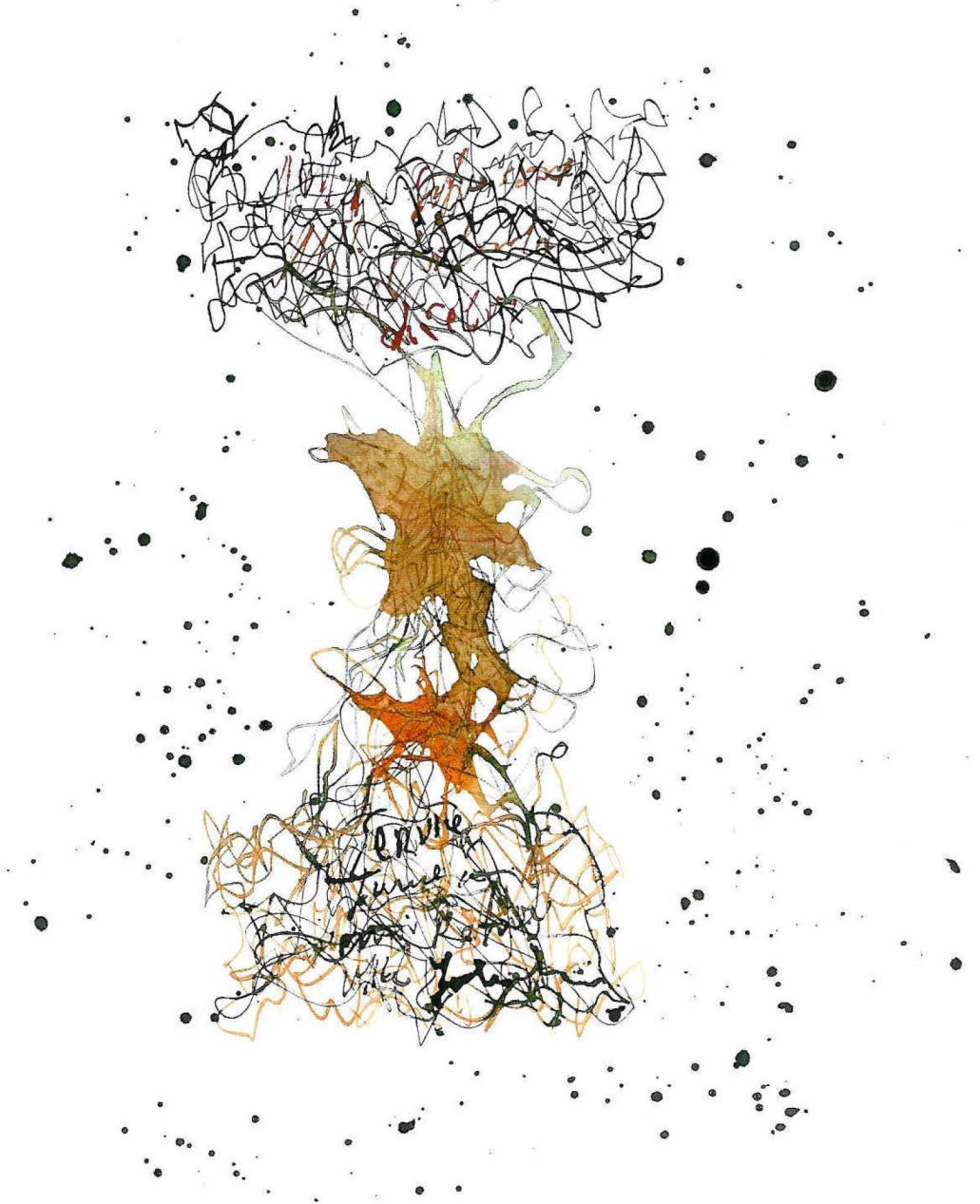
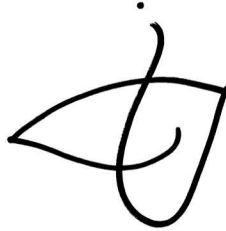


O, VOZQUE PULP



Carlos M. Luis & Derek White



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The drawings in O, Vozque Pulp were made by Carlos M. Luis in La Bastide du Roy Rene (Aix en Provence) while vacationing there with Martha. Carlos dedicates these to her as a remembrance of the magical moments they spend together every year walking in the woods next to La Bastide.

Thanks go to the following journals where some of these texts first appeared: elimae, Milk, and The Styles.

O, VOZQUE PULP

images by Carlos M. Luis

text by Derek White



MY OLD STOMPING GROUNDS REVISITED

The first thing we noticed was a dark blanket undulating offshore, parallel to the surface of the ocean. I was showing my wife where I went to school in Santa Cruz, but I had never seen this before. When we parked the rental car and looked closer, we resolved the blanket was composed of millions and millions of birds.

The tourists didn't notice and the locals had their backs to the water. When we asked, they said it happened all the time. But when we asked what it all meant, nobody had an explanation.

Until a homeless drunk whose thing was covering himself with seaweed told us they came all the way from New Zealand. He said he should know because, "I used to be a fisherman in a former life." They were hunting "baitfish" and he called them "bats" even though they were clearly birds. Their hysterical flapping and shrilling would eventually drive the fish to shore. If we waited long enough, we would see whole schools of fish throw themselves up on the beach. But as a visiting tourist, I wouldn't be able to see it.



RED SNAPPER

She kept calling them *Huachinango*, but I knew they were Red Snapper. She was also a virgin. I was deep-sea fishing for the first time somewhere off the coast of Mexico. I was thirteen and didn't know yet how my body would respond.

Even though she told me to watch the horizon, I was sick. My line was way down. After I threw up, I reeled it in. Despite the absence of any father figures, I felt the machismo pressure to suck it up and be a man.

"Not so fast," she said, "or their eyes will bulge."

My instincts told me I didn't actually have anything. Sure as the sun will rise, there were five identical red snappers with brains popping out of their eyes on each of the five baited hooks.

I was sick again and fell asleep right there at her feet.

WAITING IN A LONG LINE OF EVOLUTION

To get through the hidden hatch to the surf, you had to crawl through a ripped screen that was chocked full of debris. And even after that you still had to wait in queue. We waited, two of us, male and female, on a rock platform the size of a surfboard.

While we were waiting, I noted where the surrounding escarpment had been carved away to make room for a shoreline freeway. When our turn finally came, an unmanned crane lifted up the whole rock platform. We clutched the surface of the rock with palms flattened, relying on friction to stay on board. We were carried through the expansive airspace where the bedrock once was, but now was no longer, high through the weightless air, until we were set down in a mock stone-age campsite.

