

letter from the editor

This magazine derives its name from a mistranslation of acronyms: when I first moved to Halifax, I thought that the signs around the city requesting that citizens keep out of the park after dark, refrain from smoking in public places, resist the temptation to swim in the harbour, et cetera, came straight from the mouth of Her Royal Majesty.

When I learned that it was not the Queen, but rather the Halifax Regional Municipality that was concerned with my garbage disposal and the distribution of parking tickets, the city seemed to take on an industrious blue colour. It's this initial sensation – that particular excitement and wonder – that I want to represent with the establishment of this small, creative outlet for the artistic and imaginative people of Halifax.

I want *Her Royal Majesty* to be a public creative space open to the entire Halifax community. It is not affiliated with any university, and is funded through generous sponsors, for whose support Halifax is grateful. Submissions are open to anyone who lives or has lived (or even just existed for an extended period of time) within the Halifax Regional Municipality. Works that build or explore the relationship to community are encouraged; drawings, paintings, recipes, comics, essays, photographs, and words in any format that touches this theme in a meaningful way - the theme being the creation of a public space to appreciate beauty, inspire and be inspired – should be submitted to the editor and deputies at: halifaxroyalmajesty@gmail.com

To foster this sense of openness, the first issue of *Her Royal Majesty* is anonymous; this is also to try to look at the idea of making art solely for recognition or self-image, to consider whether or not we appreciate art differently when affected by the knowledge of who the artist is, and to explore the validity of a quote by an artist in the community who told the Globe & Mail in an interview that Halifax is "creative simply for creativity's sake." Names of those artists who do not wish to remain anonymous will be published in the second issue; publication will be every other month.

Yours, majestically.

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reading in the park

Sweet-Potato and Eggplant Curry

I conceived of this recipe when I was craving sweet potatoes, and needed to feed six very hungry people. Although I made this curry on a very bleak night in February, its flavours seem distinctly autumnal to me – sweet potatoes always make me think of the fall – and eggplants, now enjoying the peak of their season, are only scheduled stick around for a little while longer before fall begins in earnest. The colours are the perfect colours of fall: the russet of apples from the Valley, the deep oranges like the turning of the leaves, and the warm indigo of the eggplant skin combine to form a harvest palette on your plate. The delicate and complex flavour of the eggplants, often used in Indian dishes, is juxtaposed here

with the crumbling, caramelized sweetness of the yams and Vidalia onions. The spiciness of the curry is rounded out with the addition of coconut milk and the texture of the chick-peas, nutty and just-slightly crunchy, keeps the teeth excited. The hints of cinnamon and clove bring an unexpected warmth to the dish, and their warm smell will fill your kitchen and the whole house: make sure you make enough to feed the neighbours (recipe is easily doubled).

If you need any further convincing, you should know that this recipe falls into the category of “Things that my Father will Cook:” everything has to go in one pot and stay there until it’s all done. If he can do it, anyone can.

- 2 Vidalia onions (any white ones will do if you can’t find this sweeter variety) diced in small pieces
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 medium-sized eggplants, diced into half-inch cubes
- 3 sweet potatoes, diced

- 1 can of chick-peas (or, if you cook them yourself, about 1 ½ cups
- ½ can of coconut milk
- 1 pot of curry sauce (I recommend Patak’s Madras Cooking Sauce)
- ½ tsp of Cinnamon

- 3 Cloves
- 1 cup of cashews, toasted, to garnish
- slices of mango, to garnish
- Approx. 3 tablespoons of olive oil
- Salt, pepper (to taste)

Serve with basmati or wild rice. Yields 4 hearty meals, depending on the hunger levels of the eaters, with enough for left-overs the next day.

Heat olive oil on medium-high heat. Add onions and stir until translucent before adding garlic. Stir for five minutes, then add sweet potatoes, all spices, and coconut milk. (If you’re in a rush, you can par-boil the diced potatoes before adding them, to cut down on cooking time.) Add chick-peas, and turn down heat to medium.

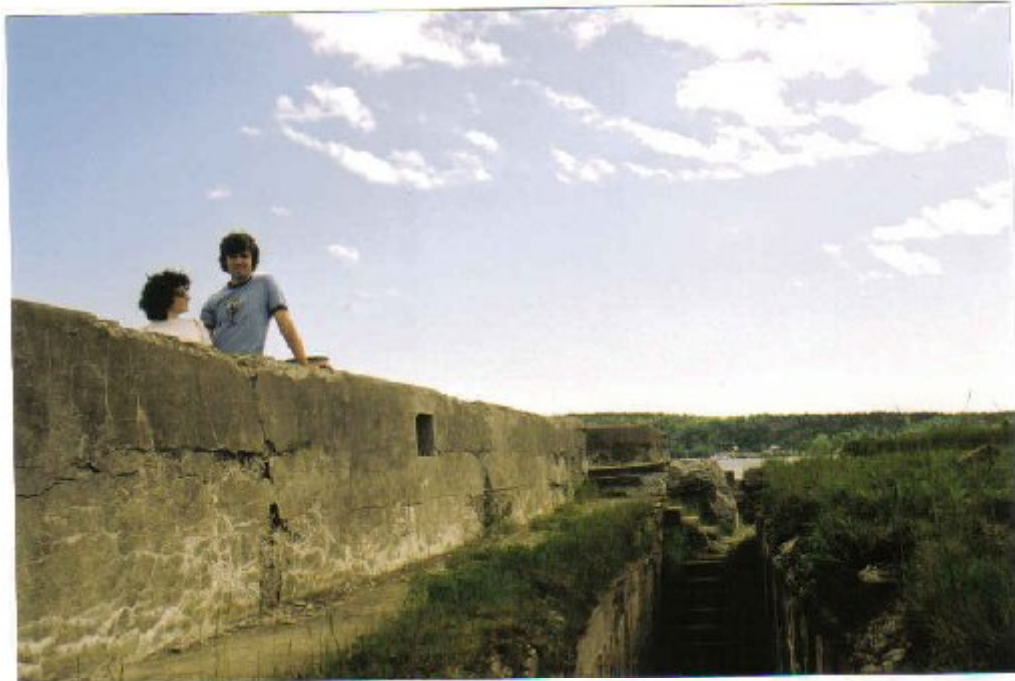
Start the rice, following instructions on packet (rice usually takes a 2:1 ratio of water to rice, with a little salt and oil in the pot.)

