

HARVARD COLLEGE

Thursday Magazine



volume 4 / issue 1

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# of things that grow

andrea jonas

At the beginning, the plants were just top heavy enough to require a seatbelt for the drive over. He teased her for her maternal instinct as they moved the baggage upstairs to mix with his own. New growth developed from freshly spliced lives, and they watched, wrapped in their concrete nest. These were the empty days she would come to remember, the months filled with wind and patience. When the buds fell early, she took them in hand and insisted on a burial. Without any ground, and despite his objections, she offered the flesh into the plants, which continued to grow under her jealous watch.

With time came fresh seasons and new harvests. Soon the concrete house became choked with creepers and dead leaves, papering shut windows and strangling the wind. This time they had a truck to move to a new home, with more space for dividing seeds. She became guardian of the steady growth; a tangle with canopies overarching house and neighbor. Gray mornings he woke in time to watch her outdoors, watering remembrances of moldering times.

The other children came, tumbling between the brushes and steady streams of boiling water. Only these were able to leave the dense thicket, sadly free of its secrets and its love.

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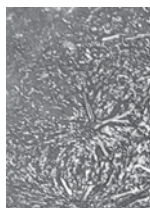
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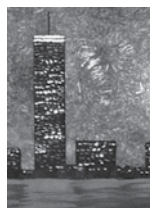
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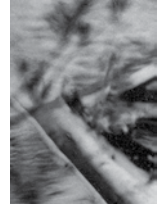
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# digging

## america is a dark place

richard s. beck

*“You can rant at him you can rave at him you can sponge his face with vinegar you can tear his tongue out with a pliers but you cannot help a dead man.” -Harry Smith*

In 1952, Harry Smith approached Moses Asch, the head of the Folkways record label, and offered to sell Asch his massive collection of records. Smith was doing it for the money. He always needed money. Oftentimes he would get Allen Ginsberg high and persuade him to loan some cash. “Apparently he went around and did that with everybody,” Ginsberg said. Sometimes the Guggenheims would give him money, but it never did much good. If Smith wasn’t broke, he was close to it.

Asch didn’t take the bait, at least in one sense. Instead, he challenged Smith to sift through his thousands of 78s—blues, hillbilly, folk, bluegrass—and put together an anthology. Smith, who managed to organize the world’s largest collection of paper airplanes and mastered forms of string figures from around the world during his life, took on the enterprise. His *Anthology of American Folk Music* was released on Folkways in 1952.

As historians and musicians alike have said over the half-century since the *Anthology’s* release, Smith unearthed a narrative of American music that had not existed before. It began to explain where rock came from, it explained what the blues were, and it put the country in touch with its own latent, particularly American brand of insanity. “This music sounded like it came right out of the ground,” said Eric von Schmidt, a folk guitarist who got his start in Cambridge, MA. “Songs like the clods of rich, dark earth.”

The *Anthology’s* influence was immediate and immense, particularly within the fledgling folk revival that would go on to transform popular music. Bob Dylan covered two songs from the *Anthology* on his first album. Dave von Ronk, who oversaw the development of the Greenwich Village folk scene, called the *Anthology* the folk musician’s Bible. Smith’s *Anthology* makes a good case for itself as the most important musical document in the country’s history.

Even today, hearing the *Anthology’s* six sides for the first time is revelatory. Smith narrowed his choices to records released between 1927, when recording technology allowed

for accurate sound replication, and 1932, when the Depression killed off the industry. Uninterested in issues of authenticity (no field recordings on back porches for him), Smith went after records that had sold well—frequently in the hundreds of thousands—and seen wide distribution. So even as the names of the musicians on the *Anthology* faded into obscurity, the songs remained in the public consciousness. As records of an artistic past go, the *Anthology* feels eerily, mysteriously contemporary, like something that’s been present all along.

In 1991, Smith received a lifetime achievement award at the Grammys for the *Anthology*, recognition less than a year before his death. In his acceptance speech, he said, “I’m glad to say that my dreams came true. I saw America changed through music.” This is the line that appears in obituaries and on the back of the *Anthology’s* liner notes. The next thing he said is usually left out: “And all that other stuff you are all talking about.” Smith was intensely interested in “all that other stuff.” Folk musicians are often unaware of his work as an experimental filmmaker, and filmmakers don’t know that he spent the 50s hanging out with Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk. Anthropologists, who appreciate the recordings of Lummi and Samish rituals that Smith made at 15, haven’t seen the abstract paintings or heard the sound collages. He was broke, frequently incomprehensible in conversation, and often drunk, but he managed to find his way into nearly every American avant-garde movement of the mid-20th century.

Born in Oregon, Smith only made it through five semesters of college before he went to a Woody Guthrie concert, smoked pot, and moved to San Francisco. He began to make abstract films, showing regularly at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. He very quickly became a respected member of both the San Francisco and Los Angeles film communities. He produced many films by hand-painting directly onto each frame, a process that sometimes required more than a year of work. These films fairly sparkle with detail and movement. It’s a rickety aesthetic, one that seems ever on the verge of collapsing into its own minutiae. The uniqueness of each frame exposes his early abstract films as things collected, and because the individual objects in

a collection don't have an inherent affinity for each other, Smith nearly leaves any semblance of wholeness behind all together.

Smith's highest film achievement is supposed to be "Heaven and Earth Magic," (1962) which was originally, like all of his films, untitled. The plot sounds like something a too-cute indie band might come up with: the heroine loses a "very valuable watermelon," suffers a toothache, goes to the dentist, goes to heaven, comes back from heaven. What

wants them shown. Occasionally he jettisons the need for sequence entirely by painting symbols or geometric figures, static objects that find movement in a rush of association rather than in actual movement. The Buddha's Footprint found on the cover of Allen Ginsberg's volumes of poetry is Smith's design.

Smith's sequencing is most powerful in the *Anthology of American Folk Music*. In the booklet that accompanied the LPs, designed entirely by Smith, the large track numbers

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**[Smith] sets up conditions that let the artists  
on the *Anthology* talk to each other,  
even argue with each other...**

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keeps the film weird (and "weird" is precisely correct) is an impenetrably dense program of symbolism. Brooms, sarcophagi, the animated skeleton of a horse, and an egg that hatches a hammer all make appearances that don't so much confront the viewer with their obscurity as return a gaze that suggests everything without ever taking hold. There's a nearly infinite associative potential, but the film frustrates any attempt to pin it down. It's not unlike alchemy (yet another of Smith's lifelong preoccupations) in that the end result is empty of mystery but the process is unknown. There's clearly an emotional, psychological, or intellectual payoff when "Heaven and Earth Magic" ends; that the band Deerhoof soundtracked a recent screening indicates its enduring popularity. It's what happens before the gold appears that's so elusive.

By the time "Heaven and Earth Magic" was made, Smith had been living in New York City for 11 years. Interested in the relationship between sound and color, Smith entered into the flourishing jazz scene and began to paint. One of the early jazz works, "Manteca," is a note-for-note illustration of a Dizzy Gillespie tune. As a rectangle of paint goes, it looks a little silly, maybe even a little stupid. But a jazz tune taken as a rectangle of sound tends to seem a little stupid itself. Following his vaguely anthropomorphic swirls around the canvas, though, one starts to see what Smith got right. He has a genius for sonic transition—momentum shifts, the way a solo dies out, how a band joins forces for the head of a song. Smith's feel for the way art moves and talks to itself—in any medium—is extraordinary.

Still, painting seems to have been one of Smith's less fruitful artistic ventures. In his films and sound collages, Smith's control of pace, his sequence of presentation, is meticulous. In a canvas that presents itself all at once, Smith loses a share of his ability to show things to the viewer as he

dominate the page. The information that actually pertains to the song—performer, instruments used, summaries of lyrics, other performances of the same song—is presented in small type, but the numbers are big, blocky bullies. The *Anthology* is not to be put on shuffle. Its emotional force registers in the way an explosion of creative love and psychosis will follow an enigmatic, poker-face of a ballad. With regard to interpretation, that's as far as Smith is willing to go. He sets up conditions that let the artists on the *Anthology* talk to each other, even argue with each other, but once the conversation gets started Smith leaves town fast. He is not, in any tangible way, present in the music that animates his most important work.

Before he covered "See That My Grave is Kept Clean" on his first album, Bob Dylan heard Blind Lemon Jefferson's original version on the 6th and final side of the *Anthology*. Accompanied by his guitar, Lemon sings as a man already dead: "Lord there's one kind favor I'll ask of you / Please see that my grave is kept clean." The guitar, the only thing walking his voice along, isn't giving anything up; no grief, no rush to either heaven or hell. It's unnervingly calm, so measured that it almost refuses to go anywhere at all. There's a verse about a long lane with no end, and it's unclear whether you or dead Lemon is going to have to walk down it. The next verse is the most terrible of all: "Lord there's two white horses in a line / Gonna take me to my burying ground." We may allow ghosts to follow their own funerals, but they're supposed to notice their family, their friends, the wind. Anything less particular, less mundane than "two white horses in a line." He's speaking like someone still alive, someone who would still bother to notice such banality, but maybe there's less of a difference between life and death once you've passed on. For Melville, the high priest of American insanity, the whiteness of his whale was

the “colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink.” But Lemon invokes the hue of spiritual nullification and absence in the voice of a spirit, a voice that refutes exactly what it suggests. “I do not exist,” it says. “I cannot exist. So what’s left is death, and that’s a fact.” The whole time, the guitar continues on its measured way, like a psychotic who strangles his victim without emotional agitation.

The song is psychologically bottomless, and so Smith allows for a few minutes of recovery. “C’est Si Triste Sans Lui,” by Clemo Breaux with Joe Falcon and Ophy Breaux, starts off with a surge of carnivalesque, roiling organ. Its movement is as though you’re following Lemon’s funeral procession out of the cemetery, or maybe it’s your own body you’re leaving behind. The words are in French, and temporary freedom from the responsibility of comprehension is a relief. But still the organ churns, a refusal to end the march until something happens to end it.

“Way Down the Old Plank Road” begins with some banjo noodling that doesn’t quite know what to do with itself. Uncle Dave Macon is testing out ideas, not really fond of any of them; it’s the kind of thing that should lighten the mood, but if it’s going to sit around like Lemon’s guitar it’s no help. Then he calls out “Let’s go!” and his banjo responds, locking into a momentum that treads exactly as heavily as it wants to. Its movement is quiet and thrilling—this isn’t a funeral march, it’s a getaway. Macon sings, “Rather be in Richmond / and saw the hail and rain / Than for to be in Georgia boy / wearin’ that ball and chain / Won’t get drunk no more / way down the old plank road.” Then the banjo unloads, Macon pounding the instrument with the heel of his hand as he picks. Next thing he knows he’s in Mobile, but he doesn’t last long before someone has him in irons again (this time he mentions that the chain makes his ankle sore). Then he tears a “Glory! Hallelujah there!” from somewhere, and it’s clear that he’s exactly the sort who should be wearing the ball and chain except that he’s so charismatic. Next he’s building a scaffold on a mountainside so he can see his girl riding by, and he’s very careful to leave out what the scaffold is for. Then this: “Friday night my wife died / Saturday she was buried / Sunday was my courtin’ day / Monday I got married.” There’s barely time to think about whether



that scaffold saw some use on Friday before he yells “Kill yourself!” Music critic Greil Marcus wrote that Macon’s shout is “what the devil would sound like singing ‘Sympathy for the Devil.’” It’s as sublime an expression of negative freedom as there is in American art. All his problems—from the girl he doesn’t like to prison time to something as stupid as a sore ankle—they’re *all* worth suicide.

