

The background of the book cover is a deep navy blue, overlaid with intricate, flowing patterns of bright red and white. These patterns resemble smoke, flames, or perhaps the veins of a stone, creating a sense of movement and intensity. The red areas are more solid and vibrant, while the white lines are thin and delicate, tracing the edges of the red shapes.

Old Flames & Burned Bridges

haibun & haiga

Mark Meyer

OLD FLAMES & BURNED BRIDGES

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-Foreword -

It's another year and the viruses are still hanging around our doors, though perhaps they're just a wee bit less nasty than before. But now a brutal new war is raging in the world and our tempers, our temperatures and our oceans continue to rise, and...well, on it goes until...we don't know the story's end. So, we all do whatever we can to breathe free and carry on. I write, I draw, I pet the dog, I sleep, I have a drink and dream of better times.

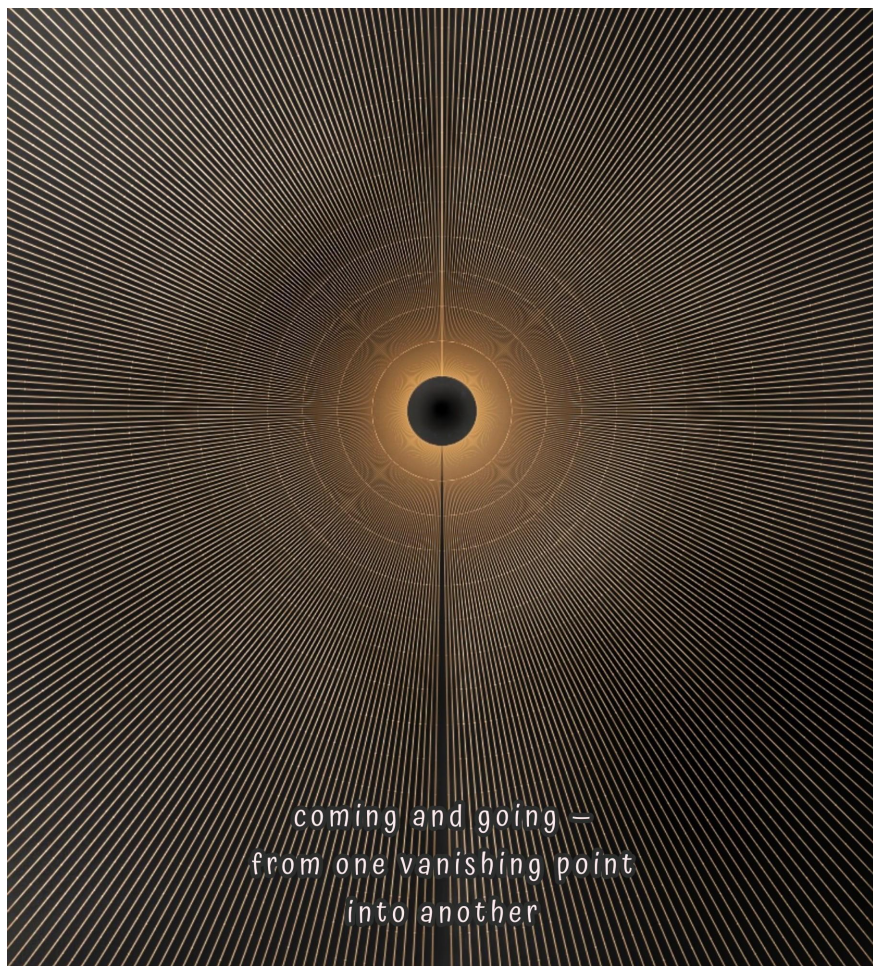
This is my second book and, like my first book, *neo-Nothyngge*, I'm writing during rather stormy times. both personal and global. My hope for those of you who read this is that you'll at least find yourself entertained and briefly diverted from the worldly woes that bedevil us all.

As always, there are so many to thank, both living and living on in memory, that my gratitude extends beyond all limits. Domo arigatō gozaimasu, y'all!

-Introduction -

It would be foolhardy of me, especially as a fledgling poet, to spend your time expounding the intricacies of Japanese poetry forms. There's a world of great literature and explanations out there for us. I simply wish to say that this book contains two forms of Japanese-style (note emphasis) modern poetry, *haibun* and *haiga*. The former are basically prose poems, containing either *haiku* (generally nature-based) or *senryu* (more personal, ironic, etc.) On the other hand, *haiga* incorporates an image with either a haiku or senryu.

Because this is Western-styled poetry, there's no need to employ the "classical" Japanese 5-7-5 scheme; if you see them herein, it's not by design. Even many in the revered classical haiku pantheon broke through conventional barriers, so no apologies from me for any liberties I may take. Oh, and you might find some five-line *tanka* attempts popping up somewhere now and then in the mix.



coming and going –
from one vanishing point
into another

coming and going –
from one vanishing point
into another

Med School Confidential

One year, 1969 - 1970, Texas, at the very height of the Vietnam War. I passed my every course with high marks. And then one day I walked away.

I had a mustache and Yellow Submarine lunchbox, but had to wear an official white coat and tie each day. The school provided me with a black bag, stethoscope, ophthalmoscope, and lots of other assorted junior A.M.A. goodies; still have 'em. The school also freely prescribed all the pretty pills I needed to get me through round-the-clock schedules. I took a lot. I drank a lot.

ego tripping
*with maxwell's silver hammer**
— knee jerk reflex jerk

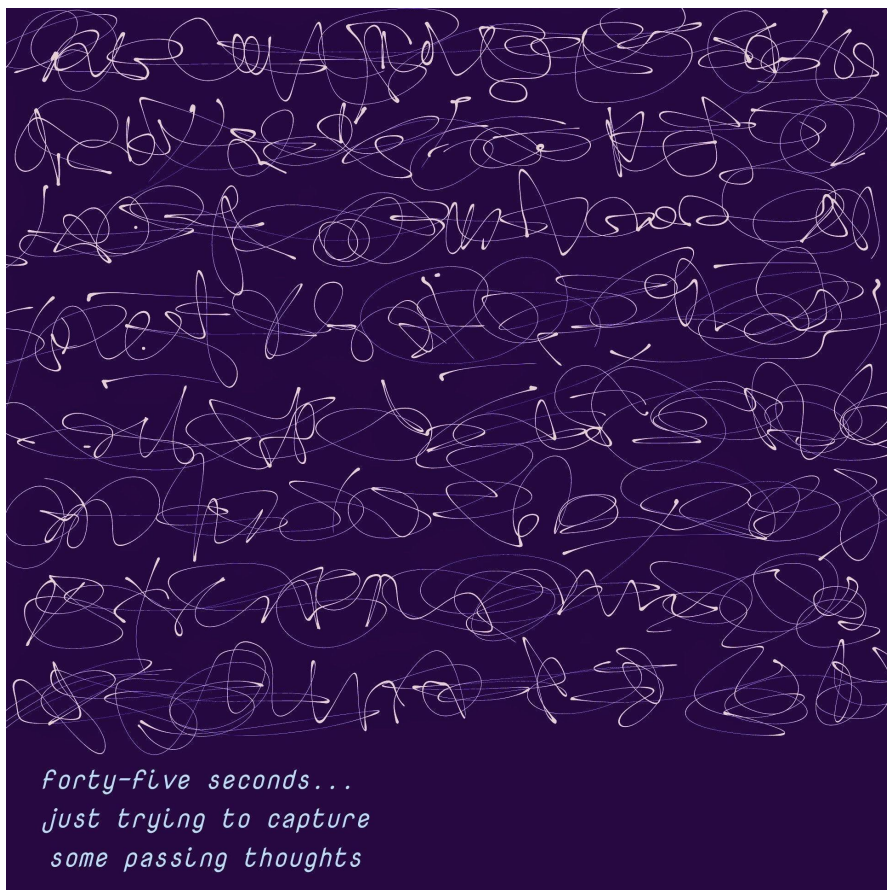
Four of us shared our own cadaver, a silver-haired giant of a gentleman who popped-up every day for us from his steel formalin tank. We named him "The Senator." The smell persists no matter how many times you wash. Can almost still smell it. One day, in the respiratory physiology lab, they

provided a dog to experiment upon. I still remember that poor sacrificial dog and will never forget her eyes looking at me - - the last straw. Shortly thereafter, I resigned, walked away from it all, and broke my parents' hearts. A week later, I received my draft notice.

and ever after...
always following
what my dog tells me

* A Beatles song off the Abbey Road album (1969)





forty-five seconds...
just trying to capture
some passing thoughts

Sandman cometh

Some believe that what we call reality is just artifice, a hologram, a trembling veil of subjective form, perhaps even a gargantuan googolplex video game. Could be, but that's a bit hard to digest, don't you think?

*a whichever world —
ortho, meta, para
or just soap bubbles*

Nonetheless, the mathematics of quantum mechanics cannot be squared without the use of imaginary complex numbers - - so there goes the neighborhood. Well then, what about the realm of dreams? Any less "real" than the day-to-day?

*into delta sleep
the reality
channel on mute*

Welcome to Dreamland! Why not? This daylight stuff is illusory; the sun's glare can easily deceive us, a mere trick of the light.

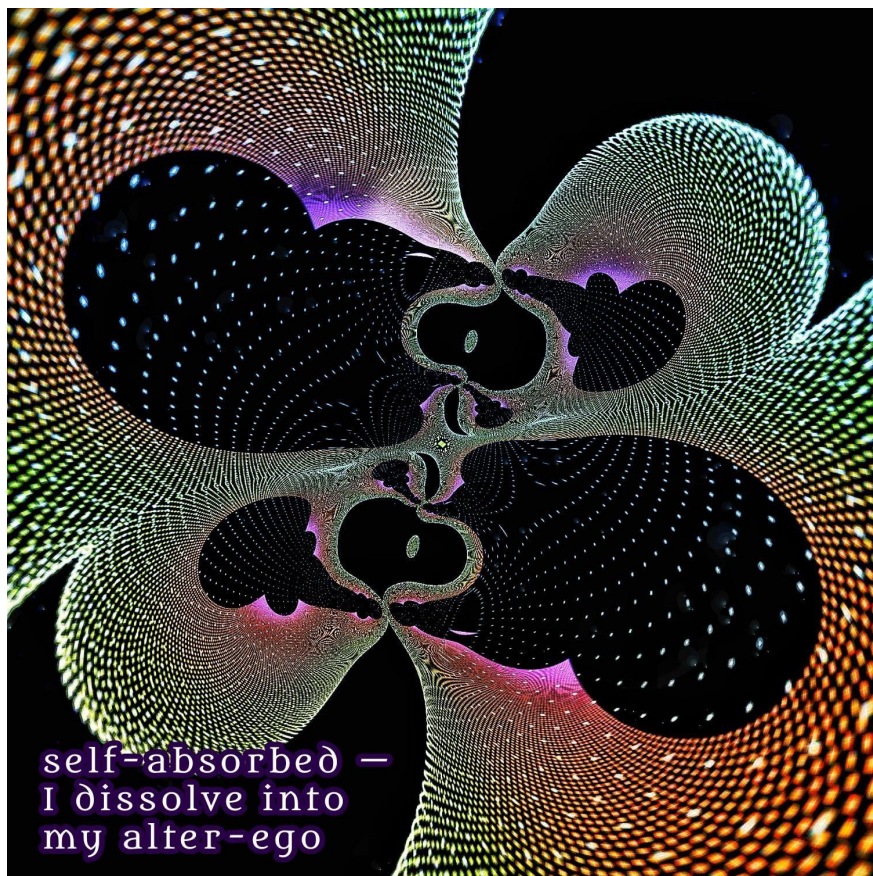
*magnesium flash —
only afterimages
that quickly fade*

Ah, but the moon - - its cold blue rays move the tides of the dark seas, illuminate the chthonic spaces, places very much alive for me.

*archetypal shapes
the comings and goings
of the Otherworlds*

The night, the moonbeams, the dreams - - in Dreamland, someone or something's always there, waiting, the familiar and the unexpected.

*indigo vapors
from out of nowhere
another face*



self-absorbed –
I dissolve into
my alter-ego

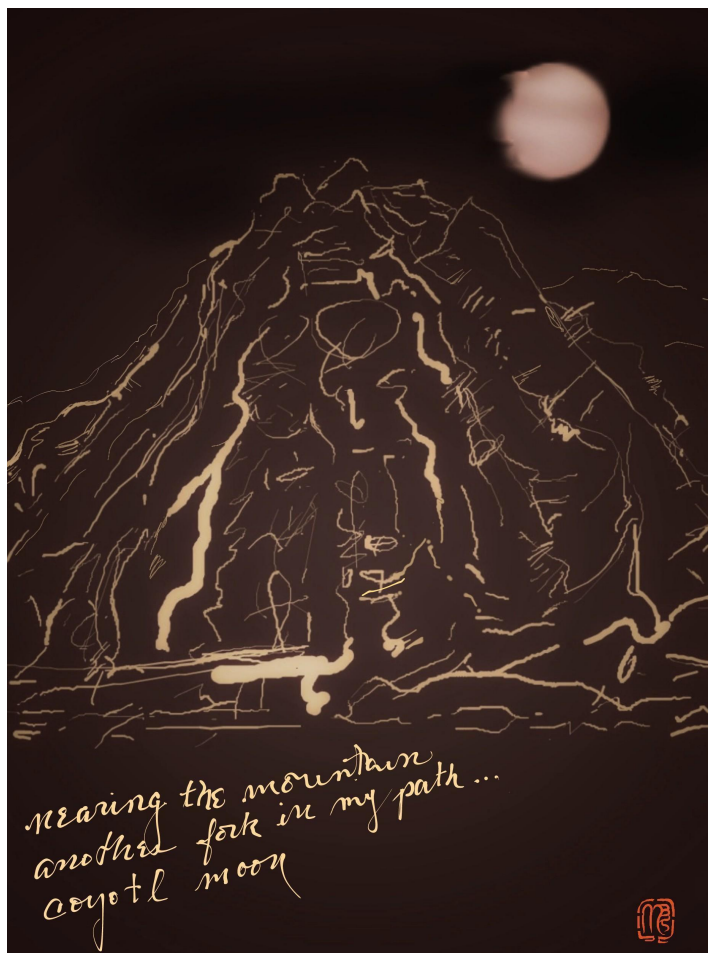
self-absorbed
I dissolve into
my alter-ego

Holograms, figments, & whatnot

There's a growing consensus among many deep theoretical thinkers that objective reality cannot really exist or is, at best, formless. That this universe, & all the others bubbling away out there, parallel or perpendicular, are virtual projections, representations created in the "mind" (whatever "mind" is/isn't) of...well, the whole enchilada. Get the picture? So, what's new, pussycat? Isaac Newton's reality wasn't Albert Einstein's reality, and his wasn't Niels Bohr's. And you should be thankful my reality ain't yours.

