



HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

Apogee Magazine

Spring Two Thousand and Seventeen



Benita VanWinkle
Lyric Theatre Waycross

po·et·ry

Words by Holly Gambrell

IF YOU DON'T
GET IT,
YOU'VE GOT IT.

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

Department of English
Norcross 211
High Point University
One University Parkway
High Point, North Carolina
USA 27268
apogee@highpoint.edu

FEATURED ARTIST

Benita VanWinkle

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Crisscrossing the United States, searching back roads and farming communities and occasional metropolitan areas, hometown movie theaters built before 1965 have been my passionate pursuit for over 30 years. This project is about preserving a collective community memory, celebrating the iconic fantasy palace that movie theaters were for small towns everywhere. Fall of 2013 brought the end of the analog movie film distribution as it had been known for over 90 years, ushering in the digital age, and with it the closing of the few small town theaters still remaining. With over 400 theaters in the collection, I am now pursuing the publication of this series entitled "Please Remain Standing." The title is a nod of recognition to my hometown theater in which the manager always announced "Please remain standing for our national anthem" before every show, turning on the house lights if a patron did not comply.



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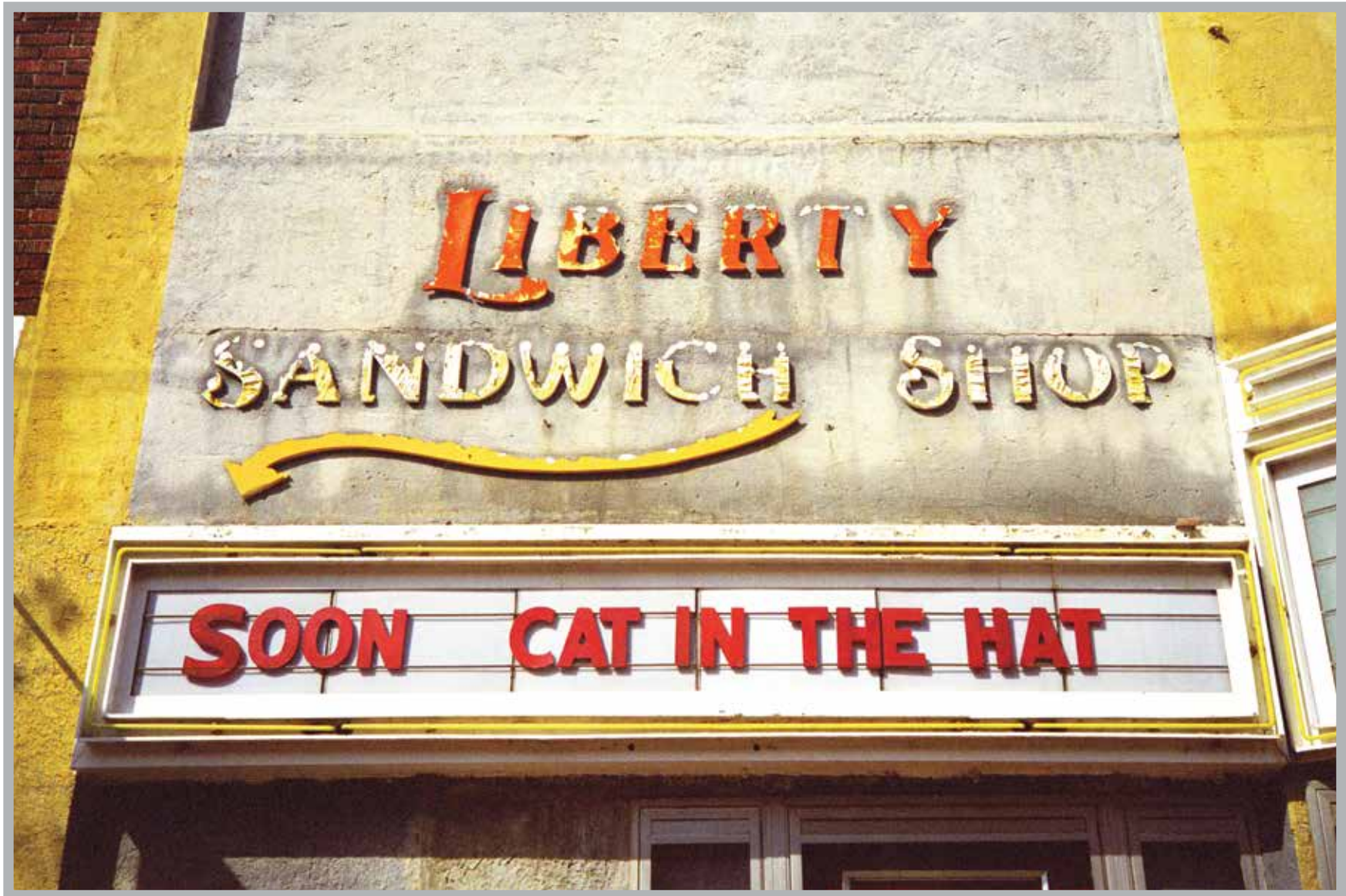
Apogee Magazine

apogee@highpoint.edu

Include a cover letter

with a brief 2-3 sentence biography.

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Benita VanWinkle
Liberty Wilkesboro

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Annie Redovian
Untitled

Reading *Nature's* Gospel

Words by Emmitt Kusrow



Kelly Molinario
Cabbage

There are days when a light mist settles over sleepy towns, somewhere in the backwoods of America. Do the mountains, in their slumber, exude it as fumes from the dark recesses of their cavernous cores? The small humans, small in number and in stature, do not question from where the mist comes. I am alone in my asking. It is damp, like the tears that grace the cheeks of a freshly-widowed spinster, and tastes of earth and decay. Deep within the forests it pours from pores in the wet soil, carrying with it the souls of creatures long dead, the remnants of their corpses distilling into humus that coats the rich dirt and leaves. Leaves of all sizes and smells, they fall every autumn like a blanket for the ground, the lifeless forms lying limply under my stride. I must return to this place, to my ancestral heritage, to find the muse that lurks in hollowed stumps, the nooks among roots and the corners behind piled stones. Are these stone effigies the graves of our past, which we choose to forget and bury with the memories we do not cherish? Here, I will sit. Here, I will write. Here, I will question.

