

THE

The Gist: Spring 2019

# Gist

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**THE GIST**

Spring 2019

Volume XXI, Part I

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Under the name *Vantage Point*, this journal fostered a booming creative community and published exceptional artwork by students for over 20 years. We've refined over these years, through generous support from the English Department, expert guidance from professors, and endless grit from editors and contributors.

As artists, we're subject to changing modes of thought and purpose. As students we sometimes lead that charge. And as a journal, we've judged that it's time to realign.

In renaming our journal *The Gist*, we emphasize meaning. The actual point of something. The main idea, the most important consequence. Clarity, brevity, and significance. We believe art—no matter the medium—should evoke. We support art for art's sake, not perspective for perspective's sake, nor cleverness for the sake of being clever. During an era where reality has become commodity, where news is fake and truths are personal, we aim to slice through fat and fluff and strike the core of purpose.

We look forward to continuing to be a space for students to learn, grow, create, and celebrate. As the University of Vermont's literary and visual arts journal, we look forward to publishing writing that continues to evoke and art that continues to think.

And as spring burns into summer, we hope you enjoy the works within these pages, that they uproot your truths and seed more questions. That through this journal, readers are able to get the gist of our passions and values, and of our community.

— THE EDITORS

“This is not an exit.”

— Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho*

“The truth will set you free. But not until it's finished with you.”

— David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*

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# Marché



# 5 Better Things You Could Go \$6, 696 In Debt For And Spend 60 Hours Of Your Life Doing Instead Of Fulfilling Your University's General Education Requirement

*Figures based from just one three-credit general education requirement course from the University of Vermont, one of the top ten most expensive schools for out-of-state students in America.*

1. **Save a life:** become Adult and Pediatric First Aid, CPR, and AED certified. Spend the remaining 54 hours volunteering at local animal shelters, nursing homes, and homeless shelters while donating \$6,549.31 to the Against Malaria Foundation. Spend the remaining \$33.69 on a megaphone and remind passersby to check for lumps on their genitals.
2. **Fight the system:** catch that grassroots fever and join a cause. Spend your days canvassing to squash our fascist-in-chief or nights online fighting fake news propagated by liberal elites. Donate to candidates that feed off your hope and hate. Fund folks going to protest at the latest bloodshed buzz. Engagement in either political extreme will be more exciting and memorable than a semester of *Writing Happiness*, which is, for real, a thing.
3. **Become your best self:** clinch that joint where body and mind sync perfectly, releasing that innermost you. Take up yoga. Take a trip to Montreal. Remember cooking? Like, with raw things? People still do that. Explore how easy, healthy, and even tasty cooking can be. Imagine how more *you* you could be if, instead of being tested on the American Revolution for the seventh time in your life, you could spend your time and money on something that actually



helped you? Like vision boards.

4. **Study something worthwhile:** spend your time and money on a course where you'll actually learn something, perhaps something that's relevant to what you're intending to study. You know, that thing you're going the other \$213,400 in debt for.

5. **YOLO:** realize that you're going in debt for the rest of your life just so you can study things that you don't want to study, things chosen for you by boomers, who—if the ever-growing amount of general education requirements in the last decade tells us anything—moan *general knowledge, general knowledge* when they climax. Realize that what you want to study has little to no career prospects, and that even if you could scrape a living while enjoying the thing that gives meaning to your life, you're still going to be the generation blamed for killing everything from casual dining chains to napkins, all while somehow expected to solve climate change and the national debt. Promptly declare *fuck this shit*, pocket your loans for yourself, and never pay them back.

## A Kitchen Poem

A girl sits at her grandmother's kitchen table,  
watching the old woman lose herself again,  
in her moment of creation.

A recipe is like a poem.  
You can divide it into parts –  
heavy cream, eggs, vanilla, cinnamon.  
Cracked eggs like grief,  
vanilla beans like sorrows,  
cinnamon sticks like regrets.  
Together the parts make something sweet to taste,  
a flan with sugar perfectly caramelized.

A recipe handed down is like an artifact,  
a glimpse of a life, a thread for stitching a story together.

## Strip Trash

“Fresh-squeezed lemonade.”

It’s all the lady says when she approaches my counter. A pack of Marlboro Reds bulges out of the strap of her bikini bottom. I rub the inside of my forearm, which aches, and I have sunburns on both shins, which prickle like thumbtacks.

“You got it.”

I take a plastic cup from the shelf, dump a defiled lemon slice and its juice into a shaker. I scoop in ice from the dirty caddy, which sits in the sun all day in the vendor’s filthy back alley. I spill an entire ladle of sugar into the shaker – the obscene “work standard” amount. I fill it with water from the sink. I shake the mixture, a careful, timed rhythm to it. When I stop, a thin layer of white coats the bottom. I cap the drink. The customer retrieves a wad of damp bills from her bra and tosses a crinkled one onto the counter. When I tell her the total is three, she gapes at me, sun sweat keeping her red and unwell in the face.

“I don’t pay for overpriced lemonade, especially with all that sugar on the bottom.”

She snatches up her money and rejoins the stream of bodies that flows up and down the Hampton Beach boardwalk strip. Before I toss the abandoned beverage down the sink, I discover little gnats floating around dead inside the cup.

The strip, a stretch of fast food joints, archaic arcades, bars and illegal t-shirt shacks, is a summer hot spot on the only 17-mile long New Hampshire coast. It is chaotic, violent with car horns, neon lights and weekly fireworks. It stinks of salt, sweat, engine exhaust, of clam strips frying in huge vats in lifeless heat. Reports of children stepping on heroin needles appeared in the *Hampton*

*Union* weekly. The strip may have once been a seaside New England idyll, but that image faded long ago, chipped away by long winters and crime.

