

under the influence
by sig hafstrom



July 30 - September 18, 2004

I find my center, recognize and acknowledge that there is only One Source, One Life in the Universe. I call that life God, and I know My Life is God's Life, My Self is God's Self, My Love is God's Love, My Intelligence the Divine Intelligence. I know I am God creating myself as Sig Hafstrom. I know this performance is already perfect, whole and complete, just as I am perfect, whole and complete, and I move into my performance with a sincere and open heart, completely confident and cool. I give thanks for this opportunity to share my creativity with my loved ones, and give thanks for this opportunity to speak the word of God. I release this treatment unto the Universe, knowing that it cannot return void, that it is done, and done well. And so it is.

Starting at the beginning. Starting at the cool gray sky on the open country side, just an hour or so before sunrise. Rain or shine, the pre-dawn light is gray, lavender, quiet, cool. For an hour, the Eastern sky radiates warm and red, growing stronger, brighter, bluer, and then it seems at any moment the golden-white crest of the sun will tip up over the horizon. It seems, at any moment, the sun's rays will burst forth, as the sky grows ever brighter and the faint gray light emboldens.

The sky is as bright as day when it finally comes, the brightest splendor on Earth, the father/mother, the fireball, the perpetual explosion.

At every moment of every day, the gray of the morning breaks into dawn somewhere—half the earth always in daylight, the other half night, and on that leading edge, the land turning constantly to catch the sun, the perpetual dawn, the top-most arc of the sun glinting up in the rising East, the cold gray of twilight succumbing to the brilliance of day. The little birds in their multitude call out to the sky, cry out to the light in triumph and joy:

This is the day the Lord has made; I rejoice and am glad in it.

This is the day the Lord has made; I rejoice and am glad in it.

This is the day the Lord has made; I rejoice and am glad in it.

There never was a beginning, and there never will be an end.

There's a heaviness on me this morning, a depression. My body feels slow, my joints and mind thick. There's always a fear that comes with depression: will it stay on me forever? When will I get out from under? How long do I have to writhe until it cuts me loose? How long will I have to wait?

I'm not keen on waiting. I'm impatient. I will not let it run its course, in fact, I'm already coaching myself out of it. "I've been drinking a lot of caffeine lately," I remind myself, "and caffeine wrecks my mood. As soon as all the caffeine receptors are back to normal, as soon as my peptides are back to normal, I'll feel better. Water and good food will bring me back around. Sleep, a long walk, a bath. The right music, some writing..."

I know it'll help to talk about it, but I haven't got the nerve up yet to open my mouth. I should have talked to Liz about it on the car ride to the wedding. I can't go down that path, though, the What I Should Have Done path.

I just feel so heavy and tired. If only I could close my eyes and my particles all blink out simultaneously, my atoms break their bonds, the electromagnetic force reverse, and I could absorb into Space-time itself. Not a death, a non-existence.

Were my belief strong enough, I could do it. I could let go of my material self, and it would effortlessly drift away, like a puff of steam whispering away into the air.

That's what I need - steam. A hot tub. A sauna. A long massage, then heavy food and a deep sleep.

(Okay, just had a cup of strong tea. Hate to admit it, but now I feel entirely better. Fucking caffeine.)

Hi, I'm Sig Hafstrom, and today I'll be reading the story of U.F.Orb. You can read along with me in your book. You'll know its time to turn the page when you hear the bass drop, like this:

Listening to the sound of my voice, you will hear writings made entirely under the influence of the album U.F.Orb. Starting July 30, I carried my walkman with me constantly, listening to the Orb and writing whatever came to mind. Sometimes I'd write about the music, sometimes the music would influence what I observed, and sometimes the music was simply a hardly-noticed background track.

Also interspersed with my own writings are writings from Walt Whitman, Hunter S. Thompson, and the Bible.

I undertook this project specifically for performance at Chillits, specifically for you.

Whoever you are, now I place my hand upon you, that you be my poem,
I whisper with my lips close to your ear,
I have loved many women and men, but I love none better than you...