*that familiar face
in the bathroom mirror —
I might not be me*

"..... nothing is real, & nothing to get hung about" (The Beatles, "Strawberry Fields")



nearing the mountain
another fork my path...
coyotl moon

Paranoid android *

Bet that bony old guy with the shiny scythe's waiting just around the bend. The actuary tables are tilted and the cosmic dice spell it out - - could be any day in any way. Any one of the scores of pathologies just waiting to latch on to me or already doing their worst unbeknownst. The next viral onslaught? A stray bullet from a drive-by, a head-on collision, a wee slip in the shower, a tainted rutabaga, perhaps a flying shard from the weed-whacker. Fire or water? Wrong place wrong time? You never know. Oh, well, that's life...

natural causes
I bet that meteor
knows where I live

*title of a song by Radiohead



falling petals...
the metallic flash
of a bayonet

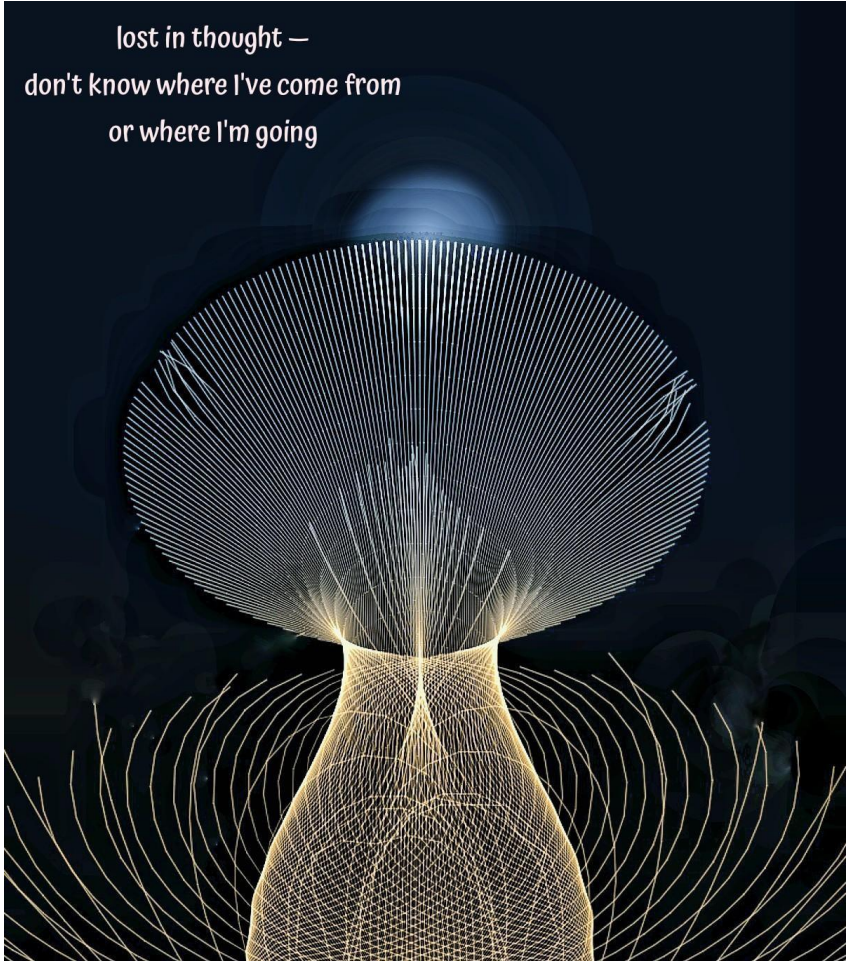
die Straße

"...cars crawl by all stuffed with eyes..." - - The Doors /
Soul Kitchen

As they say "You've read the book? - - Now see the movie!" And so I did -- Berlin Alexanderplatz - - all 15 hours. Shouldn't have. So depressing that I'm almost drinking as much beer as poor Franz Biberkopf ("Beaverhead"), the protagonist. Seeing the world in hazy sepia Expressionist fragments- - a 1920's Weimar fever dream. The damp rot, crumbling plaster, and corrupt flesh are palpable. Alfred Döblin and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, you guys just kill me.

*carousing
under a dim lamp post
I've lost my senses
devoured by the city
another forlorn soul*

lost in thought —
don't know where I've come from
or where I'm going

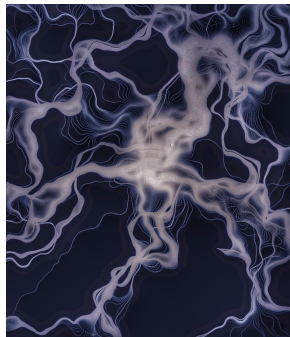


lost in thought —
don't know where I've come from
or where I'm going

five-and-dime theology *(for Andrew Riutta)*

Could be located in the sky, another dimension, a book, a blue note, the sunflower sutra. Or in sage smoke, a v    , an algorithm, lotus blossom, tao te ching, temple, tarot, torah. A mandala, a bottle, a tab, a white line, orgasm, maybe on a palimpsest or in a grimoire. Is it on a star, under a fathomless sea, on a beetle's back, in a sapphire, at the top of the minaret, a cathedral's spire, a sand castle, an ordinary pebble, in a nameless nothingness.....

hide and go seek...
finding several clues
in a dog's eyes



Neoflora

I try so hard not to eavesdrop on their conversations, their across-the-table cabals, but the strange words buzz around me in a cloud like the muffled drone of mosquitoes.

*moxetumomab
vitakvi paclitaxel...
a lexicon of grief*

In this place, we all have our private collections of variegated maladies; we're all old enough to have collected our fleurs du mal bouquets along the way. Some proudly display them in luridly colored exotic arrangements — the crimson, the dusky blues and pinks, the sulfurous yellows. Others, timid about presenting us with their less-than-flamboyant diagnosis, symptom, or treatment regimen, only speak in the subdued semi-monochromatic semiotic whispers of cancer.

*hidden moon
the strange things that flower
in our darkness*

Crime story

Max had set things up and the Peruvian dude pulled-up on time in an ostentatious '74 Chevy Monte Carlo. When he stepped out, TJ and I knew it could be trouble. Dressed like he had just stepped off the set of Miami Vice - - louche cream-colored slacks with more razor-sharp pleats than you could count, a pastel green Italian silk shirt that probably cost him half a G, white espadrilles, and the obligatory lurid 10 pound gold medallion. His mustachioed buddy sweating there in the car looked jumpy and wired. No doubt but that both carried something large caliber. Well, we had the cold cash in our attaché case; presumably he had the key of nose whiskey in his. No turning back now.

out of nowhere...
still that old
craving for velocity



finding myself
in a new dewdrop world...
the dreamer's dream

finding myself
in a new dewdrop world...
the dreamer's dream

Spinning gears*

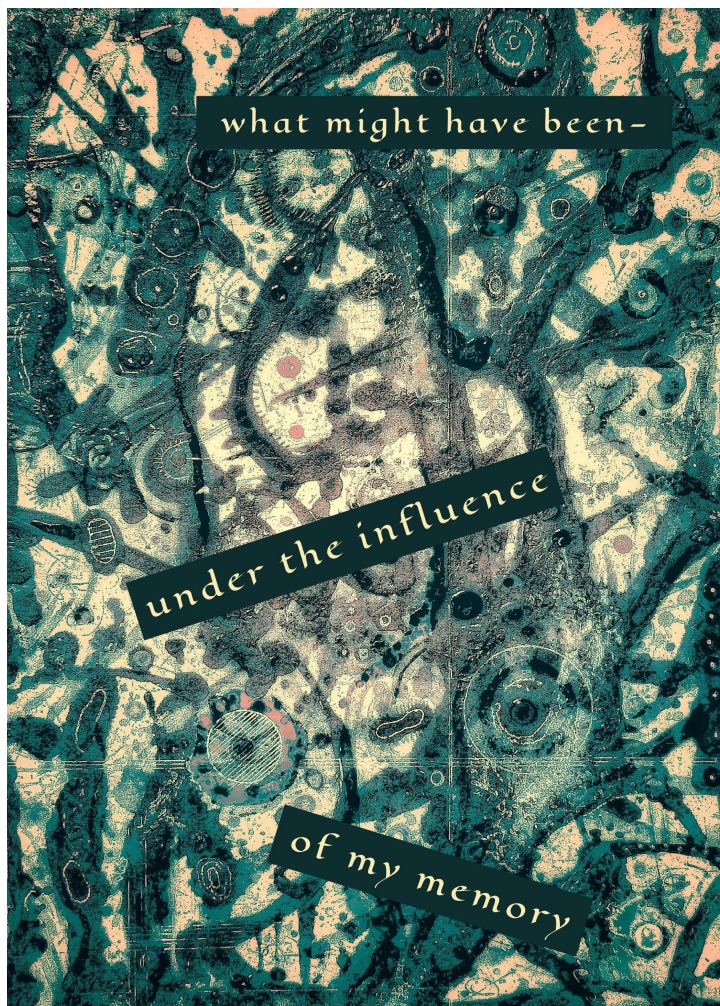
You know the classic Kurosawa film "Rashōmon?" Well, it's based on two works by Akutagawa Ryunosuke, considered the father of the modern Japanese short story. There's a famous literary prize awarded in his name. Akutagawa's writings often possess a unique, tragicomic surreality. Suppose he's an acquired taste, like absinthe or natto.

*a spider's thread...
the hapless man dangles
barely above hell*

Akutagawa succumbed to his cascading regrets, guilt, and anguish, finally committing suicide with a barbiturates overdose at the age of 35. He wasn't known for his haiku, but one of his death poems pretty much hits the mark:

*a shimmering of
heat - outside the
grave alone I dwell*

*or "Hagaruma", one of Akutagawa's harrowing final stories depicting his deteriorating state of mind.



what might have been —
under the influence
of my memory

Old flames

Amazing, all the mental floorplans out there, the ways we variously categorize, store, overwrite, and discard our memories. Memory fires flare, flicker, fade, & fizzle. Trillions of neural circuits and sparking synaptic processes - - interconnections igniting, the burning, blinking lights on an unfathomable switchboard.

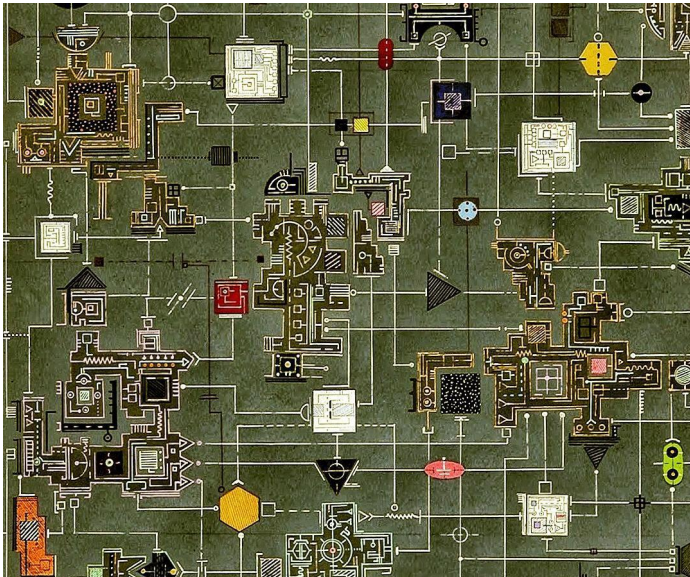
*festival bonfire
the warm distant
glow of my youth*

I just like to think simply in terms of rooms and spaces. Some minds must be like vast walk-in closets — fresh paint, dust-free, everything neatly stacked and hung, color-coded, lots of clean shelves. Unneeded thoughts and memories long ago left outside in the rummage bin. Perhaps other minds are like stainless work kitchens, or cozy knotty-pine dens, tidy home offices, tranquil pastel guest rooms — you get the picture. Then there's the hoarders, like me, who ended-up running out of

space long ago, psychic junk piled willy-nilly in the
oddest cobwebbed cubbyholes.

*always on my mind
each girlfriend and
lover alphabetized*

*among the clutter—
a shoebox of rusty locks
without any keys*



Hey, Cassandra!

"... good morning, midnight... " X,
Under the Big Black Sun

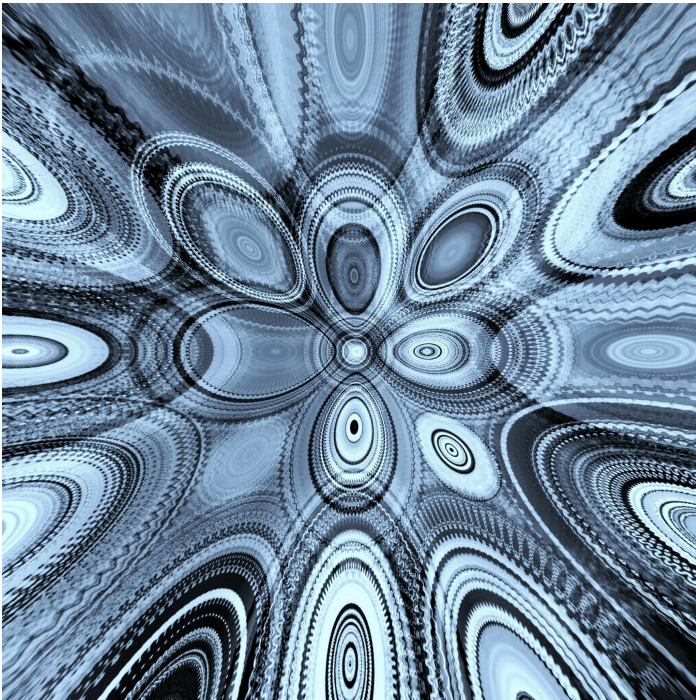
Forget the whole second childhood scenario. For that matter, you may skip the 3rd and 4th. By my conservative reckoning, having nearly hit 74, I'm well into my 5th. My friends and family are stymied, flabbergasted. Such nonsense! They can't fathom what's gotten into me this time, much less what can be done about it.

*stratocaster days hitting the whammy bar in
my amygdala**

Most likely, it's because I can finally see through my life's haze that the sky is indeed falling, ablaze. I choke on the smoke from all those burning bridges, many of which are mine. Somewhere it's raining locusts and shrapnel. Can't you feel it? No? Well, at least the dog seems to know what's going down. She looks into my eyes with that knowing look, animal wisdom. She too hears the loud thrum of the Big Clock ticking away in her head.

*practice makes perfect —
before I blow this pop-stand
one more death poem*

*a part of the limbic system in the brain that is involved in controlling mood and emotions.



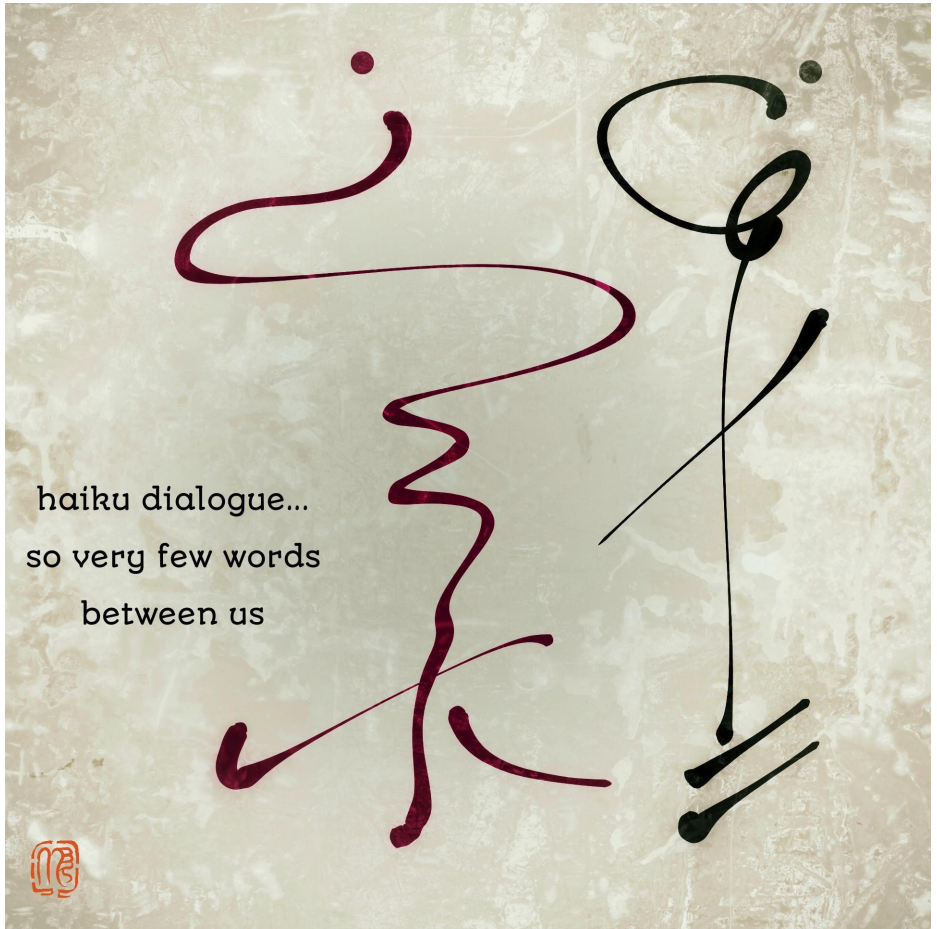
Hikikomori*

"There's a place where I can go to tell my secrets to..." Brian
Wilson / The Beach Boys / *In my Room*

Fortunate, grateful, thankful. Just about everything one might want or need so far during The Great Self-isolation. The dog and I are still enjoying each other's lockdown company. The old clunk-o-matic refrigerator's still refrigerating and the beer's cold. Have enough food in there, too. Toilet flushes and there's still paper to flush. Ancient washer and dryer, check. Got the hi-fi setup, all the guitars and the amp. Maybe listen to some John Prine today; another good one gone. Lots of books and poems to read, this chapbook to work on, all these records, art supplies, laptops, comfy bed and chairs — you name it. Yes, ok, terrific, but still.....

*sitting and spinning —
a professional recluse
so sick of himself*

*Japanese societal term for a stay-at-home person, a shut-in who generally stays in their room.



haiku dialogue...
so very few words
between us

The Creeping Unknown*

Growing up in the 1950's probably isn't anything to rhapsodize or rose-tint, but the Saturday matinées were a little kid's Shangri-la. The sci-fi horror movies sure were exciting and scary, despite the semi-obvious subcontext of either Cold-war Communism (cue "Invasion of the Body Snatchers," "Invaders from Mars," "Not of This Earth") or the potential consequences of atomic age radiation-induced mutations (e.g. "Godzilla," "The Amazing Colossal Man" "Them"). Outer space was still elusively mysterious and alien planets and their denizens almost always evil. Chills and thrills galore and often frightened back then, but I never pee'd in my pants, even when I was just 5 or 6. Oh, but these days....

