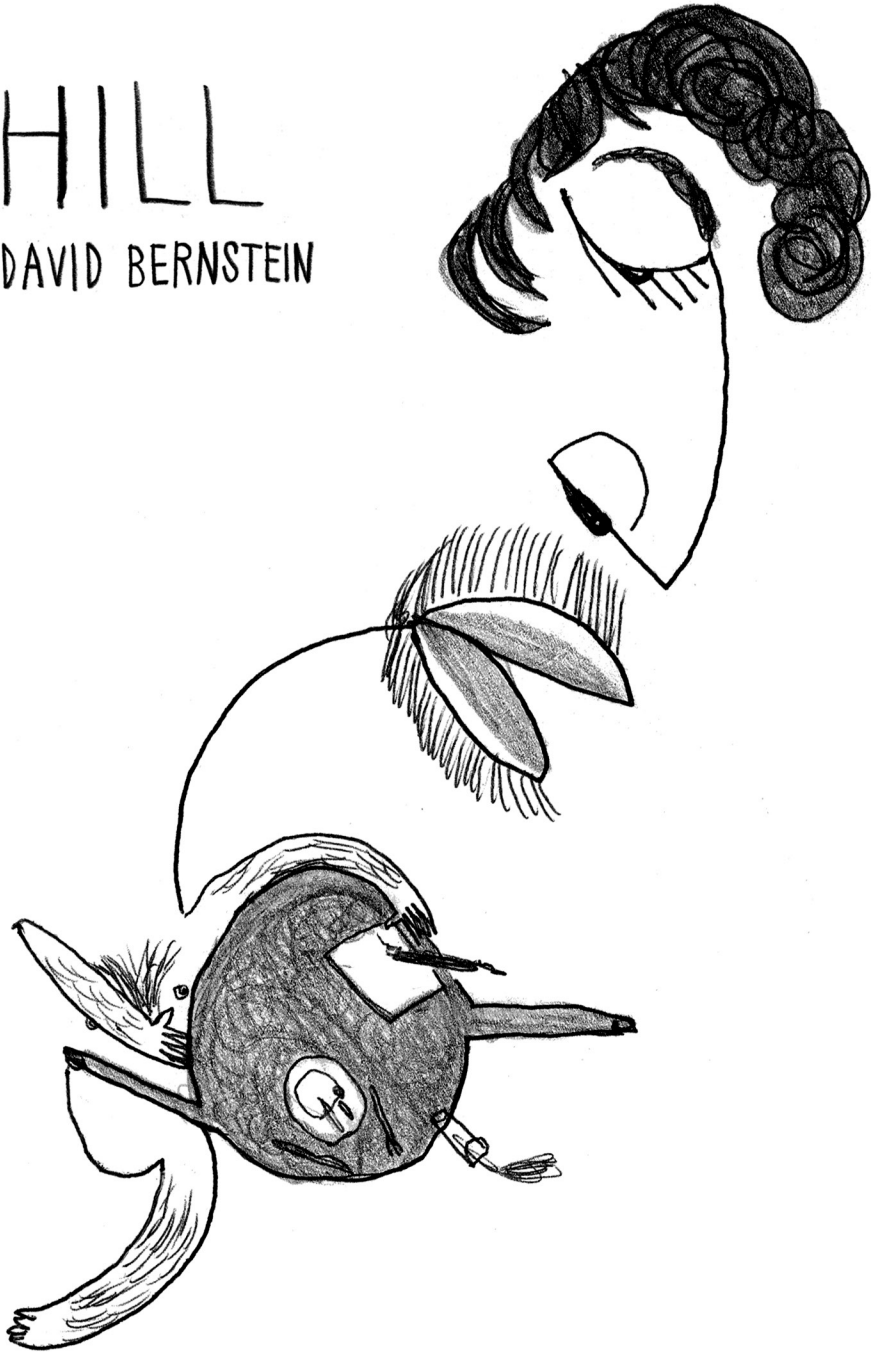


HILL

DAVID BERNSTEIN



HILL

By David Bernstein

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HILL

When I get up from the table,
I put my chair on its side.
When the table gets up,
Suzy is left behind.

Suzy is my muse

She is a mysterious one. She inspires me to swim laps in a pool and forget to count, and if I remember, then I've forgotten she existed.

She is a special one. You can always count on her when you least expect it, but if you call her name, she'll take her clothes off and jump in the river.

She is a shape shifter one and she'll start spinning your stuff if you don't flip it first. She'll join you at the table; in fact she'll join the table to become a caryatid doing karate.

We like to say, "Cheers to the miss standing under the table doing karate!"

That usually does the trick, and she smiles for it.

Hill

I live in a small town called Hill. There are not so many people, more bikes than people and a lot of other things too; things that meet things and some things are objects. Hill is an object and so are you. We both have equal existence in my flat.

Hill has many worn walls, such that they draw on you when you glide yourself along their bumps and brown bulges. There are dusty stones and on occasion a blue fence screams at you.

There are roads that go around Hill, up it usually, unless you fall asleep. But you're waking up. I'm telling you this because you're getting closer. My flat is close to the road, at the Turning Point. It's in the meat cleaver shape, which I've heard from a Feng Shui master is good luck.

In my flat, I have chairs and tables carefully arranged so that the tension remains in balance. My lamp shines one way to welcome the moment of entry. You enter and notice that you are being pulled another way by a mysterious force towards a plant. You get close and realize that you were not being pulled at all, but blown from behind and you're singing hallelujah. Today I invited my friend Arthur to come over and ponder the existence of things. He looks at my chair on its side for a silent time and says, "it looks like a question mark" and then adds, "but it has not fallen."

"No definitely not overthrown," I reply.

"A detective says to me that it is placed."

"Me thinks you thinging in the right direction."

“Well, two wrongs don’t make a right, but three lefts will point you in the right direction,” retorts Arthur.

“But do chairs have direction?”

Arthur contemplates this question and eventually comes to a new thought.

“It could be directing the body.”

“So the chair is speaking to the man and saying, ‘you thought you made me, telling me what to do, but now you move for me!’”