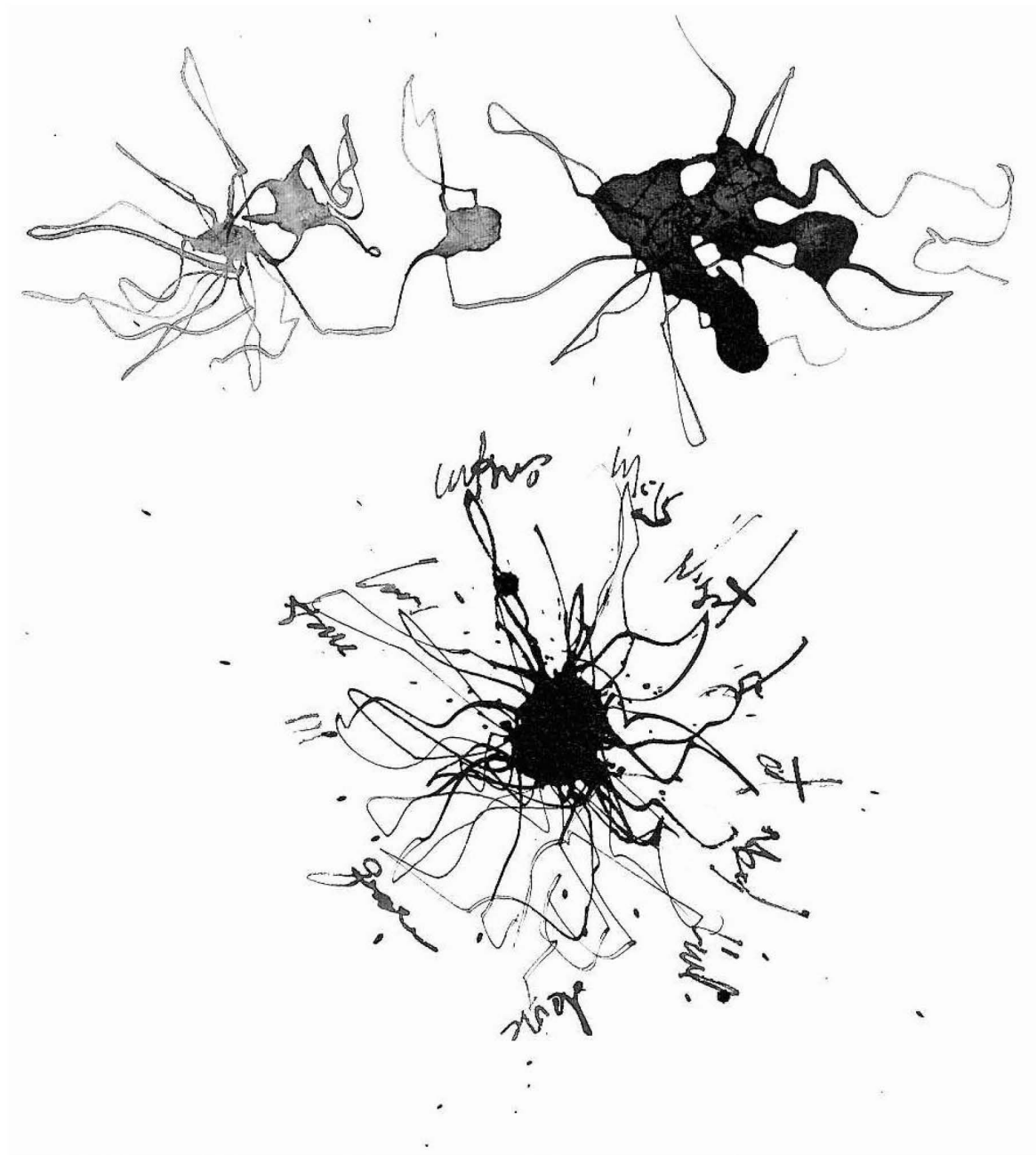
We had no choice in the matter as to which numbered site we occupied. It was nestled amongst other granite boulders and ice plants, and there were hidden cans of food and kindling without looking too far. The problem was finding a can-opener or matches. Besides a piece of obsidian that had been *carved* with a can-opener, we were left to our own devices.

WE KEEP REMINDING OURSELVES TO REMEMBER

The fountain in our garden was not running until we painted our walls orange and changed out the shower curtain to an opaque one with haphazard black lettering. Soon I will hear the birds calling, if it is still not too wet.

BEING ON A RAFT

Before we get our coffee, I finally hear the distant trumpeting. They are merely specks in the sky on the horizon, rising over Mt. Lassen. This is the part I have been waiting for that I wanted Jessica to see. The geese use my mom's pond as a layover on their way from Canada to Mexico. If we are quiet and hide in our sleeping bags they will land all around us. Then it will be like we weren't even here. That's when I want Jessica to wake up.

