

I

I saw a film today, oh boy . . .

— The Beatles

While enthusiasts and detractors will continue to empty entire dictionaries attempting to describe or deride it, “authenticity” still remains the word most likely to stir a debate. In fact, this leading obsession—to validate or invalidate the reels and tapes—invariably brings up a collateral and more general concern: whether or not, with the advent of digital technology, image has forsaken its once unimpeachable hold on the truth.¹

For the most part, skeptics call the whole effort a hoax but grudgingly admit *The Navidson Record* is a hoax of exceptional quality. Unfortunately out of those who accept its validity many tend to swear allegiance to tabloid-UFO sightings. Clearly it is not easy to appear credible when after vouching for the film’s verity, the discourse suddenly switches to why Elvis is still alive and probably wintering in the Florida Keys.² One thing remains certain: any controversy surrounding Billy Meyer’s film on flying saucers³ has been supplanted by the house on Ash Tree Lane.

Though many continue to devote substantial time and energy to the antinomies of fact or fiction, representation or artifice, document or prank, as of late the more interesting material dwells exclusively on the interpretation of events within the film. This direction seems more promising, even if the house itself, like Melville’s behemoth, remains resistant to summation.

Much like its subject, *The Navidson Record* itself is also uneasily contained—whether by category or lection. If finally catalogued as a gothic tale, contemporary urban folkmyth, or merely a ghost story, as some have called it, the documentary will still, sooner or later, slip the limits of any one of those genres. Too many important things in *The Navidson Record* jut out past the borders. Where one might expect horror, the supernatural, or traditional paroxysms of dread and fear, one discovers disturbing sadness, a sequence on radioactive isotopes, or even laughter over a *Simpsons* episode.

In the 17th century, England’s greatest topographer of worlds satanic and divine warned that hell was nothing less than “Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace/ And rest can never dwell, hope never

¹A topic more carefully considered in Chapter IX.

²See Daniel Bowler’s “Resurrection on Ash Tree Lane: Elvis, Christmas Past, and Other Non-Entities” published in *The House* (New York: Little Brown, 1995), p. 167-244 in which he examines the inherent contradiction of any claim alleging resurrection as well as the existence of that place.

³Or for that matter the Cottingley Fairies, Kirlian photography, Ted Serios’ thoughtography or Alexander Gardner’s photograph of the Union dead.

comes/ That comes to all” thus echoing the words copied down by hell’s most famous tourist: “*Dinanzi a me non fuor cose create/ Se non eterne, e io eterna duro./ Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch’entrate.*”⁴

Even today many people still feel *The Navidson Record*, in spite of all its existential refinements and contemporary allusions, continues to reflect those exact sentiments. In fact a few eager intellectuals have already begun to treat the film as a warning in and of itself, perfectly suited for hanging whole above the gates of such schools as Architectonics, Popomo, Consequentialism, Neo-Plasticism, Phenomenology, Information Theory, Marxism, Biosemiotics, to say nothing of psychology, medicine, New Age spirituality, art and even Neo-Minimalism. Will Navidson, however, remains stalwart in his insistence that his documentary should be taken literally. As he himself says, “. . . all this, don’t take it as anything else *but* this. And if one day you find yourself passing by that house, don’t stop, don’t slow down, just keep going. There’s nothing there. Beware.”

Considering how the film ends, it is not surprising that more than a handful of people have decided to heed his advice.

The Navidson Record did not first appear as it does today. Nearly seven years ago what surfaced was “The Five and a Half Minute Hallway”—a five and a half minute optical illusion barely exceeding the abilities of any NYU film school graduate. The problem, of course, was the accompanying statement that claimed all of it was true.

In one continuous shot, Navidson, whom we never actually see, momentarily focuses on a doorway on the north wall of his living room before climbing outside of the house through a window to the east of that door, where he trips slightly in the flower bed, redirects the camera from the ground to the exterior white clapboard, then moves right, crawling back inside the house through a second window, this time to the west of that door, where we hear him grunt slightly as he knocks his head on the sill, eliciting light laughter from those in the room, presumably Karen, his brother Tom, and his friend Billy Reston—though like Navidson, they too never appear on camera—before finally returning us to the starting point, thus completely circling the doorway and so proving, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that insulation or siding is the only possible thing this doorway could lead to, which is when all laughter stops, as Navidson’s hand appears in frame and pulls open the door, revealing a narrow black hallway at least ten feet long, prompting Navidson to re-investigate, once again leading us on another circumambulation of this strange passageway, climbing in and out of the windows, pointing the camera to where the hallway should extend but finding nothing more than his own backyard—no ten foot protuberance, just rose bushes, a muddy dart gun, and the translucent summer air—in essence an exercise in disbelief which despite his best intentions still takes Navidson back inside to that impossible hallway, until as the camera begins

⁴That first bit comes from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Book I, lines 65-67. The second from Dante’s *Inferno*, Canto III, lines 7-9. In 1939, some guy named John D. Sinclair from the Oxford University Press translated the Italian as follows: “Before me nothing was created but eternal things and I endure eternally. Abandon every hope, ye that enter.”⁵

⁵In an effort to limit confusion, Mr. Truant’s footnotes will appear in Courier font while Zampanò’s will appear in Times. We also wish to note here that we have never actually met Mr. Truant. All matters regarding the publication were addressed in letters or in rare instances over the phone. — The Editors

to move closer, threatening this time to actually enter it, Karen snaps, "Don't you dare go in there again, Navy," to which Tom adds, "Yeah, not such a hot idea," thus arresting Navidson at the threshold, though he still puts his hand inside, finally retracting and inspecting it, as if by seeing alone there might be something more to feel, Reston wanting to know if in fact his friend does sense something different, and Navidson providing the matter-of-fact answer which also serves as the conclusion, however abrupt, to this bizarre short: "It's freezing in there."

Dissemination of "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway" seemed driven by curiosity alone. No one ever officially distributed it and so it never appeared in film festivals or commercial film circles. Rather, VHS copies were passed around by hand, a series of progressively degenerating dubs of a home video revealing a truly bizarre house with notably very few details about the owners or for that matter the author of the piece.

Less than a year later another short surfaced. It was even more hotly sought after than "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway" and resulted in some fervent quests for Navidson and the house itself, all of which, for one reason or another, failed. Unlike the first, this short was not a continuous shot, prompting many to speculate that the eight minutes making up "Exploration #4" were in fact bits of a much larger whole.

The structure of "Exploration #4" is highly discontinuous, jarring, and as evidenced by many poor edits, even hurried. The first shot catches Navidson mid-phrase. He is tired, depressed and pale. "—days, I think. And, I . . . I don't know." [Drink of something; unclear what.] "Actually I'd like to burn it down. Can't think clearly enough to do it though." [Laughs] "And now . . . this."

The next shot jumps to Karen and Tom arguing over whether or not to "go in after him." At this point it remains unclear to whom they are referring.

There are several more shots.

Trees in winter.

Blood on the kitchen floor.

One shot of a child (Daisy) crying.

Then back to Navidson: "Nothing but this tape which I've seen enough times, it's more like a memory than anything else. And I still don't know: was he right or just out of his mind?"

Followed by three more shots.

Dark hallways.

Windowless rooms.

Stairs.

Then a new voice: "I'm lost. Out of food. Low on water. No sense of direction. Oh god . . ." The speaker is a bearded, broad shouldered man with frantic eyes. He speaks rapidly and appears short of breath: "Holloway Roberts. Born in Menomonie, Wisconsin. Bachelor's from U. Mass. There's something here. It's following me. No, it's *stalking* me. I've been stalked by it for days but for some reason it's not attacking. It's waiting, waiting for something. I don't know what. Holloway Roberts. Menomonie, Wisconsin. I'm not alone here. I'm not alone."

Thus bringing to an end this strange abstract which as the release of *The Navidson Record* revealed was sparingly incomplete.

Then for two years nothing. Few clues about who any of these people were, though eventually a number of photographers in the news

community did recognize the author as none other than Will Navidson, the prize-winning photojournalist who won the Pulitzer for his picture of a dying girl in Sudan. Unfortunately this discovery only generated a few months of heated speculation, before, in the absence of press, corroboration, the location of the house or for that matter any comment by Navidson himself, interest died out. Most people just wrote it off as some kind of weird hoax, or, because of the unusual conceit, an aberrant UFO sighting. Nevertheless the deteriorating dubs did circulate and in some trendy academic circles a debate began: was the subject a haunted house? What did Holloway mean by "lost"? How could anyone be lost in a house for days anyway? Furthermore, what was someone with Navidson's credentials doing creating two strange shorts like these? And again, was this artifice or reality?

Certainly a good deal of the debate was sustained by a bit of old fashioned cultural elitism. People talked about the Navidson pieces because they were lucky enough to have seen them. Lee Sinclair suspects a majority of professors, students, SoHo artists and avant-garde filmmakers who spoke—and even wrote—so knowingly about the tapes, more than likely had never even viewed one frame: "There just weren't that many copies available."⁶

While "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway" and "Exploration #4" have been respectively called a "teaser" and a "trailer", they are also, in their own right, peculiar cinematic moments. On a purely symbolic level, they afford a vast potential for examination: the compression of space, the power of the imagination to decompress that space, the house as trope for the unlimited and the unknowable etc., etc. On a strictly visceral level, they provide ample shocks and curiosities. However, the most unnerving aspect about both pieces is their ability to convince us that everything really happened, some of which can be attributed to the verifiable elements (Holloway Roberts, Will Navidson et al.), but most of which must be chalked up to the starkness of the production—the absence of make-up, expensive sound tracks, or crane shots. Except for framing, editing, and in some cases sub-titles,⁷ there is virtually no room for creative intrusion.

Who would have suspected that almost three years after "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway" began appearing on VHS, Miramax would quietly release *The Navidson Record* in a limited run and almost immediately unsettle audiences everywhere. Since the opening three years ago last April⁸ in New York and Los Angeles, *The Navidson Record* has been screened nationwide, and while hardly a blockbuster, the film continues to generate revenues as well as interest. Film periodicals frequently publish reviews, critiques and letters. Books devoted entirely to *The Navidson Record* now appear with some regularity. Numerous professors have made *The Navidson Record* required viewing for their seminars, while many universities already claim that dozens of students from a variety of departments have completed doctoral dissertations on the film. Comments and references frequently appear in *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *American Heritage*, *Vanity Fair*, *Spin* as well as on late night television. Interest abroad is equally intense. Japan, France and

⁶Lee Sinclair's "Degenerate" in *Twentieth Century Dub, Dub* edited by Tony Ross (New York: CCD Zeuxis Press, 1994), p. 57-91.

⁷Arguably interpretive, especially in the case of Holloway's garbled patter where even the subtitles appear as incomprehensible onomatopoeia or just question marks.

⁸i.e. 1993.

Norway have all responded with awards but to this day the spectral Navidson has yet to appear let alone accept any one of these. Even the garrulous Weinstein brothers remain unusually reticent about the film and its creator.

Interview magazine quoted Harvey Weinstein as saying, "It is what it is."⁹

The Navidson Record now stands as part of this country's cultural experience and yet in spite of the fact that hundreds of thousands of people have seen it, the film continues to remain an enigma. Some insist it must be true, others believe it is a trick on par with the Orson Welles radio romp *The War of the Worlds*. Others could care less, admitting that either way *The Navidson Record* is a pretty good tale. Still many more have never even heard of it.

These days, with the unlikely prospect of any sort of post-release resolution or revelation, Navidson's film seems destined to achieve at most cult status. Good story telling alone will guarantee a healthy sliver of popularity in the years to come but its inherent strangeness will permanently bar it from any mainstream interest.

⁹Mirjana Gortchakova's "Home Front" in *Gentleman's Quarterly*, v. 65, October 1995, p. 224.

II

The labours of men of genius, however erroneously directed, scarcely ever fail in ultimately turning to the solid advantage of mankind.

— Mary Shelley

The Navidson Record actually contains two films: the one Navidson made, which everyone remembers, and the one he set out to make, which very few people ever detect. While easily overshadowed by the finished film, the filmmaker's original intentions provide an early context in which to view the peculiar properties of the house later on.

In many ways, the opening of *The Navidson Record*, shot back in April of 1990, remains one of the more disturbing sequences because it so effectively denies itself even the slightest premonition about what will soon take place on Ash Tree Lane.

Not once during those initial minutes does Navidson indicate he knows anything about the impending nightmare he and his entire family are about to face. He is wholly innocent, and the nature of the house, at least for a little while, lies beyond his imagination let alone his suspicions.

Of course not everyone remains in accordance with this assessment. Dr. Isaiah Rosen believes, "Navidson's a fraud from frame one and his early posturing puts the entire work at risk."¹⁰ Rosen assumes the beginning is just a case of "bad acting" performed by a man who has already envisioned the rest of the film. Consequently Rosen seriously undervalues the importance of Navidson's initial intentions.

All too often major discoveries are the unintended outcome of experiments or explorations aimed at achieving entirely different results. In Navidson's case, it is impossible to disregard his primary goal, especially since it served as progenitor or at the very least the "near origin" to all that followed. Rosen's presumptions¹¹ lead him to dismiss the cause for the result, thereby losing sight of the complex and rewarding relationship which exists between the two.

"It's funny," Navidson tells us at the outset. "I just want to create a record of how Karen and I bought a small house in the country and moved into it with our children. Sort of see how everything turns out. No gunfire, famine, or flies. Just lots of toothpaste, gardening and people stuff. Which is how I got the Guggenheim Fellowship and the NEA Media Arts Grant.

¹⁰Isaiah Rosen, Ph.D., *Flawed Performances: A Consideration of the Actors in the Navidson Opus* (Baltimore: Eddie Hapax Press, 1995), p. 73.

¹¹Not the first and definitely not the last time Zampanò implies that The Navidson Record exists.

Maybe because of my past they're expecting something different, but I just thought it would be nice to see how people move into a place and start to inhabit it. Settle in, maybe put down roots, interact, hopefully understand each other a little better. Personally, I just want to create a cozy little outpost for me and my family. A place to drink lemonade on the porch and watch the sun set."

Which is almost literally how *The Navidson Record* begins, with Will Navidson relaxing on the porch of his small, old-style heritage house, enjoying a glass of lemonade, watching the sun turn the first few minutes of daytime into gold. Despite Rosen's claim, nothing about him seems particularly devious or false. Nor does he appear to be acting. In fact he is a disarmingly pleasant man, lean, attractive, slowly edging through his 40s,¹² determined once and for all to stay in and explore the quieter side of life.

At least initially he succeeds, providing us with pristine glimpses of the Virginia countryside, the rural neighborhood, purple hills born on the fringe of night, before moving past these establishing shots and focusing more closely on the process of moving into the house itself, unrolling pale blue oriental rugs, arranging and rearranging furniture, unpacking crates, replacing light bulbs and hanging pictures, including one of his own prize-winning photographs. In this way, Navidson not only reveals how each room is occupied, but how everyone has helped apply his or her own personal texture.

At one point, Navidson takes a break to interview his two children. These shots are also impeccably composed. Son and daughter bathed in sunlight. Their warmly lit faces framed against a cool backdrop of green lawn and trees.

His five year old daughter Daisy approves of their new house. "It's nice here," she giggles shyly, though she is not too shy to point out the absence of stores like "Bloomydales."

Chad who is three years older than Daisy is a little more self-conscious, even serious. Too often his response has been misread by those aware of the film's ending. It is important to realize, however, that at this point in time Chad has no sense what the future holds. He is merely expressing anxieties natural for a boy his age who has just been uprooted from his home in the city and deposited in a vastly different environment.

As he tells his father, what he misses most is the sound of traffic. It seems the noise made by trucks and taxi cabs created for him a kind of evening lullaby. Now he finds it difficult to fall asleep in the quiet.

"What about the sound of crickets?" Navidson asks.

Chad shakes his head.

"It's not the same. I dunno. Sometimes it's just silent . . . No sound at all."

"Does that scare you?"

Chad nods.

"Why?" asks his father.

"It's like something's waiting."

"What?"

Chad shrugs. "I dunno Daddy. I just like the sound of traffic."¹³

¹²In his article "Years of Those" in *The New Republic*, v. 213, November 20, 1995, p. 33-39, Helmut Kereinczsch puts Navidson's age at forty-eight.

¹³The question of lengthy narrative descriptions in what is purportedly a critical exegesis is addressed in Chapter 5; footnote 67. — Ed.

Of course, Navidson's pastoral take on his family's move hardly reflects the far more complicated and significant impetus behind his project—namely his foundering relationship with longtime companion Karen Green. While both have been perfectly content not to marry, Navidson's constant assignments abroad have led to increased alienation and untold personal difficulties. After nearly eleven years of constant departures and brief returns, Karen has made it clear that Navidson must either give up his professional habits or lose his family. Ultimately unable to make this choice, he compromises by turning reconciliation into a subject for documentation.

None of this, however, is immediately apparent. In fact it requires some willful amnesia of the more compelling sequences ahead, if we are to detect the subtle valences operating between Will and Karen; or as Donna York phrased it, "the way they talk to each other, the way they look after each other, and of course the way they don't."¹⁴

Navidson, we learn, began his project by mounting a number of Hi 8s around the house and equipping them with motion detectors to turn them on and off whenever someone enters or leaves the room. With the exception of the three bathrooms, there are cameras in every corner of the house. Navidson also keeps on hand two 16mm Arriflexes and his usual battery of 35mm cameras.

Nevertheless, as everyone knows, Navidson's project is pretty crude. Nothing, for instance, like the constant eye of CCTV systems routinely installed in local banks or the lavish equipment and multiple camera operators required on MTV's *Real World*. The whole effort would seem very home movie-ish at best were it not for the fact that Navidson is an exceptionally gifted photographer who understands how one sixtieth of a second can yield an image worth more than twenty-four hours of continuous footage. He is not interested in showing all the coverage or attempting to capture some kind of catholic or otherwise mythical view. Instead he hunts for moments, pearls of the particular, an unexpected phone call, a burst of laughter, or some snippet of conversation which might elicit from us an emotional spark and perhaps even a bit of human understanding.

More often than not, the near wordless fragments Navidson selects reveal what explication could only approximate. Two such instances seem especially sublime, and because they are so short and easy to miss, it is worth reiterating their content here.

In the first one, we see Navidson climbing to the top of the stairs with a crate full of Karen's things. Their bedroom is still cluttered with lamps in bubble wrap and assorted unpacked suitcases and garbage bags full of clothes. Nothing hangs on the walls. Their bed is not made. Navidson finds some room on top of a bureau to set down his load. He is about to leave when some invisible impulse stops him. He takes Karen's jewelry box out of the crate, lifts the hand-carved horn lid, and removes the inner tray. Unfortunately, whatever he sees inside is invisible to the camera.

When Karen walks in carrying a basket stuffed with bedsheets and pillow cases, Navidson has already turned his attention to an old hairbrush lying next to some perfume bottles.

"What are you doing?" she immediately asks.

¹⁴Donna York's "In Twain" in *Redbook*, v. 186, January 1996, p. 50.

"This is nice," he says, removing a big clump of her blonde hair from the tines and tossing it into the wastebasket.

"Give me that," Karen demands. "Just you watch, one day I'll go bald, then won't you be sorry you threw that away."

"No," Navidson replies with a grin.

It is unnecessary to dwell here on the multiple ways in which these few seconds demonstrate how much Navidson values Karen,¹⁵ except to highlight how despite his sarcasm and apparent disregard for her things the scene itself represents the exact opposite. Using image and exquisitely controlled edits, Navidson has in effect preserved her hair, called into question his own behavior and perhaps in some ways contradicted his own closing remark, which as Samuel T. Glade has pointed out could refer to either "watch," "bald," or "sorry" or all three.¹⁶ Even better, Navidson has permitted the action and subtlety of the composition to represent the profound sentiments at work without the molestations of some ill-conceived voice-over or manipulative soundtrack.

In keeping with this approach, the second moment also does without explanations or disingenuous musical cues. Navidson simply concentrates on Karen Green. Once a model with the Ford Agency in New York, she has since put behind her the life of Milan fashion shoots and Venetian Masques in order to raise her two children. Considering how beautiful she appears on the dreadful Hi 8 tapes, it is hardly surprising editors frequently relied on slides of her pouty lips, high cheek bones, and hazel eyes to sell their magazines.

Early on, Navidson gave Karen a Hi 8 which he asked her to treat like a journal. Her video entries—which Navidson promised to view only after the film was shot and then only if she agreed—reveal a thirty-seven year old woman who worries about leaving the city, growing old, keeping trim, and staying happy. Nevertheless, despite their purely confessional content, it is not a journal entry but rather an unguarded moment captured on one of the house Hi 8s that demonstrates Karen's almost bewildering dependence on Navidson.

Karen sits with Chad and Daisy in the living room. The children are in the midst of a candle-making project which involves several empty egg cartons, a dozen long lengths of wick, a bucket of plaster of Paris and a jar full of crystal wax. Using a pair of red handled scissors, Daisy cuts the wicks down to three inch pieces and then presses them down into an egg cup which Chad in turn fills with a layer of plaster followed by a layer of the tiny wax beads. The result is some kind of candle with plenty of goop to go around, most of it ending up on the children's hands. Karen helps brush the hair out of her daughter's eyes lest she try to do it herself and end up smearing plaster all over her face. And yet even though Karen keeps Chad from overfilling the molds or Daisy from hurting herself with the scissors,

¹⁵See "The Heart's Device" by Frances Leiderstahl in *Science*, v. 265 August 5, 1994, p. 741; Joel Watkin's "Jewelry Box, Perfume, and Hair" in *Mademoiselle*, v. 101 May, 1995, p. 178-181; as well as Hardy Taintic's more ironic piece "Adult Letters and Family Jewels" *The American Scholar*, v. 65 spring 1996, p. 219-241.

¹⁶Samuel T. Glade's "Omens & Signs" in *Notes From Tomorrow* ed. Lisbeth Bailey (Delaware: Taema Essay Publications, 1996).

she still cannot resist looking out the window every couple of minutes. The sound of a passing truck causes her to glance away. Even if there is no sound, the weight of a hundred seconds always turns her head.

Though clearly a matter of opinion, Karen's gaze seems just as lost as it is "surfeit with love and longing."¹⁷ The reasons are in part answered when at last Navidson's car pulls into the driveway. Karen hardly attempts to contain her relief. She instantly leaps up from the mini candle factory and dashes from the room. Seconds later—no doubt thinking better of herself—she returns.

"Daisy, hold off using the scissors until I get back."

"Mommy!" Daisy shrills.

"You heard what I said. Chad keep an eye on your sister."

"Mommy!" Daisy squealing even louder.

"Daisy, mommy also wants you to look after your brother."

This seems to appease the little girl, and she actually settles down, smugly eyeing Chad even as she continues to snip wicks.

Strangely enough, by the time Karen reaches Navidson in the foyer, she has quite effectively masked all her eagerness to see him. Her indifference is highly instructive. In that peculiar contradiction that serves as connective tissue in so many relationships, it is possible to see that she loves Navidson almost as much as she has no room for him.

"Hey, the water heater's on the fritz," she manages to say.

"When did that happen?"

She accepts his brief kiss.

"I guess last night."¹⁸

¹⁷Max C. Garten's "100 Looks" in *Vogue*, v. 185, October 1995, p. 248.

¹⁸I got up this morning to take a shower and guess what? No fucking hot water. A pretty evil discovery especially when you're depending on that watery wake-up call, me being massively dehydrated from a long night drunk my road-dog Lude and I winged our way onto last night. As I'm remembering it now, we somehow ended up at this joint on Pico, and soon thereafter found ourselves in conversation with some girls wearing black cowboy hats, supposedly lost in their own private-blend of brain-hatching euphoria—Thank you Herbal Ecstasy—prompting us to put a little Verbal Ecstasy on them which would, as it turned out, ultimately lead them giggling into the night.

I've forgotten now what we did exactly to get the whole thing rolling. I think Lude started giving one of them a trim, whipping out his scissors which he always has on hand, like old gunslingers I guess always had on hand their Colts—there he goes, snipping locks & bangs, doing a great fucking job too, but hey he's a pro, and all of it in the dark too, on a barstool, surrounded by dozens of who knows who, fingers & steel clicking away, tiny bits of hair spitting off into the surrounding turmoil, the girls all nervous until they see he really is the shit and then they're immediately chirping "me, next" & "do me" which is too easy to remark upon, so instead Lude & I remark upon something else which this time round is all about some insane adventure I supposedly had when I was a Pit Boxer. Mind you I'd never heard that term before nor had Lude. Lude just made it up and I went with it.

"Aw come on, they don't want to hear about that," I said with about as much reluctance as I could reasonably feign.

"No Hoss, you're wrong," Lude insisted. "You must."

"Very well," I said, starting then to recall for everyone how at the lonely age of nineteen I had climbed off a barge in Galveston.

"Actually I escaped," I improvised. "See, I still owed my crazy Russian Captain a thousand dollars for a wager I'd lost in Singapore. He wanted to murder me so I practically had to run the whole way to Houston."

"Don't forget to tell them about the birds," Lude winked. He was just throwing shit at me, something he loved doing, keeping me on my toes.

"Sure," I mumbled, stretching for an explanation. "This barge I'd been on was loaded with dates and pounds of hash and an incredible number of exotic birds, all of it, of course, illegal to transport, but what did I know? It didn't exactly affect me. And anyway, I wasn't sticking around. So I reach Houston and the first thing that happens, some twerp comes up and tries to rob me."

Lude frowned. He clearly wasn't pleased with what I'd just done to his birds.

I ignored him and continued.

"This guy just walked straight over and told me to give him all my money. I didn't have a dime on me but it wasn't like this weasely sonofabitch had a weapon or anything. So I slugged him. Down he went. But not for long. A second later he pops up again and you know what? he's smiling, and then this other guy joins him, much bigger, and he was smiling too and shaking my hand, congratulating me. They'd been searching all day for a Pit Boxer, pay was two hundred dollars a night and apparently I'd just made the grade. This weasely sonofabitch was the head interviewer. His partner referred to him as Punching Bag."

By now the girls were crowding around me & Lude, sucking down more drinks and all in all falling into the rhythm of the story. Carefully, I led them through that first night, describing the ring with its dirt floor surrounded by hordes of folk come to bet a few dollars and watch guys hurt—hurt themselves, hurt someone else. Gloves were not an option in this kind of fighting. Miraculously, I made it through alive. I actually won my first two fights. A couple of bruises, a cut cheek, but I walked with two hundred bucks and Punching Bag forked for ribs and beer and even let me crash on his couch. Not bad. So I continued. In fact, for a whole month I did this twice a week.

"See the scar on his eyebrow there—" Lude pointed, giving the girls one of those all knowing completely over-the-top nods.

"Is that how you broke your front tooth too?" a girl with a ruby pin in her cowboy hat blurted out, though as soon as she said it, I could see she felt bad about mentioning my busted incisor.

"I'm getting to that," I said with a smile.

Why not work the tooth into it too?, I thought.

After three-four weeks, I continued, I had enough dough to pay back the Captain and even keep a bit for myself. I was pretty tired of the whole thing anyway.

The fights were bad enough. "And incidentally I'd won every one," I added. Lude scoffed. "But having to be wary all the time around the likes of Punching Bag & his partner, that was by far the worst aspect. Also, as it turned out, the place I was staying in was a whorehouse, full of these sad girls, who between their own senseless rounds would talk about the simplest, most inconsequential things. I liked it better on the barge, even with the Captain and his murderous moods.

"Well my last night, the twerp pulls me aside and suggests I bet my dough on myself. I tell him I don't want to because I could lose. 'You stupid fucking kid,' he spits at me. 'You've won every fight so far.' 'Yeah,' I say. 'So?' 'Well figure it out. It's not because you're any good. They've all been fixed. I find some lump, pay him

fifty bucks to swing and dive. We make a killing on the bets. You won last week, you won the week before, you'll win tonight. I'm just trying to help you out here.'

"So being the stupid kid I was I bet all the money I had and walked into the ring. Who do you think was there waiting from me?"

I gave everyone a chance to come up with their own answer while I drained my glass of beer, but no one had a clue who I was about to fight. Even Lude was a step behind. Of course, that depends on how you look at it: he was also fondling the ass of a girl with a tourmaline in her cowboy hat while she in turn, or so it appeared to me, was caressing the inside of his thigh.

"In the middle of all those Houston losers, all of 'em screaming odds, screaming money, licking their gums for blood, stood Punching Bag, fists all taped up and not even the flicker of a smile or the slightest bit of recognition in his eye. Boy, let me tell you, he turned out to be a mean-spirited remorseless S.O.B. That first round he knocked me down twice. The second round I almost didn't get up.

"All month long, he and his partner had been boosting the numbers on me so that when Punching Bag—and at this point he was the long shot—slaughtered me, they'd walk with a small fortune. Or run. Me though, a dumb nineteen year old who'd wandered into Galveston after three months at sea, I was going to lose my money and wind up in a hospital. Maybe worse. Since the fights were just three rounds long, I only had one more left to do something. His partner threw a bucket of ice water in my face and told me to crawl out there and get it over with.

"As I wobbled to my feet, I shook my head, and saying it loud enough so he could hear me, but not so loud so he'd think I was selling something, I said that it was all too bad because I'd been planning to use my money to buy a shipment of some stuff worth at least a thousand percent on the street.

"Well, the next round, the last round I should say, Punching Bag broke my tooth. I was out. They'd both originally planned to ditch me but my little gambit had worked. After what the partner had heard me say, which I'm sure he shared as soon as he could with Punching Bag, they dragged me along, dumped some whiskey into me in their truck and then started grilling me about that stuff I'd been babbling about, trying to find out what was worth a thousand percent.

"Now I was in a bad way, more than a little afraid that they'd do something really evil if they found out I'd been bullshitting them. Still, if I stayed in Houston I'd probably be lynched by the bettors who by now had figured out something was sour which could only mean one thing to them (all explanations to the grave): Punching Bag & his partner and me were to blame. I had to think fast and besides, I still wanted my money back, so—"

By now even Lude was hooked. They all were. The girls all engrossed and smiling and still shimmying closer, as if maybe by touching me they could find out for sure if I was for real. Lude knew it was pure crap but he had no clue where I was heading. To tell you the truth neither did I. So I took my best shot.

"I pointed them to the barge. I hadn't figured out what I'd do once we got there but I knew the ship was leaving with the tide early next morning so we had to hurry. Luckily we arrived in time and I immediately went off to find the Captain who as soon as he saw me grabbed me by the throat. Somehow between gasps, I succeeded in telling him about Punching Bag & his partner and their money—all their money which included my money most of which was in essence the Captain's

money. That got the bastard listening. A few minutes later, he sauntered over to the duo, poured them coffee mugs full of vodka, and in his incomprehensible accent, began going on and on about pure New Guinea value.

"Punching Bag had no idea what this idiot was talking about, neither did I for that matter, but an hour and two bottles of vodka later, he came to the conclusion that the Captain must be talking about drugs. After all the Captain kept mentioning euphoria, Spanish explorers and paradise, even though he refused to show Punching Bag the tiniest bit of anything tangible, vaguely referring to custom officials and the constant threat of confiscation and jail.

"Now here was the clincher. While he's babbling on, this van drives up and a guy no one has ever seen before or ever will see again gets out, gives the Captain a thousand dollars, takes one crate and then drives off. Just like that, and boy does that do it. Without even examining what he's buying, Punching Bag hands over five g's. The Captain, keeping his word, immediately loads five crates into the back of Punching Bag's truck.

"I'm sure the twerp would of inspected them right on the spot, except suddenly in the distance we all start hearing police sirens or harbor patrol sirens or some such shit. They weren't after us, but Punching Bag & his partner still got spooked and took off as fast as they could.

"Even after we got out to sea, the Captain was still laughing. I wasn't though. The bastard wouldn't give me any of my money. By his way of thinking—and him explaining this to me in that incomprehensible accent of his—I owed him for saving my life, not to mention transporting my sorry ass all the way to Florida, where I finally did end up going, nearly dying in a cold water place called the Devil's Ear which is an altogether different story.

"Still it wasn't so bad, especially when I think now and then about Punching Bag & his partner. I mean I wonder what they did, what they said, when they finally tore open all those crates and discovered all those fucking birds. Over fifty Birds of Paradise.

"A few months later I did read somewhere how Houston Police busted two known felons trying to unload a bunch of exotic birds at a zoo."

Which was pretty much how that story ended or at least the story I told last night. Maybe not verbatim but close.

Unfortunately nothing happened with the girls. They just ran off giggling into the night. No digits, no dates, not even their names, leaving me feeling dumb and sad, a bit like a broken thermos—fine on the outside, but on the inside nothing but busted glass. And why I'm going on about any of this right now is beyond me. I've never even seen a Bird of Paradise. And I sure as hell have never boxed or been on a barge. In fact just looking at this story makes me feel a little queasy all of a sudden. I mean how fake it is. Just sorta doesn't sit right with me. It's like there's something else, something beyond it all, a greater story still looming in the twilight, which for some reason I'm unable to see.

