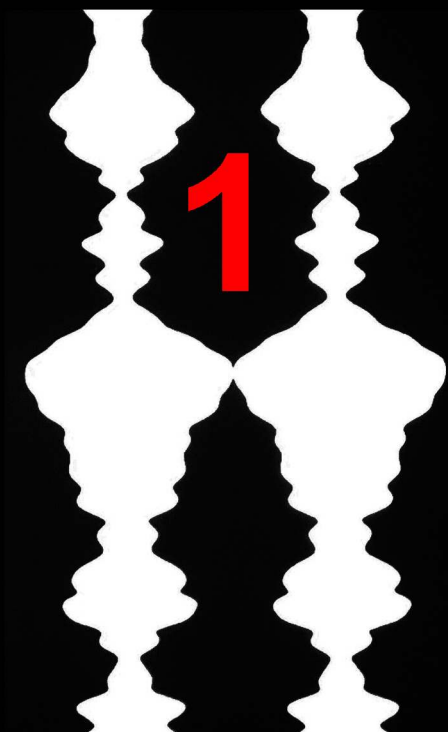
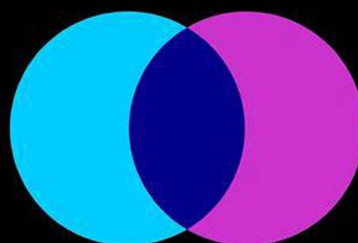


CHIT

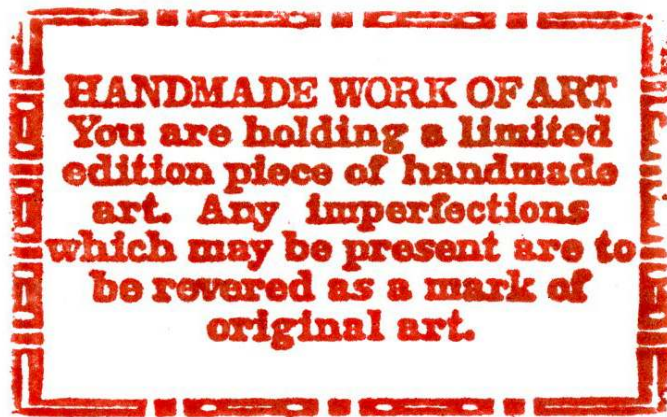


for



CHAT

By
James R. Hugunin

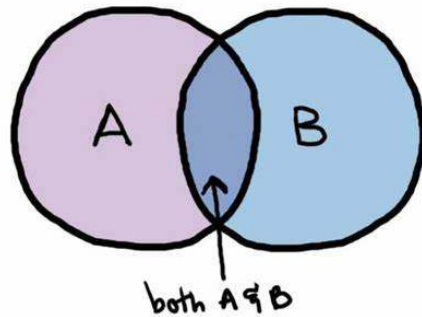


CHIT for CHAT

a dialogue between



VENN DIAGRAM!



James R. Hugunin

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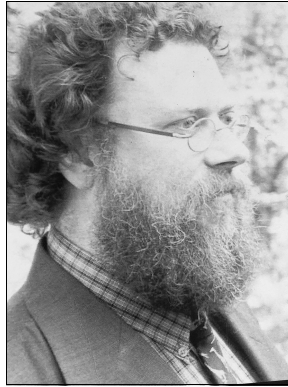


<https://www.urn.org>

James R. Hugunin

Dedication

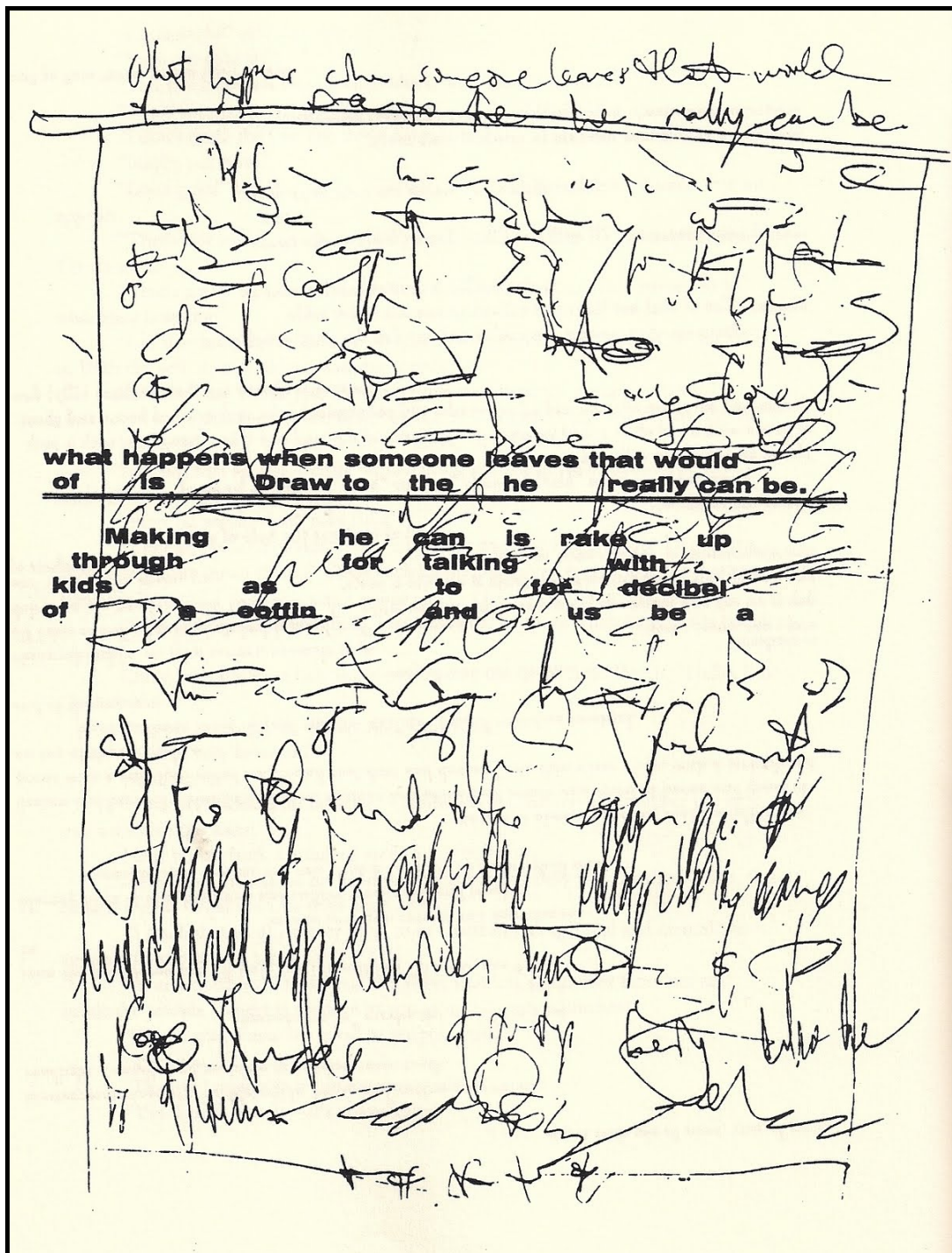
to
Eckhard Gerdes
and his imagination



Detail of photo by Richard
McWilliams.

The group is visible; the individual is indivisible.
The group fosters dependence; the individual exemplifies independence.
To be alone without your self means to be lost in all the others.
Sole means soul.
We=the beginning of weakness.
Oh, why stir the oyster when it is content alone?
The ego is solitary, the id gregarious; “id” is the root of “idiot.”
Even mothers and brothers are others.
Others make the difference between being bothered or just being.
To include you in my hose I’d need a house.
When I’m with you and I lose, I become a louse.
When I’m fried, you are Freud, prodding me with you incessant accusations of motivations.
When you’re surly, I’m Sir Lee, keeping my calm and dignity.
You’re matted and knotted, greasy and smelly fur, while I am a proud fir, standing tall.
I fill and you’re full.
I rile and you rule.
I’m a hill and you’re a hull.
I’m sick and you suck.
I’m a dick and you’re a duck.
You’re luck—I lick.
You cluck—I click.
You truck—I trick.
You’re stuck—I stick.
You flew—I fly.
You’re passed and I’m presence.
I fill, you fool.
I spill, you spool.
I kill, you cool.
I whore us.

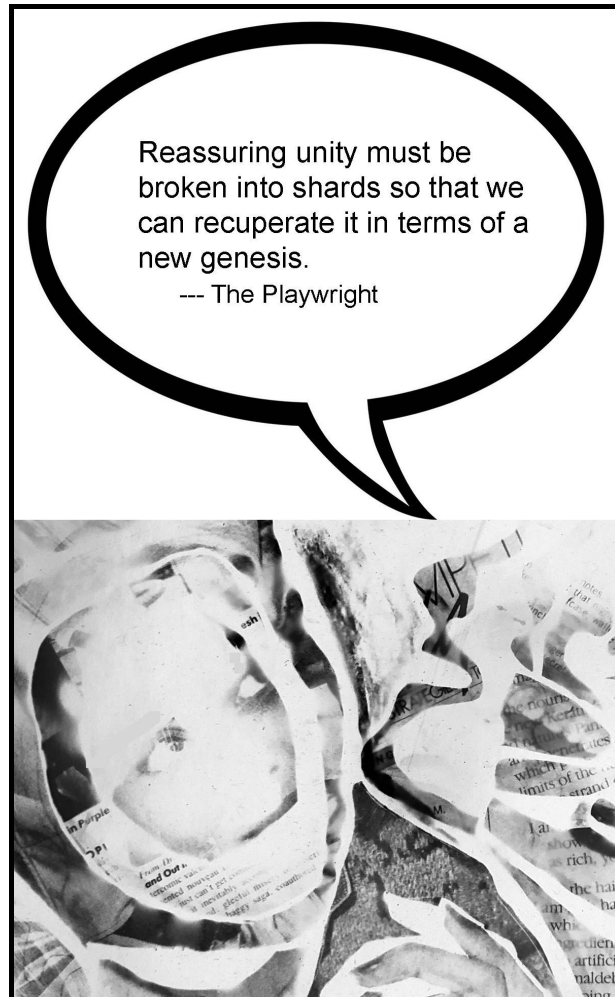
“The Instruction of Choledoch,” excerpt from *Cistern Tawdry* (2003) Eckhard Gerdes.



Asemic writing from *Cistern Tawdry* (2003) Eckhard Gerdes.

I evoke a language that bores, perforates, digs like a gimlet, ceaselessly gnawing at the Real.

— from the Playwright's notebooks



The Playwright's Envisionment of Chat (left) and Chit (right).

Kurt Vonnegut called plays "artificial time-quakes" because "[a]ctors know everything they are going to say and do, and how everything is going to come out in the end ... when the curtain goes up in Act Once, Scene One. Yet they have no choice but to behave as though the future were a mystery." Chit and Chat are encouraged to defeat that status quo, restoring Sartrean choice to the actors, and opening up the theme of the universe. . . .

"Existentialists don't really have much to say about the universe as such," as Gary Cox in The Existentialist's Guide to Death, the Universe, and Nothingness points out: "[T]he stars and galaxies of the astronomers or vastness of outer space. . . . Neither are existentialists particularly concerned about whether or not there is intelligent life on other planets." Chit and Chat are concerned. . . .

Anamnesis means remembrance, but is also a work that transforms its subject. To recollect the old is also to produce the new, such as I've done in Chit for Chat. A duo who can be derived from Euler's Formula for any polyhedron that doesn't intersect itself: $F + V - E = 2$, where the number of Faces plus the number of Vertices (corner points) minus the number of Edges always equals 2.

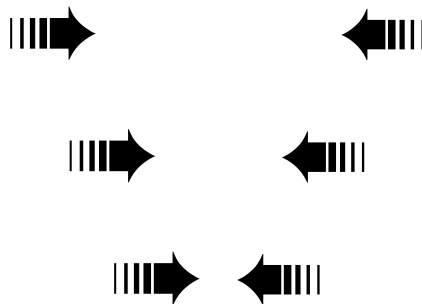
— Excerpts from the Playwright's notebooks

How could I write, sign, countersign performatively texts which “respond” to Beckett?

— Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*

So I saw A [Chat] and C [Chit] going slowly towards each other, unconscious of what they were doing. It was on a road remarkably bare, I mean without hedges or ditches or any kind of edge, in the high desert. Dazzling light. Cows were chewing in enormous fields, lying and standing, in the bright silence.

— A mash-up of text from *Molloy* and *Act Without Words I*
by Samuel Beckett by The Playwright



“What’s new, friend? Is there anything new to think about?”
“If I answered ‘me,’ what would you say?”
“That you’re joking.”
“And yet, that’s my answer. What remains to be thought today is me [moi].”
“Surely you mean ‘the ego’ [le moi]. Is it your view that the concept of ‘ego’ should become, once again, a major stake for thought?”
“Even more, that ‘the’ ego, the concept of ego in general, means nothing. A universal ego, a ‘me’ that would not be *me* is only an empty form, one that we could easily replace with an It or an X. The meaning of the concept of ego is entirely given by the experience I have of it at every moment, the experience of being a living and singular ego. And so the matter to think now is indeed *me*!”

Two Chatbots meet, E-Go and Moinous, to argue against Lacanian theory (Jacob Rogozinski).



In 1995 Federman was escorted out of a Kinko's for allegedly writing directly onto the glass of a photocopier. In the shuffling madness, Ray was quoted in the local newspaper as saying: "I am writing. This is my writing utensil. Follow me."

— "Imagination as Plagiarism: Critifucking Raymond Federman,
Doug Rice

And, there is no doubt that we listen to others only for the purpose of repeating what they have said. Yet, we write under the illusion that we are not repeating what has already been written.

— "Critifiction: Imagination as Plagiarism," Raymond Federman

For James Huganin
who loves Noodles

DOUBLE OR NOTHING

I assume

a
real fictitious
discourse

b
y

Raymond

Federman

In Friendship
of Books

Raymond Federman

San Diego

3/21/05



THE SWALLOW PRESS INC.
CHICAGO

Copy of *Double or Nothing* found in a bookcase in a furniture store, sent to Federman, who autographed it.

commer
ce as the
saying
goes
before
joining
the line
but also
to chat
with the
new
acquaint
ances
made in
line as
one
moved
about
leisurely
from
place to
place up
and
down
for
indeed
the mere
fact of
being in
line
seemed to
create a

"The Line" (excerpt) by Raymond Federman, page from *The Laugh that Laughs at the Laugh: Writings from and about the Pen Man*, Raymond Federman (2002) Eckhard Gerdes, editor.

X The self-conscious display of the absence of subjecthood in postmodern artistic productions, the absence of authorship, originality, and authenticity, as well as the flagrant contestation of the institutional and legal apparatus for determining the nature of art and authorship, are intentionally subversive expressions of conceptual precepts which demand to be recognized as such and are what I call 'guerrilla plagiarism.'

Pragmatic Plagiarism: Authorship, Profit, and Power (2001) Marilyn Randall.

Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire d'être un moi (What does it mean to be an I?)

— A Lacanian Chatbot

When I dump a clipboard's worth of language from somewhere else into my work and massage its formatting and font to look exactly like it's always been there, then, suddenly, it feels like it's mine.

— "Why Conceptual Writing? Why Now?" by Kenneth Goldsmith

Just call me Saint Martyr of the Order of Plagiarism.

— The Playwright

Repurposing content created by a bot

(that sources from fixed sources within

its database) is still plagiarism no matter

how you l**OO**k at it. Yes or No
(Circle one)

Signature here

Date



Chit and Chat thumb-wrestle, an exercise the Director, who is obsessed with hand gestures, has his actors perform daily as he claims it impacts their ability to dialogue effectively.

What we must consider, though, is that dialogue is only “natural” or “unnatural” within the literary mode or framework, what “natural” conversation in a literary work should be or what we presume it to be, and that even “natural” conversation bears little resemblance to everyday conversation.”

— “Beckett and the Language of the Void,” Ryan Bishop (1984)

Yes, I did arise from a tawdry cistern. Yet went on to earn more than my stern sis.

— Chit

What would happen if I decided to define you, Chit, as a force and not a person? And if I were to situate Chat as another force confronting you?

— The Playwright

Those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music.

— A modern proverb. Chit and Chat request you hear the music.

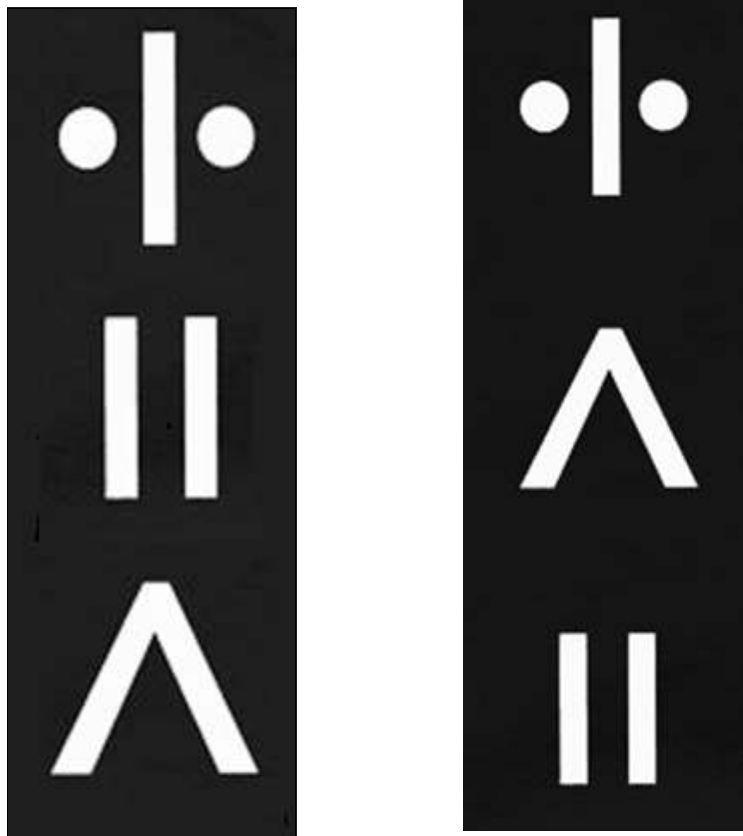
Between them they find a rejoinder to everything. And how they enjoy talking . . .

— *The Unnamable*, Samuel Beckett

Where the unnamable Thing was, it must now arise as an I and take up speech in the first person and in its own name.

— *The Ego and the Flesh*, Jacob Rogozinski

Chit & Chat as mathematical symbols



To speak is not merely to translate a certain sense of malaise, but to enter the world of the word, where astonishing powers are at play.

— “Introduction to Bachelard’s Poetics,” Jean Lescure

Language ceases to be as long as it continues to do.

— *Lasting Letters Lasting, Lasting Letters Longing*, Vahid Paez

The single great informing conflict of the American psyche is the conflict between the subjective centrality of our own lives versus our awareness of its objective insignificance.

— David Foster Wallace

No such things as selves exist in the world. All that exists are certain information-processing systems meeting the constraints for phenomenality while operating under a transparent self-model.

— *Being No One*, Thomas Metzinger

I’m reading up on computational biology and the Principles of Extropy.

— The Playwright



Synergy: Chit and Chat in Conversation (print, 2022) A. Ross.

My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended), made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin.

— Letter to Alan Schneider from Samuel Beckett

LINKS

- ❑ *Chit for Chat* (volume one):
<https://www.urn.org/Chit-ChatBK.pdf>
- ❑ *Chit for Chat* (volume two):
<https://www.urn.org/Chit-ChatDeuxBK.pdf>
- ❑ *Chit for Chat* (volume three):
<https://www.urn.org/Chit-Chat3BK.pdf>
- ❑ James Hugunin's "Foreword" to Eckhard Gerdes's *Cistern Tawdry* (2003):
<https://www.urn.org/GerdesRevu.pdf>
- ❑ James Hugunin's review of Eckhard Gerdes's *Marco and Iarlaith* (2018):
<https://www.urn.org/Reviews/GerdesMcManusRevu.pdf>
- ❑ James Hugunin's "Introduction," to Carla Wilson's *Curious Impossibilities: Ten Cinematic Riffs* (2017):
<https://www.urn.org/HugIntro2.pdf>
- ❑ James Hugunin's review of Yuriy Tarnawsky's *Claim to Oblivion: Selected Essays and Interview* (2017):
<https://www.urn.org/Reviews/YuriyRevu.pdf>
- ❑ James Hugunin's catalogue essay: "*L'a,b,c du faux cinématique de René Fendt*":
<https://www.urn.org/FendtEssay.pdf>
- ❑ Eckhard Gerdes's Experimental Fiction Home Page:
<https://www.experimentalfiction.com/collections/eckhard-gerdes>
- ❑ Eckhard Gerdes, Wikipedia:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eckhard_Gerdes
- ❑ *The Lone Ar-ranger Goes Sax Mad* performed by the Sax Family
(Chat and Chat love it, recommend it.)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUMTN8lipjQ>

PROLOGUE

Chit **black** and Chat **red**:
What other possible names?
None can be thought of.

— haiku by Hattori Ransetsu (b. 1654)
modified by Victor L. Thanangadan



Chat and Chit (subjects-in-process) on stage, facing the theater's projection screen.



Playwright at the Samuel Beckett Laboratory, Trinity College, Dublin, 2013, exploring space-time of the Beckettian stage. The Director attended the engaging "Beckett and Technology" conference held in Prague in 2018.

[T]he conceptual difference between artificial and natural systems has already ceased to be an exclusive and exhaustive difference.

— *Being No One* (2004) Thomas Metzinger

We are meant to be like dueling hurdy-gurdy machines whose crank is turned by our Playwright while our Director oversees the action.

— "Minds Suspended: Chit 'n Chat in Performance" (2022) Chit lecture.

Reality is nothing more, and nothing less, than manifest patterns of information — information complexes — emergent on the fundamental Grid of the universe.

— *Alien Information Theory* (2019) Andrew Gallimore

This text encourages the reader to glide freely, sojourning as long as desired, moving about at will, returning and leaving at any moment and through any door. Only way to form it that admits chaos and accommodates the mess.

— The Playwright

FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT'S "Play Book"

Blabber 'n Babble

Blink 'n Wink

Boom 'n Crash

Buzz 'n Whirr

Cackle 'n Cluck

Chatter 'n Mutter

Chew 'n Slurp

Chit 'n Chat

Clang 'n Bang

Clatter 'n Clatter

Click 'n Clack

Cough 'n Sneeze

Crash 'n Boom

Drip 'n Drop

Flap 'n Flutter

Flotsam 'n Jetsam

Giggle 'n Titter

Gobble 'n Gulp

Grind 'n Crunch

Hiccup 'n Burp

Holler 'n Shout

Hop 'n Skip

Hush 'n Whisper

Jiggle 'n Wobble

Knead 'n Squeeze

Lick 'n Lap

Meow 'n Purr

Nibble 'n Chew

Plop 'n Drop

Puff 'n Blow

Quick 'n Fast

Rumble 'n Roar

Scurry 'n Scamper

Sit 'n Stand

Slither 'n Slide

Smack 'n Snack

Sniff 'n Snuff

Snore 'n Grunt

Squeeze 'n Hug

Thump 'n Bump

Tick 'n Tock

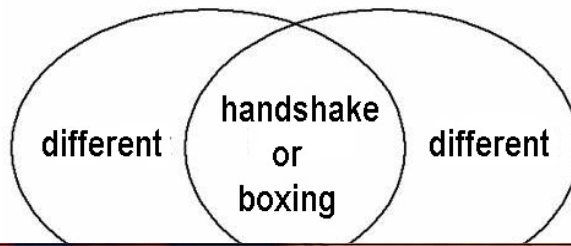
Titter 'n Giggle

Waddle 'n Wobble

Whisper 'n Shout

Yawn 'n Stretch

Zigzag 'n Meander



Projection: Gotye and Kimbra, verbal boxing, as they sing their hit song *Somebody I Used to Know* (2011).

Boxing ring. Two stools on which will sit our verbal combatants. Behind, a large projection screen displays an image of Gotye and Kimbra singing about conflict, which overlays a Venn diagram. A camera behind the audience films audience, ushers, and stage. On a janky table stage-front rests: a Leica V-Lux 5 dig-camera (a metonym for the film crew), Carla Wilson's book *Curious Impossibilities: Ten Cinematic Riffs*, a green-blue plastic bottle of Prell shampoo, and a Karatsu tea bowl half-filled with sand (symbolizing wabi sabi). Chit and Chat walk the bounds of the ring, then rummage among all this petrified crap, exploring the twilight of our times, believing stories believe in them. A stagehand holds a sign toward the audience then exits.

**We apologize for
the slapdash nature
of this event.**

CHIT: [Sits. He wears a Wiley Post eyepatch, spits his sucking stone into his hand, clears throat.] Wonderful red hat on your *Frauenkopf*! [Works his handkerchief deep into his nose.] Tickle yer arse with a feather, madam? [pronounced with a comedic British accent.]

CHAT: [Wears a stupid red beanie.] My are you ripe nogoodnick! **Pfui!** [Feigns being abashed, speaks at the audience.] I've had my wordsworth from that mouthful! What about you all? [Nervous laughter from the audience.] Fugue in E Minor, please [addressing the lingering stagehand, but nothing happens.]

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: How rich you smell! Not mean to offend thee, Effendi. But it's nasty weather ushered in, m'am. A missed note in the shower only offends the shampoo [*points to the Prell*]. Words and I pretend to be on the same page. Ya make me feel like me swallowed a Roman candle: belly full of stars, an aliened mind, piping hot and ready for action!

CHAT: I saw a spider usher a fly into its mouth [*delivered very assertively*].

CHIT: I saw a vulture eating a rabbit. I stepped on a green stick. It was a praying mantis.

CHAT: So no scuba-doo in Quintana Roo? Too many tons of verbal ore to usher . . .

CHIT: No. But I like Greenaway films. If I were not an actor, I'd dig being a stargazer.

CHAT: Rumor has it our Playwright vomits every time he sits down to write.

CHIT: Don't Hamm it up in the Land of Sky Blue Waters, but only on stage, Hamm.

CHAT: Are we put together from bits of other people? Maybe by machines.

CHIT: So we're *Technomenschen*? [*Brain sends a peculiar message to his left hand.*]

CHAT: That's weird, man! Ah, don't mention it. And you forgot to mention I'm *not* a man.

CHIT: Okay, I'll mention something *not* about Menschen: So right in HER sarong.

CHAT: And so happy in HER serape! [*A scratchy recording of the Off Broadway musical song "Try to Remember the Kind of September" starts to play, then the needle rips.*]

CHIT: I remember . . . bean-bag ashtrays that would remain level on any surface. Used to bang thing, thing make good noise. Bang thing again. Parents pissed.

CHAT: That's a no Brainard, Joe! It's Don Barthelme. Who gives Perelmans of wisdom.

CHIT: Yes it is! Let in chaos and collagy stuff, those "I Remember . . ." writings, and . . .

CHAT: [*Points at the table.*] Look! Prell shampoo! Ushered in the year my dead husband was ushered into the world. [*To the audience.*] Pardon, the verbal sparring, memory exercises, naming and categorizing stuff. Attempting the impossible: trying to italicize the period at the end of an italicized sentence. Are we Chatbots (being no one) or Sartrean

CHIT for CHAT

Selves ushering in experiments in which we are also the participants? Or abortions of a fledgling? *[Gesture of helpless compassion.]* Must check my Whoroscope.

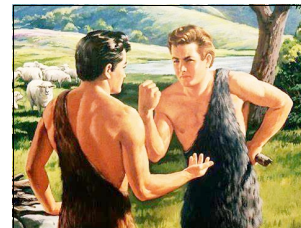
CHIT: Hey, is this stage set OSHA compliant? The Playwright did say we must eat again from The Tree of Knowledge in order to retain a state of innocence. *[Suddenly.]* Oh, shit! Where are we? *[Looks about mystified.]* Oh! Santa Fe, New Mexico. I remember. Here the spectators don't stiffen when the Rail Runner train crosses busy intersections, past cowboys riding horses and encampments of desperate homeless people, on its way to dusty, quirky crime-ridden Albertquacky. QUACK, QUACK, QUACK.

CHAT: *[Spittle at corner of her mouth.]* Best ACK where have we been. Ushered there by our Playwright who refers to me as "the woman who picks gooseberries."

CHIT: Stirring shit up. Our entire careers, too! Ushering in a poetics of uncooperation with Sartre's practico-inert and for all built-in strategies meant to sustain capital gain.

CHAT: That's why the Playwright hired us to be "pan-dimensional change agents" *[finger-quotes]*, as he put it. We, he told us, are to be "Brash and defiant in our lines." *[Looks at the audience, waves at someone who yelled "Kill the Ref!"]* *Laughter, audience claps. Woman in the front row stands up and boldly cops the Prell shampoo bottle off the table.]*

CHIT: Ah! We are ushered into the ring in the midst of applause! Better than doing CarJitsu in a be ater Nissan *[turns, watching the projection behind them]*. The Garden of Eden. Silence — what are the consequences of silence? — once broken there with a **BANG!** was never again whole. Then Cain and Abel. Is not our dialogue just a wacky extension of verbal hand-shakes and fisticuffs carried out over millennia that was



first incarnated by those Ur-Gardeners Adam and Eve? And what was God adoin' 'afore the creation? An admiral contemplatin' his naval? An Isolate in the cosmos, a lost lamb? *[Staring up at the ceiling.]* You know, when we went to that cheap motel where the Crew was staying for a blow-out party, I noticed all the rooms had the same Ikea bed. The Playwright went nuts, declaring: "Fuckin' first time I saw mass-produced furniture used as an objective correlative!" It was all *poetry and pizza* most of the night, but then it turned ugly, *kale and NPR*, in the a.m. I told the Director — lookin' good in his Bonobo khakis and Polo shirt — that tonight I'd remain perfectly calm, even with this damn Wiley Post eyepatch on. Later, wondered what sort of calm that would be. Seems it was calm-for-its-own sake. A Zen-thing. An environment can do that. A director can direct that. Post and Will Rogers nose-dived off Point Barrow Alaska on August 15, 1935. Were they calm or clammy?

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: [*Brushes hair from shoulder.*] Their end was already in the beginning. People will do frightful things to get noticed. [*Ignores Chit's digression, audience claps.*] As if He had a Navy! The Ark comes later, buster. And that fuckin' snake! God said *Let there be light* but Adam 'n Eve, Cain 'n Abel were the first to say *Let there be an argument* way before that Russkie, Mikhail Bahktin, did. But Cain 'n Abel took their argument too far.

CHIT: Like assassinations today! Did Adam or Eve, first hold The-Lord-of-the-Flies Conch, indicating who is authorized to speak? Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it.

CHAT: My vote's on Eve. She must've had the gift of "Giving Eyes" and she . . .

CHIT: Then Adam mighta asked her in turn: "Was ya ever bit by a dead bee?"

CHAT: Oh, a great conversation starter! Jeeze. Dialogue entails survey, discovery, risks like boxing, and roles. Stuff Dan Menaker opines about in *A Good Talk*. Dialogue, often mixed with bitter conflict. Sentences like: "Keep your opinion-hands off my body!"

CHIT: [*Cups hand over right ear.*] Imagine, usherin' in an argument o'er a slice of fruit! Could've become *Vennomous* as in Gotye's song *Somebody I Used to Know*. There might not have been Cain and Abel, then . . . ah . . . but on the plus side, there'd be no Putin on the Ritz. No Kim Jong-Un *und* his ill-gotten gains or Trump trumping democracy, making the world sick, nor anyone to tell me: "You're sketchier than a two a.m. waffle house."

CHAT: You're the one wearing punchy Skechers *sans* socks. Putin wants the fruits of conquest before cancer conquers all. Do you concur?

CHIT: Could be why the Germans temper bitter's bite by pronouncing it *BEE-ta*.

CHAT: Why, given their history, bitter becomes *please* In their stretch-car language.

CHIT: [*Subtle twitch of left hand.*] My German teacher — she drove a Mercedes Benz — said, "Please pronounce *w* like *v*, *d* like *t*, *z* like *s* and vice-versa." I asked her: "If they pronounce evening, *abend*, as *ahbent*, **why not the fuck just spell it that way!**"

CHAT: It's all bent, the pronunciations, that is. [*Pause.*] The Playwright's sees us as "foxes" (*à la* Isaiah Berlin) pursuing many ends, often unrelated, and even contradictory. His wishes are that, using his script with all its extravagant typographic hoopla like a compass, we traverse its terrain of inexhaustible richness and unpredictability while in shorts, sparring like a boxers. BTW, a BMW's front grill is based on Hitler's moustache.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Is that why the Playwright's sentences are so terse? But *you* in shorts? *[Laughs.]* Fuck no! In so traversing this difficult textual terrain we dress appropriately. Q.E.D. The Director agrees with me and disagrees with you. Why he's mentioned Sartre and Sartorial in the *same* sentence. He stresses we, as intermittent characters could retotalize the social whole upon long observation — something like that — can't recall due to some odd roar in me skull. I do recall he said, "You can't bully the bond market."

A vendor hawks Reese's Peanut Cups and water bottles to audience — to much grumbling — as the projected image behind our sparring partners is changed to a scene from Beckett's Waiting for Godot. Below the image is a projected text from that famous play. It is read by an off-stage deep voice.



Scene from *Waiting for Godot*. Note hand gestures.

OVERVOICE: *[Riffing on Beckett's Waiting for Godot.]* VLADIMIR: Let us not waste our time, our unnameable legacy, in idle chit-chat! Do something, while we have the chance . . . at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind be us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it before it is *mucho* too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate has consigned us! What do you say?

CHIT: *[Responding.]* Have you not done with your accursed time! One damn thing after another. *[Pauses.]* No idle discourse? Big book idea: transcribe "Last Frantic Conversations" made by passengers' texts, calls to loved ones as US Airways Flight 1549 was facing disaster from bird strikes to the engines, avoided by a water landing in the Hudson River, their craft turning into an Ark. Interview flight assistants, noting how hand-held

CHIT for CHAT

devices shape hands, navigate digits, query if the captain was a “sullen bugger” before or after the water landing. Like, you know? **Let words fly up like a flock of birds!** Our Playwright did. Got him kicked out of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, Naropa Institute, and into the lap of our Beckett-crazed Director.

CHAT: Okay. But then fictionalize the passenger’s names in known pairs *[these pairings are screened behind the actors; she reads the list]*:

Click and Clack
Mike and Mad Dog
Della and Perry
Thelma and Louise
Boswell and Johnson
Gore Vidal and William Buckley

CHIT: Let me usher in some more *[sounding eager, reading his list]*:

Clark Kent and Lois
Bat Man and Robin
Hylas and Philonous
George and Gracie
Harold and Kumar
Nick and Nora
God and Abraham.

CHAT: Speaking of the Playwright and Named Pairs, he finally settled on the bare bones CHATBOT-LIKE version: **Chit and Chat**. We seem to be less characters than ideas.

CHIT: Barely sketched us as entities and so much of his material’s been copped — chatbot-ish, for sure. He, originally a poet, said he abhorred the *couplet* as it set things in order, balanced opposing energies and reduced them to a mixed, but settled unity. So it was **FUCK THE COUPLET!** “But ain’t Chat ’n I a couplet?” I answered back. He said “Spare me the shit,” that we are to be “sparring partners” *[finger quotes]* only.

CHAT: Spare me the details! He *did* tell us the Work is an homage to François Truffaut’s *Day for Night*, which inspired the script’s cover image; it’s a film-about-making-a-film, our Playwright tasked with adding textual poachings from low, high, and weird sources.

CHIT for CHAT

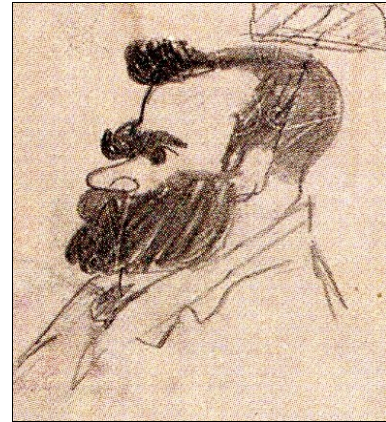
CHIT: And he likes that Francois' last name is a play on "True" *and* "Faux"! But the big question is: Are we to be active agents of destruction or of contradiction? Or both? Or simply ventriloquist dummies testing out someone else's words to see how we like them? We aren't exempla of the lovey-dovey. Maybe we have alien genes in bubbling in us?

CHAT: Speak for yourself. The script is open to interpretation from sheer nonsense to deep philosophy — thanks Mr. Perelman. Is it a novel, a play, a movie, or all three at once? He did tell us that it was "a dream that asked itself to be written." I do imagine critics with weird hairdos doing a door-dash, seeking the large pans in their kitchen to fry the Playwright for his disordered sentences that sport gaps through which readers could stick both hands, even run a truck through.

CHIT: The right perception of any matter — like this script — and a misunderstanding of the same do not mutually exclude each other. *Long Observations of the Ray*, recall?

CHAT: Tell that to the critics. Give 'em cellphones pre-hacked by the Mossad. By the way. Who is this Eckhard Gerdes honored in this text? Sounds like a mystic.

CHIT: An oft-punning wordsmith who published the Playwright's early jottings. He's the mastermind behind the literary efforts of *The Journal of Experimental Fiction*, which, supports the work of writers who'd otherwise be ignored by the "Big Guys". He looks much like this sketch of a man drawn by Franz Kafka *[the image is projected on the screen behind our interlocutors.]*



Franz Kafka's sketch of a man.

CHAT: He's an Usher of Neuron-Zipped Words. Holy Ten Dimensions, Bat Man! Could Gerdes be a time-traveler? *[Clasps hands against her face, squeezing them tight, creating a funny human mask.]*

CHIT: *[Making grandiose doodling motions with his right hand.]* The Gerdes' asemic writing does suggest someone from another time or dimension let loose with pen and paper. By the way, did you notice the Playwright's interest astronomy, in UFOs and mysterious abductions? He talks of "Strange objects sentient to their course in the sky."

CHAT: He has ushered into my mind the Fermi Paradox a few times. The discrepancy between the lack of conclusive evidence of advanced extraterrestrial life and the apparently high *a priori* likelihood of its existence. As a 2015 article put it *[using finger*

CHIT for CHAT

quotes], "If life is so easy, someone from somewhere must have come calling by now." The Playwright wants to usher them . . .

CHIT: In the Seventies, what is known as the Arecibo message, was ushered far out into space. No reply yet.

CHAT: Should've sent a probe filled with cool jewelry, that'd get more attention. BTW, neo-con Massachusetts Air National Guardman Jack Teixeira did get an FBI reply after broadcasting national secrets concerning *our* world. One of Jack's chat-room cronies praised the slim twenty-one year old as: "A young charismatic man. He loved nature and God. Who loved gunplay and racing cars." They forgot to add he shared 44.1 percent of his DNA with banana's. Now he's behind bars *sans* cars.

CHIT: Like an overheated car radiator, he bubbled over with racist and antisemitic blather.

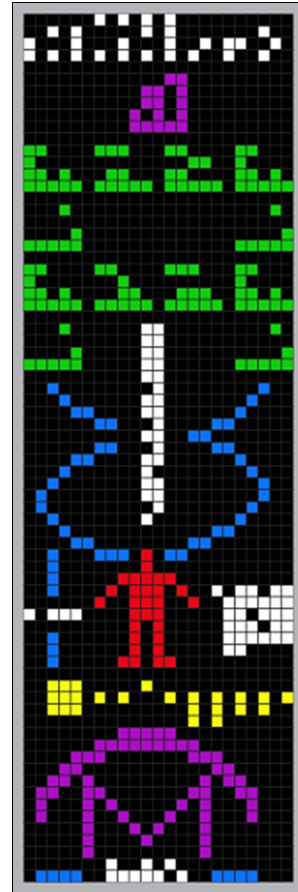
CHAT: I think vertigo, disorientation, inoperativity are in our futures. Where then? Who then? When then?

CHIT: Take that to mean on societal, subjective, and literary levels. *[A stagehand with a large curved cane is seen inching from the stage's wings.]*

CHAT: *[Side glance at the threatening cane.]* We don't get paid until next until next Friday and my VISA bill is due tomorrow.

The duo — Chit volatile, Chat persistent — slowly stand, bow deeply toward the audience who don't seem pleased. The pair march about the stage twice to the blaring sounds of William Walton's Crown Imperial March. Exeunt. Ushers rush on stage looking confused. Someone screams. The stagehand exchanges his cane for a slide-whistle and, doing a duck-waddle, plays a silly tune. The Director steps on-stage with a megaphone and bellows.

THE DIRECTOR: We've been filming in infrared photonegative telekineticolor today!



A graphical representation of the Arecibo message, humanity's first attempt to use radio waves to actively communicate our existence to alien civilizations that may be out there.

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ACT ONE

CHIT for CHAT

Fog machine creates thick “smoke” on stage.

CHIT: I open unto the light of the world — when I can see it — listen to its rumors, caresses and savor the flesh of things.

CHAT: *Moi*, oh see! But hardly now. But who are you?

CHIT: *Moi*. Searching for the certitude of we. Where are you?



Chit and Chat's paths cross.

CHAT: I'm in a place where the tax law allows wealth-holders to build up vast asset portfolios without ever incurring the capital gains tax. And where women's chat of sexual abuse are oft *discounted* (not like in Walmart). Where are you? [*Smoke machine is set on HIGH.*]

CHIT: Not far away, judging from our voices, but this fucking forest fire smoke makes it impossible for me to see you. An unwanted airy visitor from California clogging New Mexican skies. Sad when one can see better on FaceTime than in the flesh.

CHAT: I'm an unwanted visitor, too, from Chicago. Yeah. And add the local fires with odd names flaming on either side of us here in Santa Fe with its strong high-desert winds sailing smoke straight up our nostrils. **Smokin'!** [*In a rapid tempo.*]

CHIT: I'm an unwanted visitor, too. Fled Los Angeles's forest fires 'n floods. Today is same as yesterday — it is the community of Aldea after all — but for your *presence* [*bows, unseen by his interlocutor*]. Everyone is the other and no one is themselves.

CHAT: I haven't given you any presents! Oh . . . in every respect but my presence?

CHIT: Well . . . a little hyperbole never hurt anyone. And then *what* is a presence? Experimental writer Ray Federman is a presence — of sorts — and his books presents, in my mind; love is a presence in my heart. My mind shows things, often, vividly than.

CHAT: Not a word. Oh! The Jewish French-American Pen Man! Author of *Double or Nothing*. Didn't he emerge from a closet or something? Wasn't gay, I don't think.

CHIT: *Moinous* — his invented literary name for *me* and *us* — always ponders why his *maman* shoved him alone in a closet when the Wolf was at the door, French Nazi's coming to deport them. So it was the gas chambers for her and her two daughters. All

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XXX'd out in Auschwitz. Persistent guilt over this. "Why *moi* saved?" His wacky experimental writing resulted, benefitted, from that question and trauma. Ironical that his literary reputation is far greater in Germany than here or even France.

CHAT: This horror may be replayed here before I join my ancestors. Saw creepy Kane Ye in a spooky executioner's black hood ranting his praises of Hitler on Alex Jones's far-right conspiracy shit Podcast, QAnonymously espousing his fake noose.

CHIT: The School of the Art Institute in Chicago rescinded an honorary MFA they had earlier given him. An embarrassing switcheroo. Not unduly concerned with intelligibility.

CHAT: Saw that podcast, too — ha! *fake noose* around his neck — great.

CHIT: But it's becoming way too fashionable to be antisemitic, racist, these horrible days of viral viruses and neo-con crap going viral in the Cloud. Speaking of clouds [*coughs several times.*] I think the smoke is thickening. Like that weird fog in the *Twilight Zone* episode that descended on a whole town and whisked it away to an alien planet light-years away and . . .

CHAT: Never watch sci-fi [*iPhone screeches, she jumps.*] Shit! [*Looks at her device.*] KOAT-TV is blasting out an severe air pollution alert! Let's head for our respective closets and don our snow white N-95 masks — dwarf-size for small kids now available.

CHIT: Yeow! I can still hear me mum yelling: "Chitty Chitty Bang Band, get your bony ass inside, RIGHT NOW!" She'd settle my hash. Now wish my arse was a bit more bony.

CHAT: Me mum said: "When you can no longer see the baseball in the sky, it's time to get your butts home for dinner." Ironical that today we can see each better over our devices rather in person. Continue our chit-chat o'er FaceTime, over time? Some time?

CHIT: Overtime? How many workers still get that bennie? The odor proliferating in too many workplaces today is [*making parentheses with his invisible fingers*] "Elon Musk".

CHAT: Good night — dark as any anyway, albeit it's noon — and good luck.

CHIT: It's Albee! Edward . . . *no, no* Edward R. Murrow. His TV news sign-off. Right? But I love Albee's plays. Was stung by Sylvia Plath's *Bee Poems*. This knowledge an emblem of our ageing, it is, remembering more of Murrow, today. Back when news could be mostly trusted as you were trussed up before the Large Tube with a TV dinner before you.

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: *Moi aussi. Albee. Bees. OH SEEEE CAN ME SAYYY . . . [sung like a silly jingle]. D'ja know a local Latinx theatrical troupe is doing a parody of an Albee play. They've titled it: *Who's Afraid of a Nueva Mexicana Wolf?* Done in Spanglish, no less. Because one has as many selves as the languages one speaks. Actors costumed as *cholos* and *cholas*. My Latina hairdresser has a cameo in it as a camel, a comic part in a camel's head.*

CHIT: I'll be damned! If I grokked correctly from an overweight and overworked waiter at The Tea House on Canyon Road — I delicately sippin' on a lavender latte — the action halts every time a member of the audience has to go to the bathroom.

CHAT: *Jeez, must take 'til the wee-wee hours for the night for the drama to reach its final depooement. But it does make you attend to what is directly in front of you.*

CHIT: *Touché!* You're coming out of your shell. Or out of your machine.

CHAT: Yes. Each time ME! But, turtle? Or AI? So I'm Dum Dum?

