Body Blows

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Okay, I can’t resist it one second longer—My Queer Body is my most seminal piece. And not just because the show starts with me as a queer sperm getting ready to be ejaculated out of my dad’s dick—though that’s clearly a tip-off. In My Queer Body I wanted to weave a funny, scary, and emotional gay boy’s alternative creation myth, an odyssey of swimming upstream as a queer spermlet at conception to my first boy-kiss to the ecstatic visions of homo-sex transforming the state! This show explores the stories that our bodies carry and how systemic homophobia challenges our deepest selves. The performance traces a journey through the most intimate pleasures and pains of being in our bodies in these difficult and juicy times. In My Queer Body we have the sweetness of an early love, a date with a boy at the La Brea Tar Pits, and a frightening peek into a volcano and the mortal fears of the time. I wanted the show to reveal some of the secrets that are held in my heart and head and butt and breath. The show ends up with a rousing call to claim ecstasy and imagine a fabulous queer future complete with a black lesbian president. That’s it in a nutshell.
In the heat of the times, I wanted to listen to places on my body speak their tales. I began work on this piece by trying to tell the story of my dick. This launched me on a journey to discover the other stories my body has to tell. If you listen carefully, your lips remember their first kiss and their first loss, your body remembers the places of hurt and the places of pleasure. As a teacher of performance this is something I encourage my students to do. I ask them to follow their nose, as it were, to the stories that each part of their body holds. What is the story of the elbow? What happened to make that scar? The story of the teeth? The eyes? The story of your genitals? What part of your body has a story that really needs to be told? Is there a place on your body that carries a story so important that if it doesn’t get told you might burst? I invite the people I work with to allow themselves to see the most idiosyncratic metaphors of their bodies as fully as possible. For myself, as an artist, I try to do the same thing. In *My Queer Body* I summoned these embodied narratives as a way of figuring out who I am. I wanted to try to reclaim my flesh-and-blood tales from the clutches of those who would try to censor, control, slice and dice them. Even the audience in this show has to get into the act right at the top of the performance by calling out some of the favorite places on their bodies. You know you’re going to have a good show if people shout “perineum” or “pussy” without much coaxing!

I created *My Queer Body* during the worst of the AIDS crisis and in the period when my own particular front line of the nineties culture wars, the “NEA 4” controversy, was at its peak. In 1990, I, a wandering queer performance artist, had been awarded a Solo Performer Fellowship by the National Endowment for the Arts, which was promptly overturned under political pressure from George Bush the First because of the lush, wall-to-wall homo themes of my creative work. We so-called NEA 4 (me, Karen Finley, John Fleck, and Holly Hughes), then sued the federal government with the help of the ACLU (if you’re not a card-carrying member, become one!) for violation of our First Amendment
rights and won a settlement in which the government paid us the amount of the defunded grants and all court costs. The last little driblet of this case was the “decency” clause, which Congress had added to the NEA appropriation under the cattle prod of Jesse Helms. Judge A. Wallace Tashima of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals had sagely declared that using the “general standards of decency” clause as a criterion for the funding of the arts was clearly unconstitutional. Right from the bench he had thrown the language out. This could have been our happy ending, except that the Justice Department decided to appeal Judge Tashima’s decision to the Supreme Court.

If you read your newspaper in 1998, you know that in their NEA 4 decision, the Supremes decided that it was okey-dokey not to fund “indecent art.” The law “neither inherently interferes with First Amendment rights nor violates constitutional vagueness principles,” Justice Sandra Day O’Connor wrote in her majority opinion. In a disappointing eight to one decision, the high court hitched up with Helms and his ilk and declared that the National Endowment for the Arts can consider “decency” in deciding who gets public money for the arts. I was grateful that at least Justice David H. Souter showed he was sensible to the reality of how under assault artists have been in this country for the past ten years. He was the lone justice who dissented, saying the law should be struck down as unconstitutional because it was “substantially overbroad and carries with it a significant power to chill artistic production and display.” There is no question that that “chilling effect” is as real as the polar ice cap! I hear this from artists and my students all over the country. It’s so embarrassing and enraging that the Supreme Court made this decision that undermined the First Amendment.

The ten years of my life during which my performances were scrutinized by right-wing nuts was about as much fun as a colonoscopy! I felt my work be trivialized and misrepresented all over the place. Whole swaths of the country that I used to perform and
teach in became off-limits for years. I lost a great deal of work, and the brave arts organizations that did bring me in to their communities often faced ugly scenes at their theaters. Here’s an example of how this would play out: I was performing in Chattanooga not long ago. As the audience arrives at the theater, so do the protesters. They set up shop across the street, a motley bunch of a couple dozen men (they have stashed their wives and children at the corner). As the people begin to arrive for the show, they are forced to walk by the protesters across the street, who wave their Confederate flags (the black cops we hired for security don’t seem too thrilled about these characters) as they shout at the audience the usual charming greetings: “Faggots! God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve! Sodomites burn in Hell,” etc. The children down the street join in these cries. This seems to demonstrate this particular church’s version of family values: The Family That Mates Together, Hates Together. There is a mix of the rambunctious spirit of a carnival and the blood-lust adrenaline of a public hanging. The situation is simultaneously absurd and terrifying. This was my version of show business in the nineties: The gala opening nights! The glamour! The bomb threats! The Confederate flags!

I worked on *My Queer Body* as the NEA 4 crisis swirled around me. Court cases, public statements, death threats were part of my daily experience. This wasn’t all that was going on in my life. The long battle of the AIDS crisis was at its worst and my ACT UP activities consumed a lot of my energy. It was a time of feeling at total war. A time when I was as likely to be arrested at a demonstration as I was to be rushing to a performance. People were dying by the thousands. The horrors of the Reagan/Bush era were wreaking havoc on queer and artists’ communities. The stakes were very high, and it often felt as though the theaters where I did the piece were reaching the boiling point from the hard times we were in.

I remember one performance of *My Queer Body* that I did in the beautiful Yale Repertory Theatre in 1993. There is one point in the show where I wander naked out into the audience, exposed
by the glare of the follow spot as I get close enough to see people. I look them in the eye and acknowledge them as the community occupying that theater for that evening. I see their glasses. Feel their hair (maybe indulge in a quip about their hair-care products). Notice this audience’s wisdom. Discreetly, of course, cruise a boy. At a certain point, I sit on an audience member’s lap and look into their eyes. My butt naked on their lap. I try to speak simply to them about this feeling of loss and craziness inside me.

I AM here with you. My body is right here. I’m sweaty. I’ll probably get your pants all wet. You are right there. Here, feel my heart. I still feel alone. A little afraid of all of you. And I could tell you another sweet or scary story like I’ve tried to do tonight. But whatever I did . . . it would be a lot wetter and messier and more human and complicated than when I stand up there naked in the red theatrical light and pretend I’m going into the volcano.

I said these words as I sat on the lap of a young man who was sitting on the aisle (take that as a general warning). I looked into his face. Into his eyes. This young man began to shake. His face quaking. His eyes overflowing with tears. He was trembling intensely but was so present in his gaze and really making contact with me. I was scared too. I wasn’t sure what was going on for him. How intense was this? What unknown boundary have I crossed? Have I fucked somebody up?

