

VISIONS OF THE EMPIRE: A poem for the 21st century

by Jon Rappoport

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After money was sold down the river and resurrected on a cross of
blood

After a cash-loaded God strolled into town

After the Universal Hospital drugged synapses and drove the wild
horses of imagination down into underground canyons

and sculpted androids stepped out in the aftermath buying back their
own memories

geologic wraiths spiraled up inside television sets---

their only ambition to stunt prayers for deliverance and kill raw
desire---

we watched wildcats of Texas dripping sweat into their high hats
pull black blood out of the ground and send it through tubes of night
to porcupine refineries on the shores of the Body of Christ

apostles were resurrected in knife-cutter fins of long Cadillacs
running hot across the Kansas plains with blondes in the back seat
drinking

New horizontal towns were multiplying on Long Island, stage flats
of perfect geometry coddled in the breasts of hopeful mothers asking
for redemption from pill-addled afternoons and hallucinatory music
cooking in shining ovens

monthly budgets laid out neatly on Formica
counters below the knives

distant farm fields dead in the snow

blank-eyed children walking in the snow
cultivating nightmares they would one day visit on Reality

I flew over those fields and heard the crackerbox houses rot and rust
as nothing ever rotted before

We tamed the wolf and the copperhead
we broke a pond of ice and sent Promethean serpents to force a
tunnel all the way down to the volcanic hats of ancient Chinese poets

We tracked mobs and gangs and politicians and drowned them in
thunderous secret rivers under the Southwest deserts
we launched charges against the bosses and carried our prosecutions
into courtrooms of fish eye and coral and waving undersea weeds
and dragged paid-off judges from their galleon-wrecked thrones

We stood in the blinding sunlight reflected from low slung
whitewashed buildings of Pasadena and El Segundo and Long Beach
and felt the roar of departing space rockets cutting tunnels through
the future and pulling back the future with giant magnets of
illuminated dust

We walked through measureless windows of wheat and corn
growing in the middle flatlands under the warm rain of supernatural
mansions

We draped curtains of night in the upper hills of Los Angeles where
the mountain lion and the coyote and the melted mythical Greek
beast roamed like vagabonds free of the Wheel

Under poles of yellow lights, gasping midnight locomotives clamped
on to lines of freight cars in the backyards of Chicago

Plastic lilies grew in the pastures of St. Louis haberdashers and department stores

In White Plains we carved a diamond on cracked asphalt and climbed a decaying elm and walked along the iron railing of the fence holding rotting branches and threw marbles down on to Davis Avenue and watched them bounce into the muddy stream of World War Two newspapers and swollen milk cartons and broken whiskey bottles and torn black jackets of old soldiers who had died in snow drifts over the winter and mysteriously disappeared

I ran under trees filled with light green inchworms hanging from long threads until I was invisible
and glimpsed smiling robots sitting in cafes in the next platinum century

In Los Angeles, concrete sunset of three stacked freeways, a carpet of park in Beverly Hills, old poolroom on Broadway downtown, bus to San Francisco, a bum holding out his hand and saying *On Venus Jesus will show you machines of love*

I saw politicians jumping out of floating windows
their briefcases cracking open
spilling secrets like lazy snowflakes
dazzling in the sun
trillion dollar thefts
naked amazons stashed in condos and yachts
banks sucking money from the vacuum of the heavens
dead agents

in a rock pasture outside Des Moines hitchhiking to New York

glimpses of prehistoric time

before the beginning before the beginning of sacred money
before the first idols were built, before sacrifice was thought of, sly
prophets were trying on robes and combing out their long hair and
rehearsing their future executions

Standing up on a hill past Albuquerque on 66, I caught a ride into a
no-name Arizona town, walked in the foggy morning along an empty
road to a pine-filled snow-filled cliff and stared out at a spring valley
a thousand feet below

