

Five Dials



NUMBER 13

The Festival Issue

MOHSIN HAMID 6 *Is James Cameron Pakistani?*

JAMES MURPHY 9 *On Losing One's Edge*

PEGGY SHAW 18 *Birthing Woodstock*

MIKE WATT 30 *When Iggy Calls, You Answer*

DEAN WAREHAM 39 *Rock 'n' Roll is Bad for Marriage*

PAUL MURRAY 43 *Hedonism and Tents Don't Mix*

Plus George Thorogood, Alain de Botton, Hari Kunzru, Sam Lipsyte, David Shields and members of Arcade Fire, The Weakerthans, Guided by Voices and Bloc Party. With artwork by Fiona Banner, Martin Parr and Raymond Pettibon and indeed much more...



CONTRIBUTORS

RYAN ADAMS plays with his band The Cardinals, and has been a guest on albums by Toots and the Maytals, and the Cowboy Junkies. He has also published two books of poetry with Akashic Books.

FIONA BANNER is an artist who lives and works in London. Her Duveens commission 'Harrier and Jaguar', opened at Tate Britain at the end of June.

JAMIE BRISICK is a writer and former pro surfer, and is currently working on a memoir of his surfing days. He is a contributing editor to *Five Dials*.

SALLY CHAMBERLAIN lives in Marrakech with her husband and lifelong travelling companion, the artist and film-maker Wynn Chamberlain.

MATTHEW DE ABAITUA is editor-at-large of the *Idler*. His first book, *The Art of Camping: The History and Practice of Sleeping Under the Stars*, will appear in 2011.

ALAIN DE BOTTON is a founder of the School of Life and the author of numerous bestselling books, including *How Proust Can Change Your Life*.

JAMES GREER is the former bass player of Guided by Voices, and the author of several books, including, most recently, *The Failure*. He lives in Los Angeles.

MOHSIN HAMID lives in Lahore and is the author of two novels: *Moth Smoke* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, an international bestseller.

STUART HAMMOND is the books editor of *Dazed & Confused*. He lives in London.

GAVIN HILLS was one of Britain's most influential journalists until his tragically early death in 1997. His work is collected in 2000's *Bliss to be Alive*.

HARI KUNZRU lives in New York City and is the author of *The Impressionist*, *Transmission* and *My Revolutions*.

SAM LIPSYTE is the author of *The Ask*, as well as the short-story collection *Venus Drive*, and two novels, *The Subject Steve* and *Home Land*.

JAMES MURPHY is the co-founder of DFA Records. His band, LCD soundsystem, recently released the album *This Is Happening*.

PAUL MURRAY is the author of two novels, *An Evening of Long Goodbyes* and *Skippy Dies*, published in 2010. He lives in Dublin.

SARAH NEUFELD plays violin in two bands. Arcade Fire's new album is entitled *The Suburbs* and Belle Orchestre's most recent LP is *As Seen Through Windows*. She lives in Montreal.

KELE OKEREKE is a member of the band Bloc Party. *The Boxer*, his first solo album, was released in June 2010.

MARTIN PARR is one of Britain's greatest living photographers and a member of Magnum Photos.

RAYMOND PETTIBON is an American artist whose work can be seen in major galleries around the world – as well as on such seminal album covers as Sonic Youth's *Goo* and Black Flag's *Nervous Breakdown*.

JOEL PLASKETT's most recent solo release is a triple-album entitled *Three*.

IGGY POP is Iggy Pop.

GAVIN PRETOR-PINNEY is the author of *The Cloudspotter's Guide*, *The Cloud Collector's Handbook* and, most recently, *The Wavewatcher's Companion*.

SIMON PROSSER is publishing director of Hamish Hamilton, co-founder of the Port Eliot Festival and a co-editor of this issue of *Five Dials*.

JOHN K. SAMSON is a member of The Weakerthans. Their album *Live at the Burton Cummings Theatre* was released in March.

BILL SANDERSON, whose images accompany Gavin Pretor-Pinney's words, has been a full-time illustrator for over thirty-five years and has illustrated many of Felix Dennis's books of poetry.

PEGGY SHAW founded the theatre company Split Britches in 1980. In 1969 she gave birth to her daughter while she was trying to make her way to Woodstock.

DAVID SHIELDS is the author of *Reality Hunger* and *The Thing About Life is That One Day You'll be Dead*, both to be published in paperback in Spring 2011.

CRAIG TAYLOR is the editor of *Five Dials*.

GEORGE THOROGOOD wrote the song 'Bad to the Bone'. His latest album is *The Dirty Dozen*.

DEAN WAREHAM has recorded sixteen albums, including *On Fire* (with Galaxie 500) and *Penthouse* (with Luna). He is the author of the memoir *Black Postcards*. His latest project, *13 Most Beautiful: Songs for Andy Warhol's Screen Tests*, which he recorded with his partner Britta Phillips, will be released in August 2010.

NIGEL WAYMOUTH is a designer and artist. He was co-founder of legendary boutique Granny Takes a Trip, and is one part of the two-man team Hapshash and the Coloured Cat.

MIKE WATT co-founded the bands The Minute-men and fireHOSE. He has played bass for J. Mascis and the Fog, and The Stooges.

SUZY WILLSON is an Artistic Director of the Clod Ensemble. Their website can be found at www.clodensemble.com.

Subscribe: hamishhamilton.co.uk

Designed by DEAN ALLEN

Special thanks to ELLIE SMITH, DEBBIE HATFIELD, JULIETTE MITCHELL, ANNA KELLY, MATT CLACHER, ANNA RIDLEY, JON ELEK, BEN YARDE-BULLER, JOHANNA INGALLS, NAT DAMM, CATHERINE ST GERMAN, LUKE INGRAM, CAT LEDGER, ELEANOR AND LUCY, JENNI SMITH, AISLINN BELTON, SARA SMITH and AKASHIC BOOKS, OLD STREET PUBLISHING: STACY BENGTON and VANESSA COTTON

On Festivals and George Thorogood

‘THESE OLIVES taste canned,’ said my grumpy friend when we were eating together a while ago. ‘You know what the worst thing is about my new shampoo?’ he asked. ‘It’s the constant, low-level itching.’ ‘You know what I think of festivals?’ he asked a little later. ‘I hate them. I hate the idea of them. It’s as if we’ve tricked ourselves into believing we’re so busy that we need to set aside a couple of weekends of the year when we’re able, with the help of drugs and alcohol and music, to construct memories

we can look back on fondly because all our other memories are so stale and bland and useless. We don’t remember each day bleeding into the next. For one inflated ticket price,’ he said, ‘you desperately hope you’ll get life experience in return. All the while you’re stuck in these brutal little campgrounds ringed by security fences. Then you have to stick your tent up and the ground beneath is treacherous. I’m serious. The dirt in those campsites basically wants to become mud. It wants to betray you. It is willing and ready and

so happy when the rain finally hits.’

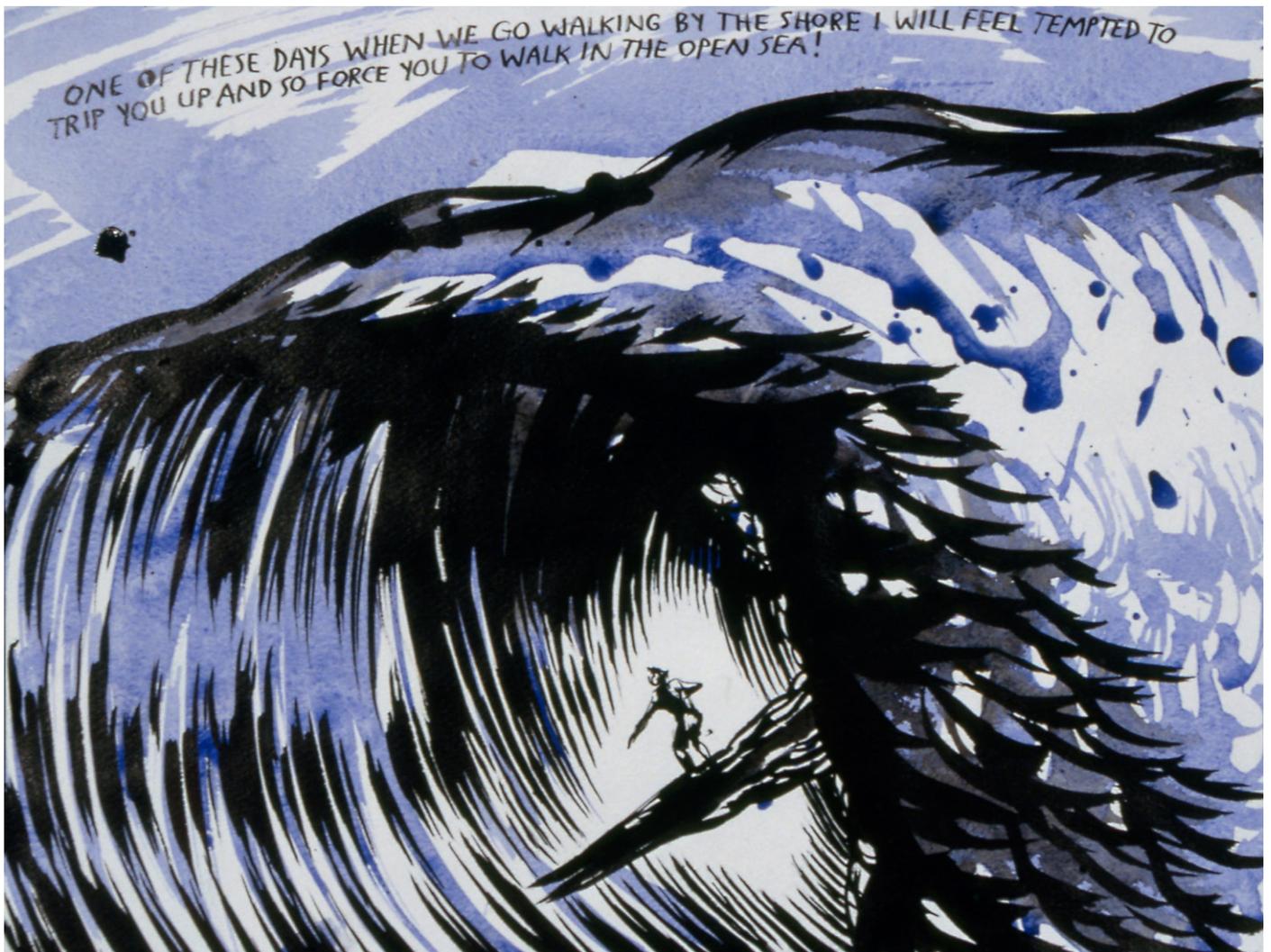
‘Which festivals are you going to this year?’ I asked.

‘Glastonbury,’ he said, and then ate the last olive. ‘I go every year. But the difference with me is that I’m not depending on it for memory.’

‘It’s just about the music,’ I said.

‘It’s just about the music.’

A WHILE AGO the *Five Dials* staff decided to put together a festival issue. It would be a good way to examine these strange events, and would allow us to ask our favourite musicians to contribute to our main stage, as it were, and it would also give us a chance to launch the issue at a festival, preferably under a flawless blue sky.



Raymond Pettibon · *No Title (One of these)* · 1998
pen and ink on paper
10 × 12½ inches (25.4 × 31.8 cm)

Most of the big music festivals these days spring up when those blue skies are likely. No longer are festivals tied to the rhythm of the seasons. They used to be fixed to the solar calendar, to the great thaw of spring and the harvest in the autumn. Not too long ago I attended a harvest festival in a small English village, and while the vegetables looked healthy and plump, the meal was a tame affair, and the dance afterwards bubbled on until 10 p.m.. All was quiet and pleasant and nothing, the locals said, like the old harvest festivals. Some of the explosive spirit of festivals, particularly the celebration of rebirth in the spring, still lives on. Later in the issue we've provided a list of some of the best examples of local traditions too weird to disappear from the British Isles. But most energy now flows towards the big music festivals, which are spoken of as rites of passage, tests of survival, so the young finally learn how to handle not only mud, lost tent pegs and torrential rain, but also over-priced falafel and dodgy ketamine. It's all done with a reverence that seems to ignore the fact most festivals are run as big businesses owned by even larger entertainment divisions.

Though, if you're not able to attend 'Bawming the Thorn' in Appleton, Cheshire, you might as well put on your fairy wings and dance to Dizzee Rascal. Who knows? Even at the biggest festivals, past the security checkpoints, there must be some residual ritual, right? I needed proof for this hunch so I got in touch with a *Five Dials* favourite, George Thorogood, of George Thorogood and the Destroyers, with the hope he might have experienced authentic festival mayhem. 'One that definitely sticks out hands down is the Roskilde Festival in Denmark in 1995,' Thorogood told me. 'This wasn't just a rock festival. It was a ritual where every year thousands of fans came out to celebrate rock. They were true devotees of the music, and everyone knew our songs.

'The festival had several stages and we were scheduled to play at 2:30 p.m. in the afternoon on the Saturday, the last day of the festival. The promoters had gone to another festival where we played on Thursday before Roskilde, and they were so knocked out by the power of the performance they called me the next day and asked if we would mind if they changed our show time to close the festival. Of course, I said yes. They closed down all the other stages and George Thorogood and the Destroyers performed the last set of the festival in front of a crowd of over 90,000 people.

'The show was so powerful that the crowd pulled down the speaker thrusts, which are speakers placed mid-way out from the stage. They set them on fire. They also banged on trash cans and anything they could use to drum along with the beat of the music as they danced around the fire chanting. The whole experience had a magical quality, like watching some sort of Native American ritual. They nearly rioted, but everyone went home happy. It was incredible to see the way these people in Europe brought the festival up to the level of ritual.'

George is not the only proper rocker to appear on the stage of our festival issue. In the following pages you'll find: remembrance from Sarah Neufeld of Arcade Fire, a short story by Kele Okereke of Bloc Party, a memoir of Dean Wareham, former member of Galaxie 500 and Luna, plus LCD Soundsystem's James Murphy and legendary bassist Mike Watt, as well as Paul Murray, Hari Kunzru, Sally Chamberlain, Sam Lipsyte and many others. What would a festival be without art? We've somehow procured contributions from Fiona Banner, Martin Parr and Raymond Pettibon. I'm especially excited about Raymond. (This might be a good time to mention that one year when I was in high school a forward-thinking art teacher allowed senior students to paint murals on the walls of the school.

One reproduced Pettibon's notorious cover illustration for the Sonic Youth album, *Go*. It's a black-and-white illustration of two impossibly cool teen lovers with the caption: 'I stole my sister's boyfriend. It was all whirlwind heat, and flash. Within a week we killed my parents and hit the road.' Needless to say, the mural was painted over a week later with an institutional shade of brown. No one's painting over the Pettibon artwork we've got inside.)

That's enough talking for now. I can hear my voice drifting out over the restless crowd who have already been welcomed and are starting to unfurl banners. There's a lot of facepaint out there, a lot of anticipation, I'll leave the last word to another excellent musician, Mr Joel Plaskett, for his favourite festival memory. He's always a class opening act. When asked about festivals he said, 'I'm not the type to camp out at festival. Sleeping in a tent kind of freaks me out. Having said that, I do like festivals that feature what my wife calls 'magic dancers'. They're the hippyish gals with hands in the air letting loose and swaying to the tunes. A great festival for this was the Dawson City Music Festival in the Yukon, a territory in the north of Canada. It was the summertime and the sun would just dip below the horizon for a few hours between 1 a.m. and 4 a.m.. I was there with my band The Emergency and we were up pretty much for four days straight. The whole experience was incredible. We rocked an epic show on the Saturday night to packed tent and the magic dancers went nuts. When we were flying home, we stopped to change planes in Whitehorse and picked up a copy of the local paper. There was a huge picture on the front of us playing the show, with a giant unrelated headline above the photo that read, 'GUNMEN ROB LOCAL STORE'. Our guitars got lost on the flight and took a week to get back to Halifax. It was a classic.'

—CRAIG TAYLOR

In Pettibon's Studio

By Jamie Brisick

ON A BRIGHT July morning in his Venice Beach studio, Raymond Pettibon pulls from his pocket a fistful of wadded-up pages.

'I have books lying around,' he explains, 'and I take the pages out. It could be practically anything. I do a lot of reading in transit, whether it's a car, bus, train, whatever. I don't read for plot. I don't care how it ends. I read a lot slower, because I'm often trying to analytically almost break down the writing as it occurs, or as it scans. In a way, it's rewriting of a sort.'

Pettibon's drawings and paintings are an unlikely, often ironic, melding of text and image. Fueled by omnivorous reading, as well as an early interest in political cartoons, underground comics, punk rock, *noir* films and the paintings of Whistler and Goya, his work runs the gamut of twentieth-century pop culture. Recurring motifs include Charles Manson, J. Edgar Hoover, baseball players,

surfers, homicidal teenagers and Gumby, the green clay stop-motion-animated figure who has the miraculous ability to walk into a book and enter the story (an alter ego for the artist, perhaps?).

Tall, shaggy and bear-like, Pettibon speaks softly, slowly, with long, ponderous pauses. Much like the words that punctuate his drawings ('Some pieces I'll work on for decades'), he'll begin a sentence, retract it and start anew. You can almost see his mental eraser rubbing away, his furrowed brow searching for the pith. He is not one for eye contact, and during much of our two-hour conversation he stares out across the room.

Pettibon's studio is a white-walled former furniture showroom on traffic-heavy Lincoln Boulevard. It exudes a certain 'ransacked by the DEA' appeal. Dirty socks, weathered LPs, pulp novels, surf magazines and vintage baseball mitts share floor space with his dachshund mutt, Barely Noble.

Strewn haphazardly about his work table are newspapers, tubes of paint, lidless inkpots, a wooden baseball bat, loose CDs, an open bottle of rosé and tortilla chips and salsa, all of which sit precariously close to or atop valuable half-finished drawings.

Taped to the wall are works-in-progress: a large-breasted topless woman with a death mask; a man kissing an outstretched hand; a child's red wagon; an apish arm and leg; a naked woman, bent over, with 'This is too forward, Trick,' scrawled above; and a feathery blue wave, much like the ones that crashed on the shores of his hometown, Hermosa Beach. Presiding over the room is a basketball hoop (Pettibon, I'm told, has a wicked jump shot). But most prevalent are the books, which are stacked floor to ceiling in an upstairs loft, and create a cacophony of voices that include Baudelaire, Henry James, Proust, Borges, Mickey Spillane, Charles Manson and a thousand others.

'Where the image stops and the words begin is not that clear cut,' he says. 'It's more a give and take, a back and forth, dialectic almost in between the two and/or both. Probably more times than not when I have problems it's because I tend to overwrite, so it's more learning when to stop.'



Is James Cameron Secretly Pakistani?

Mohsin Hamid watches Avatar in Lahore

ON THE DAY I went to see *Avatar* I finally got a haircut. I don't have much hair, but still I usually have myself cropped every three weeks. This time six had gone by, and I was looking scraggly.

It was January 2010 and a month earlier I'd moved back to Lahore after several years in London, and before that several more in New York. The week I arrived a pair of bombs went off in Moon Market, killing forty-two people and injuring one hundred and thirty-five.

For a few days, people avoided markets and banks and restaurants and other crowded places if they could. Then things more or less went back to normal. There were eight million people in Lahore before the bombing. There were eight million people in Lahore after the bombing.

I held off on going for a haircut. Maybe I was too busy settling in.

My barber wasn't in Moon Market. He was in Main Market. Main Market differs by two letters from Moon Market. Main Market is four kilometres away from Moon Market. Main Market is also larger and more densely packed than Moon Market.

The front of my barber's shop is a big glass window with some fading posters on it. On the narrow street outside are rows of parked motorcycles and cars. Bombs in Pakistan are sometimes left in motorcycles and cars. A bomb outside my barber's shop would turn that big glass window into shrapnel.

Eventually, my wife pointed out that my hair really needed attention. So I went for my haircut. I hadn't seen my barber in years.

'Hot or cold?' he asked me.

'What do you mean?' I said. What the hell was a hot haircut? Or a cold one, for that matter?

'Hot or cold?' he repeated, a little surprised.

I realized he was offering me tea or a soft drink. 'Neither,' I said, shaking my head. 'Sorry, I've been away a while.'

He cut my hair. Then he gave me a scalp massage. Then he gave me a shoulder massage. He was good. I thought of staying longer. I looked at the big glass pane of the window and the cars and motorcycles parked outside. I paid him and left.

I'd had a number of missions since moving to Lahore. I'd had to get us a new fridge and sort out the strange smell coming from one of our bathroom drains and shepherd the cardboard boxes of our belongings through customs at the dry port. But my top priority had been getting broadband. I'd succeeded remarkably easily.

Now, when I went online at home, thanks to a 1999 rupee (roughly US \$23) monthly contract, I flowed at 2Mbps through a Pakistan Telecommunications Limited ADSL telephone line, down to Karachi, offshore to the SEA-ME-WE-3, SEA-ME-WE-4 and I-ME-WE, a trio of optical fibre submarine telecommunication cables that handle the bulk of data moving between South Asia and the Middle East and Europe, and thence to any server or router I needed to access on the planet.

Out in the cyber universe, my internet persona could continue to live pretty much the same life it had lived when my physical existence was in London or New York. It could visit the same websites, fol-

low the same news and correspond with the same friends and agents and publishers. This pleased me. I'd been able to watch a streaming High Definition trailer for *Avatar* before going to see it that night.

When we arrived at the cinema, barricades meant that no one could park outside. We had to leave our car in a vacant plot down the road. A police jeep was stationed near the entrance. Security guards manned a metal detector. Inside, each bathroom had a guard as well. Other than that, it was like going to a modern Hollywood-dependent cinema anywhere. There was sweet and salty popcorn, there were hot dogs and nachos, there were M&M's and Coke.

The cinema was not configured for 3-D. But the screen was large and the surround sound system was powerful, so the 2-D experience was still impressive. The audience cheered as a race of exotically-named, technologically disadvantaged, religiously-inclined, dark-skinned (well, blue) people fought a marauding, resource-hungry, heavily-armed force of seemingly American marines whose leader roared of the need to 'fight terror with terror.'

A friend leaned over to me when it was done. 'Is James Cameron secretly Pakistani?' he asked.

We stepped outside. Some people smoked cigarettes. Others smoked joints. Then we drove home. I passed an army checkpoint on my way. At an intersection a digital billboard was running a news ticker with the number of deaths from the latest drone attack.

The main character in *Avatar* is a marine who goes online to inhabit a hybrid body that looks like the dark-skinned enemy. I wanted to get home to go online and explore his fictional universe further. I also wanted to get home because the streets were oddly deserted. A winter fog had descended, making it difficult to see ahead. ◇

Twenty Summer Calendar Customs

Simon Prosser surveys the festival landscape

As idleness scholar Tom Hodgkinson has often pointed out, the medieval citizens of Britain had a rather better time of it than we do now when it came to holidays and festivals. But while many traditional customs, both medieval and more recent, have sadly died out, there remain a heartening number which have survived the combined ravages of Puritanism, the Reformation, the Protestant Work Ethic and the Victorians.

One of our favourite books at Five Dials is A Year of Festivals: A Guide to British Calendar Customs by Geoffrey Palmer and Noel Lloyd, published in 1972, which joyfully records present-day observances and describes their history and practice, from Orange-Rolling on Dunstable Downs to Weighing the Mayor at High Wycombe (by way of Swinging the Fireballs at Stonehaven and Swan-Upping on the Thames).

LANIMER DAY (Thursday of the week 6–12 June)

Lanark, Scotland

The inspection of the ancient boundary stones and the crowning of the Lanimer Queen.

RIDING THE MARCHES (Thursday of the first full week in June)

Hawick and Selkirk, Scotland

Horseback processions, reeling and flag-bearing.

THE BEATING THE CLOCK RACE (First week of June)

Bideford, Devon

A foot-race over the River Torridge bridge.

ELECTING THE MAYOR OF OCK

STREET (on or near 20 June)

Abingdon, Berkshire

The election of the Mayor, followed by Morris dancing and carousing.

THE BELTANE FESTIVAL (Mid-June)

Peebles, Scotland

An ancient Celtic fire festival now celebrated with the crowning of the Beltane Queen and a Riding of the Marches.

DRUIDS' CEREMONY (Midsummer Eve)

Stonehenge, Wiltshire

Members of the Church of the Druid Universal Bond perform their annual rites.

BANISHING THE WITCHES (23 June)

St Cleer, near Liskeard, Cornwall

A huge bonfire, crowned with a witch's hat and broom, is lit on a hill.

ST JOHN'S EVE MIDSUMMER BONFIRES (23 June)

Cornwall

A chain of bonfires is lit across the county, from west to east, starting at St Ives.

WARRINGTON WALKING DAY (28 June)

Warrington, Lancashire

Thousands of children walk in procession through the streets, originally to protest against gambling at the horse races.

THE BRAW LADS' GATHERING (30 June)

Galashiels, Selkirkshire, Scotland

The five wards of the town each elect a Braw (handsome) Lad and Lass, then Ride the Marches.

THE BAAL FIRE (4 July)

Whalton, Northumberland

Village children dance in a ring around a bonfire on the village green; followed by adults dancing to a fiddle.

THE TYNWALD CEREMONY (5 July)

St John's, Isle of Man

The Lieutenant-Governor mounts the Tynwald Hill to sit on a crimson velvet chair, facing east, with the twenty-four members of the House of Keys, the world's smallest parliament, surrounding him. All present wear a sprig of St John's Wort.

THE BURRY MAN (8 July)

South Queensferry, West Lothian, Scotland

The fantastically-dressed Burry Man, in a suit covered with thistle and teezele burrs, walks silently through the streets collecting alms.

BAWMING THE THORN (11 July)

Appleton, Cheshire

An ancient ritual of tree worship in which garlanded children pay tribute to a hawthorn tree before dancing around it.

THE HOT PENNIES CEREMONY (Tuesday and Wednesday following 19 July)

Honiton, Devon

A gilt glove is displayed and hot pennies are thrown from the windows of the town's inns, to ensure fair trading at the market.

THE GREAT WARDMOTE OF THE WOODMEN OF ARDEN (First week in August)

Meriden, Warwickshire

An archery competition between the eighty members of this ancient society.

THE FEAST OF ST WILFRID (First Saturday in August)

Ripon, Yorkshire

An annual feast, accompanied by the custom of Setting the Watch, announced by the City Hornblower.

THE MARHAMCHURCH REVEL (Monday following 12 August)

Marhamchurch, near Bude, Cornwall

The Queen on horseback, led by a brass band, processes to the Revel ground, where there are sideshows and Cornish wrestling.

CLEIKING THE DEVIL (Third week in August)

Onnerleithen, Peebleshire, Scotland

The Dux, or headboy, of the local school plays St Ronan, who washes his hands in the spa well and then 'cleiks' (cleans) the Devil, before releasing a flock of pigeons.

