

Burnett  
Punctum Exercise 7  
("Dispatches from Calm")

*"Prepare a 'dispatch from a moment of calm,' on the model of Kluge and Richter, including both text and image. (Video essays are quite as welcome as paper submissions.) Your moment can be identical with your chosen spatio-temporal punctum, or related to it, bearing upon it by any of the modes of association K & R permit."*

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*"Nothing is more instructive than the intermixing of different scales of time"*  
-Alexander Kluge

*"I cannot suddenly operate the tools of a cockpit or a power plant in a playful or libidinous or erotic way."*  
-Alexander Kluge



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The expressions he often used were colorful: so and so "couldn't pour piss out of a boot with directions on the heel," he would

say. Even later much later, the image of someone lifting a boot overhead to try to make out the instructions for tipping it over would recall that violent man who munched cigars. These gave his mouth a foulness that surprised the boy when he was a boy. How could a person have a mouth like that? How could one stand it? The older man was frightening in other ways, too, and this made his sudden playfulness the more frightening. While others were still at the table one evening, he rose from the head and found his way down to the boy, and grinningly tugged him off the double stack of yellow-pages upon which he sat. There was an air of conspiracy,

In the den, he set to hid mysterious task with a piece of shirt-cardboard, a black ballpoint pen, and a pair of scissors. First, he cut out a little shield and then a little pair of wings. The boy, goaded, scribbled them both to black. Then the large and frightening old man took up both chits and turned his back for a moment.

When he swung back around and brought he face down to the boy, the shield had become an eye-patch, pinched up into the socket, and held there with a cockeyed squint. The wings, in turn, had become a mustache, perched between his prominent nose and a comically upturned upper lip. “Haaaaarrrrr!” growled the pirate, and the boy was both delighted by the private attention and childish antics of the frightening man of the house, and also a little frightened.

Later, the boy would dream of flying — of flapping his wings at the sliding door of the den, and rising off the ground. It is possible that, young as he was (and so real as the dream felt), the boy was not absolutely sure for some time thereafter that he could not actually fly — under the proper conditions.

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It was the first film he had ever seen in that format: with total control. The console system for editing magnetic VHS video was a new acquisition at the school, and was reputed to have been fantastically expensive, even acquired, as it was, second hand.

He watched *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, because it was the tape he had. The school library kept it on a small shelf of videocassettes, because the AP French class read the Duras novel, and got class time to watch the film as an incentive. A dial controlled the direction and speed of the playback, and this magical interface permitted him to slow the film to individual frames, something he had never experienced before.

He was not alone, in the windowless room. He sat with a school chum, who was working on a different project, who had reddish hair and bright eyes and an irrepressible spirit. The slow and soundless replay created a strange mood in the dark: the oncoming street, frame by frame; the subtitles in simple white, appearing out of nowhere at the bottom of the screen. He could stop the film on the last frame before the words came into view, and then advance a single frame, and see them pop out of nothingness: "You kill me...You kill me...You do me good."

The slow movement of the bodies was of less interest, but perhaps their mannered embraces and the slight shimmer of the naked skin set the mood for the slow movement through the streets. Slow on the dial. A slowing of time. A quickening of pulse.

Some years later, the two young men would lie in bed in the dark. They would not make love.

