CURRENTS is the annual publication of the SOURCE community, highlighting the work of students of color and international students so that we can create and showcase our own representations of ourselves. It is an important forum through which we can creatively express and embrace our multicultural and cross-cultural perspectives. Reflections of racial and cultural identity and the fight for equality have long been expressed through voice and vision. Artistic expression has the ability to reach many people and inspire multiple readings without losing its own meaning. The goal of Currents is to continue in tradition and give voice to those who are underrepresented on campus.

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cover photo by Prateek Rajbhandari
I am pushing out my accent
Trying to fill with identity the places where it is sagging.

My accent has green chile between its teeth.
It eats with a fork and knife
Because that’s where my grandmother walked it to
With her gentle steps of genteel table manners
Learned from watching the fancy ladies at Sanbournes.

My mother has strong convictions about her children carrying this on.
Parenting chews with its mouth closed.
My grandmother congratulates her daughter
In murmurs for how lightskinned the nietos are.
Momma changes the subject like one might use a handful of feathers
to knead clay.

When I speak Spanish,
My tongue and teeth ripple like a flamenco dancer’s skirt in a fast esco-
vida.
The words fall like water
On this garden of self.
Its flowers that have one fat lip, one thin.
My accent changes
Y'all twangs like a curlicue at the end of a jagged graffiti tag I've been making with string over this thing my dad told me,
He told me “you’re not of color”
And I want to hold jumbo markers like little kids hold markers
They make a fist
I want to draw a net around my inability to say much back to him

I am an open hand
I am writing this poem for the rest of my life
I am not from here)

This accent is my reassurance.
I got to college and the mariachi ay! took up residence in my cheeks,
Playing the air around me like a drum.
Otherwise I sleep with my head between the sense-administering frying pans,
Head dented with how I should already know the Hampshire flow and go with it

I worry about losing the blue sky holding my chest open.
It’s gotta desert for a tongue.
UNTITLED

You, not much to say
Except for the arch that I climbed into
Nuzzled there against warm brick
Impossible to break through
But I remained content with fingers laced between
Face resting in slope of neck
Quiet
Quiet like sound never existed except for
Moans escaping from the depths of throats
Breath and whimpers blowing across earlobe
Bed creaking under the weight of bodies dancing
You were my ocean
My tangerine I never tried to peel
And while I tasted juices sweet,
I never knew the sweetness of you
Never pried you open with my lips, throat, fingernails
scratching the surface of your back

Now, familiar distance
In silences stretching tight
like cellophane
For Laura Nelson

Mother you are floating
Above
Onlookers think they got you
Think they got your son too,
Thieves in the night,
They stole you away
You precious jewel,
Wrapped noose round our
Neck
Hung you from bridge for all to see,
Mother,
The pictures they took
Tell a story they refuse to recognize
Your beauty and strength
Eventual peace
Kingdom of God welcoming you,
Letting you leave that body behind for them
To reconcile.

That body carries epic tales for the western breeze to read like brail,
Bring your stories to the natives whose blood is also dripping into this
stream beneath you
Bring the myth of your freedom to the horn player playing his sorrow,
Let him breathe in your story and expel it in notes reserved for God
and the godlike,
Let those notes travel like love letters from brown hand to brown hand
in Ms. Ruth’s second grade class,
Let the end of your tale be entwined in the beginnings of theirs, of cin-
namon hands embracing, long black legs chasing, of full lips whispering dares
To kiss
To love
To hold
To live
To never let go
To remember
To never let go

Let the wind carry the scent of their crime to their kitchen tables,
The rain wash your blood into their bathwater.
Let each quake of this bridge remind them of your fierce audacity
   To motherhood
   and love.

You are floating,
Above.
They
Are forever tied to this bridge.

Your spirit shines like the edges of a seaside sunset,
Translucent and mystifying,
Your spirit swims upwards in circular, joyous motions leaving iridescent swirls against a mournful pink sky,
To take its place among the righteous.

And we dare them to forget you,
In Jena, in Prescott, in history.
Thank God they took your picture,
Silly fools leaving us collective memory,
combined strength,
historical solidarity,

You, mother,
Laura,
Your legacy swims

blows
dares.
My body is a forest.
Tall and twisted, dark and deep
The things hidden there might terrify you.

I am always moving, always dancing.
Swaying softly in the breeze,
Running, jumping, hiding,
Searching for something.

I keep my limbs outreached,
Hands over my head,
Trying to grab hold of the sky,
That warm blanket of light,
To pull it downward,
To pull me forward,
To keep me from staying grounded.

My lips blow kisses and
whisper secrets to the stars-
Those faithful lovers-
And I keep my ear to the wind
Awaiting their responses,
Breathy in my ear,
A hushed “I love you” heard from
Millions of miles away.
And yet still, I am not satisfied.
My body is a forest, but you-
You are a fire.

Your lips leave kisses
Down the trail of my spine
While your fingers burn my skin.
Your touch hurts.

I try to run, but I am rooted.
I try to scream, but my mouth fills with smoke.
I try to fly away, but the sky and the stars,
They have abandoned me.

