

This interview started on Fri, Apr 15, 2022, originally for **THE MUSIC VIDEO ISSUE**. It quickly expanded and morphed into something bigger than just the usual interview I do for SKREE.

SKREE: I must admit that I'm pretty excited and also feeling a bit underwater about your interview J.T.! Trying to decide where to start with someone that has such a storied past is a bit daunting.

So, let's go way way back to when you were just a smile on your mother's lips and a twinkle in your father's eye. How and where did J.T. start his 40 plus years on this plane of existence?

Corey, no need to feel underwater. We can just jump in and see what floats. Whether or not the floating makes of me a quasi-obvious turd, we may allow posterity to take care of herself...

SKREE: I was born in 1972 and I always remember music being present in my life. Records, the radio, and music on television were such an important part of my pre-teen years. Some of my earliest music memories were from tv themes, cartoons, variety shows, and commercials. There always seemed to be visual accompaniment with the songs and jingles from my pre cable childhood. How present was television in your early days and how important do you think music from the tv was to your own interest in art and music?

J.T. D: Ah, then you either have just turned 50 or about to lock a solid half century in on the sun dial. Congrats. I'm close on your heels in that regard, but glad to let you ahead of me on the trail. If I peer through the foggy mists of time to try and lift the veil on the obscurities of my origins and see them clearly, I was born Feb. 5th, 1976, a "*bicentennial baby*" in what was once known as the United States of American in the former Shawnee territory of Kentucky in the county of Jackson. Rural eastern Kentucky is known or not known as the case may be for being among the **1.** poorest **2.** whitest **3.** most rural counties in and of the nation-state.

My grandfather was a farmer. My mom took herself off to the work-study college to get herself a degree in English at Berea. Berea was established pre-Civil War by an abolitionist, to educate both poor hillbillies and African Americans. You in fact couldn't go there if you/your parents had too much income, the opposite of most higher education systems in the U.S.A. She met my dad there, a son of Memphis, TN/Cherokee NC (*he grew up in Memphis, but the family roots were all in NC*).

She brought her degree and my father back to Jackson County to teach in the public schools. I say all that just to set the scene. Middle of nowhere, but relatively speaking, employed as teachers, we had semi-disposable income compared to the region. I didn't have any siblings until a stepsister (*later*), but my mom was one of five siblings, and at the time all of them lived nearby, so I basically was one of a parade of 2,242 first cousins. When I was a kid, my grandfather's farm was still a working farm, and that was the central hub of family activity, so in some ways it was like growing up in the 19th century.

Except it wasn't the 19th century. Speaking of television, when I was a kid cable tv existed, but not in our county. Our house was on top of a small hill, and I can still recall watching my dad and family putting up this ridiculously massive tv antenna on top of the house in the pre-cable era to snatch from the ether broadcast signals riding electromagnetic waves.

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The real lid-flippers for me as a young kid were all the animated cartoons from the 1930s & 40s one could still see in syndication, especially early in the morning. Or even **Rocky and Bullwinkle**, which was very late 50s/60s and on into 1960s things like **Underdog**. Watching stuff made by the **Fleischers** or **Warner**, directed by names that would--much later--become names I'd understand to wild craftsmen: **Frank Taschlin, Tex Avery, Chuck Jones**, etc. And then I'd--out of context--see how those characters evolved, became streamlined, or altered depending on what creators were working on them, etc. Also, I'd hear that strange music that many animators/studios put into their cartoons. Again, only much later, would I attribute to that wild-composer by the name of **Raymond Scott**. **Cab Calloway's** voice doing "**St James Infirmary Blues**" in a **Betty Boop** cartoon in the guise of "**Koko**" the clown but moving like **Calloway** in a motherhumpin' danse macabre haunts me now just as much as it haunted me when I saw it at some obscure hour of the morning on tv in glorious black and white, a kid receiving a telegram from 1933 in the early 1990s.

Cable tv came into the area when I was around 10 or 11 years old. My father, growing up in Memphis with movie theaters in the 1950s as basically his babysitter, was very tv/movie oriented, so he jumped on getting cable as soon as it was available (*and we were among the first people I knew to own a VCR, as soon as they become vaguely affordable*). For someone my age, it's hard to overestimate (*and difficult to explain to younger folks*) the impact of **MTV**. It was like music mostly came in by the radio and the albums my parents owned. Of a sudden, music became thoroughly televisual, it was all eyeball kicks piped into my brain pan. Also, I didn't grow up around record stores. There weren't any, at least not without driving at least an hour and a half, and at the time chain record stores were big, so it's not like I knew how to seek out hip stores, that would all come much later.

SKREE: I can relate to the magic that was early cable television. I remember begging my mother for cable because of MTV. I'm not even sure how I heard about it to know that didn't just want my MTV, I NEEDED it! I was obsessed and so were my friends. It seemed to be beaming into our heads 24/7. Music! Animation! Fashion! Filmmaking! Special effects! Style! Sex! There was so much creativity rocketing out of MTV it was truly revolutionary. I feel like it became part of my DNA.

J.T. D: There was a funny aspect to cable in that parts of my county of origin got it before other parts. So, my good buddy growing up, who lived about a mile from me, but on the other side of the main highway, 4-21, that cut through the area, so he had cable, **MTV**, and even different channels, as I think his house might have been served by a different provider. I seem to remember watching **Night Flight** before **MTV**, and it seems like I never saw **Night Flight** actually at home (*maybe we didn't have the USA network?*), but it all becomes a jumble. I can clearly remember the day **MTV** showed up on my own tv screen for the first time and an 80s **ZZ Top** song was playing, so that was like, "*Okay, this what it's like to have MTV.*"

SKREE: I'm glad you brought up Night Flight so early in this interview. Night Flight was the cooler cousin to MTV. Everyone watched MTV but a certain type of kid watched Night Flight. It was smarter, bolder, and so influential to me as a young teen. I was exposed to a wider range of music and artists than MTV was supplying. I was already into lots of different genres of music growing up, but NF blew the doors wide open!

J.T. D: When one is young, music arrives via mainstream avenues, especially if one is in a rural area, so that blast of **MTV** into the living was something else. Now it's easy to look back and see it all as very mainstream, but, **MTV** had what they called "*Closet Classics*," so when I was barely aware of 1960s or

70s rock and roll, suddenly I'm seeing the **Alice Cooper band** from 1972 doing "***I'm Eighteen***" live when I'm not even sure I'd heard the song before, with **Alice** in a **Wonder Woman** t-shirt, projecting images of **Popeye** behind the band and he's got a bottle of whiskey in his hand, lolling about the floor like he don't give a fuck, and here I am/there I was growing up under the buckle of the bible belt in a dry county--no legal sales of alcohol of any kind--with a family of non-drinkers (*at least not openly drinkers*)....this kind of thing served to crack my fragile, eggshell mind, to steal a phrase from **Jimbo Morrison**.

I can also remember seeing "***Andy Warhol's Fifteen Minutes***" which that recent **Netflix** doc based on **Warhol's** diaries reminded me. Not that I had forgot, as it was/is more like I questioned if seeing that was a real experience in the mid-1980s. Did **Andy Warhol** really have a show on **MTV** that I watched when I was, like, 10 or 11? Why, yes: he did. Getting that periscope view via video of weirdo, NYC art culture was a helluva window to become opened for a kid in *Bumfuk Kentuk*. I still remember seeing **Alex Chilton**--a person of whom I had no frame of reference--being interviewed in a New Orleans cemetery--and only years later connecting the dots to the dudes **the Replacements** sang about or a band called **Big Star**, etc.. I'm not even sure if that was on **120 Minutes**, or if it was the proto-**120 Minutes** that **I.R.S.** produced for **MTV**, **Cutting Edge**, which predated **120 Minutes**. I didn't put a name to the **I.R.S.** program until spelunking the internet years later trying to trace memories of what I'd seen on **MTV**. For example, seeing metal programming was obviously **Headbanger's Ball**, which I remember from when **Adam Curry** hosted it, but then apparently there was **Heavy Metal Mania** before that, so I may have seen both and combined them into one in the rear-view of memory. But I stress, too, that seeing almost all of these programs meant one saw them late at night, odd hours/days, outside of the realm of regular broadcast day programming. Also, **MTV** aired both **The Young Ones** from England as well as **the Monkees** tv show, so I saw both those on there. My buddy who lived across 4-21 obsessively taped **The Young Ones** so we watched those over and over again.

One thing I remember (*and this might date to just a bit into the later 80s (Warhol died in '87) during the time that painter/Zap comix artiste Robert Williams's initial cover for the "Appetite for Destruction" Guns N Roses was circulating--which I remembered as coming out in '88, but the internet tells me it was '87, even though the album didn't catch on with a wider public until later in '88/'89*) is catching an interview with **Robert Williams** on **MTV**. I found one video on **Youtube** that seems like it's what I saw, but then he doesn't say what I remember him saying which was something like, "***When they look back at the 20th century and try to make sense of what was going on in the psychedelic era, hundreds of years from now, they'll be saying; 'you know what was wrong with these people? THEY WERE ALL ON DRUGS!!!"*** Him saying that could just be my own memory not the actuality of what he said. Either way, **Williams's** style of speech, standing on the corner of **Charles Manson** and art-bent carny barker, in which he peppers references to everything from **Underground Comics** to "***Fine Art***" blew back my hair/flipped yet again my lid as much as anything, and also planted seeds to go seek out his stuff/artists he referenced (*S. Clay Wilson, Gary Panter, etc.*).

Metal ruled the 80s. **Motorhead**, who appeared on an episode of **The Young Ones**, were I think the closest we got to punk/rock. Thrash and then later/other labels like speed/death, etc. metal was the underground for metal heads. And as much as people like to crap on "*hair metal*," that popular side of metal was what kept girls in the metal union with us all. For anybody that wants to shit on hair metal, well, maybe they weren't 11-14 years old riding bus No. 85, which stopped by the high school coming and going from Mckee Elementary (*we didn't have a separate "middle school"*) and sat with the lovely 17 year old **Darla**, obsessed with **Queen/Freddy Mercury**, but also down with bands like **Ratt**, and later

Poison and even five minutes after that: **White Lion** in the 87/88 era. If **Darla** was into it, so was I. I got a laugh out of her when she said **White Lion's Mike Tramp** needed to grow out some stubble, as he looked too much like a girl in the "**Tell Me**" video. I quipped that he didn't need stubble to prove he was a man, that's why he wore tight pants.

Which flings me all the way back from that age to the third grade. First time I ever heard of **Prince** or noticed him, it was from this gal **Gina's "Purple Rain"** notebook, the classic image of **Prince** on the motorcycle. I remember looking across from my desk to hers and wondering just what he was "**Prince**" of exactly and who was this "**Revolution:**" his band? A political movement? Both? About 30 seconds later it seemed like I knew all about **Prince**, but in that moment it was just an enigma on a cute girl's desk. I think **Gina's** a medical doctor now. Anywho, being no fool, I always was interested in what interested the society of girls. If a cute gal was into something, I made notes and did as much studying as I could.

I remember being in the seventh grade and there was, to my eyes, the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen, the olive skinned/raven haired beauty, **Tina**. I had some cassette she wanted, and she offered to trade. The tape didn't even have its case/J-card, but I would have given her anything she wanted. However, she made a big deal out of the fact that the tape she had to offer she was certain I would dig. Turned out it was **Metallica's "Master of Puppets"** and that tape sure 'nuff nudged me into thrash. Once a kid gets into **Metallica** and **Megadeth**, **Slayer** can't be far behind. The next thing ya know, with the hell-wind of **Motorhead** and **Maiden** and **Priest** as your back--like the thrashers before you--it's on to **Danzig** and **the Misfits** and an exciting world of underground punk awaits ya in the off-world colonies. Maybe if **Tina** had not put "**Puppets**" on me I wouldn't be the **Alan Vega/Suicide** fan I am today, even if mostly these days I listen to jazz and classical music. Well, I'm getting older and relate to music like I relate to everything just a touch differently than before. But ya know: it's all true.

Thinking about the **Prince** notebook on **Gina's** desk, I'm reminded again of third grade, with this kid **Jimmy** was passing around a cassette of **Whodini's "Escape"** album. Keep in mind I didn't even put the tape in a **Walkman** or hear it, I was just looking at j-card/physical object. What is this? It's a band of two guys? Only two guys are on the cover. Why do they spell "**Houdini**" that way? Again, it seems like only five minutes later I happened to see the video for "**Freaks Come Out Night**" and that was my introduction to hip hop. I should make a point that as a country kid both hip hop, once it got to me, which seems near simultaneous to grappling with metal, both of these forms were about as "**exotic**" relative to my experience, I was attracted like the moth to the light bulb, and once **Yo! MTV Raps** hit the tv, I was as a devotee of it as I was to **Headbanger's Ball**. Notice I haven't mentioned country music. As a country kid that was so much around me, I ignored it, even if I absorbed it without trying. It would take me years and a winding path to get around to the cracker music of my own kind.

But before I depart from adolescence entirely, I was going to go back to that pivotal (*for me*) year of 1987. The home video release of "**KISS Exposed**" cemented my late 80s **KISS**-fandom. Not the easiest time to be a **KISS** fan. I remember a gal in sixth grade saying to me: "**You like KISS?! You know they don't EVEN wear make-up anymore?!**" Basically, **Paul Stanley** and **Gene Simmons** are presented as their own **Spinal Tap**, playing versions of themselves, mocking their images as well as indulging the image. Speaking of **Spinal Tap**, I probably saw that for the first time around the same time, a VHS rental. I was learning to love ridiculous rockers while realizing it was all cartoony, kinda ridiculous. Also, I wouldn't realize this until later but the guy acting as the interviewer in "**Exposed**" was the actor **Mark**

Blankfield from the tv show **Fridays**. This would all snap together for me when I'd see a bootleg of **KISS** doing "*Music from the Elder*" material on **Fridays**.

