

ARIZONA CITY

*Sean McCoy*

the edge does not exist unless you venture towards it. you told me. if you venture towards it. if my tree was growing upside down. but it isn't your tree. our tree i mean. but it's growing rightside up. it's growing upside right. it's growing downside up, sideright down, leftside right, i slide right down. right here. between us. but back is not down, my dearest...

climbing the rails of a dumpster, the shadow of a man on the stucco. heaped scrap wood, fragments of discarded drywall. the surface sinks beneath his nikes, but he rides it. hands in the air like small animals. it's not that they are thieves, but we are hungry. for the chalk scent of gypsum, our whitening calluses. he would waggle the loose bits of sheet metal. listen to them vibrate. frisbee the bits like clay pigeons. fire his cordless coil nailer. i got an agate in my pocket. i got a scarf made of shrink wrap and a pvc telescope. i traced my nail across the bubbled, sun-warmed steel where someone's weld had failed to hold. ralston said, see any bodies? below the belly of my horse are smashed nips of liquor. fireballs and josé cuervos, capless, half-melted on the asphalt. chipped pills of taillight glint like live coals. the distant blacktop liquifies. start where the road ends, scale the low chain link, follow the path between cholla and creosote. the arroyo with a big palo verde in the bottom. limbs draped over the eroded slopes. a fence of zip-tied ocotillo poles. i got the bus routes in my head to get to fry's. i get to dreaming and i can't make it end.

meanwhile, four-wheelers bellow round the cul-de-sac like wounded goats.

this isn't a game it's a landscape.

this isn't a game it's a landscape, i said, or would have, had  
i walked on the banks of the distance. this isn't a game it's a  
world, i would have said. a world and not a landscape, not a  
landscape but a rainstorm, had we been inside the game we  
play, and we write it, or would have, we write the world, to  
breach the distance in the game that isn't a landscape, where  
the letters fall on the water like stars, like arrows, the chips  
of sieved meteors, had we been inside the game, i mean the  
landscape, though now i got this can of pink spray paint,  
which changes things, changes everything—between the  
distance we play and the landscape

so i walked on. i walked home. the bolls clung gently to their stalks. houses shimmered on the horizon, a low band of ochre, pigment streaked by the palms. i felt your eyes on my back, but wherever i turned, the road was empty, dry, and river cold. i passed a child on her knees on the interstate, scraping sheets of tar with a cheese plane.

    i saw the oil refinery rise against the overpass at dusk.

    i saw the neon in the sky above the gas stations.

    i saw a pigeon in the gutter like broken clarinet.

    i could hear the powerlines unzipping themselves above me like startled chicks. was yours the face in the glass with me? i'm two blocks down from sunland gin where the world opens onto the night. i can see four eyes between the vertical blinds. a child is never blind. like a man he is only becoming, but towards what he was. then i walked past a lost glove. i walked past a second lost glove. the second did not match the first but i wished i had picked them both up. can you push me on the swing mama? i figured that was why you was coming over. i saw a man with a dead bird in the grill above his bumper swerve, to avoid her, the child. you're gonna go tumbling and smack your head. she knelt and scraped the tar from the cracks. running away, running towards. it's all the same, otherwise i would have stayed put. i would have forgotten my lines, dropped out of school. i wouldn't be here, chasing stray dogs, hiding in lime colored rent-a-cans, two blocks down from sunland gin where the world opens onto the dawn. but i couldn't stay put. a decision was made without me present

(a child).

tonight the dark is the same dark in the morning the dark is  
like night. the same white lights cling to the line below the  
clay roof. the blinds are in pieces. the face in glass curtains.  
blue haloes reflect off the silence. between us.

and the house unsettles the darkness.

and the water absorbs the desert, but it soaks up none  
of the distance

if i close my eyes. if i tell you i'm closing my eyes, if the lake  
were merely here instead of there, or vice versa, leveling the  
barrel of my white pvc pipe, i can hear the thrum of traffic.

when i open them, silence.

except we weren't inside the landscape. so how could we be in between? rather the world, i would have said. then i would scratch out my name. then he would say, can we play cowboys and narcos today? yes but i want to be narcos. then i'd rather play baseball. how about indians and narcos? how about indians and narcos and baseball? one, two, three, four, i would have said as i shut the door. to the game we play inside the landscape. then he aimed, cocked, and fired his name in my direction. it missed me so i knelt to retrieve it. which door? he asked me. this door, i told him, or would have, brushing off the letters, rearranging his name, piece by piece—lifting an eyebrow, a limb—had i been inside the game we play, meaning the rainstorm. but where does it lead? back here, to our feet, where the branches meet the dirt inside the game, not the distance. then i thrust his name in my pocket. now i've got your name in my pocket, i told him. ¿esto no es un árbol? es cierto, es el paisaje: a world where the door leads back to the word. but it's growing upside down. no, it's growing out of the dirt, it's growing rightside left, in the dirt where we scratch out our names, in the mud, in the rain, with a stick or a can of pink spray paint if we find any i found some in the rain that would wash away our names, i said, or would have, had the game been played inside the landscape. ¿dentro de este paisaje? yes, no, well, if we can find any water. but i only drink whiskey. but we haven't that either, none with which to make any mud, i said, or would have, none to wash away the letters. then he said, look at the branches, the branches all point down as if to pierce it, the dirt, not the clouds, or would have, had he been inside the distance. do they point that way because of gravity? no, they point that way toward the game. but it's growing upside down.

you don't drink whiskey, i said suddenly.

the roots are floating in the air above your head. and the roots are watered by the clouds. and the roots are watered by the clouds? yes. inside the game that isn't a landscaaaaaaape.