My long limbs, once graceful
Are now brittle and stale,
No longer good for dancing,
No longer good for anything other than firewood.
What was once my beauty now lies
In ashes around my feet.

You have disarmed me.
You have destroyed me.
You have won.
My body is a forest,
But my heart is in flames.
ONCE UPON A TIME

I feel her heart on mine,
beside mine
and I open my eyes.

She moves and her breath is warm, lazy
my neck prickles
and I look at her face

I know it’s only been the night,
but I’m in love
and I can’t look away.

It’s her fault she told me to stay
no way out cause her hands on mine
and I closed my eyes.
This dis-enchantment
This dis-placement
This dis-enfranchising
It’s getting me to a point where I’m gonna flip out on some unsuspect-
ing white person
This dis-, getting dissed all the time
By friends, co-workers, the institution, society
Life disses us in only the most ultimate ways
It takes people from us when we least expect it,
Or when we do, life makes it hurt enough so that we could never
wash away the scar it leaves
We just gotta make it, uh huh, just gotta make it
Well, we need to understand that making it means moving on
But how do we ever move on when shit is still on our minds?
Do we have to get rid of the thoughts of longing or wanting or lov-
ing?
Feelings are so complicated
They help us cope with life, but we still get dissed due to the fact that
feelings can get in the way of our decision-making process
It only goes to show how human we are
We care and we love but at the end of the day, what do we have?
Feelings of loneliness, sadness, worry, fear...
We are left with the frame of mind that things will be better but are
they really?
You go through life, one less...
One less person, one less emotion, one less thought
We get dissed – we get hoodwinked, bamboozled
Turned away from the present and reflecting on the past
What we could have done or should have said
Or how much life would be different if we did...something
Life disses every decision we make because in every choice, there is
always a 2nd option
We believe in the greater good
And we believe in life’s roller coaster either staying up or evening out
But we hate when the ride looks like there is no bottom.
The dizzying discourse of life leaves us in our own private whirlwinds
This dis-apppointment
This dis-allusion
This dis, we are involuntarily expected to hegemonize ourselves for the
greater good
Being institutionally categorized means being silent when my voice
needs to be heard the most
I cannot talk with you about how oppressed I am
Because by me telling you my experience, you will look at me and
never have to wonder what it’s like to be me, what it’s like to be dissed
Extend Frequencies
through static radio
technological communication
reverberates through hollowed halls
as rhythms in the electronic continuum

Florescent lights
cascade over cold barren floors
of industrial tile
off white
with black specs
that are dirtier

we reminisce and relive the ardent orange sunlight
spring flower scents accompany our coworkers
mesmerized by televised phenomena
and abstracted essence

we conceptualize brilliant plays for the resilient screen
and call out to fictional representations of fictional characters
We dream together in the spectacle
united through out estrangement, our division
we lead lives base on lies
fed to us so other can capitalize
on our estrangement, our division
we dream together
Madeleine Hunt-Ehrlich
Miatta Kawinzi
you say struggle and you say
paths laced with the heavy
breath of history, a weight
too large to take residence within
the mind, understanding that
grows within the curves
of the heart.

you feel my pulse and you feel
the heat of centuries of voice,
resistance to established histories,
wisdom emanating from old folk’s
faces, a reworking of the
very tongue.

you say survival and you say
ancient skill, a cartography of lashes,
skin extra thick but just
as soft, you say starry
night and border patrol,
you say lanterns.
you say visas, say the sneaky
reach of empire, the static
sprawl of conquest.
as if we don’t have dust beneath our eyelids.
as if these backs weren’t fit with wings.
as if it does not take a special intonation
to foster life through centuries of silencing,
as if the song of struggle is not echoed beneath
our very feet.

you say triumph and you say
the places where true verse is
sculpted, articulation that resonates
within the bone, you say letters pouring
from the pen where once they were
restricted, you say honeyed throat
chords plump with use.
VERSATILITY

Nineteen-ninety-something. I’m twelve playing basketball on the blacktop outside of school. There’s a bunch of us just shooting around, fighting for rebounds and paying Respect if the dude makes it in. A bunch of older kids show up. They wanna get a game going. Captains pick the teams, and eventually one of them points at me and says, “Fine I guess I get milkman over there.”

Let’s call this Lesson Number One: To a bunch of black kids, this half-Indian, quarter-Lebanese, light-skinned-but-clearly-not-entirely-white kid, for all purposes, is just plain old white.

Here’s another event, which is inextricably linked to the event above:

I’m still twelve. I’m on that same blacktop, but on the other side of it, next to the bike racks. We’re playing two-hand touch. My team is on defense. I got my eyes on the QB. He throws, dude catches it, he’s tagged, and the QB gets the ball back quick and calls “Hike!” He does it quick cause he know he’s cheating and grabbing another yard. I call timeout. He says “What for?” And I say: “Cause you’re back there, n—a.” And he looks at me like he wants to fight. “What did you say?” My face drops, and in my head I’m like oh shit. I swallow and say, “You’re back there.” He says, “Nah, that’s not what you said.” And he storms off cause he know he’ll get in trouble if he beats my ass in front of the lunch aides.