Just imagine when Bruno Munari was trying to find comfort in an armchair - moving into every position possible; on his side, upside down - he was in a boxing match with a thing. He thought the chair was designed for him, but now he was trying to escape it.

But we know that comfort went to the other room to dance with the couch potato a long time ago. And even earlier, Van Gogh painted himself as a chair; so the chair became the man. If we are the chairs, are we trying to escape ourselves?

“Well it’s shaped for the human,” thought Arthur. “And it also shapes the human into a folded position. And if we place the chair on its side, then the human is placed on its side into a fetal position, the image of deep sleep.”

Sleep little baby, you’re our gift

I once had a dream I was sleeping with a chair. I had painted it white before going to bed with it, but I didn’t know why. Maybe it was a sexual dream, showing a desire to make love to the thing, or maybe it was about being so close to the chair that we could join and become one. It was a nice dream either way, the kind that felt warm waking up to, like I slept a double night.

Arthur continues, “But that was a long time ago, and since then, you forgot the chair to focus on the lines. You told me how you were drawing a chair and stopped seeing a chair and started seeing only lines. You thought you could liberate them, but they rearranged themselves while you were resting your eyes. Soon you realized that the lines were pretending to be the chair once again.”

I wanted to set them free, so I turned it on its side to bring autonomy.

But here is where Arthur flipped it back to me. He turned the chair once more and told me about the Asante tribe of Ghana. For them, a chair contains the soul of the person who sits on it, and when it's not in use, you put it on its side so no one else sits on it, breaking the bond. You put it on its side to preserve its spiritual nature. Furthermore, the chairs of the living are painted white, and when someone dies, the chair is burned black and stored away in a temple.

I realized at that moment, that in my dream, what I thought was a sexual act of painting the chair was actually the Asante spirit speaking to me and telling me to do it.

“But Arthur,” I reply, “if I try to see the chair as just as a series of lines and not a resting human, I must accept that even free lines contain soul.”

Arthur smiled and said nothing.

I began to shift my body weight, trying to understand the collision of all these things

An Asante sings

That dreams conceal

What's fake and real,

But the physical brings

Another deal.

So I lifted my chair up, took a seat, so did he, and then we said cheers.

Turning Point

On the top of Hill is the Spatula Shack, a therapy office that I trek to once a week for sessions with The Don. I'm going there today to tell him about the dream I had last night. After saying goodbye to Suzy and chair on its side, I head out the front door and begin walking towards the Turning Point where I left my bike.

Arthur sends me a message that says there's a gathering at the Rest or Run for supper tonight, and that I should come and bring something to share.

I hop on my bike and start riding up, thinking about what to share at supper. I love to bike and think. You are moving in two worlds at the same time, the physical and the mental, and it jumps back and forth as you go.

Now I'm thinking about sharing a song for you while I ride,

There was a man in Vilnius,
Who had a dream we can't dismiss,
While thinking of sharing this,
A biking plan, a freeing bliss.
He was the mayor of the town,
And his ideas people found,
Of distributing free bikes around,
An orange pile of thrashing sound.
The public destroyed them all one night,
Smashed and crashed them with delight,
They're no one's bikes so no one fights,
But we all wonder if they were white,
It would be different...

But what if it were different. What if it was small, what if they were a few of my bikes? Would you care or smash them the same? But of course if you smash my bikes, then you smash me. And if I trust you, then you smash my trust.

I'm riding my bike fast now with an intensity that says my thoughts are going too fast for my body. Here I feel an energy that is pushing, push pop.

Just around the corner, I see another approach. She is on a fast bike and she is very attractive. I'm behind her and I've forgotten the bikes, which are all around of course, but they have merely become the gray walls that channel me to gaze upon this Sexy Lucy who I don't know. Would she borrow my bike? Spank me upside the head, this is a thrilling ride indeed. Up and down and then she turns a different way and there is grass down her way disappears. A shack is on my way and I'm blowing bubbles off my tongue. I spit to the right, I spit to the left, I spit in front, I spit behind, I spit to the ground, I spit to the sky. I pop a fisherman friend between my lips and whisper fucking wind.

Spatula Shack

I enter the Spatula Shack and look around. On one wall there is a closed closet with four panel doors, accordion style. Each slim vertical door has a small round porcelain knob in the center with a bold letter **O** painted on it. Above the doors are three lights mounted on the wall like little mushrooms of glowing glass. They are spaced out so that two are closer together and one is a little bit farther to the right. The Don smiles at me to show that he is ready and he's been observing me watching his walls. On top of the orange credenza is a red lamp that disturbs me slightly, but I don't really notice. The Don invites me into his office, which is somewhat plain, with the couch, chair, and table things in order. We sit down and without asking, I begin to tell him about my dream.

I'm with my friends Jerry, Marie, and their new baby Paul. I'm giving Jerry a book and saying that it's all about collectivity. He replies sharply, "Don't tell me what it's about, let it speak for itself."

Then we hop on our bikes in some city that I hardly know with lots of hills covered in green grass, somewhere like Seattle. The ground is wet and Jerry is riding on the sidewalk, Marie and I are on the street. In a short time, Marie goes onto the sidewalk, but I miss the entrance. There is a big turn in the road and it starts to go downhill fast, so I press on the brakes, but they have no effect with the slick ground. I keep going faster and faster, I'm going so fast now, faster and faster, I'm going so fast, faster than I've ever gone in my life. I'm quickly approaching a fork in the road, and there is a triangular shaped building in the middle. I'm high with fear and see that I'm going to hit the building. In the split second before the crash, I realize that all books are

about collectivity. Then I start thinking how I will save my life. I figure out that if I let the bike hit the building without me, then I will be OK. So I jump and let the bike pass between my legs and I hit the ground, roll. Then suddenly we are back in their home and they have the book again. Marie is holding a set of stamps accompanying the book. They were a few separate letter stamps:

P-A-U-L-S-T-A

And so we thought it was for baby Paul, the Paulsta, but then we rearranged the letters and realized that it was

sPAtULa

The Don sits in silence letting the sink in.

He then asks me,

“Do you know who published the book?”