THE BLESSING OF THE MEAD (24 August)

Gulval, St Mount's Bay, Cornwall

The Almoner of the Worshipful Company of Mead Makers leads a celebration of St Bartholomew, the patron saint of bee-keepers and honey-makers. ◇

A Festival Cloud Primer

By Gavin Pretor-Pinney

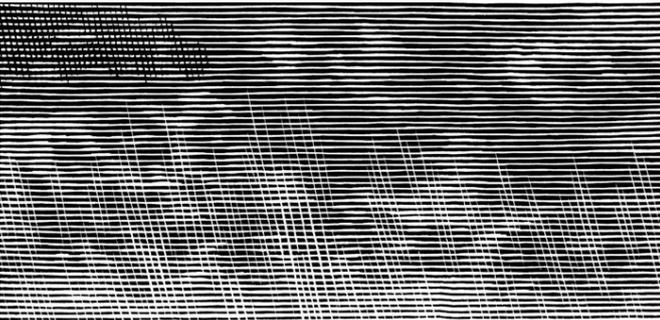
Cirrus



The Cirrus cloud enjoys great popularity amongst festival cloudspotters because it presents negligible obstruction to the sun's rays, thereby allowing warmth to shine through while providing an abstract, free-loving fresco to gaze up at. This ice-crystal cloud consists of translucent, wavy streaks that are reminiscent of a flowing dress in one of those flailing-dancer photographs from Woodstock. Expressive and unconstrained, Cirrus seems to embody the weightless, festival abandon that revellers seek (and so rarely achieve) through transcendental drugs, Shiatsu massage and late-night poetry readings.

But when Cirrus fallstreaks gradually spread across the high sky, each embracing its neighbour with absentminded, icy caresses, they indicate that a warm front is likely to breach the perimeter fence within a day or so. This may sound like the sort of front you'd welcome to your festival, but it often brings with it a prolonged hangover of drizzle.

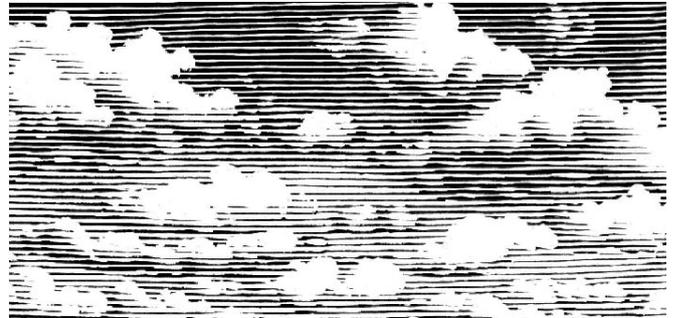
Nimbostratus



Such a hangover goes by the name of Nimbostratus. It is a flat, featureless, wet blanket of a cloud: dull, dark and drizzly. This is the cloud equivalent of the headline act refusing to play their old hits and subjecting the crowd to ninety minutes of new musical direction. It is blocked loos and bad acid: a Tupperware sky of steady rain that never lets up, dampening the spirits through one sodden set after another.

Nimbostratus is the cloud that gives all the others a bad name. Do not wear your Cloud Appreciation Society t-shirt when you are below one. You will be lynched.

Cumulus



This cloud is a festival favourite – at least, that is, when it's one of the smaller 'humilis' or 'mediocris' species. Cumulus is a crisp, bright, fair-weather heap of condensation, carried along in the summer breeze like a wad of candyfloss dispensed from the burger van in the car park. Its uncharacteristically defined edges make this the best cloud for finding shapes in (of great help after two hash cakes.)

Being dense, low and shade-giving, Cumulus provides welcome relief from the sun's heat as it drifts overhead. Within the parched, stagnant air of your tent on the sweltering morning of the day after, each Cumulus shadow is a silent ping of the microwave – a few moments' respite, before the power returns and the glass plate beneath you recommences its desiccating rotation.

Cumulonimbus



The Cumulonimbus storm cloud likes to make its presence felt. Its showers are generally short, sharp and to the point. But when the festival atmosphere is particularly unstable, one Cumulonimbus can take over from the last. This is not good when you've pitched your tent at the bottom of the hill.

But it needn't be this way. When its downpours are brief, few and interspersed with sunshine, the Cumulonimbus can even be a welcome gatecrasher. The first sudden shower can elicit solidarity amongst festival revellers: amused surprise at the deluge shared between strangers beneath the shelter of the Thali stall. The threat of disorder from this cloud can send a charge through the crowd. Does it mean lightning? Thunder? The floods of Glastonbury '98? Not necessarily. Sometimes, it is just the trough before the peak, the dissonance before the harmony – the sudden release of humid tension before the clear, fresh inhalation as you head for the healing fields.

Illustrations by Bill Sanderson

Losing My Edge

James Murphy of LCD Soundsystem on relinquishing cool and ageing gracefully

It was the first time I was living a life in New York that resembled anything cool. I was DJing and I wasn't only DJing, I was playing rock records, and I was known for playing certain records. It was remarkable. It was cool – I was cool – for about one whole minute. One night I went out and there was a kid DJing at a punk show. He was playing the same records, the same rock records as me, and I got upset. Then I got embarrassed about the fact that I was upset. And then I felt even worse because of that embarrassment. It didn't stop. The cycle went on. It was like self-annihilation.

*Yeah, I'm losing my edge,
I'm losing my edge,
The kids are coming up from behind.
I'm losing my edge,
I'm losing my edge to the kids from France
and from London.
But I was there.*

'Losing My Edge' was not written. It just came out. I was playing drums and singing, which is why the rhythm gets funny. I turned on the beatbox, sang, and made the song. The only part of the song that had been written before was the list of bands I call out at the end, and that was recorded separately. I had a lot in my head. The subject matter was all there. It was fertile. It was really fertile. I got almost all the lyrics down in one take because I was so invested in it. It was everything my life was about.

*I'm losing my edge,
I'm losing my edge to the kids whose footsteps
I hear when they get on the decks.
I'm losing my edge to the internet seekers
who can tell me every member of every good
group from 1962 to 1978.
I'm losing my edge.*

I wasn't trying to make a song. I wasn't worrying about what the next song would be about, what it would sound like, if there would be an album. It was just what needed to be said. Do I talk about the same subject again and again? Prob-

ably. I do try to find a way to find new ways of saying things.

When has it ever been interesting to hear a song where everything's going great, everything's going great, and then there's a list of everything that's going great? I'm interested in the way the cynical can be turned optimistic and the optimistic cynical, and what's most interesting to me is a song that contains some sort of argument with loss.

'Losing My Edge' is about age. Perhaps a twenty-two-year-old could have written it but it would have been an even bigger lie. If you put a million twenty-two-year-olds behind typewriters they'd come up with it eventually, or perhaps they'd just come up with *Twilight*.

Everything I write is the end result of a boiling down of influences, and the same goes for lyrics. My literary influences are equal to my musical influences – postwar American fiction, like Sam Lipsyte. Sam was my favourite singer when he was in a band called Dung Beetle. Like there is in his books, there was a mixture of menace and humour in his stage presence. He was self-effacing but with a healthy amount of ego, aggressive and uncompromising, not a cartoon drawing of cartoon punk. He was a very serious model for me.

His writing reminded me that sentiments should co-exist. If there's humour it should be present without sacrificing anything else, without pulling back. Funny-sad is way more sad. There's more resonance, and any good writing needs resonance whether it's a song or a book.

I'm interested in how cool works. It's a funny thing but I think about it a lot – the weird social currency of cool. I've thought about it ever since I was a tiny thing, and those thoughts ended up in 'Losing My Edge'. When I first gave the song to people I knew, most of them said it was horrible. They thought I was kidding. Phil Mossman, the original LCD Soundsystem guitarist, liked it. Others thought it was a horror. Then the song went out and got a positive reaction, mostly amongst people who thought,

'Oh God, that's me. I've started to feel irrelevant. Should I change to become relevant? Is that gross?'

If you're not in your full flush of youth, how do you operate? When you're young you think in mono-blocks – if I had a new computer, if I had this girlfriend, it would be OK. Your life moves in these mono movements, one at a time. When you're older it's different: I really like that, but what does that say about me, will it work, how much will it work, will it make me feel better, will it really make me feel better? What will I lose in the process? Happiness is complicated and you become more complicated as you age. Your reactions become more complicated. If you don't become more complicated you're just an asshole. George W. Bush is not complicated.

I think it's in the human condition. There's always an element that you're missing out. People who work in jobs that suck might say, 'I wish I was like a real writer.' They don't realize that real writers are just as hapless. They just know that feeling: they're doing it and I'm not.

I was thirty-two when the first record came out. I guess I'm comfortable with aging. It would be sweet if my back didn't hurt. I'd like to take some time back. I don't have kids and I'd like to, and then there's all the rest of the mortality shit. My dad died at sixty-nine years old when I was thirty-one. I'm not banking on much past seventy.

WE DIDN'T PLAY the song on our Sound of Silver tour. We're playing it now. The song came back to us. It feels good. Why did it return? Who knows? Why does anything return? Maybe for that strange, unstable, psychotic reason people are happy and satisfied and feel cool, even for a moment.

*I used to work in the record store.
I had everything before anyone.
I was there in the Paradise Garage DJ booth
with Larry Levan.
I was there in Jamaica during the great sound
clashes.
I woke up naked on the beach in Ibiza in
1988*

*But I'm losing my edge to better-looking
people with better ideas and more talent
And they're actually really, really nice. ♦*

The Ask

By Sam Lipsyte

ONE

America, said Horace, the office temp, was a run-down and demented pimp. Our republic's whoremaster days were through. Whither that frost-nerved, diamond-fanged hustler who'd stormed Normandy, dick-smacked the Soviets, turned out such firm emerging market flesh? Now our nation slumped in the corner of the pool hall, some gummy coot with a pint of Mad Dog and soggy yellow eyes, just another mark for the juvenile wolves.

'We're the bitches of the First World,' said Horace, his own eyes braziers of delight.

We all loved Horace, his clownish pronouncements. He was a white kid from Armonk who had learned to speak and feel from half a dozen VHS tapes in his father's garage. Besides, here at our desks with our turkey wraps, I did not disagree.

But I let him have it. It was my duty. We were in what they call a university setting. A bastion of, et cetera. Little did I know this was my last normal day at said bastion, that my old friend Purdy was about to butt back into my world, mangle it. I just figured this was what my worst teachers used to call a teachable moment.

'Horace,' I said. 'That's a pretty sexist way to frame a discussion of America's decline, don't you think? Not to mention racist.'

'I didn't mention anybody's race,' said Horace.

'You didn't have to.'

'P.C. robot.'

'Fascist dupe.'

'Did you get avocado on yours?'

'Fattening,' I said.

'Don't worry, baby,' said Horace. 'I like big women.'

'What about hairy ones?' I said, parted my shirt to air my nipple fuzz. Horace let me be a cretin with him. You could call him my infantilism provider, though you'd sound like an idiot. Otherwise, I was ostensibly upstanding, a bald husband, a slab-bellied father.

'Gentlemen,' said our supervisor, Vargina, coming out from her command nook.

'Did you send off those emails about the Belgian art exchange?'

Horace swivelled back to his monitor with the mock panic of a sitcom serf. Vargina took scant notice of our talk, tolerated foul banter for purposes of morale. But the fact remained, we had forgotten the afternoon's assignment. The gods of task flow did not easily forgive.

Where we worked was in the development office of a mediocre university in New York City. It was an expensive and strangely obscure institution, named for its syphilitic Whig founder, but we often called it, with what we considered a certain panache, the Mediocre University at New York City. By we, I mean Horace and I. By often, I mean once.

Our group raised funds and materials for the university's arts programmes. People paid vast sums so their spawn could take hard drugs in suitable company, draw from life on their laptops, do radical things with video cameras and caulk. Still, the sums didn't quite do the trick. Not in the cutthroat world of arts education. Our job was to grovel for more money. We could always use more video cameras, more caulk, or a dance studio, or a gala for more grovelling. The asks liked galas, openings, recitals, shows. They liked dinner with a famous filmmaker for them to fawn over or else dismiss as frivolous.

An ask could be a person, or what we wanted from that person. If they gave it to us, that was a give. The asks knew little about the student work they funded. Who could blame them? Some of the art these brats produced wouldn't stand up to the dreck my three-year-old demanded we tack to the kitchen wall. But I was biased, and not just because I often loved my son. Thing was, I'd been just like these wretches once. Now they stared through me, as though I were merely some drone in their sight line, a pathetic object momentarily obstructing their fabulous horizon. They were right. That's exactly what I was.

A solitudinous roil, my bitterness. Horace, after all, was their age. He had no health insurance, just hope. Our rainmaker,

Llewellyn, seemed born to this job, keen for any chance to tickle the rectal bristles of the rich with his Tidewater tongue. He was almost never in the office, instead sealing the deal on a Gulfstream IV to Bucharest, or lying topside on a Corfu yacht, slathered in bronzer.

Llewellyn delivered endowed chairs, editing suites, sculpture gardens. My record was not so impressive. My last big ask, for example, had failed to yield a few plasma TVs from the father of a recent film graduate.

Mr Ramadathan had mortgaged his electronics store so his son could craft affecting screenplays about an emotionally distant, workaholic immigrant's quest for the American dream. But the father's giddiness had begun to wear off. The boy was unemployable. Now Mr Ramadathan was maybe not so eager to relinquish his showroom models.

I'd made the hot, khaki-moistening hike past all the car dealerships and muffler shops on Northern Boulevard in Queens, stood in the sleek, dingy cool of the store. Mr Ramadathan sat near the register in a wicker chair. The plasmas were not on display. Sold or hidden, I had no idea. Mr Ramadathan stared at me, at the sweat patches on my crotch. He pointed toward some old video game consoles, a used floor fan, dregs of the dream.

'Please,' he said, 'take those. So that others may learn.'

Unlike the time Llewellyn secured a Foley stage for the film department, there was no celebration on the Mediocre patio. No sour chardonnay got guzzled in my honour, nor did any lithe director of communications flick her tongue in my ear, vow to put me on the splash page of *Excellence*, the university's public relations blog.

If not so ecstatic in her position as Llewellyn, Vargina seemed happy enough, or at least adopted a mode of wise, unruffled decency in the office. She'd been a crack baby, apparently due to her mother being a crackhead, one of the early ones, the baking soda vanguard. Vargina was a miracle, and that's maybe the only time I have used the word sincerely. Her mother had named her the word her name resembled. A sympathetic nurse added the 'r.'

'Milo,' she said now. 'How is the Teitelbaum ask going?'

Vargina had enormous breasts I liked to picture flopping out of a sheer burgundy

bra. Sometimes they just burst out in slow motion. Sometimes she scooped them out with her slender hands, asked me to join her reading group.

'Making progress,' I said. 'Chipping away.'

'Maybe you need a larger tool,' said Vargina, appeared to shudder slightly, perhaps worried her innocent metaphor would be misconstrued as sexual. Her words, however, were not misconstrued at all. I had already begun to picture my cock in high quiver, sliding up the lubed swell of her chest. We were in a library of lacquered wood. Viola tones rose from a carved alcove. Baby oil beaded on rare folios.

'Well,' said Vargina, tapped the plastic parapet of my cube wall. 'Just stick with it.' 'Will do.'

Truth was, the Teitelbaum ask was going nowhere. I was barely hanging on here in development. I wasn't developing. I'd done some good work at a non-profit a few years ago, but the South Bronx Restoration Comedy Project never really took off. The university snapped me up at a bargain rate. I'd become one of those mistakes you sometimes find in an office, a not unpleasant but mostly unproductive presence bobbing along on the energy tides of others, a walking reminder of somebody's error in judgment.

But today some karmic adjustment seemed due. Just as Vargina slipped back behind the particleboard walls of her command nook, a painting major we knew a bit too well around here charged up to my desk, planted her bony fist on my Vorticist mouse pad. McKenzie was one of those girls who didn't eat enough, so that all one really noticed about her were the mole-specked rods of her arms, the lurid jut of her skull. Students had no reason to visit our office, but her father had paid for our crappy observatory upstate. She was in here a lot, to preen, complain. I guess it beat making her putrid art.

'Hello, McKenzie,' I said.

'Hi, yeah, sorry, I can't remember your name.'

'Milo.'

'Sure, okay. Milo. Listen, Milo, we talked last week and you promised I'd be able to take the Impressionism to Regression seminar even though it was full.'

'Excuse me?'

'Yeah, you know, you promised you'd talk to the painting department and sort it

all out. I mean, if I told my father —'

'Hold on.'

'Hold on?'

'I made no such promise. We have nothing to do with academic decisions, with curriculum or enrolment.'

'Okay, maybe it was that guy,' said

McKenzie, pointing.

'Horace?' I said.

'Yeah, Whore-Ass,' said McKenzie.

Horace wore a pained grin at his terminal.

'Horace hasn't been well,' I told McKenzie. 'Now, as I mentioned, we have no jurisdiction over any of these issues, but maybe we can all get together with painting and figure this out.'

'Meaning what?'

'Meaning we can figure this out.'

McKenzie stared. How could she know I myself had once been a fraud, chockablock with self-regard, at an overpriced institution just like this one, still had the debt to prove it? How could she know she stared down at the wispy pate of a man who once believed he was painting's saviour, back in a decade that truly needed one?

She spoke quietly now: 'Listen, I don't mean to be rude, but you really are here to serve my needs. My father taught me that the consumer is always right. I am the consumer. You are actually the bitch of this particular exchange. But don't think I don't respect that you are just a guy, like, doing your shitty job.'

'Thank you,' I said.

'But maybe you aren't cut out to work with artists.'

I guess what set me off was her effort to be polite. I should have just leaned on the painting department to make room on the roster for her, ruin the semester for some pimple-seared hump who shared his name with no stargazing facility. Nobody cared. I would be doing my shitty job. It was a good shitty job. I'd done it for a few years and it paid pretty well, enough to let Maura go part-time since the baby. There was a quality family plan, plus a quality theft plan, the paints and brushes I smuggled home for those weekends I tried to put something on canvas again, until the old agony would overwhelm me and I'd stop and briefly weep and then begin to drink and watch Maura cruise up and down the cable dial all night, never alighting on anything for more than a moment, her thumb

poised like a hairless and tiny yet impressively predatory animal above the arrow button, Maura herself bent on peeking into every corner of the national hallucination before bedtime.

She liked reality shows the best, and then the shows that purported to be about reality.

So, yes, I should have just surrendered, cinched the entitled scion her little pouch of entitlements, put in my calls to the name shufflers, done my duty.

I thought about that moment later on. Maybe I got extratuned to the concept of bitchhood once I became Purdy's, though I must confess I've always found such usage of the term for female dogs distasteful. My mother was a second-wave feminist. I wasn't comfortable saying 'cunt' until I was twenty-three, at which point, admittedly, I couldn't hold back for a time.

Or maybe it's just that I've always despised phrases like 'that fateful day,' but as time went on I found it hard to deny that the afternoon Horace launched his E Pluribus Pimpus oratory and McKenzie tried to reify my servility and I pictured titboning Vargina in a rare books room was pretty damn fateful. Or was it, in fact, just another random day, and it was I who did the fool thing, forced my hand?

What I said to McKenzie, there is no point repeating. It's enough to report my words contained nothing an arrogant, talentless, daddy-damaged waif wants to hear about herself. When I was finished she did not speak. A thickish vein in her pale head fluttered. The blue thing seemed to veer and switch direction. Then she took a few steps back and, still staring at me, phoned her damager. What was done to me was done in hours. My outburst was deemed hate speech, which called for immediate dismissal. I could hardly argue with them. I think it probably was hate speech. I really fucking hated that girl.

two

You could say I had experienced some technical difficulties. There had been bad times, years trickled off at jobs that purported to yield what superiors called, with true sadism, opportunities. These yielded nothing, unless you considered bong slavery, a few bogus spiritual awakenings, and the unswerving belief I could run a small business from my home, opportune. Still, before my outburst at the bastion, I had

made great strides. No more did I pine aloud for that time in the past when I had a future. Yes, I still painted on occasion, or at least stood at the easel and watched my brush hand twitch. It made for an odd, jerky style I hoped would get noticed someday.

I never confessed this last part to Maura. Our intimacy was largely civic. We spoke at length about our shared revulsion for the almost briny-scented, poop-flecked plunger under the bathroom sink, and also of a mutual desire to cut down on paper towels, but we never broached topics like hopes, or dreams. Hopes were stupid. Dreams required quarantine.

Still, Maura was a devoted mother, which, even if that often amounted to being helplessly present for the ongoing thwarting of a child's heart, meant something. Bernie was a beautiful boy. Good thing, too, as he'd become an expensive hobby. Preschool, preclothing for the preschool. Then there were the hidden costs, like food. Funny, isn't it, how much you can detest the very being you'd die for in an instant? I guess that's just families. Or human nature. Or capitalism, or something.

But the price of Bernie wasn't Bernie's fault. It wasn't Maura's, either. I was the

fool who let the starveling have it, who couldn't find another job, though I came close at a few places. The interviewers could maybe tell I had the old brain. Jobs weren't about experience anymore, just wiring. Also, my salary demands might have been high. I lost out to kids who lived on hummus and a misapprehension of history, the bright newbies bosses exploit without compunction because these youngsters are, in fact, undercover aristocrats mingling with the peasantry, each stint entered on their résumés another line in the long poem of their riskless youth.

Not that I resented them.

Besides, there really wasn't work for anyone. The whole work thing was over. I'd even called up my last employers, but there were no further plans for powdered wigs and brass-buckle shoes in the Bronx. I'd grown morose, detached, faintly palsied. I stopped reading the job listings, just rode the trains each day, simmering, until dinnertime.

Back in high school, I remembered, a soothing way to fall asleep after picturing tremendous breasts in burgundy bras (yes, the image pre-dated Vargina) had been to conjure the crimson blossom of bullet-ripped concert tees, the hot suck

and pour of flamethrower flame over pep rally bleachers. Typical teen shooter fluff, though I worried I'd inherited my grandmother's nutcake gene. I was fairly popular. Why did I slaver for slaughter?

The visions had stopped in college. Some huge and dainty hand peeled them off my skull walls.

I became a painter, at least at parties. I was happy for a time.

But now, riding the trains, or else home sitting with the bills, the old terrible feeling returned. Whenever I checked my bank balance the terrible feeling welled up in me. The goddamn asks, I'd sweep them with a Maxim gun or some other wipeout device whose history I learned of late at night on the war channels, a glass of Old Overholt rye on my knee. I was not bad off compared to most of the world. Why didn't anybody do anything? We could get a few billion of us together, rush the bastards. Sure, a good many of us would die, but unless the asks popped off some nukes, eventually they'd get overrun.

What was the holdup?

The terrible feeling tended to hover for a day or so, fade. Then I'd fantasize about winning the lottery, or inheriting vast fortunes. Sometimes I was a flamboyant libertine with plush orgy rooms, personal



Raymond Pettibon · No Title (*While He Lives*)

zoos. Sometimes I jetted around the world building hospitals, or making documentaries about the poor.

It all depended on my mood.

Days I didn't ride the trains, I'd take long walks in the neighbourhood. We lived in Astoria, Queens, as close to our jobs in Manhattan as we could afford. One afternoon I made a mission for myself: stamps for the latest bills (I'd ask for American flags, stick them on upside down in protest against our nation's foreign and domestic policies), paper towels, and – as a special treat to celebrate the acceleration of my fatal spiral – a small sack of overpriced cashews from the Greek market.

I'd cure my solipsistic hysteria with a noonday jaunt. Sights and smells. Schoolkids in parochial plaids. Grizzled men grilling meat. The deaf woman handing out flyers for the nail salon, or the other deaf woman with swollen hands and a headscarf who hawked medical thrillers in front of the drugstore.

This was a kind and bountiful neighbourhood: the Korean grocery, the Mexican taqueria, the Italian butcher shop, the Albanian café, the Arab newsstand, the Czech beer garden, everybody living in provisional harmony, keeping their hateful thoughts to themselves, except maybe a few of the Czechs.

A man who looked a bit like me, same eyeware, same order of sneaker, charged past. They were infiltrating, the freaking me's. The me's were going to wreck everything, hike rents, demand better salads. The me's were going to drive me away.

The Greeks were out of cashews. I bought pistachios, ate them in line at the post office. Or on line at the post office. I could no longer recall which phrase came naturally. Either way, there was always a line at the post office, people with enormous packages bound, I assumed, for family in distant, historically fucked lands. What were they sending? TVs? TiVos? Hamburgers? Hamburger Helper? The exporting of American culture, did it continue at this level, too? It couldn't for much longer. Not according to Horace's calculations. The line hardly moved. People couldn't fill out the forms. Others did not comprehend the notion of money orders. Come on, people, I thought-beamed. I'm on your side and I'm annoyed. Doesn't that concern you? Don't

you worry your behaviour will reduce me to generalizations about why your lands are historically fucked? Or does my nation's decline make my myopia moot? They should produce a reality show about how much this line sucks, I thought. Call it *On the Line*. Or *In the Line*. Half an hour later I reached the teller. I was about to ask for stamps when I realized I already had a book of them in my wallet. I did not need stamps. I needed a job. I needed to cool it with those pills from Maura's root canal.

Home beckoned, but so did a coconut flake. I was due back an hour ago, felt the admonishing telephonic pulses in my jeans, but instead crossed the avenue to the doughnut shop. There was a high school boy behind the counter, maybe saving up for the video game where you gut and flay everybody in the doughnut shop and gain doughnut life points. He wielded his tongs with affecting delicacy.

I thought again of my brutal visions of yore. My mother had always said I reminded her of her mother, Hilda. Since therapy, my mother had maintained that her issues, which prior to treatment had been known as her demons, stemmed from the fact that Hilda 'withheld.' I never knew my grandmother well. She had badly dyed hair and a persecution complex exacerbated towards the end of her life when she was fired from the culture beat at her synagogue's newsletter.

'That pig rabbi should have died in the camps,' she said.

Most of Hilda's utterances weren't so venomous. Most of her evil she must have withheld.

Now I took a booth near the window, watched the afternoon bridge traffic. Trucks piled up at the off-ramp, trailer sides browned with exhaust.

Not long ago Bernie said 'beep-beep' every time he heard a car horn. Later his favourite word was 'mine.' Now he was fluent in the cant of his tiny world. His leaps in speech had seemed otherworldly. What else was he mastering behind our backs? Little Judas. Maura and I had worked so hard to dig the family ditch for the three of us to rot in and now here came the rope of language to haul the boy out. 'Beep-beep' begets 'Mine,' which begets 'I hate you, Dad.' Then, if you're lucky, there's a quick 'I love you, Dad,' followed by 'Let go, Dad,' these last

words whispered under the thrum of ventilators, EKG machines.

My father had been that lucky.

