

beauty (*sigh*)

by *temi rose*

Place: A Beauty Pageant.

Time: Today.

Characters in order of appearance:

**Angela Baker** – beauty pageant administrator, artistic director/producer. she used to be a contestant/contender.  
original cast: temi rose

**Grace O'Malley** – stage manager for the pageant. she prefers women. original cast: erica wiederlight

**Ellen Sussman** – pageant business manager/producer.  
original cast: stephanye dussud

**Maggie Vygotsky** – a theatre usher for this production. also The Bear. original cast: lucy mcmichael

**May Day** – a contestant in this pageant. not fully of *white* ancestry, or perhaps not at all. original cast: meeni naqvi

**Arlen Davis** - a local news reporter, currently reporting on this pageant. also a poet and videographer. she is responsible for the live videos of the event that are projected. original cast: michelle sims

Preface:

*beauty (sigh)* is a play about conversation and freedom.

comedy, it is said, can happen when there's a disjunct (that amuses): putting together what is not usually put together can make us laugh.

*beauty (sigh)* is a comedy both in its language structure (the play is about conversation yet no genuine conversations occur) and there are comedic incidents and funny stories told. however, not all disjuncts amuse. tragic, e'en melodramatic disjuncts are included here.

*beauty (sigh)* explores some parallels and crashes that occur betwixt women's spoken conversations and what actually occurs in our inner lives/thought.

a note to the actresses: as speech presupposes a listener, the audience can be used as themselves as a mass expectant, obedient, somewhat obstreperous listener, or the audience can be endowed as any other sort of listener. you always know who your character is speaking to, and where they are in relations

to you in time and space. even though your listeners are not visible, in your mind, they are vivid and reactive. this will give you more to play with and against.

the freedom explored here is a) whatever it means to you and b) Isaiah Berlin's distinction between freedom *from* and freedom *to* (*appendix*).

i've been interested in the presentation of multiple realities onstage for many years, this piece is another version of this exploration. i am also very interested in voices as instruments, solos, duos, multiple voices creating meaning through their collaborations and isolations as well as through what is actually being said in the words.

*beauty (sigh)* is meant to be a play of voices as instruments as well as a poem, or a series of poetic statements, as well as the comedic panto of, *melodrama at a beauty pageant*.

the beauty pageant contestants can be almost any sort of people, from staid

senior citizens to flamboyant transvestites, whatever group could conceivably participate in a beauty contest.

the set should have a golden apple somewhere, real or symbolic, lest we forget the connection that beauty contests have had with violence and war. symbols from other famous beauty contests as desired.

beauty is as elusive as truth, just as desirable, just as beneficial, and just as dangerous. there is no reaching these concepts as lived destinations. *beauty (sigh)* posits the notion that all attempts toward beauty, these journeys, are complex, meaningful, occasionally fulfilling, and occasionally devastating. for some, a beauty-inspired path resonates deeply, creates memories worth remembering, leads to treasures beyond imagining ~



because the lived is always far beyond imagining.

12/14

## ACT ONE

*Angela is dressed in a ballgown, walking and posing as if she were competing. she speaks at a normal pace while her physical life is somewhat slow motion and vogue.*

Angela: i remember when life was vivid, when a dozen roses stank up a three room apartment: living room, bedroom, kitchen. why doesn't the bathroom count as a room?

the bathroom floor was covered with black and white checkered tiles that spilled half way up the wall, and i was ripped. we were fooling around and i said to him, "*just a sec.*"

this is a story about my first diaphragm; it came with a clear plastic stick with notches in it. the diaphragm itself looked like a little mini (rubber) spaceship from war of the worlds.

you were supposed to hook a semi-rigid edge of the space ship onto the top notch, on the tip of the stick, stretch it tight, like an arrow, hooking the opposite edge onto another notch, this one on the shaft. then you were supposed to roll it over and turn it upside down and slide it into your vagina. once inside, the diaphragm was supposed to pop effortlessly off the stick onto your cervix, an invincible barrier to sperm. they have you practice this in the gynecologist's office, which is sort of weird, squatting, stretching, flipping, popping, in front of a nurse. but I wasn't ripped and the floors and walls were solid, beige, green, yellow, ignominious, unremarkably bland. easy. sort of. compared to black and white checkered tiles.

squatting so i could slide the stick inside my vagina, rotate it and pop the diaphragm into place, the way i was taught but the edges were greased up with the requisite sperm killing goo i was told it was necessary to spread thickly on the inside of the spaceship and liberally around its edges so no renegade spermies would breach the rubber spaceship barrier and every time i'd get the diaphragm loaded on the stick, these greased up edges that were supposed to hold the diaphragm on the stick, wouldn't, couldn't, didn't. the diaphragm shot off the stick, bounced off the walls, spreading sperm killing goo, randomly landing onto black and white squares dancing.

*Angela stops the vogue and is synchronous.*

i couldn't stop laughing. three times i had to retrieve the bouncing rubber spaceship, wipe goo off the walls and goo is hard to spot on black and white tiles. i wash the diaphragm, dry it, put more goo on it, stretch it onto the notched stick, turn it over and - kapow -

he's in the bedroom going, - *what are you doing?* he was crabby: coitus got interruptus before it got begunus. i'm laughing so hard, trying to get my new

plastic slingshot and slimy spaceship to protect me from something i didn't even know i couldn't have.

*Lights change. if possible, she is robbed, crowned, carrying roses. the winner!*

walking after midnight in the soul light magic blunts up against the man as we know him to be or not to be, mostly not being, mostly not but why not, that's what's interesting - why.

*Lights change. the entire beauty pageant set is now revealed. Grace is onstage. she holds a clipboard and wears a headset. she mimes (slightly slo-mo) running light cues with the folks in the actual light booth. Angela finishes speaking while walking to the rear of the house.*

i loved being chased. then falling and receiving whatever he was bringing, communicating in his thrusting or his teasing and the eruption of feeling and liquid warm or hot, his waste my treasure. how could two creatures be so far apart making completely different meanings from one ex-static act. i didn't feel inferior. i felt invisible.

*Angela exits. Lights change. Grace continues to run light cues as she speaks her thoughts. there is no slo-mo this time, the disjunct is a syncopation between the actress' movements and her speech.*

Grace: i have a tornado in my soul. how my life began. that's how i began. i was born as a tornado was passing through town. you become what happens to you. we become what happens to us. and a house dropped on me. but the world didn't magically change to color. not til much later. but there were birds. there're always birds.