I've often said that when **Hasil Adkins** encountered honky tonk country and then early rock and roll, his one-man band routine was not unlike a cargo cult. He heard something and made it the best he knew how, convinced he could open a portal to invoke that which he heard. I basically feel like, from an area as rural and removed as **Hasil's**, from cultures not separated by much except the Kentucky/West Virginia state line, but thirty or forty years later, **Brian Manley** and I in our band **the Smacks!** heard 70s and 80s and embarked on making our own form of "*cargo cult rock & roll*" in a different time relative to **Hasil**. About the only difference between us and **Hasil** was that he wasn't influenced by **KISS** or music videos. It's also that we weren't a genius like him, so it took two of us to do our thing.

SKREE: As you were being bombarded by all those images as a kid, what were you drawing? What was directly or indirectly contributing to your development as a visual artist?

J.T. D: As far as what was influencing me drawing. It's all kind of a jumble. Comics were the primary vector/inspiration. Being that I didn't have any older siblings or even older cousins who were both older and also into comics, my main memory is that a neighbor kid "*outgrew*" his comics and handed down to me a box of mid to late 70s comics, mostly **Marvel** and **DC**, before I could read. So I can remember "*reading*" the first **Star Wars** comics and absorbing the movie before I had seen the movie, by "*reading*" comics, the text of which I couldn't literally yet read. That definitely planted a seed. Now I know I was looking at **Howard Chaykin's** art adapting the movie, but I didn't know any of that at the time, just absorbing the anonymous surface and narrative--without words 'cause I couldn't read 'em.

Then a bit later, maybe first or second grade, not sure, I remember we used to have these book fairs in elementary school. You'd have this day at the library and there'd be a spread of all this stuff you could buy, if you/your parents had money. A kid had purchased one of four **Marvel** books. These were sort of a side effect of the **Origins/Son of Origins** trade paperbacks that would reprint some of the crucial stories, tell the origins, and were peppered by these prose bits with **Stan Lee's** hype-man lingo to connect the dots. Anyway, I'd looked at them but not bought them. But he got the **Spider-Man** one, and I borrowed it.

I can still remember taking most of Saturday just absorbed in it, mostly **Ditko** art. I realized I needed to own the thing and made a trade with the kid for it to a **Dungeons & Dragons** action figure. He thought he'd really taken me on the deal, but I knew better. I still got that **Spidey** book, and it's still got the cover where I scratched out his name where he put it to mark his ownership, heh. "*Hey, Jason Whitehead, if you're reading this...you still got that Dungeons & Dragons figure? Cause I still got the Spider-Man book.*" I'd eventually cop the other three in that series when they had the book fests again: **Hulk, Fantastic Four, and Captain America**.

What got planted in my brain was that there was a history and development to all those characters. Not only that but that--despite **Marvel's** shaky history with artists--it attached names to artists for me. All of a sudden I realized that super-dupers didn't come from some magical ether distinct from human beings, like the Mount Olympus where super-heroes lived above the world, but they represented idiosyncratic creations by idiosyncratic individuals, or a group of individuals.

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To get back around to your question about what was influencing me drawing. There was a pivotal year, whatever year it was that I was in fifth grade, so I must have been 10 going into 11, which puts us back to that 1986/7 timeframe, my mom and dad were separated, and to save money she rented out our house in Jackson county and we rented one side of duplex/apartment in the "*big city*" (*it's really very small*) of Berea, Kentucky. But compared to my uber-rural childhood, this was downright urbane. While it was just me and her in the apartment, we lived on the same street as my cousin and his mother and father, and me and that cousin grew up as close as brothers.

I was allowed to ride my bicycle across the street and across the street there was the "*Mini-Mall*," an indoor flea market, as well as a **Piggly Wiggly** supermarket that had a decent newsstand with new comics and furthermore a drug store (*maybe a Rite-Aid?*) that had an interesting magazine/comics rack. Not only that but also a video store was across the street, as well as a convenience store on my actual side of the street that stocked magazines and comics. I have a clear memory of that video store having the 1960s **Marvel** animated shows and renting them. Like **Jack Kirby** comics that moved. And **Ralph Bakshi** worked on the **Spider-Man** ones from that era? That's nuts, but it also means he was coming at me to influence me, along with **Ditko's Spidey-art**, but I'll loop back to **Bakshi** later.

I also liked to skateboard, if ever too rural to ever really be a "*skateboarder*," so I can remember seeing **Pushead's** art on covers of **Thrasher** magazine before **Pushead's** art became so ubiquitous that he was even making album covers for **Rush**. Wait, the internet tells me that **Pushead** did **NOT** do the cover for **Roll the Bones** in 1991, what I'm remembering is my buddy's t-shirt for that album that **Pushead** did draw/design, heh.

Before that, I could ride my bicycle down our quarter of a mile long gravel drive-way through the woods and encounter nothing but the end of that but a road and more nothing but neighbors, no stores. I mean, there weren't any stores, of any bike-riding distance, so that experience that I think is typical of a lot of urban/suburban kids of traveling with access to shopping/browsing as a kid on a bike I didn't get until all of a sudden, I did. That "*Mini-Mall*" was pivotal, as somebody had a booth there and were selling lots of 1970s and earlier 80s comics for very cheap. My cousin and I got addicted to collecting things from there, and this was encouraged by our parents, as nobody had much money at the time and he and I were thoroughly entertained buying these comics for something like a quarter a pop.

Also in this mix were **MAD** magazines and **CRACKED** magazines. Reading issues of those that were ten years or so before my time was something else and then led me to seeking out the new issues. Funny, a couple years into it I realized **CRACKED** was a knock-off (*I was absorbing them as equals from the same sarcastic pond of ink*), and then I got "*ashamed*" of my **CRACKED** collection. Only years, following, after that, did I realize I was seeing in the new ones editor **Mort Todd** publishing **Peter Bagge** and **Dan Clowes**, so I retro-actively realized I had good taste or at least exported early, in a different context, two of who were to become the big wigs of 90s "*alternative comics*."

I got hip to **Aragones's "Groo"** somehow in all of this, and I loved that, as I loved **Conan**, especially the big black and white **Savage Sword of Conan** magazine style comics, which seemed to be at almost every newsstand back in that time period. Always loved the **Millius** movie, which I don't recall seeing in 1982, as I was probably too young for it (*although I remember seeing other movies from '82 in the theater*), but I would have seen it on VHS and/or in an edited for broadcast television version.

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Funny side note, as I mentioned suddenly having a video store across the street from me, I did, in Jackson County, have access to a video store. Although by "video store" I must clarify that our neighbors owned a side business of a television repair shop (*then later, television and VCR repair*) and in a corner of it, Mike (*the owner*) had simply put out what amounted to his own VHS collection, this must have been circa 1984-5? Maybe 25 to 50 titles?

Anyway, once we had our first VCR, that was my "**Little House on the Prairie**" experience of walking maybe about a mile to rent a video, down this big hill behind us, past a pond, and coming in the back way on what was basically a trail through the woods to the neighbor's property to the little stand-alone shack that housed the shop which set on the paved road that went past the front of their house. *IN MY DAYS KIDS I HAD TO WALK A MILE THROUGH THE WOODS TO RENT A MOVIE WITH LESS THAN FIFTY CHOICES AND I WAS GLAD TO HAVE THOSE CHOICES!!!!* Hahaha.

Back to Berea, so I'm aged 10 or 11 and absorbing comics from before my time as meanwhile I've got access to new stuff. I stumbled across the **Comico** run of **Wagner's "Grendel"** when the **Pander Brothers** were doing that art (*for some reason, the pharmacy across the street stocked Comico titles*). That was a real *eureka* moment for me, because it was a character that had no connection to any of the big corporations, and, even though it was slick and in color, it was more subversive, more quirky and more explicit relative to what I was used to in comics, except for maybe **Savage Sword**. I'm sure I started checking out the new **Heavy Metal** mags at some point in here, but I don't remember them from this Berea year, so much as a bit later. And, really, from that late 80s/early 90s period of **Heavy Metal** what I mostly remember are the **Milo Manara** bits...that stuff was hot, especially for a pubescent kid, but I digress.

I'm painting all this out to set the scene that all of this was influencing me to draw. I wanted to draw comics. The first thing I remember drawing that was comics was "**Superly Stupid**," which was my very primitive/basic parody super-hero character, which my mom reproduced for me at work on an ancient mimeograph style machine that printed out the pages in blue ink. Funny, I don't remember doing anything with that, it's just the fact that it was reproduced art rather than my original, drawn in pencil pages made it seem more "*real*," more like an actual comic. I guess I was made for the spook racket of reproducing art in book-form.

Oh, another influence from outside of comics was catching the **Baskshi-led Mighty Mouse** reboot from the late 80s. That was priming me not only for finding **Bakshi's** older stuff but prepping me for **John K** and things **Ren & Stimpy** to come (*or even prepping me for the Liquid Television series, but I'll get back to that*). I'll also digress to say if "**Superly Stupid**" was what I started on, with parody, my next big thing I worked on as a kid was a **Spider-Man "homage"** of "**The Incredible Insect**." I oddly did something like fifteen issues of that, got wrapped up in making it and my previously mentioned cousin and I got into a system of "*distribution*" in which I'd draw the thing, we'd manage to make a few photocopies and he'd convince a few of the kids in his grade to buy them, as the younger kids were more impressed by the comics. I was this distant "*older*" artist, mysterious. I've run into people not that long ago that have brought up they still got some of the comics they bought from my cousin. One of them is an elementary school teacher and will bring in the old artifacts of my "**Insect**" comics to show the kids as an example of something somebody did when they were the same age as her students.

If I keep dancing around early drawing influences, one thing that really sticks out in my mind is checking out from the Berea College library an edition of **Bernie Wrightson's** illustrated **Frankenstein**. Even

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today, I think back, and I have this memory, both very defined/clear and fuzzy through the fog of time, but what's foggy is what's around the book/art/illustrations not the illustrations themselves, heh. It was a definitive moment of looking at the linework and just being gob smacked: How does anybody get ink on paper to do...*that*?!

I could digress all over the place. But it's not really a nostalgia trip, but a memory trip. I mean, what I got nostalgia for is that nervous system zap of discovery. I am addicted to that zap and still cultivate it now. Not only the zap that comes through experiencing other art but the zap that one gets from making something. The flash of discovery is more my addiction than addicted to collecting, but those two things also overlap. Collecting is always a fine line between what feeds my artmaking and what is distracting me from artmaking, heh.

Even if television and home video delivered eyeball kicks to my brain, I was totally invested in art/comics on the page by age 10-12. Any magazine that had to do with comics/comic culture, I'd snatch it if I could. I remember subscribing to this thing called "**Comics Career Newsletter**" and even getting a letter published in it, when I was age 11 or 12. And I remember having issues of **Amazing Heroes**, the "*mainstream*" comics mag that **Fantagraphics** did in the 80s, adjacent to **The Comics Journal**. That was a good thing to get a hold of to prep me for the world of **TCJ/Kim Thompson & Gary Groth**.

And if comic book stores were in short supply in the rural diaspora, the other influence I should not deny is fumbling across the black and white boom stuff. If I never really saw any underground comics until later, at least what comic book stores I could locate and visit irregularly were, direct market style, stocked with what was coming out in the late 1980s/early 90s. Seeing those black and white comics and, while there was a whole lot of trashier/cheaper versions of things aspiring to be mainstream, it made the idea of being able to make, publish, and distribute comics seem attainable even if one was not working for **DC** and **Marvel**. I remember **Vince Locke's** art in the **Deadworld** series. If **Wrightson's** inks seemed like something only the gods could manifest, **Locke's** art, while masterful in many ways seemed, for me, something I might be able to aspire to or even achieve. All this before really opening the can of underground/outsider worms.

SKREE: Did you buy LPs growing up or have them around the house? Were they something you studied? My first two favorite bands were AC/DC and KISS and their album covers did not disappoint.

J.T. D: As far as your question about LPs, they were around. But my parents were not major music buying freaks, so their collection was largely middle of the road, very easy-listening/nice 1970s. I feel like I'm in age-group that's a real border time for formats of music. My buddy **Brian** from **the Smacks!** is only a couple of years older than me but as a consequence he owned a heck of a lot more stuff as a youth in the LP format. All the first stuff I had that was my own were singles on seven inches at forty-five rotations per minute. I had only a handful of my own LPs, but it seems to me like I can remember going to music stores that were evenly split between albums and cassette tapes, and then that album section just got smaller and smaller until it disappeared to almost if not all nothing to all cassettes. And the age for me to buy albums was definitely the cassette era. Then it seems like the spot in stores where the albums disappeared from, not long after compact discs started to show up, just a few at first, and then in reverse action of the LPs, they were pushing out the cassettes until music stores, at least mainstream/chain ones, were nothing but CDs.

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I have that thing where LPs are more a thing of getting into collecting music in the mid 90s/late teens and my 20s. Independent/punk bands were still releasing music on/in that format and collecting older records was a (*relatively*) cheap deal. And the more I got into music, the more I realized just how much interesting/cool stuff had never been reissued on cassette much less on CD. And just the sheer "fun" of engaging with LPs as physical artifacts, especially with album art/design.

The fact that vinyl has made a resurgence is cool (*especially from my friends who own and/or worked at indie record stores that survived through the 90s to now*), but also it's isolated me more from collecting vinyl. For one thing, now you've got stores selling at inflated prices major label records from the 70s & 80s that sold millions of copies (*and thus will never be truly rare*) dominating the scene. If reissues of the **Eagles** catalogue on 180 gram *blah blah blah* are pushing everything out, and people are pricing **John Denver** albums like they're some rare gem ("*Look, Mabel: it's an ORIGINAL PRESSING of the Carpenters Greatest Hits!!!! Can I borrow some money to afford that? I just love vinyls, don't you?*"), then that's why you'll find me these days buying CDs again, ha. The mooks took over my hobby. And apologies to **the Carpenters**, as I do dig them. **The Eagles** and **John Denver**, not so much. This "dad rock" was just the dusty, bulk over in the corner for cheap at the apex of my vinyl collecting days (*which coincided with the apex of being a weekly, on-air DJ at WRFL in Lexington, but that's another story--and the influence of WRFL upon me is also a whole other can of worm-stories*).