Anyway I didn't mean to wander into all this. I was telling you about the shower. That's what I wanted to deal with. As you probably know, finding out there's no warm water is a particularly unpleasant discovery simply because it's not something you figure out immediately. You have to let the water run awhile and even though it remains icy, part of you still refuses to believe it won't change, especially if you

What both these moments reveal is how much Will and Karen need each other and yet how difficult they find handling and communicating those feelings.

Unfortunately, critics have been less than sympathetic. Following the release of *The Navidson Record*, neither Karen nor Navidson's reputation escaped unscathed. Karen, in particular, was decimated by a vituperative stream of accusations from the tabloids, reputable reviewers, and even an estranged sister. Leslie Buckman blows high the roof beams when she calls "Karen Green a cold bitch, plain and simple. A high-fashion model, not much smarter than a radiator, who grew up thinking life revolved around club owners, cocaine and credit card limits. Watching her burble on about her weight, her children, or how much she needs Navidson made me want to retch. How can she say she loves a man when she's incapable of anything even remotely resembling commitment? Did I say she was a cold bitch? She's also a slut."¹⁹

Buckman is not alone in her opinion. Dale Corrdigan has also pointed out that Karen was anything but a lovely housewife: "Karen hardly gave up the promiscuous behavior that marked her 20s. She only became more discreet."²⁰

In retrospect, the rabid speculation over Karen's infidelities seems driven by a principally sexist culture, especially since so little attention was paid to Navidson's role in their relationship. As David Liddel once

wait a little longer or open up the valve a little more. So you wait but no matter how many minutes run by, you still see no steam, you still feel no heat.

Maybe a cold shower would of been good for me. The thought crossed my mind but I was already too freezing to try for even a quick one. I don't even know why I was freezing. It was pretty warm in my place. Even warmer outside. Not even my big brown corduroy coat helped.

Later I spotted some workers in back tackling the water heater. One of them, snorting on a dirty handkerchief, covered in tats, Manson crucified on his back, told me it would be fixed by evening. It's not.

Now I'm sure you're wondering something. Is it just coincidence that this cold water predicament of mine also appears in this chapter?

Not at all. Zampanò only wrote "heater." The word "water" back there—I added that.

Now there's an admission, eh?

Hey, not fair, you cry.

Hey, hey, fuck you, I say.

Wow, am I mad right now. Clearly a nerve's been hit somewhere but I don't how, why or by what. I sure don't believe it's because of some crummy made-up story or a lousy (water) heater.

Can't follow the feeling.

If only any of it were true. I mean we'd all be so lucky to wind up a punching bag and still find our crates full of Birds of Paradise.

No such luck with this crate.

Let the cold water run.

It's gotta warm up eventually.

Right?

¹⁹"Lie Lexicon and Feminine Wiles" by Leslie Buckman published in *All In The Name Of Feminism: A Collection Of Essays* ed. Nadine Muestopher (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Shtrön Press, 1995), p. 344.

²⁰Dale Corrdigan, "Blurbs," *Glamour*, v. 94, April 1996, p. 256.

exclaimed: "If he has horns, who's to say he doesn't have hooves?"²¹ Fortunately unlike the biased treatment offered by the media, Navidson does not hesitate to constantly include in his film evidence of his own failings. In fact as of late, many have called into question the accuracy of this self-portrait, observing that Navidson may have gone too far out of his way to cast himself in a less than favorable light.²²

Not only does Navidson reveal through Karen, Chad, and Daisy how he spent the last decade perfecting a career in distance, where taking off on a moment's notice to shoot Alaskan fishing boats was something his family had to just accept, even if that three day trip slowly evolved into weeks and even months, he also, by way of the film, admits to carrying around his own alienating and intensely private obsessions.

As it turns out though, the first hint concerning these dark broodings does not come from him but from Karen. Navidson's early Hi 8 journal entries are so easy and mild they rarely, if ever, allude to deeper troubles. Only Karen, staring straight into that little lens, brings up the problem.

"He mentioned Delial again," she says in an extremely clipped tone. "I've warned him if he's not going to tell me who she is he better damn not bring her up. Part of this move south was supposed to be about putting the past and all that behind us. He's been pretty good but I guess he can't control his dreams. Last night, I wasn't sleeping very well. I was cold. It's the middle of May but I felt like I was lying in a freezer. I got up to get a blanket and when I came back he was talking in his sleep: 'Delial.' Just like that. Out of the blue. And I'm certain because he said her name twice. Almost shouted it."

As it turns out, Karen was not the only one who was kept in the dark about Delial. Even friends and fellow photojournalists who had heard Navidson use the name before never received any sort of explanation. No one had any idea who she was or why it was she haunted his thoughts and conversation like some albatross.²³

That said, while the first sequence certainly hints at a number of underlying tensions in the Navidson/Green family, all brought into relief by this chapter, it is crucial not to lose sight of the prevailing sense of bliss still evoked in those opening minutes. After a couple of nights, Chad no longer has trouble sleeping. After a couple of days, Daisy's nipped finger heals. The heater is easily repaired. Even both parents enjoy a private moment where their hands can playfully unlock and interlock, Will finally putting his arm around Karen as she, letting out a heart-stirring sigh, rests her head on his shoulder.

In fact it is rare to behold such radiant optimism in anything these days, let alone in films, each frame so replete with promise and hope. Navidson clearly cherishes these bucolic, near idyllic impressions of a new world. Of course, nostalgia's role in shaping the final cut must not be forgotten, especially since within a year these pieces were all Navidson had

²¹"A Horny Duo" by David Liddel, *Utne Reader*, July/August 1993, p. 78.

²²Ascencion Gerson's "The Vanity of Self-Loathing" in *Collected Essays on Self-Portraiture* ed. Haldor Nervene (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), p. 58.

²³Since the revelation, there has been a proliferation of material on the subject. Chapter XIX deals exclusively with the subject. See also Chris Ho's "What's in a name?" *Afterimage*, v. 31, December, 1993; Dennis Stake's *Delial* (Indianapolis: Bedeutungswandel Press, 1995); Jennifer Caps' *Delial, Beatrice, and Dulcinea* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Thumos Inc., 1996); Lester Breman's "Tis but a Name" in *Ebony*, no. 6, May 1994, p. 76; and Tab Fulrest's *Ancient Devotions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

left—Karen and the children a mere blur racing down the staircase, the pointillism of their pets' paw prints caught on the dew covered lawn, or the house itself, an indefinite shimmer, sitting quietly on the corner of Succoth and Ash Tree Lane, bathed in afternoon light.

III

*It is no accident that the photographer
becomes a photographer any more than
the lion tamer becomes a lion tamer.*

— Dorothea Lange

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים מִי אֲנִי כִּי אֵלֶךְ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה
וְכִי אֹצִיא אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם:

— Exodus 3. 11²⁴

Why Navidson? Why not someone else?

When the great Florentine howls, "*Ma io perchè venirvi? o chi 'l concede?! Io non Enëa, io non Paulo sono,*"²⁵ Homer's rival calls him a

²⁴"But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?' " — Ed.

²⁵Dante again. Again translated by Sinclair. Canto II; lines 31-32:
"But I, why should I go there, and who grants it? I am not Aeneas; I am not Paul."

A question I'm often asking myself these days. Though not the Aeneas/Paul part.

The simple answer I know: Lude woke me up at three in the morning to check out some dead guy's stuff.

Of course, it's not really all that simple. Typically when Lude calls me late at night it's because there's some party he wants to hit. He's the kind of guy who thinks sublime is something you choke on after a shot of tequila. Maybe he's right.

Not that this matters, someone once told me Lude's real name is Harry, maybe he did, though no one I know has ever called him that.

Lude knows every bar, club and gatekeeper at every bar and club. Hollywood has always been mother's milk to Lude. Mother's tongue. Whatever. Unlike me, he never needs to translate, interpret or learn in LA. He knows. He knows the drinks, the addresses and most important of all he can usually tell the difference between the women who are out to talk and those out to do something a little more interesting which always interests Lude.

Despite a nose that others have described as a bee-battered, Lude's always surrounded by very attractive women which is pretty much the norm for hair stylists—and photographers—especially if they're good and Lude is that. Beautiful women are always drawn to men they think will keep them beautiful.

During the past two years, he and I have spent a good deal of time wandering all over this odd city. We both thrive in the late hours,

appreciate its sad taste and never get in the way of each other's dreams, even though Lude just wants more money, better parties and prettier girls and I want something else. I'm not even sure what to call it anymore except I know it feels roomy and it's drenched in sunlight and it's weightless and I know it's not cheap.

Probably not even real.

Who can guess why Lude and I have ended up friends. I think it's mainly because he recognizes that I'm game for any mis-step he has in mind and he enjoys the company. Of course publicly, Lude likes to throw me plenty of props, invariably focusing on the disjointed life I've led. He's still impressed—and in turn likes to impress others—with the fact that at the age of thirteen I went to work in Alaska and by the time I was eighteen had already slept in a whorehouse in Rome. Most of all though he loves the stories. Especially the way I tell them to the girls we meet. (I already got into that a little with the whole riff on boxing and Birds of Paradise and some guy named Punching Bag.) But they're only stories, the way I tell them I mean. I actually have a whole bunch.

Take the scars for instance.

There are a number of variations on that one. The most popular is my two year stint in a Japanese Martial Arts Cult, made up entirely of Koreans living in Idaho, who on the last day of my initiation into their now-defunct brotherhood made me pick up a scalding metal wok using only my bare forearms. In the past the wok has been heated in a kiln; recently it's been full of red hot coals. The story's an absolute crock of shit, or should I say a wok of shit—sorry; I know, I know I should learn to crawl before I walk; sorry again; I mean for not being sorry the first time or for that matter the second time—but, you see, it's so hard to argue with all those whirls of melted flesh.

"Show them your arms, Johnny" Lude will say, in his most offhand over-the-top manner.

"Aw come on. Well, alright just this once." I roll up my left sleeve and then, taking my time, I roll up the right one.

"He got that in a cult in Indiana."

"Idaho," I correct him. And it goes on from there.

I'm sure most women know it's bull but hey, they're entertained. I also think it's somewhat of a relief not to hear the true story. I mean you look at the horror sweeping all the way up from my wrists to my elbows, and you have to take a deep breath and ask yourself, do I really want to know what happened there? In my experience, most people don't. They usually look away. My stories actually help them look away.

Maybe they even help me look away.

But I guess that's nothing new. We all create stories to protect ourselves.

It's March now. Late March. Three months have gone by since Lude called me up that night. Three months since I dragged away a black, unremarkable, paint spattered trunk, which as I quickly found out was one of those old cedar lined jobbers, built in Utica, NY, special thanks to the C. M. Clapp Company, complete with rusted latches, rotting leather handles and a lifetime of digressions and disappointments.

To date, I've counted over two hundred rejection letters from various literary journals, publishing houses, even a few words of discouragement from prominent professors in east coast universities. No one wanted the old man's words—except me.

coward and orders him to get moving because the powers above have taken a personal interest in his salvation.

For hell's cartographer, the answer is mildly satisfying. For Navidson, however, there is no answer at all. During "Exploration #4" he even asks aloud, "How the fuck did I end up here?" The house responds with resounding silence. No divine attention. Not even an amaurotic guide.

Some have suggested that the horrors Navidson encountered in that house were merely manifestations of his own troubled psyche. Dr. Iben Van Pollit in his book *The Incident* claims the entire house is a physical incarnation of Navidson's psychological pain: "I often wonder how things might have turned out if Will Navidson had, how shall we say, done a little bit of house cleaning."²⁶

While Pollit is not alone in asserting that Navidson's psychology profoundly influenced the nature of those rooms and hallways, few believe it conjured up that place. The reason is simple: Navidson was not the first to live in the house and encounter its peril. As the Navidsons' real estate agent Alicia Rosenbaum eventually revealed, the house on Ash Tree Lane has had more than a few occupants, approximately .37 owners every year, most of whom were traumatized in some way. Considering the house was supposedly built back in 1720, quite a few people have slept and suffered within those walls. If the house were indeed the product of psychological agonies, it would have to be the collective product of every inhabitant's agonies.

It is no great coincidence then that eventually someone with a camera and a zest for the dangerous would show up at this Mead Hall and confront

What can I say, I'm a sucker for abandoned stuff, misplaced stuff, forgotten stuff, any old stuff which despite the light of progress and all that, still vanishes every day like shadows at noon, goings unheralded, passings unmourned, well, you get the drift.

As a counselor once told me—a Counselor For Disaffected Youth, I might add: "You like that crap because it reminds you of you." Couldn't of said it better or put it more bluntly. Don't even disagree with it either. Seems pretty dead on and probably has everything to do with the fact that when I was ten my father died and almost nine years later my crazy Shakespearean mother followed him, a story I've already lived and really don't need to retell here.

Still for whatever reason, and this my Counselor For Disaffected Youth could never explain, accepting his analysis hardly altered the way I felt.

I just glanced over at the trunk. The first time I saw it, I mean when I discovered what was inside, it appalled me. Like I was staring at the old guy's corpse. Now it's just a trunk. Of course, I also remember thinking I was going to toss it by the end of the week. That was before I started reading. Long before I began putting it all together.

You know this is still the simple answer.

I guess the complicated one I don't feel like getting into.

²⁶Regrettably, Pollit's proclivity to pun and write jokes frequently detracts from his otherwise lucid analysis. *The Incident* (Chicago: Adlai Publishing, 1995), p. 108, is a remarkable example of brilliant scholarship and exemplary synthesis of research and thought. There are also some pretty good illustrations. Unfortunately almost everything he concludes is wrong.

the terror at the door. Fortunately for audiences everywhere, that someone possessed extraordinary visual talents.

Navidson's troubles may not have created the house but they did ultimately shape the way he faced it.

Navidson's childhood was fairly bleak. His father was a St. Louis salesman who worked for a string of large electronics corporations, shuttling his family around the mid-west every two or three years. He was also an alcoholic and prone toward violent outbursts or disappearing for long periods of time.²⁷

Navidson's mother was no better. She soon left them all to pursue a career as an actress and ended up living with a string of not so productive producers. Purportedly in her own words, all she ever wanted to do was "bring down the house." Navidson's father died of congestive heart failure but his mother just vanished. She was last seen in a Los Angeles bar smoking cigarettes and talking about moonlight and why you could find so much of it in Hollywood. Neither Will nor his twin brother Tom ever heard from her again.²⁸

Because the enormous narcissism of their parents deprived Will and Tom of suitable role models, both brothers learned to identify with absence. Consequently, even if something beneficial fortuitously entered their lives they immediately treated it as temporary. By the time they were teenagers they were already accustomed to a discontinuous lifestyle marked by constant threats of abandonment and the lack of any emotional stability. Unfortunately, "accustomed to" here is really synonymous with "damaged by."²⁹

Perhaps one reason Navidson became so enamored with photography was the way it gave permanence to moments that were often so fleeting.

²⁷Michelle Nadine Goetz recalls how on one occasion Navidson's father climbed onto the hood of the family's recently purchased car, used a thermos to crack up the windshield, then marched back into the kitchen, picked up a pan full of sizzling pork chops and threw it against the wall. (See the Goetz interview published in *The Denver Post*, May 14, 1986, B-4). Terry Borowska, who used to babysit both brothers, remembers how every so often Navidson's father would vanish, sometimes for up to five weeks at a time, without telling his family where he was going or when he might return. Inevitably when he did come back—typically after midnight, or early in the morning, sitting in his truck, waiting for them to wake up since he had either left his key or lost it—there would be a few days of warmth and reconciliation. Eventually though, Tony Navidson would return to his own moods and his own needs, forcing Will and Tom to realize they were better off just trying to keep clear of their father. (See Borowska's interview published in *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 27, 1992, D-3, column one.)

²⁸A selection of personal interviews with Adam Zobol, Anthony Freed and Anastasia Cullman. September 8-11, 1994.

²⁹Rita Mistopolis M.D., in her book *Black Heart, Blue Heart* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1984), p. 245, describes the seriousness of emotional deprivation:

It is not difficult to understand how children who have suffered from malnutrition or starvation need food and plenty of care if their bodies are to recover so they can go on to lead normal lives. If, however, the starvation is severe enough, the damage will be permanent and they will suffer physical impairments for the rest of their lives. Likewise, children who are deprived of emotional nurturing require care and love if their sense of security and self-confidence is to be restored. However, if love is minimal and abuse high, the damage will be permanent and the children will suffer *emotional* impairments for the rest of their lives.

Nevertheless, not even ten thousand photographs can secure a world, and so while Navidson may have worked harder, taken greater risks and become increasingly more successful, he was ultimately misled in feeling that his labor could make up for the love he was deprived of as a child and the ultimate sense of security such love bestows.

For this reason, we should again revisit Navidson on his porch, his gaze fixed, his delicate fingers wrapped around a glass of lemonade. "I just thought it would be nice to see how people move into a place and start to inhabit it," he calmly announces. "Settle in, maybe put down roots, interact, hopefully understand each other a little better. Personally, I just want to create a cozy little outpost for me and my family." A pretty innocuous and laconic rumination and yet it contains one particularly nettlesome word.

By definition "outpost" means a base, military or other, which while safe inside functions principally to provide protection from hostile forces found on the outside. This has always seemed a bizarre word to choose to describe a small house in the Virginia countryside,³⁰ but it does shed some light on why Navidson undertook this project in the first place. More than just snapping a few pictures and recording daily events with a few Hi 8s, Navidson wanted to use images to create an outpost set against the transience of the world. No wonder he found it so impossible to give up his professional occupation. In his mind abandoning photography meant submitting to loss.

Therefore to revisit our first two questions:

Why Navidson?

Considering the practically preadamite history of the house, it was inevitable someone *like* Navidson would eventually enter those rooms.

Why not someone else?

Considering his own history, talent and emotional background, only Navidson could have gone as deep as he did and still have successfully brought that vision back.³¹

³⁰Keillor Ross in his article "Legal Zoning" for *Atlantic Monthly*, v. 278, September 1996, p. 43, does not wish to discount the possibility of irony: "After all Navidson has just moved from the extremely populated confines of New York City and is now only poking fun at the relative wilderness of this suburb." Ross makes a good point, except for the fact that Navidson is a man who understands the meaning of outpost and his tone seems too straight forward to imply any kind of jest.

³¹Zampanò. This chapter first appeared as "The Matter Of Why" in *LA Weekly*, May 19, 1994.

IV

*Faith, sir, as to that matter, I don't
believe one half of it myself.*

— Diedrich Knickerbocker

In early June of 1990, the Navidsons flew to Seattle for a wedding. When they returned, something in the house had changed. Though they had only been away for four days, the change was enormous. It was not, however, obvious—like for instance a fire, a robbery, or an act of vandalism. Quite the contrary, the horror was atypical. No one could deny there had been an intrusion, but it was so odd no one knew how to respond. On video, we see Navidson acting almost amused while Karen simply draws both hands to her face as if she were about to pray. Their children, Chad and Daisy, just run through it, playing, giggling, completely oblivious to the deeper implications.

What took place amounts to a strange spatial violation which has already been described in a number of ways—namely surprising, unsettling, disturbing but most of all uncanny. In German the word for 'uncanny' is 'unheimlich' which Heidegger in his book *Sein und Zeit* thought worthy of some consideration:

Daß die Angst als Grundbefindlichkeit in solcher Weise erschließt, dafür ist weider die alltägliche Daseinsauslegung und Rede der unvoreingenommenste Beleg. Befindlichkeit, so wurde früher gesagt, macht offenbar »wie einem ist«. In der Angst is einem »unheimlich«. Darin kommt zunächst die eigentümliche Unbestimmtheit dessen, wobei sich das Dasein in der Angst befindet, zum Ausdruck: das Nichts und Nirgends. Unheimlichkeit meint aber dabei zugleich das Nichtzuhause-sein. Bei der ersten phänomenalen Anzeige der Grundverfassung des Daseins und der Klärung des existenzialen Sinnes von In-Sein im Unterschied von der kategorialen Bedeutung der »Inwendigkeit« wurde das In-Sein bestimmt als Wohnen bei . . . , Vertrautsein mit . . . Dieser Charakter des In-Seins wurde dann konkreter sichtbar gemacht durch die alltägliche Öffentlichkeit des Man, das die beruhigte Selbstsicherheit, das selbstverständliche »Zuhause-sein« in die durchschnittliche Alltäglichkeit des Daseins

bringt. Die Angst dagegen holt das Dasein aus seinem verfallenden Aufgehen in der »Welt« zurück. Die alltägliche Vertrautheit bricht in sich Zusammen. Das Dasein ist vereinzelt, das jedoch als In-der-Welt-sein. Das In-Sein kommt in den existenzialen »Modus« des Un-zuhause. Nichts anderes meint die Rede von der »Unheimlichkeit.«³²

³²Declared Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), p. 250-251.³³

³³And here's the English, thanks to John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson's translation of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Harper & Row, 1962, page 233. A real bitch to find:

In anxiety one feels uncanny. Here the peculiar indefiniteness of that which Dasein finds itself alongside in anxiety, comes proximally to expression: the "nothing and nowhere". But here "uncanniness" also means "not-being-at home." [das Nicht-zuhause-sein]. In our first indication of the phenomenal character of Dasein's basic state and in our clarification of the existential meaning of "Being-in" as distinguished from the categorial signification of 'insideness', Being-in was defined as "residing alongside . . .", "Being-familiar with . . ." This character of Being-in was then brought to view more concretely through the everyday publicness of the "they", which brings tranquilized self-assurance—'Being-at-home', with all its obviousness—into the average everydayness of Dasein. On the other hand, as Dasein falls, anxiety brings it back from its absorption in the 'world'. Everyday familiarity collapses. Dasein has been individualized, but individualized as Being-in-the-world. Being-in enters into the existential 'mode' of the "not-at-home". Nothing else is meant by our talk about 'uncanniness'.

Which only goes to prove the existence of crack back in the early twentieth century. Certainly this geezer must of gotten hung up on a pretty wicked rock habit to start spouting such nonsense. Crazier still, I've just now been wondering if something about this passage may have actually affected me, which I know doesn't exactly follow, especially since that would imply something in it really does make sense, and I just got finished calling it non-sense.

I don't know.

The point is, when I copied down the German a week ago, I was fine. Then last night I found the translation and this morning, when I went into work, I didn't feel at all myself. It's probably just a coincidence—I mean that there's some kind of connection between my state of mind and The Navidson Record or even a few arcane sentences on existence penned by a former Nazi tweaking on who knows what. More than likely, it's something entirely else, the real root lying in my already strange mood fluctuations, though I guess those are pretty recent too, rocking back and forth between wishful thinking and some private agony until the bar breaks. I've no fucking clue.

das Nicht-zuhause-sein
[not-being-at-home.]
That part's definitely true.

These days, I'm an apprentice at a tattoo shop on Sunset. I answer phones, schedule consultations and clean up. Any idiot could handle it. In fact the job's reserved for idiots. This afternoon though, how do I explain it?, something's really off. I'm off. I can't do a fucking thing. I just keep staring at all the ink we have, that wild variety of color, everything from rootbeer, midnight blue and cochineal to mauve, light doe, lilac, south sea green, maize, even pelican black, all lined up in these plastic caps, like tiny transparent thimbles—and needles too, my eyes catching on all those carefully preserved points and we have hundreds, mostly #12 sharps, many singles, though plenty in two, three, four, five, six and seven needle groups, even a fourteen round shader.

It depends on what you need.

I don't know what I need but for no apparent reason I'm going terribly south. Nothing has happened, absolutely nothing, but I'm still having problems breathing. The air in the Shop is admittedly thick with the steady smell of sweat, isopropyl alcohol, Benz-all, all that solution for the ultrasonic cleaner, even solder and flux, but that's not it either.

Of course no one notices. My boss, a retinue of his friends, some new inductee who's just put down \$150 for a rose, keep up the chatter, pretty loud chatter too, though never quite enough to drown out the most important sound of all: the single, insistent buzz of an original "J" tattoo machine logging yet another hundred stabs a minute in the dimple of some chunky ass.

I get a glass of water. I walk out into the hallway. That's a mistake. I should of stayed near people. The comfort of company and all that. Instead I'm alone, running through a quick mental check list: food poisoning? (stomach's fine) withdrawals? (haven't been on a gak or Ecstasy diet for several months, and while I didn't smoke any pot this morning—my usual ritual—I know THC doesn't create any lasting physical dependencies). And then out of the be-fucking-lue, everything gets substantially darker. Not pitch black mind you. Not even power failure black. More like a cloud passing over the sun. Make that a storm. Though there is no storm. No clouds. It's a bright day and anyway I'm inside.

I wish that had been all. Just a slight decrease in illumination and a little breathing difficulty. Could still blame that on a blown fuse or some aberrant drug related flashback. But then my nostrils flare with the scent of something bitter & foul, something inhuman, reeking with so much rot & years, telling me in the language of nausea that I'm not alone.

Something's behind me.

Of course, I deny it.

It's impossible to deny.

I wanna puke.

To get a better idea try this: focus on these words, and whatever you do don't let your eyes wander past the perimeter of this page. Now imagine just beyond your peripheral vision, maybe behind you, maybe to the side of you, maybe even in front of you, but right where you can't see it, something is quietly closing in on you, so quiet in fact you can only hear it as silence. Find those pockets without sound. That's

where it is. Right at this moment. But don't look. Keep your eyes here. Now take a deep breath. Go ahead take an even deeper one. Only this time as you start to exhale try to imagine how fast it will happen, how hard it's gonna hit you, how many times it will stab your jugular with its teeth or are they nails?, don't worry, that particular detail doesn't matter, because before you have time to even process that you should be moving, you should be running, you should at the very least be flinging up your arms—you sure as hell should be getting rid of this book—you won't have time to even scream.

Don't look.

I didn't.

Of course I looked.

I looked so fucking fast I should of ended up wearing one of those neck braces for whiplash.

My hands had gone all clammy. My face was burning up. Who knows how much adrenaline had just been dumped into my system. Before I turned, it felt exactly as if in fact I had turned and at that instant caught sight of some tremendous beast crouched off in the shadows, muscles a twitch from firing its great mass forward, ragged claws slowly extending, digging into the linoleum, even as its eyes are dilating, beyond the point of reason, completely obliterating the iris, and by that widening fire, the glowing furnace of witness, a camera lucida, with me in silhouette, like some silly Hand shadow twitching about upside down, is that right?, or am I getting confused?, either way registering at last the sign it must have been waiting for: my own recognition of exactly what has been awaiting me all along—except that when I finally do turn, jerking around like the scared-shitless shit-for-brains I am, I discover only a deserted corridor, or was it merely a recently deserted corridor?, this thing, whatever it had been, obviously beyond the grasp of my imagination or for that matter my emotions, having departed into alcoves of darkness, seeping into corners & floors, cracks & outlets, gone even to the walls. Lights now normal. The smell history. Though my fingers still tremble and I've yet to stop choking on large irregular gulps of air, as I keep spinning around like a stupid top spinning around on top of nothing, looking everywhere, even though there's absolutely nothing, nothing anywhere.

I actually thought I was going to fall, and then just as abruptly as I'd been possessed by this fear, it left me and I fell back into control.

When I re-enter the Shop things are still askew but they at least seem manageable.

The phone has been ringing. Nine times and counting, my boss announces. He's clearly annoyed. More annoyed when I express some surprise over his ability to count that high.

I pick up before he can start yammering at me about my attitude.

The call's for me. Lude's on a pay phone in the valley with important info. Apparently, there's some significant doings at some significant club. He tells me he can guest list my boss and any cohorts I deem worthy. Sure, I say, but I'm still shaken and quickly lose hold of the details when I realize I've just forgotten something else as well, something very important, which by the time I hang up, no matter how hard I try, I can no longer remember what I'd meant to remember when whatever it was had first entered my head.

Or had it?

Maybe it hadn't entered my head at all. Maybe it had just brushed past me, like someone easing by in a dark room, the face lost in shadow,

Nevertheless regardless of how extensive his analysis is here, Heidegger still fails to point out that *unheimlich* when used as an adverb means "dreadfully," "awfully," "heaps of," and "an awful lot of." Largeness has always been a condition of the weird and unsafe; it is overwhelming, too much or too big. Thus that which is uncanny or *unheimlich* is neither homey nor protective, nor comforting nor familiar. It is alien, exposed, and unsettling, or in other words, the perfect description of the house on Ash Tree Lane.

In their absence, the Navidsons' home had become something else, and while not exactly sinister or even threatening, the change still destroyed any sense of security or well-being.

Upstairs, in the master bedroom, we discover along with Will and Karen a plain, white door with a glass knob. It does not, however, open into the children's room but into a space resembling a walk-in closet. However unlike other closets in the house, this one lacks outlets, sockets, switches, shelves, a rod on which to hang things, or even some decorative molding. Instead, the walls are perfectly smooth and almost pure black—"almost" because there is a slightly grey quality to the surface. The space cannot be more than five feet wide and at most four feet long. On the opposite end, a second door, identical to the first one opens up into the children's bedroom.

Navidson immediately asks whether or not they overlooked the room. This seems ridiculous at first until one considers how the impact of such an implausible piece of reality could force anyone to question their own perceptions. Karen, however, manages to dig up some photos which clearly show a bedroom wall without a door.

The next question is whether or not someone could have broken in and in four days constructed the peculiar addition. Improbable, to say the least.

Their final thought is that someone came in and uncovered it. Just installed two doors. But why? And for that matter, to quote Rilke, *Wer?*³⁴

Navidson does check the Hi 8s but discovers that the motion sensors were never triggered. Only their exit and re-entrance exists on tape. Virtually a week seamlessly elided, showing us the family as they depart from a house without that strange interior space present only to return a fraction of a second later to find it already in place, almost as if it had been there all along.

my thoughts lost in another conversation, though something in her movement or perfume is disturbingly familiar, though how familiar is impossible to tell because by the time I realize she's someone I should know she's already gone, deep into the din, beyond the bar, taking with her any chance of recognition. Though she hasn't left. She's still there. Embracing shadows.

Is that it?

Had I been thinking of a woman?

I don't know.

I hope it doesn't matter.

I have a terrifying feeling it does.

³⁴Neatly translated as "Who?" which I happened to find in this poem "Orpheus, Eurydice, Hermes." The book's called The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, edited and translated by Stephen Mitchell. 1989. See page 53, Vintage International.

Since the discovery occurred in the evening, the Navidsons' inquiry must wait until morning. And so while Chad and Daisy sleep, we watch Karen and Will suffer through a restless night. Hillary, their one year old Siberian husky, and Mallory, their tabby cat, lie on either side of the 24" Sony television unperturbed by the new closet or the flicker from the tube or the drone from the speakers—Letterman, new revelations regarding the Iran-Contra affair, reruns, the traffic of information assuring everyone that the rest of the world is still out there, continuing on as usual, even if two new doors now stand open, providing a view across a new space of darkness, from parent's room to children's room, where a tiny nightlight of the Star Ship Enterprise burns like some North Star.

It is a beautiful shot. In fact, the composition and elegant balance of colours, not to mention the lush contrast of lights and darks, are so exquisite they temporarily distract us from any questions concerning the house or events unfolding there. It seems a perfect example of Navidson's unparalleled talent and illustrates why few, if any, could have accomplished what he did, especially toward the end.

The following day both Karen and Will pursue the most rational course: they acquire the architectural blueprints from their local real estate office. As might have been expected, these blueprints are not actual building plans but were drawn up in 1981 when former owners sought permission from the town's zoning board to construct an ell. The ell, however, was ultimately never built as the owners soon sold the property, claiming they needed something "a little smaller." Though the designs, as they appear on screen, do not show a room or closet, they do confirm the existence of a strange crawl space, roughly four feet wide, running between both bedrooms.³⁵

Alicia Rosenbaum, the real estate agent responsible for selling the Navidsons the house, gives the camera a bewildered shrug when Karen asks if she has any idea who could be responsible for "this outrage." Unable to say anything useful, Mrs. Rosenbaum finally asks if they want to call the police, which amusingly enough they do.

That afternoon, two officers arrive, examine the closet and try to hide the fact that *this* has to be the weirdest call they have ever made. As Sheriff Axnard says, "We'll file a report but other than that, well I don't know what more we can do. Better I guess t'have been a victim of a crazy carpenter than some robber" which even strikes Karen and Navidson as a little funny.

With all obvious options exhausted, Navidson returns to the building plans. At first this seems pretty innocent until he gets out a measuring tape. Idly at first, he starts comparing the dimensions indicated in the plans with those he personally takes. Very soon he realizes not everything adds up. Something, in fact, is very wrong. Navidson repeatedly tacks back and forth from his 25' Stanley Power Lock to the cold blue pages spread out on his bed, until he finally mutters aloud: "This better be a case of bad math."