Of course I don't, but I don't say anything because I don't want him to know and I'm thinking hard what to do.

-The patient begins to cry and turns his face towards a pillow.

(Half-hour gone. The patient has been sitting on the edge of the chair, sometimes half standing, turning head towards the window.)

“I feel as if there is something I'm searching for but can't find it.”

-The patient now looks out the window occupied with a bird that looks like a hamburger.

(Long pause)

Here I [The Don] say: Stop saying the same thing, it's getting boring.

(Looking out the window again. Then five minutes of absolute quiet)

“It reminds me of a memory of childhood where I put four French fries on a fork, one on each tine.”

-Now a clinical change had come about. For the first time during the session the patient seems to be in the room attempting a new motif.

“Why would I build a highway, when I want a collective bath?”

-He had now made the essential interpretation in that the question arose out of pure creativity, a sign of relaxation and non-integrative apstrac.

Rest or Run

I enter the Rest or Run and spot Arthur with the group lounging in the hippie corner. Fuzzy, cozy, I mosey on overzy, to see the letter C on the table, carved in wood, and covered in silver foil.

The Rest or Run is our suppertime spot in Hill. You go there if you want to rest or if you want to run, you can also rest and run at the same time; it's allowed. Let your mind rest while your body runs, or run your mind while you're in repose. The place is both real and physical while becoming mind space to gather noses. We meet here for supper and share thoughts and rituals with intellectual grunts and dancing both physical and real while becoming mind feet for the mindful yawn.

I talk a lot of nonsense I know, but it's fun.

Are we having fun?

The hippie corner says yes, so I sit down.

We are writing a lot these days, words are filling our bowls of soup, which brings me comfort that the letter C is here to be a character in our discussion.

At the table, sits the group:

Arthur the philosopher,
Sam the mixologist,
Kiki the enthusiast,
And Gregorias who says niet.

Suzy may come later, but you know

After we calm down a bit, there is a group silence. We slowly shift our gaze towards Sam who is rummaging in his bag.

He pulls out a song that he says contains the essence of every song he's ever wished he could share with us. He tries to play it but it won't load properly. So instead he pulls out another song and plays,

Let's have sex on the beach
Laying in the sand
Just you and me
Hand in hand
C'mon
C'mon

It has a hard techno beat with a tasty sound. We jump out of our seats and start shaking our booty like we're being paid for it.

Sam is dancing, thinking that this surprise song accomplished his goal instead. We could feel the absence of all the other potential songs to be played. I mean, we knew the other songs existed but realized that their mystery is stronger than their presence.

When we make a realization as a group, we pretend we are in a mental bathtub and lift our feet onto the table, cross our legs, and exclaim, "Why yes indeed!"

Then nothing.

Then Kiki began to share, "The factors are actors or facts with sex."

We confuse we.

But I balloon, "You can lead a horse to water, but we need another drink."

So Kiki enthusiastically orders another round.

“So what I was trying to say” she continues, “is that I think we need to throw a party.”

“What kind of party?” asks Arthur.

“One that is full of decadence, stuffed toy gorillas, Filipino hookers, the New York City Subway system, and a brand new dance.”

“Lock the doors tight,” whispers Arthur with a little dick laugh.

“Shall we have it this Friday at the Hill House?”

We all take off our shoes and place them in front of us and together chant, “Aye, Aye, Captain!” and I swear the shoes say it too. Or at least they made their own agreement with each other that the laces would change color soon. The dirt smiles from the floor, but of course dirt can’t smile. It is moving around from place to place, feeding plants and situations, and sometimes it changes the color of shoelaces, which is an agreement of the parts. What can we say instead of smile?

We slowly sneak away from the train of thought and remember that we need to put our shoes back on because it’s getting cold. A good jolly agreement can accidentally buy train tickets when you’re not looking.

Arthur seizes this pause to begin a tale about the meeting of Schrödinger’s cat with Schopenhauer’s dog. He opens up a box and starts barking at us. Kiki makes a meow and Sam coughs. Gregorias turns into a fox and starts drooling. I become the box and am no longer separated from my perceptions, and then I become a bear, grrrr.

Roof, roof, roof
Grrrrrrrrrrrrrr
Meowwwwwww
Cough cough baaaa
Grrrrr raa arrchh
Arf arf arf arf arf
Ribbit rabbit, rob it
Hisssss achhhhhhhh
Kneee he he knee he
Shirana ha she ha
She he she he she he
Me ouch me ouch

Hahahaha, we laugh like horses, pretending we understand quantum theory.

“But what about you, señor, what you got for us?” asks Sam.

“Well,” I say, “I’ve got a less academic ramble about tables.”

They sit in anticipation.

I want to tell you a story about a man named Graham who fell in love with the table he was writing on. He wondered if it was metaphysically possible to make love to it, but he had to determine how real it was and then ask it out for a date. After pondering for many days, he eventually decided to ask the table out. It replied, “Sorry but I’m buzzing electrons, I don’t have the time.” So Graham decided he’d try another table. Unfortunately the second one answered, “I’m too everyday for you, no thanks.” Graham, feeling rejected, almost gave up, but with one last try he went to the third table and it surprisingly said, “You can take me out, you can love me, but you will never truly know me, nor find me at a busy restaurant.”

Of course Graham, that cracker fool, chose the third.

“Sounds like the beginnings of a great Burger King advertisement,” mutters Gregorias while crumbs mumble and fall from his mouth.

I love hamburgers. In fact you can put one on this page if you want, but not a theoretical one, please.

Unlike Graham, I chose *the fourth table*, which appeared to me in a dream and a fantastic bike ride this afternoon. In the dream, I am a table and so is Arthur and so is the chair on its side. We are jumping together on a trampoline of joy. I look to the side and notice that there is a table we don't know jumping with us. I look down at its feet and it is wearing blue shoes, and these look like the shoes of Arthur. So I look at Arthur's shoes to see if they're the same, but he's not wearing them. Instead he has a different pair of blue shoes that I'm unfamiliar with. The chair on its side is also wearing blue shoes, and I look down to see that I too am wearing blue shoes, but I don't even own blue shoes. And then I woke up.

