

Chas Hoppe / Joshua Young

THE DIEGESIS



if this opening could react, it would flex and rev  
when people pass. make this asphalt a part of us,  
braid ourselves into its story and carry north.<sup>1</sup>  
and you, observer, you've been pulled into the diegetic  
space. can you smell the gasoline on my fingers?  
can you feel the rattle of the engine? you'll get  
used to it. we've been unable to push beyond  
the frame, though our edits gutted the strain  
our hesitations shoved into this space, and the action  
smears into something recognizable. right here,  
the script calls for a cut.<sup>2</sup> we spill forward—

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<sup>1</sup> i want this silence to mean more

<sup>2</sup> but i'm feeling rebellious. i let it roll.

street noise. a balcony. Saturday.

the pieces come from different places you know

but right now we'll just pause on one

and let it breathe

because this one deserves forgiveness.

give four people the same photograph of this street

and ask them to crop the image any way they'd like.

collect them<sup>3</sup> and immediately put them in an envelope.<sup>4</sup>

for now we'll consider this collecting evidence,

but remind me about it later

because it won't mean anything

until we make it unfamiliar.

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<sup>3</sup> but avoid folding them and cutting them into snowflakes. the point is not that each image is unique, but that the choice meant something different to them than it did to you.

<sup>4</sup> this is how i want you to think about possibility.

so, what kind of film stock are we using?

yes, we've memorized the images of who

we were at twenty, but that's only for photographs and super-8<sup>5</sup>

everything became sepia and musk

that pale gossip of adolescence scuttled

blacktops, circled the tether, and jiggled its way into the mouths of hallways<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> i'm gonna be more famous than you even realize

<sup>6</sup> my brother keeps calling and i refuse to take his calls. the phone's on vibrate, and Cohen's playing, and you haven't dressed for the scene, but you strut through the frame, nines and all. i was never actually clear on the reason why this mess chugged through our neighborhood. the language gets rough around the second act. he's all sideburns and polo shirts. i haven't let go of that kind of anger. i never have anything good to say on telephones. it's all touching-base and catch-up. i had lectures planned, but they were just hot-air left over from my *Bible* days. i'm tired of setting fires to bridges and the houses above them. there are songs about this kind of meeting. but i've only heard them distorted in bar-light. the lights stringing the block flare in the lens, and just outside the frame, our mother has something awful to say.

*it's the coming out that tells the tale*

we put a hole in the drywall

we cleared a hole in the floor and laughed into the space

inside, the darkness chewed our flashlights into pinpricks on the wall.

you were right when you said *film is truth!*

the frame is like points on a map—

what happens outside

lets the focus soften<sup>7</sup>

can you hear that clicking from the projection room?<sup>8</sup>

this place is still awake.

we don't want

a digital capture,

we want

24 frames per second,

even if the sound is dirty

this is where/how lies unfold.

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<sup>7</sup> i don't know what this means, but it sounded brilliant when i wrote it

<sup>8</sup> i bet there are poets up there capturing images—those thieves.

still on the balcony. still Saturday

that place he's standing—

about halfway between

the blue recycling bin

and the bus stop—

is not an random.<sup>9</sup>

he's responding to a Craigslist ad

title "someone who breathes joy."

see how he's checking his watch?

at 4:30 he'll break into song,<sup>10</sup>

thus publicly identifying himself

to the blonde he thinks he'll meet.

instead, the bus pulls up

crouches to let the wheelchair off

while the man's song

is drowned out by the engine.

none of the four photographs

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<sup>9</sup> we like to think of people on the street as always on their way. the act is impermanent. the location is simply a pinhole between point a and b.

<sup>10</sup> as per the instructions he received in our exchange.

captured this well-dressed man  
singing on the sidewalk

but the woman in the wheelchair  
told her husband first thing  
when she got home.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> let this be a lesson to you. there's a reason behind every crazy man's actions.

we watched the riots here

in our school's portables

but they didn't expect us

to ever learn anything.

vague memories linger,<sup>12</sup>

yet some of us are still

used to the substitutes<sup>13</sup> —

the static glass barriers

keeping us from tears.