After my first year of college, all my friends from high school returned to town for the summer. Most of us found work at the strip for \$7.50 an hour, serving tourists who came from mostly Massachusetts and Canada. Over fourteen million visitors flock to New Hampshire every summer, dramatically inflating Hampton's population of only fifteen thousand year-round residents.

Some chose to work there for its relative excitement. There was something sitcom-like about spending three months in grimy food booths, pressed close together with people we imagined we'd never see after graduation. Though many of us were forced to stand all hours of our shift, it seemed worth it. There were worse jobs. If nothing else, it paid enough to replenish school-year funds for convenience store vodka and Uber rides.

Some of us, people like me, did it for the same reasons, but masked it with an excuse of begrudging necessity. In doing so, we would hopefully evade the bratty, privileged image most upper-class Hampton kids unashamedly took. I had just taken out my first substantial student loan. I still see my father and I, hunched over a computer screen in our apartment, terrified and bickering at the kitchen table, punching in our annual gross income, proving our dismal situation for the IRS.

At my job making lemonade, I possessed a strange inner turmoil that made me particularly uncomfortable with the customers. It had something to do with the fact that I recognized them somehow. A personal chord struck whenever I spotted a small boy with his fed-up young mother, innocent and drunk on the sensory experience of the beach.

I was careful to regard the mean, often lower-class folks just as my affluent coworkers did – with a face of arrogance, bewilderment, and sympathy. I was careful to never reveal the deeper offense I harbored underneath, something ignorant, bothered and pathetic – personal shame.

I study my shoes, stained from acidic lemon juice and grease puddles from the joint fry stand. A young boy in a disarmingly formal collared shirt biking up the strip stops at every booth, leaving slips of paper on the counters. When he gets to me, without a word or a glance, he lays down a pamphlet before riding off, back into the capitalistic carnival of advertisements, beach

towel shops, lobster joints. The cover of the pamphlet depicts a quaint, almost primitive ocean scene with a holy cross floating above it.

It reads in big, emboldened letters: **HOW TO BE SAVED AND KNOW IT.**

I crumple it up, give it a free throw, and it lands in the garbage with the old lemon rinds.

I often left my shifts exhausted with a second skin of grease. The strip was long dead by the time I'd board up the booth for the night, but there were always leftover stragglers. Ones with long faces and loose skin, sitting on hollow garbage cans. Ones who scrolled through their contacts, trying to find a ride home, too strung out and sunburnt to rally themselves. But today I left flying, speeding in my father's old Corolla.

"I fucking can't stand strip trash." I overhear it out my window as I drive past the Wall, a mile-long slab of concrete that divides 1A from North Beach.

The Wall was always littered with high school bodies. A hook up spot, the ideal place to go for upperclassmen lunch period, the eternal place of tanning and boozing. An enshrined place of cool, mythologized by Instagram posts of girls drenched in sun, lounging across the concrete.

*Strip trash.* It's a classic phrase, born from the mouths of Hampton kids. It was the code for those crude tourists who just barely kept the shacks we worked for in business. The term, whenever used, revealed a subtle viciousness, the transparent agendas of my peers. Despite the fact that I had grown up with them, I found that I often liked them less than the more genuine strip trash, who reasonably rage over eighty-dollar parking spots on fourth of July weekend.

I catch some of the Wall-dwellers wearing *Seacoast Swell* t-shirts, the loudness of the brand's signature pink and teal material dotting the crowd. It was a local brand created by a deft classmate of mine who took the palpable sense of hometown pride and successfully utilized its potential to be commodified: *Seacoast Swell believes in supporting where you come from. Represent your locality by wearing us*, it's business page reads. Only \$35 for a short-sleeve – for walking, wearable, tangible proof of a claimed home turf.

It is close to midnight when I arrive at Rye State Beach with Haley and park alongside the rocky dunes which barrier the ocean from the road. A police officer stands guard, waving his flashlight around in the darkness. Our friends, Carey and Richard, meet us. Carey jumps out of the driver's seat. Richard, who at the time had been cheating on Carey, bounces after her.

“Who's ready to see this fucking whale?”

Richard's wealthy father was the President of a local bank, but he artfully dressed like he belonged on Hampton Beach. Always in holey sweats and worn beanies that covered long, unwashed hair, Richard's style was one aspect of him that afforded him the ability to distance himself from his wealth. He was able to talk down on it, criticize it with a kind of fashionable “woke” speech.

The four of us climbed over the hill, eyes scanning the dark beach. Soon, a giant, shadowed mass revealed itself a dozen yards away, the tide gently rolling around it.

She was young, only 18-years old. Four humpbacks had washed up in the Gulf of Maine that season. This was the first in New Hampshire. They named her, posthumously, Snowplow. In the day, intrigued spectators crowded around the yellow caution tape. Tourists and locals, for once alike, lay the flowers of captioned photos for her. Cameras first, elegy second. Her grave, summer. As we approach, the smell of rotting flesh becomes apparent.

We stand quiet and gaze at the thing.

“I touched a human femur once,” Haley finally breaks.

“What was that like?”

“If seeing is believing, *touching* is believing,” she finally states. “I wanna poke it...”

But she doesn't move. There was something unifying, almost purifying, being here alone with Snowplow. In the distance, I can see the boardwalk strip, far down the coast, irrelevant and small, but most alive. I can hear the bars and clubs, their bustle just getting started for the night. The red, yellow and green cluster of lights blur the vision, far away but always looming.

Before I could really sink into the moment, try to find self-absolving catharsis in Snowplow's corpse – a thing so blatantly natural, so un-artificial it

was almost vulgar – I hear a phone unlock. Believing he had given an appropriate amount of respectful silence, Richard pulls up a song. Scottish bagpipes begin to sound, a mournful “Going Home” cuts the darkness. Carey laughs at the funeral tune. He holds the phone above his head in faux-mourning.

