



**The
End
Of
America,
Book One**

Mark Wallace

So many people searching
for the end of America: from here
it's not much, white jeep
cutting tracks through sand, black-suited surfer
fighting into the water, surfboard raised high,
runners, walkers of dogs and babies, blinking lights on the turret
of the Encinas Power Station, a constantly changing
breeze through the palms. Coast Highway slow through town.
Cars, which can't imagine traveling. Beach fires prohibited
except in marked pits, a note to the crucial
need to fear fire. I grab one more instance
of love and rage, impotent and powerful
by turns, looking for more
than I already know. The end of the land, instant myth,
becomes a place to look from, or look away, to walk,
to head on out. All those poets
who seemed certain what they wanted, the ocean
a source of world, result of cosmos,
mystery under the roll of a wave.
Too much is not forgotten but never known,
history no more than the present webbing
distortion of what's temporarily remembered. Money back,
no cash down, no payments this year, good annual rates.

In Friday the 13th, 1980, the film, the teenagers still look like actual teenagers, clumsy in pants pulled high, cut-off jeans, polo shirts, their playfulness while courting death plotted for them by the usual industries. Easy to see now that the physical world is being choked, technology centers clutching their own transparent cons, half-thought solutions, chummy smirks, lines in the sand—whose freedom, whose connection, whose distance from? Whose desalination plant? Nice suit, the lawyer said, touching his colleague's shoulder, knowing that the terms could be bargained. The game of the beautiful and ugly, strong and weak, loud and soft, large and small, rich and poor, light and dark, me and not-me, you, not-you. The San Diego Union Tribune reports married households have become a minority. We all know our easy enemies, could wish them taken down forever, find ourselves in a video game that calls us the hero every time. Camp Pendleton Marines cruise the town on weekends, pack the bars for bands like Liquid Blue, three dancing girls, each a different race, belting the hard rock, classic rock, dance rock playlist. The singles scene a blatant metaphor: How to speak to someone you don't

already know how to speak to? Culture creates
a set of assumptions. How to get the news
from the news that hides you from the news?
From the beach, walkers can see the hills of La Jolla,
the Oceanside pier and Inland mountains,
grey, green-tinged, eroded. Military helicopters
roar in the sky, planes drag signs for Goodyear Tires
or beer: Miller Chill. People look at each other, decide what to see,
make their most outgoing expressions. In summer the bathers
lie facing the ocean, bodies dreaming free
of a past that continues to shape their dreams.
There's nothing more American than wanting
out of America, or acting like it doesn't exist.
The shared social myth: traffic jams
become a function of feeling
any way that one can assert. What of the relationship
between analysis and mood, social insight
and reward? Who can stomach that?
The collusion of production with theories of sleep. People in chairs
talk of avoiding empty calories, but it's the mind
that most gets stuffed with fatty crap, the Great McDonald's
of looking out and shutting off. Someday soon
we'll each be stars on our own lecture circuits,

with hand-picked fans, video screens reflecting our faces.
I'm telling you this because I want to seduce you.
Time waits for no one, is the enemy, so on,
so tonight's the night to get down and boogie. A moment of silence
and we look around like there's an emergency. The weather report says
the low clouds "bear down." In a city planned
as if it never rains. The gasoline smell
of quick dry paint. Rhetoric about community,
rhetoric about the individual. Discussions
of methods of discussion, documentaries
about documentaries. Today's news tells the story
of a new path to white success: fart a lot, flunk out,
indulge an obsession in serial killers,
lose your job, go on welfare, spray KKK
in red paint all over the lot
of a local Bank of America, assault a Mexican,
go to jail, read Pat Buchanan's books,
write him an admiring letter, get paroled,
work security at a biotech firm, at last muscle in
on the overseas money. What makes for a good
angry young man scenario these days? A friend lists all the things
she'll never do. Suffocating closed shop
thinking at obscure academic outposts.

