

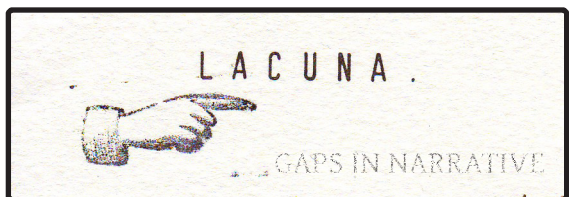
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Contents

A Conversation with Ayahuasca By Kamahl Druesne	4
Movement on Track By Andrew E. McGillivray	15
The Glade By Tom Ellison	17
Telling Time By Elin Thordarson	18
untitled By Elaine Anselmi	23
Find a Way to Make it Cook Back Better By Ryan Eric Johnson	24

A Conversation with Ayahuasca

By Kamahl Druesne

PART 1

The two stroke engine howls as we push the aluminium contraption along the wide brown tumultuous flow of the Amazon River. We are going with the tide and everything about today is leading me towards the jungle, Ayahuasca and the unknown. I wonder if the dolphin is a sign of good things to come: a spray of air and an exposed fin, another image for my memory bank. I did not know there were dolphins in the Amazon River, apparently there are two breeds, a pink one and a brown one. This one is the latter. I am travelling to the Refugio Altiplano with another Australian named Brett. Like most of my adventures, ours was a chance encounter. I had been thinking for a little while about Ayahuasca and so I said to the Universe that if it is for me and the offer is presented, I will take it. Out of the blue Brett asked on the second day after we met, if any of us would like to do an Ayahuasca ceremony. I put my hand up and here we are, dodging large submerged logs and branches speeding up the Amazon.

The Refugio is about 90 kilometres south of Iquitos in Peru. It is 600 acres of raw Amazonian jungle and it will be my home for the next five nights. After an hour or so the engine is cut and the boat floats into dock. With the engine cut, the silence and peace of the jungle is overwhelming. We are then met by the shaman, Scott Peterson, who has blonde hair and deep dark blue eyes, is of American descent, an ex cowboy and pool hustler, a wild man. He is definitely a character, you can see it in him.

He gives us a big hug and says “I’m so glad you could make it. You are going to be in for a treat.”

“Oh yeah?” we reply.

“Well at the moment I have 12 female menopausal Russian esoteric

tourists doing ceremonies. They are on their fourth night tonight. So you are going to be in for a bit of a show.”

“Cool,” we confirm.

Scott then leads us to our modest habitation. He has always been interested in plants and their healing abilities, not to mention psychedelics, and he became a shaman 17 years ago, after studying shamans in the jungle. He has a country drawl, a strong voice, a cheeky smile and I like him straight away. He is definitely a character.

Our home for the next five nights is made from the jungle. Everything is made from wood. The whole two-story building is enclosed in mosquito netting and so is the bed. I am on the bottom floor and Brett has taken the top. The bed has a safe nest-like feel, especially with the white mosquito net around it. The mattress is comfortable and the sheets soft. The shower is cold but that suits me fine as it is pretty tropical outside. I am already sweating. I like this environment. There are a few buildings like this peppered around the property and at the moment they are inhabited by the Russians. The set-up is quite spacious and at no time do you feel like you have neighbours. We spend a little time with Scott making small talk. The Russians have gone up the river on a tour. Scott shows us his library of Shamanic books. It is pretty impressive. I grab one about Shamans through the ages. I like being in the jungle. It feels so good to have the bush around me again. It is much nicer than being in Huanchaco with all the noise and the scattered energy, the culture of surfer bitcheros, the hustling, the drug energy and the lost-ness of a tourist town. I am on the veranda of Scott's home, the birds are calling each other, ants are doing their thing and I am preparing for one hell of a night to come.

One of Scott's workers takes us on a tour around a small part of the property and leads us to one of the two tree houses at the Refugio. It is massive. A beautiful layered building climbing up a large tree. We make our way to the top as the first of many surprise rain storms buckets down. I am glad I relented and bought some gumboots in Iquitos. The 20 soles (\$9) were worth it. My feet are nice and dry as we squelch our way back through the mud. The second trip is through the healing gardens. Scott has an informative and well set-out garden with many plants from the jungle that heal all sorts of ailments from itchy skin to cuts, fever to

poisoned blood. The jungle is full of medicinal plants and many multinational corporations are trying to mine the cellular information so they can package it into a “small convenient pill” for you and me. It is kind of disgusting the way our world is heading. It is time to be the change we want to see in the world, time to stop talking about it or waiting or hoping for others to do something.