I'm slipping forward in time. I was thinking back to the late 80s turning into the early 90s. All this talk reminded me of these weird. "**Feed Your Head**" spots that aired on **MTV**. **Aidan Quinn** reading from **Kafka**. **Sherilyn Fenn** reading from **Anais Nin** (*hot stuff!!!*). Then, *blammo*: **Liquid TV** showing up. Besides **Mike Judge** animation seconds before **Beavis and Butthead** would take over the 90s, I'm not sure when I realized "**Dog Boy**" was based on **Charles Burns**'s comics, but that definitely got me ready for **Burns**. Hard to explain what a real smack to the gib it was to see some of these surreal/weird things actually broadcast (*or at least coming in through the cable*) on television, especially hard to explain to younger folks.

Looping back around to music, I mentioned **Jim Morrison** before when mentioning **Alice Cooper**, and the invocation of **The Doors** can get some folks running for shelter, and I do get that. Although between **Oliver Stone**'s movie and reading about the band, I ended up getting further into **Beat literature**, **Antonin Artaud**, and when I'd read **John Densmore** going on about **John Coltrane**, I realized that **Coltrane**/jazz was music I should educate myself about, especially since I was a drummer (*even playing in high school band, a drummer who could read music!*). You can trash **The Doors** all you want, but they pointed me in interesting directions, which I think would be hard to argue with.

Enter into the picture my buddy Ed, about three years older than me. He got obsessed with the inclusion of the **Velvet Underground**'s "**Heroin**" on the **Doors** movie soundtrack and started tracking anything/everything by **VU** and/or **Lou Reed** after that. Which was a moment for me to realize that something--such as the **Velvets**--could be "*important*" and widely recognized, but not be, relatively speaking, popular in any mainstream sense of the term. It's hard to keep the kids on the farm once they've heard "**White Light / White Heat**."

There's a kind of slip-and-slide from age 12 to 18. Ed would go off to college before me and end up as a DJ at **WRFL** at University of Kentucky in Lexington. So I ever-more quickly got involved in a wider sense of underground/alternative culture, with Ed serving as a conduit to the Lexington scene (*or even WRFL's*

library of music) before I'd actually move out on my own. In retrospect it seems like if one year I learned about the **Velvets** and finding my first **Coltrane** record, then by the next year or year after that I was listening to all the post punk from the 80s that was totally foreign to me just a year or two early, **Sun Ra**, **Hasil Adkins**, **Billy Childish & Sexton Ming**, **the Cramps**, etc.

The zine--**Abortion Stories** (named, in fact, after a title of a **Jim Morrison** poem, ha) --that Ed and I started when I think I was still middle school age (?) would evolve over five issues and we got hip to **Factsheet Five** and were reviewed in **Factsheet Five**. With Ed as my "contact" in the "big city" of Lexington, we were getting our zine in the stores that would carry such things, and then the guy in charge of the periodicals section at the indie bookstore would open his own place--**Hypnotic Eye**--which was like a newsstand/magazine store that also had anything underground/alternative that had any kind of distribution, and the owner, **Phil Francis** and his partner in it, **Starlen Baxter**, was to become a real nerve-center/influence.

And I'd also see **Bill Widener** there, sometimes working behind the counter, and **Bill** was and is a King Hell cartoonist and pal of mine. Besides being a major presence in town, **Bill** was publishing comics on his own and through the **Caliber** imprint slightly before my time. If we've got any **Laughing Hyenas** fans in the studio audience, that's **Bill's** art on the cover of their 1992 **Touch and Go** album, "**Crawl**." Of course, if **Bill** became a pal, and even a self-avowed fan of my band (*or, I think his own words were he'd seen us play more than any other band, which I guess makes him a fan, heh*), **the Smacks!** as a teenager, **Bill** was a big deal who I didn't know personally. I remember buying a stack of comics at **Hypnotic Eye** before I knew him--but I knew who he was--and **Bill** looking through them as he was ringing them up and then looking up at me, saying, "Good taste." I was, like, bowing at the compliment as if in feudal Japan, ha, backing out the store towards the door without turning around, a peasant disengaging from the presence of royalty.

Before I would move to Lexington at age 18, I was aware that **Aaron Lee** was making the zine **Blue Persuasion** and **Mary Burt** was doing **Sad Magazine**. As a teenager, still at home, I was corresponding with **Aaron** via the mail, so when I showed up in person, he knew me as this crazy, enthusiastic kid from the provinces having arrived in town. So, when I'd get an issue of **Peter Bagge's Hate** and see that "**Pee Bag**" was hyping both **Lee** and **Burt** and his pages. And now buying things like **Eightball**, **Palookaville**, etc. I'd notice **Mary Burt's** letters in those books. In fact, when I met **Seth** in, uh, 2014, I think, one of our topics of conversation was what ever happened to **Mary Burt**, heh. Speaking of stores, **Aaron** worked the video rental section in the record store **Cut Corner**--recommending to me all the best and worst of weird movies--and just upstairs in the same building **Mary** worked at the old hippie/weirdo bookstore, and so the person whose name I'd see in the alternative comics of the day I'd see behind the counter. These places I was hitting as a teenager before I moved to town, and then I was living there.

And I'm not going to oversell Lexington, but as a university town of a certain size it represents a strange fulcrum. I mean, **Queen Itchy** aka **Jenn Nixon** aka **Jenn Ryan** (*last I checked she was/is Johnny Ryan's wife?*) of the **Shit & Garbage** zine-fame was living in town (*because of her contact with Mary and Aaron*)

and also working at the local Kinko's. My pal **Robert Beatty** is, like, king of album art and illustration, moving from being a dude in the noise band **Hair Police** to doing art for **The Weekend**, he's basically a mainstream artist, at this point. What's odd about Lexington is the diversity of the folks who are known beyond the Fayette County line. If **Robert** is a weirdo/experimentalist *Arty McFartsy*, on the other hand there's **Nine Pound Hammer**, southern-fried cow punk that was a **Crypt Records** label staple that birthed **Blaine**'s moving on to Nashville and forming **Nashville Pussy**. **Sturgill Simpson** is a big deal as the modern face of Alternative Country, but I remember him as **John** not **Sturgill**, and I remember the punk-country band **Sunday Valley** that he played in with my pals **Eddie** and **Billy** (*RIP*) long before he was a big deal solo artiste. I could kind of go on with more examples of "*People I know from Lexington who are artists and/or in bands you may have heard of but probably didn't realize they are from/started in Lexington, Kentucky,*" ha. You can ask me about **Robert Kirkman** or **My Morning Jacket** or whatever. But then I'd just tell you about hanging out with **Sam Shepard**. As I said to my late friend **Tom Spurgeon**, if you're going to name-drop, why mess around?

Well, that's slipping through, or ahead in time again in a big way. **MTV**. **VHS**. Comics as vector that gives one the art-virus, with a copy of the new **Factsheet Five** as a portal to the world of zines, to go. Get me to the comic book store on time, or: how to get from **Jim Morrison** to **Lux Interior** in three easy-to-learn dance steps without really trying, or: name-dropping amongst the dead and the Pulitzer prize winners. Today, **Bernie Wrihston**, tomorrow the world. Preferably on vinyl. What were we talking about?

SKREE: Honestly, I don't remember exactly what we were talking about but I'm happy with the journey so far. You started building your skills as a visual artist and a musician at a young age, so I imagine you figured out early on that the two went together like peanut butter and chocolate.

Cartooning can be a very singular and personal expression but creating music tends to lead artists to collaborating with likeminded folks. What was the road you travelled to get to Brian Manley with The Smacks!, the Cheeseburger and Fries duo you're in with Jeffery Scott Holland, and the other bands you've been part of?

J.T. D: I keep thinking of this sphere and then in the sphere, different ways that sphere is divided, yet it's all the same circle, within the globe. All of which to say there's the isolated, personal practice of being the lone-worker in the workshop, preferably the worker invisible in that workshop (*and yes, I'm lapsing into quoting Philip K. Dick quoting an old Sufi saying, and neither his quotation of that, nor my quoting PKD may be actually accurate, but, alas: the pseudo-science of attribution, accuracy being more fantasy or best guess than fact*). And then there's the world outside the workshop/studio, interacting and perhaps collaborating with others.

If we're sort of casting back through time to examine childhood, and especially being a rural kid, then, ya know, entertaining oneself with the act of drawing on paper is to cultivate a skill to keep oneself from becoming bored. Plus, drawing was encouraged by my parents. Even in church. One of my main memories of attending church--which we did a lot as a kid, but that basically stopped once my parents split up--is being on the floor between the pews, drawing or coloring, etc. Like I said, I think, I had a large extended family all living in close proximity, but then I was also an only child, so no matter how much of a social life I had as a kid, there were also lots of time alone. And I did grow up essentially surrounded in every direction by a radius of a mile or two of wilderness. So I spent a lot of time exploring the woods,

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but I also spent a lot of time in the house, when there weren't any other kids around. Good training to become an artist.

To back it up to music. My father was (*and still is*) musical. He plays piano and enjoys singing (*which he mostly does in church; he and his second wife stuck with churchy stuff, while I haven't much darkened the doors since I was a kid*). We had a piano in the house. And in second and third grade, as I think I'm remembering it right, I was taking piano lessons. I enjoyed the piano. What I didn't enjoy was recitals. The teacher would have her students perform ever few months in front of an audience, and I hated that shit because here I'd do all my practicing and be playing fine at home, but then nerves would take over performing, and I'd play badly. My kid brain revolted against the embarrassment.

As I was moving towards getting interested more in the outrageous and the rocking (*even as a kid, with most of that interest being pop music of the day, before metal and such started hitting me later*), I basically decided, "*I don't want to play piano anymore. I want to play drums.*" And, to my credit as a kid, I stuck by that. If I quit taking piano lessons when I was in the third grade, I suppose I didn't actively study any music (*although I remember still practicing on the piano at home*) until I got the chance to play the drums. The way things worked in the country school system of Jackson County, there were no music program for kids until you hit the sixth or maybe it was the seventh grade, at which point you could do "*middle school band*," but being there was no actual middle school, all the kids from sixth, seventh, and eighth grade got to ride buses to the single, central high school of the county for band.

Before that, when I was either in the fifth or sixth grade, or maybe during both, my mom, who was a teacher, had a student at the high school who was also a band student and a drummer (*I know he went on to study music in college and became a high school band teacher himself*), and she struck a deal for him to give me drum lessons for a nominal fee. And this guy was the son of a preacher man, literally, so all his drums and musical equipment were set up in the basement of McKee Baptist Church. So once a week or every other week, whatever it was, we'd meet for drum lessons. He taught me in a very proper, old school academic way. I was not one of those drummers who just started banging on a set until I finally could actually play. We started on the single, snare drum, working with actual sheet music for percussion, and then once I "*graduated*" from the single, snare drum, we'd add another element, then once I had the two together, add another, until I'd finally "*graduated*" to trying a full drum set.

My instructor, who himself was a high school student, but as a kid who was 17-8 and could drive, he seemed like an adult to me, was way into the notion of electronic drums as the future, so I ended up buying his used set of Ludwig "*Rockers*" acoustic set when he was generating the scratch to buy his expensive Yamaha set of electronic drums. My mom, guilty during the rough patch of separation and divorce (*but good for me, ha*), dipped into some money she had saved from a well-to-do, relatively speaking, great aunt and uncle (*who are still alive as of this writing*) who would send me a check of 100 dollars (*as I remember it*) every birthday. That's what bought the drums.

And I was allowed to practice/bash on 'em, at least during certain hours of the day. Luckily, we had this long, rectangular house, and the drums were at one end, my mom's room at the other, and then, as I said, we were surrounded by woods, so it wasn't like banging the bongos was going to perturb neighbors. And, hey, I was playing that same set of drums all the way through to circa 2006 or so when

my bandmate in **Kitty Twister & the Hot Dogs** bought a set of Gretsch drums for me to use. But that Ludwig kit I played through maybe seventh grade when I got them all the way up to **Hasil Adkins** playing them live several times, countless shows, recordings & tours.

You may want to cut all these details down or out completely, ha. Suffice to say I moved through the piano, into the drums, and by the time I was in the seventh grade I was taking a bus for "*band class*" at the high school, and then once I was in high school, I was in band. Man, our band...I should see if I can dig up pictures, we were so under-funded and in such a poor region, our uniforms were red polyester with big, superfly collars. Leftovers from the 70s, in the late 80s/early 90s. The trousers were black with white lines running down them. The pants weren't bell-bottoms, but the white lines flared out down the pant-leg creating the illusion of bell-bottoms. I guess real bell-bottom uniform pants in the seventies were out of the school's price-range. A few years later and with seventies fashion regarded as retro rather than out-of-date they might have been considered cool. But at the time we all looked like refugees from **Three's Company**. "***Mister Roper's Authentic All-Hillbilly Marching Band!***"

Oh, and before I forget. So, in that period that I was riding the bus from elementary school to the high school for band, there would be high school band members hanging around before class and such, the band room was a nerve center for band nerds, and the Goddess knows I was one. I can clearly remember the teacher--Mrs. Tincher--talking to one of the high school students, Dustin Pierce. I don't remember what led to it, but I can always remember somebody accusing Dustin of something, and Tincher turned to him and said something like, "*Oh, Dustin wouldn't do something like that. He's a good guy Aren't you, Dustin?*" The kid quietly nodding. Well, old Dustin soon thereafter made it national headline news. He took a class at hostage by gunpoint. The class was Mrs. Clarke's (*I had her for World and American History in high school*). He claimed to be inspired by the **Stephen King/Bachman** novella, "***Rage***." In fact, if you ever watch **A&E's Biography of King**, there's a moment in which he mentions the incident (*although he wrongly identifies the location as "Lexington," not Jackson County*) and then there's a cut to news footage from that day, a helicopter shot of my old high school. This kind of thing wouldn't even make the news today, I don't think. Dustin didn't actually kill anyone. ***Kentucky Youth Frees 11 Hostages and Surrenders - The New York Times (nytimes.com)***

Back to the "*subject*." There's working in isolation or being in isolation. Even though I was doing band and such, it wasn't like it was all that easy to hang out with or find comrades with the same interests as me. But I did always like the idea of joining a gang or a band. Or joining a band was like joining a gang. I did have a band—I don't remember what we called it--when I was a junior in high school, with two other kids, a long-hair, red head who looked like **Dave Mustaine**, **Demian Gover** and another dude who was in band with me, **Jason Kirby**. All we did was practice some covers and daydream a bit. **Demian** wasn't in school band, he was just addicted to playing guitar and everything rock/metal, and was a solid player.. The sum-total of that project was playing the high school talent show. I remember we rocked the house with our cover of **Sabbath's "Paranoid."**

Even being raised on **Marvel**, the "*Bullpen*" always made it seem like comics were a collaborative, gang like project. And getting into bands, from classic rock through metal to punk, I regarded all that as gang-like, to join a gang. Getting into **Beat** writing and realizing **Ginsberg**, **Kerouac**, **Burroughs** & company

were sort of a gang of roving misfits. Or even as a teenager I remember reading that big mama-jama **Jackson Pollock** biography that **Ed Harris** would later base his **Pollock** biopic on, as influential in thinking of all those New York based artists as a gang of hard-drinking art addicts. Later, I'd follow in the footsteps of **Pollock** and **Philip Guston**, who drove from NYC to New Hampshire to behold **Jose Clemente Orozco's "Epic of American Civilization"** mural at Dartmouth (*I was in the region summer 2011 to summer 2012, as an official/unofficial visiting artist at the Center for Cartoon Studies, which is just about a fifteen minute drive from Dartmouth*). And I think especially being a rural kid, the notion that I might someday live somewhere and be part of a "*gang*" of art-music-literature-comics making cats was always appealing.