It's time to step back from taking care of business
to find out what business has been taking, how thinking
and doing have become disconnected
from anything other than profiting on moments.
Coming soon: new washers and dryers
and new floor tiles to put them on. More choices of mustard.
Each of the local Stater Brothers stores
organizes aisles its own unique way,
giving plastic wrap a sinister furtiveness.
In doorways, Iowa families, pictured with cardboard cutouts
of their soldier-father-husbands assigned to Iraq
all laugh together at a picnic. The movie seems comfortable
describing women as dinosaurs, predatory machines
who lay hundreds of eggs. At the L.A. conference
on communities of discourse, writers talk
against a background of black curtains, while buses outside
unload Asian students for the Philharmonic.
A mouth runs on, attached to a man
who clearly doesn't own it. A storage warehouse stands
across the street from public housing. At a book fair in San Diego
she sees a woman she knew in China
and wonders if her life's been a trap. Who else wants
to leave here and go there? I'm a little too tired

to explain why I'm not who you think.
Conflict or Conflict Resolution? Your neighbor's tree
hangs over your yard, and if you pick fruit from it again
he tells you he'll cut the damn thing down. We stock Haz Mat suits
in different sizes and colors. As always, people in a room
try to get to know people. Look out here comes another
substantial body of literature. Soon enough
we bump directly into format: to change it,
sustain it, change this or keep that,
take pleasure in doing it over, in not doing it again,
in doing it like it's never been done.
To come back next year, to go away for good, to play
around with repetition, to insist on doing what's not possible.
Would anyone here like to speak for all of us?
Rules are listed that say what's allowed
within a hundred feet of the building door.
If you want to choose the Rose Queen
you need to live in Pasadena. It seemed to be going well
until local historians got involved. Ten million diabetics
form a major voting bloc. Gorbachev brought in
American economists to perform shock therapy
on Russian systems of production. Meanwhile, students visiting
L.A. from the People's Republic of China

travel in groups and come to class late. If you were walking
after dark through the desert, carrying
only water and your clothes, you might find
that cutting off heads
of rows of pigs for a regular
sub-minimum wage is your best option.
Participants have lots of achievements.
A book gets published about a river bed
that became public land for public debate, but ended up
an administrative parcel of the state park system.
What exactly do you want to give back? The auditorium,
retro-fitted for digital. Wide screen computers,
wide screen websites. Ask me what I feel
and it just might seem like what I run into.
There may be no self except in performance
but the two of them can't stand each other.
When it's sunny like this, warm in the open
and cool in the shade, who could be blamed
for never thinking again? Take off your shoes
on the train, ignore barbed wire alongside the tracks
and day laborers huddled by a pole.
Forget the debate about body counts
and loosen up, take your recommended daily dose

of outrage at life in countries
that won't accept your travel visa. Yet a list
of things to believe in remains: Elvin Jones' drumming,
how skin can soften under the hand, all the creatures
who don't have any say, the hungry
pinpoint stare of a grizzly in the film
about the guy who probably wanted
a bear to eat him. Watch your step as you exit the train
adjacent the Honda Center. Don't let your dreams
hit you upside the head. Don't complain
about the wine-stained carpet when you wouldn't
want to see the floor it's stapled over. Blogs, discussion groups,
chapbooks and file sharing, a horror festival
coming to a theater near you: in a sense
they frame a new vision of the local, one that's both
product and process, not defined by geography
but shared interest, quick snippets of e-mail during the work day
with built-in functions to moderate the shrieking
of lonely strange men with nothing to love
except their Internet access. Don't think
about the people with no one
to talk to, don't think of the ways
they tell themselves they're used to it.

Shall we meet at the airport, the jail cell,
Command Center Bunker? The people of Fullerton
gather on the grass, watching Little League Baseball.
Abandoned pickups collect in a yard.
The Will Call warehouse lot is filled
with broken chairs, cardboard boxes, piles of Styrofoam. The slow waitress
last week is cashier today. So let's admit
no setting is stable, even the corporate
technical parks, even the logo of Major League Baseball.
On the town square of the high end commercialized
beach village, crammed with clothing and footwear boutiques,
twelve-year old boys, with skateboards and designer sweats,
ask adults for spare change, as if begging
is cool; nearby, a man
with dirt-blackened feet sprawls in the grass.
Still, half the people who say "Ideology"
don't seem to know that the problem includes them.
Time to complain, to go it alone, to gather around
a group of similar minds? Time to sit back
and set a slower pace? Love beautiful things
or question standards of beauty? Plots of grass
are kept short and neat. Beneath a palm tree,
a black cat stretches in lengthening shadows.

