

a theatrical oasis in
the spine of the moon

a poem



Brian Kim Stefans

**A Theatrical Oasis
in the Spine of the Moon**

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Cover: Lysette Hunziker, photograph and paper flower; BKS design.
The main title font is called “Eight Track - Program 3.”

Note: Most of this poem was drafted prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and the uprisings that have arisen after the murder of George Floyd. There is a fair amount about the Democratic primaries in here that might seem dated.

J'ai fait la magique étude
Du Bonheur, que nul n'élude.
—Arthur Rimbaud

for Tim Davis
brother
who introduced me to Lenny Bruce
and other fun stuff

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- 26 / Often, left in a cloud, roving up the coast of New Jersey, free as a cloud
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- 28 / The state is *all that is the case*. The world is the totality of facts, not things.

29 /I certainly don't think the gods are with us, Hölderlin.

30 /I'm getting hungry. I've emptied my bottle of wine.

I / *Overture*

In the cool night of a nothing, but strangely dramatic, universe
some bookie flips through his miniature Post-Its deciphering his
doodles,
two women do a spacewalk and are flipped a bird by the President,
and Sweden sighs with relief as Greta Thunberg returns,

and a Feynman diagram, minding its own business, collides with a Lear
jet,
and Jessye Norman retires having avoided the Apocalypse,
and somewhere over the Seychelles a CEO needs deodorant,
while America abandons the Kurds and ISIS trends on the internet,

and a pigeon on a live cam from Bryant Park poops on the shoulder of
Gertrude Stein,
and the Prime Minister from Ethiopia buffs his Nobel Prize,
and Heath Ledger gives his most inscrutable, most American
performance,
and a lawyer decamps to jazzicise his psyche with a massage from Jacob
Epstein,

and pearl-teethed personalities argue that the dandruff on Rudy
Giuliani's pate
is a fascinating *ding-an-sich* as he bromances Ukraine,
and a coupon for Chik-Fil-A tries to defang the Fourth Estate,
and the proverbial bedlamite suffers a heart attack in the *Norton
Anthology*,

and opioid deaths reach a half-million in the time Big Pharma takes
to re-soil their linens, hump a trash bag, move accounts to the Islands,
and Silicon warriors man their yurts on a slope in Big Sur,
and Jonny Greenwood writes a soundtrack inspired by fracking and
unicorns,

and China swarms with new gadgets, bionic mandibles, and Belt
fanatics,
and Canada sits atop us, cold and tranquil as mint lozenges,
and Madagascar luxuriates in baobob leaves, and Ireland gyres for
posterity,
and South Korea declares plastic surgery a national shame, though its
TV serials bleed

onto the screens of most of Asia, and elsewhere (for instance, Nigeria),
and Hungary turns right, like the Philippines, and Brunei takes to
stones
to punish its “deviants,” men who love men, and women who love
women,
and endless choirs of syco-bordinates struggle to sing in key in our
relative Parliaments,

—on this cool night: I have a pork chop, peas, and English muffin for
dinner,
and hearing it’s Rimbaud’s birthday from Jennifer Moxley on
Facebook,
I don’t think the gods are with us. I open my iPhone—loveless
my cats shoot shit out of their damn boxes, but will return to me, in
bed.

This is the intelligence plan: defrosting a chicken from Trader Joe's. Yesterday's string beans and weepy arugula. This plan might sound like cooking to the uninitiated. Such a conclusion would be naive:

—There is a “deep state” browning the salad leaves, perhaps bacteria, perhaps Schopenhauer's *Willen*, and only my soft mania grants me confidence in my culinary superpowers: that this plan might succeed.

I've long been abandoned by the chorus of angels.
Pegah doesn't speak to me; she's “trying to get her shit together.”
We've all been subtracted to our regular hells.
I've just bought a cheap bottle of wine, and cigarettes.

But the World turns—the “deep state” thickens,
mocking my arugula and my pesto-choked chicken.

The cat claws the leather of my newish Ikea sofa.
 My shouts of “stop it!” don’t fall like a god’s thunder.
 My air conditioner hums. My only music
 is something by Alvin Curran from a Santa Cruz experiment

—a thin wire slung taught across the campus (that’s how
 I remember it) granting us a “deep state” access.
 I read lots of Gautier (Théophile) today and bits by Mallarmé,
 eyes flipping from translation to the French option

on the opposing pages, and Crusoe amidst the delirium
 of digging the English, but blissfully uncertain
 (thinking of my Rimbaud, which might be pure fiction).
 But poetry is a ghost, unlike my Trader Joe’s chicken.

