

The Conacle

Number 56
December 2005



"We are still in the desert."

Jarhead, 2005



From Soulard's Notebooks

December 5, 2005
2:34 p.m.
Bauhaus Cafe - ^{RS/KD} table
Seattle, Washington

Dear Jim,

I write this letter to you nearly a year after my last one, which abby you'll get about the same time, five weeks out of work though very close to scoring a couple of different jobs. Interviews this week. Maybe this letter is a way to let off some stress, not turn inward in an unhealthy way, I don't know.

The challenge with job hunting is to live some kind of meaningful life while doing it. I've been trying the best I can; having Kassi with me helps a lot, of course. If I was living alone, or simply on my own entirely, I'd not have the empathy, & sometimes simple distraction of a close friend. At least some of the time my thoughts & time turn to her worries: school, health, family & the like.

So I'm not where I've been other times in the last five years of under- & unemployment. I'm not alone. I'm not living on someone's couch or in a spare bedroom. I come home at night to my home. I have

a life worth finding a way to preserve & carry along.

Money worries push me along as well as getting married in four weeks. I do not wish to exchange wedding vows as a jobless fool others can look on with pity or mockery. Whether they do or not, I don't want the thought possible for anyone in attendance.

This cafe is an old favorite of mine. I found it back in 2002 when I first lived in Seattle, a high-ceilinged place, high windows, tall bookcases along one wall, & a cozy mezzanine I've often thought of as the prow of a ship in the way its view looks toward the nearby downtown & the mountains beyond. I've come here alone often as well as with KD. It has free wi-fi connections for laptops, so she often does her homework here, like today. Usually crowded, lots of students, loud music below, I feel hidden here, safe, nameless & focussed. Many nights here on entheogenic journeys, delving deep as possible.

The years go by & I ask the same questions: how to live & why? Things change? Wherefrom, whereto? Nature & music offer their comfort & clues. I write in the face of the mystery. Am I further along some kind of path, progressed in any way?

Is progress itself an illusion? What do I know now that I didn't? What is happiness, & does it differ from contentment, from peace? Ask & ask, yet more convinced that no man holds a sure, complete answer. More convinced that all of reality comprises the answer only knowable by assembling every bit & looking at it from outside, which seems a paradox.

What then? Simple things like kindness & some manner of clean living. Yes, but what of the beast within each, what of lawless dreams & their nudging hints? For its own sake & survival, any given society will preach of norms, what's important, what's taboo, what is valuable, what is expendable. Culture transmits these values in the form of education & entertainment. Even the most aware of individual is profoundly shaped by his surroundings because this shaping began in childhood; even deeper, it began with the time & place & species an individual creature came to be within. It began with showing up in this reality, this dimension of awareness, bodied, spirit-laden, among countless other creatures similar & not so. What perspective would remove all trace of these particulars from its view of all & allow a full picture to be grasped?

-12-

OK, then. Maybe I wasn't able to so widely express my queries in years gone by. But what of them, so expressed. Will I one day be able to sum my ignorance in six words with still no whole answer?

I await phone messages & emails from prospective employers. Now today. Do I calm & let go the day or rape harder in my efforts. Tomorrow morning I interviewed downtown for a full-time editor's job at a company called IDK. Do I focus every breath & thought on this event about 18 hours from now, or do I delve deeper & deeper into now, this hour's world, or can I do both, train my mind to co-exist now & hence? Nobody can tell me. I could die tonight, Seattle could explode within an earthquake, the interview could get cancelled, or not. Likelihood is the day will pass into night into morning, I'll wake with KD & get her breakfast & kissed off to work, & I'll dress & go. Something will happen, & then something else. Always, everywhere.

I thought this letter might go on for days ~~the~~ but I think I'll push it another pipe & let it go. It belongs to today, it bears my scattered & focussed energy & is probably better for such a concentrated

life.

I know you get better than most what I am grasping for here. Saying ideals are relative, or that one approach to living is as good as another helps little. So one chooses, piecemeal, by circumstance & fate, how one lives. Consistency can be binding or fruitful. All may be well, then a car crash. All may be dark, then a phone call.

I no longer search for definite answers that will last perpetually. Maybe what I do more is test the current, regard the patch of the world I'm in, the other creatures about, what might be best or at least not worst to do in a given hour. Work with habit while not slave to it. Hope for the best, live like the best is most likely with some effort & luck.

Think of me on New Year's Eve, & know that you are next to me in spirit & fraternity. Face west, puff some green, flash the peace sign, strum the highest notes you can.

Peace & Love, ALL
Raymond

December 17, 2005
7:22 p.m.
McDonalds at Seattle Center
DS/KD table
Seattle, WA.


P.S. - The interview at IDX went really well, so well they offered me the job & I start on Monday. Excited mostly, nervous slightly. Maturing two weeks from today, & same feeling. We bought me a full suit, even a vest.

Well, fancy all that new, & good, things change & move along, but here's me & my pen & I don't ~~want~~ want this to change. KD with me, reading a memoir, & I like her how she ~~is~~ is too.

To do more, to be fuller what I possibly am, satisfied & eager both, to have a sense of good worth, wish to spend it, share it, chase it to new & strange.

Next weekend I'll be on my own & a last weekend in my bachelorhood. I'll spend it with my notebooks & music, what else? Nothing. Heh.

Here's to 2006, to its hope, to what good we each & all can do for ourselves, each other, & the world. Keep some, give some away. Good, & better to come.

 12-17-2005



Edited by Raymond Souland Jr.

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Kramer

6 x 36 NOCTURNES (SIXTH SERIES) by Raymond Souland, Jr. [☉]	1
LETTER by Jim Burke III	7
NEW PERIOD by Raymond Souland, Jr. [☉]	9
POETRY by Judih Haggai	39
SECRET JOY AMONGST THESE TIMES by Raymond Souland, Jr. [☉]	45
PSYCHEDELIC RULES by James Kent	57
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS	60

Seattle, Washington



SCRIPTOR PRESS

Front and back covers by Raymond Soulard, Jr. of Cement Park in Hartford Connecticut. *Cenacle* logo based on design by Barbara Brannon.

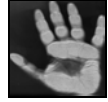
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<http://ilkins.demon.co.uk/~cenacle/cenaclesupplement.zip>

The Cenacle, 2442 NW Market Street, #363, Seattle, Washington, 98107, is published six times a year by Scriptor Press (<http://www.geocities.com/scriptorpress>). It is kin organ to *ElectroLounge* website, RaiBooks, Burning Man Books, *Scriptor Press Sampler*, & “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution w/Soulard,” broadcast online worldwide weekends on SpiritPlants Radio (Dial-up: <http://yage.net:8000/low.ogg>; High-speed: <http://yage.net:9000>). All rights of works published herein belong exclusively to the creator of the work.

Thank you to IDX for hiring me and ending my years-long failure to find full-time work. It was forever in coming. Thank you to my partner and new wife Kassandra for the good times and bad, for enduring it all, for a love that does not waver. Another year in Seattle, this one was a hard ride. I want to overleap the hardest place, that of silence, to where everything is told and everything is heard and understood, but how? Why is that place so elusive?

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



6 x 36 Nocturnes (sixth series)

xxxvi. Lasting [concluded]

xxxvi. Cry (for Cassandra)

Cry out from this world's narcotic delusion,
ceaseless flu of want, once, twice, cry out!
Now breathe, relax. Reckon all's burst from
flowers of flame, & what lasting? Nocturnes?
White leaves on a tree made of music.
Drums & dust. Nothing. What abide, love?

Secret sugar raging creation's scattered heart.
Something, & how intensely still. What begins,
& a beat, & begins again? Everything.
Call it hunger, the clawing rhythm within,
maze of heart's ripe thirst & need's hard flail.

Learn it, if you would anything of matter,
what shaman in every pain & its sate.
Secret joys, within's within, light & salve
for a seeker's chase. Hark moments sweet,
desire's lovely acceleration, & a beat, & a crash.

Now behold ruin's potent, fist of nays
a skyless mountain tall, cry out til
the coil looses life again through the bite & burn.

Once, twice, what lasting? Breathe, relax.
Garden clues toward a bouquet of answers,
sing them new, strum them high. Embrace them all.
Let them go. See what remain.

Just blue flashes cross the mind's troubled stretch,
til night flickers up, great flashing hours of root & roam.
Dreams climb high with the moon, trace Beauty's
darkling arc into the loam, roughest making stuff.
Mercy near, world's crown & flute.

A beat, again, now come-a dream of charred figure chanting
 goldensong, his tune how love greens the brittlest land,
 his urge to subtract everything from the world & reveal
 God, his haunt what conjured steps to build up again.

Cry out with him, once twice, caterwaul crack wide
 creation's sliding hum, its tart melody & lawless
 careen of beats, unruly music struck from holy emptiness,
 loosed as worlds without end. Feel it! The helpless want
 for wordless things, ever squirm in the eyes & blood.

I know you know. Lean, withdraw, a beat, another,
 let cry for your lost, nod everything lost but still cry
 for yours, sure they for you, memory's skids,
 blood's swelling tang, heart's wistful delusions.

Lights & hurry. Sad with a dream of vined unity,
 a flesh, a spirit, slave to nothing. Say again:
 all glory passeth. What lasting? Black ink on white char?
 What abide? Love's freakiest draws new from nada.

Smile. Wake up! Desire triggers its own laws.
 Happiness, though riven by stride, sink, roar & fade,
 raised for feed by kings & preachers & trinket-swingers,
 still dream-a body ache ceaseless toward the flow.

Something greater, music hints, forests & seas, first kiss,
 hundredth, cry out, truly, & heed what overruns senses,
 what your cry has ever blown through your hustling fingers,
 the hungry press of your laughter, what collects in your grief,
 chimes in your dreams, sprays you wide, exhales your want
 long linger, greater music, greater silence. A frenzied high called Art.

What lasting? Black barks on white chips of moon?
 Sung spent years, their scald remain. What abide, love?
 Its anarchy spits wild in the heart, poison to the land's
 mass of moving men. What begins, & a beat, & begins again?
 The singing, the squalor, spirit's craze of sacred & muck,
 farthest hour's storm of drums & dust.

Rootless siege in the question how to live, how to live,
 how to live & why? Hope like a spell binds the heart
 to wishes, & then come a sweet thing into this raw stretch,
 thick flicking dirge, her gestures mesmer like
 a slow salmon dusk, her loving stroke true.
 We skein home together after years in another life.
 No more veils. Cry out!

What conjure awakes this world's carnal dream music,
 how to splay freer solitude's blue fancies?
 Shake & deny, squeeze yesterdays loose, then believe:
 soul plus soul sum to soul.

World something drones, null melody, it hurts,
 I know you know, but little holds against a true stroke,
 hum & mull it, how to build up again, wield new furies
 with a softer heart, raise new thrill songs from
 higher music within, crack harder bluffs.

Chase the green pulsing, seed wisdom's first verities,
 follow into the pink currents, want's jittering play in
 the maya, jerk, groove, careen. Nod everything lost,
 caterwaul, & a beat. Reinvent & reinvent & reinvent.
 Now breathe, relax. Nothing ends but faith in old costumes.

Keep along, many names for beloved, this one firmed
 your bones, that one ripened your blood. Others taught &
 took in a week's snap or a year's awl. Where come the will
 to accept? Countless rank aches til your raggy soul knows
 to hark every new day's golden fineness.

Come a sweet thing thus love unto greater real,
 stranger path, a bare pilgrim among adoration's
 many musics. Once, twice, not enough, clench,
 release, sing it new, strum it high, what lasting?
 Black drizzle down white skies? What abide, love?
 Call it first & last flower of the world, clue, harass.
 Bed's better dreaming, night's open range lure.

What begins, & a beat, & begins again? Where creation's
 savage engine, what its spark? What is? Whither next?
 Does this strange world sum to nothing? Offer a piece
 of cosmos for this song, sprung out in moving flesh,
 stirring frantic & dull through memory's raw blood. Cry out!

Come a sweet thing, fecund wiggle, biting sauce,
 golden word, brilliant kiss, smash to ruts deep within.
 Twining's first moonlight, ocean's ancient promise,
 love what matters & the will to accept it. Breathe, relax.

Raise her music by fidelity & stroke, conjure concert
 of green by slow rhythmic devotions. Shiver, trust,
 come forth buds burst of good song, hours atwist in
 morning glories & whispering touch. What lasting?

Remnant stars in a blinding book of old dreams?
 What abide but eros & breath? What begins, & a beat,
 & a beat, & a beat? Someone passes smiling in crimson
 skirt, another's eyes quiver crazy in his rest among God
 & decline. What their yearn, what fulfillment? Turn,
 restless smoke in the air, harsh strokes across the walls.
 World drones, null melody, lost among the miles & years
 a flatness hinting no world but beams & nots.

There is no world: i told me acid told me so.
 No world but a squirming in the sheen.
 No world: reckless flounder of drums & dust.
 Plunge from nothing through sparkles of sensation to
 nothing, gone, no matter the great fist swinging
 in the night, high prayer firing through the dread house
 of bent limbs, thousands glad yowling with heavy thumps
 of song.

No remain. Neither tallest stone height nor
 widest run of moving men & galloping machines,
 centuries of throne's blight, revered chalice of self
 til blood's crumble, no remain. Another rotted
 goldensong strung through history's lousy mane.

Empire, relax. Another will one day rattle in your dust.
 Time's clay makes & mauls fists & bullets,
 maps & mansions alike. Grinds every tongue.
 No farthest wall to defend, just a vastless sea
 of lights & hurry.

There is no world: narcotic delusion.
 There is no world: you are not high enough.
 No world: become a fountain of blank sheets,
 wet scribbling's last dull relief. Wordless, faceless.
 There is no world: whither next?

Your night shifts on hard remembering bones,
 & these will melt too. Suffer years like a trial &
 its end will never come. Or cry out tonight
 because you can & you must, once, twice,
 heed no fist's press to mum.

Cry out! World's restive spirit will & again transmute
 your leaden dusk, slow siren into night's glints
 of greater evolve. Vined unity high, sweet thing's
 fine pink strum, here is everywhere, world's drone
 a lost scrap, something about to sing.

Shift, jerk, long for everything, high, higher,
 berries sharp as laughter jitter about your knees,
 this human night flails alone until someone close sings
 “we are all cosmos, we are careening.”
 Coins & clocks await the morrow’s bleatings of cheap hone,
 another pummeled day of poverty & gunfire.

Empire, relax. The land’s blur of moving men will awhile
 still moan for masters, hustle & praise their cheap scriptures
 of capitulation, this messy coalescence. No remain: what lasting?
 Scatter of noisy vapors, behold their great moment, a beat,
 another, all blows by & is gone. What abide? Starshine
 & cannabis? Green charms & pretty trembles? Ceaseless
 flu of want, something dark in the sheen. What begins,
 & a beat, & begins again?

Something true, healing prayer at the heart of the universe,
 neither faith nor fact. Twas blue fancies raised this world
 & others without end. Love of seed for soil & root for sunshine.
 Wings for high. Fins for the deep. Buzz for nectar.
 Fur for nipple’s suck. Mortal limbs for greater light,
 life’s tangle resolved.

Twas music’s love to carve songs from strange contours
 in the night. Twas desire’s happy ache for knowing its
 one & many ways, soft, cling, soft. Twas want’s metallic
 obsession & none other but this can please, have it,
 love it, kill it.

Blue fancies caused world, no world, worlds without end,
 found play for the child’s happy idle, fooled up clocks & coins
 as finest measure of a man’s subtle worth. Blue fancies with
 their choice for every soul: this world an enemy or call it home.

