

PRINTED MATTER



Language Trans-figured

Since I Moved In

Tim Peterson
Chax Press

By Angela Veronica Wong

To read Tim Peterson's first book of poems, *Since I Moved In*, is to experience identity as the body, and the body as language. Our visual bodies, our identities through our experiences of visibility and invisibility, can be translated into our worded language. Peterson's poems are a flood of experience, of setting, character, language, and feeling. His narratives compel an unexpected headiness rooted in the physical. It makes reading *Since I Moved In* an intoxicating experience. He negotiates identity through the divide of internal and external, personal and social, intellect and feeling, self and body, through language and narrative that is beautiful in its pain and painful in its beauty:

A patch of skin is a color against a background rising. Dark, slut, camphor, duct tape summer. Animated sloth of carpal system, dole. Apart from that, lurking in the waste that feels earthen, pretends to be that thing as mall lights simulate fire, to fireflies, to fading stars.

...

These parts of me I cannot deny: the space I sit in, the left arm muscle moving into the neck causing headache, colophon of sorrow from another time. Made manifest, a bulb opens in the street.

Peterson writes from a place of inbetweenness, of existing within a binary—in this case gender. His body is the site of his inbetween identity.

Peterson's poems in the first section of *Since I Moved In* consider an inbetween "self" that is forced to define its "identity" as male or female. Tiling the collection of untitled poems, "Trans

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Figures," Peterson reinvents the familiar single word, "transgender." The simple act of making "trans" its own word elevates it. No longer is "trans" a prefix describing another word, another experience; it becomes an experience unto itself. Using "figures" instead of "gender" or "sexual" strips the experience from its gendered location. The word "figures" is genderless, allowing Peterson to shift us away from our association of identity with predetermined gender expectations and toward the idea of a genderless self.

Peterson shows how the "self" schisms and becomes "the voice" and "the body" becomes an "it" to avoid being a "s/he, him/her." For Peterson the self falls on the gender divide. He opens "Trans Figures" with the achingly wishful "The voice wants to turn itself into a body," and later continues:

The voice is very conscious of efforts to pass this trial, tries on gestures that will get it overlooked, a gentle throwing back of the hair
it saw someone do who was a real body, a bending
forward in the seat so it will seem,
for an instant, like that someone is living in its skin

What is "real" and "not real" is determined by those who exist comfortably on the binary. Falling in between the binary, Peterson's "voice" feels too visible, searches to be invisible, to be a part of the body ("tries on gestures that will get it/ overlooked").

We use language to construct and reinforce binaries, as Peterson writes, "[t]he people looked around/ and saw the abundances that

language had given them." "Let there be breasts!" alternates between female and male. Breasts/penis. Fashion/construction. Covering the body/the body exposed. Those on the male or female sides of the binary are blessed with language; language allows them to exist. Peterson's "voice" does not have that privilege. It is trapped, simultaneously depending on language to express and create a space for itself, but knowing that language denies it by reinforcing existing binaries ("[the voice] could have none of this/ to keep").

Peterson's choice of form for many of the poems in "Trans Figures"—contained blocks with fairly even lines, a recognizable poetic form—is an example of how inbetween writers must create space from themselves within the expected. If the poetic form reads as a metaphor for the binary, what Peterson does within the form is akin to claiming space within the binary.

The tension between words and lines in Peterson's poems belies the apparent containment of the poem by its familiar stanza form. Just as he lives in the "/" of the male/female and his poems push the two apart, his words push against the physical constraints of a stanza as they push male/female apart.

Angela Veronica Wong lives in the Upper East Side. She is thinking about growing tomatoes on her fire escape. She likes PBS, colorful umbrellas, and hockey. Most recently, her work has appeared in *Barrow Street*. Visit her at www.seriouslysquared.blogspot.com

Whenever, Texas



kadar koli

David Hadbawnik, editor
Issue 1, Vol. 1, Spring 2007

By David A. Kirschenbaum

A year-and-a-half ago Habenicht Press editor David Hadbawnik moved from San Francisco to San Marcos, Texas to pursue a master of fine arts in poetry. "Needless to say I went from a bustling, hustling city of readings and events to a much smaller college town," says Hadbawnik.

Scott Pierce, editor of Austin's Effing Press, asked Farid Matuk and Hadbawnik to guest edit an issue of *Effing Magazine* a short time later. "It reminded me of the kind of energy and exchange that such projects can provide, given the lack of immediate contact with a large poetry center," says Hadbawnik. "So I decided to put together my own little mag."

During the winter he asked some poet friends to get him their work within a week, and then he finished the issue this spring, calling it *kadar koli*, a title suggested by his wife, which means whenever in Slovene.

Hadbawnik has a group of friends in *kadar koli* whose names just jumped out at me—Jen Hofer, Hoa Nguyen, Sarah Peters, Dale Smith,

Susan Briante's 'Mid-State' is a rambling travel poem, with stops in Abbott, Dallas, Odessa, San Antonio, and Waxahachie, Texas, as well as Buffalo, Chicago, Las Vegas, Mexico, New Jersey, New York City, and Tulsa, Okla.

and Roger Snell. Each of them delivers their usual solid work, but it's Nguyen's austere nine-line gem "On and Off Rain" that stands out:

"We will love with kisses"
even when writing through you

(Basketball sticker on the coffee table)

The real pleasure, though, lies in discovering the work of those whose names didn't jump out at me, including Susan Briante, Susanna Kittredge, Andrew Neuendorf, and Steve Wilson. Briante's "Mid-State" is a rambling travel poem, with stops in Abbott, Dallas, Odessa, San Antonio, and Waxahachie, Texas, as well as Buffalo, Chicago, Las Vegas, Mexico, New Jersey, New York City, and Tulsa, Okla. There are different travelers, locales, and eras, her observations combining for a real smooth trip.

After a long drive through central Texas I stopped to piss in an Austin coffee shop/bakery. Graffiti in the pink stall read: *Men fall in love with the women they are attracted to. Women become attracted to the men they love.* And under that, scrawled in black sharpie: *White People Suck.*

Austin has a large number of white people.

Visit www.habenichtpress.com/publications/index.html to order *kadar koli*.

David A. Kirschenbaum is the editor of *Boog City*.

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