We eat a late lunch. I am pretty hungry as the breakfast from the hotel in Iquitos was less than nourishing. The food here is simple and clean: fish, rice, beans, delicious fruit juices and generous salads. It is important not to consume fatty foods, alcohol or pork while participating in Ayahuasca ceremonies. Scott says that pork really is the main thing, he can't really tell you why but it seems to cause problems for us. Like me, Scott is a fan of bacon with his eggs so when he is not conducting ceremonies all bets are off. He recalled how while in his early years of training to be a Shaman he thought, like most of us do when we are learning something important, that the rules don't apply to him. He suffered some unpleasant experiences.

The eating schedule is arranged around the ceremony. Breakfast at 10:30 in the morning and lunch at around 3:30 in the afternoon. Eating any later is of no use as you need to digest and process your food before the ceremony at 7:30 in the evening. Ayahuasca is well known for inducing vomiting. Known as “la purga,” vomiting is one of its more obvious healing techniques. So we chew our lunch well, rest and get digested. I take a nap in order to be rested for my night. After waking I train some chi kung exercises and meditate while the candle lights flicker in my room.

Brett stomps down the stairs with his torch: “let's do this.”

We make our way through the darkness, tripping on the exposed roots of the trees, towards the massive ceremony house. It is a huge circular building: matted-leaf roof, all wood and the stairs creak as we make our way up and in. The Russians are all in their places.

There are three candles alight in the centre of the building. I grab a mattress and one of the many buckets around the room. Brett does the same and places himself to my right. The women are all chatting and laughing. Some have chairs, some are smoking, and I think some are

A Conversation with Ayahuasca

filming the session. To the right of me is the toilet room. Four toilets are there for those that need to purge in the other direction. I just sit there wondering what we are in for and waiting for Scott to arrive.

The torchlight signals that he has arrived. He comes in with two other shamans, both are native people of the Jungle. Scott strides across the room in his tight jeans and gumboots. His feet land heavily on the wood and he makes his place at the front of the circle. He has a table with candles and he places the bottles of perfume, the bottle of Ayahuasca, some tea cups, native-looking cigarettes and his fan of leaves. Behind him he hangs a piece of material with drawings and other images on them, but in the candlelight I cannot make them out. The other shamans sit to his left and right. Scott blows into the bottle of Ayahuasca and hands it to the shaman on his left. He does the same, but seemingly for a very long time. Scott then pours himself a cup, says “salute” and gulps it down like a seasoned veteran. The other two shamans do the same. Scott then invites each person up to sit beside him. Everyone is encouraged to tell Scott how much they want or need for the night. These women should know what their limit is since this is their fourth night on the brew. I watch them intently to see if there is anything I should do in the ceremony. Each person seems to say a small prayer over the cup before gulping it down. Then they take a sip from the two cups on the table (one is coffee and one is water), they say thank you with a prayer gesture to Scott. So I will do the same.

“Kamahl,” I hear my name being called. I walk up on my tippy toes and sit next to Scott. The candle’s light is like a third presence. Scott’s speech is starting to slur, almost like he is drunk.

“So you have done psychedelics before then?” he asks.

“Yeah I’ve done acid and mushrooms” I reply.

“Ok, well this is your first time with Ayahuasca, so I’ll give you enough so you don’t get bored. I am watching the cup intently as he pours. His hand is steady. The dark brown liquid fills up to a small white mark in the cup. I am guessing it is a half cup. I take it in my hand and offer a small prayer.

“Dear Ayahuasca please be firm but compassionate.” Gulp!

“Good boy,” Scott remarks. I wash the taste out of my mouth with the coffee and the water. I had heard that the mixture was disgusting but I do not mind it. I cannot explain what it tastes like as it is nothing like anything I have ever experienced before. I make my way back to my mattress as Brett is called up.

When he sits down beside me he tells me, “Scott said that during the ceremony if you want more just come up and sit beside him.”

“Ok, cool. Hey, will I know when it comes on?”

Brett smiles, “Oh you’ll know.” Brett has experienced Ayahuasca twice before.

