

## when does the kosanba rest?

I want a me that is me  
everywhere. I put on my shoes.

I leave early one morning  
to get a coffee and a cab.

After finding my caffeine, I pass  
a bench, and on it is a man

I know as a neighbor. I recognize  
and dismiss him in a flurry.

*You know him...* Bayard murmurs  
from behind my sight as I

pass him. My neighbor sees me, too,  
but doesn't speak. I don't either.

Not because I'm cruel, no.  
The truth is that I'm afraid.

Sometimes, I don't even go out.  
I just stare in the mirror, drink

my houseplants' water, and watch  
my face refuse to become familiar.

On a brave day, I'll leave as far  
as the backyard, standing stark

naked, to see the knotweed  
outgrow me. I'll imagine

it's my bones in the ground,  
expanding in all directions,

sending shoots of me  
into neighboring yards,

corrupting vegetable beds,  
looking through their windows.

I have a different face every day  
but my brain is the same machine.

*What would only stopping  
have done? I think to Bayard.*

*If it were me, I'd have sat down  
as well, taken a moment to talk.*

is his answer. *Well, it isn't  
you. It's me. I don't speak*

*to anyone here.* No cab,  
the lightrail is cheaper.

Streetlights drift to sleep,  
dimming under the sun

as we go, trash on the ground,  
dusty Chryslers line the curb,

corner by corner. Distracted,  
I start to count the Doritos bags,

and seeing this, Bayard blasts  
the shine of a Colt 45 can

abandoned in the crabgrass  
into my eyes. *Watch where*

*you're going,* Bayard sneers  
behind my retinas, optic nerves

afire. I nearly fall into a muddy  
puddle left by last night's rain,

and in it is Bayard's face.  
His mouth is a smile, mine—

a widened O, both moving closer.  
I snatch the fence and avoid

the dirty bath. Still onward.  
This is the first time he's ever

followed me to the lightrail.  
Lucite surfaces of ticket machines

and monitors, announcements

of service delays on LED banners;

all rooms for him to play in.  
Bayard possesses the leashed puppy

we pass. He winks at me and rolls over.  
I like it when we do this alone,

when this other voice  
is a private thing, and honest

answers aren't a public matter.<sup>[SEP]</sup>  
*Stop*, I think at Bayard, then, *YOLO*.

then I say a quick prayer  
over my DD coffee not to see

another living soul till after  
he's bored. A cat rustles leaves

after something, and I notice  
a body under blankets

at the bottom of a walk-down  
stoop I'm about to pass, pressed

against a basement door.  
It doesn't move, the body

or the door. *Look. Yes, look*, he tries.  
I've seen this before.

Even if the person is alive,  
if they were to breathe deep

and shout, I couldn't help.  
*How would you know?* Bayard asks.

My eye contact with the other,  
the neighbor, the friend, the stranger,

fails, invariably. I don't see  
what anyone thinks I do. I walk.

We get quiet.  
The street seems to listen.

I walk and feel—cold.  
I pull tighter the jacket

and feel Bayard's hands, his nails  
brushing against my plastic buttons,

his finger tips sliding down  
the zipper trapping my body's heat.

I say to Bayard, *That's against the rules,*  
say, *You can't touch...*

Bayard's grip tightens around the lapel  
as he begins to peel my jacket off.

*This is new for him,* I wonder aloud.  
He shines the light but I

make the choices—that's how  
this has always worked. I'm alive. Me.

*Life is information*  
*aware of itself,* he claims.

*So what about the dead?* I ask.  
*Well, what about them?* he replies.

*Them, you say?* I can't help  
but laugh when I say this.

The old man leaving the corner store  
eyes me; a single eyebrow

arches up to scrape his hairline,  
and now I wonder what he knows

from seeing me speak to myself,  
or if I can say something to break

the threat I feel in the black  
of his skin, passing mine,

also black, also a man,  
a neighbor, who breathes, eats,

the same. Yet, not safe.  
Now, Bayard becomes him.

Joined, their gaze doesn't move  
from mine; it just goes foggy

in that way of an oracle,  
and it scares me to be seen.

Or maybe my fear isn't  
the unknown behind those eyes.

Maybe my fear is exactly  
what I do know; I was born here,

but here wasn't born in me.  
Here didn't choose me.

A body can claim a place  
but the mind is homeless;

neurons gather around events,  
memories of emotions, thoughts.,

We build the people we walk with,  
and away from. So, maybe, this fear

is architectural. How was I built?  
I could ask this of my neighbor—

he's built me since I was born.  
Since before I knew who

Bayard Rustin even was. I understand  
the distance in a gaze when *other*

is the only fact available to the viewer,  
and that, too, is a form of killing.

Is my life, its gathered information,  
aware of itself?