Let’s call this Lesson Number One A: Your average white kid learns this around the same time he learns how to tie his shoes: never-never-ever-ever-ever-ever say that word. But, you see, my career as a whiteboy had only just recently started, so I was a late learner. I’d heard
that word (that word being the one that ends in ‘ga’ as opposed to ‘ger’) used to express camaraderie, and because I said it to someone who was my friend, someone I sat and ate my lunch with and played football with everyday at recess, I assumed it was okay. The fact that I’d only heard it said by black people towards black people didn’t signify anything to me. In short, I didn’t understand why the kid was offended. It didn’t make sense to me. I went through the possibilities in my head, and they all just seemed stupid, too arbitrary. The fact that the kid was black, the fact that I’m light skinned, the fact that the word has a history of hate, did not add up for me because I believed that this word’s definition – like that of any other – should be forgiving based on the perpetrator’s intent. They told us not to judge people based on the color of their skin. And I didn’t. How come he judged me?

And because I didn’t understand why I was wrong, I said it to a different black friend of mine, on the same blacktop, playing two hand touch with the same old group of kids. This time they suspended me from school.

There was not a single adult who could understand where I was coming from, why I was such a little racist. The mother of the first kid I offended called my house and my dad picked up the phone. Bear in mind my father immigrated to this country when he was twenty-eight years old. After he hung up the phone, he turned to me and said, “Sanju: that is a very offensive word.” No shit, Dad. But Indian fathers have bad tempers, so I nodded like he had dropped some serious knowledge on me and did not bother trying to explain myself.

I had to talk to the vice principal, this old Italian guy. He asked me why I said it, why I said “that word”. I told him I didn’t mean it as an insult, it just came out. I said it was like saying “man”. He said, “Don’t give me that,” like what he meant to say was, “Don’t give me that bullshit.” He made me talk to my guidance counselor, an old black woman, and I told it to her, too: I honestly didn’t mean it as an insult. She asked me if I would have said it to a white kid. I thought about it and then said, “Yeah, I guess I could have said it to a white kid, too.” She looked at me like I was crazy.

There was one person, a single person, who grasped the whole situation: my friend Ibn, who grew up around the corner from me. When I said it the first time, when the kid stormed off to refrain from kicking my ass, Ibn pulled me aside and walked with me. We were both quiet, and then he
spoke. And this is what he said: “Damn, you shouldn’t have said that.” Yes, yes, I know: it’s almost exactly the same as what everyone else told me, but with that handful of words and the way he said it, it was clear to me that he understood all of it. That some black kids said the word all the time, that it was part of our generation’s (obviously not only my generation’s) book of slang, that hip hop made this slang appealing, and that the combination of hip hop and my black peers made me want to use that word. Q-Tip called it a ‘term of endearment’, a word that black people took back from their oppressors, that, when said to one another, acknowledges their collective struggle. And out of my white-ass lips that term can only be interpreted as a term of hate. Ibn knew this; he knew all of it.

You know how it sucks to be racially slurred? Well I only knew that it probably sucked without actually knowing what it felt like until I was nineteen. Maybe eighteen, I can’t remember which. There was a time when I believed I was beyond that sort of treatment. So imagine how surprised I was when it happened:

I was at a trade show with my father in Chicago. He owned a small jewelry manufacturing company. The manufacturers all have their little booths, and the retailers walk around to look at the merchandise and place orders. This old white guy came by our booth, sixty or seventy years old. He said hello to my dad. They had done business together before. Then the old man shook my hand, introduced himself, I don’t remember his name, and I introduced myself: “Hi, I’m Sanju.” And he looked at me in confusion.

Let me explain:

For those of you with immigrant fathers who do business in this country, maybe you understand. My father’s name is Subhash Sebastian. Some immigrant businessmen hold on to their funny sounding names, and I mean, why shouldn’t they? But my dad did business as Sebastian. It became his first and last name. Why? I think my dad looked at it like this: Successful businessmen make their customers feel at ease and comfortable. This is a white country, with white businesses and white customers. When a white customer introduces himself, and you tell him your name, and he can’t say it after three tries, there’s a problem. Nobody is wrong; it’s not his fault for not being able to pronounce a name he’s never heard
before, and it’s not your fault for having an uncommon name. But there is a problem, because he’s a potential customer and you just made him feel uncomfortable. He probably won’t want to do business with you because he’ll be embarrassed about the awkward introduction. So that’s why my dad went by the name Sebastian.

Back to the old white guy at the trade show:

So he looked at me in confusion. He asked me for my name again, and I said, “It’s Sanju.” And he said, “No, no, no, your other name.” I said, “What other name?” He looked appealingly at my dad, and my dad looked at me, and told me with his eyes to please be quiet. That’s when I understood: this asshole meant my American name. What is your American name? What is it?

