

Speaker A

Artists: Theatre Replacement and Vanessa Kwan
Event Date: October 2021

Installation description: Speaker A is situated in a public pedestrian breezeway at the busy corner of 2nd Avenue and Main Street in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Three speakers are installed in the ceiling panels approximately 16 feet above the ground. Inset into the concrete below is a small brass letter, A, B or C, making the exact spot that the listener should stand to hear the voices and accompanying music.

The stories fall into three 'streams', each broadcasting from a distinct speaker: A: Restless Futures, B: Speculative Pasts, and C: Instructions for Care. In each, the narratives explore diverse perspectives on what it means to imagine the future, to mourn a loss from the past, and to describe, here in the present, how to care for something you cherish. Texts were written by 14 different writers and performed by 14 distinct voices, and have been programmed to play in randomized orders along with an audio soundtrack by sound designer Antoine Bédard – each time you experience them, the accumulated narrative will be unique. This transcript represents one pre-recorded 45-minute segment of Speaker A.

More information can be found here: speakerA.ca

Transcription by Arthi Chandra & Jamie Loh

[Vanessa:] (deep, mellow voice)

You are walking through that area, as you always do.

[pensive electronic track starts]

It is a community that operates differently from most. It's not the violence or the despair, but the shame that adheres itself to the inside of your body.

If you have any questions about the work on this transcript, please contact speakerAvancouver@gmail.com

[music continues]

[Su-Feh:] (higher voice with a slight Malaysian accent) You asked me to water your plants when you are gone. I never cared for plants. I never cared much for nature. I never truly understood, emotionally understood, all the fuss.

[music fades out]

The little vase in my hand is very tiny. The little pink flower poking out from among the thick leaves.

[music begins]

[Conor:] (deep voice) You are going to forget his name the second you see his face, the elevator doors will open to reveal him. If not this time, then tomorrow, or on the weekend. It seems you can't avoid him.

[music stops]

[Vanessa:] Place yourself in two places at once.

[music starts and reverberates for 2 breaths]

[Lorna:] (round, firm voice) You're in the car share. Looking for that place you remember. It has the part you need and you're sure it's on this street. Is it this side or the other? Is it this street? You don't remember that building or this one. They're both shiny, glass and steel, and mirroring one another.

[Lili:] (sharp, raspy voice) You spend all night waking into dreams of you waking into dreams that you know you're still inside of.

[bursts of music echo softly]

As you shower in the morning, you're aware that dreams can still be mornings. And morning can still be dreams but you continue. You figure that if you are awake, you had better not miss work.

[Lorna:]

[rapid music beats]

You answer your phone and you're happy to hear her voice. You know this means you have an errand to run.

[music continues to echo]

[**Donna:**] (pointed, clear voice) No one told you that you drift into *what if* thinking? What if that Honda Civic abandoned off of Highway 7 wasn't his? *What if* the police hadn't ignored you for so long? You're "*what if*" inquiries grow more fantastic every day. *What if* he's still alive? *What if* the Coroner Service Office is full of extraterrestrials? *What if* he's been taken to outer space? *What if*, as soon as he left this earth he discovered a profound sense of belonging and love like he never felt with you?

[light piano keys start]

No one told you grief would feel so agonizingly strange.

[**Su-Feh:**] You find that it's hard to distinguish whether you are uploading or downloading your life, your emotions.

[music fades]

Rather you are emoting to others. Your lives matter or it doesn't matter.

[lively music starts]

Your opinion isn't always welcomed, but it is better to be hated than ignored.

[**Conor:**] You will sleep in tomorrow. It's just a matter of getting through the night.

[music continues]

[**Gina:**] (calm, stable voice with a strong British accent) You sit in the chair. It lowers and reclines. A swab with pink gel is placed onto your upper gums and palate. They prepare the needle and tell you it will pinch a bit.

[sharp punctuating music beats]

They pierce your palate four times. You wait for the freezing to take hold and they prepare the rest of the instruments for the surgery. Your nose is numb. They hand you a pair of heart-shaped sunglasses to wear for protection. You open your mouth, and they hook the suction onto the left side of your mouth.

[ambient music starts]

They are temporarily called away. You feel your hands gripping your thighs.

[Norman] (deep, gravelly voice) You're about to cross the street where it happened. After years of rerouting you will reclaim the convenience of the old path. It's not about this intersection, it was just a cross section of circumstance. No, you can't un-remember, but you can conquer the crosswalk.