"The Viroid Monsters"

*— I hide under the
covers to no avail*

* a 50's B/W British "horror from outer space" classic Hammer Studios film that quite creeped me out as a kid.



purple haze —
in and out of focus
my scattered thoughts



purple haze —
in and out of focus
my scattered thoughts

Another Impromptu Eulogy Attempt

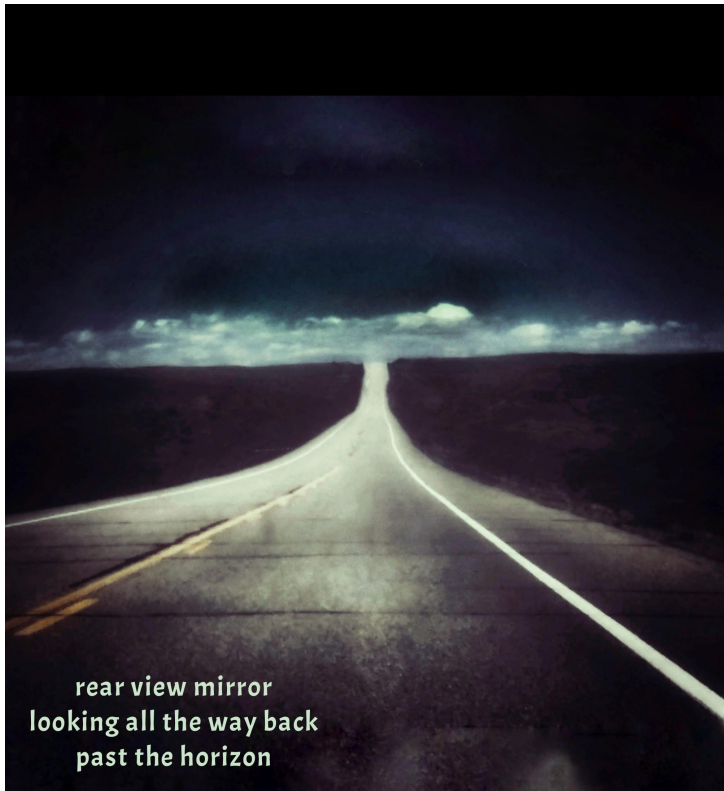
My father came from a small town near Köln. He always dressed well, as many men did in those days

— suits, sportcoats, hats and ties. Pants with double pleats, razor-sharp. I guess you could call him a "natty" dresser. I still have a few of his things. Way back then the mens' shops were called haberdasheries, a quaint and curious word, no?

a tip of the hat...
my old man's fedora
gone with the wind

Dad was 51 when I was born and died at age 73 in 1974, when I was just in my early twenties. I certainly underestimated him, definitely under-appreciated him. He worked hard, drank Schlitz beer and Four Roses bourbon, loved the NY Yankees. He was a true gentleman, always tolerant and kind-hearted to everyone, even this smart-ass, good-for-nothing, know-it-all hippie son.

ten thousand regrets
even your gentle ghost
hasn't kicked my butt



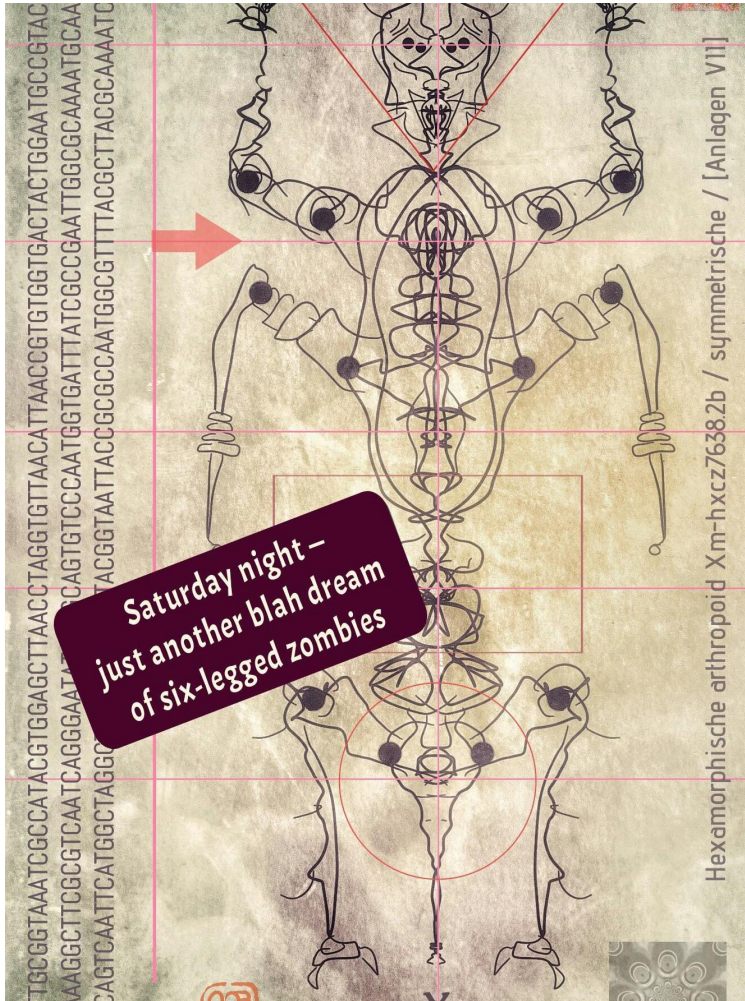
rear view mirror
looking all the way back
past the horizon

While watching a lava lamp

*what am I a stray neutrino passes right through
what I am*

Parallel worlds, palindromic worlds and split infinities? So some surmise; anything goes until disproved. In twisted multi-dimensional topologies the multiverses bubble forth and stretch their strings, expanding into what, where? And when I so much as swat that housefly, I perturb cockamamie particles knocking about on a distant star, thereby changing the very fabric of spacetime? Far out! Hey, there are cosmologists that conjecture that time travel could be a can-do thing! Really? Hey, ho, let's go — another dewdrop world — I'd be so outta here!

*abstruse algebras...
sipping my single malt
talking with phantoms*



saturday night
 just another blah dream
 of six-legged zombies

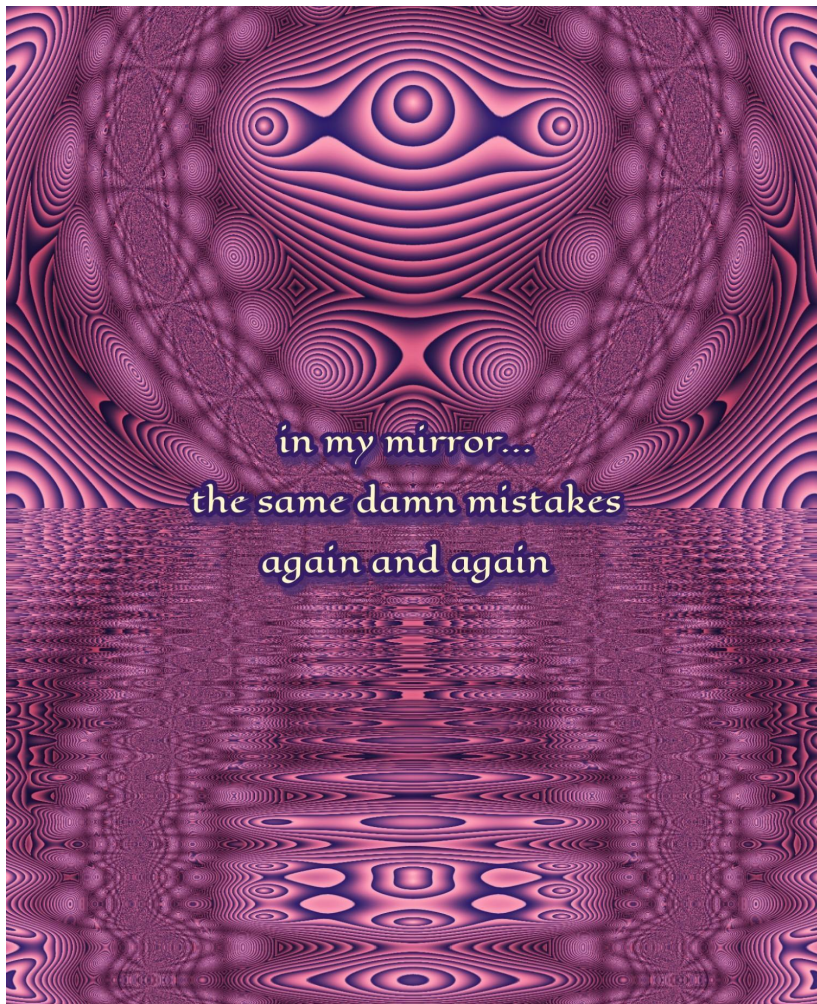
Lost in the Matrix

Ah, sweet diversion! One way to keep this version of "reality" at bay is to read current stuff about cosmogenesis - -like loop quantum gravity and the structure of the universe (or universes?) Diving deep into abstruse physics, flirting with a soupçon of metaphysics thrown in. Challenging, most especially the maths with all those weird symbols and kooky diagrams.

*hieroglyphs...
the theory of everything
on a clay tablet*

Heavy lifting. A few hours in, my lawnmower engine mind begins to smoke and sputter. Give it a rest. Ah, Laurel and Hardy's on the Retro-TV channel. Another escape route - - perhaps it says the same thing in a more easy-to-digest format.

*adios, real world!
I'll just keep hanging out
in pseudo space*



in my mirror...
the same damn mistakes
again and again

in my mirror...
the same damn mistakes
again and again

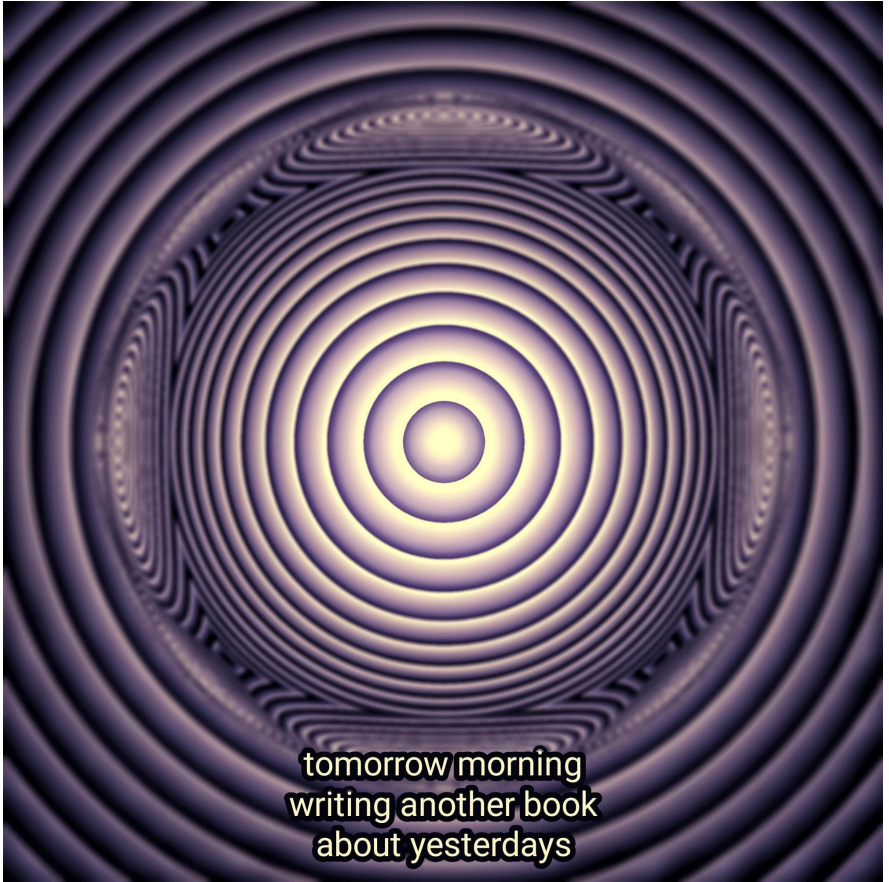
5HT_{2A} Receptors*

1967 - 1975 and many excursions into the unknown aetheric realms on this and that hallucinogen, morning glory seeds and nutmeg included.

Nothing to boast about really; often taking foolish chances - - ah, youth. I never ever felt like I was dying like Nat or freaking out, like Rick M. I generally found the slithering fluorescent snakes, occasional UFO's, and morphing mandalas quite entertaining. I never saw gods or demons, or thought I could fly, but I sure did enjoy Betty's bright magenta aura and flaming body. Seldom a remarkable transcendent religious experience to report, sadly. But there was that one time, alone in my tent at Bastrop State Park when that coyotl taught me who I was in the middle of the night.

seventh decade...
dropping ibuprofen
and just pretending

*the serotonin receptor subclass likely responsible for the psychotropic effects of many hallucinogens (e.g. LSD, mescaline)



tomorrow morning
writing another book
about yesterdays

Babylon Redux

*fertile soil —
among the spring flowers
deadly nightshade*

Atrocity after atrocity, misery upon misery,
century after century. As we stumble and fall, the
juggernaut of war and pestilence grinds all in its
path. The great wheel turns widdershins, ever
faster. As the watchtowers crumble and burn,
acrid smoke slowly smothers the land. Mammon
dies laughing as the children die screaming.
"Where have all the flowers gone?"

*lightning storm —
yet the fallen plum tree
blossoms once again*





relativity —
somehow displaced
in time and space

Cremains of the day...

*a death poem
on a pink Post-it
approximately*

So this is how it goes down. When the time's right, you know, just follow these instructions as best you can, will ya? I do realize the logistical and legal hassles entailed, but you can at least try. Gosh, thanks a million! So, here goes:

*my funeral dirge —
the music of the spheres
played on a kazoo*

Light my fire: the guitars are all done with now - - never wrote a decent song, so they'll make for a fine musical pyre when torched along with whatever's left of me. Wonder if the combined sweet smoke of flaming maple, spruce, rosewood and mahogany will be sufficient to cover my smell of beer, bones, bile, and mildewed regrets. Anyhow, just find a suitable box and combine the resultant

mess of ash-heap with a pinch from this dog urn
and a dash from that cat urn, mix well, and store in
a cool, dry place.

final instructions...
whichever it may be
wrong side up

Then, when you can get around to it, head on down
to Texas and sprinkle some of the concoction in
San Antone down around the missions. You know,
anywhere along the sluggish old river where the
pachuco ghosts still hang-out in the heat. Or
maybe in Blue Star near the graffiti-splattered
burned-down brewery; that would be ok.

mockingbirds mesquite thorns and
mosquitoes the trouble I caused

But do save some stuff on your way back for that
crummy rest stop in one-horse, fly-speck Dumas,
where we once let the dogs splash in the stagnant
puddles with the mud daubers. Remember, we
drank warm Pearl beer and pissed with the tough

truckers and were happy there for a little while,
weren't we? Weren't we? Or was that San Angelo?

And, yeah, well, if all else fails then, by all means,
just find the nearest Honey Bucket.

*nowhere man —
the autobiography
of a piss-ant*

– somewhere near Johnson City, Texas –



the playpen

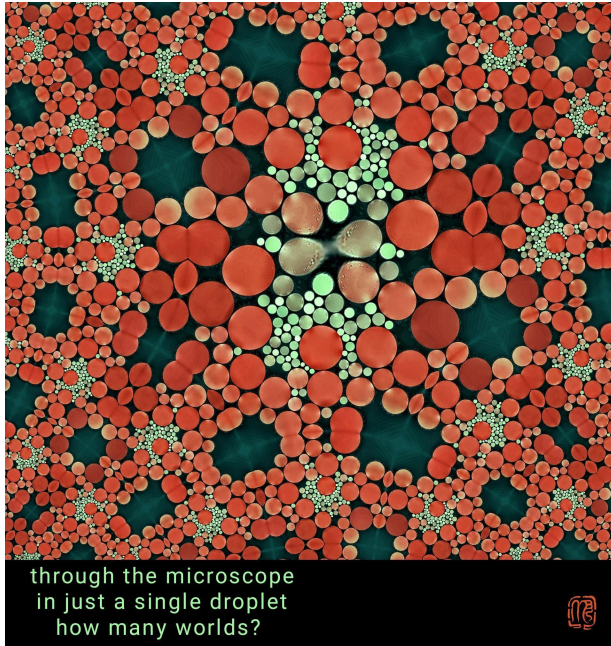
Even after all these years, I still have dreams where I find myself back in one laboratory or another, fooling around with one thing or another. Stands to reason: sixty-plus hour long weeks and still a hell of a good time for the most part. How's that? Well, for one thing, there were always those tricky challenging games of skill. Why, back in the day, in my prime, I could pluck a cell out of a fruitfly's eye, measure-out nanoliters and femtomoles. And, of course, there were always new, fascinating things to look at.