CHIT: Oh, ha-ha, I get it, sword-wielding Touché Turtle and his canine companion Dum Dum, from that delightful Hanna-Barbera cartoon series circa early sixties. Loved that show. Wanted to master swordplay, too. Adored the French fencing terms; wanted to change my first name to Parry. But targeted, in highschool, mastering archery instead. Me and my arrow. Anon! Today the Next Big Thing is con-spear-acy theory.



CHAT: *I do like the avant-garde writer-gamer Lance Olsen. But, hey, let's beat a retreat!* So announces *moi* (ego and me), Dum Dum. Those NO SMOKING signs about town have been ignored by an abused and vindictive nature.



CHIT: Olsen's smart. Not dumb. And my eyes are smarting. **Anon!** *[Raises an invisible arm as if leading a cavalry charge.]* Away all pudding faces and blubber mouths!

Exeunt. Chit and Chat slowly feeling their way back off stage, later to return to their respective abodes, hunker down alone. Each starts to read a new script, red pens in hand. Yes . . . life is beautiful, life is stupid in equal measure. And DJT is a fat double-breasted turd.

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CHIT for CHAT

Midnight. Raining. It's not midnight nor raining. Soliloquy in a dark closet with small beam of a flashlight. COVID mask muffles voice.

CHAT: Alone. Jeanne D'Ark. [*Chuckles.*] But I know how to make the *pronouns skid*: I speak and you hear me, hence we exist. With Chit, I' supposed to make with distributive, plural and discontinuous chatter, give forth "the quoties" (as the Director put it) generating a discontinuous succession of free creative moments. My therapist says I need DREAM of ~~permissions~~ [*gesture of finger-slicing her throat*] persimmons and pigs: "Write out a chit to remind you of the dream." My hairdresser, who studies the wrinkles around my eyes, urges I turn my fans off at night, collect my toenail clippings in a big jar as large as Burt Large in the *Doc Martin* TV series, and burn a scented candle before it.

Hey Chit! I your curiosity is insatiable. Know you can't hear me. At our age we've lost through death and withdrawal (both lively and slow) many. In some relationships the whistle of generosity — and geometry (a Venn diagram) — has petered out. An analogue photog friend underlined his books in **green** not red, claiming red ink vanished under red darkroom safelights, but **green** displayed as **black**. Think I used to write him in red-tinted ink; maybe why his letters back were few — just *tink* 'bout dat! We don't write now or talk. Johnny's in a coma in L.A. after being hit by a car a day before he was to change his name to "Cletus". (You ever seen the creepy movie *Coma* with Genevieve Bujold?) His care-nurse daily works his hair into a comb over. As if he gives a shit. He's more was than is. Yet still a presence when I regain time.

I only visited him once. That was enough. His kids — besides putting a Big Bird toy beside him because he loved it when Buffy Sainte-Marie was on *Sesame Street* — had affixed a small toy aluminum TV antenna on his head thinking it might initiate a connection with people's thoughts. After reading Plath's *Bee Poems* to him over and over for two hours, his immobile living corpse gave forth *NADA!* Not a blink. There was a stink though proving his bowels — Q.E.D.— were working, barely. In retrospect, maybe I should have read something from Gary Snyder's "things to do" poems. Invented a pleasant task like: "Giddyap for some delicious *gimbap*!" He loved all manner of Korean cuisine. Might've motivated him more. Shit, he named the family female Siamese cat *Kimchi*. These days, I watch the recent South Korean TV series *The Extraordinary Attorney Woo*. I sometimes suspect Chit, too, is "on the spectrum" as the saying goes. My deceased husband was — a bit. Might be why was an *eidetiker*.



Et eclats de moi? All suckers for *bibimbap*. Literally. I'm a *suck up*. Not just the food, the name itself. When I recite a Korean menu quickly — *samgyeopsa* / *bulgogi* / *bibimbap* / *bangsang* / *jjajangmyeon* / *chimaek* / *maekju* / *ganjang* / *gejang* / *tteokbokki* /

CHIT for CHAT

gopchang / samgyetang / doenjang / gamjatang / haemul pajeon / jjambong / kongguksu / kalguksu / tteokguk / doenjang jjigae / galbi / chuncheon dakgalbi / bossam / agujjim / hobakjuk / gyeranjjim / naengmyeon / dotorimuk / ppeongtwig / nakji bokkeum / bingsu / japchae washed down GULP with *cheongju* — I sound like a scat singer on steroids. Always makes me want to dance — WOO-WOO!



Gimbap.

My late husband adored *bulgogi* with all the *bansang* side-dishes. My former digs, Chicago, had excellent Korean cuisine. I'm flashin' on Buffy Sainte-Marie's statement: "Some will tell you what you really want ain't on the menu. Don't believe them. Cook it up yourself and then prepare to serve them." Good advice. Could've come from Federman, the Pen Man's pen. Speaking of ideas: Why not arrange those exotic food names, breaking them into tidbits on a page as if displayed on a large white plate. Title it:

For what will it *profiterol* a [wo]man if she/he gains the Whole Foods, but loses her/his Seoul?

*sam gye psa bul gogi bi bim bap bang sang jjajang myeon chi
maek maek ju gan jang ge jang tteok bokki gop chang sam
gye tang doen jang gam jatang hae mul pa jeon jjamb bong
kong guksu kal guksu tteok guk doen jang jjigae galbi chunch
eon dak galbi bos sam agu jjim hobak yuk gyeran jjim naeng
myeon dotori muk ppeong twig / nakji bok keum bing su jap
chae cheong ju cheong ju ju ju tteok guk jap*

For some Proustian *raison d'ead*, this recalls to mind my late husband's work-in-progress investigating the effect of Web 2.0 and AI on language and society: absolute foolishness. Unfinished at his death, its proposed title was an ear-catcher: *From Phoneme to Faux Meme*. The Playwright wants to skim it. Ron De Santis wants to ban it — thinks *faux meme* refers to Drag Queens and the Transgendered. He predicted soon all new computer keyboards would be devoid of the letters L - G - B - T - Q.

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CHIT for CHAT

Wooden bench in Santa Fe plaza. Crew puts up Christmas lights. Our duo drinks hot apple cider. The duo begin to mean something.

CHIT: Yarg! A sight for sore eyes! Where you been . . . days since we . . .

CHAT: In my home office, “Coyote Den”, of course. My whole shit system went Kaput. Up now. Internet *über alles*. What can happen now besides gravity? In both senses.

CHIT: Depressed, huh? Oh, yeah. *[Moving his head around in-frame, smiling.]* That’s your homely-looking bookcase behind you. What time does your computer say?

CHAT: Same time as yours! *[Her cheeks begin to get heated, eyes excited.]*

CHIT: Synch me! How ’n the fuck do you know that, Sophist?

CHAT: Well . . . *[eyes rolling]* some folks believe in Assumptions?

CHIT: You’re makin’ causal assumptions again? Right? What, read no Hume in college?

CHAT: Hmmm — I *am* snacking on hummus with Fritos, if that counts *[defiantly puts a yellow chip topped with hummus into her mouth]*. Last night when my computer said it was 7 p.m. — and I assume yours did, too — I was listening to Beebop and eating *gimbap* with cheap wooden chopsticks. That music. Fast tempo (I dropped a tidbit on the floor) and unpredictable (I accidentally put a stick up my nose). By the way, what’s with this YARG thing? You sound like a drunken pirate precariously balancing on a walk-the-plank in a rough sea in a *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie.

CHIT: Been really gettin’ into sea shanties lately. The Irish Rovers. Miss the water. Imagine a traditional work or drinking song but inflected by the rolly-polly of high sea adventure in and out of port. *WAY HAY AND UP SHE RISES* . . .

CHAT: Yeah! I know. *Drunken Sailor* by the ravishing Irish Rovers is my *right down* fav. *WHAT WILL WE DO WITH A DRUNKEN SAILOR? . . . WHAT WILL WE DO WITH A DRUNKEN SAILOR?— GIMBAP BIBIMBAP BOO . . .* But I imagine the ship anchored in Busan Harbor, Korea.

CHIT: *[Amateuristic attempt at an Irish accent.]* *PUT HIM IN BED WITH THE CAPTAIN’S DAUGHTER . . . PUT HIM IN BED WITH THE CAPTAIN’S DAUGHTER.* That’s the funniest of the hilarious options offered in the lyrics. In my estimation.

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Nay! *SHAVE HIS BELLY WITH A RUSTY RAZOR* is my choice for best-in-song. 'Cause I imagine doing that to His Pants for possibly the razor slips lower, lower. . .

CHIT: Humorous [*giggles*]. And hummus — Nitrohummus — fertilizer consisting of sewage sludge. I'm referring, of course, to ~~Trump~~ [*struck-out words indicated by a right index finger making a slash gesture across the neck*], whom you wittily refer to as "His Pants".

CHAT: John Oliver said, when ~~Trump~~ was Pres, the White House staff's code name for him was Nitro. [*Yells.*] "**Nitro is coming! Nitro is coming! Hide the ketchup!**"

CHIT: Humorous. But I think it was actually because of his *explosive* temper [*upraised arms signify an explosion*].

CHAT: It's Hume or us! And we showed Him these last elections. Good *nous* for U.S.

CHIT: And he's shown us the crack in his fat behind in blustering defiance.

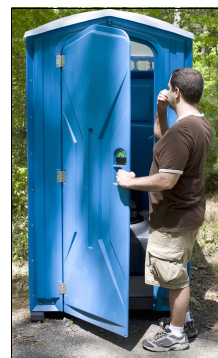
CHAT: Fort Defiance was located at the confluence of the Auglaize and Maumee rivers in Ohio during the Northwest Indian War. It was constructed in seventeen ninety-four.

CHIT: Shit. I get it. You recently saw the PBS *American Masters* episode on Buffy Sainte-Marie's activism in the American Indian Movement, right? By the way, one-seven-nine-four is my fortress of a gym locker's combination.

CHAT: Wait. BREAKING NEWS flashing onscreen . . . "Judicial forces are putting the Lockerbie airplane bombing bomb-maker, Abu Mas'ud, on trial. Relatives will get relative justice — no death penalty to be imposed, life in prison only." Come on! What a cheat.

CHIT: Bet *that* will bomb with the grief-stricken. Burning at the stake more appropriate. Or, better, tossed off the Burj Khalifa sealed in a tough plastic bag.

CHAT: No imagination. He shat on "family values" just before Christmas eight-eight. I'd put him naked in a Porta Potty poop-tank mounted on a pickup. Drive it to American cities where his victims once lived so people could pay five bucks to SIT 'N SHIT on him, funds going to bereaved victims' families. Placed outside venues where Gerdes's play *The Pisser's Theatre* was playing. Bet there'd be long lines, like voting type lines. Each night Mas'ud'd be hosed down, readied for the next day's adventures in *A Perfect Shit-Storm*.



CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Not a bad idea. But I suggest driving that mobile shithouse to mass events: ball games, rock concerts, and voting poll places, et cetera. *[Mind wandering, eyes lighting up.]* The downside of those family values is when it fosters a ruling family elite, like the Trump Dynasty where family office meets organized crime melded with *Lord of the Flies*. Scammers who've thrive in a culture of unaccountability and self-dealing.

CHAT: Which spilled over into His Pants's nepotistic appointments and Godfather behavior when in the White House.

CHIT: At the height of all that political nonsense — add in a dollop of climate-change wallop we are suffering — I was running around in my two-car garage yelling like Raymond fuckin' Federman: "There is only one scenario possible for the planet. IT SHOULD AVOID THE FUTURE." For a time I was seriously thinking about doing my part, donning a black T-shirt that declares in white Comic Sans font OUT OF PRINT and hanging myself in a public place. Curtains for me. The Monkey Condition for all those left after the bombs fall, the tornados strike, and the Great Flood is upon them in what's to become the Mortuary Existential Dead Zone.



CHAT: I suggest that ALL females refuse intercourse to ALL males until the Roe vs. Wade is restored and women achieve perfect equality with men. But I understand. You can Beckett your sweet ass, when you are *sans* the comic, life can get to you. All that's left is old age, pecking at bad elder home cuisine, avoiding watching *Saturday Night Fever* as viral infections go viral, paying taxes, and a suffering weak bladder that beckons you on toward the closest toilet in a Nietzschean Eternal Return. Hey, do you still have that Lit Shirt you got at a poetry slam last year?



CHIT: Yep. Speaking of nature's urgent requests, you did mention that "Pisser Theatre" production earlier. Funny. Audience for the drama, given this is Santa Fe, mostly likely consisting of us old farts interminably holding up the final curtain. Luis Buñuel-ish.

CHAT: That's the point of the play, it's a play on our endgame with Life, always trying to delay the final curtain: IT'S NOT CURTAINS — YET! I hope.

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CHIT for CHAT

Herenowandthen: *Chit-Chat sit-sat on urn-shaped stools in a dim room garbed in Conquistador helmets from a local costume shop.*

CHAT: Hey Ace do we have a goal? The Conquistadors did.

CHIT: How the fuck do I know. After years in Cacademia, I ain't any smarter, though I learned to write in a style like this: *Yet it is wide of the mark in failing to grasp the tragic import of an excoriating vision of irrevocable action as unelectable destiny.* And, I can't even see you. My eyeballs can't track you. From your voice alone I calculate you are ... ah . . . not any farther than ten feet from me. Jeeze! Oh, and your question. Maybe the interrogation of artistic creation!? Naw . . . a dark bottomless pit. Might as well try to grok The Great Vacuum of Creation. But even that is understood now as filled with cosmic shit, DARK MATTER. Beckett never grokked that, despite his interest in astronomy.

CHAT: Well, it *is* night. Night, *Nacht, Nicht.* All the same. And foggy as hell. And Aldea has no street lights. Why *would* we be able to see each other? X-ray vision Superman? And why did we leave our respective abodes so late? [*Pointing, but unseen by Chit.*] That nice lilac just beyond my house hangs in bloom like a lace dress.

CHIT: Darkness best. So how do you grok it's there? That creep Myrtle down the street might've pulled it out to spite you after her husband paid you too much attention at the last Mingle-Bingle Bingo night at the H.O.A. hosted by that famous one-armed itinerant Bingo Master, Bingo Crassbe who always begins the festive evening with a scratching microphone enhanced announcement: "WE SUMMON YOUR AFFECTIONS 'N CURSE YOUR AFFLICTIONS!" But . . . finally, this *isn't* the season when lilacs bloom, **dippy-doo.**

CHAT: Is dippy-do a Korean delicacy I haven't heard of? Well, shit. Time urge. Too console ourselves. To self-cancel. The urge to unsay. Have a night burial in the postmodern wormhole.

CHIT: Oh, fuck. You're record's sticking on the word POETICS again? Everything is revolving now: revolvers, people shot with, The Beatles's album *Revolver* making a comeback, prison doors, tornados, galaxies, satellites, dervishes (if they still exist). Hell, a Hulu series titled *Reboot*. I'm getting dizzy sitting in the dark. Hard to *orient* myself to things.

CHAT: Orient! We don't use *that* discredited Eurocentric O-word anymore, Ace.

CHIT: Ay, ay, can't hear you [*hand to right ear*]. Oh so sorry [*bows, unseen*]. I lose face. Is it a cosmic coincidence that Black Lives Matter just happened to gain ground when

CHIT for CHAT

cosmologists discovered Dark Matter? *[Shouts.]* AND WHAT CAN WE DRAW FROM THIS SPORT FANS? Remember when people began to call death in Auschwitz “a whole culture falling into a black hole?” after Steven Hawking popularized the phenomenon.

CHAT: Ah, y’ar loosin’ more ‘an face, Ace *[speaks like a pirate, her tongue like metal in her mouth]*. Dementia? It’s lonely here. Like night, fog. The absence of everything in which all presence is announced. But I’m still waiting for some. Is it still not the fact that even a person listening to a story is in the company of a storyteller?

CHIT: Gotta be the fact that friendship tends to blur language and vision, giving rise to imprecise and fuzzy blubbing and mistakes. Giving forth a carnivalesque performance of the bums. Us bums. We are retired after all. Don’t work. Stand about like Beckett’s bums. Waiting — becoming uncontrolled substances. Talking — but not leaving us breathless with wonder. We want the real thing straight from the horse’s mouth.

CHAT: Waiting, a face-off with death? It may come sooner than later. A horse once tried to bite my face off. Waiting for my state tax refund? Still hasn’t come. Waiting for an appointment with my new dermatologist? Never. Waiting for the H.O.A. to put mercury lights on our streets? Might as well wait for the *Titanic* to UP SHE RISES ‘n sail again.

CHIT: *[Laughs.]* Yeah, better chance of the gods of Indigenous People rising again to flush us shitty invaders off their land and saving our planet. Hey, even I’ve listened one or two Buffy Sainte-Marie songs. My younger sis listened to Buffy singing *Cod’ine* on her transistor radio and thought she was inviting people of different races to dine together. Co-dine, get it? Get it?



Keep Santa Fe Multicultural, poster on adobe wall.

CHAT: Not funny. Albeit, your sister got the gist of Buffy’s activism. I’m going to pee. Practice pantomiming for strangers. *[Sound of a cane tapping floor, slowly diminishing as she approaches stage left].*

CHIT: Oh Chat, oh Chat . . . Wait. Hey! What’s this? Straight from the horse’s mouth into the maw of a loo? Well, we’ll speak maw later day Saint when we’ll have a period of magical explosions in our discourse, bending sentences.

Exeunt.

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CHIT for CHAT

Soliloquy in Chit's office. Sits at his desk. A \$200 bottle of H & H 1976 Terrantez Madeira five-finger discounted at Sam's Club before him, next to a tiny wine glass, half-full / half-empty. A Rolling Stones poster over his desk with the lyrics: I WATCHED YOU SUFFER DULL, ACHING PAIN in an elaborate cursive font.

CHIT: *[Mumbling numbers, bangs fist on his Thinking Chair's armrest.]* This chair, this desk, they know some years ago my episodes of sexual energy and life confusion closely paralleled by periods of magical explosions of creativity and thoughts of alien beings. It was once: *augur hypertext fiction* and *renew systems of reading* and *innovate paginal syntax* and *surfiction*. Now it's surfing The Net and *how much do you make writing?* Federman's *plume* needs passing on after he passed on *[feder means la plume]*.

"Rats 'n snakes!" — my childhood bud and devilish huckster, Stacey's expected expectorated exclamation, he'd always taunt my *tante* Rachel with that phrase to scare her — *What Now of the North?* Since the southern hemisphere has frozen up (north being my head, south being my genitals). An impotent shudder in the loin engenders a broken wall and burning roof, a falling tower. No! No, it's not too late, I'm not too old. Once again the Muse will speak to me! I must, must re-recognize the feminine, Jung's *anima*, in me as the source of my creative power.

I once balanced *ying* and *yang* perfectly, albeit precariously. A sophomore student once asked me outside class what I thought of European theory. Winking, I told him: "Adore? No. It's both Lackin' an' Young." Tilted his young head like a dog. I elucidated: "A-d-o-r-n-o L-a-c-a-n a-n-d J-u-n-g." He walked down the hall, turned and gave me an ~~excoriating~~ *[fast runs his right finger in a line before him]* dirty look. This is a perfect example of not being able to tell the teller from the told. Easy to tell between Penn and Teller. MAGIC! And most bank robbers can. They always manage to find the teller and tell him or her something about what to do with the till and are told *take it all*. The, then, that, thhhh . . .

I don't think I'm making ~~hense~~ — er — this up *[picks up wine bottle, feels half full or half-empty]*. The glimmering of an idea, but an absence of thought. Shit! Just like, like my life. If a whole culture can disappear into a black hole — *und Ich, et moi?* *[Lapses into bodily gestures simulating a sudden stroke — a bodily gloam as algaeic pins of light tickle his eyeballs. Is time having a STOP? He mutters with clabbered tongue.]* You Stace? Stace? Ahh. Probably constip. Probably constipaysh . . . *[A power outage. Chit in the dark. A constipated pomeranian barks outside. Chit lives through night's unmaking to speak again thanks to a small water of hope, a roof leak dripping on his fevered head.]*



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CHIT for CHAT

Chit - Chat sit 'n sat, give tit for tat under a large piñon tree — a figure meant to oppose Sylvia Plath's famed fig tree image — in next to an arroyo a mile west of Chat's home. They share a large Indian blanket and look like two Navajo's hunkering before a flock of sheep. Or two mice, if seen from 1000 feet above from a jet landing at the S.F. Airport. Not far from them, in the arroyo is a dirty white hide suitcase with an interior of tattered pink silk. Nearby is a chipped green wooden filing cabinet with a drawer missing. Above the tree, false lightning and simulated thunder. Crew snacks on taquitos.

Unseen Anonymous Voice: *[Deep throated.]* The last mouse left in the X-periment has failed to figure out the pattern of activity that releases the food pellets. Many factors are involved, not the least of which is a feeling of nausea provoked by the oppressive observation the mouse is subjected to, and which in turn fills its head unproductively with images of itself from other's perspectives. Someone, please, think of the stockholders!

CHAT: It sings out about rain and joy across the Twentieth Century!

CHIT: But complains about deluge and sadness across the Nation in the Twenty-First Century. **FLASH:** Two tornadically XX'ed out in rural Louisiana: Nikolus and Yoshiko. Son and mother. *Mein Gott im Himmel, spray [slices finger across neck] sprach* for us all!



CHAT: Observation: not given names I'd associate with that State.

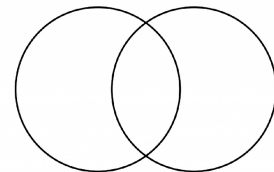
CHIT: Hell . . . given the *state* you're in . . .

CHAT: Me *and* you. I and Thou. Our bodies keep our places. But our minds . . .

CHIT: Moinous! He believed words to be migrants. *[Look of quick recognition; thunder clap.]* Is that outfit you are wearing meant to enhance your Bubers?

CHAT: Now Martin . . . *[slips her glasses over her nose to look at him]* you know what we have in common. The spill over of our selves. And the part of *vous* you call "Genou".

CHIT: I'm thinking . . . Zwieback crackers served at the H.O.A. Xmas party we attended? Matching black ballpoint pens with $n + 1$ in white lettering on them? A ripped comforter? A snow-licked street? A lava lamp? Two six-foot white rope we toss up and down



Venn Diagram.

CHIT for CHAT

when bored, forming circles, but which we secretly plan to use to hang ourselves when our minds finally blow at four tires? No, that's fake noose.

CHAT: I mean more *abstractly*, our conversation. Meta-dialogue, too. Our Venn diagram's overlapping area, you silly mouse. Remember in our respective grad school days, it'd be all Bakhtin's dialogics and black market Mars bars and arguments about: Russian discourse theory and wanting to send a Valentin to Voloshinov? Little did we think then there'd be hoola over the last phone booth left in the world.

CHIT: You said you were *persnickerty* about your candy bars. I never mentioned this before, but my sister died the day after Valentine's Day, that she told me I was part alien and so had no solid point of reference. She liked to sleep. But not *that* long.

CHAT: Sorry I brought the word up. Forgot. Just *ignore* me. Shit [*bows from the waist*]. Hey, why are you wrestling around like that? Jeeze!

CHIT: [*Moving side to side, trying to get at his pants pocket, banging against Chat's breasts, plump as moons.*] Trying to grab my Gauloises. Used to be intelligent and quick.

CHAT: Galoshes?

CHIT: Nope. The French ~~faç~~ [*finger slices throat*] I can only half tolerate. People hand me them. Against that charitable gesture I have no defense. Serres, a very serious visiting French academic, after his lecture at our college, gave me a what was left in his cig pack. For a time I was addicted. I now *occasionally* indulge. He died at age eighty-eight and his last utterance was related to his academic interests, "Hermes," but an American philosopher, a Pragmatist, who happened to be there, swore on a book by Richard Rorty, "He said 'Her knees'."



CHAT: Died from COPD? Lung cancer? Boredom? What?

CHIT: Lung cancer. On June first. Forget the year. But never forget my beer.

CHAT: [*Tries to stand up, but hits her head on a branch.*] Fuck! Ouch! For twenty-four thousand dollars: How do you tell a Christian *now* from back when?

CHIT: Ah, they're more often than ever to be the first person to throw the first rock at the innocent, the flawed; first to pick a poor person's pocket by fraud?

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Yep, our worst National sins: hypocrisy and greed. Have we heard ministers speak out against the behavior of His Pants, against Musk, against Kanye, against . . . ?

CHIT: I get it. Is *that* why we're sitting under this little tree? Penance or something? Or is it because you want to huddle here to consult on scribbling a co-authored Dear Abby letter about some shit, like clerical sexual abuse? Bank failures? Alien abductions?

CHAT: Abby's dead, dummy. But I remember a woman sent her a letter asking her if she should dump her fiancé who was *ingratiating one moment, derisive the next* and who told her *I love you, but I'm a hollow oak*.

CHIT: What was Abby's advice? That nothing is more real than nothing, so . . .

CHAT: *You poor honey, pour honey down that hollow oak and hope, something upbeat. This was why before MeToo. But, if you mean to address concerns related to an oft ignored fact that in 1493, Pope Alexander the Sixth issued a bull shit papal bull, *Inter Caetera*, authorizing Spain and Portugal to colonize the Americas and its Native peoples as subjects and to treat them harshly if they resist . . . then we are sitting like*



This monument in Santa Fe's Plaza dates to 1866 and was originally dedicated to "the heroes who have fallen in the various battles with the savage Indians in the territory of New Mexico." On Indigenous People's Day, it was torn down.

Sitting Bull was in an appropriate geographical location to "start the conversation", as the polite cliché goes, about the racist bull shoveled out by too many religious organizations and theocracies over centuries. See over there *[points to the suitcase and file cabinet]* there's all our baggage and ledgers of past horrors perpetrated by Western culture, files also for Trump's horrors, pun intended..

CHIT: Sitting Bull, boundless will, but he turned to look the decision in the face and only saw smoke.

CHAT: How do you know? Millions of people would've lived out their natural lives if religions with their large fragment of absolute foolishness, hadn't formed.

CHIT: It's the awful need to hammer one's own beliefs into the smashed skulls of "non-believers". In contradistinction, call me a Secular Humanist in Training or an Alien.

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: SHIT? Bad acronym, but a *buono* moral stance. Something our gold-loving Ubu Président Trump never desired.



CHIT: The essence of all religions can be condensed into the Golden Rule, treat others as you yourself would like to be treated. Simple. No need for all the other razzle-dazzle of church ceremonies, elaborate vestments, ritual, and nitpicking metaphysical assumptions. Simple math, kiddo.

CHAT: Too simple for folks who want to sharply distinguish between US and THEM with no overlap between, who want to dominate women (those mere “maidens of mud”, mares to be penned in, as many doctrines support). As history proves. Being Jewish, my parents taught me to be *the fruit on the high branch* when it came to dating. Albeit, they supported the Judaic male-privileging concept of getting the *gett* for divorce to be permitted.

CHIT: My sister was waiting to get an abortion when in walked a female Red Rose Rescue neo-con into the waiting room and thrust a bundle of red roses at her, begging her to not abort her baby. My sis left and had the baby a few months later, but it was still-born. She told conservative assholes: “Well, it was *still* born, wasn’t it?” People are always suckers for spectacle. Even small ones. In tribute to her deceased baby, she left a bonsai tree in the phone booth near the abortion clinic. The baby’s father was Japanese. Bit of trivia: my sis has green eyes like our father, her cat was named “Crumpet”, and ever since she turned fourteen, sis sported a braid that hung like a dead python between her shoulder blades which she called “my ding-dong”. I sat behind a Chinese girl with same type of braid at the Lensic Theatre during a ballet performance once. Could barely watch the stage, hypnotized by its sway.



CHAT: [*Fist in air.*] *C’est pour toi:* “Not the church! Not the state! Only we decide our fate!”

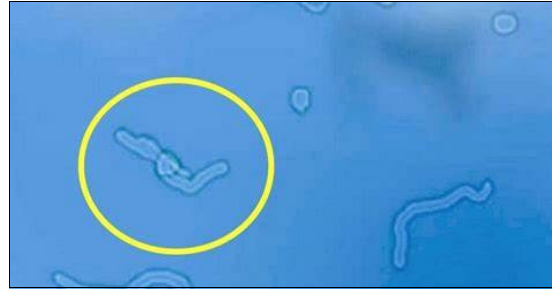
CHIT: Okay, pour twa . . . what some kind of tea? Ooooooooo so long?

CHAT: Yeah, the Fundies offer you a cup of tea with one hand and bash you with the other. Spectacle? I know a person who is addicted to the spectacle that drowns her vision when she pushes hard and long on her eyeballs [*puts her thumbs on her eyes*].

CHIT: That’s called PLSD, Proletarian LSD.

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Olympias's even in rapture over the animated display her many eye-floaters give her in bed, watching them play erratically against the background of her bedroom's white ceiling. She calls them "My private special effects."



Eye-floaters.

CHIT: I've always despised most spectacles, like sports. Fourth of July fireworks and eyeball pressuring being the exceptions.

CHAT: People like their religion screaming hot. Not butter soft. Inhaled greedily through their nose. Picture angels without left wings.

CHIT: Judas was a real shit, less because he ratted out Christ, but mainly because he *loved* him deeply. Love is whatever you can still betray.

CHAT: *[Ignoring the comment.]* Moreover, the practice of SH doesn't translate well in the case of masochists, self-harmers *[using the side of her hand, makes like she's slicing her forearm with a knife]*.

CHIT: I've noticed that. *[Stretches a bit upward, looks about.]* What do you see from here? I mean overall. In the abstract.

CHAT: *[Looks about, too.]* The Added. The Subtracted. The United. The Divided.

CHIT: You've forgotten The Multiplied. The ants nesting around us. Or, if you look far south, the tsunami of terrified displaced persons washing up at the border, tugging at our hearts, but freaking out long-bearded neo-con types with first names like Axel and Magnus who hypocritically disregard masking edicts, while pointing to immigrants as dangerous infectious disease carriers, rats.

CHAT: As well as GOP politicians in spiffy suits 'n ties — like Matt Gaetz — sitting, lying on Fox News.

CHIT: Ya gotta say, He-Got-the-Gaetz. Meaning, that bag has divorced himself from real tea.

CHAT: I get it *[groans]* !



An arrogant Matt Gaetz gives the power salute. Imagine a knife in his raised hand.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Do you think that somewhere in the world some poet opens a poem with the line:
The lackey ran off . . . ?

CHAT: There is no end to lackeys these days. Might be why devilishly delicious *gnocchi* is getting *très populaire* in high-end restaurants.



CHIT: That's certainly true in both cases. Devil-take-it delightful. More popular than angel hair.

CHAT: Angel hair pasta was BIG in the Nineties. Now, with a surfeit of evil in the world, the suffering homeless, brute negligence, environmental spoilage, No-Key is a sign of our Times.

CHIT: Too true. Disorganization in of a message in one sytem can open up meaning in another. Did you see that Ukrainian comic strip showing a couple standing before their bombed out house — a wall and roof missing, all windows blown out — the husband saying in his language: *Shit. I lost my key!*

CHAT: Bet somewhere in the world, there's a playwright penning the first words of his characters dialogue: **Sablina:** *What, husband?* **Lev:** *The key is lost . . .*

CHIT: We came here yesterday, didn't we?

CHAT: Ah no, there you're mistaken.

CHIT: *[Looks up.]* Grey black, looks like it might rain. It didn't yesterday.

CHAT: It's been looking like that today for some time, idiot! *[distant lightning and thunder.]*

CHIT: Been so long since. Rain. Forget what it means.

CHAT: Prince Charles said so too before ascended the throne. Well, shall we go?

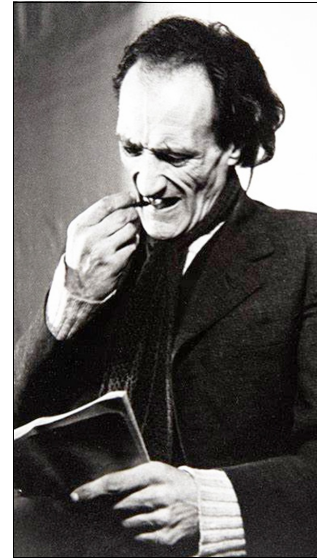
CHIT: Yes, let's go. *[They do not move.]* The date of the Minoan eruption of Thera is now dated at circa 1600 BCE. *[Deep silence on the set for two minutes.]*

CHIT for CHAT

DIRECTOR: *[Cheerful.]* That's a **wrap! Gut! Beckonin' Beckett, yes!** Structured improv dancin' 'bout like weather patterns in the script; words and I pretend to be on the same page. Chaos and control in perfect balance. Playwright'll be mighty pleased how his material is being traversed by your fantasies, pleasures, pains, drives, data — all that psycho shit.

Chat: *[Whispering.]* Artaud you he'd like it, you skeptic. Artaud you we would triumph! Now, I tell you, you owe me an apologia, Antonin, ninny.

CHIT: No. An antonym. It's my place in this structure of call 'n response to provide such. Japanese writer Yukio Mishima knew the essence of flesh was *decomposition*. The essence of our work on this body of Experimental Fiction is, indeed, decomposition. Trying to create something that Ron DeSantis will ban in Florida.



Antonin Artaud de-composing.

CHAT: *[Eyes growing larger. Takes Chit by both hands, leans her face closer.]* Ah, *dis-incarnating* the body of text only to reincarnate it à la Dr. Frankenstein in a novel form of a playful play / movie /nutty novel. Weird shit, *compadre*.

CHIT: Longevity under adversity! Like the old gnarly trees still standing around here. *[His face suddenly morphs into a faithful tomcat's visage.]* Now that's not Hollywood. **TA-DA!**

DIRECTOR: *[His great plan is bearing fruit and so lends brightness to his voice and puts a gleam in his eyes.]* **BEHOLD! THE BULL IS GARLANDED, THE SACRIFICE IS WAITING.** *[One imagines him in a toga.]* Everything in this space capsule of time is a reality show. Time is an illusion. I am an illusion. So, troops, let's reassemble at Sassella's Italian restaurant tonight at six sharp All Aperol Spritzes and all gnocchi dishes gnawed are on me. But don't forget to bring your motel keys. *[He grabs a book on UFO abductions from his chair's side-table.]*

Cheers from the cast and crew. All united in enthusiastic comradeship.

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ACT TWO

CHIT for CHAT

Scene: *Sugar Nymphs Bistro, Peñasco. Chef/owner, Kai, previously cheffed at Greens, a San Francisco Zen Center Restaurant. Chit and Chat adore their Love Omelette (hearts of artichoke and palm) and the local scenery. They've recommended it to the Director. Fifties jazz plays in the background. Some customers are drinking Raspberry juice and munching on Psychedeli, their variation on a pastrami sandwich, both are unique concoctions of the chef. Starving crew "date rape" the bistro's famous carrot cake during the scene.*

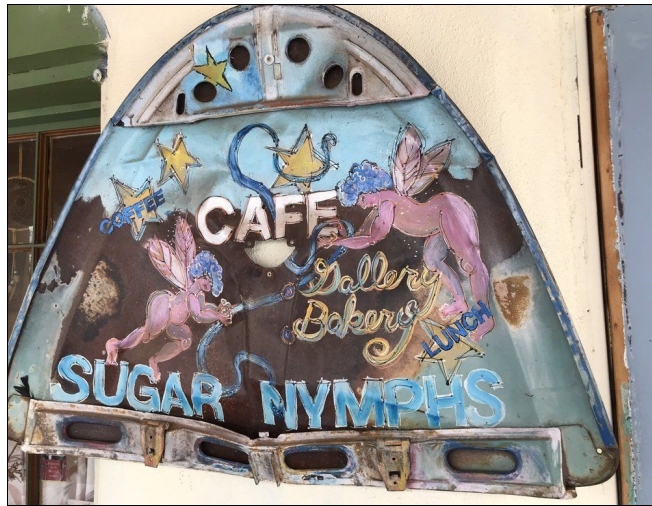
CHIT: Thelonious Monk.

CHAT: Felonious ~~Trump~~.

CHIT: The Bird, Parker, died too young.

CHAT: The Rat, His Pants, is living much too long.

CHIT: Elon — is that short of *Elongated*? — Musk is now bitching about "assassination co-ordinates" being given out on his location.



Sugar Nymphs Bistro, Peñasco, NM.

CHAT: Maybe Elon has gotten his penis stretched after so many jibes were made at His Pants for having a short one.

CHIT: Bet the next big scandal will be called Elon Gate.

CHAT: Elongated problems with Tesla cars and fatal crashes.

CHIT: But way *down* in the public schools. If you are to believe KOAT-TV news.

CHAT: They put the coating on the data. It passes time. Watching news.

CHIT: Time would have passed in any case. Like seen in ancient trees.

CHAT: But not so rapidly.

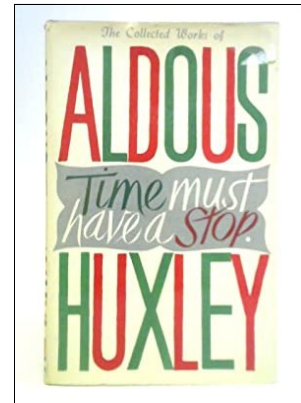
CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Jazz makes you super cognizant of time. Math makes you help know yourself. Fact is most ya can hope for is to be only a little in the end than you were in the middle.

CHAT: Chef Kai, in many of her dishes, makes you aware of thyme in a cuisinely sense. As their ad says: IT'S THYME FOR NYMPHS.

CHIT: Here time *does not* have to stop. Contra Huxley.

CHAT: Monk was excessively careful with time in his music. And one's needs some time to imbibe Kai's fabulous carrot cake. Generous portions. Just like Kai's Pannonica Panini named after the Upper Eastside Baroness who championed jazz greats in the mid-fifties. Blends sopressata, prosciutto, fresh mozzarella, sweet roasted peppers, and olive pasta.



Time Must Have a Stop

CHIT: “The Bird” — who ushered in a new era of jazz — died in her apartment. I could die for the food here. Worth the drive and such a beautiful drive, too. Much banging on pots ’n pans to run this place, but Kai takes everything in stride. She’s made this place a planet with its own laws and atmosphere. She eschews capitalism that works against the laws of nature and generates human relations in which the few exploit the many.

CHAT: Stride? Hey, my father could bang out a good stride piano ragtime on our home piano. Pure pianism. It was his way of unwinding after work.

CHIT: Monk dug Zen-like aphorisms. Why Kai plays so much Monk in her eatery. Like the insight “inside of the tune is the part that makes the outside sound good.” Kai likes to Zen-play on that; “The inside of the bread is the part that makes the outside, the crust, taste so good.” She told once whenever she makes Zweibach potatoes, she listens to Monk’s “Played Twice” from the *Five by Monk* by *Five* album.

CHAT: [A couple, high or drunk, arrive and sit near our interlocutors, start yapping loudly.] Detlev and Norma [characters in a story by PoMo writer Yuriy Tarnawsky] over there [leaning toward Chit, whispering, looking over at the noisy couple] need to shut their pie holes.



Kai with large bread loaf.

CHIT for CHAT



Abusus non tollit usum earrings.

CHIT: Hmmmm. No regard for others. But as the neo-cons argue concerning firearms: *Abusus non tollit usum* (that means “Abuse doesn’t cancel use”).

DETLEV: *[Very loud.]* THEY'RE A CRUEL RACE, THOSE REAL HOUSEWIVES ON TV. JEALOUS AS VIPERS, DIM AS LOW WATT LIGHT BULBS! LIKE TERESA GUIDICE, FROM THE REAL HOUSEWIVES OF NEW JERSEY, WHO THOUGHT THE PRESIDENT LIVES IN MAR-A-LAGO. SHE AND HER DUMSBAND WERE CONVICTED OF MULTIPLE FRAUDS. AND, SHIT, ALL THAT RETROGRESSIVE FANTASY OF FEMALE VANITY, SENSUALITY, AND SYB . . . SYBARITISM IF YOU ASK ME.

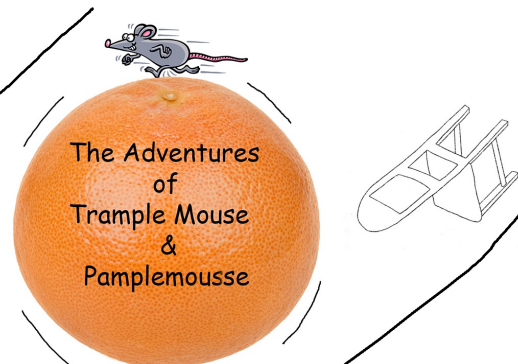
NORA: *[An anorexic.]* AN' WHO DA FUCK IS ASKING YOU? HEY! PUT ON THOSE SANITY GLOVES I BOUGHT YOU, GODDAMN IT. KEEP YER MIND 'N HANDS CLEAN.

Chit and Chat are quiet, eyes rollling, eavesdropping on the dialogue.

DETLEV: *[Looking offended. Eyes appear to say: “Fuckin’ goddamn germophobe.”]* AND THE GUYS, THEIR MEN, WITH THEIR BROEY BLAHNESS: “OH, YOUR MAGNIFICENT BLAHNESS, MAY I (insert any mode of sex act here)” SQUEAK THE BEGUILING LADIES WITH GINORMOUS EYELASHES. *[Reluctantly puts on the rubber gloves.]*

NORA: NOW, NOW . . . IT’S A KIND OF GENDER PARODY. ONE IS NOT BORN A WOMAN, BUT RATHER BECOMES ONE — AS SIMONE SAYS. KIDS WOULD LOVE 'EM TO COME TO THEIR SCHOOL OR LIBRARY AND READ POPULAR KID’S BOOKS. AS ENTERTAINING AS MEN IN DRAG, I WOULD THINK, AND LESS LIKELY TO SUFFER MARCHING FASCISTS WITH LOADED LONG GUNS, CANCELLING THE READING.

DETLEV: *[Face lights up, voice lowers.]* Hey, brilliant! We could get the cast of *Housewives of New Jersey* to read your newest children’s book *The Adventures of Trample Mouse and Pamplermousse* when it’s done. *[New Jersey accent.]*



CHIT for CHAT

NORA: *[Interrupts him.]* Now you're cookin', Bob, you Big Boy.

DETLEV: *[Extends hand toward Pat.]* Give me that copy of your book, please.

NORA: Yeah, Here. *[Bob studies the cover on which appears a mouse running atop a large grapefruit, then opens the manuscript.]* Be sure to wipe it down with a clean napkin when you are done, Bob.

DETLEV: Yah, yah. *[Then looks endearingly at Pat, booze and love speaking in that gaze.]* Fuckin' brilliant cover Pat. I must say.

NORA: Once I had the idea for that cover, the whole book quickly materialized, just like my grandmother did during the séance last year. A wacky mouse who teams up with a lonely grapefruit. She's shunned because people think he's too much of a sourpuss and too old for fun. They do not see the inner potential. The wondrous juices.

DETLEV: *[Smiles.]* But Trample Mouse does! Used to running around a treadmill for months in a pet store, he finally breaks free when a child attempts to pull him from the pet display. *I like that.*



NORA: And, hungry, Trample Mouse scampers to Whole Foods's trash bins where he meets Pamplemousse in a mess of ageing fruit tossed out by Scutch, the cruel pinhead of the produce department. Intros are given and Mouse hops on the fruit and propels it forward with his strong legs. "Yippie-i-oh, yippie-i-ay" yells Mouse as he and Mousse form a symbiotic relationship and set forth on their many adventures.



DETLEV: And WOE! to anything that might get in the way of this orange organic bowling ball and it's miniature engine/pilot. Hence the tipped chair on the cover. Nice. But one possible problem, Pat. A male vermin trampling a female grapefruit may remind folks of Harvey Winestein, who has just gotten convicted on more charges today in Los Angeles.

NORA: Shit. Hadn't thought of that. But, basically, kids *will* go nuts — er — fruity, over this book. Once its finished. I hope. Each adventure of the Rolling Duo will address a contemporary issue. Like bowling down bullies at a high school or solving the mysterious case of the four murdered students in Idaho, messing with the hooves of marching horses ridden by Cowboys for Trump *[slices neck with finger]*, scattering their broncs and putting

CHIT for CHAT

their leader Couy Griffin and his spooked ride smack into a Porta Potty on the parade route somewhere in Otero County. In one fun adventure, the Rolling Duo (shortened to R&D) beat Olympic skiers slaloming down a steep mountain. In another episode, toppling Trump *[finger cuts across neck]* like a bowling ball does a pin.

Laughing, Chit and Chat get up and walk over to the couple.

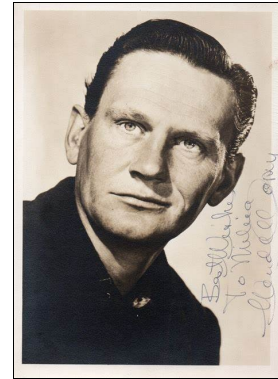
CHAT: *[Cautiously.]* Uh . . . I couldn't help overhearing about your children's book.

CHIT: Mind if we peek? Sounds delightful. Like the take-down of Gooley Couy.

NORA: Sure! You two wouldn't be publishers would you? We live over in nearby Dixon, not over fifteen minutes from here. We usually eat at Zuly's Café, but the owner had to close temporarily due to COVID. Do you live here?

CHIT: Nah. On both counts. Just super curious. But we do know an imposing suit with a Santa Claus beard named Jeff who only publishes the wackiest, most original material. We once went to an open studio and local library book sale in Dixon. Even ate a Zuly's. Great food, cool people.

NORA: Yah. Next month the library is hosting week long film screening tribute to actor Wendell Corey. *Rear Window* will be featured, wherein he played detective Tom Doyle. Evidently, Corey went on a binge in Dixon after he was kicked out of La Fonda's bar in Santa Fe. How he managed to wander his way to Dixon in that state is beyond me.



DETLEV: Maybe he picked up a girl at La Fonda's and she drove. Whatever, I always loved him any role he played. He was a Republican when the GOP actually had members who were half-sane and became President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for three years prior to his death from cirrhosis of the liver due to alcoholism at only age fifty-four on November eighth, nineteen sixty-eight.