Anyhow, finally, I got back on stage where I belonged. I trusted that this had been okay for this young man. After the show, as is my fashion, I immediately came out on stage to talk with people. I like to leave the stage lights up and encourage folks to come up on stage. They can say hello to me or each other. Before too long there were about a hundred or so people up on the stage at Yale Rep. They’d hauled themselves up onto the lip of the high stage or found the stairs and were chatting with each other, looking around, saying hello to me. I like to have people
feel that the stage is a place where they are welcome. Their bodies belong up there too. I talked to many people as they shared with me their experiences of the performance or made contact in some way that was important for them. The young fellow I had been with in the audience came up and we hugged. I asked him if the moment when I sat with him had been all right. He said that it was. It had just been very intense for him because of many things going on in his life since he had just come out as a queer man. The performance had opened up some things within. We hugged again and he went off with his friend.

Then a man came up to me and held my hand. He told me his lover had died of AIDS in his arms that morning in the hospital. He told me he hadn’t known what to do with himself. He chose to come and see my performance. He told me that the piece had helped him in a deep way to be with his feelings of loss and also to claim the life that is in him for his future. To keep claiming the life that still breathes in his body. We talked for some time. Holding hands. Tuning in.

Now, clearly, this was a very charged gathering of people that night in New Haven. I’m not saying this was a typical night. But during the years I toured My Queer Body, every night I stepped out onto a stage or performance space I assumed that many of the people who had assembled were in a dynamic and challenging experience as they took their seats. For many of them, their presence is literally a matter of life and death. One audience member may be dealing with the upheaval of just having come out and claimed identity, while another may well have buried someone that morning. I know that both mourning and celebration often hover quite near the surface of the community that gathers to see my work. Those charged feelings are quite present in the theaters when I step out and ask the audience to shout out a favorite place on their bodies. I know I am a queer performer presenting my homo-content work in a time of crisis. My work is filtered through a complex set of political events around the right wing’s attempt
to censor lesbian and gay artists. Perhaps this makes such human gatherings more pregnant with this feeling and need. The call to community more pointed. I want to feel the full blast of the humanness of the situation. I want as a performer to be pulled and challenged and to serve in some small way this most human of gatherings. As a theater artist, I look at an audience and assume that each person has just been to a funeral, or just had delicious sex, or was queer-bashed and carries some wounds and some pleasures very close to themselves as they take their seats.

The beauty of these gatherings makes me feel many things as I start to open my mouth and the lights come up. I feel humbled by the audience’s openness. Energized by human presence. Shamed by their authenticity. Emboldened by this challenge.

(The houselights dim along with the pre-show music by the Smiths, Meat Is Murder. Onstage are a bowl of water, a piece of lava, and a surprise wrapped in a red cloth. We pause in the dark for a moment to acknowledge the miracle that these humans have gathered together in this theater. Tim enters, walking through the audience in a follow spot.)

Hello. Hi everybody. This is my entrance. It’s sort of a rear entry tonight. It’s the mood I’m in. Actually, I’m here because I need a few things from the audience. Think of this as sort of a psycho-sexual scavenger hunt. As I look at you all here tonight, I can quickly see that you’ve all been on a lot of those. I need to gather a few things.

(Tim grabs an unsuspecting audience member’s fingers. And whatever else strikes his fancy during this section.)

I need your FINGERS! Oh those dancing fingers. They do a rumba! A bolero later perhaps. We summon the fingers to this
place. The fingers are here. I need this person’s FOOT! Oh foot in black leather boot. Booted foot, do you know there are entire clubs in this city devoted to your worship? We summon the foot.

We need some pulsating BRAINS. There’s a bunch of them over here. Have you noticed the brains always want to sit over there on the right? Many open HEARTS here tonight. I see them shining. These open hearts will be much needed tonight. Bring ’em onstage.

Now, this is the first of several audience participation moments in tonight’s program. (OH NO!) I know how you love them. This first one is very easy. I need you to call out some favorite places on your body, or on someone else’s body, and while you do this I will spontaneously improvise a dynamic postmodern dance. Let’s begin.

*(Tim actually gets the audience to shout out body parts: Thighs!!! Breasts!!! Lips!!! Other lips!!! This sometimes takes some coaxing. Especially to shout out naughty stuff.)*

I think we’re leaving a few things out. Don’t censor yourselves. Let’s work below the belt for a bit.

*(Dicks!!! Pussies!!! Butthole!!!)*

Good! We have summoned the body! The body is here.

*(Tim steps onstage.)*

Let’s start at the beginning. The very beginning. My dad is fucking my mom. In a bed. Where else would they be? This is suburban Whittier, California. They’re young and hot for each other. I’m trying to visualize this. Half of me is inside my father’s dick. The other half is inside my mom. My biology gets a little vague here. They’re breathing fast. My dad is going to cum any minute. He’s thrusting madly. AH AH AH! Suddenly I am thrown out of my father’s dick into my mom’s body. I am surrounded by thousands of squirming creatures.
I am swimming upstream.
Oh humble dog paddle!
Oh efficient crawl!
Oh stylish backstroke!
I am swimming upstream. As I would swim upstream throughout this life. One queer little spermlet. . . . Fighting the odds. A hideous sperm that looks like Jesse Helms tries to catch me in a net. I elude him! There’s a bunch of generals from the Joint Chiefs of Staff who want to kick me out of this fallopian tube. I elude them, as well. Then a bunch of hulking macho slimebag straight-pig sperm shove and try to elbow me out of the way. Call me “Sissy! Pansy! Fag! You’ll never find an egg! HA HA HA!”

Clearly this is homophobia. My very first experience. But! I use my superior agility, fleetness, and sense of style and calmly leap from plodding straight sperm forehead to straight sperm forehead. I quickly find a willing dyke ovum, we agree to power share. We reach consensus immediately (this is a fantasy sequence, all right!) and we . . .

FERTILIZE!!!!

There is an explosion of creative electricity. A shifting of queer tectonic plates. Skittering across the well of loneliness to Walt Whitman’s two boys together clinging on the sea beach dancing! I see Gertrude Stein is in a tutu. She dances with Vaslav Nijinsky in a butt plug. They do a pas de deux on the wings of a fabulous flying machine created by Leonardo and piloted by James Baldwin and Amelia Earhart. They fly over the island of Lesbos where Sappho is starting to put the moves on the cute woman carpenter who has arrived to build her a breakfast nook.

There is a puff of feathers . . . an angry fist . . . a surface-to-air witticism . . . the off-the-shoulder amazon look! Embodying the bridge between woman and man and back again. The sperm is a fish. The egg is a rocket. Five, four, three, two, one!!!

And . . . ECCE HOMO!!! Behold the fag.
And now the big cry to the universe. It’s time to be born. WAAAAHH! The doctor spanks my butt. WAAAAHH! He spanks it again. WAAAAHH!!! I look back and I say, “Doctor, I won’t really be into spanking till I’m at least twenty-four!”

With that first pre-erotic and nonconsensual spank a wave of shame and body fear washes over me. I fight back. I kick the doctor in the balls. Rejecting his authority. I slip on my “Action = Life” Huggies. Slither into my attractive “We’re Here We’re Queer Get Used To It” powder-blue baby jumper. I see all the other queer babies in the nursery start to shimmer and grow and explode from their diapers. They all grow to adulthood. Some of them find their way to this theater tonight.

Until I stand before you now.