The asphalt thoroughfares that crisscross town in blackened veins—modernity ripping apart history to make way for convenience—give me no comfort, put no determination in my step. Like the dream they hope to guide us to they are dead, still and unchanging. Why follow a road that leads to nowhere but empty promises? The aura of this place is tired and disheveled, all the low-lying buildings weighed down by the expectations of one hundred years, sagging further into their foundations with each passing month as if to say, “I want to sink back into the ground if only to sleep, just for a little while.” As we all do. On Sundays every door is closed, every window blinded, each lock secured and waiting for the return of its key; there is only quiet floating in

the air of these streets that seldom bustle. One gate yet lies open to visitors, leading solemnly to the land of the dead, rows upon rows of headstones demarcating those who were loved and where they lie, or used to lie before the earth swallowed their decomposing forms and fed them to its children, nourishment for the things that squirm and crawl in the darkness beneath the surface. We say such places are hallowed, waiting patiently beside a crumpled church for the day when another congregate ceases to draw breath, and thus we open its maw to lower in its next meal.

There is renewal in the foggy visage of such days, and, lost in the milky white clouds that obscure my sight I wander, hiding myself in the forest away from the streets of this downtrodden monument to the folly of man. On such days seemingly only silence resounds in waves around me; there is no birdsong nor rushing brook nor rustling leaves of fleeing creatures yet unseen. Wildflowers here have risen and fallen year after year with the chill of approaching winter, petals dropped and stems collapsed, fading into brown as the days progress only to have their offspring rise once more, towering above the dead figures of their parents like children blessed and unknowing of their fate. I look to the craggy peaks upon the horizon, sitting dormant like beasts in hibernation, towering above the smallness of this place, offering my stony heart as tribute to their majesty. There is no thought in my ambling step, I move on instinct alone, finally finding myself knelt in the mossy carpeting of this ancient museum of living obelisks, nature's testimony to the glory of the sun. I am sobbing into detritus held by the fistful, crying out for answers lost in the rings of a toppled tree. I cannot read the writing of my mother, her arcane language indecipherable to my mortal eyes and ears yet I long to comprehend the messages she has written here.

Our god does not live in those crumpled churches, stained light filtering in among the oft-used pews, their dark wood creaking like the bones of the elderly who occupy them. In somber tones the preacher, the father, the gatekeeper reads the supposed word from a dusty tome, slow and metered with his prayer, calling upon such a god to enter the hearts of the believers, and the believers cry "Amen!" They believe a belief that, intangible, can ease no suffering, nor grant any wish. The truth that we crave, to which we are addicted with our entire being, lies not in the words of a god or a preacher but in the life that we hail from and are daily a part of: the life of this globe, so verdant and nurturing to all that walk upon its face, hurling its way through the galaxy in spirals around a burning star; the scorching light of our solar center baking the yeast of creation and giving rise to the bread of existence. A chemistry is present between the molecules which support our reality, its reactions constant and shifting, in the water we drink and the air we breathe and the flesh we eat. There is an ingrained desire to forget from whence we came so that the fashion in which we elevate ourselves over our brothers and mothers can be justified, but it is not deniable; the Earth is our Earth, it is our creator and the giver of life, regardless if fate lies in the hands of some omniscient being. Just as a mist settles over this sleepy town in the backwoods of America so it settles over the vision of every person like them, oblivious and unwilling to embrace our living, growing ancestry. Yet if they listened with more than their ears and exposed the cavities of their chests to the hum of the earth and all that surrounds them— perhaps, then, the mist would clear.



Lex Poolos, *Untitled*



Words by
Holly Gambrell

I want to be known

so deeply that you can
tell what I'm
feeling just by looking
at the back of my head

That you can feel
my silent breath
pulled in across
the noisy room

I want to be known

so deeply that you can
sense my nose twitch
in the dark lying
asleep next to me

That you can feel
my ears burn under
my hair when I
crave you most

I want to be known
and I want to know

I Don't Have The Answers

Words by Holly Gambrell



Kacey Lee, *Untitled*

You say you've given
me everything.

You don't understand.
I don't know how to explain.

You're nice.
You're so fucking nice.

And all my friends say
you're perfect

but perfection
was never my want.

It's certainly not
my need.

Graves and Grays

Words by Holly Gambrell

you're speaking at
the eulogy
paint ripped
on a cloudy day

layer on another
coat of asbestos to
cover up the grief

hoping the tribute resembles
the dead relative
you have before you

for god's sake
and gods' sakes
you drank crown royal
her favorite
before arriving

cried through the burn
walked to the pulpit
you can't remember
which words to say



Kacey Lee, *Untitled*



Self destruct

Words by
Holly Gambrell

Toothbrush forgotten
and dishes in the sink.

Clothes damp
craving the heat.

She left the stovetop
on by mistake.

Subconscious hopes
it'll burn the house down.

Engulf her body
into combustion.

Burn her restless
mind to a crisp.

Maybe then she
can get some relief.



Taylor Romano
Graves and Grays

PILLOW

Words by Holly Gambrell

TALK

Each of my ribs
traced with his
calloused index finger
back and forth
side to side
my breath raising
my bones slightly

“Do you think it’s true?
Did Adam have one
less rib than Eve?”
A question I know
he doesn’t want
me to answer

It’s times like these
I know the sex was
really good
He only talks theology
when he’s satisfied

Like an anti-Christ
mind on God only
after temptation
reigns free

Richard Gengel, *Uphill battle*





French Braid

Words by Holly Gambrell

your fingers wrap
her strands into three
her hair is your
hair she is your
daughter you made

the braid in your
mother and
your mother's
mother's way
the silk hair

a solar eclipse
spinning the minuscule
world you occupy
providing your
horizon

He Said, She Said



Words by Holly Gambrell

What's it like to be a girl
he asked
Really bad cramps
once a month
she replied

What's it like to be a boy
I don't know
years of voice cracks
and growing taller
he replied

They each laugh politely

I guess
the questions
weren't really
about biology after all



Tolerants

Words by Holly Gambrell

Isn't it funny
how people,

self-proclaimed
tolerants,

are the ones
who shut

(you) down
whenever your

views dis
-align?

