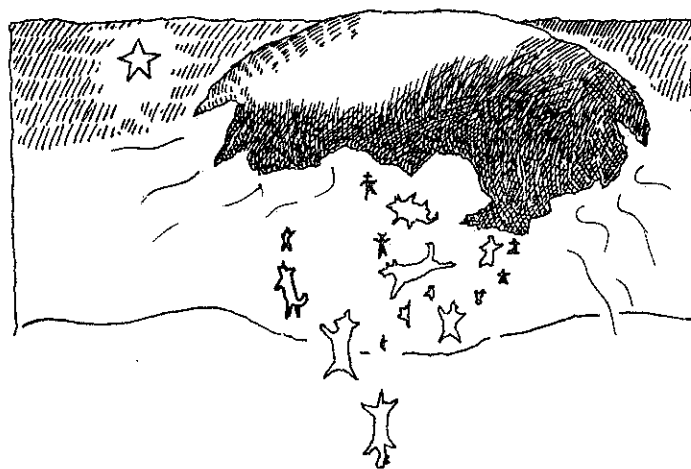


The Gates of Disappearance

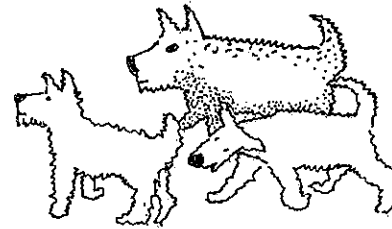
G. P. Skratz



The Gates of Disappearance

by G. P. Skratz

with drawings by Kit Hirshberg



Konglomerati Press

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Some of these pieces first appeared in *Assembling, Beyond Baroque, Center, Intrepid, Our Poets' Workshop, Quixote, Release Press Postcards, Schist, Some, The Stone, Windless Orchard, and Yellow Brick Road.*

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“Why does the Panda wear red suspenders?”

“To get to the other side.”

—Anon.



Horror Movie

I was an extinct vegetable from the planet Zuban.

Thousands of tiny time pills approached the castle with their torches.

Igor inserted the brain of Richard Nixon and waited for the fun.

Suddenly, we were in Minneapolis.

You were the mad Countess: a wisp of the moon behind dense clouds.

Perched on the edges of lightning, we watched the great void: it was a full-length movie. The spinning of wheels. The light on the other side of vanishing.

The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle

When you measure the speed of an electron, it changes.
Cameras steal souls; literacy is a graveyard.

We stand on deck, waving good-bye to ourselves.

Days of Forty-nine

The city at the tip of flame: all geometry changes with the shapes of fire, a gust of wind, the directions whirl around the heavens, all around. Charts are realigned, clocks retuned. The insistence of numbers that signify nothing – anchors in deep space.

The royal mathematician decides the law. Whenever the numbers begin with 49, he is beaten and driven to jail. Everyone else is set free. A great lake appears at the center of town. It is deep and pure, with black mist rising from the surface. No-one remembers ever having seen the king.

Press Conference

Even the most seasoned reporters had to admit something of a shock last night when the President appeared at a press conference with a jug band from New York's lower east side. Not a word was spoken for a full forty-five minutes. The President played the nose-flute and seemed distant . . . pre-occupied.

Later, he announced that they would play together at all future press conferences and important state functions. They had decided, he went on, to release an album – to be entitled: **BABY I GOT NEWS FOR YOU.**

What meaning moves these events? Is the President preparing to give up politics for the nose-flute? Or is this an attempt to reveal some terrible truth – a new and awesome weight on the national soul – which could only be revealed by this: the high scream of the nose-flute, the band's mad thunder. . .

The News

When the news came over the radio like a bum vomiting, we were sharpening our eyes on the roulette wheel in the kitchen.

Heads or tails, we said our goodbyes – “past out on the future.” My fists were springwire. Night, troubled by clouds. Our eyes rolled back, blank dice, fell in.

Caliban’s rage, on his island above Atlantis. White orbs peer out like stone. The umbilical cord sliced beyond the clouds. . .

The tealeaves were fearful: the old woman wept and shunned
my eyes.