*fluorescing green
under the microscope
a new microcosm*

Oh, let's not forget those risks and dangers. Dangers, what dangers? Well, here's just a Whitman's Sampler: radioactive isotopes, banded krait and assassin bug venom, high voltage, nerve agents, viruses, volatile vapors, whizzing

centrifuges, UV lights, all kinds of exotic caustic chemicals

*serious science —
wearing their white lab
coats all these little kids*



through the microscope
in just a single droplet
how many worlds?



through the microscope
in just a single droplet
how many worlds?

Denizen X

*in cyanide blues
and arsenical greens
his self portrait*

Would that I'd walk and listen to the sweet
birdsong, but for the sirens' wails and city shrieks.
Should smell the sweet lilac bush while it's in
bloom, but there's trashfire smoke and brimstone
in the air. Ah, yes, you say I should look at the
bright side, perhaps see everything in a better
light. But why must the streets and buildings
appear so dark, razor-edged, and tilted; the
lamp-posts all so strangely twisted?

*artists' café...
everywhere around
me these smirking
faces*

*under the streetlight
just around the corner
another murder*



sgraffito —
again he scratches out
his self-portrait

Drano & single malt

It is Excavation Day, 9 a.m. The jackhammer has stopped its racket. I'm standing in the front yard in the dreary winter drizzle rubbing my bleary eyes and stubbled chin as I gaze at the dayglo orange backhoe perched for attack in my driveway. It'll be a ten-foot ditch through concrete, dirt, birch roots, and foetid biohazard sludge-slime to expose the busted sewer line. Major surgery, major dollars. Strangely captivated, I watch the plumbing team in their spiffy logo'd overalls prepare to expose a pale gray, grease- and what-not-clogged 6" artery for a replacement and a complete re-line procedure. Well, I just can't help but think of my poor father — if only they could have excavated his thorax and relined his coronaries. Only 73. Oh, if only. I start getting all worked-up and teary, turn around, and head back to the warm kitchen. Somehow it's already been a long day; now where the hell's that shotglass?

*his heart monitor —
oh, how I remember
the bip bip bip... _____*



*she gathers
her wilted carnations
into an old vase
a dark ikebana
of her many sorrows*

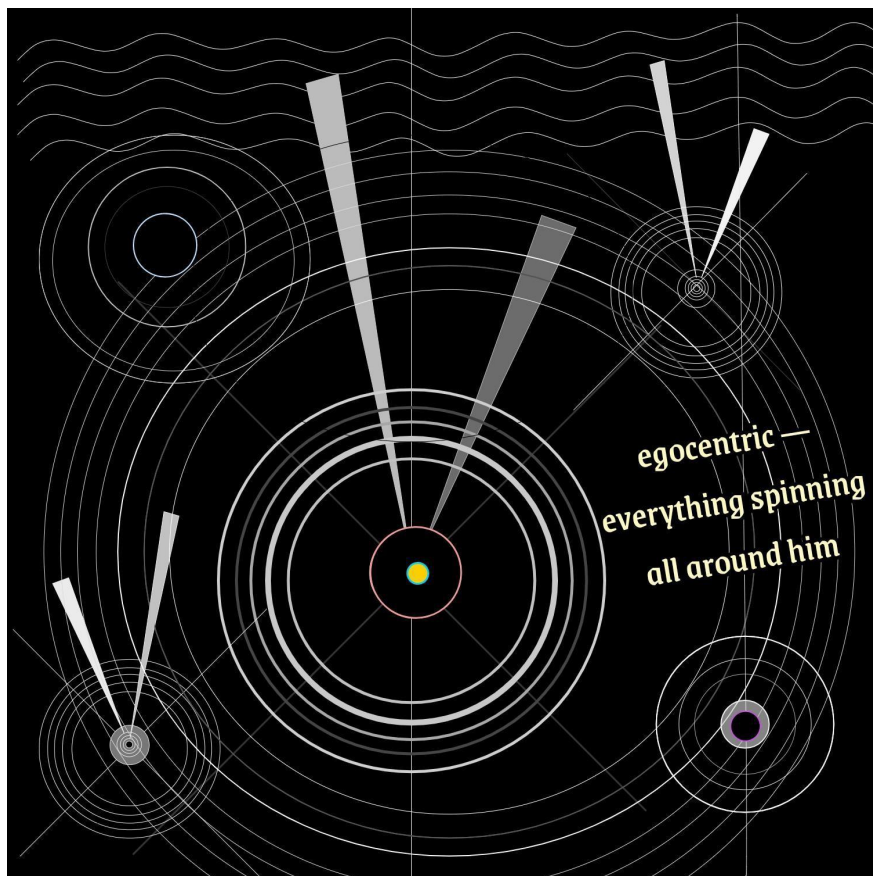
she gathers
her wilted carnations
into an old vase
a dark ikebana
of her many sorrows

Verrückt

Dazed and confused, the madman runs amok through the busy city streets, ignoring the blaring klaxons and taunts of passers-by. He shields his eyes and shakes his fist, babbling incoherently and cursing the blazing demon sun in the sky, even though it is the dark of night. Off his meds, there's only utter madness, ridicule, and dire poverty. But once he was a brilliant mathematician, a great philosopher. He remembers nothing and yet he somehow knows everything.

that algorithm...
it explained why
he could not exist

his tarot reading
The Fool or The Moon
in every draw



egocentric —
everything spinning
all around him

"bad luck & trouble..."*

He was the Eric Clapton of calamities; could somehow make them appear so smoothly done, near effortless. Astounding his peers with his ability to play such rapid jangled arpeggios of major misunderstandings, those cataclysmic chords of chaos, the most beautifully botched irrational runs and riffs. His indisputable virtuosic command of every possible scale of absolute ineptitude.

*his only friend...
a battered guitar case
chock full of regrets*

*12 bar bummer blues...
hoppin' the next freight train
that enters my mind*

*from "Born Under a Bad Sign" by Albert King

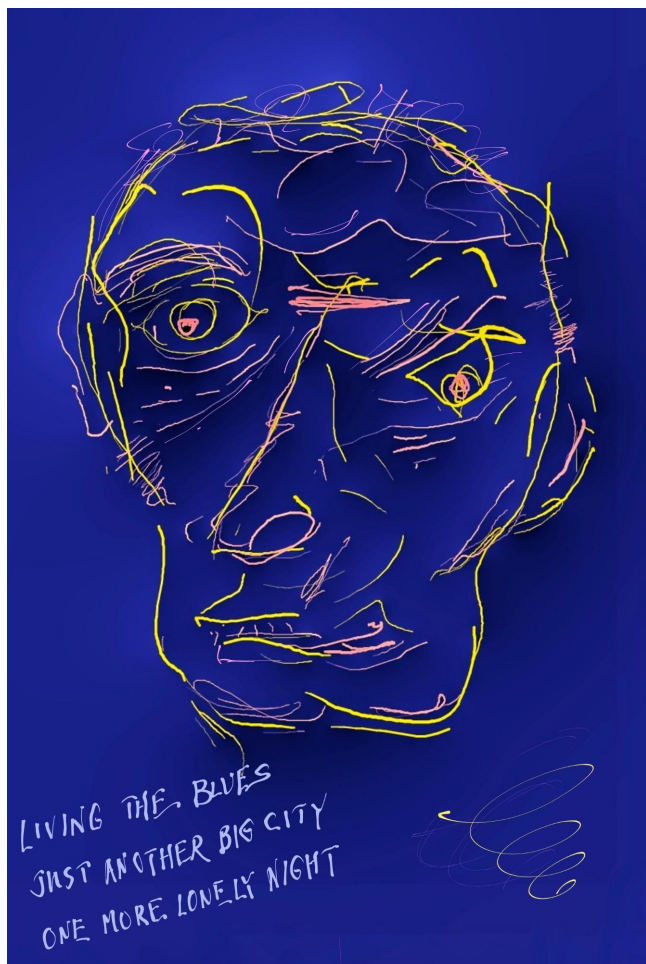
'round midnight

Goodbye pork pie hat — goodbye Lester Young,
goodbye. Sad downbeat, morose double bass. A mix of
Mingus, single malt, and Latakia smoke swirling
upstairs -- maybe the pink/white pill combo -- hell, I
don't know. You seem a galaxy away tonight, just the
faintest cold heavenly twinkle — another displaced
star. No, that's me.

*on the turntable
the temperature
of the winter moon*

Double bass rumble of the woofers. Tonight, I finally
feel the color blue — the Blues — it's an ultra-indigo
that sucks out all the light. You know Prez, Bird and
Lady Day lived with it; bet Amy Winehouse caught her
dose early on. Me, I've always been late to the gig, —
decades of slowly opening my case and trying to tune
up — rehearsing after everyone's split and the house
lights have been turned way down low.

*obbligato —
in a saxophone solo
a death poem*



living the blues
just another big city
one more lonely night

Meet the Beatles* (for Tim Patten)

Tears on the fretboard; that'll sure rust the strings.
Goddamn sentimentality and its cousin nostalgia!
Just because I'm listening to Revolver you have the
nerve to take me back to that dingy Austin
apartment in 1967. You could play "She Said She
Said" and "Dr. Robert" on your Hoffner guitar (just
like Paul's it was) and you had a Fender Deluxe
Reverb amp. So you taught me some basic chords
to a John Lee Hooker one night on wine and
mescaline. I still can't play well, but I still play
anyhow.

*bell bottom blues***
those old school days
and benzedrine nights

We shared lovers and secrets over the years, got
high together, low together, flipped out together
(that freaky blacklight cat poster) graduated
college together in '69. You smoked Winstons, wore
Lennon glasses, an afro, had a wife and two
daughters, and I watched you slowly fade and die at

70 down in San Antone. And, yeah, I'm still crying
over you.

sandalwood incense
two quasi-hippie fools
feeling immortal

*the Beatles second album (1964)

**song by Derek and the Dominos (1970)



Beyond and back

In 1993, I was in Tsukuba, Japan ("Science City") for a month, a guest scientist at a government-sponsored sericulture (silk cultivation) research institute. I was part of a group studying the developmental biology of the silkworm, still raised and hand fed on mulberry leaves in the centuries-old traditional way.

*this lowly moth —
spinning its life away
for royalty*

Each day, I would ride my clunky bike several miles to work along a narrow dirt path that wound through cultivated farmland. It was usually late at night when I'd ride slowly back to town.

*waxing moon
the deep green
breath of the rice
paddies*

The path passed by a lone, humble gravesite by the wayside. I was told that the ashes of a little girl

from the nearby farming village were interred there — she had supposedly died working in the *negi* (green onion) field close to that spot. Some community elders believed that the girl's spirit lingers there and occasionally appears to passers-by at night. Once, I believe I saw her.

*midnight mist
swirling by the canal
the faintest form*

*the child's grave...
leaving her a tangerine
as I pass by*

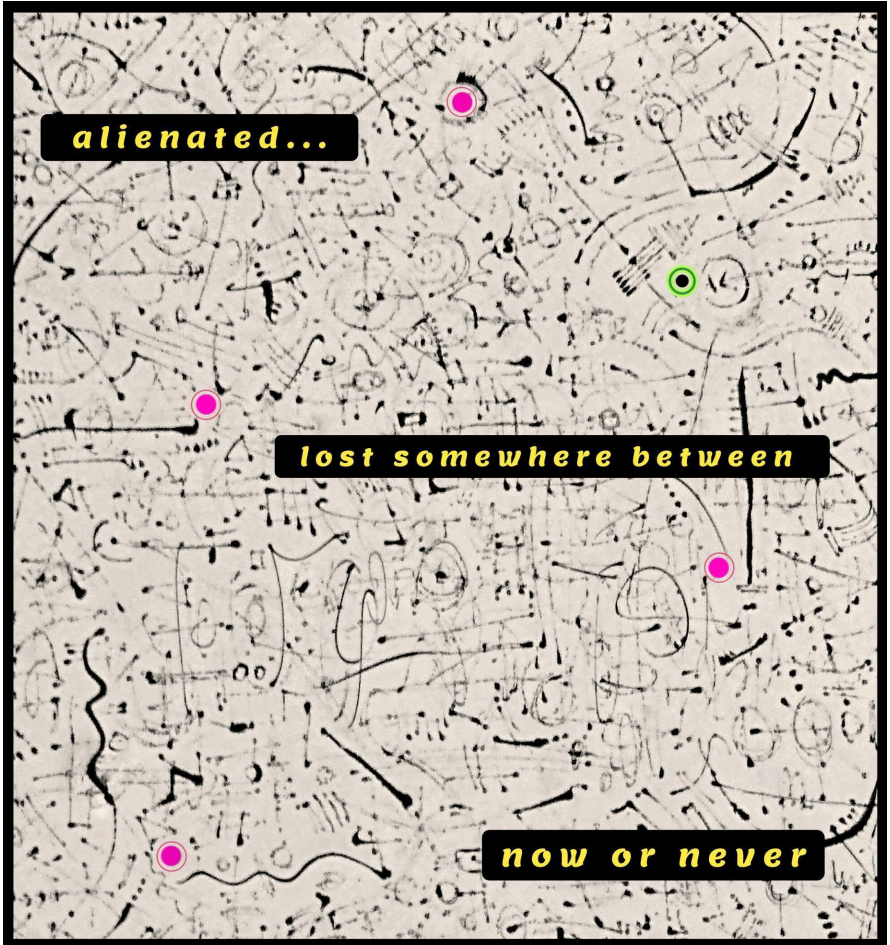


always lurking unseen
everywhere in the night
my childhood phantoms

Here comes your 19th nervous breakdown...

You're no Keith Richards, that's for sure. All the pills and the powders - - they're not working for you anymore, isn't that right? And you can guzzle down all the alcohol in the world, hell, even straight unsymmetrical dimethyl hydrazine - - there's no help there either. You fidget, fumble, and fiddle. Rome's burning and you damn well know it, can even smell it. You're terrified, coming unglued again, all those gluons losing their grip. Haunted by lost loves, lost opportunities, lost directions. And a planet you'll never ever grok if you live to be one hundred, which you certainly won't. Because you're no Keith Richards.

*it's not the guitar...
that trembling vibrato
it's in your fingers*



alienated...
lost somewhere between
now or never

... and another eulogy

She died on my birthday. It was a very small funeral service at the orthodox cemetery at the edge of town. What was left of family and close friends listened silently to the brief prayers at the gravesite, some of us took turns with the shovel as per custom. That was about all.

*wildflowers
among the old tombstones
familiar names*

Our old house still stands, but no one lives there. The once-thriving factories and manufacturing plants had shut down long ago. Rust, corrosion, corruption. The brooding rivers had conspired, had risen-up to flood the town far too many times, leaving it sodden, dark, exhausted, bereft.

*carried away
with the mud and debris
a town's history*

Grand mansions mildew and crumble among the weeds along the silent avenues. Employment has foundered, breeding despondency. The children never play outside anymore; they even ignore the free carousel rides. The old-timers slowly limp past shuttered drug stores, but then there's an ample pharmacopeia of stupefying drugs hawked in shadowy corners by shadowy figures. I'll never go back again.

*my home town
into my feverish dreams
slowly dissolving*

the Susquehanna River



Old soap & hogwash

The mindscape has always baffled me, but mine more so as I age into the golden, molten Velveeta years. I've a memory bank so densely packed with useless styrofoam trivia baloney from childhood on that no new idea light can pass through. We're talking arcane cigarette jingles from the 50's and 60's ("Call for Philip Morrisssssssss!" or "LSMFT" - - know what that stands for? I do.) Yeah, I can sing the lyrics to relic TV show theme songs (Howdy Doody Time or Have Gun Will Travel) and still name most of the kids' names in my 3rd grade class at Travis Elementary. Oh, if only I could free-up a bit of extra space in the cerebral cellar. Sure, but then I might forget the importance of "99 & 44 hundredths percent pure it floats!"*

antique memories...
just buy one
and you get one free!