[Lorna:] Touch thumb to pinky to ring to middle to index to middle to ring to pinky and repeat. Use both hands.

[music starts and reverberates]

[Amber:] (bright, clear voice) The light shifts from golden to blue and you're still in the woods. This is a familiar trail, your go-to trail, and as cedar trees become dark silhouettes you're not worried. Layla—your blue heeler—isn't worried either. She runs her routine loop: darts ahead, disappears briefly, then bounds back to touch her nose to your pant leg. The blue haze darkens.

[suspenseful music starts]

You hear Layla's paws click across the wooden walkway, which means you're almost back to the parking lot. "Wait up, girl," you call. Layla doesn't loop back. Your cellphone flashlight barely sheds a narrow streak in front of you. Your feet meet the wooden slats, but no Layla. She barks. She's not on the trail anymore. You spin around, calling her, calling her.

[music echoes ominously]

Something cracks in the distance, like a dry branch breaking from a tree. A bear sighting notice is posted to the trailhead map— it's been posted all summer. Your voice is violently loud, "Layla!" Then she's suddenly at your side again. You get a whiff of wet dog smell. Her tail is up, but she's growling. Your hand trembles as you clip her leash on. "Good girl," you say, loudly. "Good girl. Let's go home."

[music fades]

[Norman:] You're cutting it close. Subconscious resistance to leaving? Skytrain City Hall underground, emerging in a grove of Marine Drive towers. Bridging the Fraser, jets close overhead pink and orange clouds storm the Salish Sea.

[calm ambient music]

Past the casino, where the lines split, the perfect terminus for plan abandonment. Barely an hour 'til boarding. You just have carry-on, you are decided. Belt off. Liquids ziplocked. Shoes off. Hands up. Scanned. Surrendering to flight.

[ambient music continues]

[Donna:] What she said was, "if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear." And instinctively it makes sense. You've done nothing illegal, nothing even immoral or objectly immoral anyway. But you know those things are relative. And there's that counter quote by one of those whistleblower guys that warns saying your right to privacy is dependent on your past behavior. It's like saying your right to free speech is dependent on having something to say or something like that. And it almost makes sense. You'll have to google it when you get home.

[Maiko:] (mid-range, breathy voice) A pitch or tone hitting minor notes. The lullabies your mother sings to you.

[silence]

When will you be born? Suddenly cold you shiver, cram your hands inside your pockets. The escalator into the underneath moves so slowly.

[guitar plucking starts]

It's impossible to know if you're moving at all. You look around but there are no distinguishing features. You have been going to work and now you are here. All around you swells the song of birds. At first you think you are imagining it, but you come to understand, there is a bird inside your jacket pocket. Feathers, so soft you want to cry.

[Vanessa:] You discuss the many ways you could begin. You succinctly list what is known to offer a point of departure.

[music starts]

They counter with what is unknown. You cannot begin.

[music continues reverberating]

[Vanessa:] Feel your feet on the ground right now. Imagine pushing down passing through the crust of this building, touching dirt relaxing into the grid. Touch the skin on the back of your neck and imagine lying down in the belly of the earth.

[Fumiko:] (child's voice) The salad you packed for lunch leaves you feeling hollow. You take the elevator down to the ground floor and exit the lobby. Maybe a yogurt or some skinless chicken breast you think.

[calm ambient track]

The rain has stopped although the skies are grey. As you enter the crosswalk, the rustle of rushes, the peep of small frogs. A blackbird trills, *cheerilee*, and you stop in your tracks. Close your eyes. The angry honking of a car horn. "Sara sara sara", the rushes whisper. A small stream wiffles against your shins. "Come this way", the water says, "Follow me".

[Vanessa:] Your therapist draws a circle on a notepad, asked you to find three objects in the room, throws a ball and you catch it. You think but don't ask: *Do I need to know all the things the past contains?*

[music continues]

[Lorna:] Sometimes you can hear the static hum of the sodium lamps just on the cusp of lighting up. Stuck in a cycle between on and off. It's like a car ignition, trying and trying to come to life but almost too soft to hear.

[music lightens, almost twinkling]

The lamps are paused, dimming up, but not on. Waiting for the light level to drop. To fully darken.

[music stops abruptly]

[Norman:] You are stepping out into Vancouver. It's trying to use its words.