Marcus was talking about the Sex Pistols’ single “Anarchy in the U.K.” when he wrote, “Listening, you can feel yourself respond: ‘This is actually happening.’ But the voices remain suspended in time because you can’t look back and say, ‘This actually happened.’” The effect of the *Anthology* is nearly the same. When these 84 records were released between 1927 and 1932, they were not radical statements of moral subversion. They sold terrifically; they were American music. They did not possess their revelatory strangeness, the thing that says, “you do not know your country’s own madness,” until they were forgotten over time and then remembered all at once. The records on the *Anthology* never happened in the same way that the Titanic happened or that the Hindenberg happened. They were not an event until Harry Smith gathered them together.

A star may die out thousands of years before its light disappears from our sky, and so astronomers may use something that no longer exists as a point of reference. Many of the songs on the *Anthology* exist in a similar kind of suspension. We do not know what Dave Macon’s scaffold was for, and Blind Lemon’s white horses refuse our questions. But by these silences, the *Anthology* illuminates a story that is peculiar to its country, a disaster with an infinite, mysterious center. The most precise historical research will not dispel what is important about John Henry or the Donner Party. What is important about these stories—their silence—operates in the present rather than the past. The *Anthology of American Folk Music* never happened; it just keeps happening.

Melville may have understood best what Harry Smith was after: “The great flood-gates of the wonder-world swung open, and in the wild conceits that swayed me to my purpose, two and two there floated into my inmost soul, endless processions of the whale, and, midmost of them all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air.”



four and twenty ▲  
jennifer z. gong  
*digital photograph*

...and now i let  
the flies land on me

daniel nadler

I come to  
What May  
Or June  
Or afternoon  
With seeds deposited by optimism  
Under burlap  
And beside a chestnut  
Tree?  
To the May of my graduation from felicity  
To the June of my penitence and cricket  
Serenade:  
They rub their legs in the tall savannah grass  
I look  
For mineral deposits in sun-lashed rocks  
And evidence  
That the jaguar  
And that house cat  
Bend their knees the same way  
When they jump.  
I am a bump on a bump on a bough  
I am the splash  
Before the stone  
Before the throw.

# on sundays

alice cullina

On Sundays I don't wonder who you are,  
Not in that bump beneath your left worn lash,  
Not in soft wonders that roam your baby cheek.

Saturdays hold scorn enough—on Sunday, photographs are truth,  
Truth of proving words, truth of take-backs, truth of isn't-it-just—  
So I can scoff at wonder's doubts, and they can roll me down  
And under those puppy dog truths, soft with the weight  
Of their over-stroked fur, avalanching this beaten day.

There I will wait for the fingertip explosion,  
The base and tender words you coo,  
And they will come and I will duck and huge will be my bluest dreads  
And holding days won't be enough.  
And bells may fall but I won't shake, and I won't yep,  
And I won't call your name much more than twice,  
But I will sunday down the ride and I won't wonder.

# night light

scott kominers

[00:21] Bananafish: i'm about to fall asleep  
[00:22] Galoshes314: want a bedtime story?  
[00:22] Bananafish: haha  
[00:23] Bananafish: o  
[00:23] Galoshes314: o?  
[00:23] Bananafish: i'd probably just fall asleep and not remember it like last time :-p  
[00:23] Galoshes314: so?  
[00:23] Galoshes314: that's not what they're for  
[00:24] Bananafish: :)  
[00:25] Galoshes314: once upon a time  
[00:25] Galoshes314: in a land where dragons and damsels ruled,  
[00:25] Galoshes314: there lived a girl named Elsa  
[00:25] Galoshes314: who had gorgeous, golden locks  
[00:26] Galoshes314: her sister loved to rob forest animals  
[00:26] Galoshes314: but Elsa preferred to sit out on the balcony and watch the sunrise  
[00:26] Galoshes314: and so she did, day in, day out  
[00:26] Galoshes314: until one day, Prince Richard came from the town  
[00:26] Galoshes314: with a warrant for a golden-haired girl  
[00:27] Galoshes314: he found Elsa watching the sunrise, transfixed  
[00:27] Galoshes314: and, being lazy, Richard carted her away  
[00:27] Galoshes314: to stand trial in the city  
[00:28] Galoshes314: fearing for her life (the King of the forest was a harsh lion),  
[00:28] Galoshes314: Elsa cowered in prison  
[00:28] Galoshes314: but every day she would watch the sunrise  
[00:28] Galoshes314: and it would bring her a moment of calm  
[00:28] Galoshes314: \*\*\*  
[00:29] Galoshes314: on the day of the trial, the sun never rose  
[00:29] Galoshes314: but the trial went on anyway  
[00:30] Galoshes314: and when Richard was called to the stand (four "days" in),  
[00:30] Galoshes314: the sun rose blindingly, like a bear  
[00:30] Galoshes314: blinding Richard, the judge, and the townspeople  
[00:30] Galoshes314: everyone except Elsa  
[00:30] Galoshes314: who calmly took in the image  
[00:30] Galoshes314: of her sister, holding a flashlight  
[00:31] Galoshes314: stolen from Papa Bear  
[00:32] Galoshes314: "This light's too bright," Goldilocks said.  
[00:32] Galoshes314: "No, it's just right," Elsa replied.  
[00:33] Galoshes314: -----  
[00:33] Galoshes314: ::exhales::  
[00:33] Galoshes314: g'night, you  
[00:33] Galoshes314: ::kisses on cheek and tucks in::  
Session Close (Galoshes314 has logged off): Sun Aug 15 00:33:55 2006

# magnetism and painting

lewis z. liu

## Introduction

Michael Faraday, a chemist and physicist in the 19th century, was the first person to visualize electric and magnetic fields.<sup>1</sup> Although he had no mathematical education beyond trigonometry, his great insights allowed physicists who came after him to finally be able to imagine the invisible world of field lines and curves.

In this collection of artwork (pages 16 and 17), I want to capture the beauty of the everyday as seen by physicists. Specifically, these paintings explore the art of magnetic fields. Magnetic fields are integral to the everyday physics that surrounds us, from neurons to electric power plants to the nature of light itself. They permeate every inch of our bodies and every minute of our lives, but we only experience magnetic fields through their effects—we never “see” them directly.

The idea for these paintings originated from my work in a physics laboratory diagnosing and repairing a five tesla superconducting magnet. My job involved tracing the outlines of the magnet’s field in the air using a gaussmeter, which registers field strength and direction at any given point. This feels something like closing your eyes and feeling ocean currents with your fingers; you know they’re there but cannot really “see” them without a deep familiarity with their fluxes.

Representational painting arose from a similar aesthetic paradox: artists wanted to share the way they saw reality—the details that their eyes picked out, the colors that they noticed—with their friends and viewers. The progress of representational painting, however, came to a standstill with the advent of Modernist abstract painting in the early twentieth century. Although many artists today are returning to the exploration of representational painting, they, like traditional painters, limit themselves to the world as seen by the naked eye. In this project, I question the assumption that representational painting must reflect direct visual experience by attempting to represent the underlying structure of an invisible world.

<sup>1</sup>To read more about electricity and magnetism, see David J. Griffith’s *Introduction to Electrodynamics*. For a less mathematical treatment, see Edward Purcell’s *Electricity and Magnetism*.

## From the Lab to the Studio

The idea of combining physics and art is not new. Physicist Iakov Afanassiev photographed fluid mechanics experiments,<sup>2</sup> and physical chemist Eric Heller used computers to generate images of quantum mechanical phenomena.<sup>3</sup> These techniques—photography and mathematical modeling—are the mainstays of past efforts to make physics a visual art. This passive approach succeeds in creating images *of* physics, some of them quite beautiful, but it does not create images *with* physics. The point of art, though, is not just to gape at the natural beauty around us, but to *interact* with it, to fuse human emotions and ideas with the natural world. My goal in these paintings was not only to link physics with art, but to create artwork with the methods of experimental physics. The idea is to use magnetism to put paint on canvas in a way that represents magnetic fields in a conceptually rigorous and aesthetically successful way.

The magnetic field is a mathematical construct that represents the way electric charges move in the field’s vicinity. At every point in space, it possesses a magnitude (or strength) and a direction. This is called a vector field, often drawn as a field of little arrows, and one easy way of examining the field is with the arrow of a compass. If we move the compass needle—really a small bar magnet—around a source of magnetism, it will move to follow the direction of the magnetic field: the north end of the compass points in the field’s direction. The stronger the field is, the faster the compass will realign itself.

Many popular science books show the magnetic fields of horseshoe or bar magnets using iron filings (FIGURE 5).<sup>4</sup> Place a magnet under a sheet of paper, sprinkle iron filings over it, and the filings will align themselves with the magnet’s field. If the iron is spread thinly over the paper, you can see the hidden field lines emerge. In the space between the filings—where the magnetic field is implied, not

<sup>2</sup><http://www.physics.mun.ca/~yakov/> as of November, 17, 2006.

<sup>3</sup><http://www-heller.harvard.edu/> as of November, 17, 2006.

<sup>4</sup>Bingham, Jane. *The Usborne Book of Science Experiments*. E.D.C. Publishing, 1992.

Walpole, Brenda. *175 Science Experiments to Amuse and Amaze Your Friends*. Random House, 1988.