While mixture is simmering, prepare the eggplant. To prepare the eggplant, dice it into half-inch cubes and spread on a flat surface. Salt the eggplants and let sit for fifteen minutes or so before rinsing. This process, known as “degorging,” helps remove the bitterness of the eggplant as well as reducing the amount of oil absorbed in the cooking, allowing the flavours of the spices to penetrate. Add eggplant. Once all the ingredients (except cashews and mangoes) have been added, stir occasionally until potatoes and eggplants reach desired done-ness – probably half an hour.

Before serving, toast the unsalted cashews by putting them on a dry frying pan for 5 minutes, stirring constantly. Serve cashews on top of curry, on top of rice, and enjoy!

The Uncertainty Principle

On a perfectly crisp fall afternoon, walking across the bridge by the port rail yard, Hyperion and I saw a raccoon lying in the middle of the train tracks below: it was prostrate and stuck. His hind legs were flailing erratically and his front left leg was in a constant beckoning motion. When we saw him, that perfect little allegory for anything and everything, we were immobilized at the immensity of the extraordinary in this ordinary occurrence. With rooted feet and held breath, we watched the big red face of the train slowly come around the corner. The leaves were a morning shade of yellow and caught the reflection of the sun off the metal top of the approaching train. The raccoon's small body was twitching and scrambling as much as it could within the confines of his trap; he couldn't lift his head. The train came slow like molasses and its lights were on even though it was sunny. Though my judgment of distance is notoriously incorrect, I would venture to guess that the train was twenty feet from the camouflaged raccoon – he blended well in to the fallen leaves and wooden slats – when it stopped. An altogether halt of motion that lasted for about a minute, then reversed. Reversed! The raccoon was saved, or rather, spared for a while longer – given another chance. This could mean anything, really. It could mean everything.



seaside, a diptych

Birch.

Let me strip this from your frame,

I can take your rough bark and make the whole Algonquin swoon with fire. From behind the darkest pines, deer will run like shooting stars, they'll leave hearts of fur in your hollowed knots, antlers staggering in your branches, knees buckled, backs arched as they leap towards the barking lake in violent veneration. If not the flames – I can make you smoother still, ink you in ash by jagged fingernail, blistered as each sheet is ripped, scored. The sap drained, drunk. Miles away, desert sand thirsts for ancient scripture. In response: no young is bathed in the milk of its mother. Here now, on foot-stabbing rocky shore, I rinse my mouth before I kneel inside your tomb, I send my grey-worded pages to quilt the water. At once wombed by you, I take up paddle. I break the surface, loop and line; I make waves lobed as your leaves.

The Physical Impossibility of Understanding That Which Maybe Isn't Supposed to be Understood: A Story

Art History Essay Assignment:

What is Art? (A Personal Reflection)

When I think about the definition of art, I think about my job¹ at the Metropolitan Museum of Art here in New York City. Twice a week I have the pleasure of walking through one of the greatest (in my opinion, THE greatest) collections of art on the way to fulfilling my responsibilities as a lab assistant. During lunch breaks, I will often eat hastily in order to give myself 20 or 25 minutes to explore the museum. After working there for about 3 months now, I think I've seen most of the museum's collection. My personal favorite is Washington Crossing the Delaware. Of course this is an iconic depiction of American history, yet, to stand there in front of it and take in its sheer size and attention to detail is breathtaking. However, I digress – to give a formal definition, in my opinion, art is something, some material, some object created to fulfill an aesthetic purpose. Although, as I have demonstrated with my personal preference for Washington Crossing the Delaware, art is subjective. I can't expect everyone to hold Washington Crossing the Delaware in as high a regard as I do.

My roommate has a completely different take on the question: what is art? This past weekend we engaged in a heated discussion about the nature and definition of art.² From what I understand, her

¹ An unpaid internship, really, that Charlie obtained through an announcement in his Cellular and Molecular Biology class at NYU. He is one of 5 NYU Biology and Chemistry students chosen to work every Monday and Friday in the unadorned and unromantic sub-basement of the Met identifying anti-body binding affinities for specific proteins that may or may not be present in certain types of pigment material. As of this assignment, none of the students were allowed to work with any 'real art,' only lab prepared samples.

