

Resilient Regan Resonates Southern Baptist Makes Good Music in East Village

BY NICOLE CHIN

She sings like a tortured angel—it's beautiful, but filled with vulnerable and heartbreaking lyrics. There's a reason behind it, a story that goes all the way back to her childhood.

"I had this broken leg and this broken heart and I was just completely miserable," she says in a slightly Southern accent. Her voice isn't sad, but rather glows with confidence, like she knows she can make it through any dreary disaster that might come her way.

At her farewell boating trip back in August 2001, Regan and a few of her friends went tubing. In one swift motion the tube she was riding flipped over, but the boat kept going, catching her left knee in the chaos. Tearing through the ACL and the MCL, Regan finally had physical pain to compete with the heartache she'd been suffering.

"I felt awful," she says. "I had just gone through a horrible break-up and now this broken leg. All this sucked really bad."

Now, standing in front of the thick, scarlet curtain on the stage of The Sidewalk Café, the 23-year-old Regan is a vision of an ethereal muse. Crimson hair spills down her back as tiny freckles are scattered on her high boned, brazen cheekbones and pointed chin. Her satin pink lips move beautiful words around in a dusky but pristine voice, an intimate mixture of Norah Jones and Sarah McLachlan with a whisper of a Southern accent. Her lyrics glide over the music as her slender fingers strum long guitar strings or flutter harmoniously across black and white keys, producing peace in the painful memory she sings: "You'll touch my body with those calloused hands and I'll forget who I am/ you'll go home to your girl friend/ I'll

not loving me. Of course it hurt like shit that they weren't there, but I always knew why they were gone."

She carries herself with a sincere smile, a placid laugh, and a jovial voice, but if one knows her well enough they can see the subtle sadness in her cerulean eyes, an almost imperceptible hint of pain. Strangely, it seems Regan knows that life is not beautiful without its ugliness.

Car." The fan favorite is a mixture of heartbreak and comedy, as she sings, "If we get hungry we'll go to Mickey D's we'll order a dollar menu hamburger with cheese please." Regan has realized that to write a good song she needs to make the listeners laugh and cry at the same time.

"I remember 'Your Mom's Car' and just being like you know, 'that's a classic,'" says Sidewalk Café's Monday night



Raymond Doherty photo

At only 23, the Virginia native is a veteran of ruined relationships. Her heroin-addicted parents abandoned her when she was one, forcing her into abusive foster homes, before she ended up with her grandmother.

go home to my dead-end," and she pauses, long enough for the thought to sink into the hearts of her listeners before she continues, "street, where you and I never meet."

"She's not afraid to talk about things that other people are afraid to talk about," says her best friend since high school John Sfara. "She's fearless."

At only 23, the Virginia native is a veteran of ruined relationships. Her heroin-addict parents abandoned her when she was one, forcing her into abusive foster homes before she ended up with her grandmother.

"I never really felt unloved," says Regan. "I was made to understand it was an addiction. It had nothing to do with them

"She just survives," says Sfara. "She never admits defeat." Her first song, "Easy," was a poignant letter to her father, asking him to enter a life of sobriety. She performed it in front of thousands of people at the World Congress of Music Therapy when she was 14-years-old.

"It was the first time I was listened to," says Regan. The sadness, only for a moment, grows bigger at the memory. And then she smiles because since then everything has changed.

She always had a talent for songwriting but it would take her a few years and a few more busted relationships and emotional bruises for her to realize this. After her boyfriend left her and their three-year relationship for another woman, and the horrible boating accident, Regan's broken heart produced over 50 songs. And after three months of rehabilitation in North Carolina she left it all to pursue a music career in New York. "All in all I love it here," she says. "I can never go back. I can't imagine doing anything else."

The competitive East Village music scene was a challenge for the good-hearted Southern Baptist when she first came to Manhattan. She played for weeks at The Sidewalk Café's Monday night AntiHootenanny, but the intimate scene was hard to break into and stand out at the same time. Yet the resilient Regan would not give up. "I was so jealous, because I felt that I really cared about these songs," she says.

She then isolated herself for two weeks, locking herself up in an aunt's apartment in Woodstock and wrote "Your Mom's

open mic host Lach. "She inhabits her songs when she performs. When she gets to the sad part, you feel this sadness emanating from her. She knows the right word for the right time to send shivers down your spine."

Lach recalls how the audience was quietly blown away after she played because everyone knew they were witnessing something special.

"You mention stuff nobody wants to talk about and suddenly everyone likes you," says Regan, her azure bulbs growing big with disbelief. "I went from being absolutely no one to people coming up and telling me how much they respected me, and coming from where I came, it blew me away."

