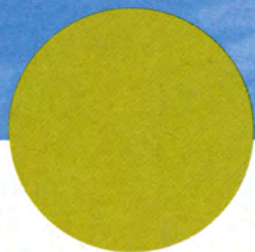


the
Aleph



5

a journal of global perspectives





Front Cover: Gazing upon Uluru, Australia Lillian Worona
Back Cover: Guarding the Past, Greece Jon Thatcher
Artisans Outside Parque de la Papa, Peru Sarah Kenney-Helfrich
Inside Front Cover: Colors of Burano, Italy Alana Santaro
Inside Back Cover: Bahia Women, Brazil Marguerite Dempsey



Water Droplet on Leaf in Amazon Risa Dubow

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Volume V, 2006

Table of Contents

Frontispiece: *Water Droplet on Leaf in Amazon* Risa Dubow

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS.....4

MOMENTS.....6

I. My Bus Life Sarah Webb

Dirt Road in Australia Lillian Worona

II. A Lost Gold Kaj Ranen

Hazy Night, Norwich, England Jeremy Katz

Counter on São Paulo Bus, Brazil Kacy Cerasoli

III. Ouzo and Ethos Sonya Saxenas

IV. Manifesto Mariza Pereira

Classic View of Machu Picchu, Peru Nate Taxel

V. Amazonia Bryan Romas

Above the Canopy, Ecuador Bryan Romas

VI. Maastricht Memoirs Suprita Kudesia

Windmill House on the Broads, England Michael Guglielmo

Zebras, Kenya Jared Shahid

Morning in Rotorua, New Zealand Jennifer Davidson

Etching of Street in Bath, England Sarah Kirchoff

VERSE AND VISION I.....26

Release Our Leaders Whitney Burton

Protest on Av. Paulista in São Paulo, Brazil Alissandro Carini

ITALY FOLIO.....28

Ponte Vecchio at Night Amanda Caplin

Morning Newspaper in Florence Justin Merolla

Rome Skyline David Niedzewiecki

The Boy with the Accordion in Verona, Italy Leidy Sanchez

Un Uomo con la Sua Ombra Aaron Agostino

Arch Reflection Julia Croft

Woman and Apple Amanda Caplin

Boating Down the Arno Jeff Meola

Boy and Beggar Jane Yoon

Solitude, or, the Bus Lady Lou Heffer

Girl in Window Julia Croft

Roman Ruins Jeremy Katz

View from the Cupola of St. Peter's, Rome Kristin Ronan

Lune on the Can Kota Kobayashi

VERSE AND VISION II.....39

Making Friends in Vietnam Sarah McGowan

Percepción Clare Morgan

WORD AND IMAGE.....41

I. All This Color Jamie Agnello

II. Notes from Prague Michael Thylur

III. Sarajevo from a Mountaintop Mary Berkery

Ice Bridge, New Zealand Lillian Worona

Mural in São Paulo, Brazil Julia Matthew

VERSE AND VISION III.....54
Chicken Mayo Collette Reny
University Of East Anglia, Norwich, England Jeremy Katz

LESSONS.....57
Boat Jumping in Ha Long Bay, Vietnam Casey Cronin
I. A Journey into the Mind Casey Cronin
II. My Vietnam Experience Sarah Hauck
Woman Rowing on Mekong River Chloe Hall
Prayer Flags at Ivolginsk Datsan, Russia Sue Jordan
III. Louisiana Mountains Alyssa Austin
Boat Garage on Rio Negro, Brazil Risa Dubow
Copenhagen Cityscapes: Canal by Night & Danish Royal Library Magdalena Piascik

VERSE AND VISION IV.....69
Cobblestone Street in Paratay, Brazil Risa Dubow
The Arrival Emily Blout

CROSSINGS.....71
Eiffel Tower at Night, Paris, France Louise Greenwood
I. Paris Burning Questions Adeyemi Adenrele
Paris Reflections, France Alessandra Raimondi
Twizel, New Zealand Stephanie Sadlon
II. An Incident of Travel in Spain Munesh Ramnarine
Grounds of Larnach Castle, New Zealand Andrew Martland
Nap in Hanoi, Vietnam Karyn Mirak
Ice Cream and Innocence in Copenhagen, Denmark Ariana Nussdorf
The Copenhagen Suitcase, Denmark Magdalena Piascik

VERSE AND VISION V.....81
Carnival Ride in Norwich, England Jeremy Katz
It Was October, Elena, & Cozier with One More Jeremy Katz
Volkswagen Bug in Salvador, Brazil Anna Lockwood
Crimson Rosella in Queensland, Australia Sarah Webb

FROM MY JOURNAL.....84
Athens, Greece Jon Thatcher

VERSE AND VISION VI.....89
Watching the Street, Brazil Anna Lockwood
Uncomfortable with Looking Aisha Rivers
Grass Trees, Australia Sarah Webb
Monasterio de Piedra, Spain Kristin Ronan
City Street in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil Anna Lockwood

REFLECTIONS.....94
I. Staring at Shiva Alexis Swan
View from the Cathedral in Lyon, France Matt Williams
King's College, Cambridge, England Jamie Agnello
Sniper Tower in (London)Derry, Northern Ireland Brian Wills
II. Now and Then Carolyn Smith
"Carpooling" in Vietnam Sarah McGowan

VERSE AND VISION VII.....108
It's Not All Gone Kacy Cerasoli
Zia Sinfina Christy Sutton

Letter from the Editors

As we prepared this fifth volume of *The Aleph* for publication, we thought it might be interesting to touch base with some of the contributors to the inaugural issue of the journal. We wanted to find out how the combined experience of study abroad and publication impacted their lives—immediately upon their return and now, five years on.

The Aleph is a medium through which students can share their experiences, further their self-knowledge, and build understanding of cultural difference. For many, the implicit deadline of a publication forced them to work out conflicting emotions and unanswered questions. Seeing the fruits of their experience (and work) in print is an important moment for students. Michael Daly told us that being published “immediately froze in time my experience in Ireland, while at the same instant seemed to...forever invite readers to share with me that time, that place.” For Leah Nero, “it literally made my thoughts and experiences that much more tangible, and easier to revisit.”

Everyone we contacted mentioned the advantage they received from having a polished, published writing sample when applying for graduate programs and jobs after college. “It always helps to be able to show someone an example of your work in a publication. It helped me to get a job at a newspaper, and it also helped me with my current job at an ad agency,” said Mary Cinadr.

Study abroad often yields a lifetime passion for the exploration of other peoples and places. Cinadr taught English in Colombia and plans to return to South America to volunteer next year. Nero volunteered in Mexico as part of her nursing program. Lauren Selchick, another *Aleph* contributor, studied maritime law in Greece. “For me, my term abroad in Brazil was the beginning of my lifetime goal to...learn about the world and

the people who make up even the smallest of communities. It has helped me to remain open-minded, optimistic and determined...,” said Selchick.

The Aleph has as its founding goal the building of cross-cultural understanding. Our past contributors have also taken on this mission in various ways. Mary Cinadr is working on publishing stories about her recent experiences and is motivated by the common misunderstandings and preconceptions people in the US have about Colombia. Michael Daly has used his cross-cultural experience in the restaurant business, managing a multiethnic, multilingual staff. He observed: “There’s a persistent, gnawing sensation, that if only more people went abroad for the right reasons and really opened their eyes, minds, and hearts to the experiences of life abroad...the world just might be a little safer, a little more compassionate, a little more understanding.”

One thing is certain: all of these contributors came back with something to say, with ideas for how to change their communities, and experiences they felt compelled to share. Time hasn’t erased the importance of their words—to them or to new travelers. Borders continue to be crossed, perspectives continue to change.

Moments I

My Bus Life

Normally, as a passenger in a car or bus, it's inevitable that I am going to fall asleep within fifteen minutes of starting the journey. However, at age 20, I finally realized what it was to enjoy a rousing trip from point A to point B. This occurred on the public transportation systems of Australia.

First of all, when riding the bus, there was the concern that I thought someone might die at any moment. This was not due to poor driving, but to the fact that we were careening down the left side of the road.

“Don't worry about the great whites,” I was told, “You keep your wits about you when you're crossing the road.”

I was told countless times that the number one cause of death for American students in Australia is getting hit by a car while crossing the street—apparently while checking for cars in the wrong direction. “Don't worry about the great whites,” I was told, “You keep your wits about you when you're crossing the road.” And I did. Still, being in a bus that I felt could cause my death was not a relaxing experience.

Eventually, being on the opposite side of the road stopped being an issue. But after I stopped focusing on that, I began to pay attention to the cars next to me. It was quite unsettling to look over to the adjacent vehicle and see a small child, or *gasp* nobody, in what you considered the driver's seat. After the initial wave of terror passed, and you realized that this was in fact the passenger side, all was well. The driver was of age and their hands were firmly planted on the wheel.

Once the rules of the road had been established in my mind, it was time to figure out where I was going. No longer did I need to suppress screams the entire time, but I actually had to get to places on my own. In retrospect, I realize and appreciate the angelic qualities of the Australians who ended up sitting next to me on the bus. They endured a solid twenty minutes of an American chirping in their ear: a repeated “did we pass so-and-so yet? Do you think I need to ring the bell now? Do you know where we are exactly?” I nearly always received calming words—and bless their hearts for that.

The trials and tribulations of bus life eventually turned into a smooth ride that I could sit back and enjoy. I found myself taking the bus places that I didn’t really need to go. The daily journey from my homestay to the university was filled with landmarks that comforted me in this new place. I saw the familiar faces of fellow passengers and my ride actually became an enjoyable endeavor. In an enticing new place, half a world away, looking out the window became a completely engrossing task—and napping never even occurred to me.

—Sarah Webb



Moments II

A Lost Gold

It happened nine seconds into the third period in the final game between Sweden and Finland in the Olympic hockey tournament. Peter Forsberg drops the puck to Mats Sundin, Mats Sundin passes it to Nicklas Lidström, Nicklas Lidström fires the hardest shot of his life. 3–2 to Sweden.

Saturday night. Half a bottle of blush wine. THEN pre-gaming.

Hockey is the biggest sport in Finland, the second biggest in Sweden after soccer. With all the NHL players—the best of the best—available for this year's Olympics, Sunday's final, the crowning event of the Games, was one of the most hyped happenings in the history of Nordic sports.

Pleasant company. A bag-in-box. Sipping was never for me.

And oh how I've waited for something like this. Oh how I wished for the golden generation of Sweden, led by the three musketeers—Sundin, Lidström, and Forsberg—to finally win something big together. A young Peter Forsberg had delivered the Olympic gold to Sweden in 1994 with a classic penalty shot that later became a postal stamp in Sweden. But that was before the NHL players—the best of the best—were allowed to partake in the Olympics.

Staggering steps. Disillusioned. Vague memories of Sideshow.

Did I mention that my parents are Finnish and that I was born and raised in Sweden? I was thinking how great it would have been if grandpa, who was older than the Finnish state before he died two years ago, and I could have watched the game together. He used to love hockey.

Memory gone. Pathetic pick-up lines. Apparently Holiday.

They say it was probably the last game that the golden generation—the best of the best—would play together. They say we will never see players like that again. That this was the last chance.

King of the night! No. Clown of the night.

I hear the streets were empty and silent in Helsinki and Stockholm. Not many TV programs these days attract more than half the population. When the referee blew his whistle for the last time, the Swedish roar was heard across the Baltic Sea. The snow that came over Geneva on Sunday was apparently the frozen tears of the Finns.

Waking in bed. Coat and shoes still on. How, when, where, what, why?

In sports, the Swedes hate the Finns and the Finns hate the Swedes. I, for one, was looking forward to just leaning back and enjoying a game, knowing that I would be happy either way.

Empty head. Then: panic! What time!?!

Judging from the pictures from Torino, Italy, Captain Mats Sundin's smile looks broader than a slice of watermelon when he raises the trophy. The players gathering around him goof around like twelve-year-old boys. It's huge, it's overwhelming, and it's larger than life. It really is. I had waited for that moment for more than 24 years.

Last period over. Fantastic game, they say. Head banged against the wall.

I thought it was the game I couldn't lose. February 26, 2006—the day Sweden won the gold medal, the day after the night when I had my last drink. I think.

—Kaj Ranen



Hazy Night, Norwich, England Jeremy Katz
Counter on São Paulo Bus, Brazil Kacy Cerasoli



Moments III

Ouzo and Ethos

I think they made airports in order to confuse overstressed, overpacked, overwhelmed travelers. Multiply the confusion by a gazillion if you're flying internationally. Multiply that number by another gazillion if you're me. I have the tendency to make a simple procedure seem like a triple bypass when I'm nervous.

