

PUFF

SPLIT

A hand-drawn illustration of the United States map, with the word 'PUFF' written in a large, stylized, outlined font across the top half and 'SPLIT' in a similar font across the bottom half. The map is surrounded by small dots and a wavy line representing a coastline or a path. The word 'SPLIT' is positioned below the map, with the letters 'S', 'P', and 'L' being larger than 'I' and 'T'.

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## Puff Mall

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*Third in an ongoing series -- an initial exploration into a longer form story. It is a sincere exploration of the pleasures and pains of pop culture and literature. This magazine also functions as repository for inquiries into herbalism, health fads, religiosity, and the difference between artwork and artisan production.*

full series at [silohradovsky.net](http://silohradovsky.net)

"puff Mall" —

No, it does not mean an enclosed courtyard of vendors selling weed wares, but rather it refers to the physical nature of vapors and attempts to orchestrate them with a nod to the pleasurable quality of observing commodities. Making rooms and outposts which might promise a more thorough congelation — displays which beg one day to be taken home.

Make your own magazine about pop culture, about Kendrick Lamar, contrasted with the gelatinous party of pop music always crystallized as the ubiquitous scene belonging to all yet none, the fun we never had together.

Write about that rather than beginning in the cold alleyway lined with stones, a street full of backwards houses revealing their secrets in that silent stretch of pavement. Rather than beginning there with his spindly fingers exposed to dry winter frighteningly unable to feel, burning the motor too white hot within, start with the the celebratory festival of the Minnesota State Fair two Augusts ago, where they stood in front of a burlap sack impregnated with cocoons giving off a disturbing warmth behind the glass, a great display of butterflies being born before sinking to the bottom of the window. Write about pop culture and about the window as a way of wondering about mountains left unclimbed or how it is that the hunger for this thinner air comes and passes. And whether it is crude or superficial to so readily aspire to an individual conquering of a peak so visible on the horizon which seems only conveniently to externalize the fear of flatness, making geography from the lower frequencies of doubt and their frozen resistance to shapeliness.

"Angelica, etc"

Communing with his own death each cigarette, his own proximity to the dead and to the hidden meaning one can hope their passage contains, the way that circumstances are explained by their physical matter if only given enough excavation—a way to feel less out of breath. The herbalists were very fond to consider poison as medication. A man who looks like beef jerky or Kid Rock or the love interest in the film *Chocolat*—sinewy and crisping his body in the sun each day as a lizard absorbing sun while intoxicated. He smokes with the boy, the brother named Rowan. He is twenty years old and grown lanky outward, so the sister observes him smoking on the beige couch outside with the neighbor they have named Meat, conversations she cannot hear through the window. Molly, we will call her. She writes down about getting better:

*"Home" — a word which itself evokes the same sense of relief as "remedy," something to be grasped for simply, like a river-wort from the shoreline or any other remedial that could take away the feeling of contamination with more or less than a talisman, leaving not even its sign in the tissues.*

A tale from far away in the place of healing, a distant riverbed. The story was off in another land completely and this was the unverified ticket away. It required more than being alive, more than all of the other animals. It was a sacrificial activity to compensate for everything else left undone and if it was completed successfully, the novel would be one good thing a human did, swinging the measure back towards Animal

The book was revolutionary but also a solution to immediate marginality, which is perhaps contradictory though pop music may say otherwise.

As for the evils, brother blames Fuckers when perhaps it is more diffused and fascial than this, responding to pressures elsewhere. After lengthy periods of physical hardship and suffering, it is now time for him to gain international stature, time that he has the time for meandering forays into failure and redemption so vital to an artistic practice. He gets stipends for expensive studio experiments, the emboldening boost of public recognition, encounters with industry leaders and other incidental sages. Time for him to tell magazines about one time, except first he must gain the rosetta stone for Reverie. This chapter has a different name, it's called "The time is ripe for his success." But first, there must be the justice of gravity and bad luck.

## "Homelessness + mental illness"

Coming to the public library to be together in study, in the examined passage of time. Hearing the coughs which come from different wings of the building, the hacking up of mucus accumulated in the street; this is the opposite of a debt, and rather is a presence we must all contend with. Whether her passage of the day is the same feeling of somewhere warm and dry to be and a kind of survival that seems concerned only with the trouble immediately at hand, desiring a kind of distraction, and whether or not this is at all lacking in legitimacy. It is not easier to not explain things; by far it is better to try than to consider trying, though this knowledge is made slippery and narrow by the ephemerality of these feelings of success, and the cruel contextuality of words.

