





1 // The Color of My Circumference I

In the delicate distance
Of brown, I sit on a bus

With uneasy proximity
Of tan, I look out on Queens

Shade shift my way to JFK
Ride past INS possessing my access

In kind and card, swipe the coded
Stripe and my name drops in ones and zeroes

Somewhere a computer may know
Ladd is to Pratt as Cawthorne is to Willis is

To Pickett and on
What it won't show are the moments

Of love or lust that swirl
Through centuries and tans me here

Making me one more memento
Of a close-quartered world

All trinkets of time shrink space
A cluttered reflection of collections

Am I a catalogue of memories
A series of possessions?

*Of an age within an age within an age
Is a mirror to a mirror to a mirror
Of a people to a people within a people*

Each image, descending in view like seeing
One's history through the core of a spine

Stepping through the act
of self-appropriation

My mother relies on the old
Negro spirit of reinvention

"I am a citizen of the world"
Ta da she is

THE COLOR OF MY
CIRCUMFERENCE I
MAY 02, 2003

3

Land dismembered
The Suez, The Panama
Channels of seduction

Continents torn
Limb from limb

Napoleon's think tanks
Still roll on, Through desert,
Forest, city and sea

A deliberate lunge at arbitrary names

Asia

Africa

The keeping of records
A maddening meter of one
And then another

The imposition of lists
The violence of names

Leopold

Stanley

Rhodes

The question of intent in questions

Lévi-Strauss

Burton

Flaubert

To sever and connect

Moses parts the Bronx

The birth of a language

and another

4

Flip tips subbin out the sha bash. Ne how ya rotis? Slow your
yin yang and egg foo your way out on some jerk; saucy on
the mafé. Chebujenin like a wing ding cutting up a trade wind.
Good hope stepped on a bag of talki talki. Celebration long
gone on a Green Card walkie. Incommunicado hollow S.O.S.
to who? It's Shuck and Jive International arrival on a depart
and we been stickin peanut butter on a tongue like TV. Whose
line is it any- way?

I can't say it
but I feel it
and it's heavy



3 // Terminal City

Mondo vagamundo

Expectaculatin' flight recreatin'
Recreate farming space
From Le Bourget to nation shapes

Spectate the crafts from early dates
To ports of state
Showcase an age
displace the pace of seas and fields to heads of state

Tempelhof-a-lin' off of folks
Spiral like a jetty hope for the best
Utope-usurped in '77
Folks fly like my dear Le Courbusier, Smithson, listen:

There's a million dance moves in the sky
Polyrhythmic ship shifts
The attitudes quick
Battle for Narita

Origami of earth
My city's the shape
Of a terminal
Permanent optics panned in place

TERMINAL CITY

4 // Rentals

(Rishu from Calcutta, living in New York)

Koma Korben, apnar ponde ki pokka
Excuse me sir, is there a bug up your ass?

1
Metal detector or Guillotine?
Electric waves roll in my pockets
Around my legs the backs of my knees
I grow goose bumps from molecular blades

They pat me down
I know where hands go
Finger me like dholek ink
I know better

I am a Porn Walla

I mop Dahi for thirty dollars a day

I can police shoplifts
In four different languages
Can they?

They are cops,
I'm a cop

A laser eye close cam-brain
A lust proctor

And they search me
Green carded
Legal as 18

Who's probing who?
Hands feel me up before the plane
No toca the merchandise!
Too much of my business

2

I am Porn Walla
From my register counter tower

I spend nights with my eyes
I sweep the shelves of shrink-wrapped sex

A blitzkrieg of boobs
Gazed on by men
Gazed on by me
Without a word

Hands move from pockets to boxes
Some shake, some too practiced at the path
Chiefs, students, hustlers, captains,

Bosses, foremen, drivers, pilots
A procession of simple needs in sorry condition
All under my supervision

3

These men don't know film
Like bright flowers, only porn

They will never know the colors
Of Bollywood adverts sprawling on Mumbai walls

They will never know the splash
Of music and shine of a dancing woman

A real dancing woman on screen
They will never know

Kaalaa
Yaarana

Armaan
Karz

Kaala Patthar
Zamaane Ko Dikhana Hai

The Great Gambler
Qurbani

Shaan
Sholay

Muqaddar Ka Sikandar

Mr. India said "*The West is the Best*"
I am video walla
Until I'm paid
Then I'll leave this country
To live with my wife, my daughter,
my pious wife