I will leave all and come and make the hymns of you,
None has understood you, but I understand you,
None has done justice to you, you have not done justice to yourself,
None but has found you imperfect, I only find no imperfection in you,
None but would subordinate you, I only am she who will never consent to subordinate
you,
I only am she who places over you no master, owner, better, God, beyond what waits
intrinsically in yourself...

Whoever you are! claim your own at any hazard!
These shows of the East and West are tame compared to you,
These immense meadows, these interminable rivers, you are immense and interminable
as they,
These furies, elements, storms, motions of Nature, throes of apparent dissolution, you are
he or she who is master or mistress over them,
Master or mistress in your own right over Nature, elements, pain, passion, dissolution.

The hopples fall from your ankles, you find an unfailing sufficiency...

-Walt Whitman

On a broad, hot rock by a river in the Sierras. It's late afternoon, the shadows of the tress stretch long across the rock and reach into the fast flowing edges of the river. The river slips down quickly over the slope of the rock, polishing the stone to a slick sheen, speaking a constant white noise: shaa, haa, shh. As far as I'm concerned, the day's too far along for swimming in the river, gathered up in pools at the bases and crooks of rocky slopes.

This group of us, we are all 90% or more naked. The sun shines in through all our skin. Liz and Megan swim in the swimming hole even though it catches long shadows. The sun is still hot, the light white. Another small group of people have hiked in. They sit on a rock opposite the river, smoking bowls and cigarettes. Together, we have created a zone of permissibility.

Megan, Liz and Saneta frolic in the water like beautiful and wonderful water nymphs. There is the top of a picnic table afloat in the swimming hole. It serves as floating dock, enlarged surf board, river raft. Liz steers it toward Saneta and Megan. The amused pot smoking contingency watches the lovely swimming nymphs, laughing. Megan rolls off the table top, and it bobs up out of the water, slippery and agile as a fish, darting up to the surface, dunking Megan and Liz into the deep. It is no small feat to dominate the table.

The trunks of the trees break up and out through the rocks. There are two different kinds, both tall, narrow conifers. Among each type an infinite diversity is expressed, forms and qualities in multitudes.

The lower branches of this tree are needleless. Instead, they are covered in chartreuse moss, giving each stubby branch the appearance of a gigantic, motionless, psychedelic caterpillars.

Here is a tree, dead as tree, alive as a structure for other life, the trunk white and tall as an alabaster tower, still reaching ever skyward in its stillness, stretching out its heavy black branches.

This tree springs from an impossible spot in the rock. Its roots grope tenaciously, yet cannot provide the trunk with any height. The tree is thick around as any other hundred footer, but tapers swiftly to its tip and stands not more than twenty feet high. Its a short, portly tree.

The sky is an unbroken blue, deeper and darker at this altitude, but our horizon limited by the heaps and mounds of round, hard granite echoing into mountains all around us.

A child said, what is the grass, fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child, I do not know what it is any more than he.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,
Bearing the owners name someway in the corners, that we may see and remark, and say
Whose?

Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation.

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
Growing among black folks as among white,
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them the same.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.

Tenderly will I use you curling grass,
It may be you transpire from breasts of young men,
It may be if I had known them, I would have loved them,
It may be you are from old people, or from offspring taken soon out of the mothers' laps,
And here you are the mothers' laps.

This grass is very dark to be from the white heads of old mothers,
Darker than the colorless beards of old men,
Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.
O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues,
And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing.

I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women,
And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken soon out of their laps.

What do you think has become of the young and old men,
And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere,

The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
And if there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,
And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.

All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
And to die is different than one supposed, and luckier.

Has any one supposed it lucky to be born?
I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I know it...
-Walt Whitman

I'm supposed to be writing. Well, I mean, I am writing, now, but I wasn't before because I was drawing a little face on Christopher's hand. Christopher is supposed to be reading *Dune Messiah*, and now he is, but before he was laughing and talking to me. Now he reads and talks to himself about the book, and I write and sing along - oho-oho-oho-oh-oh-oh.