The Flock

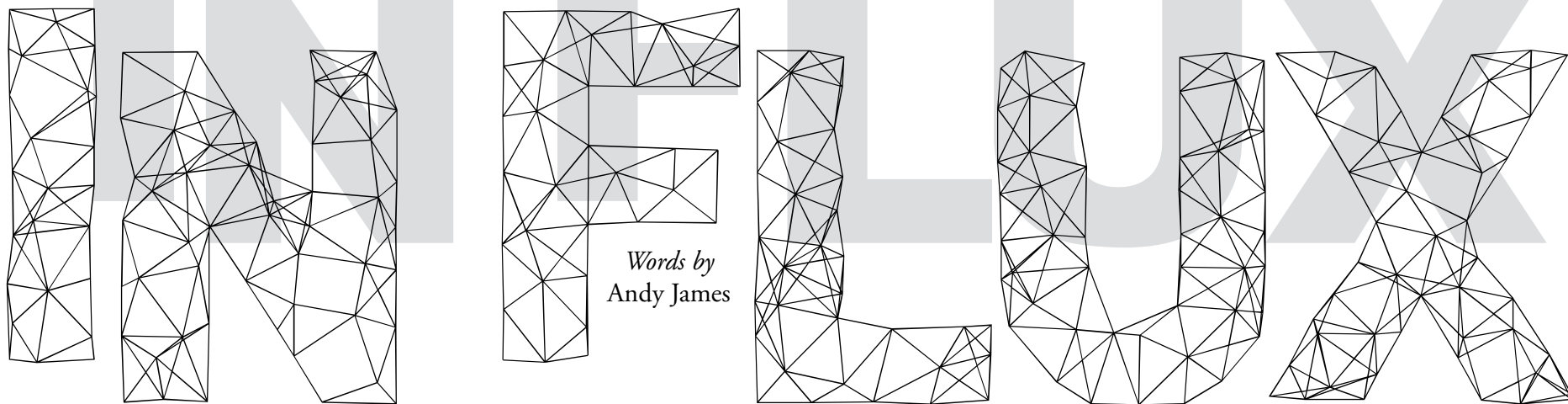


Words by Andy James

They fly in secret currents high above,
each body sensing where they will go next.
They flow and press, one each, against the whole
and each bird blooming one with all the rest.

In time, they lose their sense to tell apart
themselves from those they come to know so well.
Till no bird can be said to be but one
and not the same, but multiplicity.

Taylor Romano
Untitled



An enormous black cube.

A cylinder removed from its body,
from one face to its opposite.

Effortlessly floating inside,
a small black disk with its own hole.

Swinging in and out
for eternity.



Benita VanWinkle
Yard Light Oak Hill



Benita VanWinkle, *Yancey Theatre Burnsville NC*

DESIRING BODIES

Words by Andy James

endless languid breath
the bare and brutal ejaculate of
consumption
consuming and proliferating desire

a pile of writhing bodies
inhaling and
exhaling and
everywhere organisms pleading

yes

yes

fill me up

until there is no one left
to haul my ashes

THE DECISION

Words by Andy James

She hates all things and so
she cannot be

anything seriously

to be nothing
is to leave
room to become something
new

but for her
to be is to be
a solid someone else for yourself

she repeats
To be is not to be



Benita VanWinkle, *Earle Theatre*



Kooi b i t i o t o

Words by Andy James

Am I indecisive?

My body doesn't follow my mind.
I shiver when I start to feel warm.

Did you know the wind
moves the clouds?

I used to know how to ride a bike.

Can you imagine living
from 1879 to 1964?
That's like two entirely
different worlds.

Like time is not even a thing
and I'm not even a thing.



Benita VanWinkle, *Buffalo in a boat*

Misplaced

Words by Andy James

And what's to become of the excess,
the superfluous,
the unwanted and unnamable?
A shortage of categories,
an overflowing of one thing into the next.

The dust we try
to sweep
out.

The man without a mind
that we can't remember
or forgive.

DOLOS AND PLUTOS

Words by Andy James

On Oceanus
free with the moorings hung
lazy, as if we were to be never
moored again.

We sat out on the deck
and talked about the days
when we rowed with our gleaming white
and black uniforms.

Good times indeed,
but we knew that things had to change.

Some things did
“And thankfully some things didn’t,” I laughed
as we sailed our yachts to Lethe.



Benita Van Winkle, *Lido Theatre Newport Beach CA*



A SOCIETY OF 'EXPERTS'

Words by Andy James

What has been said is confirmed by the fact that while young men become geometricians and mathematicians and wise in matters like these, it is thought that a young man of practical wisdom cannot be found. The cause is that such wisdom is concerned not only with universals but with particulars, which become familiar from experience, but a young man has no experience, for it is length of time that gives experience; indeed one might ask this question too, why a boy may become a mathematician, but not a philosopher or a physicist. It is because the objects of mathematics exist by abstraction, while the first principles of these other subjects come from experience, and because young men have no conviction about the latter but merely use the proper language, while the essence of mathematical objects is plain enough to them?

QUIZ 2 - BLZ420 - SECTION 03

Words by Andy James

Name: _____

Multiple Choice: Read each question carefully and choose the best answer. [2 points each]

1. Which of the following candidates best embodies the reactionary impulses toward a repressive political climate?
 - A. Donald Trump
 - B. Jill Stein
 - C. Gary Johnson
2. Which of the following candidates best embodies the direction that millennials think our country should be heading in?
 - A. Hillary Clinton
 - B. Bernie Sanders
3. Which of the following candidates is the sensible choice for president?
 - A. Hillary Clinton

Short Answer: Answer each of the following questions thoroughly. [5 points each]

1. How has the internet impacted the world as a whole?

2. What impact do internet structures (upvoting/downvoting, likes, hyperlinks, pages) have on thought and language?

3. What are the invisible ways that thought is censored on the internet?
(Your answer to question two may be useful here.)

Essay: Choose one of the following essays to complete. (Good answers usually involve writing three or four well thought out sentences.) [10 points]

A. Describe the history of western civilization from ancient Greece to the present day.

B. Describe (in detail) the various unconscious forces that affect your every day life.
(For this question, try to think of things that you couldn't possibly be aware of.)



Cfuxffo bjs boe qpfusz

Words by Andy James

This poem is encrypted using the Caesar cipher method named after Julius Caesar who was said to have used this method to encrypt military information. The exact method used here was said to have been used by his nephew, Augustus. It involves replacing each letter of the poem to be encrypted with the next letter in the alphabet. Decryption involves simply reversing the process by replacing each letter of the encrypted poem with the letter preceding it in the alphabet.

Kvtu pof spx up uif sjhiu,
Pof spx up ejtsvqu,
uif bjs cfuxffo zpvs gbdf boe njof,
cfuxffo bjs boe qpfusz.

