

## ONTOLOGY OF A MADE PLACE

---

*Daniel Schonning*

The unconscious translates  
the material world.  
It's the turning

of mustard seeds  
into birdsong, or lightning  
into wind.

Little Mahmud's  
is a door, is  
a stormcloud, a

house whose rooms  
braid one another  
like bread dough,

the corners cluttered  
with half-bodied words  
that Mahmud half-thinks.

*In*, for example,  
is a sewing kit  
owned by a man in a book

who keeps it in his boot.  
*Out* is stained  
socks. A purple bunch of grapes. Flowers

shaking in their pot. There is a car  
on a train called *μεταφορά*  
lumbering its way through Mahmud,

where his parents still toil and laugh.  
Instead of Ubbi is poppy-covered hills —  
Palestine. The bed and metal bin

of newspapers beside the hearth.  
Instead of Omi is a painting of spring  
where white mountains fade so far into blue

they're nearly sky.  
The unconscious takes form  
and gives it:

a map of all the things that Mahmud is  
and an atlas  
of the many more he isn't.

# MUNA

---

*Daniel Schonning*

Little Mahmud  
with wells of joy  
for which his mother digs.

His laughter like water purling  
to the surface. Her tickling  
like probes into the earth.

She has one limp  
eye from seizures as a child  
that's always shut but works fine.

Little Mahmud nudges it open.  
She cries *Oh*  
*I see you now.*

## FROM THE ATLAS OF THE UNCONSCIOUS: MAP 4

---

*Daniel Schonning*

One fine morning Ubbi and Omi took little Mahmud on a trip.

Thinking of it now, Mahmud upturns a pot  
and pours in his saddest bits.

Mahmud saw (in order of observation):  
an olive grove where Nebuchadnezzar once stopped for tea  
a grown man pumping his arms, asking a truck to blow its horn  
a place where men once killed each other  
the shrubs from which women watched  
wild horses eating fish straight from the sea  
Roman ruins — honeycolored  
a mountain home to centuries of short quiet people  
the staircase their bare feet wore into rock.

At the last  
Ubbi shed Mahmud's  
shoes and socks.

Ubbi and Omi lifted their arms  
like tightrope walkers. Mahmud,  
strung between, climbed one small step  
every several breaths. Feet cleaved  
to the surface,  
smoothsoft as bone.

On the plateau  
(in order of observation) Mahmud saw:

a field with flowers full  
of wild skinny kids  
chewing cud

cedar trees

a man at their base  
his long pink ribs  
in bloom.

## FROM THE ATLAS OF THE UNCONSCIOUS: MAP 5

---

*Daniel Schonning*

God, in His many metal fragments,  
mixes with the rain — makes a chorus  
of little pings. Most days most people  
re-pane their windows  
and tarp their cars.

People lay canvas  
people lay chicken wire  
people lay apple skins caked with salt  
to stop the slivers from getting in, but they all  
get in anyway. They get in

the water, the meat: then your stomach  
is all pings. There so long  
they're part of you.

Mahmud is all metal bits the shape of dice,  
fruit and wood and feathers,

Rima is all needles  
and wind in jacket pockets,

Muna is all blue fruit and fiberglass,

and Hasan is all big round *khubz* filled with red metal —  
each piece petal-thin.

Hasan spends mornings plucking fragments  
from under his children's tongues,  
setting them on the windowsill.

By afternoon they've all been lifted  
by wire-bundle birds  
or faded with the rain.