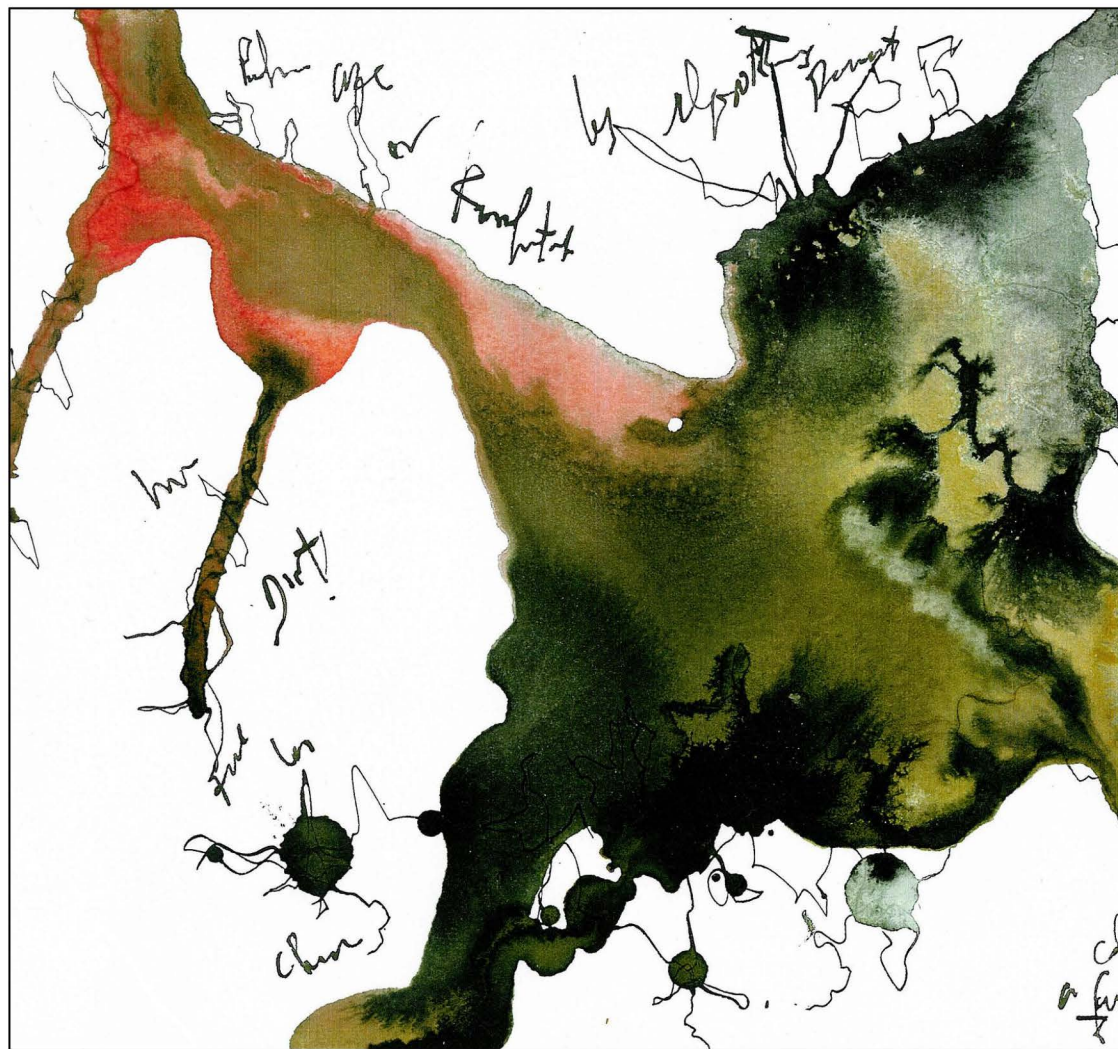


THE FALSE HOPES THAT AIRPORTS RAISE

It was when I was crossing a single-file bridge that every one I didn't know yet came streaming from the other direction. We were all clinging to pieces of debris, just trying to get by each other.

On the suspension supports below was a brilliant red woodpecker perched on a nest just beneath the water line. It was alive and desperately defended itself every time a fish came along to get at its eggs. Human nature caused me to stick my foot under to nudge at it—to selfishly verify I wasn't seeing things.

The red bird latched onto my shoe and started pecking and peeling back the sole. When I pulled my shoe out, the woodpecker held on. Once out of the water, it was dead, and it wasn't really red, but a mottled grayish-orange. It was the same bird that rattled my chimney every morning when I didn't live near a body of water.

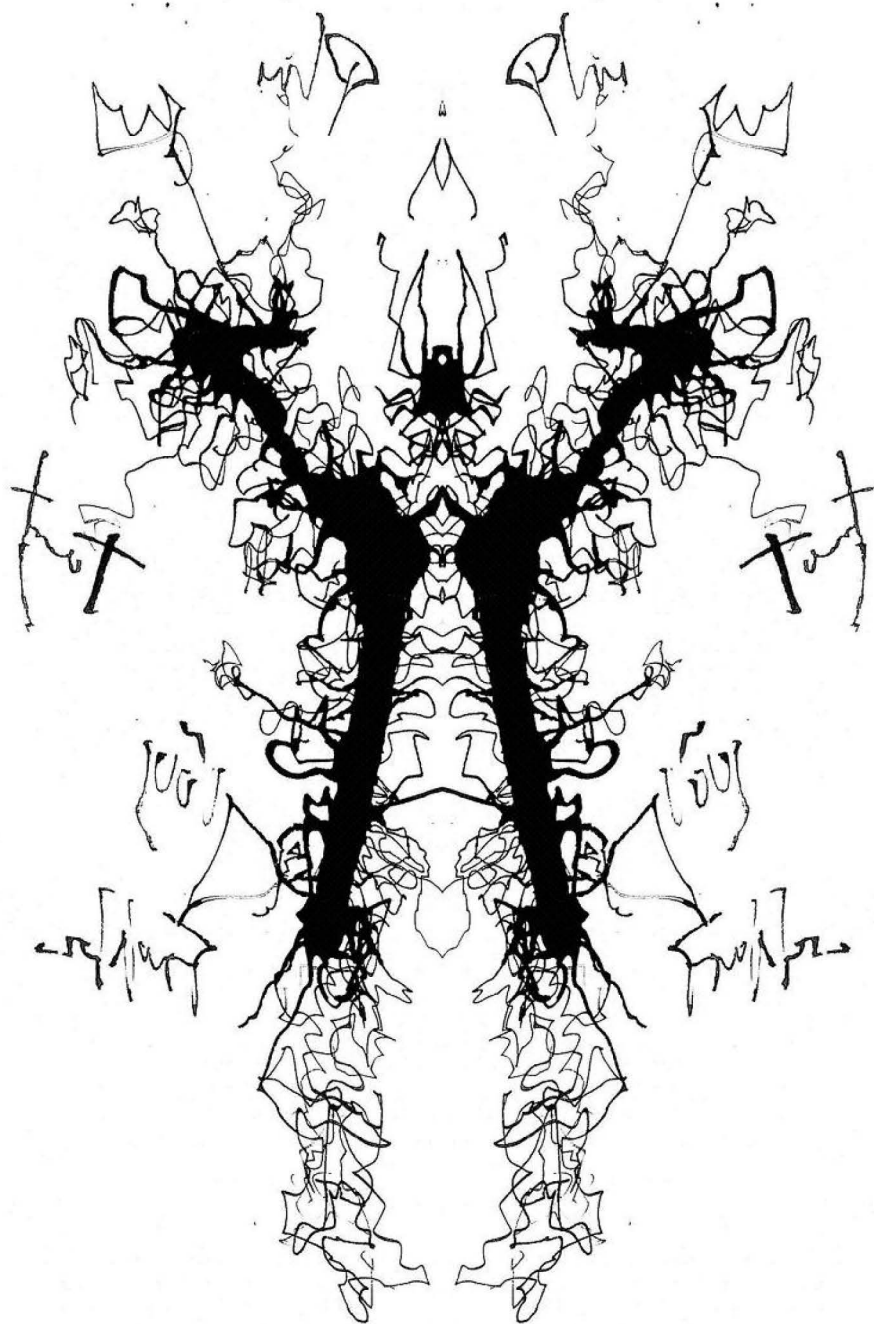


THE DANDELION HUNTER

All I did every morning was lie in my coffin and rule the world. I had a command console that gave me everything at my fingertips. My coffin was half-buried with a window at the level of my parent's untilled garden. I couldn't see much out the window except weeds going to seed and the occasional orange-breasted robin pulling a worm out of the sodden earth. Typically you could find me under the covers with a flashlight, reading.

On this particular morning I got up before noon and shut myself in our coat closet with the flashlight and a magnifying glass from my bug-collectors kit. The closet was on the landing where the stairs went up or down. The closet doors were shuttered so you could see the silent motion of air molecules in the diagonal beams. In the privacy of the closet I examined the changes in my growth. Then I searched through my father's jacket pockets for forgotten cash.

In the corner of the closet was a nest of daddy long legs. My stepmother taught me that daddy long legs were okay for spiders. It took willpower, but I broke the nest open on my stomach and let the baby daddy long legs crawl all over me. It took all I could muster not to resist. With my eyes closed, I lay on the fallen coats, feeling the tingling pricks spread across my skin until I was used to it and the spiders became the fabric of my clothing.



