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Likely Stories and other sides

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Arts

by

Glenna Jennings

Committee in Charge:

Professor Lesley Stern, Chair
Professor Steve Fagin
Professor Ruben Ortiz-Torres
Professor Anna Joy Springer
Professor Phel Steinmetz

2010

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Chair

University of California, San Diego
2010

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Likely Stories and other sides

by

Glenna Jennings

Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts

University of California, San Diego, 2010

Professor Lesley Stern, Chair

Likely Stories and other sides is a collection of kinetic photographic light boxes and a work of ficto-critical writings that reflect and examine the border town of Jacumba, located near San Diego, California.

Likely Stories and other sides

holes, photos, thermal waters and a history of Jacumba

by Glenna Jennings

“Our geographical knowledge, and even our commonest knowledge of the position of places, would be of no aid to us if we could not, by reference to the sides of our bodies, assign to regions the things so ordered and the whole system of mutually relative positions”

--Immanuel Kant, 1768

“We’ve gotta get out of this place, If it’s the last thing we ever do”

--The Animals, 1965

I.

This place is made of sides -- made to take them, to build and break them. The sides rise up from rocky lowlands, gurgle up through a liquid belly of earth long in heat, bend themselves to the dust in burnt out shells of once-lived space. The lived-in sides are put this way and that, made pink and beige and almost-beige and, never having been forced to believe in hierarchies or chunks of meaning called *eras*, these sides hold their own against the blue horizon and the brown wall that divides this place into two further chunks of meaning, each called *country*.

This is a place of 4 churches, one bar, one hotel, one library, a post office, an elementary school and a community center. It is a place with a liquor store that sells one turkey lacer and every important American condiment. The store is a side that holds its back against the sun, which sets some 70 miles due west over the beaches of Tijuana. When Ancient Bodies came to this territory to draw the first sides, they said “Mud!” and

lay down in thick mineral soups. When later bodies came on wagons with guns and horses they left blood and dogwood trees on the landscape and built what is now an empty and historical stone house. They left room for 400 varieties of birds and a dried up man-made lake bed which used to hold Bass and Blue Gill and other abundance. They made space for postal routes and family units and recreation and horse wranglers and drug peddlers and then dissected all this room into rough, thick plots of property known as ‘private.’

Signs, the flattest sides available, dominate the interior of this place. The interior is a strip of structured meanings along an historic 2-lane highway. The first sign is green and metal and not much bigger than a bread box, if you like guessing games. It says: *Welcome to Jacumba – an unincorporated community of San Diego County – Population 550*. This sign is a typically American marking that packages peoples together into tiny pixels of a bigger product called *nation*. The other sign is a monument, a side that cuts Jacumba out of the doughy stuff of generalized populations. It says: *Jacumba Hot Springs Spa – LODGING – Restaurant – MINERAL POOLS*. This spa, which is not necessarily a “spa” by definition of the International SPA Association, faces east and west to look both the rising and setting suns in the mouth. Beyond the spa the sideless sides rise up, flat patches of undeveloped and overgrown land un-writing the laws and lessons of all those planted signs.

In this place, 20th century roads and walls both fracture and facilitate. Here we are in the hotel fire of 1983, running into warm night in our underwear, accepting the conciliatory arms of strangers. From our San Diego city planning office in 1965, we draw

a line from our seats to the great Imperial Valley, a highway that will slowly turn a small town's thriving arteries to clogged veins. In 1923, we wait behind Clark Gable in the diving board line at a now charred and deceased Hotel. In 1990, we do some lines of locally-bought coke in our room before soaking in the new hotel's Jacuzzi. A blow job emanates from the adjacent sauna. We pay \$20 each in 1980 and get 3 home-cooked meals and a quiet evening of chess and backgammon in a hotel that offers hydrotherapy and no alcohol. We are men in 1940, stumbling out to cars after a night of gambling and carousing in Jacumba's saloon. We drive drunk 24 miles southwest back to the Army Barracks in Campo. In 1994 we are a team of national guardsmen building a very big fence. We are also residents of the adjacent Mexican town of Jacume and we have just lost our dishwashing jobs. In 1972, we are divided – some driving 45 miles east to work in El Centro, others heading 65 miles west to San Diego jobs. Some of us are waiting for our place's renaissance, others are happy to be left alone with the wind and the sunsets. As members of the Jacumba Improvement Association, we are proud that there are only 3 houses for sale in the entire town. 38 years later, we buy a Carne Asada plate at the community fair outside the small pink county-run library while 1,000 bodies that have migrated down here from Burning Man set up camp on the other side of town. We win raffle prizes of 2 tickets for the Museum of Photographic Arts in Balboa Park and dinner at the Viejas Casino. We walk on a dusty road, past the empty baseball field, out to the very big fence. A white and green SUV with tinted windows asks us "*You from around here?*" We see ourselves in the mirrored aviators of the inquisitor's face, small and framed by long sides both blue and brown and we try not to answer. Back at the spa, we are a family of four, enjoying high desert air and quiet sulfur splashes so far away from

East Los Angeles. A hawk flies by. The chain link fence squeaks. We are hungry for signature Spa Burgers. We decide to stay another day.

At the Chaldean's convenience store, the turkey lacer is now gone, snatched up well before this year's Thanksgiving. This year is 2009 and I am now the self-appointed and temporary keeper of this place, its artist-in-residence, the outsider who is going to cull what I can of it, smash it into finer grains of word-meanings and project its images far over its fixed horizons. I should let you know now that I have never been very good at judging distances or sizes, but that I can generally guess the time of day within a 10-minute range of accuracy, no matter in what zone my body is being. I also admit to a mild itch of mistrust in the future and an inability to leave the past where it belongs. I fall in love with Place fiercely and too often. My first word was *continent*. I never fall back out of love, I just keep expanding the map and building new roads to more willing lovers. I cheat, but I am always loyal deep in my Memory.

As the years pass, I admit to a fierce nostalgia for certain lost holidays and vacations and bank accounts. I have no relationship to my hair or finger nails except by knowing where they have been in space and time. All of my body parts started out in a place like Jacumba, 30 miles northwest, among the simple but sometimes uppity people of Alpine with their horses and mortgages. I admit this, too: a small town can make a kid feel very, very big – a feeling that experiences its own inversion as youth wears off. In keeping with the creative importance of an inferiority experience, I was picked last for PE teams. I fought my way to the bottom of the top of the American Youth Soccer League. Later, surrounded by boys and meth-amphetamines and pompoms, I lost interest. At that time, Jacumba had no organized sports and the baseball field was mainly empty and nothing has changed. Almost having once been an athlete, I will always want to wear

a uniform and march in a Grand Parade, even if taught early on to despise all things arranged in hierarchical slabs formerly known as *Fascist States* or *Communist Countries*. It will take me a long time to draw out the similarities between these faraway places and the loosely organized lives of American small town bodies, but I will always believe that there are connections, in deactivated or hidden circuits, among all real or imagined ways of life. I suppose we call these *myths* and they get lodged in our own certainties despite the knowing pleas of logic and even Q-tips can't help get them out. Eventually, I will find Tito's former pilgrims taking the cure in Jacumba's sulfur waters. I will meet a woman in Jacumba's restaurant who beat me up for being a cheerleader in the 80s. I will continue to price flights online that I can't afford to take. Everything I am about to tell you is going to be true.

I first came to the Hotel and Spa wanting to take a picture. I had forgotten my camera so I remembered this instead: slants of late November light cutting through the cold asphalt of a 2-lane town, an abandoned gas station, the smell of rotten eggs blaring from turquoise pools of sulfur, the wet nose of a big dog named Sheeba, 2 white pills, a steak dinner and a 90-minute massage. I remember being so relaxed I lit a second cigarette with one already burning in the ashtray. That was outside on a stone bench in the cool of autumn, almost alone in dark night save the glow of my MacBook's face. I have thousands or maybe millions of other images of Jacumba that I will never have time to remember, so I have substituted these with what might be called *stories*. Quite often, these stories are photographs, because every time after the first I come with a camera.

Riding into town with that MacBook, a coat and a bathing suit, I did not know *then* what I know *now*: this place has been under attack for years. It is besieged by small bodies that reproduce at the rate of 1 million per day and descend on the town's eyeballs,

never making it back to their original arugula swamps on the nearby family farm. The gnats sacrifice themselves daily for the greater nuisance, shoving bodies back inside their sides, emptying dirt and asphalt roads, uniting an entire community in an act of complaint. The gesture of complaint is a wave, generally from right to left over the face – a defensive salute against what the act of growing organic can do to ordinary folk who live nearby. All the folks need is a merry band of ladybugs to eat up the gnats. That merry band would cost about \$50,000. A third of Jacumba receives food stamps, about a half is retired and on social security. What everyone else does is a matter of opinion or none of our business. The state of California has just cut funding to about half of all backcountry public projects. Still, the elementary school was able to install 8 new ceiling fans to keep the gnats away. No further improvements are planned, except for a 2-billion dollar renewable energy field cheerfully called the Sunrise Powerlink. Like many fanciful legends, that one involves windmills. Back to the gnats: *just keep smoking and they won't bother you*, they tell me. This is not my town and I do as I am told.

Thanks to the gnats, my lungs are old and angry when I finally return from life lived in Jacumba. My hair is brittle from daily soaks in the mineral concoction, but my skin is vibrant and sloughed. I am 8 pounds lighter from a stomach flu that I hid from my quasi-friend the hotel owner so as not to be a nuisance. I am in love with 2 people in 2 different places (each called *country*). I listen to Jesus and the Merry Chain over and over and over and think about them. I have tan lines and I now fear crowds. I am leaving town at 95 miles per hour past the Golden Acorn Casino when the California Highway Patrol gives me a ticket for 85 in a 65. Revenge has never been my thing, but I do hold grudges. I have left behind a set of broken guitar strings, 6 uneaten Activia yogurts, a flip flop, an empty bottle of Vicodin, a blood stain, \$20 for Lee the maid who cleaned my room, and a

lot of skin. I am as resolved to never change the world as I am determined to *be* it; which is to say I want to squeeze the world as hard as I can until *something* squirts out, but my strength is waning. I know deep down that there can be no change, static or otherwise, without healthy doses of contradiction and passion. I am also convinced that information lives in matter, deep in the stems of plastic plants and the wet organs of people and no theories are going to change my conviction.

Los Angeles is burning to the north as I head west, out of the backcountry. To the south, drug wars ensue, vacations end, bodies set off to maneuver past a big fence. They wear knitted booties I will later find in the crevasses of moon rocks and in the clumps of chaparral around Jacumba's outskirts. Grandmothers and mothers and wives whom the bodies leave behind have made these coverings, which allow feet to moonwalk along dusty paths, avoiding earth-imbedded sensors meant to summon other bodies that will send the bootied-bodies back to the other side. But north and south are just invisible borders now - my line of spatial orientation being east to west. I only think this because memory tells me so. In truth, this is a deceptively winding road and a Global Positioning System could set me straight about this fact. I both mistrust these devices and badly want one, if only to feel better connected to points further out in the universe around which sides converge and hint at a world large enough to swallow me and my 2003 Pontiac Vibe, which is caked in course high desert dust and has "Love You" etched on the rear window. Without looking at the clock, I guess the time to be about 3:08pm – give or take 10 minutes.

I've got to get out of this place for a while, but I will take it with me in small plastic squares of binary code and post its people and places on Facebook, which is both a space and a place whose less threatening sides don't require the full force of my body

for effective navigation. I will click through these photos a thousand times over – bearded faces, burnt down buildings, dazzling sunsets, dancing women, slobbering dog heads, low rocky landscapes, too-green fields, kitsch-filled interiors, crisp skies suspended above an abandoned railroad track, heads suspended above the whirlpool’s horizon, a very big fence – each photographic file its own private place – familiar, comforting, part of a “*whole system of mutually relative positions.*” My friends will write comments: “What are you getting up to *out there?*” They will *like* certain photos and ironically *tag* other people’s faces and body parts with the names of our friends who have never been to Jacumba. We will laugh and wonder, either together or separately in front of our backlit screens. They will say, “It sure is pretty *out there.*” They will wonder, “How do people make a living *out there?*” They will ask, “What the hell is going on *out there?*”

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Imagine this:

A young Chinaman camps in the middle of the California desert. He is highly educated and expatriated and he sleeps in his car. It is almost 1960, and his vehicle is not yet a predator, but a provider of thin insulation between a young man’s foreign body and the universe at large. The young man is here to contend with the planet– to assess and reconfigure the existing system of invisible lines and curves that rise up from the cracked desert floor and extend throughout the dry, hot air he breathes, pushing space around in the sky and his car around on a map.

His next destination is Jacumba, where his colleagues at Berkeley say he can get a good massage. Though there is not yet a yoga practice or a concern with humanistic geography in the small spa town, there is gas and a grilled cheese sandwich for less than 2 dollars. There is an ample early-American porch where he can sit with his maps and

text books and continue to decipher the multiple symbols that compose various modalities that translate as “desert” – a space still teeming with movement and myths about bandits and mescaline and lost things like gold and native ritual.

He is not sure how far he is from Jacumba at this moment, but he knows that this distance is nothing more or less than the amount of energy it will take his body and his car to get there. Meanwhile, the universe at large is growing meaner and fatter and more full of promise, waiting to be pierced and gutted and then made good again. He believes in *good* and its relationship to geography, a concept he considers as the cold leather interior of his Chevrolet cramps his butt and the Earth’s sun collapses into America’s horizon. At some moment later in the night, he will sleep-slide off his thin pillow onto a chilly doorknob. The sunrise will reveal a tiny new bruise on his left temple - an imperfect circle, a central unit, a point on a map indicating the relative location of minor pain in space and time, a topographical subjective realm, a destination, home, *his* body.

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“*When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place*” Yi-Fu Tuan will later write. He will also note that “*the emotional repertoire of a clam is very restricted compared to that of a puppy.*” He will develop theories and give lectures and write books that bind sensation and emotion to place and vice versa. He will place bodies – whether those of clams or puppies or people – in the center of this humanistic geography -- not because man is meant to establish dominion over clams and puppies, but because human bodies think, move, feel, map and make claims with greater purpose and intention than clams or even computers. Because human bodies pause in space, take up residence in its organic offerings and cull sustenance from its objects, humans are the

creators of Place. They make Place because they move, but mainly because they stop moving.

Since this project is a conversation about a Place and about Stopping there, we could talk concepts and enact some well-spun variations on social, urban, public, utopic, dystopic, heterotopic, chronotopic, palimpsestic, gridded, or various forms of reconfigured or abstractly conceived Space. We can also ruminate on Territory vs. Nation and/or Place vs. Site and/or Local vs. Global. But I don't want to stop too long at these signposts, these pairings, these well and oft-explored binaries – at least not directly through acts of naming called *Definitions*. Still, I suspect that even if I don't call these couples out by their names, you will still see them in the stories that follow– copulating or quarreling in the corners of this small town, rippling the surfaces of otherwise smooth descriptions, poking through the cracks of misremembered maps and tearing through the handspun histories of Jacumba's inhabitants.

We could also get at the small town as Place with an expose of sorts – one that hones in on Place to explode myths and uncover facts and tell dirty secrets -- leaving Place fully intact but naked, panting, both proud and ashamed in one paragraph, known in the right way through the wrong words or vice versa. I could also serve the subtleties and ever-morphing nature of the mini-polis by means of an interventional project – a series of actions that penetrate Place, playing with its signifiers, trotting through its landscapes, fixing and filling its infrastructural problems with flowers and artworks and cleverly wrought tangents that both de-contextualize and exalt small-town ways. Though these acts of exposing and gesturing do interest me, the simple interventional act of living at the Jacumba Hotel and Spa on and off for a over a year has served as the basis for all that follows. That said, I am far from the first outsider to see 'artistic potential' in Jacumba's

eclectic displays of character. The town's "newcomers" – Kurt and Nora -- bought several acres of land in 2000 on the northwest side of town and turned them into a New Age site of congregation and investigation called *The Institute of Perception*. During their two yearly festivals, they place laminated signs on sticks and drive them into the ground throughout the property. The signs read, "*Leave No Trace.*"

But the simple interventional act of living *does* leave traces. Despite Kurt and Nora's heavy clean-up job, you can still read the former idiom of *meth lab* etched into the patchy desert landscape. A trip inside the recently boarded up ruins of the town pharmacy reveals rotting mattresses, abandoned socks and an array of white supremacist graffiti that wasn't there last fall. On a walk across the baseball field and out to the border fence you can find empty shotgun shells, punctured soccer balls, deflated balloons or any number of recreational vessels drained of potency. This is not to say that Jacumba is a dump – these objects don't read as litter, but rather as renegade possessions that have escaped the burden of being owned. They meld with the landscape, creating a language that - carefully deciphered - can reveal the secrets of the Everyday Jacumban.

For this place and its secrets to have meaning and validity to a broader audience, they must be translated. So just for you and me, I have taken Place, moved it through conversations and theories of Space, and converted it back into Place. Through the act of typing and deleting and revising, I invoke a rather overlooked geographic area, recording it all the while on celluloid and in binary code. This invocation provides moments that have been both *made* and *taken* from the Jacumban landscape of thing/people combinations, using the tired but always willing tools of symbol and representation to hack and harvest and explore just how concoctions of Labor, Leisure and the Everyday solidify Space into Place. There is no need to highlight the failures and other creative

properties inherent within the act of translation. Fragments of Jacumba, ripped off during careless walks, long conversations and thoughtful looks, are here congealed in a soup of words and images, becoming *something else* entirely. In this case, that *something else* is a book and an art exhibition. But there will be shards of Jacumba to spare beyond these pages and walls, and I invite you to translate freely.

In the spirit of a Translator's Note, I would like to remind us that Jacumba is not a City, nor is it officially a Town, but I will often refer to it as such, because cities and towns hold Place in place for us. These words – abstract or real – represented or imagined – exist in various forms in our memories and our daily lives. So, in a convenient way, to talk about *someplace* is to talk about *everyplace* because everything is somewhere and in place, according to Aristotle and probably to my mother as well. To see Jacumba as Northern Mexico or Southern Canada helps to destabilize the kind of space that distant civic bodies have set aside to define this town -- that space being the official *Unincorporated Community*. As such, Jacumba serves as the outskirts of Cairo as easily as it morphs into the northern edges of Bogotá. Free-floating above other communities that have set bodies, Jacumba contains the outskirts of Nairobi and the lower more temperate regions of Greenland; it is what lies far in the distance as you exit a Beijing Subway or land on the island of Tasmania. It is in the periphery when you look due southeast of a Kiev street corner; it is under the surface of every conversation you have ever had about town and community.

When Googled, Jacumba becomes mapped lines and words in primary colors. This map is accompanied by 6 squarely-gridded pretty little landscapes and surrounded by advertisements. By clicking on the map or the pictures you can come to know something about Jacumba by seeing its representation in a moderately interactive

bounded space that provides *distances* and *population* and the chance to learn about a teeth-whitening product. When someone later brings up Jacumba, you might say, “*I know that place*” whether your body has been there or not, because you instinctively know how to judge relative distance and mediate location through symbol. However, Yi-Fun Tuan may argue that what you know is *space* –an area that “*can be marked off and defended against intruders.*” Places, by contrast “*are centers of felt value where biological needs, such as those for food, water, rest and procreation, are satisfied.*” Within *this* world of Jacumba, familiarity is won from carnal rather than cerebral knowledge – the runes of experience are written on the body. In order for Space to become Place, it must exist among organic entities that eat, shit, fuck and leave – all the while making marks in Space so that it can become Place.