*slogan from an old Ivory Soap ad

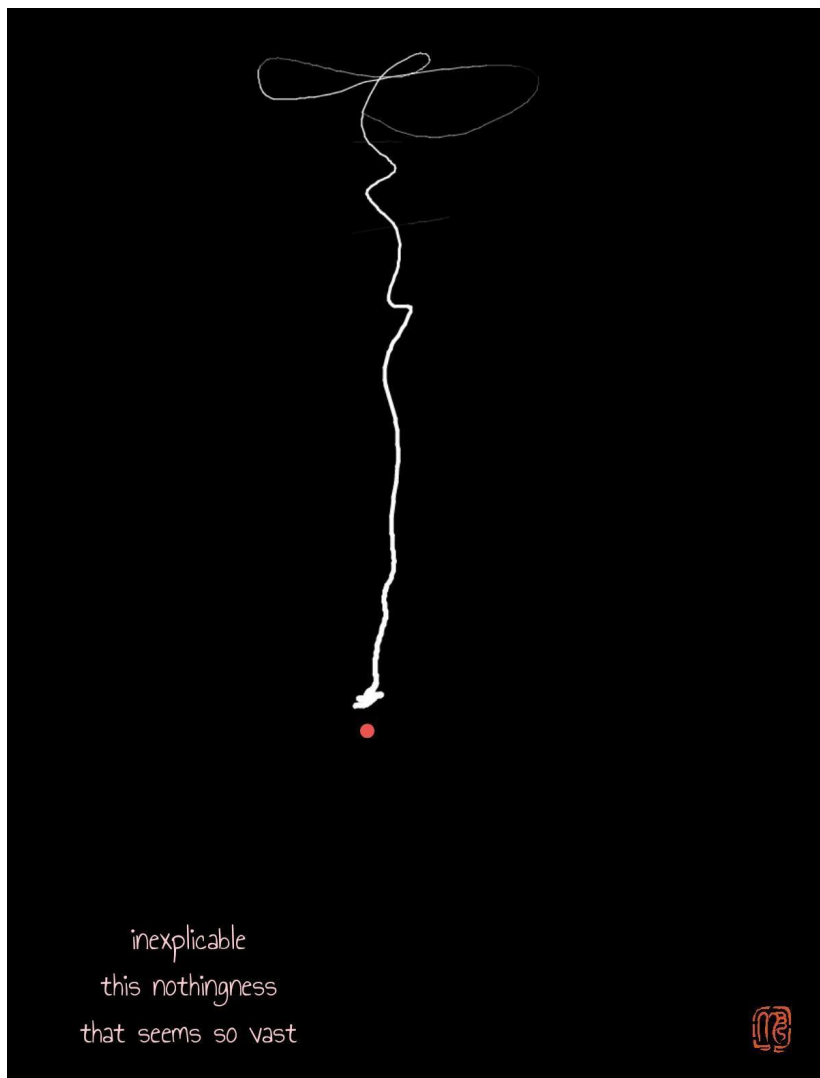


intra-introvert...
a whole asylum
all to myself

Orienteering

So there I am repairing a broken light inside my dad's green '54 Ford while my mom's setting our big mahogany dining room table with her best china and silver, a formal setting in preparation for arriving guests — my aunts and uncles from Long Island and Syracuse. Mom tells me to vacuum the crappy beige rug I hate, so I begrudgingly drag out our old heavy brown Hoover while my dad cusses as he sprays Windex all over the dining room windows. He slowly diffuses through the glass and disperses into the aethers. The hot New York sun is streaming in, lighting up all the billions of dust motes that move in their enchanting Brownian way. My mom yells at me to stop daydreaming and get to work.

*truth or consequence
I surf the boundaries
of reality*



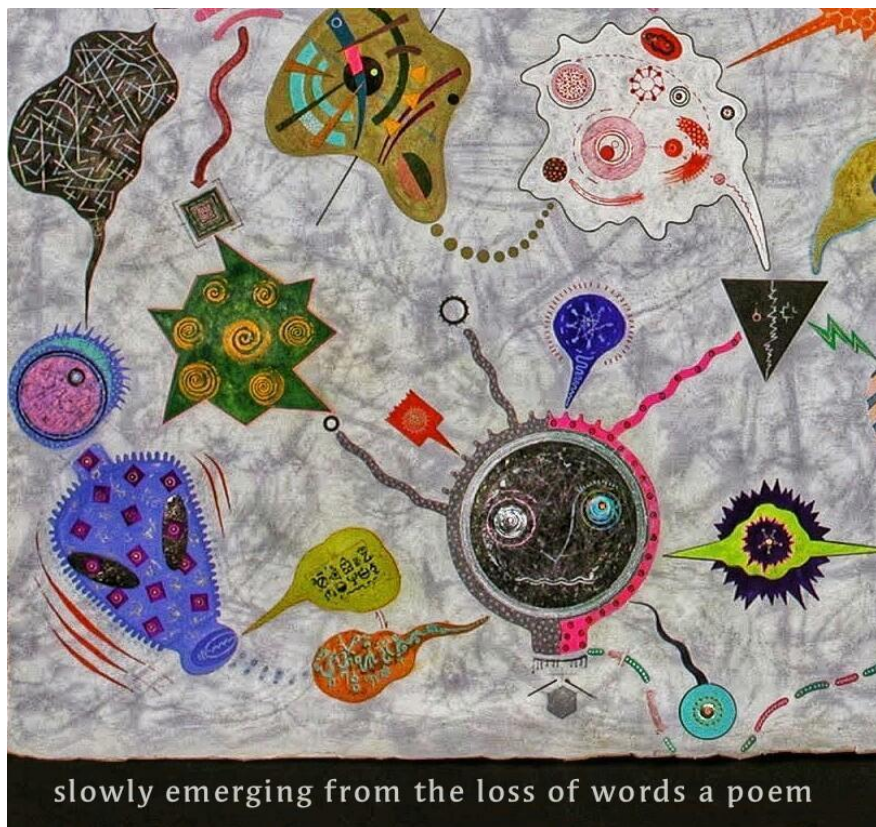
inexplicable
this nothingness
that seems so vast

Lost in the lavender mist*

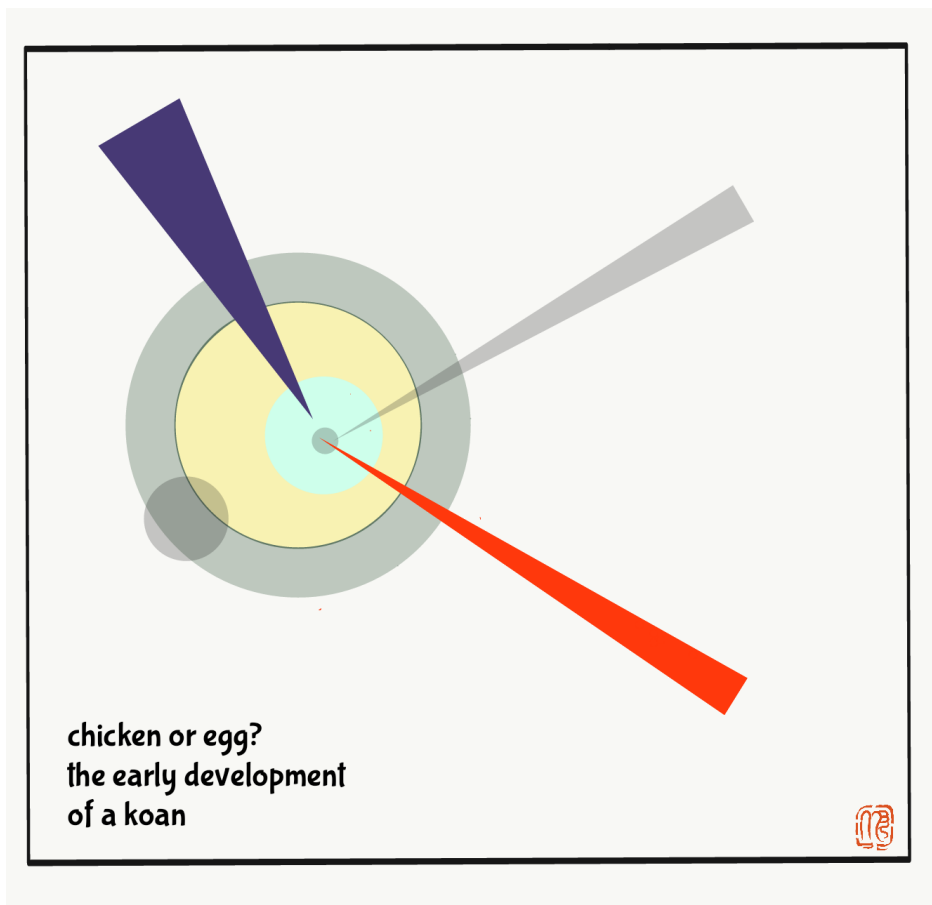
Now think. Think back. What was that occurrence, that one blazing experience that redirected the course of your life, forever altered your DNA, your perception of the world? No, it wasn't YHVH or LSD. Love? Yes, perhaps it was. It was in October of 1986, when I first saw "Number One" (1950), Jackson Pollock's great painting (in both scale and grandeur) mounted in the National Gallery in Washington DC. Playing hooky from a big science meeting, I headed straight to the gallery, and spent the rest of the day and part of the next and the next with the huge canvas. I got as close as I could get, poring over every detail, ingesting every gesture, every color, texture, the rhythms, the choreography.

one great lesson...
I can finally see
how to dance

*the alternative title of Pollock's "Number One"



slowly emerging
from the loss of words
a poem



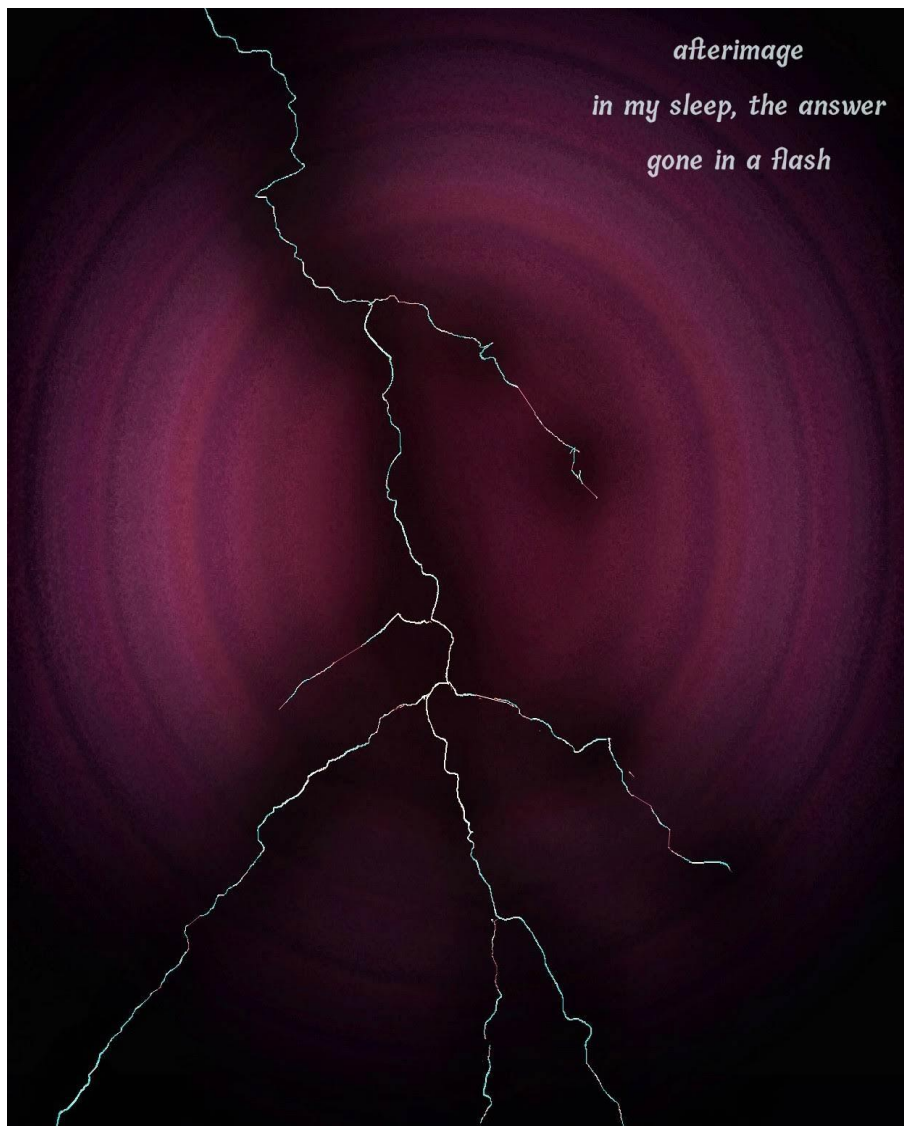
chicken or egg?
the early development
of a koan

Closing time

*the way things are...
the epistemology
of "whatever"*

Where have they all gone? So many of them, all missing in action - - family, friends, cats and dogs, acquaintances. Oh, that faded yellow photo of my family, a baker's dozen of them. happily gathered around our big mahogany dining room table. Was it 1971? Not one of them left these days, the table sold long ago to some long-gone second-hand Texas junk store. I wonder who's sitting around it now. Well, everything dissolves into everything, I guess, and just somehow disappears into something else. But where? Gosh, I'm just so weary.....

*lost on the highway
I look for a sign
to the rainbow bridge*



*afterimage
in my sleep, the answer
gone in a flash*

afterimage
in my sleep, the answer
gone in a flash

So long, Jerry Lee

I know how offensive it is nowadays to call someone ugly, but by 60's high school teenage standards of looks, I'm afraid he was beyond unattractive. Way past chubby, he was fat. Pale, pocked, acne-riddled complexion, dandruff, thick glasses, disheveled clothes, and, yes, even body odor. So yeah, ugly, I guess, my best friend in high school

*purple iris
alone in the pond
among the lilies*

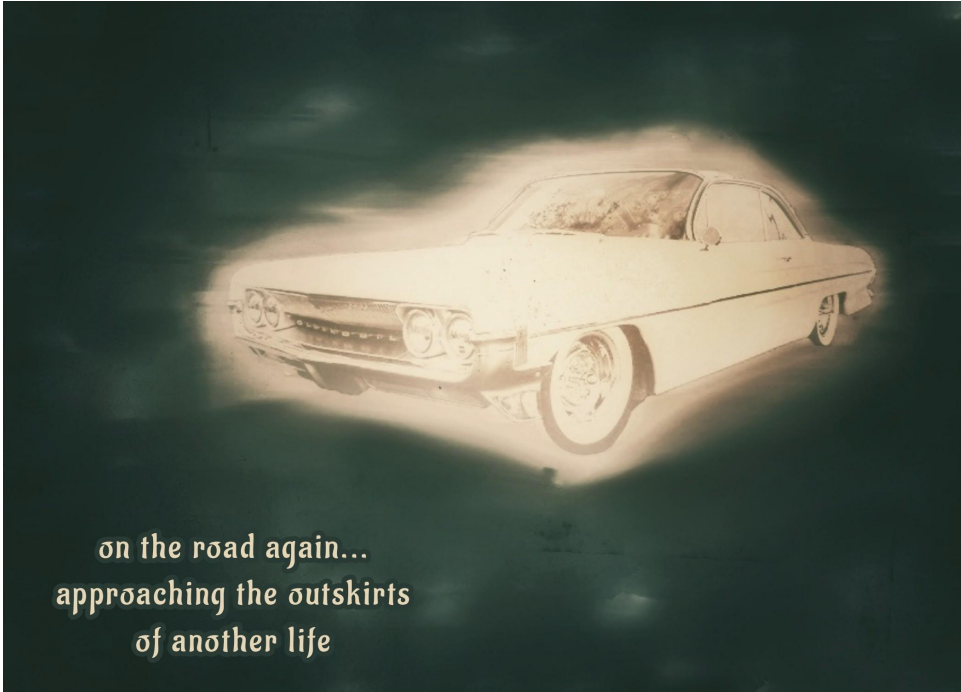
Oh, but he was hyper-brilliant, aced every course and made all the honor societies. And he could blow the alto sax, dug Coltrane and Mingus, and had a white '58 Oldsmobile Rocket 88. Man, we drove everywhere in that Olds - - from Harlandale to Lake McQueeny and way down to Mexico -- hell, all over tarnation.

*all-night poker...
Sinatra sings
about losing all*

He went to New Orleans, graduated from Tulane summa cum laude (of course) while I scraped by at UT in Austin. Then, I never saw him again. Guess he just didn't know what to do with his life after that; maybe nowhere to go. Heard from Stevie he blew his brains out in his new Olds Super '88 just off 181 on the way to Rockport, where we used to go fishing back then. I can still recall the tang of salt and seaweed in the warm Gulf breeze, the gentle sound of the waves breaking in the distance.

