

MINT

Fall 2007 Volume 13



DISCOVERIES, SCANDALS, AND SHOCKERS

PERSPECTIVES: *The Pansy Generation* by Sara Germain
STOP. READ ME: Passion Dies Without PR by Deborah Bertlesman
Blackface by Kim Perrella

FEATURE: *The Final Gasp* by Patrick Morgan

CREATIVE: *A Fading Memory* by Jayme Faye Wonderland
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All the Way Down by Kaitlin Springston

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The end of the Fall 2007 semester is here whether we students are ready or not! Snow is finally dusting our campus, the library is becoming increasingly busier, and students are preparing themselves for the final push to the very end. During this busy and often stressful time, MiNT invites you to settle back and peruse something more entertaining than your textbooks. Take a look inside this newest issue; we are certain you will appreciate what our writers have to say.

Flip to the back of the magazine and you will find a busy creative writing section that is bustling with stories, poems, and artistic thoughts we know will be appreciated by all of you during this hectic time. Our creative writing section has made a comeback this semester, and we invite all of you creative writers out there to submit your work to MiNT. Our theme carried throughout the pages of this issue is Discoveries, Scandals, and Shockers. Yes, our writers have bravely taken on some heavy issues that have been affecting all of us, both on and off our campus. From lazy children to spending too much time on the Web, vegetarians to the issue of dressing in Blackface, we are confident that this issue of MiNT provides more than enough for all of you students to peruse.

I have thoroughly enjoyed being Editor-in-Chief of MiNT for the past four semesters. It has been extremely satisfying to watch MiNT grow into a capable, sufficient, and sophisticated presence on our campus. The experience has been at the heart of my time here in Geneseo, and I will hold many fond memories of working for this magazine. I am fortunate to have worked with many inspiring people in MiNT, and I am fully confident in the new editing team that will take charge after I leave. With Will Sankey leading MiNT, along with the help of Patrick Morgan as Senior Editor, I have no doubt that MiNT will thrive and become even more of a presence here in Geneseo. Thus, it is with great confidence in this new team that I take my leave of MiNT. Thank you to everyone who I have been able to work with; you have made MiNT into a lasting memory for me.

Goodbye MiNT!
Sara Germain



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MiNT Magazine is an outlet for students of SUNY Geneseo to exercise their freedom of speech, whether it be artistic, creative, or political. The editorials published reflect the opinions and sentiments of their authors.

We welcome responses to our editorials
Send your letters to:
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The Pansy Generation

by Sara Germain

You're all a bunch of pansies that are afraid to play outside, lest you should have to suffer the horror of getting dirty. Well... maybe not us, but our kids certainly will be, considering the way we are headed.

We're raising an army of wusses who look at exercise as the range of movement that their thumbs get while holding the video game controller. Nowadays, kids spend their recesses talking on their razor cell phones and hanging out in the computer labs, rather than climbing on the playground or swinging. They wouldn't want to get a splinter, or worse, a rock in their shoe. Remember when kids relished playing in the dirt, when building a fort in the woods was the coolest thing ever, and when climbing trees and jumping down from the highest branches was what made other kids respect you? Come to think of it, I remember hanging upside down off of the pole of our jungle gym in the backyard, trying to hang on longer than all the neighborhood kids. I don't think any child would attempt this nowadays since it would require them to get up off the couch and leave their video games, or put down their cell phones. If any child did get this idea into his head, his parents would be horrified for his safety.

I think we can all learn a lot about how we see child's play if we look at the toys on the market and compare them to toys of the past. Toys are a means of providing entertainment for children. The walking, talking, flashing, blinking toys for children lining the shelves today all require 4-6 batteries and over-stimulate the senses of adults as well as children. The most popular "toy" is the video game, with titles that range from "Bioshock," "Flesh is Stronger than Steel" to the ever popular "Halo." A recent study done by the University of Texas showed that kids prefer video games that have a violent theme. The two most preferred categories were games that involved fantasy violence, and sports games, some of which were violent. While parents are attempting to protect their children from the dangerous world, they are indulging them in an even more dangerous fantasy world. Not all video games have a negative effect, some are educational in nature; the newest game system on the market, the Wii, at least gets kids involved in some physical activity.

When they aren't playing with video games, they are still glued to the television, watching DVDs or shows. Toys in the past were much more dangerous and sometimes consisted of whatever a child could find to play with. At the same time, poor children do not play any less than rich children do. Kids will play no matter what materials you give them; simply having more toys to play with does not increase a kid's playtime; rather it will make children with fewer toys more creative. My little cousin, Joey, was bombarded with gifts this past Christmas to the point that he was over-stimulated by all the talking, moving and flashing devices and was brought to tears. Presented with toy after toy, all Joey wanted to play with was his grandmother's cane. Toys created today are increasingly computerized or turned into some sort of video game that we make into a learning experience. And we wonder why no one has anything original to contribute anymore.

As for those kids who do play outside, they are only al-

lowed to do so in strictly regimented sports leagues, where they will be overly supervised. Sources indicate that many children's soccer leagues are aiming to prevent one team from winning so that the children on the losing team do not develop lower images of themselves. An elementary school in San Francisco has decided to implement a new grading policy in which letters and numbers used to indicate grades will be strictly forbidden. Instead, children will be graded with geometrical shapes - you know, triangles and squares and circles, to indicate grades, obviously. At another school, a no-touch policy was implemented in order to prevent children from harming one another through touch, because "for one child, what may be a playful hit is a very hard punch for another." A father of a child at this school received a phone call informing him that his 8-year-old daughter had violated the no-touch policy by playing paddy-cake with a fellow schoolmate at recess. The father responded with laughter.

The recent market for children's cell phones is also contributing towards making our kids less child-like. While cell phones for children were first introduced as a safety precaution, particularly for children living in cities, they have now become a market of their own, and are leading to the "technologization" of our kids. Kids will whine for a cell phone because it will make them the cool kid in class. They see it as a step towards independence and growing up, when they should be relishing their time as kids.

Perhaps America has gone to extremes when it comes to protecting its children. While the world is unmistakably becoming more dangerous as time progresses, is it not true that a parent's job is to best prepare their child for the world? Our society is not regulated under the policy of making sure that nobody's feelings get hurt. The effect of this coddling is showing itself in the size of our children. According to the Institute of Medicine, over the past three decades, the obesity rate has more than doubled for children ages 2-5 and 12-19 years, and has more than tripled for children ages 6-11 years. Approximately 9 million children at present are considered obese. We can't blame our children for being obese, though, when in 2008, a projected 73% of Americans will be overweight.

We are placing GameCube controllers into our kid's hands rather than baseball bats. We are teaching them to stare at computer screens or television screens, rather than telling them to keep their eye on the ball. Some children's book writers must have noticed this trend, as instruction books are popping up all over with subjects such as "How to Build a Fort" and "How to Build a Go-cart." Indeed, *The Dangerous Book for Boys*, written by Conn and Hal Iggulden, and the complimentary book for girls, *The Daring Book for Girls*, by Andrea J. Buchanan and Miriam Peskowitz, have instructions as to how to go about playing. While these books are a great attempt to bring children away from the television screen and back to playing outside, do they really need instructions on how to play? What really is being lost in the pursuit to protect our children from the world is their own creativity, something that is vital to their development if we want them to be successful, and if we want them to make changes in the world.

PERSPECTIVES

Everyone needs to fall down and scrape their knee. Parents cannot protect their children forever, and raising kids to play video games rather than real games outside robs them of so many experiences. While it may be that our society is becoming more dangerous on a daily basis, children will have to face this at some point. Raising our kids so that they are equipped to best handle what is thrown at them is the longest-lasting means for protecting them. So let them get dirty outside, let them get their feelings hurt. Maybe adults would have less frustration if we were allowed to keep playing. Hey, wouldn't you all like to play on a playground again?



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The Vegetarian Next Door

by Ashley Wool

The word “vegetarian” is not synonymous with “self-righteous,” “superiority complex,” “anorexic,” “extremist” or “hippie.” Having been a vegetarian for nearly four years, I’ve encountered many such stereotypes. Thus, for fear of being an annoyance to my friends and family, I once employed a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy regarding the beliefs behind my vegetarianism. Recently, however, I’ve come to realize that, while keeping quiet might prevent awkwardness in social dining situations, it will never aid anyone in understanding me better. If you shouldn’t shun people for their religions, cultural beliefs or sexual orientations, why is it ok to poke fun at them for choosing not to eat meat? It’s therefore a matter of personal importance for me to speak out about and defend my vegetarianism, not necessarily to persuade people to join me, but merely to give people a clearer idea of why I, and millions of others, have made this choice.