There I was dragging 100lbs of luggage with the vague knowledge that one of the eighty terminals at JFK airport would provide my passage to Greece—"the land of togas" as my friend Sarah likes to call it. I couldn't tell her that the Greeks didn't wear togas as she wished me well that afternoon before I left.

I looked down and realized that the paper I was holding in my hand was an ad for cold cream and not my ticket. And so I took my chances with the ticket woman. After schlepping my way over to Terminal C as directed and waiting in line for a good 30 minutes, I realized that I was in line for Air Korea. Confusion morphed into frustration. I was pretty sure Air Korea wasn't going to take me to Greece and I was pretty annoyed with myself that after 2 years of higher education, I hadn't learned how to stand in a line.

A passport verification, luggage check-in, and quick goodbye later I was at the gate security check-in. There are two things that make my pulse race—the smell of ethanol and Hugh Grant—but by the time it was over, I had added airport security as the third. After waiting in line (the correct one this time) and passing through two passport checks, I arrived at the final checkpoint. They had to check my passport again, which makes perfect sense since the U.S. government is on high

alert for people who can morph their facial structures at will. They've had reports of Jim Carrey boarding planes in France and Switzerland at exactly the same time. I tried to keep my face impassive and avoid making sudden movements. Airport security guards have a very delicate and easily excitable nature; they've been known to arrest people for doing things such as asking questions, filing their nails, and sneezing.

My bags went through without a problem, and since I still looked like me and not Cameron Diaz, the last guard was nice enough to waive the customary passport check and let me go to my gate. I later heard that he was fed to a pack of wild dogs for violating security procedures. Dick Cheney would be proud. By this time, I had started to resemble Halle Berry, so a passport check before I got on the plane was perfectly understandable.

Once on the plane and in my seat, I was looking forward to nuking my brain with fashion magazines and my personal television screen. Everything was in French. *C'est magnifique, oui?* I cursed the fool who convinced me to take Latin as I searched the area for English magazines and struggled with the electronic menu. I had almost convinced myself that American-English has a scruffy sort of charm, but then the passengers next to me started talking—in French among themselves and in English, colored with an exquisite French accent, to me. I think the reason Americans seem to be so frustrated is because we don't have sexy accents. I decided to add "learn French" to my list of lifelong ambitions. I spent the ride watching movies, among them Wolfgang Peterson's *Troy*, in honor of my Grecian adventure. Great movie—I'm surprised the director didn't have the Trojans win the war.

—Sonya Saxenas

Moments IV

Manifesto

Imagine a one-meter tall Barbie (because being European, I think in meters) and on her back there is a pull string, “Hi, how are you?” Now, imagine the repetition of that phrase just as fast as you could pull the string, that is, more quickly than you could ever reply - if you were actually *meant* to answer. And you look at that keeping-up-with-the-Jones’s smile while she says it. Isn’t that just a little, well, weird?

Now you know how I feel walking around the Hobart and William Smith Colleges campus.

When I first arrived in January 2004, I was perplexed. No, that doesn’t do it justice. I was upset, I was indignant. How could you make your way past someone and utter “How are you?” without waiting for an answer? Barbie would be ten meters beyond me (yes, meters again) before the last breath of “you” made it to my ears.

I, naive, would open my mouth, thinking the person would have stopped: you know, they might want to talk while they were looking at their mailboxes behind me, or looking for a comfortable shady spot adjacent to me... but no, they didn’t stop at all. They were long gone. So, feeling really clever, I would shut my mouth after “Well, I’m...”

But alas, after the embarrassment period came the pay-back era: someone would stop me by saying “Hi, how are you?” with a magnificent grin on their face. My punctured European pride trained my mind to believe the true motive of the question-greeting was an impolite attempt at politeness. So the automated question began to trigger an automated response: I would strategically place my body, look into their eyes and say “Oh, hiiiiii, I’m ok. Actually, I’m pretty tired (or sick or unhappy, or whatever - you fill in the blank), my classes are killing me, and my job, oh maaaaan.” The thing is, something odd always happens after that.

There we are, I look at her, she looks at me. My eyes shrink to blue peas. Barbie's perform the opposite exercise: her eyes widen and those iconic brows aren't level; she's not smiling and it's a disturbing image of Barbie, trust me. So there it is, the formula for the cross-cultural greeting-bomb. Like with any other explosion, there ensues a moment of nothingness...

"Whaaaa?" We're both perplexed. It was supposed to be a simple greeting; why do we feel so awkward, like we're both naked? Greetings are supposed to be the "ok" stamp, as in "she's civilized" and normal. But it failed so utterly. The exact moment of awkwardness, of the displacement we both see in each other, is when we reach the summits of our respective cultural mountains. We've seen the other side and in looking at it, we are neither present with our bodies nor can our minds wrap themselves around what our eyes see over there, what's beyond our culture.

Recognizing the awkwardness, Barbie urgently decides to break the newly formed ice giving an uneasy smile. Yet she doesn't know what to say... "ohhhh, (pause), oh....(I'll run away quickly)." When she's ten meters in front, behind or to my side I hear a fainting "oh...well...have to run, have...a...good.....dayyyy! (This one's definitely nuts...)"

Geez, all of this to explain that I hate the use of this question as a greeting. If greetings are strictly meant to acknowledge another's presence, why not just make eye contact? Nod your head? Umm, here's a brilliant one—say hi. Ahhh, saying hi—a one syllable greeting.

Whether this time-consuming address of another person is restricted to Hobart and William Smith Colleges, western New York, or it's a general phenomenon of the upper east coast of the United States of America, I doubt I will ever figure out. But as the outsider I consider myself and am considered to be, let me just say, Americans can be very confusing at times. Why would you use a question for an acknowledgment? "Acknowledgment: 1—the act of admitting or owning to something. 2—Recognition of another's existence, validity, authority, or right."

What about greeting-questions in other cultures, you ask? Let me first say here that not only am I European, but proudly Portuguese, too. We Portuguese do not have any formal greetings in the form of a question. All of them are affirmative: *Bom*

dia. Olá. Boa tarde. They may be (frequently) followed up with questions—we are a sociable people. But, we never start off the first conversation of the day with someone by employing a question. Well, with the exception of *Tá tudo?* or *Como vai isso?* That’s really informal, however, and you would never greet your grandmother or a professor that way (they’d give you a funny look) whereas here you can ask a professor the how-are-you and walk by them; it’s fine. In other words, my disorientation was specific: if I were studying in another country where question-greetings were more common (even France or Germany), I probably would have felt equally disoriented in that moment of cultural displacement.

There’s an underlying tension between the present me who cracks a smile at the whole cross-cultural greeting situation and the person I was when these things really upset me: each me contradicts the other. A few days ago, I learned that there are two main schools of thought on culture: either it’s predefined and we come along to play the parts, or it’s made when millions of individual encounters between people coincidentally start showing common denominators. When in my encounters with Barbies and Kens, I realized that I’m not a Barbie, this was the moment I understood we belonged to different tribes. Perhaps this was the exact “moment of nothingness” I described earlier.

The funny thing is, not only do I feel like I’m caught in a surreal place, but all around me I hear Barbie and Ken armies being taken seriously. I wonder if I’m the only one who knows these dolls come from a pre-fab pink Mattel box. On the other hand, I’ve found that I’ve put *How are you?* out into the world at least a couple of times this semester. I can’t for the life of me explain why and I always catch myself lingering thereafter for two seconds more than necessary. Maybe I still hope for an answer. I eventually realize what I’m doing; I smile and walk on.

I’m still different, however, and I feel it. I must necessarily be to them a blind, demented Tin(a)-Tin(a) cartoon who cannot really perceive, much less understand, the world around her! “Shut the hell up, Tin-Tin. Stop thinking so much and being so proper! You’re so boring, too. Always wearing that dull blue sweater and those stupid brown pants...” No wonder Tin-Tin never made it big on American television...

—Mariza Pereira



Classic View of Machu Picchu, Peru Nate Taxel

Moments V

Amazonia

Gray clouds rumble and thunder booms far above the canopy as we push through the Amazon. I am swimming through the rain forest. The rain is coming down in thick droplets despite the seemingly unending shelter of the leaves above. I am soaked through, as is everyone else. Sweat from the humidity and the strenuous hike mix with the rain that has soaked through our clothes, weighing us down. For half a week we have been visiting a Quechua community at Rio Blanco. Today we are hiking out to the Napo Rio, which will carry us down to the research station at Jatun Sacha. But right now we are still in the jungle following paths that are a mixture of mud, leaves, roots, and planks of wood. Without our guide we would have been lost a long time ago, yet he makes the trip seem like a stroll down the block. We push up slick and demanding hills and then quickly stumble down them. On the straight sections I look up to watch those in front of me traverse the path — otherwise I keep my head down, pick out my steps and let distractions roll through my head.

There is an unspoken yet tangible pressure to make this semester abroad an unrepeatable and remarkable experience. Every excursion and every moment has been so filled with this expectation that it has become a constant companion. We cross streams that are flowing over their banks, we struggle through calf-deep mud, we listen to the thunder. I quietly sing songs to myself and sneak looks at the wet greenery; I imagine what you would be doing here. In some sections the mud is a completely different color: there's chocolate brown, here's terra cotta, and ahead is a patch of green and gray mix.

My knees creak, I tighten and release straps to relieve my back, I shift my weight; I am my own beast of burden. Quechua men swiftly pass us with stacks of wood strapped to their foreheads with cloth. They are headed to the community to make

repairs and build new cabanas for tourists. I think of how you would have slept in the cabana or what you would have said about the food. But you're not here; none of you are here. I concentrate, trying to bundle this all up, making sure it is wrapped up and stuffed inside me to add it to the rest. I want to bring it back home and display it in the living room to impress all of you. I imagine you watching intently, pointing and gasping in wonder as I stand by proud and triumphant in front of the evidence of my transformation. But I am so worn from the hike, the humidity, the rain, and the dissatisfying meals that any extra burden would push me down to the ground. This stored-up mass of sensations, panoramas, scents, fabrics, llamas, palm trees, gringolandia, host brothers, *Pichincha*, *reggaeton*, and *salchipapas* is already so massive and hard to categorize. Yet I fear that without monitoring and cataloging every bit of my experience, it will be lost and unable to be shared.

When we reach the Napo Rio I am surprised it is still where we left it. I thought that it might have moved itself on a whim, relying on its god-like immensity and strength to overwhelm the nearby landmasses into subjugation. As we get into the motorized canoe I can finally release my tight hold on my experiences and I let all of the bundles go like an unraveling sweater. Shamans, dragon's blood, camaraderie, Quechua dances, and soccer games; they all leave me. Thankfully, the canoe moves in unison with the speeding water. Behind me there is a trail. We slip down to our destination, still in the rain, but satisfied to be looking at our bus and its dry interior. I swallow down one precious fragment I saved, something unspecific yet grand, and bury it within me hoping against hope that one day it will resurface and coalesce into something comprehensible.

—Bryan Romas



Above the Canopy, Ecuador Bryan Romas

Moments VI

Maastricht Memoirs

Here I am again, suspended in time and space, nowhere and everywhere at the same time, flying through the skies across time zones and an endless stretch of water, sometimes blue, other times murky black depending on the virtual time that my plane flies in, still other times hidden by a fleece of clouds. Who do I belong to? Who will claim me but the water if this plane goes down? My mind drifts from the narcosis of stale air and airplane food, my body numb from the cold loneliness of airports. I am going to the Netherlands, a place I've never been before. I've been told by all my friends that I absolutely have to go to the coffee shops—I remember feeling a little morose that legal drugs were what people associated most with the country in which I was about to spend four months of my life. But then I wasn't faring any better—windmills and tulips were the two things that had come to *my* mind. I didn't know what to expect but that didn't scare me. What scared me was my anonymity, no self. My only claim to myself was my passport. One would think that I would be used to traveling. I hate airports. I wish I could get places without ever stepping into one.

Maastricht...beautiful Maastricht. It's split by the river Maas. Water seems to call me, I think—from Seneca to the Maas across the Atlantic. The cobblestone streets wind through back alleys, undulating with patterned crevices that hide the rare coin, a stubbed cigarette butt, a broken heel. They all lead to the river. Fancy boutiques line the narrow streets, dotted with cafes, the odd antique store. I step inside one on my wanderings after class. A dim yellow light engulfs me into a squashed room that seems to have time muddled, history jumbled—like me flying, not claiming any extremity. The door jingles when I close it and a man as ancient as the pipe that caught my eye in the window greets me. “*Oi*,” I say back to him. (Dutch for hello, if you're won-

dering). I think of my grandfather; he would have liked the pipe. He smoked his oak pipe bought in Boston in the 1920s until his hands trembled too much from old age. I stay looking at dusty remnants of forgotten people and their lives washed in the diffused light of the shop. I stay until I feel that I need to grasp onto my concrete real time and not hang in history.