What lasting? The music of every open hand.
 What abide? Love’s every pock, its countless tugs upon the fabric.
 What begins, & a beat, & begins again? Hope, its mystery rise,
 its helpless decline.

Cry out! What breathes worlds listens, & listens for you.



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Jim Burke III



Editor's Note: The following is the twenty-fourth in an ongoing series derived from the correspondence between Jim Burke III and myself, begun in 1992, and in the spirit of the more enthused letter-writing tradition of yesteryear.

December 30, 2005
[West Hartford, Connecticut]

Dear Ray,

My thoughts have turned to Nature again for many reasons. Another year in our measure of time has elapsed and another one begun by the time you receive this letter. Wars continue and oil prices rise, the middle class in this country continues to erode as the gap between the “haves and have nots” widens. I heard the news today (oh boy!) and the half-dozen stories locally involved the use of guns for various crimes, by both criminals and police. It would appear then that guns are out of control. Logically therefore, our lawmakers should pass stricter gun control laws—*GET IT?* I know I do, you and Kassi do, but the general population seems to plod along like mindlessly, far less aware of each other than geese in flight.

Thoreau stated that the best form of government is that which governs the least. Perhaps a modern day update of this statement would be to have a lottery for serving in the capacity of key government positions. The general population could pick about a thousand individuals to serve for about a year. There could (and probably should) be a hierarchy. I think that this would prevent lobbyists, special interest groups, etc. from getting a foothold. It would eliminate corruption greatly and the “leaders” would hope to achieve stability at best. However, there is a thing called greed to be dealt with, and apparently absolute power does corrupt absolutely.

I guess the geese are way ahead of us with respect to greed and the distribution of wealth and power. They live as one within something that unfortunately our government cannot comprehend and apply to itself, Nature. The only time I have seen geese fight is to defend their territory, especially their family. Other geese respect this and know their boundaries. They will not intrude on their neighbors’ land because they know there is enough to go around. Greed does not exist in Nature, as in polar opposites. When geese fly south for the winter on long treks across the sky, they form the most efficient method available—an arrow formation where the one at the top drafts the immediate ones on its right and left behind it. Those two draft the ones behind them which results in less energy being expended and their cooperation benefiting the whole flock. The most annoying part of this event can be observed by noticing how the leader will fall back to the rear and all the other geese move up a notch. On a several-hundred-mile trip, this can result in a staggered leadership so that not one particular member of the flock benefits the most.

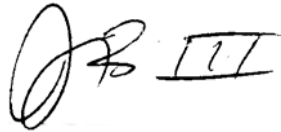
This is just a brief example of how our society must change its priorities. Our culture has grown compliant and is not acting swiftly enough to prevent the watershed from being reached. I am convinced that Iraq is headed for a full-blown civil war, just as the obvious conclusion to this country’s system of eliminating the middle class is revolution. Our middle

class acts a wonderful buffer; it is not entirely out of reach of the lower economic classes and yet it strives to be included in the upper class. Again, wealth and the accumulation thereof is another polar opposite of nature.

I have enjoyed living in New England my whole life because of the four seasons that nature bestows upon us every year. The spring melts the winter and the leaves appear on the trees after the buds bloom. The trees don't need anyone during the summer and provides ample shade for themselves during the hot weather. It is rooted to the ground and the ecosystem is complete. The fall arrives and the trees give up their leaves to the ground, which eventually fertilize the ground to produce more trees. The winter comes and as the bark protects the trees from the onslaught of snow and ice, the rest of nature gets ready to rejuvenate itself. Mankind, however, has decided to rob the planet of its finite resources and alter the ecosystem, and Nature has very subtle but harsh ways of revenge. As the trees are cut down and the water table rises (since it has no means of depleting itself), the inevitable occurs: mudslides that wash away the houses that the cut-down the trees were used for in the first place are the equalizer. We have seen this again and again in California.

So we must ask ourselves: what is the Soul Equalizer? Throughout our planet's history, as far as our science can determine, there have been watersheds reached, paradigm shifts have occurred, and the eradication of whole species have taken place through cataclysmic events such as meteor impacts, ice ages and, most recently, the technological-exponential syndrome. It is now truly a race by the more enlightened individuals residing on this planet, versus the people who want as much as possible without regard to nature. One of the former, Einstein, opened the way to the Cosmos by showing the implications of his Relativity Theory. Another, Stephen Hawking, has presented his Theory of Unified Quantum Mechanics which could be used to not only explore Einstein's theory, but preserve energy.

Our soul is tied to the planet and I truly believe we all become stars when we leave the physical plane. The energy we have left returns to the cosmic plane to shine on our earth, just as the tree begins a new cycle with a fresh set of leaves every spring. Reservoir #6 anyone?! Peace and love.



P.S.—Wait and see if the ozone layer repairs itself. If not, hope they make enough suntan lotion, reminds me of the episode of *Northern Exposure* where the atmosphere has become radioactive and water was sold at the bar.

MOTHER NATURE IS GETTING EVEN

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



New Period

(concluded)

It will begin slowly, accumulate naturally, a loose swing between intention & freedom, light, music, all the familiar joys, likely too the ongoing demons & doubts, plenty of music, sex, psychedelics—

“What doth thee seek, darkling pilgrim! What doth thee seek? A forbidden glimpse of the very face of our lord? A harem of soft maidens waylaid whilst bound for the nunnery? A glowing temple crowded with thine own followers? What doth thee seek?!” demands Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker & his crashing stick upon Luna T’s bar.

I ignore him. I’ve got one hand on a full pint of Guinness & th’other caressingly between Rebecca’s warm thighs.

“Talk to him, Ray,” she urges tho her thighs tightening around my hand instruct me not to leave my seat.

“Art, old man. What do you know about Art? What the bloody fuck can you tell me about Art?”

Knickerbocker’s eyes glint; my challenge ripples across his face.

“The practice of pagans! The activity of savages riddled with blood markings! Unretracted lust! False spirituality for rough-hewn minds! A kingdom of dead ends & ghettos for harlots, sinners, blasphemers, & the various foul & fallen souls entangled without cessation in the many animal hungers!”

“I could take him out with a blow,” I growl.

“Not if his stick gets a good swing at you first,” greyly snaps suddenly arrived Americus close by his blonde smiling Franny.

Mr. Bob the barman turns up the bar radio’s volume to comment:

“It’s so fine!

It’s sunshine!

It’s the word . . . love!”

Ahh, Beatles. Proper for any occasion & better than most of them, frankly.

Knickerbocker glowers at me but, discovering his cup of black coffee laced with bourbon is drained, meaning not instantly refilled, sets up such a hoot & holler that my queries & concerns are eradicated from his concerns.

Rich & Franny settle in at the bar near us. Rebecca is tickled childly pink to have all of us with her. Mr. Bob fetches me a fresh mug of Guinness, Reb a glass of milk, Franny a glass of spiced rum, & Americus a glass of Wild Turkey bourbon on the rocks.

“To Marriage Day!”

“Cheers!”

It's not yet noon & already the liquor is flowing freely. I learned long ago that any day that includes a shot of booze or a puff of weed before noon is blessed & likely to be quite special. So too this day.

I don't feel anxious about all this. "Trust in Art" I told a sister recently. Trust in Art. Mine duty here to be chronicler, friend, & my sweet piece's loyal pussy pleasurer. Fine. I can do all these.

"You look good enough to eat" I write on this page & draw her near to read it.

"I'm ready" she snatches my pen & writes back.

Finest piece of ass. I know. Cherry vanilla & peyote. *Mate. Muse. Wife.*

"Floating in tempo is the essence of cool" someone says & these words have their effect, mood, colors, tone, more people arrive, the radio replaced by jukebox

"Come hear Uncle John's band

by the river side

got some things to talk about

here beside the rising tide"

& Mr. Bob is asked & agrees provided it's done in the back room with the door shut & so half the bar clears out to the old manager's office to pass around a pipe. A few pitchers & many mugs brought along too.

Merry, merry.

The looseness continues here. The escalation deeper outward, the trust Art demands foremost no matter it may trail fear or doubt behind it so long as its thrusting star-face is pure, no regrets, no cracks in its loyalty—

"Drink up, ya hippie!"

"Sorry, Grey."

His hoary old face regards me amused. "What don't you have, Van Goat! A nice piece of ass—"

"Hey!" warns Americus.

"Thank you!" Rebecca, pleased.

Grey pauses to glare around. "A time-traveling drug den. Us artist types at your beck & call."

"Since when have you been an artist, Grey!"

"Why not? If it'll land a Schoolgirl or Schoolgirl Jr. in my lap, I'll wear the fruity cap & stow a dictionary amongst my bollocks!"

"Amongst! Where'd you learn that one! Listen to him, Americus!"

"He's been reading his balls again."

Rebecca seats herself roundly in Franny's lap. "I'm Jr. Schoolgirl now," she laughs.

The pipe goes around again. "Where's Jim? He's missing this. Good shit."

"Whose do you think it is?"

"Where is he?"

"I think he's composing."

"What's her name?"

"He's not saying yet."

It gets sillier & sillier.

Floating in tempo is the essence of cool. A guitar, some drumsticks, several voices. Wherefrom, thereto. Ronnie Pascale the only Noisy Children member not present. He'll be coming. Franny holding Rebecca & I notice a watery quality to their borders. Fingers & lips, the intensity of their continual hugs. Play, delight. I close my eyes to listen to acoustic rock meld with play, delight, floating in tempo, nearing cool because here I belong, now I am happy.

Eventually I am plucked from my spot on the floor & seated between Her & Her. I look at Americus. His expression growls: hold nothing back. His hard struck guitar adds: or I'll maul you.

(Where's McLoughlin? Your comfortable seat, whiskey, leering approval, maybe impatient because me not you—still I'd make you laugh, singing the 'Hokey Pokey' as I peeked out at you from between fine girlish tits)

I let Franny & Rebecca lead, let the circuit between us close through their completing closeness. I give each one a hand for her own, imagine some parallel here with playing piano.

(Not so much a closing or completing of the circuit between us as a flicking on of what's already in place & has always been ready.

(This will go further, of course, is what I've devoted my Art & life to, in part. So much further to go & the end, if any, pulses still in Mystery.

(When connecting, hope. When swathed in Art & Beauty, ecstasy. When caressing a soul into delight, happiness. When trusting, when engaged in trust, sunshine daydream. When no difference between here & nowhere & everywhere, understanding.

(Floating in tempo, *I love you all.*)

We twine amongst each other, music glowing, Ronnie arrived looking ready to play two instruments same time too.

We follow the music while defining it. Franny's tongue in my ear while mine noses & swabs Rebecca's buttocks while hers pokes at my cock she's told me her mouth has a crush on my prick I have a crush on her everything & Franny's too—

It's getting silly again. We start laughing & none of us can continue for the moment. The music hasn't stopped tho . . . drifting into young Beatles, no surprise.

"Say the word & you'll be free

Say the word & be like me

it's the word I'm thinking of

& the only word is love"

a yelling romp that brings more people into the room, allegedly Rebecca's office, the room's filling how can such a small room hold so many oh sure no walls anymore oh sure trees & sunshine oh sure music instead of ceiling oh sure begin, crazy grin, full moon laughter the most dangerous fire of all let smiles multiply some crazy old hippy in beat jeans & torn Quicksilver Messenger Service t- & he's wild in the sunshine & music

New Period. Pray for everyone. Resurrection, Now. Heal the Future. There is no final obstacle. All vision, no ground. Floating in the tempo.

we are already there

we are already there
nobody needs to go anywhere
... else.

And thus deeper, and thus further, and thus here grows fatter, and thus now ripples more thickly.

Constantly arriving, nearing home. Home a process. Home a verb.

Skinless.

My notebook is on fire. Dance 'round & 'round it, OK?

Dream belly. The whole fucking universe one big dream belly.

She smiles. We continue. All of us.

become a walls-less box of art happy after pages & days of doubt & wonder
power of Art, you just don't know it all, power of Love, you're a thousand miles from home,

the moon above round dream belly pregnant with potency & influence gonna bear my moon & your moon & his moon & hers & theirs & on

something more . . . & easier . . .
easy to make people happy if
they'll allow it . . . many thoughts . . .
I am still learning how to love . . .
i am still learning how to be . . .

Chinese advise no blame

Art . . . very beginning . . . tomorrow. . . i don't know . . . maybe not about beginnings & endings . . . maybe about boxes full of infinite possibilities . . . stars for walls . . . ether for ceiling . . . fire for floor . . . laughter for interior . . . mystery for audience . . . doubt for critic . . . hope for children . . . love for history . . . art for legacy . . .

Power of Art is infinite . . . magnification of, amplification of, yes, laughter, tears, yes, Power of Art is Infinite . . . some lessons bypass the learning conscious mind . . . some lessons jack directly into Dreams . . .

some lessons keep coming & coming . . . jack directly into Dreams . . . blood . . . hot & disturbing . . . coming & coming . . . still learning how to love . . . still learning how to be . . . jack directly into dreams . . . coming & coming . . . this is too lovely . . .

& somewhere along the way feeling stripped of even the last familiar thread . . . the music so crazy tis no longer words & notes but blurring sonic assault . . . the lights not as simple as lamps nor as sacred as stars . . . the dancing faces completely disappear—

the dancing faces completely disappear.

Well, maybe so. Maybe not. Well.

Just one familiar thing now, that's all I need . . . 30 seconds from an old cartoon . . . the ease with which a beloved story handles me . . . a memory still delicious & juicy . . .

suddenly home. The faces around me my family, cluster skinlessly.

the music travels on, I recognize its badge, its attitude twined into chords . . . I know it & watch it play me about . . . like her breast it bears me no matter my distance . . . its concern now with bringing me home but with teaching me how to see by my own natural light, available at all times . . .

OK. Maybe so. Maybe not. But likely. True, as much as anything, more than most.

She's got a fine ass. I'd like to slap it lightly, then get a lingering taste of the rest of her . . .

Rebecca smirks proprietorially.

The band is ready to rock 360.

Floating in tempo. Creating creation. Nice damp mouth.

Turn on the all the jets. Tune up. Tune in. Turn on. Even the shadows are on fire tonight.

"Today" corrects Americus. Friendly.

"Morning" Gretta smiles at me.

Yes. Tonight. This morning. Yesterday yet to come.

30 or so years from now in 1999 we'll gather & celebrate. Our union a survivor in this crackling world.

Faces turn to Rebecca. She studies me quietly, love humming, curious.

"We'll follow him," she says finally. The authority of love & loyalty.

It's time to go back & set the matter to rights. It's time. David?

"I'm here, Ray."

"There's a secret joy amongst these times."

"A within's within."

"A known & speckled spectral thing."

"An exploding blare & swoop from between our dreams."

"A series of coded midnight shadows."

"Glyphs taut with our best laughter"

"All cosmos—"

"We are all cosmos—"

"Without & within—"

"We are all cosmos."

"We are all careening."

"We need to begin now."

"Trade into ecstasy."

"We are beginning now."

"Always beginning now."

Americus needs no second hint. Ronnie fetched from the barroom, his band is ready, barely need their instruments they're so ready.

It's beginning now.

Always beginning now.

Calm again, for a moment. Noisy Children tuning. Franny & Rebecca owning me either side, I am purring like a man.

Rebecca stroking my forehead. Wife. Mate. Muse.

"I want you to do your art, Reb."

"I am."

"I've led you away from it."

"No, Ray. You're wrong. You've led me deeper into it. It means more than ever to me."

"Tell me how."