(You saw that coming.) I’m “not happy but I’m not sad,”
 but the “deep state” of my kneecaps won’t talk!
 The news presses on: there’s turmoil in the Capital,
 the king might be dethroned, but there’s no chance of a cure—

some bureaucrats might retire, some simply live on
 with book deals and paternosters, ripe with confession.
 None of them will admit to killing my chicken,
 oxidizing my string beans for the sake of the Virgin,

and will circulate among the Sunday news shows, reeking of piety,
 and not a strong enjambment in their thin lines!
 The bottle of wine near over, Pegah still not talking,
 and now I’m wondering if a plan *can be* “intelligence.”

I love a tawdry joke, and if I'm fired for one, *c'est la vie*,
so long as it is musical, and has some relation to the human.
Jokes are jokes, and if they are truly human comedy,
the tune jams the populace, though the next day is pedestrian.

Richard Pryor was great at this, and so was George Carlin.
Lenny Bruce was the martyr, like the Christ crucified,
but never in a Mel Gibson flick—he was simply the unwitting agent
who'd led the calvary. He expired on his kitchen tiles.

You saw the photos. A Jew who thought he could beat the government.
Now, the battle call has been adopted by the President.
Half the nation is impotent, another has been conscripted,
enduringly indigent—and now post bounties against the Federal?

Some illiterate turkey can raise his talons in Kentucky.
Give us a few decisions, and the States will turn the other way.

I want to freeze in my Speedo—I want my balls to freeze
 amidst the scarlet eyes of Southern California fires,
 Malibu basking in the air of billionaire ease
 as residential Camelots tumble into virtuous, if disbelieving, seas.

And the man they call the “Skipper” because of his resemblance to Bob
 Hale,
 (he played the “Skipper” on Gilligan’s Isle) tugs at his belt,
 preparing to hit me over the Speedo with his Greek fisherman’s cap
 only to stumble over his yacht’s charred mast,

and the tea-stirrers (they are not Teamsters) lift a regnant pinkie,
 like Lovey did when she got cerebral with Mr. Howell
 or Gilligan, who was wearing a Speedo just like me,
 the whole show shifting to a guttering damn in the Central Valley.

So I tumble down the 101, no break pedal, shouting
 that the Irish have not *learned their trade*—and who’s to blame
 for that? John Ashbery? Who killed “close reading”?
 And I wonder if Bob Dylan really deserved that medal (I think

he did), or if the MFAs, humming like spark plugs, haven’t earned their
 grease.

And I wonder if John Skelton didn’t hanker for a good dance party
 with his Skeltonics—seems like a clergyman’s hip hop
 to *me*—and whether Baudelaire’s sultry syllables

couldn’t have pulled a few smooth pulses from Fruity Loops’ impossible
 DAW.

I hanker for the Love of the deep state’s reservoir,
 the one that holds the water that could have saved Bob Hale’s yacht
 —I think such fancy thoughts when defrosting my Speedo.

New York poets still want to be Frank O'Hara—I want to be Emma Stone,
 one second the blonde vixen, another a Picasso neurotic,
 —in thirty seconds saving a film, like the execrable *La La Land*
 and elsewhere conjuring a master class from the Billie Jean King biopic.

We loves you, Emma Stone—though you're not helping me to die
 slower,
 to sink into the mattress-in-a-box, to trust in therapy
 for my Thor “temporarily disenfranchised” in a mental trailer
 —you've got me thumbing the ropes, like that elegant fish, Peter
 Lorre.

But back to Gena Rowlands, who was never in a Frank O'Hara movie,
 since movies have foundered since Will Smith got de-aged
 by Ang Lee in a flick I passed on, much as I loved *Crouching Tiger,*
Hidden Dragon,
 with its “message from afar” that I inflict on my screenplay students.

Hélas, New York: time to bathe in the froufrou on the wifi,
 refill the revolutionary slow cooker, and indulge in Paleolithic diets.

The deep state horrorglasses our discoveries, blurts obscenities
 into our arias and adagios—the deep state flips a bird
 at the child we had been shielding from the dirty words—
 but even as the deep state is unheard, its gestures are an alchemy

of indoctrination, so that even the simplest terms
 like *family*, *community*, are shot out like hypnogogic geese
 at eyes that *reach*—so that spontaneous creativity,
 the finger-painting of “mere existence,” is just a prelude to work.

The deep state has its surfaces: for instance, the 700-day “election year”
 when back-scratching pupates into a commodity,
 the good are purged for not marching like Calvinist demiurges
 fingering the puppet-strings of the *unchosen*, their fears,

or reducing the querulous to trigger fingers, the wonderers to Faith,
 —so that, when the tallies are in, *hate* is triumphant.