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<sup>12</sup> apropos of nothing, i no longer think the great and enigmatic figures of our planet die before their time.

<sup>13</sup> eventually this will have all the swear words swapped out.

our fathers taught us to speak in monologues,

all judgment and how-to.

our mothers taught us to unlisten<sup>14</sup> —

bless them.

you love politics because your parents were clueless.

ooh. ooh. ooh<sup>15</sup>.

*integrity and tennis shoes.* sing, motherfucker.

it means something in this red-light<sup>16</sup> and black.

you won't make up your mind<sup>17</sup>, and in

Seattle, you bent yourself into your shirt and kept on<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> i've always thought of a tea party as a place where children go to make things up and learn how to gossip.

<sup>15</sup> i take it back you can't come over. you'll say things to lose and i'll do things to let you win.

<sup>16</sup> have you ever been stuck at a red light where the sun dipped just below your visor but you were waiting to make a left turn and you knew it was your turn next so you put your hand up to block the sun frantically dodging your head left and right while peeking through your fingers to see if you could just get out of that fucking sun and you dodged your head left and right to watch flashing red hands placate you

before you realize the sensors missed you and you had to wait out another cycle?

<sup>17</sup> haven't i? dude, that's like my most helpless kind of anger.

<sup>18</sup> i'm not saying i'm right, but you're wrong.

the documentary reeks of stock footage,  
proof you can parse a story out of anything.

sometimes you start listening to a song  
a few bars into the phrase and can't catch up.<sup>19</sup>

we knew he'd met an untimely death  
but the biopic only dedicates a sentence to it  
right before strings introduce the end credits.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> for me the other day it was *god is in the radio*, which i couldn't recognize until the chorus.

<sup>20</sup> here i make the separation permanent. it wasn't what i was watching, the champ's face heavily shadowed in the mid-afternoon sun, his hair mostly gone, and his voice like someone permanently clearing their throat. it wasn't even the heartwarming speech he gave that seemed to summarize everything about his legacy. it's the fallen figure, and our inability to incorporate it into the myth in any other way than a footnote.



if this moment had a soundtrack,

it would get funky, right now.

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mine, mine, mine, mine, mine, mine, mine, mine, mine, mine, mine mine, mine, mine, mine, mine,  
mine, mine, mine, mine, mine, mine, mine, mine, mine

this wasn't shot in sequence<sup>24</sup>

and three point lighting isn't natural.<sup>25</sup>

today we'll check our schedules

and block out a couple hours

before some other task crops up.<sup>26</sup>

we've got to get that first scene in the can,

otherwise we'll never understand how this begins.

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<sup>24</sup> i promise to put the timeline back in order when i'm done.

<sup>25</sup> we remember everybody as a sequence of moving pictures, but i don't think all of us are cut out for the iconography of the still shot. i have a picture of my grandfather standing on a baseball field in some Navy duds. he faces the camera while throwing back a beer, his other arm triumphantly posed against his hip. baseball bats are strewn about on the grass around him, and everyone in the background seems completely indifferent to the scene, as if epic poses that capture every early 20th century American stereotype happen every day.

<sup>26</sup> shoestrings are better as potatoes than budgets.

**Chas Hoppe** generally wins any staredown contest he has with his fish. He enjoys these nonsense activities quite regularly, as they are far more entertaining than the activities he engages in in order to pay his bills. Armed by his favorite mantra, "that'll do, pig," he has seen modest success with poems in Alligator Juniper, Glass, and Jeopardy. Although he keeps promising Joshua Young that he'll get better at submitting poems in the future, he finds reruns of Star Trek: The Next Generation to be sufficiently distracting. One day, one day.

**Joshua Young** does not write fun bios, he lets Chas have all the glory. He is the author of *When the Wolves Quit: A Play-in-Verse* (Gold Wake Press). He lives in Chicago where he studies poetry in the MFA program at Columbia College Chicago. He also teaches and serves as the Poetry Programs Assistant. For more information about his films, writings, and projects visit <http://thestorythief.tumblr.com>