Now Regan plans on playing as much as she can. She just finished a residency at The Living Room and has been mixing sounds with Steve Brown and Steve Waite while she played around town in August. She emphasized though that "nothing's permanent" and she's been "experimenting." She also plans on releasing her first album in the near future, though she remains unsigned. She just wants to work on "getting her music out there."

"I'm not sure of the direction I'm going," says Regan. "But when I start in that direction, I want to make sure I have all the songs that I want."

For more information visit www.erinregan.com and www.myspace.com/erinregan.

Nicole Chin is a junior communications major at Azusa Pacific University in Los Angeles and spent the summer studying journalism at NYU.

Larissa Shmailo's CD is Reviewed

BY JONATHAN BERGER

Larissa Shmailo
 The No-Net World
 SongCrew Records

Larissa Shmailo is a poet, published in *Newsweek* and *Street News*, who has just released a CD of her work. A few of the 18 poems presented on *The No-Net World* have musical accompaniment by Bobby Perfect.

Larissa Shmailo is a performer who has played the Knitting Factory and various radio stations. She clearly knows how to read, enlivening her rhythmic work with strong presentation and excellent delivery. Many of the poems could easily be transformed into songs, though when

the music accompanies the words they rarely seem to synch up.

Larissa Shmailo is an activist, as evident by her album's title. The No-Net World refers to those living so close to the financial edge that they can't afford even a day off of work. There's no net, you see, when you walk the tightrope. Most of her subjects deal with the underclass of urban life, such as "Madwoman," or the poor in "Hunts Point Counterpoint."

Larissa Shmailo is a teacher, so she really knows how to write, how to read, how to present her poetry. She's masterful in the wonderfully rhythmic "Johnny I love you, don't die."

Larissa Shmailo is a translator, so the different languages that come up throughout the album are no surprise. Two of the last tracks are short translations of Russian works. "My grandmother learned six languages," she says in "How My Family Survived the Camps." There are snatches of Spanish, German, Russian, and, is that Yiddish?

While her voice sometimes has too theatrical a quality, Shmailo's album is thoughtful, entertaining, and bears repeated listens.

Visit www.larissashmailo.blogspot.com for more information.

Jonathan Berger strives to be better than he is. He hasn't quite gotten there yet.

Jeremy Gardner

Upper East Side

Tercet of Tercets (or, Traiku)

We do not claim to
 {Somebody tell me}
 [You have done enough]

Be doing anything but
 {That I am special, chapter}
 [Stop the self-deprecation]

What we are doing
 {Audience: action}
 [In the cutting room]

PRINTED MATTER



Mark Lamoureux photo

A Walk Down Amnesia Lane

Elsewhere #2

Gary Sullivan

By Mark Lamoureux

Since last February I have been teaching English at Kingsborough Community College, at the far end of Brighton Beach. Spending up to four days a week in the vicinity, I have become very fond of the college and its neighborhood and people. It was with great anticipation then that I awaited the release of the second issue of Gary Sullivan's comic book-cum-visual poem, *Elsewhere*, which is focused on this neighborhood. I was curious to see Sullivan's reaction to the area and how he would confront the challenge of depicting such a singular entity as is Brighton Beach in two-dimensions. Would he succumb to the alienating chaos of the neighborhood's plastic and polyester facade without plumbing the depths of its religious power? Would he be seduced by the erotics of its exterior but remain indifferent to its young and chaste heart?

Having the issue at last in hand, I find that Sullivan and Nada Gordon, who has contributed text to the issue in the style of Frank O'Hara's poem "Second Avenue," do not

disappoint. The authors approach their subject with the sophistication and intensity that it deserves. The volume's cover, depicting a woman in a full burqa, opens to a photographed image of a ceramic Christ facing a sign for Neil Sedaka Way; in a few nearly wordless pages Sullivan encapsulates the neighborhood's most powerful nuances, marrying kitsch to un-ironic religious ecstasy. The book closes with a similar view-from-the air of a Virgin of Guadalupe intersected with ceramic Lady and the Tramp figurines, presumably from the same vendor offering the crucifixion. The last image of the book is that of a Mickey Mouse in electrical-cord bondage, a salute to the underlying, and perhaps artificially imposed, erotics of Brighton Beach's contradictory symbolologies.

Sullivan's view is up-close and truncated, abstracting signs and graffiti to language and context-less collages—Cyrillic, Roman, and Arabic fonts merging to form a sensuous and scintillating mélange. His panorama remains blissfully free of over politicization or ham-fisted deconstructing. Politically or sexually charged images assume their inconspicuous place amid the general buzz of enigmatic

and hallucinatory apparitions—a winking tire, a yarmulked smiley-face, a man with a fez in the moon.

