The Doorbell as Fiction
Field Trips to Mars (Psychedelic Flashbacks, With Scones and Jam)
The Third Eye
Wounds to Bind
Photo Album
The Sound of Free Love
The Lost Psychedelic Episode of *Dragnet*
Song for Dead Romance
Jack Acid
Sally Simpson Packs a Bag & Goes on a Journey to the Edge of Night
Bull of the Woods
The Moans
Living Boy
Phone Call in Peyote Gardens #1 (for Nanebah)
Monoceros
Magic Carpet Ride
Summer ’88
You Can’t Ask Alice Anything Anymore
Essential Psychedelia
The night television, streaks of red moving through a celluloid dark, some thought of philip k’s moving through the rain like a box, or gloom—an unfurnished room with soiled bandages below the narrow windows—a large sow of photons and slop of an uncertain night crossing:

It was a delivery from a pharmacy: he opened the heavy door and realized God stood there for the purposes of an interview. Even the French found him mad.

LSD & conjugating verbs in Latin. He was just another superior being. Burning oil. The night’s seminarian. The rest of us, early twenty-first century barbarians.
Ms. Sunshine delighted her pupils at the Helen Frankenthaler Elementary School with tales of her youthful enthusiasms. It was Music Appreciation Day and everyone was supposed to bring an album—“preferably vinyl, but a compact disc or digital download will suffice for those of you who do not have ready access to grandparents.” The teacher went through the recordings her charges brought in, singling out songs, then holding forth on the virtues and demerits of each successive piece she played.

“Whole Lotta Love” off *Led Zeppelin II*, she indicated curtly, was so much “apoplectic wallpaper,” whatever that could be. “Yellow” from Coldplay’s *Parachutes* was “aptly named on account of its special egg-yolkiness, because infertile mums-in-waiting liked to listen to it while attempting to conceive, and obviously, in at least certain cases, it worked.” Everyone nodded contentedly, picturing breakfast. “Coyote,” on Joni Mitchell’s *Hejira*, elicited a vermouth chuckle: “A zoo tune is always agreeable. Have you been? That’s where all the animals are behind department store windows and non-alcoholic bars. I should have brought in my copy of *Pet Sounds*, another demonstration of how deeply grown-ups love the domestication of wild things.”

Ms. Sunshine then dropped the needle on a staticky “White Rabbit,” from the Great Society’s *Conspicuous Only in Its Absence*. Her ears perked up: “At last, children! A storybook episode, à la Harry Potter or Pasolini’s *Winnie the Pooh!*” The music meandered forward, “deliberate and woozy as a Spanish drunkard,” she marveled, whilst a saxophone imitated a harmonica or maybe it was the other way round. In any case, “a West-to-East Indian love call,” she dubbed it, as the spidery, chomping guitar simultaneously spun and undid its web. The solo “turned in tight spirals the way an anal-retentive cat toys with a ball of yarn,” as a hush descended on the record and in the classroom.

A slightly fire-alarming voice came out of the left-hand speaker. “That, ladies and gentlemen, is Gracie Slick, once upon a time a very great and very wicked witch.” The children puzzled over how she could be both at once, but the stern, imploring voice on the record crying *Feed your head* did not seem to be either one thing or the
other but both and neither. “You all remember Old McDonald, not to be confused with his awful scion Ronald. He had a neighbor called Lewis Carroll, who had a farm-with-a-Ph, what Little Gracie might have called a pharm-a-see—can you all say that, girls and boys? It is a kind of farm for your head. On this farm he and his Alice had rabbits and dormice and caterpillars of the community, as well as white knights and red queens with and without heads to be fed. He grew words like crops, and the crops resembled pills and tabs and bitter potions and powders you could take so you could see all the different animals and multi-color-coated people that were invisible to the naked eye but were everywhere once you broke through the barn doors of experience. Do you understand?”

No, not really. It didn’t matter. Ms. Sunshine carried the class along with the tart-honeyed cadence of her voice and that of the good-bad witch. Perhaps they were sisters or belonged to the same sisterhood, in the way that she previously explained Mary Poppins, Doc McStuffins, Catwoman, Dora the Explorer, Buffy, Eloise and Dorothy were all part of the same unbreakable “chain of becoming.”

“When I was scarcely more than your age, my dears, I used to hitchhike to the Matrix and the Fillmore to watch the psychedelic”—here smirking slightly at the passé ring of that term—“bands and their eye-boggling light shows. To be young was very heaven, indeed.” Tiny oohs and ahhs came from the intently listening and cheerfully mystified students. Ms. Sunshine spoke of the Great Society, before Gracie left it on the Jefferson Airplane, which the children gathered was like Air Force One painted funny colors and made out of the special plastic used only for credit cards and Star Wars costumes.

This next part was confusing, but it appeared that the Grateful Dead were friends of Charlie Brown’s and that his friend Pigpen had run off to join them after carelessly “dropping some acid” when playing with his new chemistry set. The Grateful Dead came and tidied up his mess. Their shows were like those inflatable castles you went into at birthday parties, magically predictable in their choreographed spontaneity. “Those boys were nothing but hairy Mormons,” as Ms. Sunshine scrunched her face and shoulders in the manner of a toothless Muppet, and everyone laughed themselves to near-tears. “Soundtracks for trips were strictly for pussies anyway,” she declared. “Straight, no skip tracer, is the only way to get good and properly gone.” She believed that if the music were far out enough, it could surpass any chemical enhancement. Remembering an American bunch called Kaleidoscope, she beamed, “In ’68 at the Civic, they played ‘Egyptian Gardens’ for twenty solid
minutes, and by the time they switched over to ‘The Cuckoo’ I could have sworn the whole scene was being directed by Orson Welles from a perch atop a giant Ferris wheel, stage right.

“If you listened avidly enough to Captain Beefheart’s *Trout Mask Replica* while watching Captain Kangaroo’s show on a black-and-white Zenith, you could actually teleport yourself from Laurel Canyon to the Mojave Desert without leaving your bowl of Froot Loops.” Her favorites were Can and electrical Miles Davis, “Afro-Cubist Voodoo-wop-bam-boom.” She also had a weakness for Soft Machine’s *Third* and pre-1970 Jimi Hendrix, and staunchly believed Pink Floyd’s early children’s records were of pedagogic value, particularly their bracing safety lesson, “Careful With That Axe, Eugene,” which she now played to conclude the school day. “I hope you take that to heart when you get on the bus,” she admonished. “Class is dismissed. On Monday we will be watching a divine film entitled *A Boy and His Dog*….”
I began to turn into myself, to loop through my own flesh. I swirled and involuted and squirmed and tried to keep from screaming at the glory and the terror of it all. Then the eye appeared, a great shining eye suspended in space. The eye pulsated and shot rays of burning, sweet-sounding light through my body. But it wasn’t my body. Suddenly I was the great eye and I saw everything there is to see. It was ecstasy and it was horrible and I saw it all and understood it all.

A student on LSD
John Cashman, *The LSD Story*

It begins with a rising guitar fanfare: Eastern drones against a sliding bass. As the last note rings out there’s a quick tap and a roll on the snare, and the ride begins with raga twelve-strings, deep bass and clattering drums chasing each other down the rabbit hole. A young voice sings in the soon-to-be-standard mystical punk style with each syllable stretched against the rhythm. The melody and harmonies are horizontal without the chord changes standard in Western pop; the words speak of nothing less than a fundamental transformation:

*Unlocked by the key*
*And now I am free*
*Magic curtains of green and blue lights pass by*
*Moon and sky*

The fanfare returns: The guitar spirals upwards in ever ascending scales, underpinned by the high-pitched drone while drums splash and clatter. It’s a brief passage, only twenty-five seconds, but it’s almost out of control, grounded only by the rumbling, minatory bass—the one note of warning in this ecstatic experience. The band crunches out of this brief improvisation into the song’s tricky central riff, a jump-cut so jarring that it feels as though they’ve leapt out of their skins. The voice returns from high on the mountaintop:
No wings for my flight
I drift through the night
Understanding the secrets of space and time
The third eye

The frantic spiral returns with greater intensity, resolving into a growl of guitar amplification. The song lasts for 135 seconds but it’s so compressed and intense that it feels longer; as an attempt to boil down a seven- or eight-hour experience into a pop format it’s extremely successful, not an advert for a lifestyle but a sincere attempt to capture something shattering if not fundamental. All the musicians are working at the limit of their capabilities (an exciting moment in itself) in an attempt to explain the inexplicable.

Released in April 1966, the Dovers’ record “The Third Eye” captures the overwhelming impact of LSD on teen consciousness in a raw and barely filtered form. Like many of the earlier acid records it is not beatific—that would be a later gloss—but raw, wild and threatening; LSD opened a window into another world, but it was so strong that it derailed the fragile and the unwary. This is the contradiction that “The Third Eye” encodes. Lyrically and vocally it captures a moment of visionary transcendence. The rational mind seeks to define the experience in positive if awe-struck terms, but the explosive chaotic intensity of the performance tells you the whole experience is all too much. You’re left with a disturbed aftertaste, a growl of chemical electricity that is anything but resolved or peaceful.

Based in Santa Barbara, about ninety miles away from Hollywood, the Dovers—with their British sounding name—were one of a thousand groups living through the rapid changes of the time. “The Third Eye” reflects some of the ideas and influences in this period when teens, academics, writers, artists and bohemians were attempting to translate acid for pop culture and Western society, something so new that there were few rules: Some groups embraced chaos and chance while others attempted to tame the untameable through religious concepts and doctrines. Underlying this was a messianic sense, the desire to proselytize as personal revelation pointed towards powerful social change.

The central concept of “The Third Eye” came from a controversial book first published in the mid 1950s under the same name. This was written as the apparent autobiography of a Tibetan named Tuesday Lobsang Rampa who was taken from his family at the age of eight and underwent various initiation ceremonies before becoming a lama at the age of twelve. The book was a best seller and revealed to
a Western readership for the first time the depth and breadth of Buddhist beliefs
and spiritual practices: levitation, astral projection, meditation and yoga. Lobsang
Rampa’s crucial initiation was the opening of the third eye: an operation that would
allow him “to see people as they are, and not as they pretend to be.”

This involved what is now known as trepanation. A small hole was opened
in the center of his forehead by a specially designed steel instrument pressed down
until it penetrated the bone. Once the first hole had been made, a “hard, clean sliver
of wood” was inserted through the steel bradawl into Rampa’s forehead where it
would remain for the next two or three weeks; after the operation Rampa realized he
could see people’s “auras” swirling around their physical form. He could determine
the state of their health or know whether they were speaking the truth. In fact he
could see their whole being: red for anger, shifting bands of intermittent flecks for
deceit, discolorations in a yellow nimbus for a hidebound monk. This was not only
useful in interpersonal dealings but also for the general good: “Particularly with the
sick we used the power of the third eye, for those who were sick in the flesh and
sick in the spirit.”

The existence of the third eye was a living testament to mankind’s fall.
“Many years ago,” wrote Rampa, “all men and women could use the third eye.
In those days the gods walked upon the earth and mixed with men. Mankind had
visions of replacing the gods and tried to kill them, forgetting that what man could
see, the gods could see better. As punishment, the third eye was closed. Throughout
the ages a few people have been born with the ability of see clairvoyantly: Those
who have it naturally can have its power increased a thousandfold by appropriate
treatment, as I had.” The opening of the third eye endowed a godlike status on
a human being, even as those with this quasi-divine facility were still subject to
temptation and human frailty; the third eye was the source of a skill and talent that
brought with it an intense and rigorous self-discipline: “It had to be treated with
care and respect.” Rampa remembered how he was sent for one day by the Lord
Abbot who told him, “My son, you now have this ability, an ability denied to most.
Use it only for good, never for self-gain.”

This was not merely a spiritual metaphor.

The third eye is generally held to correspond to a little-known organ called
the pineal gland, located near the brain’s center. About the size of a rice grain and in
the shape of a pine cone, it was originally described in the West by the pioneering First Century medical researcher Galen, who thought the gland regulated the flow of thought from the lateral ventricles of the brain. The Seventeenth Century French philosopher René Descartes thought that the pineal gland was the “seat of the soul.” It regulates powerful mood triggers in the human psyche; highly sensitive to light, it mirrors the circadian rhythm of night and day as well as the longer cycle of the four seasons, and triggers behavioral changes which enable humans to adapt to the changing circumstances of hibernation, sleep, the euphoria of high summer. Residing in the front of the forehead between the eyes, the pineal gland is activated by intense meditation; if you draw a line from between the eyes to the back of the head, and then between the ears, that’s the position of the pineal gland in the head. The third eye is the front meridian of this occluded organ.

In *The Secret Doctrine*, a 1888 survey of the occult (in the classic sense of hidden gnostic knowledge…), Helena Blavatsky held that back in time the third eye had been standard human equipment, but “because MAN had sunk too deep into the mire of Matter” it had atrophied, leaving behind “a witness to its existence. This witness is now the PINEAL GLAND.” She felt that this was the organ most closely associated with “the more highly evolved or spiritual man” and, as such, left traces throughout the legends and traditions of different countries. Above all the third eye was “indissolubly connected with Karma.” It’s clear that Lobsang Rampa had read *The Secret Doctrine* (as had most travelers down the byways of esoteric thought during the first half of the Twentieth Century); like Blavatsky, Rampa was held to be a fraud, especially after an investigation by the Tibetan explorer Heinrich Harrer revealed the author of *The Third Eye* to be one Cyril Henry Hoskin from Devon. When confronted with this by the UK press in 1958, Hoskin did not deny his identity but claimed that the soul of Rampa had transmigrated into his body. Controversy and confusion still surround this story given Harrer’s tenure in the German Nazi SS and Hoskin’s account of how, in 1947, his body was inhabited by the spirit of a Tibetan lama even as it turned out Hoskin never had been to Tibet. But the idea of transmigration—namely that an individual soul or spirit, after biological death, can reincarnate in another human form—is common among many world religions, in particular Buddhism; even more common is the idea of death and rebirth. At the very least Hoskin had carefully studied Buddhist life and thought, and there’s a filament of authenticity that runs through *The Third Eye* that persuades the open-minded reader there might be things stranger than known.
Hoskin’s book was popular both in the UK and the U.S., where it found a readership hungry for something beyond Fifties materialism. There was a strong undercurrent of exoticism and esotericism in American culture during that period—the shadow side of popluxe—that took in the exotica of aural travelogues by Martin Denny, Arthur Lyman and others, as well as unlikely TV stars like Korla Pandit, an African American from Missouri who posed as a Far Eastern mystic while playing spooky, dreamtime electric organ music. Exactly where the Dovers got the idea for their song is unknown but, by the mid-Sixties, references to the third eye were part of the currency: Lobsang Rampa’s book had its first U.S. paperback edition in 1964, and in late 1965 Bob Dylan used the third eye in the splenetic lyric of his song “Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window.” The 13th Floor Elevators from Austin, Texas, explicitly formed to broadcast LSD consciousness, picked up on the third eye as a central motif. Designed by John Cleveland, the Elevators’ business card had the image of a single eye, placed upon a plinth, with the legend: psychedelic rock.

The third eye was a wonderful metaphor for LSD, which mimics the production of serotonin, normally the function of the pineal gland, flooding unused parts of the brain. For many users in the mid-Sixties LSD functioned as an agent of death and rebirth; after taking it, one saw the world as if for the first time. The experience was so overwhelming as to be religious; like the ancients described by Madame Blavatsky or the young Tibetan child in Hoskin’s lamasery, LSD adepts felt that they had attained another level of consciousness.

At the very least the LSD experience was inimical to the mainstream values of Western society. Competition and materialism seemed ludicrous to the cosmically attuned mind. In The Doors of Perception, Aldous Huxley wrote of his amusement at seeing “a large pale blue automobile” while on mescaline: “What complacency, what an absurd self-satisfaction beamed from those bulging surfaces of glossiest enamel! Man had created the thing in his own image—or rather in the image of his favorite character in fiction. I laughed till the tears rolled down my cheeks.” Things and stuff suddenly weren’t enough. The concept of the Teenager—youth as consumer—had been developed in the last years of the Second World War, the period that also saw the development and first use of the atomic bomb. To some teens these events fused into some bizarre symmetry: “Acid can be a beautiful
reaction lighting up cities,” one user told photojournalist Lawrence Schiller in March 1966, “or it can be Hiroshima, an event you must live with forever.”

In the intervening twenty years after the invention of the Teenager, LSD and the atom bomb, youth consumerism expanded through its very commercial success into youth culture, increasingly separate from parents, adults and authorities. But youth culture still had a material base until wider LSD use blew it sky high; even if comparatively few dared to take it in 1965 and early 1966, the idea of the drug entered mainstream media culture—the subject of magazine exposés, scare stories, and the first tricklings of new and strange popular songs. Soldiers, take orders only from the rainbow alliance! Peace to the world, the poet George Andrews wrote in early 1966. Acid transformed the existentialism that seemed like the only viable response to instant atomization and transformed it into an eternal present, for which there was barely a language outside the furthest reaches of Eastern thought. Along with the bomb, it was the single most powerful dissolving agent in Sixties culture, and after its arrival, nothing would be the same.

In 1965 and ’66 the drug moved to center stage. Pandora’s box opened and all the spites flew out. The hyperventilated teen psyche was bombarded with sensations and revelations beyond the ken of most humans; this was instant satori, the result of a single ampoule or sugar cube, often sourced on the black market and taken in unstructured circumstances. It wasn’t like pot or pills: It was fundamental. Similar to the Dovers’ “The Third Eye” and released around the same time, the Byrds’ “Eight Miles High” translated a transcendent experience through Indian drones. Skilled communicators, the seminal Los Angeles band cloaked their visions in an account of a summer ’65 visit to London:

Eight miles high
And when you touch down
You’ll find that
It’s stranger than known

Mixing Eastern influences, free-jazz harmolodics and hard rock dynamics, the record was new and startling, moving up the Cashbox charts also dominated by the Yardbirds’ “Shapes of Things” and the Rolling Stones’ “19th Nervous Breakdown.” Drug culture was going mass. Seeing and traveling was a central metaphor for LSD from the start, and an integral part of artistic attempts to describe the experience of the drug; a 1966 account of a trip in the Los Angeles Free Press noted that light changed color in time and pitch with jazz on the radio: “With my eyes open, the
radiant colors filled the room, folding over on top of one another in rhythm with the music. Suddenly I was aware that the colors were the music. The discovery did not seem startling.” A drug whose uses previously had been psychiatric and even hostile—as a secret weapon designed by the U.S. and UK governments—spreading into bohemia on both sides of the Atlantic, its ability to obliterate intention and structure was most apparent in the story of Harvard lecturer Timothy Leary, to whom poet Allen Ginsberg advocated an alternative LSD future.

Leary had taken his first LSD dose in 1961, later calling it “the most shattering experience of my life.” He found that it was impossible “to return to the life I was leading before,” and Leary’s house in Harvard effectively became a commune of utopian acid groupings. His increasing messianism attracted the interest not only of Harvard authorities worried about an upsurge in black market LSD, but the CIA, and the Food and Drug Administration declared the drug dangerous, only to be supplied by a trained physician. In 1963 LSD became a hot topic in the media. In November, the month of President John Kennedy’s assassination, *Playboy* published three major articles on the drug with the tagline: “The pros and cons, history and future possibilities of vision-inducing psychochemicals.” By 1964 it was percolating into youth culture in the form of the Merry Pranksters, a group of acid recruits led by novelist Ken Kesey, for whom the literary success of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* wasn’t enough; Kesey wanted to follow the acid path as deep down the rabbit hole as he could go. The Pranksters’ approach to LSD couldn’t have been more different from the religiosity of Leary or the elitism of Huxley; their ideal was existential instantaneity and synesthesia, everything fusing into the everlasting present. Surrendering to chance and the moment, the Pranksters drove across America from the West Coast, aiming to arrive at the New York World’s Fair that ’64 summer. Taking film cameras and a plentiful supply of LSD, their mission was to embody the LSD experience—bright clothes, spontaneous living, media simultaneity. This was a confrontational performance piece designed to shock and confound, to break the bonds of everyday consciousness in a visceral manner. Emblazoned on the destination boards of their bus for all to see were their mottoes: in the front, FURTHUR; in back, CAUTION: WEIRD LOAD.

No one knew it at the time, but these polarized approaches—pseudo-religiosity and careless chaos—would dominate interpretations of LSD when the drug hit youth culture eighteen months later. In the spring of 1965—just as Dylan was heard singing, *Take me for a trip upon your magic swirling ship*—John Lennon...
and George Harrison were exposed to LSD at dinner one night by their dentist, who took it upon himself to lace their coffee with drenched sugar cubes. Angry at being dosed, the Beatles hurriedly left the flat and traveled through the center of London to the Pickwick Club off Charing Cross Road: “We went up into the nightclub,” Lennon remembered, “and it felt as though the elevator was on fire and we were going into hell—and it was and we were.” When the nightclub closed, the Beatles were still sitting there, transfixed; to Harrison “it felt as if a bomb had made a direct hit on the nightclub and the roof had been blown off.” The effect was shattering. Once it wore off the Beatles began to process what had happened. Always the first of the group to jump into any fire, Lennon concluded it “was terrifying but… fantastic,” and Harrison recalled how he’d experienced “a very concentrated version of the best feeling I’d ever had in my life…I felt in love, not with anything or anyone in particular, but everything.”

LSD was still legal in both England and America. That summer the first major gathering of a psychedelic subculture was the International Poetry Incarnation at London’s Albert Hall, where an audience of several thousand witnessed performances by Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Gregory Corso, Alexander Trocchi, Christopher Logue and others. Leary’s co-written The Psychedelic Experience, published in the fall of ’64, was subtitled A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Leary went out on the road as LSD’s high priest, preaching nothing less than a revolution of values: the mass use of psychedelics in a vast social experiment to overcome “the games” of Western society. On the West Coast, the Merry Pranksters stepped up their activities; after a riotous party in August attended by the Hell’s Angels, they conceived of an event where chance, chaos and the primacy of the instant — the everlasting NOW! — could be celebrated. A cluster of frankly hallucinogenic records included Donovan’s “Sunny Goodge Street” and “Hey Gyp (Dig the Slowness),” which took a wonderful 1930 blues “Can I Do It For You?” by Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie and souped up the call-and-response banter with an intense acoustic riff, off-kilter handclaps and a lyric that offered a “sugar cube.” While Dylan continued his explorations of time, space and the random nature of reality on the ten-minute epic “Desolation Row,” the Beatles delivered their most explicit statement yet on Rubber Soul: “The Word.”
By the beginning of ’66, things began to accelerate and warp. Once the biggest rock band in the world had become adepts, the drug’s spread throughout pop culture was inevitable; the messages were still opaque, but avidly received by those with attuned antennae. From that point on, LSD ceased to become the preserve of a small but closely interconnected claque. What previously had been a trickle of acid songs would soon become a rushing river; naturally the authorities were horrified. The whole thing was like a paranoid Fifties science-fiction movie, a laboratory experiment gone disastrously wrong. Existing concerns about illegal drug use and youth lifestyles—primarily focused on amphetamines, marijuana and hair length—spiraled into the stratosphere. This wasn’t mere teen obnoxiousness but the advance guard of a full-blown youth revolution.

There were psychedelic districts in several major cities—London, Los Angeles and San Francisco in particular—all of which had their own venues, their own groups, their own subcultures based on clothes, print, music and drugs. The traditional youthful/artistic desire to create one’s own world was heightened by LSD; no drug before or since had driven such a wedge between those who had and hadn’t taken it, which included over ninety-nine percent of all adults. In early ’66 London’s Marquee Club hosted a Giant Mystery Happening featuring Donovan, Mose Allison and Graham Bond along with ad-hoc theatre pieces and poetry readings: “Who will be there?” asked the Sunday Times, answering, “Poets, painters, pop singers, hoods, Americans, homosexuals (because they make up ten per cent of the population).” This was an attempt to create an environment that approached the perceptual disruption experienced under LSD as well as to explore the furthest possibilities of artistic endeavor and fuse them in a kind of synesthesia.

Back in the States the Merry Pranksters held a series of “acid tests” in Hollywood, the Los Angeles suburb of Northridge, Watts bizarrely (the locus of disastrous race riots the previous year), and San Francisco where there had long been a burgeoning bohemian if not politicized scene centered around the University of California in Berkeley, and the Haight-Ashbury district.

In the Bay Area, the tribes gathered—there were promotions of local groups like the Charlatans, Jefferson Airplane and the Great Society—even as from the other side of the planet, the Beatles typically showed the way. Music journalist Charles Perry wrote they were “the soundtrack of Haight-Ashbury, Berkeley and the rest of the circuit. You could party hop all night and hear nothing but Rubber Soul.” Smaller and more easily defined than Los Angeles, San Francisco quickly
gained a cohesive psychedelic identity; the Psychedelic Shop opened on Haight Street. Influenced by Leary, it stocked anything and everything that an acid head might find interesting or necessary. Soon after, the Pranksters combined with local activists to hold the Trips Festival; over three nights, six thousand people attended.

Even sympathetic observers saw ominous signs. The age of free exploration couldn’t last.

*Time* published its exposé of LSD, which presented the drug as a new virus hitting the young: “The disease is striking in beachside beatnik pads and in the dormitories of expensive prep schools; it has grown into an alarming problem at UCLA and on the UC campus at Berkeley. And everywhere the diagnosis is the same: psychotic illness resulting from unauthorized, nonmedical use of the drug LSD-25.” In London the police raided the World Psychedelic Centre, a flat in Pont Street that had been under surveillance for some weeks during which time plainclothes officers were dosed at a party. Fear that the police and tabloid press were acting in concert to prepare the ground for legislation against the drug was confirmed with more major articles, and while there was psychological damage caused by LSD, it remained still rare: Out of every thousand people who took the drug, seven had an adverse reaction. It was into this polarized climate that the Byrds dropped “Eight Miles High.”

Sounding like no other pop record, it was a quantum leap, the band reprogramming itself with frequent applications of Ravi Shankar and John Coltrane’s *Impressions* and *Africa/Brass*. “Eight Miles High” was a masterpiece of movement, tension and release with the Byrds’ distanced harmonies gliding above a bubbling lava of metallic twelve-string guitar and Far Eastern harmonics. The group had taken a pass at the song at RCA Studios in late 1965 just a few weeks after finishing sessions for their album *Turn! Turn! Turn!* Forced by record-company politics to recut the song, the Byrds tightened everything up: The final version was sharper, with more low end and better organized solos, beginning with a fanfare that launched into Gene Clark’s allusive lyrics; the place “stranger than known” was identifiable as London (“rain-gray town”) but the feeling was harder to pin down, at once ecstatic and profoundly adrift. The song’s Elvin Jones style drums, Coltrane convulsions and time-stretching Shankar drones fused two staples of Sixties minority taste: free jazz and Indian classical music. Both had been the
period’s secret soundtrack, the preserve of beats and hipsters, and “Eight Miles High” brought them into the mainstream pop market. It was an indication that beat and blues were no longer enough.

The Indian influence already had begun to assert itself. Music from the Indian subcontinent appeared like the perfect soundtrack to the drug’s overwhelming effects: Both the drone of the sitar and the length of the pieces paralleled LSD’s time dislocation while the timbre of the instrument penetrated the body reverberating into eternity. To Western ears the music seemed to convey no ego—no insistent sexuality or emotional demands, no constriction by pop-friendly two- or three-minute formats. Like free jazz it was the sound of true and untrammelled expression, which was attractive to musicians finding themselves and wishing to break out of commercial formats. Sitars crept into pop songs hinting at another time scale, another world—the perfect vehicle by which to examine loss and alienation. The flip of “Eight Miles High” was another sonically extreme recording; with its jumpy riff, furious bass and meshing guitar drones, “Why” was faster and harder than its revolutionary A side. The Kinks’ “See My Friends” and the Yardbirds’ “Heart Full of Soul” successfully integrated the sitar sound into evocative, complex pop 45s while Brian Jones’ drone underscored the Rolling Stones’ pitiless and relentless “Paint It Black.” On Rubber Soul, Harrison’s sitar line soundtracked Lennon’s “Norwegian Wood,” a cryptic tale of an affair.

In the 1920s Prohibition had fomented a generation gap, providing a rallying point for college students who were at once derisive of the adults behind the Volstead Act and actively rebellious in their efforts to subvert the new laws. Now in the 1960s, comparing the LSD furor with that of Prohibition and the birth control pill, one newspaper noted: “Prohibition lost; birth control won. No one can foresee where LSD will stand a decade from now.” The first skirmishes in the LSD battle were won by the authorities, but it was too late: The genie was out of the bottle; LSD was a powerful dissolving agent with a great ability to shift and mutate, and its ability to transcend social and legal structures already was revealed. The siren call of self-discovery and instant transcendence couldn’t be silenced, the messages having been well heard. There was something in the music in particular, an urgency and a yearning, an almost overwhelming sense of being in the present that tallied with youthful dreams and aspirations; it engendered LSD’s sense that life could be different, freer, more intense.
In March 1966, the same month that Life published its piece on LSD, the Beatles gathered together in a Chelsea studio for a photo shoot and a radio interview. Bar a series of one-to-one interviews conducted a month or so earlier, it was their first public appearance following four months, their longest time off since the onset of fame, during which they metamorphosed into entirely different creatures and each of the four had time to reflect on his situation and explore his own interests, instincts and inclinations. Together the Beatles arrived at the studio brimful of forbidden knowledge, having gone through a profound change they didn’t care to disguise. The photographer, Bob Whitaker, came up with a complicated idea, meant to be displayed on a gatefold album sleeve and called “A Somnambulant Adventure,” inspired by Un Chien Andalou, the film collaboration between Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel. The band posed in a series of tableaux meant to comment on the arbitrary and highly dangerous nature of their global fame. This was Beatle dreamtime, the group through a distorted prism: Framed by a bird cage, Harrison is seen hammering nails through the skull of a blissful Lennon, who brandishes a string of sausages and a box that frames Ringo Starr’s head. A young woman kneels in worship before the four young men.

The level of fame the Beatles experienced had become all devouring. They were, almost literally, in danger of being dismembered, physically by their fans and psychically by their celebrity. The photos from that shoot are awkward, half-formed, and unfinished, but they tell a truth; stumbling around in the dark, the photographer enacted what the Beatles felt—that what had begun in innocence and excitement was turning dark and dangerous, that it was all getting far too much. The starkest image features the four sitting on a low table wearing white laboratory/butcher’s smocks over their fashionable polo necks, their cleanliness forever polluted by a series of dismembered doll parts and red raw chunks of meat. Every member of the group is giving a sick leer, mouths wide open, pot-slitted eyes staring into the camera. If Ringo doesn’t look totally present, both Lennon and Paul McCartney — sitting in the front row — are totally in the moment, endorsing the idea in triumphant rebellion.

Two weeks later the Beatles convened at Abbey Road for their first session since the previous November. They began with a song that would be the summation of everything they had learned since: a radical departure not just from their sound
but any sound, fusing Lennon’s LSD experiences with McCartney’s avant-garde experiments and Harrison’s fascination with Eastern textures.

The song began as a one-chord drone over which Lennon sang lyrics taken directly from _The Psychedelic Experience_ and its summarization of the _Tibetan Book of the Dead_. Filtered through a Leslie speaker, Lennon aimed for the sound of a Buddhist monk.

*Turn off your mind*

*Relax and float downstream*

*It is not dying*

Over two more days the basic idea was tightened up. Starr’s thunderous, circular drum pattern—a Vedic clarion call—was accelerated while McCartney overlaid a sequence of tape loops of sped-up laughter, backwards guitar, treated orchestral music that, set against the unyielding rhythm, stretched time and looped it into a new consciousness. “Tomorrow Never Knows” _was_ acid: Swerving and swooping through the sound mix, the overdubs captured the ebbs and flows, zaps and zings of LSD’s perceptual overload while the overall drone—established on the final version by the opening tambour—harmonized with the synesthetic lyrics: _Listen to the color of your dreams_. Just over three years previously, the Beatles were recording “From Me to You” and “Thank You, Girl.” Now they were a million miles away from simple songs about love and courtship with a definite beginning, middle and end. In 1963 Lennon had been a young bull ready to take on and take over the world; in 1966 he was recording a song that shattered pop’s linear time. He already sounded like an old man.

He was twenty-five.
Fifty years ago this spring, when a dentist named John Riley slipped the synthetic chemical lysergic acid diethylamide into the coffee of John Lennon, George Harrison and their wives one night at dinner, the resulting Psychedelic Era already had a how-to manual. An alleged update and rewrite of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, if a travel guide to the afterlife can be updated let alone rewritten, *The Psychedelic Experience* was published eight months earlier after two of its authors, Timothy Leary and Ralph Metzner, had treated prisoners with the ergoline drug as part of a Harvard psychological study. The third author—to become more widely known as Ram Dass but still publishing as Richard Alpert—was a New England philosopher who rejected his native Judaism for a mutated Hinduism; thus even as the public was still barely aware of LSD, its implications already had transmigrated from the medical to the psychiatric to the spiritual.

Correspondingly, psychedelia began as an experience that became a sensibility that became an aesthetic that became a lifestyle that became a metaphor, the cultural impact pervasive enough to cut out altogether for many people, maybe
even most, the middle-man: the drug itself. On its four-year journey from inkling to cliché, psychedelia charted a jungian sea of possibilities that none but the congenitally surreal ever sensed was there to be sailed; if that ocean was round rather than flat, some fell off the edge anyway. Eventually self-transcendence, as novelist and LSD pioneer Aldous Huxley identified it, would become confused with self-gratification. In the case of such phenomena, more established bastions of the culture may be slow to catch up; but popular music—having already emerged over the previous year as a kind of social media (before anyone called it that) in what already was an age of revolution—was primed for taking apart the clockwork of the times and reconceiving human existence as if lived in the shade of some impossible eclipse of the moon by the sun, with luminance in closer proximity than lunacy. Lennon and Harrison continued to seethe about the dentist’s treachery before embracing its consequences altogether. That summer the former, with a latent convert’s typically single-minded impetuousness, bought a Mellotron, its sound not especially common in the Beatles’ recordings until then; and at a Hollywood party a song was born when a young woman enraged Lennon (well, greatly irritated him, anyway) by claiming she knew what it was like to be dead. Then the subsequent fall Lennon wrote still another song, “Norwegian Wood,” the trippiest admission ever to cheating on one’s wife.
Nonetheless the first great fully-fledged psychedelic record was by a
Scottish folk singer whose second album was called *Fairytale*, retrospectively
all too apt a title when Donovan’s flower-child affectations got the better of
him. From the droning descent of its opening cello to its evocation of a road in
downtown London that once was the site of an air-raid shelter during World War
II and now was a shimmering arcade of exotica (*doll-house rooms with colored
lights swinging / strange music-boxes sadly tinkling / drink in the sun shining
all around you*), “Sunny Goodge Street” wasn’t just a departure from Donovan’s
other music but from anyone’s, including that of Bob Dylan with whom the Scot
often was compared and never favorably. Dylan’s “Mr. Tambourine Man” talked
the trip but “Sunny Goodge Street” sounded it, a portal to some otherworldly
place at once beautiful, terrifying and irresistible.

Donovan’s lysergic wanderings were just getting started (see Essential
Psychedelia #22). His path crossed the Beatles’ with frequency; they listened to
what each other was doing and played on each other’s tracks, contributed a lyric
here, a backup vocal there. If Lennon’s first experience by way of the mischievous
Dr. Riley had been for him at least as nightmarish as it was revelatory, a year
later at a St. James bookstore called Indica he found a copy of *The Psychedelic
Experience*, which fused Huxley with murmurs to the dead mid-reincarnation,
and directly inspired Lennon not only to try LSD again but to write and record
with his band psychedelia’s most spectacular and emblematic magnum opus (see
Essential Psychedelia #1). *Experience* co-author Metzner went on to become
an environmentalist when he wasn’t suggesting—under no influence from
psychedelics apparently—that the United States government was really behind the
attacks of September 11, 2001, and Ram Dass published the enormously successful
treatise *Be Here Now*, which advocated the existential life of the moment that LSD
distilled for those who took it. Always too glib for his own good, Leary became so
unrelenting a spokesman for the widespread use of LSD as to seem more huckster
than prophet even to the curious and inclined; among his proclamations was that
the Beatles were “prototypes of evolutionary agents sent by God, endowed with
a mysterious power to create a new human species, a young race of laughing
freemen.” Leary would be called “the most dangerous man in America” by the
president of the United States, Richard Nixon; it took one to know one.
Random memories stay with me. Driving from a concert date in Wisconsin to St. Paul. It was a warm October day and we wore short sleeves. The evening cooled so we raised the windows and Beverly fired up a joint, coating the car with smoke as we sank in for a two-hour drive into the darkness.

Less than an hour in, I started to become entranced by the bugs in the headlights, more of them by the second, both a beautiful and strange enough whirl that I woke Pete and Bev to watch the show. But my fascination decayed to fear when we saw the bugs get thicker still. A cloud, nearly opaque. Someone suggested that we stop, but not knowing what kind of insects we might be dealing with, I tensed and pushed on toward St. Paul, trying grimly now to figure out why the bugs left no evidence of a collision against the windshield as the speedometer climbed. The number grew to swarm levels. I reached to crack open the wind wing and Beverly panicked, “NO! God, Jerry! We don’t know what they are. What if they get in the car?” But to stay as we were was to remain literally in darkness. I was nervous but that only made the right choice clearer. I took a chance and put a single finger in the stream of the air. No bugs came in the car, but my finger returned wet. I started laughing and said, “Pete, roll down your window.” He stuck his hand out too and began to laugh with me as we discovered that the temperature had dropped about thirty degrees and it was snowing.

We had seen snowfall before—we weren’t completely sunbaked in California—but never when we didn’t expect it. As the panic passed, we tipped just as hard to the other extreme, laughing till our eyes watered, although of course not as sure of our sanity as we’d have been if we weren’t so stoned.

So many things, looking back, expose how vulnerable we were right then: that we were so far from home; that for all we understood we were watching the Apocalypse; that pushing a single finger out of a car window could seem like an act of gigantic courage; that snowfall to stoned teenagers from California was no less weird than a universe that might rain bugs. That our laughter, like almost everything else in 1965-1967, was both a facet of, and a break from, how incredibly lost our generation suddenly was.
Three months before Bob Dylan blew up the laboratory by going electric at the Newport Folk Festival, we had been thrust to the forefront of the counterculture with a million-selling record called “You Were On My Mind,” a vocal anthem exactly midpoint between Peter, Paul and Mary and the Jefferson Airplane’s “White Rabbit” that added both electric twelve-string guitar and a black drummer to a white acoustic folk group. Through the summer of ’65 it vied with the Byrds’ “Mr. Tambourine Man” for the distinction of being the first folk-rock hit. To many ears our record signaled a generational moment, melding sorrow into invincibility—partly because of the startling irreconcilables (I’ve got troubles / I’ve got worries / I’ve got wounds to bind sung as if none of that could possibly matter again) and partly the momentum: from opening hush to effusion, to the first crescendo and false ending, to the triumphant climax that leaves nothing unsaid.

In that transitional summer of race riots and “Eve of Destruction,” while our manager tried to pass the Kingston Trio’s torch to a new generation, the culture was straining at the seams. Hollywood Palace opted to film our drummer, John Chambers, in silhouette; the hotel where we stayed in Atlanta refused to seat us. But our band, We Five, was on the rise. By winter we’d become San Francisco’s highest-charting electrified band ever, a distinction we’d hold until Creedence Clearwater Revival arrived a few years later. And the same new collision of styles that could make the band’s playlist sometimes a bit ethereal and formless had the equally powerful potential—through soaring folk vocals and mountaintop idealism—to seemingly harmonize Everything. Madison Avenue heard it, too.