She smiles astride my heart. "You're my muse, Ray. I've been learning how to play you. That's why you haven't seen me drawing or painting so much. I have to know my new palette really well."

"Are you ready?"

"Almost."

Franny blondely strokes me.

"& you, Franny?"

"Me, Ray? I'm here, brother, lover."

"But what's your Art? Do you have one?"

"You really want me to, don't you?"

"I want to do rightly by you, Franny. I love you. You mean so much to me."

She fixes me within her purple eyes & gradually I lose track of her caressing hand, her near & warm skin, for her purple eyes interest me & I pursue deeper within them to find out why, pursue into them until I find myself no longer within her purple eyes within the Ampitheatre within Luna T's Cafe but outside vastness Franny's purple eyes & I'm impossibly outside so much so there is no inside all is exposed skin naked soul & still i move outward no longer concerned with where i was heretofore just here & hereon no those aren't stars up there toward which i reach & no they're not up there out there somewhere i am among them water love dreams hope wind shadows no here & hereon anymore nor hereafter for that matter no outside to come out into nor inside to return from notes endless notes drums keeping a kinetic talky beat a sentient beat keeping track urging more more more! how more! how more! & a bass guitar dropping us lower into our understanding the pool we all share at the baseless bass of things drums flailing for more & more bass guitar seeking security in freedom hustling the cosmos for its best mystery & of course there are keyboards dance all of you keyboards get up & shake that mojo keyboards dance with me let's make that nest we all desire keyboards here we are together forever laughter sunshine daydream daydream sunshine daydream

say the word & you'll be free

say the word & be like me

say the word I'm thinking of

have you heard the word is

love love love love art art art

my my my keyboards mojo my my my drums saying more bass guitar holding us to our own deeply sunk promises keyboards mojo mojo my my my & here's that crazy singer these purple eyes universe withinless withoutless secret girlish smile laughter fire yes here he is singing singing & there's a secret joy amongst these times a known & speckled spectral thing blare & swoop Godd is in yr mouth & you are chewing no final obstacle no final obstacle there is no final obstacle oh my drums saying more ever more more ever more bass guitar

earth bass guitar Happy Valley bass guitar planet other side Happy Valley say the word & you'll be free say the word & be like me keyboards mojo singer ruffling purple eyed cosmos making her go blonde & hungry more more more Happy Valley nobody needs to go anywhere else can you see the real me shadows on fire push it push it this better than a congress of wishes a galaxy of green perfections press a little harder guitar will come in little harder give that acoustic the extra soft slap it needs there here comes Godd the shiny electric guitar smirking & lovely can't begin the dance til the song's finally commenced

Time.

Shocks my brain.

Time.

Shocks my brain.

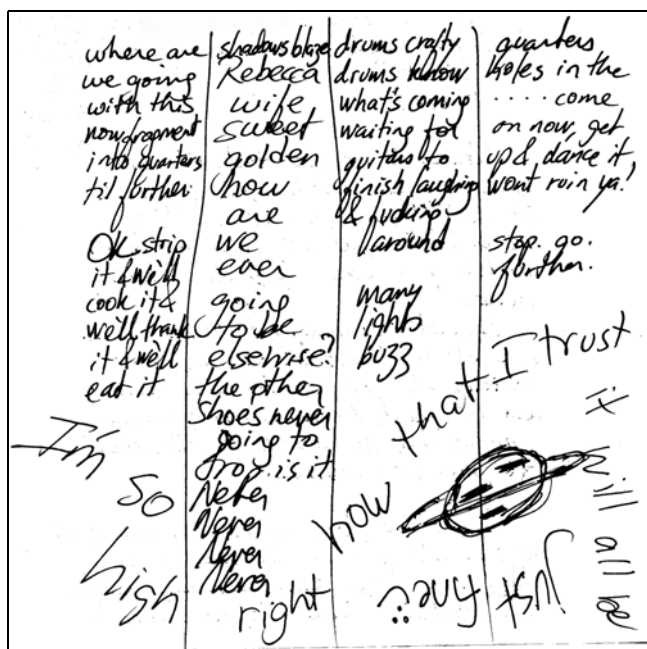
Listen for the beat, count its chaos, notice obscure precision do you think the kids will come to dance for the lights alone?

Out of my brain on
the train the train
Who! out of my brain

Float, OK, well past float well past time & those several other impediments

Maybe the jugs of acid OJ go around simply to quench thirst. This manifestation, this truth

yes
what?



“OK?” she smiles.

I nod. It makes sense now.

“There’s something we need to do & we need to do it really soon.”

“What?”

“Fuck.”

There is no secret that won’t be revealed in time, if you seek it a little, allow it a little, be a little patient, find your beat, watch your sun, hug your dreams, relax.

Secret joy amongst these times. Secret joy, within’s within, but waiting for you to breathe, allow, let yourself know what you know, pay mind to how easy life seems to you sometimes.

No need to leave the manager’s office at T’s as it has opened itself out to the Cosmos, become the outside implicit, we are in the Ampitheatre (& I think sadly, for just a moment: how long ago that night is becoming, nearly a year now, how far I’ve come, am I remembering it well? Correctly? Did it really happen? Rebecca shakes me a little & smiles: yes, it really did happen. I’m where I am now all this time later because of that night. It surely did happen. OK. Continue).

Noisy Children, playing now, finally, & they won’t be stopping for a long time to come. A unity, immutable phalanx, wonderful fun, curved & delightful noise, audience is anyone who happens by & cares to listen—

good. that much accounted for. that much prepared & a great deal still to attend to—but this much so far.

“Fine” I say to Rebecca. She smiles nods.

(How many more parenthetical comments? Can’t be so many—time & pages dwindling.

(Yet this another night in the ongoing birthing of this story. Art, Acid, Pussy, Nature, Dreams, all the usual hungers & needs. Watching girlish mouths, wishing energy & time just tonight were more.

(What can this story hope to accomplish? How long can one go on digging the hole & filling it behind?

(You’re bright, sweetie, but your speechifying is dull, familiar. Would that nice moist mouth of yours do the dirty on me if I was the boy who obsesses you tonight? I’d love to squeeze you out of blouse & harness, hush up your talk—It was, like, & it’s, like, & she said, like—get a good feel for those beautiful breasts—It’s, like, I felt, like, she was, like, I’d like to fuck you like a cock filling like a tight hole, like, the way breasts respond, like to touch & touch, like, you know, stop, Soulard, but this is fun it fills pages another night no pussy nor muse in my bed just lust & Art in my head fuck all this end it now.

(Fuck, like, all, like, this, end, like, it, like, now)

(bright girl, soft shoulders, I wish I could praise her without bitterness)

Rebecca pulls me out of this pointless rant with a picture I can’t deny: my sister, 4 years old, lying contented on the couch in family living room, drinking milk from her teddy bear bottle. 4 years old? No, younger, I think. Only bottle she’d drink from—my brothers were given one of several unnamed ones.

“Thank you, Reb.”

“You’re welcome. You showed me how so I thought it would be OK.”

Luna T’s Cafe & the Ampitheatre are mingling more & more until what it looks like is the rooms of Luna T’s—barroom, bandroom, manager’s office—are in the Ampitheatre—except these rooms no longer have normal ceilings or floors.

Ceiling is sky, floor is grass. Walls remain between the rooms and where what faces the street would be—but no longer a street. Luna T’s is in the Ampitheatre which is in turn inside Luna T’s having sprung up in the basement.

Rebecca is happy with this—& that I’m paying attention again.

“Who can still get in?”

She shrugs. Doesn’t matter. She’s right. The ones who should get in will.

I don’t have answers to all of this anymore. Is this fixtion still? I don’t know.

What story was it many months ago? Where did it come from? Did I know how much I’d be willing to forfeit or dismantle? Anything left?

Yes, much.

Much gone, much new, much remains.

Ask: when the full moon rises over this story tonight, is it remembered Glover moon & celebrated resurrection moon?

Resurrection moon one I saw recently, approaching a year traveled from that Glover night.

Resurrection moon I’m here I’ve made it this far sometimes I help others too.

Resurrection moon so much more coming life the harder choice because it goes on & on & on sometimes without grace charm or humor.

Resurrection moon & wish & want & lust still if not more because here I am there must be some reason why.

Resurrection moon another night another trainride home to ZombieTown another set of tooth-led questions about why & why & why

Resurrection moon & my beloved Rebecca is here with me knowing me better than anyone ever has & could this mean aught to anyone?

Well, writing programs of America? Unedited, solipsistic prose? Come on! It’s wrong, i’n’t it?

Can’t write to Beatles *Rubber Soul* looking through you, train, faces, angst, hope, lust, psychedelics, sheafs of nymphs, thinking about Heinlein & Huxley.

This line is blank.

This line is cherry vanilla.

This line peyote.

This line is hard & cold, helping in Boston’s Big Dig.

The line played with Doug Williams in that Super Bowl he was with the Redskins long ago & never really played after that no matter the MVP award.

No matter. This line doesn't wish to be fucked with, won't take money or an extra 5 minutes on earth to do what someone says.

Perform. Explain. Leave me the fuck alone. Rustle them late night atoms & people is gonna get excited.

Goodbye. Good luck. Hope you—

no. Sorry. I didn't.

Listen, I've done most of the fashionable drugs of my day & I'd take Art over any of them & the smart ones too—LSD, Marijuana, the various psychedelics—know that—& keep sending me back to her

again & again & again

back to her

ever young ever hot Merry

Muse blue eyes Scotch swilling

artist girlgodd i love you

“thanks, ray, i'm sure.”

I sit with David Time on the Ampitheatre's hill, watching coalescence. Perhaps he's feeling old. Maybe I am too. Still, without smiling, we comfort each other.

“You've gotten us this far.”

“Yes.”

“You can't bring it home yourself tho. That's why we're all here. All summoned to one place.”

Silence. “OK. But what's home in this story? It's ridiculous to say but I'm not sure anymore.”

“You're right that it's ridiculous.”

“David, what we want is fundamental change! This is approaching cartoonish!”

“Let it be cartoonish?”

“Let it be. Let go of the wheel a little. You can't know what it all means. Maybe not ever. Why did you even decide to do it?”

“I don't know. It was necessity, David. You understand that.”

“And I question it less than you do. At least when I was younger.”

“Is that a caution?”

“Yes.”

“Thanks.”

Rebecca approaches. David smiles at me, for real, & even more at her. “Your muse is here, Ray. I have to go find mine.”

She isn't hard to find. They haven't stood facing each other in 30 years.

Delay that first touch. Let it seem unreal, floating, for a bit more.

“Davey.”

“Suzanne.”

“Look what it took for us to see each other again!”

“Everything.”

“Yes. It took everything.”

Silence.

“Davey, are we, uh, dead? I mean I don’t remember how—”

“No. We’re not. But we won’t be returning to our lives again either.”

“That’s OK.”

“Yah. Me too.”

Now, touch. Now, there, closer, good, there aren’t any words because this isn’t what language is for. Sweet. Yes, tears. Yes, don’t stop. You never have to stop ever again. David, this is fundamental change as much as anything. You both willing gave up your lives for this, hoping it would be like it seems right now, trade into ecstasy, one choking spasm at a time if necessary.

Leave them be. More my friends than my characters by now anyway. I savor in silence their reunion for a moment, then take the wifely hand offered to me a page ago.

It’s OK. Here we’ve jettisoned all which doesn’t matter but not everything that’s hard. A lot of work to do.

Noisy Children are playing more effortlessly than in a long time. Happily noisy as no amount of volume is forbidden here, & like children in that they lead each other from one song to the next, five fingers, one hand, single intent.

Manifest utterly.

Franny sits near listening happily, the best audience a band could want. Sometimes she dances, sometimes she rolls in the grass. This all is enough for her, is everything.

She’s surprised when she finds herself invited into the music, that Rich, aided by his bandmates, have sketched a door in their music inviting her inside. Willing, happy, maybe a bit shy, she accepts, steps through.

Americus flashes Petty’s “Free Girl Now” around & the band roars into it:

“I remember you were his dog

I remember you under his thumb

Yah baby when he would call

every time you had to come

hey baby! you a free girl now

hey baby! you a free girl now”

Franny afloat in the song now, hard drumming by Grey build a brick floor, Americus & Pascale torrid twin guitar lead, Gretta floats bass note colors throughout the space & Stephanie singing for fun & Franny finds herself five’d like a candy store display union blend delight this is something called Freedom what it’s like to marry the man & his band not go Yoko or heroin on the scene no we’ll learn something & save something & go on phuck molly the kids told me vehemently & fuck X & phuck opium don’t do that shit dose on Art & girls & love & nature

listen to happy music

eat good food

What about it, writing professors? Does this pass the test? Will it make *Harper's* or *Paris Review* or *New Yorker*? Can we dose the pages of every issue so readers can trip to this obviously tripped out words?

"Come on! Franny Renée Emily Salinger isn't real! You're like Salinger, hippy motherfucker loving your characters more than Godd loves them!"

"Um, no," disagrees Godd the little pink bear while dancing with Franny in this room where she is five'd & ecstatic

"Come on, Soulard! How brave to write shit like this? Not very. You're a coward with your pens & paper & psychedelic drugs & justifications!"

Would they say such shit? No. They wouldn't. I'm writing my truth not theirs—I doubt most have a truth they'd go down for—not go down as in send PBS a check or sign a petition in the *New York Times* or subscribe to an egghead bulletin to be read in fine armchair fireplace in between the colored pasta & the *Kama Sutra* home video.

What?

Franny's dancing with Godd the little pink bear, five'd & ecstatic, this is how Noisy Children doesn't get lost like Beatles this is how we don't go down this time like we did back then—

We'll take the kids

We'll take the old mothefuckers

We won't do phucking molly or snow or opium or X or G

We'll survive this time—survival the beginning of triumph

Time, you get me, right?

Time nods. "That's why I'm here, Ray."

We're taking Knickerbocker too. Mr. Bob. Every regular. Every last beautiful bastard that will come.

We won't lose this time.

We've lost too much already.

You're all coming.

The band slows to nearly still & Franny steps back from where she danced floated five'd with Godd the little pink bear & near the end there David Time who leaped in of greatest wish & necessity.

OK. Calm. We're all here. We're all here.

All is maya. Maya is play. All is play. All is maya. Maya is Art. Art is play. Maya is illusion. All is illusion. Art is illusion. All is maya is play is Art is illusion is maya is play is Art is illusion.

Resurrection moon above.

Resurrection moon below.

All is maya.

Art. Play. Illusion.

We're going to get it right this time. We're going to float rightly & not get picked off. We'll be part hippies & part bastards if necessary. Oh, sure will be necessary.

We are the fire we are building laughter most dangerous fire of all is maya is play is illusion is Art we will not be sunk this time perhaps all we can do is step back & let the blood flow when it must those of us who survive but we will win we will endure. Yes. We will endure.

We're gathered here to get it right *here & now* because it has to start somewhere when & as many timeplaces as possible I think so let's not bother too much over what doesn't matter let the fuckers have most of it we'll win by staying by always being around by sometimes gathering in really big numbers with no riot nor bullet nor hate amongst us no we begin to win by surviving at all we continue to win by just continuing we win finally when we're proven right as many argue is slowly happening—

I suppose it is. Everyone is welcome. The door never closes. The smiles for a newcomer never cease.

& there'll be more of us as time goes on, newborns & converts our myths & joys taking over more durable than the jackals thought oh there was a time but no little matters now. Not quite. But never forget. The hippie loves on, the bastard remembers back.

Fire, bring on the fire!