For instance: down the street, a man sits in a beach chair
 drinking Corona on his lawn—he receives disability payments,

drinks until his jaws quiver, bullshits about Obama, Iran,
 with anyone who’ll listen—some ten-year old brat, the postman—
 an unattractive figure who won’t be played by Tom
 Hanks in a future biopic. And it might be fine to *abhor* him

—but with ideological mustard? He might be shot through with
 charity,

he might just be the boxer who stumbled stupidly
 —a blind shot to the temple—while struggling to raise his kids
 with only his tedious mediocrity. For a glass jaw, he’s not *human*?

Hard to say “democratic”—there are no “votes” on the streets of Thai
Town,
few here hold opinions about the new tariffs against Hong Kong,
no one’s watching Chuck Todd in the warm hearths of their tent
encampments
that appear and disappear, like England’s Roman settlements

—but in days, not centuries. I don’t know what sort of kibitzing
happens
in white Protestant enclaves in Montana or Michigan,
and concur that it’s a blindness—I haven’t met the inhabitants
of the non-coastal *states*, Democrats or Republicans.

But I hear a Syrian expostulate into his phone about locally-made
croissants
and the probiotic drink he’s carrying, while that handsome Mongolian
draws out a plastic bag for me (though I bring my own,
—I’m sort of a white liberal that way) to pack up my obscenities.

I’m not the Korean *singularity*. I’m an atom with an Instagram.
I’ve just bought a pack of cigarettes, and crossed several continents.

Let's get this straight: I'm driving from Echo Park to Silverlake,
 the brake pedal glued to my nostrils, toes dysfunctional,
 but I'm really, in fact, in *control*—it's this Cartesianism that makes me
 make
 a hairpin turn at Alvarado, as the *mind* and *meat* are “dual.”

Might be time to stop for a torta, or a “breakfast burrito.”
 It's been quite an afternoon: something *fucked* me—a bacterium, a
 POTUS.

My viscera have grown irascible, my bowels are vetoes,
 or maybe—it's so difficult being lonely—it's merely my conscience

that flips like a drunken cantor between noble and reprobate,
 wondering if there's a lover I could meet in scintillating Silverlake
 at a party with a bean-shaped pool, pumping Skeltonics,
 in an architectural miracle that overlooks the freeway.

And I think: the World is ballooning, and we haven't even reached
 Mars yet,
 so much is the “state,” bubbling like some bouillabaisse
 played on repeat from a YouTube channel that makes gastronomical
 saints of us
 —vegan tuna sandwiches on 12-grain bread with Omega-3 mayonnaise.

So we bask in our counter-convictions and well-earned, we think,
 ironies
 after all the third-rate *Karate Kid* sequels we suffered in the 80s
 and the Russell Mulcahy videos that made Duran Duran seem
 desultorily aristocratic
 —we fed our asceticism with import-bin LPs from the Smiths.

The car—that sperm-tailed dynamo, that machine-age Golem—settles
 on a torta,
 as rebels learn Marxian dialectics in a cottage in Annandale

forgetting that Brecht loathed the oranges and succulents of Santa
Monica
and the “free” in *Freie Bühne* meant more than crazy ticket sales.

The cat rubs more love goo on my bouncing knee.
Quite a gambit for attraction, but he's barely seventeen.
Outside, on the cops, are imitation leather,
some jaundiced donuts, tires with conspiring treads.

The journalists of the *Guardian* are writing—ours
are channeling, a mere circumstance of the World's turning.
We wait for the text. All the clashing *Willen*
chymify themselves, unaccounted beneath the bylines.

We can only hope that this poem might be pretty,
melody that darts across the bureaucracies of intention,
a Sprite in peripheral vision, balletic, *seizing*
and promising, above the sprawl, the image of a City.

Facts and re-facts and un-facts conspire to deceive.
An ambulance and a chihuahua howl in the distant gray.

II /

In Switzerland, the Parliament speaks four languages,
each Senator two, though few Romansch:
that seems unfair, given Romansch's romanticness.
—What's more sexy than being the last of your clan?

Often, the kiss, the canoodle, happens in the dark parts
of features, the blood pulsing in a reprieve,
the enemy swollen, about to unleash a rain of darts,
laser beam the Capitol, or murder the young Queen.

The heroes know they've lost, so they quietly fuck
(they've hated each other; they're suddenly amorous)
while we, the viewers, anticipate the luck
that frees them from the “belly of the whale,” for the clamorous

Act III. That runs about twenty minutes.
The subplots have been festering in subterranean status.
Maybe the comic relief countermanded the ficus.
The audience needs to piss, but steel themselves for the circus

—it doesn't arrive. Romansch will likely die.
Han Solo won't read an obscure grammar.
And Leia, who doesn't speak Aldaraanish, has other eggs to fry,
and Luke only sulks in green-screened savannas.