In blinding rain I stood on the Indiana Turnpike outside Chicago
pointed east and wound up in the Pennsylvania countryside driving
the car of a half-crippled man with a Bible I met in a Howard
Johnson

our headlights went dead on a curve and a cop pulled in behind us
and stopped us

he led us to a fat judge's house in the middle of the night where we
paid thirty bucks

then parked on a quiet lane and slept until dawn

early spring in March

flowering magnolia trees

he dropped two Thorazine and told me to drive

and his babbling about Heaven slowed down and he slept

and when we pulled into Manhattan he had me park in midtown

he looked at me with glazed doe's eyes and said

son, I've reached the end of the line, this is it, within a month I'll kill
myself

I walked along the astral cloisters of Wall Street among crowds
lapping at honey loopholes in a web of proprietary secrets and I flew

through steel walls into the psychotic fandango of the international
electronic invented money Surge

I recorded architects laying out blueprints for the perfect human in
bunkers of Virginia where silent factories printed minds whose
memories could be selectively erased
technicians built new bodies from tendons and ligaments of cougars
and predatory owls and membranes from soldier ants and feral dogs

I walked through fields of cactus east of Tijuana
into caverns of mass graves where sacrificed Aztec skeletons still
stank in pulsing blood rhymes of a toothless hobo Ziggurat

I sat in the courtroom where the two-hundred-year trial of America
labored like a wounded beast, witness after witness screaming
accusations at captains of production and dark iron-masked
prosecutors hammered their fists on tables and smooth Rockefeller
men sat in the witness box and advocated drugging the population

One Sunday night I walked out of a small bookstore on 3rd Avenue
and a drunken Ben Franklin, wearing his waistcoat and slippers, his
spectacles halfway down his crooked nose, pulled me over to the
doorway of a paint store, and whispered:

*“I should prefer, to an ordinary death, being immersed
with a few friends in a cask of Madeira, until that time,
then to be recalled to life by the solar warmth of my
dear country!”*

he patted me on the cheek and grinned

What about the weathered Declaration on which you staked your
honor, your future, your fortune, your life, I ask him

His face turns sour

Oh that, he says

They sold it for a war, and it fetched a handsome price

They sold it for a bank, and rated it a fair exchange

They sold it for a choking nightmare called the greater good, and it drained their living blood

They sold it for a legend of heaven under a burning copper sky and it vaporized in the whirlwind

Fifty million video cameras record the washed out moment-to-moment ballet in streets and offices

people stop for a moment in a bulging tableau
light peers in through immobile troughs of fury
complaints are frozen

all the children of America with their endless needs are frozen

We slashed our way through faded blue Virginia mountain ranges
ruled by subhuman priests
lizards crawled through the sunlight between leaves on rumbling
trees spreading out their knuckles above ground

Through dream gardens of the starlit Sagittarius, coral horses,
amber-fed lichen
we walked the Cherokee Trail glittering with bodies frozen in the
silver fog

We flew over steaming cities and freezing cities and came to the
Asia plain of tropical magic where the walls of enduring space were

cracked and broken and the false curtain of the sky lay at half-mast
torn and stained

Here the empire had shriveled and small mobs wandered under
saturated space broken off from the Maypole of trance

We still hear a voice of freedom
in the
aether

now freedom barks like a dog
it weeps over stones
it demands cash
it lies in the mud and croaks
flees a burning church

On a parapet at the center of an unknown city, we hear a bovine
preacher of the sub-brain announce:

ADORE! ADORE!

We have

A

New

God

And

Time

Is

Peeling off

Around him.

ADORE! ADORE!

Your life

Is being

Mapped out

In steel-banded

Central Planning

Operating

From

The Temple

Of the Just

A gram of license

For every ton of compliance

This is the new energy equation

One

Glittering

Breath

Of

Spontaneously inhaled

Stolen

Money

leveled like an exploding shell

o leader

your only remaining job

is the calculation

of the religious component

how to mountaintop

and sell that vacation view

theocratic meteors

whirling around the crown

what testament

and scripture

will you

invent

for the made-holy parade

of intercellular

electronic

money laundering

(left hand to the right)

how will you

market

the ark

of androids

what murders

will you

recast

as

sacrifices

made

on behalf of

the

rising

membership

in the

temple

of

those

seeking

justice

a node

of memoryless

cold blue light

shining on

citizens

entranced

in trust

Adore!

Adore!

The rebellion is over!

Everything

We hoped for

Granted!