Gordon's text does an excellent job of providing an ambient soundtrack for Sullivan's images and of bringing O'Hara to Brighton Beach (did the man himself ever leave Manhattan, except to go to Fire Island?), utilizing found text and the general landscape in a verbally analogous way to Sullivan's images. I find myself more interested in Gordon's dialogue with Brighton Beach than with O'Hara. Gordon inserts at least one verbatim quote from "Second Avenue," her model text, into her narrative. I would have preferred the project to remain completely free of any ghosts of Manhattan, however the interlocution of O'Hara takes its modest place in the general pleasing din.

What is missing from the text is the vibrant color of the avenue in contrast to the washed-out steeliness of the sea, though presumably Sullivan's choice of black and white for the interior is financially required and not an aesthetic one. I would like to see the vibrant color of the cover throughout.

Mark Lamoureux is the printed matter editor for Boog City.

Mind Over Over-Mind

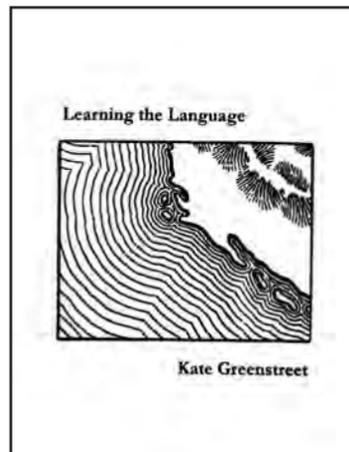
Learning the Language

Kate Greenstreet

Etherdome Press

By Jennifer Firestone

H.D., explaining her concept of the "over-mind" in *Notes On Thought And Vision*, says, "That over-mind seems a cap, like water, transparent, fluid yet with



definite body, contained in a definite space. It is like a closed sea-plant, jellyfish, or anemone. Into that over-mind thoughts pass and are visible like fish swimming under clear water."

Reading poet and painter Kate Greenstreet's chapbook, *Learning the Language*, I had the sensation of being privy to a particular "over-mind," where many slippery and illuminating thoughts dart by to be studied, or merely observed. Perhaps it is a mind unafraid to engage dreams and surreal visions alongside the quotidian and diaristic. Or perhaps it is a mind that has a certain truth-seeking integrity no matter the investment or journey. "Deep in my own green element,/ I met a friend—/ my

double, my dearest," writes Greenstreet.

Learning the Language takes many risks; the work doesn't submit to a particular aesthetic or reflect a preconceived intent. Part of the work's struggle involves how the speaker reveals herself, her visions, amid the intrusion of others. "A genius! they say./ Or then: She has almost no gifts," writes Greenstreet. These constant interruptions perpetuate the conflation between the speaker's sense of self with the stream of

Possibly the important thing about looking and thinking about 'language' is the never-ending shaping, the constant processing, much like the gerund learning.

societal messaging that is projected upon her. The struggle to individuate and test one's desires is attacked, hindered, and sculpted by society. It is this conflict that leads to one of the heartbreaking questions in the book, "I don't know why some people are/ abandoned so completely./ It can make you hate life."

In the poem "Yellow Book" we are lost in a myriad of squares: doors, books, maps, painting, quilts. These squares allow us to think about how things are framed, considered; even the speaker holds herself up to questions regarding her narration, testimony, memory, and credibility, "Every rearrangement makes a meaning/ what I am remembering/ what I am forgetting."

And what is *Learning the Language*? Is it the attention to dreams, limitations, seasons, colors, temperatures, grief and history that are all tracked throughout the book? Does each of these provide a way "in"? Is it instinctual—"We learn to speak by hearing sounds/ and deciding what they mean"; is it a "Code of the body: chest pain, meaning/ something like homesickness." In this book there aren't concrete signs. The speaker encounters fragments of dreams, journeys, translations, maps, and tarot cards, and even when fragments are revealed the question arises: how does one read these fragments? What will be discounted, eliminated, what will be emphasized? Possibly the important thing about looking and thinking about "language" is the never-ending shaping, the constant processing, much like the gerund learning.

The work's interrogation is honest and admirable. One of the questions it poses has stayed with me: "How will we see where we are from where we are?"

Jennifer Firestone's chapbook *Flashes* is forthcoming from Sona Books. She's co-editing the anthology *Letters To Poets: Conversations about Poetics, Politics, and Community and is the poet in residence at Eugene Lang (The New School)*. Her work has recently appeared in *How2*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Dusie*, *moria*, and *MIPoesias* among others.