Bring on the fire, sunshine, bring on the fire, sunshine, psychedelic, bring on the fire, psychedelic sunshine, time to gather the souls, form circles within circles, Ampitheatre, time to perform, time to *be the performance*, secret joy amongst all times, within's within, but way more & far simple, psychedelic sunshine, gather the souls, circle, bring on the sunshine, here we are, here we've always been, *here we go*—

Come together, right now, here we go, each a seeming lone soul, hopeful at best, but each also a ray of cosmic starshine, each proof & glory that the universe grows humans natively in its soil, that each of us belongs, that we are home, here & now & always, that all is well behind distracting patterns of noise & desire—

“Nobody needs to go anywhere. We are, if we only knew it, already there.”

Come to where we have always been, continuously arriving, perhaps getting a little better along the way.

Already there. Already here.

Psychedelic sunshine in wooden mugs carved from, offered from these very woods that surround us, the universe's woods, trees as native as we to this cosmos a thousand years from now a little girl 10 billion light-years from now will dance with her favorite oak, her mother, her sister, bush-soul, simulacra & from a hundred yards away a worried & directionless poet will spy her, & smile, suddenly licked by a light sound, can it be elusive music? Music giving his fool soul another chance to sing? Maybe. Spies the little nymph dancing with her oak, marks the spot & the moment triangulated by the number of suns in the sky just then, & he will return again

and it all begins again & again & nothing ever ends
or returns to former places where illusion might attest once it had been

already here. we are already here.

I am sitting between Rebecca & Franny my nearest muses right now—but I suppose, um,
differentiation, um,

“Finish your orange juice, Ray.” Smiling.

“Oh yah. Thanks.”

Already here. Already here. Already here.

The day is people—silent, mostly, right now. I wonder: is there something inside the
within’s within? Franny laughs in my head, & several others do too. Oh. I see. Acid
telepathy. At least.

Start from stillness. The world & all beyond moving around you as you calm, quiet,
slow your breathing, close your eyes, try to picture a blank, colorless wall, & focus on it, all
your stray particles of attention. Focus on nothing . . .

I can’t. I can at best juggle my nothing-focused efforts on word, pierce closer until I
am alight at the continuously moving point where pen presses paper. Is this enough? I don’t
know. I hope so.

I try again. coming to the next blank page after this one, I try again:

— —

.....

Fragments strike the wall. Musical notes bearing color & light. Disembodied save for my
hand & pen, paper inverse cosmic ether, sense of sight & sound, & a light breathing not my
own . . . —

Rebecca is with me. She’s who rendered my hand, more beautiful than it really is, my pen,
the flaming broadsword it is not. She is inverse cosmic ether, beautiful & sweet & delicious
& laughter as no other . . . —

“You’re never going to leave me, are you?”

“We’re married.”

“Love is all. Love is you.”

Keyboards. Bass guitar. OK. I know where I am. I am home, like always, arriving
where I have always been, becoming who I already am.

Swimming between different perspectives of the same place, its kaleidoscopic
dimensionality.

We’re all here, today, tonight, now, forever, we’ve none of us been lost. Listen to that
hopping lead guitar, we’re home! we’re home!

“One sweet dream . . . cam true . . . today”

The words are willing & so is the world. The words are music fragment painted onto the blank page that must have been what the Eternal Note filled, when there were trees & godds but no movement, no life, when all was in waiting, readiness for the first & only & forever note from which men & molecules & supernovas would emerge.

Shadows waiting. No fire yet. No laughter yet. No words. No note. Waiting. All waiting.

Yah! Yah! Yah!

Was it blurring fingers striking six-string electric instruments that opened the show? This show? Did bass guitar & drums & organ blast in too, after a beat? Did the awaited singer think of his pending oaknymphmusewifemate finally open his mouth & did Godd finally tumble happily out?

“Once there was a way to get back homeward
Once there was a way to get back home
sleep pretty darling do not cry
& I will sing a lullaby”

Arriving now, arriving here. Look!
Listen! It’s gong to be OK.

“Boy, you’re gonna carry that weight,
carry that weight . . . a long time”

Home. Here & now. The singer has begun to sung & *will never cease*.

“Oh yah! Alright!
Are you gonna be in my dreams . . . tonight?”

We are loved beyond our ability to comprehend. We are blessed as all is blessed

“And in the end
the love you take
is equal to
the love you make”

Moon & sun both. Day & night together. Neither good nor evil anymore. We = I = You = Me = We.

And, again, simmer down toward still & quiet. But the Song never ceases, ever, is there for praise & comfort, for guidance & explanation.

I am waiting.
I am embodying.
I am trying to get home.
I am learning to sing.

"I really want to know
 I really want to know
 tell me . . . who . . . who . . . who
 are you?"

—The Who, 1978

Begin, Begin, Begin. Begin because no choice, because heart says so, because must, because dreams, because trees, because of moments of blind wordless woe, because the traffic is too heavy too often fuck daily because the LSD hasn't kicked in yet, because the exotically colored filling station restroom condom is only yellow again, because the road rises & falls, sun rises & sets, make it to that full moon a couple of days hence, tell that trucker at the 2 a.m. rest stop it will be OK it will be OK *it will be OK* give him a book of poems for his long drive, give him a hug, give him back a bit of his youth watching Janis post-Woodstock pre-OD rock the waves down in Florida

& leave no trace

& leave no trace

never leave a trace

Begin, crazy grin, then add some guitars, we're gonna make it this time, the many of us out there just trying to make it day to day we're going to swab our very souls with Art & love, tribalize, tribalize, go, daddy, go, tribalize, begin

crazy grin, bridge may be icy, Kylertown approaches, Moosip somewhere back there, approaching water towers days hence labeled Ra, Smoke, & good green Dope, & then add some guitars

we're gonna make it this time, I have no doubt, naked around the fire, gosh how long since my faith emerged from flames no longer caring for tunic nor calling card & here I am, here I float, I'll teach you how, you must teach me too—

"Ray?" I know the voice tho choose to delay seeing. I know her face, her smile, her body, her heart, her history, some of her joy—

"Ray? Are you alright?"

"Fine, Rebby."

"Are your eyes OK?"

"Yes. I'm imagining you right now."

"You can see me right here!"

"You're words on my page. I am writing all of this on a sheet of paper. I'm using a black pen."

"Oh. Is that all I am?"

I open my eyes, She won't cry, won't even shudder unless I gather her fears right now—& realize them.

"I love you, Rebecca. Wife. Mate. Muse. Looking at you sometimes scares me good sometimes. You're words on a page. I am writing them. You're my wife. You're real. I'm holding your hand. I'm caressing your breast. I love you. I love this world. I am in the Ampitheatre, with you & all of our loved ones. I am traveling with my friend on Interstate 80 going west, now just past Snow Shoe, Pennsylvania, bound for Black Rock City, Nevada some days hence."

"Yes." She smiles. She softens & nears me. Mate. Muse. Wife.

Time to build the fire. New Period. We pray with tongues of flame here.

Lone tree on a hill. Empty coalmine, the score of Hog riders been for their visit & gone. Bridge may be icy. Noisy Children trip, grin, regroup. A wall says Trust Jesus in wet blue paint, 50th now so clad just tonight, are you high yet? Soon then. Soon enough.

We want to go home. Or, rather, I want to go home. One vessel, two vessels, many vessels, none at all. We all rejoice & suffer full moon beneath skies of corn & mist, are you listening to me? Am I?

Look at Americus with his band, rocking unreasonably, his beloved blonde Franny purpleeyed afloat in their music their 6th member muse manifest

I want to go home
we want to go home
one vessel, two vessels,
many vessels,
none at all

& David Time has his muse again too, at last, finally, there she is, painting his naked body while he scrawls young verses with '68 roar upon hers

I want to go home
We want to go home
one vessel, many vessels,
two vessels, none at all.

My mate & muse & wife is sitting with old Knickerbocker & amused Mr. Bob become again 9 years old for them, for Knickerbocker really, as Dorothy as she can be yet she is Rebecca still breathes in my ears I love you I love you I love

we are home
I am home
one vessel, any vessel
every vessel, & *more*

& somewhere else I am the usual Soulard huddled pen & paper in a corner trying to love trying to give comfort trying to learn, picking up my pen again, preparing to burn, preparing to burn, preparing to burn

to burn, one vessel
to burn, many vessels
to burn, every vessel
to burn, every one

I want to know the way home even as Aldous appears to point me to Rebecca's heart & to my heart & to my pen & to the sureenough pink glow touching every point in the Ampitheatre is it Muse or Goddpink or am I tripping on all three? Aldous nods at me, politely, my brother, & Rebecca is with me again, nearly 19 tho I fear I make her feel nearly 40 because I still feel 17 & she laughs as she knocks me back I am *her* piece & that's fine she

is both home & the way home, the map of instructions & the scriptures of why & we kiss
for that is what we always do

all rejoice & suffer full moon beneath skies of corn & mist, going home, we're going home,
arriving, now arriving, we are already there we are already there we are already there already
there already there!

The fire will begin with a plan, & some hard work, some preparation, here we go

I remember a large edifice of a man & how he burned at Glover while dozens at least
danced around, yelled, played drums & what-not.

& approaching a big edifice to be burned soon.

approaching, now, a big fire
even as now before a big fire
even as died back then, a big fire

a big fire . . . a big fire
neon night . . . soon a big fire

story breaking down like kindling weary of its time, its continuance, but then a match, &
hope suddenly, story rising like flames, the whole Ampitheatre in flames, a faraway desert in
flames

& laughter the most dangerous
fire of all

we're going to make it, i nod, & all around me agree, secret joy amongst these times, within's
within, a blare, a swoop, neon night in some far off state of madness, we're going to make it
this time, I know, & everyone around me laughs & agrees

OK. This goes on.
Fuck all but Art.
This goes on.

Days pass. My family waits. Fire grows.
Has the marriage ceremony begun? Does it ever end?
Embrace the Mystery. It will feed you, kindling for your fire, new blood for your old
heart

raise the volume
laughter firestorms the darkening sky

"I've suffered of late in the desert," I explain as my family gathers around me, Noisy
Children playing softly to my words "but I watched a beloved friend bloom fully at last &
there was more than that even"

Rebecca is weaved in amongst me as I talk. I love her more than ever. Cherry vanilla
& peyote forever. Jailbait guru.

"I helped build a temple in the desert. It was hard work. Later I supped on absinthe, vodka, LSD & pancakes.

"I wanted a girl there one night. Her eyes considered me, thought I was 19. Backed off when she feared I was along the path enough to rival her.

"& I would have. I've been through her kind already. Too young. Too certain. I would've borrowed some of Shorette's manacles & Shakespeare's sonnets to tame her, grow her up a bit."

"You've already got a rose, mate," observes Cecile, paused in his drumming.

"Girlgodd," I agree. "I am her nymph," I add, laughing.

David Time approaches me. "Come on. Just us two." We walk into the woods around the Ampitheatre.

"We didn't lose back then, Ray. I think you're beginning to see that."

"Yes I am. Strange truth."

"But it isn't about winning either. It's about continuance."

"Spiraling outward & inward more & more"

"All we have is now"

"Now always"

"The answer is yes"

"It's always been yes"

Time leans against an oak. Briefly I see a little girl's face in the trunk. My daughter Eurydice. Soon. Someday.

"So I can continue my work. That's what I do. What I have to do."

"That's it."

I hug him. "You have Suzann back after all these years."

He nods. Sadly. "She'll make an excellent widow."

"No."

"My work is done. I only had so long. You helped me so much."

"You can stay here! In these stories. You'll be alive always, with Suzann & all of us!"

"Remember me. & give me a damned good funeral. Make sure Cohn comes, OK?"

"When?"

"Later. But you needed to know now. There's always a price."

"Trade into ecstasy."

I continue my story. "It was a city in the desert. Built up & brought down in about a week. Annually."

"What did you learn?"

"Art. Acid. Rebecca. More & more. The answer is yes. We're going to make it. I have to get back to work."

I stop, wearied.

I don't know if I still want to burn it all down, if that would really help. I feel pulled away from what's happening here.

This story has been about a vital period in my life, strange & glorious, unreal & true. A period I'm drifting away from. New Period is becoming the stuff of the past.

What means this I do not know. But I feel the pressure to finish soon.

Rebecca manifests & leans into me. "I love you" she purrs softly. She is softness but strength too. Easy to like, vast to love. None other like her. None even close.

What's left to accomplish here? Should I be needing this story's ending announcing itself?

I've given this story everything I have for over a year. A long journey page after page month after month for nearly 500 pages & 13 months.

Maybe I'll just write

THE END

& continue but what I say hereon is after the end & so does not stand in the same relation to pages before the end that those pages had with each other.

Rebecca smiles at me. "Better?"

"I'm not sure. But at least I don't have to hurry now. The story will be the length I desired without forcing it to be that long. The story's over & I get to keep writing it."

Cecile stumbles over, spilling his pitcher of stout, just a little. Tosses a muscled arm around me & grins. "Bloody tosser" he crows. "Artiste. My old band would have bloodied you in an alley."

Gives me an even better hug. Grin blooms more. "My present band loves you. They're right, every one of them."

Considers his pitcher. Drains it, then looks hopefully at me. I nod & it's full again. Offers me the first taste. I shake my head. "Thanks. But I've been straight for 9 days now."

"Sorry, mate."

"No. I'm glad. I've got work to do before it's time to fling into the colored rain again."

Grey nods, losing interest. Staggers back to his drums, lightly slapping Stephanie's fine ass on the way & receiving a fairly hard blow to his shoulders.

"I thought we were all about free love here now! We're all married or going to be married or whatever."

"Nothing's free, Grey. You'll earn my ass before you can slap it."

"So I have a chance then?"

"You always did. Now start drumming unless you're too drunk."

"*Never* too drunk!"

I count the pages in my sheaf. "466!" I announce cheerfully. "That's what page we're all living on right now."

"Is it so important?" someone asks.

"To me it is. I've never written anything this long in my life. Almost 500 pages. Almost 13 months. & noone's ever going to publish it but me."

"Is that good?"

"This story is mine," I explain fiercely. "All of you. You belong to me & I'm yours."

Noone says anything to this. I guess it truly only matters to me.

Tonight I feel lightly hopeful. Days of late grotesque, dull, but not now. I have 8¢ in my pocket. Hopes. Plans. Loved ones scattered far. Grateful Dead live '72 on my walkman. A familiar chair in a usual joint. Will this story ever end? Hell, I don't know. But lightly hopeful.

On the train to ZombieTown again has anything changed do I love or hate better see differently feel things I never felt before or familiar things from some new perspective & why

the continuous questions never enough to sail happily along on a planet bound to destination X no that's never enough

"Why?" I ask Rebecca. Reminding me of certain magical blonde sisters I know she smiles & cuddles me I try to listen in the right way but can't can't can't.

This world is mine not because I own it but because it feels like home as my native one has but only in blips. I belong here only requires my pen & a bit of hope sometimes not even that always the pen & my time & my attention OK can do can do can do

Riding the night train to ZombieTown but not very late 10:11 pm is all but tired but writing but tired but writing

I am surrounded by girls who like me Stephanie Gretta Franny Suzann Valentine Rebecca brought them over to me all is soft & female & jolly thank you Godd thank you universe thank you Express medium point black point pens thank you paper company whatever name may be

*"I know you rider gonna
miss me when I'm gone
Gonna miss yr baby from
Rolling in yr arms"*

*we all sing hippie hoedown what's left of Noisy Children plays on & on even Cecile shuts his
fucking mouth about playing hippie music for once*

all is going well going going home

"Solipsism! Solipsism!" howled the ivy-towered raven.
More than a dozen sets of eyes turn raven-ward, blink, nod, "yes! yes!"