Some natty loon sat alone at the next table. He wore a pill-herringbone blazer, crusty at the cuffs, guarded a shopping bag packed with neatly folded shopping bags. A notebook lay open on his table. It looked full of sketches, apothegms. His pen still had the wire on it from where he'd maybe snipped it at the bank. The loon muttered, picked white scabs on his head.

I could picture my colleagues back at the Mediocre development suite, Horace at his desk, unwrapping the outer, non-edible wrapping of his turkey wrap, Virginia holed up in her command nook, poring over ask dossiers and budget spreads, Llewellyn patched in from Zanzibar with the skinny on a give.

But I was at my new office now, my Formica workstation smeared with jelly and Bavarian cream. This scab-picker was my potential partner. We could make an ace development combo.

And the ask? Maybe the ask was that boy over there at the far booth, the one with fluorescent earbuds, a forehead full of leaky cysts. There was a horrible glitter in his eyes that looked like murder, or maybe just higher math.

The loon caught me staring at the boy, winked.

'What was that for?' I said.

The loon winked again. Teen brooder stood. I felt the glare of the leaky child, decided to meet the boy's gaze, try my best to transmit this thought: *I'm not the enemy, just an earlier iteration of our kind.*

'Goddamn fucking faggots!' the boy shouted, careened out the door.

Poor kid was a wild child, a homophobe. He might as well have been illiterate, guessing at supermarket signage. For all my adolescent rage, I had never included the marginalized or oppressed in my dream carnage. I never said gypped, or Indian giver, or paddy wagon, or accused anyone of welshing on a bet. If there ever evolved a tradition of locutions such as 'She tried to tranny me on that real estate deal,' you would not hear them out of my mouth. I never even called myself a yid with that tribal swagger I envied in others, though I had a right, or half a right, from my mother's side. I nearly spoke this truth aloud when the loon cackled.

'Don't mind the boy,' he said. 'I've known him since he was a child. A marvelous little specimen.'

The man's voice had odd nasal authority. He sounded like some mandarin of vintage radio, and hearing him I suddenly recalled certain items from my childhood, a particular carton of laundry detergent, the mouthfeel of a discontinued cola. The man dove back into his notebooks, his boy doodles and prurient runes. Even from here his sketches looked quite accomplished and insane.

Maybe someday he'd be heralded, a folk museum folk hero.

Maybe someday Bernie, still getting over his father's untimely but somehow not surprising death, would take his new girlfriend to see the disturbed but brilliant drawings by the kiddie-diddler who spent most of his adult life guarding a shopping bag full of shopping bags in a doughnut shop not far from where he, Bernie, grew up, but who also, unbeknownst to the world, inhabited a fabulous and secret universe of the mind.

My phone pulsed again. There were two messages, one from a number I recognized: the Mediocre development suite. The other was a text from Maura: *How's the donut, Fat Heart? Find a job yet? Buy milk for Bern. Also p. towels.*

The bile was a good sign.

It's when they stop trying to destroy you, my mother once said, that you should really start to worry.

THREE

Home, hidden by the refrigerator, I hovered over the garbage bin, gulped down a bottle of Vitamin Drink. We still dreaded the day that little Bernie, asquat now on the kitchen floor spooning oatmeal into the body cavity of a decapitated superhero, might spot this iridescent liquid, demand a sip. Vitamin Drink may or may not have contained vitamins, but it was too polluted for the tykes. They needed wholesome nectars humped back from the wholesome food empires in Manhattan. This sugary shit was for the dying. I was dying, surely, sugary-ly.

I made to speak before I did.

'A call. A message. From work.'

'What?' said Maura. 'Work? What work?'

Maura sat on a stool, fresh from the shower and still unclothed, pecked at her

laptop.

She had been raised in one of those happy, naked families from Vermont. I looked at her body now, remembered Bernie's weaning, that era of inconsolable sobs and farewell fondles. Maura's breasts, large and milk white when they'd been full of milk, had darkened, pancaked a bit, but they were still beautiful, and I was not just saying that, or thinking of saying that, to be kind.

'Wait,' said Maura, 'what?'

It was her I'm-downloading-a-crucial-file-from-the-office tone.

'A call from work on my voice mail,' I said. 'From old work. Vargina and Llewellyn. They want me to come in.'

'Why would they want that?'

'I don't know.'

'Wasn't firing you enough? Is this a legal thing? Do you need a lawyer?'

'I said I don't know.'

I leaned out from my trash niche. Bernie pointed at the bottle in my hand.

'Daddy, what are you drinking?'

'Coffee, Bern. Why, do you think I need a lawyer?'

'Do lawyers have foreskins?' said Bernie.

'I'm talking to Mommy,' I said.

'I have a foreskin.'

'I know, Bernie.'

'You don't.'

'True,' I said, opened the refrigerator door, sneaked the bottle back into the door rack.

'How come I have a foreskin, Daddy?'

'We've talked about this, don't you remember? Your mother and I decided that —'

'Hey, that's juice. I want some, Daddy! I want some juice!'

'Shit,' I said. 'Sorry. Bernie, it's not juice. It's for grown-ups. It's like coffee.'

'You said it *was* coffee.'

'That's right.'

'But it's pink!'

'It's pink coffee, Bernie. It's what I drink. It's what grownups drink.'

'Do superheroes have foreskins? Like my guy?'

He held up his headless hero.

'Yes. No. I don't know. Probably. So, who would I call, Maura? They want me tomorrow.'

'Do they, Daddy?'

'I don't know, Bernie. It's possible.'

'Do foreskins help you fly?'

'Maybe,' I said.

'All I'm saying,' said Maura, 'is you don't have to play it their way. That's all you've ever done.'

'Excuse me?' I said.

'Give me some juice!' Bernie called again. 'I want it!'

'Ask nicely.'

'Please.'

'But it's not for kids, Bernie.'

'Don't confuse him like that,' said Maura. 'Daddy's going to give Bernie some pink coffee juice that's not really coffee. Would Bernie like Daddy to give Bernie some pink coffee juice that's not really coffee? Daddy, would you please give Bernie some pink coffee juice that's not really coffee?'

'Fine!' I said.

'Fine!' said Bernie.

He flicked his guy and a cold gob of oatmeal slapped my cheek. I could see this was the beginning of something. Like sudden sympathy for Goliath. What was the phrase? Tell it not in Gath? How about we start telling it?

'What?' said Maura.

'Was I mumbling again?'

'Who's Goliath?' said Bernie. 'A superhero? Is he a bad guy? A masher?'

'He's a masher, for sure,' I said.

'Whether he's a bad guy depends on your politics.'

'What's politics?'

'Well, let me see. It's —'

'Does Goliath have a foreskin?'

'Not for long. Not when David's done with him.'

'Who's David?'

'A foreskin collector.'

'What are you telling him!' said Maura.

'Nothing,' I said. 'He should know about the Bible. He lives in a fucking theocracy.'

'Jesus, language, Milo.'

'Daddy! Juice!'

'Okay, Bern, but first, how about some water?'

I filled a cup from the tap. Bernie batted it away, lunged toward the refrigerator.

'Give me pink coffee juice, Daddy!'

'Okay,' I said. 'Okay.'

I dumped out the tap water, took the Vitamin Drink from the refrigerator. Back turned, I mimed a long pour, added a drop for colour, refilled the cup from the tap.

Bernie stared up at me.

'Let go, Dad,' the boy seemed to be saying, but his beautiful mouth wasn't moving.

Later, in bed, Maura and I cuddled in the way of a couple about to not have sex. It never appeared to bother us much, unless we watched one of those cable dramas about a sexless marriage. Then we'd curse the inanity of the show, its implausibility, switch over to something where the human wreckage was too crass and tan to touch us.

'I still don't understand why they want to meet with you,' said Maura.

'I don't, either. Maybe they realized they forgot to take the shirt off my back.'

'It's not funny. That girl's father. I don't know.'

'What more can they do to me?'

'Oh, I'm sure there are all sorts of things we'd never even think of.'

'That's very calming. Thank you.'

'I'm just saying. You never learned to protect yourself. You always rail against the evil and exploitation in the world but you still act as though everybody has your best interests at heart. I never got it. You're like an idiot savant without the savant part.'

'I still have faith in the basic goodness of humanity. Shoot me.'

'Don't be so sure that's not the plan.'

Vargina had reserved the conference room. A tray of turkey wraps sat near the edge of the table. They looked like university wraps, from the cafeteria downstairs, not the deli across the street. They had no avocado.

Llewellyn and Vargina sat across the table. We took turns popping the tops of our sodas, listened to the sounds reverberate in the wood-paneled room. The word 'reverberate' reverberated in my mind, which I could now picture as a wood-paneled room.

'It's nice to see you again,' said Vargina.

'Hear, hear,' said Llewellyn. 'So, hoss, what have you been doing to yourself?'

'Excuse me?'

'Just shitting you,' said Llewellyn. 'Seriously, how's it going?'

'I didn't see Horace when I walked in,' I said to Vargina.

'He's at a lunch.'

'A lunch?'

'He's working on an ask.'

'Horace? He's a temp.'

'No longer,' said Llewellyn. 'He's looking like a little earner.'

'Very exciting possibility, Horace's ask,' said Vargina. 'Very worthy. The lady is a major admirer of our dance program.'

'Where's the money from?'

'Her husband's company. Private security. Military catering.'

'Blood sausage, anyone?' I said.

'Oh, please,' said Llewellyn.

'We can't wash the bad off anybody's money, now, can we? But we can make something good out of all the misery. That's what you never understood.'

'I understood it. I'm just not sure I believed it.'

'Oh, some kind of martyr now, are you?'

'A martyr has to give a shit.'

'Get over yourself, Milo. You're a sad man. A born wanker. You were born into the House of Wanker. You're a berk, and you probably think I'm just saying your last name.'

Llewellyn's Cambridge year was the stuff of office legend, thanks to Llewellyn, but I'd always suspected he lifted most of his lingo from the British editions of American men's magazines.

'Wanker,' I said. 'Don't know that word. Is that a Southern thing? What is that, Richmond? Newport News? Is that like peanuts in your Coke?'

'You have a provincial mind, hucklebuck.'

'Pardon?'

'It's a global globe now,' said Llewellyn. 'We sink or swim together.'

'It's a global globe?'

'That's right.'

'Moron.'

'Gentlemen,' said Vargina.

'Why am I here?' I said. 'I thought I was fired.'

'You were,' said Vargina.

'You are,' said Llewellyn.

'Then what's going on?'

'We have special circumstances,' said Vargina.

'You have special circumstances,' I said.

'Yes.'

'I have not-so-special circumstances,' I said.

'If you help us with our circumstances,' said Vargina, 'we might be able to assist you with yours.'

The door opened and in walked a large man with a moist pompadour and a tight beige moustache. Dean Cooley was not a dean.



Raymond Pettibon · No Title (*I've Still Got*)

He was Mediocre's chief development officer. Several groups worked under him, and he spent most of his energy on the more lucrative ones, like business, law, or medicine. His art appreciation did not reach much past the impressionistic prints from the Montreal Olympics he'd mounted on his office wall. He'd been a marine, and then some kind of salesman, had started with cars and ended up in microchips and early internet hustles. Here in the cozy halls of academe, as he had put it during our first team talk, he meant to reassess his priorities. Meanwhile he would train us maggots how to ask asks and get gives. Cooley was a hard-charger who often began his reply to basic office queries by invoking 'the lessons of Borodino.' He was the kind of man you could picture barking into a field phone, sending thousands to slaughter, or perhaps ordering the mass dozing of homes. People often called him War Crimes. By

people, I mean Horace and I. By often, I mean twice.

'Dean,' said Vargina. 'This is the man we were telling you about. Milo Burke.'
'Nice to meet you.'

We'd met a dozen times before, at lunches, cocktail receptions. He had stood beside me while his wife explained a project she'd embarked upon in her student days, something to do with Balinese puppets and social allegory.

'I assume you are wondering why, after being terminated for cause two months ago, we've asked you to come in,' Cooley began.

'A fair assumption,' I said.

'What you need to understand is that the incident with Mr Rayfield's daughter was very serious. Mr Rayfield is still angry. You made his daughter doubt herself, artistically. He had to buy her an apartment in Copenhagen so she could heal.'

'I'm sorry, sir.'

'The whole debacle nearly cost us a new, working telescope for our observatory.'

'I do understand that.'

'But what you also need to understand is that we are not simply some heartless, money-mad, commercial enterprise. We are partly that, of course, but we are also a compassionate and, yes, money-mad place of learning. And while we're on the topic of learning, we think people can learn from their mistakes. We believe in redemption.'

'As long,' said Llewellyn, 'as it is not tied to a particular ideology or religious tradition and promotes inclusiveness.'

'Is that from the handbook, Lew?' said Dean Cooley. 'Anyway, the point is, we are a family.'

'A family dedicated to furthering science and the humanities in an increasingly meaning-starved culture,' said Vargina.

'Well put,' said Dean Cooley.

'But may I remind us all,' said Llewellyn, 'that here in development our task is to raise money for said furthering. We can't hug all day. We've got to get out there and work.'

'Also well put. Especially these days. We need every drop of philanthropy we can get. We must fasten our lips to the spigot and suck, so to speak. Which is

where you come in, Mr Burke.'

'Pardon?'

'It's an ask,' said Vargina.

'A big one,' said Llewellyn. 'Not quite Rayfield range, but big.'

'Why me?' I said.

'Good question,' said Vargina.

'Yes,' said Cooley. 'That is the question, as the Bard might say.'

'The Bard?'

'What's so funny?' said Cooley.

'Nothing, sir,' I said. 'I just didn't know people still used that term.'

'Well, I'm a people, Burke. Am I not?'

'Of course.'

'If you prick me, do I not bleed, you scat-gobbling, motherrimming prick?'

Occasionally Dean Cooley reverted to a vocabulary more suited to his marine years, but some maintained it was only when he felt threatened, or stretched for time.

'Yes, sir,' I said.

'Trust me, Milo,' said Llewellyn.

'Nobody wants it to be you. You were nothing but dead weight since the day you arrived. Nobody respects you and your leering got on people's nerves.'

'My leering?'

Vargina shrugged, tapped her pen against her legal pad.

'Listen,' said Cooley. 'I don't give a slutty snow monkey's prolapsed uterus for your office politics. The point is that Burke needs to come back and complete this mission.'

'Why?' I said. 'Why me?'

'It's the ask,' said Vargina. 'The ask demands it.'

'Excuse me?'

'He says he knows you. His wife is an alumnus of our extension program and they want to be donors, but when he found out you were in our office, he requested your presence. He wants to work with somebody he trusts.'

'Who is this person?' I said.

'His name is Stuart. Purdy Stuart. You do know him, don't you?'

'Yes. I know him.'

I said nothing more, felt now like the boy in the fairy-tale book I often read to Bernie, the polite farmer's son who stands before the cruel ogre's castle.

Each time Bernie would ask: 'Daddy, why does the boy have to knock on the door? Why can't he just turn around and go home?'

Each time I'd chuckle with stagey amusement, say: 'Well, kid, if he didn't open the door, we wouldn't have a story, would we?'

Odds were good I was, in the final analysis, nothing but a scat gobbler from the House of Wanker.

'I mean,' I said now, 'I used to know him.'

'Well, that's just swell,' said Cooley, rose, petted his moustache with a kind of cunnidigital ardour.

'I'm late for another meeting,' he said. 'Tell our contestant what he's won.'

The door clicked shut behind him. It did not reverberate.

'What have I won?' I said.

'Your old job back,' said Vargina. 'If you make this work.'

'And if I don't?'

'You'll be finished,' said Llewellyn. 'For ever. Do we have clarity?'

'Obscene amounts.'

Llewellyn stood, stalked off. It would not be the last I saw of him, I knew. The ogres, they just lurk behind those gnarled oak doors so ubiquitous in fairy-tale carpentry, wait for gentle lads to knock. Trolls, on the other hand, they must have a paging device. Either way, the odious is ever ready.

Vargina and I sat there for a while, a new, electric awkwardness in the room.

'Can you make it happen?' said Vargina.

'When have I ever disappointed you?'

'Nearly every day that we have worked together.'

'Listen,' I said. 'I just want to apologize.'

'For what?'

'For the leering.'

'The leering?'

'You know. That stuff Llewellyn said.'

'Don't apologize to me. Apologize to Horace.'

'Horace?'

'He's the one who reported you. But don't worry. He wasn't vindictive. He just said he didn't understand why somebody would need to be in the closet in this day and age. At least around here.'

'In the closet,' I said.

'But he's a kid. He doesn't know how complicated these things can get.'

'No,' I said. 'I guess he doesn't.' ◊

The Sex, Drugs & Rock 'n' Roll Were Incidental

By *Matthew De Abaitua*

'Just a very unpleasant camping experience'
Joseph Coakley, quoted in Woodstock: The Oral History by Joel Makower

WE ARRIVED at White Lake farm in the late afternoon after a dusty hike along back lanes. There were no allotted pitches, nor was the campsite owner there to meet us. Sylvia went to check on the facilities while I hunted out a promising spot to pitch the tent. Summer showers had left the ground soft. The cow field curved down from a ridge into a deep bowl. Further rainfall would turn that lowland into a muddy bog, so I resolved to pitch high on the ridge on the edge of a wood. My first intimation that something was wrong came from Sylvia.

Her expression was grave with foreboding. 'The facilities are rudimentary, the site is filling up, but many of the campers seem ill-equipped.'

A muggy afternoon deepened into a sultry twilight. I gained the ridge and gazed down. A great crowd was massing around a distant orange haze. I asked Sylvia if she knew what it was. She did not. The night grew cold. I set a campfire and lit it with a single match. All that existed in the world for me then was illuminated by the flickering light of the campfire: Sylvia's strong cheekbones, her chestnut hair tied back, her green singlet dusty from the trail.

All night, I dreamed of a great exodus, of weary feet tramping. The Indian followed the herds of mastodon and giant buffalo across the ice of the Baring Straits to Newfoundland, and then down through the continent upon a ceaseless ancient quest; the Great Campers who walked the land before us and whose footsteps echoed under the soil.

I woke from this dream and felt the need to use the facilities. It is a scientific fact that the body expends warmth heating up a full bowel and bladder. As I put on my boots, I was minded of the wisdom of Deuteronomy concerning camp latrines: 'Thou shalt have a place also without the camp, whither thou shalt go

forth abroad: and thou shalt have a paddle upon thy weapon, and it shall be, when thou wilt ease thyself abroad, thou shalt dig therewith, and shalt turn back and cover that which cometh from thee.'

I took up my paddle and went out into the woods. The ground cursed at me. There were lovers under my boots, lovers wrapped in plastic sheeting. Under moonlight I saw bodies – bodies everywhere, in fitful, cold and painful sleep. My dream of exodus had come true. As I slept, a mass of people had arrived at the campsite. These child-like half-naked people had done nothing to ease their hardship, not even hollowed out a curve in the ground for their hipbone to rest in.

'What are you doing here?' I asked them.

'We have come for the music,' was their groggy reply.

'But there is no music,' I said.

A bearded naked man disagreed with me. He took me up on to the ridge and pointed to the distant orange glow. 'That is where the music is,' he said. 'Yesterday, some of my friends went to listen to it. I haven't seen them since.'

I picked my way through the sleepers and into the woods. I dug a hollow and crouched over it. The treetops thrashed overhead, broken guy ropes and shreds of flysheet snagged in the branches.

Dawn rose upon what I can only describe as the most disastrous camping trip in human experience. As I breakfasted, frying a little ham fat over the fire, our fellow campers hung around in muddy and sodden blankets, as many as jackals. Sylvia shared her bread and dripping with them, and they in turn offered her a reefer and a jug of wine. All good campers are abstinent; the discipline required at camp quickly falls apart with excessive libation. She cheerfully refused their offer, but found them friendly and implored me to help them.

The clouds were low and swift. Spiders strengthened their webs. Portents of a storm. A camp needs a captain. The young men responded to my call to

action. In no time, we strung up a tarpaulin between the trees. Again they offered us wine and smouldering reefers, as if it was their panacea to cure all ills. Their friends returned with stories of other goings-on across the campsite. The music, I ascertained, was far out. But the mood was labile, jackknifing from bliss to grinding fear. The barbed wire fences enclosing the site had been breached, spilling more ardent campers into our midst, and the mud in the hollow cow field had been churned into a quagmire.

'We must help the people down there too,' said Sylvia. I agreed. We packed a light rucksack with provisions for the day and a change of dry clothes, and then we set off over the ridge and down towards the orange haze. The camp kitchens had been torched overnight, in an act of self-sabotaging delirium. Everywhere the spirit was poised between creation and destruction.

'It's like a war zone,' Sylvia gasped.

Overhead, a helicopter kept a watchful distance, the violence of its rotor blades matched by flinching and twitching expressions upon the faces of stupefied campers. A trio of nuns passed ahead of us; they too had come to minister to this tragic assembly. I asked the nuns if any campers had died and one of them held up two fingers.

The crowd loitered bovine in the mud. It took hours of apologies to pick our way through them. At last, we reached the orange haze – a rig of lights and a stage, bookended by two towers, tall assemblies of scaffolding with a tarpaulin stretched between them. Here, I reasoned, was the source of the music that everyone spoke of. Yet the stage was empty.

The long-brewing storm broke with terrifying vigour: the towers listed and shook, and the tarp – for want of a guy rope – twisted and billowed. The rain raked over the crowd. Sylvia and I, secure in our ponchos and boots, erected makeshift shelters out of plastic sheeting and splintered planks, the trash that was strewn upon the earth. No sooner had we heaved another improvised bivouac into position than it bulged with cold and weary youngsters. One man refused my offer of shelter. He lifted his dirty face to the downpour and accepted it as his due.

A toothless clown clambered up

onstage. He warned the crowd away from the towers. At last, I thought, someone to take charge of the rabble. I pleaded with my fellow campers to return to their tents and seek shelter. No, they would wait for the music.

‘There is no music,’ I shouted against the gale.

‘You are wrong,’ they muttered.

The clown took leave of his senses and lead the mob into a chant to ward off the rain. Any good camper comes prepared for rain and should have no need to resort

to sympathetic magic. Under foot, the mud liquefied and turned to a foul slick. Camp hygiene was the first to suffer. The site was rank with body odour and it was apparent, downwind of them, that the facilities had been overwhelmed.

I tried my best to enter into the spirit of the thing. Against the silence flowing from the stage, spontaneous bands of music-makers sprung up; a beautiful woman played the flute accompanied by a shirtless, long-haired gentleman on the bongos. A small crowd danced; the yearn-

ing for rapture teetered on the verge of desperation. From the stage, the toothless clown persisted with his announcements, even as the wind tried to blow him off the stage. A messenger crouched beside the clown and handed up a piece of paper containing further messages, and from the clown’s serious expression, I reasoned there was bad news to come. Behind the stage, at the centre of its own tempest, a helicopter reared over flattened grass, the side doors open, preparing to evacuate the first of the musicians. ◇

THE FESTIVAL ISSUE: WOODSTOCK

An Extract from *Must: The Inside Story*

Peggy Shaw in collaboration with Clod Ensemble. By Peggy Shaw and Suzy Willson.

15 August 1969. New York City.

I HAD TICKETS to Woodstock but never made it out of town. When I went into labour they placed my feet up, head back. The nurse said,

‘Lay down and I’ll shave your pubic hair and give you an enema.’

I told her I’d rather be in the mud and the rain listening to Jimi Hendrix.

My hips were growing wider and wider, like a doublewide trailer. Room enough for a whole family. My hips were keeping the door from shutting. When the doctor came in, he said there wasn’t enough room for both of us.

I was a giant among men.

They pinned me to the table
like Gulliver,
thousands of ropes keeping me still,
shooting little arrows into me.

I told the doctor to think of my body as magic.

‘Just relax,’ he said, smoking his pipe.

My daughter was ready to touch down on the planet, but she had to climb up and out of my womb, ‘cause they had me tipping backwards, my feet in cold stirrups. (That was thirty-eight years ago, before they discovered the law of gravity applied to women.) I was wearing a cosmic suit, with stars and moons and planets. They forced me to disrobe.

‘I will kill you and your whole family if you don’t get me out of this pain.’

The Time I Bled All Over The Place

By James Greer

IT HAPPENED in Philadelphia, which is a city on the northeastern coast of America, for those of you who don't get out much. Philadelphia features the Liberty Bell, which is famous for (inscrutable) reasons of its own, but is best known for its cameo appearance in a Guided By Voices song called 'Echos Myron', from the *Bee Thousand* album. We were playing a club in Philly's Chinatown called the Trocadero, and a curious feature of the Trocadero was that it had two levels, on both of which you were able to buy beer in bottles (this was back when America was still a lawless and often awesome place, in other words in 1995). The show itself was unremarkable except in the sense that we were, of course, insanely great, as usual, and as a result, were called back for three encores. In those days by the time we got to the third encore there was often some discussion as to what we should play, because having released at that point only two or three albums that everybody knew, and not having learned every single one of the songs on those albums for the purposes of playing live, our repertoire was somewhat more limited than that enjoyed by later iterations of the band, who were known for sometimes playing for three days straight without repeating a song. It doesn't really matter: I remember the discussion, but I don't remember what we played.

For whatever reason, my drink of choice that evening had been some kind of vodka concoction, consisting of vodka, ice and a glass, and probably another ingredient I'm forgetting. It may or may not have been the famous 'Pink Drink', surrounding which there has grown over the years some mythomania, mostly due to the song called 'Pink Drink' that Robert Pollard wrote and had slated for inclusion on *The Power of Suck* album we never made, for reasons which are far too complex to explore right here, right now. It's irrelevant, anyway. The point is, I was very drunk, all of us in the band were very drunk, and so as a consequence my memory in this instance has had to be

padded out with the help of an obliging friend who happened to be in the audience that night.

What happened, in short, was this: between encores, our presence was requested back onstage both in the usual manner – by cheers and stomps and applause and the ritual chant 'GBV! GBV!' that Bob inadvertently and artificially invented at the beginning of the album *Propeller*, and only slightly regrets – and by a shower of mostly-empty beer bottles raining on the stage itself, many of which shattered upon impact, so that by the time we shuffled back on for the third encore the stage was covered in shards of broken glass. Making it an inopportune time for guitarist Mitch Mitchell, in an admirable excess of rock's natural spirit of excess, to awkwardly bear-hug/tackle me from behind. We both went down in a heap, and I cut open my right wrist on one of the bottle shards. It started bleeding. A lot. I noticed, but in a detached, third-person, kind of 'huh' way. Pete Jamison, Manager For Life, also noticed and quickly found a towel to which he applied a quantity of soap (obtained where? obtained how?) and between songs I would go over to him and he would apply the towel to my wound in an attempt to staunch the bleeding. It didn't work, because playing bass requires a lot of right-wrist movement, which obviated any amelioratory effects from the soaped-up towel. In my recollection, I bled quite a lot, but I'm never sure how far I can trust my memory, which is sieve-like at the best of times and through which entire events have sluiced away under the effect of alcohol.

