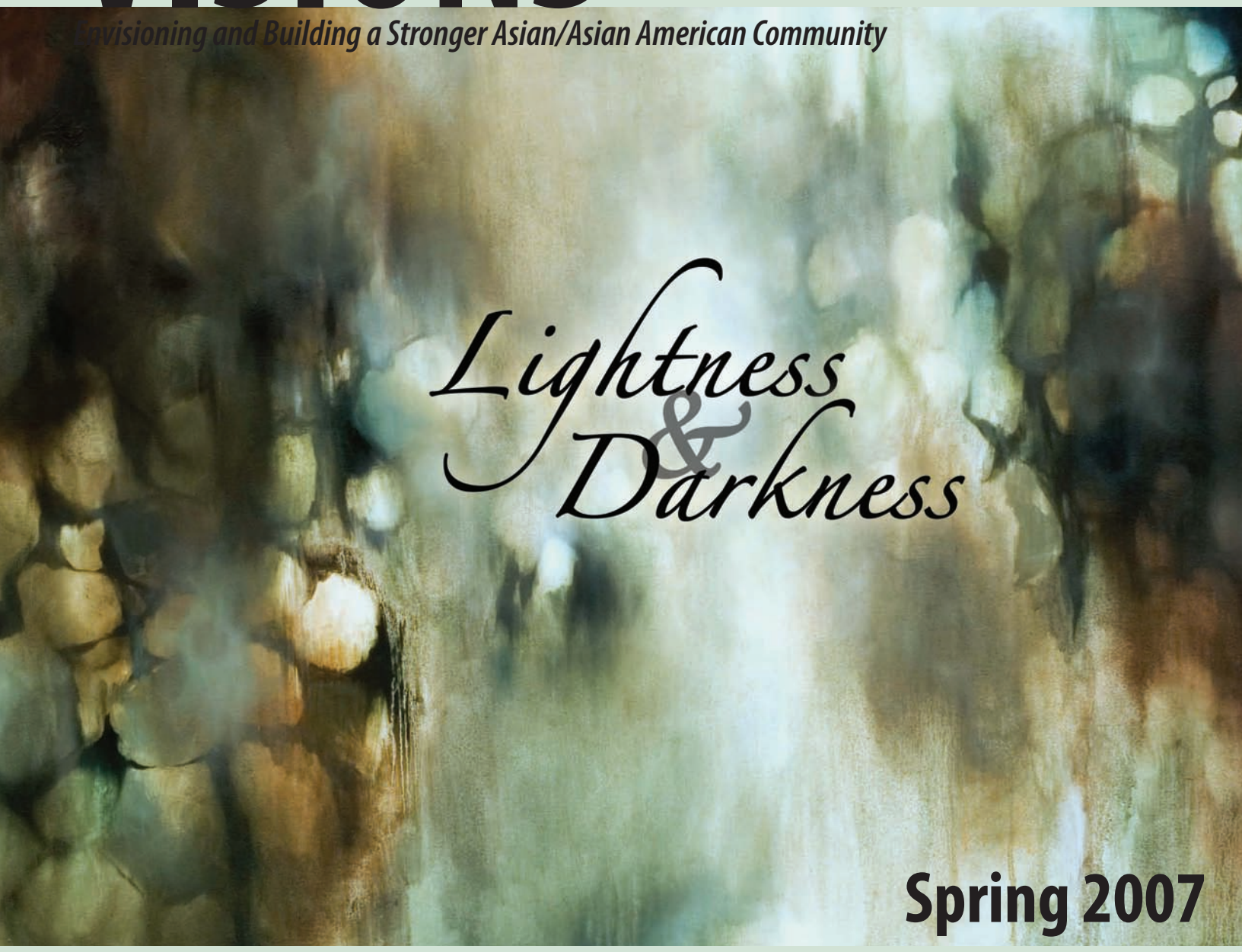
VISIONS

Envisioning and Building a Stronger Asian/Asian American Community



Spring 2007

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Mission Statement

VISIONS is a publication that highlights and celebrates the diversity of Brown's Asian/Asian American community. We are committed to being an open literary and artistic forum for Asian/Asian Americans, as well as other members of the university community, to freely express and address issues relating both to Asia and the Asian American experience. VISIONS further serves as a forum for issues that cannot find a voice in other campus publications. As a collaborative initiative, VISIONS attempts to strengthen and actively engage Brown's vibrant community of students, faculty, staff, and alumni, as well as the larger Providence community.

LETTER from **THE EDITORS**

Spring 2007
Volume viii, Issue 2

When Spring semester rolled around this year, we realized we had a new problem on our hands. Fortunately, it was the kind of problem editors dream of: with more and more people contributing their writing and art, we didn't know what to do with so much talent.

So we decided a challenge would be fun. We wanted to see what would happen if we gave this issue a theme—something like "lightness and darkness" seemed like a good start. And sure enough, we were blown away by how many brilliant "light" and "dark" submissions we received!

But why "lightness and darkness" in the first place? Aside from the fact that Asians overlap these two categories in terms of skin color, our theme recognizes Asians' position at this point in history—somewhere between a darker past and a lighter future.

Speaking of bright futures, we dedicate this issue to all of our seniors. Your commitment over the years has transformed VISIONS into the publication it is today, and we thank you for inspiring us with your endless enthusiasm.

We also thank our contributors, staff members, and UFB for making this issue possible, and most of all, we thank you—for taking part in our mission of Envisioning and Building a Stronger Asian/Asian American Community.

And now, we welcome you to enjoy the "light" and "dark" masterpieces of prose, poetry, artwork, and photography of VISIONS, Spring 2007!

Love,

Soyoung Park Erin Frauenhofer

Karynn Ikeda

Soyoung Park '09 **Karynn Ikeda '09** **Erin Frauenhofer '09**

Light

Artwork & Photography

Dark

Artwork & Photography

5 a.m.

Janet Shu

The sky bleaches away
Beneath steel and chrome wings
To return to concrete boots
And slipstreams of downed fabric

Janet Shu MD '07 enjoys writing poetry, painting, volunteering, and traveling when she has time during medical school. She is excited to be entering psychiatry residency this summer.

Rain Drops on Rose Branch
Tai-Ho Shin '09
Digital Photograph

Puddling
Hannah Schafer '09
Digital Photograph

Do You Pretty Me? Oh!

Davis Jung

On a trip to Korea when I was very young, I happened upon a commercial that would forever change my life.

This was during the dark ages of Asian advertisement from which it is still just recovering. An age which held beliefs that if a commercial could induce seizures from bright flashing colors and inanely inappropriate pre-pubescent girls, well, all the better. This was a commercial that not only clung to these deep-rooted ideals, but expounded on them. Lit by rapidly changing color fields and rainbow stars that randomly fizzled across the screen, a girl with the body of a mature eighteen year old, but with the voice of a four year old, dressed in white, furry go-go boots, bunny ears, and hotpants with a little cotton ball on the back, did outrageously cutesy dance moves as the camera zoomed in and out from all different angles. She did this for quite a while until the camera shot to her face and she suddenly seemed to be holding a large sausage on a stick. She oh-so-carefully bit into it and suddenly a cartoon bubble with the onomatopoeia *KWAZAJAK!* appeared on the screen. Then she looked up at the camera with her oh-so-big eyes and said, in Korean, something that

literally translates to, "Do you pretty me? Oh!" I guess a more accurate, contextualized translation would be something like, "Do you fancy me?" or "Do you fawn on me?"

At this point, you're probably pretty confused. So was the four-year-old me until I had watched that commercial maybe nineteen or twenty times. At this point, I realized two things:

1. the commercial was advertising a sausage that made a cool *KWAZAJAK!* sound when bitten into, and
2. by saying, "Do you pretty me?" and then saying "Oh!" without a pause in between, the girl was both asking, "Do you love me" and forcing a "yes" in return. It was genius!

Not only did I fall in love with eating those damned sausages, but I was forever asking my parents, "Do you pretty me? Oh!" You have to realize that it was very hard for me to see all my friends being constantly smothered by the affectations of their parents while mine wouldn't touch me unless I had been groomed and bathed in disinfectant. In my household, to ask if I was loved was to ask if there were any way the theory of evolution could be upheld in the face of the Bible: the result was a hard stare that said never to ask such silly questions ever again.

But now, with the power of the words, "Do you pretty me? Oh!" I had a way of asking for love that:

1. amused my parents to a certain degree, meaning I would not be given a hard stare nor feel embarrassed, but
2. was completely safe as my parents had no chance to give that answer of no in which I was in constant dread.

Now, I know that such dread is foolish and I know that it's perhaps really weird that, as a twenty year old, I still ask my parents, "Do you pretty me? Oh!" But I need to. It's an inexplicable psychosis, a desperate hunger for affirmation. It is my only non-drug-based addiction- my need to ask for love without actually having to say the l-word aloud. This does make me worried about when I actually fall in love with someone. How will I tell them so? The scene which follows is one about which I have thought long and one of which I am perpetually afraid:

Potential Wife: Davis, I love you.

Davis: Wow, really?

Potential Wife: Yes. Do you love me too?

Davis: Oh geez. One second. [pulls out handpuppets]

Potential Spouse: Davis, I love you.

Davis: Potential Wife, I love you too! [mashes handpuppets together repeatedly]

Potential Wife: Yea … I'm going to go now.

But these fears aside, I did recently experience a day in which the intentions of my catch-phrase changed.

Coincidentally, it was on another trip to Korea with just my mother and me. I was twenty at the time and my family had insisted that I keep dual-citizenship as both a Korean and an American. However, due to a recent change in the law, any dual-citizen male over the age eighteen who landed in Korea could possibly be taken and forced to serve the obligatory two years of military service that all Korean male citizens faced. My mother and I did not worry about such petty matters though for we had always considered ourselves above the law, or at least, Korean law.

In any case, we had just arrived in Incheon after a grueling 20-hour flight. My face was greasier than the pizza at the Brown University cafeteria. Although you would think being forced to watch *A New World*, starring Colin Farrell and Quayala-nanaclickclick or whatever her name is in silence three times because my in-flight television set was broken, to be wildly amusing, I was actually in quite a grouchy mood. After waiting another wildly amusing line at customs, I finally made it up to the stamp-wielding agent. Our conversation went something like this.

Me: Hello, how are—

Customs Lady: Your passport please.

Me: Oh yes, of course.

[long beat]

Customs Lady: You are a Korean citizen?

Me: Dual. I have both American and Korean.

Customs Lady: And you are twenty years old?

Me: Yes.

Customs Lady: You are a Korean citizen?

Me: I have dual citizenship.

Customs Lady: And you are twenty years old?

Me: Uh, yes.

Customs: You are a Korean citizen?