First, there is the issue of personal health, for which a vegetarian diet holds many benefits. Aside from the well-known dangers of mad-cow disease, bird flu, fish mercury, salmonella, etc. associated with meat, even a “good” cut of meat is quite dense in fat and cholesterol, and it takes a very long time to digest. If you ate a cheeseburger with lettuce and tomato, your body would work for 48 hours to process the burger’s tough lipids and proteins first...plenty of time for the cheese, lettuce, tomato and bun to rot and ferment in your colon before a good deal of the fiber, vitamins and essential carbohydrates can be absorbed. Also, while it is unwise to adopt a vegetarian diet strictly for weight-loss purposes (contradicting the myth that vegetarians are anorexics who use their meatless diet as an excuse not to eat), it can be useful in cutting calories and increasing metabolism, since your digestive system works more efficiently without meat.

Second, there is also the animal rights angle, and this is where the most controversy and backlash occurs. Yes, I support PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). No, I have no desire to burn down Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants or spray-paint fur coats. I consider PETA to be a group of modern-day muckrakers who expose the horrors of animal testing, fur farms and slaughterhouses. There are many peaceful and logical ways to support their missions, such as petitioning, letter-writing and politely educating the public. Yes, some animal rights activists are extremists, but one will always find some extremists involved with any conceivable cause, including vegetarianism. Saying, “I don’t care, I’ll still eat meat” is one thing, but telling a vegetarian, “For every animal you don’t eat, I’m going to eat three,” certainly sounds like an extremist attitude, and one that is as insulting as an ethnic joke.

I do not discredit anyone for eating meat. However, I believe that if you do choose to eat meat, you should understand the production processes, and what the animals endure prior to being slaughtered. You should know, for instance, that chickens raised for meat are fed hormones to make them grow unnaturally fast, that they can die of broken limbs and heart attacks due to the extra

weight, and that they have their beaks cut off so that their madness from constant confinement will not result in them pecking each other to death. You should know that minks, foxes, raccoons, rabbits and even cats and dogs are often boiled or skinned alive in the name of fashion. You might argue that animal rights activists often embellish and exaggerate these issues, but regardless of the context in which such information is presented, videos obtained during undercover investigations tell no lies.

It should be noted, to provide some perspective, that the days of hunting for food, the days in which farmers commonly raised, killed and ate their own poultry and livestock, are mostly a thing of the past. My mother grew up in a family of seven children in a log cabin in the Adirondack Mountains, and their dinner often consisted of whatever my grandfather could hunt that day. One can become desensitized to the process of shooting a deer, gutting it, cooking it and eating it, if it is the only way you will have enough food to feed your whole family. Doing so can also teach respect for nature, respect for the animal you aim to kill with minimal pain during the proper season, and respect for the labor involved in putting the animal to good use and not being wasteful.

Yet, how many of us live like that nowadays? Many people in our so-called “Fast Food Nation” live a privileged lifestyle, one that supports the meat industry. They go to the supermarket and buy pre-packaged meat, or order it from a restaurant. They are very much separated from the animals that become their dinner, unaware of the unthinkably miserable lives into which these voiceless and defenseless animals are born.

One question that is proposed to me a little too often is, “But what do you eat?” To that I say: there are now more options for vegetarians and vegans than ever before. I have had no problem finding alternate sources of protein (tofu, tempeh, and other soy-based products) and iron (prunes are full of it and are, as you probably know, easier on the digestive system). Most meat substitutes have plenty of flavor and a fraction of the fat. The average hamburger has 13 grams of fat, while the average veggie burger has 2.5 grams of fat, around the same amount of protein, but with more essential vitamins, and no worries about whether or not it is fully cooked. You certainly do not have to be a full-time vegetarian to appreciate these products for their health benefits and their deliciousness. While I am the only vegetarian in my family, my diet has helped to open my family’s minds to new food options, such as grilled eggplant and peppers, and the veggie stir-fry dishes I make.

However, even those who love me and respect my vegetarianism sometimes don’t understand it. When I was new to giving up meat, my mom wanted to split a chicken dinner with me and asked, “Could you cheat on it just this once?” She knows better now. She understands what I hope I’ve helped you understand: that vegetarianism is more than just a diet; it is a lifestyle, and one that deserves no less acceptance and respect than other cultural and religious differences that exist in this world.



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STOP. READ ME: Passion Dies Without PR

by Deborah Bertlesman

Artists have chosen a life of solemnity. We have decided that our success will be based mostly on our ability to observe and regurgitate. We have formed our foundation on vomit. This is the spit up of society after a blackout perspective has viewed it, after random hookups or beer Olympics. We realize our fatal flaw. We are not, however, unlike you. Contrary to popular belief, which artists, on a whole, lack, we are ball hogs, spot light cravers and success mongers. No one really desires to be famous after they are dead. Don't be confused by our want for eternal listeners and our fear of solely after-life fans. Everyone is popular in heaven; few are properly recognized on earth. We are not asking for a gold medallion or even a Pulitzer Prize. Keep your sympathy cookies to a limit. We do not wish to gorge ourselves on self-appreciation either. Recognition of existence, however, is pertinent to our survival.

Environmental blocks are defiantly the worst kind, and when a belly dancing superstar is plastered onto a big screen, while Opus and MiNT are buried underneath "Free Notebooks" in Welles Hall, one cannot help but admit that SUNY Geneseo is an environmental block for certain groups: on a general scale, for artists, but more specifically, for writers.

Just to clarify: Opus is a creative writing publication compiled by the English Club and MiNT is what you are currently reading.

In registering for classes, I flipped to the English – Creative Writing Track section of the undergraduate bulletin, and although I was aware that this fairly new option existed, I doubted that any visitor to the campus would have any idea. The newly built integrated science center stretches its shadows over Brodie and Welles, adorned with its wall-scale periodic table and perfect pendulum, each swing devilishly aware that every time it sways, Geneseo's artistic tradition is slipping on its weak foundation. We have a brand new particle accelerator, but Opus is still in black and white and bound by staples. We are combating racist issues, participating in charity walks, conserving energy in our residence halls, but when I tell someone I write for MiNT, they still ask me what a "mint" is. We are known to relate to suffering, but even Kafka liked a little recognition.

I am not ignorant enough to solely blame funding. I am not malicious enough to calculate how much money is wasted on copies of the Lamron that are not even touched, and I am certainly not ungrateful enough to ignore the fact that this page is appearing in a magazine published on campus, but I am motivated enough to question in order to improve. To be fair, self-examination is just as necessary as critiquing the outside environmental blocks. It is true that perhaps the most gut wrenching of all these creative blockers is not the dominating science equipment, or buried literary publications, but that we are consuming ourselves. At SUNY Geneseo, artists are cannibals. There are numerous and massive sections of natural sciences, sociology and history courses, but creative writing classes are limited to four sections of sixteen. We are limiting ourselves. There is no doubt that we are concerned with ourselves, however selfish that may sound.

We want to be read, and are doing most things within our power in order to be heard, but we still become like an ineffective, torn apart tid-bit when someone sits down to write a note. THIS IS NOT SCRAP PAPER. So despite our best efforts at chalking the sidewalks and telling our friends, why is it that creative outlets are only appreciated when they become extra-credit? Why do we only attend plays to get programs signed, or read an article because our roommate wrote it, or look at a poem because there is nothing better to do when you're waiting for food at the South Side Cafe? Just because we are aware of our flaws does not mean that we repair them. We are all self-consumed and stuck in the muck of human nature. Every artist, professor and money-lender is ultimately concerned with themselves and not with each other.

We really should try to reach a little, to read something even though we may not need or even want to, to see a play even though we do not know anyone performing, to stop for a moment and look at a sculpture even though it may not make sense. It seems useless, maybe even mindless participation, but for the sake of us, do it. It makes us feel better.

Passion dies without PR. All lonely, attic dwelling, scroll rolling, over thinking artists had a little more than mere initiative. Whether they had nothing better to do, could not fall in love, or were forced to use ink and paper, artists, as unromantic as it may seem, all had forces other than passion that pushed them to create. There probably existed more than just Greek letters spray painted on a tree, more than murals begging for pledges, more than advertisements for free iPods, and even posters that encouraged more than student participation in community building free-bees. We are not anything out of the ordinary; just because our trade is creative does not mean we don't have finance, happiness, or even over-bearing adults weighing our shoulders down, trying to prompt us towards success.

