

PEOPLE I USED TO KNOW

STEPHEN SLAPPE
2012

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I've met a lot of people in my life. Everyone has really. The majority of those people occupy a small portion of my memory bank, some have been all but erased, probably to make room for new faces and names. An expert on cognition might be able to provide a more specific explanation but this is my essay. These people I used to know were close friends, dumb kids down the street, awkward sex partners, and rowdy drinking buddies. Each one exists in a specific time (the past) and a place (somewhere else) on my subjective timeline.

But memory is a bit more complex nowadays. Thanks to the combined wonders of electricity, digital image processing, and social networking, people I used to know regularly appear in my home, at my job, and even in my pocket. Initially, this was an exciting turn of events! The internet, with its text-based search engines, has always invited cyberstalking. It's just as easy to type an ex's name as it is to type "free porn." Social networking sites have upped the ante, there are now databases built to archive people I used to know. Cyberstalking has been promoted from part time to full time with benefits, if you know what I mean. In the era preceding social networking, a person had to cast lines wildly into the digital void, sifting through pages of synonyms and false

leads in order to locate a single pixelated jpeg of your ex on her employer's website.

The allure faded quickly and an uncomfortable reality of social networking has become apparent—people I used to know are fucking assholes. Not all of them of course, many of them are respectable netizens, productive workers, and all-around honest folks. However, the assholes have a way of haunting me with their right-wing rants, religious zealotry, and overall lack of personal boundaries. My negative reaction toward posts made by these people has acted as an early warning system for what I see as an inherent flaw in social networking. Namely, it remembers too well and I believe it is important to forget people, to let their presence in your life wither with time and distance. And by forgetting, I don't mean deletion but more like preserving a version of the person you once knew, letting it slowly meld with the long narrative you construct when recalling the past. The images and text in this book are an attempt at reclaiming mystery and subjectivity, recognizing that people I used to know have changed into other people but, just as importantly, my version of them is worth saving.

Around 2005, I began collecting photographs of people I used to know in a folder on my computer desktop. For me, image collection has always been a relatively mindless form of feigned productivity while poking around the internet. Over the years, I have gathered tens of thousands of jpegs and gifs, squirreled away in very loosely organized folders. People I Used to Know was just one of many folders, existing only as an archive of my obsessive

habits. In 2010, I began examining these images outside of their social networking context-- no names, mutual friends, or other indicators of the person's identity. I noticed their living rooms, kitchens, clothing, cars, and backyards. I looked at their faces and saw strangers, strangers who were simultaneously infecting my past and, especially in the case of the assholes, influencing my present.

So I erased them. The face and skin in each image have been replaced with algorithmically generated patterns, constructed from pixels in the background. The text paired with each image conveys a prominent memory of my being in that person's presence. It's a way of trying to pull these images closer to my hazy personal narrative and away from the self-conscious clarity of the networked town square.

For the record, the people included in this book are not assholes.