[music starts]

Tech types talking content, discontent, malcontent. Pollsters vacuuming up stats. Real estate agents with smiles wide as Hollywood. Billboards with self-referential sales pitches. The Airbnb's from Madrid know Grouse shines northern light, and Broadway traverses East and West. But you'll be their guide to a nightcap, joining your Spanish improving by the ounce, though you have an early morning.

[music fades]

[Gina:] You feel them before you see them. The force of their thoughts precede them. They walk to the back of the space and watch you without actually seeing you. They project a future interaction upon your body –

[gentle, bright track starts]

one that you are not privy to.

[music fades]

[Vanessa:] You're walking home and it's the smell of cedar that makes your breath catch, and your heart snag in the weeds rooted at the bottom of your heart in still silty water. The cedar is probably just drifting over from an essential oil shop you can't afford –

[music starts and echoes]

but that's a smell that's home and even though you need to be here, you miss it there, and that makes the smoky sweet sting so bad that you feel your whole body cringe. Beneath you the concrete threatens to cave in, swallow you with wire and dirt. They've buried the light in the ground and the neon hum sings through the soles of your feet. That vibration makes you feel spectral glitched-out superimposed overlaid, and disintegrating.

[music continues softly]

[Su-Feh:] REST LESS NESS. You have lived here for longer than 10 years. You never travel. You don't get your bike fixed. LESS REST NESS. You only read from screens, never print. You get all food and groceries delivered to your door. Your download speed seems sluggish.

NESS LESS REST. You only text rarely call. You watch the evening news. You only speak one language. REST NESS LESS. You forget to stretch. You only eat the same thing for breakfast. You don't collect travel rewards points on your credit card.

[music stops abruptly]

LESS NESS REST.

[sharp electronic beats]

You don't talk to your neighbors in the elevator. You never go to the movies. You don't see live music anymore.

[music grows more urgent]

NESS REST LESS. You feel trapped inside your body. You feel trapped inside your head. It's been years since you danced. STER SSEL SSEN. You drive the same way to work every day. You have a specific outfit for every day of the week.

[music echoes louder]

You watch the same shows. SSEL STER SSEN. You haven't read a novel in years. Print makes you bored. Large gatherings of people are anxiety inducing.

[music slows down again]

SSEN STER SSEL. Crowds are terrorizing, oceans too vast, mountains overwhelm. SSEL SSEN STER. Ten years, no travel, no bike.

[music fades]

[Gina:] You have to pull over. The cedar is massive. It's growth unimpeded on the wide Boulevard.

[music starts, a curious tune]

But it's dead. So very dead. Petrified really. Every brown needle still clings to its desiccated branch, from bottom to top. You look in all four directions to see where it will land when it falls.

[music echoes softly]

[Lorna:] A raven caught your attention and you tried to ignore him, but he was so beautiful and friendly, you could not resist. It felt like it was someone you knew who had traveled over to the spirit world. Ravens are said to be messengers, and they can be messengers for many reasons. The Raven you saw feels like a friend, because you need to believe in the fact that there is a method of communicating between the spirit world and the human world. The Raven you were drawn to has been trying to reach out to you in different ways. And you haven't allowed yourself to see it. Because you're still in denial about the loss of that friend.

[music fades]

[Aryo:] (deep, strong voice with a slight Persian accent) You show it to me. It is a huge knife, a medieval dagger of a knife. Goth looking. You assure me, it's for safety, for emergencies –

[calm, electronic music starts]

for when things go wrong. For when nothing goes as planned. For when your toes curl up from fear. For when your hands never stop dripping with sweat.

[Fumiko:] The underneath, you left something there. But you also took a little, with you, in the pocket. The small bird, they flutter and flutter their wings. They're not panicked. A fledgling, who wants to fly.

[music continues]

[Whess:] (deep, clear voice) You're walking to the site of the old settlement, no matter what the land always remembers when it was loved best. On the way you wonder if it remembers you falling in love with it, and staying in love, even when it's looking under the weather. Even if it's strong back is bent, and it's knees aren't what they used to be. Even when there are six pack rings, cigarette filters from the old schoolers, chocolate wrappers, and wadded up protest flyers caught in its teeth. It's still got it going on, still holds everything that it needs to. You always tell it that, even if you're not sure that it helps, and even if you already have this idea that maybe you're the kind of lover it has and doesn't ever quite forget, but gets a little lost behind the ones that really love them up good.