Now

By the blessed

Eye

Capture and Love are the same!

Their

Separation

Was

Our

Sin

We

Surrender

To

The Egoless

Cage

Adore! Adore!

All

Objections

Are

Swept away

This

Is
Our
Day
Our
Hope
Has Been
Justified
In the
Temperament
Of
The Wise
Who
Unleash
A hurricane
To catapult us
Into

The new world

Adore! Adore!

One shapeless limp impulse

Desperately shared by nine billion people

Dissolves

The threshold

Of mystery

And opens at last

The door

To

The everlasting

Life

This is the apotheosis of

What

We have all

Been unconsciously seeking

I see populations surge through golden avenues wrapped around the upper stories of Orphic ships waiting for solar winds

I open books in a shining arboretum, ten-thousand-foot wells pour from the sky down into stratified layers of rock...

Summer night on an old porch, rhododendrons are thrashed by slow comets of rain

there is a sleep so pervasive numbing the chest and shoulders, a despair so charming as to be final, a titanic loss of mobility

there were buildings in the old World War 2 Paris that looked like beautiful rotting vegetables propped on the ark of the River windows scalloped stone sacred mucosal choirs

in a nostalgic vortex
death is a protocol
a virginal reopening of the wound
insignia piping gardens from its royal wax
into the dark
old pleasures run in familiar magnetic channels

Ah, this is old-world death, the happiness of remembering time, a thing of wonder in the thrall of dying autumn
and then we knew what could be lost, and then we knew we were seeing each other fading on sheets of papyrus
and we dropped through the earth

flaming

into the legend of the unconscious

and

struggled back and emerged up into the lights of the city

We move through the halls of this summertime life

the meridians of gills breathing in and out, in and out

and cross the bridges of memory
and are New

We punch through the wax of space-time into the warm rain

we unplug the money presses

we abandon the long steel trading tables and the slaughtering floor

we defect

we drink the root turning into the bud
the bud turning to grain

we brush away the choking filaments of narcosis and finally admit
our immortality

we walk in the canopy of clouds

in the canal where time and space are bolted, cloth to cloth

We ride tigers across the Styx into the mud houses of Hades and
blow sacks of north wind to clean the ruined stables of broadcast
memory

We race up the canyons of the Rockies, we float on the Salt Lake in
mirrors of gold

We walk out of the house in the middle of the night and watch the
magnolia tree in the little grassy island open white flowers of joy!

Sing now!
Speak now!

Tear away the seal on the tomb!

MAGICIANS!

MASTERS OF TIME!

in any weather, any season

long forgotten and hidden in hard flesh

they are there!

all the fires are out

all the wars of the bankrupt versus the bankrupt are over

I watched a sleek black car pull up to a house down the block where
an old man who grew apple trees was screaming and three men got
out of the car and grabbed his arms and put him on a stretcher and
took him away to the Foundation, a place where they kept the insane
he had spent every Sunday morning polishing his red car

he had once been a judge
he retired and built department stores
he kept a bulldog in his garage and fed it there
his son who wore gray suits and drove a foreign car
owned a brewery

i dreamed the father was sitting on the back of a white swan who
had a leash around his neck
I woke up and went into the kitchen and sat down at the table
I looked out the window and under a streetlight I saw the old man's
son putting something into the trunk of his car
his movements were frail
he had aged overnight

I fled through the oily swamps of New Jersey into the bright green
plastic of Delaware and through the Carolinas and woke up in a pink
sand motel in Miami under tropic rain

I hitchhiked down the old 66 from East St. Louis out to Joplin in the
back of a vegetable truck and floated into a diner in Oklahoma City

In a long, long Los Angeles bar on a slow Tuesday afternoon I
counted six Hindu gods sitting on stools drinking rotgut and
transmitting sign language to their London banker lolling outside the
men's room

I walked along the death harbors of New York
I saw ships gleaming
I watched swarms of seagulls bend this way in the air and flap their
white wings and gray wings in the dark morning

I'm walking the cemetery lawns of Los Angeles
now and then a plastic face looms up out of the fog

Boston...in the ocean mythic giants
all their capillaries have gone dry
the moon is setting on page one
intestinal tract of a beached octopus suctioned to a sidewalk

in a small café I look at the faces and know there was universally
accepted time and it's ended