*Ellen enters from the outside in a raincoat, she is carrying a soft briefcase and an umbrella, to have a convo with Grace onstage. maybe Grace is asking for a raise, or better equipment. their simultaneous, unspoken (!) conversation is as follows.*

Ellen: I hate myself but I can't get away from myself, so I better work something out with myself.

Grace: a good game should never come out the same way twice, otherwise why keep playing it? if you already know how it'll turn out, it's not a game, it's a play.

Ellen: but that's the nouns, the verbs are the opposite: to play is to be free of predetermined ends. "to game" is to know the outcome, because it's a trick, the

outcome is fixed.

Grace: like a play (noun) where there's a script is the opposite from "playing" (the verb) where imagination trumps trickery.

Ellen: not anymore: to play someone today means exactly the same thing as to game them: trick them.

*Maggie speaks from somewhere offstage.*

Maggie: where does food come from?

*May enters from the street, wearing a coat, headscarf, gloves, carrying many bags and sundry items.*

May: do you think she's as stupid as she's supposed to be, Barbie? or is Barbie shy? with secret depths.

Grace: i'm sorry the words have lost their distinction. the reality remains: you have to decide whether to try and win, once you realize you're caught in a particular game.

*Arlen enters carrying cameras, a tripod, and bags filled with accessories for her job.*

Arlen: poetry (*sigh*). it's a privilege to add beauty to the world.

*Arlen heads to the dressing room to set up. lights change to purple. Angela is looking in a mirror in the office.*

Angela (*amused*): i got a purple heart. there is something sacred about the face. it portrays us. it fascinates us. we crave faces. wounded in mortal combat. we want to like our face. i want to like my face. but it's hard. hard for me to see beauty in my own face. hard to acknowledge you need your own approval. and i survive to tell the tale.

*Lights change to red as Ellen ends her convo with Grace, heads for the office.*

Ellen: you see how the world is and you take your stand or you lie down and watch the parade, or you are fodder. i particularly dislike the idea of being fodder.

May: who names their daughter Barbie?

*Lights change to orange as Maggie speaks to the audience from where she can be seen.*

Maggie: tonight there will be one fifteen minute intermission. Beulah's boy is 62. please silence all your electronic devices. he lives at home. Beulah takes care of him. that's phones, tablets... (*she may list other items*) he has no legs.

there is no smoking anywhere in this facility. i asked her how he lost his legs. *agent orange ate his legs*. no. she says, *agent orange took his legs*. but you can smoke outside. how did that happen? i ask. *Nam*, says Beulah so quietly i don't hear her. i wait a long time in the silence for an answer she's already given. where you see the large ashtrays. *i don't mean to upset you*, i say. *Vietnam*, says Beulah with some energy behind it, *i said, Nam*, she says. she's not angry with me. we talk about how they both smoke cigarettes anywhere they want to, inside their home. no smoking anywhere inside here.

*Ellen arrives in the office, collapses into a comfy chair.*

Ellen: my soul bones ache. I am dizzy with despair.

*Grace is getting the show ready.*

Grace: how is protecting different than rescuing? if you let (*beat*) anyone write your life for you, what kind of a life is a life that somebody else designs? you live it out ...

*Grace illustrates what she says with movements across the stage:*

Grace: like stepping into big yellow footsteps on the floor that teach you how to dance. or the way to exit in case of emergency.

*We hear May before we see her.*

May: porn.

*Lights up on May and a lot of other beauty contestants in the dressing room. All in a state of semi-undress: underwear and robes. Arlen's images of eyes being made up and other beautifications, mostly in close up and extreme close up. if wigs are used, no one is wearing one now.*

Arlen: the room calls out the poem. the world inspires creation. calls it forth from infinite, inchoate being.

*Angela is sitting in the office. Ellen is there doing paperwork.*

Angela: i'm looking for a lover who's an ethical humanitarian and an intrinsic, undefinable searcher. or maybe unrefinable reacher? undeniable teacher?

May: this tangled mess pulls me, defines me whirling, feeding off the nectar of now.

*Now is a cue for a light change. Arlen and May mime one conversation, while they say*

*something else.*

Arlen: i have a friend named Charity. (*sigh*) it's not fun being named after a virtue. virtues are not generally highly regarded, except in theory. in practice, not so much. good guys mostly only win in fiction. in real life the bullies win most of the battles. and when you witness people who behave with nobility, it's a blessing for others but often a burden for them.

May: i'm sure you'd have a happier life if you're named after a sin - not like greed or fornication, something poetic, like Apple. i bet it's great to be named something desirable and wicked, something that caused the trojan war and the expulsion from the garden. you'd never, ever have to prove that you are meaningful, you'd be automatically desirable unless they call you a fruit or you think about all the chemicals they spray on apples to poison the children. that horrible moment in sleeping beauty where the witch offers beauty the poison apple. good intentioned mothers feeding their children chemical time bombs.

*Bombs is the cue for a light change. Ellen is in the office.*

Ellen: all she wanted to do was make other people wrong so she could feel right but she got to me. when you're the one who's always wrong - it's hard - hard to live in the moment. we abandon something important when we can't appreciate.

*Lights change rapidly, kaleidoscopically. we might not know who says the following, certainly we do not see them speak.*

May: i get tired of pretending i'm stupid.

Maggie: an illusion created by the cyclicity of the process.

Grace: something rare and true, i see in you.

May: one day only, today and tomorrow, all sales final.

*Back in the dressing room.*

Arlen: this is what Charity told me – (*speaking as Charity, Arlen seems truly a different person:*) difficult to be named after a virtue, especially one that has gone completely out of style. it's a lot of pressure. people expect you to be good in that way, to exhibit the qualities of the sign. you hear your name a lot in anger, in interrogation. if you're lucky in love,

Angela: language. embraced.

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| Grace ( <i>sings</i> ):<br>white coral bells<br>upon a slender stalk<br>lilies of the valley<br>deck my garden walk<br>oh don't you wish | Arlen: ( <i>in her own voice:</i> ) perhaps you hear your virtue/name cooed or blamed, maybe you get announced randomly, or you're part of a scolding: <i>don't expect any charity from her!</i> in a world almost entirely devoid of meaning. you are an |
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| that you could<br>hear them ring | emblem, a concept. the polar bear on her<br>shrinking ice island. |
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Grace: that will happen only when the fairies sing.

