



*Stilt Fishing, Sri Lanka. Photograph by Ulrich Lambert*

been blocked and the drilling stops, the experience of watching the ghostly flock is unquestionably powerful. It is also disorienting in a way that, it occurs to me, Booth would have welcomed.

Though sympathetic to Booth, Clarke ultimately refused to help him “testify” against the wanton destruction. A few days after their meeting, he learned that Booth had proceeded without him. The actor had purchased a cemetery plot, had had a coffin made, and had arranged for a funeral service to be recited for the dead pigeons. For several days, according to Clarke, Booth “continued to visit the grave of his little friends, and mourned over them with a grief that did not seem at all theatrical.”

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## Ravished

JULIA SHIPLEY

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**PAULUS BERENSOHN** stands in his doorway wearing a purple shirt, black cotton pants, and flip-flops. His white hair is combed back from his formidable forehead and gathered in a small ponytail. The chunky necklace he’s wearing, made from pink and orange plastic beads, gives him the appearance of an elegant, elderly first grader—and in some ways he is exactly that. For the past eighty-one years he has concerned himself with primary skills: movement (he’s a practitioner of modern dance); manual arts (he’s a sculptor, mainly in clay); and the naming and investigation of sixty-one human senses.

Paulus is the author of the ceramicist’s bible, *Finding One’s Way with Clay*, and a handmade book in which he’s written a vo-

luminous list of senses: sense of temperature and temperature change (#7); sense of fear, dread of injury, death, or attack (#27); domineering and territorial sense (#36); sense of pupation, including cocoon building and metamorphosis (#50); a sense of being known (#60)—sense upon sense, handwritten in green Magic Marker.

While preparing our lunch, grating cabbage and picking the crackled shells off hard-boiled eggs, Paulus warns that “our most endangered sense is touch,” both activating tactility and receiving it. (That’s #14—to feel, particularly touch on the skin.) Thus commences a mini-lecture on shaping clay as a means of reconnecting with touch, and on clay itself, which is suggested by some scientists to be an ancestral material, an intermediary between inert minerals and the earliest life forms. As he peels the tiny label off a banana and adds it to the strand of stickies jewelling the cabinet, he allows that science has confirmed religion, wherein Christianity’s Adam and Eve, fashioned on a potter’s



wheel, correspond to geology, as “Adam” translates to “red clay,” and red pigment is evidence of iron, essential to the hemoglobin in our blood.

Filling up two goblets of water, Paulus explains what he means by senses in the first place: “Senses are ways we get information about the environment,” he says. “They’re ways of participating in the world.” He laments that our sense of sight (#1) has overwhelmed our sense of hearing (#10, including resonance, vibrations, sonars, and ultrasonic frequencies), which he says is ten times more powerful than vision. Therefore, he is committed to “slow seeing,” and has been cutting nature photographs into skinny strips and then weaving the strips together—an image of a red desert landscape with shadows, cut and reassembled, now looks kaleidoscopic, like the patterns of a Navajo blanket. He reckons this is the way insects see things with their multifaceted eyes.

“Did you know that there are three hundred pounds of insects for every human on

the planet?” he asks.

I did not.

“Well, that means theirs, not ours, is the dominant reality.”

**BUT WHY** the list?

Paulus’s answer is spare, neutral, and almost Yoda-esque: “Generator of consciousness.” I’d been thinking of his list as analogous to other kinds of lists and inventories, and so I ask, Do you agree or disagree it bears any resemblance to:

- a) a bird count
- b) a probate inventory
- c) a gratitude list
- d) a bucket list
- e) a genome project
- f) the Vietnam Veterans Memorial
- g) a butterfly collection
- h) an extended dictionary definition for “human being”

He agrees with c) d) e) g) and h). “F is a list of the dead,” he says. “I guess it

could become that.”

Paulus began committing his list of senses to paper while reading Guy Murchie’s *The Seven Mysteries of Life*, which has a chapter describing twenty-one senses. And then he added some senses mentioned by philosopher-educator Rudolf Steiner, and then he added some that, as he says, “touched me.” Then he discovered Michael J. Cohen’s *Field Guide* from the World Peace University in Eugene, Oregon, which suggests more senses, and by then he was up to fifty-three, and so he kept going, collecting and classifying them into categories like “radiation,” “feeling,” and “mental”—accounting for what Paulus thinks of as our innate “apps”—until his list had reached #61: sense of acceleration and deceleration.

This sense of speeding up and slowing down has come to his attention lately as he’s developed a condition called atrial fibrillation—his heart rate speeds up inexplicably. “So I am more aware of my heart rate than I was before,” he says. “But that’s something people even without this condition could do, to cultivate awareness, to get in touch with their natural rhythms.”

He cites technology’s fibrillation of a century, noting that his father witnessed the arrival of the automobile and launch of the space shuttle in a single lifetime. When asked what he made of such rapid change, his father replied, “I was so busy making a living I didn’t even notice.”

But what about the opposite—what about the possibility of feeling everything at once? Has Paulus ever known the full extent of his senses? Has he ever felt overwhelmed?

“I think of the French word for overwhelm,” he says. “*Bouleversé*—knocked out! Ravished! I am ravished by abundance.”

*Julia Shipley describes a sense of place in her contribution to Wildbranch: An Anthology of Nature, Environmental, and Place-based Writing.*