You mentioned **Jeffrey Scott Holland**, and I haven't talked about him yet. I did mention **Ed** and **Ed** was a conduit to **Jeff**. He was a **WRFL** DJ, sold antiques and such at an indoor flea-market in Richmond, KY and bounced around central and eastern KY. Ten years or thereabouts older than me, a writer and artist and musician, I caught snips of his old "**Rockabilly Rules**" program on **WRFL** and then later inherited/took over his "**Late, Late Show**" at the station with **Brian Manley**, which we co-hosted, which was like a non-commercial radio station's version of "*oldies*" programming, but the only parameter on the music was time: we didn't play anything made past the late 1960s. "*From 1869 to 1969,*" was our motto.

I get ahead of myself. **Ed** trailblazing, older brother-like, ahead of me to Richmond and then Lexington/**WRFL**, the great urbane expanse of central Kentucky, beyond the remote, isolated east, hahaha. **JSH**, for short, whom **Ed** met before me, introduced me to all kinds of hipster stuff. **JSH**--and he through **Ed**--really got us listening to **Billy Childish** and **Sexton Ming**. Plus, **JSH** never met a crispy, lo-fi country/blues/garage rock record he didn't assay and cling to his breast. So, his record collection, reading habits--including the literary, the fringe, and comics--and just his status as a *Collector Supreme* all made him a master relative to my apprentice. Not only that, he was an influence on embracing a Kentucky identity, not trying to distance myself from it, while at the same time being interested in the worlds beyond Kentucky's borders. I mean, later **JSH** would write the "**Weird Kentucky**" installment for the "**Weird USA**" series, a fella uniquely positioned for that gig.

As we became pals, **Jeff** already had a back-log of art-fuckery behind him. He and his pal were behind (*or were they?*) the rural-**Residents** style art/sound project of **Retrovirus & Opportunistic Infection**. And one of the few over-21 shows I was able to sneak into before I was 21 was seeing **JSH** doing--with his girlfriend at the time, **Kelly**--their two-piece country/garage rock/abilly act, **Formula LX-321** (*I think that's what they were called*). Besides that, **JSH** was gladly putting out cassette tapes of various projects on his **Creeps Records** micro-label. As I was getting, through **Jeff's** influence and following my own nose, into more "*ancient*" country and blues music, and archaic jazz from before the rise of **Charlie Parker** (*and nothing against Bird or bop or every/anything else that follows, but jazz once it became an accepted/academic form often ignores the early/rag-time or New Orleans street/bar music roots up through swing, etc. in favor of the self-conscious jazz of the second half of the 20th century*), my interests aligned with **Jeff's** and we get into busking in and around Lexington, Richmond, Berea, wherever we roamed together (*and often we roamed on the hunt in regional junk shops, thrift store, flea markets*). I wasn't playing in any bands at this point, and to set the scene, we were cranking up our street performances was, like age 19 to 21 for me, so I wasn't even legally drinking yet, so to speak. And I

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almost forgot that in this era, too, **JSH** and **Kelly** were co-hosting his **Late, Late Show** radio show, of which I was an avid listener.

Influenced by the aforementioned **Childish & Ming**--and also the **Flat Duo Jets**--and many other things besides, but the **Childish/Ming** connection was a real shot in the arm of the idea of professional amateurs. Writing poetry, making weird lo-fi surreal home recordings, playing in "punk rock" bands, doing it all at King's Island, so to speak, with all my or **Jeff's** various interests, that made sense. Why can't we do it all? And if we're not perfect, who gives a shit about perfection much less professionalism? Better to be authentic, in and of the moment. A couple of **Jethro Bodines** at large in the diaspora. So, we were not chasing gigs at bars or clubs or even being a proper band. We were more buskers engaged in entertaining ourselves and, also, performing for the tape recorder. We didn't always, but most often, had a tape recorder recording.

My friend **Jesse Saxon** always brings up a story to me whenever I see him of this mid to late 90s period. He remembers walking down the train tracks around Lexington as a short cut, he turns a corner, and encounters **JSH** & I crouching over by the tracks, performing for an audience of...no one. Heh. **Jesse** would become a great pal of mine (*in fact he and his girlfriend at the time helped me deliver **Hasil Adkins** from West Virginia and back on the initial gig we put together for **Hasil** in Lexington in the summer of either 1999 or 2000...I'd have to go back and check on that to be sure*), but on this train track encounter, he was just recognizable to me as a dude I'd seen around town. **Jesse** didn't stop, as he tells it, just kept walking by as we never stopped performing, and--the way he likes to tell it at least--**JSH** and I seemed to resent his presence. He emphasizes that we weren't performing for him or anybody else but for ourselves/the tape recorder.

I mean, for the record, I remember before I really started playing with **Jeff** but had met him, one day I into him in the same neighborhood over by some old tobacco warehouses as the train tracks/**Jesse** encounter. He was standing in the doorway of the defunct **Boot's Bar** (*where **Little Enis the All-American Left-Handed Guitar Player**, performed in the 1960s & 70s, whom **Ed McClanahan**--he shows up later in my story--popularized*). **Jeff** had a battery powered, portable guitar amp, and was just performing for the ether, or perhaps also performing for a tape recorder. I stopped and chatted, but it did seem like I was interrupting some private ritual in forcing **JSH** into mundane conversation, heh. So, I can see why **Jesse** regarded us the same way.

I mean, we sort of saw ourselves as **Homer & Jethro** meets **Slim & Slam**, in a post beatnik/ **Cap'n Beefheart/Childish & Ming** universe with plenty of Kentucky twang. As **Jeff** liked to say to any audience, "*We're **Cheeseburger & Fries** and we've got that high and lonesome sound. He's high, and I'm lonesome.*". At first, this performance art/busking (*and, hey, we did sometime make tips/perform on populated corners...we were popular with homeless people, as I recall, once getting five dollars from a lady who just wanted us to do "**Your Cheating Heart**" a few times, over and over, again, which we gladly obliged...and even tried to give her money back to her, but she was offended if we didn't accept, a memory that's always stuck with me*). What was I saying? Oh yeah, at first, we didn't have a name. We were just doing what we were doing. One day **Jeff** was carney-barking at passersby: "*We'll play y'all a song! What do you want to hear? If we don't know it, we'll make it up! We'll provide this special service and only ask for a small donation of some sparge change, or even a cheeseburger!*" I think I tossed in, in

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my sorta second-position hype-man role, "*We'll even do a song for just some fries!*" Thus we became **Cheeseburger & Fries**. **JSH** as **Cheeseburger**, me as **Fries**.

The best of our moments were probably never really captured on tape. To have seen us, you'd have to have been there, as they say. Although **Jeff** has a whole, literal shoebox full of various recordings, which only a tiny fraction have been released in any form. Although the two cassettes we made back in the first flush of our days--**Rural & Unusual Punishment**, which **Jeff** put together, or **Gray Hawk Fever** which I put together--had some legs in the mid to late 90s. I remember a guy from Antioch--the hippie school in Ohio around where comedian **Dave Chappelle** famously lives in greater Yellow Springs--who got a hold of one of these tapes reported through a mutual friend he was obsessively listening to it as he was somewhere off in Europe working as a shepherd for a summer, heh.

So by the time we accepted to do our first indoor gig, at a legitimate venue (*a coffeehouse in Georgetown, KY, near Lex*), which was an invitation by a guy who had been exposed to our busking and cassette releases, we basically were uncomfortable, as if to put the **Cheeseburger & Fries** deal into a "show," in which we were ostensibly supposed to perform during a specified time, really did feel like a bit of a sell-out, an existential crisis. But we did it and were popular that night at what was ostensibly **Troy Teegarden's** first **SoUP festival**, which is a whole story unto itself. **Troy** would go on to do lots of things, besides the festival, and for a while was *King Shit* of small press literary journals for a run several years with his **SoUP zine**, and even a corresponding, nationally syndicated literary/arts radio program.

Then the **Cheeseburger & Fries** thing kind of snow balled. **Troy** had us back as stand-alone performers on specific nights, and we had a small following in the small(er) college town of Georgetown. However, the way **JSH** and I structured our performances, we never took breaks, we never "*broke character*." **JSH**, to his credit, was more adamant about this than me. Hell, I like to--then and now--smoke cigarettes and take smoke breaks. However, this was an age in which smoking indoors was no problem, even in the late 90s in KY. At the coffee shop, we would perform for three to four hours. But unlike a usual band with sets and breaks, we just remained "*on*" the whole time. As **Jeff** would put it: we take our breaks on stage. So, if we weren't playing music all that time, we were talking/performing/staying in character (*just as we'd done outside on street corners, busking*).

A bar in Lexington hired us on to do a weekly gig on the slow night of Tuesdays (*as I remember it*). This worked for a month or two, but then the owner's wife was covering for the main bartender/owner, and she really didn't like us, not like the owner, who enjoyed having us, and then that weekly gig went away. But for a stretch there every week we'd start in character and then stay in character the whole evening until last call. That did establish us as an "*indoor*" act in Lexington, and lots of people who caught us in that era will still bring it up to me. There was definitely a time in Lexington in which I could just be walking down the street and someone I didn't know would stop me and invariably say, "*Hey, ain't you Hamburger? I saw you guys at the Blah Blah Blah.*"

Add to this mix our mutual pal **Brian Manley**, who was the Program Director at **WRFL** when it started there. I knew **Brian** but we were not close pals until a couple or three years later, at the apex of **CH/FR** activity, and then **Brian**, who had married young, young and briefly, heh, was going through the wake of

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a divorce, and he was hanging out with us more. **Brian** owned a mandolin and would join in with us sometimes. We anointed him "**Eggroll**" somehow. So when we'd perform as a three-piece, it was by the anti-brevity moniker: "**Cheeseburger & Fries w/Eggroll.**" Also, it just came back to me that when **JSH** and the aforementioned **Kelly** went *Splitsville* as a couple, that really sparked more of us hanging out--as I also was recently dumped/single--so both with **Eggroll** and us, a lot of these shenanigans can be connected to starting up in times of guys without gals, venting spleens. Hell, no matter one's gender, etc. getting dumped/being heartbroken or just "*heartbroken*": always a good time to make art, gets the balls rolling. I gave this same advice to a young guy recently. "*Gal left ya, huh? Start that band you've been wanting to start.*"

This leads us into the waters of the fact that **JSH**, rocking his own "*No Show Jones*" reality principle--couldn't always be counted on to actually show up for gigs that had been booked/promoted. One gig he left us high and dry for, we just took a "*the show goes on*" adaptability and appeared as "**Eggroll & Fries,**" thus establishing that as a separate but related option/variation. Unlike **CH/FR** in which I'd usually be playing just a snare drum with brushes, **JSH** on acoustic guitar (*and then add Eggroll for mandolin/to taste*), when we'd do **Eggroll & Fries** it was like the world's worst or weirdest nightclub act, me as a front-man/singer, with just a mandolin for music. I always imagined it as if we thought we were some full orchestra, unaware it was just one guy singing and one guy playing mandolin. I mean, we covered **Elvis's "Kentucky Rain"** as **Eggroll & Fries**, if you can imagine (*or even would want to, if you can*).

In all this mix, **JSH** also had his notion of **The Kentuckians**--which was basically just **CH/FR** and/or with **Eggroll**--as an electric/full drum set act, with more of an emphasis on him as the leader/singer. And in our way embracing the Medway scene of **Childish & company** with our own Kentucky twang, we had all sorts of bands/acts within bands and acts, made up of the same few people in alternate versions. So, when **Brian** and I were hanging out and making home recordings without **Jeff** around, we also developed our own two-piece we called **The Smacks!** At first **the Smacks!** were like a side-project within side-projects but stood as the lone vehicle for **Manley's** song-writing, his own, and/or collaborative with me. I mean, hell, in this weird period of my early 20s, I even recorded a solo album, "**Sodajerkers & Jitterbugs,**" of which, as far as I know, doesn't exist in any form, although there may be one archived in the aforementioned shoebox, if that shoebox even still exists (*I'd have to ask JSH*).

But that's not all we were up to. Hell, there was **Holland's Jug Stompers** (*which did expand to like a rotating six to seven or even more membership*). That was **Jeff's** idea of our own jug band. I remember the first time we performed at the **Cardinal Deli (RIP)** in Berea, KY, the manager there said to me after the gig, in which I played mandolin: "*Hey, JT, I didn't know you played mandolin.*" I looked at the mandolin in my hand, looked back at him, shrugged, adding this authentic quip: "*I don't.*" We also had the **Appalachian Voodoo Ensemble** in which me and some of the same cast of characters as the **Holland's Jug Stompers** would make costumes/masks, and then go marching around obscure parts of central Kentucky. I wish I had a copy of the **AVE "Live Nude Chicken Wrestling"** cassette release, just edited together sounds of what got caught on the tape recorder we had on us as we moved through the landscape.