² Charlie walked up the stairs of his apartment building. It was Friday and he was exhausted from a long day at the Met. On the first floor landing he noticed a drawing that had not been there the day before. In dark black, presumably from a sharpie, there was a picture, more a doodle really, of a some sort of nautical beast and a dialogue box around the words 'I'M COMING'

He popped the door open with his key and put his backpack down on a chair by the door. All the lights were on in the kitchen and in the living room, but he could see that his roommate's room was dark. He assumed that Jen, his roommate, had forgot to turn the lights out again and was wasting their money.

He grabbed a glass of water and walked into his room. The overhead lights were off, but his reading light was on. Jen had her knees on the hard wood floor and her elbows propped up on the bed as if she were saying some sort of goodnight prayer. She had a cigar moving between her fingers and her mouth, and she was blowing quick little smoke rings at the window that was open over his bed. "Hey! Look what I can do," she said as she noticed his presence.

Charlie was impressed. "That's tight, when did you learn to do that?"

"Just now! You don't mind that I use your room, do you? My window's jammed shut and I didn't want the place to smell like cigarette smoke."

"No, no it's fine..." He really didn't care.

Jen finished the cigarette and stubbed it out on an ashtray that she'd brought into his room. Charlie sat down on the bed next to her and propped up against the wall. She got up to leave the room and, as she was on her way out, Charlie launched into it, "Hey Jen, what is art? ...I mean, to you, what is art to you?"

She laughed, "Wow, shit, uh...I don't know. Why do you ask?"

"It's for this retarded creative essay required class. The first assignment is to write a page on what art is to us."

"That sounds pretty gay."

"Yeah, I have no *fucking* idea what I'm going to write, maybe something about working at the Met. We're not supposed to use any external sources, but I'll probably run it by wikipedia anyways just to get some ideas."

Jen put the ashtray down and headed to the computer on Charlie's desk. "Here let me show you a website that I've been into recently." She opened up an internet browser and typed in a website. A little bar moved across the top of the screen to indicate that the page was loading. Then bright flashing letters appeared on a black background. It said: AWESOME SOUND. There was no sound.

"What the fuck is this?" Charlie asked.

Jen made a few clicks with the mouse and some pictures came up on the screen. "It's this photographer who goes to parties and takes pictures of people."

"What's so special about that?"

"Well, I guess it's that he's at really hip places and parties. You'll catch a celebrity on his site once in a while."

"Why don't I just open a celebrity magazine then? Why do I need this guy's website?"

"Well these are a lot more candid...he's not the paparazzi. He's like one of them."

"One of who?"

"I mean, he's at those parties too, he's not just there to document, he's a participant in the scene."

"What scene?"

"The New York/LA art/fashion scene, I guess. Look...that's Febs." Jen pointed to a man with a beard wearing a bright purple track jacket.

"Who the fuck is Febs?"

"He's a New York graffiti artist. You haven't seen his tags around? They're everywhere in the village."

"I don't think so."

"Well he just designed a new limited edition set of Vans slip-ons. Look, some of our friends made it on the site too." Jen clicked the mouse a few more times and opened up a picture of another bearded guy – this one was sandwiched between two attractive, yet modestly dressed and under-aged-looking blonde girls.

In the upper right hand corner of the picture Charlie saw a face he recognized. "Is that Jake Brower?!"

"Yeah, isn't that crazy?!"

"No...not really, I mean if I wanted to see a picture of Jake on the internet I could have just gone to his facebook. If I wanted to see pictures of people partying I could have just gone to facebook also. At least there I'll know most of the people I'm looking at. I think I'm missing something here, why do you like AWESOME SOUND?"

"Well I know this is going to sound really lame, but this guy's life is just way more exciting than ours. I mean he's at fashion shows, gallery openings, hanging out with models."

"Apparently our friends are too, right? So, to get back to my original question...would you call this art?"

"Well, in a sense, yeah, I think so."

"Has this guy AWESOME SOUND ever had his stuff in a gallery or anything?"

idea of art is a more dynamic nature. Art, in her opinion, is not necessarily something to be placed behind glass and admired, but her art is an ongoing performance piece, a lifestyle. Her art transcends medium to affect and exist in real life and real people. Although I don't agree with her, as I said before, art is subjective, and everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion. To provide a concrete example, many people question the artistic value of Damien Hirst's "The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living," which consists of a shark suspended in formaldehyde.³ Many claim that no formal 'artistry' went into making the piece, and thus it is not art, although it is quite visually stimulating, which is why others say it is, in fact, art. It's a question of process versus content.

Whichever way you look at it, art is something that affects or stimulates people by using the senses. I know in this response I've only addressed the visual arts, however, I believe that music and literature also fall under the category of 'art.' In another sense, art can refer to a high degree of skill in a certain field, such as the 'art' of making a sale or the electrician's 'art.' What I've come to learn from this assignment, though, is that the definition of art is highly subjective, to the point that art is entirely indefinable.⁴

"No, I don't think so."

"So, just because this guy has cool, minor celebrity friends and a camera, he's an artist? I mean who's to say his parties are better than the ones we go to? Or if he shows up does the party automatically get better?!" Charlie was frustrated at the stupidity of looking at 'candid' pictures of people he didn't know. Jen decided to ease off and leave the room.

