

Title	Seven Digressions from an Essay	Author	Richard Flood
Date	2010	Artist	Rivane Neuenschwander
Publication	FLOOD, Richard; RAYMON, Yasmil; THOMAS, Rachael; LARSEN, Lars Bang; HERKENHOFF, Paulo. <i>A Day Like Any Other</i> . Rio de Janeiro: Cobogó; New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010.		

Richard Flood

Seven
Digressions

from

an
Essay

Contingent (Contingente); Continent-Cloud (Continente-nuvem); Secondary Stories (Estórias secundárias); Rain Rains (Chove chuva); Continentals (Continentais); Starving Letters (Carta faminta); Pangaea's Diaries (Diários de Pangaea); Belongs Does Not Belong (Pertence não pertence); Rain Maps (Carta d'água)

DIGRESSION (FORECAST RAIN)

The world is drowning. The rain is constant, driving. Continents are tearing apart and reforming. Skies are scudding from dark and agitated to kaleidoscopic reveries. Insects and mollusks triumph over the land, redrawing boundaries and forming armies of terrifying industry. In the house in the forest, buckets and metal bowls collect the insistently dripping rainwater until they are full, and a Sisyphean bailing begins anew. On a table, slugs devour sheets of rice paper, creating patterns of exquisite violation. On a nearby platter, ants assault a sliver of carpaccio, wresting it into choreographed geography. Attempting to flee the drowning house, beetles cling tenaciously to bubbles rising from a sudsy bath. In a clearing behind the house, maps lie exposed to the downpours and their colors blend and slip into the mud, rendering the diagrams useless with their liquid boundaries.

Inventory of Small Deaths (Blow) (Inventário das pequenas mortes [Sopro]); The Tenant (O inquilino)

DIGRESSION (TRAVEL ADVISORY)

An engorged bubble drifts along the perimeter of the jungle. Its movement is drowsy and languorous. As it twirls and dips, it appears to contain all that it reflects like a canopic vessel composed of air and dreams. There is a delicate coquettishness in its dance of perilous endurance, the outcome of which even it knows. On the outskirts of the town, the bubble slips into a house, where it floats from room to room. Whether its passage is part of an idyll or a surveillance mission is unclear. Neither guest nor intruder, the bubble has an exquisite fragility that suggests a tubercular heroine dancing on the brink; every move is both a triumph and a prelude to nothingness.

I Wish Your Wish (Eu desejo o seu desejo)

DIGRESSION (KNOW YOUR DESTINATION)

The name of the cathedral is Nosso Senhor do Bonfim. Its name honors Christ in his last moment on the cross, when the agony resolved itself into a silently stoic passing—the good end. On the gates girdling the church, rainbow waves of ribbons flicker in the breeze. As lines of pilgrims add ever more layers of ribbons, women in white turbans and bell skirts dip into soapy buckets to wash the

Title	Seven Digressions from an Essay	Author	Richard Flood
Date	2010	Artist	Rivane Neuenschwander
Publication	FLOOD, Richard; RAYMON, Yasmit; THOMAS, Rachael; LARSEN, Lars Bang; HERKENHOFF, Paulo. <i>A Day Like Any Other</i> . Rio de Janeiro: Cobogó; New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010.		

steps leading to the cathedral. Nosso Senhor do Bonfim is known for his miracles, and each of the thousands of ribbons is the posting of a possibility. In the shadows of the altars lurk the others, the parallels. Nosso Senhor is also Oxalá, but different. Both traveled to the New World, but one came from Portugal and one from Africa. Even the colors of the ribbons are the seed of Oxalá. The pilgrim reaching for a glittering yellow ribbon is also reaching for the patronage of Oxalá's daughter Oxum, who is the envied goddess (*orixa*) of wealth and fresh water. The combination is intoxicating. Yellow ribbons from the gates mean dreams of gold, copper, iron, emeralds, diamonds, and combine with waterfalls, infinity pools, ponds, streams, water parks, weirs, flush toilets, oceans, seas.

One or Another Crossword (Uma ou outra palavra cruzada); Love Lettering; Mapa-múndi/BR (Postal); Scrabble (Palavras cruzadas); Word/World; First Love (Primeiro amor); [...] Stories of Another Day (Estórias de um outro dia)

DIGRESSION (DESTINATION)