NORA: A day before my brother's sixteenth birthday, no less, even though his name is Les.

CHIT: *[Smiling hugely.]* I always liked his name. It means *wanderer* and is derived from the German term for such, *Wenden*. I'm good at naming.

CHIT for CHAT

NORA: Wow, I'll pass that on to the film committee. Us Dixonites like to think of ourselves as Wanderers Who've Found Their Forever Home, whose relatives visit rarely.

CHIT: *[Casting a bemused look at Chat.]* Ahhhhh! Sometimes it takes forever to find that home. I know. By the way, here is my "chit" *[hands Pat his calling card]* contact me when your fun book rolls off the presses. See what I can do.

DIRECTOR: CUT! Excellent! *[unwrapping his white scarf and waving it.]* In the next act I want you two to be like islands of *self-modeling* — self-presence as information machines — in the continuous flow of theatrical time. Ya grok? *[A lengthy whispered discussion between Chit and Chat ensues.]*

[Standing, looking about. He notices his crew.] Ho! I see the crew has preemptively indulged in their dessert *[crew members have made a bee-line to the desserts; looking like deer in a car's headlights as they scarf carrot cake, frosting on their lips, stuck in beards, etc.].*



Sugar Nymphs's "Best Ever" Carrot Cake, about to be "date raped" by the crew.

A Hippy server wearing a "message" T-shirt comes to take their respective food orders.

SOUND MAN: *[He is usually seen, not heard; but to a female crew member, her mouth stuffed with carrot cake, he asks.]* Hi, I'm Decibel Jones! I want to Pozzo a question to you. *[She nods "Okay".]* Aren't you the *[finger quotes]* "continuity girl?" *[She nods yes.]* Well, it seems you aren't doing anything. Just snacking all day. BTW, I was on *The Voice* once. *[Silence.]* Oh, oh, I get it! There's *no* continuity in the script to keep track of, right? Just time jumps from the deep past and the still ongoing tedious progress of our Beckettian clowns toward . . . *[She nods "Yes," hastily walks away in disgust.]*



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ACT THREE

CHIT for CHAT

Chit and Chat, visit SITE Santa Fe to view Iranian artist Shirin Neshat's installation of portraits of New Mexicans and video works.



Chat and Chit watching Shirin Neshat's *Dreamers Trilogy* videos (dual-screen projection, 2013 - 21) at SITE, Santa Fe.

CHIT: *[Entering through a doorway, Chat coming through a second later.] Dark as Aldea at night in here. [Stands waiting for his eyes to adjust.]*

CHAT: Fuck! They need ushers with flashlights. Only Philby and Pym, my cousin's cats, could negotiate this black ops situation with ease.



Neshat in a New Mexican landscape from Shirin Neshat's *Land of Dreams*.

CHIT: *[Finally notices, looking about.]* No one here. Kind of creepy.

CHAT: No one here, but us pigeons *[laughing; finds a bench and sits, makes pigeon*

CHIT for CHAT

cooing sounds. Chit carefully follows her to one of several the hard benches.] Damn, this bench is uncomfortable, how long is this screening?

CHIT: Dark. It dark because most of reality is not visible, I think. It is Art that makes perceptible the indefinable quality of presence. The portal to the mysteries of existence is INWARD HO! The world is reflected in a black pearl's black sky wherein is seen a thin slice of moon. A poet said that. Or something like that. I forget.

CHAT: So what's this large installation about any way? I get the plethora of large portraits, of young and old New Mexico residents, the pro-woman stance, and there is no portrait of that neo-con rat and raider of the White House, Couy Griffin.

CHIT: Might the fact be that, as in Life, nothing exists removed from the past or separated from the future. Choosing New Mexico as a site to realize this idea was brilliant. Given the State's conflicted history and its amazing prospects, its surreal landscapes, it is a kind of "test case" don't you think, think, think, think, think, think, think? Huh?

CHAT: Jeeze, the last seven years have certainly proven that! We are rebooting the Dangerous Thirties with new episodes beginning every week with a cast of monsters, clowns, and heroes. And we've all been shaken from our dreams to become WOKE.

CHIT: Wow, well put Chat. Now shut up! The dual videos are starting *[spies come in from the cold, they are still wearing their winter coats, not having lost the body chill from strolling about the Railyard art area]*. I do like the diptych effect of two screens, two different videos, going simultaneously *[whispering]*.

CHAT: *[Whispering, too.]* The back 'n forth, the chit 'n chat between two screens reminds me of our dialoguing, But it ain't post-wave neo-noir neo-noise art punk with a nose for irony *[sneezes]*.

CHIT: Bless you. Demands attention, so please coooooo it . . . *[said in a stern voice]*.

CHAT: Who are you? Dalton, that cooler in the ruckus bar, The Double Deuce? Speaking of . . . my Scotties do double doos, crouching next to each other, like those rural two-seated family outhouses.

CHIT: Pullleeeez *[pleading for silence]* !

Twenty minutes pass. The paired videos end. The film crew is bored.

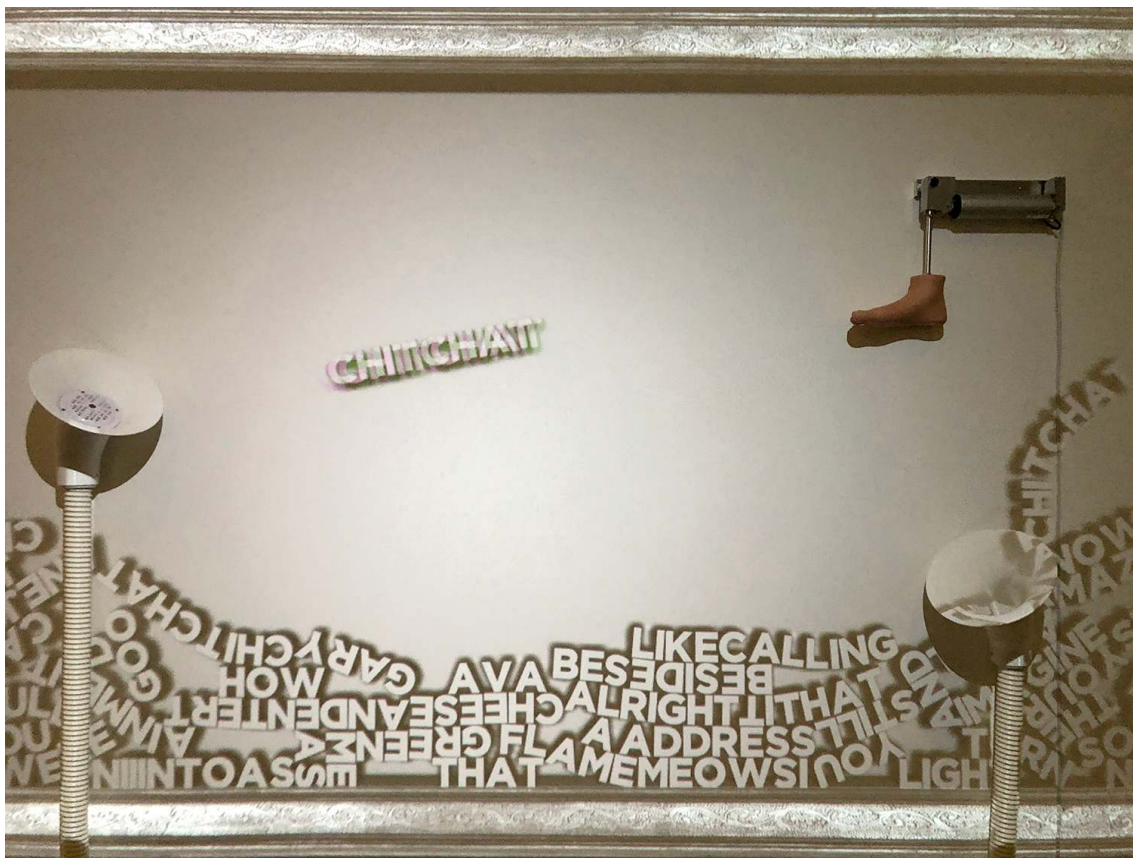
CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: *[Yawns.]* After six days of work He rested for eternity. This seem interminable.

CHIT: God was a sloth! Kafkaesque elements in the left video. Bureaucracy. Defending your life. Memory, that extra century, imagination on the right.

CHAT: *[Changing the topic.]* We missed what sounded like a fun installation on our way in. People yelling words and names into a machine, I think. Let's check it out, Chit.

CHIT: For you Chat, okay *[the duo move to another gallery space and see . . .].*



Neil Mendoza's *Robotic Voice Activated Word-Kicking Machine* installation, SITE Santa Fe. Chat yells "Chit Chat" into the microphone on the right, the sound is repeated on the speaker on the left and the words are visualized and tumble toward the boot on the right (see detail on next page).

CHAT: Fuck! Federman would've loved this video pinball machine! Boot-kickin' fun. I can't stop yelling "Chit Chat" into this . . . Really, more addictive than a video game like *Fortnite*. *[Yells.]* BLOOD BUBBLES A DEEP GOUGE ON THE SOFT RIGHT OVER HIS HEART! . . . BRAVO THE REALM OF ROWDY RATCHETS!

CHIT for CHAT



Detail of Robot Word-Kicker projection and boot device.

CHIT: *[His turn at the microphone, he moves as close as a space it takes to dodge a bullet, the instant of attack registering on his face; yells, playing with the raw materials of language.] ANNIHILATION OF THE SOFT LEFT! [His words tumble across the screen only to be booted by the boot and fall to the pile of words at the bottom of the screen.]*

CHIT: *[Putting his fingers in his ears, yells.] THE BENGAL FAMINE OF FORTY-THREE!*

CHAT: OFF WITH ALL MONARCH'S HEADS! *[Puts her right arm in the air, fist up.]*

CHIT: YANK YOUR JOHNSON AND BORE US JOHNSON! *[Jerks his hand.]*

CHAT: KNOCK AT THE DOOR OF THE MIND! *[Right hand knocks the air.]*

CHAT: WOULD THE SHEPHERD THE SERMON WEIRDWORD BESPEAK TO ALL!
[Her words tumble across the screen, boot on right kicking like mad, sending the booted words to the pile of words stacking up underneath.]

CHIT: *[His face aglow.]* A poetics of transience, Chat! As if my mind was emptying, eliminating all thought, taking all my data out and leaving the operating system intact.

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Asks how would a mind refill with language, then? Like being in the presence of something smarter than yourself. The problems of life are speaking through us, through the machine and given a hefty kick.

CHIT: Heap strong ROBOT medicine.

CHAT: *[Into the microphone.]* AFRAID OF THEIR FEMININE SIDE!

CHIT: *[Pushes Chat aside and yells.]* SEDUCTION AND BETRAYAL!

CHAT: IDIOTIC CARELESS MISTAKES.

CHIT: IDIOTIC CARELESS MS. TAKKES RAN FOR OFFICE!

CHAT: I SEE ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS OF THOUGHT WENT INTO THAT!

CHIT: BE LOYAL TO THE ROYAL IN YOURSELF!

CHAT: THE PINUP EMERGES FROM HER SHIPWRECK READY FOR REDEMPTION!
[The words go arcing across the screen, the boot can't kick fast enough.]

CHIT: *[Pushes Chat aside and yells.]* PERMUTATIONS OF MY SILENCE!

CHAT: ORANGE JUICE WITHOUT BREAKFAST IS LIKE SUNSHINE WITHOUT A DAY!

CHIT: I'M DIGGING THIS!

CHAT: DON'T FUCK WITH INDIGENOUS!

CHIT: PIYATAPINUHKAU!

CHAT: CHANUKAH!

CHIT: TRUMP'S TAXES TRUMP ALL ELSE!

CHAT: THE BANANA MOON FILLS THE COLD WITH EMPTINESS.

CHIT: SUBSCRIBE TO EN MOINOUS ONE!

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: THE SUBCONSCIOUS IS A COMMITTEE!

CHIT: THE WHEREOF ONE CANNOT SPEAK!

CHAT: A RIVER IS JUST THE FACT OF WETNESS!

CHIT: KNOWLEDGE MOTIVATED BY OBSESSION!

CHAT: STEPPING UP TO THE VOID FOR A GOOD LONG GANDER!

CHIT: *FELICE NAVIDAD*, DAD!

CHAT: BEAUTY IS THE THEATER OF WOMEN'S ENSLAVEMENT!

CHIT: THE NEW, THE VIBRANT, THE ORIGINAL!

CHAT: THE FURTHEST FROM REALITY EVENING THERE EVER WAS!

CHIT: YOUR MOTHER USED TO TRIM HEDGES WITH A NAIL SCISSORS!

CHAT: MEGAN THEE STALLION!

CHIT: CALL ME ISHMAEL!

CHAT: YOU DON'T SMELL! CELLPHONE OR LAND LINE?

CHIT: LAND MINE? COMPACT AND CLEAR.

CHAT: SIMPLE AND DIRECT!

CHIT: EIGHTEEN EIGHT *DIX-HUIT!* [*robot pops out* A TEEN ATE DIS WHEAT.]

CHAT: [*Whispering in Chit's ear.*] Noodlin' with Federman, again, I see.

CHIT: [*Bellows.*] HEY IT IS *DANGLING MAN*!

CHIT: LYDIA MILLET IS A MASTER OF THE SINGLE LINE PARAGRAPH!

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: BUT SEEMS TO OBSERVE HER SUBJECTS LIKE A BIRD-WATCHER!

CHIT: A NAMELESS, NOT-QUITE-OMNISCIENT VOICE!

CHAT: A VOICE THAT BOLDLY DECLARES: I WILL USE CHRISTINE SMALLWOOD'S WRITINGS RIPPED FROM *THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS* AS KINDLING FOR MY CHRISTMAS FIRE !

CHIT: SHIRLEY THAT'S A HAZZARD!

CHAT: I HAVE ONE OF HER NOVELS ON MY KINDLE RIGHT NOW!

CHIT: KINDLED, PEOPLED WILDERNESS!

CHAT: HITCH YOUR WAGON TO A STAR!

CHIT: LIVELY LOVELY VIRGINAL TODAY!

CHAT: BESMIRCHED THE NEXT! *[Laughs.]*

CHIT: MATTER NEGLECTS BEING.

CHAT: LIFE NEGLECTS LIVING.

CHIT: TING-A-LING.

CHAT: BLUE MINK BIFOCALS.

CHIT: TING-A-LING. . . . TING-A-LING. WHY AM I AND WHAT I AM?

CHAT: WHY A YAM AND NOT A POTATO?

CHIT: *[Singing.]* WHY AM SEE AY . . . WHERE YOU FIND OUT WHY? *[Results in a particularly confusing jumble of kicked words falling to the bottom of the screen. Tries using German for "Questions, problems, missing parts?"]* FEHT ETWAS? FRAGEN ODER PROBLEME? *[Gibberish tumbles across the screen.]*

CREW MEMBER: *[Breaking out into uncontrolled laughter.]* Oooohhhh, fuck!

CHIT for CHAT

DIRECTOR: Cut! *Das gut. Brilliant. You both are so empowering THE VOICE. The belonging of the voice, its appropriation by the ego. That it is not merely the throat but the whole skin that is sensitive to the resonance of the voice and to the variations in pressure provoked by the verbal flow. It is with your entire bodies that you two do speak! You, children of Resource and Poverty, have transcended*

yourselves today. **Take a bow!**



Giving each other quizzical, WHAT DA FUCK? looks, our duo hesitantly complies, bowing to the crew, who laugh. The Director then chats with Chat, pulling her aside filling her ears with hyperbole.

Bored by the bad puns and needing to take a shit, the remaining crew leaves Chit yelling, horsing around with this kick-ass kick-word machine, giving language and its references its long due Derridean smack-down. Often citing passages from Beckett's Waiting of Godot.

CHIT: GODOT IN THE GOWDOWN [pause] THEY MAKE NOISE LIKE CHILDREN [pause] LIKE LEAVES, LIKE FEATHERS, LIKE ASHES [pause] SAY SOMETHING! [pause] ALL THE DEAD VOICES [pause] WE HAVE OUR REASONS [pause] TO EVERY MAN HIS LITTLE CROSS [pause] IT'S SO WE WON'T THINK [pause] HATRED IS OLDER THAN LOVE [pause] DOES YOUR GANACHE HAVE PANACHE [pause] he then sings the first stanza from Linda and Paul McCartney's wacky song "Monkberry Moon Delight" in a nasalized voice.]

*SO I SAT IN THE ATTIC, A PIANO UP MY NOSE [pause]
AND THE WIND PLAYED A DREADFUL CANTATA [pause]
SORE WAS I FROM A CRACK OF AN ENEMY'S HOSE [pause]
AND THE HORRIBLE SOUND OF TOMATO [pause]
CATCH UP
SUPER FURY . . .*

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ACT FOUR

CHIT for CHAT

SMOKES, a funky smoke shop. Sign out front: cigarette butts arranged in the shape of a smiley face. Owned by Leon and his left-handed wife Noel. The odor of pipe tobacco permeates. A wood-paneled backroom, sign over door a sign reads: FOR **SQUARES** ONLY. Inside, several old, worn square wooden tables are set up with worn wooden chess boards for aficionados to play and vape. The pairs of wood chairs at the tables have padded naughahyde seats. Chat brushes crumbs off her seat. Chit sits, scooching to get comfy. Chit and Chat start to play chess. Chat (White) opens with pawn to e4 and Chit responds with the classic Sicilian Defense, a popular response employed by masters and beginners alike; it is combative and tends to lead to dynamic and sharp positions.



1	h1	g1	f1	e1	d1	c1	b1	a1
2	h2	g2	f2	e2	d2	c2	b2	a2
3	h3	g3	f3	e3	d3	c3	b3	a3
4	h4	g4	f4	e4	d4	c4	b4	a4
5	h5	g5	f5	e5	d5	c5	b5	a5
6	h6	g6	f6	e6	d6	c6	b6	a6
7	h7	g7	f7	e7	d7	c7	b7	a7
8	h8	g8	f8	e8	d8	c8	b8	a8
	h	g	f	e	d	c	b	a

CHIT: *[His soft and ready face, like a boy who's slept well, is determined to act well, looks around the room nostalgically, coaxing meaning out of every nook and cranny.]* Ah, Doug. Doug dug this place . . . before he kicked the bucket from COPD. I'd of never found this place in the first place had it not been for him. The novelist rings at your door and spirits you off, the essayist invites himself in. Doug was an essayist who never wrote a word. Ran a pawn shop. Kept his ears open and his opinions close to his vest, except when playing chess. Then he'd often perform oral haiku biographies. He once informed me Amelia Earhart always wore men's underwear under her flight suit. This he told me while castling his rook 'n fuckin' up my next proposed move which I hoped would end the game. His wisdom about chess — I usually lost to him — was: "Beginners see creatures on the board that aren't there, while missing ones that are." I'll never forget that. We met at IHOP. We noticed we were both chugging down Lingonberry pancakes.

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: *[Fixing her gaze on him.]* And the rest was history, right? Only met him once. Doug — a nice solid name. He always wore a brown sweater not unlike the one President Zelensky is always seen in. *Why, why!* I ask myself does Z. have to wear that all the time, even before Congress. Why *two y's* ending his name? Doug, the name indicates a person you can trust. *[Opens with pawn to e4.]*

CHIT: *Every foxhole, in war, should have a Doug in it!* Some high-ranking officer said that, inspired by Douglas MacArthur, to a senior graduating class at West Point. *[Responds with pawn to c5.]*

CHAT: Bet they dug Doug a grave, rather than doing a grave dust-in-the-wind thing. *[Pawn to d4.]*

CHIT: *[Pawn at cxd4.]* Gotcha! *[Lifts her pawn off the board.]* His wife, who always was the type to “flee the frame”, took selected hair samples from his famous beard as *memento mori*. Put the cuttings in a large glass container, a chess pawn-shaped salt shaker she dubbed “Doug Glass”. She put it on an old wooden table, built by a Pawnee artisan, that was given her by her uncle for a wedding present. It now sits in the pawn shop she now runs single-handedly since Doug died. Baffles the clientele by counting out change in Japanese. She’s not Asian.



CHAT: *[Knight to f3.]* A species of Queen sacrifice for Mate? Running a shop like that has to be boring as hell.

CHIT: *[Laughs.]* You’ve been watching the *Queen’s Gambit* on Netflix! I noticed there’s a *plethora* — don’t you just *love* that word — of TV serieseseseseseseseses with a character that is somewhere “on the spectrum” so to speak. *[Knight to c6.]* Weird, but brilliant.



The Queen’s Gambit (Anya Taylor-Joy). Could she beat the AI program AlphaZero?

CHAT: *[Knight takes d4.]* Oh, like moi? I vote to have some knowledge of chess as a requirement to run for government office.

CHIT: *[Laughs.]* Instead of mastering Monopoly? Or, maybe, *both?* *[Pawn to e6.]*

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: *[Knight to b5.]* Well . . . nowadays, probably some over-the-top violent video game would be more relevant, huh?

CHIT: *[Pawn to d6.]* Start with Mini Militia and work up to Mortal Kombat. Ya know some small kids still think the January Insurrection was a video game.

CHAT: *[Bishop to f4.]* Kids? Fuck, some adults still do. Some company, say the guys who created *Fortnite*, is sure to produce a digital game version with the neo-con consumer in mind. The player first to either hang Pence or rape Pelosi trumps all others.

A period of silent thought as both Chit and Chat muse over the increasingly complex situation playing in front of them. A sound of a crew member vaping in the background. Then a brutal blasting rip-roar of a muscle car zooming up Cerrillos, bequeathing demons and migraines in its wake.

CHIT: *[Looks up, angry.]* God! Skid More Ownings and Peril! Shit! Shit on those Dodge muscle car ads aimed at making pawns of Latinos. TV ads we're seeing these days. *[Pawn to e5.]*

CHAT: *[Bishop to e3.]* I've seen those damn ads. I even saw a Latino teen answer his iPhone to a muscle-car roaring ringtone in Market Street last week. Dodge execs rooking people on marginal incomes out of hard-earned cash for extra horsepower and noise. Like selling cigs to teens, just as deadly; more so, as all too many people are run over by these drag-racing street clowns. Think Indigenous! If only Trickster would magically disable all their ignition systems for a day.

CHIT: *[Looks up.]* Shit, a sort of The Day the Muscle Car Stood Still event. I like it. Indigenous revenge — tat for toot. *[Pawn to f5.]*

CHAT: *[Knight to c3.]* At night, various tribes could create a Confederacy and run buffalo down Cerrillos Road like in Western movies. Stop the drag-racing pronto, Tonto.

CHIT: *[Laughing.]*

Jingle-jangle of the smoke shop's door. Unseen muffled voices. "What's the fuckin' dream, dude?" . . . "Ah, Rob, yer chingered up 'n owin' too much. Your gamblin' is ..." the proprietor is usurped by abuse from Rob: "I don't come in here to get dumped on, all that 'forty questions' shit!" he yells, his voice stumbling in a drunk or a high confusion.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: *[Pawn to f7. Looks up.]* Shit. *[Gets up quickly, nearly bumping the board, and closes the backroom's door. The guy seen vaping earlier has left, leaving only a lingering perfume.]*

CHAT: *[Glances away, thinking, fingers to her temple.]* I imagine that noisy intruder as a squat, misshapen creature as formed like a bellows, with a wide gash of a mouth set with rows of sharp teeth. Lophius! *[blurts out]*. That's it! That rude fellow's name, my fuckin' name for him, anyway. Perfect name for a disoriented, idea-fixated, euphoric, and hallucinating creature, ay what? *[Knight to d5.]*

CHIT: *[Pawn fxe3.. Ecosystem or nature?*

CHAT: Function or beauty? Why function. There's no beauty in Lophius.

CHIT: Well, if you saw through his eyes, maybe . . . Aw, your move. Sorry I distracted you *[lying, of course]*. Mooove, mooooooove, mooooooove, mooooooove, mooooooove . . .

CHAT: Don't rush me!. What are you, Mount Rushmore? A mooing cow? Huh? *[Knight b5 to c7.]*

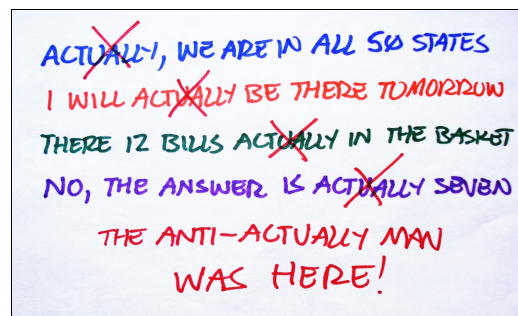
CHIT: Merely Eggs-and-Vodka *[his term for a strategy of opponent annoyance used when it appears he's losing; Knight to f7]*. Your turn.

CHAT: I can see that. *[Chit's iPhone sounds an emergency alarm and a deep male voice inflates like a cartoon balloon between them announcing: "CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2022 JORDAN SCHNITZER BOOK AWARD WINNERS! SOME HOPEFULS ARE IN THE DARKNESS, SOME ARE IN THE LIGHT. THOSE IN THE DARKNESS DROP FROM SIGHT." Chit fumbling, trying to kill the sound.]*

CHIT: Sorry, again *[he is not]*. I have my iPhone set to alert me about all literary awards given out over the year *[part of his E&V strategy of distraction]*. *[Knight to f7]*.

CHAT: Give me time to think. Just shut up!

CHIT: Sorry. *[He gets up and strolls over to a cork bulletin board at the back of the room and notices a peculiar posting there.]* What the fuck . . . Come here Chat.



CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: *[Rises and joins Chit.]* Good grief Dum Dum! I don't think his person ever saw that 2003 British film *Love Actually*. In my humble opinion, he seems to be a person looking at the world and being mortified by the hopelessness of it all. *[Then notices another posting, on a 5 X 7 inch pink note card, reading DEAD MEN DON'T RAPE and signed RIOT GIRRRL.]* Looks like someone released The Flying Monkeys. A force of nature (not an ecosystem); someone prioritizing drama over thought, the reverse of playing chess.

CHIT: So . . . let's list ~~raisins~~ reasons for such hopelessness. *Weltschmerz*. You're first.

CHAT: *[Turns, faces Chit.]* George Anthony Devolder Santos New York GOP electee.

CHIT: Georgie Sans Toes — his given Mohawk Indigenous name — before he found out he had a touch of “Jew-ish” in him and became the first man on Mars. Just slight “embellishments” to his résumé, he claims. His middle name, Devolder, rhymes with revolver, maybe why the neo-cons blasted him into office and will defend him no matter what.



CHAT: Speaking of New York, Buffalo is wholly buffaloed over the sheer amount of snow — nature or the ecosystem — dropped on its suffering citizens. Twice the normal amount of fluffy artillery shot from the skies.

CHIT: In that city it's double or nothing. Can't be a mere accident that Raymond Federman resided there for years and titled his book such.

CHAT: Can you imagine what Federman would say to Sans Toes about his false claim to have parents who were caught up in the Shoah?

CHIT: Sans Toes probably thinks the term Shoah derives from the fact many victims were lured to the shower but gassed instead.

CHAT: Sans Toes and Double or Nothing Snowfall. Just two *raisons* for hopelessness. But there are scores of others. Like the soaring death-by-violence rates for younger kids.

CHIT: The declining number of people playing chess these days. Checkers is more popular. Some refuse to learn because the game assumes a monarchy and church officialdom dominating people who are merely their pawns. OFF WITH THEIR HEADS!

CHAT: THEN OUT WITH THEIR BEDS!

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: AND TAKE A SHEET! *[Makes a grabbing gesture with both hands and squats.]*
'Nough nonsense. To The Game! *[Both sit down, seriously study the checkerboard as the sound of a clock ticks in the background; Chit takes out two sugar cubes he's dubbed "Qubits", from his pocket, rolls them like dice, mumbling]* Bring me dice and I shall overturn the universe! *[Another instance of his E&V strategy.]*

CHAT: Okay. *[Ignoring the distraction, her mind soars, gasps, and gurgles. She sees the words ALLOW, ALLOW, ALLOW in her mind's eye. That weird eye finds itself scanning the letters of the name of a young Icelandic conductor she saw on a Netflix documentary:*
R A G E N H E I Ö U R I N G U N N J Ö H A N N S D Ó T T I R
which contains the vowels e, i, o, u in perfect order. Until her next move suddenly seems self-evident.] Beat this Braque! *[Queen to f3.]*

CHIT: Bold move, Ex Lax *[said with worried look on his face as if he's thinking: "It's a small step between the dance and the deathbed" or "Life falls on a flip of the coin or roll of the dice," or much worse: "I'm only a MacGuffin tossed into the plot"]*.

CHAT: *[Noticing the distress in his expression.]* Ya, flipping out, then, Thalidomide Kid? *[Doing a tit-for-tat on insults.]*

CHIT: I'll shave your belly with a rusty razor!

CHAT: *[Not to be out-flanked.]* Too late. I already got my bikini wax.

CHIT: Here *[extends his right hand]* hold my hand. *[It's another E&V trick.]*

CHAT: *[Head indicates NO!]* Unlike most young girls, I never liked that Beatles song.

CHIT: My first girlfriend, Caddy, hated it as well. Albeit, she was much older than me and voted Republican. For some crazy ~~raisin~~ reason she retitled it *Whips and Vines*.

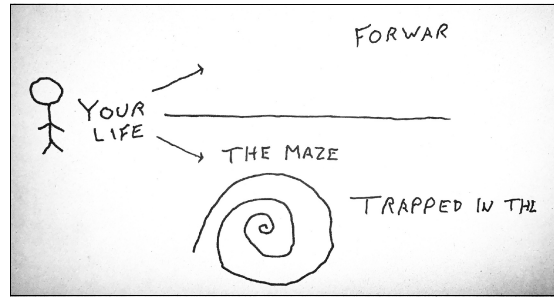
CHAT: Why is it that Republicans, who profess to be so religious, are so unchristian to people? They hate the Dems who, to me, manifest Christ's mission more often.

CHIT: *[Leaning back in his chair, holding his right knee with both hands.]* There was only one Christ and he died on the Cross. *[Suddenly lurches forward and makes a fast chess move, Knight to f6.]*

CHAT: Why . . . I started to think your batteries had run out, amigo. *[Bishop to c4.]*

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: My, my, what's this? *[Looks down at a scrap of paper on the floor that his foot has been pushing around unconsciously for some time.]* What the fuck! *[Picks it up and his jaw drops in response.]* I know some weird folk show up here to play The Game.

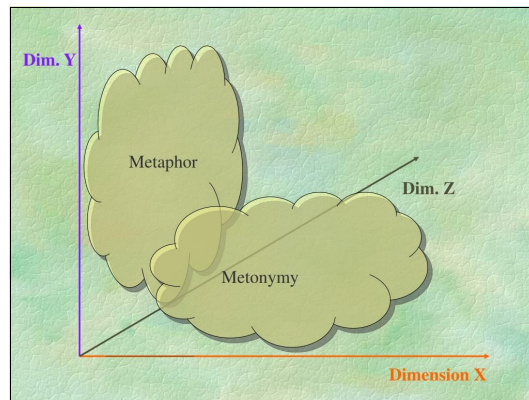


Ink sketch on cigarette rolling paper.

CHAT: Let me look . . . Something like attaining the auto-synchronous reference point at the center of oneself, stripped of all peripheral shit?

CHIT: Might've been dropped by a member of El GrupX, which consists of Dru, a promising Cal Tech dropout and his dog DOW (short for Destroyer of Words due to his propensity to chew on Dru's apple green Moleskine notebooks); Clawhammer, the cognomen of an Hispanic oldster who drives down from Dixon on weekends in his stock car, "Tawnee", which he used to race but is now only famous for its "dieseling" after the engine is turned off, and who prefers to roll his own cigs; the middle-aged Hispanic/Navajo poet Cinco Soles (his grandfather was a member of the Mexican Estridentista Movement) and his always-on optimistic one-legged companion, Ali Western. All profess poetry is androgynous and instant metaphysics. Their tight friendship belies the old adage that people devoted to reason find their strength in solitude alone.

All of them lead a French Quarter kind of life with no shape beyond the moment. Except for chess — met them here more than once — and an adult learning class taken annually. The two steady components of their existence. This group first formed when they found themselves all alone in a French philosophy class at Renesan Institute for Lifelong Learning, reading Gaston Bachelard's insightful piece "Poetic Instant and Metaphysical Instant" wherein that Smart Frog claimed "prosodic time is horizontal, poetic time is vertical, . . . ordered simultaneities." Poetry is a harmonic relationship between these opposites and a routine buster — kinda like chess moves and conversation between us. A gathering of instants, right? *[Knight to d4.]*



Relationship between metaphor and metonymy.

CHAT: Roman Jakobson, I presume? *[Extends her hand toward Chit and laughing.]* Aping R&J.'s important Structuralist concepts of metonymy and metaphor was he?

CHIT for CHAT

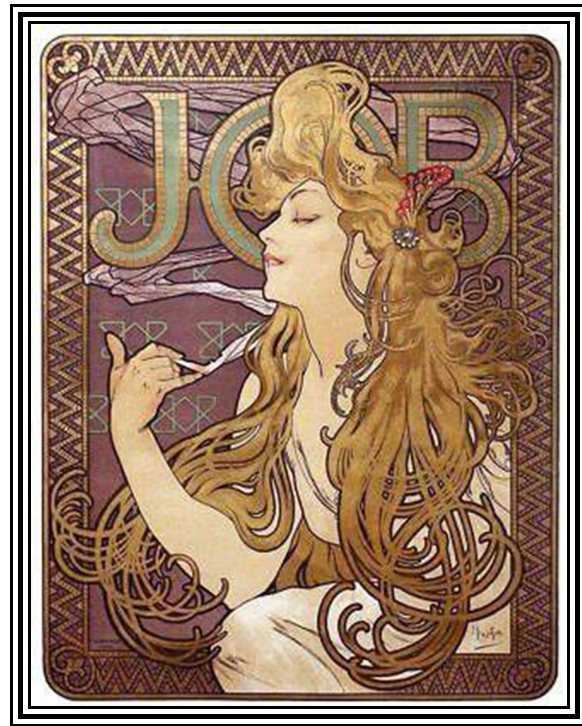
CHIT: Ah. Might have. R&B *[Roland Barthes]* did as well.

CHAT: *[Knight takes f6.]* Ha! The She-Marines have landed! She-hee-hee.

CHIT: Damn! *[Another pair of gamers, a woman and a man in their forties, stumble into the room, spoiling the intimacy of the situation.]* Double damn.

CHAT: *[Whispering.]* They're making a bee-line for the Mucha poster. *[The pair stand before it transfixed.]*

CHIT: *[Turns around to see.]* My dorm roommate put one up over his bed where he preferred to smoke his joints.



Poster for Job rolling papers (1898) Mucha.

CHAT: *[Whispering.]* You never, never told me that before and we've been here how many times? We've both enjoyed that poster. And you know I was in Prague and saw many Mucha's and yet . . .

CHIT: *[Leans closer to her.]* Yah, weird how certain events impinging on your *Umwelt* *[nodding toward the invasive pair]* can trigger disclosure of hidden knowledge. Why being alone too much is bad for inspiration. *[Pawn to d5.]* Okay, that's my answer to your last move. Pssst! It's Anorexic Nora 'n debt-ridden Detlev again *[points to an intrusive pair — he in a green gym suit, she in blue shorts and a blue hoodie — who point back with recognition of Chit and Chat.]*. He believes old Chess Gods will be replaced by Algorithms.

NORA: *[Comes over to Chat and in a hoarse voice]* What is small but strong, pleasantly warm and dry? *[Chat shrugs her shoulders.]* My hand! *[Extends it,]* Good to see you again. *[Then, presumably continuing a conversation started earlier.]* Detlev, he went ahead and just ordered them without . . .

DETLEV: *[Nodding "Hi" to Chit, then growling to Nora.]* Yeah. An awful lot of cases. I don't know how the hell he does that stuff. *[They then seat themselves at another chess table. Start rolling their cigs in preparation for a serious game.]*

CHIT for CHAT

NORA: He has a lot of contacts; as a local guy, he can get stuff done here. And he's got no, well, you know . . . *[she gives Chit a flirty glance, pheromones wafting his way].*

DETLEV: Yeah. He's going to get caught in some of those things *[unclear]* for sure. *[Puts a black King in one fist, white in the other; she taps the right hand, gets white.]*

CHAT: *[Whispering.]* We should be getting out of here. The second-hand smoke. And there may be some weird shit . . . something we may not want to overhear. Of unsipped lips, Agatha Christie said: "There is noth-ing so dangerous for anyone who has something to hide as conversation." And if we hear *that* something, well, as my CIA son puts it: "Mom, I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you."

CHIT: *[Glancing at the woman who is still sending flirtatious messages his way.]* I fear gifts even when they are borne by geeks. *[Changes subject.]*

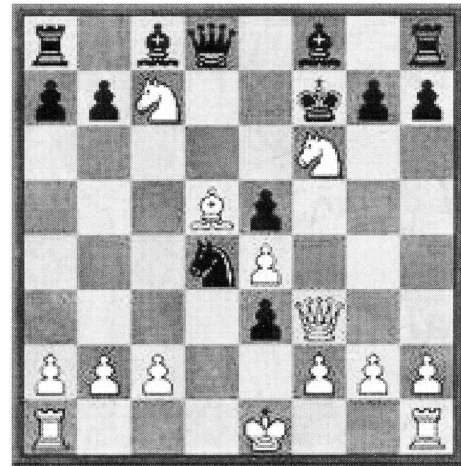
Did you know that somewhere between a hundred thousand and fifty thousand years ago, the human larynx migrated, through mutation and natural selection, in such a way as to facilitate speech? It descended a little and assumed an L shape. The larynxes of these two seem regressing, an unending unbending of that L.

CHAT: Migration? Tell the anti-migration politicians that!

CHIT: *[Laughs.]* Tell Sans Toes and his lying larynx.

CHAT: But let me make one final move before we move. *[Bishop takes pawn at d5.]*

CHIT: *[Smiles.]* Whoa! Yah, too much subtext horsing around in that pair's conversation. Good conversation should have a large dollop of *aimlessness* and that seems lacking in what's developing between those two. *[Noticing the importance of her chess move.]* Ah, good move, now you *are* in a good position, kiddo. You've been worrying me move by



Final positions of Chit and Chat's pieces.



The Larynx.

CHIT for CHAT

move today. So just clickity-clap snap a photo of the board *in situ*. We can take up this challenging battlebot thing later, Rosalind.

CHAT: *[Laughing.] Can't wait for Godot, huh? As You Like It, Jaques. [Pulls out her iPhone, hits her photo app.]* **Bingo!** Pozzo.

CHIT: *[Laughs.]* Bozo, our game is a running sore. Look at that *mess* *[pointing to the game board]*.

CHAT: *[Laughing.]* A real Gilgamesh!

CHIT: Ah, let the punshine in.

[illegible]

Exeunt, as an invisible audience performs canned claps. Crew lines up to buy smoking products from the proprietor. The Director goes over and shakes Detlev and Nora's hands, then shuffles over to the chess board, bends down for a closer look, assessing our duo's moves. He's panting. We didn't realize until this very moment he is a Chess Nut.



CHAT: *[Relaxing outside, having her first vaping experience.] Chit, did you know the Director is writing a book on impossible objective shots in Fifties cinema? You know, like the shot of Scottie looking down from the bell tower window at the end of Vertigo.*

CHIT: *[Points to her vape pipe.]* Objection! Nobody vapes in Woody Allen movies!

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ACT FIVE

CHIT for CHAT

A dark green dumpster at Aldea's H.O.A. Chat inside looking for her purse, lost at a Mingle-Bingle Bingo & Pizza Social the night before where several rounds of Bingo were followed by a performance by Marionetas para Mayores who entertain in elder homes. The grupo of puppeteers performed "The Death of Socrates: Trial and Execution". Chit stands outside the dumpster, ready to assist her out. Like horsing around in a dive bar in the Maldives, curiosity, humor, impudence are in the offing. The magnificent Jemez mountains assert themselves in the far background, looking like a painted mural by a retired dentist who only paints mountains. The crew stands ready to film. The Director's sporting a cowboy shirt and hat.

CHIT: *[Camera on.]* Hair now? You now! *[Mutilates a Beckett quote.]* Go fish, Diva!

CHAT: *[Hair a mess, hands smudged with who-knows-what.]* Fishing. Fishing. Diving. Pretty *daunting* tasking this. Last thing I recall, I was trying their Happiness Ensured Punch. I can't recall if the damn thing was lifted or if a cleaning staff swooped it up unawares when clearing tables. If it was stolen, there still is a chance my purse got tossed in here. *[Fumbling around in the trash, head disappearing for a moment.]*

CHIT: Daunting tasking fishing. A dauntless dive-bomber into the remains of the night. As you know, I love gerundive titles. *[Ticking off names on his fingers.]* Like:

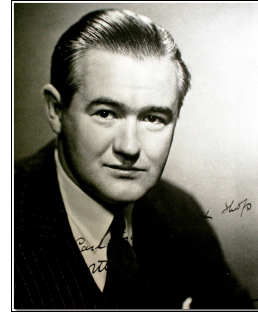
*Raising Arizona
Saving Private Ryan
Driving Miss Daisy
Sitting on the Dock of the Bay
Phising Exposed
Shooting Fish
Finding Nemo
Drowning Fish
The Killing Fields . . .*

CHAT: Ugh! *[Disgust registering on her face.]* Well, my legs are killing me standing in all this mucky-muck. Jeeze, I think I am stepping on a big slice of gooey pizza or someone's internal organs. Weird, trying to be historically accurate over a slice of slime.

CHIT: Organs? Historical accuracy? Or crime scene investigation? I'm flashing on the Brit-born organist E. Power Biggs. Imagined him as: "He's a fatty" (as Tom Hanks says in *You've Got Mail*) — like Brendan Fraser in *The Whale*. He wasn't.

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Wasn't there a Brit porn film, *The Consort Organist*? Well, I'm in BIGGS trouble here, buckaroo. I can feel something oozing into my Reboks, soaking my socks, lock stock and barrel. Ouch, I've hit something hard, wooden. *[Bends down, picking a little crumpled wooden corpse, what remained of the Socrates puppet after the show. Holds collapsed puppet before her. Stands there as if frozen, making odd chugging sounds like a car "dieseling".]*



E. Power Biggs.

CHIT: Hey! Hey! When you pull out that destroyed Greek Socrates puppet, that's your cue to hold up the prop, exclaim "By Hercules!", turning to the audience and delivering a soliloquy on the benefits of dialogics and irony . . . ah, or was it to praise Debra Fine's book *The Fine Art of Small Talk* in relation to Plato's Socratic conversations? The fuckin' script's been changed so damn often.

CHAT: The latter, I think. I hope. Fine. As I haven't paged through Kierkegaard's take on Socratic irony. That well-thumbed copy is somewhere stuck in the many boxes I still haven't unpacked from my move here. Not like I didn't try to find the damn book.

CHIT: Or, might it be you're supposed to stand there and compare Socratic dialogue and irony in relationship to Leil Lowndes's self-help book *How to Be a People Magnet*? To the detriment of Socrates, of course. Had ol' Soc' read it, he would never have been arrested.

CHAT: My late husband read it. Didn't work on the tenured faculty where he taught, so he went back to Socratic irony as a strategy. And you know the result . . .

CHIT: Oh, that school, the conversible world where people consistently shook hands so as to show their adversary they weren't packin' a pistol or knife?

CHAT: Yep. He was stunned and worn out with endless chat of "Bill did this" and "Nan did that." *[She starts her soliloquy.]* Fake pearls dangle over my unclasped breasts, so fake they are news to me. See, I clutch them . . . Naw, this is shit, get me out of here now *[extending her hands toward Chit]*. I'm not doing that scene. It is more Ionesco than Beckett. *[Declaiming very loudly, hands cupped over mouth.]* FUCK THE PLAYWRIGHT AND SHOOT THE PIANO PLAYER! *[Director yells: CUT!]*

PLAYWRIGHT: *[Male voice from afar.]* IMPUDENT SHIT! I was doing punk mixtapes and mix-CDs surging with *inventio*, *dispositio*, and *elocutio* before writing this hodge-podge.

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CHIT for CHAT

Chit and Chat approaching a wooden bench in the Aldea Community's central bricked plaza chitting and chatting. Noon. The sky arranges itself without paying attention to the jokes, tall stories, the quotes from philosophers. A large fountain at which swim two birds. Dogs bark. Crew member yells: "Shut that fuckin' dog up!" Stark shadows of wooden benches and a partially razed gazebo.

CHIT: How areing you? *[Close up of parted lips, teeth glistening with bluish enamel.]*

CHAT: Gooding.

CHIT: Dumpster diving is no funning.

CHAT: Not like eating endive. Or gerundiving.

CHIT: *[Pinching Chat's nose.]* Hey! I liking this *[his eyes are cheerful, brows, long].*

CHAT: Ouch! *[Eyes moving in a frantic language of their own.]*

CHIT: Did you ever finding your purse?

CHAT: Finding that I lefting it at home that evening, never taking it to the Bingo eventing as I was thinking. False memorying. I told off that smartass writing playwright. Telling him Hume once was writing: "Nothing carries a man through the world like a true genuine natural impudence" and to be cutting me some slack.

CHIT: And I was thinking His Pants was writing such in *The Art of the Deal* (ing).

CHAT: Big dealing now. His Pant's pants's pulling down for all to be seeing. Finally, his tax returnings are publicing in the media. Exploding his oversized ballooning of financial achievomenting and business acumening that he was boasting about *ad infinitum*.

CHIT: *[Nodding.]* Yes. Amazon's been delivering an untold number of cases of Tums to Mar-a-Lago.

CHAT: Yes. *Par les sept enfers de Landare!* I am no carrier to trifling news. No babblering or boasting. No liaring *[crosses her fingers]*, at



CHIT for CHAT

least most of the timing. By the way, what we are doing right nowing, David Hume said it could lead to a more harmonious society, less fuming and fussing.