5 // Security

(Karen from Trinidad)

I am a gatekeeper
You cannot pass without
My gaze X-raying your pockets

Pats, my hands to the soles
Of your shoes
The bottom of you

I hold the detector
That exposes your fears
The steel in your secrets and keys

I feel you up and let you go
Below an eye beneath an eye
Within an... I am bored-to-tears

I do nothing but miss
The touch of warm concrete
Painted smooth under my toes

The tricky odor of mango leaves
Rubbish and grass smoldering
On a path to a door

Fire and need
Zigzagged me here, to this airport.
To land...to fly away

6 // De Gaulle

(Nadine from Ivory Coast, living in Paris)

The terminal
an inverse ship

The boat is upside down
The boat is inside out

All for the gods

Wind is the currency of heaven
not this

I, passer-by who is passed by

A cacophony of rituals

*Have you received any gifts of packages?
Did you pack your bags yourself?
They have never left your side*

Rejoice, duty-free

Teotihuacan
JFK
Amun-Re

Temples of the sky

Flight

high

higher

arch

Uncle ashtray cleaner Sister toilet scrubber Aunti baggage handler

The promise of commerce

Doctor ashtray cleaner Student toilet scrubber Broker baggage handler

People just disappear

Don't forget the boat



7 // TLC

(Rehan, Muslim from Mumbai, living in NYC)

I face life with my back to the world

1

I tabla my wheel
Da ge na thun na

The airport my realm
Concrete sky way roads

Bend into sky domes
Domes into theme parks

My cab as amusement
My cab as escape

My cab is my job
No tip? Then fuck off

2

New York to Bombay
BJP's Mumbai

(as) Bloomberg to play-pen
Is to, I'm too tired

1010 Wins Radio
94.6

W-I-N
India's number

One station, all hits
My family my kids

std-isd...
ba-phd

mba-md
ins-tlc

Paycheck to Chundun
Auntie one two three

American cab
Waving through traffic

Lost in the traffic
Trafficking Traffic

3

Frogger on highways

I can get you to Arlington Virginia for the worst price
Wackenhut for the worst price

Check point to spot check

Hey urban Cowboy
Hold on to your hats

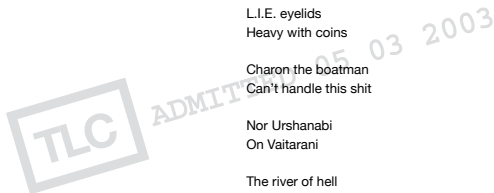
It's a 420 Country
River Styx beltway

L.I.E. eyelids
Heavy with coins

Charon the boatman
Can't handle this shit

Nor Urshanabi
On Vaitarani

The river of hell



8 // Three Lotto Stories

(Amina from Yemen)

Between the carnival of phone cards,
Batteries, trinkets and the pastel
Cliff of Hallmark well wishes

I crunch other people's dreams
Punching numbers into the black
And blue lotto machine

My neighbors secret codes
For dollar brand fantasies

If her ticket wins
Triple fours and a nine,

Her grandson in college
Miriam would retire
Above Kingston
2-car garage
A lawn as far as the eye can see

Amine would buy
The limo he drives
Invest in Smith & Barney
A 5 bedroom in Dejenne
Maybe a pool and satellite dish

My neighbors toss figures, incantations

*575 seven days six times
400 for two dollars straight
50-50 for five days
Separate tickets, don't forget
Let me get it seven days six times
Take five
Pick ten
Quick draw
2-2 Back pair front pair
41-41 midday and evening*

Customers surrender numbers
Like my brother surrenders his name
Passport digits fingerprints for group four
On certain days

Even though my father owns
Three of these shops
From the Bronx to Atlanta

When they arrested me for the gambling machine
They forced my mother to strip naked her arms
Her hennaed hands a mysterious joke
Perhaps even evidence
Of me, Yemeni
Despite my I.D.

Elsie played triple eights until the day she died



9 // The Color of My Circumference II

I walk the skywalk,

To the sky belt, sky promenade,
Sit in sky lounge, read the sky mall,
Have a skywich with my sky Drink,
Wish for cigarette...

