

# HOW TO MAKE JUICE



COLLECTED POEMS AND WRITINGS | ADRIEL LUIS

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*Collected Poems and Writings*

**ADRIEL LUIS**

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For fam.

For human children will inherit the universe  
only if they lose all that makes them human.

Octavia E. Butler

# FOREWORD



## **Adriel—Making Juice** **by Genny Lim**

Be prepared and forewarned when Adriel cooks. Where there's smoke there's fire. And like a guerilla poet with a slash and burn tongue that cuts to the quick of what's boiling over in Amerika's melting pot, he doesn't pull any punches. No he kicks open doors kung fu style and pulls the covers off the wounds of racism and sexism, often turning the mirror upon himself to locate whatever hidden seeds of self-hatred, self-oppression and sexual abuse and violence lurks in Amerika's at risk communities. At the heart of Adriel's tough journey to self-discovery, is the vulnerable core of a young man, coming to human terms with his immigrant mother's sublimated dreams of being an artist through him and with his father's growing estrangement from him in the suburban homogeneity of his childhood Union City.

Adriel's promise as a poet is this universality of experience through persistent self-examination and frank honesty. His craft is lean and surefire and his vision is full of bittersweet yearning for a more humane world. Adriel demonstrates how poetry can be a dangerous tightrope straddling the hidden and public facets of ourselves. In that way, his rants against systems of oppression, whether they be institutional or social, takes on a personal dimension, which assumes as much self-responsibility as it does blame. We are all participants not bystanders in the spin cycle of oppression.

His words bombard you with the unrelenting ferocity of a tiger and just when you think you've had enough, they pull you to the quiet, dark corners of a young boy's mind coming to grips with the strange and jagged edged world around him. Coming of age also requires the capacity to take risks in love and Adriel confronts himself with a self-conscious earnesty that strips his hip veneer. Whether in poetry, personal narrative, journal entries or graphic spoken word dialogue, Adriel's message cuts through.

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Reading these poems as Adriel’s editor and poet senior, I feel I’ve come full circle. Each of his poems resonate as if I were living through them. This is the world I’d be experiencing coming up now. If I was a third generation Chinese American Toisan poet this is exactly how I’d want to tell it. I feel like shoutin’ ‘yeah!’ each time Adriel nails reality on its head. Each naming becomes a collective catharsis binding generations of silenced and suppressed voices. I recognize the points of disconnection, the anguish and pain, the hope and promise that emerge from his stories and I am relieved to know that the bloodline flows with such vital force and craft.

I am proud that the tradition of what was once called, “Third World Poetry,” lives on in these powerful pages. The hue and cry that rose from communities of color for immigrant and workers’ rights, housing rights, civil rights, affirmative action, women’s rights, anti-apartheid, anti-war and human justice, has never been silenced. Our outbursts of truth, which the mainstream categorically dismissed as “Multicultural/ Propaganda Poetry,” in order to discredit our voices and the legitimacy of our themes, has not only survived decades of neglect and censorship, but burns now with a brave vengeance so blatant and incendiary, that no press, government, academy or power structure can put out the fire. Adriel is heir to that uncompromised literary legacy. Let the truth be told with words such as his:

*This is not my story  
It is beyond that  
We are not making history  
We are narrating the world  
This is not art  
It is breath in its very essence*

*This is where it all begins  
Every poem could be your last  
So let them live*

Keep squeezing, bro, let the juice flow!

Genny Lim  
San Francisco 2006

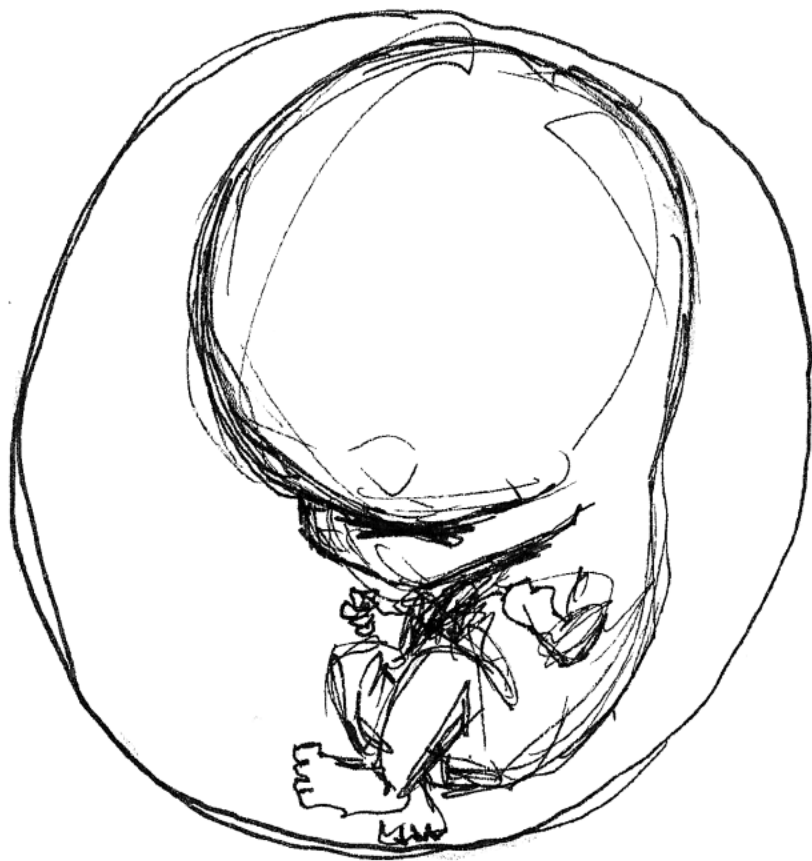
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## HOW TO MAKE JUICE

# STEP 1:



**SOW THE SEED**  
\*KEEP IT NICE AND DIIIRRTY!



“Fetus,” by Matthew Luis - 2006

# I WAS BORN IN THE BROKEN BELLY OF THE CITY.

AND EVEN WITHIN THE SUBURBS  
I WAS RAISED,  
I CAN HEAR  
THE BUILDINGS  
BREATHE.  
AND SOMETIMES  
IF I PAY ENOUGH ATTENTION  
I CAN FEEL MYSELF  
TRYING TO KICK  
GOD'S WOMB OPEN.  
LIKE THIS MORNING  
I WOKE UP  
ON THE FLOOR OF A PLAYGROUND  
IN HORIZONTAL POSTURE  
SIDEWAYS VIEW  
THE PLASTIC SLIDE  
WAS A NEW DIAGONAL  
SWALLOWED BY THE SKY  
CLOUDS IN CRACKED BLUES



**I REMEMBERED:  
I WAS NOT FAR FROM HOME.  
I AM NEVER FAR  
FROM HOME.**

STILL CONSUMED IN THIS CONCRETE WOMB  
BUILDINGS ROTTEN IN STAINS OF STRUGGLE  
AND SOMETIMES I WONDER  
IF THIS MOMENT RIGHT HERE  
WAS REVISITED OFTEN IN GOD'S MIND  
DID SHE REFLECT LONG  
THAT FOUR LOST SALTWATER CHILDREN  
WOULD ROAM THE CITY  
CIPHERING ON THE SOCIOLOGY OF PRAYER

I WONDER IF GOD EVER RESISTED ANY IMAGES THAT I'VE HAD OF HER:

WHETHER

**MOTHERLY ENERGY OR OLD WHITE MAN  
IN THE SKY**

I WONDER IF SHE MINDS THAT SHE IS MORE BEAUTIFUL

TO ME AT SOME TIMES THAN OTHERS

AND IF SHE MATERIALIZES IN THE WAYS THE WORLD TRANSFORMS

**I WAS BORN IN THE BROKEN BELLY OF THE CITY**

AND I CANNOT SEPARATE MYSELF.

**WE ARE STILL IN EMBRYOTIC STATE**

OPEN ARMS // CALLOUSED WOUNDS // TOOTH AND NAIL // NAIL TO PALM

**THIS MUST BE WHY WE WERE BORN—**

TO SWIM HORIZONTALLY STEADY IN THIS BELLY

WAITING FOR GOD TO MANIFEST

WHILE WE WAIT IN THIS VOID BETWEEN CREATION AND EXISTENCE

CLAWING FOR A LIGHT THAT IS ALREADY TRANSLUCENT  
IN WE  
IN HER  
WE SPEAK

SOLILOQUIES  
OF SONGS

US SUNBURNT CHILDREN JUST LISTEN:

**G**OD  
IF NOT IN US  
THEN US EXISTS IN HER SPIRIT

CELESTIAL ATMOSPHERE CAN BE HARD TO SEE, CHILD

**G**OD  
**I WANT TO BREAK OPEN  
IN FRONT OF YOU.**

I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT  
MY BROTHERHOOD TO YOU

IS NOT BOUND BY RELIGION.

I WANT YOU TO SEE THAT I AM CONFUSED

AT WHAT TO CALL GOD

BECAUSE YOU MIGHT HAVE

A NAME THAT I'LL UNDERSTAND

AND I MIGHT BE ABLE TO JOIN YOU AT BIRTH.

AND TOGETHER

WE CAN KICK AT GOD'S WOMB

WHEN IT IS TRANSLATED

THAT WE ARE READY

FOR PEACE

**D**  
**O**  
**D**  
**E**  
**X**  
**I**  
**S**  
**T**  
**S**  
**!**

## THE TIP OF MY MOTHER’S TONGUE

My name was born on the tip of my mother’s tongue. Stepping upon a new shore at the age of eighteen, still toying with consonants and vowels, she chose to challenge herself by giving me an elaborate label.

Always pushing boundaries, I would cup my palms to my ears, shudder as substitute teachers massacred its pronunciation, over-ethnicized my identity.

But hey, I’ve never led a simple life. When my mother was at the brink of post-graduate starvation, raising a rebellious teenage baby sister and trying to convince my computer engineer father that quitting her job for an extra five hours a day with me was worth struggling for, I guess a name like Kevin or Mike were easy ways out.

This is my reflection: forever mispronounced, folks could never get me just right.

So I believe, when my mother named me Adriel, she knew what she was doing.

## CHINESE OPERA

Keep me in check about this:

If I ever tell a girl, in a sudden flurry of hot infatuation  
that she is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen  
I am soooooooooo lying!

My mother was raised poor in Hong Kong, brushing her fingers along hot humid walls. They say she was a troublemaker. Angsty middle daughter, ready to shake down her two sibling pillars on either side of the age spectrum. Her parents yelled at her the most. Probably shook their heads like tired, rusty hinges at the would-be should-be docile year-of-the-hen daughter dancing around the room simulating Chinese opera, pissing off her older sister.

Her father’s mouth summoned a storm at her for one reason or another, and she stood blankly in the middle of the hallway, cupping her pudgy yellow fingers over her eyes, convinced that this provided a sufficient hiding place.

Imagination run amok in her silky black bowl cut.

If I had been around back then, I would have bet that she was destined to be an artist. Seventeen years later, I would take all that back, standing by her cubicle on bring-your-child-to-work day, watching her clutching her three-year-old firstborn son vomiting Cheerios on the office carpet. I wonder, at that moment, with soggy clumps of cereal and Vienna sausages petrified to her fingers, and a hideous little Mowgli spilling his guts on her shoes, if she realized that being a full-time mother was the only way I, who was raised to be as needy of attention as her, would survive.

My mom used to tell me she got off of work at 5. And so, sitting on the orange carpet at grandma’s house, the television was my clock. And without any concept of commute or colored people’s time, I expected that doorbell to ring as soon as the theme for *Silver Spoons* came on. And of course, it never did. So everyday I worried, 1980’s jingles

painting a portrait of my paranoia.

“Here we are...”

*Where is mommy?*

“Face to face...”

*Pshh...5-o-clock...she's living a LIE!*

“With a couple of silver—

*Mommy must be dead!!*

But mom told me that Jesus said that I shouldn't worry.

And she stripped away all reason, diverting her art degree to a focus on giving me drawing lessons and conjuring illustrations of ugly space aliens, saying that that was what I looked like when I was asleep. To say that my mother—who now stays at home to cook, clean, commute, and watch Korean soap operas—is the hardest working woman I know, is a cliché that reeks of truth. And sometimes, soaking in tears from a heated argument, she tells me that I am so much like her, the pain runs crooked down her spine like birth revisited. She never got to finish school, or become interested in politics, or get involved in so many of the aspects of the world that I have grown to find as necessary to my being as my mother's touch. But even still, without knowing it, she raised me as a mama's boy since age three, exemplifying the very essence of a figure that demands respect—not in the stern-Asian-parent sort of way, but as a beautiful construction of soul sacrifice—who just happens to be a stern Asian parent. And I know bearing three Bay Area goblins didn't kill her youth. It just corked it for preservation, to be indulged sweeter still, like a good wine...or dried squid.

Last night my sister told me that my mom made her stay up until 4am watching her freshly downloaded season of *The O.C.*. That feisty middle-child-brat still lives on in her. And I can imagine, when dad's at work, and when all the kids are in school, that she still waltzes the freshly mopped tile floor, simulating Chinese opera.



## CLIFFHANG

to the almighty luis family

His arms are the silhouettes of wilted branches  
stretched across endless wrinkled white plains.

He grasps all 76 years about him;  
every word that has taken flight from his purple tongue  
every syllable, every sound  
he scrambles it all to scrounge each thin breath.

But air itself has become his lung's miser.

My grandfather is dangling  
on the cliffs of life  
above the abyss of forever,  
and I am standing on his broken fingers.

I want to help him.  
I want to alleviate my foot from his quivering hand  
anchor my knees to the ground  
and pull him back up to safety.  
But each time I try I force more weight on my legs.

He shrieks as fingernails crack beneath my heels.  
“Jie-jie!”  
He pleads,  
“Why are you doing this?”  
I want to answer but I don't even know why.

It's just so strange to see him like this

He, who survived so much.  
Who fought the waves of the pacific  
grappled the sands of the central shore.  
He, whose skin melted from a beaming yellow  
to a toiled brown beneath the stabbing rays of the Mexican sun.  
One with the soil no one would let him call his own.  
He, who endured the slaughter of his name  
from *Lui* which stood for *thunder* in Chinese—  
bastardized—  
*Luis* which means nothing in Spanish  
but translates to  
constant confusion, misunderstanding, and ambiguity in English.  
Lui, The sound of countless towers of  
forefathers, foremothers, cousins, and kin—  
toppled—  
for legibility to work for a sub-minimum wage.  
Funny how I, his seed of sixteen cycles of the earth, can challenge it all.