I pass by the waffles and decide I need a mid-afternoon snack. I'd go back to Maastricht just for the waffles, even if there was nothing else drawing me back. Fortunately there is, but the waffles are as good an excuse as any... warm, golden, dusted with powdered sugar that melts in your mouth and finds its way down your clothes. Maybe I should stop in at Albert Heijn and get some groceries. My time here is almost up; I am excited about going home to India after having been away from it for a year, not looking forward as much to coming back to Geneva. Sometimes in the middle of the night I am awoken and wonder how I could possibly describe my time in Maastricht—the city that became my home for four months, the city that will always claim a part of me, just like Geneva will. How will I tell my stories?

So many stories. Like the one time that I went to the immigration office to get my residence permit. The woman behind the counter examines my application and passport for a good five minutes. "What is your name?" she asks. "Suprita Kudesia," I reply. "I don't understand," she says. I point to where my name is printed on my passport, accustomed to people not understanding my name and not thinking much about it. She scratches her head, "It's not right," she says. I am a little flabbergasted, not quite knowing what to say. I confirm my identity with more assertiveness, feeling like I am in a Kafkaesque scenario. Next they'll scream because all they see is a monstrous insect in place of me. She takes my passport and walks over to a colleague. Both pour over the document and talk in hushed whispers addressing a computer screen. I'm getting just a little worried at this point. She returns and asks my name again. I reply with the only two words that I can—Suprita Kudesia. "That is a problem," she says. "I don't understand," I reply, thinking this entire situation is utterly and completely ridiculous. Before I realize it, her face is inches away from mine and she asks loudly in a painstakingly condescending tone, "Do you speak

uh-English?” Do you know the feeling when you want to punch someone? Luckily her colleague returns and says apologetically that my name was too short and their Indian database wasn't accepting it but everything is fine now. I don't know whether I should laugh or cry.

How can I write about the number of wonderful people I met from all over the world, the friends I made, the dinners we cooked, the bonds we made in Maastricht? I miss being lulled to sleep with the Chileans playing their guitar next door, a daily ritual that my roommate and I got so used to that if we didn't hear the first chords of the guitar at midnight we would wonder what was wrong. I miss the thin slices of dark brown bread that smelled like horseshit but tasted unbelievably good with a slice of Gouda cheese stuck in between. I miss trekking to the gas station for late night chocolate because that was the only place open past eight that was not a restaurant.

—Suprita Kudesia





Facing: Windmill House on the Broads, England Michael Guglielmo

Top: Zebras, Kenya Jared Shahid

Bottom: Morning in Rotorua, New Zealand Jennifer Davidson



Etching of Street in Bath, England Sarah Kirchoff



Verse and Vision I

Release Our Leaders

“Release our leaders” etched silently on the wall
Telling of past students’ woes
Administrations fenced, barb wired, and even turn-styled
them in
Anti-apartheid era
“Freedom first, education later”
Chanted students on education strikes
Today, with a decade of democracy
Granted internationally, taken internally
I walk through Cecil Esau Block’s courtyard at least four
times a day
“Inmate meeting 8pm with House Committee”
Most students stroll by as the sun starts to nap
Moving in masses to the study rooms
Although a few showcase rugby or soccer skills
“Kaizer Chiefs vs. Orlando Pirates tonight”
“Shoosh” with a grin “I hope my team wins”
Hours later sounds of riots
Filter to B block’s windows
Languages and chants I do not understand
I am told later toy-toying and “bush circles” took place
Tonight the hash man will go home hungry
Tonight the students will go to sleep happy
Stress and woes of building up their African race
Via educations that originally
Systematically taught them to be unprepared for
Is placed on the back burner
Normally, I do not buy into sports as a release
To me that seems like “rocks for jock” bull
See tonight camaraderie has filled that gap of being far
from home

Fear of fifty percent plus state unemployment rate
Book and food funds tonight
Yes, tonight will not be baked and flow
Out of a light bulb through a straw
To cloud this generation's brain
Depleting past, current, and even future ability of knowledge
While pulling them spiraling down
To a level of dehumanized being
That generations of colonizers' seeds believed them
To actually be in reality
Often we are told
"The children are our future"
Passing the entry out of the courtyard
"Release our leaders"

—Whitney Burton

Protest on Av. Paulista in São Paulo, Brazil Alissandro Carini



Italy Folio



Clockwise from above: Ponte Vecchio at Night Amanda Caplin
Morning Newspaper in Florence Justin Merolla
Rome Skyline David Niedziewiecki



Following: The Boy with the Accordion in Verona, Italy Leidy Sanchez
Un Uomo con la Sua Ombra Aaron Agostino









Facing: Arch Reflection Julia Croft
Above: Woman and Apple Amanda Caplin



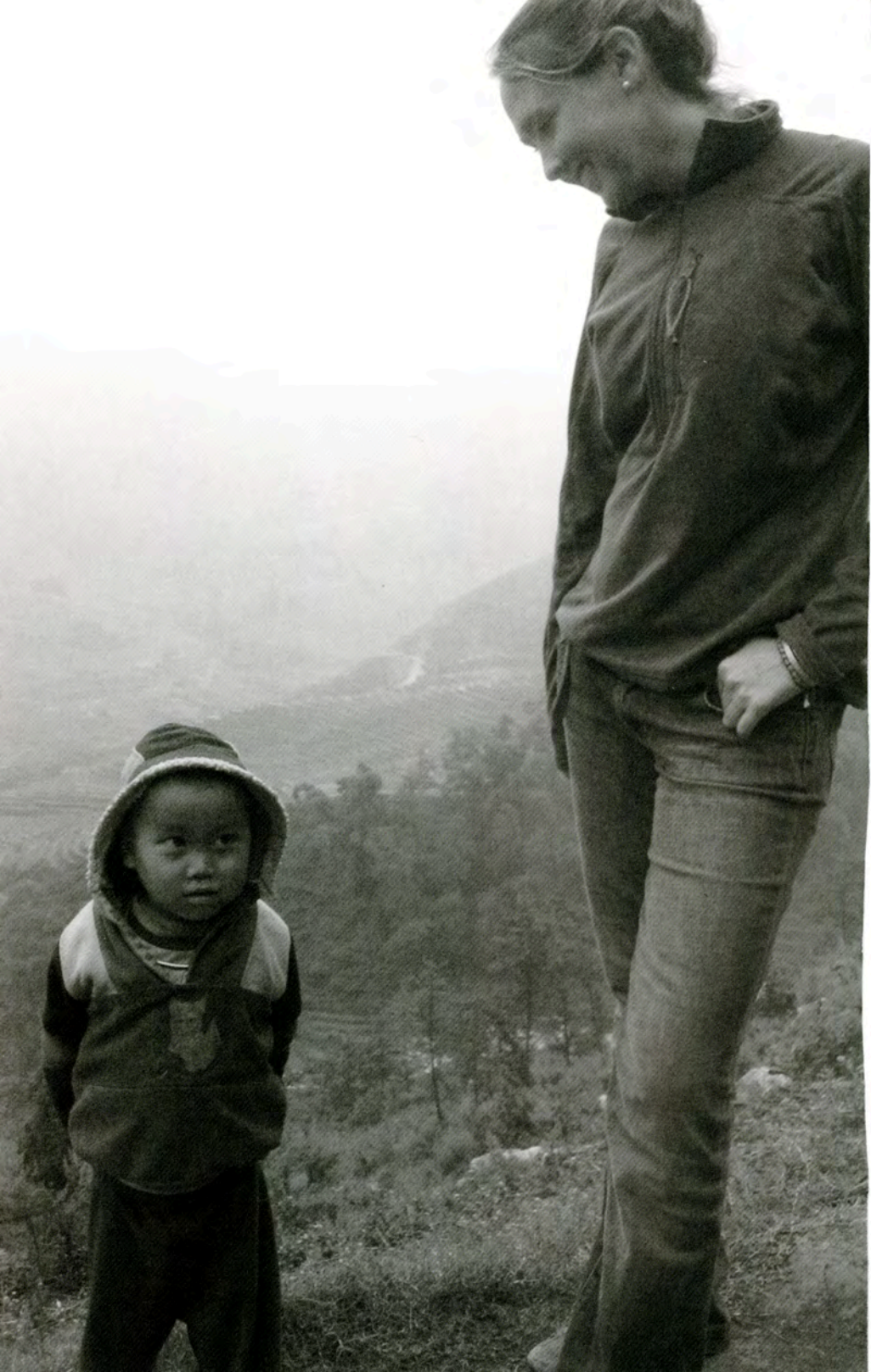


*Clockwise from top left: Boating Down the Arno Jeff Meola
Boy and Beggar Jane Yoon
Solitude, or, the Bus Lady Lou Heffer
Girl in Window Julia Croft*



Above: Roman Ruins Jeremy Katz
View from the Cupola of St. Peter's, Rome Kristin Ronan
Facing: Lune on the Can Kota Kobayashi





Verse and Vision II

Percepción

“The Diversion Continues”

it appeared
to read
but we choose to see
what we want to see
to some degree.

We will pass children
with woven figures
on their fingers
as offerings
in exchange for
centimos and *soles*,
in exchange for
sympathy and compassion,
in exchange for numbness and apathy.

And while there are no billboards
promoting consumerism,
individuals are aggressive,
presenting their watercolors,
their knitted tops,
their shoe shines,
out of desperation, for
economic independence,
to pester the Gringo for money.

Is it wrong to put
gasoline in your mouth for
a display of fire or
allow children
to carry younger children
wrapped in colorful sashes on their backs?
Is it wrong to beat animals with branches
and is it wrong to spend
money on alcohol
for fun,
as a release,
while street children sniff glue
so that they can ignore
the frigid sidewalk
against their skin?

We will fly for seven hours
to comfort and *abundancia*
leaving the “Third World” in
another galaxy,
symbolically distancing
the impact of our collective actions,
or lack of actions,
to minimize internal conflict.

It is naïve
to believe
that simple actions
can change situations.
And the diversion continues*.

-Clare Morgan

*A phrase seen on a taxi’s bumper sticker in Ecuador.

Word and Image I

All This Color

one

Proclamation: Any pub that plays Bobby Darin's "Little Bitty Pretty One" on their record player for me to dance to, automatically wins my heart.

two

Bridget's dad has cooked an entire stir fry dinner for Heather and me. An early Christmas, he yells from the kitchen, with his white apron spotted with soy sauce. We leave tomorrow and neither of us believes it. We are half and half—yes, we want to go home, but we will miss so much. Bridget's tiny mother, who reminds us of Audrey Hepburn, lights candles over our stoneware plates set with chopsticks and a big Christmas cracker next to our glasses of white wine. Katherine, Bridget's sister, yells something about OHHHH, the Americans are in the house again! and as Bridget's mother says, in her small voice, I feel like I'm eating dinner in a sitcom! You Americans are very funny. Bridget sits back in her chair, across the table from me; her entirely black outfit makes her skin glow so white in this light. She rolls her eyes and smiles, holding her glass up for a toast.

three

We sit in the dim light of an underground pub. I sit slumped in a slick pub chair, professing my love of Dusty Springfield to a man whose name I never learned, round and glistening in the heat of this cove, pressing his tall back to my short one, attempting to share the square of my seat.

four

There are loud noises in the bottom of the bus. There's thrashing and throwing up against walls and the bus driver yelling. Katia, my friend from Estonia, grabs my hand and turns her tiny bobbed head to look out the window. Bridget keeps on telling stories of her boyfriend Steve and her plans for her 21st birthday party and suddenly stops. She has noticed that Katia and I are petrified. People don't carry guns in this country, she whispers. Katia loosens her grip.

five

In Hungary, there were many names on the map that we tried to sneak through our American lips. The consonants were stuck like peanut butter on the roofs of our mouths; the vowels strung themselves like taffy between our teeth. There were accents and hyphens and the letters all seemed to stretch out like the drone of foghorns and look like vines or tangles of shoelaces.

six

They said I'd notice the accent as soon as I got off the plane. I did notice it, but it didn't surprise me too much. The five of us in the cast of *Absent Friends* on campus last February had listened to six weeks of dialect tapes to learn "standard British southern." I thought we had the accents down—along with the way we held our tea, ate our tiny cucumber sandwiches, and pursed our lips. We didn't have it at all.