Anyway, I'll put us now in 1998. Jeff had made contact with **Sexton Ming** and arranged to do a **Creeps**

release of the **Ming's** solo album, "*Marshan Love Secrets*". Turned out that the **Ming's** partner, and later wife, **Ella Guru** was not a Brit but in fact a native of Columbus, Ohio. On a visit back to the states with **Ming** to see her parents, we booked an album-release gig for **Sexton**. I think we were supposed to perform as **The Kentuckians**, and I'm not certain if **The Smacks!** were officially on the bill--which would have been funny but not unlike us: two bands at one gig, made up of ostensibly three people, heh. Either way, despite the fact that **Manley** I drove up to Cbus, transporting and hosting **Sexton/Ella**, driving them back again the next day, and also having done most of the promotion/flyer hanging up around town for the gig, this was one of those nights in which **JSH** decided to pull a no-show. I'm sure he'll chalk it up to some problem he had that made missing the gig unavoidable, and I'll let **JSH** tell that story. This is my version.

Either way, we had to scramble to secure a bass and amp for **Ella**, since **Jeff** was supposed to supply that, too. He lived in Berea at the time and operated a record/bookstore (*which worked at, mostly on the weekends*), which is about half hour or forty-five-minute drive south of Lexington. The next day, I'd drive **Sexton** and **Ella** down to Berea to "surprise" **JSH**, which was all good and cordial. **Jeff** certainly didn't expect that. Anyways, the night of that gig was stressful and that was a turning point for **Brian** and I to emphasize **the Smacks!** more than to emphasize being **Jeff's** handy-men. Remember that **Eggroll & Fries** was founded as a solution to the problem of a **JSH** in absentia, ha. In retrospect, **Brian** and I were becoming more "*professional*" about music, more than **JSH** cared or could be, so I don't really blame him. His nature is his nature, for both the better and the worser (*and the same could be said of any/all of us*).

So from 1998 moving forward, even if we still did lots of stuff with **JSH**, **Brian** and I put more focused effort, if you can call it that, into being **the Smacks!** And my connection to **Ming** may never have happened if not for **JSH**, no-show gigs or not, and that friendship/collaboration rolls on to now. **Sexton** and I released a comic book--2019, "*Kentucky Pussy*," from **Nix**---that was based on work/an idea that began back in 2004 when I organized the **Ming's** final U.S. tour. In between 1998 and 2019, I published and illustrated **Sexton's** "*House of Nunn*" book in, uh 1999 (?) and a couple or three years later published his collection of poems illustrated by **Ella**, "*Choice Cut Fillets*." I've got a script from **Sexton** here now that we're talking about developing into another weirdo, comic book collaboration. And now I forgot what year, in the past decade or so, I illustrated one of **JSH's** novels. It was **Jeff** who first put a **Nick Tosches** book (*Country*) in my hand when I was about 19 or 20 and said, "*Here, kid; read this.*" And **Nick**, like **Ed McClanahan** shows up in my story later.

Anywho, I'd go on to do other bands, the all-girl group with me as the lone male, **The Dangels** (*pronounced like "Angels" with a "D," not the "Dangles" as in the Bangles*), and the half girl/half boy, **Miss Kitty Twister & the Hot Dogs**, with **Joe Turner**, who I admired from his earlier bands like **Baby Shit Brown** and **Stuck Pig** (*both of which featured albums and t shirts designed by the aforementioned Bill Widener*). I still remember **Stuck Pig**, like **Formula LX-321**, being one of those over 21 local shows I managed to get into when I was less than legal drinking age. So, there's this mid to late 90s on up through the end of the first decade of the 2000s in which I was very busy with music. But this whole time I was making zines early on, then moved more into chapbooks of art/writing (*something like 5 issues of **Abortion Stores** on to four issues of my solo zine, **Alright**, and something like over 20 chapbooks?*), and while I aspired to comics, and at least three of the books in this same time period I

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self-released were all more like one pagers, gag panels, weird comic book oriented sketchbook stuff (**Tom Spurgeon** reviewed one of these things in *The Comics Journal*, and in the age before everything went totally online, I remember the, again aforementioned, calling me on the landline to point out that review was in the new *TCJ*).

I say all that to get to saying that I'd followed comics, and things like **Dylan Williams's** and **Jeff LeVine's DESTROY ALL COMICS** was very influential on me. I experimented with comics, wanted to draw comics, but had not applied the discipline it takes to make a significant work of comics. By around about 2005-7, I drew a line in the sand for myself. I decided to quit dabbling in stand-alone art pieces (I'd had several exhibitions and even painted, etc.), and quit writing as if I might write a prose novel, etc. I even dabbled with video and wanting to make moving pictures/movies. I loved all these forms, and it became clear to me that to master a form, I might want to put all my eggs in the basket/form of comics, as I could still work with words/narrative and images. There was just no way I was going to be good at comics without focusing on the form to the exclusion (**or certain a diminishing of, in terms of my practice**) other forms. I mean, the words of **Dan Clowes** from an interview always stick in my mind: *there's no real reason for making comics unless that reason is you can't not make comics*. And I'd been making comics since I was a kid, but in this branching out, I wanted to bring back what I'd done in other forms and put them all back into comics.

All of that above to then now say that pretty much was the trajectory that led to my 2008 book, **In Tongues Illustrated**, a big oversized, honking thing. I've often called it an "*art book meets graphic novel*." One of my guideposts on that was trying to do my version of the original, oversized **Joe Coleman** comic book, **Woolverine Woo-bait**. **Fantagraphics** reprinted it a diminutive size, but the first edition is the real way to look at that work. I figured if **Joe** left comics for painting, I was going to leave art made for the wall to go back to comics, and maybe try to extend what I perceived in his accomplishment in comics up to **Woo-Bait** and do my own version of that. So once **In Tongues Illustrated** landed, that pretty much defines the start of me focusing/fixating on/with comics to now, circa 2022.

In music, I intentionally played the role of the drummer. I wasn't interested in being one of those drummers who are chomping at the bit to be a front man, move to guitar, or whatever. I wanted to contribute to the songwriting, the visuals of promotions, but I wanted to remain a drummer (*even if I'd play mandolin now and again, heh*). Besides focusing on comics, the other thing I got going on is the fact of my arthritis, a relatively rare type, that began when I was age 19-20. At this point all the fingers on both hands have mostly fused and/or deviated joints. Luckily, I'm on a medication that keeps the pain/inflammation/swelling in check and it doesn't really get in the way of the act of drawing. However, the last time I played drums behind a kit was getting together for a festival in Louisville with **Brian** to do the **Smacks!** I'd been off in New England, and in practicing for that gig and then doing the gig, which went over well, I was aware that I couldn't really control the sticks anymore up to own standards. I'd bash on the drums now and again (**one memorable gig is putting together a hybrid one-time only act from members of Brian's band at the time, Insect Policy, adding me and another gut to open for Gary Panter (for his band Devin, Ross & Gary)** in Lexington on a gig that a **Robert Beatty** put together...side note: I was sitting next to **Gary** in Lexington when he drank his first ever bourbon). But the point here is I realized I'd had a good run, it was a good time to hang up my spurs and put the sticks

back on the shelf.

However, all these collaborative experiences and projects led to me being more open and arguably able to do collaborative projects in comics. Making **In Tongues** Illustrated led to me being capable of taking on **Nick Toshes's Spud Crazy**. The style of which I developed by myself to approach some comics telling memories about **Hasil Adkins**, me trying to nail what a "*hillbilly comic by J.T. Dockery*" might look like. So, when **Ed McClanahan** came calling to adapt his **Juanita & the Frog Prince** to comic book form, I moved over some of what I did on my own to apply to adaptation/collaboration. All these things connect. It's like collaborating alters the personal or individual works and then the personal works bleed through to providing skills at collaborating. I'm definitely not that archetypal alone and uncompromising or unwilling/unable to collaborate type artist, although I can be, heh. But I enjoy collaboration and being in conversation with other artists. I may not be a conformist, but if reality provides me with the right kind of gang, I'll join it.

SKREE: We'll we've hit on lots of your friends and collaborators so far but one name that hasn't come up yet is artist, editor, and publisher, Steve Bisette. I think you mentioned in passing to me a while back that you and Bisette watched a movie a week together for an entire year! What's the story around that and what films were y'all watching?

J.T. D: If we turn the clock back to 2010 into 2011, I had been working as a shift manager for almost five years at a family-owned Cajun-Creole restaurant in Lexington, and then suddenly my arthritis--which had been getting worse over the years--took a nosedive, got off work one evening, had three days off because we were closed for Labor Day as a holiday, and in that three day period I got worse enough that my wrists swelled, and I couldn't even pick up a glass of water, couldn't return to work. I applied for disability and twiddled my thumbs at my mom's house (*I was a home owner at the time, but not able to inhabit it with my ex-in-training--going through our D-I-O-R-V-C-E--and had been kind a homeless homeowner, bouncing around friends, family, couches while I was in limbo*) waiting for that months' long process to be decided. I guess the disability and the divorce to be decided, big double D's.

I did receive the state stamp of gimp certified besides being single with no kids or home and also single, so then it became: *what next?* I had a year or so before met **Caitlin McGurk** at **SPX** in Bethesda and had a connection to her. She had got a gig for a year, as a librarian to get the library in shape at the **Center for Cartoon Studies** in White River Junction, VT. Upon her invite, I ended up making a trip to visit her and visit the school in the winter of 2011. I had the old issue of **The Comics Journal**, with founder **James Sturm** depicting himself naked in front of a class of students, in which he first announced his intentions to create the first **MFA** program focusing exclusively on comics, so I was aware of the place before it became an actual thing.

I had a vague notion that maybe I should attend the program. Either way, I took **McGurk's** invitation as an opportunity to check out the place and visit. It was part of an actual/official check-out-the-school hosted tour and a portfolio review for those attending. I brought a portfolio and then **McGurk** kind of made sure that the instructor that I got paired up with for my review was **Steve Bisette**. **Steve** taught there from the first year up through his retirement from teaching a few years ago. One of the "*selling points*" on visiting, was **McGurk** was like, "*and I'll make sure you get to meet Steve.*" **SOLD.**

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I was a **Swamp Thing** kid, for sure. I remember I was on a "*spiritual mission*" even as a lad to collect all the first issues of the comic with **Bernie Wrightson's** art, which were before my time, and then the whole **Alan Moore/John Totleben/Bissette** and later **Rick Veitch** era. I was a watcher of **Wes Craven's** movie version, which, man, is a movie I know I saw several times as a kid and teenager on VHS, but I don't remember much about it now except in those old memories.

When I did **DESPAIR vol. 3**, I had a scene, to end the three volumes of the series that was like me as a comic book caricature version of myself, finally crucified by a gang of comics/comic strip/animation character as an "*apocalyptic*" conclusion. **Swamp Thing** is depicted as an empathetic onlooker in the crowd, heh. Which for me was a direct allusion to the infamous censored **Swamp Thing/Christ** issue that **Veitch** cooked up, the tales of which made an impact on me as a youngun.

But I'm slipping forward in time with **DESPAIR 3** to 2015. After that visit to **CCS** in White River Junction, VT, when it came time to decide what to do now that I also found myself a pensioner, on disability. I could have moved to some apartment in Lexington, but then **McGurk** and **Steve** were talking among themselves with **Caitlin** reporting back to me with the wisdom that if I could get to Vermont, not being tethered to Kentucky for any particular reason, regardless of performing any official role at the school, that I might as well just move to "*toon town*", take advantage of being in the social scene around the school.

There was an opening of a room for rent at a big place known as "**The Red House**" that was stocked full of mostly students or former students, and it was fluid for me to take that open room, and it seemed to beat the bejesus out of moving into an apartment/back to Lexington, at that time, with just the getting from Kentucky to Vermont being the main hurdle.

My first full day in town was graduation day for that year's outgoing class. **Françoise Mouly** gave the commencement speech at the graduation. After the ceremony, I was standing on the sidewalk having a cigarette with and talking to **Art Spiegelman**. He was marveling at the scene of a small, Vermont town full of cartoonists. "*It must be like being in Paris in the 20s,*" I remember him mooning. Which by that I mean in that he was all moonstruck, not that he dropped his trousers and flashed me his butt cheeks.

I told him what and why I was there, not as a student or as a teacher, but had just talked myself into the "*why not*" of relocating, taking advantage of the social scene and change of pace. I clearly recall **Art** (*I call him Art because we're pals now, just kidding, I barely know the guy although I've met him a few times*), in an almost avuncular way, looking at me, and saying with gravitas: "*I believe you've done the right thing.*" Well, stop the press, tell the folks back home: "*Pulitzer Prize winning funny book artiste Art Spiegelman sez 'Kentucky Boy Made Correct Decision.'*" Hahaha.

All of that to get back around to saying that now that I was living in White River Junction, one of the features of the **Center for Cartoon Studies** community was that **Steve** hosted weekly movie nights. Sometimes more than once a week, but rarely ever less. **Steve's** a very ethical guy, so it's not like something that was advertised in public, and it served the **CCS** community, but it was not strictly/officially a **CCS** event. It wasn't like a public screening in which money should exchange hands or permission granted for the movies, but instead was treated as **Steve** having a movie night with his friends, even if it was mostly **CCS**-affiliated folks who attended. Unless somebody else brought a DVD, they were all DVDs from **Steve's** impressive, personal home video collection.

I guess for anybody reading this who might not know, besides being a comic book artist/writer, from the team that brought America **Alan Moore** for the **Swamp Thing** run, to all of the black and white boom years stuff that **Steve** did, from editing the quasi-horror anthology **TABOO** to his famous and famously unfinished **TYRANT** comics, **Steve's** also a total movie-head; he even managed (*or did he own?*) a video store at some point. One of his best pals is **Tim Lucas**, the guy behind the bible of movie zines, **VIDEO WATCHDOG**. **Steve's** always written about movies, with a specific emphasis on horror. I'm about halfway through his epic monograph on **Cronenberg's THE BROOD** right now.