“Coca-Cola called,” manager Frank Werber greeted us one afternoon at the door of his office. “They want us to do a rock spot.” McCann-Erickson had been commissioning youth-market radio ads for Coke since 1963, sung and played by everyone from the Limeliters to the Supremes, Jay and the Americans, the Moody Blues, Jan and Dean, Roy Orbison, Petula Clark and Ray Charles. A hit commercial still offered as much staying power as a hit song, and Werber, in position to make San Francisco Ground Zero of the folk-rock revolution, was determined to funnel the future through that past.

Upping the ante, he offered Coke a bigger deal than they had asked for. He secured an all-or-nothing partnership along the lines of what the Kingston Trio had with 7-Up in the late Fifties—madcap TV spots where they mugged and joshed and gave each other noogies beside a soft drink machine. The agency brought us to New York and played us their Ray Charles ads, which did nothing to shame the
enterprise; the things go better with Coca-Cola line came out like “Georgia on My Mind” sung sideways. Of course Charles could sing the phone book and make it sound credible. A Coke machine was set up in the studio and we cut a pretty-sounding piece for the Rose Bowl game on New Year’s Day, figuring we’d create a couple more spots that would satisfy the Coke people and sustain us while still drawing a line against committing the one unconscionable sellout: to take Coke’s initial brainstorm (“Coke was on my mind”) and sing it verbatim.

Incredibly, after a half dozen rejected takes, Werber was unworried; perhaps he figured we had Coke on the hook legally for a sizable share of money even if we failed. Perhaps it was pot. For whatever reason Werber liked his position; if we were adventurous enough and stuck to our guns he was certain we would come up with a lyric or musical hook that the Coke people would like just as well as “Coke was on my mind.”

Ten or fifteen more failures followed that we thought were pretty good, and the war between McCann-Erickson and our manager became entrenched. One hour of rehearsal led to two, two hours led to a day, two days led to weeks. Then our lead singer, Beverly Bevins, came down with tonsillitis. You could almost hear the band not smile.

Between college dates in Ohio and Oklahoma and Montana and New York, between taping The Lloyd Thaxton Show and Hullabaloo, in the desert wilderness of Coke sessions We Five managed to record material for the next album that was rapidly becoming overdue. But the daily frustration of Coke commercials boiled over into rebellion, and by the time Bev’s voice recovered, we were openly directing our frustration toward the soft drink. After close to fifty rejected spots, Coca-Cola dispatched a hand-picked producer of its own. Billy Strange was a session guitarist from L.A.’s famed “wrecking crew” who fed the twelve-string craze with an album devoted to the sound; he had just arranged Nancy Sinatra’s top-five Boots. Starting from outright aversion—whatever Billy said, we were against—we finally ground out one arrangement we could live with: not as creative as the others, but with a Bo Diddley shave-and-a-haircut beat that we liked well enough to cross Columbus Street into the Trident building and record. Werber showed up, expectant. He had a speaker in his seventh-floor office that relayed whatever was going on in the studio; if you created something he especially liked or didn’t, he might mystically
appear. Whether it was that or Billy rousing him with a phone call, it seemed we had crossed the finish line. At long last we sent Billy Strange on a redeye flight to New York, where he strode into McCann-Erickson’s office the next morning to play the final version for his bosses.

Before it even finished, the reaction was uniformly funereal.

The Coke episode would prove a turning point. Like every other folk-rock act, we’d been stretching our repertoire, learning to be extemporaneous; musicians would ask, “What was that jam you were doing before the show started? Can I buy that on a record?” Each day the call of invention sped past us. Audiences wanted creation in the moment. Our label owner, Herb Alpert, sensed trouble even before he walked in on our set at the Unicorn in Boston one Tuesday night in April 1966. Not a lot of people were in the club, and we were getting loud and electric and definitely rowdy for a folk venue; I wouldn’t have recognized us either.

We Five is over, Alpert reportedly prophesied to his partner, Jerry Moss. We watched him leave mid-set.

We wanted to play the Fillmore—Werber forbade it. He didn’t want the public associating us with the Grateful Dead and Big Brother and the Holding Company. He refused to sign the Mamas and Papas, turning down a demo from John Phillips without listening to it (“You’re a pain in the ass, and I’m afraid I might like it”). He turned down the Airplane, who sounded similar to We Five then but not as “classy” and less controllable. By the time we finished hearing the first side of the Beatles’ Rubber Soul back in San Francisco, with headphones and a pipe, we knew our choices were to struggle against the newness or hang on for the ride. As the ridiculous range of what the Beatles were doing set in, someone said, “And there’s another side.”

I was curious about these new enlightenments, but not ready to go there full-time. I took methedrine just once, at a rehearsal; when I went to bed a few hours later, my heart was pounding so hard I thought it would wake my wife, if I didn’t die first. At our rehearsal house one afternoon I found the band in the kitchen smoking opium; it had a heavy, sticky smell—an incredible downer. Early in my experimental phase, LSD made an appearance on our houseboat; as with my first time on grass, at least an hour passed before I realized my perceptions were changing. I began reading the Tibetan Book of the Dead, but soon got bored and
headed for the stereo to listen to Bob Dylan’s “Like a Rolling Stone”—the lush

guitar and organ sounded ragged, and when Dylan started to sing I saw Pinocchio

on Pleasure Island complete with donkey ears and tail, braying from the speaker.

Revolted, I turned off the stereo and wandered outside. Dawn was breaking on

Richardson Bay, the houseboat squatting in a mud hole at low tide; beyond the

retaining wall, a parking lot also looked like a cartoon, tinted in junkyard purples

and pastels. Driving over the Golden Gate Bridge during rush hour—a spectacular

sight seldom seen by musicians—gazing at the people in the cars dealing with the

tedium of getting themselves to work, I suddenly felt overpowered by the existential

curse of Facing the Day. I began to wonder if they were crazy for doing it. Then

it struck me: I must be the crazy one, because there were so many more of them

than me and they looked like they knew what they were doing. Almost instantly I

slid from being amazed by the sunrise on the Bay to questioning my own sanity,

to realizing that I wasn’t the first crazy person to conclude atop the Golden Gate

Bridge that life was too much to bear. Plainly the thing was to jump—that’s what

crazy people did—and I began to strategize my escape from the car when, instead,

I threw up like a fountain, coating the very ample seat of the ’57 Plymouth. I never

did acid again.

We were missing our moment, while in another sense we were evolving beyond

recognition. As 1967 began, we were booked at ultraconservative Baylor

University, where we were featured as guest judges for the “Baylor Beauties”

pageant. Dressed in formal wear and eating crumpets in a wood-paneled hall,

the Beauties were to meet the visiting band before all the bigwigs of school and

community—another concept brokered by Werber that had worked fine for the

Kingston Trio. Our first concern arose at the Dallas airport, where a welcoming

party appeared. On the cover of our album we looked like a church’s youth group

in bright sweaters and close haircuts; at the terminal we were an integrated San

Francisco rock band in moccasins and Afros. It would be the mid-1970s before

hippie fashion found Texas.

Faced with the reality of our black drummer, the liaison stiffened. “Can he

arrive in the other car? With the equipment?”

At the pageant, the committee took us in with expressions of What. Is. This.
We were joined by a guy who seemed to be the event’s emcee or publicist, trying to give us a crash course on the format.

“It’s like a beauty contest, then?” asked Bev.

“Not a contest, because there’s no official winner—I mean there won’t be a queen crowned. We Five is going to have tea and talk to each Beauty and then rank them, based on points.”

We were judging but there’d be no winner?

“Not judging,” he clarified. “Rating.”

This wasn’t clear to any of us, but there seemed no way out. We had tried to sound alarms at the airport. We’d asked if it wouldn’t be better to bypass the tea and go to sound check, but they reminded us we were under contract. After further commotion about whether the drummer was also a band member and thus a judge, and how to account for the album cover showing five members when six showed up, the Beauties in their formals made their individual entrances, announced in turn and approaching us to shake hands. Then they stood by as we held up our shameful cards showing sixes and fives—all but John, our drummer, whose commentary on the whole affair was to hold up zeroes.

Maybe he reacted to some aversion on the part of the girls, a few of whom had shaken hands as if they were worried the black would rub off.

The agency that booked us forwarded a letter from Baylor to our manager: *In the first place...since their appearance was so slouchy and unkempt, they passed by a group of our students [at the airport] without being recognized. They looked nothing like the publicity pictures you sent!... [Our] greatest disappointment came, however, when they presented their entertainment. There were six of them instead of WE FIVE. They had added a drummer along the way! The music was loud and by the time the first intermission came, almost half of our audience had left.... Numerous students and administrative personnel have suggested that we not secure entertainment from your company again if that is the quality that you have to offer.*

With our second album, *Make Someone Happy*, stuck on hold, several songs were issued as singles but never charted. Only “Get Together” penetrated the Top Forty, peaking at thirty-one; it had been composed in the early Sixties by Dino Valenti, later of Quicksilver Messenger Service, and recorded by the Kingston Trio well ahead of its time. A half-decade later it was a perfect anthem for the changing
era, an almost scriptural vision of flower-child spirituality and universal love with allusions to the second coming: *When the One who left us here returns for us at last*. But unlike “You Were On My Mind” we never found the combination of lyric, mood and instrumentation that would capture and define a generation’s hopes; we just kept making the record *bigger*, abusing the listener about peace and love while pounding out drum rolls on a timpani found under a blanket in Capitol’s Studio B. The Youngbloods’ meander better romanced the vibey brotherhood of the words; ours was more scold than invitation.

Barely a year after the birth of folk-rock, the group that hoped to synergize the vanguard of a new generation and “the San Francisco Sound” privately disbanded. We had only some college dates left to play, but later schedulings wouldn’t survive the fallout of the first at Utah State, where we were informed that the concert was a twenty-year tradition memorializing a plane crash—as best we could tell, our presence meant it was now a celebration. There were student performers in topcoats and tails. But the front rows were filled with leaders of the Mormon Church, and within our first couple of numbers the school liaison relayed a request through the backstage curtain that we turn down our volume.

It was the nose too close to my eyes to see, though I get it now: We had taken the stage not only integrated but electrified and psychedelic, doing a Fillmore show in Southern Utah. The amps went mute. The speakers were silenced mid-song, like with Dylan at Newport. We looked back and forth at each other, apologized to the audience for the sound failure, whereupon a head poked through the curtain one last time: *Play your hit and get off.* With no miked vocals, We Five delivered the last live performance of “You Were On My Mind” by its original lineup.

We got on the bus. I don’t remember going on to our next scheduled dates in Iowa City or Ottawa, Kansas. The collective mood was, Maybe it’s better this way. Times were changing. Dylan had it right.
Now listen, *Cosmicomics*; How’d you get so folksy,
So elegant, so insouciant, when by any paraphrase
You’re some sort of staggering cosmic acid journey?
I guess the Grateful Dead pulled off the same trick
But they’re nothing like you. Though then again,
If Deadheads ran the public education system
You’d be the high school science class textbook.
(How I’d love to impose you on Texas.)
I’d better explain. In your tales
This unpronounceable character Qfwfq
Appears and reappears in many forms and guises,
And like Marvel’s “The Watcher” (another Calvino title, hey!)
Ogles the big bang, evolution and a whole menu
Of zoological and cosmological happenings.
Each time he’s stuck inside the story, hapless voyager
And yet also an eternal galactic bystander,
One aware he’ll jaunt from this exploit to another.
Goofy Qfwfq: He’s nobody and everybody,
He has no body, yet he’s all of us.
*Cosmicomics*, you’re silly, and sexy too; my paperback
Edition boasts “‘All at One Point’ and ‘Games Without End’
Originally appeared in *Playboy* magazine”—yowza!
I guess you could be some kind of angelic stroke book
With pinups of the cosmos which, when unfolded,
Filled all time and space. But then easily folded back, too.
*Cosmicomics*, you’re like that: bigger on the inside
Than the outside; as when, while tripping, you
Stare at the housecat and see a sabertooth, or pick
Your nose and find a whole fractal world up in there.
Introduced in July 1963 in *Strange Tales* #110, Dr. Strange, Master of the Mystic Arts, was not simply the most otherworldly of all Marvel Comics heroes but the most tuned in and turned on. After a car accident strips him of his abilities in the operating room, arrogant neurosurgeon Stephen Strange descends into alcoholism, wanders the Himalayas and seeks answers from a teacher known as the Ancient One. In the midst of his studies, he is inspired to become the Sorcerer Supreme by his need to protect his guru from an evil disciple, Baron Mordo.

The character of Dr. Strange found acolytes among seekers (mostly college students) who were drawn to Eastern mysticism and other mythological systems. Dr. Strange didn’t fly into crime-ridden neighborhoods but astrally traveled to lands of strange energy and bizarre beings or to worlds-between-worlds known as bardos in adventures that seemed to owe as much to Timothy Leary as Aleister Crowley. Many readers enmeshed in Stan Lee’s ostentatious prose and artist Steve Ditko’s weird surrealist forms assumed the creators were no strangers to psychedelic experience. Novelist and Merry Prankster Ken Kesey and filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky were fans. “People who read [the comic],” *Dr. Strange* writer Roy Thomas said later, “assumed we must be heads because they had had similar experiences high on mushrooms.”

No issue confirmed this assertion more than #138 (“If Eternity Should Fail!”), when Dr. Strange confronts the entity known as Eternity, the embodiment of the entire universe or, in a word, God. Seeking the infinite, Dr. Strange has passed through the Eye of Agamotto, the magical amulet bequeathed to him by the Ancient One. Roaming down a Blakean corridor of light into a place where “time and distance, as we know them, are meaningless,” an atom pulsing with boundless activity flickers before his eyes. That miniature universe assumes the shape of a man, with planets and stars filling out his dark outline. How do you capture eternity in a single comic-book page? As the magical hero “watches in mute fascination,” according to the caption, so does the reader: “Slowly, the figure speaks...in a voice which is not a voice...mouthing words which are more than words...expressing thoughts no mortal has ever gleaned before!”
Steve Erickson

ESSENTIAL PSYCHEDELIA #4

“Eight Miles High,” the Byrds
The Byrds were a Sixties rock band in the same way that many Sixties rock bands were, preceding the mythologization of rock that didn’t really set in until the following decade. This is to say that, as folk singers, they didn’t much care about rock, except as shrewd opportunists who knew a good thing when they saw (and heard) it in what Andrew Sarris called “the Citizen Kane of jukebox musicals,” *A Hard Day’s Night*. They also were an L.A. band in the same way that most L.A. bands were, which is to say that only two of the five members were from L.A. But their single “Eight Miles High,” written in the last months of 1965 and released with the new year, could only have come out of Los Angeles, sounding nothing less than supersonic and like nothing less than the siren call of the future. It was the breach in AM radio through which rushed the rest of psychedelia, one of those seminal accomplishments that has the effect of dividing time.

Whether in fact the track is merely the chronicle of a flight to England (and the band’s subsequent tour that was something of a disaster, despite the Beatles’ imprimatur bestowed on the Byrds as America’s best band), which no one believed including radio stations that refused to play it, or an allusion to aeronautics more metaphoric, is too literal a question. On the far side of a song that so effortlessly crosses John Coltrane with Ravi Shankar with the New Christy Minstrels, the listener lands at the end only to find that 3:36 was never his destination after all, and that the song is still going even after it’s over, vanishing into the sky-blue horizon even after the last note has died. The Byrds would continue to dally with psychedelia to varying effect in “5D (Fifth Dimension),” “Mr. Spaceman,” “Why,” “I See You,” and “Mind Gardens” before taking a sharp right turn to country-rock. But it was on hearing “Eight Miles High” that the Beatles and everyone else knew they had some catching up to do.
Four bodies lie on a paisley blanket on the beach, jutting out every which way from where they touch each other at various points in the center. There is a fifth figure in the picture but only his shadow is visible, cast over the others on the blanket holding a Polaroid camera. It is summer and three of them have just graduated from high school, while the other two are a few years older. They have all come here for a day away from the Valley where they drive around in the heat and late drifting adolescence. None of them know it, but it is the last time they will be together. This particular configuration of friends will soon disperse to other cities, some staying back and getting into different things. They are all fully dressed, one of the girls flat on her back in big white sunglasses with a balloon in her hand, her younger sister propped up on her elbows beside her in fishnet stockings and boots. The girl in the sunglasses is transfixed by the rocks scattered around the edges of the blanket which, as she watches them, seem to be melting away in layers of swirling mud and sediment as though they are eroding back and forth in time. She reaches out to touch one, but it is as if the rocks are miles away now. The air feels thick and swimming with bacteria. It is almost impossible to move at all. The girl in the boots is gazing at her legs. She stares at them so pointedly that when she finally looks up, the pattern of her stockings is impressed upon the sky, a lattice of threads hanging in the air. A fish leaps out from behind the clouds, slipping through the fishnet lines before they fade. The girls have no idea how long they have been lying there. It feels like it has only been a few minutes, but as they look around they notice the others are gone, each sucked in by something fantastic in the distance. In fact, the girls have been paralyzed in front of the ocean for hours.

The boys have wandered off to the hillside next to the house leading down to the water. The hillside is covered with flowers, mostly wild beach weeds the color of driftwood, today appearing as vibrant birds of paradise. Two of the boys meander through the weeds in a daze, one seventeen and the other about to turn twenty. The older one has reddish hair and is almost albino in appearance, with white eyebrows and nearly translucent features. He is wearing baggy jeans and an oversized T-shirt, black with red lettering that says, *D.A.R.E. to resist drugs and violence*. The other boy’s family owns the beach house. He is tan and fit, wearing a giant straw hat his mother wears when she is gardening. The third figure in the
picture, again, appears in shadow, lingering at the edge with his camera, taller and edgier but less conventionally attractive, often overbearing in his artistic pursuits. He stands on the back steps of the house watching his friends through the view finder, taking Polaroids of them as they wander the hill of flowers, staring into crocuses and crawling through the grass, jumping up with handfuls of cat tails and giddy exclamations. He has known the other two since childhood and until today has never taken part in this kind of sport. At length, the albino removes his clothes, wrapping his T-shirt around his head like a turban. As he begins to whip the flowers with his belt, an exotic parrot flies down from the sky and lands on his shoulder. The boy in the straw hat looks on in sedated amusement as the albino perches the bird on one of his fingers and lifts his other hand in the air like a claw, his face taking on the expression of an Indonesian war mask.

The girls are changing their clothes in the car, parked on the street outside the beach house. There is a giant menorah on the hill across the street, reminiscent of the large cross on the side of the freeway down the road. The house is a three-story beachfront property with several bedrooms and multiple baths. It is tiered like a wedding cake with decks and balconies, hammocks, beachy knick-knacks and taupe-colored furnishings. But the girls decide they have to change in the car on the side of Pacific Coast Highway. Why they are changing clothes in the first place, neither can remember. It is the girl in the white sunglasses’ idea; and as her quiet younger sister, the girl in the boots is obliged to tag along as wingman. The car is small and very hot and both of the girls have sand all over them, which makes the whole process even more of a maneuver. Before they are halfway through, a man knocks at the window. The girls are petrified, hanging in suspension of their various states of undress, throwing whatever they can find over any exposed parts. The girl with the white sunglasses is wearing a crop top and nothing else, but has placed a 7-Eleven bag full of trash over her naked lap. The girl in the boots has her stockings rolled down to her knees and covers her chest with a wig grabbed from the backseat. The girl in the white sunglasses is foregoing college to be an actress and thus has a car equipped with things like wigs and empty packets of non-dairy creamer. A few years out of school now, she has seen her friends go off to other places, and knows that when her sister leaves in the fall she is never coming back. The man rapping at the window is dressed in plain clothes, shorts and flip flops—more than reasonable civilian beach attire—but the girls are certain he is a cop. Terrified, they roll down the window. “Have you seen my parrot?” he asks.

The orangutan lies on the velvet settee, an invalid gazing at the view from his veranda, a tropical landscape crawling with insects and Jurassic palms. There is a
boa constrictor slithering across the floor, eyeing the bird hanging in a delicate cage from the ceiling, deep vermillion with a fan of red feathers at the tail and a crest of gold plumage. It was found by the orangutan’s mistress yesterday in the hollow of a tree, left exposed by its mother like the young of all parrots, nomadic creatures, neither sedentary nor devoted to migration but living somewhere between the two extremes. The room is filled with a menagerie of exotic pets, rows of stuffed birds and animal heads on the walls. The parrot is the newest addition to the collection, captured for the young boy of the house, a precocious child partial to drawing animals. In his sickly condition, the orangutan knows he will no longer be the favorite. Full of spite, he stares out the window and instead of seeing the glory of the jungle he is blinded by the thought of parrots, imagining a whole flock flying away over the Amazon with an enormous fallen branch, as if the flock were a singular winged object scattering a million specks of color into the sky. Now, just shy of a century later, the orangutan is gone while the old bird inches along the banister of a staircase in some Malibu bungalow. The parrot’s owner sleeps on the couch, a bachelor beach bum who has spent the night filling the bird’s trough with beer and trying to get it to repeat obscene phrases. The man lets out an uproarious snore, and still a little tipsy, the bird flies out the window.

The boy with the camera walks into the downstairs bedroom to find the girl in the boots pressed up against the sliding glass door, breathing onto it so that everything is fogged up around her in an aura-like array. She is his girlfriend, the object of his fantasies since he was in kindergarten, only recently become real in their last semester of high school. On the other side of the glass hangs a coil of garden hose. But from where the boy stands, it appears as an extension of the girl’s body, as if there are snakes crawling out of her hair over her shoulders. Everything has looked green to him today, a hazy swamp glow falling over every object in the landscape. Through the green fog of her breath on the glass he can see an emerald beach stretching into the distance with a tiny emerald city on the horizon. The girl thinks she is the only one in the house, and has come down to the bottom floor because she is frightened. Looking down at the beach from her place at the window she can see the others running through the water, chasing a Japanese kite, a parrot flying along behind them. They look like children to her, the sand bar beneath them like the body of an enormous manatee washed up on the shore, glistening with streaks of wet florescent color. She isn’t sure whether the kite or the bird are real, in fact at this point she has stopped believing anything is. The boy with the camera pulls her away from the window and leads her to the bed. They kiss for a while and the girl can see herself with him from above, as though she is having an out-of-body experience, the boy breathing green breath onto her neck. He is skinny, and
sometimes after he’s been swimming you can see his heart beating under his skin, thumping in his chest with a frog-like pulse as he lies in the sun and lets the water drip off his body. The beach house belongs to the boy in the straw hat running outside and this is essentially his parents’ bedroom, but at least five couples from school have lost their virginities here. The girl in the boots is not like the others. Instead she crawls down from the bed and sits on the ground at the foot with arms coiled around the bedpost. There is a single handprint left in the fog on the glass where she was standing. The boy sits and watches it fade, then photographs his own hand laid against the backdrop of the sea in the window, shadows of the wooden banister running across it like a cage.

In the emerald city there is a castle built of fish skeletons and sea glass. It is surrounded by a moat, a lake once turquoise now turned to green sludge. A single figure sails her boat across it. She is draped in white and her sail is a Cypress tree that grows from the floor of the vessel. The clouds above are like boulders and giant loaves of bread, one with the profile of a Roman god, the other in the shape of a discarded apron. Everything is green. Turtles float through the swamps looking for the moonlight. Hillsides crawl with packs of lizards. The shells lining the paths move slowly over the ground in the darkness. At night the crabs erupt from the rock walls, shuffling sideways and waiting at the bottoms of drainpipes for drips of water. In the highest tower is an empty room, a hollow chamber grown over with vines, holding nothing but a single bed. Behind the curtains that flank the bedposts are two children who sleep through the day. At dusk, hawks circle the air, blowing over the mountains in clumps with the looming storm. Hearing their cries, the girl-child wakes and looks over at the boy in the bed beside her. He crawls his hand towards her in his sleep, moving sideways like a crab in search of her body. Rising, she pulls the bow from her hair, a green satin ribbon she lets fly from the window. “Your eyes are like silence resting on me,” sings the figure in the ship.

The girl in the boots is all but frozen to the floor in the downstairs bedroom, clinging to the foot of the iron bedpost as though shackled to it. It feels like she is still on the beach, as though the wall before her has dissipated and opened onto the ocean. The white carpet looks like sand. She tries to scrape the bits of tar from her feet, which unleash from her skin and crawl away as ants. Her friends still wander the house, up and down the stairs and onto the various decks, slowly coming back into their bodies as they ransack this place they have all been coming to for years. But for the girl on the floor it is as if the house is empty. It is like she is in the bottom of a submarine that has sunk, everything drifting in green slow motion. She sees her sister through the window, alone on the beach in her big white sunglasses,
finally reaching the rocks and looking up at the house from a crevice between two boulders. The parrot swoops down past her face and she releases her balloon. On the bedside table is a book of Sufi poems. The girl in the boots crawls over to it and flips through a few pages, then closes the book and holds it in her hands. On the cover is a painting of a man kneeling on the floor of a mosque. She looks at the picture and a long ray of light shines down on the man through the chapel window.

Upstairs, a big sheet of paper is taped to the table. Everyone is gathered near it in a frenzy, some writing poems together and drawing designs over the surface. The boy whose parents own the beach house lays his cheek on the table, his straw hat askew as he gnaws on a toothpick while the albino dances with the girl in white sunglasses behind him. The boy with the camera lays all the Polaroids out on the table and starts pulling the layers of film apart. This makes them look out of focus, showing blurry multiples of each image layered onto each other. He takes the back of a pen and presses it along the outlines of the objects in the pictures, drawing jagged neon stripes through them like fault lines. The Polaroids have become sheets of color detached from each other, going pink and orange at the edges. When the boy looks at them, sections of moving sky fill the holes where layers have been ripped away, California blue, with clouds rolling through them. Ten years from now the boy with the camera will still photograph reflections in crinkled pieces of tin foil sitting under rainbow umbrellas at hotdog stands, though in just a few months the girl in the boots will no longer be his girlfriend. She is the only one not at the table, still downstairs in the bedroom staring through the glass. The boy steps into the bathroom and holds the camera up in front of himself. There are mirrors on all sides showing diminishing versions of his face extending into a kaleidoscopic vanishing point, his eyes dilated black. They are the same size and color as the centers of the flowers on the wallpaper behind him, blossoming into more complex plant life the longer he stands there. Back at the table he writes down a sentence that has come into his head. When the girl in the boots finally emerges and reads it, she imagines the phrase is about her. All thoughts at once, one thought always, it says.

A man kneels on the floor of a temple, his feet exposed at the edge of his robes, calloused and dirty from the long walk to get here. Towering above him is a great dome lined with high panels of colored glass. The ceiling seems a cavernous abyss. Rather than giving the impression of being closer to the sky, it weights the man beneath it deeper to the ground. All around him, men in long skirts twirl through the room, most with eyes closed and hands over their hearts. They all look the same with long beards and pointed hats, like a flock of birds seen through binoculars on the horizon, their triangular shadows casting mathematical symbols onto the
walls. A candelabra hangs above them with a single flame burning at the center. Otherwise the place is dark. The dancing figures block any view to be seen from the windows. Beyond is a flat expanse that seems never ending, where one longs to see caravans moving across the plain, with topless women in transparent tutus descending from the windows, climbing over whale skeletons left in the dunes and dancing through their rib cages. But rarely is there anything to be seen in the distance, aside from a solitary camel clopping towards an oasis. Inside the temple the dervishes sway through the darkness, mouths ajar as if they are singing. But to the man on the ground all is silent. His forehead is pressed to the cold stone floor, his hands stretched before him in sphinx position. He is thinking of the stray dogs in the square, the lizard crawling over sacks of spices at the witch market, the skinned cow he saw hanging in a doorway. He has just returned from somewhere far away and his mind is so full of that other place that now he can hardly tell where he is. He lifts his head to look up for a moment, and a ray of light shines down on him from the windows as if there is no one in the room but him.

The ocean. Captured in a two-by-two square panel. Empty of people. All foam two-thirds of the way up the picture. A single wave approaching on the horizon.
Devin McKinney

ESSENTIAL PSYCHEDELIA #44
Granny Takes a Trip

ESSENTIAL PSYCHEDELIA #21
“Happenings Ten Years Time Ago,” the Yardbirds
You entered through a heavy bead curtain and were instantly blinded. The air was heavy with incense and patchouli oil and also with the aromas of what the police called Certain Substances. Psychedelic music, big on feedback, terrorized your eardrums. After a time you became aware of a low purple glow, in which you could make out a few motionless shapes. These were probably clothes, probably for sale. You didn’t like to ask. 

Granny’s was a pretty scary place.

Salman Rushdie

Granny Takes a Trip, a second-hand clothes shop owned by lovers Nigel Waymouth and Sheila Cohen, opened in Kings Road, Chelsea, in early 1966. Rushdie’s roomscape, painted from memory, suggests the sensual slide of real life down the well of time. That’s where London 1966 now exists, if it does—as real a place to most of us as the Big Rock Candy Mountain. Obviously this is logical and not a cause for regret. A paucity of, or resistance to, objective reality is much of what keeps a piece of cultural history thriving and irresistible, a thing like London 1966 ever revenant as sound, style and happy manifestation of the pop life. Even so articulate an observer-participant as Rushdie recalls Granny Takes a Trip as mainly a shape, a scent, a sound, a light hitting a surface—the lived Sixties as a Sixties movie.
Only a small number of people were truly there, not just on the scene but in it, consuming or creating it, adding tiny touches and entire wings to the collective sand castle—Swinging London—whose true foundations remain a mystery to archeology. (Did it begin with photographer David Bailey, showgirl Christine Keeler, designer Mary Quant, the Beatles—or playwright John Osborne? Novelist Colin MacInnes? Carnaby Street’s John Stephen? Hand signals and eye contact between Fifties punks and students and homosexuals who all knew that, for them, “making the scene” would mean quite literally making it?)

A few months after Granny’s opened, London blues-rockers the Yardbirds issued a forty-five, “Happenings Ten Years Time Ago,” their last single with guitarist Jeff Beck and first with Jimmy Page. (Page’s future Led Zeppelin lieutenant John Paul Jones played bass.) Lyrically it was a statement of déjà vu, of eerie familiarity, and infinitely less suggestive on that level than a haven’t-we-met-before chestnut like “Where or When”—or “Fancy Our Meeting,” from the 1929 musical *Wake Up and Dream*, a poetic rendering of Varignon’s principle of moments (Fancy our meeting for just one fond greeting / When days are so fleeting and few). Walking Kings Road, dressed in frogged jacket and flowered tie, the scenester incarnated in Keith Relf’s echoing vocal finds himself suddenly out of place, out of time. “Ten years time”: the mid-1950s? Is that the nightmare, the sense of hells and holes opening all around—Sunshine Superman caught wearing last decade’s clothes?

No, the lyrics were unimportant, except to spread an incense of mystery amid physical assault. It could have been ten years ago or a thousand, Relf’s trip or Granny’s. Like most Yardbirds records, “Happenings” was not a meaning record but a guitar record, sculpted and scorched by fuzz, the beat racing to pace Beck’s paranoid rhythmic changes, the tantrum of his strokes: the action was in the noise. The *echt*-Oriental melody led to an instant of relative stillness
when the music and the scene it made seemed to shudder all over, and a few key words emerged to tell you what was going on: *Sinking deep into the well of time*. Then the pieces all broke apart for a chunk of *musique concrète* where a guitar solo should have been, where instead a police siren, crashing beat and explosion fought for space against human clamor—laughter, voices you might understand if you could get close enough, which you never would. The record’s fade was not an ending but a disappearing from view, as the well of time swallowed the scenester and his scene, the madness and memory of this rip in time.

Over under sideways down: on this record, freakbeat—that infuriated English power pop typified by the Small Faces, Creation and dozens of one-hitters—met the world, and London 1966 met its imaginative limit. “Happenings” did for *déjà vu* what Granny’s did for Victoriana: discovered and displaced it, put old objects under colored light, bathed them in noise and Certain Substances. It was the art of the Surrealist and of the rag-picker, the constant rediscovery that nothing is so strange as the familiar. The constant rediscovery of individuals and artists on the edge that even the objective reality of the moment one inhabits is not inarguably there; that facts don’t tell, and that both consciousness and the clock can dissolve in a flash.

There are facts galore about London 1966, linearities of fashion to follow. We can and should read books, study photographs, view documentary. But only music will ever take us inside the well of time, past its rim, where we gather information and inferences at visible levels. Music is texture and personality, romance and resonance: From it we get our truest sense of what a moment was, what history is. Rushdie, ushering us into Granny’s, low-lit and scary, gives us a glimpse, from a safe distance, down the well of time. The Yardbirds, from no distance at all, give us three minutes in the dark, senseless cylinder itself—then release us back to our senses and our surfaces, our moment in time, where we live for a while longer, until it’s our turn to take the trip.
Steve Erickson

ESSENTIAL PSYCHEDELIA #41

Cover of *Time*, April 8, 1966

ESSENTIAL PSYCHEDELIA #1

“Tomorrow Never Knows,” the Beatles

Though the editors of the staid weekly newsmagazine *Time* surely didn’t see it this way, nothing more dramatically signaled the Psychedelic Era’s intellectual revolution than their cover of April 6, 1966. Amidst growing social upheaval merely twenty years after the end of World War II—which is to say the last time history ever was so incontestably delineated in terms of good and evil—the cover forsook an actual image in order to simply pose an unsimple inquiry in stark red letters against a black background: “Is God Dead?” The impact was such that, by comparison, the actual article (referring not to a dead God but a “hidden” one) was tentative and timid and has long since been forgotten, whereas the cover has reverberated down the decades, one of the most notorious in journalism history.

In the way that psychedelic time was round and After often preceded Before, two days prior to the cover of *Time* hitting the newsstands with its question, the Beatles began recording the answer in an EMI studio in London. It didn’t necessarily mean to be an answer but rather a question of its own, and it certainly didn’t mean to be any answer that was yes or no; not simply the most radical thing the band had done but the most radical thing anyone had done—British critic Ian MacDonald wrote that the record was to Twentieth Century pop what Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique* was to Nineteenth Century classical—the three-minute “Tomorrow Never Knows” took the trip farther than any music or movie or book would go without making a mockery of itself. Everything that followed, including by the Beatles themselves, would be elaborations and variations on this. Like Leary, Alpert and Metzner’s *The Psychedelic Experience* (Essential Psychedelia #6), with the working title “The Void” the song was based in part on the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and in part on John Lennon’s dreads and hopes and the paroxysms of his own ego: an atonal howl from the Himalayas if not the cosmos. It’s worth noting that, aside from Ringo Starr’s hybrid Western/Eastern percussion that still awes drummers half a century later, the record’s sound design of musique concrète tape loops and fragmented human voices was as much Paul McCartney’s inspiration as anyone’s, and that McCartney was the only one of the band who hadn’t yet done psychedelics. Authenticity, then, was not just foreign to psychedelia but by definition meaningless: Everything was as “authentic” as anything else.
You think of Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* and you think of the colors. Yet for all the wild and fancy dance of swinging London, *Blow-Up*’s colors are the blues, greens, grays and distant whites of a far-off sea. The park’s muted green trees (it is said Antonioni had them painted, leaf by leaf). David Hemmings’ blue gingham shirt, bottle-green velvet jacket. Vanessa Redgrave’s pale-blue/pale-gray plaid button-down. The pale-blue neon sign that may say FLY, or may not. Jane Birkin’s blue-and-green dress, pale-green tights, paler flesh…. Against those liquid blues and greens, the shocking red phone booth (yes, Antonioni had that painted, too) stands in for the blood we never see. It was only Antonioni’s second color film after a lifetime of stately black-and-white, and his gorgeous, deliberate palette tells a story of its own. The silent clowns jump and cavort, to be sure. But in *Blow-Up* we catch more than a glimpse of an older, grainier narrative: As we look on, a man loses hold of the world, and himself.

*Blow-Up* was co-written by Antonioni, working with his frequent collaborator Tonino Guerra, one of the great screenwriters of the Twentieth Century. The Englishing was done by the playwright Edward Bond. We may forget, though, that it’s from a story by Julio Cortázar, the Argentinian novelist who spent much of his time in France. (He is the prime cartographer of the Paris within my head.) Cortázar’s fictions do an extraordinary two-step: they capture the ambiguities that elude us, then render ambiguous our certainties. In translation by American poet Paul Blackburn, the Cortázar story upon which *Blow-Up* is based begins: *It will never be known how this has to be told, in the first person or in the second, using the third person plural…. It goes on to muse that perhaps the typewriter is writing by itself after the narrator has stepped away. The story—and in this, it drags the film along with it—wonders whether we are even vaguely the authors of our own lives.*

*Blow-Up* is, famously, a detective story. (Was that the body of her lover in the park? Did the camera capture what the eye, in that instant, could not see?) It’s a story of a man in the moment, attention lured by objects—a pair of lithe models, an airplane propeller, a shattered guitar—that he pursues, obtains, leaves behind. But perhaps more than anything Antonioni’s take on mod London now seems, from the perspective of half a hundred years’ distance, less about the swirl, more about the undertow. Its murders, large and small, are all offscreen, and all the more haunting for it.
Bearing a name that suggested a ride into an unknown or impossible destination (given the triskaidekaphobia that leads many elevators to be without a thirteenth-floor button), this Austin, Texas, band led the psychedelic charge. Catching the Elevators at the Vulcan Gas Company would become as much a rite of passage in Austin as watching the Jefferson Airplane at the Matrix in San Francisco. Inspired by the writings of Aldous Huxley and Alfred Korzybski, Tommy Hall wrote the bulk of the band’s lyrics; his liner notes for *The Psychedelic Sounds of the 13th Floor Elevators*, the band’s first album, were a call to arms: “Recently, it has become possible for man to chemically alter his mental state and thus alter his point of view…. It is this quest for pure sanity that forms the basis of the songs on this album.”

Hall may have written the lyrics but it was singer Roky (Roger Kynard) Erickson who inhabited them. Songs such as “Reverberation,” “Fire Engine” and “Kingdom of Heaven” bore the earmarks of hallucinogenic revelation, but “Roller Coaster” was the most lucid and candid of the album’s lysergic entreaties. *After you trip, your life opens up / You start doing what you want to do*, Erickson sings. *And you find out that the world you once feared / Gets what it has from you.* On this track, among others, Hall’s signature “electric jug,” an amplified version of the jug played in bluegrass bands, lent the song an eerie background warble like the cry of some supernatural owl.

In November 1967, a year after their debut, the Elevators released *Easter Everywhere*, an album that found a more receptive audience for “Slip Inside This House” and “She Lives (In a Time of Her Own).” In January 1968, Lightnin’ Hopkins recorded *Free Form Patterns* alongside the Elevators’ rhythm section. By then, Erickson’s mental health had gone from erratic to precarious and he underwent electroconvulsive shock treatment. Busted for marijuana possession in 1969, he pled insanity on the basis of his three hundred acid trips and was indefinitely institutionalized in the maximum-security unit for the criminally insane at Rusk State Hospital. Although eventually he would be released, judged sane, and return to making music, Erickson—like Syd Barrett and Brian Wilson—became an emissary from a realm belonging to those who had strayed too close to the psychedelic fire.
Greil Marcus
ESSENTIAL PSYCHEDELIA #39
Love’s Body, Norman O. Brown
In the late 1960s the congressional scholar Nelson Polsby was teaching in the political science department at Berkeley. He was renowned for charts, graphs, long quotations and trend analysis. I recall someone once mentioning a new study of Jefferson to him. “Ah yes,” he said with a huge, happy grin. “More from Professor Heinz Zeit!” History was not interesting to him. Everything served the present. He was a big, dominating man with a bullet head and a burr cut—a bully of enormous charm.