I used to think my skin color gave me versatility. I can walk into any room and feel comfortable. I’m comfortable in a room full of white people, because I’m partially white. I’m comfortable with Indians, Asian people as a whole because I’m Asian. And I feel comfortable with pretty much any American minority group, because I’m a minority. But another way of looking at it is that my skin color alienates me. Indians don’t even know I’m Indian until they hear my name is Sanju. White people don’t know what the hell I am, but they know I’m not quite white. This doesn’t bother me. I’m comfortable; if my race makes someone feel uncomfortable that’s their problem.

There isn’t really any kind of conclusion to this mess. It’s just that race is a four-dimensional topic. When politicians say we need to put the “race problem” behind us, they don’t know what the hell they’re talking about. Or maybe they say things like that because they’re speaking to a white audience who doesn’t understand that it will always be a “problem”. And I hated how in public school people would hear the word “race” and immediately think about white and black tension; people ignore the rest of the spectrum. I also hated how my Chinese friends in high school would get mad at me if I mistook a Korean person for Chinese. Most people can’t tell the difference between Indians and Pakistanis. Or Puerto Ricans and Dominicans. That shit’s okay. The trick is, don’t assume one way or the other. Keep your mouth shut if you don’t know what you’re talking about. People just need to understand that they are at least a little racist. I promise you. And you know, get over it. Act accordingly. Try not to offend people. Be nice. …Yeah.
Mama Rock is Dead

Here in lies mama rock
She is dead
gone, buried among dirt and gravel
earth opened, body in, closed shut

Here in lies mama rock
invisible women
mammi, big breast ready, half human, full thick, and nothing but emptied
rock face, grey aged thing, mindless memory-less bundled bits of dead earth

mama rock was
a nurturer,
belly warm for huggin, pillow crafted body
sold over and over and over,
hands on her hips
“do you know what time it is?”
grumpy old women
with a rock for a face
alone, lonely, always alone, waiting
living for her children to come home
flat feet, bare foot, always in the kitchen preparing
ready, waiting and willing
always willing
and her body
was a sexless thing
cause mama had had all the children she was ever gonna have
and sex, sex is for young skinny things
for those not fully lived their life yet things
sex is something other people do
so mama hid her body
behind layers of clothing, behind closed doors
behind herself for nobody to see
cause she was never a body
she was just mama

mama rock died of young age
she died because she wasn’t as old as she thought she was
she died because she realized that she had never really given herself
that name
she died in the house fire of herself
she died slow
until nothing was left
but what she always was
nothing left but her own self,
and the name that her own mama gave her

Because her mama
has everything to do with mama rock,
bed bond, tied to her mind mama
pill after pill after pill mama
that rock trying to rescue her
years of a little girl falling into quicksand,
waiting, hoping, wanting for her health
now knowing she can’t save her own mama
she can only save herself

So now that mama rock is dead
now that she is gone
now that she is buried in the deep, deep
solid final ground
Here’s what she
what I will no longer do

No, I will not make you pancakes after your long nights
of fuckin escapades while you lick your syrupy stained lips
only to bury your head in my chest for comfort and talking and crying
then walk away when you are done just to come back for breakfast
the next day

My chest is mine

No, I will not untie my red bandanna from my untamed head
to wipe your tears and let your snot cover my sleeves,
“Baby, you just let it all out. You tell mama all about it”

Fuck that

No, I will not be your twisted face of sleep, a rock,
a core unturned, unbroken, solid heavy weight for you to
stand upon when the ground has come out from underneath you

There are more surfaces for you to stand on, and honey, it ain’t me

No, I will not kiss your boo-boos, mend your torn clothing,
be your late night phone call, your ass better call Tyron

I will not be your butt wigglin’ hugger, one-way lover
breakin’ her back to please you
mama

that shit is done, its finished, it’s cut

Cause I am tired of fulfilling everybodies expectations,
of people thinking this body
is just a house

walkin in, haven’t even taken your shoes off
all up on my couch, kickin and screamin
eating the marrow from off my bones to purely nourish yourself
and you didn’t even ring the damn doorbell

well I have neighborhood watch now
and they know if and when you are coming
and only I can open the door to my own house

Cause I will no longer, sacrifice who I am, what I am or how I am

My body
is a pleasant, soft, curvy, mine
she screams, yearns, breaths,
opens, fills with laughter, fills with self
and is sick and tired of digesting your poison
you can’t feed that shit to her any longer

My body is capable of receiving love
real love, sweaty, tense, sticky, urgent loving
harsh, real, endless, honest love

and I am not a rock,
I am a human being, capable of breaking
ready for the constant hurt of change
ready for those ready to listen

and this skin
changes shape but never changes color
defines and redefines but is never defined

so now I honor mama rock
by returning her to the earth

no tombstone, no funeral, no nothing
just a simple gathering, a few words

she would have wanted it that way
I know, I was her once
Suffocating under her weight
Under the way I thought I owed it to the world

But now, I only owe it to myself

Don’t cry for her
cause she was dying all along
she was just waiting
waiting for her fat sparrow wings
to spread and fly
free

Here in lies mama rock
and what’s left is me
My vision is blurry,
but it’s not astigmatism.
It’s your smell, your look;
It’s you.
I’m up high, a snowflake.
Waiting to glide down and
be lost.