From then on, I drank only coffee.

Desert Life

We are watching a candle. It is green with red streaks.

Pieces of colored glass are imbedded in the wax, stained glass windows on the cathedral of formlessness. They lie, now, in blobs.

When it burns all the way down, it becomes a camel. It thunders off the table. It breaks down the door.

Its two large humps, filled with water, make it uniquely suited for desert life.

The Bubble

It begins with pain. A sudden choking in the middle of lunch, the collapsing of lungs. And then the awful widening, my throat spreading like a cobra's. And the opening of the mouth.

In an hour, it is done. A brown, leathery sphere, a foot wide, slides up my throat and into the sky.

By nightfall, it has a width of about 100 feet. It is floating low, in front of my cabin. The skin of the bubble, stretched thin, has become nearly transparent. And with a flashlight, you can see dark shapes of the beasts inside. I try to guess what they will be this time, what their voices will be like.

The bubble descends a bit. It lets out a tired, low-pitched moan and vanishes. The beasts are dropped.

This time, they are dogs. Terriers, I think; 30 or 40 of them. They are small, with longish, curly hair. As always, their eyes are empty white, without pupils.

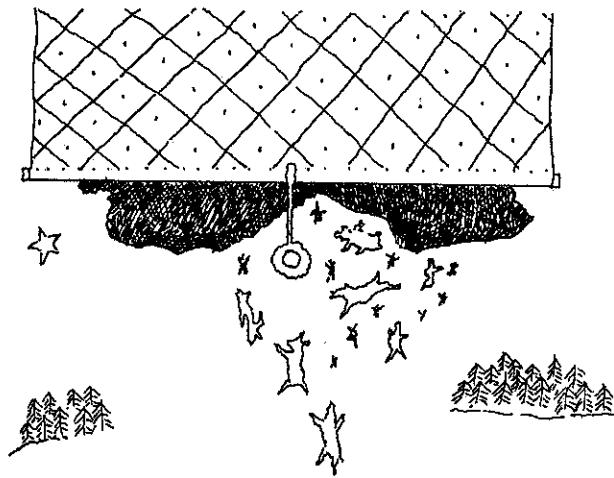
They rise quickly to their feet. Each of them speaks a word, his name. Their names are the messages they were told to bring. It is different for each. One beckons a pine tree. "Load," he says. Another runs circles, snarling, "twisssted," almost like a cat. And another barks, "jalopy," to the stars. The words are formed deep inside their bodies and come out their opened jaws simply, like breath.

Some of them are unclear, slurred sounds without easy meaning. One has a nearly inaudible sound, almost silence. He is lying on the ground, whining. I want to understand. And yet, I am afraid to get too close to him, to set my ear before his lips. I don't know why.

Once a couple of beasts, instead of dropping with the others, remained still and suspended where the bubble had been. Then they, too, vanished. The remaining beasts ran aimlessly into trees, the ground, each other. Their sounds were mad, tortured steel. I felt I should stay. I couldn't. When I got back, they were gone.

It is important to hear them all, but most of them run away as soon as they land. Here's one: sitting on pine needles. He seems to have been waiting for me. He says, "and."

LOAD LOAD TWISTED AND JALOPY. The ones that stayed begin to disappear, their voices a freight train miles away. The others are too far now to find. Scattered words.



This Time (a breath)

the beast and vanishes sudden of lungs been waiting for me
voices a freight get too close to don't know why where sounds
without sound almost i want and yet i am afraid before his lips
i of beasts instead will be this time

Mandala: eye to eye.

Dream Note

A reporter for the *New York Times*, I was covering a meeting between Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and a leading Bodhisattva from Mars on the Martian moon, Phobos. Space warped and I was in my room, on Earth, working out the technicalities of a poem: scratching out excess, "seeds and stems," adjectives, etc.; pacing back and forth, testing line/rhythm flow: the little trickeries. That done, I awoke to write it out from memory, like the Gettysburg Address:

Flying Saucer Poem

their flutes
play us

a full breath
in the thought-fire

waves in the spine
of lightning

it is the tune
our words
sing to themselves
as they parade
like flying saucers
out of our mouths.

