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A City Fragmented

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A CITY FRAGMENTED
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A CITY FRAGMENTED

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THESIS

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I. A Relationship with Space

I cling to my culture because it is my memory-- and what is a poet without memory? I cling to my culture because it is my skin, because it is my heart, because it is my voice, because it breathes my mother's mother into me. My culture is the genesis and the center of my writing- the most authentic space I have to write from. I am blind without the lenses of my culture.

-Benjamin Alire Sáenz

To understand El Paso, Texas is to understand what the city's culture is composed of, a culture unique in itself. The city is a fragmentation of several districts that compete and interact with each other daily. What makes these districts stand out is that El Paso is comprised of a Hispanic population of 82 percent. Unlike other cities such as New York where its Burroughs and neighborhoods are defined by various ethnic groups, El Paso's uniqueness relies on one large ethnic group. To clarify, Hispanic is a term the United States Census Bureau uses to define Mexican ethnic groups born in the U.S. In these terms, Hispanics are the majority, which is why it is strange to say that the Eastside of El Paso is quite different from the Lower Valley, yet both areas are mainly composed of a Hispanic population. Because of this, the argument can be made that El Paso is made up of smaller cities within itself. Bobby Byrd further echoes this in, "July in the Desert of Chihuahua," in which the speaker identifies an illegal immigrant couple that brings tomatoes to the citizens of El Paso. The speaker's observations create an odd desert land, an unwanted space occupied by many types:

God has to send along special emissaries
to El Paso
to teach the faithful
the true meaning of heat.
It can be a difficult lesson to learn.
This year it happened so quick—
those two days
during the whole hot summer

when we got to feast on
a harvest of real juicy tomatoes.
Everyone was stuffing themselves with tomatoes,
and the sidewalks were sticky

Byrd creates the scene to show how El Paso is a unique area where its people walk the streets consuming tomatoes, a fruit that comes from the dirt. Using an illegal immigrant and his wife selling the tomatoes to El Pasoans displays that the land is a foreign one, yet at the same time, a comfortable space because of its large Hispanic background. Meaning, because the immigrants themselves are of Mexican origin the adaptation to El Paso, which was Mexican soil long before it was colonized, eases the process. Though the economics differ between Mexico and the U.S. it is a small enough issue (on a level of comfort) not to create an uncomfortable situation for many Latin immigrants.

This represents a different type of fragmentation in which there is a lack of regard for the border. It is the immigrants in this poem that bring a salvation for the locals with the tomatoes. This fragmentation is further complicated when the illegal immigrant couple takes its earnings to buy a meal. “/José and Maria then disappeared into/ the downtown Jack in the Box/ where they brought two large chocolate milkshakes/ two Big Jacks and two regular order of fries./” (Byrd 47). Because the couple goes to a *Jack in the Box* as opposed to any other restaurant, they become immersed in the bicultural attitude in El Paso where capitalism is privileged. Furthermore, this image of the *Jack in the Box* shows a different side of the city as opposed to earlier in the poem. The first half of the poem reveals a hot desert land with a dirt-grown fruit, unlike the latter half, in which the reader sees how El Paso is a U.S. city because of the burgers and shakes. The key part of this is that the illegal immigrants are purchasing these items. A similar representation can be illustrated by someone who lives on the Eastside of El Paso

entering downtown; a new yet comfortable place. This is a minor yet detailed example of how El Paso is a unique city that is divided into smaller segments.

Just as Byrd shows how the area is foreign, yet familiar to the Mexican couple in “July in the Desert of Chihuahua,” so is the case for those who call El Paso home. I use foreign in the sense of when we enter a new area of the city, we see it with new eyes. We immerse ourselves in the surroundings, because it is different from the Eastside, if we live on that side of town, because much like when we enter a new country or city, we soak in the environment, unlike those who live there. To illustrate, El Paso’s Low Valley is littered with car dealerships, candy stores, and hole-in-the-wall cantinas. All of which mirror the residents in this district. Most people that live in this area tend to rely heavily on Spanish when spoken and written. An outsider to the Lower Valley will find vivid murals of La Virgen de Guadalupe painted on stores that sell traditional rainbow burro piñatas yet still incorporate current popular cartoon characters such as *Spongebob Square Pants* or *Power Rangers*. This is the Lower Valley.

The Eastside, however, is occupied by *B.J.’s Brewhouse*, *Olive Garden*, *Famous Dave’s*, *AppleBee’s* among other franchise restaurants. Within the Eastside, there is also a large amount of empty land plots that in essence are small patches of desert. Much like the Lower Valley, Far Eastside residents parallel their environment just as this area is surrounded by a mix of sand, homes and eateries, so are the people a mixture of class and culture. A large portion of this district is made up of younger El Pasoans, who like the chain restaurants are representative of an English, North American tongue. Yet shades of the characteristics we might find in the Lower Valley are represented through elements like the sand which is symbolic of El Pasoans that began migrating east in the early 1980s. Much like the scattered bits of desert on the Eastside so are hints of Mexican culture you are likely to find more of in the Lower Valley.

Both the Lower Valley and Far Eastside differ from each other. One is largely made up of people who fully immerse themselves in Mexican culture, while the latter is a mixture of cultures. The former is more representative of the images portrayed in Byrd's "The Price of doing Business in Mexico" of: "beans and tortillas" or the curandera in "City Life" in which the speaker meets a woman, on a sidewalk, with a mystical worm on her arm. These are details similarly found in the Lower Valley where the Virgen de Guadalupe has more in common with the Aztec Goddess Tonantzin than the Virgin Mary. Whereas the Far Eastside compares to the immigrant couple's want to eat an American cheeseburger at a U.S. fast food restaurant in "July in the Desert of Chihuahua."

But beyond these differences that create fragmentation there are connections between each district of El Paso. Whether it is something as simple as the piñatas El Pasoans purchase in the Lower Valley or that somehow *Chico's Tacos* is a staple that unites the city. Landmarks such as the Border Highway which serve as a symbol because it circles the city; unite each district together or El Paso's ability to come together in an effort to stand up against political injustices like the May 14th, 2010 walk in opposition against Arizona's State Senate Bill 1070. The very notion of El Paso standing together as one body shows that though each district differs in characteristics the city understands it is a minority voice that needs each other. Language is another common connection within El Paso, here El Pasoans give power to Spanglish which is an in-between of code switching, it draws a special connection because of the power it gives. Many outsiders whether willingly or forcefully pick up the vernacular. Gloria Anzaldúa identifies this hybrid speech as such: "ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity-- I am my language." (Anzaldúa 81). This is El Paso, a space full of fragmented districts and a fragmented language that creates connection.

Therefore I propose this thesis about El Paso; as a symbol, and as a city in constant conversation with its people, as a space in which I am writing, as a space in which I am in constant flux as artist and the non-artist. I must recognize space as an area that gives the writer a distinct way to explore his relationship with the I and through this, “the real beginnings of images, if we study them phenomenologically, will give concrete evidence of the values of inhabited space, of the non-I that protects the I.” (Bachelard 3). Bachelard is signifying that by giving true value and care for the non-I, an artist can truly fulfill what the I is seeking. In other words, forget the ego of the I and how it influences the space and objects around it, and instead focus on how it is the environment that gives authentic value to what encompasses the I.

By stating that the non-I protects the I, the artist allows himself to be absorbed by his space. In essence, Bachelard examines this concept of a house being the non-I protector of the I. Within this realm, the artist, specifically the poet becomes less afraid to express his vision, the walls of the house seem to help reinforce how he approaches his images with little to no regard of outsiders’ criticism. That is not to say that once the poet has finished writing he disregards what others may say, but rather that his raw vision is realized in his space. He is allowed to develop and nourish his art inside a house which “allows one to dream in peace,” as opposed to allowing outside forces to enter his space and to interpret, then reinterpret it from their perspective. The house is a space in which the poet’s writing can manifest in its purest form. Meaning he is writing from a space that he knows, a place of authenticity. He writes from inside the house, sees the frame, the minute details that cannot be observed through a window from somebody outside.

My house is El Paso, a space where I was raised, and now where my writing continues to grow. It is in this space that I experience various non-Is that help shape my perceptions. My

writing from a young age has always been shaped around El Paso, or perhaps it is better to say that my most passionate work has always stemmed from this localized space. In the sixth grade at Walter E. Clarke Middle School, I wrote a poem about the sun, in which my perception of what the sun looked like was shaped through an El Paso lens. For example, how it hangs over the mountain tops shadowing them purple while illuminating in orange. Because of the El Paso landscape I always associate the sun with shades of purple or dryness because of the sand. Though I may have not realized it then, I was writing about the non-I and its indirect relationship to the I. Without ever knowing it, I have always been writing this book about El Paso, writing out my space and its relationship to my I. Similarly, when I wrote more concisely, I produced poems about that same sun, and those same conversations with El Paso—as—space influencing my view of the world and thus, myself. In order to shape *A City Fragmented*, I returned to the familiar images of sand. Since childhood sand has been around my life, it was in my sandbox that I truly remember my first experience with pain after being bitten by a fire ant. This remembrance of pain still strikes me because in that moment sand became more than a space of comfort, but one of multiple characteristics. This moment revealed that the spaces in which we live can be uncomfortable, dangerous and unknown to us. These are issues I further uncover through exploration of El Paso's districts. For example, on first glance, the Northeast of the city is seen as the military district by a majority of El Paso. Through exploring this area for the collection I found my interactions with it to differ from that outside perception. I immersed myself within the Northeast which opened up the opportunity to see beyond the military aspect. I had to learn how to approach it as a space, and not necessarily in direct relationship to me but how it functions on its own as a Non-I. For the I, it is always hard to fully understand a space still exists with or without you, it is our job as poets to learn how to interact with space, a

struggle for myself in relationship to certain areas of El Paso. By interacting with unfamiliar spaces we allow the chance for authenticity because we observe the habits from the inside. Bachelard sees the house as our space of writing, if we peer in at each room from outside the door frame we can only see certain things within the room from that vantage point. But if we walk into the room, we become a part of it with the ability to see it from multiple points of view. In addition, we have the opportunity to touch and feel the textures and objects within it. As the poet we have to make this effort to explore the house and not be satisfied with only living in it such is the case with El Paso as my space from which I write within. Bachelard writes that “the house we were born in is an inhabited house. In it the *values of intimacy are scattered, they are not easily stabilized*, they are subjected to dialectics.” (Bachelard 14 emphasis added), and it is these scattered values of intimacy in relationship to El Paso, in which I am learning to understand, looking for their bits of intimacy, which Bachelard warns are not easy to secure.