We saw old iron ore carriers moving slowly on Lake Erie
frost clinging to their torn-painted sides
pulling along hills of hidden Nevada gold

GM monitor lizards sway down Main St. USA like garbage
machines on the move, guzzling and chewing tin cans, bottles, bags
of medical waste, wrappers, assaulting bins

you're in the reality tunnel again
where predators finger like worry-beads cocoons of demolished
light

limbic vacuum cleaners
suck up embers of war

be of good cheer, son, never fear the end, there is no end **THERE IS
NO END**

abide by the central directive--

when you're lying on a slab in the
mortuary

STAND UP

tell them they've made a minor miscalculation
recite a few lines from scripture
and stride quickly to the exit

confess to the guards
you're just a pathetic figure
a minor functionary
in a bureau of functionaries
all the way up

tip your hat, grin, drop a few coins in the basket, move on
this universe is

a hell of a vacation
thrills and chills
buy the ticket
if you can't get out
call me

The cosmos is a forgery of the individual

They say the dark arts are fine things

They lie below the gold rings

That surround every living cell

OR you can

Strip naked from the stirrups

Of gravity

Sit with clouds banked over the ocean

And burn in the dish your own name

The great thief said

I have given you

Everything you need

And so it was

Another message

A column of fire

Rising out of the sea

you can lift twelve Persephones out of a Swiss watch
and push an orange train at top speed to Mongolia

each thought on the ruined wreck of sands
is a poet
driving a Cadillac into a living room

(pretending to understand a foreign language
they invented a hundred more)

midtown Manhattan...my father walks from the haberdasher to the
barber shop with a new hat in a box

he sits in the chair and the barber winds it back and shaves him
with a straight razor that was lolling in a tall glass of alcohol

the barber wipes off the blade with a white linen towel and
moves the razor back and forth on his strop and shaves my father
and cuts his hair

the pool room on 14th Street, old men playing three-cushion slowly
with long tapered fingers, under a hanging lamp one face peeks in
and then it's ripped away as the floor sweeper lifts the shades and the
sun comes streaming through the dust

ever deepening beauty,
there is a little garden behind our house
where vines grow over a wood shed

and purple bougainvillea and morning glory

in this idyll I can rest
I can dream of her while I hold her hand
we set the kettle boiling
and pour the steaming water
and drink a tea of the world

you sold me an empty room
I moved in and found you there

you waited in the rain for me
And I came to you

The home we built at the end of a street
Is becoming larger every day

The poet picks the street on which he will starve
and grow rich

I am painting on a sheet of sturdy paper
A small garden
The sky is on the bottom
The flowers are on top
There are window boxes

I am making the same proposal to you, my darling

I pray to prayer

I deliver myself to you

I say the night and I say down the stairs we go again

never the garden

ever the garden

we are always in between everything we thought

always

my darling,

I'll go with you

into the garden

into the bedroom

into the living room

into the kitchen

on to the rust-colored couch after the sandstorm

when the evening is quiet

the stove is ticking

my dead father is again sitting in a metal chair playing pinochle with his friends

my dead mother bounds down the stairs
she's suddenly thirty again
grinning with the August of the Black Sea

my sister is holding a feral dog in her arms and he is wrapping his
mouth around her wrist and slowly quieting down

Not one god
not fewer gods
give me a proliferation of gods
gods in plantains and mangoes
gods in broken chairs in vague Arizona motels
gods in piles of gray wood at the back of a barn in Mississippi
gods in statues on broad plazas in Chicago
gods in lagoons festering with green mold in San Diego
gods on the foggy windows of diners in Western Massachusetts
gods on the graves of Vikings and accountants in New Jersey
gods in silverware and white napkins

one version of what the old Tibetans
called the Great Void:

everybody looks around and tries to figure out what to
do
because the long hustle of discovery is over
and all the explorers have been paid off

There is nothing left
except a few magicians
living in cold mountains
punching holes in the universe at will

In Lhasa they were faced with that Nothing
and they turned to it in the eastern sky hanging like a lamp in a long
vacated whorehouse
and bowed

that was the only ceremony in the original book
which they later
in quiet rooms
burned in wood bowls

before starting their exercises

Worship?
Decay?
Never heard of it.