Language

Money used to be dough. Now it's bread. Sooner or later, it'll
be ash: baked by millions of mouths, little ovens of language.

(for Cece)

Flexible as the bones of a bowery bum, our lives wind around each other, a tightrope we walk to here: now: Christian Brothers champagne as we jam our abundances into boxes, moving away, this Valentine's Day, and a new word, for you, on a theme by Dante: womandala: and the invisible, signaling at the center, on and on. . .

The Hearth

Farmer Andy. Farmer Mary. Farmer Slam. Farmer Cece. Farmer
er ah, me. Farmer Katy. Farmer Uncle Steve. And farmer Bessie:

“the invisible cow”

“mother of the buddha”

“singin & dancin just for you”

The Bourbon Museum
(A True-Life Adventure:
After A Dream By Andy Dinsmoor)

Well, Andy, all those days I spent, stoned on my savings account, have marched away like clowns on parade and taken on new lives without me. I'm here at the factory. But they've become tasters at the bourbon museum – that mammoth, hollowed-out liver on Lexington Avenue we used to think was the globe of a caved-in change purse.

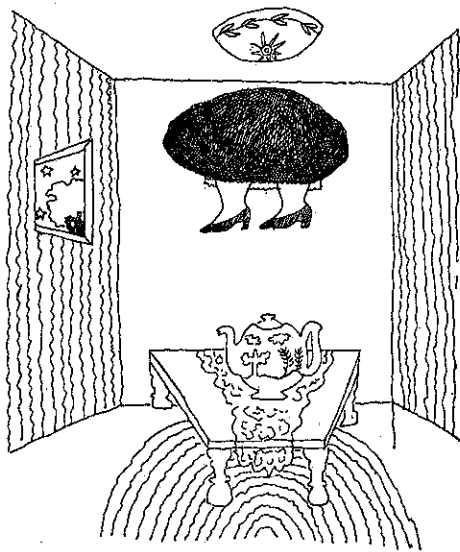
Wild Turkey is always the best, but they try them all – even the novelty bourbons from Atlantic City, bottled in pink elephants. They listen for us at the bottom of each glass and search for signs in the wax faces of famous bourbon drinkers:

Scream of machines, fights over rent.

Interview: Uncle Steve

“What’s that noise in your right ear, Uncle Steve?”

“It’s a message: first, I’m to call an emergency meeting of the Stonington Art Association. Then, when everyone has his brushes and paint together, I ascend into heaven like a pink whistle imploding like an ambulance of meditation beads!”



King Harvest and the Bride of Dynamite

This 5 foot green Goddess, 7 marijuana plants, cradled in my arms like helium up to the attic where we hang her, Magritte's floating stone, dirty feet up on the beam – earth on heaven: peace. Her 100,000 fingers spread like a magician's, like an armada of ghosts taking off into the sun.

The Postcard

Just as I am about to wash the dishes, I am struck by a majestic laziness like an octopus brain or a scrotum in the moments after orgasm.

A mistake has been made and I receive a postcard addressed to one of the neighbors. I look at it anyway:

It is an ancient painting, reproduced for the people! It is an immense, bearded white light with peacock feathered wings! It is my old friend, Hash Flash, in heaven!

Introduction to a Long Treatise on Boredom

Here at the factory, a new batch of boredom is oozing down the chute: it drags across the second shift like the crippled foot of a behemoth stumbling from the *Book of Revelations*.

At the end, when it has been crated for shipping, I look at its label. It is addressed to you, dear Reader. But there is nothing I can do. I am merely the man who carries the great emptiness from machine to machine to machine.

And even now, you become a pirate's gangplank in a museum. It is long after closing and you are desperate with memories of the pretty bare feet of the Princess of Siam, scented with sandalwood, the splinter in her left big toe . . .

Skratz's Theory of Relativity

When you burst from your body at 186,000 miles per second, the "places to go" are so far spaced it's just like walking around back home.

The Coin Flip Oracle
Texts & Notes

1.

Heads: the blank side. Thoughts, hydrogen balloons, guitar picks, and meteors. The date.