I wonder then, what the all-night patrol officer on the dune must think of us. Of our insistence to insert ourselves into this scene, a scene I could easily imagine had been close to sacred before we showed up. I wonder if he can sense our boredom, our willingness to exploit almost anything for a thrill. Here, that shame bubbles up again.

Before I can live in it for long, Carey starts to shuffle her feet. It was getting late. We had shifts the next day. In only a few hours, local marine biologists would begin Snowplow’s necropsy. So we said our goodbyes before we even really said our hellos and, always unsatisfied, packed up in the cars again.

Years later, an intriguing headline about a nationwide contest leads me to the website for *Coastal Living*, where a lush photo of Hampton Beach displays on the front page. The airbrushed image depicts a stranger to me: a blue sky, green ocean, only white people in the frame. It erases the strip altogether.

The headline reads:

**HAMPTON, NH IN THE RUNNING  
FOR “HAPPIEST SEASIDE TOWN”**

## Stagecoach Struck By Lightning

at the first crack, i splintered  
and a piece of me lodged in between his ribs.  
i could barely hear him scream over the pounding storm.  
i felt the scrape of hot metal at my side,  
and iron clad hooves churned in the burning soil,  
and the rain did nothing but sear my skin.

there is a place deep in the woods  
where the light filters in purple and murky  
and insects hover in the air as if suspended in water  
and it is hard to tell the forest from the sea.

but now, as electricity scars the earth around me, there is no question:  
this is a brutal place of dirt and marrow  
and not even the water can soothe us  
when we burn.



## Aubade for the Apocalypse

*I can't I can't I can't*—such a tasty lethal jingle—this yellow April Jell-o bleeding a.m. hello out my ears, across your toes, syruling down our chins. Last night we snoozed under neon clouds, swallowed by city rot: licked brick, yogurt shells, sweet and salty wraps.

Poking from the alley across Macy's and a dive bar, we uncrust our eyes to see a girl shopping. She begins to bouquet. She is walking when her legs twist, then twine, bundling like stems. Her torso flails and she keeps screaming, frightened by petal tears.

Tongue gunked in fig you spit *are they dressing her up or stripping her down?* Time yo-yos for me as well so I do not respond. I focus on the beasts trapped in stone outside City Hall. The deer, the lion—their fur starts splitting through.

Lazed and laced in gutterblooms we rise and—I can't help myself. *If I asked you to marry me, would you?* Somewhere someone's someone was just shot by a cop while in London a boy's doorstep package waits to explode and you lasso your dumpster boots, scoop Nutella from a jar, and say with sudden sorrow truth *this is not part of a complete breakfast.*

Rhythm-snipped I go  
now diagnosed, still laughing  
at the things undone.

## A Love Language

Take a teaspoon as if you were measuring mouthfuls  
of my marrow when your salivary glands'

nectar

drips.

The thumbnail nestles in nimble leaves,  
like monarchs, when milkweed

nectar

drips.

You said collect dry axils and stems,  
and gnaw peach pits when plum

nectar

drips.

My spine is composed of hyacinth,  
wilts when parched, is quenched when skin's

nectar

drips.

The earth sweats like chests tied in tandem.  
We form intamacy from friction when pelvis

nectar

drips.

## Ode to an Alien

Oh alien, your translucent physique,  
Your suction limbs, your warty beak,  
Voluminous fins, your scaly skin  
All give way to a convivial grin.

We met on a soggy moonlit night,  
I yelled, but you soothed my fright.  
With one tender look from your glowing, green eyes,  
We assembled our love nigh.

I never thought I'd love you so  
With the way you sway to and fro,

Till you eat sewage and glow mystically blue  
But you chose me and I chose you.

After two months your gills turned black,  
Your limbs wilted and mucous skin cracked.  
This earthly atmosphere is deadly,  
We both know what you must do already.

Oh lover, I want to see you creep  
Into my bed, so tenderly, then weep,  
For alien, we must depart;  
Everyday you die here, you break my heart.

# Mirela

Mirela,  
I can picture your legs in our kitchen,  
flowy, skirted, and wrapped like twist-ties.  
Boats made of apple skins rock on the floor.

You're sitting in the brown smell of autumn.  
Radio static ribbons between your fingers wherever they move  
and I feel like I've just cried and eaten a graham cracker  
even though it's been years since I've had a good, fulfilling cry.

I can't imagine what your face looks like  
so for now it takes on the appearance of everyone.  
Mirela,  
your shirt reminds me of my mom.

The cracks in the legs of the kitchen table remind me of you,  
and so do the spiky dead spiders I find in the loft.  
Mirela,  
no creatures have ever looked so beautiful naked  
as the granny smiths you've skinned,  
lavishly plopped on the table like little French girls waiting to be drawn,  
drowned in liquid cinnamon.

I love you.  
The fiancé's voice sounds like a raisin and still sours those words.  
The femininity of our silence cracks with the shock of a splitting glacier

and I wish I were marrying you instead.

A pair of glass slippers stand in first position behind your chair.  
You only ever wear them when he's home,  
but I couldn't give you glass slippers.  
We'd walk around barefoot and feel knotted floors with our toes  
before sitting down to peel apples together.  
Mirela,  
we'd laugh at pictures on a misfit smartphone  
and inhale wafts of posh hand sanitizer instead of cologne.

Mirela,  
I can sense that your pie is no longer wholehearted.

# Help

I'm writing this poem in class.  
I'm pulling it out of my ass.

I'm zoning out,  
And beginning to doubt.  
Twenty third glance at the clock.

My professor's a schmuck,  
So the class is a muck.  
Please hit my head with a rock.

Now today's going late  
I guess this is my fate.  
He must love to hear himself talk.

But seriously though,  
I do have to go.  
My next one's even more of a cock.