"Take a look at his site. He's documenting a generation, a lifestyle, you know..." Jen picked up the ashtray and walked out of the room, "browse around a little, give it a chance."

³ Charlie stumbled on Hirst's shark during the lunch break of his 5th Monday at the Met. It scared the shit out of him. He returned again that Friday, the following Monday, then the Monday after that.

⁴ After Jen left his room, Charlie began browsing through AWESOME SOUND. He wanted, if not to agree with, but understand Jen's viewpoint on this supposed art form. However, he found himself quickly scanning through the site for attractive girls. After a while each mouse click made him more frustrated with the seemingly pointlessness of it all. "Why am I looking at other people having a good time? Am I supposed to be enjoying this vicariously through them?" he thought. "Couldn't I be out partying right now?" However he continued to click through the site. In another browser window, he pulled up a picture of Hirst's shark and kept returning to it for some kind of inspiration or epiphany, but it never came. Before he realized it, it was 3 AM and Charlie had missed 3 calls (all from Jake Brower coincidentally enough) because he had never taken his phone off silent. He went to bed and woke up the next morning at noon to put on a shirt that he'd never worn before.



phimy, in bed

Coffee Aphorism

The coffee on the table
looks like the way I used to speak
 freely filling the room
with translucent steam.

I like to be more like a window now
when there is a cold day breathing
so that,
just by feeling the room
you can see what it looks like outside

It Was

There was a moment
When we were young
It had windows and cans tied to strings
 It had you looking at a tree
With your face gorgeous and your arms crossed

You remember.
It was a Lilac bush waking you up
It was me and everyone else calling your name
 It was two figures running in a
 haze of
 sunlight

You remember
 that moment
 those senses
we were beautiful and we didn't exist
 to the world
 our names were carved in the sand
twice a day, washed by the salty water

I'm looking
And looking at it
I remember something.

Runner's Communion

He had forgotten to stretch and he cursed as he rolled his left ankle. This misfortune occurred more or less every time he neglected the stretching ritual. As a matter of course, he kept running in an awkward limp, trying to conceal the mild injury. It was the first few blocks that he feared the most: running North or South, out of the Halifax student ghetto, he was most likely to encounter familiar faces. He forced an amiable smile and waved as he limp-ran past a couple of girls smoking on their porch -- friends of an ex. As he rounded the corner and picked up speed, the soreness in his ankle dissipated. Reaching a dirt mound on the next corner, he executed a kind of 'leap-jump' that he likened in his mind to the movements of a gazelle. In reality, however, it was much less graceful. At any rate, the satisfying stomp with which he returned to the ground was a thing to be relished.

Clearing the intersection of Spring Garden and Robie, he felt relieved. Now clear of the student neighborhood, he was picking up speed at a satisfactory pace. Today was a South end run, encompassing the campus of Saint Mary's University, Point Pleasant, and, most importantly, the ocean. The alternative was the North end run that he'd devised before discovering the lure of Point Pleasant Park. He tried not to play favourites, alternating diligently (almost obsessively) between the two routes, which formed, as he learned by tracing a line on top of a map of the HRM, a sort of fractured oval that he felt to be the ordering factor in his life. The fact that he was able to stamp his feet in a pattern that traced such a large portion of the city reminded him how small Halifax -- a town disguised as a city -- really was. In Toronto he had run on a path in the ravine near his house; a sunken foresty area designated for runners, walkers, dog walkers and cyclists, dipping below the metropolis that rose up around it. Whereas he ran *in* the ravine, underneath it all, he was on top of everything as he ran through Halifax.

At some point in his life, he had fancied himself a city boy -- a lover of vast bright skylines and smoggy days. However, there was no escaping the intensity of downtown: there were traces of the decaying culture and sordid values in everything. Eventually, the once-refreshing feeling of lying in the scorching summer heat, sipping beer with one hand in the pool, lost all of its charm. The sound of weed-whackers polluted the air and the hum of the pool-heater reminded him of the cost it took to maintain such a lifestyle. He understood, in some vague way, that this cost included the squalor of other countries. Within this understanding was the knowledge that there was no straight-forward way to rectify the imbalance. The obvious short-term answer -- at least for him -- seemed to be to join the ranks of counter-culture and undermine corporate/ industrial society: he needed to sew elbow-patches to tweed blazers and join the Communist Knitting Circles and Critical Theory Reading Groups that met in coffee shops on Baldwin. But, at the same time, something about counter-culture groups nauseated Trevor: they were groups who described themselves in negative terms, their object being the absence of that which they despised. The post-modernists and the anti-punk musicians both rely on the modernists and the punks for self-definition. In any case, everyone was, in some way, no matter which side they belonged to, tied into Trevor's feelings of dissatisfaction with the world. It wasn't capitalism or counter-culture, intellectualism or idiocy that instilled this feeling of dissatisfaction within him; it was the overwhelming-ness of it all, an indissimilable feeling that so much was wrong with the world coupled with the invisibility of a path that clearly helped anything. Life in the big city became existential paralysis; at some point everything just stopped being fun.