...and how I try to emulate the shallow curve and glide of Bridget's words, deep under the blankets of my bed in the middle of the night.

seven

The yellow metro line in Budapest instantly turns me into an eight-year-old. With each arriving stop, the train plays the same music of *Super Mario Brothers* on Nintendo, or something very much like it. The doors slide open, quiet faces walk out, and I

am sitting in a memory with my Uncle Jeff, his big hands around his grey controller, my small ones around mine. Uncle Jeff does things my parents don't do with me—plays videogames for hours while I cook us toasted marshmallows in the woodstove next to me or holds me by the ankles as I scream, flipping me upside-down, and saying, "Walking on the ceiling! Walking on the ceiling!"

eight

I stand at arrivals without a sign with TIM scribbled on the front. I know he will see my large hair, frizzed out from the London humidity, my unmistakable 1970s red coat, my cat shoes. Of course I feel as if I'm waiting an eternity, waiting for his smile and tiny glasses, the feel of our hugs, our kiss. I fiddle around with the contents of my purse, eat mint candy after mint candy. I then notice people with American accents strolling out the arrivals door. This must be the Boston flight. My eyes dart from person to person, and then, and then, I see the glint of his glasses. Ohhhhh, I melt in my shoes, wave a small wave and he runs over, rolling suitcase clattering along behind him and the wait is over. I smile and wrap my arms around his waist, lock my fingers together, nestle my head under his neck. The world feels so much smaller. I am in a different country and I can hear Tim's heart beat.

nine

Warren and I descend the tiny staircase into the Buda Castle Labyrinth, finally out of the rain, and the water that splashes the sidewalks from cobbled streets. I roll up my jeans, sick of the heavy weight of all that rain dragging around behind my shoes. As I'm lifting my backpack back onto my shoulders, I hear a song I've heard more times than I can count on all my fingers and toes. I'm in Budapest and I hear...*the only one who could ever reach me/Was the son of a preacher man/The only boy who could ever teach me/Was the son of a preacher man/Yes he was, he was, mmm, yes he was.*

ten

It's as if I'm looking at Budapest and seeing Pittsburgh, the city I claimed as my own when I was a child. I actually grew up in Oil City, which is not a city at all. The wet light makes the bridge yellow and if it's the right time of night, I smell steel.

eleven

December 15, 2005: I realize there are too many things to write about. Every few days there happened, in the city of Norwich or in the dusk of Budapest, an event that is worthy of a photo, a poem, a song, a snippet of story. Someday, I will write them all. Someday I will forget the danger in writing all these events down, as I hear from a famous writer, only write down the memories you want to forget. If we write all our memories down, we remember the writing and not the way things unfolded ever-so-slowly, like the tiny blossoms of tree leaves.

twelve

I walk out of a pub with Bridget and there is the photo I'm supposed to take. It happens to be Global Snapshot Day, November 16th, and all students studying abroad are asked to take a photo of something/someone that shows a glimpse into the life of that country.

Above the rows of grey stone townhouses, there is dark grey sky and a rainbow. I snap a photo. This is the country I have come to know, the dark, muted clouds, the tiny houses, the downpours out of nowhere...and yet, all this color.

—Jamie Agnello



Word and Image II

Notes from Prague

The tourism industry is a fantastic way for countries to keep the money flowing, and the Czech Republic capitalizes on this with a vengeance. Prague's center is packed with modern clothing stores, ice cream shops, and Kentucky Fried Chicken. There is a KFC on every other street corner, trumping even McDonald's brave showing of one restaurant for every five streets.

The Czechs like to drink beer—lots of it, all the time. The famous Czech beer *Pilsner Urquell* is consumed far more than that plain, boring substance called water.

To buy a beer, or really do anything in Prague, a line must be waited in and a stamp must be stamped. Well, maybe they've freed beer drinking from bureaucratic entanglements, but the Czechs do love their lines and 'official channels'.



Near our dormitory, an industrial trash bin had been sitting for months, filled to the brim with construction waste. What's odd is that there was absolutely no sign of construction within 100 meters. It just sat there, through rain and shine, the nooks and crevices filling up with cigarette butts...until, finally, the whole thing disappeared. Someone, somewhere had stamped a paper that allowed the poor man who had been waiting in line for all those months to finally move his trash bin.



After a few days, going from pub line to pub line to falafel shop line at 2AM isn't all that strange, and something peculiar happens—it starts to feel like home. And, just like at home, I take the everyday things for granted while the extraordinary emerges.

The reflections of the Prague Castle off the water at night fills me with a sense of wonder. How can I be in such a grand place with so much history? It makes me ponder the big questions: What is the purpose of life? Where am I going? Snowflakes begin to fall, resting on my nose for a second before melting, and the scene all of a sudden has a calming effect. The tranquility lulls my mind into forgetting my befuddlement a few moments earlier.



The Czech Republic enchants with its variety and deft manipulation of emotions. A person can leave a rock concert with sweat dripping and their shirt stuck to their back from so many bodies grooving together or emerge thoughtful but unruffled from a concert of classical music.





The combination of alternately waiting in a line to dance to a one-two beat, and contemplating the meaning of life, defines the nature of the Czech Republic: multifaceted to the core.

—Michael Thylur





Word and Image III

Sarajevo from a Mountaintop

Standing in a cemetery on a mountain overlooking Sarajevo, Bosnia, I was wrapped in confusion. It swirled around me like November's chill. Warren took in the scenery with his flashbulb. I would be thankful later for his photographs; my own fingers were too numb from the cold to bother with the tiny buttons on my camera.

Our trip to Sarajevo went nothing like I had imagined. We traveled 12 hours overnight from Budapest, Hungary, without a sleeping car, and without much escape from the endless harassment of customs officers. Hungary/Croatia. Croatia/Bosnia, yelling at us in unfamiliar languages, while we responded by wearily handing over our passports. For all we knew, they may have been yelling "Fire, fire, get off the train!!!", while we unzipped our backpacks looking for passports. When we arrived

My feet crunched against the hard earth beneath me, in that mountain cemetery, where victims of Europe's most recent genocide lay.

at 6 am in Sarajevo, we realized how unprepared we really were. First of all, it was cold. How could that be, when we had just traveled 12 hours south? Alas, Sarajevo lies in a tremendous valley flanked by snowcapped mountains. I put on every piece of clothing that I had packed (for four days!) to stay warm. Freezing and tired, we had no Bosnian money, no knowledge of the Bosnian language, and no map of the city. Everyday tourist luxuries, like an information booth in the train station, or a helpful English-speaking resident, were absent. As we exited the train station, in the pitch dark, rainy cold, Warren and I looked at one another.

Is there something wrong with looking down upon a city surrounded by death, while feeling nothing but life? My feet crunched against the hard earth beneath me, in that mountain cemetery, where victims of Europe's most recent genocide lay. To my left and right were buildings, if you can even call them that anymore, that used to be Bosnian houses. Today, they are rubble. Houses ruined, lives cut short; I wondered where the residents were now.

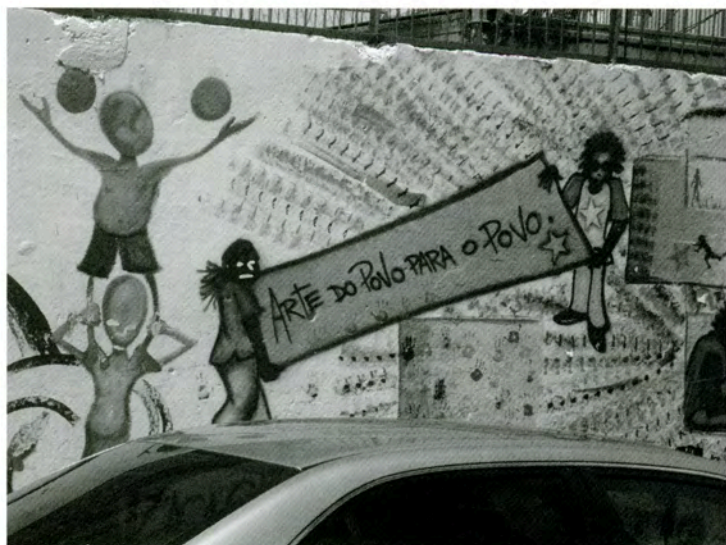
But life has a funny way of getting at you in this city. Brand new buildings, reconstruction efforts, hundreds of thousands of citizens healing from their "dark age." The city is re-emerging. In the shadow of death, Sarajevo is giving birth to hope. In the four days that I called Sarajevo home I was sickened by my own ignorance of what happened there. I was paralyzed by the sight of the bullet-riddled Parliament building. I was chilled by the effects of human coldness. True horror like that never disappears; I could feel it in the Bosnian air. Cruelty permeated the UN-patrolled streets, the war-damaged mosques, and the beautiful snowy mountains deadly with unexploded mines.

But, when I stood in that cemetery, Sarajevo the place and Sarajevo the spirit separated. And I understood. Now, Sarajevo is standing up to reclaim itself. It is burying its past; life becomes it.

—Mary Berkery



**Ice Bridge, New Zealand Lillian Worona
Mural in São Paulo, Brazil Julia Matthew**



Verse and Vision III

Chicken Mayo

I had to go to class.
I came all the way to South Africa, and I had to go to class.
On Thursday at 11 am.
It wasn't being in class that I dreaded,
I have always been a good student, able to keep up,
It was the walk.
I left behind the steel gates in the sticky January air.
Everyone was staring, sweaty.
Who is that girl?
What is she doing here?
But I had to go to class.

Past the tennis courts, the gated garage, the Barn.
Past Sophia's Tuck Shop where she would make her delicious
chicken mayo sandwiches,
Able to taste the warm dripping mayo, always slathered between
toasted bread.
This new routine every day,
Familiarity soon to set in.
But now, I had to go to class.

I walked fast,
Faster than anyone.
I'd be right on someone's heels before I'd slow down.
My eyes gazing towards the earth
No one looked like me, and I couldn't hide my pale complexion.
Failing every day.
But I had to go to class.

I smiled,
Eyes wandering from the ground, squinting
Still not used to the constant summer sun.
They smiled back.

I became a regular at the Barn every weekend,
Gates were held open,
And chicken mayos became 'the usual'
I'd stop to chat with the matron,
With new friends I'd run into.
I was late to class.

I'm back in New York,
The cold hovers above my blankets in the morning, just waiting for
my first move.
Again I have to go to class, but the walk is not what bothers me.
It's the sea of pastel polo students typing furiously at their
individual computers as I pass the huge streak-free library windows.

My skin is translucent, there isn't enough mayo on my sandwiches,
and no one toasts the bread.
I have to go to South Africa.
I came all the way home, and I have to go to South Africa.

—Collette Reny





Boat Jumping in Ha Long Bay, Vietnam Casey Cronin

Lessons I

A Journey into the Mind

Prior to embarking on my meditation retreat, I lay on my bed, thinking about all that I had learned about Mahayana Buddhism and meditation, and imagined myself with a mind absent of pollution. Everything I had learned thus far made perfect sense to me, but perfect sense offered me nothing in terms of actually training my mind to harvest its potential energy. Finally, I said to myself: "Ok, enough talk. I have all the know-how, so all that's left is to get out there and do it!!" Living in the crazy city of Hanoi aided me greatly with my research but offered an unsatisfactory environment for meditation.

So, I set out on the 3 o'clock bus to Lan Pagoda, 2 hours away in the Quang Ninh province. The Pagoda itself was breathtaking, while being quiet and peaceful so I could have the ideal meditation environment.

I immediately put all of my energy into meditating. In the course of four days, intensive meditation revealed the true nature of what I had been learning. There came a point in my retreat where I doubted whether or not I could continue. One half-hour

These emotions are like bubbles drifting down a river. They look real, but when you reach out to grasp them, they pop.

meditation session would leave me feeling intensely happy, while the following session would leave me close to despair. I was on a roller-coaster, my feelings and emotions violently bouncing around. What I didn't know at the time was that this was not caused by a fault in my meditation practice; it was just a natural stage in the reconditioning process. More importantly, the mixed emotions I experienced were my mind's way of expressing the

truth of the human condition. I realized that suffering is never alleviated by itself, but coexists with happiness.

Through this bumpy period, I also gained an awareness of the impermanence of life. My sessions didn't always end with happiness and bliss. This is also the case with life. By being ignorant and seeking happiness in a world of impermanence, through beauty, money, fame, and worldly goods, we will only lead ourselves to more suffering and deeper attachment to the self. Thus I was "awakened" to a greater understanding of reality. I cannot hold on to either happiness or suffering, for they are never fixed. These emotions are like bubbles drifting down a river. They look real, but when you reach out to grasp them, they pop.

I became aware that my retreat was coming to an end. I decided to devote my last morning at the Pagoda to a hike up the nearby sacred mountain of Yen Tu. From the first step up the mountain I was inspired to utilize what I had learned about Mahayana Buddhism and meditation. Rather than looking up or down the mountain, I tried to focus deeply on the present moment, with my inner dialogue running: "Right foot up, left foot up..." Focusing on the present moment proved to be very relaxing. It also made me contemplate how it is only my mind that says "I am tired" or "This is difficult". For what exactly are such feelings without the mind?