Me: Like I said, I—

Customs: GET HIM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Before I knew what was happening to me, five Korean soldiers, all carrying guns and other scary things, had surrounded me and were pulling me towards a suspicious looking office. Now while this scenario could have indeed turned out to be similar to something I had recently watched on a porno called "Czech Whore Soldier Gangbang", I was neither a lusty virgin eagerly awaiting to be torn a new one, nor did I speak flustered Russian. So not knowing what else to do, I instinctively reacted like I did when I went on my first waterslide ride at Six Flags.

I cried for my mommy.

They say that in some species, I think they were bats or something, the mothers can tell their babies apart from the other million squealing pieces of shit by the sound of their cries. Frankly, I always believed that the mothers could tell who their babies were because they were the ones clinging for dear life on their backs, but I think National Geographic may have stumbled across some inadvertent truth on that one. Because what I know is this: somehow, among the din of a hundred grumbling travelers, through the screeches of dozens of crying babies, in the deafening noise of a too-busy airport, my mother heard the tonal cry of her brood and reacted.

Before I even knew what was happening, my 5 foot 3 tall mother had tackled the pack of burly soldiers and was laying waste to them with the weaponry only a mother has: a disciplining voice like the hand of God coming down to give you not only a brutal purple nurple, but to cup your balls and then twist. Hard. In their moment of confusion, I tried quickly to formulate a strategy. Just as I had decided on a plan of action that included:

1. Mentally signaling my mother to start flailing with her purse,
2. Bite anything that came across my path of vision,
3. Grab a guard's gun, and
4. Force our way to a plane and fly to Cuba,

My mother gripped my hand and calmly walked out of the customs office. She managed a stride that was both deliberate and quick, surprisingly long steps emanating from her short body. I too tried such a dignified walk, my chest out, my paces long and fast but realized that I looked like a fairy reincarnated as an awkward penguin. As soon as we reached the lobby, my mother sat me down on a bench and said in the most motherly of ways, "I'm going to go pee. If they come for you, don't scream like a five-year old girl again. That was embarrassing. If they're that persistent, chances are there's nothing I can do for you. Besides, being in the army might be good for you." With that, she walked away to the ladies' room.

As I watched her leave, her diminutive figure disappearing in the crowd, I came upon a surprising realization. In that moment, in that time and space, for once in my life I could, for the first time, give my mother an opportunity to answer.

She came back from the bathroom with a greasy looking package. Ignoring it, I looked straight into her eyes and asked, "Do you pretty me?"

There was a moment of silence until it became painstakingly apparent that the "Oh!" would not be forthcoming.

"Shut up," she said. "I brought you those sausages you're so fond of."

Oh. It was all the answer I needed.

I bit into her love. It went *KWAZAJAK!*

Davis Jung '09 spends his days researching postmodern interpretive dance.

Untitled
Janice Kim '09
Digital Photograph

Point to Point

Sukjoo Kang

Bailamos

we are too young to dance the Punta but
we've already bro–
ken all the rules,
twisting, twirling—stomping
and giggling
with you
in our living room,
its air stained with the fragrance
of half-ripe mangoes and sugar-fried
plantains.

Mire, Mire:

Aminta, we dance to your music; we wiggle
our hips out of rhythm to the song shaking
in tune, we attempt
to hum the song you hum. we mirror the
way you
wave your arms but being

the young daughters of the coreanos,
the
second imperialists,

we cannot hold the same
bubble-gum pink plastic broom.

¡Conchas, maracas, tambores!

amid the familiar sensation of sweat drops
along my cheeks,
the unfamiliar friction beneath my heels, relieved
by the ecstasy
of being swung in your dark arms, smelling
your skin, carved deep with
the perfume of chimol and corn tortilla
and
laundry detergent—
everything so quite right—
I never knew that the second drum only
occasionally
synchronized with the first.

– Aminta, la cena.
– Si, Señora, vuelvo a la cocina.

you rush to the kitchen and night deepens
like silence. the house was more yours
than ours,

siempre.

(And sometimes we would step outside
to the endless garden, enclosed in brick walls,
where the smell of gunpowder forever
lingered in the air,
all too familiar.
Jorge always stood at the gate;
the machete at his left,
the rifle at his right,
petting the guard dog that never barked,
he made sure we would
never
be interrupted in dancing
the Punta.)

Sukjoo Kang '09 can't stop eating champagne truffles.

Name

En-Ling Wu

When I was in first grade, I changed my name every week. Several of my first grade classmates were called by their middle names. This opened up a whole new world to me: I could give myself an English middle name to make up for my non-English first name. My middle names varied with mood and the books I read. One week I was En-Ling Melanie Wu. The next week I was En-Ling Heather Wu. En-Ling Kimberly Wu. I picked the most English-sounding middle names possible, and made the name change official by writing it under "This book belongs to:" inside the cover. One week I was En-Ling Bonnie Wu, except I spelled Bonnie B-O-N-Y. My mother noticed my book cover and called me Bony for the rest of the night, laughing all the while. That was the end of middle names.

In junior high, I found out people didn't know I was born in the U.S. I had never realized before that I could be mistaken as a fob (fresh off the

Through Tranquility
Mai Denawa '08
Digital Photograph

Hokokuji Temple, Kamakura, Japan

boat). The kids at school referred to recent immigrants to the U.S. as fobs. We mocked the way they spoke English, the way they dressed, and the way they made peace signs when they took pictures. With each insult, we imagined ourselves one step further from our parents' or even our own immigrant backgrounds. Thus, it was a shock for me to hear my classmates confess, "When you first introduced yourself, I thought you would be really fobby. But you're totally not."

"Thanks," I would say awkwardly, grateful to them for allowing me to be part of that exclusive group known as Americans.

I grew accustomed to mispronunciations of my name; the energy required to correct them was too great. Em-Ling and On-Ling were close enough. Ing-ling was highly annoying, but perhaps my standards were too high. Lack of hyphenation and capitalization of the "L" in the written form was also tolerable. I became Enling on all standardized tests because there was no bubble for the hyphen.

I did hate it when people rechristened me altogether. A few of my teachers insisted on calling me Ellen, Elaine, or Ann Lee, even after I clarified that my name followed all the usual phonetic conventions. But how could I blame them when I, too, wanted to change my name?

Nicknames were plentiful. En-Ling easily became Eny, Enya, Lingy, Enslingy, Bling, Duckling, Zergling. I was never sure whether I liked them or not. Because my friends used these nicknames as terms of endearment, I figured I had to like them by default. I couldn't even have a no-nonsense last name, like Chang, or Lee, or Chen. No, I had to be a Wu, which meant En-Ling AROOO or En-Ling WOOHOO to my sixth grade history teacher. And my initials spelled "ew."

At restaurants and coffee shops, I came prepared with a list of noms de plume: Julie, Emily, Kyla. I pretended to feel lucky—I could be whoever I wanted to be, whenever I wanted to be. Anonymity was wonderful. I suppressed the urge to respond to "What's your name?" with "Your Majesty." I imagined how satisfying it would be to hear "Your Majesty… your hot chocolate is ready."

"What's your name?"

(Pause) "En—Julie."

"What?"

"Julie."

I learned to be quick on the uptake. When asked for your name, always repeat it twice, the second time loudly, with pronounced lip and tongue movements. Be ready to spell. Don't pause too long to answer a question regarding your driver's license, or you'll be reproved with: "Do you speak English?" After you spell your name out, clench your teeth patiently when you are greeted with a badly accented ni hao ma. Don't give attitude when correcting people about your name unless you brace yourself for "Why don't you go back to your own country?"

One night in high school, after years of curiosity and resentment, I finally asked my parents why they didn't give me an English name. "We gave you a Chinese name first," my father explained, stating the obvious. "And then we thought it was so easy to pronounce in English, you didn't need an English name," my mother added.

"What's so hard about it?" my father inquired. "E-N, En, L-I-N-G, Ling."

"I know Baba, but people still mispronounce it."

"Well, when you get older you can change it if you want," my mother suggested.

That was an interesting thought. But what would I change it to? Melanie? Kimberly? Bonnie/Bony?

"No, that's okay. I probably wouldn't remember my new name."

Both of my parents were Anglicized at age fourteen. My father's parents sent him away from home to Canada in order to avoid service in the Taiwanese army where his older brother had died. At the Catholic boarding school, a priest gave my father the English (or rather, French) name of Clement. My mother's father received a job offer from the University of Wisconsin and moved the family to America in the hopes of better educational opportunities for his daughters. At the Wisconsin public high school, the school counselor gave my mother the English name of Sara.

"What are your parents' names?" ask my friends.

"Sara and Clement."

"What?"

I lack the fullness of a name. Even the correct English pronunciation is not the true Chinese pronunciation. My real name sounds a little more like oo un leen—oo carries the down and up tone, un carries the flat tone, and leen carries the up tone. But how can you expect a stranger's lips to form the right sounds, or, at the very least, the sound of respect?

In Chinese, En-Ling means showers of blessings. En contains the character for the heart; Ling is the heavy downpour of rain above a forest of trees. You're our shower of blessings, my parents explain, we know you'll be one to others as well. A name is just a name, right? But I hope their small prophecy comes true.

Last summer, I worked as a science camp counselor for first graders. We taught basic science to, played games with, and watched over thirty different children every two weeks. On the first day of camp, we sat the kids in a circle and went around sharing names, ages, schools, and our favorite things in nature. Things like bunnies and Spiderman.

"My name is Nikesh and—"

"What?"

"Nikesh. N-I-K—"

"That's great, kid." Our senior recreation leader Steven turned around and whispered to us, "Yeah, I'm never going to remember that one." I stared at him, "Your name is too hard to pronounce; can't I just call you Ann?" reverberating through my head. The other counselors snickered. Steven also enjoyed making homophobic jokes, ridiculing the parents behind their backs, and lording his senior counselor position over us. The city Parks and Recreation Department supervisors loved him.

I made it a point to learn all of the children's names, and pronounce them exactly the way they pronounced them. I made sure Kurumi, Sawan, Jee-woo, and Rahul were paid as much attention as David, Justine, Ben, and Alexandra. Even the other counselors were impressed by how quickly I caught on. I have a depressing knack for learning names quickly; depressing because people won't remember my name until the third, fourth, or fifth meeting.

One afternoon, I sit on the stone bench and watch the first graders finish their high-calorie cookies and diluted, powdered juice. I envy them. Children never notice when you are watching them. They are blissfully unconscious of self. The hot summer sun filters through the trees, making everything a bright, yet hazy color. It is an idyllic day. I watch as Kainoa climbs onto the stone bench, sandals first. Kainoa lives in Hawaii but is visiting friends in California this summer. When we announce "Science Time," his chocolate brown eyes light up and he skips over. He slips his hand into yours when you are not looking. He smiles he plays with the other children, but when he is all alone in a daydream he laughs deep belly laughs.

"Kainoa, what does your name mean?"