# Ingrown

Sap pushes at the tree's skin like organs  
attempting escape from a body  
a maze of concentric rings  
from the red pine that changes its mind  
until it grows all twisted  
spine arched across a trail  
and you begin to realize you're contorted  
with dependence too  
liver spleen and capillaries  
jiggling on the car ride home  
that you lose blood involuntarily  
from elevated pores  
that you can't stand not to be touched  
and grow bark around  
whoever will put pressure  
on your sternum.  
Even if it's just a human.  
Even if they're oozing out their edges too.

## Sparkly But Mighty





## homage to my lips

these lips are plump lips  
they request sugar to  
sweeten them.  
they don't fix on another  
woman's lips. These lips  
fall on infants cheeks.  
they fall on a man's husky voice.  
they don't like to be overused.  
these lips have been captured,  
they soften a mood  
they spice up an afternoon.  
they search what they want to search  
they please what they want to please.  
these lips are majestic lips.  
these lips are enchanting lips.  
she has known them  
to hush a cry or hypnotize a man and  
tease wonder out of fascinated eyes!

## Lady Hungary at Castle Sárvár

*i wonder where the kids have gone*  
no children now, but winking fires.  
I hear them all  
call overhead,  
birds of every size and color  
plumage bright and brimming red,  
hold them under  
heavy thunder.

*there are no children*  
only dogs,  
beaten and demanding more.  
youth is not a thing  
to be poured  
over limbs,  
hanging on cracked porcelain,  
like a dirty, matted flower  
or an animal gone sour...

*i wonder where my mind has gone*  
down down down the bathtub drain  
with all the other emptied veins.  
dripping toes on tile floor  
red tendrils over every pore,  
I emerge remodeled  
in burning liquid ore,

my phoenix habit,  
with broken dolls,  
like empty vials,  
strewn upon the cold stone floor.

## Fractured Reality

It was a day like any other day  
although I might have been slightly intoxicated  
as I flung my phone at the ground  
the screen violently shattered  
blooming into a brilliant glass flower  
prickly thorns scrapped my fingers  
so rough to the touch  
soaking a fractured reflection with blood  
the scarlet face scowled back at me  
mirroring my confused pain.

How will I access reality?  
The private life that I treasured  
has been taken away.  
My friends must be worried  
I haven't sent any messages for weeks  
contact with the outside world has been cut off.  
Nothing to do  
I stare at the wall  
waiting for my body to dry up  
and wither away.  
Maybe I'll be reborn  
as a computer chip  
living happily within a secure network.

# Can You Hear Me Now?



## Rodin Museum

This is a child balancing in preparation for a backflip.  
This is how I kiss you in the morning,  
all crouched over your supine body.  
This is how the gardener walks, with  
inkless twigs and crumpled leaves.  
This is her despair; fingers clasp her foot,  
foot presses forward against tight hamstrings.  
This is her face when her child cries,  
eyes and eyebrows all slanted like a slingshot.  
This is two hands that touch as they twist and  
cross, like felines facing off before a fight.

# Inches

ev er y  
inch  
you move  
away  
from me,

mythroattightens  
my eyes SHOUT  
my lips dance,

and

ev er y  
inch  
of me

craves

you.

## At the Racetrack

What can be done  
About the little boy on the racetracks  
Following his father's footsteps  
He doesn't know  
That those cries are for him  
He doesn't know  
How like a little boy rolling down a hill  
That car is hard to stop  
What can be done  
But watch  
Then turn away



## It Might Check Out



## Getting Better

They question me. Doctor Gibson, the nurses, Dorian. After hours of sweat and writhing and feeling like something shredded, after my child and I are no longer one. They question me like my answer is easy.

*Aren't you happy?*

Labor sapped all my screams, so I wait, silent, for a cry that doesn't come. My baby is dusty pale-blue, too soft and light, looking like something wilting.

*Ophelia—what's wrong?*

I stare at my wilting child and feel pregnant again—stuffed with knots. I hold tight—as if I might squeeze life back in—and they see I'm joyless. This is when they take my child, panicked, and say

*just give it time.*

I realize they don't understand. They don't see. Dorian holds me down, as Doctor Gibson swathes my baby, as the nurses pump me more poisons, as I mutter

*it's dead it's dead it's dead.*

<<<<>>>>

Doctor Gibson prescribes me antidepressants. So. I. Swallow them. And they're bitter. My coworkers at Emmings Community High School leave a shitty Hallmark-sounding ditty on my voicemail, congratulating me on the birth of my first child. Dorian's mother, Beverly, texted that I should be expecting a delivery any day now. From Amazon. They sell everything on that site now. She texts me

*get package yet lol*

every day until a drone buzzes by, cradling a brown package like a stork. The gift—a pale orange Grandma's Little Pumpkin onesie. My baby's rigid limbs make it nearly impossible to worm on. But I manage. And as I do, the dusty pale-blue skin cracks, blooming rivers of crimson blisters. I text Beverly a picture, staring at the red seeping through the cloth. Beverly texts back

*OMG so cute lol*

<<<<>>

My older sister, Joanne, recommends a restorative support group downtown. So. I go to the meetings. They're dull and pathetic and the whole endeavor is a waste of my time. When I get back home and bring in the mail I find the following terrors: 1) a rejection slip from Waylanders Literary Review with a yellow stain and a note saying Better Luck Next Time, 2) poorly crafted congratulation cards that some substitute teacher forced my students to mash together, 3) a notice from my bank reminding me just how great their investment rates are right now, 4) another rejection slip but this time from my health insurance company, 5) a political ad featuring a middle-aged woman with curly hair whose unrelenting enthusiasm for the position of Town Clerk makes me uneasy.

My neighbors, the Bronstons, drop off a Lemon Meringue pie, drop by to get a whiff of that new baby smell, cooing and giggling around the puffing corpse. I only smell sulfur. The stench of something wasting. Of something aching to explode.