Here's where audience member John Golden came to my rescue during a recent correspondence, through which it transpired that he had been there, and had been impressed enough by what he saw that the memory remains clearer for him than for me.

In John's words: *'I was geeked enough to be right up front, but also clever enough to be sufficiently soused. The bad news is I have no recollection whatsoever regarding opening*

act(s). I don't even remember if I saw them and forgot them, or spent that time working on the aforementioned sousing. The good news is that from the moment the first set ended and the encores began, the memories are indelible. To answer your question: yes, OH YES, I most certainly saw the blood. Everyone in at least the first twenty, erm, rows (?) must have seen the blood. When I tell the story, I always say (I really do) that the blood was "pouring down (your) bass." I also remember the meteor shower of beer bottles directed at the stage by an audience starving for another encore and reciting the obvious chant while putting said bottles into flight. One whizzed right past my ear – one of those delirious and dangerous moments that seem profound when one is young, drunk and at a rock show. You know, in a no guts, no glory kind of way. So yes, you ambled back onstage, a stage positively strewn with broken glass, and Mitch tackled you from behind. You both went down, you both came up. You, with some major artery seemingly severed. The rest of the band came out. Bob launched into song. And you played, as I mentioned, with blood pouring down your bass. The other thing I often mention when telling the story is that at that point, it no longer mattered that I never saw a Kiss show back when they were in their prime.'

I have no idea who 'Kiss' may be, probably some local Philadelphia band, probably not as good as the Strapping Fieldhands (few bands were or are) but I appreciate John's confirmation of my own impressions of that night. Here's what I would add: in my memory, there was girl videotaping the show from just to the side of the stage, and I think she may have fainted. Bob didn't notice that anything was wrong, because when Bob is in rock mode he notices nothing, literally, that does not directly impinge on his delivery of the song. I'm not sure what Toby or Kevin or Mitch noticed, because I was too busy trying to stop the bleeding and the urge to scream in pain. We made it through the three or four or eleventy-seven songs that constituted the third and final encore, and when I went backstage I was surrounded by well-intentioned people who urged me to go to the ER and have my wound (which occurred on the soft part of the wrist just below the hand, and was deep, but did not sever any arteries, obviously, or I would not still be alive) stitched. I refused, because there was still some alcohol left, and I believed, back then, that it was bad form to go any-

where while there was still alcohol left. 'I must have lost a pint of vodka,' I remember saying, and then tried to replace that pint as quickly as I could. Bob's comment, when he saw the extent of my injury, was that 'Guided By Voices don't get stitches.'

Back at the hotel later that night, I began to regret my decision to leave the wound untreated, as I had trouble sleeping because of the throbbing pain in my wrist. And at the next show, in Washington D.C. (either at the Black Cat or the new 9:30 Club), I regretted it even more, because no matter how I bandaged the thing, the wound kept opening up, and Pete had to stand by the side of the stage and apply soaped-up towel after soaped-up towel to my wrist in a fruitless attempt to get the damn thing to stop bleeding. Luckily, that was the last show of the tour, and except for a taping of a few songs we had to do for a D.C. radio station, I then had two weeks or so to

let the thing heal. And like all things eventually either do or do not, it did.

I'm left with a scar that will stay with me until I die, and what I guess is a funny, if gory, story. As for the bass – that poor early sixties Thunderbird, I believe it suffered the worst. Try as I might, I could not get all the blood cleaned out of that thing. I took the strings off, and the pickguard. I used rubbing alcohol and Q-tips, but the blood had poured down into the pick-ups

and dried there, and I was not in the mood to open up the guts of my instrument and mess with its mysterious mojo. Somewhere, today, in the pawnshops or music stores of Dayton, Ohio, or possibly in the hands of a new owner – who if he or she knew its sanguine history would freak out at its indelible but essential grossness – you can find that bass and, in it, some residue of my blood. I am between happy and sad about that idea. ◇

Raymond Pettibon · *No Title (In some of)* · 2000
pen and ink on paper
22¼ × 16¼ inches (56.5 × 41.3 cm)

THE FESTIVAL ISSUE: ISLE OF WIGHT

Miles Davis Canoodles!

*Granny Takes a Trip founder
Nigel Waymouth was there*

THE LAST TWO big pop festivals I went to were the 1969 and 1970 Isle of Wight Festivals. If I can recover enough memory from the clouds of pot I'd say I remember more of the '69 event. The 1970 festival was spent sitting in Donovan's caravan backstage, listening to him and John Sebastian swapping songs. As a result I failed to see Jimi Hendrix and The Who onstage. I did go a bit weak at the knees when I spotted Miles Davis, lying on the grass, dressed in black, shades and all, canoodling with a beautiful blonde woman. It seemed to me the ultimate picture of cool. The year before we had witnessed the first return of Bob Dylan to performing live after his motorcycle accident. We had heard the *Basement Tapes*, *John Wesley Harding* and *Nashville Skyline* and listened to all the rumours but now we would



see the re-emergence of the man himself. He was backed by The Band, who were already a legend in their own right. Dylan seemed nervous and reluctant, but it wasn't the kind of cool reluctance of a Miles Davis performance: Dylan seemed a bit unsteady and his performance was short, unlike his present day very generous

and confident two-and-a-half-hour-long shows. Still, it was a thrill to see him again and no one was really disappointed. People forget that that year's Isle of Wight festival was only a couple of weeks after Woodstock and had a much larger attendance. It was Glastonbury before Glastonbury, but without the £7,000 yurts. ◇

The Kick

Fiction by Kele Okereke

HE IS SITTING patiently in the outdoor section of the McDonalds at the entrance to Liverpool Street train station. It is ten o'clock on Monday morning, the rush hour is subsiding. He watches the strangers pass each other below, darting in and out of each other like grey-coloured fish at the bottom of the sea, being careful not to touch each other. He is waiting for her, and though she is late, he does not care. He is remembering being in secondary school, and running through this station every morning. It all comes back to him: the robot voice over the tannoy, the dull sound of a thousand feet marching, his quickness of breath as he weaved in between the suited businessmen. This train station was one of the few places that he felt he could look people in the eye. It did not matter if you held the gaze of a passing stranger; they would be gone in seconds, intimacy without any consequences. Every face on its way to work told a different story: stress, fatigue – even back then, as a child, he had hoped that he would never look like these grown-ups. He wonders what his face says about his problems today.

She is always late and today is no different. He sips the coffee he bought for her. It is lukewarm and she will not drink it now. She never drank coffee anyway; she said she didn't like the taste. But she will need something to get her through today. He stops his thoughts mid flow; this day will only be possible if he does not allow himself to think about what he is doing. He pulls his denim jacket tighter around his shoulders and sighs, focusing again on the swarming mass of people below him and that's when he sees her, on the floor below, wearing the black corduroy jacket that she thinks makes her look older, clutching her purse to her chest; not making eye contact with anyone. He wants to comfort her. Like this, she looks like her mother, but he will not tell her because he knows how angry she would get. She starts to climb the stairs. He wants to run, run as fast as he can away from here. Their eyes have not met; he could do it, he could . . . but she is looking up now, scanning the concourse.

She reaches the top of the stairs. Their eyes meet. After an awkward moment he offers a feeble wave. She smiles weakly then looks down at the ground. Hey, she says. Hey, he replies. I'm sorry I'm late. Don't be, it's all right. She sits at the table outside. He is not sure if he should hug her or not. He decides not to. And for a moment they sit just looking at each other. He thinks that she might cry. Hey, he interrupts her, I bought you a McMuffin, I think it might be cold. Thanks, she says, without looking at it. He pushes it towards her and she says nothing, just looks at the wrapper and starts to play with it. She is still angry with him, she is still hurt: but there is nothing that he can do about the past. She is looking into the concourse at a toddler playing while his parents eat, walking backwards through the tables and chairs of the restaurant. She is staring at the child intently and then she looks away, resting her head on her hands. Michelle, he says, and then again in a softer voice, Chelley. He knows exactly what she is thinking and, even though he knows that they are going to miss the 10.12 train, he puts his hand on top of hers and lets it lie there.

She gets her toughness from her mother. She is relying on it now as they descend the escalator together. She is telling herself not to cry. She thinks about what her mother would do. Her mother, who survived the move from Lagos to the UK in the seventies, who survived an alcoholic, womanizing husband, who raised two children on her own when he ran off back to Nigeria. Who, no matter what, kept her head held high. Recently she had come to realize that she is like her mother in more ways than she had thought, and although it was mainly a good thing, there were times when it worried her. There was a hardness appearing inside her, a barrier that was stopping her emotions from flowing. She did not cry when Marcus left her, she buried her feelings. She learnt this technique from her mother; it was how she had dealt with her sadness at being forty years old and alone. Her mother was still pretty, still desirable, she thought, and still must have felt desire,

but she did not let herself express it. Now her social life was baptisms, holy communions, weddings and funerals. Or Circle 21, a weekly meeting for all the Nigerians in the parish, where they would gossip and talk about who was doing what back home. She did not want a life like her mother, she would never let a man's shadow have such an impact over her own life, and for the most part she had kept that promise. But Marcus had been different, he was the first man that she had truly fallen for, he wasn't like all the boys in her year who talked about computer games and lied about what they had done with girls. Marcus was a man, five years her senior. At first it had just been fun; they had met at a party. She had thought he was handsome, mysterious; she liked the way he smiled at her across the room. He was self-assured, aloof almost. When he leaned to kiss her she felt that this was what it was like to be desired properly by a man. And that was how it started, something fun, meeting after school to go and sit in the park, fucking in his flat in the daytime, watching DVDs on his sofa with the smell of marijuana in the air. He made her laugh. He always asked about her day, always walked her back to the end of her road. And although at times he appeared distant, caught up in his own problems, she liked that, found it intriguing. She wanted to know more about him, to win him over – it had only been six weeks but she caught herself fantasizing about cooking for him, even having babies together one day. She had fallen in the way that first love always falls, completely and resolutely his. So when the call came that Thursday afternoon, she did not know that there was something wrong. He had said that he wanted to meet her that night. They met at Fortune House, the café at the end of his road. He told her that she was a great girl, but that this had come to an end for him. He did not feel that it was going anywhere. She did not cry, though she wanted to. She just felt deflated, as if someone had let the air out of her. She sat in silence, and nodded her head. He walked her to the end of the road, kissed her on her cheek, and walked the other way. There is no preparation, no prevention for the first heartbreak. She felt stupid and she made a promise to herself that she would never let herself feel like this ever again. She would never fall for another man like this: she would protect herself. In the fol-

lowing weeks she threw away the things that he had bought her, all gone. She never wanted to be reminded of him. It was in these following weeks that she found out that she was pregnant.

THEY SILENTLY board the next train, the 10.26 to Southend, choosing a deserted middle carriage. She sits next to the window, and he sits next to her. She is staring out of the window at the tracks, not wanting to meet his eye. He gets the message and is somewhat relieved as he doesn't have to make conversation now. He wonders, will she hate him for ever for what she is about to do today?

She is thinking about her father. She cannot remember much about him personally, he left when she was still a child. The only way she pictures him now is how she saw him in a photograph her mother keeps by her bed, a picture of him and her mother in Lagos on a motorcycle in the seventies. He looks handsome with his beard and kinky wild hair, orange shirt open at the chest. And she looks pretty in the thin pink dress she wore, her hair plaited up in a bun. So different to how she sees her mother now. She hadn't told her mother about the abortion; she never could. Her mother had hated Marcus from the start, distrustful of his intentions. This older white man, what was he doing with her teenage Nigerian daughter? Although she never confronted him herself, she moaned constantly whenever Michelle got ready to meet him in the evenings. Have you finished your homework? What time will you be home? Endless questions to try and delay her. Do you think I was born yesterday, Chelle, do you think that Nigeria is such a far away place? You are a smart girl, don't be a fool for this one, don't make the same mistakes that I did. Mummy, enough, she would say, exasperated. I have to go, or I will be late. She kissed her on the cheek before she left the flat. Now it was dawning on her that her mother had been right all along.

He is thinking about the day when she told him. She called him in the afternoon at work. They had not spoken since they had split up and there was something in the tone of her voice, it was curt, clipped. She wasn't giving anything away. He called her back in his lunch break and that was when she told him. He was careful not to let his feelings show. Though he was shaking, he asked her, in his most matter-of-fact voice,

what she wanted to do about it. Well, what do you want me to do? C'mon Chelle, what do you want to do? He was starting to see flashes of a future that he did not want but he did not say anything. He could not pre-empt or interrupt, it all had to be her decision. Relax, she said, I don't want to have this baby, maybe I might have if things had been different, but they aren't, are they? His world swung back into focus. But she had left it very late, she was in her twenty-second week, the child already formed inside her. She was going to have it done privately. How much does it cost? He offered to pay for it. She said that it had been hard, she could feel it inside her. They had sent her leaflets about what the process would entail, about general anaesthetic, about forceps and the physical and mental pain she would feel afterwards. About the chances that the procedure would fail. She had found all of this overwhelming, frightening, with no one to talk to, but she had decided that it was best. He listened attentively, she had made the appointment for next week, Monday, at a clinic in Southend, and she knew that it was short notice, but would he come with her? They arranged to meet the following Monday at Liverpool Street station at ten a.m. Both of them wondering how it would feel to be reunited under such circumstances.

Her leg brushes his leg as the train is pulling out of Rochford, and she pulls away discreetly, hoping that he doesn't notice, but he does. She watches the rows of houses with big sprawling gardens, different shades of brown and greens. She sees a man in his back garden burning things on a bonfire, the smoke rising in a grey column; she cannot work it out exactly but it looks like a rocking horse, burning in the sunlight.

AS THEY GET out of the station at Southend he pulls out a map that he has drawn for directions to the clinic. He is saddened to be getting off the train. She had fallen asleep and he had let her head lie on his shoulder. It felt like old times. Now, out in the salty sea-air of Southend, the reality of what they are about to do hits him. It's this way, I think, he leads her away from the motorway to the seafront. She can smell the sea as soon as she steps off the train. She hadn't been to Southend since she was a child. Every year there was a church coach trip to either Margate

or Southend and her mother took her and her brother every year. She preferred Southend because of the pleasure dome, the mini theme park at the end of the pier. Her favourite ride was the waltzers. She loved the sensation of spinning so fast that she was out of control, the exhilaration of simulated danger. Unconsciously that was why she chose the Southend clinic: there were lots of good memories in the town. He looks at his watch: the appointment is for one p.m. They are almost an hour and a half early. I'm hungry, he says – A little. Let's stop and get some food.

They stop at a café at the start of the promenade, hit by the smell of fried food as they enter. The tablemats are lime green and sticky. They are alone in the café, apart from two builders with dust-stained overalls. They look at the menu and the old lady behind the till eyes them suspiciously. He orders a bacon sandwich and a cup of tea and some toast. They've told her not to eat. They sit by the window and watch the clouds move quickly over the sea. He starts to tell her a story about his best friend Barry falling off his bicycle and having to walk on crutches for the next six months. She liked Barry; he was always so hapless, always getting into scrapes. The thought of him in a plaster cast makes her smile. And even though she covers her mouth, this is the first time that he has seen her smile honestly today.

This scene reminds her of their first date, when they sat in PizzaExpress on Bishopsgate, and he had made her laugh with his impressions; it was rare to see him in an entertaining mood, usually he was so serious. He points out of the window: did you see that? What? Look at the shore, those seagulls fighting over the remnants of some food, *mine, mine, mine*, and before she can stop herself she starts to laugh. She remembers watching *Finding Nemo* with him that afternoon when she bunked off geography. For weeks after that, whenever there was some food left over he would mimic those seagulls in that film, *mine, mine, mine*. The wicked look in his eye as he laughed. She was remembering all the things about him that she had fallen in love with.

But this wasn't a date, he was accompanying her to kill their child. She finishes her tea and sits in silence, the sound of the builders' conversation floats around their heads. He can tell that something is wrong.

He wonders what he has said. What's wrong? Nothing, nothing's wrong. Are you sure? What time is it? 12.35, we have to get going. He goes to the counter and pays the old woman, whose look has now softened into a more quizzical look. He wonders how many sad young couples in a similar predicament she sees in her café every week.

He takes the map out of his jacket pocket. This way, he says, with his hand on her shoulder. But she does not move, she is watching the waves, she could hear them roaring around as they walked to the seafront but watching them up close is making her feel emotional. She remembers something a friend had told her about our bodies being more than eighty per cent water, so coming to the sea was a spiritual act for us. She had laughed him off when he had said it but it started to make sense now. That's when she hears them, running

up behind her, a parade of primary school children being led by an exasperated middle-aged woman with horn-rimmed glasses. The children are wearing matching maroon jumpers and grey shorts and skirts, all different colours of brown skin and white skin. Curly, straight, blond, black and brown hair. They are talking to one another, laughing, singing, screaming, but all holding hands. He puts his hand out in front of her so that the children can pass. Thank you, says the schoolmistress. No problem. As soon as the last children have passed, he turns to look at her but she is still facing away. He goes to grab her tightly but it's too late. She runs away from him down the steps towards the sea, tears streaming down her face. He calls out to her but she will not stop running towards the shoreline. As she gets there she stops and turns to face him.

Her words coming out faster than she

can breathe. He goes to grab her, holding her tightly. Please, let go of me, I feel like an idiot. Hey, hey, he says, like a father trying to silence a crying baby. Hey, what's wrong? What did I say? It's not what you said or what you didn't say, you are not mine anymore. He does not say anything then, he just looks at her, his silence telling her everything she needs to know. He goes to hold her again. Don't touch me: she stands away from him on the beach with her hands out, protecting herself. No, she kept repeating to herself, no. In the distance she could see the gaudy, bright lights of the pleasure dome, the yellows and the reds of the carousels. He speaks but she isn't listening to him anymore. She is thinking about her mother, about how alike they are.

That's when she feels it, the kick in her womb. The first sign of a new life. ◇



Raymond Pettibon · *No Title (He whistled, too.)* · 2005
pen and ink on paper
18 × 24 inches (45.7 × 61.0 cm)

Of Love and Lycra

By Gavin Hills

I can now confirm that, No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, there's no limit. None at all, bar overdose. The acid/house/rave/techno scene has spanned the globe and snatched the souls of the world's reckless. It reaches every corner of what we call the West and happily entertains those in the developing world who are at economic liberty to indulge in such follies. Apolitical, agnostic and asexual, this particular brand of hedonism has taken modern computers and pharmaceuticals, and plonked them together with dancing and beats as old as our species. And what a great success it's all been. Now it even has its own festival. The Berlin Love Parade draws huge crowds from all over Europe and beyond. It's a celebration of house music, of peace, love and tolerance. It's a coming together of house music, peace, love and tolerance. It's a coming together of the world's youth in a spirit of, er, togetherness. It's also a damned good excuse to dance and take lots of drugs.

For years the city of Munich has played host to regular beer festivals. People gather together from this planet's furthest corners to celebrate the old god, alcohol. Now the city of Berlin has provided a rival session for the young. Here, in the first weekend in July, the Love Parade pays homage to the new idol, ecstasy. At only six years old, it is a pretty young tradition. But with over 100,000 people in attendance this year, it's a calendar date that looks likely to have some longevity. This much fun doesn't disappear overnight.

The Love Parade was one of those six-in-the-morning ideas, an abstract concept set up by the city's camp club crowd. They thought it would be a laugh to nut around town proclaiming their love for fellow human beings. Originally an odd mix of Notting Hill Carnival and Gay Pride, it's developed rapidly into the march of the rave generation. This year's event started at 4 p.m. on Saturday 1 July. This was a very reasonable time. Left-wing activists tend to do things at about

10 a.m. and eco-warriors think dawn raids are a good idea – trust clubbers to get things right. So I made my way to the Wittenburg Platz in the centre of what was – and I suppose still is – West Berlin.

At first I couldn't really work out what was meant to happen. All down the main high street and right into the Platz, everywhere was jam-packed with clubbers. They were cheering, whistling, pinching arses and indulging in manic water-pistol fights. It was all good fun, but I didn't really get it. Then, from the back of the Platz, the drums were heard. A faint beat drifted over the horizon and ignited the crowds into motion. Over a lake of bobbing heads and waving arms I saw the tip of the first articulated lorry. Smothered in dancers, sound system blaring, it entered the crowds and Pied Pipered the awaiting mass further into the city centre. It was the first of thirty floats put together by clubs, record shops and groups from abroad. They banged out the tracks and set every building thumping. The city hadn't taken such a pounding since the war.

A jolly mix of trannies, straights and gays then paraded their love around town. And what an attractive love it was. Tight Adidas outfits do something for our passions that fishnets provoked in previous generations. Oh, for a leggy blonde in Lycra now that summer's here! There is no crustie element on the scene in Germany, and things seem far more united than they could ever be here. Even your average Mr and Mrs Schmidt seemed happy enough to sit at one of the many pavement cafés, drink a beer and clap along to the throngs of dancing *jugend*. What police there were confined themselves to a few traffic duties.

After strutting down the *strasse* with the sun in my hair and sweat on my forehead, a strange thought occurred to me. Germany is actually a *really* nice country. Actually, knock me down with a *bockwurst*, the Germans even have a sense of humour. You can't drop two Es and march down your main street dressed

in a frock holding a large blow-up duck without seeing life's more mirthful side. I almost found myself becoming uncynical: dancing away a weekend has its purposes. As a result, I got to know the German people particularly close up by crawling around their gardens and fish ponds at seven o'clock on Sunday morning. (Fair play to the *fräulein* who fished me out, incidentally. One at a time in the future.)

The parade was a kind of Poll Tax riot in reverse. After the last sound system drove off into the sunset, everyone was left buzzed with excitement and heading off east to the city's numerous clubs, most of which were initially squatted when the Wall came down. Berlin has a plethora of dandy night-spots. E-works, the Bunker and the legendary Tresor all provide the headstrong with a far more banging soundtrack than you hear in the UK these days. Clubs all over town were jammed, but Tresor was particularly insane. I'm not used to grown men showing me their cuddly toys, and I'm not sure if I approve.

'Handbag' is a not a genre that has reached Germany, and to be honest I don't really think it will catch on in a country where practically anything with lyrics is considered disco. Gabba and hardcore provide lads' music in a lot of the clubs, and the quest for a bit of piano proved an elusive one. But at the Tresor it's techno, techno, techno. This sound is still the erratic heartbeat of the city that was once the centre of the Cold War world. Despite the thaw, Berlin remains unique. And for the young, the Love Parade gives it the edge on a lot of Euro destinations. For all concerned it is a particularly mad, unusual, barmy, bonkers, bender of a weekend.

After a weekend of prime Berliner abuse, my *vorsprung* had lost its *durch technik*. I crawled into my hotel bed and took notes, trying to make sense of what had gone on. This unique event, this weird music, these happy-go-lucky people – this strange *nothingness*. In a bizarre attempt at drugged-up self analysis, I took out a pen and preposterously started to look for meanings and concepts to explain what's happening to us all on planet party. It was tempting to write that we live in a world so remote, so fucked up, that pure hedonism is our only escape route. Or perhaps attempt to justify it all, not as submission, but as a

strong force for empowerment, a push for a liberal agenda of equality, tolerance and freedom.

Trouble is, I'm not so sure of anything, certainty being what it is these days. I threw the pad to the floor, raided the mini-bar, skinned up and put on the TV. CNN is the only channel in English, so I sit and stare. It's *Larry King Live*. And guess who's on? Noel Edmonds is pushing Mr Blobby to the Yanks.

'I don't get it,' says Larry, understandably. 'All he says is "Blobby, Blobby, Blobby"'. How do you know what he's going on about?'

'It's obvious', replies Noel. 'Mr Blobby is on a mission to save the world!'

Bingo! Inspiration. Follow me, if you will, away from Berlin and into our vaguely collective psyche. Blobby, Blobby, Blobby: techno, techno, techno. Read what you like into it. Can it save

the world, or is it complete nonsense? All I know is that it leads our lives out of the mundane. The vacuous feeling of Monday mourn has little to do with what has gone before, and more to do with the future we face. With our souls on slide and our hopes dashed, maybe things *can* only get better, maybe there *is* no limit. Where will the Love Parade lead us?

First published in The Face, August 1994

FESTIVAL ISSUE MAIN STAGE: ARCADE FIRE

The Crazy Maker

Sarah Neufeld shares the view from onstage

WHAT IS THE craziest song to play at a festival? I think different songs can take on that role depending on the situation. From the perspective of the audience, our song 'Wake Up' is the crazy maker, but that doesn't need to happen at a festival.

And then there's any song near the end of the set. You push a lot harder and use more energy for a festival crowd. There are more people. They're stuck standing further away, so you push. Anything near the end of the set starts to feel like a big hill.

We wear in-ear monitors so the sound is supposedly the same no matter where we are or how big the crowd is or how big the stage is, but I swear there must be in-ear festival fairies that just screw with the sound. It's all part of the festivities, I guess. We try to rally ourselves a little more when we're doing a pre-show huddle before launching out in front of the masses.

I feel quite regular-sized when I emerge onstage. Or perhaps I'm even on the short side actually. We definitely get a sense of the elements out there – the sun or the rain or the fields of mud. For the most part we're protected onstage but off-

stage, it's every man for his wellies. The crowds themselves are unique. A crowd will reflect the culture of its people. English Canadians are shy and polite. French Canadians are jubilant. Europeans? Well, it's quite a quilt isn't it? Let's just say a Spanish crowd is a lot more visibly excited than a crowd in Germany.

Backstage you can hide or you can mingle. Our rider police are very on the ball. I get my almond butter no matter the venue. I find space to do yoga at a festival wherever I feel the least distracted, or wherever I don't feel like an exhibitionist. Sometimes when I tour with Belle Orchestre, my other band, there's no choice and I end up wedged in a tiny production office in France with people coming in every few minutes and 'oh-excuse-moi'-ing me in my somewhat compromising physical position.

Arcade Fire was just at the Hove festival in Norway, which is in the south where it's all tiny inlets and beautiful fjords. They have this amazing vintage backstage aesthetic with crazy, colourful furniture and flowers and a pink piano in a field and a waffle trailer with two

blonde Norwegian babes making heart-shaped waffles with delicious goat cheese just for you. So yes, sometimes it's just about food.

REALLY, when you have a bad time at a festival it's probably not the festival's fault. I do, however, now have some very grim memories in the bank – apocalyptic dust clouds, oceans of plastic cups, garbage fires, torrential downpours and floating tents, muddy people pissing on fences while drinking, terrible smells, people falling into puddles while puking. This could be one festival. This could be any festival.

Some of the sights are incredible. Any crowd of more than 20,000 starts to look like a big human ocean stretching out. The first time we saw the carpet was at Coachella. It was magic hour and people started pouring across the field towards us. It was impressive. Sometimes we're able to look out on beautiful sights. It's pretty when they've all got lights. In Quebec City last week the festival passes had tiny red LEDs on them. It was a great twinkling mass. ◇

‘... but that isn’t his fault ...’

Singer/lyricist John K. Samson on the uses of poetry

5D: What were the first poems to have an effect on you?