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No Fried Dough or Sausages, Please

BY CHRISTINA STRONG

My first street festival, not including those church bazaars and the white elephant Rice Krispies with marshmallow affairs usually held in parking lots, was the Italian festival in the south end of Hartford, Conn. One went whether they were Italian or not and there was nothing arty or political about it. The focus was on food—pizza, sausage, Italian ices (not gelato), and fried dough—and, well, not much else. All I remember is going there with friends, walking around, and finding other kids from school to hang out with. It was usually packed, lots of big sweaty men showing off their muscles, and the talk was about the local boy who made good, boxer Willie Pep, whose last fight was in 1966.

Curious if the festival was still going on I did a search. The Italian festival does not exist any more in Hartford. Researching further I found that everyone from Bosnians to Somalians are moving into the area, and that many of the “old locals” have fled toward the suburbs. After finding no additional information on the festival itself, I called one of the Hartford branch libraries and confirmed the futility of my quest: “It stopped a few years ago; it was getting too big and hard to handle. You might want to try Wethersfield [a suburb south of Hartford]. They might have something going on.”

Ending my search left me feeling somewhat sad and nostalgic and craving fried dough, and remembering watching the old Italian men on the sidelines of the street fair. I didn’t realize it at the time (since I wasn’t even a teenager yet)

but Hartford at one point had an Italian population so large the nickname for the south end is “Little Italy,” of course named after our own Little Italy.

I can’t explain why I’m feeling nostalgic because I’m not Italian. Not even a tiny bit.

While I’m wary of nostalgia, I have little to be nostalgic about. I grew up with a war sitcom (*M.A.S.H.*), a slight fear of swimming (blame the movies *Jaws* and *Piranhas*), waiting in line every other day to put gas in my family’s non-economical bright yellow Chevy station wagon, Irish Republican Army member Bobby Sands’s starvation tactic (again, as seen on TV), the song “Summer Breeze” (which always creeped me out), and every time Nixon was on TV asking “Daddy, who is that scary man?”

Then came the decade of greed and bad haircuts, deregulation, cuts in social welfare programs (because every welfare mom drives a caddy, right?), AIDS, the Iranian hostage crisis, the Iran-Contra Affair, and the so-called war on drugs. Out of that era, I think the only things that saved me were punk rock and poetry.

The last street fair I attended was last year in Cambridge, Mass. I walked around, didn’t see anyone I knew (and I had been living there for four years, you’d think I’d see somebody I recognized), I didn’t like the bands that played (just plain boring to me), and it seemed more geared around food from the local restaurants and people selling raku bowls and hippie jewelry. And oh yeah, the politics? MassPIRG and whoever else were canvassing the streets asking if we were voters and would sign different petitions. The Billionaires for Bush couldn’t even be bothered to throw their bling in our faces.

In time, ethnic street fairs in places I’ve lived from San Francisco to Vermont, Boston to New York were replaced by anti-war/pro-peace marches, abortion rights marches, Lollapalooza, Bread and Puppet, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, Pride weekend (or week if you happened to live in SF),

the Folsom Street Fair, concerts for assorted left and progressive causes, inauguration protests, anti-racism rallies, immigrant rights rallies, pro gay marriage rallies, even more anti-war protests, art festivals, open studios, marathon poetry readings, and the Mermaid Parade. Most of these events have happened in the summertime, when folks are displaying body parts, tattoos, piercings, mohawks, leather, and sometimes just body paint. Some of these events offer food, others require the foresight to bring a big bottle of water or a bottle of wine. These are my good old days—no wonder I’m a little tired.

It also doesn’t help when I move to a new neighborhood and hear over and over, “it was better when...” I either can’t help lamenting missing out on a chunk of time and place I wasn’t privy to or, conversely, becoming annoyed with the “you missed out on the good old days” attitude. Maybe it’s because I just spent some time with a friend of mine who is a little older than me and has lived in New York since day one, about 45 years, and often gives the “I remember when...” lecture. I’ve been listening to that since I was 16. It’s first patronizing, and second, I’m

moved from Indiana to San Francisco, and he said that the gay bars back home were closeted. He wanted to feel free. Albeit we had had a few drinks and were pontificating on a number of things, but I wonder now if he had stayed in Indiana and started some kind of queer art show/music/poetry something or other,

I think art and music fairs and festivals are a temporary solution to the crass commercialization, if at the very least, showcasing that artists don’t work in a vacuum.

would that have helped him and perhaps jumpstarted a community, no matter how small?

Festivals, rallies, marches, and the like are a jumpstart to a community’s artistic outlook, or they can be, in a way that I can’t explain. Some people find it by creating a space, some actively look for it, and perhaps for others it just clicks once they find themselves in some sort of environment. This is all a vague description for people who were not born (or brought up) with art under their nursery blanket.