<<<<>>

My hipster buddy Christopher emails me an article titled How to Health Yourself to Happiness. So. I chop up, slurp down kale and blueberries and chickpeas and avocados and almonds and chia seeds and bananas and coconut flour. They're just as effective as the antidepressants. After needlessly changing diapers before dinner, Dorian sees me wince. He asks me to try breastfeeding. Again. But I can't bring myself to do it—to press my breasts against that clammy cool flesh. Dorian threatens to call Doctor Gibson. And my breasts are engorged—hot and throbbing. So. I use a breast pump I bought herself from Walmart, hold up a bottle of motherhood, rest the silicone nipple on my babe's stiff lips. Bloody froth dribbles out the mouth and I close my eyes. Think to myself

*how do you mother death, Ophelia?*

<<<<>>

To fool myself into being happy, to make Dorian and Doctor Gibson happy, to show off my happiness to the whole goddamn world and—what the hell—maybe it'll even make my dead baby happy: I go to the park. Whip out

that stroller Aunt Karen bought me from Bed Bath & Beyond and strap in my rotting tot, now sunken instead of puffing, skin soupy green instead of dusty pale-blue. I sit on a sleek wooden bench. With other mothers. Looking at trees so green they smell minty, under a sky so blue I hears splashing. Squeals peel out from the playground. A mother yells at her kid to put something down. And—for the first time—I wish all the children in the world were corpses too.

*My goodness!*

A mother peers into my stroller. My baby’s lower jaw gapes down to the left, the tongue shriveled—like something pickled peeking out of a jar darkness. The mother snaps her head up. Eyes feverish.

*Same smile!*

I smile back. Blurt out a

*thanks*

and go back to sitting. Among all the happy. Sitting. I don’t know whose life this is anymore.

<<<<>>>

Today on Good Morning America a man in an itchy looking vest spoke in an itchy sounding voice for half-past eternity on how to best utilize maternity leave for the bond of mother and child. Which I watch while the breast pump hums and I chop oddly named veggies and fruits into another batch of bitter smoothies. Now and then I glance at my baby crammed in a Bright Start Walk-A-Bout Walker, upper body slumping to one side. No longer wilting—but melting. Nails fallen out. Eyes goopy and black. White and yellow Maggots squirming in and out of burnt looking skin. With unsettling ease.

Christopher suggests I get back into writing. Joanne suggests I try gardening again. Dorian attempts to woo me into bed by cooking something frozen. So. I try. But after one word on the page and one scoop into the earth and one thrust inside me—I bursts. Yell. Mewing as dread swaddles me.

*Ophelia!*

I’m shaking.

*What’s wrong?*

*I can’t*

I sputter between chokes

*not more death.*

<<<<>>>

Early morning, I leave my baby to sink myself. Deep. Into a sofa at Crow's Bookshop. Angry. Reading something I'm not reading. Patrons lull between walls of faded books and everything is silent. Past the smudged shop windows, through the windows of my car, I see the unmoving blot of black that's buckled inside a Graco Highback Turbo Booster Car Seat. The windows steam.

Now patrons fly by as time zips on. The sun swings. Anger slips into hate. Silence somehow humming. Buzzing like flies. I pulse with that rhythm, back and forth and forth and back. I'm about to laugh when someone shouts

*Ma'am!*

Someone shakes my shoulder. An old woman shakes my shoulder. She points to the window. Her eyes blooming fear.

*Ma'am! is that your child in—*

*I'm happy!*

I fling myself off the sofa, stagger forward then lurch back. I rush away, leaving Crow's Bookshop and stumbling into my car. A man bangs on the window, shouting as I twist my keys and. I drive home, swaying to the rhythm of the flies.

<<<>>>

After a horrible lunch of healthy things and digging myself into my overstarched bedsheets for my usual midday nap. I awake. Doesn't understand why I'm awake. Almost fall back asleep. But—I hear it. Again, for the first time. A wailing. Calling me. Only me. Needing me. Only me. Gravely.

My baby is crying.

This vibrates throughout my body. Shakes my bones. I bound out of bed. Run to the nursery. Grip the crib. Panic throbs, from the veins in my eyes to the pads of my fingers. I don't know what I'm expecting or what I'm hoping for as I looks inside and see.

Alive. My baby—alive. That other part of me is alive.

Pink and white and just the right amount of puffy. Eyes bright blue. Lips wet. I reach down—skin just the right amount of soft. And warm. My mind clanks around—my baby's so alive I questions if it's still my baby. Then a pudgy hand squeezes my thumb and. I can't control myself—I seizes my child close. My darling, hot and heavy with life. I smile so wide and wild, relief and

delight bathing over me.

*It's alive*

I babble. I pet and kiss and squeeze and sniff and cradle my baby even closer as I mutter in ecstasy

*it's alive it's alive it's alive.*

Something inside me melts. That melting thing inside flows. Flows and makes me feel whole as I heave out and in. I sniff my baby hard, breathe in as much as I can. For hours that feel like minutes I absorb my child. Squeezing. Like even the air might whisk my darling away.

<<<>>>

When Dorian comes home from work, tossing his coat on the table and his boots near the door, I don't go and greet him. I keep lying. On the couch.

*Ophelia?*

His footsteps grow louder then fades as he steps onto the thick carpet of the living room. My eyes stick to my laptop as I click-clacks away. My baby fusses on the floor, playing with an empty Kleenex box. Something smells fresh.

*I started the garden today*

I say as I stop typing, clasping my palms around a mug of something hot and slurping something sweet.

*Ophelia, where's*

*Right here.*

I put down the mug. Take off the laptop. Lift my child into my lap. Smiling.

*Ophelia?*

Dorian moves closer. Face shifting. Eyes pin balling. Like he's tracking fireflies at night, ghosts flickering in the dark.