Now that the conversation has turned to the Body, we can jump into gender and discuss how being female has born down upon my agency and authority in Jacumba. We can participate in nostalgia for the days when most academic projects had to contain the word “body” in order to gain entrance to the important realm of identity politics and we can celebrate and lament the gift of becoming Posthuman this contemporary cyborg/body has suffered. We could discuss the queering of unincorporated communities – whether metaphorical or literal. Rather than mapping rivers and roads, we could visualize and shape the number of illegal immigrants that move daily or weekly into this territory, creating maps of contact zones and containment and contamination. We could hash out the way labor pours in and out of Jacumba, with sets of resident-hands leaving town for desk jobs and sets of outsider-hands riding in to work at the arugula field every day. We could also bring up the gnats again – setting the stage for battles among biological bodies

of all shapes, sizes and species, bodies whose informational residue is greater than the plight of their temporary wetwear.

However the body is written into the text (or vice versa) it cannot be functionally removed from Place. Space and Place dance in a remixed mash-up, not only mutually dependent, but also ingrown and inbred like stubborn hairs. In **The Practice of Everyday Life**, Michel DeCerteau reminds us of the preconditions of scientific space, which demands that its objects of study be transferred into its own realm. As such, “*movable elements*” like deflated soccer balls and Indian arrowheads and dead gnats make their way into dumps and museums and laboratories, while “*descriptive schemas*” produce portable maps and voting statistics and environmental impact reports. His warning is attached to language – specifically to the proverb – a spoken entity which fails to carry into writing or translation the objective marks of daily use. “*Something essential is at work in this everyday historicity,*” he says, “[*something*] which cannot be dissociated from the existence of the subjects who are the agents and authors of conjunctural operations.”

“*Conjunctural Operations.*” Whatever DeCerteau means with this phrase, such maneuvers abound in Jacumba, creating a body *with* organs – organs that can be removed and laid out in acts of metaphorical augury, but which atrophy when taken to the lab. Any book or exhibition can be viewed as a language lab – a place where “*conjunctural operations*” are translated and displayed to make new meanings on pages and walls during half-drunk conversations or moments of quiet repose. But the language lab has an advantage over the science lab – it is willing to embrace sensation and affect and can give “*movable elements*” and “*descriptive schema*” jolts of life. Kathleen Stewart would define these jolts as “*Ordinary Affects*” which “*work not as ‘meanings’ per se, but rather*

in the way that they pick up meanings and texture as they move through bodies, dreams, dramas and social worldings of all kinds.” For Stewart, these affects can take the form of still lifes that “*punctuate*” Ordinary Life. Her prose paints dogs and kids sleeping in back seats, rock collections on dashboards, love letters in boxes, hip couples in car ads, the scars a coal miner has acquired by stubbing out cigarettes on his hand. In Jacumba, this punctuation might be a dusty turkey lacer on a display peg, swinging slightly to the whir of a ceiling fan or a dirty black Labrador splashing in an antique bathtub at sunset while you check out her owner’s ass. It could be an old Serbian lady’s blue swimming cap laid wetly on a jacuzzi’s edge, or the flicker of a Charger’s game on TV as a drunken couple dances to Vicente Fernandez. Whatever these Affects are, they can trigger “*odd moments of spacing out when a malaise comes over you*” and become “*the fragments of experience that pull at ordinary existence but rarely come fully into view.*”

Books and pictures are also spaces of memory, but memory exists as much in the body as it does in the archive. When space feels fully familiar to us, becomes place, and is then abandoned, it takes up residence in memory. We need to *stay* in Space for it to become Place, but in order for our *stay* to linger and matter after our body leaves Place, we have to *remember*. So in addition to being *familiar*, Place needs to be *remembered* in order to pass from the abstract/cosmic ocean of space into its own specific, local pond of ‘real’ experience. To become more metonymic – “*home is where the heart is*” – though you may not read the cadence or tone or possible irony in my use of this proverb, and you certainly can’t see the bruises and bumps in its worn out body, it serves my purpose. We come to recognize Place like we come to accept the bumps and lumps and holes of our own bodies. Places are bodies because you can love or revile them - because you can remember them the way you remember a lover. Unlike lovers, they never really leave you

but *you* can always leave *them*. Generally, you decide when and if you want to come back. My life is a love affair with Place(s) and this project, in all of its manifestations, is perhaps nothing more than an affair. A traveler, like some monsters, is a body with more than one heart. But I am not so naïve and warm-hearted as to slip into barrels of unsexy nostalgia here. Jacumba's heart is more like a liver, and its liver is the Hotel and Spa – a place where toxicities congregate to be cleansed and there is always a risk of cirrhosis. Its promise is *Sanitas Per Aquam*, health by water, hydrotherapy. The well worn word SPA was made from a *backronym*, as the founders of the first *thermae* most likely did not bother with mashing words into monosyllabic fragments. From the Roman bathhouse to the bourgeois clinics of Vichy, France, the spa has always been a place where bodies seek purification, eternal youth and/or rehabilitation. Strangely, the process is often laborious.

The inventor of cornflakes offers an understanding of how spas were first translated into the American idiom. John Harvey Kellogg was a Seventh Day Adventist, a vegetarian and a proponent of sexual abstinence who ran a turn of the century sanitarium in Battle Creek Michigan. His alternative to European cures was a concoction of repression and release:

Kellogg made sure that the bowel of each and every patient was plied with water, from above and below. His favorite device was an enema machine that could rapidly instill several gallons of water in a series of enemas. Every water enema was followed by a pint of yogurt — half was eaten, the other half was administered by enema, “thus planting the protective germs where they are most needed and may render most effective service.” The yogurt served to replace the intestinal flora of the bowel, creating what Kellogg claimed was a squeaky-clean intestine.

An unrecognizable Anthony Hopkins plays the late physician and inventor in the

1994 comedy *Road to Wellville*, based on the book by T.C. Boyle. He is a plump but supposedly healthy undersexed man who has adopted 13 children to adapt his healthy lifestyle – Yes, adopting to adapt! Director Alan Parker makes Wellville a visual tableau of baroque rooms and devices that allude to medieval torture mechanisms -- whirlpool cages and electrical foot prisons rise fully formed from the age of industrialization – new symbiotic beasts genetically engineered to fill the lack within imperfect host bodies. In one scene, an unsuspecting Russian tourist is electrocuted by a foot bath. The American Matthew Broderick is horrified. The Brit John Neville is politely amused. We are left wondering how fluffy robes and overpriced lotions evolved from this ritual.

Though Jacumba Hotel and Spa was founded, like Battle Creek, as a health resort, it never boasted elaborate cures or devices. Though for a stint in the late 50s and early 60s, it did stop serving alcohol -- imposing a “quiet time” of day and offering gin rummy and reading rooms. Before that, it lived up to the grandeur of other east coast and European spas by hosting famous guests – Louise Brooks, Carey Grant, and Tellulah Bankhead, who actually lived down the road for a while. Like Battle Creek, it was a place for the wealthy, who mostly came from their plantations in the Imperial Valley to escape the heat, because Jacumba can be as much as 15 degrees cooler in the summer. I have cited Highway 8 as a cause of Jacumba’s demise – but blame should also be spared for Air Conditioning, which started polluting the universe at large around 1926, allowing the booming agriculturalists of El Centro to stay at home. Like the semi-fictive Wellville, Jacumba can claim a long line of actors, directors, inventors, writers, speculators, con men and men of God – also adding Cowboys and Indians. With their varying ethical intentions, these characters hoped to create the proper infrastructure (post office, rail station, airport, tourism, health clinic, drug trade) that would render this former

Kumeyaay Indian ground fit for survival in the coming age of information. Whatever their various plans or schemes, the town, like all cities and communities whether incorporated or not, remains in a constant conversation with those who choose to pass through it. And travelers, whether on business or pleasure, need hotels.

In January of 2008 I brought Merve Kayan and her husband Jeff to the Jacumba Hotel. She is a filmmaker from Turkey. We are image makers. We are artists. We are sound people. We travel. We stayed in room 119 - the one nearest a fountain made out of decaying cherubs. Merve filmed the slants of late afternoon light that cross county-paved historic Highway 80 around 5pm. The highway fits rural stereotypes, remaining empty for stretches of time long enough to entice you to stand right in the middle of it. You do this to violate universal mandates that prohibit frivolous or dangerous standing. You do this to flirt with the idea that bodies *can* and sometimes *do* get run over by cars.

Up until I was about 8 years old, my parents and a caravan of other white and brown folk used to road trip 130 miles south of Jacumba to San Felipe, Mexico every year. We braved much more desolate roads in a series of Chevy pick-ups and Winnebagos. Often the women would drive while the men got plastered on cans of Negro Modelo or Tecate and played with their CB radios. I have a Polaroid, (culled from my mom's large Polaroid archive) of a little Me laying on the chest of my Mexican Godfather Rudy Martinez in the middle of one such road. We are playing dead. The yellow line stretches into infinity while the barren desert that skirts Mexico's Highway 22 takes shape around a big body and a little body. It is supposed to be funny. It is supposed to address the same liberating low-risk involved in standing or filming with your feet directly on the yellow strip in front of the Jacumba Hotel and Spa. It is supposed to say, "*We are Free!*"

From our position in the middle of the road, the sides rise up all around us. Kant reminded us that these sides are only known by our own relationship to the sides of our bodies – that the whole universe lies out there, growing meaner and fatter and more full of promise. Today I read some pages in which Slavoj Žižek reminded me that two events mark the beginning and the end of the last decade of the 20th century: the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the financial meltdown of 2008. He then reminds us that Marx had reminded him that Hegel left something important out of his theory of history repeating itself: *“Hegel remarks somewhere that all great events and characters of world history occur, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.”*

Talking about place eventually leads to placing place into the scheme of world history. This, in turn, leads to comparing place to other places and asking the question *Why? Why should we look at Jacumba during a time of financial meltdown and trot through its landscapes while bigger and better trickle-down traces of late global capitalism exist elsewhere?* This book does not answer the *Why* question, so if you are seeking such deep and definitive prose, you are free to stop reading now. Or: you can keep reading and use these scenes and stories to fashion your own answer. After all, Jacumba was great and fat with capitalism’s promises in the past. Its tragedy involved a highway and the invention of controllable cold air. Its farce has arguably been a big wall. The place may rise again, as we often discuss over cold beer or morning tea. Jacumba, at any rate, survives, through Grand Marches and Global Meltdowns alike.

Though I have proposed that Jacumba is the outskirts of Nairobi and the lower dregs of Manitoba, this is not a comparative project. I have not brought specimens back from the space of Jacumba’s body for isolated examinations. But, still, here they are. As

we pack up our equipment and get out of the middle of the road, Merve is in the process of finishing up a film about the village of Erikli in her native Turkey – a chimeric coastal place that rises and falls with the weather, taking on hundreds of Turks and a few Gypsies during tourist season. Families from nearby cities own summer homes there. They form caravans like those of my childhood Mexican memories and make their way through less-empty landscapes, buying pieces of plaster kitsch (Snow Whites, Regal Lions, Boticelli Venuses) on the outskirts of town before settling into their equivalent of rural bliss for the summer months. I had originally told Merve that Jacumba was an eclectic Place surviving largely on tourism and Merve decided to investigate with me towards the ends of an artistic collaboration – not to place our places side by side, but to keep up a conversation because we share a certain sensibility as women who have existed between countries, revere Agnes Varda films and are never satisfied with linear story telling or naked facts. But Jacumba is not a town that exists on tourism. I just had no other way of explaining or understanding it 15 months ago, so I had taken the easy way out while writing a string of rejected grant proposals. In fact, besides that elusive and whimsical quality so often defined as ‘character,’ Jacumba has very little in common with Erikli. Jacumba has nearly nothing to sell.

In the months between my first January visit with Merve and her 16mm camera (a creature of a device held together by carefully placed duct tape) and my month long August-September stay at the Spa, I let go of the need to compare Jacumba to anywhere else -- at least in the manner of some ethnographic study that uses binary relations to marry disparate but related modes of existence for the end of satisfying the intellectual needs of a grant-giving art audience. There is no need for forced product placement when

you get past the skin and start playing with the guts of Place. Comparisons just happen as our bodies and all the information they contain are forced to deal with more and more sides.

So I have laid out here, for you, an array of intentions and anti-intentions, aiming to arouse rather than confuse. The sides I build with words and pictures are constructed to puncture spaces beyond the exotic and the quaint. They hope to produce *something* more *telling* than the limited archived histories, online hotel reviews and rampant small town gossip that currently attempt to stabilize the errant aspects of ‘Jacumba as (floating) signifier’.

On the night of our January 2008 trip, chef Fernando has prepared a special of spaghetti and meatballs. I want it badly. Merve reminds me that I had warned against ordering any type of pasta dish here. This is different, I say, this is ‘the special’ and the special is always good. Merve and Jeff don’t last long after dinner. They go back to 119 and watch a black and white movie about cowboy dwarves in a small Mexican village. When I return hours later this is what they are watching: tiny heads in cowboy hats fumbling with ropes and cattle and tall skinny land owners. I have been in the bar, fumbling with some tourists and Alfred (the manager) and Ron (the cigar-smoking sheriff). We have been talking politics and they have been bagging on Obama. I scold Ron for being black and not supporting a black candidate, but no one ever changes his mind here, so I start dancing. A guy from San Diego is vacationing with his drunk girlfriend. This guy and his drunk girlfriend are always here, but they are always different bodies with different names. She is playing every Abba song available on the high-tech digital juke box. When I try to sit down, she grabs me by the bicep. *Hard*. When I wake up in the morning, groggy and not ready to go, the sunrise reveals a tiny bruise - an

imperfect circle, a central unit, a point on a map indicating the relative location of minor pain in space and time, a topographical subjective realm, a destination, home, *my* body.

II. Sanitas Per Aquam

1.

Let's go inside first. The door creaks a little and the heavy air stinks like rotten eggs. I have never been miniaturized and stuck inside an armpit, but I am sure it is not as bad as it sounds. I am sure it can be a lot like a womb, a sauna or a hot tub. I am sure it can be a lot like Home.

2.

After a year of visiting these waters, I decide to make them a home. I decide to live in the Jacumba Hotel and Spa for something like a month. Alfred quickly reminds me that I am *staying* in Jacumba and not *living* in Jacumba and this gives us something to argue about during my first night on the communal patio: the navigable gulf between Stays and Lives.

It's a particularly sticky-dry San Diego summer. I've arrived to the high desert with a brand new transmission in my lemon of a car and a copy of Mike Davis' *Under the Perfect Sun* in my portable library, which I carry around in several paper Trader Joe's bags. They put me in room 103, right next to Alfred's living quarters, and right away it's clear I shouldn't be having sex. My two queen-sized beds and their headboards jut up against his wall, which transmits the sounds of Lifetime movies and old Westerns at all hours. My two queens and their floral bedspreads are clumsy and loud. Like all hotel beds, they talk and know their histories all too well. I'm so happy to be out here I don't

even think to ask for another room. But if I had, perhaps all of these words would just have to go down differently.

I've sworn off drinking during my first week of spa-cure-taking because I am only here to work and heal and lie low and 'stay out of trouble' and emerge a new and better person who is fully aware of the pitfalls residing between Place and Space. But the waitress brings me a Corona out of habit and I change my mind. Back in middle school, this same woman had tried to beat me up. We had only discovered our formal rivalry 3 months ago, while drinking Coronas at the bar with the Usual Suspects – Ronnie the Sheriff, Dennis the "mayor" and Alfred the manager. All of us were biding time before the right moment to walk down Railroad Street (which is more like a dirt path than either a road or a street) and lend our bodies to the yearly ritual of Telemagica. Kurt and Nora created this festival 7 years ago to pledge allegiance to the "*next cultural evolution*" and use their large plot of land to help visitor bodies and resident bodies separate from the "*lukewarm virus*" that is destroying the world - a world which is going to end anyway in 2012.

If you go to Telemagica to see the fire eaters and walk in silence to the white pyramid (an 18-foot structure made out of corrugated steel from Home Depot), Kurt and Nora and the *Institute of Perception* would like you to know this about yourself and your body and the beating of moth wings:

Luminescence is about igniting the personal energy body with the emanations at large. You are the creative bridge between the Known world and the Unknown. Your manifested sounds ignite Telemagica, and in turn, TeleMagica becomes an energy mass that unites with the Greater Universal Intention. You have worked for many centuries to arrive at the creative artistry that forms worlds. Your actions are like the Luminescent Moth that beats its glowing wings in the dark

*of the night to create a wave of power that sparks the new day. We are the future. Thank you all,
We look forward to seeing you at the Ignition Point White Pyramid.*

And you need to know this about art:

ART and its inspiration does not dissolve or stagnate. ART only gets brighter with the Patina of Time. Let us shine on as humans who have been granted the ultimate challenge of dreaming ART with our beautiful planet.

Hundreds of bodies come from all over the world to Jacumba to join with this Castaneda-esque mass of energy and ignite at the pyramid. Local bodies are welcome too, and in the 6th year of Magic, we were a small and slightly intoxicated cohort setting out from the spa. We would not blend much with the visitors from Japan, Hungary, Ukraine and Australia that had pitched tents all along the dry wash that used to feed Jacumba's now defunct lake (nor could we be sure those alien visitors existed). Rather, we would enter the abandoned train and make crayon drawings inspired by the umpteen *Art Forums* that Nora had carefully laid out on the former passenger tables. We would stop by the caravans peopled with former Deadheads and barter for jewels carried in from other deserts. We would let a full moon and some Tiki torches light our paths around rocky lowlands, watching out for rattlesnakes. We would pay for some North African vegan wraps and sit by the fire with hidden flasks because alcohol does not figure in much with telemagical future-making.

I am not a local but I am not yet Telemagical either and I throw in my lot with the spa crew. Since Michelle (the waitress) and I both grew up in Alpine, I am backcountry enough. We are on our 3rd round of Coronas when we exchange last names, sparking a mutual recollection. As happens with memories, we each have our own. Both involve

Amanda Mulligan, an 8th grade badass whose threats arrived the old-fashioned way, on carefully folded pieces of paper with prudent little triangles sticking out.

I am going to kick your ass, Mulligan wrote. *I am going to kill you*, she promised.

Nowadays these threats arrive in a much less personal way. They pop up on kids' websites and Facebook pages and cell phone screens and there is no need to master the ancient paper folds and creases. The month I move into the hotel, a Florida boy's parents have filed suit after the kid received this post: "*We are going to pound your head in with an ice-pick.*" The new virtual threats now turn virgins into sluts and straight boys into fags and prompt more postings and websites demanding the government redefine the first amendment in order to protect young bodies. Nowadays, your aggressors have no faces and dwell in space instead of place. Nowadays, fear is a non-regulated commodity, traversing boundaries much more tenuous than the confines of boxy suburban middle schools.

But Mulligan had a face. It was long and horse-like and marked up with Wet and Wild black eyeliner. It was topped off by inches of upright bangs lacquered in Aquanet. I lived in fear of that face for months, changing out of my cheerleading uniform after 7th period so as not to die in a skirt. I didn't want to be found splayed out in the dirt lot across from my bus stop with uniform-blue underwear ripped open and gold nylon around my neck. If I was going to die, I would do so in flannel and denim.