So, with those weekly movie nights, man: it's hard to remember everything we were watching. I have more this general sense of living in a "*story-telling think tank*," movies or comics and both. **Steve** would have animated shorts and other things before the movie, and often it would be a double bill of related movies. And it wasn't all just horror or sci fi. I remember **Steve**--you have to picture this as small town living--dropping somebody off at the **Red House** while I happened to be sitting on the front porch. He was saying to me he was in the mood to go European art house and switch out of the psychotronic gear. I mentioned that I had seen the cycle of **Bergman** movies that go together from **Persona** through **Hour of the Wolf** to **Shame** but had not seen the final one of those that get grouped together, **The Passion of Anna**. So, of course, **Steve's** the kind of guy who has a video library where he's just going to automatically have that on DVD, so, boom: **Steve** put together a "*Bergman night*" for me. Great movie, **Passion**, by the way. For my money, one of the bleakest endings to any movie. I think of it often.

The one movie that really sticks out in my mind as far as horror goes is seeing **Bob Clark's Deathdream** aka **Dead of Night**. I'd never seen it, never even heard of it, despite being a **Black Christmas/Bob Clark** fan. Later, I did a drawing from it for a set of horror movie images for a project that I was going to do with **Johnny Brewton** for **X Ray Book Co** that ended up never going to print. I just sold the original for the **Ghoulardi** portrait from that cycle of images a few weeks ago. Anyway, I had never seen **Suzan Pitt's** animated **Asparagus** movie, and I saw that for the first time with **Steve** and the gang. Now I don't remember if he paired it with **Eraserhead** or not, although the movies used to be paired with each other on the midnight movie circuit as a double feature package deal.

I can also clearly remember watching--nothing obscure but the experience of watching it again in context being memorable--**Romero's Martin**, which I had seen on VHS as a teenager, maybe more than once. Watching it again in my 30s, I was more impressed by it. I mean, I dug it at as a teen, but fast forwarding through lots of life experience and experience watching movies and coming back around to it, instead of seeming like an interesting but lesser/clunky effort by **Romero**, it spoke to me more clearly than when I was, like, 16 years old. Funny that the guy who single-handedly invented a subgenre of horror could be undervalued, but **Romero** is a moviemaker to not take for granted.

Speaking of memory, what sticks in my mind is that after almost every movie, if it wasn't too late, some of us would go with **Steve** to one of the local pubs, get something to eat, and/or have beers and spend another hour or two shooting the shit, either discussing what we'd just watched, what we might watch next time, comics and/or just, ya know: life. **CCS** graduate **Denis St. John** attended regularly. Besides talking movies, I remember one night when it was just **Denis** and I with **Steve** for the after-movie get together, **Steve** started talking a lot of behind-the-scenes tales of the **Eastman & Larid** crew, what they

were up to with all that **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** money and what was going on with their publishing imprint, **Tundra**. He met those guys before the **TMNT** thing exploded and was around for all of that. **Steve** revealed lots of details about the personal lives and habits of those involved, to which he swore us to secrecy. Or, as **Steve** put it, all those guys got mad at him for what he said in his **Comics Journal** interview, when, "*They should be thanking me for all of things that I did **NOT** say,*" heh.

Even beyond the weekly get togethers with **Steve**, my buddy and graduate who had stuck around, **Brandon Elston**, was a big **Old Hollywood** guy, westerns, and pre-Code stuff. We were and are both card-carrying **Nicholas Ray** fans. **Brandon** and I had all that in common, and I'd be reporting some of our own, independent watching habits back to **Steve**. Cartoonist **Chris Wright**, former fellow at **CCS**, lived nearby and he'd show up to hang out, get drunk. We'd talk about movies more than watch movies, as there was the social aspect of him swinging through town. He was more of a big guns of European art house style guy in his movie watching habits. A **Tarkovsky** man!

I can remember cartoonist **Ben Horak**, another graduate and my roommate at the **Red House**, spending an entire day watching horror movies, even if now I can't remember what we were watching, but he's a guy who knows his stuff--I always like to see the list of movies that **Ben** watches in any given year he maintains in his notebook and will share pics of his lists on social media--so I'm sure it was something interesting. Either way, part of why it's difficult to remember specific things is that there were always comic books around being read and movies being watched, either at **Steve's** formal/informal gatherings or on our own. It really was like living in a think-tank-bubble.

And that was the heaven and hell of White River Junction. Spend the day working on art and comics. You step out of your room or walk down the street and you are encountering a whole bunch of other people doing the same thing. I mean, while I was there, I got the opportunity to go visit **John Byrne** at his house. One of my roommates, his girlfriend just happened as a summer job in CT as a teenager working for a cleaning company that **Byrne** hired. Once he found out the teenage girl cleaning his house aspired to be an artist, he took her under his wing. So, through her a gang of us got an invite to visit. That was a trip. **Byrne's** an odd guy, lives in his own world, that's for sure. But you can probably say that about any/all artist, comic book artist or otherwise. I mean, one thing I can tell you: **John Byrne** has an amazing, museum level collection of original comic book art.

I wrote a piece for **Zack Soto & Co's "Studygroup"** zine about going to visit **Byrne** at the height of some folks, such as **Steve** and others like **Seth**, etc. who finally had enough of **Marvel/Disney treating Jack Kirby** as if he was just some work-for-hire guy and decided to boycott any/all **Marvel** product. I definitely "*betrayed*" **Byrne's** trust by revealing what I saw, our conversations. I mean, despite the fact that there would be no **John Byrne** if there had been no **Jack Kirby**. He plays in a sandbox that **Kirby** built, but **Byrne** has always maintained a public, "*company girl*" stance on the subject of whether **Kirby** or other freelancers were owed more rights/money than what they received, or even promised, dangled in front of them to keep them working but never delivered.

But yet I saw with my own eyes the amount of custom art that **Byrne** does for fans of copyrighted **Marvel** characters as a side business, or maybe even his main business at this point, it's just not something he advertises because of the fact that he's making money off graven images he don't own,

ha. . So for a guy to condemn **Kirby's** heirs and others trying to squeeze some shekles out of the **Marvel-Mouse-Beast** while he's also making money on the sly from characters that the same chimera own that he didn't have any hand in creating.... whew. It'd be different, ya know, if he was all for creator's rights and the notion of universally recognized characters being in the public domain, but that's not his line.

All that said: I don't hate **John Byrne**. And it does sort of scream against every notion of hospitality I was raised on in Kentucky to speak ill of a man who allowed me into his home and even bought me pizza and had some kind things to say about my artwork. But ya know: **Jack** is one of the **Old Gods** and worth defending, even if he's dead and not directly going to get more money or proper credit. And all of this is academic now, because the many-headed **Mouse** settled out of court with his heirs once the **Disney** lawyers realized they might lose more not less money if they didn't finally settle. I may be painting **Byrne** badly. It's just in the creators' rights/**Kirby** debate, **Byrne** and I were definitely in two opposing camps of fandom versus fair pay and ownership, refusing to think of **Jack Kirby** as a hired hand. Doesn't take away from **Byrne** that he's got a knack for comics, good at what he does. And I was basically an apprentice to **Steve** who represents that first wave of comic book creators who knew the history of the form and were kicking against the pricks to establish creators' rights.

Anywho, I do remember closing out the cycle of weekly movie watching sessions. Knowing that I was heading out, **Steve** set up my last one in my honor. We talked a lot about **Harry Dean Stanton** and **Warren Oates**, both having been (*Harry Dean if not Oates was alive at the time*), like me, Kentucky natives. My pal **Tom Thurman**, to bring it back to Lexington, directed documentaries on both. To call **Tom** a pal is a stretch, I've only met him a handful of times. However, he and his creative writing partner, whom I've met just a few more times, **Tom Marksbury**, put together an impressive string of documentaries. I stumbled across their doc on **Sam Peckinpah's** westerns randomly on the **Starz** channel live on cable when I was house-sitting for someone who had cable. Already a **Peckinpah** fan, I was surprised when the credits rolled to see a name I recognized for having created music for the score, **Frank Schaap**, a musician I knew about if didn't know personally. A few days later, I was pontificating to a friend, **Mick**, wondering how **Frank** ended up having made music for a documentary about **Sam Peckinpah**, and **Mick**, kinda of jokingly responded, "*You know how he ended up making music for the movie, dummy? It's because the guys that made it are right here in Lexington.*"

All these knots are kind of tangled up, because **Tom Marksbury** also was a great pal of **Ed McClanahan**, with whom I also ended up collaborating. When I finally met **Marksbury** to talk to him, we were walking out of the ceremony in 2019 where **Ed** had just got himself inducted into the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame. Having seen most if not all the documentaries he had a hand in creating, I was able to just jump in, like, "*Hey, nice to meet ya. Also: I'm a student of your good works.*" I remember stopping by **Ed's** place one day and he had a copy of the movie **Criss Cross** on DVD sitting out. I said something about it being one of my favorite film noirs (*it's basically the same team that made **The Killers**, just swap **Ava Gardner** out with a young, pre-**Munsters Yvonne De Carlo***). **Ed** was always saying **Marksbury** and I should be friends, basically because we both talked about the same kinds of movies. Last time I "*saw*" **Marksbury** was doing a zoom-in/live on the radio tribute to **Ed** on **WRFL** out of Lexington, hosted, to close a circle within circles, by the previously mentioned **Mick**, whose full name is **Mick Jeffries**.

But to back the bus up again, I say all this to say that I wanted **Steve** and friends to check out **Thurman's**

documentary on **HDS**, "**Crossing Mulholland**." That doc was made for **KET/PBS** and it's not received wide, commercial release outside of **PBS**. I think one of the issues there is the rights for all the music that shows up in the doc, since there's a lot of song singing featured in it, **Harry Dean** hanging around with pals. It's a more lyrical, free-form affair than the more widely seen doc, "**Partly Fiction**" which came out the next year after "**Mulholland**." A unique service I was able to provide for **Bissette's** movie-watching crew was that I contacted **Thurman** and got him to provide personally a DVD copy of it, under penalty of deep shame if I were ever to allow it to be copied/reproduced/uploaded online. But **Thurman** knew I was just using it for a screening for a private group. Now the funny thing after all of this...**Steve** ended up losing the disc before we could screen it, ha. He apologized 100 times that somehow the DVD-R got mixed up with trash. At least **Tom** did not have to worry about us leaking the movie online.

Oh, and before I forget, while **Thurman's** doc was screened at the very first **Harry Dean Stanton Film Festival** in 2011 that my friend **Lucy Jones** masterminded in Lexington, and I did attend that screening and see **Tom** there, the only time I really met him has a story. A friend of mine just happened to be renting a house next door to **Thurman** and his family. I was visiting her, and while I'd traded some emails with **Thurman**, I'd never met him. He was out mowing his lawn, and I walked over and introduced myself. He'd just completed a documentary he made with/about **Nick Nolte**, "**No Exit**," which is a fascinating, weird movie. And I've seen it because **Tom** actually let me borrow a DVD-R advance edit before it even appeared on the **Starz** network. Definitely a doc worth watching if you can find it. I don't know if showing up in **Tom's** yard while he's mowing the lawn is going to work for anyone else to see his movies, but it worked for me.

Another layer of connection here is that **Thurman's Nolte** doc was born from having **Nolte** narrate the documentary that **Thurman** and **Marksbury** did on the subject of **Hunter S. Thompson**, "**Buy the Ticket Take the Ride**." And one of the people interviewed for that doc was **Nick Tosches**. Once I made email contact with both **Tosches**, who actually wrote me first, which is another story, and then later **Thurman**, after having realized there was this guy doing documentaries right up my nightmare alley in my own backyard, or at least in Lexington and with adjoining yards to a friend of mine, I felt like one of my main services I provided was supplying either **Nick** or **Tom** with each other's email addresses and contact information, as both seemed to always be asking me for the other's information. I do what I can and serve humbly, heh.

Anywho, to flash back forward to **Steve** and our movie nights. We continued with the idea to do "*an evening with **Harry Dean Stanton***" for my final stand. I remember **Steve** kept trying to stump me. He assumed I had not seen **Monte Hellman's** 1966 westerns, one with **Stanton** the other with **Oates**, **Ride in the Whirlwind** and **The Shooting**, but to his surprise I had not only seen but owned copies of both those rare morsels. But then **Steve** started to realize that a whole bunch of our gang, largely younger than me, had never seen **Repo Man**, so them missing out in their education sort of sealed the deal, even if I was fully fluent in **Repo Man**. He set up our main feature with several episodes of western tv shows featuring **Stanton** and/or **Oates** as the lead-ins to the main event.

Speaking of these connections within connections, one of the movies I was interested in seeing, "**92 in the Shade**," another one featuring both **Oates** and **Harry Dean**, directed by **Thomas McGuane**, that I had not seen, but, if I remember correctly, even **Steve** didn't have a copy of that when I put that on the

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table for **HDS** obscurities. I'd have to refresh my memory glands, but I think that's only ever received, for home video, a single, VHS release. But in the meantime, and in between time, **Susan Compo** was doing a signing of her biography of **Oates** that the **University Press of Kentucky** had published in Muhlenberg County, near **Oates's** place of raising, Depoy. My dad moved to the area after he retired. I got in touch with **Susan** and we made plans to hang out while she was in the area.

Susan, a California gal, did a fanzine during the first flush of punk, continued on to write for big music rags in the 80s/90s like **Spin** and **Mojo**. We seem to have the DNA of the same tribe, as she used to teach at **USC** at the same time as the late **Hubert Selby, Jr. Selby**—or **Cubby**, as everybody he who ever met him called him—I interviewed, which was published in **Johnny Brewton's** arty, artfully and finely printed **X-Ray zine** back in 1998.

And on a side note, it was that 1998 interview that served as catalyst for me being in touch with **Nick Tosches**. **Nick** was putting together a complete bibliography of everything every published or published about **Cubby** for his birthday, so despite being a fan of **Nick's**, the way we got in touch was him tracking *ME* down. He'd looked me up to confirm some details about the interview and found my email address. To receive an unsolicited email from *THEE* **Nick Tosches** knocked me out of my chair in the early 00s. It was that being/staying in touch that led to us working on our **Spud Crazy** project together years later.

But dialing back to a time when **Selby** was still alive, he and I kept in touch and I even hung out with him for a day, took him to lunch, the one and only time I've stayed in California. Funny, **Selby's** father was born in Kentucky. **Susan's** back-in-the-day zine was called **Blank Generation**. I pointed out to **Susan** that in her very first zine, she used an allusion to **Richard Hell** for the title. And, as I pointed out/reminded her: **Richard Hell** grew up in Lexington. **Susan** decided that she just can't "*get away*" from Kentucky.