I stand out clear, bright and
melting on your sleeve
with its delicate ink
stabbed into your skin.
The words carved in,
indelibly.
Just like summer camp with
names etched on underwear.

The word is written,
and it is Anomia;
chaos, law without order.
A deep dysfunction,
a gulf between us and
no, Luke didn’t dream
of hips and lips
of a bed split.
I am Babylon and you Judea.
You are the righteous sword,
The Chosen.
I am a savage in the wild.
Say the word!
I am yours, taken
a willing hostage.

No.
I am a snowflake
and I am melted.
Barely a memory.
my penis is seeming like a new thing this autumn
dirty against clean peach toilet seats
can’t ever have been used for any good
foreign foe between my legs

i get anxious
when i suspect white women have seen my brown penis
and have been hurt
their delicate effeminacy
torched by disgust
or even lust

my penis
sleeping and barbaric
in their daughter’s bed
LOVE IN F-MAJOR AIN’T SO SWEET LIKE YOU THINK: A DIARY OF SORTS, IN VERSE FORM

(Afternoon sun pours through the living room windows, Mother leaves for church in her best brown suede shoes)

Fred Astaire loves the girl in color this time.
He is dancing on the ceiling and my brother
Is still young enough to believe.

He turns his head upside down to see pirouettes right side up,
he presses one hand to the television screen as if checking for a pulse.

My brother wants to know
what it is this guy’s got
that lets him beat

gravity.

(The apartment is street level. Sometimes I walk by and look in. The kitchen table is the same. Less grand as a surface for onions and tomatoes than nights when it was my debut stage.)

My childhood babysitter liked to dress in vintage Missoni
To sing aloud to The Spinners.

Make-up in hand, he’d say “Who do you want to look like tonight?” and I’d try to think up someone good. swaying atop a pair of his stiletto heels,
four sizes too big.

Those shoes might’ve meant death for a weaker eight year old. I couldn’t have cared less. In those hours I was the girl of my dreams.

(We dangle our feet over the edge of the abandoned dock. For a second it’s as if we are a place very beautiful, where things are entirely simple. But the rivers all run toxic here.)

His mother once threw their pet dog, against a wall, for barking too loud. Her hysterics and the dog lying at his feet all made him sick. He kicked its limp body and left the house a ghost. An hour later he kissed me and I thought nothing of his silence except to ask if he thought misery really loved company. To this day I remember his answer, “Only the quiet kind,” he’d said.

(The 4 train is a kind of purgatory for bored sinners. Under overcast horizons the Bronx is like the graying eaves of a back split in half by the elevated green-line track racing through like a spine.)

A man plays the penny whistle for captive travelers. The notes sound like parakeets circling in formation, like the sound of cartoon shooting stars in flux. Each of his fingers doing their best slapstick,

as they try to get as close as they can to his mouth without falling in.

(It’s cold and windy and I can barely turn my face to look up at smoke rings ascending his lips like angels heading home beneath the streetlight.)

His poetry reminds me of old men talking dirty under the cover of dark. He has no respect for pursuits of compassion, or grammar. He is defendant and gavel both.
So how come his verse is like the scripture undressed before me?
How come he can make that woman in the third row bite
Down on her fist as if to keep afloat?

He talks in a southern drawl in bed.
He likes his women beneath him where they can feel his weight.
When we are supposed to be asleep I watch him have nightmares worse
Then I have ever seen.

“Describe me in a single phrase,” he requested once with a smile,
because the only questions he ever truly had were about himself.

“Door to door salesman,” I said.

(The green screen behind him will eventually be an animated city. Cars will move, windows will open and shut, the weather will not remain the same. In real life, the director will break every few minutes to pat the star’s face down matte and the spotlights will leave everyone but him in the dark.)

When rappers straight talk, their sweatshirt hoods are always down.

“You need to be good to what is yours,” he will say to future viewers,
“And these streets, they are yours.”

Later as he applies eye drops, face tilted, he will say to me alone
“I believe in ideals rather than politics, also I am a Muslim,”

he will say to himself with a shift in his stature,
“I would have seen myself the conductor of great orchestras.

But there was no music program in my high school,
and anyways brass and ivory are too expensive.

So I make hip hop.”

I want to tell him
his music gives morning sparrows pause,

that in today’s news
infamous works of art
have been excavated from a city dump bordering
city limits.

(In my mother’s church women dress up fine to get down on their knees.

A moment where the divisions blur. Baptist’s rock back and forth just like Muslims bow to bury their faces in their hands like Jews summoning ancestors over Sabbath candles, eyes closed as in the wringing of rosaries through hands, over cathedral candles lit in prayer. )

There is an over the hill rhythm and blues singer who now in retirement lives with his daughter on east 3rd street.

Afternoons he spends seated outside the C-town on Loisaida Avenue.
He is the one who told me long ago, angels taught all people to sing in answer to one boy’s wish for immortality.