I believe that this 'other table' is the fourth table *to be*, once it is made real.

“Radical” says Kiki.

“Sounds mysterious,” grunts Gregorias.

Arthur then offers, “So the fourth table is not the everyday table, nor the scientific one, nor is it the one we can only know indirectly; it is the unknown dancer we will meet when we share the same shoe color.”

“Or it is the table that is real when it is being made real?” wonders Sam.

I smile and look at Sam.

Out of the corner of my eye, I notice Graham and Suzy dancing at the other end of the room. Above them hangs a shredded palm leaf. Suzy is clapping her hands on her thighs and he is standing motionless. We get up from our seats to join them, but Kiki stays behind. We make threatening gestures and every now and then break into a shrill shout. Graham continues to stand silently without moving. After a little time, I approach him, grab his shoulders, and give him a good shaking. Then each one in turn repeats this gesture. We go sit down and Kiki stands up. She joins Suzy and they do the same dance as the men did and then give Graham a good shaking. When done, the three of them join us at the hippie corner. We take a seat and weep together.

My Flat Party

Meta is the best friend of Suzy.

Meta's table is precariously placed on top of the hill. It's balancing on one leg and doing a little twist. My rug is scrunched up dog slither under the side table and armchair sandwich. Lamp is glaring corner style, relying on wall for good vibes. Picture frame is bent for space which smoothes out the in-between. This all allows for a cozy contemplation, god dammit.

The door opens with a gust of wind blowing two kilograms of berries into the room. They find their way to the couch and are lifted onto the cushions. They are resting with confidence, knowing that somewhere in another city, in another house, two kilograms of another form are being another. The chair in the corner, to the right of sassy lamp, blows over from the wind and its wooden back makes the sound of a rocking big drum. Its screws are finding ways out of holes and falling into finding notches to sit next to.

A pillow vomits.

My rug is dancing in a circle and we are clearly in a jamboree. Meta sings a song to the dog that is no longer here because it twisted out the door during the wind. Turning down now, picture frame starts to shout at couch calling it a liar. Side table attempts to defend but slips on sawdust and pillow vomit. Lamp is barking which begins to take rhythm. In the violence and energetic gusto, table lifts off the ground a distance of two kilograms as my rug dances to the best song in the world.

“Are you still alive?”

Whoa now...

You were leaning extra far back in your seat like a BMX basketball player doing tricks in the third annual Hill parade.

My bike is moving me past the Turning Point and I'm certain The Don is waiting for me. I'm late as usual because table and I danced last night and rug kept egging us on. It was an evening of song fists pounding till the drum decided that being a stool was a better way to spend its time.

But forget about it now because we overslept, and I'm biking as fast as I can so that when I arrive, The Don can see my sweat. He's a relaxed guy though, that's why I like him. He believes nothing should start on time, otherwise "it's disgusting." When The Don says that, he usually spits out his window at the Hill Clock, which coincidentally never shows the right time anyway. Its motors have gotten slower over the years and faster in the winter, then slower again in the summer. It fluctuates but is progressively a snail, which in French is escargot, a spiral body where the S can go in two different directions. The e on the other hand drives a car and makes a U turn back into itself. It takes a look in the rear view mirror and the boy becomes the man.

I go through the tunnel that takes me to the other side of Hill where I continue to the Spatula Shack and to the other man.

The Don's Face

The Don welcomes me in with a warm smile like a watermelon slice soaked in vodka, drunk with pleasure. I apologize for being late and he quickly snaps, "Don't you dare say that, I know you're not sorry and I'm happy you're not on time, because if you were, I would not only spit a handful of dots around the room, but I would also lose my voice shouting to high heaven!"

I smile and feel like taking a bath.

"Unfortunately" he says, "we haven't gotten far enough in our analysis for the tub. I can give you a rubber ducky for the mean time, and if it becomes something else then maybe you'll be in warm water sooner than you think."

I don't quite understand what he means by this, but I figure it has something to do with his sleeves. I start looking at The Don sitting behind his table and notice how it hides his lower half. What is happening down there? Is he wearing dimpled socks, monographic slippers, or rough chaps? I imagine that his body is half-table and I can't help but blurt out, "Your style is great."

He smiles.

"I mean, you are rocking the half-table and I can say that because I'm on the other side."

"Well I can say that you have the style of a man who broke up with a girl that you never met," replies The Don.

But what does it mean to meet? I have seen many women without them seeing me. If they don't see me at the same time, then we don't

meet. If half a body is hidden, then we are only half meeting. When I see only half the woman and I don't know her other half, then I'd rather not talk about meeting her at all because I have other things to do like buying a glass table that is half empty and half broken.

“What do you think of that!” I shout.

The Don asks me to choose a book from the shelf that would sit on the broken half. I start to search his shelves, looking at the titles, the thickness of the books, the colors of the spines, and the textures of the covers. I tell him that I choose the shelf instead. He chuckles and says, “It's a nice choice, they're abstractly similar.”

“It's not about shelves and tables though.” I go to the window with a glimmer in my eye and tell the town, “It's about the most entertaining dingle berry I've plucked from my creativity closet this day, pinche perfecto, it is simply this: a shelf is a book with two spines.”

“So you mean, a book that you can not read?”

“Well that all depends on how you eat your taco text in Texas, and believe you me, I don't intend to make sense out of this because I no read too good.”

The patient is spineless, muttering and attempting to evade answering the question.

The patient shouts while pacing around the room.

“Make way for the third creature! Make way for an idiot!”

The patient grabs the shelf and empties its contents to the floor. With a swift move, he folds the shelf in half, sits on it, and makes a big grin.

Half an hour of communal giggling commences followed by complete silence for fifteen minutes.

“I want to tell you about a dream.”

“Please,” replies The Don.

“It’s actually not my dream, but that of my friend Marie. We are walking with her mother in a parallel town to Hill. We are having conversation and it’s really pleasant. She couldn’t tell me much more than that...but oh yeah, the sky looked really great.”

“It’s a warm dream,” thinks The Don, “it could be a message that she is in search of the sublime and you can help that happen.”