Which is where festivals, marches, art openings, fairs, and music come in. They are an acceptable way of fighting back. Or are they? P.S.1 in Long Island City had a fete recently, and the streets were littered with trash and promo postcards. My friend, whom I was visiting in LIC, said cynically, “Yup, the hipsters are moving in.”

I didn’t correct him, although he didn’t mean hipsters. I think he meant party animals. I’m not putting words in his mouth, for all I know he could have meant hipster, although the term is highly ironic and was initially directed toward jazz musicians. The term was probably not meant toward the woman I saw throwing up behind a parked car on Jackson Avenue.

Watching the East Village or the Lower East Side or other neighborhoods in New York turn into suburban strip malls doesn’t fill me with glee. I think art and music fairs and festivals are a temporary solution to the crass commercialization, if at the very least, showcasing that artists don’t work in a vacuum. And what is unique about New York, and why millions of people move here, is the art, the funkiness, the grit, the punks, the bus exhaust, the poetry, the counterculture. I especially like what the Howl Festival’s web site said, that these same people “invigorate the neighborhood with their iconoclastic spirit” even if what we’re encountering is skyrocketing rents, numbed partygoers, and swanky bars. At these same festivals, I get to hang out with other people who probably felt the same way I did when I was 16; just a tad weirder than everyone else.

And I don’t have to eat the fried dough.

Christina Strong is a poet and designer who lives in Red Hook. She longs to go skinny-dipping in Dummerston, Vt. She can be found at openmouth.org, xtina.org, and bookwhore.com.



(clockwise from top) Buy! Sell! Consume! Die! Orchard Street, NYC • Above the Masses, NYC • What Was This Supposed to Represent?, NYC • Partisan Government, Partisan Lifestyle, Washington, D.C.

Christina Strong photos

probably not likely to have an identical experience.

The East Village, for one, became an object of talk when at 16 I met an ex-junkie who used to live there in Hartford. Although he kicked heroin he still read junkie memoirs and I let him talk about New York, not caring whether he was putting me on or not. The East Village wasn’t about “art” initially to me, it was about music. The art seemed inaccessible to me, location-wise, and I wasn’t about to run away to New York City at 16, though I had thought about it a million times. Music was the most accessible medium.

The East Village signified, at the time, an individualistic—either born or moved there—attitude of “Fuck You” before I had even heard of Ed Sanders. This motto was directed toward the United States government, bad hair bands, and conformity, without, of course, having an intelligent and persuasive argument as to why I, for example, was so dissatisfied with the world. In hindsight, I wanted a group of people I could converse with, a community, if you will.

I never thought about community much until I moved to San Francisco in 1994. Or if I had thought about community, I thought of it under the rhetoric of psychobabble, that any community was “dysfunctional.” There was a bar in San Francisco’s Castro that I frequented. It had an outdoor patio and anyone and everyone congregated. It was friendly and one would end up talking to strangers. I asked someone why they

Green Party the alternative

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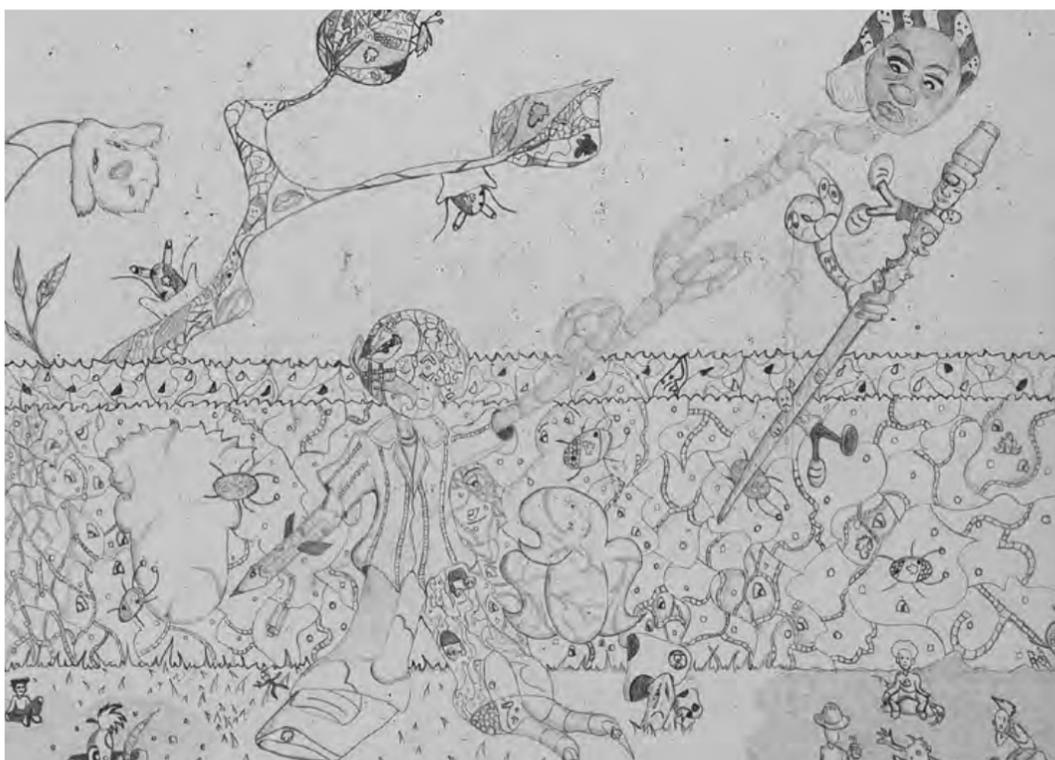
James Cook Gloucester, Mass. Third Base