He's got the album playing on his stereo, but before we could get to our reading and writing, first we had to talk about all the different ways we love the Orb: the first time taking ecstasy, listening to Towers of Dub in Anna's room, hearing Assassin at two a.m. at the first Chillits, walking on the ceiling at the Warfield.

There is a lamp on the bedside table that gives this room its light. Two palm trees on either side of the CD decks, one with fat leaves, the other with little spidery leaves.

We recline on Christopher's bed, he with his book, and I with my pen and paper, but we pause for a long time when Towers of Dub comes on. We just listen. We recline motionless. Then my hand jerks the pen across the lines, and rests still for a few moments.

It's a bit chilly in Christopher's room. I'm a little twitchy, too restless to write, too preoccupied by Christopher because I have crush on him and there he is a foot away from me, slumped comfortable on his bed, his head on the pillows, long thin legs in angles to each other, holding his book, slipping each page between finger and thumb to turn. Goose bumps rise on my arm, but its the temperature. I almost wish I would fall asleep in this very position, in this very state, and take this moment with me into the subconscious, but I feel a little too cold, plus I haven't brushed my teeth yet.

Late night on bart. This train is crowded. Its not the last train, but its close. A young black man with delicate, girlish features sits near me. He carries a pearly-white boom box playing boring top 40 hip-hop. The noisy roar of the train in the tunnel blasts out most of the music from my headphones, and mostly covers his beats entirely, though every few moments I hear a high hat bleeding over from his CD player.

He's just put on these ridiculous glasses—ridiculous because they're fake, don't even have lenses. The rims are gold, empty gold like the teeth-framing fronts on his smile.

The train zips out of the tunnel, the overwhelming roar turns to a loud buzzy-hum, and the girlish-boy and his mannish friend go into the next car to hit on three chicks talking loudly and wearing paper burger king crowns. An attractive white boy takes the girlish boy's place, rubbing his waspy girlfriend's outstretched foot. Her gold high-heeled sandal comes off, and he rubs her toes vigorously.

His head is covered in tight little golden-brown ringlets, he has bronzy-green eyes, tan skin, full lips. Where as the boy before had a round face, broad pouty lips, soft eyes, long dark eyelashes, and could easily be a woman in disguise under those baggy layers upon layers of clothes, this new boy radiates a sort of western über-mench masculinity, popular on college campuses, according to the laws of the mall. In fact, he's minding a bag from FCUK. He's trying to act sexy and coy to his waspy girlfriend, but he's actually quite awestruck by her, still surprised to find he even has a girlfriend.

Saturday morning, 10:38 a.m. What am I doing here? I feel a vacancy inside me. I see a desert. Why am I in this room? Why am I in this mood? What do I seek, what need am I trying to fulfill?

Outside, the air is cool, flat, the sky is gray. I have not been outside, but I'm near a large window opening out into a wide airshaft almost as big as a courtyard. I'm in one of these typical San Francisco apartments—a long hallway, out of square, dark without daylight, leading past many doors to a bright, sunny room with a bay window.

Maybe I'm hungry; maybe that's why I feel empty.

There are times when I am aimless in the city, a period between two events, a waiting, an unresolved wandering until a destination becomes. Passing time, killing time. Walking vast distances. Today, what will I do with myself? And what about tomorrow?

Its a beautiful sunny Thursday, 11:30 a.m. Even looking out across the bay, I see nothing but clear skies over the city, maybe all the way out over the sea.

I'm on my way to work. Its the middle of the day. I had a fucking pelvic exam today. Everything looked great up there, apparently. But now I'm running late for work. I haven't called to tell them. Who wants to hear that anyway: sorry I'm late, but I was having my pap smear.

Honestly, I'm ready for something better. I'm ready to go out to breakfast on a Saturday morning, and have juice *and* tea and not have to concern myself with how I'm going to pay for it. I'm ready to wake up in the morning and want to get out of bed. I'm ready to go to work instead of just going to some job.

I've had this feeling before, and now here it is again. As long as I can remember, in fact, I've felt moments of intense restlessness, severe, acute restlessness: I am not in quite the right place, not spending my time and my love on quite the right efforts, not quite being who I really am. Is it possible to be off-course of my destiny my whole life long. Or do I feel the tingle before the flash of lightening, saying, yes, it is coming—the light, the heat, the big bang.