These scattered pieces of intimacy can be a number of things such as the terra-cotta stone used on old Downtown buildings, but they do not become intimate until we engage with them. We must search them out, understand their value in our house. The terra-cotta stone Downtown is only that, until we seek to understand value beyond stone walls. We must come to the realization of the history behind them or even the possibility of their histories, even if imagined. In my poem, “old buildings made of stone constructed to ensure they kept up their appearance,” I look to explore the possible history behind the terra-cotta walls of the old *State National Bank*. Through this exploration there is a need for want, a want to know what history remains there. I believe this is the scattered pieces of intimacy that Bachelard makes reference to, in which we understand a wall is not just a wall, but in the case of the *State National Bank*, terra-cotta walls throbbing with history to be explored.

My job as the poet is to engage myself in excavating these scattered bits of intimacy, by bringing spaces to life, creating a space in which the past and present occupy the same time. Through excavation I am looking to expose the truth within each space, to find each layer of existence, whether fragmented or whole. Secondly to process these findings and understand what they mean towards themselves as the non-I, then to connect that with my I. Lastly, to record these excavated spaces by writing about them. Through excavation “I return to dream in the attics of yester-year, I never go down again” (Bachelard 26), which allows for an opportunity to understand the spaces’ histories. Essentially by incorporating El Paso, more specifically its individual districts’ pasts, I understand my true relationship to this space. This does not necessarily mean I write about the past in each poem of *A City Fragmented*, but rather that I comprehend and appreciate El Paso’s history. Also, that the city’s yester-year ultimately affects my interpretation of it as a space, whether directly or indirectly. By excavating bits of the past I am uncovering a deep level of relationship between the non-I and the I. In other words through correspondence with the city as a part of me as opposed to “the other” I am recognizing our importance to each other —there is a sense of community. I am rejecting the city as “the other” and in fact connect us both through the concept of the non-I and the I.

To recognize the past is to link a connection between the city and my thesis. Many texts have been written about El Paso but they are contradictory of the city being Mexican or something North American which pushes one or the other forward without fully acknowledging El Paso as more than a one dimensional area. A common thread within these texts is El Paso’s heavy use of Spanish and how it gives power to Hispanics, Chicanos, and Mexicanos. (I shutter to use the term Mexican-American because it clumps Mexican ethnic groups born in the United States into one group.) By identifying Spanglish as a language El Paso is automatically entered

into a realm that pushes these boundaries between Mexican and North American. Yet most writers stop there, and in fact group El Paso's large Mexican ethnic groups into one category. When in fact there are at least three groups. Hispanics as stated earlier is a name given to Mexican-Americans by the U.S. Census Bureau, it is also the least complex of the three. This is a name that most of the younger generation identify themselves as, because it is what they know, what they see when they take state tests or fill out forms. Chicano is a political term, that identifies Mexican-Americans that consider themselves neither Mexican nor American, or do not feel fully accepted by either. Though I would argue most of El Paso would fall under this term, most would claim not to be because of the negative stigma created from it. A stigma that many feel only those of low economic status identify themselves as Chicanos. Yet it is a term that holds more power and a greater sense of identity than Hispanic. Another term is Mexicano or Mexicans, for those who come from Mexico and obtained citizenship in the U.S. They are a group that like my parents, will call themselves Mexicans before anything else, that is who they are, they disregard the term Mexican-American, and Hispanic. These are three groups among many in El Paso that are not written about, yet clumped together, just as El Paso is. El Paso is a dynamic city, a space with fragmented bodies that must be fully explored.

Yet most writers tend to write about one part of the city and use that to represent the whole, Bobby Byrd is an example of this. A large percentage of his poems in *The Price of Doing Business in Mexico*, tend to be centered around the Downtown, Mesa/Sunset Heights districts. To do so is to short change the city, robbing it of its uniqueness within itself, just as it is to group Mexican ethnic groups as only Hispanic. Therefore I speak as a new generation that looks to connect my poems to each district of El Paso while also infusing the Mexican and different American landscapes encapsulated within the city, polarizing neither. To understand my

relationship to each space within the city is to grasp a grand idea of what El Paso is as a whole space. Excavating each place in which I write in is to allow the city (the non-I) to reveal itself to the I. By allowing this to happen, I, as the poet can immerse myself in this space which in turn will uncover a sense of identity. Carl Sandburg's *Chicago* poems do this as he explores the city as a space of observation and community.

In "Mill Doors," Sandburg describes a generic situation which later incorporates the blue collar worker of the Windy City. He address the worker as 'you,' by having the speaker use the second person the reader cannot help but feel as though he is implicated into the character's actions and psyche. "You never come back./ I say goodbye when I see you going in the doors," (Sandburg 6). The reader is unaware of who the 'you' or the 'I' of the poem is, and while it is likely not a lined experience for the reader, Sandburg's use of second person makes this non-empirical experience feel empirical, even personal. Sandburg looks for identity in relation to the city enveloped in the non-I. He does this through the lens of the blue collar worker and by making that worker "you." By doing so Sandburg engages the reader, welcoming him into this room. Chicago becomes a space from the inside, there is intimacy found through Sandburg's use of point-of-view.

Poet Frank O'Hara's *Lunch Poems*, takes a different approach in writing about New York City. In the poem "The Day Lady Died," O'Hara brings to life an abundance of description. "It is 12:20 in New York a Friday/ three days after Bastille day, yes/it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine/because I will get off the 4:19 in East Hampton/" (O'Hara 25). By painting this picture O'Hara allows what he does next to become more effective. He seduces the reader to identify with this space. The reader himself is in East Hampton on a Friday getting a shoeshine. And the line breaks create a "bang-bang" rhythm, further enmeshing the reader into that space with its

momentum. A momentum that flows into a breathlessness found through the connection between the speaker's experience in the poem, who by the end is ultimately held breathless.

Both of these writers become one with the house in which they explore how the environment around them creates a unique space. These are key ideas that I write from when exploring El Paso as a writing space. I aim to find identity within the districts and the bodies that exist within them, to find and incorporate their histories.

Yet, even as I excavate and create a relationship between the city's past, present and myself, there is still a fragmentation within that for both myself and the city. The poet Benjamin Sáenz uses a similar idea, though he refers to memory, I would like to reference that with a sense of time: "even if no memory is true, despite all of that, there must be some truth that remains—." (Book of What Remains). Though we can never fully recover a 100% authentic version of memories or the past we can piece together what we know. Yet because no memory is exact, we must keep in mind that El Paso's history is a re-memory, a recreation of the past through the present. This idea is further echoed in my aesthetic because I, like the city have an inability to fully uncover El Paso's history or even its present. Furthermore, though I explore and enter each district as a partial space of writing I can never fully enter it; to believe so would be naive. This is because in some respect I am an immigrant within my city. An immigrant in the sense that I am disconnected from other areas of the city, when I enter them they are perceived as new places with different habits than the Eastside, I do not know the in and outs of spaces like the Lower Valley. Therefore my use of white space, syntax, punctuation and line are affected by my interpretation of the space I write within. A large portion of my poems move away from punctuation, which attempts to allow two things to happen.

The first is to parallel the disconnection between each district in the city. Because punctuation can be seen as a border, the lack of it helps to keep a fluidity between the lines of narrative. In place of the absence of punctuation comes a larger sense of white space. The line breaks create dueling images through enjambment. The white space is used to create tension within the poems, to control the rhythm of the poem, it also emulates the fragmentation of my landscape. I attempt this play of migrancy on the page (and in the land) in the poem “Mosaic in our Structure”:

we are colors
 painting the map coffee
split from mugs made in Taiwan shops
 the daily grind in
 Phoenix heat cuts open lips sand dries out
pores hairs on head drip pools
of sweat wet grass mowed to inched perfection

I am attempting to emphasize certain words such as: *colors*, *coffee*, *Phoenix* and *pools*. My hope is that by adding emphasis on these words, the reader will pause and take a minute before moving on to the next word, that the white space will also show a sense of space between speaker and subject. The speaker is reflecting on what he is watching on television, here, Arizona lawmakers stance on immigration, and because of this, the white space emphasizes the distance between Phoenix and El Paso. In addition, the way in which the lines are broken up is meant to create, for the reader, multiple images. For instance, “sand dries out” creates an image of the temperature in Phoenix being unbearable, that even the sands are drying out. Yet as you continue to the next line, this image changes into pores dried out from the sand. There is an underlining tone of want within this poem, a want to understand not why the unethical law passed by Arizona’s Senate but to understand what it means for the future. This want is something similar I find in other writers.