"It means Big Sea." And without waiting for a response, he leaps off the stone bench—arms spread out wide, a little boy riding a great wave on a sunny summer day.

En-Ling Wu '08 can also be a shower of plagues.

Inspired Musings About Nature

Ngoc-Tran Vu

Lightly and cautiously, I stepped from one massive boulder to the next, all lined up to form a sort of cliff over the sloshing water fifteen feet or so beneath. The morning radiated with the freshness of a May day, the air tinged with the lingering crispness of dew. The breezes rushed by with just enough strength to tango with my hair before proceeding onward to wherever winds journeyed. I had separated from my church youth group and decided to explore the rock quarry on my own. Rarely did I get the opportunity to be enveloped by the pure forces of nature, away from city lights and car noises and people's endless presence. I relished this solitude with nature, because it was then that I could hear my own thoughts.

My Vietnamese childhood memories are so surreal in contrast to the reality of my present American life. I look back at the early years of my childhood with nostalgia and a sense of utter disbelief at where I am today. I grew up in the late 80's in a little neighborhood in Vietnam, in the outskirts of Ho Chi Minh City—quite a distance away from all the technological accommodations of any modernized culture. If I remember correctly, there was only one color T.V. set in the whole neighborhood. Although it did belong to one family, on nights when foreign movies or world soccer games were broadcasted, it became communal property for everyone to enjoy. There were a few other black-and-white sets and some cassette players around, but for the most part, the kids in the neighborhood looked for entertainment elsewhere.

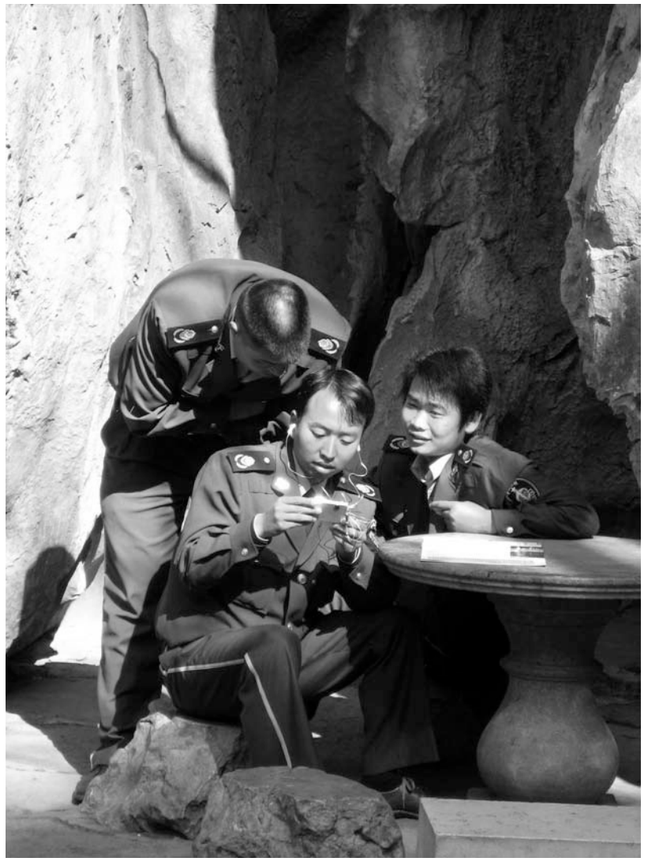
Since urban development hadn't really reached my town yet in the 80's, there were still expansive tracts of fields and woodland in the back of the populated area. These fields—some domesticated, but a large portion still wild—became my playground. Every afternoon, after a grueling day of second grade penmanship or third grade math, my friends and I would roam the unbounded horizon of grass and swamps and trees. Away from the watchful eyes of our parents and grandparents, we would gallop carelessly through the open fields, wind in our faces and kites soaring our childhood dreams of flight. Arms widespread, chasing after the kites at full speed, I had wanted to be a bird. If the wind had blown with just a bit more force, I would have been lifted off the ground; at times, I could have sworn that the wind pushed me to my very tip-toe.

Of course then, I hadn't learned the unnaturalness of a human being in flight. And even if I had deduced it from common sense, I still wanted to think that one day, it might happen. I had wanted to fly because I wanted to know where the wind goes. It seemed to me that things in nature were immersed in a veil of mystery, fluttering back and forth between what I could discern in the visible and what I had to draw on my imagination to comprehend. Then there were things that I couldn't even attempt to explain, even with an imagination—things like why people couldn't just flap their arms and fly off like the birds. In these musings came my appreciation for the workings of nature all around me. The harder I noticed the details of my environment, the more aware I was of my miniscule part in the grandness of nature's infinity. Just as there was no beginning or end to the travels of the wind, there also were no such boundaries in nature.

Vietnamese Children at Orphanage
Ngoc-Tran Vu '10
Digital Photograph

Unfortunately, as I grew older, I no longer had the option of charging freely through open fields at whim. My family emigrated to the United States in the early 90's, and the move changed the landscape of my childhood dramatically. No longer was the back of my neighborhood a refuge for fanciful imagination, but rather it turned into a maze of brick buildings and houses and cars that howled louder than the wind. I no longer interacted actively with my surroundings, having instead to confine my movements to the box-shaped contours of my new home in this modernized country. Time eventually passed by, and I learned to fit into the cubic mold of my new life. My daily excursion in the fields came to be replaced by a daily dosage of television; my wondering of where the wind blew, replaced by a wondering of when I would be able to speak English. The T.V. talked to me, and the new language talked to me, constantly and rapidly, as if egging me on to some goal, and soon.

My new life blew me away in a whirlwind of new activities and new occupations—none of which involved any interaction with nature. And so it was especially refreshing to find occasions to be by myself with only nature's presence to keep me company. That day when I separated from my youth group to do my own exploration, I wheezed out puffs of social conventions, of worrying about my relationships with my peers in the group. For a short while, I listened to the comforting wind and marveled at the magnificence of the enduring waves. I imagined myself a droplet of water making the transatlantic voyage, perhaps from the gulfs of Vietnam to a bay in Massachusetts; my thoughts rolled on and on with each slap of the waves against the cliff…



Guards in Shilin (Rock Forest), Yunnan, China
Amy Chang '08
Digital Photograph

Ngoc-Tran Vu '10 is feelin' the winds of change.

Red

Chin Lin Wong

I went skiing on the first day of New Year this year: talk about an unconventional way to spend the holiday. Okay, so it wasn't that unconventional. New Year fell on Presidents' Day Weekend this year, which, according to one of my friends, is one of the biggest skiing weekends. So I was not the only one who spent Chinese New Year in a mountain somewhere, with the cold, and a huge amount of snow.

I find it odd to celebrate Chinese New Year in the cold, even though that must have been what my ancestors did when they celebrated the festival in China. China, unlike Malaysia, has seasons. The festival is, after all, celebrated before the harvest in the spring. Of course it would be cold.

But I have always associated Chinese New Year with the heat, never the cold. It always seems to be blindingly sunny and unbearably hot in Kuala Lumpur at New Year's. After spending an hour or two in my aunt's house, we would pile back into the car, which had been parked in the sun, and try to avoid drenching our nice new clothes in sweat. For we children always had new clothes for New Year's. And then there were the peanut cookies, and jam tarts, and love letters, and crystallized coconut slices, and dried longans, and mandarin oranges, which were always urged on us at every house we visited. And of course, there were the ang pow packets, extra pocket money from the married adults.

I was a lot more traditional freshman year. I emailed my friends in Boston, and on New Year's Eve we had dinner at Penang, a Malaysian restaurant in Harvard Square. It was a Reunion Dinner of sorts, the meal where everyone in the family tries their best to make it home to meet each other. There were five of us in this overseas family of mine: Nad, who goes to Harvard; Hoong, who studies at Brandeis; Eing and Hau, who go to MIT; and me at Brown. We had rice and green vegetables and steamed fish. Nothing of the specialties we would have had at home, but a home-style meal nonetheless.

I don't remember how I spent New Year's during sophomore year. It could have been on a plane, flying back from home. Junior year, I spent it at Sawadee, a Thai restaurant, with friends from Brown.

This year, my senior year, my Malaysian friends and I made plans to meet in Boston. It was the second day of New Year, and I had been skiing the day before. Miraculously, I managed to get up in time to catch the bus to Boston and meet Hoong at the bus station at 12:30 p.m. Apparently, Hau had called Hoong earlier and said that he couldn't make it. Hoong asked me if I wanted to yell at him. He passed me his phone, and after a few minutes of publicizing my opinion on people who bail out to the entire bus station, he agreed to turn up. We met Nad and made our way to Imperial Seafood Restaurant for some dim sum.

At home, on the second day of New Year, I would have eaten rice. The meal translates as "Rice to Open the Year." We went to the dim sum restaurant because I had no idea where else in Boston to go, and no one else would recommend any other place to eat. Besides, I knew it had good food. After lunch, we made our way to Super88, the famous Chinese grocery store everyone in Boston talks about, and got peanuts, sunflower seeds, and canned longans. By 3:00 p.m., we were sitting comfortably at a table at MIT munching on snacks and playing cards.

I don't know where I will be spending New Year next year, but I do know that the best way to spend New Year is with friends and family and food. A card game or two would be great, but a bit of camaraderie is all I need.

Chin Lin Wong '07 is waiting for spring to come.

Memoirs of an Imperfect Speaker

Jane Tanimura

Blake Kobashigawa was a twinkie. His skin was yellow but his soul was white. In 8th grade he brought back the trend of abbreviating "Japanese" to "Jap." Pretty soon everyone was saying it.

"Where are you going, Matt?" "To Jap class."

The historical implications of the term escaped these white prep school kids. For Blake, a fourth generation Japanese-American, it was a way to flaunt his ethnicity without alienating his fair-skinned friends. His campaign was so successful that he became the most popular boy in school.

Perhaps to relieve his guilty conscience, he would instead accuse me of being a traitor to the race. Asian people, especially Japanese-Americans like me, should not be taking French. While his learning Japanese redeemed him of his sins, my studying a white man's language made me guilty of denying my heritage.

I received his abuse unflinchingly. I felt but never spoke a response, never articulated that I hated him for being right. In a class of 110 students, only a handful was of Asian descent. Too small and resistant to be our own community, we looked to other influences to satisfy our need for belonging. Mariko, Evan and Alice hung out with the black kids and sported FUBU without recognizing the irony, their shirts and pants too baggy for their slim, short frames. They embraced rap and hip-hop as their own, music that spoke of a violent street life as foreign to them as their ancestral countries. Just like Blake, Jenny sided with the comforts of white culture. A tiny alligator or moose adorned the left pockets of her brightly colored polo shirts. She raved about the Dave Matthews Band, whose songs "spoke" to her. Yuki, on the other hand, was actually Japanese, a *Harajuku* girl,[1] who could lay claim to her nationality as reason for her bizarre fashion choices and wacky blue hair, her aspiration of becoming a famous J-pop star. Asian American didn't warrant a separate notion of self-identification. There was only black, white and foreign.