The courtyard is hung with an enormous multi-colored, three-dimensional crossword puzzle. Its fabric grid devours the open space and columns of words climb and cross in the promise of plein-air discourse. Visitors lose their balance trying to find the angle of revelation. Frustration erodes into submission as the skeins of words and fiber weave themselves into an intoxicating collapse of meaning. Tumbling from the vortex of subverted language, people enter the shadowed loggia wrapping the courtyard. They cannot help encountering a vast aquarium filled with captive goldfish swimming in patterns that describe the dimensions of their prison. Drifting from their tail fins are words; simple words like "I," "hotel," "love," "next," and "you" pass each other in the tank, creating felicitous poems that do not linger in the lambent water. A philanthropic vendor hands out postcards that travel the world without ever leaving the courtyard. The micropsian vision gives way to the macropsian delusion. Hence it is easy to remain rooted in Brazil while visiting New York, Bogotá, Berlin, Hollywood, Madrid, Ibiza, Hawaii. It's delusional travel, with all the right destinations in all the wrong places. Farther along, the designer of the crossword puzzle has created a multidimensional game of Scrabble. The letters of the alphabet are carved into dehydrated oranges, and there are gaming cages for the disposition of the pieces. The guests are playing rough and fast, perhaps because of the strange, shell-like fragility of the oranges. In the dirt bordering the loggia, a contingent of ants mimics the Scrabble players off in the shade. The ants, caught in a sunbeam, appear alarmingly vivid as they

move strips of paper emblazoned with the words "world" and "word." There is a teetering randomness in their movements that seems almost drug-induced. Still, the cultural baggage of the "world" and the "word" will inevitably weigh heavily on those who bear it aloft. Under an umbrella in a corner of the courtyard, a man sits at a card table facing a woman. She's talking about a man; no, a boy. She loved him and he loved her. Then it was over. The man gradually begins sketching the boy back to the present for his client. The mouth seems easiest, then the shape of the face, but something goes wrong. The nose compromises the mouth and the eyes do not hold the physiognomy together. The man keeps questioning the woman as she desperately tries to reconcile her memory with her sentiment. In the background, the incessant sound of typing drowns out the woman's narrative of love lost. Arranged along the eastern perimeter of the loggia is a multitude of typewriters on tables. The typewriters have been neutered and enhanced by the surgical removal of all alphabetic keys, leaving only dots. The guests sit facing a wall of green baize while typing abstract epistles in which form and content are twinned imperatives. The absence of the typewriters' letters has stopped no one from creating meaning. Without the letters, there is a freedom from linguistic constraints and an invitation to create a new optical language. When the guests have finished their contributions, they mount them on the baize fabric to create a hymn to the liberating seduction of the concrete poem.

Gastronomic Translations (Traduções gastronômicas); Edible Alphabet (Alfabeto comestível)

DIGRESSION (RECIPES)

A piece of lined paper slips from a coat pocket onto the linoleum floor of a market. It comes to rest near the selection of grains and detergents. A curious hand retrieves the paper and a curious eye scans its contents: olive oil/vinegar; cherry vine tomatoes; lettuce, bell peppers; coffee; watermelon; cantelope [*sic*], bananas, oranges, [an erasure]; cashews, pistachios; eggs; chicken breasts; parmasean [*sic*] cheese; oregano (from the organic herb woman); garlic. Caught in a gustatory force field, the list's new owner moves somnambulistically through the aisles, filling a market basket with the memo's items. A guilty, almost hysterical giggle rises in the shopper, close to the kind that overtakes one in church when something as unexpected and natural as a fart or a hiccup occurs. Now only one thing is left to resolve prior to coaxing a recipe from the list's ingredients and that is locating the mysterious "organic herb woman." Being a bit of an etymologist, the shopper knows that the linguistic root of *oregano* is from the Greek, meaning joy of the

Title	Seven Digressions from an Essay	Author	Richard Flood
Date	2010	Artist	Rivane Neuenschwander
Publication	FLOOD, Richard; RAYMON, Yasmit; THOMAS, Rachael; LARSEN, Lars Bang; HERKENHOFF, Paulo. <i>A Day Like Any Other</i> . Rio de Janeiro: Cobogó; New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010.		

mountains, and selects a path from the market to a hillock in a neighboring park, where an old woman sits surrounded by herbal samples hanging from a clothesline and rustling aromatically in the breeze. Each sample contains one of twenty-six herbs whose first letter corresponds to the Latin alphabet: açafraão (saffron in the language of the place) to zattar. The woman has stories to share before parting with her inventory. Oregano, she tells the shopper, is the invention of Aphrodite and was worn as a wreath by Artemis, the goddess midwife, whose oregano coil was traditionally worn by women in labor. Feeling new burdens of piety and ritual embedded in the recipe, the shopper hurries home to discover an enormous harvest of menus to be reaped from the recipe's largesse.

Deadline Calendar, Canteiros/Conversations and Constructions; Involuntary Sculptures (Speech Acts) (Esculturas involuntárias [Atos de fala]); A Day Like Any Other (Um dia como outro qualquer)

DIGRESSION (SOCIAL WORK)