Against this backdrop, Molly made a promise with herself that if she sat in the chair whatever she wrote could be the first chapter of her new novel:

*Outside of the butterfly room, a man stood collecting admission at the door, calling out to the crowd of pedestrians that oozed through the streets of the fair. That steady crowd was constantly fluctuating in composition, a stream of bodies that had the appearance of shifting or staying the same depending upon the vantage point, a rearrangement of bodies evoking swarms of insects busy at work. All moderation was lost in the final hours of that day in August, the second to last of the annual extravaganza, after which many grease-stained disposable plates and wax paper cups would be consolidated and taken away, and the exhausted pavement hit hard by the steps would be scrubbed clean. The faces of those employees of the booths and the trucks vending so many varieties of burgers and things to be drincken with straws were flat and shining with the gray oil that filled the air, stacking up a*

*tenuous proportion of labor to sleep, hours of absorbing the chatter of bodies in motion, rapid cycling of the process in which objects become trash crushed underfoot. The voice of the butterfly caller was absorbed in the general noise, the sound of entertainment machinery and the voices of the participants from near and far range. It was not that man wearing khaki green but two glass windows dimly lit outside the insect emporium, displaying the birth of many butterflies whose cocoons had been affixed to a piece of white fabric that captured Violet's attention — the thin blue wings of the re-birth of the butterflies. Viewed from a distance, the window was awash with grey. The rows of cocoons had been affixed to a large piece of fabric; the bottom of the window was lined with the paper husks, and fluttering and still bodies of alive and dead insects.*





## " Fissure "

The novel meant beginning with something broken and sewing it back together. Even then, initially it felt as a Victorian corset, an unhealthy kind of constraint upon the excess of experience.

When had Molly's first novel become a success? When it became necessary. That's when it became magical. Because "supernatural" came to fill the gaps of any more rational reason to write. It had reactivated all suppressed desire to repair a fractured geography which spread out across that sphere floating in space and zoomed in focus even in such a blissful place as a small city on the West Coast of America, sending people into the seclusion of their homes while rattling against their own sense of meaninglessness without anything to do with their hands. So a hopefulness for a place as big as the Everything bloomed open once again within the confined cavity of her body, so it felt expansively possible to touch even distant shores; the invisible electricity of the brain seemed as many gentle, powerful hands extending for light years, grasping fingers around Ports in Taiwan and China which appeared in full color, drawing up dreams of long lines waiting for ships and carnivals at the edges of the water that filled in the gaps between continents. The book was several kinds of salvation and the chemicals were as real as life.

Waiting for another big push, another fluke appearance from the side of the moon we rarely see, another cycle of crossing from its

circular orbit, the kind of distance that's difficult to measure from down on the ground except to say "far." It's hardly even interesting until it happens, and all the dots connect into constellations, taking liberties with sparkles to explain stories more immediately comprehended than the realistic explanation of the stars as gaseous balls of fire amidst the frigid flotation tank of outer space. A constellation is comprehensive, but the stars are good in their own way as sustained explosions, the sustenance of non-essential light that lasts a long time after its death. Such is the speed of transmission.

*"Letter About 'Endurance + Exigency'"*

A soldier is someone you have never been; you are not that kind of buck-up. Though at the time of writing about your personal war, it was a nice idea to entertain that kind of exigency, and perhaps it had genuinely been so, carrying your limp body past exhaustion through the scaffold of a cause. This winter, this spring, the masses do not come from an era of mistaken revolutionary ambition, but instead, you face the foibles of any traveler carrying an expired lantern.

Sending oneself off towards the balancing point of contradictory forces under the clavical banner of one body, now reconciling a will for survival, which does seem less pure, somehow, than a faint memory of the beauty of battle and its irreconcilable differences. Now pondering the sufficiency of conquest of a cacophony of these oceanic forces, and the way it leaves little room for complete eradication. Now grasping towards the worthiness of wandering slowly towards something, towards a different war, giving up on comprehension, completion, settling into the faulty pain of aphorisms and ultimatums, and then stepping over their strings once the dust has settled, into the place where it neither feels nor is the same, though all forcefulness remains outside the window, outside the second skin.

## "The Super Bowl"

Exhausted, and landing again on earth. There is a temporary lapse of attention associated with dancing. But what about when you cannot stop thinking "Will it be over, yet?" with anticipation. And the best you can do is passionless drills. When it seems you are capable to hunger only with one side of you, and something crucial refuses to be shaken back into life. Like the rationality of the little brother now gone missing, stupidly adrift in the netherlands for safe-keeping except leaving his and our bodies alone in the mundane realm where life is sharp, cold, and dangerous. He is the worst brother ever and it would almost be easier if he died rather than to see him get close over and over again. Both brother and sister struggle with impossibility, either unvisited by that actualizing act of fantasy, or too much in its grips — falling too far to one pole or another, but is even that middle ground truly the place of science? The reasonable truth. They stand on either side of a nation, occasionally making contact.

