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## Constructing Deseret

Dana Boam

*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

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CONSTRUCTING DESERET

by

Dana Boam

Bachelor of Arts  
University of Utah, Salt Lake City  
1987

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts**

in

**English**

**Department of English**  
**University of Nevada, Las Vegas**  
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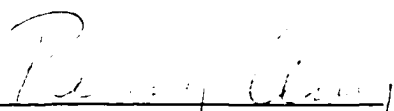
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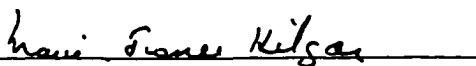
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ABSTRACT

**Constructing Deseret**

by

Dana Boam

Dr. Claudia Keelan, Examination Committee Chair  
Professor of English  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

*Constructing Deseret* is an examination of the epistemological assumption that perfect knowledge equals perfect being. It follows my progression as a poet from imitation of Yeats and Shakespeare, and traditional forms, such as sonnet, villanelle and haiku, to the investigation and validation of my own styles and forms. For the early poems the reaching of insight and wisdom is the goal of the poem. Next I look at nature and the world as a source of knowledge and standard of perfection. What follows is a rejection of the pursuit of education/perfection in order to embrace a plain looking at self, an attempt to reconcile striving for perfection with an Emersonian ideal of self-knowledge.



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## PREFACE

In his preface to *Leaves of Grass* Walt Whitman wrote:

I will not have in my writing any elegance or effect or originality to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains. I will have nothing in the way, not the richest curtains. What I tell I tell for precisely what it is. Let who may exalt or startle or fascinate or soothe I will have purposes as health or heat or snow has and be as regardless of observation. What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition. You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me. (1006-07)

In my poetry I adopt as fully as possible this renunciation of “curtains”. I reject the use of poetic devices as obscuring the issue of interest to me--my composition as a testament of language alive. William Carlos Williams states it this way: “write carelessly so that nothing that is not green will survive” (*Paterson*, 129). The project on these pages concerns English language used in poetry in a “green” and “curtainless” manner.

My undergraduate degree was in French. I achieved excellent grades on every homework assignment and test throughout my study, yet still can't compose a sentence without much thought and application of rules. When I speak it's with an apology for my ineptitude. After college I lived in Japan, where I purposely avoided textbooks and declined any invitation for instruction in the language. Since my job was to speak

English all day every day, my neighbors and new friends wanted to practice English with me, and I lived with an American friend, I was not fully immersed in Japanese. Yet I spoke Japanese more fluently, and understood more widely in six months what I'd strained to acquire for five years while learning French.

In rejecting the trappings of poetry I seek to recreate this experience. Perhaps other poets use poetic devices so effortlessly that the purposes of form and content are not crossed, as they are for me. In my work adherence to forms and adopting structures makes poetry a game, a skill, a vivisection. I seek to speak plainly in the present, allowing pre-language to operate in my writing. I define pre-language as that state of language in which the sign, signifier and signified exist but are unknown to the language user. In Japan I saw people speaking and understanding, but the sounds didn't attach to meanings for me at that time. Later I did possess meanings for these sounds and their contexts, but they were meanings that reflected my own understanding of the words. In my poetry I examine the way the reader engages in this same process.

I didn't start writing poetry until I was thirty. For years before that I wanted to write, thought about writing, and wrote in my head to please myself. Before I could begin writing poetry on the page I felt I had to resolve the question of audience. Who am I writing for? Do I write for those who understand? To make others understand? Is my goal as a poet related to Keats' negative capability or aligned with Wordsworth's concept of the egotistical sublime? Fortunately, a deadline forced my hand and I wrote a poem which was read by twelve readers. Their range of reading skills varied from uninformed to highly skilled, and their intimacy with me ranged from those who knew

me well, to those who didn't know me and didn't care to. What I learned from that first poem is that the answers I was laboring to uncover had little consequence. The variety of readings of that one poem made plain the power and responsibility the reader carries in the reader/writer relationship.

When Roland Barthes called for the "death of the author" he pinpointed one dynamic in the reader/writer relationship that goes largely unexamined to this day. Barthes' questioning of the writer's higher position, as the giver of experience or wisdom through language, states only part of this relationship. His demystification of the author still gives the author principal power--even if that power is to allow readers their own interpretations; Barthes assumes that power is the author's to give. The significant second part is the freedom this positioning gives the reader. For once the reader determines that what is being read is literature, and for the most part this classification is made by the status of the author, the reader assumes the powers of interpretation that lead to responses to that literature as individual as the reader. I believe it is this assertiveness on the reader's part that results in the opacity of language, rather than Jakobson's axis, which the author manipulates.