STOP. READ ME. I could probably do more but it is just too difficult. I do not want to be the one to scavenge through free notebooks, the one to distribute student publications that will sit in RJ until they get thrown out with dry grilled chicken. I do not have the time to create intricate chalk masterpieces on uneven bricks just to be washed away by the Geneseo rain. I refuse to advertise and be overpowered by frat parties with their beer olympics and enticing jello shots. If only Geneseo was more overbearing.

If only the State University at Geneseo pushed me to write, I could possibly be something other than another freshman at a frat house. With things as they are, I write without a reader and without regard.

Your food is probably ready.

Blackface

by Kim Perrella

Last night, my roommate and I were sitting at our computers at our respective desks. I was quietly playing Jack Johnson and I was feeling pleased with myself because I had actually started to write one of my four essays due at the end of the semester. Then, there was a knock on our door. I opened it, and standing in my doorway was a boy I had never seen before, with two of my suitemates standing behind him in the common room, apparently trying to get him to leave. He began to give a somewhat bumbling explanation as to what he was doing there, and asked if I was the one, or if I knew the individual, who had given FARI a picture of his friend dressed in blackface. Surprised and a little put-off, but still curious, I told him that I had not given anyone's picture to FARI. He began to leave at my suitemates' urging, but not before letting me know that he thought what FARI is doing is absolutely ridiculous because his friend "is not racist at all."

I was kind of shocked and still not entirely sure of what had just happened, but my suitemate filled me in shortly after. Apparently, she had mentioned to him that I am in FARI and because I was living with girls who also know his friend, he thought I might have been the one to submit the picture to FARI. FARI, if you don't know, is a new group on our campus. The acronym stands for Fighting Against Racial Injustice, and the controversy is over a student's Halloween costume, the issue being that he was dressed in blackface. Since Halloween, FARI has been making a public campaign to put an end to the college's ignorance, and the acceptance of it through inaction, of these blackface costumes and other racial issues on campus. Signs went up around campus showing pictures of the three or four guys who dressed in blackface, stating this as unacceptable and offensive, petitions were signed and protests were - and are still being - staged.

I see the incident of the boy running into my suite to talk to me as one more manifestation of the explosion of racial issues on this campus. It is an exciting time to be attending SUNY Geneseo right now, but also a difficult and even potentially frightening one. Issues of race seem to be coming up repeatedly this semester, with professor Maria's Lima calling our school "god-forsaken white" and subsequent reactions to her statement, including one by Dr. Stelzig. These racial tensions seem to be culminating in the issue of blackface.

I attended the college's community discussion forum on Friday, November 16, and talked to a fair number of people on my own, and opinions are incredibly split. At the forum, some students suggested that the kids were not actually dressed in blackface at all because, historically, blackface tended to include exaggerated lips. It seemed that most students at the forum, however, felt that blackface is a problem stemming from a larger racial issue in Geneseo, mainly that it is hardly addressed. Many students that I spoke with on a personal level feel (like I do) that it is a sad situation that is really exposing the ignorance of some people on this campus.

There are many students, however, who still do not see why blackface is offensive. In her article, "The Blackface Stereotype," Manthia Diawara states: "Every stereotype emerges in the wake of a pre-existing ideology which deforms it, appropriates

it, and naturalizes it. The blackface stereotype too, by deforming the body, silences it and leaves room only for white supremacy to speak through it." I believe that this is what many people on our campus do not understand. In an issue of someone dressing in blackface, even if that person means no harm by their actions, nothing can be seen but what is presented. All you see is a white person painted up to look like a black person, engaged in a behavior that has a long, well-documented history of being used to systematically dehumanize and mock black people in our society.

In the U.S., blackface has a long history of providing entertainment for whites at the expense of black people, and also of perpetuating stereotypes. Minstrel shows began in the 1830s and were popular from 1840 until the early 1900s, but performances continued all the way through the 1960s. They depicted white actors with their skin painted "black," performing as caricatures of "blackness." The white actors exaggerated their lips and feet, donned outlandish costumes, and portrayed blacks as being lazy, ridiculous, superstitious, cheerful and ignorant.

Three main characters that represented stereotypes of black men were popular in minstrel shows: "Jim Crow," the ignorant, "carefree," country slave; "Mr. Tambo," the overly-happy, eager-to-please musician; and "Zip Coon," the almost flamboyant, urban, learned black who is too absorbed in himself to be likeable. Female stereotypes (who were portrayed by white men dressed in blackface drag) included the "mammy," who is jovial, loud, protective, asexual, and fat; the "funny ol' gal," who would make jokes at the expense of the men; and "wench," the provocative mulatto. Minstrel shows consisted of songs and skits that mocked black people, but also featured, and seemed to appreciate traditional African music and instruments, like the banjo. This appreciation masked some of the racism of these shows, and it makes the history of minstrelsy even more complex. Added to this complexity is the fact that after the Civil War, black people began to perform in blackface minstrel shows as well, portraying the same stereotypes white performers had established.

The influences of minstrel shows and their stereotypical portrayal of blacks continued far past the end of their popularity, in all aspects of the media. The 1915 silent film, "Birth of a Nation," which portrays the Klu Klux Klan as heroes trying to restore order to the anarchy-ridden post-Civil War south, shows white people in blackface raping, looting and raiding white villages. The first television portrayal of blacks was a show in 1951 called "Amos and Andy." The title characters were two comically uneducated black men, who were played by white men in blackface. Even when black people began to play themselves in television and movies, many of the characters they play were stereotypical, and written by white people. At the forum on Friday, one person suggested that there is a level of ignorance not only on the part of the public, but also on the part of rappers who are essentially exploiting themselves. This is not a new idea. In Spike Lee's 2001 film, *Bamboozled*, this same comparison is made between the exploiting aspects of blackface and that of the media industry

today, with blacks themselves perpetuating stereotypes and allowing themselves and their race to be generalized in order to turn a profit.

The young man who came into my room was ushered out before I could tell him that I do not think his friend, or any of the young men who dressed in blackface were trying to be racist; neither does FARI. The question at hand is not the question of the intent of the costumes. I do think that they are sadly ignorant of the implications of their decision to dress in blackface, and how it can make people feel. The thing that I find really sad and frustrating is the negative reactions people have had to what FARI is doing. We are not trying to point out people and call them racist. We are asking people to take a critical look at their actions and beliefs and try to open up their minds to another person's perspective.

A group of students who called themselves SAFARI, or Students Against [groups like] FARI put up flyers mocking those that FARI has been posting. The people who put up these flyers claimed that FARI was making a big deal out of nothing, protesting just to protest. I have heard this sentiment reflected in various individuals around campus, both those students who spoke in the forum, and others who I have spoken with on my own. A fair number of students are already sick of hearing about the blackface issue and think that people need to "get over it already." I think one of the things that are most misunderstood about FARI is that we are not protesting individuals, but the lack of concern of the college administration that allows this to go on. One of the members of FARI spoke at the forum about the fact that there were students over 30 years ago trying to promote a response on the college's behalf, to the issue of blackface, but with no real reaction. His view was that, if it takes actual pictures of individuals dressed in blackface to provoke a reaction by the school and by students, then that is what will be done.

Another negative reaction I have heard is the question the Lamron posed in its "The Way We See It" segment: "Awareness is good, but is it creating a hostile campus?" This is going about the issue from a purely white perspective. One young man in my forum group spoke about talking with his Dominican roommate about the issue of blackface. His roommate said that the allowance of blackface on campus makes him genuinely frightened. In the newest installment of the FARI documentary, one black student says that she does not go out on Halloween anymore because she knows she will see someone wearing blackface, and be angry and offended. Why should it be okay for some students to feel that they are in a hostile environment, as long as they are isolated and keep quiet?

As a white person from a predominantly white town, going to a predominantly white college, I cannot pretend for a minute that I understand what it is like to be a minority here or in America in general. What I can do, and what I try to do, is listen to what other people have to say and how other people feel. To say that

FARI is overreacting is to completely disregard a long and continuing history of the oppression of an entire race in our country. Possibly more important, is that it disregards the feelings of individual students who live here and go to this school, who have been offended and are attempting to voice their unhappiness. Until everyone begins to try to open up their minds to new understandings of others and themselves, we will not see any real progress towards the end of white supremacy and racism in this country.