He's so confused.  
How I  
son of his son  
son of the son of the sun  
that rose in the Toi San Village a thousand times before him  
and will set in the clouded bays of America a thousand times after me  
could just stand there.

He penetrates me with his obliviousness  
and I honestly want to stop but instead I push harder.  
Bones snap like chalk written with rage.  
*crack*  
He, who shouldered past glaring eyes of doubt

to birth a humble kitchen in the shadows of the Tenderloin.  
I, who stampeded through the gray mist of boiling bok choy and steamed rice  
to embrace the grease-stained apron of my own Gung-gung.

*crack*

He, who stood among American soldiers  
but watched Veteran's Day walk him by without an utter of recognition.

I, who marveled at his Herculean muscles  
scars of untold war stories.

*crack*

He, who cried blood, sweat tears, and bled struggle for ten years  
to bring his entire family from the colonized grips of Hong Kong  
to the colonized grips of San Francisco.

I, who became infuriated  
when he picked me up from school ten minutes late.

*crack*

Sorry, Gung-gung  
I can't come over for dinner.

Prior engagements

*crack*

Sorry, Gung-gung  
I can't come to your birthday party.  
Too much homework

*crack*

Sorry, Gung-gung  
I know you only live five blocks away.  
I'll visit you more when I get my car.

Finally, I lift my foot  
Broken flesh from fingers  
Red channels down the lines of his palms  
I see the weariness  
in the wrinkles on his forehead  
the veins in his eyes

the concrete hardness of his lip.  
I kneel down, lean forward, and kiss him.  
For one moment his face softens.  
He smiles and lets go.

*Fong Luis (1923-2000)*



who sees this kid with the wit of John Donne on his deathbed  
but who still can't wittle even the littlest of human connection?

## POINTING FINGERS

**‘83**

Redwood City delivery room. Easy first labor. I am born into the arms of a Berkeley grad so fresh off a computer science degree, its corners are still crisp.  
My father names me Adriel.

First-born son of a last child. He holds me with a grip so tender,  
it could only have been molded by four older sisters.

**‘84**

I’m crying again. It’s 3AM but his eyes are bloodshot gongs. Sleep doesn’t pay for the down payment on the new house.

My tears aren’t wet enough to dampen his clutch.

He turns on the bathtub faucet because the sound of running water puts me to sleep.  
And as far as he’s concerned, there’s nothing spiritual about that.  
It’s just the way things are.

**‘88**

Elementary school Olympics. I am frustrated with dad! Three-legged-race and we are in last place. His strides are too wide.

I cannot keep up.

My left leg bound to his right. It is swept beyond its stretching point.  
My right leg is dragged limp. Sneakers stained in crushed grass.

**‘95**

I got my first C. On a test. On the history of China. What.  
I do not want dad to come home.

His eyes will glaze. His sigh will tug at my soul.  
Anxiety’s voice is his engine’s hum pulling into the garage.

**‘01**

I only come back home every three weeks freshman year. And even on those weekends, I don’t kiss him goodnight like I used to. His eyes are twin tunnels that trace a love that I may have intentionally rejected.

He wants to talk.

But he always catches me at the wrong time—when I’m studying, when I’m on the phone, when I’m writing. He has created a poet in me.  
I have created a stranger in him.

**‘05**

Sometimes I don’t come home  
because I don’t want him to see the new dent I put  
on the car.

Sometimes I come home  
and the only sign of life in the house  
is light seeping through the bottom of the office door  
and the chattering of a keyboard.

I peek through the door and say hi,  
but honestly, sometimes I don’t see him.

I look past his eyes as if there I’ll find something better.  
Those eyes are no longer familiar,  
and it is my fault.

Sometimes I watch old home videos  
and try to trace the moment my smile no longer existed as a right of his.  
I want to pinpoint at what chapter I birthed this void,  
but I cannot.

I want to blame him,  
but I cannot,  
because the gleeful twenty-five-year-old father on the videos  
looks so damned much like me when I point at him.

And I just wish I didn't have to admit  
love has mutated into a whisper of a bond  
only loosely laced by the four letters of our last name.  
I don't want to believe that our interaction is paved with obligation.

But sometimes I can't even look at my father  
without seeing a reflection of my rejection projected on his face.

Sometimes I want to illuminate his silhouette  
and ask him if he has given up on a relationship  
that may never share a connection as tight as both our zipped lips.

I wish this poem wasn't just a defense mechanism.  
But I have written my father into third-person existence too many times,  
and poetry for me has never been a solution.

It just names my demons in stanzas.  
It juggles literary merit into what I will not hold myself accountable for.

But dad,  
I'm begging you to surface past the last scrambled pages of my notebook.

Because fatherhood has evaporated into a phantom concept  
that ricochets from our shared silence.

And I know it's as simple as initiation.

Emancipation from twenty-one years of miscommunication is a speed dial away.

But I suppose that is the sick irony.

Hand in hand  
To foot in mouth  
Open elbowed  
Eyes half shut  
Father son  
Redemption



## SAPPY BIRTHDAY PT. 22

I WENT HOME TO SEE MY FATHER AND MOTHER... OVER  
SINCE I MOVED TO BERKELEY I HAVEN'T CLEANED MY EARS  
BECAUSE I HAVEN'T BOUGHT Q-TIPS YET. SO I CLEANED THEM  
TODAY. 7 Q-TIPS LATER (NO JOKE!) I AM SOOOOOO  
MUCH MORE CLAIRVOYANT. AND MY BATHROOM'S TRASH  
CAN IS FILLED WITH BROWNISH COTTON SWABS. BUT FOR REAL,  
IT WAS AS SIMPLE AS THAT... I'M MORE IN TUNE AGAIN  
AND I FEEL GREAT! IT'S LIKE IN THOSE MOVIES WHEN  
THERE'S HAPPY MUSIC AND FIRST ~~THE~~ THE CAMERA  
SHOWS THE CHARACTER'S FEET WALKING HELLA FAST, AND  
THEN IT PANS TO HIS FACE AND HE'S ALL HAPPY AND  
SHIT AND THEN HE GOES TO THE GIRL'S WORKPLACE  
AND SAYS SOMETHING ABOUT SELF-REIALIZATION AND  
THEY MAKE OUT IN FRONT OF ALL HER CUSTOMERS  
AND THEN THE CREDITS ROLL. LL COULDS BIN IT IN  
"DELIVER US FROM EVIL" EXCEPT HE WAS RIDING A HORSE...  
WHAT THE HELL? THIS YEAR I STRIVE THAT BY NEXT MAY

A MOTHER WILL KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT HER SON TO AT LEAST  
KNOW WHAT HE WOULD WANT FOR HIS BIRTHDAY. I STRIVE  
FOR EXCELLENCE, TO NOT FINISH SCHOOL AS A BURDEN I  
AM FINALLY LAYING DOWN, BUT RATHER AS A CHUNCH-  
TUN FOR A LIFE OF PEACE. I STRIVE TO BE A COMMUNITY  
ARTIST, TO NOT ALLOW MY APOCALYPSE TO SHIELD MY  
FACE FROM MY COMMUNITY. I STRIVE TO LOVE WITHOUT  
INHIBITION OR EXPECTATION, TO PROVIDE MY REFLECTION  
WITH THE CONFIDENCE THAT NURTURES HER EXISTENCE IN  
MY PRESENCE, SO THAT SHE NEVER FEELS UNAPPRECIATED  
OR OVERLOOKED. I STRIVE TO BE A BETTER BROTHER TO MY  
SIBLINGS, TO NOT CALL ANOTHER PERSON "BRO" OR "SIS"  
UNTIL I EXEMPLIFY WHAT IT MEANS WITH MY OWN  
KIN. I STRIVE TO GO NIKING WITH MY DAD. I STRIVE TO  
RECLAIM THE HEART OF MY COLLEGE COMMUNITY, AND NOT  
LEAVE ~~THE~~ BITTER. AND I STRIVE TO SEE GOD MORE  
CLEARLY. ☘



# STEP 2:

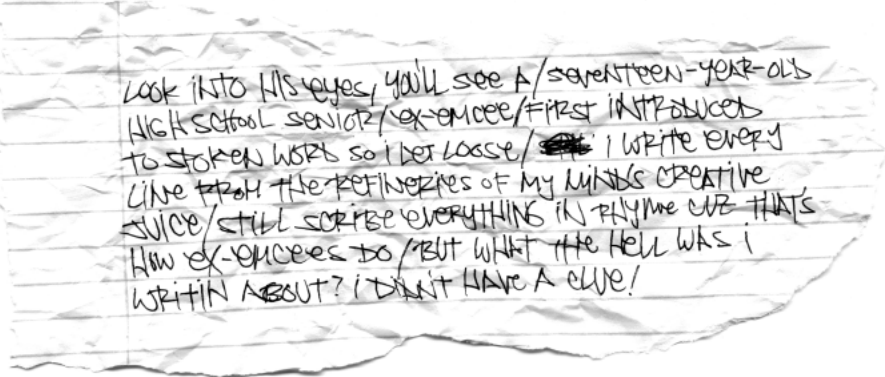


# PICK THE FRUIT

**\*STAY AWAY FROM THEM SOFTIES!**

THIS IS WHERE IT ALL ENDS  
BECAUSE EVERY STRANGER THAT HAS EVER  
    DWELLED IN THIS HOUSE  
    IS PACKING HIS BAGS WITH HIS BACK TURNED TO ME  
AND I DON'T WANT THEM TO LEAVE  
BUT EVERY SECOND THAT I'M CLENCHING TO THESE  
    MIND-CONJURED GENTLEMEN  
MY SOUL IS LOSING BREATH AND  
MY WRITING'S LOSING BREADTH AND  
INSPIRATION'S LOSING ITS OPPORTUNITY TO SHINE  
    BECAUSE I CAN'T LOOSEN GRIP ON YESTERDAY'S  
    STATE OF MIND  
SEE, THESE GUESTS WEAR THE MASKS  
    OF MY PAST'S POETRY  
NOURISHED BY A PASSION FOR SOCIETAL ANGST THAT I'VE  
    LONG OVERCOME  
I SHOULD TELL MYSELF  
    THAT I WILL NEVER WRITE THE WAY THAT I  
    DID TWO YEARS AGO  
BECAUSE THE WORLD HAS CHANGED SINCE THEN  
    AND SO HAVE I  
AND THE FIRE THAT I CAME WITH BEFORE HASN'T DIED  
THE WIND'S JUST CHANGED THE FLAME'S DIRECTION  
REFLECTION, WE BEGIN WITH...

# GUEST ONE.



Look into his eyes, you'll see A/seventeen-year-old  
HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR/ex-onclee/FIRST INTRODUCED  
TO STOKEN WORK SO I GOT LOOSE/~~THE~~ I WRITE EVERY  
LINE FROM THE REFINEMENTS OF MY MIND'S CREATIVE  
JUICE/STILL SCRIBE EVERYTHING IN RHYME Cuz THAT'S  
HOW EX-ONCEES DO/BUT WHAT THE HELL WAS I  
WRITIN ABOUT? I DIDN'T HAVE A CLUE!

AND SO I BOOTED HIM THROUGH THE WINDOW TO MAKE ROOM FOR

# GUEST TWO.

he came to me  
cloaked in a darkness  
that spelled depression  
outlining my loneliness

for 8 twirls  
of the moon  
i took solo mindtrips  
with ambivalence  
as my concubine

she wore a scarlet wedding gown  
scoured by poetry  
written by her other lovers  
in my own pen

and i won't front

i saw

**SLAM**

and tried to barter  
to claim

**A SAUL-STYLE**

as my OWN  
(oblivious to the fact that that queen  
didn't belong on my throne)  
sitting on the dock  
of another poet's bay

**SKIPPING**

**AMETHYST STONES!\***

**I WAS**

biting all the poets who I felt were good  
connection to myself unplugged

**I WAS**

fighting ego  
trying to impress the people

my scarlet bride  
dragged me deeper  
into my solitude's puddle  
my guests in a huddle

UNTIL  
CAME IN TO HELP ME FIGHT IN THE STRUGGLE!

# GUEST THREE

(check it)

POLITICAL PRISONERS PRESSED AGAINST THE WALL!  
HINTED THE MISSION TO EXPRESS AGAINST THE WAR!  
AGAINST THE OPPRESSION THAT STRESSES ALL OF Y'ALL!  
I WAS SPITTIN' TO BEGIN A MILITANT REVOLT!  
I HAD MY EARTHTONES ON!  
A HEADWRAP TWISTED IN MY HAIR!  
ONE FIST AROUND THE MIC!  
ONE FIST UP IN THE AIR!  
ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICAN ACTIVIST!  
MAD AT THE SYSTEM THAT KEPT MY MIND  
FROM ALL THIS INFORMATION THAT I HAD BEEN LACKING!  
I JOINED ALL THE ORGANIZATIONS  
THAT WERE NAMED WITH COOL ACRONYMS!  
I COULDN'T GET MYSELF TO BE VEGAN  
BUT I DID TAKE MORE VITAMINS!  
CUZ THERE WAS SOMETHING GOING ON, Y'ALL!  
THE REVOLUTION WAS UPON Y'ALL!

BUT ITS EXCLUSIVENESS  
WAS THE ROOT  
FOR MY DOWNFALL

I REPLACED GUEST THREE WITH HIS BROTHER,

# GUEST FOUR,

who taught me how beautiful my community truly is

yellowbrown gods in  
context with a world in  
simultaneous chaos and harmony  
a wordfist of poets

he introduced me to some raw, real writing

(2) **tongues** // (8<sup>th</sup>) **wonder** // **isang**(mahal) // (proletariat) **bronze**

i was wrapped in the love  
of (ill)-**literate** arms  
i took theory to practice  
had to get my mind right  
the movement was a backdrop  
to individuals in the backlight

pass it to others  
“ikalat muna,” right?

breathing these sunburnt children  
into my bloodstream  
i believe  
just like these other three guests  
number four is still very much  
a part of me  
focusing on using my voice to help uplift humanity

i guess?

I DON'T KNOW. BECAUSE MY CURRENT GUEST, FIVE,  
HAS LEFT ME ON THE BRINK OF INSANITY.