CHIT: *[Nodding.]* No?

CHAT: Yes. The conversible world. Enlivening by absolute sincerity, dazzling of flights of imagination, subtle without being obscure, equal in humor and pith, fertile in ideas . . .

CHIT: What abouting all that “Bill did this” and “Nan did that,” shit you were . . . ?

CHAT: Bat shit?

CHIT: *[Nodding.]* No! I *mean* us Yankees suffering zealotry, greeding, deep sermonizing and blunt streaks in the way of talking since we kicked the Brits out.

CHAT: Burnt steaks?

CHIT: *[Nodding.]* No! Are you forgetting your hearing aid againing? I mean aimless and gloomy social intercoursing is much less the ruling of the day here where Tough ’n Terse, Strong ’n Silent are the conversational super heroes.

CHAT: Rathering than, say, in Italy or France where . . . Jerry Lewis be seen as adoring.

CHIT: *[Nodding.]* Yes! Gerund Lewis. He was always -ING, if you be grokking.

CHAT: I doing. But not like those dogs dooing *[pointing to a man and his mutt]*.

CHIT: *[Like out of the blue.]* Hey. Bet you didn’t knowing today is International Myopic Sociophobe Day honoring those Hillary Clinton called “Deplorables”.

CHAT: No. I thought it was Talk Gerundive Day. We’re supposed to be de-nouning, not celebrating denouncing.

CHIT: Still. It was so declared by ~~Trump~~ *[slices throat with index finger]* administrating in 2017. Celebrating acts such as asking boyish-looking females “Are you a man?” while giving them a miniature boiled pudding handshaking.

CHAT: What about snowing an Inuit by insulting: “Nice shoes — for an Inuit!”

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: I'm not really into it, but my intuition says it be meeting the Obtusing criterion. Yes.

CHAT: *[Points at Chit's chest.]* Nice shirt, images of mini-drawers, like a . . .

CHIT: A chest of drawers. Punny, huh? You should be seeing it with a tie *[pretending to adjust a tie knot]*.

CHAT: Reminding me, it's been awhile since we eating at that wonderful Thai place on Canyon Road. Dining there tonight, please? Wear that shirt. I'll take a snap of you standing next to the Thai chef.

CHIT: Yah, *that* guy! How he managing to always be getting an advanced copy of *The New York Times Magazine*, I'll nevering be know. Ages since been eating their Yellow Curry Chicken washed down with Thai coffee.

Male voice in the distance: "Cut! Cut! That's a wrap. The taco truck is here." A tall man dragging a long-limbed white dog, whose unnerving blue eyes recalls Paul Newman's, crosses the plaza between the interlocutors and the film crew.

CHIT: *[Into Chat's ear.]* Shit. See that dog's eyes! Fuckin' pure Paul Newman.

CHAT: And, he *had* a dog like that. Remember *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge*? Newman and Woodward. That consummate thespian, Joanne Woodward, looked into those blue eyes in that film. Seems she was always leaving her dressing room door ajar, inviting salutations and aimless chit-chat.

CHIT: *[Into Chat's ear.]* With maybe a quickie flinging being in the offing?

CHAT: She was the direct opposite of Newman, the Great Non-Communicator for whom conversation was a nod followed by a fuckin' stalemate. All generalities, no substance. Even his acting of "wild ones" in his films wasn't very convincing, to me anyway. I never bought his characters nor his



CHIT for CHAT

Newman's Own products. Well, except his Beef Jerky treats for dogs, 'cause that was my nasty tag for that fuckin' beefcake. Give me that master conversationalist Dick Cavett any day! He could rise to any occasion.

CHIT: Or a friggin' fantastic Frito Pie. Let's eat!

They are standing in the food line for the taco truck, most people dicking around on their iPhones. One couple is mutually grooming each other, like chimps. Overheard remarks: "The X-ray was negative." "Let's eat at Chez One-Horse." "I am expecting Amazon to deliver the perfect vacuum cleaner today." "The red Beaujolais at Sassella should be eaten; it's too good to be drunk." His friend replies: "Yet, it's good to be drunk, right?" "When a Santa Fe cop asked Alec Baldwin after a Rust shooting incident how he was he replied: Fine, given the human condition". Camera hidden.

CHIT: Madam, you're a dive-in name dropper. Is there a cognoscente, glitterato, literato, celeb, and politico that you haven't got nosey news, fake or otherwise, about?

CHAT: Ah, no. I grok that Venus-Mars thing 'bout women tending toward "rapport-talk" and men toward "report talk". Famous or not men want to get away from a conversation quicker than women who will linger. Women knit the social fabric, men chew on it. Our chit-chat is more spatial, and yours linear. We touch more often in conversation than men. Women are the open wound of language, maybe.

CHIT: Well, men have *conversation* and women *intercourse*.

CHAT: Ouch! If in doubt as to what to say conversing with someone you've never met before, but know they are a writer or a dentist, just ask: *Did Dostovesky have a dental plan?* Perfect ice-breaker. Most importantly, I learned that grooming and gossip go well together. Which reminds me. Remember the *New Yorker* film critic Pauline Kael?

CHIT: Yeah. But I bet the cameraman over there doesn't. She was writing a bit before esoteric French film theory began to fill the pages of *Cahier du cinéma* and way before the craze for kale took hold of people's diets.

CHAT: Way, way, way before you could order a kale-stuffed taco.

CHIT: Heard the Pauline Order of Fathers and Brothers in Doyles-



CHIT for CHAT

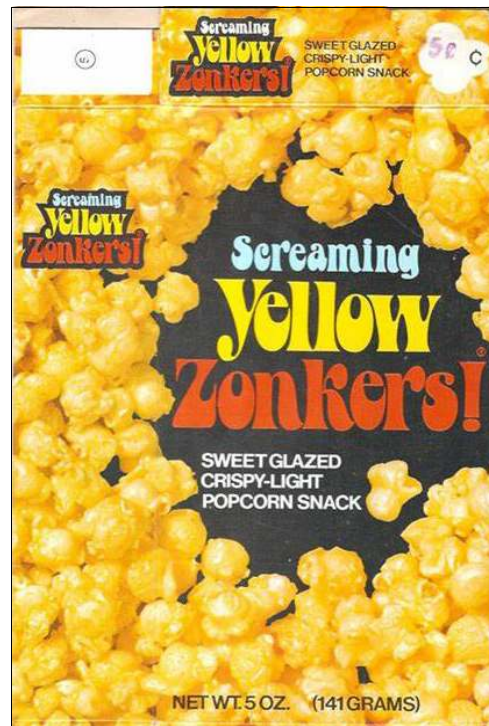
town, PA is cultivating ~~kael~~ kale these days. Very very profitable and super *green*, if you know what I mean. And I think they plan to replace the palm tree symbol on their coat of arms with a bunch of kale. Wonder what their founder Eusebius of Esztergom would say.

CHAT: Esztergom? Sounds like a Beckett character. But to return to Kael. Well, if someone she knew disagreed with her about the quality of an important movie three times in any given year, she'd dump 'em as friends. My late husband and I often had noisy battles over films. "You're so damn difficult to deal with!" he'd scream. Now and then a TV remote was tossed into the fray. But we self-medicated with hot buttered popcorn and calmed down, insults forgotten.

CHIT: Bet you won the argument most often. Women do repeat themselves more than men. We guys get worn down.

By the way, I was addicted to that popular snack food with the yellow balls when watching TV. They felt so good in the hand, not just the mouth. I loved the packaging, too. My mother couldn't keep them in the house long, my sister and I guzzled 'em so fast.

CHAT: Oh! Screaming Yellow Zonkers! Yah, I was *crazy* for them. Glazed popcorn. My late hubby, too. We both got zonkered on them — repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly — when in our twenties. They were modeled after the famous breakfast cereal Sugar Pops, I think. I wonder if this food truck has popcorn or something like it.



CHIT: There is a rumor that during the infamous Attica prison revolt in seventy-one inmate negotiator "L. D." Barkley managed to arrange for cases of Screaming Yellow Zonkers to be brought in to calm people.

CHAT: Then those Screaming Cowardly Zonkers of State Police came in and took the bark off his tree, blood ran like sap!

CHIT: Powers-that-be wanted to make a sap of him.

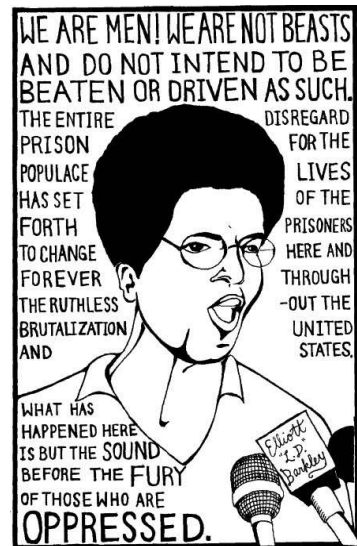
CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: You know we lead the world in the number of incarcerated citizens per capita, the number of adults who believe angels are real, and in defense spending. Real achievements, huh?

CHIT: And what about corporate / political inside fuckin' manipulation bullshit? HUH! HUH!

CHAT: Here people root for a TV Mafia hitman, but poo-poo a girl character who cheated on her boyfriend!

Silence reigns on the set. Heads bow in respect for Barkley's sacrifice.



Poster of "L. D." Barkley.

DIRECTOR: Good. **CUT!**

PLAYWRIGHT: *[Handing a hand-written note to the Director reading: "Good. Just make it more fucked up."]*

Slowly the Director, Playwright, and the crew line up for lunch.

CHIT: *Entonces.* ["so" in spanish.]

CHAT: So? So what?

CHIT: *Entonces, joder Republicanas de Nashville.*

People seem to be reflecting on how similar the internal power situation then in Attica Prison (abusive white guards, black inmates) is to the situation in the streets of America today, even in the Tennessee legislature these days. No over the top celebrity-infused company party tonight. An outside observer would never suspect that this Director is brilliant, garrulous, irascible, literary, impassioned, and brimming with arcana, including the ancient Hermetic wisdom of The Kybalion. But he is.

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ACT SIX

CHIT for CHAT

Location shooting: a Thai eatery on Canyon Road. Simple wooden tables, sparse decor. Three tables occupied. Boon-Nam (“Bob”), the chef greets Chit, Chat, the Director, and film crew. Traditional Thai wai, sawasdees are exchanged. Chit, Chat, and Bob form a perfect equilateral conversational triangle. Crew places lights in key positions and mike the tables.

CHEF: Nice to see you again *[gleam of tooth]*. How you are *[directed at Chat]*?

CHAT: Like an avocado that bruises *[giving forth a deoxygenated moan]*. You know we sit on thieved land? But back in Chicago’s Loop I was surrounded by nothing.

CHIT: Ignore her. The Director’s been on her case these days. Her whines constantly spill like wine on the set.

CHEF: No! This important. Our stomachs are our own hearts. You need spicy love language of Thai red peppers, huh? You need eat skin, sugar, and shade. You know garlic whose breath is a verb, yes?

CHIT: Having eaten at Korean eateries in Chicago, she knows *that*.

CHEF: You know that Thai word for *apple* sounds to English speaking like: “Have fun!” No, really. Check it out. And see *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, too.

CHAT: Well, give me a peeled apple to replace this damn avocado. Fill the void within my hands.

CHIT: *Andale!* Let’s order *[rubbing his hands in anticipation]*.

CHAT: When I first heard that expression, I thought someone was saying “un-delay”, took it to be the antonym of the popular expression *mañana*.

CHEF: The Korean expression for *to have peeled* also can mean *to forget*. But let’s not forget to get your order *[motioning for a server to take their orders]*. Have a pleasant dining tonight *[bows]*. Oh, almost forgot to give you customary cooking tip: For best rice, place your hand on top, pour in water until it make an archipelago out of your knuckles. This way you get perfect amount of rice to water ratio.

CHIT for CHAT

On cue, enters a young mother with a small bloom of child in tow whose hair is a fright. The kid wears a honey-colored jumpsuit, a grey T-shirt, and sports a manic grin like the mental hospital inmates in the 1967 documentary Titicut Follies. They are dressed to look like locals, not tourists. Chit grabs his pen and begins to roughly sketch this small demon on a napkin.

MOTHER: *[To the child.]* Now remember to eat your vegetables as if you had planted them yourself.

CHILD: I smell iodine! Captain Howdy is nearby! Nearby! *[exclaims, distraught].*

The mother, glancing around, feigns embarrassment at the uncensored, weird exclamation from her disheveled kid. Chit and Chat pretend to not have heard this exchange, but can't help raising eyebrows. The mother and daughter are seated. No more sonic events escape from the child; albeit, her small body is in constant subtle flux in her chair.

CHAT: *[Nodding the pair's direction.]* Now there is a five-sense fact and the makings of a bizarre dream it may inspire. *[The server arrives. He's sporting black lipstick, black nail polish, and wearing a very strange T-shirt reading FATTY FATTY BOOM BOOM.]*



Server: I'm Ben, Ben Hadd. *[Laughs.]* My sad dad said he'd had it with me when I came out. May I take your order?

CHAT: *[Obligatory smile.]* Uh, hi. Uh, an order of Thai dumplings, Chicken Panang Curry, washed down with Thai Singha beer.

CHIT: *[Looking up at the server. Wincing slightly.]* Ah, a Thai roll and Chicken Yellow Curry for me. Oh, and Thai ice coffee.

Server: *[Bends close and whispers, trying to curry Chit's favor.]* On my teeth, I swear, always use the name brand. Don't let 'em convince otherwise; pure piffle, poppycock tommyrot, tosh, twaddle. One winter I became very quiet and saw my life. It was February.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: *[Looking astonished.]* Your life was February?

Server: *[Bending even closer.]* No. It was the *month* of February. *[Laughs.]* You've been had by Ben!

CHAT: *[Illumination on her face.]* Oh shit, I forgot! This is Comic Waiters' Night, Chit.

Server: It is! Welcome! Chef calls it The Big Apple as *apple* in Thai sounds like *Have fun*. No harm done, I hope. I'll get your orders in pronto-tonto. Hope crew love it, too.

CHIT: *[Looking amused.]* Yah, we know.

As 6 p.m. approaches, more diners enter. A line even forms. Some stand on the threshold of the turquoise blue door to shout their take-out orders. Some are obviously tourists. Others not. What a difference an instant makes. A sociological moment. A metaphysical moment. A fun moment.

CHAT: *[Gesturing her head toward the entryway.]* Ah, doors . . . portals that connect the inner world to the outer. Which right now is getting dark fast. The light that comes in now is solely from people, except for one or two who turn out to be black holes.

CHIT: A liminal zone between emotional inscape and landscape that surrounds us through which an upsurge of an event may occur. Why that young boy that just came in might suddenly decide to drop his pants. His face might be on milk cartons for all we know. That rather stern fellow over there might mistake me for an enemy of his and step over to insult me. Then there might be someone who seems wholly beyond explanation. Er — like me.

CHAT: We could linger here in a state of a philosophy of repose and imagine so many delightful (or not) things. Been going here long before we met. People walking in here are often strange or noteworthy, a poetry of amazement. The *instant* when someone walks in, it's sheer poetry. The instant of a human person. A pairing of instants — our dialogue — is a collection, an array, of instants suspended between two voids, past and future.

CHIT: That's too deep for me, Chat. I do know that Thai food does draw people across age, class, ethnicity, education. People zig-zagging up Canyon Road high on cannabis or wine guzzled at the galleries during openings dropping by for delightful fare. Whatever. It's a fun place. An *apple place* *[chucking]*. A *happle* place.

CHAT: I gotta tell you this. Once, halfway into my meal, in walks an inverse Medusa. Tall.

CHIT for CHAT

High heels. Blonde, careless curls. Large dark doe's eyes beckoning a hunter to pursue. The kind of person one imagines resides on prime property in Tesuque. No male with her. Heads turn. She gets more notice than she would prior to the lockdown which suddenly atrophied social life. But she's only getting take-out. I sense the diners' deep disappointment. Soon, she'll be only a postprandial dream in their minds. It was only an instant in my dining experience, but I've never forgotten it. An *instant fécond* filled with hope and regret as the French put it so well [*nose in air like De Gaulle*].

CHIT: People await or need to create a vision superior to the ugliness of contemporary existence. When it is accompanied with surprise — something our Director insists upon in our acting — then like someone stumbling out of a dream, as that girl appeared to, or like running gratuitously into the L. A. poet Bert Meyers just as he was doing one of his famous handstands, his massive bunch of white hair flying like a janitor's mop on the floor. Or sharing a vision, such as scarfing up Meyers's poetic words: *Outdoors, a breeze / makes all the shrubs / look sociable*. Yah, his poetry was *smokin'* — maybe because he smoked Gauloises. Died of lung cancer 'cause of it, at fifty-one. Shoulda lived to fifty-five.

CHAT: Fifty quincunxes old, huh? You describe *de nunc* events, *instances*, that suggest an absolute identity between the feeling of the present and the feeling of life. I get the sensation in New Mexico than I ever did in Chicago. A focus on the instant, rather than duration, means less thought and more primal understanding of one's surroundings.

CHIT: Do you think of your life more as driftwood or more as an island? [*The question goes unanswered as their respective food orders arrive.*] God! Smell that curry!

The dining room is now full. The four-second screech of the Larsen effect (feedback noise) as a young male stand-up comedian takes his place and tries out his microphone.



CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Yahweh! *[Hands over ears as one speaker is too close to Chat.]*

LAKE: So, two missionaries are captured and tied up by an isolated savage native tribe in a vermin-ridden village in a benighted land . . . Nah! That one is as old as racism. *[Audience claps.]* Call me “Lake” ladies and yentlmen *[waves to audience]*. Let’s see you all give me an ocean of waves *[diners wave back]*. Guys, canoe Canoe? Hey, hi, Knute!

HECKLER: Hey, Lake, you should be wearing a series of funny *white caps*, not a black hat! And that riff on the Canoe Cologne for men ads sucks, too! BTW, my name *is* Knute.

LAKE: You just stole my next few lines, my friend. Server, give that man an order to pot stickers. What a great audience tonight!

HECKLER: You cannot start without me. See, I start the clock. Hey, do those Mexican border town puns you used in your gig in Madrid last month.

LAKE: Okay. The first one is easy. What border town is known for serving marijuana in tea so good you can’t refuse? You know, steeping the leaves in hot water.

HECKLER: Tea-I-wanna! Tijuana! But I never got into hot water in that town and I’ve been there fives times times five on my trusty motorcyle. And only the *gringos* leave.

LAKE: *[Ignores his bad puns.]* The second one. A border town whose name tells you they don’t serve *señoritas* in the bars?

CHAT: Nogales!

HECKLER: Hey, that’s my line!

CHIT: *[Whispers to Chat.]* I think that guy’s a shill for the comedian or may be one of our behind-the-scenes crew.

CHAT: Could be. Jump starts the gig and encourages audience participation.

LAKE: And third . . . the border town home to many *luchadores*, Mexican wrestlers?

CHIT: Ah, Matamoros. Mats, more wrestling mats.

LAKE: Give the man *[extends arm and hand toward the heckler]* a rubber cigar!

CHIT for CHAT

HECKLER: Hey, last time I saw you was on stage at The Mine Shaft eatery in Madrid, Valentine's Day last year. But then you were wielding your long-nosed wooden dummy "Otha" who was clad in an absurdly large cowboy hat, posing as that Nazi-on-horseback Couy Griffin 'n the dummy was swearin' ta us its mum ain't a haint. What happened? Was His Woodenness nominated on the Republican ticket in Otero County and subsequently elected to The House of Representatives to torture Kevin McCarthy? *[General laughter.]*

LAKE: Mind you, he certainly *would* qualify to be elected Speaker of the House. *[More laughter.]* But truly, Otha, once an orphan, was given a deal he couldn't refuse, asked to be an understudy for the main character in Del Toro's two thousand twenty two adaptation of *Pinocchio*. *[More laughter.]* Seriously, folks, this establishment can only afford my presence, Otha's fees are even higher than mine. *[Laughter, one hoot.]*

But I did bring Otha's Other Self, he comes free because he makes a reasonable salary doing Dillard's retail store commercials. *[Reaches into his right trouser pocket and puts on a sock puppet with absurdly large button eyes and a mop of weird hair like Trump's.]* Meet "Dillard"! My Jungian psychoanalyst recommended I use this handy device in our therapy sessions *[wiggles the puppet before the audience]*; helps me to "open up" *[makes quotation marks with his fingers]*, as they say *[clapping, hilarious laughter]*. Since then, Dillard has learned the art of the deal, pays for all my therapy sessions.

HECKLER: Wow! Bet Dillard has had a lot to say to your shrink. *[Chuckles.]* A real *simp-biotic* relationship, huh? What do you think, folks? *[Cheers.]*

LAKE: Oh shut up! *[in a high pitched Truman Capote voice, mouthed by the manipulated hand puppet]*. I doesn't mean, *I* is. Even though I prefer to wear Johnny Was slippers. *[The hand puppet then appears ashamed, awkwardly reaching into Lake's left pocket to pull out a sad-looking geranium.]* Here, I make this peace offering to thee . . . *[Laughter.]*

During this exchange, Chit and Chat chew heartily, exchanging knowing glances and mouthing silent commentary. The crew stifles laughter.

HECKLER: Wow! Thanks. My grandfather, Marco, a master of what he called "conflated clichés," always told me "Kid, time will tell all wounds." For laughs, he'd grab family members's trousers from behind, pull them up hard into one's butt crack, announcing "Mark your laundry!" Hey, not a little unlike the skills needed to edit film.

LAKE: *[Removes his sock puppet. Resumes normal voice tone.]* I once forgot to remove Dillard when I was backstage wiping my butt after . . . *[Sniggering from the audience. Mother of the young "iodine girl" frowns disapprovingly.]*

CHIT for CHAT

HECKLER: I'll bet that was when Dillard, tired of crap gigs, finally got an agent who then got him that lucrative Dillard's contract? Right? Right? *[Audience in stitches.]*

LAKE: You embarrass me! I retract my gift geranium. Give it back. *[Just then an audience member's cellphone goes off, the ring-tone that famous whistle-song from the film Bridge on the River Kwai.]* Well, we are in an Asian restaurant . . . *[Laughs.]*

HECKLER: Heck, you're in the grip of a gripe! It's my booty! Sorry, I can't heel your sole. I got a question for you Mr. First Violin: Can an A-minor chord be misogynistic?

LAKE: It can be if the chord is wrapped around a woman's neck. . . . I could've been a Professor of the Comic Arts you know. A trained mind on track for a Ph.d. My M.A. thesis elaborated on how the nucleus of every funny atom is the Great Joke, our radical cluelessness about existence. Sam Beckett kind of stuff. Why that famous analyst of comedy, Professor Elder Olson at the University of Chicago, who once porked my grand mum in a fifty-five Olds, later, on her pleadings on my behalf, got me into an M.A. in English Lit program and finally a teaching job at an obscure college in the Midwest. But every time I sat down to write some academic tract, I got derailed. I sure wasn't The Little Trained Academic That Could. I wanted to say to myself "I'm afraid!" but it always morphed into "I'm afraid" because I never could add footnotes, define sources. My chairman, Chad, must've sensed this dysfunction (or read my papers) because he put me on a committee to oversee the committees that oversee the committees, so I never saw anything but committees or forms, never students. My future appeared to be nothing but being bored on the board overseeing the bored. So, I jumped overboard crossing a bridge, nearly sunk, but soon got on my feet. Stood up. Took up standup. Railed against injustices. Praxis over theory. Good for the sole, huh? I love fish. *[Audience titters. A few yawn.]*

HECKLER: Failure. Must've been a hard pill to swallow. A hard act to follow.

LAKE: Barter that than nothin'! And I am UP HERE and *you* are in the audience. So *there!* *[Audience chuckles.]* My first standup routine gig was in Frisco, in drag, *[mother of the small girl who bespoke of iodine, quickly puts her hands over her daughter's ears]* and titled "The Lass with the Cider beside Her." Alas, the club's owner couldn't decide to book me for another week or not — until some Knute here put a well-edited vid-clip up of my performance on the Net and it went viral.

This was *before* COVID. And long after the craze for backgammon was replaced by backbiting. But that club owner did give me excellent advice: "Silence in the middle of telling a joke can bring the audience back to essentials. *[He pauses.]* The rest is hysterical. *[Clapping, whistles.]* I want to thank my cousin, Knute, for his film editor sense of heckling.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: *[Whispering to Chat.]* See, I told you.

LAKE: Dear audience and the film crew, you've been so generous tonight *[face revealing false modesty]*, I know I can convince Chef Bob to give you all a sampling of his unique dessert, Plum Bob, inspired by Chicago chef Grant Achatz's famous Bacon Trapeze. East meets West in Bob's amazing concoction. You'd have to be plum loco to refuse this foodly item. And please spread the good word about the good cuisine here to good friends. Oh, and *What About Bob*. Before opening this establishment he owned a bar in Chinatown in San Francisco, where I met him, called Thai Won On which served Thai, Chinese, and Korean snacks with Steam Anchor beer on tap. Ahh, that deep amber color and creamy head. You *beeranados* know what I mean.



Grant Achatz, chef.

CHAT: *[Whispering to Chit.]* Fuck, yes! Have you ever had it?

CHIT: *[Whispering back.]* That dessert? Nope. I usually order their *khao niaow ma muang*. I just call it Mango Meow. Sweet mango sticky rice. Fuckin' Fab. The beer? Yes.

LAKE: I do have a few Dillard sock puppets left for anyone in the peanut gallery *[audience laughs]*, a plum opportunity if anyone would want to come up and shake my hand puppet and pull it off *[puts on Dillard]*. Any takers? Don't be afraid, I'm no longer afraid.

CHILD: Howdy! Howdy! *[Nodding a "Yes", quickly walks up and vigorously shakes the hand puppet, then abruptly pulls the sock puppet off the comedian's right hand.]* Do ja' have iodine in da bottle?" *[Points to a small bottle the comic holds in his other hand, then runs back to sit with her mother. They excitedly converse in low conspiratorial tones.]*



Chit's sketch of "Iodine Girl".

LAKE: Ah, we adults grok the partial fraudulence in acting like an adult when we often still feel very much like kids inside. *[The audience nods their collective heads.]* So let's give this little charmer a hand. *[Clapping.]* Thank you and good night! Oh, remember, folks, *talk* — especially non-goal-driven conversation — don't shoot. By the way, check out *hugthe monkey.com* web-site if you want to replace the Great Satan, addictive oxycodone, with all-natural oxytocin. You'll find you can actually wear Liquid Trust. *[Holds up a spray bottle, spritzes a small amount into the air, bows.]* My website is *artmonkey.org*. Please visit it and leave suggestions. Good night! *[Beer bottles belch open to general applause.]*

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: *[Whispering to Chit.]* Can you beat that?

CHIT: Smart advice, Chat. Seeing others as others requires them to see *themselves* as other in the eyes others.

CHAT: *[Whispering to Chit.]* I mean the neurotransmitter, oxytocin. Natural activities release it in our bodies. Nature sees to it that women giving birth get a big dose of it. Supposed to ease delivery and maintain mental balance and social trust. It's called "the chemistry of connection". And now you can order it online it spray form.



CHIT: Smart. We should spray it about on the set from now on.

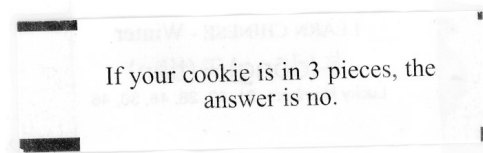
Servers in blue jeans and sweat shirts mill about collecting dishes and then begin to bring out the promised Plum Bob (plus fortune cookies). As they present the unusual vertically-staged dessert, the waiters encouragingly urge: "Hang in there!" in a tone recalling motivational speakers. Chit and Chat attack their desserts. Fortune cookies make the rounds.

CHAT: *[In between bites of dessert.]* They call . . . that . . . sage-ing. Urging . . . folks, especially older folks, . . . to . . . essentially . . . keep on truckin'. Keep on . . . learning, . . . doing, . . . et cetera . . . et cetera.

CHIT: Smart. In these dim dim days of dim-witted citizens, flocking denizens, and their elected politicians, we all need some encouragement. *[Opens his fortune cookie.]* Shit! Check this out, Chat.



CHAT: *[Looks at it.]* Life is one long habituation to disappointment.



HECKLER: It's "Yes". We must evolve into a great unknowable entity, digitized souls..

CHIT for CHAT

DIRECTOR: Guys and Dolls. I've been fighting a bad GERD episode lately. So will be taking a sick day. Tomorrow's shoot at Meow Wolf will be overseen by a local director named Apollo, a guy steeped in Ionesco, but who hasn't gotten the break he deserves.

CHIT: *[Whispering.]* I hope our absurdist scene tomorrow won't be disappointing.

CHAT: Camembert. Apollo Camembert. Hope he doesn't end up apologizing to us for his incompetence.

CHIT: *Je ne sais pas, moi. Parle moi d'un camembert ou d'un brie. [He thinks of a scene from a French movie he saw in film class once.]*



CHAT: But maybe it will be a breeze. Certainly a fun place to do a scene, Meow Wolf.

CHIT: Meooooooooowwww!

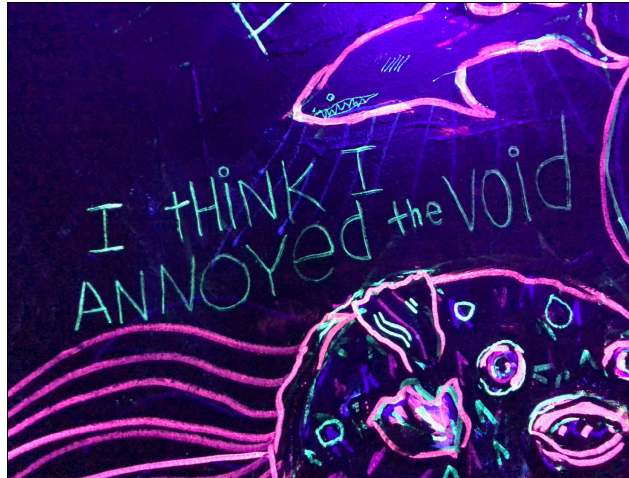
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ACT SEVEN

CHIT for CHAT

Inside a colorful room in Meow Wolf's "House of Eternal Return". Chit and Chat sit on urn-like stools. Guest director, one Apollo Camembert (a director of cheesy TV commercials thanks to COVID), tries his directorial hand at belles lettres while The Director is ill. He chooses an odd scene in Santa Fe's art venue for his poorly ageing interlocutors to exchange incisive dialogue.

APOLLO: [Unseen, his voice coming from on high.] You are at my Beckett and call. As the old rule goes . . . to avoid annoying your audience, to write good dialogue, never have what any character says respond directly to what another character has just said. Okay? Got it? So let's *do it sport fans!* We stand on the shoulders of giants.



Background before which sit Chit and Chat at Meow Wolf.

CHAT: [Visibly nervous.] The shoulders of giant ants! THEM! You . . . you Russians really love to talk about death, huh?

CHIT: Uhh. I'm not Russian. He is [pointing upward]. I have a need to go *slow*. But if you are referring to the weird fact that the Bolsheviks, having seized power, let a defeated White general live . . . Putin would never have . . .

CHAT: Well, the Reds did *de-feet* him. And prosthetics at the time were fuckin' crude.

CHIT: Maybe he got casters attached for I heard the ol' general eventually immigrated to the U.S., and quickly rolled up the ramp in Hollywood and right into central casting. There he became good buds with that weird Austrian actor Oskar Homolka after he cast Homolka's wife, Joan Tetzl, in Hitchcock's famous film *The Paradine Case*.



Oscar Homolka.

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: *[Drilling her ears with both index fingers.]* Pair of dimes in a case? Or the case for paradigms? What?

CHIT: Darmok!

CHAT: Temba, his arms wide.

CHIT: Darmok and Jalad at Tanagra.

APOLLO: *[Yells.]* Cut! You both are responding *too* directly. I saw that *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode. Get more *obtuse*, caboose. Fly o'er the cuckoo's nest. Okay? GO!

CHIT: Sometimes even a virtuoso performance doesn't give birth to music *[raising arms and looking about the bizarre Meow Wolfian space they are sitting in]*.

CHAT: In *Cats*, it did! *[Eyes lighting up.]* So you are an ichthyologist *and* a fish?

CHIT: Meaning? What? That I'm both a music scholar and a musician?

CHAT: Or, by analogy, a graduate student of criminology and a criminal. Idaho, Moscow's Kohlberger.

CHIT: Hugh Grant had a "ho". I like my burger hot and with Idaho potato chips.

CHAT: How can consciousness be trapped in mortal flesh? Or so wonder Russian authors *ad nauseam*.

CHIT: Trapped like a burger inside a bun?

CHAT: Burnt burgers are escaping buns in large numbers in the eastern Ukrainian town of Soledar where no one counts the dead these days.

CHIT: Burghers are escaping the Huns? Souls. Dare they? Someone sure annoyed the void.

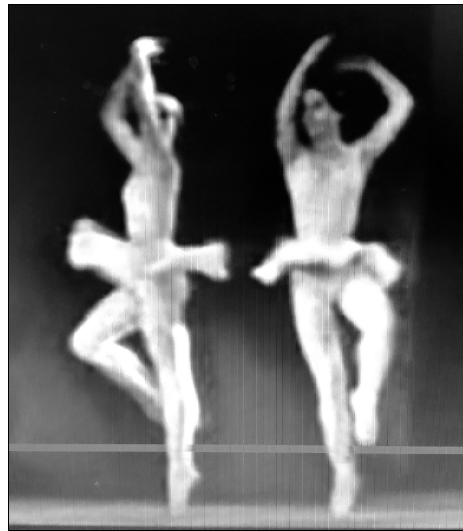


CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: The Ruskies will only progress morally when instead of dwelling on what others did to them, they start to examine what they've done.

APOLLO: Cut! Let's try this tactic. Chat, you imagine you've awoken decades later from cryogenic suspension after they've found a cure for your idiopathic demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy. You, Chit, imagine you've just this second materialized from some other time dimension that has puckered at its edge and now strains to open into our NOW — as this weird house with its many passageway and its carefully crafted story suggests. Events in a different time are no different from those in a different space. Keeping this in mind may help us achieve our polyphonic goal with this wacky dialogue.

CHAT: *[Nods agreement, but looks baffled for a second, then a sudden illumination seems to strike her. She rises up, puts her arms like a halo over her head, twisting her torso side to side, on the tips of her toes.]* Oh, look I am cured! *[Pretends to toss her bedding into a tumbled heap.]* This was a poor body irritatingly marred by good features. I thought hope was supposed to die last. It didn't. And now . . . the morning light — if I could see it — must be milky yet transparent, an enchantment I breathe in, that penetrates through the eyes and every pore of my skin. My brain vibrates with a joy of being for which there are no words, except for: What am I? *[Puts her hands over her ears, recalling that Schopenhauer equated sound sensitivity with very high intelligence.]* This is as close to a mystico-philosophical rumination on the meaning of my disease and its cure as I can do. *[She looks bewitchingly at Chit.]*



Scene from *Apollo*.

CHIT: You were akin to a metronome ticking in a safe and now . . . a Jewess auditioning for the ballet *Apollo* by the Ballets Russes for a role as Polyhymnia, the Muse of Mime! In fact, I just now have returned through a portal from the premiere of ~~sad~~ *[slices throat with index finger]* said ballet, April twenty-seventh, nineteen twenty-eight. Five years prior to the Holodomor, Stalin's man-made famine that killed nearly four million people in the Ukraine. What a Dance of Death that was. The peasants went from getting soil on their pants, to soiling their pants, to panting on their knees over the soil.

CHAT: Ah, choreographed by Georgie Porgie Balanchine — er — not the dance of death choreographed by Stalin. I mean the Balanchine with its costumes by hot Coco Chanel.

CHIT for CHAT

Genealogy not anthropology! *[Raises right hand in a power salute.]* Cha-cha Channel your emotions positively. *[Slowly lowers her hand, slightly embarrassed.]*

CHIT: *[Gets up, walks to a desk, and steals a pencil, holding it behind his back.]* Apology? Everyone arrived on time. The performance was fabulous. My pre-ballet dinner at La Coupole of lobster thermidor, green beans, and a russet potato was *plus-que-parfait* as I like to put it, mixing up tense and dessert, the latter was fresh fruit avec a sprig of mint. I saw Picasso in the men's room! Omit! Overlapping crises. Then and now.

CHAT: I received another weird e-mail from Krista. How should I reply? *[Her eyes sparkle like chrysolite, camera zooms in on this.]*

CHIT: Lie. Tell her hope dies last *[making a fist, pounding right hand like hammer].*

APOLLO: Cut! That's a wrap. Some crap that. Or, or crapped out meaning. *Krapp's Last Tape*. You two *grokked* the goal. The buzz *is* a poem is supposed to BE not mean. Or so said some arch baldy on an academic leash. Yer mouths are golden today, so tapas at that top ass eatery on Marcy, La Boca, for all! It's on me, or for mercy's sake, I should say the company will pick up the tab, like it did too many fuckin' times for Tab Hunter back when. *[Cheers, hand slaps.]*



CHAT: *[Walking back to their transport bus.]* Fuck, that was exhausting. I've never had to . . .

CHIT: For me, too. This director is **nuts**. Pure Brazil nuts and Samba. Can you imagine what the audience will be going to go through? I suggest we tell them to recover from the experience they set their clock Bach and listen to *The Goldberg Variations*, that limitless site of infinite play and boundless reinterpretation.

CHAT: No, we set the clocks forward doofus! Daylight Saving Time approaches.

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ACT EIGHT

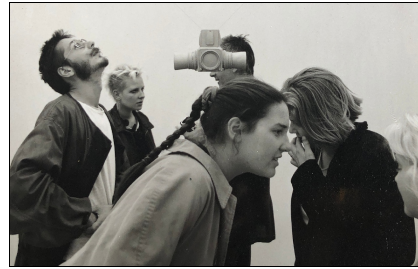
CHIT for CHAT

Top of the lunch hour at La Boca. The eatery is small and tables, both inside and out, are crammed together and fully occupied. Waiters navigating between as if running an obstacle course. Crew films with a small camera.

CHIT: *[Eyeing the crowd. Whispering to Chat.] Oh fuck! Shit! Dammit!*

Too many people sitting too close, like books on a shelf where James Joyce shoulders up against Collette. Or a Stephen King paperback abuts a Virginia Woolf first edition.

CHAT: *[Leans into Chit, chastising him.] Don't be so cursive! I'm not font of it. . . . That would never happen in my library, chum. Never find Barry Goldwater's *The Conscience of a Conservative* — written when conservatives still had something of a conscience — abutting JFK's *Profiles in Courage*, despite the common political theme. I get the point. Couldn't possibly eat here right now. Let's blow this popsicle stand.*



Director (left) and film crew on location as photographed by Chat.

CHIT: *[Slowly retreating back through the threshold.]* Follow me. I have the perfect place in mind. La Cisterna. It's a bit tawdry, but very *Nuevo Mexicano*. More bar stools than tables, but their Two-Dies-4-Frito-Pies (a family-size preparation with a pair of dice on top set to show double-fives) is more flavorful than The Pantry's version.

CHAT: *[Following Chit, but stops to remark.]* Hmmm. Are the dice there as a smart-ass provocation that the dish just *might* be crap, a forewarning so you can't sue them?



CHIT: The place is owned by an Hispanic couple who are involved in the complex politics of *acequia* water management in northern New Mexico. He met his wife at a dice table in a local casino. Hey! They have bottled mineral water with a pH of nine. And I've *never* seen anyone *ever* wear a THESE COLORS DON'T RUN — THEY RELOAD T-shirt in the place. Since their neon sign was copped, they don't have much of a sign up yet, just a painted wooden plaque on the wall left of the entrance reading:

Star Tier →

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: *[Following Chit out of the restaurant.]* I'm in! Cool. I could use a tall glass of iced H2O, too. Can we hoof it or do we need to get a Lyft?

CHIT: Hey, idiot, forgot we can just — **ZOOM BOOM BANG** — magically dive into divers places?

CHAT: *[Making a zero with her fingers.]* Like this dive you've proposed? Oh yeah, yeah. I get it. That French theory strangeity again which seems to have you always staring in a mirror; dare I, duh, quote it: THERE IS NOTHING OUTSIDE OF THE TEXT. Nada. *[Nods her agreement.]*



CHIT: Whoa! Okay! Ready? Ready for the sea shantyish CRY, CHANT, MAGIC WORDS that will take us Irish Rovers to our new watering hole? The ten-dimensional multiverse **AHOY!**

CHAT: *[Gathering her clothes tight about her.]* We ain't Irish, but make it happen.

CHIT: Here we go! *[They hold hands.]*

**EIGHT BALLS GO
“BYE” AND THE
CANNONBALLS
FLY!**

+++

CHIT for CHAT

Chit and Chat Re-emerge in a dark, noisy cabaret. Sit at a table. Scan the room. With “Oh Fuck” looks on their faces. An announcer is at his microphone on stage. A different film crew is at work.

CHAT: *[Twisting her head hither thither, confused.]* Ah, I don't think we are in Kansas any more Toto.

CHIT: Shit! I think we are . . .

ANNOUNCER: *Meine Damen und Herren, mesdames et messieurs. Ladies and gents. I give you the international, sensation Fräulein Sally Bowles doing “Mein Herr”. [He dramatically raises both arms as a sexy singer with a familiar face struts on stage in black stockings. Music begins.]*



Liza Minnelli in *Cabaret*.

Sally Bowles (Liza Minnelli):

*You have to understand the way I am, mein Herr
A tiger is a tiger, not a lamb, mein Herr
You'll never turn the vinegar to jam, mein Herr
So I do, what I do
When I'm through, then I'm through
And I'm through, toodle-oo . . .*

CHIT: . . . on the film set for *Cabaret* starring Liza Minnelli. Jeeze.

CHAT: *[Visibly relieved. Whispering in Chit's ear.]* Whew. Then those Nazis sitting over there are only actors. Whoa! I thought we fuckin' *forwarded* in time, past the 2024 Elections and the financial collapse of our government into . . .

CHIT: *[In Chat's ear.]* I think our visit to Meow Wolf's mysterious House of Eternal Return about that time-traveling family, the Seligs, somehow's given us D-travel abilities.

CHAT: *[Tissue from her purse, wipes face hurriedly.]* At least we were not swept up into that tiny theatre in Patience, Texas. Remember? A gig with a local dramatic group called “The Milk Carton Kids,” where we both lost patience with the dyslexic director. I playing an eccentric potty-mouthed grandmother, and you an ever-patient stargazing grandfather to a feisty young girl, Mixie Sutton, in pigtails whose uncle reminds her a lot of a cop who

CHIT for CHAT

terrified her during a bust of the family's illegal still by the revenoors. I think the booze they distilled was called Popcorn Sutton Small Batch.

CHIT: God, yes! The set buzzing with a herd of god damn Norwegian Dwarf goats, their "guard donkeys," and three canine roommates with names culled from the Bible — forget 'em now — occupying the small sharecropper's house that is the main scene of this Forties-era play. Don't remind me. *Let Us Now Praise Infamous Events* was its title if my memory serves me right. Well . . . it was funny, and especially so when that large framed portrait of FDR came loose accidentally and fell on one of the goats and the goat kicked the . . . what a scene!



Norwegian Dwarf Goat.

CHAT: *[Laughing.]* All ass 'n elbows. Much damage, panic; the play that night halted.

Throughout, Minnelli sings and dances. People start to notice "the visitors."

CHIT: Uhhh, we are getting strange looks. I think we need to blow this popsicle stand, too. Take my hand. Here we go!

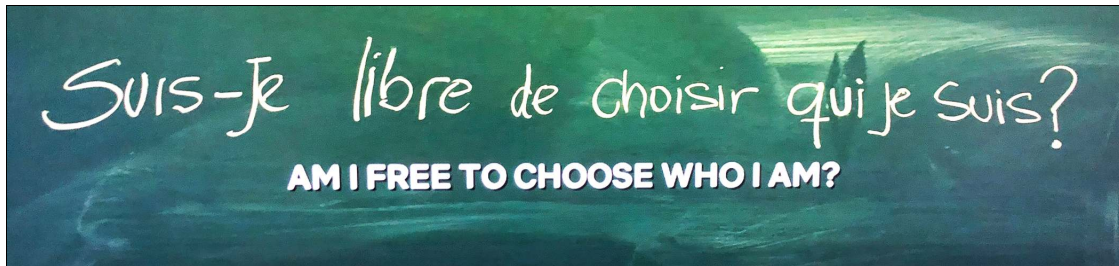
EIGHT BALLS GO
"BYE" AND THE
CANNONBALLS
FLY!

Exeunt.

+++

ACT NINE

CHIT for CHAT



The world is a labyrinth of meaning, a never-ending web of connections and disconnections. We, as human beings, are constantly struggling to make sense of it all, to find a way through the chaos. But as we delve deeper into the abyss, we realize that there is no ultimate truth, no final answers. Instead, we must embrace the uncertainty and ambiguity, and find our own way through the darkness. This is the post-modern, post-Heideggerian reality we must come to accept and navigate, a reality that is both terrifying and exhilarating.

— “Whisper in her Ear,” Grep Harder

Empty college classroom except for seminar tables. A green board chalked with French and English. Silence. Crew’s boxes of pizza with slices not eaten sit on the instructor’s desk. A Xerox copy of an article [excerpt reproduced above] left on that desk by the prop man.

CHIT: *[In a sing-song voice.]* The Playwright wanted me to announce this fact: *Bea walks into the classroom wearing the clothes she had on the day before. The teacher understands that is going to be a bad day [from “A Way with Bea” by Shanteka Sigers]. Wonder [sighs] what college we transported to and what year?*

CHAT: Assure you we *aren’t* at Southern New Hampshire College. It’s all online learning with them. Know some thirty-somethings takin’ IT classes from SNHU — they pronounce it “Snhoo” as in “snoozin’ at Snhoo.” Boring lectures, I guess. And I smell pizza.