The Halloween carnival somehow put an end to Amanda Mulligan and the death threats. Once a year the former Alpine Creek Shopping Center used to host its own telemagical event, with a haunted house and a mechanical bull and a dunk tank and dozens of bodies

masquerading as ghouls and slutty French maids competing for seran-wrapped gold fish and free video game tokens (though the only games available were one stand-up Gallactica and a sit down Ms. Pac Man).

Cheerleader bodies were too advanced for juvenile transformations, so my cohort took on the skewed landscape in Esprit jeans and blue mascara and bowl cuts and a pack of Djarms that we intended to smoke behind the supermarket, which was not really a place for cohorts of cheerleaders. It belonged to the Mulligan gang, who governed the patch of dumpsters and rotting meat in leather jackets and miles of plastic bracelets and piles of gnarly big hair.

One of the cheerleaders had successfully fished a fifth of Vodka, which helped us brave the dark corners of carnivalized Alpine with little fear. We didn't notice the team of mean shadows etched into the concrete night until our sides were circling one another in feigned ignorance, wondering who would reestablish proper social order behind the supermarket.

Michelle remembers it like this: somebody had stolen Amanda's purse. She decided that body was mine and after the behind-the-supermarket situation broke off she sent her minion Michelle to track me down. Michelle found me smoking more Djarms outside the Haunted House and demanded the purse back. I didn't have it. She grabbed me by my flannel collar and hurled me up against a plastic ghost. I still didn't have that purse. She raised her fist to my face: *You sure about that Cunt?* Still, no purse. She held me against that ghost until some other shadow showed up and whispered in her ear. *You got lucky this time Bitch!* With that announcement, I was free to move about the carnival, shaken and knowing my place (according to her).

I remember it this way: There was a carnival and I was jealous because Darcy Drover looked hot in her French maid outfit and was making out with Brett Jacobs. I was so pissed off that I took two sips of cheap Vodka and the world caught fire and fused into an amalgam of cackling witches, dark corners, sweet clove cigarettes and exotic plastic blurs of orange and black.

I don't remember a purse or a fist in my face, but I recall that by mid-November Amanda Mulligan had disappeared. Some say she got locked up in Juvy for shoplifting or drinking in public or killing someone. Michelle Walter took over as the distributor of death threats but I had somehow been left off the list. I remember graduating from 8th grade and leaving the mountain town for the valley of El Cajon. I remember leaving the valley of El Cajon for the beaches of a privileged little beach town on the California coast where I belonged to a new cohort of international bodies called a *sorority*. I got some degrees and left the coast for the cities of another continent and belonged to other bodies in different ways. I recall that fear and worry never dissipated, but they started taking on different forms that involved reaching potentials and surviving on teachers' salaries and not dying alone in a nursing home or being infected by any growing, lukewarm cultural viruses.

Eventually, I ended up on a bar stool at *Jacumba Hotel and Spa* with Michelle Walter. By that time Michelle was a woman with a motorcycle and a trailer on the DeAnza Nudist Colony compound a few miles from Jacumba. She was happy and good-natured if a little crazy. She was convinced that some former co-workers from El Cajon were stalking her, tracking through the desert to rattle her doors and tap on her windows. Ronnie the Sheriff was helping her with the predators, coming out to patrol the scene in

his green and white SUV, finding raccoons and some footprints but no threatening bodies. Somehow, Michelle had managed to make her own very real haunted house in the backcountry, where there are no supermarkets or teenage gangs and instead only Greater Universal Intentions and dozens of species of medium-sized animals and very few decent paying waitressing jobs.

When Michelle found out who I *really* was she had already been serving me Coronas for 6 months. All the outsider bodies that I had brought to the spa town liked her best. She was wiry and attractive and full of stories about boys and bikes. Like me, she was childless and single and facing her Universal Fears alone. Like me, she had tried to go far and ended up near.

The Usual Suspects hoped badly for a cat fight that night. There had been a moment (by the newly installed juke box) when Michelle's features had turned ghoulish and her age showed clearly and all her wiry cheerfulness had disappeared.

You're Glenna JENNINGS? Glenna fucking JENNINGS?

In that moment, I was a skinny cheerleader on a barstool fearing I no longer fit in. In that moment, I truly believed a 40-year-old woman was about to beat the shit out of me.

After Telemagica #6, I didn't come back to the spa for a few months. Ronnie and the boys told Michelle that she had scared me off and they had lost a customer. But I had never been a customer. I was applying for citizenship to the unincorporated community through rituals involving shared anecdotes and arguments and long nights by the fire and I had always planned to come back.

On my first night in 103 Michelle suggests we play a game. She'll call the Sheriff and tell him to get his ass down to the bar because that *bitch* is back and she doesn't trust her body around my body. I sit on a bar stool as she recites this lie over the bar's landline. It doesn't work. We start laughing. Ronnie comes anyway and we all sit in the fireless heat of an August night arguing about Obama and slamming the border patrol.

The stars above Jacumba are sharp with stories on my first night as a solo guest in the hotel. Like an ancient Light Brite screen from the 70s, each glowing syllable carefully pokes through an inky void of sky making a clown, a dog, a sea duck, a dead cheerleader. The gnats are small and devious and all up in our nostrils and eyelashes. Somewhere, a luminescent moth is beating her wings and our manifested sounds join her in the great chorus of energies that is preparing for the world's demise. When one small point of light cascades towards the desert floor I take up its cause - I have worked for many centuries to be right here, a traveler and a resident and a guest, stopping briefly in place and time to take in sulfur waters at a working class spa, stopping briefly in time and space to *belong*.

3.

The first western spas were crude and rustic like their prehistoric ancestors and then opulent and unbounded and rich with minerals and semen. The wealthy Republican Roman body was meant to bathe every 9th day, but as opulence increased with time so did regular washings and the cities filled with rich, wet bodies circulating like pulsating orbs through the 300 bathhouses of Rome. These bodies and their penises had slaves in tow to de-robe them and oil them and scrub them and scrape them with bent sticks and send them glistening into the polis, which also glistened.

With time and no little trouble vaginas joined the mass of pulsating orbs, which were really just so many miles of skin with pores that opened and closed upon contact with airs and waters of varying temperatures. These vaginas, which were essential inconveniences at home, had separate rooms and slaves and scraping rites inside the architecture of hydrotherapy. That architecture was and is collectively called *thermae* and the Romans spread it in all geographic directions, temporarily altering the smells of several continents and islands. With time and no little trouble poorer, dirtier, smellier orbs of skin were permitted to enter the waters. Their sojourns into the less-ornate spaces of the spa compound were often sponsored by wealthy politicians vying for offices within democracy's womb. The poor bodies were not allowed to stay long.

As greed and self-serving group-think increased, stinky bodies eventually descended on squeaky-clean Rome and de-sanctified its waters and architectures and the stench of unbathed humanness retook the continent. The *thermae* shriveled and grew thick as pubes with vines and vermin and soon a single God rose up and the penises that served him declared it unholy to bathe the body more than twice per year. This single God mainly wanted to stop the spread of syphilis, a distracting and deadly disease passed through holes and openings found on penises and vaginas.

The body stayed inside this dark age for some time, all crinkled and cracked and caked in undiscovered microbes and single cell organisms. Some say when vaginas (like England's Fairy Queen's) rose back to temporary states of power, you could smell their yeasty humidity from up to 20 ft away. Some say you could smell just about everybody.

4.

Inside Jacumba's Jacuzzi room you will smell only sulfur and old lady perfume and rarely the faintest trace of spilt beer that must have been recently smuggled in because drinking alcohol in Jacuzzis is recommended by neither the International Spa nor the American Medical Associations.

We are joined today by corpulent Romanian bathers who let flatulence prevail under the hum of whirling water. Their farts, though hidden by polka-dot bathing suits, do their small part in the geo-thermal uprising. You can sit down on a wooden bench beaded with geo-residual sweat or you can get in (bathing suits are unfortunately required during regular hours) Once submerged, you can cuddle up to the precipitating metal pole designed for safety with many affordances and few constraints. You can let your butt slide over the slimy goose-bumped flesh of this poured and painted concrete and kick your legs out a bit. Rest your head on the cool igneous lip serving as the pool's edge. Feel the pulse of the jets work their way in and around all of your body's holes and openings (don't be embarrassed to actively pursue some of those hidden areas). Feel the undulating calm of the unstill water whose revolution is an aggressive balance of cause and effect, a perfect measured reaction of *it to you* – a physical state the Japanese call *Mizu no kokoro* (mind like water), a communion of body and element in a relationship far older than the Jacumba Water Company or its adjacent pump house or the town's ever-changing land rights or the nearby Mexican American border, all of which silently manage the particulars of our revolutionary hot tub experience.

(I will let you know that I am tired and heavy-bored today and I have smuggled in a plastic hotel cup filled with beer. I slept alone in room 103 last night, feeling small and

chilled under my floral bedspread. It was the 7th day of my lonely summer pilgrimage and the 19 other rooms were empty -- except the ones taken by myself, Alfred, Gina and the man who is employed to watch the nearby growing community of registered sex-offenders that have left the polis for the non-judging reclusiveness of desert life. That man gets up every morning to take a run before the heat ascends to 101 degrees. That man disturbs my dreams. That man carries binoculars and drives a station wagon.)

5.

When the European continent had become so stinky that microbes grew vicious and fat and bodies piled up on dirt roads inside and outside new places called *cities*, some lively pre-Enlightened bodies braved the forgotten pube and rat-infested spas and reconnected with the earth's deep womb of warm waters and washed the layers of visible and invisible grit from their miles of skin. They polished the marble and mended the pipes and sanctified spaces both private and public for the treatment of the insides and outsides of bodies. These old Roman spaces were both quaint and wild and full of strange elixirs and vaginas you could buy if you could afford the bumpy carriage ride from Paris. And if you were French the mineral water belonged as much to you as it did to me and rich bodies were treated better but poor bodies weren't untreated.

The belly of the 15th and 16th century French spa was not always smooth and opulent and instead was mud-floored and teeming with corpulent nuns, arthritic clerks, rheumatoid monks, tired horses, infertile wombs and the de-limbed veterans of various continental wars. When not floating in the concupiscent soup of groping fingers and gaping holes, the bodies were bled and purged and sent to imbibe glass after glass of curative water so that liquids flowed freely from earth and human-orifice alike.

Threats of snake infestations and other ungodly myths and conditions prompted the bodies to clean up their acts, and soon spas from *Aix-les-Bains* to *Karlsbad* took the co-ed cure in linen suits and hats. Product designers emerged, providing portable trays that could be harnessed to the body and filled with all your social bathing essentials – a handkerchief, a snuff box, and a drink.

The spas were a favorite topic of the famed French essayist Michel de Montaigne, who traveled 4,000 kilometers on horseback through France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and finally Italy, seeking a curative route to his ailing kidneys and gall bladder. When his travel journals were discovered and eagerly read by such aristocrats as Diderot and Grimm, these nobler minds criticized Montaigne's favoring of machines and irrigation systems and crops over more appropriate cultural topics like churches and monuments and paintings. They disapproved of Montaigne's rants about the gushing forth of fountains and the pleasantly looser company of Italian women. He was obviously more concerned with holes and openings than the more patently philosophical stuff of his more popular published essays.

In spite of all this attention, the essayist never found his cure and some say his gall bladder eventually shut down the rest of his body. After all, the open baths of the early modern period were not medical centers, in spite of all their claims and elixirs and small-town men of medicine. Sick people and doctors were happy coincidences circulating as separate orbs through a landscape of water and mud. Sick people and doctors were biding time while their bodies worked things in and out and waited for accountants.

6.

In Jacumba, the system of body regulation is simple. You can purchase a year's membership for \$500 and come and go as you please. You can become a hotel guest and get in and out of the waters at will. You can sneak in if you know a guest or an owner or can pick a lock or jump a fence. If you are really that sick, you should find someplace else to go.

7.

Jacumba's cool pools are not at all like armpits. They are like warm bellies or pre-natal swimsuits. In the winter, jumping in the chilled sulfur is like getting wedged between frostbitten toes.

The lizard and her husband are taking the cure at the central cool pool today. Their banter is an unwanted wall between my ears and the mouths of two ladies in the pool. The ladies and their floral one-pieces have been hanging onto those smeared-up yellow and blue floating tubes for over an hour. I have a full Pan-San in my stomach (two pancakes, two eggs, two strips of bacon) and I don't want to get in the minerals now (for all of those reasons your mother used to talk about).

The lizard's wet braid bleeds little plops of sulfur onto the hot concrete. She is smoking, as she always does after 14 laps across the pool. Always. The husband doesn't smoke.

"Where did you end up putting them?!" he says to the lizard about some objects, unseen.

"God dammit Liz!"

The lizard says *"humph"* and a trail of smoke see-saws up to the cottonwood trees.

8.

In last night's dream Chepe had an incredible amount of body hair and very long pubes, like a mane – like a horse or a lion head cradling his decent-sized cock. Chepe was my boyfriend in Cali, Colombia. It was kind of serious. When he took off his shoes his nails were long and yellowed and individually encased in tiny plastic vitrines to protect a peeling black polish job. I remember thinking he was beautiful. I remember thinking maybe now this relationship can work out. Maybe now I won't get so constantly annoyed by him. We were somewhere in the sub-saharan in a Laundromat and the flood was on its way.

9.

The lizard's husband says, "*Oh the professor is back.*" I guess I am the professor, and I say "*humph.*"

"*You'll never learn anything from a book,*" he says. "*I taught myself everything I know,*" he follows, "*school!*" he says. "*Humph!*" he says. "*Ha,*" he says.

I am reading Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* for the 2nd or maybe the 5th time. Marco Polo is telling Ghengis Khan that a city is an answer to a question of yours. The conqueror tells the explorer that a city is a question *it asks you* and then forces *you* to answer.

My questions today are more than a few:

- "Did I bring enough Activia Yogurt to last a month?"
- "Is it a sin to leave the air-conditioning blasting at 60-degrees all day?"
- "Why did I forget one of my best sandals. *Just one?*"
- "Is sulfur OK for highlighted hair?"

- “Who all knows I am here?”
- “Is it mean or just too Gonzo-esque to think of that woman as a lizard?”
- “If a city is a question, then what is an unincorporated community?”
- “Will I ever wake up on time to walk through the cool morning and unite with the Greater Universal Intentions that abide within the thick desert energies outside the spa structure – those energies that will help me, an artist, transcend the Patina of Time?”
- “Will I ever wake up *on time*?”

“*What are you reading TODAY?*” asks the self-taught scholar. “*a STORY.*” I tell him. I am picking a hangnail off my thumb and producing a big red bead. I smear it on page 52. Now this book will always be mine, even though I nicked it off my friend’s shelf in LA.

10.

It is important that the pool sparkles blue today, and that this blue is the shade of a Mr. Bubbles bubble bath box from the seventies (I haven’t seen Mr. Bubbles since then, except on an ironic hipster T-shirt, which I bought). Because the pool is made out of water that comes from the belly of the earth, it is allowed to make up its own mind about what color it wants to be on any given day. The water is made, more or less, of this:

- Sodium Chloride 31.1%
- Sodium Sulphate 39.8%
- Sodium Bicarbonate 8.7%
- Calcium Sulphate 17.1%
- Magnesium Chloride 1.2%

- Magnesium Sulphate 2.1%

11.

The lizard and her husband leave now, removing the sound barrier between me and the one-pieces. Now I can hear the syllables more clearly. They are fatter and more robust than Russian. They splash my way in plops and chunks. You can hear Russian in the main pool about every other day, but you can't hear *this* language.

I grab a bruised up flotation device and get in. I kick my legs out and listen. I was right and now I am getting aroused. The language of these ladies has always had an aphrodisiacal effect on my memory, as I knew it fluently 2 or 3 lives ago, before the age of contemporary warfare and battered-up European opinions. Back then, I lived in the hills and brought forth water or coal from the earth. The nearby mountain spa was elegant and used proper china in the dining halls, but coal miners were allowed in the waters on weekends, which was only fair. Of course, I wore a scarf on my head and wasn't allowed to dine inside.

The woman in the purple/blue blotchy one-piece and droopy straw hat is saying something about a daughter and a son named Vladimir. Her Vladimir is in Chicago and he called yesterday. He sounds like a handful in the way certain faraway sons can. The older woman in the Rothko-esque suit and sunglasses mostly says "Da" or "Da da."

12.

On Wikipedia there are 50 shades of blue, which include Air Force, Platinate, Tiffany, Yale and Majorelle, which looks purple to me. You can see them there in an alphabetized grid of color, hypnotizing you through LCD. The page warns you that, "*the*

samples shown above are representative only.” I suppose they just mean representative of blue.

Still, I have never seen the waters of Jacumba issue forth in any of these representative colors. Except for International Klein – that one does look familiar.

13.

Last night more nocturnal water reminded me how my friend Daniela’s old world Sicilian mom used to analyze our dreams every Sunday over the phone from Canada. Back then, our bodies were living in a cardboard-like 13-story structure on the outskirts of Prague. We had no TV or maybe we just couldn’t understand the one we did have. Instead, we had a Cuckoo clock and 3 portable CD players hooked up to the wall through a complicated system of cords and power converters *and* we had weekly dream analysis. Since we were sort of de-territorialized and constantly in lust and lacking proper kitchen utensils, the content of our dreams was as real and useful as anything else. I believed every translated myth Daniela related to me and waited all week for the meanings my faraway guru inserted into the creaky fiber-optics of our newly post-communist city.

It is very important how the dreamer’s dream body confronts the dream’s water body but no metaphor should be that difficult to penetrate and dream-water metaphors are no exception. Clear water means clarity and getting into it means change and abundance and acceptance. Dark water is bad and means that, in some abstract or very literal way, you are fucked – like a drowning cat or Bas Van Adder. *But*, if you get *in* the dark water, you are brave. You are confronting your difficulties. You are saying *Fuck You Adversity!* You

are prepared to rid yourself of lukewarm cultural and personal viruses. You are willing to drown.

14.

I am ready now. My head is 14 inches from that one-piece conversation in the cool pool. My feet are behind me. My hat, too, is floppy

I ask the ladies straight out if they are from (the former) Yugoslavia. The younger one wants to know why I want to know and how I would know and she is blunt but happy. She grins into the interrogation as my body floats within the small world of her dark sunglasses. She has great legs – old-lady-great-legs, which are the best kind -- full of grace and millions of muscle memories and stories you and I can never tell.

Yes, they are from there and they are from Serbia, the same place I was 2 or 6 lives ago. We float around with those tubes between our legs for another hour. Nadezda is the older one in the Rothko suit. She came here from Belgrade with her husband after WWII and doesn't speak much English. Andja is from Knin and she came here in the 60s when most of her hometown was inhabited by ethnic refugee Serbs. You and I may never understand Knin or how someone who is from a place becomes a refugee in that same place, but it doesn't hurt to ask.

Sometimes Andja goes back. Half of Knin is Croatian, the other is Ethnic Serb. Once a year all the bodies forget what they are and work on the reconstruction of an Orthodox church that is somehow non-denominational. Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox Christians bring picnic baskets and tools and set about making a structure that is not about religion or class or race, but about *place* – a small neutral dot on a map otherwise marked up by conflict and forgotten agreements and faraway authority.