An incongruous cut presents us with the title card: $\frac{1}{4}$

Outside the house, Navidson climbs up a ladder to the second story. Not an easy ascent he casually confesses to us, explaining how a troublesome skin condition he has had since childhood has recently begun to flare up around his toes. Wincing slightly at what we can assume is at least moderate pain, he reaches the top rung where using a 100' Empire

³⁵In Appendix II-A, Mr. Truant provides a sketch of this floor plan on the back of an envelope. — Ed.

fiberglass tape with a hand crank, he proceeds to measure the distance from the far end of the master bedroom to the far end of the children's bedroom. The total comes to 32' 9 3/4" which the house plans corroborate—plus or minus an inch. The puzzling part comes when Navidson measures the internal space. He carefully notes the length of the new area, the length of both bedrooms and then factors in the width of all the walls. The result is anything but comforting. In fact it is impossible.

32' 10" exactly.

The width of the house inside would appear to exceed the width of the house as measured from the outside by 1/4".

Certain that he has miscalculated, Navidson drills through the outer walls to measure their width precisely. Finally, with Karen's help, he fastens the end of some fishing line to the edge of the outer wall, runs it through the drilled hole, stretches it across the master bedroom, the new space, the children's bedroom and then runs it through a hole drilled through the opposite wall. He double checks his work, makes sure the line is straight, level and taut and then marks it. The measurement is still the same.

32' 10" exactly.

Using the same line, Navidson goes outside, stretches the fishing line from one side of the house to the other only to find it is a quarter of an inch too long.

Exactly.

The impossible is one thing when considered as a purely intellectual conceit. After all, it is not so large a problem when one can puzzle over an Escher print and then close the book. It is quite another thing when one faces a physical reality the mind and body cannot accept.

Karen refuses the knowledge. A reluctant Eve who prefers tangerines to apples. "I don't care," she tells Navidson. "Stop drilling holes in my walls." Undeterred, Navidson continues his quest, even though repeated attempts at measuring the house continue to reveal the quarter-inch anomaly. Karen gets quieter and quieter, Navidson's mood darkens, and responding like finely tuned weathervanes the children react to the change in parental weather by hiding in other parts of the house. Frustration edges into Navidson's voice. No matter how hard he tries—and Navidson tries six consecutive times in six consecutive segments—he cannot slaughter that tiny sliver of space. Another night passes and that quarter of an inch still survives.

Where narratives in film and fiction often rely on virtually immediate reactions, reality is far more insistent and infinitely (literally) more patient. Just as insidious poisons in the water table can take years before their effects are felt, the consequences of the impossible are likewise not so instantly apparent.

Morning means orange juice, *The New York Times*, NPR, a squabble over the children's right to eat sugared cereal. The dishwasher moans, the toaster pops. We watch Karen scan the classifieds as Navidson toys with his coffee. He adds sugar, milk, stirs it all up, stirs it again, and then as an afterthought adds more sugar, a little more milk. The liquid rises to the rim and then by a fraction exceeds even this limit. Only it does not spill. It holds—a bulge of coffee arcing tragically over china, preserved by the physics of surface tension, rhyme to some unspeakable magic, though as everyone knows, coffee miracles never last long. The morning wake-up call wobbles, splits, and then abruptly slips over the edge, now a Nile of

caffeine wending past glass and politics until there is nothing more than a brown blot on the morning paper.³⁶

When Navidson looks up Karen is watching him.

"I called Tom," he tells her.

She understands him well enough not to say a thing.

"He knows I'm insane," he continues. "And besides he builds houses for a living."

"Did you talk to him?" she carefully asks.

"Left a message."

The next card simply reads: **Tom.**

Tom is Will Navidson's fraternal twin brother. Neither one has said much to the other in over eight years. "Navy's successful, Tom's not," Karen explains in the film. "There's been a lot of resentment over the years. I guess it's always been there, except when they lived at home. It was different then. They kind of looked after each other more."

Two days later, Tom arrives. Karen greets him with a big hug and a Hi 8. He is an affable, overweight giant of a man who has an innate ability to amuse. The children immediately take to him. They love his laugh, not to mention his McDonalds french fries.

"My own brother who I haven't talked to in years calls me up at four in the morning and tells me he needs my tools. Go figure."

"That means you're family" Karen says happily, leading the way to Navidson's study where she has already set out clean towels and made up the hideaway.

³⁶Easily that whole bit from "coffee arcing tragically" down to "the mourning paper" could have been cut. You wouldn't of noticed the absence. I probably wouldn't of either. But that doesn't change the fact that I can't do it. Get rid of it, I mean. What's gained in economy doesn't really seem to make up for what you lose of Zampanò, the old man himself, coming a little more into focus, especially where digressions like these are concerned.

I can't tell you why exactly but more and more these days I'm struck by the fact that everything Zampanò had is really gone, including the bowl of betel nuts left on his mantle or the battered shotgun bearing the initials RLB under his bed—Flaze appropriated that goody; the shotgun, not the bed—or even the curiously preserved bud of a white rose hidden in the drawer of his nightstand. By now his apartment has been scrubbed with Clorox, repainted, probably rented out to someone else. His body's either molding in the ground or reduced to ash. Nothing else remains of him but this.

So you see from my perspective, having to decide between old man Z and his story is an artificial, maybe even dangerous choice, and one I'm obviously not comfortable making. The way I figure it, if there's something you find irksome—go ahead and skip it. I couldn't care less how you read any of this. His wandering passages are staying, along with all his oddly canted phrases and even some warped bits in the plot. There's just too much at stake. It may be the wrong decision, but fuck it, it's mine.

Zampanò himself probably would of insisted on corrections and edits, he was his own harshest critic, but I've come to believe errors, especially written errors, are often the only markers left by a solitary life: to sacrifice them is to lose the angles of personality, the riddle of a soul. In this case a very old soul. A very old riddle.

“Usually when you want a level you ask a neighbor or go to the hardware store. Count on Will Navidson to call Lowell, Massachusetts. Where is he?”

As it turns out Navidson has gone to the hardware store to pick up a few items.

In the film, Tom and Navidson’s first encounter has almost nothing to do with each other. Instead of addressing any interpersonal issues, we find them both huddled over a Cowley level mirror transit, alternately taking turns peering across the house, the line of sight floating a few feet above the floor, occasionally interrupted when Hillary or Mallory in some keystone chase race around the children’s beds. Tom believes they will account for the quarter inch discrepancy with a perfectly level measurement.

Later on, out in the backyard, Tom lights up a joint of marijuana. The drug clearly bothers Navidson but he says nothing. Tom knows his brother disapproves but refuses to alter his behavior. Based on their body language and the way both of them avoid looking directly at each other, not to speak of the space between their words, the last eight years continues to haunt them.

“Hey, at least I’m an acquaintance of Bill’s now” Tom finally says, exhaling a thin stream of smoke. “Not a drop of booze in over two years.”

At first glance, it seems hard to believe these two men are even related let alone brothers. Tom is content if there happens to be a game on and a soft place from which to watch it. Navidson works out every day, devours volumes of esoteric criticism, and constantly attaches the world around him to one thing: photography. Tom gets by, Navidson succeeds. Tom just wants to be, Navidson must become. And yet despite such obvious differences, anyone who looks past Tom’s wide grin and considers his eyes will find surprisingly deep pools of sorrow. Which is how we know they are brothers, because like Tom, Navidson’s eyes share the same water.

Either way the moment and opportunity for some kind of fraternal healing disappears when Tom makes an important discovery: Navidson was wrong. The interior of the house exceeds the exterior not by $1/4$ ” but by $5/16$ ”.

No matter how many legal pads, napkins, or newspaper margins they fill with notes or equations, they cannot account for that fraction. One incontrovertible fact stands in their way: the exterior measurement *must* equal the internal measurement. Physics depends on a universe infinitely centred on an equal sign. As science writer and sometime theologian David Conte wrote: “God for all intents and purposes is an equal sign, and at least up until now, something humanity has always been able to believe in is that the universe adds up.”³⁷

On this point, both brothers agree. The problem must lie with their measuring techniques or with some unseen mitigating factor: air temperature, mis-calibrated instruments, warped floors, something, anything. But after a day and a half passes without a solution, they both decide to look for help. Tom calls Lowell and postpones his construction obligations. Navidson calls an old friend who teaches engineering at UVA.

³⁷Look at David Conte’s “All Thing Being Equal” in *Maclean’s*, v. 107, n. 14, 1994, p. 102. Also see Martin Gardner’s “The Vanishing Area Paradox” which appeared in his “Mathematical Games” column in *Scientific America*, May 1961.

Early the following morning, both brothers head off for Charlottesville.

Navidson is not the only one who knows people in the vicinity. Karen's friend Audrie McCulloch drives down from Washington, D.C. to catch up and help construct some bookshelves. Thus as Will and Tom set out to find an answer, two old friends put an enigma on hold, stir up some vodka tonics, and enjoy the rhythm of working with brackets and pine.

Edith Skourja has written an impressive forty page essay entitled *Riddles Without* on this one episode. While most of it focuses on what Skourja refers to as "the political posture" of both women—Karen as ex-model; Audrie as travel agent—one particular passage yields an elegant perspective into the whys and ways people confront unanswered questions:

Riddles: they either delight or torment. Their delight lies in solutions. Answers provide bright moments of comprehension perfectly suited for children who still inhabit a world where solutions are readily available. Implicit in the riddle's form is a promise that the rest of the world resolves just as easily. And so riddles comfort the child's mind which spins wildly before the onslaught of so much information and so many subsequent questions.

The adult world, however, produces riddles of a different variety. They do not have answers and are often called enigmas or paradoxes. Still the old hint of the riddle's form corrupts these questions by re-echoing the most fundamental lesson: there must be an answer. From there comes torment.

It is not uncharacteristic to encounter adults who detest riddles. A variety of reasons may lie behind their reaction but a significant one is the rejection of the adolescent belief in answers. These adults are often the same ones who say "grow up" and "face the facts." They are offended by the incongruities of yesterday's riddles with answers when compared to today's riddles without.

It is beneficial to consider the origins of "riddle." The Old English *rædelse* means "opinion, conjure" which is related to the Old English *rædon* "to interpret" in turn belonging to the same etymological history of "read." "Riddling" is an offshoot of "reading" calling to mind the participatory nature of that act—to interpret—which is all the adult world has left when faced with the unsolvable.

"To read" actually comes from the Latin *reri* "to calculate, to think" which is not only the progenitor of "read" but of "reason" as well, both of which hail from the Greek *arariskein* "to fit." Aside from giving us "reason," *arariskein* also gives us an unlikely sibling, Latin *arma* meaning "weapons." It seems that "to fit" the world or to make sense of it requires either reason or arms. Charmingly enough Karen

Green and Audrie McCulloch “fit it” with a bookshelf.

As we all know, both reason and weapons will eventually be resorted to. At least though for now—before the explorations, before the bloodshed—a drill, a hammer, and a Phillips screwdriver suffice.

Karen refers to her books as her “newly found day to day comfort.” By assembling a stronghold for them, she provides a pleasant balance between the known and the unknown. Here stands one warm, solid, and colorful wall of volume after volume of history, poetry, photo albums, and pulp. And though irony eventually subsumes this moment, for now at least it remains uncommented upon and thus wholly innocent. Karen simply removes a photo album, as anyone might do, and causes all the books to fall like dominos along the length of the shelf. However instead of tumbling to the floor, they are soundly stopped, eliciting a smile from both women and this profound remark by Karen: “No better book ends than two walls.”

Lessons from a library.³⁸

Skourja’s analysis, especially concerning the inherent innocence of Karen’s project, sheds some light on the value of patience.

Walter Joseph Adeltine argues that Skourja forms a dishonest partnership with the shelf building segment: “Riddle me this—Riddle me that—Is all elegant crap. This is not a confrontation with the unknown but a flat-out case of denial.”³⁹ What Adeltine himself denies is the need to face some problems with patience, to wait instead of bumble, or as Tolstoy wrote: “*Dans le doute, mon cher . . . abstiens-toi.*”⁴⁰

Gibbons when working on *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* would go on long walks before sitting down to write. Walking was a time to organize his thoughts, focus and relax. Karen’s shelf building serves the same purpose as Gibbon’s retreats outside. Maturity, one discovers, has everything to do with the acceptance of “not knowing.” Of course not knowing hardly prevents the approaching chaos.

*Tum vero omne mihi visum considerare in ignis Ilium:
Delenda est Carthago.*⁴¹

³⁸Edith Skourja’s “Riddles Without” in *Riddles Within*, ed. Amon Whitten (Chicago: Sphinx Press, 1994), p. 17-57.

³⁹Walter Joseph Adeltine “Crap,” *New Perspectives Quarterly*, v. 11, winter 1994, p. 30.

⁴⁰Something like “When in doubt, friend, do nothing.” *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy, 1982, Penguin Classics in New York, p. 885.

⁴¹Know what, Latin’s way out of my league. I can find people who speak Spanish, French, Hebrew, Italian and even German but the Roman tongue’s not exactly thriving in the streets of LA.

A girl named Amber Rightacre suggested it might have something to do with the destruction of Carthage.⁴² She’s the one who translated and sourced the previous Tolstoy phrase. I’ve actually never read *War and Peace* but she had, and get this, she read it to Zampanò.

I guess you might say in a round about way the old man introduced us.

Anyway since that episode in the tattoo shop, I haven't gone out as much, though to tell you the truth I'm no longer convinced anything happened. I keep cornering myself with questions: did I really experience some sort of decapacitating seizure, I mean in-? Or did I invent it? Maybe I just got a little creative with a residual hangover or a stupid head rush?

Whatever the truth is, I've been spending more and more time riddling through Zampanò's bits—riddling also means sifting; as in passing corn, gravel or cinders through a coarse sieve; a certain coed taught me that. Not only have I found journals packed with bibliographies and snaking etymologies and strange little, I don't know what you'd call them, aphorisms??? epiphanies???, I also came across this notepad crammed with names and telephone numbers. Zampanò's readers. Easily over a hundred of them, though as I quickly discovered more than a few of the numbers are now defunct and very few of the names have last names and for whatever reason those that do are unlisted. I left a couple of messages on some machines and then somewhere on page three, Ms. Rightacre picked up. I told her about my inheritance and she immediately agreed to meet me for a drink.

Amber, it turns out, was quite a number; a quarter French and a quarter Native American with naturally black hair, dark blue eyes and a beautiful belly, long and flat and thin, with a slender twine of silver piercing her navel. A barbed wire tattoo in blue & red encircled her ankle. Whether Zampanò knew it or not, she was a sight I'm sure he was sorry to miss.

"He loved to brag about how uneducated he was," Amber told me. "'I never even went to high school' he would say. "'Good, that makes me smarter than you.' We talked like that a little, but most of the time, I just read to him. He insisted on Tolstoy. Said I read Tolstoy better than anyone else. I think that was mainly because I could manage the French passages okay, my Canadian background and all."

After a few more drinks, we ambled over to the Viper. Lude was hanging out at the door and walked us in. Much to my surprise, Amber grabbed my arm as we headed up the stairs. This thing we shared in common seemed to have created a surprisingly intense bond. Lude listened to us for a while, hastening to add at every pause that he was the one who'd found the damn thing, in fact he was the one who'd called me, he'd even seen Amber around his building a few times, but because he hadn't taken the time to read any of the text he could never address the particulars of our conversation. Amber and I were lost to a different world, a deeper history. Lude knew the play. He ordered a drink on my tab and went in search of other entertainment.

When I eventually got around to asking Amber to describe Zampanò, she just called him "imperceivable and alone, though not I think so lonely." Then the first band came on and we stopped talking. Afterwards, Amber was the one who resumed the conversation, stepping a little closer, her elbow grazing mine. "I never got the idea he had a family," she continued. "I asked him once—and I remember this very clearly—I asked him if he had any children. He said he didn't have any children any more. Then he added: 'Of course, you're all my children,' which was strange since I was the only one there. But the way he looked at me with those blank eyes—" she shuddered and quickly folded her arms as if she'd just gotten cold. "It was like that tiny place of his was suddenly full of faces and he could see them all, even speak to them."

It made me real uneasy, like I was surrounded by ghosts. Do you believe in ghosts?"

I told her I didn't know.

She smiled.

"I'm a Virgo, what about you?"

We ordered another round of drinks, the next band came up, but we didn't stay to hear them finish. As we walked to her place—it turned out she lived nearby, right above Sunset Plaza in fact—she kept returning to the old man, a trace of her own obsession mingling with the drift of her thoughts.

"So not so lonely," she murmured. "I mean with all those ghosts, me and his other children, whoever they were, though actually, hmmm I forgot about this, I don't know why, I mean it was why I finally stopped going over there. When he blinked, his eyelids, this is kind of weird, but they stayed closed a little bit longer than a blink, like he was consciously closing them, or about to sleep, and I always wondered for a fraction of a second if they would ever open again. Maybe they wouldn't, maybe he was going to go to sleep or maybe even die, and looking at his face then, so serene and peaceful made me sad, and I guess I take back what I said before, because with his eyes closed he didn't look alone, then he looked lonely, terribly lonely, and that made me feel real sad and it made me feel lonely too. I stopped going there after a while. But you know what, not visiting him made me feel guilty. I think I still feel guilty about just dropping out on him like that."

We stopped talking about Zampanò then. She paged her friend Christina who took less than twenty minutes to come over. There were no introductions. We just sat down on the floor and snorted lines of coke off a CD case, gulped down a bottle of wine and then used it to play spin the bottle. They kissed each other first, then they both kissed me, and then we forgot about the bottle, and I even managed to forget about Zampanò, about this, and about how much that attack in the tattoo shop had put me on edge. Two kisses in one kiss was all it took, a comfort, a warmth, perhaps temporary, perhaps false, but reassuring nonetheless, and mine, and theirs, ours, all three of us giggling, insane giggles and laughter with still more kisses on the way, and I remember a brief instant then, out of the blue, when I suddenly glimpsed my own father, a rare but oddly peaceful recollection, as if he actually approved of my play in the way he himself had always laughed and played, always laughing, surrendering to its ease, especially when he soared in great updrafts of light, burning off distant plateaus of bistro & sage, throwing him up like an angel, high above the red earth, deep into the sparkling blank, the tender sky that never once let him down, preserving his attachment to youth, propriety and kindness, his plane almost, but never quite, outracing his whoops of joy, trailing him in his sudden turn to the wind, followed then by a near vertical climb up to the angles of the sun, and I was barely eight and still with him and yes, that was the thought that flickered madly through me, a brief instant of communion, possessing me with warmth and ageless ease, causing me to smile again and relax as if memory alone could lift the heart like the wind lifts a wing, and so I renewed my kisses with even greater enthusiasm, caressing and in turn devouring their dark lips, dark with wine and fleeting love, an ancient memory love had promised but finally never gave, until there were too many kisses to count or remember, and the memory of love proved not love at all and needed a replacement, which our bodies found, and then the giggles subsided, and the laughter dimmed, and darkness enfolded all of us and we gave away our childhood for nothing and we died and condoms littered the floor and Christina

Karen's project is one mechanism against the uncanny or that which is "un-home-like." She remains watchful and willing to let the bizarre dimensions of her house gestate within her. She challenges its irregularity by introducing normalcy: her friend's presence, bookshelves, peaceful conversation. In this respect, Karen acts as the quintessential gatherer. She keeps close to the homestead and while she may not forage for berries and mushrooms she does accumulate tiny bits of sense.

Navidson and Tom, on the other hand, are classic hunters. They select weapons (tools; reason) and they track their prey (a solution). Billy Reston is the one they hope will help them achieve their goal. He is a gruff man, frequently caustic and more like a drill sergeant than a tenured professor. He is also a paraplegic who has spent almost half his life in an aluminum wheelchair. Navidson was barely twenty-seven when he first met Reston. Actually it was a photograph that brought them together. Navidson had been on assignment in India, taking pictures of trains, rail workers, engineers, whatever caught his attention. The piece was supposed to capture the clamor of industry outside of Hyderabad. What ended up plastered on the pages of more than a few newspapers, however, was a photograph of a black American engineer desperately trying to out run a falling high voltage wire. The cable had been cut when an inexperienced crane operator had swung wide of a freight car and accidentally collided with an electrical pole. The wood had instantly splintered, tearing in half one of the power cables which descended toward the helpless Billy Reston, spitting sparks, and lashing the air like Nag or Nagaina.⁴³

threw up in the sink and Amber chuckled a little and kissed me a little more, but in a way that told me it was time to leave.

And so only now, days later, as I give these moments shape here, do I re-encounter what my high briefly withheld; the covering memory permanently hitched to everything preceding it and so prohibiting all of it, those memories, the good ones, no matter how different, how blissful, eclipsed by the jack-knifed trailer across the highway, the tractor truck lodged in the stony ditch off the shoulder, oily smoke billowing up into the night, and hardly deterred by the pin prick drizzle, the fire itself crawling up from the punctured fuel tanks, stripping the paint, melting the tires and blackening the shattered glass, the windshield struck from within, each jagged line telling the story of a broken heart which no ten year old boy should ever have to recollect let alone see, even if it is only in half-tone, the ink, all of it, over and over again, finally gathered on his delicate finger tips, as if by tracing the picture printed in the newspaper, he could in some way retract the details of death, smooth away the cab where the man he saw and loved like a god, agonized and died with no word of his own, illegible or otherwise, no god at all, and so by dissolving the black sky bring back the blue. But he never did. He only wore through one newspaper after another which was when the officials responsible for the custody of parentless children decided something was gravely wrong with him and sent him away, making sure he had no more clippings and all the ink, all that remained of his father, was washed from my hands.

⁴²In an effort to keep the translations as literal as possible, both Latin phrases read as follows: "Then in fact all of Troy seemed to me to sink into flames" (*Aeneid* II, 624) and "Carthage must be destroyed." — Ed.

⁴³Nag and Nagaina were the names of the two cobras in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. Eventually both were defeated by the mongoose Rikki-Tikki-Tavi.

Despite his best efforts, Tom cannot hold back a laugh: "You know I hate to tell you this but there are simpler reasons you could of come up with."

"You're telling me," Navidson says, shaking his head.

Rain starts splashing down on the windshield and lightning cracks across the sky. Another pause follows.

This time, Tom breaks the silence: "Did you hear the one about the guy on the tightrope?"

Navidson grins: "I'm glad to see some things never change."

"Hey this one's true. There was this twenty-five year old guy walking a tightrope across a deep river gorge while half way around the world another twenty-five year old guy was getting a blow job from a seventy year old woman, but get this, at the exact same moment both men were thinking the exact same thought. You know what it was?"

"No clue."

Tom gives his brother a wink.

"Don't look down."

And thus as one storm begins to ravage the Virginias, another one just as easily dissipates and vanishes in a flood of bad jokes and old stories.

When confronting the spatial disparity in the house, Karen set her mind on familiar things while Navidson went in search of a solution. The children, however, just accepted it. They raced through the closet. They played in it. They inhabited it. They denied the paradox by swallowing it whole. Paradox, after all, is two irreconcilable truths. But children do not know the laws of the world well enough yet to fear the ramifications of the irreconcilable. There are certainly no primal associations with spatial anomalies.

Similar to the ingenuous opening sequence of *The Navidson Record*, seeing these two giddy children romp around is an equally unsettling experience, perhaps because their state of naïveté is so appealing to us, even seductive, offering such a simple resolution to an enigma. Unfortunately, denial also means ignoring the possibility of peril.

That possibility, however, seems at least momentarily irrelevant when we cut to Will and Tom hauling Billy Reston's equipment upstairs, the authority of their tools quickly subduing any sense of threat.

Just watching the two brothers use the Stanley Beacon level to establish the distance they will need to measure communicates comfort. When they then turn their attention to the Leica meter it is nearly impossible not to at last expect some kind of resolution to this confounding problem. In fact Tom's crossed fingers as the Class 2 laser finally fires a tiny red dot across the width of the house manages to succinctly represent our own sympathies.

As the results are not immediate, we wait along with the whole family as the internal computer calibrates the dimension. Navidson captures these seconds in 16mm. His Arriflex, already pre-focused and left running, spools in 24 frames per second as Daisy and Chad sit on their beds in the background, Hillary and Mallory linger in the foreground near Tom, while Karen and Audrie stand off to the right near the newly created bookshelves.

Suddenly Navidson lets out a hoot. It appears the discrepancy has finally been eliminated.

Tom peers over his shoulder, "Good-bye Mr. Fraction."

"One more time" Navidson says. "One more time. Just to make sure."

Oddly enough, a slight draft keeps easing one of the closet doors shut. It has an eerie effect because each time the door closes we lose sight of the children.

“Hey would you mind propping that open with something?” Navidson asks his brother.

Tom turns to Karen’s shelves and reaches for the largest volume he can find. A novel. Just as with Karen, its removal causes an immediate domino effect. Only this time, as the books topple into each other, the last few do not stop at the wall as they had previously done but fall instead to the floor, revealing at least a foot between the end of the shelf and the plaster.

Tom thinks nothing of it.

“Sorry,” he mumbles and leans over to pick up the scattered books. Which is exactly when Karen screams.

V

*Raju welcomed the intrusion—something to
relieve the loneliness of the place.*

— R. K. Narayan

It is impossible to appreciate the importance of space in *The Navidson Record* without first taking into account the significance of echoes. However, before even beginning a cursory examination of their literal and thematic presence in the film, echoes reverberating within the word itself need to be distinguished.

Generally speaking, echo has two coextensive histories: the mythological one and the scientific one.⁴⁶ Each provides a slightly different perspective on the inherent meaning of recurrence, especially when that repetition is imperfect.

To illustrate the multiple resonances found in an echo, the Greeks conjured up the story of a beautiful mountain nymph. Her name was Echo and she made the mistake of helping Zeus succeed in one of his sexual conquests. Hera found out and punished Echo, making it impossible for her to say anything except the last words spoken to her. Soon after, Echo fell in love with Narcissus whose obsession with himself caused her to pine away until only her voice remained. Another lesser known version of this myth has Pan falling in love with Echo. Echo, however, rejects his amorous offers and Pan, being the god of civility and restraint, tears her to pieces, burying all of her except her voice. *Adonta ta melê*.⁴⁷ In both cases, unfulfilled love results in the total negation of Echo's body and the near negation of her voice.⁴⁸

But Echo is an insurgent. Despite the divine constraints imposed upon her, she still manages to subvert the gods' ruling. After all, her repetitions are far from digital, much closer to analog. Echo colours the words with faint traces of sorrow (The Narcissus myth) or accusation (The Pan myth) never present in the original. As Ovid recognized in his *Metamorphoses*:

⁴⁶David Eric Katz argues for a third: the epistemological one. Of course, the implication that the current categories of myth and science ignore the reverberation of knowledge itself is not true. Katz's treatment of repetition, however, is still highly rewarding. His list of examples in Table iii are particularly impressive. See *The Third Beside You: An Analysis of the Epistemological Echo* by David Eric Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

⁴⁷*Adonta ta . . .* = "Her still singing limbs."⁴⁷

⁴⁷Note that luckily in this chapter, Zampanò penciled many of the translations for these Greek and Latin quotations into the margins. I've gone ahead and turned them into footnotes.

⁴⁸Ivan Largo Stilets, *Greek Mythology Again* (Boston: Biloquist Press, 1995), p. 343-497; as well as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, III. 356-410.

*Spreta latet silvis pudibundaque frondibus
ora protegit et solis ex illo vivit in antris; sed
tamen haeret amor crescitque dolore repulsae;
extenuant vigiles corpus miserabile curae ad-
ducitque cutem macies et in aera sucus
corporis omnis abit; vox tantum atque ossa
supersunt: vox manet, ossa ferunt lapidis
traxisse figuram. Inde latet silvis nulloque in
monte videtur, omnibus auditur: sonus est,
qui vivit in illa.*⁴⁸

To repeat: her voice has life. It possesses a quality not present in the original, revealing how a nymph can return a different and more meaningful story, in spite of telling the same story.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Eloquently translated by Horace Gregory as: "So she was turned away/ To hide her face, her lips, her guilt among the trees./ Even their leaves, to haunt caves of the forest./ To feed her love on melancholy sorrow/ Which, sleepless, turned her body to a shade./ First pale and wrinkled, then a sheet of air./ Then bones, which some say turned to thin-worn rocks; / And last her voice remained. Vanished in forest./ Far from her usual walks on hills and valleys./ She's heard by all who call; her voice has life." *The Metamorphoses* by Ovid. (New York: A Mentor Book, 1958), p. 97.

⁴⁹Literary marvel Miguel de Cervantes set down this compelling passage in his *Don Quixote* (Part One, Chapter Nine) :

. . . la verdad, cuya madre es la historia, émula del tiempo, depósito de las acciones, testigo de lo pasado, ejemplo y aviso de lo presente, advertencia de lo por venir.⁵¹

Much later, a yet untried disciple of arms had the rare pleasure of meeting the extraordinary Pierre Menard in a Paris café following the second world war. Reportedly Menard expounded on his distinct distaste for Madelines but never mentioned the passage (and echo of *Don Quixote*) he had penned before the war which had subsequently earned him a fair amount of literary fame:

. . . la verdad, cuya madre es la historia, émula del tiempo, depósito de las acciones, testigo de lo pasado, ejemplo y aviso de lo presente, advertencia de lo por venir.

This exquisite variation on the passage by the "ingenious layman" is far too dense to unpack here. Suffice it to say Menard's nuances are so fine they are nearly undetectable, though talk with the Framer and you will immediately see how haunted they are by sorrow, accusation, and sarcasm.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Exactly! How the fuck do you write about "exquisite variation" when both passages are exactly the same?

I'm sure the late hour has helped, add to that the dim light in my room, or how poorly I've been sleeping, going to sleep but not really resting, if that's possible, though let me tell you, sitting alone, awake to nothing else but this odd murmuring, like listening to the penitent pray—you know it's a prayer but you miss the words—or better yet listening to a bitter curse, realizing a whole lot wrong's being ushered into the world but still missing the words, me like that, listening in my way by comparing in his way both Spanish fragments, both written out on brown leaves of paper, or no, that's not right, not brown, more like, oh I don't know, yes brown but in the failing light appearing almost colored or the memory of a color, somehow violent, or close to that, or not at all, as I just kept reading both pieces over and over again, trying to detect at least one differing accent or

In his own befuddled way, John Hollander has given the world a beautiful and strange reflection on love and longing. To read his marvelous dialogue on echo⁵² is to find its author standing perfectly still in the middle of the sidewalk, eyes wild with a cascade of internal reckonings, lips acting out some unintelligible discourse, inaudible to the numerous students who race by him, noting his mad appearance and quite rightly offering him a wide berth as they escape into someone else's class.⁵³

Hollander begins with a virtual catalogue of literal echoes. For example, the Latin "*decem iam annos aetatem trivi in Cicerone*" echoed by the Greek "*one!*"♂ Or "*Musarum studia*" (Latin) described by the echo as "*dia*" (Greek).♀ Or Narcissus' rejection "*Emoriar, quam sit tibi copia*

letter, wanting to detect at least one differing accent or letter, getting almost desperate in that pursuit, only to repeatedly discover perfect similitude, though how can that be, right? if it were perfect it wouldn't be similar it would be identical, and you know what? I've lost this sentence, I can't even finish it, don't know how—

Here's the point: the more I focused in on the words the farther I seemed from my room. No sense where either, until all of a sudden along the edges of my tongue, towards the back of my mouth, I started to taste something extremely bitter, almost metallic. I began to gag. I didn't gag, but I was certain I would. Then I got a whiff of that same something awful I'd detected outside of the Shop in the hall. Faint as hell at first until I knew I'd smelled it and then it wasn't faint at all. A whole lot of rot was suddenly packed up my nose, slowly creeping down my throat, closing it off. I started to throw up, watery chunks of vomit flying everywhere, sluicing out of me onto the floor, splashing onto the wall, even onto this. Except I only coughed. I didn't cough. I lightly cleared my throat and then the smell was gone and so was the taste. I was back in my room again, looking around in the dim light, jittery, disoriented but hardly fooled.

I put the fragments back in the trunk. Walked the perimeter of my room. Glass of bourbon. A toke on a blunt. There we go. Bring on the haze. But who am I kidding? I can still see what's happening. My line of defense has not only failed, it failed long ago. Don't ask me to define the line either or why exactly it's needed or even what it stands in defense against. I haven't the foggiest idea.

This much though I'm sure of: I'm alone in hostile territories with no clue why they're hostile or how to get back to safe havens, an Old Haven, a lost haven, the temperature dropping, the hour heaving & pitching towards a profound darkness, while before me my idiotic amaurotic Guide laughs, actually cackles is more like it, lost in his own litany of inside jokes, completely out of his head, out of focus too, zonules of Zinn, among other things, having snapped long ago like piano wires, leaving me with absolutely no sound way to determine where the hell I'm going, though right now going to hell seems like a pretty sound bet.