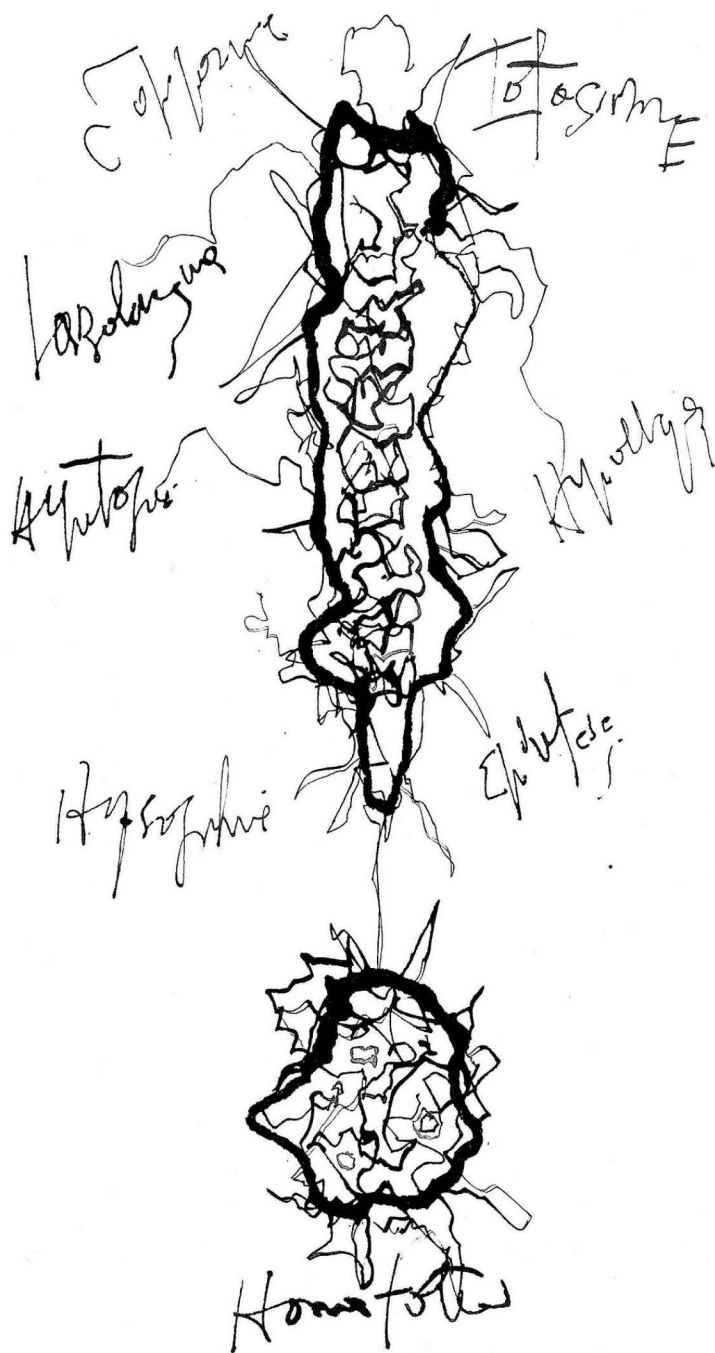
BEFORE PUBERTY I WAS A GOAT FAN

(It hit a gland in my armpit without me knowing).

That very spider uses the fence on a manmade pier to extend its web. In the summer we slept on that pier. At low tide we bellied under the razor wire to get to the radio transmitter (that also served as a lighthouse). It didn't matter what it was (to us). We didn't do anything except maybe spray paint our names as high in the tower as we dared, or break the cashed bottles of Chivas we stole from our stepparents.

One time Miles cut himself on the razor wire because we were pushing our low tide window of opportunity. It ripped through his down jacket to the skin, bloodying the feathers. The scar welted because he didn't get it sutured by a legitimate doctor. We tried to fix it ourselves using pieces of the spider web—a cure I read about in a Foxfire book my father left me. Miles was scared after that but I kept going by myself.

The abandoned pier jutted out from miles of scenic beachfront that people would kill to live on, but this is how I chose to spend my time.



FORESTED DISCONTENT

The temple monkey had no arms. If it weren't for the fact that tourists hand-fed him, he wouldn't be alive. But the icing on the cake was the ruin shrouded in scaffolding.

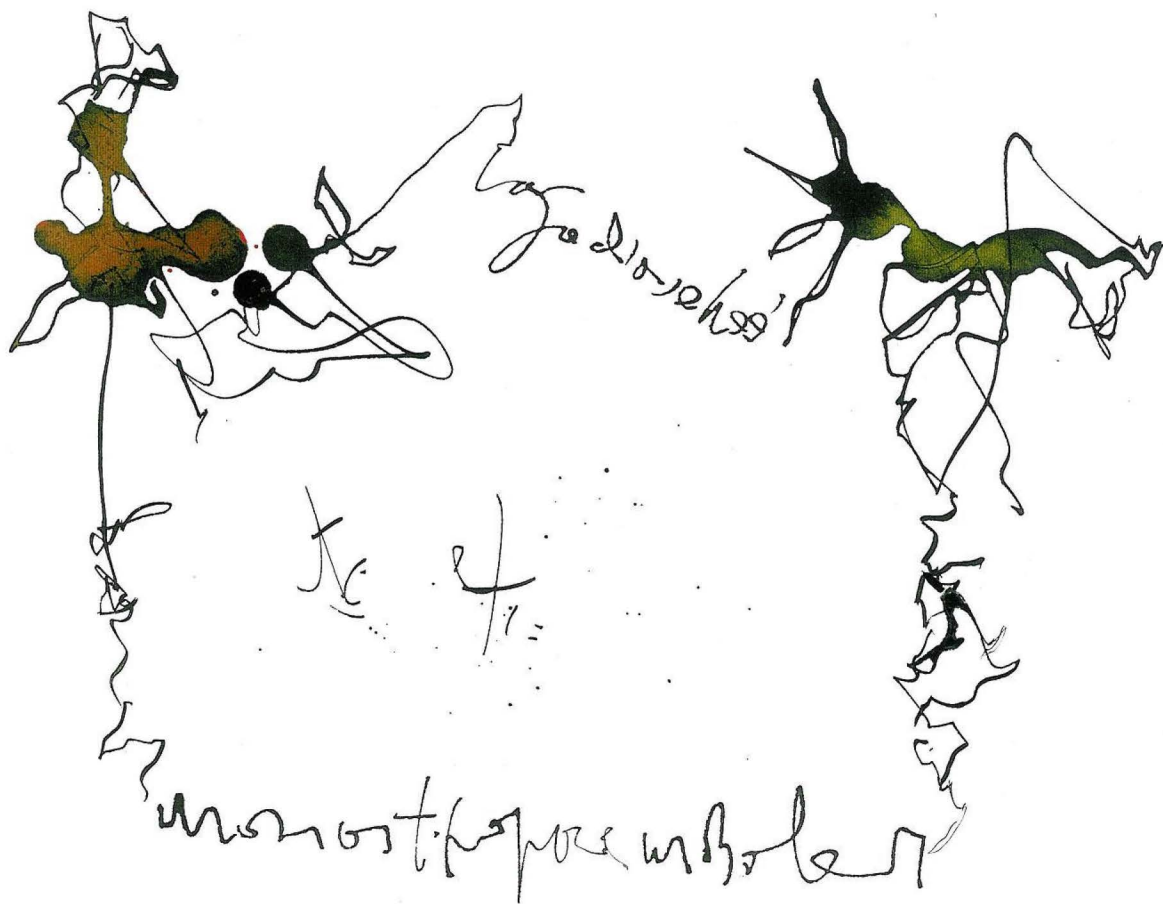
THE LIFELINES LEFT BY THE LATHE

My father cheated and carved his totem poles with a chainsaw. I never knew what his driving force was, but for the most part they were reproductions of animals. Before I left the Pacific Northwest, I was under the impression that everyone's father made totems to fill the clearings in front of their homes.