It was when he was telling me about his experiences that it was solidified for me in my mind. His whole body seemed to come alive and look lighter. His breathing changed and a sparkle was in his eyes as he told me of the marvellous messages he had received and the insight into the world he had gained. Brett is here, like me, searching for some answers, his are more along the wife-family-and-kids line, whereas mine, well, they are always about the future and exploring my curiosity. Scott says a prayer in Spanish. I do not understand it except I think it is to God and asking for a good ceremony. Then he stands and strides over to the candles and puts them to sleep for the time being with his fan made of leaves.

The ceremony room is encased in darkness and my eyes adjust to the moonlight. I sit and wait. Scott and one of the shamans come to each of us and perform a ceremony over us. They dose us in the perfume from the bottles almost like a baptism. There is a cross on the forehead, some on the face and nose, a cross on the chest and one on the back of the neck. The hands are extended in a cupping position as the perfume is poured onto the palms. Then they blow into them and close your palms into a prayer position. I thought this was quite amazing as this is pretty much the same ceremony for receiving Reiki training. My, my, my—the world is very small, is it not?

One of the shamans lights one of the tobacco cigarettes and blows it around the room, I think it is to clear the space of negative energy. When he sits down next to Scott, the singing starts. The two shamans on either

A Conversation with Ayahuasca

side of Scott sing “Icaros.” The one on the left seems to sing to Ayahuasca, telling us about its healing properties, and when he is done the one on the right seems to sing to the spirits. The songs are beautiful but they are intense. The one on the left had harmonics that seemed to punch straight through me. The Russians must also be feeling it as the vomiting and moaning starts. Scott was right, I am in for “a bit of a show.” This is going to be intense.

The sensation comes on slowly and it takes about 20 minutes. It is a full body sensation. Just when I think nothing is really going to happen, the vibrations in my arms and legs start. I get that tingling feeling, it is like taking ecstasy but better. Warm and pulsating, searching, creeping up and in and through. It feels like curiosity. Something is looking at me or dissecting me. This is no party drug people, this is alive, this is conscious, this is tasting and watching me. The bubbles arrive...bubbles growing with the refracted moon light. Bubbles are falling from the ceiling. Is this my imagination? I blink, they reappear.

“Man this is cool.” I think I said it out loud but I am not too sure. The music is covering the whole room. It is hard to believe that it is coming out of one man. He is standing and moving around the room, swaying as the words are leaving his mouth effortlessly. The Vibration is throughout my body and my eyes are becoming heavy. This is being stoned, but totally aware. Maybe too aware. The bubbles transform into Spirits.

The human form has materialised in front of me, just floating there looking at me, studying me. I do not have any fear just curiosity. I am looking at them looking at me. They do not have facial features that I can latch onto but they do have sex. Most of them are female and I am not surprised seeing the amount of feminine energy that is in the room already.

I shut my eyes (Scott said it is good to spend half the ceremony with eyes shut and half open). The Ayahuasca pattern surrounds me. Bright green colours and infinite fractal shapes. Geometric patterns all connected to each other. The blanket of lines is in 3D and it covers my entire peripheral vision. It starts moving, almost grinding and everything is moving in time with everything else. There are no gaps. I get the funny feeling it is trying to trick me, to overwhelm me, to help my mind to be quiet, to make me ready for something, maybe a message?

“This is so cool,” I start laughing out loud. I am laughing. Brett is sitting up.

“Hey man has it come on for you yet?” he asks.

“Um, yeah bro. It has.” I am smiling at him but I can’t distinguish his face.

Time to get back to reality. I shut my eyes. The messages are coming. I can hear that voice in my head, the one when I know I am on the right track. It is my meditation voice. It is the clear sound of my voice. The one that does not make my body react when it speaks the first message:

YOU MUST REMEMBER THIS: YOU DESERVE LOVE.

What did that say? I what? Brain going fuzzy—I am jolted out of the dream for a second. My “conscious mind” is coming back alive. I can hear the singing, the chanting, the women vomiting, and moaning. Where the fuck am I? Eyes wide open and there is a room full of spirits around me. They are all pointing at me or have their hands in different positions, with hands open. They are keeping a respectful distance, I will give them that. I look over at Brett who is lying down and I notice there are spirits hanging around his feet. Women on all fours that look like they are begging for his attention. Something is low about their energy. Scott is walking around the room. The torch light is sobering. The spirits seem to vanish around him.

I shut my eyes again and my mind starts firing up. I start raving at Ayahuasca.

“No, no, no, I want to know about...and I want to know about....” I start to argue with Ayahuasca.