I continued up the mountain with a mindset of peace. After just four days of meditating, my mind seemed to be channeling its energy in a positive way. As my journey continued, I got the chance to deepen my experience even further by helping someone else. I was about a third of the way up the mountain when I met a young Vietnamese girl of no more than 105 pounds, who was hauling a 20-foot steel pipe on her shoulder. She looked utterly exhausted. I handed her my water bottle and took the pipe. Eventually, we each made it to our own destination and, sharing a smile, went our separate ways.

—Casey Cronin

Lessons II

My Vietnam Experience

I spent a long time looking back at my abroad experience with a bad attitude—about three months in fact (as long a time as I had spent in Vietnam)—and I still have a long way to go. I was happy that I went and certain that I had gotten a lot out of it. But...I just didn't think I had gotten enough out of it, or rather what I believed I "should" have gotten out of it. I guess I had just expected it to amount to more—or at least something different. I thought I should and would come back with amazing stories and pictures and new knowledge about the world that I could share and really do something with, something bigger than myself, something to really make a positive impact.

Instead, when I got back, I couldn't even organize my photos. My normal life snuck back up on me—in fact, it seemed to reappear as soon as I was unpacked. This made my experience abroad feel even more devalued.

I believed that if I didn't experience culture shock then I hadn't really "experienced" Vietnam to my full capacity. I had made a lot of new friends, learned to live in a foreign city where most people didn't speak my language, and became comfortable

For some reason I was convinced that other people were able to have a deeper experience of Vietnam and its people—maybe because my attention was focused less on what was going on around me and more on my own personal struggles.

with not being able to call home whenever I wanted. I even managed to get by without washing my sheets for three months! I learned to communicate my needs creatively with people who couldn't speak English. I learned to wander alone in the city.

I even started to like riding on the back of the motorbikes of complete strangers with whom I could hardly exchange a word, even though after my first ride I swore I would never do it again. I learned to take risks and reevaluated many parts of my life. Yet, I still felt like my experience was not as full as it should be and somehow less than that of most of my classmates. For some reason I was convinced that other people were able to have a deeper experience of Vietnam and its people—maybe because my attention was focused less on what was going on around me and more on my own personal struggles.

What is experience? How do we take full advantage of what is offered to us? What did I or anyone else who has been abroad get out of their experience? These are difficult questions. A new environment doesn't make you a different person. Sure, it inspires you to explore and to challenge yourself, and oftentimes it forces you to take risks and think new thoughts. High expectations are good and they challenge you to take opportunities and push yourself in the direction you want to go, moreso than if you didn't have them. But still my advice is "be reasonable and don't be afraid." Don't be afraid to take risks and don't be afraid to celebrate and cherish your accomplishments. You have to be ready to adjust your frame of reference as to what counts as progress, as to what counts as "real" experience. If you want to experience more, take it as another challenge, another opportunity to grow and change, reevaluate, appreciate, and possibly take yourself in a direction you never would have dreamed of going before your departure. It's good to try to let go of the expectations you had before your arrival. When you judge your experience abroad based on your expectations, you are filtering and devaluing all the learning that goes on outside of what you were prepared for. What would I tell a student about to go abroad? Talk, grow, let down your guard.

—Sarah Hauck



**Woman Rowing on Mekong River Chloe Hall
Prayer Flags at Ivolginsk Datsan, Russia Sue Jordan**



Lessons III

Louisiana Mountains

This place was stolen. Left rotting, rough, ragged. But these were just adjectives misused and overused. Their meaning melted when the newspapers and magazine stories—and people's interest—started to wane. Katrina, they may have said, what a disaster—so much destruction—such devastation. But slowly, these words were tucked away. Just like the broken boards, the disfigured furniture, and the muddy carpets—tucked away in the newly formed mountains of Louisiana.

I arrived in Louisiana in a sweaty van, packed full with wide-eyed students, clean boots, and twenty-two hours worth of flat land and board-straight highways. Cleveland, Columbus, Louisville, Nashville—they were just a part of the roads we had already forgotten, our attention now fixed on New Orleans—and finally Saint Bernard's Parish.

We came at night, my face pressed against the foggy window, searching for the places I had seen in the magazines. I wanted to see a car in a tree, a broken roof, maybe a beached boat—I wanted to be jolted, displaced, slapped into awe. I wanted

I found the rhythm of the parish, and soon, what I once thought impossible—cars in trees, mountains of trash, boats in the street—began to breathe normalcy like eggs in a refrigerator or ketchup on a restaurant table.

to reawaken my sense of what is real. Already I was trying to insert myself into the pain of this place, trying to dig my own space inside of it. But I couldn't make anything out. I couldn't find that jolt. There was no electricity in the parish and therefore no

images to threaten my comfortable seat in the van. So I watched the shadows that fanned away from the highway, watching them give way to the broken trees that climbed the distant sky with their injured branches. And I wondered what was really there underneath the dark.

The people of Saint Bernard's Parish were warned. They knew that if a class five hurricane were to come their way, then the levees would break and the parish would flood—not three feet, not four feet, but ten feet or more of gushing tide. The levees were sinking, but no one seemed to care. Built originally at seventeen feet, the dirt walls had sunk into the softening ground, shrinking to a mere fourteen.

In late August the levees did break. And they broke in the backyard of Annie, our homeowner. When the storm surge from Hurricane Katrina hit, it came with twenty-five feet of sea water and mud that toppled over the sunken levees, eroding their backside until there was nothing left to shield the vulnerable parish from the ocean. In came the water, rising to the rooftops of the homes in this area.

We wore white suits too big for us all, with green rubber gloves—3 pairs to be exact, layered one on top of the other. We couldn't risk a hole that would let the muck slide in. We wore boots, tied up around our ankles, thick-soled for the corroded nails, tucked into the white suits so our winter skin wouldn't touch the milky air the hurricane had spit out. Goggles on top of face masks to hide our noses, hide our lungs from that black muck that floated in the air.

The smell was thick. It held its own identity, defining the parish in terms of its foulness, much like how the mountains of garbage—mountains of a life lost—came to define the landscape. That smell held tight to the weave of my clothing, built up around the corners of my work boots. It trudged back to my bunk each night with me, caught in my hair, or smudged on my wrist or the back of my ear. But it wasn't mud. No. This was nothing like mud.

This was the sewage in the street—streams of it, starting as a trickle coming up through the ground, collecting itself around the broken set of dresser drawers left in shards, baking in the sun that made water rot.

This was the suitcase shut tight for four months, holding papers of an old life, soaked in the orange water that dripped from its cracks.

This was the jar of white rice seething in low tide, spilling its milky contents onto the broken mirror that lay in the center of the kitchen floor.

We worked for five days, our backs to the levees and our feet leaving footprints in the muck, marking our presence across soggy carpets and down the narrowing streets of Annie's neighborhood. I'd stop sometimes to break from the muddy air of the house we were gutting. Pulling down my white suit, I'd remove my mask, letting the sun get to my skin. I remember standing in the street outside Annie's house, sheltered by the mounds of lonely sofas and abandoned kitchen appliances. They reached beyond my height.

"It's just stuff," she said, shrugging her shoulders. "We can always get more stuff."

I didn't understand. The mounds of electronics and toys, broken lamps and water-logged mattresses were not just stuff to me—this was life. A life lost. I saw stories in the laundry we pulled from the washing machine. I found memory smeared across a photograph that floated in a blackened puddle. Soon though, I began to dissect the mountains, looking at each object as no more than it was. I understood what she meant. A couch, depending on how I looked at it, could be nothing more than some wooden legs and some worn cotton upholstery. And so, I grew to know these piles of broken boards, rusting electronics, and sad furniture as a part of Saint Bernard's landscape, much like the Green Mountains of Vermont or the smooth deserts of the west. Yes, there still was pain in these piles, but it wasn't the pain that was disturbing—for the pain was widespread and it didn't hide. Rather, it let itself be known in the ragged landscape of broken furniture and bare houses stripped to their skeletal frames.

I came to Saint Bernard's Parish an outsider and I left an outsider. But I think, for a moment, I may have gotten in. I shoveled the muck and I ripped away at the walls of a rotting house. I added my own pieces of chair and carpet and wall to the mountains that lined the streets. I found the rhythm of the parish, and soon, what I once thought impossible—cars in trees, mountains

of trash, boats in the street—began to breathe normalcy like eggs in a refrigerator or ketchup on a restaurant table.

These images followed me home. And I am left now with a nose that can't understand the sweet smells of air and snow and dirt. I forgot what a normal neighborhood looks like—forgot what houses look like without broken windows and torn roofs. I forgot the shape of land without injured trees, forgot how to look at mountains not piled high with lonely sofas and abandoned kitchen appliances. Even now, walking clean paths around Geneva, I wonder how much water it would take to buoy the brick house that sits on the corner. How much muck would it take to fill the shopping center parking lot? And more importantly—could I shovel it?

And I am left wondering where all the mountains have gone.

—Alyssa Austin

Boat Garage on Rio Negro, Brazil Risa Dubow





Copenhagen Cityscapes: Canal by Night (*above*)
Danish Royal Library (*below*) Magdalena Piascik







Cobblestone Street in Paraty, Brazil Risa Dubow

Verse and Vision IV

The Arrival

It's lonely here
abroad, on my own
but then I guess
everyone is alone
in the thin night air
on cobble and brick
and laughter in courtyards
where a window is lit
and remembering now
as I've remembered before
the absence of myself
from another.

—Emily Blout



Crossings I

Paris Burning Questions

Paris Burning. I read those words in the *New York Times*, online. The riots rocking France had captured international headlines. I was on a study abroad program in a country at war with itself, and I related to the discontent of the rioters. Who would have ever thought that France, with its great revolutionary ideals, would now have those foundational principles challenged? The rioters had forced the government to acknowledge the high unemployment rates (more than four times the nationwide rate in the *banlieues* where most immigrants lived) and chronic racism.

I sat back and read *L'Ouest-France* (the most popular newspaper in Western France) as the young rioters were acting on frustrations that resonated with my own. Recently, I've had to speak obnoxious American English in public to avoid being treated like them. It's made me examine some of the deep-rooted frustrations I've experienced as a second generation Caribbean-American.

My parents came to the United States as children from their native Trinidad and Tobago. Their parents had understood that, regardless of American society's constraints, bringing their family to the United States was a good option. If I understood the techniques of the oppressors, I was taught, it would be easier to maneuver through the system.

The rioters were expressing dissatisfactions similar to those that I had been taught to conceal. The situation raised many questions in my mind about race and integration—in France as well as the United States. I was led to think deeply about the history of my family as Caribbean-Americans. The stories that my parents and grandparents told me bombarded my mind. I saw my great-great grandfather running through the endless night as a runaway Yoruba slave. I saw my father standing on

a sidewalk in Brooklyn, completely terrified on his first day in the United States because he had been mugged. I saw my mother crying to my grandmother because the children at school abused her for “talking funny.” My thoughts went beyond the personal. Did Caribbeans around the world and, more relevantly, did the Caribbeans in France, have similar stories?

Although I knew countries like Martinique and Guadeloupe had strong ties to France, it was the relationship between France and Haiti that captured my fascination. The extreme violence (and also extreme hope) of the Haitian Revolution that lasted from 1791 to 1804, and the depressing state of Haiti today, combined with the turmoil in France, gave birth to a research project. I wanted to know what it was like for Haitians living in France.

The Haitian Revolution (also called “The Bloody Revolution”) led to the establishment of Haiti as the first “Black Republic” and the expulsion of all the whites in the country. The revolution gave hope to slave populations around the world, but also (and for the same reason) ensured the country’s isolation. Haiti was

Haiti constantly pulled on the Haitians in France, whether they planned to return or not. This longing is tinged with a hint of guilt, as if to say, if a Haitian in France does not look back then he may not be considered a “real” Haitian.

completely disconnected from the international community, which continues to this day. This isolation caused Haitians to gain a strong sense of national pride which later crystalized into the *Negritude* movement of the 1960s. I was interested to find out what this tumultuous relationship of violent separation meant for Haitians living in France. How was that sense of nationalistic pride transported to France, and how did immigrants from Haiti negotiate questions of identity?

Bursting with questions, I could barely contain myself when I met my first Haitian in France. He was a close friend of my host mother and from the moment that I saw him, I knew we would be friends. As we shook hands, all I could think about were the questions that I couldn’t ask within the first five minutes

without seeming intrusive. His inability to stop smiling and his persistence in speaking in broken English phrases showed me that his attraction to the English language and my infatuation with Haitian culture would make us a great match. When I finally gathered the confidence to explain that I wanted to ask him questions about his experience with Haitian identity in France, he hesitantly agreed.