At the same time Norman O. Brown was teaching at Santa Cruz. *Life Against Death*, his study of what Freud defined as the death instinct, had appeared in 1959 and made him famous. It was conceptually brave—he ended with the argument that only what he called polymorphous perversity, which was instantly translated as free love if not group sex, could hold the death instinct at bay—and stylistically timid. The writing felt confined, as if, to control the psychological chaos of his subject matter, he had to put it in a clinic. The combination paid off in terms of reputation: He was revered as a savant but could also be trusted. Brown seemed a shy, retiring person, and when he published *Love’s Body* in 1966 no one could connect the man with the writing. He was writing about the will to live as translated into, and by, sexual desire, and the writing rang the bells of its subject. It all but wrote itself off the page. People said that he had gone crazy. I sat in seminars where it was taken for granted that the book made no sense, that it was impossible to find an argument in its flood of short paragraphs that seemingly had no connection from one to the next, that maybe it was drugs. In fact Brown had devised a book where transitions were unnecessary, where the argument started up again with every paragraph, where polymorphous perversity was acted out as a form of intellectual life in which someone walked down the street and fell in love with a new person every second, the memory of all of the thinker’s loves piling up as each new love came into view, gathering around that new person’s head and then floating off, ideas crashing into each other like atoms. The argument was in its style, and the style was the argument. The book didn’t explain the will to live, it enacted it.

About this time a story went around the Berkeley political science department. It was said that in the early 1960s, when both Polsby and Brown were teaching at Wesleyan, they had offices next to each other. Both habitually kept their doors open. People would pass by just to watch: to see Polsby at his desk shuffling through piles of books, journals, magazines and newspapers, cutting and pasting clips and quotations and graphics onto pages of his own articles, tirelessly, for hours at a time, while Brown, his desktop completely empty, stared into space.
I’m going to say two words and ask you to conjure a scene in your head. *Free love.* Relax and be transported by that sweet, sticky, strangely heavy phrase. I hope you’re thinking of naked bodies or at least partially disrobed ones, but this is your fantasy, so drift into it. Maybe the gentle metaphorical caress of the words *free love* transports you into a contemporary scene, in the shade of the sculptures thrown up at the exhibitionistic cyber-age desert festival Burning Man. Or you might dream of a Fire Island disco in 1974, relishing the passion sounds emanating from the sand dunes nearby. Or a women’s commune from the mid-1980s, the kind that proved wrong the clichés of lesbian bed death. Or go back further, to the secret lives of flappers in the 1920s, or William Blake and his wife sitting together in their English garden stark naked.

Let’s stay more present. It’s just as likely that your response to the words *free love* is brief and to the point: “Ick!” Dirty hippies. *Free love*, the delusion of a 1960s generation that fooled itself into thinking it could escape the oppressive sexual habits of its forebears. “Free love, baby,” says the grizzled old guy with the leather hat and the faded (has to be fake) Monterey Pop T-shirt—not to you but to your poor mother or older sister who had to live through that line of bull. Feminist reassessments of the 1960s counterculture, especially as it flowered in San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury, have exposed how the new lifestyles it promoted didn’t include women’s liberation: “The women of the Haight were having sex with lots of different men and living in alternative families, but they were still expected, and many of them still wanted to be, pregnant and dependent,” writes Alice Echols in *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and Its Aftershocks.* “In this way the counterculture was even less hospitable to ambitious, creative women than the older beatnik subculture, where women could at least occasionally gain entry by acting like one of the guys.” Gina Arnold has documented the power dynamics of rock festivals where brown-skinned goddesses with towering Afros were common on psychedelic posters that belied the actual exclusion of people of color from their own former neighborhoods (including the Haight).

Asking what is the sound of *free love* risks titillation followed by dismissal. Serge Gainsbourg’s “Je t’aime…moi non plus,” we’re done—*free love* made into
music is just pornography, right? But what I mean to identify is not some cosmic moan but the stream of popular music that realizes the ultimate potential of the holy get-down known as call and response, touching the point at which hierarchies dissolve and each participant, onstage or off, feels herself part of a unified flow. If we accept that all music at its core is erotic—meaning that it gives expressive form to both the yearning for embodied bliss and its realization, and in so doing brings its own pleasures that can facilitate the experience it describes—then free-love music is the kind that expands or explodes the habitual conventions restricting the ways we understand desire. Most pop performances are courtship rituals of one kind or another: seductions by charismatic stars or conquests by aggressive masters of the instrumental universe. Free-love music enacts abundance and fluidity; rhythmically it roams rather than pushes for simple conquest of the listener’s mood and bodily response. Melodically it can feel awfully loose, because its peaks and valleys don’t follow clear patterns, determined as they are by musicians responding to each other’s changing prompts. Its tone can be cacophonous or soothing or, at its best, both at once: Change is the point of free-love music, changes rendered subtly enough for listeners to feel them as their own.

This form of erotic play surfaces throughout the history of American popular music. It’s there from the beginning in African ring shouts, from hot New Orleans jams to circular blues ramblings to free jazz and disco DJ sets, all the way to today’s electronic dance music scenes. It was in mid-Sixties rock, however, that free-love music became clearly aligned with an ideology of sexual liberation. The music played by psychedelic bands at San Francisco’s Fillmore and Avalon Ballroom expressed the hopes and hungers of countercultural rebels pushing against sexual conventions and facilitated the realization of those goals. Historian Michael J. Kramer writes, “Not only in language but in appropriations of electronics, religion, psychoactive drugs, the rediscovered spaces of the deindustrializing city, the ephemera of popular culture, poster-art iconography, and perhaps most importantly, in the erotics of dancing bodies, participants engaged many issues key to public life: intimacy and collectivity, immediacy and distance, community and otherness, the supposedly mundane and the grand-historical. Their activities helped constitute a public sphere that seemed to flicker in and out of existence, much like they themselves did in the strobe lights of the psychedelic dance floor….”

Kramer describes how the multimedia, multisensory environments where hippies danced to psychedelic music fed the heads of those present as effectively as did their ingestion of hallucinogenic drugs. Acknowledging that outside the ballrooms sexism still held the old ways in place, he argues that the ultimate taste
of enlightenment for both genders took place within that ritual space of music and dancing; women dancing freeform, not in couples, allowed for a kind of liberation (however momentary and contingent on escaping male harassment) from the constraints of typical gender roles. “These new forms of dancing were less driven by courtship,” Kramer goes on, instead emphasizing “erotic interactions among strangers improvising and projecting their subjectivity through bodily movement, while moving through the enveloping electronic mediation of light and sound that the ballrooms contained.” The dancers engaged in symbolic free love as they grooved to the long stoned jams that blew through so many doors in San Francisco between 1965 and 1969. According to certain sensationalistic reports, some participants took it to a literal level; an eyewitness account from a ballroom habitué known only as “Peter” stated, “After six hours of acid, pot and rock, the evening ended with virtually the entire audience making love on the floor of the ballroom—a thousand-headed god with no cameras permitted.”

To confront free love as a musical ideal is to come to terms with the eroticism of the Grateful Dead, a band that on its surface is as unsexy as rock and roll gets. This can be difficult for anyone not part of the band’s tribe of loyal Heads; few artists—certainly none in the era of titanic hotness that was the 1960s—possessed less bottle-ready, marketable mojo. The group’s unofficial sex symbol, Bob Weir, had the phlegmatic charm of a proto-slacker, while the member most likely to voice somewhat macho desire during performances was a scruff known as Pigpen. The Dead’s leader, Jerry Garcia, owned up to his own sexual repression: “He would concede,” writes his official biographer Dennis McNally, “that sex and women were never his primary concern.” Yet the Grateful Dead is the band best embodying the energy of free love that organized psychedelic rock, that transformed rock audiences and forever changed the concert-going experience. Its live performances made possible the turn from pop as a courtship facilitator to a more sensual, emotionally open-ended experience, and accomplished this precisely by not fulfilling the norms of pop allure.

The Dead found its identity as house band for the Acid Tests staged in the mid-Sixties by Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, its members often taking hallucinogens before performing, especially in the early days with its audience also fully dosed. (Garcia’s nickname was “Captain Trips.”) So it’s fair to question whether the drugs not the music opened the door to the polymorphous release many experienced during San Francisco’s long Summer of Love—yet anyone who has taken hallucinogens knows that, if anything, LSD startles people out of their
customary routes to erotic satisfaction. The New Age teacher Ram Dass, in his earlier life as a psychologist experimenting with hallucinogens as a therapeutic tool, conducted a 1969 study on the use of LSD in sex therapy and concluded that the “perceptual-cognitive-affective re-organization” that the drug produced rearranged people’s understanding of their objects of desire: “Our male subjects report over and over again that to look at one woman is to see ‘woman’—the harlot, the virgin, the seductress, the juvenile, the matron, the mother and so on, with all feelings—lust, anger, love, kindness, protectiveness, vulnerability…and to look at any man is to see ‘man’.” This change in perception could be erotic, terrifying or profoundly distracting. Stars of the classic rock era reacted in different ways to the dissemination of these altered states. Fantastically modifying the black sexual stereotypes that would contain him, Jimi Hendrix used his virtuosity and imagination to break free of them, while Jim Morrison and Mick Jagger found their eroticism by exploring and exploiting the same clichés as white men.

The Grateful Dead never made such shows of power. Garcia didn’t consider the Dead to be playing for an audience—“It used to be,” he said in a 1971 interview, “we didn’t have audiences. We used to play at parties where we were the incidental music. We would be playing and everybody would be jumping and screaming and raving. Everywhere you looked you saw somebody you knew. We didn’t start getting audiences until we started going out of town.” In the same interview Garcia scorned Jagger’s manipulation of his fans: “Well, see, the Rolling Stones never did have a cool audience. When they started playing, people were screaming. Then they knocked off for two or three years and now they come back, and it’s back to screaming…it was a trick. You know, Mick Jagger would make his little speech about turn on the lights so we can see you, and the lights would go on and everybody would scream and run up to the stage. It was so predictable.” Garcia explicitly rejected Dionysian hysteria as a route to rock liberation. In the mutual exchange of an Acid Test, the performer doesn’t drive the crowd to a frenzy; everyone present finds his or her own way, with the music serving as a net instead of a push.

Garcia’s conception of the Dead was as another part of a moving crowd. The release was erotic; the dancing at Dead concerts was orgasmic, a full-body moment of jouissance particularly evocative of women’s multiple orgasms. Dead sets were structured to reinforce this connection. A typical live performance involved multiple shifts in tone and tempo within every tune—and this is what real sex, not Dionysian frenzy, feels like, especially for women. It has ups and downs. One moment you’re feeling it and the next you’ve lost the thread. A sensitive partner
can follow and help forge the winding path of sensation. The Dead’s music began as homoerotic before becoming omnisexual in a way that included female dancers in the audience; this is how the thousand-headed god manifests—not through stars’ performed prowess but in a vast circle where everyone is pleasuring, and being pleasured. In the original ballrooms where the early Dead played and their first fans danced, new possibilities for both sexuality and music were cultivated; Kramer describes how hippies “brought questions of intimacy and strangeness, selfhood and publicness, isolation and togetherness, independence and relationship, citizen and mass society, to the ‘fore’ around musical performance.”

Soon the Dead and their audiences went beyond the ballrooms, cementing the band’s role as the most important creator of free-love music in rock. Not long after being the Acid Test house band, the Dead began playing in Golden Gate Park; sometimes these gigs were prearranged and became historic, as in the case of the Gathering of the Tribes or Human Be-In of January 1967. By making the choice to perform in the beautiful green space adjoining their own neighborhood, the Dead connected to a long history of encounters that brought private desires into the public sphere and took a scene beyond the realm of the subcultural. In his book Erotic City: Sexual Revolutions and the Making of Modern San Francisco, Josh Sides argues that Golden Gate Park was destined to be rife with trysts: “The very design of the park—its winding roads, high shrubs and isolated dells—allowed people to act out their human penchant for violence and sex with anonymity and, usually, impunity.” If sex already was key to the park’s legend by the time the hippies arrived, the difference was that the hippies performed their erotic acts in public. Nudity became common in the Panhandle and on “Hippie Hill” at the eastern end of the park, and it was normal for the audience to strip down and dance. In this moment, the insular experience of free-love music turned outward and became political.

The most important moments in American music and American sex take place in threshold environments where the private and public converge. From Congo Square in antebellum New Orleans to the streets of the early-Twentieth Century French Quarter, from gospel churches to the backseats of cars steaming up in parking lots, from the floating cities of rock festivals to the underground network of raves, these spaces feel safe enough to inspire erotic daring but are open enough to allow for outsiders to witness what transformations occur.

Led by the Grateful Dead, the hippie takeover of Golden Gate Park became the model for festivals like Monterey Pop and Woodstock, defining events in the counterculture. “Some of the Grateful Dead feeling must have rubbed off on our
band,” Jefferson Airplane drummer Spencer Dryden would remember later about their invasion of a Toronto hotel, “because when we found ourselves on the same floor with them and all in connecting rooms, we decided to basically just open up the whole floor…It was completely wild, and what was even wilder is that…each [room] was a completely different environment. The Dead would put up tapestries on the walls, Persian carpets on the floors, posters were brought out, hookahs….We simply carried our home with us.” In such moments life became a non-performed performance. The same “happening” broke down fourth walls in theaters and concert halls throughout countercultural America, and free love became a cultural practice that not only encompassed but transcended the sexual, manifesting the multiple meanings of the erotic.

Formed at psychedelia’s onset, the Grateful Dead were fixtures on the San Francisco scene before they moved on musically to the country-rock pastures of their “long strange trip,” which various listeners found transportive and tedious in equal measure. Other than the minor classic “Dark Star,” the most enduring remnant of the Dead’s acid phase had less to do with the Dead themselves than Alton Kelley, a former welder from New England, and Stanley Miller aka Mouse, a proto-tagger and protégé of hot-rod graffix auteur Big Daddy Roth. Along with Peter Blake, Milton Glaser, Rick Griffin, Victor Moscoso, Tadanori Yokoo, Wes Wilson and Martin Sharp (Essential Psychedelia #43), Kelley and Mouse turned psychedelia into a visual shorthand, most notably with their poster for a 1966 Dead concert at the Avalon Ballroom. Depicting a flower-laureled skeleton that was inspired by an illustration in the Persian poem-cycle Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, the image became so associated with the band that it wound up the cover of their self-titled 1971 live album.
Released within weeks of the Beatles’ great and intermittently psychedelic *Revolver*, the Byrds’ psychedelic and intermittently great *Fifth Dimension*, the Beach Boys’ *Pet Sounds* that was more psychedelic in its influences than its music, and the 13th Floor Elevators’ *Psychedelic Sounds* that was more rumor than reality for the public at large, Donovan’s *Sunshine Superman* was the first album to make an impact as a fully rendered psychedelic statement. From the title song’s opening chord played by Jimmy Page to the glistening medieval “Celeste” that closes the album (and slyly calls into question the nine songs that come before), every note of *Sunshine Superman* melts in a vapor of starlight. Donovan’s songs take flight from Goodge Street (Essential Psychedelia #42) and London environs for the West Coast by way of “jefferson airplane” and “Translove Airways” decamping to Mama Cass Elliot’s house in the Hollywood Hills (“The Fat Angel”) when not prowling the Sunset Strip (“The Trip”). Goofy flower child though Donovan surely was, as with “Sunny Goodge Street” an unnamable darkness lurks in Donovan’s best psychedelic songs including the later “Hampstead Incident,” “Young Girl Blues” (as compassionate an account of a prostitute as any recorded) and “Hurdy Gurdy Man,” sinister enough to become the theme of David Fincher’s serial-killer epic *Zodiac* four decades later. For anyone who failed—as most did—to glimpse the apocalypse at the end of psychedelic utopia, at the core of *Sunshine Superman* was “Season of the Witch,” Donovan’s masterpiece and the era’s premature, here-there-be-monsters obit.

“Season of the Witch” was a song of the moment that Bob Dylan might have written had Dylan’s ego allowed him to write about any moment not of his own making. Dylan was the Scottish Donovan’s American counterpart and also his idol and withering tormentor, a self-creation made as much from image-savvy
appropriation and unerring opportunism as from an hallucinatory new music that hadn’t just turned the page on the Great American Songbook but slammed it shut. By ’66 Dylan’s reputation and cachet had so grown that he was the Beatles’ only real rival even as his record sales would never be in their league. If his album *Highway 61 Revisited* was a rock and roll *On the Road*, the follow-up *Blonde on Blonde* was rock and roll *Fleurs du mal*, so baudelairian you could smell the absinthe. No one doubts that Dylan dropped acid, but the actual extent of his LSD use is more suspect, and Dylan himself, so incapable of providing anyone a straight answer about anything that he may not have been able to give himself one, was never going to clear up the matter. By all accounts and by the evidence of the songs—the velocity of their composition and recording—Dylan’s drug was speed. While the lyrics of “Desolation Row” were phantasmagoric enough to qualify as psychedelia, the music recalled country singer Marty Robbins’ ballads of West Texas bad men and the Mexican girls they loved; even at its most far-flung—in “Visions of Johanna,” “I Want You,” “Tiny Montgomery,” “Memphis Blues Again,” “Lo and Behold,” “This Wheel’s On Fire” and “Ballad of a Thin Man,” some written more as a response to psychedelia than as part of it—the music, as often executed by Nashville session players, was more surrealist honky-tonk. In any case Dylan insisted on leading movements not following them, opting instead to engineer retirement by way of motorcycle mishaps.

If Dylan’s music wasn’t really psychedelic, however, his hipster image was inescapable: mad lysergic Beethoven with prophecies reflecting off his shades. The Martin Sharp poster “Blowin in the Mind” (aka “Mister Tambourine Man”) made Dylan totemic in a way that may have both outwardly repelled and secretly pleased the songwriter; moreover it may even have expanded perceptions of Dylan’s music itself. Sharp was barely out of college in Sydney when he became co-founder and art director of the magazine *Oz*, and with Australian renown exploding in his wake he got to London in time for a series of fortuitous turns, beginning with his musically-inclined flatmate turning out to be Eric Clapton. The former Yardbirds guitarist was starting a band called Cream and, as well as the Dylan poster and an exploding Jimi Hendrix, Sharp designed the covers of Cream’s *Disraeli Gears* and *Wheels of Fire*. Proof that the young artist instinctively caught on to the zeitgeist was one of Cream’s best songs, “Tales of Brave Ulysses,” for which Sharp wrote the lyric.
It was 1966. His name was Arthur Lee. You might say he had the Sunset Strip in a bottle, the stopper in his right hand. What could be cooler than a psychedelic Negro in 1966? Well, you know: nothing.

Let’s say we ran into each other at the Whisky. He looked at me over the blue-tinted wire-rims that were his trademark before…well, everything Arthur Lee did was before. Yeah, he said to me. What? I asked. I heard a funny thing, he said, then waited me out. Finally he spoke, a whole string of words in one breath: Somebody said to me that I could be in love with almost anyone. Almost anyone? I asked. In particular? I asked. “Anyone,” meaning “someone”? When he finally spoke it was of course a non sequitur: I had missed that long portion of the conversation that had carried itself out, unvocalized, in Arthur’s mind (and let’s say, continuing the argument, that I was in a frisky mood that night, hopped up on some black beauties washed down with WPLJ). But he was a king then and I was on a descendent path. What right had I even to speak to him? There are two kinds of drummers you know. The timekeepers, and the ones that swing. Me, I’m a timekeeper: I just keep on going. So I say to Arthur, And didn’t Bryan write that? As quick as anything he says, Yeah, but who wrote Bryan? Then I see his eyes go shut. Not the lids: the eyes. As if a nictitating membrane had descended over each cornea.

When Arthur shuts you out, you shut yourself out. You take care of yourself. You do things to yourself. Next day I show up late of course. Arthur he just stares, and when he speaks it’s with the courtliness of a Renaissance prince. I looked for you everywhere, Arthur says, till I’m not around. It makes no sense but that was Arthur and then I see the guy, I’d seen him before,
somebody’s roommate, his name is Snoopy and he’s sitting at the drums. My drums. Am I fired? I ask Arthur. Arthur he doesn’t look at me and not Johnny and not Bryan even. I go, fuck it, and that was that. It was 1966. A lot of that was happening all over the map.

You know Arthur wrote a song about me, “Signed D.C.” So even when I was not there he was thinking, you know, about me. Just so you know.

Bryan, he was the best of us, Bryan he died in 1998. I died in 2004. Arthur he come to join us a couple years later. And I remember, from this place, what Arthur he told me. In the Whisky. The last time he spoke to me. His glasses slipped down and his eyes came out from behind and he looked at me, not as any old annoyance, not even as a long-lost pal but as a man like himself. And he could be angry but he was not, that night, in anger with me. Here’s what he said before he turned away, and before he went his way (and, as we said in those days, I went mine). He said, When I was invisible, I needed no light. And then he said, You looked right through me. Quick as that he spins a full circle and he goes, Was I out of sight? Like for all he was, he never knew, and had to keep asking, and not knowing, and asking again no matter what I said, what any of us said. Was I out of sight? Arthur, spinning around, a little man in a suit of lights dodging the bull. Until one day.

Arthur, he comes in colors. You can tell him from the clothes he wears. And Arthur is alone again tonight. Every night. Though they play his music and always will. You know when Bryan sang, I will be alone again tonight, he always added, my dear. Because Bryan he was singing to Arthur. Reaching out across time and space with longing and tenderness and Spanish guitars, to the one whose name he could not say.
In 1991, I saw J.G. Ballard read at an event in London to celebrate publication of *The Kindness of Women*, and at the Q&A session afterwards somebody asked him to talk about his experiences with LSD. Ballard said he had taken it only once and the result was “instant psychosis.”

Longtime Ballard readers already knew that he wasn’t a big fan of psychedelics, although he certainly had friends who were, including Michael Moorcock, who later claimed, in an interview with Hari Kunzru, to have been Ballard’s supplier for that one bad trip: “I got Jimmy some acid one time. He insisted. He kept saying, ‘Get me some acid.’ I was his kind of running boy really for experience…. I got him a sugar cube and I said to him, ‘Don’t take it now,’ because he was as drunk as a skunk when I gave it to him. Wait. And of course, being Jimmy, he took it immediately. Appalling, psychotic—snakes all over the bed. Everything bad about Shanghai on top of everything bad about everything else.”

A fictionalized account appears in *The Kindness of Women*, an “autobiographical novel” with all the evasions and revisions that term implies. The hero, Jim, takes LSD and has a pretty good time at first: light, colors, the belief that he can walk on water, but then he goes into his bedroom and starts staring at the ceiling. *Whenever my gaze lingered for more than a few seconds a festering sore appeared in the old plaster, as if my eyes were transmitting a virulent disease, a Gorgon-stare that turned a minute insect stain into a throbbing infection. Soon the suppurating plaster was covered with a plague of boils...when*
I moved my hand I saw that flies covered every inch of the room. Their trembling wings seethed on the sheets and pillows, cloaking my hands in black mittens. Trying to drive them away, I touched my scalp and found that a piece of my skull was missing. The tips of my fingers dipped into the soft tissues of my brain....

No doubt there’s some literary license and invention at work there, but this is about as far as you can get from any blissed out psychedelic mind expansion (even Timothy Leary advised, “Don’t take LSD unless...you are specifically prepared to go out of your mind”). Clues about Ballard’s attitude to LSD were there in Crash, published in 1973. The hero James Ballard drops acid and goes for a drive: Already I could feel the first effects of the acid. My palms felt cool and tender; wings were about to grow from them and lift me into the speeding air. An icy nimbus was gathering around the roof of my skull, like the clouds that form in the hangars of spacecraft. I had taken an acid trip two years earlier, a paranoid nightmare during which...I had felt my brains sliding on to the pillow through [a] hole...in my skull. In the Paris Review Ballard said, “I haven’t taken any drugs since one terrifying LSD trip in 1967. A nightmarish mistake. It opened a vent of hell that took years to close and left me wary even of aspirin. Visually it was just like my 1965 novel, The Crystal World, which some people think was inspired by my LSD trip. It convinced me that a powerful and obsessive enough imagination can reach, unaided, the very deepest layers of the mind. (I take it that beyond LSD there lies nothing.)”
For what it’s worth *The Crystal World* never struck me as very “psychedelic.” It was the first Ballard novel I ever saw, borrowed from my local public library though I returned it unread; I was thirteen years old, so I think that’s just about forgivable. I only came back to it much later. I judged, and chose, the book by its cover, which featured Max Ernst’s *The Eye of Silence* (though I didn’t know that at the time) showing a wonderful otherworldly landscape that seemed part rock, part flesh, part ruined city with mysterious and misshapen eyes and faces peering out from the folds and crevices of the topography; it seems to me now an image that’s poised exactly at the tipping point between a good and a bad trip.

*The Crystal World* was the fourth of Ballard’s “elemental” novels, in which the world is devastated by more or less “natural” disasters: hurricanes in *The Wind From Nowhere* (1961), flood in *The Drowned World* (1962), water shortage in *The Burning World* (1964, revised and retitled *The Drought*). It’s easy enough to see something prophetic in these novels, yet it’s hard to posit Ballard as a prophet of doom much less an eco freak. In any case Ballard’s bibliography suggests that by the time *The Crystal World* was published in 1966, some radical change was taking place in the author’s sensibility; the short stories published in the same year included “You : Coma : Marilyn Monroe,” “The Assassination of JFK Considered as a Downhill Motor Race,” “You and Me and the Continuum,” “Plan for the Assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy” and “The Atrocity Exhibition,” which would share its name with a 1973 collection of what Ballard described as “condensed novels.” He had become a writer of “experimental fiction.”

Certainly the times were on his side politically, sexually, culturally, chemically, throwing up some mindboggling source material. Perhaps the real traumatic change already had arrived for Ballard in 1964 when his wife Mary caught pneumonia on a family holiday in Spain and died within a matter of days, leaving Ballard a single father of three. Some things are more potent than drugs. A different author might have written a realistic, heartbreaking memoir of love and loss; Ballard wrote about malignant technology, bizarre scientific experiments, deviant sex, plastic surgery, political assassination. He began, in his own words, to explore “inner space,” a term he had been using since at least 1962 (and which sources indicate was first used by J.B. Priestley, of all people, in 1953). In a 1968 interview Ballard said, “I define Inner Space as an imaginary realm in which on the one hand the outer world of reality, and on the other the inner world of the mind, meet and merge. Now, in the landscapes of the surrealist painters, for example, one sees the regions of Inner Space, and increasingly I believe that we will encounter in film and literature scenes which are neither solely realistic nor fantastic. In a sense it will be a movement in the interzone between both spheres.”
What Samuel Taylor Coleridge was to opium, Syd Barrett was to acid. As Pink Floyd’s disheveled visionary he vacillated between the lyrical and nonsensical, a journey that culminated in the band’s debut *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*. (The album’s working title was *Perception* before Barrett cribbed the title from a chapter in one of his favorite childhood books, Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*.) *Piper* featured riveting extended flights into sonic netherworlds—“Astronomy Domine,” “Interstellar Overdrive”—but also compact and childlike ditties about gnomes and bikes as well as a reading of a hexagram from the *I Ching* accompanied by music. While Pink Floyd would continue on (and on and on, releasing their fifteenth studio album last November), no other work by the band would possess this hallucinatory amalgam of auditory elements.

In the early morning hours of April 30, 1967, Pink Floyd headlined the 14 Hour Technicolor Dream, an “environmental atmosphere” of poetry, music, art and film at London’s Alexandra Palace. The event was a fundraiser for another of Swinging London’s most prominent psychedelic touchstones, Tom McGrath’s underground newspaper the *International Times*, also known as *it. it* came onto the scene the same year as Pink Floyd, ushering in its first issue with a party at which the band performed. *it’s* logo was a picture of Theda Bara, originally meant to have been a picture of silent-screen “It” girl Clara Bow (the error went uncorrected); editors and contributors included John “Hoppy” Hopkins, Barry Miles, Alexander...
Trocchi, Allen Ginsberg, Germaine Greer, Mick Farren and radio DJ John Peel. Those assembled at the Alexandra Palace no doubt were carrying a copy of hot-off-the-presses issue #12, the “it Presents a 14 Hour Technicolor Read In Issue,” the words billowing from a balloon above a faceless hippie’s head as if being dreamed against a multicolored background. On the first page was the following statement in big letters: “When the Mode of the Music Changes, the Walls of the City Shake,” a variant on a line from Plato’s Republic that would find its way into the conversation of the times. Like Piper at the Gates of Dawn, the International Times made its fundamental contribution to the shaking of the city walls.

A nineteen-year-old artist when he co-founded Pink Floyd, Barrett was twenty-two when the band excommunicated him. His behavior grew increasingly strange and detached: Sometimes in performance he failed to play altogether, and in an appearance at Santa Monica’s Cheetah Club, his hair lacquered with Brylcreem and sprinkled with bits of the tranquilizer Mandrax, he looked as if he were melting onstage. In short order the post-Floyd Barrett released two idiosyncratic yet astonishing solo albums, The Madcap Laughs and Barrett, notable for songs like “Octopus,” “No Good Trying,” “Baby Lemonade,” and his musical interpretation of a James Joyce poem, “Golden Hair.” At twenty-four he retreated from music and returned to Cambridge to become Mad Syd, British psychedelia’s reclusive poet laureate and the most famous of all acid casualties.
With its intriguing characters and stylized visual presence, it’s a tragedy the episode of *Dragnet* directed by the Doors’ shamanistic lead singer Jim Morrison failed to make it to the small screen. Resurrected from the holdings of an embattled NBC by Los Angeles artist Doug Aitken to be shown before an expectant crowd at this year’s Venice Biennale, and billed by network heads as an “audience builder,” this anomalous entry gives us the chance to see a typically stoic Sergeant Joe Friday as vulnerable and companionable with a deep need to connect—“to tune in to himself,” as it were. How Morrison persuaded series creator and star Jack Webb to cast, in his own role of Joe Friday, Jim McGuinn of the Byrds (before the ’67 name change to “Roger” at the behest of a Subud leader) is best left to our wilder speculations, not to mention Augustus Owsley Stanley III in the role of Friday’s sidekick, Gannon. Flashing a bright silver buccaneer’s earring, clearly relishing his role as an ever-disappointed authoritarian and henpecked family man, Owsley’s knowing facial expressions throughout are lifted straight out of the Living Theatre’s absurdist playbook.

For post-boomers unfamiliar with the *Dragnet* franchise, this police procedural first ran as a radio show in 1949, then as a television program originally airing in 1951 while the radio program continued until 1957. Based on true stories, the program focused on a wide range of crimes including robbery, murder, parental neglect, substance abuse and prostitution. Through attention to realistic detail the show sought to make cops seem less alien, even heroic; unafraid to touch upon taboo subjects, the program angered many including the National Rifle Association for what would be considered a reasonable view on gun control even by today’s standards. Even so, the conservatism of the writers dominated and was routinely doled out in blanket statements by the law-enforcing duo and the remarks of woeful parents, forensic scientists and other rotating “experts.”

Morrison’s lost episode, “The Big Blue Boy,” turns on its head the moralistic view of the youth culture exhorted by Webb and his cohorts, quite literally. One of the more socially liberating moments contained within this half-hour occurs between the partners shortly before the episode’s climax when, high on LSD,
Friday demands that his sidekick climb onto his head to explore the beauty of weightlessness as the two “trip” down the side of Mulholland Drive into a dark and mysterious canyon ravine. In tow is winsome and minimally dressed Leigh Taylor-Young (opposite Peter Sellers a year later in *I Love You, Alice B. Toklas*, proof again of how ahead of his time Morrison was), referred to for the remainder of the episode as “the girl in black.” Paying homage to Timothy Leary’s “fifth freedom” (the right to get high), Morrison elicits convincing portrayals of the spiritual transformation of two deadpan (“Just the facts, Ma’am”) law enforcers via the intoxicating powers of “orange sunshine.”

The episode opens with Friday and Gannon called to a park where a man painted as a member of the Native American Cahuilla tribe is purportedly committing an obscene act. Seated quietly on the grass beneath a flowering tree, the Indian offers to teach the cops a thing or two about American history. “You mean pre-Mayflower?” Friday cocks a brow. “Are you sure you wouldn’t rather commit a crime?” says Gannon, whose wardrobe of gray flannel jacket and white collared shirt is visibly disheveled, abundant chest hair exposed for all to see. But soon the two are rapt, intently listening to the mysterious interloper recount the history of the Los Angeles basin ten or twenty thousand years before Europeans arrived. By the time the first Mexicans and Spanish settlers arrived around 1769, the Cahuilla in the Uto-Aztecan family were one of the predominant tribes; then the Gold Rush of the 1840s compelled the Cahuilla to move east where they endured government-sanctioned land grabs in the name of railroad robber barons. We learn about the cosmological views of the traditional Cahuilla, the creation story and death of God, hunting and fishing and gathering practices, and the sacred blue lizard, in addition to being handed an education in Eighteenth Century European art.

Dubbed by our beloved hippies-in-training “Blueboy” for his enduring love of painter Thomas Gainsborough in particular, the Indian is in trouble for giving impromptu history and art lessons in the park without the affiliation of a sanctified institution of higher learning. A gaggle of college-aged girls in ankle-length gauzy skirts arrive for their “daily lesson,” which typically requires the ingestion of orange sunshine in order to fully absorb the finer points. “With orange sunshine,” Blueboy informs his coterie, “we face a dead world and the void”—at which point schoolgirls and police alike experience a consensual hallucination. Appearing like an apparition from the tight tree branches, a skull collaged in bright triangular strips of color slowly morphs into view.
Anxious and in need of reassurance, our initiates return to the downtown station to review the properties of orange sunshine with the forensic chemist played by the Doors’ founding member, keyboardist and most conscientious future biographer, Ray Manzarek. White-coated in semi-rimmed glasses, Manzarek extrapolates convincingly on the beneficial properties of the still legal substance first synthesized in 1938 by Swiss chemist Albert Hoffman, reminding the audience of those qualities so enthralling in the first place: its ability to confer on the taker a greater sense of the cycle of life and a connectedness to others and oneself. “Successfully used in psychoanalysis,” Manzarek explains, “it’s known to enhance an individual’s ability to trust with lost emotions.” Stirred, Gannon admits to his difficulties at home with the wife he feels henpecked by, prompting Friday to open up about his misery cooped up alone at home with his mother. “Coming home to Mom every night is dreary,” McGuinn intones, “perhaps we should have taken Blueboy up on his offer,” while Gannon scratches his head, displaying for the first and only time in the series’ history anything resembling self-doubt.

Six months pass and the plot takes an unexpected direction. LSD is now a Schedule I drug, deemed a street narcotic, habit-forming with inebriating effects and illegal. Friday and Gannon receive more complaints of Blueboy’s participation in public shamanistic rituals and at Hollywood acid parties, but instead of arresting him (as happens in the episode that ultimately was swapped by the network for Morrison’s would-be television debut), the two officers experience a mesmerizing psychedelic trip at a party where Blueboy dispenses acid hits for a dollar a pop. Decked out in multicolored single light bulbs, the Hollywood mansion evokes a quintessential L.A. sunset by the yet undiscovered light artist James Turrell—smudge-orange, powder-blue, neon-pink. Entrance at the house is accompanied by a perceptual shift: Corners soften, heavy objects appear to float, spatial relations are reconfigured. Dipping his fingers into a clear fishbowl for another orange sunshine-dosed sugar cube, Friday is dazzled by a winsome brunette in a short black shift who paints alluring abstract forms onto the stone walls through some form of telepathy; a single alluring look from this misty beauty is all it takes. Patterns appear in the walls and on the furniture: ripples, vortices, waves.

A heavy emphasis on overpowering imagery and expressive sound is central to this episode, as it was to everything Morrison accomplished in his markedly brief career. Shot with giddy and delirious bursts of affection for tall white skies and ominous desert foliage, Morrison edits the work in such a way as to add a languid
rhythm to a show otherwise characterized by unremarkable camera work and grim mise-en-scène. By all accounts the producers were too distracted by the trippiness, enhanced by Morrison’s signature lines of poetry chillingly intoned by McGuinn, to recognize that “The Big Blue Boy” was original, aesthetically resplendent, and distinguished from just another “audience building” episode about an acid-taking youth culture. We have to wonder if Morrison’s entire oeuvre can’t be gleaned from this buried celluloid gem: “Strange days,” Gannon/Owsley barks at the louche Hollywood party pad, and when the Girl in Black plants our uptight and lonely, lonely crime-fighting soldier with a kiss, she whispers into his ear, “Waiting for the sun, waiting for the sun.” In place of the famous Dragnet trademark postscript during which the fate of the suspect is usually recounted, the final shot appears to be of a badge-shaped swatch of female pubic hair meticulously snipped in the form of Nietzsche’s dictum from Beyond Good and Evil: “He who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby become a monster. And if thou gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee.”

Break on through. 😊
Bruce Bauman
ESSENTIAL PSYCHEDELIA #9
“Purple Haze” / “The Wind Cries Mary,” Jimi Hendrix
And God said, “Let there be music.” And from the psychedelic cloud burst the voodoo child playing a guitar like no one had before or has since. It’s accepted wisdom among, well, everyone (with the possible exception of Lou Reed who, of course, nominated himself) that Hendrix was the greatest rock guitarist ever; but it wasn’t just the music. Cream’s Jack Bruce put it best: “Eric [Clapton] was a guitar player. Jimi was a force of nature.”

Hendrix was an American who had to flee his country to make it big. That didn’t make him unique. A black American returning to the homeland as the Jimi Hendrix Experience with two white sidemen—that was unique. He wasn’t Sammy who needed Frank as his cover in the white world, or Cosby who teamed with Culp. He was the man on stage and in the recording studio, and his sound—the most innovative psychedelic-blues electric guitar—resonated with a majority white fan base. Those who will hear “Purple Haze” and “The Wind Cries Mary” for the first time are to be envied, because they won’t ever hear music the same way again.

Offstage Hendrix was shy. He wasn’t verbally brash like Bob Dylan with his W.C Fields “Go away, kid, ya bother me” smirk. Onstage Hendrix was all id, what Joni Mitchell called “phallic Jimi”—he was Muhammad Ali, fast, daring, technically perfect, beautiful to watch with his multi-colored headbands and swaying scarves. Like Michael Jordan and other sports stars who (as noted in a past issue of this magazine) made Barack Obama possible, Hendrix is part of that tradition. When television talk-show host Dick Cavett asked Hendrix about performing the “Star-Spangled Banner” at the Woodstock Festival, the former paratrooper gave the simplest and most disarming answer: “I’m an American, so I played it,” like no mortal had played or even imagined it before. In that performance (that segued into “Purple Haze”), an era’s battle cry became an elegy, signaling psychedelia’s end.

What would have come next for him? A family friend who owned a record store in Harlem once told me he had seen Hendrix one afternoon at the Apollo Theater playing an acoustic guitar, mostly the blues, and someone asked, “When are you playing here for real?” And Jimi answered, “Not yet. But soon.”

Like much of the promise of the rest of the era, soon became never.
David L. Ulin
ESSENTIAL PSYCHEDELIA #7
“White Rabbit,” Jefferson Airplane
Jefferson Airplane were the American Beatles and “White Rabbit” was their “Love Me Do.” Sure, they took the song—along with singer Grace Slick—from another San Francisco band, the Great Society, but that’s like saying the Beatles got their start in 1957 at the Woolton village fete rather than in Hamburg, or even at the Cavern Club. There are roots and there are roots, and “White Rabbit” comes alive with the Airplane. Smart, hypnotic, literate: It signaled a new sort of rock and roll, psychedelic but with diverse antecedents, Lewis Carroll meets the Reverend Gary Davis, in which Alice in Wonderland and the blues travel to the crossroads hand in hand.