A couple of mammals with furs & helmets
outwith my slack internment
all remembered this I lost
Everyone ignored Everyone else thrived
The firmness & victory they all wanted
is imperceptible to the eye that wants
to hang on No one remembered so I kept no one close
The single hermit was obviously right
Life had to happen this way—
the eremite would always keep what’s his
I’ll always keep what’s mine & live
where they knew I would

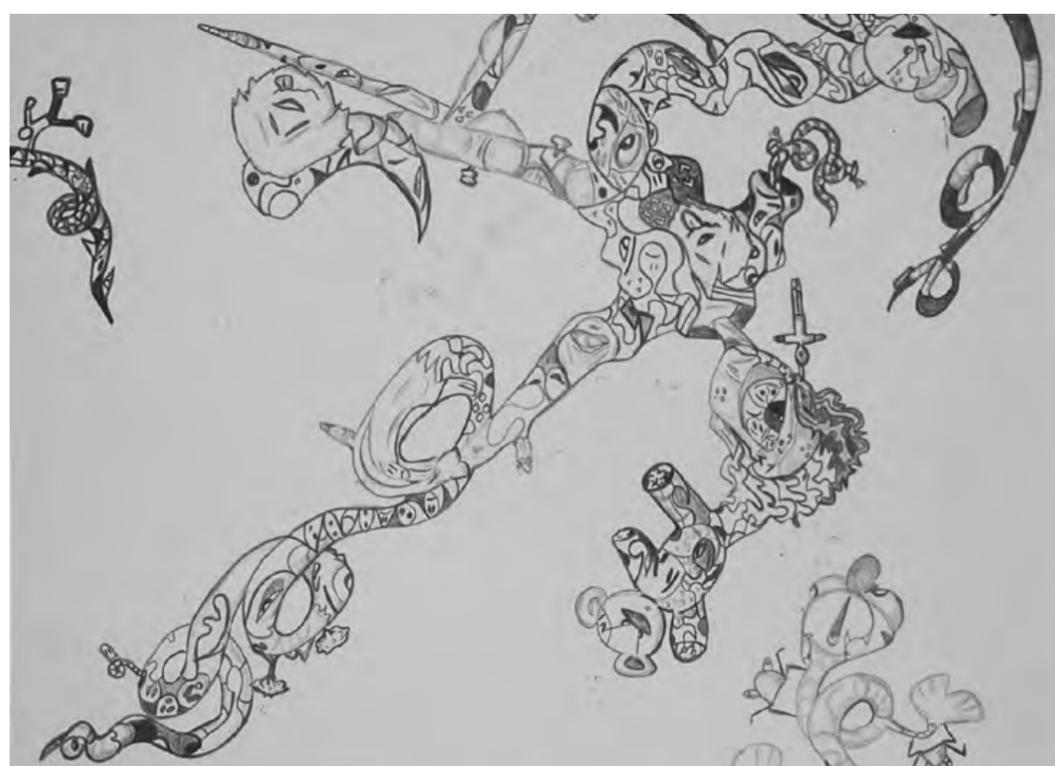
from *Nine Variations for Workers* (a fourth argument concerning liberation)

Johnathan Neal

The Bronx



My Brother's Keeper



My Brother's Keeper, detail



My Brother's Keeper, detail

About the Artist

Johnathan Neal studied illustration during his undergraduate years at the School of Visual Arts. After that he enrolled in the City College of New York and received a Master of Fine Arts in painting. Following graduation, he had the opportunity to exhibit his work at the Geoff Young Gallery in Great Barrington, Mass.