For there are other moments when I feel precisely on, radiant, fulfilled. They are moments of knowing I am right where I need to be, am going right where I need to become, and I know, the light, the heat, the big bang all come from within, explode ever outward, inexhaustible, ever available. Everything I need is within me right now.

On my way to Burning Man!, via my house, the store, the long road. Its a quarter past seven. I'll be home in fifteen minutes. I should call Mike. I need to pack. I'm 92% packed. It's always that last 8%, the last Killer Eight. What a little psycho killer it is, haunting me.

I'm in the frantic, frenetic phase. I'm hoping Mike will be on the same or worse schedule as I am. Better if he's worse, because then I won't be the one who gets us to Burning Man at dawn.

Looking forward to the dust. Looking forward to the cold, the heat, the dry, the wet, the sleepy, the cranky, the blissed the fuck out. I no longer hold any misconceptions about Burning Man being a party oasis. I look forward to it for what it really is: cooking dinner super-fast before it gets totally dark. Dust on my calves that almost reaches my knees. Filthy carpets. Loosing all my friends in the dark. Looking for somebody's camp. Bumming cigarettes. Hang nails.

I am so excited.

I cannot write about Towers of Dub without telling you about the first time, the very first time, I heard it. I must have been about seventeen years old, in the midst of getting my first exposure to real electronic music, and not that crappy dance-pop, Paula Abdul remix nonsense I'd hear late Saturday nights on KDON. I'd taken acid before, just maybe once or twice. It was right about then I'd gone to my first rave. So my brain was ripe and ready for the Orb.

It was late at night in Anna's room. She had this huge, sprawling room with a Barcelona chair near a little orange fireplace, one of those free-standing 70's kind shaped like a funny little flying saucer. Some of us lay on her bed, some sat in the Barcelona chair or maybe on the floor. I don't remember exactly who was there, but I'm sure it was the usual pack. We were teenagers, you know, we traveled in packs, though I seem to remember it was Christy's idea to play "The Song". I remember, we simply called it "The Song", no other song like it, so no need to use a more complicated name.

Anna turned off the lights, and the room darkened save the street light coming in through the glass door onto the garden, and the glow from the fire in the little flying saucer fireplace. We fell utterly silent.

I think I lay on the floor. I didn't know what I was about to hear, not a clue, but like I said, my brain was ripe and ready.

It started with some funny little conversation, some dog barked, bells and chimes, then a harmonica floated in from very far away. And then The Song, it took me. It took me. I'd never heard anything like it in my life. I was flown away in the little flying saucer to a place with warm, soft air, darkness, tiny twinkling stars all about me. Floating free, floating in a warm, dark place, lost and floating.

The deep bass a cool grass curling up to meet my bare feet. The sky brightens. Birds hide in their trees, singing. A dog barks far off in the distance, over green, rolling hills and dells of low, round oak. The sky pulsates radiant loops of purple and turquoise. The darkness is overtaken by a mosaic of interlocking shapes and colors, geometric yet organic, fluid but regular, each color distinct and contrasting with its neighbor - dark greens and oranges rippling up next to brilliant bright reds and blues. Stars burst in energetic beams of gold and silver.

Some years back, at Burning Man, someone built a Tower of Dub. It was just a scrappy scaffolding maybe twenty feet high, strung with a lonely string of white Christmas lights. But the beauty of it was the big speaker booming out The Song across the dark and chaotic playa. There was even a sign, "Tower of Dub". It was like a beacon to me, a temple, grounding me, exciting me. I felt a bond with whomever had built this simple thing, knowing she'd been taken, too, when her brain was ripe and ready.

On the beach, just South of Aptos, Capitola, Santa Cruz. I look across the aqua-gray water and see the ashy-purple silhouette of the Monterey Peninsula stretch solidly out into the sea and sky. Directly to my left, in the South, stands the Cloud Factory. Where would I be without the Cloud Factory? Who would I be? Who would I love? The important people are all here.