Now, you'd think maybe that's a stretch, but if one of her major works is the "**Wild Life**" biography of **Oates**, then she goes and does the story of the making of **Nic Roeg's** "**The Man Who Fell to Earth**" with **David Bowie** (**Earthbound** is the name of the book, which is really great, highly recommended, as is her **Oates** biography or anything else she writes. **Bowie**, **Roeg**, science fiction. That's got nothing to do with Kentucky, right? Except the source novel was written by none other than Kentucky's own, **Walter Tevis**. So, **Susan's** book, in part, tells the story of **Roeg's** movie by also telling the story of the novel it adapts and the writer who wrote it. And then to square that particular circle, I could step out the door of my place right now, and if I wanted to, take a walk and in a few minutes, as I live on a street that borders a cemetery, I could be at **Walter Tevis's** final resting place in Richmond, KY.

Tevis's story is kind of amazing. His first novel was **The Hustler**. That was made into a little movie you might have heard of starring **Paul Newman** and **Jackie Gleason**. His second novel is **The Man Who Fell To Earth**. After his second novel, I remember reading **Tevis** saying that he figured out he couldn't drink and write but that he could drink and teach, and basically, he taught school while indulging his alcoholism for two decades. Then after years of that, he sobered up later in the 1970s, and moved to NYC, vowing to write a book a year for the rest of his life, which he did. But then the rest of his life only ended up being a few more years and a few more books, as he died in 1984 at age 56. But if you think I'm still stretching the "*Kentucky curse*" for **Susan**, the most recent communication I've had with her is that the book she's working on now is a biography of **Sam Shepard**, who, in fact, bought a horse farm

outside of Midway, which is itself outside of Lexington, and that's where he cooled his jets when not out and about acting in movies or working in theater in relation to his status as one of the great playwrights.

But I forgot to mention that during **Susan's** signing, back when we first met in Muhlenberg county, **Warren's** brother **Gordon**, who became friends with **Susan** during the process of her working on the book about his brother, also attended that event, so I got to meet him. Sadly, **Gordon** died not too long after. I say this to spin the yarn that for the **Harry Dean Stanton** festival of 2016 (*I think that's right*), I had gone to the "drive in" screening of **Cisco Pike** with my friend, photographer **Cary Neal/Gough** and her boyfriend and stayed with them at their place in Midway, a small town to the north of Lexington, knee-deep in horse country. I was living back in the rural, eastern region of my origins at the time, and then on my way out of time, headed back home, I was going to hit up a Sunday afternoon screening of--*finally*--**92 in the Shade** which as of 2016 I'd still never seen.

I'd parked up the street from the theater where the movie was screening at the coffee shop **Third Street Stuff** where I'd had some grub and coffee after driving in from Midway. I remember talking to my old buddy, **Charlie Whittington**, no longer among the living, sadly. Walking to the theater at the Lexington public library that was hosting the movie, I decided to duck into **Fayette Cigar**, directly across the street, to snatch a cigar for later when I got home.

I happened to walk in the door at the same time that **Lucy** was walking in to grab a couple of drinks at the newsstand/tobacco shop with **Timothy Oates**, son of **Warren Oates**, who I'd realize had brought his own personal copy of the movie to screen. So with this synchronicity of running into them and meeting **Timothy**, I was able to tell him I'd met his late uncle briefly, and was sad to hear of his passing, and talk to him that because of my dad living in Muhlenberg county, I'd actually visited Depoy--*there's really nothing there now*---and seen the remnants of his family's old general store there, and that if he ever wanted to visit the "old country" I could always be a guide.

The lightbulb flashed for **Lucy** in this moment, and she asked me if I'd lead the post-screening discussion with **Timothy**. It was surreal to be aware that while watching a movie I'd never seen before that immediately after I'd be on stage talking to the son of **Warren Oates** who I'd quite literally only just and briefly met before schlepping over from across the street to watch it. So that's the story not only of how I came to see **92 in the Shade** but also of how I came to lead the post-screening talk about it at the **Harry Dean Stanton film festival**.

Being that I've never observed a synchronicity I didn't take notice of, all these threads can also be stitched back together to point to the first **Harry Dean Stanton festival**. During that same weekend back in 2011 was also the opening reception for the exhibition and book release of **Nick Tosches's Spud Crazy** that I adapted into comics. Because of the cross-up of the timing, the only part of that first festival I attended was the first night when **Tom Thurman** was screening his "**Crossing Mulholland**" doc. The next evening was my opening reception at **Institute 193**.

I had also recorded a soundtrack disc for the book with a one-off band consisting of myself, **Brian Manley**, **Justin Eslinger**, and **Robert Beatty** as the "**Spud Imperials**," a reference to an old brand of **Spud cigarettes**, actual brand-name. Recorded at my friend **Paul Puckett's** studio, **Robert**, who is more known now as an artist, illustrator, designer, but was a few years ago more known for his music, in such

projects as the noise band **Hair Police**, or his personal project, **Three Legged Race**, etc. edited and mixed what became the **Spud Imperials** disc, a single thirty minute piece of music. I say all that to say that **Brian, Justin**, and then **Justin's** theremin-playing friend from Nashville (*who did not perform on the album*) did a further mutation of the **Spud Imperials** by playing a few sets of music live during the reception.

In turn, I'm saying all that to say **Lucy**, escorting **Hunter Carson** on the way to the festival's screening of "**Paris, Texas**," stopped in at the opening reception with **Hunter** to expose him to a little local color and culture. **Hunter** plays **Harry Dean Stanton's** kid who is living with **Stanton's** brother played by **Dean Stockwell** in "**Paris, Texas**," (*and horror-hounds reading this might also recognize **Hunter** as the kid in **Tobe Hooper's** version of "**Invaders from Mars**"*). Meeting **Hunter**, he was enjoying the scene at **Institute 193**. Beer flowing and music happening. He asked me if it'd be cool that, after going with **Lucy** to get the movie rolling, he came back to hang with us while the movie was on before returning for the Q&A. I mean, what was I gonna tell him? "*No, **Hunter**, fuck off, you can't come back,*" so of course I told him to come back, which he did, hanging out with us.

To fill in blanks on how some of this all connects, **Hunter's** parents, who were both alive when I first met him but just a decade and some change later are neither now still with us among the living are **L.M. Kit Carson** and **Karen Black**. I think I kept my cool, but it was hard when first meeting **Hunter** to not, in awe, say to him: "*DUDE YOUR MOM IS **KAREN BLACK!!!!***" Of course, **Hunter** knows who his mom is and her stature as one of the greats. His father, if not quite on the same level of fame as his mother, is also a very important figure to film in general and Texas movie culture specifically. He co-directed the crazy, great documentary, **The American Dreamer** on the crazy and great **Dennis Hopper** while **Hopper** was editing **The Last Movie**. And then **Carson** worked as a writer to take what **Sam Shepard** wrote to put the script in final form of what would become "**Paris, Texas**," which is how **Hunter** ended up in the **Wim Wenders** movie as **Harry Dean's** kid. So if, following, you are aware that **Kit Carson** also wrote the screenplay for **Hooper's Texas Chainsaw Massacre** sequel, it makes sense that **Hunter** would end up playing the kid in **Hooper's Invaders from Mars** movie.

Then, I guess I should digress yet again to point out I also ended up meeting **Sam Shepard** after years going back to the 90s of rumors in and around Lexington of **Shepard-sightings** and that he apparently owned a horse farm somewhere in the area. But it took my friend, the photographer **Carey Neal/Gough** previously mentioned, who was a **Shepard** super-fan. **Carey** had lived in England for a decade, but upon returning to Kentucky she actually, through a series of her own synchronistic events, not only befriended **Shepard** but became something of an official/unofficial secretary/assistant.

While she was close enough to the guy that she was actually typing up his final manuscripts for him, I can't claim to ever have got to know the guy. I just attended a family dinner at a restaurant in Midway, KY by **Carey's** invite and with **Shepard's** permission. I think that was 2015. His two sisters and one of his sons were in visiting as his health was in its slow decline from ALS (*which is also why he needed **Carey** as a typist*). I sat at a table with **Shepard**, but on the other end of a long table, and mostly talked to his son and his girlfriend. After dinner, we stopped by his farm. **Shepard** and his sisters were watching a movie inside while **Carey** and his son and girlfriend were hanging outside, sort of like "*the kids*" outside and the "*grown-ups*" inside, ha. While **Carey** really did know the guy on a personal level, all I did was shake his hand and thanked him for having me on the way out.

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Back to **Hunter Carson**. Meeting him put us in touch as friendlies. I remember when I was living in White River Junction, I signed a letter of intent to appear in a reality series that **Hunter** was considering, even if that idea never took wings. But, with all his various irons he has in the fire in the filmmaking racket, **Hunter** kept the idea of us collaborating on something together on the stove. That finally ended taking a shape in what is one of the oddest bits of my bibliography as a comic book artiste when I did the art for a promotional comic book together for the "**Rusty Revolver**" project that **Hunter** and his collaborators were working on.

After **Hunter's** dad died, I also donated a portrait of his pops to use for in any way he wants to promote a foundation **Hunter** established in his father's name. I depicted **Kit** in the guise of **David Holzman** in "**David Holzman's Diary**," an odd but influential movie starring **L.M. Kit Carson** in the titular role, with he and **James McBride's** late 1960s infusion of **French New Wave/cinema verité** to late 1960s New York. Sort of a movie you might expect more from the late 70s New York scene but a decade ahead of the game. And that's also a movie that had a big impact on, you guessed it (*maybe*): **Steve Bissette**. You gotta remember that **Steve** and **Rick Veitch** were of the first graduating class of **The Kubert School**, and he was knee-deep in seeing just about every movie at every theater, from the sketchy grindhouse to the arthouse in late 70s NYC, and **Steve** was hosting a film society in VT as a young lad long before his run as teacher at the **Center for Cartoon Studies** and host of movies during his stint as an illustrious professor of comics.

Now, if you think I'm crazy in telling the stories of all these layers of synchronicity, hold on to your hat. I'm not sure what year it was, but it'd be great to go ahead and say it happened in the same year, before my arrival in VT, that I met **Hunter**. I'd say, "*print the legend*," but this is all legendary enough, either way. What I do know is that somehow **L.M. Kit Carson** ended up an opening reception of art--*I'm not sure if it was a **Center for Cartoon Studies** exhibition or just another exhibit in the area*--that **Steve** also attended. They got introduced, but for **Steve**, **Kit** required no introduction. They became friendly and cultivated some kind of collaborative project, of which I was never made clear of the details. I got the idea that **Steve** considered it hush-hush, and, as I said, the man is nothing if not ethical and---*The Comics Journal* interview by **Kim Thompson** (RIP) notwithstanding--he doesn't speak out of school.

What did happen is that after **Kit** died in October of 2014, it just so happened that the last time I saw **Steve** in the flesh was after I'd moved away from Vermont, but I was in Columbus, Ohio visiting **Caitlin McGurk** for a few days. She was going to be going out of town for a wedding right before **Steve** was set to appear in Columbus to do a drawing workshop at the **Billy Ireland** one night before doing a talk on campus next door at the **Wexner center for the arts** on the history of the **Comics Code Authority**. 2014 marked, what, sixty years since the **CCA** was established, thus the timing of his lecture.

That lecture, by the way, was fascinating. Somebody ought to do a book if **Steve** doesn't. In **Steve's** research, which is not just his own but also was added to by students and others over the years. One of **Steve's** functions at **CCS** was he taught the history of comics. But one of the things that research reveals is that some of the comics panels in early pop art, as seen in examples by **Warhol**, **Rosenquist**, etc., which seems to be alterations the pop artists made to images in comics, are actually still just direct, unaltered appropriations.

There's this period after the **Comics Code Authority** came to the industry that comics that had been completed before **the Code** or were reprinted or otherwise were getting published when editor/writer/artists didn't have a grip on what was allowed or not allowed, so comics of the mid-fifties came out in which panels, images and dialogue, were very crudely corrected...and by corrected I mean censored. And these same comics were catching the eyes of pop artists. They looked like surreal or dada, avant-garde images, when bits of dialogue would just be wiped out but leave blank spaces, or a guy's arm shooting a gun was blotted out or awkwardly and hastily redrawn so as not to offend the new regulatory--*the censorship*--of the newly minted **Comics Code Authority**. So much of what art history assumes were inventions of pop artists were more them noticing and appropriating the clunky, weird results of comics being published with altered, censored bits from that mid-1950s transitional period of the **CCA** coming into the industry.

But I'm saying all this, again, to get to saying something else. So, with **McGurk** out of town, **Steve** needed to be driven down to Columbus from Cleveland. He'd been in Cleveland to be involved in talking about dinosaurs at the **Museum of Natural History** there, as one of the paleontologists there, also into comics, had invited **Steve**, being that if you're a dinosaur nerd and a comics fan, then **Steve** is the king of that niche! With **McGurk** unavailable to transport **Steve**, I was put on that task with local cartoonist, who now lives on the west coast, **Liz Valasco**. Also, **Liz** used to live in Cleveland and attended art school there, so she knew how to get around Cleveland. So with the timing of **Kit Carson** having just died, on the drive from Cleveland to Columbus, that subject came up, and the fact that **Steve** had whatever materials he had from the unfinished project with **Hunter's** dad, so I was able to serve as a conduit for **Steve** to get in touch with **Hunter**, as it was important to **Steve** to return materials to **Hunter/the Carson** family.

