

Tim Wagg

One does not pet a rattlesnake until it has been defanged; only then does one take it on the road so that one and all can marvel at its natural beauty

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THE PHYSICS ROOM

A CONTEMPORARY ART PROJECT SPACE

Get your dead incinerated crumbs of corpse out of my hair!

Evangeline Graham

You take me to the worst places.

You never take me anywhere nice.

You know how much I hate to be under the ground.

Yet here we are again, you tugging me along.

I don't think you care what I think. I'm just a thing you drag around.

Years ago, when I went to the dentist to get de-fanged, he told me a story about working at a hospital, when he was a young man. The dentist was in the surgeon's operating theatre. The surgeon was taking off the leg of a man who had been driving on the highway. Got all bunged up. The leg had to come off. He, the guy, he had a lot of guns on him when he was brought in. The doctors thought they would have to call the police. Then they found out that he – the guy – was a doctor himself. So it was alright. Maybe a doctor at that very hospital. The dentist wasn't sure. But the dentist was definitely there in the operating room, and the leg was handed (that's what he said, the leg was handed) to him, and the dentist, who was a young man then, put it in the place you put limbs, in the theatre. Then later that day the dentist was down in the bowels of the hospital, doing some other job. The dentist crossed paths with an orderly struggling with a big bag. Want help? asked the dentist. Yes, said the man, but be careful, it's heavy, it's a leg. Oh, said the dentist, I know that leg. What's happening to it now? Getting burnt, said the orderly. That's all.

I feel like I'm dead. I'm not even a body you drag around – I'm just a leg. A leg that's dead and carried.

When I was living you held me in your arms. But now that I am just a leg that's dead, there's no reason for you to be clutching me. There's no reason for you to hang on so long. But you do, you hang on, and you drag me round to dumps like this. I'm not a corpse even, I'm just a dead appendage, but taking a quick squizz I can tell you that this place sucks.

You like to watch your own body move. You want to show me. You say, 'Here I took these steps and saw such things.' You carried me with you and I can't say it was very comfortable. Now that I'm dead, your moving legs don't matter to me, and neither do your arms.

Before I was a dead leg, I was a woman who once sat on a sofa and watched a movie. In this movie, two friends go to scatter the ashes of their dead friend into the ocean. But Walter, one of the living friends, won't stop going on about 'Nam, and then when they, the living friends, get started with the sprinkling, the ashes of the dead friend, Donny, blow right back in their faces. And I thought yeesh, that is disgusting. And although in the movie Walter is kind of a big dick who always makes everything worse, I tend to agree with him that Donny was pretty much a loser in real life, in the movie, so it was no surprise that now that he was dead he was still a screw up. And if he had been my friend I would have told him – Get your dead incinerated crumbs of corpse out of my hair!

But I'm not in that movie I'm in this one and it's a dump like I told you. I don't feel alone though – there are a lot of legs around here, you know. And shoes. But it's fucking grubby. I wouldn't wear my dead foot bare upon the floor, if I had a choice about these things.

I wonder if they burned my trousers, and my single sock and shoe.

I wonder why you carry me with you, why you need to make me feel your feet crunching between soda cans, your eyes directing your hands, your hands directing your eyes, your ears roaring.

I wonder why you care about power plugs and orchids and water bottles, and stripper poles and shaving foam, and batteries, and full nude hot girls, and gateways, and molded vulvas and the dirt upon the tiles.

You think I'll like these things because I'm dead, and because these things will remind me of me.

Like I said, you like moving around, and showing me what you see. It makes for a very particular kind of vision, this walking-looking. It's seeing, but as dictated by gait. I guess, as a leg, I'm sensitive to the view from the foot.

So we tread. You and I move through places, and then we move on, in a rhythm of looking that is strictly encounter based. The clutter we pass we attend to only briefly. I can't quite see what I'm looking at – I'm in a memory game, as much as I'm in a movie. You know, the kind of memory game played at birthday parties, in which living children try to remember all the objects that have been placed on a tray before them, and then taken away. That game's a funny one – the answers are present at the start, and then they disappear. To remember them, and to win, you have to make up your own clues, by attaching your own meanings, your own story, to the things on the tray. You have to socialize the objects, in order to make yourself care.

If we were playing the game properly, I'd complain. I'd say you haven't given me enough to work with. You aren't giving me a chance to care. You don't give me time to arrange my train of thought, and then just when I am getting used to breezing by, you turn off the music, and we pause. And, having got me scrambling for answers once again, you cut away, and take me in another circle, as if to say, that wasn't important anyway. But that's because it's your body, your holiday. You decide the looking, not me.

All I've got to go on is the knowledge of being your spare part, of moving through a place as your body does. The turned over parts and pieces I'm seeing – broken cash register, a glue-stick, old screws forever – don't mean much to me. You don't hold on. You don't clutch at anything but me. I'd say this was very essentialist of you, except that, as an amputation, I'm not too keen on such reductions.

In this miserable piece of shit nothingness room, you carry me with you.

I think perhaps you have taken me here to show me that you are a person who can tolerate dust and trash and ashes.

I think that you are taking me on a spiritual retreat.

I think you hope that's what it is.

I would like to know which one of us you think is the monk, and which you think is the donkey.

I would like to know where you're going to put me down, once I get too heavy for you to keep dragging me around.

I would like to know if you are going to take me to the crematorium, once we go back through those gates.

Do you think you will keep my dried up crumby remnants in a box beside your bed? Then I think I would feel less afraid of being burnt up. I would feel less afraid of being in a place that doesn't have a name.