To this day he insists
James Brown rose from the ashes of his cigar.

(This was your city once but you don’t live here anymore)

I do not know what they will build in place of the Dominican Catholic Church
On the corner of Avenue B. Its yellow ruins will one day give roots to condos
I am sure. This is the end. The other day I saw a small kid walking in the middle of the street alone. People on their cell phones took no notice of his refusal to step off the dotted line.

(Only upon leaving New York could I begin to understand. Having visions on Midwest porches, different porches but seemingly the same street, identical tea cup houses with weathervanes and chimneys and frost creeping up on screen doors like a bandit in the dark. I remember

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his philosophy on life, he claims to have forgotten. And perhaps that means it is not his any longer but someone else’s.

“My philosophy on living is to see everything as honestly as you can. The way to see is to look

first for the sadness in something, that’s where you’ll find the heart,

and then to find the humor, because that’s the life force.”

(Two men in love drive the wrong way up one-way avenues for the sake of carving something geometrically perfect in the earth. In the backseat I am far flung stars, in the backseat I am)

always lost in other people’s stories

which speak my own pulse to me louder then the city can, Louder than a beloved face beckoning or overcome with private madness, Louder, the car stereo that rivals car horns like trumpet’s Sound, all around lives rub, unravel only to tie one person’s loose ends to another’s.

You can talk of the things we must do for our self

but think of it, an old friend of my mother’s who, on the day he met Nelson Mandela, called long distance to say

“My dear I have finally seen Real tangible peace in that man’s face. Gives me hope enough that I can finally die happy.”

And later that day he did.
I know her, I once was her, and I am sick of her.

I am ready to let her die, let her rot, let her burn in hell
With her big belly full of lies and laughter;
She lives off of white children’s tears
As her broken hands caress their pale cheeks
Lap full of blonde-hair blue-eyed bundles of joy.
Her hands are gray and swollen
From beating her own children,
Breaking their backs, making them learn to bend, to bow
to hate their blackness the way their mama hates it.

I know her, I once was her, and I hate her.

She hums a song to herself about freedom
Deep, throaty, from the depths of her bowels
While she crawls on her knees with a rag full of bleach
Trying to rid the white tiles of dirt,
Trying to rid her brown skin of dirt.
She prays for blue eyes and bright skin but instead
Gets chaffed knees and burning hands.
The bleach stings her eyes, and now she cries a bit,
Still humming, as if she were happy,
As if she still has a drop of dignity left.
I know her, I once was her, she is my mother.

For years, my mother would scrub my face and hands clean
Till my own brown skin would shine red
And she would pinch my nose at the bridge
And make me practice prancing the room
Back high, head straight, belly sucked in tight-
Make sure to pronounce your arrrs
And mind your peas and cues.
Black was a mindset that I had to destroy
Through a stern white education.

I know her, I once was her, and I still am her.

I am starting to come to terms with the fact that
I will always be her. She is my other self.
She comes out in small ways,
The big hands, dirty feet,
Broken back, cracked smile.
She is so sad and so tired.
Please, lay her down to rest.
Let her die.
There is nothing left of her to use,
Her body is an empty shell,
A hardened husk with hollowed space.
father
your stone hands
bones of scrap metal
lifelines cracked into
the dust and ash
of earth
the ach of age
from building beating loving
without your eyes

they will always dream
big of a home from your heart out
you live inside them
i have searched
for that door for years
the carpenter’s daughter

my childhood:
carpet samples, floor tiles
your saw-dusted workbench
dulling tool blades rust from use
the plaid work shirts i wore
to fit inside your chest and arms
press to your hard pounding heart

we’ve both worked and searched
for home
inside a room is built
with the ways I tried to forget
loving you

how do hands hold
hurt take-apart build
forget to bend and
stretch their love
in unison?

they don’t
First to my mom:
You are my rock. You are the most amazing and wonderful person I have ever met. You are a single parent, making it by on food stamps and false promises. You have always been there. No matter what – through rebellion, through lies, through tough time...when ma passed, our family fell apart. We only had each other. Clarissa understood as much as she could but she was still so young. We went through our roughest times and still you loved me. I’m a mama’s boy thru and thru. Since I’ve been gone, I have developed such an appreciation for who you are. I have never realized how similar we are. I swore that we had nothing in common, but I have made the same mistakes, chose the same decisions, and lived a similar life that you have. I never need validation from you because you always know how to tell me what needs to be said no matter how I feel about it. If I mess up, you let me know. But you also let me know that life gets better and things happen for a reason and to never give up hope. You are my inspiration. You are my constant reminder that things can be better. Mom, I love you.