BECAUSE IT MAKES NO SENSE WHY SO MUCH OF MY RECENT WRITING  
HAS FOUND ITSELF STUCK IN THE SCRAMBLED PAGES OF MY NOTEBOOK.  
DRENCHED IN CONFUSION, OBSESSED WITH THIRD TONGUE MOVEMENT, A  
WORDSMITH FASCINATED WITH THE CAPACITY OF THE COMMUNICATION  
THAT THRIVES IN SILENCE.

SURELY,  
THIS EATS ME UP INSIDE  
LIKE HOW THESE FIVE ERAS OF MY WRITING HAVE  
CONSUMED MY LIFE  
FIVE GUESTS  
DWELLING IN MY MIND

HAVE YOU TAKEN A LOOK INTO  
YOUR GUEST'S EYES?

BECAUSE I HAVE DECIDED THAT  
OUR POEMS TAKE  
LIVES OF THEIR OWN  
SCARLET BRIDES SITTING ON THEIR PROPER THRONES  
BROKEN WORD  
SPOKEN UNSURELY  
FROM THESE QUIVERING LIPS  
ARE TESTIMONY  
TO COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS  
THIS IS NOT MY STORY  
IT IS BEYOND THAT  
WE ARE NOT MAKING HISTORY  
WE ARE NARRATING THE WORLD  
THIS IS NOT ART  
IT IS BREATH IN ITS VERY ESSENCE  
  
THIS IS WHERE IT ALL BEGINS  
EVERY POEM COULD BE YOUR LAST  
SO LET THEM LIVE

# UNE TOWN

**Indication That You're in the Suburbs and Not the Hood #238:** If you're walking down the street and a car rolls up on you very slowly, you don't duck...you buy a popsicle.



Growing up in the suburbs  
is pretty much the way they show it  
in *Desperate Housewives*.

With a few minor changes.

Union City is one of those towns that wants to be urban.  
Early 1970's showed a farmer uprising  
Brown, black, and yellow bolts implanted into the city limit

quicker than you could say "There goes the neighborhood!"

A whole town is transformed into the All-American City in  
the apple of the melting pot's cauldron.

The locals rushing out so fast,

The red clay dirt left bold streaks next to their white flight,  
leaving the dark, blue-collared cornered with stars in their eyes.

The perfect American flag.

For some.

Especially the colored folks.

So no, it's not quite like in *Desperate Housewives*.

Instead of 50's throwback diners and fudge factories,

Newly paved streets are lined with taco trucks and Filipino bakeries  
intertwined with the scent of carne asada and fish sauce.

The Decoto Street rosebushes are tangled with alcoholic twigs clawing at  
torn Steel Reserve labels and aluminum caps.

Instead of white picket fences,

Neighbors are cargoed into rented one-story pentagons

separated by aerosol-coated wood planks

lined side-by-side,

and so in need of a paint job,

It's almost...vintage.

Union City

Une Town!

The most ghetto-fabulous of the Alameda County suburbs.

I swear, if someone were to take a bird's eye picture of that town,

the multi-green lawns and swimming pools would

make out the silhouette of a G-Unit sneaker.

**Indication That You're in the Suburbs and Not the Hood #172: If there's a rat running around in the halls, it's not a scathing rodent. Its name is Wally, and it wears a mini Nautica sweater from PetsMart.**



Sometimes that house on Jean Drive got too small.  
Despite the fact that my brother, sister, and I each had our own rooms along  
the carpet path to the two-car garage,  
Sometimes the shit was too small.

And when California Music Channel taunted me with  
brightly-tinted Puffy and Ma\$e videos,  
I couldn't help but yearn for life outside these coyote hills.  
Predictable like the garbage trucks at 9:30 every Monday morning,  
I longed for something—anything—to shake things

slightly away from the copy-and-paste responses I resorted to every time  
my parents asked how my day was.

Some kids were bored into thuggery,  
Inventing themselves in front of 2Pac posters like they were mirrors,  
breaking the monotony and their curfews to cause  
ruckus in elementary school playgrounds and maybe  
make the local headlines.  
See, Union City goes through identity issues  
as the mulatto child of Oakland and the Silicon Valley,  
Almost too good for its own good.  
Gated communities protect us from everything but ourselves,  
And with world views as identical as our mailboxes,  
Carbon-copy existences just didn't cut it for everyone.  
See, at least twice a year,  
The pledge of allegiance would be followed by loudspeaker  
fables of fellow students who opted out of a life of mediocrity  
with the swipe of a sterling razor just under the palm,  
or through a final visit to the train tracks to kiss  
an out-of-town locomotive head on.  
In Union City,  
Some kids literally bored themselves to death.  
The rest of us either left,  
or as they say, "got stuck."

**Indication That You're in the Suburbs and Not the Hood #337: Everybody and their mama is at Walmart at 3AM...on a Wednesday.**



For me,  
Reflecting on Union City is like reflecting on *Power Rangers*—  
I don't want to admit it,  
But dammit,  
It played a huge role in my development as a person.

And I'll confess,  
Sometimes I return to it feeling like I'm better than it,  
Not because I think I'm smarter, or stronger, or savvier,  
But because I figured out how to escape it in the first place.

And it looks back at me like the one that got away.  
The quiet kid in the corner that it used to ignore or poke fun at until  
he disappeared one day, only to come back fiercer.  
Union City and I share a bitterness like only rival siblings can.  
And as much as I grow nostalgic strolling down Alvarado Boulevard,  
I can't find it in myself to forgive the isolation these  
suburban streets fashioned in me for 18 years.  
All of the pigeonholes and limitations I barely  
evaded on my way out these city gates.

Union City  
I look back and almost despise what I could have become—  
and also who I could have been,  
had these sidewalks not been swept so crisp-clean everywhere I went.  
Union City  
Almost urban if you close your eyes and wish hard enough.  
A big city trapped in a small town's body,  
But constructed to protect itself from the “concrete jungle” image  
that it wants so bad to be.  
Birthplace of reverse rebels  
sick of being blindfolded and spoon-fed security.

It is in this town that some people lose themselves  
And where others avoid that  
by sacrificing everything else.



## ASIAN KID

Sometimes I wonder  
If I ever lived through high school  
Or if my adolescence was a period of virtual nonexistence

Swept off the stoops of popularity  
Sanding my flesh with my palm  
I could've sworn that if I rubbed hard enough  
I could wipe this yellowbrown off

At James Logan High School  
I never was *down* enough to hang out with the popular Asians  
Silently cropping away at my self image since the 7<sup>th</sup> grade  
It felt as if the cuffs of my Anchor Blues wouldn't staple just right  
The thick Walmart tubs of green gel wouldn't slick my hair back all the way  
And the seats at the lunch tables couldn't pronounce my name

Constantly rubbing my skin to see if it would just peel  
I just knew that if I ripped off that top layer  
Black skin would be revealed

I backed this belief with  
The fact that a seat was always saved for me elsewhere—  
Three plastic booths between the lunch line and the Sprite machines  
*The Spot*, they called it  
Subtly subtitled *The Black Tables*  
Yellow-tinted I, swimming in an oversized Ecko jacket  
And a sea of ebony faces

This was no artificial validation

It's not like I grew dreads and started claiming Compton

But inside  
It was a struggle over who I was  
I just wanted so bad to feel familial breath from my own caramel kin  
But they would just juggle me around  
Never allowed me in the crowd  
But when I kicked it with other folks I was suddenly a sellout

*(Sidenote)*  
*Have you ever had a Filipino guy*  
*Wearing a doo rag*  
*Tell you that you're not being real with yourself?*  
*That shit hurts!*

Welding strings of my self perception  
My only concepts of Asian Americans  
Were these people I didn't want to be  
While I exchanged pounds with differently hued realnesses  
I just wanted so bad to be Black  
How was I supposed to not want to swap my reflection?

Without a question  
Other Asian men are the most difficult people for me to interact with  
Even today  
My notion of them have been tainted by that Union City mentality

And yes,  
Things could have been worse

I narrowly escaped those campus gates  
Still embracing my cashew eyes and mother's tongue

But I believe I had to go through that awkward phase of self-hatred  
Teeter on the cliff of being a wannabe  
Ride seesaws with minstrelsies of longing  
Face demons that lined my skeleton in tan hues  
And yank them out of their closets  
To understand how gorgeous this yellow skin is  
When I allow it to shine on my own terms

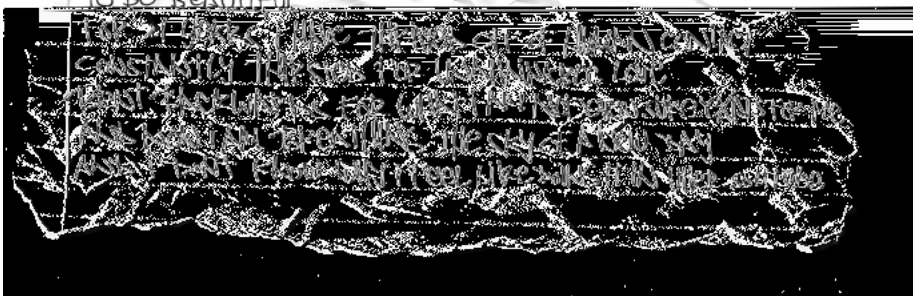
## SAPPY BIRTHDAY PT. 21

5/23/04  
11:49 PM

SLOWLY COUNTING THE YEARS AWAY  
PAINSTAKING MEMORIES I WISH I COULD REMEMBER ON THE BACKS OF MY FISTS  
ANOTHER YEAR OF THEM FORGOTTEN.  
JUST ANOTHER YEAR  
I'M TURNING 21 IN 10 MINUTES  
AND AS I LIE HERE IN BED  
PART OF ME STILL EXPECTS SOMETHING SPECTACULAR TO HAPPEN  
LIKE WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES  
MY DOOR IS GOING TO BURST OPEN  
AND POLYNESIAN MIDGETS ARE GOING TO CAPTIVATE INTO MY ROOM,  
HYPNOTIC TRIZZLING FROM PUMP BLUE BOTTLES,  
AND THEY ARE GOING TO ESCORT ME TO GO GAMBLING  
AT A 21+ UP CLUB  
AND THEN TO BUY A BAZOOKA IN MY NAME  
  
BUT INSTEAD  
I AM IN BED  
CAT-CLOTHED QUILT WRAPPED OVER MY LAP  
TAKING SIPS FROM TAY-OLD WATER  
WRITING POETRY.  
  
AND THAT'S PATHETIC.

KNuckles clunched tightly to grain,  
BREATH INTERLACES WITH ALCOHOL AND GARLIC CHICKEN PIZZA  
AND IF THEY'RE FEELING EXTRA TOOTHY/  
THEY'LL EXCHANGE DIRTY HAIKUS AND <sup>QUOTE</sup> ~~SHIT~~ GINSENG FINGERLY  
TOOTH ARE SPECIAL IN A SPECIAL WAY

BUT I AM NOT ANY OF THOSE  
AND I AM WONDERING IF THIS IS ALL MY FACT LIFE HAS AMOUNTED TO -  
SCRIBBLING AWAY AT A TATTERED ~~MAN'S~~ NOTEBOOK  
ANTICIPATING PHONE CALLS AND TEXT MESSAGES  
ONLY TO IGNORE THEM WHEN THEY COME  
THIS IS ALL TOO ~~CRYSTALLY CLEAR~~ DISMALLY CYNICAL  
TO BE REALITY!!



like i want to see the life that has changed this cracked journey  
and begin anew  
baptized of ~~atrocious~~ hell  
a normal without an acquaintance to call anything home with  
i'm fighting for extreme  
and i'm finding myself kicking in the dark  
planning for pure seclusion  
because the opposite puts itself beyond these outstretched  
fingers  
to be supervised by every person i have ever loved  
every body where my kisses ~~had~~ were more passionate than  
these fantasies would never spoil me

i guess when you're not a frat boy  
and still have a curfew at your parent's house  
turning 21 isn't the revolution it's made up to be  
lost memories trickle down by bestests  
i'm not ready to be less young than i was yesterday  
sullen anonymities welcome me into the gates  
of this new yearz

DAMN...  
I HOPE SOMEONE'S WISHES CAME TRUE WHEN I  
BLEW OUT THOSE CANDLES... 🍌



## HEADPHONE DISASTER

because his loneliness poems still  
echo in his headfonez

audio projections of  
solo lifestyle wars  
story of a boy told through  
dreams crumbling slowly  
they rock-rock on

silence doesn't stop when  
the wire is unplugged  
when he steps into his bedroom  
the hum of his computer is  
still all that sings him into  
december slumber

his own fingers running through  
his hair do not bring  
the same comfort

his bad days stick like  
gum to sole  
tarnish his path with  
grayish pink  
acrylics paint his stumble in paradox

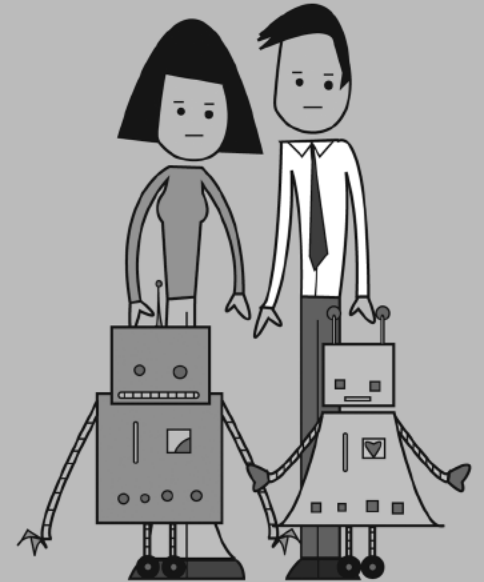
he misses skipping stones in  
chicagoan beaches  
drawing symbols in turmeric with  
witches

solitude tastes better in the midwest  
disappointment doesn't get to him  
unless she cloaks herself in his image  
too many bonds have been shattered by  
his inability to embody expectations  
he is forever reaching  
they are the monkey bars that  
carpet heaven

it has gotten to this point  
because he has surrounded himself with  
tired souls  
spirits on the verge of meltdown  
he has set fields ablaze with his solemn  
rants  
so at any moment  
he could be anyone's last straw  
the culprit of another's woes  
he has his own to be  
his muse

sometimes even kings trip over their  
own robes  
no matter how thin  
or short  
like kings  
he has one eye on his community  
his other is a poorly-wielded saltwater dam  
vision too blurry  
to watch where he's going

OUR  
CHILDREN  
ARE THE  
FUTURE.