There is no substantial plotting in the deep state.
Mind dies, intelligence dies, best efforts die.
Nice to think a Syd Field story arc could mediate,
but language turns to dirt, heroines to has-beens, in time.

The circle of a bicycle tire is the cover of a Germs album.
A slice of “cheese pizza” has become a symbol for child pornography
(look that one up, but—trigger warning—it’s not “random,”
but something like Exhibit A of the deep state’s shoulder claw on
humanity).

I’m not going to look that up. I’m inured to the Google mind meld
that made quick work of the memorable family squabbles
about whether the Police, the Cars, or the Go-Go’s were the balls,
or whether the Rangers could ever beat the Devils.

I’ll be a counter-revolutionary as the bile drip drips slower,
sing the singe of my causal wires, cancel my subscriptions,
my neuralgia, my Sisyphus, my phenomenal mass-thought from
Heidegger,
and bungle like a neon rabbit while not channelling Henry Miller.

The genius behind the genius of *Brokeback Mountain* (I’ve changed the
subject)
brought it to the point—that Love is a white shirt in a closet.

The singularity slips a mickey into the Hadron Collider.
 That night, I meet a homeless woman, perched
 like an angling buzzard on the stairs of the “Hollywood Inn
 Express North” (emblazoned with images of Elvis, Michael and
 Marilyn),

shivering, talkative, wanting a cigarette. But I am carrying bags of shit
 from “Crooked Liquor” (it’s really Norwood Market),
 so I flip her the inner bird—that’s what I do, tired, depressed,
 intestinally compromised, and pining for my apartment.

A hoarder tosses a milk carton into a room of kittens.
 On Pandora, hipster boys I used to know grow wearily suspicious.
 A few steps later, near Winona, my indolent conscience
 Mr. Smiths me into talking to her, so I turn back into the wind

—it really is *cold* this evening—thinking something in my bags
 could be proffered (plastic-wrapped, hygienic).
 So we talk, I root among my bags, but she really just wants to gab,
 —just *really* wants a cigarette. So I give her half my pack.

My great-aunt, Sister Aquin, used to say “kindergarten” with a proper
 German
 accent. Eileen Myles ran for President on MTV.
 Elon Musk pulls a daisy from his ass, waves it before his fans.
 This woman, who’s name is Jackie, probably mid-60s, is clearly
 freezing.

I tell her I have an old suede coat (I’d bought it for my first trip
 to London, to visit Miles) that I never wear, that I can just run and get.
 I live halfway down the block, won’t take a second. She asks
 to come along—there’s nothing else to do!—and Mr. Smith says: why
 not?

We see it in those sentiments—that poetry is an *action*—
in the two “Lettres du voyant” Rimbaud penned to his friends,
Demeny and Izambard — that the poet “exhausts all poisons,”
can awake a brass trumpet, an *autre*, and divested of ego.

Then we had Pound, the Surrealists, Olson, Negritude, Baraka,
affirming the Greek “harmonious” with paganisms, pure *qualia*,
Mayan cycles, the Blues, reestablishing the concord
of word, song and “news” that had animated the agora.

Culture is essentially tragic: one chooses, another dies—
picks a church, a lipstick, or opts for Freedom Fries,
and a dolphin tumbles downward, a synagogue is arsoned,
a Mazda factory is shuttered, a lab animal licks its burns.

In the pall of war, adolescence, Rimbaud coined a new civics
(while flipping off the Parnassians) in which Lilies were emetics.

15 / *Les Épreuves du Roi*

I stormed out of that goddamned meeting with my fists clenched.
I ran for the nearest beer (or, point of fact, 7-Up),
brushed the dandruff from my lapels, and pledged allegiance
to the only nation I've known—the one with helipads.

I stumbled—unwavering, *natch*—for the nearest exit
toward my weekend in Wherever-the-Fuck—so long as it was clean
and swore that I'd return with an FBI cover-up,
waving it like a proof-of-concept of some unseemly cuckoldry.

I spread my legs in my palace, where the chandeliers hang low
over the Cokes and Big Macs, chicken fried in dough,
Fox TV on the 80-inch screen, the sound in stereo,
which, the kids tell me, is the *thing* now—much better than mono.

Here, all the World is my Lover, all the World is my Queen
skiing like Norwegian angels down the ice-floes of my dreams.
Except that I don't *like* Norwegians, they have that *thing*
about loving the Other, supporting the press—let me say, harrowing.