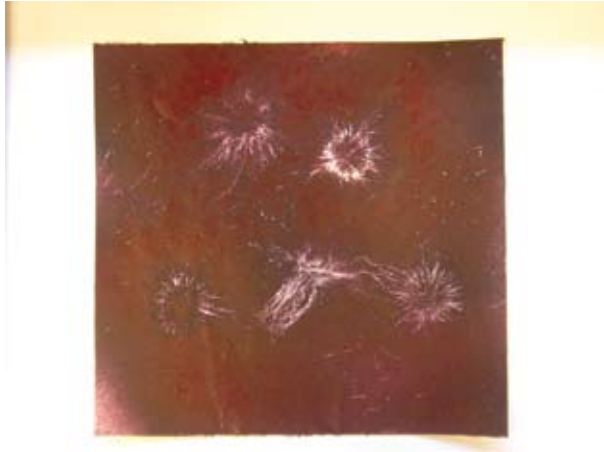


figure 1 ▲



figure 2 ▲

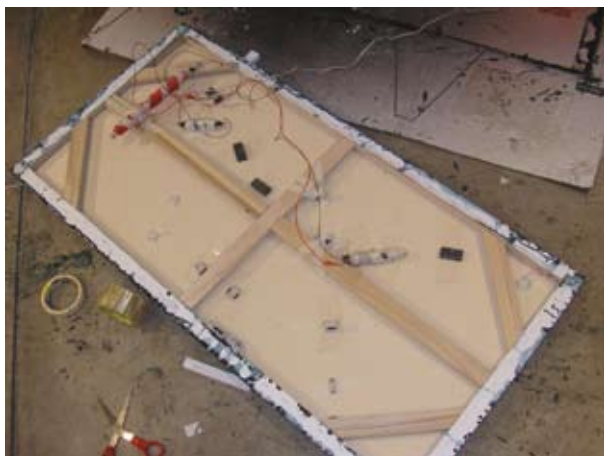


figure 3 ▲



figure 4 ▲

**figure 1** – the magnetic field recorded via spray paint

**figure 2**—the magnetic field recorded via acrylic latex spray

**figure 3** – the magnets used during *The Dance of Zero Divergence* on the back of the canvas

**figure 4** – painting the sky for *Boston Fantasy*.

**figure 5** – iron filings exhibit the structure of a bar magnet's field

**figure 6** – an electromagnet creating a physical magnetic dipole moment

shown—this simple experiment reveals the suggestiveness of magnetic energy.

Iron is ferromagnetic; this means that it retains its magnetization even after the field that polarized it is removed.<sup>5</sup> This field induces a magnetic dipole moment in the iron by aligning its electrons. A magnetic dipole moment is more or less a measurement of the strength of a bar magnet. The iron filings then trace lines on the page as they seek to align their ends with those of their neighbors (FIGURE 5). The dotted curves this creates shows the magnetic field lines emerging and retreating into nothingness.

### Painting the Magnetic Field

I used both household magnets and electromagnets to create the paintings. An electromagnet is made by coiling wire around an iron bar and attaching it to a power source. Its strength can be controlled by adjusting the current that runs through the circuit (FIGURE 6). The placement of the magnets on the canvas was part calculation and part intuition. The initial idea was to epoxy filings to a surface, preserving the patterns they formed. I made the filings by cutting up little pieces of steel wool, and although the steel spread over the surface was visually appealing (FIGURE 5), the uniform shiny-gray color had no expressiveness.

I wanted to record the positions of the filings while maintaining control over color depth and variation, so I turned to spray paint. I sprinkled the steel wool filings over a sheet of paper with magnets underneath. I then spray-painted the paper and removed the filings, leaving uncolored spaces where the filings blocked the paint.

After considering the results of this process (FIGURE 1), I decided I wanted control over the color of the marks made by the filings. The spray paint method left all the marks the color of the underlying canvas, limiting the range of possible expression in the field lines themselves.

After some experimentation, I discovered that acrylic latex pigment could be diluted to a consistency at which its

surface tension attracted it to the iron filings. Spraying it over iron filings on canvas, it would be sucked under the filings, coloring the canvas under them but leaving the surrounding canvas mostly untouched. This technique (FIGURE 2) allowed preservation of the steel wool's positions and control over the colors of the marks, and it was this process that I used in the creation of *The Dance of Zero Divergence* and *Boston Fantasy*.

Once the pigment is applied, the filings are removed, leaving a colored image of the magnetic fields on the canvas. It should be noted that this process only captures a two-dimensional slice of the field, which really extends into three dimensions.

### Composition and Process:

#### *The Dance of Zero Divergence*

In 1969, conceptual artist Robert Barry installed in an art gallery two hidden radio wave generators, one broadcasting an 88 MHz FM radio signal and the other a 1600 kHz AM radio signal.<sup>6</sup> These radio waves were neither audible nor visible; the art gallery posted signs alerting visitors of the piece, but there were no other indications of its presence.

Physicists have tried to bridge the gap between physics and art through photographs and computer models; artists have approached the task by attempting to break

down the distinctions separating the disciplines. In his book *Conceptual Art*, Tony Godfrey explains, "Post-Object Art is based on the premise that the idea of art has expanded beyond the object or visual experience to an area of serious art 'investigations'. That is, to a philosophical-like inquiry into the nature of the concept 'art' so that the working procedure of the artist not only encompasses the formulation of the works, but also annexes

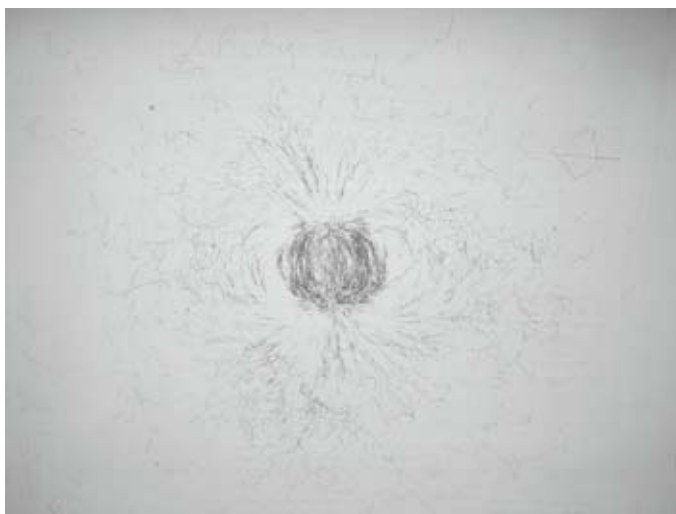


figure 5 ▲

the traditional one of the critic."<sup>7</sup> In creating radio waves in a gallery and declaring them "art," Barry attacks the idea that a work of art requires the presence of some object to be passively contemplated. Without this contemplation, the

<sup>5</sup>Griffiths, David J. *Introduction to Electrodynamics*. Third Edition. Prentice Hall, NJ, 1999. Page 225.

<sup>6</sup>Godfrey, Tony. *Conceptual Art*. Phaidon, London, 2001. Page 201.  
<sup>7</sup>Godfrey, Tony. *Conceptual Art*. Phaidon, London, 2001. Page 208

boundaries between art and non-art blur, and the physical universe itself becomes artwork.

This manifestation of art can be alienating to those who look to art for passion and beauty. I find myself in my own work trying to balance conceptual rigor with intuitive aesthetics. On the one hand, the rigorous conceptual framework that started with the Duchampian ready-made in the early 1900s and evolved into pure conceptualism in the 60s freed artists from the constraints of pure formal aesthetics without losing the logical order of traditional aesthetics. On the other hand, these conceptual works tend to lose sight of the aesthetic and emotional power that makes artwork worth pursuing. *The Dance of Zero*

*Divergence* is an attempt to bridge the gap not only between physics and art but also between conceptual rigor and emotional appeal. Barry's work involves a certain amount of "physics" in making visitors aware of the physical world and technology. However, by retreating completely from art as object, Barry fails to give his audience a direct experience of his art. While I want to make the conceptually interesting parallel between the process of experimental physics and the production of artwork, my goal is also to create an accessible object that presents the beauty and magnificence of the natural world.

This is the motivation behind *The Dance of Zero Divergence*. I tried to conceive and execute the painting as if it were a physics experiment, keeping intact the very specific aesthetic exhibited by magnetic fields. I designed and calculated the magnetic fields, constructed the magnets, recorded the "results" with the acrylic latex pigment, and then put the painting on display (FIGURE 3). The title of the painting comes from the fact that magnetic fields have the mathematical property of zero divergence ( $\nabla \cdot \mathbf{B} = 0$ ), meaning that any field line leaving a magnet must eventually return to another—or the same—magnet, a property that is exploited throughout the painting.

## A Physics Story: *Boston Fantasy*

There is a story about a famous Scottish physicist, James Clerk Maxwell, who was walking in a garden with his wife-to-be on the day he discovered that light is just an electromagnetic wave.<sup>8</sup> When she remarked on how beautiful the stars

were that night, he asked her how it felt to be with the only man in the world who knew what starlight was made of.<sup>9</sup>

Over the summer, I thought of this story while walking along the Charles River and was struck by the simple beauty of the skyline, river, and stars. I wanted to find a fresh approach to the river-skyline-couple-stars subject in light of Maxwell's story, representing it through contemporary art—without slipping into kitsch.

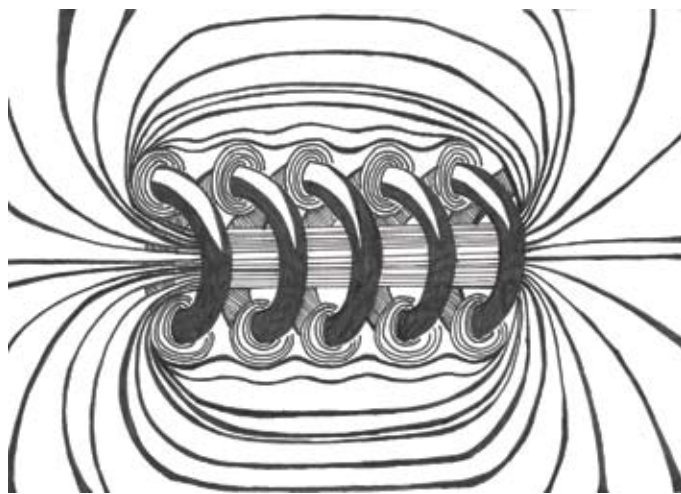


figure 6 ▲

I looked for a painting with similar content from around Maxwell's time period to help me relate the modern skyline painting to the 19th century physicist. I set up my painting with van Gogh's *Starry Night Over the Rhone* in mind. The Charles River in *Boston Fantasy* was not painted with a brush, but rather, like the river itself: I let the paint flow down the canvas. Only when I started painting the skyline, the reflection of the skyline, and the couple did I employ a brush. The couple appears very faintly in the bottom right. Most importantly, I wanted to paint the stars from Maxwell's point of view (FIGURE 4), showing magnetic fields as "frozen starlight".

Artists, like scientists and engineers, explore and change their environments to improve or understand facets of our world. Following 19th century physicists discovering electrodynamics with equations and deep intuitions, I explored and manipulated magnetism through painting. Faraday connected magnetism with electricity and Maxwell taught us that light was made of electromagnetic waves. Similarly, these paintings attempt to show something else about magnetism that cannot be captured in the four equations that model classical electrodynamics: they attempt to exhibit the brilliance of moving electric charges through a novel means of perceiving them.

<sup>8</sup>An electromagnetic wave is a propagation of electric and magnetic fields in a specific direction.

<sup>9</sup>C. Cobb and H. Goldwhite: *Creations of Fire: Chemistry's Lively History from Alchemy to the Atomic Age*. Perseus Publishing 1995, p.313.



dance of zero divergence ▲

lewis z. liu

*acrylic, acrylic latex, and rust on canvas, 121.9 x 61.0 cm*



boston fantasy ▲

lewis z. liu

*acrylic, acrylic latex, and rust on canvas, 243.8 x 121.9 cm*

# study in duality

scott kominers

## A

Asian girl, shoulder-length straight, black hair tied back in a ponytail. Wearing a navy polo shirt—women’s cut—and blue jeans. Her frame is lithe. Also, beautiful.