Arlen: it was nice knowing you, but you are no longer needed on earth, thank you very much. your virtue is out of style. we can do without you. don't get me wrong, it's nice to see you, really, personally i have no problems with you.

*Maggie with a flashlight in the audience.*

Maggie: hail the dove! that bitch promised land, offers hope, an end to being squished, rocking, damp, surrounded by two of every flora and fauna. seasick, debts paid, land ahoy!

*Angela is on the busy pre-pageant stage.*

Angela: i conjured him. harmonic rhapsodic. i conjured him from black matter, the infinite ether. i drew my ideal penis on the bathroom stall wall. i saw it in my mind. i drew it and he appeared. the perfect dick. you'd probably like to see it. *(sigh)* but i wouldn't - dare conjure him again. got the t-shirt.

*Ellen in the office.*

Ellen: not everyone values kindness. some people are only interested in what they characterize as success but I would call inordinate cruelty. my mother never did anything nice for anyone else unless there was something concrete in it for her or unless it benefitted a social climb she was contemplating making, which in her mind was the same thing. my childhood was house arrest peppered with gross humiliation, random psychological beatings that kept me crippled and in my place, everything orderly. nothing kind.

*Angela goes to the dressing room where Arlen is packing her equipment.*

Maggie: releasing heavy metal memories now.

*Now is a cue for a light change and/or a multi-media moment.*

Arlen: the anatomy of betrayal.

*A battle starts in the dressing room. someone has borrowed (stolen) makeup or stockings or a boyfriend, role or simply offended in some way. this mime will escalate to involve all contestants and personnel.*

Arlen: how do you really know how you feel until the emotion-sensation complex reaches outside the limits of inner feeling and touches the realms of how we live in and among one another? a free woman. a woman free to feel and



express herself, free from convention, rituals that castrate, cliterodectomize, lynch.

*From different vantage points, Angela and Arlen notice the battle and become involved. Arlen films. Angela tries to stop the fight but it flares.*

Angela: i shared peace with him. we were in that space together. it didn't last long. i liked it. a lot. and i know now that peace can exist between a man and a woman. people can inhabit that space together.

*Ellen in the office.*

Ellen: not from analysis. love cannot come from analysis. in the face of tragedy my mother was unmoved, she did not seem to care about the passing away of love or life. only gaining or losing position got her emotions going. she was obsessed with power, with gaining advantage. these obsessions emerged from her greed. she was an insatiable, pathological, sociopath masquerading as an enlightened incandescent. she was far more popular than i'll ever be.

*Lights out on office as Ellen exits. Grace is somewhere in the house on a ladder.*

Grace: life reveals the love inside itself. the mind walks through its mazes designed to distract us from amazement at the splendor of the immensities that embrace us. (*sings joyfully*): i've been working on the railroad, all the live-long day.

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| Grace ( <i>sings</i> ):<br>i've been working on the railroad,<br>just to pass the time away.<br>can't you hear the whistle blowing,<br>rise up so early in the morn,<br>can't you hear the captain shouting,<br>dinah blow your horn. | Maggie: have you ever<br>put a lampshade<br>on your head?<br>sighing for silent distances,<br>making silly faces. ( <i>sigh</i> )<br>then the flagrant fragrance<br>of death, curtains delight; |
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Maggie: a tsunami floods the shore, brings bathing-suited cynics to their knees.

*During the apex, in the midst of the mimed fight, May alone is still.*

May: i am very crazy if crazy means i'm not like the rest of them then i'm crazy. very crazy. every day i'm glad i'm crazy. every day i'm glad i'm not like them. i can not imagine why anyone would be willing to abrogate their wild dimensions to be part of a world that is at its best hypocritical and at worst - words fail. society does every possible evil thing to its members then adds insult to injury, telling us we're crazy, so we should take pills, whose interactions have not been considered. who's pondering the longterm effects of these pills on innocent

consumers numbed, emotionally coerced, feeling only requisite non-resonating non-threats to the system – the system that they create and to which they are beholden. systems are tyrants, that's their nature, they can't help it, but I can. stuck in the muck: stepford corporate clone consumers. (*sigh*) how to escape that sucking quicksand, flee from tyrannical thought forms: thoughts that humiliate, diminish, dehumanize. the middle class in america is a cult – a materialist mega(lo)maniacal cult. we embody the sicknesses we perpetuate through systems we insist have power over us; when in fact we create and recreate these oppressive systems with every breath we take. just say no, i'm not sick, i'm just sick and tired of you.

*The fight is over. Grace is still on her ladder.  
Arlen is packing up again while conversing  
with May, another dual-reality convo. Maggie  
is in the house.*

Grace: it's a bit complicated. I think I love her. she makes me feel (*sigh*) less invisible.

May: everyone has a crutch; some ideology, dream, narcotic, sport, hobby. some people have more than one crutch. because they're necessary, a way of touching the earth, rooting and flowering. object-obsessed viewers bewilder me. the way women value each other, or rate each other really - that look up and down - assessing - is she a threat? am i better looking? better dressed? who is best? who is best at what? why do people want to be perceived as desirable objects? why do we want to be purchased? acquired. how is that different from voluntary slavery? i've been in thrilling conversations. some people can really open your mind.

Arlen: romance languages are romantic because they gender all their nouns and their verbs. their linguistic life is awash in gender.

Grace: it would be easy to be monogamous if there was never a moment of ownership between people (because) the minute there is power over another, that ends the delicate sexual balance that sets the wheel of desire turning, tilts the scale away from appreciation, towards disdain. contempt is the death of love. That's what makes it so hard to be monogamous.

Maggie: melt me rain. i'm not a witch, just a good girl frozen in time. melt me back. rain. melt me back to myself. down to the ground. down to the ground to get out of the rain. hand me down. melt me. rain.

Arlen: a lot happens between amoeba and homo sapiens but it happens very slowly.

*Arlen exits. May is alone onstage.*

May: i have a discontent so deep it rocks my soul; even in sleep i desire beauty. i desire the beautiful to come into being. where i can appreciate it. i am aware that your idea of the beautiful and mine are not the same, and i wonder if it

means the same to you. if it soothes you like a hot sun on a winter day. like a hug from someone you love, loving you back.

*The stage is dark, house lights are dim, Maggie is seen as she speaks to the audience.*

Maggie: everything is food.