*by the wayside
beside a dried-out ditch
lone Texas thistle**

**Cersium texana*

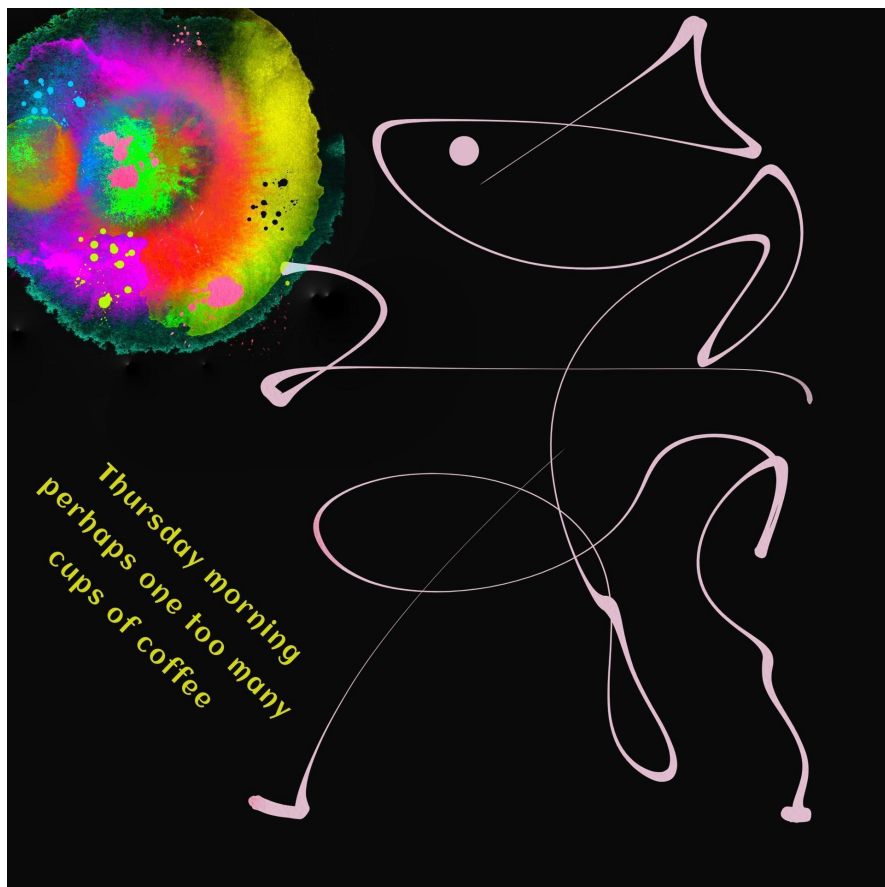


on the road again...
approaching the outskirts
of another life

L'étranger (*for SCE*)

By late morning on Wednesday it was already close to 100° in San Antonio as they all watched the falconer perform her act at the senior facility. Suddenly, he gasped a few times, blanched, and fell from the wrought-iron patio chair to the pavement. No pulse detected, no breathing, no nothing - - his heart simply stopped. Lucky for him there was a nurse at the performance who was well-versed in CPR. He quickly regained consciousness, unaware of why he was sprawled on the ground with all these faceless forms looming over him. He remembers he was thirsty and the searing pain in his ribs where someone was pushing so hard and fast - - he had no idea why. Nor, come to think of it, did he know where he was. Or, for that matter, who the hell he was.

*family archive —
under the Texas sun
bleached from existence*



Thursday morning
perhaps one too many
cups of coffee

But enough about me....

Where in tarnation have they gone, all my virtual friends? Someone changed a line of code, a few parameters in the secret social algorithm and, just like that, they've vanished from my personal metacosm. Well, I suppose you can't really miss what you've never really known.

*offset and offline —
my avatar won't mix
with their avatars*

After all, it's probably my fault. No doubt all those sour nihilistic broadcast packets have been quietly dialed-down, tuned-out by exasperated idealists. Just like a lone radio station by the wayside that's lost its bandwidth in the ethereal pink-noise static of a zillion clamoring magpies.

*dust motes...
a flash in the sun
then nothing*



*sunlit blossom
how much more you matter
as the world darkens*

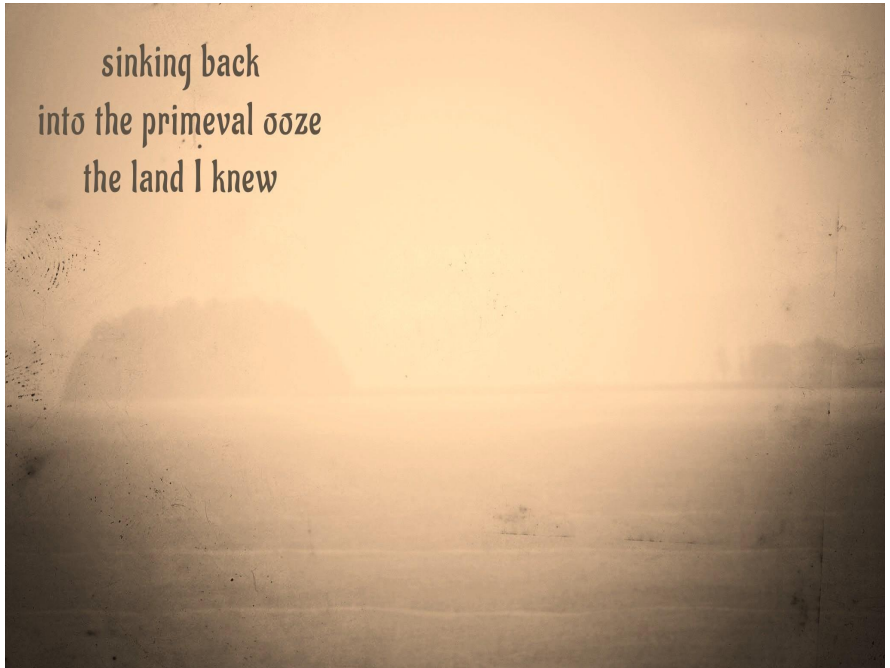
sunlit blossom
how much more you matter
as the world darkens

@igA5zEWuN1iGp#Cy9S...?

Last Tuesday, my friend Dave forgot the key code to disarm his burglar alarm system — right until the cops showed up — it's happened before. Yesterday, I got locked-out of my online bank account after three successive failed attempts to log in; had to sheepishly call customer support, get another text message code for a password reset. Ben totally forgot his PIN number at the ATM. And Nick recently acquired a "smart" refrigerator that seems to have been set up improperly; it sporadically issues a very loud beep for no apparent reason. Of course, he didn't know how to access the online instructions containing all the touchscreen keypad programming settings. Now, what was the blasted master password for the password manager app on my tablet? I know it started with either a "Z", or was that a "2"

permutations...

*I call tech support
to reset my mind*



sinking back
into the primeval ooze
the land I knew

South Presa Street

San Antonio's the city where I grew up. Whenever I return, I just drive - - drive down into the past, into the old south side of town. Down by the sluggish mud river that meanders by the mesquite-strewn missions. I walk by shrouded riverside hovels, and loiter around the derelict, graffiti-splattered brewery — the places my parents strictly forbade me to go when I was in high school.

*after-school bell —
the hoods smoke their Old Gold's
down by the river*

The spirits are usually still hanging around. At times you can hear the sad mothers sob - - dolorosa, dolorosa. They're somewhere in the scorched yellow dust and citronella smoke. Switchblade ghost pachucos might still lurk in the corner shadows, skeletal mongrels might skulk through the alleys. That blind brujo with his twisted cane, he could even pop up behind some broken factory window. Anything may happen, but you have to be there long after sunset, when you can

smell a city's sweet laurel summer sweat. When
the cloy of cheap pomade, sin, sadness, and danger
hangs thick in the thick, humid air. Yes, that's the
time I wait for, that time.

fiesta city...
among the joyous colors
las calaveras



dolorosa —
the mission bells toll
for the lost souls

dolorosa —
the mission bells toll
for the lost souls

Surrealistic hourglass

At this age at this stage in this place we've somehow become adapted to existence in a hyperbolic spacetime of shape-shifting recollections and ambiguous contradictions. Dimensions expand or contract randomly between now and then, here and there. The arrow of time might stay firmly in its place or just run plumb backwards. Multiple realities paradoxically co-exist here, often interfering with one-another's gravitational memory fields.

*room 1206
her vast collection
of time crystals*

*winding his way
through endless corridors —
no direction home**

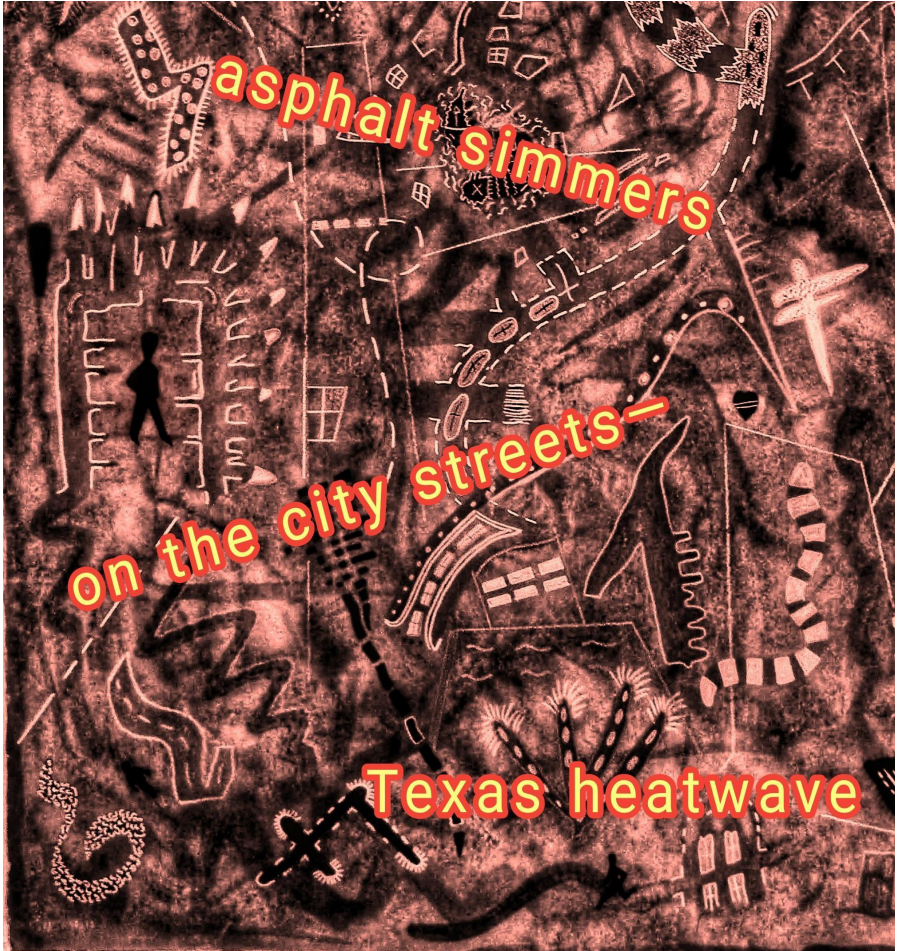
They come from everyplace and everywhere, but the universal language spoken here is Proustian, with a Texas twang. Anachronistic nonsequiturs, fuzzy epigrams, and stale jokes comprise the major

particles of speech in this metacosm I find myself
in. Their eyes disclose a very different narrative - -
love and loneliness, grandchildren and hospital
beds, lost friends and family feuds, sad waltzes and
December's aches, perpetual gray.

*remembering back
to his World War 2 days —
Wednesday's forgotten*

*dinner menu —
the house special
baked nostalgia*

*"Like a Rolling Stone" / Bob Dylan



asphalt simmers
on the city streets —
Texas heatwave

Last rites / axle grease

The little maroon Japanese truck faithfully transported me, two wives, at least six dogs, and countless tons of everything for over twenty-five years. Tens of thousands of miles, scorching summers and freezing winters. She always rattled, often overheated, sometimes wheezed, blew puffs of white smoke and leaked indiscriminately, refused to play music, and sorely needed cosmetic surgery, but never once stranded us or let us down.

*interior lights —
the slow dimming
of yesterdays*

But last week the old girl expired in her sleep. Despite frantic efforts, and a final seizure, she could not be resuscitated. Today I donated her to an animal welfare shelter I'd known, transferred the title, and watched the towtruck carry her away to I don't know her final destination or fate. Tonight, sentimental fool that I am, I wept.

inanimate old pile of scrap metal sayonara nonetheless



old pickup truck
driving the backroads
of memory

Across the Universe and Back

The latest images from the updated Webb telescope are mind-blowingly phenomenal, no doubt about it. Those vivid, pleiomorphic galaxies, to me, look just like 3-D representations of protein globules. The whole macrocosm is the microcosm within the whirling magenta mandala acid trip thing (cue sitar background). But truthfully, folks, I'd be just as fascinated exploring the darkest recesses of our mysterious crawlspace, the back alleys of downtown Tokyo or Schenectady, the intricate patterns on a beetle's back, the reflection on a bottle of beer.

*topology –
within you without you*
looks the very same*

Like you, lots of questions and few answers so far. But then I don't really care to know the Kabbalist's final count of the number of hairs in ol' Jehovah's beard. For that matter, getting down to earth, I never really got jazzed by the origin of the species and I'm especially bored by anything

anthropological. Big deal! No, I'd just like to know what my dog dreams about when she talks in her sleep. Yep, that's it: answer me that!

*graduation day —
a doctoral degree
in misanthropy*

*song by the Beatles on *Revolver*



looking no further
most everything's there
in my dog's eyes



parallel worlds
with centillions of me's
enough already!

Illusions Perdues*

To hell with bucket lists! I've feasted on fugu and Cajun-fried crickets; been around the block a few times on my little red tricycle. Watched *Sunset Boulevard* more than thrice, broke a bar room mirror in Mexico, heard Hendrix up close for 5 bucks, been to Amarillo and Wall Drugs, for what that's worth. Good people, dogs, and guitars. That'll have to do.

*lost highway
just stumbling along
under the half moon*

Just a few last-minute cryptic calls, emails, and texts. Bury a couple of remaining hatchets, burn that bridge, cross the "t's", dot an "i". Should I leave a love note, a poison pen letter, a hexagram, a PostIt, epigram, a koan? Nah! Shoulda coulda woulda. Well, *quelle dommage*. You bet I'll kill that bottle of Glenfiddich; shame to waste it. There, guess that's that, c'est la vie. I really ought to drum up a decent death poem. Or maybe I don't need one after all. Let me think on it a bit.....

*scattered all over
the poet's grave
cigarette butts*

Ok, not bad, but not quite it. Besides, I may have read it somewhere.

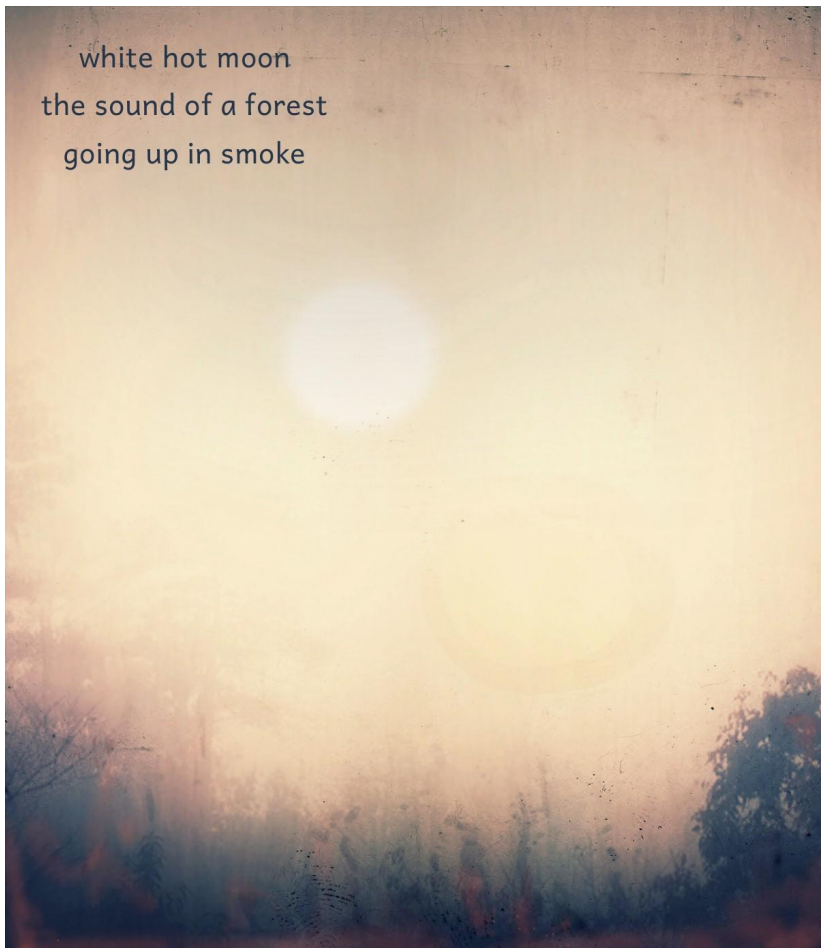
*if only
to fly away once more
dying horsefly*

Well, yeah, I kind of like it - - has an Issa-like ring to it, but kind of derivative. Maybe one more try?