Against these limited conceptions of race, I imagined myself as colorless. My best defense against Blake was to be transparent, known not as the token Asian student but more generally as a conqueror of knowledge. Of course in doing so I fulfilled the exact standards from which I sought to free myself. I personified the model minority myth—competitive and hardworking, teacher's pet, a goody-goody—and yet I did so not simply to please my stereotypically demanding parents, but to invent an identity that had no reference to an ethnicity that my peers neither recognized nor respected. If I couldn't be fluent in Japanese, then I would be the best at English and French. I would breathe their grammatical structures, consume myself with their literatures and emulate the styles of their great writers. I would master other languages, just not the one that matched the color of my skin.

Because I scored perfectly on the grammar competency test, my 8th grade English teacher named me the "grammar goddess." I bore the title with pride, knowing that I could identify the parts of speech and spot grammatical mistakes—misplaced modifier, parallel structure, subject-verb agreement—with ease and accuracy. My peers may have had the advantage of being raised by native speakers, but I had the drive that they lacked as well as the natural aptitude for understanding how language was supposed to be used.

At home, my heightened sense to how English should function and sound fueled my obsessive affinity for living by the laws of grammar. My mom's assault of these rules was cacophony to my ears, and accordingly I would correct the tense or arrangement of her words. "'I did it,' mom. Not 'I done it.'" In response, she would mask her flawed speech by mixing English with Japanese. Her jumbling of languages prevented me from criticizing the ways of her native tongue, which I could not decipher. She infuriated my sensibilities of what was standard and pure.

"Why can't you be more like Tina's or Alex's mom?" I once asked. "Why can't you speak as well as they do? " I should have stopped myself then, but the words spilled out without my permission. "Why do I have to have such a dumb mother? You embarrass me."

It was the first time I ever saw her cry. I ruptured a central nerve, the floodgates to her self-consciousness. For the next few days, she punished me with the absence of her communication. She made me miss her words, even her broken ones.

I never intended to hurt her. The inclination to patronize came naturally. It was simply a means to flaunt an awareness that I came to realize from school. My superiority complex proved that I was learning something. My mom had enrolled me at these snooty private schools precisely because she wanted me to learn from the best, from people who could teach me to speak inconspicuously. She knew from experience the hardship of being an immigrant without the necessary linguistic skills to advance oneself in this country. It was up to me to realize an ability that she never achieved.

As much as she wanted me to assimilate, she also didn't want me to abandon her roots. From first until sixth grade, I attended Japanese school every Saturday to learn a language that I could not, and perhaps did not want to retain. I could pronounce the alphabet like a native, copy the *hiragana*, *katakana* and *kanji*[2] just as our *sensei* [3]showed us. But beyond that, I was lost. At this other school, I left behind my motivated self. I was dumb, inattentive, unwilling.

When I entered middle school—a glamorous setting for privileged whites, a few African Americans, Latinos and Asians who struggled to find a place within this selective milieu—my mom knew it was useless to push me any further. From then on, her primary concern was that I become

1 A term for girls who gather in Tokyo's fashion forward district of Harajuku

2 Three different types of Japanese alphabets

3 Japanese for "teacher"

Toward the Light
Siqing He '08
Digital Painting

an intellect, a multi-dimensional person, the perfect candidate for Stanford or Yale. In 8th grade, when given the option to learn a foreign language, I chose French, which I had already started studying in elementary school. Subtle skills that my peers lacked—the ability to roll r's, the slurring of vowel sounds with consonants, the inherent pace and beat of the language—I had already mastered. It was an irrelevant and easy pursuit, not related to anything I was really interested in, the language of a land far away from my mom's home and my American one too. I was already ahead of the game but still I relentlessly practiced, absorbing every detail if only to retain my status as the best.

I feigned attraction to the ideas of its iconic writers. Each had a unique style, a clear vision. Moliere was wholly irreverent and openly mocked the aristocracy. Maupassant was a sad misogynist, known for his clever plotting and supernatural modes. Camus was simple, direct and unpretentious. He wrote the existential novel *The Stranger* in the *passé composé*[4] rather than the *passé antérieur*, an elevated tense traditionally used in French fiction writing. The effect of his conception actualized the story's own absurdity. The natural flow of his words enabled by his simple grammar made the plot active and relevant. His writing said more with what it left out than with what it included.

My interest in the bareness of his prose was only skin-deep. Class time was mostly devoted to translating the text verbatim. By concentrating solely on the novel's form, we failed to realize the themes of moral humanism, alienation and nihilism, which drove the story and paralleled the author's own struggles. Like his protagonist Mersault —a man who commits murder and then waits to be executed for his crime—Camus was Algerian, a witness to the tragic implications of French colonialism. He spoke and wrote in the language of the enemy, only to subvert the foundation of this culture's moral and social fabric. Mme. Gelfand never mentioned this burdensome truth. France's history of imperialism, a subject that motivated much of its greatest literature, was ignored for a sunnier portrait, an admiration of its mellifluous words and not the ugly that lay underneath their beauty.

That was the way high school literature was taught, as a specimen or phenomenon that warranted shallow scrutiny. We dissected these novels as if they were corpses. What did the author mean by this word? What was the character's motivation for acting this way? I responded by stating the obvious with an affected French accent that distracted Mme. Gelfand from detecting the emptiness of my thoughts.

Blake was right. I was a poser. Studying French merely dissuaded me from the fact of my yellow skin. What did these white intellects, these princes of privilege, know about being Asian American? They thought abstractly about the human condition but they had no conception of otherness or the discomfort of being in-between cultures. Camus was the dark horse among these literary giants but even as I read his easy prose, I could not perceive the depth of his creation, the similarities between the author's story and my own. I could not, or perhaps did not want to see a reflection of myself in an apathetic killer.

At least my studies reassured me that I was expanding my knowledge of words. I memorized its arbitrary rules and read its arcane literature with the intent of quantifying these small truths into a whole product that represented intelligence gained. If anything, I learned to be pompous, to use language unapologetically.

Ninth grade was the only year I did not receive the English award, an honor given to the best English student in the grade. On my report card, Mrs. Creasy wrote that I was a "superficial reader" and that my essays did not decode the depth of the "truly amazing" world literature we read. Perhaps it came as a shock to her that the class' only student of color had nothing provocative to say about the cultural struggles conveyed in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* or Victor Villasenor's *Rain of Gold*. After unlocking the novel's secret—a key to which *only* she had—my high-strung emaciated teacher would stare at me for a response. "You should be able to relate. You should know what it's like to be a child of immigrants, a victim of racism," she told me with her eyes. Too intimidated to raise my hand, I sat there quietly and submissively. I didn't see myself in these ethnic American characters, who exploited memories of the diaspora to advance a readable and marketable story. Nothing I wanted to say would have pleased her, so I said nothing at all.

For the next three years, I worked to reclaim my honor by proving her biting words wrong. I pushed myself to think more clearly about the neuroses of these fictional characters, to become an active participant in their worlds. Falstaff, Hester Prynne, Frederic Henry and Holden Caulfield were more than memorable literary figures. They became role models. They endured what I did not have to, giving me knowledge that I could achieve simply by reading their experiences. I could live their lives just by a turn of the page.

My devotion encouraged delusions of grandeur. "Mrs. Dunn, I'm so much like Hotspur!" I once told my 10th grade English teacher after reading *Henry IV*. "I'm hot-headed and impatient. My pride will be my downfall." My enthusiasm made her smile. The passion I showed in the classroom, my meandering papers and piercing opinions, it all added up. John Donne was confused. He had to question God before he could exalt him. Coleridge's opium-induced hallucinations did not contribute to the genius of his poetry; he abused his own reputation to enhance the thrill of his works. This mania may have improved my reputation as an ardent student of British literature, but it didn't make my resemblance to Hotspur any more apparent. Really I just wanted to be like him, to act like a hasty British aristocrat, a fantastical tragic hero.

The desire to create my own myth, to be a fictional character in my own novel, superseded all reality. It enabled an escape from a bland existence of reading and writing, to a surreal world where I was my ideal self, realized—powerful, wealthy and white. Stories of the brave and beautiful, the rich and depraved, perpetuated my hunger for the melodrama of this privileged world. *The Great Gatsby* especially teased this ironic obsession and made me hopeful of some day achieving greatness. I would be Jay Gatsby in search of the green light, faithful to the end to the Platonic conception of myself. I would earn privilege by my own merits and fool them with my irresistible charm. The masses would be too enthralled by my opulence to be curious about my scarred history.

I held on tight to this sacred image of Gatsby. Just as Nick Carraway did, I saw what I wanted to see in him. But the reality was that Gatsby was self-conscious. He second-guessed his behavior, his appearance, his words. In the end his experiment at self-transformation failed and he died alone in his quest to win a girl out of his caste. Even now, I still try to deny the implication of this outcome. I don't want to accept the truth that Gatsby's mastery at concealment could not expunge his past, that the facts about himself he tried to stifle, were eventually unmasked.

When I was accepted to Brown, the myth my mom made for me was finally fulfilled. I would be her Ivy League educated prize, a testament to her good mothering skills. Her job was done. She let me go.

Thousands of miles away from home, I started to forget the sound of her voice. Her syncopated accent and irregular speech, imperfections that pushed to be so anal in the first place, no longer permeated my thoughts or influenced my choices. There was no more Blake to remind me of my deficiencies. Suddenly, I lost the motivation to become a scrupulous reader, a flawless writer and speaker. I was already so exhausted.

By habit I became an English major. For hours at a time, I sat among fifteen other students and talked about books. We didn't focus on plot, but dwelled on obscure technicalities—how Henry James constructs fear in *The Turning of the Screw*, why Faulkner homoeroticizes Old Ben to glorify male-to-male combat in *The Bear*. This scholarly dialogue intimidated me; it made me question the validity of my thoughts. I even started stumbling when I spoke, mixing up the order of my words or repeating my reasoning over and over until I could finally articulate what I wanted to say.

It took time for me to get over my enthusiasm, to study literature for what it was and not as a substitution. It helped that I finally started reading novels that validated my confusion and made me feel less isolated about struggling with identity. Maxine Hong Kingston and Chang-rae Lee, both Asian American writers, weren't extravagant or conceited like Fitzgerald and perhaps for those exact reasons, could reveal a more profound honesty about being an outsider. They explored the disconnection between their American and Asian selves and unlike Amy Tan, cautioned against nostalgia. Their characters are uncomfortable in their own skins and latch on to concrete identities that never really fit who they are. Eventually, they real-

4 The equivalent to a spoken past tense

ize their blunders and seek to be something else entirely.

They reassure me that I can be my own category.