The late Andrés Montoya's poems in his book *the iceworker sings*, do what I hope to accomplish with *A City Fragmented*. *the iceworker sings*, bursts with themes of want/desire, loss, and loss of nature. For example, in "Locura," Montoya exhibits a constant want, specifically for something that the speaker does not have, yet the poet tells the reader what this want is for:

i've lived the life of a coward,
a slave, i never had the guts
to explode, really exploded, like cuauhtemoc or zapata
suicide style so my gente can live like gente with honor

Instead Montoya tells the reader what he is *not*, and it is the non-I which constructs an identity who has hopes for his *gente*. This need for want is a consistent thread within *the iceworker sings*, yet it is something that is always in flux, the want is never entirely the same. There is a want to understand what is lost, such as in "The Alley": "jessie's father tore/ at the dark skin/of an old tree/looking for/ answers./nothing./" (Montoya 20). Here, the father attempts to understand why his son is dead, and more importantly what the loss means. What is unique here is that the father is not necessarily asking for his son to be alive again nor reflecting on his son's life. Though Montoya's writing is different in main ways from mine, it bares a resemblance in want, in my own need to understand the importance of my own losses.

In addition to Montoya there are a variety of writers in which I learn from such as Brenda Coultas, whose book *the marvelous bones of time*, discusses issues of borders (the Daviess County, Kentucky and Spencer County, Indiana borders) in relationship to communal and family histories she discovers. Her constant need within the book to want to find these one-of-a-kind artifacts is something I attempt to incorporate within my own writing. Coultas excavates through these histories by putting them in context to her familial histories. Yet she also removes herself

from the equation in certain instances to identify how these artifacts work on their own. In “Coal Seams Under The Corn Fields,” Coultas searches for through the histories of town names: “Towns once named for nature now named for men:/ Chrisney was Springs Stations/” (50), in doing so she removes herself from the equation to expose the artifacts—the first step of excavation. Given importance to the past connects the poet to street signs, old family photos or carvings in cement. These are things that give a face to things of the past: memories, old toys, foods, even the vernacular Coultas excavates are words or phrases that have been disposed of over time, and she finds a need to revive it, possibly to show that language is something that is always fluid and something important, something we take for granted: “/The palmist heard many voices, a mournful ocean coming from/my right hand/And felt a deep sadness./” (Coultas 29).

Though these are writing styles which I take from, I also create poetry differently. My aesthetic is not a random or free flowing choice, but it is a style that has been developed by studying and emulating poets such as Andrés Montoya, Benjamin Sáenz, Brenda Coultas, and Frank O’Hara, among others. There is something unique I find within each of these writers that I have adapted towards my own aesthetic. All four seem to be observers in their poetry, and in my case I write as an observer too, even if that observation might manifest in many points of view. Referring back to Bachelard’s house, I write as an observer from the porch, the attic, the kitchen and from the tree outside of the house. In other words, I write as, who is, in a sense, an immigrant of each culture I write from, never truly a full part of any. I write from an American, middle class, lower class, Chicano, Academic and popular cultural voice. My first language growing up was English, the name, “A.J.,” is also Americanized because when I was a young child I could not pronounce the Spanish of “Arturo Javier.” I am American because I grew up in the United States, surrounded by this culture, through music, books and television. I am both

middle class and lower income, because my family has experienced both socioeconomics, and because some of my cousins still live in poverty. I am Chicano, in both my writing and approach to life, I see myself as the hyphen between Mexican and American, again never truly comfortable in both spaces. And I am popular cultural because before I am a writer or a reader, I am a product of television and music. These perspectives or voices shift in my writing space as I too shift between political, social, linguistic, economic, physical, intellectual and artistic spaces. In “Intersection,” I observe the Downtown shopping area, with a hope of joining these perspectives:

vintage chess games a collector
would get excited for but
would he find himself
downtown
among mostly mexicanos y bi-lingual
groups who know how to play
this daily game cuz only the skilled
can haggle 39.99 Adidas
track jackets to 29.99

As observer, I notice the Downtown culture and the “lingo” and body movements it takes to become a part of its fluidity, both the speaker and game collector are intimate acquaintances of the happenings on San Antonio Street. But what differentiates the former from the latter is he understands how things work because he grew up around this environment as a child when his mother would haggle, even if now, he is disconnected from the practice. Because he does not speak with such confidence in Spanish as his mother did when he was younger he feels uncomfortable becoming a part of the Downtown culture. He feels that he will be viewed as an outsider because he is unable to articulate his words in Spanish as he can in English. This is not the first time he has seen this before, which is hinted in the lines “groups who know how to play/ this daily game cuz only the skilled/can haggle.../,” but the point is that this space is comfortable

enough for me to write about, to become a participant in my writings but still foreign enough that I am only an observer or witness. I cannot call myself an American poet nor a Latin American poet, yet a Chicano poet looking to write in a space that connects beyond my community, and to my community, “a commitment to create a climate where all the peoples of the Americas can enter into dialogue” (Sáenz 532). Sáenz says this in reference to a sense of authentic community, and to create this authentic community, one must have a sense of the space in which he is writing from, the relationship built between the non-I and the I. For me this space is El Paso, where I am still a foreign body while still a native son.

II. What is lost

remembrance is lost brick
a rare building block
out here where desert is replaced
by florescent lights Talking
Rock Red Deer
mountains are pushed under
balconies satellite dishes
stars lost
to the brightness of food
signs littered over Montwood
rolling tractor tires pushes
its way further east smooths
out sand with ease into grooved curbs
- “Final Frontier”

When choosing an aesthetic that very much involves fragmentation within the poetry then something is sure to be lost. In white space and fragmentation images can appear to bear resemblance to photo stills, such as in my poem “Final Frontier,” which uses small abrupt lines. The poem relies on implicit tension between the constant pauses and white space. In a poem with longer lines a different type of tension is manifested: one in which the tensions builds through the allowed free flowing of the language. I made this choice with shorter lines, allowing the fragmented lines, and white space to, in some way, to take hold of the poem, to emulate loss. In

loss there is disconnection, after all. Specifically, this particular loss speaks to a space between the U.S.-Mexican border.

El Paso, is a unique U.S. city in that Ciudad Juarez is so close in proximity to it, yet the space between the two areas stretches much further than geography. The cities are fractured, disconnected because of border issues, losses which take shape within my poems. While there is still an infusion of Mexican culture in El Paso because of our closeness to Mexico, and because of our genetic closeness— El Paso is a largely Hispanic city—that closeness feels all too often unattainable. One of the more telling cultural characteristics of this conflict is the rasquache in El Paso.

Rasquache is the Chicano version of kitsch. “To be rasquache is to posit a bawdy, spunky consciousness, *to seek to subvert and turn ruling paradigms upside down*. It is a witty, irreverent, and impertinent poster that recodes and *moves outside established boundaries*.” (Ybarra-Frausto 155 emphasis added), and rasquache’s constant need to challenge high art or culture is what gives El Paso a character that many within “America” may frown upon, as does perhaps the American canon.

Because rasquache always challenges it is always in resistance or at loss in itself without that which is challenging: this loss is necessary because through rasquache a new “alternative aesthetic--a sort of good taste of bad taste to create,” creates an authentic identity, a self assertive one in the wake of post-colonialism. Rasquache, in challenging, the “Last Conquistador” statue that sits outside of El Paso International Airport, a statue that is more representative of a consistent want to invoke the Spanish blood over the Mestizo. A statue that finds itself within my poem “Horserider” where the speaker asks why do we(Chicanos and Mexicanos) keep allowing this to happen, to appear among us. Similarly, in the poem “Rasquache Gas Station,” I celebrate

the owner of Treinta Tres eatery off of Gateway and Lee Trevino which was once a gas station, because it symbolizes “the tattered, shattered, and broken: lo remendado (stitched together)” (Ybarra-Frausto 156). Both the poem and the restaurant itself challenge and shake the White American norm and the accepted, and such celebration invokes elements of rasquache, which is to take what is scattered and create something new out of what is rejected.

Diamond Shamrock made
turned Treinta tres eatery
tropical curtains palm trees
finish the scene
it's in his blood to see this
'cause El Pasoans'
are hybridity we know how to do it yourself
out of a grim situation how to collect that American
dollar with hustle

The celebration is not that he is an entrepreneur but that he is a specific type of entrepreneur. He creates with hybridity, one that uses colors like “curandera pink” and he himself is proud of what he has made because it was founded on authenticity and sweat, two things that are rasquache. To be authentic in the sense of rasquache is to not force it, but to allow it to happen. In other words, if the restaurant owner took on the project with the conscious idea to make it rasquache, then it would fail to be that, to be rasquache is involuntary, it is who you are. What is lost is another American gas station, but what is built in its place is a sincere place of community.

Ybarra-Frausto notes that “The use of available resources engenders hybridization, juxtaposition, and integration. Rasquachismo is a sensibility attuned to a mixture and confluence, preferring communion over purity” (Ybarra-Frausto 156). The purity that certain types in El Paso seek out through statues of Spaniards, American franchise restaurants to put El Paso on the map as an American city in the sense of higher class is false—they are symbols of forced external

culture. Hybridity makes El Paso a truly unique American city through rasquache and with places like *Chico's Tacos* and the Chinese-Mexican restaurants on East San Antonio Street. What is lost in our celebration of rasquache is our ideal American characteristics set upon us by others. But what is gained is what is needed more of in El Paso, and in the United States is a sense of pride in culture our own, and a loss of shame. "As impertinent outcasts they [we] resurrect symbols of negation, redeemed them with positive connotations." (Ybarra-Frausto 160). Through this, our identify as a monolithic people in El Paso can be found, not one which is Mexican-American, or one which is lost, but Chicano.