Descriptions, problems with descriptions, then a return
to description in a more aware way.
Fitting art to an objective, a verifiable outcome
that can lead to institutional funding.
Families, strollers, business men, briefcases.
I've worked a long time to wear suits, he said,
so fuck all this talk about Casual Fridays.
What's the moral of the story? Does your outfit
match the season? We need an updated list
of literary terms. Glut, niche, smear.
Longing to imagine impossible distances, he wasn't prepared
to administer the first-year portfolio program.
Men get out of trucks, shake guns at the empty creosote
plains just across the Mexican border. There's no stopping
this fast-track economy, no stopping how much of yourself
you're already willing to sell without knowing it.
We'll need an updated model for trading,
less tin foil, plastic wrap, or baggies for fruit.
Put it away and get ready to duck; that's flame
surging from the perimeter. Strategy or tactics?
Good taste or bad? Lamplight or flashlights,
insight or anger? Do I seem less full
of love than I might be? The rope

to walk out on is taut and small, but in the end
we might just slide over another abyss. Some of us anyway.
That's teamwork, yes? Getting it together to build a better pipeline.
Asking everybody's name until you have them right.
Embracing shifts on the charts about function
or denying that something can happen otherwise. All that ain't
exactly multiple choice. I Want You To Want Me, I Need Your Love
and other memorable Cheap Trick hits. Talk shows bemoan
a psychic oblivion they're actively promoting,
like the Jackson Browne song about two people
who didn't know each other and didn't want to
and when it's over, get in their separate cars, driving
away through the scrub brush night, no traffic jam
in all directions. The urge to fade,
to reach the end and look beyond it,
to get outside the human mess, to stand
alone with yourself until you vanish.
I have to admit: the human longing not to be human
takes more forms than I can track.
A little quiet, a little center of the universe
gift card packet, a little phony balancing act,
a whole room of us blushing in body-fitting tights
while dancing on an economic tightrope. Specifically what justice

were you expecting in Returns? The bearded man,
sagging in his seat, spends hours waiting his chance
to shout at the woman making seven
dollars an hour for her past mistakes.
“Sleep In Heavenly Peace” piped across the plaza.
All space, ground and air, becomes potential
location for an ad. Should televisions be placed
in every train car? The psychological landscape
and the landscape made psychological. But the mind draws strength
from the continued attempt to apply itself
to the world of detail, to the fact of all those
people not content with things as they are.
Living on part-time work
cobbled together at community centers,
community colleges, hours on-line, momentary markets,
objects made from scraps, tossed-off jokes about survival.
They gather for a few hours talk in bars, parks,
among the cliches of coffee shops, academic lounges,
even for a moment on street corners, then sweep back
into the day’s current. All part of the land
I have loved and known, lost, cursed, spit at, screamed for, fought for,
turned away from in shame. The error of celebrating
the abstractions of nations carved on that land,

all the self-indulgent lies too easy
both to repeat and to attack, as if only others could possibly be wrong.
There's no way to sum it all up:
nomads and farmers, owners and slaves,
miners and migrants, races and cultures and monies.
The difference between what I know and what
I can change, cold metal face of institutional night
belting sentimental tunes with shopping tie-ins.
Welcome to Central Casting. Here's your Performance Review,
now with more comments than ever before.
Imagine all the layers of command
that have trickled down these details to you. Counted that way, no one's worth
more than what's been officially registered.
Just inside eyeshot, a roiling mass makes
its way to the exits. Please Sir, have I reached
the other side? Does Jefferson Airplane still love me
now that they're making money from Starbucks?
Still there's always a bigger dream, a world where people
get to work on something they care for
while no goon squads cruise the streets after dark.
Yet obsession with the social can be also a way
of forgetting to keep ourselves partly outside,
neglecting to hold out for some better pact,

unavailable though it is at the moment,
that can't be packaged or even described,
conscious mind striving not to give in
to everything that others demand that it do.
It's winter here now, time to go out
into warm morning sun. Winter on the southern coast
is felt mainly inside, in chill
shaded rooms organized for computers,
sight and sound systems, a thousand ways
to fiddle around, to produce new distraction
for long nights ahead. Sports bar happy hours,
the Fish House Vera Cruz. Describing a place
describes what's not there. Sometimes I think
exactly like my job, measuring observable units,
aggregate results, percentages matched to norms.
A poem has nothing to do with it.
Which is a way of saying what's turned up missing
is that strangely real moment when things seem present, full,
like the light blue tiles on the public fountain
on the public square that no one much sits in.
The American dream has perfected
a way of saving life from having meaning,
a content-free universe, blip of advertising gestures