I feel honored even if it is only a speculative situation. I would like to write a song for Marie that she might sing with her mother while in outer space:

Hilly, hilly, hilly bump
Walking, talking, hilly bump
Sky and mama so relaxing,
Thump, thump, thump, thump, thump, thump!

I start singing and The Don sings along because he wants to sing along. I’m surprised for this moment because there are some things no need to analyze, no need to question, no nee no nee, nee na na, but nee no, hilly nee na? So nee and nee, singing to see the hilly, hilly bump nee na!

Sitting

My bike is red next to me, waiting for the evening to come. Nearby,
an old woman starts rolling down the side of a blanket.

The Hill House

The Hill House is a grand place with staircases that lead to staircases, nets, and cavernous hippie corners on all sides of the main room. The nets make a cozy canopy so the room becomes a breath. An X is painted on the ground quite wide, converging from the four corners of the room towards the center. There is a lot of string all over the place leading back to the door. I enter in and grab a cigar from the master pine bin to my right. A greeter says, "Smoke up and fuck the welcome away." I know tonight is going to be a rager fest. "Thank you."

I move into the main room and spot Arthur in the center. He looks like a grinning monument with no intention. I blow up smoke above him and he points his finger like a sly dog to the left corner where a woman is getting naked.

"Looks like she is starting a revolution." Says Arthur.

"I say you're right, or maybe she's reacting to the nets, you know how it makes the glands go wild."

Arthur takes the pose of an abstract form looking me in the eye.

"It's an absolute craze. A dagger craze."

In wanders Sam with a smooth walk. He's gliding low-rider like a grandiose lump. He's got a proud strutting pizzazz stride. Sam is wearing a blue hat.

"Hey guys, what's the word?"

“Fuzz” Says Arthur.

“Fuzz Brown”

“Homer Fuzz”

“Homer Fuzz has a brown buzz.”

The group is slowly gathering to celebrate this Kiki. With our shoelaces tight we feel a beat rising from the floor. The lights go low and the room is filling with people fast. We spot Kiki through the crowd. She is shiny. She’s wearing a dress made of magnified sand crystals and as she moves, cold is hot. I mean, if we were in Iceland, they would be printing shot glasses with the name Paradiceland on the side.

“Hihi, this is a mighty fresh celebration,” she says, “how are y’all?”

We smile dancing do the thirsty twist response call. Gregorias suddenly appears with a round of drinks and we cheer. He pulls us in close amidst all the surrounding bodies and whispers in our ears, “Tonight there will be a sacrifice, but we don’t know yet what it is.”

The stirring remark causes apprehensive tingles on the neck skin. Other circles around us are discussing the same thought. It appears to be spreading and coating the dance floor with excitement and wonder. What is going to be sacrificed?

The beat drops then hits a ball bounces in a microphone. The room begins to thump and changes in rhythmic proportions. The ceiling becomes higher and lower with lights like jelly, oozing from the compression and collective thrust. The men are standing side by side with the women. They are moving differently, extra different. Back and forth they begin leading and following, morphing in simultaneous trance. The French people in the room are ahead.

The Chinese people in the room are behind, and the Turkish people are a foot. We all begin to melt into each other while still retaining individuality. Some of the men touch the women's shoulders and progress to the breasts. Some men are women pretending to be curtains. Everyone including the lonely make kiss sounds. We smile at the dancing joy. Kiki climbs on top of Sam and shouts at the chandeliers.

“Listen here you repetitive bursts. As our kisses scatter, the moon reflects our light. And it does it softly.”

She turns her head towards the crowd and the room goes silent.

“I want to share a special dance for tonight. It's a dance really we do together and it will determine the sacrifice.”

A commotion swings through the crowd as she continues.

“What you haven't noticed is that this dance hall is on the edge of the other side of the world. In the center of the room is a covered hole which is the portal. Inside the hole, the sacrifice goes and disappears to 'away'. Very soon, we will begin the dance by unrolling the carpets and continue by pretending to be some things we are not, and not which is. After an hour of debauchery, whoever receives the most attention will shake hands with the least and their handshake will jump in the hole taking the sacrifice with it!”

“Ooohho,” goes the crowd.

It's a confusing proposition so we forget the rules to dance like fools. At this, the lights flash and squiggle pulsing ready. Big lengths of skinny carpet roll out into a big square frame surrounding the center. This makes the image of a box with an X in it. The place is set.

The music comes on full force with trumpets and bongos. We are dancing like an airplane arrived for a famous guy. We are surrounding the carpet on both sides, jumping back and forth, inside and out, giving energy to their woven glory.

Gregorias breaks the tension as he hops on the carpet for a super shock break dance. Flipping and gyrating, he's a salad spinner, and Sam 'the mixer' joins him for a parallel tangle ding. Lazy Suzy appears as the guest DJ and starts playing a song of sorts. Nets jingle, strings slip, basket boxes litter spice wow and the people go wild for a straight half an hour. Some of the men become dinosaurs and the rest become various birds. The women become boxes and rabbits; beat the shortcut. I be a twister and a roller coaster tycoon. The stairs are shaking their kiki to the toaster pop jive. The dance is out of this world.

The Hill House Master Host enters the blaring party of the main room and stands up as tall as a double man. He runs the Hill House and knows how to make the show go. He speaks in a low clear voice.

“The hour is up and the sacrifice will now commence.”

The music fades out and Suzy disappears. The color of the room changes to a muted red-orange. Dressed in a turquoise jacket, The Hill House Master Host opens up the hole portal in the center of the room. Everyone is sweaty but excited. Who is the dancer who got the most attention? The host slowly declares,

“According to our attention-economists, we have found that Gregorias has acquired the most attention of the evening. I think you'd agree with me when I say his pelvic thrusts and gesticulations are simply marvelous.”

We look at Gregorias thrilled that he is chosen.

“Now for the least attention, would you look out the window.”

We turn our heads in succession, one after the other, towards the night. In the distance, a bicycle is riding in our direction. To my surprise, it is the woman from before, the unknown Sexy Lucy. I get a glimpse of her profile as she passes by, and it is just splendid; gentle lips and eyes of passion.