“I don’t want to get into this shit. I came here for information. You are not in control here, I am. This is about healing.” Firm yet compassionate.

“Where is my Nan?!” I start laughing. I know I am having a tantrum but it is funny. I laugh at my own ridiculousness. I am trying to argue with a high being about what is good for me and what is bad. It is kind of like trying to wrestle eternity! I give in pretty quick.

A Conversation with Ayahuasca

“Ok, ok. You are right. I am sorry. Please continue.” I shut my eyes again and my eye-line is filled with more patterns, yellows looking like flash animation. Unbelievable patterns, lines inside lines, shapes inside shapes. So many butterfly shapes. I find myself standing on a train station, and then many images of train stations surround me for a moment until they begin transforming into more vibrant colours. I have to open my eyes and lie down.

Scott appears over top of me. I shut my eyes and he breathes on me. A soothing, blowing sensation sounds and a feeling washes over me. It is calming. Drops of the perfume fall onto my head. I open my eyes and he is gone, performing the same ritual over another in the darkness. Spirits floating towards me from the ceiling. I have this vague thought that I could do more Ayahuasca, but then I am stopped.

That voice comes through loud and clear: “this is my first time. This will do. Ease into it. You have four nights of this.” And then Boom! The second message, like a sneaky quick punch to the side:

YOU ARE LOVED

I see my family, my brothers, my father, and my mum. They are all there in a circle around me. I am sure my friends are also there in the background, but the information will not let me think, it keeps punching away at me.

I hear myself saying “All their annoying characteristics will fall away and point towards their love for me. You think that they are hassling you, but their “hassling” really stems from their love for you. Their anger, jealousy, picking on you, their bullshit all comes from love, it has just been mangled along the way by their view of the world.”

Oh my, it is true. What a revelation. Somehow I just accept this information and believe it. The tears start to flow, but with no sadness. I do not really notice till I touch my face. I must be getting it now. If my mind is not getting it my body certainly is receiving the healing from Ayahuasca. Bang! Third message. Not really a pause tonight. Is it going to be like this every time?

EVERYONE DESERVES LOVE.

Therefore forgiveness is paramount. I see a few people emerge from behind the wall of spirits, people that are alive today. Certain people, who really have made my life more difficult than it need be. People that I could hate if I had the energy, or the time. I tell all those that have done me wrong that I forgive them. They shrink away, back into the darkness. I open my eyes. The spirits are dancing around me. I feel good all over. I am hugging myself.

“Thank you Ayahuasca.”

“You are welcome.” I shut my eyes and fall back into the mattress.

THE WORLD IS LOVE

Boom, time explosion. It is hard to explain and there is no picture but it rings true throughout my whole body. Like when you know someone is good for you. More tears with no sadness. If the world is love and you feel like you do not deserve love, what then? How can you receive the gifts of the world if you feel like you do not deserve them?

“By just thinking that about yourself, you are denying yourself, you are self sabotaging.” I cut it off.

“When did I, or how did I ever think this about myself?”

“Your father.” I do not want to go there in my mind at the moment. I don’t want to deal with this now that I am having such a good time. No chance. I whiz through my past, I see a lot of things that were not perfect, but still come to the realisation that he does love me. I cannot deny that because there are so many moments of love (ok, in his way, but they are there) in my past from my father to me.

“In this life he is your father. Maybe in the next life he will be your brother? Try not to take the roles we have to play too seriously in this life. Try not to let them affect your soul.”

I sit up. The spirits are still around Brett’s feet. I do not know whether to tell him or not. I try to shoo them away but they are not listening to me. They have nothing to do with me.

“Should I tell him? Why not?” So I lean forward. I am trying to make out his body on the mattress.

“Hey Brett you have some spirits hanging around your ankles, begging. They are low energy.”

I forget what I had just said. Brett says something about negativity and that is what they are hanging onto. I have to agree but I am losing the point of why I am talking. I try to sit up and look around the room. I start clapping and laughing. A shaman is standing over me singing. I am totally absorbed in his music. It is in Spanish and all I can get from it is that he is saying Ayahuasca is medicine. He is facing me and the harmonics are smashing through my atoms. He turns and faces Brett and I can see the sound waves emanating from his chest and throat as a long clear cylindrical tube. The easiest description would be a mix from two films: Donny Darko (the scene where the clear tube is leading him to the fridge representing intention) and the latest Hulk with Edward Norton (when they try shooting sound waves at him to stop him). The shaman then turns back to me and I feel the music within me. I was pretty absorbed in the visuals, but am now back to feeling reality. He sways over to me and I am clapping. I am just loving it. I cannot see his face and the mass around his head is huge. He is like a giant towering over me. I decided to try not to focus and I fall back and watch the spirits float towards me from the ceiling. Man, I feel so good. I am hugging myself. The odd tear is still evacuating and I cannot stop twitching and moving around.