standing in for a song, the logo that identifies
an abstraction with an abstraction, the quick stream
of metallic surface saying hey, why worry?
Poverty and hunger shuttled off to districts
that won't be aired primetime. With all those voices
shouting out of cars, navy tankers
anchored in the ocean beyond wind-bent trees,
night sweats, dreams of buses falling off cliffs,
is it any wonder America becomes
the problem of how to remain
committed and to what? To human connection
to animals, land, and water, to justice if there is any,
to the rights of international workers, to a way to use less
resources and use them better, to the living manifested
in the specific practices of art, to the existence
of other people, all we can or can't know of them,
to the minimization of the causes of poverty, to a concept of love
that's not a subtraction from the whole of the human.
Still I wake up saying, "It's me against the world,"
not because freedom and isolation are the same
but because they're both concepts, a way of replacing
what's right here and hard to accept:
work, meals, cars, faces and bodies,

battles over wages, resources, goals,
the sound of waves and wind, the repetitions of television.
A few weeks to travel and months to go nowhere.
The lack of ground in most conversations
and the moments when ground can be reached.
Sometimes something does happen somewhere
followed by attempts to explain it.
In a Macro-managed world, you are encouraged
to micro-manage your life, and the distinction
between doing that and what happens
is the one we've got to remember to insist on.
But how define any more
what's close by? Eroded hills above the ocean,
scrub and small trees, gated communities
of standardized houses (grey garage doors,
red clay ornaments) propped in tiers on ridges,
surfers on Swami's Beach, the history of men
coming north from Mexico to find scarce harbors,
Cabrillo at his point, then his final turning back, traders
rounding Tierra del Fuego from the east
and calling it all America, settlers pushing through the desert
always in search of more land, refugees
swirled up from the Dust Bowl, new workers

for the new desert agricultural farms
that made a few people rich, military bases
springing up near the ruins
of Spanish missions, an extreme
militaristic voting population, giving birth
to the John Birch Society
that into the sixties patrolled the coast
watching for Russian invaders. These days I can walk
from that coast to anywhere in the world almost,
down the street to the commuter rail, once in the city
take the shuttle to the airport, stow my bags,
walk on the plane, some hours later walk off again
into new specific geographies. Can anyone trace how that grand scale
filters through to the politics of a gesture?
“A woman with two children divorcing her husband”
has already become a way of describing
who should be responsible for what, so the details
of any story get lost in pre-set patterns.
Because you don't have to know what you want
either of someone or to give of yourself
when the path seems laid out beforehand; all you have to do is follow
where it's already clear you're supposed to be going.
It's not that we all could be more prepared.

Still there are better ways to be unprepared, to know
that ending up alone in a room in a city
that you never even intended to visit
could probably not have been stopped, and finally
you wouldn't even want that, like thinking
what would happen to your life if you knew
the day you were going to die. So not only is the end
not the goal; wanting to get there is like wanting
nothing to have ever happened. Yet the idea of ends
seems built into life on the freeway, your exit
or mine, "You'd be Home if You Lived Here," eight lanes
full of makes and models of a tool so threatening
to everything around it that it's no wonder
it changed the nature of the planet. But I like the convenience,
I have to admit, the five minutes I save by driving too fast, the CD player,
thermometer on the dash, windshield wipers and defrost,
the spool of commercials ruling the radio
broken up by occasional songs
that everyone has always heard before
even if they don't know it, except on a few more risky stations
playing new songs that aren't hits, or old ones
in surprising random orders. And the struggles over public radio,
where information can still be had,

a little sometimes anyway,
though multiple renditions of sponsor biases
clog most time on the airwaves.
Meanwhile, these towns have pretty good bars.
If there's anything we know, it's how
to get shit-faced and financially ruined.
It took me years of hard work to get here.
Dave puts onions in his martini, looks around,
mumbles at everyone, "Keep your distance,"
when they're not looking. In the age
of the microbrew, we think we're too good
for the old-fashioned sugar water that made the country great.
"This is a family establishment. We want your grandma
to order her double unafraid." Pizza and beer,
tacos and beer, Shepherd's Pie and beer, hamburgers
and beer of course. But hey, beer isn't
the only option, though I have to admit
it tastes better than advertised. If you don't have health insurance
cheap drinks are the next best thing. Everybody
Wants To Be My Baby Now. "I slid my hand
inside your jeans, then realized it wasn't you."
A man takes a piss on the side of the highway,
waving one hand to get people's attention.