(Tim rubs his heart.)

It hit me right here. First it hit me right here in the heart. Right here. Only later it hit me in the head.

(Tim walks into audience and approaches someone.)

Could you rub me here please?

(Audience member rubs Tim’s heart. They get fresh sometimes.)

Well, a lot of things have done that. Hit me in the heart and the head. The election of Ronald Reagan, AIDS, the first time I got butt-fucked. Oh, and the only date I went on with a boy in high school.

(To person rubbing.)

Keep going. A little faster and harder please. If your arm gets tired just switch hands. I’m going to set the stage now. Everyone pay attention. There is a bed there. Right there up on stage. It has a big old pine headboard painted Pin-N-Save antique green. The Vitalis on my father’s head has burnt a hole right through
seven layers of paint to the maple wood underneath. My mom’s sacred jar of Noxzema is on the bedstand. I always tried to use that Noxzema to beat off with it but you can never get up a good slide with Noxzema. Plus it stings! See, people have tried.

I make a solemn vow never to endorse Noxzema for masturbation no matter how much they try to pay me. This is the bed. The bed I was conceived on. The bed on which I would be born once again. Thank you, nice rubbing-person.

*(Tim walks onstage.)*

I offer this now in tribute to the first time this meat and bones got close to other flesh and blood. It’s the story of the only date I went on with a boy in high school. I met him. Robert. The guy I would go on the date with. I was seventeen years old. He was seventeen. I am thirty-four now, so that means I am now almost old enough to be my own father in this story. It’s a stretch, I know, but it’s possible. I think maybe I am my own father in this story? Trying to give birth to myself? But I don’t want to do that. I really support guys who do. You know, all the cool granola-y straight men with the drums and stuff in the woods. I want to do something else. I want to remember and claim and conjure my queer body at seventeen when my entire body was a hard-on.

Oh, I had a hard-on for Dostoyevsky.

I had a hard-on for Patti Smith.

I had a hard-on for many of the boys in my gym class.

Robert went to a different high school in Anaheim near Disneyland. He grew to his seventeen years in the forbidding shadow of the Matterhorn Bobsled Ride. He was slight and fair, cute, and wore glasses, always a plus. He was the lead singer in a proto-punk rock band based in Tustin, California. They mostly did songs taken from obscure texts of the Marquis de Sade. My friend Lori introduced us. She had met him at one of those bohemian hangs in Fullerton, the left bank of (hyper-conservative) Republican Orange County.
She loved him. But quickly realized he was a big fag and passed him on to her friend Tim. I called him up.

“Hi, Robert! This is Tim. I met you with Lori. Hey, you wanna go to the beach with me and then we’ll go into LA to the ‘Shakespeare on Film’ retrospective at the County Museum of Art? Huh?”

He said he would.

I picked him up in Anaheim with my blue ’65 VW Bug. This car was my initiation. My symbol of freedom. I drove the streets of LA feeling the future inside my body and listening to Bryan Ferry and Roxy Music on the transistor radio pressed to my ear.

Robert and I went to Diver’s Cove at Laguna Beach. I had been to this beach many times before . . . mostly with my Congregational church youth group. But now everything was different. The sand was epic. Like in Lawrence of Arabia. Bigger than a 70mm widescreen movie. Each word we said hung perfect and crystalline in the cool fall air before it was blown by a wind toward Japan. We found a secluded nook and talked. While we spoke, I noticed that he was doodling with his fingers and building a wall of sand between us. While he was doing this, he was saying that he always put up barriers between himself and other people. That he kept emotional distance. The wall was shoulder height now. I said, “Robert, this is so intense. It’s such a coincidence. I know exactly what you mean. I feel like I do that too. I put up those emotional walls. But, Robert. Robert, we have to find the way to break through those walls.”

And our hands moved through the base of that sand wall and our fingertips touched. Our eyes connected in a Star Trek laser beam of awareness and perfect feeling. Our lips projected beyond our bodies’ boundaries. We kissed! The Big Bang.

YES!!!!

The triumph over all the times I was chosen last for football. YES!!!!
The victory over the tears that ran down my face when my fucked-up cousin would knock me down punching me in the face calling me “Half Man! Half Man! Half Man!”

The times my sister dressed me as a girl—looked like Jackie Kennedy in my wig, pillbox hat and pink dress—and introduced me to our neighbors as her distant cousin Melinda from Kansas.

That confusing ping-pong of feelings when I watched David Cassidy in the *Partridge Family*. I think I love you. But what am I so afraid of?

Our lips parted and we put our tongues in each others’ mouths just like you’re supposed to. I tasted his mouth. It tasted like . . . hmm. The roof of his mouth tasted like cigarettes. His gums tasted like a child’s. His tongue tasted a lot like my own.

We kissed for a long time. He pulled his high school ring off his finger and slipped it on mine. I have this ring with me. I wear it always. The Valencia High Panthers. I treasure this ring as a symbol of perfect love, of course, but also because I really suspect this will be the only high school ring that any seventeen-year-old boy is gonna give me in this lifetime.

We kissed and kissed and kissed again.

The wave crashes on a California beach and the page has turned.

We drove blissfully back through traffic on the Santa Ana freeway past the theme parks. Past Disneyland. Past the Movieland Wax Museum. A cloud hovered over my Bug when we drove by Knott’s Berry Farm. Robert began telling me about this affair he had been having with Ricky Nelson. He had fallen from his *Ozzie and Harriet* glory and was reduced to playing gigs at the Knott’s Berry Farm amphitheater. They had had a very bad sex scene backstage. This scene seemed to include a large amount of LSD and several enormous summer squash. Should I believe him? I’m not sure. Ricky Nelson queer? Not according to my sources. What is he telling me? That he’s scared of sex? Scared of me? I can relate. I’m scared of everything too!!!!
WE WERE YOUNG QUEERS IN LOVE AND WE WERE SCARED SHITLESS!!!

Some things don’t change.

We got back to Whittier and picked up my friend Lori to go to the movies with us. Now, this might seem strange to you that we would go on a romantic date with my friend Lori. But, Lori, though she was not a dyke, was (believe me) the queerest of the queer kids at my high school. And both then and now the queer kids (whether they’re straight or gay) better fucking stick together.

We were going to see the Zeffirelli film *Romeo and Juliet* at the LA County Museum of Art. SHAKESPEARE ON FILM! I had seen it as a little boy when it first came out with my sister and her best girlfriend who had the unfortunate name of Kay Hickey. Me and Betsy and Kay Hickey went to the Whitwood cinema to see it. It was all a little bit much for me with the cleavage and the heavy breathing so I mostly kept my eyes covered. But, there was one shot in this movie where I had to look. We see the beautiful Leonard Whiting as Romeo face down and naked on a bed. His butt hovering there lunar-like in the soft Verona light. My fingers intuitively opened over my eyes. I rose from my seat and began to walk down the aisle. My fingers reached toward the screen casting ten-foot-tall Panavision shadows onto that perfect butt. I touched the screen and his Romeo’s ass undulated and danced above me.

And at that precise instant . . . at that moment . . . I enlisted. I signed up. I am now a career homo officer. Because I knew someday I would get to see that butt again except the next time I would be seventeen and holding the hand of my new boyfriend from Anaheim.