To David:
You have been in my life more than I can even imagine. I spent so much of my childhood trying to get you to like me, trying to make you a part of my life, knowing that you did not fit within my 1000 piece puzzle. Your shape is way too awkward. You told me you loved me when I got to college. You always had excuses. You never told me the truth. And as much as I hate you, I look in the mirror and I see you. Your nose, your eyes, your swagger...that is all in me. You gave me what I look like.
I am flirtatious and energetic and people like me because of how I hold myself. I do have my own swag and I carry myself in a certain way. But you cheated. You lied. You manipulated. I have made the very same mistakes that you have...every single one. I possess every quality you have and I don’t like who I am. I hate that I made the same mistakes you have and I’m sorry for being your mistake. And now that I don’t talk to you anymore, I feel confident in saying that I will never be like you...ever again. You do not own any part of me. I cannot subject myself to your errors. I want to be a man, the only way I know how.

You both have been influential in my progress as a man. I am going to be a better man for the one I end up loving. I am never going to treat her wrong ever again. I am not going to lie. Not gonna cheat. Not gonna manipulate. Dear parents, I am not going to continue living in your mistakes. Dear self, I am going to make you better...and things will work themselves out.
Speech given to introduce the faculty panel ("The Myth of Multiculturalism") for Action/Awareness Week 2008

As a student of color, I believe that Hampshire is a racist institution, but that statement alone is not enough. In order to understand what that really means, we need to critically look at racism. To me, racism does not only manifest in overt ways. Of course overt racism is really painful to experience and witness, but I think Hampshire’s problem is one of colorblind racism, which manifests in those moments when people don’t acknowledge race because they think if you acknowledge race that means you’re racist.

Colorblind racists believe that we’re all a part of the human race, and that we all need to look beyond skin tone, hair, eye shape, etc. I’ve had many discussions with folks at Hampshire that think that my experiences of racism are my own problem, or that I’m too sensitive, or that racism would go away if I would just lighten up my attitude.

As a person of color at a colorblind institution, I get angry—not just angry, but outraged. Because we’re at a place where people pretend that race doesn’t exist, I am silenced in my anger and don’t feel like there is a place to release it besides among my equally outraged friends of color. In putting together a resource for white allies, I found a striking quote from Paul Kivel’s Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work For Racial Justice that explains anger and why its important for people of color to let it out and white folks to really listen:
“When people of color are angry, it is a legitimate anger. It is not their oversensitivity but our lack of sensitivity that causes this communication gap. They are vulnerable to the abuse of racism every day. They are experts on it. White society, and most of us individually, rarely notice racism.

It is the anger and actions of people of color that call our attention to the injustice of racism. Sometimes that anger comes from an individual person of color who is talking to us. At other times it is the rage of an entire community protesting, bringing legal action, or burning down buildings. Such anger and action is almost always a last resort, a desperate attempt to get our attention when all else fails.

It is tremendously draining, costly, and personally devastating for people of color to have to rage about racism. They often end up losing their friends, their livelihoods, even their lives. Rather than attacking them for their anger, we need to ask ourselves how many layers of complacency, ignorance, collusion, privilege, and misinformation have we put into place for it to take so much outrage to get our attention?”

I want all of us to really think about this next time we experience or witness the externalized anger of people of color, and if that anger isn’t there, we must ask if it’s being replaced by silence. I know that I sometimes internalize and silence a lot of anger in order to keep the white folks around me comfortable. My silence is just as exhausting as my anger, and I’m tired of both. I hope that this panel can open up discussion for us to think critically about how racism is silenced by multicultural rhetoric and the band-aid of diversity.
once she’d had enough, my grandmother sank her brown body down into the black water by the bayou: in a rundown white town where wasn’t no one gonna give her a hand she finally died by her own.

I ache to know the crow’s feet that would’ve traced her eyes by now—dark and bitter as coal, set in a face carved out of trailer parks and dust just north of the border. she always had that haunted half-feral look of one who done dark things to survive. they say she could’ve seduced the devil himself, that she stole, lied, cursed em all to hell, made my mama cut our mother tongue from her mouth.

I reckon the silent rage still in her bones is what pushes those red flowers up from her grave in the first hot weeks of every summer.

most days, this last testament just blooms unnoticed. today it is waving vainly in the breeze, fading in the sun and rain, to be forgotten and buried between the weeds.
I can’t stop moving, so I slip from under her arm and go to the porch to pace. My hands are shaking, and I keep smoking, thinking of all the excuses that sounded so good 14-hours ago. The stars are high in the sky, ready for dawn and I should be in bed with her. But I’m not.

I think about two years with her and I think about this song that we bonded over at a concert.

But my heart isn’t in this.
I’m supposed to be a seasoned fighter.
It feels like my first hit.
(And it hurts like...)
I didn’t see this coming anyway.
(Yeah, it hurts like hell)
I want to tell her so many lies, but the truth keeps coming up and that drunk that felt so good, that kept us close is burning away. It’s slipping away and so is my resolve. I want to think that I’m no coward, but I am and I’m set to run. They say you have to fight for love, that happiness doesn’t come easy, but in the back of my head I hear a girl screaming for hope, for a future and it sounds just like this song I once knew...

How’d it go...
When we can’t begin
Unless it’s with an argument
We’re losing out on
Love for the sake of it
And I want to tell her that I can’t fight anymore. I know I’ve been out here too long ’cause I can hear her shuffling behind the door. How many rounds can I go? And how can I soften the blows?