No, life is not the same thing as an election, excessively hyping one faulty character, when a once-better option becomes sufficiently unviable in the eyes of the party; they are not the same thing as polar opposites whose believers intermingle amidst the sprawl of geography forged violently across the land. We are not the brittle voice of women easily defiled as Masculine Bitch, nor an idealistic savior of the virtues of taxes. We are not a brash exposition of brutal honesty of falsehood, a nostalgia for a simpler era of monarchic reign re-cast as populism. Or more tempered versions of the same deranged practicality. We are not a flawed figurehead winning a game of face-saving to stand as the appointed adjustor of meaning, little sooth-sayers of optimism about the economy and our own marginal influence upon the calibration of the scales and where it is that center stands. We are

not truly the legitimating spectators of a battle of feigned physicality, battling to the death in lieu of citizens brawling. The contention is just as real; however, it is an echo of experience, and we live with it circulating and unsaid, not acknowledging the trueness of even that which is wrong lest fracturing the solvency of our determination, furthering the mute military might of the feeling of being infringed upon. Having not yet decided upon a genre, the contradictory elements feel as antagonistic as all this, as bold and articulate as any public lie productive of shared feelings and other kinds of social manipulation to garner status.

More real than the election is the fairness of the game begun with a rendition of the National Anthem by Lady Gaga, proof that we are no more real than as a feeling of belonging which is itself full of satire, and we cannot decipher the source of its realness except as a hand on the heart as a reminder of a perseverance so distant in the past that it's easy to replace the meaning of its historical moment with our own oceanic feelings about waves breaking and the stakage of land. Is she a reappropriation of this identity, another inclusion of freaks and outsiders such as that when the camera shifts to a live stream of American Soldiers in Afghanistan, we are all caught by the apologetic separation of Soldier from war made necessary by the ideological fallout of colonial violence now come to life like a mutant from the genre of Fantasy or Horror, and we say to the soldiers who are honorable in their camo and in the dimly lit room on the other side of earth, from the aquamarine glow of the stadium and its bright bursts of light, "I am sorry you are there for us," no matter what the liberals say about the superflousness of war here we are in a logic of battle that's bigger and worse than the specificity of a territorial campaign, that there is safety in this moment, shepherded by Lady Gaga, that for this instant even war is glamorous and queer, and football is better than the election. We thank the sacrifice made by Lady Gaga in her shimmering pink-red suit, done up in the colors of the flag, bedazzled, with her provocatively stiff hair-do, a manicured trashiness befitting of any outsider dreaming of

success, as she executes the performance with classical form so easily that there is room for punctuation with her super long nails, repurposing the tradition as either its epitome or as sarcasm and because we cannot tell the difference for a moment they are all there together with hands on the chest, for a moment relieved of the bitterness of all disagreement with the sensation that there is something ethereal that is shared, and that it is delightful and choreographed, and more honest than any candidate about colonization and slavery, and what it is that makes life good in the present, and what it takes to succeed. All this said so honestly and openly without words, except slant and sly, and then at half-time Beyoncé breaks through the waves and comes down the middle of the field with a troupe of Ladies to do war upon racism, and it does seem as possible that she and all pop stars now stand on the side of Good, fighting with the continental legacy of pain and its continuance, setting aside all other Black Female musicians who have been cast aside by the industry, but here Beyoncé has the microphone in her hands and look how it is she uses it, so from the outside of fame here we are cheering her on, though it's lonely out here where it seems insignificant to undergo sensation and emotion without being fed by the attention of many hungry/jealous/supportive fans, out here where a solution is not always as simple as a re-appropriation of wealth, mourning for all those who do not make it into recognition but who are acknowledged by the turn of the camera, for we are the recipients of the show, who are responsible for the nature of Big Time, loving those who are paid (it is nice to think) for being themselves, happy for the reminder of the stars overhead as someplace that exists, however unattainable it might be, proof that there is an Outside.

"By writing about the Capital Mall, what do you mean exactly?"

Looking for similarities and differences to relief sought elsewhere; examining all kinds of misplaced collectivity; confronting dread for captivity by prodding sterilized components partially-reassembled and entertaining the soft sweet voice of another Owl proposing that the missing parts might be found again, or that things aren't so deficient as you consider, just misaligned.

Optimistically entering the red doors and passing various human terrariums of hairstyling and the communal wardrobe for hire to end up one of two luminous blue locations, beauty and computer technicians; you are there presenting yourself under the anonymous ambient squint, great Father Mall hovering critically, offering beauty in clenched fists like an accidental Luck Dragon begrudgingly accepting the stable income; showing up with tremendous miniature ambitions so regularly critical for the halfway healing town, bright and cleansing in the battle over finite position for truly life-giving work, the kind of employment you could be satisfied with busting out of all the seams. Showing up to be groomed in the regular ways, a way to claim that unexisting future where the regular things we do mean something new. Students torture themselves at school, as though neutralizing the luxury that is study, that is reading and writing. Before becoming again embittered to land back in the hands of administration and its ruinous maintenance completely absent from any thought to nurture, trying to save the same story from any easy conclusions it comes to.