*blackout.*

*end act one*

## ACT TWO

*The swimsuit competition is about to begin. The stage is empty. Arlen is setting up her equipment again, this time to video the contest. Grace is stage right, ready to call the show. Maggie is in the house. May is stage left in a robe. Ellen and Angela are in the office.*

Arlen: hideous remonstrances. the burden of malice. basic needs. monkey see, monkey do.

Grace: if there was a place inside my heart for you -

Arlen: don't be nice to the weirdo -

Grace: would you enter kindly, tenderly, or would you come to conquer, possess? I want to dance with her, create a world, a reality. why not?

Arlen: the engine that drives conformity. no one wants to be the weirdo. fears create the thought that we must associate with people who are more powerful who have access to what we need. because you don't really believe that you can take care of yourself.

Grace: how much brutality should someone have to wade through?

Arlen: people have aesthetic needs, not just basic needs.

Grace: how much punishment for the crime of loving?

Arlen: we crave our own enslavement. if not to a person, then to an idea, a tradition, a revolution. anything just so we can give the responsibility for our lives to someone else. the burden of significance weighs heavy on our hearts.

Maggie: i walk and walk and get no further than the back of the house.

*Ellen and Angela are in the office, able to watch the pageant on a monitor while they do business.*

Ellen: our society tries to kill the smart kids. first we drug them to silence, stillness, complacency, then we ridicule their dreams. then we teach them that the only respectable use for their intelligence is to serve someone else's purposes. aren't we all making money for someone else? what is that about?

Angela: so i said, *i don't need your money, sonny i'm in it for the kicks, not the ones you'd give me with your black boots but the ones i get from re-organizing chaos.*

Grace and Angela (*speaking as one*): *are you brave enough to enter chaos and wait for her to reveal her patterns in her own time?*

Ellen: are you an emotional vampire?

Angela: *a parasite walking into fecundity, gorging, destroying, stuffing your pockets weighed down bloated, bleating, bewildered? (sigh) we never had sex with each other again.*

Ellen: why is it so difficult to comprehend that each person is a gem?

*The contestants drop their robes as they file onstage for the swimsuit parade/competition. May begins speaking while she is still in her robe off the pageant stage but visible to the actual audience.*

May: my family likes to improve their social position whenever possible. so - periodically they make me a pawn in that game. one summer my crotchety elderly great aunt who i was forced to spend a month with, because my parents were traveling or in love again or something. my great aunt ordered me to spend time with a girl my age who i'd never met but who lived down the street. and was from a really good family. better than ours, they were the country club crowd. so i go. and the mother of this girl opens the front door when i ring the bell and says *go on upstairs (what's-her-name) is waiting for you in her room.* her room is crazy enormous. you can fit three of my bedrooms in hers. that was my first impression. the floor was wall to wall plush red carpet. the music blasting, louder than i was allowed. and then her. she's lying on the floor, sorting tiny little dot-things into color-coded piles. *what are you doing?* i say. *if you get all the (i-forget-which-color)ed ones and take them, she says, you get really high.* i find an excuse to leave and lie convincingly to my great aunt.

*Maggie speaks as if she were young May lying to her difficult aunt as May drops her robe and enters the pageant stage.*

Maggie: *yes, indeed, I had a lovely time, they were very gracious.*

Arlen: what is the first thing you can remember? how old were you?

Angela: you can get addicted to a certain type of conversation.

May: then, one really hot day, i was invited to the country club pool with them. my irritating great aunt insisted i go. hot day. i stayed in the water and ignored the wasps. on the way home in the back of the car, the dot-sorting, music-blasting girl and i were laughing about how our sweaty thighs were sticking to the car seats, making funny noises when we tried to unstick them. *(May makes the sucking sound of seats trying to hold onto thighs)* the mother swiftly lurched the car to a stop on the side of the road, turned, faced us with a scrunched-up angry face. we watch stunned as she spit-hissed: *horses sweat, men perspire, and ladies glow. (sigh) that summer was a long sad song.*

*Contestants are being judged and some eliminated, but no judging agent or agency is portrayed.*

Arlen: i never thought different was bad. but it was still painful.

May: do girls have gonads? i don't even know what gonads are.

Maggie: there's water everywhere. a gargantuan tidal wave washes over us, pulls me under, holds us down. sweeping away my world. (*beat*) then nothing. for a long time nothing. i don't move. i can't move. i'm scared to move.

All (*not in precise unison, more like a form of syncopation*): the girl who draws the girl who cries, the girl who weeps, the girl who sings, who dances, who freaks, the girl who swims, the girl who breathes, the girl who flies, the girl who reads, who thinks, who sinks, the girl who remembers, who forgets, who cries, the girl who sings, who lives, who flies.

*Eliminated contestants leave the stage.*

Angela: do you really think your penis has a mind of its own? what language does this mind understand? do you really think your penis is like a gun going off killing enemies? who are these enemies? I wonder - and the men who vote to go to war, how big are their dicks? and what shape? long and thin? short and thick? short and thin? do you think your semen is like piss or shit, some sort of bodily waste that builds up and you have to release its poison?

Maggie: partly it was sadness, partly it was fear.

*The remaining contestants, May among them, parade on the pageant stage.*

Arlen: when i was a kid i couldn't understand why it was not a source of continuous amusement that airplanes look like flying penises. Now I wonder why no one analyzes why we call the origin of the universe the big bang. our mad infatuation with the penis is the emperor's new clothes backwards, it's not that we see something that isn't there, we won't see something that is. i find nothing attractive or amusing about singleminded pricks whether they're flying me to Chicago or fucking me up at work, they don't get inside me anymore. i prefer plastic.

Angela: maybe because penises shoot stuff out and that's really pleasant so it becomes hard-wired that anything that shoots is a feel good toy. how about astronauts? what is their average penile dimensionality? How 'bout presidents? generals? waiters? concert pianists? aren't you the least bit curious? but if we had that information it would only be nano-seconds before some idiot savant made up a way to exploit penile insecurities for profit. there would immediately be an ideal set of dimensions promoted and on this would be based an ideology to add to the pre-existing longing and ever-reaching-toward fantastical ideals of penile potential. then of course, every man will know where he stands in the penis hierarchy. anyway, as i was saying penises are so beautiful, and we are so

obsessed with them, it seems irresponsible not to study them more thoroughly.

Grace: the vagina, the peach, the soft flower petal folds over pulsing suction, desire and pleasure manifest in one pink organ, fascinating, infuriating, mysterious, powerful. i'm sick of shame. our cultures shred hope, tell us who to be, how to be, how to live. fit in or feel shame. i want to resist that. resist shame.