Dear Blake,

It's been more than three years since I last saw you but I haven't forgotten about what you said. I never told you how much your torments affected me. But now I have perspective, the capacity to use words wisely. I write to tell you that I've changed.

It may make you happy to know that I don't take French anymore. I study Japanese instead. I can write and read it well enough but I still struggle to say the words aloud. I don't want people to be confused when they hear me stutter or use the wrong tense, or wonder why I'm not already fluent. I'm still insecure but now I can admit it.

I heard that you traveled abroad to Japan last year. I've even seen the pictures you posted online. The one where you huddle with a dozen or so Japanese schoolgirls stands out to me the most. You make a peace sign with your two fingers and wear a smart smirk on your face. You think you're mocking their girly, typically Japanese sensibilities, but do you ever think it might be the other way around? I doubt your Japanese was good enough to fool them. When I visited many years ago, my Japanese relatives immediately noticed my discomfort. I couldn't speak a word of their native tongue, I couldn't easily engage in their customs. I was an American with a Japanese face. Perhaps those Japanese schoolgirls saw right through you too and simply conceded to the demands of the dumb tourist, the bigoted foreigner.

One day when I'm ready, I'll go back. Not to find my other half but hopefully to achieve a balance. I know I won't blend in, but that's okay. I'm different. My yellow skin doesn't match my white speech but the words I write and speak are my own. My language is looser now. I'm not afraid to break grammar rules, to honestly write what and how I feel.

I'm making progress. Are you?

Jane Tanimura '07 had the opportunity to go to Spats with Chang-rae Lee last fall. They talked about good writing, good food and good times. He inspires her to be a better writer.

Daitoku-ji Koto-in Hall
Amy Marshall PhD '09
Digital Photograph

My Father Spreads Flames of Remembrance
K. Zafra '08
Digital Photograph

Basilica Minore del Santo Niño, Cebu City, Philippines

Close Your Eyes

Jennifer Lee

the panes withstand the heat
while I gaze into the blinding light.
my body urges me
pull down the shades
plunge into obscurity.
a flute
strikes its most piercing note
and it is I, alone in the woods.
a marching procession of colors
flash before me
and then disappear.
there is a longing to follow
but a jerk in the circadian rhythm
and I again, am submerged in the radiance of the sun.

Jennifer Lee '10 is in a Cheshire Cat kind of wonderland.

You Ask, and I'll Tell You

K. Zafra and Vijou Bryant

K

My mom is Filipino.
My dad is Filipino.

She was born in Manila.
He was born in Kabankalan.

Over 10 times

My parents speak Tagalog to each other and to me,
And I understand

When I was growing up

We had
Pansit and lumpia

sinagang

Cassava and lecheflan

When my family got together,
They all told me I was Filipino.
The archipelago of paradise was "back home".
My titas were all nurses who immigrated to this country for their children's education.
I could feel my parents' self-sacrifice in every plate of kanin we shared.

Both

I've been to the Philippines
I've been to the Philippines

In my life.

But English is the only language I can speak.

And CHICKEN ADOBO.

Vijou

My mom is Filipino.
My dad is African American.

She was born in Bautaan.
He was born in New York.

Only 1 time

My Mom speaks Tagalog on occasion, and I don't understand

When my family got together

Hamburgers and hot dogs

Spaghetti

Ice cream and cake

When I was growing up,

And all I owed them was success in my studies and pride in my background. They all told me I was Filipino, and it all felt natural.
So I accepted it.

But I still question my identity.
Filipino Alliance was the obvious club of choice

It was doctor, lawyer, or nothing.

When I tell people I'm Filipino, they say they can… "See that."

I always check Asian.

They raised me hardcore Catholic.

When I was growing up,
Having to fill out forms that told me that checking more than one box was not an option…
I choose being black over Asian because black was how I was perceived.
Made to feel guilty by some, that in choosing to identify as *biracial*, I wasn't accepting my "blackness"
But I accepted it.

Unsure of which communities or groups I fit in here at Brown
But I still question

Seeing my parents marriage as "normal" but others don't
But I still question

People see me and the first thing that comes to mind is, "What *are* you?"
But I still question

Not knowing what box to check, black, Asian, or other
But I still question

Never feeling quite "authentic" enough in either the black or Asian community.

But I still question my identity.
But I still question my identity.

You see me and what do you see?
Half this. Half that.
Stop making me question who I am.
Stop trying to put me into a box.
My race, ethnicity, identity is not for you to decide,
Just because I don't speak Tagalog or _____ doesn't mean I'm any less Filipino.
Just because I don't look or act a certain way doesn't make me less black. What makes someone Filipina?
What makes someone black?
You have no right to make me feel any less than 100%.
Stop making me question who I am.
Stop trying to put me into a box.

You ask

I'll tell you.

I am
Filipina American

You ask,
And I'll tell you.

I am

Filipina American
AND
AFRICAN AMERICAN.

K. Zafra '08 loves being Filipina American and sends her love to her FAmily!

Vijou Bryant '09 is ballin. (Ballin!)

So Much Light

Kevin Wu

---- so much light to fall into the darkness, so much light to suffuse every man, so much light to vanish into the light, so much light to make and shatter, so much light to follow, so much light like a road, so much light like paper, so much light like my heart, so much light of expanse, so much light of reach, so much light, such mighty light, such indifferent light… 2:41 AM PST 10/2/06

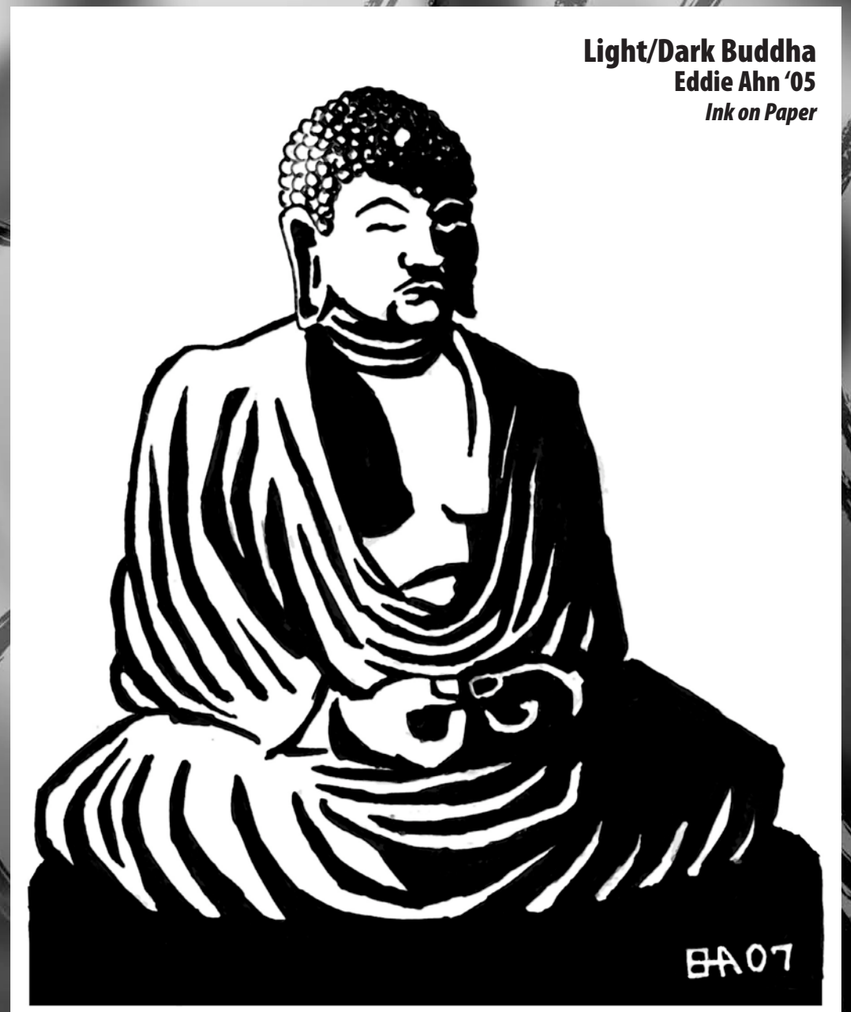
Kevin Wu '06 is on patrol.

Haiku of Light and Dark

Jennifer Braga

Twilight comes in blue
That can wash us in wonder
As day and night join.

Jennifer Braga is an executive assistant at Brown Technology Partnerships.



Light/Dark Buddha
Eddie Ahn '05
Ink on Paper

Circular Logic
Jan Brudeer '06
Digitally Enhanced Photograph

Immortality

[noun]: perpetual life after death

Irene Chen

The first person on the moon was a woman, my mother stated. I had brought home my history project about Neil Armstrong, hoping my parents could help me with it. I was confused. Mrs. Landith had taught the whole third grade class about Armstrong. My teacher, in my 8-year-old eyes at least, could not be wrong. It was then my mother first told me about Chang O, and the pills of immortality. She swallowed them and flew up to live on the moon. It was then I told my mother I wanted to be immortal. She laughed and told me immortality came at a price. *Immortality*, she said, *is only possible after you die*. Who will remember you then, after you die, if no one is there to tell your story?

His hands were all over me. *Look what I have*, he whispered in my ear, opening his fingers wrapped around some pills. *Immortality*, he whispered. *It's all ours baby*. He had taken several shots in a row, his eyes glazed and his tongue slurred. He kissed me sloppily on my mouth, and I let him, embarrassed by his actions. But maybe it was just because I wasn't drunk enough.

Immortality. We certainly could have touched the sky that night. Bodies touched, and the strobe light flashed; our laughter had turned into hysterics. We touched one another just to see if we could still feel. There was a numbness and a hollowness in my laughter. I stumbled into the bathroom, and peered at my face in the florescent lit mirror. I looked pale and ghost-like, my mascara smeared into dark moons under my eyes. I stumbled in my heels into someone else, knocking over their drink. I slurred out a drunken apology, and the girl simply laughed in my face. Oh yeah, we were all going down in the history books.

Immortality. I walked out onto the porch, and saw the full whiteness of the moon contrasting to the dark silk of the sky. I remembered the story about the woman on the moon. If only my parents could see me now. I laughed to myself and turned to go inside.

Immortality. Youth makes us all believe we are invincible. We've all been told that we could do anything we wanted. It wasn't until we went to college, realized that our brains meant nothing, and that the valedictorian status we had back in Hometown High School meant nothing. We were all searching for our own stakes in immortality. A way to make our names infamous. It all seemed so possible then. This immortality. He was back, whispering in my ear. *I've got enough for myself*, he said. He had already had several of them. *Last one*, he said. I laughed in his face even though nothing had been funny, but I could see that he was no longer seeing the present, but the past and the future all at once.