[music continues]

[Vanessa:] You haven't called him in weeks. You think of him sitting alone with his thoughts,

resentment building like a storm.

[Quelemia:] (heavy, breathy voice) You check your email for the fourth time in the last hour. You were supposed to receive word today, but what time today? You check the original email. It doesn't say any specific time but it's already 4pm. Is that a good thing? Maybe they're sending rejection letters to everyone first.

[music abruptly quickens]

You know you probably didn't get in. You can feel it in your gut. But still, you're hopeful. You check your email a fifth time. What's that saying again? A watched pot never boils or is it a kettle or whatever, maybe a watched inbox will finally receive what you've been waiting for.

[Lorna:] He asked you in the elevator out of the blue. Where do you go when you want to be alone?

[music continues]

[Fumiko:] You want to find your way back.

[electronic track becomes vibrant, almost chirping]

You won't know if it is a place or a time. There is a small bird in your pocket. You want to look but wouldn't revealing the hidden make the bird disappear? You shake your head, enter the coffee shop and order an americano. "There's no bird," you tell yourself.

[chirping stops]

[Vanessa:] You're standing together now. Since you met, you've always gotten to talking about the highlights.

[electronic track starts and echoes softly]

The more you talk, the more you realize you've been at the same shows together for over five years, always within arm's length, but you'd never spoken to one another. Knowing that sinks something heavy in the pit of your stomach. But at least now you've got the bones to carry it. There are moments when you still feel alone. Other moments you feel yourself getting buried beneath the reverb. The baseline is messy and it still takes an entire set for you to warm up to your own insatiable desire to move in a town that hates to move. But

eventually, you start crashing into the wall of sweat and meat and you're not even mad when you collide with someone holding a drink and a half a cup of beer washes up over your face. The air gets hot in your lungs and feels like clay. In the mess you drift and collide and grin every time you find one another again. Sloppy retellings of the ways you met condensed into three minute bursts of ambling cascades of violent carefully clumsy screeching and tripping fingers.

[music continues]

[James:] (low, slightly hoarse voice) Shift your weight from one foot to the other. Lift the soul of your right foot two millimeters off the ground. Make it imperceptible.

[Vanessa:] You sit in the meeting thinking about where you are not, and what you are not doing. You nod your head thoughtfully and place pen to paper at strategic moments to appear interested. You are not listening. You are making a list of household administrative duties:

do groceries

renew health card

apply for a GST number

pay membership fees

buy fleece blankets for nighttime potty training

write post-dated cheques to the landlord

clean bathroom mirrors

take clothes to the shelter

call the CRA

return library books

go to Costco for toilet paper and laundry detergent

shake out living room rug

throw away dried play doh.

[music stops]

[James:] At 5:07am you hit the snooze button immediately.

[chaotic music starts suddenly]

Every morning, two snoozes, each seven minutes long. Maybe a third on the really tough nights. When you include the two hours you spent awake worrying about the lack of sleep you have been getting. You will have had three hours in that semi-sleeping state and maybe, maybe two hours completely asleep.

[music stops]

[Maiko:] You stand over the sink and drink three consecutive glasses of water. You don't remember ever being this thirsty. Your body seems to produce less fluids these days.

[electronic track starts echoing]

Your eyes are always dry. You can't cry. You used to cry a lot but now it's rare. You don't feel less. It just hits you in a different kind of way. Like swallowing a rock.

[music continues softly]

[Lili:] The evening pulses like a fresh bruise. There is a splintering of voices sharp and dry. They crack and keen as you hunt your shoulders and hustle on. Somebody knocks against you as they barrel off the curb side. You walk more quickly now head down, hood up. You hear laughter? Yes. And singing a raucous chorus along the wall behind the bus stop. You slow for a moment to take in this brief, toughened, togetherness.

[Fumiko:] At any moment over the next minute or so, take a deep breath and let your eyes move upward.

[silence]

[Maiko:] You wonder what ever happened to that object. It was one of your favorites as a

child, the image of it is imprinted into your memory. It was a joke barometer made from a piece of wood, pine maybe? You bought it from a gift shop while on a family road trip to Banff, in Lake Louise maybe. It was a slice of a young trunk or branch about six inches in diameter. The bark still on.