In the morning, I woke in my pajamas, alarmed that I was sweating,
—quite gross, you know, no leader loves a body—
and showered, tanned, blow-dried my blondness—had it since my
teens,
I'm proud to say, like Dean or Eastwood—in any case, pristine.

Even in my Green Acres, some assistant handed me nonsense!
—some shit about the Kurds, failing education, and, I think, poverty.
But I found the lines about my falling ratings interesting,
gripping, imaginative—poetic, in fact—being far from reality.

My goddamned tie! My goddamned empathy! Can't they see, the fools,
that I must sit here woefully as the chicken cools?
Can't they see my Christian palm, my turn-the-other-cheek

as we huddle here back-stabbing about my skin in the game?

I shouldn't have left all the best words back at the hotel,
I should have gone for the fuchsia tie, should have opted for the beer!
How can I wage Human War on the modestly incapable
if only the *screens* deems me President, and not the Capitol?

That's my inner dialogue: I twitch beyond obvious righteousness,
 —the vote for progressives, the vote for the free market—
 angling like a Watt-figure among the wheelchairs and tents
 wondering if, outside of “justice,” I'd get a 10 for my performance.

There are many others I could conjure, though it's raining men
 when the earth explodes with zingers, like dandelions
 (though we don't have dandelions in L.A.), or like rains from El Niño,
 that pelt the dust and over-rated succulents of Runyon Canyon.

Yes, this all sounds pretty cool—a way to Zorro with panache
 the zombilly unimaginative when they conspire in enmity,
 the ones addicted to Paradise gas, for whom shitting is not entropy,
 the ones who wake impossibly confirmed, in a data-czar's employ.

Verlaine wrote: *Fuck rhetoric*—in a teacup of perfect rhyme,
 a dime of quietness, of comforting heresy, of Love beyond time.

Perhaps the study of happiness that no one eludes
 has camped under my feet, licking his paws.
 There's a lot of clap-trapping clogging up the news.
 The cat finds solace sharpening his claws,

signaling his defiance of basic physical laws:
 cats don't watch news. I'd like not to,
 too. I'd rather watch Billie Eilish stretching her jaws
 on *Saturday Night Live* while dancing on the roof.

But what about the *poem*—is it really so floozy easy,
 a Thursday night date with booze and cigarettes
 in a Neo-realist film budgeted “B,” starring
 a paper mâché eggplant, and a tumescent high school athlete?

At least I know we're *breathing* in these galloping lines,
 an insect, claws on the typer, sucking oxygen
 if that's what insects *do*—I suspect those parasites,
 in the personhood we grant them, just aerate for *fun*.

The fact is that breathing could only ever *be* a poem
 —could only *be*, and not a Platonic statistic
 in a producer's boardroom, with charts that rate the spasms
 Kit Harrington inflicts, as he glooms his way through an epic.

I like breathing—no problem granting it words.
 If the breath won't lie in bed with me, I'm sure it cares.
 And if others breathe, even the reptilian herds
 in congressional politics, well I'm sure there's a poem there.

The armies are marching, marching—on the internet!
The martial Tweets and mercenary Facebook posts are at the gates
of the Capital! We've raised our cameras and scythes,
and are turning animal! Blood will spill, and at a high bitrate!

Stories from *The Hill* and *Politico* will heat our pulse!
We'll fight for better news anchors, who cares about Shepard Smith!
We'll tear them down, no better than ventriloquists!
Kimmel and Colbert will be our Jeanne d'Arcs—our Vulgarians!

We'll never have to leave the comforts of our evening hosts,
the tracings of the “rational” a heart-warming placebo,
as the galumphing tactics of a hotel-emolument Nationalist
—Fascist, whatevs—pull rabbits from our Constitutional aporias!

You are not “leftist” because you're “liberal”—dissociate this couplet.
What falls at the feet of the “voter” are golden apples.

The deep state has no patience for bourgeois solace:
 it bubbles in the decaying pipes of the waterways in Michigan,
 it pulses in the packets of liquor store ramen,
 it kills the scallop and sea turtle in the Pacific Ocean,

it levels its salty tear on the most adventurous vacations,
 the trek to Machu Picchu, Nashville, or Vons,
 into the cool streams bottled for the healthful option
 from Switzerland, or Nestlé, whatever these words confirm.

If I think the problem is poetry—I think I’m right.
 But a poem about poetry seems like inveterate circle-jerking.
 The *Strich* might have value, ephemeral as it is,
 and falling into the abyss, grasping, is extreme sporting.

Perhaps a Korean recipe can recover this bold entrance.
 The ssamjang, the great “trespass” (Rimbaud).
 I listen to the deep state for my next dalliance
 and wonder: Who’s had butterflies hatch in their beard?