Stephen Slappe

Portland, Oregon, November 2012

a case of beer separating us



the best record store in Columbia



tough mouth, sweet disposition



basement storyteller



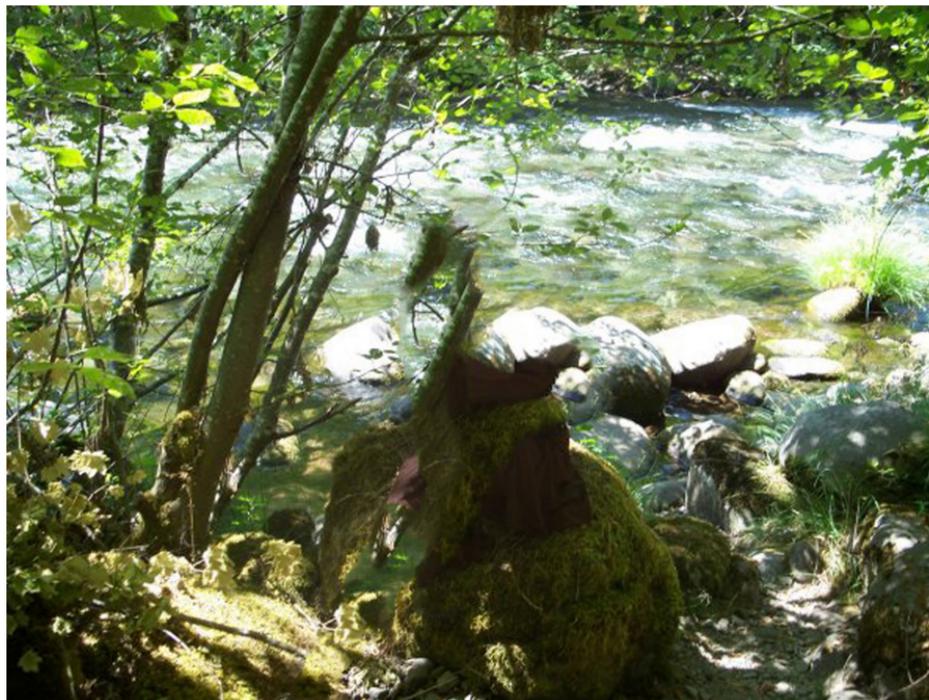
I learned from his family



fucking everywhere



Thunderbird in a vacant warehouse



short conversations in a bright bar



video introduction



twin



ants in Arkansas



painting her apartment



giant glasses in her mom's house



Algebra



takes no shit



voyeur



quiet



walking with a cane



too drunk



cigarettes and dirt jumps



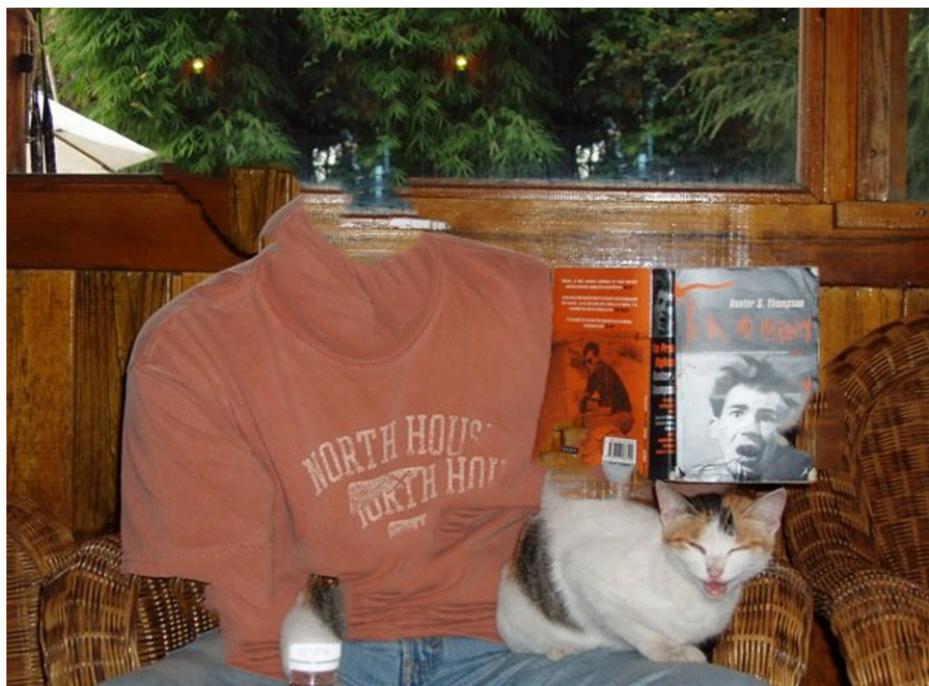
fits in the hallway



talking under an interstate bridge



drag queen Halloween



her brother, my friend



pussy paintings and mary janes



shot his partner in the ass at a party