Lonely Poem

Words by Andy James

The following poem has been encrypted using the “poem code” method used briefly in World War II by the Special Operations Executive, a secret British organization. The poem code method uses a pre-arranged poem known by both the sender and receiver of the message as the key. The exact method used to encrypt this one is outlined in a blog post by Cornell statistics professor, William M. Briggs. The source poem used to encrypt the message is the unencrypted version of the previous poem “Cfuxffo bjs boe qpfusz.” The poem key is these five words from the poem in their unencrypted form: “up ejtsvqu uif bjs spx.” Decrypting the following message using that key will yield a URL link to the poem titled, “Lonely Poem.”

iap/c ltnei: rdllc- w/etg mwmnn todee
peetk zhirl/ ./ul bnywo oho/

Link to William Briggs blog post:
<http://wmbriggs.com/post/1001/>

Lonely Poem

Words by Andy James

What difference is there
between a poem never read and
a poem never written?

It can only be that
the poem never read
has at least been disclosed
to its author.

But what use is a lonely poem
read only by its author?
How can that poem move in the world,
affect it?

For the lonely poem,
it's only through the guilt and
debt accrued by its secrecy,
that the author can seek justice
for all the other lonely poems.

public static void main {

Words by Andy James

```
                priv
int  er {change}          break;
price/                  esc;
less  $know

                ::forces
market                (ng)
                ledge
run://    far.exe
system("pause");

}
}
```


Words by Andy James

リーブミーアローン

アイリアリヘイトマイジヨブ

エブリディーワーキング

ネバーエンディング

Words by Andy James

linger linger

linger linger linger linger

linger linger linger

linger linger linger

linger linger linger linger linger

linger

linger linger

linger linger linger

linger

linger

RENEWAL

Words by Logan King

Dust off your childhood desk
and empty the junk drawers full

of the shit you forgot to remember.
Adopt the three-legged table outside of

the crumpled house down the street
and nurse it like a three-legged dog

that hasn't eaten in a week.
Brush over the vulgar mustard

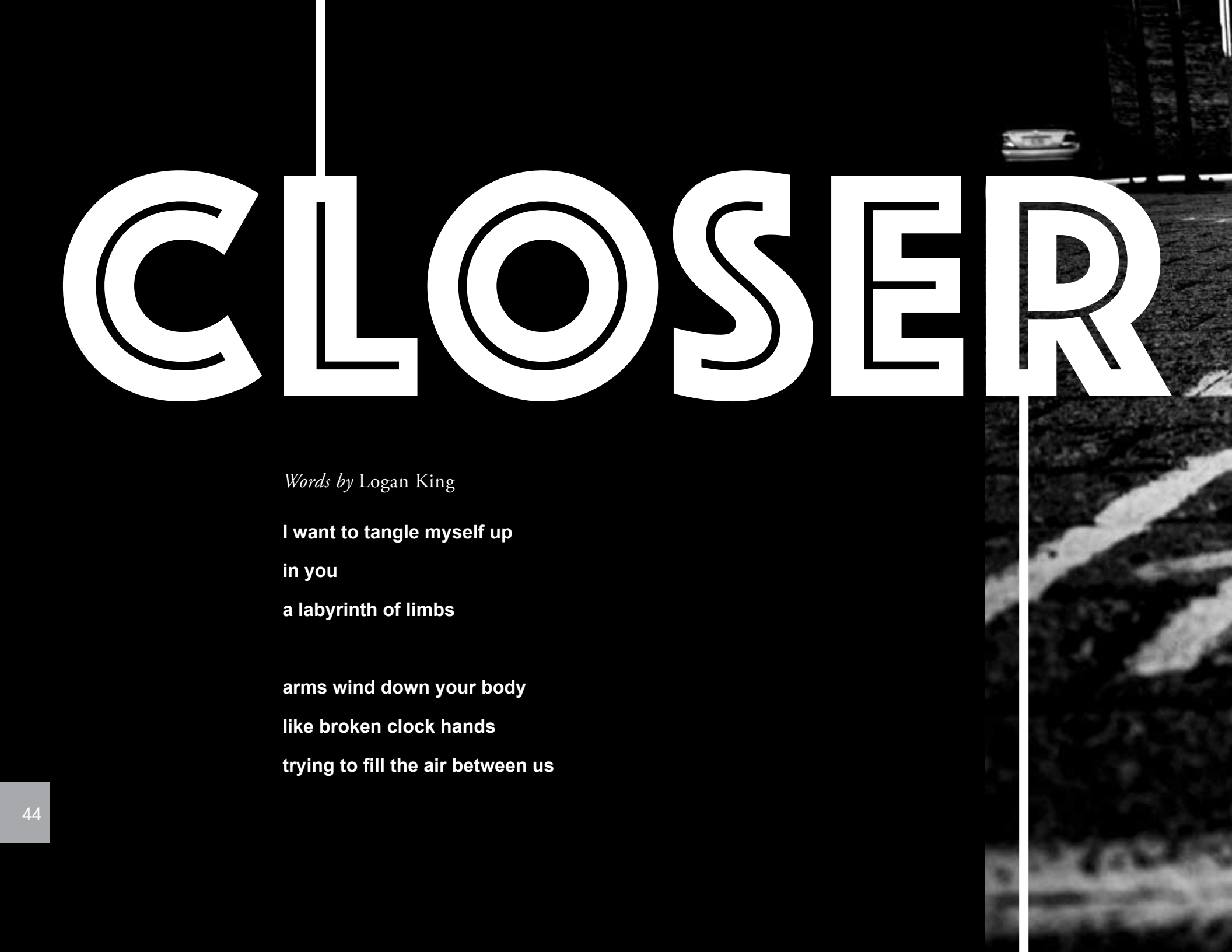
with a paint white enough to yellow your edgy teeth.
Take your useless hands and let the world

wrap your fingers.