*from the library
Suicide for Dummies
decades overdue*

*a mid-19th century serial novel by Honoré de Balzac

white hot moon
the sound of a forest
going up in smoke



white hot moon
the sound of a forest
going up in smoke

Muddying the frogpond

Admittedly, Im not a very good poet. OK, but come on, get real, you're probably nothing that special either. Just read your Yeats, your Plath, Rimbaud,, Glück, Ginsberg, Eliot, Chiyo-ni, Bukowski, Berryman, Bishop, Bashō, Keats, Milosz, Shiki, Sarton, Sexton....on and on you know, the really big fish. With a few words and mere swish of their lyrical tails they can nebulize us all to so much semantic plankton, literary detritus.

a wee minnow I excrete one more publication

We should be cautious, we little fishies, as we cavort in these thick, murky, nutrient-laden poetic seas. Despite our colorful protective camouflage, Hubris attracts the fanged lurking benthic predators that voraciously feed on our wide-eyed, naive self-esteem.

*a stray gerund
I forgot to excise —
rejection note*



just one more world
a puffball bursts open
in my backyard

Maverick Street Gothic

The cicadas lurking in the laurel bushes are shrieking ever louder as the night turns a deeper violet and the temperature climbs into the upper jalapeño range. I know I'm in a dream but there's a palpable metabolic logic to the phenomenon, so my quasi-conscious mind's eye relaxes, droops, dropping its vigilance for just long enough to diffuse into a demi-reality

*Hotel Nondescript —
under someone's sheets
soaked in sweat*

That gives him the perfect opportunity to slowly diffuse through the great oaken front door of the deserted Higginbotham mansion down the street, materializing right in front of me out of the thick delirium ooze. Same as always, soft luminous radium green glow, top hat, cravat, cane, and those crazy long, pointed fingers. Same as always, such erudite, sibilant speech, elegant mannerisms. Same as always, I do not know his name, yet he calls me by the name only my parents knew when I

was 5. So, of course, I must follow him again
into.....

San Antonio
all those junebugs
and Nosferatu



*back in Texas
my mother and father
together again
in the recurring dreams
of an old man*

back in Texas
my mother and father
together again
in the recurring dream
of an old man

Old strings

I re-tune the mahogany parlor guitar and pick up the ceramic slide. Another couple swigs of beer and I go out into the August heat, sit and swelter on the iron bench under the wisteria, and start playing. No Expectations (Brian's way) and a bit of Elmore James, some quasi-Ry Cooder, then a Muddy Waters or two. Hell, I was always pretty damned good on slide. And today I'm 75 and picked up a few more blue molecules of soul - - I got my mojo workin' for once. Guess I could've been a contender. Now, just let me have some space, another beer, and play on for just a spell. That's really all I want for this one day.

*exclusive party
for the crows and me
in open E*

Hazmat

A dead crow decomposes under the blue spruce.
The noonday sky's a mauve-gray miasma, the drift
from the nearby mountain wildfires. I've closed all
the windows to shut out the smoke, but the new
washing machine in the utility room is still
off-gassing some exotic, no- doubt carcinogenic
hydrocarbons. I see there's been another recall of
Listeria-tainted lettuce, a raw sewage spill in Lake
Washington, and the swimming beaches are
closed again for a toxic algal bloom. Even fewer
bees have visited the sage and lavender this
summer. The spiderwebs appear carelessly woven.

*blotched sun —
the forlorn wail
of tribal elders*

The Fool and the Folly

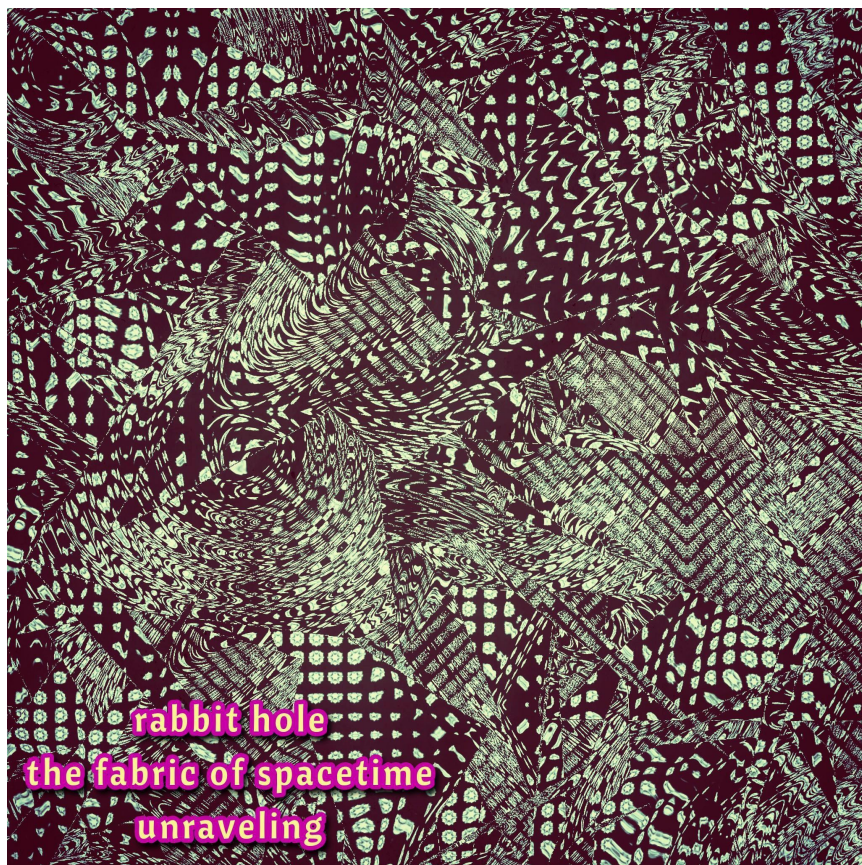
Herr Doktor Dieter N. could deftly pluck a single cell from a fruitfly's eye, could precisely measure out an infinitesimal quantity of a precious enzyme time and again. Yet if he ever once hammered a nail straight in his life or had properly knotted his necktie, it would have been a miracle. The revered Talmudic scholar and Kabbalist, Rabbi Yitzhak ben R., had nearly solved the age-old quest to properly vibrate the four sacred letters of the Tetragrammaton and thus unlock the key to the Great Arcanum. But though he made many efforts, he was constantly baffled by the instruction manuals for his new microwave and smart thermostat. And then there's Rex W., the high ranking martial artist. Karate, kung-fu, judo, capoeira, you-name-it - - even the smallest spider and he's morphed into a quivering hunk of quince jelly.

*mundane topology
without all those holes
no doughnuts today*



through the pall
of wildfire smoke
harvest moon

through the pall
of wildfire smoke
harvest moon



rabbit hole
the fabric of spacetime
unraveling

Geriatric Field Theory

That big Texas horsefly just won't leave us alone during dinner at the senior facility I've been visiting. Doing nothing but sluggishly circling, precessing in a wobbled flightpath, the fly looks old, tired, and tattered. It's a waning moon, Scorpio's in some kind of bad aspect somewhere in the heavens - - likely an astrologically off-kilter day for insects. So a waiter soon appears to perfunctorily dispatch the fly on the white linen tablecloth when it finally alights.

*atom smasher —
blood, dust, and dead cells
dance in a sunbeam*

That's the fourth death that I know of so far in the last month. The horsefly and three people. Now, four vacancies at our table. Cosmic vacuum residues, their gluons recycled into the quantum foam or what-have-you continuum. I think of waves and particles, youth and old age, purpose

and futility. yin and yang, wabi and sabi, ebb and flow you know, all that duality stuff that everything seems to run on these days as always.

*karmic carnival —
an eternal ticket
to ride the wheel*

He was 93, a colonel, a much-decorated Korean War fighter pilot; his vision and heart faded progressively faster year by year, then lights out and Taps. She ran a very successful jewelry chain in Galveston until she was 85 and had that spill in the bathroom, and then later, at a luncheon, the last stroke. And then there was the gracious Mexican matriarch - - a noble woman, a San Antone native with four daughters, scores of nieces and nephews, grandchildren and great-grandchildren - - a huge family. Everyone here really liked her. She departed last Friday, at 98, I believe. She left some of her laughter and sobs to echo through the long, empty corridors. I heard her funeral was quite brief, spare, and poorly attended.

*new arrival —
one more camellia
in an antique vase*



para los muertos
the sad echoes
of mission bells

para los muertos
the sad echoes
of mission bells



retirement home
down the long hallway
the chill of winter

Existential Psychobabble v3.02

*comfortably numb**

I take another swig

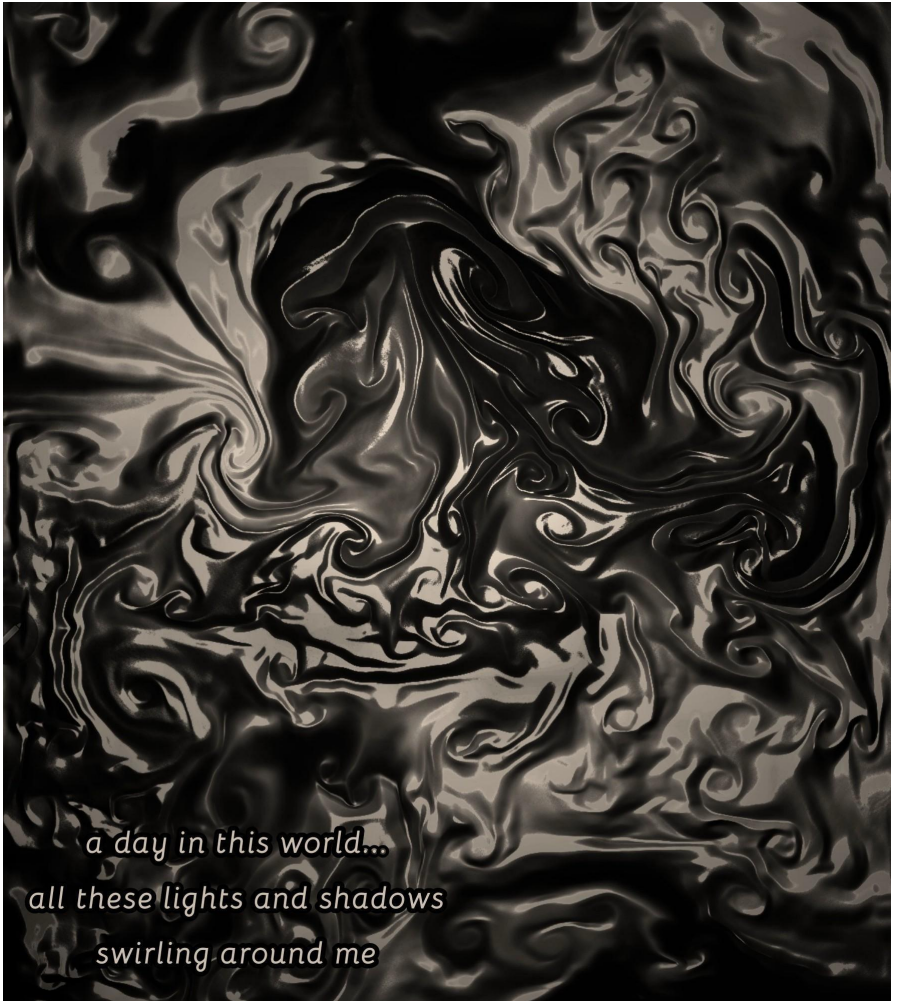
from a Klein bottle

Even after the rough spots have been sanded-down and the finest of relativistic polishings, this universe remains flawed, edgy and off-kilter. Occam's razor, if you take a fine-grained view, hyper-magnified, is full of pits and bumps, so truth gets frayed and logic shows its holes. The cosmic mirror's quite deceitful, you know. It reflects a tricky 13-dimensional reversed virtual image. So, unpredictably, all the 1's can easily flip to become 0's in a split zeptosecond - - and vice-versa - - sorry, no guarantees. There is no perfect vacuum either, everything's just itsy bitsy teeny weeny seltzer bubbles and quantum pond foam. And you can bet zero isn't absolute at all. So what am I trying to get at, Tim asks, half-pissed, what's the deal? I'm not really sure, but I suppose something like this: Even though I'm a crudely constructed fractured glass vessel, one of God's

mega-botched handicraft projects, I can still contain, for an instant, at one time or another, almost any damn stray gamma ray or neutrino you can throw my way. Surely, that must count for something, don't you think? Then Tim asks me if I think we're just two avatars or holographic projections at play in some archetype's massive video game. I just shrug my shoulders and throw up my hands.

*peyotl flashbacks
the man in the moon
gives me "that" look*

*song by Pink Floyd



a day in this world
all these lights and shadows
swirling around me

L'il Heresy

*false positive
another dewdrop world
that wasn't there*

Oh, what a brilliant poet and consummate liar, that guy, that suicide. But isn't every poet a deceiver or at least a self-deceiver in some way? We swoon and drown in our own dopamine-drenched words, sink down into our verisimilitude and obscure verse. I did, I do! We are surely all well aware that the tender pink buds died forever in that freak blizzard one lonely winter's day long ago. Still, we strive every spring, to no avail, to revivify them, water and fertilize them with recycled honeyed haiku, hackneyed phrases, hoping beyond hope they'd bloom once again. Thrive, like the tadpoles we used to catch in our youth, imprison in mason jars down by the old mill stream -- where old Moloch so cleverly hid himself in the bushes, patiently waiting to meet us, gently smirking

borracho moon I smell the auto-da-fé ever closer



oh, enough of this!
looking for a wormhole
to anywhere else

Cyclothyme

Good, it's beginning to get darker outside each day
and I can almost smell the coming damp, the mold,
musty toadstools, and the winter's rotting wood.
Guess some folks just run with the cold white
moon, don't evade the Shades, relish the taste of
bitter alkaloids, the intricate, many-armed dance
of Durga. Of course, there's the kind warmth of the
dog's heart, the elation of amplified guitars, the
exhilaration of paragraphs and the poems. But
close by the paintbrushes, the pens, the vellum and
parchment, the turquoise ring and amber amulet,
there lies the heavy gray brutal beauty of the 9mm.
Oh, this wonderful, this terrible bipolar planet.
Both of you. No blame.

*the inner depths —
there, despite the sunbeams
that undertow*



a bundle of nerves
resisting the caress
of the alkaloids

high and low

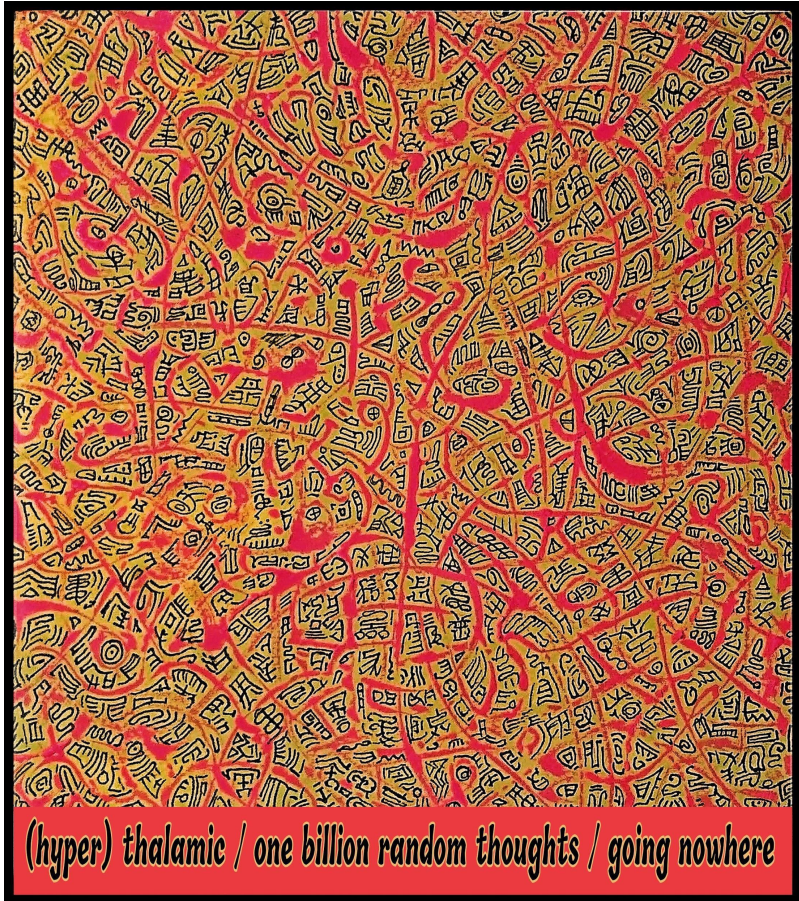
With a lukewarm-ish Corona in my hand I straggle through the many rooms of the cocktail party. The host who invited me is nowhere - - I hardly know anyone, hardly speak with anyone. Faceless faces shadowed in varied shades of gray. Inside it's labyrinthine, dark and cave-like, and it's hazy, a heady mix of cigar and weed smoke. Sounds mix and reverberate, a fluctuating ambient thrum of voices, music, and the zodiac. Some of the rooms are painted matte black, most everyone's wearing black, as am I. Just outside, the patio glows a faint green-gray under the decorative lights twinkling softly from the trees.