“Our Children Are the Future,” by Adriel Luis, 2005

## A LESSON IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN DAVIS, CA

community development.

first day of lecture.

welcome to davis, suckers.

there is a professor  
thirty students  
it's 11am and among the sea of  
morning crust-infested faces,  
UCD sweaters tossed on while rolling out of bed,  
grumbling bellies,  
and breath reeking of stomach acid screaming  
"FEED ME!" from the brink of chapped lips  
there is me  
on the back left corner of this dingy gray classroom  
"yellow pimpslap" thermal cuffs perfectly lined on each wrist  
and i'm trying my best to pay attention  
but i've settled for either going to sleep or writing crappy poetry.

i think it's obvious which one i ended up doing.

the girl in front of me smells like meatloaf  
dude next to me has already dozed off  
but i look like i'm the posterchild student  
scribbling away at my notebook  
perfectly in sync with the professor's words

little do they know that i'm writing THIS  
muahahahahahahahaha!

the topic of the day is urban development  
so here's the issue at hand:  
there is a 15 story housing project in an *ethnic neighborhood*  
drug dealers on every third floor  
walls painted with piss and blood  
the building has its own murder rate  
you're a community developer  
what do you do?

a guy across from me  
his baby-blue eyes light up  
braces gleaming  
hand shoots into the air  
abercrombie & fitch sleeve creates a perfect crease at his shoulder  
fingers bolted together  
slightly tilted forward  
baby-blue's excited about this one!  
i think i know what's coming  
teacher calls on baby-blue  
i cringe at what i think he's going to say  
everything's in slow motion  
mouth begins to open  
deep, low voice mutters,  
"TEAR...THAT...BUILDING...DOWN!"  
he giggles like the little schoolboy that he is  
smiling  
pretty content with his little joke  
and i'm wondering if he was raised by wolves  
or republicans  
i want to lunge from my prison desk

tackle him to the floor  
stab his eyeballs out with my pen  
and shove them up his ass  
so that they can be closer to his head

TEAR THAT BUILDING DOWN??

i want to take him outside  
and catapult petition clipboards at his crotch  
i-hotel  
bindlestiff studio  
east palo alto  
renaissance plaza  
homes toppled  
shoving *the ethnics* onto the streets

buildings torn down  
because baby-blue learned in college  
that's what you do when there's a problem  
it's embedded into our history  
native lifestyles  
chopped to shreds by columbus' hatchet  
blood trickles down white revolutionary ideals  
i'm in class 500 years later  
and nothing has changed

i'm in a community development class

the class is in davis

davis is a bubble

ridiculous mentalities like baby-blue's  
have been allowed to flourish without interference

and as class is dismissed,  
so is his comment  
his racist sentiment tucked into his back pocket as he heads out the door  
it's the tragic tale  
of white-bred amerikan life in the great town of davis

where blades pierce the hearts of gook boys in tetherball courts  
where aerosol cans detonate the n-bomb onto gated community walls  
where ghetto barrios have been tied to train tracks off L street  
where fratboys grin in content, bloodstains of savage whores tainted on their  
fingers and penises

welcome to davis, baby-blue.

welcome to davis.

psst...when's the last time you thought of "gecko hawaii?"

## HALF MOON BAY

7/25/05

I CHASED THE FOG AND FOUND AN OASIS OF SUNLIGHT  
IN HALF MOON BAY.

SKINAT TOLD ME TO SUBMERGE. COMPLETELY. BUT IF NOT, THEN  
AT LEAST WAIST DEEP. YOU'LL TAKE CARE OF THE  
REST. I CHOSE TO GO FOR THE BIG LEBOWSKI.

FOOT DEEP, GOD CLEANSE THEM. I HAVE BEEN WALKING ON  
CLOUDS BUT MY SOLES STILL ACHIE. LAY MY PATH ALREADY,  
BECAUSE I KNOW I WILL PASS BY AS MANY RECOGNIZABLE  
LANDMARKS AS NEW ONES. IF I STEP INTO FAMILIAR  
FOOTSTEPS, ALLOW ME TO SPLASH JOYOUSLY IN MY OWN HISTORY.

KNEE DEEP, KNEES BUCKLE. WE THINK IN CROUCHED POSITIONS  
(LIKE IN THAT STATUE), INTAKE RELEASE. MY LIMBS BEND  
AWKWARDLY, SOMEHOW CUTS MY CALVES LIKE AQUARIAN  
ASTRONAUT BOOTS.

WAIST DEEP, GOD KEEP ME IN CHECK. THE PELVIS LIKES TO  
GIVE BIRTH TO MANY THINGS, ESPECIALLY RASH DECISIONS.  
LOVE MAKE IS VALUABLE, BUT MY CELIBACY IS SACRED.  
LOVE MAKE LOVE, IN GOD'S WORK WE ARE BUT FETTERES WHO  
THINK WE'RE HELLA SEXY OR SOMETHING.

CHEST DEEP, CLEANSE HEART. THIS IS NO SAGE SONG, THIS IS  
THE STORY OF MY LIFE. LOVE, SORROW, WHATEVER YOUR HEART  
FILLS ITSELF WITH WILL PUMP THROUGH TO ~~THE~~ YOUR FURTHEST  
FINGERTIPS AND TOETIPS. TAKING CARE OF AN EMPTY  
HEART IS LIKE CALMING THE CRUMBLES OF A LATE-NIGHT  
EMPTY STOMACH—FILL IT WITH WATER, AND GO TO SLEEP AFTERWARDS.

SUBMERGE. I STAY THERE WITH ARMS OPEN, ONLY RESISTING  
THE WAVES FROM KNOCKING ME DOWN ENOUGH SO THAT THE KIDS  
BEHIND ME WOULDN'T LAUGH AT ME. VOICES CLOSED, FEELING THE  
PULSE OF THE TIDE WITH MY EARS, I SUBMERGED UNTIL A FINAL  
WAVE WASHED ME BACK ON SHORE.

I DON'T EVEN THINK I WAS AT THE BEACH FOR THAT LONG. THESE  
SHORES ARE BUT STILT HOURGLASSES THAT I CARESS WITH MY  
PALMS TO BUILD FRAGILE MOUNTAINS.

MY JOURNEY BEGINS AND I AM OPEN. IN MY POSSESSION  
REMAINS A TASTER BRACELET TRAPPED BETWEEN WINGS OF INFINITY.  
THESE DIAMOND-SHATTERED STONES WOULD NOT FINISH POLISHING WHEN  
PICKED FROM THE OCEAN. EMERGES FROM WATER, I AM WET CLAY.  
GOD MOLD ME, BECAUSE IF ALL CANVASES THOUGHT THEY  
ALREADY KNEW WHAT WAS BEST FOR THEM, THEY'D REMAIN  
BLANK-FACED AND UNSTRETCHED. THIS IS WHERE NEW COLORS  
ARE INTRODUCED, NEW EMOTIONS ARE CONJURED, ~~NEW~~ NEW LOVE  
IS CAST, AND TONGUES CONVERSE.

INFINITY IS ALWAYS BEGINNING.

# STEP 3:



**PEEL THE FRUIT**  
\*EXPOSE THE TANGY INSIDES!



# SOMETIMES WORDS AREN'T ENOUGH.

FOR EXAMPLE, TAKE SCRIPTURE —  
OLD WORLD TEXT  
SAID TO HAVE BEEN PLUCKED

FROM **GOD'S TONGUE**

ONTO PAPER  
IN HEBREW  
TRANSPLANT ARABIC  
TRANSPLANT LATIN  
TRANSPLANT ENGLISH

IMPLANTED INTO THE TONGUE OF THIS  
YOUNG SON OF IMMIGRANTS

MIND TOO LIMITED TO EVEN  
SPAWN CONCEPTION  
OF NEW EMOTION

NOW IMAGINE HE,  
BARELY LAYING THE BRICKS TO HIS  
TOWER OF BABEL'S FOUNDATION  
AND HIS TONGUE HAS ALREADY  
BEEN SPLIT IN THREE:

## ONE,

DRIPPING, DROOLING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

OF POET,

PULSATING MOSTLY OF PHILOSOPHICAL JARGON PLANTED IN A BERKELEY  
TREEHOUSE AMIDST GLASS, FLAME, AND HAZE.

THIS IS THE HEALTHIEST TONGUE BECAUSE HE NURTURES IT MOST.  
IT HAS BECOME HIS SOUL'S DIPLOMAT. CORRUPT, BUT ONLY WHEN IT CAN'T COME UP  
WITH ANY ALTERNATIVES. BUT IT WASN'T ALWAYS THE STRONGEST.

## THE 2<sup>ND</sup> TONGUE,

NOW DRY AND LIMP,

WAS ONCE THE JOYFUL FRESHWATER FISH  
THAT HAS SINCE BEEN DRENCHED BY THE SALTWATER DAMS  
THAT WERE TOPPLED AND REPLACED BY LANGUAGE BARRIERS

BETWEEN FATHER AND MOTHER.

IMAGINE HE WHO ONCE ROAMED UNION CITY STREETS WITH ONLY CANTONESE  
SLEEPING BETWEEN HIS TEETH, UNTIL RIVAL FIRST-WORLD TONGUE CAME AND  
PUNKED WHAT HAS NOW BECOME THE SECOND ONE OF ITS POSITION. SECOND TONGUE

CAN'T EVEN GLISTEN LIKE IT USED TO. BECAUSE WHEN I WAS FIVE, THERE WAS A  
BATTLE IN MY MOUTH, AND MY JAW STILL WEARS THE SCARS THAT EXIST THROUGH  
THE RANDOM SLURS AND STUTTERS WHEN THESE TWO TONGUES BUMP AGAINST EACH  
OTHER. NOW THIS ISN'T JUST AN HOMAGE TO ANIDA, IT'S A BITTER RENDITION OF MY  
FRUSTRATION BECAUSE WORDS AREN'T ENOUGH.

AND SOMETIMES

## MY THIRD TONGUE

SLIPS IN AND OUT OF EXISTENCE  
AND TRIES TO LICK GOD.

## THIRD TONGUE, DO YOU REMEMBER ME? FROM IN THE BEGINNING, WHEN HUMANS CIPHERED THROUGH HEARTBEAT?

FATHER MOTHER BROTHER SISTER COUSIN LOVER, STRANGER,  
DO YOU RECALL?

BEFORE WORD WAS BORN TO REPLACE SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION  
BEFORE WORD, THE NEWER BETA VERSION  
WAS FORMED WHEN VOICE AND EAR BECAME EASIER THAN BREATH AND THOUGHT

## THIRD TONGUE

THE ONLY SANCTUARY IN WHICH TRUTH CANNOT CONFLICT  
THE CENTER IN WHICH EACH OF OUR MULTIPLE UNIVERSES LINK

BECAUSE NO MATTER HOW MANY NEW REALITIES ARE SPAWNED PERPETUALLY AS  
PREMISES POSE PALETES PER POTENTIAL POSSIBILITY  
LANGUAGE CLASHES NOT WHERE SPIRIT HOLDS PRECEDENCE

WITH SPIRIT  
WE NEED NOT QUESTION THAT WE CAN HOLD THESE TO BE SELF-EVIDENT:  
TRUTH IS TRUTH

EXISTENCE EXISTS  
AND MISCOMMUNICATION IS AS CERTAIN AS DEATH  
AS LONG AS WE ALLOW OUR WORDS  
TO DICTATE OUR REALITIES

## LOVER,

WORDS ARE NOT ENOUGH TO NAME THE WAY MY HEART SPITS TO YOU.

## MOTHER,

LANGUAGE ITSELF IS THE LANGUAGE BARRIER THAT WILL NEVER ALLOW ME TO  
EXPRESS MY APPRECIATION TO YOU.

## BROTHER,

THE MISUNDERSTOOD WORDS THAT I USE TO DANCE AROUND MY UNTRANSLATABLE  
EMOTIONS DECLARE MY WARS WITH YOU.

BECAUSE WORDS ARE NOT ENOUGH, AND WORDS BECOME CORRUPT WHEN THEY STAND  
IN THE WAY OF COMMUNICATION.

FATHER MOTHER  
BROTHER SISTER  
COUSIN LOVER  
STRANGER

CAN YOU HEAR YOUR THIRD TONGUE WHISPER?

CAN YOU RECALL ALL OF THE  
UNIVERSES THAT GOT LOST BETWEEN  
GOD'S VOICE AND SCRIPTURE?

ALL OF THE EMOTIONS THAT WE FORGOT HOW  
TO FEEL BECAUSE WE COULD NOT JUSTIFY  
THEIR EXISTENCES THROUGH DICTION?

DID WE NOT TAKE FLIGHT BEFORE  
WE INVENTED THE WORDS TO SPEAK  
RESTRICTION?

THIRD TONGUE! PLEASE SAVE ME!  
YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE WHO  
HAS NOT BETRAYED ME!

BECAUSE I HAVE EVEN LOST A LOVER IN MY VOICE'S VENOM  
I HAVE BELLOWED ROARS  
THAT HAVE SHAKEN THE RIBBONS OF INFINITY INTO QUESTION  
IN THIS SAME LANGUAGE  
THAT LEFT ME ALONE AND BEGGING  
WHEN I SOUGHT TO SUMMON THE WORDS FOR MY REDEMPTION

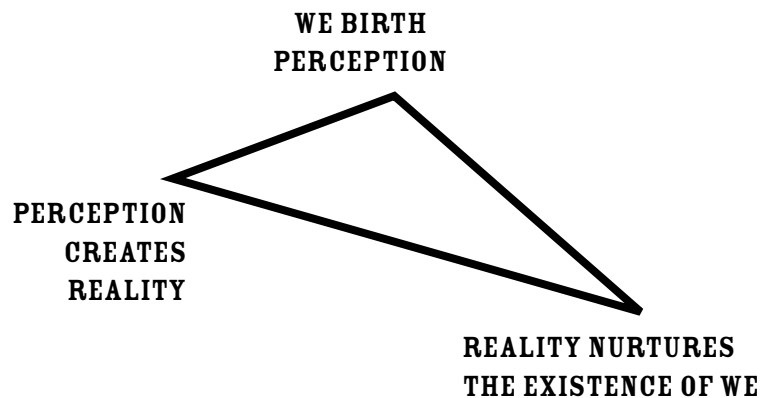
AND I GET CAUGHT UP IN THIS CATCH 22  
SPEWING JARGON THROUGH POETRY  
REITERATING NIETZSCHIAN THEORIES WHEN  
CLEARLY THE TOOLS I HAVE CARVED TO  
BOLT US TOGETHER  
BUILD THE WALL THAT DIVIDES US

LANGUAGE IS THE VERY REASON I CAN'T EVEN KNOW YOU—

GOD  
SISTER  
SELF  
LIKE I USED TO.