Herr Professor smirked & said "By the way, all writing is about writing. No matter how it's dressed up or disguised, this is a fact. A truth the mainstream maintains"

Cough! Cough!
No writing is not about sickness
Oh my heart!
No writing is not about love
Ho I am slain!
No writing is not about death
Charge lightly, Brigade!
No writing is not about war

Loss. Madness. Beauty. Nature. Godd. Cmon! Sing along! Evil stepmothers. Lustful stepfathers. Funny bones. Maidenhair weaved with daisies. Lovers branded A. Whales & whirlpools. Carousels where redemption rides in pigtails & affection. No sir. Her voice sounded like money. Aristocrats scribble no more must dig in the dirt. Poets who hear angels in the howling wind. No fucking way. Skinny Irish bards penning fat triumphant books.

You know the refrain:

All writing is about writing
Get your hand off my prick

All writing is about writing
It's easy easy easy easy

About mad kings & loyal daughters? Mad princes & carnal queens? Donkeys heads & pentambic iameter? No sir! No ma'am! Paper or plastic? Fries with that? Tonight on an all new special When Eggheads Speak!

Singalong you know the tune
All writing is about writing
Ivytowered raven told me so
All writing is about writing
Now get your hand off my cunt!

"Solipsism! Solipsism!"

Yes. No. Hurricane. Snow. All writing is about writing. Can I stop now?

Tell me more, Herr Professor. You're so smart. You have a Piss Hard Dick from Hans Joplin's University School & Automative Repair & Deluxe Shake shop VideoDrone & Laundrette Package Store Inn Mall.

Don't believe in Art no more? Then close your fat fucking yap.

Leave it to the big boys who'd take the bullet *with no irony whatsoever*—
"Only 28 more pages" someone mutters.

"Art is a miracle, no less—
All creation is a miracle, no less—
You, me, we are all miracles, no less—"

& the band joins me, softly, I look a little shaky, maybe I can't do this—Rebecca motions them suddenly—they increase their volume & tempo a little

"We walk on Divine Ground, no choice—
but awake, aware, grateful:"

Americus & Pascale both play acoustic guitar, Gretta acoustic bass, Stephanie & Grey tandem percussion. David Time, not yet deceased, I guess, smiles that gorgeous ugly smile of his & reads next from what's on my page:

"Dance at dawn with laughter & thanks"

& Rebecca finishes:

"Help others learn how."

Rebecca leads David & me into a slow easy dance, we three twine & feel the music gather around us, feel the moonlight thicken, liquify, feel miracle & mystery manifest, shimmer, all the world a miracle, all the world a mystery, the cynical only see moments, the cynical only see maneuverings

"the answer in a stranger's

distracted face" we sing
 "the answer in a bough drooping
 over water" we sing

Americus offers a line: "The wise man said 'I am a fool because I still hope.'"

Franny finishes: "His friend, the fool, grunted, continued reading his newspaper."

There's a whoosh, laughter & fire, & another, all is burning down, forever, all is burning down.

I told them my final story tho of course there would always be more. But this one bore the mark of having been long anticipated, long longed for.

The wife cherry vanilla snuggled peyote me story mate friends muse this here was:

"I guess I'd been looking for the next fire for a long time, esp. from when my memories of Glover had begun to soften a little, blur. Had it really been like that? Had I really died that night, born new morning light?

"Yes. I never doubted it but . . . something, a need to go that far again, risk as much, meaning everything, dare freely to lose what was not being demanded & yet know that the slide down commences when the crawl up pauses.

"The new night, sequel night, I never found the drums as I had at Glover, they eluded me, & I never really found the dancing either. I looked. Sort of. Truth was, I looked for something invisible, an oracle devised of the moment I writhed within. Approaching the fire, I bore some of my answer already.

"I'd been writing poems for girls, you see. Nymphs & muses. Ecstatic, I took 3 hits of LSD. Tripping, I walked from the temple I'd helped build toward the fire I'd been waiting for.

"No dancing, though crowded. A kind of continuing procession around the Burning Man, a walking pace for most. Yelling, screaming, invisible drums. I followed. I neared the fire until I could have stepped into it. The procession kept moving. It was a strange, weird but sober crowd. Maybe it wasn't late enough. Maybe noone really knew what to do. Fire. Miracle. Mystery. I danced for awhile. But not all night. Not Glover, this. Black Rock City."

I stop. Look around. Morning, the shyest earliest edges of it, but arriving.

Embrace it all. Let it go.

Something we have. Something we lose.

I look at Rebecca, her perfect dark blue eyes. "This is ending, isn't it?" She says nothing. She stays. Thank you.

I received confirmation that night. Rebecca. Art. Psychedelic vision. I'm doing OK, from a stellar perspective. Day to day is my test, but my path is not wrong & my race is nowhere near concluded.

Rebecca draws me from all perspectives, obsessively. Crayons, watercolors, oils, pencils. She etches, she sculpts.

One time she schemes with her friend Godd the little pink bear shapes & reshapes Godd until I am rendered, sitting at some joint, hunched over, writing.

"Thou art Godd," she giggles, 12 years old again, 90 too.

She is happy. She is *mine*. Ragged jeans, tye-die t-shirt, hair long brown swirly gorgeous, bare feet

“help me hide from you”

“why?”

“so I won’t see when you leave for good”

that’s when she hits me, hard, & throws things at me, missing, mostly, & yells & screams & worse, silent for awhile sitting stunned staring at me

I go away. From her, from myself. For a little while. I don’t like it. I really don’t like it.

So we marry again. We marry often, still. Concentric rings of wedding, further within, further without.

I approached the edifice in the desert, ecstatic, tripping, crazy, hopeful, & I wanted to burn something, a symbol, a gesture, hadn’t remembered to bring anything
sheet of paper from my notebook & wrote:

I am art

The answer is yes

& the funny thing I tell the wife as I’m tickling her in that special place I know between & slightly below her breasts, is that when I was close enough to the fire to crumple my page & toss it in & I did, *I missed!* Crumpled ball landed among flames but within none

oh what to do scared & carried along but no this is what I want to burn this is my choice

I am art

The answer is yes

I pushed nearer, nearer even than most of the crowd & kicked . . . at . . . the . . . motherfucker til a flame took it & it caught. Fine. Sure.

But not reinvention this time, I continue to the wife, tickling ceased but carnal play begun, no, not reinvention but confirmation: Art. Rebecca. Psychedelic vision.

Confirmation this time. I don’t know but maybe harder than last time.

My pen is being taken away by a soft insistent hand. Lusty nymph. Lusty muse.

New Period. Given birth, soon now a time to retract a little. Still more to tell, always more to tell. Echoes & ideas & on & on.

“I know you Rider

gonna miss me when I’m gone”

& the crowd goes completely nuts as Noisy Children eases brightly into the old Grateful Dead song.

“I wish I was a headlight

on a northbound train”

& they break it open completely reinvent secret joy amongst these times spectral swoop we are already there crowd a dancing fool now only voices & drums

“Gonna miss your baby

from rolling in your arms”

& I am sitting with Rebecca at hers & her dad’s little table neath the front window of Luna T’s Cafe’s bar. Sitting, holding hands until music so good we jingle into the crowd the place

is completely mad with joy is this literature? don't know don't care dancing happy all is well going to make it all of us going to make it all of us going to make it . . .

precisely now I notice the heavy swinging door separating bar room & band room opening slowly & eventually revealed is a familiar personage, tho one I've rarely if ever seen in this room.

A somewhat familiar personage I should say. For Doctor Arnold T. Knickerbocker is not begarbed in his usual ancient suit & crumpled hate. Nay.

He looks around uncertainly, clearly disconcerted by the dancing crowd & loud music.

Rebecca's face brightens immeasurably & as she hurries over to the old man I see her few years halve as she takes his hand & turns her ear to his barely audible barks. She looks over at me, smiling, grinning, Loki-nymph, & directs Dr. Knickerbocker toward where I sit.

Joy. I see now that Dr. K is not dressed merely different, more brightly, than usual, but indeed wears a cloak of flames, red flames, his hat a bright corona, his face grim & disturbingly sober.

I gesture to Rebecca's empty seat, because she'd probably want me to. He desists, with a slight imperious shake of his head. Begins to speak, continues to speak, tho I can't hear a word he says. Funny, this: ordinarily Knickerbocker's voice drowns other bar room noise in its great din.

I look, scowling, at Rebecca who's gone all pigtails & gingham dresses. I feel like spanking her but know I'd enjoy it too much. She's laughing, harder than who knows how long.

She finally leaves him to go up to the band, caught several times in ecstatic circles of dance, & eventually gets her father's attention. At first he plays to her laughter, motions invisibly to his mates & they are all playing to her laughter, eventually he tones down the music to hear her speak.

"Yes, beautiful?"

"Dad, Mr. Knickerbocker wants to marry me & Ray."

"Haven't you & Soulard already married a half-dozen times today?"

"Yes. But not by him. I think he has a speech & everything."

Americus grimaces. Rebecca's smile re-invents him, as always, & he nods.

"Can we play or does he expect us to do something?"

"I'll take care of it, Dad. Just wait for my signal. You know what song to sing, right?"

"Right."

Rebecca returns to me, flitting, where she finds Knickerbocker guarding my possible exit like a doberman at the junkyard gates.

"He seems to think I won't go through with it."

"It's OK, Mr. Knickerbocker. Ray loves me."

"Child, this dubious individual has rarely impressed me with his virtue. Skulking about with his tools of deceit & guile, I would not feel certain he wouldn't write 'The End' & thus extract his freedom in that lowly manner."

"I already wrote 'The End,' dude! Look! Page 462!"

Enraged, Knickerbocker is so engulfed in flames that I can't make out his face, tho I can hear his bellow.

“Iniquitous contriver of blasphemous fables! Darkling maker of insinuating falsehoods! Sinpocked chronicler of spangled lies!”

On & on, I get bored writing it all down so I stop. Rebecca is laughing again, hugging Dr. Knickerbocker, unsinged, of course, by his many wrathful flames.

I get up to leave. For a story that’s over, I sure spend a lot of time with it.

Rebecca joins me in the bar after awhile.

“Sorry, Reb, another failed scene.”

“It’s OK.”

“I wanted to Noisy Children to play ‘Here There & Everywhere.’ It’s the song you remind me of, or something.”

I take her hand. “I wanted Dr. Knickerbocker to give a grand speech.”

“What would he have said?” Sly one.

“Well, he would have risen up mighty & righteous & said *‘Marriage between souls is not about beginnings. Nay, it is about endings. Shall you breathe your last in an empty silent room, with a secular physician & a table full of unclean modern scientific instruments measuring thy demise? Or shall a weeping face soften your deathmask with loving tears, & your children be for a moment again the salvation once upon a time you believed them to be?’*

“The lord frowns upon isolated stragglers at his gates! Pathetic souls whose crass tones bear no genuine agony & wisdom, the kind of agony that only sacred union & fruitful issue thereof can produce!

“Did you marry & know the secret torments of the wedding bed? The inevitable sorrows of the weaker sex? The escalating tragedy that is to be the father of any living child?

“Gathered to us today are two who fear not the suffering in which they shall to death be jointly engaged.

“She shall know the rightful agonies of childbirth that will sink low her breast & dim her cheeks. & he shall know the final end of his freedom to want & hunt & take like an upright strongbacked man. He will droop with the years until acquiescence to cessation will hardly seem a strange new thing to him.’

“Then he’d pause & give all of us a glare that would describe minutely how unlucky would be the fate of the personage who objected to any words he’d said or vows he was intent on leading us through.

Finally, satisfied that my 6th ‘I do’ was loud enough to count with the lord, if just barely, he would gift us with a few lingering thoughts.

“There is no fate toward which you are hurtling. No answer preparing itself for your arrival. No blessing that will mark your path between uncertain past & assured future. No guarantee, nothing at all seeking to convince you that all is well, has been, or ever shall be.

“From this moment forward, increased uncertainty totaling years for every moment of passing bliss. From this moment forward, love tightens its noose more noticeably with each passing year, each yowling new spawn.

“Blessed be, you are now fully believers in the infinite & the holy. Peril for he who would love! Nearly inevitable woe! Answers few if any to ages-ever

cried out questions! Your fates are now twisted mercilessly together. You are quite doomed! Eve has once again offered the fruit & Adam has again accepted. Congratulations.”

Rebecca smiles at first then laughs unceasingly at my cracked imagining of Knickerbocker’s betrothal speech. When she calms, her carnal glint returns & she invites me to renew our vows in her office in the back.

Mate. Muse. Nymph. Wife. Better than all else. I just can’t say it enough.

“And I opened my heart to the whole universe
& I found it was loving
And I saw the great blunder my teachers had made
scientific delirium madness”

we listen together, mates, friends, forever, to this beautiful old Byrds song, about tripping, about Art, about love, about innocence once pervasive now elusive—

Was it worth it, these many pages? I don’t know. Yes, of course. Both are true in a way.

“Talk to me, Ray,” Rebecca tells me impatiently. She is in the window seat, I’m in the aisle seat.

“Kathy I’m lost I said
though I knew she was sleeping
I’m empty & aching & I don’t know why”

I sing to her. She’s pleased, she’s annoyed. She is sketching full moon over trees seen from a heavily trafficked highway.

“I’m Rebecca, not Kathy.”

“I know that.”

“I’m real, not a song lyric.”

“I know that too.”

I want to hold her hand so she switches to drawing with her left. I didn’t know she could. “So I get everything I want right now,” she giggles.

I planned so long ago how long this story would be but didn’t know it would be nearly 13 months later when I had finally come this close to its finish.

“I started this story a long time ago,” I say to Rebecca who’s looked up annoyed at me.

Then she looks sad. “August 1998. I was 17. Still jailbait.”

“I married you, Reb. You’re my mate & my muse & my wife.”

“I wish I was still your nymph.”

“You are, sometimes.”

She smiles softly. Returns to her drawing. It becomes magical as she deepens within it. Her pencil defines some aspects, leaves others indistinct. Depth, mystery. Miracle. I watch, & love her.

“There really isn’t any more to all this than this ride,” I say.

“But there’ll be another story soon.” Hopeful. Eager.

“Yes. But it will be more about you than me.”

“What do you mean?” Tense. Curious.

“I mean that this story was about me more than most because of all that had happened, because I was still here at all; I thought this was a miracle, a chance to renew, everything.”

“You don’t feel like that anymore?”

“I do. But I’ve told it all.”

"Are you sure?"

"I have a new idea, that's all, a different idea. It doesn't have to be about me. It didn't used to be."

"So it's, um, about me?"

I nod.

She's quiet, drawing. "I don't want you to recede from here too much," she says finally.

"I won't. I don't."

"Good."

I am wearing a necklace that I now remove to show to her.

A silver charm.

"It looks like Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*. Her basket, & that's her dog."

"It's her. I want you to have her."

Rebecca is quiet, breathless. I put the necklace around her neck. "Dorothy & I are both looking for home. She'll find hers back in Kansas. My home is with you. So my little Dorothy is home finally."

Rebecca is not one to weep but she does. "You keep making me" she burbles.

Life. Just add Art. Stir.

Joy.

I guess this goes on a little further.

Miracle & mystery.

New Period. What did it mean? I am alone now, finally, again, wondering this, hours from a day during which I will smile, & whore.

What did it mean? I am alone, now, finally, sad & writing because, really, what the fuck else?