The evidence of the reader's power was presented with my first poem, but I didn't accept it. I believed that the reason individual readers had individual responses was that I wasn't a good enough writer to convey exactly what I meant to convey. I still believed that I had the power and responsibility, as the author, to direct the reading of my work. I felt I had achieved as much in term papers. I knew how to present my point of view in a convincing manner in the realm of research and criticism, surely I could do

as much in poetry.

My early work reflects this perspective. The poetry I enjoyed was about the attainment of pearly drops of wisdom, distilled from life experiences by a greater sensitivity and intellect than others enjoyed. Early on I read Yeats and Dickinson, who share an intellectual discussion in their work that intrigues me. They considered important topics: God, love, country, creating; and they wrote in a condensed fashion that I enjoyed. Yeats' more compassionate "Easter 1916" was the model for "Signs of the Times," my own look at patriotism. Shakespeare and Donne created beauty on the page, in the form of monuments or little worlds, that were as tangible as sculpture or painting to me. I imitated the work of these four poets, using their styles, their intensity of questioning and seeking of answers, and I wrote very short poems. I was convinced I had to have some wisdom to impart before taking up the reader's time, and strove to speed up the process of enlightenment to make my work worthy. I tried to package my work in traditionally accepted ways: counting syllables, laboring over lines, checking off the use of each poetic device in each poem, if possible.

Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks assert flatly : "No form, no poem" in *Understanding Poetry* 561. Although it seems an unlikely combination, many language poets seem to agree with Brooks and Warren. For whether the poet throws the dice to determine the next word or line, feeds the information into a computer to ensure its random arrangement, or tosses scraps of paper in the air, each one imposes form on the chosen content. Ideally, the line between form and content blurs so completely that form no longer supports content, but becomes it. Whether this blending occurs at the

level of the poem interests me, and my next group of poems negotiates this question.

In order to widen my scope from the level of the poem I adopted two stances: first, I gave up having something worthwhile to say; and second, I attempted more open-ended poems. I had had enough readers by that point to convince me that no matter how plainly I wrote, no matter how carefully I followed the rules, no matter how transparent I tried to make a poem, the important message that I envisioned would not get delivered to the reader. Instead I wrote poems about what was around me, rather than inside me. In some sense this relates to Keats, since he labored in his poetry to become what he wrote about. I admired his subordination of ideas to words, theme to sounds and senses. "Desert Suite" tries to abandon intellect, yet it is unable to resist the Emersonian ideal of looking to nature for answers. My goal wasn't to become the desert I write about, but to change the focus of my inquiry: instead of looking inside for answers I looked outside for them. I have not been able to stop looking entirely.

I suppose it's fair to say that my purpose in my later poems is expression. This sounds suspiciously close to what every artist condemns as self-expression, wholly separate from Art, and perhaps it is. But as the next step in my progression, here I attempt to deflate the immediacy of knowledge acquisition, no longer expecting much from any poem or group of poems. My purpose is not to construct a grammar in each poem, but to widen my scope as much as possible before looking at the grammar that is at work. This idea is similar to theories that dispute the existence of chaos or randomness. By examining the situation on a cosmic scale, that accounts for all places and all times, patterns become clear that were invisible or counter-intuitive on all

smaller scales. By retaining my diction and syntax in the forms in which I write them. I am perhaps only revisiting the native vs. natural debate, but possibly, I am opening a way to view language at work. Said another way, I prefer to consider William Carlos Williams' *Patterson*, not the "plum" poem; when I think about Emily Dickinson, "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass" fades before the body of work contained in her "fascicles".

Eavan Boland and David Lehman both compare writing poetry to painting.

Boland says that the "precedents for this [the poems she was beginning to write] were in painting" (*Object Lessons* 252). In *The Line Forms Here* Lehman compares writing to construction, and also to a "painter experimenting on canvas" (242). My reading of this instruction is that the function of each line is to delineate, fill in, define, clarify, set off or amplify. Lehman calls this the "grammar of emphasis" (9). Free verse's "potential for enjambment," (9) and its emphasis on words that are "capitalized," "first," or "rhythmically stressed," (12) combine with the "manipulation of the space between and around the lines" (14) to create poetry. My form is my syntax, the language of my life about my life. Without the constructions of Lyn Hejinian's repetitions, without the decorations of allusions that pretend to communicate with another, and with attention on the body of work, I approach gaining knowledge about the way a life is depicted in language.

I've chosen my title to represent the structuralist, deconstructive and post-modern poles my views seem to orbit between. I believe in pre-language, and I give that notion play in my work: not in the use of morphemes or words, but in privileging resistance to image, metaphor, and imposed forms. I recognize the awesome power of



language to shape our world, but where language poets use fragments, repetition and montage to chip away at language's grip, I adopt a passivist attitude to their activism. Rather than striking at the core of the colonizing power of language, I allow myself to flow past, around or over that rock in the river. Like Pozzo, I can't see the way out of language--especially by using language--but I will go "On!" Deseret is the Latter-Day-Saint term for "promised land."