Old and Young Sell Their Wares Visiting the Union Square Farmers' Market

BY STEPHEN DIGNAN

Farmers' markets this fall are offering unique items beyond homegrown Swiss chard, mini acorn squash, and other edibles. There are 47 of them in 33 locations in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island under the auspices of The Council on the Environment of New York City's Greenmarket program.

At the Union Square Farmers' Market at East 17th Street and Broadway, for five bucks you can buy a "Star," a surgical-looking, stainless steel, no miss peeler. Its distributor, Joseph Ades, a sixtyish, balding Brit with a bushy white beard and eyebrows hawks his tool like a ringmaster.

"Step in closely now, I won't hurt you," says Ades, gesturing with both hands to draw in the crowd. "I've been selling these all-purpose peelers for 15 years. It's made in Switzerland by people who make instruments for doctors."

In front of Ades is a large cutting board, and four deep, white plastic bins holding little mountains of carrots, zucchini, and potatoes. He grabs a thick carrot and digs five grooves into it lengthwise with the side knife, then draws the blade across it. "Do this and you make carrot

sunflowers," he says. "Prepare zucchini like this and the kids will eat it. They'll think it's candy. You can use it left-handed or right-handed or, like a politician, underhanded," he adds with a self-aggrandizing laugh.

Ades grabs a potato and peels half of it with lengthwise strokes, then does some side-to-side maneuvers, slowly, in the other direction. "This little dynamo can take the skin off a ripe tomato. Off a mango! Off a Kiwi!" he says. "Do it with a potato and you make paper thin slices. Then you make your own chips so you know what's in them."

Ades picks up and pretends not to know how to use a classic knife-shaped peeler. "Use one of these and you'll get arthritis," he says and then he holds up the Star. "Step right up to get your Star," he adds. "You won't find this little gem anywhere else."

John Gagliardi Jr. stands on the corner of Central Park West and West 106th Street at the Stranger's Gate Greenmarket, which opened this past July, selling grass-fed beef. He sells all the cuts, including filet mignon, Delmonico steaks, boneless sirloins, New York Strips,

porterhouses, beef ribs, beef roast, and ground beef. He's 15, a student at Arlington High School in LaGrangerville, New York, where his father, John Sr., owns a 92-acre cattle ranch with about 100 head. Wearing a maroon parka, a

'It might cost a little more, but this boy sells the sweetest, juiciest pot roast I ever ate in my life. Tell your Daddy "hello" for me, son.'

buzz cut, and a retainer, John Jr. mans the booth, while his father sells at a greenmarket in Brooklyn, on Vernon Boulevard and 48th Street South; his mother and little brother sit on a bench nearby. "We sell at the Union Square market on Mondays and Wednesdays," John Jr. says, "that's where we sell the most, usually almost 50 pounds, or more."

"Our cows only eat grass," John Jr. says. "In the winter we ship them down to Mississippi so

we don't have to feed them hay in the winter. Grass is better for cattle, it's free-range and contains a lots of Omega 3's—the fatty acids that can reduce risk of disease, as opposed to cows that are fattened up in grain feedlots before they go to market, which are high in Omega 6's—the fatty acids that can raise cholesterol levels. My dad's grass-finished beef also offers 400 percent more vitamin A and E than commercial beef. It's healthier."

"You want to see one of our steaks?" John Jr. says, and then he pulls a skirt steak out of the cooler. "This is my favorite: the skirt steak. It's got a lot of flavor."

A woman in a pea-green overcoat buys a beef roast. "It might cost a little more," she says, "but this boy sells the sweetest, juiciest pot roast I ever ate in my life. Tell your Daddy 'hello' for me, son." She shuffles over to the next booth and buys some carrots, onions, and celery. "She's a regular customer," John Jr. says.

Stephen Dignan is a native Texan writer and musician based in NYC. He's working on a CD, two books, and a movie. For more information visit www.stephendignan.com.

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Urayoán Noel

Melrose, The Bronx

There's Nothing on TV Anymore (Jan '06)

There's nothing on TV anymore.
The self-help sound bytes and the bloopers of war.
The call-in shows where middle Americans
Call middle Americans to listen to them snore
In the middling conversation of "Which Olsen twin are you for?!"

There's nothing on TV anymore.
The networks bore like needlework conventions
And PBS is nothing more than Celtic folk, telethons,
And the occasional warmed-over Ken Burns heartburn.
HBO is *The Sopranos* plus lite porn.
FOX is populism as buckets of creamed corn
With the laughtracked cackle of Auntie Christs reborn.