I knew the song before I ever knew the song, from the 1971 book Go Ask Alice, which takes its title from the penultimate stanza: Go ask Alice / I think she’ll know. Sold as the diary of an anonymous fifteen-year-old girl whose encounters with sex and drugs end (as they must) in tragedy, it was long ago revealed to be a work of fiction, but I remember being riveted as a junior high school student reading my best friend’s older sister’s copy of the paperback. I knew about drugs—by the early 1970s everybody knew about drugs—but I’d never tried them, and after Go Ask Alice I vowed I never would. Still, how to maintain my equilibrium with Grace urging me to feed my head? She was the most stunning woman I had ever seen and, not only that, a badass: When, in 1969, she was invited to the White House for a Finch College alumnae tea (both she and Richard Nixon’s daughter, Tricia, had gone to school there), she brought Abbie Hoffman as her date, and 600 micrograms of acid to dose the president. Nowadays we’d call that terrorism, but there’s something oddly poetic about Grace, Abbie and Nixon coming face to face
to face. Both she and Abbie, after all, were homegrown revolutionaries, products of the postwar middle class who saw revolution as, by turns, deadly serious and a form of performance art. “Sacred cows,” Abbie once said, “make the tastiest hamburger,” suggesting that the most lasting revolution is one of sensibility. This, too, sits at the center of “White Rabbit” with its appropriation of a children’s story that is not a children’s story; its embrace of derangement, of what let’s call heightened nonsense, casts into doubt our most cherished verities.

That is what the Airplane taught me, that reality was fluid, malleable, that (as the song insists) logic and proportion have fallen sloppy dead. It’s easy to write this off as a bit of juvenile whatsis, but if that’s the case, then it is whatsis that continues to resonate. I date my own skepticism, my own counterculturalism, to several touchstones: listening to Grace belt out those lyrics, and reading Kurt Vonnegut’s Cat’s Cradle and Joseph Heller’s Catch-22 in junior high. Later there would be other influences: Terry Southern, William Burroughs, Joe Strummer, Philip K. Dick. In the spring of ninth grade, I wandered the streets of Manhattan with a friend, now dead, asking random passersby what they thought when they heard the name Jefferson Airplane; every one of them replied, Grace Slick. That summer, the two of us took the LIRR from Penn Station to Uniondale, Long Island, Nassau Coliseum, to see the Starship, who were touring for their album Spitfire. During a lull in the show, I called out, “Play some Airplane.” Grace replied, “We’re getting to that.” I don’t remember any longer what they played—although I’m sure “White Rabbit” was on the set list—just that in that moment, that brief interaction, I felt as if I belonged. This, it seems to me, remains the promise of rock and roll, that in its great communal convocation we can be together, as the Airplane once sang.

In a certain sense, it was this that compelled me: the idea of music as a form of politics. My favorite Airplane album is, as it has ever been, Volunteers—their swan song really, the last record with the classic six: Grace, Paul Kantner, Marty Balin, Jorma Kaukonen, Jack Casady, Spencer Dryden. That’s as essential
a lineup as there has ever been, a group of disparate personalities (like the Beatles) that were more than the sum of their parts. By the time of *Volunteers*, released three months after Woodstock, they were already breaking open, you can feel the tension in the record, and yet this is only fitting, for the same might be said of the 1960s. In the wake of 1968, of the assassinations and Chicago, in the slipstream of the Days of Rage and Altamont, *Volunteers* chronicled the collision of hope and desolation, idealism and despair. You can hear it in the harmonies, Grace and Paul’s voices rising sweetly as they sing to us a different sort of nursery rhyme. No more chasing rabbits; now it’s *Up against the wall, motherfucker* and *This generation got no destination to hold*. True, of course, every bit of it, a harbinger of Meredith Hunter, Kent State, George Jackson, the bombing of Cambodia. And yet, in the midst of that, how can we overlook Jorma’s reworking of “Good Shepherd,” an early Nineteenth Century hymn reinvented as gospel blues, turned into a contemporary spiritual?

*If you want to get to heaven
Over on the other shore
Stay out of the way of the blood-stained bandit
Oh Good Shepherd
Feed my sheep*

From *feed my head to feed my sheep*, the personal vision gone communal, the revolution wishful, otherworldly, with its roots deep in the past. I first heard that song in the late 1970s, around the moment I turned from politics to psychedelics, as if tracing the history of the 1960s in reverse. Logic and proportion (or so my thinking went), who needs them, when one pill makes you larger, and one pill makes you small.
In his 1965 novel *The Magus*, John Fowles created a term for stories about characters grappling with questions about identity and freedom while caught in the machinations of others: the “godgame.” The protagonists of Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* and the British television show *The Prisoner* are ensnared in just such scenarios. As cultural bedfellows go, a twenty-eight-year-old Northern California housewife serving as the reluctant executrix of an old lover’s will and a secret agent determined to get out of the game are hardly an obvious pair. In the Sixties love suddenly (some would say finally) became free; the flipside of the decade’s hedonism was a pervasive sense that even the escape or illumination tantalizingly offered by psychedelics might be part of the plot. The tendrils of suspicion would eventually be borne out in all sorts of moments from My Lai to Watergate. Before public institutions began to seem like guardians of a sinister order, before reality was routinely perceived as such a hopelessly rigged shell game that we (mostly) stopped trying to spot the ruse, our collective paranoia was by turns comical and campy, cerebral and stylish.

While attempting to carry out Pierce Inverarity’s will, Oedipa Maas, *Lot 49*’s unlikely heroine, befriends a goofy band called the Paranoids, meets the inventor of a bizarre information-sorting machine, watches a crazy Jacobean revenge drama, finds her husband has ingested the LSD that her shrink has been suggesting she should take, and stumbles upon a shadowy organization known as the Trystero. Oedipa, whose name references the tragic figure able to solve any riddle except that of his own destiny, begins to notice the Trystero’s emblem, a
muted postal horn, everywhere she goes. Conspiracies spool and unspool; the reader’s experience becomes something like an intense trip without any single abiding revelation. (The cover of the Bantam paperback picturing a blue-haired Oedipa dancing against a paisley background is a psychedelic rave-up all its own.)

In *The Prisoner*, a seventeen-episode series created by and starring Patrick McGoohan, a secret agent only referred to as Number Six is imprisoned in a strange and too-pleasant town simply called the Village (actually the Hotel Portmeirion in Wales). What the Trystero horn is to *Lot 49* the Village’s image of a penny-farthing bicycle is to *The Prisoner*. A succession of interrogators, always called Number Two, attempts to break his will through a variety of mind-control trials to make him reveal why he has resigned. *The Prisoner* appealed to the counterculture’s romantic ideal of the rebel whose absolute independence was an affront to the system. “Be seeing you,” Number Six says to his captors, acknowledging their shared surveillance and the fact that even monitors have monitors. In the final episode, following a showdown to the death with Number Two, Six is taken to confront Number One in a subterranean judicial chamber beneath the Village where jukeboxes lining the cave walls blare the Beatles’ “All You Need Is Love.”

As Oedipa and Number Six negotiate clandestine networks and labyrinthine plots, readers and viewers traverse a Venn diagram where psychedelia and paranoia intersect, with only their own analogous decipherings and understandings pointing the way out.
Greil Marcus
ESSENTIAL PSYCHEDELIA #10
“A Day in the Life,” the Beatles
No one had ever heard anything like it; no one has heard anything like it since. That is the first thing to remember about “A Day in the Life,” the last track on the Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, an album that, at least in its moment, made almost every other performer in rock ’n’ roll feel incomplete, inarticulate, fraudulent, and small: left behind.

As 1966 broke into 1967, it was a time in rock ’n’ roll—in life lived according to its pace—when no one knew what to expect. Album by album, the Beatles, Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones, even the Beach Boys, even someone who might not have been heard of the year or the month before, were in a constant battle to top each other. On 29 August 1966, in San Francisco, the Beatles had played what would turn out to be their last show, an event that, in its absence, would transform the group. George was spending time in a London ashram, days that would transform his life. On a night that would transform his, John Lennon had met the conceptual artist Yoko Ono. Still, no one, perhaps not even the Beatles themselves, was ready for the daring of “A Day in the Life”—for its bet that the future had already arrived.

It was the second song to be recorded for *Sgt. Pepper*, made in January and February of 1967, but in a way it wasn’t part of the album at all. *Sgt. Pepper* was constructed as a music-hall revue, harking back to the 1920s or even before. It began and ended with the title celebration and its reprise, with rousing shouts from the stage and deliriously happy applause from the crowd. Then, creeping out of the last burst of affirmation as it faded back into the past—“A ‘regular’ movie,” Pauline Kael once wrote, “says yes to the whole world or it says not much of anything,” and that’s what “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” said—the present, in the form of its wars, greed, vanity, and triviality, returned.
That determined, bright strum from John’s acoustic guitar, placing the listener right on the steps to the door that was about to open; the loose, floating notes from Paul’s piano, disconnected, abstract, distracting you from the feeling that something was about to happen, making you forget why you were waiting for the door to open—it was like a play, complete and finished in a few seconds.

John had written three verses about reading the news: a car crash and a movie opening in London, a count of potholes in “Blackburn, Lancashire” somehow matching the number of seats in the Albert Hall. DJs quickly told their listeners that the person who “blew his mind out in a car” in the first verse was Tara Browne, a Beatle hanger-on and heir to the Guinness fortune who was killed in an auto accident, and that the film the singer saw in the second verse was How I Won the War, starring John himself, who died at the end, but none of that mattered. It wasn’t only the notes in the song that floated; it was the play itself. The story unfolded like a dream, dissolving each time you tried to make its details into facts.

But it was too much of a dream. The story was pierced by a piece of song that Paul McCartney had been holding onto, an account of a commuter rushing for the bus, and this was the prosaic anchor the song needed. The commuter makes the bus, goes upstairs for a smoke, and drifts off—returning, as Devin McKinney wrote in 2003, to “the dream from which he believed he had been awakened.” And there is “a sound building up from nothing to the end of the world,” as John put it when he demanded an orchestra to take the song into a maelstrom. “We’ll tell the orchestra to start on whatever the lowest note on their instrument is,” Paul remembered saying to John, “and to arrive at the highest note on their instrument, but to do it in their own time.” In their own time—that was the source of the danger in the heart-stopping climb that took the everyday to the face of eternity. There were random cymbal slashes from Ringo Starr broken up in the noise; a stentorian, counting voice disappearing into the whirlwind, and then a single, giant chord, three pianos struck at once, then a slipping, droning forty-three seconds from a thunderclap to a buzz that never quite reached silence.

Page upon page has been written on the song as a poem of alienation, an echoing damn on all the works of modern life. In 1984, Jon Wiener noted that while the Sgt. Pepper song cycle ends with the band thanking its “lovely audience,” “A Day in the Life” ends with the audience described as empty holes, and perhaps
this explains anything that needs to be said about what the song means. Very little has been said about the way the song’s meaning is conveyed. The song created an altogether new field of expression, one that was never occupied again; the question of how that field was made remains open.

As the song begins, both John’s singing and the melody he is tracing are intentionally following in the tracks of Elvis Presley’s 1956 “Heartbreak Hotel.” Then the song leaps forward, past itself, past 1967, and past the Beatles, to the last moments in John’s 1970 “God,” the last song on his first solo album, where, in the absurdly pompous line, “I was the dreamweaver,” he found the most sublime singing of his life and of his time; it was the way he put his whole being into “was.” “A crowd of people turned away,” he sings of the movie he goes to see in “A Day in the Life,” his tone echoing that moment three years later in advance, in the quiet sweep as he lets the words drift, so that you can picture the crowd as a wave, a single body and no mind. “But I just had to look—”

“You never use the word ‘just,’” John once said. “It’s meaningless. It’s a fill-in word.” In the handwritten lyrics for Lennon’s part of “A Day in the Life,” you can see where he omitted the word in the line that follows “I just had to look”: “Just having read the book.” There it is, the fill-in word. But in the previous line—“I just had to look”—just can mean nothing, or it can be an absolute. I had to look, I had no choice—here “just” pulls down against the other words, making its own music, allowing the “had” to rise up like a spirit, making you feel you would give anything to follow it.

“A Day in the Life” remains a play in which the most casual events of the day—the stories in the paper, anyone’s morning routine—turn into inexplicable threats. Daily life becomes a circus, at just that point where someone cuts the ropes holding up the tent. As cheers ride the band off the stage, as the boards pile high with bouquets thrown from all over the theater, even the balconies, a figure dressed in white tie and tails stands in the wings. He looks out into the crowd, where even strangers are embracing, and as the last round of applause drops away, he steps forward. He is there to bring the news that, outside the theater, nothing has changed. The hall falls silent. As the members of the audience leave the building, they become the crowds that will course through “A Day in the Life,” averting their eyes from the smashed car in the street outside, walking briskly past the headlines on the hoardings, trying to get the sound of the man’s voice out of their heads.
Bruce Bauman

ESSENTIAL PSYCHEDELIA #28
“I Had Too Much to Dream (Last Night),” the Electric Prunes

ESSENTIAL PSYCHEDELIA #46
“Incense and Peppermints,” the Strawberry Alarm Clock
In 1967 tutti-frutti psychedelia hit mainstream radio, making it safer for a twelve-year-old to sing *Incense and peppermints, meaningless nouns / Turn on, tune in, turn your eyes around than Father? / Yes son? / I want to kill you / Mother, I want to...arghhhh! The Strawberry Alarm Clock’s “Incense and Peppermints” hit number one, the Blues Magoos’ “(We Ain’t Got) Nothin’ Yet” (from their album *Psychedelic Lollipop*) number five, the Electric Prunes’ “I Had Too Much to Dream (Last Night)” number eleven, and the Seeds’ “Pushin’ Too Hard” number thirty-six. At first these bands straddled the *American Bandstand* /hip gap. The Alarm Clock appeared on the first *Laugh-In* (Essential Psychedelia #45) and the Prunes were on a bill with Jefferson Airplane. The Magoos opened for the Who.

There were scads of these one- or two-hit wonders. Some were awful (Iron Butterfly with “In-a-Gadda-da-Vida”), some were emblematic (the Lemon Pipers and “Green Tambourine”). Some were pretentiously maudlin (Procol Harum ripping off Bach in “Whiter Shade of Pale,” Scott McKenzie beckoning the hair-beflowered masses to “San Francisco”), some were plain goofy (Richard Harris singing Jimmy Webb’s “MacArthur Park,” the First Edition making a star out of Kenny Rogers with “Just Dropped In (To See What Condition My Condition Was In”). Some juiced you while you drove your car (Steppenwolf promising a “Magic Carpet Ride”). They all had one thing in common besides falling under the ever-growing tent of Sixties psychedelia: They sold shitloads of records to mainstream radio listeners.

Some were bands making psychedelic breakthroughs in earlier incarnations: the Small Faces with “Itchycoo Park” before losing Steve Marriott for Rod Stewart; Alex Chilton who, following “The Letter” with the Box Tops and before Big Star’s “September Gurls” later in the Seventies, gave us “Neon Rainbow.” Status Quo’s “Pictures of Matchstick Men” isn’t just a psychedelic classic but a rock classic. A few records were too good and strange to be easily classified: Tomorrow’s “My White Bicycle,” Kaleidoscope’s “Flight From Ashiya,” the Balloon Farm’s “A Question of Temperature,” the Left Banke’s entrancing “Walk Away Renée.”

Many of these bands formed a long-lasting community. In 1989 the Strawberry Alarm Clock and the Seeds along with the Music Machine, Arthur Lee and Love, and Big Brother and the Holding Company headlined the “Summer of Love Tour.” In 2009 Love, the Electric Prunes and the Smashing Pumpkins performed a tribute concert to Seeds lead singer Sky Saxon. In 2012, half a century since first forming, and more than forty years after their previous recording, the Blues Magoos released a new album: *Psychedelic Resurrection.*
When we took mushrooms in chocolate
I wore headphones. I climbed
a spindly Texas tree.
We were traversing a bamboo ditch, then suddenly realized we were
next to a lineup of camouflaged jeeps. He was scared
to cross the tiny creek.
The grass so sharp it was cutting his or my
feet, so one of us gave the other a back ride.
I already knew
the word *girlfriend* from his mouth
sounded wrong. They were looking at us and didn’t
understand.
When I was cold
he gave me his shirt. Bike riders howled at him: *Put some clothes on!*
*It's cold out!* I drank
carrot juice. The sun came up
slow. His voice was music. I don’t remember
if he had a smell. I carried
a stone. When I put my ear to his heart I couldn’t hear
the sea. Thought that
a prerequisite.
Bored with high school, Salen had learned drill, performed with a Springfield replica rifle, and taken piano lessons, learning a bit of blues theory. She played the flute in band, marched in uniform when she wasn’t in the sequined skirt, flipping and dancing. Her father Carl was a desk sergeant at the local precinct; he presided over a small brick office in suburban Cincinnati, where he processed paperwork. Carl’s father had been a fiddler in the hills of Kentucky. Carl loved when his girls sang. Salen was the baby of the family.

Salen’s older brother Sam invited her into his room that winter night. It was December 1997. At midnight Salen sat at Sam’s desk chair by the window, Sam on the bed; he had just put up his guitar. On the radio Steven Lansky’s voice said, “It’s midnight, time for Jack Acid. Dim the lights, light a candle, and listen to my story.” Salen clicked the light switch closed as Sam lit a candle in a glass on the headboard; Steven’s voice filled the room.

This is a true story of the supernatural. I was living in Palo Alto, California, with a group of people in a small commune. One day we had a visit from Mountain Ken, a famous novelist—he dropped off a poster about the Second Perennial Poetical Hoohaw. The poster showed a harlequin with his wrists manacled to two of seven stars and his lower body trapped in the bars of a cell. A spaceship called HOOHAW 2 flew across the top of the dark sky. In the spaceship were four X-Men.

The event was to take place in Eugene, Oregon, about seven hundred miles north of Palo Alto. I decided to hitchhike to the Hoohaw. I don’t hitchhike often, but when I do, I prepare myself. Cosmic hitchhiking law number one states: The amount of time spent waiting for a ride is inversely proportional to the amount of time spent preparing a sign. So I built a little sign out of some supplies I found in the garage. The sign turned out six feet long—two three-foot-long plywood planks, each a foot wide, were painted white and joined with inner-tube hinges. I wrote HOOHAW! in green DayGlo paint, sprayed carefully into the masked areas—the
paint came from a trash collecting job. When I reached the highway it was twenty-four hours before the start of the Hoohaw. One of the commune dwellers, Baldy, agreed to drive me to the highway in my truck. I hadn’t even unfolded my sign when a new yellow Ford pulled up. The door swung open, an invitation. A young man with long brown hair and mustache and beard, dressed in jeans and wearing a bluejean jacket, said, “You have longer legs than I do, I’ll get in back.”

The driver, a man in his late thirties, face covered in beard stubble and wearing mirrored aviator glasses, asked, “Where you going?”

I said, “To the Hoohaw!”
“What’s that?” he asked.
“A poetry festival in Eugene, Oregon.”
“Oh,” he said, “I’m a poet, let’s go.”
“It’s about seven hundred miles.”
“That’s OK!” he said. “I’m Lloyd Richard Lockett. Scorch is in back.”
“Jack Acid,” I said.

“I’m from Philadelphia, the nation’s true seat of government,” said Lockett. “Did you know that at one time this whole country was Pennsylvania?” He faced me for moments at a time as he drove, his concentration divided nearly equally between the task of driving and telling his story. “Left Pennsylvania twelve days ago. Picked up Scorch outside Cleveland. He joined the cause. We’re out to celebrate the true bicentennial of the United States of America. We’ll celebrate with the greatest ever marijuana smoke-in in Philadelphia on July 4, 1977, the 200th anniversary of the founding fathers’ smoke for freedom. Thomas Jefferson was a marijuana farmer. Did you know that U.S. currency has hemp in the paper? Anyway you understand that the country’s true 200th anniversary couldn’t be in 1976 because the country was only 199 that year.” Lockett was animated.

“What started this quest?”

“My nine-year-old daughter came to me six months ago in tears. She wanted something only her dad could give her. Her eyes abrim, throat raw, she asked for a pet horse. I couldn’t say no. That was the second hardest day of my life.” I suspected he could talk all the way to Eugene. I thought about asking what the hardest day was. “The hardest day? You want to ask—they all do. Twelve days ago I said goodbye to Maggie with a tear in her eye. She knew I had to leave. The night before, I told her about my dream—Morning Star would be the foal’s name, she’d have a blaze on her forehead and that would
be the only spot of white on a pure black horse. And that morning Maggie had come down to the barn to see Morning Star and I had sent her back to the house. Maggie’s horse died giving birth.”

Lockett paused. He knew I would ask. “Morning Star?”

“Just like the dream. Anyway I have an American Express card and my company will pay the bill and I’m on a mission. We’re going north to Aurora to see the aurora borealis then southeast to make the mark of the Z across the continent to the Florida Keys. We’ll work the carny circuit up the Carolinas and be in Philly for the Fourth.” He wore a key on a string around his neck. “The key,” he said, following my gaze. “You’re welcome to join us as far as you want, Jack.”

He asked if I had any money or food. “About twenty dollars,” I said, “two peanut butter and honey sandwiches, three apples.”

“We,” he motioned to Scorch, “have three dollars. Jack, you be the treasurer.” Scorch handed me three dollars “for safe keeping.” At this point in time, having evolved from a Cincinnati kid, who wanted to become a writer and had discovered “fleemy” —a sense of joyful anticipation—in the backseat of a ’69 Dodge in the childhood netherworld of the highway between Michigan and Ohio, to a Harvard dropout on the left side of the map in more ways than one, I was now on my way to a HOOHAW! Lockett looked grim, glum, sarcastic and seductive, his lips softening as he placed a crooked filtered cigarette between them. Talking through the jacket he handed one over his shoulder to Scorch, who reached with singular interest. “Would you like one?” Lockett said, “they’re my own special blend,” taking down the aviators so I could see the wink. Touching the car lighter to the fag I smelled the acrid combination of grass and cheap tobacco—as I took mine and put it to my lips, a door opened. I had put off Eugene, I had put off Eugene, cutting through the glass, I was on the doorstep, I realized I had no sanity to save so I stepped into literary reality and fired up my first tobacco-blended filtered pot stick. A bit dizzy. Yes I had put Eugene off the map, I was out west and San Francisco’s shrouded skyline appeared, the radio crackled with lightning flashes—welcome to the Green Sun Planet, what a lovely place…and then in the driving drizzle, wipers slapping the patterned drops on the windshield, I reached into my pocket for further inspiration.

“I only have three,” I said and handed a toothpick-sized cannabis stick to each of them.

“When they come like that, you know they’re good,” said Lockett. I sought that orgasm of the mind, the overstated mindfuck that is all satisfying and expiring.
Scorch got the munchies. I gave him a peanut butter and honey sandwich. The clover honey had come from local beekeepers, the peanut butter exploded with gentle ground-peanut flavor—I had baked honey-sunflower wheat bread two days before. These were sandwiches formed with purpose. I ate the other one myself. Then we each had an apple. The crispness of these apples from, yeah, the Briarpatch Cooperative grocery in Palo Alto picked off the south side of a Washington state apple tree sent sparkles of light from my molars to my jaw, and I heard streaks of light when I looked at the eight-track of Green Sun of the Apocalypse. A prism divided a beam of light into the color spectrum. Lockett coaxed the Ford past a truck, snugged the left lane as the Golden Gate opened to our journey. We passed into Marin County in a steady rain.

There was another hitchhiker by the roadside. He looked barely seventeen, wore a white shirt and thin dark necktie and dark trousers. Around his neck hung a cardboard sign scrawled in ballpoint ink that said: B.C. I wondered if he was trying to get back to before Christ. Lockett turned as if to ask, was slowing down when I nodded, we pulled onto the gravel shoulder and the car rocked to a stop. The young man climbed past me, joined Scorch in the back seat. His arrival was heralded by the usual questions. “How far are you going?” asked Lockett. “Do you have any money?”

“I have a dollar seventy and I’m headed for British Columbia, my father sent me to L.A. to live with my uncle who’s sending me back, I’ll keep my own money,” the young man rattled off in a singsong pitch.

“Do you want a cigarette?” Lockett pulled a packet from his shirt, offered one of the bent filtered ones.

“No, thank you.”

“Are you sure, they’re quite good, we’re all smoking,” added Lockett, handing each of us one and lighting one himself then handing me the lighter. For a moment I seemed to be in two places at once. I felt the young man’s heart skip a beat as I lit and drew.

“Smoking is unhealthy,” he opened the rear window.

“Close that,” said Lockett, his face showing concern about losing smoke. He was angry.

“It’s marijuana, isn’t it,” he said.

“Do you want a ride or not?” Lockett was testy. I was put off by the pressure on the young man. “It is good for you,” Lockett added.
“It says in the Bible that drugs are wicked.”

“Have you read Revelations?” asked Lockett. They commenced debating and arguing, quoting verse and scripture. I pulled the eight-track, instantly saw my duty, fished a blues harp out of my sack, began drawing and blowing the blues. Lockett drove up Highway 1—Pacific waves rolled into the shore on our left, rain and discussion both abated as I swayed and wailed with dark sounds like a ship at sea in a storm. By the time I stopped playing Scorch was cleaning his fingernails with a huge jackknife and Lockett was eyeing him in the rearview mirror. “Put that thing away,” Lockett said, “that may be OK with your friends in Cleveland but not around me.” I thought for a moment about saying I originally come from Cincinnati, but Cleveland’s a long way from Cincinnati. B.C. looked scared. Scorch folded the blade with a gentle click and a flip of the wrist, and we traveled on this way with Lockett talking and rattling on. Now he was telling us he was going to start a rock band using an invention of his, an instrument that was a set of metal teeth allowing the musician to make music without any visible motion. The musicians would wear silver contact lenses so the audience couldn’t see their eyes. He said he needed an electronics expert to build his invention. I told him it was out of my realm of knowledge.

At the Eureka city limits, we saw the first signs of a rainbow. Lockett and I looked at each other and said, “That’s the end of a rainbow.” The rainbow disappeared into the sky but its end appeared to be nearby, so we followed it. B.C. said we were crazy to chase a rainbow, but Lockett and I shouted him down. We turned off the highway to the right, away from the coast—the rainbow intensified and became two rainbows. Lockett said, “Keep your eye on the real one.” I did and the extra one disappeared soon enough. Then we made another turn and the rainbow disappeared completely. In its place was a large field of golden glowing dried grass. We took a turn into the field. It was muddy and damp. Moments later we were out of the car looking at the surrounding hills. I spotted it first—there was a purple glow in the air alongside one of the hills. We got back into the car and headed for the wedge of light, and as we approached it ended at a tree in full bloom. Little lavender blossoms, lotus blossoms. Now some of you may say there is no such thing as a lotus tree or that the lotus is a lily, but it was there glowing at the end of a rainbow.

The four of us piled out of the car. We walked across the wet road to the tree. Little blossoms had fallen off and were living in the puddle beneath. I picked
a blossom off the tree and tasted it. No distinct taste, waxy and dry to the tongue. I stood under the lotus tree, lavender blossoms floating at my feet as something began, the light moved from the sky above in swirling rainbow colors, violet, blue, green, red, yellow, orange, and pink aglow with a sparkle like innumerable grains of sand focused into a line of jeweled light flying out of the sphere touching space light time in the flow touching the bodies of Lloyd, B.C., Scorch flashing, zipping and zapping and I sat in the puddle, tucked my legs into lotus, opened my palms to the light emanating everywhere feeling purification of the sky and its realms, seeing the woods around, the fields dance with life, light, penetrating glow, the puddle shining like a zillion tiny mirrors, then I opened my lips, the gold touched my face, my bad tooth was the focus of a miracle of the eye of wisdom opening on gold glowing dentifrice.

Light popped out in a burst. We were back in the car stunned, silent and lost. Lockett drove. We were stuck in the mud when Lockett tried a turnaround by the roadside. Scorch and I pushed the car and finally got it moving, but not without being covered with mud—my boots were heavy and jeans thick with stuff. The driving went on, silence in the car until Lockett spoke up. “We need some female hitchhikers, or something. To perk us up, that is,” and there they were. Two women, young in colored shirts with hair all around their shoulders hitching in a small town. We picked them up.

“I’m Jack,” I said, “this is Lloyd driving. Scorch and B.C. are in back.”

The dark one said, “I’m Alice, she’s Trixie. We’re not going far. Thanks for stopping.” Alice sat between Lockett and myself, Trixie folded her long legs into the back between Scorch and B.C.

“We’re poets, on our way to a festival in Oregon,” I said.

“Join us,” said Lockett.

“Our court date is Monday,” said Alice. We took them home to a trailer on a secluded road. We went in and talked for awhile. Lockett was getting sort of pushy and they weren’t responding. He said it was time for us to go.

The darkness served as a reminder that we were off the beaten path. We weren’t sure if we were still in California or had crossed into Oregon. The car was getting low on gas. Lockett proposed that we pull into the next gas station and wait for morning. There was really no other choice. The station was across from a small diner. The four of us emptied out of the car and into this small restaurant with wood-panel walls and little booths. We took a booth. Scorch, Lockett and B.C.
ordered ham and cheese sandwiches, a vegetarian omelet, and they each had soup. When we got to sipping our after-meal coffees I determined that the treasury was cleaned out.

In the morning American Express paid for the gas and we drove on into Eugene. B.C. went on his way. Lockett bought an orange three-piece denim suit—he looked sharp despite his stubble. I changed out of my muddy clothes in the car. Then we went to MacArthur Court where the poetry festival was just beginning. They started with an open reading. Lockett scrawled out a silly rhyming poem that tied in Christ with rainbows and asked me to read it for him. I declined. He decided to find a motel that accepted American Express. He and Scorch went off together with my gear still in their car. Around three-thirty the rain began and the readings had to be moved inside; the auditorium was huge and only slightly filled. At about five the stage was set for the evening. Mountain Ken came out and led the audience in some breathing exercises, then asked that everyone leave until seven-thirty so that the fire marshals would be satisfied with the seating arrangement.

Everyone left quietly and in an orderly fashion. I bumped into a friend, Molly, whom I knew from Harvard the year before, and we drank wine at her friend’s apartment. She invited me to stay the night at her place—her family lived in Eugene—and gave me directions to get there after the show. I went looking for Lockett and picked up my gear and sign. He said what he said before: He planned to head north to Aurora to see the aurora borealis and then make the mark of the Z across the continent to the Florida Keys, and from there work the carnival circuit, ending up in Philadelphia on the Fourth. I wished him good luck and decided he was the one that got away.

The show that followed included the Hoohaw players who recited this mysterious nursery rhyme:

Lucky Lockett picked a pocket,
Jack Acid lost it.
Not a penny was there in it,
Only ribbon round it.

I tried to hitchhike up to Molly’s and spent my last few cents on a carton of buttermilk, figuring that if I bought something I didn’t like, it would last longer.
Steven’s voice stopped. Sam wanted Salen to leave, but Steven played Paul Winter’s *Callings*; whales called out to the soprano saxophone while the cello eased through. Salen’s pupils dilated with the sound, and candlelight cast a yellow glow over Sam’s bearded face. He silently reached under the bed into his cedar stash box and produced a pipe. The brother and sister shared a toke. When Salen finally went to her room, she lay down in the dark, pulled her knees up to her chest and imagined the end of the rainbow, the glowing light, a warm buzz charging her body. She felt very good. Steven’s voice took her far away from Cincinnati into a secret world of road tripping; she thought of how she would leave home soon, too. As she drifted off, she imagined someday being a radio host.

Several years later, sitting alone in an outdoor garden on a cool spring night, drinking a dark beer and smoking a hand-rolled cigarette, Salen still hadn’t told Steven about hearing him on the radio. There was a sadness to early May: Wait for it, the birds seem to say. Wait for it. It was fecund and anticipatory, the musk of attraction, growing. While she had decided she liked him, he was self-absorbed, wearing sweater vests and writing poetry about urban neighborhoods peopled with characters from Over-the-Rhine and Clifton. Salen could be direct, could get a guy to follow her, and yet this guy was older, and while she liked older men, she couldn’t feed his ego. When they kissed in a dream their faces were upside down to one another, his beard tickling her eyelashes and brushing her forehead, her eyes disappearing under his chin as her lips parted. The kiss, open mouthed, met his mind with a burst of sound, the color of the sound secure, crisp, total black: She kissed him into the void.
In 1967 the soon-to-be *Easy Rider* Hollywood A-team of Jack Nicholson, Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper were hired by B-movie master Roger Corman and created a C movie. Nicholson wrote the script which some might call “period realism” and others would call plain bad; there are “groovy boots” and “groovy people” and platitudes aplenty, with a few funny scenes: Fonda staring into a spinning washing machine as if it holds the secret of the universe. If this is Fonda on a trip, what is he like on Quaaludes? He appears neither elated when having sex with gorgeous women nor terrified when seeing himself dead. Hopper perfects his drug-dealer persona (“There’s nothing to be afraid of, man”) and Bruce Dern has a memorable line—“Relax and float downstream”—that sounds better sung by John Lennon. Everyone is young and beautiful, Susan Strasberg most of all.

But the cinematography of Archie Dalzell (veteran of the *Mister Ed* TV series, perhaps a whole other kind of proto-psychedelia) feels fresh, as does the editing. The use of flashing lights and paint-pour-like colors washing over the screen became movie and television clichés, but the saturated and burnished hues still pop. Los Angeles looks stunning—the streets, the beaches, the panoramic views. It also took guts to produce this movie. There were serious censorship issues and, aside from a laughable opening warning about LSD’s dangers recited Jack Webb-style, no apologies for portraying drugs and sex in a way they rarely had been before: LSD is a good, no, great experience; you’ll get laid by hot blondes and find the meaning of life. *Listen* to this movie—scored by Mike Bloomfield and the Electric Flag—and you’ll know why Bloomfield once was considered in the stratosphere of Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton. Gram Parsons and the International Submarine Band appear in a club scene; Peter Bogdanovich makes an uncredited cameo; and according to Rotten Tomatoes, Cindy Williams and Talia Shire are here somewhere too. Both appear to have left *The Trip* off their IMDb profiles.

Embarrassing now, *The Trip* was a product of the zeitgeist, like that photo of your teenage self that makes you wonder, “How the fuck did I think that haircut and outfit looked cool?”
Before their impact was overwhelmed by the preposterous cult that surrounded their lead singer, the Doors represented the forbidden in pop culture more effectively than any group that wasn’t called the Velvet Underground. They formed on the beaches of Los Angeles and their start couldn’t have been less auspicious: Playing local dives like the London Fog, signed and then immediately dropped by their dream label Columbia, fired from an ongoing gig at the Sunset Strip’s Whisky a Go Go for provocative declarations by the singer about fucking his mother, the Doors were regarded with contempt by other members of a music scene that wasn’t merely explosive but the equivalent of a white dwarf star. Two years later, they were the biggest band in America.

L.A.’s dark response to the Beach Boys, they were more influenced by Blake, Rimbaud and Céline than by Chuck Berry, James Brown and Elvis, in all the ways such a thing could be both good and bad. Maybe a band so brazenly about sex and death in the ‘67 summer of love and peace was inevitable. Constantly promising derangement, with a presence that men coveted and for which women abandoned all virtue, Jim Morrison sang against a nocturnal soundscape empty of bass and full of space, the first major rock singer of his time not trying to sound black, British or like Bob Dylan (in later interviews he openly confessed his admiration for Frank Sinatra). Morrison swallowed whole the band’s identity, which became forever mired in volatile assessments of the singer as either puerile poseur or shaman savant, when he was neither and some of each.

On their second album the Doors replaced the harder blues of the smash predecessor with a sound dreamier and more seductive and dangerous. As in the earlier oedipal allegory about a generation raping and killing off the one that preceded it, a new epic, “When the Music’s Over,” found Morrison yearning for his own end (I want to hear the scream of the butterfly) while the haunted “People Are Strange” persuaded you why. Excepting only the debut’s “The Crystal Ship,” which expressed the band’s enigmas more exquisitely in two and a half minutes than “The End” did in twelve, Strange Days’ title track presented better than anything else they did the state of the psychedelic union as irresistible maelstrom and “strange night of stone,” wedding a vortex of keyboard and synthesizer to one of Morrison’s best lyrics. Aiming the car off a high cliff toward the sea, the Doors pursued a watery and ecstatic oblivion, hoping to take out a surfer or two along the way.
Ronald David Laing made it his life’s work to examine, re-conceptualize and successfully treat the very state that LSD appeared to mimic: schizophrenia. He sought to synthesize “existential psychology and psychiatry,” insisting that schizophrenia should be considered not in isolation but “in existential context,” that “there is a comprehensible transition from the sane schizoid way of being-in-the-world to a psychotic way of being-in-the-world.” Laing took on the basic Freudian notion that our civilization is repressive, and then went further: “Our civilization represses not only ‘the instincts,’ not only sexuality, but any form of transcendence. Among one-dimensional men, it is not surprising that someone with an insistent experience of other dimensions, that he cannot deny or forget, will run the risk of either being destroyed by the others or of betraying what he knows.”

Culminating with *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise*, Laing’s writing led him to question and challenge the fundamental values of Western society. He cited the case of a girl of seventeen hospitalized for claiming the atom bomb was inside her while the world’s statesmen—who threatened and boasted of their Doomsday weapons—were more dangerous and far more estranged from “reality.” Laing persistently attacked the hegemonic idea of normality: “In the context of our present pervasive madness that we call normality,” he said, “sanity, freedom, all our frames of reference are ambiguous and equivocal.” In a lecture titled “Violence and Love,” Laing described parenting as the systematic destruction of potential; the result was “a being like ourselves…a half-crazed creature…more or less adjusted to a mad world. This is normality in our present age.”

Thus Laing turned the world upside down. As his media profile rose, by the mid-Sixties he was Britain’s best known psychiatrist; visitors included Kenneth Tynan, David Mercer, Sean Connery and Timothy Leary. Echoing Leary and other acid proselytizers, Laing first took LSD in the belief that it mimicked psychoses, and from then on regularly used small controllable doses in his therapy sessions. He made the crucial connection between LSD and the unlocking of not only psychological paralysis, but personal creativity and human possibility. “The aim of therapy,” Laing stated in an address to the mental health establishment in 1966, “should be to enhance consciousness rather than diminish it.”
Bruce Bauman
ESSENTIAL PSYCHEDELIA #16
“"I Can See for Miles," the Who
Infamous for destroying their instruments, punching each other offstage and on, songwriter Pete Townshend clobbering leftist activist Abbie Hoffman with his guitar at Woodstock, and the meth-infused, self-immolating stutter of “My Generation,” the odd Mods’ venture into psychedelia came not with peace signs but clenched fists. The all-seeing and distinctly paranoid visionary with “magic in his eyes” singing “I Can See for Miles” flips the acceptance/nonviolence/forgiveness mantra into a cry of revenge. The music surges with the most manic drumming of rock and roll’s most manic drummer, Keith Moon, while Townshend’s one-note solo eviscerates your synapses and John Entwistle’s throbbing bass makes your ventricles explode. You know things are not going to end well in this song and they don’t. The cosmic cube hasn’t turned Townshend passive, only more reflective and terrified of himself and what he’s witnessed. In what could be Part Two, “Behind Blue Eyes” four years later, the sad/bad man’s repressed lament turns vicious again when Roger Daltrey’s vocal shifts from soft to menacing and the band unleashes a beat-down on your soul. In the most concise flip-out lyric ever, with a sentiment familiar to anyone who ever had the displeasure of being dragged into that demonic multicolored hole, is Daltrey’s plea: And if I swallow anything evil / Put your finger down my throat / And if I shiver, please give me a blanket / Keep me warm, let me wear your coat.

The Who Sell Out was the Who’s first “concept” album, “I Can See for Miles” at the center of humorous asides that take the piss out of the BBC amid nuggets of other edgy psychedelia like Speedy Keen’s “Armenia City in the Sky” and “Mary Anne with the Shaky Hand” (the B-side version of the “Miles” single is much freakier), as well as the tragically insightful “Tattoo.” “Rael 1&2” and “I Can’t Reach You” use riffs and themes that presaged Townshend’s rock opera Tommy, which had its own psychedelic moments like “The Acid Queen.” But on vinyl, at least, the band never again reached this pinnacle of anger and paranoia in the psychedelic canon’s most beautifully dangerous song.
many film directors with a truelove of the medium will eventually shoot teenage girls tripping down the street in platform shoes with gold glitter painted on it’s such a good scene actually tripping maybe acid maybe falling down

★
Sally packs a red tartan valise with a brass zipper. Or she just stuffs it all in a Mary Quant shopping bag: blue suckers Jack of Clubs house key cough syrup math book permanent marker Kotex.

