

Elliot R. Mandel

in the middle of Nosomewhere
or
on the road with the bradley university chorale,
spring tour 2002

in the middle of Nosomewhere

or at least, between the mississippi and the rockies,
or more practically, between the last concert and the next,

is space:

the sun has room enough to make whole shadows of clouds
upon terrain known as kansas
where a continuous yet flimsy wire-woodenpost fence guides the two-lane highway
supporting a greyhound going one way
and a peoria charter going the other.

make no mistake,

we're not settlers on this western prairie
we're not staying long enough, and some of us aren't even awake.

chin rests on knuckles, shoulder smushes against window,
eyes watching the land stand still;
after all, it's the bus (with me inside) that does the flying by.

“american” doesn't describe the landscape;

this space sitting blurringly still isn't kansas, you don't cross a line into colorado.
this part of america is defined not by the presence of people, but by the wind that carves,
whistling its song of ghostly vastness
over dried-up streams
dead-grass-golden hills
the backs of benevolent bovine

skimming the tumbleweed along...

glancing up from out, now approaching the golden arches of metropolis,

it sometimes wears an arby's hat

promising intestinal havoc;

this is american landscape,

so is the train out there that classically parallels the road.

the distinctive american stamp:

any town with nine or more people has a baseball field.

there is also farmland, both meat and wheat

and occasional proof that rickety windmills still creak in the prairie breeze,

but are the only wild animals the silhouetted birds V-sweeping the sky?

as the edge of the road—pavement and grass—smears along the bottom of my window,

a feathery dark mass seizes my stare.

the regal hawk puffs out his chest

subtly poised in a tree's mid-march skeleton

surveying the vista, ruler of everything his eye pierces

unflinchingly oblivious to the concrete arteries

pumping people empowered by sedans.

if the years did 75 down a lonely highway,

this bus and those cars passed the people we inaccurately dub

"indians"

("native americans" in a spasm of political correctness)

a long ways back;

as a matter of fact,

we left 'em drunk off our dust.

time and driving fade the silver spur motel into the rusty spur saloon

outside a colony of crumbling ranch shanties.

some were promised paint jobs, others knew they'd survive without 'em.

a grove of trees sprouts on the horizon

soon dusk will drive seamlessly into dark

and the grove will go with it,

and in another hour, the color on the other side of the window

will begin to look like the underside of my eyelids.

Joseph Woods

*To My Mother Doris,
Who Knitted My Pattern Of Thought,
With Grandma's Hands,*

Black Goes With Everything

Tommy Hilfiger,
Didn't make his clothes,
For the Black figure,
Yet you eye it,
Buy it,
Incomplete without it,
Does it make you feel,
Bigger, badder, better,
Or does it attract,
An hourglass figure,

Go figure,

Fubu,
The designer guru,
Who got the best of you,
For it and its kind knew,
What was most important to you,
An appearance,
That won't get you clearance,
To the celestial club,
The one the prophets spoke of,

You see,
Nike seeped into your psyche,
Thus psyched thee,
Into opening your mentality,
And with audacity,
Made its own key,
But I ain't mad at you,
Mikey,

Forgive me,
But I never gave,
Amazed praise,
To the days glazed,
With worship ways,
To Izod,

Instead of,
My God,

Fila's fiat fantasies,
Failed to fulfill me,
Do you feel me?
Do you feel me?

Descending tommy hills,
Hence ascending,
To a greater part of me,
The part of me,
You don't see,
My link to immortality,
Declaring,
Not wardrobe,
But peacedrobe,
The clothes to my soul...

I got,
Langston Hughes shoes,
With a Nat King Cole sole,
And Stevie Wonder wingtips,
Redd Foxx socks,
And Paul Robeson pants,
Pressed with a Malcolm crease,
And Sidney Poitier pleats,
All held up with a Muhammad Ali championship belt,

I got,
A Frederick Douglass dress shirt,
With Martin Luther King cufflinks,
And Belafonte buttons,
A Jackie Robinson jacket,
With Satchel Paige pockets,
A Bojangles bow tie,
And Coltrane coattails,

And when I feel,
Like there ain't nothing I can't do,
I wear my Shaka Zulu zoot suit,
And as I take,
That slow soul stroll,
Down Countee Cullom's Heritage Avenue,
Spicy Grove,
Cinnamon Tree,

With a solstice soul kiss,
My soul mate greets me...

Draped in a Dorothy Dandridge dress,
Made of Sarah Vaughn silk,
And Nancy Wilson satin,
Styling a Mahalia manicure,
Precious Lord Take My Hand,
And a Billie Holiday hairdo,

She's got,
A Minnie Ripperton minnie skirt,
Stitched with Harriet Tubman thread,
And woven with Phillis Wheatly wool,
A Rosa Parks pair of Sorjourner Truth boots,
Tammy Terrell tights,
A Tina Turner tank top,

She wears a Pamela Greer shear brassiere,
And a Dianne Carroll corset,
That shines with the eloquence,
Of that Diana Ross gloss,

And when she takes me,
To the higher place,
Love,
To the superlative case,
She wears Cleopatra panties,
Trimmed with Lena Horne lace,

Oh Those Old Souls That Sewed My Soul,

With needlework wisdom,
They embroidered examples,
Knitted knowledge,
Macramed minds,
Quilted quotes,
And hemmed hopes,

tommy molehill,
About nothing,
You are much ado,
Donning your red,
White,
And blue,
It was never really about you,
Go Figure

Rosanna Lloyd

Summertime Trilogy

June:

Pray for a Chocolate Wind

as I sit on the front stoop
the tannery spreads its
sickly sweet odor along the river
and into my neighborhood
it smells like baby powder and burning skin
if you don't breathe too deep
you can only smell the baby powder but
if you breathe like that for too long
you'll pass out for sure
my only hope for peace
is a southeasterly wind
coming from the chocolate factory

July:

The Slow Death of the Ice Cream Man

I can hear the ice cream van
far away, getting closer
the twinkling clown song
distorted by a
heavy July wind, tunneling

through the thick air into my
screened window
I always picture it in
a swarm of children
but when it rolls by my house
it's always alone
the song is sharp and painful
and the man behind the
chicken-wired windows looks like he
hates ice cream

August:

Child of the Future

the air is heavy with particles of industry
the street bristles with mechanical flora
the ground is coated with
brazenly colored food packaging material
I haven't set foot off pavement for days
my bike wheels churn the debris beneath me and
a sudden wind pushes my hair to the side with the
heavy perfume
of the chocolate factory
I turn my face into the wind
I breathe deep

some people call it ugly

I call it progress

I want a fast train I want to call people while I'm on

it

I want to buy shrunken heads on ebay

I want to see five movies at the same multiplex

I want to play dance dance revolution in between them

I want the internet in my head a hard drive in my

temporal lobe

I want a hormone cocktail in my milk

I want to donate my eggs to science for money

I want a goddamn flying car

I just want to ride this wave of invention until it

crashes

if it ever does

copper sunlight filters through the dust and I turn
the corner at the light

on the street

a dead pigeon with its skull flattened

its face stuck to the sidewalk the eyes gone

like one of those feathery halloween masks