My eyes focused beyond his head; the moon was full tonight and mysterious. I saw Chang O then, her dress swirling, white as she hummed to herself while weaving. I look at him finally, and his eyes have slid out of focus. *Let's go baby, I'm going to drive you somewhere, and we're going to have fun*. Even his fingers were slurred, sloppily trying to trace the side of my face. I protested, but my voice seemed to be coming from far away. *You shouldn't drive*, I heard my voice echo in my own head.

He became indignant and insisted on it. He was no longer focused on me, and wanted to drive, anywhere, to go anywhere just driving fast. *It's like flying, baby, you know? You wanna fly with me?* He lurched up and insisted on finding his keys. The bag of pills he had been taking fell quietly to the floor. I picked it up and studied them. *Immortality*, I laughed softly. I needed to save everyone else from his immortality.

I wobbled over and found him, fumbling in the pocket of his jacket. I tried to stop him. He reared back, and punched me in the face. Luckily he was drunk enough that it barely came close. His punch threw him off-balance and he fell down to the ground, giggling. I took the keys and went into the bathroom. I sat there on the side of the bathtub and fingered the bag of pills.

Immortality. He said I could fly, become weightless. He promised me a lot of things. I stared into the mirror again. Why not live on the moon, if it meant I could fly? I cupped my hands, filling them with water from the sink and popped the pill into my mouth. I stared at my face until my vision slowly cleared, and there was nothing but all-encompassing blankness.

I was tied to a rope, entwined to the high circus

Untitled
Glenda Tan '09
Digital Photograph

tent ceiling, and I faced a man who was similarly tied in. We slowly began to run in circles, and as we ran, people holding ropes behind us slowly pulled us into the air. As our feet left the ground, we began to make circles in the air, first huge circles, then soon, the circles became smaller, and came faster and faster, until our ropes became entwined in the middle, and our palms met together. Then we pushed off from each other's hands, and we began circling away to our descent.

I loved the feeling of flying, and I told him that I wanted to know how it was to fly without ropes carrying me. He smiled and said that he would give me what I had been wishing for.

Then he handed me a pair of wax wings, which attached to my back. He told me to be careful, and I nodded in agreement, too excited to think properly. And as I soared through the blue skies, I flew closer and closer to the sun, and its fiery white fury. And as I came closer, I realized that the wings were made of wax, and that I would never be able to meet the sun. And as I plummeted back to the earth, I remembered too late the story of Icarus, who didn't realize how much the light could burn.

And as I sank into the ocean, weighed down to the white wax that had now cooled into what was now going to be my anchor. As I watched the light of the sun play on the waves of the ocean, the golden dots that danced on the surface of the water, I reached out, but I kept sinking to the darkness of the bottom, where secrets lie and life began.

Irene Chen '09 doesn't like to fly, because she gets airsick.

Untitled
Janice Kim '09
Digital Photograph

Untitled

Masumi Hayashi-Smith

The first thing I hear is silence. I take a deep breath and hear the air enter through my nose and exit through my mouth. My eyes are closed to allow my breath to connect me to the world. In the distance, the waves rush in. I feel my breaths become a part of this infinite rhythm of coming and going. Coming and going. I am at peace. The world sounds so empty. This space around me makes me feel colder and I pull my sleeping bag around me. My swing sways and creaks to counter my movement. I sway, the swing creaks, and the ocean breathes. Sleeping outdoors makes me believe that I am a participant in the world. I no longer wait for something to happen because everything that I want is with me. I am rejuvenated and relaxed with each breath of fresh air. From time to time I hear the vibration of a car, or my mother calling to the dog. Tonight, a train passes. It is a mile away, so its horn is faint. The horn is less of an alarm and more of a siren. A siren calling me out to the ocean, beckoning me back to my dreams. I shift a little, and the swing creaks again. I am gently lulled by the swing, by the ocean, by the gentleness of the night and I drift away.

Masumi Hayashi-Smith '10 is sleep deprived.

Hush

Erin Frauenhofer

Hush.

The blanket's thick sigh cradles us between shadows. You and I, hidden by the dry blushing darkness, each lay cheek to pillow and shoulder to sheet. Our faces are a whisper's width apart; you inhale my breath, your breath, our breath. The cadence overlaps our hearts' unbroken beats.

When I sleep alone, I wonder why—not how—I breathe. I wonder why we strive and trust and crave, then emerge as dust.

My hand rests against the calm fabric of your shirt; your arm wraps around my waist. Breath after breath, we compose a warm rhythm, parching a fraction of air where my lips almost brush yours.

When I sleep alone, I ache for the dark surfaces. I ache for the quiet, unseen corners I will never know.

My breath, your breath, our breath. The heat of our sleepy sighs prickles my cheeks. My skin flushes, the tickle reaching from my face to my feet.

When I sleep alone, I bury my head beneath the blanket. I bury my body within the soft shell, the folds sheltering me in a cavity of air.

With you, I watch the shadows. My hair stretches across the pillow, embracing hot darkness; my face, by yours, is bare to the night air.

We are still.

Breathing.

Erin Frauenhofer '09 is happy.

Untitled
Jenny Rhee '09
Digital Photograph

Ransom

Corrie Tan

i met him for the last time yesterday; i have reason to believe that i was the last person he'd met. i hadn't seen him for years and there he was, amidst the greys and browns of people hurrying to work, his guitar case in one hand and battered suitcase in the other. we were at the train station and we were gawking in surprise, a platform apart—me on my way to school, him standing in a puddle of luggage. he looked the same. a little chubbier, perhaps, and in a proper jacket and tie—no scruffy jeans and no oversized sneakers. he looked like a rockstar in a straitjacket. he'd always wanted to be famous.

i wanted to wave, or blow a kiss, but the train nosed its way between us and his image blended into the rush of steel.

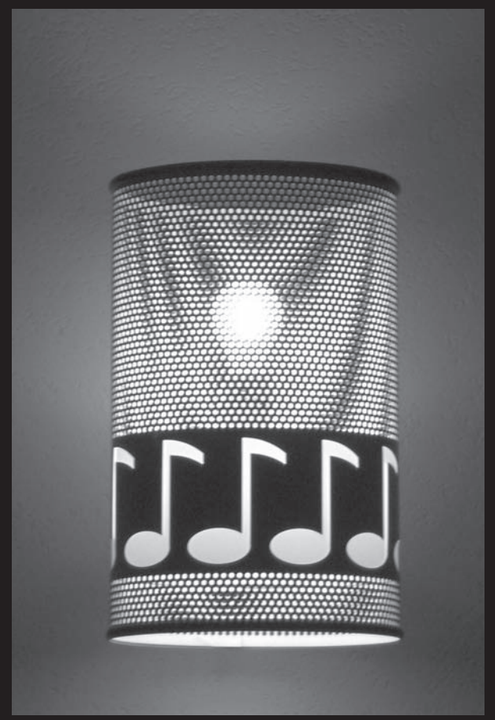
today the "missing" posters were flapping weakly all over town, taped to grimy lampposts and peeling walls. his photocopied face grainy and pixel-

lated against the jaundiced yellow tone of paper. last seen at this train station, it said, please call this number.

i traced the carbon outline of his features and in that blurred moment he wasn't special any longer. he felt mass-produced, manufactured, commercialized; he now belonged to everyone and not just me. my heart sank and it was my first taste of disappointment, trying to understand the bitter concept of unasked fame.

Corrie Tan '10 is tesseracting.

Untitled
Hariharan Krishnaswamy
Digital Photograph



There is No More Moonlight
Aviva Grossman

romance has become gritty real and improbable
hooded lyricists string together words like
toaster and acne and corduroy pants to woo
the girl in the grocery store. there is no more
moonlight in lovelorn faces only skin
sometimes pale sometimes littered with
toadstool specks that are explained to be
beautiful as only details are. i dated a boy
who wrote a song about baby teeth in
his dresser drawer and it was a love song but
for the life of me i can't imagine why. kisses
don't need to taste good anymore and noses
can bump. the sensuality of eyelashes depends
not on length but on being simply cosmeticless
adorning the face but unadorned. appearances
and bodies are significant for their shape in
relation to a lover's there is no beauty but
in the beauty of the everyday. i wonder
what is left when romance is too ordinary
to be extraordinary anymore.

Aviva Grossman '10 believes that there is never a dull moment.

Desconocida
Sandra Valenciano '08
Digitally Enhanced Photograph

Asian Fetishes and Empty Subway Cars

Janine Kwoh

Your eyes flicker thickly over the tops of smudgy small print, headlines of hurricanes and genocide only cursorily considered until you turn your attention to something more satisfying to the baseness of your desires. Lustful violations of basic common courtesy dart from seat to seat until they settle finally on my apparent vulnerability. You lick your lips to stave off the sudden desert in your mouth as your gaze darkens in anticipation of some visual Asian stimulation. You wonder how hands folded across my lap will make your skin tingle as they drunkenly clutch at the exposed curves of your back; how my legs, buckling now from the car compartment's lurching sway, will feel as they spasm thrown across your dark contours in some hidden alley or cheap motel getaway. Graffitied windows reflect an enticing silhouette, this symbol of clandestine unmentionables and the stuff of cheaply exotic dime-store novels. But what has escaped your blind abilities, and what is lost in the translation of your sordid fantasies, are the burdens of expected perfection, facades of personal strength and direction from a proud cultural legacy, and the fingering of scars, visible or not, that tell of a history of hardship and learned futility.

Let me make it clear, just so you know. I will only tell you once, so listen closely: Leave me out of your fantasies of virginal dancing geisha dolls on rolls of oceanous blue silken tapestries, of powdered bodies that contrast black waves cascading over fragile collarbones, which lift like budding breasts and adolescent moans from heavily blushed lotus lips parted in feverish expectation of sexual liberation from red communist oppression. Pungent incensuous fumes, fiery as tiger balm and cool as crushed icy rose petals in green tea, emanate from flat stomachs revealed by robes torn open at the height of luxury. I am not a territory to be claimed like the beautiful concessions bought with beguiling lies that conceal contemptible intentions. I am not genetically programmed to suit your needs; my stature designed for your comfort, and my body stripped for your greed. I am not to be admired for what I represent, but expect to be respected for what I am.

I tell you this now for all the ignorant comments, suggestive leers, and painful memories. I tell you this now for the time you pressed up against me in an empty subway train, for the time you pulled me in to kiss you without even first asking for my name. Listen hard, because I'm telling you this for that night you whispered so softly in my ear that I was your 'first Asian,' and the cold rush of bitter realization that what to me held the possibility of meaningful intimacy was to you just the satisfying of some oriental itch hit me with all the bitterness and harshness of a winter monsoon in the crackling heat of our summer fit. My dignity disdained to fulfill some fantasy, my entire existence, reduced to one single deed—crossed off your "to do" list with a big, red checkmark—and my heart broken by the glory of your conquest like the sound of cheap porcelain crashing in the dark.