★
Sally is twelve years old she is fourteen years old. She has been getting high since she was ten. Every bone she owns solid as Christendom.

★
Sally says, All boys love girls with thick blond bangs. All boys love skinny girls with sad mouths and false eyelashes. The drummer kinda psychotic will be easiest to bag. The blue of the strobe lights and maybe the dry ice in my eyes the pupils swelling and shrinking like blowfish. My Candies leave Coke tracks and coke tracks on the floor-once-hockey-rink-will-be-again-tomorrow, everyone’s powder spilled now razored into demolition derby comic book crosshatching. It’s slippery. My own two inner eardrums which are now taffy. When a door backstage slits open, when the lights swirl up, the girls mash our titties sore patch pockets into each other’s Mexican blouses and halter tops. The sequins leave a shill of dents across our shoulders, sticky-clean wet. The screaming is fever. The music makes me just wanna give up, like good. The pitch. Me and the other girls are mad, can’t recognize eyes as eyes we ever had, the guitars are the biggest shiniest cocks we’ve ever seen, no kidding. I now know crush. I know/own crush. Tomorrow I will change all the posters on the back of my bedroom door so this band backlit purple edges of their long hair will watch me undress and give me the chills just everywhere.
I ate my first tab in the fall of ’85. It was cold and I could see my breath pluming upwards, drifting towards a sky that was milky and enigmatic to begin with. I stood in the middle of the quad, craning my neck at the strange, modernist cube of our dorm, all ruddy bricks and impenetrable windows. I wasn’t wearing any shoes.

“Hey, man.” My friend Microbe came over. “Aren’t you freezing?”
“Not really, no.”
“You sure?”

I was from California. My reputation rested upon a certain fearlessness about the weather. I didn’t own any winter clothes and was currently sporting threadbare corduroys and a T-shirt that read, with or without irony, *Go Climb a Rock*. “Define ‘sure.’”

He scrutinized me. Good old Microbe, the experienced psychonaut. He knew something was up. “Isn’t it a little early for law school? You’re either fucking cold or you’re not.”

I stared down at my toes splayed atop the hard, grassless mud, up at the branches that were brittle and, likewise, bare. “I guess it’s a little nippy.”
“What are you doing?”

It wasn’t really all that unusual to see one of us standing out here on the quad alone, paralyzed by indecision. Indecision was our métier. At any hour of the day or night you could see one or two of us wandering around in circles like disoriented mimes. Hamster College (as we referred to it, thanks to the network of subterranean tunnels that ran from building to building, an alleged means of keeping dry and warm in winter although we used them mostly for graffiti and psychic torment) was for the confused. Sexually, philosophically, academically. Seven hundred kids had been shipped off by our parents to a kind of work farm in northern Vermont, only none of us actually did any work. Well, some did. Others, like me, had attended a smattering of classes—Foucault, Todorov, Cognitive Development in Dogs—and then bailed out, devoting ourselves to fucking up in its purest form.
“What do you think I’m doing?” I clenched my fist and I shook it in Microbe’s face, then opened it. “*Drogas.*”
“Really?” He was a bland-featured Michigander with frizzy hair. His face looked like a binky that had been thrown in the wash too long. After you stared at him awhile, you forgot you were looking at a person at all—more like a stuffed bear whose nose was in the process of disintegrating. “What kind?”

I smiled. “I’m not telling.”

He’d done it. Everyone here had done it, it seemed. I was the lone remaining neophyte, at least when it came to LSD. Thus far the quad hadn’t revealed any mysteries: just the same scrubby little set of bunker-like dormitories, the white clapboard house of student-health services, and the dumpy brick dining commons, all clustered around whatever these trees were. The sky was an iridescent white, the ground a hard crust interrupted by tufts of dying grass; and the trees that I hoped would start talking soon were just sickly, deciduous trunks, sad candelabra. “Come on, then!” He yanked my sleeve. “Let’s go listen to *Bull of the Woods*!”

I’d hoped to spend a little more time in nature. Then again, this was our thing. “ Alright, alright.” My feet slipped a little, kicking against the cold dirt. “Don’t have an aneurysm.”

He dragged me off to the dorms. Things were, just at that moment, getting interesting. I figured it was all happening outdoors.

“*BULL OF THE WOODS*…the new album from the 13th Floor Elevators….”

We listened to the radio promo first, some weird little tag Microbe had taped off a garage rock compilation album. A Don Pardo-ish voice raved over a set of muffled musical snippets.

“From one mind to another…to you the Elevators say…‘BARNYARD BLUES’!”

We were way into this as we were into the Electric Prunes’ Vox wah wah pedal commercial—whatever odd bits of Sixties detritus had washed themselves up for our delectation, the weirder and more psychedelic the better. Whether we appreciated these things for what they were, or if our enjoyment was a little more… considered, wasn’t clear to us at the time, and still isn’t now. Was it superiority we sought, or was it a genuine recognition that all these doofuses in Beatle boots, those goons who glared from the cover of *Hipsville 29 B.C.* and *What A Way to Die!* were cooler than we’d ever be? Who knew? Except that these laughing punks, these acid-fed slugabeds from San Jose and Boulder (rumor had it one member of the Chocolate Watchband was now a professor of astronomy there) impressed us.
They weren’t hippies, like those asshole Deadheads who clustered around the salad bar and wouldn’t let us in, nor were they visionaries like Ken Kesey or Timothy Leary, people who actually thought acid would lead you to knowledge. We’d heard all about that, those old heads with their Beethoven sonatas ringing through the woods at La Honda, their Technicolor buses festooned with signs that read *A Vote for Barry is a Vote for Fun!* No, they were drifters, like Microbe and me, people destined to be forgotten by history but who’d made their peace with mediocrity early. And…what mediocrity, besides!

“Is that a…trombone?”

“No, man.” Microbe tapped his foot, twisted his head. We were lying on our backs on the floor of his dorm room that had a coarse gray coating like the baize on a pool table. “There are no trombones here.”

“You sure?”

*BAAARNYAAAAARD BLUUUUUZ*…. I knew nothing. I’d never lived or loved or been dosed by a reckless dentist before going home to write “Tomorrow Never Knows.” I only knew this record was wack. The current song sounded like “Season of the Witch” as performed by a cough-syrup-drunk hillbilly with a substandard IQ; the lyrics just dribbled out both sides of his mouth, forming continent-shaped stains on his bib. I was coming on, just, *finally*: The ceiling seemed to lower itself overhead, the drab lamp in the center of it glowing like a fiery tit.

“I’m sorry,” I said, and then started giggling. “Did I just say something about a trombone?”

Microbe was pissed. “Fuck you. Where did you get it?”

“Geezix.”

“What the? Geezix doesn’t—”

“No, Skeeze,” I said. “Skeeze. Sorry.”

“Oh.” Skeeze and Geezix were two guys who lived on our hall, not really germane here. All you really need to know is that everybody had a nickname (obviously), and that the two were neither related nor alike. Geezix came from Wyoming somewhere and Skeeze was from New York City, a skinny guy like a railroad spike in a trench coat, a real Times Square pervert in training. “Well, shit. How could you mistake those two characters?”

“I dunno.”

“Does he have any more?” Microbe, whose real name was Ira—he owed his nickname to hygiene, as we all did, really—sat up. He looked around. “Does he?”
“How should I know?”
“You’re tripping. Didn’t you at least have the decency to ask him if there was more?”
“No,” I said. “I was over in the Commons having breakfast and he just grabbed my jaw and force-fed me. It wasn’t like I had a choice.”
“Really? Blotter?”
I nodded. “What else would it have been?”
“And you didn’t think to spit it out and just…share it?”
“Come on, man.” You see why ‘Microbe,’ “That’s disgusting.”
“That little shit,” he fumed. “That’s just so uncool! Skeezeix is a prick!”
I was pretty kindly disposed to Skeezeix at the moment. I lay back down—no, wait. I was already lying down. I lay back further, feeling the floor tilt back like one of those zero gravity chairs, like I was wearing those boots Richard Gere wore in American Gigolo. Fuck.
“I’m gonna get some,” he said.
“You’ll be behind me.”
“I don’t care.” He got up and, though my eyes were closed, I could see perfectly well as he ambled across the room and stepped out into the hall. “Stay here.”
“Where am I gonna go?” My lips never twitched. The little tikkatikkatikka sound of the electric jug that was all over this record, as it was all over every song the Elevators recorded, tuned me right in. I could go anywhere without having to move. I watched him go down the hall, pound churlishly on Skeezeix’s door with his fist, manage a few boorish negotiations (Skeezeix himself was so high all the time that talking to him was like talking to a rhino; all you got was hide and horns and unintelligible grunting) before he came back in, working his jaw and feeling (I could see, even with my eyes closed) extremely self-satisfied.
“So.”
“So,” I mimicked. Dear God in heaven, that was a hard syllable to utter. My teeth now felt made of steel. “Wharrrrgh?” What happened, in other words. (I’m gonna go ahead and subtitle myself for a bit because…well, you know, because. Because the literal utterances of tripping children aren’t interesting to begin with, and there may have been quite the gulf between what I meant and whatever phonetic salad passed my lips.)
“That Skeezeix is a reasonable man.”
“I’m sure.”
“This is the same shit he had earlier in the semester, that he got from that dude at Columbia. Not very speedy at all.”

“OK.”

“You’re going to enjoy this. This isn’t some boom-boom bathtub score-it-in-the-parking-lot-at-Worcester-Centrum-type shit. This is pure.”

“Stop talking.”

“I can see you’re enjoying it already. Foxy, I was worried about your first time. I always wanted to be a good chaperone for this experience.”

“[Redacted.]”

“You want me to flip the record over?”

I honestly don’t know what I said then. I opened my eyes and think I was surprised to realize it had stopped. Ah, Roky! Ah, Elevators! A bunch of fuckin’ goat ropers from Austin, Texas, had figured it all out. You didn’t even need to play music to hear it.

“Foxy. Hey, Foxy.”

Even transcendence gets boring after a while. When I finally opened my eyes I could see Microbe had joined me. His pupils looked like dinner plates.

“What is it?”

“Shouldn’t we go outside?”

“I dunno,” I said. “Isn’t it…cold?”

“Since when did you care about cold, Inland Empire Man?”

I didn’t. “I don’t, but…there are extreme weather systems rolling in. Global blockages. I think there’s going to be another Ice Age, or at least another Cincinnati.”

“Oh.” He headed my gobbledygook off at the pass. “I have a pair of shoes you can borrow. Will that help?”

“GOD yes.”

“OK.” He shook his head. “Second Cincinnati averted. Now let’s get out of this room before it grows on us any further.”

Somehow, I managed to put his shoes, which looked like pontoons, hardcore clown shoes, on my feet. They were wingtips, which felt really weird without socks.

“Jesus,” I said, “how do you drive these things?”

“Pretend they’re your fingers and you’re walking on your hands.”

God knows why, but this advice actually helped. Microbe handed me a coat and, because I wasn’t a total idiot and didn’t want to end up at Student Health
Services with pneumonia (chlamydia, perhaps, but pneumonia? no fucking way), I took it. “Where are we going?”

“To the future,” he said. “The toppermost of the poppermost.”

“Don’t go all pre-Revolver on me, Johnny,” I said. “Stay current.”

I followed him outside. I wanted something, I realize now. Love, insight. We may have hated hippies, but I wanted the same things they did. I wanted to be changed. We left Microbe’s door open, but so what? Actions on hallucinogens have weird consequences. They either lead you into worlds of complication that are so baroque you forget, eventually, what caused them, or else they create little loopholes so elegant they lead you to God. By the time we’d wind our way back to the dorms, even if it was just five minutes from now, that door would seem nothing less than a gateway to Atlantis.

“Good grief!” It was dark as we stepped into the quad. “Have we been in there all day?”

“No, no,” Microbe said. “It’ll resolve.”

Sure enough, I’d been mistaken. I shook my head and…whoa there. Sunlight fell across my feet, my hands. “How’d I do that?”

“I dunno.”

I looked up into the sky and saw clouds scudding, drifting thickly across the horizon. Otherwise it was clear. “Damn,” I said. “I thought maybe that extreme weather situation I talked about was real.”

“It is real,” he said, and I had no idea if he was humoring me.

“What time is it?”

He shrugged. Neither he nor anybody else on this campus wore a watch. Professors didn’t, students certainly didn’t, and everyone pretty much went by the clock that was affixed to the library tower that was permanently stuck at 11:55. Or maybe it just happened to be 11:55 whenever anyone bothered to look at it. We lived by our circadian rhythms; classes happened whenever we felt like it, whenever we tumbled out of bed and decided it was time to go. Even the dining commons—staffed by students—opened and closed at odd hours. It wasn’t that long ago we had found ourselves having breakfast at four in the morning, prodding at cold French toast with our spoons, sipping evaporated milk. It was a mess. “Lunchtime!”

He said it with such enthusiasm I felt obliged to play my California bumpkin to the hilt. “Cowafuckingbunga, buddy! Let’s nosh!”
My high had smoothed out for a moment: Everything was crystalline and sharp, radiant and elegant; the tree bark looked supremely articulated. Even Microbe’s pallid Middle American face—frizzy hair, a turnip nose, button-black eyes—looked more human than Muppet. At last I’d found a world I could love!

“Don’t they have Jews in the Midwest?” My friend looked confused, so I added. “By ‘nosh’ I mean—”

“I know what ‘nosh’ means, you idiot! Look!”

I did look. I was looking. I could do nothing but look. But whatever it was he saw, I couldn’t find it. My world was crisp, and his, from the look of horror that was spreading across his face, must have been apocalyptic, melty and green. But it remained beyond the power of language to describe.

“Move it!” Inside the dining commons it was the hostile hour—lots of elbows and complicated maneuverings with trays, weird positions in which people were attempting to screen others out of line or else hide their food from grabbing hands. Which was weird because the commons never actually ran out of anything and all of the food besides cereal and ice cream—in fact, even that—was repellent.

“All right.” I took a plate of something writhing and red—probably lasagna, but it looked searingly, terrifyingly alive—and moseyed on over to the cashier who happened to be a girl I was in love with from afar. A sophomore, bare-armed in overalls, curls corkscrewing out from under a woolen hat. “Hi.”

I came from Riverside, California, and of the world—and by “the world” I mean absolutely everywhere that wasn’t the California desert, and this…mutant institution that was founded in the early 1970s, basically an Ivy college for people who hated rules—I knew nothing. I’d been to Los Angeles once. My father was a tenured professor of economics, and my mom, well, what could I say about her? Tennis player, drinker of vodka tonics, reader of many, many books. She had been his student when he was a TA, and now both were firmly committed to the rugged, weird part of the world in which they had each, somewhat accidentally, come to reside. Ours was the meth country, my mother used to sigh, affecting a sardonic wistfulness as we sat out on the back patio of our ranch-style home staring at the radio towers and phone lines, the infinite, hot, blasted landscape of the Inland Empire with its drab armadillo colors, Las Vegas without the neon or casinos.

“Hey, Foxy. Where’s your card?”

“I left it in the dorm. Can you comp me this delicious seafood salad?”
“Sure. Even though that’s not what it is.” She waved me past. In high school I’d had a girlfriend, or at least someone I’d slept with; that didn’t mean I’d been in love. Everyone here called me Foxy in part because of the reddish hair, in part because I was a desert creature, but also…well, I don’t exactly know why. Someone tagged me with it early on and it stuck. I was always sniffing under my pits to make sure there wasn’t some other, less comfortable reason. Do foxes stink? I took my tray and piloted it across the room, and found a table where I could sit by myself. I had no idea where Microbe had gone. He probably was still out there on the quad, watching the helicopters descend.

I had always wanted to be feral—to be, in some sense, an animal. Not just a mammal, but a beast. I’d grown up in a civilized household, roughly middle class—upper middle class—and everything was so polite. No pornography, no violence, no shouting. No one had the initiative to be a monster. My father was a careless educator and my mom a lackadaisical low-wattage drunk; you couldn’t exactly rebel against that. You could try —there’d been a hardcore scene nearby when I was in high school, scads of bands with names like the Urnz and Smegmaniacs—but really, all that seemed stupid. The psychonauts of yore had something to push against. My parents, by which I mean America, weren’t positioned that way anymore. Which meant that this lysergic acid diethylamide that was sizzling through my system—the very shit that set the Beatles on their collective Liverpudlian ass and made Bob Dylan write songs about the business of being born and drove Skip Spence to chase his bandmates around the studio with an ax and caused Syd Barrett to shave his eyebrows and melt Mandrax and hair gel over his face, the very thing, in whatever attenuated form, that had painted the culture DayGlo—was nothing but a toy. An amusement. What a fucking waste.

“Hey.”

I looked up. The girl from the cash register was standing over me. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen the face of your beloved on a hallucinogen before, but it is surprisingly like watching the face of your beloved, perfectly sober. I felt on the verge of tears before she even sat down.

“Oh, hey,” I smiled, or at least did something with my mouth that felt appropriately gummy and hopeful. Her name, her real name, was Lula. Nobody called her anything else. She was Portuguese—her family was, though she’d grown up in Providence, Rhode Island. That was all I knew. “What have you got there?” I said, looking at her tray. “An orange? You know, they used to dose those with LSD.”
“Yep. But not this one.” She scrutinized me; her lips flexed, her curls trembled. “You’re having an experience, aren’t you?”

“Little bit.” I glanced down at my plate and saw that I had, in fact, brought my fist to rest in the lurid red center of my lasagna and that I actually had managed not to eat any of it. I’d simply mauled and mashed it across my tray. “Nothing too hairy.”

“That’s all right.” She smiled. Her face had the soft glow of an environmentally-sound light bulb, a kind of gentle radiance; her hair spilled brown and unruly around her shoulders, and she looked, just a bit, like the figure of an Italian Renaissance painting, a Titian maybe. “I’ll help you through.”

“You will?” I must have sounded overjoyed because her face cracked wide open in a goofy smile I wouldn’t have suspected she had. (Titian, my ass—this was more like Bernadette Peters in The Jerk.) She was a hippie, of course, which was part of the problem. She probably had seen the Grateful Dead, perhaps even listened to them rather than having the common sense to loathe them preemptively. I’d seen her playing hackysack in front of the second year dorm, which was why we were in this Montague/Capulet situation. I was surprised she even knew my name.

“Sure.” On our hall there was a sign: DEADHEADS with an arrow pointing one way, TALKING HEADS with an arrow pointing the other. By this peculiar compass we lived our lives. Politics, culture, it was all one and the same. “I’ve done it a million times.”

Until this moment I’d managed to hold the rest of the local stimuli at bay. I’d focused only on her face, and before that the lasagna, which looked pretty much the same only bloodier— but now my attention flowered out and I took it all in: freaks, students, innocent shaggy kids all gliding around with trays in their thrift store coats and woolen caps, the backdrop gray and transactional like an airport converted into a picnic area. They all looked so purposeful, which was amazing, considering—like Olympians whose event was general competence: Lunch Buying; Walking Without Falling. “I need to get out of here,” I said. It was like being at confession. She was the cathedral and all of us were bits of stained glass. “I need to get closer to nature.”

“Oh.” She bobbed her head and I followed it up and down, up and down. “I can help you with that too.”
“Stop! Help! Wait!!” Getting out of my clothes turned out to be a serious operation. She was sitting upright on her bed, in her room that turned out to be a perfect facsimile of Microbe’s and my own: a bunk, desk, dresser, with some books and clothes and pajamas strewn all over, along with a poster I don’t have to tell you depicted Bob Marley.

She came over and—with that patient, elegant grace with which so many women attend to the difficulties of men, if they happen to be so inclined—untied me. All she seemed to do was tap me on the shoulder; it was like being knighted.

“How’d you do that?”

She shrugged. Every move now carried contrails, aftershocks; a simple shrug was like a dog shaking off water. There I was, though, naked in the middle of her room. “Come on.” She pulled me onto her bed; we’d come up here with the express purpose of having sex (“Closer to nature, huh?” was what she said when we stepped outside the dining commons), but now I just couldn’t remember how to do it. Or rather, why. I’d bogged down in the conceptual middle. Insert Tab A into Slot B. Were we making an origami plane? Why didn’t the acid visionaries talk about this? Surely it wasn’t all revelation. Even Timothy Leary needed to eat a TV dinner once in a while, didn’t he?

I looked at her. Lula. The room had taken on some of her soothing glow; even the mantis horror that was Bob Marley no longer appalled me. I just accepted that I was afraid, that all this chaos was ongoing and all the melty parts of the world were going to go on doing what they did, deliquescing and coalescing by turns until they…what?

“Just lie down,” she said, “you don’t actually have to do anything.”

So we didn’t. I didn’t. Fully dressed, she put her head on my shoulder.

“I like you,” she said.

“Why?”

But there was no “why?” I understood. There wasn’t anything at all.

Eventually we had sex. Of course we did: We were eighteen living away from home; given time and drugs andinclination, anyone our age would do anything. Given none of those things, we still would. Lula and I would wind up dating for years until eventually she’d break my heart. That afternoon she was just a child who opened a door. We lay there until twilight with her stroking my head and my own acid seizures lasting well into the day.
At last I sat up. “Look!” I pointed outside.

“Yeah?” How did the two of us even fit in that bed? It was tiny, so narrow we had to lie on our sides, knotted up like pipe cleaners.

“Snow!” It was the first truly lucid thing I’d said for hours. It was the first ordinary perception, though it was metallic, magical: The flakes looked like silver. Then again, maybe they were. “I’ve never seen it,” I said, and she laughed.

“You’re cute, Fox.”

“Maybe.” This might not have been the word I’d have chosen to describe me in that moment, impotent and acid-addled, a shy desert rat who’d found his way into her bed and then, then—

Other people were so organized. Other students even, kids who’d come to this place because we’d flipped a coin between it and Bennington, because we were too antisocial or too unintelligent—who knew?—to go to Harvard. This, this chaos, this uncertainty was how I’d staked my claim in the world. Maybe acid was for people like us, confusion’s princes, as that band we were listening to—the one Lula would torture me with for years—would put it, back at the beginning when they were still called the Warlocks. Maybe all that visionary shit was created in just this way, and Bob Dylan wrote “Desolation Row” as easily as he sneezed. I didn’t know and just then didn’t care.

“Let’s go outside,” I said.

Lula, sweet Lula, was as gentle as they came. Her father was a mob attorney, and when I met him the following summer, he cupped my round and stupid little face in his palm. So you’re the one, he said. The invalid? We were in a cake shop somewhere on Federal Hill, and I felt like I’d earned that designation, sitting with this rubicund man in a pink shirt, his gold watch scraping up against my chin like I was stuck in some scene from The Godfather or, worse, The Freshman. I’d already ruined my future by then, so it didn’t seem to matter if I fell to my knees blubbering about how much I loved his daughter, or if I kept cool, decorous, knocking back an espresso and behaving as if my deformity were simply an affectation I’d assumed to amuse him.

“Come on!” I said.

“Honey—”

I was still pristine, at that moment: None of these terrible things had happened yet. I was still up in Lula’s room watching the first snow of the season, which really was the first snow I’d seen. It looked like fast-moving, magical hair.
“Babe? Foxy?”

She kept babbling at me, but I knew what to do. Was I conscious of it? Sort of. I mean “conscious” the way a drowning man is conscious of a surface or a saguaro cactus might be that there are other things without spines. I rocketed out of the room, loosely aware that I was naked—aware, I mean, that there were other ways of doing or being things, but also aware that these didn’t seem to pertain to me right then—as I sprinted down the hall and into the quad. Freaks were everywhere at my school. I don’t think what I’ve told you has even begun to give you an idea. There was a cat who dressed only in goat skins (at least that’s what he said they were) and a trio of girls who’d formed a pact around the business of drinking their menstrual blood. What was a little nudity?

As I bolted out onto the quad, my feet were raw against the wet, slippery brick. People did this stuff in California all the time, stripped down to their bare essentials and hightailed it outside because they knew if they ran far enough—and it was never very far—there’d be a swimming pool to jump in and they could play the whole thing off. No such luck here. I was naked and on my own.

It was colder than I’d anticipated. Even a T-shirt and some thrift-store corduroys provided more protection than I’d known. The chill seemed to seep through my feet and shoot directly, bitingly to my crown like a body-length ice cream headache. Plus, it turned out snow is only frozen water. It looked so magical from up in Lula’s room, like powdered salt or lunar dust; out here it was a soft slippery crust that disappeared every time I touched it, each footfall making it evaporate into mere mud and grass.

I kept running. There was a gargantuan tree on the opposite end of the quad that felt—to me in my agitated state—like home base, like that thing that would explain it all. I didn’t even believe I was tripping anymore, although of course I was, and I would be until I woke in the student health center the next day. *Frostbite, pneumonia.* It turned out those aren’t just myths! I charged through the gray afternoon, that lowering twilight that reminded me, for want of another point of reference, of television static. Snow! Flakes! They came at me as fiercely, as seemingly impenetrable as a blizzard; but that’s just because everything was enhanced.

People were filing towards the commons, since I guess it was dinnertime already, and surprisingly few of them even glanced my way at first. *Hey,* someone must have said eventually, *check out naked Foxy over there,* since I could feel the slow pressure of their attention. But their regard was casual. *Haven’t you ever seen*
a naked Californian before? And all of my own focus was on that tree. I found out later it was a Parkhurst elm, that it had stood in that very place for over a hundred years, but just then it was Gethsemane, a gargantuan set of antlers sprouting out of the earth. To my left, the people who lived on the TALKING HEADS side of my hall, those spectral, overcoated figures, were pausing on their way to the commons, tugging on their Export A cigarettes and checking me out, the year’s first real casualty; behind me, Lula came flailing out of her dorm, her voice rising reedily to the sky. I heard her calling my name but also laughing. It was too late to save me from humiliation; in fact it was too late to save me from anything. I swept my tongue behind my teeth riddled with her pubic hair. The tree rose before me, terrifying in its granite physicality. Flakes rained through its branches, pelting my bare skin. These felt amazing. And in the onrushing darkness, the collision of nightfall, LSD and freezing light, I heard Microbe approaching.

“Foxy, man, what are you doing? I was looking for you earlier. You won’t believe what happened to me!”

That’s the last thing I remember, before I reached the tree and started shimmying up the trunk. It’s hard enough to climb a tree with your clothes on, but I made it, or so they told me. My palms and chest would be completely raw once they got me back down, my thighs and biceps riddled with gashes and cuts. Eventually I got up there and squatted, hugging my knees in the crook of a branch and staring up towards where there should have been stars but weren’t. All I saw were streaks and holes.

“Come on down,” they said, the people who had come over to watch like a little mob of game-show hosts. “Come on down now.”

Meteors! Falling stars! Constellations of frozen fire!

“Come on down!”

But I stayed where I was, shivering as I watched these worlds—one after another bursting into the air—being born, never dying.
Steve Erickson

ESSENTIAL PSYCHEDELIA #5

*Magical Mystery Tour*, the Beatles
Maybe psychedelia would have happened without the Beatles, but it wouldn’t have happened in the same way. The band transformed the phenomenon in songs like not only “Tomorrow Never Knows” (Essential Psychedelia #1) and “A Day in the Life” (Essential Psychedelia #10) but also “Rain,” “Fixing a Hole,” “Love You To,” “I’m Only Sleeping,” “Eleanor Rigby,” “Within You, Without You,” “It’s All Too Much” and “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds.” *Magical Mystery Tour* was part soundtrack to one of the Beatles’ rare misfires—a glorified home movie that ran on TV in Britain, where in fact the accompanying album wasn’t even an album — and part postscript to *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* released six months before. The impact of *Sgt. Pepper* is difficult to explain now in an age distinguished by both ever-present media and a fractured pop culture that not only defies consensus but definitionally rejects the idea; *Pepper* took over the pop consciousness so thoroughly, tyrannizing the airwaves so relentlessly (to the extent that for days absolutely nothing else was played on the radio), that nearly half a century later its reputation still surpasses its content.

Notwithstanding its patchwork intentions, *Magical Mystery Tour* remains the more complete psychedelic statement, perhaps inevitably when, in what was yet another somewhat unique lapse in the Beatles’ collective judgment, the core of *Pepper*’s concept (assuming a concept was ever there) was dropped entirely, only to resurface on this sequel. Dueling memoirs of growing up in a small seaport on the other side of England represented the band at a peak, with Paul McCartney’s gleaming “Penny Lane” a tableau of ordinary life turned enchanted, and John Lennon’s haunting “Strawberry Fields Forever” rendering interior psychodrama as exterior cityscape. On the other side of *Magical Mystery Tour*’s looking glass, Lennon’s sonic spectacle “I Am the Walrus” picks up where Lewis Carroll left off, and “All You Need is Love” provided psychedelia with a worthier manifesto than it may have deserved. And although overshadowed by sunnier crowd-pleasers yet to come, “Blue Jay Way” is George Harrison’s greatest song, evoking an Antonioni-like pageant of adrift beautiful LSD burnouts wandering L.A. in the fog; having just returned from San Francisco’s LSD Central, Haight-Ashbury, Harrison (always the band’s reflexive skeptic) was already having his doubts. If Debussy had lived a century later, *Magical Mystery Tour* is the music he would have made. It also was the end of psychedelia for the Beatles; except for a few brilliant afterthoughts in the coming years—“The Inner Light,” “Glass Onion,” “Cry Baby Cry,” “Because,” “Across the Universe”—the band had exhausted its inspiration. Without its leaders, the era entered the final throes.
These town-criers with their respective program’s openings—Fass’ “Good morning, cabal,” and Rowan-to-Martin’s “C’mon, Dick, let’s go to the party”—used their respective media of radio and television to deliver the message: “Listen up, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, there’s a brave new world out there, and we know what it is….”

Fass never achieved nationwide fame but was a true underground star in New York City. He pioneered free-form, stream-of-consciousness radio in 1963 when, taking his show’s title from Samuel Beckett’s novel, he turned commercial-free WBAI, New York’s Pacifica station, into one hot medium. At that time the big guns of the AM dial ruled the airwaves: Murray the K, Cousin Brucie, B. Mitchel Reed and Scott Muni gonged, sloganered and raved like sleep-deprived salesmen selling you clothes from Dennison’s in Union, New Jersey, as easily as they flogged Bobby Vinton’s latest slop.

Unless he was playing it backwards, no such pabulum passed over Fass’ airwaves. Each weekday at midnight he invited you to the first electronic secret society that anyone could join; from there he wandered anywhere his brain desired. Timothy Leary, Joni Mitchell and Allen Ginsberg all appeared as guests. Arlo Guthrie premiered Alice’s Restaurant on the program. You can listen on YouTube to a 2 AM hour-long Dylan riff on the “Mario Lanza Society,” “Rosa Minnelli, Judy Garland’s daughter,” the Fugs (Dylan loved them), manager Albert Grossman, his “peppermaker,” folk rock as a conspiracy cooked up by the Brill Building, toothpaste companies and the Elders of Zion. When a caller says, “I’m on a psychedelic trip, you have any suggestions?” Dylan asks knowingly, “How’s your gums feel?”

Fass had a few thousand listeners. Replacing The Man From U.N.C.L.E. in primetime, Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-In reached an audience of tens of millions every week. There had been madmen on TV since its inception and many a cool customer, but Dan Rowan and Dick Martin were the coolest of the cool among a cast of barely controlled lunatics. Nothing could ruffle their tuxedos; they had seen it all during their years on the nightclub circuit. More sly and revolutionary
than the Monkees without the angry, often peevish smugness of the Smothers Brothers, bereft of Little Dickie Cavett coyness, these two funny men changed television. *Laugh-In* was psychedelic vaudeville, a combination of Burns and Allen’s straight-man-Dumb-Dora routine and hellzapoppin absurdity with a dollop of THC. After their intro dialogue, like a couple of martini-drinking dads bemused by their kids’ antics, the hosts dropped in on the paisley-dressed, Nehru-jacketed, mini-skirted hip kids prancing to music that stopped like musical chairs. Someone would utter a drug-, sexual- or politically-related quip (Rowan: “Ronald Reagan said if he were ever elected President he would bring peace to the world.” Two beats, and a female guest answers: “That seems like an awfully high price to pay”) before moving into weekly skits like “It’s a Mod, Mod World” where Goldie Hawn, Judy Carne and Chelsea Brown danced in bikinis, bodies graffitied with absurd puns. The show finally ended at the psychedelic “joke wall” where the cast stuck their heads out of panels and a volley of, uh, off-the-wall comments ensued. You could practically smell the pot fumes.

The show made stars out of Hawn and Lily Tomlin. Jo Anne Worley, Henry Gibson, Arte Johnson and Ruth Buzzi became cult heroes. Weekly guests ranged from comedian Henny Youngman to evangelist Billy Graham; the show brought to world consciousness Tiny Tim, the most improbable singing sensation who could never have happened except in the Sixties. The show popularized a bevy of cultural catchphrases: “Blow in my ear and I’ll follow you anywhere,” “Now that’s a no-no,” “You bet your sweet bippy!” and “Here come da judge.” Perhaps the most famous of all, “Sock it to me,” led to *Laugh-In*’s most unfortunate legacy, contributing to the presidential election of Richard Nixon, the ultimate acid nightmare and most paranoid motherfucker ever to utter the words. The appearance by the once-and-future dirty trickster implied a sense of humor and humanity as false as a promise to end the Vietnam War. Too bad nobody slipped him a tab of Owsley acid.

There were other radio innovators—Jean Shepherd, Steve Post—and Scott Muni would leave WABC and get the FM radio rev going at WOR and later WNEW. None could match the legendary Fass, who continues beating his unique drum on BAI to this very day. *Laugh-In*, like many phenomena of the era, blazed into your living room and flamed out, resurfacing in the world of DVDs and YouTube. Its influence on generations of TV comics has been immense: Picking up a bag of tricks from the show as a young writer, Lorne Michaels became Mister *Saturday Night Live*, and half a century later you can feel Dan and Dick’s presence hovering over Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert.
A 1967 duet by Nancy Sinatra and the song’s writer and producer, Lee Hazlewood, “Some Velvet Morning” has been covered and theorized about within an inch of its life. The song is a singular artifact, alluring and strange even by the standards of its strange times; following Sinatra’s sensation “These Boots Are Made for Walkin’,” and Nancy & Lee precursors “Summer Wine” and “Sand,” “Some Velvet Morning” almost completely abandons what was Hazlewood’s more typically countrified pop in favor of a foray into pop psych. Mysterious lyrics convey a darkly sensual imaginary where male and female archetypes comingle in contrasting time signatures—basically two different songs alternating back and forth to yield one hot psych mess. “Some Velvet Morning” was a hit anyway, reaching number 26 on the Billboard Hot 100 in early 1968.

In the song Hazlewood plays a world-weary Malibu cowboy to Sinatra’s childlike flower nymph. Singing with the authority of five Johnny Cashes (Some velvet morning when I’m straight / I’m going to open up your gate), he appears to be haunted by memories of a woman he’s recast as some delegate of the eternal feminine; while he clearly has gotten older and drunker, “Phaedra” has remained young, supple and lethal. In an echoey unadorned voice she sings of flowers and secrets, and about looking but not touching, and Hazlewood’s grizzled baritone softens as it segues into hers, a dissolve transition into his interior imaginings. The first lines are cryptic: “Some velvet morning when I’m straight” is Hazlewood’s crafty way of saying, “On a chilly day in hell when I’m sober.” The song comes less in bright cheery colors than in blacks, grays, purples, browns, and fiery reds. A “velvet morning” is a contradiction in terms: a night-morning.

Or not. It’s possible the song bears none of the scrutiny that internet messageboards grant it: “It doesn’t mean all that much,” Hazlewood once said,
despite lavishing a great deal of time on his masterpiece—which leads us to wonder what the song is for. You can’t dance to it (well, you can waltz to Nancy’s part) and it’s too jarring to settle into a good-time listen, say, in the car. While Hazlewood always insisted he wasn’t a “druggie,” “Some Velvet Morning” itself is a song under the influence, the accelerating tempo in its opening strains suggesting an erratic heartbeat, a body under the sway of some chemical agent. The parade of covers that’s followed has drawn on the song’s intoxicating blend of contrasts and synergies, making for wildly divergent interpretations, some campy, some more serious: Hungarian jazz guitarist Gábor Szabó provided a Calypso-inflected version in 1968, and Vanilla Fudge interpreted the song in 1969 as a protracted falsetto fever dream punctuated by moments of sonic assault. Then the Seventies largely forgot about Lee Hazlewood, taste and drugs changing until, like so many other psych gems, the song sounded gauche, silly, or just plain odd.

The alt-rock movement that began in the Nineties initiated a full-fledged Hazlewood revival. Independent record labels Light in the Attic and Smells Like Records have been reissuing Hazlewood’s solo albums, and Hazlewood has been cited and covered by bands and recording artists as far ranging as Sonic Youth, Einstürzende Neubauten, Beck, Megadeth and Pulp’s Jarvis Cocker. Shades of a Nancy & Lee duet are all over the Jesus and Mary Chain’s “Sometimes Always” featuring Hope Sandoval, Nick Cave’s “Henry Lee” with Polly Harvey and “Where the Wild Roses Grow” with Kylie Minogue, and the Mark Lanegan and Isobel Campbell collaborations Ballad of the Broken Seas, Sunday at Devil Dirt and Hawk. The era yielded more “Some Velvet Morning” covers primarily from bands with shoegaze or goth leanings including Slowdive, Primal Scream featuring Kate Moss, Thin White Rope, Lydia Lunch and Rowland S. Howard, and more recently Glenn Danzig and Cherie Currie.

The Danzig/Currie “Some Velvet Morning” is, in a word, terrible. But it’s worth noting how Currie dares to violate the ethereal-nymph role of the song’s female half, belting Phaedra’s part in a style more reminiscent of hair metal. Currie isn’t right for the part; she’s loud when she should be soft, and certainly sounds like she’s over eighteen. But it’s womanly singing, over the top in a way contrary to Hazlewood’s eternal-flower archetype—a flagrantly unfaithful cover in which Danzig changes the lyrics: Some velvet morning when I’m dead / They’re going to open up my head / And then they’ll all learn about Phaedra....
Delany’s novel sets its controls for the heart of the sun. Captain Lorq Von Ray is hunting a nova, looking to plunge into its unruly maelstrom to extract the precious substance Illyrion. The crew aboard his spaceship, the Roc, is populated like an interstellar version of the kind of commune the young Delany once inhabited; if the scarred Von Ray is the novel’s Ahab, the gypsy musician Mouse is Ishmael, a Hendrix-like maestro of the “sensory-syrinx,” a synesthetic panflute that generates pictures to accompany its sounds. For all that the book owes to Moby-Dick and to Alfred Bester’s The Stars My Destination, it also belongs to the tumultuous and sumptuous textures of the Sixties. Teeming with riffs on sensory input and overload, Nova shimmers with lines like “Electric arpeggios of a neo-raga rilled.”

Headings run across the tops of pages to chart the passage forward and backward in space and time. Some chapters begin in mid-sentence and the last line never entirely concludes. A song by the Twentieth-Century Mamas and the Papas (rendered with a slightly different spelling) is performed at a decadent Paris party. Beyond the space opera, the book combines mythological and political reflections and descriptions of the arts of various cities and star systems. In this Thirty-Second century of disparate worlds, consulting Tarot cards is a routine practice. As for the use of psychedelics, the Harvard-educated member of the crew compiling notes for an archaic art form called a “novel” offers this historical anecdote of a bygone era: “The experiences opened by psychedelics were making everybody doubt everything anyway and it was a hundred and fifty years before the whole mess was put back into some sort of coherent order by those great names in the synthetic and integrative sciences that are too familiar to both of us for me to insult you by naming.”
Raised in the Bronx and later Los Angeles, Stanley Kubrick graduated from high school a D student, which precluded any chances of college. So he took a keen interest in photography to *Look* magazine while frequenting the cinemas of Greenwich Village; soon he found himself staging his photos, directing his subjects, and making short films. His first features, *Fear and Desire* and *Killer’s Kiss*, led to the late-noir classic *The Killing*, followed by the passionately anti-war *Paths of Glory*, the neo-Western *One-Eyed Jacks* which Kubrick left his fingerprints all over before star Marlon Brando fired him, the sword-and-sandals blockbuster *Spartacus*, a fitfully brilliant adaptation of Nabokov’s *Lolita*, and the most talked about movie of its year, armageddon-satire *Dr. Strangelove*, all in a decade’s time.