JKS: The Lutheran liturgy, if it qualifies, was likely the first big poem for me. I started hearing it from a very early age. It is sort of sung and spoken at the same time, clunky and awkward in parts, but beautiful, and the text often seems arbitrarily draped over simple melodies. For example, a line like ‘we give him thanks,’ is somehow stretched into seven syllables and, to my ear at least, sounds perfectly natural. Is this because maybe it is translated from German? Guess I should know more about it.

Like, I think many Canadians of his age, my dad knew some sections of ‘The Cremation of Sam McGee’ by Robert Service by heart. I remember loving the word ‘moil’, getting really excited about it. The ‘men whomoil for gold.’

5D: Is it the poem itself or the individual image that lingers longest in your mind?

JKS: Yeah, maybe it is more an image, or a feeling, for me. I can’t recite any of Phillip Larkin’s ‘Aubade’, but just thinking of it can make me a bit queasy and morbid. The last image is of the postman going reaper-like from door to door, I think. Or maybe it isn’t. That might be fun, actually, to ask folks to describe a poem in a couple of images. It would have to be people like me who have trouble memorizing them. One of my favourite poems is ‘Snow’ by Louis MacNeice. It would go, like, ‘snow at the window, the world is surprising, tangerine orange.’ We could make little reference card catalogues for poems we like.

5D: When is the best time and where is the best place to read?

JKS: I sort of hate doing things that don’t involve some reading, they just

seem like a big waste of time. I like to read while walking my two fairly undisciplined dogs. It’s a lot easier than it sounds. I’m really lucky that I can read as a passenger in a moving vehicle – bus, boat, train, plane – and I enjoy it. I don’t understand how the motion-sickened travel anywhere. I met a drunken long-haul truck driver at a party who confessed to me that he often read a book a day while driving a truck, looking up frequently. He said Elmore Leonard novels were good to read while driving a truck.

5D: Do you need to read poetry in a different way than you read prose?

JKS: I think you do need to read poetry in a more deliberate way than prose, maybe a more open way. It is more difficult, but very rewarding. I think good poetry makes you feel like reading is a creative act.

5D: Is it hard to fit poetry into the constraints of a song?

JKS: I don’t think it is that hard, the constraints can be really useful. I’m always so impressed by poets facing a blank page. Songwriters get the structure of a melody to build something with, sometimes that seems like cheating, whereas poets have to bring it up out of nothing and make it go.

5D: Who does it well?

JKS: So many do it really well, but John Darnielle of the Mountain Goats might be the lyricist I am currently most attracted to – he has an almost freakish focus on the characters and places he writes about. And he knows it is labour, you can hear that in the songs, that they aren’t being written to impress or defend, but to actually explore and exchange, like good poetry should.

5D: Which poets have you learned from?

JKS: I’d say I’ve learned most from contemporary poets that live or lived here in Canada, my part of the world. Writers like Catherine Hunter and Patrick Friesen and more lately Karen Solie. She’s becoming justly well known now. They all have voices that have been tempered somehow by the place I am from.

My first favourites were the big twentieth century British and American anthology poets. Auden, for sure. Adrienne Rich was a revelation.

5D: What lessons have you learned from these poets?

JKS: The prairie writers taught me to look at the place I live in, and not to let it overwhelm me. It is a massive place, the Canadian prairie. It’s easy to feel unimportant in that much sky and horizon.

Auden likely encouraged some bad writing from me, but that isn’t his fault, I guess. He did say somewhere that the same rules apply to writing as do to confession: be brief, be blunt, be gone. And that you should write during office hours. Those are two things I often keep in mind.

Adrienne Rich is, for me, an example of wanting to write like someone, but being totally unable to do so. That can be useful, I think.

5D: Why is geography important to song lyrics and poetry?

I go from one extreme to the other on location and geography in writing. Either the land needs humans to do the work of describing and naming it so that it exists, or the land just abides, beautifully indifferent to all our attempts at understanding it. Either way makes it important. ◇



Raymond Pettibon · No Title (*I wish I*) · 1998
pen and ink on paper
11 × 8½ inches (27.9 × 21.6 cm)

Heroic Dose

Hari Kunzru loses his mind

Safety Third! says the cheery slogan on the pseudo-doctor's white coat. Get me off this fucking table. Not that I'm in a position to complain. I signed up, or so Ratface tells me. That must be why I'm dressed as Marie Antoinette. We (that's me and Skywalker) loaded up half a ton of perishable food that's gradually turning to probiotic slime in the heat, bought rusty bicycles off a guy at a stall on the Venice boardwalk, and drove north out of LA into the Nevada desert, to the most inhospitable environment we could find, an immense white salt-flat bounded by jagged mountains. Nothing lives here. Not a snake, not an insect. It's earth, simplified, a smooth plane (of consistency), a vast crazy-paved stage-set for the mass games.

Because we are not alone. It's not just that there's intelligent life on other planets, or ghosts in the machine, or bats in the belfry or more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. There are 40,000 others here. Actual testably-non-hypothetical people; bodies, which need ice and coffee and sunscreen and socks and are going to get their needs met, without access to mallspace or retail of any kind. They call it a city, though it's more like a shanty town or a bustee or a boomtown mining camp; Lagos meets Morningstar meets the Slabs meets Jonestown with fewer light refreshments. Rickety architecture: yurts and wickiups and marquees and giant seesaws and Bucky domes; RV's, space-age cubes, inflatables and scaffolding enclosures, ramadas and sweatlodges and miles of parachute silk billowing in the breeze. There's a rocket and any number of steampunk derricks and a three storey astroturf-covered deathslide that you chuck yourself down on a flour sack, one of those five a.m. good ideas that breaks limbs at the rate of three or four a day. No money on site, no facilities, bring everything you need to survive and thrive and deal with sudden throw-down zero-visibility dust-storms. A post-holocaust rave fantasy for anyone who can afford

a \$200 ticket, a mass gathering of dehydrated globo-boho-wannabe nomads with great tits, all game for the ultimate test of sanity and centredness – taking a shit in a porta-potty swimming in terrifying hippy effluent whilst high on the most radical molecules yet devised by the minds of Stanford-dropout entheogen chemists. It's an expensive simulation, an experiment in new forms of leisure and moneyless exchange, a potlatch economy devised by and for (let's be honest) a relatively privileged crowd of utopians. But right now there's a dude in some kind of rat make-up, a dick-like prosthetic pink snout poking out from under his leprechaun hat. He's got a *Mary Poppins* Cockney accent. He's here, he says, 'poking into things'. It's like something out of the class-war subtext of *Wind in the Willows*. He needs to leave me the fuck alone.

Cut.

Kappy wears black silk martial-arts pajamas, a flashing illuminated pendant and a sheep mask. Sometimes the mask is perched at a jaunty angle on the top of his head, giving him an impish appearance; sometimes it covers his face, twin red LEDs lighting up the eye-sockets. Two modes: merry prankster and sinister sheep-god. He has the pill in his palm. Thing is, he says, I've had it for a while. Not sure it'll still work. Now there's a classic opening line. What we're talking about here are substances only known by chemical acronyms, whispered about in Humboldt County hot tubs, formulae jotted down in notebooks and refined by men with beards and advanced degrees and serious, punishing meditation routines; phenethylamines we have known and loved, members of the mythical 'magic six'. There's stuff that takes you to an alternate pre-existent reality for fifteen minutes, to converse with non-organic entities who seem only mildly disturbed that you've dropped out of the sky to watch them unicycling about with their witty banners. Other stuff takes two hours to come on, then explodes in your mind like a cosmic hollow-point bul-

let, expanding to fill the universe, then creating enormous psychic exit wounds, out of which reality gushes in great dark red floods. Once you drop, you can't stop. You're booked in. And whichever side of the sheep-mask you find, impish or implacable, *it is what it is*. That's more profound than it sounds. You have to deal with the cock-rat or the dust that gets into everything, every fold of skin, every crack and follicle, or the dude with the giant tuba-like megaphone, the one who never looked up passive-aggressive in the dictionary and really, really wants you to broadcast your tripping thoughts through the 200-watt speaker duct-taped to his back. 'Shirtcocker!' he shouts at Sexx Ed, who's dressed in 'normal' clothes that in this context make him look like a Levittown golf dad circa 1958, but who's got pants on – admittedly they are terrible plaid shorts with a huge rip in them out of which his cock could potentially poke, but nevertheless he is not technically a shirtcocker, not one of those guys who are revelling in their first ever chance to be naked in the vicinity of hot women, but who are prudent enough about desert skincare to cover their lobster backs and shoulders with, preferably, a nice blue button-down, beneath which their members can peep out inquisitively, hoping against hope for a look or touch or a little lick or suck or any other action whatsoever. The epithet is hence unfair. But we've no time to argue semantics. We're going over there. Where? There. See that pyramid? Yes, we are going forth to the pulsing pyramid with the eye on top to deal with them all: old primal hippies with steel wool for pubic hair and mother Ganga trapped in their top-knots; straight-edge vegan badasses facing down the flesh-eaters; sweltering goths in factor 2000 sunscreen; dykes on bikes; lost surfers; S&M masters in self-oiling chaps looking for co-eds to spider-gag; washboard-stomached yoga queens; body-dysmorphic glamour models; aromatherapists, ufologists, ontologists, oncologists and endless nameless lightly alternative folk with hemp waistcoats and unfortunate quasi-ethnic tattoos. There will be suburban candy-ravers, all cowboy hats, fluffy boots and bikinis; there will be party-boys in wraparound shades throwing the horns; we already met a flock of British furies, who travelled twelve hours in

cattle class to yiff with those cute cos-play kitties, small town lads wearing explorer hats and kilts, carrying laminated pictures of their characters, who have blue manes, giant manga eyes and unicorn horns. We will meet them all. And we will love them. Or at least share water. And listen to them talk about how Szechuan pepper makes everything taste like lemon.

And just when you're at your highest and lost in some bad nineties Hollywood version of an underground rave, all fire jugglers and plastic punks and low-calorie techno-metal music, and a close encounter with carbon-fibre ant-like entities possessing no human feelings whatsoever would feel like a relief, would feel like a nice cup of tea and a sit down compared to this ridiculous blank are-we-having-fun-yet temple of the lobotomised damned, then you run into something properly odd – giant multistoreyed structures composed of ineffable filigreed light, or a charming old Nevada retiree couple who look like Evil Knieval and his missus if they'd been wrapped in silver foil and pegged out in a Golden Valley trailer park since 1977: skin like badly-cured cowhide, mullets and matching moustaches and denim jerkins bristling with souvenir pins, the pair of them handing out trays of toxic Danishes to the deranged trippers of early morn in an old fashioned gesture of western hospitality. So you hop on a teapot and listen to this chick called Moon or June or Spoon who wants to tell you you've a beautiful aura, but doesn't want to discuss her RL non-existence as a dental technician in Las Cruces, and doesn't seem to understand when you insist that reality's more interesting than her past lives as a Renaissance Fair princess or witch or Voodoo futuristic seer, and actually gets off the Soul Train or the Dragon or the Fluffy Bus or Magic Carpet or whatever you're riding on, and runs screaming into the night rather than carry on the conversation, which makes you feel bad, but at least it gives you something to look at: you can see her a long way off because, like you, like everybody in this pitch dark

desert, she's festooned with glowsticks and LED's and bike lights and reflectors, because that's the only way you're not going to get run over by some loon piloting a giant steel catfish, powered by compost and tofu run-off, a catfish which actually breathes fire and goes nought-to-twenty in less time than you can get



Raymond Pettibon · *No Title (The first I)* · 2008
Pen, ink and gouache on paper
41 × 25½ inches (104.1 × 64.8 cm)

your googly eyes to focus and probably spends the rest of the year lurking in a Reno storage unit, ready for its fifteen minutes of fishy fame. And once the poor dental technician's no more than a winking point of light on the horizon, you forward roll into the next scene, which is packed with hula-hooping convoy queens, horny skaters, pirates, steampunks, lounge lizards, cosmonauts, psychonauts, human computers, riverboat gamblers, serious ethnobotanists boiling up MAO-inhibitors so they can get back in touch with their spirit animals, cocktail shakers, shy busking violinists, penny-farthing

roadhogs, superheroes, hedge wizards, cheesy trance DJs with feathered caps and bolero jackets, undercover Hollywood directors, handjob gurus, off-duty stuntmen and Nevada law enforcement, wandering through the encampment in full Stormtrooper gear, semi-automatics at the ready in case someone gets an erection near their arses. In the back of a particularly dark tent you run into Quetzalcoatl in full regalia looking for hearts to cut out, three geologists who want to talk about basin and range formations and a crew of naked wannabe Hindus chanting 'Hare Krishna, Hare Rama' (here I like to imagine my conservative aunties slipping out of their saris to sing a few verses of 'To Be A Pilgrim'), and finally, when you're sacked out somewhere silky and comfortable (let's say a yurt) and you've got to smugly thinking, like the optimistic fool you are, that your head is in some small way together, there comes the wetsuit guy, this guy who seems very definitely official, who strides up, all beard and waders and grey insulating performance fabric, and wishes everyone a gruff good morning, causing the beautiful and damned lolling about on the soft furnishings to straighten their spines momentarily, in case they have to deal with The Man in some fashion, perhaps a representative from the Port Authority (but wait, says a very small voice in your head, aren't we in . . . kind of a dry place? Kind of . . . a desert?) and he throws a sack down on the couch, which is probably an important official delivery that someone will need to sign for, and starts doing something very technical and boring with tape and a hammer and bits of wire, which seems to be stressing him out because he's cursing under his breath and you wish he'd go deal with his dealings elsewhere, until he opens the sack and out spills a mess of tentacles and your head melts again, for he is no Port Authority Straight Guy, but an octopus-man, and he finishes fixing his costume and slips it on, and yes sir, yes indeed he now has eight arms to wiggle with and so, most joyfully, he boogies away into the night. ◇

‘Providence’ by Sonic Youth

Bass-playing hero Mike Watt on his famous answerphone messages

Interview by Jamie Brisick.

For the uninitiated, Mike Watt is a bass-playing Zelig figure who has woven himself into the fabric of indie music for the past twenty years.

His band, The Minutemen, influenced a generation of DIY musicians, and after the tragic death of bandmate D. Boone, Watt went on to form FIREHOSE, which incorporated jazz influences, and from there collaborated with members of Dinosaur Jr, Jane’s Addiction and many others. He now plays bass for The Stooges, the band behind Iggy Pop’s writhing frame.

We here at Five Dials wanted to speak to Watt about one of his more unconventional cameos. His voice appears on a song that comes halfway through Sonic Youth’s masterpiece album from 1988, Daydream Nation. The song, ‘Providence’, is built around messages Watt left on the machine of Sonic Youth guitarist Thurston Moore. But before ‘Providence’ we had to first tell Watt about the art we’d collected for the issue.

5D: We’ve got art by Raymond Pettibon.

mw : I’ve known him a long time. He’s probably one of my greatest teachers and best friends. I love him to death. I met him on the punk scene and he did the artwork for the first Minutemen record.

Raymond learned me about jazz and stuff. Turned me on to John Coltrane, took me to gigs at Catalina, Memory Lane and the lobby of the Hilton to see Tal Farlow, Tootie Heath, Warren Marsh. He turned me onto all these cats. I must have seen Albert Jones fifteen times. I grew up in naval housing in San Pedro and I didn’t know anything about jazz. When I first heard it I thought they were doing punk but were just older. I didn’t know Coltrane was dead.

Raymond opened my mind up so much. Not in a kind of officer-to-enlisted-man kind of way. He never talked to me like that. Raymond never talked to anybody like that. He has this dry humour that people trip on. But he learns you without ever scolding you or beating you.

5D: The next question I want to ask you about is ‘Providence’ on Sonic Youth’s Daydream Nation in 1988. It’s such a great piece of found sound. It’s a song that’s both mournful and mysterious.

mw : Yeah. This is something from fucking phone machine. I didn’t know it was going to be used on a record. And he (Thurston Moore) didn’t know either.

Thurston is very artistic. He’ll use found stuff, like Dada or the surrealist people did. Stuff you just find and then make work out of.

I had come to his town and played and he came to the gig. He had just gone to the store and bought a bunch of cables and cassettes. Afterwards he came to the van. I asked him to throw out some trash and at the end of the night he was like, ‘Where’s all the shit I bought?’ And nobody could remember.

Actually the song is made up of two phone calls. The first one was in New York, from the payphone down on the street below his apartment.

Because of the way he lived in those days, there was a payphone and you would call up and he would put the keys in a sock and throw them down to you. So first I called so he could throw down the keys.

His pad had a window at each end. It was like a boat. It even had a list! There was one little room for the shitter and the tub was the table. You’d lift the top off and there was the tub. They’d let me stay there and I’d walk around and explore Manhattan. It’s how I learned the place.

The next day was Providence, Rhode Island, and I called him back on another payphone.

Astonishingly I can recall what happened. I called him up and said, ‘Look, when I asked you to throw out that trash you threw away everything you fucking bought too. That’s where the shit is. Why don’t you check in that can to see if it’s there still?’ Because I’ve done that.

That’s what it was all about. There wasn’t much symbolism going on, or metaphor or analogy.

5D: Do you remember anything from the specific moment? What you were wearing? Was it raining out?

mw : Shit. Come on.

I don’t remember that. I remember being happy with myself that I could remember, or thought I could remember what happened. The mystery of where the shit was. But I can’t remember what it was like and in those days I was too stupid to do fucking diaries. I do them now.

5D: The funny thing is, because it’s been immortalised in this song you can read so much into it. It’s a mystery.

mw : It’s cables. RCA jack cables and cassettes.

The memory has gone away. It’s kind of added. I can’t remember. I think it was 1988, 1987?

I should’ve done diaries back then.

5D: How do you like the song when you hear it now?

mw : I love all Sonic Youth’s stuff. I remember when I first saw them they blew my mind. I thought we were trying things, then I saw those guys and thought, ‘Fuck, we’re Chuck Berry compared to this.’

It changed my whole life. Thurston has incredible knowledge of music. Kim Gordon has too. Lee Ranaldo as well. Interesting people and they’ve always been so kind to me. Even if I didn’t know them, their band is a yardstick when you’re trying to find your voice.

5D: Are you still on tour with Iggy Pop?

mw : We’ve got all of July and August with the Stooges. We’ve done nine gigs this year. Now we’ve got another twenty-five or something. This is why I’ve been busy. It’s just been crazy for me.

The phone rings.

There’s Ig right now.

He answers and speaks into his phone.
Watt.

...

Hey Ig. Ready to go tomorrow.

...

OK. Yep.

...

Yeah. Yeah.

...
 You don't want me smoking on stage, Ig.
 ...
 Yeah. OK. OK. Sure.
 ...
 Yeah. OK.
 ...
 Are you talking within the riff, or are you talking sections?
 ...
 That little lick. Dada dada dada dada.
 Yep.
 ...
 Sure I can, no problem. It might have more dynamic.
 ...
 See, I could pull out sections then come back in. Inside the riffs I'm pretty simple. But I could drop out. It would give more dynamic to the tune, keep it from flatlining.

...
 Mmhhh. Yeah.
 ...
 Yeah. That's why I clammed at the gig. But I'll leave out there. Maybe I'll go out after four.
 ...
 Yeah. OK.
 ...
 No, OK. Right. The thing I see about 'Gimme Some Skin' is I've got to push that fast. Yeah.
 ...
 Yeah.
 ...
 OK, Ig. Safe seas. OK.
He returns to the phone
 So sorry. That was the boss.

5D: *He is the boss.*

mw: This is Ig. He reminds me of Raymond too, man. These guys are always thinking. He's talking about a song to do the day after tomorrow in France and putting parts in here and out there. He's always thinking. It's beautiful, his work ethic. He's very interesting too, a unique person.

I've been a lucky cat. I can't believe it sometimes. Iggy's been a great teacher in my life. Actually I'm coming around to thinking everybody's got something to teach me.

It's what's neat about middle age. You finally figure that shit out. It's great. And he's beautiful. I never thought I would get a call from Ig, y'know?

5D: *Does he call often?*

mw: He usually calls me after kayaking. ◇



Raymond Pettibon · *No Title (Do you have)* · 2000
 pen and ink on paper
 22 × 30 inches (55.9 × 76.2 cm)

Threadbare

Simon Prosser explains Martin Parr's photographs of Port Eliot

THIS ISSUE of *Five Dials* is coming to you live from the Port Eliot Festival in Cornwall, England, so we thought it only apt to include some pictures of Port Eliot itself, the seat of the Earl of St Germans. We decided to start at the top, with Magnum photographer Martin Parr, who shot a series of images at the house in 2006, exhibited at the festival in 2007 under the title 'Threadbare', but rarely seen elsewhere. Happily, he agreed to let us select our favourites from the series and reproduce them here.

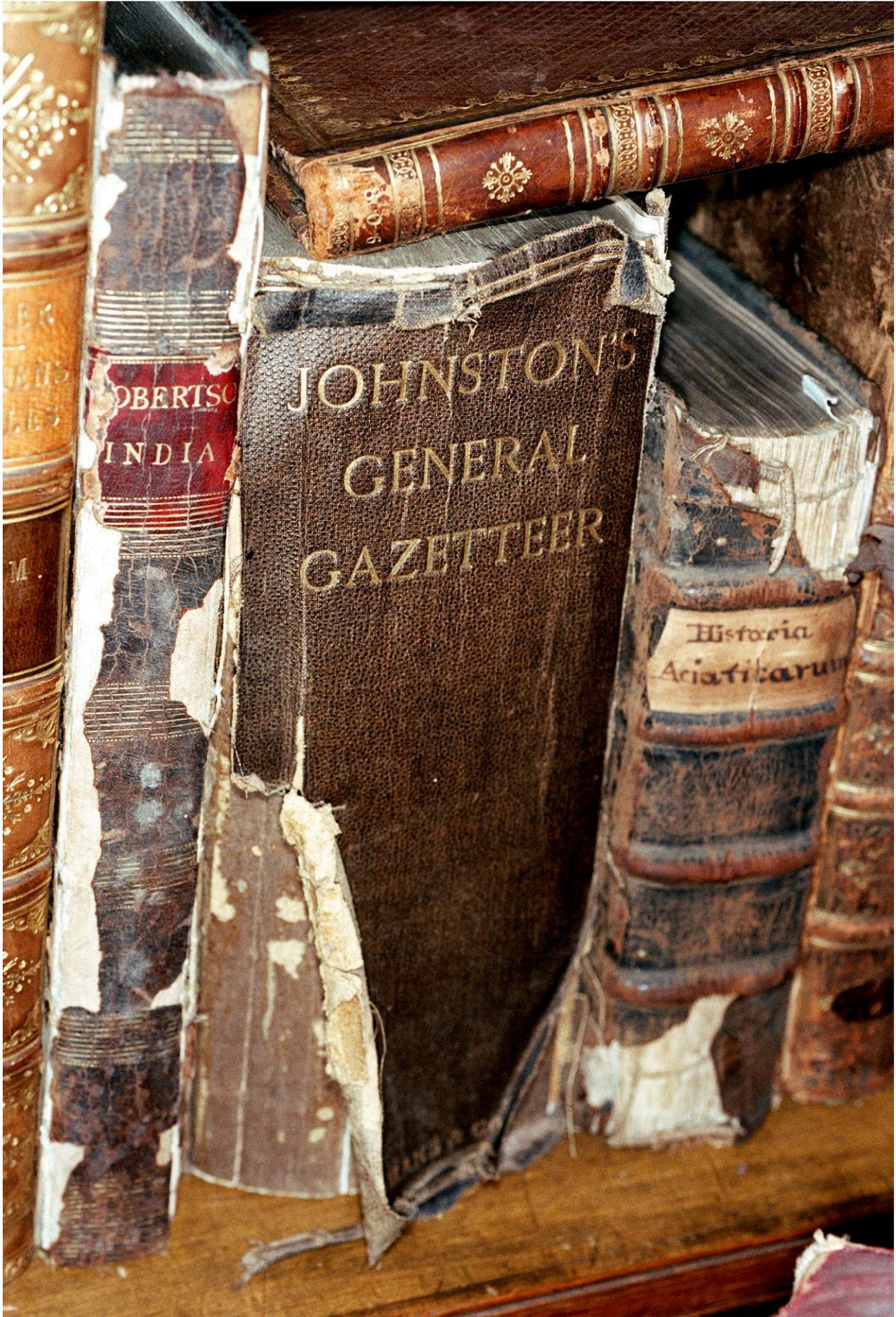
As you will see, the house has a very distinctive character. Occupied by the same family, the Eliots, since 1565 (T. S. Eliot was from a far-flung branch), it has a unique personality that reflects not just the architectural heritage of the build-

ings but also the tastes and obsessions of its inhabitants. So, for example, the 13m – diameter, John Soane-designed Round Drawing Room contains a vintage Harley Davidson, resting next to an antique Aubusson carpet, below a giant frieze painted by the late Robert Lenkiewicz, entitled *The Conditions of Man*, depicting, in the words of the current Earl, 'loneliness, corruption, insanity, death, destruction and general mayhem' in one half and 'harmony, proportion, love, truth and beauty' in the other. On the fireplace mantle rests a collection of wooden books, carved by poet Heathcote Williams when he lived at the house for some years, while a glittery disco ball hangs from the ancient chandelier.

Elsewhere, the cosy Red Room or Morning Room at the centre of the house combines a group of Van Dyck paintings with an overflowing record collection, a painted surfboard, a constantly lit fire and piles of books and magazines, all illuminated by a collection of exquisitely dilapidated lamps.

Everywhere you look in the house there is something arresting and pleasing to notice, as Martin Parr has conveyed in this series of photographs, which beautifully capture the spirit of Port Eliot, from the faded grandeur of its arsenic-laced, green-dyed wallpaper to the improvised series of receptacles designed to catch leaks in rainy months. (As its owner has said, the house has 'not once in living memory been completely watertight'.)















Co-conspirators

What happens when you fall for your bass player? By Dean Wareham

The television host noted that we had made five albums, which is a lot in this day and age.

'What advice would you give to young people about having career longevity?'

'Go to law school,' I said.

THE TOUR for the fifth Luna album, *The Days of Our Nights*, included a handful of shows opening for a band called Guster in Columbus, Detroit, Providence and Philadelphia.

We had never heard of them, but apparently Guster was very popular, and the label really wanted us to do it. They were described to us as a jam band. We were not really a jam band. What might look like improvisation was always pretty well arranged beforehand.

I got onstage in Columbus and looked out at the crowd. Jesus Christ! Guster had a lot of fans. And the average age of a Guster fan was fourteen, a very straight-looking fourteen – these were preppy, clean-cut kids. These kids didn't like Luna so much. They stared at us, bored, waiting for their Guster. Since they were bored, I was bored right back. Whatever the audience gives you, that's what you give them. Fuck trying to win them over. These kids were evil.