teenage skinhead



sweaty handholding on cold nights



equal parts bourbon and water



a bunch of G.I. Joes for a stack of comics



minor crimes



summer PCP under a carport



pizza shop make-out



a tight fade



playground nights



stepping on a knife



Jack Daniels and Slayer at the Hell House



swimming with pants

car full



22012014

punk shows



trench coat



lunchtime hot dogs and video games



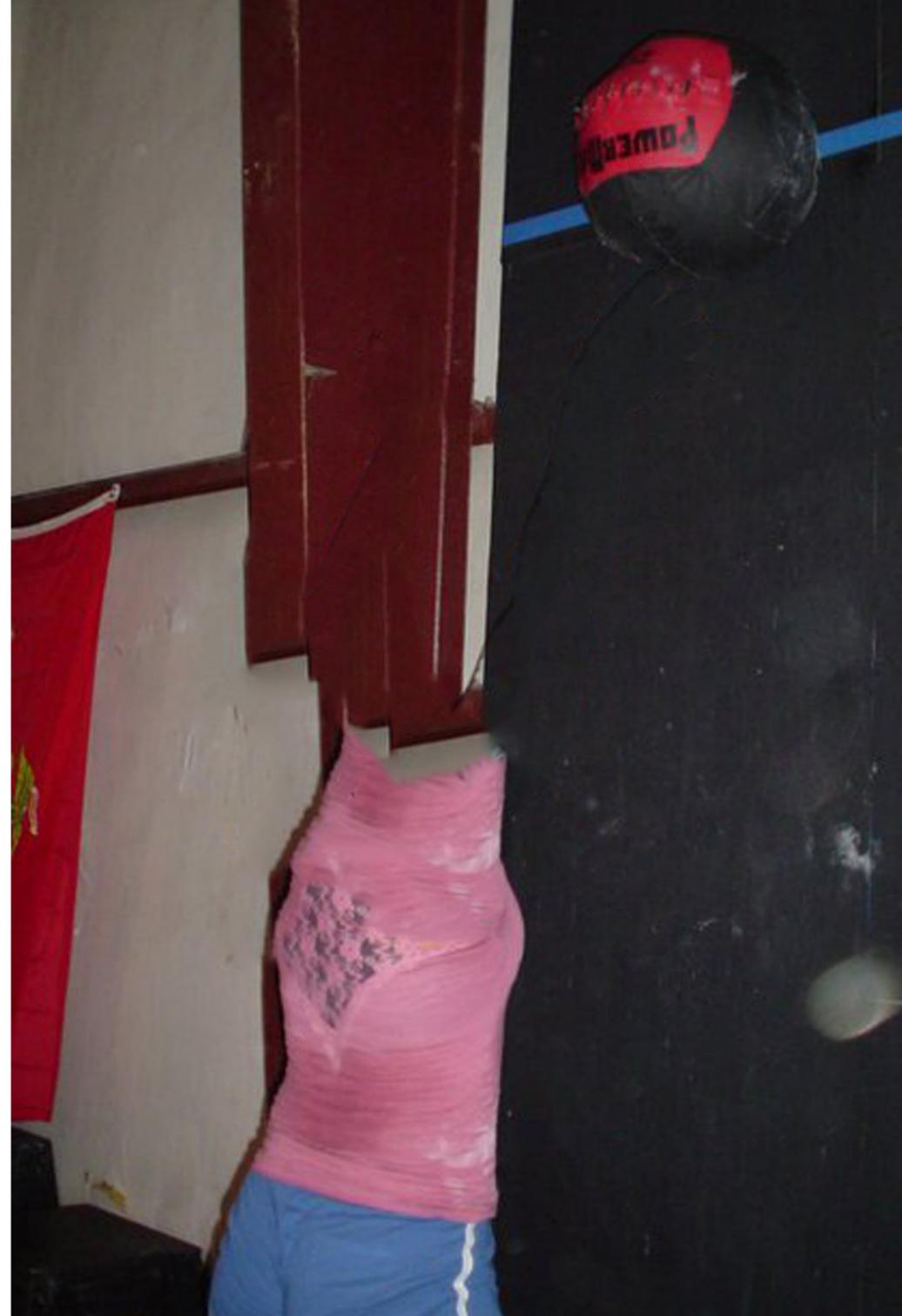
dusty keg party



skinny arms hanging from polo shirts



grope and tug



bombing a parking garage



metal ramps on hot days



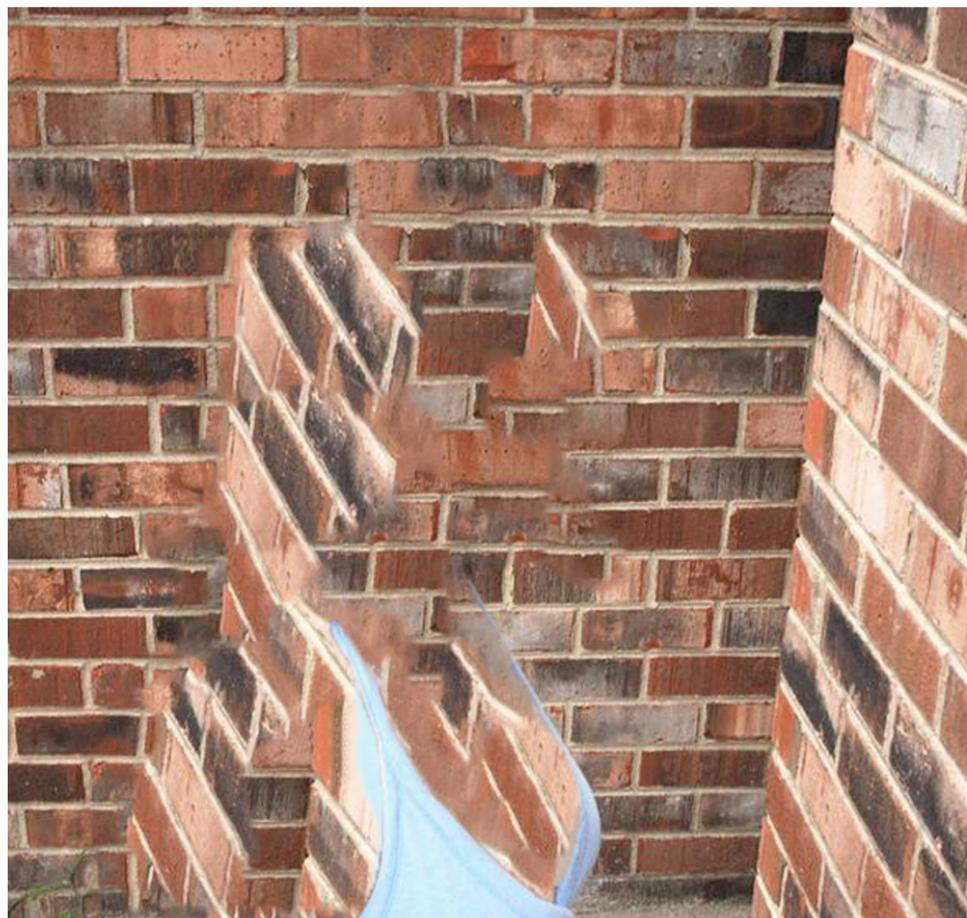
I barely knew her



on a bank of the Kanawha River



hippie parents



darkroom antics



smiling in the distance



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