Stuck in traffic, the bus driver calls on his cell.
How'd I end up in Technology Systems
computer discard basement? Sex as liberation,
entertainment, procreation, distraction, conversation,
means, end, shock, misunderstanding, repression,
product, trade off, accident, nightmare,
mirror, hope, connection, anxiety, death.
Sitting here watching my instep twitch.
The making of people and the meaning
they keep making, attempts to alter meaning
that work in ways no one expected, all of us
changing meaning but unable
to stop it: meaning goes on
because of us and without us. And one man
feels it and pukes on a bush. And one woman
feels it and writes energetically
on incorrect assumptions about sight and sound.
Like running from meaning makes meaning.
Like saying, "I don't want to die
so I might as well get it over with." Minutes
and roads. Billboards and fences and exit signs.
Marking the boundary, tearing open the boundary.
The boundary as oppression, the tearing as freedom.

The boundary as freedom, the tearing as terror.
Pocket your registration routes, but we still have to take
extra cancellation fees. This position will allow you
to think in its terms. Develop your evaluation
of the fact that the problem keeps changing.
Vote Republican when you think
things are going well, Democrat when they go badly.
Then, on a cloudy day, the whole culture vanishes,
hides at home in ritual oblations, memories crowding
the fringes of big screen TVs, visionary transoms
yoked to the usual episodes, strung out along
the grand plateau of other worlds
chased away or lost. Ginobli knocks down
the dagger that gives the Spurs hope.
Criticism or celebration are not
the only options. Under the circumstances, commuter planes
save time, lead to global warming. We like disaster movies
where most everybody dies, but that doesn't mean
we want to be in one. A man comes monthly
to read our Chance of Tragedy Meter.
Our neighbors called the police about
Latino gang activity, but the trespassers turned out to be
the complex groundskeeping crew. Did the Pilgrims enter

this country legally? I'm proud of the petty criminals
who populate my ancestry, prisoners abandoned
on the Carolina shore, each generation moving further west
until they reached California, my grandfather working
his brother's date farm. Living in the desert,
my family is mentioned by Levi-Strauss:
"a once rich native culture in a region now barren,
home only to a few hard-scrabble whites."
Thousand Palms had a store, a motel, a school,
and at times my grandfather ran them all.
Now it's given over to mobile home parks
and retirement communities, golf courses springing
from irrigated land. Once a fancy resort,
all Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, nearby Palm Springs
these days seems more hip and run down,
home to a thriving gay scene. The divorce rate
is rising in Christian counties. The permeable boundary
between pleasure and pain. Between the ages
of 35 and 40, he felt he understood
the differences between men and women. "Termite Fumigation
Your Way has scheduled your fumigation
over a holiday Monday for your convenience," a day almost no one
really has off. The frustration I feel reading writers

who haven't spent their lives working bad jobs.
In fact there was no golden age.
It's all been for sale from the start.
Biotech firms spread out along the tendrils
of the valley, among stubby trees and scrubby brush.
A deer runs in the grass beside the train tracks
and I think, "That animal's alive
and doesn't have to die today."
Which of these well-qualified people
who have no jobs should we turn down? A warehouse stuffed
with orange-green trolley cars. Vineyard
Garage Doors. The terminal offers
a variety of wheeled vehicles. Reading cheap paperbacks as a way
of stepping outside time. We've got nothing but.
With these new mutual funds, you have more options
than ever for buying a piece of Iraq.
Stop War. Go To War. Stop War. Go To War.
Stop War. Go To War. Stop War. Go To War.
Picking up what's left to be said
about what's left. So much news,
so little information. If you speak out
against using assault rifles
to shoot prairie dogs for sport, your career as a famous hunter