They ask me why I care about Serbia and I am forced to admit the truth: I dated 5 or 6 Serbs when I was young and I wanted to marry one or two of them if only to have a 5-day wedding in the woods -- if only to dance on tables and then abandon the fucked over economy and marked-up map, get them visas, come home to California and get them passports.

"I can find you a nice Serb at the Church," says Andja, "and they all have passports."

I have been to St. Georges Serbian Orthodox church in San Diego. It's up on a hill in Clairemont, a place named after a rich man's wife. Its onion tower rises above the bay, small and blue and white, breaking up the litany of track homes and front lawns, teasing them with its much older heritage and quirky out-of-placeness.

I tell them I went to St. George's Fall Festival in 2007 to eat Pljeskavica and Civapcici and dance in a circle. I had been in Belgrade only months before that, dancing in front of the same parliament building where the Serbs had smoked out Milosevic in 2000. All of the bodies in my Belgradian cohort were stoned, but none of them wanted to dance in a circle. There was a James Brown cover band on a stage. It had been paid for by Vlade Divac, who was in town hosting benefits and installing basketball courts in public places throughout the city. I had come to Belgrade on a pilgrimage with my own Vladimir, a long lost lover/friend/refugee I'd met in Prague while living in that 13-storey structure. It had taken me over a decade to stand in front of parliament, dazed and exuberant and holding an empty can of Jelen beer and surrounded by the citizens of my distant past life.

There was no cover band at St. George's church. My friend Tracey and I paid \$5 to get in and \$7 dollars for huge plates of food served in those gingham paper wedges

you can only buy at restaurant supply chains. Even without rides or dunking booths, the place sounded like a Disneyland to me -- syllables of Serbian blending with bland moments of English and the occasional squeals of small children. Tracey and I were without child or spouse and people looked at us funny. We introduced ourselves as Americans with no ethnic ties whatsoever to the Balkans and for a long while I didn't say anything about my long lost Serbian lovers.

St. George's church has a bar. It is mainly for old men, who serve slivovice and rakja for a little more charitable money. The bar's edge is one of those stuffed pleather situations – like the rim of a pool table with its insides coming out. Tracey and I installed ourselves at this edge, where it was no problem for strange, childless women to end up paying nothing for shots of Slivo. During our installation at the bar we met Zarko, Stefan, Mike, Dragan and George. We met Mladan, Zoran, Branko, Dave and Jeff. We also met a few of their wives.

George looks like an older version of Blackie from Emir Kusterica's film *Underground*. The famous (to Serbs) actor Lazar Ristovski was supposed to age 40 years in that film, transforming from young body to old body in what some say is a very long 3 hours. I am sure it has taken George much longer to look as old as he does. Still, he is a man very light on his feet in the macho sense. We had seen him in the fluorescent-bathed recreation room, twittering above the ground in a multi-generational circle dance whose Balkan brass sounds aroused my latent past-life memory. George has that every-which-way hair – a peppered see-saw of situations above a wrinkled territory of nose and smile. He was wearing a black turtleneck and smoking menthol cigarettes from an almost-elegant long plastic filter.

Under the full moon, he told us something about owning a goldmine in the mountains of Serbia and something else about Tito taking it away from him. After inhaling deeply from his elegant plastic bit, he invited us all to go with him and get that goldmine back.

In the following months I would receive many invitations from George. He wanted to take us Greek dancing in North County, where there is a place for that kind of exotic movement. He wanted to take us to a pastry shop that makes almost-authentic Burak and to a church picnic and a bookstore and a belly dance. I am pretty sure he just wanted to hang out, nothing weird, nothing creepy – that he just wanted to twitter lightly above the earth while some American girls looked on.

But this reunion with my real-life Blackie never happened. I lost my phone and he eventually quit calling. Yet this single encounter has carved out a special place for him in my well-tended repertory of Serbian men – a place from which George and his goldmine can be summoned at anytime.

I tell Andja I am ready for her to take me back to St. George's. By now my hands are wilting prunes plump with minerals. The whole pool is shaded over by dogwood branches and our 3 bodies are the early afternoon's last apostrophes, laying claim to this place just for us. As we refuse to stop floating, a geography of *here* and *there* takes unseen form among us, scarred and demarcated by grown-up sons and lovers and lost goldmines and the well-laid plans for a different far off church.

When I am floating here, unbothered by the pains in my knees that come from too much standing on well-worn city streets, pretty much anytime is fine with me. I am ready to go.

15.

That night a Bulgarian cohort showed up in Jacumba to install a ferris wheel. Alfred and Sonja had gone someplace far away and I had to check the friend/guests into room 217 on the 7th floor. We opened the door to bloody sheets, ripe with desert dirt and cum and night sweats and dead gnats and sulfur water was seeping in through the walls and the cool pool was swampy green/purple due to clogged pumps and dead sea gulls cried and barked into the dust-belching oblivion of what had once been a quaint town.

I did not fear the waters. I stepped through rats and tentacles and blood and saved the village. I walked through infected fluids and brought back 6 tubs of ice cream to the guests. I woke up to fat liquid plops on the roof. The first rain of summer 2009 was falling on Jacumba.

16.

Andja asks me *vat kind uv man is dis Vladimir uv mine?*

I tell her he is a bit difficult, with very nice slightly gapped teeth. Everyone loves him. He fixed our broken Cuckoo clock in 1996. He doesn't care about Serbian politics at all. He is an only child and only a child. I am not in love with him anymore, but he's been contacting me on Facebook and wanting to marry me ever since he and his former Czech model broke up earlier this summer. I say that maybe I can love him now, that maybe this time he won't get on my nerves so much. I say that maybe I am ready.

17.

I cannot tell if Napoleon Bonaparte had gapped teeth because he never smiled for us. Both before and after he entered the revolutionary waters the spas began to change. As the little emperor's men built better roads, the quaint and wild *thermae* became more

and more lucrative and newly-purposed Spa Doctors descended on the towns with little black bags and books and ideas on how to better manage the multiplying bodies seeking cures.

While monarchies were being overthrown and heads chopped off and a whole new economic class (composed of its own hierarchical layers) was being born, the spas grew fat with tubs that had re-purposed bottoms and separate areas for penises and vaginas. Signs reading “*Royal Baths*” were replaced by signs reading “*Baths of the People*” and through bureaucratic mismanagement the spas grew thin and the chandeliers broke and the doctors with elixirs moved away – all this despite the inscription over the door of Vichy’s baths that promised to “*strengthen the arms that would destroy tyranny.*”

But spa makers coupled with spa doctors outlasted Old and New regimes and learned that making places for growing pockets of time called *leisure* meant making money. They bought beautiful leather-bound ledgers and employed bodies to count bodies, carefully noting how many showers each body took, where each body lodged itself in the town, and how each body fit into the city economy. Thanks to all this counting, I can tell you that during the first week of July 1820, 31 proprietors and landowners, 7 lawyers, 3 government employees, 1 book merchant, 1 architect, 1 entrepreneur, 1 merchant, 3 priests, 1 count and 1 countess had their pores opened and closed at quaint and wild Aix-les-Bains.

The new 19th century authors of punishment and remedy knew that no cure was worth its minerals without a good measure of pain, so they brought forth devices both efficient and gothic in their demands. The curists plied their insides out with the following regime:

- wake up at 6am
- drink mineral water
- “dispatch quickly and without pretension with the morning toilette” (i.e. take a shit)
- drink more water for an hour
- follow up with baths, rest and “epochs of exercise”

The bodies were almost (but not quite) ready for dominance and normalization, ready to take orders and rid themselves of dangerous microbes through means that underscored rationality, respectability and science. The body/orbs were circulating the outskirts of the clinical age, wet and panting and bloated with the waters of the earth.

18.

Andja and Nadezda want Spa burgers and they abandon me for approx. 1.5 hours. I stick around with Calvino. The lizard and the self-taught scholar return, with more semi-regular curists and they talk about Art.

A white middle-age woman has just taken a watercolor class. A pot-bellied middle-aged man wants to know if she made landscapes. She says no. She says the teacher wanted them to paint only in the abstract manner.

I picture the teacher as an older Latino gentleman, and I wonder what it is like to be him, teaching watercolor to middle-aged, middle-class women. I put him in a category of art teachers who have brief or failed careers that revolve around representing and then decompressing and deconstructing the California Desert. Since I am an artist in the desert I fear this deconstruction and this looming vision of abstract watercolors. I fear making

sense and not making sense. I fear representation and failure. I fear never reaching latent potentials and mostly I fear that photography, too, is dead, and that I've unknowingly spent decades of my life in mourning.

That's a strange genre for watercolor' says the belly man. Later, he also says, *"I had a brother-in-law who used to sell his paintings for, like, a million dollars"* and, *"only the artist really knows what the abstract work is supposed to signify."*

"I don't like Abstract Art," says the self-taught man.

19.

The water that bubbles up through the earth to fill the hot and cool pools of Jacumba is not at all abstract. Obviously, it first fell as rain upon an arid desert. It percolated down through limestone and aquifers to depths between 9,000 and 15,000 ft. Geothermal energy raised its temperature up to 150 degrees and the pressures of the earth raised the water through fissures and faults in the limestone. Heated water is good at holding onto dissolved solids, so warm and hot springs maintain high mineral contents, holding onto useful stuff like calcium, lithium, sulfur and even radium.

Henry La Zare was the first able-bodied visionary to translate the earth's offerings into usable contributions to the town's building and bodies. The San Diego Tribune from August 1st 1979 tells us he "dug a 125 foot well at the eastern edge of town to help capture a peak flow of 2000 gallons a minute. He built a 160,000 gallon reservoir in 1955. He also built and stocked the lake with catfish and bluegill."

The fish are gone now. Though from time to time, Chef Fernando prepares hearty chunks of salmon that Alfred has brought in from somewhere in Chula Vista. Salmon is good at holding onto Zinc, Thiamine, Riboflavin, potassium and mercury.

20.

14 days in there is something wrong. I am puking and shitting and losing pounds, releasing myself back into Jacumba microbe by microbe. So much has happened that I don't want to get into just now. I visit the jacuzzi, cleaned up and sober and wearing a bathing suit that jingles as I walk the 27 steps to the creaking door.

I am almost alone inside. An old man is taking the cure in the day's last puddle of light and I hope that the splayed hands and open mouth and head conked out on the igneous lip don't mean he's dead.

Someone is playing the Eagles on the bar's jukebox. *Some dance to remember, some dance to forget* seeps in through the sliding-glass sound barrier, all steamed up with memory and American culture. The pump is humming along, carrying the waters forth from .5 miles away. I insert myself into the dripping painting of a faraway fishing village, where there is piano music and clinking dishes and sea monsters furrowing in the deep. I exit into the larger frame of Spanish Galleons, where the hairy men's boasting is ancient and thick with testosterone and I don't understand a syllable and the clinking chains of the slaves below deck is deafening. I rise up into the best melting kitsch of all, the 7-foot waterfall painted by J.F. Wells, our own local Kincaid. I work the jets into my tired asshole (don't judge, you have done it too) and listen to the fall of tropical rain, smooth and cadent and stuffed with serenity. I listen until the explorers arrive. They trample the fuchsia flowers and slip on the rocks with slaves in tow and ruin just about every last brush stroke.

The dead man stirs with a deep cough that's obviously full of mucous and I have to get out. It is too noisy in here today.

21.

I meet Lupita in the middle of my stay.

I am still hanging out with Calvino at a cool pool full of bodies. A little girl shivers her way to Lupita, who swaddles her in a towel and I ask if the girl is her daughter. It's hard to say, as Lupita is brown and the little body is much much darker brown and Lupita looks more like a grandma.

Lupita says no, the girl is from foster care and so is the bigger girl swimming in the white shirt. I can tell she swims in a white shirt because she is embarrassed that her budding breasts are still tiny bullets and I used to swim in T-shirt too.

Lupita and I speak in Spanish, maybe so her husband can't understand, maybe to feel like two strangers with secrets, maybe to add to the cacophony of Russian and redneck rampant at the pool today. My Spanish is better than good, but I never fully understand the transaction that brought the little girl to Lupita. All I can tell you is that she showed up with a backpack full of clothes and said they belonged to her real mother. They were hooker clothes, and they fit the 8-year old body and Lupita wanted to burn them. She tells me the mother took the little girl along with her to lure clients on the street and the clothes worked just fine for that. The mother, it seems, is a crack whore.

And now here she is, swimming back and forth on a neon pink floatation tube, never having taken a lesson in her life, gulping and flailing with inexpert enthusiasm and raw skill. The foster dad adores her, but Lupita tells me that he always gets too attached. This means there are many bodies that arrive to Lupita and the Gringo but I decide not to place them into the category of people who foster for benefits. I decide that they are

changing lives for the better and the world is a fine place in spite of hooker moms. The world is a place where a hawk flies over and little girls swim in the earth's bounty and breasts eventually grow.

The couple tells me that the little girl loves to sing and dance and is a regular comedian with her own routine. She uses a stick like a cane in a popular old-lady imitation. She "*sticks her butt out*" and says "*oh my aching legs oh my aching back.*" We ask her to do this in the pool. She grabs her 3-ft. tube, says "*Oh my aching legs Oh my aching back*" and waddles along the shallow-end step.

It seems that foster care has transformed the little body from a meat market lure to a neutralized swimmer/waddler. How did she learn to embody another body not her own? How did she incorporate that old woman into her 4-foot frame? How did she come to possess phantom aches and pains that just may serve as surrogates for pain she herself can't feel? She arrived at this rehearsal with a backpack full of hooker clothes, she arrived at that waddle through a state-funded program.

In the late afternoon Lupita invites me to come eat her cooking in east LA. I can already smell it, overpowering my dysentery and the sulfur caked in my nostrils – a faraway promise offered to my body, future income for an ailing and empty intestine. I can see myself driving out on the 10-East, finding Lupita's home without GPS, walking inside tamale-filled air, *hablando el español con toda la familia*, eating her cooking. I am homesick without a home. I am a body, aching and throbbing for a body who never showed up last night, aching and throbbing for Lupita's food.

Lupita says she feels tense sometimes and has to take off for Tijuana and eat her family's cooking and walk through the bustling avenidas. I say I feel tense, too, and cross borders as a remedy. I say that I feel at home in Mexico because it calms the body, no matter how many disembodied heads show up on the beaches these days. Baja calms the body because as a foreigner or even a Mexican foreigner, you can de-dichotomize yourself, be both what you are and what you are not. You can sit down and eat with people half your age and twice your age and you can eat until you are full. You can get fat or shrink skinny and everyone will let you know which way your body is growing in loud laughs instead of judging whispers. We say this is true or even truer in Tecate. We talk about towels. We talk about cousins. We talk about Home Depot. We plan a trip.

When the little girl wants to get back in the water, almost all of the flotation tubes have been taken up by the lizard and the abstract artist and the gay Russian bear and his neatly balding boy. She needs 3 for her solo swim, so she grabs a bruised neon pink tube out of the trash and the dad says *be careful with that*. At some point, it slips out from under her. She later explains to us the exact series of events – which color had slipped first, how her mouth couldn't close right, how the sulfur stung her nose, how she had started to drown. Her foster sister saved her, pulling the little body to the edge of the pool and hoisting it up by its elbows. The little body had started barfing up more than water and little clumps of little girl insides formed neatly on the lip of the cool pool. She could have died while Lupita and I sat discussing de-dichotomizing ourselves.

All declared and recounted, the little body sits shivering under a Tinkerbell towel, proud and traumatized and narrating nonstop.

Don't worry, it happened to me before. I tell her this because I used to swallow half of the neighbor's pool in backyard swim class atop my little mountain community.

Foster dad says, *Did you hear that Anaya?* He tells me to say it again. *Did you hear that?*

When I say it again she looks me directly in the eyes. *You will swim again,* I say, *It's just a matter of time, you will swim in many pools,* I say.

That day will stay inside her body. When she is older and winning American Idol or finishing a cultural anthropology test or turning tricks she will not know what is tugging at her esophagus, making her feel both triumphant and nearly dead. She will next remember a time when she lived with a Mexican foster mom who took her 300 miles from East LA to a town called Jacumba. She will not know that the only reason she ended up in Jacumba is because the night manager at Live Oak Springs was too drunk to check the state-made family into their less beautiful hotel the night before. She will not remember me. She will not remember the Tinkerbell towel. She will only remember that tug, that death-charged event, that miracle of water expelling itself from her body and she will know that was one of the best moments of her life.

I know this because at some level I am her. We share the same organs and the same relationship to water as an agent that once ended it for our bodies. I know this because water is ubiquitous and deadly and far too wet for organisms without gills. I know this because everyone says that life isn't easy. I know this because I take 2-minute showers and 5-minute baths. I know this because right now, if only right now, I need to *be her.*

I promise to send Lupita the photos and to call her when I am back in LA. Her cell number fell out of *Invisible Cities* and I have been looking for it for about 8 months. One of these days, I will find it. One of these days, I will call.

22.

The night after Tinkerbell exploded on the side of the pool I ride on top of a killer whale through pink Hawaiian waters. My mother rides alongside on a boat captained by a French man with a nice ass and a barge of commercial photographers flank me and Shamu from the south. I am worried about my mother and this well-built Jacques Cousteau. The waters are dark and putrid and we all know what that means.

At our island destination we dress as pink camouflaged soldiers for a recruitment photo. We will send bodies to Iraq or convince them to come back - the ad's intention is not clear. The art director is angry and smoky blue. We are shot from aerial view, laid out on stretchers that foreground the event within the frame. We carry guns and wounds. The upper half of the photograph reveals a landscape bearded with chaparral and dolphin huts. We soldiers sparkle and glow.

The photos win a prize. They are printed as full-bleed foldouts on glossy stock. I am given full credit for the creation of these photos, as in the old days, when art directors took precedence over the mere machinists behind the lens. But I was not the art director, and I feel guilty as I unfold the thousand folds to reveal my glossy centerfold to the happy hour crowd at Jacumba bar. *That's me and that's my mom*, I say. *I told you I was working on a project out here*, I say, *This is award-winning stuff man!*

Alfred rips it up.

23.

By the 1850s the European body has come to know shame and the hydro-punishments turn even further inward. This is the age of the bathtub, so the old mud-basins where snakes slithered are filled in and hundreds of tiny gender-specific bathing closets for individuated bathing are built in and around the old and new architectures. The body moves from vertical roaming to horizontal cure-taking, and each one gets a card and a number and specific medical instructions as to exact temperatures and times. The body can no longer wallow about in minerals with drink and snuff as long as it wants -- it has to stay in or out for durations the doctor deems fit, for as long as it takes the proper secretions and excretions to bubble and seep. Meanwhile, spa owners conduct good capitalism through rigorous competition. Accusations fly, claiming that the other guy's spa "*collects and confines dangerous vapors*" and stinks and allows too much indecent contact between penises and vaginas and is little more than a collection of "*cells of the dead.*"

But all clinicians know that scalding waters are good for gout and arthritis and while miles of skin blister and scabs litter the land bodies just keep getting better. Anuses and Vaginas are particularly convenient portals to interior ills, and special ascending jets of water are built to bring these holes and openings back to life. The woman-hole is especially profitable, as the ladies of both middle and upper bourgeois families are idle readers of hundreds of published spa guides that turn them into family diagnosticians. This diagnostic ability in turn makes them travel agents who can suggest vacations to cure the household ills. They can even avoid tedious conjugal intercourse if the doctor

advises against such bumping around *down there* while suffering certain real or faked conditions.