## POEMS

“Few women made homes on the desert by choice. Most of them followed her man to Las Vegas while he sought wealth here. For a woman the elusive secret of happy tent life was to have a clean house.”

--Stanley W. Paher

*Las Vegas: As it began--as it grew*

PART ONE

EARLY POEMS

### Sleepless Woman Visits Doctor

The iron wedge is 2 inches wide at eye level  
and 5 out the back of the head.

The shaft passes through the left hemisphere  
and maxillary sinus.

A steel heel keeps the neck from resting on the pillow.  
from occipital protuberance to second cervical vertebra.

*Try to relax.*

Feet and hands are dry ice

and don't generate or marshall heat under blankets.

Heating packs on maple legs warm contact spots only.

(Wood's an ineffective conductor.)

Inevitable cold hardens each trapezius  
into Lucite.

*You need more exercise.*

Lying on side, front, back, covered or not,

Semi-darkness, light, never full dark.

Reading scripture until the eyes close.

As they do there's yellow behind them.

The voice starts,

"Out of bed - accomplish something".

*I wish I had that problem.*

What not to forget and how to remember it,

A revised budget, a five-year plan,

Goal-setting, evaluation, criticisms, praise,

List-making, replaying, re-visiting,

Multi-level emotion and thought symbiosis.

Sharp-edged, magnified, clear.

*There's a reason you don't want to sleep.*

Doctor, please give me the pill that will

bring sleep. I don't ask for rest.

Just simple unconsciousness.

Resting is too active. It involves

Processing and reworking; I'm too tired.

I want to turn the screen off.

*I don't really see much of a problem here.*

## Single. 32

She fell for the five-foot Brazilian.  
And the handsome divorced man who  
    Though he paid not a cent  
    For their food nor their rent.  
Cried when he spoke of his children two.

The polygamist tried to be careful  
    To make it appear as if  
    He wasn't devout.  
    He was checking it out.  
To a young man she ran with a sniff.

This young man was known as a groper.  
    But still she gave him a chance.  
    Perhaps he was smart  
    Or had a good heart,  
    Perhaps he could ballroom dance.

Her Japanese friend kept on writing,  
    To him she had given her heart.  
    But he never would visit  
    For always the 'biz it  
    Conspired to keep them apart.

The rest of the year kept her busy.  
    There were so many left to date:  
    The one who was gay and  
    An Iranian strongman;  
She searched fruitlessly for a mate.

## Tankas

Blond, beautiful boy,  
spinning serve and backhand slice,  
lobs that drop just in.  
Is it the player or his  
game that is more admirable?

Sweat, breathe, lift and hold.  
Twenty reps, and now five more.  
Squat, up, stretch, up, lunge, up, turn.  
Some days all I can do is  
watch the workout video.

Twenty-five, virile,  
he has beer breath at 7  
a.m., vagabond.  
Worse than the drunks are those who  
earnestly try to help them.

LANDSCAPING

My husband and I  
argue  
about the difference between  
and native  
natural.

He is too kind-hearted to be any good at weeding.

I have worked four years at a nursery.

I am in the top 10% of English speakers. I am right because

He is not wrong  
because he's a man.

## Vacation without Children

We swear: every other sentence.

We eat wherever, whenever, whatever: in quiet restaurants, crowded diners,  
in places with only stools.

We sleep long and take naps in public places: remembering dreams.

We read the daily newspaper: not bothering to dress.

We laugh with each other: forgiving tone-of-voice offenses easily.

We inspect museums, bookstores, and music stores: Art in America, Kinokunia,  
Carl Fischer.

We ingest plays, concerts, shopping and conversation: Brian Friel, Yo-Yo Ma,  
Glassworks.

We are a deliberate full-time mother and a dedicated father-provider: at week's end,  
we are almost ready to go home.



## Signs of the Times

Business was good the last few years,  
Signs were in high demand.  
Cost of materials remained  
Quite low. labor the same.

Melissa could afford grad school:  
Finish her thesis and  
Earn her master's in social work.  
Open a free clinic.

Nathan could now coach Little League,  
And attend the sports camps to  
Learn strategies and techniques of  
Winning while having fun.

He could pay their medical bills,  
Left from unwealthy times.  
Next year they'd go on vacation.  
If sales continued strong.

So every day Neil went to work.  
Neatly lettering signs:  
TRYING TO SURVIVE HONESTLY,  
VIETNAM VET PLEASE HELP.