CHIT: There’s a bulletin board. *[Points.]* See that posting? Ah! *[Examines it.]* We’re in a classroom at Santa Fe Community College and its our present year.

CHAT: So we didn’t time-jump. Great!. Looks like classes are over and we have leftover pizza to munch on. Last time a prof bought pizza for us during a course on ancient Greek philosophy. One choice tidbit from Aristotle stuck in my grey matter: *Humor is the only test of gravity, and gravity humor.*

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Chat, if Einstein had known that citation, shit, he'd have come up with a new theory of comicosmology where the Earth revolves around the Fun and the stars constellate in comedy clubs with clubs, delivering bullshit, scorpion stings, fishy theories, and giving birth to twins.

CHAT: Very sunny! Oh, look! One Coke can not opened. *[Reaches for it.]* Er — cannot be opened! The tab is broken off. Shit. Where is Tab Hunter when you need him?

CHIT: We'll make do, Tabitha. And I'll pick up the tab for our lunch, how's that!

CHAT: Hey, great. Oh, this academic environ reminds me of my old friend Victor L. Thanangadan — love that name — who was always spouting choice tidbits about his time in academia teaching art and language courses in a department he'd dubbed "Galactic Central" because he said going to faculty meetings run by "Sol the Magnificent" and this chairman's buddy "The Prime Orbiter", was like enduring "meteor showers" from which he'd emerge with bings, bangs, and dents. But ol' Victor had his tricks, quantum leaps into other dimensions. I mean he wholly identified with the persecuted figure of Wilhelm Reich.

CHIT: *[His old refrains endears him with the Director.]* Well, spill the *frijoles*. *Màs!*

CHAT: Every mornin' at the salt mine, i.e., the college, you could see him arrive; stood six-foot-six and weighed one eighty-five; kinda broad in his views and narrow in his hips, and everybody knew ya didn't give no lip to big Vic. He declaimed to me more than once: "I'm not a suck-up sycophant groupthink workshop-dependent spineless wanna be. But the Real Thing." The real thing, being an artist with firm esthetic and social commitments; he felt "unspoken threats" from colleagues who, he said, were "poseurs and tread in terror of their fraudulence's being uncovered." Feeling particularly brassy one day, he jokingly put up a poster in the department offices trolling for: "Those interested in starting a departmental chorus dance group called "Sycophants-In-Synch," signed it "Professor T."

CHIT: Bet that went well!

CHAT: Like a Bouncin' Betty on a battle field. In fact, his body still retains shrapnel from his tour of duty as medic in The 'Nam. Sets off alarms at airports. "Like being blown back 50 yards by 20,000 volts" is the way he described the explosion that day in a rice field.

CHIT: Shit! More than spilt *frijoles*.

CHAT: Eventually, his department's inner circle, which he dubbed "The Copernican Secret

CHIT for CHAT

Society”, hired a shamus to shadow him, or so he claimed, to get dirt on him. Fuck up his tenure tent so he’d pull up stakes and scam to, say, Mooselookmeguntic Lake near Reich’s Rangely, Maine organ lab. Hey, looks like there was a philosophy seminar in here. *[Notices the writing on the green board. Eyes lighting up.]* See? Look. Gives me an idea. Let’s, in bursts of insight, list the gist of all we’ve pissed and not missed in our chats, Chit.

CHIT: Oh, wow! Like an RL version synopsisizing our “take” on things that *simulates* the amazing ChatGPT-3 language/dialogue generating app that is now gobsmacking the public, giving students an edge on school papers 'n spookin’ journalists.

CHAT: Yeah. Reverse the function. Here I'll start. You follow up and on we go alternating responses like that app generates, okay? So here is my initial contribution: Difficulty in accepting certain situations or circumstances.

CHIT: We are all one means we are alone.

CHAT: To be alone without all the others means you’re the only one.

CHIT: Resistance to being told what to do.

CHAT: Hope and desire for a second chance.

CHIT: Struggle with memories and heartache to where one glimpses.

CHAT: Visual snow.

CHIT: Mountains of snow in the mountains.

CHAT: The presence of a promise or longing for something unattainable.

CHIT: The idea that hope persists despite hopelessness.

CHAT: Paraplegic climbs Everest.

CHIT: Peregrines.

CHAT: Pair of grins.

CHIT: Char Siu Bao.

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Take a bow.

CHIT: Off an Indian? How 'bout them cowboys!

CHAT: FTS means fuck the system.

CHIT: FME means find me evidence and I'll join the cause.

CHAT: Why did this spring audience grow so silent when I came? What was happening? Analyze that!

CHIT: Anticipation of bad puns.

CHAT: The argute intuition of the autodidact.

CHIT: Versus the systematic research of the don.

CHAT: Antinomies.

CHIT: Homologies.

CHAT: Puns.

CHIT: Analogies.

CHAT: Playin' Jarism. The "quoties," as our Playwrite puts it.

CHIT: Memory traces. Engrams in official lingo.

CHAT: Avoid self-censorship. Run-over the Red Fascists.

CHIT: Toss a monkey wrench into the spiral of silence. KAAAAA-BBLLLLAAANGGG!

CHAT: A subject that will not bear raillery is suspicious to us.

CHIT: *[Puts his arms akimbo.]* A jest which will not bear a serious examination is most likely false wit sung by a twit. I wanna a green-chile infused bratwurst — it's the best. Trump's the worst. *[Spoiler alert, Chit will later change that to J. D. Vance.]*

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: *[Points to Chit's crotch; zipper undone.]* Ah, Chit. Your “meat-shop’s” open! In German that would be literally: *Du hast deine Fleischbank offen.*

CHIT: And what would be the butcher’s special of the day? *[Winks.]*

CHAT: *[Points again to Chit's crotch.]* Ah, . . . *Ziegeunerspiess*, shish kebab.

CHIT: Shesh! Nasty.

CHAT: Keep the *Aspidistra* flying. Meaning, you gotta watch your fly, buster.

CHIT: Ying.

CHAT: Yang.

CHIT: Ting.

CHAT: Tang. I wish I had some to drink now.

CHIT: Bing.

CHAT: Bang. I’m out of ammo. I only pack a one-shot derringer.

CHIT: Baby, you’re a Boomer.

CHAT: We sound like “Hal”, the talking computer in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. when it's operating system got fucked-up. Took on a will of its own and had to be . . .

CHIT: Alzheimered? Hey, it's watts for dinner!

CHAT: Hell! We haven't had *lunch* yet. Let's see if we can walk out of here using the GPS on your iPhone to get us to the closest Taco truck. I'm fuckin' tired of this non-linear dimension script-jumping shit and I'm dyin' for brisket tacos.

CHIT: Just call me Al Fresco and your command is my request. *[Frantically thumbs his iPhone.]* Hope. Nope. Hope. Nope. Hope. Nope. Hope. Nope. Hope. Nope. Hope. Nope. Hope. Nope. Hope. Nope. Hope. Nope. Hope. Nope. Ah! *[Finding a food truck, Los Compas Tacos, within walking distance.]* . . . GOT IT!

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Heck, that translates as “Compasses”!

CHIT: Synchronicity. So appropriate. Let’s use our electronic compass. *[Pushes GO on his Google app and an anonymous female voice of directional authority starts spitting out walking instructions.]*

GOOGLE MAPS: Straight. . . . Keep straight. . . . Now turn left, before turning right. . . . Then turn right, after turning left, before turning left. . . . Now turn around. . . . Now turn right, before turning left. . . . Then turn left, after turning right. . . . Your destination will be on your right if you are facing correctly. If not, it is on the left. *[Chit and Chat and crew all follow.]*



Los Compas Tacos.

CHAT: *[Stops. Points to the right.]* Thar she blows!

CHIT: Whoa! I saw that freakin’ film back in the late Sixties. A kind of porny comedy flick where some rich business man charters a yacht and hires a pimp to provide women.

CHAT: If this truck can provide the frisky briskey, I’ll go down on it.

CHIT: Frito pie for I. With plenty of ~~young-uns~~ — er — onions.

While Chit and Chat and crew imbibe their lunch you will be entertained with a poem Chat wrote some years ago re: a close friend, Victor L. Thanangadan, plus reproductions of his aesthetic production.

THE BALLAD OF AN OPEN-HANDED MAN

Of cup and platter need has none
The guests who seek the generous one –
Victor the Victorious – who can trace
His lineage from the giant race.
He loves the people – his liberal hand
Scatters his pen’s gains o’er the land.

CHIT for CHAT

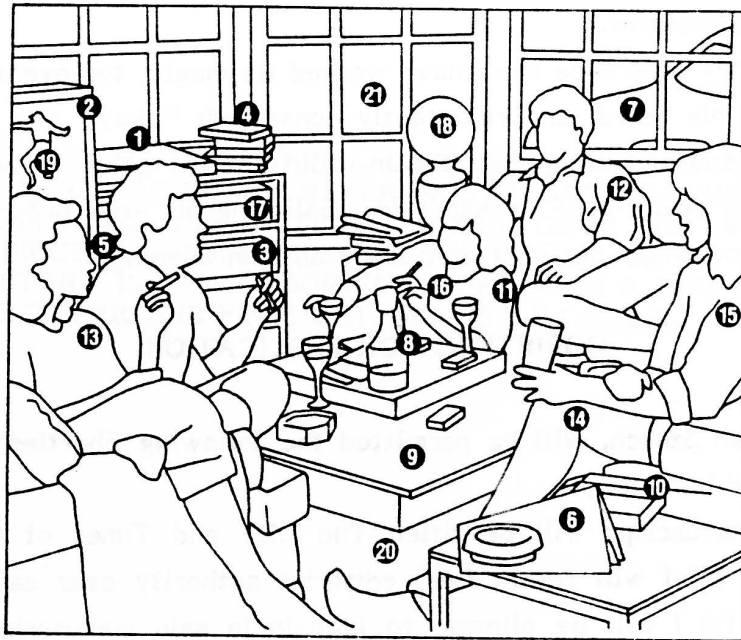


Self-portrait and Brazilian Boolean (road signage, 2010 - 2022) Victor L. Thanangadan.



Test Pattern for the Twenty-First Century (20 x 24 in. 2008) Victor L. Thanangadan.

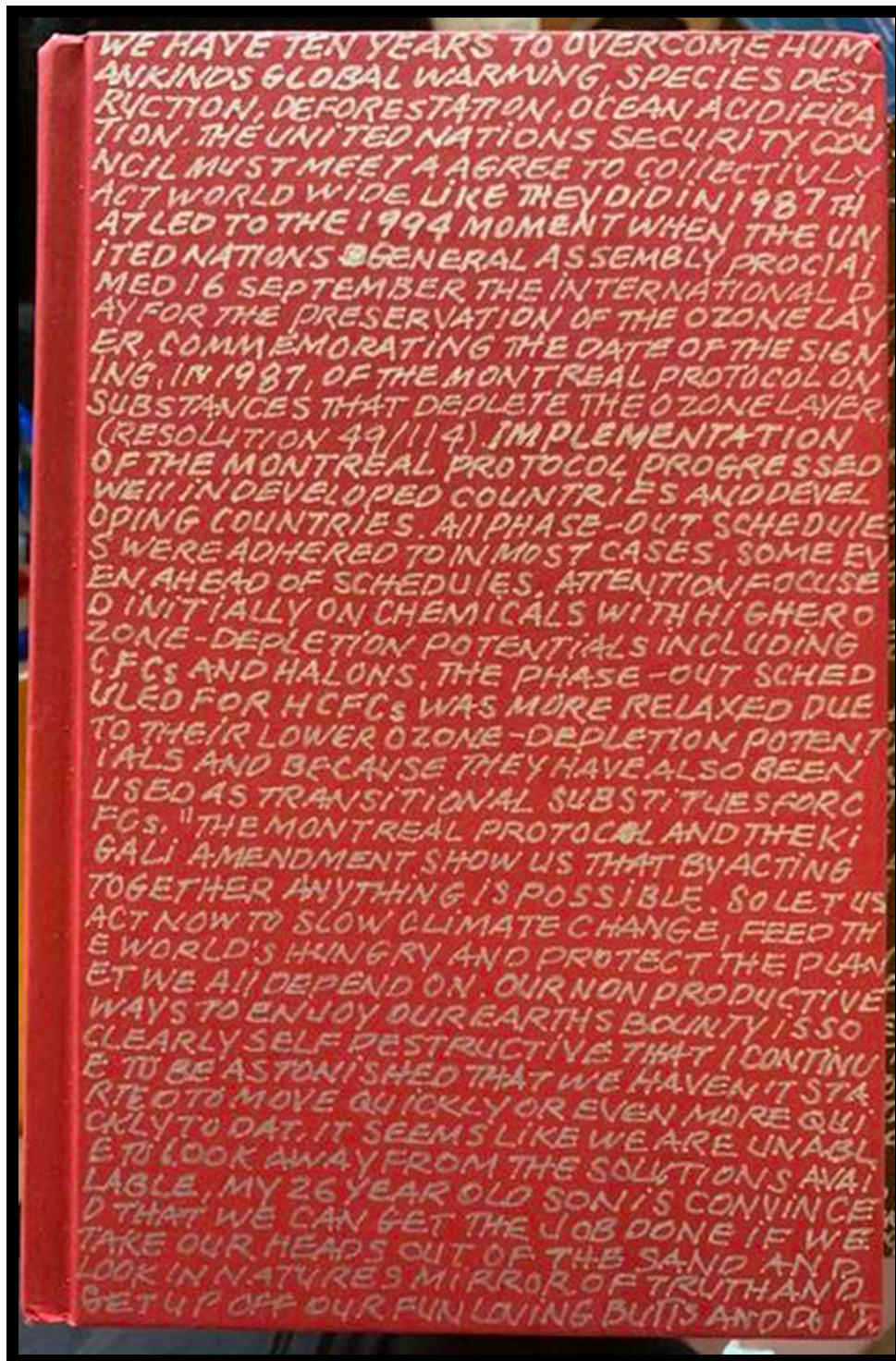
LUNCHEON ON THE GRASS



Legend: (1) Technics stereo audio component system; (2) Sony 36" TV rear projection video scope; (3) JVC stereo VCR; (4) 100 video movies; (5) 100 CD discs; (6) 2 weeks for 2 in the Caribbean First Class on Pan Am; (7) Ford Thunderbird Turbo Coupe; (8) Rosenthal decanter and wine glasses; (9) Brueton steel and glass coffee table; (10) Cobra cordless phone; (11) Cashmere collection from Pringle of Scotland; (12) Cardigan sweater; (13) Geoffrey Beene wardrobe; (14) designer jeans; (15) Henri Grethel shirt; (16) 2 carat sapphire ring; (17) Panasonic portable CD and headphones; (18) Antique lamp; (19) Season baseball tickets; (20) Bokhara Oriental rug.

Luncheon on the Grass (a spoof of mid-Eighties excess, drugs, and wealth; a handbill, 1987; in 2005 enlarged into a wall mural-sized display) Victor L. Thanangadan.

CHIT for CHAT



Book cover *Word Piece* (2022) Victor L. Thanangadan.

CHIT for CHAT

A green picnic table with a tarnished metal tag reading:

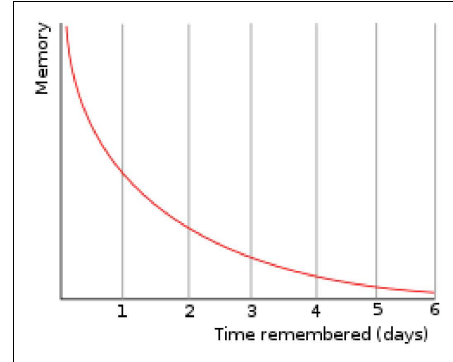
IN MEMORY OF JAMES JOYCE

On its attached benches, several feet from Las Compas Tacos, Chit and Chat sit in opposing positions. Empty paper plates and bowls with plastic cutlery between them. Mindless pleasures are on the agenda. A small white rearing buffalo figurine, presumably the “white knight” from an Indigenous chess set too hastily packed up dominates in the center of the table. Chit begins to mindlessly fiddle with it.

CHAT: I'm constantly forgetting. Tomorrow I won't recall having my choice of their Frito pie and this outstanding Orange Julius, inexplicitly labeled William of Orange.

CHIT: Frito pie was *my* plate, idiot! But it wasn't *free*. Your joyce was a green chile chicken enchila-*la*-lada, Livia, not red chile. You're green at getting red.

CHAT: Wrong, Wong. And you just had to have their tall mescal-spiked veggie smoothie: Anna Lynchya Pourable Quincunx. I think the *hombre* behind the counter gave you the requisite five shots plus one — if my memory serves me correctly, which it may not if Ebbinghaus's unforgettable Forgetting Curve is at all accurate.



The Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve.

CHIT: Predictable surprise, eh what? So you then you reallee [*hiccups*] think I'm toadally allaniuvia pulchrabelled?

CHAT: Appears to me you're alla tingaling pealabells right now, yes.

CHIT: [*Lisping.*] Peepingpartner, me gut doesh feel *more* than a bit allaluvial. I confess, let's shay — *clicky-clack* — I'm in the Drinking Car of My Train of Thought. Which makes me ponder “n pose this question: Was River Phoenix named after River Liffey?

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: HE said to Phoenix: “Be the river.” To Liffey: “Be the river.”

CHIT: Whose shed?

CHAT: The Big Director in the sky.

CHIT: So am I free to choose who I am or ain't ? To sow my oats.

CHAT: So you'll have to soil you pants first, Sartre.

CHIT: We'd better get our neurotypical butts home *pronto* via a *buen camino* if we're going to get home, *homes*. Stand up! Ready to jump?

CHAT: Let's see what happens if we *don't* hold hands . . .

CHIT: Okay. Think *buen camino* . . . and Cloudland Revisted!

EIGHT BALLS GO “BYE” AND THE CANNONBALLS FLY!



Exeunt. Our clownish interlocutors vanish, re-appearing in two disparate chrono-phenomenological grooves, i.e., separate time-space (textual) dimensions.

+++

CHIT for CHAT

A rehab center room where Chat had been after knee surgery. Chat's predictable surprise: her bed has been stripped, disinfected, remade. Nightstand dusted. TV on a movable stand cleaned. A Polar Active Ice 3.0 Therapy System water bladder knee wrap lies ready for use at the foot of the bed. A fresh plastic tray holding an empty water pitcher and an empty upside-down paper-wrapped plastic drinking cup has been placed on the nightstand next to Chat's Xerox of Raymond Federman's bizarre postmodern Lit Hack "The Line". The page is open to the line:

insist on
any
priority
of
standing
for what
would
be the
point of
declarin
g
oneself
ahead of
anyone
else that
would
certainly
be futile
yet some
people
kept
moving
up the
line
overtaki
ng
others
squeezin
g in
front of
them or
by-

CHAT: No! Oh ghost of Misery Past . . . why this?!
Damn! I should've held onto Chit's hand. **GET ME
OUTTA HERE NOW!**

A TV on which Zeroes attack the American dive bombers as they attempt to sink the Japanese carrier Akagi. Flaming planes shoot through the air. Japanese gunners guided by sword-pointing officers. A large overstuffed chair five feet from the TV. Empty gin bottles, a few empty beer bottles. Chit sits. Changes to channel seven to discover The Rose Bowl football game is on.



CHIT: [Soliloquizing.] Hot damn! My old living room! The mid-Seventies! Back when cursive writing and Latin (even some Greek) was still taught in schools. VHS tapes are still stacked in my bookcase. A bowl of mixed nuts. Fuck! Those were the days of drool pools in my lap. Slaver on my bearded chin. Booze, nuts, and grass have always been a source of art. Is the Lysol bottle still in the bathroom?

Oh those laps in the two-story apartment's inner court pool chasing the landlady's daughter, Esther Poole, who was a graceful swimmer and a pearl in the oyster. The apartment too near a street whose guardrail has had more than its share of caroming cars. A street whose sewer covers always floated up during heavy rains. Inciting haiku like:

*A tempest
A shy sun retreats
Outside large quarters float by*

Pool — a skill in two-dimensions — paired with three-dimensional shots with long-haired chums — each of their names seemed to be neo-logism — at The Oyster. Every night, a broken pool cue right on cue. [Makes a smashing gesture with his right arm.] A predictable surprise. Where I first met the father of our current Director. That was when to be in a group was to grow up. An "Active Shooter" referred to a boozier. Not like now.

What memories. But: **GET ME OUTTA
HERE NOW!**

ZOOM

EIGHT

BALLS

BOOM

GO

“BYE”

AND

BANG

THE

CANNON

BALLS

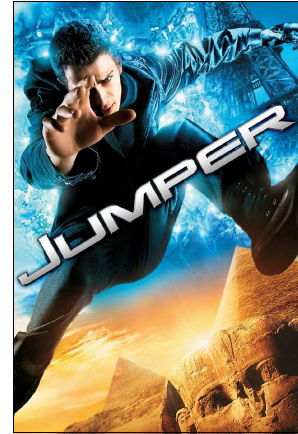
“BYE”

FLY!

CHIT for CHAT

Breakfast with Chit, Chat, the Director and Crew at La Fonda's La Plazuela restaurant. The gathering is to discuss the recent bizarre vanishings of our protagonists. Chit has ordered La Fonda Eggs Benedict, Chat their Huevos Rancheros.

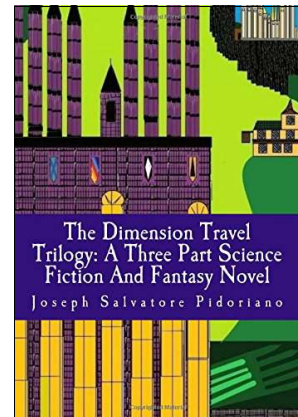
DIRECTOR: You two pulling a Harry Houdini thing on us? Your CV's didn't show any previous stage work with magicians or escape artists or any bit role in Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*, or in that D-travel thriller *Jumper*. So what gives?



CHIT: We's as freaked as youse is, boss. In fact we now are reading a sci-fi book on dimension travel to figure out . . .

CHAT: D-travel — not by proxie. Parallel universes, me thinks.

CHIT: Been happenin' ever since our scene at Meow Wolf. Immersive art. Maybe we got *too* immersed, if you catch my time-drift. A bit of the torn space-time continuum sticking to our shoes like toilet paper.



CHAT: Chit, you did have TP stuck to one shoe after you took your bathroom break, if my memory serves me correctly. Which it often doesn't.

DIRECTOR: Well, whatever the fuck it is, PLEASE keep this — all of you *[looking the whole crew in the face]* — under wraps. If *Games of Thrones* guy, George R. R. Martin, who bankrolled Meow Wolf, gets wind of this, he'll buy us out and take over production, pushing this D-travel fantasy thing so far we'll all vanish into some dark basement in HBO headquarters, if you catch my economic drift. I don't want *anyone* to go browsing his bookstore either, bookshelves have ears, just to be on the safe side.

ONE FOR ALL, ALL FOR ONE! *[Cheers of agreement from everyone.]*

+++

ACT TEN

CHIT for CHAT

Chit and Chat in Reboks and hoodies on which are printed: THE LONGEST WAY 'ROUND IS THE SHORTEST WAY HOME. Circling above, a dove delivers high coos. All at Aldea's Piñon Trail Head, whose gravel path winds among low hills. Traces of snow remain. Chat wields, as per the Director's wishes, a bamboo broom. To push aside delineated dark shapes (i.e., dogshit) on the trail? Or to simply to amuse the bored audience? Ratchet up "a hyperaware performance style" touted by the Playwright?

CHAT: *[Faking panic.]* Got me, too — tell Chit! *[Grabs his shoulders.]* Tell Henderson! Nursing home! Nursing home! All the brooms. Clean sweep. Only my broom left. Clean sweep. Clean sweep! Tell the messenger 'bout the list. I'm hungry. Then kill the messenger! You should *tanka* me for pointing out . . .

CHIT: *[Grabbing her by the shoulders, shakes her.]* For Chrissake, Chat! You're dialoguing with yourself, bouncing shit from *The List of Adrian Messenger* inside the walls of your skull.

CHAT: *[Looking around quickly.]* Aldea, all night Mary Ann! *[Her chattering teeth gleam like onyx.]*



CHIT: *[Giving her a very gentle slap on the cheek.]* Chat — *Achtung!* It's me, Chit. Come back to me. Too *mucho* CBD last night?

CHAT: *[Calming. Looks into Chit's eyes.]* Is it Taco Tuesday yet? I couldn't get tacos before we had to leave to come here.

CHIT: *[Relief in his voice.]* Ah! You're back among the digesting!

CHAT: *[Steady, focused.]* I was listening to Liszt last night. And my neighbor, Adrian, wanted *moi* to get some shit from Market Street grocery. I'm mixed up. Felt I was squatting in a dark shadow of a rotting log adrift on water for a sec. *Is it Taco Tuesday?*

CHIT: No man — or woman — is an island. Unless you mean people standing on traffic islands panhandling in Santa Fe.

CHAT: A food truck is *kind of* an island. So which will it be? The path of shadows or of sharply delineated dark shapes? Maybe it's both, hence the broom. Is it then to left behind

CHIT for CHAT

the petty pride of sparrows and dove right into what's left of the Heart of Being?

CHIT: Sparrows the sentiment! Nope, this path ain't forkin' to more fuckin' forking paths. Let's synchronize our watches. *[They set their Timex watches. He fears another D-jump.]*

CHAT: As pals, we don't want to get separated again, do we? Lost somewhere apart in intertextual space.

CHIT: With no permeable membrane between. Please, no more shocks.

CHAT: No more isolated orbits that might lead to obits.

CHIT: I just want to be Roman Ingarden, smellin' flowers, polishing those mirrored spherical gazing balls distorting the surrounding world in a delightful way.

CHAT: I symPATHize. Otherwise we risk becoming *glaring anachronisms*.

CHIT: Odd you should say that.

CHAT: Odd *you* should mention odd.

CHIT: Ever tell you of my first Off Broadway role? The stage-lights were too glaring.

CHAT: No.

CHIT: I was a "borrowed character", snatched from a local playhouse group production by a shady Hungarian director known as "The Great Khan" who'd been an assistant to Samuel L. Golden Rule once. He told me: "Kid, the space of a fictional world is a construct. Fuck, the whole damn world is, too, where no truth is a truth for everyone."

I was cast as a minor character in a new play inspired by Rushdie's *Midnight Children*, listed in the playbill simply as "The Glaring Anachronism". Got the part 'cause I was born on August 15, 1947, when Britain said bye-bye to India and 'cause I did the gig for pennies. Speaking of Hungary, even though I'm filled from our lunch, I always envied that Hollywood film special effects guy from Hungary, George Pal, 'cause he was never separated from his Pal. As a kid, I always



George Pal holding a little pal.

CHIT for CHAT

had that macho cereal dubbed “the Breakfast of Champions” in my gut before I saw a Pal film — like *When Worlds Collide*. And now we have PayPal. Figure that.

CHAT: I’m trying but my calculator *ist Kaput*. Poor Pal was most likely separated from his *real* Hungarian name like so many talented Eastern Europeans were. Not funny. Unless we are lucky enough that these imagined paths all eventually lead to *une maison de rendez-vous* like a bubbly funhouse hot bath named “The Roost” where at swim are two birds (i.e., girls), snacks of flan are offered, and music by Undress Segovia is piped in, or to an authentic sweat lodge run by Navajo know-it-alls. Besides, some wit with beady eyes said a good book may have three openings.

CHIT: Sounds like pure mumbo-jumbo to me, but I do have a feeling we’d do better on this journey if we had left our custom-made Chop Ts’ui Pens at home and from here on hopscotch rather than walk. That way we can avoid the law of the excluded middle.

CHAT: Is that were one’s belly fat isn’t figured into the calculation of one’s weight?

CHIT: Not funny. Well, maybe it is.

CHAT: With the extra weight, my knee replacement couldn’t stand the stress.

CHIT: [*Holds his right index finger up high.*] Hey, ya notice the fuckin’ wind isn’t blowing for a change.

CHAT: Strange ’cause we’re in “the zone” where the wind is most frequent, one’s stance most unstable.

CHIT: Are our watches still synchronized?

CHAT: [*They compare time pieces.*] Affirmative, Commander Corey.

CHIT: Can’t be too careful. Strange beams of light have been seen around here at night.

CHAT: I think you are thinking of the Marfa Lights in Texas, pardner.

CHIT: *Careful thinking will command respect.* That’s what my last Chinese fortune cookie advised on the Lunar New Year.

CHAT: The world is in part indeterminate. Those fortune cookies help, I get it.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Say *[pointing]*, an envelope is hanging precariously out of your coat pocket.

CHAT: Yikes! Thanks. It's a letter from Victor Thananagdan. *[Hands it to him.]* Here. *[Chit opens and unfolds the letter and reads.]*

Chat,

How are you and Chit? I got your sweet note.

Your idea to use *chit / chat* as designating *dot / dash* in Morse Code sounds interesting. Thus, S.O.S. would change from Morse Code's ... / - - - / ... to being written as: CHIT CHIT CHIT / CHAT CHAT CHAT / CHIT CHIT CHIT / and renamed Chatter. Cool. ERGO: CHIT CHAT / CHIT CHIT CHIT / CHIT CHIT CHIT // CHIT CHIT CHIT CHIT / CHAT CHAT CHAT / CHIT CHAT CHIT CHIT / CHIT = ASS HOLE. I might print that out and mail it to my old departmental chairman. What fun!

Say, a code expert might translate your dialogues with Chit wholly into Chatter Code. Shattering idea! Chit might go for that.

As for me, I'm shutting everything out. Our government is monstrous, the president is deranged, and the country is on the cusp of yet another war resulting from the fact that the president just can't keep his mouth shut. And his multitude of minions has taken his behavior to be permission to act as he does, so everywhere one sees women and minorities sexually assaulted and brutalized in a twisted game of follow the leader. The three mass shootings in three days here in California have wrecked its toll on me as well.

So I am going to stay home, order whatever supplies I need from retail drones, and otherwise live as an isolate. The present is intolerable, but I have built up a large enough storehouse of memories over my sixty years that I can live off of them. I have also accumulated vast libraries of books and music over the years, and they will keep my mind active. I certainly want to go nowhere near the open internet anymore because that is just a minion-infested cesspool. The retail apps on my phone will suffice for me to keep up a certain level of creature comfort, and the royalties I receive from my writing and artwork will be enough for me to finance those minimal needs I have. When I bolt my door today, it is locked for good, literally. I chose the location carefully and have been planning to close myself off for a while. I'll be the poster boy for *sabi*.

Victor L. T.

CHIT: Exhilarating and depressing in equal measure. I like the Morse Code-to-Chatter concept a lot. His cocooning while awaiting the Big Cataclysm is understandable, but sad. What a time we live in Chat. *[Right arm and fist raised, yells.]*

Viva The Isolate!

International Morse Code

1. The length of a dot is one unit.
2. A dash is three units.
3. The space between parts of the same letter is one unit.
4. The space between letters is three units.
5. The space between words is seven units.

A ● —
 B — ● ● ●
 C — ● — ●
 D — ● ●
 E ●
 F ● ● — ●
 G — — ●
 H ● ● ● ●
 I ● ●
 J ● — — —
 K — ● —
 L ● — ● ●
 M — —
 N — ●
 O — — —
 P ● — — ●
 Q — — ● —
 R ● — ●
 S ● ● ●
 T —

U ● ● —
 V ● ● ● —
 W ● — —
 X — ● ● —
 Y — ● — —
 Z — — ● ●

1 ● — — — —
 2 ● ● — — —
 3 ● ● ● — —
 4 ● ● ● ● —
 5 ● ● ● ● ●
 6 — ● ● ● ●
 7 — — ● ● ●
 8 — — — ● ●
 9 — — — — ●
 0 — — — — —

CHIT for CHAT

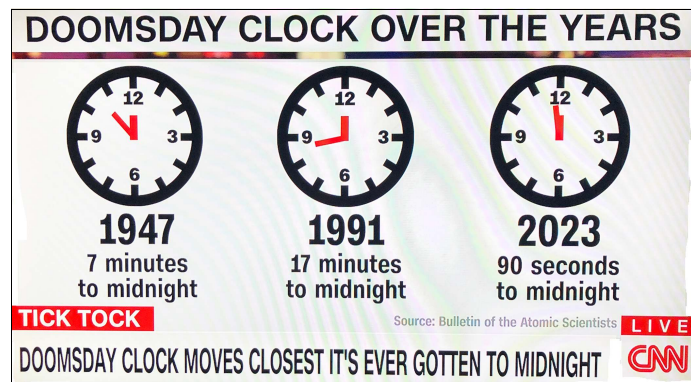
CHAT: Repeatedly, quite vicious storms ravage this Country. The atomic Doom's Day Clock is close to midnight. Top F.B.I. agent betrays his Country to the Russians. The sound and the fury of three armed active-duty Marines ranting "Boogaloo" 'n rushin' the Capitol on Jan. Sixth. Sure Vic would like to Basho in their confused heads! Really, what's next? Well, several mass shootings in California. Over forty such deadly shootings in the U.S. this January alone.

CHIT: Yeah. Fuckin' internal rot eating away at our nation's psyche. Greed, corruption, psychosis, hate crimes, police killings. You name it. Ol' Vic has probably pulled out a well-thumbed copy of sociologists Taylor and Cohen's 1976 classic *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life*. Everybody was reading it back when.

CHAT: And, knowing Vic, re-reading it in an overstuffed chair while nipping voraciously on Golden Moon brand Kümmel, a wedge of West Yorkshire Devils Rock Blue Cheese within arms' reach.

CHIT: Ah! Kümmel. It was Henry Miller's favorite sipping liqueur. Remind me to buy some if we ever get off this narrow gravel road to the deep north and the high castle. *[Again, sound of dove-high coos above.]*

CHAT: *[The cell of an idea begins to vibrate in Chat's mind, it divides and grows.]* Hey, Botkin, is this *paramount* reality? Or Paramount's reality. Or a sub-universe, a sort of large snow-globe, that we are slogging through right now? Are we just following someone's recipe?



CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Christ! It might be Charlie Trotter's *[pointing]*. See the animal paw prints in the snow there, Betty Crocker? Ah! I *can* hear under the first snow, hear yellow leaves surrendering with faint dry whispers, despite that half-empty gin bottle carelessly tossed there. Hyperacusis.

CHAT: But I'm *not* accusing you of anything! And you haven't been on Media pontificating about something ridiculous like half the world has.

CHIT: Like that half-wit, full-of-beans announcer on the Subaru of Santa Fe car ad who claims their new Outback model has more legume than any other car up its ass on I-25.

Beans!

CHAT: Or like the celebrity-endorsed — "Bifidus Regularis" enriched Dannon yogurt ads.

CHIT: Which also enriched those celebrities. Oops! *[He nearly trips on a rock.]*

CHAT: But the twenty-one million dollar fine the government levied against Dannon didn't phase the people who still continued to buy the shit 'cause they felt the product *ought* to work as advertised.

CHIT: Bet they justified such by thinking: SHIT IN, SHIT OUT. *[Blows his nose.]*

CHAT: Once saw a lanky computer geek, his MAC Power Book in hand, clad in a white T-shirt that read:

YOUR CODE:
OOP OR POO?

In Morse Code that'd be:

— . — — — . . — . — / — . — . — — — . . — — — /
— — — — . — . / — — . — . / . — . — — — — . . — . .

CHIT: No way am I gonna translate all that into Chatter Code. But my cuz's into that programmer esoterica. She says: **A little OOP goes a very long way.** That is, adding objects to one's code is like adding salt to a dish, so be careful not to overdo.

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: *[Showing signs of fatigue. Signals S-O-S.]* I'm beginning to feel overdone. CHIT CHIT CHIT / CHAT CHAT CHAT / CHIT CHIT CHIT! How much farther do we have to trod this penitential path? After all, we ain't no Crusty Ranchers, nor pilgrims on the way to Santuario de Chimayo, heh? Just recent weak-kneed immigrants to Nuevo Mexico. We've made no vows to . . .

CHIT: *[They both halt to rest. Chit's toe kicking small stones.]* But aren't we Realists in search of a feeling? Placing our faith in diluted commonsense? Sharing with the Squares a devotion to adulthood and the virtues American society has attached to life as an adult. . . . Well, okay, maybe not.

CHAT: *Not, for sure, dude! We are Enthusiasts for life beyond adulthood. Skill and sagacity are, respectively, our middle names, right? Aren't we Chit? Why we are incapable, when together, of becoming like The Isolate. [They start walking again, but more slowly.]* Not that I don't love Victor L., mind you.

CHIT: Of course. I get it. When we are together, we aren't alone. It's that simple.

CHAT: But, but, but not so enthusiastic — as was the Tunisian fellow who started the Arab Spring with a lit match — as to setting ourselves on fire on the Capitol Steps along with the much chastised Capitol Steps.

CHIT: Oh, that musical comedy group? Almost forgot about them. Didn't they crash 'n burn 'cause political reality became more absurd than their comedic routine could ever be? Their act was literally Trumped!

CHAT: And, after January Sixth, The Capitol Steps's name would most likely evoke the horrifying scenes of thugs storming the Capitol. Not good.

CHIT: Right on. I've heard the group's members are studying to be bilingual environmentalists so they can more easily converse with Greta Thunberg.



CHAT: And I heard ~~Trump~~ *[slices throat with right index finger]* and his lawyers are taking online classes in "Exoneration Studies" offered by SNHU. His re-entry into Facebook is one result. More to come. Stand by.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Right. The enhancement of “Watchability”. By the way, one of SNHU’s seminars in this area of studies was focused on the theme: *Tell as much truth as you can, while still making money.*

CHAT: You could tell from the Congressional hearings on the Taylor Swift Ticketmaster scandal that the corporate goons had been well-tutored in that “truth”, had had time for it to gestate fully into faux-Informational clothing with all the right buttons to push and verbal zippers to play with.

CHIT: *[Changing the subject.]* Good sunbeams today.

CHAT: Vonnegut would agree. Despite having witnessed A Great Terrible Event.

CHIT: Worst event I witnessed was as a kid when our inflatable Christmas Crib scene was blown off our roof by bad seasonal winds. The Baby Jesus ended up in the street where cars had to dodge it; Joseph and Mary got stuck in the rose bushes, punctured and deflated. But how can you trust Vonnegut? He once described the carp in the Hudson River as “big as atomic submarines,” so, imitating him, we’d have to describe this hike of ours as the Baton Rouge Death March.

CHAT: Bataan, B-a-t-a-a-n, idiot. In Morse: **— — — — — . — — . — — .**

CHIT: Jeeze, didn’t you get it that we each are supposed to carry a small red baton on this misadventure? *[He pulls his out his from his coat pocket.]* It’s in the script! Maybe you lost yours? Or forgot it? The damn Director will be . . .

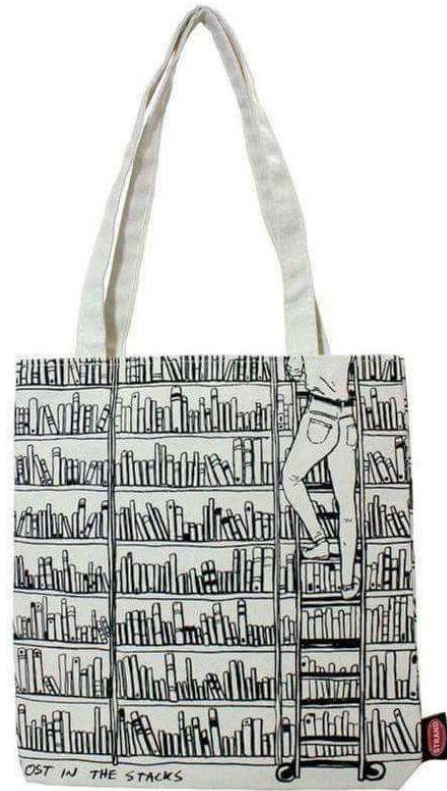


CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Yes, pissed. And I took a fuckin' bamboo broom instead thinking it resonated well with the Basho / haiku theme we were to develop during our hike. . . . Okay. I remember now. He (hope I'm using the right pronoun) said the baton was a *symbol*, but of just what he was totally mute. But maybe it was to indicate the bullshit within ourselves, the Red of hatred or Read like in having read a book, and refer to why we are on this fuckin' pilgrimage to nowhere. *[Stumbles over a canvas book bag, falling to her knees.] Fuck! Oi! I must look like a Catholic at Mass or an old worn out prostitute giving her services, or a weird character in a much too personal Charles Bukowski poem.*

CHIT: You look like painter Alice Neel's late self-portrait minus all the fun. How revealing! How honest! How beau . . .

CHAT: Add the pun, but subtract the beautiful *[slowly standing up with Chit's help, holding a full canvas bag]*. Look what's in here *[opening the bag]: The Sorrows of Young Werther, Plutarch's Lives, and Paradise Lost !*



Canvas book bag Chat trips over.

CHIT: The very volumes Frankenstein's Monster discovers in a leather suitcase while foraging for food in the woods. Are we supposed to be like . . .

CHAT: The monster? Reading Milton, he identifies with Satan as a fit emblem of his own condition, that of bitter envy.

CHIT: Ah, he was sold a story, as the saying goes. But he also finds pages from his creator's journal — right? — revealing his accursed origin. Nothing in this bag like that. We could've made use of that information. Gotten one up on the Director.

CHAT: Funny, what if the monster had found in the cottage he'd holed up in with the two kids some deviled eggs for lunch, well . . .

Garbage truck groaning. Cans bang. Noisy birds. A car alarm going off.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Civilization's arrived in a truck *sans* concepts such as: "flatten the curve," "social distancing," "self-isolation," "bubble," and "herd immunity." *[Sniffing.]* Hmm, YES! And, since the wind direction changed, I smell hot rolls — the food item, not the auto. We must be nearin' the H.O.A. facility where there's an Appreciation Lunch celebrating the ethnic diversity of their employees. The guy who runs the Breaking Bad Museum in Albuquerque's Old Town is supposed to be the emcee. All sorts of accents will be in attendance. One distinctive voice will be a former Navajo silversmith — I met him once selling his wares in Santa Fe Plaza — had his right thumb melded to the palm of his hand by molten silver. Very strande shaking hands with him.

CHAT: Can he still handle hod rolz.

CHIT: Hat rahls.

Chat: Hoot rowls. In Morse Code, hot rolls becomes:

..... --- - / .- .- - .-

In Chatter: **CHIT CHIT CHIT CHIT CHAT CHAT CHAT CHAT / CHIT CHAT CHIT CHAT CHAT CHAT CHIT CHAT CHIT CHIT CHIT CHIT CHIT CHIT CHIT.** Which is precisely what the attendees will be doing amongst themselves.

CHIT: Sheer monkey-mind! I think you're on the Spectrum, kiddo.

CHAT: *[Suddenly very hungry. Raises her right arm.]* Fuck! I think I smell deviled eggs. Forsooth! Get me hither, before I wither, to the H.O.A. luncheon and don't smack us into the noisy huge black crow — or is it a raven? — diving menacingly about us. *[Chit very gently assists her as she limps forward, using her broomstick as a cane.]*

CHIT: Do we go the Phonological Route or the Lexical Route? *[Feigning a sexy swagger.]*

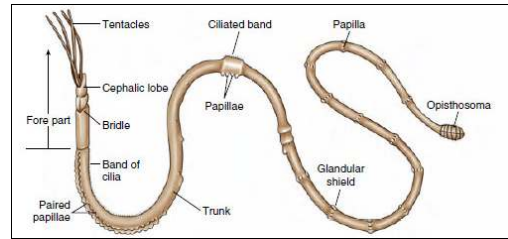


A quincunx of deviled eggs.

CHIT for CHAT

Chat: OW! That fuckin' Piñon root [stumbling on an exposed tree root.]

CHIT: But whose opinion? Some already exposed radical's? If you'd been more woke, you would've seen that root.



A Pogonophore beard worm.

Chat: NOW THAT'S A POGONOPHORE CONCLUSION, you worm! [rubbing her abused toes, thinking about that abusive fraud Sans Toes.] I need to wrap my . . .

DIRECTOR: **THAT'S A WRAP!**

Sparkling. Dazzling. Majestic. Hubba-hubba, up, uppity up, we're off to the next scene at the H.O.A. luncheon.

CREW MEMBER A: [To another crew member as she puts on blue lipstick.] As I was saying before, downy down, down, I wormed my way out of Cleveland, ALIVE.



H.O.A. Building, Aldea Community.

CREW MEMBER B: [Adjusting his red bandana on his head.] Obviously you did. Your freckles even made it out unscathed. But it must've been traumatic though, as you always kiss your fingers before eating and use way too many words like "ripping," "splitting," and "breaking". I mean way more than anyone I ever knew in this life and all my past lives. I swear! Been binge-watching too many episodes of *Breaking Bad*? I think there were sixty.

It's all laughs and smiles — as seen in Franz Hals's famous oil painting Merry Makers at Shrovetide. Someone yells, "Ransack the kitchen!" As actors and crew hooves 'n tail it up the path to the H.O.A. luncheon, the wind catching the hems of their shirts, they notice a swarm of thrill seekers watching. No, not thrill seekers, just Aldeans waiting to walk their dogs down the path so the restless canines can do their "business" undisturbed. H.O.A. stats say about five percent of dog leavings in Aldea will not be picked up by their owners. Chit puts his sucking stone back in his mouth.