The woman-holes both bring good business and make good myths because of their inherent weaknesses. Hundreds of case studies attest to the thousands of shut-down uteruses and frozen cervixes that are saved by this or that region's minerals. The woman-holes belong to bodies that live their whole lives as invalids, bleeding and swelling and fainting all over the place. With fewer and fewer bodies being born through the inside chambers of these European invalids, spa vacations offer a great venue in which to work on re-peopling the withering continent. The woman-holes can convalesce far from the compromising world of material production and emerge plumped and resplendent and ready to fulfill their purposes: genetic production and domestic maintenance.

One such profitable and popular hole belongs to a certain Madame V. On top of being boringly rich and barren and afflicted by all kinds of pain and itches down there, her period has stopped due to "*a drive in an open carriage on a cold day.*" A city midwife has covered V.'s vagina with leeches and "*other things she has forgotten*" but still no flow. By the time V. makes it to the spa, she is suffering "*irritability of the bladder, fullness and heat about the pelvis, her cervix pushed forward in a state of prolapsus, hard and sensitive.*" Her doctor knows just what to do and readers of his case study learn that a catheter glides quite easily into Madame's uterus "*to a distance of about six centimeters.*" After following up with "*iodine of iron before meals, a glass of Merlioz water at night, 12 daily baths [and] 18 [vaginal] douches,*" her period returns,

“abundant and satisfactory in color.” Madame V. is sent off to re-people her lands with a satisfactorily *“supple”* cervix and a nice, plump womb.

Penises are far from left out. They also benefit by being rendered newly erectable and the sad plight of the belabored bourgeois male is corrected in vapor chambers that imprison him from the neck down in cedar capsules that reach temperatures of up to 150 degrees. His tired butthole is rejuvenated by Scotch Hoses that inject it with water-needles, penetrating deep into this exhausted cavern and leaving it newly hygienic.

Critical thinkers in the form of artists working as caricaturists read this pain and punishment as testimony to the feeble mind of the status-seeking bourgeoisie. The wealthy bodies feel even more shame when they see cartoons depicting them inside their paid-for prisons. But the Bourgeoisie is neither feeble nor ignorant in its forward-thinking march. It finds a way out of pain into pleasure by constructing elegant casinos and holding lavish dinner parties. By 1860, the requirement of registering with a spa doctor before being pleasured or punished is lifted and the practice of Old-Regime pleasure seeking is renewed. Even Victor Hugo, whose asshole is tired from so much writing, says that *“under the pretext of bathing in warm water and drinking sulfur, I have every day a new, unexpected and marvelous spectacle.”* One of these spectacles is the tubercular hooker-mom Fantine, whose character helps to people the literary landscape with more sick, sacrificing woman-holes.

When fun is brought back into the spaces of the spa, there will be no smelly poor people to interfere with lovers' walks through the newly laid parks. The mayor of Aix-les-

Bain declares that the “*delicate people of the easy classes, and of course all children, find it upsetting to share the same water with disreputable persons*” and funds both public and private help erect separate hospitals where lower-class bodies can be shut up and monitored with heavy locks and strict cure schedules. Later, Foucault can partly build his ideas about medical authority on these looming edifices of the poor, because the bourgeois spa body is now dancing in newly-decorated ballrooms and watching *Antigone* in newly-built theaters and not listening too strictly to well-paid doctors. The new bourgeois body is circulating throughout Europe, taking full advantage of the entertaining spectacles accompanying all of the vigorous hydrotherapy and sanitation programs taking root from Bath to Baden-Baden and beyond.

The French spa towns are no longer just spa towns but *villes-de-eaux* and an entire pulsating throng of orbs flashes and yearns within an economic system that once again makes room for everyone, including the servants who arrive on working vacations paid for by the monied bodies they are there to serve. The fully operative villages now rhythm more than just rest – they become schools of etiquette for bodies seeking inclusion in the somewhat pliable upper classes and they issue bragging rights to working-class members lucky enough to penetrate this relatively new fabric of organized leisure, these epochs of relatively idle time being called *vacation* by some and *holiday* by others.

As the doctors recede, signs are written and posted in their place to help the petit bourgeoisie control itself in the midst of so much *Haute politesse*. Unknowing bodies and mouths are reminded that it is “*forbidden to obstruct paths in any way or to call or to*

sing in the direction of the interior.” The proliferating uneducated groping hands are “*forbidden to pick flowers or to pull branches down from trees*” in order to protect the no-longer-wild exterior. But many social climbers are lost forever in the abyss of foreign foods and table instruments, a space where any petit body looking for advantageous friends or marriage partners has to hold its own through the skill of mimicry.

The signs on one account are clear, the age of travel has arrived, complicating the matrix of time, space and leisure currently composing the spa experience. Government bodies will not democratize holiday-making until the next century, when the French Popular Front and other inter-war European Governments try to guarantee worker-bodies the right to take vacations at times and seasons no longer pre-ordained. Those hydro-therapists who have survived into the 20th century will seek legitimization around the same time, demanding their cures be taught in medical schools and their services be paid for by an infant system called *state health insurance*.

Throughout all this leisure-legislating, image-signs known as *postcards* have been circulating freely through towns and continents, depicting the pleasures and pains of various bourgeois bodies and their “*douche masters*” and revealing the pleasant beauty of various building projects within the *villes-de-eaux* and beyond. The steam engine has emerged from the age of industry, pushing and pulling bodies around formerly wild and insurmountable terrains and proliferating lines on maps. Formerly monstrous image-making machines called *cameras* have begun shrinking and depositing themselves in the hands of the petit bourgeoisie and the working class alike. The power to move and record

and then fall idle is in or near the hands of everyone, if only they can afford it.

24.

Eileen Myles's most recent book *Iceland* contains thick plated images of small-town women lit with ice-cool window light and suspended in and above the bones of fish and other fragile creatures. How had I failed to notice her photography until now? Why have I not thought of this series myself? It's perfect, like an X-ray of Reineke Dijkstra's catalog of teenage beach bodies posing along the coasts of Europe. I am jealous of these creamy satin pages, this other-worldly light, these perfectly packaged commodities that the spa owners are selling on a blue velvet table inside the Jacuzzi room. I slide one into my bathing suit bottoms and exit to conceive of my own post-feminist project that will oscillate between whimsy and ancient truths.

William Vollman's voice is going on about the subtle horrors of Imperial Valley life when I awake. I have dosed off to the sounds of a podcast emanating from my itunes library. "*We want our empire just like the next guy... We take over the water before we take over the territory.*" He is touting the ammoniac smells of the Salton Sea and the publication of a new coffee table book of imagery that will accompany his behemoth 1,000-page work, *Imperial*, whose abundant and seemingly unedited pages link the fate of the Imperial Valley to all its neighbors great and small, including Jacumba. He quotes Wordsworth during this 20-minute radio interview, claiming for himself something of "*the spontaneous overflow of emotion reflected upon in tranquility.*"

I throw off the sheets, turn down the AC, light a cigarette and get back to what I am calling *work*, but which is really just so much spontaneous overflow of emotion.

25.

“*She’s trying to be a writer too!*” Sonja gestures toward me, alone at the Westside table with Mike Davis’ book held open by a butter knife. “*She’s here for a month.*”

An older gentleman with longish hair is telling her about the broken down car that brought him to the hotel. He was trying to get to the nearby border town of Calexico, but ended up here, joining an archive of stories that involve failed brakes or transmissions resulting in stays at the Jacumba Hotel or even entire lives in Jacumba. Both Sonja and the longish haired man are far too awake.

“*Oh how lucky,*” says a polished-up Northerner’s English accent. Luck. *Hmph.*

The Englishman is writing a book called Amarexico and has until late November to make it to Texas. We sit at our separate breakfast tables with our Pan Sans and agree that Jacumba is an anomaly, untouched by the touristic pretensions of Julian and unbothered by the heated labor pains of the Imperial Valley. He shows enough British politesse to ask what my book is about. I want to say simply what Bukowski’s character said to his boss in Factotum. I want to say “*everything.*” But I don’t. I say something else.

Last year, he went on tour with the Plastic People of the Universe. I didn’t even know they still existed, but I learn they sometimes do after positioning myself as a San Diegan who used to live in Prague. In his long and adventurous life, this writer has taken on the Balkans more than once. He has also spent time with Frank Zappa and met William Vollmann. He’s also good friends with the guy that wrote a scathingly true tale I’d read in Harper’s magazine earlier this year about a sicario from city Juarez. That guy

is Charles Bowden, a writer whose powerful sentences continue to inspire me but whose voice put me off when I heard him talking to Terry Gross one day. He sounded like a booming advertisement for liberal white male intellectual superiority, an entitled good ol' boy of polite guns and robust words, a real asshole, someone I would probably date.

With his customary politeness, the Brit excuses himself to take a call and I don't see him again until his body emerges from room 116 in day-glow orange shorts with a towel dangling politely from its shoulder. He is the perfect representation of the alien tourist/writer, a roving brain capable of casual conversation and continental politesse and bad fashion.

I surprise myself with the idea of fucking him. I am not inclined towards aging bodies, in spite of the one slowly becoming my own. He is not sexy but he does have that accent and the allure of well-traveled bones. The sex happens in 103. It's not too messy and is punctuated by *Darlings* and whiffs of sulfur. I never reach orgasm but am relieved when he excuses himself to take a call from his publisher. I lay there on the floral bedspread imagining the lands that lie ahead as we conquer the bounded spaces of an unknown land called Amerexico.

But he is not alone in Jacumba. An American voice calls to him from the interior of 116 before a younger body emerges (well, older than mine but younger than his anyway.) The pretty brunette pulls the towel from his shoulder and slaps him across his droopy, day-glow ass and they re-enter the dark space of their hotel room without taking the waters.

So Amerexico already has an attendant muse for at least this leg of its journey. I want them to take me away. I want to penetrate the arid places between here and Texas and pretend I am the muse's step-daughter, complaining about the AC and demanding to stop and use the toilet every 20 miles. This might mean that some small part of me already wants out of Jacumba, wants bigger stakes and increased mobility and a place within an epic work of non-fiction. But I never see them again nor do I remember his name or ask Sonja to remind me of it. I will google Amerexico next year and I will find him there, long after November has come and gone. I will finish my own book and fit him into its world, another body residing within my meditations on place, another signpost in these memories of Jacumba converging like sharp edges on once-blank pages.

26.

As the Old World is cleaning up its mud-based communal pools and writing its initial book on Hydrotherapy, a New World is being 'discovered' and tamed and made thick with imaginary lines drawn by those Old World bodies brave or criminal or pure enough to traverse an ocean. The New World is really an old world covered in holes that seep liquid minerals or spit scalding waters straight into the air in bursts large enough to accommodate maybe 75 anuses at a time. But the Earth's natural Scotch Hoses won't be discovered by the line-makers for a while.

The bodies found in the New World have sacred and intimate relationships with the earth's core and the water it heats and they have been in this relationship for some 11,000 years. Known as *savages* and then *Indians* and later *Native Americans* and now *First Nations* or even *American Indians*, these peoples use the waters for ailments and

social rites both physical and spiritual. These wet contact zones are places of peace, where warring tribes are required by unwritten laws to lay down weapons and put aside long-held differences (like the Old World peoples, they have a lot of differences based on region, language and food preference).

Nowadays, if you take your body to Arizona and then to a place called Tonopah, which means “*hot water under the bush*,” you can treat yourself to some Old World/New World fusions at something called a *Day Spa*, which specializes in getting bodies in and out before a set closing time, indicating the extent to which social time has sped up since the acquisition of the New World. Today I am summoned to sacred diurnal healing on the Internet:

An Invitation to an Inner Quest at Mii Amo

***Mii Amo**, a destination spa in New Age Sedona, has a deep spa menu filled with unique offerings like color therapy, chakra balancing and Native American Spiritual treatments. The Inner Quest was created by Mii Amo’s Native American program director and is designed to allow people to let go of a worry and reconnect with the inner self.*

The treatment starts with the therapist encouraging the guest to release a life worry while she burns sage followed by sweet grass. The sweet grass is to replace the worry with love and she uses an Indian feather fan to sweep the vapors over the person’s body. This is followed by the therapist drumming to call on the ancestral spirits of the east, west, north and south to guide the person in a quest for self-awareness. A brief massage is performed and hot rocks are placed underneath your body to simulate the experience of being in a sweat lodge. For the next twenty minutes the guest simply lies there and reflects.

At the Westin Kierland Resort, your body can be massaged with hot, oily sticks decorated with genuine “*Arizona Indian Rock Drawings*” that symbolize “*luck, success,*

prosperity, strength, victory and love.” As your therapist moves these sticks across your aches and pains you will hear the gentle sound of rainfall washing away your “*negative chi.*” You can also get one of these noisy sticks from a Chinese Guy I know on Los Angeles Street for \$5.

108 miles north of Jacumba at a resort in Coachella Valley, you can participate in an Indian-inspired Event called the “*Phenomenal Foot Fest.*” Once a year, you can also circulate among thousands of orbs in the form of musicians and their fans as they converge in this part of the desert for the Coachella Music and Arts Festival.

But the feet and bodies of the early Americans were not trying to connect with an Inner Self or release Life Worries or attend music festivals. They lead fairly outward existences, constantly negotiating with and warring against each other and those other native bodies. One of these early American bodies from England via Ireland was Sir William Johnson, who served as “*Superintendent of Indian Affairs*” and “*Colonel of the Warriors of the Six Nations*” and “*Indian agent to New York*” and various other titles that put him in league with or at arms against any number of Frenchmen or Natives. He also had sex with a lot of bodies, resulting in perhaps 100 illegitimate children. During his work with a loosely organized conglomeration of native tribes known as the Six Nations, he managed to convince hundreds of Mohawks and other Iroquois to fight in the Old World’s wars. He prospered and produced through the buying of scalps, the owning of slaves and the selling of lumber. His body survived a long time thanks to his Mohawk friends, who healed his war wounds in the medicinal waters at High Rock Springs in

Saratoga, New York - a place that would become the first large scale spa resort in the American Colonies. Sir Johnson continued to organize the Indians and speak their language and sleep with their women up until his death 3 years before the Revolutionary War.

Meanwhile, another famous body called George Washington was preparing that war and taking the waters in a place called Bath, which the colonists had named after its Belgian and English predecessors. He said or wrote to someone at some point, *“I find myself benefited by the waters and am not without hope of them making a cure for me.”* But he never did find a cure for his syphilis, which some say finally had its way with his toothless body in 1799.

Some present-day chemists who have analyzed the American Mineral Spa in terms of its contribution to history, science, The National Park Service, carbonation, and finally bottled water, believe this way: *“It may be asserted with confidence that the warm water of these places was a powerful solvent for provincialism and promoted nationalism at a time before the Revolutionary War when it was much needed.”*

So these ancient waters were harnessed and domesticated and well-built sides based on European models gradually grew up around them, providing a warm forum for discussions about revolution and city planning and nation building among wet white male bodies.

Thousands of miles away from the revolution, other ancient bodies were still free

from all those lines and sides and white man's wars. They hunted and bathed and converged in territories like that housing nature's Scotch Hose, which is Old Faithful Geyser, one of Yellowstone National Park's 10,000 geothermal events and the biggest and most regular of its 300 geysers.

In the 1850s Yellowstone is just another point in the unmapped West, a place wild and not yet won and filling with miles and miles of white skin seeking freedom from the Laws and restraints and manners being imposed on the East side. Inside the West, white and brown bodies can swim and soak in the soupy minerals of the earth's abundance. They can swim and soak and scrub and float belly up in open-air surrounded by purple mountains and deep forests and petrified trees and four-legged creatures and they can swim and soak and scrub and float and fuck buck naked.

27.

At some point in September I decide to switch to the East cool pool, which is sort of a locals only place - a crystal blue kidney bean adhered to the hotel like a well-formed afterthought or a childhood backyard outpost you think your parents don't know about.

Today Mock 5 the maintenance man is expressing awe over a water bug he has found in the filter. He tells me these creatures live underwater, reaching the kidney bean through the mile-long pipe system and flying off into the air when provoked. He also found a bat and a scorpion in there this morning, but those bodies were dead. This body is glistening in eddies of morning light, merely playing dead while Mock 5 stirs the waters with the pool net.

Mock 5 is Mike and he lives on Jacumba St. with his sick mom. He is a kind of genius fix-it guy in the way that certain tweekers can be. Depending on the amount of meth in his body, he is capable of making these 50-year-old pools glisten anew, which makes him complicit in the chemo-magical system that shifts the waters from International Klein to Teal to Cobalt throughout the month. He is complicit in a lot of Jacumba's myths and magic and technical systematics, fixing faulty cable, mending roofs, breaking up bar fights and all the while managing a relationship with the hotel's former waitress who crushed her femur in a car accident and is now living in room 117, but I shouldn't really get into that here. I promised.

Mike has been happily humming to himself for a few weeks, meaning things are good with the girlfriend even though she is scheduled to go to rehab back in San Diego for 90 days, which I guess I shouldn't get into either.

It's amazing the things you find in here. The way he says this, you'd think the water bugs were worth something. I ask him if the found stuff includes people.

No but a guy did drop dead from a heart attack once at the other pool.

Apparently, he hadn't even made it to the water, so that doesn't really count. But I imagine this was no small ordeal for those in charge of the body. The ambulance has to come from El Centro, 45 miles east of here.

When I later look up water bugs they don't look anything like the creature in the pool that day. They look like cockroaches and my friend Eun who is here googling with me tells me that is what they are. I don't want this to be the case, I want them to be magical creatures of pristine beauty who dive deep and fly high, eradicating luke warm

cultural viruses and making the world a safer place. But they are not. They are ugly and also known as toe-biters whose bug-jaws are capable of causing human bodies permanent disfigurement. I am mad at Eun for shattering the patina I've lacquered around my new mascot.

The bugs in Jacumba are different, I insist, they fly!

But I don't find much solid stuff on flying water bugs, just a litany of complaints from unhappy homeowners in moist places who have seen small ugly bodies take flight from unwanted puddles and dirty pools. In a small act of defiance I decide to place the water bug in the center of the Jacumban eco-system, where it can gain back the esteem and agency the internet and Eun have eclipsed. I imagine this: all of our bodies (mine, yours, Alfred's, his dog Sheeba's, his bird Ruby's) circulate around and because of this tiny bug, this ancient insect that is much uglier but more steadfast than that luminescent moth who merely crashes and burns on the patio light.

When I open up my copy of Kathleen Stewart's recent book for the 20th time, I am far away from Jacumba. I am on an unlit patio overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Ensenada, Mexico. I have taken my body over the border again for all the reasons that Lupita and I laid out. This place is also a spa, but here the pool guys are less talented if more sober than Mock 5. They wear black pants and white shirts and accommodate my every need. At this spa, you can have other bodies place hot rocks on your body for \$132 or wrap it in abalone sea kelp for \$138. You can also less expensively have it smothered in oatmeal, sea salt, eucalyptus, avocado, lavender, cocoa butter, cranberry or volcanic dust. I can't offer my body these luxuries, but I can afford this room and its patio thanks

to all those disembodied heads rolling on beaches – the price of 4-star accommodation along the coast of Baja has dropped significantly in the past few years.