I would not be in this spot. I am on the beach, near the beach house where Melon and Tony got married. I sit in the sand cross legged. The air is cool and salty, I smell the salt spray, the coolness of the sea, the seaweed in piles on the sand. The constant breaking of the waves

upon the shore brings me back into myself. The sun is just set into the deep and endless West, all around me the light is warm violet, lavender, golden. The champagne orange of the sunset washes into the pale blues and steel purple clouds of the East. The clean, white pages in my hand glow with the violet of the sky. The sea keeps meeting the shore, ceaselessly, tirelessly, rhythmically; transfixed, hypnotized, memorized. Bringing me back to myself, back to the I Am. I would not be me now had I never been, had I never done, had I never seen.

Every moment in the life of the Universe had lead to this moment now. The present is an ever-rising pinnacle perched aloft the vaults of every passing moment. I sit here bold and alive, cool and confident before a million Universes, at truth with myself, ceaselessly Me as the waves break and recede from the shore. The ocean carves the land, the land contains the water, the sky pushes, pulls, each an influence, a force. My foot falls crater the sand, the impact of the sand against my soles jarring my ligaments, sloughing off skin, building my muscles, breaking my bones. Each influence creative/destructive, every push a change, every pull met with a snapping back.

There is no evil in this Universe, only the forces rubbing against each other in the dance of creation/destruction. How many people there'd be on Earth if we never died, how many mountains waiting to be carved to sand, ice caps waiting to melt and meet the shore. No gain and no loss, only the persistence of flux, of waves upon the shore calling me back into my Self. Beats of the music like my own heart beat, blood coursing down my legs into my toes, feeding my finger tips frantically motioning the pen across the page, trying with all might to match the rate of my thoughts rising and falling like the sea.

I Am. There is only Self. One Life. The life I am is the One Life of the Universe, Nature, God, the Self.

Jenny sang the song she wrote at the wedding: love is all there is; love is the purpose; only love, only love.

I am not too proud to admit I have pain. I'm not too proud to admit I fear rejection, criticism, vulnerability. I don't like asking for help. I don't like getting too close. I try to act tough. I take things personally, I make assumptions, jump to conclusions. I panic, I feel alone, I loose track of myself. But here on the soft, cool sand, still velvet from the sun's heat, here with the sky growing black, here with my mother the sea singing to me from her great bay, here with the moon in crescent smoldering a white window for itself through the slate gray clouds, where a wider window in the clouds lets the last yellow-green-periwinkle blues bring some light to me here, where the deep beat of Towers of Dub search into me and find me, with all this here for me, I am soothed. My pain is lifted. I find myself, I know myself. I Am. I have no need to feel there is any other outside of the One Life. I am one with the light, the beat, the sea, the clouds, the Earth, the air, the smell of salt. Mother, into your hands I commend my spirit.

I can no longer see the page in the deepening dark, barely make out the lines, almost see the words, more formless shapes. But I know they're there. My faith in the words holds. Now there is nothing left to me but the music.

Security.

Hello, is this reception, London Weekend Television?

This is security, reception's gone off duty, sir.

Oh, I see, uh, er, I, uh, I'm supposed to meet somebody in reception, and I wanted to know if they were there waiting?

What's the name of the person you're supposed to meet?

Haile Selassie.

Haile...?

Selassie.

Is there a Haile Selassie here? No.

Could you possibly, um, if he does, he will come in, very shortly, would you tell him that Marcus Garvey, um, phoned...

Uh-huh.

...and that I will meet him, well its a, meet him in Babylon and Ting.

Yes, when Marcus comes in, right?

Yeah.

And you're supposed to say... someone's just come in.

Oh, was that Haile Selassie?

No, it wasn't him, it was a cab.

He's a, he's a, uh, a black gentleman.

When he comes in, asks for you, you were going to meet him at, uh, where was it, Babylon?

Yeah. Babylon and Ting.

Babylon and Ting.

That's it.

Right you are.

Thank you, god bless you.

Bye.

The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
She makes me lie down in green pastures,
She leads me beside quiet waters,
She restores my soul.
She guides me in paths of righteousness for her name's sake.