After I had enough time to form a few good, open ended questions, I sat down with my new friend, Janeau. Not until then did I understand the importance of his move to France from Haiti. Evidently, he was in exile. He had worked in Haiti for a radio station called "Vision 2000." After making controversial statements on the air he left the country, fearing for his life. While working for the radio station he also was studying to become a lawyer. Now in France he works two jobs: a bartender in a nightclub and a clerk in a supermarket.

"Le racisme de France est plus fort que d'Amerique," Janeau said. Racism is worse in France than in America. (I had found this hard to believe, until I experienced it myself.) He attributes this racism to the savage rhetoric of Dessalines, the Haitian leader during the revolution. At this point he moved in close to me and talked in a whisper so as to not allow those around us to hear. He said that the French still remember Dessalines's call to cut off the heads of the French living in Haiti. *"Nous devons couper les têtes des francais!"*

Janeau does not deal with racism the way I knew many American Caribbeans dealt with it in the United States. When my parents arrived in New York there was a lot of pressure for them to integrate with the African-Americans in school. Now, Caribbeans and African-Americans are often lumped under the umbrella of being black. Janeau feels no need for this "umbrella". He consciously identifies himself as a Haitian in France. He continues to look back to Haiti as his home, and he hopes to return some day.

With all this new information in hand, I was excited to get more perspectives. Janeau introduced me to my next contact, Jean. They shared similar backgrounds; Jean also worked in the Haitian media, and he also left after making some dissenting remarks against the government. However, he didn't feel like

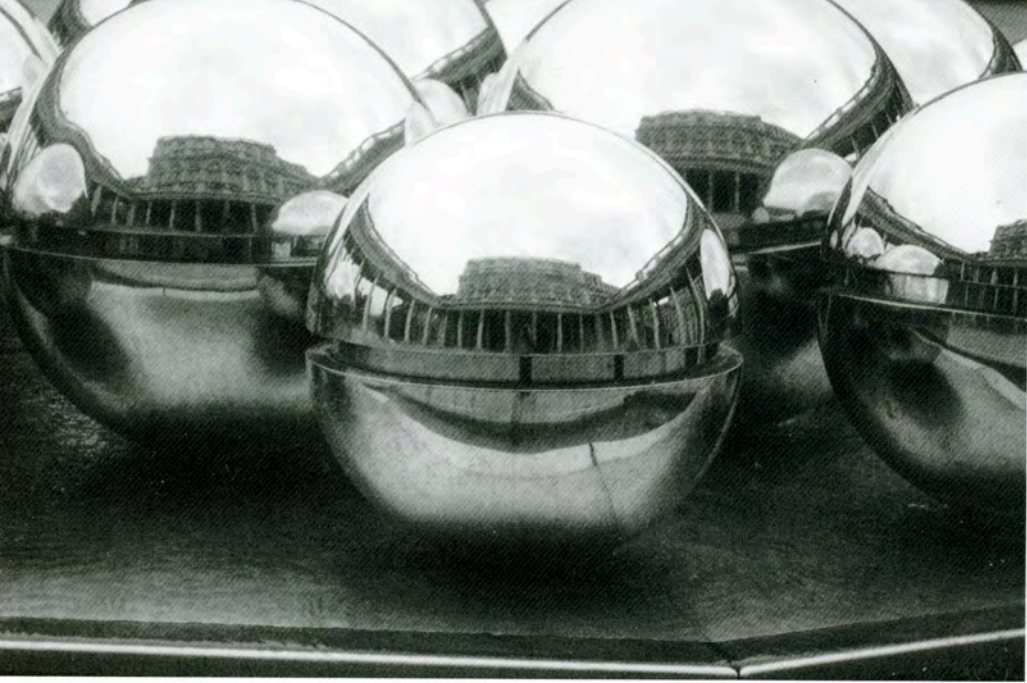
his life was in danger. His move to France was motivated instead by his desire for greater opportunities. Since having a son in France, he has decided that he will not be returning to Haiti.

Jean explained that he will teach his son the importance of his Haitian roots but he also believes that he does not need to go back to Haiti to achieve this. He wants his son to work and live outside of Haiti. Although he feels that it is important for his son to understand racism, he said that it is an obstacle, not an insurmountable wall. "*Ce n'est pas une mur qu'on ne peut pas surpasser.*" He does not understand the defeatist attitude that he sees among other minorities in France. He will teach his son how to adapt and succeed in France.

I was starting to understand the nature of the Haitian experience in France. Haiti constantly pulled on the Haitians in France, whether they planned to return or not. This longing is tinged with a hint of guilt, as if to say, if a Haitian in France does not look back then he may not be considered a "real" Haitian. This constant "looking back" seems to reflect a deeper discomfort with the Haitian identity of the individual in a society dominated by the French.

I reflect on my own Caribbean past in light of what I learned from Janeau and Jean. What allows me to look forward to a future in the United States as a Caribbean-American, instead of looking back to Trinidad? Did this happen because my parents nurtured my Caribbean identity but also taught me that racism is not insurmountable—things that Jean intends to teach his own son? These questions continue to haunt me. And the answers, at a larger level, will affect not only me, but the future of Caribbeans around the world.

—Adeyemi Adenrele



Paris Reflections, France Alessandra Raimondi
Twizel, New Zealand Stephanie Sadlon



Crossings II

An Incident of Travel in Spain

I catch his eyes locking on to me and I quickly turn my head away. My eyes focus on an empty space hoping that I had only imagined him staring. But it is too late. The guard and his fellow officer, both armed, make their way towards me. Panicking, I think, “keep cool.” Gazing at the floor, I hope that one of my friends, anyone other than these officers, would come by and we could strike up a rapid Spanish conversation. Is it too late? The two officers, with their machine guns slung around their shoulders, their polished black boots and their camouflage-designed uniforms, which assert their authority and serve no purpose of blending in with anything, have a clear path.

One officer, with a hardened face, greets me with a simple “*Buenos días*” while the other stands behind, hand on his machine gun. I respond in Spanish, knowing that I am being “sized-up.” The hard-faced officer asks for my documentation. The game of good cop/bad cop transcends cultures: he does so in a casual, nonchalant fashion while his partner’s face reads, “just do what you’re told.” Documents? What documents? Did I translate that correctly? I...I don’t have any documents.

My American passport is hidden under layers of clothing back in Madrid and I only have a flimsy international student I.D. card. For a few seconds all I can see, all I can hear is this officer, but almost instantly my eyes and ears reopen. I become aware of the stares of the people passing by and the lack of familiarity surrounding me in the crowded streets of Barcelona and hope just for someone who knows me to intervene. I try clearing my throat, bidding for time to form the right sentence to tell them that I have only an I.D. card. The officer’s monotone voice becomes serious and he tells me to hand over the card. I fumble through my pants pocket, grab my wallet. My hands are trembling. Why me? Why is it always me? But I already know the answer.

The officer stares at the plastic card, flips it around, glances at me several times and then asks, “Is this all you have?” I want to say, “Yeah, now get out of my face”, but I know better.

Now Ángel emerges from the mass of people and asks if I need help with anything. I cannot help but flash him a stare of total fury for having left me to fend for myself and for my sheer frustration with what is happening. I look away as Ángel takes charge. I hear talk of a number of robberies in Barcelona and riots in France and realize that the entire group of students who accompanied me to Spain has suddenly appeared and are staring at me. At that moment I realize how jealous I feel and how lucky they are. They may never have to go through what I had just been through, they may never have to be ashamed and degraded for who they are and may never have to hate themselves for having thought, “if only I weren’t a colored man.”

—Munesh Ramnarine

Grounds of Larnach Castle, New Zealand Andrew Martland







Clockwise from top left: Nap in Hanoi, Vietnam Karyn Mirak
The Copenhagen Suitcase, Denmark Magdalena Piascik
Ice Cream and Innocence in Copenhagen, Denmark Ariana Nussdorf



Carnival Ride in Norwich, England Jeremy Katz

Verse and Vision V

It Was October

I remember your clothes
squeezed you like peanut shells
I held you closer—I think
your residue wasn't enough

I knew I loved you
When Everything became fractals
I saw the sky—blue—between the trees in your eyes
And
Setting like suns we sat

You glowed as leaves swirled—nightfull
That fall and falling.

Elena

I got the postcard from a bride store
I sent for one, but you came back in blue
You stood smiling wearing your skin so clue
Lessly, you didn't know who it was for
Your eyes searched the space—movement's contour
If you were my fleshfire I'd dress you
In lace, effortlessly restringing views
Of your body like diamond cut and cored

I would fall for you quick I estimate
I'd have no choice see, you were sent to me
I'd want my money to be worth a mate

Your family needs it more than me, so
Logically love reasons you to me
A reason for loving, I'd hope you know

Cozier with One More

I cannot sleep and then wake to find your
bodyrest soft in formful consummate;
a zoetrope of lucidity "lately"
sees "your naked passion for the floor"

your textuality demands me more
polka dots from your dress last night dilate
upon a scene-slice-memory collate
themselves around your printed form folder

alone—this wakelessness cannot be fed

a silent boat dream hovering on sea
2:55 a.m. red droning clock.
actionless—I know my gentle thought spread
your storyboard sleepwalking toward me
brunette, naked, "barefoot, beautiful"

I can't dream—till we take the boat to dock

*Sourced from John Berryman

—Jeremy Katz



From My Journal

Athens, Greece

The experience of going on a term abroad was something that I will never forget. I find it hard to believe that I will ever get the opportunity again to learn so much about the world and so much about myself for such a length of time. I think that traveling abroad is a great way, perhaps the best way, to test your ability to remain comfortable in uncomfortable situations. I will always remember my term abroad as a time in my life in which my horizons were broadened and my limits were tested. Below are excerpts from emails that I sent home during my time in Athens, Greece, detailing some of my experiences and observations from the start of my term to the end.

August 30, 2005

I have arrived in Athens and gotten settled in my apartment. So far everything is going well. What I have seen of Athens is exactly what I hoped it would be like—a complete contrast to both Ticonderoga and Schenectady. Today I'm going to get to know my neighborhood a little better—I might even head up to the Acropolis, which somehow I didn't notice until this morning. And, of course, the weather is a balmy 29 degrees Celsius and perfectly sunny and clear.

September 6, 2005

After more than a week, I think I am getting used to the atmosphere here in Athens. The weather is still beautiful and classes are keeping me busy. This past weekend a few of us visited Aegina, which is the closest island to Athens, and went to a few ancient sites, which were impressive. It was a good introduction

to the whole island scene and it turned out to be a great trip. I'm thinking of heading to Santorini this weekend because it seems to be one of our last three-day weekends for a while, and it would be nice to see the island when it's warmer. I have been reading about an ancient village on the island that was covered by ash when the volcano exploded and is apparently in outstanding condition, so I'm really looking forward to that.

September 12, 2005

This past weekend on Santorini was great. The island was everything I had heard it would be. It was blown apart by a volcano around 1600 BCE. The caldera forms one edge of the island and the views from it are unbelievable. We took a boat to explore the inside and swam in hot springs and climbed to the top of what's left of the volcano, and from there we saw most of the sunset. We also got to visit the ancient city of Acrotiri, which they say is only about 3% excavated, but was left in near perfect condition by the volcanic ash. It is similar to Pompeii except they haven't found human remains so experts believe the citizens knew the volcano was going to erupt.

Steve and I also hiked to the highest point on the island to see the ancient city of Thera and the views were worth the climb. The "airport" on Santorini is next to the peak and it was the first time I've ever looked down on an airplane in flight...

September 13, 2005

I recently heard Athens referred to as "a bridge between the east and the west", which is pretty interesting. The culture in the city has many similarities to the American culture, but the Greeks certainly are their own people. It has been really helpful to meet Greeks and learn more about their way of life. So far, most people I have met have been really interested in why I'm here and helpful in learning the culture.

September 26, 2005

I've spent most of the past few weeks getting to know Athens, and the area surrounding it, better. I feel like I could spend the whole semester seeing Athens and not see everything there is to see. I've enjoyed getting away from the group and experiencing things on my own as much as possible. Last weekend, I went with a Greek hiking club and spent the day hiking outside the city. Yesterday, a friend and I hiked Mt. Olympus. We didn't know how hard it would be, but it was definitely worth the experience.

October 1, 2005

I returned this morning from Crete. We saw a ton of ancient sites and did a lot of touring. We hiked down the Samaria Gorge yesterday, which was probably the most incredible landscape I've ever seen.

I'm starting to run a lot on my own in preparation for the Athens Classic Mini-Marathon 10k. I thought it would be a neat atmosphere to run in, and the training has turned out to be a great way to get to know Athens better. Someday I'm going to have to come back for the full marathon...

October 10, 2005

On Sunday night, I went with a friend to the closing night of the Opera/Symphony at the Heroditus Atticus Theater; I've never seen a performance like that. Tons of energy and the environment obviously could not have been better.

