

the narrative impulse to various characters' attempts to control their realities is most strongly suggested in "Story." The careful, dislocated questions the narrator poses about her lover at the end of the piece ("whether he is angry or not; if he is then how angry; whether he still loves her or not; if he does then how much") clearly serve the same distancing and controlling functions for her as the act of writing, described earlier on ("And then I go on to write, in the third person and the past tense, that clearly she always needed to know love, even if it was a complicated love").

Certainly Davis's style works to assure us that reality is orderly and reasonable. The syntax presents no disturbing dislocations, the vocabulary no difficulties. The diction tends, in fact, to be conservative in formality: with the exception of the first story, "Break It Down," there are very few contractions to be found in the collection.

Lexical and syntactical repetition tell us, by their example of congruence, that all is harmonious. And the ratiocinative urges of the narrators of such pieces as "Story" and "Break It Down" are evidence of prose that sets out all the roadsigns of logic: phrases like "for example," "how it works," "on the one hand, on the other hand" abound, and we even find occasional subtitles that summarize the material to follow. Definitions of character types in "Strangers" and "The Taster" imply that people are quantifiable, categorizable. Indeed many of the pieces take an essay-like form, opening with a clearly stated topic sentence followed by illustrative evidence.

The alternative texts we construct from the same linguistic material tell rather less comforting stories. The notes of the reader-as-analyst might include some of the following observations. Repetition is a manifestation of obsessive/compulsive behavior, an activity outside of the characters'/narrators' control. Causality breaks down at the level of the individual sentences, which tend to be coordinate rather than subordinate—utterances of characters unwilling or unable to impose meaning on the data they observe. (As the narrator of "Therapy," describing herself in a state of disturbance, puts it, "I had a pair of eyes buried under understanding.") And the formal diction may be read as a sign of alienation of speakers who are not only out of sync with the contemporary world, but also estranged from their own language. Davis's characters sound at times like intelligent foreigners who have learned to speak correctly but have not entirely mastered colloquialism. The narrator of "Television," with the tautological propriety of a non-native speaker, refers to "dead people" outside the window and describes the