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The Dérive—Condensation and Drift: Psychogeography

by Will Sankey

It's the first day of classes, you walk into the room and choose a seat, partially randomly—it may depend on a position from which you can see the brunette across the room, it may depend on how hard the class is, on how boring it'll be—regardless, you choose a seat, and it is highly probable that this seat will be yours for the rest of the semester. The people around you have their own seats that they've chosen; they may move once a friend comes into class, if the Professor makes them or for some other reason, but this is highly unlikely. Where you've chosen to sit is your spot, it's your random domain. Now suppose it's halfway through the year, you walk into your morning Economics class and someone is sitting in your spot. You stop, stare at that person menacingly, think to yourself: what the hell are they doing, they're in my seat. Flustered, you sit somewhere else, in foreign territory; the whole class is ruined for you. But maybe, maybe you'll see something different in class today. You'll get a new perspective; you'll notice someone or something that you haven't noticed before. Now image this extrapolated onto your environment, your life--this is the basic premise of psychogeography and sitting somewhere different in class is just a beginning.

Deriving from the Dada movement, Psychogeography began in France in the 1950s, and is simply defined as “strategies for exploring cities.” For some adventurers, this means navigating a city like Rochester using a map of Paris, or striking out along an algorithm: “first right, down two blocks, second left,” the desired destination being nowhere. What results is an entirely new experience. Described as “neither goal-orientated nor random, structured but always surprising,” the goal of the psychogeographer is to jar you from your mundance existence into a radically new perspective. Starting with the premise that your environment determines more than just what route you're going to take to work, psychogeography reaches into a discipline of fact, and adds humanity. The structure of geography changes precisely because the subjective “I” has been introduced. It is that “I” which says geography is not a static concept; it is not independent of people, but directly impacts and is directly impacted by the human presence.

As psychogeographer Christina Ray elaborates: “Most of us...just follow a small set of preprogrammed instructions as we wander through the city: office, day care, grocery store, home...If you track your own path through a typical day, you'll soon discover that your journey is habitual, that you're slowly wearing a canyon through the same streets, the same sidewalks, day after day.” How many times per day, days per week, do you walk the same course, along the same causeways, encountering the same landscape? Everyday life is conditioned and controlled, manipulated and modeled by that geography we experience, which is usually the path of least resistance. Imagine what beautiful scenes you've passed by with your head down against the wind, that were just around the corner from your usual path. It's time to ride the *dérive* (literally drift, but with a militaristic aspect), encounter a city without a goal. It's time to be drawn to the attractions of the terrain itself, desiring the encounters that you can find when you cast off your

expectations and deadlines.

So I tried it one evening; starting on Center Street, I made a right onto Main, walked down to the first alleyway on my right to discover a backyard full of old refrigerators, abandoned washing machines, rotting cars and a lonely garage along a road littered with pot holes. I made it onto Ward Street, skated onto Second, rambled down North, trudged up Wadsworth and eventually made it into Newton where I found that you can visit the greenhouse anytime from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. during the weekdays. My whole trip, though it may seem uneventful, had anticipation about it. I can't honestly relate the energy I felt about encountering Geneseo as Geneseo. I didn't have an agenda (other than trying to be obscure). I wasn't trying to get somewhere; I was a man adrift and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

This article isn't just about psychogeography. There is something broader happening beyond this new movement, a larger picture of condensing disciplines that I've seen lately. Today, colleges like SUNY Binghamton are allowing students to create their own majors. Like a basket of multi-colored clays, you pick two apparently unrelated fields, mash them together and see what you get. You can mix psychology with geography, biology with English, music with physics or mathematics with philosophy. Take the two most obscure majors you can think of, stir well, and what happens usually isn't chaos but a chorus. Harmony between fields is being found more and more often. Disciplines are not islands unto themselves.

Some early psychogeographers promised to “play upon topophobia and create a topophilia,” to take fear and generate curiosity. At its core, psychogeography seeks to find the hidden things that are present when disciplines collide—when the objective and subjective mingle, and this should set an example to us all, find your hidden alleyways, explore the darkness beyond the scope of your known world, *sit in a different seat damnit*.

In short I leave you with a challenge and a plea: drift.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychogeography>



Illegal Humans

by Eric Metz

I saw an operating slave vessel over summer vacation. We were kayaking on the St. Lawrence. Passing a bottle of Wild Turkey back and forth, we slipped out of the eddy, and into the main channel. And that's when we saw her. Well, we didn't so much see the freighter, as drift into the eclipse of her prow.

We dropped the bottle and picked up our paddles and rode the wake back to the granite shore. After eight days of swashbuckling my way through the islands, I was in no state to realize it that morning, but I had just been within a bulkhead of shackled slaves. Every year the government acknowledges that thousands of people arrive as human cargo in freight containers. But, reflecting back on the size of that boat, I wouldn't be surprised if there's millions.

After their vacuum packed middle passage, they are unpacked as illegal aliens. They've spent their life savings to pay for shipping and handling, and they arrive poor, tired, and probably hungry. But we don't greet them on the docks.

America welcomes them in secret and gives each of them a new name: illegal alien. Of course, government officials will say that they are developing gamma ray freight scanning software to plug up the holes in port security. They may be tinkering with new human tracking software, but it's not to keep an eye on illegal aliens.

They choose not to look. It's in their best interest. The same NSA-industrial complex that's developing our security technology is pirating money off of illegal immigrants. But it's not just them, everybody is making money off of these new age slaves. When you employ illegal aliens to do all those jobs that minimum wage demanding citizens won't, it's hard not to increase profits.

But I don't really even want to talk about money. It's never been too hard to turn a profit on poverty. I am more upset with the way our government legislates to sacrifice immigrant fodder to American industry. By refusing citizenship to the packaged people, the government throws them into the same unprotected limbo that chattel slaves used to enjoy.

The term is absurd. It blasts away their humanity. Of course I know that "alien" could denote a non-resident. But when

I hear it, I think of the mantis musician Zorak locked in the corner of Space Ghost's ship. Zorak isn't the first word most Americans think of when they hear immigration, but they probably don't think homo sapien either. But with labels like illegal alien thrown around, it may as well be the Zorak issue.

I can't believe we have a Zorak issue. To deny them the rights afforded to citizens of the state is unconstitutional. The bill of rights doesn't exist to innocently protect citizens. Sure, it can do that, but I see it more as a ten commandments for an amoral Machiavellian robot eagle. The robot eagle may be happy pecking apart illegal aliens at the moment, but what's to stop it from going after groups of citizens next? By making one group of our country's inhabitants illegal, the government sets a legal standard for further stratifying citizens.

With federal identification cards around the corner, I may become a class B citizen. I don't think I could pass the Grade A-merican Citizenship test. I don't think too many would. It's so easy to believe in the freedom of your kayak, but without a universal standard of humanity, were all packaged in the freighter. We need to stop fearing Zorak and start believing in each other.



Withering Away on the Web

by Meghan Gleason

Don't feel bad for people with diabetes; don't donate money to cancer research; and certainly don't exert yourself in a 5k to help fight AIDS. They aren't diseases; they're lifestyles, chosen with free will.

[Please note the heavy use of sarcasm.]

Anorexia nervosa, though proven a disease, is portrayed as a lifestyle choice by pro-anorexia websites. Because its outward symptoms are seemingly self-induced, anorexics are under the impression that they're in complete control. Self-starvation is perceived as an issue of mind over matter, rather than one of molecular interactions.

In 2005, scientists made a connection between anorexia and the body's immune system. Research has shown that an anorexic's antibodies may interfere with the body's chemical messengers used to control appetite. While scientists aren't certain why these particular antibodies are produced, they believe it's correlated with their having previously fought an infection. Once the micro-organisms have been staved off by antibodies, appetite-controlling molecules may become their next target.

Anorexics continually reinforce the illusion of choice through LiveJournal's Proanorexia Community, the "world's largest pro-anorexic site," which celebrated its millionth post on October 9, 2007. With the convenience of 24-hour posting, the only thing anorexics are being fed is the idea that self-inflicted starvation is a lifestyle, rather than a symptom of a potentially fatal disease.