October 20, 2005

It's amazing how being away from what you know for so long can change the way you look, not only at the world, but also at your everyday life. A few weeks ago, I spent five days on the island of Crete visiting ancient palaces and touring all of the sites. Never in my life did I think that might be possible, but it's amazing how now it seems like just one incredible experience among a myriad of others.

It seems like every day I see Greece in a different light. There always seems to be something new that surprises me. I'm doing my best to expose myself to the culture and not only see things, but get immersed in them. From the beginning it has amazed me

how proud the people here are to be Greek. In a country with such a tumultuous recent history, I'm not sure that I expected such deep nationalism. It's pretty neat though, especially when 77,000 people pack into the Olympic stadium to watch Panathinaikos, their hometown soccer team, play Barcelona.

November 26, 2005

Thanksgiving just wasn't the same without the real meal, but we had fun regardless. Hard to believe I have less than three weeks left. I'm not going to think about leaving until I get on the plane...

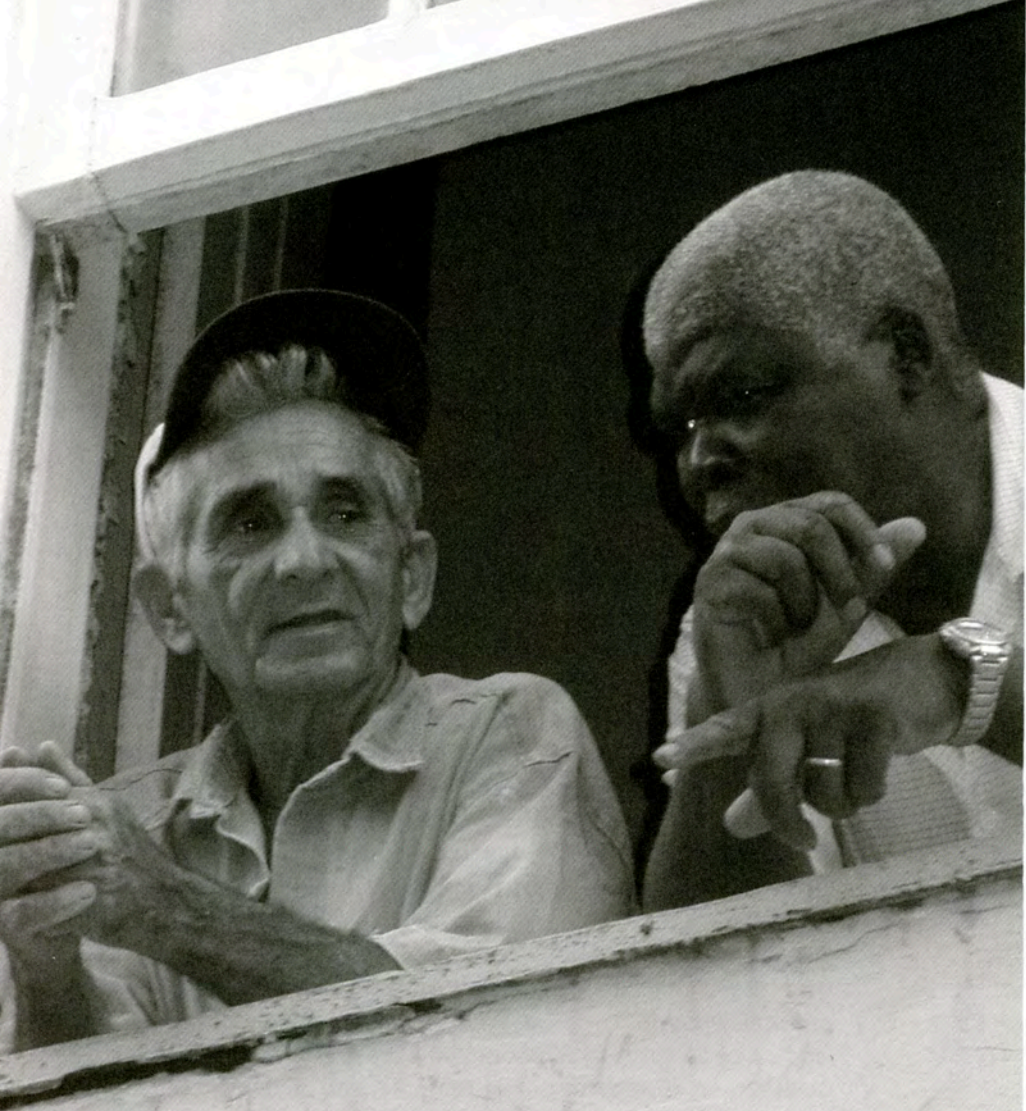
December 2, 2005

As the term is winding down, I feel like I'm just now starting to feel the full impact of my time abroad. It still seems like every day is a new adventure, with a different, unique experience, but after being here long enough to be comfortable in the culture, I'm amazed at how much more I realize now about what's around me than I used to. Greek people are very proud to be Greek and it seems to be a common thread between the people. It seems that more Greeks than Americans have an opinion on U.S. foreign policy, and they are never afraid to say exactly what they think. My view of the world has changed a lot since being here, and I feel like I have a much more complete picture in my mind.

December 14, 2005

The interesting part of going on a term abroad is that I don't think it will end. I will always think differently about Greece and come to think of it, about the world. It's impressive how such a short time away can do that. It's also made me ready to go back to the States. It's nice to like where you're from, but it's also nice to get away. This might be the first time since I've been a student at Union that I feel like I've actually learned something that will have an effect on my life—something that is actually substantial that I can carry with me. That's a pretty gratifying feeling and it makes it even more exciting to get back to my world because I feel like I'm bringing something new with me. I'm convinced that I'm not going to be ready to leave until I step foot on the plane.

—Jon Thatcher



Verse and Vision VI

Uncomfortable with Looking

I was so hot, my sweat was sweating
Looking out the window at scenes in a blur
Damn, it must be hotter out there
Mothers carried chocolate-covered babies
Melting in their hands
Or molding to towels attached to their backs
The sky was blue
People walked
They looked hot too
They stared at us
I peeked at them
I sat back in my seat
I sat up to look out the window
I sat back
I sat up
I was uncomfortable with looking
And yet I wanted to see
I felt like
They felt
That we felt
We were looking at a zoo
This sociological exchange was tormenting my mind
And creating unfamiliar feelings
Us in our vans
Them going about life
Us just driving through
No interaction
Like a badly done ethnographic film
No air in the van
The heat made my eyelids heavy
Sleep sang in my ear

Rhythm of the ride made my limbs floppy
And then
Stop!
“Let’s get out here.” A South African-American accent spoke
Our professor motioned to the outside
I followed
The sun saw my skin and ran to it
Hugging
Squeezing
Embracing me
Like an annoying little brother returning home from camp
I became submerged in a crowd of unfamiliar faces
Beautifully imprisoned by the sun
They all looked different but had one thing in common
The reflection of us in their expressions
And then a question floated above their heads like those
little comic book bubbles
“Who are you?”
Behind that question were more
“What is your purpose?”
“What is your background?”
But one that was answered by our swagger
Our tongue
The look of ambiguity on our faces
Was that “oh they must be American.”
“*Molweni eMelika!*” I could tell some of them wanted to yell
“Hello!”
But our lost bewildered looks
Reflected off of their questioning conveyances
Reflected off our frightened demeanors
Shut all modes of communication down
Until capital stole the show
And soon it was “You buy this?”
And I was hot again
I look American
Do I look like I have money too?

—Aisha Rivers





City Street in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil Anna Lockwood



LIMPURB
Salvador

Bahia

Lo
art
Ses

Reflections I

Staring at Shiva

I'm remembering India so I might capture the subcontinent onto a piece of paper to read later on.

I remember the dusty streets, the cows sitting unconcerned in the middle of the highways, the showers taken with a bucket of hot water.

I remember the Himalayas.

I liked talking to Hindu pilgrims while resting at the stops that dotted the long trek up the mountain.

They would tell me about how being in the mountains reminded them how small they were. Being small reminded them that life was not small. And that reminded them of God.

Sometimes I'd meet an ascetic who had renounced worldly affairs and had come to live in the mountains.

I loved the silence of the ascetics. I felt they said more when they didn't say anything. When they opened their mouths, they became human. When they were silent, it was easy to imagine they were God.

Later on, I realized that it was all the same thing.

But maybe I should write about cows instead.

I remember seeing a cow amble up to a house with a door opened to the street and try determinedly to walk in. I watched the woman inside the house fretfully try to shoo the cow away

The taxi driver pulled off into a secluded area, no people around. We were supposed to be in Bombay. It worried me that I could no longer see the city.

without touching her. Before much time had passed, the cow gave up. The woman gave a sigh of relief and then gave me a dirty look as she noticed me lingering nearby, trying to conceal a smile.

There was no need for the cow to be so adamant. The woman already kept God in her house.

But now I'm back to where I began.

In the Puranas, it is said that the beginning is the same as the end, and if you can find the beginning, then you've already found the end.

Actually, it might have been the Gospel of Thomas that said that. A Hindu ascetic I met would tell me, "It's the same; it's all the same."

This leads me to think that there is no beginning nor end.

That's kind of like this story.

The elections in India are something I don't want to write about. The patenting of Basmati rice is another. When Indian Basmati rice was patented by western corporations, it was only Indian farmers who suffered.

This reminds me of imperialism.

It made me feel empty to drive past villages on the way to a pilgrimage and see Coca Cola ads painted on the sides of buildings.

Once when we stopped, we chatted with villagers underneath a sign advertising Hoover vacuum cleaners for 8,000 rupees (160 dollars).

8,000 rupees is how much money many working class Indians make in a year and a half.

I worked with people in India who made 3,000 rupees a year. It was at a shoe factory in a former lepers' colony. The people I worked with were people of low caste who couldn't get jobs elsewhere.

Someone told me that the glue I breathed in there might take years off my life.

But I didn't mind because the shoemakers taught me Hindi and we laughed with each other for two afternoons over nonsensical things.

They didn't make much money, the head of the colony explained to us, because the colony paid for their housing. All the same, if they wanted to leave the colony, they wouldn't have enough money to do so.

I'd had respect for the place until I discovered that.

I found it difficult to talk to the head of the colony because he was so impressed with his own generosity. He believed that he had achieved *moksha* in this lifetime.

I didn't think so.

But I'm not the one who gets to make that decision.

In Hinduism, if you say that you've achieved *moksha*, then you really haven't. You're still displaying your adherence to the world of forms by trying to name everything. You're still caught

When I got back from India, I didn't want to talk to anyone. I didn't want to see anyone. I didn't want to think about India or talk about India. I lost contact with almost everyone I knew. He had shattered my belief that humans were essentially good.

in desire—the desire to be something to someone, even if only to yourself. *Moksha* is the realization that you aren't happy or sad or nice or bad, you just are. Achieving *moksha* is realizing that there is no *moksha*.

That's what I learned in India, anyway.

I also learned how to make the hand gesture in Indian classical dance for “deer.” It involves holding up two fingers and making them dance around in front of your face.

It looks ridiculous to my western eye. That is precisely why I like it so much.

I haven't gotten much chance to use it, though.

I haven't used most of the skills I learned in India.

That's because of what happened in my last month there while I was in a taxi going from one airport to another in Bombay.

The taxi driver pulled off into a secluded area, no people around. We were supposed to be in Bombay. It worried me that I could no longer see the city. He was intimidating, and the subtlety of his silent threat was not lost on me.

He demanded about twenty times as much as the trip should have cost. I thought that if I paid him, he would leave me there, in the middle of nowhere, penniless and without a single possession.

He didn't have a weapon. I think he was expecting me to become afraid and do everything he asked. But I wasn't afraid. I was angry. So I refused.

I didn't even look human to him, just rich and white.

I wondered if I would ever see my family again. Suddenly, I realized how much I was going to miss them. Did they even know that I loved them?

The things I would leave behind flashed through my mind: the holidays I would miss, the warmth my house has when people are there.

I would die here, in this foreign place, of starvation, walking lost and directionless without knowing which way led back to people, back to survival.

I longed for the lights of the city.

I suddenly felt sad about how far I was from home.

While I was adamantly refusing to comply with his demands, I was thinking of the positive side of being left for dead—maybe by having no material possessions, I'd become more enlightened in my last days alive spent wandering the Earth.

I doubt the validity of that argument now, but I suppose you have to grab onto whatever you can when you're in a situation like that.

He didn't leave me for dead, though. I injected anger into my voice and demanded to know if he had ever really intended to take me to the airport, and he flinched and laughed, then started the car and drove on.

Later, I would think this was impressive, because everyone assumes that I'm a passive person, and I've tended to think so, too. But that was one of those rare moments when you surprise yourself, or maybe when you find out who you really are.

For a long time after that, I was angry.