Stewart is talking about Ordinary Affects and how they pull the subject all over the place. She thinks belonging to *“the secret conspiracy of everyday life”* is *“sort of like being a water bug, living on the surface tension of some kind of liquid. Seduced by the sense of an incipient vitality lodged in things, but keeping oneself afloat, too.”*

This incipient vitality is what gives Jacumba its place-ness, it is the seduction that makes regulars of so many guests whose bodies alight here both to escape urbanity and to prey on the waters, the remoteness and the residual character of a town that has survived so many economic attacks.

Water bugs alight here because they like fresh water. Known intelligently as *Belostomatidaes*, they are ambush predators who lie motionless below surfaces of water and wait for crustaceans or fish or amphibians to inject with a powerful concoction of poison and spit that turns muscle tissue into soup. The female body lays her eggs on top of the male body and he has to carry them around on his wings not getting laid until the brood hatches. Meanwhile, the female goes around looking for more bodies to mate with. This sounds pretty good to me.

I later learn that Mock 5’s insect is fairly lucky, as many varieties of water bug are *“limited to swimming in the waterway they were born in.”* I also learn from the faraway Newcastle City Council that water bugs actually come in many forms and are very important measures of biodiversity and creek health because of their inability to escape storm pollution, bank erosion and *place* in general. They are good indicators as to the

level of toxins and poop in bodies of water and their healthy accumulation helps enhance sedimentation rates, which I take as a move in the right direction that greatly supports my placement of water bugs in the center of my current affective universe. The council in New Jersey knows all of this because it collects the insects in thick nets and squishes enough water out of their bodies to use in lab tests. At the bottom of their webpage I find this comforting news: *“Important Note: We always return all of the Water Bugs we collect back to their creek at the end of each survey.”*

Water bugs are also good at camouflage, and can attach themselves to a place for hours without moving, just waiting for something to happen. Mock 5 is good at this too, though I assume his *“surface tension”* comes in powder rather than liquid form. I often find him in dark corners or under trees or on a discarded mattress behind the hotel, staring purposefully into the Jacumban day. One particularly dazed morning, I almost trip over a fold out chair with which his body has fused in deep meditation, a tall skinny Buddha in board shorts. I have been in my room for hours, smoking too much and hosting a holy communion with my computer screen.

“Sorry. Totally out of it! Got a lot of good stuff going on in 103” I say in reference to some brilliant writing long since dispensed with.

Mock 5 chuckles or groans or hiccups in a drawn-out grunt of forgiveness. It is a syncopated sound I can’t quite describe but will always be able to hear – a reminder that not all sensations of importance offer themselves up in words.

“I know exactly what you mean I got a lot of good stuff goin’ on in here, too” He points one finger to his head of see-saw hair. *“crazy crazy shit man.”*

Mock 5 and I are complicit in the secret conspiracy of everyday life and we know it now. We are complicit in the water bugs and the dead mammals and the chameleonic waters and even in the discarded Privacy Please signs found in the pine needles of the hotel's backyard. We are complicit in the crumbling cherub sculptures and the slimy Jacuzzi seat and the scratched-up sediment of the netless tennis court. We are complicit in the coyote's howls and the one song the jukebox won't play and the way the generator spits when it wakes up in the morning. We are complicit in the deep pink dust storms and our complicity is a silent knowledge about all things that never again make it out of Jacumba.

But unlike Mike I will most likely leave soon, and have only alit for a brief moment of Jacumban history, a history I would call contemporary if it were not being constantly pulled into the past by forces beyond all of our agencies. Like the water bugs of New Castle, I will be safely returned to my habitat. Like the lady water bug, I will continue roaming the planet looking for other bodies to mate with. I am not so sure about Mock 5. He has been swimming the waterway in which he was born for over 30 years and he hasn't alit on much more of the world map than what is bound up here. But he has been everywhere in that brain, even places that don't exist in bounded space. At speeds unknown to human bodies, he has traversed galaxies inside an object that weighs only 1300 grams. For his travels and mine and those of the *Belostomatidaes*, I would like to thank the *incipient vitality lodged in things*. I would like to thank the universal laws that keep things afloat.

28.

This one happens every week:

I will never get all of these fucking bags packed. I am moving from one place to another place because a Tsunami is coming or an election went wrong or a cultural virus has infected my current living quarters or some very important body has passed on to the other side.

The bags bulge and buckle and unbuckle and the boxes moan and cuss and spit and still I can't live without a collection of long floral dresses from the mid-nineties. This one is yellow with menstrual explosions of fuchsia and soon Paris Hilton will be here to manage the give-away event and she can re-gift this one to the limbless legions waiting in the hotel lobby. It's strapless.

The Colombian coastal town outside my steamed up window is a patchwork of bloated water and sodium lights. I have just fucked a guy who stood up and ejaculated into his own face instead of onto my tits. This is criminal.

My ESL friends Elaine and Jen are back after the insurgency mission from which I went AWOL. Jen only had to slit someone's throat but Elaine actually decapitated a man on live television and I am glad I left. I am not cut out for that kind of thing or this kind of thing either, which is deep, dark rising waters about to eradicate a population of beach dwellers, along with me and Jen and Elaine and the criminal ejaculator and my collection of floral print. My friend Leigh has just finished a mammoth sculpture made out of Colombian cum and chicken bones and she is going to go ahead and stay for her art

opening. *Why bother leaving?* She says. *The whole world is going to end up like this anyway.*

A body has a right to enjoy Armageddon in comfort, I retort, *Texture and temperature are important,* I believe, *It's too fucking hot here,* I conclude.

But what about your ESL students? Asks the Starbucks barista. He's right. Shit! I run out legless into the sodium lit streets. The MFA grads of UCLA are conducting a public culture fashion show and all these goat bodies and trans-goat bodies and overgrown garlic seeds are parading through the apocalypse in the earth's last majestic textile: whale skin.

I am searching for my students everywhere, in armpits, under collars, inside the pre-operative bodies of trans goats. I must save them if only *them* from this deluge, this uber-wave, this overblown Scotch Hose, this mounting body of dark-tentacled water rushing toward the helpless city, but I only find her, Anaya.

She is such a small ferret! I take off my menstrual explosion of a dress and wrap it around her shivering body, which is largely composed of rough foreskin. I cradle her to my breast and let her suckle from my ample nostrils. Her mouth is so small! Her arms are so furry! The rectum on her face is so endearing!

It is time to get in the water. It is time to go. It is time to save Anaya. It is time to float. It is really *really* time to float.

29.

Allen and Shelly think that photography is “*just about the coolest thing ever.*” I have brought my Canon 5-D to the bar tonight, and Allen thinks this means he should stand up, turn around, and pull his pants down. I capture only a quarter-moon, his left elbow nudging the upper corner of the frame, his crack pointing up and north-westward, towards LA and Julian and the unseen stars and the real full moon, because it is once again that time of month.

Shelly leans toward the Southwest, toward Tecate and Las Playas de Tijuana and the high desert floor, which is littered with tiny sensors meant to detect northward moving bodies. She grips a Marlboro Light in her southernmost fist, her cleavage creating a line that mimics Allen’s ass crack, moving up *up up* into outer space.

She is probably shaking hands with an off-camera Ronnie, who has just arrived in his street clothes with his cigar. Shelly is East-County-cute and about my age and slightly drunk. I met them an hour ago, when Allen, much drunker and rounder and red-faced, came outside to admire my camera. This is typical. “*Wow that’s quite a piece of equipment,*” everyone tells me. “*How much did that run you?*” everyone asks. They generally finish off with, “*Are you a pro or something?*” Sometimes I let them touch it.

Within 10 minutes of meeting Allen I’d learned this:

- He’s had 3 arrests for Driving Under the Influence
- He’s good friends with a well-known local from my mountain town who ran our once and never-again Texaco station
- He and the Texacan met in DUI school

- The Texacan is now in jail for getting four DUIs in one week
- Allen and Shelly are art lovers who go to Telemagica every year
- Allen has a close, personal relationship with Jesus Christ

This information is delivered in drunken non-stop exuberance. Shelly keeps telling him to let me talk, but I have learned to almost keep my mouth shut in Jacumba. I welcome the data surge, trying to keep the story straight in my growing cerebral archive entitled: *the lives of others I have met and will never see again*.

There is no fear of Allen getting another DUI tonight. There is nowhere else to go in Jacumba. This lack of place-option doesn't stop everyone. The CHP issues about 12 DUIs a month in the backcountry. But Jacumba Hotel and Spa is a safe-haven for the intoxicated, offer a respite of endless beer and nearby beds.

I exit frequently with Alfred to take some secret swigs of a guest-gifted homemade tequila (Jacumba does not serve spirits). He is also in possession of the perfect vodka, another gift that's encased in one of those round, sculpted bottles I have only previously seen housing Croatian Slivovice. This one has a CCCR label that would go great in my soviet kitsch collection, in spite of its highly utilitarian function and the fact that it's not likely vintage. In these moments Alfred drops the curmudgeonly manager bullshit and we share the same complicity I have with Mock 5. In these moments, he is a long lost grandfather/boyfriend, taking me on little trips to his Croatian and German pasts right here in the confines of the spa.

With all of these trips going on, I cannot stop an oncoming deluge of political rant. "*See what you've done!*" Says Ronnie. (I get blamed a lot here.)

The table has converged into a seesaw of opinions on every mundane matter from health care to the second amendment. I invoke the spirits of my redneck-affiliated heritage to silence my distaste for sitting around a table of McCain supporters. I remember all the Rush Limbaugh propaganda that I recycled unopened when my dad's dementia was too progressed for him to have opened it anyway. I think I have done enough for my cause and the environment and my faraway people and when Alfred tells them I am a *silly-minded bleeding liberal*, rather than taking offense I take another sip of Stella.

But soon God arrives and everyone starts recounting personalized Higher Power versions as if we were at an AA meeting gone wrong. It turns out Allen is a reformed meth-addict, but his religious fervor does not come from getting clean. It comes from a drug-induced revelation.

Allen was walking down Alpine Blvd. tweaking off his ass on crystal meth when his feet had suddenly begun to glow. A holy concoction of serenity and fear filled his roaming body. He sat down at a bus stop "*right there where the main street turns into Arnold Way*" and asked God to show him a sign. About 3 minutes later a Monster Truck blew one of its 36" tires just 15 feet from his tweaking body. The driver got out and recited the specialized tools he would need to fix his beast. Allen happened to have all of this rare equipment in his own truck, which happened to be parked nearby in the Youth Center parking lot, a place where my 12-year-old body used to stand around trying to belong.

"If that isn't a sign, well I don't know what is!"

As it turns out, his apostolic behavior has a glitch: the Monster driver offered Allen some cash and he took it. He needed it to pay back some alienated ex, so it can't have been merely a few bucks.

The table holds court over Allen and his act as a chorus of voices I both will and won't ever hear again convert his singular body into a matter of collective justification. Ronnie's voice, having been mediated by military, legal and paternal systems (he's a proud dad of two Oceanside teenagers), is the soundest of all. He writes off Allen's deed as simple self-service, joining a larger tribe of dead and undead thinkers who believe no gift recognized as gift is a gift.

By this reasoning, only crazy people or amnesiacs are the perfect givers and receivers. Only those that have mastered the art of non-intention and forgetfulness can traverse the no-gift-is-a-gift paradigm. But there is another category of giving that comes close – the stuff you get from people you have met and will never see again, which includes the gifts of words and time because these goods are invisible and readymade for forgetting. So the only real gift is past time converted into present reflection. The only real gift is memory.

In the end I just tell Allen what he wants to hear, which is along the lines of "*Wow, Cool Story!*" I say this because I just want to go back to their room and try out the tequila they've brought back from Tecate and they want to take me there and give me gifts, like a sprig of white desert sage illegally procured from the desert tower. They want to talk about art, which they say is something you don't find here in Jacumba. They like

weird stuff, not the oil landscape of the historic desert tower or the charcoal drawing of a floppy-hatted hottie or the pastel adolescent that pouts at us through thick glasses. None of these pieces in the bar's permanent collection make the grade.

After I tuck them into bed, Alfred and Ronnie are still at the bar, alone and arguing the efficacy of windmills. Alfred wants to close up but I'm not ready to let go of the night and offer to read Ronnie some newly discovered passages about black civil rights in San Diego from *Under the Perfect Sun*, but I've promised not to get into the rest of that night in words.

When I start to remember all of this, my body is 48 miles west and 6 months past that night. I look up on my magnetic walls towards Allen's moon and Shelly's tits. I take out that sprig of illegally procured white sage from its small plastic home under my studio desk and hold it up to my nostrils. The scent is still in there, though the leaves are increasingly dry and brittle and threatening collapse. I inhale deeply and consider the size of the archive entitled *others I have met and will never see again*. It gets bigger every day, fatter and louder and more unmanageable. But this sprig of sage is entirely under my control. It sits in my hand, holding history in genetic codes that I can't see, keeping Allen and Shelly more present than any words ever could. It just lies there, demanding nothing. I put it back in its box and take out a sharpie and a post-it note. I write, "The Perfect Gift" and stick this label on the air-tight plastic container and get back to remembering.

30.

The naked bodies swimming the waters of Yellowstone were not the only naked bodies on the planet taking in mud and minerals. Penises and Vaginas on a faraway volcanic island called Nippon had been bathing together unclothed for centuries in public waters known as *onsen*. By current legal definition, onsen water must contain 19 elements, including metabolic acid and radon, a noble gas that can either kill you or take away your arthritis. Even though some Japanese bodies are still dying thanks to radiation gifted by two atomic bombs the United States dropped over Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945, other Japanese bodies still allow trace amounts of radon to seep into their holes and openings, because not all poison is bad poison.

I do not know if double survivor Tsutomu Yamaguchi ever frequented the onsen. His body was badly burned while on a business trip 3 kilometers from ground zero in Hiroshima on Monday, August 6th, 1945. By August 9th, he was back home in Nagasaki for the dropping of Fat Man and a lot of radiation seeped into his pores while he searched the broken city for his relatives. He later described the victims as “*ant-walking alligators*” with “*blackened alligator hides displaying red holes, indicating mouths.*” He said the noises made by the red holes were “*worse than screaming. They uttered a continuous murmur—like locusts on a midsummer night.*”

I cannot ask Yamaguchi about any penises or vaginas he encountered while communally bathing, because he died from stomach cancer a few months ago on January 4th, 2010. I was in Jacumba that day, celebrating the birth of my body.

While the spas of Europe were being rebuilt and claimed for the common people and then re-claimed by the bourgeoisie, the tired farmers of rural Japan were washing the soil from their skin in geothermal waters provided by volcanic respites. This was the Edo Period and it lasted from 1603 to 1867, all the while nurturing the virtues of “*naked communion*” which the Japanese believe is a great way to “*break down barriers*” and “*get to know people.*”

The Edo Period also contributed to the world of proportionally exaggerated visual representations of Penises and Vaginas in the form of Shunga prints. In earlier times, images of monks and courtiers fucking each other had passed through the hands of the politically and socially important on narrative hand scrolls. But later artists learned how to cut and chisel and sand away on little wooden cubes made out of trees. The Woodcut technique allowed copies of the same penises and vaginas to proliferate and move all over the place, even into the hands of farmers and merchants. The themes of these explicit woodblocks can be grouped into 7 fetishes that include headings like “*clothing,*” “*unnoticed intercourse,*” “*water,*” and “*tentacles.*”

Though the Japanese fascination with sex in water has somewhat fallen out of favor today (probably for reasons that anyone who has tried it can understand), the “*Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife*” is one of the most popular prints still in circulation. Imagine (if you are a woman) being eaten out by a many-tentacled octopus while you lie atop an ergonomically efficient relief of scrubby yellow hills. There is a lot to hold onto and a lot to hold on to you. Though water is absent from this marine-inspired event, it’s

not that far away. All of the erotic woodcuts belong to a larger category of representation called Ukiyo-E, which roughly means “*pictures of the floating world.*” So all the pleasures of urban life and nature (tea houses, geisha, courtesans, the theater, the onsen, huge cocks and daintily wide vaginas) relied on the unseen forces of air and water to keep them suspended in an alter world of visual representation.

But along with the big white bodies pouring into Nippon in the 19th century came cameras – devices that reproduced and disseminated erotic acts much more quickly than cubed tree parts. Thanks to film and the changing mores of a society that had banned Shunga in 1722, the first floating worlds alit and went underground.

Nowadays, you can you enjoy a different kind of floating world in major onsen resort hotels, which feature artificial waterfalls and theme baths. You can even float in a ramen bowl that “contains pepper-flavored water colored a light, milky brown [to emulate] tonkatsu ramen soup:”

The special bath was created jointly by the Hakone theme park and a famous ramen shop, Nantsuttei in Hadano, Kanagawa Prefecture. The bath was completed at the unveiling event, with the owner of Nantsuttei adding “noodles” made of bathwater additives into the tub. The water contains collagen and garlic extracts, and theme park officials claim it can help produce beautiful skin and aid moisture retention. The aroma of pepper is said to have the effects of refreshing your mind, warming your burned-out heart and inflaming your passion,” explained a statement by spa complex Hakone Kowakien Yunessun. Ramen lovers in bathing suits turned into ingredients in the broth, jumping

into the three tubs shaped like ramen bowls underneath noodle decorations hanging over their heads. “Customers may have been puzzled at first, but I think they enjoyed it ... because the hot water smells good, like pepper,” said Yusuke Sato, a spa employee who poured in the noodle-looking salt.

If you take your body to Hokune, you can also swim or sit in waters meant to look like green tea, coffee or red wine. Of course, you will have to wear a bathing suit or stick to your own gender because single-sex bathing has slowly become more or less the norm since the Meiji Period, when all those foreign bodies started showing up. But you can still congress naked within your own gender category, as my friend Doug often did during his 11 years as a big, hairy, white man on the island of Japan. It was at the onsen that Doug received one of the most purely given gifts of his life. While sitting wide-legged and blissed-out on a wooden bench, a group of Japanese men approached Doug with the following news: “*You have enormous genitals! Congratulations!*”

Doug and I were in Los Angeles teaching an ESL seminar about comparative culture when this anecdote came up. One of the girls in the class let us know that such reverence for size was not translatable into the female bath. In her assessment of gender difference, she wrote “*If woman has large breasts, other woman in Japanese bathhouse say ‘she is maybe bitch or some kind of slut!’*” (The writer had big boobs herself, so I take it this was personal experience not necessarily indicative of all female Japanese egos.)

Japan has plenty of other water experiences to offer those bodies that don’t want to take off all of their clothes. Over the past decade, footbaths have popped up all over the place – at the Hokune resort, in hundreds of train stations, taverns and restaurants and

inside the Miyage baseball park, which has culled the waters of a nearby hot springs to fill small tubs for each spectator. As your head enjoys the game, you can push a button that massages your butt and another button to control the temperature of the floating world circulating around the microbes and muscles of your own naked feet. The only thing missing from this modern manifestation of comfort is a little octopus to suckle your aching blisters.

32.