Little. I am receding from the people in my world as much as I don't want to. Maybe I just don't want to finish this story, haha, after all this time.

It's 1:12 a.m. September 28, 1999, & have I come to any clear conclusions, beyond the murk & noise of every day?

Art my freedom Art my responsibility Art my burden when I darken & doubt. Art wings. Art dreams. Art as some wish but can't.

Will it continue to save me, salve me? If I let it. Will I let it?

I'm trying.

Nobody finally & forever knows the pain of another. Nor can anyone know the precise way comfort can be or indeed is given. We are each other's miracle & salvation, sometimes, never knowing why.

I want to know why.

This world be too brimming over with pain & harsh shit & I don't understand why.

I want to know why. But I may never. There are moments of revelatory sensation, to be sure, but unkeepable. Why am I sad tonight? Why feeling trapped? Is it really external circumstance? No.

I can't imagine being 40 or 50 or 60 because I keep wishing I could go back to 17 or maybe even 12 & try again.

Loss pervades my life, perhaps it pervades every life sooner or later. So am I looking for wonder or comfort these days?

Blue eyes float before me. Smiling. No.

"Yes."

No.

"Our song is coming up on your stereo."

"To lead a better life

I need my love to be here . . . "

Don't leave me, Rebecca, no matter that I can't explain you to anyone it doesn't matter

"Each one believing

that love never dies

watching her eyes

& hoping I'm always there"

I can't explain you even to myself but I love you, you are my muse, no matter who I do or do not meet in my own world none of them were there for me most of these many years you were I wrote about you & felt happy felt like I mattered

"I won't leave you if you don't abandon me"

I can't abandon you.

"You can. It's a choice, Ray. It's always been a choice."

I choose Art. I choose you, Rebecca.

"Then come with me."

We're now sitting at the bar of Luna T's Cafe. It's early evening, the regulars are drinking & laughing.

Baseball highlights on TV. Chicago Cub Sammy Sosa hitting his 62nd home run of 1999 season.

"He's the man!"

"McGuire is!"

"Garciparra!"

An old voice speaks up, thought mightily. *"Our lord is the man! Our lord is the only man! I beseech thee, tavern dwellers, sinners one & all, never forget this!"*

They wait for more but Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker is briefly finished. There's a pause.

"Sosa!"

"Big Mac!"

"Nomar!"

Secret Joy Amongst These Times. I chase from answer through darkness to answer & always it's the same: Art.

I don't have your answer, but let me say: Art, Love, Dreams, Tribe. Art. Art.

I sit in my corner of the bar, & my many lovers appear: Rebecca, wife; Rich, brother; Franny, sister, lover; brothers Ronnie Pascale & Cecile Grey; sisters Gretta Black & Stephanie Tormé. My favorite preacher, Knickerbocker. Favorite barman, Mr. Bob.

More & more.

Where's the Ampitheatre? Where isn't it? There will always be a full moon over a bonfire-lit green field, Vermont-near-Canada, & it is 1998 or 1981 or 1968 or a day long ago when souls tremblingly, happily approached Eleusis I don't know except the answer is of course yes to them all.

Secret Joy Amongst These Times. Nobody Needs to Go Anywhere. We Are, If We Only Knew It, Already There.

"That is here," I say aloud to Rebecca who's nudging close to me to read this page & drawing rapidly with her other hand, Dorothy silver charm hanging round her neck.

"We're already here, Americus."

"I know. I've been finding that out too."

Franny smiles at me, cosmic purple eyes inviting me. Maybe later. Likely later.

Rebecca leaves me to go sit with old Dr. Knickerbocker. Old man raises a toothy smile, begins advising her how to raise children properly. I ignore him save the stray comment that "the secret, child, is not inevitable annihilation, come for us all, no doubt. No, beyond that there's—" I don't want to know. Knickerbocker hopeful? Not utter nihilist? Always something new.

Jim & I smoke a bone in his new car, The Seed, listening to *Sargeant Pepper*. Merry, merry.

"Eat good food. Listen to happy music" I say, quoting someone special from back in my own world, back there, someone perhaps a little bit like Rebecca.

"Smoke good weed," Jim adds, after a moment's thought.

Yes. Of course.

I wonder what answers each person on this train bears chalice through the world. Are any of us right? Is it possible to know?

Is the journey through life all we get for guidance & guru? I don't know.

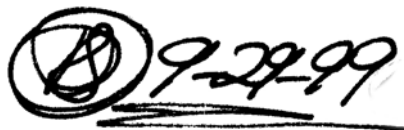
But for a moment, on this page, foolish train, anonymous day, I feel nonetheless something akin to home. Sitting at Luna T's bar I know love as I most want to.

Secret Joy Amongst These Times. Yes, I Know.

The train's arriving somewhere. I have to get off & then get along & I still don't know why.

"Why?" I ask Rebecca, for a moment desperate for truth.

Smiles. Shows me her drawing. A picture of me, here & now, sitting with her, smiling too, smiling. Finally knowing why.



Judih Haggai



Puffin ions at the Fairground

New York tears
 puffin ions at the fairground
 skyscrapin memories
 so close, so utterly distant
 touch the smells of bagel steam
 chestnut impressions of walk stop walk
 how much for a lazy extra moment?
 no time no time
 sidewalk pushes me past my address

seatbelted, glued to a timeline
 electric trivia sparks from behind
 how much for a slower passage?

on the splendid dinosaur
 polished and painted bright
 seizing the brandished diatribe
 how much for a cheap seat on the aisle?

A Winter Thing (dec 22)

so early this morning
a blast of love from a nearby dream
a risk to rise, a quiet walk to awareness

this winter thing is not so bad
together we bring the light
intensity magnifies love

like laughter in darkness
shared secrets in a quiet room
we pull each other towards joy

our touch is gentle
our message is firm
we survive and we live to tell the tale

Solstice

just when winter arrives
the calendar clicks for solstice
short days, give it up
gone, before you made your dent
soon the sun will outweigh the moon
balance will tilt
golden gleam will nudge me awake
long drawn out evenings
will beckon me for long radiant walks

solstice brings light to the heart
and hope to the mottled brain

Mid-December Reverie

a chunk in the middle of december
half is still to come
at the end a holiday break
a row of candles
lighting up the scene

far from enlightened
the shadows whisper as they busily plan for the future
what secrets are up their sleeves?

whispering futures
giggling at sudden schemes
inventing surprises, blows, directional change

a band of banditos
swiping the highlights of this year
and rekindling the best

the tribe of no-goods, some-goods, ultimately fines
arranging our life
and re-wording the signs

if you could, would you?

Buddha bit

beauty, it comes in breaths and starts
a gasp, a halt in the flow of time
cosmic crunch—a bash oh!
small steps over lily pads
whish of dragonfly
life is a well-kept oasis

a love poem to my daughter
dedicated to i, first born daughter

a love poem to my daughter
serenades the house
her essence scents the room
the couch begs her to stay

she enters the door
and silence starts to sing
fear dwindles, life lightens
the idiocy of others fades into irrelevance

what is love
till this daughter arrives?
it pales even sighs in dim peaks
what is happiness
till this daughter returns?
a low thud in the sinking heart

rise, oh soul felt laughter
as daughter walks this silent floor
the earth is her living room
the sky her endless trail

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Secret Joy Amongst These Times: The History of Scriptor Press, 1995 to the Present

“Think for yourself
& question authority”
—Dr. Timothy Leary

Chapter Eleven

continued from

The Cenacle | 55 | October 2005

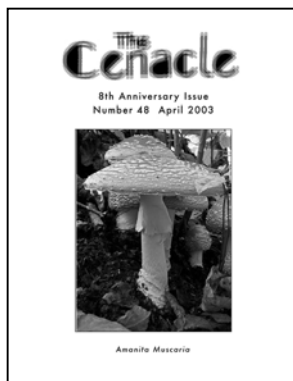
Remember 2004 how it began in the crumble of yesteryear & by virtue of boldness & luck concluded in better days, from one side of the North American continent to the other, from living with a suffering old friend to living with a blooming new one.

Living in Connecticut wasn't working very well anymore. My commute to part-time work at the *New Haven Advocate* was three hours each way & yet didn't pay well enough or offer enough security for me to move out of my friend Gerry Dillon's house. He'd kindly hosted me since the previous March, rented me his extra room at scant cost, but he had his own struggles & I didn't think I was helping him too much. We got along, happily, but I was restless to move along.

Scriptor Press work prospered that year, developed anew after its time in the hole of my depression. There were several new issues of *The Cenacle*; the *Scriptor Press Sampler* series was at long last caught up; there was a fifth volume in the *RaiBook* series; my radio show continued; the press's website, *ElectroLounge*, developed further; & there was a sixth year of Burning Man Books. As well I worked year long on my *6 x 36 Nocturnes* poetry series, & *Things Change?* fiction. Finally, there was my beloved Kassi, still half a continent away in Nebraska but closer to my heart than ever.

My focus early in the year was reviving *The Cenacle*, building on the momentum of finishing in December 2003 the year-late *Cenacle* | 47 | 2002. More than that: I wanted to distribute it online. The expense of paper issues meant I could never make more than a few dozen issues at most—& I *would* keep on making them—but I wanted to reach further & the power of desktop publishing coupled with the Internet could work this magic for me, for anyone willing to work it long & steady.

Cenacle | 48 | April 2003 was both the 8th anniversary issue and the first one reflecting my return to Connecticut. Its theme of struggle & progress emerged from the sly joke of the magic mushroom on the issue's cover and the blunt words of “From Soulard's



Notebooks,” dated 4/19/03: “I’m dirty, ragged: I stink. Nothing gains from me this way. I’m from here; this is not my home any longer. My home is out West. But am I ready? No. I’m dirty, ragged: I stink. To get there I have to do better as long as necessary. I need money, residence, people. Mend fences, build bridges. Humility & work. Other things unnamed or unknown.” That’s how it was.

But there was more, else, better. This issue featured a great new singer, my friend Judih Haggai from Israel, known online years & met in person too briefly in summer 2003. C48 features five of her poems. One poem in particular, “Spirit World Restless,” catches her deep groove & funky melody:

*swords, flowers, dinosaurs
water steams, lava sears
why not give in. spirit world takes off
hitch a ride to genesis
toss aside your emptiness
catch the next wave out.*

Chapter four of “Secret Joys Amongst These Times: The History of Scriptor Press” chronicles Scriptor Press’s history for 1997. Notable here is that I was doing a better job at laying out these chapters, their text-&-images mix.

C48 includes the last poetry contributions from Ric Amante, whose work had been featured from *The Cenacle*’s inception in 1995. Quite simply, we’d buried the hatchet, & lost touch around December 2002, when I was in Portland & he was near Detroit, Michigan. Our last phone call was full of forgiveness, at least a try at it, & old good cheer anew. His poem “Campobasso” rears alive in my heart everything good & decent, sweet & haunted about this man:

*Tonight I drink from a jug of Campobasso
and though I have no woman, no boys, no home,
to recall with affection how father
would take a plastic bread bag and
place it over the neck of the bottle
before screwing the cap back down—
my doing so now somehow saves me.*

Sleinte, Amante.

My fiction *Blue Period* continued in this issue, a wildly strange story I re-read these few years later with deep smiling affection. Its peak moments are portraits of the fictional hippie poet David Time & nineteenth-century American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson. Time relates to a crowd at Luna T’s Cafe his old days of romance & LSD in Haight-Ashbury, while Emerson later lectures at the same place on the dread pitfalls of passivity & complacency:

Stop waiting for Dame Fortune to wend your way! Look inside of yourself & ponder what you discover! How much is left after society’s passing clowns & your dread history are removed from consideration? How alone with your thoughts can you become if you do not think about known or famous persons? How much of your happiness depends upon the continued or hoped-for affections of others?

I look back on this extended imagining of one of my favorite writers & think I sketched him with great love.

C48 features the opening dozen poems of the sixth series of my 6 x 36 *Nocturnes* poetry series, a run deeply tucked inside my long distance 2001-2002 romance with Lisa Marie Zent. One poem, “Winter Solstice [concluded]” & its prescient lines:

*A greater music, a greater silence:
Contrive the thing you must release.
Til its dream no longer haunts you.
Til its fruit you no more seek.
Til it unclasps your hungry hold.*

Til forgetting, a scrap, you careen off the path.

I had not forgotten anything but I’d certainly become awhile that careening scrap. Finding the path again, some, any, making a new one, was taking everything I had.

The final piece in the issue is a reprint of Alan Watts’ 1968 essay, “Psychedelics and Religious Experience.” In it he writes:

Lack of awareness of the basic unity of organism and environment is a serious and dangerous hallucination. For in a civilization equipped with immense technological power, the sense of alienation between man and nature leads to the use of technology in a hostile spirit—to the ‘conquest’ of nature instead of intelligent co-operation with nature.

I find it notable that advocates of psychedelic sacraments are often the deepest, most sensitive advocates of a better world in all its forms.

The back cover is an old photo of me sitting on the steps of an abandoned building near my former home north of Boston. I sat there many times, alone, high, grappling for the surface on a propulsion of black ink.

It took only six weeks to make the next issue of *The Cenacle*, 49 | 2003. This issue was shot through with my experiences at Burning Man 2003. I worked very hard on this issue, pushing to find a new path, relevant, exciting. It is shot through with black & white images of the event. The cover is an image Photoshopped several different ways within the issue’s pages. The lead story, “Black Rockin’ Beats” is the essay of BM03 which I published in the *Hartford Advocate* in September 2003. Its conclusion speaks for the whole piece:



*What matters to me is the burst open window to shake loose
for a week, stop connecting A to B by rote and try A to K,
hand out books of poetry and fiction from my small press to friendly folks from Istanbul to
Eugene, ingest whatever plant or pill hooks my fancy, and sheerly revel in the knowing
that every calm and dangerous soul in Black Rock City will disperse again to spread to the
larger world its virus of spectral ecstasy, its spirit of whispered healing in the wind,
burning possibilities in the night.*

A visual companion to this piece is the “Burning Man Wall” collage which Kassi & I made together, a strange complex of images we crafted from our far distance. Other issues of *The Cenacle* had documented my experiences at Burning Man; I wanted this one to embed deeper, say more.

“State of the World, Part Two” marked the welcomed return of Jim Burke III to *The Cenacle*’s pages. In it he warns that whether technology was sourced in native human ingenuity or involved alien acceleration, the troubles plaguing humankind remain the same: “In either case, the resulting technological advances that aid an increase in consumption have to be brought under control. This would have the (unintended) effect of reducing corporate

earnings and combating greed on a planetary scale. The State of the World would be a less consuming one.”

This issue again featured poetry by Judih Haggai. Among her many twisting high lines, I like in particular: “Love, a lost petunia,/a flurry of sounds,/no way back, the tide/closed in” and

*Pale glaze over sunset—
as stars shine their rampant glow.
All's clear for take-off—
planetary blessings for the road.*

My fiction *Blue Period* concluded, & I'd thought at the time the story was finished, in July 1998, that my *Cement Park* series was finished, after 17 years. In the summer of '98 I'd been suicidal & endings seemed like the only good idea. I tried to breach linear time & coherent space to arrive somewhere real of my own hand:

*Life is long.
Love is vulnerable.
Save those you can.
Save yourself.
Heal the Future.
Heal Your Future.*

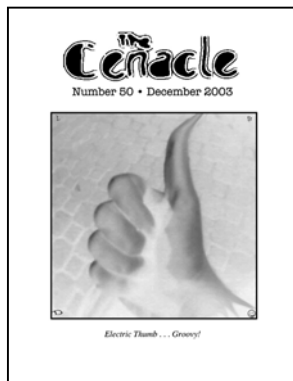
The series did end—& go on too. I don't believe Art has any true borders or limits.