Users log into the Proanorexia LiveJournal with names like "onlywaterforme," "skinnaylove," and "iwish_iwasthin" to post what they ate today and what they will (or won't) eat tomorrow. They ask for advice on how to hide their eating disorder and lose weight faster, about diet pills and negative calorie foods, and to see who wants to join in on their fasts, often lasting for multiple days. Anonyms also ask for comments on pictures of themselves, which can only be seen by clicking on a link provided, in accordance with the site's rules.

Aside from personal pictures, montages also require a link. Videos highlighting the physical effects of eating disorders are common in the pro-ana world; they're watched for "thinspiration." Images of themselves, fragile celebrities and models are compiled to form a painful-to-watch slideshow with a soundtrack to match. The lyrics to Maria Mena's "Just a Little Bit," for example, reinforce the message: "Just a little bit pretty /Just a little more aware /Just a little bit thinner /And maybe I'd get there..."

While "thinspo" is currently available on YouTube, charities involved in helping people with eating disorders have asked that they be banned from the site. They have also asked websites like Facebook and MySpace to eliminate their pro-anorexia groups. So as not to infringe on the freedom of speech, MySpace responded: "Rather than censor these groups, we are working to create partnerships with organizations that provide resources and advice to people suffering from such problems. We will target those groups with messages of support."

In Spain, health officials have taken matters into their own hands. Four months after banning size 0 models from the runway, they have begun a campaign against pro-anorexia websites. Their first target is The Great Ana Competition, which gives points based on how many calories one consumes in a day. The maximum award of ten points is given to those who have completed a 24-hour fast, and one point to those who have eaten less than 850 calories. Officials have deemed the site's competition a "serious health risk for young people." For those with an eating disorder, following the website's advice could lead to their death, according to health officials.

Also potentially detrimental is the medical advice anorexics give each other. To avoid seeing a doctor (who may intervene in his or her "starvation diet"), health questions are posted on pro-anorexia sites and answered by people whose knowledge doesn't come from a medical school, but from their own experience. Under the heading "emergency," Kaylie007 wrote: "While i was purging i started to purge blood, my throat is very sore right now and it feels as if there is a lump in my throat, i dont know what to do please help im desperate and scared, i feel very dizzy and very shaky please help me." After analyzing her own symptoms, Kaylie007 thought she had ruptured her esophagus. A fellow anorexic, hia06gl, however, offered a different diagnosis: "The heart beating is panic. The lump in your throat could be globus hystericus I get it from anxiety its muscle spasms, feels real hard to swallow. I just looked in my bulimia book and it says esophogus rupture is a medical emergency I think you would know for sure if you had done that, I think if that happens you can be in no doubt, so you are probably just having a panic attack and imagining the worse. Like I said before prob just really sore and raw from constant purging has caused bleeding." What hia06gl's "bulimia book" didn't tell her, though, is that the severity of this problem cannot be determined without a medical examination. Therefore, Medline Plus recommends that you "call your doctor or go to the emergency room if vomiting of blood occurs -- this requires immediate medical evaluation."

Pro-anorexia sites, like a gated community, make sure to bar anyone who might rob them of their "lifestyle." One rule for posting on the Proanorexia LiveJournal site is: "no...reverse thinspiration." Any posts offering a negative opinion of anorexia are deleted from the site.

If these messages were included, would they be influential? One girl speaking out against critics doesn't think so; according to her, nothing "anyone has to say regarding proana will make things change. Not unless a plague struck earth causing all females to be fatties and unable to change. So nothing any of you 'critics' say will make a difference. This will always exist...The girls that are more serious, that are actually sick from this...don't need meds, they don't need doctors, they don't need to gain weight... they need someone to be there for them, understand and help them cope." They need someone to hold their hair back as they kill themselves.

The Final Gasp

by Patrick Morgan

Think fast: you're about to exhale your final gasp. You have one lungful of air left. What do you say? What do you do with that last vocal chord vibration? Worlds of people have gone through this moment, and everyone will follow; you will face it and I will face it, along with generations to come. And this is only if we're lucky, only if our vocal chords aren't obstructed, only if our brains aren't muddled and only if there is someone willing to listen. Last words are both grisly and fascinating, and yet we must also consider the processes that lead to them – the many circumstances and decisions that result in that final utterance. I believe we are ready to live only when we are ready to die, and I examine last words so that I may live better. Plus, I have to admit, final words are more interesting than first words. Babies are so unoriginal, saying things like “mama” and “dada.” How we approach death says a lot about how we approach life, and there seem to be more approaches to death than there are ways of dying.

If you've taken Humanities I, you might remember how the ancient Greeks and medieval Europeans thought about death. The Greeks emphasized the importance of “the good death.” A good person advances toward death in a calm, rational and brave manner. In other words, a good person dies well (whatever that means). This, in turn, influenced medieval Europe, where people believed they were defined by the present. The typical medieval European believed that all life led up to that final moment, which, considering the power of Catholic Church at the time, could really screw you over. You might have lived a virtually sinless life, but if you merely thought about committing a mortal sin during your moment of death, you'd go straight to the inferno. Just think: all those prayers, pleasantries and manners for nothing! Even Dante believed all life was a preparation for death, which is funny when you consider that the prolific Spanish playwright, Lope Felix de Vega Carpio, died disparaging Dante. Although he died several centuries after Dante, with his final words he rasped: “All right, then, I'll say it, Dante makes me sick.” He obviously did not take Humanities I at SUNY Geneseo.

In later European times, dying people were basically pestered for their last words, all in order to “save them for posterity.” Such a pestering was what prompted Karl Marx's final gasp. On being asked for his final say by his housekeeper, he remonstrated: “Go on, get out! Last words are for fools who haven't said enough!” It is debatable whether Marx even said this, but it just reveals that there is no avoiding your last words: unless you're incapable of communication from birth, at some point and some time, eternal silence will be the only thing that follows your words. You might as well say something profound, or at least go out with a laugh. Oddly or not, I've found that linguists and grammarians sometimes say the funniest things as they approach death. For example, the linguist Joseph Wright uttered “Dictionary” in the end. Even better are the final words of Dominique Bouhours, a French grammarian: “I am about to – or I am going to – die: either expression is correct.” You have to respect someone who remains grammatically correct to the end.

The prominence of last words is not, by far, a mere Euro-

pean construct; many cultures place a special significance on them. For example, within the Buddhist and Hindu worldviews, dying people are expected to say something profound. In China and Japan, if the words are good enough, they will even be etched into wood or kept as a family record. For over a thousand years, dying Zen masters have written and recited poems during their final moments. The last gasps of the Buddha are a great illustration; while lying in a grove of trees, he was surrounded by monks as he passed on his final thoughts about life and death: “Then I exhort you, brothers: remember, all things that come into being must pass away. Strive earnestly!” The Buddha encompasses the essence of last words: you're only ready to live if you're ready to die – understand this transience, and you will truly live.

Sadly, many “last words” are not authentic last words. The business of final utterances is so convoluted that it is difficult to know exactly who said what – people could mishear, or even deliberately change words. Ironically, Henry David Thoreau – that great admirer of simplicity – is an excellent example of such a complication. There are four very different “last words” of Thoreau's floating around. Some people believe that Thoreau left the world saying: “I leave this world without a regret.” Others may argue that, upon being asked what his expectations for life after death were, Thoreau yelled: “One world at a time!” Still others may tell you that Thoreau was asked whether he made peace with God, in which he replied: “I have never quarreled with him.” He most likely said all of these at some point, but there are two words that most people agree are Thoreau's last. Bedridden from several years of fighting what was initially bronchitis, Thoreau died murmuring: “Moose...Indian.” It may seem like a letdown that the man who wished to live deliberately did not die deliberately – or even sanely – but his words were oddly fitting with his naturalist leanings.

It seems that some of the most accurate last words are those given by criminals who are about to be executed – it is usually clear when they are going to die, and at this moment there are usually people around them who witness the last gasp. It was in such a circumstance that George Appel shouted, before being electrocuted in New York in 1928: “Well, folks, you'll soon see a baked Appel!” He probably never imagined that his morbidly funny pun would wind up in an under-funded college magazine – oh the places you'll go!