[music cuts in with a drawn out, reverberating notes]

On it was a drawing of a moose with a piece of string for a tail, you just remember that if the tail was gone, that meant tornado. You sometimes longed to see it again, to hold it in your hands.

[music continues softly]

[James:] You will wait as someone struggles with their overhead luggage. It exceeds the acceptable size. There's no way it would fit into the little limiters they scatter throughout the airports, but still, here you are watching them heave and wrestle.

[sharp punctuating notes echo]

You peek ahead to what you guess is your row, row 23, and hope for a small person, a clean person, a nice smelling person. It doesn't have to be a similar person because that could mean conversation. The plane is a cocoon. And your goal as always, is to disappear inside of it. You're settled into your window seat and prepare everything you need for the next 5, 6, 9, maybe 12 hours. And then you wait to see which elbow you will navigate for the next period of time. Who scents you'll try not to detect, whose choice of movies you will question.

[music calms and slows with low strumming]

[Amber:] Your heart is inside you out of sight, and so you rarely think about it. Know that it is a hollow organ in charge of pumping blood. But if you just shush your nagging brain for a second, you'll hear the sound of your own heartbeat. And then you can tell yourself, "Hear that? That means you're still living."

[music continues softly]

[Donna:] You attempt to delay things by keeping the heat off. You put on an extra sweater. You wait a couple minutes later to look outside each day. And it rains. Maybe you're one of those people who wears shorts too late in the season, or a short sleeve shirt and ends up shivering in public. But you remain stalwart. Pretend it's a gift. Do the no white clothes after

Labour Day thing. Do people still do that? Maybe? Your mother or maybe one of her friends said something like that when you were a kid. Or you read about it in a Chatelaine magazine that time you went to the creepy dentist to have three teeth pulled. He ended up losing his license.

[Maiko:] A morning of sunshine turns to rain, something breaks. Beside you a brown sparrow or a pigeon alights upon the wet concrete.

[music stops]

You may or may not glance. Downward.

[eerie, slow music starts]

An escalator through the sidewalk you did not know exists, into the underneath. Your heart. A bird does or does not call your name.

[slow music continues]

[Whess:] You keep looking even though the most dangerous things are the ones that you look for. The problems, the causes, the stories about who's most at fault, but you can't stop looking; "ghoose" your sister says. Like a whiskey jack you're watching because you're looking for when the most precarious thread gets pulled and everything starts to unravel. It's not because you want to see how it falls apart. Maybe what's being held together isn't supposed to last forever. You want to see what happens when someone keeps pulling. Find out if all it was blocking was something better behind it.

[music continues softly]

[Maiko:] You can't sleep. You get up, go to the washroom and contemplate taking melatonin. You walk around the kitchen island a few times, in the dark. There's a dull ache in your lower back on the left side. You run the back of your hand along the edge of the table and head back down the hall to the bedroom.

[music stops]

You lie down on your back, you adjust your pillow. You cross your fingers and lay them on your chest. You say the same words you always say before going to sleep— not a prayer. But it has become a kind of ritual to think of these words every night before you go to sleep,

[electronic beeping starts]

or try to go to sleep, as is the case this particular night. “Dear universe,” it starts. You would never repeat the thoughts aloud. But you do a bit of thanking the universe. And then you ask the universe for a few things, big things, things that only the universe can command. All the while you don’t know what good it might do. But deep down, you believe it’s helping.

[gentle beeping continues]

[Fumiko:] At any moment, over the next minute or so, take a deep breath and let your eyes move upward.

[music fades out]

[Conor:] You will delete that photo.

[electronic track fades in]

No, don’t archive subfolder within subfolder within folder. You’ll delete it now. After a last look. Later tonight.

[music continues softly]

[Vanessa:] It’s the week before Halloween and all the dog owners have masks on. You pass each puppy leash from hand to hand. The instructor encourages you to make jerky movements, loom over them, speak in muffled voices and give them treats for being brave. Later in the car Cosmo gets into the box of 100 mini chocolate bars that you bought on sale at shoppers. And you have to have her tiny stomach pumped at the emergency vet. You reach into your coat pocket, past the plastic Batman mask and find your credit card.

[silence]

[Gina:] You stand near the counter and hope you will be the first called. You feel the weight of your bag. You are thirsty.