just might be over. When legal immigrants flee Colorado
because of anti-illegal-immigrant laws,
the labor shortage causes state government
to suggest putting convicts to work on farms.
Along the coast, the bus is used mainly
by Latinos, teenagers, the occasional teacher
and the institutionalized mentally ill
who've been allowed some freedom of movement.
Factory pollutants run in rivulets
down neighborhood streets just south
of the border. Young men and women,
newly arrived in California (some newly arrived in the country)
ask the bus driver, politely, if this route will take them
to the Marine base. Your extra hours at the Yoga Center
can be redeemed for merchandise.
I'm still trying to learn the lingo.
"Right on." "Have you ever met
a healer before?" he asked her in the bank
parking lot. "Well, it's my truth." "I don't speak
Philippino but some people do." "She's really sketching
on her job." Please be mindful
that we don't want more people to move here.
Four teenagers on roller skates, each walking

two pit bulls. "I'm on a spiritual adventure."
It's purple, but from cleaning it has
some semi-white spots, just like tie dye.
At the Mexican live-in factory, the babies are stored
in Baby Village, the workers
in cubby holes. Don't worry,
there's no rush. A medley of healthy greens
purchased from the Farmer's Market. Need salt?
This isn't a third world country, but if you want
one there's one nearby. Cut the rhetoric
and go right to anger avoidance. Get shrill,
get silly. Call the Tequila Shotline.
A couple of neighborhood waitresses tell me
they're all headed down to Coyote Grill.
Most people here don't have much money
but we're all being sold a vision of the good life.
Several days of clouds in a row, and the acacia trees,
fluttering lightly in the wind, are the only moving things
out the window. The pool, quiet and empty, the laundry building
quiet and empty. Writing this poem, I pull myself away
from the mindset that led to it, the sense of being consumed
by the tasks of my job, so much so that I and them
seem to mean no more than "Time is passing."

Accurate description, satirical description, and how the two are connected. The host family of the student visiting from overseas fed her sugar on bread, took her to visit a neighbor who talked nonstop about her sexual affairs and those of her husband, then finally one weekend when the student was gone, the family moved away without telling her. "I've never approved of any of my friends' boyfriends." Now with more channels for watching more games. Because stepping back changed the things he stepped back from. There's a difference between being critical in the name of change and being critical because of feeling superior, but many people flounder there. It's too much trouble to start over and too much trouble to finish, so this will have to continue. More media than ever, more options, more ways to cross, more disciplines, interdisciplines, ways of resisting discipline, and the result: we go to work, come home, watch TV, see friends on weekends. Know people who can't get good jobs after years of training. Read poems from students about going to church, feeling trapped, lonely, stuck hopeless in abstraction and longing for things they can't identify.

Later one of them goes to the hospital.
A woman in three hundred dollar sweats
comes into the Yoga Center, asks about photos
of nude women, photos she hasn't even seen; finding them,
she hands her already written letter of complaint
to the female volunteer who works the desk
for free dance classes. Walkers, runners,
skateboarders, bikers, dogs: it's time
to repeat their repeated appearance. Volleyball players,
people tossing footballs and frisbees. The tendency to cloud
when cold air hits land. Clear away brush
from potential home properties, leave it in piles
dried out like tinder when the wind reverses.
Big Jim's Barbecue becomes Healthy Meats.
Squirrels, fat after a string of cloudy days,
pip loudly in warning, scoot under fences, into holes.
Ways of fulfilling the need for playful language:
group walks or hikes, cell phones, instant messaging,
bonfires, dirty jokes. Please speak directly
into the translation machine. Ignore the jowly dog.
Do you know more people or corporations?
When everybody let you down, was marijuana
still your friend? A moment of discomfort

may be the least you can do. Hiding from others
until you become them. With a shortage of jobs
for ex-Marines, who can blame them for hanging around?
One brings his parrots to a park by the ocean:
a sun conure, two jauntily bickering macaws, a cockatoo
that says “Hey Honey” in a woman’s voice.
Car dealerships, taco shops, burger joints, gun shops,
liquor stores, bars. Vast house-selling prices
teeter on a sub-prime bubble, but in the long run
nothing ever costs less. Living in the garage
of a small two-story house, his couch bed, TV
and tools beside him, a guy starts up in detailing,
every few weeks gets a visit from the cops.
Almost half the city board
has gone to jail in the last five years. From the grave
a dead celebrity gives up new secrets, men
go to court for her son and his money.
Since 1984, nine wastewater spills
of more than 100,000 gallons
in the same lagoon. Each time it happens
we vow to prevent it. Time for a better
yoga mat. There has always been evidence
of multiple assailants. Maybe a grim