Regardless of what other people in past generations have felt about last words, those final moments of life can be a source of strength for the living. Those words represent the culmination of a life lived in a certain way – a brain taken down a certain path, having made (for good or bad) specific choices. Final gasps range from the inane to the utterly profound. Having perused many last words, I have to admit that one of the most senseless last sentences were uttered by the American poet, Fitz-Greene Halleck, who said to his sister: “Maria, hand me my pantaloons, if you please.” Pantaloons! First, I would ask Mr. Halleck why he's asking for some blipping pantaloons when he's about to die. Second, I would ask him: What the heck are pantaloons? At the opposite end is Leonardo Da Vinci, whose mind-boggling last words will forever be one of my major

Block

by Jayme Faye Wonderland

It's amazing
how, when wrought with pain,
the heart bleeds beautiful words.

Yet, now,
in the throws of love,
the pen finds no ink.
I cannot even write
about this wonderful man
who loves me.

A Fading Memory

by Jayme Faye Wonderland

You sit there, on the windowsill, knees hugging your chest. You lean against the glass pane because the cold burns your bare skin. You stare out but you don't see the street lamp that glares inside your room, or the drunkards stumbling around the corner. You see him, an hour ago, looking down at you, that half-conscious grin slapped across his face. You still feel him, the weight of him, and you try to hold onto that, but you can feel it slipping away already, and you are just a few feet from his bed.

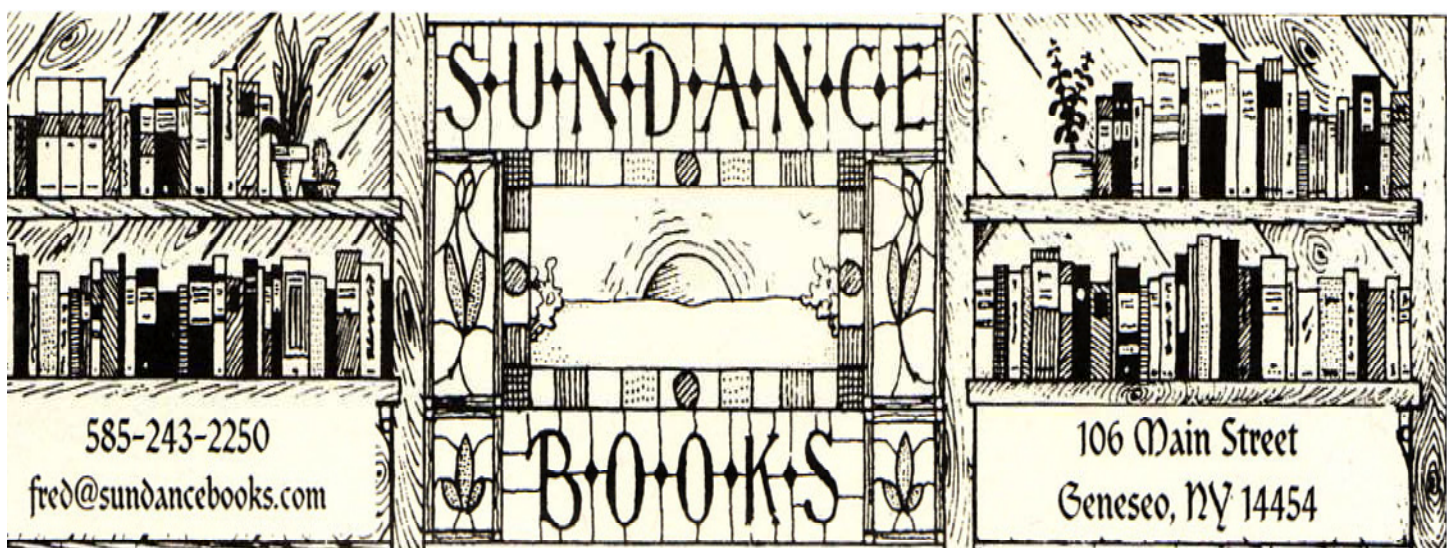
You slide off the sill, careful not to wake him. As you make your way into the kitchen you collect your discarded clothes and slip into your jeans and tank top. Pulling a bottle of water out of the fridge you take a sip and close your eyes. You remember his lips, soft and full; a trace of vodka and punch had lingered on them. He had smelled like sweat and Old Spice, and just a hint of aftershave. Breathing in his scent, you forgot the papers and your ex and the chaos of the party. Everything had been quiet except for his labored breath and yours. His jaw was so smooth, nothing about him was rough; you melted into him. He did not hide in the crook of your neck but looked you in the eye. His touch was so light as he brushed your hair out of your face and for a minute you thought he really saw you.

You lean against the door frame and stare at his sleeping form. He held you afterward; pulled you to him and clung for life. The desperation disgusted you and as soon as you were sure he was asleep you flew out of bed. The attention was suffocating and you felt the room spin as you ran from him. Need was a weakness and you would not let yourself need him or his touch as he so obviously needed yours. You would not give into the comfort of his arms.

Stepping into the bathroom you set down the bottle and splash cold water on your face. Glancing in the mirror you laugh as the water makes your mascara run. Taking the band on your wrist you slip your mess of hair into a knot. No hand-towel is visible so you dry your face with a fistful of toilet-paper; classy.

In the morning when he wakes, he will reach out his hand for you and find only empty space. When you see him on the quad you will laugh louder with your friends and you won't allow yourself to look at him. When he calls your cell you will role your eyes and you won't pick up. Your friends will ask you why you ignore him and you'll just grin and shrug, like you always do. And at night, you will hold your cat tight against your chest as you fight off the cold.

Padding back into the bedroom, you find your shoes kicked off by the closet. Softly sitting on the bed, you slip them on and turn to look at him once more. You run your hand through his hair and he grunts, burrowing deeper into the covers, a satisfied smile playing on his lips. They all look so tender like this. Your eyes graze over the muscles on his back, and try to memorize the freckles on his arms. You want to remember him like this, soft and quiet under your gaze, his skin warm to your touch. You want at least this memory to last. You get up quietly, slipping into the kitchen. You find your purse on the counter and head out the door without looking back.



Moth

by Aaron Netsky

When the clouds blur the sky,
and the rain blurs the night,
if there is no one to say “here,”
there is no set direction.
And I must set out on my own
like a lone moth.

Through the dark and rain
I fly,
aimless wandering, unfortunate,
sad,
down abandoned streets,
facing whatever direction.
Flash.
A bedroom light comes on.
My face turns to it
too close.
Her eyes meet mine
and the embarrassment burns my face...

...but the rain cools it.

In My Walk

by Aaron Netsky

I hadn't realized I loved him until that day we were walking hand in hand in the park and I saw all those little kids on the playground. I wondered what our kids would look like. I didn't realize that, at the same time, he was having similar thoughts about the kids on the playground. And now he's in jail for it.

So now I'm in the park alone, wondering how I could have been attractive to someone like that. I've looked myself over several times now; I'm very womanly, inside and out. How could he be attracted to me in the same way as those young boys? It's such a confusing feeling: what did he see when he looked at me? What did he think when he thought about me? What was he thinking when we...

It could have been worse, I suppose. He could have been caught with a dog. I feel very sorry for the woman whose boyfriend is caught fucking a dog.

I'm never getting a dog.

Joking and imagining how it could be worse are defense mechanisms. That could be the reason it hasn't hit quite as hard as it feels like it should have. We were only together a year. He was perfect, I was imperfect, I was lucky. Isn't that always the case? He probably felt the same way about me, at the beginning. It turns out he was closer to being right.

How long has he been that way? It couldn't have been just me that caused it, could it? It must go back to his upbringing. It always does. I guess his dad touched him. It must have been at a very young age, his dad's been dead for twenty years. Could it have been his mom?

Or was it me? What could I possibly have done to create...that, in someone? It isn't as though I kept him waiting too long. We were in his bed together the morning after our second date. Perhaps he thought he hadn't done well his first time? That still wouldn't explain the fact that it was young boys, not young girls.

The best way to forget about something is to think about something else. Maybe this squirrel who's been looking at me wants to talk. "Hello. Hello? It's ok, even I don't want to talk to me."

I'm not crazy. I guess I'm still trying to laugh. It's harder to laugh when it's just been raining. And the air is thick and warm, and the sky is just a bunch of hazy clouds. The trees are drooping. They're not happy. The ground is wet and muddy. It's not happy. Even the squirrel doesn't seem to be happy, but he, or she (I won't be rude and check) doesn't want to talk to me, so I can't ask. I'll just have to assume that it's not happy either. Maybe I should move on...in my walk, I mean.