⁵¹Which Anthony Bonner translates as ". . . truth, whose mother is history, who is the rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, example and lesson to the present, and warning to the future." — Ed.

⁵²See John Hollander's *The Figure of Echo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

⁵³Kelly Chamotto makes mention of Hollander in her essay "Mid-Sentence, Mid-Stream" in *Glorious Garrulous Graphomania* ed. T. N Joseph Truslow (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), p. 345.

♂ "I've spent ten years on Cicero" "Ass!"

♀ "The Muses' studies" "divine ones."

nostris” to which Echo responds “*sit tibi copia nostris*.”[¶] On page 4, he even provides a woodcut from Athanasius Kircher’s *Neue Hall -und Thonkunst* (Nördlingen, 1684) illustrating an artificial echo machine designed to exchange “*clamore*” for four echoes: “*amore*,” “*more*,” “*ore*,” and finally “*re*.”[‡] Nor does Hollander stop there. His slim volume abounds with examples of textual transfiguration, though in an effort to keep from repeating the entire book, let this heart-wrenching interchange serve as a final example:

*Chi dara fine al gran dolore?
L'ore.*[∞]

While *The Figure of Echo* takes special delight in clever word games, Hollander knows better than to limit his examination there. Echo may live in metaphors, puns and the suffix—*solis ex illo vivit in antris*^Ω—but her range extends far beyond those literal walls. For instance, the rabbinical *bat kol* means “daughter of a voice” which in modern Hebrew serves as a rough equivalent for the word “echo.” Milton knew it: “God so commanded, and left that Command/ Sole Daughter of his voice.”⁵⁵ So did Wordsworth: “stern Daughter of the Voice of God.” Quoting from Henry Reynold’s *Mythomystes* (1632), Hollander evidences religious appropriation of the ancient myth (page 16):

This *Winde* is (as the before-mentioned Iamblicus, by consent of his other fellow-*Cabalists* sayes) the Symbole of the Breath of God; and Ecco, the reflection of this divine breath, or spirit upon us; or (as they interpret it) *the daughter of the divine voice*; which through the beatifying splendor it sheds and diffuses through the Soule, is justly worthy to be revered and adored by us. This *Ecco* descending upon a Narcissus, or such a Soule as (impurely and vitiously affected) slights, and stops his eares to the Divine voice, or shuts his harte from divine Inspirations, through his being enamour’d of not himselfe, but his owne shadow meerely . . . he becomes thence . . . an earthy, weake, worthlesse thing, and fit sacrificize for only eternall oblivion . . .

Thus Echo suddenly assumes the role of god’s messenger, a female Mercury or perhaps even Prometheus, decked in talaria, with lamp in hand, descending on fortunate humanity.

[¶]Narcissus: “May I die before I give you power over me.” Echo: “I give you power over me.”

[‡]“O outcry” returns as “love,” “delays,” “hours” and “king.”

[∞] “Who will put an end to this great sadness?” “The hours passing”

^Ω “Literature’s rocky caves”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ “From that time on she lived in lonely caves.” — Ed.

⁵⁵ John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, IX, 653-54.

In 1989, however, the noted southern theologian Hanson Edwin Rose dramatically revised this reading. In a series of lectures delivered at Chapel Hill, Rose referred to “God’s Grand Utterance” as “The Biggest Bang Of Them All.” After discussing in depth the difference between the Hebrew *davhar* and the Greek *logos*, Rose took a careful accounting of St. John, chapter 1, Verse 1 — “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” It was a virtuoso performance but one that surely would have been relegated to those dusty shelves already burdened with a thousand years of seminary discourse had he not summed up his ruminations with this incendiary and still infamous conclusion: “Look to the sky, look to yourself and remember: we are only god’s echoes and god is Narcissus.”⁵⁶

Rose’s pronouncement recalls another equally important meditation:

Why did god create a dual universe?
So he might say,
“Be not like me. I am alone.”
And it might be heard.⁵⁷

There is not time or room to adequately address the complexity inherent in this passage, aside from noting how the voice is returned—or figuratively echoed—not with an actual word but with the mere understanding that it was received, listened to, or as the text explicitly states “heard.” What the passage occludes, no doubt on purpose, is how such an understanding might be attained.

Interestingly enough, for all its marvelous observation, *The Figure of Echo* contains a startling error, one which performs a poetic modulation on a voice sounded over a century ago. While discussing Wordsworth’s poem “The Power of Sound” Hollander quotes on page 19 the following few lines:

Ye Voices, and ye Shadows
And Images of voice—to hound and horn
From rocky steep and rock-bestudded meadows
Flung back, and in the sky’s blue *care* reborn —

[Italics added for emphasis]

Perhaps it is simply a typographical error committed by the publisher. Or perhaps the publisher was dutifully transcribing an error committed by Hollander himself, not just a scholar but a poet as well, who in that tiny slip where an “r” replaced a “v” and an “s” miraculously vanished reveals his own relation to the meaning of echo. A meaning Wordsworth did not share. Consider the original text:

⁵⁶Hanson Edwin Rose, *Creationist Myths* (Detroit, Michigan: Pneuma Publications, 1989), p. 219.

⁵⁷These lines have a familiar ring though I’ve no clue why or where I’ve heard them before.⁵⁸

⁵⁸Though we were ultimately unsuccessful, all efforts were made to determine who wrote the above verse. We apologize for this inconsistency. Anyone who can provide legitimate proof of authorship will be credited in future editions. — Ed.

Ye Voices, and ye Shadows
And Images of voice—to hound and horn
From rocky steep and rock-bestudded meadows
Flung back, and, in the sky's blue *caves* reborn —⁵⁹

[Italics added for emphasis]

While Wordsworth's poetics retain the literal properties and stay within the canonical jurisdiction of Echo, Hollander's find something else, not exactly 'religious'—that would be hyperbole—but 'compassionate', which as an echo of humanity suggests the profoundest return of all.

Aside from recurrence, revision, and commensurate symbolic reference, echoes also reveal emptiness. Since objects always muffle or impede acoustic reflection, only empty places can create echoes of lasting clarity.

Ironically, hollowness only increases the eerie quality of otherness inherent in any echo. Delay and fragmented repetition create a sense of another inhabiting a necessarily deserted place. Strange then how something so uncanny and outside of the self, even ghostly as some have suggested, can at the same time also contain a resilient comfort: the assurance that even if it is imaginary and at best the product of a wall, there is still something else out there, something to stake out in the face of nothingness.

Hollander is wrong when he writes on page 55:

The apparent echoing of solitary words . . .
[reminds] us . . . that acoustical echoing in empty
places can be a very common auditory emblem,
redolent of gothic novels as it may be, of isolation
and often of unwilling solitude. This is no doubt a
case of natural echoes conforming to echo's
mythographic mocking, rather than affirming, role.
In an empty hall that should be comfortably
inhabited, echoes of our voices and motions mock
our very presence in the hollow space.

It is not by accident that choirs singing Psalms are most always recorded with ample reverb. Divinity seems defined by echo. Whether the Vienna Boys Choir or monks chanting away on some chart climbing CD, the hallowed always seems to abide in the province of the hollow. The reason for this is not too complex. An echo, while implying an enormity of a space, at the same time also defines it, limits it, and even temporarily inhabits it.

When a pebble falls down a well, it is gratifying to hear the eventual plunk. If, however, the pebble only slips into darkness and vanishes without a sound, the effect is disquieting. In the case of a verbal echo, the

⁵⁹William Wordsworth, *The Poems Of William Wordsworth*, ed. Nowell Charles Smith, M.A. vol. 1. (London: Methuen and Co., 1908), p. 395. Also of some interest is Alice May Williams letter to the observers at Mount Wilson (CAT. #0005) in which she writes: "I beleive that sky opens & closes on certain periods, When you see all that cloud covering the sky right up, & over. Those clouds are called. Blinds, shutters, & verandahs. Somtimes that sky opens underneath." See *No One May Ever Have The Same Knowledge Again: Letters to Mount Wilson Observatory 1915-1935*, edited and transcribed by Sarah Simons (West Covina, California: Society For the Diffusion of Useful Information Press, 1993), p. 11.

spoken word acts as the pebble and the subsequent repetition serves as “the plunk.” In this way, speaking can result in a form of “seeing.”

For all its merits, Hollander’s book only devotes five pages to the actual physics of sound. While this is not the place to dwell on the beautiful and complex properties of reflection, in order to even dimly comprehend the shape of the Navidson house it is still critical to recognize how the laws of physics in tandem with echo’s mythic inheritance serve to enhance echo’s interpretive strength.

The descriptive ability of the audible is easily designated with the following formula:

⊙ Sound + Time = Acoustic Light

As most people know who are versed in this century’s technological effects, exact distances can be determined by timing the duration of a sound’s round trip between the deflecting object and its point of origin. This principle serves as the basis for all the radar, sonar and ultrasonics used every day around the world by air traffic controllers, fishermen, and obstetricians. By using sound or electromagnetic waves, visible blips may be produced on a screen, indicating either a 747, a school of salmon, or the barely pumping heart of a fetus.

Of course echolocation has never belonged exclusively to technology. *Microchiroptera* (bats), *Cetacean* (porpoises and toothed whales), *Delphinis delphis* (dolphins) as well as certain mammals (flying foxes) and birds (oilbirds) all use sound to create extremely accurate acoustic images. However, unlike their human counterparts, neither bats nor dolphins require an intermediary screen to interpret the echoes. They simply “see” the shape of sound.

Bats, for example, create frequency modulated [FM] images by producing constant-frequency signals [0.5 to 100+ ms] and FM signals [0.5 to 10 ms] in their larynx. The respondent echoes are then translated into nerve discharges in the auditory cortex, enabling the bat not only to determine an insect’s velocity and direction (through synaptic interpretation of Doppler shifts) but pinpoint its location to within a fraction of a millimeter.⁶⁰

As Michael J. Buckingham noted in the mid-80s, imaging performed by the human eye is neither active nor passive. The eye does not need to produce a signal to see nor does an object have to produce a signal in order to be seen. An object merely needs to be illuminated. Based on these observations, the already mentioned formula reflects a more accurate understanding of vision with the following refinement:

⊙ Sound + Time = Acoustic Touch

As Gloucester murmured, “I see it feelingly.”⁶¹

Unfortunately, humans lack the sophisticated neural hardware present in bats and whales. The blind must rely on the feeble light of fingertips and the painful shape of a cracked shin. Echolocation comes down to the crude assessment of simple sound modulations, whether in the dull reply of

⁶⁰See D. R. Griffin, *Listening in the Dark* (1986).

⁶¹*King Lear*, IV, vi, 147.

a tapping cane or the low, eerie flutter in one simple word—perhaps your word—flung down empty hallways long past midnight.⁶²

⁶²You don't need me to point out the intensely personal nature of this passage. Frankly I'd of rec'd a quick skip past the whole echo ramble were it not for those six lines, especially the last bit "— perhaps your word—" conjuring up, at least for me, one of those deep piercing reactions, the kind that just misses a ventricle, the old man making his way—feeling his way—around the walls of another evening, a slow and tedious progress but one which begins to yield, somehow, the story of his own creature darkness, taking me completely by surprise, a sudden charge from out of the dullest moment, jaws lunging open, claws protracting, and just so you understand where I'm coming from, I consider ". . . long past midnight" one claw and "empty hallways" another.

Don't worry Lude didn't buy it either but at least he bought a couple of rounds.

Two nights ago, we were checking out the Sky Bar, hemorrhaging dough on drinks, but Lude could only cough hard and then laugh real coronary like: "Hoss, a claw's made of bone just like a stilt's made of steel."

"Sure" I said.

But it was loud there and the crowd kept both of us from hearing correctly. And while I wanted to believe Lude's basics, I couldn't. There was something just so awful in the old man's utterance. I felt a terrible empathy for him then, living in that tiny place, permeated with the odor of age, useless blinks against the darkness. His word—my word, maybe even your word—added to this, and ringing inside me like some awful dream, over and over again, modulating slightly, slowly pitching my own defenses into something entirely different, until the music of that recurrence drew into relief my own scars drawn long ago, over two decades ago, and with more than a claw, a stiletto or even an ancient Samuel O'Reilly @ 1891, and these scars torn, ripped, bleeding and stuttering—for they are first of all his scars—the kind only bars of an EKG can accurately remember, a more precise if incomplete history, Q waves deflecting downward at what must be considered the commencement of the QRS complex, telling the story of a past infarction, that awful endurance and eventual letting go, the failure which began it all in the first place, probably right after one burning maze but still years ahead of the Other loss, a horrible violence, before the coming of that great Whale, before the final drift, nod, macking skid, twist and topple—his own burning—years before the long rest, coming along in its own way, its own nightmare, perhaps even in the folds of another unprotected sleep (so I like to imagine), silvering wings fragmenting then scattering like fish scales flung on the jet stream, above the clouds and every epic venture still suggested in those delicate, light-cradled borders—Other Lands—sweeping the world like a whisper, a hand, even if salmon scales still slip through words as easily as palmed prisms of salt will always slip through fingers, shimmering, raining, confused, and no matter how spectacular forever unable to prevent his fall, down through the silver, the salmon, away from the gold and the myriad of games held in just that word, suggesting it might have even been Spanish gold, though this makes no difference, still tumbling in rem-, dying and -embered, even? or never, in a different light, and not waking this time, before the hit, but sleeping right through it, the slamming into the ground, at terminal velocity too, the pound, the bounce, What kind of ground-air emergency code would that mark mean? the opposition of L's? Not understood? Probably just X marks the spot: Unable To

The study of architectural acoustics focuses on the rich interplay between sound and interior design. Consider, for example, how an enclosed space will naturally increase sound pressure and raise the frequency. Even though they are usually difficult to calculate, resonance frequencies, also known as eigenfrequencies or natural frequencies, can be easily determined for a perfectly rectangular room with hard smooth walls. The following formula describes the resonance frequencies [f] in a room

Proceed—then in the awful second arc and second descent, after the sound, the realization of what Sleep has just now delivered, that bloody handmaiden, this time her toiling fingers wet with boiling deformation, oozing in the mutilations of birth, heartless & unholy, black with afterbirth, miscreated changeling and foul, what no one beside him could prevent, but rather might have even caused, and mine too, this unread trauma, driving him to consciousness with a scream, not even a word, a scream, and even that never heard, so not a scream but the clutch of life held by will alone, no 911, no call at all, just his own misunderstanding of the reality that had broken into the Hall, the silence then of a woman and an only son, describing in an agonizing hour all it takes to let go, broken, bleeding, ragged, twisted, savaged, torn and dying too, so permanently wronged, though for how many years gone untold, unseen, reminiscent of another silver shape, so removed and yet so dear, kept on a cold gold chain, years on, this fistful of twitching injured life, finally recovering on its own until eventually like a seed conceived, born and grown, the story of its injured beat survives long enough to destroy and devour by the simple telling of its fall, all his hope, his home, his only love, the very color of his flesh and the dark marrow of his bone.

"You okay Truant?" Lude asked.

But I saw a strange glimmer everywhere, confined to the sharp oscillations of yellow & blue, as if my retinal view suddenly included along with the reflective blessings of light, an unearthly collusion with scent & sound, registering all possibilities of harm, every threat, every move, even with all that grinning and meeting and din.

A thousand and one possible claws.

Of course, Lude didn't see it. He was blind. Maybe even right. We drove down Sunset and soon veered south into the flats. A party somewhere. An important gathering of E heads and coke heads. Lude would never feel how "empty hallways long past midnight" could slice inside of you, though I'm not so sure he wasn't sliced up just the same. Not seeing the rip doesn't mean you automatically get to keep clear of the Hey-I'm-Bleeding part. To feel though, you have to care and as we walked out onto the blue-lit patio and discovered a motorcycle sputtering up oil and bubbles from the bottom of the pool while on the diving board two men shoved flakes of ice up a woman's bleeding nostrils, her shirt off, her bra nearly transparent, I knew Lude would never care much about the dead. And maybe he was right. Maybe some things are best left untouched. Of course he didn't know the dead like I did. And so when he absconded with a bottle of Jack from the kitchen, I did my best to join him. Obliterate my own cavities and graves.

But come morning, despite my headache and the vomit on my shirt, I knew I'd failed.

Inside me, a long dark hallway already caressed the other music of a single word, and what's worse, despite the amazements of chemicals, continued to grow.

with a length of L , width of W , and height of H , where the velocity of sound equals c :

$$f = c/2 \left[(n/L)^2 + (m/W)^2 + (p/H)^2 \right]^{1/2} \text{ Hz}$$

Notice that if L , W , and H all equal ∞ , f will equal 0.

Along with resonance frequencies, the study of sound also takes into account wave acoustics, ray acoustics, diffusion, and steady-state pressure level, as well as sound absorption and transmission through walls. A careful examination of the dynamics involved in sound absorption reveals how incident sound waves are converted to energy. (In the case of porous material, the subsurface lattice of interstices translates sound waves into heat.) Nevertheless, above and beyond the details of frequency shifts and volume fluctuations—the physics of ‘otherness’—what matters most is a sound’s delay.⁶³

Point of fact, the human ear cannot distinguish one sound wave from the same sound wave if it returns in less than 50 milliseconds. Therefore for anyone to hear a reverberation requires a certain amount of space. At 68 degrees Fahrenheit sound travels at approximately 1,130ft per second. A reflective surface must stand at least 56 1/2ft away in order for a person to detect the doubling of her voice.⁶⁴

In other words, to hear an echo, regardless of whether eyes are open or closed, is to have already “seen” a sizable space.

Myth makes Echo the subject of longing and desire. Physics makes Echo the subject of distance and design. Where emotion and reason are concerned both claims are accurate.

And where there is no Echo there is no description of space or love.
There is only silence.⁶⁵

⁶³Further attention should probably be given to sabins and Transmission Loss as described by $TL = 10 \log 1/\tau$ dB, where τ = a transmission coefficient and a high TL indicates a high sound insulation. Unfortunately, one could write several lengthy books on sound alone in *The Navidson Record*. Oddly enough, with the sole exception of Kellog Pequity’s article on acoustic impedance in Navidson’s house (*Science*, April 1995, p. 43), nothing else has been rendered on this particularly resonant topic. On the subject of acoustic coefficient, however, see Ned Noi’s “Echo’s Verse” in *Science News*, v. 143, February 6, 1993, p. 85.

⁶⁴Parallel surfaces will create a flutter echo, though frequently a splay of as little as 16mm (5/8 inch) can prevent the multiple repetitions.

⁶⁵There is something more at work here, some sort of antithetical reasoning and proof making, and what about light?, all of which actually made sense to me at a certain hour before midnight or at least came close to making sense. Problem was Lude interrupted my thoughts when he came over and after much discussion (not to mention shots of tequila and a nice haircut) convinced me to share a bag of mushrooms with him and in spite of getting violently ill in the aisle of a certain 7-Eleven (me; not him) led me to an after hours party where I soon became engrossed in a green-eyed brunette (Lucy) who had no intention of letting our dance end at the club, and yet even in our sheet twisting, lightless dance on my floor, her own features, those pale legs, soft arms, the fragile collar bone tracing a shadow of (—can’t write the word—), invariably became entwined and permanently??? entangled, even entirely replaced??? by images of a completely different woman; relatively new, or not new at

all, but for reasons unknown to me still continuing to endure as a center to my thoughts; her—

—first encountered in the company of Lude and my boss at a place my boss likes to call The Ghost. The problem is that in his mind The Ghost actually refers to two places: The Garden of Eden on La Brea and The Rainbow Bar & Grill on Sunset. How or why this came about is impossible to trace. Private nomenclature seems to rapidly develop in tight set-upon circles, though truth be told we were only set-upon on a good day, and tight here should be taken pretty loosely.

How then, you ask, do you know what's being referred to when The Ghost gets mentioned?

You don't.

You just end up at one or the other. Often the Rainbow. Though not always the Rainbow. You see, how my boss defines The Ghost varies from day to day, depending mostly on his moods and appetites. Consequently, the previously mentioned "pretty loosely" should probably be struck and re-stated as "very, very loosely."

Anyway, what I'm about to tell you happened on one of those rare evenings when we actually all got together. My boss was chattering incessantly about his junk days in London and how he'd contemplated sobriety and what those contemplations had been like. Eventually he detoured into long winded non-stories about his Art School experiences in Detroit,—lots of "Hey, my thing for that whole time thing was really a kinda art thing or something"—which was about when I hauled out my pad of sketches, because no matter what you made of his BS you still couldn't fault him for his work. He was one of best, and every tatted local knew it.

Truth be known, I'd been waiting for this chance for a while, keen on getting his out-of-the-Shop perspective on my efforts, and what efforts they were—diligent designs sketched over the months, intended someday to live in skin, each image carefully wrapped and coiled in colors of cinnabar, lemon, celadon and indigo, incarnated in the scales of dragons, the bark of ancient roods, shields welded by generations cast aside in the oily umber of shadow & blood not to speak of lifeless trees prevailing against indifferent skies or colossal vessels asleep in prehistoric sediment, miles beneath even the faintest suggestion of light—at least that's how I would describe them—every one meticulously rendered on tracing paper, cracking like fire whenever touched, a multitude of pages, which my boss briefly examined before handing them back to me.

"Take up typing," he grunted.

Well that's nice, I thought.

At least the next step was clear.

Some act of violence would be necessary.

And so it was that before another synapse could fire within my bad-off labyrinthine brain, he was already lying on the floor. Or I should say his mangled body was lying on the floor. His head remained in my hands. Twisted off like a cap. Not as difficult as I'd imagined. The first turn definitely the toughest, necessitating the breaking of cervical vertebrae and the snapping of the spinal cord, but after that, another six or so turns, and voilà—the head was off. Nothing could be easier. Time to go bowling.

My boss smiled. Said hello.

But he wasn't smiling or saying hello to me.

Somehow she was already standing there, right in front of him, right in front of me, talking to him, reminiscing, touching his shoulder, even winking at me and Lude.

Wow. Out of nowhere. Out of the blue.

Where had she come from? Or for that matter, when?

Of course my boss didn't introduce her. He just left me to gape. I couldn't even imagine twisting off his head for a second time as that would of meant losing sight of her. Which I found myself quite unwilling to do.

Fortunately, after that evening, she began dropping by the Shop alot, always wearing these daisy sunglasses and each time taking me completely off guard.

She still drives me nuts. Just thinking of her now and I'm lost, lost in the smell of her, the way of her and everything she conjures up inside me, a mad rush of folly & oddly muted lusts, sensations sublimated faster than I can follow, into— oh hell I don't know what into, I probably shouldn't even be using a word like sublimate, but that's beside the point, her hair reminding me of a shiny gold desert wind brazed in a hot August sun, hips curving like coastal norths, tits rising and falling beneath her blue sweatshirt the way an ocean will do long after the storm has passed. (She's always a little out of breath when she climbs the flight of stairs leading up to the Shop.) One glance at her, even now in the glass of my mind, and I want to take off, travel with her, who knows where either, somewhere, my desire suddenly informed by something deeper, even unknown, pouring into me, drawn off some peculiar reserve, tracing thoughts of the drive she and I would take, lungs full of that pine rasping air, outracing something unpleasant, something burning, in fact the entire coast along with tens of thousands of acres of inland forest is burning but we're leaving, we're getting away, we're free, our hands battered by the clutch of holding on—I don't know what to, but holding just the same—and cheeks streaked with wind tears; and now that I think of it I guess we are on a motorcycle, a Triumph?, isn't that what Lude always talks about buying?, ascending into colder but brighter climes, and I don't know anything about bikes let alone how to drive one. And there I go again. She does that to me. Like I already said, drives me nuts.

"Hello?"

That was the first word she ever said to me in the Shop. Not like "Hi" either. More like "Hello, is anyone home?" hence the question mark. I wasn't even looking at her when she said it, just staring blankly down at my equally blank pad of tracing paper, probably thinking something similar to all those ridiculous, sappy thoughts I just now recounted, about road trips and forest fires and motorcycles, remembering her, even though she was right there in front of me, only a few feet away.

"Hey asshole," my boss shouted. "Hang up her fucking pants. What's the matter with you?"

Something would have to be done about him.

But before I could hurl him through the plate glass window into the traffic below, she smiled and handed me her bright pink flip-flops & white Adidas sweats. My boss was lucky. This magnificent creature had just saved his life.

Gratefully I received her clothes, lifting them from her fingers tips like they were some sacred vesture bestowed upon me by the Virgin Mary herself. The hard part, I found, was trying not to stare too long

at her legs. Very tricky to do. Next to impossible, especially with her just standing there in a black G-string, her bare feet sweating on the naked floor.

I did my best to smile in a way that would conceal my awe.

"Thank you," I said, thinking I should kneel.

"Thank you," she insisted.

Those were the next two words she ever said to me, and wow, I don't know why but her voice went off in my head like a symphony. A great symphony. A sweet symphony. A great-fucking-sweet symphony. I don't know what I'm saying. I know absolutely shit about symphonies.

"What's your name?" The total suddenly climbing to an impossible six words.

"Johnny," I mumbled, promptly earning four more words. And just like that.

"Nice to meet you," she said in a way that almost sounded like a psalm. And then even though she clearly enjoyed the effect she was having on me, she turned away with a wink, leaving me to ponder and perhaps pray.

At least I had her ten words: "hello thank you what's your name nice to meet you." Ten whole fucking words. Wow. Wow. Wow. And hard as this may be for you to believe, I really was reeling. Even after she left the Shop an hour or so later, I was still giving serious thought to petitioning all major religions in order to have her deified.

In fact I was so caught up in the thought of her, there was even a moment where I failed to recognize my boss. I had absolutely no clue who he was. I just stared at him thinking to myself, "Who's this dumb mutant and how the hell did he get up here?" which it turns out I didn't think at all but accidentally said aloud, causing all sorts of mayhem to ensue, not worth delving into now.

Quick note here: if this crush—slash—swooning stuff is hard for you to stomach; if you've never had a similar experience, then you should come to grips with the fact that you've got a TV dinner for a heart and might want to consider climbing inside a microwave and turning it on high for at least an hour, which if you do consider only goes to show what kind of idiot you truly are because microwaves are way too small for anyone, let alone you, to climb into.

Quick second note: if that last paragraph didn't apply to you, you may skip it and proceed to this next part.

As for her real name, I still don't know it. She's a stripper at some place near the airport. She has a dozen names. The first time she came into the Shop, she wanted one of her tattoos retouched. "Just an inch away from my perfectly shaved pussy," she announced very matter-a-factly, only to add somewhat coyly, slipping two fingers beneath her G-string and pulling it aside; no need to wink now: "The Happiest Place On Earth."

Suffice it to say, the second I saw that rabbit the second I started calling her Thumper.

I do admit it seems a little strange, even to me, to realize that even after four months I'm still swept up in her. Lude sure as hell doesn't understand it. One— because I've fallen for a stripper: "'fuck a' and 'fall for' have very different meanings, Hoss. The first one you do as much as you can. The second one you never ever, ever do."; and two— because she's older than me: "If you're gonna reel for a stripper," he advises. "You should at least reel for a young one. They're sexier and not as bent." Which is true, she does have a good six years on me, but what can I say? I'm taken; I love how enthralled

she remains by this festival of living, nothing reserved or even remotely ashamed about who she is or what she does, always talking blue streak to my boss about her three year old child, her boyfriend, her boyfriends, the hand jobs she gets extra for, eleven years of sobriety, her words always winding up the way it feels to wake up wide awake, everything about her awakening at every moment, alive to the world and its quirky opportunities, a sudden rite of spring, Thumper's spring, though spring's already sprung, rabbit rabbit, and now April's ruling April's looming April's fooling, around, in yet another round, for this year's ruling April fool.

Yeah I know, I know. This shit's getting ridiculous.

Even worse, I feel like I could continue in that vein for years, maybe even decades.

And yet, listen to this, to date I've hardly said a word to her. Don't have a decent explanation for my silence either. Maybe it's my boss and his guard dog glare. Maybe it's her. I suspect it's her. Every time she visits (though I admit there haven't been that many visits), she overwhelms me. It doesn't matter that she always gives me a wink and sometimes even a full throated laugh when I call her "Thumper", "Hi Thumper" "Bye Thumper" the only words I can really muster, she still really only exists for me as a strange mixture of daydream and present day edge, by which I mean something without a past or a future, an icon or idyll of sorts, for some reason forbidden to me, but seductive beyond belief and probably relief, her image feeling permanently fixed within me, but not new, more like it's been there all along, even if I know that's not true, and come last night going so far as to entwine, entangle and finally completely replace her with the (—can't write the word—) of—

—Thumper's flashing eyes, her aching lips, her heart-ending moans, those I had imagined, an ongoing list, so minute and distracting that long after, when the sheets were gathered, wet with sex, cold with rest, I did not know who lay beside me (—) and seeing this stranger, the vessel of my dreams, I withdrew to the toilet, to the shower, to my table, enough racket and detachment to communicate an unfair request, but poor her she heard it and without a word dressed, and without a smile requested a brush, and without a kiss left, leaving me alone to return to this passage where I discovered the beginnings of a sense long since taken and strewn, leading me away on what I guess amounts to another hopeless digression.

Perhaps when I'm finished I'll remember what I'd hoped to say in the first place.⁶⁶

⁶⁶Mr. Truant declined to comment further on this particular passage. — Ed.

As tape and film reveal, in the month following the expansion of the walls bracketing the book shelves, Billy Reston made several trips to the house where despite all efforts to the contrary, he continued to confirm the confounding impossibility of an interior dimension greater than an exterior one.

Navidson skillfully captures Reston's mental frustration by focusing on the physical impediments his friend must face within a house not designed with the disabled in mind. Since the area in question is in the master bedroom, Reston must make his way upstairs each time he wishes to inspect the area.

On the first visit, Tom volunteers to try and carry him.

"That won't be necessary" Reston grunts, effortlessly swinging out of his chair and dragging himself up to the second story using only his arms.

"You got a pair of guns there, don't you partner."

The engineer is only slightly winded.

"Too bad you forgot your chair," Tom adds dryly.

Reston looks up in disbelief, a little surprised, maybe even a bit shocked, and then bursts out laughing.

"Well, and fuck you."

In the end, Navidson is the one who hauls up the wheelchair.⁶⁷

Still, no matter how many times Reston wheels from the children's bedroom to the master bedroom or how carefully he examines the strange closet space, the bookshelves, or the various tools Tom and Will have been measuring the house with, he can provide no reasonable explanation for what he keeps referring to as "a goddamn spatial rape."

⁶⁷Yesterday I managed to get Maus Fife-Harris on the phone. She's a UC Irvine PhD candidate in Comp Lit who apparently always objected to the large chunks of narrative Zampanò kept asking her to write down. "I told him all those passages were inappropriate for a critical work, and if he were in my class I'd mark him down for it. But he'd just chuckle and continue. It bothered me a little but the guy wasn't my student and he was blind and old, so why should I care? Still, I did care, so I'd always protest when he asked me to write down a new bit of narrative. 'Why won't you listen to me?' I demanded one time. 'You're writing like a freshman.' And he replied—I remember this very distinctly: 'We always look for doctors but sometimes we're lucky to find a frosh.' And then he chuckled again and pressed on." Not a bad way to respond to this whole fucking book, if you ask me.

By June—as the date on the Hi 8 tape indicates—the problem still remains unsolved. Tom, however, realizes he cannot afford to stay any longer and asks Reston to give him a lift to Charlottesville where he can catch a ride up to Dulles.

It is a bright summer morning when we watch Tom emerge from the house. He gives Karen a quick kiss good-bye and then kneels down to present Chad and Daisy with a set of neon yellow dart guns.

“Remember kids,” he tells them sternly. “Don’t shoot each other. Aim at the fragile, expensive stuff.”

Navidson gives his brother a lasting hug.

“I’ll miss you, man.”

“You got a phone,” Tom grins.

“It even rings,” Navidson adds without missing a beat.

While there is no question the tone of this exchange is jocular and perhaps even slightly combative, what matters most here is unspoken. The way Tom’s cheeks burn with a sudden flush of color. Or the way Navidson quickly tries to wipe something from his eyes. Certainly the long, lingering shot of Tom as he tosses his duffel bag in the back of Reston’s van, waving the camera good-bye, reveals to us just how much affection Navidson feels for his brother.

Strangely enough, following Tom’s departure, communication between Navidson and Karen begins to radically deteriorate.

An unusual quiet descends on the house.

Karen refuses to speak about the anomaly. She brews coffee, calls her mother in New York, brews more coffee, and keeps track of the real estate market in the classifieds.

Frustrated by her unwillingness to discuss the implications of their strange living quarters, Navidson retreats to the downstairs study, reviewing photographs, tapes, even—as a few stills reveal—compiling a list of possible experts, government agencies, newspapers, periodicals, and television shows they might want to approach.