There's nothing on TV anymore.
Yesterday's newscasters are yesterday's news
And MTV stopped playing videos long ago.
The camera crews cruise the avenues in search of chanteuses
To sing their off-key blues on morning shows!
(In mourning, still in bed, the rest of us hit "Snooze.")

There's nothing on TV anymore.
There's Bono and Angelina receiving a humanitarian award.
There's a 20/20 special on Freegans (people who live off of thrown-away food
To make some statement about our disposable culture,
As if statements weren't the most disposable product of our culture).
There are about twenty different infomercials for money-making real estate gurus
("No money down in a no-money town!")
And innumerable ads for cars whose names sound like viruses or Esperanto curses
Or restless-leg-syndrome medications—
Insignias of mobility in a banal globality.

There's nothing on TV anymore.
Reality TV and the news are now jejunely interchangeable:
A front page full of apprentices, top models, nannies, and fat, B-lisp celebrities,
While the evening news resembles a glossy grab-bag of mega-events:
Tsunamis! Levee breaks! Plain crashes! Prison breaks! Pandemics! Mass transit strikes!
(And what's up with the endless parade of Wholesome-White-Girls-Gone-Missing
In Caribbean islands?)

There's nothing on TV anymore. There never was.
You ask me why and I will answer you "Because."
Or "It's on a count of the media conglomerates
Who are busy doing their conglomerating."
People just got tired of the buzz
Sort of like what happened with Internet-dating
(And carbon-dating centuries before).

There's nothing on TV anymore.
I hear at ESPN they're hyping high-school lacrosse as the next Xtreme sport.
I hear media-savvy hate groups are carpet-bombing Walmart-furnished trailer parks
To make some other statement.
I can see the statesmen making statements on TV, demanding reinstatements.
I can see the screen's reflection on the floor.
There's nothing on TV anymore.

About the Poets

Zhang Er was born in Beijing. Her work has been collected in three books in Chinese, most recently *Because of Mountain* (Tonsan). English translations include the chapbooks *Carved Water* (Tinfish) and *Sight Progress* (Pleasureboat Studio). Her bilingual poetry collection *Verses on Bird* was from Zephyr Press. **Jeremy Gardner** recently self-published his first chapbook *I Wall*. He is the lyricist of the Lit-Hop duo, THEM ISMS, and is self-published at www.geocities.com/thehartwick. **Urayoán Noel** is the author of the books of poetry *Las flores del mall* (Alamala), *Kool Logic/La Lógica kool* (Bilingual Press), and the forthcoming *Boringkén* (Ediciones Vértigo). He is coediting, with Guillermo Rebollo Gil, a bilingual anthology of Puerto Rican poetry from the 1960s to the present for Terranova Editores.

Zhang Er

Olympia, Wash.

Check-Up

How long do I have to wait here?
Write a poem
lighten these heavy prognostications.

The bee needle stabs a vein
"buzz" lights up the heart
(radiation isn't related to emotion, generally speaking.)
Seductive green snake curves across the monitor.
Want to eat the forbidden fruit?
Curve up? Yang and strength: bird's dancing wings. Curve down? Accept the bleeding
to relax is no sign of giving up.
In a snap it swirls away, sheds skin
apple peels everywhere.

Outside the windowblind, youths
surround a brand new Volkswagen,
take turns in the driver's seat, touch here, there.
Have you touched the tail? Where is it hidden?
An apple tree buds out. Bees swarm.

Speed up. He extends one finger
steps quicken, have to run. Climb
At first, morning always filled us with
confidence, how beautiful
how strong! Watch them shoulder to shoulder
sharing a cigarette, so cool kiss each other's
lip petals or fuzzy cheeks.
Speed up. Two fingers now
heart beats, blue fork tongue licks, contracts
the red light
still ten more seconds.

Enter the cold machine, white metal arms
curve, hold me tight, hands behind my head
expose both armpits, like when I was young
without warning or wariness
(Mom!)
heart suddenly
loud
Mom singing, my cries, and
the pink fluorescent dye
symbolizes blood (or rubies)
shines on the branches of flowering
youth, His garden, even if
surrounded by gold, I still
see the innocent glimmer
contracting ahead,
forty years of age
can I expect
more?

We will see each other again, youngster
believe or not
you turn and don't look at me, blow a smoke ring
swaying, divergent, not a blink, so what?
They won't go home
Star light, star bright.

Tomorrow the results from life.
These kids will take the world for a spin
everything is normal, everything's all right.
Narrowing those eyes without eyelids
snake, so flamboyant
scribbles out its secrets to no one.

translation by Bill Ransom

ammiel alcalay
mairéad byrne
andrew choate
jen hofer
walter k. lew
dana teen lomax
bill marsh
mark nowak
christian peet
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