We got to the County Museum of Art and had a romantic walk (just the three of us) past the La Brea Tar Pits. Now, for those of you that don’t know, the La Brea Tar Pits are primordial pits of petroleum sludge that are next to the County Museum of Art. They’ve been there since the dawn of time . . . or at least since that
field trip in first grade. Anyway, for tens of thousands of years, prehistoric animals, people, tennis balls, and coffee cans have fallen into these pits and been sucked to the center of the earth. Well, it hit me right here. Then right here.

The feeling of eternity that was there in my heart and in my head was so strong. All of those beasts and those people, they were like me. Feeding and fucking. And then they got sucked to a tarry death. This put us in the proper mood for the movie.

We walked down Wilshire and into the movie theater. We sat in the front row. The lights dimmed slowly . . . slowly. The movie began.

(Yes, dear reader, we now hear the haunting, melancholy music from Romeo and Juliet.)

I sank down in my seat. I slowly reached over and grabbed Robert’s hand. I had never watched a movie while holding someone’s hand before. It’s nice! I see why people like it so much. You might wanna try it right now. That feeling of connection. A lifeline back into the world as the movie rolls and rolls.

And what a movie to watch on your first date with a boyfriend. It had everything. Poetic language. Fabulous sword play. Doomed love. MICHAEL YORK!!!! Now, what is going on when a coupla fag teenage boys hold hands and watch Romeo and Juliet at the LA County Museum of Art? There is a survival technique about how we manage to see who we are. Sure, we enjoy all the cute Italian boys stuffed in their tights and bulging cod pieces. But we also project ourselves into the film. Take in the images. Become them. Use them. I was always really good at this. Sometimes I was Romeo/Tim hanging with his friends. And then I would be Juliet/Tim throwing herself on Romeo/Robert’s chest. And then I would be Mercutio/Tim, so obviously in love with Romeo/Robert, if you do a careful textual reading. Then, this was my favorite one, once again I was Romeo/Tim and I was gonna run away with Mercutio/Robert. I was gonna heal him of
his pain, so haunted by Queen Mab. We’d go someplace safe and good . . . like the Renaissance Faire in the San Fernando Valley or something! We’d build a life together there at that Pleasure Faire. We’d get a little duplex over a tallow-maker’s souvenir shop. There’d be a big fluffy bed with feather comforters. We would take our clothes off and rub our bodies together. Loving the touch of skin. Just like I would when I was a little boy. I would come home from church and take off all my clothes, the suit the tie and the tight shoes, and put my naked little boy’s body between the polyester sheets. Loving the feelings on my skin. Making them mine. Reclaiming my body from church and state.

I remember. I remember.

But, then, the sword is pulled. The shit happens. Everyone is torn from everyone they love. And there is a plague on all our houses.

The movie ends and all are punished. The lights come up slowly.

It’s very quiet as we leave the movie theater. We walk silently out past the tar pits. I wander off by myself through the trees down to the chain-link fence surrounding the pits. I look at the moonlight sheen of water hovering over this eternal life-filled goo. I stare across the tar pit lake toward the giant plastic sculpture of the woolly mammoth in his death throes.

It’s been there as long as I can remember. Then, I see something. The woolly mammoth opens his eyes. His trunk snakes out into the night. He lifts one massive leg. Tar dripping from each woolly mammoth toenail. A rapier pierces through the tar. We see Tybalt and Mercutio and Romeo and Juliet rise out of the heavy sticky stuff, hover a bit, and whisper to me . . .

Live these days.
Love well
Value every kiss.
And savor your body’s blink between being born and dying.
They wave at me and sink slowly back into the unforgiving tar pit. Only the woolly mammoth is left. I see him wink at me and then he throws his trunk and tusks back in a permanent plastic death trumpet. I shake my head and the vision is gone.

My friends call to me. I run to join them. I want to explain to them what I have seen. I dance in front of them, leading them down the path past the bone museum. I leapfrog over the bronze saber-toothed tiger. Climb up on the back of a mastodon . . . and crow to the night.

And yet I wish but for the thing I have:
My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite.

(I knew these lines by heart because we had the soundtrack LP to the movie.)

We fall on each other and run galumphing toward my VW. I open the passenger door and Robert gets in the back and Lori in the front. We laugh and scream and joke about stuff. We are just so glad to be together in a car in Los Angeles in 1976 and not in Verona in 1303. I drive a little bit too fast down Sixth Street toward La Brea. I keep trying to catch Robert’s eye there in the back seat. I wanna kiss him right then. I want to keep the connection going. Stay the link.

(Shocking blast of a follow spot. Tim is pinned to the wall.)

THEN IT HAPPENS.

It’s a wild panic-filled slow-mo. The crunch of metal. The breaking of glass. I’m thrown forward. It hits me in the heart as the steering wheel takes my breath. And then it hits me in the head. My face becomes stars as I hit the windshield. Just in time to see Lori break the glass with her forehead as Robert is thrown between the front seats cutting his face on the rear-view mirror. The horn is stuck blowing. The woolly mammoth in the tar pit
hears it and tries to come save us but he just sinks deeper toward
death. Gas is leaking. Tires are spinning.

Why, God? Why, on my only date with a boy in high school
did I have to rear-end a hopped-up maroon El Camino at forty-
five miles an hour, thus totaling my beloved Bug, ruining my date
and my entire life? WHY?

Questions careen. Can I get the car home somehow? Is any-
body hurt bad? How will I explain this? Do I look like I have been
kissing a boy all night long?? We get out of the car. We’re all basi-
cally okay. But my beloved Bug is dead. The woolly mammoth
can’t help me now. Who will save us? I’ll call my father.

I walk about two inches tall to a phone booth on Fairfax and
call my dad. He arrives shortly after followed by a tow truck. I
don’t think my dad does a big shame-on-you routine, but I def-
itely could be repressing that. The tow truck takes my Bug away
and we pile in my dad’s Datsun to drive home in complete silence.

My mind races. I plot to myself how to salvage this evening.
I look at Robert. All I want to do is lay down with him and kiss
him. I start to improvise plans and strategies. Finally I have it. I
say, “Dad, it’s very late isn’t it? You know, I was thinking, Ana-
heim is twenty minutes past Whittier. It would really make more
sense for Robert to stay at our house tonight and then you and I
can drive him home in the morning.”

Pretty creative, really, under the circumstances.

My dad raises his eyebrow. Seventeen-year-old boys do not
do sleepovers. All he said was, “AAAARGHHHHHHH!!!!!!!”

English translation subtitle of Angry Father Language,
“OK,” appears over the stage. We get to Whittier and drop off
Lori. We get to my house. As my dad tries to open the front door
with his keys, my mom keeps locking it on the other side. I decide
to use this Freudian moment for the second part of my plan. I say,
“Gee, Dad, we’re both pretty upset from what has happened.
Traumatized, really. I think it would be best if Robert and I sleep
in the same room tonight.”
My dad raised both eyebrows, but all he said was “AAAARGHHH!!!!!” Translation: “whatever.” Which was as close as we were going to get to a blessing that night. Now, I know I said “same room,” but what I should have said was “same bed” because there was definitely only one bed in my room. Yes, that’s right. This was THE bed. The bed I had been conceived on. My parents had recently gotten a new giant double king and I, ever the drama queen, thought I would like to sleep on “The Bed I Was Conceived On.”