## Rate of Exchange

I don't know, Cindy.  
if we need that "last little push"  
for extra definition.  
When I see beautiful women's  
bodies I think they look expensive.

They look back at me  
and wonder how I can pay the price  
of looking lumpy under clothes  
or missing Junior Prom.

### Shakespeare Never Writ

I must here, in the marriage of true minds,  
Admit impediments. What we call love  
Tries hard to mend when alteration finds,  
And bends, extends to straining, then will shove.  
O, yes! it is an ever-fixed mark:  
Correctness found in self, emulation.  
Untrue to spirited, initial spark  
From opposites held in close relation.  
Once we adored our due of perfectness,  
Deemed complementary, insightful, rare.  
Residing with our love replaced largesse,  
Changed traits to defects difficult to bear.  
Should we accede, converted to a twin  
Our love would leave to seek what we had been.

## Camille

My son smelled like Camille in bed tonight.  
She's sat him 3 or 4 weeks in my stead.  
I've tended him three years - this can't be right.

I fed him, rocked him, walked him in the night.  
I never noticed my scent on his head.  
My son smelled like Camille in bed tonight.

Each day we left our house for some new site.  
Exploring, stimulating, on I lead.  
He's happy at her house - this can't be right.

At home it's Play-Dough, markers, paints, Lite-Brite.  
Then Creepy Crawlers, Things That Go, bake bread.  
My son smelled like Camille in bed tonight.

"It's colorful." he showed his picture bright.  
A term, locution never by me said.  
I taught him many words - this can't be right.

I searched the town for house and head upright.  
Abundant garlic, mown grass, pencil lead,  
My son smelled like Camille in bed tonight.  
Can't stay at home, can't work - this can't be right.

## Desert I

The desert is a contraceptive.  
Who could conceive without the smell of chloroplasts winding down.  
Sweatsalt holding heat in skin against the cooling stars?

What's fertile about grit and cactus?  
Cicadas aren't crickets. sand stones aren't mountains. nor are Joshuas trees.  
The rain here doesn't wet underclothes.

No one is born in the desert.  
Why have we come for green from green. expecting fecundity  
Among thorns. before a furnace. in achromaticity?

1996

Play-Doh on CD-ROM.

## Quiz

I don't have time for Dr. Feelgood, a rattlesnake shake or to kickstart my heart. I miss Klaus Meine's hard without u; Rudi's no nonsense guitar is relegated to abs work. Nowadays I dig, dig, dig for bare necessities. It's pathétique, but Rock mann is off.

I can't remember the last time I choreographed the requiem and conducted lacrimosa. I don't indulge in the three or either of the trios. Cliburn is vetter than Halen since Sammy. As if def I never mind the bullocks.

My first husband was Stevie Ray Vaughan; I didn't have enough money for Mick. He was looking for me somewhere and I had to catch the first thing smoking, but he didn't mind Ray, some pundits, those 12/8 cops and the Edge, Nightwatchman, King of America and Hubert Sumlin.

With my stipend I'm no longer in dire straits, but today as I give (said the little stream) to an angel from on high I wonder: Is there a cure? Will there be new clear days? Can I keep the fire?

### Honeymoon

Ah, love! Hawaiian sun to tourist fair.  
Warms gently, newly, unfamiliar skin.  
From coloring to blisters unaware,  
*Koni koni* island hour sibylline  
Our tourguides warned us of *papa'a la*.  
Their own and others' deeds a lesson burned.  
We knew we were outside the reach of law  
Explorers screened, and so their counsel spurned.  
On looking back our skin still blushes dark.  
We wonder if we should have stood so bare.  
A lack of scars from dazzling sunshine's mark.  
Could bring content to continental air.  
Yet don't we proudly tell *aloha's* tale -  
What scrapbook's full if missing this detail?

*koni koni* - pangs of love  
*papa'a la* - sunburn  
*aloha* - love



PART TWO

DESERT SUITE

Gather ye the fruits of this world and store them in a house  
unto the Lord shore up, provide, replenish, sustain, survive.

Rain running over tap  
roots effective over time.

Desert rock not sand shelters  
from robbery or settling. Soft creatures

I'd like to sleep through the day and wake for the night.  
Miss the work and light and use the night sky with stars.

The rabbit sees cars rumbling over rocks as if asphalt.  
Raising dust and dirt: they will not follow themselves.

Pointed yuccas, cactus thorns, small rocks of a lakebed, crust of earth, twisted metal,  
flattened beer cans, deposits of excess concrete, landscaping rocks and PVC, lizard  
claws, scorpions, tarantulas, developers, hermits, young rich, loose big dogs, foxes.  
Rabbits, birds - even hummingbirds.

Brittle, broken, healthy  
brown. Water makes weak.