Swedish murder mystery with globalist overtones
will cheer me up. Or greens with a lemony flavor.
Hard rock doesn't have to have macho lyrics
but counterexamples are hard to find.
Probably it's not surprising that the center
of my social life is the Internet.
You can now make purchases from home, but you can't
find someone to tell you what you've bought.
A great region for golf. The hummingbird
flies close to my face, pauses to look at me.
Shorebirds cover the less
polluted waterways, briefly flying inland:
white herons, whimbrels, ruddy ducks. The yearly calendar
to support clean-up projects describes them all
and has pictures. House finches
give birth in the rafters above the balcony.
To draw off attention, the red-breasted male whistles.
The chicks peep madly when they're fed.
Across the courtyard, a raven chases a smaller hawk.
In a dark grove of trees, nesting herons roar at each other,
mating or fighting, it's hard to know which.
But we need equal time for the opposing views
that run the TV stations: "America is great

and this is no time to back down. Members of Congress
go to Syria. Own your own home. Second marriages
now have less of a stigma. We can't compromise
with people like that. The playoff matchups look intriguing
and several slots are still up for grabs. The Pussycat Dolls
just don't have a spot for a retread Deborah Harry.
He did what it takes to make it big.
Never demoralize the troops. I'll save you \$4 million here
so you can waste it there. Lights fast and easy.
With your talent, you might just end up
on a game show. Sleep deprivation + dog-eat-dog ideology=
you could win it all. Now, take those you most love
and turn on them." Sooner or later
I shut off the sound. Even the weather's been changeable,
clouds putting out attitude on their way inland
to die a lonely death in the mountains.
Sunday: work, relaxation, time to remember some small portion
of the friends I've had no time for. Sun hot
on the forehead, the moment of the immediate physical
fact of what's here. Even think to describe it
and it's gone. At best, there's reciprocal
give and take between human construction, animal construction
and the non-animal world, or at least it seems possible,

at times even has been. A waterway park
going fifty miles inland? “Too many people live out here,”
say all the people living here. The dental hygienist adds,
“And there’s almost nowhere left to put them.” Which is the way, maybe,
with all ends, once defined as such: everything rushes towards them,
tries to fill them in. Like wanting to be a novelist
but not to write. Like counting the pages
of your non-existent autobiography. Like the desperation to get married
while not liking anyone. Like telling people you’ve won the war
in order to start a war. Like insisting on the meaning of the story
while refusing to tell the story. Every so often,
they see each other again, remember
why they don’t like to. “It’s not that I’m not making sense.
It’s that I don’t make the sense you want me to make.” Easier to believe
that you’re doing something wrong than to see
that there was nothing you could do. According to the WASC site visit team,
“Cal State San Marcos, like other universities, faces significant challenges
in a short timeline in fully implementing the structures and processes
it has in place for planning and assessment and in demonstrating
the results and systematic uses of assessment
in its Educational Effectiveness Review. As Cal State San Marcos
moves forward to the next phase of the accreditation process
in the Educational Effectiveness Review, it must keep in mind

that it needs to create a culture of evidence and demonstrate that it is using that evidence in a 'feedback loop' for improvement of student learning as well as for its processes. At present, that culture is uneven. What the University has learned at this point from incorporating data in decision-making processes could be a lesson emulated in the next phase of its accreditation and institutional assessment process to strengthen learning goals and objectives, the collection of results from the classroom as well as from extracurricular activities, and the demonstration of how the University is using this evidence to become a true learning organization. The WASC Site Visit Team looks forward to coming back in two years and learning how much the University has accomplished." Conference participants take a break to piss or smoke, to call husbands or wives or children or the people they're having affairs with, to nod agreeably that it didn't make sense to them either. Once erased, the line between accountability and free fall flowers into words, deployed like soldiers who spread out to camouflage meaning, to hide what systems of people do to people, count them and stack them, funnel them so money flows upwards into the hands of a few

and now and then trickles down. A peaceful sheen
covers the lurching of massive resources, cities growing
or falling apart, buildings and bombs made
with each other in mind. Every few hours,
“Hotel California” comes over the speakers,
not urging people to lose their minds, but insisting
they already have, that the day is a multi-platinum deal
involving champagne, the dead, and a final sexy encounter
with a final sexy beast. Three days left
for cheap online tickets to London.

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