Scott the shaman strides across the room and lights the candles. The wicks snap, crackle and pop as the flames come to life. The bubbles and spirits leave the room and the energy seems to deflate. There is a loud exhalation sound from the shamans and soft laughter and giggling from the Russians. The ceremony is over but the full body stone is not. The shamans come around and hug everyone individually. I struggle to stand and hug them, but I do.

Scott asks me, “how was that?”

I reply, “pretty awesome dude.”

I am still stoned in the body, standing or walking is a challenge. I am glad I have been so drunk in my life before this, just to be able to ride

this moment with some kind of perceived dignity. I hug one of the other shamans. "Brother."

He gives me a big hug.

I have to thank him, "thank you."

I wait for Brett. My gumboots feel foreign. Scott starts herding us out of the room. I was pretty pleased that I did not throw up. Stand, torch on, follow, walk, stay upright, I find myself giving myself commands. We follow someone's torchlight back to the house. The walk seems to take forever. Each step is an achievement of massive proportion. As we stumble and bumble back through the bush, Brett turns to me.

"Did you get your message?"

"Yeah dude I got heaps of them."

"Did you get the one about how you deserve love?"

"Um, yeah bro, that was the first one."

"Yeah I got told that I had to tell you that, to remind you of it, just in case."

"No worries about that. It is loud and clear." I keep that as my mantra as we walk back. I want to make sure I remember it for my diary tomorrow. There is no way I could scribble anything now. Ayahuasca still in the veins and sleep is impossible. Millions of images and designs flying through my brain, and I am stunned when I look at my watch and it is only 11:15pm. I would have thought it was 3 am or something.

A blast rocks through the jungle. It is the three sentries that Scott has patrolling the refuge. They all fire their shotguns at midnight. It is quite shocking but took me out of the endless vague thought I was reliving over and over again. Scott said that it is a wild jungle out here and there are no rules. He likes the villagers to know that he is armed. I do not get that feeling of fear from the bush. I guess it is because I have grown up in it. I guess it was around 1 am or 2 am that I finally fell unconscious into the nest. I wonder what I am in for tomorrow night?

Movement on Track

By Andrew E. McGillivray

Reykjavík

Congestion in the centre: the ride moved from the path to the street. Rain spitting down, making the asphalt slick. Moving through traffic, signalling, integrating into the early afternoon rush. The hills of the city give softly to the wheels' touch and rotation on the climb and the descent.

Arnarnes

Due south across the hill and through two fjords to Arnarnes. With the wind, and against the wind, winding along the shoreline, in and out of the setting sun. The sky patched with rainclouds, and falling flakes of snow. To the tip of the point and back, never leaving the track.

Seltjarnarnes

Movement into water, the land tethers off, flanked by mountains. High tide at the lighthouse. Wrapping back around the hill, a black rabbit is spotted chewing away at a branch. Cut across into the hills, and this circuit is complete.

Elliðavatn

The journey to this lake winds through networks of hills and valleys. It takes the rider through urban sprawl and neighbourhoods of empty cement houses, built-up and abandoned half-way on beautiful hills with panoramic views. Complicated and challenging routing. The inland body of water does not disappoint, it reinvigorates.

Geldinganes

Leaving the hills with the wind, into the northeast through the main artery then north across a subterannean bridge. Making land, up and over through a breath-taking sculpture garden, and down across a strait at low-tide and land is made in the end. Back into the wind, through a hail-storm, and home again.

Álftanes

Over jagged lava flows, passing rocks tailored with green moss and dampened with wetness. Not much else grows on the heath. Yet the thumb in the sea is draped in light breaking through the clouds. Looking back across at Reykjavík, the grey skies above the city have opened up and pour.

Öskjuhlíð

Strong winds keep me in the hills, tucked into the forest rising from the ground. Filled with deciduous, spruce and a few pine. A quick figure eight and back down. The land is rocky and high.