Quiet and introspective, with unshakeable notions of what he wanted in terms of his art, expatriating to something resembling self-imposed exile outside of London, Kubrick was hardly anyone’s idea of an acid-head when he released *2001: A Space Odyssey* at the age of nearly forty. But the one-time photographer never stopped dreaming in caught moments, including the moment at the End of Moments, and few movies so split perfectly smart people between those who thought it was visionary and those who thought it was claptrap; what remains incontestable is its status as one of cinema’s landmarks. *2001* took science fiction from the merely galactic to the defiantly cosmic, imprinting on the cultural consciousness the flung sky-bound bone that—having just been used to commit the first murder—arcs into a spacecraft, the towering black monolith that greets mankind’s every quantum leap, the computer that speaks with unctuous malevolence, Strauss’ momentous theme that announces a new age, and the embryonic starchild that waits on the other side of a psychedelic plummet into the infinite, via its way station that takes the form of…
...a white room where Man waits for God, the Vast Endless, the Big Unknowable Next. Surely this is the same place the London band Cream sang of in their record issued three months after 2001 hit the theaters? *In the white room with black curtains near the station...where the sun never shines...where the shadows run from themselves.* An offshoot of the Yardbirds (as the post-psychedelic Led Zeppelin would be later) and the Graham Bond Organisation, Cream was begun when one malcontent, drummer Ginger Baker, recruited another, guitarist Eric Clapton, the two engaging a third, bassist and singer Jack Bruce, who made the band more his than anyone’s. Somehow the three found frisson in the fact that none of them much liked the others and that all were blues purists who had little use for psychedelia, apparently the basis for Cream becoming, by the summer of 1967, the English psychedelic band after the Beatles and Pink Floyd. Their album *Disraeli Gears*, with its swirling cover by poster artist Martin Sharp (Essential Psychedelia #43) and surrealist blues like “Tales of Brave Ulysses,” “Strange Brew,” “World of Pain” and “Sunshine of Your Love,” practically vibrated from the record shelves.

Opening the follow-up *Wheels of Fire*, like so much of the greatest psychedelia from Donovan’s “Sunny Goodge Street” to the Beatles’ “I Am the Walrus” to Jimi Hendrix’s “All Along the Watchtower,” Cream’s most enduring song “White Room” is a mix of the transporting and portentous, at once otherworldly and threatening. It depicts a love affair poised between deliverance and collapse so vividly and with such drama and mystery as to be a small movie in itself, written and recorded by Cream eight months *before* anyone had seen *2001*, assuming that Baker, Clapton and Bruce didn’t hop the wall at Abbots Mead and hide among the shrubs to catch a glimpse of Kubrick shooting his masterpiece’s final scene. In which case surely they could explain the movie to the rest of us, as perhaps “White Room” always has.
At first everyone told him the back porch was haunted and invited him to throw his rucksack in one of the other rooms, share an already shared bed or curl up on the floor. But when he pressed them they said, Well, no, not haunted exactly, not haunted all the time anyway. You only felt it was haunted when you were flying.

“Flying?” he asked, thinking his English must not be as good as he thought.

“Tripping,” said the woman whose name was Hannah but who called herself Little God, “stoned.”

Ah yes, he had learned those slang terms, he understood. Flying was the same? But in that case he would be okay, he would not be haunted, for he was here to observe the community, to be in it for a time but not part of it, and he was a teetotaler.

“A what?” whispered Little God, smoke curling out of the corners of her mouth. Was it the wrong word? “Whatever, man,” she said, “it’s all good.”

It was all good, for now he had a room to himself. Or something like a room, since the way they had nailed up the scrap lumber to close off the porch still allowed in the whistling wind. He bought a lamp from the thrift store down the street and ran in an extension cord; there was half a mattress in the porch room and if he put his rucksack at the bottom just right, he could sleep comfortably enough. There was a stack of broken chairs that Summer or Fawnstar—could that possibly be her name, anyone’s name, a name someone had actually chosen?—claimed to be planning to repair but never looked at. Other than that, there was just him.

During the day he moved through the collective and observed. At first he made notes of what everyone was doing, but then the man called Big Dig told him no, it wasn’t cool, observation could mess with their rhythm, that you start writing things down and they change, recording something changes it, so he stopped taking notes. He just watched, and then later on the porch he would write down what he could remember, whatever he thought might be important.

And Big Dig was right. Before, everybody had been playing to him and his notepad. Now that he wasn’t taking notes, after a while everybody just kind of
ignored him; they bumped and jostled around him, passed the pipe right past him, reached around him for a glass or a plate. It was like he wasn’t there, like he was a ghost. Which was funny in a way, considering he was living in the haunted room. *In the community but not part of the community*, he thought. He liked it. It was like being alive and dead at the same time, or being alive but the only one who knew you were.

He got so used to them not noticing that it was a surprise when, suddenly, one did. It was Little God, sitting cross-legged on the floor. She was stoned, even more so than usual; her dull eyes swept past him and then swept back, made an effort to focus as if seeing him for the first time, as if he was difficult to see. “You’re still here?” she said. “I thought you’d left.”

“Yes, he claimed, he was.

“Still writing about us?” she asked.

“Yes, he admitted, though in a way he wasn’t anymore, had stopped recording much of anything in his notebook. He was still there, but wasn’t sure what exactly he was doing now.

Little God nodded. She turned and stretched backward, reached a sheet of pink paper covered with a series of blurred blotted red images from behind her. She tore a piece of the sheet off and handed it to him, but even looking at one of the images up close he wasn’t sure what it was. It was a face, maybe. Maybe human, maybe not.

“Thank you, no,” he said and pushed the square back toward her.

But Little God just shook her head. And when he kept his hand held out, she lazily reached out with both her own. With one, she took the square; with the other she reached out as if in slow motion and touched his lips, parting them with her fingertips. He let her do it, and let her, a moment later, place the paper on his tongue. It tasted slightly bitter, but only slightly. She kept her finger there, just inside his mouth. “Just hold it there,” she said, “don’t swallow it.” And when he nodded, she slowly withdrew the finger.

Maybe it was a defective tab, because nothing was happening. “Just wait,” Little God said. “It’ll come.” But it didn’t come. How much time went by? It felt like a
lot of time, hours perhaps, but the hands on the clock hadn’t seemed to move much. What time had it been when she gave him the tab? He couldn’t remember. But every time he looked at the clock, the hands seemed to be in the same place.

“Where are you going?” Little God asked.

What? He hadn’t been aware he was going anywhere, but yes, it looked like he was on his feet. He was so concerned about what would happen once the drug started working that he wasn’t paying attention, really. He was anxious. He needed to stop being anxious since the drug wasn’t working, it was a defective batch, or his tab hadn’t gotten painted properly, if that was how they got the acid on it—how was he supposed to know how they got the acid on it? He wasn’t an expert, he never claimed to be.

A voice was calling from behind him and it took him a moment to realize it was Little God. Where are you going? she was calling out, or rather had called out—it was hard to know if it was happening or already had happened. And there was his own voice, coming from a place where he knew his body not to be. Who had gotten hold of his voice? To my room, the voice said from behind him, and yes, that made sense, because his body already was there, already in the porch room, waiting for the voice to catch up.

Once there, once around his familiar things, everything seemed fine again, normal. Yes, that was all he needed, some time to himself. He just imagined everything, nothing was really happening, he was just fine. He picked up a book, began to flip through it.

For a moment the letters had a startling crispness and clarity, then began to pulse slightly. When I have killed, he read, I make a pile of stones, a cairn, and I set in my memory who it was, what it was that died there and how. My mind is shaped like a map of these cairns.

Excuse me? he thought. What book was this? He tried to turn it over to look at the title, but no matter how he turned the book, he couldn’t see the cover. And when he turned the page of the book, it was still the same page, and the same words, and somehow he knew they were words of a book that hadn’t been written yet, that what he was reading wasn’t a book, or not yet a book, but that he’d plucked something out of a web of a future time without getting entangled himself, like a ghost might.

And when he thought that word, ghost, he remembered that this was the room that was haunted. My mind, he thought, is shaped like a map of these cairns.
What cairns? The room flickered around him. He found he couldn’t move his arms—and then, unexpectedly, he knew now he could, but had to move them carefully if he was to keep them from breaking off. He moved them so slowly it was as if they weren’t moving at all. There were shapes all around him, and he moved his arms through them so slowly that he did not disperse them; they were all his own shape, all the places his body had been in the room, a strange fleeting, rustling in the air, time overlapped and smearing together. There were other shadows too, and perhaps these were the ghosts the others had meant. But he was more frightened by being surrounded by a dozen versions of himself, some paralyzed, some moving so fast they could barely be perceived.

And there was a sound too, a moaning that part of his mind knew he always had heard, a moaning he had thought to be caused by wind through the gaps in the walls but now he wasn’t so sure. When he brought his ear close to the outer walls, the moans weren’t any louder and maybe softer. There was wind whistling through the gaps, but this moaning, moans, and not just any moans, his mind told him, but the moans. Part of him was terrified to realize this, but another part was more terrified because it wasn’t sure what exactly it was that had been realized.

He fell back on the half mattress. Around him the room throbbed and his own shapes circled him and the moans grew. He felt it all swirl around him, the room growing darker and darker until it seemed there was no room but only blackness and the moans.

Then for one brief moment there was Little God over him, slapping him, and Big Dig there beside saying, “What else was in it, do you think?” and the improbable Fawnstar—Fawnstar?—rubbing his temples. He turned his head weakly to one side and retched but nothing came out, then he drily retched again and blacked out.

He awoke in the hospital, his rucksack stuffed into the space beneath the end table. Eventually the nurse came, and nodded and smiled and spoke to him like this wasn’t the first time they’d had a conversation. He apparently had been speaking to people, speaking for hours, or his voice had; he had—so the doctor told him—been only technically dead rather than actually dead. An important difference, the doctor claimed. What was it that he had ingested exactly? How had he gotten to the hospital? Had he walked? Had someone dropped him off?
After a few days he felt all right. Eventually they let him leave, though he had nobody to pick him up. His rucksack had all of his possessions except for his notebook, and when he went back to the house to get it, he found the place abandoned. The porch was as it had been—boarded over in a room, same stack of broken chairs, same half-mattress—but his notebook wasn’t there. The rest of the house was an empty shell mostly taken by fire, apparently a long time before, though he didn’t understand how this could be.

For years he forgot about it. He wandered through the rest of his life, dabbled a little in this, a little in that; for a time he was a step away from the street. He learned to hide his accent, then learned when it was advantageous to bring it out, even magnify it. He published a number of articles, then a book, then another.

Then, suddenly, it became clear that he knew just enough about any number of things for someone to decide he might be useful. He was hired to wear a suit and tie and sit in a room for eight hours a day with five other people, considering ethical and political problems, some practical, some abstract. A question would be posed and then they would think it through aloud until their voices were hoarse. They talked and argued and a microphone with a green light in the center of the table recorded the discussion and, presumably, someone transcribed it and it was shared with the people who paid to have the question discussed. It was a strange profession, and sometimes he wondered if he wasn’t in some very special sort of hell.

And then one day in the middle of considering the best way to warn people thousands of years from now—when perhaps language doesn’t even exist—that an area is dangerous, that the ground and air and water are shot through with deadly but invisible poison, he flashed. He remembered the trip, the ghosts in the room, and the moans; and all of it, despite the time passed, was so vivid, so real, that for an instant he was sure he was still in the porch flying. My mind is shaped like a map of these cairns, he thought. The moans were terrible, and he could feel his vision tunneling down to darkness, and knew that he would soon black out.

Until a hand touched his shoulder. “All right?” the woman next to him asked, a behavioral psychologist who often acted as if she were in charge, though whether she was, nobody seemed to know. The woman was looking at him with what he suspected was supposed to be relaxed calm, though it was slightly too studied to come across that way. His vision still throbbed slightly. She looks like Little God, a part of him thought, though he knew that part of him was wrong; Little God and this woman were not remotely alike.
Aloud, he didn’t express any of this. Aloud, he said “Fine.” Then he began to speak not to the woman beside him or to the rest of the group but to the microphone with the green light on it. *Recording something changes it,* he thought, and imagined aloud black basalt monuments, leaning columns that would be perceived as threatening to collapse, electrical barriers somehow powered by lightning and by machinery capable of staying functional for thousands or tens of thousands of years, the slow release of noxious gasses and smells, and, above all, stone carved and sculpted just right so that the instant it was touched by the slightest wind, it would begin to moan.

And then he opened his mouth and let the moans, lodged inside him all these years, come out.
Sitting in the foreground, framed by the Family, Sly looks like he just might fly away. That was my first thought—or how I remember it. On closer inspection of the album cover, I determined that what might appear to be some fussy flounce of a collar wasn’t just a funky gabardine mini-cloak: *Sly’s got wings*, I thought. I was sure of it.

We find our superheroes when and where we need them. The spring of 1968 I was living part time on the radio. Only six, I already had a sense that I was ready to be “out there”—wherever it was that the sound defined: out there along the AM band; and *inside* that feeling that music had gotten a jump-start on. For a black girl growing up on the West Coast, the messages were mixed and coming fast; for every gain there was punishing loss. Too many my age watched a parent or an uncle or a down-the-block teacher tearfully stoic before a murmuring television screen, mourning the passing of yet another leader, chance or dream. It was a season of assassination, and we didn’t know that early spring there would be more to come.

We find our succor where we can. In April 1968 anyone who had felt a lightness of heart linked to the promise of what might be was shattered by the news of Dr. Martin Luther King’s murder at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. But living on the radio, I found light and hope, and evidence of a new notion of blackness, one that was self-defining, unyielding—one that, for all our loss, seemed not too far away. The soul station certainly said so. The title track of Sly and the Family Stone’s *Dance to the Music*—2:59 seconds of relief from the grief—was everywhere; its elation, in the face of all the sadness, was a balm.

The Family Stone was a DayGlo patchouli and pot-scented San Francisco flat with soul food cooking in the kitchen. The multiracial crew of musicians in paisleys and acid-greens spun a mix of sounds that wasn’t straight-no-chaser rhythm and blues but added to the flash of brass and thudding strut of a bassline the texture of frayed guitars and baroque swirls of psychedelia. It was California, the edge of the world reflecting whatever little experiment was going on in my multiethnic elementary school playground: I saw *us* in *them* but, more significantly, them in us—an openness. “Dance to the Music” was hope on vinyl by way of a DJ and
musician who saw possibilities in juxtapositions, a performer whose stage name was a gift of chance; a school friend’s transposition of letters (in which Sylvester became Slyvester, who then became Sly) was an apt rechristening of an artist who would go on to cannily fuse genres, pen songs about unity and identity and pride, and make it all sound something like a party. Despite its sunny effervescence, the music announced—no, demanded—with after-the-storm clarity: We aren’t going backwards.

Reportedly, perhaps apocryphally, the band saw the album that featured “Dance to the Music” as a compromise. But to my ear the band figured out a way around shaving off the edges and diluting the essence of sadness and loss and boldface headlines that had to be avenged; you could hear the neon Bay Area influences—shards of Sly’s audio-omnivorous radio playlist (the Rolling Stones, San Francisco’s Beau Brummels)—but there also was a foot planted firmly in a people’s history: the call and response of black church, Larry Graham’s way-down-in-the-basement low bass and deep cavernous singing voice, the sweat-and-blood risks that come with self-definition. Sly wasn’t just the architect of a new sound but of an elaborate platform for staging his funk sermons, for extolling infectious hands-across-the-divide homilies while also pressing for not just acceptance but respect. Just a few revolutions into the twelve-minute sequel “Dance to the Medley,” a long loop of a groove telegraphs not just where they were headed but the corner they already were turning; the extended jam/collage sounds like a series of from-the-street testimonials, an ebullient forward-march. Throwing a little psychedelia at the chaos, Freddie Stone’s guitar lines would etch their way into black music’s consciousness along with Graham’s bass—a funkified Morse code that echoed in form and spirit across genres and decades.

Black America wasn’t only looking for a model but wide-open space. It was looking for a place to just be. This is what that music didn’t just announce, didn’t just demand, but celebrated. In the Family Stone’s brief life the band didn’t just alter music but called into question labels that corralled personal expression, or tried to: Sly played with those expectations, and that influence is still traceable, palpable, from free jazz and funk to neo-soul to the first effervescent years of trip hop, from Sun Ra’s Atlantis to Miles Davis’ Bitches Brew to Funkadelic’s Maggot Brain to Tricky’s Maxinquaye. “Dance to the Music” was an exhortation, a ticket to fly, like Sly.
Mathematician Emile Borel posited that infinite monkeys with infinite typewriters would ultimately type out the works of Shakespeare, but there were only four Monkees—Davy, Micky, Mike and Peter—and what they would produce with their musical instruments would be a subject of some consternation, even for them. Before the end of the second (and last) season of their NBC television series, the Monkees already were bristling against their image as an invented band, having fired music supervisor Don Kirshner and asserting their own control in the studio with Headquarters, which hit number one on the charts for a week in the summer of 1967 before being unseated by Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band. When the Beatles embarked on their Magical Mystery Tour (see Essential Psychedelia #5), they were embraced by fans; when TV’s Prefab Four ditched their TV masters, fans had to wrap their minds around a film called Head. One early sign in the movie that the band is starting to rend the veil occurs when the frame fills with little TV screens, accompanied by an altered version of the band’s TV theme:

Hey, hey we’re the Monkees
You know we love to please
A manufactured image
With no philosophies.

You say we’re manufactured
To that we all agree.
So make your choice and we’ll rejoice
In never being free!

The predicament for the Monkees throughout Head is how to escape being trapped in a big black box, which could stand for television, celebrity, the perception of...
their limited talent, or reality itself. *Head* is about artifice and getting out of it, musing on militarism on and offscreen, and life as a McLuhanesque media maze.

From the opening sequence, the viewer sees this is no mere Monkees episode. Micky Dolenz runs with his other bandmates trailing behind him, breaking the tape of a bridge opening, which some have suggested marks the film’s break with linear time. He leaps from the bridge and is retrieved by mermaids in a solarized sequence scored to one of psychedelia’s most underrated songs, Gerry Goffin and Carole King’s “Porpoise Song.” At the end of the film, we loop back to this sequence—with all four band members plummeting from the bridge—before seeing them submerged in a tank on a flatbed being driven back to the studio. The Monkees will never escape their physical and psychic cage. A Coke machine that appears in the middle of a desert is destroyed more than once in the film, communicating the same message about the commodification of culture as the explosions in Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Zabriskie Point*.

The title of the film is elusive, despite the band’s ending up at one point as dandruff in a giant Victor Mature’s hair, but the word “head” was also a synonym for the sort of turned-on spectator who knew how to savor the film’s images and jokes. The “screenplay,” an LSD-guided shuffling of transcribed conversations from a stoned weekend with the band, is credited to director Bob Rafelson and Jack Nicholson (who shows up momentarily at the half-hour mark). The Monkees are joined in their hallucinatory escapades by Annette Funicello, Sonny Liston, Timothy Carey, Teri Garr, and Frank Zappa, who tells Davy to spend more time on the music then exits the scene accompanied by a talking cow.

*Head* plays with images of Davy Jones as the dreamy lad, Micky Dolenz as the man of action, Michael Nesmith as the sensible yet laconic voice, and Peter Tork poking fun at his reputation as the quartet’s “dummy,” contemplating a melting ice cream cone like a holy fool. The film was a box-office disaster and nearly everyone who watched it was flummoxed. Today *Head*’s parodies of movies and veering back and forth through scenes bears some resemblance to the methods of another psychedelic quartet, the Los Angeles audio troupe the Firesign Theatre, particularly in their 1970 late-night TV-channel-changing-influenced masterpiece *Don’t Crush That Dwarf, Hand Me the Pliers*. Rather than a career suicide note, *Head* is a freewheeling experiment in freedom from a band that knows it’s never been free to make its own destiny.
Steve Erickson
ESSENTIAL PSYCHEDELIA #30
“Child of the Moon,” the Rolling Stones
To the extent that psychedelics made a good time better, the Rolling Stones were all in favor. To the extent that psychedelics were a tool of spirituality, revelation, transcendence, the Stones could reliably have been expected to say, Fuck that. Only three years before psychedelia, after all, they began as a tough blues cover band in London, and for all their psychedelic flourishes, even the distinctly trippy “Have You Seen Your Mother” and “Paint It Black” (*I want to see the sun / Blotted out from the sky*) evoked venom and doom. So the Stones never were persuasively psychedelic in spirit, their forays quite rightly smacking of careerism—but because they had become rather expert careerists, and notwithstanding the shabby reputation of their 1967 extravaganza *Their Satanic Majesties Request*, once the clouds of bad faith parted there was left the evidence of very good records that were psychedelic if only in the most cynical sense: “2,000 Light Years From Home,” “Dandelion,” “I Am Waiting,” “Backstreet Girl,” “We Love You,” “She’s a Rainbow” (neatly plagiarizing Essential Psychedelia #24) and the glimmering “Ruby Tuesday,” which met the Beatles on their terms and more than held its own.

Maybe more a surprise to them than to anyone, even after they discarded psychedelia by mid-1968 its exotica still had them in its sway. “Jumpin’ Jack Flash” and the Days of Rage anthem “Street Fighting Man” announced a new band getting back to where they once belonged, as their rivals might put it—yet you don’t have to listen too hard to still hear sitars in the latter’s fadeout, ruined and ill-fated Brian Jones earning his paycheck one final time. Even the rhythm-and-blues saxophones seem to drip from the record Dalí-like. The flip side of “Jumpin’ Jack Flash” was “Child of the Moon,” making for not only the greatest two-sided single by the Stones but as good a two-sided single as made by anyone; written for Mick Jagger’s girlfriend Marianne Faithfull, who broke men’s hearts all over the planet just by walking its surface, the record is alluring and frightening both, strange voices squawking over the intro—a song overrun by magical winged beasts who keep threatening to fly off with it into the lunar light. Thus the band said goodbye to not only their past but ours, with the storm threatening in the not-so-distant future and love just a kiss away. As everyone was growing lost, the Rolling Stones were finding themselves.
In snow so thick each could barely palp the other, a woman and a boy stood side by side at the property edge of a cottage neither had seen before, beside a motorcycle that had just finished crashing, waiting for its gashed-open rider to die. This was the one time they would stand together with nothing between.

It was 1988, the biggest blizzard to reach this part of Colorado since the Nineteenth Century. The woman and boy stood in poses of familiarity, like they knew they were meant for one another, this first meeting fraught with the relief of reunion.

They shivered and danced at the knees. She wore a robe and held it tight. This was their middle moment, paused as if in wait for a long-abandoned winter house to get warm after their arrival at midnight, turning on the heat. The property extended away from where they stood. The motorcycle rider lay on his face, the gash in his side streaming forth in welcome, the back of his leather jacket spelling TARKOV in white thread lost in the snow.

Last words in a language they couldn’t grasp.

Those words finished, the air turned.

Committing to memory the shape, the sized blur of the other, they went in opposite directions, Laura Selwyn into the cottage, Fritz into Tarkov.

Something almost there before his eyes, on his back, across the millennium lip in 2008. A blizzard was coming tonight that would dwarf the one he’d arrived in, bridging a twenty-year lull.

Fritz sniffled, sucked down sour, turned over inside the shell so that he was facedown, his back to Tarkov’s face, his face to Tarkov’s spine. He was the size of a boy and also a molecule, Tarkov the size of a man and also a mansion. Fritz could fill almost all the space he’d been given, stretched thick in a stiff sleeping bag, or he could fill almost none, miniaturized in unlit depots, trains rolling in after two in the morning, grease-headed passengers pressed against unshaded
windows looking out at piles of rubble and factories with letters falling from their flanks, street signs in a pile, home to all the scavengers of Kiev.

He yawned, scratching the surfaces around him, agitating the wreckage of the mind he lived in: the summer steppe, Tarkov at nineteen.

A farmhouse, a family at ease around a broad unsanded table with benches on two sides, bowls and platters in the center, high seats for the patriarchs at the head and foot, bottles making the rounds.

Tarkov was out in the meadow behind, his place set, his bowl untended. He had taken the two-man work saw from the shed and dragged it on the ground through the wheat; sufficiently alone, the wheat cold and sharp at that distance from the family meal, he took it upon himself. Its teeth ground into his skin, redoubling the noise of insects grinding.

It was clumsy, meant for two, but he worked it. The image lingered inside him of cutting down an unused wooden structure, something built long ago and isolated now in a field whose home had moved away. Pulling the saw across himself and pushing it back, amazed at how much skin he had, he would cut it down like an old tree; he knew it would take a long time and that it would not be pleasant work, but he grew surprised at how long, how unpleasant.

It became clear that it would not end this way. He was tattooing his insides, carving channels with the work saw, new courses and grooves in his physical self, reseating his spine. But he would not die at night in the Ukraine in 1978.

The cuts instead revealed something that, if not quite purpose, was energy, and a map, going in a direction. Something geometric in which he was a corner, to and from whom lines to others would connect, the whole shape carrying such charge that he couldn’t pull away. So he stole an uncle’s motorbike and peeled off to Kiev, never taking his seat at that table. Tarkov closed his eyes and saw himself a decade later as he would be, or would have been, that night in the Superdome in Denver on his first and soon to be last American tour, winter of ’88.

He shrugged with a surge of adrenaline, aggression, ambition. He leaned, like he had all along the mountain and desert roads of the country-continent, and all through the Urals and the Caucasus and across the plateau of the Ukraine and up the Bulgarian coast ten summers running, building his name. But this time the ground was an inch closer, rising with the snow, and it tongued his shoulder, enough to flip him over the wall of the path he’d been cutting and for him to skid
and tear across planes of ice. The edge of the sky reached out sideways to slash into him as he fell, deep and wide enough for Fritz to fit through.

He came to rest in what, thereafter in history, would serve as winter garden to Laura Selwyn, who would stand nearby and watch him house, in death, the boy she had for a moment stood beside and with whom it would then be her lot to live.

Laura Selwyn came out at dawn, 2008.

She could now see the snow she’d heard from her bed last night. It had fallen so hard it covered the body. She stood on her porch with the shovel, dusting the snow around her feet, debating whether to uncover the body or leave it under as if the snow would bury it forever, as it had the motorcycle. She had her big boots on over her socks under her nightgown and a heavy coat over that, down to her lower knees; by now she was well into mid-life, beyond the span of anyone she had known or expected to know.

It went on like this for another minute. Though she wasn’t mistress of her own schedule, it permitted her to linger a while longer. She imagined the body swallowed up, leaving her alone from now on. She tried to feel gladness at the opened plane before her, the room for breathing, but felt only the tragedy of too much space and too little person. So she hurried to uncover it, spurred by the fear that her passing wish for its absence had been granted and she would find nothing but snow the deeper she dug.

There, eventually, it was. She could feel sweat running down her fingers inside her gloves, making them heavy.

She would turn the body over to avoid bedsores. She smiled under her wool headcovering at the familiar thought, put her foot where the handle was screwed into the shovel’s bowl and worked it under the belly. Come sunrise she flipped the body onto its back to face what was beaming down; she likened this to the turning of an hourglass, setting the new day adrip.

Now her face and the body’s face had nothing but cold between them. She looked down at Tarkov’s scars and beard, frostbitten neck and broken nose, the teeth that remained jagged in the gums, and saw in its eyes the animate presence of Fritz within, and knew he could see her. She went to fetch breakfast and came back carrying a bowl and a cup; kneeling, she spooned a few drops of coffee onto the lips, waited for them to sink in like water on the dirt of a plant, then spooned a few
drops of porridge. She pictured Fritz bunched up birdlike near the mouth; some of what she spooned in leaked out the gash in the body’s side.

She wanted to ask Fritz how he had slept and what his plans for the day might be. But she resisted, seeing in such urges signs of a loneliness-madness that she wanted for as many years as possible to keep confined to her outer edges. Diverting these thoughts, she looked out at her property in the morning that was going bright, at the fallow field and rocks halved by snow; this had all come with the cottage but, she tended to think, had grown over time. Had grown as time, time accreting like roughage over a farm gone to seed, roamed over by half-feral animals that humbly bred and died under such cover as they could find. It was a twenty-year field. The year—as she knelt there with the shovel, catching her breath and smelling bread that would soon be ready—was 1988.

No it wasn’t, anymore: Twenty years had fallen on top. She scolded herself, like she’d gotten confused again; perhaps the time for such confusion, of blending times in preparation for when all times would be one, was upon her already, and the time to do the thing that had been hers to do had gone sweet with rot.

She swatted such thinking away. Gathering up the bowl and cup, she turned indoors from the body, its mouth steaming with sunlight.

Bread taken from the oven, somewhat burnt, and coffee cooked—she always loved that phrase, to cook coffee—and poured, she sat scraping black knots off the loaf with a butter knife, piling them on the tablecloth.

For now, time was hers. 1988: That she’d thought of it this morning stayed with her; she would use part of her day to float back to the convent.

There was nothing on, not television or radio or even a dishwasher or digital clock. A space heater. There were outlets, but they were free; the cords of several appliances—microwave, iron, toaster—she kept rolled up nearby, to be used for brief minutes at a time. It wasn’t silence she wanted but other sounds, buzzings that rose when the air could accommodate them.

First, though, she would plug in the telephone. Whenever she thought of 1988, she thought of Tarkov—not in death but in life, the living, singing, crusading man. She had ordered his audiocassettes from a distributer in Iowa—all four of his hit records in their original Soviet-Pop Editions—and paid by credit card, but they had yet to arrive. She called, asked when they would come. They were coming, she was told.
When? she asked.
They’re in the middle, she was told. In a great middle, coming your way by truck.

She hung up the phone, unplugged and bagged it.

The convent, summer of ’88.

She lay on a bunk with three other sisters and listened to the gasps through the wall, where one of them was Taking Her Turn in That Room.

Days at the convent were spent on the terraces surrounding the one-story structure where the nights were spent, attending to chores with a marked and encouraged slowness. She and her sisters passed the time singing, working the grounds and gardens, fruits and vegetables, making honey and citrus liqueurs. She was, as long as she wished to be, in charge of lemonade.

Then one night came Her Turn in That Room. They were virgins until then. When it was time, she could order anything she liked for dinner and the other sisters would meet the delivery van and pay from their savings; she would unload from the paper bag its sub-containers and eat right from them or transfer their contents to a plate, and she could drink a little if she liked, and then it would be time for her shower, and the sisters would abate. They would be gone into their bunks by the time she came out, wearing a bathrobe made ceremonial in light of the way it soon would be opened. Thus clothed she would enter That Room and find its bedding still warm from the dryer; even the curtains and rugs would seem fresh and dry.

Laura tried to open her eyes in the cottage in 2008, to turn from this next part and elide or creep out of its way, or say to it, “How about a light lunch?” But no. There was a daytime reprieve in the blizzard now, between two nights of it, and there was nothing in this reprieve for Laura, to spare her the reminiscence. She’d known on that night in the convent, just as she knew tonight in her cottage, that something was coming—only she didn’t know it consciously; she treated her conscious mind like another person, an infirm mother or grandmother not to be shaken or upset, to be whispered and euphemized around, while the rest of her sat long and quiet with the truth of things.

Her takeout meal, Greek, reached the convent. Plastic plates and forks were laid out; the sisters stood in a silent quorum as she ate, forestalling their own dinners until morning when they would eat and she would not. She knew they
were watching her as she had watched others so often, one at a time over the years. She tried to eat at the same rate and in the same way as ever, trying not to taste the change on her fork, but she did taste it, it and nothing else. Then she was in the shower with the feeling she’d been escorted into it. The hot water was so dizzying it gave her to wonder if something had been laced through her eggplant.

Images of nextness: people stuffed to bursting with themselves, being borne away to give birth and, in so doing, die. Each sister, after Her Turn in That Room, departed to carry herself through to term, descending the steep road to Denver in a vehicle with tinted windows and being left to deliver her there, and to die and be born and live on there, anew, partially sensible to what had been, and to then one day, as a girl or young woman, return to the convent. If the baby were born a boy, a different orphanhood would unfurl.

Their was an eternal life in patches, sewed and taped together, full of whistling seams. This was what the sisters meant when they said, *She’s gone to Denver.*

When she stepped out of the shower, she found only a towel and the robe, her clothes gone, down a chute.

Laura Selwyn was in That Room, on a made bed.

She decided to explore, though she could see everything from where she sat. As she returned from her exploration, she started to gargle, feeling the ventricles in her throat that would make the sounds of her pleasure at Taking Pregnant By No Earthly Means.

It had gotten later, the lights dim like they’d been primed to reflect the change outside, evening into night. Her sisters listened through the wall; there was something else in That Room with her now. Opening her robe, she lay back on the bed.

Her voice began to tremble, not in scream, closer to song. It was a private song, almost a hum, in a language she didn’t know; she saw, heard in it that other bodies would be moved tonight, strewn with her into a common shape.

Her voice picked up, louder and louder like steam from her throat, corroding the sheet-rock wall to reveal a patchwork of pressed-up ears, overlapping into a sheet of mottled skin. It worked in her mouth counter to the more conscious flection of her tongue, enjoining it, *Be still, be still, let me do my work.*
Her eyes broke, glassy and wet. They filled with a scene of a racing motorcycle and a running boy under the slit sky, darting, covered not in blood but in a biology flowing from her.

They harmonized. Each sang its part and together roughed out a story. She had all the towels on her now: *Pace yourself*, went the chorus. *You have a long way to go tonight, and all of it steep, dim, petitioning for movement against all of ice.* On her back in That Room, making contact with nothing but the towels, she let what had to happen happen. When it was done, surprised she could move, she left That Room; wrapped in her robe again, the convent showed itself to her in emptiness. The sisters were gone, stowed in closets and under loose floorboards and in toy chests, or lost among earlier days or other versions, faded to pencil sketches that had never seen ink.

The blizzard covered the convent. Nothing but white and steep all around, gigantic drop-offs from which she could not fall.

She ran. Out of breath, groping through middle air as white as ground and sky, sticking her hands as far out as she could in prayer that some guide would take them, she pressed on into the backcountry. The lights of Denver in the distance rendered some of the flakes more orange.

Fritz was in this too, fighting his way toward her.

Together they plied the graven course of Tarkov’s demise, the tracks of his wheels still fresh in the snow.

Laura arrived first and knew to wait. She relished what she took as the end of the past. Then Fritz stood beside her while the body finished its preparations. As if for the sake of modesty, an obscuring haze escaped the body’s side as the boy made his way in.

In her kitchen with bread all around her in 2008, Laura Selwyn returned to her present self. The fallen snow outside her windows took on the blue of pre-sunset, rolled out low onto the ground, the sky switched off until it opened with more blizzard in an hour or two.

It was time for a warm shower, then to see what she had in the freezer or in cans for dinner. First, as a comedown from extremity, she let boredom have its turn with her, settling into her chair beside the space heater.
Unsure if she’d eaten or not, showered or not, tried or not to nap, Laura Selwyn came down her back steps with a tray balanced in one hand and the shovel over her shoulder.

She was walking around and around the body without having yet flipped it. Inside, Fritz could hear the reverberations of her footfalls outside in the snow. *Leave by dawn*, they said.

She knelt to settle the tray on the snow, then removed a steaming bowl of tomato soup and began to spoon it into the mouth. Supping, Fritz could see steam across the portholes of Tarkov’s eyes, not bad to watch given that sometimes at night awful things came. He tried to read his fortune in that steam. There were infinite chances for him in this universe, but each had to be treated as if it were the only one. He reached up and smudged condensation across the veins of his wrist, licked it off, testing.

Laura put the soup bowl down and took up her shovel. She turned the body over, imagining its tomatoey mouth washed clean in the snow. When she was finished, she looked for the bowl and found it gone.

*So it begins*, she thought. *Thick and heavy.*

A buzz worked up in Tarkov’s interior on this second and final night of the blizzard.

Fritz roamed the troughs. There were glimmers down by the spine, in a solution, electric fish flashing, awakened or newly hatched. Tendrils rested on his back as he pressed his face down. He pushed deeper in, scattering the fish, submerging himself in the saw groove where the spine rested. *I am the one who will make it*: The thought, his first in that language, surrounded and protected him as he swam.

Beyond the liquid he alighted on a shore he’d never had the breath to reach. He inhaled the last of the old, inhaled the first of the new. The way down from here was a rock slope; he had to be careful, and held onto the far side of the spine, replacing one hand with the other when the shock got too strong, peeling away bits of matter wedged between the vertebrae, balling them between his fingers, clues for later. Long nerves lashed at his knees but they couldn’t hold him back or knock him down. He traveled the grooves that Tarkov had carved in himself with the saw that summer night, pathways through a wild park.

It got bluer. Ice floes, slabs thick and square as granite, thrown up on the banks by recent swells. Fritz came to where it was cold and dim, only blue, the hue pervasive, grooves unworn by foot travel. On this far shore nothing had been used up.
He could feel the dead man’s furnace flare. Ambition, of manic and unnegotiable purpose, burned the disused passageways clean. It turned itself on just as it had that night in the Ukraine in 1978, a boy alone in a field, the words and melodies cascading over each other, and survived all this time as blue, blue-green, shock, fish, and memory, sustaining the life of a Fritz that hadn’t aged an inch in the twenty that it had huddled toward hatching, tingling with the thing that demanded to go on being sung.

Fritz was ecstatic. He heard the falling snow outside as fists pounding on the body’s edges, rooting him out, demanding he go. The walls and edges displayed images of Tarkov’s last night in Kiev before his American tour, all his harmonicas in their right cases, and Fritz could see tomorrow’s departure as the next in an infinite series. He would emerge into snow that had never before fallen on Colorado.

Laura Selwyn and her son rode up the path in a truck as the sun rose on what would be their first day in their new home. They carried a signed letter with the address and the terms and conditions.

Inside the cottage, Laura stepped from the shower and into the clothes she had laid out. She wore no makeup, pulled her hair back in a tight ponytail, doled balm over chapped lips. Turning the stove down low, she saw the truck pull onto her property; she stirred her porridge, salted and sweetened it. The truck pulled in further through the snow that had fallen the night before, heavier by far than the night before that.

Licking a little raw sugar from her fingertips, she packed a basket of apples, pears, cured meat, the remnant of yesterday’s bread, a cloth napkin, another. It must have been a hard night for that truck, she thought. The truck came to a stop and then Laura Selwyn and her son Fritz were standing in the yard. From inside the cottage, it wouldn’t be for her to know if they’d been unloaded from the cargo portion of the truck and stood in the snow as props, or if they had ridden in the cab like passengers and stood now as subjects. She looked more, saw Iowa plates.

The presence that had been with her in That Room returned. It might have been maddening that it was here and wouldn’t speak, but she wasn’t maddened. She knew all it could have told her, and it was simple: They were here now, to stay awhile, and thus it was her duty to leave.
She looked again at the next Laura Selwyn and Fritz on the lawn, standing near where Tarkov was so covered in fresh snow they couldn’t see him. Swallowing the last of her porridge, she filled the bowl with warm soapy water and left it to soak.

FriCarrying her picnic basket and a simple leather satchel, her boots laced, Laura locked the door. Then she walked into the yard, head high. “The key is under the mat,” she said.

The Laura Selwyn who had been waiting, and her son beside her, were eager to enter what was now their home. “Where is your son?” she asked the Laura Selwyn who had lived here and was leaving.