Walk back

Past the sky cops, by the sky detector,
Through the sky plaza,
To the sky lot, on the smoke street.
Talk to sky folks pigment earth tones

See my inside through my out-side, linked to out-side via skin-side
When the out-side is a brown world and I gaze from the USA
Triple conscious of the whole globe

Passport shade my skin tone
Tan glow turn a blue hue
Empire built on my back
Can't back out the empire
See?

That's how I'm seen

Carte blanche like an accident
My shot off this continent
Is a sky stroll in a sky park.

Unh.

what a view

MAY 03, 2003
THE COLOR OF MY
CIRCUMFERENCE II

10 // Iraqi Businessman

(Tariq, used to work for the World Bank)

Before I packed last night I watched
The Godfather on A&E...I love mob movies.
But sitting in this airport lounge
The news on my shoulder
Now they remind me of all
The thugs that we endure
How the boss pretends to be your friend

He wraps your neck in
His crooked arm and grates
Your face with grinning teeth
And when he has squeezed you dry
And tousled your hair until you are dizzy
He smacks the back of your head
And you say 'ouch'

He says 'What was that?'
You tell him that he hurt you
He calls you ungrateful. His eyes
That had read you more like a child
See you as a dog, he squints and barks
At you, calling you names, audacious,
Arrogant, defiant and stupid

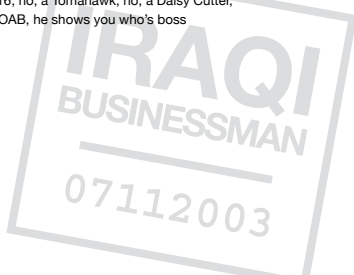
He hits you once in your stomach
Once across your face
He picks you up he brushes you off
He straightens your tie
Because weather you like it or not
You do work for them and must wear a tie
He turns his back to you

Only to whip around and slap you again
His goons in your house, in front of
Your children he sits you down gives you
A drink and slaps you some more
When you tell them you have nothing
To give them, he rises in rage
And threatens to kill you

His boys hold him back
They say 'no boss, not like this, not now' but
He will not be held, he puts
The gun to your head, his breath on your face
His spit on your lips
He is squeezing your cheeks so you look like a pug
Steel to your temple

Then he steps back, pulls on the trigger
Shoots you in the leg, the other, the arm,
The other, then the stomach, the right of your
chest, he does it again and leaves you alive
Your world is a pulp, he washes his hands
He takes off his shirt, the snap of a glove

He returns with a brick, no, a bat,
No, a pipe, a steak knife, no, a cleaver,
No an axe, no, chainsaw, machine gun,
A grenade, no bomb, a plane of bombs,
An F 16, no, a Tomahawk, no, a Daisy Cutter,
No MOAB, he shows you who's boss



11 // Taking Back the Airplane

A hyphenated ghazal

(Nadine from St. Thomas, living in Brooklyn)

We lay on our rooftop our hearts like the sky
The children are sleeping dreaming in sky

Fourth Avenue stretches as far as the sea
Streetlights mute starlight and dampen the sky

We stretch like snow angels, gazing where stars
Are replaced by airplanes landing through sky

In the line of their flight pattern we witness the light
Glimmer like lemur eyes off in the sky

Tiny at first, afraid of the earth
Beams hover in night and order the sky

Like watching your frame in a rainforest mist
The airplanes fly into their shape in the sky

My thumbs in your palm sifting our history
I squeeze on your veins when planes break the sky

When a jet is above you gather my hands
The rumble is distant, you feel like the sky...