Throughout his life there had more often than not been the stabilizing factor of a girlfriend. He generally attracted optimistic types, beautiful and understanding women with

personality to spare. Usually brunettes. They saw avenues of hope where he saw bleakness, involved themselves with people and events, lived good and proper lives and believed they were helping to work towards a better world. He wanted nothing more than to share this with them, to live an involved and passionate life, or go live in some obscure sunny corner of the world, content with just himself. But his feelings of insignificance and incompetence in the face of such vague, overwhelming and insurmountable odds gave him a sinking feeling in his stomach that got the best of him each time.

The Saint Mary's University Campus was quite pretty. The sun shone down on the old stone buildings and lush green grass and for a second, Trevor felt as if he'd been transported to a rural university town in upstate New York. He thought how nice it would be to live in one of the houses across the street and teach at the university. He would teach something obscure and meaningless, abstract but concrete, like real estate or communications. He would settle down with a wife and build a family, eat meatloaf on Thursday, schedule hump night on Friday. As he ran, a whiff of barbecued meat drifted up his nose from behind one of the houses and he felt a sudden pang of jealousy towards the man that meat was destined for, a man who lived, he was quite sure, the exact life that he had just imagined. It occurred to Trevor in that same moment that he hadn't the faintest idea of what a communications degree entailed: the broadness of the label baffled him and he cracked a wide, genuine smile.

He passed through the Gorsebrook parking lot at the end of Robie, springing high off a rock as he cut East on Tower Road. As he rounded the corner, he saw what appeared to be a mirror image approaching him: a twenty-something year old boy, goofy tracksuit, wayfarer sunglasses, bushy beard. As he passed, the boy gave an enthusiastic wave and flashed Trevor a smile so familiar it struck at his core. For a moment he paused to watch the young man, growing smaller and springing high off the ground with every step. Continuing, Trevor turned and came to a small bridge above the train tracks, from which you could observe the harbour and the shipyard. He stopped running again; he had started shaking uncontrollably with that common feeling of elation that often struck him at random. He grasped the iron railing. There was much beauty in the world, this much he conceded. His encounter with his bearded double, not to mention his current vantage point, reminded him of this, of the indescribable beauty of shared moments that pass between people. There had been a moment when the sunlight had been just right and Trevor had seen through the dark lenses of the other boy's glasses, and in that instant he had glimpsed an intelligence and sadness that could only be covered up by the random irony of jogging in the guise of a homeless track-star.

There was a distinct feeling one got from running, a rare feeling of being a good and decent person. Running -- Trevor felt -- was something that good and decent people did. Inhabiting the existence of an unemployed, dissatisfied twenty-something filled with endless feelings of guilt and anxiety welling up from an unknown source was one that demanded constant escape. Imbibing drugs and alcohol made Trevor feel evil, like he shouldn't be allowed to be around children. With the exception of proper literature, there existed no other forms of escape that made Trevor feel decent. Comic books, video games and movies were mostly neutral, they merely passed the time. But Running - now there was an escape you could feel good about. Trevor thrived on the smiles and waves he received from cute girls and middle-aged moms and dads as they ran by; it made him think 'Now here! Here is one thing I'm doing that no one, self included, can criticize me for.' It was a strange form of salvation. And indeed, he had recognized in the face of his double a complicatedness, an ambivalent sensation that he felt within himself and inspired him to run.

As he stood, shaking on the bridge, he perceived the motion of the cranes, the splitting of the train tracks and the pink streaks that appear in the maritime sky in the evening. It occurred to him that these moments of experience, of beauty and harmony, individual or shared, these moments that flew from some frantic corner of his mind out into the ether, were all that he valued, all that he found any worth in. And yet there was no measure, no verification, no way in which he could properly convey the meaning of these moments: he could only assume and hope that other people felt them as well. "Of course they do!" he cried, for he had seen it written on the face of the other runner, but he would never see him again! A wave of despair swept over him. He watched in awe as the cranes carefully swung their cargo bins from the China shipping company back and forth, placing them in meticulous piles. He tried to conceive of all the shipyards in the world swinging their metal cargo boxes around and failed; he didn't make it past Boston. 'Crane operator,' he thought, 'that's a job I could get used to!' Sometimes he wanted nothing more than to be a blue collar, working class hero. The discomfort of the cold, drying sweat on the back of his neck brought him back to self-awareness. A crow glided gracefully beside him and perched on a wire that hung above the bridge and he resumed his run.

