

Crazy bastard. Damn near lost my patience,
waiting for him to come out of there. Christ,
you'd think that he was hiding, or something,
needed some time alone, or something.

AUGUST THIRTY-FIRST, NINETEEN EIGHTY-NINE

— for Kerouac

Going up I-5 with the windows closed and the tape deck
going;
Cannonball Adderly blowing his ass off in a studio in
L.A. in 1962
like he knew
an 8.6 would hit the minute the last note was wrapped.

And California, languid against the windows
of my '87 Subaru with Cruise Control, tapping
against the windshield like insects to prove
there's nothing to be afraid of.

A steady 70 MPH gloss over the tectonics of Lassen and
Shasta
and the auto-reverse turns the tape over to Lee Morgan
playing like he knew that the woman with the gun
was waiting for him at the bar when the set was over.

All those guys going for the moon, clean and pure,
no more hedging bets, no more
getting rich in the movies, platinum records;
this is the place; this is it, man;

a feeling, going down the road, coming across the faults;
the twentieth century, man; the 9.2 around the bend;
the feeling;

fresh air light as a lover over fresh land; the blue sky
shrink-wrapped and stretched over brand new history;
hills pushed up still smelling of tar,
mountain ranges like cake, black glass caves still cold,
red clay still warm,
buck-tooth tigers and hairy elephants hiding in oak groves,
redwoods everywhere like baby fuzz;

making it up as it goes along and fuck the rest;
those chinese guys throwing beautiful poems into streams,
those indians dying only on good days,
those black guys standing up and playing regardless
who's listening;

something in the fresh air that oozes from the faults;
adolescent gas; it tickles, it hurts;

makes me care, or maybe makes me
give even less of a shit than before;

who knows, being
suddenly on the line here, sitting on the back bumper
of the Sube
of all places, only 33,000 miles on it, parked
at a rest stop in California
asphalted and concreted over, landscaped over
with eucalyptus and lawn; a piss stop
tiled over with porcelain walls to throw poems onto.
It is August 31st, 1989. It is 4:15 P.M. and I am still
alive.

I am snacking on corn chips and watermelon and beer.
Not thirty feet away, on a bench, waiting for a lift,
three young people are playing blues, guitar and
harmonica,
the girl with them has tired eyes and is dressed
in black.

She may sing when she finishes her cigarette
if the spirit moves her. She may not. Not everyone

steps over the line, opens all the windows, bets
everything they got on such chancey geography,
such iffy geology.

DO THE TREES FALL IN THE FOREST WITHOUT US?

I have an urge to prune the woods,
thin the deadwood,
starting with the oaks around the house,
get out there with saws and shears —
make 'em look nice, encourage new growth.

'Course, I'd be destroying the habitat of bugs
and parasites that live in places like that,
and maybe a few birds and lizards'll have to go
hungry for a while, but
it's something to do, something more useful, maybe,

than writing
useless poems about subjects like this,
trying to publish them, beautify the world
so full of deadwood, parasites, etc.

I know there are others who feel, from time to time,
like pruning the trees in the forest,
and calling it to the world's attention.