Traffic and blood vessels move the same way
I have seen it in movies obsessed with sky

I wake in our towel, your side my horizon
I have dreamt of our families shipped through this sky



12 // The Color of My Circumference III

My accent shifts like high-speed clouds. One word
Is not a language, but god damn I have
Forgotten which metropolis we're in

The continents of neighborhoods traversable by tubes
The high pitched ring in airplanes
Or rumble of the trains challenge my ear

So too my tongue is more elastic
This is a positive reaction shared by millions
My ex, like millions more, had her borders well defined

She was the type whose mood is at the mercy of the weather
Ballooning through my tones she'd get confused
And therefore my confusion, Listen,

I could pick endorphins off her sweat with just my lips
I hear her speak my name in the chambers
Of my head to this day

Yesterday the news of looted artifacts reached Texas I suppose
Hip-hop tracks in New York have a life span of six weeks
Glib is the size of the world

Perhaps folks don't expect so much sea in one shell
I untied my tongue from her affections over time
The same time that had made this tongue

With one thousand generations.
I will never cease to love the seesaw of
Inflections that fly between my friends

Pretzeled speech in flux
Influenced by the rhythm of machines and drums
And wind and drums



13 // Inanna After Baghdad

I saw her in the market
Her skin and dates in her wax palm
Matched in shaded sun

Uruk or Nippur, impossible to recall
They are sand and wind that mound to tells
Yet she was there

And here below the innards of a ghost
That was earth, these black clouds of oil
I see her walk the road in the absence of dunes

In this deceived Eden of grass and palms
She like I, has no tongue, no limbs
To gesture tired history

The horror is in brown pools of song
That wail where her eyes once were
A well of time over providence



14 // In What Language

After Jafar Panahi

These digital ill pixellated chips
Are sick, I find no rhythm in their paint
The celluloid that slipped through camera tips
Irrelevant for satellites and quick
Immediate remedies chomping at
The bits and pieces of our metered thoughts
That rock to paces more like feet and news
Was still within the sights of horse and mouth
Now foot in mouth disease, unease has found
Its profit I suppose, the news that I
Am now a criminal should not be news
But who will hear the innocence when eyes
And lips and tongues are cast as rumor, I
Have made my living with my witness now
I witness all the living disappear,

I look outside the plastic oval
I wonder if Zarathustra had it right
Because in this position, with cuffed wrists
My soul must seem as sick as colors fused
On airline seats with flame retarded weaves
I am waiting for the Cosmic Bull to die
For Ahura Mazda's grin to light this earth
And let the bovine's insides fertilize.
I am confusing times. It should be no surprise
I'm handcuffed in a vessel that cheats day
While speeding West to East we swallow night

If I catch one more eye casting suspicion
My tongue will turn around and mine my stomach
For just one word. If there's no language to
Explain, at least a word or grunt. Disdain
When facing innocence is madness. There's
No word for this, for if there were, then I
Could capture truth within a lens and screen
The scenes to non believers and they'd see
And they would touch and they would hear me speak



15 // Asylum

(Yuyanda from Sierra Leone)

1

To escape
One rat will eat
Through another

Her comrade dead
In the confining wall
Poisoned by the lime
Still, now food

In my desperation,
I never thought
Flats on the outside
Would be worse

2

Five years spent
In the cover of night

Long gray roads in blue full moons
Gravel to my breasts

In fog smothering dark,
A mouth of stones and thorns

My breath on the floor
When soldiers come

Sneakers and flip flops
Through the crack of a door

A petrol womb
Is the trunk of a car

3

I ran through three countries
Before I was safe for day
Before I could even begin
To approach the guarded
Cathedrals of flight

From Bo to Dakar
After six paper names
This one Laminated
I rose from the ground
For the first time, for several seconds,
My muscles were clouds

Asylum

There for me –

*When I was a girl
My mother and father on the beach
Roger's Bar for Fanta and frites
His cassette would play
'New York State of Mind'*

Little me afraid of the sea

Inside the plane
I feel like food,
Sterilized with my, fork, my knife
My seat,
The air a preservative
Preparing me for consumption

4

How I would have known
I don't know
But I should have known better

To be pulled from a crowd is familiar
To be pulled from this promised gate
Is to break from a branch
Below the lip of a cliff

Even when detained, beaten and
Wetted with shock
I thought
I least I am here

Here, where it's darker than night
Where the floor is a gasp
Cold, sucked in
No road, no moon
Day is a phosphorescent light

Where because I can't say "I'm terrified"
In American tongue
I am stripped naked and bound
Tan to black cops in clear plastic masks

My language a threat along with my limbs
My skin a question
My skin a critique

My skin is critique

Half a word for a volume
Of indictments five hundred years long

Yet I run from those in my skin
It is the same skin that jails me here

Within this skin I may never see who did this to me

ASYLUM
APR 21, 2003

16 // The Color of My Circumference IV

1

Calcutta in one thousand clouds of soot
Free School Street with stars of coal fire
Blinking down the curbs. The rustle of dark
Hours, Hash Walla, Take the money and-run-Walla
Stumble with Chendun, hit the pub

I could pay for everyone's drink
100 times with what is in my pocket
I walk past outstretched fingers
Like a soldier past a bush
I am an airplane, a space shuttle

An ATM with thick legs,
A free pack of cigarettes
I am the expert on the band
One step to a visa
I am Backshish. I am covert.