The host with the most continues, “We don’t know this lady, but she is on her way here. She has come to shake the hand of Gregorias.”

Lucy steps into the room, walks over to Gregorias and their hands meet. Light starts to come out from the hole. Everyone surrounds it, curious to see what it is. The handshake fingertips produce the sun, which immediately jumps into the hole. The sun speaks to the room, “It’s very nice in here. Y’all should come and have a look.”

The whole room is clamoring, gathering everything it can to make its way into the hole. We build mountains of things in every direction that are all tall and colorful, but not tall enough to enter the hole. Some people start to build ladders made of the nets, but they break. The men as dinosaurs offer their horns to be used for a better ladder. The women as boxes open up and climb the ladder into the hole with a piece of string. They tie the string around the sun and pull it back into the room. They tie the other end to the moon out the window. It rains four times, and then everyone in the room surrounds the hole and settles.

Gone

I'm leaving my flat, leaving chairs and tables to rot. Suzy already left home swimming back to her own. The rugs rolled up and the walls are calling other friends to see about meeting up. Everything on hinges is unhinged. The lamps are laughing because they don't know what else to do. White is right and left.

I'm making an empty room so more potential builds plain sight.

Memory is vacuumed up and uploaded outside.

My Zen paradise is rearranged to meditate upon the end of the den.

I'm furniture freaking out and I pose to disappear from the magazine photo feature. I was the inhabitant, just for now, but I'm turning down. So long simple.

The Hill Clock

Kiki meets me bike down by the corner of bricks. We are outside the tallest building in Hill known by most as the Hill Clock, though it's official name is The George Tower Henry Deluxe. We planned for weeks to climb to the top and go inside the clock chamber. The George Tower Henry Deluxe is wrapped up under repair with neon textile blue sheets covering the scaffolding behind. Sometimes we stare and wish the blue would stay forever, but others want to switch it to green and sever the old soul blend of the sky. The trees across the street smile at the proposition and the wind whispers "go on, give it a try." But today Kiki and I don't have ambition, see, we have a climbing mission, see.

We start up the scaffolding and realize quick that it's gonna be a long way up.

"I have an idea for a game. What if with every story we climb, we go back and forth with a phrase about time, attempting to build off each other's response."

"That sounds fun" goes Kiki.

"And we could try to do our best to let our words construct a parallel building."

We ascend.

"Ok, I'll start."

Time is not money.

Time is much more complicated than that.

If we had much more time, we'd have much more complication.

We'd probably meet less complicated situations, but we'd probably have more time to solve them, so it doesn't change much.

Less time, less solving.

It's good for ice cubes though.

If I give you more ice cubes, you won't have more time than if I give you less.

Indeed.

(The climbing now stops for a while)

I give you time for a good deed.

(Our footsteps sound like an African piano)

So kind of you...a good deed could be to give you more time.

(We stop to tie our shoes and begin again)

To give more time to more than one.

Which one?

Which two?

I wish I would never get too old, no...then I would have less time.

There's no time like a present.

Except all the past presents.

Gaining future time from all the past presents.

Is the unfortunate operation of history making. Rather, I'd like to say, Valorizing future time from past presents is the unfortunate operation of history making.

It takes a lot of time to make history.

Fortunately.

Bed

I hop from bike to bike, borrowing home. I curl up cozy with Suzy and ride away into dreams.

My bed is close to the window so that when I open my eyes, I see the sky. I see it above me as if I'm outdoors. I turn slowly, half drunk, towards shadows on the walls where minimal combinations of décor hang. They are colorful memories and inspiring objects at the same time. They have potential, as all things do, to tell stories, to create new ones, to jump into bicycle ships and into other spaces like cardboard boxes moved under stairs or white walled palaces with big floors.

My things are always moving, unpacked, stashed, and carried along for the ride. They are my tools which I bring along for the life. I'll unpack a chair and place it next to the upside down bottle bowl with dots. A rectangle here, a little bundle on the shelf over there, and soon the room becomes a multi-vortex attention station with plants yelling across the room at rugs. Quiet cards on a blank wall pause before a boisterous yellow bed. Things talk too much. Head.

But my things do not only speak, they listen and witness life around them. They sit there and see it all, but cannot talk back to us as we might expect from things that "speak". But we are confusing ourselves because we don't know their secret language. We can feel it though, every time we move and try to make a new home. We hear them when they are taken out of their boxes in daylight, shining.

A decoration, interpretation conversation,
and the placement game begins.

Where do I put the table, the shelf, and the little things upon it that cannot be so functionally defined? If you have an open ear, then you can listen to how things communicate with each other. It becomes a group conversation with you as the moderator. You can create arrangements that not only shift the energy of the room, but result in screaming. If everything is pushed into one corner and the rest of the space is left blank, then that corner explodes. You feel the concentrated, almost magnetic force and the rest of the room is Siberia.

I hear a knock at my front door and find Arthur has appeared for a surprise visit. I invite him in to my bedroom explaining that I'm in the middle of a conversation with my things. He looks enthusiastic and curious.

“Do you mind if I join in, I find it very interesting what you're doing.”

“Yes yes yes of course.”

“Do you ever see your room as a mirror of yourself?”

“In a sense, my choices reflect my identity, but I also respond to the particularities of the things themselves. Though I realize that the memories I attach to my things are invisible to you. They can only come from me, or if we share an experience with them together.”

“So what you're saying is that you see your room as a personal space of secret stories tied within the chosen objects. But because I don't know these stories, I approach the room at a distance to the things, seeing them for their individual qualities. Of course I also recognize their value as they are linked to you, so they become a collective portrait.”

“But this is very important what you just said, *to see them for their individual qualities*. I wonder a lot when arranging my room how someone else will experience my things. I imagine multiple points of views while I look and think. I am therefore multiple identities wrapped in one; a self-multitude! It’s also a bit crazy inventing yourself into the other person’s shoes, because how do you create their perspective? Perhaps they tie their shoes in a manner that you don’t know?”

Arthur looks down for a while in thought, he notices my carpet with a duck on it and imagines swimming in a lake.