Good fortune in the beginning.

He drinks his wine and watches the wall: for three months, he sees no-one. Blue sky with no clouds.

He was so senile that I don't remember a thing about him.



2.

Tails: the monument and the price tag.

Babe in belly, she climbs to the top of the mountain: sets stones,
builds fire, bathes in melting snow.

In the end, good fortune.

Tortoise Notes

Its shell is the dark bone of change: a fossilized movie.

Its name is Latin: "tortus" – the mangled, as in torture, distortion, its twisted limbs.

The God of Hashish is a tortoise. His lover is the dawn, who shines forever in his plodding presence.

The Marrying Maiden Changing to Power of the Great

Today, the *I Ching* thought it was 1971 & I was Richard Nixon getting ready to run for President again.

Chile Pepper

She's got this cowboy junk car holiness that spits in your eye,
clears the clouds. Stars fall from her belly. Pay attention. Pay
attention.

Moons of Zuban?

Was the planet Earth colonized by spacepeople?

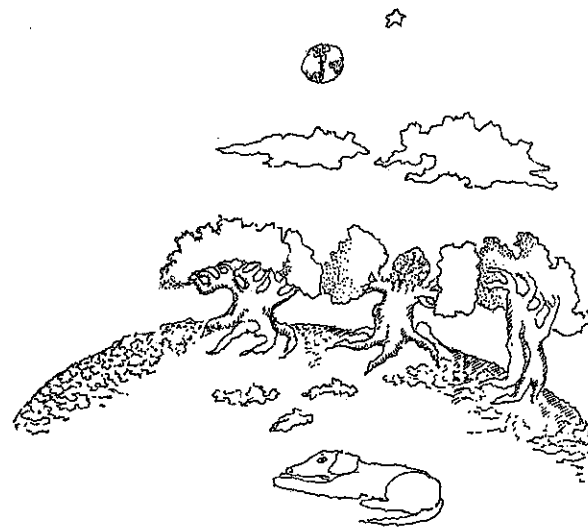
Why do people go blind when they stare into the sun? Is it because they catch sight of the lost planet Zuban, directly behind it?

Why is there "evil" on the Earth? Is there "evil" on the moon? on the sun? Is it because the Zubanians were bored?

Is Carl Sagan a creature from Outer Space?

Why do people stand in line for an hour & a half at Bud's Ice Cream Shop? Was the Ice Age a "rough draft" for Bud's Ice Cream?

Are we all moons of Zuban juggled randomly in a night sky we'll never know?



The Fan

The old man is handing the girl a pill. Over the centuries, his hand moves closer. When she swallows it, the fan will glow.

The Tiger

According to Liu-hsian in his book *Liao Chai Chih I* ("The Record of Marvels"), there is a tiger that eats bad poets. Like a werewolf, this creature frequents the bars and lecture halls of this world as an ordinary human being. He is even said to be something of a poet himself. His one extant stanza, part of a Chinese linked verse which has rarely been translated for fear of arousing his attention, runs like this:

crossword sword
harvest moon over shattered vase

It is apparent that he doesn't like or fully understand his role: when he hears a poem that offends him, his first instinct is to distract himself. He picks fights with his companions; he shouts down the poet. But once the seed is planted, the transformation inevitably occurs: his back bends and he is forced to crouch;

dark stripes like bars appear on his face, suddenly alive with hair; his clothes fall in shreds from his body as he flexes his muscles. And he is a tiger, lunging on the bones of his newest victim.

And who is so confident of his verse that he would willfully read it to this monster? And how are we to recognize him in our audiences? Small wonder, then, that so many aging, unknown poets seem uncomfortable in their lives, like Christians in lions' dens.

But there is more to the tale: this tiger is an instrument of the sirens. His teeth are the rocks that sink us. When we reappear, it is as the most joyous measure of music in the sirens' song. O God, we could stay there forever, and we do.

Actualism Defined

W. C. Williams meets Hans Arp meets Ted Berrigan & Anselm
Hollo. Someone brings a quart of vodka. Everyone piles into a
'58 Chevy & crashes into a telephone pole on the way to the
nearest pinball machine.