She carries herself with the grace of a dancer. She carries with her a pink shopping bag from Victoria’s Secret. She also carries everyone’s eyes.

The bag, in fact, does not contain underwear; it holds a ten-inch diameter, sad-looking blue tote, a gift she is returning to Abercrombie. The tote bag was a present from a former friend, before the qualifier “former” became necessary.

While it is not her intent today, she does shop at Victoria’s Secret regularly, resulting in a preponderance of shopping bags from the store. While it happens to be her intent today, she does not usually seek vengeance.

In any event, she turns into the Abercrombie with confidence, suggesting that she expects the retailer to return cash for her gift, no questions about messy dissolution of friendships asked. Her confidence also suggests, perhaps, that she has at least been told how beautiful she is.

Her boyfriend is a quiet, clean-shaven guy who generally wears t-shirts and khaki pants. He never shops at Victoria’s Secret—not even when she wants him to. Instead, he sits outside the store, quietly reading the newspaper, usually starting with the comics. He also dislikes playing Twister, although he can sometimes be convinced when aided by sufficient quantities of alcohol.

Nonetheless, he loves her very much.

After returning the tote and receiving every cent of the \$39.98 (plus tax) asking price, she struts out of the store, triumphant. She folds the shopping bag and hands it to her boyfriend, who smiles nervously at the logo.

## B

Caucasian girl, curly blonde hair (which usually hangs down but is currently) tied back in a ponytail. Wearing a crimson t-shirt and blue jeans. She is strong, with visible muscle tone and a gaze that holds others’ eyes. Yet she is warm and poised; her voice sometimes enchants.

She giggles seriously, somehow. Every drop of her laughter couches another sip of reality. But she is beautiful, too—very beautiful. And she is sitting on her bed, laptop in hand.

The computer sits on her lap uncomfortably, like a disgruntled kitten. The essay, for some reason, does not appear intent upon writing itself.

She nibbles her fingertip, thinking. Time and again, she reaches for the keyboard, but there is no answer. A sigh stifled at the back of her throat suggests that she will not finish the essay tonight. It also suggests, perhaps, that she does not believe in her own beauty, even if she has been told.

Her boyfriend is preppy, sunny, and sly. He wakes up looking like an Abercrombie model—every day, including weekends. While he has shopped at Victoria’s Secret on occasion, he has never bought her anything there. He ignores her sometimes, but he cannot figure out why. He also cannot write her essay for her, being asleep and hence oblivious to her frustration.

She loves him more than her friends think he deserves.

The essay is a meager two pages out of the needed ten, the laptop closed and shoved in a corner. She prods her boyfriend awake and smiles. He returns the smile upon awakening, and then nuzzles in for a kiss. And, somehow, just like it does in the wee hours of every morning, it feels like everything will be alright.

# october

azzurra cox

These nudities breathe silence as if  
laughter can no longer clatter from hand to hand  
and adders lie waiting in drums.  
You stand sweating rhymed songs of all things,  
smile alike at stench and pale scents and  
stare at your specimen reflection in stone  
confused by the brilliance of gray.  
The fates and the furies moved in sepulchers  
but shuddered their ultimate dreams so  
blank buildings now too taste the tremors of air  
and dancers wander the deserts like beanstalks  
etching echoes in sand

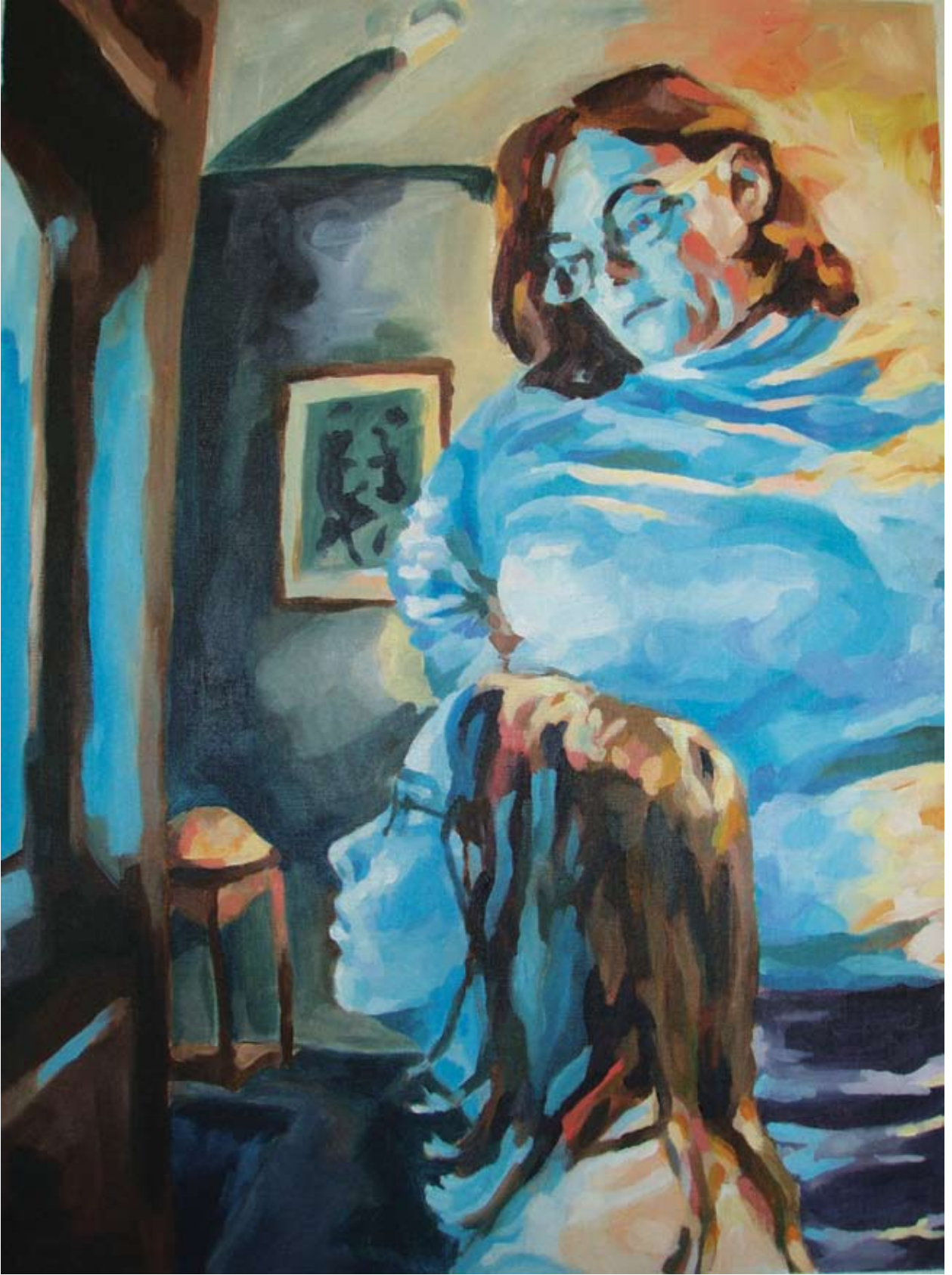
rooting for magnetic fields  
where wet feathers chant over buds and  
weave to the sun.

Moon-spots are deftly sunk tracks for those  
who can bear to tread on filigree,  
the translucent alphabet of fallen hairs  
that makes sense of itself  
in strains of planetary memory.  
My song alone can laugh at this viscous air and  
the scarlet laurels on your wrists and  
the plump bluebells adorning your toes, unhappy pumpkins  
over-ripe and ready for carving.



waiting for sound ▲  
julie wright  
*oil on canvas, 40.6 x 55.9 cm*

maids of honor ►  
julie wright  
*oil on canvas, 43.2 x 58.4 cm*



# running in circles

mallory hellman

Twelve frozen sausages gazed blankly at Stella from their home inside an airtight plastic wrapper. She stared back almost as icily, and then, as if she'd lost the will to compete, turned over the package and scanned for the sell-by date with an uneven fingernail. October.

George could feel it catching up to him. Careening down the sidewalk on a broken blue bicycle, he jumped. He landed in a hedge, scratched by a few twigs but otherwise unharmed. He could still hear it behind him. The voice was grating, shrill: "George! George, get your ass down to breakfast!"

It was 7:00, so she'd probably be waking up for school around now. Just a moment. And there she was, yep. Right on time. Hand reaching out to slap the alarm clock, her delicate arm retracing the arc as it returned to rest beside her freshly awakened body. She wore white. She sat up, stretched, and oh. Edging toward the window, he focused his binoculars.

Stella sliced open the sausage packet, removing each petrified link with a begrudged sort of care. They sizzled and popped as she placed them in the pan. *If I have to ask that man one more time to get out of bed, I swear.* She cooked his eggs first, over medium with tomatoes and onions, and then hers, the same but with capers. *Not enough people like capers. They're good.* Jabbing a swollen finger into the jar, she retrieved two or three of the tart green morsels and ate them after flipping the eggs. A bit of brine dripped onto her scarlet robe, the spot darkening to crimson as it expanded. While the eggs bubbled, sitting unevenly on the burner, Stella observed her outstretched hands. Veiny, she thought with ever so slight a shiver, and when did this happen? When did her young, spunky curls loosen into the unkempt ringlets of middle age? When would the inertia of elderliness grab her skin and melt it downward, toward the stove, until her flesh became no more than an over-easy casing for a soft-boiled collection of experience, memory, and blank space?

She was out of bed now, examining her still-puffy face in the mirror and fiddling with the drawstring of her cotton pajama pants. What would she wear today? She stepped back, and the full-length mirror afforded her a view of her chest, her tapered torso, her slightly bowed legs. It would be the red tee shirt this morning. Crossing her arms gently over her ribs, she removed the white tank top.

The eggs were beginning to burn, so Stella took the pan off the stove and slammed it into the oven before

remembering that she'd forgotten to clean the latter after Tuesday's lasagna experience. *The hell with it.* Stella took advantage of her time alone in the kitchen to light a cigarette. She stood, an awkward figure it seemed, attenuated in all the wrong places and arched out in all the others. She hadn't felt this self-conscious since she was twelve. Wandering over to the refrigerator, an avocado-colored monument to childhood artwork, photos discolored with age, and a single kitschy Statue of David magnet, Stella paused. She took a deep drag and noticed for the first time, oddly enough, that she could catch a distorted image of her reflection in the fridge's oblong handle.

She examined her adolescent profile carefully. Was this rectangular mirror placed at an angle to make her look long and lean or short and dumpy, she may have been wondering. A hand searched thoughtfully down the abdomen, stopping just above the bellybutton. Pat, pat, pat. His muscles tightened. Her hand stopped.