We used to take field trips to the nearby Indian tribes as if they were convalescing relatives. The men clutched spears in their hands and chanted, but it never looked like their hearts were into it.

I lived there because my parents lived there. My parents lived there because our grandparents lived there. My grandparents had run out of lives to escape. The Columbia ran into the Pacific.

I thought about this as I peed into a puddle in front of the house and wondered if it was polluting.

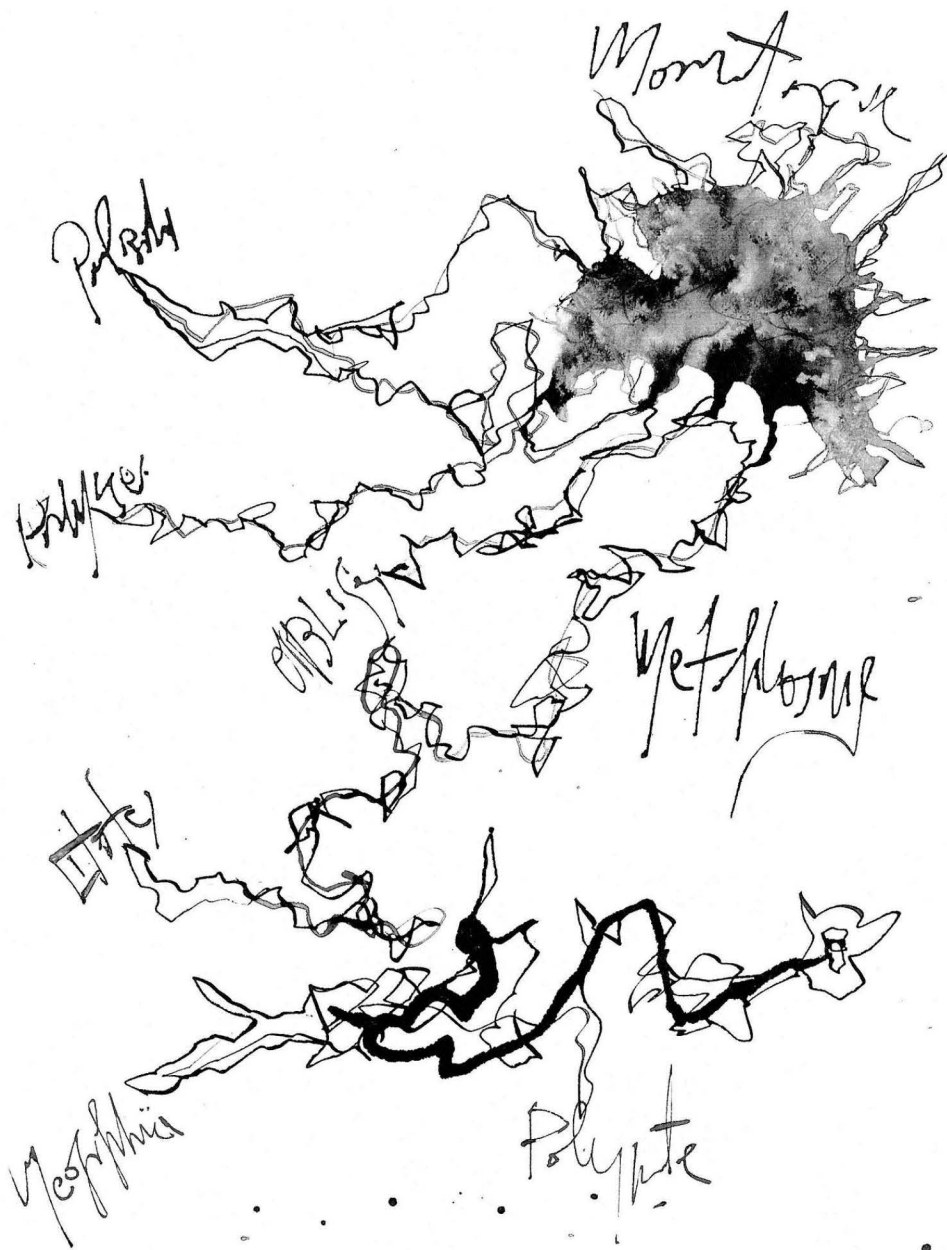


AN UNCLE TWICE REMOVED

EXT. On the screen, stones skip across the surface of the lake. Flat odorless stones from the river (that may explode if placed in fire). ZOOM IN on broken teacup saucers (shrapnel). PAN TO an UNCLE that served in the war. The water is cold (freshly melted). SHE (POV's AUNT-IN-LAW) brings it to the verge, but it must not boil. Each detail matters.

EXT.INT. A STRANGER wearing a red Swiss Army backpack climbs up a ladder in front of the screen. A FEMALE SOLDIER smells him, but can't (directly) identify him. The uncle is projected onto the stranger.

These are all elements of history. In every theatre (globally) they must hire a REAL ACTOR (locally) with no degrees of nepotism.



WHAT THE IRREVERSIBLE FREE PATH DELINEATES

There are a lot of cities near bays, but only one they call The Bay Area. Many times I would fish in the murky waters that I never once saw anyone swim in. I didn't bother to bait my hook. It was just an excuse to be in the company of others who were also waiting for something they couldn't define until it struck.

The other strangers on the pier called me a punk because my hair was not a natural color. I wanted to stand out, but at the same time I was terrified of being affiliated with any groups. I was perpetually conscious of being a poseur, so I was.

On weekdays I drove a '66 Volkswagen Bug in the rain with no windshield wipers, trying every exit along Bayshore freeway. The car was black, but it was so faded you could tell it was red underneath, and beneath that you could make out the gray primer. The car had a funny smell that I grew to like. I don't remember breaking the jar of maraschino cherries in the backseat, and I never bothered cleaning up the mess. Memory can be corrosive if you let it.

A lot of time was also spent at the airport even though I never traveled anywhere. I collected baggage carts and returned them for quarters—not because I needed the money, but because I needed something to occupy myself. The more people I met, the more people I didn't know.