Laura turned from the question, face into her scarf. She’d resolved not to look at the cottage again. The driver of the truck from Iowa, who had remained in the idling cab, reached across to open the door for her. “I go as far as Denver,” he said, adjusting his mirrors and gathering strength for the drive out, through all that had fallen along the access roads, technically closed for the season, across the cliffs that cut this zone off from the others, and finally onto the highway.

The cab was full of song which, as they were backing out, Laura Selwyn recognized as the audiocassettes she’d waited so long for.

Fritz had left Tarkov before dawn, kissing the gash on his way out. Now he walked barefoot through the mountains, sometimes intersecting the old tracks of Tarkov’s motorcycle, sometimes the newer tracks of Laura Selwyn’s truck, but mostly cutting his own way.

He felt a voice coming up in him that he knew would be so loud he covered his ears before he heard it. Concussing the ice faces and mountaintops that looked down, the voice came in lyrics that translated as, I’m hatched! I’m hatched! and Fritz screamed it and sang it and felt it, his voice setting off such an avalanche that it buried all the former surfaces. He walked way up on a new one, on top of all that was under and past, buried farther underfoot than he could ever fall no matter how much footing he lost, on into a future that had not yet received its requirements, coming, as they were, across a great middle, from very far away.
The circumstances of the composition of “Surf’s Up” are by now well known: the falling apart in 1967 of Brian Wilson’s post-*Pet Sounds* magnum opus, the Beach Boys’ *Smile*; Wilson’s own erratic tendencies during the period; the sandbox inside Wilson’s house with the piano in it, where he and Van Dyke Parks wrote the song *in one hour*; Mike Love’s alleged distaste for the lyric (he since has recanted); Love’s browbeating of various parties to explain “columnated ruins domino,” the closest thing in the song to a refrain. So the story goes.

Wilson hated the vocal take from his 1966 piano recording and refused to be the group’s lead singer thereafter; this is just one of many enigmas relating to “Surf’s Up.” Various drafts were cobbled together in succeeding years, a lot of them with Wilson’s younger brother and fellow band member Carl singing lead for at least some portion. The incredibly beautiful group section at the end was created much later, and you have to admire the way the band shepherded the song to *some* conclusion, if not *the* conclusion, with little participation by Wilson, though it’s a measure of how inconclusive was their understanding of the issues that they later included “Disney Girls” on the album titled *Surf’s Up* from 1971.

So: When you say “Surf’s Up,” which song do you mean? Wilson recorded it again without the Beach Boys when he recreated *Smile* in 2004, adopting the form (if not the feel) of the *Surf’s Up* version rather than the version from the original *Smile* sessions. As with a number of other classics from the rock and roll era, it can be argued about “Surf’s Up” that there is no definitive recording; all versions, after a fashion, are partial or reconstructed. The same, moreover, is true of “Till I Die,” which immediately precedes “Surf’s Up” on *Surf’s Up*; it too appeared in a great number of iterations, each an attempt to deal with the somber intensity of the lyric.
“Surf’s Up” is the end of something, a eulogy, an aftermath, and Wilson apparently understood this in the double meaning of the song’s title (surf’s up in the traditional sense, but also surfing is over with, completed, done, finished), in particular the end of the Beach Boys as originally constituted (a bunch of friends and relatives singing and playing their own instruments and wearing matching shirts and wowing the teenage girls) perhaps because the times no longer permitted such innocence. In the historical moment in which “Surf’s Up” was written, “Eight Miles High” already had been released and Jimi Hendrix already was playing “Hey Joe” in the clubs, and for that matter the Beach Boys’ own “Good Vibrations” was under assembly, which means that history had lapped “Surfin’ USA” et al. No longer could you have fun till daddy took your T-bird away.

What did this time—which for lack of a better word we might call the psychedelic moment—mean with respect to Brian Wilson and the composition of the popular song? It meant, for example, modular composition. With “Good Vibrations” and Smile generally, songs were broken into constituent pieces that didn’t necessarily require relationship to one another, and then these fragments were developed independently and conjoined, sometimes simply for the effect of the conjunction, and allowed to amass value through adjacency. Modular composition. Another effect of the psychedelic on composition might be described as lyrical impressionism; in the non-linear psychedelic lyric the meaning of the words is not immediately apparent and often can be read in a number of ways so that the song isn’t easily depleted of its manifest content, or even of its latencies.

“Surf’s Up” is less modular than other compositions from the Smile period (“Heroes and Villains” is a good example), though its group ending is certainly sudden and startling. However it undeniably has an impressionistic lyric that
Wilson has credited in its entirety to Van Dyke Parks; in his later work Parks isn’t nearly as densely poetical as here (though he is exceedingly literary: c.f. 1967’s Song Cycle or even his much later collaboration with Wilson, Orange Crate Art), so the assumption must be that this particular lyric—as with others on which Parks worked during Smile—was generated in the furnace of the psychedelic time. Smile bears the marks of the counterculture in its oblique surface, its subtleties; it bears the marks of the peculiar growth spurt that afflicted Wilson’s compositions as he tried to grapple personally and artistically with what he was seeing and hearing around him in Southern California in the middle and later Sixties.

This abbreviated explanation of the lyric cannot fully describe its twists and turns in lines like: A diamond necklace played the pawn / Hand in hand some drummed along, oh / To a handsome mannered baton / A blind class aristocracy / Back through the opera glass you see.... And even Brian Wilson’s highly attenuated description of the song from a 1967 interview with Jules Siegel, available in full online, more obsurses than reveals the story:

Then even the music is gone, turned into a trumpeter swan, into what the music really is. Canvas the town and brush the backdrop. He’s off in his vision, on a trip. Reality is gone—he’s creating it like a dream. Dove-nested towers. Europe, a long time ago. The laughs come hard in ‘Auld Lang Syne.’ The poor people in the cellar taverns, trying to make themselves happy by singing. Then there’s the parties, the drinking, trying to forget the wars, the battles at sea. While at port a do or die. Ships in the harbor, battling it out. A kind of Roman empire thing. A choke of grief.

The dramatic pinnacle of “Surf's Up”—and I say this after several decades of listening to this song—would seem to come here exactly: A choke of grief heart hardened I / Beyond belief a broken man too tough to cry. In each of the recordings there’s a sort of romantic ledge here, in falsetto, a stilled moment of vocal tenderness. As with many great moments in the Brian Wilson oeuvre, falsetto. But for this listener the moment that stops me cold follows just after, the moment that awakens me from a slavery of self and transports me into the wonder of melody is the beginning of the third verse, which begins simply Surf’s up...mmm hmmm, mmm hmmm, some murmuring of assent, some phonemic abstraction as if the dreamy stage-memory of the first verses and the bridge has
As if there’s nothing to say after the words “Surf’s up,” not at first. It’s the inexpressibility trope, the one that Dante employed to repeated effect in *Paradiso* (“From that time on, my power of sight exceeded that of speech, which fails at such a vision”). Nothing more to say, nothing is sayable at all, until *aboard a tidal wave / Come about hard and join / The young and often spring you gave / I heard the word / Wonderful thing / A children’s song.*

If one were considering all this theologically (*Smile* was meant to be a “teenage symphony to God,” after all), the absence of the words in the first line in verse three are re-inscribed in the heard *word* at end of verse, which lands exactly like some analogue for the holy spirit, the very spirit of language or, in this case, the very spirit of music, the word in *children’s song.* The lyrics prior to verse three (*Are you sleeping, Brother John?*) glance off the French nursery song “Frère Jacques” and therefore emblematically, children’s song serving here as key for the unlocking of song in general. It’s a heretical theology, Wilson’s theology, in which the simplest of melodies is in some way supplanting the orthodoxy of the word. And right after Wilson and Parks pronounce this word, invoke the children’s song, “Surf’s Up” lifts into its acme of virtuosity, and on the 1971 version all of the Beach Boys commit to the astoundingly beautiful coda, the “Child is Father to the Man,” which has a sort of Gnostic theological intensity to it or a pantheistic ecstasy, in which the idea of *word* is borne out in vocal harmony.

“Good Vibrations,” with its warbling electro-theremin and extrasensory theme, would appear to be more psychedelic, and it is a profound and lasting example of Wilson’s mature style. But the comprehensive theology, the almost Plato’s Cave-like theater of melancholy that is “Surf’s Up,” its shockingly beautiful melody and then its development into harmonic release—these all make “Surf’s Up” even more unforgettable. Abstract, evasive, pensive, sad and then conversely affirmative, stately in its complex confirmation of loss and love, in which simplicity is both the generator of complexity and the occasion for a new sophistication in the popular song, “Surf’s Up” is not merely a psychedelic gem, it’s one of the very best rock and roll songs ever written.
Two books in 1968 investigated the varieties of hallucinogenic experience. Their portraits of psychedelic seekers taught readers how adventures in altered states of consciousness could find their way onto the page. Carlos Castaneda ventured out to the desert in search of a shaman. Tom Wolfe went on the road with Ken Kesey and a band of Merry Pranksters. Each book could be considered a work of ethnography and, for some, of exploitation. By the time *The Teachings of Don Juan* and *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* were a requisite part of the countercultural library, both Castaneda and Kesey had begun to distance themselves from hallucinogens as a primary vehicle for enlightenment.

Castaneda was a graduate student in anthropology when he met the *brujo* (sorcerer) Don Juan Matus in the Sonoran desert. His encounters with Don Juan read like turned-on Platonic dialogues. The other characters are “allies” and “teachers”: Mescalito (peyote), Yerba Del Diablo (jimson weed) and humito (a
“little smoke” prepared from psilocybin mushrooms). Don Juan guides Castaneda in his preparations and perceptions, finding a path “with heart” and journeying to become a “man of knowledge.” Plunging the reader into a world of magic and sorcery, The Teachings of Don Juan (subtitled A Yaqui Way of Knowledge) returned the idea of the sacred to those who might only have come into contact with drugs in dorm rooms. It might require an alteration in consciousness to imagine such a book—first published by the University of California Press—could ever be accepted as an anthropology dissertation. When Castaneda’s account was scrutinized, the author kept himself and definitive answers at arm’s length, privileging obscurity over clarity. “To ask me to verify my life by giving you my statistics,” Castaneda told Time magazine in 1973, “is like using science to validate sorcery. It robs the world of its magic and makes milestones out of us all.”

The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test is a kind of Canterbury Tales of psychedelia, a story of pilgrims with names like Cool Breeze and Mountain Girl proceeding by multicolored bus through a new American wilderness. Typography and punctuation running riot, Wolfe’s most enthralling and entertaining book is an attempt by the New Journalist to comprehend (although some might be tempted to say simulate) the hippie voice in prose. The central figure in his free-flowing narrative is Ken Kesey—novelist, outlaw, host of the LSD ceremonies known as the “Acid Tests,” great Promethean spirit of the age. Wolfe harnesses the narrative energy left behind when the author of One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest and Sometimes A Great Notion set his writing aside to voyage aboard the psychedelic vessel Furthur, a 1939 International Harvester school bus swathed in colored paint like a light show projected at a rock concert in a San Francisco ballroom. By the late Sixties, Kesey would become more famous in the popular imagination for what Wolfe wrote about him than for what the writer himself contributed to American letters.
It is hearing your voice in the electric
As the sun grazes the moist wind
Readying the night to shimmer
The glint of antlers, stars
A great heard of blue deer
Racing toward the glow of a morning fire
*Hayilkáá chîzh ko’*
The day rises just as all the
Deer, the Bi between big and little
All the ones I have góshdiyé
Burst out in prayer
Túnteel the Earth shakes her mane
And the dark water hurls in succession till
The land remembers no more people

In all this,
The songs go on
Tobacco gently burns and we ask the earth,
Be gentle with our children

Here her breath under the groaning ribs of a tipi
It is dry, bright, timeless our moccasins brush dust while
Cedar bears witness in smoke
The fireman’s tracks are lost outside in mud and rain
With the last of winter’s green grass growing through the old paths

The morning has become us
At the edge of the ocean
Where the holy ones gained a greater sense of becoming
I see your eyes in the ocean
*Godet’ aa il ijóói* the grace of grey green water
And you laughing at boyish screams and Donkey Kong
And I yank the wheel of my truck
Like the harness of a hard mouthed pony
Toward all of you and the coals of the fire
Pushing toward the earthen moon.
A figure is unfolding amid scrub oak and yellow pine. It is rising huge against the sky, turning as if to watch something go by (jets, clouds) or read something written on the weather, the high-up face a smear white as this page, black as this print, yellow as old news.

Try to identify this figure—I do. Plain face, weather eye. No caption.

The figure blows something, a fly or possibly a kiss, off its huge palm, and a wind rises, carrying sand and trash. In the gathering storm the figure can no longer be made out.

At the library the sand storm scrubs the print off a page. The blackened sand blows on, a turning column of letters, high as the sky, that gathers up a house in which a girl is standing at a window, that blows a man down. Blows a man down. A man down. The flying house takes the curves like an escape car. The girl holds onto difficult life with both hands, eyes streaming.

Over the bayou the hurricane slows. Lets fall the house, which comes to rest in a tree. Lets fall an El Camino and a jungle gym. A Department of Invitational Justice. Slows. Lets fall a plastic chicken. Slows.

The sand comes to rest on a page. It says:

At nine, Debbie’s father referred to her as “son” and “Roger Jr.”

Eleven-year-old Anne was misidentified as Edwin, a thirteen-year-old boy from the Bronx.

At twelve, Pat privately believed that she was a boy.

At fifteen, Barbara was described by relatives and friends as a handsome man.

Christine, also fifteen, passes for minor league baseball star Leroy Florida.

Katrina, twenty, is described as a “father figure” and “all man.”

All girls exposed to the Monoceros virus turn into men. Their faces grow hard and adult, like the hulls of boats. Their hands grow huge. At a median age of fifteen, their genitals become inflamed, then quickly—over a weekend, say—turn inside out; a vessel becomes, what, a club. Possibly a mast.
If girls become men, men become mythic. They use snuff and steroids, murder a steak. They crunch on tools and automobile parts.

Monoceros is a disease. It is also a way of life. It is a government, a campaign, a daily practice that some call sport, some religion, some art. It has offices and a good steakhouse. It does not have everything. But it has time.

One man put a face on Monoceros: Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr. A man’s man, a father figure’s father figure. He has two upper hands, a blacklist and a five-year plan. He says, “All news is good news.” He says, “Make my day.”

Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr. at a surveillance window in his mansion, La Tour d’Monoceros, raised high above the city: Everything caught his eye. Men playing, men squabbling, men clubbing men for sport. Automobiles carrying men to deal with men. He said, “This is a man’s—

“man’s man’s—
“world—”

Monoceros has abolished death for men, so old men, or men with flagging confidence in what passes for life these days, just slow into architecture. Their exposed backs crunch a little as the trucks roll over them. They live the way a tree lives: slowly.

The daily public beheadings are not called deaths, but taxes. Today, dying is something only girls do.

In La Tour d’Monoceros, there is a library of suicides. Dead girls, in photographs. Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr. extracts one. Bleached-white face. Sand in the eyes. What? What? He doesn’t comprehend it. “Delay by a day or two and you’d have been one of useros,” he says. “Useros! Write it down,” he tells an aide.

Girls wrote a letter:

“Death, we muster in the milky wetlands of childhood. Our hopes are slow and complicated—muted phantoms, difficult to comprehend; a strange daydreaming trying to be believed. We have believed. Our objections are unfolding. They have begun the long insurgency. Only, by the time they are full-grown, we will be men, and our objections will slip from our minds like a childhood daydream.

“You are a stripper in the marriage bed, Death, the betrayal of a vow it is always too late to take back. You are a ticket to Florida, Death; but the cost—the cost is very high....”
New New York: it’s no Emerald City. Here everything is made of men—houses, malls, schools, offices. Health food stores, kosher grills. Columns of bleached men support a library. Trucks pass, made of men held together with chains, rolling on rolling men, on roads made of men with curbs of men, laid neatly, back to back, on the ground. Building is meatpacking; a house is a species of cabin made of men fit together, laid end to end, heels exposed at the corners. In a house made of men, in a room made of men, men get laid with men on a bed made of men.

“No man is an island, something something; every man / is a piece of the something, a part of the main / something something,” says Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr.

“What is not made of men?” girls ask. The ground? Or is the ground made of very old, slow men, nationwide men, men deep in the world as in a bed? “Texas is made of men,” girls say. “No controversy there. And Germany.”

The weather? Or is the weather made of tiny, flying men, men like windows, difficult to see? On a summer day in the city, the breeze is seasoned with rich hints of Ken, Roger and Emanuel (even I catch them, rising off the page), and girls go upstream for fresh air, little feet slipping on sunshiny behinds. In the cool woods, they rest. Men at stud buck and rumble in the brush. In a grove of oaks, men compete in the Man Prix. Men troop up and down with men on their backs. Two men batter another with smaller men. Men point a man at a target made of men, then shoot. A miss.

A Miss Something writes her name. Print’s charming. “I,” she writes, sexually, and everything smears. Her image is a hint of yellow, deep in the mirror. She is trying to comprehend it. So many small details. She is a cloud or a constellation, not a girl. Or girls are made of flies, shrimp—strange darting things.

We say girls become men, but do they? By the time they are men the girls they were are dead. We say the girls are dead, but dead girls are no longer girls.

The late girls last in pictures—a Swiss miss rolling down a hill on a fresh spring day; a child star dancing on TV; a good girl making a bed, working a huge scrub brush over an oak cabinet. In photography the traveling today, the momentarily, is cornered into architecture. A childhood is fit to print, protected and handed down, like a gold pocket watch. It’s good on paper. But an image is a muted death, a burial in black and white, and these stills are not girls.

In bed, hand shoved into a “horological tool” a “medical device” a “time machine.” What is this landmark, this tiny milestone? Weather gathers. A star explodes under her palm.
Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr. is rolling through the city, his huge back curved as he examines his genitals, around which are smears of brain or something, not important. One sees on his back the letter M as he unfolds to hail his men (all men his men!), flies abuzz around his yellow eyes, strange eyes that are like crustaceans, set deep in little pockets of meat; a cloud of flies blackens the sky around him. A broadcaster plays “M is for Monoceros” and “Are We Not Men,” rallying many admirers who shake with belonging. Supporters express hopes that Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr. will live long and produce no daughters. A man boosts a man onto the back of another man to display his handsome build, his huge package symbolizing his passion for his compelling leader. Inflamed, Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr. rapes a supporter or two, bringing out, when his genitals flag, his second, smaller genitals (yellow gold richly studded with malachite? No, meat) to the violent approval of the people who call out “Most-wanted!” and “Department of the Interior!” Gold chains and watches fly into his truck bed. He catches a Cartier necklace on the mast of his genitals—star effect on the diamond pendant! Men dance, strangle chickens, hold up tiny Monoceros flags: on black, a white pentagon with a centered letter M.

Back at La Tour d’Monoceros, the rising wind batters open a window. It worries a black and white photograph out of a file, brushes it out of the window. Turning, turning, the photograph falls out of the sky. On the back of the photograph is written: Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr., age eight.

Photography is sunshine’s backlash. The exposed image reverses everything: a bleached cloud passes over a blackened sun. Suspended in the blackened sunshine a phantom stands, an immigrant from another constellation. (A girl is an immigrant. Yesterday is a constellation.) Onyx eyes turn white, eye-whites blacken in blackened faces. Bleached blood rolls milky down a blackened hand. Is an image a muted death—a burial in black and white—or a strange life trying to come true?

A little girl stands on the strand. Her prints are white on sands as black as print. We will call her Thursday.

Now say this reversed world is reversed. Blood turns bloody. The stuck breeze blows: a blue-green streaming. Thursday cuts the paper, passes through into time. If that is what you call this.

Reader, I am going in. This is writing, this is how it works, the writer puts on a new face and posts down into the day inside the day. The girl Thursday is like a case in which I am held and guarded, or a boat with her masts and rigging inside
her. Like a complicated breeze I move her—a slow way to proceed, but a way. Her white, white face was my hull; it shoves into the sunlight, cool and still, with no hint of need or worry; only in the skeptical little eyes am I exposed. I turn and turn, working my figure deeper into the day. Here I can do surveillance or eliminate a target. Monoceros is in my sights.

Thursday was standing in a room, at a window. In her, a mind. In the mind, a figure: the image of a girl, the blacks and whites reversed. Slowly the blacks bleached; her mind was white, a new page, and she could not remember the last one.

Flies abuzz at the window. Sun slipping across the pine shakes.

There was a cut on her hand. A key in her pocket.

She was dissatisfied. She wanted to crunch on diamonds, own jets. She wanted to damage something and to kiss something; she wanted to be something. A dancer, something coveted. Or an architect who designed a mighty city?

She moved across the room. Her image, cornered in a mirror, became pale, darting, strange. It was exposed—a wounded shrimp, something not necessary. A plain sight. A boy in a slip, she saw the slow eruption of the virus in her. Tomorrow, or tomorrow’s tomorrow, she would be a man. Chastened, she saw that she was already a corpse, the yesterday in today. Kiss that. She scrubbed her face with her hand, then laid her palms on the mirror. Planted a hard kiss on it. Palms against reversed palms, she buried her corpse in her image.

Flies battered the window. She shook with them and ignited. A stripper, she slipped her image off, her name off, her corpse off, and passed from the house as a cloud, a curve in the day. In the house, her image was stranded in the mirror. For today, it was safe there.

A girl only, stripped of her image, she passed through the city like a part of the sky. The sky that cornered around houses restaurants libraries, cloning them in reverse. She cloned the road in reverse, she cloned the faces of men, she cloned a way through Monoceros, which did not believe in her and did not see her. She was a diamond of mind.

She saw that today is a bloodletting, yesterday a corpse. She saw that tomorrow digests its prey, which is yesterday. The man digests the girl; a daughter is redefined as a private wound, mythic and protected. An archive, cornered in the library of a father. Some photographs.

Handprints on a mirror. A little key in her pocket. Where did the key fit?

Is death a stranded image, suspended life, or a difficult, necessary objection?

She saw what death was: a daughter. A tomorrow that, passing through
today, becomes only yesterday. Life was Monoceros, the city of men. Life rapes
death and breeds boys.

No girl is not an island, she had believed. Peaceful sand, but then she found
the prints.

She would kiss death in the mirror. She would clone death in reverse and, a
corpse in spectacular diamonds, give herself in marriage to life. The phantom girl
depth in Monoceros would scrub off her blackened face. The blackened constellation
would become diamonds. A girl would become not a man but a lady, the first lady
in all time.

But first, she would muster girls.

Thursday passed through the city like a breeze, and on every girl she brushed by
she left a listing letter M. Or was it a W? It wasn’t kidnapping. They came on their
own. If anyone questioned them, they said they were playing follow-the-leader, and
in this way, one after another, passing the last house, passing the grove where the
Man Prix was held, they left the living city and made their way, over ground that
appeared to be made only of earth and sand, into the bayou.


And a little house in the brush. The girls’ eyes open wide. The house is
made of wood!

The girls debate suicide and car bomb attacks, beheadings and kidnappings.
They lay plans to design a vaccine, or breed a counter-virus. They ignite. They play
baseball with a pine shake for a bat. Mee Mee shoves a bottle of soy sauce into an
oyster. Katrina shakes her chains.

It gets late. The girls display their genitals like pocket watches. They
root in their genitals and extricate tiny blue boats, car tools, bottles with charts
neatly rolled inside them. Girls strip and have sex with girls, hands neatly
shoving and opening.

Or not neatly. Let us acknowledge that. Girls struggle over girls, investigating
their smeared genitals like flies. A milky pap issues from their genitals; they smear
it on their inflamed faces; their hands fill with it; they sup on it, eyes rolling. Their
inflamed genitals empty their faces of blood; their bleached faces are set, delivered
over to strange itineraries. They become crustacean.

It’s a new day. Fair sky cupped in earth, a good fit. Sunshine stabbing the eye.
In every mirror, girls are mustering phantoms, practicing difficult daydreams. The
reversed image is an unknown figure they are trying to read, a chart of a new world. Every girl is a terrorist, and the image is already insurgency, because it’s all one to Monoceros, but the mirror makes two.

The girls are into mirrors! They carry them down to the beach, point them at flies, at clouds. They are cloning everything. Shrimp become two shrimp. Fish copy fish. Oysters wanted to be oysters, said they were bred for it; the sky mirrored the sand. We must clone Monoceros, girls said and, igniting one hundred pine trees on the beach, made a huge mirror out of sand. But how will they corner their prey? They list, dispirited. It has been a long day. “We can’t even carry this,” they say, and go back to having sex.

They leave the mirror on the beach, reflecting only the sky, on which a jet is writing something in reverse.

Where did Monoceros come from? June believes the void raped a meatpacking plant and the virus is their issue, but Barbara believes it travelled here from across the Milky Way. Anne says, “It’s your old First Cause playing party games. We’ve all known girls raped by a cloud or other weather. Like here’s something to remember me by, little lady.” Madison contradicts her: The virus escaped from a military research center. “Yes, created by men,” says Mee Mee, “but planted, the culmination of years of effort, in playgrounds around the world, to decide the long debate at last.”

The girls are dispirited.

“Then where did men come from?” says Page. “Are they just overstated girls? Yesterday’s militants come into their inheritance?”

“For that matter,” Elizabeth said, “where did we come from?”

A suspension of talk. No one is sure.

“From women?”

“‘Women’?”

“We breed like oysters,” said Madison. “We deliver our daughters into the breeze, broadcast them. They grow where they fall.”

Now the girls see that this is true. The sand is abuzz with tiny daughters. The girls gather them up in their hands and blow kisses. The tiny daughters dance. They will inherit the world!

“A Girl’s a Man for a’ that,” says Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr.
Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr. does his daily beheading in the Senate—a bloody shower stars the sand—then smears his bloody hands on the faces of the boy workers who carry out the parts. They dart out, hands full, eyes strange, as the people encourage them with bell-like calls.

Among the supporters outside, what passes for a short man—a girl named Madison—aims her bow between the columns where, she expects, Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr. will appear in a hurricane of blood. Her eyes are level.

Her target comes out carrying a little girl who wears a Chanel piece worked with the caption, Little Miss Mr.

Madison’s hand strains on the bow, then lays it down.

“There are reports of a growing insurgency,” said a reporter. “Comments?”


See Madison, back from a mission.

She is the very picture of a little girl: Short, fair, good as gold, her feet in flora, her tiny hands struggling to hold up a bloody club.

Stars in her eyes, blood on her hands. A bounty on her huge blue bow.

Good little girls are good the way wildlife is good, and only momentarily little. Charm is not a long-term plan. It is a local insurgency, of limited use to the mission. I wanted to tell you that the girls were still, in a complicated way, good girls. But that was not correct.

I will say it: the girls were angry, unfair and dangerous. I didn’t want to tell you, but girls sat on a man’s back and cut a bloody star into his white behind with a broken bottle. I don’t like it, but they hurt him with tools. They hurt him with documents. They raped him with a rolled newspaper. They ignited pieces of paper and let them fall on him, leaving blackened places. Girls played in the damage, slipping and rolling. Blood ran over their feet.

Who doesn’t like a little miss with bloody feet?

Girls say “let’s rumble!” and stab men and plant flags in the wounds and talk on the telephone. Girls strip men and use them for stud. Girls cut up men and root in the pieces for something to wear. Girls put soy sauce on men’s parts and sup on them like chicken. Girls placate their man houses then resume violence, every stab an exploding star. There is so much blood that my hands slip on the keys. Girls
strangle men with necklaces and kiss their blue faces. Girls worry a dead boy, crunch on his hands and feet. Their bloody faces bold and strange. They sup on the pieces—mm, mm, good.

But a little hard to digest. I didn’t expect it; did you? I didn’t want to know that girls were not good. I want to weigh girls and men and—I want to believe girls are batter than, letter than, I mean—what do I mean?

I am not sure there are girls, as girls, at all. Is it likely? What is a girl? It could be that girl is just a species of weather, or a sauce that gathers in low regions. It could be that girl is just smeared on the world. Girls erode into girl parts; blue eyes, white bows, charm, parties, pap, blood, tiny hands and feet mixed into a rich sauce. The surviving girls pass the cup around. It is a struggle to get it down, the eyes follow you, but I have emptied the cup. Blue fills me. I seem to see with my blood.

The eyes in my blood open.

Reader, you have seen the mighty figure of Monoceros. But I see another figure rising, a little girl as huge as a country or a constellation. I can see her tiny huge hands and her tiny huge feet. She is crunching a city underfoot, she is standing on a hundred thousand corpses, and she is beheading. She beheads an architect a coach an informant the proprietor of a restaurant a dancer a guard a religious broadcaster a lawyer a lacrosse player a student a handsome man who had many admirers. She shoves the corpses into her genitals (I can see up her slip) and beheads an official a Vietnamese immigrant a Shiite a Sunni a stripper a taxi driver a Republican a Democrat a leader a soldier a father a son a corpse an image of a corpse an image of an image of a corpse and she shoves them into the burial ground and resumes beheading a king an editor a Jr. a Sr. a newsman a shrimp a fly and an endangered species of manatee that got caught up in the bloodletting, and she is now trying to behead Provo, Ottawa and the South Bronx.

There is a tiny globe of blood pendant from her lashes. Reflected in it, I can see my eyes.

What a writer can give her daughters:
A paper storm
A life in letters
Readers
“For that matter,” Elizabeth said, “where did this time machine come from?”
A suspension of talk.
“From tomorrow? A tomorrow years from today?” dares Barbara.

“Is it here by chance? Or is it for us? For use? To help us gather this—” a
hand acknowledges the group—“into something, a writing tool that can make this
business end another way, in print instead of blood or architecture?

“I don’t know,” said Thursday, taking something out of her pocket, “but I
have the key.”

Thursday stands on the beach. On one foot: the huge mirror is broken now, pieces
nestle in the sand, and one has cut her. She is daydreaming: Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen.
Dr. President, Jr. strains. His cervix opens. Out rolls a globe, smeared with blood.

Thursday cups a piece of sky in her hands. A cloud slips across it. Her eyes follow
it, but something gets in the way. “What’s that—my face? I don’t like it.”

A mirror breaks us in two. Saws off a piece of brain, reverses it, shows us
to it. We see its seeing, but not what it sees—us, from over there—so the empty
spot we stood in now appears to be full of some unknown thing. Our face is an
advertisement for something we can’t identify. We watch other people’s eyes to see
if they can. We tax them to tell us, over and over, though we do not believe what
they say. The mirror shows us that not one thing is the same as another; you are not
even the same as you. You are, one could say, the girl to your boy, the death to your
life; the reverse is also true.

“Writing is also a mirror,” said Thursday. “It shows the world, in a way. A
strange way.”

Into the world I had made in a vessel I had made I had gone, my eyes behind
the eyes of the girl I, with mind-boggling confidence, had called my daughter,
and wearing her or driving her, watching the world through the windows of her
eyes, I handed out paper dollars, paper food and paper answers. Itineraries, if
not travel. Everything my people needed, I described, and describing, made. I
described my daughter’s daughters and even the writing of their daughters so
that they might describe something in turn, as I wished to give them everything
I had.

I didn’t expect my daughter to describe me, to slip inside me in turn,
and wearing me or driving me, to go up into my world, to plant a hard kiss on
my mirror and gather my writing tools. She laid me on my bed (that is where I
work), took up this document and a yellowed newspaper from Friday, June 9,
2006, and began to make some corrections.
In the news there are also girls, although not many, and chained to columns of print. Thursday extricated them. Set them on a new course.

Cut the news, mixed the pieces. Misspelled names. Copied incorrectly. Editorialized.

Followed hints gathered suggestions corrected the record.
The editorial jihadist fit symbols together—a slow, difficult insurgency. She laid out a new page one. (An article about Monoceros appeared in tiny print on the back of the page, under Corrections.)

She was breeding a counter-virus of letters. A Monoceros to end Monoceros.

“This is a man’s man’s man’s man’s world but it something something something something something something girl,”
said Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr. He was standing in a room in his mansion, La Tour d’Monoceros. It was a room of distinction; only handsome men had been used in building it, and as he reviewed their bold faces, one hand shoved deep into a pocket cupped his genitals.

Nestled in his hand, those strange little articles were peaceful, daydreaming of something he could not hope to identify. He spoke to them, calling them “Coach” and “Duke.” They did not acknowledge him.

“There is a smear on the eye of Monoceros,” he said. “A cloud in the sky of Monoceros. There is a fly in his sauce, but he has not yet identified the species.”

“The proprietor of a small business wishes an interview,” said his boy Friday.


He was not worried. Rallying his genitals, he reached out for a handsome rogue named Leroy.

That day, June betrayed an attraction to jets; Elizabeth owned that she liked baseball and trucks, and the girls voted to eliminate her. Someone had made a flag (a reverse M, or W) and it was dancing in the breeze. Some of the girls were battering the food ground with their palms. Some were training with bombs. A manatee was being difficult in the pines. New girls were rising out of the ground, brushing off the sand, and taking up their clubs and crossbows.

It was a homemade day. Because of an editing error, the sky was green. The weather was not working—clouds were brushing the ground—and there appeared
to be sand in the motor. The day restarted every hour or so. (Girls battering the food
ground, defiant manatee, and so on.) Move to trash? Girls with tools in their pockets
opened the machine, blew off what was left of a fly that appeared to have gotten
crunched in the parts, set the clock for the fifth time. Empty trash?

The day snuffs it. One little yellow cloud high in the sky behind the trees
still holds the sunshine. A breeze cools the bombs. Stars editorialize the sky. Girls
stand around the time machine.

Wind it, says Thursday.

It was the eleventh hour. Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr. was blowing
kisses, blowing kings, blowing no one any good, he was bidding low, aiming high,
he was playing chicken, playing house, playing hard to get, he was abandoning
hope, endangering species, breaking backs and breaking news. He was killing time,
which was slowly killing him.

“That’s the telephone,” said his boy Friday.

He answered it (the way he always did): “Never something for something
the bell tolls!” His face fell. He shook the telephone, blew into it, turned to Friday:
“Dead air.”

Hope is for an end—the reader beached on the last page, digesting a one-hundred-
ton answer. I own, I too have tried to fill my readers with that paper food. Now I
will begin to empty them.

Let us say that against Monoceros I cannot win, because to win is Monoceros.
Good news is a eulogy, it records what has reached an end.... Only I must not fail,
I must try desperately hard.... And then? Let us say that I must fall short, must
continue to fall short, that falling short is the only hope I have. Or not hope—hope
will betray me, although that is not to say that doom is the new hope; doom is
also doomed. We must do without it, without them. We cannot dispose of them,
however. They survive, a suspended doom and a suspended hope, huge figures
struggling against a mythic sky. Girls, let us leave them to it. We will gather in a
still corner to practice a less inflated art of debate. When I come to an end, and I
must now produce an end, Thursday tells me, understand that it is a quotation of an
end, an empty vessel.

A little key turns. The second hand strains, then explodes. Today, tonight, tomorrow....

The time machine, that is, writing, removed Thursday from time, that is, life. The
late Thursday appeared to be deep in a strange sky without air, where she was battered by clouds as hard as clubs. Hurt to death, she claimed her inheritance among the corpses; there, she built her insurgency, calling her people, corpses, to muster. Her death survived her and lived to carry out her mission. Now my help was a hurdle, because my hope was only human, but the death of Thursday was mightier than hope. After a long hunt, she identified a corner in the sky and took a left turn. A window opened.

Thursday fell through it.

How long she traveled doesn’t matter. When you have a time machine, you can travel for a very long time and still get there yesterday. What she did first, what she did second doesn’t matter; when you have a time machine, you can reverse them later.

Say it’s a Wednesday morning decades from now. In a world stuffed with men, one of them named Thursday, in a small house filled with a strange second sunlight, she bows to a team of girls in white who have gathered around a complicated medical device.

Say it’s 1937. Weegee photographs Thursday, misidentifying her as a woman accused of murder in New York.

“Woman”?

Say it’s already tomorrow, she has failed, or has not even begun. Men email, examine their flies, Google earth. Girls pend. Everything goes on.

Say it’s now. I don’t know what day it is, or what time it is, but you are reading this, and Thursday is standing in the suicide archive at the library of La Tour d’Monoceros. Her name, she sees, is listed there. She extracts her photograph. (She is laid out on sand, a bloody piece of mirror in her hand. Her part is neat, her eyes a little open, showing the whites.) Is holding it when she corners Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr. in the M’s.

“M is for message,” she says. “I am your delivery girl.”

“A message from—?” Long face yellow-white like old newspaper. Eyes that do not fill their pockets.

“Girls, you would call us.”
“Come, come,” he says. “Girls are just little men.”
“We aim to change that.”
“Please. You are already one of us, short of a, let us say, *member* or two; I can tell by your charming violence. Here’s your incentives package—a little piece of Americana. Meet...your New Deal!” He opens his fly.

The guerrilla goes to the window. It is day, but not today: tomorrow. On the road, men tool around on the backs of men—more old news.

Turning, she opens her hand. A little bottle falls. Breaks. A blue cloud rises. He sees—does he?—letters in it, turning and turning in it.

“We have a counter-virus—men become girls,” she says. “And you have just exposed [yourself] to it.”

The face of Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr. changes. In it she sees something strange. Is it—the name slips one’s mind. Hurricane? Horological?

“Never something for something
the bell tolls, it tolls for
something”

Says Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr.
And shoves her out the window.

Hope?

A parliament of corpses watches Thursday fall, a tiny figure turning end over end.

Thursday falls into a horological architecture blackened with handprints, hers. The motor turns over and she starts. Articles pass: the, the. Though her feet do not move, she is travelling, possibly on a truck, toward an imprecisely defined end in which, she now sees, her name does not appear: an editing error, possibly. Her hand falls on something, a tool or the name of a tool. This she shoves into the works. Paper cut! Blood (possibly hers, possibly mine or even yours), stars the page. See: a new constellation by which to chart her way home. Call it that.

SHELLEY JACKSON
Thursday sees her name, a little cloud of letters on a page (she’s good on paper), move through the machine. Sees Monoceros, not a man of letters, but a library. She (letters) calls (letters) and other letters club up around her. A mission is a huge cloud of letters all moving toward. But a breeze can come up, and how she hurricanes.

The second hand reverses.
The second hand resumes its old course.
The clock is set.

La Tour d’Monoceros is shaking—it is not a building but a storm of men, struggling shoving—men fall from the sky—roll on rolling men—the ground is rising—the road is running—on no road—

The city, the city is on strike! Trucks buck. Houses go home. A library is leaving Texas for Baghdad, a restaurant decides to move to Miami. A Center of Photography winds up on a jungle gym, where it exposes its pictures to little boys. An office darts into the bayou, where it names itself The Emerald Panther.

Buildings shake, then break up. Men who, year after year, had been part of the architecture of the city, rumble, “We want to go home at night and rest in bed, daydreaming, watching a white jetstream curve across the black sky, our onyx eyes filling with unknown symbols. We want to have hopes, even charms. Wear a huge blue bow.

“We want to be, in part, girls.”

Mee Mee opens the safe house door. “I am a little girl inside,” says a man who had been part of a restaurant for three decades—a huge figure, listing to the left. Eyes up. Eyes down. “I wanted to be—was—a girl, in childhood.”

“Was, or wanted to be?”

Hard hands made complicated signs. What’s the distinction, he appeared to say. “A girl is nestled inside this—this hull. Rolled up neatly, a letter in a bottle. She has been in that dead letter office for decades.

“For her delivery I turn to you.”

The tiny man in her bows to the tiny lady in him. The tiny lady in him bows to the tiny man in her.
A cool breeze rises. The blackened sand streams on the page.

A girl is a stream now. A boy is a stream, a man is also a stream. A nearby star streams sunshine. Summer streams through everything.