Olivia Blandford
Barren

CLOSER



Words by Logan King

**I want to tangle myself up
in you
a labyrinth of limbs**

**arms wind down your body
like broken clock hands
trying to fill the air between us**



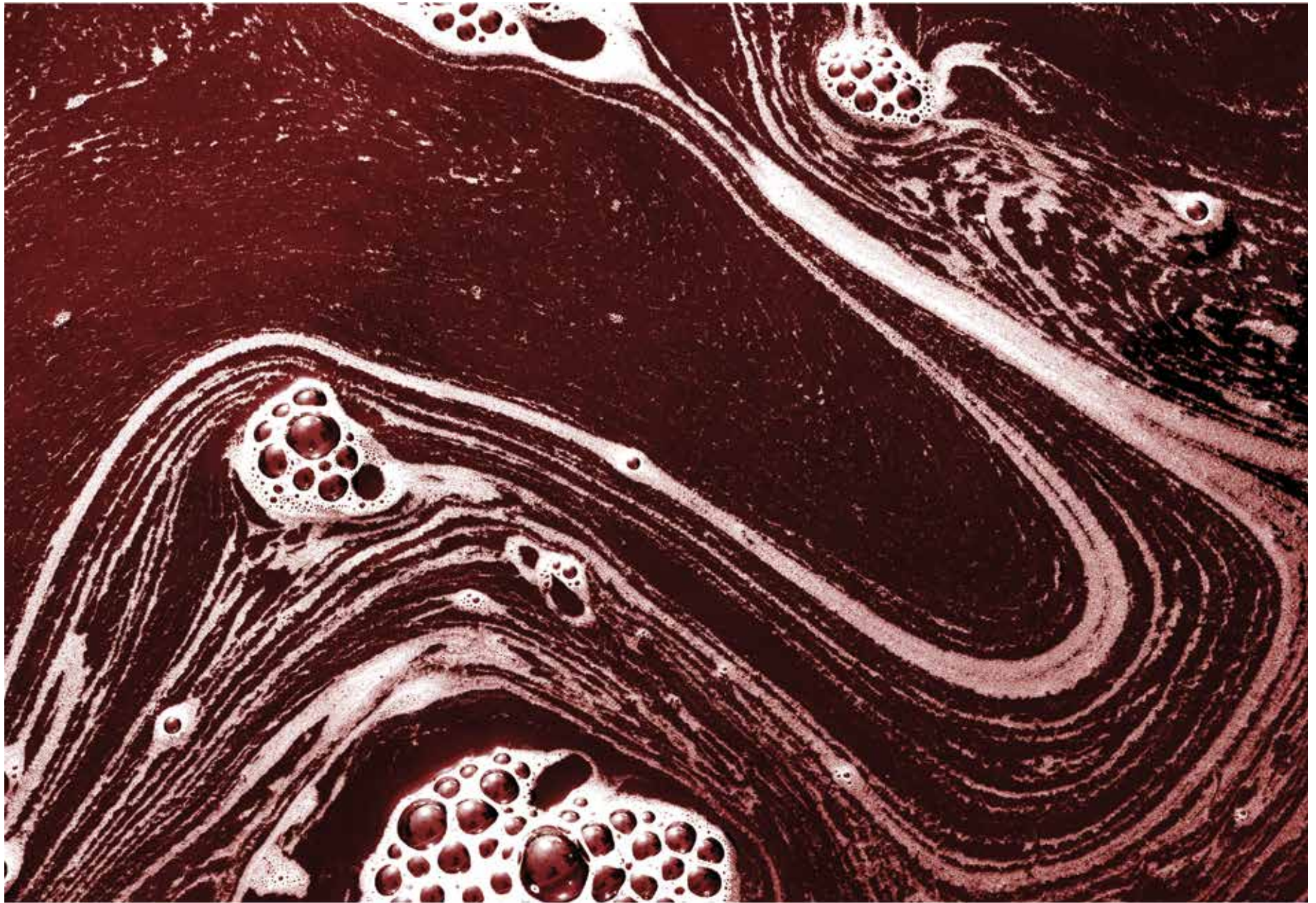
Drowning

Words by Logan King

Jump in,
murky water clings to my skin
icing veins over with a steel-toed
kick to the pit of my
core.

Alone in deep water
baited by my dirty fear
you pull me under
filling my lungs with nostalgia.
I breathe you in and let myself

sink.



Olivia Blandford, *Overflow*





SKELTON

Words by Logan King

you convinced me I was the key
each of my jagged edges bringing us closer together

what you didn't tell me
is that you had a spare whose
edges you also held in your fingers
turned over in the light
& pressed into

LOVE AND

Words by Logan King

DEATH

we anticipate love like
we anticipate death

we wait anxiously from afar
or let ourselves be blindsided

either way, we should have known
it was coming

Annie Redovian
Untitled





Benita VanWinkle
Fatigue 5c

Classical CONDITIONING

Words by Angelica Stabile

I've been conditioned
To your love
When the liquor
Hits my lips

Because every time
I drink
I'm missing you
And



THE NEXT TIME
COULD BE THE
LAST TIME

Words by Angelica Stabile

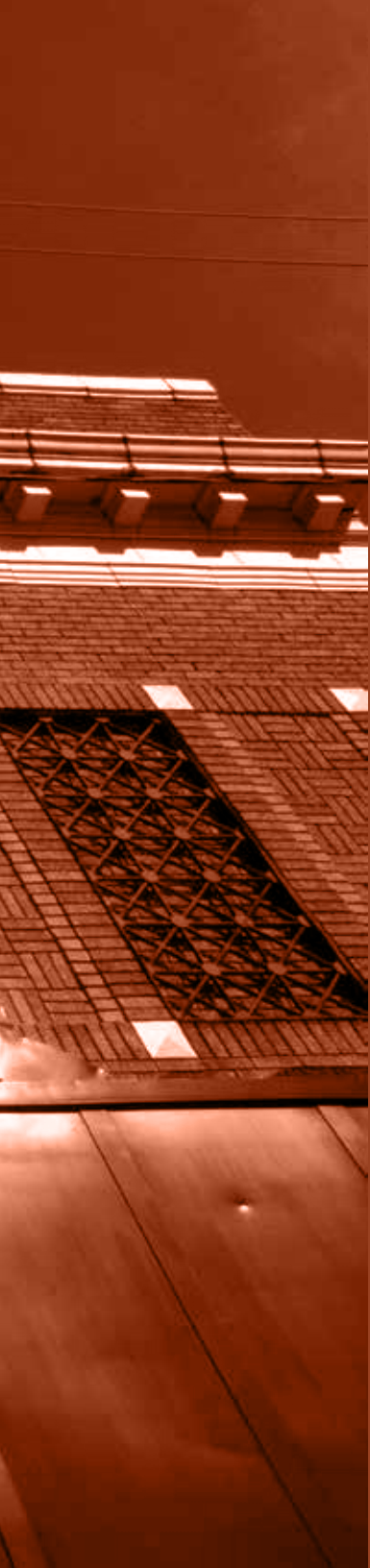
Take a breath in this moment's
shard of time and space and cotton
bedding. How in love you are with
this very instant — the motionless
acceptance of body heat. Remember
your infatuation with the universe,
the aligned stars, the eye of night,
the window-breeze, the thighs, the
hands, the lips lying next to you

because tomorrow you'll be praying
and pleading for one thousand more
moments like this. And no one kissed
a hooked pinky for even one more.