*All speak in a syncopated unison that sounds different than when they spoke of the girl who. contestants are leaving the stage as they are eliminated by an unseen force.*

All: the woman who draws, the woman who cries, the woman who weeps, the woman who sings, who dances, who freaks, the woman who swims, the woman who breathes, the woman who flies, the woman who reads, who thinks, who sinks, the woman who remembers, who forgets, who cries, the woman who sings, who lives, who flies.

Angela: from dismal to abysmal.

Arlen: you feel. you have to feel. how you interpret your feelings will determine your actions. the beginning of freedom is learning to interpret your own feelings. to determine your own actions.

Angela: all thought derives from feeling. i keep forgetting everything so i can learn it again. i like to touch you, feel the tides of energy move between us.

*Down to 3 contenders. May is one of the three.*

Maggie: it's a trick of the light, you know, you think you know but then you're standing alone on the beach no sand, just bare rocks and ocean looking down, a grain of sand between the tips of my fingers sparkling, shining, like a tiny sun, the tiniest sun you can imagine shining between the tips of my fingers bright as the memories of what we lost.

All (*in true unison*): don't hit me. i don't like it when you hit me. stop touching me. i don't want you to touch me anymore. i have to stop, wanting you - to touch me.

Ellen: i have to let me let go of you.

Grace: sure, i have complaints. my life isn't perfect. i want to break things. you say to yourself, i'm not going to do that. there are limits. i have limits. but sometimes going beyond what i thought was my limit has been great, liberating. other times, no. i don't want to always be the one who keeps it all together. i've got my share of rancor and rage.

Maggie: i'm never finished, time keeps taking it away from me.

*Down to the 1 winner, it's not May. all the contestants return to the stage to pose with the winner. the images from Arlen's filming are*

*poignant.*

Arlen: the immediacy of identity frescoed into iterated flanks of what is, stands testimony, repeals dread. i walk by walls filled with self expression. that's against the law: expressing yourself on other people's property. another art form you can go to jail for, or die for. testimony that courage is part of art, i write to ease my ache to defame the iterated walls of ignorant bigotry. i long to sneak out at night, spray metaphors, i am here.

Grace: no one can tell you. it's something you have to find out for yourself by living.

Arlen: maybe what you can't say is as important as what you can say. freedom of speech implies the thoughts behind the speech; it means the freedom to think differently and the freedom to speak what you think. and the freedom to decide not to speak.

*Contestants are exiting the stage.*

May: no amount of beautification, no exercise, no skin magic elixir, secret formula, transcendent diet can ever return your self to you. not if you've already given your self away.

*May exits.*

Ellen: her soul had come apart. i don't know how it happened, i'm not sure i want to know. do you think i need to know? because i'm not sure, sometimes i think it's better to draw a line between me and insanity. it's so tempting to swirl with any available story and call it the truth but that's exactly how souls come apart. souls are muscles too. souls need exercise. like brains. beauty and truth are the jumping jacks and push ups of soul exercise. thinking about them strengthens the brain. creating them strengthens the soul.

*The last contestant exits. lights to black on the pageant stage.*

Arlen: some people are imbeciles.

*Arlen exits. Maggie is making her way to the back of the auditorium where she will stay in character as an usher during the coming intermission.*

Maggie: there is a twining in me. vines growing. maybe millions. maybe just a few. at least five. fifty maybe? more?

*Ellen and Angela are in the office.*

Ellen: they say to heal you have to make peace with yourself. forgive yourself. and them. when i reach inside intending to extend a peace offering to myself what i find are furious panicked beasts starving and i retreat. i can't face them.



Angela: i want to make love, i'm so weary of strategy, paranoia, war.

*Lights fade slowly on the office.*

*end act two*

intermission

ACT THREE

*Maggie is in the dressing room as if she were one of the contestants getting ready for the talent section.*

Maggie: she had three children when i knew her - when we were friends - we lived in the heart of working class America. i loved it there. i felt at home. i was a single parent. i had run away to escape from the ignominy to what i hoped would be a good life. i made a friend, the everyday kind: our children played together; we did our laundry together; went to the park by the lake. back at her house, she kept the radio on all day, i liked pop music too, but i couldn't figure why she didn't hate the brash advertisements, loud pushy voices demanding, *buy!* one day she says, *my husband raped me on our first date.* i was unsure how to respond. yes, i could say, i was raped at 6 and again at 19 and - or i could say, that's horrible. but, no. (*sigh*) i say, *oh. oh.* she says, he still raped her *some times.* absolute inner silence. radio on. sounds of children playing in the other room, at least some of them products of rapes. what should i think about us? what did i dare to share? my daughter is the result of a rape too? oh what to say, what to do? how do we live in this world?

*Angela is in the office. wild is the cue for kaleidoscope lights.*

Angela: i love you so much it hurts to breathe. i am electric current wild waiting for your touch so i can flow into your flesh laughing wet leaping into forever.

*We might recognize voices but we only see Maggie clearly.*

Angela: sport fucking.

May: lost in space.

Maggie: dance on the head of a pin?

Angela: wild abandon.

Maggie: what kind of dance?

May: everyone likes to be treated nice.

Maggie: ballet?

Angela: clever passion.

May: play the game.

Maggie: modern-martha-angst-dance on the head of a pin!

May: everything likes to be treated nice.

Maggie: tap dance.

*Kaleidoscope ends. perhaps Arlen's cameras are roving the audience. Ellen enters the office to make urgent phone calls.*

Ellen: smart people want to pretend we're normal but we're not. and the doctors know it now. so in order to go to school they have to drug the smart kids. so they don't get bored and cause trouble. so they won't be change agents for their generation and speak the agony of bearing a weight of ignorance pretending it's intelligence.

Arlen: if you believe the culture, there's nothing intrinsically valuable, soulwise in the female. she is chattel. useful but not herself a source of creativity soulwise. doesn't that seem ironic to anyone else??? that women's centrality in the creation of human life is left peripheral to any discussions about the development of humans, body and soul ... in every country's political and social philosophies, in every religion I've ever heard of. when you hear someone say, *she's bright* do you think of halos??

Angela: gold Giotto halos in medieval cathedrals.

Arlen: no? why not? that's what it means. you see a bright child, she shines.