Rasquache is one aesthetic that helps to give a voice to those frowned upon, such as Chicanos, but even within that how we connect with language is just as important. Often times language is a point of negotiation for Chicanos. Code switching is the result of Chicanos being a people torn between two cultures, thus a new language one of the borderlands is born. Gloria Anzaldúa states that for one to take pride in themselves they must first immerse themselves in their culture. Chicanos must embrace their voices and understand that in order to speak, you must speak freely and with confidence: "...as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate." (Anzaldúa 81). She is saying that the time for Chicanos to speak is when they take pride in the use of Spanglish. Only then will it be accepted as a language, not by the American canon necessarily but by Chicanos. But language extends beyond this, into a realm of having a voice for Chicanos, not relying on how something is said but what is said. "There is no such thing as the Chicano voice: there are only Chicano and Chicana voices." (Sáenz 526).

When we talk about language in relation to poets we look at how they use it as well as how they are unable to say certain things with language. When poets use language, it is used as a

way in which to interact with the past or to understand identity. Craig Santos Perez explores this very idea in the poem “*from all with oceans views*”:

brought here’ ‘my guidebook’ | ‘different| spelling for places names’
‘become souvenirs’ | ‘empty pools| with infinity
edge’

Perez is redefining how language is used within this poem through two ways: first he explores language by saying he brought a guidebook. He touches on how we use different languages to describe or name the same places. Both of these are connected, he is not well versed in a multitude of languages so he uses a guidebook to identify the different spellings, but secondly, Perez also hints that this creates an emptiness or filter in understanding other languages. This is echoed by the lines placed behind certain words. What these lines also do is add emphasis to words that question our use of all languages. This is a case in which language is unable to express what Perez wants to be present, so he redefines it through the lines to push boundaries. Also evident in Perez’s work—and other colonized poets—is the loss of something, in this case a fragmentation of language. Again he echoes this loss with the use of white space and line breaks, which is not uncommon among marginalized poets. This use of white space is used to emphasize their disconnect from the colonizers and the heritage that has been fragmented through this colonization.

Other poets tend to play with language such as Vicente Huidobro in *Altazor*, specifically, toward the end of the collection when Huidobro begins to create an emphasis on sound over language. In “Canto VII,” Huidobro emulates this very idea: “Ooheeahyah zobbinary/laleela/Sierrastraluna sierrastralux/laloloo/,” in doing this he is playing with language and sound. Meshing words together but also employing a rhythm that plays with the poem’s

energy. What is lost here is articulated language, but what is created is a raw feeling of language that sings in order to connect fragments of language. Perhaps Huidobro is searching for a way to connect pieces that have been lost from his culture, not necessarily to regret the losses but to understand their significance. Though the same cannot be said for all marginalized groups, some resist loss, only looking for nostalgic moments from their ancestry.

Such is the case for Chicano poets who fall into a realm of questioning their language. That is not to say that Chicano poets do not have a voice, but instead that there is often a need for this voice to be nostalgic. Because Chicanos are stuck between two spaces unsure which one to favor they find comfort in connecting to indigenous ancestors and search for places such as Atzlán. This can be illustrated in Lisa D. Chavez in her book *In an Angry season*, which mostly reflects on the history of Native Americans. Chavez is looking to connect with her ancestors, though it is more of a nostalgic sentiment than one of pure loss. “The ache/ in my bleeding body distant/ as those whose I mourned.” (15). Because she is mourning what is lost, but never gained, her nostalgia is constricting, full of loss rather than challenge, as more rasquache poets do. Nostalgia is a branch stemming from loss, yet it relies more on the moment than what happens in conjunction to the moment. Andrés Montoya uses the father in “The Alley” to understand the moment that happened within his son’s death and not to reflect on the death itself, but what it means. This is how Chicano poets need to have a voice in connection with the past, to understand what was lost and what is gained from it, and not only the nostalgia of that past moment. To be nostalgic is to be selfish, it is a want that relies heavily on a false memory of past histories, whereas the necessary want is to gain something from loss to push the future or gain something for the future. Montoya pushes this very notion in *the iceworker sings*, looking to understand how he, as a writer can gain from the losses in his culture, city, and death.

To explore what loss means is an extension or expression of human want. We as humans feel a need to understand the significance of things, and with loss something must be gained. When we lose something of importance, we tend to see how growth comes from this experience. Out of this growth we find creation, because we have the ability to create out of our losses we become sympathetic to it; it is an extension of our being. In the poem “The Franklins,” various types of want are identified within the poem in relation to the speaker.

I want to climb buildings tall skinny
fat like legos
made up of metal plaster fibers
University Towers to see what they
hide through the unnatural lanes
I spot creamy moon
jacketed by clouds
Mountains scratch the sky
with dusty tops like I wish I could
because mountains don't pierce

Here the need for the speaker is to connect with the Franklin Mountains to see what they do. In order to touch them he must climb man-made structures that rival the mountains. A concept that stems back to me, as writer, being popular cultural and socialized, while still wanting to be natural to the landscape. “The Franklins,” echoes this through the images of skyscrapers, coffee shops, and I-pods with a mixture of mountains, fireflies, string theory and stars. These images are present and isolated, at times, because the speaker wants to gain access to them to better understand their purpose in accordance to him.

His proximity to the mountains is paralleled by the white space in the lines. Yet what is interesting to note is that the white space is emphasized in the lines that describe the skyscrapers. This is to show that these are artifacts with less intrigue than mountains because they are made up of materials with less mystery than the Franklin Mountains. Because of a want to be

connected to the mountains the lines early on in the poem are meant to mimic this distance. Yet when the speaker attempts to connect with other college students the lines become more compact.

does the complexities of string theory
run through their brains
does this string of students catch
 these thoughts that I trash or do I
latch onto the ones they leave
in eateries and bars
 a star of light bulbs
strung together on a mountain's
peek in on the city's happenings

where I can see bits of sky
 torn from
the inside of a mountain cement blocks
made of
electricity cars people hairs nails plastic hot dogs lost rock particles inside

The lines become more closely tied together in hope to emulate the level of ease it takes to connect with people than that of the mountains or at least the thought of it being simpler. But within the lines there are still questions to their relationship to the speaker. Perhaps the ability to build a relationship with these other people is because he can ask questions and gain answers, so that is why less distance is within this stanza. As the stanza progresses, the white space begins to stretch, as images of the Franklins resurface. The last line is symbolic of how the mountains become lost within the human need to build and build.

The ultimate hope for "The Franklins," is to reveal the want for connection to everything around the speaker, from the tiniest of objects such as food, to people, to the Franklin Mountains, and the universe. He is aware of what is lost as El Paso becomes a more urban area through the creation of skyscrapers, eateries, and sport stadiums, that obscure the mountains view. The Franklins themselves become lost in the shuffle of the city. Yet he also recognizes from loss

there is a creation for want. He finds himself wanting to connect to some of the more basic concepts within society for the ultimate hope of uncovering community.

By exploring what creates community within El Paso through my poems, I can unveil a sense of self. Referring to Bachelard the city is my house and I am the non-I. As a poet I must explore this place in which I was born in so that I may discover the self. In *A City Fragmented*, I believe this concept begins to potentially unfold itself. As a citizen of El Paso like any plant or animal born in the desert, I have an adaptive personality. (You must learn to adapt or better yet, learn how to hustle and fight for your passions.) My personality has spunk, it is imbedded within me, I am rasquache. Though I enjoy human connection, I, like the desert can live on my own, and find peace within necessity. Nothing is every easy when you live in a desert, a minority, and a minority within that (to be Chicano), you must fight and work hard, this is what I am learning about myself as a citizen.

As an artist, my struggle is just as tough, but because I am hard on myself to be more than just a poet, or perceived as a Chicano poet who only writes for Chicanos. I want to keep improving my craft, but I believe for that to happen I must give more of my authentic self to my work. This is something that has not always been easy it is something I have had to dig out of myself. Through the process of creating this book, it has challenged me to open myself up, because what I am writing is about my community, and myself. In the early stages of this thesis the poems were dull and lacking, with minimal observation, but an even greater lack of the self within the poems. Without the self present in your work, or a great understanding of how the non-I helps in justifying and revealing the self, a poet's voice will never truly emerge.

III. Voice.

Loud!Loud!Loud!
Loud! I call to you, my love!
High and clear I shoot my voice over the waves,
Surely you must know who is here, is here,
You must know who I am, my love.
-Walt Whitman (Sea Drift)

Voice is key to a poet's work because it holds the aesthetic together, it has the ability to take the reader through breathless moments if it is strong. For instance Whitman's voice in "Sea Drift," expresses an attitude that is both confident and clear, he does this with concrete images. Specifically, in the line "High and Clear I shoot my voice over the waves," the image substantiates the power in his voice that it can reach heights beyond ocean waves, and in addition, his voice is so grand that it reaches decibels beyond sound waves, which creates multiple images. Whitman's voice is strong yet his imagery is simplistic.