[music cuts in with rapid beats]

But your water bottle is artfully packed down inside and you don’t dare throw things into disorder. When the time comes, you want to be nimble, swift, and responsive. The first

announcement is made and everyone begins to nonchalantly swarm the counter regardless of their zone.

[music slows]

You wait, you begin to count the people as they pass by the counter. As if you know what the capacity is. You gently edge closer to the counter, identification in hand. The crowd thins, and still you continue to wait. You may not get home tonight.

[electronic track continues]

[Conor:] You were standing in front of the mailbox, key in hand, are you actually praying? The mail has already been delivered. You can see that. If the check arrived, then it arrived. Nothing your prayers can do now.

[Fumiko:] All the streams that used to flow on this land before the city was built to top it, the streams did not dry up. They were buried. The streams are still flowing. Underneath.

[Conor:] Instead of taking a photo, record the soundscape while locking the visual details into memory. Listen to the recording daily and record yourself describing the memory. Repeat until the memory becomes fiction.

[Lorna:] You're moving like a slug. But it nevertheless motivates you to stay active and alert.

[Donna:] There are no instructions beyond the prenatal classes or chatter from the knowing parents or non-parents for that matter.

[sharp punctuating notes echo]

Detailed opinions on the traumas of sleep training or the cognitive delays that come with too much screen time. Someone recommends Alicia Silverstone's parenting book, *The Kind Mama* for a bit of comfort. They hear it's really good, and they loved her in *Clueless* and you tell them you'll look for it before going back to wondering if your own anxieties coupled with your partner's –

[electronic track fades in]

will result in more complex vigorous anxieties for your child. And when they sleep, you stand in their doorway and see ease, innocence and what you hope is some kind of peace.

[music continues]

[Lorna:] This is his corner. He turns up here several times a week, for the last 10 years. You say, “Hi” as always, “How’s it going?” And he tells you about his hunger and how wet it was last night.

[Maiko:] You can’t help but wonder if he’s doing alright. If he is starting to make friends. You hope he is. You wish that he understood better how to read a room. But then you remember he doesn’t care. To him, it is not a thing.

[Fumiko:] Unclench your jaw, or your fists.

[Quelemia:] The street is dimly lit. You pick up the pace, checking over your shoulder every few steps. A street light flickers. You try to calm your mind, reassuring yourself. You’ve walked here 1000 times and nothing bad has ever happened. You’re probably fine. You know everyone in this neighborhood? Yeah, you’re okay.

[eerie music lingers]

[Maiko:] You press down on the gas pedal, and wait for the correlating response. Sometimes it seems like these two things are not related to each other. Like there’s a loose connection or wire or fuse. You don’t know if cars have fuses, but they probably do. They do. The road is windy, you are alert. You imagine what would happen if you got a flat tire. You would muddle your way through it. Although it feels like centuries since you changed a tire. Have you ever changed a tire? You like driving, but you also have a small fear deep down, of something going wrong. You drive on and start to accelerate, speed up a bit. When you realize you’ve gone past the limit you pull back, slow it down.

[sharp notes punctuate]

When you are driving a highway, even this windy-ass highway, you have time to think about things. Sometimes you replay events of the past week. See if there was anything you might have done better. And then sometimes, with your kids in the backseat, you imagine another scenario where you might be driving down this highway. Like what if you were escaping? What if the world was falling apart? You throw the kids in the car and start driving. Where would you go?

[music fades out]

[Quelemia:] You dig your bare heels deep into the frozen sand.

[suspenseful track echoes]

As you take a seat on the log,= closest to the water. The tide is creeping in, kissing your toes as it approaches. You can see your breath as you exhale. It clouds your vision like fog. You close your eyes and imagine what it used to be like here. You remember the stories you've been told. Imagining those that walked here generations before you. You feel them. You hear them and the whispers of the wind reminding you who you are. You open your eyes and look out on the water.

[clanging notes cut in]

So much has changed. So much is changing.

[clanging lingers]

[Aryo:] You can't stand being inside anymore so you decide to go to the corner store and find dinner. Leave your mother alone with her cigarettes and the blare of the TV.

[electronic track echoes softly]

This place is all beige gray walls, and humming lazy fluorescents, darkened by flies and worse caught in their pains. You gasp out onto the sidewalk and good god, you can breathe again. But there's still such itching underneath your skin. You walk up to the corner store with your fingers tapping tattoos into your upper thigh. It's with some surprise you find yourself outside the store again. Hot dogs and buns and chips in the plastic bag. As if somehow this was \$20? How could this be \$20? Surely not. You drag your feet on the walk home. A little hollow. You are 11, and starting to understand how much things cost.