# Clouds in the Water



## Letter to My Clam Shell

You are as safe as a clam shell,  
where I am lulled by scalloped fringes into slowed rhythm  
and time  
that keep your bass heartbeat pacing the train of my half-conscious brain,  
rolling us in with the tide.  
Like the pearl that's underneath your tongue,  
I taste how rare it is, how mildly gentle,  
like a glass of tepid water before bed,  
if sleep could sit in a glass –  
water that is nothing more than  
there.

Years from now you'll be a little fossil,  
the cutest clam under the sea,  
your pearl having long since made its glittering statement  
as a droplet gracing my forehead.  
The only ridges I can find  
are the ones that are protecting me.

My favorite corner of you is your spine,  
the hinge where you open.  
It's where your voice lingers before I feel it  
and you're rumblier than I remembered,  
rolling over and over and over and over.  
I never want the current to stop our turning.

You've held me, serene and saline,



cuttled against whatever is soft and silky inside you,  
your noise, your motion, your breathing, your hearty metronome,  
the satin sound of sand underwater –  
fsh...

# Snakes

I haven't gotten a good night's sleep since you started climbing into my bed after me

I mean, at first it was ok  
 there were cuddles and whispered giggles and stolen kisses  
 it was nice to share my bed, my space with you  
 but the nights passed and I felt something slither across my chest  
 Winding around my breasts, wrapping around my stomach  
 Coiling around me and crushing me like a vice  
*Snakes* I thought, struggling to breathe *there are snakes in my bed*  
 I didn't mention how scared I was, they were your snakes after all  
 surely, I could trust you

It was ok at first, until they started talking  
 after all the kisses and whispers  
 they came and started squeezing me, the usual  
 then I heard it  
*Can you do it? I can't ssssleep, please? Can you? Just to help me ssssleep.*  
 Frozen. What do I do? what will the snakes do if I don't?  
 I closed my eyes and pretended not to notice  
*Can you do it? Pleasssse? Do it.*  
 The insistent rubbing and grinding and squeezing  
 I just wanted sleep  
*Pleasssse?*  
 I closed my eyes, gave my hand, and prayed for it to end  
 I thought that was the end  
 the snakes came and pleaded every night  
*Can you pleassse? Just once? To help me ssssleep.*

I get no rest

“I just don’t like doing that every night.”

“You don’t have to then, I’ll stop asking so much.”

“I’m sorry, I feel bad about it, but I just want to sleep.”

over dinner, a small wooden table and low lights

red face, holding back tears

and keeping my face down

I swallow my shame and disgust to give truth a chance

And I really thought it worked

The snakes stopped for a day

they were back the next night

*Pleasssse?*

they hissed at me

liar

you said you would stop

Tiptoeing back into bed, carefully trying to replace my shape  
without disturbing the nest of snakes

Big mistake

*Where were you?*

*In the bathroom*

*Why*

*I couldn’t sleep so I...*

Silence

I think I’m safe

Then

*Haha, and all this time I didn’t think you had a sex drive*

Silence

Slow bubbling anger and a single thought arises

*Maybe I would have more of a sex drive if I wasn’t playing snake charmer every  
night*

The sun shines through the slats of my blinds

The Gist, Art. 3 [2019]

And the light shines on my closed eyes and gently wakes me  
These days, I sleep in a bed too small for me  
with my feet hanging off the end of it  
and I love it  
Theres always a draft and the sun blinds me when I open my eyes  
and there are no snakes  
I take all of the covers and I revel in the solitude  
There are no more whispers or kisses  
Just snores and dreams  
and I feel free

## What He Said

I'd never reveal your mystery  
Black ripples ebb the ceramic rim  
Instinctively drawn to you as my  
Hands coil forming around your core up to your brim  
And he said "coffee is not poetry"  
Swishing against walls you leave me bitter  
Adapting to the request of all  
Your faces of masked identity  
And he said "coffee is not poetry"

Brown gaze to greet a morning bright  
Growling sweet nothings at a steady flow  
Molding as an Adam's ale to desire on the go  
And he said "coffee is not poetry"

Night falls as my legs fold cat's cradle  
Under blankets with a book I lay  
And you by my side forever encouraging a good read  
And he said "coffee is not poetry"

Steady pen skimming empty words I study  
Cup after cup refilling - a well never ending  
Gaze staggering till I obtain sight of you  
And he said "coffee is not poetry"  
And I said "life is poetry."

# Sunshine

warmth  
glistens my skin,  
flickers my eyelids,  
parts my teeth.

you are

like sunshine.

## Hot New Products To Save The World So You Don't Have To

*Consent*, L'Oréal — \$96.69

It beckons at night: a teasing glimpse, a whiff of wild. It is the sexiest fragrance in the world. It is *Consent*, by L'Oréal. Blended by master perfumer Franco Toff, using powerful flowers and spices never used before in perfumery, this rich and stimulating aroma evokes the heart drumming, skin tingling sensations that burst from the mind after consensual intercourse is arranged.

*Scents of Justice*, Yankee Candle — \$49.99

You've brightened spaces with rousing fragrances by America's Best Loved Candle—now ignite your movement with Yankee Candle's new *Scents of Justice!* Empower yourself with the wispy aroma of cloves and rose found in Social Justice. Chill and enjoy the wafting scents of lemon leaf and melon in Environmental Justice. Maybe racial inequality is where your passions burn brightest, in which case, you'll love Yankee Candle's very own Racial Justice: a lively blend of red berry, warm amber, and sandalwood.

*Mindful Muffins*, Little Debbie — \$5

Oatmeal Cream Pies, Honey Buns, Cosmic Cupcakes—you've savored Little Debbie's scrumptious sweets for decades. And now you can snack mindfully, with Little Debbie's new *Mindful Muffins*. That same gooey goodness you've stuffed yourself with before, now lovingly baked with heaps of mindfulness. Be honest: wouldn't it be easier to center yourself or just focus on being your truest you with a mouthful of sugar?