I live here like it's anywhere else.  
(Mothers leave their babies to bring back food.)

Weakening myself and my child with antibiotics.  
Hoping to outwit but falling.

Strep throat, sinusitis, ear infection.  
Not their complications, but their simple presentation.

We don't control rain yet, but we should.  
Main causes, not periphery's.

We went into the desert with a guide and picked up trash, looking for the same colors.  
The synthetic is not found in the natural.

Rusted vanilla buttes, easily weathered  
Sage, fawn, periwinkle, slate, ginger, cumulus.

Cat-pee vinegar Texas Ranger flowers  
Non-native crinkling sage scent.

Molds that shouldn't prosper in the desert.  
Dust and pollens cover desert my deseret.

The desert was made for me.

It's the gift I gave myself after slaving through college until I knew when to quit.

I know an opportunity when I see it and I know what to do with it, too.

I can build homes.

I can build golf courses and green belts, change master plans and rezone boundaries.

I can build multi-level and one-level handicapped access.

I'll make the roofs the same colors as the mountains - Tri-State can do a special mix.

I can set speed limits and build private drives and crossroads.

Hotel mix and eldaricas for the perimeter. Slumpstone, fauxcrete, syncrete?

A sign. Tasteful - not YESCO.

I see progress, invention, building, not the dishes in the sink, the clothes folded on the bed or the papers lying around.

Single family detacheds, PUDs, condos - those things allow her to be concerned with the dishes and laundry.

If she worked she wouldn't notice that crap either.

On-site financing. Conforming and jumbos, EZ-DOCS. I can calculate risks.

That's why I left Matthew in the car. Someone could have seen him and taken him, but they didn't.

I know what it takes to make a deseret.

To her children she is rainforest,  
to husband fields and mines.  
house four seasons.  
position ocean.  
To herself she is desert: deep rooted, unappealing, shelterless, gift-giver.  
Single planet.

She smells heat rising,  
hears iron in sandstone.  
tastes licorice mint tea of starlight.

Can't see the mountains and the wind blows.  
Without sun everything is two shades darker:  
Echo Trail becomes Sierra Vista, Fallen Leaf Harwood.  
Expectation presses the diaphragm.  
Second-nature calculations begin:  
How dark are the clouds? How thick do they appear? How much of the sky is covered?  
How long since the last rain? How strong the smell of humidity?  
How welcome?  
Approximation: by noon.  
Hear no birds, cars don't go out, background muffled.  
Work without windows, take jacket to lunch.  
Back safely disappointed. Recalculate.  
Work until hungry. Work out.  
Brow and windshield unreplenished.  
No insects or birds move, passers don't talk, twelve shades now.  
Drive slowly watching horizon, not slick.  
Smell static electricity of vanilla wafer crumbs.  
Eat outside, air dense and greying.  
Three-quarter moon.

In this desert rodeo is a college sport, offering full scholarship and living expenses for riders, three mounts, and additional equipment as needed.

Valets make more than nurses. cocktail waitresses more than professors.

The blue sky never fails me.

I can go to the grocery store or pharmacy any time--and I can go looking any way I want because I know I won't see anyone I know.

I can start over. get lucky, be important.

The blue sky never fails me.

I can reach civilization in a day and the mountains in an hour.

Gravel pits buy PM 10 credits.

I can be alone.

New York on a street corner.

Rhodes builds 9000 homes on 1000 rural preservation acres.

I can be alone.

I want to be desert: requiring little; continuing.  
No struggle to decline because no one would ask,  
bearing heat and blows of wind without comment.  
Witness to day light and night sky,  
small flowers secretly bloomed.  
100 degree range.  
Unprofitable to mine or farm,  
allowing to erode what others have built upon me.  
Life as lakebed or desert floor - mine.



Rear legs first, I guess.

I didn't think about lizards getting caught in the Roach Motels.

Can't tell how long this one has been here. His tail sure isn't stuck.

If I slide this cardboard between the  
putty knife

nope. They're all sticking to the glue.

Carefully with the razor blade.

Crescent pushes.

Heel--I guess it's the heel--free.

Forward and to the side. slowly detach the toes from the bottom of the box.

One leg free!

Quick--put down the cardboard so he doesn't step. Ok.

Now don't scratch me, I'm getting you out of this.

Again. Crescent pushes. We're making progress.

Just hold still...

Yeah, well, I bet you can't understand why it took 45 minutes to set that lizard free.

You can't understand why building homes is more interesting than folding laundry.