And now think of something else, *perfect automobiles*
streaming down a tropical planet toward the
a mirror lake on which stands a demigod in green pantaloons
who holds all data everywhere in his outstretched arms

and freeze THAT in memory like a sword for sixteen hours
without moving
and finally see universe
is a product
of mind

this is what they were doing
before they wrote the books and ordered the prayer wheels from
sears catalog
and jingle jangled their way into a theocracy on a cold saturday
morning

they were the dim sum masters
never ordered the same breakfast twice in the holy rivers of
energy
took apart the river and the energy
too
down to Nothing
sat in Void for
indeterminate length of no-time
stopping all creating
because they could
and then emerged
those few
magicians in the cold wasted hills and

and said WELL
if you folks want to elect a billion reincarnated hopalong
cassidys
as your head chief go ahead it doesn't matter
we're out here on the edge
inventing and destroying dimensions

a painted hand on a canvas disappears down into the mouth of a
virgin

a factory in Cincinnati plunges into the production of synthetic
thighs

the cage of the tiger is very clean
attendants come in once a day and
scoop up the feces and remove them
they hose down the floor
when they're done the tiger is let back into the cage
and picks up his pacing

Huge sums in bank accounts disappear
Wearing a webbed helmet, you're running across a lake in Liberia
with an M-16

an orange bird
walks down
to a small fountain pouring into the eye of an exploded
centurion

Disembodied skulls are talking to each other in a Times Square
liquor store
what was the greatest war?
in whose name did we lay down our flesh
was the uranium really depleted
how many roadside bombs did you see before the last one

did we guarantee the oil
did we plant the poppies

freedom is standing in a bar on university place and ordering a beer
at six o'clock and listening to the voices

freedom is taking a shirt of infinite sadness and folding it up

freedom is sitting in a bus station in a small town and counting the
money in your pocket and watching the door as a wolf trots in and
stares at you

freedom is being as sad as the animals

freedom is falling down on your knees in the street

freedom is a beautiful drunken woman tearing off her clothes and
taking the elevator down to the lobby of the Fairmont Hotel in San
Francisco

Raphael's curls
Are wired
From cliffs domed with chimes.

The NY Times
Is a mosquito
On a plum.

In halls of marble
Heralds open the door

Spring
At last

The gold-seated apparatus
Spits out souls,
Tourniquet
Of the faded sea.

South of Los Angeles...dancers arrive early in a giant room above
the ocean.

In forest halls, dryads run like crystal.

CON FRER Tito Puente strides into the endless Balboa ballroom.
Timbales, rolling cymbals, chingachcook congas, brass section put
in harness from the ceiling. Tito is sitting in a blue mist. The slow
vibraphone turns over and over and Silver runners flash around
corners.

In the New York harbor
Turbines with numerical rivets
Are driven into light.
Shoreline hardworking men rest on the
Kneecap of a colossal Buddha
Coming into port

when I was a boy
 a road among trees
 magnolia, oak, maple...

squirrels with great healthy bushy tails ran up trunks
jumped on to roofs
sniffed smoke coming out of chimneys
and in the dark
there were horse chestnut trees dropping polished mahogany
along the little lanes leading off the road...

After the Cross of money burned and rotted
we walked to the shore
we walked into the ocean
we walked on the ocean floor
we discovered the oceanic mind
we swam on the towering waves
we came back to ourselves

we smelled towers of the city
we floated into the city
we rolled out on to the highways of America

we broke veins of golden paralysis in the clock of the galaxy

we rose with our swords and decapitated the Holy Worm

we planted gardens around the wreck of the Babel Tower and
invented new languages that would spread like morning glories

knowing the past was dead
I walked out of the house of melting shadows

I bathed in clear water

I sat down by an old stream and waited for the fish to speak
I sat inside a reflection of lunar decay for thirty incarnations
and nothing happened