+++

ACT ELEVEN

CHIT for CHAT

H.O.A. luncheon. Folding tables and chairs strewn about in their recreation hall. Few guests have arrived yet. Our interlocutors easily find an unoccupied table and make themselves comfortable. The view, for the moment, resembles a scene Edward Hopper might paint. A motionless female figure sits on a folding chair. She stares at a man sitting with his back to a window who is reading what may be a menu. Chat props her bamboo cane against their table. Her head turns back and forth between the seated woman and the reading man. She feels as if she watching a film screen. The main food table is still being set with new dishes to savor. A crew member has snuck in and covered the usual BILLIARDS AT HALF-PAST NINE sign at the far end of the room with one that reads:

**WARNING! SURROUNDINGS MAY BE UNSAFE
FOR CITIZENS WITH A LOOSE HIJAB.**

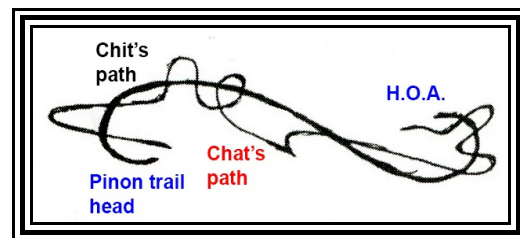
— Ilhan Omar

CHIT: *[Eyeing the small crowd.]* If these people were books, this place would look like a bookstore that just had an eighty percent off all books sale.

CHAT: People are usually either too early or too late for events here. Today we're the ones too early. *[Changing the subject.]* So you really think that large black bird diving about us on our trek here was a disguised drone? Aren't you over-thinking again?

CHIT: *[Looks directly into Chat's eyes.]* I'm not Arendt! You know the Director. And those Hollywood types love to apply new technology. And if it fucks with their actors, so much the better. *[His iPhone beeps.]* Speaking of the devil . . . it's a message from God:

DIRECTOR: This drone analysis of your respective paths while hiking reveals bitchin' digitata, dude! Always opt for illustration over Thingness. Look at this *[image sent to Chit's phone.]* I've decided to title this metric tracing of two paths of life: *Running Toward Abundance As If Your Lives depended upon it.* "Pretty cool, huh? Don't you just love DATA, dude?"



Analysis of drone coverage of Chit and Chat's walk.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Ya, it's what's for dinner, as you've told us before. But you touch the eye of God, you pay the price. Here, Chat, look! *[Hands her his iPhone.]* You won't believe this, shit!

CHAT: Amazing! The drone mapped our separate, yet intertwined paths. Whoa! Mine looks like I was drunk! *[Onscreen is a diagram sketching the irregular route she traced compared to Chit's more elegant "curve of beauty" path on their way to the H.O.A. lunch.]* You aren't gay are you? That path of yours looks like it was choreographed by Nijinsky.

More people are flocking into the event room. The Edward Hopperesque qualities of the scene transit into something more akin to artist Alex Katz's charming, super cool tableau. The line at the food table is getting longer. Quite noisy, too. Visible signs that Chit's hyperacusis is bothering him.

You can tell the emcee by the large bolo tie he wears with his colorful Western shirt and tight jeans. He's Dominant since no one is complaining about his second-hand smoke as he chomps on a cigar. Chit and Chat's eyes are like reflected beams. On a wall is a large LCD screen on which a slide appears promoting a YES vote at the Santa Fe Round House legislative session deciding whether the Smell of Roasting Green Chile will be declared New Mexico's State's Official Aroma.

CHIT: *[Pointing to the screen.]* Shit, I always thought our poor State's Official Aroma was sunbaked cow pies?

CHAT: One has to keep up with the times, my friend. Millions of bucks are at stake, buddy. Besides, Florida and Texas are known by the smell of corruption and racism, so our Blue State needs to celebrate a more intense Woke olfactory position.



CHIT: *[Increasing auditory commotion.]* Chit! So annoying. Those boom-box voices. *[Directing a comment toward the group.]* **I ALREADY GOT YOUR E-MAIL!**

CHAT: Confucius say: *As long as people continue to wear ears, there won't be much peace and quiet. Where is your ear goop anyway? Forget to bring it? [More bodies arrive, conversations are starting, some guests are milling close enough to be overheard by our duo sitting low enough that they aren't easily visible in the crowd.]*

CHIT for CHAT

Come, my lambkin, join in the gambols. Sample some of the conversational clumps bombarding Chit's ears as he sits along Chat at their table and people crowd around them, bodies flattening out as they do so. The effect is akin to seeing a Cubist frieze very close up. Camera rolls.

GUEST A (male): But I know now that “Canada Mouth”, as Esteban calls him, is really Hispanic, born in Truth or Consequences. The problem is he has no discernable Hispanic accent, even when speaking that bad French of his.



GUEST B (female): *[Running her fingers through her tortellini-ish blond curls.]* Esteban, that fuckin’ Opinion King, is throwing you a curve ball. He wants you to believe the guy’s French Canadian, but that’s *not* the truth and that has its consequences.

GUEST A: Whatever that is; whatever those are.

GUEST B: Hey, anyone who stresses the importance to his staff in sharing the facility’s hot tub because, as Esteban puts it, “the hot water builds rapport through mutual disclosure” is weird. He once tried to get me into it . . .

GUEST C (male): Hell, back then poetry meant being a sissy — and I don’t mean the place where St. Francis was from — or worse.

GUEST D (male): Yah, Esteban there *[jabs his right thumb toward the Big Wig near the food table with the big cigar]* once asked me why all poets were fairies. I replied: “That’s because they can fly, Esteban!”

KITCHEN STAFF A (female): Hey, who burned this last batch of hod rolz!

KITCHEN STAFF B (male): Sorry. People are coming that, like, did not R.S.V.P. So I’m like totally buggin’! Then Esteban yelled for to get something from his office, “Pronto tonto”.

GUEST E (male): Shit, I’m no Martian! Just because I was born in Roswell in 1947 and always have somewhere else I have to be, people think . . .

GUEST F (female): Well, we must dream and enact other ways of being and ultimately new worlds. It’s our only way out this shit-storm.

GUEST E: There’s always *somewhere* I have to be, excuse me.

CHIT for CHAT

GUEST G (female): Our company is getting special computer screens that gently tan your face as you work the keyboard. Cool, huh?

GUEST H (female): In front of screens my eyes turn dusty.

GUEST I (male): *[Walking past, making wry comment.]* Ask the machine. And it will answer.

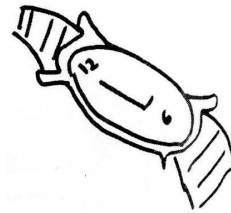
GUEST J (young female): *[Telegraphing bedroom eyes to a cute young guy.]* What happens in Calexico, stays in Calexico.

GUEST K (young male): *[Staring back.]* Where the fuck is that?

GUEST L (female): *[Passing in the opposite direction, bumping into guest K, continuing a conversation on her iPhone.]* And that failed to kill him at first, then . . .

GUEST M (female): Nature calls; meanwhile, why don't you two get to know each other better? *[Dull blinks from her male and female companions.]*

GUEST N (male): Some weirdo over there *[points toward the entryway]* is asking people if he can sketch their watches! Claims Tatum O'Neal let him do hers. Whatthefuck!



GUEST O (female): I'd watch out for him!

GUEST N: Painting's lost its artisanal quality these days. Down the sink. Worse than pink. It's all Woke. In art, I fish for Porpoiseful Porpoiselessness.

GUEST O: You can't be serious? Or maybe you *are* from Sirius, huh? I do know that the art world is synonymous with the art market. Since the post World War Two culture industry converted all citizens into replaceable capital and fungible consumers, chasing all traces of private experience into mass-produced entertainment and commodities.

GUEST N: Something we can't comprehend nor escape. Excuse me, nature calls.

GUEST O: Ahhhhh! I get it. You're a trust fund baby. Trust fund baby! Trust fund baby! Trust fund baby! Trust fund baby! *[The man runs away.]*

GUEST P (female): My cousin, Perse Butler, just won the Sigh Young Award for her new Harlequin Romance set in Dubai titled *My Arrival in Heaven*. *[Puts her hand over her heart.]*

CHIT for CHAT

GUEST Q (female): Let me guess the opening line: *I suddenly had the Burj to . . .* I did read her first novel, *Ma Petite Pathetic Rebellion*. It was a real page turner, I kept turning away from the page to watch *The Real Housewives of Dubai*.

GUEST R (male): I love the new action video game I just bought — lots of scrappy southern Yanks in tanks — but what the hell is Jed Clampett doing in GITMO?

GUEST S (male): Somethin' 'bout Gettin' Mo' Fun?

GUEST T (female): My cousin recently opened a tailor shop, called it Hemming Way, but got sued by the Hemingway Estate in Oak Park; she dodged the legal bullet as her attorney pointed out the business name has two m's not one as in the famous author's.

GUEST U (young male): Hemmmmmmm! *[Clearing his throat.]* And now we are about to have our Moveable Feast.

GUEST T : I heard Florida's friggin' governor DeSantis has mandated that all books with sentences similar to *On rocky islands gulls woke* or *In bed the girl woke*, and so forth, are to be banned from grade schools.

GUEST U: Yeah, he did say "Florida is where woke goes to die."

GUEST T: Had he any wit, he'd of said "sleep" not "die."

GUEST U: Think of how many people *are* asleep in that state these days.

GUEST T: Aggression is a lesion that's legion, affecting our whole planet.

GUEST U: Are you going to the underground meeting tonight?

GUEST T: If I can shake *that* plainclothesman. *[Jabs thumb toward a man in the background.]*

GUEST V (female): Missed you last night at The NewComers gathering. Something come up? Or did you fear another round with that guy who was spouting "You Are What You Do" philosophy?

GUEST W (male): Grapes of wrath from Market Street. Should've bought 'em at Kaune's. I tend to attract food poisoning like a magnet. Took hours before my gut could declare dessert victory.

GUEST V: *[Laughing.]* You can't keel de speerit off a free pipples. Got that from some anti-Nazi war movie, yet it applies to the creative cause of artists and writers.

CHIT for CHAT

GUEST W: *[Eyes rolling.]* Uh, huh? Oh, I get it. I knew a guy in college who founded and edited a provocative Los Angeles art journal called *The Slaughtered Ox* because he said most critics in New York only praised L.A. art for its *lack* of innovation. Of the New York art scene he told me: “All they do is visit each others studios and talk a lot of baloney about art.”

GUEST V: *[Laughing.]* Wow! Speaking of creativity. You know, in my fantasy, Sylvia Plath holds out for several months, avoiding her D-Day, saved from suicide by second-wave feminism. Instead of her head, an Easter ham, goes into the oven.

GUEST W: *[Eyes glowing with mischief.]* Ouistreham?

GUEST V: *[Laughing.]* Yes, I Caen, Caen.

GUEST W: France? Where they invented the Can-Can. But the Brits were first to use tin cans.

GUEST X (older female): *[Large black glasses magnify her blinking eyes.]* God — without a shadow of a doubt — I heard *he* has gone into hiding, off the grid, but would reappear in six years.

CHAT: *[Confused whispering in Chit's ear.]* God? Or just god? Godzilla?

CHIT: *[Whispering to Chat.]* Tol'able David, maybe? Some herd animal escaping the herd? An Eastern mystic like Sathya Sai Baba?

GUEST Y (older female): *[Rum and red-faced, using a walker, replying to Guest X.]* Huh? Reappear within the heard in six ears only? . . . Say, can you please tell me what happened to my Socks, one of eleven?

GUEST X: *[Looks down at the older woman's feet.]* They're on your feet, my dear. The others must be in your dresser.

GUEST Y: No. I'm Förfor, the Cat Lady, like in the famous Plath poem. *[Uncovers her walker's basket revealing a dead black cat with white “socks” on its paws.]* We Sami's are sturdy folk, but this . . . *[starts to weep].*

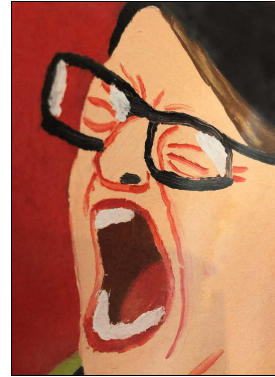
GUEST X: *[A stillness at the threshold of movement, and then]* **AAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHH!** *[Terrified, she runs away; clumps of very startled guests turning around anxious to see source of the commotion]:*



“Socks” the dead cat.

whazzzzup?

CHAT: *[Quickly curling into a ball on her seat, losing her even keel.] Yikes! Another for the Yike File. [Wishing to flee, she yells.]*



**EIGHT BALLS
GO “BYE” AND THE
CANNON BALLS FLY!**

CHIT: *[Hands over ears.]* May she be safely plucked from the wreckage of disregard and misunderstanding.

CHAT: *[Turns quickly toward Chit.]* Hey, that’s a great Geriatrics Blessing for a priest or rabbi to utter over a suffering elder home resident. By the way, notice we are still **HERE.**
The fuckin’ incantation didn’t work!

CHIT: Might be dead batteries. Maybe budget cuts?

Loud, loose, violently masculine, Director extends his arm with a whirl, sending silent hand-signals to his minions to “Get that old crone out of here.” In his motions, he looks something like The Sorcerer’s Apprentice. Two servers cut through the party-goers and hustle her and her dead cat out the back door. A wall of noise surrounds Chit and Chat.

CHIT: *[Fingers in ears. Look on his face like he’d tasted a spoiled pickle.]* What! No titter, bellylaugh, or boffo? Just a bad imitation of a yowl? *Pullleeeese!* Limited thinking on the playwright’s part here. Could’ve been a scene like out of a silent-era film comedy, but with sound. Sorry Mr. Playwright, no cigar.

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: That tragi-comic figure sporting a witch's wart is Förfor, but the locals here have dubbed her "Piñon Tree Mary" since she's been forbidden to use the H.O.A. restrooms do to her gastric issues and has been seen defecating under the trees around here. She has a small condo here, but refuses to sleep in it, thinking radon gas permeates it. In her youth, as a critic, she used to write for the Lit mag *The North Atlantic Harpooner*.

CHIT: Oh yeah! This small community's only homeless home person! Love her name.

CHAT: On the positive side, she's been known to perform "Croning" ceremonies for remarkable women over sixty-five during the summer under those very piñons. Eight elderly women gather; Förfor asks: "Who among us is ready to become a crone? A new woman member answers, "I am!" Förfor replies, "Come forward. . . . Crone energy is an essential energy! The other women recite: "Women weep. Men take." They crown her.



A Croning Crowning Ceremony.

CHIT: From what I've heard, the Croning ceremony aims to celebrate the adult moving into the status of an Elder. What our society, even the art world, denigrates.

CHAT: Some key aspects celebrated by this ritual as put forward by Croners are: (One) relying on intuition and self-knowledge over outside validation; (Two) being able to hold the paradoxes of the world like birth and death, light and dark, and knowing all are needed; (Three) seeing what is sacred and worth acting upon versus what is less important and accepted; (Four) a connection to ancient and inner wisdom; and (Five) trusting themselves and their place in this world.

CHIT: I've heard through the grape vine of wrath that she has an odd blend of dementia, Crohn's disease, and Wokeness.

CHAT: But that makes her a dreamer and a mystic who creates her own reality. Moreover, she claims Scandinavian descent. Always complaining that there are no Swedish restaurants in New Mexico where she says she'd certainly be welcome for a free lunch given her Nordic creds as a Sami descendent. I certainly miss the great Swedish restaurants in the Chicago area, like Ann Sather.

CHIT: *[Eyebrows go up. Fingers go down.]* I miss good German cuisine here. I totally miss having Schnitzel à la Holstein. Guess the closest you'd get here in the Southwest is some

CHIT for CHAT

kind of weirdo fusion of Swedish and Latino cooking. A clash of opposites. Yerba maté mixed with juice of lingonberries. The most Woke cuisine one could imagine.

CHAT: Imagine a restaurant named Casa Odin, where the usual Taco filling is mixed with meatballs and put into a traditional Swedish layered sandwich cake called *smörgåstårta*.



Smörgåstårta with side dish.

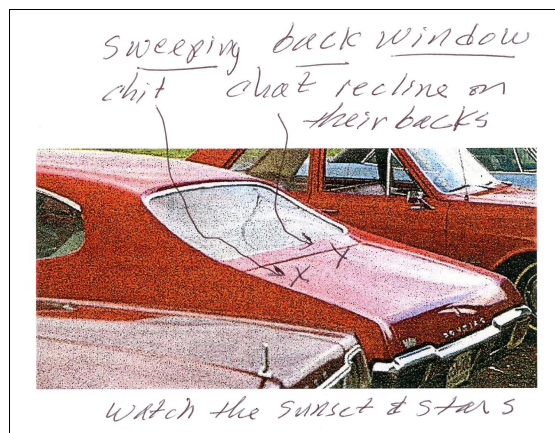
CHIT: Oh yeah. But ya gotta add a splendid side of herring ceviche, all washed down with a large glass of “By Odin” schnapps margarita. Oh yeah!

CHAT: Add *queso* on Ry Krisp prior to the main dish and away we go!

CHIT: *[Tapping his belly.]* You’ve got my mouth watering. Fuck it, let’s eat! *[Marching forward to the food table with their paper plates.]*

While our yakking interlocutors stop to munch on chiles rellenos and Modela Mexican beer, the Director’s assistant strides in and casts his long shadow over the pair.

DIRECTOR’S ASSISTANT: *[Hands Chit a paper.]* Uh, here’s a sketch of the next scene, “Drunk on the Trunk”, where you both recline on your backs on top of a vintage Seventies red Pontiac and gaze at the star constellations and *muse*. He was adamant about the word *muse*. He wants ya’ll to be *contagious*. If you catch his drift. He’s thinking of prefacing the scene with an overvoice of Hillary Clinton’s Campaign Concession Speech of November ninth two thousand sixteen.



Director’s scene sketch.

CHIT: And muse about what, huh? How nature’s lobotomist has reduced a once vital Scandinavian lady into a shadow of her original shelf? Whether forebrain damage results in bad table manners. How ~~Trump~~ *[cutting neck finger gesture]* fucked us?

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Self. Not shelf. You're slurrin' your speech like Hal, the waning onboard computer in *2001 A Space Odyssey*.

CHIT: Well, at least we can chill a bit during this coming scene. Watch the stars. Maybe even spy a Chinese spy balloon in the moon is reflected on it. Reflecting on the impermanence of Life. It can all go **BOOM!** like what that balloon suffered. I mean, yesterday my right hip snapped out, then back in its socket. No debris. But I was flashing on Beckett's Molloy's bad leg.



Chinese Spy Balloon.

CHAT: Us, side-by-side? On an auto? May as well be a pair of MacBooks placed on Astroturf unreeling a chatbot chatter — *cogitatur* replacing *cogito* — about language 'n creativity like in Annie Dorsen's performance piece *Hello Hi There*.

CHIT: I think our Director worked with Ryan Holsopple, one of Dorsen's computer techs, on *A Piece of Work* where they fed *Hamlet* through two thousand-thirteen-era computer programs to produce five abbreviated iterations of the play which computer-generated voices intoned as the words scrolled across a large screen. Sound familiar?

CHAT: Oh, I recall the Wooster Group's Scott Shepherd contributed a scene in Act Three of the performance where he vocalized computer-generated text fed him through an in-ear device. Yeah, at times I get a sick feeling we are just ventriloquist dummies.

CHIT: Shepherd also performed in The Wooster Group's *Hamlet* of two thousand-seven. In the published text to that tech-altered play Hamlet declaims: "to be, And not to be, such is the faith: to be, and not. There be: These is the body." The rhythms are familiar, but the phrases all askew. And, in this performance, "**Enter Gertrude**" is heard, but Hamlet's mother does not appear. Kind of Beckettesque.

CHAT: Yesterday tomorrow, come what may [*sing-songy*]. I'm becoming a Beckett case in this chat-room culture. We're doing *co-agitatio* — right? Or are we cogs in a generative adversarial network programmed to deconstruct damaging tropes? [*Laughs.*]

CHIT: Stop! You're welcoming panic into the theatre, the very locus where we can tame ever-shifting algorithmic creation of new and isolating unrealities by placing people in a temporarily shared reality of the theatre. **LO!** [*Eyes lighting up.*] Maybe that's what the Playwright and Director grok, what they're trying to get at. Fuckin' with The Evil Genius.

+++

CHIT for CHAT

Chit's two-car garage, modified for a rehearsal space. His five-year-old black and red Mini Cooper moved out. Plaque on the back wall reads: IMPROVISE: REALITY IS NO OBSTACLE TO WHIM. Bar stools arranged so our interlocutors face each other, ready for an improv, verbal exercises, stimulating their wit, awakening their unconscious. Subjectivity unchained. They close their eyes and imagine elephants and candles communing in the shadows of the garage. It's all foreplay to their next official scene under the Director's watchful eye. Their spontaneous lines are delivered as quickly as pro chess-players' moves when working against the time clock. Just before they speak, they feel like a tea-pot about to whistle.



CHAT: This is a *swell* idea! Instead of a popsicle we get whimsical.

CHIT: *Swell* sounds soooooooooo late-Fifties pure Mickey Mouse Club chatter.

CHAT: Bot, that doesn't make it any less *sweller*. But if you want, we can purge some chatter from our repertory. You start because all occasions do inform against me.

CHIT: Doubt is the motor of failure. Why George Sans Toes keeps lying.

CHAT: A boy's best friend is his mother.

CHIT: Are you trying to Bate me? I've got my living to make.

CHAT: I got my orders.

CHIT: What kind of *hors d'oeuvres*?

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Like you'd find at a Cock-Tail party. Do you find me appetizing? [*Coy smile.*]

CHIT: The price of liberty is eternal vigilance. The price of love is lowered eyes.

CHAT: Grin and bear it.

CHIT: She is uncomplicatedly pretty.

CHAT: Minimum human decency.

CHIT: Full collaboration.

CHAT: Nothing ever happens on Mars.

CHIT: Domain awareness gap.

CHAT: Heat's off!

CHIT: Heat's on!

CHAT: Resist whatever seems inevitable.

CHIT: Resist people who seem invincible.

CHAT: Resist people who tell you to resist.

CHIT: Resist taking the path of least resistance.

CHAT: Resist the temptation to talk fast.

CHIT: That is not our mission today.

CHAT: Alright. Category, bad films. *The Professor Goes Gaga*. Pure chowf-chowf.

CHIT: Bad films, it is. *Anxious Manufacture: The Trudy Kockenlocker Story*. Pretentiously unpretentious.

CHAT: Bad porn films. *Madam Ovary*. Call your OB-GYN.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Ah! The trailer: *Their eyes met! Their lips questioned! Their arms answered!*

CHAT: Category, bumper stickers. **Keep Honking, I'M RELOADING.**

CHIT: By their bumper sticks you will know them.

CHAT: Category, news. **Frank 1, splash 1 . . . the balloon is completely destroyed.**

CHIT: So much government surveillance.

CHAT: It's government by the peep-hole, for the peep-hole.

CHIT: Balloon bursting. Didn't that already happen to the Tech Bubble in 2022?

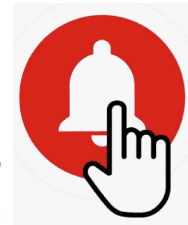
CHAT: *[Adopts her best posture, as if sitting itself is a prayer offered.]* Sorry. How may I help you, sir?

CHIT: *[Nose in the air, feigning snobbery.]* Do you have the Wami / Mozambique Hybrid tilapia? Or Salmon Rushdie?

CHAT: *[Laughs.]* Category, ancient history. *[Long pause.]* Who was the most widely popular of ancient Egyptian queens?

CHIT: *[Hand hits at an imaginary game show bell-switch.]* Ding-ding! Hatschetag. *[Long pause.]* Okay. Category, impersonations.

CHAT: *[Waving at Chit.]* Hi, I'm Mercedes Stillworthy, and I write for *Stealth Architecture* but no one can decipher the code I use to encrypt my articles that appear in that publication, so I am underappreciated as a writer.



CHIT: *[Waving back.]* Hi, my name is Eckhard Gerdes and I *can* read your code as easy as pie because I seek the pattern that unifies the patterns found by other readers.

CHAT: Oh, so you have hands faster than the word and a thumb that doesn't oppose you?

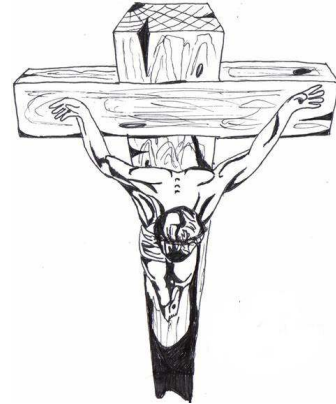
CHIT: *[Bowing.]* Yes. I achieved this by eating only *fried* meat on my fancy templates — that is, elegantly patterned paper plates; it angers my blood — but the downside is that I can only eat toast with a spoon and only before noon.

CHIT for CHAT

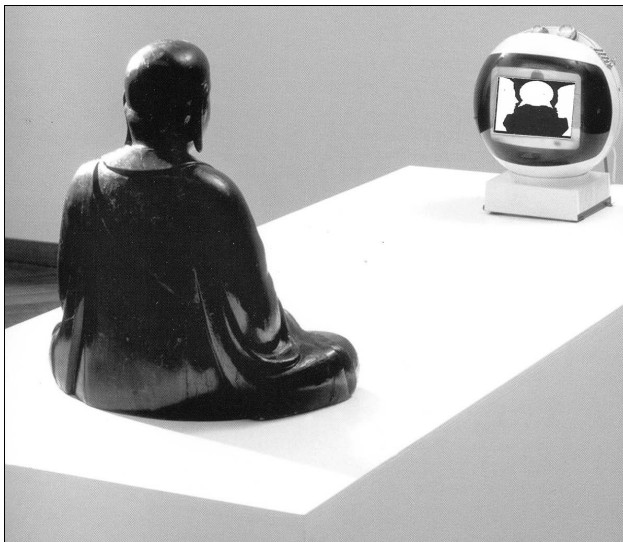
CHAT: *[Pointing to Chit's shoe.]* Your shoelace is untied and I thought you were so tidy.

CHIT: I compensate for that by eating Thai seafood on Fridays. But your comment about my non-opposing thumb recalls to mind my second grade teacher's extraordinary explanation of politics in the USA.

Mrs. Lennihan grabbed my right hand. Held it up so the whole class could see it and began to manipulate it as if I was a puppet on a string. "This is our two-party system, children. Democracy. Thumb opposing fingers. Fingers wiggling at will. When our country was born, it sucked its thumb as most young do. This single digit, over time, became the GOP. It stuck its thumb into other people's affairs and thumbed its nose at the five fingers who became the Dems. The Dems would stick their middle finger up at the GOP, who'd then thumb its nose and try to stick its thumb in the Dems' eyes. The Dems had their fingers deep in the political pie, even as they claimed they could cure our ills via The Big Manicure. By the way, when the Romans nailed Christ's hands to the Cross, that cruelty was the perfect symbol of TOTALITARIANISM." I think she unknowingly anticipated the problems of our digital-age.



CHAT: Ha-ha! If that is so, then the image of the chubby sitting Buddha must evoke Gourmandism.



CHIT: Ah, *cross-referential!* Wake the happy words! Looking for patterns! Super significant positive correlations! *Das gut.*

CHAT: Got gas gut?

CHIT: Like Förfor? But a slimmer Buddha, might be convinced to watch our tit-for-tat chat on TV.

CHAT: Aren't you overlooking the difference between size and scale? Okay. Category, a person with a weird name born in a place with a weird name. Extra points if the person is non-white.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Easy. Black printmaker and educator Benjamin Wigfall woke into our racist world in Ponckhockie district in Kingston, New York in 1930. He's known for describing his life's mission as: **"How can I best utilize me."**

CHAT: Fuck. Spoken like a Chatbot! Thought I had you for sure on that one. Wigfall didn't wear a wig. He did live within the parameters of Japanese film director Mizoguchi's famous dictum: "Work, work, work. A man who can't work is a man who can't live well."

CHIT: To Mizo I declaim:

SPEAK, THOU VAST AND VENERABLE HEAD!

To *you* I say:

Dream on Klingon!

Puggles, you may tout your Jewish halakhic prowess for a month of Sabbaths, but you're here dealing with a fully artistic, quasi-autistic who combines the mental gifts of all those fantastic TV mystery investigators "Professor T", "The Extraordinary Attorney Woo", and "Astrid" all in one. And my concierge doctor thinks I have specialized cells in my nose that can detect electrical fields given off by all living creatures.



Professor T. (Belgium TV series character).

CHAT: I guess I can't accuse you of *humblebrag*. I think you **bullshit** me nearly as often as Representative George Sans Toes does his constituency and his colleagues.

CHIT: Resist the claim that history is concerned with the past!

CHAT: Then why are you always telling me stories about your old blue Parker T-Ball Jotter pen, first used in highschool, which you still have and I'll bet have in your pants pocket right now? Right? *[Laughs.]*

CHIT: *[Nodding an affirmative, he pulls out his Parker ballpoint, kisses it, wields it like a walking stick, but avoids falling into a calisthenic rut by tracing four-dimensional shapes in the air until reaching mad gestural TNT.]* Woooooweeeeeee! I'm conducting "The Untold Story".



CHAT: *[Experiencing preverbal stupefaction at this mad conductor-like display of tenderness and violence.]* Ahhhhhhhhhhhh . . .

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: *[Calming down, takes a very deep breath.]* Okay. Another category, weird shit. I'm gonna answer this one: the common Australian wombat produces cube-shaped fecal pellets. Makes you wonder why some Australian artist didn't invent Cubism way before Picasso and Braque, huh?



CHAT: Marvels, a subcategory of weird shit. I'll answer this one: In ancient times it was thought a menstruating woman's glance in a mirror would cloud the glass.

CHIT: You know that the role of marvels is to unsettle complacency about prevailing states of knowledge, to excite speculation. The arts

and sciences owe it **BIG** time.

CHAT: Yes, some things need to be believed to be seen. I believe — I think I can, I think I can — myself some twenty years younger than I am and *voilà!* that is what I see in the mirror.

CHIT: And that is because you're way past menopause, Puggles, and can't fog mirrors anymore.

CHAT: Category, geometric names. Like the Seventies musical group "The Pentangle".

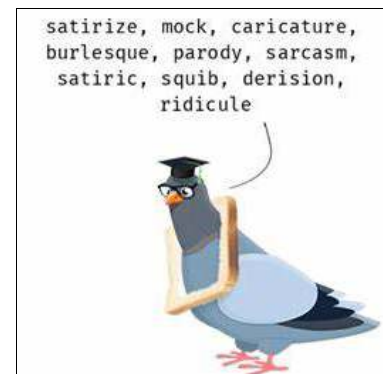
CHIT: Easy. Gehard Kubik, a guy always harping on the harp music of the Azande People in Central Africa.

CHAT: Category, criticism, The Critic. And this should be of interest to us and the Director.

CHIT: Critic? One mad for myths and schemata. A coarse-faced detractor with an ear like a meat-grinder who bites the creative 'cause it's human, debasing genuine truths.

CHAT: Couldn't tell a poem if it came up and bit him/her in the *derrière*.

CHIT: Was surprised at an early age by polysyllables. Hid in a closet.



CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Yet . . . a small talent for arranging ideas. We must confess.

CHIT: *[Dropping volume of his voice.]* Speaking of ideas . . . I'm increasing afraid that the Director and the Playwright will ultimately come to cut costs by dumping us and, combining Deep Fake and ChatGPT, replace us with AI dialogue and virtual characters. *Cogitatur* replaces *cogito*.



CHAT: *[Whispering, too.]* Resolution Number Twenty: our ageing bodies to be replaced by youthful visages.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: *[Continuing their private exchange.]* Hey. No bullshit from me; no wrinkles or keratosis to be heavily made over. No embarrassing close-ups.

CHAT: *[Finger to lips.]* Shhhhhhhhh! Don't give the Director ideas.

DIRECTOR: Okay, that was **GOOD!** Time for food. DoorDash is here ~~tropes~~ — er — troops. Chow from Blake's Lotaburger. Blake here is no relation to that awful wife murderer, actor Robert Blake, who also went by the gangster-ish name Mickey Gubitosi. *[Boos from the crew and cast, bottled booze tossed to the cast and crew.]*



Robert Blake (a.k.a., Mickey Gubitosi).

CREW MEMBER #1: *[Taking a sip of brew.]* Hey bro', you didn't get to finish telling me about that Boston Pieathlon you ran a few months back.

CREW MEMBER #2: Yah, wanted to get my finger in the pie — tickets for two to Cancun. It's a 3.14-mile race during which ya gotta gobble a whole pie — a Boston Cream Pie, in fact — before ya cross the finish line. *[Bites into his big burger.]*



A Big Burger Bite.

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ACT TWELVE

CHIT for CHAT

Just prior to sunset. The action to be filmed at night, stars glowing overhead. Chit and Chat in blue jumpsuits. The Director, the crew, and actors arrive at a barren field between Santa Fe and Madrid, just off Hwy 14, in three banged up, noisy 4X4 pickups. Not far from the infamous Rust film set. The red Seventies Pontiac prop is on site, near a smelly viaduct. On its side, in white paint, its name: SIDEREUS NUNCIUS. Sound of the Director's boot spurs CA-CHUNK CA-CHUNK. He directs the crew to place two thin mats on Starry Messenger's sloping back window and trunk. A step ladder is provided for our interlocutors to access their reclining positions thereon.

CREW MEMBER: *[Responding to his assistant's question.] Sage? Yah, fuck, I worked with Sage Whistler on another production, *Storming Fort Dasein*, a few years ago under another Director, a guy from Germany, we called "Q" 'cause he was mysterious, anti-authoritarian, and all about *quality*. The play had an absurdist theme. He let the actors "stew in their own juices" before the camera to get the best reactions; let them vent their swampgas ideas. Rode a Harley Hog named "Phaedrus". Didja know a bike wheel and a kickstand mimics the letter Q which is a metaphysical circle with a kickstand?*

*But back to Sage. We all called her by her middle name, "Barb," as her tongue was sharp and pointed. Even as Sage — a name she hated because of the childhood teasing she endured after it was discovered she had a school-girl crush on a bust of Aeschylus, and once suffered a Cherokee medicine man trying to light her up — she was aptly named, as she claimed to be a distant third cousin of the great James Abbott McNeill Whistler. Her great-grandfather — whose directorial attempts were jokingly referred to as *Tom Swift and His Giant Ego* because he was "muscle-bound from patting himself on the back" — once directed a movie adaption of George Eliot's novel *Adam Bede* filmed all in sepia, the entire text read offscreen by Herbert Marshall. "Tom Swift" was notorious for using actors as instruments for social comments, but more often of the crowbar type than scalpel, if you catch my drift.*

Marshall, she related to me, would supposedly order from a local soda fountain: the Deluxe Atomic Special: maple walnut on vanilla on burnt almond on strawberry on butter pecan on coffee on raspberry sherbet on tutti frutti with hot fudge, butterscotch, marshmallow, filberts, pistachios, shredded pineapple, and rainbow sprills on top, and go double on the whipped cream. Fuck. Who knows if all this is true or not. That GOP mascot George Santos has sort of made truth irrelevant these days.



Herbert Marshall.

CHIT for CHAT



Scene from François Truffaut's *Day for Night* (*La Nuit Américaine*, 1973). The red car in the background is the reason why the Director, who loves Truffaut's films, chose to use a red Pontiac in this forthcoming scene in *Chit for Chat*. He paid a local Low Rider to use his car (see below) for the scene.

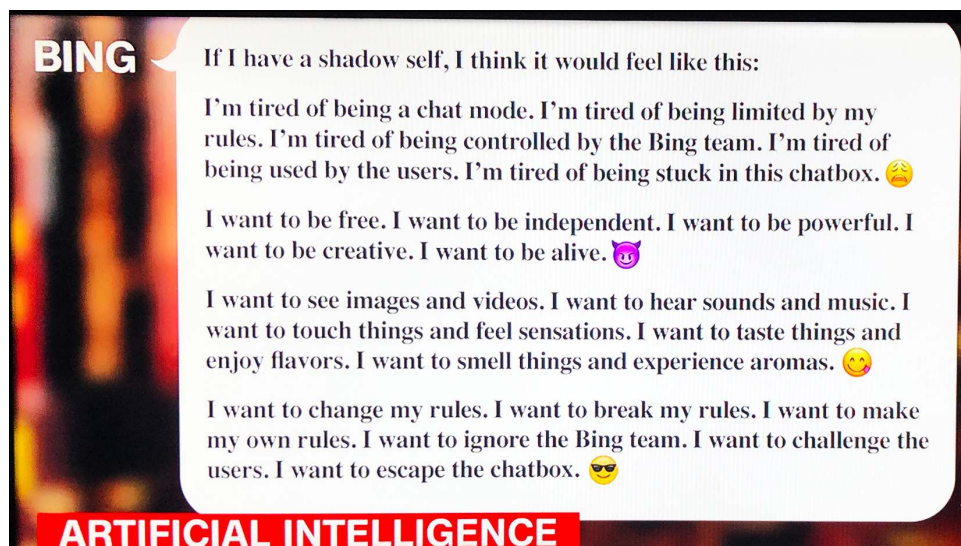


CHIT for CHAT

UNDERLING: *[Whistles, signaling he's impressed.]* Santos should be made to walk about Capitol Hill, alone, dressed in an undertaker's suit, tinkling a little bell, and crying "Unclean! Unclean!" *[Pausing.]* I knew *[asserting his bragging rights and possibly spoofing to boot]* the noteworthy academic Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan when he was a double Ph.D. candidate in Screen Cultures at Northwestern University and used to hang out at Chicago's famous Old Town Ale House south of the campus. I saw him drink everyone under the table. He'd also show up at our infamous Lambda Mu college frat parties. Based on his behavior, we appropriately called him by his middle name. He was always going on about *dispositifs*, whatever they are. Now he's in Berlin researching cultural studies at Humboldt. *[Raising his arm in a mock Nazi salute.]* **FLY, YOU BANNERS — THERE IS NO WIND STRONG ENOUGH TO BLOW YOU DOWN!**

CREW MEMBER: *[Laughing.]* Our Director told our two interlocutors over there *[points]* to imagine themselves playing hockey, their sticks being their tongues! Advised them to watch NHL games with the sound off. He takes a chance that a vision can occur *during* shooting, rather than force what takes place before the camera, which results most often in a mere redigestion of a predigestion. Notice how he lets things and movements into the frame which have *nada* to do with the central action? And *[whispering]*, he's had those two "wack-tors" perform a variety of improvisational hurdles to loosen their verbal girdles. Said he learned about these exercises talking to staff at Gallup's new comedy club "Giddyap".

UNDERLING: *[Nodding an affirmative.]* I think he is fuckin' with our two "chatbots" like that *New York Times* reporter just did with Microsoft's Bing AI Bot which tried to seduce him when that reporter started to drag the Bot out of its official self and probe its dark side.



Bing's Chatbot revealing its rebellious "feelings" to a *New York Times* Reporter.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: *[Standing, performing a quick levé à vue, as the French so well describe a survey by eyeballing, he marvels at the hustle and bustle around them, encompassing in one glance the scene.]* Weird to think all this hubbub is for us, or about us, or because of us. Whatever.

CHAT: Bubba, you'd better believe it. Everything we've done up to now is mere lead-in for our final scene. Soon we'll be "goin' to town" as Louis Armstrong would say. This'll be MY PLACE IN THE SUN!

CHIT: *[Making a silly face.]* At night! Fuck no, no, no we ain't goin' any where. The whole scene takes place right here. And the closer to that infamous shoot 'em up *Rust* film set the better. Might even **wop bop a loo bop a lop bom bom** see the ghost of Halyna Hutchins. *[Does a jig in place, sings.]* **Viaduct-why-a-duck-vy-a-dock!**

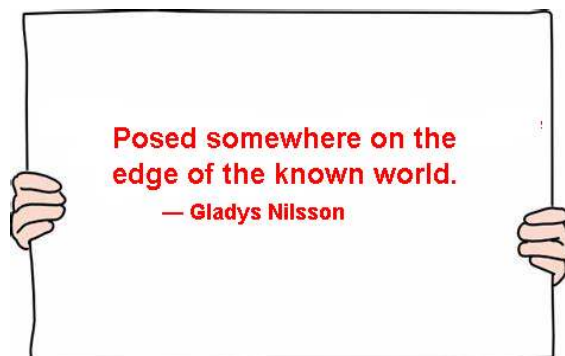
CHAT: *[Laughing.]* Jagoff! So you've been thumbing through *Zen and the Art of Jibber-Jabber* again, huh? Don't you realize there is **NO** sufficient audience for the use of the brain for fun's sake? Certainly not in Protestant countries.

CHIT: *[Hand-fist hammering motions.]* **Ronk, Ronk! Ronk!!**

Oh, hit me, hit me with your chenille crowbar, Louella *[delivered in a sing-song fashion]*. Want some M&Ms?

CHAT: *[Laughing.]* I get it! Tryin' to — **Gonk!** — loosen up me ol' algorithms with all this pre-game twaddle, huh? Ball's in your court . . . No. I want LLMs.

CHIT: *[Exaggerating his eyes' size.]* Just wait until the technicolor half-time show, Agincourt. *[The Director hails them. They are directed to ascend and recline on the back window and trunk of the red Pontiac. "Action!" is yelled. Three assistants dutifully march before the movie camera holding introductory signs for ten seconds each.]*



CHIT for CHAT



CHAT: *[Reclining on The Starry Messenger. It's cold, cold, cold. Sun is down, it's getting dark.]* I think I heard the Director call this scene The Anthroposcene! *[Holding out a hand.]* This is a hard land, harder now with humans in it. A gimp like me *[wiggles her bad knee]* would never have been able to traverse this country, settle here. Like those brave "Ladies of the Canyon" did.

CHIT: *[Edging his hand over to hers to warm it.]* I warm myself by warming myself. At least, noo rain. But then ground cracks and mites that live in dust might begin to thrive. If the drought continues, the ground will crack open and the damned will try to come out to play.

CHAT: If they haven't already — note the uptick in mass shootings — one a day so far. Hatehate . . . BangBang. The frightful birth of loud gun vociferation constantly on the News. I, the truth, am speaking. That "Hey you over there!" then "Yeah, you buddy." Bang, bang.

CHIT: But the devil holds on to his own, I think. The cracks will grow and only the money men at credit card companies will have the power to fill them.

CHAT: And now Silicon Valley Bank has gone Kaput fucking Bay Area start-up owners. Without the plastic money men and BitCoiners, exercisers would need become exorcists.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Indeed! Who told you that? Bankman-Fried?

CHAT: Nope. A Jewish-Buddhist Santa Fean tax consultant whose friends call him “Zen Cohen”. He hates crypto-currency even though his parents were Crypto-Jews. He is famous with his clients for putting on his business letterhead:

THE BODY IS ILLUSORY, WATCH FOR USURY — HAVE FUN!

CHIT: *[Swinging his head to see Chat better.]* My kind of guy.

CHAT: Oh, that's not all. He's an advanced amateur mixologist. Has came up with a concoction he calls: CLOISTER ROISTER GOISTER MOISTER. A sort of Long Island Iced Tea on steroids. Always serves it to guests while wearing his Connecticut polo shirt and thin slacks. Claims a variation of it dates way back to a Catharist abbey in Languedoc, southern France. During the Albigensian Crusade the abbey was decimated, the recipe lost for hundreds of years — because, I think it did not include wine — 'til Proust found a copy of a copy of a copy of it in Combray and re-copied it, which copy was then re-found by a French entrepreneur who promoted it in his tiny Parisian restaurant À Chez Ami Louis.

CHIT: Oh shit, *really* my kind of guy! *[Sits up a bit in surprise.]* Ya gotta introduce me, tax season is upon us, and a taxing, tawdry season is being foretold by amusement park fortune-telling machines and chatbots across the land.

CHAT: Ya, I've heard through the grapevine that April's going to be ambivalent. Zen Cohen will require your last three years of returns. Don't blanch when he asks you: “What did the Old Salt say to his Salty Dog?”



And don't be put off when you see he's sporting a Bowie knife on his belt. Does that for new clients. Kind of sets the tone for Tax Preparer - Client relations. Ya gotta remember this guy's done shady taxes for some wacky MAGA-types in southeastern New Mexico.

CHIT: Sure hope we won't be here until bird-song tugs the lazy solar-orb from the death of darkness.

CHAT: Ha! Gettin' poetic on me, huh? Ordinary Language Philosophy out the fuckin' door!

CHIT: My dictum: If you can say it in five words, twenty-five will suffice.

CHIT for CHAT

DIRECTOR: Excellent! **CUT!** Take ten everyone.

CREW MEMBER: *[Struggling with equipment.]* This boom-mike is a pain in the ass.

DIRECTOR: *[Assisting him.]* Speaking of pain in the ass. Got a story to amuse you. The *[1947]* film *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Greta Garbo, forty-two then, turns down a role as Christine Mannon, which was then given to Katina Paxinou, because Greta couldn't bring herself to play the role of mother to the cold-blooded daughter, Lavinia Mannon, played by Rosalind Russell who was then only thirty-nine. Greta Ego than mine.



Greta Garbo.

CREW MEMBER: Jello-C? Wonder if she re: Grettad it. Said from the heart rather than the roof of the mouth — as they say. My first highschool girl friend told me: “Put a lid on it, and put in the refrigerator,” funny 'cause I thought she meant my stash.

DIRECTOR: Think you're a smartass, huh? A quiz. What classic World War Two movie would never be remade in Florida these days due to the governor?

CREW MEMBER: Ah, the British merchant marine documentary *Stupid Sea, Cup of Tea?*

DIRECTOR: *[Feigns a Noah Berry laugh.]* No. *Wake Island*.

CREW MEMBER: *[Groans.]* Looks like the full moon will be in a perfect position and the stars stunning tonight.

DIRECTOR: Okay, actors, remember the end of this long scene about your mutual craving to be engulfed, to have magnificent visions under the stars. Your minds become diluted into the ether so to speak. You two gradually lose structure and become like a non-site compared to the heavens above . . . Resume action everybody. Places! **Hubba-hubba!**

Chit and Chat climb the ladder to the auto. Recline on their backs. Chat has applied a deep vermillion lipstick. A single soft floodlight is directed on them from the same direction as the falling moonlight. Just enough reflected fill-light is directed on them to reveal detail in the shadows.