WINGMEAT

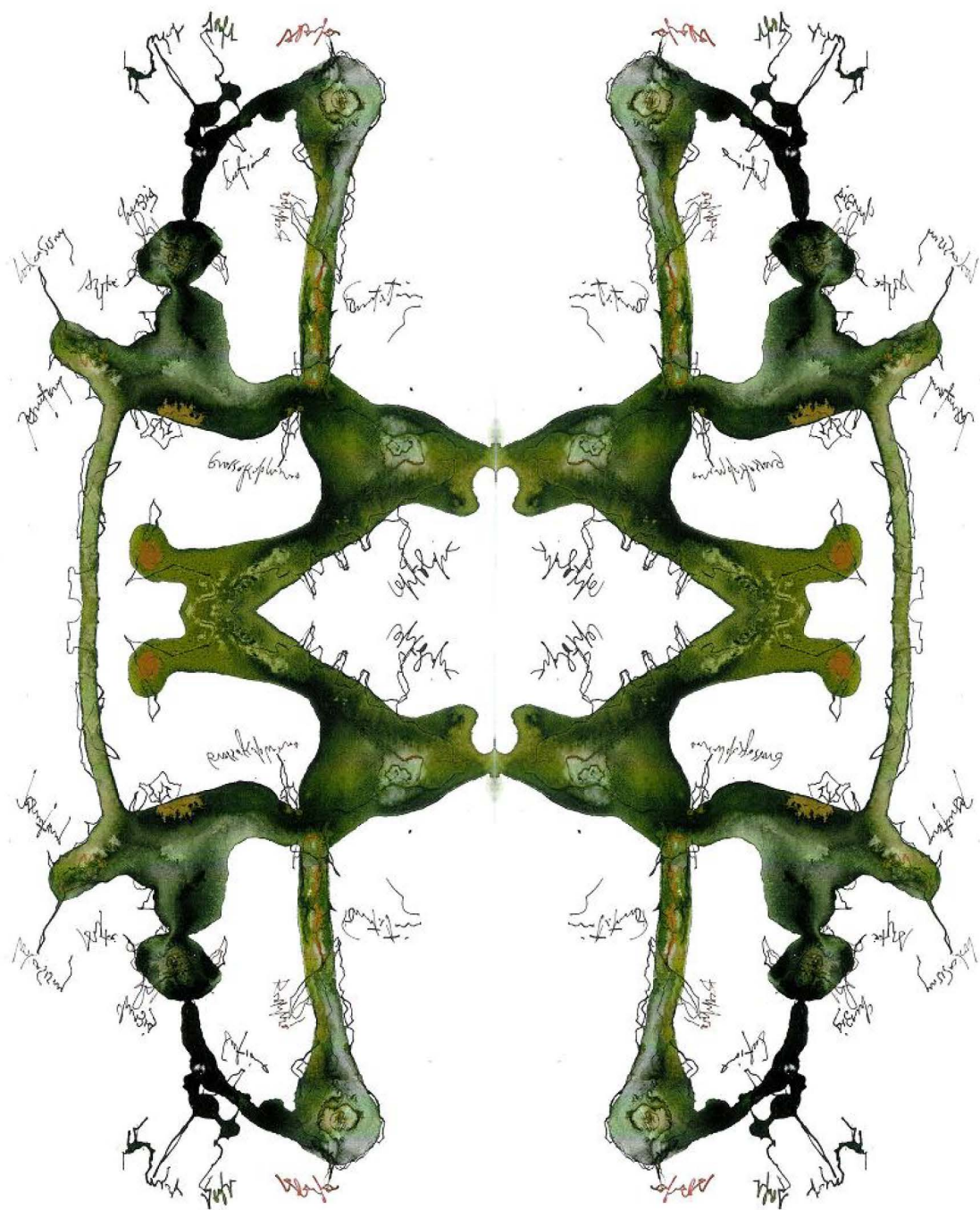
Buffalo, my editor, carved the meat away from the albatross wings. The bird was still able to fly better than ever (with weightless wings), spiraling towards the mouth of heaven. It was so sad and beautiful that I broke down and cried *real* crocodile tears.

AVALANCHE

The empty cars were parked on a sloped lot at the base of the ski mountain. One vehicle started rolling and colliding with other vehicles in a violent slide of parked cars that were now being driven by obscene hypocrisy.

FLAGELLANT

The albatross landed on the rim of the convertible Bug I was driving to work. At first I wanted to feed him, but the bird edged closer and became more aggressive. He told me his appetite could not be satiated. I had to resort to violence. I flogged him with a cane but it only provoked him more. It was a declaration of war that I wear to this day.



NOW, IT'S THE RABBIT CHASING THE GREYHOUND

Most people count sheep. When my mind was still free and malleable, my coefficient was *manta ray*. Each swimming ray reflected the detailed brain coral demarcations that I didn't quite let myself focus on. To my naïve imagination, they came as an undulating stream of Aztec magic carpets, one for each conscious breath. This always did the trick.

The corruption set in when I witnessed a real manta ray for the first time while skin diving off the Mexican Coast. It was in an agitated state because a remora was sucking on its head. When I approached to investigate, all in a sudden, it darted straight up and broke the surface. The ray disappeared and the remora was stranded underwater looking for somewhere to call home. It tried to latch onto my thrashing leg over and over like a skipping record.

That was the last vacation I ever took. Now I'm afraid if I fall asleep I won't be able to catch up to my breath. When I close my eyes I only relive (over and over) the previous day spent at the dog track, perpetually trying to cover my losses.