"The sun burns in a lovely, perfect sky: the day is very hot. I pause when necessary beneath pinyon pine or juniper for rest and shade and for a precious drink of water. Also, I will admit, for recreation: to admire the splendor of the landscape, the perfection of the silence." Edward Abbey

"Now the working world, see, is like this desert.  
 There are scorpions and rattlesnakes.  
 The men are the scorpions, they only come out at night.  
 Women practically come equipped with black light goggles, and men, you know, they know their own kind.  
 But the women exist in this beauty.  
 They live among arches, hoodoos, slot canyons and seeps.  
 lava flows, hawks, winds.  
 And they get you to believe the world is like this.  
 But as you're going along, you step too close--and BAM!"

Laughing, hands in pockets, continues the hike.

"Things not Christian," Diane Panozzo.  
"Keeping no Sabbath they work night and day," Peter says.  
So much work to keep order.  
I must teach my children and make it easy:

Melt anything that's left out,  
Blow away what remains.  
Deep roots stay put while tumbleweeds move from room to room.  
There's always dust.

We turn to two reflections in the ditch.  
Footlong tail and angular ears.  
We couldn't see.  
*The honor of seeing one.*  
If we could get one to come around more often.  
To visit at night with the moon.  
To pick us.  
To eat lizards that steal pink strawberries.  
The ground squirrels that pierce orange tomatoes.  
Roof-tile birds and their splotches.  
Rats of the compost.  
We discuss ways.

When it smells 94 at 9:30  
I walk north.  
Saturn dyes  
Yellow brown white to blue.  
Out my right eye casino neon.  
Six o'clock stars  
Testify of no neighborhood.  
Dayblind at four.  
Five draped stars align, move in.  
Land.

To live in the desert is to know sand as water.  
Birds and bats without canopy.  
To live in the desert is to taste alkali,  
Caliche-cleansed.  
To live in the desert is to have no word for damp.  
Smell daily battle with Bag Balm.

Strumming guitar of flies  
lawnmower start of bumblebees  
Nevada dog

Relative of wolf, coyote and god  
(what difference at order level?)  
danced a song as it moved away  
harps plucked  
lizard-flesh smell  
the blood that ran into his mouth  
outside fangs

After the Saints,  
Octavius Decatur and  
Mrs. Gass had a ranch.  
a welcome.  
Potosi yielded lead and silver  
Walking Paiutes  
warned of Mohaves.



I live here like it's anywhere.  
Leave my baby to bring back food.

Weaken myself with antibiotics and my child  
Strep, sinus, otitis in simple presentation.

I live here without understanding  
water storage in cactii  
noise amplified in the desert quiet  
ten feet between homes  
molds prosper.

Relearning natural laws in new contexts.  
Hoping for rain because it's overcast.

I live here, hear and see  
cicadas scratching metal  
my son licking spills off McDonald's floor  
uneven regularity of traintracks

While I endure the delay.

PART THREE

VALIDATION OF TWO

## Imagining

The author steps away.  
 I want to be one.  
 For language leaves the body blameless.  
 Those women who tell the truth: it's enough.  
 The numbers occur in spite, not because.

The incense-maker's green hands, smalt-tinged *gi*.  
 Our *dojo* fills with dance, fragrance.  
 Sue recognizes a temple and worships.  
 I accept a tour with clipboard English,  
 And samples to burn in my husband's house.  
 Waving smoke to head, to stomach, to heart.  
 The sticks burn quickly, and this is no shrine.

I take another index card, deal one.  
 Face cards in this pastime  
 Create lives lived within a language.  
 My husband wants a massage, my son,  
 My son wants his midnight snack and story.  
 "The Alien and the Anaconda."

Once there was an alien who landed in a rain forest.  
 An anaconda tried to squeeze the breath out of him,  
 But the alien didn't breathe through nose and lungs.  
 The snake tired and the alien spoke the hissing tongue of serpents.  
 "Why were you squeezing me?"  
 "I'm the largest of the boa constrictors--I constrict.  
 And I'm hungry. For almost two years I haven't had a juicy bite."  
 "Well, you're glad you didn't eat me. I'm an alien.  
 If you had eaten me you would have tasted alloys, zippers and broken plastic.  
 If you had swallowed me whole, stretched your mouth to twice its size,  
 Your blood and guts would have poured out all over."  
 "So actually, this was a favor that didn't look like a favor."

I lack imagination so I keep the story short.  
 A few lines each night about whatever seems real,  
 No narration of color pictures in my head.  
 Facts, reasonable dialogue, no embellishments.  
 There are twenty installments, I reassure my son.

“Would you return the favor.” asked the alien.  
“Show me where the people are. They talk.”  
“What for? People take more than they need; smoke.  
When a human comes I glide away.  
We talk. And not always about ourselves and what we want.”  
“I have a message for them.”  
“A message won’t save them. Pretty soon  
They will have used everything up and will die.  
Cockroaches. by the hundred millions will crawl over their bodies.  
Bite, bite, bite.”  
I nip at my son’s stomach and scare him a little.  
Although cockroaches are detritus-feeders,  
I’m unsure whether they eat decaying human flesh.  
“It’s good I have come now. I have a message they will have to figure out.”