*#MeTooCrunchy*, Hershey's — \$9.99

We hear you: sexual assault and harassment must be dealt with. Victims have been silenced and stigmatized for far too long. Which is why we're unveiling Reese's Pieces *#MeTooCrunchy*! Show your solidarity by munching on pretzel coated, hashtag bites of pure chocolate and peanut butter crunch. You've spread awareness through liking and tweeting—why not through eating? With Reese's Pieces *#MeTooCrunchy*, resisting and persisting has never tasted this sweet.



## To Sleep, With No Bed

In the armpit of the beige point,  
east of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge,  
there was a camp of bums.  
Of myself and  
the tattooed men,  
stripped to their white underwear  
that wedges the pit of their genitalia,  
hobbled out of their small fortresses  
to check the generator.

I walked along the cliff  
to the rhythm of dog barks  
and gas guzzling to  
power his Bunsen burner,  
through the block and between wooden  
branches and brittle leaves that scratch each other  
when the wind blows beneath the bridge.

And along the lines of bushes I peed in,  
along neighborhoods of stained canvas tents,  
I rushed by to find my own spot passed the  
the shrubs and in the dirt.  
A suede quilt was lifted  
to reveal a man sandwiched by two women with ink sleeves  
and black nails,  
they were in the middle of passing  
a cigarette between each other,

and the man removed his head  
to reveal smoke clouds  
boxed in a blanket from Market Street.

In the dirt beneath the bent, brown  
tree branches and amongst the noise  
muffled by the shield of the tree.  
The city over the mouth of the bay  
radiated orange and red,  
sidewalks illuminated by cars rolling  
into the mouth of the bridge.

There are a few left to arrive,  
with woven bags stuck to their shoulders,  
and hunched over to their small steps on the cement,  
leaned forward to sneak away from the  
city, untainted and free.  
They carry street dust on their shins and  
pollinate the bay after the traffic dies down,  
and they slip off down the hill,  
beneath long steel shadows.

## Forced Visions of an Open Relationship

strewn with pillow fluff from between her shoulder blades  
downy effluent scraped aside  
smeared and flaking  
on dead coral  
cresting smooth surface sinew

High above,  
I see the Ocean's skeleton.

white pocked marrow sweet  
flecked with splintered feather ends

I know where she grows

soggy stuffing sticks in clots to her feet  
her back  
her half turned thighs  
tangled in some sea-green sheets  
not mine  
mine seek to hide my salt-dried skin  
her spine a multitude of iron fragments  
set with obliging handheld grips  
not my branding fingerprints

High above,  
I see the water's differentness

indifferentness  
like cancer bloated barnacles  
regurgitate my sense of self  
and huddle under sheets of water  
pressed hard against my blooming lids

High above,  
through a seeing glass skylight

her arch  
splayed against the cold woodgrain  
neglected by the black iron oxidized  
radiator encrusted with burnt dust lichen  
banners hung like blankets  
against the slouching roof  
struggling to keep heat in  
clenched under blankets and  
bent-back fingers flexed and  
sheets torn off and warmth fallen  
forgotten on the floor

High above,  
I see  
another boy  
with salt-dried skin

# Clear Day



The People of California  
v.  
The Adult World Bookstore  
*A Response from Gloryholes Worldwide*

You say you find us lewd and we guess that sucks for you.  
Don't you know there's more of us in Texas than Texans?  
And sinful? Don't be nuts. We're everywhere  
in Vatican City. Hell, look at our name.  
But—by all means—plug away. Slather warnings  
on the walls, toss the tissues from our stalls, smash  
projectors, cut locks while cuffing gags. But know  
this: you cannot lighten lust and you cannot patrol away  
the jumps in a young man's pulse. We give the wild passage.  
We cradle flesh of fathers, slicken strangers into bliss.  
You fear—what exactly? A slit in a wall and a slut in stall?  
Didn't seem lethal to that cop. The holes he bored  
leaked crimson, while we just drool salted thrill.  
And, what's that saying you who fill us say about closing doors?  
  
So—by all means—make us spore.

# Precipitate



## What's Going On (Question Mark)

Well, if you must know,  
I have formulated a make-believe land in my mind, everyone is there. Don't  
you want to come visit?  
It's pretty dark. If you bring a light you can stay the night  
But you probably shouldn't come. People get lost in there, yaknow.  
You know what happened to the last one who went up there?  
Did you hear the news?  
See it in the paper?  
She disappeared. All they found was her light.  
It was on the ground and broken- still flickering though. So it hadn't been too  
long since she was taken away.  
They're still looking for her.  
Her parents and friends look everyday-  
Every single day, even though it's been so many years.  
They are printing out flyers, searching neighborhoods.  
The police  
Have cleared the woods.  
*Nobody is there.*  
Didn't you hear the news? See it in the paper?  
No?  
Well you probably shouldn't come.  
I wouldn't want you to go missing, too.  
They're running out of milk cartons, they're running out of faces.  
Run away or come on in; become the dark or bring a light-  
Either is fine with me.

You seem nice enough and I really would love some company.  
I'm far away from home and my parents can't seem to find me



## Pinned

There's this cobweb next to my window that  
reflects the sound waves of uncommunicated whispers.  
I've tried chipping you off like my  
rose-pink nail polish. Tried avoiding  
personal pronouns, called you a "former  
lover," but I still walk around with my mouth partly open  
and wonder what I can catch through the gaps and  
what my baleen teeth fail to filter out.  
I've tried filler words to avoid saying  
"God" or "breaking"  
to avoid realizing there's something in the  
molten candle wax that won't peel off my fingertips.  
Friends sit next to me on floor pillows, reluctant and quiet like  
popped soap bubbles, as I try again and  
again to cough you up and spit you out.  
Meanwhile the asters in my yard expire,  
become inanimate as the butterfly bodies in that exhibit  
whose curation you ridiculed with a tilted brow and limp limbs.  
These days, my father puts his arm around my shoulders  
and asks me how it's going, healing heartbreak.  
"It drains my liquid," I say.  
"Prepares me for under-glass display."