Which way is out? I'm so used to him paying attention to where we are and me paying attention to him, I'm not sure. I never walked in this park before I met him, and this is my first time walking in it without him. I'm sure I'll find my way out. If not before dark, I know how to navigate by the stars. My parents are both sailors. I don't want to be one, but I could, if I wanted to. But then, if the clouds don't go away, I won't be able to see the stars.

And there won't be a moon, so there won't be light. I suppose in that case, I'll wait until morning to continue my search. Oh. There it is.

I'm not sure which street I'm on, but streets are easier to navigate than the park. Jefferson Street. I know where I am. There's Pizza Mark's. I can find my way from here. I just don't want to quite yet. I want to go the other way. Not back into the park, no, just not towards our...my place.

Oh, look: Orion. I'm walking south. Orion always makes me think of Men in Black. Back when it came out, I was young enough to think there might be something else out there. Someone else? Nothing and no one else, though. I'm alone. Especially now.

No, I'm not. Someone's crying. It's a child. Where? The crying is getting louder. I'll find you. You won't be alone for long.

He must be five years old, sitting by the fire hydrant. I walk quickly over to him, crouch down and ask him a question I already know the answer to. "Where are your parents?" "I don't know." "It's ok, we'll find them." I look around. The streets are dead. "Where did you see them last?" "That way." He points back the way I came from. "They told me to wait here." "How long ago?" "I don't know."

"Come on." I take his hand. We walk back towards Jefferson Street, and I look all around while he snuffles. No sign of his parents. I start wondering if I'll have to take him home with me. No, no, the police, I'll take him to the police, if we don't find his parents. Not home. That's kidnapping.

"Robby!" We hear the shout from the park, as we're out in front of Pizza Mark's. I look over as he runs to his parents. At that moment I have my first instance of *déjà vu*: he was one of the kids in the park that day. Not the one my boyfriend abducted, but the one playing jungle gym tag with two little girls. From the *déjà vu*, I suddenly have a vision of me on top of him, we're both naked. He looks horrified.

"Thank you, so much, for finding him," his mother says, and I snap out of it. I struggle to speak, still in shock at my imagination. "Oh, no problem," I manage to say. "Really," his father says, "you're a gift from heaven, we were so worried, we forgot where we had left him, we were terrified something had happened. Can we do anything for you, can we give you a lift somewhere?" "Um," I say, still having trouble thinking about anything but my vision. "Um...I live...yes, please, thank you. I live about a mile up the street, and I've just started to feel a bit dizzy."

I feel rude not talking as they drive me home. The mother gives me some water, nice and cold, for me to drink to feel better. We thank each other as I get out of the car. I enter my apartment with a tear in my eye at how my good deed was polluted by an evil thought. Thought, not feeling. Not even thought, vision. I collapse on my bed.

I'm not like him, I tell myself. I won't be like him. I can't allow myself to be like him. I need to sleep.

There's nothing wrong with me.

Dolce et Decorum

by Nate Northrop

The sun rose, ostensibly, somewhere behind the dark curtain of smoke, ash, dust and what stubborn remains of cloud cover persisted in the naïve fiction that they could still nourish a dying planet. The hitherto faithful glowing yellow orb was occluded by this haze, as it had been forty days now, but its presence in the sky could be extrapolated from the deep crimson hue the sky took on for a few hours a day before reverting to an all-encompassing, mind-swallowing black. The smog was not just confined to the sky—it filled every inch of air as unequivocally as the embracing darkness. The haze and the dark were so intimately interwoven into the fabric of the air that it was impossible to declare with any certainty which precipitated the other. Did the haze blot out the light and invite the darkness into the world, or had the Earth, in mourning, clothed herself in such blackness, such hopelessness, that the dark itself had begun to solidify into these tiny particles which tickled bare skin as one walked, accumulated on clothing, and plugged the lungs full of disease? The smog and the dark were occasionally separated by some source of illumination other than the brief visits from the benign sun. There were structural fires, fuel fires, carcass fires—whatever combustible material was left to burn seemed to do so with suicidal desperation. And even when it seemed there was nothing left, the ground herself would burn, Dido-like, with grief. These brief visits of firelight were hardly welcome—they simply reminded one that more once-living material was being eradicated and transformed into lifeless ash.

On this night, the haze and blackness were as entwined as ever. A weak light flicked on briefly and attempted to pierce the dark. It illuminated a small patch of lifeless ash, which a pair of feet trudged towards in the darkness. Given the state of things, batteries were a bit hard to come by. The only sounds to be heard were the soft patter of the feet on the ashen landscape and the rhythmic sounds of breathing, hollow and alien, within his archaic gasmask. The flashlight flicked on again and splashed off the largely intact foundation of a brick building. The footsteps stopped, the breathing stopped, and the light paused for a moment before climbing the scarred and pocked surface of the building.

The light only made it halfway up the second floor before falling on the blackness beyond. Resigned, the man looked for an entrance.

The door was blocked by something, so the man planted his shoulder and pushed with all the strength he could spare. It moved about an inch and would go no further. After trying for another several minutes with no effect, he collapsed against the door and tried to weep. He could muster neither moisture enough for tears nor a renewed sense of despair to push them out of his eyes. A scraping sound came from behind him and he jumped to his feet. Footsteps. Silence. Warily, he pushed the unimpeded door open a crack and peered inside. With the door shielding his body, he pierced the darkness with his trusty flashlight. He walked out of the smoke and ash outside and into the smoke and ash filling the room. Some of the smoke was fresh and he thought he smelled wood burning. Wasting his precious batteries with wanton aban-

don, he traced the fresh footprints on the floor to their abrupt disappearance in the middle of the room. He cleared some ash away to reveal a hidden door in the floor.

“Hello?” he called down the cellar stairway. He heard the faint click of a pistol being cocked.

“Careful, boy, you’ll wake the dead.” The voice sounded as if it belonged to an old man, probably a smoker of cigars. After a pause: “Are you friend or foe?”

“I have neither.”

“I envy your popularity.” There was another click of the hammer being eased back. “Well, don’t stand there and let the cold in.” Obediently, the first man descended the stairs into a small room faintly lit by a large nine-branched candelabrum.

“Is it Hanukah?”

“Only if you’ve brought gifts,” the older man said, forcing a laugh. The first man observed him in the candlelight. He sat in a rickety rocking chair behind the small table which held the candelabrum. He looked much younger than he sounded, at first glance, though the wrinkles of his forehead and eyes betrayed a certain archaic grace. It was hard to tell whether he was thin or obese under the thick flannel blanket that covered him. Obesity would mean he had food.

“I don’t have much,” the first man said, reaching for his pack.

“Then save it. I have more.” He motioned to the shelves around him, which contained a respectable supply of canned goods and dusty wine bottles. “Can I interest you in a romantic dinner by candlelight?” he asked in surprisingly good humor.

“Thank you, sir, thank you very much,” the younger man stammered. “I haven’t eaten in days.”

“Help yourself.” He did just that, greedily grabbing an after can off the shelves, not even inspecting the labels first. While his back was turned, the old man had produced a chair on the other side of the table and resumed his original position. The younger man sat down, voraciously thanking the older man and awkwardly struggling to open a can with his knife. Peaches. Better than nothing. In fact, it was heaven.

“So tell me, boy,” the older man started. The younger man hated the diminutive, but held his tongue, since he was currently drowning it in peach juice. “What did you do... before?”

“I was a journalist,” he said between peach slices. As he struggled to open a new can, he said: “I used to do a music review column, until nobody felt like singing anymore.” He peeled the lid off the can triumphantly. Beets. Whatever.

“Did you cover the war at all?”

“Between the time people stopped singing and when the presses got blown up.” He paused from glutting himself long enough to lift his head and ask, “What did you do?” The old man sighed and poured two glasses of wine from the bottle he had miraculously produced.

“I was a General, before my army got blown up.”

“Not that fascist son of a bitch Howard,” the younger man snorted.

“The same.” An explosion somewhere in the distance punctuated his response. Suddenly the beets tasted a little bitterer. “At the risk of oversimplifying things, I’m the one who pushed the button.” The General emptied his wineglass and set it down nonchalantly. As if it were no big deal to effect the destruction of modern civilization.

“You were framed or something, right?” the younger man asked, abandoning his beets altogether.