DIVINITY SINGS TO US WITH A **THIRD TONGUE.**  
 LANGUAGE FORCES  
 US TO PLUCK IT  
 ONTO PAPER  
 IN HEBREW  
 TRANSPLANT ARABIC  
 TRANSPLANT LATIN  
 TRANSPLANT ENGLISH  
 AND COUNTLESS OTHER LIMITED SCRIPTURES WRITTEN IN A COLOR  
 THAT COULD NEVER BE TRANSLATED INTO SPIRIT.

**BUT WE ARE SPIRIT.**



FORULATING OUR UNIVERSE'S TRINITY

**THIRD TONGUE, SPEAK!**  
 IT IS THE ONLY ONE THAT HAS EVER TASTED TRUTH

**TRUTH!**  
 I WANT TO GRASP YOU

**LANGUAGE!**  
 I WANT TO BREAK PAST YOU

**TONGUES!**  
 I WANT TO OWN YOU

**LOVE!**  
 I WANT TO COMMUNICATE.

## SLIP OF THE TONGUE



my glares burn through her. and i'm sure that such actions aren't foreign to her because the essence of her beauty is...well...the essence of beauty. and in the presence of this higher being, the weakness of my masculinity kicks in, causing me to personify my wannabebigballershotcallergod'sgifttothefemalespecies image, like:

**"YO WHAT'S CRACKIN' SHORTIE, HOW YOU LIVING? WHAT'S YOUR SIGN? WHAT'S YOUR SIZE? I DIG YOUR STYLE, YO!!"**

now this girl is no fool, and she gives me a dirty look like **"BOY, YOU MUST BE STUPID."** so i'm looking at myself like 'boy, you must be stupid...' but i am kinda feelin her style, so i try again. but instead of addressing her properly, i blurt out one of my fake-ass-playalistik lines like:

**"gurrrrrrrrllllll, i must be parked at a red zone...'cuz**

**I AM SUBJECT TO MAXIMUM FINE!!"**

now she's trying to leave and i'm trying to keep her here, so at a final attempt, i babble:

**"SHAWTEEEE YOU IZ LOOKIN GOOD,  
WHAT IS YOUR ETHNIC MAKEUP??"**

at this point, her glare is scorching through me...reminiscent of feminist theory classes that i should have paid more attention in...and i'm envisioning her setting her bra on fire and shaving her scalp G.I. JANE STYLE, but there's no snap or head movement. no palm to face, click of tongue, middle finger, roll of eyes, or Girl Power chant. she just slits my glimpse with those brimstone pupils like:

"ok, mu'fucka. i'll tell you about my ethnic makeup...

## I WEAR FOUNDATION.

But not that powdery shit  
Because foundation was once grounded between ancestral toes  
Foundation once caressed the waves that ricocheted off alabaster souls  
But now it is capsulated tint of the bastards that sold us of our skintones  
They found Asians  
We lost nations  
And I am pitifully padding fake foundation on my skin so now  
My kin don't know how to get home

I want to get home  
And so I ask my mother what my foundation is  
And she answers, "Revlon."  
And I want to speak out  
But I don't know which mic to get on

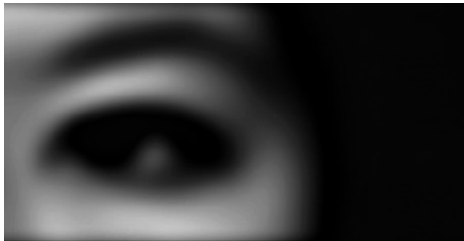
And that's why I keep my lips skintone  
**BECAUSE FUCK LIPSTICK**  
Wisdom can't glisten with my lips stitched  
My mother sucked blood-stained colonizer dick  
For the survival of her daughters  
And got her lips red  
All over



Colonizer liked the look and told her not to lick it off  
Oh mother!  
Kept stick in her lips so her kin wouldn't suffer  
But we got it twisted and said  
"Mommy, we also want our mouths covered!"

Girl, keep it covered  
Girl, keep it covered, girl,  
Cover, girl, keep your lips the way they were  
When you last kissed your blood-covered mother  
So please take cover

Take cover from the sun that shines on your brothers  
Keep your vision from the light  
Keep the shade in your eyes  
I keep the shade in my eyes  
**UNTIL MY EYES ARE COVERED IN EYE SHADOWS**  
Pupils weary of suffering,  
Manifested in dark circles  
Like oil in my eye  
I've become blind to the battle  
And that's why I don't fuck with eye shadows  
And that's why the shade spreads over my face  
Whenever I start crying



Because it has become apparent that  
My brothers' eyes are also shadowed from me here dying  
**SIMPLY MANIFESTED BY ME PERIODICALLY HAIR DYEING**  
Scalp no longer able to maintain Technicolor life  
Because I'm too busy here dying  
And I can't even cry about it anymore  
Because my tears get my ethnic makeup all smothered

And I don't want this ethnic makeup  
So don't ask me about my ethnic makeup  
I don't want to believe my ethnicity can be made up  
And I just wish my sisters could see  
That they're not made up of that shit they call make up  
That shit is not makeup  
That shit is make believe."



**and i can't look up at her.  
she, mystic historic capsule.  
i, misogynistic asshole  
we, another broken balance  
my ego left in crutches  
groveling for a lesson  
in my beautiful rejection.**

*\*Stills from Slip of the Tongue, directed & produced by Karen Lum, courtesy of BAVC-Youth Sounds*

# SELF-HATRED’S SOLILOQUY

*SELF-HATRED enters*

SELF-HATRED (*Looking hellla angry and demonic*): Taking jabs  
At who you were born to be.  
I’ve gotten all types of people to conform to me—  
I’ve gotten women to be submissive for centuries  
And men to take out on women  
Their frustration towards me.  
Now that’s some pimp shit!

*(SELF-HATRED pops his collar. Beat.)*

I’ve gotten blacks to wanna be paler,  
Gotten Asians to hide their accents in shame,  
Made fags pretend to be straight,  
And the masses chase paper. Do you know who I am?  
That’s right. I’m Self-Hatred, motherfucker.  
And I am coming to an ego near you.  
So if you have an inch of dignity, or emotional stability,  
Know that I’ve got a list with your name written in it!  
And no, idiot,  
This isn’t on some new shit.  
I’ve been fuckin’ with people since the beginning.  
I’ve created a long lineage of suckas who would love to be anyone.  
Well that’s anyone but themselves.  
See, that’s where I excel.  
I was there to help when Madam C.J. Walker invented hair straighteners.  
Fast-forward to all the Filipinas who have ever bought Eskinol  
To make their skin paler!

Pass it to their daughters,  
So they can be raised to believe  
That you could never  
Be beautiful  
Enough!  
Now isn’t that a wonderful way to grow up?  
In a world where Benefit, Origins, and Philosophy are just names of makeup  
That you can cake up on your face,  
Because I’ve gotten all these girls around me to believe that they can’t step outside  
Without their face done! Face done, face down,  
It’s crazy how you can control someone when they hate themselves  
More than the actions they’re committing.  
And I’ve got those same clown-faced bitches  
Spittin’ up their favorite dishes, face-down in a toilet bowl,  
Diggin’ for a potion to make them more skinny.  
I’ve got all the lost kids in the playground off in a craze,  
Not knowing how to behave,  
Because all they’ve been taught in school is how to obey!  
I just give them gold stars and report cards to keep ‘em sedated!  
And if you comply easily,  
I’ll tell you you’re a gifted student, and put you in advanced classes,  
Advanced towards shifting your mind state towards oblivion!  
‘Tell you you’re a wonderful, unique individual,  
Then implement a curriculum that contradicts it.  
And after all that, you seen what I’ve done?  
Aiiiiiight, DIG IT!  
After you finish school,  
If you don’t go on to do more school,  
Everyone will think you’re an idiot!  
Oooohhhhhhhhhhhhh! Damn, world!  
I’ve got you twisted!

*(Audience breaks out in laughter and applause)*

That's right. I'm laughing at you. And you are going to accept it.  
Because that is how I have raised you.

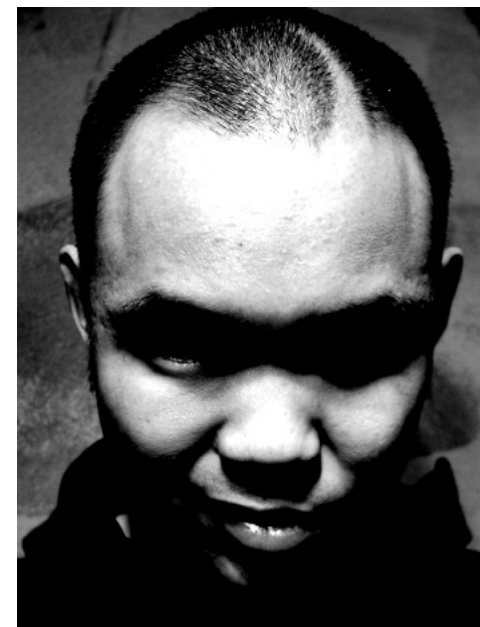
*(Audience shuts the fuck up. Beat.)*

Now, I don't only deal with internal affairs.  
Because I have coined a patented method of taking the hate you have for yourself  
To also impair everyone else! 60  
I've gotten civil rights activists to turn against feminists!  
I even tapped Fredrick Douglass to say that all men of color should get to vote  
Before women should!  
I've got Mexicans fighting Mexicans to claim sets within California,  
Forgetting that the whole fuckin' state was their set 65  
Before the Europeans came and spoiled it!  
I've got Korean store owners ready to blast holes in the black customers  
That hate Koreans for exploiting them!  
Now DAWG!! Even I know that's dirty!  
I've got them fighting over the ghetto, 70  
to the point where they don't even think about why they're there in the first place!  
All that is because of me! I did that! The killers, the takers, the stealers,  
The rapists, who can understand what's precious to a woman, then take it!  
All that shit, because you are brimming with Self-Hatred!  
It's racism, sexism, homophobia, anorexia, 75  
Conflict, poverty, qualms in the media! It's problems in politics!  
Bombs in the East! It's the models in magazines!  
All the implants I've seen! Plastic surgery! Bastard nurseries,  
Filled with illegitimate bastard emergencies! It's envy! It's enemies!  
It's suicide! It's losing pride! It's commercialism! Materialism! 80  
Lack of love for yourself, but BLAMING THE SYSTEM!  
All this shit, because I live in you, motherfuckaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

*(Hella long beat.)*

Now, you probably want to know how to stop me.  
Well, first, you've got to find me.  
And with all the shit I've spawned in my lifetime, that won't be easy.  
But I will give you a hint:  
If you can stop trying to find me in everyone else, stupid,  
Maybe—just maybe—you'll be able to recognize me  
In yourself.

85



*Self-Hatred's Self Portrait*, by Adriel Luis, 2006



## Z

Flipping through wire hangers  
Scanning each dully colored garment  
He chooses with deep concentration.  
Only the best for him.

They call him Z. And never has a one-letter name had such a perfect fit. Since birth, he's been consistently trailing in last place. The youngest of five, you'd think he'd be spoiled as the baby of the family. But after three siblings through college, seventeen years of Bay Area rent, and a failing business, Z's family has been depleted completely of the financial and emotional resources needed to foster youth. So needless to say, Z reached adulthood early, like most immigrant children do, who join the workforce at age 8, stacking plates at his parents' Asian bakery. Fingers soiled to the bone in dishwashing soap. So after school everyday, he hops BART across Oakland to do the only thing he knows how—survive.

Ok, he knows how to do two things:  
Survive, and *be sprung off his ass in love!*

He's been with Trish since the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. And if these past four years have taught Z anything, it's that God must be a woman. And Trish is the reflection of both him and the Most High. She takes the train to his work everyday, just so that she can take a train back, sleeping on his shoulder.  
Only the best for him.

She makes him rich inside, which for some beautiful reason makes all this economic turmoil okay. Which is why he's fine with flipping through wire hangers shopping at the St. Vincent de Paul thrift store off San Pablo Avenue. Combining frugal with fashion—perfect illustration of his adaptation. His musical taste is far advanced from his peers too—digging through used CD's at Amoeba Records on Telegraph.

Fly used clothes, hot used tracks,  
But Z's learned to be tough growing up in his used Oakland shack  
Like I said, Z adapts.

But then again,  
Penny-pinching can only save you so much  
Used music can only sound so fresh  
And Oakland streets can only be so safe.

Which is why Z didn't have to think twice about worrying when Trish didn't show up outside the bakery one day. Sitting on an Oakland Chinatown curb for the longest two hours of his life, the sweet scent of mini custard tarts leaking outside the bakery, mixed with the metallic stench of smog and dead catfish from the market next door.

The rancid discomfort of panicking when you think you shouldn't.  
When you can smell the sweat from your scalp.  
It's incredible how insanely hot a gray November evening in the Bay can be,  
when you have not a clue where your own reflection is.

And so Z took BART home alone that night. Instead of studying the maze of thick black hair atop Trish's sleeping head, he stared blankly at the trees and telephone poles whisking by the window. Towering vertical structures like brown arms outstretched to God in a passionate hymn.

But Z's mind was not on that  
It was on Trish, who he hoped was waiting at home  
He would not be mad that she stood him up  
He would accept any excuse  
That she had lost her BART ticket  
Gone out with friends and lost track of time  
Was mad at him for whatever reason  
But safe.

Which is why the sigh of relief came when she opened her front door.  
Eyes raw of tears  
Limply standing in front of him  
She looked exhausted,  
Like she had misplaced a part of her soul  
And had spent the entire day clawing through the furniture searching for it.

He took her to her room where she buried her face in her heart-shaped pillow. Z's fingers waltzed the back of her neck in the way she liked. But this time, the familiar smoothness of her flesh was replaced by cold goose bumps. He turned her over. Her face was red and swollen. Her bottom lip bitten so hard there were imprints of her front teeth on it. Her voice was raspy as she explained in broken sobs that she had gone to a study group after school. When she got there, Jacob (who was always trying to get at her) told her that she was early.