Finding your voice is the most difficult thing within poetry because it always seems to be shifting. When I say shifting I do not necessarily mean it changes but that it moves around, but a central focus in your voice, as a poet should remain. Though a poet may garnish it differently his job is to not lose sight of its central focus. The central focus is how reader's recognize a poet's voice, it is the element in which all other components come back to. A poet's voice changes over time, and his aesthetic will differ for various books, but within that there is always something in all these changes that remains tied to the poet. I intend to identify the central focus through looking at Raúl Zurita and how his voice grows in *Anteparadise* yet keeps key elements. While also looking at how Frank O'Hara and Vicente Huidoboro's voices compare towards each other and how my own voice draws from them

Voice is used for consistency and rhythm throughout a collection of poems such as Raúl Zurita's *Anteparadise*. Zurita's voice in *Anteparadise*, experiences a gradual growth, in the section, *Las Utopias*, Zurita's voice is somber and in the early stages of rebirth: "it seemed that the light again/lit my lifeless eyes./"(Zurita 5), with the use of the word *again*, the reader understands the speaker is returning to something, and it is implied he is not thrilled about it as his *lifeless eyes* are opened again through this light. While in the section *Esplendor en el Viento*,—the last part of the book— the voice is more hopeful as it has undergone rebirth: "dry your tears/ save them to water the growing meadows/" (Zurita 193). The voice remains consistent throughout the book's entirety but like the speaker and Chile, the voice undergoes transformation. The ability, for the poet to maintain his voice is key in allowing the reader to immerse himself in the work because a trust is created. This trust is created through the consistency in the vernacular choices of the poet, through this a rolling rhythm manifests itself throughout the book, such is the case with Zurita in *Anteparadise*. Having a consistent vernacular is one way in which a poet can establish his voice.

Frank O'Hara has a confidence in his voices, very distinct with his use of details. O'Hara's accomplishes this through his ability to mold a conversationalist tone within his poems, "it was fun, it was clear/ you knew where you stood// in Boston you were never really standing/I was usually lying/it was amusing to be lying all/ the time for everybody/" (O'Hara 59). His ability to do this with such ease shows that poetry does not have to be heavy, and some of the best poets rely more on simplicity. O'Hara's tone, specifically, in *Lunch Poems*, plays into his approach as a writer, his tone accentuates the voice that he creates, it mimics the movements of the poetry. The tone in his voice is conversational (as stated earlier), in addition it is

Though both O'Hara and Huidobro share different approaches, which can be attributed to the spaces, in which they are writing from. O'Hara's conversationalist voice and closeness between lines, perhaps, are associated with him being a white male, from a non-colonized background, which shapes his approach. O'Hara is less likely to know what it is like to be marginalized or fragmented through language or voice. Whereas, Huidobro is more identifiable, in this sense, that because he has been colonized, his language is jumbled, but as opposed to seeing it as a weakness, he finds strengths in its shifting attitude. Therefore, his voice becomes identifiable and relatable to his space, a voice that finds connections within the fragmentation of his space. What I cannot take from O'Hara's voice I find in Huidobro's, because he, like me, share a fragmentation, and though I would like to fully incorporate myself as O'Hara does, I cannot.

Therefore it is my belief that the central focus of my voice is a fragmentation of my perception of the world, because I grew up in such a space, because I am identified as such, and even further so as being a Chicano, yet like El Paso, my voice is connected through this fragmentation. My voice's corksy vernacular, communal tone and fragmented use of space both on and off the page work together to shape what it is I am saying about El Paso. This is how my voice reveals itself. My voice is constructed through El Paso, and it is because of El Paso that I can write about this space made up of fragments, all of which build upon each other to create one entity in which each part is both the non I and the I. El Paso is *A City Fragmented*, yet a city of community, though most writers look at how the city is fragmented or alienated from the rest of the American landscape. Yet there is a need for a voice to look at the fragmentation within each district of the city, so that one can understand El Paso's entire make up, both demographically and geographically. El Paso is in essence rasquache because it is made up a parts and pieces, it is

a scattered area frown on by outsiders, but we as El Pasoans should take pride in our authenticity:

Raquachismo is a vernacular system of taste that is intuitive and sincere, not thought out and self-conscious. It is a way of putting yourself together or creating an environment replete with color texture and pattern...

-Tomas Ybarra-Frausto

Replace rasquachismo with El Paso and you'll understand my need to express this idea through the poetry, to connect with the city. It is unique, responsible for shaping me as a person and as a poet, who searches for the foundation in his voice. I am a native son of El Paso. Much like rasquache relies on community so does El Paso, because though we are separate entities, we are one.

My hope for *A City Fragmented*, is to show how El Paso's opposing districts do in fact have their own characteristics, motions and people. Yet to also show how the city has a sense of community when it calls for it. The theme of want and connections to the past to understand how loss leads to creation is another hope that is felt through the images and form. Yet as stated, I am still working toward allowing myself to show up more in the work, to let myself go. In addition, being more consistent in my aesthetic choices, specifically when putting together a book, and to be confident those choices will work in conjunction with the content as opposed to against it.

While I am still learning to build a foundation for my voice, it is through *A City Fragmented*, that I take that first step.

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A City Fragmented

i.

*This furious architecture,
this severed connection,
has forgotten you and I.*

- Gabriel Gomez, *The Outer Bands*

A City

look beyond the raised bronze
that stretches out strong claws that pierce
through the tierra
our region of residency given an excuse
to gawk at the wall we forget ghosts

that lay beyond our eyes?
I'm guilty with a fear of Mexico
from the time I was a youth
in the late 80s early 90s
of what stretches beyond the desert far
eastside only paid attention to stories
of women raped down stream
men hung from flagpoles
the dead bodies swing back
and forth in midnight

airbehind the cloak hovering
over the city culture
spoke to my soul through hamburguesas

dripping with fresh tomates
crisp lechuga amarillo cheese melting
brown carne and chile on the side
cupped in walls of plastic
it was here *though I can't remember
the name of this food joint*
I began to eat burgers with salsa verde

the booth stared out toward the back
boys a few years older
brown and bearded white
uniforms pushing and moving plastic
crates meant to hold bread
separate bordered bins
colored blue and a faded red now pink

sipped on Coke made with raw sugar-
cane walked streets with my Abuelito

and uncles looking for his warehouse
full of metals and the smell of dirt soaked oil
I had the best carnitas

meat soft and moist
now the streets swim raw
human flesh coated in dried
blood I sit miles away hid
away behind a metallic force of car
meant to keep others out

a city stares back buried on a mountain
of chaos I'm enclosed
in an opera box made who can afford to sit
inside luxury framed lovely at night

the mood calm
silent a halogen glow blurs
the sky from this god's eye
view the city catches
its breath briefly waiting
til day wakes
quakes with decibels of screams
from guns bullets bed inside
handful over handful of innocent flesh
dirt kicks up floating through small gaps
freedom found between the wall
it creeps up into our eyes
embedding itself under contacts
making contact against soft retina tissue

is this residue something more
or do we make it something more
we can't escape what stands
so close to us
A city deep in crisis

A city
"Yes, it's tragic
let's wait until it dies
down before we go back."

I'm guilty
of not crossing over concrete
bridges to save souls
instead I stay on the other side
to save mine

people are dying who make tortillas
sell tacos on street corners
work their way toward downtown
El Paso daily to buy sell retail
survival stretches beyond bullets
drugs or power
food for children money meant to pay rent

women cover their faces
with scarves men with black bandanas
to protect brown eyes from dust
a bigger threat to the day than intended
bullets that stray
slyly along their way
a bronze colored fence separates
a wall we stare back with an eye full

of sand we are Mexicano
it is us in blood that spills
dirt rooted in each other

old buildings made of stone constructed to ensure they kept up their appearance

a mix of terra-cotta and granite
bricks over and under each
arched over tinted black
windows State
National Bank engraved
designs finely layered
like a wedding cake
how many times was it robbed
and was as it as easy
to take this city
has a large percentage of robbers get
away vanish
into the air
back in the 20s
they dissipated
into the dust

underneath these engraved letters

Rio Grande Fashion
118 San Antonio

screen printed on blue nylon
I wonder if Trost knew
a tent would shade away
the sun mannequins inside
windows reflecting heat
rising from black
asphalt assaults on the green trash can
has left the paint
chipped revealing silver
metal robbed of its
history is more than a load
of bricks blueprinted constructed
in a dust bitten city
think
of haunted houses the spirits
dwell in between the fabric
now only a hum
of bankers clerks
can be heard from a past
life hidden underneath air
conditioning discounted clothing

Billy Rodgers Arroyo Park

A boy's mouth forms thin
white lines from thirst
he walked too deep
into a cavity
that once held
water for eyes
for the sun's reflection
now just a bunch of oblong rocks desert plants
cut and itch his skin inside
only huddles of green
trees kept alive by Virginia and New York
residents the park's dirt trail
exposes an old beat up
sewer container
made of brick and mortar
he tries to tear this El Paso City
sewer cap with soft palms
water swims underneath
and keeps the garden alive
an arroyo essential
for the coyote man plant life's
preservation
people must have bathed
their children
in the 3 foot deep pool
back in the day
when wheels were wooden
when their feet felt
mud silk
before when mountain
peaks were unoccupied homes
or stationed with satellite dishes

I image this boy
for a second before
an old Nike Air shoe
takes my focus
it's blanketed by rocky sand
beaten up by sunlight

was he swallowed up
by earth
as it gulped down

final bits
of river only roots
can taste the broken
glass and caution tape
a new nature
cacti alive and dead
lay next to one another
fighting for what remains

Needle through the Sky

Earth spit out boulders on top
of boulders building
mountains. Man named them
the Franklins. Decades down
the line man erected needle
like cement and iron framed
smelter towers. This
monument stands stiff and
dominant over westside
homes. Behind tall green
pines, or slouching palms.
Border patrol agents in olive
uniforms tosses seized green
bricks into the incinerator's
mouth. Smoke makes the air
thick, workers remove masks
and goggles breathe in the
vapors like a dose of Vick's
44 under nostrils. Quick steps
come down to a methodical
pace. Nobody knows the
secret, or maybe nobody
cares. 'Cause smoke is all the
same when it funnels through
the faded orange and white
needle. Smelter townies
huddled underneath it for
shade.