When Guster came on, the crowd screamed like teenage girls watching the Beatles. If the singer from Guster had pooped onstage, they would have squealed in delight. One of the teenage fans stopped by our dressing room. All sweet-sixteen, with long perfect hair, dressed in American Eagle. She looked at the arms of our bass player, Britta.

'You must work out,' she said.

WE MOVED ON to Fletcher's in Baltimore – our second Baltimore gig in five months. That was crazy. Why were we back in Baltimore? Just trying to fill a Friday night, I suppose. We had some Polish fans in the crowd that night, a couple of guys in their forties.

'Luna is number one in Poland!' they shouted.

I doubted that very much, but I dedi-

cated a song to Rosa Luxemburg.

'This is for Rosa Luxemburg!'

'She's not Polish – she's Russian!' they said.

'Really? That's news to me.' I knew a little about Rosa Luxemburg.

'Play the song!' someone else yelled.

A fan sent an email to our website the next day, confirming that Rosa Luxemburg was indeed born in Poland. Perhaps they really meant, 'She's not Polish – she's a commie and a Jew!' I don't know. But there was another email, far more important, from our manager. Our record company was filing for bankruptcy.

'The difference between men and boys,' business mogul Leonard Stern once said, 'is the size of their toys.' Stern made his money in pet supplies and real estate. His 'toys' were weekly alternative magazines like the *Village Voice* and *LA Weekly*. Our record company was also a toy, owned by one Rick Adams, a Fortune 400 guy who had founded a company named UUNET. UUNET was the biggest internet service provider on the planet. In 1996, his company was acquired by MCI Worldcom for \$700 million. Rick took some of that money and bought a famous recording studio – Ocean Way. He renamed the studio Cello Recording. In addition to the studio, he created Jericho Records. We never met Rick Adams, though he did let us know that our website sucked, and he paid someone to fix it for us.

Mr Adams wasn't involved in the running of the record company – he hired a few experienced record company people for that, and they were good at their jobs. They had a five-year plan – the company would lose money at first, but they hoped to see profits eventually.

The tech stock collapse changed everything. Rick Adams didn't want his expensive toy anymore. He pulled the plug on Jericho. That's how a company owned by a billionaire comes to file for Chapter 11. He wasn't personally bankrupt. But a company can be bankrupt, even while its owners are rich. Nobody likes to lose money.

Our label was going under, but we still had two more shows with Guster. We drove up to Providence, seven hours in the pouring rain. I had become acutely aware of where I was sitting in the van. I used to think of it as sitting in the front row or the back row, on the left or on the right. But lately I was thinking of it as being in front of Britta, or next to Britta, or, on that drive to Providence, behind Britta. There I was, trying to be cool. I felt like I had fallen under a spell, and it had to stop. I took to chanting silently inside my head on these long rides. *No, no, no. No, no, no. Yes.*

You can't just put a beautiful woman in a van full of men and think that there will be no effect. Any scientist or psychologist will tell you as much. Take three or four male apes, and put them in a cage – or a Ford Econoline van, which is a cage on wheels. Observe their behaviour. Now put a desirable female ape in the cage and continue to observe.

The Guster tour ended at the Electric Factory in Philadelphia. We last played the Electric Factory in 1996, opening for Lou Reed on his Hooky Wooky tour. He called it the Hooky Wooky tour because he had a song called 'Hooky Wooky', which was his own slang term for sex. At least I think so. I was backstage with Lou, waiting to use the men's room, and he said sarcastically, 'This is so glamorous, huh?' It was glamorous for me – I was backstage talking to Lou Reed. And the Electric Factory was pretty glamorous compared with some of the places Luna had played, like the Jewish Mother in Norfolk, Virginia, or Sudy's in Cincinnati.

Tonight we were playing to two thousand Guster fans. It was like a dream. We were up on the big stage performing to a big crowd, but the people could not have cared less about us. They were waiting for Guster. It was like we were not even there. I decided to test this theory. After our second song, I made an announcement through my microphone.

'I wish I were dead.'

Silence. Or rather, continued chatter. No change. No one heard, or no one cared, except for the guys in Guster, who were standing at the side of the stage. They thought it was funny.

Next, we flew to New Orleans, where the Jazz and Heritage Festival was starting up. They call it Jazz Fest but they have a

loose definition of jazz, loose enough to let Luna in.

A guy showed up at the Howlin' Wolf – riding into the club on an old bicycle with big handlebars and a banana seat. He said he could get us anything we wanted. We ordered eight hits of ecstasy, and all four of us dropped it after the show.

We tried going out on the town, hanging out at a cool bar with our friend Wade. But we soon started acting a little strange, rolling our eyes and taking deep breaths.

'What are you guys on?' asked Wade.

We moved the party back to my spacious hotel room. I was the DJ. First up on my portable speakers was 'Girl', a pretty little waltz by Papas Fritas. It calmed me right down, except that I looked at Britta and she looked at me and something passed between us.

We stayed up all night. Each of us threw up at least once. Our drummer, Lee, excused himself at around three a.m. Our guitarist, Sean, followed at around four. It was just Britta and me, listening to music. I wanted to kiss her, but I knew that wouldn't be appropriate. Come to think of it, it wasn't appropriate for me to be alone with her in my hotel room.

We flew home the next day, and had a connecting flight in Atlanta. Britta's boyfriend lived in Atlanta, and he came to visit her during the hour we had to change planes. The Atlanta airport had a filthy little room for smokers. I sat there and smoked my cigarette and stared at the other smokers through a thick cloud. This was the room from hell. Hell is other smokers and airports. Especially when you are only half alive from staying up all night.

MY LIFE unravelled in the summer of 2001. I no longer lived on Bleecker Street with my wife Claudia and son Jack. I was splitting time between my parents' loft apartment on Twenty-first Street – they were away for the summer – and my own tiny one-hundred-square-foot studio at 373 Broadway, where I kept my recording equipment and spare guitars. I bought a futon so I could sleep there, too, if I had to.

My affair with Britta began at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Like all college shows, this one was poorly organized. Bands played in the courtyard all afternoon, each of them running a little longer than they should have. By the time they got to the headlining act – Luna –

there were only fifteen minutes till curfew. We didn't much care – they still had to pay us.

After the show we were invited to a dorm room party. A Napster party. They weren't playing records or compact discs. Instead, they had a high-speed cable connection, provided free by the university, and they had compiled a big long playlist on Napster. This was my first exposure to the world of file sharing, to the dorm room jukebox that would shake the music business to its core. A funny thing happened in 2001. After years of going up and up and up, record sales dropped 2.5 per cent. The following year they dropped 6.8 per cent, and they have continued to drop ever since, in ever-larger increments.

When I was in college I spent my own money on LPs. That's what the record business was built on – affluent kids, spending their weekly allowances on vinyl and compact discs. But change was afoot. Now students could find any song they wanted on the internet. What kind of idiot would go out and buy records now? Well, maybe if people knew that vinyl records are vastly superior in sound quality to those MP3s that they play on their computers, they might think about it. But college students don't seem too bothered about high fidelity.

We had been invited to the dorm room party by a pretty, blonde film student, who had been dancing wildly in front of me throughout our fifteen-minute set. I had stopped noticing the girls in the audience at Luna shows, consumed by my crush on the beautiful girl onstage, directly to my right, a crush that wouldn't go away. I knew I should try to control it. But I couldn't control it. I thought about Britta all the time. Especially on long van rides. Some days I sat behind Britta. Some days I sat next to her. Some days I drove the van. It didn't matter. I was riding in a van with Britta. I was singing a song with Britta. I was intoxicated. It was all so predictable.

It didn't help that we sang 'Bonnie and Clyde' together – this long, sexy Serge Gainsbourg song, sung in French, about a doomed couple. The song ends with Bonnie and Clyde being mowed down in a hail of bullets, and then descending into hell.

'You should look at each other when you sing that song,' our manager told me. I knew I couldn't do that. I would have forgotten the words. And my feelings would

have shown in my face. No, I was careful not to look at Britta onstage.

After half an hour at the dorm room party, we drove the van over to the Campus Center Hotel. The Campus Center at U. Mass, designed by Marcel Breuer, is made of cinder block. But it is Bauhaus cinder block. The rooms are elegant and austere.

I deliberately left my pack of cigarettes in the van that night, which gave me an excuse to knock on Britta's door. I could have just lied about not having a cigarette. But I was going to play the charade properly. I wasn't thinking straight.

I knocked on Britta's door and she gave me a cigarette and a kiss.

By the next day we were co-conspirators. We rode home in the van that Sunday afternoon with a secret. The morning started off well. I was in a semi-pleasant daze from the night before. But as the van rattled down FDR Drive I started to panic. I was shaking as I approached the door of my building on Bleecker Street, wondering how I could possibly walk into my apartment and not have the whole thing written all over my face. But I opened the door, was greeted by my wife and son and dog, and life went on. Only something had changed.

We are all capable of grand deceptions. Or at least I am. It's difficult at first, terrifying even, but you get used to it. Sort of. Britta and I carried on an affair for months. In Pittsburgh or Nashville – or anywhere – we would rush to our hotel to meet in secret. It was exhilarating. It was also awful. I was lying to everyone around me, to my wife, friends, family and to my booking agent.

Interviewers asked, 'Has the dynamic changed with a woman in the band?'

Umm, yes.

Sean and Lee called a meeting, ostensibly to discuss the making of our next record. Britta wasn't invited, as she wasn't a full member of the band she didn't have a vote. We rarely had band meetings. We met at Sean's apartment on Avenue A, and Lee spoke first.

He and Sean were aware that something was going on between Britta and myself. They were concerned. Sean was mostly bothered by having to pretend that he didn't know anything.

Fair enough. I'm sure that it wasn't pleasant for either of them, being lied to,

sitting next to me in the van and pretending not to know about it.

Lee was more concerned that all of this would blow up in our faces.

What would you do, he asked, if you had a friend who was engaging in self-destructive behaviour, like he had a drug problem? You would intervene.

I was engaged in dangerous and self-destructive behaviour. More importantly, perhaps, it was behaviour that could be destructive to the band. If word got out, said Lee, our whole lives as Luna would end. It would be over.

I was humble and contrite at the meeting that afternoon. They were quite right – it is not nice to make other people keep your secrets. It wasn't nice of me to turn my bandmates into liars, brothers in deception.

'You're right,' I said. 'It's dangerous. It has to end.'

But later that afternoon I became incensed. How dare they compare me to a drug addict? How dare they tell me who to sleep with? I didn't tell them who to sleep with. I'd kept secrets for Sean and Lee over the years – yes, I had. We had an official band policy – what happens on the road is locked in the vault (the idea of the vault was taken from an episode of *Seinfeld*).

That's how it was supposed to be. The reality was different, because everyone likes to share a little secret now and then.

The affair continued. I had no intention of leaving Claudia and Jack – the very thought of it struck fear in my heart. And yet I couldn't stop. I've heard preachers say that once you let the devil into your life, it's hard to get him out, and I have found this to be true.

It was hard to travel around the country with the lovely Britta Phillips, getting onstage and singing together and drinking champagne after the shows, and thinking that I was going to just say no. I had all kinds of real feelings for Britta, feelings that were beyond my control.

I promised myself that I would make a move, a decision, do something to fix my life. Soon, I said, soon I will fix things.

The decision was made for me by the maid at the Days Inn in Fredonia, New York.

WE RECORDED OUR *Romantica* album with Gene Holder (of the dB's) at Jolly Roger in Hoboken, New Jersey. Sean, Britta

and I moved on to Tarbox Road Studios, outside Fredonia, New York, to mix our album with Dave Fridmann. I had worked with Dave in 1992, on some very early Luna demos, and on Mercury Rev's 'Car Wash Hair.'

Tarbox Road is in the middle of nowhere – the sticks, the boonies, Dullsville. Sean, Britta and I took turns cooking. The studio was residential, but there was really only one bedroom upstairs. I booked a room at the Days Inn in town, a ten-minute drive away.

Britta came with me. I didn't feel quite comfortable with this arrangement – it was a whole new level of deception. And yet I did it anyway. On the final day of mixing, I checked out of the hotel – we were scheduled to fly out that evening. When I arrived at the studio at noon that day, there was a phone call waiting for me. It was Claudia, who had just called the hotel. The receptionist had put Claudia's call through to my hotel room, where it was answered by the maid.

'Oh, no,' she said, 'they just left.'

With that utterance, I was cooked.

Claudia ordered me to get my ass on a plane home – immediately.

I felt sick to my stomach. It was that terrible feeling you get when you've lost something valuable, or done something incredibly stupid or bad. I took that Jet-Blue plane from Buffalo to JFK, a bundle of nerves, feeling like I was about to walk the plank. Walk the plank I did, through my apartment door into a sea of anger and tears – and questions, questions, questions. I felt like a criminal. But as my shrink pointed out, I was not a criminal. I was only a liar and a cheat.

Question: How could I be so stupid as to let myself get caught like that?

Answer: Because I wanted to get caught. I had put myself in an impossible situation. I was miserable. I didn't know how to extricate myself.

Claudia made it easier than it might have been. She gave me two choices, and five days to decide. Either Britta would leave Luna, or I would pack my things and move out. I was panic-stricken. I honestly didn't know what to do.

I called my dad.

'What should I do?'

'You should follow your heart.'

'But I don't know what my heart wants.'

'You need to figure that out.'

Claudia and I had an emergency meeting with our marriage counsellor, Ben Marinucci, and his wife, Kay Marinucci who was also a therapist – together they ran a weekly group. The two of us sat in the waiting room at eight p.m, waiting for the group session to finish. Once again, I felt like I was about to walk the plank.

Claudia was the one who had been wronged here, and the therapists were generally supportive of her.

'Claudia needs to tell you that it's not acceptable for you to have a girlfriend,' said Ben.

Various unpleasant scenarios were discussed. Maybe Claudia could accompany the band on the road for our next tour (Luna had shows scheduled in Spain the following week). This option did not appeal to either of us. The only sensible options were the ones that Claudia had laid out – either the band had to find a new bass player, or I had to find somewhere new to live. This was not unreasonable. How could she live otherwise? Could she be expected to sit at home waiting for me while I went on a summer 'business trip' to Barcelona and Majorca, with Sean and Lee and Britta?

I hadn't seen Bernie, my shrink, since 1996. I saw him weekly for six months that year, saying that my marriage had lost its passion and that maybe I needed to get out.

'You have been running away from this problem for a long time,' said Bernie.

'What should I do?'

He couldn't, or wouldn't, tell me. He said I had to figure it out for myself.

'If I knew the answer,' he said, 'I would tell you. But I don't.'

'But I have to decide by Friday whether to ask Britta to leave the band.'

'I think maybe you should consult a lawyer before you do something like that.'

He had a point. In any other job this would be an obvious case of sexual harassment – you can't have an affair with an employee and then fire her when your wife catches you. But these things happen in rock and roll bands. It had never happened before in Luna, but it was not to be the last time.

I called Britta.

'I'll leave if you want me to,' she said.

I called Sean and told him that Claudia wanted me to find a new bass player for the band.

'Well, Lee and I don't want that,' he said.

No surprise there.

I was at a crossroads. I had no idea what I would do come Friday. I didn't want to leave Claudia and Jack. But neither did I want to kick Britta out of Luna, and out of my life.

FRIDAY ROLLED around, and I still hadn't fired Britta. Which meant that I was leaving. I pulled my suitcase down from the closet shelf, stuffed it with summer clothes, grabbed my '58 Les Paul and walked out of the door.

My feet took over. They walked me to the street and out of my marriage. I cabbed it down to my horrid studio at 373 Broadway, where I lay on the floor and cried.

I went out for a tuna melt and a chocolate shake at a greasy diner on Broadway. It was a gorgeous summer day. I managed a few bites of my sandwich, and then walked up Broadway all the way to Fourteenth Street, then east and south to Tompkins Square Park. I had no destination that I was aware of, but at four in the afternoon I found myself wandering aimlessly down Second Avenue, arriving at the basketball courts at Houston Street.

I had unconsciously wandered very close to home, if I was still allowed to use

that word.

At that moment I looked across Second Avenue and saw our babysitter, Nicoleen, pushing Jack along in his stroller, heading west – home for the day. I froze. I wanted so badly to run across the street to Jack. He was only a couple weeks shy of his second birthday and was talking now. He didn't know many words yet, but his vocabulary was increasing each day. I wanted to say hello, but I couldn't. He was on his way home, and how could I explain to him that as of noon that day we no longer shared a roof?

There I stood, frozen on Second Avenue, watching my son being wheeled away and feeling as if he no longer belonged to me, as if he was being wheeled out of my life, unable to do anything about it.

This was the worst moment of my life. Of course I know that other people live through much worse. Mine were the problems of a spoiled and self-indulgent singer/songwriter. Still, this was my moment, and it hurt. Never mind that it was self-inflicted.

I gathered myself and walked down Crosby Street, through SoHo, across Canal Street, and back to my studio, where I rolled on the floor and sobbed again.

Strange sounds came out of my throat; from deep down inside, guttural, primal noises that I didn't know were in me. But they were there. Worse, perhaps, was the fact that there really was something I could have done about it. I could have taken the other path, and cancelled the dates in Spain. I could have started looking for a new bassist, asking for Lee and Sean's forgiveness and understanding in this, and telling them that this was the only way the band could continue.

I could have embarked on an extensive course of therapy and marriage counseling. Claudia and I could have read books and attended weekly couples' seminars to help us learn where things went wrong. Maybe after a couple of years of this I would be able to rebuild the trust that I had destroyed. I could cast out the bad Dean and work on the kind and obedient Dean. Cast out the liar and the cheat, and become a dutiful husband.

I knew other people who had tried this route. It worked for some of them. Others soon suffered relapses. I also knew, and Claudia did, too, that we were beyond that point. Claudia could be forgiving. But this time I had gone too far. ◇

POEM

The Wind-up

By Ryan Adams

are there any volunteers by choice in the ways of the heart
who grow up strong like their fathers and sprout dreams
to be piano movers
or is it just something you inherit for need of
replacement not genetics not something in somebody's bloodstream
and is there anyone who moves those things
who gets lazy on break and twinkles at the keys
who gets strayed from the day's work and carried away
and ten years later is sweating moments before he hits the
stage at carnegie hall
after being nervous for days, knowing his parents are gonna be there
and he feels pressure to play it good, considering
it was them that told him he was throwing it all away
on a shot in the dark, with a sure thing right in front of his face
it's 5:21 and my plants are in
and the phone is ringing and nighttime is coming.

Fugue State in a Forest

Paul Murray's quest for restrained hedonism

I'VE NEVER quite got the hang of festivals. There's nothing like other people's idea of fun to make you feel alone; also, the unbridled hedonism seems to bring out the Victorian in me. What are all these people doing drunk in a field? Why aren't they at home reading their books, or curled up in terror in their beds, melancholically contemplating their deaths? Not to mention the apocalyptic toilet facilities you get at these things. Milan Kundera once defined kitsch as the denial of shit. Your typical festival crowd, dressed up to the nines in their vintage slips and their sparkly wellies, then trotting off to Portaloos that make the Black Hole of Calcutta look like tea at the Ritz, embraces kitsch on a monumental scale. In the wake of twentieth-century history, it is actually quite terrifying, and that's why you'll rarely see Milan Kundera at Glastonbury, and definitely not at Pukkelpop.

As for literary festivals, these seemed to go far in the other direction. The benefits of bringing thousands of highly strung book-loving isolates into one place seemed dubious. Wasn't that what happened in Jonestown? And anyway, isn't the entire point of reading that you're on your own? But then my editor told me about a new festival he was curating in Cornwall. There would be a certain amount of both music and film, art forms, he conceded, which can spiral dangerously into hedonism. But it wouldn't be *unbridled* hedonism, as the main focus would be literature, and the prevailing spirit bookish.

I was intrigued. Could literature and its old enemy, summer, truly be reconciled? Was restrained hedonism really a thing? Between the melancholy isolate lying on his bed contemplating death, and a hundred thousand people on drugs singing along to Oasis — could there be a third way?

I had a look at the website. The fact that it was taking place on a rolling country estate, as opposed to some random field, was encouraging. Milan Kundera

wasn't coming, but several very reputable authors were. One act in particular that caught my eye was something called Alain de Botton's *Agony Hour*. I wasn't sure what it meant, but the unusual admission of the existence of agony, often glossed over at festivals, seemed to augur well for the sober tone. The presence of Alain de Botton reassured me too. He wouldn't tolerate any nonsense; there would be no 'going mental' or 'getting ur freak on' on de Botton's watch. I was almost sold. 'What about the toilet facilities?' I asked. 'We've spent a lot of money on those toilets,' my editor said, 'a lot of money.'

I made a plan to drive down to Cornwall with my friend Seraphina. Seraphina works in publishing, and is a very beautiful woman. There are a lot of beautiful women in publishing. This is one of the exciting discoveries you make when you first publish a book. It's almost like you've gained access to a secret society, though obviously it would be juvenile and sexist to actually think of it that way, or to come up with a name for it, such as *Fabulous Ladies Of Publishing*, or *FLOP*. Initially, as I say, it's very exciting to publish a book and find yourself in the middle of *FLOP*. But you quickly learn that it's very much a giveth-and-taketh-away-type situation. You have indeed breached the citadel of beautiful bookish women — but, what are you going to impress them with? If your plan is to tell them about your novel, think again. These ladies have just had lunch with Dostoyevsky. Last week they were skiing with Kafka and Homer. They look after Yukio Mishima's cat when he's away. Your unique selling point is the least unique thing in the room. Until you win a Nobel (which members of *FLOP* call 'Nobes', as in, 'Seamus just clocked the Nobe') that citadel will remain closed.

I digress. Seraphina and I decided to drive down to Cornwall from London. I live in Dublin, which is much closer to Cornwall than London, but, like most Irish people, I have only a very vague idea

of British geography. Towns with football teams I can just about handle, but the counties thing completely throws me. I know that Gloucestershire and Berkshire exist, but *where* they exist I have no idea. I know there's a Surrey, a Sussex, a Somerset, but have trouble convincing myself they are not the same place. In short, Seraphina's proposal to drive seemed quite reasonable, as in my head Cornwall was just outside Wimbledon.

We set off into the Friday afternoon traffic in the high-but-not-overly-so spirits we felt appropriate for a literary-cum-music festival. The first couple of hours passed happily enough, with me telling Seraphina about my life as a novelist — how I would sometimes use a computer, and sometimes a pen — and Seraphina telling me stories about all the Nobel-winners she knew who when you got to know them were just so nice. But as time went on, and the traffic refused to budge, we grew restive. I remembered one of the other reasons I didn't like festivals, which is that they take place Somewhere Else. The willingness of other people to go Somewhere Else — even if it's a field in the middle of nowhere, even though all their stuff remains Here and this will cause them endless logistical and hygienic problems — I have always found mystifying. The fact that they are also quite happy to sit in a car on a gridlocked motorway on the *way* to Somewhere Else for hours on end makes it hard not to draw the conclusion that they are so desperate to escape the thought of the implacable meaningless of life and the ever-nearing prospect of death that any distraction short of actually being roasted on a spit is welcome. For the contemplative sort of person, though, who is aware just how much effort it takes to get one's head around something like death, and how limited a time for thinking about death life affords us, wasting hours on end in a pokey death-free rented Nissan Micra is sorely testing.

By hour five, we were feeling that we had grievously overestimated our capacity for hedonism. Also, I was realizing that Seraphina's *FLOPPY* beauty had blinded me to the fact that her sense of direction was even worse than mine.

By hour ten, however, we finally arrived at the rolling country estate. It did look magical. Fairy lights decked the

trees, guiding us towards the marquees where attractively thoughtful-looking people sat and talked and generally indulged in acceptable levels of hedonism. My editor emerged from the throng and welcomed us. We asked if there was anything to eat as we had travelled non-stop in the hope of making it down before darkness fell so we could put up our tent. The kitchen was closed, my editor said, but he would ask the chef if there was anything left in the fridge. He came back five minutes later with two small and very hard baps. He presented these to us apologetically. This is all we have, he said. I was too hungry even to make a double-entendre about the small hard baps. 'Why don't I get you some beers?' my editor said.

The beer was ice-cold and the summer night and the fairy lights were restoring my hedonism, such that, though I'd given up smoking in April, when my editor took out a pack of cigarettes I asked him for one. 'Of course,' said my editor. I pulled on the cigarette and leaned back in my seat. This was the life after all, I was thinking. 'We should put up our tent,' said Seraphina. Right, I'd forgotten about that. Let me just have another of these delicious cigarettes – 'Before all the light goes,' said Seraphina, who beneath her floppiness was a bit of a whip-cracker. Right, right.

We went to the spot we'd been allotted. Seraphina spread the notably un-tent-like constituents of the tent out on the ground, and turned to me expectantly.

There are certain things that women seem to think men should be able to do. Lighting a fire is one. Fixing a flat tyre, being able to shuffle a pack of cards, uncork wine, strike up conversation with their friends' boring husbands. Putting up a tent is another of these abilities. I don't know where the misconception comes from. It's not like we all go to fire-lighting school. It's not like we're born with innate tent-erecting ability. Yet when a man reveals that his gifts may lie elsewhere than building a bridge out of vines or repairing a stalled engine with a pipe cleaner, what he will get from a woman, more often than not, and in spite of all the talk of equality between the genders, is a withering look. This look implies that if he can't put up a tent or light a fire or steal a jet fighter like Jack Bauer in 24, he

probably won't be able to do certain *other* things. Women love giving men this look. I suspect they spend a lot of time practising it in front of a mirror. In terms of actually getting the fire lit, though, or the cards shuffled, the withering look is *not* helpful. It puts a lot of pressure on a man when he's trying to light a fire or shuffle a pack of cards and a woman is standing there giving him a withering look. Does the woman actually *want* to get the fire lit, one begins to wonder, or the tent erected, or whatever it is? Or does she *want* to stand there being sardonic and scoring points?

Anyway, after about five minutes of me moving around the various pieces of tent with what I hoped was a knowledgeable air, Seraphina's look took a turn for the withering. 'What are you doing?' she asked. 'I think your tent's broken,' I said. The truth was I wasn't even sure it was a tent. Seraphina sighed. 'I'll do it,' she said. 'Why don't you pump up the inflatable mattress?'

That I could do. I found the pump and set to work, determined to do the best possible job. After ten minutes, Seraphina appeared from the other side of the newly erected and admirably tent-like tent. 'What are you doing?' she asked again. 'I'm pumping up the mattress,' I said. 'It's still totally flat,' she pointed out. 'It isn't,' I said, 'It's just taking a while.' 'It's flat,' she said. 'It's gone up a little bit,' I said, 'It's just slow.' 'It hasn't done anything,' she said, 'It's flaccid.' 'Well, just give me a minute, would you?' I cried. 'Stop pressuring me, how do you think that's going to help?' I turned my back on her and began to pump even more vigorously than before. I pumped for all I was worth. But nothing happened. If you think it's embarrassing not being able to erect a tent, believe me, that's nothing compared to having a total pump breakdown with flop looking on. 'Why isn't it going up?' she said. 'I don't know,' I said. 'Maybe there's something you can do that would help?' 'Like what?' she asked. 'I don't know, like, if while I'm pumping, you sort of massage it?' 'Let's just try again tomorrow,' Seraphina said. Her tone made it clear, however, that there would be no more trying on this particular weekend.