George made his way down the stairs, the uncertain arc of his belly leading his blinking, bespectacled face into the kitchen. His silk robe was beginning to come open in the front, so he turned momentarily and re-tied it while standing on a shabby throw mat depicting kittens.

"Christ, I thought you'd died up there." Stella had reluctantly torn herself from the refrigerator, thrown the cigarette down the garbage disposal, and started eating her breakfast. She stood against the kitchen counter, the enormous purple curlers in her hair radiating an aura of almost menacing domesticity. She had bought them for \$3.99 at Sally's Beauty Supply in an effort to get her husband to tell her that she was the most beautiful woman he'd ever met, something he hadn't said since they were in their twenties. As of this morning, he still had not.

George fumbled with the sash of his robe again, avoiding the eyes of his household Medusa and tottering over to the coffee pot. It was so hot that he nearly burned himself on it, retracting his outstretched paw and then extending it again gingerly to reach for a mug.

*How did I end up with this man?* The sausage was a little too salty. Next time, Stella would buy the organic kind, the one that was made with little pieces of vegetables. *When did they start making those, anyway? When I was in high school, I ate nothing but french fries.* Stella honestly believed that the general public's ignorance of heart disease in the 1950s kept them blissfully free of cardiac arrest. She wished she had another cigarette.

The red tee shirt fit just right, and he was hoping that she'd decide to wear it with the dark jeans. But this moment was nice, too, this in-limbo period of red tee shirt and thin white pajama pants. She was laughing at something, another person in the room whose entrance he must have missed while concentrating on that tee shirt. He ducked instinctively.

"Well, I do declare." George, now slumped at the Formica kitchen table, placed the coffee mug within centimeters of the sticky brown ring left from yesterday's cup. He picked it up, brought it thoughtfully to his nose, and situated it back in its place. The coffee was still too hot.

*I am married to my great-grandmother*, thought Stella as she sliced a tomato. She threw away the remains of her breakfast and reached into the cabinet to get a plate for the food still sitting in the oven. Later today, she would have to scrub that oven with the noxiously scented cleaner in the yellow bottle, the one that she thought might've expired. She would cut her finger on the upper grate and require a butterfly stitch. She knew how to make one herself. Her husband did not.

He peered cautiously over the windowsill, the binoculars stashed hastily in the drawer of his nightstand. Her sister had just left the room, and she had moved from the mirror back to her bed. She was eating a piece of toast. As silently as he possibly could, he retrieved the binoculars.

"I tell you, cupcake, I had the weirdest dream just now." His wife didn't respond, but that never deterred George. "Someone had given me this creaky old bicycle to ride..."

*If I ask him whether he wants some grapefruit, will that make him stop?* Stella decided it would be better just to give the man his fruit without interrupting him. Some stray fuzz from her slipper caught on a splinter in the hardwood floor, sending Stella lurching forward in the direction of the refrigerator, while one arm and leg clawed the air. Her husband did not turn around.

George remained fixated on his reflective little well of coffee. "—and the giant opossum kept chasing me, I tell you. Running me right down the block. Sucker was huge, must have been at least the size of a mountain lion. No, bigger. Anyway, it was gnashing its opossum teeth and grinning. I knew if I stopped that bike, the fierce little mother would swallow me whole."

The grapefruit was out of the refrigerator now and lay chilled on the counter before Stella, waiting to be split.

"And, honey, can real-life opossums roar? I know they say that gators make some kind of noise when they're agitated, but I thought opossums were meek creatures. Scavengers, you know. They play dead when they're scared. Anyway, this one had a voice on it that, I swear—"

She ate the toast slowly, teasing him. When she'd finally finished, she gently brushed the crumbs from just below her collarbone, sending them cascading down her curves on that perfect red tee shirt to land silently on the floor and stare worshipfully up.

"...the bicycle was clanking and hollering in a rusty sort of way, so I could tell it hadn't been ridden in years, and I blamed old Coach Parsons for trying to sell it to me in the first place. Remember Coach Parsons? He used to coach the junior varsity team down at Red River High. Been dead for going on twenty years now."

In one sawing stroke, Stella halved the grapefruit. It blinked up at her, its transparent juice forming droplets in between its sections. *Not another day of this*. She sprinkled a bit of sugar over the top.

"And I was just so *anxious* about the whole deal, you know? Like the thing was as much inside of me as it was chasing me. Isn't that weird? Charlie said he read—what was it?—that the postmodern man never feels guilty, but simply anxious. How do you feel about that?"

Stella silently placed the grapefruit next to her husband's coffee. She lifted the plate with the tomato slices, removed the pan from the oven, and stooped silently behind her husband.

"Now, I don't consider myself an anxious man, but I—"

At last, she was holding the dark jeans. But instead of putting them on, she threw them at the bed, so that they lay there, flayed before him, while she retreated to the bathroom.

"Do you see where I'm going with this? I think maybe this dream gave me an idea worth writing down."

From behind her husband's slouched figure, Stella placed the sliced tomato next to the grapefruit and then slowly tipped the eggs from the pan onto the same plate.

"I'm *thinking* again, honey!"

Stella brought the pan back gently, but instead of returning it to her side, she continued its motion in an upward half-circle until the pan rested behind her head. Holding it aloft for no more than a second, she brought it swiftly, precisely, to its final gratifying *clank*.

George was finally thinking again. He was so ecstatic to have had this opossum dream, so excited to have something to talk about, something to share with the world since he'd retired from his job with the accounting department of—my, those eggs smell nice. And just as soon as he could write this down, he'd—. A hot, clanking eruption of force. Then blackness.

After what seemed like ten minutes, she finally returned from the bathroom. Pausing before her makeup mirror, she plucked at a stray eyebrow. Could she not see the intensity, the readiness of the pants waiting so devotedly on the bed? She turned. After a moment of thought, she began brushing her hair. Stroke by stroke, and just when he thought he could take it no longer, she moved toward the jeans on the bedspread. Suddenly, the silence of the room was broken by a loud *clank...thud*. He'd have to run downstairs to see what had happened in the kitchen.



wilshire boulevard ▲  
eva tramer  
*digital photograph*



boat ▲  
anita mukherji  
*digital phograph*

# introverts and the internet

rachel k. popkin

There is nothing as terrifyingly lame as online friends, yet hundreds of thousands of websites, bulletin boards, and chat rooms exist for socializing online. Are these forums all being used by the same ten nerds? Online social communities range over every possible niche interest, from role-play gaming to bird watching, from fantasy football to shoe fetishes. While some people use the internet solely to communicate with people they already know in “real life,” many users are making new friends online. As many as twenty-five percent of American teenagers report having an online friendship, and most of those friendships last more than two years. In the media, these people are depicted as pathetic. Stuck at their computers night and day, they LOL and ROFL their way to isolation. Many young people, however, are actually using the internet as a platform to launch their offline social lives. They use the internet to practice the social skills they need to form meaningful relationships in all spheres of their lives.

Some experts argue that introverts turn to the internet when they fail to make social connections offline, and that this leads to internet dependence and increased social isolation. Recent studies suggest that people increase their internet use when they find themselves in new offline social settings, providing evidence for the first half of this claim. For example, studies have found that first year undergraduate students are at especially high risk for developing problematic internet use. In the past, this effect has been attributed to newfound freedom from parental supervision, free and speedy internet access, and more flexibility in students’ daily schedules. It seems more likely, however, that the increased internet use can be attributed to the loss of offline social network contact. First year college students, often living away from home for the first time, are disconnected from many of the people who once composed their “real life” social network. These students go online for social interaction and can become “addicted” to the internet.

Other studies support the idea that introverts use the internet as a source of escapism. A 2005 survey of undergraduate students found a strong relationship between social phobia

and reliance on the internet to regulate social fears.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, a 2003 study found that lonely people were more likely to use the internet for emotional support and theorized that such a pattern could lead to maladaptive reliance on the internet—that is, reliance that causes academic, professional, or interpersonal problems.<sup>2</sup> Scott Caplan of the University of Delaware surveyed 386 undergraduate students and found that loneliness and depression were correlated with problematic internet use.<sup>3</sup> He also found that many students perceived internet communication as less threatening than face-to-face communication. Other studies have also found that introverts perceive online communication as easier and less anxiety provoking than offline communication.

Even though the internet eases social interaction, it offers more than simple escapism. Introverts still face many of the same challenges—and reap many of the same rewards—as they do in face-to-face communication. Researchers at the University of Amsterdam administered a series of self-report questionnaires to 600 adolescents between the ages of 9 and 18.<sup>4</sup> The questionnaires assessed their online habits and several personality characteristics, including degree of introversion. They found that extroverted adolescents naturally communicated online and self-disclosed frequently, just as they did in their offline lives. The frequency and depth of their communication then led to the creation of online relationships. In other words, their social skills enabled them to make new friends online in the same way they make new friends in face-to-face interaction. Those with deficient offline social skills, on the other hand, had a harder time forming online relationships. The researchers found that introversion correlated with less online self-disclosure and lower frequency of online communication. This would be expected, since introverts tend to prefer quiet reflection

<sup>1</sup>Shepherd, R. M., & Edelmans, R. J. (2005). Reasons for internet use and social anxiety. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 39, 949-958.

<sup>2</sup>Morahan-Martin, J., & Schumacher, P. (2003). Loneliness and social uses of the internet. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 19, 659-671.

<sup>3</sup>Caplan, S. E. (2003). Preference for online social interaction: A theory of problematic internet use and psychosocial well-being. *Communications Research*, 30, 625-648.

<sup>4</sup>Peter, J., Valkenburg, P. M., & Schouten, A. P. (2005). Developing a model of adolescent friendship formation on the internet. *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, 8, 423-430.

to social interaction and are more reluctant than their extroverted counterparts to disclose personal information to others. Interestingly, though, this pattern is the same in both their online and offline interactions.

Although the basic challenges of forming a relationship—communicating with others and disclosing personal information—are the same, the internet eliminates some other barriers to relationship formation. Many studies on social internet use have commented on how easy it is to form friendships online, attributing this to the internet's lack of “gating features.” Gating features are undesirable personal characteristics that are often evident during face-to-face first meetings, such as strange appearance, stuttering, or noticeable social anxiety. First impressions tend to last, so a negative one caused by a gating feature can result in a relationship “not getting past the gate.”

On the internet, many of these gating features are rendered invisible. By bypassing the negative first impressions they would otherwise have made, users are able to have more positive interactions. These results can be dramatic. In 2002, Katelyn McKenna of New York University found that college students who chatted online from separate rooms liked each other more than students who met face-to-face in the laboratory.<sup>5</sup>

Gating features are not the only obstacles that the internet helps bypass. Once beyond the gate, many people have trouble taking the next step towards friendship: disclosing meaningful things about themselves. Although sharing of this kind requires taking a risk no matter how the friendship is formed, McKenna found that people share information about themselves earlier and more frequently in online relationships than in offline relationships. She also found that people are less afraid of being rejected or ridiculed while interacting online. McKenna theorized that it is the internet's anonymity that creates this effect. The phenomenon of internet self-disclosure

is similar to the well-documented “strangers on a train” phenomenon, in which people share intimate information with their seatmates. The seatmates are total strangers and “safe” listeners because they don't know the discloser's friends and can't leak information. Internet strangers are similarly anonymous and therefore similarly “safe,” but unlike strangers on a train, people can return to the same internet strangers over and over again. This creates the possibility of repeated and more intimate instances of self-disclosure, which in turn provide the foundation for close online relationships. These relationships then provide a forum in which people can become more comfortable with self-disclosing, which plays a key role in both online and offline friendship development.

