

# THE HUNGER IN OUR EYES

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*Buffalo, New York*

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## Tributears for Merce Cunningham

the body  
a morphing-orphic glyph

kinetickling energies  
become  
fluxurious muscle-&-bone blossoms

Merce  
Lazurustled  
our awhereness,

he knew space is not  
the unembraceable empty,

it's populaced with  
our peek-a-boosing potentialitanies,

our undelved  
selves.

*Merce Cunningham (1919-2009): the 20<sup>th</sup>-century's great choreographer.*

## This land needs medicine

*for Jake Kosek*

Here in New Mexico's Española Valley,  
ristras of red chiles  
hang from homes,  
edible effigies of Christmas lights  
alarming the eyes.  
To exile colds,  
one bits into a pod,  
inviting the brash thorn blossom  
on the tongue.

Ghosts fog over the Rio Grande:  
Spanish hands  
collect rebel Pueblo feet.  
Georgia O'Keefes paint  
Los Alamos mushroom clouds.  
Fields long for human touch  
as commuters careen by  
89 cent burrito specials.  
Teachers tell Hispano children  
they speak their own language  
wrong.  
Rain has become a rumor.  
Piñon trees die,  
beetles bursting out their bark.

In the desert light,  
a *tecato* vigils over  
an overdosed comrade.  
He shoots a syringe  
straight into the soil  
to make the earth forget  
the sediments of pain.

## Geophagy: The Cape Verdean American Diaspora

I.

cabo verde  
'nha cretcheu

nostalgic mornas  
mourning  
nos stall  
yet  
diaspora  
días pouring

mãos do mar  
marring as veias  
do amor  
com  
onda      onda      onda  
onda           onda      onda

agora é hora  
chora

exiles try  
geophagy

*cape verde  
my beloved*

*nostalgic ballads  
mourning  
we stall  
yet  
diaspora  
days pouring*

*hands of the sea  
marring the veins  
of love  
with*

*waves waves waves  
waves waves waves*

*now is the hour  
to weep*

*exiles try  
geophagy*

## II.

Caetano is still with me. You wouldn't believe me, but I swear he is.

Sometimes I can feel him by my side, feel his rough hands lightly touch the back of my neck as I wring out the clothes, as I collect firewood for the *cacuphinha*, the stew that only I and our son will get to eat.

Whenever I feel those hands, I get startled and quickly turn around, expecting to see him standing there, his hands in his pockets, his face glowing with that grin of his, the one that he always has in the pictures I hung up in the living room. He's always been a man full of smiles, no matter how much pain he carried around. It was why I even married him in the first place.

But, after so many years, those smiling photographs are fading.

I went down to the beach today, like I try to do every morning. It's hot in the sun, especially when you wear black like I do. The heat just builds and builds until you feel like you're just going to collapse right there on the sand. A piece of driftwood that the seagulls can perch on. And since most of the trees have been chopped up for firewood, there's no relief from it.

But then there's little relief on Fogo anyway. It's why people keep on leaving. The ocean waves just wash up on the island's shore, grab onto people's ankles and drag them far away.

Most of them never come back. A couple letters a year, a third cousin or two bringing a *mantenha*, a brief greeting from your loved one, and that's it. The rest of the time, it's just silence. And space.

When Caetano decided that he would join his cousin in New Bedford in America, he would joke with me, "Well, I guess I won't be crowding you in the bed anymore, stealing the blankets. You'll finally get enough space." He was right. But enough space seems like too much space.

So I listen to the ocean, looking for some kind of silent code. And the crash of each wave is another *mantenha*, one declaration of love after another.



### III.

Years of Cape Verdean crop failures and famines:

1580-1583	1830-1833
1609-1611	1845-1846
1685-1690	1863-1865
1704-1712	1875-1876
1719-1723	1883-1886
1738-1742	1894-1900
1748-1750	1903-1904
1754-1755	1911-1915
1764	1916-1918
1773-1775	1921-1924
1790-1791	1941-1943
1810-1814	1947-1948

1773-1774: 44% of population died.

1830-1833: 42% died.

1863-1865: 40 % of people died, 95% of livestock.

1886-1890: 35,000-50,000 animals slaughtered for lack of pasturage and water.

1900-1950: 80,000 Cape Verdeans died from famine

#### IV.

Amount of rain usually needed to grow corn: 600-900 mm.

Average annual rainfall in Cape Verde: 265 mm.

Corn appears in 98% of the meals on the island of São Nicolau.

On São Nicolau:

Corn in the field.

Corn in the pot.

Corn in your belly.

Corn in your dreams.

Pellets of samp

maraca'd

like your rattling bones.

Sores volcano'd

on your skin

and teeth jumped out

your mouth.

Still, corn was often

the only thing in your bowl.

The sunrise seemed like

a *cachupa's* broth,

linguica's paprika bleeding

all over a celestial corn kernel.

Sunny day after fuckin' sunny day.

Rain clouds were full of spite,

dumping gallons of water offshore,

but snubbing your farm-fields yet again.

You used to put your ear to the ground,  
listening to the corn roots  
slurping up all the water underground,  
straws attacking an almost empty soda cup.

Now, at night in New Bedford,  
you toss and turn  
until you dream of corn stalks  
bending over and caressing  
your knotted face,  
whispering, *Tudo bem, tudo bem.*

V.

*On trading with 19<sup>th</sup>-century American whalers*

We give harbor.

They give rags.

We give shelter.

They give rags.

We give salt.

They give rags.

We give cornmeal.

They give rags.

We give men.

They give rags.

Now, money's no use here,  
but they don't even offer it.

Just rags.

Dangling rags.

## VI.

*On the Portuguese colonial policy of prohibiting Cape Verdeans from owning boats*

Farm fields turned to desert yet again.  
Skin-topped skeletons stare at the sea.  
Crowds of tuna tease,  
waving their flippers,  
blowing tauntilicious kisses.  
But Lisbon papers scream,  
"No boats for Cape Verdeans!"  
So the skeletons must learn  
to eat fish-frenzied dreams.