Robert and I shut the door to my room and I locked it with a chair under the doorknob. We stood there real nervous. Then it happened. The miracle of life. We opened our bodies, walked toward each other, hugged and kissed. This is it. This is it! The best thing we get while we’re in our bodies on the planet Earth. I felt it in my heart, where the steering wheel had taken my breath. I felt it in my head, where my face had smashed the glass. And now I felt my love and desire for this boy rise up from those two places on my body.

We took off our clothes but kept our underwear on and got into the cold bed. I think that at that moment, as my skin hit those sheets and I naturally moved to hold my friend’s body, that at that moment maybe I became a man. This might have been the moment. Maybe I am a man now with a man’s ways.

I comfort my boyfriend as we lay down at the end of a hard day.

I will soothe Mercutio who in this story does not die from his wide and deep wound.

I will honor the little boy I once was who had the good sense to wiggle his body naked between the sheets after church.

I will hold that boy and that man close to me throughout this life.

We kissed for a long time. Our hands owning each other’s bodies. But, then, Robert pulled away and looked at me and said. “You know, Tim, I’m still pretty fucked up from that bad sex scene with Ricky Nelson at Knott’s Berry Farm. Is it okay if we just hold each other and kiss and don’t do a big sex thing?”
Well, I didn’t care. This was enough of a miracle for one night. The woolly mammoth had taught me that. I am happy to smooth that other rough touch with my gentle kiss. That out of the crash. The explosion of metal on metal. The face breaking the glass. That the end of day has brought me to this bed with a scared and (except for his JCPenney white underwear) naked punk rock boy filled me with such feeling.

He looked me in the eye and we kissed. And kissed. And kissed again.

His senior ring on my finger.
His hand on my heart.
His body next to mine.
We slept together on THE BED.
And I was conceived once again.

(\textit{Tim rubs his heart as lights fade to deep green. Breathes loudly and moves with the text.})

My skin is a map.
A map of my world. My secret world.
It tells you where I’ve been. And how to get to where I come from.

It charts my seas . . .
my peninsulas . . .
my caves . . .
and my mountains.
I travel with this map over my skin.
I go on journeys. Find new coastlines. Hidden borders.
I follow my nose along the touch that has pulled me through life.
I lead with my tongue.
I go by foot . . . by dick . . . by brain sometimes.
I know the path by heart.
The pleasures I sailed across.
The pain I pointed toward.
The knowing my bends and hollows.
The bodies . . . many bodies . . . I have touched and been
taught by.
The secret places soothed and stroked.
But, then . . .
“X” marks the spot.

(Tim stombs.)

There is a plague and hatred on the land.
An earthquake within.
Whole continents have been lost to us . . .
The Island, that no man is . . .
A hemisphere carved out of my fucking heart . . .
Then the burning began.
Burned up those carefully drawn and protected maps.
This fire spread over our skin.
Boiled our seas.
Burned up my city of angels.
The flames spread to the tar pits. Smoke to the sky.
And burned. And burned. And burned.

(Follow spot catches Tim as he is thrown again and again
against the wall.)

And a COP threw me against that same chain-link fence—
where the woolly mammoth had winked at me.

And a COP threw me against that same chain-link fence—
where I had pressed my seventeen-year-old cheek trying to see
love for another boy.

And a COP threw me against that same chain-link fence—
when thousands of us queers marched to the County Museum of
Art after our slimebag Governor Wilson had vetoed the state les-
bian and gay rights bill last year. We marched there pissed off and
strong because we felt like it. Shut down our city. Trapped the governor inside that museum while he giggled nervously sipping champagne in front of a Rembrandt.

*(Tim walks down an aisle into the audience.)*

A lot of things happened in those days. Some good. Some scary. When we started tonight we called up some places on our bodies. Some things happened to those places too. Somebody said fingers . . .

*(Tim touches people with each body place, marking the audience.)*

Your fingers were smashed by a horse’s hoof when hundreds of LAPD cops on horseback trampled through us hurting a lot of people. Your beautiful arm struck with a cop’s nightstick.

Your wrists swelled real bad from the tightness of the handcuffs after you were arrested and were kept in the basement of the parking structure at the Century Plaza Hotel. Your beautiful ass got dragged along the pavement. All our spirits battered by the fuckheads in charge. My face up against the wall of art.

I watched this happen here at my tar pit as they surrounded us, hundreds of LA cops on horses. Hurt. Hit my friends. Bully with horses. Everything rushed in.

So many friends and lovers dead from AIDS. City of plague. Government of hate. Vain and crazy men in power. The war they make on our bodies. My body’s in a state. The state of California? I saw the flag of my state burn many times that night. The last time it burned . . . at the last possible moment the California bear that is on that flag jumped off walked over to me and said, “Tim, let’s get outta here.”

Now I firmly believe that if a bear jumps off of your burning state flag, you should do whatever it tells you to. I took a drink.

*(Tim drinks from bowl and picks up big piece of lava.)*
Gathered my personal effects and followed the bear down Wilshire Boulevard. Everyone was frozen where they stood, the activists and the cops, just like in a bad mid-seventies science fiction film starring Charlton Heston. I followed the bear for a long time down Wilshire Blvd. For about two years. I grew tired and couldn’t stand. I crawled on my knees. I eventually collapsed in the parking lot of a Denny’s restaurant in Barstow. I lay there with my face on the broken glass. But then a graceful Denny’s waitress with big hair came to me. She cradled my head on her mustard blouse and spooned weak spoonfuls of coffee with non-dairy creamer into my parched lips. And then she sent me into the desert.

I crawled through sand along a wash. The sand went into my skin. Into my bones. Into my blood. Into my breath. Until I became just a speck of sand. And was blown by a hot wind far east into the Mojave Desert until I came to the Amboy Volcano.

AM BOY.

It’s a real place. I’m not making it up. A scar on the horizon. A wound open to the sky.

Is this the mouth or asshole of California? Great chunks of lava. Black and grimacing.

Looking like angry clenched faces.

This is the volcano of my family. I came here with my dad when I was a little boy. The only time we went on a journey by ourselves. Left the City of Angels. Had breakfast in Barstow. Passed through the wreckage of Baghdad on old Route 66. Walked the lava fields of Amboy. Went through Needles. Crossed the river to King Man. King Man, Arizona . . . where my grandfather homesteaded a ranch.

This is the volcano of my family. A frayed snapshot in 1919 of my grandparents passing the volcano on their way from the farm in Kansas to a new life in California. My dad and I wandering in the lava fields of Am Boy. My brother knowing I would come to this volcano once again.
(Tim dangles the big lava rock over his head.)

This is the volcano of my life. It has a sharp point and it hangs over my head. I walk toward this volcano with my dead father. I walk toward this volcano with my dead boyfriend John who came to this desert to try to heal himself of AIDS. I walk toward this volcano now with my living boyfriend these ten years, Doug. Even though I’m alone.

This is the volcano of my life.

I crawl up the side of the volcano. Every step I take I sink up to my hips in ash and blasted bits of bone. I feel like each step might be the wrong one. Might shake the earth to its soul. Break its heart. The lip of the crater is high. My breath races. There are cocked Eisenhower-era hydrogen bombs and exploded Frigidaires everywhere. Bits of bone blasted from the center of the earth. The smell of rotten grease blasted from a place for burning.

I get to the top of the volcano.