Although the natural communication styles of introverts make relationship formation difficult both online and offline, introverts do succeed in forming close online relationships. The University of Amsterdam study found that introverts were strongly motivated to interact with others on the internet to compensate for poor social skills. The study also found that this motivation resulted in online self-disclosure and frequent online communication. Because online relationships are of more value to introverted internet users, they develop closer online relationships than extroverted users do, and their relationships grow closer at a faster pace.

Online relationships offer benefits comparable to those found in friendships formed of-

fine. McKenna found that in a sample of internet users who posted in online newsgroups, 84% considered their internet relationships to be as real, as important, and as close as their non-internet relationships. McKenna also found that 75% of the close online relationships that she studied were still intact two years later. It appears that online relationships are not only real, important, and close, but also stable over time.

These online relationships play an important role in a significant number of people's lives. An analysis of



<sup>5</sup>McKenna, K. Y. A., Green, A. S., & Gleason, M. E. J. (2002). Relationship formation on the internet: What's the big attraction? *Journal of Social Issues*, 58, 9-31.



tsfat electrical box ▲  
stephen wertheim  
*digital photograph*

data from the Youth Internet Safety Survey, a national telephone survey of youths ages 10 to 17, found that 25% of all youth surveyed reported having a casual online friendship, which was defined as someone whom they had met online whom they liked and who felt like a friend.<sup>6</sup> 17% of all youth reported having at least one close online relationship, which was defined as a close friendship with “someone you could talk online with about things that were real important to you.” The analysis also found that 71% of those close online relationships were cross-gender. Only 2% of all youth reported having an online romantic relationship, defined as “someone who felt like a boyfriend or girlfriend.” The majority of close online relationships therefore appear to be platonic cross-sex friendships. This is very different from offline relationships, where same-sex friendships dominate throughout adolescence. The researchers interpreted this result as evidence that, for adolescents, the internet provides a means of meeting new people free of the awkwardness caused by the physical presence of someone of the opposite sex.

One possible cause of this effect is the structure of the internet itself. Before the internet, almost all social communication took place *between* households. All of the members of one household would be in the social network of all of the members of another household, and vice versa. With the advent of the internet, communication in America has shifted away from this model and towards a model that researchers are calling “networked individualism,” in which one individual from a household communicates directly with other individuals from many other households. Rather than relying on a single community for social support, individuals seek out a wide range of appropriate people for different situations.

The result is that the internet enables users to receive social support from a much wider circle of contacts. Internet users and internet non-users do not have significantly different numbers of close relationships that are characterized by emotional intimacy, frequent contact, and mutual support. However, a 2006 study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that internet users have a substantially greater number of *significant ties*: contacts who are more than acquaintances but lie outside of an individual’s ring of close friends.<sup>7</sup> This expanded network of significant ties benefits them:

they are able to keep in touch with more people in ways that are more meaningful. Internet users can retrieve information and share social support with people outside their regular social circle. They use this expanded social network to seek information and advice on a variety of topics, even those as private as health matters or finances. The Pew study found that internet users were more likely than non-users to have received help with a significant personal issue within the last 12 months: 85% of internet users reported receiving help, while only 72% of non-users reported receiving help. These results cannot be attributed to the confounding variables of income, education, or even size of social network or size of professional network. The internet itself seems to facilitate better access to social support.

For some internet users, this enhanced online support can be disastrous. The pro-anorexia nervosa movement, commonly called “pro-ana,” offers support in the form of a large online subculture that promotes anorexia as a lifestyle choice rather than conceptualizing it as an illness or disorder. Pro-ana communities allow users to communicate anonymously and advise each other on subjects like hiding severe dieting from friends and family, resisting hunger for long periods of time, and even the relative merits of different brands of diuretics. Social support in the community is offered only to those who remain anorexic, providing a strong incentive for them not to seek help.

In general, however, increased social support tends to bolster an individual’s sense of wellbeing. A study found that online social support activity caused increased utilization of healthcare in a sample of people with stigmatized psychiatric illnesses.<sup>8</sup> This finding implies that online social support activity increases confidence, since seeking healthcare for psychiatric illness can be difficult. Another study that analyzed more than 33,200 postings from an online breast cancer message board found that 45% of the women posting on the board had shown increased ability to cope with the disease.<sup>9</sup> They also found that 43% had experienced improved mood over the course of their involvement with the board, 33% had experienced decreased stress, and 30% had gained strategies to manage stress.

It’s not surprising that online social support contributes to people’s overall psychosocial well-being, because the

<sup>6</sup>Wolak, J., Mitchell, K. J., & Finkelhor, D. (2002). Close online relationships in a national sample of adolescents. *Adolescence*, 37, 441-456.

<sup>7</sup>Boase, J., Horrigan, J. B., Wellman, B., & Rainie, L. (2006). The strength of internet ties: The internet and email aid users in maintaining their social networks and provide pathways to help when people face big decisions. Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet and American Life Project.

<sup>8</sup>Berger, M., Wagner, T. H., & Baker, L. C. (2005). Internet use and stigmatized illness. *Social Science and Medicine*, 61, 1821-1827.

<sup>9</sup>Rodgers, S., and Chen, Q. (2005). Internet community group participation: Psychosocial benefits for women with breast cancer. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 10, article 5.

qualities of enduring close relationships are actually quite similar regardless of whether the relationship takes place online or offline. Even though the internet theoretically allows for different patterns of interaction to emerge, the patterns that do emerge tend to be very similar to those found in offline interactions. It seems that the internet can provide “practice” social interactions, which because

between a user’s online and offline social network. Without an online-offline connection, internet use can lead to an internet “addiction” or worse. But with a connection to offline friends to check dangerous forms of socialization and to promote social skill carry-over, online networks can complement an individual’s real-world social life. Studies have found that the internet does not

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**It seems that the internet can provide “practice”  
social interactions which...may enable individuals to  
transfer newly acquired social skills  
into offline contexts.**

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of their similarity to offline social interactions may enable individuals to transfer newly acquired social skills into offline contexts. It’s useful to think of the internet as a social “stepping-stone.” Internet users, especially the more introverted ones, can use the internet to develop social confidence and social skills. They can then begin to apply their new competence to their offline lives, strengthening social contacts there as well.

When an individual’s online and offline social networks have some degree of overlap, the stepping-stone effect is the natural result of close online relationships. An introverted individual can form a close online relationship and participate in self-disclosure and social support, perhaps at a level he or she is not able to do in offline life. Then, as the online relationship spills over into the offline world, whether through face-to-face meetings or through communication between the online friend and the individual’s offline contacts, the introvert’s new social skills are put to use in an offline venue. The close online relationship, when brought into an offline, face-to-face context, provides a safe testing ground for verbal communication and in-person self-expression, something introverts usually have difficulty doing well. Overlap between an individual’s online and offline social networks therefore makes the stepping-stone effect more likely and helps the individual to develop more broadly applicable social skills.

As evidenced by the “pro-ana” movement, online socialization can be damaging when there is no overlap

conflict with existing community ties; rather, internet use seamlessly supplements in-person and phone encounters. The Pew study found that the internet exhibits “media multiplexity”: that is, the more people see each other in person and talk on the phone, the more they use the internet to communicate with each other. This online communication has the effect of strengthening social contact between individuals who know one another already.

Overlap between offline and online social networks seems very effective in protecting against internet addiction, and can help develop social skills. Encouragingly, there is evidence that many internet users purposefully create overlap between their offline and online worlds. In 2002, a study found that 41% of youth who reported having a close relationship with someone they met online subsequently had had at least one face-to-face meeting with their friend.<sup>10</sup> McKenna found that in her survey of 568 posters to online newsgroups, 63% had spoken to an online friend on the telephone, 54% had written a letter through postal mail, and 54% had met a least one friend face-to-face in an offline venue. In these cases, where online friends communicate offline, it’s likely that the offline contacts of both people will become involved, creating a social network that spans both online and offline realms—and these overlapping social networks can help even the most awkward introvert learn to make friends.

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<sup>10</sup>Wolak et al (2002).



fisherman ▲  
nicole salazar  
*oil on canvas, 121.9 x 152.4 cm*

# summer sestina

natalia irizarra-cole

It was the summer before college, the summer I worked at a fucking Starbucks because I needed the money. That day I had handed the last skim-milk frappucino to the last dyed-blond girl who had to be told the price twice because she wouldn't stop checking email on her Blackberry, and didn't tip besides. When I stepped out it was raining and a coworker had told me the subways were down and I thought, "This is just too much."

Though I'd seen you around our high school, we'd never talked much, but when you heard me say, "Oh fucking hell no" I guess you felt bad for me, because suddenly at my side I heard your voice "Need a hand?"— and saw your black umbrella above my head. "Thanks," I said. "This makes twice this week this happens to me." You shook your head: "Some girls

just never learn." "And just what kind of girls are those?" I asked as we walked towards Broadway. "The ones much too preoccupied to remember an umbrella, even if they get soaked twice or thrice or a hundred times." "Well, fuck you," I said, but I liked that you said "thrice" and made sure the umbrella stayed over my head. You raised your hand to hail us a cab and ushered me inside.

The cabbie was listening to a Yankees game. It turned out we both hated baseball, lived on the Upper West Side, and thought the Sex Pistols weren't even worth listening to high. You said you'd never met a girl that cursed as much as me, and took my hand to help me out of the car after the hour we spent caught in traffic. No matter how much I protested, you wouldn't let me pay the outrageous fare. "What the fuck do you think this is," I said, "some kind of date?" You said, "It'd be nice." Before I knew it we'd gone out twice

and were seeing each other often twice  
a day: in the mornings when you stopped by my Starbucks on your way to  
your internship at some East Side  
patent firm—"here you go, you soulless wannabe yuppie," I liked to say  
when I gave you your coffee—and afternoons spent at your apartment,  
fucking  
happily and talking about shitty jobs and the future and the differences  
between girls  
and boys and ordering cheap Chinese food and not doing much  
else, except somehow gradually falling into cuddling and compliments  
and holding hands

against our wills. And then somehow it was August and you were taking  
my hand  
for the last time and saying with heartbreaking hesitance, "I know I told  
you I've only been in love once but now I really sort of think it might  
be twice."  
I looked away to keep from letting you see me cry when I whispered,  
"that's just too much—  
I mean we were just..." and then trailed off. You let go and I watched your arm  
float slowly back to your side.  
"You'll find someone else," I said, "I know you will, a girl  
you'll know you love." You turned your back to me and lit up a cigarette  
with a bitter shake of your head: "Good to know you never really gave  
a fuck."

