



**The  
End  
Of  
America,  
Book One**

**Mark Wallace**

S o 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 13<sup>th</sup>, 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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