It was anger that had saved me. But anger is a sword with two edges. It became the instrument of my destruction when I could not let go of it.

When I got back from India, I didn't want to talk to anyone. I didn't want to see anyone. I didn't want to think about India or talk about India. I lost contact with almost everyone I knew.

He had shattered my belief that humans were essentially good. That was why I was angry.

I could not exist without that belief—it was the foundation of me, the point where I began and the point where I ended.

Clearly, there was only one thing to do. I dissected him in my mind until I found the point where he could rob me, and maybe even leave me for dead, and still be good.

It wasn't a very bright point. It was murky and dark.

I lived there for a while after coming back from India.

Then one day, I looked at myself in the mirror and saw someone else. That was when I decided I had lived too long in my anger. The time had come to find the way that led back to people.

I was staring at a picture of Shiva when I emerged from the darkness. It was a print of Shiva as a hermaphrodite that I'd bought in a market in India for ten rupees. After I returned to myself, I was surprised to notice for the first time that Shiva had a quiet smile on his face.

I'd never liked the picture much before, because I'd always thought that Shiva looked too severe in it.

I stared at Shiva for a long time after that.

And then I remembered India.

—Alexis Swan





King's College, Cambridge, England Jamie Agnello



Sniper Tower in (London)Derry, Northern Ireland Brian Wills

Reflections II

Now and Then

“Why did the chicken cross the road?” Almost every American child, by the time they reach kindergarten, can confidently answer: “To get to the other side!” This riddle hasn’t crossed my mind in years, but as I whizzed along a dusty Vietnamese road on a rickety motorbike one Sunday last November, it suddenly flashed through my consciousness: we were about to hit a chicken!

Swerving to avoid the kill, my friend Hien just laughed at my startled gasp of alarm. Never before in my Chicken McNugget existence had I ever considered places in the world where chickens actually do cross roads to get to the other side!

But as I sat down to lunch with the four members of Hien’s family on the bed that served as their kitchen table, the reality was laid right before my very eyes: in honor of me, their exciting foreign guest, the Nguyen family had killed their prize chicken! Feathers and other remnants of the kill could be seen outside, and the tough meat, skin, and bones stared up at me in little carefully prepared pieces. My stomach churning, I looked into the face of Hien’s kind, eager-to-please mother, flashed a smile, and dug in.

“*Rat ngon*,” I said, rubbing my stomach and feebly trying to convey that I found this special feast to be very, very tasty. I hope that my theatrics counteracted the miniscule amount of food I consumed, and the involuntary expressions that crossed my face as I ate it. Whether they bought my act or not, it seemed that the Nguyens found me to be quite entertaining. “Can you believe this crazy American?” they seemed to be chattering as they watched me fumble with my chopsticks and unsuccessfully attempt to cram my inflexible body into a cross-legged-position on the bed with the rest of them. I good-naturedly tried to grin and ignore the incomprehensible foreign words that swirled around me, the

uncomfortable tingling sensation of my limbs falling asleep, and the chicken that was churning around in my stomach. “What on earth am I *doing* here?”, I said to myself.

Well, I was *doing* diversity, adventure and self-discovery. I went to Vietnam looking for a semester of new experiences - and I certainly found them. I encountered poverty that wrung my heart to the core, I continually saw my life flashing before my eyes as I traveled, and I experienced homesickness on a previously unfathomable level. I acquired a number of unidentifiable red bumps on my skin, I peed in places that most Americans wouldn't classify as bathrooms, and I learned that the sensible way of crossing the street was to walk directly into a line of streaming traffic and not stop. Overwhelmed and frightened though I often was, I was determined to make something of my three months in this country.

In this adventurous spirit, I had set out a month ago before this November day with the courageous goal of independently exploring the city of Hanoi that had been my home for a month. Rising with the sun and smog one Saturday morning, I boarded bus 24. Lurching through the city, packed among sweaty Vietnamese bodies, I was quite eager to get off the bus when we reached the stop for the Vietnam Museum of Ethnography.

Bursting out of the bus doors, I looked around to find... a hot smelly street that looked exactly like every other street in Hanoi! There were no museum-esque buildings in sight, no English-speaking street vendors, no nice cafes to which I could retreat and escape the staring eyes and pointing fingers. Not knowing what to do, I just stood on the street corner, turning my map around and around in an attempt to project a sense of knowledge and control I didn't feel. Crying inside, I couldn't help but think about the paved sidewalks, organized roadways, smooth car rides, and familiar destinations that would have characterized my travels back at home. Here I was just utterly alone, so far from everything and everyone that I had always known, in a place that no one from home could ever even possibly imagine.

And then, in the midst of my street-side pity party, along came Hien, a girl who single-handedly restored my faith in the generous hearts of the Vietnamese people and provided complete justification for my decision to go live in this far-away land.

“Are you lost?” she asked as she pulled over on her rickety bicycle.

“You speak English!” I had just been handed a winning lottery ticket. Not only did Hien understand and know where the museum was, but she offered to pedal me there herself if I’d climb on the back of her bicycle.

Now, I shouldn’t get too romantic about all this—the metal bars of her creaking bicycle “passenger seat” provided the single most uncomfortable traveling experience of my entire life. It is no easy feat to suspend one’s feet in the air while one’s butt is crushing into the metal rods of a “seat.” It even made the motorbike taxis look attractive! Eventually, though, we made it, and Hien accepted my offer to buy her an admission ticket. As we toured the museum, we talked and shared stories, experiences, and some very intimate details of our lives. Divulging everything from boyfriend stories to family secrets, our day continued as we went from the museum to Hien’s “flat” (once again, riding that damn bicycle!). This small, dingy room, though quite nice by Vietnamese college-student standards, would make an American college dorm room look like a luxury suite in comparison. After talking more and meeting her friends and neighbors, we exchanged home and e-mail addresses, and Hien put me back on the bus with explicit directions to my dorm, promising to contact me soon and take me to visit her home village.

Hien made good on that promise—and that’s how I found myself sitting on her family’s mattressless bed being served a feast of freshly killed chicken. This was a visit to remember—for Hien’s family and village, as well as for myself. What I wasn’t prepared for, as Hien and I took the long bus and motorbike trip from urban Hanoi to her rural home village, was that Hien’s village was a military base, and her parents were Vietnamese soldiers. I think that I was the first non-enemy American that many of these people had ever met, and they greeted me with remarkable warmth. Except a few misspelled signs forbidding entrance into “No Stress Passing” zones (minor miscommunications across the language barrier provided me with an endless source of amusement throughout the semester), the village was an incredibly friendly and welcoming place. The main comment everyone seemed to have was, “American, huh? You rich, we poor.”

To this I would feebly reply, "Oh no, you're not poor!" This was a ridiculous comment to make in the face of such blatant economic disparity; these people were indeed very poor. Being in the military is the primary occupation for those who have little money and no other employment options, and the village's standard of living reflected this lower-class status. While Hien's family wasn't destitute, I was overcome when I saw the bare gray concrete two-room crumbling shack that was her home. "The entire contents of this family's material belongings could fit into my single bedroom at home," I thought. But sparse though it was, the Nguyens took great pride in their home: the traditional Vietnamese ancestor altar was prominently displayed, and more contemporary decorations like her brother's Harry Potter poster hung proudly on the walls.

And there was love in this house. As I was welcomed into this family circle, I could feel the love among its members that I had so dearly missed in the months that I'd been away from my home. I felt it emanating most strongly from Hien's mother as she prepared the feast, chatted away at me, grasped my arm. While comforted by this familiar warmth, I was also struck by something about this family's love that differed from my own: their love had a quality of determined fortitude that my own family had never been forced to develop. Theirs was a strong, courageous, resilient love that had fought to survive troubled times and was prepared to hold its ground in an uncertain future.

Hien's parents' love was prepared to battle with forces in the ambivalent future as their daughter had been accepted to university in Hanoi and was living in a city environment that was incredibly foreign and frightening to them; as people from the rural countryside, they knew very little of urban life. An even more frightening future lay before their son, a nineteen-year-old who was to leave the week after my visit to do industrial work in Taiwan for seven years so he could earn some money to send home. The fates of both these children were insecure and held many frightening possibilities, and their parents' love had to be tough in the face of this fear.

The roots of this resilient love, I discovered, sprang from the difficult lives that Hien's parents had led, experiences that I can't even imagine living through. They had both fought in the

war, lost their loved ones, and survived the years of extreme economic hardship that followed. As the day progressed, Hien translated her mother's story for me. When Hien's mother was four years old, she was out playing in the field when an American bomb hit her home, killing her parents and all but one of her siblings. She was too young to remember her parents, but she will never forget the day that they died. "A horrible, horrible day," she shook her head and cried, softly weeping for the family she never knew, and the orphaned, war-torn years that followed their deaths. "War is a terrible, terrible thing."

"I can't even imagine a life of such heartache and hardship," I thought, amazed that this woman had welcomed me so enthusiastically and warmly into her home. I have never met a more vehement critic of President Bush (some communication breaks through the barriers of language!), but she didn't carry this animosity over to include me. I was relieved by her ability to recognize me for the empathetic, slightly homesick girl that I was, resisting the prejudicial urges that characterize so many cross-cultural encounters.

We were reaching out and embracing diversity in a monumental way that day. While stomaching that chicken was a difficult task for me, I'm sure that it was even more of a leap for Hien's mother to invite this American girl into her home. And yet, for an experience so ideologically grand, it was really quite simple. It was eating chicken and drinking tea and walking through rice paddies. It was glimpsing into another world and finding threads of common humanity. It was a moment in time when the events that happened back "then" became secondary to the connections that we were forming "now."

As the day wore on, it came time for the customary Vietnamese afternoon nap. I never imagined that I would feel comfortable enough to fall asleep beside Hien on the hard mattress-less bed board upon which we had just eaten lunch. But surprisingly, I entered a restful slumber, peacefully dozing off amidst the sounds of her father watching soccer on TV, her mother chatting with the neighbors, the birds chirping and the chickens clucking outside. As I gradually awoke, I lay still and just stared at the gray concrete wall, trying to take in the fact that real people live their lives like this, and that I was actually there sharing that life with them at that moment.

That was quite a while ago now. I have long since returned to the box of my normal, comfortable, familiar life - a place where chickens stay safely in pens and KFC take-out containers. When I think back on my adventures with Hien, the memories of “then” cast a fresh perspective on my trivial concerns of “now.” Having been in a place that is so far removed from the realm of reality that I typically call “life,” I can better appreciate how my joys and concerns and dreams and routines and problems are not the whole world. The life I live is not the only reality that can, or should, exist.

Somewhere out there is a little village where people have never heard of computer viruses or fifteen-page paper assignments or scheduling meetings or counting calories. Somewhere out there, people are recovering from wars and sending their children off to foreign sweatshops. Somewhere out there, people are trusting in love to weather them through tumultuous storms. Somewhere out there, chickens are crossing roads, just to get to the other side.

—Carolyn Smith

“Carpooling” in Vietnam Sarah McGowan



Verse and Vision VII

It's Not All Gone

It's not all gone. But does it end here? Where did you start? I can't see. But there is nothing I can do about it. What about it? I could cry; I did that. I could laugh; I did that too. I waited and I waited for so long, too long. The Inevitable showed up on my doorstep quicker than I wanted her to. I don't need her. I don't need them. I don't need anything or anybody else's. It only took a couple of days to give me back my sanity. But it doesn't bother me.

It does.

It always will.

What did you say a memory was? Something you look at? Or read? Or sing? Or dance? Or do you *remember* a memory? I want to and I should remember memories. I did cry; I laughed too.

Amazing. *Legal. Que legal menina Ibirapuera.* It's coming back to me. On Avenida Paulista. On the corner of Brigadeiro. Sometimes it's not easy, yet not difficult either. I do remember memories. Without any substantial help. It's all in my head. Walking "Edu Chaves", don't be late. Trianon-Masp, just another stop to get me to where I'm going. Baby Frutas, just another sign I'm home.

I will remember memories because I don't need frames or material or something right in front of me to hold; I need me. I need talk. And I will cry. I will laugh.

It's all in my head.

But it's written in my heart.

—Kacy Cerasoli



Zia Sinfina, Italy Christy Sutton

the Aleph

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Thomas D'Agostino and Doug Reilly, Editors
Sarah Kenney-Helfrich, Assistant Editor and Layouts
Sharon Walsh, Assistant Editor
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To submit your work for the next issue of *The Aleph*, please contact the Editors at the address below.

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THE HOBART AND WILLIAM SMITH COLLEGES AND
UNION COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP FOR GLOBAL EDUCATION

Thomas D'Agostino, Executive Director
Doug Reilly, Assistant Director
Trinity Hall, 3rd Floor
Hobart and William Smith Colleges
Geneva, New York 14456
(315) 781-3788 pge@hws.edu

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