But when I'm bored, or it's raining and I still remember your hands on the scar  
on my side  
and your laugh and your jeans and how you always sneezed twice, I  
wonder about the girls  
you've found and loved and fucked since then, and what you're doing, and if  
you also have days like this, when you look at the time that's passed since then  
and wonder how it got to be so much.

## cure

caroline white

Lots of people love me  
(they do) but I love you and when you yell  
I feel it in my fingernails

I believe you  
only when you shift grip from arm flesh to wrist bone,  
you leave  
your mark

I learned about the loony bin when I was six  
I sent characters off  
in white jackets with too long arms  
untied, they flapped at their sides like  
sheets on the line, tethered but only just

I was sure I wouldn't like to wear one  
so I relished the parade across the page,  
cardboard cutouts, eyes wide, mouths gaping  
silently, faces like Rorschachs, blots of white and black

The ones that love me (you could) are sometimes  
real, sometimes made up and I know what  
that means it means I need to get a grip and  
snap out of it! come on and get myself together

Sometimes sanity is a thing to be considered,  
an objet d'art, a pretty little thing, do you have one?

At night the walls crawl like women, wallpaper,  
the rippling ripe darkness begins to wiggle away,  
you can pull at the film of itch until the fabric tears  
Open your eyes, it's never enough

# the fresh side

annemarie munn

Birdie served me a cup of coffee every day at eleven fifteen. She called it my “cigacoffee break,” and yes, I took it because the other clerks smoked every day at eleven fifteen exactly, but I took it at the Fresh Side Cafe because Birdie told me, the first time I went in, that she always made a fresh pot at eleven eleven exactly, and promised to give me the first cup if I came in on time. Other people thought of Birdie as the bad-tempered girl at the Fresh Side, because she burned their toast and didn’t think to apologize, and she never joked around with the other servers, but I kind of liked her, and thought it was sweet. I don’t know. I never ordered toast.

Not to wax too poetic, but she had river-god eyes. They were green and deep, and if the rest of her was unremarkable, I didn’t notice. She wore the white Fresh Side apron of course, like everyone else, which made her look fresher and cleaner than she really was, I suppose, and I suppose further that her dirty fingernails should have tipped me off, but I was thoroughly charmed. The effect of her frown was intoxicating.

“Chuck,” she growled when she shook my hand that Tuesday, a couple of weeks after I started coming to her, “I swear not to spit in your coffee if you’d like to be friends. Help me pick up a couch when you get off work today and I might even steal you a pastry.”

“Why not, Birdie?” I said, and shook back. Her hand was so tan and strong next to mine. Sammy, who worked in the cubicle beside mine at the office, had been listening to Django Reinhardt and Stefan Grappelli on his computer all week, and that shook up the adventure and the romance inside me, so I promised to meet her at five, outside my office. I had only just moved into town, after all, and what could it hurt to make friends with the bad-tempered coffee girl?

“It’s my birthday,” she said, “and my old roommate Gigi, who moved out to Boston, somehow called the Goodwill here and bought me a couch.” She rolled her eyes. “Fine piece of work,” she said, and whether she was referring to her roommate, the transaction, or the couch itself, I don’t know. It *was* a piece of work, though, that couch; a very fine, ugly piece of work. Birdie fell in love with it. Despite of course her complaints that it was too large, overstuffed, scratchy, stained, and the ugliest son of a bitch this side of Pittsburgh, the way those green eyes just melted as we grunted and sweated and swore our way cross town? Undeniable love. And I started to love the couch just a little bit, too.

Her house was quite far from the Goodwill, but it felt like just a few blocks as people stared and whistled and told us just exactly how ugly the thing was. When I walked in, I saw workboots and jackets that couldn’t possibly be Birdie’s. The house was sunsoaked, over-white, and there were album covers fading up the walls. The rooms were full of standard hipster detritus, and hundreds of books on some rickety shelves. The little house seemed to lack any trace of what I thought of as Birdie’s sensibility, which I had seen in the faint henna lines leading out from those chipped, dirty nails, and in what little I could glimpse under her apron. There were two things, though: a small stick of dhoop burnt out on top of the fridge, and a plate mounted on the wall above the sink. It was painted in bright colors, now chipping off from the terra-cotta, and it was just Birdie all over.

We passed a bedroom on the way to the kitchen, where she hoped the couch would fit. There was only one bedroom, which I peered into and saw several sets of clothes—both hers and the workboot-and-jacket man’s—strewn round the bed.

“Roommate?” I cocked my eyebrow.

“Oh yeah,” Birdie said. “I live with this guy Josh. But it’s not serious.” I thought I could make out faint pictures on the wall, beneath the white paint.

She smiled at me as we sat down on the couch, and brushed my arm with her fingers by way of thanks. The grass I could see out the window looked just that much greener, the concrete just that much greyer. Knowing I wore a kind of stupid half-smile, I sat at the table and took the beer, then the pastry, then the joint that she gave me. She didn’t say much—not one for chatter, Birdie—just tapped her feet to an invisible tune and looked at me charmingly out those green eyes. “Let’s go for a walk,” she finally said.

It was summer and the sun hadn’t set, and the evening could have taken us anywhere. In Oregon, where I lived before, there would have been jasmine everywhere. The air would’ve been thick with it on a night like this. Birdie would have plucked a sprig of it, tucked it into my lapel. It would’ve started, then, and it would’ve been incontrovertible. There’s nothing like a sprig of jasmine in my lapel to make me give in to a girl’s pouring honey. As it was we just walked.

It wasn’t long before we began to do what people do in the beginning, men and women alike, when they meet and want to get deeper. We talked out our beginnings.

*I was born very early in life, I liked to begin these things, in a rose-covered cottage by the sea. I had the misfortune of having but one*



jessica acosta ▲  
*digital photograph*

*father and one mother, two arms and two legs.* Somehow I knew it would be the wrong thing to say to Birdie.

“You know, my father gave me a bicycle in a box when I was seven,” I said, “and then watched me put it together. It took days and days and—”

“Are you an only child?” Birdie asked. I was. “So am I,” she said. She huffed out some air as if to indicate that she was now the topic of conversation. “My dad plays the accordion for contra dances, and he taught me all the calls when I was—as soon as I could talk.” Then, flashing me a grin, “They say only children can only really get along with other onlies.” I had heard the saying, and had always been unimpressed.

“Yeah, it’s really true, isn’t it?” I said.

“Josh has three sisters,” was her only reply.

We continued to walk, veering down by the river. We talked of first lost teeth, then first Christmases without believing in Santa Claus (Birdie claimed that she never believed, that she was a canny little girl who knew what her father’s handwriting looked like), then of first kisses, first roommates, first cigarettes, and skirted around sex and went straight to first time out of state.

“I’m from Montana,” Birdie said, “and Montana’s pretty fucking big. And don’t ever let anyone tell you there’s nothing to do in Montana. It’s not true. There’s more to do there than anywhere else.” She frowned, and I imagined her growing up in dance halls, surrounded by people wearing older, less hip versions of the flared skirt she wore now, stomping their clogs. Her hair was quite blond, and quite dirty, and she wore it up in the semblance of a bun. She suddenly looked terribly serious. “I only left to go to college in Ohio. College was awful.”

“You didn’t leave until college?” I thought of my summers in the Rockies, springs on Lake Huron, and Christmases with grandparents in Phoenix.

“That’s right,” she said, and smiled. “Now look at me! I’m by a river in Massachusetts, and I meet charming strangers like you. And I’m never leaving.” I smiled back at her, suddenly not quite sure what exactly she was playing at as she took my hand. For my part, I planned on leaving as soon as possible.

She must have read my mind. “Of course, that’s probably a lie. I don’t really like it here. Not since Gigi left. I’ll probably move on soon.” (It was just self-reflection, of course. Birdie never paid anywhere near enough attention to me to read my mind). “I like that couch, though,” she said, remembering I was there. “Thanks for helping out. Do you want to go break it in?”

I really ought to have given her the benefit of the doubt, because in twenty minutes’ time we were still fully clothed, jumping up and down on the sofa to beat the band, working up more of a sweat than we had carrying it home. At some point Josh wandered in, and pulled a beer out of the fridge with one hand and a plate of leftovers with the other.

“Hi!” Birdie shouted over the springs, never missing a beat. “This is Chuck! He helped me carry this couch today! Chuck, this is Josh!”

Josh smiled. He was curly-haired, soft around the edges, and looked quite friendly. “Hey, Chuck,” he said. “I’m going to go put on a record, okay? If you want anything to eat, just holler.”

“Yeah,” Birdie said, and waved him away.

I was chilly, as I walked home, with the perspiration evaporating off my skin.

I saw her the next day at the Fresh Side, of course, just like always. There was never any question about that, and although it was nice to see her every day, it was on that day that I said “Birdie! Nice to see you!” I was a bit too ecstatic, perhaps, but it was time for us to play our cards.

“Likewise, Chuck,” she said. She was wiping my cup on her apron, then filling it with coffee. “I brewed it at eleven thirteen today,” she confided, handing it over, “so it would be just that much fresher for you.” She winked. “Maybe, tomorrow, eleven fourteen! Who knows?”

“Oh, Birdie, you’re too good to me.” I said. And she was. Much too good.

After work, she actually met me at my office. That was nice, and surprising, just the right kind of surprising, neither too strong nor too sudden.

“I thought we could go to the aquarium,” she told me. Birdie had this tone that really brooked no disagreement. I had no plans in any case, and in the state I was in, would have gone with her if she’d wanted to sightsee at an abattoir. “You know, you’re the first friend I’ve made in a long time,” she said. She really was laying it on thick, Birdie was.

Children at aquariums get excited, because fish, they think, are easy. They’re flashy or bland or timid, and when they’re frightened or fight or lay eggs, it’s exciting, because they’re so bright and so fast. Best of all, kids don’t have to worry about fish. After all, everyone knows fish don’t have feelings.

Adults have gotten over this excitement. I’d gotten over it a long time ago. Birdie had too, I think, though you can never be sure with Birdie. People at the Fresh Side thought she was bad-tempered, after all, and here she was taking my arm and walking me gently around where it was all soft-focus lights and swatches of bright, bold, quick scales.

No, aquariums are calculated to have a different effect on adults. All that wetness. Aquariums have a quiet, soothing rhythm designed to lull us into trusting, whatever is given to us. Well, I was pretty ready to accept whatever Birdie gave me.

The manta rays swooped, almost in curlicues, flattening around each other like they were two-dimensional, like they had just no substance at all. We had also curlicued, from one side of the aquarium around to the other, back to where we had been before. She wore a dirty and tattered silk ribbon in her hair, which I could see was disintegrating though the

light played off it so nicely as we and the fish swam through the night. She turned to me and she breathed, “isn’t it just so divine?” At that point it seemed like time to get out.