I didn’t go into the volcano when I was here with my dad when I was little. But I will now. I did what you’re supposed to do. I stripped myself naked.

(Tim takes off all of his clothes and stands in red light.)

Bared my heart to the hot sun. Hoping that it might warm the frozen places. Dug my feet into the earth. Ash between each toe. Under each toenail. It felt like an old friend. So familiar. Like the ash we will all become. Bared my dick and butt to the sky. Took a walk around that crater and far in the distance I could see a billboard for the Bun Boy Restaurant in Baker, California. “We are the Bun Boy Restaurant. We have the best biscuits in all the Mojave.”

What is inside my volcano?

My fear . . . stronger than life. Sometimes. Who taught me that? My shame . . . deep as the sea. Sometimes. Who gave me that?

I’m knocked down. I am grabbed and pushed and shoved along the top of the crater. A hundred hands tear at me.
Blood pours from here and here where my first major lover David was stabbed nine times with an icepick in front of a gay bar in Garden Grove. QUEER! QUEER!

Blood pours from here and here where my boyfriend Doug was bashed almost killed with the two-by-four and the blood pours over our breakfast linoleum. FAG! FAG!

Blood pours from here and here where the catheters pierced my friends’ sides so the medicine could go in their bodies. AIDS! AIDS!

Broken here where Reagan and Bush smiled their do-nothing holocaust grins while my friends died.

Broken here and here where my own embarrassment twisted my spine and threw me off-center with the feeling I’m no fucking good.

Broken here and here why is it . . . when I am about to kiss a boy I have been flirting with on Santa Monica Boulevard do I have to imagine an unkind god above me is going to throw a rock at me and smash my head.

Broken here and here dick and balls smashed off by the hammers of Helms and Buchanan and Sheldon and Wildmon.

Broken here and here.

Butthole blown open by DIRTY DIRTY DIRTY they said. DEATH DEATH DEATH they said.

Blow winds. You’re cracking my fucking cheeks.

I’m dragged down into the crater. Pinned there at the bottom. Naked in the crater. My butt and hole up to the sky. Dick buried in ash. My mouth is full. I whispered secrets into the earth.

I miss my friends and lovers who have died.

I am afraid of my mom’s body.

The tumor on my side kept my shirt on for fourteen years. He was so thin. I was so scared.

Don’t watch me take a shit.

What are my father’s secrets?

I miss the dicks that were up my ass that are now ash.

I am embarrassed that I am alive sometimes.
I lay there for nine years. Watching my friends and lovers die before my eyes. Then, a horrible beast came into the crater and crawled toward me. It opened my body. Tore at my skin. This beast started pulling corpses out from inside me. Hundreds of them. I recognized every face. It pulled these friends dead from AIDS out of my butthole. Piled them like wood in this giant crater. Filling the hole. The wound. All around me. I was being buried. They were gonna block out the sky. Up here. Up here.

I’m gonna stop there. If it’s okay with you I’m gonna stop there. Actually, even if it’s not I’m gonna stop there.

*(Tim calls up to the tech booth.)*

Hey, up in the booth! Could I have that bright follow spot light we had before?

I made all that up. All that about the volcano and the beast. I lied to you. I’m sorry. Don’t hate me. I don’t really know what’s in my volcano. I don’t know much of anything anymore. The only thing I really know is that I’m here naked in front of all of you right now.

*(Tim walks naked down into the audience.)*

That becomes even more tangible when I walk in the aisle. I’m here with you and you and you. I see you. Even without my glasses. Which are very strong.

*(Tim touches someone’s hair.)*

This person has nice hair. A little too much mousse, maybe. I could learn something from you. You look wise tonight. Many cute boys here. Can I sit down here?

*(Tim sits naked on someone’s lap.)*

This is the most nervous part of the performance. Here, feel my heart. I see my face reflected in your eyes. I am here with you. I AM here with you. My body is right here. I’m sweaty. I’ll probably get your pants all wet. You are right there. Here, feel my
heart. I still feel alone. A little afraid of all of you. And I could tell you another sweet or scary story like I’ve tried to do tonight. But whatever I did . . . it would be a lot wetter and messier and more human and complicated than when I stand up there naked in the red theatrical light and pretend I’m going into the volcano.

See, I can shove through the bare-assed shame. I’m pretty good at that. But I still feel more of my friends slip away so what good is it? After ten years of being scared and angry. No wonder I gotta go into the volcano sometimes. Some nights I feel this strange border between my body and some friends who are really sick right now. It’s a coastline I don’t like. I want to throw a surf-rider to them and pull them to shore . . . but I can’t do that. Who am I kidding? I wanna tongue-kiss them, and I do, even though I’m afraid. I wanna hold our bodies really close together so nobody else slips away and that I can try to do . . . that I can at least try to do. And I’m really glad cause I don’t think I can manage much fucking else.

Please nobody go anywhere. I have one more thing I gotta tell you. It won’t take long. I swear.

*(Tim goes back onto the stage.)*

You want a volcano. I’ll give you one. Up here on stage there are the outlines of hundreds and thousands of people who have died of AIDS. Some of them I know. Some of them you know. You walked across ’em on your way to your seats. Do ya feel them on your shoes? It’s a strange crater we’re in and there’s strange fruit here.

This one is Martin and I’ve told his story before but it hurt much more in real life and the sex was better than I let on.

This man was Keith, drawer of pictures on the subway, and we sniffed around each other and made love a few times in a tiny bed in a room with no windows when we were both intensely young and wanting to be famous artists on the Lower East Side.

This was John. A man I loved but not well enough and left and whose face I see in my mirror and on the faces of my friends if the light is right. And whose body I still feel inside of mine just
like it was that one blizzardy Sunday in New York before the snow got real dirty.

Now these three are just my boyfriends. The men whose dreams I shared, art we made, lips I kissed and dicks I sucked.

There are dozens of other friends here. People I know or you know. Now, I shout myself hoarse. I’ve ACTED UP all over. I wash my hands. I put up my stickers. And I’m still here and I’m fucking glad of that but it means the world makes no fucking sense. I am not USDA choice anything. Why am I breathing right now, tonight, and they are not?

Now that’s a big fucking question. And I’ll get an answer if I have to go into twenty volcanoes or pull God down here by his too-wide lapels and slap him around until I get some answers.

Because I don’t understand this pain and this loss anymore than I did ten years ago.

Because I try . . . but sometimes I am still the same selfish prick who ran for the hills when love walked into the room.

Because I’ve lost my maps and I don’t know where I wanna go on my body.

Because we’re all gonna die. Right? We all know that. We all bought that ticket. We all signed that lease. We all got our volcano, but, meanwhile, I am here in my body. I gotta find the chant, the rhythm, the offering, the ritual to be here in my body and remember what is gone.


(Tim stands still. Pause. Tim looks at his forlorn penis.)

Uh oh. I’ve got myself in trouble again. I’m naked in front of all you people. Painted into a corner without any clothes on. Plus my dick looks so sad and forlorn. So abandoned. So soft and so shy.
Pssst. Hey you. You missed your cue. You know you were supposed to get hard after the psychosexual empowerment litany. Look I’m really sorry. This never happens to me. It’ll just be a second.

(Back talking to his penis.)