At least both he and Karen agree on one thing: they want the children to stay out of the house. Unfortunately, since neither Chad nor Daisy has had a real opportunity to make any new friends in Virginia, they keep to themselves, romping around the backyard, shouting, screaming, stinging each other with darts until eventually they drift farther and farther out into the neighborhood for increasingly longer spates of time.

Neither Karen nor Navidson seems to notice.

The alienation of their children finally becomes apparent to both of them one evening in the middle of July.

Karen is upstairs, sitting on the bed playing with a deck of Tarot cards. Navidson is downstairs in his study examining several slides returned from the lab. News of Oliver North’s annulled conviction plays on the TV. In the background, we can hear Chad and Daisy squealing about something, their voices peeling through the house, the strained music of their play threatening at any instant to turn into a brawl.

With superb cross-cutting, Navidson depicts how both he and Karen react to the next moment. Karen has drawn another card from the deck but instead of adding it to the cross slowly forming before her crossed legs, the occult image hangs unseen in the air, frozen between her two fingers, Karen’s eyes already diverted, concentrating on a sound, a new sound, almost out of reach, but reaching her just the same. Navidson is

much closer. His children's cries immediately tell him that they are way out of bounds.

Karen has only just started to head downstairs, calling out for Chad and Daisy, her agitation and panic increasing with every step, when Navidson bolts out of the study and races for the living room.

The terrifying implication of their children's shouts is now impossible to miss. No room in the house exceeds a length of twenty-five feet, let alone fifty feet, let alone fifty-six and a half feet, and yet Chad and Daisy's voices are echoing, each call responding with an entirely separate answer.

In the living room, Navidson discovers the echoes emanating from a dark doorless hallway which has appeared out of nowhere in the west wall.⁶⁸ Without hesitating, Navidson plunges in after them. Unfortunately the living room Hi 8 cannot follow him nor for that matter can Karen. She freezes on the threshold, unable to push herself into the darkness toward the faint flicker of light within. Fortunately, she does not have to wait too long. Navidson soon reappears with Chad and Daisy in each arm, both of them still clutching a homemade candle, their faces lit like sprites on a winter's eve.

This is the first sign of Karen's chronic disability. Up until now there has never been even the slightest indication that she suffers from crippling claustrophobia. By the time Navidson and the two children are safe and sound in the living room, Karen is drenched in sweat. She hugs and holds them as if they had just narrowly avoided some terrible fate, even though neither Chad nor Daisy seems particularly disturbed by their little adventure. In fact, they want to go back. Perhaps because of Karen's evident distress, Navidson agrees to at least temporarily make this new addition to their house off limits.

For the rest of the night, Karen keeps a tight grip on Navidson. Even when they finally slip into bed, she is still holding his hand.

"Navy, promise me you won't go in there again."

"Let's see if it's even here in the morning."

"It will be."

She lays her head down flat on his chest and begins to cry.

"I love you so much. Please promise me. Please."

Whether it is the lasting flush of terror still in Karen's cheeks or her absolute need for him, so markedly different from her frequently aloof posture, Navidson cradles her in his arms like a child and promises.

Since the release of *The Navidson Record*, Virginia Posah has written extensively about Karen Green's adolescent years. Posah's thin volume entitled *Wishing Well* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996) represents one of the few works which while based on the Navidsons' experience still manages to stand on its own merits outside of the film.

Along with an exceptional background in everything ranging from Kate Chopin, Sylvia Plath, Toni Morrison, *Autobiography of a*

⁶⁸There's a problem here concerning the location of "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway." Initially the doorway was supposed to be on the north wall of the living room (page 4), but now, as you can see for yourself, that position has changed. Maybe it's a mistake. Maybe there's some underlying logic to the shift. Fuck if I know. Your guess is as good as mine.

Schizophrenic Girl: The True Story of "Renee", Francesca Block's Weetzie Bat books to Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia* and more importantly Carol Gilligan's landmark work *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Posah has spent hundreds of hours researching the early life of Karen Green, analyzing the cultural forces shaping her personality, ultimately uncovering a remarkable difference between the child she once was and the woman she eventually became. In her introduction (page xv), Posah provides this brief overview:

When Diderot told the teenage Sophie Volland "You all die at fifteen" he could have been speaking to Karen Green who at fifteen did die.

To behold Karen as a child is nearly as ghostly an experience as the house itself. Old family films capture her athletic zeal, her unguarded smiles, the tomboy spirit which sends her racing through the muddy flats of a recently drained pond. She's awkward, a little clumsy, but rarely self-conscious, even when covered in mud.

Former teachers claim she frequently expressed a desire to be president, a nuclear physicist, a surgeon, even a professional hockey player. All her choices reflected unattenuated self-confidence—a remarkably healthy sign for a thirteen year old girl.

Along with superb class work, she excelled in extra-curricular activities. She loved planning surprise parties, working on school productions, and even on occasion taking on a schoolyard bully with a bout of fists. Karen Green was exuberant, feisty, charming, independent, spontaneous, sweet, and most of all fearless.

By the time she turned fifteen, all of that was gone. She hardly spoke in class. She refused to function in any sort of school event, and rather than discuss her feelings she deferred the world with a hard and perfectly practiced smile.

Apparently—if her sister is to be believed—Karen spent every night of her fourteenth year composing that smile in front of a blue plastic handled mirror. Tragically her creation proved flawless and though her near aphonia should have alarmed any adept teacher or guidance counselor, it was invariably rewarded with the pyritic prize of high school popularity.

Though Posah goes on to discuss the cultural aspects and consequences of beauty, these details in particular are most disturbing, especially in light of the fact that little of their history appears in the film.

Considering the substantial coverage present in *The Navidson Record*, it is unsettling to discover such a glaring omission. In spite of the enormous quantity of home footage obviously available, for some reason calamities of the past still do not appear. Clearly Karen's personal life, to say nothing of his own life, caused Navidson too much anxiety to portray either one particularly well in his film. Rather than delve into the pathology

of Karen's claustrophobia, Navidson chose instead to focus strictly on the house.⁶⁹

Of course by the following morning, Karen has already molded her desperation into a familiar pose of indifference.

She does not seem to care when they discover the hallway has not vanished. She keeps her arms folded, no longer clinging to Navidson's hand or stroking her children.

⁶⁹Fortunately a few years before *The Navidson Record* was made Karen took part in a study which promised to evaluate and possibly treat her fear. After the film became something of a phenomenon, those results surfaced and were eventually published in a number of periodicals. The *Anomic Mag* based out of Berkeley (v. 87, n. 7, April, 1995) offered the most comprehensive account of that study as it pertained to Karen Green:

. . . Subject #0027-00-8785 (Karen Green) suffers severe panic attacks when confronting dark, enclosed spaces, usually windowless and unknown (e.g. a dark room in an unfamiliar building). The attacks are consistently characterized by (1) accelerated heart rate (2) sweating (3) trembling (4) sensation of suffocation (5) feeling of choking (6) chest pain (7) severe dizziness (8) derealization (feelings of unreality) and eventual depersonalization (being detached from oneself) (9) culmination in an intense fear of dying. See DSM-IV "Criteria for Panic Attack." . . . Diagnosis—subject suffers from Specific Phobia (formally known as Simple Phobia); Situational type. See DSM-IV "Diagnostic criteria for 300.29 Specific Phobia." . . . Because behavioral-cognitive techniques have thus far failed to modify perspectives on anxiety-provoking stimuli, subject was considered ideal for current pharmacotherapy study . . . Initially subject received between 100-200 mg/ day of Tofranil (Imipramine) but with no improvement switched early on to a β -adrenergic blocker (Propranolol). An increase in vivid nightmares caused her to switch again to the MAOI (Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitor) Tranylcypromine. Still dissatisfied with the results, subject switched to the SSRI (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor) Fluoxetine, commonly known as Prozac. Subject responded well and soon showed increased tolerance when intentionally exposed to enclosed, dark spaces. Unfortunately moderate weight gain and orgasmic dysfunction caused the subject to drop out of the study . . . Subject apparently relies now on her own phobia avoidance mechanisms, choosing to stay clear of enclosed, unknown spaces (i.e. elevators, basements, unfamiliar closets etc., etc.), though occasionally when attacks become "more frequent" . . . she returns to Prozac for short periods of time . . . See David Kahn's article "Simple Phobias: The Failure of Pharmacological Intervention"; also see subject's results on Sheehan Clinician Rated Anxiety Scale as well as Sheehan Phobia Scale.⁷⁰

While the report seems fairly comprehensive, there is admittedly one point which remains utterly perplexing. Other publications repeat verbatim the ambiguous phrasing but still fail to shed light on the exact meaning of those six words: "occasionally when attacks become 'more frequent.'" At least the implication seems clear, vicissitudes in Karen's life, whatever those may be, affect her sensitivity to space. In her article "Significant (OT)Her" published in *The Psychology Quarterly* (v. 142, n. 17, December 1995, p. 453) Celine Berezin, M.D. observes that "Karen's attacks, which I suspect stem from early adolescent betrayal, increase proportionally with the level of intimacy—or even the threat of potential intimacy—she experiences whether with Will Navidson or even her children."

Also see Steve Sokol and Julia Carter's *Women Who Can't Love: When a Woman's Fear Makes Her Run from Commitment and What a Smart Man Can Do About It* (New Hampshire: T. Devans and Company, 1978).

⁷⁰See Exhibit Six.

She removes herself from her family's company by saying very little, while at the same time maintaining a semblance of participation with a smile.

Virginia Posah is right. Karen's smile is tragic because, in spite of its meaning, it succeeds in remaining so utterly beautiful.

The Five and a Half Minute Hallway in *The Navidson Record* differs slightly from the bootleg copy which appeared in 1990. For one thing, in addition to the continuous circumambulating shot, a wider selection of shots has made the coverage of the sequence much more thorough and fluid. For another, the hallway has shrunk. This was impossible to see in the VHS copy because there was no point of comparison. Now, however, it is perfectly clear that the hallway which was well over sixty feet deep when the children entered it is now a little less than ten feet.

Context also significantly alters "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway." A greater sense of the Navidsons and their friends and how they all interact with the house adds the greatest amount of depth to this quietly evolving enigma. Their personalities almost crowd that place and suddenly too, as an abrupt jump cut redelivers Tom from Massachusetts and Billy Reston from Charlottesville, the UVA professor once again wheeling around the periphery of the angle, unable to take his eyes off the strange, dark corridor.

Unlike *The Twilight Zone*, however, or some other like cousin where understanding comes neat and fast (i.e. This is clearly a door to another dimension! or This is a passage to another world—with directions!) the hallway offers no answers. The monolith in *2001* seems the most appropriate cinematic analog, incontrovertibly there but virtually inviolate to interpretation.⁷¹ Similarly the hallway also remains meaningless, though it is most assuredly not without effect. As Navidson threatens to reenter it for a closer inspection, Karen reiterates her previous plea and injunction with a sharp and abrupt rise in pitch.

The ensuing tension is more than temporary.

Navidson has always been an adventurer willing to risk his personal safety in the name of achievement. Karen, on the other hand, remains the standard bearer of responsibility and is categorically against risks especially those which might endanger her family or her happiness. Tom also shies from danger, preferring to turn over a problem to someone else, ideally a police officer, fireman, or other state paid official. Without sound or movement but by presence alone, the hallway creates a serious rift in the Navidson household.

Bazine Naodook suggests that the hallway exudes a "conflict creating force": "It's those oily walls radiating badness which maneuver Karen and Will into that nonsensical fight."⁷² Naodook's argument reveals a rather tedious mind. She feels a need to invent some non-existent "dark-force" to account for all ill will instead of recognizing the dangerous influence the unknown naturally has on everyone.

A couple of weeks pass. Karen privately puzzles over the experience but says very little. The only indication that the hallway has in some way intruded on her thoughts is her newfound interest in Feng Shui. In the film,

⁷¹Consider Drew Bluth's "Summer's Passage" in *Architectural Digest*, v. 50, n. 10, October 1993, p. 30.

⁷²Bazine Naodook's *The Bad Bodhi Wall* (Marina Del Rey: Bix Oikofoe Publishing House, 1995), p. 91.

we can make out a number of books lying around the house, including *The Elements of Feng Shui* by Kwok Man-Ho and Joanne O'Brien (Element Books: Shaftesbury, 1991), *Feng Shui Handbook: A Practical Guide to Chinese Geomancy and Environmental Harmony* by Derek Walters (Aquarian Press, 1991), *Interior Design with Feng Shui* by Sarah Rosbach (Rider: London, 1987) and *The I Ching or Book of Changes, 3rd Edition* translated by Richard Wilhelm (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968).

There is a particularly tender moment as Chad sits with his mother in the kitchen. She is busily determining the Kua number (a calculation based on the year of birth) for everyone in the family, while he is carefully making a peanut butter and honey sandwich.

"Mommy" Chad says quietly after a while.

"Hmm?"

"How do I get to become President when I grow up?"

Karen looks up from her notebook. Quite unexpectedly, and with the simplest question, her son has managed to move her.

"You study hard at school and keep doing what you're doing, then you can be whatever you want."

Chad smiles.

"When I'm President, can I make you Vice President?"

Karen's eyes shine with affection. Putting aside her Feng Shui studies, she reaches over and gives Chad a big kiss on his forehead.

"How about Secretary of Defense?"

During all this, Tom earns his keep by installing a door to close off the hallway. First, he mounts a wood frame using some of the tools he brought from Lowell and a few more he rented from the local hardware store. Then he hangs a single door with 24-gauge hot-dipped, galvanized steel skins and an acoustical performance rating coded at ASTM E413-70T-STC 28. Last but not least, he puts in four Schlage dead bolts and colour codes the four separate keys: red, yellow, green, and blue.

For a while Daisy keeps him company, though it remains hard to determine whether she is more transfixed by Tom or the hallway. At one point she walks up to the threshold and lets out a little yelp, but the cry just flattens and dies in the narrow corridor.

Tom seems noticeably relieved when he finally shuts the door and turns over the four locks. Unfortunately as he twists the last key, the accompanying sound contains a familiar ring. He grips the red key and tries it again. As the dead bolt glances the strike plate, the resulting click creates an unexpected and very unwelcome echo.

Slowly, Tom unlocks the door and peers inside.

Somehow, and for whatever reason, the thing has grown again.

Intermittently, Navidson opens the door himself and stares down the hallway, sometimes using a flashlight, sometimes just studying the darkness itself.

"What do you do with that?" Navidson asks his brother one evening.

"Move," Tom replies.

Sadly, even with the unnatural darkness now locked behind a steel door, Karen and Navidson still continue to say very little to each other, their own feelings seemingly as impossible for them to address as the meaning of the hallway itself.

Chad accompanies his mother to town as she searches for various Feng Shui objects guaranteed to change the energy of the home, while Daisy follows her father around the house as he paces from room to room, talking vehemently on the phone with Reston, trying to come up with a feasible and acceptable way to investigate the phenomenon lurking in his living room, until finally, in the middle of all this, he lifts his daughter onto his shoulders. Unfortunately as soon as Karen returns, Navidson sets Daisy back down on the floor and retreats to the study to continue his discussions alone.

With domestic tensions proving a little too much to stomach, Tom escapes to the garage where he works for a while on a doll house he has started to build for Daisy,⁷³ until eventually he takes a break, drifting out to the backyard to get high and hot in the sun, pointedly walking around the patch of lawn the hallway should for all intents and purposes occupy. Before long, both Chad and Daisy are sidling up to this great bear snoring under a tree, and even though they start to tie his shoe laces together, tickle his nostrils with long blades of grass, or use a mirror to focus the sun on his nose, Tom remains remarkably patient. He almost seems to enjoy their mischief, growling, yawning, playing along, putting both of them in a headlock, Chad and Daisy laughing hysterically, until finally all three are exhausted and snoozing into dusk.

Considering the complexity of Karen and Navidson's relationship, it is fortunate our understanding of their problems is not left entirely up to interpretation. Some of their respective views and feelings are revealed in their video journal entries.

"Sex, sex, sex," Karen whispers into her camcorder. "It was like we just met when we got here. The kids would go out and we'd fuck in the kitchen, in the shower. We even did it in the garage. But ever since that closet thing appeared I can't. I don't know why. It terrifies me."

On the same subject, Navidson offers a similar view: "When we first moved here, Karen was like a college co-ed. Anywhere, anytime. Now all of a sudden, she refuses to be touched. I kiss her, she practically starts to cry. And it all started when we got back from Seattle."⁷⁴

But the division between them is not just physical.

Karen again: "Doesn't he see I don't want him going in there because I love him. You don't need to be a genius to realize there's something really bad about that place. Navy, don't you see that?"

Navidson: "The only thing I want to do is go in there but she's adamant that I don't and I love her so I won't but, well, it's just killing me. Maybe because I know this is all about her, her fears, her anxieties. She hasn't even given a thought to what I care about."

Until finally the lack of physical intimacy and emotional understanding leads both of them to make privately voiced ultimatums.

Karen: "But I will say this, if he goes in there, I'm outta here. Kids and all."

⁷³See Lewis Marsano's "Tom's 1865 Shelter" in *This Old House*, September/October 1995, p. 87.

⁷⁴Nor does it seem to help that Navidson and Karen both have among their books Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1973), Anne Hooper's *The Ultimate Sex Book : A Therapist's Guide to the Programs and Techniques That Will Enhance Your Relationship and Transform Your Life* (DK Publishing, 1992), X.Y.'s *Broken Daisy-Chains* (Seattle: Town Over All Press, 1989), Chris Allen's *1001 Sex Secrets Every Man Should Know* (New York: Avon Books, 1995) as well as Chris Allen's *1001 Sex Secrets Every Woman Should Know* (New York: Avon Books, 1995).

Navidson: "If she keeps up this cold front, you bet I'm going in there."

Then one night in early August _____⁷⁴ and the equally famous _____ drop in for dinner. It is a complete coincidence that they happened to be in D.C. at the same time, but neither one seems to mind the presence of the other. As _____ said, "Any friend of Navy's is a friend of mine." Navidson and Karen have known both of them for quite a few years, so the evening is light hearted and filled with plenty of amusing stories. Clearly Karen and Navidson relish the chance to reminisce a little about some good times when things seemed a lot less complicated.

Perhaps a little star struck, Tom says very little. There is plenty of opportunity for a glass of wine but he proves himself by keeping to water, though he does excuse himself from the table once to smoke a joint outside. (Much to Tom's surprise and delight, _____ joins him.)

As the evening progresses, _____ harps a little on Navidson's new found domesticity: "No more Crazy Navy, eh? Are those days gone for good? I remember when you'd party all night, shoot all morning, and then spend the rest of the day developing your film—in a closet with just a bucket and a bulb if you had to. I'm willing to bet you don't even have a darkroom here." Which is just a little too much for Navidson to bear: "Here _____, you wanna see a darkroom, I'll show you a darkroom." "Don't you dare, Navy!" Karen immediately cries. "Come on Karen, they're our friends," Navidson says, leading the two celebrities into the living room where he instructs them to look out the window so they can see for themselves his ordinary backyard. Satisfied that they understand nothing but trees and lawn could possibly lie on the other side of the wall, he retrieves the four coloured keys hidden in the antique basinet in the foyer. Everyone is pretty tipsy and the general mood is so friendly and easy it seems impossible to disturb. Which of course all changes when Navidson unlocks the door and reveals the hallway.

_____ takes one look at that dark place and retreats into the kitchen. Ten minutes later _____ is gone. _____ steps up to the threshold, points Navidson's flashlight at the walls and floor and then retires to the bathroom. A little later _____ is also gone.

Karen is so enraged by the whole incident, she makes Navidson sleep on the couch with his "beloved hallway."

No surprise, Navidson fails to fall asleep.

He tosses around for an hour until he finally gets up and goes off in search of his camera.

A title card reads: **Exploration A**

The time stamp on Navidson's camcorder indicates that it is exactly 3:19 A.M.

"Call me impetuous or just curious," we hear him mutter as he shoves his sore feet into a pair of boots. "But a little look around isn't going to hurt."

Without ceremony, he unlocks the door and slips across the threshold, taking with him only a Hi 8, a MagLite, and his 35mm Nikon. The commentary he provides us with remains very spare: "Cold. Wow, really cold! Walls are dark. Similar to the closet space upstairs." Within a few

⁷⁴zampanò provided the blanks but never filled them in.

seconds he reaches the end. The hallway cannot be more than seventy feet long. "That's it. Nothing else. No big deal. Over this Karen and I have been fighting." Except as Navidson swings around, he suddenly discovers a new doorway to the right. It was not there before.

"What the . . . ?"

Navidson carefully nudges his flashlight into this new darkness and discovers an even longer corridor. "This one's easily . . . I'd say a hundred feet." A few seconds later, he comes across a still larger corridor branching off to the left. It is at least fifteen feet wide with a ceiling well over ten feet high. The length of this one, however, is impossible to estimate as Navidson's flashlight proves useless against the darkness ahead, dying long before it can ever come close to determining an end.

Navidson pushes ahead, moving deeper and deeper into the house, eventually passing a number of doorways leading off into alternate passageways or chambers. "Here's a door. No lock. Hmmm . . . a room, not very big. Empty. No windows. No switches. No outlets. Heading back to the corridor. Leaving the room. It seems colder now. Maybe I'm just getting colder. Here's another door. Unlocked. Another room. Again no windows. Continuing on."

Flashlight and camera skitter across ceiling and floor in loose harmony, stabbing into small rooms, alcoves, or spaces reminiscent of closets, though no shirts hang there. Still, no matter how far Navidson proceeds down this particular passageway, his light never comes close to touching the punctuation point promised by the converging perspective lines, sliding on and on and on, spawning one space after another, a constant stream of corners and walls, all of them unreadable and perfectly smooth.

Finally, Navidson stops in front of an entrance much larger than the rest. It arcs high above his head and yawns into an undisturbed blackness. His flashlight finds the floor but no walls and, for the first time, no ceiling.

Only now do we begin to see how big Navidson's house really is.

Something should be said here about Navidson's hand. Out of all the footage he personally shoots, there rarely exists a shake, tremble, jerk, or even a case of poor framing. His camera, no matter the circumstances, manages to view the world—even this world—with a remarkable steadiness as well as a highly refined aesthetic sensibility.

Comparisons immediately make Navidson's strengths apparent. Holloway Roberts' tape is virtually unwatchable: tilted frames, out of focus, shakes, horrible lighting and finally oblivion when faced with danger. Likewise Karen and Tom's tapes reflect their inexperience and can only be considered for content. Only the images Navidson shoots capture the otherness inherent in that place. Undeniably Navidson's experience as a photojournalist gives him an advantage over the rest when focusing on something that is as terrifying as it is threatening. But, of course, there is more at work here than just the courage to stand and focus. There is also the courage to face and shape the subject in an extremely original manner.⁷⁵

⁷⁵See Liza Speen's *Images Of Dark*; Brassai's *Paris By Night*; the tenderly encountered history of rooms in Andrew Bush's *Bonnettstown*; work of O. Winston Link and Karekin Goekjian; as well as some of the photographs by Lucien Aigner, Osbert Lam, Cas Oorthuys, Floris M. Neusüss, Ashim Ghosh, Annette Lemieux, Irèna Ionesco, Cindy Sherman, Edmund Teske, Andreas Feininger, John Vachon, Tetsuya Ichimura, Sandy Skoglund, Yasuhiro Ishimoto, Beaumont Newhall, James Alinder, Robert Rauschenberg, Miyaka Ishiuchi, Alfred Eisentaedt, Sabastiao Ribeiro Salgado, Alfred Stieglitz, Robert Adams, Sol

Libsohn, Huynh Cong ("Nick") Ut, Lester Talkington, William Henry Jackson, Edward Weston, William Baker, Yousuf Karsh, Adam Clark Vroman, Julia Margaret Cameron, George Barnard, Lennart Nilsson, Herb Ritts, Nancy Burson ("Untitled, 1993"), Bragaglia, Henri Cartier-Bresson ("Place de l'Europe"), William Wegman, Gordon Parks, Alvin Langdon Coburn, Edward Ruscha, Herbert Pointing, Simpson Kalisher, Bob Adelman, Volkhard Hofer ("Natural Buildings, 1991"), Lee Friedlander, Mark Edwards, Harry Callahan, Robert Frank, Baltimore *Sun* photographer Aubrey Bodine, Charles Gatewood, Ferenc Berko, Leland Rice, Joan Lyons, Robert D'Alessandro, Victor Keppler, Larry Fink, Bevan Davies, Lotte Jacobi, Burk Uzzle, George Washington Wilson, Julia Margaret Cameron, Carleton Watkins, Edward S. Curtis, Eve Arnold, Michael Lesy (*Wisconsin Death Trip*), Aaron Siskind, Kelly Wise, Cornell Capa, Bert Stern, James Van Der Zee, Leonard Freed, Philip Perkis, Keith Smith, Burt Glin, Bill Brandt, László Moholy-Nagy, Lennart Arthur Rothstein, Louis Stettner, Ray K. Metzker, Edward W. Quigley, Jim Bengston, Richard Prince, Walter Chappell, Paz Errazuriz, Rosamond Wolff Purcell, E. J. Marey, Gary Winogrand, Alexander Gardner, Wynn Bullock, Neal Slavin, Lew Thomas, Patrick Nagatani, Donald Blumberg, David Plowden, Ernestine Ruben, Will McBride, David Vestal, Jerry Burchard, George Gardner, Galina Sankova, Frank Gohlke, Olivia Parker, Charles Traub, Ashvin Mehta, Walter Rosenblum, Bruce Gilden, Imogen Cunningham, Barbara Crane, Lewis Baltz, Roger Minick, George Krause, Saul Leiter, William Horeis, Ed Douglas, John Baldessari, Charles Harbutt, Greg McGregor, Liliane Decock, Lilo Raymond, Hiro, Don Worth, Peter Magubane, Brett Weston, Jill Freedman, Joanne Leonard, Larry Clark, Nancy Rexroth, Jack Manning, Ben Shahn, Marie Cosindas, Robert Demachy, Aleksandra Macijauskas, Andreas Serrano, Les Krims, Heinrich Tönnies, George Rodger, Art Sinsabaugh, Arnold Genthe, Frank Majore, Gertrude Käsebier, Charles Nègre, Harold Edgerton, Shomei Tomatsu, Roy Decarava, Samuel Bourne, Giuseppe Primoli, Paul Strand, Lewis Hine, William Eggleston, Frank Sutcliffe, Diane Arbus, Daniel Ibis, Raja Lala Deen Dayal, Ralph Eugene Meatyard, Walker Evans, Mary Ellen Mark, Timothy O'Sullivan, Jacob A. Riis, Ian Isaacs, David Epstein, Karl Struss, Sally Mann. P.H. Emerson, Ansel Adams, Liu Ban Nong, Berencie Abbot, Susan Lipper, Dortha Lange, James Balog, Doris Ulmann, William Henry Fox Talbot, John Thomson, Phillippe Halsman, Morris Engel, Christophe Yve, Thomas Annan, Alexander Rodchenko, Eliot Elisofon, Eugène Atget, Clarence John Laughlin, Arthur Leipzig, F. Holland Day, Jack English, Alice Austen, Bruce Davidson, Eudora Welty, Jimmy Hare, Ruth Orkin, Masahiko Yoshioka, Paul Outerbridge, Jr., Jerry N. Uelsmann, Louis Jacques Mandè Daguerre, Emmet Gowin, Cary Wasserman, Susan Meiselas, Naomi Savage, Henry Peach Robinson, Sandra Eleta, Boris Ignatovich, Eva Rubinstein, Weegee (Arthur Fellig), Benjamin Stone, André Kertész, Stephen Shore, Lee Miller, Sid Grossman, Donigan Cumming, Jack Welpott, David Sims, Detlef Orlopp ("Untitled"), Margaret Bourke-White, Dmitri Kessel, Val Telberg, Patt Blue, Francisco Infante, Jed Fielding, John Heartfield, Eliot Porter, Gabriele and Helmut Nothhelfer, Francis Bruguière, Jerome Liebling, Eugene Richards, Werner Bischof, Martin Munkacsy, Bruno Barbey, Linda Connor, Oliver Gagliani, Arno Rafael Minkinen, Richard Margolis, Judith Golden, Philip Trager, Scott Hyde, Willard Van Dyke, Eileen Cowin, Nadar (Gaspard Felix Tournachon), Roger Mertin, Lucas Samaras, Raoul Hausmann, Vilem Kriz, Lisette Model, Robert Leverant, Josef Sudek, Glen Luchford, Edna Bullock, Susan Rankaitis, Gail Skoff, Frank Hurley, Bank Langmore, Carrie Mae Weems, Michael Bishop, Albert and Jean Seeberger, John Gutmann, Kipton Kumler, Joel Sternfeld, Derek Bennett, William Clift, Erica Lennard, Arthur Siegel, Marcia Resnick, Clarence H. White, Fritz Henle, Julio Etchart, Fritz Goro, E.J. Bellocq, Nathan Lyons, Ralph Gibson, Leon Levinstein, Elaine Mayes, Arthur Tess, William Larson, Duane Michals, Benno Friedman, Eve Sonneman, Mark Cohen, Joyce Tenneson, John Pfahl, Doug Prince, Albert Sands Southworth and Josiah Johnson Hawes, Robert W. Fichter, George A. Tice, John Collier, Anton Bruehl, Paul Martin, Tina Barney, Bob Willoughby, Steven Szabo, Paul Caponigro, Gilles Peress, Robert Heinecken, Wright Morris, Inez van Lamsweerde, Peter Hujar, Inge Morath, Judith Joy Ross, Judy Dater, Melissa Shook, Bea Nettles, Dmitri Baltermants, Karl Blossfeldt, Alexander Liberman, Wolfgang Tillmans, Hans Namuth, Bill Burke, Marion Palfi, Jan Groover, Peter Keetman ("Porcelain Hands, 1958"), Henry Wessel, Jr., Syl Labrot, Gilles Ehrmann, Tana Hoban, Martine Franck, John Dominis, Ilse Bing, Jo Ann Callis, Lou Bernstein, Vinoodh Matadin, Todd Webb, Andre Gelpke ("Chiffre 389506: Inkognito, 1993"), Thomas F. Barrow, Robert Cumming, Josef Ehm, Mark Yavno, Tod Papageorge, Ruth Bernhard, Charles Sheeler, Tina Modotti, Zofia Rydet, M. Alvarez Bravo, William Henry Jackson, Peeter Tooming, Betty Hahn, T. S. Nagarajan, Meridel Rubinstein, Romano Cagnoni, Robert Mapplethorpe, Albert Renger-Patzsch, Stasys Zvirgzdas, Geoff Wainingham, Thomas Joshua Cooper, Erich Hartmann, Oscar Bailey, Herbert List, Mirella Ricciardi, Franco Fontana, Art Kane, Georgij Zelma, Sergei Mikhailovich Prokudin-Gorskii, Mario Sorrenti, Craig McDean, René Burri, David Douglas Duncan, Tazio Secchiaroli, Joseph D. Jachna, Richard Baltauss, Richard Misrach, Yoshihiko Ito, Minor White, Ellen Auerbach, Izis, Deborah Turbeville, Arnold Newman,