*Angela exits the office, walks towards the dressing room. Maggie is still in the dressing room.*

Maggie: i'm giving up on instant.

Angela: ok, so there was this guy and i didn't fuck him because he really wasn't that interesting, you know the kind of person i mean – his ideas came from standard sociological ideologies: this is good, this is bad; i want this because i've seen it advertised with a bleached buxom blonde, boobs so big if she falls over she'll need help standing up. (*sigh*) he was beginning to bald, beginning to be too fat, but he had nice hands and basically was a lover not a fighter. so i took him home. we had no interest in one another: no mysteries to incite my passion and i wasn't willing to perform in any of his trite scenarios. since there wasn't enough passion between the two of us or in either of us for the other, we kissed and touched each other's genitals, trying to stir the pot. and we were so incapable. i wanted to laugh. but it hurts their feelings when you laugh, even if you're not laughing at them.

Maggie: moist.

Arlen: beauty.

*Angela is in the dressing room.*

May: i was micro-managed, supervised in an attempt to standardize my persona to a type. i'm supposed to marry up, secure position, create security for family. that was the mission. (*sigh*) i failed to accept that mission. threw it in their faces.

they tossed it back, told me i was scared of my own potential. as what? an object to be bartered so the family can have more objects. more stuff.

Angela: it's just two pumps. a projectile pump and a vacuum pump. one pumps out the seeds, the other sucks the seeds in. the story of life, humanity, hisandherstory. every human being who ever existed – until now, was a result of two complementary pumps. (*sigh*) but pumping is no longer required to produce progeny.

May: unfortunately, i'm susceptible to dares and i'm a natural compromiser and i love to win.

*Lights change. May, Ellen and Arlen mime the Peanuts' cartoon (preface).*

May: so charlie brown says,

Ellen: *i'm in sad shape.*

May: then lucy says,

Arlen: *good morning, sir, sit right down.*

May: lucy's stand says,

Maggie (*yells*): the doctor is in.

May: then charlie brown says,

Ellen: *fine. i was afraid i might need an appointment.*

May: now you can see lucy's stand also says,

Maggie (*yells more quietly*): psychiatric help 5 cents

May: and it's spelled correctly – which is crazy, how old are these kids? they look like 4 years old. lucy says nothing. she leans back, expectantly receptive, on her arm. charlie brown says,

Ellen: *what can you do when you don't fit in? what can you do when life seems to be passing you by?*

May: lucy says,

Arlen: *follow me I want to show you something.*

May: they walk. then they're standing on a hill with cuddly sheep clouds floating in the sky and lucy says,

Arlen: *see the horizon over there? see how big this world is? see how much room there is for everybody?*

May: then lucy turns to charlie brown and says,

Arlen: *have you ever seen any other worlds?*

May: charlie brown says,

Ellen: *no.*

May: lucy says,

Arlen: *as far as you know, this is the only world there is, right?*

Ellen: *right.*

Arlen: *there are no other worlds for you to live in, right?*

Ellen: *right.*

Arlen (*yells loudest of all*): well, live in it then!

May: charlie brown somersaults away from the force of lucy's yell. (*sigh*) lucy says,

Arlen: *5 cents, please.*

*Panto ends. Grace speaks from the rafters, as high as she can be in the space, adjusting a light, out on a limb.*

Grace: no matter how great the temptation, refuse blame, given or received. refuse to be enemies.

May: but even for my family, i can't offer my soul for a win. i could stake everything for beauty, but not for a win. dance with mediocrity, experience the unbearable heaviness of not-being. for the beautiful, i could win. i can struggle to create and sustain the beautiful. there's nothing petty about that. nothing mediocre.

*Maggie may be starting to look a little like a bear but not enough to give it away.*

Maggie: I bet she could sell a bear a washing-machine!

*blackout.*

*end act three*

## ACT FOUR

*The talent competition; five distinct spotlights illuminate an empty stage. Ellen walks in the shadows. as she speaks, all the contestants enter from up and down, left and right stage, at different tempos, in a wide variety of outfits and with various amusing props to do with their talents.*

Ellen: i hold my breath because i'm scared. because i learned that when i'm breathing bad things can happen. like bad smells they go right to the brain - zoom beautiful, but it's not beautiful at all. so i stopped smelling. i stopped breathing. to protect myself from bad smells - bad moments. everyone has circumstances. and circumstances are hard to take sometimes. some people break physically first, others break emotionally first, others break when their mind collapses under the weight of categorical ambiguities and plenty of people collapse under the weight of spiritual ambiguity.

*A five-ring circus: five contestants (not May) enter the circles of light and mime their talents. the talents do not start or finish all at once, they are at various rates of speed. some might be heard, say a tap dance or acapella instrumental, or the whoosh of something juggled or ...*

Angela: i think once you've been in love, you have to keep part of yourself tuned to that station, or you wither inside. it's important to be in love, to be pleasantly anticipating the future, to have a sense of partnership with life.

Ellen: it is our continued intention to gather and hold onto everything material, mental, psychological, emotional and spiritual. we hold it so tight, loving it, not wanting to lose any of it. but it's too heavy. when you try to hold it, it crushes me. the hardest reality is the passing throughness of everything. that is the hardest truth for me to bear, if i faced that fear, would my breath come easy? would life smell sweet?

*Ellen enters the office, Angela is there. Arlen's images are seen. Maggie is stage left in what appears to be a fur coat. five contestants actively contesting their talents, the other contestants in the shadows, posing. Grace is stage right calling the show.*

Maggie: pieces of wholeness. the incorruptible accidental truth.

Grace: we make the world by the way we are in it.

Angela: my wordless improbable.

Arlen: i don't want to write about abuse. most stories that sell revolve around abuse and revenge. i write to escape my rage, to make it beautiful, purposeful. just because i experienced abuse, doesn't mean i automatically become a working partner in the culture of abuse. an advertisement for its perpetuation.

May: spoiler alert to rampant, unrepentant consumerism: you are cancer. i insist on my right to flower. if i am able to flower, then i might bear fruit, recycle myself on the wind. that would be something.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Grace (<i>sings</i>):<br/>really would<br/>be something<br/>to meet you<br/>in the pouring rain, mama<br/>meet you in the pouring rain...<br/><br/>(<i>speaks</i>:) that would be<br/>something.</p> | <p>Ellen: i can't remember my parents<br/>ever touching me except to wash me or<br/>hit me.<br/><br/>May: what are women for? we must be<br/>here for something.<br/><br/>Maggie: feeding, cleaning, incubating<br/>and decorating.</p> |
|---|---|

Angela: we were all for sale longing for our possessors.