My son is bored with my moralizing.  
He resisted it from the womb.  
Like Ikuta, he sees things and requires nothing else.  
*Kata* is as important as strength in kicks and punches.  
And deserves the same amount of practice.  
Although Fujiwara reserves it only the last minutes of class.  
Ikuta doesn’t require the foreigners to count out loud.

## Darwin

The goal of evolution is perpetuation.  
Not happiness.  
It isn't that viruses, silverfish or people are smart.  
Adapting to suit circumstances.  
It's luck.  
If you already have resistance to a pesticide  
You live to reproduce.  
If you're a virus and have to hijack other cells,  
The consequent faulty replication allows an  
Accelerated rate of mutation.  
Bane of R&D Departments worldwide.  
Drug addicts, sexual offenders.  
Poor, ignorant, dirty.  
Mormon, Catholic  
Make themselves numerous.  
Wasps stay together  
Repeating repertoires: explain, demand, sulk, forgive.  
Not reproducing.  
Not moving towards happiness.

## Repas à la Déprimée

### The mixed greens:

a house in a tax-free state,  
 a paid-for car,  
 front landscaping,  
 enough space between the house and the neighbors.  
 those dissolving Coca-Cola commercials.

### Soup du jour:

telephone calls from friends you've known since grade school.  
 weekly catch-ups with parents.  
 the son who runs shouting to the door at the sound of your key in  
 the lock. the husband whose fidelity exempts him from  
 unnecessary relationships.

### Crab Meunière:

"Enthusiasm. credentials, emerging professionalism."  
 "Recommended for rehire."  
 Reorganizing the closet. reusing brown paper.  
 "Yes! The baby walked today.  
 And I--I cleaned the floor you stand on."

### Fresh Fruits (always in season):

Custom-made curtains,  
 Hand-quilted baby blankets,  
 Home-grown tomatoes.  
 Whole wheat banana bread.  
 Sliced fresh onions.

### Coffee with cream:

Eyes that see  
 And weep.

## Delicious

In my mother's house I peel an apple.  
Her quick breath is forgiveness.  
The paring knife cuts small pieces.  
My sister-in-law rises to describe  
A gadget that cores apples and cuts them into proper slices.  
She has it at home. She should have thought to bring it.  
She tells me where I can buy one.  
My father says nothing,  
But picks up an apple, rubs it on his shirt.  
Bites in.  
My mother gets up as I choose another apple.  
One is enough for four children.  
"The vitamins are in the skin," she can't help saying now.  
"Side by side with pesticide." I rhyme silently,  
And I continue separating maroon wax from polystyrene.

Sub

I was an idiot. How was I to know?  
That holding a pencil was hard,  
Then making the line, the circle.  
The one desperate for recess, denied.  
At the end of one week, a pencil  
For me. I love you.  
I was wrong and he loved me.  
Loved the pushing, shaping, molding, telling,  
Loved.



## Plenty Act

Living guilty

I reject my mother's legacy:

*Continue in patience until ye are perfected.*

God's standard of righteousness

Defying

Natural laws

Homeostasis, inertia, gravity.

Things don't fall up.

*We believe all things, we hope all things,*

*We have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things.*

Greed is the root of religion.

Charity: give to someone to receive.

Faith: God will make things better.

Forgiveness: become divine.

I look up these quotations in my grandfather's triple.

*Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price*

Marked with name and date.

No red underlining,

Each page clean and flat.

When I was ten I lied to my best friend and told her she had to wear a dress to Primary. She wore pants every day to school and had no mother. My mother would say, "Wouldn't Jenny look so much nicer in a dress. She ought to try it sometime and see how she likes it."

I told Jenny Primary was fun. (It was sitting in the nearly-empty chapel on Tuesdays after school, singing, listening to prayers and lessons.) Everyone except Jenny came. We were both new that year and my mother didn't mind a bit that I played with a non-member. She said I should invite her to Primary and tell her to wear a dress.

Jenny figured that one out the minute she walked through the chapel doors (seem to say to me, "Shh...be still.") She didn't come back to Primary, but we were still friends. I instructed her in soccer skills in my backyard, careful to allow her to score without it being obvious.

[untitled]

A man's life is competition.  
He competes with sleep and adult conversation.  
Then comes Little League, upper-classmen.  
Handsome friends.  
He wins a wife if he's meeting demands at work,  
and outscoring every other male.  
At the birth of his son he's matched with  
A younger, smarter, more beautiful inculpable.  
For death he must remain strong,  
Lest breaking down cause to disappear  
His life's striving.