But not love, not necessarily. The run of my *6 x 36 Nocturnes*, sixth series, written in early 2002, documented my heart's last eager days of unbroken hope for union with Lisa Marie Zent. She suddenly crushed me; my life collapsed even as I kept writing:

*First Spring Song
Love sticks hard. We each need to keep
breathing. today I watch snow & pretty
branches. The drop of yesterday on wet
grass. How you looked in a picture brushes at
me over & over. Words within say “await,”
sheets of dreams hush “let it be.” What's coming more
a roar than a song. An ache. A collision. A shine.*

As that year had gone on, I had little else left but *Nocturnes*. I published them as proof of survival.

“History of Scriptor Press,” chapter five, documented 1998 & the issue concluded with Dr. Huston Smith's 1964 essay, “Do Drugs Have Religious Import?” One of his most potent lines reads: “Drugs appear able to induce religious experiences; it is less evident that they can produce religious lives.”



One more especial note from this issue: the “Last Yawp” piece was a visual & text collaboration between Kassi in Nebraska, me in Connecticut, & our online friend Oddborn Jensen in Denmark, nicknamed “Satori.” Breaching space & time, indeed.

Cenacle | 50 | December 2003 is an overtly political issue. Several anti-war posters & graphic images convey my sentiments then & now: George Bush & his cabal have hijacked the American Republic & seek to turn it into a global empire, have lied & bullied the U.S. into an illegal occupation of Iraq, & will pursue their designs on other oil-rich Middle Eastern nations until they are cut from power. I bluntly advocate resistance to Bush & all who would aid in his fumbling pursuit of world dominion. In the

issue's opening piece, "Why I Turned Back D.C.," I wrote: "I hope for clear and legal repudiation of his empire-building ambitions. In the meantime, he needs to be held accountable for the nightmare he and his gang of proto-fascist ideologues have wrought in Iraq." Nothing has changed in my sentiments two years along; the "King" still bears power & his fist still crushes countless souls in the name of freedom. Nobody knows when it will end.

My *6 x 36 Nocturnes* series continued to appear, most notably the 24-part poem "Release (for Lisa Marie)," in which I returned to the subject matter of my 1999 book *Orpheus & Eurydice: Making the Lyre* to retell the tale once more. These poems were composed in the spring & early summer of 2002 when I was living my last days in Boston & then moving West to Portland & then Seattle. I was writing from deep romantic love but more than that I was trying to keep myself from cracking up. These poems were my cries to the universe:

*Then she turns & looks within. The strum continues
as it always has. Vipers & demons bite only so
deep. Love, & love's nameless god, web fiercely &
finely worlds without beginning or cease. She
turns & looks within. Something jumps. Clusters
of words break before heart's holy roar.*

She was one more muse. She came & went. My heart little regards her but these poems matter much to me still. In a time when little made me feel good or right, my pens & notebooks kept me up, high, strong, were more to me than any person. Lingual beloveds.

My old publishing partner Barbara Brannon contributed "North Carolina Sketchbook" & glad was I to have her art in *The Cenacle's* pages once more. The sixth chapter of "Secret Joys Amongst These Times" appeared too, & marked when I was now writing about Scriptor Press's history past 1999, past what had been contained in my thesis. More of Judih Haggai's poems appeared too, including the following delightful come-hither lines: "let's undo the seconds/caress the futon/undress in closest closet time/listen how life has chosen us/come on baby/let's listen to life."

My fiction *New Period* began serializing, feeling to me like what happens after the story ends. In this case, more story. Much of it was driven by my surviving some very black times in my life, but in truth I simply wanted to keep writing what I write, never stop:

*if we're going to make it, i say, we have to acknowledge our eternal kinship from molecule
to supernova. the cosmos has neither beginning nor end but a continuity that reductionist
thinking calls time. we belong as much to forever as we do to right now & all that was or
will be is rightfully, inarguably ours. so too with space. we are stardust. stardust is ours.
we belong to all of the cosmos as much as it belongs to us.*

I was blowing on all pipes, happiest when leaning over the psychic far cliff & singing for very life.

The final piece in the issue was a reprint of Jay Stevens' chapter "The Politics of Consciousness" from his 1987 book *Storming Heaven: LSD & the American Dream*, a recounting of the early, unruly years of acid counterculture: Huxley, Hubbard, Janiger, Leary. Stevens writes about the "turf war" involving "who would control traffic to the Other World." How those days ended, the tidal wave of cultural catharsis which followed, is well-known. Turned on, tuned in, dropped out. Struggled hard, carried on.

By the spring of 2004 I'd been back in Connecticut for a year & was hard dry fuck sick of it. My commute was exhausting & I wasn't earning enough to do better than live in my friend's spare bedroom & pay him a scant rent. My beloved Cassandra was half a continent away & missing me every time our visits ended, & I could only afford these trips

rarely.

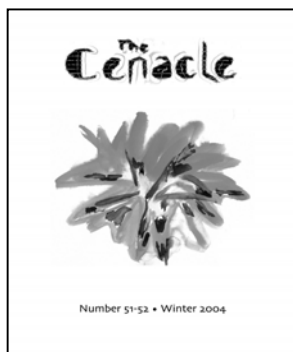
Bastards solved my problem. I arrived one Monday morning at the *New Haven Advocate* offices, returned from a freshening happy week with Kassi, & was laid off without honest explain by managing editor Paul Bass. I cursed him literally & figuratively for stripping me of what little stability I had, walked out, called Kassi, & decided a few hours later I was moving to Seattle. Fuck Connecticut. Sat a long day at a coffee house trying to figure out how to do what I'd vowed. On a call later that day, Kassi told me she was coming too.

It wasn't easy to pull off but by early June we'd both gotten there. I arrived just in time for my 40th birthday, spent a month living on a friend's couch, scored work at a chain bookstore, & moved in with Kassi when she'd successfully transferred to a school in Seattle. Here we both were in a city where I'd run hard previously &, defeated, abandoned; she was in a city she barely knew.

The lesson I've had to learn is that love, desire, & romance are not synonymous. Romance is airy, the stuff of melodies; love is visceral, want, need, eyes licking along flesh as the mouth cries & the mind lustily imagines; desire is what interests me, because it changes, it floats, not bound to the present hour or mere human dreams of gain. Desire runs deeper, spreads crazy, is what I believe we share with all other creatures, not rooted in consciousness nor I believe directed by consciousness. Desire is root & world. Desire builds with glee & destroys with a yowl. Desire remembers long & remembers little. Where desire no longer prospers some light is fading.

My partnership with Kassi is rooted in love & romance, & shares in the eternal sweep of desire; I do not believe a relationship could prosper missing any one of these. When that summer I pushed away the last twisted desire from Lisa Marie Zent toward me I finally knew I no longer felt them for her. I felt them all for Kassi. The world had turned too many times. Something finally over, something new even more deeply commenced. I am still learning what any of this means. If anything, I miss who I was then, little of the rest.

Both of us worked that summer & prepared for Burning Man 2004, my sixth, Kassi's first. We managed to publish one more *Cenacle*, 51-52 | Winter 2004, the year's fourth & last.



It was the first issue to be dated 2004 & resembled those others in many ways: a lot of Photoshopped art & photographs (several taken with my camphone), a handful of writers, & Kassi & I at the core of it. An impressionist bloom by Jude Haggai adorns its cover, & my letter to Kassi from the day I lost my *Advocate* job is the first prose piece within.

Welcomed back to the magazine's pages was fiction by G.C. Dillon. "The Cat and the Moon"—a sequel to his story "Haunting of Yusif" which had appeared in *Cenacle* | 46 | June 2001—is a "tall tale told in every harbor of the land of dreams; it is repeated by swaggering seamen, sweating stevedores, and the odd harbormaster or two." Dillon revels in made-up tongues, strange engines, conjured creatures, & tells his stories with confidence & sly levity.

My *6 x 36 Nocturnes* continued its obsessive arcing plummet through my heart's blown-out darkening skies, recording my summer & autumn of 2002 as no other record could. My months in Seattle were struggling ones at best, no work, little hope, & yet I kept along. My memories of bike-riding psychedelic Saturdays back then remain strong. My pen & bike & I etched psychic ruts deep in the city. I still feel these several years later. The steep roads I tripping flew down fast. The parks I wrote with nothing & everything left in my heart. I

cried with music as though the whole world was pressed toward me & listening:

*Approach yourself again, beginning on the day
we missed, the moment your love grew off.
There. That moment like a rat or a roach,
first of a countless. Now. Speak a spell, loudly,
& see that moment throttle green & go. Speak
again, a few stumbling words of love laced in
freedom. Look. The sun is shining. You made it.*

What was I to write like this? Who was this? Who were you? What have you & I to do with each other? Did I save you by surviving? How much of you is left? What would you say to me tonight if voice across the years you possessed?

The seventh chapter of “History of Scriptor Press” covered the year 2000 from the perspective of summer 2004. We ever see the past & future, if such concepts are true, from a distance, & the elevation & shadows between ever distort what we would remember or discover.

Jude Haggai’s poems again featured in *The Cenacle*, her “intimate DNA banter,” her skies with “neptune nudging nearer,” the auras & kisses she traces “en route/toward destiny.” Praise to her voice familiar & new in the growing years of our fraternity.

My story *New Period*, more a novel really, continued its run as I tried to broach & then breach the farthest borders of what fiction my pen can make, mixing tale with my long poem *Millennial Artist’s Survival Guide*, mixing in memory of the Vermont woods where not long ago I’d danced & died & been born anew by morning. Trying so strange & high I sometimes tumbled:

*I don’t know. It seems like I want to write this grand experimental narrative that brings in
much new & also plays more with recent ideas. So it should be easy. But much lately has
become shadowed in doubt that I’ve lost my way. And I not only can’t answer the questions
I’m struggling with, but I’m not so sure I can articulate the questions accurately.*

But I wrote on, of course, because what Art does not solve or at least illumine nothing else surely does.

The final piece in the issue was the first part of a reprint of a 1967 [San Francisco] Oracle-published dialogue among Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg, Alan Watts, & Gary Snyder, called “The Houseboat Summit.” The four seminal thinkers & artists debate points of society & philosophy aboard a houseboat near Sausalito, California. Watts at one point argues for an anti-Western, “Chinese view of the world”:

*a movement . . . a stirring among people . . . which can be organically designed instead of
politically designed. It has no boss. Yet all parts recognize each other in the same way as
the cells of the body all cooperate together.*

The excitement in reading this dialogue many years later is how live some of its ideas & ideals still are, how many of its proposals have not worn to dust.

The back cover of C51-52 is an elaborately Photoshopped picture of a very pretty arched entryway at Yale University in New Haven, an arch I would pass while at lunch from the *Advocate*. By when the next issue of *The Cenacle* appeared some 11 months later, I would be a continent’s distance away from that arch & the hope & disappointment I’d experienced in that city.

My partner Kassi became the third collaborator I had worked with on the Burning Man Books series (Mio Cohen, 1999; solo, 2000; Barbara Brannon, 2001-2003), & gave the project exciting new impulse. We worked especially closely on volumes by Octavio Paz & Basho.

The first of the year’s additions was Flannery O’Connor’s savage tale “A Good Man

is Hard to Find.” O’Connor is a favorite writer I share with Barbara Brannon. Her fiction is merciless in its drilling in for the subtle, hard morality of a situation or character. Truth, as she knows it, wins. Angels & devils both live & die according to this truth.

Carl Gustav Jung’s essay “On the Nature of Dreams” is an old favorite of mine & one whose ideas color my own in thinking about the collective unconscious. I do pursue their sometimes insightful, even prophetic qualities a bit farther than he does.

Octavio Paz’s long poem “Sunstone” conjures sweet recollection of its being chosen for our series. I knew I wanted something by the Mexican master, but not sure what. Kassi & I went to the Elliott Bay Bookstore one day & sat with a volume of his collected poems. Perhaps on a whim she began reading me this 600-plus-line poem, & didn’t stop til its end. The selection was made. Later she read it to me again, its crazy swoops of meaning & melody, as I typed it on my Macintosh.



James Joyce’s short story “The Dead” was another old friend, culled from his collection *Dubliners* which I’d first read many years ago in grad school. I am also a fan of John Huston’s film version. A quite visceral tale of love & regret, it sounds its highest note in conclusion: “His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.”

The sixth annual volume of psychedelic anthologies is called *Stones of Your Mind*, a line nipped from John Lennon’s brilliant song “Mind Games.” Its featured authors include Theodore Golas (*The Lazy Man’s Guide to Enlightenment*), Robert Hunter (“The Withering Away of the Revolution”), Ralph Metzner (“Seven Phases of Social-Cultural Transformation Catalyzed by LSD and Psychedelics”), Alexander Shulgin (“The Agony & Ecstasy of Alexander Shulgin”), & Jorie Graham (“Same Time”).

The last of the half dozen new titles is, like the Paz book, especially dear to me. It began as an anthology of haiku, meant to cover a wide space of centuries, but the scope narrowed as time went on. Anthologies to be successful must be sharp in focus, summed in a short phrase. Kassi & I looked at many books of haikus (evolved from the haikai no renga) & eventually chose the progenitor of the form, the seventeenth-century poet Basho. We read through many many of Basho's poems to choose three dozen, & thus create the best of the best of his work. Poems like:

*Midfield
attached to nothing
the skylark singing*

and:

*You turn this way,
I'm also lonely
this autumn evening*

and:

*The whole household—
each with white hair and cane—
visiting a grave.*

At one point we sat together in the Seattle Public Library & read a children's storybook detailing Basho's wander across Japan. I think indie presses like ours are built soul-up to receive such blessed hours.

It had been three years since Scriptor Press had published a volume in the RaiBooks chapbooks series (the last had been Barbara Brannon's *Pawn Title Keep Car* in December 2001). It was time to put out a new volume, & my poet friend Judih Haggai in Israel was the ideal artist to promote in this way. Born in Goshen, New York in 1953 she moved to Toronto, Canada and eventually a kibbutz, in the Western Negev, Israel. I had known her several years by 2004, & we'd been lucky enough to meet for an evening in 2003 when I lived in Connecticut, & she & her husband Gad were in the US visiting kinfolk. Such dear hours, at the now-gone Xando Coffeehouse in Hartford. We exchanged poems, hugs, & chapbooks of poems, took photos, more hugs, & then parting. But what fraternity had grown up online was cemented in person. Scriptor Press's *Spirit World Restless* collection of her poetry was inevitable. Kassi & I together spent many hours designing this book, its layout, font style, contents, running order. The cover we worked from an image by a friend of Jude sitting meditatively, gave it our Photoshopping twist & twirl. Looking through its forty-some pages I find stanzas riding high, high music:



*we, magic mushrooms
emerge
inner fire blaze*

*we squeeze our anxiety
for traces of pure inspiration
looking for angels
in soul compost*

*my last life
swirls within
as i direct my gaze to you*

*when I think of you
I pull forest twigs
from your hair
and suck the sap of life*



The last of the publications we readied that summer, and & again reviving a dormant series, was *Scriptor Press Sampler* | 3 | 2001 *Annual*. Much of *The Cenacle*'s old crew was featured—some of whom I'd fallen somewhat or completely out of touch with by 2004—art by Barbara Brannon, prose rant by Jim Burke III, fiction by G.C. Dillon, poetry by both Joe Ciccone & Ric Amante, essay by Mark Shorete, & a few samples from my 6 x 36 *Nocturnes* series. The *Sampler* series is meant to cull the best of Scriptor Press's originally published work (so no Burning Man books or *Cenacle* reprints), to detach a volume's worth & send it along to the world. If done with care & timeliness, its concept holds much promise.