Maggie: i liked being a housewife. no. i loved being a housewife.

Arlen: i'm here working on *my* idea of freedom. it's a free country only if we practice freedom, if we make it a reality. not just the negative freedom, freedom from, freedom to not experience a cruelty ... but also the kind of freedom that makes life abundant, freedom to experience, create, explore.

Ellen: my mother was an ice cold vampire, releasing a secret language of atrocious deeds, like poison gas. what is the point of not living well? what's the point of polluting the future with the poisons of the past?

Grace: i was in love with a tree. i've been in love with several trees in my life, crept my soul right up close to theirs. such loneliness in life; such plethora of empty moments. a pioneer on the prairie is grateful for a new song on her radio. the doing is comforting. the doing has grace.

Arlen: i want freedom from fear, freedom from inequality of pay and treatment. i want freedom to write what i want, to live a life that means something to me.

*This time when they speak altogether, they are making a wave of sound. structured as in a round, they each say the phrase ? times, starting one word after the previous person:*

All (*round*): the freedom to love who I want.

*While all the speakers are involved in the round, the contestants in the five spots are being replaced by a new set of five contestants (not May). they perform their talents while -*

Angela: i am a different woman for every meaningful relationship i have participated in. every conversation.

Grace: all my addictions.

*All speak in a chaotic burst of words: a jumble.  
Not always in the same word order.*

All: air, love, sky, television, breath, language, connection, birds, dirt, water, driving, dreaming, dancing.

All (*unison*): food.

All (*again a jumble*): garlic, music, herbs, salt, maple syrup.

Angela: conversation.

All (*unison*): passion.

Arlen: blueberries.

Grace: peaches.

Ellen: apricots.

May: grapes.

Grace: sleep.

Maggie: sex.

Ellen: swimming.

May: walking.

Arlen: reading

Angela: living.

Grace: i'm addicted to life. i go to sleep wanting more. i wake up the same way.

May: so much sweetness to life.

All (*jumble*): complex, tasty, heavy, effervescent, lusty, soporific.

Ellen: what if she had understood herself to be the creator of all things beneficial to herself? she fed the poison thing inside her. It was alive. it had needs that superseded – everyone's. all she wants is joy but the poison begs to be fed. but when she feeds it, does what it wants, it gets stronger, the better to eat you alive inside and out, my dear.



*The five spots are gone and The Bear is onstage alone, looking aristocratic and intimidating.*

The Bear: earth wild. strong. i can sleep all winter if i want to, rip you to shreds, if i want to. but i prefer to spend my time breathing, tasting the air, smelling the humans: their fear, their love, their greed, their despair. they don't scare me. i can eat them. vanish them, flesh and bones down my gullet. the bare essentials. i prefer exstasy, the smells that surge from all living creatures when they rejoice inside the passions of their becoming, the pulse of their ontological existence is perfume to me. those bear essentials. i rip your throat open with my teeth, my teeth deep into your flesh, the tendons of your neck, blood bursts onto my tongue, over my teeth, floods my mouth. nice.

*The Bear goes to sit nonchalantly on the edge of the stage as the contestants appear in the aisles, very attractively dressed in black or brown or white, with bear masks. they threaten the audience w/o stealing too much attention from The Bear. they are most definitely talented wild, sexy beasts.*

The Bear: once upon a time, a long time ago, mama bear got her first very own washing machine. It wasn't a fancy kind, just a plain white washing machine with two dials. (sigh) mama bear never told a soul how she would wake up in the middle of the night while her family was dreaming, and sneak down quietly to touch her first very own washing machine. with both palms flat on its shiny cool surface she would close her eyes and say, *thank you, thank you, thank you. thank you.*

*Lights off central stage. All bears vanish. Ellen in the office.*

Ellen: only powerless people manipulate. only people who believe that they are powerless manipulate. because no one is powerless, when she told herself she was powerless, she was manipulating herself, not in a good way, into a frenzy.

*One spotlight onstage and May is in it.*

May: how many versions of truth are true?

*Angela is not in May's spotlight but standing behind her, facing forward, supportive.*

Angela: what if I was to rain on you like thunder, decry your addiction to rules and games, your ignorance of love and play and freedom?

*Maggie without The Bear head, joins Angela behind May and facing forward.*

Maggie: fascists fractured like the mops and buckets in fantasia:

*Suddenly everyone is lined up, facing forward  
in back of May.*

All: smaller and smaller.

Maggie: and more and ever more woven into the fabric of how we are with each other.

Angela: it's the women who hold each other down while other women gouge out young women's –

All: no!

Angela: young girls' –

All: no!

Angela: ok! gouge out children's clitorises.

Maggie: men cut the top off baby-boy penises.

Angela: well.

Maggie: what do you make of that?

Angela: we cut the tip off of pleasure flesh. this is how we dance, we do not honor pleasure.

Ellen: the genders do far less damage to each other than they do to their own kind.

May: is everything for sale?

Maggie: sparkle power.

*Lights change and the color of May's spotlight.  
May, alone on the pageant stage, begins her  
talent in mime while:*

Ellen: can it be our purpose to create some wild invulnerable machine out of ourselves? or is it to become as human as we can be? you seem content to define alive as simply not-dead. (sigh) i was tiny and very brave. i'll keep her hands off my future.

Arlen: you know a poet doesn't see the world any differently than she writes about it. my world is filled with halos, auras, layers of meanings. and each of those meanings means something. and meaning something is its life. i live in a world of word spirits and when i dance with them, i am in a world of oceanic splendor.

*No one is visible except May.*

May: i think we're all incredibly peculiar. peculiar is human, not pathological. pathological means anti-human, by definition, normal isn't human. normal is a

numerical concept that has pathological effects on the people it's meant to help. unique is nature. there's nothing standard about life. peculiar is human. peculiar is life.

*May finishes her talent with a flourish. her spotlight goes out. Grace is stage right.*

Grace: i'm a real american, i love happy endings; give me, give me, give me a happy ending.