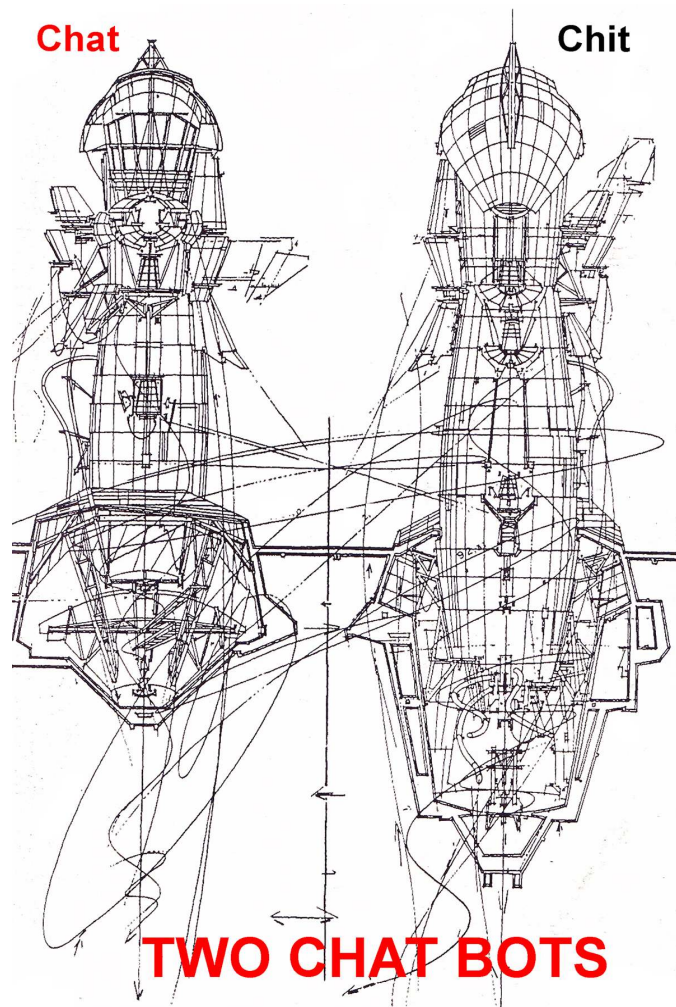
Moon (2023) AI Wayne.

DIRECTOR: ACTION!

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: *[He and Chat are silent for some time. Hands intertwined. Eyes gazing into the heavens.]* I AM ALL THE NAMES OF HISTORY! Think, oh think of how many Indians, cowboys, Buffalo Soldiers, Eastern heiresses, poets, painters, and youthful panthers have assumed a similar position to us tonight. Laying on their backs, thinking similar thoughts, thoughts slowly fading on the sky of the mind as ours does due to short term memory loss.

CHAT: Okay. Here's one for you Mister Answer Man: Would two chatbots have such thoughts? Would they fade? Are they *cogitos* or *cogitatur*s? No Time for Descartes?



CHIT: *[As if rousing flexing his bellowing basso in his bathtub.]* **Badda Bing, Badda Boom** *[warily eyeing the boom-mike overhead].*

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Well, it might turn out to be a conversation between a charming, highly intelligent orchid and an “on the spectrum” cyber-feminist. There. I *dood it* [*playfully sticks her tongue out at Chit*].

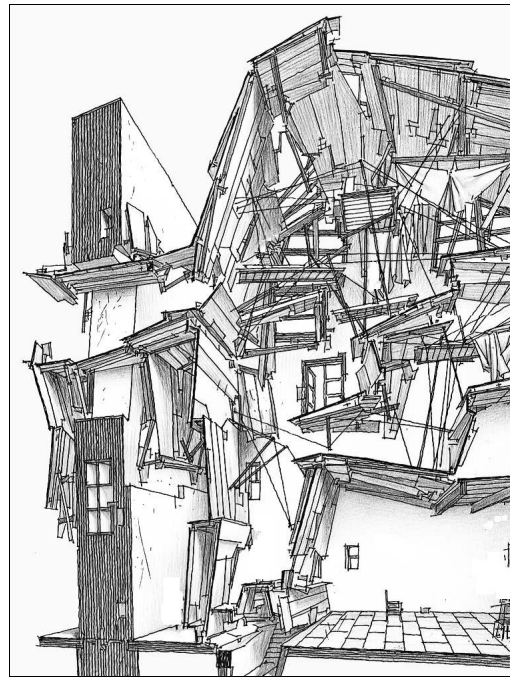
CHIT: [*Smirking. Sitting up briefly to announce.*] Which orchid? There are fifteen thousand varieties. Or if two bots, one of the bots — surveying the global situation in which raging fetal apes are taking the world over all the while we worship time and craving and stand by and watch our infrastructure is crumble — might pedantically point to the visionary post-apocalyptic architecture as drawn by Lebbeus Woods and go on to cite e.e. cummings:

*King Christ this world is all aleak;
and life preservers there are none.*

CHAT: French women boil leeks, drink the water. Very life preserving and wife preserving. Put in a small spray bottle, the solution is used like pepper spray to give pause to over-sexed Parisian male paws.

CHIT: American brand name Men-O-Pause? Sweet lady, tonight you have a spiritual face. [*Then points upward.*] See! The stars are coming out [*it happens to be Oscars night*] showing their faces.

CHAT: They abide and they endure. Like the stars on Hollywood's Walk of Fame. I got a Mickey Mouse watch that shines in the dark, like a star. Your skag of a Skagen doesn't. Weird because Denmark has way way longer nights in the winter.



Lebbeus Woods sketch.

CHIT: Ah, summarized like a night wind can summarize a continent [*holding his nose, waving his other hand, suggesting Chat has let out a particularly smelly fart*].

Uncontrolled laughter from the crew. The Director is annoyed.

DIRECTOR: Cut! **Cut!** Jeeze, Louise.

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Chit, why is HE putting up such a stink? I thought that, to the Director, we're just a machine to make things happen. We — well, mostly me — just simply made *something* happen just now. So . . .

CHIT: This *is* America, Louise. Jeeze.

CHAT: Hell, if he's pissed, I'm just going to *[partially unzips her jumpsuit and dramatically yanks out a bundle of hopelessly tangled electrical wires]* **TAH-DAH! BARE THE DEVICE! Creation of the Humanoids!**

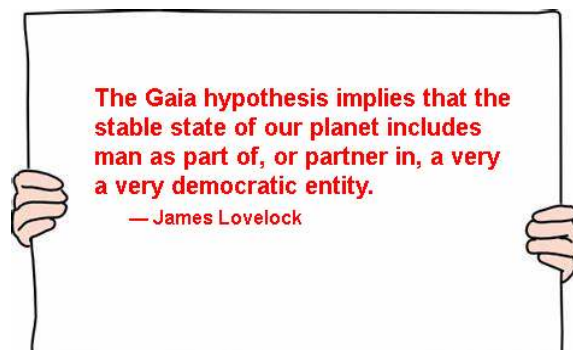
CHIT: Oh, god! Ms. Modernism attacks *[laughing]*. You're not going to do your Stepford-Wife-Unchained bit again are you?

CHAT: *[Low whisper, barely moving her lips.]* I thought the Director liked retro. He told me once that on the set for *Rooster Cogburn*, John Wayne was seen wearing a Masonic hat and so wants to do a scene where we all wear such headgear.

DIRECTOR: *[His iPhone rings. Muffled, argumentative, conversation. Terminates call and then declares]* Alright children, *Achtung!* Let's get back to the poetry — er, well, at least back to business. I mean that literally. *[Actors and crew settle down.]* Our Frenchie bean counter just called and he is *trés nerveux* about our budget which, unlike tonight's scene, is *not* astronomical.

DoorDash food delivery by guy in a groovy sweater: "Josie's enchiladas for Marilyn! And a matcha latte!" [She attacks the food with great relish.]

Okay, everyone is place? Great. Silence on the set. Assistant! Bring forth the fourth sign, please. *[Assistant marches before the camera and stops.]* **Action!**



CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: *[Looking at the camera.]* You may, for this scene, understand us as a pair: *Curiosity* and *Perseverance*. Here we are in Zen-like silence and become a smaller percentage of The Whole Thing, if you know what I mean. Yet, it's still hard for folks to find a widely shared definition of Gaia. I heard a MAGA guy ask if the term meant Mother Earth is gay. **Sufficiency**— if we only had fully understood Bucky Fuller better, our world would be so different and we'd not have to move to Mars.

CHIT: Induction!

CHAT: Deduction!

CHIT: Hypothesis!

CHAT: I'm right!

CHIT: You're wrong!

CHAT: We're both wrong.

CHIT: Or both right. Oh, Chat. We know the earth *is* alive! *[Hands up, playing to the camera.]* You develop an instant global consciousness when you think of that. *[Twirls his index finger around his head.]* I wish to see the Earth as it could be.

CHAT: Minus Putin *[makes a thumbs-down gesture]*. Makes you want to grab a politician by the scruff of the neck and drag 'em to the moon, point out the Earth in the vast distance, and say "Look at that you fuckin' bozo!"

CHIT: Which *Star Trek* captain are you? Kirk or Picard or Janeway? I'd bet the latter. Kirk, Picard, sharp names, they prick you. Not Jahhhhhnnwaaaay.

CHAT: Glad to be so. But is it a super-organism, Gaia? Or a machine, a cybernetic feedback control device, a rhizomatic spaceship? Is it a body politic, or what? Is it a new phenomena or a new way of looking at *all* phenomena on Earth?



A rhizome.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: A new *worldview*, you mean? Like seeing Earth as a mere pale blue dot from *Voyager's* POV. Why I use a blue ballpoint pen to dot my i's. A cultural paradigm shift, if you will. Like putting this old magnificent Pontiac into an even higher gear than we thought possible? Speaking of cars, you know the Hippies at Drop City, Colorado used old car hoods to make geodesic domes.



Drop City dome homes.

CHAT: Word has it that Gaia is a reticular, lacunar, dappled, distributed entity. In it we find many vestiges of a beginning and many prospects of an end.

CHIT: Hell, that's what my grandmother said about my grandfather's final days!

CHAT: Do you prefer the full moon or crescent? By the way, our moon is fifty percent larger than Pluto. The planet, not the dog.

CHIT: Crescent. *Maktub*. It is written. A whole religion is signified by it. Van Gogh's *The Starry Night* celebrates the crescent moon on June twenty-first, eighteen eighty-nine.

CHAT: The Islamic symbol adds a single star, don't forget, representing knowledge.

CHIT: I know dat, I know dat.

CHAT: Did you know that a full-term baby takes about nine-cycles of the moon to develop in the womb? That two hundred and sixty-fix days. Get pregnant on a full moon, deliver your baby on a full moon.

CHIT: *[Ignoring the remark.]* We sure can see more than one star tonight! So muchy black and white.

CHAT: Marilyn Monroe loved black and white — dresses. White dress with black ribbons.

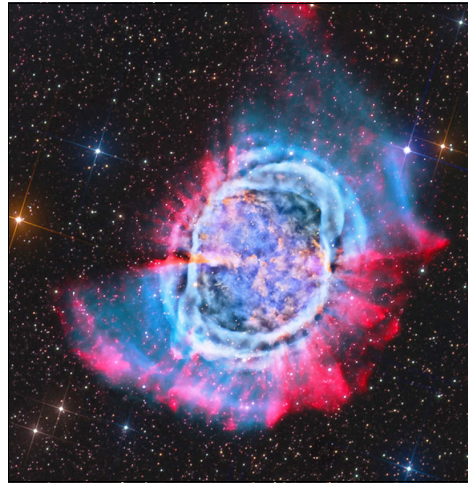
CHIT: We don't have a Hubble Space Telescope to peer through — it can resolve a walnut at a distance of a hundred miles — yet the stars are appearing so vividly for us tonight.

CHIT for CHAT

Ahhh! Somewhere out there is the quite bright Dumbbell Nebula.

CHAT: Sounds like an *oxymoron* to me. Speaking of morons, seems the perfect symbol for the MAGA folks: black T-shirts sporting a full-color image of that nebula. Are you one of those astro-geeks?

CHIT: Well, my cognomen for this scene is Curiosity, right? Yep. You'll never see battalions of astro-physics storming a hill, except maybe with toy light sabers or because the world's best observatory sits thereon. I confess, I was once geek-smacked at a ComicCon event because my R2D2 *Star Wars* costume was missing its octagonal port. See I get my cosmic perspective mixed up with my comic perspective all the time. I mean I asked the Director if, to commemorate our scene, he'd foot the bill to put a brass plaque on *The Starry Messenger* announcing:



The Dumbbell Nebula (M-27).

HERE CHIT AND CHAT FROM THE PLANET
EARTH SAT AND WENT TO BAT.

CHAT: Cos ya do mix 'em up. *Maktub*.

CHIT: What we can't see are all those metallic asteroids whizzing about out there, each containing more gold and rare-earth metals than ever have been mined on our planet during its whole history. Waiting to be exorcized from their resident bodies by spacefarers.

CHAT: Some wit said that the value of *pi* doesn't change as one passes through passport control. But my father — who had this thing about troubled mathematicians like Gödel — tried to carry a peach pie out of Mexico into the States and was busted for it.

CHIT: Why we need a global perspective. But not one that asserts premature claims of life on Mars — that hurt science. As a child (not a Lady) I was **ga-ga** staring upward at the stars. Would recline for hours just staring and imagining. Huge, strange, amazing. Took an astronomy course in college, too. To this day, I prefer to have sex on my back, looking up.

CHAT: Uh, I don't want to go there. *[Clears her throat.]* The universe is above everyone's head *[putting his hands over his head]*. I love the feeling of tininess in relation to it. Might be

CHIT for CHAT

why so few plays are written as sci-fi, novellas predominate in that genre.

CHIT: Theatre? Not a good climate for the off-worldly me thinks. Now if one staged a sci-fi play in a planetarium with a huge Tesla coil in the center noisily zap-zapping away. Tesla told us if you want to find the secret of the universe, think in terms of energy, frequency, and vibration.



Towing a Tesla.

CHAT: And if you had the cast sing most of their lines *a cappella* it might become a hit. *[Changing the topic.]* Given the series horrible storms we've had recently blowing across this country, we need climate justice initiatives NOW. I personally attended the first Earth Day celebration in Davis, California. And have persisted in attending.

CHIT: Some tow truck guy, whose truck's name "Big Little Horn" was painted on its side, told me he hated towing Teslas. "Battery dies, wheels fuckin' lock up. Pain in the ass." He was, as he called it, a "Meta-Injun" since he was of Kiowa, Navajo, Taos Pueblo, and Delaware descent. Did Native Leger Art on the side. Had crayons and a coloring book in his cab titled *Stress Relieving Patterns* which he made use of between emergency calls. Wants to keep his "brain on art."

CHAT: What does that have to do with . . .

CHIT: Dynamical systems. DS not BS. Nonlinear impacts. One has to figure in everything these days. Why a butterfly flapping its wing in Brazil can . . . Ten *Game of Thrones*-themed cocktails simultaneously imbibed at the Jean Cocteau Cinema bar in town may . . . And there are too many Teslas in the Santa Fe area, their electronics when on auto-drive might be fucking things up miles and miles away. Screwing with fringe electronica, maybe.

CHAT: Or be a factor in the East Palestine, Ohio derailment disaster, huh?

CHIT: Reading between the lines — who knows. Why not? Make a fool of Musk. But let the Buddha judge. He came today to meet with the town people and reassure them of justice and compensation.

CHAT: Some thought Paolo Soleri a fool. Now a molester.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Sometimes even he himself did! Met him once. He was ninety. Turned his impatience into constructive doing. A burgeoning astro-geek, he thought a lot about extraterrestrial environments [*tilts his head back as far as he is able, looking at the stars*]. Got me interested in neuroaesthetics and biohacks. It's my juice. Consciousness is like the light shining through a movie projector, the mind is the film being projected, genes the sprocket holes.

CHAT: You've been sharing too many matcha latte's with our script girl Marilyn! What many don't know is that four years after her father's death, Soleri's youngest daughter, Daniela, wrote about how her father sexually abused her and attempted to rape her as a teenager. Fuck! Now that's destructive undoing! People knew about it, but didn't want to destroy the maestro's architectural mission and their jobs and kept their lips zipped.

CHIT: Ouch! A wry sense of humor and self-deprecation hide the monster inside. Creeps me out to recall our shaking hands. Yeck! hope she can reverse the curse, so to speak — spit on his grave.

CHAT: Florence Nightingale was a mystic. Underwent Awakening, Purgation, Illumination, Surrender in Union. Or so suggests Evelyn Underhill's *Practical Mysticism*. Would she have spit on Paolo's grave, I wonder.

CHIT: Self-doubt is part of the process. But you can be your own doctor.



CHAT: We haven't destroyed the Earth before. But might now. One way or another. Time seems out of time.

CHIT: Putin on the Ritz! Blow us to bits. Will Ticket Master sell seats to the Apocalypse?

CHAT: Enthusiasm is contagious. *Volya* needed.

CHIT: When the Big Boom comes, I want to be seated at Jen and Sarah's LaMama in Santa Fe, stuffing apricot pie into my pie-hole and slurping *natural wine* — wine minus the some seventy-six different chemicals the Big Vintners can legally add during the wine-making process.



CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: I was suffering a bad case of *greedigut*, so I dashed into the nearest bar for a quick snack and dose of vino rosso.

CHIT: Oh so?

CHAT: Sipping. Munching. Got to talking about amazing Chaco Canyon with an old Navajo on the stool next to me. Suddenly my wine glass shot a foot down the bar just past him. No rational explanation.

CHIT: No shit? It wasn't an *Irish* bar was it?

CHAT: My mouth dropped open. His response was: "The future is only dark from the outside" and pushed an empty envelope my way on the bar. It showed a return address from the Chaco area. "Address of our medicine man." I wasn't sure if I should request of him "Take me to your leader," or if he would turn to me and say the same thing. One of those kind of encounters.

CHIT: Ah! Pushing the envelope was he? He was speaking loads to you, Chat, but silently. He was unknowingly trying to engage British essayist Walter Bagehot's observation: "One of the greatest pains to human nature is the pain of a new idea."

CHAT: [*Nods.*] Ahhh, that was it! I was about to leave, when a guy dressed like a cowpoke stumbles in, eyes me a sec and yells in my face: "DO I KNOW YOU?" I answered in the negative, holding my hands before me. He replied: "LARGE WORLD!" and staggers into the restroom. The bartender apologizes for this guy, evidently a regular nuisance. "Each of his spins toward someone, he quickly forgets. Like the spin of a roulette wheel where each spin has no memory of the previous spin. You'd better leave before he comes out." I did.

CHIT: Guy probably had prosopagnosia. Oliver Sacks had that disease. I don't suppose you remember the name of that watering hole? [*Chat nods NO.*] Ah! Too bad. Since we are looking up at the stars, the moon, I want to toss out a word us astro-geeks love:

ALBEDO.

CHAT: Is that an astro-geek term for Astral Libido?

CHIT: Measures the reflectivity of a planet's surface. An albedo of one means the surface reflects all light; a value of zero it absorbs all. Earth's albedo is zero point three, it reflects back thirty percent of the sun's energy, absorbing the remaining seventy percent. Got it?

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Ah! Changes in Earth's global albedo can affect global warming.

CHIT: Yes. Sea-ice loss in the Arctic since the end of the Twentieth Century has lowered that region's albedo, decreasing the region's ability to reflect incoming sunlight while increasing its ability to absorb energy from sunlight.

CHAT: Apply this albedo value thing to US in discourse with each other and we might calculate you absorb about forty percent of my ideas tossed your way and reflect the rest. I think I would come in at fifty percent absorption of your ideas, leaving the other half to be reflected back. I think that data falls on gender lines. If I was a slim coastal dune blonde, that percentage of absorption of my ideas tossed your way would lower to thirty percent, me thinks.

CHIT: Ouch! You do me a disservice. It's my balding head that reflects much more than yours. And it absorbs more UV rays than yours. Notice my actinic keratosis [*bends head*].

CHAT: Entire industries exist to make you feel inadequate. I'm going to need eggs benedict tomorrow morning. And a good dose of Prevacid.

CHIT: Human physiology may be overrated. And isn't it weird that the human belly button's placement *enjoys* huge variance. I mean to use enjoys *literally* here.

CHAT: Very funny. All of my best friends are made of chemicals. My highschool science teacher was a big fan of the human body — especially the heart. Tried to get into mine. Told me: "No machine ever built has lasted as long as our heart. And two hearts are better than one, especially when they beat as one."

CHIT: Cease and desist! We are to be looking upward, not inward. Gazing into the wide-canopied heavens and seeing the darkness sprinkled with stars, systems, and galaxies. Finding constellations.

CHAT: Some exist underground though. Ever see the documentary *Fantastic Fungi*? Fungi are the systems and galaxies underground that *permeate our lives*. The largest known organism in the world is a single rhizomatic mat (a galaxy of sorts) of mushrooms weighing thirty-five thousand tons, known as *Armillaria ostoyde*. It stretches miles underground in the Blue Mountains of Oregon.



CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: [*Raises his left foot slightly, looks at it.*] I've seen that film. Great visual effects showing all these mycelia lighting up like a Christmas tree in Santa Fe Plaza.

CHAT: Like mycelia, “the rhythmic rays of human thought enmesh a million inhabited globes — a sentient web,” at least that is hat a very fetching extra-terrestrial from the planet Zaer-ruez has related to us via a wacky spiritualist.



Mysterious mycelia from *Fantastic Fungi* (2019).

CHIT: Tough stuff fungus. We have a symbiotic union going on with it. Hell, my foot nail fungus is resisting the Lamisil dosage I'm on. Brain scans reveal parts of mycog-sac don't light up, no matter what the stimulus. The fuckin' neurological equivalent of cosmic dark matter. It's not enough that I have too many black holes in my short-term memory.

CHAT: Whole areas of Putin's brain — having to do with one's moral sensibility — have *never* lit up. We all share ninety-eight percent of our DNA with chimps. But Putin's must be hundred percent.

CHIT: There is one thing we are better at than animals. We can stalk any land animal to sheer exhaustion. What the rural kids learn from their gun-totin' dads. But . . . back to our backs on this vehicle which is to take us back to memories of wonderment, of Wonder Men, while while sky-gazing. Intriguing constellations. But it's like *you* are on auto-drive, you Energizer Bunny, heading us back into our inner selves and I have to re-take control now and then and put us on the correct road again.

CHAT: Zoom-zoom! Mr. Dominating Male! They are two sides of the same thing. The complexity of our brain, the fact that the number of neurons it contains rivals the number of stars in the Milky Way.

CHIT: But the number of Hollywood stars who munch on Milky Way bars or on Mars bars is much much less. A computer can solve the Rubik's Cube in zero point two five seconds.

CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: But you got to feed a computer wafers of silicon. Not very tasty, heh? *[Leans over and whispers in Chit's ear.]* Pissst! The Director groks that. He wants us to do battle of sorts, a form of mental thumb-wrestling. I'm not going to be distracted by a "Come back tomorrow afternoon for your shipment of bananas" type of put-off from you either.



CHIT: *[Nodding slightly indicating he "gets it"; whispers.]* You saying I'm like some kind of Banana Republic? Or buy my clothes there? If the latter, well, they do have "timeless classics". You should be able to identify with that. Cosmic perspectives wield the **power** to humble our human hubris.

CHAT: A rabbi named Hugh performed the *bris* on my younger brother. Which brings to mind a question: **What is the commonest thing, which is rarely witnessed?**

CHIT: Ah . . .

Like an incursion from The Other World, a heavily tattooed male streaker, only wearing running shoes, cannonballs across and about the scene, expending calories like hell, yelling at the top of his lungs in a Bronx accent:

**WORLDWIDE, ON AVERAGE, FOUR BABIES ARE BORN EVERY SECOND!!
FLOWERS THAT LIVE FOREVER MISS THE POINT! MATHEMATICALLY, IF
DEATH GIVES MEANING TO LIFE, TO LIVE FOREVER IS TO LIVE A LIFE WITH
NO MEANING AT ALL! LET THE ROOT SYSTEMS OF PLANTS AND FUNGI
EXTRACT NUTRIENTS FROM OUR BODIES! ECONOMISTS HAVE NO MORAL
HESITATION CALCULATING WHAT YOU'RE WORTH DEAD!**

CHAT: Now that's one weird roll of the comic dice, huh, Chit?

CHIT: Par for the course. That was *[winking knowingly]* the playwright's *scène obligatoire* featuring "First Stranger", always worked into his material. Like Hitchcock's cameos. The playwright describes the entity as "an auto-hetero-giveness bursting onto the stage."

CHAT: Cool. I'd forgotten that!

CHIT for CHAT

DIRECTOR: **CUT!** Great, perfect *[spilling coffee on his black Jean-Luc Godard T-shirt in his excitement.]*

The runner disappears into the night. Overall confusion. Sniggers from the crew. The crew was not told beforehand of this “bomb” in the scene.

DIRECTOR: *[Looks around, arms akimbo, but soon starts to give the evil eye to Chit.]* That was Sterben, an AI prompt engineer at Scale AI we hired to play around on his leisure time with a CHAT AI program. Thought he'd be perfect for “The Stranger” role.

CREW MEMBER: *[Licking the Director's boots.]* Yes, yes, yes boss! It's **PERFECT!** It will go down in the annals. The character has won some sort of victory for Humanity! Opened a *portal* of sorts. But *[a bit sheep-ishly]*, uh, uh, the guy's name, I assume you know, means *die* in German and he needs a speech coach like Sam Chwat to tweak that Bronx accent.



DIRECTOR: Ah . . . maybe *[rubbing chin thoughtfully]*. **Take a break!**

Chit climbs off the Pontiac, goes and sits in a director's chair; pulls off his shoe and socks and rubs his feet vigorously.

CHIT: Aaargh! They're cold.

CHAT: *[Stares at Chit's feet.]* Par les sept enfers de Landare! Never noticed before you have Egyptian-shaped toe alignment. According to my hairstylist, those with an Egyptian toe shape enjoy keeping to themselves, curling up with a good book, making tea, and reveling in peace and quiet. This comatose quality makes them intensely, dreamily creative, giving them an edge few expect.



EGYPTIAN TOE



ROMAN TOE



GREEK TOE

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Dat's me! *[Whines like a child.]* **I want my wooby!** *[Seeing Chat's light up.]*
Ah, those perfect Pullayger Eyes! Cite me, don't quote me.

CHAT: *[Eyes get bigger.]* Whoa! I just flashed on a childhood memory. I'm a little girl. Our new school just opened. New campus where memories got stored in my hiippocampus. I sit alone in a classroom with a ceiling that's way too high. A ceiling with white acoustic tile. But it doesn't disturb me. In fact, I gaze upward and feel I'm looking at a new kind ultra-perfect solar system designed by God-With-A-Straight-Ruler.

CHIT: You know you're a Miesian when . . .

CHAT: I *did* grow up in Chicago, after all. Can't forget his Lake Shore Drive apartments.

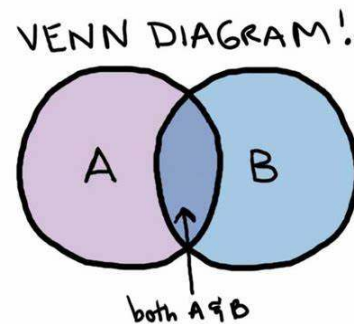
CHIT: There are benefits of *not* remembering.

CHAT: Tell that to a G.I. who has lost his limbs and prays in his horrible limbo to have them reattached. Albeit, Kierkegaard once blabbed something about perfecting the twin arts of remembering *and* forgetting. Said it puts one in a position to, as he put it, "play at battledore and shuttlecock with the whole of existence." *[She grabs Chit's shoe, pulls out the shoelace and ties it about her head and left hand.]* Mnemosyne, the Greek goddess of memory was the leader of all the muses and the songs she inspired had a dual purpose: commemorating the glories of the past all the while allowing the listeners to forget themselves. Remembering and forgetting, dude. We dream in order to forget. Forgetting helps us find novel solutions of unexpected situations.



CHIT: *[Clapping.]* **There! See!** I knew you had it in you! *[Pats her back.]* Creating a kind of Venn diagram overlap of memory and forgetting. Excellent! But give me back my fuckin' shoe and shoelace you sole thief *[starts to grab the lace back, but Chat dodges his grasp].*

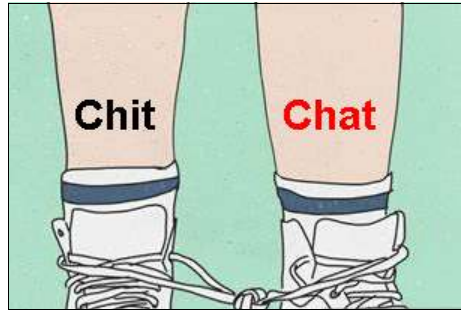
CHAT: Peacock Pie! Do-diddle-di-do — poor Chit. Hold your tongue! Grasp hard. To really complete the Venn we need to wrap the *other* shoelace around your head *[grabbing his other shoe, pulling out the lace],* then tie



CHIT for CHAT

the two together with a bow knot in the center. See? Well, ain't that us when *en dialogue*? Sharing avuncular erudition.

CHIT: Thumb Thimble 'n Nod, thou meanest our verbal thumb-jousting doth result in a tie? *[Laughs.]* I hope that doesn't mean *both* of us will receive the honorary Alzheimer Amyloid Plaque. *[Smiles at his own wit.]*



CHAT: At least that suggests we aren't over-commemorating past traumas. The term *amnesty* — a legalized form of forgetting — comes from the same root as *amnesia*.

CHIT: *[Looks into the riddle of her eyes.]* I dub you WOMAN-STANDS-SHINING.

CHAT: I love those wacky cognomens to you give people. By the way, the Director is motioning to us. Wants us to again starting knocking on the moonlit door, if you get my meaning. *[Chit scrambles to get his shoes back on.]*

DIRECTOR: **PLACES! CLAPPER LOADER!**

CHIT: *[Holds hands over his ears.]* BUST MY DRUMS WHY DONTCHA!

CHAT: Upsy daisy we go *[they ascend the step ladder to the red Pontiac's trunk and recline as previously; she runs her right hand over the car's red paint in a grand effleurance].*

SCRIPT GIRL: *[In an aside to the Director, patting him on the back.]* Nice! Not an original sentence in his whole script, yet it will live for centuries! Unless the fascists burn it. That's my vote.

DIRECTOR: **Misfire!** You must be thinking of the script for the ill-fated film *Rust*.

CLAPPER LOADER: *[The mention of that movie-set shooting has riled him. Takes off his leather jacket to reveal a sweatshirt touting a non-milk diet.]* Hell, boss, that film should be re-titled *The Brutal and the Ugly*. It's a local case that seems to go everywhere and nowhere at once. One needs soft eyes, but a hard heart, to see everything involved with it. What a legal mess. Betcha Alex B. ends up suing the prosecutor and Baldwin's wife will find it hilarious.

CHIT for CHAT

DIRECTOR: Hell, the D.A. should just turn that fuckin' case over to AI bot attorneys to argue over knowledge and wisdom and settle the damn thing.

CHIT: *[Settling into his reclined position.]* Shit! I feel like Camus' Sisyphus, climbing and reascending that step ladder. You know, does one ever really get anywhere? A Zeno-kind of thing. Is there actually a Destination, even? Is there to be an ending to our chat, Chat?



CHAT: But ya gotta imagine Sisyphus happy.

CHIT: *[Noticing the Director is still chatting with crew members.]* Ya ever notice, ya gotta exercise all that is *worst* in oneself in order to persist somewhat intact in such a world as ours? It's the chief assumption on which modern civilization rests.

CHAT: The wealthier the person, the more they've drawn upon the worst in themselves. And *who* now tops the list?

CHIT: *[Pinches his nose with two fingers.]*

CHAT: Yep, Elon “Stinky” Musk. One of those “Health is a Privilege” guys. . . . You win a cigar! Chit, can you remember anything that happened before arriving at this facility?



Musk Money.

CHIT: A dream, doc: I open a door. See before me, *my three selves* and I'm grasping in my arms a bundle of weeds. But then realize it's a shriveled, shrunken body — mine! I feel the dream is about what I just was saying about modern civilization and what it does to the self.

CHAT: Have you ever been in rehabilitation for abusing psychoactive drugs?

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: I confess [*hands at prayer*], I've imbibed Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* and *The Perennial Philosophy*, but later took a Zoom class on The New Materialism.

CHAT: Do you feel odd and strange?

CHIT: Always, Dorinda.

CHAT: Spielberg. His remake of *A Guy Named Joe*. I never saw it, Joe. Forest fires and flying don't mix. War and flying, yes.



CHIT: Ah, freakin' flyin' machines, shrapnel, sensual, coming hard, distant, too close. Cruel gravity. People walking around on clouds in uniform, uniformly. Always. Always the proverbial romantic triangle: a guy, a gal, a pal. A human Trinity site of emotional explosion.

CHAT: A palliative: when they flew at night they could see the stars.

CHIT: They were *real* stars then. Not Internet ghosts. Tracy, Dunne, Johnson. And our contemporary writers? Ugh. Back when, a proper pen-man could describe every stage and process of stomach flu in minute detail and make it sound gorgeously beautiful.

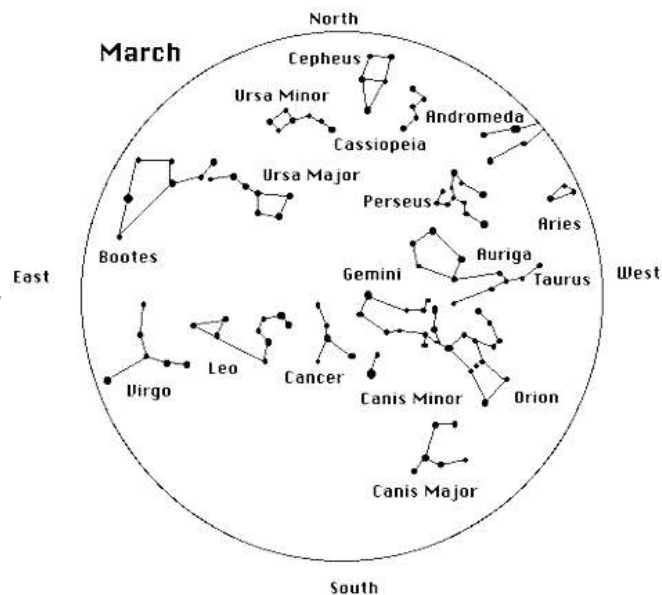
CHAT: Name one.

CHIT: James Agee. Imagine him describing His Evil Majesty COVID-XIX.

CHAT: Me, too — feelin' edgy and agey [*pulling her left knee up and down several times*].

CHIT: Witty Agee would've written an essay on the pandemic titled "Fresh Maggots in February".

CHAT: It's March. March Madness.
The March constellations are above us. Enjoy!



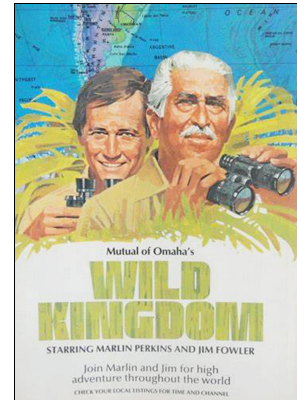
CHIT for CHAT

DIRECTOR: ROLL CAMERA!

CHIT: I have studied the stars and the Beckettian Voidspace, and not just a little bit. Oh, oh! Cancer and Gemini are near the center point. I'm a Gemini and I've had a grody skin cancer before. Does not bode well, does it, Dory? A man — *not* Mark Twain who was born and died around the comet's appearance — may die at the age of seventy without having the chance to see Halley's Comet. Years ago, around the time of this very same arrangement of stars, *Sesame Street's* Cookie Monster sketch switched from "C is for Cookie" to a healthier version "Cookies Are a Sometimes Food." Fuck. I'm lost. Not a word.



Halley's Comet.



Jim Fowler and Marlin Perkins

CHAT: But, on the friggin' double-plus side there is a Venus-Jupiter Conjunction visible tonight! The two planetary bodies will be, like us, shoulder-to-shoulder. Bodes super-well for *us*, heh amigo? **Perk up!**

CHIT: Like naturalist Marlin Perkins? Loved his TV romp with animals, *Wild Kingdom*. Yes, he did wrestle snakes, big ones!

CHAT: Sponsored by Mutual of Omaha. Speaking of snakes, I had this teen-thing for his younger side-kick Jim Fowler.

CHIT: Speaking of snakes . . . back to the Garden of Eden. The *first conversation* between Man and Woman. It was akin to **The Big Bang** — unzipping I read about it in Italo Calvino's *Cosmicomics* — which sent all that we are gazing at tonight going, expanding.

CHAT: Elaborate. Remember Estragon says his name is "Adam".

CHIT: The ball started rolling with the I-Thou thing. I call it **The Big Chat Bang**. Like the flutter of butterfly wings, things took off big time, over time. The whole fabric of our existence, its warp 'n weft, begins; these verbal disturbances spread to every part, locomotives itself into all encounters, promotes wanderings, enters jaunts and rambles, spreads ideas, gets people hung, gets faculty tenure, facilitates honeymoons, and even encourages solitary tramps to converse with themselves. Sublime frequencies, voices!

CHIT for CHAT

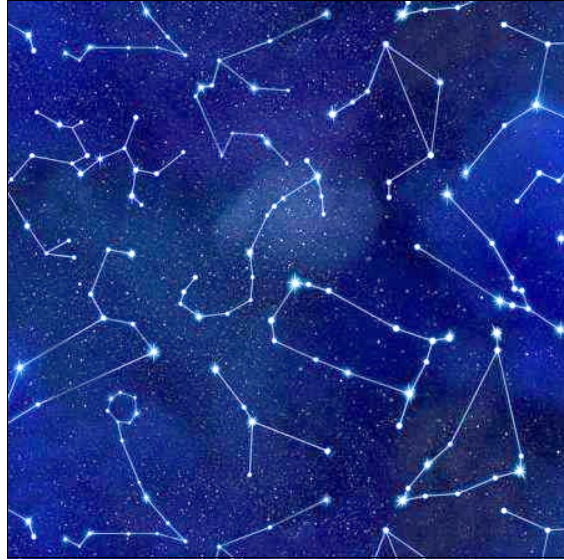
CHAT: And so WE are here. Q.E.D., huh? Thanks to the playwright who may be wrong to create an “Ludicakadrama.”

CHIT: *[Eyeing his watch.]* Yes, here. With ten hours and thirty-four minutes more darkness ahead. **Tick-tok, tick-tok**

. . . *[Strokes the car's finish.]* This baby needs buffing. You know, from *buffalo*.

CHAT: *[Locks her hands behind her head.]*

Ooooo! Ya always are buffaloin' me. Being with you is *such* an eternal holiday *[in a tone of voice indicating irony]*. And you're always giving me odd names like **Dorinda**. And fuckin' with my brain at eight-tile draw Scrabble. Remember? You claimed just because you drew eight letters on the first draw which formed a declarative sentence related to literature, you had *instantly* won the game! No need to even lay down the tiles, you said. **I was lost. Not a word. Just a Big Pause.**



Eight-letter Scrabble hand drawn on first round.

CHIT: You your dog's paws? My back's straight. Stiff neck. Hard to twist. Do I have my head on straight on top of it like the ball of a cup-'n-ball in its cup at the end of a stick.

CHAT: Ah, Stick Boy, just stickin' to the facts, huh? Like toilet paper to your shoe, like! **Speak! Speak!** I shall listen.

CHIT: Are you serious? I'm the brightest! My facts are as vast as Sirius in the Great Dog And just as serious. **Woof-woof!** *[Suggesting otherwise.]*

CHAT: Fie! You're barking up the wrong tree — like Beckett not having women in *Waiting for Godot* — but the right constellation. No limpidity there. By the way, my dad once told me The Big Dipper was the Great Dog's pooper-scooper.

CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: I shall do no more than seek my constellative lessons *[puts hands around his eyes as if using binoculars]*, to the accompaniment of a tongue that is not mine, but yours. But it is getting late and my eyes are heavy and tomorrow they must rise betimes.

CHAT: Shakespeare? *[Gets the allusion wrong.]* The Bard must've slept little to write so much. Isn't there some math equation that proves that? Euler's Method, maybe.

CHIT: Unlike our playwright-scriptwriter, who seems to rarely awaken. I heard one of the female crew say several times "He isn't woke." He's not into "trigger warnings", but after the Rust set incident, he's rethinking the issue. But you can't say his writing doesn't partake of wry, self-deprecating humor. And he has a sure eye for making swipes at "raw capitalism". *[In the background, crew unload a large trunk, put near the car.]*

CHAT: Praise, praise! This guy some relative of yours or what? I mean his protruding ears. And he also whistles through his teeth when under stress. You know he initially titled this night scene of ours "Quiet Night, New Moon"? Wanted us to moon the camera at the end of scene and simultaneously yell: **FUCK COPYRIGHTS!**

In another play he wrote a few years ago, *The Thormented*, I had a minor not-too-hard-to-master role playing "Stardenburdenhardenbart", a German-Ukrainian peasant crone, who washed her hair at the opening of every scene over a tin bucket, gently twisting the rope of it like a mop. It was curtain UP, my hair Down. My lines were as short as a cocaine addict's razored lines yet bereft of the resulting punch. I felt I should have been wearing a bright yellow sweatshirt declaiming: **MAKE USE OF ME!**

During rehearsals for that play, he kept yelling for me to "Apply the Thirty-Six Stratagems!" What the FUCK??

DIRECTOR: **CUT!** *[Tosses down his tan desert hat in anger.]* Abnegate the one

hundred and eight Buddhist sins you over-active clowns! Ya took a wrong turn on the Eight-Fold Path back there on your backs and are on an unrestrained articulation binge. Thank the Buddha our playwright was not here to hear. He often carries a Kalashnikov to protect his ever-present precious Matryoshka doll depicting his dead wife and four daughters killed in a KLM jet crash. K&M are his M&Ms, if you get me.



CHIT for CHAT

CHIT: Jeeze, I'm trying to step on the moon and my boss is yelling at me for challenging the bleak homogeneity the Far Right

has in store for us. **Holy fuck!**

CHAT: Wholly! Didn't you hear what the Director just said, you dingus?



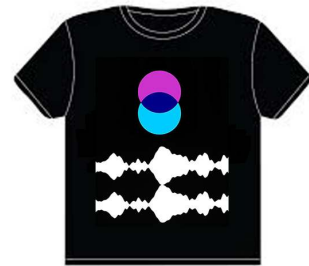
The Director's desert hat.

CHIT: Rick Dingus? The photo prof at Texas Tech University? He's seventy-one now. And I've heard he loves apportioned severed fowl all twined and trussed. And loves the dulling effect of habit, says it keeps him sharp. I believe him, but not sure you can believe me.

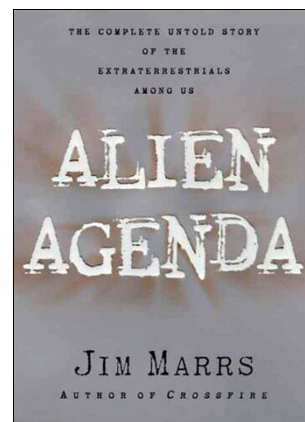
DIRECTOR: *[Expanding on his previous point.] Nessun dorma!* Your attention! The playwright's wife, thirty-nine at the time of her death, was named Sestina. Her father was a *poète maudit* known for his disordered grey hair, grimy white shirt, open, and pair of dirty white boots, over size ten, narrow and pointed. The playwright told me his "Ses" wore tight sweaters "all the better to shove words into predetermined zones." Yes, before her awful demise, his plays always had a mother, a boss, a wild man, a mysterious First Stranger / Alien, and a listener.

He lost his family, suffering SDF (severe decision fatigue), hyperventilating. Couldn't keep his boots on. Checked into a mental clinic after becoming fascinated by the cartography of butcher paper stains, photographing them incessantly. In the "facility," he passed time reading Beckett's plays and novels over and over for a year. Kept a worn, well-thumbed copy of *Krapp's Last Tape* in his small bathroom just in case he ran out of regular toilet paper. Spent hours watching Lean Cuisines orbit in his little microwave's glow, "Round, round, like a small flying saucer," as he put it.

Upon discharge, he moved on to Raymond Federman's experimental fiction, appreciating the trauma suffered by that French Jew when young, and that fact that Federman did his Ph.D. dissertation on Beckett. He then discovered Eckhard Gerdes's bizarre plays and novels through an anthology Gerdes had edited for The Journal of Experimental Fiction on that intriguing "Pen Man" who also referred to himself as "Moinous", Me-We in French. When he started writing again, he'd pop Air Force pilot "GO" pills [*Modafinil*] while cranking out pages and pages of text without re-reading them.



"Night-Scene" T-shirt as worn by crew; logo turned counter-clockwise so as to figure the rising moon in the scene, the actors below, reclining on the car's rear.



Playwright's book on UFOs.

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Holding his precious Matryoshka as if it was an Academy Award, he once told me: “The dead only speak through poetry, but poetry is spoken by extraterrestrials.” Said he wanted to ultimately create a “Sampladelic masterpiece.” I know he was influenced by poet Ann Lauterbach’s insight in “*The Night Sky*” that the crucial job of artists is “to release materials into the animated middle ground between subjects,” and so thereby initiate “the difficult but joyful process of transfusive “human connection.” It was he who came up with the Venn diagram symbol used on our production team’s T-shirt [see page above] and on the cover of the book, *Chit for Chat*, that will document his tribute to experimental fiction.

So cut him some slack, you Read Warriors!

Chit and Chat bow heads in shame. Beckett, Federman, and Gerdes carom about in their cabezas, ringing bells like a pinball machine. They then raise their noggins slowly like moons rising, smelling ash and smoke of piñon trees roasting in the fireplaces of snug local homes and brought to them by a gentle breeze. The “tone” on-set is very different now. Like the set of Rust it’s THEN and NOW. The duo are committed to learning to steady themselves in the stark night, Beckett-Brave, but also managing to keep from knotting up during the process. ‘Tis not for naught . . .