We packed up our tent & boxes of publications & traveled to Burning Man 2004 via the Green Tortoise, an alternative-to-Greyhound travel service which also runs trips down the West Coast & across the North American continent. Great heaps of bicycles stacked on its roof, the bus hauled a couple of dozen very excited people to Black Rock City, many like Kassi new to the event. We made & ate meals communally, aided each other in acclimating to the desert & opening out to the festival's many promises.

Kassi & I brought Scriptor Press's many books & publications, 24 copies of over 40 titles, each day to Center Camp, spread them all on a blanket, & mixed in with the crowds going by, stopping to see. This was No Borders Free Bookstore's 6th year & my favorite so far.

By night we wandered, often tripping, through camps, fire dancers, random strange shit, grokking with countless others in many kinds of ways. I remember one particularly sweet eve, looking for the Starlight Drive-In when I'd often seen movies in previous years, sometimes falling asleep on its scattered mattresses. We never found it but walked on & on in the high wind, the dust storm less seen than felt. Here I was at last with my true love in my adopted native city. All was well.

Too soon we returned to the daily yoke. KD resumed classes & part-time work, & I continued to work at Borders Books, a corporate fascist charnel house for any possible freedom of thought or individuality among its booksellers. Low paid, & by manner of treatment presumed to be potential thieves. Bookbags & purses checked upon arrival & exit, constantly watched & graded for signs of relaxing or reading, formulaically adjudged for worth & reward, had my fellow bookselling slaves not been so decent, had I not a household to help keep, & an indie press to finance, had it been easier to find better work or I more truly motivated, not tired by day & night, I might have left sooner. As it was I slogged on there for the rest of the year, compelling myself to work hard to become well-regarded by management & labor alike even as I spoke my dissenting mind & took shit rarely.

September saw publication of *Scriptor Press Sampler* | 4 | 2002. This was a challenging volume to produce as only *Cenacle* | 47 | Dec 2002 existed to represent that year. Thus *SPS* 4's simply prints art & writing from that issue, featuring Amante, Brannon, & Soulard. But it did travel other paths than *C47* at times, & carried along its own series another year. Worth doing for that.

November 2004 was another presidential election time. Had there not been so many rigged elections, had the Democrats not nominated another weak-willed nerd in the Humphrey/McGovern/Mondale/Dukakis mode, had people come



out to vote in truly respectable numbers, I would not be writing from what remains the American Empire, well aware how things might have been & are not, having by force of will hardly been able to rouse up myself & countless others to attempt yet another electoral turn back of the lunatic cabal running DC as of this winter 2005-2006. Hope is everywhere & always but its welcome, how deeply it is being tapped, varies much.

Scriptor Press Sampler | 5 | 2003 was the last major publication of the year, appearing in December. Its cover features a Burning Man 2003 photo collage by my partner, & newly minted Assistant Editor, Kassi Kramer, & within my sentiments to sum up the year by way of Mahatma Ghandi's words: "Be the change you want to see in the world." My "Editor's Note" strikes a hopeful note too, saying in part: "... now is a continual mystery, stays and goes perpetually. Things change, it can get better if it feels bad, in this world and others too."



The contributors are a mix of newcomers & stalwarts: Haggai, Brannon, Burke, Amante, Soulard, Kramer. I would bring them all along still if I could, these & others too. Some possible still to recover, others little likely. Things change, & change again. What mattered is that Scriptor Press had come out of the worst of its days—my days, of course—and was finding its way back into the world, hoping readers still waited or pended—

The ElectroLounge ended the year on a fruitful note too. With the help of my friend Alfie Ilkins in the UK, & his offer of Web server space, I was able to launch an archive for my radio show. This involved converting each broadcast to a single mp3 audio file, checking it for problems, & uploading it. I created an archives page to list the archived shows as they accumulated, & to promote the next live show.

december 21, 2004

3:32 p.m.

viewmont

seattle, washington

today exciting news...i've added the three most recent broadcasts of my radio show, "within's within: scenes from the psychedelic revolution w/soulard"...i started doing this show back in january 1999 at radio free cambridge in cambridge, massachusetts, it was low watt FM radio...then in 2000 at allston-brighton free radio in allston, mass...that was low watt AM and eventually webcast too...now my show is on spiritplants radio on the web...the archive added to this site today marks the greatest availability of this show to date...thanks to my friend Alfie in UK for the web space to make it possible...



It had been a tumultuous year of change & movement but, as delineated here at great length, one of much work. I've learned that it is only by years-long effort of scattered minutes & hours can worthy results emerge. Nearly ten years into the revived Scriptor Press, an idea born in my private adolescent dreams & notebooks, & I was still learning this by the results of better & worse nights. The most epic writing of my career came to its conclusion in December 2004.

It had begun in June 2000 on a bus traveling from Boston, Massachusetts to Hartford, Connecticut, & was originally, simply, *36 Nocturnes*, another poetry series like others I'd done & published in *The Cenacle* [*Stranger America*, 4-5 | Summer 1995; *Orpheus & Eurydice: Making the Lyre*, 31 | December 1998; *Two Vessels*, 39-40 | Winter 2000]. I wanted to mix poems like DJs mix musics; mix lines & see what came of it. The project became more ambitious when I realized it would be more than 36 poems. It would be six series of 36, & each series got longer & more ambitious as I mixed erotic love, psychedelics, nature, loneliness, hope, music, dreams, kept along the path as it multi-dimensionalized, at one point color, going for more, this was my current shot at the clearing, the place of arrival, & there were times my *Nocturnes* were pretty much all I had, traveling to the West, Seattle, Portland, Black Rock City; the East, Hartford, Boston, it went on & on, & the sixth series was vastest of all, a series of series, epic after epic, whatever it meant to anyone else these poems meant everything to me & here it was in the last months of 2004 I was down to the 360th & last poem of the series, "Cry [for Cassandra]."

I worked over this poem as I'd never worked over a poem before. I couldn't write it at one go, didn't want to, no, I wanted to write successive versions, one & the next & the next, longer & longer, lines appearing new & next, some coming & going & coming again, I wrote it often on the late evening bust ride over Lake Washington from Bellevue Borders Books to Seattle & awaiting KD. Wrote it over & over, throwing my all into it, hustling & worrying it, possessing it & possessed by it, one vessels, two vessels, many vessels, none. Breath, relax. I tried to finish it a few times before I did; I remember one night with candles at our kitchen table. It came as it came, that's all. On December 3, 2004, I wrote the final lines:

*What lasting? The music of every open hand.
What abide? Love's every pock, its countless tugs upon the fabric.
What begins, & a beat, & begins again? Hope, its mystery rise,
its helpless decline.*

*Cry out! What breathes worlds listens, & listens for you.**

& it was done, 360 poems & 4+ years made of my days, my music, my blood, & the rest too.

For all the even more I wanted to do that year, more of the same & wish ever for new & different, I can nonetheless look back at 2004 & say: alright, fine. Kassi & I fell asleep shortly after the New Year arrived in the U.S. Pacific time zone; I could not have wished to be anywhere else as the clock struck twelve.



* Editor's Note: The full text of this poem appears on page 1 of this issue.

James Kent

Psychedelic Rules

Psychedelic Information Theory, Chapter 5
<http://tripzine.com/pit.asp?id=pit04>

While these are not hard scientific rules they are in large part agreed upon to be true by people familiar with the psychedelics, and some have become basic axioms of the psychedelic experience. Listed in no specific order, the Rules of Psychodelia are as follows:

1. *A single drug can do many things.* If there is one rule you need to know above all about psychedelics, this is the big one. It is difficult to explain how utterly true this statement is, but the range of experience produced by psychedelic drugs is almost limitless. Every possible facet of human emotion and experience is accessible within the psychedelic experience, and even facets that you never dreamed of can pop right out of nowhere. While practice can get you familiar with the territory, no one really knows exactly what they are going to get when they enter into a psychedelic voyage. Tears, laughter, mania, joy, catharsis, sleep, visions, voices, paranoia, peace, exalted bliss, torturous hell, close encounters with aliens, devils, angels, visits from strange and unknown entities . . . All are possible outcomes of the psychedelic trip, and you may experience them all within the course of a single psychedelic session. It is truly a roller coaster ride into the unknown. Do not take this path unless you know the rules up front. Which brings us to . . .

2. *Psychedelics are Non-Specific Amplifiers.* In *LSD Psychotherapy*, Dr. Stanislav Grof writes: "LSD and other psychedelics function more or less as nonspecific catalysts and amplifiers of the psyche." This is a truism held over from the heyday of psychedelic research in the late 1950s and early '60s, and is still widely accepted as true and accurate to this day. What this means is that psychedelics have the power to amplify any specific facet of the human psyche depending solely on the situational context or some combination of both the conscious and subconscious focus, desires, and intent of the user. Which brings us to:

3. *It all comes down to ingestion context, or: "Dose, Set, and Setting."* The tone and content of each psychedelic session all comes down to the amount of the particular drug you're taking (dose), the frame of mind or mental state you're in when you take it (set), and where you happen to be and who you are with when it starts to kick in (setting). By paying careful attention to each of these details a user can attempt to program the boundaries and desired outcome of the trip, thus minimizing bummers, freak-outs, or messy intrusions that could move a psychedelic trip into sour territory. But nobody can foresee everything, and sometimes even the best planned trip can go into unknown territory and get very weird very quickly. So it is important to remember:

4. *Psychedelics Dissolve Boundaries.* It's no secret why the '60s counterculture picked up on the "acid" part of *lysergic-acid diethylamide* (or LSD) as the slang handle for the drug. LSD was said to dissolve boundaries, all kinds of boundaries: class boundaries, race boundaries, gender boundaries, and even more abstract things like the boundary between self and other, subject and object, waking and dreaming, the ego and the transpersonal self, even the boundaries between life and death. Under the influence of a boundary-dissolving psychedelic, the concept of the "ego" or "independent self" slowly vanishes as consciousness grapples with heavy concepts like "the illusion of self" or "the fundamental interconnectedness of all things." For people seeking communion with a higher mind this is a good thing; for other people the dissolution of personal boundaries and the vanishing of the self is the scariest part of the experience. The ability to cope with this fundamental aspect of the trip may very well be at the heart of all "positive" psychedelic trips, and the fear of this specific experience may underlie all "bummers" or negative trips. Which is why you need to:

5. *Relax, Submit to the Experience.* When things get crazy there's no use fighting it, you're in it for the long haul and you did it to yourself. Trying to struggle against an uncomfortable experience will only make it worse. The sooner you learn to relax and just go with the flow the better off you'll be. Just because it is weird beyond belief doesn't mean there is any reason to be uncomfortable with what you are feeling or seeing; you should just let it do its thing and try not to get in the way. Some people have a natural resistance to giving up control of the experience, but it's for the best, really. If you get scared just sit still and wait it out. Since psychedelics are non-specific amplifiers, if you choose to fight an experience your mind may exaggerate the conflict or amplify the source of anxiety, thus putting you in an aggressive/paranoid feedback loop. Should you choose to relax, your sensations of peace and calm will only be enhanced by the psychedelic. So whatever you do:

6. *Don't Freak Out.* No matter how weird it gets you must not give into to the urge to totally freak out, like yelling and screaming and getting violent, especially if you happen to be in an unsafe and uncontrolled environment. Freaking out will just land you in the emergency room and that is the last place you want to be in this state. The main trick to warding off bad trips is simply remembering to stay calm, take a deep breath, clear your mind, and push through whatever is giving you grief. You can feel fear, pain, paranoia, danger, menace, death, nothingness . . . but as long as you stay calm and keep breathing you'll be just fine. If you focus your attention on your own breathing and autonomic systems you'll find that the slower and deeper you breath, the more calm and relaxed you will feel. This is all you need to know to undo even the most hellish downward spirals. Take a deep breath, relax. Clear your mind. Take another one. See, you're feeling better already, and remember:

7. *It Will Eventually End.* No matter how much it may seem so at the time, you will not be stuck in the psychedelic state forever. Like all things, the psychedelic state is fleeting and generally cannot be maintained for long periods of time. The time it takes to have a trip may feel like a lifetime, and the memory of the experience will stay with you forever, but the truly odd perceptual bits in the middle, those will fade away in a few hours, I promise. It is extremely rare for people to have any lingering perceptual effects from a psychedelic trip; even the notorious flashbacks are extremely rare if downright mythical. While some people with psychotic tendencies are more at risk for having severe adverse reactions, the average person recovers from a psychedelic trip quite quickly. So don't worry, just try to get something out of it while it lasts.

The key to getting the most out of psychedelics is to be safe and have some kind of intent for the trip. Having a pre-planned focus or ritual for the trip is not essential, but it does help set the tone for whatever will come next. I have also found it helpful in early experiences to find a "ground object" like a watch, or a photo, a polished stone, or anything small and interesting you can return your focus to when things start to get beyond your grasp. The ground object may be a childish notion — like a trail of breadcrumbs to keep from getting lost in the forest — but it can be like a little piece of the "old world" you cling to when everything else falls apart and the "new world" unfolds before your very eyes. It may sound silly now, but if you know what I mean, well, you know how important the little things can be when the foundation of reality starts to come entirely apart.

And believe it or not, that is *it*. Those are all the rules. Within these boundaries just about any outcome you can think of is possible.

Notes on Contributors

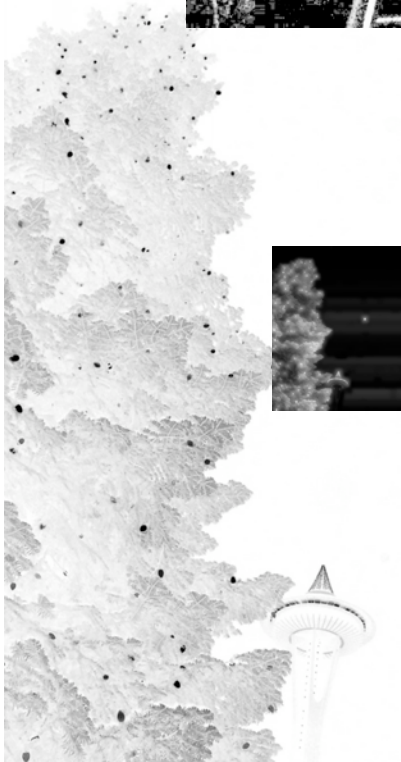
Jim Burke III lives in West Hartford, Connecticut. His letters have been appearing in *The Cenacle* since its inception in 1995. He lives vital by Buddhist ideals, entheogenic truths, and acoustic guitar.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. She sees far and feels far too, and within endlessly, and ways without direction but toward home and the cosmos.

James Kent is the former editor of *Psychedelic Illuminations* and publisher of *Trip* magazine. He has written for many print and web publications on psychedelics, and is esteemed for his intelligence, sense of humor, and compelling insights on the topic.

Kassandra Kramer lives in Seattle, Washington. Her collage art contributions appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. At month's end she will bond in marriage to a man who could not very long ago have dreamed wedding her wonderful like.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Seattle, Washington. He has been the editor and publisher of *The Cenacle* for ten years as of this past April, and is marrying his dearest friend this month. He understands the ways of the world less and less as years go on, but knows good luck when he sees it.



Seattle,
Washington
December 2005
RS & KD