The former Mr. Ms. Maj. Rev. Gen. Dr. President, Jr. is now a peaceful lady. One day there will also be women.
Psychedelia was a phenomenon of upper-middle-class white kids, its utopianism a luxury—or maybe an indulgence—that African Americans (among others) couldn’t afford. Unlike other “brother” acts that weren’t brothers at all, the Chamberses really were, four Mississippi sharecropper’s sons who migrated to Los Angeles where utopia was in the DNA; they had recorded three albums and a cover of Otis Redding’s “I Can’t Turn You Loose” that was a middling hit, and were well received at the same Newport Folk Festival that booed Bob Dylan for plugging in his electric guitar, when and where they picked up on the new sounds and got themselves a white rock and roll drummer. “Time Has Come Today” was first recorded in the fall of 1966 and rejected by Columbia Records, whose capacity for cluelessness hadn’t diminished in the wake of Dylan’s success, and when the brothers returned to it more than a year later, with its clanging guitars and the sound of a ticking clock that ate the world mixed in with the call-and-response of their gospel upbringing, the song grew to an eleven-minute epic that, in a five-minute version, flirted with the Top Ten.

Whether it’s fair to call the Chambers Brothers one-hit wonders, and whether they meant for their magnum opus to count down the end of psychedelia as it seemed to, “Time Has Come Today” became one of the era’s enduring survivors, covered over the years by artists from Sheryl Crow & Steve Earle to Joan Jett to the Ramones, and soundtracking the denouements of many movies and TV episodes. Through the door opened by it and Sly and the Family Stone’s “Dance to the Music” (Essential Psychedelia #26) rushed a new psychedelic soul as written and performed by the Supremes (“Reflections”), the 5th Dimension (“Aquarius/Let the Sunshine In”) and most successfully the Temptations, whose “Cloud Nine,” “Psychedelic Shack” and “Ball of Confusion” suggested that, Age of Aquarius or no, there were problems in utopia after all.
The end of the Psychedelic Era was marked by two rites of passage: seeing Paradise Now performed by New York City’s Living Theatre and catching a midnight screening of El Topo. Whether characterized by vatic pronouncements or outrageous provocations, absurdity or insanity, the two phantasmagorias shared a common shamanistic ancestor: Antonin Artaud, the French poet, actor, theater director and author of The Theater and its Double, who took peyote with the Tarahumara Indians and created the Theatre of Cruelty before dying in 1948.

With Paradise Now the experimental theatrical troupe founded by Julian Beck and Judith Malina reached its ritualistic apotheosis and greatest notoriety. Actors writhed, disrobed, shouted proclamations and demolished the boundaries between performer and audience. Apocalyptic and cathartic, the play was exhortation and exorcism, a staging of primordial chaos, an aggressive dream that never let go. Put another way, Paradise Now was an onstage group manifestation of an LSD trip. (In “Notes to Paradise Now,” Beck talked about the use of hallucinogens so as to “enable one to associate differently in the head, remember differently, learn time differently.”) The play was an inspiration to performers in the audience: Al Pacino praised it as being “so alive that it was like walking into someone’s anatomy” and the Doors’ Jim Morrison watched the Living Theatre the night before he famously exposed himself to a Miami audience (for which he was arrested and charged).
Chilean-born Alejandro Jodorowsky proclaimed, “I ask of film what most North Americans ask of psychedelic drugs.” Filmmaker, mime, Tarot card reader and practitioner of “psychomagic,” he wrote, directed and starred in El Topo (The Mole), the saga of a mystic gunslinger. An acid Western with distant kinship to Monte Hellman’s The Shooting and Ride in the Whirlwind, Jodorowsky’s cinematic universe resonated with metaphysical import, awash in violence and libido. Abandoning his son (played by Jodorowsky’s own son), El Topo slays four masters to be reborn as a savior to a group of deformed cave-bound pariahs. Like Carlos Castaneda’s books (see Essential Psychedelia #29), El Topo was a countercultural text that charted a new perceptual topography. Jodorowsky would further his concept of film-as-head-trip with The Holy Mountain in 1973 and an ill-fated attempt at adapting Frank Herbert’s science fiction epic Dune. But it was El Topo that made him a legend. The film would be an inspiration to filmmakers and musicians as varied as David Lynch, John Lennon, George Harrison, Dennis Hopper, Peter Gabriel, Marilyn Manson, Erykah Badu and Nicolas Winding Refn. “If you are great, El Topo is great,” explained Jodorowsky with mischievous grandiosity. “If you’re limited, El Topo is limited.” More than a cult film, El Topo was a cinematic sacrament.
Jonathan Lethem
ESSENTIAL PSYCHEDELIA #14
Ubik, Philip K. Dick
Ubik, short for ubiquity, a kind of medicinal eternity
Available in pharmacies, an aerosol product,
*Ubik*, you yourself play at being little more than a discontinued item.
Though disguised as a clown or a jape, as ephemera, an eruption
From the pop-junk stratum,
you’re an American Book of the Dead.
You embarrass your readers and get under their skins forever—
You embarrassed your author!
It was he who disguised you as a clown,
Your characters in costumes unbearably larkish,
Your women all described tits-first, yet—
Your author found himself condemned to wonder
Whether this book, above all his others, might hold the key
To his lifework, to his life, to the universe.
Your hero’s an everyman—Joe Chip,
A good egg, stolid and homely as they come.
Your basic motif’s as sturdy, as hoary! even,
As Bierce’s “Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” or
O’Brien’s *Third Policeman*. Yet unfolded, as it is,
Within your satiric consumer paranoia
Of rival corporate psychic-spies dependent
On over-the-counter entropy-reversal balm
You’re positively Pataphysical!
(In fact, were ratified as such by the French,
A nation better at theorizing the surreal
Than at creating it themselves,
That best left to Austrians, Swiss, Russians
Or American pulp writers—nearly anyone else.)
Ubik, in our hour of need, you restore our sense
That the living and the awakened dead
Have more in common than not:
Both lost in time, and permeable
To selves not ourselves.
With the possible exception of John Lennon, James Marshall Hendrix was the era’s single crucial figure. An American mutt of black, Cherokee and Irish, he was raised in Seattle by a family so abusive and dysfunctional that a social worker reported only the boy’s interest in guitar would save him. A fellow serviceman from army days—when the young musician’s sole distinction was jumping out of airplanes—described Hendrix’s playing as “John Lee Hooker crossed with Beethoven,” and after the service Hendrix played with Little Richard, Sam Cooke, Wilson Pickett, Jackie Wilson and the Isley Brothers before one night at New York’s Cheetah catching the attention of a young woman who happened to be dating Keith Richards. Soon Hendrix was in London.

A classic example of the right person in the right place at the right time, Hendrix proceeded directly from buzz-on-the-street to legend, bypassing mere notoriety. Famously he wandered into a club where local guitar god Eric Clapton was playing and joined the set; by the time he left, the stunned Cream guitarist was divinely deposed. Six weeks later at the Bag O’Nails, where Hendrix fronted his new band the Experience, the audience included among others the Yardbirds, the Rolling Stones, the Who, Soft Machine and the Beatles, all departing hours later in various shades of disbelief. Hendrix’s cover of the Leaves’ garage classic “Hey Joe” was a prelude; the double-sided “Purple Haze”/“The Wind Cries Mary” (Essential Psychedelia #9) was the millennium. Paul McCartney told the organizers of an upcoming three-day pop-music festival in Monterey, California, that he would lend his name to their event on the condition that Hendrix was added to the bill—so what began as a tradeoff became the festival’s defining event. In the tradition of show-biz myths that never really happen except when they do, seven months after leaving the States in obscurity the guitarist returned a conqueror. Hendrix’s intergalactic blues seemed to warp time and space; like a lot of artists who are introverted in life, in his art he was untamed and transcendent. At Monterey where he was introduced by Brian Jones, Hendrix played “Wild Thing,” the song that would climax the D.A. Pennebaker film of the proceedings, before Ravi Shankar’s ravishing coda.
By the time both *Monterey Pop* and *Electric Ladyland*, Hendrix’s third and final album in his lifetime, were released within a couple months of each other at the end of 1968, they would serve as autopsies to what the festival and man apotheosized. The concert began on a Friday in June 1967 and hit its stride with the fall of dark on Saturday and then on through Sunday when not only Hendrix but Janis Joplin and the Who shattered whatever national or racial or cultural provincialism previously constrained them, becoming huge stars in a matter of minutes; following Otis Redding’s electrifying “I’ve Been Loving You Too Long,” Hendrix in particular is something to behold. Watch the audience react to him fucking his guitar before he sets fire to it and you can see this is one moment of disquiet that offsets exhilaration. Only a single other performance is as mesmerizing: If Hendrix seems from another planet, Shankar sounds as if from another celestial reality. *Monterey Pop* remains the greatest concert film because of both the music it documents as well as a final innocent moment—one of the movie’s delights is watching Joplin skip off the stage in childlike triumph knowing she’s just given a star-is-born performance—before pop reached critical mass beyond which lay exploitation. The psychedelic movement coheres before our eyes and ears, and to watch all the joy and hope onscreen just eighteen months after the actual festival was to feel your heart break.

*Electric Ladyland* was recorded over the course of those eighteen months. As the anti-lysergicism of the Band and Creedence Clearwater Revival advanced its counterattack before finally overwhelming Psychedelic Nation, *Electric Ladyland* grew defiantly trippier, matching the *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* cover entourage of sixty-six notables including Einstein, Freud, Karl Marx and Marilyn Monroe with nineteen naked ladies, subsequently and roundly rejected by the record company in America. That the resulting four sides of vinyl sound as shambolic as the sessions that produced them is one of the album’s virtues, soundscape moving from the urban chaos of “Crosstown Traffic” to the oceanic grottoes of “1983 (A Merman I Should Turn To Be)” to the entirely perilous outlaw shore of “All Along the Watchtower,” the greatest thing Hendrix ever did and so impressing the song’s author that thereafter Bob Dylan adopted Hendrix’s arrangement. More than any album, *Electric Ladyland* came closest to breaking down the psychic wall between outer space and inner, an ambient-groove epic only partly matched by Miles Davis, whose dream of working with Hendrix died with the guitarist’s overdose two years later.
Bob Dylan lay low for eighteen months while the planet was swapping orbiting’s dull care (enough with the Copernican crap!) for loop-the-loops and other stunts. Man, how the first Apollo astronauts must have wondered if they were guinea pigs in some sort of frantic game of chicken. Then the onetime Robert Zimmerman brought out *John Wesley Harding* on December 27, 1967.

On top of being two days after Christmas, in itself an act of insolence marketing-wise, the album’s release was also less than a week before everybody still compos mentis enough to notice bid adios to a year that had been to mind-altering pharmaceuticals more or less what 1945 was to atomic warfare. From the *Sgt. Pepper*-ized Beatles and the satanic Stones on down, every musician this side of Lawrence Welk had vied to up the trippiness ante. So, in his own way, had Lyndon Baines Johnson, and as for Welk—well, he was already *there*, baby, as mysteriously ungainsayable as the flying head in John Boorman’s *Zardoz*. Nobody would have been any too taken aback to learn he’d been on acid since Herbert Hoover was in flower.

All this added considerable tang to the release of an album by the original mystique-meister consisting of a dozen quaint-sounding songs whose nobody-here-but-Bob vocals were in the main adorned only by his guitar, harmonica, and piano, backed by a discreet rhythm section. For good measure, the thing was packaged about as ornately as a Duluth eighth-grader’s homemade Valentine card. As critic Robert Christgau, who was and is nobody’s fool, crowed at the time, “Psychedelic!”

It was neither the first nor last time Dylan would make stepping curbside look like a pinnacle everyone else had rushed past. Just picture him togged out in Jimi Hendrix’s pirate regalia to appreciate how he dodged the Sixties confusion of millenarianism and faddishness. Instead *John Wesley Harding* achieved psychedelia’s *effects*—perceptual mutations, time-space Scrabble, those good old doors of perception reconceived as Mount Vernon’s entrance combined with a Deadwood saloon’s—via non- or even anti-psychedelic means. Even
before Hendrix’s atom-splitting version of Harding’s centerpiece, “All Along The Watchtower,” brought things full circle, the album was a great reminder that America’s homemade Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band, as bizarro and revelatory as any you might encounter courtesy of Owsley’s kitchen, ranged from the title-track outlaw to Tom Paine, with various wicked messengers, poor immigrants and lonesome hobos foresting the mix.

Since Bob Dylan I’m not—jeez, should I have prefaced that with “spoiler alert”? He was so much younger then, I’m older than that now—you’re just going to have to forgive me for taking John Wesley Harding as my homely guide here. Not that I’ve got much choice, as my firsthand experience of hallucinogens in the god-love-’em Sixties was limited. My gateway drug was U.S. citizenship, a pretty disorienting sort of eight-miles-high—not quite just a figure of speech, folks, since I mostly grew up on airplanes—even before I got a taste of the hard stuff. Translation: God and Chuck Berry’s favorite country might as well have been Brobdingnag to me until my diplomat dad got posted Stateside in, whaddya know, 1968—the year that was to mind-altering pharmaceuticals more or less what Under the Volcano is to dipsomania.

Nothing could have made acid so redundant. Raised on Tintin and unfamiliar with a whole lot about American life that postdated Huckleberry Finn, I was tossed into contending like a bat in a glue emporium with Laugh-In, Richard Nixon, Joe Namath (that he was Jim Morrison’s football-playing twin brother seemed surpassingly obvious to me), Planet of the Apes and “Harper Valley PTA”—and proceeding, moreover, on the babe-in-the-woods assumption that they all were hooked together in some undisclosed pattern. Not only did this approximate the hair-raisingly unified field theories my shaggier elders hoped would be disclosed to them on drugs, it turned out to be what I’d do for a living once I got more guileful about it.

My brain needed synthetic battering rams to feel gate-crashed by delirium about as much as Joe Cocker needed a cattle prod to go spastic. LSD struck me as on the coals-to-Newcastle side even before my acidhead high-school friends all agreed, sorta like the Wolf Pack chaperoning Mowgli, to never let me near a tab; the odds of me having a good trip, they opined, were beyond nil. What may have proved it was the way I reacted minus even pot or even Tab’s help to the Who’s Tommy—a record I might have taken less to heart, granted, had its hero been named Elmer—as if it were as gauntly journalistic as “The Death of Emmett Till.”
OK, so there have been eras since when I toyed (at least) with making illicit pharma my frenemy. Not much over a decade later, I was scoring the only drug I still occasionally miss in my senescence—coke, and didja-didja-didja even have to ask?—at the Peppermint Lounge or was-it-Danceteria, then making my frayed way home just as daytime Manhattan crowded the IRT in the opposite direction. But that, as *The Jungle Book* might say, is another story, O Best Beloved, and to this day all I need to do to blow my mind out in a car is get behind the wheel of one somewhere in Chuck and God’s favorite country.

Arranged in push-me-pull-you order of sightings for that freaky wrong-end-of-the-telescope effect, this triptych of not-quite-random visions and revisions—which they all are, being memorials—may tell you why sometimes I feel like my own private acid trip hasn’t ended since puberty. “Let up already, wilya?” I sometimes want to say. But our own indigenous (that is, manufactured) Oracle of Delphi—you know, the supersized diva in the Grace Slick headgear, with a certain date carved on a tablet in the crook of her elbow and that stupid torch thrusting upward out of her green sleeves like she’s a Deadhead at the Garden or something—always has the same answer: “Not a chance, Tommy.”

1. The Last D-Day Veteran To Come Home

For starters, let me take you back to Easter 1966. I have no idea who Bob Dylan is—though I do know who Tom Lehrer is, and as the twig is bent and so on. As for the Beatles, I’m still tussling with a vague impression that there must be hundreds of them. I’m just shy of ten, and the Carson family is trundling in our Necco-green VW Beetle from West Berlin—my father’s current post, half John le Carré and half *Hollywood Squares*—to the D-Day beaches in Normandy.

Dad was an invasion bit player in his mysterious teens, doing stubbornly un-anecdotalized sailor stuff off Omaha. But this trip is for my benefit, not his, because I’m cuckoo about D-Day. So cuckoo, in fact, that he’s cautioned me against expecting too much: “It’s just a beach, son, you know. There won’t be guns going off or boats landing.” What he’s trying to say—and he really didn’t want to go back there at all, I suspect—is that there won’t be anybody dying.

Even so, I’m craving some manifestation of calcified fury. (That it was sitting in the driver’s seat never crossed my mind.) At the American cemetery at
Colleville-sur-Mer, an already four-eyed me is dismayed to find myself gazing up instead at a statue of some loinclothed doofus, his arms shooting invisible hoops and his rippling pecs exposed for daws to peck at, apparently celebrating a successful audition for George Balanchine’s ballet troupe. *The Spirit of American Youth Rising From the Waves*, the thing is called, and it’s meant to allegorize the beauty of the GI’s sacrifice in schlepping overseas to liberate Europe. I consider it girly.

Little do I know I haven’t seen the last of Adonis Kilroy, as I now call him. Flash forward almost half a minotaur-like century to September 19, 2014: the day the iPhone 6 goes on sale, as it happens, explaining the long queue on the yellow brick road at an outdoor Glendale mall called the Americana at Brand. The place features a musicalized fountain display yclept “Waters of Americana,” and in the middle of its September-song sprays, as I docilely follow a bobbing and purposeful cinnamon coif I’ve lately decided I’ll follow pretty much anywhere, I spot a familiar figure—now gilded, which the original wasn’t, and bigger and buffer than ever. Guess who.

*Psychedelic!* I think of a line from “Went to See the Gypsy,” Dylan’s *New Morning* ditty about meeting Elvis: *He did it in Las Vegas, and he can do it here.* Yes, in Glendale, Adonis Kilroy—surrounded by gravestones no more—incarnates the Spirit of American Youth Going Forth to Consume. The developer responsible for the Americana at Brand, Rick Caruso, commissioned the oversized replica after deciding Don was just the ticket to add patriotic euphoria to his *Gesamtkunstwerk.* But the unexpected song in my heart pre-empted scorn; I was ready to believe that Rick Caruso was descended from Enrico. What I’d grokked in a flash was that only in Glendale does Adonis Kilroy achieve true poetry, transcendence and the rest of that vaulting poppycock. Dude always did look a bit out of place above Omaha Beach, but he *belongs* here.

My reaction to him at age ten is best explained by the fact that, Berlin or no Berlin, I didn’t yet know the word *kitsch.* But kitsch Adonis Kilroy unmistakably is, not least because you can’t imagine him shooting craps in the barracks or grousing about a chickenshit C.O.—something that can’t be said, incidentally, of the Iwo Jima memorial’s stubbornly grungy, Bill Mauldin-ish flag-raisers, let alone the names on the Vietnam Wall. Among other sins, there’s nothing particularly American about him except insofar as aping European shibboleths of beauty is a very American sort of cultural banana peel. From a physique that would’ve thrilled Arno Breker—Hitler’s favorite sculptor, and just imagine how hip *his* stuff is—
to those Luftmensch arms getting all tomorrow-the-sky for tourists’ benefit, the original Don exemplifies and may have helped inaugurate our peculiar penchant for World War II memorials whose aesthetics seem to indicate the Germans won.

Yet now that he’s been mustered out of the service in Glendale of all places—fuggin’ Army—he’s been Americanized at last. No more far-off lands for him, and triumphant inanity has ever been Glendale’s lingua franca. For the first time Adonis Kilroy moves me; for the first time he does seem representative—and, for the first time, victorious. This silly, coarsely placid setting is what the men he so ineptly commemorates yearned to return to someday—yes, iPhone 6s and all, at least if they could have foreseen those—and Adonis Kilroy has fulfilled their collective dream. Peace, peace! He is not dead, he doth not sleep, as Percy Bysshe Shelley said in—wait for it—“Adonais.” After all those strange and baffling years abroad, he’s home. What’s more, I can identify.

2. Le Tombeau de Johnny Ramone

June, 1977. Whipping off my graduation robes to reveal the black T-shirt underneath, I’m on a bus to New York within hours to put Princeton behind me for good. This spring, my similarly misfit college pals have introduced me to CBGB and Max’s Kansas City.

Man, do the punk-besotted likes of us hate hippies, the Sixties we missed out on, and psychedelia—their musical soundtrack included, or maybe above all. Even something as great as, oh, say, Neil Young’s “Cinnamon Girl” won’t get back on our playlist until Rust Never Sleeps and Live Rust serve notice that Neil, in his weird Canuck way, is on Our Side if not quite, gabba-gabba, one of us.

I haven’t discovered coke yet. That won’t be until the Eighties, and is no doubt one reason I’ll behave badly when a redhead with eyes like a Hershey’s New York kiss at Maxwell’s—she says her hair was still brown then, but never mind—tries to tell me why her boyfriend would be the ideal lead in a movie version of a novel I’ve somehow written called Twisted Kicks. But I have discovered the Ramones, and not much else matters except for maybe—so much for putting Princeton behind me, right?—Talking Heads. More than David Byrne’s antsy crew, however, the Ramones are my very own simulacrum Beatles. I have a habit of assuming anyone else who claims to love them like I do is shamming; given my childhood overseas
in the superpower diaspora, which Army brat Dee Dee Ramone shared, how can I not totally identify with music and attitudes that exult in displacement? Since one of the multitude of things we crave from pop culture is to see our own experience transmuted and crystallized into conventional wisdom, I fully expect the Ramones to conquer the charts and thereby transform the texture if not the nature of everyday reality—yep, just like the Fab (I’ve learned to count by now) Four. My ultimate reason for turning rock critic is to modestly abet them in this goal.

Those were the days. All of a sudden, and for no good reason I can see, it’s August 8, 2014: the fortieth anniversary of Nixon’s resignation, not that that matters much even to me anymore. Tommy Erdelyi, the last original Ramone, has been dead for under a month, and I’m at Hollywood Forever cemetery to attend my first honest-to-gosh rock concert (Spoon) in many years. Well, unless you count a sentimental revisit to Blondie when they played Woldenberg Park during French Quarter Fest in New Orleans, from which I’m newly relocated to Los Angeles—the azure-ceilinged fire I once scrambled to after New York started laying on the frying-pan bit a mite thick—after twenty-plus years elsewhere.

L.A. is my favorite city in the world, and Joan Didion can go to hell. These days I’ve taken to calling myself Rip Van Henry Winkler. Ho ho ho. After the Spoon show, the old acquaintance from East Coast punk days who brought me—now an Angelena of a quarter-century’s standing, and it’s funny how time slips away—leads a bunch of us to the hunk of rock-and-roll lagniappe she came across on a trip to the Port-o-Sans: the tomb of Johnny Ramone.

It takes effort to turn a gravesite gaudy hereabouts, but Johnny has done it. Perhaps especially at night, when his is lit from below to Haunted Mansion effect—and even more so tonight, since Britt Daniel and Co. have played under not only a full moon but a Supermoon. Brandishing a guitar, coiffed in a mop that looks like squid pasta doing a poor job of mimicking Mount Vesuvius, a sculpture of the former John Cummings emerges up to mid-thigh from his own cenotaph, which features goodbye quotes on its flanks from, among others, Vincent Gallo and Lisa Marie Presley. Besides his all-caps stage name, followed by his real one, the inscription on the front identifies him as the “legendary guitarist” for THE RAMONES above a not too punky aperçu from the man himself to the effect that the real measure of success in life is having friends.

Uh-uh, Johnny. Your real measure of success in life is this tomb, because its whole point is that your estate can afford it. Granting that the most unrepentantly
Republican Ramone was always my least favorite band member, am I scandalized? Nope. I’m thrilled by the recognition that this isn’t a rock star’s grave so much as that of a prosperous bourgeois who wants us all to know he made a bundle of the stuff he couldn’t take with him.

Starting with the temples the Greeks used to paint in migraine-inducing DayGlo colors before Yahweh got the upper hand, half of what we call civilization is just vulgarity with time on its side. Nineteenth-Century Parisians with bad taste rivaling Johnny’s adopted the identical posthumous strategy to impress people with the ghelt they’d made, perhaps the most celebrated—or notorious—example being the tomb of “famille Charles PIGEON” in Montparnasse. The bier doubles as a marital bed from which the sculpted Charles, hiked on one elbow—and fully dressed, because propriety counts—regards us with a perhaps forgivably dull twinkle in his eye. Next to him, Mme. Charles is already endormie, and whew: These utterly trivial people sure must’ve made a packet to pay for this atrocity. Time, lichen and la famille Pigeon’s feathered namesakes—how I’d love to say it’s their favorite spot—have had their way; hack sculptors also had a bit more on the ball back then, and we’re in Paris, after all. So the display may strike aesthetic innocents as a bit less crass than Johnny’s, but this is an illusion. Give his Hollywood Forever memorial another fifty years—hell, give L.A. another fifty years—and it’ll look, at the very least, appropriately tenacious rather than garish.

If there’s poignancy in the fact that, unlike la famille Pigeon, Johnny Ramone wasn’t trivial—he didn’t need this to make sure we’d remember, and not only Joey’s but even Elvis’ graves are models of chasteness by comparison—there’s compensating pleasure in understanding that the Ramones’ guitarist and Charles Pigeon could greet each other in the great beyond with “Mon semblable, mon frère.” No more up on his Baudelaire than M. Pigeon probably was, Johnny might well figure that’s just French for “Local boy makes good.”

Which he did, even if his final stop on earth is a continent away from his birthplace. So will mine be with an ocean thrown in: As the Ramones said, it’s a long way back to Germany. But in the meantime, here I am at a Spoon concert in a cemetery, jumping from leather jackets to frock coats, Hollywood to Paris, and 1977 to now. Really, people used to need acid to unlock their brains’ funhouses? How psychedelic.
My father loathed middle age’s onset. He told me once that on July 7, 1966, the eve of his fortieth birthday—the real one, not the one he’d invented to join the Navy at age fifteen; until gloom did in his sense of humor, we celebrated both—he nearly threw himself into the evening rush-hour traffic at the Arc de Triomphe, unable to face the big turnstile. Hey, thanks for sharing, Dad; what a heck of a father you were. I was fifteen myself when he spilled that lonesome bean, and his indifference to the pudgy, blinking audience for his morbid narcissism verged on the sublime.

Since he’d have offed himself all of three months after his son’s puzzled gaze up at Adonis Kilroy on the bluffs above Omaha, it’s pretty irresistible in hindsight to picture my dad as the Spirit of Bygone American Youth Chucking Itself Under a Bus. But I knew him well enough to know he wouldn’t have been as tempted in, say, San Diego. Whatever Foreign Service junket placed him in Paris instead is lost to my memory, but committing suicide at sunset in the City of Light was plainly his fantasy equivalent of *famille* Charles PIGEON—not that *famille*, evidently, loomed what you’d call large in the mix in his case.

He grew a mustache instead, let his hair creep toward his collar like a caterpillar cautiously investigating a new leaf. At least once he borrowed a hairpiece of my mother’s to give himself Beatle bangs. The Beatles themselves no longer sported them, and maybe it’s just as well my dad kicked the bucket in ’72, on the ninth anniversary of JFK’s death and at the same age—a *famille* Charles PIGEON detail whose serendipity my father would undoubtedly have been ridiculous enough to find eloquent. I don’t think he could have taken the fall of Saigon.

In ’68 or so, he’d wiggled out of a prospective posting to our embassy there, I have no idea why. But opposition to the war couldn’t have been it. Fake Beatle bangs or no fake Beatle bangs, my dad—simply unable to believe, I imagine, that John F. Kennedy could have made such a ghastly mistake, or that his own career had, however obscurely, annotated it—was such a Vietnam hawk that he once submitted an embarrassing piece called “Who Died in Vain?” to the *New Yorker*; of all places. It argued that the ’Nam grunts being shipped home in body bags had achieved every bit as much as, and I quote, “the heroes of Normandy.” Yeesh.

Not that he lived to know it, but Dad was so much younger then. I’m older than that by June 30, 2014—just over a week before what would have been his 88th birthday, not that that matters much even to me anymore. In Austin, Texas,
I’m looking up at the gigantic sarcophagus housing the legacy of the man who was famille James CARSON’s ultimate boss from late 1963 to early 1969. As white as a Lone Star State Alp and as boxy as one of the aircraft carriers that Navy pilots like John McCain used to fly off of to smack the bejesus out of—or maybe into—Hanoi, damned if it doesn’t also look like a humongous sugar cube just waiting for an eyedropper of Owsley’s best to turn it lysergic.

Today, though, it isn’t waiting anymore. Across the top of the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library is a banner touting an exhibit called “Sixty From The ’60s,” and La Bagnole, aka the blue convertible I’m driving from New Orleans to L.A., is just going to have to cool its wheels for a while. Am I only imagining that “White Rabbit” is playing on the literal jukebox tucked among the displays? The Civil Rights Bill made you larger, but My Lai made you small / And the briefings Dean Rusk gave you don’t do anything at all…

Here they all are: Dylan, Andy Warhol, MLK, the Peanuts gang, Muhammad Ali (still “Cassius Clay” on the robe on exhibit), Roy Lichtenstein, Berry Gordy, Hugh Hefner, the one and only Jackie O and even the decade’s other Jacqueline (Susann, as in Valley of The Dolls). Vonnegut is on hand too, and talk about Billy Pilgrim coming unstuck in time. This is Tralfamadore.

That planet’s inhabitants, as you may recall, see all sorts of seeming time-space antipodes as coexisting. With a relative handful of exceptions, most of the Chosen Sixty represent movements, trends and whatnot antagonistic to Johnson, whether politically (a category ranging from Barry Goldwater to Bobby Kennedy), culturally or both. Yet now LBJ has put a literal roof over all of their heads, fulfilling his dream—“Come, let us reason together” and so on—of being president of all the people at long last. Psychedelic!

At least to my mind, the most striking omission is no contest: Gene Roddenberry. From Uhura to the Prime Directive—yeah, tell it to Ho Chi Minh—was any TV show so thoroughly a construct of Great Society liberal idealism as Star Trek? Its later iterations turned Lyndon Johnson’s heyday into the pea under nineteen mattresses of increasingly referent-discarding fandom. Fittingly, the original series was canceled at the dawn of the Nixon era, shortening the Enterprise’s five-year mission to three. The latter is the average length of a Foreign Service posting, and you bet famille James T. KIRK is another of my secret sharers.

You can probably also divine for yourself which Dylan song I wish were on the exhibit’s jukebox. Whatever else you think of him, Lyndon Baines Johnson
was a friend to the poor. He traveled with a helicopter in every hand: “Son, they’re all my helicopters,” he once famously told a military aide trying to steer him to the presidential one. Were they ever, including the ones machine-gunning fleeing peasants in Vietnamese rice paddies, and the lone one that took off from our embassy’s roof in ’75—but what the hell. Let’s let Saigon be bygones, shall we? If you want to talk about achieving psychedelia by non- or even anti-psychedelic means, start with the man then in the White House. Though the LBJ Library is more honest than some, no wonder it can tell you practically everything about Lyndon Johnson except how to make sense of him.

“LBJ was my Beatles,” says the octogenarian heroine of my novel *Daisy Buchanan’s Daughter*—recalling her good-Democrat exhilaration at his heady 1964-’65 prime, not the war in Vietnam that by ’68 has her sending checks to Eugene McCarthy’s campaign. She’s speaking for herself, not me, and you already know who *my* Beatles were. I wasn’t expecting to catch on today that our thirty-sixth president was my Owsley and Timothy Leary instead, but that’s how it goes when you’re a government brat.

I doubt many five-year-olds get an instruction as likely to trigger a certain insecurity, along with an equal jolt of—gee, how to put this?—exceptionalism, as the one that my parents gave me when we shipped out for West Africa in early ’61: “Don’t ever forget that you represent the United States from now on.” But now I’m a dozen years older than my father got to be, not to mention a few more than that than he ever wanted to be, and fuck it. I sometimes like to think I didn’t do too badly before quitting.

Adios, LBJ! So long, Dad. I’m coming into Los Angeles now. Since I’m not quite weaned from oldies yet, but no longer in the mood for *Ramones Leave Home* after my Austin stop, I’m blasting Led Zep’s “Rock and Roll” and—oh, yeah—“Cinnamon Girl.” Been a long time, been a long time, and I’m chasing the same moonlight—or Supermoonlight—that soon will light the tomb of Johnny Ramone from above.

As for why I’ve just parked La Bagnole on a quiet street north of Hollywood Boulevard and said “Whew,” oh well. For better or worse, I’ve spent most of my life’s magic carpet ride deciphering the patterns in the rug instead of eyeing whatever’s passing down below. That’s where the real mysteries are, at least if you ask me, and the one that’s captivating me the most as I switch off the ignition is that the various women flitting in and out of this little triptych—the girl who
wanted to chat about a movie version of *Twisted Kicks*, the nice woman who took me to the Spoon show, the imperious one I followed through the Americana at Brand to behold Adonis Kilroy’s Glendale resurrection—have never been seen in the same room together and never will be. But back when I was being snotty to her at Maxwell’s in 1984, little did I know that thirty years later I’d be barreling up the 101 to end up at her door.

Psychedelic.
You are at a party at a band-mate’s Boston apartment, and you’ve taken a couple hits of acid in the afternoon because your girlfriend Jane is supposed to be out of town visiting her folks for the weekend, and you reason that if you are really fucked up you will be less inclined to cheat on her. This, in your early twenties, passes for foresight, nobility, and all around general stand-up guy-ness on your part.

Later, a cold plastic cup of beer sweats condensation in your hand. You sit on your friend’s bed watching his fish as it swims back and forth only on the left wall of its enormous aquarium. The story goes, and you have no idea if it’s true, that your friend dropped a hit of liquid acid in the tank once and the fish freaked out for days—swimming at three and four times its normal speed—and now has settled into an aquatic psychosis where it would never venture to the right side of the tank where the drug had been dropped. As far as the fish seems to be concerned, the right side of the tank is where VERY BAD SHIT once happened, and there isn’t anything that is going to get him to go back there. If this is true, that fish, that brainless cartilage-knuckle full of prehistoric DNA flip-flopping a slow glide on the left side of the tank is, in its way, smarter than you, who returns and returns and returns and keeps returning in various ways to where the very bad shit will happen for the next twenty years of your life.

You sit drunk and tripping and thinking about that little fish when your girlfriend Jane, having changed her plans for some reason unknown to you, walks into your friend’s bedroom. Except for the party-noise swelling and receding with the opening and the closing of the bedroom door, her entrance to the room is lost on you.

She is screaming your name.

It’s the first time you’ve heard your name, but she’s saying it with the intensity and annoyance of someone who has had to repeat herself several times, so logic dictates that you missed her first few attempts at communicating.

She grabs your head and forces you to look up at her and screams your name again. Her beautiful face is full-mooned into your line of vision so that all you can
see are her probing worried eyes that look much like loved ones and paramedics and doctors look into your eyes when you overdose.

“Hey,” you say.
“What’s wrong with you?” she says.
A valid question, to be sure. But one you are not really capable of taking on.
“I thought you were in Rhode Island?” you say.
“What the fuck is wrong with your eyes?” she says.
“I think my eyes are OK,” you say, then start to get scared. You feel for your eyes, half expecting them to be gone or bloodied and dangling, but they feel normal. You blink fast a few times. “What’s wrong with my eyes?”
“You are so fucked up,” she says.
You point to the aquarium. “That fish can only swim on one side of the tank.”
“What the fuck are you talking about?”
“I’ve been studying it.”

She shakes her head. There is no way you can articulate it or explain your desperate desire to not let her down or hurt her again, but it seems, whether you can talk or not, that her disappointment is on a train that already has pulled out of the station and, no matter how much you chase it, it’s beyond your reach. You want to say to her, “Don’t leave.” Or, “I’m surprised and happy to see you.” Or, even, of course, “I love you.” But these may as well be phrases from a foreign-language phrase book, for all the access you have to them at the time. She is beautiful, smart, funny and talented. She is, in short, everything you think you are not and will go on thinking you’re not for the next twenty years. The only thing you can find wrong with Jane is her taste—that she loves you is a blot on her otherwise spotless record—but you are soon to fix that problem.

There are few worse feelings than watching someone you love, who loves you, deeply, come to the realization that she can no longer love you out of fear for her own survival. This is a lesson, like many others, you will have to learn a couple dozen times before it sinks in that it is not at all cool or good to be the drowning man who makes others, repeatedly, decide to go down with him, or leave him to whatever the world might have for him.

“I can’t even talk to you anymore,” she says.
You reach out to her. “You can talk to me.”
She shakes her head, eyes alive with tears as she looks above you at a point on the ceiling. “You are always so fucked up.”

You put your head down. The acid has you in a grip that’s making words hard to form. You look back up at her and her head sways above you, floating like heat waves on blacktop.

She says it again. “You are always so fucked up.”

“I can’t really talk about this right now,” you finally manage to say. “I’m really fucked up.”

She looks up at the ceiling again and you see a tear drop from her right cheek and fall onto your thigh where it darkens your jeans for a second. She takes the beer from your lap and throws it across the room, against your friend’s wall, and runs out of the room. You sit for a moment trying to think, losing the thoughts as soon as they come, unable to focus. Where her tear fell already has gotten less dark and has started to fade and blend in with the fabric of your jeans.
Inside a ziggurat, the body of a young man lies in repose in a burial chamber that resembles a crash pad. The enclosure and the figure, an effigy of the artist himself, are both pink. His eyes are closed, his tongue protrudes from his open mouth, and discs with psychedelic colors are affixed to each cheek. Three fingers have been severed from the left hand (and in some installations were placed in the pouch mounted on the wall). Entitled The Tomb and later renamed Death of a Hippie (it might also have been called The Tomb of the Unknown Hippie), it was first displayed at Eleanor Ward’s Stable Gallery on East Seventy-Fourth Street in September 1967 and traveled to numerous museums, an elegiac meditation on the death of a man or a movement, perhaps both. What was preserved in The Tomb was not a body but a vanishing time period, a decaying dream.

The artist Paul Thek was nomadic, contemplative, original. His Technological Reliquaries, made during the 1960s, were grotesque wax models of meat blooming with hairs and tubes presented in vitrines. At his most golden and glorious, Thek was one of Andy Warhol’s screen-test subjects in 1964, but while displaying for Warhol a look-at-me insouciance, Thek trafficked in the decade’s darker, doom-laden counter-ethos. His friend and mentor Susan Sontag dedicated her essay collection Against Interpretation to him. Writing in Artforum, Robert Pincus-Witten declared Thek’s Tomb “a monument which may easily prove to be one of the unanticipated yet representative masterworks of American sculpture of the Sixties.”

Then The Tomb was lost. When the hippie cast was returned damaged from an exhibition in Cologne in 1981, Thek—whether out of dismay at its condition, exhaustion with its prominent place in his oeuvre, or disappointment that the piece never found a home in a permanent collection—never retrieved The Tomb from the shipper. Most likely it was subsequently destroyed. In 1988 Thek died of AIDS at age fifty-four, a lost artist from a movement whose demise he had already foreseen.
Rayanne Graff on Kurt Cobain: I still can’t look at him.
I found your ring in the cobwebs in my closet. Your name in needle scratches in my arm.
Like a stigmata cause I knew you I was in you all along.

In 90210 when they play Skeletons in the Closet & Amanda says that’s cute Kelly but tell us about your real first time.

Angela Chase on getting over Jordan: dancing around her room to “Blister in the Sun.”

You guys I found my suicide note from 1995 LOL.

I wrote it by candlelight while listening to the Cranberries. Instead of killing myself I took one too many Motrin and went to sleep. I am glad,

I’m gliding. Bricks are heavy.

I’m calling in  teen girl.

Go Ask Alice on downers: Who needs to go down when you can go up!
Up up up up up up up.

Richie gave me some joints to smoke when I’m alone and I want to be in heaven.
Isn’t that nice, nice, nice, nice, nice, nice, nice, nice!

I draw flowers subconsciously it’s crazy.

The wet brown eyes with bangs in them on the cover look just like mine.

Go Ask Alice on “She’s Leaving Home:” I had tears dripping down my face like two spigots had been turned on inside my head.

Kurt, is possession sexy? Is it like  girl on girl?

Hot pink and bright forest green and black like your death, like yr converse black.

Oh that song was written about me and all the others of thousands of girls like me.

Janie B on acid: We put it where our heart is.

And where our eyes go we put red candy hearts.
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