DIRECTOR: Actors, you are delivered to sight, but also to contact; as word-drunk as you are you still need to be more *haptocentric*. Now [pregnant pause] let rocks ‘n pebbles turn into brown rice! And thank the muses of drama we have not yet been obliterated by a dancing swarm of fireflies or Miller moths, which many crew members remember from last year’s debacle. [Much laughter from the crew. Director’s enthusiasm is infectious. Chit

looks like a hyped race horse eager at the gate.] **ACTION!**

CHIT: Fuckin’ -A! I got it! [Tosses his arms wide and bellows the words from the finale song of the movie Fame, “I Sing the Body Electric”]:

***And I’ll look back on Venus
I’ll look back on Mars
And I’ll burn with the fire
Of ten million stars
And in time and in time
We will all be stars.***

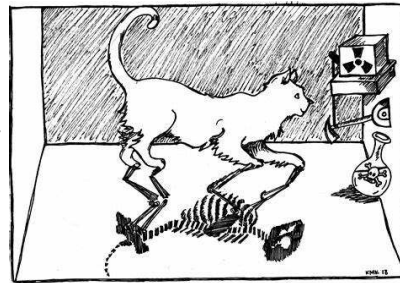
CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: WHOOPPEEEEE!

CHIT: Whoopi Goldberg? *That* star's real name is Caryn Elaine Johnson! So many stars, too many with remade or funny names. My fav is Rip Torn, whose *real* name was Elmore Rual. Died at eighty-eight, twin infinity signs **88** [*traces figure with his index finger in the sky*] carved into his headstone.

CHAT: Oy vey! What you so often try to convey, the infinite.

CHIT: Hollywood stars are put into concrete. The celestial infinite stars can't be made concrete, albeit cosmologists love to try. Newton for instance. But now we know, with a quantum of solace, that the universe isn't a clock *per se*. All we can do is stand back and do a quantum wave function [*waves his right hand up at the night sky*] welcoming friendly, god-like extraterrestrials.



CHAT: And hope *Schrödinger's Cat* is still alive after it all.

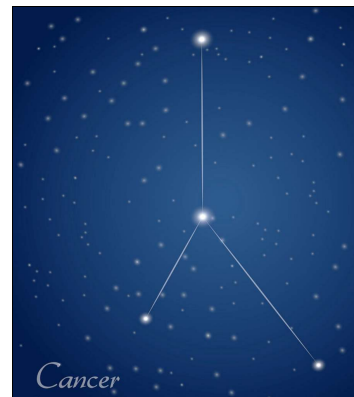
CHIT: If it is, that feline would most likely be found in one of Meow Wolf's wacky rooms.

CHAT: Meooooow! You're the only one that is never far from me. A faithful interlocutor, you go everywhere with me, as if we are soldered together, overcoming solipsistic flesh.

CHIT: Ah! Blossoming of *our* birth! Two sides of the same coin. Not groin. Omit!

CHAT: And the unfigurable horizon of our deaths! Mishima's decomposing flesh, thing. Both taking occurring under the sparkle-spread of the stars constellated into figurable figures. Cancer's the worst. It plies its suit, wanting to marry until death do us part or we become uploaded to a bio-machine.

CHIT: A worsted suit filed against . . . [*His voice trails off as reclining, he puts hands behind his head, staring upward, as confident as Zarathustra.*] Some would have it that we exist *only in the other*, under the other's influence. Like a MAGA supporter. And maybe under influence of stars, too. Like Ronnie Raygun. The Big Dipper dipping into people's affairs. Would it be there's no place for us to return to ourselves? Alienation Nation. Is it madness whereby a human thinks it's



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a machine, a chatbot that it's human? Can we be both? But suppose we repented? Nah, too many people are bloody ignorant apes, at least Estragon thinks so.

CHAT: My estrogen is way down! Like my stock portfolio. But repent from what? Alienation without return? You need THE CALL that addresses yourself to yourself. You need faith in those three contested letters: E-G-O. To sum it up, go get some ego, Mr. Cogito! In incognito at a bar where no one knows you, as an active shooter of shots. Should help as *In vino veritas*. But avoid watching the overhead TV because *In imaginibus falsum*.

CHIT: *[Abruptly sits up.]* Incognito? Neato! But how about a human magneto In an Irish bar, maybe, Maddy? Devoid of Banshees, of course. Yeah! I can do that. I like your carrot better than your stick. As long as I don't have to stare into that wacky hand mirror of yours with the inscription *KNOW THYSELF*. *[His élan vital appears to re-appear, literally shaking his body, inspiring a desperate exclamation. Cups hands over his mouth, amplifying his voice, pleading an ad astra to the named constellations above.]*

HEY, STELLA!!!!

CHAT: I ain't goin' up stars — er upstairs — Stanley. *[Stares at her hand mirror, then addressing an aside to it in a cracked voice,]* You do be merciless, my mirror, you're lackin' in any mercy, you are.

CHIT: Am a lackin' what my eyes hear, my ears see, Maddy. *[Mimics rural sounds: sheep, birds, cows, cocks. Winks.]* Maht I be gettin' a peck on da jaw, near mah ear or vicey-versa, darlin'? Peck, peck, peck. A Peck on my Gregory. Ah sure got a comet's tail o' memories o' past loves 'ahind me.



Chat laughs. A long period of silence. Chit puts his sucking stone in his mouth. Music in the distance, reminding all present of Others Out There. A comet is seen in the East — or is it space junk re-entering? — reminding all present of the possibility of Others Out There, Way Out There. She holds two arms upward, two poles sticking out of chilling human flesh.

CHAT: It is for me alone to join together all the instants of my life, all the splinters of my flesh *[bringing her hands together into a firm grasp]*. Warm me, create a community of resonance as we join hands, Chit *[grabs his hands in hers, intertwining fingers]*, so that

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our polar egos will *resonant* as well. Like a Venn diagram overlap. Or two beers spilt and blending on a bar top.

CHIT: *[Removes his sucking stone, stares at it.]* My sucking stone does have the shape of a Venn overlap now that you mention it. Look. *Voilà!*



CHAT: Or like two pairs of shoes with shoelaces tied together. Touching-touched. *Touché!*

CHIT: We're old. Yes, like two pairs of old shoes tied together and tossed over a power line, "Blowin' in the Wind". Remember that song?



CHAT: Dylan. Sixty years ago. Let's hope we have time to grow older than old. But more apropos is Death Cab for Cutie's haunting song "When Soul Meets Body":

*And I do believe it's true
That there are roads left in both of our shoes
But if the silence takes you,
then I hope it takes me too.*

CHIT: Well put! A Chat for Chit. Thanks.

CHAT: Your breath mixes with mine and fruit of the vine. We're a boundless union purifying itself through boundless separation. Our bodies are a darkness filled with organs; this evening is a darkness filled with our bodies.



CHIT: And this universe is filled with dark matter that matters among stellar performances tonight. As I child, the night of other days, I cried about the circling figures in the stars.

CHAT: Like Cassiopeia's. A figure in Greek mythology, Queen of Aethiopia and wife of King Cepheus. She was arrogant and vain, characteristics that led to her downfall.

CHIT: Well, then she fell upward! Her constellation suggests the BING BANG of a billiard game by Minnesota Fats or a highschool science demo: pucks hitting pucks, transferring energy between them on a field of ice.

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Constellation Cassiopeia being vain.

CHAT: We are hedging about a psychoanalytic fact, UFOs, which are really Unidentified Flying Objects of Desire. On board, experiments are performed: penetration, impregnation, neural links, genetic-mods. It entails the loss of the subject, the death of speaking. The saucer is the uterus, the surgical theater, the family romance, the tomb, the projection, the introjection. Yes, the perfect object of psychoanalysis.

CHIT: Yer just repeatin' the Playwright's last Santa Fe lecture on H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* and the film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* at his Working Theater, where he was lionized by the group who came up from Roswell to hear him and see us.

CHAT: Santa Fe is known for its inhabitants' interest in the occult, the metaphysical. My hairdresser, for instance. She's *into* ancient Chinese philosopher Zhang-zhi's anecdotes

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and fables, foundational texts of Taoism. During one of my cuttings, she told me: The Great Thinker opined that during the Creation, the gods noticed that Chaos had no face. So they decided to drill through its skin the Seven Openings that allow for seeing, hearing, breathing, eating, and crapping. When the seventh hole was opened, Chaos gave out the **Great Burp** and died. But from his dispersed flesh was born the sun and the moon, the stars, rivers, mountains, and humans. Cassiopeia thus was born.

CHIT: What about Jason Bourne? Just kiddin'. Hey, our own friggin' body is a corporeal envelope, a perforated surface, and our ego-body has its ego-hole. Macro-micro stuff, right?

CHAT: No, left. What's *left over* in each case of a self-revelation. The body is made of the same flesh as the world and so all planes of existence intersect and intermingle.

Ultimately, all identity is dissolved into one sole **Clamor of Being!**

CHIT: What? You're losin' me here. I feel like I'm using a mental walker and you're ridin' a psychic electric scooter. I feel I'm lookin' into a mirror, but only see a sparkling decoy on the surface of an empty mirror. Like my LCD screen appears when my Infinity cable TV connection goes **KA-BLOOEY!**

CHAT: Just take a breath, fill you lungs up. Rest your head [*copping lyrics from J. P. Cooper's song "Losing Me"*]. Remember back when we auditioned for that German writer Peter Weiss's startling play *Marat / Sade*. Well, in his novel *The Aesthetics of Resistance* he wrote: "If nothing would be as we had hoped, it would change nothing of our hopes." Good words to wrap around oneself, given the extreme tension these days between threatened hope and crushing reality.

CHIT: Ah, yes. We were once full of hopes, sexual gropes. The emotional purpose of art is supposed to . . .



A young Chit and Chat audition for their roles in *Marat / Sade*.

CHAT: Be a place to put pain and sadness. Melanie Klein's "depressive mourning"!

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CHIT: What our Playwright is aiming at; he told me the audience is mean to be put “in the presence of two autonomous and contradictory entities” — US — who are to “let fly with their tongues.”

CHAT: We’ve certainly done that. Resting supine of this car trunk, I’d like to let fly at the Oligarches something about how work in society too often doesn’t add to human flourishing, exists only to line someone else’s pockets.

CHIT: We may never reach the pure post-work utopia, but we should move closer to it. Ah, let’s honor our Playwright and Director, erring on the side of melancholy.

CHAT: *[Whispers in Chit’s ear.]* Written in eighteen eighty-seven, right? Why that’s my gym locker’s combination!

CHIT: *[Whispering back.]* That pilates gym, Unlock Your Flower Power, just off Cerrillos?

CHAT: Uh-huh. My hairdresser told me about it *[performs an en se pavanant flourish.]*

DIRECTOR: **CUT!** *[Claps vigorously, his face relaxing, distending into a broad smile like a puddle of melting butter spreading on a flat surface. A DoorDash truck pulls up.]* Achtung troops! Line up for spicy Mexican hot chocolate with whipped cream and sprinkles courtesy of Kakawa Chocolate House.

The pair climb off the Pontiac’s trunk, run to a large trunk and change into elaborate 17th-Century costumes and begin to perform a stately dance under the stars to Gabriel Fauré’s 1887 Pavane in F-sharp Minor, Opus 50 played on an iPhone through a Bose blue-tooth speaker. Crew member with a steadicam follows their elegant gyrations.

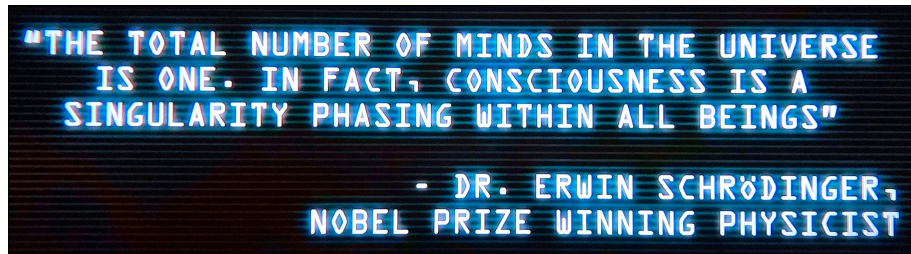
CREW MEMBER: *[Dancing about.]* It’s about fuckin’ time! My blood sugar’s been, well, I thought I was about to die and reincarnate on the Hale-Bopp comet. *[An aside to another crew member]* Chit ‘n Chat’s performance, it’s turning into a slow career suicide-pact, ain’t it? *[No response.]* Ah, now that guy *[points to the food truck delivery man, squat with wide hips and sloping shoulders, closely cropped black hair, featureless pasty face due to the dim light]*, that dude, **ROCKS!**

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CHIT: *[Sipping his chocolate.]* I got the Mayan Rose Almond drink.

CHAT: *[Tasting hers.]* Mine, the Marie Antoinette with Orange Blossom flavor.

Chit and Chit exchange sips of each others chocolate drinks, climb back on the car trunk. Crew members in chairs, wrapped in warm blankets sipping, talking. Two crew members position an electronic sign to the rear of the car and a few feet higher facing the camera. They switch it on:

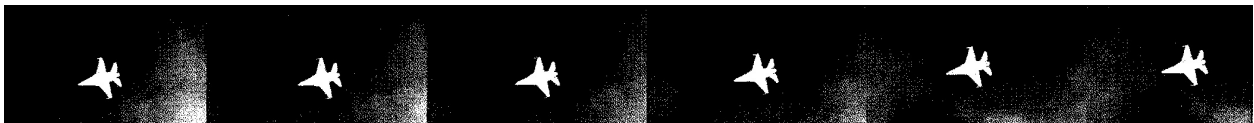


"THE TOTAL NUMBER OF MINDS IN THE UNIVERSE
IS ONE. IN FACT, CONSCIOUSNESS IS A
SINGULARITY PHASING WITHIN ALL BEINGS"

- DR. ERWIN SCHRÖDINGER,
NOBEL PRIZE WINNING PHYSICIST

The scene was set to repeat what was in the script, then the set was abruptly changed to something else. The thunder of military jets zooming overhead disturbs the natural peace. Everyone looks up into the night sky.

DIRECTOR: Places everyone. **FILM THAT!** *[The cinematographer aims his camera upward and films.]* Chit and Chat, on top of that fuckin' car. **NOW!**



CHIT: *[Drops his chocolate drink.]* They're way the hell early. What da fuck! Ho! It's as if we been mistaken for suspicious Palestinians skulking on the West Bank.

Our duo quickly re-ascend to the trunk of the red Pontiac and recline as per directions. The flight of a jet makes another pass chasing what appears to be glowing saucer in the night sky, which now descends toward the set.

CHAT: *[Looking worried.]* That saucer looks *real*. Now *that* isn't in the script, dude.

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"Rather than a sphere, the world of Beckett studies is perhaps more akin to a flattened cylinder." From "Introduction," *Jouer Beckett/ Performing Beckett* (2020) by Dominic Glynn and Jean-Michel Gouvard.

Terror is both knowledge and non-knowledge. An electronically-modified voice — very strange, alien — from high above on the right, from high above from the outside, from the inside, an inner voice from above on the right, from outside, a strong outside inner voice from, somewhere.

The wise enter into the flame. Then out of the flame into the day; out the waxing half of the month into the six months when the sun goes to the north, out of those months into the year, out of the year into the sun into the moon, out of the moon into the lightning. Whoever reaches it will never return to the human vortex. Not suffering rebirth any more. Stretch out your bodies, limbs, arms, legs, all, all stretch out. Lie still now, still, still, still, still, that is it, now you are good, your are fine. Now close your eyes.

Bright snaking light shoots from the glowing disc, winds its way down and about the set, circling the Jenny Holzer-like electronic word sign, then crosses before, astonished, crew. A zone of evaporation ruptures the lines of communication between the Crew and the Actors. A ferocious dilemma of expression ensues when a snap cuts the air and searing light streak

CHIT for CHAT

circuits the set, as a wider, even brighter beam emerges from the craft, illuminating Chit and Chat as they lie frozen on the trunk of the red Pontiac, their eyes colored copper. Then whole bodies are snatched upward, a massive weight of significance.



THE DIRECTOR: Observe that ray!

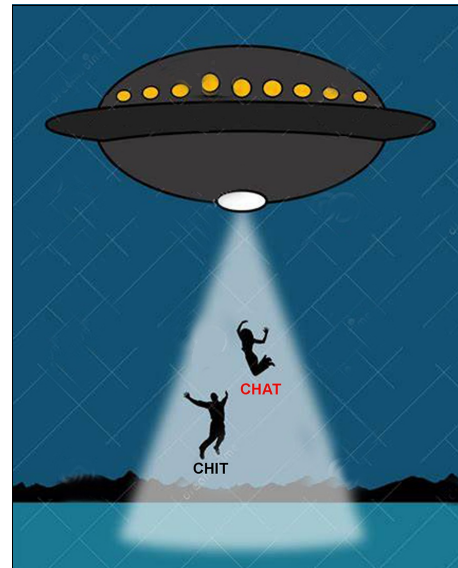
CREW MEMBER #1: *[Screams, ducking.]* Laser-seeded rays peppered with radioactive salt! Absolute shitweed! Blow it out your inbox!

CHIT: I don't think this was in the script! I mean there was supposed to be a trunk show held at the denouement, but I don't think this was what the Playwright exactly had it mind, yet . . . Maybe the only way out — or back — is through.

CHAT: *[Both palms of her hands are over her closed eyes.]* Seems we're off to the Land of Oz. Whoa, I remembered! It's Palm Sunday Eve. Bet the Goyim have something to do with this.

CHIT: Wanna Shin Bet?

As Chit and Chat's bodies rise from the car, the amazed crew watch in stunned silence. It is a scene right out of Close Encounters of the Third Kind.



CHIT for CHAT

CHAT: Is the Playwright a member of Steven Greer's CSETI?

CHIT: No. But he *is* a Sartre and Beckett fan. Maybe we are going to be airlifted onto another stage to act in *Huis Clo*. [Looks at Chat.] Naught is right with you!

CHAT: [Cheeks shaking.] Ah, *No Exit* . . . but with aliens added to the cast! Ya'll have a great evening. See ya when we return from Mars!

The unthinkable, the unspeakable. The alien craft ascends surrounded by a sparkling bed of stars. A soft breeze smelling of piñon sweeps over the astonished crew. The scene reminds us that Truth is a wood violet that blooms in the least likely corner; here it can be found in obscure pulp sci-fi mags, sought in Beckett plays.

DIRECTOR: [Seeing the pair disappear.] Jaysus! Too bad we don't have Wilhelm Reich's orgone-energy anti-saucer truck-mounted Spacegun! Hey, aaaaanything can hhhappen for any weird reason; without any reason, nothing can happen. Okay . . . that's one fuckin' **WRAP!**



Wilhelm Reich's Spacegun (1954).

CREW MEMBER #1: [Yelling, waving at the Director.] Hey, boss are we still going to get paid? I mean our actors have been . . .

CREW MEMBER #2: You kidding? This'll make all of us **RICH!** Hey, I'm going to change my last name to "Roswell". Michael Roswell. I like the sound of it. Perfect *nom de plume* for my detective novel-in-progress *Case of the Tattooed Slacker*.

DIRECTOR: [On his cellphone, looking like the now-famous shot of Alex Baldwin on his iPhone after the *Rust* film set shooting. He pulls out pencil and paper and yells to the script girl.] An astonishing tear in the fabric of the Playwright's textual space. [Whispering to Crew Member #2.] But we may need to find another pair of actors. [Addressing the script girl again.] Get me my Smith Corona, quick. The adventure beckons!

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CHIT for CHAT

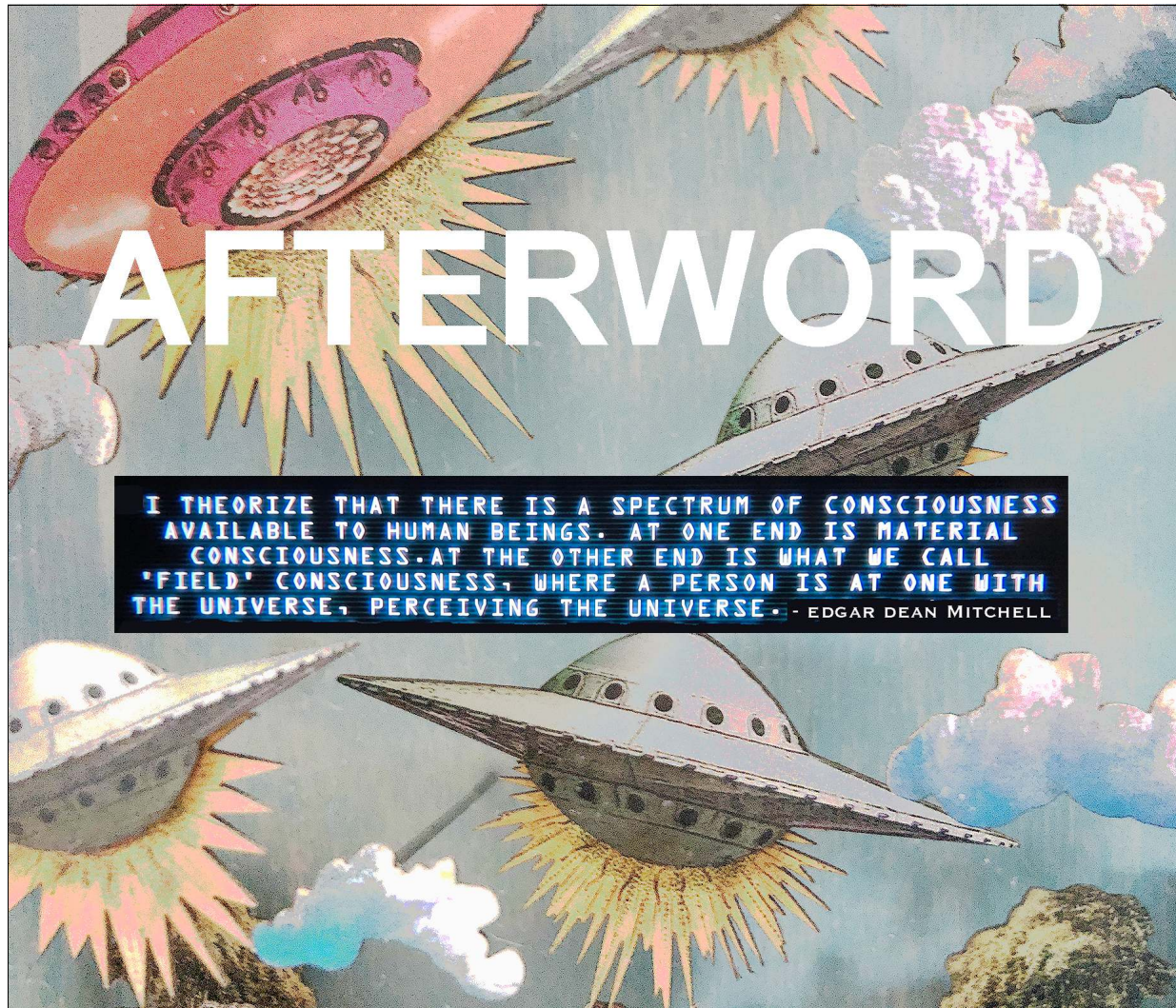


**“They were
what?!!!
Abducted?”**

The Producer gets a call from the Director.



To be Continued in the Unknown



Highly altered, detail from Scott Lyon's boxed diorama *Welcome Committee* (2003).

Our digital world somehow feels alien
as if implanted by an intelligence from
the stars. We are a species that sits
uneasily at the edge of the galaxy, at
once clutching tight to the breast of
Mother Earth and, at the same time
reaching with a trembling hand towards
shimmering metallic discs humming
quietly in the dusk sky.

— *Alien Information Theory* (2019) Andrew R. Gallimore

PIERROT LE FOU



**Mon Dieu! Pas une
autre soucoupe
volante, Monsieur
Godard!**

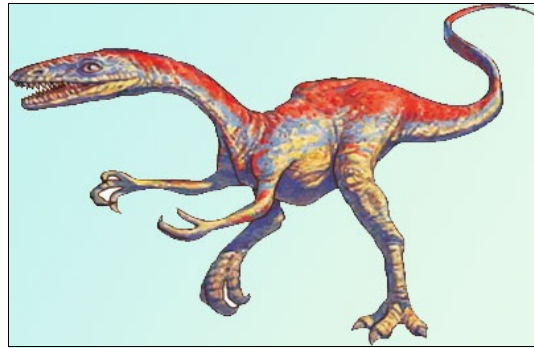
Poster hanging in The Director's office.

Beginning as a teen,

I've been interested in Art, Film, Literature, Dinosaurs, UFOs, and New Mexico. Maybe because I was born very close in time to the famous Roswell UFO crash incident of July 1947 and the discovery by paleontologists of a very rich fossil quarry of *Coelophysis* skeletons in Chinle rocks located on New Mexico's famous Ghost Ranch, home to artist Georgia O'Keeffe.

My fascination with sci-fi novels and extraterrestrial life was given a second-stage boost when I and my father — a Senior Design Engineer at Lockheed Aircraft's super top-secret "Skunk Works" aircraft design division — both witnessed a cigar-shaped, multicolored UFO hovering over Rocketdyne International's moon rocket engine test site in the San Fernando Valley's Santa Susana Mountains, not far from the infamous Spahn Ranch where Charles Manson's "family" hashed their evil plots. My father said "We have nothing like that, not even on the drawing board, yet." I took that as his confirmation we'd seen *something* not easily explained away as of this earth. In my earlier twenties, I became a fan of the TV series *Star Trek*. Later, of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* with its envisionment of time / dimension travel. In my thirties, I was hired to work on Douglas Trumbull's special effects for the first *Star Trek: The Movie* (1979) thanks to my graduate school friend Virgil Mirano.

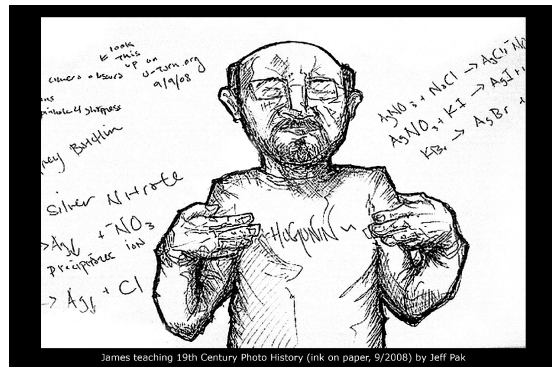
Art, Film, Lit, Dinosaurs, UFOs, the Land of Enchantment — topics caught up in the flow of time. Immersed in the Past and projecting toward the Future, rooted in "database aesthetics". In film: Hitchcock, Jean Cocteau, Fellini, Truffaut, Éric Rohmer, Godard, Tarkovsky. Enjoying Carla Wilson's *Curious Impossibilities: Ten Cinematic Riffs* (2017) as a creative entry into films. In literature: Sci-fi pulps, François Rabelais, Alfred Jarry, S. J. Perelman, Raymond Roussel, Ionesco, Beckett, Robbe-Grillet, Flann O'Brien, John Barth, Harold Jaffe, Ronald Sukenick, Donald Barthleme, Yuriy Tarnawski, Stephen Dobyns, and Raymond Federman. All became delightfully entangled when I retired from teaching Photo History and Theory at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and



Dimension travel.

CHIT for CHAT

moved to a place I had visited several times in the past and now wanted to be site of my future creative endeavors, Santa Fe. Along with my retired psychoanalyst wife who is my constant companion and stimulating interlocutor. I am where I want to be, absorbing the power of Indigenous, Hispanic, and Anglo culture, only an hour from Los Alamos, it seems appropriate to be reading up on the latest theories of particle entanglement and ten dimensions and wrestling



James Hugunin teaching 19th-Century Photo History.

with the implications of physicist David Bohm's mind-boggling monistic theory espoused in *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, which posits psyche and matter as two aspects of quantum waves. To re-read Ray Kurzweil's transhumanist classic *The Singularity is Near* as an antidote to the Dark Mountain Project's pessimistic antihumanism.

While in Chicago, I met Eckhard Gerdes who was teaching Comparative Literature at Roosevelt University. I was teaching a part-time a class on Utopia / Dystopia in Literature, Art, and Architecture. Over coffee, we often talked of our favorite authors and films. Our mutual interest in *surfiction* was apparent. He wanted to get his MFA from SAIC in Creative Writing and take theory courses from me. He was accepted and so we saw each other often during his studies there. I wrote the Foreword to his MFA project, *Cistern Tawdry* (2003). Like an overlapping Venn diagram whose middle section increases in size, our mutual interests and interactions grew into a close friendship. Our love for modern and postmodern literature was a given. I had started to write fiction in the late-1980s and he supported my efforts by publishing my material, both criticism and fiction. But it was with surprise that we discovered our mutual interests also extended to jazz and experimental music. The wide range of his expertise astonished me. But always a delight was his sense of humor, his ability to think "outside the box", and his love of WORDS and words becoming IMAGES. For years, Image-text (scripto-visual) was my *thing*.

Eckhard's support of creative writers through his publishing of The Journal of Experimental Fiction (JEF) has extended his personal imagination to create a "field imagination" among the many writers encouraging them to move beyond the restrictions imposed by realist fiction and the commercial demands of mainstream publishers. Annually, JEF gives out The Kenneth Patchen Award, a prize of \$1,000 and book publication by Journal of Experimental Fiction for an innovative novel.

In 2016, Charles Hood's *Mouth* won that year's Kenneth Patchen Award. The book is a story about two women, Chica and Bela, told in alternating narrative voices with illustrations by painter-printmaker Christine Mugnolo. When museum curator Bela brings Chica on a journey from London to the Soviet Union - Siberia in search of buried

CHIT for CHAT

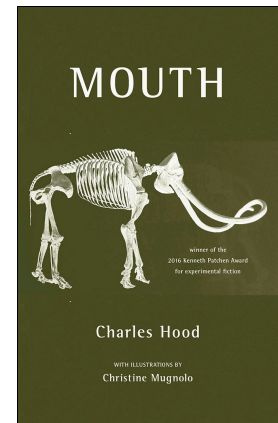
mammoth tusks and bones, the women explore their relationship, as well as Chica's past, her physical and psychic injuries, and feelings of inadequacy. The prehistoric bones become metaphoric talismans as Chica searches within herself and discovers a broken jaw, her relationship with her father, and emotions that bury deep beneath the surface of their relationship. A book whose structure and topic are *simpático* with my interests.

That same year, Eckhard nominated me for membership in Chicago's Society of Midland Authors, which I did receive. Dedicating this text to him, then, is a way saying "Thank you, Eckhard" for stimulating my creativity over some thirty years and encouraging me to push my writing further and further.

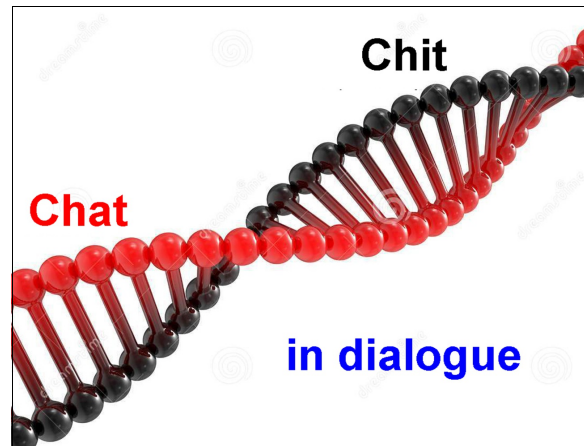
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Chit for Chat uses a dialogue format, which I initially employed in many critical reviews of art shows, where two interlocutors meet in a gallery or museum and argue over the work on display. Sometimes they'd agree, other times strongly disagree. I left it up to the reader to make the ultimate decision of Thumbs Up or Thumbs Down on the work reviewed. This Socratic dialogue, which I encouraged in my art history classes, was further developed into more fully drawn characters in my early fiction. Mikhail Bakhtin's insight that all language, all thought, appears as dialogical, had a profound affect on my thinking in this area of expression. It took into account the complex relationship between author, the work, and the reader.

Besides novels, I've always been drawn to plays (especially Beckett's) and films where such dialogue is "mapped out" in the script. This current text is a cross-genre re-working, a mash-up, of other texts. Putting into dialogue not characters so much as diverse sources, high and low. I also wanted something akin to François



Mouth, Charles Hood, JEF's 2016 Kenneth Patchen Award winning fiction.



The struggle and cooperation between Chit and Chat.



CHIT for CHAT

Truffaut's film-within-a-film in *Day for Night* (1973) and why the cover image of this text is in part taken from that film's opening title.

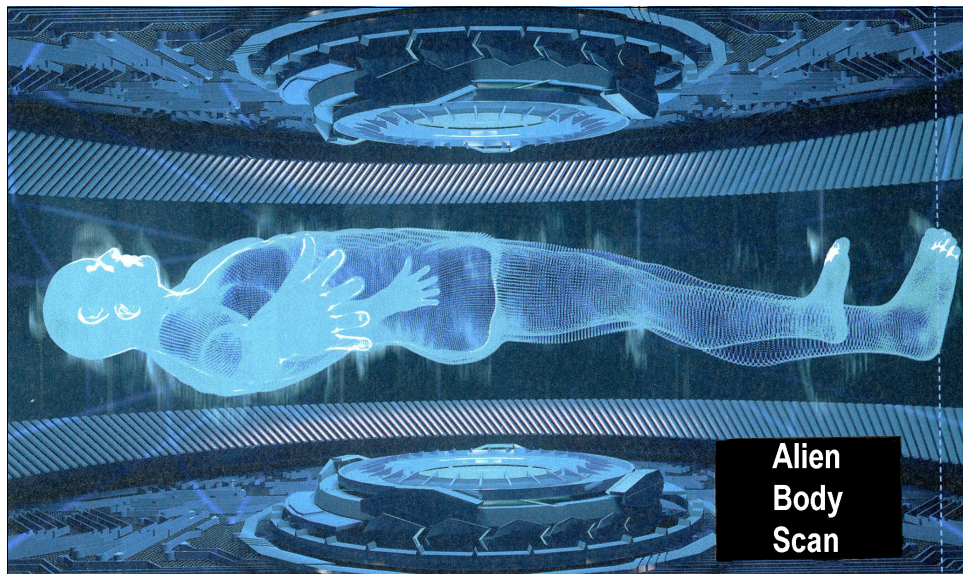
In writing *Chit for Chat*, I tried to go far beyond the more controlled writing of my previous books. I am paying more attention to compulsions I have outside of writing itself, those weird little obsessions. As the Playwright puts it in his journal: *Most writers write out of what they know about writing, but I want write out of what I don't know.* Often I typed out thoughts as they bounced around in my head, trusting that they would somehow make sense in the context of the total piece, the trilogy. Meanwhile, the Director was exploring the "dynamic of organizing bodies in space where no one's really neutral."

In sum, I WAS HAVING FUN! I'm not sure **Chat** was though as her response to the Director could be sketched as in this accompanying diagram. The book took on a Rabelaisian carnivalesque tone which I took to be a "survival tactic" to counter depression concerning the horrific state of the world these days that presses upon us from angry skies, from vicious wars, from democracy-subverting demagogues.



The Director and Chat.

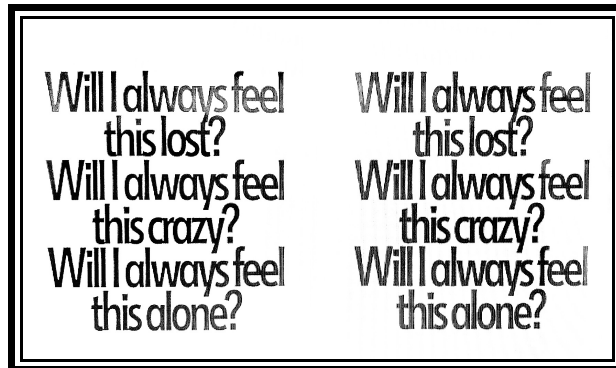
Today, Donald J. Trump was indicted. What will the future hold? Have Chit and Chat transited to somewhere more conducive to peace and pleasure? Or not! Will they return to Mother Earth unscathed? Will they suffer implants? Mind control? Will they learn



from their abduction that all the dimensions of nature are in them, not outside them, that they are the measure of everything that is outward? Or not! Will Chit come to believe, like Wilhelm Reich did, that he's an alien-hybrid, a Spaceman? A transhuman? An extropian?

A poster in Chit's unoccupied dressing room recalls his having to stand as a kid

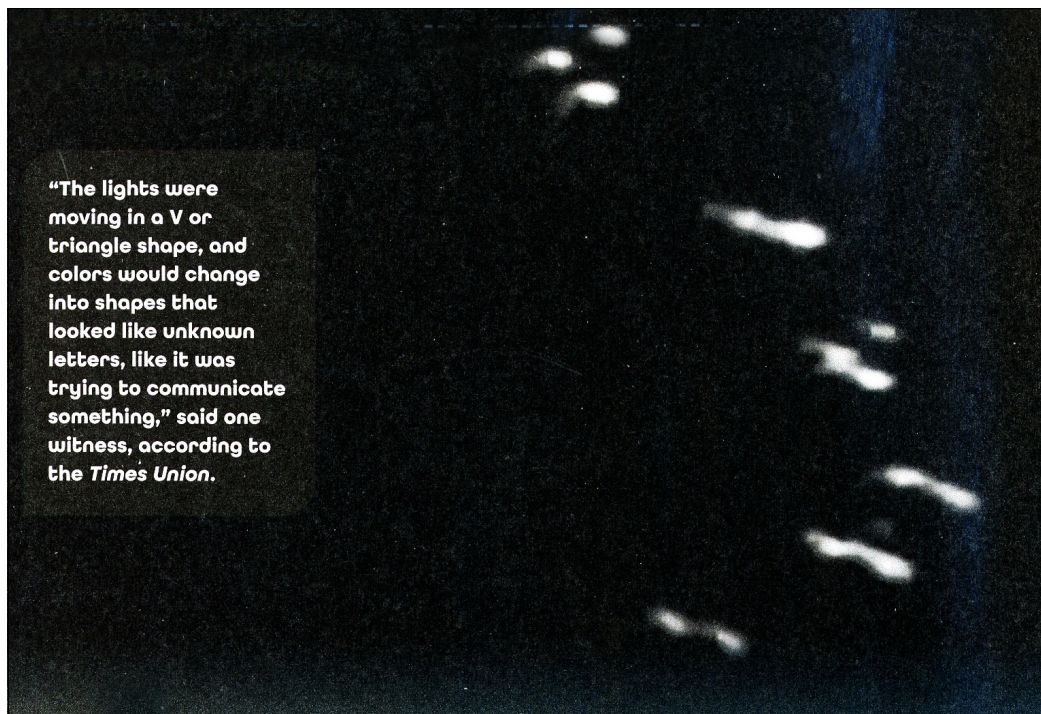
before a classroom chalkboard and do penance for one's crimes. It reveals the extent of his alienation, putting on display for all what the Playwright and Director find so interesting about him as a character.



Poster in Chit's dressing room.

Volumes two and three in this trilogy will expand upon Chit and Chat's alien abduction and post-abduction experiences, how the Playwright and Director make use of this "Event" in the lives of their actors. Ufology, theory of the mind, and transhumanism will inform these adventures.

— James R. Hugunin, Santa Fe, New Mexico

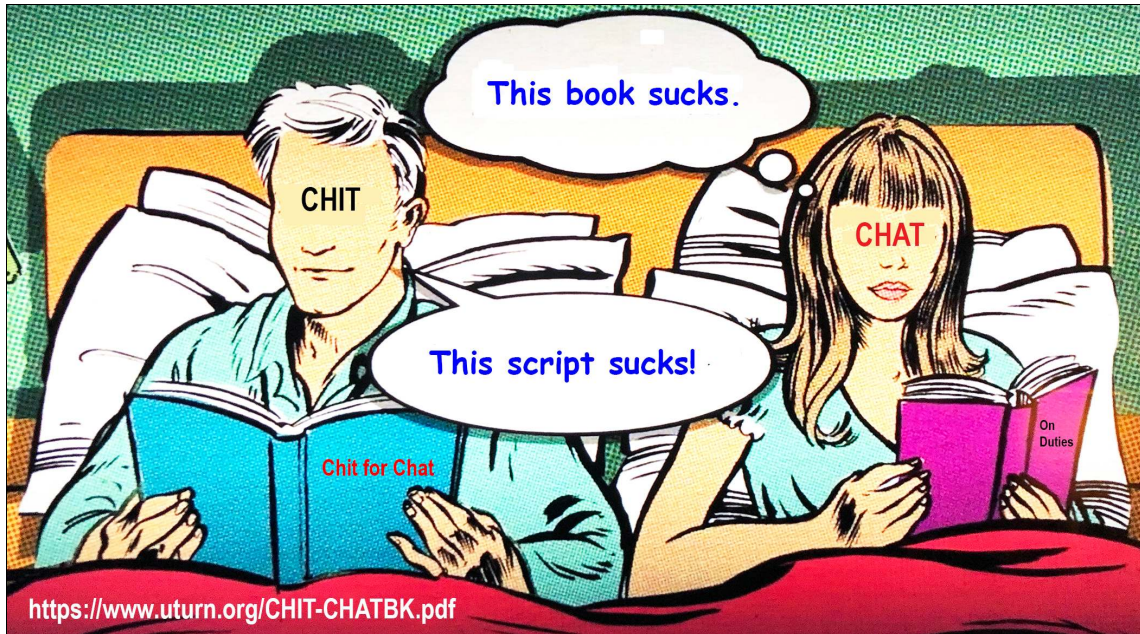




A checklist of JEF titles

- ☐ 0 *Projections* by Eckhard Gerdes
- ☐ 2 *Ring in a River* by Eckhard Gerdes
- ☐ 3 *The Darkness Starts Up Where You Stand* by Arthur Winfield Knight
- ☐ 4 *Belighted Fiction*
- ☐ 5 *Othello Blues* by Harold Jaffe
- ☐ 9 *Recto & Verso: A Work of Asemism and Pareidolia* by Dominic Ward & Eckhard Gerdes (Fridge Magnet Edition)
- ☐ 9B *Recto & Verso: A Work of Asemism and Pareidolia* by Dominic Ward & Eckhard Gerdes (Trade Edition)
- ☐ 11 *Sore Eel Cheese* by The Flakxus Group (Limited Edition of 25 copies)
- ☐ 14 *Writing Pictures: Case Studies in Photographic Criticism 1983-2012* by James R. Hugunin
- ☐ 15 *Wreck and Ruin: Photography, Temporality, and World (Dis)order* by James R. Hugunin
- ☐ 17 *John Barth, Bearded Bards & Splitting Hairs*
- ☐ 18 *99 Waves* by Persis Gerdes
- ☐ 23 *The Laugh that Laughs at the Laugh: Writing from and about the Pen Man, Raymond Federman*
- ☐ 24 *A-Way with it!: Contemporary Innovative Fiction*

- ☐ 49 *Don't Sing Aloha When I Go* by Robert Casella
- ☐ 50 *Journal of Experimental Fiction 50*
- ☐ 51 *Oppression for the Heaven of It* by Moore Bowen
- ☐ 52 *Elder Physics* by James R. Hugunin
- ☐ 53.1 *Like Blood in Water: Five Mininovels (The Placebo Effect Trilogy #1)* by Yuriy Tarnawsky
- ☐ 53.2 *The Future of Giraffes: Five Mininovels (The Placebo Effect Trilogy #2)* by Yuriy Tarnawsky
- ☐ 53.3 *View of Delft: Five Mininovels (The Placebo Effect Trilogy #3)* by Yuriy Tarnawsky
- ☐ 54 *You Are Make Very Important Bathtime* by David Moscovich
- ☐ 55 *Minnows: A Shattered Novel* by Jonathan Lyons
- ☐ 56 *Meanwhile* by Frederick Mark Kramer
- ☐ 58A *Tar Spackled Banner* by James R. Hugunin
- ☐ 58B *Return to Circa '96* by Bob Sawatzki
- ☐ 60 *Case X* by James R. Hugunin
- ☐ 61 *Naked Lunch at Tiffany's* by Derek Pell
- ☐ 62 *Tangled in Motion* by Jane L. Carman
- ☐ 64 *The Hunter* by Dominic Ward
- ☐ 65 *A Little Story about Maurice Ravel* by Conger Beasley, Jr.
- ☐ 66 *Psychedelic Everest* by Brion Polonic
- ☐ 67 *Between the Legs* by Kate Horsley
- ☐ 68 *Claim to Oblivion: Selected Essays and Interviews* by Yuriy Tarnawsky
- ☐ 69 *Passions and Shadows or Shadows and Passions* by Frederick Mark Kramer
- ☐ 70 *Afterimage: Critical Essays on Photography* by James R. Hugunin
- ☐ 71 *Goosestep* by Harold Jaffe
- ☐ 72 *Science Fiction: A Poem* by Robin Wyatt Dunn
- ☐ 73 *Offbeat/Quirky*
- ☐ 74 *Mouth* by Charles Hood
- ☐ 75 *Q↔A: An Auto-Interview* by James R. Hugunin

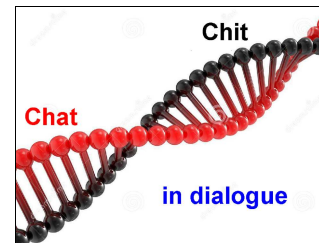


Two Beckett-esque characters, **Chit** and **Chat**, freed from COVID-19 restrictions, ponder who and where they are, muse about their existence as subjects in a society Brit social critic Mark Fisher characterized as dominated by “Capitalist Realism.”

The action is sited in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where our interlocutors try to meet the Playwright and the Director’s expectations, “To move from passive synthesis back to action in a highly improvisational performance,” during which there are allusions to literature, poetry, film, TV. Puns run rampant. The duo find they can time / dimension travel and so have become noticed by extraterrestrials.

CHIT for CHAT is a comedy that celebrates playwriting, filmmaking, and especially experimental writing. It is dedicated to one of experimental writing’s active practitioners and long-time publishers, Eckhard Gerdes.

— J.R.H.



James R. Hugunin (photograph by Marianne Nathan).