I don't know when I stop walking,  
turn back. At some point I realize,

the lightrail never mattered.  
Bayard claims me again, steers me

to the basement stoop, dark

& damp from rain last night.

The blanket is wet. Bayard  
pulls it back, reveals my own

body, unmoving. The skin  
of the person who walked here,

who has spoken this long-long,  
peels off in thick sheets, drifts

through the air, and evaporates.  
Eyebrows, scalp, dander—

yet Bayard remains, emerging  
as a *he*, unafraid to be known,

by anyone. Strange that he  
still looks exactly like me.

He looks down at me, shrouds  
me with the same blanket, &

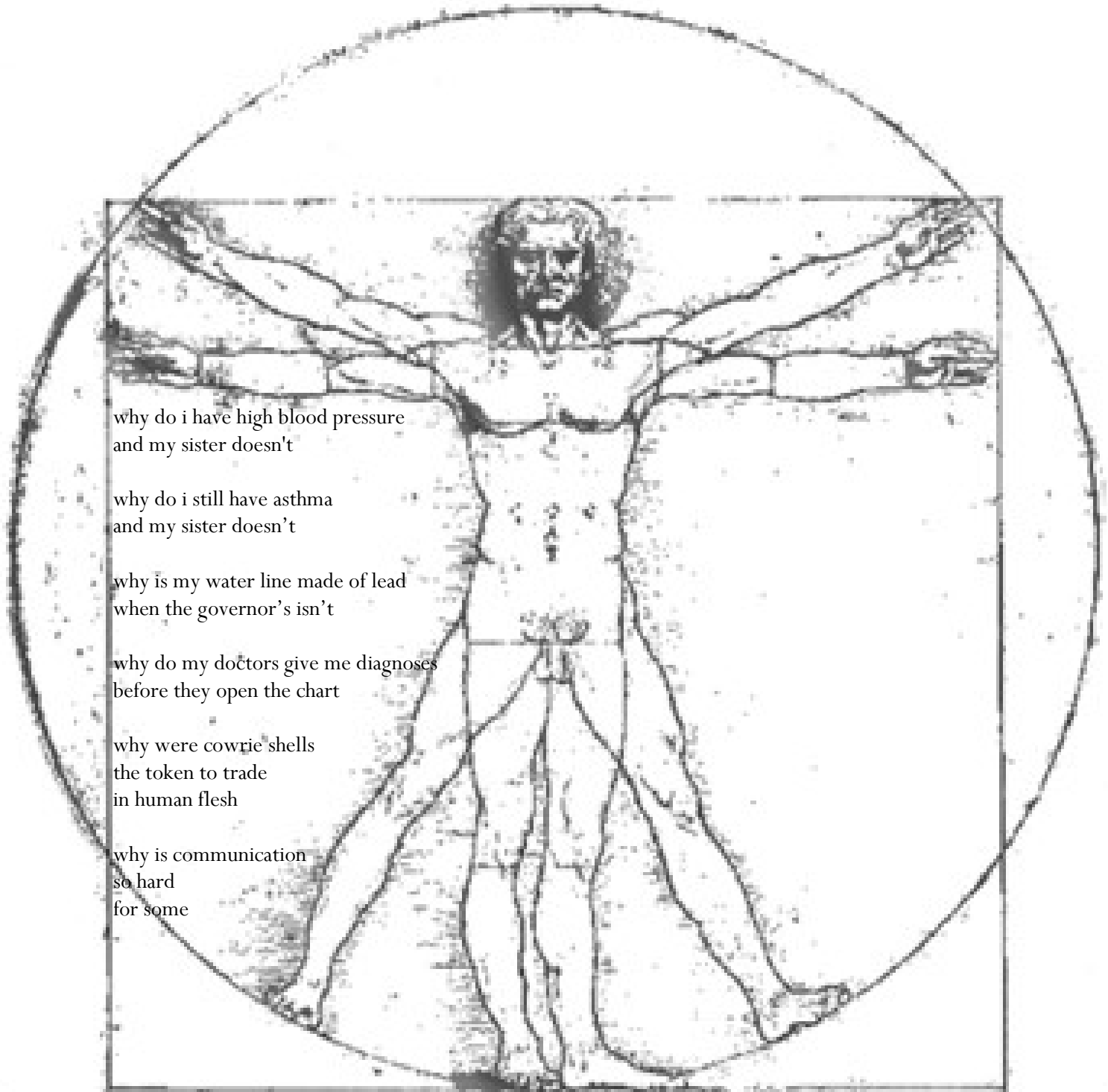
leaves me here, ascends the stairs  
as a new man. I hear people