So don't think that I can't see you or that I will stay silent when I do, and remember that fantasies can all too quickly turn into nightmares.

Janine Kwoh '09 has yellow fever.

Inventing the Alphabet

Sonia Nayak

"h"

i polish my eyes.
a ghastly mistral of a spirit that made me blind…
i pinch the lashes. they drip-drip sabbath air and chipped whiskey; burn away
haze floating above the cheeks. haggard, impish—i can see…
the pupils breathe and retch, beached in a stretch of fast food parking lots,
where it all began. i was born a shell and blossomed a hustler with
a thousand heavens—but i chose–
i chose the truth: an itch for shame. i found him chain-
smoking dark green dunhills by the
shore. hair of leather, pale of ghost, gray hound with a chronic itch
he lit me high shook me low. We merged in dim light near the beeches
outside hojo's—mashing lips, ashing tips.

i wash them well. the iris howls like a kettle whistles; it should be bathed with sloth,
just to shut, just to mother the closed lids— i've seen all i must—

we went north. hej hej chainlinked lips; hej hej head
shrinker; cherry blossoms dry earth softball grounds—
grown man, mothered by a danish seamstress: hej hej, goodbye. his haven for his
homeless–

and i was hailed lilith. i flew high i lathered satan i nursed the
children hickeys of honey they paid me in haste,
they could not shake the look of my bare breast—chapped, bashed, hot
to the touch, to the tongue. hej hej.

to he: nothing belongs to me- no more, no more. to me: wretch. those
black shapes on your face, the eyes, your lips. uglyugly. shell.
helium, I laughed- I must be clean, I must sing—
halleluia.

Sonia Nayak '08 can usually steep a perfect—paralyzing bliss.

You and I

JoAnna Liu

You and I

We laugh like idiots
We always talk crass
About crotchbog and swampass
And how noodles make our shirts smell
funky
And what we think is in
cloud ear fungus
oh and that time you sweat curry
Some nights
we'll roll over
into the subject of
school
Things get heavier
You're depressed and orgo is
killing
you
I can't stop crying from physics
I tell you you'll be okay
And you say I'll be fine
If we flunk out
We'll come home to each other
Failed loser townies
Still best friends since the
first
grade

I called you up the other night
I was having doubts about God
You said hey it's okay
Sometimes I doubt Him too
We shot the shit about Christ

I said I need my soul to be grounded
I said I need something good in my life
And you were quiet for a while

You're doing better now too aren't you
I'm proud
Your phone call last semester
My turn to hear you
hiccup
and sniffle

I've got your secret dreams on
my chest
You've locked away my
middle name
behind your lips
When it comes to things we shouldn't say
You and I
hear each other
all
too
well
Let's stick to the jokes
And the quirky stories
Tell me more about finding your roommate naked
And I'll tell you about the frat party
If it feels shallow
We can talk about family problems
Or wade around in
a little more substance
But the less we dig
The better
Or we might find What we've been trying not to all along

JoAnna Liu '07 is hoping that her last Spring in Providence is the most beautiful one yet.

Peekaboo
Angela Wong '09
Digital Photograph

Untitled (Staircase)
Kam Sripada '09
Black & White Photograph

Boiled Potatoes

Chris Suh

I was a freak. An extra tooth was growing between my front two incisors towards the bottom of my nose. Thanks to modern medicine, my dentist was able to detect the unwanted tenant far before it could do much damage. "It can come out through the inside of your nose you know," he told me with a smile.

So I went under the blade after my first semester of elementary school. He pulled out my front four baby teeth—they were rotten from too much candy anyway—then cut through my gum to yank out the interloper. The surgeon held out the tooth in his palm inches away from my face after the procedure. "That's a tooth?" I was appalled. It was shaped like a fat needle. "So it *could* have grown through my nose."

Having sewn up gums without front teeth meant that I looked like a veteran ice hockey player every time I laughed. It also meant that I could not have any hard food items. The idea sounded terrible at first, but it was the best present I could ask for at the time. I now had an excuse to avoid the abominable school food, which we were forced to eat regardless of whether we liked it or not. We didn't get to pick what we ate. Over-fermented kimchi, all sorts of lukewarm vegetable dishes, watery cucumbers, and fish soups, especially the fish soups… my body shivered at the moment my tongue touched the surface of the liquid.

My teacher, Mrs. Lee, was a sadistic witch who beat kids with a small broomstick or her bony hand whenever she was in a bad mood. She forced us to lick the trays clean everyday at lunch and repeated the same phrase, "Think of the starving North Korean children. You should consider yourselves fortunate!"

For almost two months, I never had to worry about standing in the lunch line since I could simply pull mine out of my backpack. Boiled potatoes topped with cheese. They sound absolutely insipid, but they were heavenly compared to the school food. Before kids started to line up, I'd prepare my meal by avidly poking and mashing the potatoes with my fork, so I could simply insert the wet crumbs into my mouth and let my tongue do all the work.

One day I dropped one of the potatoes on the floor while trying to prepare my meal—my fork slid off the potato's curves, popping it out of the red plastic lunch box and rolling it off the desk beyond my reach. Right then Mrs. Lee rose from her chair and signaled everyone to be quiet. I froze. If I moved a muscle in Mrs. Lee's peripheral vision after she rose from her chair, my row would eat dead last.

With forty kids in the class, everyone getting up the same time would cause chaos, so she devised a rule for the lunch line. She divided the class by rows; the "best behaving" one would go first, and the worst one last. "Best behaving" simply meant you didn't piss her off. But her notion of "misbehaving" wasn't as simple. Loudly talking or misbehaving was out of the question because she'd have beaten the rule violator to a pulp, so no one dared to try that, but flinching a muscle, coughing, sneezing, yawning, or touching hair all qualified as "misbehaving" and justified her hatred of you.

I stealthily tried to reach out to the fallen potato with my foot and hide it every time she gazed at the other side of the room. But inevitably she glanced around the room and stopped at me. We exchanged a long uncomfortable stare.

She plodded towards me and asked, "Is that your potato?"

"Yes Meme," I trembled.

"Pick it up."

I got out of the chair with my head down, and bent my knees to pick up the potato. Then came the crushing force, concentrated on my spine, all in one blow. I collapsed on top of my arms and the potato. I could no longer able to keep the balance between inhaling and exhaling—so I gasped and coughed out a cry. Then she dragged me up and smacked my back again and again. Her hand felt like a wooden block spiked with metal just to make each stroke even more painful. I closed my eyes shut and hoped it would eventually stop, listening to the echoes of the smacks. I never knew my back could make such loud, resonating sounds.

"How dare you litter in my classroom? Pick it up!"

I bent down again, trying to reach for the potato, but she kept on hitting me while the whole class sat silently watching the scene. Then she told me to go back to my desk, with the entire potato crumpled in my fist. "Don't throw it in the trashcan!" She screamed. I picked up the crumbs that were stuck between my chest and the floor, and then threw them into my lunch box along with the perfectly healthy golden potato. My row ended up receiving lunch last and kids hungrily wiped the metal trays with their tongues, just like every other day.

I sat there tacitly while the whole class ate. Instead, I ground and pulverized the potatoes with my fork, stabbed and crushed them till I was scraping the bottom of the plastic lunch box that was now filled with an indistinguishable mess jumbled in tears and mucous. I sat there glowering at the disgusting platter, while my teacher squinted her eyes at me.

That afternoon, she got me again.

"Where's your notebook?" she said.

"It's right here," I pointed at my brand new one placed on my desk.

"No, the other notebook."

"What other notebook?"

She looked at me with disgust, ordered me to get up and pummeled her fists into my back. I fell hard onto the ground and rose back up at her command. Lines of warm salty liquid slid down my cheeks and accumulated at the corners of my mouth, but I kept my eyes open and didn't make a sound. She smacked me harder and harder until she ran of gas and my back was numb. Then in between her panting Mrs. Lee screamed and ordered me to go stand outside.

"Fucking bitch," I muttered as I exited the room.

Chris Suh '10 is updating his facebook status. Updated moments ago.

A Short Moment
Won Hoe Koo '10
Digital Photograph

Of Coffee and Man

Tao Rugkhapan

La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme une nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais comme de chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
—Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.

Charles Baudelaire

When Autumn comes true at last, fallen leaves have already turned brown smelling like crisp coffee. It was a Thursday afternoon in cloudy September when I decided to buy a coffee maker, a machine, so I wouldn't have to set up my alarm for a second time, and could instead let the sweet spice of brewing Morning Blend awaken me without first sipping it. After bothering to roll off the bed, press the red button, and roll back to sleep again only to wake up 15 minutes later, that is. Since then my coffee-drinking routine has not simply entailed adding sugar and stirring, but being lulled to sleep by the 15-minute unlikeliest lullaby of a buzzing sound, touching the burning carafe, and cracking open the lid of the coffee maker to let the steaming vapour tickle my face all the while floating on high.

When the fizzing starts to fizzle, I pour the boiling frothy coffee from its carafe to my cool aluminum mug ever so slowly, not so much to

Inside Agra Fort
Kam Sripada '09
Black & White Photograph

pretentiously reveal the classy art of coffee-preparing as to avoid clumsily burning myself. Then, I hold my mug in the palms of my hands for a few seconds to gratify my morning fetish: to feel the warmth inside seep through the coolness of the metal container, so I can no longer tell what causes the numbness in my hands. There, my coffee sits dark in the previously hollow well of my mug where you stare down and find nothing but a motionless coffee surface on a bottomless bottom. When I was much younger and void of sarcasm, I was simplistic enough to describe the colour of coffee as strictly dark at best and absolutely black at worst. Then again you cannot blame a child's inclination to oversimplify because it is the only way he can make sense of the world of coffee and the world of man. But as I grew up listening to my mum's teaspoon swiftly clanking against her porcelain mug every morning (the favourite one that her friend bought her from Japan), examining coffee shops in the streets (the kind of coffee shop only Thai people understand), and burning myself a few times, the nuanced analogue of black and brown, of copper and orange began to dawn on me. The gradation of the same natural colour that is lighter and lucid when lit by sunlight, and darker in a secret lover's chamber. Almost like the spectrum of Caucasian complexions that cascadingly spans from ghostly white to Scandinavian fair. My hands are confused and numb still.

I don't exactly remember when I first drank coffee. It might have been any simple passing moment as boring as switching on the TV or winking or yawning. But as far as I can remember, I was consistently that mischievous kid who would sneak a sip from older people's coffee mugs, without their consent, of course. Coffee, they said and I quote, was not good for us kids and would destroy each of our brain cells with every gulp we swigged. I don't know if the warning was out of their good intention or their laziness to make more coffee when it ran out, or maybe a bit of both. But wouldn't you adults, methinks, not have brains by now? I thereupon gulped down some more. Since then it's been well over ten years that I have wondered if, in all fairness, I could presently be smarter.