Tim Burnett has given me: a Penzoil box filled with over 300 photos from the Pacific Theater of WWII, a broken tripod, beer, a custom 4 x 5 field camera, gun cleaner, William Mortenson's "*How to Photograph Women*," steak, an Igloo cooler filled with film holders, time, a dead falcon brought down by a bullet the morning I left Jacumba.

He lives in a house on Jacumba St. in a place much like an Igloo that's kept at a pleasant, antiseptic 65 degrees all summer long. He built this house on a plot of land right behind his mother's home. Kathleen Burnett is second in command to the post-mistress as the guardian of town knowledge. She can make you a mean cup of Sanka and give you a hunk of Sara Lee and tell you just about anything you need to know.

The Burnett family ended up in Jacumba because their car broke down en route from Yuma, where Tim's dad was working as a photographer on the military testing grounds, shooting parachutes and explosions and other desert cold war spectacles we aren't supposed to know about. It was the summer of 1953 and The Imperial Valley was 115 degrees and overcrowded, but Jacumba's thermometer read a mere 100 and its town offered an array of affordable single-family dwellings and living here would require a

simple 200-mile daily commute for dad.

56 years later, the dad is gone. He's left Tim a legacy of photographic equipment - the kind of now useless stuff I still have in storage as well: 4x5 hand-lining tanks, color enlargers, darkroom safe lights, contact printers, a dictionary of photography and a library of instructional books written by men.

Merve and I met Tim on our first trip to Jacumba, when he'd become enamored of her 16mm camera while we were out in the middle of that 2-lane road. Today he's invited me over to look inside the Penzoil box at hundreds of RC prints made in Honolulu during WWII, all of them rendered in tiny grain, fixed with long evaporated chemistry and stamped with red ink that reads *Official Marine Corps Photo. CINCPAC PHOTO LAB.*

Many photos bear pasted-on parchment with data like this:

MARINE AND JAP SNIPER HE SHOT – Marine private John H. Jennings, of Columbia, Miss., and Jap sniper he shot on Tarawa atoll in the Gilbert Islands.

Another dead Nipponese warrior can be seen in the same ditch near the sniper.

CREDIT: Official U.S. Marine Corps photograph

My father's name is John H. Jennings. It takes me some moments to remember that he served a relaxing tour in Korea and never set foot in the Pacific Theater of WWII. Still, I find myself wanting this Marine private – this killer -- to be my father. Maybe I want this because it would make a good story or maybe it's a symptom of unresolved grief, a way to encounter in someone else's boxed up histories the ghost of a man who still haunts my dreams as an undead body escaped from an assisted living home. If I found my father buried here in Jacumba, perhaps those dreams would stop (the ones in

which he wanders around our old chicken coop with his pants down, the ones where he shows up insisting I buy him new sweat pants, the ones when I try to find the words to tell him he's not alive anymore and has to stop showing up for dinner). Or perhaps I simply want to be inscribed into the community, and a photo from this long-shelved box could make my body a little part of the bigger archive that Jacumba is daily becoming for me. But most likely, I just want the story.

I wonder if this John Jennings' descendants have seen this photo – if they have Pennzoil boxes stashed away in their Missouri closets that house a copy of this image, which has been “*released by CINC PACFLT for publication*” and is officially sanctioned to float around in the world of war signification with impunity. I wonder if John himself ever saw the photo, since it is unlikely that snapshots were shared with the freedom or at the speed that would forever vilify his countrymen stationed at Abu Ghraib prison 60 years later. Would this photo embarrass him as it now embarrasses me? Or am I just a typical naïve, neo-leftist civilian with too many years of liberal arts education to appreciate the drastically different ethical conditions of warfare?

We abandon these piles of dead men in the late afternoon and take our last Coronas and a bag of Cheetos out to the driveway to discuss how the war archive should be organized. Last night's rainfall and today's hazy atmosphere seem to be discouraging gnat attacks, so when we pull a pair of lawn chairs out into the driveway the air is combatant-free. Tim has already been sorting the photos in terms of explosions and battles. He hasn't yet thought up the Buddy Photo category, which I suggest as a way of distancing myself from my new memories of 'burnt Japs' and naked female detainees on

black and white pacific islands.

But there will be no escaping the eventual task of archiving this afternoon within the many other cluttered experiences accumulating under the category 'Jacumba.' Tim has added another layer to the growing Jacumban landscape – the part of Place in which imagined and recorded geographies congeal inside boxes, attics, closets – in which other people's memories open and infect the area between invisible county, city and community boundaries. The bodies living inside the Penzoil box for the past 60 years have increased the population of this town, making it impossible to separate their silent existences from the louder ones I have already encountered – Vladimir the painter with his tales from the front lines of 1960s Afghanistan, Alfred the bar manager and his 1970s detainments within his native Croatia, Austin the hot guy and his early 90s trips across the Mexican border to bring beer to Federales in the dry town of Jacume.

I am still not sure I deserve these photos, though Tim is insisting I take them. This haunted Penzoil box carries more responsibility than a dried up sage sprig. But Kathleen has told her son he should just throw them away if nobody wants them. She's just trying to help him de-clutter his life, and among the many things that photographs can be, one of them is definitely clutter.

33.

In the early 1900s the New World is a full-blown block of nations replete with structured sides and oncoming wars against bodies beyond their new boundaries. The United States has incorporated the hydrotherapy craze into dozens of well-managed clinics and resorts from Warm Springs, Georgia to Calistoga, California. These places are equipped to cure American bodies suffering from any number of inner and outer ailments.

One of these American bodies is a fairly crippled one bearing the very important name Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This future president's polio was supposedly brought on by some heavy exercise up and over the Canadian border, but some contemporary retro-diagnosticians speculate that the president actually suffered from Guillain-Barré syndrome, a condition resulting in rubbery legs and unwanted drooling and pain beyond belief. My dream-analysand friend Daniela also contracted this disease in Canada, and it is not an easy thing for anybody's body.

Because the images from all those cameras circulating the globe are much easier to control than they will later be, not every American knows that the man saving their economy and thwarting its cultural viruses carts his own body around with wheels and metal braces. For most of them, Roosevelt is a comforting, disembodied voice, transporting an invisible cure some call *Hope* over equally invisible waves that translate into sound through devices called radios. While his Fireside Chats are placating the fears of a pre-teen nation, he continues to battle his physical disabilities in the waters of Warm Springs, a place he eventually buys with the majority of his savings. With this \$200,000 he establishes a hydrotherapy center for polio treatment, putting his own body in the newly built pools to lead therapy sessions for an equally afflicted cohort that calls him "Uncle Rosey."

Before the president can see to the end of WWII, his body collapses from a brain hemorrhage while a portrait artist named Elizabeth Shoumatoff is busy translating his head onto a 2-D plane of watercolor. "*We only have 15 minutes left for our session,*" he

tells her and 15 minutes later the real head, still unfinished on Elizabeth's easel, falls down on the desk and says no more. That desk and head are located in the *Little White House* he has built on his land at Warm Springs, Georgia and you can visit the place any day from 9:00 to 4:45pm, except on Thanksgiving, Christmas or New Years.

Meanwhile the formerly wild west side of Roosevelt's country is finding many ways to deal with its abundant supply of earthbound waters. No longer satisfied with the constraints of public bathing on posh private lands, bodies use discarded olive oil vats and wine barrels and water troughs to create portable tubs using a wooden Japanese Ofuro prototype brought back from the Pacific theater by U.S. soldiers. The redwood trees of California lend themselves to these structures, which manage to hold hot water but lack the circulation needed to fend off infectious microbes, whose invisible bodies lodge themselves in the walls of hot tubs and the skins of their occupants and create all kinds of ugly problems for holes and openings.

Several hundred miles west of the Redwood Forest, a family of Italian Immigrants is readying its 15 members for a revolution that will forever change the social and medical milieu of hydrotherapy. These brothers embody the can-do spirit of the industro-entrepreneurial revolution, inventing the Jacuzzi J-7, a closed-cabin, high-winged monoplane able to carry mail and bodies from California to the home of all those natural hot tubs in Yosemite, Wyoming.

The family entrepreneurship might have stayed air-bound if a 1925 Jacuzzi-monoplane crash hadn't put an end to the body of brother Giocondo. Instead, the grieving

clan turned its hydraulic air pump efforts to the somewhat safer space of water – an element which they are adept at moving from one place to another. Their new agricultural pump wins an award at the California State fair in 1930 and many square miles of arid land in California and the Imperial Valley near Jacumba flourish, prompting more and more Mexicans over a border and Chinese across an ocean.

The Jacuzzi's more famous invention is inspired by an arthritic 15-month old body. In order to put an end to his son's chronic suffering, brother Candido develops a submersible bathtub pump that the little body can use at home between hospital visits. The J-300 was marketable to places from hotels and homes to clinics and cruise ships and was even given away to contestants on the 1960s game show *Queen for a Day*. Now "the worn-out housewife" could enjoy hydrotherapy at home between the configuration of casserole recipes and the sucking of dirt from new acrylic floor coverings. Jack Benny was hired as the new invention's spokes-body and the personal water pump took its place in this growing world of celebrity-endorsed commodities and pimped out bathrooms.

It is a matter of dispute whether Candido or his Berkley-reformed slacker nephew Roy came up with the first fully integrated whirlpool bath, but everyone knows that the best thing about a modern Jacuzzi is *jets*. More durable and friendly than the former douche-master controlled scotch hoses, these plastic or concrete water needles can apply pressure to just about any personal hole or crevasse in need of prodding. Though this prodding is still performed both medically and pleasurably, the simultaneous proliferation of dirty wooden hot tubs and clean acrylic "Roman Baths" (as the Jacuzzis called their

first model) become popular signifiers of a new luxurious post-war lifestyle. By the 1970s, bodies no longer need the crowded stages of hot spring resorts to display upper middle-class status. These virtues can be just as easily and more comfortably demonstrated in the privacy of the modern American home.

In the 1970s, a fledgling model named Suzanne Sommers becomes the face of the Jacuzzi campaign. She will later go on to star as Chrissy, the ditzy blonde on the sitcom *Three's Company*. I will watch her every day after school, and think that one day I may live in an apartment with another girl and a guy. This is one of those rare childhood thoughts that comes true.

33.

The first celebrity body my body wanted to touch belonged to Farrah Fawcett. The Alpine Shirt shop 3 doors down from my dad's pharmacy would iron her bikinied likeness onto a ribbed cotton tee for about 5 bucks, but my mom would not buy me one. She should not have been afraid. I soon moved on to *Magnum P.I.* and Burt Reynolds and she bought me 2-dollar posters of their heads at Woolworths in Parkway Plaza without complaint. But I don't think I ever really looked at the posters or understood moustaches as anything but surplus value growing on a vast and haunted array of patriarchal faces that I both did and did not know.

With time I stopped wanting to touch Farrah and started wanting to be her. I have spent quality face time with both penises and vaginas, but I will never know if my preference for cock is based on biology or on a complicated set of unwritten rules belonging to a game I still feel the need to win.

I was never the prettiest girl at school and when people later told me that maybe I had *at least* (perhaps) been *one* of them it didn't matter because I talked too loud and walked funny and only gravitated towards male bodies that were unavailable for reasons both psychological and geographical. These reasons were never legal or based on *coveting thy neighbor* or any other violation of romantic social contract. I never want bodies that belong to other bodies. Just those that belong as completely to themselves as mine seems to belong to me.

My first love was a name that arrived without a body. Carlos. This word, foreign but not exotic, floated my way while I was sitting in the back of a pickup truck about 50 miles east of Jacumba. We called that place "The Riv" instead of the river, but that's what it is – a 1,450-mile long flow of rocky mountain run-off that makes the border between California and Arizona into a palpable set of sides before jutting into the gulf of Mexico. I am terribly superficial when it comes to penises, but at sixteen I ran off the charge of narrative possibility rather than the promise of physical evidence. The bodiless character called Carlos was from a place down a long road and across a steep canyon from my high school and that distance alone opened up potentials beyond the limitations of my first familiar grid of mapped-out valley.

The narrative that followed didn't go too well. Who knows if that's why I still live at a distance from the concepts of commitment and fidelity and settling that my female body is meant to both covet and embrace. Beneath the flow of rivers and marriages and wedding cupcakes the earth is busy settling so why should I?

Before I move into room 103 in the summer of 2009 I tell an artist friend that I am

going to find the hottest guy in Jacumba. His existence is not prophecy or divination because I met him during my first trip to the spa while he was playing pool with some other Jacumbans. My traveling friend had just broken up with her boyfriend and she laid claim to his body before I could and they ended up making out in a doorway between the red lobby and the yellow bar. This made me mad because I like to be the one who makes out in doorways with the hottest guy in town, regardless of colors.

But a year later my friend has moved on and Austin and I eventually and inevitably end up floating naked after hours in the Jacuzzi while he tells me all the reasons I am just not trusted in his town. People don't understand what I am doing out here and why I am doing it. Am I with the FBI or something? Am I just naïve? How can I leave my big pretty camera on the table unattended? Why would I get in a car with an ex-convict and go on a family-meeting spree? Am I gonna reveal a bunch of stuff that is none of my business? Am I gonna write about him? Am I gonna write about his mom? I had better NOT.

I am buzzed off liters of vodka and cranberry he poured at a Labor Day garage party down the street - a party composed of 10 bodies sitting around smoking Marlboro Reds and talking about the gnat infestation and the farm and the dried up lake and the plight of being young in Jacumba.

As we float in sulfur I tell Austin I don't want to hurt anyone. I tell him that some of what I say will be true and some will be false. I tell them that at best life and its living are made out of well-wrought fictions and I invite him away from the Jacuzzi to room 103 where he can listen to me read some passages from **Invisible Cities**. He says he doesn't read. I say it doesn't matter. *I will read to him.*

I am sitting on a wet towel making a wet bed when I finally get to recite the conjured voice of Marco Polo:

From the number of imaginable cities we must exclude those whose elements are assembled without a connecting thread, an inner rule, a perspective, a discourse. With cities, it is as with dreams; everything imaginable can be dreamed, but even the most unexpected dream is a rebus that conceals a desire or, its reverse, a fear. Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.

Polo later reminds Ghengis Khan and me that the city “*must never be confused with the words that describe it. And yet between the one and the other there is a connection.*”

Among this room and Austin’s cock and the Colorado River and Farrah Fawcett and the back of any pick-up truck there exists a boundless space of connection and contact. There are millions of girls confused about their own and others’ vaginas and thousands of disembodied names entering the ears of still more girls who are falling in love with words. Just 63 days before I use Calvino’s book as a means of seduction Ms. Fawcett’s body was laid to rest at Westwood Memorial Park in Los Angeles. It was ravaged by cancers no amount of T-shirt money or hydrotherapy could ever repair. Hundreds of meters and miles away from my wet towel countless bodies are touching other bodies and not one of them can map the resulting zone of contact their combined fears and desires might produce.

When I return from Jacumba and tell another artist friend about all the boys I have recently read to in bed, she will call me a wandering minstrel. So perhaps this is a book of songs or a collection of dirges or an itunes faves list. Or maybe all these words are just a modern romance fueled by unrealized wants and caused by the soupy run-off from the

far-off Colorado Rockies.

It is late in Jacumba and Austin isn't listening to me. He does not need a rebus or any other enigma to convince my body to move from its present location. I go over there because I want to touch him. I go over there because I feel like a high school girl who just scored the hottest commodity on the market. I go over there because this bed is all wet.

34.

The first Jacumba Hotel and Spa holds its Grand Opening on Memorial Day 1925, the same day that the first air-conditioned movie theater opens 2400 miles away in New York City. Luckily, AC has not yet made its way to the Imperial Valley, so the upper-class bodies of Southern California's agricultural empire to the East have a new place to cool down.

The first man to buy up the entire space of Jacumba was entrepreneur named Burt Vaughn. With its purchase came all the places that hadn't already been made private – a dozen or so homes belonging to families who had made claims going back to the past century, when many white bodies came hoping to find some gold a Spaniard had buried under a pine tree. That Spaniard had been busy colonizing California for his King and/or searching for the fountain of youth and/or serving some other selfish interests.

The Spaniards and their selfish interests would be gone by the 1820s, when Mexico won independence from the far-off crown. After 1848, many of the newly independent Mexicans would also be gone, thanks to the signing of a piece of paper called *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* that turned Mexican-owned California into the U.S.A. The land of medicinal mud called *Jacumba* by English-speaking bodies and

Jacume by Spanish-speaking bodies would simply begin a geographical drift, with the Mexican version leaving the water underground and becoming one of many *ejididos* – collective farming towns gifted to the Mexican peasants in 1920s and 30s in fulfillment of revolutionary promises.

By 1919, Jacumba had joined the growing American archive of turn-of-the-century One-Man-Towns that, like Frank Capra’s fictional (and ethically skewed) Pottersville, fulfilled promises of self-reliance and capitalism and economic booms. In **Jacumba – Mountain Empire Town with Bibles and Bullets on the Border**, mid-century minister Jordan Edward Detzer thD tells us that around the time of Vaughn’s purchase “*shooting at Indians changed to shootings at drug peddlers, as they totted [sic] opium across the border and were met by the U.S. Border Patrol agents.*” Today the Mexican cartels with their American coyotes and peddlers keep these myths and facts alive, as bullets and bodies continue to draw lines between the two towns and bibles remain pretty popular among the 7 religious denominations found within these cousin communities.

As any resident or regular can tell you, Jacumba’s promised boom lasted through the 20s and beyond. You can buy postcards that prove it at the spa or the library – There’s Louise Brooks pouting into the lens as she films *Beggars of Life* in the nearby Carrizo Gorge! There’s Clark Gable grinning and leaning on his private plane at the now defunct Jacumba airfield! There are a group of soldiers posing in front of the saloon, looking for the many promised “*loose women!*” Some claim that more than 10,000 bodies lived around the luxurious hotel at the time of its Grand Opening and celebrity influx, but no

census can prove it.

In 1954 entrepreneur Henry LaZare says “*This is not a one man town,*” and becomes the 5th or 6th body to buy it all up. He plans to “*promote Jacumba as a health resort because the mineral waters here have the same rating as those of Warm Springs, Georgia.*” He brings out a team of Kentucky-trained doctors to run a clinic specializing in the treatment of polio and arthritis “victims”. He draws up plans for a full-fledged hospital that will protect and regulate all these booming bodies. Across the street from the hotel, he builds “*individual cubicles and a large therapeutic pool equipped with whirlpool-like circulators.*” When green mud and algae are found in the fancy waters, bodies spread it on swollen limbs to relieve aches and pains and it works! It works! Soon there is Yoga and health food and physical therapy and drawn-up papers for the creation of a medical non-profit organization, but the hospital never happens and at some point the medical dream team moves back to Kentucky.

A 1967 issue of the **San Diego Union** claims that Highway 8 and Air Conditioning and better cars have “*left the town in a cultural backwash that LaZare hopes to change.*” This backwash is “*a little hamlet [that] at times seems almost deserted with trash blowing into the streets and stray dogs slowing traffic to a crawl. Yet the hotel continues to attract hikers, artists and San Diegans who need to get away just a half tank of gasoline from town.*”

By 1979, the myth of 10,000 bodies has become a reality of 200, with 80 of these small enough for elementary school chairs. But money-making entities back in the big city of San Diego see promise in the youth. They ignore this Tribune headline: “*from lush spa to debris then nada*” and then lay down \$2,000,000 to convert the one-man town into

an investor-group oligarchy. This consortium, which includes an office furniture store owner, a contractor-developer, a retired tunaboat captain and the notorious SD mob-body J. Davis Dominelli, wants to “*make the town more period authentic*” by taking away TVs and phones and offering 3 home-cooked meals for \$21 per night. The group installs a few managers, who carefully note that Jacumba is not a “fat farm.”