Neat

"I know how that is." he said.  
Fingering my poem.  
Did anything I'd written have to do  
With black ponytails and black jeans?  
Female experience  
Possessed. taken over. taken away.

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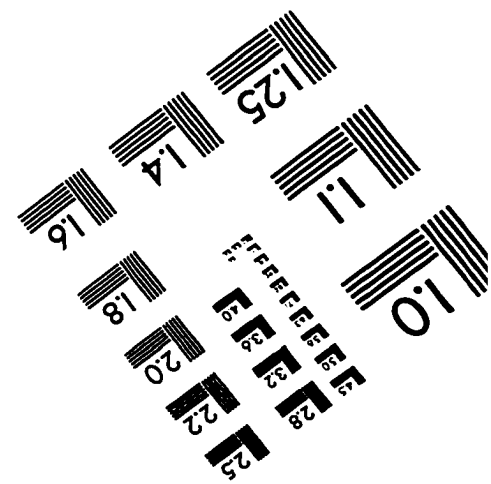
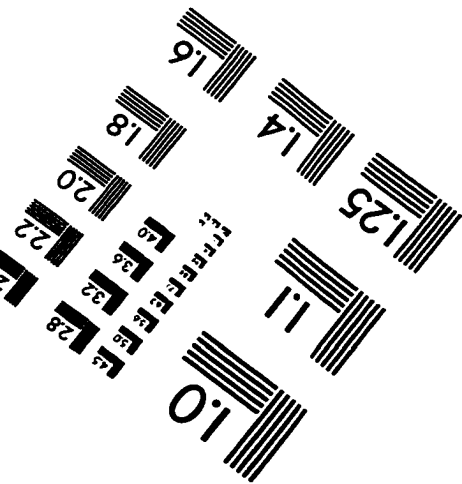
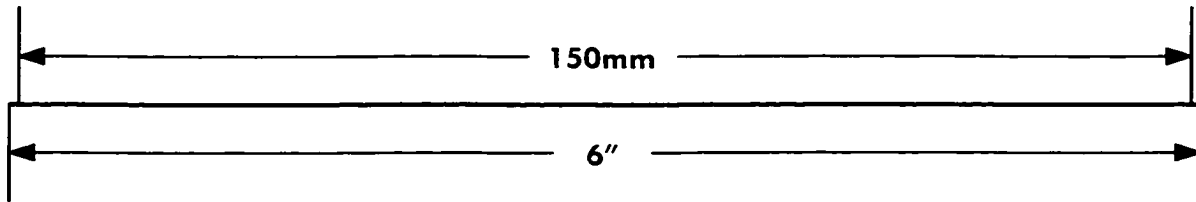
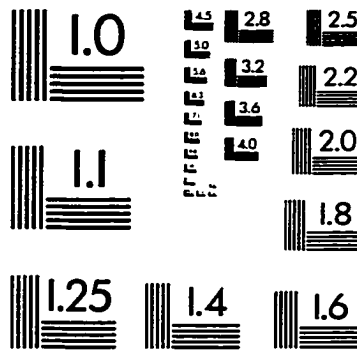
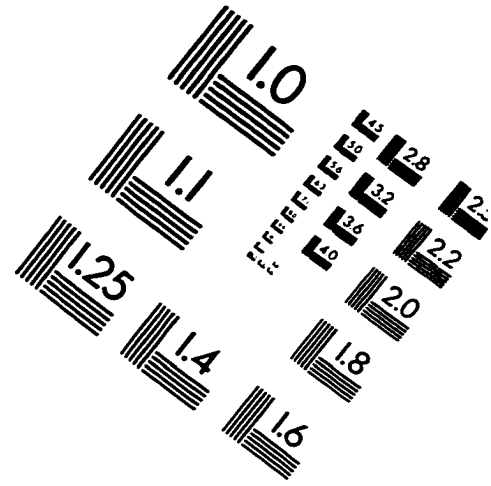
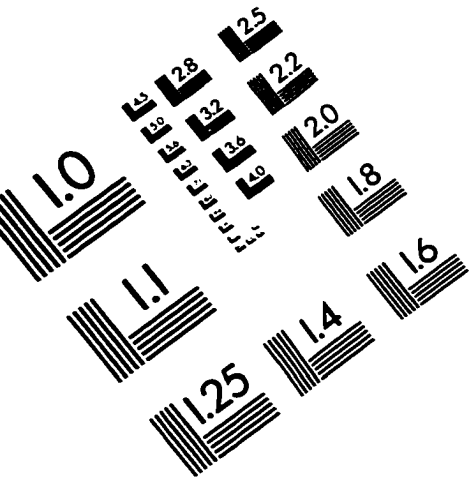
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