Tzachi Ostrovsky, Joel-Peter Witkin, Adam Fuss, Inge Osswald, Enzo Ragazzini, Bill Owens, Soyna Noskowiak, David Lawrence Levinthal, Mariana Yampolsky, Juergen Teller, Nancy Honey, Elliott Erwitt, Bill Witt, Taizo Ichinose, Nicholas Nixon, Allen A. Dutton, Henry Callahan, Joel Meyrowitz, Willaim A. Garnett, Ulf Sjöstedt, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Toni Frissell, John Blakemore, Roman Vishniac, Debbie Fleming Caffery, Raúl Corrales, Gyorgy Kepes, Joe Deal, David P. Bayles, Michael Snow, Aleksander Krzywoblocki, Paul Bowen, Laura Gilpin, Andy Warhol, Tuija Lydia Elisabeth Lindström-Caudwell, Corinne Day, Kristen McMenamy, Danny Lyon, Erich Salomon, Désiré Charnay, Paul Kwilecki, Carol Beckwith, George Citcherson ("Sailing Ships in an Ice Field, 1869"), W. Eugene Smith, William Klein, José Ortiz-Echagüe, Eadweard Muybridge, and David Octavius Hill, August Sander (*Anlitz der Zeit*), Herbert Bayer, Man Ray, Alex Webb, Frances B. Johnston, Russell Lee, Suzy Lake, Jack Delano, Diane Cook, Heinrich Zille, Lyalya Kuznetsova, Miodrag Djordjevi, Terry Fincher, Joel Meyerowitz, John R. Gossage, Barbara Morgan, Édouard Boubat, Horst P. Horst, Hippolyte Bayard, Albert Kahn, Karen Helen Knorr, Carlotta M. Corpon, Abigail Heyman, Marion Post Wolcott, Lillian Bassman, Henry Holmes Smith, Constantine Manos, Gjon Mili, Michael Nichols, Roger Fenton, Adolph de Meyer, Van Deren Coke, Barbara Astman, Richard Kirstel, William Notman, Kenneth Josephson, Louise Dahl-Wolfe, Josef Koudelka, Sarah E. Charlesworth, Erwin Blumenfeld, Jacques Henri Lartigue, Pirkle Jones, Edward Steichen, George Hurrell, Steve Fitch, Lady Hawarden, Helmar Lerski, Oscar Gustave Rejlander, John Thomson, Irving Penn, and Jane Evelyn Atwood (photographs of children at the National School for Blind Youth). Not to mention Suze Randall, Art Wolfe, Charles and Rita Summers, Tom and Pat Leeson, Michael H. Francis, John Botkin, Dan Blackburn, Barbara Ess, Erwin and Peggy Bauer, Peter Arnold, Gerald Lacz, James Wojcik, Dan Borris, Melanie Acevedo, Micheal McLaughlin, Darrin Haddad, William Vazquez, J. Michael Myers, Rosa & Rosa, Patricia McDonough, Aldo Rossi, Mark Weiss, Craig Cutler, David Barry, Chris Sanders, Neil Brown, James Schnepf, Kevin Wilkes, Ron Simmons, Chip Clark, Ron Kerbo, Kevin Downey, Nick Nichols; also Erik Aeder, Drew Kampion, Les Walker, Rob Gilley, Don King, Jeff Hornbaker, Alexander Gallardo, Russell Hoover, Jeff Flindt, Chris Van Lennep, Mike Moir, Brent Humble, Ivan Ferrer, Don James, John Callahan, Bill Morris, Kimiro Kondo, Leonard Brady, Fred Swegles, Eric Baeseman, Tsuchiya, Darrell Wong, Warren Bolster, Joseph Libby, Russell Hoover, Peter Frieden, Craig Peterson, Ted Grambeau, Gordinho, Steve Wilkings, Mike Foley, Kevin Welsh, LeRoy Grannis, John Bilderback, Craig Fineman, Michael Grosswendt, Craig Huglin, Seamas Mercado, John Heath "Doc" Ball, Tom Boyle, Rob Keith, Vince Cavataio, Jeff Divine, Aaron Loyd, Chris Dyball, Steve Fox, George Greenough, Aaron Loyd, Ron Stoner, Jason Childs, Kin Kimoto, Chris Dyball, Bob Barbour, John Witzig, Ben Siegfried, Ron Romanosky, Brian Biemann, Dave Bjorn, John Severson, Martin Thick (see his profound shot of Dana Fisher cradling a chimpanzee rescued from a meat vendor in Zaire), Doug Cockwell, Art Brewer, Fred Swegles, Erik Hans, Mike Balzer, John Scott, Rob Brown, Bernie Baker, William Sharp, Randy Johnson, Nick Pugay, Tom Servais, Dennis Junor, Eric Baeseman, Sylvain Cazenave, Woody Woodworth, and of course, J.C. Hemment, David "Chim" Seymour, Vu Ngoc Tong, William Dinwiddie, James Burton, Marv Wolf, London Thorne, John Gallo, Nguyen Huy, Leonidas Stanson, Pham Co Phac, Kadel & Herbert, Underwood & Underwood, James H. Hare, Tran Oai Dung, Lucian S. Kirtland, Edmond Ratisbonne, Pham Tranh, Luong Tan Tuc, George Strock, Joe Rosenthal, Ralph Morse, Ho Van De, Nguyen Nhut Hoa, Nguyen Van Chien, Nguyen Van Thang, Phung Quang Liem, Truong Phu Thien, John Florea, George Silk, Carl Mydans, Pham Van Kuong, Nguyen Khac Tam, Vu Hung Dung, Nguyen Van Nang, Yevgeny Khaldei, To Dinh, Ho Ca, Hank Walker, Tran Ngoc Dang, Vo Duc Hiep, Trinh Dinh Hy, Howard Breedlove, Nguyen Van Thuan, Vu Hanh, Ly Van Cao, Burr McIntosh, Ho Van Tu, Helen Levitt, Robert Capa, Ly Eng, Mathew Brady, Sau Van, Thoi Huu, Leng, Thong Veasna, Nguyen Luong Nam, Huynh Van Huu, Ngoc Huong, Alan Hiron, Lek, George J. Denoncourt II, Hoang Chau, Eric Weigand, Pham Vu Binh, Gilles Caron, Tran Binh Khuol, Jerald Kringle, Le Duy Que, Thanh Tinh, Frederick Sommer, Nguyen Van Thuy, Robert Moeser, Chhim Sarath, Duong Thanh Van, Howard Nurenberger, Vo Ngoc Khanh, Dang Van Hang, James Pardue, Bui Dinh Tuy, Doug Clifford, Tran Xuan Hy, Nguyen Van Tha, Keizaburo Shimamoto, Nguyen Van Ung, Bob Hodieme, Nguyen Viet Hien, Dinh De, Sun Heang, Tea "Moonface" Kim Heang, Lyng Nhan, Charles Chellappah, The Dinh, Nguyen Van Nhu, Ngoc Nhu, John Andescavage, Nguyen Van Huong, Francis Bailly, Georg Gensluckner, Vo Van Luong, James Denis Gill, Huynh Van Dung, Nguyen Than Hien, Terrence Khoo, Paul Schutzer, Vo Van Quy, Malcolm Browne, Le Khac Tam, Huynh Van Huong, Do Van Nhan, Franz Dalma, Kyoichi Sawada, Willy Mettler, James Lohr, Le Kia, Sam Kai Faye, Frank Lee, Nguyen Van Man, Joseph Tourtelot, Doan Phi Hung, Ty Many, Nguyen Ngoc Tu, Le Thi Nang, Nguyen Van Chien, Doug Woods, Glen Rasmussen, Hiromichi Mine, Duong Cong Thien, Bernard B. Fall, Randall Reimer, Luong Nghia Dung, Bill Hackwell, Pen, Nguyen Duc Thanh, Chea Ho, Jerry Wyngarden, Vantha, Chip Maury, J.

As Navidson takes his first step through that immense arch, he is suddenly a long way away from the warm light of the living room. In fact his creep into that place resembles the eerie faith required for any deep sea exploration, the beam of his flashlight scratching at nothing but the invariant blackness.

Navidson keeps his attention focused on the floor ahead of him, and no doubt because he keeps looking down, the floor begins to assume a new meaning. It can no longer be taken for granted. Perhaps something lies beneath it. Perhaps it will open up into some deep fissure.

Suddenly immutable silence rushes in to replace what had momentarily shattered it.

Navidson freezes, unsure whether or not he really just heard something growl.

"I better be able to find my way back," he finally whispers, which though probably muttered in jest suddenly catches him off guard.

Navidson swiftly turns around. Much to his horror, he can no longer see the arch let alone the wall. He has walked beyond the range of his light. In fact, no matter where he points the flashlight, the only thing he can perceive is oily darkness. Even worse, his panicked turn and the subsequent absence of any landmarks has made it impossible for him to remember which direction he just came from.

"Oh god" he blurts, creating odd repeats in the distance.

He twists around again.

"Hey!" he shouts, spawning a multitude of a's, then rotates forty-five degrees and yells "Balls!" a long moment of silence follows before he hears the faint halls racing back through the dark. After several more such turns, he discovers a loud "easy" returns a z with the least amount of delay. This is the direction he decides on, and within less than a minute the beam from his flashlight finds something more than darkness.

Quickening his pace slightly, Navidson reaches the wall and the safety he perceives there. He now faces another decision: left or right. This time, before going anywhere, he reaches into his pocket and places a penny

Gonzales, Pierre Jahan, Catherine Leroy, Leonard Hekel, Kim Van Tuoc, W.B. Bass Jr., Sean Flynn, Heng Ho, Dana Stone, Nguyen Dung, Landon K. Thorne II, Gerard Hebert, Michel Laurent, Robert Jackson Ellison, Put Sophan, Nguyen Trung Dinh, Huynh Van Tri, Neil K. Hulbert, James McJunkin, Le Dinh Du, Chhor Vuthi, Claude Arpin-Pont, Raymond Martinoff, Jean Peraud, Nguyen Huong Nam, Dickey Chapelle, Lanh Daanh Rar, Bryan Grigsby, Henri Huet, Huynh Thang My, Peter Ronald Van Thiel, Everette Dixie Reese, Jerry A. Rose, Oliver E. Noonan, Kim Savath, Bernard Moran, Kuoy Sarun, Do Van Vu, Nguyen Man Hieu, Charles Richard Eggleston, Sain Hel, Nguyen Oanh Liet, Dick Durance, Vu Van Giang, Bernard Kolenberg, Sou Vichith, Ronald D. Gallagher, Dan Dodd, Francois Sully, Kent Potter, Alfred Batungbacal, Dieter Bellendorf, Nick Mills, Ronald L. Haeberle, Terry Reynolds, Leroy Massie, Sam Castan, Al Chang, Philip R. Boehme. And finally Eddie Adams, Charles Hoff, Larry Burrows, and Don McCullin ("American soldiers tending wounded child in a cellar of a house by candlelight, 1968").⁷⁶

⁷⁶Alison Adrian Burns, another Zampanò reader, told me this list was entirely random. With the possible exception of Brassai, Speen, Bush and Link, Zampanò was not very familiar with photographers. "We just picked the names out of some books and magazines he had lying around," Burns told me. "I'd describe a picture or two and he'd say no or he'd say fine. A few times he just told me to choose a page and point. Hey, whatever he wanted to do. That was what I was there for. Sometimes though he just wanted to hear about the LA scene, what was happening, what wasn't, the gloss, the names of clubs and bars. That sort of thing. As far as I know, that list never got written down."

at his feet. Relying on this marker, he heads left for a while. When a minute passes and he has still failed to find the entrance, he returns to the penny. Now he moves off to the right and very quickly comes across a doorway, only this one, as we can see, is much smaller and has a different shape than the one he originally came through. He decides to keep walking. When a minute passes and he still has not found the arch, he stops.

"Think, Navy, think," he whispers to himself, his voice edged slightly with fear.

Again that faint growl returns, rolling through the darkness like thunder.

Navidson quickly does an about face and returns to the doorway. Only now he discovers that the penny he left behind, which should have been at least a hundred feet further, lies directly before him. Even stranger, the doorway is no longer the doorway but the arch he had been looking for all along.

Unfortunately as he steps through it, he immediately sees how drastically everything has changed. The corridor is now much narrower and ends very quickly in a T. He has no idea which way to go, and when a third growl ripples through that place, this time significantly louder, Navidson panics and starts to run.

His sprint, however, lasts only a few seconds. He realizes quickly enough that it is a useless, even dangerous, course of action. Catching his breath and doing his best to calm his frayed nerves, he tries to come up with a better plan.

"Karen!" he finally shouts, a flurry of air-in's almost instantly swallowed in front of him. "Tom!" he tries, briefly catching hold of the -om's as they too start to vanish, though before doing so completely, Navidson momentarily detects in the last -om a slightly higher pitch entwined in his own voice.

He waits a moment, and not hearing anything else, shouts again: "I'm in here!" giving rise to tripping nn-ear's reverberating and fading, until in the next to last instant a sharp cry comes back to him, a child's cry, calling out for him, drawing him to the right.

By shouting "I'm here" and following the add-ee's singing off the walls, Navidson slowly begins to make his way through an incredibly complex and frequently disorienting series of turns. Eventually after backtracking several times and making numerous wrong choices, occasionally descending into disturbing territories of silence, the voice begins to grow noticeably louder, until finally Navidson slips around a corner, certain he has found his way out. Instead though, he encounters only more darkness and this time greater quiet. His breathing quickens. He is uncertain which way to go. Obviously he is afraid. And then quite abruptly he steps to the right through a low passageway and discovers a corridor terminating in warm yellow light, lamp light, with a tiny silhouette standing in the doorway, tugging her daddy home with a cry.

Emerging into the safety of his own living room, Navidson immediately scoops Daisy up in his arms and gives her a big hug.

"I had a nightmare," she says with a very serious nod.

Similar to the Khumbu Icefall at the base of Mount Everest where blue seracs and chasms change unexpectedly throughout the day and night, Navidson is the first one to discover how that place also seems to constantly change. Unlike the Icefall, however, not even a single hairline fracture appears in those walls. Absolutely nothing visible to the eye provides a

reason for or even evidence of those terrifying shifts which can in a matter of moments reconstitute a simple path into an extremely complicated one.⁷⁷

⁷⁷"nothing visible to the eye provides a reason"—a fitting phrase for what's happened.

And to think my day actually started off pretty well.

I woke up having had an almost wet-dream about Thumper. She was doing this crazy Margaretha Geertruida Zelle dance, veil after colored veil thrown aside, though oddly enough never landing, rather flying around her as if she were in the middle of some kind of gentle twister, these sheer sheets of fabric continuing to encircle her, even as she removes more and more of them, allowing me only momentary glimpses of her body, her smooth skin, her mouth, her waist, her—ah yes, I get a glimpse of that too, and I'm moving towards her, moving past all that interference, certain that with every step I take I'll soon have her, after all she's almost taken everything off, no she has taken everything off, her knees are spreading apart, just a few more veils to get past and I'll be able to see her, not just bits & pieces of her, but all of her, no longer molested by all this nonsense, in fact I'm there already which means I'm about to enter her which apparently is enough to blow the circuit, hit the switch, prohibit that sublime and much anticipated conclusion, leaving me blind in the daylight stream pouring through my window.

Fuck.

I go off to cuff in the shower. At least the water's hot and there's enough steam to fog the mirror. Afterwards, I pack my pipe and light up. Wake & Bake. More like Wash & Bake. Half a bowl of cereal and a shot of bourbon later, I'm there, my friendly haze having finally arrived. I'm ready for work.

Parking's easy to find. On Vista. I jog up to Sunset, even jog up the stairs, practically skipping past the By Appointment Only sign. Why skipping? Because as I step into the Shop I know I'm not even one minute late, which is not usually the case for me. The expression on my boss's face reveals just how astonishing an achievement this is. I couldn't care less about him. I want to see Thumper. I want to find out if she's really wearing any of that diaphanous rainbow fabric I was dreaming about.

Of course she's not there, but that doesn't get me down. I'm still optimistic she'll arrive. And if not today, why fuck, tomorrow's just another day away.

A sentiment I could almost sing.

I immediately sit down at the side counter and start working, mainly because I don't want to deal with my boss which could mean jeopardizing my good mood. Of course he couldn't care less about me or my mood. He approaches, clearing his throat. He will talk, he will ruin everything, except it suddenly penetrates that chalky material he actually insists on calling his brain, that I'm building his precious points, and sure enough this insight prohibits his trap from opening and he leaves me alone.

Points are basically clusters of needles used to shade the skin. They are necessary because a single point amounts to a prick not much bigger than this period ".". Okay, maybe a little bigger. Anyway, five needles go into what's called a 5, seven for 7's and so on—all soldered together towards the base.

I actually enjoy making them. There's something pleasant about concentrating on the subtle details, the precision required, constantly checking and re-checking to assure yourself that yes indeed the sharps are level, in the correct arrangement, ready at last to be fixed in

place with dots of hot solder. Then I re-check all my re-checking: the points must not be too close nor too far apart nor skewed in any way, and only then, if I'm satisfied, which I usually am—though take heed "usually" does not always mean "always"—will I scrub the shafts and put them aside to be sterilized later in the ultrasound or Autoclave.

My boss may think I can't draw worth shit but he knows I build needles better than anyone. He calls me all the time on my tardiness, my tendency to drift & moither and of course the odds that I'll ever get to tattoo anything—"Johnny, nothing you do, (shaking his head) no one's ever gonna wanna make permanent, unless they're crazy, and let me tell you something Johnny, crazies never pay"—but about my needle making I've never heard him complain once.

Anyway, a couple of hours whiz by. I'm finishing up a batch of 5's—my boss's cluster of choice—when he finally speaks, telling me to pull some bottles of black and purple ink and fill a few caps while I'm at it. We keep the stuff in a storeroom in back. It's a sizable space, big enough to fit a small work table in. You have to climb eight pretty steep steps to reach it. That's where we stock all the extras, and we have extras for almost everything, except light bulbs. For some reason my boss hasn't picked up any extra light bulbs in a while. Today, of course, I flick the switch, and FLASH! BLAM! POP!, okay scratch the blam, the storeroom bulb burns out. I recommence flicking, as if such insistent, highly repetitive and at this point pointless action could actually resurrect the light. It doesn't. The switch has been rendered meaningless, forcing me to feel my way around in the dark. I keep the door open so I can see okay, but it still takes me awhile to negotiate the shadows before I can locate the caps and ink.

By now, the sweet effects of my dream, to say nothing of the soft thrumming delivered care of alcohol and Oregon bud, have worn off, though I still continue to think about Thumper, slowly coming to grips with the fact that she won't be visiting today. This causes my spirits to drop substantially, until I realize I have no way of knowing that for certain. After all, there's still half a day left. No, she's not coming. I know it. I can feel it in my gut. That's okay. Tomorrow's—aw, fuck that.

I start filling caps with purple, concentrating on its texture, the strange hue, imagining I can actually observe the rapid pulse of its bandwidth. These are stupid thoughts, and as if to confirm that sentiment, darkness pushes in on me. Suddenly the slash of light on my hands looks sharp enough to cut me. Real sharp. Move and it will cut me. I do move and guess what? I start to bleed. The laceration isn't deep but important stuff has been struck, leaking over the table and floor. Lost.

I don't have long.

Except I'm not bleeding though I am breathing hard. Real hard. I don't need to touch my face to know there are now beads of sweat slipping off my forehead, flicking off my eyelids, streaming down the back of my neck. Cold as hands. Hands of the dead. Something terrible is going on here. Going extremely wrong. Get out, I think. I want to get out. But I can't move.

Then as if this were nothing but a grim prelude, shit really starts to happen.

There's that awful taste again, sharp as rust, wrapping around my tongue.

Worse, I'm no longer alone.

Impossible.

Not impossible.

This time it's human.
Maybe not.
Extremely long fingers.

A sucking sound too. Sucking on teeth, teeth already torn from the gums.

I don't know how I know this.

But it's already too late, I've seen the eyes. The eyes. They have no whites. I haven't seen this. The way they glisten they glisten red. Then it begins reaching for me, slowly unfolding itself out of its corner, mad meat all of it, but I understand. These eyes are full of blood.

Except I'm only looking at shadows and shelves.

Of course, I'm alone.

And then behind me, the door closes.

The rest is in pieces. A scream, a howl, a roar. All's warping, or splintering. That makes no sense. There's a terrible banging. The air's rank with stench. At least that's not a mystery. I know the source. Boy, do I ever. I've shit myself. Pissed myself too. I can't believe it. Urine soaking into my pants, fecal matter running down the back of my legs, I'm caught in it, must run and hide from it, but I still can't move. In fact, the more I try to escape, the less I can breathe. The more I try to hold on, the less I can focus. Something's leaving me. Parts of me.

Everything falls apart.

Stories heard but not recalled.

Letters too.

Words filling my head. Fragmenting like artillery shells.

Shrapnel, like syllables, flying everywhere. Terrible syllables.

Sharp. Cracked. Traveling at murderous speed. Tearing through it all in a very, very bad perhaps even irreparable way.

Known.

Some.

Call.

Is.

Air.

Am?

Incoherent—yes.

Without meaning—I'm afraid not.

The shape of a shape of a shape of a face dis(as)sembling right before my eyes. What wail embattled break. Like a hawk. Another Maldon or no Maldon at all, on snowy days, or not snowy at all, far beyond the edge of any reasonable awareness. This is what it feels like to be really afraid. Though of course it doesn't. None of this can truly approach the reality of that fear, there in the midst of all that bedlam, like the sound of a heart or some other unholy blast, desperate & dying, slamming, no banging into the thin wall of my inner ear, paper thin in fact, attempting to shatter inside what had already been shattered long ago.

I should be dead.

Why am I still here?

And as that question appears—concise, in order, properly accented—I see I'm holding onto the tray loaded with all those caps and bottles of black and purple ink. Not only that but I'm already walking as fast as I can through the doorway. The door is open though I did not

After putting his daughter back to bed, Navidson finds Karen standing in the entrance to their room.

open it. I stub my toe. I'm falling down the stairs, tripping over myself, hurling the tray in the air, the caps, the ink, all of it, floating now above me, as my hands, independent of anything I might have thought to suggest, reach up to protect my head. Something hisses and slashes out at the back of my neck. It doesn't matter. Down I go, head first, somersaulting down those eight pretty steep steps, a wild blur, leaving me to passively note the pain spots as they happen: shoulders, hip, elbows, even as I also, at the same time, remain dimly aware of so much ink coming down like a bad rain, splattering around me, everywhere, covering me, even the tray hitting me, though that doesn't hurt, the caps scattering across the floor, and of course the accompanying racket, telling my boss, telling them all, whoever else was there— What? not that it was over, it wasn't, not yet.

The wind's knocked out of me. It's not coming back. Here's where I die, I think. And it's true, I'm possessed by the premonition of what will be, what has to be, my inevitable asphyxiation. At least that's what they see, my boss and crew, as they come running to the back, called there by all that clatter & mess. What they can't see though is the omen seen in a fall, my fall, as I'm doused in black ink, my hands now completely covered, and see the floor is black, and—have you anticipated this or should I be more explicit?—jet on jet; for a blinding instant I have watched my hand vanish, in fact all of me has vanished, one hell of a disappearing act too, the already foreseen dissolution of the self, lost without contrast, slipping into oblivion, until mid-gasp I catch sight of my reflection in the back of the tray, the ghost in the way: seems I'm not gone, not quite. My face has been splattered with purple, as have my arms, granting contrast, and thus defining me, marking me, and at least for the moment, preserving me.

Suddenly I can breathe and with each breath the terror rapidly dissipates.

My boss, however, is scared shitless.

"Jesus Christ Johnny," he says. "Are you okay? What happened?"

Can't you see I've shit myself, I think to shout. But now I see that I haven't. Except for the ink blotting my threads, my pants are bone dry.

I mumble something about how much my toe hurts.

He takes that to mean I'm alright and won't try to sue him from a wheelchair.

Later a patron points out the long, bloody scratch on the back of my neck.

I'm unable to respond.

Now though, I realize what I should of said—in the spirit of the dark; in the spirit of the staircase —

"Known some call is air am."

Which is to say —

"I am not what I used to be."⁷⁸

⁷⁸Though Mr. Truant's asides may often seem impenetrable, they are not without rhyme or reason. The reader who wishes to interpret Mr. Truant on his or her own may disregard this note. Those, however, who feel they would profit from a better understanding of his past may wish to proceed ahead and read his father's obituary in Appendix II-D as well as those letters written by his institutionalized mother in Appendix II-E. — Ed.

"What's the matter," she murmurs, still half-asleep.

"Go back to sleep. Daisy just had a bad dream."

Navidson starts to go back downstairs.

"I'm sorry Navy," Karen says quietly. "I'm sorry I got so mad. It's not your fault. That thing just scares me. Come back to bed."

And as they later confide in separate video entries, that night, for the first time in weeks, they made love again, their descriptions running the gamut of anything from "gentle" and "comforting" to "familiar" and "very satisfying." Their bodies had repaired what words never tried to, and at least for a little while they felt close again.

The next morning, with harmony now restored, Navidson cannot bring himself to tell Karen about his visit. Fortunately having nearly gotten lost inside his own house has for the moment diminished his appetite for its darkness. He promises to turn over the initial investigation to Billy Reston: "Then we'll call *The New York Times*, Larry King, whoever, and we'll move. End of story." Karen responds to his offer with kisses, clinging to his hand, a stability of sorts once again returning to their lives.

Still the compromise is far from satisfying. As Karen records on her Hi 8: "I told Navy I'll stay for the first look in there but I've also called Mom. I want to get out of here as soon as possible."

Navidson admits in his: "I feel lousy about lying to Karen. But I think it's unreasonable of her to expect me not to investigate. She knows who I am. I think —"

At which point, the study door suddenly swings open and Daisy, wearing a red and gold dress, barges in and begins tugging on her father's sleeve.

"Come play with me Daddy."

Navidson lifts his daughter onto his lap.

"Okay. What do you want to play?"

"I don't know," she shrugs. "Always."

"What's always?"

But before she can answer, he starts tickling her around the neck and Daisy dissolves into bursts of delight.

Despite the tremendous amount of material generated by Exploration A, no one has ever commented on the game Daisy wants to play with her father, perhaps because everyone assumes it is either a request "to play always" or just a childish neologism.

Then again, "always" slightly mispronounces "hallways."

It also echoes it.

VI

[Animals] lack a symbolic identity and the self-consciousness that goes with it. They merely act and move reflexively as they are driven by their instincts. If they pause at all, it is only a physical pause; inside they are anonymous, and even their faces have no name. They live in a world without time, pulsating, as it were, in a state of dumb being . . . The knowledge of death is reflective and conceptual, and animals are spared it. They live and they disappear with the same thoughtlessness: a few minutes of fear, a few seconds of anguish, and it is over. But to live a whole lifetime with the fate of death haunting one's dreams and even the most sun-filled days—that's something else.

— Ernest Becker

While the pragmatic space of animals is a function of inborn instincts, man has to learn what orientation he needs in order to act.

— Christian Norberg-Schulz

When Hillary, the grey coated Siberian husky, appears at the end of *The Navidson Record*, he is no longer a puppy. A couple of years have passed. Something forever watchful has taken up residence in his eyes. He may be playful with those he knows but whenever strangers wander too close they invariably hear a growl rising from somewhere deep in his throat, a little like distant thunder, warning them away.⁷⁹

Mallory, the tabby cat, vanishes completely, and no mention is made about what happened to him. His disappearance remains a mystery.

One thing however is certain: the house played a very small part in both their histories.

The incident took place on August 11th, 1990 a week after Will Navidson's secret exploration of the hallway. Saturday morning cartoons blare from the kitchen television, Chad and Daisy munch down their breakfast, and Karen stands outside smoking a cigarette, talking on the phone with Audrie McCulloch, her shelf building accomplice. The topic of the moment is Feng Shui and all it has failed to do. "No matter how many ceramic turtles or wooden ducks, goldfish, celestial dragons, or bronze lions I put in this goddamn house," she rants. "It still keeps throwing off this awful energy. I need to find a psychic. Or an exorcist. Or a really good

real-estate agent.” Meanwhile in the living room, Tom helps Navidson take some still shots of the hallway using a strobe.

Suddenly, somewhere in the house, there is a loud yowl and bark. An instant later Mallory comes screaming into the living room with Hillary nipping at his tail. It is not the first time they have involved themselves in such a routine. The only exception is that on this occasion, after dashing up and over the sofa, both puppy and cat head straight down the hallway and disappear into the darkness. Navidson probably would have gone in after them had he not instantly heard barks outside followed by Karen’s shouts accusing him of letting the animals out when on that day they were supposed to stay in.

“What the hell?” we hear Navidson mutter loudly.

Sure enough Hillary and Mallory are in the backyard. Mallory up a tree, Hillary howling grandly over his achievement.

For something so startling, it seems surprising how little has been made of this event. Bernard Porch in his four thousand page treatise on *The Navidson Record* devotes only a third of a sentence to the subject: “, (strange how the house won’t support the presence of animals).”⁸⁰ Mary Widmunt leaves us with just one terse question: “So what’s the deal with the pets?”⁸¹ Even Navidson himself, the consummate investigator, never revisits the subject.

Who knows what might have been discovered if he had.

Regardless, Holloway soon arrives and any understanding that might have been gained by further analyzing the strange relationship between animals and the house is passed over in favor of human exploration.⁸²

Endnotes

⁷⁹See Selwyn Hyrkas' "The End of City Life" in *Interview*, v. 25 October 1995, p. 54.

⁸⁰Bernard Porch's *All In All* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 1,302.

⁸¹Mary Widmunt's "The Echo of Dark" in *Gotta Go* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), p. 59.

⁸²Strange how Zampanò also fails to comment on the inability of animals to wander those corridors. I believe there's a great deal of significance in this discovery. Unfortunately, Zampanò never returns to the matter and while I would like to offer you my own interpretation I am a little high and a lot drunk, trying to determine what set me off in the first place on this private little home-bound binge.

For one thing, Thumper came into the Shop today.

Ever since I fell down the stairs, things have changed there. My boss kind of tiptoes around me, playing all low key and far off, his demeanor probably matching his old junkie days. Even his friends keep their distance, everyone for the most part just leaving me alone to sketch and solder, though I'm sketching far less these days, I mean, with all this writing. Anyway, Thumper's actually been by a few times but my incomprehensible shyness persists, forbidding me to ever summon up more than an occasional intelligible sentence. Recently though I did get this crazy idea: I decided to go out on a limb and show her that sappy little bit I wrote about her—you know with all that coastal norths and August-sun scent-of-pine-trees stuff, even the Lucy part. I just put it in an envelope and carried it around with me until she dropped by and then handed it to her without a word.

I don't know what I expected, but she opened it right on the spot and read it and then laughed and then my boss grabbed it and he sort of winced—"Now look who's the dumb mutant" he shuddered—and that was that. Thumper handed me her flip flops and Adidas sweat pants and stretched out on the chair. I felt like such an idiot. Lude had warned me I'd be certifiable if I showed it to her. Maybe I am. I actually believed it would touch her in some absurd way. But to hear her laugh like that really fucked me up. I should of stayed away from such flights of fancy, stuck to my regular made-up stories.

I did my best to hide in the back, though I was too scared to go too far back because of the storeroom.

Then right before she left, Thumper came over and handed me her card.

"Call me some time," she said with a wink. "You're cute."

My life instantly changed.

I thought.

I told Lude. He told me to call her at once.

I waited.

Then I re-considered, then I postponed.

Finally, at exactly twenty-two past three in the morning, I dialed. It was a beeper. I punched in my number.

She's a stripper I reasoned. Strippers live late.

An hour passed. I started drinking. I'm still drinking. She hasn't called. She isn't going to call.

I feel dead. Hillary and Mallory, I suddenly envy them. I wonder if Navidson did too. I bet Zampanò envied them. I need to get away. Zampanò liked animals. Far away. All those cats he would talk to in that weedy courtyard. At dawn. At night. So many shades slinking out from under that dusty place like years, his years, could they be like my years too? though certainly not so many, not like him, years and years of them, always rubbing up against his legs, and I see it all so clearly now, static announcements that yes! hmmm, how shocking, they still are there, disconnected but vital, the way memories reveal their life by simply appearing, sprinting out from under the shadows, paws!-patter-paws-paws!, pausing then to rub against our legs, zap! senile sparks perhaps but ah yes still there, and I'm thinking, has another missing year resolved in song?—though let me not get too far from myself, they were after all only cats, quadruped mice-devouring mote-chasing shades, Felis catus, with very little to remind them of themselves or their past or even their tomorrows, especially when the present burns hot with play, their pursuits and their fear, a bright flash to pursue (sun a star on a nothing's back), a dark slash to escape (there are always predators . . .), the sly interplay of hidden things and visible wings flung upon that great black sail of rods and cones, thin and fractionary, a covenant of light, ark for the instant, echoing out the dark and the Other, harmonizing with the crack-brack-crisp-tricks of every broken leaf of grass or displaced stick, and so thrust by shadow and the vague hope of color into a rhapsody of motion and meaning, albeit momentary, pupil pulling wider, wider still, and darker, receiving all of it, and even more of it, though still only beholding some of it, until in the frenzy of reception, this mote-clawing hawk-fearing shade loses itself in temporary madness, leaping, springing, flinging itself after it all, as if it were possessed (and it is); as if that kind of physical response could approximate the witnessed world, which it can't, though very little matters enough to prevent the try—all of which is to say, in the end, they are only cats but cats to talk to just the same before in their own weaving and wending, they Kilkenny-disappear, just as they first appeared, out of nowhere, vanishing back into the nowhere, tales from some great story we will never see but one day just might imagine (which in the gray of gentler eyes will prove far more than any of us could ever need; "enough," we will shout, "enough!" our bellies full, our hearts full, our ages full; fullness and greater fullness and even more fullness; how then we will laugh and forget how the imagining has already left us) slinking back into that place of urban barley, grass, fennel and wheat, or just plain hay, golden hay, where—Hey! Hey! Hey-hey! Hay days gone by, bye-bye, gone way way away. And what of dogs you ask? Well, there are no dogs except for the Pekinese but that's another story, one I won't, I cannot tell. It's too dark and difficult and without whim, and if you didn't notice I'm in a whimsical (inconsequential) frame of mind right now, talking (scribbling?) aimlessly and strangely about cats, enjoying all the rules in this School of Whim, the play of it,—Where Have I Moved? What Have I Mattered? Who Have I Met?—the frolic and the drift, as I go thinking now, tripping really, over the notion of eighty or more of Zampanò's dusty cats (for no particular/relevant reason) which must implicitly mean that no, it cannot be raining cats and dogs, due to the dust, so much of it, on the ground, about the weeds, in the air, so therefore/ ergo/ thus (. . .): no dogs, no Pekinese, just the courtyard,

Zampanò's courtyard, on a mad lost-noon day, wild with years and pounce and sun, even if another day would find Zampanò elsewhere, far from the sun, this sun, flung face down on his ill-swept floor, without so much as a clue, "No trauma, just old age" the paramedics would say, though they could never explain—no one could—what they found near where he lay, four of them, six or seven inches long and half an inch deep, splintering the wood, left by some terrible awe-full thing, signature in script of steel or claws, though not Santa, Zampanò died after Christmas after all, but no myth either, for I saw the impossible marks near the trunk, touched them, even caught some splinters in my fingertips, some of their unexpected sadness and mourning, which though dug out later with a safety pin, I swear still fester beneath my skin, reminding me in a peculiar way of him, just like other splinters I still carry, though these much much deeper, having never been worked out by the body but quite the contrary worked into the body, by now long since buried, calcified and fused to my very bones, taking me further from the warm frolic of years, reminding me of much colder days, Where I Left Death, or thought I had—I am tripping—overcast in tones December gray, recalling names,—I have tripped—swept in Ohio sleet and rain, ruled by a man with a beard rougher than horse hide and hands harder than horn, who called me beast because I was his boy though he wasn't my father, which is another story, another place I'm here to avoid, as I'm certain there are places you too have sought to avoid, just as one of Zampanò's early readers also found a story she wanted to avoid, though she finally told me it, or at least some of it, how she'd departed from the old man's apartment at nightfall, having just endured hours of speech on comfort, death and legend, not to speak of mothers & daughters and birds & bees and fathers & sons and cats & dogs, all of it distressing her, saddening her, confusing her, and thus leaving her completely unprepared for the memory she was about to find, abruptly returning from her childhood in Santa Cruz, even as she was trying to reorient herself in a familiar setting and the comforting routine of a long walk back to her car,—it had been raining there; pouring in fact; though not on Franklin & Whitley—suddenly noticing the unnatural heaviness of a shadow slipping free from the burnt dusk, though not a shadow at all, later translating this as the sight of an enormous creature trespassing on the curve of a Northern California night, like the shadow she saw hiding in the bottom turn of Zampanò's stairwell, moving too, towards her, and so causing her to panic and scramble into the comforts offered by a local bar—or that night scramble through the gate of Zampanò's building—away from all that gloom, until only many hours and many drinks later could she finally fall asleep, her hangover the following day leaving her—"gratefully," she said—with only a fleeting memory of something white with ropes of sea smoke and one terrifying flash of blue, which was more, she told me, than she could usually share even if—which she wouldn't share—she knew it still wasn't even the half of it.