“No.” Another explosion. “Why?” the General extrapolated from the journalist’s mute expression. He refilled his glass and took a large gulp from it. “Where to begin? It’s complicated.” The former journalist would have punched him, except for the loaded revolver resting comfortably on the table, pointed at him. “There is no more beauty in the world. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but there are no more beholders. We’re so... so... blasé! We’ve seen it all; nothing shocks us anymore; we can’t take anything seriously!” As his passion rose, his eloquence failed. “There is no more art!” Scattered gunfire in the distance.

“So you decided to kill us all?” The former journalist gripped his knife tightly.

“No! Not all. Many will die, many have died, but life will survive; it always does.” The younger man scoffed. “When the sun comes through the clouds, weeks from now, it will be the most beautiful sight you have ever seen,” the General spat contemptuously. “And if you are any kind of writer, you’ll write poetry about it.”

“You are absolutely insane!” the writer yelled. “Do you even understand what you’ve done? Or are bodies just numbers to you? How many corpses is a sonnet worth?”

“I’ve seen the goddamned piles, boy. Don’t talk to me about the cost of war. I’ve felt the hot spray of another man’s blood on my face. I’ve smelled the rotting flesh. I have seen Death wink as He takes my family and friends from my arms. Do not lecture me.”

“And you want to bring that violence to others’ lives?”

“Aesthetics are violence, boy!” the General roared. “How is what you do any different? It is a rape of the natural world to categorize it into what is beautiful and what is not. Without violence, there is no beauty! And that is no world I want to live in.” At this, the General raised the revolver and pointed it at the writer’s face. He blinked. The writer blinked. The General pointed it at his own head. “I hope you live long enough to thank me some day.” He pulled the trigger and slumped over the table. The young man wasted several minutes in contemplation of the event before coming to his senses, picking up the revolver and filling his pack with canned food and a bottle of wine before setting off again in search of God knows what.

As he exited the building, he was blinded by light which his eyes had grown unaccustomed to. It seemed that the bombing had pierced a hole in the cloud cover, at least temporarily, and the sunlight spilled through the gap. A single ray penetrated the blackness and fell upon his face. The young journalist was arrested by the yellow—no longer blood-colored—light. It was warm and comforting and beautiful. Now that the bombs had stopped, a chirping bird pierced the silence. He wept bitterly. He wept and hated himself—hated humanity—for it. And he wept.

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MiNT meets Tuesday evenings at 6:00 in the Harding Lounge located in Welles. We always welcome new members! Come ready to write!

Why*by Kaitlin Springston*

Desperate for love,
 Desperate to feel loved.
 Everyone else was.
 Just wanted to belong.
 Wanted to be normal.
 I reached out, to have you pull me in.
 You seemed so innocent.
 A little jealous.
 Didn't want to share me.
 I understood.
 You were my angel.
 My knight in shining armor.
 You made me feel so wonderful.
 So loved.
 For a time.
 Then you lost your halo.
 Shed your armor.
 Didn't want me to live outside of you.
 I couldn't see what you wanted.
 Blind to your true self.
 Now I can see.
 There was no love between us.
 All you wanted was my body.
 A body to control.
 Something that belonged to you.
 In return, you gave me bruises,
 Going deep beneath the surface.
 Hitting my heart,
 My soul.

Your words were harder than your hands.
 Names you gave me,
 My own was lost.
 Buried beneath your mocking tone.
 Calling me your turtle-dove, your little bird,
 While you caged me,
 Clipped my wings,
 Cut me off from everything.
 I thought you wanted to be together.
 But you just wanted me to be yours.
 Not enough to have my heart.
 Not enough to have my body.
 Finally enough to have my life.
 My nightmare fantasy.
 Ending with a kiss.
 Mouth-to-mouth,
 By an unknown Prince Charming,
 Trying to save the life you ruined.
 The life you dragged down.
 It wasn't my fault you shot me.
 I didn't look at him!
 I swear!
 Too afraid to.
 Too scared.
 To you, it didn't matter.
 You shot me anyway.
 Dead center, in the heart you stole.
 In the heart you broke.
 As I lie here, my last thought will be:
 Why?

All the Way Down

by Kaitlin Springston

There her baby boy lay, not ten minutes old, and she cried. Cried for her mother and father who had thrown their daughter and unwanted grandson away like so much trash. Cried for her lover who left her with nothing but an aching bruise the moment she uttered those pain-filled words: "I'm pregnant." Cried for herself and her ruined future, tearing up her acceptance letter in a rage of blinding tears and desperation. And she cried for her baby, his distorted face revealing the worst.

She didn't, couldn't understand the severity until a kindly nurse in patterned scrubs gave her the death sentence. No, not a death sentence: jail for life. For that was what this baby meant, complete loss of life, of freedom. No longer could she blow off chores for the AC of the mall. The deep fried smells of the food court would now be lost in the stench of soaking diapers.

The nurse said she understood; she had seen plenty of girls in this situation. But how many high schoolers have a problem like this? How many have to deal with a mental defect in a kid, a baby no less?! The rest of her life was at the mercy of this wriggling pink thing! How dare anyone say they understood her pain, this torture!

Her highlighted perm soaked with sweat, she turned away from the incubator. This can't be happening, she thought. Not even a year ago, she had the world at her feet. She had met the perfect man: handsome, charming, what did it matter that he was married? He had made her feel so good, so worthy. He had given her so much; she had wanted to give him that thing which was most precious to her, that thing she knew he would want.

Nine months later, she arrived at the maternity ward. How unfair! All those health classes she took in Junior High and High School always told the students how hard it was to conceive. Commercials on every channel advertised professional help for couples who had trouble getting a baby the normal way. Other girls at school were always talking about how many times they'd 'done it' but did they ever get a baby? It figured she would be so lucky. After everything she had heard, she couldn't have expected the ultimate consequence from her first time. Liars!

And now here she was, with a worse result than ever expected. Not only was her life ruined, she had known that from the first time she missed her period, but now, with a baby who was damaged physically and mentally, she knew what would happen: she was to be a servant to this...this slave driver.

The pamphlet that know-it-all nurse had given to her said it all. Her baby had Down's Syndrome: "a congenital disorder causing intellectual impairment and physical abnormalities." In other words, a disease that required her to wait on him hand and foot. Her baby would forever struggle in the classroom, a special education student for life. Or worse, he might never even learn to tie his shoes, button his jacket, or lift his head mere inches off the ground.

This was her baby, her future: a parasite needing constant care. The prospect alone was enough to make her scream. As if sensing her discomfort, a weak gasping sound arose from the

hard plastic tub at the other end of the room. In no time at all, the noise grew to a full-on roar, coming out of the seemingly incapable mouth of a body no larger than a loaf of bread.

Eyes screwed shut, she tried to block out the crying of her baby. How dare that thing cry! Her life was ruined, not his! He took her freedom and he was complaining?! How dare he! He was her jailer, holding her back from all she had hoped to be and do. A strangled sob escaped her dry, chapped lips, his cries triggering the onset of a migraine not unlike those she had suffered through the last six months.

"Shut up," she whispered, giving voice to the echoing mantra in her head. The answering scream snapped her fragile mind. "Shut up!" she screamed, her voice raspy and harsh. Throwing the threadbare bed sheets off her aching body, she stormed over to the incubator.

She stared daggers at her writhing offender through the puffy red bags which had long since replaced her eyes. If only looks could kill, she thought. A shiver trickled down her back, realizing what she had just unwittingly stumbled upon. Babies die all the time, her fevered brain whispered. They fall asleep in their cribs and never wake up. And a baby that already has problems would be even more susceptible, right?

Moving of their own accord, her hands reached down into the hard plastic walls of the incubator. Fingers curling, she clutched at the blanket the nurses had tucked around his tiny limbs. Mind void of any thought or reason, she raised him to the level of her hard-set eyes.

Then the unthinkable happened. The screaming stopped. His bright baby blue orbs turned and looked directly into the malevolent gleam of his mother's. Full of innocence and unconditional love, he gazed at his mother, with the soft smile of an infant.

And in that moment, her heart stopped.

Fingers trembling, she pulled her baby close to the warmth of her chest. She could feel the warm pressure of his fuzzy blue blanket through her cold hospital gown. In a daze, she turned back to her bed. Sitting down softly so she wouldn't jostle him, she pulled her baby closer to get her first real look at him.

His eyelids were shut; he had gone from howling to sleeping peacefully. Beautiful, she thought, he really is a beautiful baby. He was her baby. Her son.

I don't want it to end.



Don't worry, MiNT will return!



MINT!

MIA GAZZINTE