“I am getting the feeling that your room is neither a mirror or a self portrait, it is an extension of your thoughts, like a parallel brain. You are thinging and constantly seeing your room externally and internally, in fact you are in both realms at the same time, or a third in between, spatula.”

“I’m sorry, what was it you just said, Arthur?”

“That you are in a third realm in your room, between internal and external thought. You could say an intermediate zone of imagination and creativity.”

“No, I mean you said spatula.”

“No, no, I don’t know what you’re talking about, I was just coughing.”

“Well I like this idea about the third space, but I think it’s important to see how we can inhabit it together as we are doing in this room right now. You describe it as my parallel brain and I’d like to open it up to include your parallel brain and our parallel brain.”

Arthur looks around quickly and replies, “don’t mind if I do.” He takes my plant drawing off the center wall, moves it to the side wall next to the picture of my mother, hanging it just below her. I move the postcard of a Japanese temple to hang just below the drawing and we have what looks like the beginnings of a totem. Arthur moves my chair below this line and sits down, his head touching the Japanese temple. He completes the totem and simultaneously looks like a tribal king, with a very decadent crown. He sits motionless as I take my blanket and wrap him up as a statue with a royal cape. He chants,

“I am part of the room, and because you are looking at me as the monument, I realize my objecthood. Could you get me a glass of water?”

The Don and the Dinner

I've invited The Don to dine with the group at the Rest or Run. I've invited Jerry, Marie, and baby Paul to come as well. I've asked everyone to bring something to share in twisting to think about.

Coincidentally everyone wrote a poem like this.

The Don's Poem

Hello everybody,
Hello The Don,
We are good boys and girls,
False and true.
We are wooden toy worlds
That transform our things
From apples to horses,
And from horses to shoe.
When we pick up our shoes,
And onto the table,
Then we think and choose
To cheer and chant
Our cultural life, a product of play
Potentially found if we are able.

At this point in the poem, The Don stops and crawls under the big round table we're sitting at. He starts grabbing our feet, giggles, and then reappears with 20 cards above the table. On each card is an image of a person interacting with a thing. The Don picks one card and tosses it onto the table. It has a drawing of a man holding a banana with his hand grasping the middle of it. The man is shaking the banana, looking at it with a contemplative face. He is in his underpants.

The Don continues,

What is going on here?
What is banana man thinking?
Notice the lone bear printed on his underwear.
Is he alone or together with banana?
And if this is breakfast,
What is he drinking?
And if this is not,
Why no pants?
His business is hot,
Summertime heat wave.

Suddenly at the other side of the table, Jerry chants,
“Eat it from both sides, Na na na!”

“That’s not the way!” moans Gregorias.

“Soul Mugger!” pouts Kiki with a sly grin.

“Sloppy Joe go home!” shouts Sam.

Our joy is lifted from the interruptions, so we collectively lift our legs, cross them on top of the table and exclaim, “why yes indeed!” The table spins and our feet fall off looking at Jerry.

Jerry’s Poem

Pro, pro, seductive
Dubious Vancouver
I am so shining
Cause you suck like a Hoover.
Million a message
In twisting I be thinking
A plank as a man and a man as a Plinko

Chips roll down the slots
Sluts made of wooden knots
A boy plays with balls of string
Wrapping round them poke a dots
The string is known to be
Extensions of all techniques
Of communication
Of communication
Of communication
Said someone who was important.

We dance in our seats and make beats with our fists. Kiki is fresh,
Gregorias is sweaty, Sam is still thinking about the banana, and
Arthur is taking notes.

I ask him, “Arthur, what do you?”

Arthur’s Poem

This is a story about a chair that became the most famous
chair in the world.

The other day I saw a fox that was hurt. It looked like a
bike accident. Nearby a chair was placed on the side of the
road; an offering to the street. The fox made his way to the
chair limping in pain, clearly using all his last energy to pull
himself onto the seat. I guess he hoped it was comfortable
and fortunately, it was ever so comfortable, so much so that
the fox immediately fell asleep. After a short while the fox
awoke to the sounds of the chair talking, which sometimes
happens in Hill.

It said, “I see you’re in pain, let your body rest on my plush
cushions and I will be your legs taking you wherever you
need to go.”

The fox agreed and was gracious for the kindness of this simple but comfortable chair.

“How will I repay you for your kindness?” asked the fox.

“You mustn’t do anything. I’m no longer alone on the street, that’s repayment enough.”

“It’s a deal,” the fox replied.

The fox is the local town handshaker so he is constantly moving, going from place to place to perform the sacred ceremony. He helps emphasize the entrance and exit of intimacy, plus he is a witness for legal contracts. The fox has a critically important and famous job here in Hill. In fact, many children look up to him and ask for hi fives.

The chair was impressed with this and said he would do his duty so the fox could continue on with his task. That day the fox had an appointment with The George Tower Henry Deluxe executives. They were meeting with the renovation company and were looking to present a solid, firm handshake.

The chair said, “No worries, I will take you there!”

So off the chair and the fox trotted towards the tower. The chair was very excited. It had never been inside the tower and now it would be in the presence of very important executives. As they exited the elevator on the top floor, they were greeted by the executives and led towards the corner glass office.

The executives looked at the fox sitting on the chair and were a bit confused.

“Who’s the chair?” one executive asked.

“Why’s it here, it doesn’t even have leather,” another executive thought.

The fox smiled with his hands outstretched.

“This chair has saved my life. Without its plush comfort, I wouldn’t have been able to come here today. I got in a bike accident and this chair has volunteered to be my legs.”

“How selfless!” the executives thought.

They extended their hands to shake with the chair and smiled, “what a warm shake you have, dear chair. Thank you for bringing the fox here for our important meeting.”

The chair beamed with excitement. It was shaking hands with the George Tower Henry Deluxe executives! The fox and the chair thanked the executives and went on their way.

Soon the fox and the chair were becoming close friends. Everywhere they went people marveled at their grace.

“What smooth walking,” a woman from the Spatula Shack said.

“Your handshake made my day,” another man said near the Turning Point.

Even Graham had to shout, “Two exquisite handshakes for the price of one, that’s for real.”

