the only gift now gone.

I come from hope, I come from cramped diction,
desires
carved in dust laid out on your tongue, brushstroked
into corners
by generations whimmed and whined to tender
anything out
of what remained but dustbunnies and saltlickers
groping for feeling.

I come from love. I lied. I come from love, contrived.

collision