Are you trying to make me look bad? Don’t talk to me about performance anxiety. GET HARD! Ooops. We all know, in this situation, yelling does not help. I’m going to work with you. Directorially. Okay. I’ll suggest some stimulating and arousing imagery and then you’ll get hard and we can leave the volcano. You can all do this now in your seats or later in the comfort of your homes. We are in a field. A plain. Warm and sensual water moves across this field. Reeds and grasses dance in the wind. Beautiful and muscurally defined golden retrievers running through that high grass. Sal Mineo and James Dean are there naked having hot sex finally rewriting the last scene from Rebel without a Cause. NOW GET HARD, GOD DAMMIT!!!

What? You say not until I finish my story? Okay. This is a fairy tale. Maybe I can make up a new ending and maybe we’ll find our way out of the volcano. Now, in that volcano, the corpses were pulled out of my butthole for a long time. Some corpses were found that everyone had been looking for. Jimmy Hoffa. JFK’s assassins. All eighty-six of them. An important object, too. The Holy Grail. But I had always known it was there. Then it stopped. I was spent. I bent over and smoked a cigarette. Then I felt something moving through me. I squatted down over the earth and I gave birth to an EGG! Well not an egg. It’s a seedpod, obviously. Wait. I know this seedpod. I know it well. I left Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love. I walked over the river to New Jersey. I walked for many miles. I came to a cemetery. I found the grave I was looking for. At this crypt there were poems, flowers, offerings of food. This is Walt Whitman’s grave in Camden, New Jersey. The moment I stood in front of this grave
this seedpod fell from a tree far above and hit me on my head. Inside it were many things. Inside it was a high school ring. The breath of every man I’ve ever kissed. And a light that could change the end of that old story that tells us our bodies are good only for death. Well, that’s my story. It had a magic seedpod ending. That should be enough. So now you’ll get hard and we can leave this place and I’ll tell you why.

Get hard because it still feels good to be touched . . .
get hard because there is so much that is gone . . .
get hard because even though it’s not the most important thing it’s magic when it happens . . .
get hard because it’s the least we can do . . .
get hard because you can remember you are alive . . .
get hard because every time I come I think of the men I’ve loved who are dead . . .
get hard because once we’re gone we can’t . . . I think.
Get hard because we can’t let the right-wing fuckheads tell us how to fuck . . .
get hard because I want these boners before I am just a bag of bones . . .
get hard because there’s work to be done . . .
get hard because I am a queer and it is good and I am good and I don’t just mean in bed . . .
get hard because it is time to make a move. To transubstantiate. A little alchemy please. Let’s turn that rock into gold. The water into wine. The pain into change. The bus is arriving. The alarm is going off. Because I only know one thing. This is my body! And these are all our times.

So . . .
Get hard . . .
Get hard . . .
Get hard . . .

I hard-ly know what to say . . . except that we’re here in the greenish glow again. I’m gonna use this greenish moment to pull
up my pants. You’ll have to use your imagination for the rest. You might wanna arrange yourselves in case you got a little damp or bulgy. Well, come on, it could happen, it did in Cleveland! Whatever you do, I need you to do it quick. I need your help to help me create a little alternative reality. We have to project a bit into the future. Not too far into the future . . . otherwise it’s just too depressing.

Okay. Back at the volcano. I said, “Fuck this Jungian mythopoetic stuff. My queer friends are getting beat up back at the museum.” I rushed back to the tar pits. Everybody unfroze. As you know, that night we forced the governor out of office. He works in the copy room at the Lesbian and Gay Center in LA now. This created a firestorm of change throughout the nineties during which queers, people of color, and women made enormous advances until finally at some point early in the new century the United States elected the first black lesbian president.

This is where I need your help. We are no longer in this glamorous theater. We are now at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. It is the inaugural gala for the first black lesbian president of the U.S. She has appointed me performance art laureate of the nation. As you might imagine, I have accepted. But she has given me a very serious challenge. She has commissioned me to create a symphonic homoerotic performance art cantata that will exorcise homophobia and bigotry from our land. Basically she wants me to create a work that will, via a global satellite TV hookup, explain to the planet how fabulous it is when two men have sex together. The lesbian a capella group from Portland, Maine, will be doing the same thing for dyke/dyke sex in the second half of the show. I have been working with the LA Philharmonic for weeks in California and then here in the District for the last ten days. There is tremendous excitement here tonight; both houses of Congress, the Supreme Court. I’m going to put on my evening clothes now. The lights in the Kennedy Center dim. They dim. Oh how they dim. There is a buzz of anticipation in the hall. From
ten thousand lips this buzz comes. Make a buzz please. I step out onto the stage; there is immediate thunderous applause.

My conductor, Zubin Mehta, steps to the platform. We exchange a meaningful, yet private, personal gesture. And I begin.

Good evening, as performance art laureate of the nation, I bid you welcome to the inauguration of the first black lesbian president of the U.S. I offer this piece in memory of all our friends who have died of AIDS and in honor of the breath and pleasure that exists in every body here tonight.

Music, Maestro Zubin.

(The music comes up. Yes, it’s Ravel’s Bolero. Please, dear reader, imagine the music brewing toward climax during the rest of the performance.)

You look at him . . . sometimes over your shoulder . . . sometimes across the crowded performance art space . . . you make the signals . . . a glance held too long . . . a leg in contact not pulled away . . . the sharing of knowledge . . . the crucial questions . . .

“Didn’t I meet you once at ACT UP?”

“Weren’t you in that performance piece at Highways?”

“Do you have a boyfriend . . . if so do you sleep around?”

These are the politics of our space and how we bridge it. Close. But not close enough yet. Not for this reporter. I want to know this man. What he tastes like. The books he reads. The touch he has. A little neck massage is not out of order here . . .

OR PERHAPS

A QUICK GAME

OF POSTMODERN

MID-PLAGUE

TWISTER.

But, finally, the lips touch. I kiss this man. Oh good. Who will stick his tongue in first? Him or me? Who cares! A little two-day beard on the faces as they rub and EUREKA we know we’re guys. All right, I admit it. It’s that sandpaper cha cha that gets my
fingers snapping and does a soft-shoe on my slutty heart. The hands grab each other close in a real embrace. So close that no junior high chaperon can shine light between us. You feel each other’s backs. His hair. His butt. With pelvoid radar beginning to feel the hard thing. . . . Oh that lovely hard thing, in the pants.

A coupla bumps in the night start to rub over each other before the embrace pulls away. You look each other in the eye. It’s scary isn’t it? Don’t pull away.

I SEE YOU NOW
HELLO I’M HERE
Hands move over chests.
Get the lay of the land.
The cut of the cloth.
Pinch the nipples.
Which, yes, we do find get more sensitive with each passing year. . . .
One of the many benefits of getting older. . .
What is inside my heart?
What have we here inside this second-hand Walt Whitman breast?
There is so much LOVE!
We roll the foreheads together.
Pinching each other’s tits.
A breath or a “yeah” showing what feels good.
Beginning the spar.
And let me hear a “yeah.”
Good! This is not a joke.
Not to be kept at arm’s length with a nervous laugh.
This is ground zero. A crossroads. The vortex.
THIS IS
THE HIT PARADE
My hands reach down and feel the particular hard dick there in the pants. This is a big moment.
Sort of like the lottery.
And I don’t give a shit whether they’re big or small. Black or white. Cut or not.