Benita VanWinkle
Liberty Showcase Theatre







Words by Angelica Stabile

Galaxies

I dreamt of you in purple parachutes
on Saturn's icy rings and spinning hoops

clutch red a star and swing the light to dim
the echoing of distant Seraphim

among the cotton eye in sips of blue
to wade in the clairvoyance of you.

What do I see in scintillating pools
without the rippled clouds in decibels

entranced, I may let all my freedoms loose
in purple parachutes.



Flush

Words by Angelica Stabile

You left him in Del Mar. Ripped him into ashes and sent him swimming down the sewage pipes of San Diego. When is nostalgia tortured? Perhaps when your mind consumes your whole being, unable to generate without disruption of a memory, the amber of sun-leaked windows debilitating your subconscious with a blistering reminder.

You lent him a week to come around the way you had fantasized he would. Every day inched by with the aggression and silence of feather pillow fights, striking the white noise of presence out of your skull, disassembling the loops of retrospection, pointing straight for the darkest lairs of under-the-bed monsters.

You've flushed him down the goddamn toilet and sent him off with a flip of the bird.



Dylan Houseworth
Untitled

Matthew

Words by Angelica Stabile

Not of the Gospel,
but a light, still.
A tall man, disposition
of silk, he and I, a kick
from the liquor.
He asks for me to sing
to him, to serenade a party of fifty,
unlatching my jaw
with verbal allure.
Let the notes wave in flushed August.
Tucked under the amber street lamp, his
eyes fixated on my lips.
A stranger of spontaneity,
infatuated with naked tonality.

TO THROW OUR ARMS

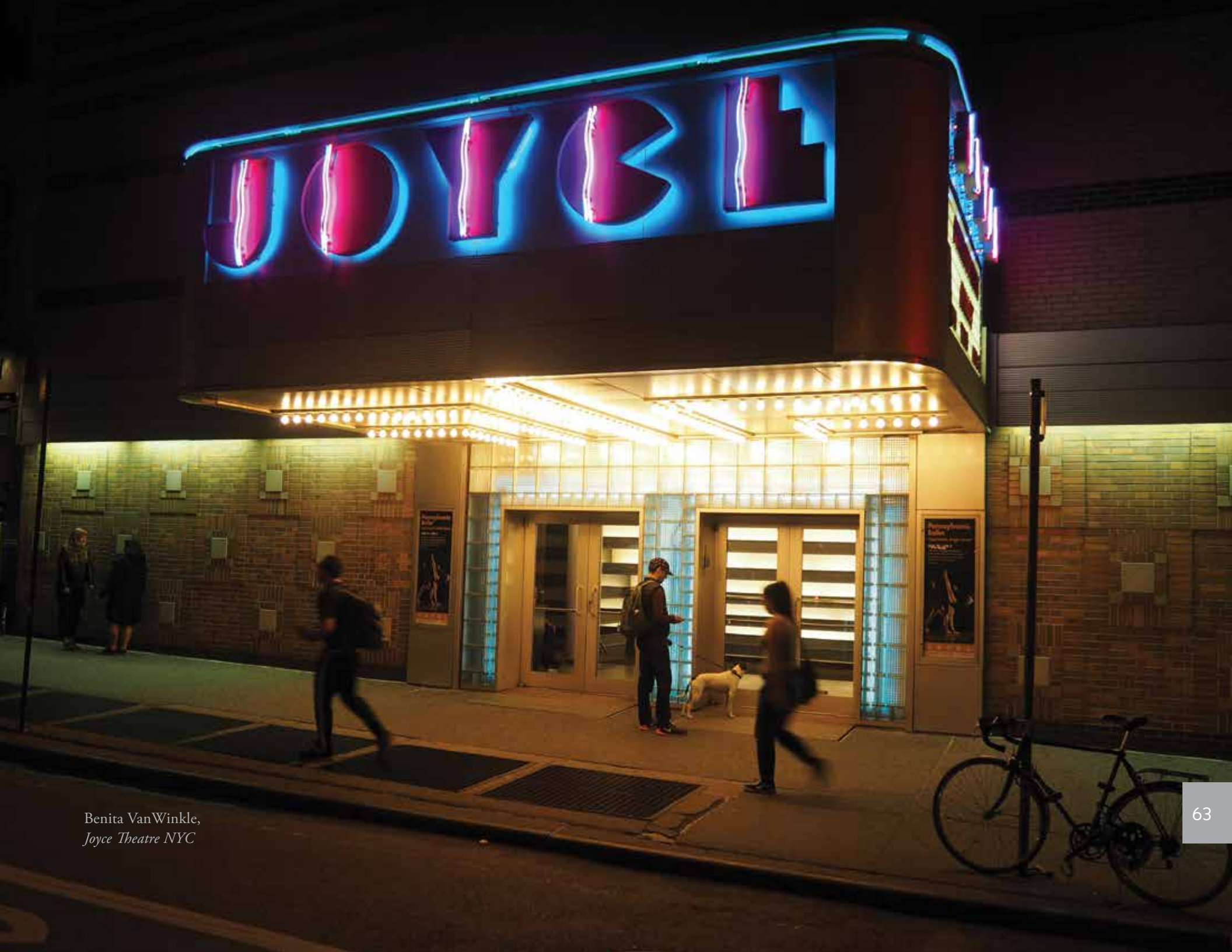
Words by Sam Truitt

To throw our arms
around a moment

throws our arms
around the dream

enveloping
the universe we

are the voice
of throbbing



Benita VanWinkle,
Joyce Theatre NYC

OUR LIVES FACE OR...

Words by Sam Truitt

Our lives face or
are the face of

a cliff we
awake on &

on climbing
out of space

like the blueprint
of a breath took

in at birth &
never let

know we don't
know we

really don't
know only

go



Benita VanWinkle
Carolina Greensboro



Benita VanWinkle, *Emerson Theatre*

JUST THIS

Words by
Sam Truitt

Just this
then then

to begin again
when nothing

is separate is
here at all

I want to know

THESE WORDS...

Words by Sam Truitt

These words
in lines are

placed the way
fire stares

thru their faces

—

branches

—

forests

—

worlds
of fire—fanning

darkness



HENRICO



CAPITAL OPERA RICHMOND PRESENTS
HMS PINAFORE
MARCH 8 & 9

Benita VanWinkle, *Henrico Highland Springs*



Benita VanWinkle, *Hippodrome Outside*

I know the name
of a man's mud

because I've held
his hand & hauled

his bucket & ate
& drank the crescent

moon of this life
taking hold of

nothing there the
last we breathe

Earth


I KNOW THE NAME

Words by Sam Truitt



Benita VanWinkle, *Edison Theatre*

UNDER CLOUDS



Words by
Prageeta Sharma

The only thing I can find to do
is mourn my husband like a teenager,
downcast, filled with careless intention,
crying along a filament of sound
in my Converse high-tops, which I believe he,
if he could really see me, would love.