The custodians patrol the corridors with an air of benign goodwill. Their crepe-soled footfalls mute the sound of their routines. Stabilization and the appearance of normalcy are the goals. Any digressions are met with the imposition of restraint. Most of the residents are kept busy with tasks and games that reinforce both creativity and order in the environment. In the facility's large industrial kitchen, a select group of residents sit surrounded by products used for cooking and hygiene. Using childproof scissors, they are neatly cutting and peeling expiration dates off perishable products and capturing those rectangles to create calendars, which will be sold in the gift shop just outside the gates. There is competition among the cutters as they try to secure their monthly chronologies, but it never becomes cause for argument. The activity is dedicated to linear harmony, and the residents seem at ease with the simple accrual of dates. In the dining room, there are those residents who simply eat, but there are others who arrange their food with feverish intensity into structures and communities. Among the custodians, there is speculation that these food modelers come from professions like architecture, engineering, and city planning. They play with precision and cunning. Does a pasta city trump a ramping bridge made of pastel wafers? Do two eggs in a desert of flour rival an acoustical wall of cheese squares? Only the vanity of the residents' creativity compromises the viability of their creations. Squabbling over materials is rare and subdued as the residents are committed more to sustaining their fragile concepts than to integrating them in a coherent

whole. Only when their materials can't sustain the creators' fantasies does the process move forward, past the collapsed parking ramp and tumbled stadium. The rest of the residents are unburdened by the need to create or compete. As they finish their desserts and linger over their beverages, their fingers move idly, blindly across the tabletops, modeling forms out of debris. An occasional pursing of the lips or intake of air may indicate concentration, but that is the exception. The fingers do all the work as they collide with corks, toothpicks, sugar packets, pieces of bread, napkins, straws, soiled menus, foil. Out of this debris flows a stream of unsorted, three-dimensional doodles. The residents barely glance at their creations. Later the custodians will harvest them for the shop. Torpor hangs over the facility as the residents rise to return to their rooms and dormitories. On the way to bed, they glance up at the flip clocks installed along the hallways. The soft mechanical sound marking the forward movement of the seconds and hours creates a cadence that the residents adapt in their walk. Seeing the endless fall of zeroes into zeroes provides a sense of security that all is as it was and is and will be at the end of this day like any other.

The Fall (A queda); One Thousand and One Possible Nights (As mil e uma noites possíveis); Arabian Moons (Noites árabes)

DIGRESSION (SOCIAL STUDIES)

In the court of the emperor, a child who would be prince is given a challenge. He is the youngest of the emperor's children and the one whose mother has best schooled him in what it means to be son and heir. If the child is to command the attention of the emperor, he must first endure a test that will determine the fate of an audience with his father. The elders take the boy to the mouth of the cave of One Thousand and One Nights. An obsidian spoon is placed between his lips and he is instructed to bite down on its arching handle. A flawless freshly laid egg is placed in the bowl of the spoon and the child is instructed to run ahead and not stop until he is washed by the flickering light of an Arabian moon. If he stops running or drops the egg, says the eldest of the elders, he will be forever banished from the court of the emperor. Tremulously, as if running in syrup, the boy enters the cave and is immediately plunged into a howling wind and the swirling constellations of a dark night sky. The boy's knees are shaking and the egg is bouncing precariously. As the constellations spin, a voice rises out of wind and a froth of stars soar into words and sentences. The voice whispers in the child's ears. The words intertwine around stories. The constellations fly deep into space and careen back to caress the runner's face. Is it the voice of

Title	Seven Drigressions from an Essay	Author	Richard Flood
Date	2010	Artist	Rivane Neuenschwander
Publication	FLOOD, Richard; RAYMON, Yasmit; THOMAS, Rachael; LARSEN, Lars Bang; HERKENHOFF, Paulo. <i>A Day Like Any Other</i> . Rio de Janeiro: Cobogó; New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010.		

his mother that curls into his ears? She's telling tales of a fisherman and a jinni, an ebony horse, Sinbad the seaman, Nur al-Din Ali and Badr al-Din Hasan, and the many-columned city of Iram. The stories fill his head and steady his balance. His knees rise higher and the voice becomes a wind at his back. The egg lies steady in the bowl and the child soars into the sky, embraced by the constellations and carried out of the cave to a place of sand and silence. The egg remains secure but the boy has stopped running. His mother's voice has deserted him but he still feels her warmth in the cool desert air. The full moon flickers like a guttering candle and the boy notices how far his shadow stretches before him. He raises his hands and sees that they are no longer plump but elongated and that his sleeves have retreated up his arms. He is struggling to comprehend these changes when he is startled by a procession composed of elders and the emperor's wives approaching from the distance. Waning sounds of lamentation are slowly overtaken by songs of rejoicing. In an instant the boy knows of the death of his father. The respirations of the moon make the procession strangely ghostly as it recedes and emerges in the turbulent moonlight. Two figures separate themselves from the rest. One is the elder of elders and the other is the boy's mother, the storyteller. The elder removes the spoon from the boy's mouth and places the egg in the new emperor's right hand. His mother raises her arm sinuously into the air as a scarlet ribbon falls from her wrist. She describes a crescent against the sky, cups her hand, and floats a bubble into the palm of her son's left hand. Contained in these two orbs, she whispers to the boy, is all you need to know. Somewhat later, during the celebrations to mark his ascendancy, the egg hatches and the bubble bursts. The mother gives her son one final embrace.