And so now, in the shadow of unspoken events, I watch Zampanò's courtyard darken.

Everything whimsical has left.

I try to study the light-going carefully. From my room. In the glass of my memory. In the moonstream of my imagination. The weeds, the windows, every bench.

But the old man is not there, and the cats are all gone.

Something else has taken their place. Something I am unable to see. Waiting.

I'm afraid.
It is hungry. It is immortal.
Worse, it knows nothing of whim.

VII

But all this—the mysterious, far-reaching hair-line trail, the absence of sun from the sky, the tremendous cold, and the strangeness and weirdness of it all—made no impression on the man. It was not because he was long used to it. He was a newcomer in the land, a chechaquo, and this was his first winter. The trouble with him was that he was without imagination.

— Jack London
“To Build A Fire”

Holloway Roberts arrives carrying a rifle. In fact in the very first shot we see of him, he emerges from a truck holding a Weatherby 300 magnum.

Even without weapons though, Holloway would still be an intimidating man. He is broad and powerful with a thick beard and deeply creased brow. Dissatisfaction motivates him, and at forty-eight, he still drives himself harder than any man half his age. Consequently, when he steps onto Navidson's front lawn, arms folded, eyes scrutinizing the house, bees flying near his boots, he looks less like a guest and more like some conquistador landing on new shores, preparing for war.

Born in Menomonie, Wisconsin, Holloway Roberts has made a career as a professional hunter and explorer. As travel writer Aramis Garcia Pineda commented: “He is confident, leads well, and possesses a remarkable amount of brassball courage. Over the past some have resented his strength and drive but most agree the sense of security one feels in his presence—especially in life-threatening situations—makes tolerating the irritating sides of his character well worth it.”⁸³

When Navidson told Reston how Karen had explicitly asked him not to explore the hallway—and presumably Navidson described the discoveries he made during Exploration A—the first person Reston called was Holloway.

Reston had met Holloway four years earlier at a symposium on arctic gear design held at Northwestern University. Holloway was one of the speakers invited to represent explorers. Not only did he clearly articulate the problems with current equipment, he also focused on what was needed to correct the problems. Though a fairly humorless speech, its conciseness impressed many people there, especially Reston who bought the man a drink. A sort of friendship soon developed.⁸⁴ “I always thought he was

⁸³See Aramis Garcia Pineda's “More Than Meets The Eye” in *Field and Stream*, v. 100, January 1996, p. 39-47.

⁸⁴Leezel Brant's “Billy Reston's Friends For Life” in *Backpacker*, v. 23, February 1995, p. 7.

rock solid,” Reston said much later in **The Reston Interview**. “Just look at his C.V. Never for a moment did I suspect he was capable of that.”⁸⁵

As it turned out, as soon as Holloway saw the tape of “The Five and Half Minute Hallway”, which Reston had sent him, he was more than willing to participate in an investigation. ✨ Within a week he had arrived at the house, along with two employees: Jed Leeder and Kirby “Wax” Hook.

As we learn in *The Navidson Record*, Jed Leeder lives in Seattle, though he was originally from Vineland, New Jersey. He had actually been on his way to becoming a career truck driver when a trans-continental job took him all the way to Washington. It was there that he discovered the great outdoors was not just some myth conjured up in a magazine. He was twenty-seven when he first saw the Cascades. One look was all he needed. Love at first sight. He quit his job on the spot and started selling camping gear. Six years later he is still a long way from Vineland, and as we can see for ourselves, his passion for the Pacific Northwest and the great outdoors only seems to have grown more intense.

Consummately shy, almost to the point of frailty, Jed possesses an uncanny sense of direction and remarkable endurance. Even Holloway concedes that Jed would probably out distance him in a packless climb. When he is not trekking, Jed loves drinking coffee, watching the tide turn, and listening to Lyle Lovett with his fiancée. “She’s from Texas,” he tells us very softly. “I think that’s where we’re going to get married.”⁸⁶

Wax Hook could not be more different. At twenty-six, he is the youngest member of the Holloway team. Born in Aspen, Colorado, he grew up on mountain faces and in cave shafts. Before he could walk he knew where to drive a piton and before he could talk he had a whole vocabulary of knots under his fingers. If there is such a thing as a climbing prodigy, Wax is it. By the time he dropped out of high school, he had climbed more peaks than most climbers have claimed in a lifetime. In one clip, he tells us how he plans to eventually make a solo ascent of Everest’s North Face: “And I’ll tell you this, more than a few people are bettin’ I’ll do it.”

When Wax was twenty-three, Holloway hired him as a guide. For the next three years, Wax helped Holloway and Jed lead teams up Mt. McKinley, down into Ellison’s Cave in Georgia, or across some Nepalese cwm. The pay was not much to brag about but the experience was worth plenty.

Wax sometimes gets a little out of hand. He likes to drink, get laid, and most of all boast about how much he drank and how many times he got laid. But he never brags about climbing. Booze and women are one thing but “a rocky face is always better than you and if you make it down alive you’re grateful you had a good trip.”⁸⁷

“This though has to be the weirdest,” Wax later tells Navidson, right before making his last foray down the hallway. “When Holloway asked me

⁸⁵See Exhibit Four for the complete transcript of The Reston Interview.

✨ Gabriel Reller in his book *Beyond The Grasp of Commercial Media* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995) suggests that the appearance of the first short entitled “The Five and a Half Minute Hallway” originated here: “Holloway probably copied the tape, gave it to a couple of friends, who in turn passed it along to others. Eventually it found its way to the academic set” (p. 252).

⁸⁶See also Susan Wright’s “Leeder of the Pack” in *Outdoor Life*, v. 195, June 1995, p. 28.

⁸⁷Bentley Harper’s “Hook, Line and Sinker” in *Sierra*, v. 81, July/August 1996, p. 42.

if I wanted to explore a house I thought he was cracked. But whatever Holloway does is interesting to me, so sure I went for it, and sure enough this *is* the weirdest!”

On the day Holloway and his team arrive at Ash Tree Lane, Navidson and Tom are there to greet them at the door. Karen says a brief hello and leaves to pick the children up from school. Reston makes the necessary introductions and then after everyone has gathered in the living room, Navidson begins to explain what he knows about the hallway.

He shows them a map he drew based on his first visit. Tellingly, this hardly strikes Tom as news. While Navidson does his best to impress upon everyone the dangers posed by the tremendous size of that place as well as the need to record in detail every part of the exploration, Tom passes out xerox copies of his brother’s diagram.

Jed finds it difficult to stop smiling while Wax finds it difficult to stop laughing. Holloway keeps throwing glances at Reston. In spite of the tape he saw, Holloway seems convinced that Navidson has more than a few loose wing nuts jangling around in his cerebral cortex. But when the four dead bolts are at last unlocked and the hallway door drawn open, the icy darkness instantly slaughters every smile and glance.

Newt Kuellster suspects the first view of that place irreparably altered something in Holloway: “His face loses color, something even close to panic suffuses his system. Suddenly he sees what fortune has plopped on his plate and how famous and rich it could make him, and he wants it. He wants all of it, immediately, no matter the cost.”⁸⁸ Studying Holloway’s reaction, it is almost impossible to deny how serious he gets staring down the hallway. “How far back does it go?” he finally asks.

“You’re about to find out,” Navidson replies, sizing up the man, a half-smile on his lips. “Just be careful of the shifts.”

From the first time they shake hands on the doorstep, it is obvious to us Navidson and Holloway dislike each other. Neither one says anything critical but both men bristle in each other’s presence. Holloway is probably a little unnerved by Navidson’s distinguished career. Navidson, no doubt, is privately incensed that he must ask another man to explore his own house. Holloway does not make this intrusion any easier. He is cocky and following Navidson’s little introduction immediately starts calling the shots.

In earlier years, Navidson would have probably paid little attention to Karen and headed down those corridors by himself—danger be damned. Yet as has already been discussed, the move to Virginia was about repairing their crumbling relationship. Karen would refrain from relying on other men to mollify her insecurities if Navidson curbed his own risk-lust and gave domesticity a real shot. After all, as Karen later intimated, their home was supposed to bring them closer together.⁸⁹ The appearance of the hallway, however, tests those informal vows. Navidson finds himself constantly itching to leave his family for that place just as Karen discovers old patterns surfacing in herself.

Later that evening, Holloway places his hand on Karen’s back and makes her laugh with a line the camera never hears. Navidson immediately

⁸⁸See Newt Kuellster’s “The Five and a Half Minute Holloway” in *The Holloway Question* (San Francisco: Metalambino Inc., 1996), p. 532; as well as Tiffany Balter’s “Gone Away” in *People*, v. 43, May 15, 1995, p. 89.

⁸⁹See Chapter XIII.

bumps Holloway aside with his shoulder, revealing, for one thing, his own easily underestimated strength. Navidson, however, reserves his glare for Karen. She laughs it off but the uneasy energy released recalls Leslie Buckman and Dale Corrdigan's accusations.⁹⁰

Yet even after Navidson's interjection, Holloway still finds it difficult to keep his eyes off of Karen. Her flirting hardly helps. She is bright, extremely sexual, and just as Navidson has always enjoyed danger, she has always thrived on attention.

Karen brings the men beers and they go outside with her and light her cigarettes. It matters very little what they say, her eyes always flash, she gives them that famous smile, and sure enough soon they are all dotting on her.

Navidson confides to his Hi 8, "I can't tell you how much I'd like to deviate that fucker's [Holloway's] septum." And then later on mutters somewhat enigmatically: "For that I should throw her out." Still aside from these comments and the strong nudge he gave Holloway, Navidson refrains from openly displaying any other signs of jealousy or rage.

Unfortunately he also refrains from openly considering the significance of these feelings. The closest he comes appears in a Hi 8 journal entry spliced in following his encounter with Holloway. On camera, Navidson treats what he refers to as "his rotten feet." As we can clearly see, the tops are puffy and in some places as red as clay. Furthermore, all his toe nails are horribly cracked, disfigured, and yellow. "Perpetuated," Navidson informs us. "By a nasty fungus two decades worth of doctors finally ended up calling S-T-R-E-S-S." Sitting by himself on the edge of the tub, blood stained socks draped over the edge, he carefully spreads a silky ointment around what he glibly calls his "light fantastic toe." It is one of the more naked moments of Navidson, and especially considering its placement in the sequence, seems to reveal in a non-verbal way some of the anxiety Karen's flirtation with Holloway has provoked in him.

All of which becomes pretty irrelevant as Holloway soon spends most of his hours leading his team down that lightless hallway.

Frequently treatment of the first three explorations has concentrated on the physical aspects of the house. Florencia Calzatti, however, has shown in her compelling book *The Fraying of the American Family* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1995)—no longer in print—how these invasions begin to strip the Navidsons of any existing cohesion. It is an interesting examination of the complex variables implicit in any intrusion. Unfortunately understanding Calzatti's work is not at all easy, as she makes her case using a peculiar idiom no reader will find readily comprehensible

⁹⁰Refer to footnotes 19 and 20 concerning Karen's infidelities. Perhaps it also should be noted here that for all his wanderings Navidson was pointedly not promiscuous. Good looks, intelligence, and fame did not combine to create an adulterous lifestyle. Iona Panofsky in "Saints, Sinners, and Photojournalists" *Fortune*, v. 111, March 18, 1985, p. 20, attributes Navidson's genius to his "monk-like existence." However, Australian native, Ryan Murray in his book *Wilder Ways* (Sydney: Outback Works, 1996) calls Navidson's monastic habits "a sure sign of unresolved oedipal anxieties, repressed homosexuality, and a disturbed sense of self. Considering the time he spent away from home coupled with the kind of offers he got from the most exotic and tantalizing women (not even including those from his numerous female assistants), his refusal proves a nauseating absence of character. Make no mistake about it: over here his kind enter a bar with a smile and leave with a barstool for a hat." An odd thing to say considering Navidson drank freely in every Australian bar he ever visited and on the one occasion when he was attacked by two drunks, purportedly angry over all the attention the waitresses were lavishing on him, both inebriates left bruised and bleeding. (*The Wall Street Journal*, March 29, 1985, p. 31, column 3.)

(e.g. She never refers to Holloway as anything but “the stranger”; Jed and Wax appear as only “the instruments”; and the house is encoded as “the patient”). No doubt inspired by Calzatti, a small group of other writers, including the poet Elfor O’Halloran, have continued to mull over the dynamics brought on by Holloway’s arrival.⁹¹

Without focusing too closely on the fine filigree of detail presented in these pieces—a book in itself—it is worthwhile, however briefly, to track the narrative events of the three explorations and recite to some degree how they effect the Navidsons.

For **Exploration #1**, Holloway, Jed and Wax enter the hallway equipped with Hi 8s, down parkas, hats, Gortex gloves, powerful halogen lamps, extra batteries, and a radio to keep in contact with Navidson, Tom and Reston. Navidson ties one end of some fishing line to the hallway door and then hands the spool to Holloway.

“There’s almost two miles of line here,” he tells him. “Don’t let go of it.”

Karen says nothing when she hears Navidson make this comment, though she does get up abruptly to go out to the backyard and smoke a cigarette. It is particularly eerie to watch Holloway and his team disappear down the long hallway, while just outside Karen paces back and forth in the light of a September day, oblivious of the space she repeatedly crosses though for whatever reason cannot penetrate.⁹²

An hour later, Holloway, Jed, and Wax return. When their Hi 8 tapes are replayed in the living room, we watch along with everyone else how a series of lefts eventually leads them to the apparently endless corridor which, again to the left, offers entrance into that huge space where Navidson almost got lost. Though Holloway’s ability to shoot this trip hardly compares to the expertise evident in Navidson’s Exploration A, it is still thrilling to follow the trio as they investigate the darkness.

As they quickly discover, the void above them is not infinite. Their flashlights, much more powerful than Navidson’s, illuminate a ceiling at least two hundred feet high. A little later, at least fifteen hundred feet away, they discover an opposing wall. What no one is prepared for, however, is the even larger entrance waiting for them, opening into an even greater void.

Two things keep them from proceeding further. One—Holloway runs out of fishing line. In fact, he briefly considers setting the spool down, when two—he hears the growl Navidson had warned them about. A little rattled by the sound, Holloway decides to turn back in order to better consider their next move. As Navidson foretold, they soon see for themselves how all the walls have shifted (though not as severely as they had for Navidson). Fortunately, the changes have not severed the fishing line and the three men find their way back to the living room with relative ease.

Exploration #2 takes place the following day. This time Holloway carries with him four spools of fishing line, several flares, and some

⁹¹Consider Bingham Arzumian’s “Stranger in a Hall” *Journal of Psychoanalysis*, v.14 April 12, 1996, p. 142; Yvonne Hunsucker’s “Counseling, Relief, and Introjection” *Medicine*, v.2 July 18, 1996, p. 56; Curtis Melchor’s “The Surgical Hand” *Internal Medicine*, v.8 September 30, 1996, p. 93; and Elfor O’Halloran’s “Invasive Cures” *Homeopathic Alternatives*, October 31, 1996, p. 28.

⁹²See Jeffrey Neblett’s “The Illusion of Intimacy and Depth” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, v. 111, January 1994, p. 90-93.

neon markers. He virtually ignores Navidson, putting Wax in charge of a 35mm camera and instructing Jed on how to collect scratchings from all the walls they pass along the way. Reston provides the dozen or so sample jars.

Though Exploration #2 ends up lasting over eight hours, Holloway, Jed, Wax only hear the growl once and the resulting shifts are negligible. The first hallway seems narrower, the ceiling a little lower, and while some of the rooms they pass look larger, for the most part everything has remained the same. It is almost as if continued use deters the growl and preserves the path they walk.

Aside from feeling generally incensed by what he perceives as Holloway's postured authority, Navidson almost goes berserk listening to the discoveries on the radio. Reston and Tom try to cheer him up and to Navidson's credit he tries to act cheerful, but when Jed announces they have crossed what he names the Anteroom and entered what Holloway starts calling the Great Hall, Navidson finds it increasingly more difficult to conjure even a smile.

Radio psychologist Fannie Lamkins believes this is a clear cut example of the classic male struggle for dominance:

It's bad enough to hear the Great Hall has a ceiling at least five hundred feet high with a span that may approach a mile, but when Holloway radios that they've found a staircase in the center which is over two hundred feet in diameter and spirals down into nothing, Navidson has to hand Reston the radio, unable to muster another word of support. He has been deprived of the right to name what he inherently understands as his own.⁹³

Lamkins sees Navidson's willingness to obey Karen's injunction as a sacrifice on par with scarification, "though invisible to Karen."⁹⁴

After Holloway's team returns, Jed tries to describe the staircase: "It was enormous. We dropped a few flares down it but never heard them hit bottom. I mean in that place, it being so empty and cold and still and all, you really can hear a pin drop, but the darkness just swallowed the flares right up." Wax nods, and then adds with a shake of his head: "It's so deep, man, it's like it's almost dream like."

This last comment is actually not uncommon, especially for individuals who find themselves confronting vast tenebrific spaces. Back in the mid-60s, American cavers tackled the Sotano de las Golondrinas, an incredible 1,092ft hole in Mexico's Sierra Madre Oriental. They used rope, rappel racks, and mechanical ascenders to make the descent. Later on, one of the cavers described his experience: "I was suspended in a giant dome with thousands of birds circling in small groups near the vague blackcloth of the far walls. Moving slowly down the rope, I had the feeling that I was

⁹³Fannie Lamkins' "Eleven Minute Shrink," KLAT, Buffalo, New York, June 24, 1994.

⁹⁴Ibid. Florencia Calzatti also sees Karen's edict as violent, though she ultimately considers it of great value: "A needed rite to reinvigorate and strengthen the couple's personal bonds." *The Fraying of the American Family*, p. 249.

descending into an illusion and would soon become part of it as the distances became unrelatable and entirely unreal.”⁹⁵

When Holloway plays back the Hi 8s for everyone, Navidson’s frustrations get the best of him. He leaves the room. It hardly helps that Karen stays, entirely engrossed in Holloway’s presentation and the ghostly if inadequate images of a banister frozen on the monitor. Tom, actually, pulls her aside and tries to convince her to let Navidson lead the next exploration.

“Tom,” she replies defensively. “Nothing’s stopping Navy. If he wants to go, he can go. But then I go too. That’s our deal. He knows that. You know that.”

Tom seems a little shocked by her anger, until Karen directs his attention to Chad and Daisy, sitting in the kitchen, working hard at not doing their homework.

“Look at them,” she whispers. “Navy’s had a lifetime of wandering and danger. He can let someone else take over now. It won’t kill him, but losing him would kill them. It would kill me too. I want to grow old, Tom. I want to grow old with him. Is that such an awful thing?”

Her words clearly register with Tom, who perhaps also perceives what a great toll his brother’s death would have on him as well.⁹⁶

When he sees Navidson next, Tom tells him to go find his son.

Based on what we can tell from *The Navidson Record*, it appears Chad soon got fed up with his class assignment and took off down the street with Hillary, determined to explore his own dark. Navidson had to look for almost an hour before he finally found him. Chad it turned out was in the park filling a jar full of fireflies. Instead of scolding him, Navidson helped out.

By ten, they had returned home with jars full of light and hands sticky with ice cream.

Exploration #3 ends up lasting almost twenty hours. Relying primarily on the team’s radio transmissions interspersed with a few clips from the Hi 8s, Navidson relates how Holloway, Jed, and Wax take forty-five minutes to reach the Spiral Staircase only to spend the next seven hours walking down it. When they at last stop, a dropped flare still does not illuminate or sound a bottom. Jed notes that the diameter has also increased from two hundred feet to well over five hundred feet. It takes them over eleven hours to return.

Unlike the two previous explorations, this intrusion brings them face to face with the consequences of the immensity of that place. All three men come back cold, depleted, their muscles aching, their enthusiasm gone.

“I got some vertigo,” Jed confesses. “I had to step way back from the edge and sit down. That was a first for me.” Wax is more cavalier, claiming to have felt no fear, though for some reason he is more exhausted than the rest. Holloway remains the most stoic, keeping any doubts to himself, adding only that the experience is beyond the power of any Hi 8 or 35mm camera: “It’s impossible to photograph what we saw.”⁹⁷

⁹⁵*Planet Earth: Underground Worlds* by Donald Dale Jackson and The Editors of Time-Life Books (Alexandra, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1982), p. 149.

⁹⁶Both Bingham Arzumanian and Curtis Melchor’s pieces have offered valuable insight into the nature of Tom’s alignment with Karen. Also see Chapter XI.

⁹⁷Marjorie Preece uses this one line to launch into her powerfully observed essay “The Loss of Authority: Holloway’s Challenge” *Kaos Journal*, v. 32, September, 1996, p. 44. Preece wonderfully shows how

Even after seeing Navidson's accomplished shots, it is hard to disagree with Holloway. The darkness recreated in a lab or television set does not begin to tell the true story. Whether chemical clots determining black or video grey approximating absence, the images still remain two dimensional. In order to have a third dimension, depth cues are required, which in the case of the stairway means more light. The flares, however, barely illuminate the size of that bore. In fact they are easily extinguished by the very thing they are supposed to expose. Only knowledge illuminates that bottomless place, disclosing the deep ultimately absent in all the tapes and stills—those strange *cartes de visites*. It is unfortunate that Holloway's images cannot even be counted as approximations of that vast abrupt, where as Rilke wrote, "*aber da, an diesem schwarzen Felle/ wird dein stärkstes Schauen aufgelöst.*"⁹⁸

Holloway's assertion that the camera is impotent within the house "helps establish him—at least for a little while—as the tribe's head."

⁹⁸No idea. Actually, Lude had a German friend named Kyrie, a tall blonde haired beauty who spoke Chinese, Japanese and French, drank beer by the quart, trained for triathlons when she wasn't playing competitive squash, made six figures a year as a corporate consultant and loved to fuck. Lude took heed when I told him I needed a German translation and introduced us.

As it turned out, I'd met her before, about five or so months ago. It had actually been a little tricky. I was leering about, pretty obliterated in the arms of drink, hours of drink actually, feeling like days of drink, when this monstrous guy loomed up in front of me, grumbling insensibly about bad behavior, something concerning too much talk with too much gesture, gestures towards her, that much of the grumble, the "her" bit, I understood. He meant Kyrie of course who even back then was a blonde haired beauty, writing my name in Japanese and assigning all sorts of portentous things to it, things I was hoping to lead or was it follow? elsewhere, when this prehistoric shithead, reeking of money and ignorance, interposed himself, cursing, spitting and threatening, in fact so loud & mean Kyrie had to interpose herself, which only made matters worse. He reached over her and hit me in the forehead with the heel of his hand. Not hard, more like a shove, but a strong enough shove to push me back a few feet.

"Well look at that," I remember hollering. "He has an opposable thumb."

The monster wasn't amused. It didn't matter. The alcohol in me had already quickened and fled. I stood there tingling all over, a dangerous clarity returning to me, ancient bloodlines colluding under what I imagine now must of been the very aegis of Mars, my fingers itching to weld into themselves, while directly beneath my sternum a hammer struck the timeless bell of war, a call to arms, though all of it still held back by what? words I guess, or rather a voice, though whose I have no clue.

He was twice my size, bigger and stronger. That should of mattered. For some reason it didn't. Odds were he'd rip me to pieces, probably even try to stomp me, and yet part of me still wanted to find out for sure. Luckily, the alcohol returned. I got wobbly and then I got scared.

Lude was yelling at me.

"You got a death wish Truant?"

Which was the thing that scared me.

'Cause maybe I did.

Five months or so later, Lude arranged for me to meet Kyrie at Union. I was late by an hour. I had an excuse. Every time I tried to open my door, my heart started racing for a bypass. I had to sit down and wait for the thumping to calm. This went on for almost fifty minutes, until I finally just gave up, gritted my teeth and charged out into the night.

Of course I recognized Kyrie immediately and she recognized me. She was getting ready to leave when I arrived. I apologized and begged her to stay, making up some lame excuse about police trying to save a guy in my building who'd stuck his head in a microwave. She looked wonderful and her voice was soft and offered me something Thumper had taken away when she hadn't called me back. She even wrote down on a napkin the glyph she'd created for me half a year ago to reflect my name and nature.

Before I could order a drink, a Jack and Coke, she told me her boyfriend was out of town, working on some construction site in Poland, single handedly dislodging supertankers stuck in dry dock in Gdansk or something. It was a dirty job but someone had to do it, and what's more he wasn't going to be back for a few more weeks. Before I even took a sip of my drink, Kyrie was complaining about all the people filtering in around us and then as I finished my drink in one long gulp, she suggested we go for a drive in her new 2 door BMW Coupe.

"Sure" I said, feeling vaguely uneasy about wandering too far from where I lived, which I realized, as I took a second to think that out, was absolutely absurd. What the fuck was happening to me? My apartment's a dump. There's nothing there for me. Not even sleep. Cat naps are fine but for some reason deep REM is getting more and more difficult to achieve. Definitely not a good thing.

Fortunately, I was falling under the spell of Kyrie's blue eyes, like sea ice, almost inhuman, reminding me again—as she herself had already pointed out—that she was alone, Gdansk Man more than half a world spinning world away.

In the parking lot, we slipped into her bucket seats and quickly swallowed two tabs of Ecstasy.

Kyrie took over from there.

At nearly ninety miles per hour, she zipped us up to that windy edge known to some as Mullholland, a sinuous road running the ridge of the Santa Monica mountains, where she then proceeded to pump her vehicle in and out of turns, sometimes dropping down to fifty miles per hour only to immediately gun it back up to ninety again, fast, slow, fast-fast, slow, sometimes a wide turn, sometimes a quick one. She preferred the tighter ones, the sharp controlled jerks, swinging left to right, before driving back to the right, only so she could do it all over again, until after enough speed and enough wind and more distance than I'd been prepared to expect, taking me to parts of this city I rarely think of and never visit, she dipped down into some slower offshoot, a lane of lightless coves, not stopping there either, but pushing further on until she finally found the secluded spot she'd been heading for all along, overlooking the city, far from anyone, pedestrian or home, and yet directly beneath a street lamp, which as far as I could tell, was the only street lamp around for miles.

Seems all that twittering light flooding down through the sunroof really turned her on.

I can't remember the inane things I started babbling about then. I know it didn't really matter. She wasn't listening. She just yanked up on the emergency brake, dropped her seat back and told me to lie on top of her, on top of those leather pants of hers, extremely expensive

leather pants mind you, her hands immediately guiding mine over those soft slightly oily folds, positioning my fingers on the shiny metal tab, small and round like a tear, then murmuring a murmur so inaudible that even though I could feel her lips tremble against my ear, she seemed far, far away—"pinch it" she'd said, which I did, lightly, until she also said "pull it" which I also did, gently, parting the teeth, one at a time, down, under and beneath, the longest unzipping of my life, all the way from right beneath her perfectly oval navel to the tiny tattoo, a Japanese sign, the meaning of which I never guessed, marking her lower back, and not a stitch of underwear to get in the way, the rest very guessable though don't underestimate the danger which I guess really wasn't so dangerous after all.

We never even kissed or looked into each other's eyes. Our lips just trespassed on those inner labyrinths hidden deep within our ears, filled them with the private music of wicked words, hers in many languages, mine in the off color of my only tongue, until as our tones shifted, and our consonants spun and squealed, rattled faster, hesitated, raced harder, syllables soon melting with groans, or moans finding purchase in new words, or old words, or made-up words, until we gathered up our heat and refused to release it, enjoying too much the dark language we had suddenly stumbled upon, craved to, carved to, not a communication really but a channeling of our rumored desires, hers for all I know gone to Black Forests and wolves, mine banging back to a familiar form, that great revenant mystery I still could only hear the shape of, which in spite of our separate lusts and individual cries still continued to drive us deeper into stranger tones, our mutual desire to keep gripping the burn fueled by sound, hers screeching, mine—I didn't hear mine—only hers, probably counter-pointing mine, a high-pitched cry, then a whisper dropping unexpectedly to practically a bark, a grunt, whatever, no sense any more, and suddenly no more curves either, just the straight away, some line crossed, where every fractured sound already spoken finally compacts into one long agonizing word, easily exceeding a hundred letters, even thunder, anticipating the inevitable letting go, when the heat is ultimately too much to bear, threatening to burn, scar, tear it all apart, yet tempting enough to hold onto for even one second more, to extend it all, if we can, as if by getting that much closer to the heat, that much more enveloped, would prove . . .—which when we did clutch, hold, postpone, did in fact prove too much after all, seconds too much, and impossible to refuse, so blowing all of everything apart, shivers and shakes and deep in her throat a thousand letters crashing in a long unmodulated fall, resonating deep within my cochlea and down the cochlear nerve, a last fit of fury describing in lasting detail the shape of things already come.

Too bad dark languages rarely survive.

As quickly as they're invented, they die, unable to penetrate much, explore anything or even connect. Terribly beautiful but more often than not inadequate. So I guess it's no surprise that what I recall now with the most clarity is actually pretty odd.

When Kyrie dropped me off, she burped.

At the time I thought it was kind of cute but I guess "man eater" did cross my mind. Then as I opened the door, she burst into tears. All she was in that \$85,000 car could not exclude the little girl. She said something about Gdansk Man's disinterest in her, in fucking her, in even touching her, running away to Poland, and then she apologized, blamed the drugs still roaming around in her veins and told me to get out.

Resistance to representation, however, is not the only difficulty posed by those replicating chambers and corridors. As Karen discovers, the whole house defies any normal means of determining direction.

Apparently while Karen had been struggling with the explorers' invasion of her home, her mother had managed to acquire the number of a Feng Shui master in Manhattan. After a long conversation with this expert, Karen is relieved to learn she has been putting all the ceramic animals, crystals, and plants in the wrong places. She is still told to use the Pau Kua table, *I Ching*, and the Lo Shu magic square, but to do so with the assistance of a compass. Since much of Feng Shui, especially in the Compass School, relies on auspicious and inauspicious directions, it is crucial to get an accurate reading on how the house sits in relationship to points north, south, east, and west.