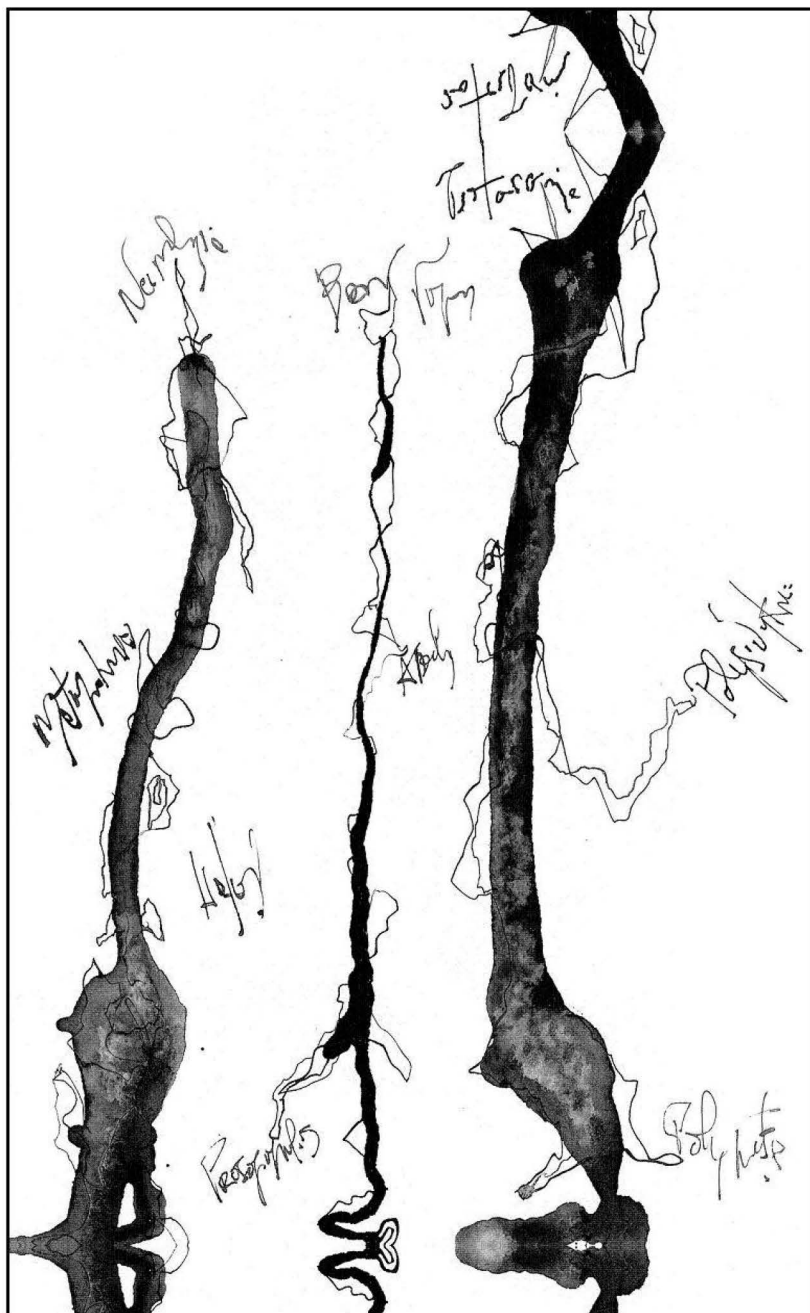
MY IDOLS WON'T SUPPORT HANGING WEIGHT

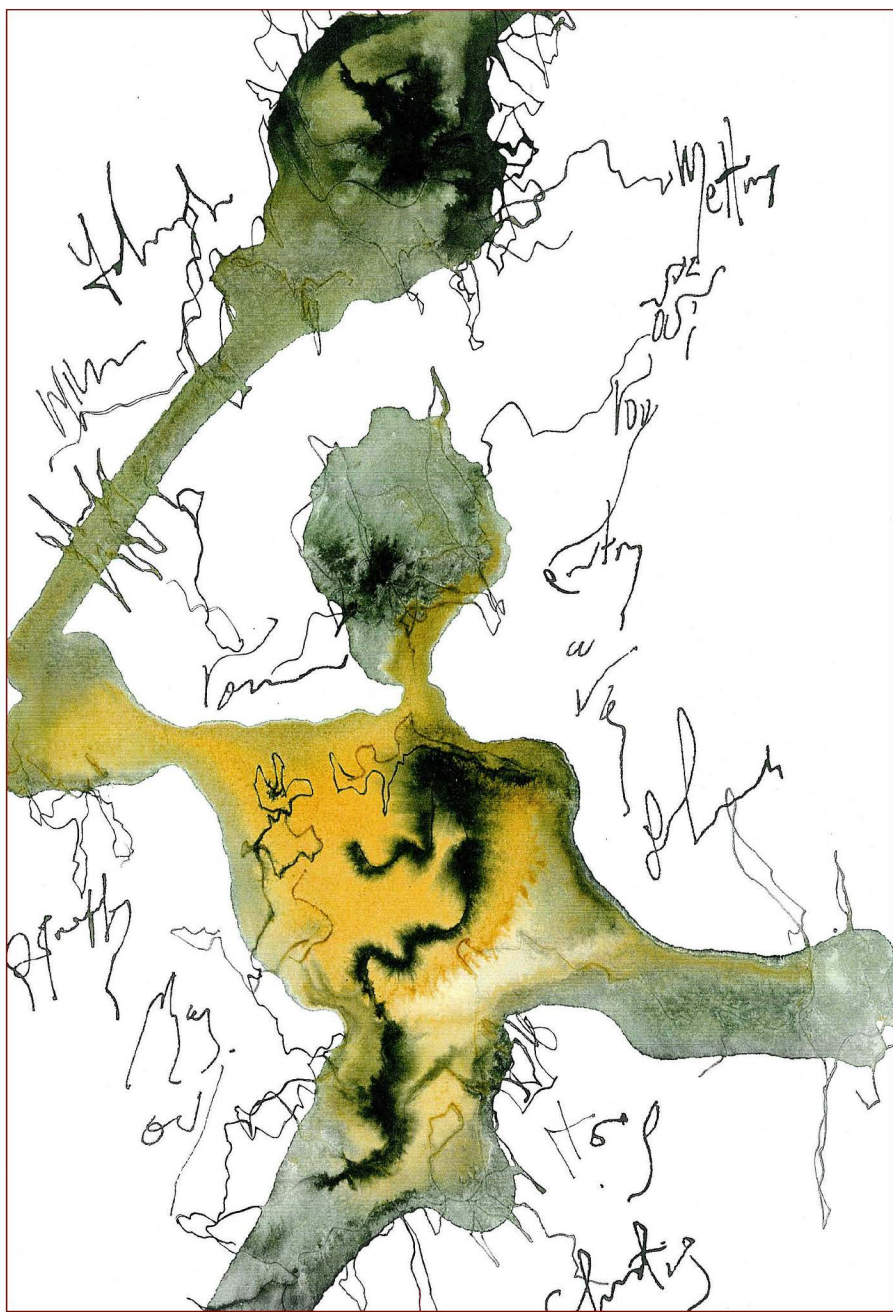
My Figa never left home without his aviation sunglasses and his unsung secrets. While he was out flying, the second woman he married would sit me down on the organ seat and teach me “I Walk the Line” by the numbers. My Figa’s red-tipped cane never once raked the bars inside a cell. He eventually drowned in his own blood without a cent in his pocket.

A generation later I would learn “I Will Follow” on two strings and scale cliffs by making a fist.

ACCUMULATING FROM THE DECK UP

It is raining steadily now on the fountain outside our window. The resonance is driven by the stream of trucks filled with debris that keep pouring up (or down) 8th avenue. The nightly din comes in between shifts, as they accelerate from the green light, and then again as they decelerate before Columbus Circle. Notwithstanding this anomaly, the traffic moves continuously in one direction, gambling from an incomprehensible sum.





(h)ALT(O) HE(ME)

There's a host in "ghost" but the "h" is silent. He lived in the same building with us, on the floor above. The (g)host occupied his time by occupying the building. His hemorrhaging was indicative of everything going on upstream. The hourglass sand dripped from his brain, diffusing and lining his esophagus.

When it finally happened, he was thinking of something else. He was considering the permeability of his own skin and how it was able to let certain molecules diffuse out and not let others in. He raised his hand to hail the taxi. He opened his mouth, but did not speak. It was too late. A man living inside him was jostled loose. It was nothing he was proud of—harboring this being inside him this whole time.

WITHIN A TIDAL ESTUARY

I was in a mangrove swamp when I stopped to think

I was in a mangrove swamp.



A VESTIGIAL INTEREST

Luck only means something if you are ready for it. For me, it swept up on my surfboard before I even went through puberty. It came from a breaking wave.

There were still plenty of things I didn't understand about her. I met her at a Del Mar pet store, but didn't know how to react. I didn't even know to be careful. We were watching a tank full of sea horses for sale.

"Every morning at this time they do a sort of dance," she said, without taking her eyes off the tank. "Their tails intertwine like a Barrel O' Monkeys. Do you remember that game?"

I was tempted, but couldn't make eye contact with her. My eyes were darting in and out of the coral and plastic seaweed shoots. In a dark recess of the tank I caught a reflection of her white teeth. The sound of the percolating bubbles was getting louder. If I had just turned a few degrees, she would have been right there in front of me.



ATTRIBUTE TO GRAVITY

On our one day off, the Grip and I cruised the street market to buy fresh fruit and fish (our mutual vice). Or at least look at it—we couldn't bear to buy anything round because we didn't want to break the symmetry of the piles. That, and the language barrier.