Hafnarfjörður

Heading south again, four hills to cross on this path. Over the last one is the natural harbour, lined with cranes, tucked into the hills like a hamlet. In some ways a twin city, in other ways its own. The end of a good week, the track continues on.

Tjörnin

To the central pond in the lowlands, fed from the marshes above. Along the edge of the water, fowl feeds and swans move gracefully. Standing at the poet's statue, in an oasis from the elements, the wet stones bleed with rain. The skies feed the earth with much needed breath.

The Glade

By Tom Ellison

is a gleam of light there
is a bright space between

the clouds, like frith in fir, lap up the golden fish
that flourishes the stream.
Basking in the Sun-pool, the earth beneath
the wheel sparks
the green fuse in the petal from sleep,
the only orchid in the dark.

Telling Time

By Elin Thordarson

The word tattoo is commonly used as a verb: to tattoo someone or something, to be tattooed in the past participle. Tattooing is the act of leaving an indelible mark on the skin by puncturing its surface and filling the resulting wound with ink.

But tattoo is also often used as a noun. As such it has several meanings. Of course, a tattoo is a design made in the manner described.

A tattoo is also a military evening song on horn. It is the signal that all lights in squad rooms be extinguished, and that all loud talking and other disturbances be discontinued within fifteen minutes.

There is at least one more meaning.

A tattoo is also the word for a rhythmic tapping or drumming; it is the repetition of a tone, endless or otherwise.

Shall we linger on this third meaning a moment? Let's exercise the abstract faculty of human imagination. Imagine it's the middle of the night. You're in your bed. If it was natural for you to picture that you are with your beloved, then put them to sleep in your mind. Only you're awake and it's very quiet and it's very late and you're trying your best to relax your body and fall asleep. Your lips softly sealed, you are distinctly aware of how relaxed your tongue has become, your jaw, your eyebrows too. And now you begin to slip sideways into the logic of the thinking that precedes sleep. All of a sudden your sense of hearing becomes attune to the sound of an interminable chain of droplets of water hitting the flat, steel bottom of the sink in the kitchen. The drops can be as quick or as slow as you imagine them to be. Not so much irritated by the leaky tap, you become rather enthralled by its sheer repetition. And you

Telling Time

try to see if you can “peer into” the tattoo. There is a silent space between each single droplet and you slither the dragon of your awareness into that sub-minuscule place. Comfortably settled in the interior of the repetition, a calm knowledge of the reality of time, and of time’s duration is somehow awakened within. Laying in your bed, the tattoo of the leaking kitchen tap’s ever-repeating singular parts communicate an abstract picture of everything that came before you, and everything that will come long after you’re as gone as you’ll ever be.

Now imagine us. We shall not exist if you do not imagine us. If you’re going to grant us this existence then you had better start with the night Mom and Da roasted a leg of lamb over potatoes. We had never eaten anything as fine as that, and the smell of that dinner lingered inside our trailer in the woods for many days afterwards: the mustard smell of rosemary over a young thing’s roasted flesh. Mom and I were celebrating in secret that night, so I thought. And I had relished in that. I had come to her that morning and showed her the dark blood crusted along the edges of my fingernails in my ragged cuticles. She sent Da, Herzog and Sepp out to buy that leg of lamb. Then she took me to the drawer where she kept all her sewing supplies, and we made rags together out of Da’s old shirts. She told me how to wash them, showed me how to fasten each one with a button to the inside of my shorts. Then she had me cut all those potatoes at the kitchen sink and plunge them into blood stopping cold water while she sat at the little table humming something faraway to herself and smoking and rolling and smoking and rolling cigarettes.

I remember after dinner that long long ago night, everything seems greasy with thick lamb’s fat; my fingers, my mouth, the empty glasses of milk on the table, even my vision seems smeared with it in my memory. I remember sitting in this bleary daze at the little table afterwards, while Sepp sobbed, for something beautiful had just ended, and Herzog choked back his own tears because he is the eldest. Mom was humming again, this time clear enough to identify it as the bed time song *Der Wärmetod der Welt*, The Heat Death of the Universe. That’s about all I can remember because

then Da gave us each a hot cuppa tea with an eel of something black and bitter at the bottom of it to put us out. All my drugged parts were carried to bed with my brothers. Our parents had laced our hot drinks, made sure we were sleeping, and with a hope that our heartbeats would slow to nothing, they disappeared together into the woods. I suppose.

