

Advice remembered or misremembered:

“Don’t begin with a quote, put your voice first”

“You could always be more energetic”

“I don’t like the word ‘seminal’”

(New York, date unknown)

I met José in Cheryl Dunye’s backyard. My undergraduate advisor, Gabrielle Foreman, had taught me to read queer and black film. She introduced me to Cheryl when I graduated and was looking for a job. I remember her telling Cheryl in an email that I was “good people.” I was so flattered, fuck, I really wanted to be good people.

(Eagle Rock// Pasadena, 2002)

“I’m totally around. Next week is fine. I wander to my office almost everyday like a weird old man.”

(New York, July 6, 2013)

The spring after college I spent a lot of time in Cheryl’s backyard bungalow office in Pasadena reading scripts and writing treatments or packaging up promo posters for her film *Stranger Inside*. It was chilly LA desert weather, probably March, when José walked into the backyard. Or maybe I exited the little shaded doorway and saw him there. “I know who you are,” I muttered, always a fangirl. Some of us really do treat theorists like idols, like Morrissey. I had written my undergraduate thesis on disidentification strategies in queer grrrl punk music. It was 2002, so José must have been on sabbatical, going to Silverlake Lounge and Catch 22. I was at The Smell and Fais Do-Do looking for queer community, looking for a date, looking for music in a turn-of-the-century Los Angeles that was coated in flatness, in expanded rubber tires and distance. Maybe José and I overlapped at a bar or club one of those nights, maybe we didn’t.

(Pasadena//Los Angeles, 2002-2008)

jem: Try to socialize more.

kbb: What do you mean?

jem: Go up and shake people’s hands

kbb: How?

jem: Put out your hand

kbb: But how do I introduce myself?

jem: “Hi, my name is Katie. I work on escape.”

(New York, date unknown)

The last time I saw José, though I did not know it would be the last, I was talking about my book project, talking to him at a bar in between drinks, in between ASA themed cocktail hours. It was November. I was full of lesbian feelings, equivocations, and he told me I needed to take up space, that I needed “to learn to bullshit.” Those words, his words to me, became the title of another piece I wrote for him, or about him, or about me and what he looked like to me across the eight years we worked together. I have been writing a lot about him this year. I don’t want to forget the small conversations. I’m trying not to forget.

(DC, Nov 23, 2013)