We trudged back to the bar, where I spotted my editor and asked him for a

cigarette. 'Of course,' he said. 'What's that music?' I asked him. 'That's the disco tent,' he said. 'Are you dancing?'

It was like asking the Brno death march if they were dancing. We were weak with hunger, tired from travelling in the wrong direction, traumatized by the uninflating mattress. It seemed like the best thing to do was cut our losses and go to bed. Beneath the uninflated inflatable mattress, the Cornwall ground was obdurately hard and lumpy. My stomach gurgled with hunger. 'Tomorrow will be better,' I told Seraphina, at which precise moment it started to rain. Not pittery-pattery, Cath Kidston-type rain. Heavy torrential rain. At first we pretended not to hear it. Then the hateful useless mattress began to feel distinctly damp. Seraphina sat up. 'This is awful,' she said. It was awful. And I *felt* awful, because I was responsible. I was the one who'd invited her to come down. At the same time, what did she expect me to do? Did women expect men to be able to stop the rain now? I suppose Yukio Mishima ('Yukie') and Dostoyevsky ('dear, dear Fyodor') would have just commanded the rain to stop. 'What are you talking about?' Seraphina said, and then, before I had a chance to explain, 'I'm going to sleep in the car,' she added. I wasn't giving in, though. I had come here to camp hedonistically and I wasn't going to let the rain put me off.

About ten minutes later, the rain had put me off, so I went to sleep in the car. Seraphina, of course, had got to the back seat first, so I had to lie in the front, with my head on one seat and my feet on the other and the gear stick propping up my spine. The hours passed slowly. Every time I turned around, my knee would hit the horn and wake me out of whatever bad dream of being tortured by garage mechanics I'd fallen into. The people in the VW van across the way would honk back merrily. I wished I was at home in bed contemplating death. Sometimes death can feel very far away.

The next morning we got out of the car to find the rolling estate thoroughly waterlogged, and the festival-goers wandering around in varying states of dampness. By the breakfast stall we found my editor looking disconsolate. This was the first day of the inaugural festival. It couldn't afford to be a washout! I shook

my head sympathetically and asked him for a cigarette. He offered me the box. I could see he was running low. 'Is there a cigarette machine here anywhere?' I asked. He said there wasn't. I took a cigarette and shook my head sympathetically some more.

For the rest of the morning, we watched the rain come down. It was depressing – not nice-depressing like lying on your bed weeping while listening to Schoenberg, just straight-up depressing. At a normal festival, I suppose everyone would just have taken a load more drugs and put on Oasis or burned down a church or something. But this was a literary festival, and these were sensitive souls, highly susceptible to pathetic fallacy. We could take some solace in the excellent toilet facilities, but excellent toilet facilities do not a festival make.

My editor looked at his watch. 'Poetry,' he mumbled, and trudged off. Seraphina and I glanced at each other. Was he all right? We decided we should follow him. He took us in the direction of a marquee. Inside it was a poet and a small crowd. 'I'm going to read to you from *War Music*,' said the poet.

Although I spend a lot of my life listening to music or reading or watching films, I nevertheless wonder sometimes whether art is really all that important. Isn't it ultimately an indulgence? Couldn't I get by without it? And then, something will happen that reminds me how crucial it is – that the redemptive power of art isn't just an empty cliché.

No one who saw us that day could have denied that we needed redemption. I looked like I'd crawled out my own grave. The other punters were in similar shape. Mud-covered, dehumanized, we resem-

bled one of the ropier orc platoons from *The Lord of the Rings* – apart, that is, from Seraphina and her friends, who looked like they'd just breezed in from a three-week stay at a health spa in Switzerland. It was clear that the art would have to be top-drawer for us to have any chance of redemption.

And it was. Christopher Logue's thunderous and incredibly violent retelling of *The Iliad* I remember to this day. He was followed by the genial Tom Payne, who read some translations of Catullus, detailing the poet's run-ins with what sounded like an ancient progenitor of FLOP. Then Alain de Botton did his Agony Hour, solving the audience's problems with the wisdom of the philosophers. I wondered if was anything in Schopenhauer or Nietzsche or whoever about how to fix an inflatable mattress, but he didn't seem to see my hand. After that, though, several stalls selling delicious food had opened, and I made good on yesterday's famine by ordering a double-portion of crab salad. Then – almost as if nature were admitting defeat in the face of all the bonhomie – the sun, to cheers, came out! Everything was turning out for the best, and I was glad I hadn't stolen the car while Seraphina was in the shower and driven back to London.

Unfortunately I can only give a partial account of the day's redemption. After my editor went to ground, I set off to find the local pub to buy cigarettes without giving sufficient regard to the many latent pitfalls in the seemingly innocent phrase 'there's a shortcut through that forest', with the result that I spent Anita Pallenberg's talk, Hari Kunzru's DJ set and several other events stumbling in pitch-darkness through a wood. Far from denting my spirits, though, once I found

my way out I discovered that my hiatus from civilisation had shaken away the last of my inhibitions. Crawling from the undergrowth, I followed the music to the music tent, where the dancing was now in full swing. Seraphina and other members of FLOP were gyrating picturesquely; Alain de Botton stood at the margin with folded arms, keeping an eye on things. I hit the floor. 'You're covered in leaves,' Seraphina said. I didn't care. I was all about living in the moment now. The festival had brought me, via a ten-hour road trip, the worst night's sleep I had ever had and a strange fugue state in a forest which I had escaped only accidentally by running away from a badger, right back to myself; and now . . . I just wanted to *be*. I wanted to express myself, completely and unashamedly, through dance. All around me people stopped dancing and turned to watch, awed and perhaps moved by this display of pure being. Then, just as I executed an ambitious double-pirouette, I felt my stomach lurch.

I left the tent at speed.

Outside in the velvety sky the stars were arrayed like fairy lights. I took deep breaths, until I saw someone wander through the darkness towards me. It was Seraphina. 'Are you all right?' she said.

'Too much crab salad,' I told her.

'Oh,' she said, and then, 'Do you know who makes the most *adorable* crab salad? Milan Kundera.'

'Really?'

'Oh God, it's astonishing.' She fell silent; we spent a moment sitting there on the bench, listening to the music and the happy chatter spin themselves out into the darkness, thinking that Milan Kundera, if he'd had a good inflatable mattress, would surely have liked it here too. ◇



HAVING HAD MYSELF LASHED BY THE ANKLE, AT LOW
TIDE, TO THE REEF, SO THAT I COULD, IN SOME
SLIGHT DEGREE, BETTER SEE IT, AND JUDGE A
LITTLE WHERE (IF ANYWHERE), THE TRUE
HANDLES OF IT MIGHT BE
GROPED FOR.

Raymond Pettibon · *No Title (Having had myself)* · 2009
Pen, ink, gouache and acrylic on paper
30 × 22½ inches (76.2 × 57.2 cm)

Death Fest: How It Was For Me

By Stuart Hammond

SO HERE'S something totally true and super-weird that will trip you out completely. Two days before the festival started I was crying my eyes out in the back of a cab because those evil shits at the magazine had totally bugged my ticket into thin air and it looked like I wasn't even going to be going. Imagine my agony! When The Witches broke it to me in the office I held it together and did a passable job of seeming unfazed but as soon as I got in the taxi I was in *floods*, like Biblical floods, for serious. I literally had snot all down the front of my Balenciaga cardigan and that just made everything worse and I was just totally hating life and dying inside. Somewhat unexpectedly, the driver was actually quite sweet and sympathetic (gay?) and when I explained about the hateful betrayal he said that really I shouldn't worry, and that I was better off not going to the festival anyway because he'd heard – and I **SWEAR DOWN COMPLETELY** that this is exactly what he said – that there was a rumour going around that terrorists (!!!) were planning to crash a hijacked plane right into the thick of the thing. The horreur! He opined that it all made perfect sense, because a festival like that is the absolute epitome of “Western decadence at its decadentest” (sic). Petulant, I spluttered through the tears; “I fucking well know that don't I? That's why I want to go.”

Anyway I forgot about all that pretty quickly and went home to pen my now infamous ‘UM, FASHION WORLD; HELLOOOO? BLOGGERS ARE VIPS TOO NOW’ update. Mercifully, a right-minded, hugely influential and most benevolent editor at another, far superior magazine read it, loved it, and personally offered me a press pass, in exchange for my jumping ship to their (celebrated!) style pages. Reader, I hopped, skipped, jumped. Au revoir, witches!

So I finally got into the festival and I was walking around in my Diesel short shorts trying to find cool people I know when I bumped into Cheryl Cole (yay!) and she called me ‘pet’ like she knew who I was (super-yay!) so her security guys

chillaxed a bit and she let me get a few pics (she was in Ray Bans / D&G playsuit / Hermes Birkin / Barbour / Hunters: pretty much yawnsville TBH, but *still*) and I had it all beamed onto the blog within minutes. After that I was like: good start, much? and was feeling pretty stoked on myself. Never Not Working! But still the fact remained that even though this festival was freakishly teeming with people, I had been there for nearly an hour already and I'd only found like one actual *actual person* and then – super bummer – it started to rain. It was only a light sort of drizzle but I was under it all on my own and it got quite depressing quite quickly so I took half a pill to try and cheer myself up.

Half an hour later I was in VIP with TT who had mercifully found me through Twitter and even though nothing was really happening off the pill I was beginning to feel a bit better. So far I'd blogged two just-about passable celeb looks and four complete fucking trainwrecks. Of course, I personally *prefer* a fashion disaster. With disasters; *everyone* wants pics, so for me it's like; ‘ker-ching!’

TT stopped Twittering for about a nanosecond to look up and do this exaggerated hiss at that jumped-up chavvy whore YOU KNOW (if you're addicted to the blog!) WHO at the far end of the bar. And out of earshot, thank *fuck*; she'd probably batter us both. I was not about to ask *her* for a picture, that's for sure. I recall that we briefly discussed her terminal slagdom and then we were sipping our drinks and scanning the tent for some semblance of an actual A-list and this incessant handbaggy house music was pumping away and I can remember thinking – irked, sigh – how I had still not come up off the pill. We split another one, ordered more drinks, assessed our likelihood of getting K. Brett-amine was out there somewhere, apparently, but neither of us had seen or heard from him since the Shoreditch House Gucci bukkake party and that was like weeks ago. After a while, this is me to TT:

“You know babe, I have seriously got this super-strong feeling that some bad shit is going to go down here.” Then TT's like: “Like, duh it is dude: Coldplay is playing tonight.” LOL (totally not LOL-ing in disrespect though, obv).

Even though that afternoon me and TT agreed that we would rather watch our whole entire families get raped and eaten by a pack of rabid wolves than watch Coldplay headline another festival, come nine o'clock – why God, why?! – we found ourselves somehow adrift in the sea of their people. At least we were both feeling pretty good by this point, because we were (finally!) buzzing off the pills and TT had scored a nice bit of white off Blackie and we had been hitting that hard and also we had both got three pairs of Ray Bans each, free, from the Ray Ban caravan backstage. Even with all of these definite pros there was still one big definite con: this crowd was basically like the most bleaksville scene of all time. I don't much like being in crowds anyway; you feel all hemmed-in and trapped and there's no escape routes and everyone keeps barging past you and your drink gets spilled and your shoes get ruined and you look around you at all of these people for miles! and you start to think, like; ‘OMG like who actually even *am I!*’ This crowd though, was next-level lame. Every direction you turned there was some sunburned twat in a straw trilby hat and some garish cheap plastic sunglasses, waving a flag and hooting inanities. People actually wearing *face paint*. Do they honestly think they look *good*? Me and TT were like Invaders From Planet Actually Stylish. We were seriously both of us like; ‘*Seriously?*’

Waiting for Coldplay to come on was like Waiting for the Bad Thing to Happen, but me and TT found some old crusty (OMG his outfit: such a holocaust I can't even bring myself to put it in words) selling balloons of laughing gas for two quid a pop, so that brought some welcome relief. We did like four balloons each in five minutes, so when the band came on in the end I barely noticed it, great mercies. By that point I had retreated so far into myself that I felt like I was looking the wrong way down a telescope, only like a telescope that telescopes sound and vision and touching and totally everything. My hearing had gone like how

it goes when it feels like there's a massive throbbing helicopter hovering right over the top of your head, insanely buzzing. I was really, truly, totally insanely buzzing, and TBH I think that that rather helped me to deal with what happened next.

What happened next was of course clouded by how high I was and it took me a while longer than everyone else to get it untwisted. But on the big screen Chris Martin was talking I think and behind him on another big screen I could make out the big white words MAKE TRADE FAIR, and the sun was going down, Coldplay were segueing into another slow number and two giant roman candles at each side of the stage exploded in these fountains of fire that rolled upwards and into the gloaming. It was not an entirely unpleasant moment I guess, and I remember giving in a bit and thinking that when it came down to it this whole deal maybe wasn't even so bad. Then me and TT did a bump of the coke and another balloon and I was pretty much feeling rosy, out of it, hardly even there. And then the whole situation went super, super bad.

On the big video screens there was yet another close-up of Chris Martin singing away and then you could hear these faint sort of staccato popping sounds and then suddenly the top side of his face just burst off the front of his head in this (implausible!) shower of gore and his body fell right out of the frame. Total confusion ensued but the cameras were still rolling, so up on the video screens you could clearly see these four guys suddenly bum-rush the stage from the wings and they all had rifles and they all had all of this ammo strapped onto their bodies like Rambo and it was totally unclear what this was but it was happening right there onstage as if it was part of the performance and it had us all kind of like hypnotized. My first thought, obv's, was of the kindly cabbie's Jihadi prophesy, but it was still pretty hard to tell what these guys' deal was. Like, stylewise; I'd say they were about halfway between Al Qaeda and the Trenchcoat Mafia. And one of them was deffo white so it was like; *hellooooh?! Were these guys pissed off Fundamental Muslims of just pissed off?* Anyway, by that point it seemed like the whole of Coldplay and most of the security guys around the stage area had been

shot dead or shot and basically dying, and everyone around – natch – was totally freaking the fuck out.

I was looking out for dive-bombing planes when the explosion erupted and further confused the whole thing. It happened in the crowd, about twenty metres back from where Coldplay were just standing and it drowned out the screaming completely with this deafening crack and this big fiery flash and this up-rolling cloud of thick dusty smoke that totally obscured the stage. Me and TT were about a hundred metres behind it and both high as fuck and both like 'WTF?!' and confused and thinking 'Is this just the drugs?' and everyone was suddenly quiet for a couple of seconds, totally stunned, the blast settling, and no one seeming to understand what was happening. I felt the rain start up again then. I gripped TT by the arm and he looked back at me, wide-eyed, dumbstruck, petrified, and that's when I saw it spattering his face in flecks of red. It was actually raining blood I shit you not.

I saw some gnarly shit then that I don't even want to go into. I'd lost TT in the ensuing stampede, I was totes on my own in this absolute harrowing clusterfuck and I was suddenly, resolutely, completely intent on surviving. The vibe by then was pretty much look-out-for-number-one so I didn't feel guilty at all about stepping over (and *on*, TB totally H) all of these trampled bodies all squished into the dust and the mud while I was trying to double back on these crowds of plebs and make my way back to the track that lead to VIP. VIP, I had cunningly decided, would be the safest place to be.

Dumb decision. For a start there was nobody even *there* at the bit where they check your wristband – so it was like *anybody* could just waltz in. Then on the track on the way up there I saw Emma Watson and her boyf (FYI: still looking *insanely gorgeous*) come flying past me in a golf buggy and even though they were going pretty fast it was clear that her Vuitton basque and his deep-V Apparel T-shirt were totally covered in blood. Some girl who I think might be a T4 TV presenter was draped across the backseat, also bloody, totally limp. Not a good look.

In the section of VIP that's basically like a big sort of picnic area, I peeped

around the side of a portaloos to see what was occurring. What was occurring – it was immediately obv's – was a sort of open air Columbine-meets-Mumbai-style sort of massacre. Bodies were literally *strewn*. Three of the gunmen from the stage invasion were stalking between the picnic tables and picking off anything that moved. About ten metres in front of me, U2's The Edge lay dead. He didn't even have his little hat on: that was how dead he was.

It was at this point that it struck me that these sick bastards were actually actively seeking out the VIPs. Crashing a plane into a festival *did* make sense, in a way, sure. But what a nightmare to actually organize! Much easier – and oh-dear-God how much more totally terrifying – to go straight for the cultural jugular, to 'reach for the stars,' terror-wise, as it were. There would be no bigger news story all year. I was witnessing the birth of a whole new way of approaching terrorism, and it was well, well fucking out of order. I know that way less people died at 'Death Fest' and everything, but am I wrong in thinking that this was actually kind of *worse* than 9/11? Is that bad? >bites nails!<

I couldn't think straight enough to get any kind of escape plan together, and TBH I couldn't really tear myself away, so I lurked by the portaloos and tried to take stock. I checked my Iphone and saw that TT had updated his Facebook status to 'Terrified,' so at least I knew he was alive. This happy news reminded me that I was still holding the wrap of his coke, so I super-quietly did a little bump off the back of my hand to try and sharpen-up the old nerves.

All I'm trying to do here is write down like a totally searingly honest account of my experiences that day, which hopefully might get published somewhere and exclusively tell my side of the story. Thinking about it; maybe I should cut out the drugs stuff. What I won't do is go on and on ad nauseam about which celebs got killed and which got maimed and how many normal people died compared to famous people and blah blah blah blah. Suffice to say: celeb-wise, Yes: I got some totally shocking and super-amazing photos of a shitload of them. I know this sounds kind of grimsville, but it turns out that if you take someone who's

an icon already, and then get a picture of them scared shitless and covered in blood, or dead or dying or with their arm recently detached from their actual body, then you have got an image that's like iconic to the power of a bazillion. The fact that Alexa Chung still looks beautiful and stylish in my aftermath pics, in spite of her injuries, is a testament to the power of her cool. The same goes for Kate

Hudson, who saw her Muse-frontman boyf fully take a bullet in the neck (you're gonna pull through, Matt!), got his blood absolutely all over her cute floral-print summer dress, but never once looked anything short of AAAAA-MAZING.

You all know how it ended; the SWAT team's retardedly late arrival, the standoff, the hail of bullets, the final suicide bomb. It's ironic, I guess, that this three-hour

reign of the Worst Terror Ever came to an end just metres from the Comedy Tent. Because it was in no way remotely funny at all, obv's. It was totally gross and totally upsetting in the gnarliest way imaginable, and even though (as I'm sure you know) I got suddenly kind of super-rich off the back of it, I honestly wish more than anything ever that the whole thing could just like, un happen. ◇

THE FESTIVAL ISSUE: MEMOIR

'Make Interesting Mistakes'

Sally Chamberlain searches for enlightenment – and Robert Fraser – in 1970s India

In Five Dials 7 we left Sally Chamberlain and her husband, Wynn, escaping New York as the euphoria of the Woodstock Festival faded to the blackness of Altamont. Here she picks up the story – and provides the first first-hand account of the lost years in India of iconic sixties art dealer and Rolling Stones co-conspirator Robert Fraser.

'Time to get out of America,' wrote our friend Robert Fraser. Wynn and I had known Robert since the late fifties when he came to New York to work at Knoedler's, and we stayed in touch after he returned to London and set up his avant garde gallery. But after a stint in prison for drug possession, Robert closed the gallery and disappeared. We didn't know where he was until the letter came: 'I'm in India and you should escape New York while you can. Nothing creative is going to happen while Nixon is President. I'm learning so much from an old sage who has the answer for changing our lives. Why don't you come? India's an amazing country and a wonderful place for children. It will change your life – come!'

It was the autumn of 1970 and we wanted to change our lives. The happy, hopeful sixties were gone and the party was over. When Wynn was mugged in broad daylight on Fifth Avenue, we took it as a message to leave. Encouraged by Allen Ginsberg and intrigued by Robert's letters we took off for India.

There, on an island off the coast of Kerala, we met Robert's sage, Nataraja

Guru, sitting barefoot under a coconut tree. To our amazement this old man, with his curtain of white hair falling from his bald pate and his nut-brown body wrapped in a faded tangerine cloth, had studied with Henri Bergson at the Sorbonne in Paris. He was familiar with Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead and had actually advised Robert Oppenheimer not to make the atom bomb. The old man and Wynn – who had written his Master's thesis on Whitehead – hit it off immediately. For months, we followed him around South India, but never heard a word from Robert.

In late 1971, the old man took us to Ooty (Ootacamund), his retreat in the Nilgiri Hills. There he talked about the Goddess, Shakti, the natural life force in the world; about beings who kept the world going by sleeping on serpents in milk oceans, who danced on corpses, sat naked in glacial Himalayan caves and even made mistakes. 'There is no sin in Hinduism,' Nataraja explained, 'just mistakes. Every action is a mistake. If you must take action, make interesting mistakes . . . and make them quickly.'

At the time, India had just defeated Pakistan in a brief but bloody war and East Pakistan had declared independence and renamed itself Bangladesh. Thousands of miles away, America was still bogged down in Vietnam, and after Nixon abandoned the Gold Standard the country was caught in an economic crunch whose tentacles stretched all the

way to Ooty. The local bank abruptly closed, our funds ran low and the only place to receive international money transfers became Madras.

There, we finally caught up with Robert – charismatic and handsome as ever, wearing starched white kurta pajamas, his dark hair cut short. But he, who always had been the hippest of the hip, now wanted to live for ever in his pink bungalow on the shores of the Bay of Bengal.

'I picked Madras because it's not on the t-tourist trail, is a c-cultural centre far from the p-political shenanigans of Delhi.' (When excited, Robert's stutter returned and now he was excited about his new life.) Talking non-stop, he guided us through an enfilade of airy rooms crammed with exquisite bronzes, Tibetan scrolls and silk weavings stretching up to the roof. Shaded by a canopy from the hot sun, we sat on batik-covered cushions listening to Robert talk about watching bodies burn beside the Ganges in Varanasi and about Tarapith, where holy men sat in meditation on dead bodies. Here in the South, he was studying classical Indian dance, music and art. 'India is so c-complex but everything c-connects. I am t-trying to put it all together into a philosophy to live by.'

'Wow, you've covered a lot of ground,' Wynn whistled. 'And your house is full of amazing stuff. Are you going to reopen your gallery and sell Indian art in London?'

'I c-can't bear the thought of going b-back to London,' Robert said emphatically. 'D-didn't anyone tell you? I went overboard on d-drugs, was put in prison and then went through rehab at an Ayurvedic clinic in Kerala.'

'We heard something,' I said, 'but we never believe rumours.'

'I don't either,' he grinned. 'Anyway,

that's all b-behind me. I'm off d-drugs and d-drink for ever. This is a chance to turn my life around. That's why I sent you to Nataraja, wanted your reaction . . . You say he's the real thing so I'm going to spend more time with him, soak up his wisdom.' His voice lost its enthusiasm. 'But I c-can't stand that bunch of b-back-biting zealots who hang around him. Not even Eton had such crazies.'

The crazies were a mixed bag of Europeans and Americans – dysfunctional types who had taken too many drugs or had alcoholic and abusive parents. They dominated daily life at Nataraja's various retreats and put their own twist on the old man's teachings, starting every sentence with 'Guru says'. Their ideas were so contradictory I often couldn't figure out what the Guru was saying.

'Sally and I feel the same way,' Wynn told Robert. 'We want his wisdom-teaching but we need to stop travelling and find a sane base for our children.'

'This world is so insane and that old man knows so much. He has the p-power to give us strength to get through anything, b-bring it all together,' Robert sighed. 'If we could only see him without those idiots.'

Wynn nodded. 'I keep hearing Bill Burroughs' gravelly drawl: "Don't hang around with stupid people, their stupidity will rub off on you and they'll get you in trouble."'

'Poor B-Bill,' Robert sighed, 'he's in London now, trying to get off smack but it's impossible there. If only he'd come to India . . .'

We waited for the wire transfer to come. Wynn haunted the State Bank of India, only to be told by indifferent clerks that our money was held up in some intricate international spider's web. Robert offered a generous loan to keep us afloat and we lingered in Madras. He was a marvellous guide; whizzing us from classical music concerts to art exhibitions to dance performances. He turned every event into a memorable occasion – he knew all the stars, introduced us to the spellbinding singer Subhalakshmi and the Kathakali dance and theatre troupe who entranced us with their intricate make up, colourful costumes and brilliant retelling of ancient stories of the Hindu gods and goddesses.

December was the time of year when

famous Indian musicians gathered in Madras. Wynn and I still talk about those evenings walking the winding streets of ancient Mylapore, following musicians playing compositions by Tyagaraja, who had lived and composed before the birth of Mozart. ('It was right here,' Robert said insouciantly, 'right where we are standing that St Thomas, after preaching the Brotherhood of Man, was stoned to death by irate Brahmins.' 'When?' I gasped and he grinned, 'That was in AD 72, my dear.')

One day, as we walked on the beach in front of Robert's bungalow, our children running ahead chasing his little dog, Chapatti, Robert asked Wynn why he'd given up painting. Wynn launched into an explanation and my mind drifted back five years . . .

1967 was the year of the first communes, of Allen Ginsberg testifying before a Senate committee that LSD was not as dangerous as alcohol, that if people expanded their minds, it would be beneficial for the United States. It was the Summer of Love and of Be-Ins, and the buzz words were 'Flower Power', 'Black is Beautiful' and, in New York, 'See you at Max's!'

Max's Kansas City on Park Avenue South looked like an ordinary dive with its wooden bar, leather booths and small tables but no other place had such a clientele. On the night I was thinking of, Bob Rauschenberg was huddled at the bar with Senator Jake Javits and his wife Marian; trendsetters Earl and Camilla McGrath yakked with Scottish artist Rory McEwen; Brigid Berlin and Viva hopped from Andy Warhol's round table in the back to the front room tables of models and photographers.

We greeted them all, slid into a side booth and ordered dinner. Our jumbo shrimp arrived, '(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction' blared from the jukebox and it seemed like an ordinary evening until Wynn said, 'I can't get no satisfaction either.'

'What do you mean?' I was alarmed. 'Have I . . . am I . . .?'

'No, no . . . it's not you, darling, it's me. I've decided to stop painting. Everything changed when Frank died.'

Frank O'Hara, curator at MOMA, *bon vivant* and poet *extraordinaire* had been hit by a jeep on Fire Island on a hot July

night in 1966. We had rushed to Bayview General Hospital to see him. Arriving in the waiting room, arms full of red roses, we found Joe LeSueur (Frank's long time roommate), artist Larry Rivers and poet Kenneth Koch pacing the floor. One look at their faces and we knew Frank's condition was serious. The door of Frank's room opened and a weeping Bill de Kooning stumbled out. 'Give him anything he wants,' he choked to the nurse, 'I'll pay for everything.' He nodded at us and vanished down the corridor.