He remembered the day he had decided to leave Toronto: it had been a sweltering day in May, the first heat wave of the summer. He'd slept at a friend's place off of Queen West. In the morning, he stepped out into the hot summer soup and boarded the streetcar in a hung-over stupor, sweating from the heat and the hangover. The fact that the car was entirely full didn't help. There was an old man behind him on the diagonal who was going on and on about the state of banking, "Banking in the fifties, now that was a different time, they didn't have you in the computer, you would go and they'd use their real voices and they'd write it on the cheque and now with the computer we've lost our voices, just numbers and who's to say the population has the money to afford the numbers in the computers. Yes, it was a bookstore I was looking for around here at that time, and I couldn't find it, but the fifties, now the fifties were different times, there was a self then, a sense of self, and then we became psychological, all the writers and their psychology, they became psychological." As the old man spoke, Trevor turned and realized that the person seated next to the old man was wearing headphones. The man was speaking to no one in particular and garnering a good deal of nervous attention from the passengers around him. Trevor looked directly at him; his skin was smooth and oily; it looked like it was made of marble that had been chipped away at over the years – wrinkles had eroded his features. His silver hair was swept elegantly to the side, and as their eyes met, the pupils in the old man's soft, pale blue eyes dilated and he grew excited. Trevor turned away quickly, but listened carefully. "Now Dostoevsky!" He continued "Dostoevsky was the psychological writer of his time, before the psychological, aha! Before we'd withdrawn into ourselves, *there* was a man who saw it happening! Aha!" This comment struck Trevor like a blow to the head. He held his stomach, struggling not to vomit. As the car approached Yonge Street, Trevor forced himself to his feet and spun to catch one last glimpse of the man: his pale blue eyes were there to meet his and there was no mistaking it -- he had been speaking directly to Trevor and as he saw that he had, for a brief moment, found an attentive listener, he sputtered with excitement. His eyes pleaded with Trevor as if to say "Don't go, don't give up, we can fight this thing out!" For an instant, Trevor considered staying in the car with the man and conversing with him. He looked upon the man with an infinite sense of longing and compassion before turning and walking out the folding doors. When out, he nearly fell over, steadied himself on a concrete post, and then threw up all over the intersection of Queen and Yonge at eleven-thirteen on a Tuesday morning. There was no hope in the city.

Trevor jogged comfortably to the bottom of Tower Road, passing through the gates of the park. The park provided a feeling of sanctuary: it was the high point of the South end run. As he ran happily into the park, he contemplated the smallness of Halifax, the inescapable feeling of a tight-knit community. It's true that he had grown to hate city life in Toronto, but at the same time, that feeling of anonymity amongst the masses, although disturbing, seemed appropriate in the age of modernity, post-modernity, pre-apocalypse, whatever it was. In encountering the same faces on a daily basis, Trevor felt like there was less coincidence to life, less spontaneity; people in Halifax still seemed surprised to run into each other, but they shouldn't. Haligonians were mistaken insofar as they thought that they lived in a city -- they didn't.

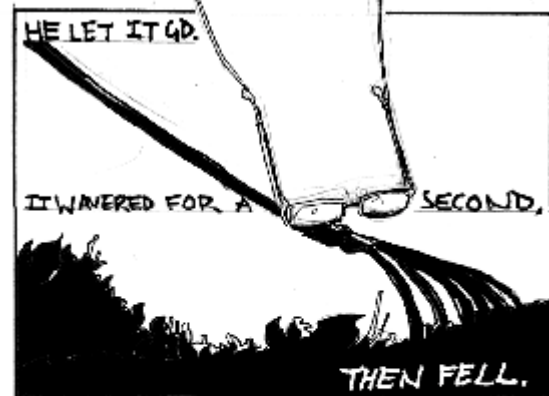
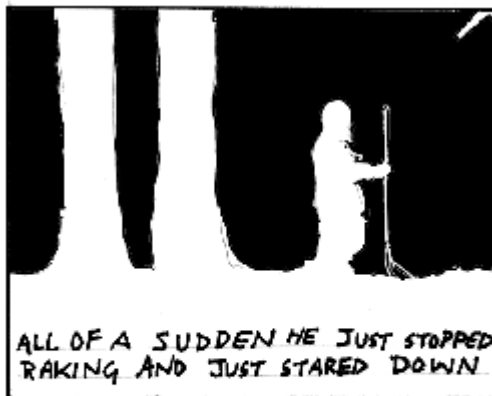
He broke off the main path, heading left down Prince of Wales road, coming closer to the water. Across the harbour, in Dartmouth, a torch burned brightly in the sky. It was the oil refinery, burning fossil fuels, wispy black smoke trickled out into the atmosphere. It was a hot evening, and Trevor was suddenly attuned to the searing heat that permeated his body, the sweat that ran down his face and neck, stinging his eyes and soaking through his shirt. He was reminded of why he ran: to feel like an animal, to be aware of his body, a vehicle, taking it for a run to get the joints and pistons firing, creaking, challenging his lungs and liver after polluted them. In the winter, the awareness of the body took on a whole new meaning. In frozen Point Pleasant Park, his nipples would harden as the friction from fabric of his t-shirt drew blood and his cock would shrivel and harden into a sore sorry icicle as the wind whipped it painfully. Running in the winter was downright beastly.