In his living room,  
Sipping on a cup of Coke,  
She asked him not to sit so close.  
And so he obeyed by slapping her to the ground  
Broken glass and soda spilt onto the carpet

He was the only one who could hear her screams to stop.  
How convenient for him, he was the only one who didn't care.

And now,  
Only moments later,  
Z is a stone in front of his queen dethroned  
Unable to look into the eyes of the only pure, untainted element of his life.  
When everything else—his clothes, his music, his apartment, his family,  
were gray and tattered.  
She, his life's pride  
Was his only source of rejuvenation.

He hated himself for making that comparison—for casting her into the stash of the rest of his fucked up life. This was not about him. This was about she whom he defined himself by. He saw her wings wilt as he took her in his arms, her back quivering as his palm caressed it. Whispers in her ear, "Nothing that you do not offer can ever be taken. We adapt, remember? Only the best for us."

Two tired souls  
Wrapped in each other's elbows,  
Fall into a forced slumber.  
Thoughts oozing down the sides of Z's mind, even as his eyes flicker shut.

*They say that true monsters are those who can steal souls, and still look themselves in the mirror. If so, then there must await a much more severe damnation for those who can do it staring into the reflection of God.*

# 1 PRAYER

## CHAPTER 1

<sup>1</sup>I don't even know how to pray. <sup>2</sup>I don't feel any connection. <sup>3</sup>I've spent a lifetime straining to build a concept of to whom I speak these alms, but when I close my eyes and clench my palms it's like my words wither. <sup>4</sup>And so it's no surprise I've spent life lost, with no firm place to rest my qualms, because when I vocalize to vent to God I get silenced by religion. <sup>5</sup>O man-made vessel of spiritual prison! <sup>6</sup>These canned relationships with God inhibit me from seeing the Supreme Being.

<sup>7</sup>It's twisted, because when I think of God, it translates to visions of twenty-one years of confinement of spirit. <sup>8</sup>And I can't get myself to embrace that. <sup>9</sup>And I don't think I was created to. <sup>10</sup>But it's so difficult to believe otherwise when I'm praying to a two-dimensional Soul Dictator, like I've been trained to do.

## CHAPTER 2

<sup>1</sup>God, I know You're not who they tell me You are. <sup>2</sup>But every time I hear your name, it's so hard for me not to lose focus and snap back into my Church's hypnosis. <sup>3</sup>Because to me, the word "God" doesn't sound like "Jehovah." <sup>4</sup>It sounds like holy water, bread and wine, chanting, and pulpits. Fear that these questions will infest me with locusts, and if I die still wondering, I probably wasn't chosen.

<sup>5</sup>O God! Have I become so sadistic, <sup>6</sup>that every week, I force myself to praise a church in a building? Raise my hands and close my mouth to worship the ceiling, comforted by the fact that I won't burn with the heathens? <sup>7</sup>How did my Mother Creator get misconstrued into this? <sup>8</sup>What is this ridiculous institution that swings

continuous like a pendulum? <sup>9</sup>I must be a fool to trust the view that to love God, I must pursue a church's curriculum. <sup>10</sup>And every blink of the eye is another battle—clawing for religious light, but ending up in spiritual shadows. <sup>11</sup>But I read the other night that the path to life is narrow. <sup>12</sup>So what does that say about the masses that have been looped into the demonized state of a denomination's lasso?

## CHAPTER 3

<sup>1</sup>Oh God! I'm so scared! <sup>2</sup>Because I've seen the thin line dividing blasphemy and the path to freedom, and I feel like I'm caught in between them—<sup>3</sup>convinced I'm a divine being, but scared to Hell that I'm damned if the truth that I seek in myself ends up being a make-believe one. <sup>4</sup>And I don't know how to pray for help if I can't properly see you.

<sup>5</sup>So I sit in the pews, asking the pastor, "What could my purpose be?" <sup>6</sup>But any response from the Church I see is the burning glare of religious purging. <sup>7</sup>Jesus! It's like spiritual surgery with the skeptic's scalpel piercing me, and the Bible-belt's palm on my forehead, yodeling to the clouds to find out what my curse could be. <sup>8</sup>So God, with these words I seek you. Because I have yet to see Jesus beyond the forty-day Christians and Mel Gibson DVDs <sup>9</sup>and those who speak your name, but puff hate and blame from between their teeth, <sup>10</sup>because I need to believe that, despite religion, I can find spiritual healing, and finally learn how to pray.

See poet  
It seems that  
our thoughts  
are limited to  
our eloquence  
Because sometimes  
my dopest lines  
won't fit through  
my esophagus  
Now imagine he  
who has created  
an archive  
of silence  
A lifetime of poetry  
that I can't even find beauty in  
Because the language  
is too  
damned  
undecipherable

## FIVE-O-CLOCK

It's 5:00

Somewhere in France  
Paris Hilton is chillin' at the Paris Hilton  
Flipping through the channels  
She's skipping past "A Simple Life"

At the same time  
That chick who sang "What if God Was One of Us"  
Is polishing her Grammy  
Watching "VH1's One Hit Wonders"

In Berkeley High  
A crew of 10<sup>th</sup> grade hip-hop heads  
Can't seem to remember the name of the other rapper in Run DMC

In Vallejo  
Brenda is waiting by her radio  
for Dominique to give her a shout-out on Wild 94.9

In Union City  
Jeffery is checking his ex-girlfriend's MySpace page  
To see if she deleted his photos

And not too far away  
Someone is dying  
His last breath slowly unclenches the back of his throat  
Surrounded by empty picture frames

And everywhere  
Everybody is dying  
To live in someone else's thoughts

Ultimate loneliness  
The greatest hell known to man  
To exist as a drifter  
Dwelling in homes with untouched doorbells  
And minimum phone bills  
As the only one who cares whether or not he's alive

(This is not on any Siddhartha tip. Ain't no one gonna be finding ultimate peace by meditating on images of the bum that froze to death last night on 18<sup>th</sup> & Shotwell.)

No one began life alone  
So ending it that way seems backwards  
And the fact is  
Everyone craves fame—popularity  
At least within their own social networks

I want my funeral to close down the street in front of the chapel  
With people leaving fingernail scratches on my casket  
And stopping traffic with an army of black Lincolns  
My ex-girlfriends huddled in a circle  
Padding down their tears with their veils  
Reminiscing on my good lovin'

### FAME! THE LONGING FOR FAME!

It's the reason we get excited when we see our faces  
On the big screen at baseball games  
It's why we scratch our names into poles while waiting in line at Great America  
Carving instant legacy with your house key  
And don't front—  
Everyone has Googled themselves at least once

Everyone wants to be thought of  
It's like we get sadder when we feel like no one cares that we're sad

It's so human to want to be noticed by other humans  
Our names always sound warmer in the breaths of others  
So we grab onto them as if we don't hella own them  
Acknowledgement is the greatest human necessity  
And like all the others  
We've created an over-consumptive obsession

When I'm not in this room  
How many times will my name get mentioned?  
I need to know that shit in order to validate my own existence

What can I do to be brought up in relevant casual conversation?  
Because we all find a particular comfort in the fiction of another's imagination  
Whether it's based completely on fact  
Or loosely on fiction  
As long as my name is etched on your lips  
Among others from whom I crave respect

**FAME!**  
**THINK ABOUT THAT SHIT!**

Because all it means to be famous  
Is that you're surrounded by more people trying to claim it  
Going ape-shit over how many people are thinking of us at a particular time  
How many yearbooks we've signed  
I trip out even watching *Trading Spaces*  
Knowing I'm witnessing these decorating neighbors  
Experiencing what they must swear is the highlight of their lives

It's crazy how today's hot shit becomes yesterday's not shit  
Waiting for those 15 minutes of fame  
Spending our whole lives beforehand trying to cop it  
Spending our whole lives afterwards riding on the aftershocks  
It's like we're struggling  
To get into the daydreams and conversations  
Of people who crave our attention  
To claim the same significance  
Cups pouring the same water into each other  
Divine sojourners clinging to the earth's surface  
Unable to rise because we're too busy trying to catch everyone else's eyes  
Is this all that we aspire for?

Do we build family or fan-bases nowadays,  
Friendships or Friendsters, all of which we display  
So that we can impress *somebody*  
By showing them that we know somebody else  
Thinking that knowing that "somebody else"  
Will make us a somebody

"I was on Def Poetry Jam!"  
"I won the San Francisco Slam!"  
Trust me,  
I only care enough to drop your name  
So I can show everyone else how cool I am!

Modern day community building, y'all  
Capitalism exists today, more than ever,  
Manifested in the ways that we stack up on human interaction

Has human civilization only been driven by people  
Who wanted to create a name for themselves?

Because if so  
How can I create *my* name?  
How do I get *my* signature scripted into the clouds?

**It's 5:00**

I need to know I exist,

Can you help me?

Just say my name

I need to hear my name in your lips

Please

Say my name

Let me know that I still matter

## THE WATTS EXPERIMENT

**This is an experimental theatre.**

*We have TWO SUBJECTS of observation*

*(and we don't really need to give them names because they'll both be dead by the end of this poem)*

*so we'll just label them as follows:*



# SUBJECT A

is a 16-year-old black man  
with a broken lisp.

*At age 12, sirens blared his name and six pigs surrounded.*

*Open palms to back of brown-flesh skull*

*Legs spread waist-length*

*See, SUBJECT A fit the description. But not knowing so, he asked the cop*

**“What did I do wrong???”**

*but answered to baton against back of knees,  
toppled body*

*tooth cracked on concrete*

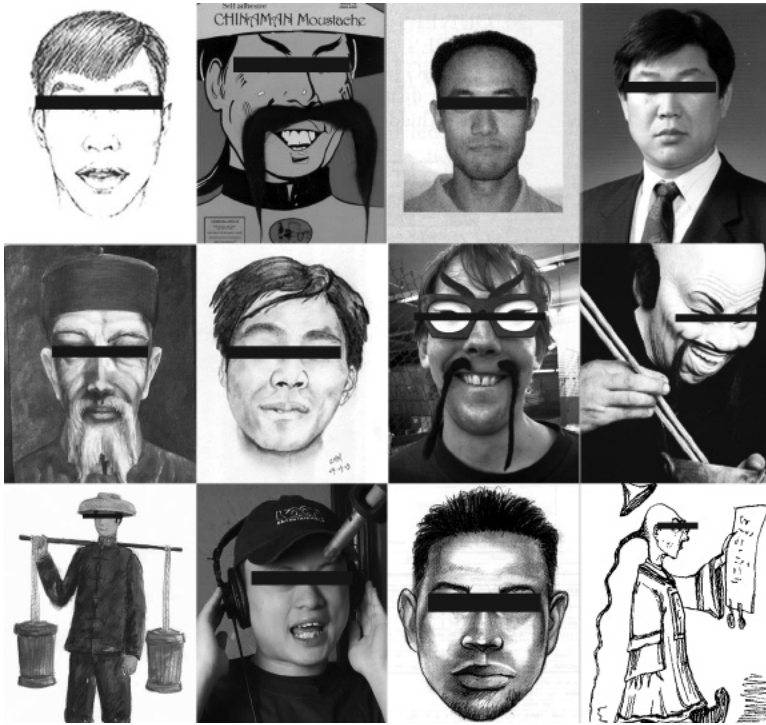
*And since then, SUBJECT A hasn't been able to pronounce his words correctly.*

*His tongue stumbles over words with the “s” sound helplessly.*

*Words like “strength.” And “soul.” And “happiness.”*

*So no one takes SUBJECT A seriously when he speaks.*

But not like anyone ever really did.



# SUBJECT B

is a 43-year-old Korean man  
(and I think you know where this is going)

*The scent of freedom was strong enough to coax a family of 3 across the Pacific. But now SUBJECT B sells bubble gum and beer in a corner store in Watts. He hands people change through a bullet-proof face.*

**Folks always wonder why Mr. Subject B won't smile**

*But after 17 years of wiping down the same dingy iron-bar window, there's just not much to be happy about.*

*But hey, he can't complain.*

*He sells enough Coca-Colas to pay the rent. And he sells enough lottery tickets to put food on the table.*

*His 18-YEAR-OLD-SON has been helping him out for the past 12 years, stocking liquor bottles in refrigerated cases. Ever since he was forced into this dust-ridden store, SUBJECT B has been dreaming of rice terraces that his eyes won't ever kiss again. Dreaming of the home village where his name meant something.*

But like I said  
we're not paying attention to names this time.



Scene open.

*Today the sky cringes with smog and brokenness. Rusty copper bells rattle as SUBJECT A enters the store. It's hot, so he grabs a Coke and a Snickers bar for his girl. (It isn't the fanciest anniversary present, but he's adding a home-made slow jams mixtape so the gift will have some character).*

*SUBJECT B watches him from the counter. Despite the fact that he recognizes every Black face that enters the store, he can't help but be nervous.*

*Because of the taunts. Because of the anger.*

*Because of the **BLACK FISTS** that picketed his store*

*2 weeks back,*

*when the **Black-owned** store*

*2 blocks down*

*closed.*

**“THESE DAMNED  
KOREANS NEED TO  
GET OUT OF OUR  
NEIGHBORHOODS!”**

*His ears echo their cries that swore that these rallies were fueled by a love that these foreign exploiters can't feel. But SUBJECT B gave up his home so his son could eat a hot meal. So if that's not love, then what is?*

SUBJECT A *has been standing there for awhile now.*

SUBJECT B *scrambles for the words but he just can't piece them together. He doesn't mean to be rude, but it's the only English mood that he's ever been taught.*

SUBJECT B:        **Buy now or get out!**  
                      **Buy now or get out!**

SUBJECT A *doesn't want to hear it. He's been labeled as a thug inappropriately one too many times. Their eyes touch once.*

SUBJECT A:        **What's your**  
                      **problem, man??????**

SUBJECT A *is pissed.*

SUBJECT B *is scared.*

SUBJECT A *steps forward.*

SUBJECT B *grabs the nine from behind the counter—*

**DEAD AIM**  
**ON**  
**BLACK MAN.**

SUBJECT B *(gun cocked back, sweat drips, fist shakes):*        **Get out now!**

*But* SUBJECT A *has never been one to punk out like that.*

SUBJECT A *(takes another step forward):*                        **I have money, see?**  
   **I have money, see??**

*But both can't understand the words coming out of the other's mouth.*

**2 subjects**  
**2 speech impediments**  
**Struggling over 1 language**  
**Demonstrating 500 years of socialization**

*Shouts continue, sirens approach. With all the commotion, SUBJECT B'S 18-YEAR-OLD-SON bursts in through the back, gun in hand—*

**DEAD AIM**  
**ON**  
**BLACK MAN.**

Shouts continue

Sirens approach

18-year-old son

Gun in hand

Shouts continue

Sirens approach

18-year-old son

Gun in hand

## ...TWO SHOTS FIRED

*But SUBJECT A is thinking 2 seconds ahead.*

*He jumps aside and*

**SUBJECT B takes 2 bullets to the chest.**

*Dead silence.*

*Sirens approach.*

*18-year-old-son.*

*Gun in hand.*

*Dead silence.*

*Sirens approach.*

*Rusty copper bells.*

*PIGS enter.*

*OLD KOREAN MAN down.*

*BLACK MAN standing.*

*6 shots fired.*

*BLACK MAN down.*

*Scene close*

*This is an experimental theatre. Red and blue spotlights. Cameras in the sky. The audience is numbed by another story of Black and Asian conflict. Tonight, the sky bleeds of distortion. The news will paint a picture of it. The 2 SUBJECTS will be replaced. The scene will play again.*

This is The Watts Experiment. Thank you for watching.