Who’s traced a curve and called it “Bird in Space”?
 Who’s had a sixth finger emerge while they’re painting?
 Who’s had their vision reduced to six primary
 colors—lines rectilinear, and the diagonal a heresy?

This isn’t a quiz. I’m only fucking with you.
 Just trying to get at the meaning of “solace” and “trespass.”
 Dogs sleep in alleys, don’t care about our objects,
 but we train them to bark at ghosts—the scent of poems.

The Seventies tried your game—the punks turned mortality into extravagant travesty, and the poets were popping quaaludes, —but now we want it *all*, a paradigm for the eternal, a promise of endless life, while sitting on the Mice that Roar:

sex until you're eighty, grandchildren in droves who mewl until they're part of Democracy, but who don't learn more than to survive,
as the Knack throbs their song about the “teenage sort,”
and a girl smokes bubblegum Camels through unkempt tonsils.

Dying ever slower: it's counter-revolutionary. The gut sags but there's a pill for that—a plan for that—with siliconed geriatrics, the bile dropping in a slow drip into the potted plants, and any show of *dis-ease* just fanatical, Sanders-esque theatrics.

The deep state quickens as it finds its compass—Xanax—
and keeps us from the brink, a null distance from our pickaxes.

At my apartment, I offer her food—an avocado, lemon juice, and a
 spoon

(not much else, actually, except “Crooked Liquor” wine).

North Korea perfects that goddamned missile—makes it go *BOOM*.

Mr. Rogers speaks before Congress, sort of like Mr. Smith, but not Bill
 Nye

the “Science Guy.” She gabs, tries to charm—I tell her I write poetry.

She asks: “What is that?” And I soon learn: she’s illiterate.

She’d been living in a car for three months with her mother who’s left
 for Vegas

with the car. Now, she’s on the streets—she leaves her stuff behind a
 gate

at the YMCA (on Schrader). She impossibly believes that no one will
 touch it. I ask her

if she wants sleep on my sofa, out of the cold, at least for

the night? She nods like a sunflower at my dining room table.

(I suspect, later, that she’s an addict.) After more syllables, she is
 noddingly grateful.

I hide my valuables under the bed, in my closets, guiltily not trusting
 her.

A trans woman strolls the street on Santa Monica Blvd.

A marriage counselor pops an Adderall. I used to go to Danceteria in
 high school.

The next morning, nothing’s gone—she is fantastically, soundly asleep.

Later, we chat like old friends (if dysfunctional). I make her eggs.

I ask her about disability payments. She’s owed hundreds of dollars
 from the government,

if she only can get her *phone* to work—she blames

her problems on technology. She wants to contact her son

on *my* phone. She normally gets help from people on the street, those
who can read,
to pay bills, find addresses. I overhear her depressing call.
They'd wanted to atom bomb the entirety of the Yalu River.
There are Saints that can't reach Modernity—perhaps that's her
miracle.

This is the temptation: to fuck around with the iPhone,
free synthesizer apps with dark, sexy interfaces,
wheel between the sine and the square waves, master a drone
worthy of Terry Riley, Le Monte Young, or John Cale.

A lossless afternoon. Something like this can account for non-reading,
sounding the inner dome with synaptic susurrus,
—the Old Men of Haddam, reeking of feathers, reclining
in symbolical spaces, but never sounding assurances.

The inner ear and the slave to the virtual are not much
different. The former has legends and bacchanals,
fevers and sense, lost causes at distance, the World held in abeyance.
The latter is titillation: pulchritudinous mathematics

descended from the eternal to argue its aesthetic
verities. A mosquito laps at the ear, and will soon be dead.

Everyone wakes up, fragrant with new developments, vexed in their
 fields
 of attractions, chasing Baudelairean cats down the hallways
 of this repurposed mental hospital, not sure if the World is still on stilts
 crossing the Andalusian Sea on its way to Norway

to meet wise people, get free health care, and photograph the fjords
 and otherwise bask in our post-Pangean interlude of being stable.
 Youth has gotten so fancy in this economic downturn,
 if by “downturn” we mean the inching forward of tele-surveillance
 Capital,

shaved sides and purple combovers, tattered jeans and turntables
 to keep them tied to the analog, to feel the “Bern.”

Slap-happy in my own aberrant goo, I want to coin a New
 Evangelicalism:

Dada picnic baskets after transcendental meditation,

LARPing adventures in the Andes with characters from A.E. Milne,
 happy hours in the Castle Wirtemberg, and a cornucopia of
 commandments

moving sometimes to the right, to the left, like cardigans.