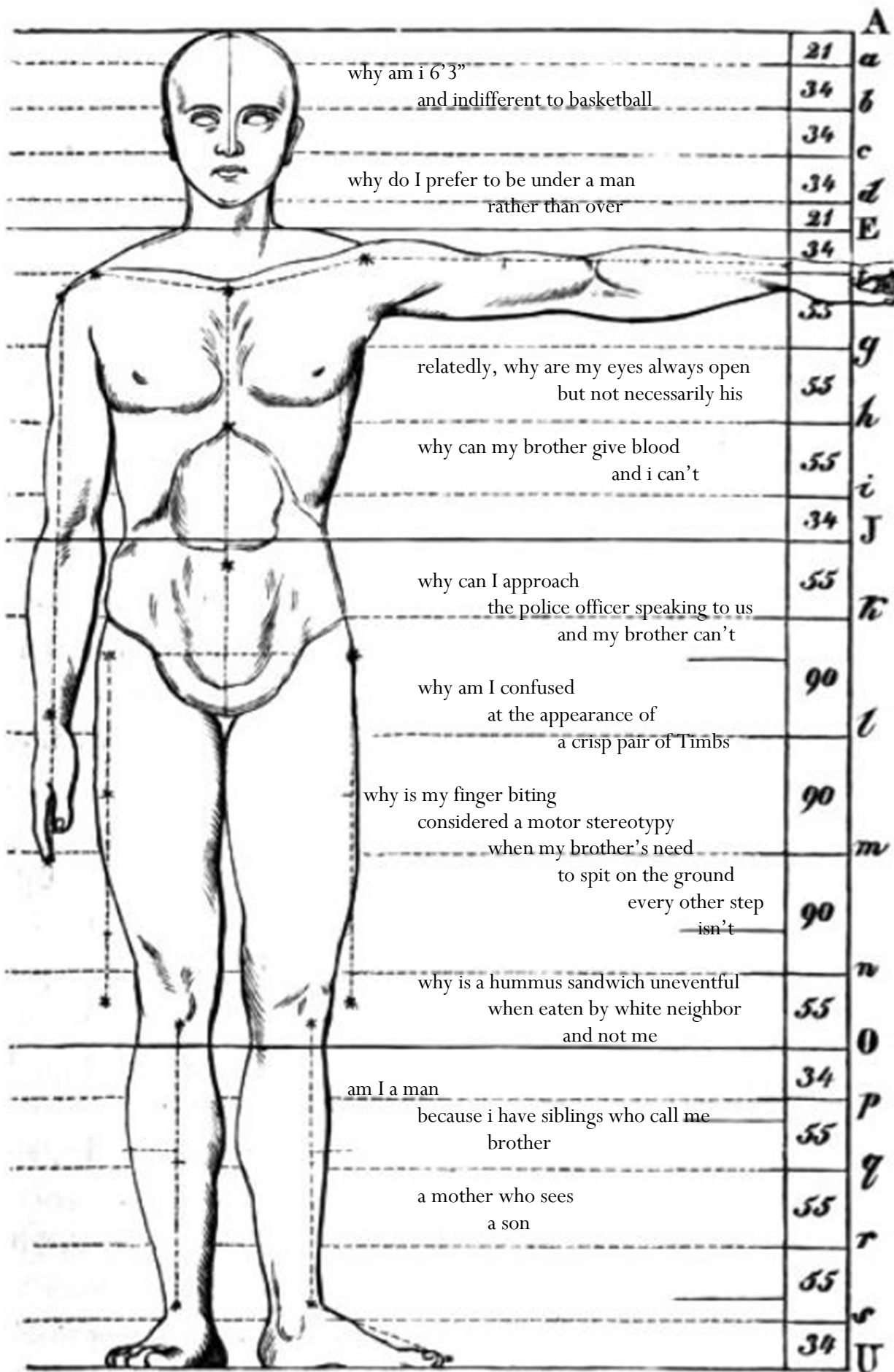
calling my name. I also hear them  
being answered.

*golden ratio is to trope as community is to fractal wrongness*

*"Why is a bird a bird and I'm not?"*

—Charles Gaines





why am i 6'3"  
and indifferent to basketball

why do I prefer to be under a man  
rather than over

relatedly, why are my eyes always open  
but not necessarily his

why can my brother give blood  
and i can't

why can I approach  
the police officer speaking to us  
and my brother can't

why am I confused  
at the appearance of  
a crisp pair of Timbs

why is my finger biting  
considered a motor stereotypy  
when my brother's need  
to spit on the ground  
every other step  
isn't

why is a hummus sandwich uneventful  
when eaten by white neighbor  
and not me

am I a man  
because i have siblings who call me  
brother

a mother who sees  
a son

21	A
34	a
34	b
34	c
34	d
21	E
34	f
55	g
55	h
55	i
34	J
55	k
90	l
90	m
90	n
55	o
34	P
55	q
55	r
55	s
34	U