She used to fit so nice into the crook of my arm and I fit real good against the curve of her body at crowded shows. I remember dreaming of her and fighting to hide the smile that crept across my lips when I saw her lying next to me. She didn’t have to open her eyes for me to know they were the most beautiful brown I’d ever seen, glowing like a forest set ablaze.

Oh baby, when you close your eyes
You’re so terrified, so terrified
So am I.

I’m scared of her, of me, of us. It seems so obvious, but it’s more. I suppose. It’s starting to get foggy and I’m happy to hide in it, to smoke another cigarette and hope that it hides the fear in my eyes. I know she wants to come out, to know that I’m not pacing and thinking of her, or here.

Instead I think about the club, about her, about the way I saw her through a crowd and knew she had to go home with me. Two month later I was holding her hand in public, smiling at the jealousy of the boys who walked past us. Three months later we were living together, first until I found my own place, then because it didn’t make sense for us to live apart as so much of our lives were already tangled up in each other. And it was so easy, so easy to be lost in that, to be lost in her.

You’re brilliant, but...
You’re amazing, what...

But still I wonder if I want to be here with her. But then I look at my hands, see them shaking and wonder if it’s the cold in the air or its me. I turn around and the light behind the door’s off, and I know she’s in bed, pretending to be asleep. She’s waiting for me to come back, to fit back in with her, to let her find her shape against mine. And I think about that last song at the show we met at:

Lay down all those instruments of navigation
Cause we’re already lost,
And maybe we
Will fall apart at the seams
Am I through with you?
Have you had enough of me?

But I can’t shake her, if I could I would’ve, I know it. For better or worse
this girl is mine and I’m hers and I can’t get past that. So I flick my ciga-
rette and I go back into the bed and she moves to put her arm across
me. I smile ‘cause I know I can do this. I can’t not. I kiss the top of her
head and close my eyes, and in my head a girl is singing,
It’s like a bottle to the head.
I’m seeing stars, I’m seeing red.
I’d taste your mouth in anyone’s kiss.
Where do you end and I begin?
It’s like a bottle to the head.
Peg the needle in the red!
I’d taste your mouth in any kiss.
Where do you end and I begin?

*All italicized sections are quotes from Rainer Maria or Garrison Starr*
Her eyes are big, brown, and beautiful
Round like the sun and piercing like a sword
The look in her eyes can tell you everything you need to know
Whether she’s tired, hungry, happy, sleepy, confused, or nothing
The one time her eyes told me nothing
She was so hurt, so shocked, so sad, so betrayed that her eyes didn’t know how to be
Her eyes filled with stinging water
Water that flows from the ocean of her heart
Streaming down her face, I cannot look her in the eyes
Once the eyes that showed so much love and affection, now show anger and pain
and they will never look at me the same again
However, maybe it’s my eyes that deceive me
because there are moments when our eyes meet
and they understand that thru this jungle of sadness, there is love.
Love that was built, love that was tested, love that has prevailed
Love that will never be the same
Your eyes hold so much weight that your bags have extra compartments
The sleep patterns they once had have become rare
They only close to blink or to keep reality from sinking in
You see, your eyes are the windows to your most private parts
Once those shades come down, my eyes will begin to know that
love is not what you see; it’s what you do
Your eyes cannot see what’s lacking in mine
because you cannot look in mine the same
But if all we have are our eyes, then I never want to be unable to see them again.
Katrina De Wees

GEOMETRIC SPACE

Geometric Space
Tragic Monolithic Masculinity
Pornographic Indicators of Nature, of Beauty
Decoat the Spirit
Lost in the Temple of my less familiar
Searching for the somewhat familiar former
In Geometric Space

Geometric Space
Substantiates
Monolithic Masculinity
Reveals Pornographic indicators of nature and beauty
Erratic Eroticism
Decocts Spirits
Start and Bitter

Shoulders Roll over
Fashion sells chains to Disposable people
Who shake crystal tambourines on stage
Who shake the golden embers of our forgotten testimony
And we Deteriorate

Just another lost place
Just another lost place
In Geometric Space
I have lost dead skin
I am walking over shells of people i once knew
She sits on top of the clouds
And masturbates to the beat of her swallowed sorrow
They rhythmic contractions transcend the void
and keep pace with the sheer absurdity of what we call life
But life is not a play
Familiar with what life is not
Hers is redeemed by the poignant maroon
The mark of their ephemeral love
PHOTON

Light travels faster than sound,
So I stare at the darkness.
I wait, patiently, for the first,
For the most energetic photons to pass the corner.
I know they will come first
Because I read it.

They will be wild and untamed,
Eager to show off and impress.
These dots, a trillion times smaller than
A laser, a pin prick, a hairline fracture,
have traveled unchecked for a thousand million years.
Each one has survived long enough to
Light the tunnels and bring men from
Perdition.

Each pin prick is the absence of
Absence. It is being in the most
Excited way. It is what each cell in
Us craves. Each bit of light is
Collected and held, remembered in its
Uniqueness until we pass and become
Light bending the corner to...