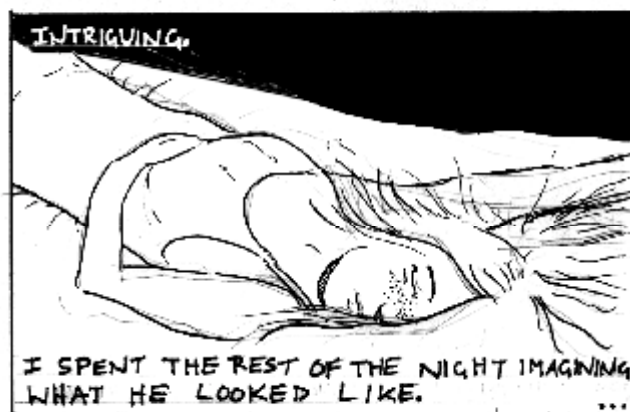
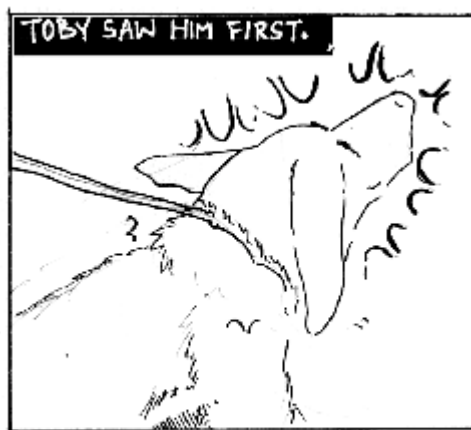
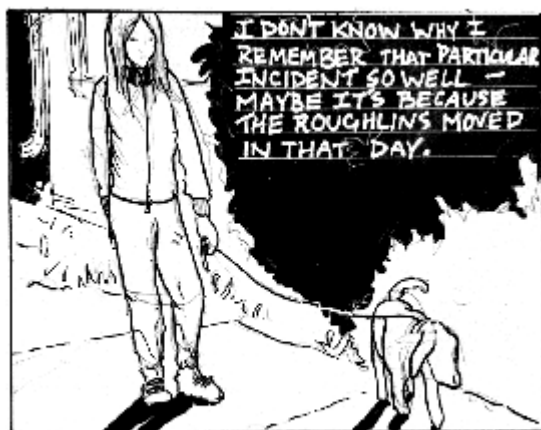
He had reached the path that ran along the water now, along the ocean that stretched out forever. In some way the ocean always reminded Trevor of how tiny and insubstantial humans really were, how they were just parasites climbing all over each other on the surface of a massive beast whose mercy they lived at, but whose mercy was waning. He wondered how he would feel if the fragile mercy of the Earth were to truly wane, and whether he would be ready to die. He answered his own question, 'no.... but nothing would ever have been enough.' He wondered what, if anything, he wanted to accomplish; he felt truthfully, harrowingly, that the answer was nothing.

He reached the Southwestern point and leaned over on the decorative cannon, breathing heavily and cursing. He had not intended for this run to become a cynical meditation on his life, but it had inevitably ended up that way. He looked down at the water lapping up against the garbage-strewn rocks. The wind picked up coming out of the South, Trevor noticed that the low hanging clouds were suddenly rushing towards him. He turned and ran, scared. The lack of trees in the park came to his attention: they had all been uprooted or knocked over by a hurricane a few years back. He turned again: up in the sky there was an endless trail of birds flying inland; it was a terrifying vision. The wind whistled and he heard a low rumble. The clouds above streaked faster. On the horizon he saw an endless wall of water, stretching upwards, merging with the sky. He was fearful, he was too young, he was alone, he was confused, he was ignorant. He searched his surroundings frantically with his eyes for a life boat, an inflatable raft, something, anything! Through the brush and broken trees he made out the outline of a boy in a bright blue tracksuit, wearing sunglasses; though the sunlight wasn't perfect, he was able to see that the boy was staring back. His bearded runner! He must have doubled back and come into the park from the Young Street entrance. Seeing this compatriot, Trevor took a deep breath. He wasn't alone, he was someone else, he was swimming with the whales, he was nothing, never had been. They broke from their locked gaze and he turned towards the ocean's wrath as it roared into shore. He didn't even have to think about it; he knew it was what he'd always wanted.

PEGBOARD

No. 1





Getting up: The writing on the wall in Halifax

Graffiti thrives on the coast. I don't wonder that there is some strange affinity between the watery part of the world and words which are painted—and painted over—on flat edges, walls and moving things of all kinds. Halifax has its own rich history of kids getting up since at least the early nineties. The trouble is figuring out what sort of thing a history of graffiti might be given its commonly ephemeral nature. It is one thing to talk about Chile, Cop94, and the cats that were doing it even before the HRA (Halifax Writers Association), but what do we say about what may have come before this? What do we even say about more established artists which have become recorded by a name that few recognize and even fewer can identify as someone in the flesh? Or is this not to the point at all—isn't it obvious that graffiti is not about the artist, whom we almost never know, but rather the work itself?

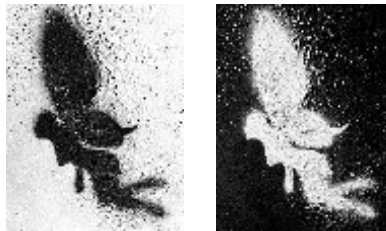
I should pause to say that my own experience with graffiti has been largely channeled through Brighton and Halifax, the two coasts of the Atlantic which I have lived on. Also, I admit that graffiti has come to me primarily as an element of hip-hop, nurtured in New York with the advent of the breakbeat. Most of the graffiti we think of today by and large finds its birthplace here. Of course, what we call graffiti has origins far before this and before the American constitution at that, and there are many permutations of the art form which would undoubtedly deny affiliations with hip-hop culture. But let's set this aside and avoid getting tangled in overly tedious definitions. We know what graffiti is. We see it everyday.

Certainly it is easy to recognize. After all, graffiti is about getting up. When people talk about the first writers in New York, you always hear the name TAKI 183, and often not Julio 204, even though TAKI admits that he was originally inspired by the latter. So why do we hear his name when he acknowledges not being the absolute first? Because TAKI 183 was going all city before kids even knew what that was; Julio 204 mainly stuck to his own neighborhood. Yet going all city is, in essence, just taking the original idea a step further—it's about getting noticed. From simplistic tags in straight letters to wildstyle burners that showcase individual style, the driving purpose was contained in this initial seed.