# STEP 4:



**SMASH THE FRUIT**  
\*IF IT DON'T HURT THEN YOU AIN'T DOIN' IT RIGHT!

# SYNCHRONICITY, LOVER! :: \*SIGH!

AS **FLAMES IGNITE** AND **EXTINGUISH** ONE ANOTHER IN HARMONY,  
WAVES DAMPEN EACH OTHER, ALLOW ME TO MELT INTO YOU ::  
LET OUR MOLECULES INTERTWINE, AND WE CAN QUENCH EACH OTHER  
WITH THE LIBERATIONS WE FIND IN EACH OTHER'S IRISES ::  
YOU KNOW ME WELL, BUT YOU DON'T YET KNOW HOW WISE I CAN BE ::

AND IS THAT NOT THE ULTIMATE POINT OF EXISTENCE (?) TO

## LOVE WITH WISDOM ::

I WANT TO LOVE YOU SO INTENSELY THAT PROVERBS SPROUT  
LIKE LOTUSES FROM OUR SEPARATING LIPS EVERY TIME WE FINISH EACH KISS ::  
COULD WE ILLUSTRATE THESE RIPTIDE FLAMES WHETHER THROUGH SECRETS  
WHISPERED UNDER DOWN COMFORTERS OR TATTERED CELLULAR RECEPTION? ::

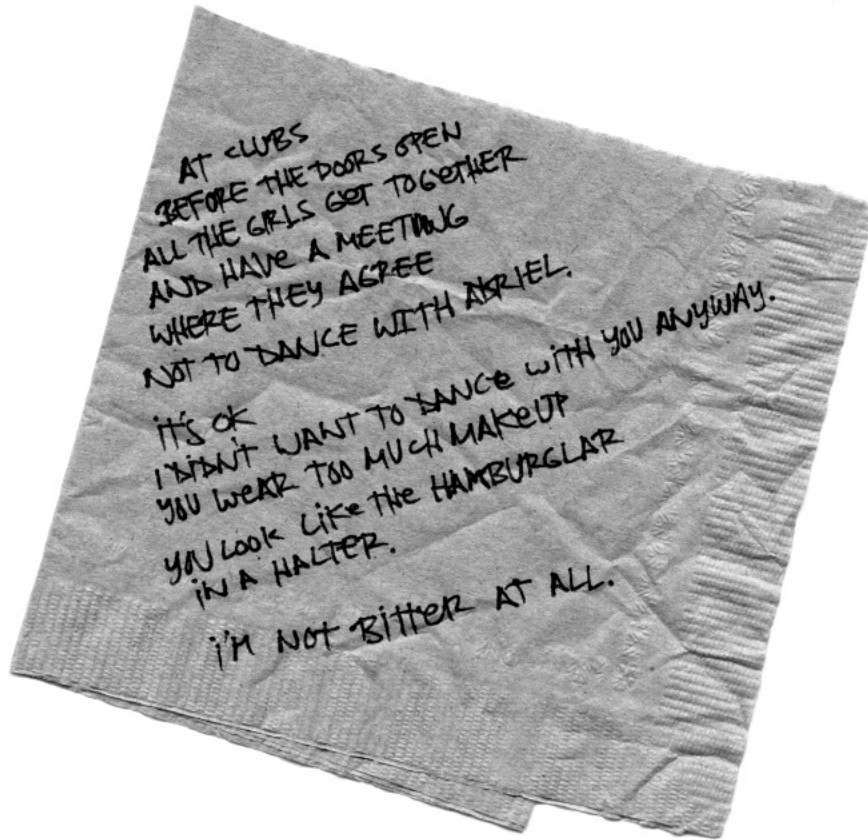
**SISTAH**, COULD BOTH OF OUR CALLOUSED FINGERTIPS BE THE NECESSARIES  
TO GATHER OUR PERSONAL SHARDS THAT SHRED OUR PALMS  
WHEN WE TRY TO TEND TO THEM ON OUR OWN? ::

**TRUTHSPEAKER**, I HAVE DISCOVERED WHY MEN SENSE THAT THE  
UNIVERSE IS CONSTANTLY EXPANDING— ::

A WIZARDRESS STRETCHES STARS TO SHINE PAST WHERE ITS BORDERS  
WOULD OTHERWISE SIT STAGNANT ::

WHO NEEDS THE SOCIAL ILLS OF TOMORROW WHEN YOUR BEAUTY TURNS HEADS SO OFTEN  
THAT WE CAN'T HELP BUT REDISCOVER THE MAGNIFICENCE OF YESTERDAY? ::

## CLUB



## RACQUETBALL

i was disrupted from my sleep by a white dude parked outside my window pumping “SPRINKLE ME” BY E-40 & THE CLICK. what the FEEZEE. it’s “move-out” weekend for the freshmen. and since i live on campus, i’m forced to witness the hoard of adolescents, still scraping the rusty surface of adulthood, engage in a campaign of heaving their lives from their dorms into their parents’ cars. apparently, 8:30 in the morning is the appropriate time for any 18-year-old wigga to display his impeccable taste for 1995 vallejo gangsta rap. windows rolled down. music blasting from his speakers so hard that the bass could simultaneously pop every single pimple on his grease-stricken face. the volume is bleeding through the entire apartment complex, as if pleading, “girls, if you are impressed by overpriced circuit city paraphernalia, then I’M YOUR MAN!”

last night’s 151 proof did nothing for me except teach me how to instantly give myself a headache and a sore throat. i still meandered home in a lonely stupor, reaffirmed that college parties just aren’t my thing, and on the same hand, having a satisfactory social life just isn’t my thing either. life at davis has left me as isolated as the town itself.

and so i commence to lying in bed, crust dangling from the corners of my eyes like shriveled grapes rotting in their vines. i wish i weren’t such a light sleeper. but i am. and as suga-t croons about her own name, with e-40 echoing her like a supersized bay area puff daddy, i am reminded of that past era. when i was in 6th grade—still pining after my first real crush, the first of a series of realizations of how beautiful a woman can be, and how unattainable her attention is.

and now, three broken love lives later, i am in the same place that i was almost a decade ago. maybe i was even better off back then. because my lips had yet to taste the bitterness of romance. an addiction for affection had yet to develop. i feel hopeless, like homey-boy with his system cranked up, hoping to milk the emotions from an unsuspecting heart. to lure her with such a shallow act, long enough to expose something deeper that she would never be drawn to in the first place. this process translates to the same game for every man who has ever fallen in love with a wall—quietly engaged in a sullen game of emotional racquetball. tossing affection at a blank structure only to have them bounce back at him effortlessly, and without the same passion. hell yeah, it’s pathetic.

## SANCTUARY OF SHE

dwelling in the sanctuary of she  
broken pellets of you poking freely  
from my skull  
you are  
swimming circular motions in my head

this place is new to me

so forgive me if i sound too forward  
when i say  
i just might have found  
home

and i refuse to write a poem about how good i would love you  
because i don't know  
i haven't embarked on that journey with you yet  
we haven't boarded that magical school bus  
flown in a microscopic vehicle to gawk behind  
shatter-proof windows  
to see how future hearts act

but yeah, i'll say it  
i think you're hella dope, yo

but i will not write another poem about how beautiful you are  
because i am hard-pressed to believe that any  
long-meditated lines could ever justify what you define  
just by breathing  
that i could take what i see when the sun reflects off your flesh

and translate it into a three-minute spoken word piece that could  
help one not blessed by your presence to perceive it

i won't stoop to that level

but just in case you prefer for me  
to illustrate to you  
just how damned saucy you are  
i would be honored to do so by walking at your side  
as your reflection

because there are far too many lonely adriel luises in the world

and i have dedicated far too many rotations of "candy girl" to you  
to let this thing fizzle like stale pop rocks  
i have spent too much time posing,  
playing charades over the phone in hopes  
you'll be able to tell yourself my  
secrets i'm too chicken to disclose

surprise!..  
i bet you didn't know  
that you've been talking to a mime

and since meeting you  
i've developed a horrible habit of fantasizing  
staring at the ceiling in darkness  
trying to formulate images out of concrete storm clouds  
thoughts gnawing at my heart like  
love's rubber toy  
it's ridiculous  
i tread through this everyday  
and i'm still not used to it

thrashing at the walls of my scalp  
this cannot be all it amounts to  
but is it?

because for every second that i think about  
how badly i want to be with you  
there is a mirrored image of how  
horrified i am  
to do anything  
about it

like regurgitating a sack of x-acto knife blades  
it's insane that i've been able to  
full-frontally display every emotional aspect of my life  
except for the one that's most relevant  
to you

and i know exactly what's happened  
i've learned to love like an artist  
gauging the exact timing and setting needed  
to create the most favorable outcome

i'm sorry

because in trying to figure out the best way  
for me to open myself to you  
i've put more faith in circumstance  
than your heart

and i'm not trying to win circumstance  
and i'm not trying to dictate your future with  
my amok-driven emotions  
or claim that your life would be so much better with

me calling you "baby" over the phone  
or that i'll be that dude that you can forever turn to when  
you're feeling alone  
because i can't even guarantee that after writing this  
i'll be able to separate myself from logic long enough  
to read it to you

stepping astray, i've heard denizens say  
"present moment,  
beautiful moment"  
and despite the fact that  
i don't know  
what will come out of this  
here i am  
raw, open, and stinking of honesty

present moment,  
beautiful moment  
right now  
the future is irrelevant  
it is my pleasure to be nestling in this wrinkle in time with you



## REFLECTION IN RED

REFLECTION, TODAY I WRITE YOU IN RED. BALL POINT  
BLOOM WALGREENS NOTEBOOK, AND SOMETIMES I WONDER  
IF THIS IS THE BIGGEST RISK I TAKE AS A WRITER — TO USE  
A COLOR INK THAT MIGHT MESS UP MY EYES. BUT WHATEVER.  
LOVER, I HAVE BEEN THINKING OF YOU LATELY. YOU REST  
IN THE NOOKS OF MY SMILE AS I FALL ASLEEP. MINUTE  
SUN RISES TO THOUGHTS OF A SAN JOSE DAUGHTER.  
AND YET YOU SUMMER. PROBABLY AS I MAKE MY HASH  
BROWNS AND CHECK MYSPACE. WHAT IS IT THAT ALLOW  
US TO FORM RELATIONSHIPS ALMOST ENTIRELY IN OUR  
HEADS? A GLANCE, AN EMAIL, A CONVERSATION, AND  
MY MADNESS ALLOWS ME TO FALL INTO YOUR REFLECTION.  
I THEN WONDER, IF ALL I TRULY FALL IN LOVE WITH AT  
TIMES ARE IMAGES OF YOU FORMED IN MY OWN MIND, AM  
I DOING NOTHING MORE THAN FALLING INTO MYSELF? AS  
I SUBMERGE INTO ANAEROBIC LAGOON IS THAT METAMORPHOSIS  
IN THE MIST NO ONE MORE THAN MY FEMININE ALTER-  
EGO THAT WEARS THE FACES OF MY INFATUATIONS?

OR DOES COLLECTIVE ENERGY MANIFEST IN THESE MOMENTS?  
WHEN MY SHOULDER BRUSHES YOURS, DO WE SHARE A TELEPATHIC  
CIPHER THAT VALIDATES ~~THE~~ HOW TWO INTERACTIONS CAN  
WHISPER THE IDEA THAT I COULD LOVE YOU TIMELESSLY?  
IF I TOLD YOU ABOUT MY DAYDREAMS, AND WE AGREED  
TO BELIEVE THAT THEY ACTUALLY HAPPENED, WOULD THEY  
THEN EXIST IN OUR REALITY? TO OPEN YOURSELF TO  
DREAM AMONG OTHER DREAMERS IS TO ~~STAY~~  
SURRENDER OWNERSHIP OF ABSOLUTELY EVERY  
~~ONE~~ EXPERIENCE. WE BECOME SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE  
IMAGINATIONS OF THOSE WHO CARE TO REMINISCE  
ON US.

10/2/04  
romance keeps tapping me on the shoulder and looking away when I turn around. then everyone laughs at me.