[silence]

[Gina:] Not enough to do anything really. You could slow your pace between A and B. Here and there. You could slow down and look at things more carefully,

[music starts]

or you could walk faster and arrive early and bank those minutes to grab something. Or you could run, and then run back and return, and arrive, out of breath. Or you could stop

and call her, just lean and lounge on that step over there, and find out about what she's doing with her time, but no.

[electronic music continues]

[Donna:] The creep from the number twenty bus just got off at your stop. The creep that sat next to you even though there were dozens of empty seats. The creep that asked for your name three times. The creep that pulled your earphones out of your ear so you would hear him ask for your name. The creep walks behind you. You will duck into Turks, all the baristas at Turks know you. If the creep follows you into Turks you will scream.

[Maiko:] You return home too late for a work night, a little drunk you fall into bed without brushing your teeth. When you close your eyes you hear the sound of water. Open your eyes. The city lights mean your home is never completely dark. Your gaze falls upon your jacket, there was something. You roll out of bed and pat the pocket from the outside of it. There's nothing. "See?" You mutter, and cram your hand into its depths. Feathers, so many, each one so soft, so small you can scarcely feel them. You gather. A small handful. Withdraw your clenched fist. Turn on the bedside lamp before you unclench your hand.

[music grows urgent]

You have a palm full of fluff. Like the stuffing from your coat burst into your pocket. But then you take a closer look. Seeds. The fluff is a part of the seeds, something that catches the breeze and flies. You feel something flutter inside your chest, like a fledgling trying out their wings.

[music continues]

[Vanessa:] You have no idea what people are talking about. Some of them are in tears.

[fade to silence]

[Maiko:] Let your eyes and tongue relax. Soften.

[music starts, notes dripping]

[Maiko:] You don't want to go anywhere but you must. People depend on you for god sakes.

[music continues]

[James] What would you prefer—to be a lover or to be loved?

When you love, assuming you do love, do you love like you want to be *in love*, or like you want to *do love*? Do both of you love equally?

[music stops]

Or is one of you the lover, the maker of the love, the maker of sex if you will, which might feel very, very loving but might also leave the other one, the lov-er or be-loved,

[music echoes out]

feeling loved upon rather than loved, and as result, not really loving back.

[Lorna] You caught a glimpse of a Coyote running through the trails by the train tracks.

[music turns spritely and curious]

You were intrigued but a little frightened, like you could be his prey.

[music continues]

[Quelemia:] You stare at the clock—3:42PM. You drum your fingers along your wooden desk. It is the only sound that fills the room. Well, that and the ticking of the clock. You finished your work over an hour ago. All that's left to do is scroll through whatever news website your office hasn't blocked for "productivity" reasons. You check again—3:46PM.

[music fades out]

[Vanessa:] You're not going to understand what's happening when it happens, but you'll be ok. It's like swimming;

[music fades in]

You have to keep moving, but don't resist too much. Move your arms to stay afloat, kick your feet in slow circles underneath you. Feel your body get used to the temperature, your blood cools, but never stops. When you look up, you'll feel with amazement what it's like to be buoyant, lasting in a current.

[Amber:] Your neighbour's downpipe drains onto your property. Hate is a word you prefer not to use, but you deeply despise how their cedar hedge crests the fence and overhangs your yard. You despise that after every single garbage day remnants of their garbage remain strewn along the sidewalk. You despise their two tabby cats that use your garden as a litter box. You have photos of these tabbys, both of them, squatting simultaneous in your herbs, crapping. Your neighbours don't care about these photos. They don't care about cat crap or sidewalk smears. It's rainy season, and now the runoff from their downpipe floods your front walk.

[slow electronic music fades in]

Hate is a word you prefer not to use.

[Maiko:] You step through the elevator doors as a matter of habit. Into the lobby of the hotel or the doctor's office or the building where you work. Weren't you just in the underneath, you wonder for a brief moment. You look down at your shoes. Where did the mud come from? Until the receptionist calls your name. Or your co-worker waves at you from across the room. You smell someone's coffee. You forget about the underneath the same way you forget what you were dreaming as soon as your alarm goes off.

[music fades out]