The deep state would be a *dream state* as the cilia keep things moving

on an otherwise not-outrageous Sunday talk show, politicians just
 balmy

and keeping it cool, determined to stick to the meters
 about my New Evangelicalism. I really think that it will take hold:
 Phoebe Waller-Bridge as the new Secretary of Education

(she knows something about repurposed mental hospitals, my major
 conceit, here), Quentin Meillassoux with a portfolio in science fiction,
 and Anna Karina as dance instructor in a torrid Parisian

café (Secretary of Kühllheit), swaying us, oh, *this-a-way*, and, oh, *that-a-way*.

24 / *Orientalisms (Pegah)*

The gypsy body talks—I struggle to listen.
You said you liked potatoes? or maybe Ambien?
as 4 am descends into the Over-question
of whether sleep will moot the august obsession.

The gypsy body reclines on my secular couch,
the one uncouthed by cats, and smelling of crotch,
glowing faintly yellow, and absurdly lithe,
like the ladies of Diaghilev, but more serpentine.

A helicopter whirls to secure the moment,
drop it from Sacher-Masoch to rank pedestrian,
return it to Trader Joe's from the Parnassian,
ensnare it for Snapchat, and rescue it from Titian.

The body has a name, decidedly Persian,
that taxes memory, at least for barbarians
of the New Jersey sort, the naive humans
who thought Jesus was blonde, and probably Italian.

The gypsy, descended from a pulsing universe
scholared by Rimbaud in diamantine verse,
remembers my name; I half-pronounce hers,
as I struggle to re-regulate my aberrant viscera.

Naturally we talk, we talk—we forget,
in the “windmills of our minds,” our best *bon mots*,
eat the potatoes, listen to Led Zeppelin,
and ponder the retirement of the Ikea futon.

So we're as still as the Louvre in the after hours,
mute as the *Victory of Samothrace* in a dust shower,
dumb as stacks of *Olympia* in a poster pile,
or Picasso's erotic doodles in the remainder aisle.

The deep state eradicated *the* better century,
but the gypsy body is whole, is permanent.
This Halcyon moment surrenders a pendant
—as pure as a term in the canon of abstractions.

I want to fall out of love with this deep state, not that they're asking
for my paw on the dotted line, my grease on the contract
—they leave me quite alone, which is a show of generosity,
or negligence, or stupidity, as I retire into my Aflac.

I wonder if the belly scratchers who populate the “debates”
are just drum circle pulsers, instinctive, prelapsarian,
fodder for the data sluts, or a protein rush in my Ovaltine,
and I should just listen more closely to the Bay Area communists.

Perhaps the study of happiness that no one eludes
is gripping a *Watchtower* while sounding my doorbell's Beethoven,
or is the Scientologist needling me at La Poubelle
who is writing a book of conspiracy theories about Olivia Coleman,

or is the inventor of the “Green Super Drink” they sell at Trader Joe's
or is the latest kitten to adopt me at Saint D'ore.

Often, left in a cloud, roving up the coast of New Jersey, free as a cloud,
 the deep state still touches me—I'm an apotheosized ordure,
 or that's what my fans think, anchoring me to Romantic allegory
 about "freedom" and the corruption of urban company.

It's getting giddy in the deep state—the deep state is defined by
 giddiness:
 no Cold War sobriety when a marriage was "tamed by Milltowns,"
 no John Frankenheimer films where the enemy wore plastic eyelids,
 no Freudian missiles (the *au courant* word is "dicks").

Now, dissolution aspires to Totality—even with computers
 and a Vesuvius of content, the best Ranters don't know how to write,
 leaving the dull cloud to slip quietly, beset by tumors,
 down the North American coast, taste-testing Oaxacan delicacies.

The deep, intimate state, the one that feeds the arugula to the
 bacterium,
 that rattles your synapses like a Tesla hawking bitcoin,
 that wrote the Late Night monologue that wants to origami your
 sinuses,
 that names you bkstefans22 because of twenty-one prior occupants,
 the one that obliterates the whale carcass you were saving for Friday's
 shepherd's pie,
 the one that slams the shepherd with a dismal credit score,
 so he looks up at the sky and asks his Hebridean forebears to send him
 signs,
 —manna for his poems—since he's nothing much to do out there
 in the Orkneys—and, because he's 22.3 percent Ghanian, 44 percent
 Polish, as he learned on 23andme,
 he's not sure if he can be a Makar, if his poems are Ossianesque,

—so he shears the sheep, spans the bills, hides under crags from the
rain
from that fucking cloud from New Jersey, and peppers his songs with
tradition.

This is a good time for sweating. Tell me if you're cold.
It's a good time for the dead. The new season of *The Expanse* is on.
Madonna looks pretty good in that new video, but her legs are too big,
like, muscular. I'm sure she's not happy staying at home.