I travel to Seattle, now
a string of private tree-lined vistas,
and forecasts of intermittent, unexpected
outbursts and splatterings
of rain streaking windows.

It was so clear when Dale was alive:
we had a jaunted and jumbled
happiness. We'd drive away from Missoula
with the mountains lost in our rearview mirror.
Now I am here by myself.
It's daunting and full of the solitude
of these smaller windows,
an ineffable Puget Sound.
I can understand how the poem can land
on its nothing, so the cloudless is somewhere
in a spirit that's vanishing on mute.

MOURNING

Words by Prageeta Sharma

The condo is a dusty library
of all the records he left behind that decorated
a previous life I had. This morning in bed,
“These are amazing,” revives me with the recognition
that after mourning, there are many mornings.
That can be amazing—looking out upon Seattle
and its trees. How they define us & signify our
determination. How Seattle, because its vagueness,
provokes us to re-define a squalor of feelings.
How to read “Some Trees” and see it in the windows.





Benita VanWinkle
Beach Theatre





ABIDE

Words by Prageeta Sharma

You have gone to get a haircut in Kirkland.
But, before you left, you rubbed my arms
to warm them, out of the blankets, with a dearness
that I thought I would never find. When you grow older
and I fret that you, too, will die, you will tell me that
I conflate the stars with tombs. I sang you Earth, Wind
& Fire's Reasons and we folded into the Delfonics
Didn't I Blow Your Mind, and I said you don't even know
you did. You are too modest to even think you could
because someone else once did it in a magnanimous way
and you know somewhere hidden we live now to solve
our soft hearts's problems, which come from the fallen places
where they are the raconteurs who died on us. They took up
the largesse of the art of death, but we don't care who had the better
lover, the better spouse, the kinder or more considerate one.
Now, we can just take this morning and stretch out a line of aporia,
an aphoristic single-sided horizon of trees, buildings, and sky.



Stuck

Words by Taylor Tedford

The glimmer of frost on the windshield
reminds me of the way our breath once fogged
even the mirrors.

And each house's lights shine with
faith strung across Christmas Eve,
perpetual entanglements.

My tea smells like your coffee
and I keep buying cream at the store.

I started listening to Mozart
and science fiction
anything that didn't come with
an echo of your fingers.

And it's crazy how mom's counter
and the click of the spoon and
her mumbling mixing with the sizzle
makes me feel like I'm back in
high school.



Kelly Moliniaro, *Love and Death*

Numb

Words by Taylor Tedford

Wade into the ocean,
slowly numb your toes
your knees
your hips.

Retrain
your body
to feel.

It takes a moment
to adjust

to the rhythm of a song
to blinding sun
to news of death
and marriage.

To adoration.

Caught

Words by Taylor Tedford

A ninja signature
spoiled her lie

beneath sweaty toes
a blue camisole

reeks with the odor
of car sex cologne

lying on fresh sheets
stained mattress underneath

fucking carpet burn
from fucking on the floor

never used to have
a password on her phone

dark stains on your pillow
but you never drool

she bought new underwear
but didn't wear it for you

hair in the shower
the color isn't we

she never used to sleep
facing the heat.



Benita VanWinkle
Spring 5 2014







BUTTERFLIES

Words by Taylor Tedford

Lies fly like butterflies
retched from mouth ripe
with its spawn surprise

sewing patches on shirts
with the wrong colored thread

you get itchy when I mention
your bestfriend Ted

creating holes in a road
swerve and insist
you're following cones

stupid to bet on
a bear in a horse race

naïve to believe
in the power of belief.

Laniakēa

Words by Taylor Tedford



She said to me,
“Have you ever thought
about how each person
is their own entity?”

We orbit each other,
a million universes
endlessly.

All of the same organs
and neurons-
no exact replica,
operations testy
performing helplessly.

We look-
see only the faintest
vibrations
of the disaster
erupting another's core.

No One Mentions The Birds

Words by Bria Ballard

This man, like everyone else, has a set routine.

6:30am. Wake up.

6:33am. Stagger towards the bathroom.

6:37am. Get dressed. Today he will wear the gray suit with the blue tie.

6:45am. Go outside. Wave at the neighbors and get the newspaper.

7:00am. Make and eat breakfast. It was Thursday, so he gets to have a few strips of bacon with his eggs today. He always looks forward to Thursdays; he loves bacon and eggs.

7:34am. Read the newspaper. All good things, like always. Becca won the school's spelling bee. He heard about it yesterday when he bumped into both Becca and her mother Lauren at the grocery store. Wednesdays were a bit boring to him – that was when he ran all his errands. His most hated thing he had to do on Wednesdays was to grocery shop. He, Becca, and Lauren always saw each other in the produce section. She'd buy broccoli, celery, and carrots. He'd buy asparagus, tomatoes, and lettuce. Once, when Becca was younger and didn't know any better, she asked her mom why they always bought the same three vegetables. Lauren hushed her, but that was alright. Becca still had time to learn.

Demi Painter
Reading Nature's Gospel



Every once in awhile, though, he wonders what it would be like to buy something else...was that a bird's squawk, just now? No, he's just hearing things. Or was he? No one liked birds. No one really talks about them. No. Stay calm. Don't panic. He flips the page – a notice from the hospital says that a new baby will be born soon, making this town's population rise from 998 to 999. So close to hitting a thousand. He listens for the birds but hears nothing.

7:45am. Grab briefcase and walk to work. He'll seldom see a car, perhaps maybe one or two a year driven by a lost tourist. The local (and only) theater showcases films set in areas that have cars. Areas with superheroes, and places where disaster can strike at any given time, like earthquakes, tsunamis, or the walking dead. He still remembers the first film he's ever seen, when he was still just seven years old. It was a movie about aliens coming down to earth, circling it with their spaceships before destroying entire cities with their weapons. The spaceships were invincible to military weapons, and the aliens very nearly managed to wipe out all the humans off of planet earth. He was scared for weeks after that field trip, especially since he had been told that that film was a documentary of something that actually happened. Luckily, his mom broke her normal routine of putting him to his bed and let him sleep with her one night so she could chase away his nightmares. She also informed him that *Independence Day* wasn't a real movie, though he didn't believe her at the time. He remembered falling asleep in his mother's bed to birds chirping. At that time it was soothing, now it frightens him.