## CLENCH

i.

we are born into this world  
with nothing in our clenched fingers  
naked and pink  
broken and disheveled  
greeted by an urgency that pushes  
these tears from their eyelids  
hearts unaware of the earths they will hold  
still fresh of their first beats

we incubate behind glass portals swallowed  
by baby blue and pink blankets,  
cotton caps, and mittens so that  
we won't scratch our new faces  
we squint to the hum of florescent lights  
and brace ourselves  
a fire burns in our bellies  
if you pay close enough attention  
you can smell smolder from our cracked lips

ii.

as children  
we serenade our shadows  
and learn to pronounce our names  
sunburnt tongues breed  
scathing mispronunciations  
and at times  
we take our wounded reflections into  
our hiding places

to evade their embers

but our hearts sometimes revolt  
sometimes they creep out in our slumbers  
and we awake to chaos in our bruised romances  
at times  
our hearts escape into our fingers and caress  
our poison lovers  
seeking redemption in the scars they planted on  
our battered surfaces

risk—it is the language of the lovesick  
not to be mistaken for desperation  
but often substituted by it when our bodies  
crave the warmth of another's grasp  
*i want to be owned*  
*i want to be controlled*  
*because then i will know*  
*that i am not alone*

it is during these times that we know we are alive  
we long for lovers who will remind us  
even if it means they will destroy us

iii.

it's always the pretty ones that are the wackest  
we place our palms near them like simmering stovetops  
it is a rush  
like birth  
like bleeding  
we smile when it hurts less than last time  
we convince ourselves that we have  
evolved past this pain  
that the fires in our bellies flicker more fiercely than the ones

that burned our guards down  
that this self-torture overpowers the hits from the external war field  
we're tougher  
more sustainable  
ready for anything this traveling circus has for us

and so we love  
like the way we eat vegetables  
like the way we prepare to scrub the bathroom  
it sucks  
but it's good for us  
it will make sense  
eventually

iv.  
father mother  
brother sister  
cousin lover  
stranger  
i have seen mud-faced regret  
sustained the nonfatal hits that are to make us stronger  
the purposes had by everything  
the reasons everything happened for  
and i am tired  
i want to rest in the crevice of another who will  
convince me that there is nothing more ultimate  
than this moment  
but i cannot fool myself any longer  
there is a fire that burns in our bellies  
if you pay enough attention  
you can smell the smolder that screams to  
demolish the inhibition that  
bars human connection

we were birthed by a movement  
we find the evidence in the sediment  
left on the wrinkles of each other's faces  
we were destined to create so much more  
than these selfish games of scattered ego

i find my purpose not in your time  
or your attention  
or your promises  
but in the fires that tango when our  
frequencies align  
human  
look at us  
we are broken and disheveled  
but it is what we were born into

and life has provided  
and we are no longer unaware  
and i find refuge  
when i look into my clenched fingers  
and fine yours pressed against my palm

# STEP 5:



**DRINK THE JUICE**  
\*MMM...PULPY!

## SKIPPING STONES

to sarwat

spirits don't break  
they transform as collectives of self  
like pebbles from rock

on a murky gray afternoon  
in a flooded lake michigan beach  
sarwat taught me to skip stones  
panning the warm multi-gray surface with her palm  
she taught me to love each one  
like as they were placed specifically for me  
handheld time capsules  
they looked even more beautiful against her bronze flesh  
radiating of the energy in the waves that juggled them into smoothness  
i got lost that day  
staring hypnotized by a slab of stone  
with wet sand slung on and off by the tide  
like an aquatic yo-yo  
scattered grains in a freshwater storm  
guaranteed to return back in place  
like infatuations that won't dissolve  
it was all because of sarwat that i could see this

upward armed sister  
fly poetess  
i recognize her by her wide open eyes  
breathing chicagoan moonrises with her pupils  
succumbing to earth

like a browntone version of amelie  
sliding fairy rocks into her pocket

the week before  
she taught me how to taste  
caressing golden trout steaks  
with turmeric and cilantro encrusted on her knuckles  
she spoke to them as they simmered  
lullabied flavor into them  
i never knew fish could taste so sweet  
taking in a woman's work  
it was at that moment that i realized what christ must have meant  
when he suggested to love like a child  
wide-eyed, curious, vulnerable  
and with an innate confidence that the universe would take care of you  
to think, i learned this from a desi witch from the midwest

skipping stones into the san francisco bay is lonelier  
magical, but still lonelier  
but i suppose not much can outshine a friendship  
where the first day that we met resulted in us bawling in each other's arms

i could never be a stranger  
to someone whose tears are tattooed into the backs of my shoulders

## SOME STORIES

to jocie

Some stories need to be written with raw ink on paper  
Because sometimes  
Our audiences don't capture present moments as  
    readily as imprints bronzed in longevity  
And it has become apparent to me  
    that you are the makings of oral tradition that was  
    lost in the stutters of past generations  
Bright-eyed sister  
Manifestation of breath  
So how do I write about she who was conceived while  
    dancing on ancestral tongues?  
I guess it begins inevitably at One.

Before History  
Before Once Upon a Time  
Folklore as it was before it became what it exists as now  
What were the first stories that the first humans told each other?  
    And who were they about?  
    Were they focused on Self  
    Or completely absent of it?  
And it's that same paradox that unsheathes itself in your presence  
You,  
    Suspended just one inch below the divine  
    At level glance  
    It can seem lonely up there sometimes  
But you once told me that you could find peace in isolation at sea  
    Steadily treading water with only skylines surrounding

I guess some stories can exist alone  
And some tales can be projected to the masses  
    and go unheard  
Because sometimes

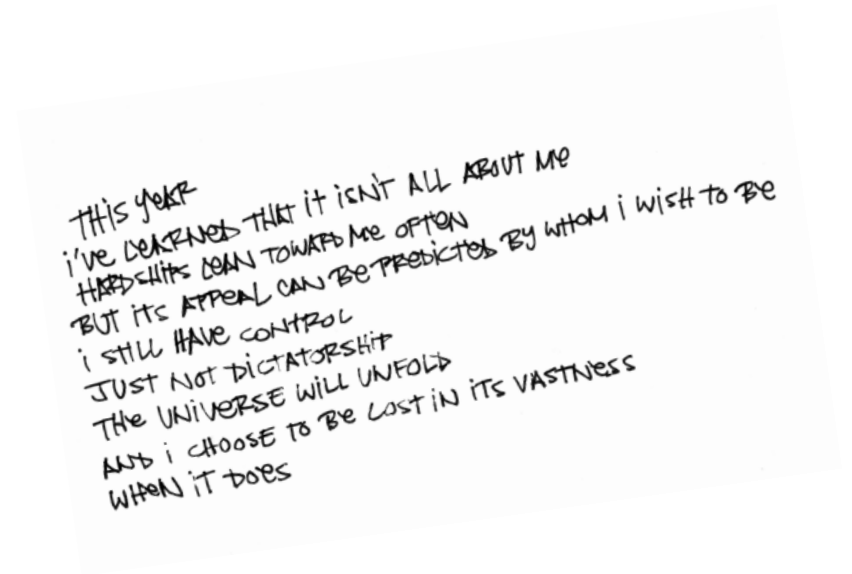
Our audiences fail to recognize Self when  
    spoken by others  
But deafness doesn't invalidate voice  
And stubbornness doesn't invalidate movement  
And emptiness of spirit isn't a reason to stop writing your history  
Because some of us hollow souls are still listening  
So speak, Poet  
And if your roar breaks us open  
    So be it  
Focus on self  
    Beautiful reflection  
You are the Phoenix you have breathed life into in your past poetry  
Hawk of the sun  
Fire on the moon  
Recognize and comprehend the arc of your wingspan  
Because Phoenix,  
    I am convinced that you possess the capacity to break myth  
    Shatter the confines that fence human interpretation of celestial song  
Recognize and comprehend  
    You do not need to burn to ashes in order to rise  
Phoenix,  
    You possess the capacity to rise consecutive times  
But it just means that you need to break myth  
  
Call your kin see unaccustomed colors  
    Break myth  
Because only then can you own reason  
    Break myth  
    Shift perspective  
    Balance energy  
    Speak easy  
    Breathe peace  
And sometimes  
    Open wounds  
Because sometimes  
    Scars are beautiful  
And when you breathe, Phoenix  
    You make yours seem vital

## UNIVERSE UNFOLDS

And I feel lost, Poet  
Because I don't have as many of my own  
to trace my history  
But you wear yours so nobly  
I catch myself envying your pain  
But our experiences are our own  
So all I can do is cup my hands when you bleed to me  
And I just hope that the lines of my palm  
can be channels for you to confide in  
when you need a reference point  
Because I appreciate that remnants of our conversation drip  
from your fingertips, too

It is a blessing  
The silhouette of my hero keeps outlining you  
Sister,  
You have opened a new eye of perception  
And it can see 720 degrees  
All around  
Twice over  
Once, as it seems  
Once again, as it could be  
It is the truth  
Because Hi-Five Connect means "free"  
And in the end  
I guess this poem is about me  
Broken shards of Self handed back to me  
from you

In the presence of beauty unabridged  
Many have come to the conclusion  
that you are simply not human  
On the contrary  
You are a palpitating reminder for those of us  
who have forgotten how to be  
Thank you for narrating me back into existence.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



peace to god, my creator, my universe, my center, my reference point, my self. i think i'm lost again. please send help.

mom, dad, kimberly, matthew, for understanding when i'm feeling too emo to come home for dinner. to the almighty luis clan, to fong luis, my elders who i have only joined hands with during those times you handed me red envelopes and white rabbit candy.

curtis and nikki for letting me use corey for my cover guinea pig.

ill-literacy, my vital organs :: ruby for telling me when i'm being ridiculous, dahlak for telling me when i'm being wack, and nico for saying "naw, i feel you though, drizzle," even when i'm being hella confusing. arcala for starting the ish up with me. isa, david, drew, homer, caleb, ej, leejay, anghel, armael, jun-fung, sickspits, for making up the ungeekiest poetry club ever.

to the tangled branches of the berkeley treehouse :: jish for asking how i'm doing even after five minute breaks from each other, rafa for raspy-voiced brainstormers, hozay for random roadtrips, mush for having similar tastebuds, viveca for the best cookies ever, chinaka for being the most amazing person on the planet. ever.

to youth speaks, i mooch off your wireless internet :: james for shaking your head in frustration when i outwit you (which is always), bamuthi for putting me to sleep at slims, joannie for jumping out of your chair to hug, paul for pretending to be swamped even though i know you're thrilled to see me. khalil, you know i make that 15 minute detour to carpool with you cuz i gotz love for ya. elz, you fit in my armpit. watsky for being shaky. ise, for your analogies. tomas, aya, hodari, lauren, leah-joy, spokes spokes spokes, the yoof, thank you for painting the bay so beautifully.

to the yay area shards of my cities :: 8th wonder for showing me how to lick buckshots from my belly. jocie for introducing me to seared ahi tuna, dwellah for laughing when i



imitate you even though you'd rather ring my neck, alan for crying on the floor with me, lily for being the sweetness of the shugashack, jayar for greetings like long lost friends, irene for always making eye contact, golda for genuine smiles and passing swishers with fishnet gloves, denizen for greeting me at the door like i should've come earlier, micah and mahalya for being wide-eyed and curious, lyle for being brokenhearted with me, dandiggity for sushi and orange sauce, jimmythong for hating slam with me, kiwizzo for making me want to be better in all ways, justine for showing me angels in the sky, karen lum for making my poetry look so coooooool, glenda for being ourtista, bani for looking cool in the tricycle, jaybay, jaylee, and mesej for being the dopest proletariats ever, david huang for being the sweetest man ever, zellee for being my broadway buddy, mai-lei for zoning out in front of *vh1 soul* with me, m'kai for flying with me, kit for the fuzzies and dessert invites, liz for sending me instant messages from next door, 2004 sf slam team, and the bindlestiff tribe. the lavish crew :: james for saving my life, etienne for saving my life, shaud for saving my life, daniel for saving my life. other james for saving my life.

genny lim gets her own line because she's cool like dat. thank you for taking my book on as your own and introducing me to that dope veggie burger joint on valencia.

my scattered sages :: tommie lindsey for showing me my voice, anida for woodchuck cider and pun contests, marlon for barefoot afternoons with deepdish pizzas and tivo, sarwat for cherry tomatoes on your porch, vanessa for calling me "hun" since day 1, jill for being almost as cool as me, saul for pronouncing my name way cooler than i can, ishle for telling me i'm a superstar, chris lee for being the kindest and humblest urbanite ever (thebeastisback.com!), helene for music swapping at twilight, beau for the dope conversations of now and future, ebz jade pearl and eileen for 97% of my smiles at davis, stephen for periodically becoming my favorite writer, giles for being hot and chinese, j9 for spam & eggs, anita for putting up with my asian jokes, bao for having the best musical taste. mango tribe, isangmahal, yawp!, suicide kings, undocumented sons, end-dependence, 2tongues, jigsaw, and the wordfist community for being the sexiest people in the universe. to everyone who has offered me a couch and a pillow.

to asian people worldwide, i speak this with you in heart. do not question your magnificence. beautiful like yellow, beautiful like brown, beautiful like you.

to the kid that picked this book up at the used bookstore. watch out for that booger on page 38.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Adriel Luis** is a writer, spoken word artist, and graphic designer born and raised in Union City, California. He is the founder of iLL-Literacy, a spoken word collective based in the Bay Area. He has released two solo chapbooks, *CutLoose* (2002) and *Wannabe Spoken Werd Gangsta Ninja* (2004), and a chapbook with iLL-Literacy, entitled *GET LITerate* (2005). In 2004 he won the title of San Francisco Slam Champion and performed at the National Poetry Slam as a part of the San Francisco Slam Team. He has performed throughout the United States and in Paris, and his work has been featured in numerous publications, television programs, and festivals, including *My Words Consume Me*, *Call of the Griot*, *Tea Party Magazine*, PBS' *Quest for Excellence*, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Hyphen Magazine*,

UPN, KPFA, KDVS, the Living Word Festival, and the Bay Area Hip-Hop Theater Festival. In Fall 2005, Adriel co-produced and co-directed iLL-Literacy's debut stage production, *Approaching Twilight*, sponsored in part by the UC Davis Theater & Dance Department. In 2005 his poem *Slip of the Tongue* was adapted by filmmaker Karen Lum. The film has since received national acclaim, with screenings in over 15 film festivals including the San Francisco Asian American Film Festival, the Women of Color Film Festival, and the San Francisco International Film Festival, and has been nominated for two Northern California EMMY Awards. Adriel received his B.S. in Community & Regional Development with a minor in Asian American Studies from the University of California, Davis, and is currently the Web and Graphics Coordinator at Youth Speaks San Francisco.

Visit his websites at [www.adrizzle.com](http://www.adrizzle.com) and [www.ill-literacy.com](http://www.ill-literacy.com)



Adriel's promise as a poet is this universality of experience through persistent self-examination and frank honesty. His craft is lean and surefire and his vision is full of bittersweet yearning for a more humane world.

--**GENNY LIM**, author of *Child of War*

*and despite the fact that  
i don't know  
what will come out of this  
here i am  
raw, open, and stinking of honesty*

This book, much like its author, goes through identity crises. It is full of poems that long to be paintings, photographs that wish they were soliloquys, and words that fight with every other word in this book for you to love it most. Chances are, you won't like all of them, but maybe a few will strike you. Maybe some of them will converse with you when you call their names. And maybe in time, they'll recognize their names in your voice, and find contentment in who they are.

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