I have come to love the phrase to lace something. I had never thought of its beauty until that next morning once I had come-to with a gasp and Herzog shaking the blue from my lips, his eyes shining black and wild in the violet gray light of the dawn. To lace a drink with something, it's like craftwork. Use it in a sentence. She spent all afternoon teaching her menarcheal daughter to lace tea in the traditional way, before poisoning her that night.

The ritual of tattoo day birthday was Herzog's idea. After leg of lamb night came and went, Sepp's thirteenth birthday rolled around. Sepp is really Joseph, and he is second eldest. I'm sure there must be a beautiful royal term for this entirely different breed of brother; the second most important imperial shrine. On the morning of Sepp's birthday, as always, Herzog was first to get up. He lit a small fire outside our trailer. Sepp and I woke to the sound of Herzog slamming shut mom's sewing drawer and then the familiar bang bounce bang of the trailer's door. Outside we watched him put a couple of mom's sewing needles into a pan of boiling water and boiled the hell out of them. That's another great phrase, to something the hell out of something. As though it's possible to purge the hellishness from something, say, by putting it into boiling water. That's how Herzog put it that morning "you gotta boil the hell outta them" he said, and I stood and watched and thought of mom and the slow heat death of our universe.

Herzog then rigged the newly disinfected sewing needles onto a chewed up, eraser worn flat, graphite snapped off well up the shaft of a Ticonderoga brand pencil. He carefully wound the thread round and round the pencil and then round the needle, until only the needle's point was exposed. Next, with a flourish, he brandished an old bottle of India ink that he produced from the pocket

of a flannel shirt of Da's he wore nearly constantly those days. Herzog made himself comfortable, squatting down between Sepp and I, our knees, all bony in the familial way, touching. He handed the bottle of ink to Sepp to hold. "Don't lose that", he said handing the cap to Sepp who slipped it into his own shirt pocket. We watched as he dipped the threaded needle into the ink. The pitch black ink soaked its way upwards, like blood, through the thread. Now completely saturated, the first small black drop collects on the needle's sharp point, steadies itself, as if waiting, all surface tension.

"I've been thinking a lot about something I read, that suffering is the only way we can remember anything" Herzog said to us. "But we only gotta remember one thing. Ancestry and family is the people that all come from the same bit of nothingness out there. Us three all come from the same stuff". It was all so sorrowful what he was trying to explain to us. How vast the universe is, how mostly empty, how life by life we got to this day in history and how everyone had to experience their own death, but how in the chaos and seeming meaninglessness of it all we had this one connection if anything. Our dragons of awareness were being hatched that day, and the universe was beginning to look a certain way. "If you wanna remember it, you have to burn it into you. This is your birthday present Sepp-o". And as he said it he pulled the skin on the inside of his left wrist taut, and jabbed the point in quick and dragged it just slightly; just enough to open the flesh so that some of the ink could spill in. Sepp and I watched, enthralled by the sound of this tattoo, the repetition of the tone of my brother wounding his own flesh for us. Puncturing flesh and wiping away the blood and surplus ink makes a sound like a whisper, like a sigh repeated over and over. I felt myself hanging onto the spaces between and felt like I was shaking hands with the way I would die someday.

Very slowly, after about a million needle poke-and-drags later, Herzog had spelled S-E-P-P into his wrist. He didn't have to tell us how much it was going to hurt. We could see his initial plan was to tattoo J-O-S-E-P-H into the wrist's flesh, and we watched as he clumsily changed the J into an S, reducing how much pain we

would each have to remember.

There once was a man who said that ritual is repetition. And here's the paradox: to repeat something, as in a behaviour, occurs only in relation to a completely non-exchangeable, singular event. It is a contradiction in terms, the repetition of an "unrepeatable". Up one and down the other, my brothers' names take up that much more space on my arms each year in the unrepeatable realization of family and time. It ends.

untitled

By Elaine Anselmi

Paint me with your words
So my nakedness turns to silk through your fingertips

So I know only of the liquid feel
And nothing of the vulnerability exposed.

Take me somewhere
Not a beach, or a mountain or the bottom of a glass

Take me to your place

To the scribe of your thoughts
And the intention of your kiss

But make me wait

Hold it all in front of me until I can't possibly reach any further
Make it everything and the only thing

Or God knows I'll find a fire escape
And if I do, close it.