Karen immediately goes out and buys a compass—this while the men are in the midst of Exploration #2. Upon returning home, however, she is astonished to find the compass refuses to settle on any one direction inside the house. Assuming it must be broken, she drives back to town and exchanges it for a new one. Apparently this time she tests it in the store. Satisfied, she returns to the house only to discover that once again the compass is useless.¹⁰⁰

No matter what room she stands in, whether in the back or the front, upstairs or downstairs, the needle never stays still. North it seems has no authority there. Tom confirms the strange phenomenon, and during Exploration #3 Holloway, who up till then has relied solely on neon arrows and fishing line to mark their path, demonstrates how the same holds true for a compass read within those ash-like halls.

"I'll be damned," Holloway grunts as he stares at the twitching needle.¹⁰¹

"I guess all we've got now is your sense of direction," Wax jokingly tells Jed, which as Luther Shepard wrote: "Only helps to emphasize how real the threat was of getting lost in there."¹⁰²

She was still crying when she drove off.

In the end, the whole thing had been so frantic and fast and strange and even sad in some ways, I completely forgot to ask her about the German phrase.⁹⁹ I suppose I could call her (Lude has her number) but for some reason these days dialing seven let alone eleven numbers feels like an infinite stretch. The phone's right in front of me but it's out of reach. When it rings at four AM I don't answer it. All I have to do is extend my hand but I can't run that far. Sleep never really arrives. Not even rest. There's no satisfaction anymore. Morning shrinks space but leaves no message.

⁹⁹"But here within this thick black pelt, your strongest gaze will be absorbed and utterly disappear." As translated by Stephen Mitchell. — Ed.

¹⁰⁰Rosemary Park considers Karen's dilemma highly emblematic of the absence of cultural polarities: "In this case, Karen's inability to determine a direction is not a fault but a challenge, requiring tools more capable than compasses and reference points more accurate than magnetic fields." See "Impossible Directions" in *Inside Out* (San Francisco: Urban B-light, 1995), p. 91.

¹⁰¹Devon Lettau wrote an amusing if ultimately pointless essay on the compass' behavior. He asserted that the minute fluctuations of the needle proved the house was nothing less than a vestibule for pure energy which if harnessed correctly could supply the world with unlimited power. See *The Faraday Conclusion* (Boston: Maxwell Press, 1996). Rosie O'Donnell, however, offered a different perspective when she wryly remarked on *Entertainment Tonight*: "The fact that Holloway waited that long to use a compass only goes to show how men—even explorers—still refuse to ask for directions."

¹⁰²See Luther Shepard's chapter entitled "The Compass School" in *The Complete Feng Shui Guide for The Navidson Record* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1996), p. 387.

In light of this new development and in preparation for Exploration #4, Tom makes several trips into town to purchase more fishing line, neon markers, and anything else that might serve to mark the team's path. Since Holloway's plan is to spend at least five nights inside, Tom also picks up extra food and water. On one of these excursions, he even takes Daisy and Chad along. No Hi 8 records their trip but the way Chad and Daisy relate to their mother the details of their shopping spree reveals how fond they have become of their uncle.

Unfortunately, Tom also has to buy a ticket back to Massachusetts. With the exception of a few weeks in July, he has not worked in over three months. As Tom explains to Karen and Navidson, "the time's come for me to put ass in gear and get on with my life." He also tells them the time has come for them to contact the media and find a new house.

Originally Tom had intended to leave right after Exploration #3 but when Navidson begs him to stay through Exploration #4, he agrees.

Reston also sticks around. He had briefly considered taking a leave of absence from the university but managed instead to somehow arrange for a week off, despite the fact that it is late September and the fall semester has already begun. He and Tom both live at the house, Tom in the study,¹⁰³ Reston crashing on the pull-out in the living room, while Holloway, Jed, and Wax—at least up until Exploration #4—stay at a local motel.

From all the clips leading up to Exploration #4, we can see how both Navidson and Holloway expect to gain a great deal of fame and fortune. Even if Holloway's team does not reach the bottom of the staircase, both men agree their story will guarantee them national attention as well as research grants and speaking opportunities. Holloway's company will more than likely thrive, to say nothing of the reputations of all those involved.

This kind of talk, on the day before Exploration #4 is scheduled to start, actually manages to bring Navidson and Holloway a little closer together. There is still a good deal of unspecified tension between them but Holloway warms to discussions of success, especially to the idea of, to use Navidson's words, "going down in history." Perhaps Holloway imagines himself joining Navidson's world, what he perceives as a place for the esteemed, secure, and remembered. Nevertheless, what these short clips do not show is the paranoia growing within him. As we are well aware, future events will ultimately reveal how much Holloway feared Navidson would get rid of him and thus deprive him of the recognition he had spent a lifetime trying to obtain, the recognition the house seemed to promise.

Of course, Karen will have nothing to do with such talk. Upon hearing what the men are discussing, she angrily withdraws to the periphery of the house. She clearly despises anything that might suggest a longer, more protracted relationship with the oddities of their home. Daisy, on the other hand, keeps close to Navidson, picking at tiny scabs on her wrists, always sitting on her father's shoulders or when that proves impossible on Tom's. Chad turns out to be the most problematic. He spends more and more time outside by himself, and that afternoon returns home from school with a bruised eye and swollen nose.

¹⁰³Neekisha Dedic's "The Study: Tom's Place" Diss. Boston University, 1996, examines the meaning of "study" when juxtaposed with the ritual of territory, sleep, and memory.

Navidson breaks off his conversation with Holloway to find out what happened. Chad, however, refuses to speak.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴Which is not really a good response. And you know changing the details or changing the subject can be just the same as refusing to speak. I guess I've been guilty of those two things for a long time now, especially the first one, always shifting and re-shifting details, smoothing out the edges, removing the corners, colorizing the whole thing or if need be de-colorizing, sometimes even flying in a whole chorus of cartoon characters, complete with slapstick Biff! Blam! Pow! antics,—this time leave in the blam—which may have some appeal, can't underrate the amusement factor there, even though it's so far from the truth it might as well be a cartoon because it certainly isn't what happened, no Bugs Bunny there, no Thumper, no Biff! Blam! Pow! either, no nothing of the kind. And fuck, now I know exactly where I'm going, a place I've already managed to avoid twice, the first time with a fictive tooth improv, the second time with that quick dart north to Santa Cruz and the troubles of a girl I barely know, though here I am again, right at this moment too, again heading straight for it, which I suppose I could still resist. I am resisting. Maybe not. I mean I could always just stop, do something else, light up a joint, get swollen on booze. In fact doing virtually anything at all, aside from this, would keep me from relating the real story behind my broken tooth, though I don't know if I want to, not relate that story I mean, not anymore. I actually think it would do me some good to tell it, put it down here, at least some of it, so I can see the truth of it, see the details, revisit that taste, that time, and maybe re-evaluate or re-understand or re- I don't know.

Besides, I can always burn it when I'm done.

After my father died I was shipped around to a number of foster homes. I was trouble wherever I went. No one knew what to do with me. Eventually—though it did take awhile—I ended up with Raymond and his family. He was a former marine with, as I've already described, a beard rougher than horse hide and hands harder than horn. He was also a total control freak. No matter the means, no matter the cost, he was going to be in control. And everyone knew if push came to shove he was as likely to die for it as he was to kill for it.

I was twelve years old.

What did I know?

I pushed.

I pushed all the time.

Then one night, late at night, much closer to dawn than dusk, while ice still gathered outside along the window frames and tessellated walks, I woke up to find Raymond squatting on my bed, wearing his black dirt-covered boots, chewing on a big chunk of beef jerky, jabbing me in the face with his fingers, murdering all remnants of sterno or park dreams.

"Beast," he said when he was satisfied sleep was completely dead.

"Let's get an understanding going. You're not really in this family but you're living with this family, been living'n us for near a year, so what does that make you?"

I didn't answer. The smart move.

"That makes you a guest, and being a guest means you act like a guest. Not like some kind of barnyard animal. If that doesn't suit you, then I'll treat you like an animal which'll have to suit you. And

what I'm saying 'bout your behavior don't just go for here either. It goes for that school too. I don't want no more problems. You clear?"

Again I didn't say anything.

He leaned closer, forcing on me that rank smell of meat clinging to his teeth. "If you understand that, then you and I aren't going to cross no more." Which was all he said, though he squatted there on my bed for a while longer.

The next day I fought in the schoolyard until my knuckles were bloody. And then I fought the following day and the day after that. A whole week, fifteen faceless assailants racing after me right when school rang out, mostly eighth graders but a few ninth graders too, always bigger than me, telling me no seventh grade newcomer ever gets a say back, but I always said back, I bounced all of it right back, back-off whenever they gave me even the slightest bit of shit, and they finally hurt me for doing it, hurt me enough to make me give up and die, just curl up and cry, kicking the ground, my face all puffy, balls bashed and ribs battered, though something would always just pick me up from that fetal hold, maybe in the end it was all the nothing I had to hold, and it would throw me again after whoever was winning or just wanted to go next.

After the tenth fight, something really poisonous got inside me and turned off all the pain. I didn't even register a hit or cut anymore. I heard the blow but it never made it far enough along my nerves for me to even feel. As if all the feel-meters had blown. So I just kept hacking back, spending everything I was against what I still didn't know.

This one kid, he must have been fourteen too, hit me twice and figured I was down for good. I clawed up his face pretty bad then, enough for the blood to get in his eyes, and I don't think he expected it was ever going to get to that. I mean there were rivulets on his parka and on alot of the snow and he kind of froze up, frightened I guess, I don't know, but I apparently fractured his jaw and loosened a couple of his teeth then, split three of my knuckles too. Gloves were not an option in this kind of fighting.

Anyway, he's the kid that got me expelled, but since the fight had taken place after school, it took all the next day for the administrators to put the pieces together. In the meantime, I fought three more times. Right at noon recess. Friends of the ninth grader came after me. I couldn't punch too well with my broken knuckles and they kept pushing me down and kicking me. Some teachers finally pulled them off, but not before I got my thumb in one of the kid's eyes. I heard he had blood in it for weeks.

When I got home Raymond was waiting for me. His wife had called him at the site and told him what had happened. Over the last week, Raymond had seen the bruises and cuts on my hands but since the school hadn't called and I wasn't saying anything, he didn't say anything either.

No one asked me what happened. Raymond just told me to get in the truck. I asked him where we were going. Even a question from me made him mad. He yelled at his daughters to go to their room.

"I'm taking you to the hospital," he finally whispered.

But we didn't go directly to the hospital.

Raymond took me somewhere else first, where I lost half my tooth, and alot more too I guess, on the outskirts, in an ice covered place, surrounded by barbed wire and willows, where monuments of rust, seldom touched, lie frozen alongside fence posts and no one ever comes near enough to hear the hawks cry.

Holloway, for his part, does not permit these domestic tensions and concomitant stresses to distract him from his preparations. The ever oblique Leon Robbins in attempting to adequately evaluate these efforts has gone so far as to suggest that "Operation" would in fact be a far more appropriate word than "Exploration":

Holloway in many ways resembles a conscientious medical practitioner in pre-op. Take for example how meticulously he reviews his team's supplies the evening before—what I like to call—"Operation #4." He makes sure flashlights are all securely mounted on helmets and Hi 8s properly attached to chest harnesses. He personally checks, re-checks, packs, and re-packs all the tents, sleeping bags, thermal blankets, chemical heat packs, food, water, and First-Aid kits. Most of all, he confirms that they have ample amounts of neon markers, lightsticks (12 hours), ultra high intensity lightsticks (5 minutes), spools of 4 lb test/ 3,100 yard monofilament fishing line, flares, extra flash lights, including a pumper light (hand generator), extra batteries, extra parts for the radios, and one altimeter (which like the compass will fail to function).¹⁰⁵

Robbins' medical analogy may be a little misguided, but his emphasis on Holloway's deliberate and careful planning reminds one of the technical demands required in this journey—whether an "Operation" or "Exploration."

After all, spending a night in an enclosed lightless place is very uncommon, even in the world of caving. The Lechugilla Crystal Cavern in New Mexico is one exception. Typically Lech visits last twenty-four to thirty-six hours.¹⁰⁶ Holloway, however, expects to take at least four, possibly five nights exploring the Spiral Staircase.

Despite the detailed preparations and Holloway's infectious determination, everyone is still a little nervous. Five nights is a long time to remain in freezing temperatures and complete darkness. No one knows what to expect.

Though Wax puts his faith in Jed's unerring sense of direction, Jed admits to some pre-exploration apprehensions: "How can I know where to go when I don't know where we are? I mean, really, where is that place in relation to here, to us, to everything? Where?"

Holloway tries to make sure everyone stays as busy as bees, and in an effort to keep them focused, creates a simple set of priorities: "We're taking pictures. We're collecting samples. We're trying to reach the bottom of the stairs. Who knows, if we do that then maybe we'll even discover something before Navidson starts all the hoopla involved with raising

¹⁰⁵Leon Robbins' *Operation #4: The Art of Internal Medicine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1996), p. 479.

¹⁰⁶See "The Crystal Cavern" chapter in Michael Ray Taylor's *Cave Passages* (New York: Scribner, 1996).

money and organizing large scale explorations.” Jed and Wax both nod, unaware of the darker implications inherent in what Holloway has just uttered.

As Gavin Young later writes: “Who could have predicted that those two words ‘discover something’ would prove the seeds to such unfortunate destruction? The problem, of course, was that the certain ‘something’ Holloway so adamantly sought to locate never existed per se in that place to begin with.”¹⁰⁷

Unlike Explorations #1 thru #3, for Exploration #4 Holloway decides to take along his rifle. When Navidson asks him “what the hell” he plans to shoot, Holloway replies: “Just in case.”

By this point, Navidson has settled on the belief that the persistent growl is probably just a sound generated when the house alters its internal layout. Holloway, however, is not at all in accordance with this assessment. Furthermore, as he pointedly reminds Navidson, he is the team captain and the one responsible for everyone’s safety: “With all due respect, since I’m also the one actually going in there, your notions don’t really hold much water with me.” Wax and Jed do not object. They are accustomed to Holloway carrying some sort of firearm. The inclusion of the Weatherby hardly causes them any concern.

Jed just shrugs.

Wax though proves a little more fractious.

“I mean what if you’re wrong?” he asks Navidson. “What if that sound’s not from the wall’s shifting but coming from something else, some kind of thing? You wanna leave us defenseless?”

Navidson drops the subject.

The question of weapons aside, another big point of concern that comes up is communication. During Exploration #3 the team discovered just how quickly all their transmissions deteriorated. Without a cost effective way of rectifying the problem—obviously buying thousands of feet of audio cable would be impossible—Holloway settled the issue by simply announcing that they should just plan on losing radio contact by the first night. “After that, it’ll be four to five days on our own. Not ideal but we’ll manage.”

That evening, Holloway, Jed, and Wax move from their motel and camp out in the living room with Reston. Navidson briefs Holloway for the last time on the most efficacious way to handle the cameras. Jed makes a brief call to his fiancée in Seattle and then helps Reston organize the sample jars. Tom in an effort to cheer up a bruised and unnaturally quiet Chad winds up reading both him and Daisy a long bedtime story.

Somehow Wax ends up alone with Karen.¹⁰⁸

If Holloway’s hand on Karen had upset Navidson, it is hard to imagine what his reaction would have been had he walked in on this particular moment. However when he finally did see the tape so much had happened, Navidson, by his own admission, felt nothing. “I’m surprised, I

¹⁰⁷Gavin Young, *Shots In The Dark* (Stanford: University of California Press, 1995), p. 151.

¹⁰⁸Again Florencia Calzatti’s *The Fraying of the American Family* proves full of valuable insight. In particular see “Chapter Seven: The Last Straw” where she decries the absolute absurdity of end-series items: “There is no such thing as the last straw. There is only hay.”

guess” he says in **The Last Interview**. “But there’s no rage. Just regret. I actually laughed a little. I’d been watching Holloway all the time, feeling insecure by this guy’s strength and courage and all that, and I never even thought about the kid. (He shakes his head.) Anyway, I betrayed her when I went in there the first time and so she betrayed me. People always say how two people were meant for each other. Well we weren’t but somehow we ended up together anyway and had two incredible children. It’s too bad. I love her. I wish it didn’t have to turn out like this.”¹⁰⁹

The clip of Karen and Wax did not appear in the first release print of *The Navidson Record* but apparently was edited in a few months later. Miramax never commented on the inclusion nor did anyone else. It is a little strange Karen did not erase the tape in the wall mounted camcorder. Perhaps she forgot it was there or planned to destroy it later. Then again perhaps she wanted Navidson to see it.

Regardless of her intentions, the shot catches Karen and Wax alone in the kitchen. She picks at a bowl of popcorn, he helps himself to another beer. Their conversation circles tediously around Wax’s girlfriends, intermittently returning to his desire to get married *someday*. Karen keeps telling him that he is young, he should have fun, keep living, stop worrying about settling down. For some reason both of them speak very softly.

On the counter, someone has left a copy of the map Navidson drew following Exploration A. Karen occasionally glances over at it.

“Did you do that?” she finally asks.

“Nah, I can’t draw.”

“Oh,” she says, letting the syllable hang in the air like a question.

Wax shrugs.

“I actually don’t know who made it. I thought your old Navy man did.”

Based on the film, it is impossible for us to tell if Holloway, Jed, or Wax were ever explicitly told not to mention to Karen Navidson’s illegal excursion. Wax, however, does not seem to recognize any trespass in his admission.

Karen does not look at the map again. She just smiles and takes a sip of Wax’s beer. They continue talking, more about Wax’s girl troubles, another round of “don’t worry, keep living, you’re young” and then out of nowhere Wax leans over and kisses Karen on the lips. It lasts less than a second and clearly shocks her, but when he leans over and kisses her again she does not resist. In fact the kiss turns into something more than a kiss, Karen’s hunger almost exceeding Wax’s. But when he knocks over his beer in an effort to get still closer, Karen pulls away, glances once at the liquid spilling onto the floor and quickly walks out of the room. Wax starts to follow her but realizes before he takes a second step that the game is already over. He cleans up the mess instead.

A few months later Navidson saw the kiss.

By that time Karen was gone along with everyone else.

Nothing mattered.

¹⁰⁹See Exhibit Four for the complete transcript of *The Last Interview*.

VIII

SOS . . . A wireless code-signal summoning assistance in extreme distress, used esp. by ships at sea. The letters are arbitrarily chosen as being easy to transmit and distinguish. The signal was recommended at the Radio Telegraph Conference in 1906 and officially adopted at the Radio Telegraph Convention in 1908 (See G. G. Blake Hist. Radio Telegr., 1926, 111-12).

— The Oxford English Dictionary

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Billy Reston glides into frame, paying no attention to the equipment which Navidson over the last few weeks has been setting up in the living room, including though not limited to, three monitors, two 3/4" decks, a VHS machine, a Quadra Mac, two Zip drives, an Epson colour printer, an old PC, at least six radio transmitters and receivers, heavy spools of electrical cord, video cable, one 16mm Arriflex, one 16mm Bolex, a Minolta Super 8, as well as additional flashlights, flares, rope, fishing line (anything from braided Dacron to 40 lb multi-strand steel), boxes of extra batteries, assorted tools, compasses twitching to the odd polarities in the house, and a broken megaphone, not to mention surrounding shelves

already loaded with sample jars, graphs, books, and even an old microscope.

Instead Reston concentrates all his energies on the radios, monitoring Holloway as he makes his way through the Great Hall. Exploration #4 is underway and will mark the team's second attempt to reach the bottom of the staircase.

"We hear you fine, Billy" Holloway replies in a wash of white noise.

Reston tries to improve the signal. This time Holloway's voice comes in a little clearer.

"We're continuing down. Will try you again in fifteen minutes. Over and out."

The obvious choice would have been to structure the segment around Holloway's journey but clearly nothing about Navidson is obvious. He keeps his camera trained on Billy who serves now as the expedition's base commander. In grainy 7298 (probably pushed one T-stop), Navidson captures this crippled man expertly maneuvering his wheelchair from radio to tape recorder to computer, his attention never wavering from the team's progress.



By concentrating on Reston at the beginning of Exploration #4, Navidson provides a perfect counterpoint to the murky world Holloway navigates. Confining us to the comforts of a well-lit home gives our varied imaginations a chance to fill the adjacent darkness with questions and demons. It also further increases our identification with Navidson, who like us, wants nothing more than to penetrate first hand the mystery of that place. Other directors might have intercut shots of the 'Base Camp' or 'Command Post'¹¹⁰ with Holloway's tapes but Navidson refuses to view Exploration #4 in any other way except from Reston's vantage point. As Frizell Clary writes, "Before personally permitting us the sight of such species of Cimmerian dark, Navidson wants us to experience, like he already has, a sequence dedicated solely to the much more revealing details of waiting."¹¹¹

Naguib Paredes, however, goes one step further than Clary, passing over questions concerning the structure of anticipation in favor of a slightly different, but perhaps more acute analysis of Navidson's strategy: "First and foremost, this restricted perspective subtly and somewhat cunningly allows Navidson to materialize his own feelings in Reston, a man with fearsome intelligence and energy but who is nonetheless—and tragically I might add—physically handicapped. Not by chance does Navidson shoot Reston's wheelchair in the photographic idiom of a prison: spokes for bars, seat like a cell, glimmering brake resembling some kind of lock. Thus in the manner of such images, Navidson can represent for us his own increasing frustration."¹¹²

As predicted, by the first night Holloway and the team start to lose radio contact. Navidson reacts by focusing on a family of copper-verdigris coffee cups taking up residence on the floor like settlers on the range while nearby a pile of sunflower seed shells rises out of a bowl like a volcano born on some unseen plate in the Pacific. In the background, the ever-present hiss of the radios continues to fill the room like some high untouch-

able wind. Considering the grand way these moments are photographed, it almost appears as if Navidson is trying through even the most quotidian objects and events to evoke for us some sense of Holloway's epic progress. That or participate in it. Perhaps even challenge it.¹¹³

¹¹⁰There's something weird going on here, as if Zampanò can't quite make up his mind whether this is all an exploration (i.e. 'Base Camp') or a war (i.e. 'Command Post')?

¹¹¹Frizell Clary's *Tick-Tock-Fade: The Representation of Time in Film Narrative* (Delaware: Tame An Essay Publications, 1996), p. 64.

¹¹²Naguib Paredes' *Cinematic Projections* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995), p. 84.

¹¹³Navidson's camera work is an infinitely complex topic. Edwin Minamide in *Objects of a Thousand Facets* (Bismark, North Dakota: Shive Stuart Press, 1994), p. 421, asserts that such "resonant images," especially those in this instance, conjure up what Holloway could never have achieved: "The fact that Navidson can photograph even the dirtiest blue mugs in a way that reminds us of pilgrims on a quest proves he is the necessary narrator without whom there would be no film; no understanding of the house." Yuriy Pleak in *Semiotic Rivalry* (Casper, Wyoming: Hazard United, 1995), p. 105, disagrees, claiming Navidson's lush colors and steady pans only reveal his competitiveness and bitterness toward Holloway: "He seeks to eclipse the team's historical descent with his own limited art." Mace Roger-Court, however, finds *In These Things I Find*, Series #18 (Great Falls, Montana: Ash Otter Range Press, 1995) that Navidson's posture is highly instructive and even enlightening: "His lonely coffee cups, his volcanic bowl

Time passes. There are long conversations, there are long silences. Sometimes Navidson and Tom play Go. Sometimes one reads aloud to Daisy¹¹⁴ while the other assists Chad with some role-playing game on the family computer.¹¹⁵ Periodically Tom goes outside to smoke a joint of marijuana while his brother jots down notes in some now lost journal. Karen keeps clear of the living room, entering only once to retrieve the coffee cups and empty the bowl of sunflower seed shells. When Navidson's camera finds her, she is usually on the phone in the kitchen, the TV volume on high, whispering to her mother, closing the door.

But even as the days lose themselves in night and find themselves again come dawn only to drag on to yet more hours of lightless passage, Billy Reston remains vigilant. As Navidson shows us, he never loses focus, rarely leaves his post, and constantly monitors the radios, never forgetting the peril Holloway and the team are in.

Janice Whitman was right when she noted another extraordinary quality: "Aside from the natural force of his character, his exemplary intellect, and the constant show of concern for those participating in Exploration #4, what I'm still most struck by is [Reston's] matter of fact treatment of this twisting labyrinth extending into nowhere. He does not seem confounded by its impossibility or at all paralyzed by doubt."¹¹⁶ Belief is one of Reston's greatest strengths. He has an almost animal like ability to accept the world as it comes to him. Perhaps one overcast morning in Hyderabad, India he had stood rooted to the ground for one second too long because he did not really believe an electrical pole had fallen and an ugly lash of death was now whipping toward him. Reston had paid a high price for that disbelief: he would never walk up stairs again and he would never fuck.¹¹⁷ At least he would also never doubt again.

of shells, the maze like way equipment and furniture are arranged, all reveal how the everyday can contain objects emblematic of what's lyrical and what's epic in our lives. Navidson shows us how a sudden sense of the world, of who or where we are or even what we do not have can be found in even the most ordinary things."

¹¹⁴Ascher Blootz in her pithy piece "Bedtime Stories" (*Seattle Weekly*, October 13, 1994, p. 37) claims the book Tom reads to Daisy is Maurice Sendak's *Where The Wild Things Are*. Gene D. Hart in his letter entitled "A Blootz Bedtime Story" (*Seattle Weekly*, October 20, 1994, p. 7) disagrees: "After repeatedly viewing this sequence, frame by frame, I am still unable to determine whether or not she's right. The cover is constantly blocked by Tom's arm and his whisper consistently evades the range of the microphone. That said I'm quite fond of Blootz's claim, for whether she's right or wrong, she is certainly appropriate."

¹¹⁵See Corning Qureshy's essay "D & D, *Myst*, and Other Future Paths" in *MIND GAMES* ed. Mario Aceytuno (Rapid City, South Dakota: Fortson Press, 1996); M. Slade's "Pawns, Bishops & Castles" <http://cdip.ucsd.edu/>; as well as Lucy T. Wickramasinghe's "Apple of Knowledge vs. Windows of Light: The Macintosh-Microsoft Debate" in *Gestures*, v.2, November 1996, p. 164-171.

¹¹⁶Janice Whitman's *Red Cross Faith* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 235.

¹¹⁷Though this chapter was originally typed, there were also a number of handwritten corrections. "make love" wasn't crossed out but

"FUCK" was still scratched in above it. As I've been doing my best to incorporate most of these amendments, I didn't think it fair to

suddenly exclude this one even if it did mean a pretty radical shift in tone.

By now you've probably noticed that except when safely contained by quotes, Zampanò always steers clear of such questionable four-letter language. This instance in particular proves that beneath all that cool

pseudo-academic hogwash lurked a very passionate man who knew how important it was to say "fuck" now and then, and say it loud too, relish

its syllabic sweetness, its immigrant pride, a great American epic word really, starting at the lower lip, often the very front of the lower

lip, before racing all the way to the back of the throat, where it finishes with a great blast, the concussive force of the K catching up

then with the hush of the F already on its way, thus loading it with plenty of offense and edge and certainly ambiguity. FUCK. A great by-

the-bootstrap prayer or curse if you prefer, depending on how you look at it, or use it, suited perfectly for hurling at the skies or at the world, or sometimes, if said just right, for uttering with enough love and fire, the woman beside you melts inside herself, immersed in all that word-heat.

Holy fuck, what was that all about?
"Love and fire"? "word-heat"?
Who the hell is thinking up this shit?

Maybe Zampanò just wrote "fuck" because he wasn't saying fuck before when he could fuck and now as he waited in that hole on Whitley he wished he would of lived a little differently. Or then again maybe he just needed a word strong enough to push back his doubts, a word

strong enough to obliterate, at least temporarily, the certain vision of his own death, definitely necessary for those times when he was working

his way around the courtyard, trying to stretch his limbs, keep his heart pumping, a few remaining cats still rubbing up against his withered legs, reminding him of the years he missed, the old color, the old light. The perfect occasion, if you ask me, to say "fuck." Though if he did say it no one there ever heard him.

Of course, fuck you, you may have a better idea. I went ahead and paged Thumper again. Again she didn't call me back. Then this morning,

I discovered a message on my machine. It startled me. I couldn't remember hearing the phone ring. Turned out some girl named Ashley wanted to see me, but I had no idea who she was. When I finally rolled into the Shop, I was a good three hours late. My boss flew off the handle. Put me on probation. Said I was an ass hair away from getting

fired, and no he didn't care anymore how well I made needles.
Unfortunately, I'm not too hopeful about improving my punctuality.

You wouldn't believe how much harder it's getting for me to just leave my studio. It's really sad. In fact these days the only thing that gets me outside is when I say: Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck you. Fuck me. Fuck this. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. —

All the images Navidson finds during this period are beautifully concise. Every angle he chooses describes the agony of the wait, whether a shot of Tom sleeping on the couch, Reston listening more and more intently to the nonsense coming over the radio, or Karen watching them from the foyer, for the first time smoking a cigarette inside the house. Even the occasional shot of Navidson himself, pacing around the living room, communicates the impatience he feels over being denied this extraordinary opportunity. He has done his best to keep from resenting Karen, but clearly feels it just the same. Not once are they shown talking together. For that matter not once are they shown in the same frame together.

Eventually the entire segment becomes a composition of strain. Jump cuts increase. People stop speaking to each another. A single shot never includes more than one person. Everything seems to be on the verge of breaking apart, whether between Navidson and Karen, the family as a whole, or even the expedition itself. On the seventh day there is still no sign of the team. By the seventh night, Reston begins to fear the worst, and then in the early A.M. hours of the eighth day everyone hears the worst. The radio remains an incomprehensible buzz of static, but from somewhere in the house, rising up like some strange black oil, there comes a faint knocking. Chad and Daisy actually detect it first, but by the time they reach their parent's bedroom, Karen is already up with the light on, listening intently to this new disturbance.

It sounds exactly like someone rapping his knuckles against the wall: three quick knocks followed by three slow knocks, followed by three more quick knocks. Over and over again.

Despite a rapid search of the upstairs and downstairs, no one can locate the source, even though every room resonates with the distress signal. Then Tom presses his ear against the living room wall.

"Bro', don't ask me how, but it's coming from in there. In fact, for a second it sounded like it was right on the other side."

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Ironically enough, it is the call for assistance that eliminates the jump cuts and reintegrates everyone again into a single frame. Navidson has finally been granted the opportunity he has been waiting for all along. Consequently, with Navidson suddenly in charge now, declaring his intent to lead a rescue attempt, the sequence immediately starts to resolve with the elimination of visual tensions. Karen, however, is furious. "Why don't we just call the police?" she demands. "Why does it have to be the great Will Navidson who goes to the rescue?" Her question is a good one, but unfortunately it only has one answer: because he *is* the great Will Navidson.

Considering the circumstances, it does seem a little ludicrous for Karen to expect a man who has thrived his whole life under shell fire and

napalm to turn his back on Holloway and go drink lemonade on the porch. Furthermore, as Navidson points out, "They've been in there almost eight days with water for six. It's three in the morning. We don't have time to get officials involved or a search party organized. We have to go now." Then

adding in a half-mumble: "I waited too long with Delial. I'm not going to do it again."

The name "Delial" and its adamant mystery stops Karen cold. Without saying another word, she sits down on the couch and waits for Navidson to finish organizing all the equipment they will need.

It takes only thirty minutes to assemble the necessary supplies. The hope is that they will locate Holloway's team nearby. If not, the plan is for Reston to go as far as the stairway where he will establish a camp and

handle the radios, serving as a relay between the living room command post and Navidson and Tom who will continue on down the stairs. As far as photographic equipment is concerned, everyone wears a Hi 8 in a chest harness. (Short two cameras, Navidson has to take down one of the wall mounted Hi 8s from his study and another one from the upstairs hall.) He also brings his 35mm Nikon equipped with a powerful Metz strobe, as well as the 16mm Arriflex, which Reston volunteers to carry in his lap. Karen unhappily takes over the task of manning the radios. A Hi 8 captures her sitting in the living room, watching the men fade into the darkness of the hallway. There are in fact three quick shots of her, the last two as she calls her mother to report Navidson's departure as well as his mention of Delial. At first the phone is busy, then it rings.

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Navidson names this sequence **SOS** which aside from referring to the distress signal sent by Holloway's team also informs another aspect of the work. At the same time he was mapping out the personal and domestic tensions escalating in the house, Navidson was also editing the footage in accordance to a very specific cadence. Tasha K. Wheelston was the first to discover this carefully created structure:

At first I thought I was seeing things but after I watched SOS more carefully I realized it was true: Navidson had not just filmed the distress call, he had literally incorporated it into the sequence. Observe how Navidson alternates between three shots with short durations and three shots with longer durations. He begins with three quick angles of Reston, followed by three long shots of the living room (and these are in fact just that — long shots taken from the

foyer), followed again by three short shots and so on. Content has on a few occasions interfered with the rhythm but the pattern of three-short three-long three-short is unmistakable.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸Tasha K. Wheelston's "M.O.S.: Literal Distress," *Film Quarterly*, v. 48, fall 1994, p. 2-11.