And even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for she is with me; her rod and her staff, they comfort me.

She prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
She anoints my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

For goodness and loving-kindness follows me all the days of my life,
and I dwell in the house of the Lord, now and forever.
-Psalm 23

I honestly thought I'd get some good writing done at Burning Man. I know, naive, but I really truly did. I think I actually might have had I been there longer. I wanted to write, I had the urge, I just didn't get the opportunity. When I finally tried to chisel out the opportunity, I lost my pen sprinting to hop on the Slug as it started driving away.

But I saw the sunrise, and can tell you all about it. My memory is still vivid. I don't usually work from memory, but I'm willing to give it a try.

At first, there is doubt: does the sky really have that faint blue glow, or is it the false dawn? The moon is still bright, so its possible the glow is only the moonlight catching the dust in the air. But the Eastern glow is boldest. The mountains, which previously could have been mistaken for dark clouds, reveal themselves as jagged black silhouettes solid against the slowly lightening sky. The dark blue glow, barely more than a shade of moonlight, slips into a foamy greenish blue, then that cold yellow, growing warmer. The fainter stars retreat from the light.

The invisible structures lofting blinking light out on the playa begin to once again take their physical form, the blinking lights swallowed slowly by the sky. The West holds onto its night, still rich and dark with stars, but in the East, day makes in inescapable rush forward. Clouds are caught in the light, beam in blacks, purples, blues, golds. Yellow, orange and green arch up into the velvety lavenders and blues, and in turn, the lavenders and blues begin to resemble the bright blue of the day. Shadows stretch along the ground, friends faces show cold and soft in the growing light. The jumble of art, dusty people, make-shift architecture, bicycles comes forward out of the darkness. The word is solid and recognizable again, takes its old familiar form back from the undifferentiated and mysterious, unseeable night.

There are, of course, two option for you at this time: stand and face the increasing whiteness of day and the inevitable presence of the dazzling sun, or quickly hide in your tent and try to lock your eyes shut before the penetrating rays sizzle you.

The gang of Fuckos kept me sticking with it Sunday morning. We rolled into camp on the Slug just before the suns début, so clearly there was no escaping that part, but to rage against the increasing of the light seemed like a piss-poor idea.

My mood was foul. I'm always cranky when I don't have sleep. Scout tried in vane to impress reason upon me and pack me off to bed. The rest of the gang wanted me to buck up, get a hold of myself, and head out to the next party. Stephan and Cynthia even made coffee. I sat in a chair next to Teiwaz, feeling harsh, smoking and making rude comments, until Stephan produced the ultimate pick-me-up, the essential morning-after buzz-nitrous! A good, hard, stupid laugh brought me clean around. Carrie and Kimmi said they knew I wouldn't let them down.

Live steady. Don't fuck around. Give anything weird a wide berth—including people. It's not worth it. I learned this the hard way, through brutal overindulgence.
-Dr. Hunter S. Thompson

Rewind one hour. We're out on the Slug, rolling across the playa. We've just left the warmth of a large fire to head back to camp for the regroup and to get Carrie's records. The mood is quiet and subdued. The laughing, yelling, screaming, snorting and pole dancing have all retreated into quiet contemplation and far-off gazes across the brightening desert. Our morning is colored in stillness and peace by the sound of Jeff Buckley's portentous voice singing out from the sound system: But remember when I moved in you, And the holy dove was moving too, And every breath we drew was Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah.

I have a profound sense of love and warmth for everyone on the old Slug. I look around to see the faces of friends and the faces of strangers. In the cool gray light, they all look radiant. We're all filthy. We all have smeared and faded make-up, dust in our hair, circles under our

eyes, and we are beautiful. The sky lightens.