The chair and the fox were starting to become quite big celebrities; even children from the surrounding towns were coming to Hill to ask for hi fives.

On a Wednesday afternoon two weeks later, something strange happened and things started to change. When they had a job for the Hill House Social, everyone greeted the chair and forgot to shake hands with the fox. They were so excited and said how happy they were to see the chair again. This made the fox very jealous and from this day on, he started acting a bit odd. He was not as friendly as he used to be towards the chair. This frustration carried over into his handshakes as well. On and on they went with people excited to see the chair and a little less excited to see the fox and his odd shakes. The nervous fox started to ask the chair lots of probing questions, like why it was left on the street before. But the chair would just reply that it didn't want to talk about those dark and lonely days, it wanted to enjoy the moment now together.

The fox started to get the feeling back in his legs and said one day soon after that, "Listen, chair, I think I'm able to walk again. I don't think I will need your help anymore. I want to thank you for all you've done, but now you are free to enjoy your life."

"But why, I've enjoyed it so much with you," responded the chair, "please let me continue to help you. Please don't put me back out on the street."

Feeling guilty with a knot building in the stomach, the fox said, "Ok, I have an idea. You can help me in my home by supporting guests when they come to visit."

The chair was very pleased and said thank you. For the next few weeks, fox walked alone and shook hands alone. People were not so excited to see the fox and kept asking what happened to the chair. But eventually, they stopped asking and things went relatively back to normal. The fox decided at this point to celebrate what he felt to be a renewed return to the handshaking world by throwing a grand party at his home. He invited all the important people of Hill, the executives, the Hill House Master Host, the socialites, and even Graham.

As everyone began to hustle and bustle bounce, a very unexpected guest arrived. It was Eveline Krantburger from the National News. She wanted to meet this famous fox that she had heard so much about. She entered in and shook the fox's hand with slender fingers.

“My what a nice handshake!” she pronounced, “I will remember this the next time I have an important meeting.”

“Why thank you milady” said the fox, “please make yourself comfortable, we have many plush cushions.”

She wandered into the living room and found herself a seat in a leather armchair right next to the chair, which was beginning to be surrounded by a small crowd.

“We've missed you so much,” said the crowd.

The chair was red and happy. Eveline looked at the chair and wondered why everyone was so interested in this simple thing, so she extended her hand for a meeting. The chair took her hand and gave a gentle squeeze.

“What an incredible delicate shake you have given me. Does everything the fox own give such proper handshakes?”

“Well” said the chair, “I learned a lot from the fox” and he told her the story. By the end, she was amazed and understood why there was a crowd around the chair.

After a lot of social hooplah, the evening began to come to a close. Everyone was giving his or her farewells. Eveline said goodbye to the chair and gave it her card, letting it know that if it were ever in the city it should come by and say hello.

A few days after the party, the fox started to become ill. He could not do much other than be in bed. The chair helped him by making soup and keeping him company. The fox would entertain the chair by telling stories of strange hand shake positions.

The next day, the phone rang and the fox answered it from bed. It was Eveline Krantburger calling from the National News. She needed an expert handshake right away. The fox explained that it was not possible because he was very sick. Eveline paused and thought for a moment.

“But what about your chair? It can give a good handshake too.”

From the bed, the fox looked out the door to the other room and noticed the chair practicing a handshake in the mirror.

“Yes,” said the fox, “the chair will go in my place.”

The fox hung up the phone and asked the chair to come to the room. The chair was so excited with the request that it jumped up and down and its screws almost fell out.

“But what about your health, who will take care of you?”

“Oh don’t worry,” said the fox, “I will ask the lamp to help me.”

After packing its bags, the chair gave a warm handshake to the fox saying, “I’ll do my best.”

“I’m sure you will,” the fox warmly replied.

The chair then went to the train and off to the city. As the chair approached the National News headquarters, it could feel the city stimulation surrounding the place. Into the main doors and up the glass elevator, the chair entered into a big wooden paneled room with many doors and drawers.

“Take a seat,” said Eveline.

“I’m ready to shake at your service,” replied the chair.

“Great, because I have an agreement shake for you today.”

“Between who?”

“Between you and me.”

The chair looked a bit confused.

“I don’t understand.”

“Well it’s a simple agreement. I’ve brought you here, because I want you to be my chair. I want you to work for me. Whatever I say, you will do. Whoever I want you to shake with, you’ll shake. And whatever you get paid, you’ll give to me. I want you to be my chair. Will you agree to that?”

“But I don’t want that, I just came here to shake in the fox’s place.”

Out the window, the grey lights of city sparkled.

“Cut the crap, chair. You called me on the phone because you knew fox was sick and you wanted me to offer him a job so you could take his place.”

The chair began to sweat looking nervous.

“I think I should go.”

The chair started to get up and turn towards the door.

“Oh no you don’t. I’m not going to let you get away. You have a great handshake and I’m going to use it. No matter what you decide, in tomorrow’s news, millions will read the headline, **HOW THE CHAIR GAVE THE BEST HANDSHAKE IN THE WORLD.**”

“What?”

The chair looked with crazy eyes to Eveline.

“You’ll be famous, everyone will want you and the fox will not let you back after you’ve betrayed him.”

“He will forgive me, I know him,” pleaded the chair.

“But he won’t forgive you one week later, when you will read in the news, **HOW THE CHAIR TRICKED THE WORLD**. I know your real story. You don’t think I’m stupid do you? I research things. I know how you used to be the bike mechanic’s chair until he threw you out after you disturbed all the customers trying to shake their hands. I wonder to myself how the fox, with a brand-new bike, just happened to get in an accident near you.”

“NO!” shouted the chair in a panic.

“YES!” shouted Eveline back, “You will be my chair or I will ruin you! You won’t be left on the side of the road this time. There will be a warm fire place in Hill calling your name!”

Looking down at its hands, the chair began to cry with tears walking down the side of its face.

“You wanted to be famous and I’m making you famous!”

Silence filled the room from all the dark corners.

Trembling, the chair slowly extended its hand to perform the sacred shake and then fell apart.