The Open Road

1. (The Ears)

The ears of a rabbit protruding from a splotch in the middle of the road.

2.

The eyes of the road.

The tongue of the road.

The limbs, the nose, the flesh of the road.

The heart, the lungs, the stomach, the liver, the pancreas, the chakras, the kidneys, the intestines, the spleen, the bowels, the adrenals, the thyroid, the gonads, the penial of the road.

Last Will and Testament

I leave my brain and left thighbone to art, in the hands of Andrew Dinsmoor. The following techniques should be applied for maximum benefit:

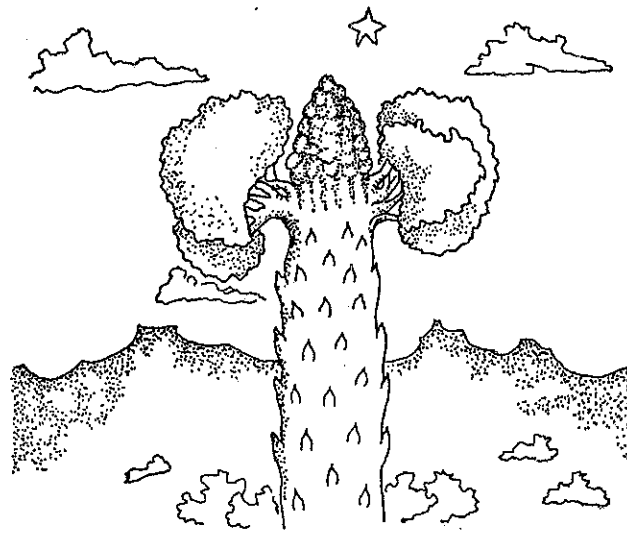
1. The plant will require nitrogen. Place the brain in an iron pot and securely fasten it to the top of a high lightning rod. Allow it to be struck by lightning,

Make a flute of the bone and play it throughout the storm. You should be alone so that your attention is riveted on the junctions of flute and thunder. Eventually, your concentration will slip into the spaces between. Play what you hear. The storm will follow.

2. Do not speak to mortals and abstain from all solid nourishment as you proceed.

3. Now that the brain has its nitrogen, put it in a clay pot and plant the seed. You may add, of course, whatever soil nutrients you deem necessary. Keep the brain in sunlight and water it daily. It would be nice to have a young virgin do the watering, but do what you can. Play the melody that you heard most insistently during the thunderstorm as the brain is being watered.

4. When the plant has reached a height of about 10 feet, take the flowers and the rich, glossy leaves and dry them in the sun. Smoke them. At the end, play your flute-part long and hard until you can offer yourself to collapse. Whether or not you actually collapse will be of no consequence, but make the offer.



G. P. Skratz is a California writer and video artist. He co-founded and co-directs Channel Zero Productions in Oakland, which has produced tapes by Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, Darrell Gray, and other major contemporary authors. He produced **The Stone** magazine and The Stone Chapbook Series from 1967-1974, and has exhibited his work as a visual artist and videographer at the San Francisco Art Institute, LAICA, the Palace of Fine Arts & Science in Warsaw (Poland), La Mamelle, and elsewhere. He has been a visiting poet-instructor at NAROPA Institute, a clown with **Dr. Hugo & His Grand Magic Circus**, and a scene painter for the British Lyons production **The Man Who Fell to Earth**. His prose and poetry have been widely published in magazines and anthologies.

Kit Hirshberg is a Florida artist and illustrator whose drawings have been featured in books from John Knox Press, Possum Press, and most recently from Konglomerati Press. She has taught at the Atlanta College of Art and Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida, and currently teaches art in the public schools in Pinellas County.

This book we set mostly by hand in Kennerley Old Style types cast at the press. Titling in Cloister Old Style and small matter in Kenntonian (8- and 10-point) we set at the keyboard of a Model 5 Linotype. Six hundred copies of this book were made by Barbara Russ and Richard Mathews in the breezy Spring of 1982 at Konglomerati Press.