I am the black joke and they don't know it
Rohan, darker than I, serves
The line. The joke is on
How do you keep me from drowning?
I take his foot off my head and let him know.



2

Kolkutta in one thousand clouds of home
Nazim's mutton rolls, my mother's Poulet
African (Skippy peanut butter and chicken)

The first gust of Bombay at the airplane door
My throat in knots of joy and relief, the smell
Of gas, palms and fire is home for what reason?

From under an officer's boot in Union Square
I once saw the curve of the earth. Lines shot out
Around the globe from where my eye met the street

The lines connected to one million heads under boots
A universe of shouting mouths under feet and this
Is not the reason, for each cry is in a different tongue

Perhaps it is the peanut butter chicken and the Bappi
Lahiri wah wah funk with dholek bumping Connaught place
Like DJ Clue in Jersey spinning Asha in a waft of roti in a Trini shop

This sense of home is older than the memory of marrow
In the bones of ghosts from Goa to Kenya to Gorée
To Carolina Islands, Olaudah Equiano or Sultans on wind

But Bombay is not my home. Like heartbreak in Liberia
My footsteps are imperial when I step off the plane
The newscasts show my caste with M16s, sandbagged in missions

Yet within the impositions of assumptions such as
Sanskrit, Latin, Arabic or English reinvention gives a bed
And so we rise with new vernacular of satellites and rivers

Kanishka paints a cowboy hat, my cousin is a Gundham
My godson Ishan thinks on skyward roads like Neeshan's
Sister's paintings, we are the vegetation that will subdue the lobby

In the airport at the borders of a babble that never swallows whole
I swallow whole every complexity and digest all the answers
And no answers will emerge, only music, food and family in the air

17 // Plastic Bag

(Sekou, Senegalese Murid vendor)

Air born being
As I, Modu-modu
Moved by the will of beneficent breath my home is with me
Touba to Dakar to Strasbourg Touba, Touba Djedda, Touba Turin,
Touba Hillcrest, Touba Beijing

Wherever air catches my bags

The wind picks up

I ride with them from city to city as if
Jet streams were market streets
I ride with Allah The Beneficent, The Merciful
These streets my tracts
On which I tote my wears and God

My theopolis, my bazaar

In the Mosque of my heart

The airport is lost
'France is not France'
The world is my Touba

Tin trunks and sacks of small fortune
Walk-mans, sunglasses, watches, hats
Airbuses that light up
And spin on the floor

'My fingerprints are all over this world'

Amadou Bamba and I at the gate
Wait for my flight
With my plastic bag,
The size of a suitcase

Woven red, blue
And white stripes
Stuffed with my airborne
home

Mafé in tinfoil

Wrapped in spice and scent

A meal borne in hot clay

Eaten on the airport floor

Yassa poulet
Jolof and stew

Plastic for hemp sack
Full to the top
New Radios wrapped
In old bou bous

Parts of this bag are older than history
This will outlast our memory



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Rentals, TLC, Color II recorded April 30 at **TME Studios**, The Bronx by **Fred Ones**
Mixed May-June 2003 in NYC by **Scotty Hard** with **Iyer & Ladd**

Executive Producer: **Seth Rosner**

Associate Producer: **Yulun Wang**

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Rudresh Mahanthappa uses Vandoren reeds and mouthpieces exclusively.

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www.vijay-iyer.com

www.pirecordings.com

SCHEDULED STATUS GATE

HORA ESTATUS SALA

9:15A 9:00A C125

10:15A ON TIME C127

11:12A 11:13A C104

1:34P ON TIME C114

12:15P 12:07P C134

10:57A 11:03A C130

8:00A ARRIVED C72

2:07P 2:05P C139

9:50A 9:50A C115