They climb its peak and
witness a city of lights and
people. I can hear them
shuffling feet across dirt
paths and they can hear cars
drive through 1-10 west on
the daily. Forgetting their
lunch on kitchen counters.
Forgetting that 6 a.m. traffic
is a long pause. Forgetting
that class was canceled today,
snow storms. Townies like
George Washington forget
none of these things. They
stroll through their ghostly

existence remembering how
friend's lost arms on the job,
or took in too much mary
jane into their lungs. But they
can't forget a city that lost
sight of them. Forgetting that
El Paso is a desert but
neither party forgets the sky
pinching tower with the
letters:

A

S

A

R

C

O

running down its belly.
California had poison in
planes in grape fields for
migrant farm workers. The
South had pricks and calluses
from cotton picking for
slaves. El Paso had smelter
pollution punching the desert
air, and bong smoke for its
people. The company created
more jobs, the company
looked to bring back jobs in a
down economy. Bodies of
people desperate for work
hoped for the company to re-
open its doors, tossing aside a
care for their health. Inside a
class in Hudspeth hall I peak
out at the tower, wish it
away. I hope earth swallows
it whole as I read Tomas
Rivera. I wish it away, I ask
that the wind and sand erodes
the error into dust. I never

find myself wondering who
will demolish it with tractors
and steel balls. Now I'm at a
scenic spot on Trans-
mountain, snapping photos of
the desert city where lights and
rock sediment collide into
one. As day dims into night,
mountains lose definition,
orange lights blink on and a
shadow of a narrow tower
sticks out of the ground just
standing there.

Slow Motion Traffic

Stuck in 4:30 traffic on a monday
again familiar patterns
familiar cars zig
through the slow lanes then zag
only a few feet further cutting me off
like assholes transitioning paused traffic
into stops a few feet up I spot
illuminated flares
bumbling red and blue lights
taking up a lane and a half
for what
bits of carbon fiber peppered
on I-10 next to shards of red
against the sun's glare looking like disco
ball squared mirrors
gawkers in fragile
predicaments as they move methodically
waiting to look at the accident
as I wait ten cars back
I observed
unfinished medians near Copia
I'm reminded of a row of florescent
bow lights near downtown
light poles assorted T structured
others form halos
I-10 a mix and match highway
yet these people in front of me
can't keep their eyes off police
uniforms and people arguing who hit who
after a quick glance most cars
zooming by a falling
scene of fire orange sky crumpled gray clouds reflect
I grip my steering wheel
hard wanting to jump out
of my corolla and into
passenger seats
and scream in ears
go go go
cause its the same accident
you will see tomorrow
so God damn it move

ii.

*in the jarring streets of dreams and urban landscapes...on street corners carving cities in two...
- Mike Medrano, Born In the Cavity of Sunsets*

Block of Gene Torres Dr.

I drift past the crack
in the concrete on the corner
of Vista del Sol and Gene Torres
and old women with tennis balled
walkers

weeds crawl from black
landscape tarps blanketed with lava
rocks that a middle aged father picks
at in his yard I want
to cross the oil slicked street
and help him out
but I think better of it

He looks a bit grumpy
maybe because his son is inside
playing x-box live

we used to live outside
running around with mushroom hair cuts hiding
and seeking in people's
yards when it was ok
but people get old moody
and kids lay in bed nowadays
lawns are occupied with dirt
mustang's black paint job
burns away under sun
on cinder blocks police chase
cholos or middle schoolers in starched
khaki pants thinking they are starring in *American*
Me on t.v. and COPS on fox play
roles given to them
not ones they asked for
I imagine each of these homes
is a factory creating and distributing lines
of kids with chips implanted
in their heads with either
the cowboy or indian archetype looping
but I'm never really sure
which is the hero or heel
either way I can't see past
thick curtained houses barred
with twisted floral designs

Butterfly Effect

Expansion far east causes a reaction on Hawkins. As a result of what is occurring by the Tierras and the Montana Vista district but unlike that far far east region, here, contractors hire me to tear down vintage buildings. Buildings look like compound bone fractures when I bulldoze over them. The eastside is looking to move on up like the Jefferson's. The sun beams down hot on metal machines. The Hawkins exit is backed up with rows of cars, El Pasoans gawking at the poster looking past me. Three green lights later the congestion flows away.

An empty cement block holds my eyes' attention. What's not there is an I-hop when me and friends piled layers of pancakes and syrup into our mouths not even hungry, but we ate cause what else could we do. It's gone. The sun is falling away behind a scatter of stars behind the shadows of scrap metal hanging loose off building tops. Even the sun says its time to go but I keep at it. I see the tall almond color of the mall erasing the 80s orange from the structure. I remember wanting to go to the mall for Orange Julius Piña Coladas, when the mall had a pocket sized movie theatre inside it.

The fountains inside the mall once filled with pennies that let out an aroma, clean and sweet. Here is where my childhood imagination wrote images on paper before. Now, here, the cold touch of orange eighties tile cracks like the fallen plaster from these old buildings crushed under my tractor.

Industrial Park

Northeast e.p. mirrors
ghost towns from old westerns
the way the sun kisses the gravel
only further encourages this illusion
as I drive past industrial sized
buildings all of them
cubed bland with no human
activity as if

the residents are hiding
out waiting for the hero to enter

the air is dry noises fail
to reach dead grass patches
flutters of sound hang
in the pale blue with the birds
nature is odd here
beat up steel rusted orange
surrounded by planted trees
if not for the familiar
mountains over my back
I'd feel uneasy
tunnel visions strands of weeds
resemble thin long fingers
as they pry through
parking lots I can't help
but imagine each building
should say For Lease
yet most of them still occupy
work flow specks of personnel
engage in it move crates
of product into the back of rigs
somehow out here
I can gather thoughts
like a clump of dirt
I shovel into my cupped
hands and like the bits of ground
I see rock sediment
dirt minerals all aspects
the silences dissolve sounds
surroundings become ghostly
I find el paso deep
underneath the silent flight of birds
between the chain link fences
dusted in sand.

Intersection

Oregon meets San Antonio traffic
people occupy sidewalks
jumping from street to street store to store
looking for deals filled
with zapatos *who buys this shit*
my question has nothing
to do with money
but fashion
these shoes look like recycled tires
the man a tired hoarder
with tons of junk in his shop space collectors
decades worth of barbies
you'd find down at the swap meet on Alameda
I wonder if he lines up rows
of knock off toys
in a booth at *El Bronco*

vintage chess games a collector
would get excited for but
would he find himself
downtown
among mostly mexicanos y bi-lingual
groups who know how to play
this daily game cuz only the skilled
can haggle 39.99 Adidas
track jackets to 29.99
but this older man
that manages this little
mercado seems to be lost in his
dusty items unable to keep
up with new shipments
people swamp
other shops along the building
where are his kids
I'm guessing they booked it
to school or some telemarketing trabajo
with more pay less hustle

daily art populations of bodies mirror
a game of tiles which are in constant movement Please
come shop, sale! Mijo ropa! Polo y Tommy Hilfiger
float through the dry air

handfuls of words trap
themselves in trees leaves distribute them among the cinder blocks

Night Out on the West Side of El Paso, more specifically the bars on Cincinnati and surrounding Streets...

night life detailed a color spectrum bar lounge club lights. tuesday night specials brings in bodies.

quench a thirst relax stress

musics boom speaker boxes dj booths

crisp summer air heavy glow of orange patches reflect off moist gravel signal lights

huddles of hipsters preps thugs ect wait for walk to flicker white on a box escape into a small cubed room another stacked on top looks like childhood cubbies

sticky floors cling briefly to high heels Van slip-ons boots

lines to the bar to the restroom to the chatter outside insides of minds flutter with thoughts of her him a potential something

the night fuzzes like a t.v. channel unavailable teasing with glimpses of clarity.

packed patios.

the moon hangs low its almond butter color shimmers on gray Tacoholic truck the smell of beef reaches crowds of people filing out of bars like ants from a hill.

a modern age Marty Robbins would write: out in the old west texas town of el paso on wet gravel splashes of street lights. snuck out beer bottles by curbs. half eaten Texan tacos bits of cilantro jack cheese steak lime juice.

night dies down. flashes of metal headlights on Cinci wait to cross over past Yandell a left on Franklin. merge on I-10 east

along the way
blurs of bums gas stations
churches portions of desert

a tumbleweed
bits of caliche dry air becomes moist
and it rains

Above

In a city. On a mountain.
On the Westside of town.
Driving down Stanton.
A row of houses nestled
into a desert mountain.
Surrounded by a wall of pine trees
all put in place by
God's hand.
from a hole, he reached
through the clouds
in a balled fist
he clutched homes
the size of Monopoly plastic
icons. from his seat,
from their rooftops
he dug them in between rock
and dirt. From these homes
you can see the grooved gravel of-
once mountains-
Mesa, Kansas, and McKelligon.
At night, you can see
the city shine orange and a greenish
white. I-10 carries cars
that push against cool desert air
blurring past Fred Loya
billboards but never
escaping the mountain
or the bulbs of lights
shaped into a star,
below stars that hover
over Franklin peeks
like a swarm of jittery fire
flies rustling through pines.
From here, the cars never cease
to stop their movements
like hummingbirds
going deeper into the mountain
toward a downtown that held
Zapatistas in its grasp,
years ago.
Others dig their way out from
montanas toward Montana
Street where a peaceful stretch

of the Chihuahua desert
sits flat
waiting for sunlight to crack
the sky's black coat
to expose homes resting
below a mountain.

