

## Visiting Vermont: A Radio Interview

I was listening to the radio interview with a woman who had written a book on her own autism. I listened to the end of the program, stirring spaghetti in the pot, and waited for the anticipated moment in which I felt the symptoms, remembered, if vaguely, my own rocking, the confusion at trying to find the ground beneath as I extended my leg out of the back seat of the car. It hung in the air, posed but without purpose. The woman sounded like a good student, like one of my own students, not good at math, but good at what she called "language arts," learning early the word for *paleolithic*. As a child she had built forts out of sticks and mud behind her house. The spaghetti was muddy looking, covered in bits of chopped basil and garlic that had turned the whole the color of mortar, of clay figurines tossing their javelins, dancing in the street. It was gritty under my teeth. When I woke up, the room I had fallen asleep in was still there. (*On the rare occasions when we do focus on an element of everyday life and really examine it, recontextualized out of its unnoticed setting, it quickly begins to look odd.*)

The summer was wet. The pit bull was still chained up, but when I walked I carried a walking stick past the house with the fallen roof, the motor home marked with an official-looking sign, "unsafe because of gas emissions," a beagle with a deep yowl, a woman who came out occasionally to pull at a weed or two before disappearing again. The man in the yard asked if I wanted to buy a horse with one blue walleye. There's enough to think of, he said, without a horse.

Last summer I had tried not to adopt the pronunciation of "but," but the woman who said it, said it with such a seductive swagger of earrings that I couldn't help it. I imagined curling up inside the sound of the word, warm against intrusion. The woman on the radio said she just did things the way she wanted to no matter what anybody said. This summer I found myself walking past the conversations in the garden as if they were coming, as Jack

Spicer said, from the radio, as if I were just picking up random static from an antenna buried in my left ear. It was Donne who first used the word "labyrinthine" to refer to the ear. My son had wanted Q-tips but it was among the other things I'd forgotten at the store.

The store was air-conditioned and icy cold; people ran in and out rapidly leaving the aisles vacant. They ran to their cars in the rain. The small elderly woman who sounded as if she were from New York, not nearby, said in a run-on: don't ever buy the store brand always get Reynold's wrap can you see it dear on the shelf and would you get it for me. My bed was a shelf under the deep eaves just like the bed I had had as a child. If I sat up too quickly I banged my head, and so it was important to edge out carefully in the morning, sliding between the blankets and the mattress in order to leave everything flat and smooth. There was no way to stand on the other side of the bed, but I took a damp paper towel and leaned flat over the bed and mopped up the moths that had fallen during the night. *(One form that this estrangement seems to have taken is a reversal of ordinary subject/object relations.)*

When I set out for my daily walk I saw a woman standing just up the road under the shade of a large tree. She stood as still as a statue, so still that it looked as if something might be the matter. It looked as if she would stare and then suddenly startle and flee back up the hill. The woman said, I'll just join you back up the hill; I never go any further. She said, I thought my children would marry and have their children early, but here I am old and they are too heavy for me to carry. Her limp dress hung on her as if it had been made from fabric already used for something else. I began to walk as slowly as the woman who lived in the house up the hill. She walked more and more slowly until I thought she might stop and never move again until someone else came along to prod her. I felt old as if it were contagious. That night I would dream of heavy, lumpy children.

The woman on the radio said her clothes hurt and she took off all her clothes. In order to wash my hair I lie down in the bath. There is no shower. My right knee hurts in the cramped position it needs to be in to fit into the tub and I wondered if it would always hurt or if after time it might improve. In the days of kung

fu, I had often hurt my right knee kicking hard into the space above the polished concrete floors, and in those days it had righted itself. But now I am not so sure. The man who mowed the lawns said that with *Qi Gong* he could feel the energy moving around in his body, could drop his organs, never needed to read a book ever again. (*Otherwise, there is nothing that need be developed; all the student must do is simply renounce both the hope that there is something that can be achieved through the practice as well as the conceit that he will achieve the result.*)

The man who is a friend and neighbor gave instructions about the code for locking the house. He was going out of town. He looked through me as if I were transparent and saw all the pots he had collected over many years smashed by a vandal. All the windows were wired and the doors. The most precious pots were by the Mimbres people of the American Southwest. All the pots had been “killed” and placed over the head or face of the deceased at the time of burial, aiding the spiritual transformation of the deceased from one realm to the next. Many have been carefully mended. At night in the storm, heavy rain and winds, responsible for both my own cabin and the neighbor’s house and pots, I thought about how in earlier years I had been afraid of being dramatically killed in the woods. I thought of myself as a person so far from anyone, so unrelated to anyone, that anything could happen and no one would know. I thought about how the Mimbres poked a hole through the pot, avoiding the beautiful image of the deer, but mostly I thought about the beautiful white space on which the image had been painted.

The woman on the radio described how she likes being pressed and how her liking for being pressed influenced her invention of the pressing machine for cattle being led off to slaughter; that way, she reasoned, they wouldn’t be so fearful. When I was a child I crawled between the mattress and the box springs. I asked my sister to sit on my extended legs. I crawled into the dark space behind the clothes in the closet so I didn’t have to see anyone, not even myself. In the back of my cabin the cows make a sound that is clearly distinct, but which from time to time I confuse with the machines mowing hay in the distance. This morning the farmer

next door lifted his hand to me for the first time in four years. His wife, however, turned away.