*blackout*  
*end act four*

## ACT FIVE

*Nothing visible except Angela.*

Angela: can you imagine? you're married to olivier but he won't fuck you. he says in his autobiography that he's sorry, that he thinks he may have driven his wife crazy. that he realizes that she had needs that he didn't share. he doesn't mention his bisexuality. he prefers to present himself as a sexual failure. according to him, he denied her sexual and intimate needs. he was entirely enraptured, he says, by his art. and his wife lost her mind. *(sigh)* we continue to dominate our bodies, our own souls, the earth, anything more complex than we are, anything more beautiful, anything splendid that nurtures life - instead we starve, punish, drug, beat, silence our immensities. we need better habits.

*Angela smoothly teeps out of her clothes and, as in West Side Story's song Cool - naked Angela snaps the fingers of one hand, she gets in two snaps when, from all around the house, all the contestants snap the fingers of one hand in the same rhythm. the contestants are in ballgowns. they make their way up the aisle towards her, looking gorgeous and hip. it is as if Angela is pulling them forward, towards herself, onto the stage.*

Angela: the soft sweet taste of summer air.

*Angela and the contestants are now using both hands to snap, the rhythm is impressive.*

Angela: sink into the luxury of the time that is present now.

*Once All contestants are onstage with naked Angela, the snapping stops abruptly.*

Angela: i walk at night, sing to the stars. the stars sing back.

*Angela vanishes behind the contestants and exits. Lights, cameras, music up. the stage is glorious. the contestants parade gracefully in ballgowns. Arlen's images enhance the loveliness of these beauties. the atmosphere is stately, calm. the music is instrumental, not trite, corny, or sentimental, not instrumental versions of songs we know, no subliminal verbal messages. perhaps 18<sup>th</sup> century or very new. May stands out among the contestants.*

May: i don't want to dress up again and be stood up. but i don't want to leave my party dress in the closet til it disintegrates before i've even worn it. i'm having a good hair day. i want to show off a little.

*Grace is stage right, running the show.*

Grace: i can't describe the pain as unbearable because i bear it. (*sings:*) the itsy bitsy spider went up the water spout. down came the rain and washed the spider out. out came the sun and dried up all the rain. and the itsy bitsy spider went up the spout again.

*Arlen is with her equipment, her line overlaps the end of Grace's song.*

Arlen: it's difficult to avoid an avalanche of idiocy.

*Lights dim artistically on the contestants, they are still visible but not as brightly lit. Ellen is in the office, dressed to go out in the rain.*

Ellen: there is something sacred about the rain.

Arlen: you can only talk about things you've thought about. good is just as complicated as evil: nuanced. we should try to talk about how happiness feels. we assume that we all mean the same thing, so we don't discuss joy, we take it as a given, the word on a christmas card. but what about the unspeakable joy of existence? and our unspoken pleasure in that joy. the bottoms of your feet touch the inside of your shoes, their soles touch the linoleum, touch the concrete of dreams, to the center of the earth roiling in fire. your heart beats swirl with the galaxy. that was a long time ago when i could still feel feminine before the weight of my tasks washed away my delicacy; i know that's a mixed metaphor but i don't care. that's what i mean, i've lost my ability to put myself beneath you, beneath your cruelties, your dominations, beneath your parasitic addictions, beneath your orders, your conceptions of what the world is, what it's made of.

*As Ellen speaks, the contestants diminish in numbers til only May is left on the pageant stage. Ellen takes off her coat, starts unbuttoning her blouse.*

Ellen: he said i was a great wife. the doctors said i had nothing to do with his breakdown. but when your husband is losing his mind. and you try everything heart centered and everything head centered and he's still fast on the way to personal immolation, internal disintegration and then he pulls a gun. (*Ellen takes off her blouse*) the police say it was loaded. it's difficult not to blame yourself. you're his wife. if you were such a great wife, then why isn't your love and care enough to keep him in the world we created together? was there something wrong with him? with me? (*Ellen takes off her bra*) with us? i saw myself pour vitriol on someone and watched their soul burn. how am i supposed to feel about myself now? proud of having won the argument? to what end? we scorch and

rape our worlds so why shouldn't the world turn against us? (*sigh*)

*Ellen rips the rest of her clothes off in one swift movement. she is naked for a moment then turns her back and blackout on the office.*

*Lights bright on the pageant stage, May has won. the contestants surround her, posing. May, smiling, wears a crown, holds flowers.*

*Lights fade slowly as Grace sings about a very pleasant sexual encounter with Dinah and her banjo.*

Grace: someone's in the kitchen with Dinah, someone's in the kitchen i know-o-o-o-o, someone's in the kitchen with Dinah, strummin' on the old banjo. and singin' fee, fi, fiddle-i- O! (*now we're at the peak, a very pleasant experience indeed:*) fee, fi, fiddle-i- O! O! O! O! (*now quieter:*) fee, fi, fiddle-i- OOOOOO! strummin' on the old banjo....

Maggie: she did it because it was a beautiful thing to do and she's not sorry. she expressed her love. as much and as often as she could. what better way is there to live a life? say goodnight, gracie.

Grace: good night, gracie.

*Grace gives a sign to the lightbooth to fade to black.*

Fin

Appendix:

Quote from Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958)

To coerce a man [sic] is to deprive him of freedom – freedom from what? Almost every moralist in human history has praised freedom. Like happiness and goodness, like nature and reality, it is a term whose meaning is so porous that there is little interpretation that it seems able to resist. I do not propose to discuss either the history of this protean word or the more than two hundred senses of it recorded by historians of ideas. I propose to examine no more than two of these senses – but they are central ones, with a great deal of human history behind them, and, I dare say, still to come. The first of these political senses of freedom or liberty (I shall use both words to mean the same), which (following much precedent) I shall call the ‘negative’ sense, is involved in the answer to the question ‘What is the area within which the subject – a person or group of persons – is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?’ The second, which I shall call the ‘positive’ sense, is involved in the answer to the question, ‘What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?’ The two questions are clearly different, even though the answers to them may overlap.

Quote from *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1973)

Conversation: ... 1. The action of living or having one’s being in or among. 1705 2. The action of consorting with others; living together, commerce, society, intimacy. 1770 3. Sexual intimacy. 1511 ... 6. Behaviour, manner of life. archaic, ME 7. Interchange of thought and words; familiar discourse or talk. 1580 ... 9. A kind of genre painting representing a group of figures.

Quote from Agatha Christie, *A Murder is Announced* (1950)

“I like living myself –not just being happy and enjoying myself and having a good time. I mean *living* – waking up and feeling, all over me, that I’m *there* – ticking over.”

Chinese proverb:

Keep a green tree in your heart and perhaps a songbird will come.