Let me burn
Let me feel your char

Then brush me off and tell me that we don't need silk or fire.

We just are.

Find a Way to Make it Cook Back Better

By Ryan Eric Johnson

A cold lonely island in the North Atlantic. Walking the streets brings about only vagabonds that want to rape you of any small amount of change you have. Everybody wants something and everything comes at an exorbitant price. They talk to you like you couldn't fathom the most intellectual of their ideas. Though their ideas are a pittance of what humanity could achieve if given the time to govern their own thoughts and some instruction in how to do so.

There is no saviour waiting in the wings. Whatever I knew of humanity is lost in some void somewhere. I read about these hominids in the newspapers, thinking that I know them, but I do not. It gives me solace to know that back home there are some of my own ilk there. But when I go back there it is all too similar to the travesty found everywhere across this globe. Once I get there, there is nothing for me any longer. Oh sure, there's a honeymoon for a week or two, then I realize the depravity of it all again. The only thing to concern yourself with when you're not concerned about how to make your boss happy is whether the deck is rotting or not. Should it be replaced completely? Perhaps the new composite "wood" on the market would go a long way to giving this life the life it deserves. The cat meows and the mother howls and all is well as soon as you have bought a pair of pants that fit.

Depravity. All of it. Deprave. The house, the cottage, the deck, the lights and the flicker of flames. It's all full of depravity. There is nothing but domesticity and it feels like abuse to my heart. Fix this, repair that, and make sure it will last long enough so we don't have to do it again any time soon. Then a few years pass and you realize that what they sold you was cheap shit and in the end you have to go about repairing it yet again. Is this life? Is this what God promised us? Suddenly the sodomites don't seem so bad any long-

er. At least they were open about fucking you up the ass. All these assholes want to suck at your pucker and give it to you without you knowing. Cash is king and your happiness is but a pittance.

The only way to deal with it is to stuff cocaine up your nose. But then you have to deal with the paranoia. Once you achieve that drug addled happiness it is washed away by having to wonder if someone is out there watching you. Are they going to leap out of the bushes and take you in? Handcuff you and tell you how wrong you are to attach yourself to such a substance. As though you stuffed a concoction of drug in a needle and plunged their veins full of it. It doesn't matter if it's your body or not, you don't own it. The Governor does. He's a rich bitch and he'll take you down if you don't follow his rules. Of course his rules are of no consequence to him. The coke trade revolves around him. He tells the minions who to crack down on and who to let slide. Poor Cobb Parker. Sittin' in prison. He thought he had it made for a while. Raking it in while he pushed the coke and the guns upon their laps. He thought he was smart. He was the ring leader. But his gang, the Marauders, always had it coming. Did he really think he could outsmart the horn of Gabriel?

Deprave. The lot of 'em. Cash, drugs and rock and roll. Who knew how enticing all this ridiculous bullshit was. And all anybody wants is a little respect and to get their rocks off. Oh but I forgot if you don't stain your deck and build a fence, you're useless. The people inside the glass house don't know how people outside get those rocks of theirs off. It must be those god damned Indians that brought about all this depravity. Let's lock those cocksuckers up and when it comes time for Cobb Parker to take the fall we can relish in the news of the only white guy in the neighbourhood who fell in with the "wrong crowd". We never thought it would be him. We never thought that he would be so depraved.

What a terrible set of affairs. What a terrible set of crimes. Nobody will ever do that again once we slam the jail cell door on Cobb Parker. They'll all think twice after that.

That's what the kingpin wants you to think you depraved mother

fuckers. High Society has got you all by the balls, and the ones you thought were waging some kind of war on these “criminals” are their bed buddies; sodomites, all of them. Rob Ford is nothing but the latest goat in a long line of rails. And all this time the masterminds count your children’s money as those same children look neurotically for the plunger to stick in their veins. Or perhaps they fancy the glass pipe. Crack anyone? I understand if you cut the coke with benzocaine it cooks back better. They’ll never know they aren’t getting the pure shit. And that’s the nice way of cheating a junkie cause it won’t kill the poor son of a bitch. But as Bainbridge said to Oppenheimer when he saw the destruction of the H. Bomb for the first time, “now we are all sons of bitches”. And believe you me, I’ve seen the depravity in all of our eyes, especially those domestic sodomites that live in glass houses, we are all sons and daughters of bastards and bitches, just look in that god damn mirror for once and see the ambiguity in your sanguine eyes.