The bright colours we tend to associate with graffiti have always tried to stand out. Jungle green, icy grape, and other revered Krylon cans were venerated for a reason. The colours come together with intricate style that is hardly meant to be subtle; it's meant to capture one's attention, to arrest our regular activity, to bring a certain pause. Words of all kinds are meant to do this to us in our daily life (although with varying success), advertisements and billboards being only one example. Graffiti, however, brings more questions with it and is apt to stand out from the web of product placement humming in the background. If it doesn't, one would want to say it has, in a sense, failed.

So what are these words doing here? Where are they from? How did they get here? Of all the elements in hip hop, the art of the aerosol can is by far the most mysterious. This is partly due to the tentative nature of trust given by circles of street artists who violate property laws as a matter of course. But moreover, with the dawn of wildstyle and more complex techniques, the writing on the wall has largely become esoteric and relatively indecipherable to all but the true heads. This is not entirely unwelcome. Skeme's words, "this is for us," has echoed throughout the subculture in a time when getting up is harder than ever; wider access to information about the best places to paint, increased surveillance, and active law enforcement cracking down on toys and kings alike have led to a that many more precautions for experienced writers.

That fact is, what distinguishes graffiti from other art forms most significantly is that graffiti is where it shouldn't be, and makes its home in that environment. There is the age-old argument between people who perceive street art as vandalism and those who see it as expression. Generally speaking, although strong sides are taken, people can sometimes find themselves on both sides of the debate, with something reminiscent of the way we tend to speak of free speech. Sometimes it's ugly—but what does this say? Sometimes its intended to beautify in the most literal sense as seems to be the case with the "Fairies of Spryfield," which were stencilled around poles and fire hydrants last summer. Of course, some would want to say that the issue is not aesthetic at all, but rather relates to the simple fact that it is not the writer's property to begin with. Graffiti is not only an affront to their ownership, but by extension, one would think, brings to light the somewhat troubled ground where Locke found property itself.



There is a definite political edge to graffiti in its essence, which draws much of its power from anonymity. This can be seen, for example, in early satirical caricatures of politicians from the Roman Empire. I am clearly not neutral in the matter, although there are few polemical concerns that I am trying to advance here. All I will say is that insofar as graffiti is moved into controlled environments—which albeit may be positive in and of itself—one cannot help but feel something has been lost in the transfer. Graffiti is alive, and part of its intrigue consists in its nocturnal habits, and cosmopolitan stomping grounds.

The writing on the wall is much more than creative expression, something beautiful or ugly, or a mere political gesture. What we are talking about here is a subculture that is very much alive, which is to say *in flux* and changing. There is nothing static about it. A piece can go up and come down in a week with few people noticing. Unlike art preserved in museums and

restoration projects all over the world, this art dies and usually after quite a short life. There are exceptions, of course, but the thought is not so much if and when a piece dies, but that it is put out there acknowledging its ephemeral status.

This is why a history of graffiti seems so odd, even with all the remarkable talent in Halifax that has been preserved within the culture itself. Long after they have left their mark, one hears about Thesis, Fatso, Lope4, and Uber. Most of the most impressive graffiti since I have been around has been done by Sectr, Slug, Skunk, Deza and Cabin. The newest writer I've seen and been impressed by is Aestir, who sticks with a simple but subtle style that true writers can appreciate. But for all these artists, only certain pieces will survive as long as the names do.

And this is the strange tension. What is graffiti's strange fixation with names? In one sense our intuition is that graffiti is largely anonymous, and that's part of the charm. But in another sense, it's exactly the opposite. What sort of narcissistic art form takes simply the artist's name and attempts to develop a personal style with the letters? Yet these aren't real names at all; why are they painting with a name that has only a vague referent (if it can be read at all)? It's hard to say, but even if graffiti is only for the heads, it seems to communicate, above all the elements of style, above respect and affiliation, that the writer was *there*. They were there getting up. This tries to name something that is far more deep-rooted, despite what may change.

Almanac

I used to love like a gardener –
A wise old thing with heavy-lidded
Sparkling eyes, wrinkled (seasoned, ripened)
But sturdy. Wearing gardening gloves
Inside of doors. Thrusting small seeds into
Moist soil, dark and deep; creating tiny

Underground caves in which to bury them,
Those soft little beating hearts.
An implicit subterranean grid.
The prospect of evenly spaced greens.
Room for roots, for
 burgeoning.

I had confidence that my green thumbs, my
Cultivation, and careful, careful tending
Of your dormant land would yield corpulent
Courgettes, plump tomatoes, empathy;
 Love (maybe, inevitably).
Seedlings of hope coming to fruition.

A gardener has an understanding of the
Future in a way that nobody, nobody else does.
They squint their eyes into the sun, press their
Palms into the earth, and predict the future based
On patterns of sunlight and
Pattering rains.

An early frost, unforeseen, dooms the fall harvest.



a forest fairy tale

A long-distance relationship ends

I check the weather forecast, happy to know
it is raining where you are.

Strange Adventures!

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