# Majesty



# Erase

Erase me from your memory  
forget the first time you came to my door  
eager and excited to introduce yourself  
Vanish the thought of my blue eyes  
gazing into your green ones  
Taking in your features and sizing you up  
Trying to figure out if you were worth my time  
Eradicate my hand holding yours in the hospital  
Comforting you as doctor after doctor comes in and questions you  
And me, still remaining by your side for ten hours  
Delete the memory of me  
So warm, so close,  
Connected as one  
You so happy  
and me so unchanged  
Erase me fully

# Daddy

*Inspired by Adrian Piper*

Daddy do you remember  
how the back of our days turned thick  
like the oatmeal we ate.  
Your knees were my throne  
and so were your swollen arms  
that I commonly mistook for my home.

Do you remember the way  
tulips grew from my hair  
that one Montana muddy spring?  
Their petals soft,  
like virginity.  
And the yellow fibers of my dress,  
like the pale lights  
of our favorite all-night-diner.

Remember the cassettes,  
that wrapped our Sundays of 89'  
into the knuckles of our palms,  
my hands were smaller in yours—  
the same way  
my elbows and knees  
were sugar and yours  
were grease,  
oiled every night  
you begged to keep them sober.

You must have loved the feeling  
of a clutched revolver  
between your 2nd and 3rd rib,  
as you cried through a war,  
feuded before each morning—  
after dancing on your toes,  
you whispered to the wooden floor  
transcending oil back to water  
to do it all again.

You created shrap metal with your tongue  
as you forgot me with your eyes,  
but I was still young enough to find solace  
in the white fur and picture frames,  
how I mistook that for  
bedtime story's and dance lessons.  
nonetheless I prayed at your feet.  
If only I could see your  
bones scrape the dust from your spine  
just so I know I could pass through you—  
to see the fat fall from your bones,  
and your skin, tainted yellow.  
You left me nothing  
but hope  
that you fell down  
under my toes  
and if God damned the coincidence,  
I could feel you under my Mary Janes  
one last time.

[-O x O-]



## Restaurant Lillois

I was purged when I dipped the tiny spoon into its ovular body,  
sprawled on the small ceramic bowl and asleep,  
covered in a caramelized blanket.

Its sun-colored heart bathed beside cream organs, foie de gras bones.

Purged the moment I bit into the chausson de pommes. Its layers, stacked like ancient stone,  
shattered between my lips and uncovered a fossilized leaf interior.

Out with mourning.

Out with unintended asceticism.

I'm here to toast my mother goodbye and bon voyage. To hug her across from a crowded bar,  
and pour the litchis she bought for me at the market into a blue, Japanese bowl.

# Nesting Doll





## Florence, Oregon

My lips were sovereignty over your philosophies  
as you recited my remembrance of drained lives last August  
like runoff after Sunday's cleanse— a ritual—  
you insinuate my futility,  
but I'm vain when it comes to power,

and I'm still foraging the discipline to be raw,  
but just remember,  
I wasn't raised,  
I was a liability.  
So silence me with your false reality.  
Because I've never held a gun before,  
I'll never smell the bodies existing between my fingers.  
None the less,  
I know your loneliest with me.

And I forgot who I was at 5am,  
licking sobriety—so piously  
like a universal problem.  
And for the last time  
I'll mistake my home for the place  
between your ego and pride,  
I already told Venus to pray for us.

## Blue J

I waded for you  
in muddy waters below  
creamsicle skies

I watch as your hair topples over your widow's peak as rain crashes into my window pane.

As worm lovers mate in the grass, as trees soak in chocolate soil, as you sit across from me, as I skim poems of our past, as I remember when you weren't my Blue J bird.

We once loved, divided by concrete walls, by paper thin masculinity, by unemployed vocal cords, by too much giving, by too much taking. My curiosity like ivy, bloomed, burst, latched to the grooves of each brick and cradled, clasped, clawed.

I once wanted to sing your song: silent, sweet, cryptic. Now I watch as you're perched on my bed, the rainstorm as our symphony, and all that's left is a fence—for good measure.

## Love Poem From Olivier<sup>1</sup>

The world sees an artist –  
but there's nothing beautiful about him,  
he's all gangly arms and legs with protruding eyes like a bug.  
The world he imagines he inhabits alone,  
as he leaves this one behind.

Today I accidentally poured a jar of cayenne pepper into a soup,  
mistaking it for saffron,  
but he didn't notice.  
He ate quickly and silently,  
staring at the food in front of him without really seeing it,  
lost in some other daydream.  
He spends the night painting.

He says he can't drink bitter coffee.  
And so at breakfast I let water run through espresso beans,  
and I don't add sugar.  
He doesn't notice.  
When he shows me what he's been working on,  
*Head of a Woman*,  
I feel nothing.

<sup>1</sup> *Pablo Picasso's first lover and muse. An account of Picasso's daily ritual as an artist states that he would eat dinner, made by Olivier, with her every night without speaking to her. They lived in Paris together from 1904 to 1912.*

# GET THE GIST

Want to get involved? *The Gist* meets every Wednesday at 8 pm in Old Mill Annex A200. Come on by!

# SUBMIT YOUR GIST

Want to see your work published? Send up to six submissions for consideration to [submissions.gist@gmail.com](mailto:submissions.gist@gmail.com).

Poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction—all forms of visual art. If you create it, we'll review it!

All works must be titled. There is a 2,000 word limit for prose and a 150 line limit for poetry.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this issue. Our success is impossible without the creative talents of our contributors who continue to reawaken this journal's spirit.

And a special thanks to those in the English Department of the University of Vermont who continue to support this journal and student work, even when the arts and humanities are slashed in favor of STEM programs. *The Gist*, along with other UVM publications, stand with you.