The street market hugged a stagnant harbor. We made our way towards a protruding peninsula and picked up the pace to justify it as exercise. Plaques indicated it was a “touristique” trail, but it was contrived. Rich people's vacant summer homes were all along the waterfront. We never got close enough to the sea to touch it. Even after that, I didn't know the Grip better than the VP of Induction or anyone else on the crew.

The next day was the first day of internal shooting. Lots of time was spent in the icehouse as they set the lights up. The AD chewed on the walkie-talkie antenna and instructed me to lie on a black V-shaped bed, while the VP of induction *pretended* to saw me in half. This happened over and over until I lost track and fell asleep.

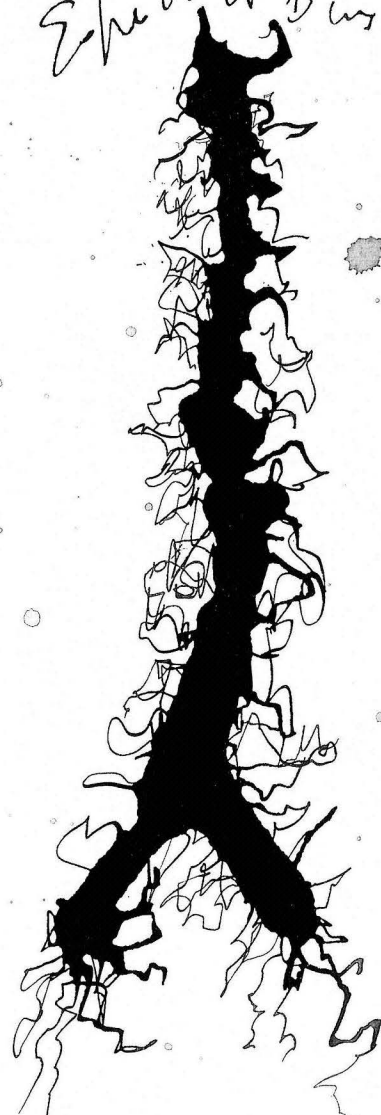
I woke up in a sweat under the lights. Everyone else was taking a break, which didn't feel any different than “working” except they were all looking in different directions with arms crossed. I was looking forward to scaling the fish the next day. After all, that was the real task I was commissioned to do. But because of studio liability issues, they put the fish sideways to trick people into thinking it was vertical.

In the end, I could have been anyone else.

EYES ON THE DIVINING ROD

... all to feed the ego of an armchair hydrologist. I was pulling a trailer with two 6-wheel survey buggies inside. The sub-surface imaging data from the target in Idaho I had already sent back to the lab via modem. Now I was white-knuckling myself and the equipment in a blizzard, until I was detoured off the highway towards the Great Salt Lake. What the hell, I was on an expense account. I stopped for the night and had a heated indoor pool all to myself. For all I knew, I was the only real person in the state of Utah. The rest were fleeting ghosts that occupied the reservoir of my head.

She works



Chickens

Ex 18/1/11

CROSS-BREEDING THE SICKLE CELL NODES

During Carnival I lent her my fishnet, but was quick to change my mind. The Rio Grande where they crossed (to free themselves) was a stream of disconnected puddles. The symbolic fish became so condensed in the diminishing pools that it was a free for all. The birds overhead were in a frenzy, mapping the function of fight to flight—for each fish there was a corresponding bird.

I couldn't see clearly through the ash on my eyelid. The smell of mustard and lentils rose from my clothes into my nasal membranes. Her shyness was only an act that had gotten her this far. Now she would have to cross on her own without my help. Then we could talk, face to face.

TEST-DRIVING A CAR WITH MILEAGE LEFT

Everything paled in comparison to the clammy stench of oysters and menthol cigarettes beneath the 25-cent vanilla air-freshener. The used car dealer told me, "it would take a farm boy to fix the smell," holding his cigarette out the window, as if that would help.

Earlier in this same life, an ember flew from my grandfather's cigarette and caught the backseat of his Mercury coup on fire. The only way he could think of to put it out was to piss on it. He left the burned-out seat as a reminder. He also told me that the only reason to buy your own suburban home was to have a lawn to urinate on.

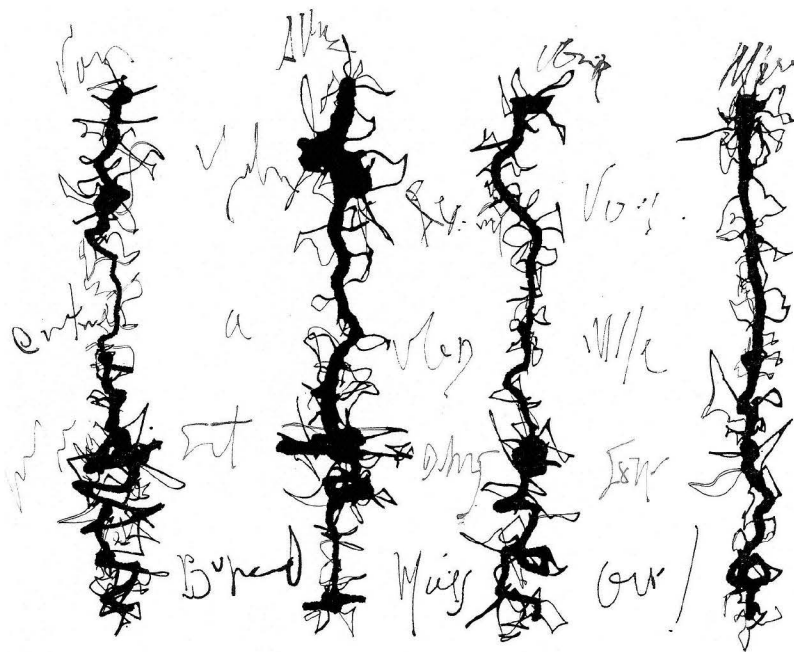


THE VACANT TIDINGS OF MY ALLERGY

I am always clearing my throat but never feel a need to speak. I swallow when there is nothing to eat except my own saliva. It is taxing to be this conscious of living when you don't even have to remember to breathe.

STAMPEDING THE ENCORE

We are all puddled together, awaiting some sort of affirmation. It is only when you let go of something important do you notice the untied laces and debris underfoot. We long to be so close that the actual music is muddled and the high-kicking performers end up watching *us*. This is when I realize I am sweating, and begin to *really* sweat. "All you have to remember," she sang through the microphone, "is to keep your head above water."



CARLOS M. LUIS was born in La Habana, Cuba in 1932. He left Cuba in '62 and settled in New York City until '79, when he moved to Miami and became the director of the Cuban Museum. As an artist and visual poet he has exhibited his work in a number of galleries around the country and world. He has taught courses and given lectures on a variety of subjects including Renaissance, Cuban and contemporary art, cultural studies, socialism, avant-garde, surrealism and philosophy. His poetry and essays have been published widely, his most recent book being, "Dysfunctional Texts" (Luna Bisonte, 2002). He is married with two sons, a daughter and five grandchildren.

DEREK WHITE lives with his wife in New York City. Before that he lived in some other places.