Fast forward twenty-four hours. I make haste to get the steel wool ready to set on fire and spin. The dawn's coming on quick, and flaming steel wool spinning needs darkness. Teiwaz has his flame thrower out, and burns a low flame along the ground near his feet. We've set ourselves up near a large bonfire, but he's still wearing his flip-flops and his toes are cold, and he's not getting warm enough from the bonfire alone. I sit on the side of the Slug, threading baling wire through pads of steel wool. My fingers just can't work fast enough. I get it lit off the flame thrower, then sprint out past the people warming themselves by the fire, though I'm too excited to get very far out; after a few running steps I start spinning the wire exuberantly in wide circles, wide as my arm can reach. A thick nimbus of bright sparks bursts out around me. They fly out in great arc, sailing high into the air, smashing hard against the ground, pattering down onto my covered head. I face the sunrise, but am only fascinated by the fire in my hand. The last fibers of the steel wool smolder away, and I turn resplendent toward the bag of steel wool on the Slug, and toward the crowd by the fire still cowering from the sparks rained down upon them. Oops. Whatever. I'll just be sure to go out a little farther next time.

And I do go farther, but not much. It takes too long to get far away, and I'm impatient to be the center of my own fiery orange galaxy, expanding ever away from me at the swing of my arm. I keep spinning and spinning the flaming steel wool, until at last the wire breaks and goes sailing away from me on the same trajectory as my little orange galaxies. Teiwaz takes his flame thrower to my broken wire, then to the Slug itself. We are like children up at dawn on Christmas morning, playing with our new toys before our folks are even awake. Scout cuddles on the Slug's couch with a cute girl, too sleepy and comfortable to notice he might be set good-naturedly on fire. Samba music plays softly from the sound system.

In the East, out where the mountains tumble down toward a flat horizon, the sky is alive in deep oranges the color of my burning steel. The orange is haloed in yellow, which in turn is haloed in greens and blues. Dark streaks of clouds out on that flat Eastern horizon lighten with each passing moment. We are faced once again with the two options: stand and endure, or run and hide. Teiwaz looks tired, but I'm excited by the whole thing.

"I guess if we've made it this far," he says, "we might as well just stick it out."

We load up the Slug and head back to camp to climb the Buzz Tower and witness the sun.

The dawn is at its perfection: the air most still and quiet, the colors most brilliant, still dark in the West, flaming jewel in the East. Only the half moon and big blue Venus still show in the sky. The Slug crawls across the desert through the half-light, past the few still-burning lanterns on their posts. I sit close to Teiwaz as he drives, and we start to kiss, quickly at first, as he is driving, but then longer and deeper, and then, for a moment, there is no sunrise, and no desert, and no Slug, and no motion, just this long, sweet kiss gradually taking over the Universe. But then it's I who look up out the windshield to find, to my amusement, we're stopped, right there in the middle of the playa, halfway back to camp.

"You know, this really is the best part of the sun rise. It just gets all white and hot and uncomfortable from this point on," I say. When we get back to camp, we do not climb the buzz tower, we climb into bed and are asleep before the sun crests the mountains.

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,
I, now twenty-nine years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.

Creeds and schools in abeyance,
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten,
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,
Nature without check with original energy.
- Walt Whitman

Noon exactly at the group campsite in Big Sur. I haven't been out of bed for more than half an hour. I'm sleeping "out doors", so there's no sauna effect from a tent. The sun shone directly on me sometime mid-morning, but the air was still crisp and cool, still hanging on to night. This is the spot where I've taken to making my bed, on the broad, mossy, flat face of an ancient fallen redwood. The river ripples gently by twenty feet down a sharp embankment on my left—the North-East. The sounds it makes are quiet, easy going, like laughter. But there is a highway near by, too, and the cars speeding past are louder, though they can almost sound like the sea against the shore. Fortunately, the highway is mostly empty at night, save the exceptional lone traveler.

Night was still and black last night. From this spot on the fallen tree, I've seen the moon rise big and silver, bright enough to wake me. It crests into the sky from behind the ridge miles beyond the little river. Last night there was no moon brightening the black, and there won't be one tonight, either.

It was exquisitely dark. The snaky clearing toward the sky shone in flat, soft black, pierced with bright, cold, distant stars. And the trees stood absolutely motionless and devoid of all light, solid, black, silhouetted in a darkness even darker than the sky.