I walked out of the house of melting shadows

not a closed night or a fearful night or a weeping night or a
money night or a political night or an atomic night

the herds of stars are breaking out of their corral

I'm sitting at a cafe
on the beach in Cardiff
blue January afternoon

my mind unwrinkles

the restaurant's empty

a huge whitewashed gull with a red beak
stands on a rock a few feet away
he waits, he looks

mouthless cash/samurai governments in twinkling skyscrapers

I try on soft hats in a phantasmagorical haberdasher on 5th Avenue

in a jar the size of Des Moines I pickle brains of ancient Sinatras

sand in the engine, empty canteens, thirsty in the desert, I climb the next set of dunes and stagger down into a level-B resort, artificial lake restaurants women in bikinis fat men children sliding into blue pools waiters delivering drinks, robot Adam&Eve standing under a palm tree eating a bowl of fruit, Machine God sitting at a huge poolside table with a few cronies, he waves me over, the sun sets and the moon comes up, I watch old skulls of mob defectors rolling like tumbleweed in the desert....

hollow planets ring like gongs, shepherds bring in their animals, ghosts in the arbor pick the grapes and feel the warm wind, we're walking through a forest, the yellow-horned flowers are weeping with fog, chrome-edged clouds are dropping sheets of loneliness

the universe said goodbye

the universe was going away

there was no JFK assassination

it was a mirage in Texas

Allen Dulles was sitting in the back of the limo

his brains were splashed all over an unknown woman

she was fighting to breathe and squirming

she was wearing a little pillbox hat and a polkadot dress

she jumped out of the car and ran up the street

and no one ever saw her again

the Virgin Mary
the Virgin Mary of Texas

the lilies of the valley are growing in the back yard again
splashed in the Buick majesty of steady spring rain
and the snow is gone
the branches of crystalline ice are giving out little green buds
and worms are crawling in the mud around the porch sniffing roses

Caravaggio talks to Raphael and Raphael talks to Piero and a leg
takes shape

Michelangelo talks to Titian and half a face emerges

Durer talks to Velasquez and Goya walks out of a cave ready to go to
work

we return to the Bronx and visit my grandmother sitting in her
pudding chair in the middle of the living room, she slowly moves her
head and trembles and mumbles something in Yiddish and I kiss her
on the cheek, the mirror sits on the heavy bureau above candles
flickering for the dead in the middle of the afternoon, someone is
always dying, they were dying in Russia and they are dying in the
Bronx, there was a daughter who died a few weeks after she was
born and my grandfather died when I was three, and the candy store
across the street died when bubble gum was outlawed during WW2,

and my father's father is dead, he owned a clothing store and his partner ran off with the cash and now the partner is dead too, and the books on the shelves in my grandmother's house are dead, and the plates behind glass are dead, the forks and knives and spoons are dead, the rugs in the living room are dead, and my father's mother will soon be dead in the dining room on the floor at our house late in the afternoon in January, but no one is supposed to make a move to stop the dying in the way the dying is happening, we are all supposed to stand by, centurions at a gateless city, the rivers shallow and frozen, kiss your grandmother, stand back, smile, go over to the table, sit down, play cards, eat honey cake, listen, listen, listen
Hermes is circling the brick house and tearing tiles off the roof, he's coming down into the living room and breaking into the glass cases and stealing the silverware, he's crawling under the piano and ripping out the pedals, he's moving the laundry room between the living room and the kitchen, he's going next door to the psychiatrist's house and laying down the names of 297 mental disorders that will be invented out of wholecloth in the next 50 years

I'm lying back in a leather chair in Grand Central Station and an old man is cutting my hair

he puts a hot white towel on my face

I enter St. Pat's, it's a huge bookie joint, crowds standing in the aisles, betting on anti-Lucifer

I take a seat at the end of a long pew and fold my hands in prayer to Piero della Francesca, silver painter of Solomon & Sheba and Henry Miller of the Rosy Crucifixion and Kenneth Patchen in his bed of pain and Gregory Corso roaming the streets of Rotterdam blessings of wine and bread and skeletons growing new flesh and

father Walt sitting in the middle of Times Square his voice a violet
thunder

the President is on television and the Pope is drunk on ceremonial
wine cursing the Church fathers as he floats naked near the Sistine
ceiling

O dream garden of the ancient flower...

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