The nurse turned to us. 'You can only stay a few minutes, he's very weak.'

Frank's electric blue eyes were sleepy, his Roman centurion's face bruised and sunken, but he smiled and whispered, 'How nice of you to come see me. What's the news?'

Driving back to the city, I cried, realizing a vital part of living poetry was going. He died that night, a week before his fortieth birthday.

I remembered him saying, 'I'm afraid of old age.' That was at The Quadrangle, our farm in Rhinebeck. Frank had come for a February weekend, along with poets Bill Berkson and John Giorno, underground film star Beverly Grant and musician Tony Conrad. There had been a heavy snowfall the night before and we'd pelted each other with snowballs and whizzed down the hill behind the barn on a motley collection of sleds and garbage can lids. Later, we sat by the fire drinking hot toddies laced with Frank's favorite Jack Daniels and played 'Truth'. When we got to the question of what was our greatest fear, Frank tossed down his drink, poured another and said, 'Living beyond forty . . . I'm afraid of old age . . . of being an old messy drunk.'

The only consolation was that Frank would never be old.

Robert had known and loved Frank too. Back in the fifties, the two of them had had wild nights together in downtown dancing bars and up in Harlem. Now, in Madras, Wynn was explaining what Frank's death had meant to the New York art world: 'A devastating blow. Frank was so important, the only one who could have blocked the Warhol gang. Andy's commercialized and taken the art out of art; he says the artist's hand and brush on the canvas doesn't mean

anything. After a lifetime of painting, I felt artists were doomed to be mechanics and all art was going to be like a soup can or bar of soap, something to sell to investors.' He lit a cigarette and sighed. 'It was soul-destroying trying to market them and myself. My paintings didn't matter, only who I knew. I told Sally if we had to go to one more Park Avenue collector's dinner, I would throw my soup plate at the hostess. Idiotically, I thought theatre or filmmaking would be better but they were just more of the same . . . By the time I was mugged, I wasn't interested in any of it . . . wanted to find something more significant.'

'Same with me,' nodded Robert. 'The English are so resistant to anything new . . . I got bored trying to get them to see in a different way – so bored I took too many drugs and got totally lost. I closed my gallery to get away from all that and I'm living a new life in India.'

1972 opened with a message that Nataraja had arrived in Madras and wanted to see us.

'Ah, I am most happy to see you. We must talk.' His lemur-like eyes stared at us from behind thick horn-rimmed spectacles. There was something on his mind besides a tea party. 'I have rushed down to Madras, Elwyn, because I have a proposal for you.' He talked as if he were thinking out loud. 'Do you realize that your President Nixon and his cronies are going mad in America? Unless they come to their senses, they could destroy the whole world. It is clear to me your country really needs the Goddess. What is the best way of teaching in this modern age? The cinema. I want you to help me make a film about the Goddess. We shall bring Her to the West. You have made a film and have experience with that world.'

I choked back laughter at the thought of the film Wynn wrote and directed in 1969. *Brand X* was a raunchy parody of everyday American television. Underground star Taylor Mead starred as the host of a funky TV station. Yippie leader Abbie Hoffman sat in a bathtub burning American dollar bills; the immensely fat Tally Brown played a nurse making out with a sexy doctor and a talk show hostess flirting with muscle builders. A panel show called 'What's My Sex' starred drag queen Candy Darling as mystery guest

Marlene D Train. In a talent contest, Ultra Violet sang beautifully off key and young Sam Shepard roared and growled. There had been something in *Brand X* to shock or offend everybody. What would this pure old man think if he ever saw it? Actually, he wouldn't be upset, just say, 'If you're obsessed about something, do it to excess – throw the bomb down the smokestack!'

'Great idea, Guru, I'd love to help you,' Wynn said enthusiastically, forgetting he was through with films and actors.

Every afternoon they brainstormed in our hotel room, Nataraja and Wynn outlining a script based on a hermetic eighth-century work celebrating the Goddess, and Robert eagerly agreeing to collaborate and raise money for filming. The outline was almost finished when the Western devotees tracked us down. Script sessions ended as they belaboured the patient old man with their problems and complained that our children were too noisy. One even harangued us for eating fish and staying in a hotel with a swimming pool.

'He might enjoy looking like a ghoul,' I groused, 'but Sara and Sam are growing and need nourishing food. Besides, it's a very small pool and what's wrong with children getting some exercise?'

'Nothing, darling, calm down,' Wynn soothed me. 'I agree with you. I love Nataraja but I can't take these idiots either. Our money transfer just came through and it's going to get hot and then hotter in Madras . . . we'd be smart to find a better year-round climate.'

'Where?' I asked, reaching for the India guidebook.

'Robert advises we go to Bangalore and find a house there.'

Bangalore, situated in the centre of the Deccan Plateau at 3,500 feet, had one of the finest tropical climates in the world. Through Robert's contacts we found a bungalow built in 1799 by Colonel Arthur Wellesley (before he became the Duke of Wellington) and signed a two-year lease at fifty dollars per month rent. The house and its ten bedrooms had been neglected for a long time but a few coats of whitewash fixed that and for a modest sum Wynn bought or rented everything necessary in the local bazaar. Robert furnished his room with exotic hangings, silk cushions and patterned carpets and, at one

end, an antique Sheraton table. (When I saw him sitting behind it, I laughed. 'You look exactly like your banker father.' His face fell. 'I hadn't realized . . . hardly yogic, is it? I'll throw it away.' 'No, no,' I said, 'it's beautiful – just don't get too bankerish.')

I'll always miss the Bangalore of 1972. The azure sky and cows ambling down wide streets lined with jacaranda and other flamboyant trees; vendors coming by with ripe papayas, bananas and other fruits every morning; muezzins calling the faithful to prayer, Christian priests intoning Hail Marys in the nearby Cathedral and the chanting of Namō Shivaya in the Shiva Temple.

As soon as we settled in, Nataraja joined us. Wynn and Robert, yawning and rubbing their eyes, would stumble out of bed at dawn and go to his room, furnished with just a bed and chair. Sometimes I managed to get there too and listened as he talked.

'Our film is for Western women,' said Nataraja in his come-hither voice. 'When I was in the United States I noticed that your country abounds in strong-minded women, descended from the pioneering days of the Pilgrim Fathers. These women are strong feminine types with great psychic powers and possibilities. If channelled and directed to high ends, they could easily form the nucleus of a world society to bring about great changes . . .'

Wynn and Robert lived and breathed that screenplay, wondering how to get a spiritual idea into cinematic form, to awaken a world conditioned to an all-powerful father figure, somewhere up in a mythical heaven, to the Goddess.

Robert was a great housemate, kept us laughing and stirred things up. We had a lot in common – old friends in New York and London, as well as our search to find an anchor, something to believe in besides chasing money and fame. He also had a rapport with our children Sara and Sam – he teased them out of their squabbles, romped around the house or through the park with them, acting as if he was four years old too. When they spent mornings at nursery school, he came shopping with me.

One day we headed toward the fabric shops, only to run into a tsunami of lepers. Down Old Poorhouse Road they swept, in wheelchairs and in baby car-

riages or seated on long boards attached to roller skates, calling to us for alms. I'd seen lepers before, but never *en masse* and wanted to bolt. Robert put his arm around me and hissed, 'Stay c-cool, they won't hurt you.' As he began tossing coins and joking with them, they crowded around us. One, whose nose had been totally eaten away, noticed my stricken face and grinned. 'No problem, Madame, not to worry,' he shouted, waving a hideous stump that had once been a hand, 'we are on our way to our convention. Happy leper party, happy life . . . ha, ha, ha!'

Happy life! I was reminded of the enigmatic signs we'd seen all over South India. HAPPY LIFE, the billboard announced in huge red letters. We never knew if it was an advertisement for soap, cigarettes or a movie. For years that message blinked in my brain, HAPPY LIFE, along with something the old sage had once said: 'You can make yourself miserable or make yourself

happy, it takes the same amount of energy.'

I will always be thankful I had that special time with Nataraja. After he suffered a series of strokes in 1973 that time ended. He stopped taking food or water and went into deep meditation. We were bereft when we heard he had died. After we got the news, I went to Robert's room and found him surrounded by open bags, piles of clothes, musical instruments, scrolls and icons. His eyes were morose and he emanated misery.

'I'm leaving,' he said, throwing a pile of kurtas into a duffel bag. I sensed he was on the verge of a breakdown but couldn't get him to confide in me. Perhaps it was the presence of his handsome dancer friend Karma Dev, visiting from Madras and lounging in a cane armchair. 'No reason to hang around B-Bangalore – G-Guru is gone, end of our film p-project and I can't stand his d-disciples. No

p-point hanging on here. I'm b-bored. T-time to g-get back to my classes in Indian dance, they make me feel really g-good. Karma Dev and I are going to have fun together.'

Nothing we said could change his mind and, to this day, I regret that we didn't kidnap him or bully him into staying with us. Maybe he would still be alive. He had learned a lot during his Indian years but didn't know how to put his knowledge into practice. Without Nataraja, he was lost.

Dear Robert, I'll always be grateful to you – you were the catalyst who brought us to India and to Nataraja Guru. You helped transform and make our lives better. Thank you.

(Robert Fraser returned to London in the early 1980s and opened a second gallery in 1983, but his last years were sadly marred by chronic drug and alcohol problems. He died in 1986, an early British victim of AIDS.) ◇

HELP PAGES

The Agony Uncle

Alain de Botton knows how to help

You said in your last column a few weeks ago that it was silly to worry about what other people think about you; and that 'philosophy' can help you not to concern yourself with the negative views of other people. If that's what philosophy says, then I don't like it much! I hate the idea that everyone should just 'love themselves' – whatever they are actually like. I lived in California for a few years, and there people talk all the time about the need to just love yourself. Well actually, I sometimes think people should love themselves a bit less – and maybe worry a bit more about criticism. Any thoughts?

—MARIA, EDINBURGH

I DIDN'T WANT to suggest that the condemnation or censure of others is invariably undeserved; that there must always be good reasons to think well of ourselves even when society mocks us or suggests we are mismanaging our job or our family life.

Leaving our assessment of our worth to an intellectual conscience is not to be confused with an expectation of unconditional love. Reason does not imitate the

pattern of parents or lovers, who may value us whatever we do and however great our faults. The approval of philosophers remains conditional, only that approval is not conditional on the whimsical criteria that the wider world is sometimes in danger of applying when it allocates honour. Indeed, there may be times when worldly opinion will shower praise upon us, but when an intellectual conscience demands that we be harsher on ourselves than others have been. Philosophy does not reject a hierarchy of human worth and achievement; it merely moves the judging process inward, creating space for the thought that the prominent communal value system may be unfairly consigning some people to ignominy and others to respectability. And in the case of an injustice, it helps us to hold on to the idea that we may be loveable even outside the halo of the praise of others.

That said, if we have listened to well-founded criticism of our behaviour, paid heed to targeted anxieties about our ambitions and adopted a proper sense of

responsibility for our failures, and yet if we nevertheless continue to be hated by our community, we may be tempted to adopt an approach practised by some of the greatest philosophers of the Western tradition. We may, through an un-paranoid understanding of the warps of the value-system around us, settle for a stance of intelligent misanthropy, free of either defensiveness or pride.

When we begin to scrutinize the opinions of other people rationally, philosophers have long proposed that we stand to make a discovery that is both saddening and curiously releasing; that the views of the majority of the population on the majority of subjects are perforated with extraordinary confusion and error. Nicolas Chamfort, echoing the misanthropic attitude of generations of philosophers before and after him, put the matter simply: 'Public opinion is the worst of all opinions.'

The reason for this defectiveness of opinion lies in the public's reluctance to submit its thoughts to the rigours of

rational examination, and its reliance on intuition, emotion and custom instead. ‘One can be certain that every generally-held idea, every received notion, will be an idiocy, because it has been able to appeal to a majority,’ observed Chamfort.

Though it may be painful to have to acknowledge the poverty of public opinion (for it is nice to imagine ourselves living among thoughtful, self-critical people), the realization may nevertheless have helpful implications for our sometimes exhausting, obsessive desire to ensure that others think well of us – a desire which can usher in a thin-skinned longing for signs of love. The approval of others could be said to matter to us for two reasons. Firstly it matters materially, because the neglect of the community can bring with it physical discomfort and danger. And secondly, and in this context more significantly, neglect can matter to us psychologically, because it may prove almost impossible to retain confidence in ourselves once others have ceased to accord us signs of respect. We will hate ourselves in response to the hatred of others, out of an embedded belief that their disdain must stem from an accurate awareness of genuine flaws within us.

It is chiefly in relation to this second, psychological consequence of inattention that the benefits of a philosophical approach can be felt. Rather than letting every case of opposition or neglect

wound us, we are invited first to examine the justice of others’ behaviour. Only that which is both damning and true should be allowed to shatter our esteem. In the eyes of philosophers, we should halt the masochistic process whereby we seek the approval of people before we have asked ourselves whether their views deserve to be listened to; the process whereby we seek the love of those for whom we discover, once we examine their minds, that we have scant respect. We may then start without rancour to disdain certain others as much as they disdain us – a stance of which the history of philosophy is replete with inspiring examples.

‘Whoever attaches much value to the opinions of others pays them too much honour,’ argued Arthur Schopenhauer, a leading model of philosophical misanthropy. In *Parerga and Paralipomena* (1851), the philosopher proposed that nothing could more quickly correct our desire to be liked by others than to focus wholeheartedly on what they were actually like: for the most part, deeply unpleasant and stupid. Schopenhauer quoted with approval Voltaire’s remark that ‘*la terre est couverte de gens qui ne méritent pas qu’on leur parle*’ [the earth swarms with people who are not worth talking to].

Could we really take the opinions of such people so seriously? asked Schopenhauer. Could we really continue to let their verdicts govern what we made of

ourselves? Even if these people did come to respect one, how much could this respect ever be worth? Or, as Schopenhauer put the question: ‘Would a musician feel flattered by the loud applause of his audience if it were known to him that, with the exception of one or two, it consisted entirely of deaf people?’

Philosophers’ tendency to pay little attention to people’s views shouldn’t imply a hatred of all humanity nor a complete disregard for their fellow creatures. Misanthropes may feel intense attachments to a few people they know (or imagine they might have liked to know if only they had been born in the right country or century); it is just that their high standards have made them incapable of adhering too closely to the views of those they have to consort with day to day. A tender-hearted idealism combined with an intellectual rigour is to blame for their apparent cynicism – and their related acerbic suggestions to us that we not listen to other people.

‘It is sometimes said of a man who lives alone that he does not like society. This is as if one were to say of a man that he does not like going for walks because he is not fond of walking at night in the forêt de Bondy [a place outside Paris notorious for thieves and murderers]’

—Nicolas Chamfort

A FINAL THOUGHT

‘I Wanna Do It’

David Shields on Tiger Woods’s transgressive streak

WHAT HAS BEEN completely absent from all the coverage of Tiger Woods’s self-destruction is even the slightest recognition that for all of us a force for good can convert so frighteningly easily into a force for ill, that our deepest strengths are indivisible from our most embarrassing weaknesses, that what makes us great will inexorably get us into terrible trouble. Everyone’s ambition is underwritten by a tragic flaw.

We are deeply divided animals, and we are drawn to the creation of our own demise. As Milan Kundera has writ-

ten, ‘Anyone whose goal is “something higher” must expect someday to suffer vertigo. What is vertigo? Fear of falling? No, vertigo is something other than fear of falling. It is the voice of the emptiness below us which tempts and lures us, it is the desire to fall, against which, terrified, we defend ourselves.’

And the more righteous our self-presentation, the more deeply we yearn to transgress, to fall, to fail. Because being bad is more interesting, more exciting, more erotic than being good. Even little children, especially little children, know

this: when my daughter Natalie was three, she was friends with two girls, sisters aged three and four. The older girl, Julia, ran away from her mother, for which she was reprimanded. The younger girl, Emily, asked why and was told that running away was bad. ‘I wanna do it,’ Emily said.

Tiger Woods needed to demolish the perfect marble statue he’d made of himself: the image of perfect rectitude. We are shocked – *shocked* – that his furious will to dominate on the golf course also expressed itself in an insatiable will to humiliate innumerable sexual part-

ners. We all contrive different, wonderfully idiosyncratic and revealing ways to remain blind to our own blindnesses. Richard Nixon had to undo himself, because – as hard as he worked to get the top – he didn't believe he belonged there. Bill Clinton's fatal charm was – is – his charming fatality. His magnetism is his doom; they're the same trait. Someone recently said to me about Clinton, 'By all accounts he could have been, should have been, one of the great presidents of the twentieth century, so it's such a shame that –' No. No. No. There's no 'if only' in human nature; it's all one brutal feedback loop: when W. was a young man, he said to Poppy, 'Okay, then, let's go. Mano a mano. Right now.' The war on terror was the not-so-indirect result.

In short, what animates us inevitably

ails us. That fine edge gets harder and harder to maintain.

When our difficult heroes (and all real heroes are difficult) self-destruct, watch us retreat and reassure ourselves that it's safer here close to shore, where we live. We distance ourselves from the disaster, but we gawk in glee (I have studied Tiger's sexts to and from Joslyn James no less assiduously than anyone else). We want the good in them, the gift in them, not the nastiness, or so we pretend. Publicly, we tsk-tsk, chastising them for their transgressions. Secretly, we thrill to their violations, their (psychic or physical) violence, because through them we vicariously renew our acquaintance with our own shadow side. By detaching, though, before free fall, we preserve our distance from death, staving off any seri-

ous knowledge about the exact ratio in ourselves of angel to animal.

In college, when I read Greek tragedies and commentaries upon them, I would think, rather blithely, 'Well, that tragic flaw thing is nicely symmetrical: whatever makes Oedipus heroic is also –' What did I know then? Nothing. I didn't feel in my bones as I do now that what powers our drive assures our downfall, that our birth date is our death sentence. You're fated to kill your dad and marry your mom, so they send you away. You live with your new mom and dad, find out about the curse, run off and kill your real dad, marry your real mom. It was a setup. You had to test it. Even though you knew it would cost you your eyes, you had to do it. You had to push ahead. You had to prove who you are. ◇

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ARTIST

Full Stopping

Simon Prosser meets Fiona Banner

HERE AT *Five Dials* we are especially partial to artists who do things with words – and Fiona Banner has long been one of our very favourites. Fresh from the opening of her Tate Duveens commission, 'Harrier and Jaguar', she took time out to make (delicious) Gazpacho for me at her studio and to show me the layouts of her project for this issue – a series of images of the full-stop sculptures she has been making over the last decade.

Sitting on the sunny terrace of her studio, surrounded by bits of fighter planes ingeniously transformed into planters, she described her evolution as an artist, beginning with her days in Hackney Wick, watching and rewatching iconic war films like *Top Gun* in an attempt to understand and decode their fascination. Grappling with the 'impossibility' of the image, she ended up literally writing the image. And so began her extraordinary series of handwritten, stencilled and printed 'wordscapes', transcribing in their totality the action of an individual film

on a scale comparable almost to the cinema screen itself.

This project culminated in 1997's *The Nam*, her thousand-page 'supermovie in words' retelling as an unbroken narrative six classic Vietnam movies. Published as a paperback so chunky that it was, as she says, 'as much a sculpture as a book', it was described by one writer friend as 'unreadable', which Fiona immediately converted into an ironic endorsement on the poster she produced to advertise it: '*The Nam*, it has been described as unreadable.'

On finishing *The Nam* she noticed that 'the last full stop at the end of a book is always more significant than the one at the end of the first sentence'. And so began her committed and ongoing interest in punctuation – 'the in-between spaces of language'. (And if there is one thing we at *Five Dials* love even more than an artist who works with words, it is an artist who works with punctuation.) This investigation coincided with a period

where she felt she had lost her connection with words and was asking the question: 'How do you work when you don't know how to do it?' The answer came when she 'found a way of working without the thing I thought I needed to work – which was words'.

Fiona's first full-stop sculpture was a small blue dot executed in neon (the smallest neon sign in the world), after she noticed that neon signs always reproduced the full stop as more of a stunted dash. Then she moved on to scaling up full stops from desktop publishing programmes and producing them as thousand-point polystyrene, and later bronze, sculptures – each a one-off, crafted with great care. They explore what she calls 'the dumbness of not finding the right language' – and like so much of her work they are simultaneously comic and serious. In situ, they punctuate the space they are in – with the people examining them, or skateboarding off them, standing in for the missing words.

The sculptures also punctuate Fiona's other artistic activities (at this point she is preparing to melt down a Tornado fighter jet and to recast it in a foundry as a bell). And, of course, they now punctuate this issue of *Five Dials*, for which we are very grateful. ◇



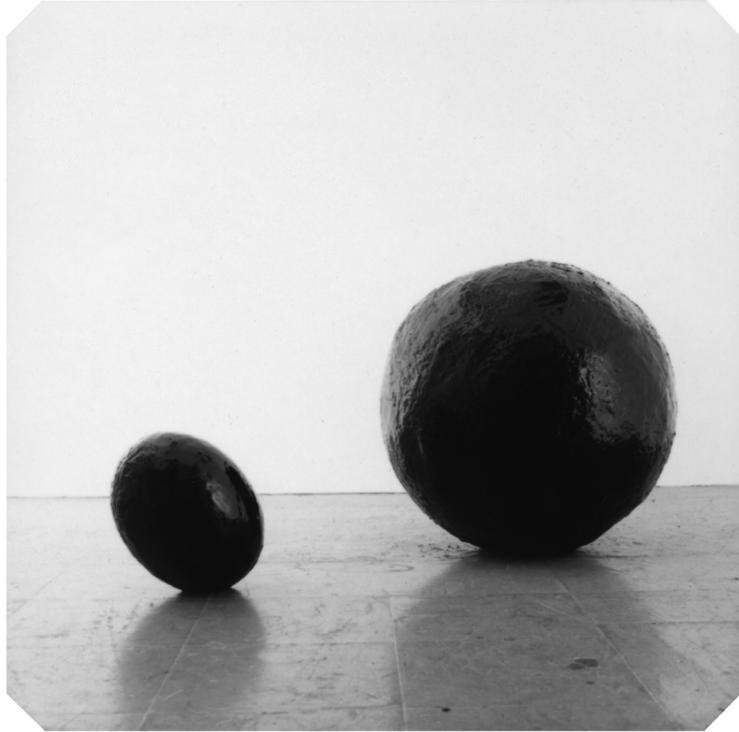
Courier. Full Stop, bronze, paint, 2003



Nuptial. Full Stop, bronze, paint, 2003



Avant Garde. Full Stop, steel, paint, 2003



Momento and Elephant. Full Stop, bronze, paint, 2004



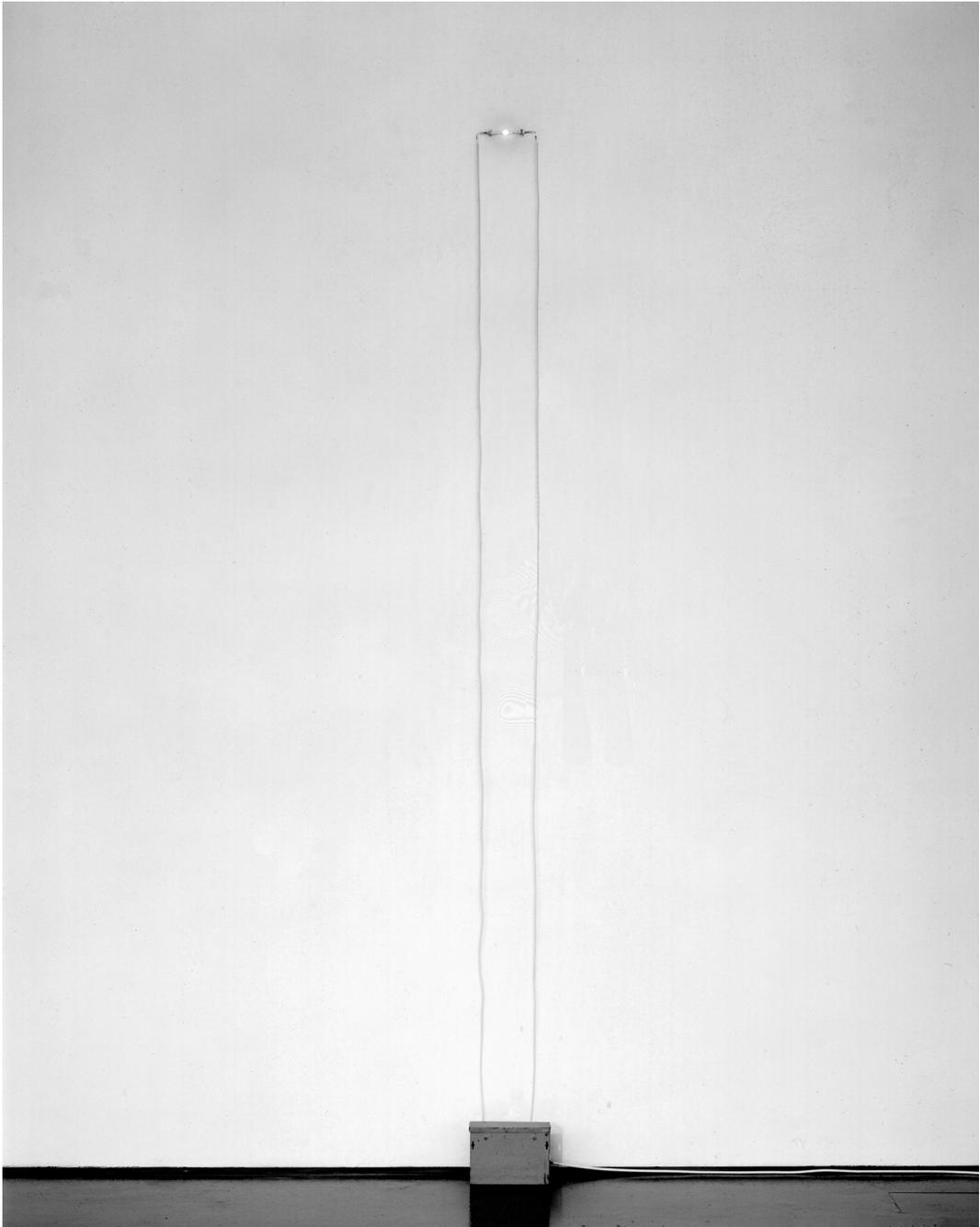
Slipstream. Full Stop, bronze, paint, 2003



Playbill, Broadway and Futura. Full Stop, steel, paint, 2003



Klang. Full Stop, bronze, paint, 2003



Neon Full Stop. Neon, wire, transformer, 1997



SUMMER 2010

Summer 2010. Sun burnt paper