As I lay here warm and bundled against the chill of the lightless air, I noticed my vision earnestly colorless. Not a shade of purple or blue could be seen, only black: flatter black,

darker black, deeper black. It was the darkness of the unknown, the shade of pure faith. There were no shadows and no details, no depth, nothing familiar, save the pure form of redwood fronds stretching their dense blank filaments outward and upward into the night. The stars shone strong and small in the clearing and through the interlocking mass of patches and lines in the indistinguishable canopy above me.

And now, in the bright wash of daylight, my vision looks entirely different. A billion colors erupt forth from every inch of the land and sky, and each of those colors enlivened with light and shadow. I sit in shadow, cool and blue, lifting my eyes out to the East to look upon the bright, blue, cloudless sky, that beautiful blue that is the color of the world. The once-black ridge vaults up into the seamless blue sky, a mound of browns, reds, sage, oakleaf, manzanita, lichen, warm green, dusty tan, bright, sun exposed, patches of shade, growing thick around bare rock.

And here between the ridge and the river, the narrow strip of forest on the narrow valley floor. I admit I do not know the names of all these trees, but there are of course the undeniable redwoods, launching and lofting like fine, thin Apollos, taller, straighter than any other tree around. The redwoods in the distance have a golden hue amidst the dark green fronds, from dried needles still clinging to their twigs.

The redwoods, standing together shoulder to shoulder, tower above their leafy sisters: oaks with great veiny branches stretching long out to their sides, and some other kind of tree with electric green leaves shaped like exuberant and chubby hands catching the fast-falling sun rays. The trunks of the hand-leaf trees are blond-barked mottled with gray. It barely takes a breeze to ruffle and ripple the leaves of the leafy trees, and put the redwoods into a slow sway.

Along the river, amongst the smooth white stones and fine white sand, shrubs and baby trees grow. The dense shrubs with thumb-like leaves are a dusty, sagey green, and the leaves of the baby trees broad and shiny dark green. Shade plays across them, growing there in the broken shadows of their elders.

I've made the trek up to Buzzard's Roost by myself, and now here I sit, on an angular rock. I didn't come up here by myself specifically; I invited everyone else, but no one else was interested. Which is just as well, because I didn't hike up here to party, I hiked up here to sit with my eyes open, write, listen to the Orb, watch the golden light cross the tall and deep Earth then slip down under the fog.

The great, sharp mountains of the Santa Lucia glow like embers against the blue sky. The sky is darker in the North and over head, but yellows toward the South-East, and is brown and smoky to the South. The setting sun is at my back, too bright and hot to catch with the eyes. It is stark and burning above the flat strata of fog coating the vast Pacific.

I know the color of the sea under that blanket of fog. I know how gray it is. I look down and see the fog blowing, slipping swiftly Southward along the coast, and I can see the metallic

gray edge of the sea peaking out toward the shore. In the quiet moments of the music, I hear it breaking through my headphones. I know the sea curves endlessly West in that metallic, cold gray, capped in splashes of windy white.

The sun touches down into the fog now, and the mountains are red. A long, concentrated gaze upon the mountains reveal a perceptible elongating of the mountains purple shadows.

I now face West. The sun just nudged its way below the South-racing fog. The last bright rays catch the top edge of the Western-most lip of the fog, setting it ablaze in a halo of dazzling bright light.

A secretive cold whispers in from the North. The nearest mountains barely glow in ruby, and off in the distance, one last ridge deep in the range is positively amethyst. The sky, from East to West, is a warm violet, to a grayish-blue, to a white, bright turquoise, to a golden green, to a mellow amber, then the quick edge of the soft, blue fog. The horizon glows pink to the South, yellow with pink clouds to the North.

The mountains, now out of the sun's long, direct rays, have returned to their thick brown-greens and soft, dusty tans. All around me the manzanita and chaparral shiver delicately in the growing breath of cool air caressing in from the North. The sun sinks lower, by now drown the very sea, and the sky darkens. I hear birds singing the evensong.

You've been orb'd if you're sitting a room and you get up to look out the window, and you suddenly realize that it was coming from the record.

-Dr. Alex Paterson