Photo Chopped

A downtown
framed
bits
of sunset
stone and building
windows warped
reflections
metal
antennas poke
clouds hover closely
metal architecture
trickles
rise fall
like decibels
A downtown
framed
college
escapes students
routes
around Downtown Mesa exits
accidentally turn left
find
a cluster
busy bodies
Texas forks San Antonio
curious eyes
dart down apartments
old fashioned
made up in cream painted cinder

home- remind me
of the east united states
dancing right left at
A downtown
framed bunches
litter
crawls
under cracked yellow
sidewalks
candy vendors hustle
young students laugh
shop
tiny room-sized shops
smell of A&D old dust
up Oregon
Scottish Rite Temple
altered skyscrapers
an Albertson's bag hangs
on a brittle branch a foreground
Double Tree hotel
a background
looks painted
on cardboard
a photo's perspective
as does downtown
creatures at night climbs into sky
the bag tears A downtown
floods with lights sleek bodies
take a right
franklin to 1-10 E
away from Downtown
tomorrow

Rices

San Antonio is filled with a smell of greasy foods.

Perspiring water bottles made in Mexico Coke.

Litter kisses the cracked gravel

near all you can eat for \$5.99.

A cubed restaurant bunched in the middle of the strip.

Selling comida china y mexicana.

A market next door sells blankets, leather jackets, Faux fashion.

A line of shops together but blind to one another's common purpose.

Tiny brown skinned women with callused palms rest on metal seats.

Kitchens flooded with a mix of Spanish and Chinese
rice prepared in the same area.

These Kitchen foods still perfume people under these shared oven and wok flames
for decades.

An odd perfection chow mien gorditas hot sauce.

Language without a use for words
just the bangs swishes of kitchenware.

Raw musicality seeping through the walls out toward downtown
streets heavy with footsteps, motor engines, the mild coo of a pigeon.

they are a time machine
without knowing
that the colored sidewalks
around them have faded are fading
deep under the gray sinking

Steel

Diamond cut steel shapes
into miles of fence man made honeycombs
windows to a view beyond
a dirt littered
terrain the fence roots itself
in slabs of concrete
Garcias Lopez Godinez cross
the fences together callused
hands wrap tightly together
people the fence
poles creating a strong structure a spine
connecting A to B
all headed in the same direction underneath lays box
cars old rusted
a faint red paint job
dark and musty I see men pulled
from these giant storage sheds
men pulling cargo from them
in order to live their american dream
maybe the dream was simply working
slum jobs maybe one day
their children could do better
finish middle school
read a magazine a book
at a ninth grade level
maybe the next generation could be
bi-lingual and finish high school
enroll in a community college
or city school
if they were determined enough
enter college with a sense of entitlement
first generation immigrants
are steel ropes creating stability
fences are unity for the Other
they are why we dig through
dirt and pebbles jump them relentless with effort
in beaten up chanclas cut them with pliers
but the effort is together
we walk Oregon through Campbell
blending into streets
bypassing fences
trimming the downtown bridge

The Franklins

I'm lost in a crowd
on Kerbey street occupied by backpacked students
I walk these streets in black corduroy Chucks
back and forth to UTEP
joining others a trails of ants cars parked
on Kansas Stanton avoid
parking fees

I pass Kinley's Coffee house
with a want for vanilla bean
cappuccinos and
strawberry chipotle crapes
a poetry reading
the scene cars flow
by on Mesa street headlights
become blurred city fireflies
sweep under orange street lamps
I want to climb buildings tall skinny
fat like legos
made up of metal plaster fibers
University Towers to see what they
hide through the unnatural lanes
I spot creamy moon
jacketed by clouds
Mountains scratch the sky
with dusty tops like I wish I could
because mountains don't pierce

darkness is
a 6 pm purple
on a 5:30 pm pale lavender
pushing away a 4:45 desert blue

an illusion of a cut
notepaper catches my eye
the mountains pass into the dark

The smell
of grease from the re-opened Whataburger
that felt flames bury
its original body clings
to my nostrils
Cyclers zoom by drivers startling my walk

they head home to shoebox apartment complexes
because they want to be close
to campus but aren't
heavy on enough cash

to rent better digs
me I'd rather drive from the east
then walk to campus
are bike riders allowed
the opportunity to think
about things
as I do with headphones and ipod tunes
does the complexities of string theory
run through their brains
do these string of students catch
these thoughts that I trash or do I
latch onto the ones they leave
in eateries and bars

a star of light bulbs
strung together on a mountain's
peek in on the city's happenings

where I can see bits of sky
torn from
the inside of a mountain cement blocks
made of
electricity cars people hairs nails plastic hot dogs lostrockparticlesinside

mountains are caught
under our heavy weight

the same rock and dirt
mounds where I picnicked
with sisters cousins strangers even
the hot heat couldn't keep us
away
from them we walked
looking for indian caves
hoped to find arrow heads maybe a bear
we barely managed
to pull ourselves up
and down the smallest rock formations

but I forget about

them now though they surround this sand
filled city
of mine

iii.

...all the bones buried by time, nature or natives. Given eternity, we could find marvelous bones
-Brenda Coultas, *The marvelous Bones of Time*

Final Frontier

I'm amazed how many
Eastside homes in the Tierras are bread
on an assembly line sliced perfect
math cut to precision Meteor street
framed by desert
sands weeds and rusty yellow
tractor trucks homes a mirror image of the early years
in my neighborhood
when sand swamped around along
dirt/cement clogs a hill
leading to an apartment complex at the top
of that pile of dirt my sisters
and I could spot
our house we knew the shape
each home its own Gene Torres
Drive character
the only place to drive was out
toward central
because we were only ten
homes a Furr's unused pools
of insolation covers the ground
around these new homes
more families
more fast food joints
east side expansion spreads residencies made
plaster and wire
remembrance is lost brick
a rare building block
out here where desert is replaced
by florescent lights Talking
Rock Red Deer
mountains are pushed under
balconies satellite dishes
stars lost
to the brightness of food
signs littered over Montwood
rolling tractor tires pushes
its way further east smooths
out sand with ease into grooved curbs

Rasquache Gas Station

vacant buildings now
pawn shops
mexican restaurants Fred Loya insurance
traffic ticket offices
out of work a man buys a gas station
for lease re-does the inside-outside
with buckets of paint
curandera brown
and vanilla white
new floors tiled like stained
glass windows as he
cracks white peppered linoleum
with a mallet
Diamond Shamrock
turned Treinta tres eatery
tropical curtains palm trees
finish the scene
it's in his blood to see this
'cause El Pasoans'
are hybridity we know how to do it yourself
out of a grim situation how to collect that American
dollar with hustle
it's this burning sensation
that climbs the bones in our feet
to our spine occupying both heart and left lobe
'cause when the ability to buy groceries
diminishes like ash from burnt paper
a drive in our nature kicks in
a supernatural power
anybody with mexican
in their genes can call upon
maybe it was a mexican
that inspired Stan Lee
to create stories
of super abilities
yes humans know how to survive
when they need to but
we do it better
and innovate with what we have
in Mexico we ate ants with tortillas
in Mexico we eat pan fried ants with tortillas
in El Paso we re-design gas stations
into something new
we re-imagine the blueprint

that was first imagined
we give a new symbol
to these once gas pumping
corner stores
once painted tricycle red
now wedding cake pink
pumps dressed up
with cantina lights
green yellow white
modelo signs
replace budwieser
the cosmic race in live action
for our family selfless acts
keep us moving because we want
our kids to trade Little Debbie snacks
at recess with their friends
because they know they can
do something more with the crackers
and hot sauce than schoolmates so we sell
tacos in reborn pump stations
new life sold at 4.99
a lunch plate with a drink

Mosaic in Our Structure

“You are going to look different if you are an alien, and cops know” - Mr. White New York Times

we are colors
painting the map coffee
split from mugs made in Taiwan shops
the daily grind in
Phoenix heat cuts lips open sand dries out
pores hairs on head drip pools
of sweat wet grass mowed to inched perfection
but thats not his “dream” bones know limits the heart ignores
laughs from kids huddled around corners making money the only way he can claim
credit card me we fit a profile brown pigment swimming the city big round eyes
venders selling knock off Louis Vuitton only a person with
unfamiliar mustaches or rough browned fingers
sells tacos candy bars for small money
do rednecks only carry rifles dear let me tell you people
are rallying against a bill inked black on white
brown yellow green w/polka dots call the cops eyebrows climb like fingers on fences
cut out the fat is what alien bodies do for
you/us/him/whoever in meat factories limbs cut
I’m sliced into the non neither alien nor citizen
both sides look
at me with curiosity mistaken
for Indian possibly Asian before deciding Mexican
when I.D. they speak
in a language my tongue loses
itself in no accent no proper pronunciation
where am I
from people wanna know I speak
a little Texas a bit El Pasoan never calling library lie-barry
a boxed paradox I walk
Chicano and crave crab enchiladas w/ ranch
and glassed iced Chai a hunger to climb
inside the television pass downtown Arizona
with fence cutters I have a fear of being
profiled as somebody I’m not by a crowd
of differently shaped heads each one of them

Landmark Burger Joint

Downtown traffic slices
through summer heat
people walk through
downtown shopping for pumas
the heat a wool pancho
hovering over market terrain
sweat drips down on gray
pavement buildings bits
of yesterday
remain like an unfamiliar tattoo
scattered signs
of discount prices and trademarked
logos obscure the architecture's
original face hiding the classic design
like a dirty old stain
in the same process Forever 21 replaces others gone
only fragments of a generation
for an old generation
bits of it sweep the air like raw saw dust
demolition paved
the way for a lot full
of yellow lines painted on black
gravel cement cinder steel plastic fiber glass
build a template blueprints
a burger franchise
a king screen printed on cardboard
turns bypassers heads
raised eyebrows mouths salivate
as stomachs grumble with desire
wraps accumulate on sidewalks
like clouds before a storm
customers walk past
a denoted historical landmark
reduced to a bilingual plaque
onto Burger King property
step by step over a city's history
dormant under a thinly sliced
paved parking lot
into double doors toward menu boards
wondering if the two for one
chicken sandwich is still available
only to have the cashier
tell them "it comes and goes"