Everyone walking their dogs looks at me like I'm the Stasi,
and I, them. I'm warming up some stew in my HotLogic mini,
turmeric, carrots. I'm not a member of the Stasi, but you might want to
wash
your hands. As we wonder if the air's turned "Chinese."

Please tell me if you're susceptible—susceptible to conversation.
I'm just a fool for it—I lean way too far in to tell jokes
conjuring some voice from George Carlin—that indelible first HBO
special—
and, ugh, spit while doing it. Perhaps we should watch *The Expanse*.

I'll play guitar in the kitchen while my cats toil over the dishes.
You'll half-slumber on the couch, fearing my stew, watching *The
Expanse*.

March 23, 2020

The *state* is all that *is the case*. The world is the totality of facts, not things.

Pegah sits in her deliberate shadows, not writing to me—and not being the “case.” As I clean the stove, contemplate maturity, the “state” is a tattoo on the wall, an innocuous intensity, notes flattened by distance.

Bernard Stiegler has died—I read notices in digital translations from the French.

“Born of a mother bank employee and a father engineer,” he’d robbed many banks.

An “interactive philosopher.” The U.S. doesn’t mourn his death, as it nearly didn’t

Bob Hale’s. As for maturity, I need to mellow into my subscriptions.

There is no *ground*, just the massless making rounds, “commonsense” a deception.

What is the *state* is the totality of facts, but the “deep state” is unspoken.

Jackie is alive out there—a revolutionary, she’d stolen some of my things.

I lean into my Sketcher Maxes, write texts to deliberate shadows, and think.

Apollinaire died in 1918 in the Spanish Flu pandemic—to shouts of “Down with Guillaume!”

Die Welt ist die Gesamtheit der Taten sachen, nicht der Dinge. Facts are toxic.

Ikea boxes arrive with corpses in them, but happily never a poet’s.

If I’ve learned anything from Michael Robbins, it’s that rhymes can be obnoxious.

Is literature just a warm clasp of the hand—another white-skinned brother?

As the countdown bores us, *tick-tock tick-tock* (Kermode), we are happy.

He grasps the Glock. A Christian. A barometer. Is there no word in my language for “empty.”

“Born of a mother bank employee.” The United States atom bombed the entirety of the Yalu River.

The *state* is all that *is the case*. An adolescent in Fullerton listens to the Adolescents.

Pegah posts videos on Instagram, puckering before her camera.

Jimmy Page is tried for statutory rape. *The Sopranos* debuts in 1999.

There was cocaine in the Coke.

Rain pours over a forgotten Glock. Michael Robbins’s poetry is largely snark.

I certainly don't think the gods are with us, Hölderlin.
 I fancy I'm just a shuffling fetus who bucked the trends,
 some palpitating jellyfish who took to land
 hearing the wages were generous, in the world of men.

Perhaps I'd merely ascended from a deep sea vent
 to put on this flesh suit—two arms, two legs, nipples and a chin—
 and carry within some memory of the acids
 that still animate this quizzical, humanish actant.

Oh, I would love to have a god within me. I wouldn't be lonely
 shoveling into my gullet microwaved peas,
 or soaping my genitals, warbling pop tunes decades old
 —not from Eternity—fearing the *state* inside me,

and could fathom how there's no verdict in my credit cards,
 that Man bargains with the gland, and is still of earth.

I'm getting hungry. I've emptied my bottle of wine.
 My cats, supporting supplicants, are silent.
 It's a quarter past strophe, much past my bedtime.
 I'm loath to disappear now; I appreciate the violence

of testing thought against rash impurities,
 of acting imbecilic in the perfunctory courts of stanzas,
 of throwing *dark matter* against physics' felicities,
 the *abyss* that lets us think, that nominates us humans.

Outside, the unlucky, like my illiterate homeless friend,
 lean into object-hood, the symbolic cachet
 of the objectively valueless: an earring, a button,
 a redundant screwdriver that she tried to foist upon me

as some sort of payment. For a *shower*. An *avocado*.
 Sure, these things cost money, but it's just a roof
 I'd provided her. Seemed the least I could do.
 (Though she'd *stolen* from me. My backpack, sort of proof.)

The news no one can elude provides us narratives:
 Rachel Maddow has documents, charisma, some nerve,
 Sean Hannity a haircut, diuretic palliatives,
 and a host of candidates their impressionistic overtures.

The deep state is *slime*, but let's trust in the "deep state"
 —its form is merely intemperate agency:
 the bacteria browns my arugula, what I see of the New gestates
 in the gut of an extremophile as it swallows the sea.