We stood in silence at the entrance for a moment, where the lights, which were fluorescent, were hurting our eyes. She seemed unsure of what to say to me. I wished I was six again in the Monterey Bay Aquarium for the very first time and could buy her a hotdog, with relish. Birdie had a hungry look to her. Maybe she had had it all along, I’m not sure. She looked really hungry, though, like she could more than likely eat me up whole. There was an ice-cream store nearby. I told her I thought it looked like a good idea.

We shared a cone. The night was darker and damper than the last, so the ice cream made us shiver. Inevitably, we took a simultaneous lick and sugared lips met.

I expected something to change after that. Though I can’t put my finger exactly on it, I think I expected, now that we’d finally gotten it out in the open, that somehow I wouldn’t see her at the cafe any more, that she would be in places like aquariums and riversides only, but the next morning when I walked into the Fresh Side she was brewing the pot in front of me, and I drank from it feeling special. She stroked my wrist with her stained fingers. She stroked my lips with the back of her hand, and told me she was lucky to know me. We picnicked for lunch, and she pulled up grass like a little girl, twisting it, staining her fingers a greener shade. She threw it over my head like confetti and kissed me as it fell. I made her feel young, she said.

I don’t think, really, that it was me that was making Birdie feel young. I can’t remember saying anything intelligent, telling her she was beautiful, or pouring any honey of my own. Whatever the reason, though, she did seem to feel young, and happy, and fizzed with the energy of it, and I ate it up. I was nearly slobbering with glee. It wasn’t more than a few days before we dispensed with our couches, rivers, aquariums, picnics, zoos, and fell at full tilt back to my place.

My apartment was like everyone else’s apartment, I felt (though nothing like Birdie’s, because nothing was like Birdie). The walls were gray, the carpet was gray, and the light coming through the windows was most often gray as well. It had so far resisted all personalization. Anything I put on the walls just looked small and lost, as though the people in my photos were, in fact, in the middle of a dark forest. Colorful bedspreads and rugs looked garish and out-of-place enough that I had given in to the grayness.

The food I cooked there by myself was also fairly colorless, simple food like picky kids eat. All the blandness had probably been contributing to what I felt when I met Birdie, because when she stepped in I started to cook curries, complicated seafood dishes, delicious and long-cooking roasts and casseroles and soufflés. I put fresh jalapeño salsa on bagels, which I fed to her all over the

apartment, which was beginning to smell spicy. She smiled sometimes, and sometimes wrinkled her nose. She said it made her feet itch.

I was using fresh, green summer ingredients to cook with now, and Birdie and I sometimes went to the Farmer’s Market together on Sundays. She was always distracted, hung over or stoned, humming to herself, and me, I was out of my element squeezing fruits and selecting vegetables. Once Birdie picked up a tangled mess of green beans and peered out at me through them. “Hello Chuck,” she intoned. “How do I know that you’re Chuck and not a clever illusion of the beans?” I laughed.

She was always sort of like that, covered in dirt and vines. Birdie, it seemed, had a green, green thumb. She was organic, and pulled these tangled lumps right out of the soil. I felt like a sprout. Maybe she just thought I was. Sunlight and watering weren’t enough for Birdie. She tied strings around new shoots and tugged them right up. Worked up a sweat doing it, too.

I was realizing something, despite all her sweet protestations, and the way she tried to make me feel big these days. In fact, I think I maybe realized it because of all that. Even when we were curled around each other in my bed or, more often, on my couch, slamming together every inch of sweaty summer bodies, and me listening to her saying things that really gave new meaning to “sweet nothings,” I somehow got the feeling that she wasn’t really looking at me. When she said “Chuck, you know, you have the most giving face. You make me think it’s Christmas morning,” and when she said “Let’s make hot chocolate and build a fort. Like grade-school sweethearts,” and when she said “Chuck, you know, you really are perfect,” it was as though the words were missing me slightly, whizzing past my ear, and when they really hit me, it was only by mistake. I certainly did not have a giving face, but the way Birdie said these things sometimes tasted right in my mouth, sweet and alcoholic, a little watered-down perhaps, but larrupin good nonetheless. I guess I was pretty far down already. If I had doubts, I put on one of her records and pretended they weren’t there. If I thought Birdie was a bit cardboard, I just thought about how I’d felt about my girlfriend in high school, and pushed that feeling at Birdie. I suppose I was sending all the wrong signals, too. I think she thought it was all working splendidly.

I can’t really think how long we did that for. Summers are like that for me, empty of time markers, especially at a new job like that one, where I would enter the same five numbers into a computer over and over again, in different orders, and things would be mixed up only by what Sammy, in the next cubicle over, was listening to on his computer. Rolling Stones, at the time. It was a pretty long time, I think, my time with Birdie. Then one morning I knew, from the moment I woke, that something was different, something was about to change. Well, that’s what I thought I knew. I hadn’t slept well.

After work, though, she showed up outside my office in a pretty blue dress and Teva sandals. It was really funny, the habit Birdie had of putting on new clothes without showering first. Yesterday's smell was still lingering about her and I hesitated to put my fingers in her hair (sure enough, it left a film of grease on them). I didn't know whether to touch her, whether to go with her.

I hadn't seen her the night before. I'd spent it trying to figure out just how one baked a loaf of bread. It turned out to be quite the operation, bread-making. *Christ*, I remember thinking, *is it meant to be this gritty?* I'd been up most of the night wrestling with yeast and flour and pan grease, and the arms I put around Birdie were still pretty sore from all the kneading. However she smelled, I smelled nice and bready enough to make up for it, I thought, and she did look so sweet, tapping her foot in that dress. She was a picture, and I thought I had to hold onto it hard.

"Come on," she said, "I've got the best surprise." She poked her little lips up at me and I was reminded of a dog begging for a treat but kissed her anyway. All I could see were those wet little lips.

She took my hand. She jingled when she walked—I think she was wearing a little ringle of bells round her ankle. She smiled with each jingle. Birdie made a very sweet little girl.

She led me down to the river, where we lay down and shimmied our way under a tree whose branches lay strangely low. Inside, Birdie laid me out on the grass beneath. She'd covered the branches in ribbons and blossoms, and, heavy with all the decoration, they reached almost to the ground so that it was like we were in a little room of foliage and flowers. Confident in her small, impromptu shelter, Birdie covered me as thoroughly as possible in kisses, from top to toe, gently pulling off my tie, shirt, shoes, socks, trousers. It wasn't long before the sweet blue dress was pulled off, too, and I was left looking at Birdie herself, clothed only in greenery and her even greener gaze.

There was something magical about that evening. It wasn't just the music that I seemed to hear coming out of the treetops and birds and all that whatnot, or my sentimental feeling that I could smell jasmine blossoms on the wind, or the safety of those soft old east coast mountains smiling down on us. It was also the way Birdie had drawn me into her world, slowly, quietly, so deliberately it made my fingernails ache, and the fact that she didn't seem to be able to tell how far down her well I had sunk, and she just kept pulling, with just as much honey as before, or even more. Birdie didn't know, I suppose, or didn't believe, Shakespeare's old adage. "The sweetest honey is loathsome in its own deliciousness, and in the taste confounds the appetite."

I believed it, though. I must be perverse, or have some problem that has to do with mixing ambitions and metaphors, because it was the sweetness of the night that let me know, with finality, that I was right, that something *was* wrong. Birdie could have done the things she did for anyone, even for a silent figure in a blank white mask, and it would have been all the same to her. I was convinced, and the perfect evening by the river confirmed everything.

"Birdie," I said in the middle of the night, stroking her hair as the moon climbed, "Birdie, wake up."

"I've been awake all the time," she said. She sounded mildly annoyed.

"That's not what I meant." I had to try to explain. It sounded silly now that it was time to put it in words. "I mean..." I stopped. I had to try again. "Birdie, I think you've been dreaming this whole time."

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about."

It was suddenly chilly in the damp night grass.

"Yes you do." If she hadn't denied it, I wouldn't have been so sure. "You've been making love to me like you would make love to somebody you made up. In fact, you are making love to someone you made up."

"Well, I'm sorry you don't think I'm a good lover." God, she could be exasperating, that bad-tempered girl from the Fresh Side.

"You know that's not what I mean." She sat up and looked at me finally, really looked at me, to see if I meant it. And she sighed.

"Yeah, Chuck, I know what you mean. God, this always seems to happen."

"I'm sorry." I was, even if I didn't sound it. Sorry or not, though, sometimes you just have to call a forgery what it is.

"Nice things only happen to the beautiful and the good, don't they?" Birdie said finally. She got up and went down to the bank and the river reflection made her face look real wet. "I mean, damn it Chuck, I was really trying, you know? I just wanted something nice to happen. Something really nice, for once. But it only ever happens when you're pretty or you're good."

"You have to learn to stop faking it," I tried to tell her. God, it sounded stupid out my lips, but that's the way it sometimes goes when you have to end some baroque piece of work that was supposed to look fine.

She snorted. "Aren't you going to tell me that I *am* beautiful, after all?"

"If you like."

We sat out the rest of the night under the tree. In the morning she gave me two cups from freshly brewed pots of coffee—one before work, and one at eleven eleven, per normal routine.

## at the drive-thru

annie levenson

I wouldn't believe it either, Dan,  
but I'm driving down A1A—up A1A,  
I mean I was heading north—and  
it pops up quick like a possum at night,  
you know the way the eyes look like  
green pennies? I mean to say like  
the tail lights of a VW, the new ones  
with the flower in the dash, okay for some  
people but not you and me, Dan...

I was saying? Right, there it is, a drive-thru  
Christian church off A1A. No arches  
but I could still smell the grease,  
and there was the black speaker  
hissing like when your goddamn tires bust.  
So I figure, hell, I'll mess with them—you'd do it too—  
I mean those religious types are great,  
the kind who buy water at the station  
for a buck-fifty and drive off in their  
Volvos, I'm saying with the AC on when  
it's 72. I tell 'em, gimme  
salvation and a side of fries,  
and pull up around the back  
to see what they're gonna do. And I  
wanted those fries, you know? It's like that  
on the road, you need salt  
just like the wheels do to keep your grip,  
and I ate all my Cheez-Its by mile 200  
a couple of hours back, you can tell by the dust  
on the seats.

I'm telling you, Dan, I pull up  
to the next window and I roll down  
mine—but there's nothing there  
but leaflets, the glossy ones you can  
smudge real easy, and a couple stray  
packets of ketchup. I mean no one's  
there, I figured I'd at least get a sermon,  
something better than Billy Graham on 87.7,  
but it's empty, kinda quiet like the road  
at five AM, when even the semis pull into  
weigh stations for fifteen.

And I'm telling you, Dan, there  
was nobody to argue with, so what  
was I gonna do but get moving?  
It was getting late anyway, I'm saying  
the heat was two o'clock hazy,  
the other cars looked shaky  
and maybe they were, 'cause Dan  
it was that kind of afternoon, don't laugh  
you know the kind I mean...  
I mean to say I gave up on those fries.



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