In 1983, two brothers enjoying the wholesome quiet of this re-newly formulated period piece forget to blow out their candles before bed and that’s the end of the hotel. They should have known. Their mother had called the hotel earlier with “*a bad feeling.*” But by 12:42am it’s too late, and the 30,000 gallons of water imported from the motel pool across the street are not enough to save the structure. Nor does anyone want to pay the \$200,000 insurance premium to rebuild. Today you can walk along the foundation of Jacumba’s legacy to get a great view of the liquor store and the new spa/old motel and the big fence, but everything else is gone. Someone paid the guys from Jacume to come over and tote it all away a long time ago.

But even without its doctors and cubicles and Yoga teachers, the spa prevails. In 1986 a mysterious investment group from Chicago saves the town for (some say) less than \$950,000. Thus begins the era of Felix and Lisa Bachmeirer, whose reign **the San Diego Union** describes like this: “*In pursuit of the American Dream, they have come west to these pristine, uncluttered and cool mountains to take advantage of the opportunities in this fast –growing and unique area of Southern California.*” The undated article also has this to say about the patio where I sit with Alfred and Ronnie and Austin and Norman and Tim: “*Visitors can also enjoy the outdoor dining area, now under*

construction, designed to provide for romantic interludes under the stars accompanied by the melodious sounds of water splashing in the ornate, old world fountains.” After construction, *“the bar will feature imported beers from all over the world in an atmosphere designed for quiet conversation and relaxation.”* Nowadays, all the good international stuff is locked up in Albert’s cabinet and definitely not for sale. The biggest selling domestic is Bud Light, foreign: Corona.

Jacumba’s county-run library holds little evidence of what went down at the spa in the 90s. From what I hear, a 13-year-old dishwasher walked into the bar one night to find a happy guest getting blow job and there were plenty of bodies moving in and out of rooms paid for in-full monthly by some businessmen from Jacume. From what I hear, Felix spent a year in jail for harboring illegal aliens and now lives up on a hill and rarely visits the international bar he founded. From what I hear, it was far from wholesome or quiet and was the best time ever in the history of some now young adults current lives. But if you want to know who really owns Jacumba now, don’t ask at the spa. I am settling up my bill one day when a hopeful tourist walks in asking for information and trying to negotiate discounts.

“It costs vat it costs” Sonja tells him.

“Well, where’s Felix? He used to give us a good deal.”

“Felix duzn’t vurk here anymore. Vat days do you vant?”

The tourist smiles big, leans into the counter with both fists, tucks in his chin: *“How ‘bout if I bring a big party of people? Can we work something out?”*

“It costs vat it costs.”

He raises his chin: “*Well who owns the place now?*”

Sonja doesn't look at him, she's busy counting my money. “*The owner is Colombian woman. She duzn't live here.*”

The frustrated San Diegan finally storms off, leaving me confused, elated, thinking I have just found another amazing narrative link between myself and the history of this spa: “*Is this place really owned by Colombians? You know I used to live there, right?*”

Sonja gives me a humorless laugh, still counting. “*No, that vas jus bullshit. Vat bizness is it uv his who owns this place? It's not the fucking Hilton!*”

35.

Lately there's been a lot of talk about a friendship I've fused with Jacumba's Mexican contingency. The talk revolves around a guy named Cesar who is on the lam after taking a jog in the wrong direction from his prison work furlough.

Cesar has decided to hide in the inconspicuous territory of plain sight, which means leaning into the broad shadow of the liquor store entrance. When I find him there most late mornings he's already buzzed off Bud Light and emoting nervous energies around the ice machine.

He's now afraid to use the bar as an inconspicuous site because he thinks I'm mad at him and the town is mad at him and all of this because of one pink afternoon when he and some cousins had been happy-houring on the patio. I'd used that afternoon to start translating my project aims into Spanish, a helpful exercise for my communications with the academic border crew back at university, an important linguistic opportunity that could greatly improve my future.

Cesar decided he should drive me around the community, down Brawely St. and up Empire Ave and back around Rail Road St, and introduce me to people. I had just come back from a trip to ‘town’ with a new HD video camera and I sat recording our conversations on my new device’s decent sound component. He swore that his intimacy with the townsfolk could help me produce great material, lasting friendships and an insider’s glance into the social guts of this complicated place. In the end, the trip did produce some friends and some potential enemies and ended the moment I gauged the extent of his drunkenness and the town’s distaste for outsider women.

The morning after, Norman Blackwell is at breakfast in his daily uniform: white pants, a white cowboy shirt, a white hat and a black neck tie. Back in what many call ‘the day,’ Norman had faced mountain lions and survived car crashes and won bar fights and lost loves. Now he’s a hardcore Christian who goes to a bible meetings in Alpine every Sunday right down the street from my mom’s place in Alpine. He’s also a musician, with an old guitar and a set of songs he’s written about God and growing up in Jacumba and Shadows and showdowns. Norman is having his regular cup of black coffee, which he takes by the southern sun-blasted window.

You know, I was just thinking yesterday...

When Norm says this, I know I may or may not hear a story I’ve already heard. Granted, the stories are good, composed and practiced for years and years until they’ve achieved an eternally vintage quality. There’s the one about being the last body (his) born into a family of 8 or 12 aboard an empty train car not long after after John D. Spreckle’s

San Diego railroad efforts went bunk. There's the one about going off to war on a big ship and coming back as the talk of the town only to find out his girlfriend had taken up with another man. Then there's the regretful one: In the late 40s Norman and his crew got an idea about a bobcat. They would inject this typical rocky lowland predator with powerful sedatives and put its body in a suitcase. They would put the suitcase in the middle of Highway 80, the only road in town. They would wait for a carload of Black guys heading back to El Centro to pick up the suitcase and put it in their low riding Cadillac. They would see what happened, which was this: the bobcat awoke on cue. Norman and friends watched with binoculars as 4 car doors opened and 4 bodies fled into the desert night, followed shortly by a pissed off cat. The black bodies, clad in fancy suits and shiny shoes, spread in 4 directions, mapping circular courses into the scrubby desert floor. The bobcat, still groggy with chemistry, limped off never to be seen again.

Norm is repentant for what he did that day. Still, he doesn't look at it as a hate crime, since he hadn't yet heard of that term. But he knows it was wrong. He is open-minded now, and well-meaning, and good friends with the sheriff, who is more or less the only black man in town. He is a Christian, and he now leaves bobcats alone.

Norman is not angling at any of these stories today. Instead, he tells me about the two kinds of people that exist in this world: decent ones and indecent ones. He tells me he has met plenty of both and we all have to be careful – especially women. Women and their bodies are always in great danger, especially if their bodies are attractive. Then he tells me about a place 4 miles west of town on the other side of the border where *bad*

things are known to happen. This place, it seems, *is a dumping ground for women.*

I tell Norman I have been around the block, lived in dangerous places, and can handle my own. He heads off to church on this note, leaving me to wonder how those indecent people get the bodies over *there* nowadays. There is damned big fence between them and this real or mythic burial ground and I just don't see catapulting as an option.

You know what he's really trying to say, don't you? Alma, my other favorite waitress asks me. I tell her I do and I don't. I ask her what the hell is going on. She says it's all about Cesar. Someone from the town went into the post office that morning to ask the postmistress, Austin's mom, about the girl staying at the hotel. The postmistress of Jacumba has long been the town's matriarchal keeper of secrets, ever since the days of the Pony Express, which was about 70 years before Norman was born. Norman is about 90 years old.

I had seen Cesar at the bar on the way to breakfast, emoting nervous energy over a bud light. I'd said *Buenos Dias* and he'd said *No quiero problemas, disculpa todo* and taken off to his new hideout across the street.

What the hell did I do wrong? I ask Alma.

She says *it's not you, it's him.* It seems the townsfolk of Jacumba are worried about my getting caught up with the wrong people and even though everyone loves big-boned Cesar, he is a wrong person. Later, I will realize that I have crossed a border without even leaving town. I will find out that friendly relations among the Mexicans, the Mexican-Americans, the Americans and the Germans have their own complicated grid of

social lines and boundaries going back hundreds of years before the erection of a big, expensive fence. I will learn that much of the town has already pegged me as the postmistress' son's paramour and realize that *his* grid has a lot of lines as well and I will figure out what lines I should and shouldn't cross.

Alma says that I am innocent in this. They all think I'm young (which pleases me) and naïve and don't know what I'm getting myself into. Others, I am sure, just think I'm a slut, given the tenuous border between these two female identities. Over the next few weeks, Cesar will work his way back into the spa space, cordially and nervously buying drinks for me and everyone else he knows. He will tell me about his daughter and her mom and his childhood on this specific point on the race/space/place grid. He will make Alfred pissed at both of us for speaking in closed-circuit Spanish. He will proclaim his undying attraction to a girl named Sara, a twenty-something who frequents the pools with her 6-year-old son, Achilles. Sara has an all-year spa pass. I see her and Achilles floating in one pool or the other almost every afternoon. Achilles is a curly, golden cherubic head winged by red floaties that bobs across the shallow end. Sara is usually a bigger body doing laps in a floral bikini.

At a certain point in my stay, I am no longer innocent but also not a slut. I've survived the curse of Cesar and the many moods of Alfred. I've weathered the gnats and the rumors and the limited high-carb menu. I'm almost done and I can feel it, the call of other spaces: the gallery back in LA, my studio, home – places where I don't have to smoke in a contained room, ward of tiny bugs or constantly worry about pissing people off.

It's a weeknight and Alfred is in a good mood – probably because he won big at the casino last night. He's giving out shots of Brandy and Sara and I accept. We sit on the cedar benches in front of his room and my room and watch what the setting sun does to the Eastern Mountains – its shadow a slow farewell with an abrupt goodbye – one last wink at the hottest day in September.

Sara is waiting for her ex-husband to come get their son and take him to his bachelor pad in Live Oaks, a place Achilles hates. Her ex is a youngish white guy with a Maori design inked into his bald head. He also has a year spa pass, so I often see him here with his own young-guy cohort. Given that I have enough problems with social boundaries, I avoid this group, which is peppered with Austin's childhood friends. Once they invited me to go get pizza 17 miles away, but I was afraid to leave, in spite of the enticing possibility of this much missed food item. I don't need more breakfast lectures about riding in cars with boys. Besides that big tat, I know only this about the baby-daddy: he is a follower of Kurt and Nora and strongly believes that *his body has worked for centuries to be where it is* and he's eagerly awaiting the oncoming cultural shifts of 2012. By the time he shows up, Sara is a bit tipsy and they fight in the empty lobby while I read passages from *Teach Yourself Serbian* to Alfred and pretend not to listen and keep one eye on Achilles as he plays catch with Sheeba.

What the hell are you doin drinkin with them? You have your fucking kid here for chrissakes!

But Sara is not a yeller or a crier. She comes back smiling and tells Achilles to dry off and get his stuff together. Sara is almost always smiling or floating, and her baby

daddy is almost always frowning or shouting and I am almost always glad I didn't end up in her situation: young, divorced, and responsible for another growing body. Almost always.

I ask her what the hell his problem is, even though I understand it. She says he's a hothead and always does that and don't worry. Weeks earlier, she'd told me that her baby daddy and I might make a good couple and I should meet him since we both read and think a lot. But by now I'm sure I could never handle his pensive moodiness or his new age convictions or the tattoo on his head.

We switch to beer and watch the east mountain until all the sun is gone. Alfred and I give her lessons about Yugoslavia and we all sit talking about nations and childhoods and road trips and how one goes from here to there. There is no one in the bar tonight, so Alfred locks the door and makes us all a big plate of fries and even breaks out his personal lump of prosciutto, which is salty and cut too thickly for my tastes, but goes down well with Stella.

We end up back in the cool pool around 10pm. All the windows are dark except for chef Fernando's and the one belonging to the guy who protects kids from child molesters. Alfred is off making more fries so Sara and I swim some laps through liquid made yellow-green by the underwater pool lights.

By the time she slips her hand into my suit bottoms the pool is a choppy sea of rough water wake, alive with maps and swirls produced by drunken bodies. When she goes for my mouth, I push her back – using my arm like the paw of a willing but reluctant cat.

What are you doing? I ask, even though I know. *I know.* I've been in this place before.

Nothing, It's Ok. Its ok. She is transformed and she's beautiful and all that stuff she's supposed to be — wet hair, half-mast eyes, perfect teeth, round breasts —. I'm flattered and I submit mechanically, in a gesture of politeness and mild arousal that lasts until I push her away.

Have you done this before? I want to know. She is aggressive, dude-like, yet there's something naïve about her candor and the quick movement of her fingers in their search for an opening.

Not really. Maybe once. But I want to. Don't you? Haven't You?

The question gives me a chance to put some words between us. *Of course, yeah, I've done this but it's not my thing — you know, not really, is it yours?*

Sara likes girls. She *really* likes girls, but what's she supposed to do? This is the backcountry and there's nobody to do anything with. Most of the outed lesbians in Jacumba and Boulevard are found in men's porn collections and here I come, with talk of queer friends and dyke bars and art and dildos and open-mindedness and she just can't help herself.

I didn't realize I'd been talking about dildos or dykes, but I guess I have been, maybe out of homesickness or habit — the way one talks about best friends or favorite brands or a much-missed radio station. I wasn't looking for temptation or come-ons, but now I am obligated, being forced to take one for the team. Even if I'm not a lesbian, I

want to be queer and I *am* an educator and Sara *needs* lessons and rescuing and opportunities Jacumba can't readily provide. How can I abandon another woman in this important time of need? Then I remember...

You know, there are quite a few lesbians who live in Ocotillo...

But Sara is already down there, not waiting around for written permission or other options. It's then that the fence squeaks and she swims off, all laughs and green-yellow bubbles and bobbing boobs. Alfred is back with the fries and more beers and I decide he hasn't seen any of it.

We eat the crinkled potatoes and pretend nothing happened until Alfred decides this will be the one night of the summer that he goes in the Jacuzzi, so maybe he has seen something and expects a show. We get our towels and head west to the locked up armpit and its greener sulfur.

Alfred installs himself by a jet and gives his regular speech about not needing anything – not even hydrotherapy – for the chronic back pain that causes him to walk crooked and yell a lot: *I haf never taken pain pill in my life. The doctor gif me pil und I say 'vat I vant mit dat?' I don't need nufink! I havunt even been in jacuzzi for 18 munts! I don't need dis shit!*

As soon as his glasses steam up and his mouth assumes its natural gnat-catching pose – the one revealing the fact he doesn't take anything from dentists, either – Sara starts at it again. This is *wrong*, but I am here in the nexus, the womb, the place it all started, the wet revolution that caused my art revelation and that makes it all seem *right*.

Sara kisses like a girl, of course, which means she is soft, unthreatening, all about texture, moisture, companionship, lip gloss. This is the way it should end, safe and warm and with no fear of ending up in the dumping ground on the other side of the fence.

We stay like this for at least fifteen minutes, enjoying the perversity of the cranky, closed-eyed voyeur along for a soak. When Alfred decides its time to go, I'm relieved. It's his Jacuzzi, and he won't let us stay in there alone, despite Sara's pleas. She is definitely too drunk to drive the 8 miles back to Boulevard, so he says she can stay on my extra bed and he makes this offer without any perverted comments or acknowledgement of our make-out session and I love his angry ass all the more for this feigned ignorance.

Back in 103, I give Sara some sweat pants and a shirt. None of my friends have been here this summer to witness the life I live in this dingy room. She is the first woman, besides the maid, to set foot in here. I keep my pants on and get in my own bed, but I'm not tired.

Are you sure you don't want to sleep over here? She asks in that inviting voice that women other than myself often use. I pour her some champagne and don't answer. I want to talk. I want to talk to a girl. She starts apologizing for coming on so strong, she starts asking me about girls and what I've done with them. But I don't want to talk about vaginas anymore, so I turn our conversation to her desire to fuck Austin's best friend and the proposed home-schooling of Achilles and the fall-out from the whole Cesar situation and the lukewarm cultural viruses of which her baby daddy's so convinced.

We talk for an hour, with Lifetime booming in through Alfred's wall. Eventually, I go over to the other bed. This one is lonely and boring and full of desert dirt because the maid was out sick today.

36.

On the last day of my stay, I drive over to Tim's to pick up the Penzoil box. Tim always leaves notes on his door for me. Often they are on paper plates or utilities envelopes and they say things like "*Your prosecco is in the fridge*" or "*I'm in the bathroom*" or "*Gina, come on in.*" Today the note is leaning up against the stuccoed wall, surrounded by pine needles, ants, and one dead, ripely feathered falcon, still warm to the touch. The note says:

The hawk the stealth sharp eyed bird soaring above the surface of the earth's pull...on high is finally brought down low...now lying from it's heavens flight...gone forever...oh how we weary and weep about life s fate.

A nameless sentiment strikes full force – the same one that often overcomes me when I see kids with balloons or old bodies on benches or stuffed animals smudged and abandoned in gutters. It is something like pity, but more like respect, longing, regret, confusion, empathy and hope. It's a silent knowledge that even though everything worldly will always be *wrong*, it is still marked up with potential, tinged with affect, pitted with *incipient vitality*.

Information is carried on matter in these sides. No theories can suck it out of its many homes inside brittle stems of plastic plants, legs of morning waterbugs or the glucose that cements baked beans in cans. The data that makes Jacumba *Jacumba* is

housed above and below the earth in the bodies that built these sides, in bodies that cross and clean them, in bodies that have been protecting them since they emerged from so much mud. These sometimes hidden histories are Jacumba's homeland securities.

I carry the box back to the hotel, where Sonja has laid out some Russian tomatoes along with the free continental breakfast. The tomatoes are hybrid heirlooms, red with green swirls, each a flat, global map of an alternate world. She's bought them from a Mexican lady who sets up a roadside stand near the Golden Acorn Casino every Sunday, probably earning in one day the amount that Alfred blows in his first 15 minutes at the blackjack table.

I take 4 bagel slices, 4 plastic cups of cream cheese, 4 tomato slices and carefully create and consume a small galaxy. The secret sex-offender agent is at the east table, silently doing the same. Norm is seated to the north with no tomatoes and his morning cup, gazing out at the *ornate old world fountains*. Sonja is installed on the south side, reviewing last night's receipts.

"So Glenna, vat are you going to do with yourself now?"

I am going back west, where I will start to mix and mash this data, *cull what I can of it, smash it into finer grains of word-meanings and project its images far over its fixed horizons*. I am going to *take this place, translate it into space, and convert it back into place again*. I am going to leave.

But I've only skimmed the surface of the water here. The earth still needs penetrating, and there are sides rising on paper surfaces that will soon be translated into steel and concrete – big, fat, moving sides of windmills that will add more lines and

energies to the mutable landscape. Burning Man Decompression is coming up, and Thanksgiving, and New Year's Eve, and the season when snow falls briefly into the cracks of the desert floor. There is still plenty of *work* to be done in Jacumba. I won't be gone for long.