*just passing through
on its invisible way
stray neutrino*

There's some very fashionable-looking people slowly diffusing through, in and out- - I hear a legendary basketball star's here somewhere, up-and-coming hot artist elsewhere. Vast open bar's in the kitchen, everything topnotch quality,

and there's cocaine on a small vermillion lacquer tray discretely placed on a sideboard in the dining room near the *hors d'oeuvres* and rows of covered silver chafing dishes. Subtle smell of Sterno, spices, and steam. A couple is fucking in one of the back bedrooms I inadvertently blunder into. The powder room seems forever occupied and the saxophone player noodling a Kenny G-esque number in a dark corner gives me a sly nod as I pass by on my way through another indistinct hallway, another room.

*half-assed flâneur
the Brownian motion
of us lost souls*



(hyper) thalamic
one billion random thoughts
going nowhere

demi-fugue

"... Thou art a dreaming thing; a fever of thyself ..." Keats

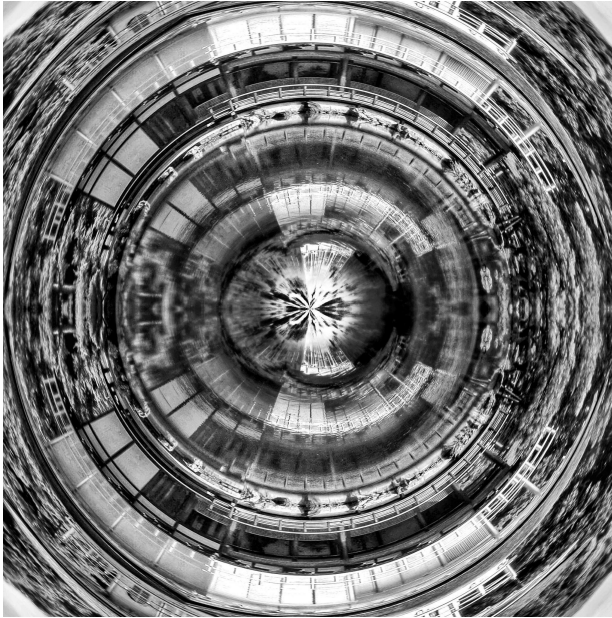
Mind-body problems? Nah, I don't quite get it -- what's the problem? Aren't we all just floating in our dreams, in our own home movies, freely dissociated bionic minds detached from our crude lumps of soma-selves, puffs of ectoplasm? Hey you, yeah you, sitting pretty out there in deSitter space- - do you know your present coordinates? No, we're not talking Cartesian here, pal, there's many many maps and lots of other projections besides Mercator. Are ya lost maybe?

*crests and troughs...
we dog-paddle through the sea
of gravity waves*

Recently I re-watched Mulholland Drive for the umpteenth time & I think David Lynch pretty much gets it right on the money frames of reference, alternative realities, parallel lives, portals, doppelgangers & all that stuff. Me, I'm not so sure I'm me anymore.

*forks in the road
with each decision
another future*

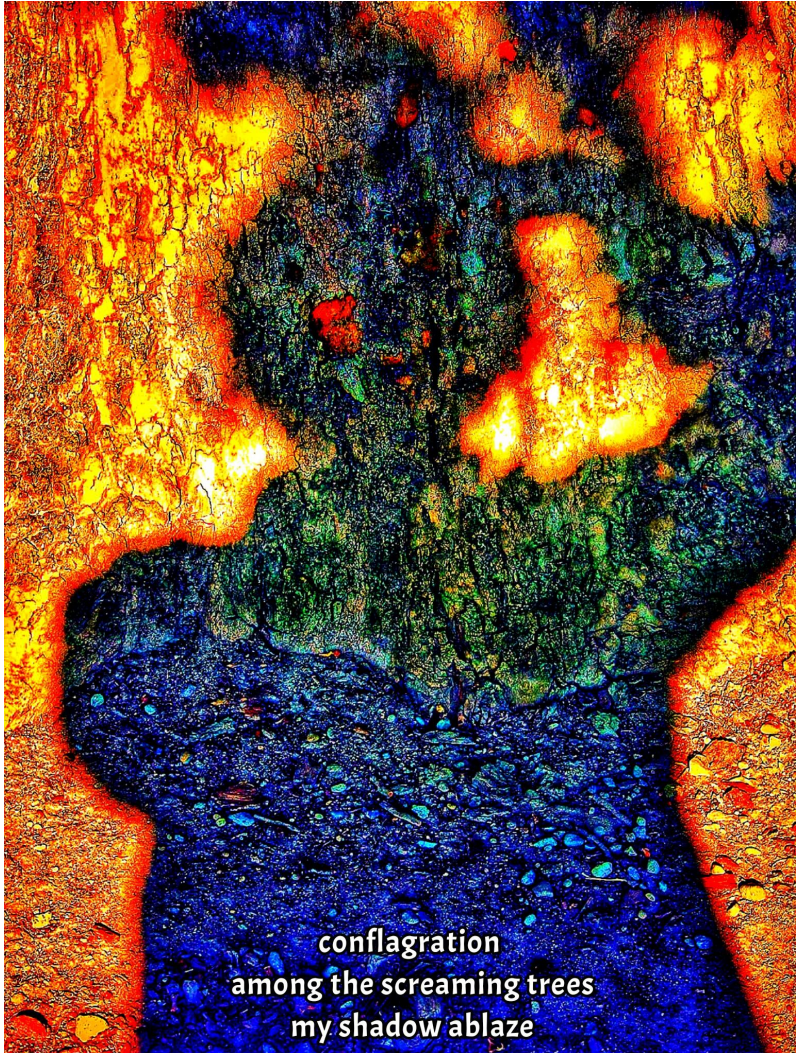
*grand delusion
your reality, bro
it ain't mine*



Apparitions

After an endless wait in the sultry Kyoto night, I finally spot a geisha, but she quickly evaporates in the steamy mists of Gion next to a bashed-in, rusty soft-drink dispenser . Much later, in a dimly lit Ponto-chō alleyway, two maiko in matching patterned kimono suddenly rush from a recessed wooden doorway to the sound of raucous, obscene laughter. Within seconds they dissolve into the lantern-lit sepia murk. Only the echoing clatter of their geta on the wet stone paving remains, and the sour-sweet cloy of sake and shōchu.

*reading Tanizaki...
the motel alarm goes off
somewhere near Pittsburg*



conflagration
among the screaming trees
my shadow ablaze

art history

Happiness, sadness, loneliness — straightforward enough for an artist to depict. But sorrow? I've searched and studied — classical to modern art, old masters to minimalists — no-one appears to have gotten it. Rembrandt, Goya, Munch, you say? Fear or misery perhaps, not sorrow. For me, Käthe Kollwitz comes closest in her prints, and yet... No, sorrow is still deeper, darker. It is objectively formless, transcendent, and Its hues - - infracolors beyond any known palette. Perhaps only poets and musicians can capture sorrow's tones and textures, trace its contours. Evading the brush, the artist's hand hesitates.

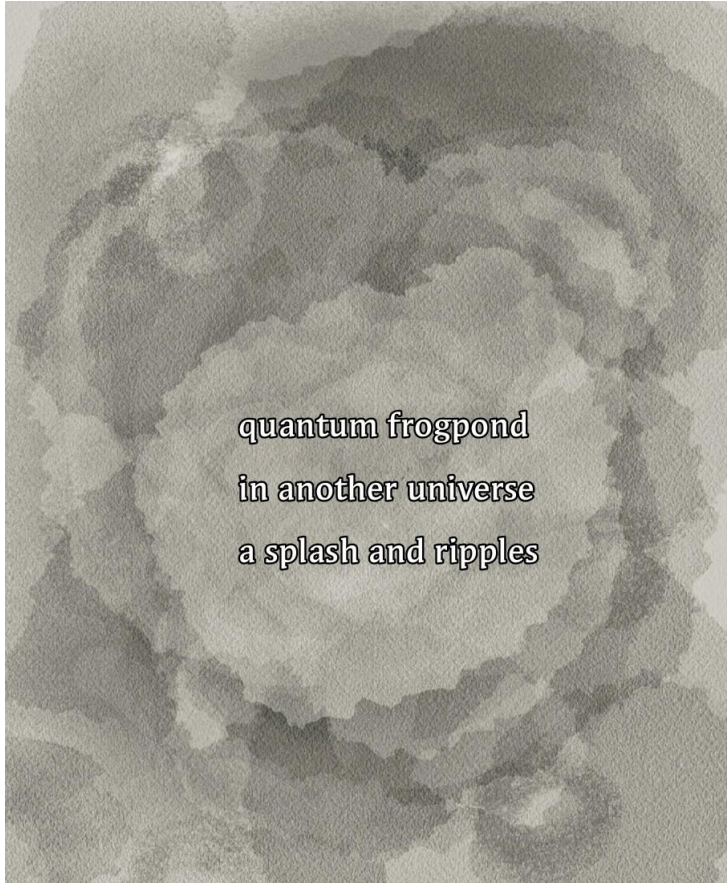
*wilted roses
her funeral ashes
in D minor*

Woodshedding

*scrawled and scratched
on a blotched Bounty towel
opus de nada*

Over and over, practicing my poetical scales - - the scansions, assonant arpeggios, tones, tempos, timbres, lines, legato - - wordplay, technique. Hell, that's hard enough, but just the horse without the cart, right? So I try even harder to achieve a novel lick of truth, just one honest meaningful original riff. Fat chance -- I ain't got the chops, never had 'em. For me, veracity' s just a wave in the sway of general relativity. Mass metaphors bend and bloat, displaced in space and time by my own gravity and hyperbole. My particles of speech split apart, echo and entangle with one-another, ricochet in the cerebral canyons only to diffract into a quadrillion possible/impossible meanings. And these, these flimsy papier mâché thoughts, when struck, they don't ring true; they simply decay, disintegrate - - vanish into the great dark noise clouds of chaos. Lost for good, before I can strike a single worthwhile literary chord.

broken symmetry / an entire universe / of make believe

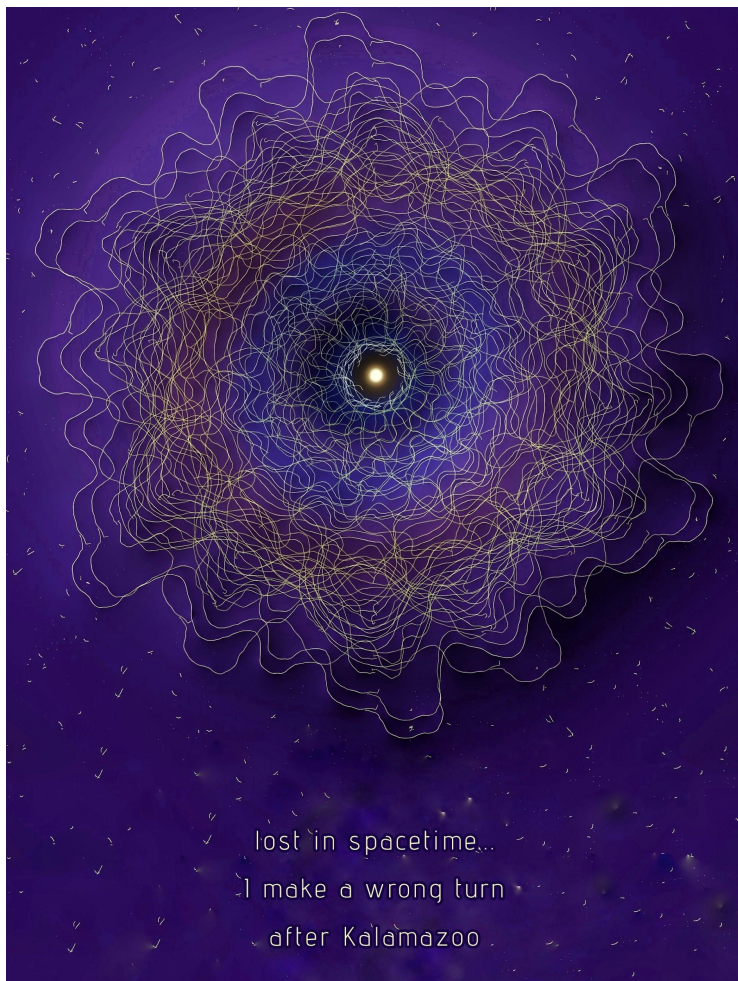


quantum frogpond
in another universe
a splash and ripples

Nepenthe, perhaps?

This place - - a vast, colorless otherness without detectable sky or horizon, dimly illuminated, neither cold nor hot. I can no longer feel the pull of the tides here; the moon is without luster or mystique and the sun's a nondescript blank white disc. So quiet without birdsong or breeze: the seldom heard voices are in soft mumbled subliminal monotones, indiscernible . Where have all the flowers gone? Food is a tasteless pabulum and even the strongest elixir is tepid and impotent. Paradise has been lost, placed in a vague demi-torpor of inexorable sameness. An unfathomable void, and yet all seems so oddly safe and comforting here, wherever I am. Oh, Lord, where am I?

*distant galaxy
the fading light
of a dying star*



lost in spacetime...

I make a wrong turn

after Kalamazoo

lost in spacetime
I make a wrong turn
after Kalamazoo

Supposedly juxtaposed

What am I doing down here in steamy New Orleans?
Walking up Chartres to the French Quarter for a
mufaletta at Napoleon House with my very best friend.
He's sporting his big shiny turquoise bolo as always, got
his wraparound RayBans. But I don't know him from
Adam!! Does that mean I'm not who I think I am? Now
wait a sec, is that the Matterhorn on the horizon? I start
to orient myself and get things straight, but lose my
footing way up on the skyscraper's balcony, and do a
swan dive into one big-ass green dumpster far below
that's over-filled with rotting tropical fruits, mostly
mangoes. I survive intact, but then, dripping ocher fruit
slush..... well, I'm not sure after that. Truth be told, I'm a
bit befuddled, and now I think maybe it's downtown L. A.
and my "friend" has vanished. That's enough! So, come
Saturday night, when I'm playing guitar and having a few
beers with the boys, I'll ask them what they think it all
means. They're right ornery geezers, but supremely
sensitive, intuitive ghosts - - they ought to know.

*red plastic raygun —
I fight the zombie robots
in a used car lot
on some other planet
near downtown Poughkeepsie*



monday morning
suddenly awakened
from a strange dream
for just a brief moment
I forget who I am

monday morning
suddenly awakened
from a strange dream
for just a brief moment
I forget who I am

Old flames & burned bridges – Coda

I'm peering through a fragmented rear view mirror these days - - somehow, I've acquired compound eyes - - can see the facets, angles, perspectives. Spared the cataracts for now, I have panoramic nostalgic retrovision, at least one perk of old age.

*parallel worlds
looking at myself
through someone else*

Ah, the pluperfect past. So many missed opportunities, so many blunders, so many I've disappointed, betrayed, misused, hurt. But then again, the loved ones and lovers, the small triumphs, the brilliant colors, beautiful chords, great writers' words, the suns and moons, seasons. And the dogs! Was it all worthwhile? I sip one last golden drop of Islay, realizing I too shall evaporate without a trace, and it is just so damned right.

*peat smoke and brine –
the manifold depths
of this existence*



journey's end...
I find everything
in my backyard

journey's end
I find everything
in my backyard

– Afterword –

"I've got nothing to say, but it's OK..."

Lennon/McCartney - - *Good Morning, Good Morning*
/ *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*

dedicated to John, Lillian, Tim, & "The Six"

About the author: Mark Meyer is a septuagenarian ex-neurobiologist artist and writer who lives in the middle of a lake in Washington state near Seattle. His artwork has been widely shown and collected, and his writing has been published both in print journals and online. He's even won some awards along the way, despite his best efforts. This is his second book to be published; his first book, *neo-Nothyngge* was published in 2021 and is available on Amazon. He has no earthly idea whatsoever why he does these things.