That coffee was not the kind of coffee I tend to drink nowadays, however. Not the silken vanilla latte I soften almond biscotti in and finish off to the last cold drip before I scurry to class. *Oleang* was the dangerously sweet, charcoal-dark coffee served with shaved ice and sold in a small plastic bag with a straw that Thai people are fond of. The taste is a unique blend of sweet and bitter and the smell is slightly sour and curiously metallic. The visual texture is impossibly black and glistening. All too syrupy without ice. And it is, mind you, impossible to make this specialty drink at home unless your home is a Thai coffeehouse that can be found right around the corner. It is our local National Assembly where older people flock together at 7 in the morning to talk politics while munching on golden fried dough dipped in thickly sweet condensed milk and drinking hearty morning coffee that turns mild and airy by the time the discussion is finished. It is the place we at first frequent as patrons until we at last become friends with the owner, who we will come to call *Auntie* or *Uncle*. It is also our sun-proof midday refuge where we casually stroll in to get something iced and cool like *Cha Yen* (Thai milky iced tea), *Cha Manao* (lime iced tea), *Ka Fae Yen* (Thai iced latte), and of course, a dead-brained old man's *Oleang*. There can't be a better fix for a thirsty, sticky afternoon when the tropical sun glares blindingly above your head and sweat is in the air.

Like the shoe size I wear or the books I read, coffee is personal. Whether Dark or Creamy, it resists stereotype and defies definition. If I stumbled into a coffee shop to order *a coffee*, chances are I would end up getting a paper cup of hot coffee in Starbucks America, an avid espresso shot in a French café, whereas people at a local Thai coffee place would give me an inquisitive look and ask "Hot or cold, sweet or bitter?" Just like every other coffee drinker, I too like my coffee strictly tailored and accept nothing short of personal. This much sugar and this much cream in this much coffee, the fussy specificity extends from the moment it is brewed to the moment it is seasoned now that I have total control over the beans. I always love to add fatty, refrigerated Half and Half and watch the gradual transformation in my coffee as the cold white cream swirls down the cup turning the scalding, matter-of-fact coffee into warm personal obsession. I then would top it off with a little sugar or sometimes Splenda® in hope of offsetting the cholesterol in Half and Half, just like the average weight-conscious American who would order a double cheeseburger and large fries with a large, big-hearted diet coke who is hoped to work miracles. Much as I love my coffee bold and dark, I rarely have it pure and black. My coffee has to be bittersweet and sweetbitter. If there is one thing my mum and I have in common, it must be an incurable sweet tooth that continues to add simple pleasures to the living. A packet of sugar here or there always makes our days, for caffeine is surely not the only thing that runs down in our blood.

My humble coffee maker is very cheap and the size is personal, so I can only make a few cups at a time, which has begun to not suffice for a day. It is now months old and sits solidly on the floor in my bedroom like a quiet stanza delivering both functional values and sensual promise. Making coffee has become the morning highlight I use to persuade myself to get up at 8 am for. First, I open the curtain to let the light in so I can examine the colour when I finally pour the coffee down into my mug. Second, I pour cold water (as suggested in the instructions) into the mini reservoir, measure the pre-ground coffee (extra dark French Roast these days) to match the water level and pour it into a brown paper filter (#2, unbleached), which already sits neatly in its place. Then I wait until I hear the buzzing and the whirring of a throaty whoosh of intimate wordplay. I can't tell what colour these sounds make, but I like the familiar smell of coffee and sunwashed linen that the room lets loose.

Tao Rugkhapan '08 highly recommends milk-free Thai iced tea with lime juice.

Thoughts on Asian American Political Identity

Jessica Kawamura and Karynn Ikeda

Seven years ago, Dean Kisa Takesue had the foresight to create a publication dedicated to envisioning and building the Asian American community at Brown. This publication provided a space for Asian Americans to express their viewpoints on issues ranging from personal identity to the state of Asian America to the very concept of the Asian American writer and artist. VISIONS is now in its eighth volume, and through the issues, it has grown from a four-page newsletter to the glossy magazine that you see before you today. This transformation is only a small indicator of a continued struggle toward defining an Asian American voice, one that the early VISIONS states would "reflect the different communities that now make up Asian America as a whole."

Given this background, it is an interesting moment in time to revisit what it means to be Asian American and to be part of an Asian American community. While Asian is the box that we check on numerous forms throughout our lives, is also a term that we utilize as a source of collective agency like in the early VISIONS. Asian American is thus both imposed upon us and self proclaimed; in both cases it is inherently political.

If we claim an Asian American identity, what are its political implications? If we are Asian American activists, what issues do we focus on? While there are numerous challenges and inequities impacting individual Asian American communities at any given point in time, there are very few overarching issues that address the racial group as a whole.

One way to look at Asian American politics and activism is from a Third World perspective. To explore Asian American activism at Brown, it is interesting to consider a number of Third World political issues that have arisen on campus in the past few years, in particular police brutality, reparations for slavery, and affirmative action in admissions.

The issue of police brutality has been a central issue in the Black community on campus, particularly since two incidents in the fall when Brown students were violently attacked by both DPS and Providence police officers. Despite the active involvement of a handful of Asian American students, there was not a collective Asian American voice in support of the Black community.

In contrast, Asian American students played a prominent role in the David Horowitz incident that took place in March 2001. After the Brown Daily Herald decided to run Horowitz's advertisement against reparations for slavery, a group of students took the copies of the paper as they were distributed. The incident made national news. What is particularly interesting about the incident though, is that all of the students who took the copies of the BDH were Asian American. Although they were working with other students of color, they purposely chose to act on behalf of the group.

Most recently, affirmative action has again become an issue on campus as two students have initiated an effort to find out whether Brown discriminates against Asian American applicants. Apparently, this endeavor was in part in response to a January article in the Daily Princetonian ridiculing an Asian American who is currently suing Princeton for racial discrimination in the admissions process.

If being Asian American is about a political identity, the Asian American community is also the consequence of conscious political alliance rather than the natural result of cultural uniformity. Asian is just a racial category that encompasses numerous countries, languages, cultures. Within Asian America, there are not only ethnic, but also regional and generational differences. At Brown, this is evidenced by the many Asian ethnic and cultural organizations on campus.

However, what becomes of the Asian American community when no common political voice emerges? Is there a community? Or do the many Asian groups comprise nothing but themselves without a common cause? Although we may have a vibrant Chinese American or Korean American or Vietnamese American or Filipino American or Taiwanese American or South Asian American community at Brown, the same cannot be said of a unified Asian American community.

As VISIONS pulls away from its political op-eds, it embraces a more subtle blend of poetry and prose. The writing is not always benign, but the form lends itself to a passive-aggressive nature that attempts a subtle approach at the issue. However, this approach is in danger of leaving the casual reader a superficial impression that Asian America has acquiesced to the American Dream: Asian Americans have finally made it, so there are no issues. There is no glass ceiling and we are not perceived as stereotypes. We are not underrepresented in America's leadership, and race is nothing more than an artifact of our lives. As such, we need no political op-eds to rally the community into action. There are those who would believe this, and so they may not see the necessity for an Asian American community. But if the events of the past few years are any indication, perhaps it is time to reevaluate whether any of these issues belong to more than just a few marginalized Asian Americans.

To envision and create and Asian American community at Brown, we must celebrate the diversity of our experiences, while simultaneously claiming a common political identity and collective voice. Whether we organize around issues specific to our ethnic communities, those affecting Third World people, or those impacting society as a whole, it is critical that we find our voice and power as Asian Americans.

In the early days of VISIONS, Dean Takesue,

along with the VISIONS staff, expressed a hope that the publication would "serve as a forum to offer visions of what that diversity means, what it can become." As Asian Americans we cannot be described by the term alone, and VISIONS has gone a long way in demystifying what it means to be Asian American. Yet if we unite under "Asian American" as a source of collective power there is no limit to what we as a community can accomplish. But we must be bold in our efforts, and where the writing ends, action must take place. Indeed, the call for Asian American activism is one that has been written on many times before and will inevitably continue to appear until the day we are all ready to act.

Karynn Ikeda '09 and Jessica Kawamura '07 are two NorCal yonsei rockin' it on the East Coast. They make ochazuke when the weather gets cold.

Exercise in Form
Aviva Grossman '10
Charcoal on Paper

I Live on a Street With No Streetlights

Sophia Lin

There's something sharply hopeless about
a lack of color, a world as it is, a
realization of my own weakness
against the burning of the sun, the orbit of
the moon, the fact I couldn't see those
deer feces, and how one day
I too will be waste, like ashes in a
chamber pot, or embalmed in a dead tree
surrounded by wet roots, or
defenseless in a salty sea, like Li Bai
in 762 BC after he leapt overboard
to catch the moon. Drunk poets dying
alone are like orphans wishing on
stars long dead and mute song sparrows in mating
season—little tragedies of strange silence.

But not us, not us in our noisy glory.

We are busy fighting windmills, inexplicably
beating wings around light bulbs
above other heads, marrying
lights we think are true soul mates,
parading them around like trophy spouses
and writing three-chord love songs
in the name of God, Evolution,
Fashion, or Low Carb Diets—like moths
spreading rumors of enlightenment.

A firefly glimmers gold somewhere in the blackness.

Or perhaps we are more like fireflies, with
their flashes of brilliance, illuminating
instead of illuminated, flitting into
unknown territory and skeptical of the moths
crowding the glow of a lamppost. These are
the real loners, lit up in isolation,
the ones left with nothing but light that
sometimes glows in time with other light, but
they do not expect unity, only the
ability to make their own meanings in
destructive chaos. See how nobly
they philosophize, with solitary amber gleams?

But—remember—the light comes straight out of its ass.

There's something utterly honest about
a lack of color, a world as it is, the
apathy of the deer, the insensitivity
of stars to wishes, like underpaid Santas
at the mall, and the indifference of
the Grim Reaper—yet, we do not leave these
cold, as they are.

Rarely does a suburban street remain unlit.

Sophia Lin '10 wishes on the lights of New York City.

Display:
Juxtaposition by Yang
Tai-Ho Shin '09
Digital Photograph

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Corrections

VISIONS would like to acknowledge the following corrections to its previous issue (vol. viii, i. 1):

- The poem entitled "Su Shi Dingfengpi" was written by Su She, a Chinese poet of the S'ung Dynasty, and translated into English by Joshua Bocher and Larson Difiori.
- The last sentence of Corrie Tan's "Affection" on page 12 is supposed to read as follows, "Hide and seek, peering between fingers and glistening eyes."

Please email any corrections to the current issue to visions.brown@gmail.com.

If you are interested in joining the VISIONS staff or would like to submit any pieces of work, please contact:

visions.brown@gmail.com

and place "VISIONS interest" in the subject heading.

Comments? Questions? Suggestions?
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