Through thick and through thin, I am just glad to be lucky enough to be feeling this particular hard cock at this troubled moment in history, if you know what I mean.

Our hands go under shirts.
The tongue-tips . . . touch . . . down . . . down . . . the neck. . . .
The fingers open the shirt, a bite on the nape, a nip on the nipple.
The other hand negotiates the buttons or zipper. Struggle with the belt or Velcro tabs. I hate this part.

And finally reach in.
Oh it’s hot and sweaty here.
Where the underwear mashes the curly queer hair.
Then you reach down and grab low under the balls.
Feeling them heavy like a scoop of ice cream.
AND PULL THE DICK UP AND OUT

The pants may now get cheerfully dropped, depending on your fashion.
Shirts get pulled over the head and then . . .
Oh skin, skin, skin—thank God for skin.
Our pants are open and our hearts uncovered as we get ready to bare our souls and buttholes.
Cocks mushed against bellies.
The tongue-tip trails down to the tit, up to the pit.
Redrawing those maps with our tongues on skin.
Down to the place where the pubes and the dick hook up.
Where the freeways meet. Where the turf meets the surf.
Then the tongue goes up Interstate 35 up up and around the shaft. Tongue-tip dances along that cock. The mouth is open. We pause there now for station identification.
RIGHT THERE
AT THE TOP
Safe sex quandary moment. Is it or isn’t it?
Only your urologist knows for sure.
To suck or not to suck. That is the question.
Let’s be serious. . . . Let’s be honest.
Let’s assume, of course, we’re gonna take a little journey up
and over that dick for a while at least.
This is a special moment.
A sacrament of sorts. Made more sacred for our fears.
Speaking of fears, I don’t taste any pre-cum.
(I once had to explain to a straight woman friend what pre-
cum is. I told her . . .
““It is the rustle of wings
The rumble afar. It is the taste of things to come.”
) And when that dick is in my mouth or my dick in someone’s
there is a faith in the universe and the rhyme comes out right.
AND IT GOES DOWN
LIKE HOME COOKING
And hands go up and down and around the town to a visit
to the balls so pleasant and bouncy.
And we’re up and there is a kiss.
The fingers now do the walking and the dance down under
beyond the balls to what my friend in Texas calls . . .
(He was a cute boy who I had sex with in a hayloft in San
Antonio. I lured him back there with my classic pick-up line,
““Hey, wanna ditch the party and go out back and look at the
chickens?” Well, that’s another story.)
Anyway, he told me that where he comes from this area is
known as the “’tain’t,” the area between dick and butthole.
The scientific word being perineum.
It is called this, and not just in Mississippi and East Texas,
because “’tain’t your dick and ’tain’t your butthole.”
It doesn’t matter to me what words you use.
WHATEVER YOU CALL IT
IT IS GOOD
And then the question . . .
“How much does each of us want our buttholes to be played with and what will we find when we get there?”
I know this is a nervous subject so let’s assume we have both been swimming in a highly chlorinated pool for seven hours doing the breast stroke. So when we get down there things are extremely tidy and puckered and cool.
Our fingers go around and converse, flirt with our buttholes. Getting to know you. Getting to know all about you.
And a “yeah” is called for.
Which is an affirmation of our place in the universe.
Everybody take a breath . . .
LET ME HEAR YA SAY YEAH
PUT IT IN!
And the democracy of fingers.
We all got ’em. Lots of them. Enough to go around.
Ten times ourselves.
And we got ’em inside each other now. No one on top.
The bottom pulled out from under us like a sly slapstick rug.
The other hand is on each other’s dicks.
The finger goes in and the held hand goes up and lips are pressed.
And we fall down and over and about.
And head to foot.
Lip to ball.
Finger in butt.
We’re in a universe of our own making.
No more waiting.
Our hoped-for escape from gravity. Weightless.
We’re in our own solar system.
PLANETS IN
OUR SEXY ORBIT
Don’t you see?
This is the promised land where your lips . . . all of them and your points . . . all of them and your holes . . . all of them get tended and loved.
Get their valves adjusted and their licenses renewed.
It’s like this sex will revive the big identity document that says “I am! My body belongs to me!”
Flipping the bird to fear.
Because even though there has been so much death, we are still here with our skin and bones.
There is blood and spirit and queer horndogginess within and about me.
Between you and me. Between your butts and your seats. Between our hearts and our heads.
I AM IN MY BODY
I AM IN MY LIFE
I’ve got a hard-on for the universe.
Sometimes a yielding unclenched butthole that might keep the world from blowing itself up. . . .
And don’t tell me this white boy don’t have rhythm because that’s all it is now.
It’s all listening and sensing . . . and reaching . . . and reaching.
And someone reaches for a condom.
They’re never where you put them.
There they are. Oh reminder of plague we embrace you!
Someone opens it with slippery hands (this has a 9.3 level of difficulty)
and slips it over, pinch at the tip . . . roll it down.
THE AIR IS OUT
AND THERE IT IS
And, now, let’s flip a coin or consult the oracle.
Check the tea leaves in the tea room and one way or another a dick is going to find its way into a man tonight.
And this is no small thing.
It makes the world turn upside down.
This pleasure that one man can and will give another.
A dick in a butthole.
A whole lot of peace.
A piece of ass.
Now, what is the problem here?
Is this the love that dare not show up on network TV?
Is this the sex that launched a thousand ships and burnt the
topless towers of Washington?
Is this the butt-fuck that put bees in the bonnets and tent
poles under the cassocks of cardinals in Columbus?
Are we stuck with their images? Their projections?
Their religion?
IS IT ALL OF THEIR THINGS???
No. For once, right now.
It is just ourselves.
Two men inside of each other without a knife, a gun, or a
stock portfolio.
And one is close. And then another is closer yet.
Full. Fuller. Fullest.
There is a nod and a yes and a squeeze and breath.
I am fucking I am being fucked. Every single cell.
And heads or tails I am glad to be here my body in the world.
The water inside me.
The dying that comes to all.
And it is faster and closer than we knew.
Everything that we hoped for on the jungle gym . . .
hanging upside down and twirling around and around
on the highbar of our lives.
Naked between the sheets after church.
THE CURTAIN RISES
AND THERE WE ARE
Naked in the sight of each other. The only ones that matter.
I am fucking I am being fucked. Touched and touching.
Time now to know each other and ourselves.
I am fucking I am being fucked. And so close.
The words in my brain fly out the windows like a bunch of
crazy birds let out of their cage.
I am fucking I am being fucked. Right there.
There is wetness and hardness and growing together and quick in my heart and my head.
I am with you now. And with my friends and lovers who are
dead from AIDS. And with all the queers who got burned up in
the concentration camps. With all the dykes and homos bashed
on the streets of our fucked-up country. And for the little fag
within me who cried so much as a kid and never does now. Not
anymore.

(The Bolero builds, becoming really loud.)

But, now, I feel the blessing of being closer than they told us
was possible. The fuckers lied to us. I am not ashamed of naked-
ness and I will not be cast out of Paradise by Jesse Helms or some
fucking hunky archangel with a flaming sword in front of some
garden.

(Music totally blaring.)

This is one sex between two queer men’s bodies
in the time of trial
on the planet Earth
at the very end of the second millennium.

(The music ends with almost a flash-bulb moment of cli-
max. Then blackout.)