8:00am. He arrives to his office building.

10:15am. His boss talks about last night's high school football game. They won again, like always. How do they find other teams to play

against? This town is so, so secluded from everywhere else. He begins to ask but stops when he hears that bird again. In fact, everyone stops talking and briskly goes back to work. Don't acknowledge anything.

12pm. Lunch. Today was BLT day. He thinks about the PB&J sandwiches his mom used to make him. Once, she substituted the grape jelly for strawberry jam. It was delicious. He had eaten that PB&S sandwich while listening to birds chirping in his backyard. Today he eats his BLT in silence.

1pm. Go back to work.

1:34pm. Garrett gets a call. His wife is going into labor. He rushes out of the office. This change in routine is acceptable. People start guessing the baby's gender. A boy? A girl? They comment on how the baby will be the 999th citizen of this small town.

1:35pm. The man wonders if they'll ever reach one thousand.

2:00pm. Still working.

3:22pm. His cubicle neighbor Sarah cracks a tired joke. She has a limited list of them that she always cycles through. Today's was at least a short one: "Hey, would you like to hear a construction joke?" She says before taking a short pause as she waits for someone to respond. That person was always Andrew. He tells her "Sure, I'd love to hear one." She then says "Well...I'm still working on it!"

It was groan-inducing when the man first heard that joke. Today was literally the 422nd time she's told it. He laughs anyway, since everyone else does.

5:00pm. Work is over. He should just walk home.

5:08pm. He detours to the park.

5:12pm. He sits on a bench. No, not any bench – the bench. *The* bench that he and his mom used to sit on, all those years ago when she was still around. She was always so nervous back then, scanning her surroundings intently as he fed the birds with little pieces of bread. She'd keep an arm around him, squeezing him tightly as if she was afraid that one of the birds would grab him and fly away, carrying him to parts unknown. None of the other townspeople wanted to be around them back then, and he used to not understand why.

5:20pm. Nothing. He continues to sit.

5:25pm. Nothing.

5:30pm. He sees a teen couple walk towards him...their names are Riley and Charlie, if he remembers correctly. They look surprised, almost scared, when they see him just sitting there. They walk faster.

5:33pm. Chirp.

5:34pm. Chirp chirp.

5:35pm. Does he dare turn around?

5:46pm. He decides to wait.

6:00pm. Still waiting. He sees people walk in his direction, spot him, then turn back. He wonders how many routines he's interrupted so far.

6:15pm. The sun is starting to set. The chirping gets louder.

6:20pm. It's time. He reaches into his briefcase and pulls out a sandwich. The chirps turn into squawks. No one is around but the birds.

6:21pm. He begins to eat. Thursday's were always pot roast night

but he decided to switch things up a little. He takes a bite out of his peanut butter and strawberry sandwich.

6:22pm. It tastes just like what his mom used to make.

6:23pm. The sun is partially down the horizon. Birds are landing all around him. Not acknowledging them is purely by habit now.

6:24pm. What was the outside world like? Sometimes, during those rare occasions where a lost out-of-towner appears, he wonders what would happen if he just hijacked their car to leave. Never mind the fact that he can't drive.

6:25pm. Part of him feels like he's being silly about all of this, but he really wants to see his mom again.

6:26pm. His sandwich is almost gone. So is the sun.

6:27pm. Who will even miss him? His neighbors? His coworkers?

6:28pm. He takes a last bite as the sun fully sets. He can feel the presence of birds all around him. He shouldn't be here – it isn't part of his routine. But he's here. And he's staying.

6:29pm. The squawking becomes louder and louder as the birds suddenly take flight, not towards the sky, but towards him.

The next day the newspaper reads – “Miraculous! Hannah Schmidt gives birth to not ONE but TWO babies! Town population rises to 999!”

A great celebration occurs – they're so close to reaching one thousand!

No one mentions the man.

CONTRIBUTORS

BRIA BALLARD is a senior English major at High Point University.

HOLLY GAMBRELL graduated from HPU in December 2016 with a BA in Communication with a concentration in Journalism and an English Writing minor. She hopes to start working in the magazine industry to combine her hobbies of writing and editing with her job. Holly's passions include running, eating pizza, and making jokes with really bad puns.

ANDY JAMES is a recent Philosophy graduate. He lives in Charlotte, North Carolina and is currently studying to become a software developer. In his free time, he volunteers teaching programming to elementary school children.

LOGAN KING is a recent graduate of High Point University. She currently resides and works in Greensboro, NC.

EMMITT KUSSROW is a sophomore majoring in Communications with a tract in Journalism, and minoring in English for writing. They enjoy wordy poetry, quirky fiction, and morbid humor; in their free time, they play terribly nerdy role playing games like Dungeons and Dragons, and advocate for the non-binary LGBTQIA+ community.

PRAGEETA SHARMA is the author of three poetry collections: *Infamous Landscapes* (Fence Books, 2007); *The Opening Question* (Fence Books, 2004), winner of the 2004 Fence Modern Poets Prize; and *Bliss to Fill* (Subpress Collective, 2000).

ANGELICA STABILE is a poet at High Point University.

TAYLOR TEDFORD is an English major in her senior year at High Point University.

SAM TRUITT was born in Washington, DC, and raised there and in Tokyo, Japan. He is the author of *Dick: A Vertical Elegy* (*Lunar Chandelier*, 2014); *Vertical Elegies 6: Street Mete* (*Station Hill*, 2011); *Vertical Elegies: Three Works* (*UDP*, 2008), *Vertical Elegies 5: The Section* (*Georgia*, 2003) and *Anamorphosis Eisenhower* (*Lost Roads*, 1998), among other books. He is the Director of Station Hill Press and lives in Woodstock, NY. For more, including links to audio-visual compositions, visit samtruitt.org

BENITA VANWINKLE is an Assistant Professor of Art in the School of Art and Design at High Point University. She lives just outside the city of Winston-Salem with her husband, two rescued dogs, and the neighbor's horses and chickens just beyond her back fence. She is a documentary photographer, and at any given moment is given to distraction with yet another amazing project, but her current passion is finishing up work on a book of photos that record vintage movie theaters across the US. Her website www.busybstudio.com showcases her photography, books, and other award winning art.



HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

ONE UNIVERSITY PARKWAY

HIGH POINT, NORTH CAROLINA 27268 USA

HIGHPOINT.EDU