Horse Rider

Copper green giant last living equestrian
conquistador shadows over
desert landscape maps out east west
interstate ten slices through
 Chihuahuan desert with gravel
 slabs dusted debris lurks
 in middle lanes he was carried
 over and through drivers
 gawk at this monument
 sculptor's blood rubbed in
 his creation ten years
in the making baby Mayor Cook
and sponsors
brought him to El Paso
 International Airport travelers ponder
 reasons for his existence
sponsors who boast about his:
 height weight horse's penis size
overlooking what he stands for
 centuries later the mestizaje people
are still overshadowed by Spanish blood
 this time we should have known better
 we still wander around trying to figure out
 which language is ours
 so we create spanglish
 strangers who pace desert plains
we haunt ourselves
we forgot the terrain
and embraced one we have never touched
made up of castles and sticky moss
and it is here where we allow
it to happen
so we nod limp
 to the world's large dick
out of towners ask me what
that green man at the airport is
I tell them its a mexican
 border patrol agent
roaming the highway

grains sheet under contacts with blurred vision he spots
mountains haloed by nimbus clouds small uncoordinated drops
dot sidewalks slowly rain pounds sand dunes aromas
of wet dirt clutch the city clutch him
sandy bodies occupying the land
plots sponge water wind cradles everything perfumes
a city cleanses a boy's skin

La Patria

History is hidden underneath racks of Dickies Jeans clothing brand and boxes full of clothing old and new. Hidden underneath sticky floors. Torn apart by the dry El Paso air. Only a plaque from the El Paso County Historical Commission reminds us of the newspaper press that sat here. Letters and characters in black and white print stretched across thin paper with reasons to support Pancho Villa and his fight against Díaz. Fresh ink from the paper rubbed against finger tips engaged our ancestors further in news. Fresh paper receipts now fill our palms warm with sales tax. Passers-by window shop this small store with a faded red door-the color of caliche. Where does the door lead? A storage room with thousands of cardboard boxes holding knockoff clothing laying against brick and mortar. Speckles of ink sprayed across the walls, holding onto a bit of the past. Plans and schemes discussed in these rooms as men worked in unison to fight for the mestizo, a fight for the Chicano before Chicano became a reality. Customers fight for bargains and sales, back to school savings. Bodies circulate with green wads of bills and leave with piles of clothes in white plastic bags.

In Nashville, Tennessee's downtown district sits a small fort of the first settlers in that area. It smells of accumulated grease. Yet it remains intact built over a hundred years ago the wood planks are replaced every so often but the the structure's frame and purpose has not been altered. It shelters homeless bodies who wear oil stained shirts. The fort is a homeland representing the settlement in the honky tonk city. La Patria an embedded plaque written in both English and Spanish. Monday's newspaper floats in air until hitting a mannequin leg. Old newspapers clean smudges off of the windows.

Fo/mida

a pot
a skillet
a frying pan
and a rectangular tray
a stove occupied by leftover frijoles
on the back burner
made every other day
they seem
to hang around
almost forgotten
until you want some
then gone
on front burners
grilled sweet potatoes
salt and peppered
cooks beside
chile colorado
hit with a few leaves of basil
a side of rice
which seems to go good
with any food
you can always find it
either spanish
or mixed with black
beans pineapple
or roots
such as carrots or diced potatoes
but today its plain white
in the fork it falls
apart nothing
holds it together
but itself
strange how chinese
steam the same small grains
and it sticks together
unlike here
at home
horchata in a tall cool glass
iced with crescent
moon cubes
some specks of cinnamon stick
a sweet drink
that goes down easy
but made with effort

and strength
when fresh
we drink it out a mix
made in detroit,mi
milk rice and cinnamon
run across my taste buds
but my pallet
knows the taste
salsa verde
on a kitchen top counter
in a Caesar dressing jar
three scoops
with my spoon
because chile
goes good with everything
an El Paso thing
some like it hotter than others
even if it burns
your mouth
on its way down
you have to do it
there's something about heat
stimulating your olfactory sensations
that only these indigenous fruits
can accomplish
if the spanish did anything
right it was keeping them
around to be eaten up
by mestizos like me
or white people in E.P.
who may think
it makes them Mexican
because they like the flavors
nope it just means you like chile
if there was anything the Indios
failed to think of
in the fight for their land
was to use chiles as weapons
the hottest chiles live
in India lords or war
want to use them
for weapons not consumption
if only this was thought of centuries earlier
we'd be dancing under the sun
eating jalapenos habaneros
like bananas

or wrapped up in tortillas
maize onion and beans
instead today
we eat tortillas
with Vietnamese cuisine
or hamburger patties
covered in cheese sauce
we eat tortillas
holding together
a blend of brisket meat
bbq and texas fries
the indio lost his land
the world became
a mixing bowl
with containers of culture
sitting on spice shelves
and produce pockets
re-imaging
pizza with jalapeno crusts
chile rellenos with crab
cream cheese
and a thick reduction
squash sauce
we keep it simple
at home
we eat tortillas
with refried beans
and sauteed yams
we eat
tortillas

like we suck in

air.

Eastside Print Shops

Carlos used to work here
me and Janie brought
him lunch
every building the same
file down Rojas
a faint sound of paper slaps
warm inked sheets even now
still buzzes in my ears
like RC toy cars
he was a boy
worked as a man
hands black
a smell of metallic paper
cuts on finger tips calloused palms
I stared at the stitches
they slipped up the inside
of his hand curving around
his middle finger
if I had to work
here under hot heated metal
oversized storage rooms
he must of escaped
momentarily from dull
rectangular manilla buildings
only to slip back in
when warm purple
blood trickles out in red streaks
against pale
white linoleum
my eyes studies them all
a population of eyes
grew older palms stained darker
with scars bodies line print shops
new product
moves in for part time job
extra cash old
story as old worn persons
are pushed out smells of cheap
ink and sweat sponged
the suede of his boots
as he slept under blankets nightly.

Valley Dance

I

Lower Valley streets fade in and out of each other
montages in movies
a dance the rest of El Chuco wants to learn
Lower Valley rhythm like jazz
improvisation the key
down Alameda alternating between
party stores and car dealerships
April says ___ is the best for pricing on candy
I only remember the crayon blue
paint over plaster and the rainbow papered
burro piñata dangling through the barred windows
I believe her she grew up down here

II

I went to school here
I never explored the terrain
until I was 17 with friends driving
in a mini van to drive-thru liquor stores
for tall boys and cigarettes
down in the Valley near the Bronco
swap meet we were pulled over by police
who acted overly aggressive and beat the fuck
out of our bodies an Eastside kid scared
in the moment cold near a canal
as headlights called attention towards dust
floating in the air my body shook
from the beating or was it because I was
helpless in a part of the city I never knew
my lower lip tasted of dirt and blood

III

an exchange where you have to know
what places are the spots to hit
a tiny ice cream shop
sells Frutas frozen fruit bars
ten dollars a dozen

Pina Colada Limon Melon
shops like this hold a treasure inside
them with things you wouldn't find
at any toy store like the Batman
action figure I had as a child
spray painted gold without a cape
but it didn't matter because it was unique
out in the Valley I found things
that were probably haggled with
at a garage sale only to be sold down here
cause the Valley is a worm hole

IV

A viejo on Zaragoza and Roseway
owns La Llanta Tire Co.
he doesn't say much
just goes about his business
fixes tires for 10 bucks
he drains all the air
then melts down the rubber
over the hole all while a novella plays
on a small t.v. set
he works small and stained
oil and dirt massaged
into his skin over the decades
not because he loves it
but for his wife
I like to imagine
this when I think of him

V

you have to dance
with her through the train tracks
follow her movements
the way she paints La Virgen
on building walls or rides
tall with praise for rasquache
bright colors hop up and down Alemeda
car dealerships comida mexicana
filling the streets like confetti
Frutas Street harbors
an old brew building
windows either cracked

broken or accumulated with dust
130 is written all over these walls
electrical wires slump
over the unattractive brown
that pigeons won't even rest on
it resembles a mental institution
people in the 1950s
knew its color inside the walls
the smell of hops
from brewed beer batches
money made down and around here
when the east side was a dust bowl
nothing except a getaway for teens
maybe it isn't that old
next to it a row of taxis
crowd around the back alley streets
Manhattan comes to mind

VI

El paso has a life
I am just uncovering
excavating fossils from an unknown
like the sepia photos
my mom pulls out of my grandpa
when he was her age
with shops and buildings
he owned the same buildings I pass
going down Zaragosa toward North Loop
rest his soul
who owns what he did
who lives in duplexes
he lent out to family
the same duplex
with a dirt driveway slope
we were not to run down as kids
the streets were busy
Zaragosa has always
been this way
a main rope of circulation
for the valley unlike Frutas
harboring this beaten up shell
of a once busy factory
when everything American

was American even in a little mexican
city El Paso El Chuco El Pisshole

El home

CURRICULUM VITAE

Arturo J. Lechuga was born in El Paso, Texas. The only son of Rosa and Art Lechuga, he graduated from Americas High School, El Paso, Texas, in the spring of 2004 and entered El Paso Community College in the fall of 2004, where he remained until 2006 when he then transferred to the University of Texas at El Paso. After receive his bachelor's of art degree in creative writing in the fall of 2008 he entered Graduate School at the University of Texas at El Paso in the fall of 2008.

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