One of the side effects of that last time I hung with **Steve** was I also got to be present while **Steve** and **Tim Lucas--of Video Watchdog, etc. fame, who lives in Cincinnati--**were hanging out at a mutual Columbus friend's house. I was able to remark to **Tim**, besides having read **Video Watchdog** over the years, it was totally surreal to be sitting next to him and hear his voice. As opposed to sitting and hearing his voice coming from, for example, the commentary track he did for the DVD of **Mario Bava's "Blood and Black Lace."**

As I wrap up this lengthy wind, in communicating with the aforementioned **Susan Compo** recently about her planned and in progress **Sam Shepard** biography (*I understand she signed a contract, but I'm not sure who is publishing*), I was reminded of another odd bit of synchronicity. So when **Walter Tevis** got on track for doing the one book a year task in the last few, sober years of his life, one of those novels was "**The Color of Money**," a sequel to "**The Hustler**" (*which was filmed with Tom Cruise and Newman and Scorsese directing...which I've seen many moons ago but never read the novel, which I understand the movie changed the story quite a bit*). **Tevis** dedicated that novel to **Toby Kavanaugh**, crediting him in educating him in everything he knew about pool.

Kavanaugh for decades owned and operated **Bluegrass Billiards**. And as an 18 year old, while I was never a serious pool player, I did hit up the place with **Jeffrey Scott Holland** and other friends. **Jeff** was aware of it, liked it, for having a very old school vibe. So, when the news hit in 1994 that **Kavanaugh** was murdered, that's the moment that, because it was in the news, I found out he had some connection to **Walter Tevis** and the two novels and following movie adaptations. That murder still remains

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unsolved, and as recently as 2020 I noted that it was considered a cold case that was being reopened. But just a strange convergence that I should be shooting pool in a pool hall in Lexington, KY owned by a guy who **Tevis** considered to be a great influence on everything he experienced and wrote about pool that turned into **The Hustler** and **The Color of Money**. I remember seeing **Kavanaugh** there when I was 18, with no idea he had any connection to those things until I soon thereafter read about his murder in the local newspaper. If you watch the movie adaptation of **The Hustler**, the final scenes take place in Louisville, but if you read **Tevis's** novel the ending is actually set in Lexington.

Anyway, you asked about watching movies with **Steve**, I think? I don't know if all these yarns I just take out for a spin amount to anything. I'm reminded of a quote from **W.B. Yeats** to **Ezra Pound** in a letter from 1918: "*After all one's art is not the chief end of life but an accident in one's search for reality or rather perhaps one's method of search.*"

SKREE: Wonderful as usual!! Just so much info it's staggering. I think it's only fair we should let you talk about literature for a while. You've mentioned quite a few authors already and I'm curious about your reading habits starting a youngster and heading into your 50s.

J.T. D: *(Once again, I've zipped when you were asking me about zaggin, lol...I'll get around to talking about tv/movies/streaming and literature next...)*

Despite the fact that I dump-trucked so much into discussing **Steve**, it just hit me I didn't give props to **Steve** on another way he influenced me, however indirectly, in that 2011-12 frame of time. I had this notion of my next major act as a *comix artiste* following **In Tongues Illustrated** in 2008 and **Spud Crazy** in 2011 of doing a series of my own work. Like **Peter Bagge's HATE**, etc., I wanted to do "**J.T. Dockery's DESPAIR**." I had that image from **Crumb's "Plunge into the Depths of Despair"** from 1969 in my mind, as well as **Nabokov's** novel and the **Fassbinder** adaptation of "**Despair**," as well as **Kierkegaard's "Sickness Unto Death"** (*which is another way of saying: despair*).

Now, also before and during my time in White River Junction, I had this foggy notion of doing an anthology of horror comics. It was hitting me that there were quite a few comics artists doing work that could be put under a horror genre umbrella, even if it was indirect. A kind of new wave of idiosyncratic horror comics I was picking up on. However, in a sense, that same thing I was identifying was getting picked up on and identified by others. Some of the artists I wanted to spotlight were getting recognized more widely, and I didn't feel so strongly that I needed to continue with that.

So what spliced in my mind was doing a solo comic with guest artists, a kind of hybrid of a solo book and an anthology. Inviting artists to "*share*" in my or the "*despair*," hahaha. And rather than do horror with a wide brush, let the "*horror*" tackle the notion of despair with some focused precision. I did legitimately feel despair, both on the micro or personal level but also on the macro stage of the world and world events. I felt like **Carl Jung** having his vision of Europe soaked in blood on the cusp of **World War I**. A vision that didn't make sense to him until after **WWI** kicked off.

However, I also viewed the attempt at the comic as something of a ritual, at least on the personal level, of getting past despair by going through despair with "*my DESPAIR*." The way **Steve's** influence crept into this is his old indomitable anthology, **TABOO**. People often call that a horror anthology, but **Steve** corrects that saying the real subject of the book was grappling with the notion of the taboo in and

with comics. And if that veers into the murky waters of what the reader might call horror, that's fine and dandy, but not the main editorial goal, which was more specific regarding what is taboo. So take **Steve's** editorial mandate, but then move it from "*taboo*" to "*despair*," and make it a personal book of personal work but have featured guest artists in each issue, and that's how I got to "**J.T. Dockery's DESPAIR**."

I always meant for it--*instead of just to meander forever or until I lost steam*--to be three issues, or, ya know, get fancy: three volumes in three years. And that is what came to be. Each spring consecutively saw the release of a volume, 2013-15. Ostensibly self-published, I also partnered with **Institute 193**, so officially they put their stamp of approval on it and promoted it, although basically it was something I made on my own. That period was also the era when I did the most travel, hitting up comics shows, ending up in Seattle for **Short Run**, Minneapolis for **Autoptic** and I think I hit **SPX** all three of those "**DESPAIR** years."

Bill Kartalopoulos selected the **Stephen Crane** adaptations of some of his 1890s poems from "**The Black Riders and Other Lines**" into comics from **DESPAIR vol. 1** for his "**Notable Comics**" list for **Best American Comics 2014**, so that was a feather in the cap. While **Bill** did actually stay at the **Red House** while I was in VT as a guest when we're friendly, it's not like **Bill** would ever endorse something that he didn't genuinely dig, as he's not that kind of an editor/critic. The writer **Bob Levin** reviewed **volume 2** for **The Comics Journal**. Not that long ago, as **Bob** and I keep up an ongoing correspondence, he was saying to me that the second volume for him from 2014 has some precognitive vibe of the second half the 2000-teens into 2020-21. Well, if I felt like **Jung** looking at Europe before **WWI**, I may have inadvertently picked up some of the ripples in the wavelength of the ways in which reality would be bending and twisting.

Anyways, my vision of **DESPAIR** was born in White River Junction while seeing lots of issues of **TABOO** floating around and watching movies every week with **Steve**. I started working on **vol. 1** in VT and finished in Kentucky. I remember telling **Denis St. John** over a beer my notion of the dick-hole that becomes a mouth--*rather than the cliché of a vagina with teeth*--that devours/attacks the protagonist, and he lit up over my dick-hole as a mouth with teeth, har-har.

Funny, when I hit 40 in 2016, I developed a five-year plan that's now, at age 46 right at this moment, into a ten year plan of books and projects I wanted to complete. Originally, **DESPAIR vol. 3**, which ends with the encounter of a **Christ** figure by someone named "**JT**" who then goes through a crucifixion witnessed by a cast of comic book/cartoon strip characters, from **Swamp Thing** to **Dick** to **Tracy** to **Lena the Hyena**, etc.

That was going to flow directly into a comic about the life of **Yeshua of Nazareth**, he whom the **Hellenes** called **Jesus the Christ**. Which actually had its roots from prior to **DESPAIR**, when I was kicking the gong around on the idea of doing a riff on the life of **John the Baptist** in comics form. I had a conversation with the aforementioned **Chris Wright** about how he had in mind the idea to do something in comics with a **Salome/John the Baptist** story. I offered to collect my research and forward to **Chris**, but then the process of doing that gave me new ideas, but also of how to tell a story of **Jesus** not just **John the Baptist**.

I don't know if **Chris** will ever use the research I forwarded to him in any way, but that all sprouted this evolving body of research and narrative ideas that I started calling **BOOK OF VISION**. But then one day I

was sitting around, and this "*funny animal*" image popped into my eye, fully formed. **John the Baptist** as a dog named **Pup-Paps**. And following I saw a **Jesus**-type as a donkey with the name of **Valentinus** aka **Henry**. There's a whole story about that name/those names I won't get into now, but anyhow: if anything, the pressing in my research of trying to get to a historical **Jesus** just led me to realizing that's ever going to be a slippery fish. Often when individuals reach out to the divine, they seek to confirm a sort of reflection of themselves, myself and my own baggage included, as I think part of this is human nature. I say that simply to say that once I had a vision of **Pup-Paps** sitting at the bottom of my steps if not on the road to **Damascus**, I realized I wanted to create more a work of imagination and the vision tied together a couple of things I was interested in exploring or had inspired me.

Plus, part of returning to the bible belt for me in the summer of 2012, and living again more in the rural, eastern part of the state of my raising instead of in Lexington and being under the buckle of the bible belt again, I felt a need to really grapple with Christianity. Often when people rebuke religion, it's in sort of a knee-jerk way. Of course, one could say of people dedicated to church, they also accept the theology of their congregation without question. Not much middle ground. I wanted to explore not only biblical texts but also the whole history of the **Jesus** movement, so if nothing else, whatever my own take on it could not be argued came from a place of either ignorance or blind acceptance. Anywho, doing an imaginative narrative as opposed to attempting something nonfiction takes my own points of view and experiences and spins them into a yarn rather than trying to make something more dogmatic or instructive in nature.

Philip K. Dick had his vision of ancient Rome in the time of **Christ** transposed over his Orange County California in the 70s. **Gary Panter** had his **Dal-Tokyo**, Texas and Japan mashed up. I interviewed **Panter** at length--or more accurately hornswoogled him into a conversation with me, heh--about what it was like hanging out and talking with **Dick**. That interview happened/was published, in March of 2015 just as the third volume of **DESPAIR** was coming out. The interview was originally published in an online journal, but then after that folded, I put it up online via my **Medium** account.

As reality twisted, the Lexington release gig for **DESPAIR vol. 3** turned out to be a music gig, which was I guess spring? It was warm out, and I pretty much released every issue April/May for those three consecutive years. **Gary's** band--**Devin, Gary & Ross**- was touring and **Robert Beatty**, friendly with all those guys, was charged with creating a line-up, poster and promoting the Lexington gig.

I had met **Gary** briefly at **SPX**, and our interview was through email, but getting to spend an evening hanging out as one of the two opening acts and the event doubling as a **DESPAIR** release gig was a hoot. I happened to be on the patio out back at the venue, **Al's Bar**, when the band's van rolled up. **Gary** sat down with me at a table, and we picked up with talking about **PK Dick**. The interview got a lot of traction online, with **Tom Spurgeon** (*RIP*) sharing it on his **Comics Reporter** site. I think **Fantagraphics** and/or **The Comics Journal** pointed it out, too. What really sticks out for me from this "*evening with Gary and friends*" was sitting at the table he did a **Philip K. Dick** impersonation, and I swear I could feel the presence of **Dick** flow through **Gary**.

Reaching out to **Panter**, part of my motivation was wanting to engage in the kind of free-wheeling conversations **Dick** engaged in with pals, to be in that conversation with **PKD**. But that squared a circle, as I realized, "*Hey, I'm in conversation with Dick's writing, even if it doesn't talk back, and I'm in*

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conversation with **Gary** who did conversate with **PKD**, so I'm in-on-with the flux of it all." So, there's that, and then after the gig, sitting with **Gary** as he drank his first bourbon, ever. Not a drinker--he prefers traditional medicinal marijuana to booze--he was trying new things, so, hey: to sit with **Gary Panter** as he drank his first Kentucky whiskey? Memories are made of that!

As I get lost in my digressionary fables here, before I forget my point, and back to **Jesus**, ha, I realized that I didn't need to come at **Jesus** directly. While I decided to make **BOOK OF VISION** to be a more free-wheeling, imaginative narrative rather than a biography in comics, so to speak, "**Jesus**" would instead just be a character among a cast of characters. Then once I had that **Pup-Paps** vision, the **BOOK OF VISION** "split" into different parts, with the **John the Baptist/Jesus** material becoming an act of imagined versions. And the way this connects to **Panter/Dick** is that I realized that having ancient Rome be some alternate Kentucky, as if it was also part of the **Roman** diaspora, like Jerusalem, in which my funny animal characters exist: that would be "my" Orange County/Rome like **PKD**, "my" **Dal-Tokyo**. Not ripping off **Dick/Panter** so much as joining the tradition or, I guess you could say: seeing the same things with my own eyes. Let me join the gang of **Jesus** damaged subversive vision-seekers.

The bits that were already completed and/or didn't fit into the funny animal, future-past mythopoeic tale of the book what that I am calling **NEVER GAVE SUCK** right now (*which is a biblical quote, believe it or not...well, you don't have to believe it, just turn to **Luke 23:29** of the nearest **King James Version** you can find*), as its in progress and process, were just hanging around dormant, quite a few pages, maybe 20 or 30 completed pages, not counting a whole folder busting at the seams of research and ideas. Then I got this idea for what I'm calling **NOVA POLICE ACTION COMICS**, a sort of sci-fi/psychedelic "adventure" or "action" book that comfortably can incorporate the work that was "leftover" from **BOOK OF VISION**. Anywho, that's the story how one idea for a book changes and becomes another book and then how that book, again, actually becomes two different books, split from the original tree.

Oh, what's funny about my ten-year plan for my forties is that so far everything I've released actually isn't from the plan. It seems like once I got on that path, then suddenly other things came up. So since 2016 I've released that **Rusty Revolver** comic that **Hunter Carson** recruited me to do for his gang, then I discovered this once thought lost "**Kentucky Pussy**" manuscript by **Sexton Ming** that resulted from conversations during the **Ming's** final, 2004 U.S. tour, which was going to be a traditional approach, with poems with illustrations format. But with the reappearance of the "lost" manuscript years later, I altered the original approach and turned **Sexton's** poems into comics. And the finally or most recently, there were two years in there and then a year of waiting for it to come out, my collaboration with writer **Ed McClanahan**, adapting his story "**Juanita and the Frog Prince**" to comics form. After waiting for the publisher to roll it out, a year after they agreed to do it, put the release date at...March 2020! Sucked, we had to cancel all the events we were going to do to promote it, so my hardcover comic from a new imprint, **South Limestone**, of the **University Press of Kentucky**, got to emerge just as the world went into pandemic shut down limbo.

It might be worthwhile to back up the cart and talk **Ed** for a bit. Sadly, **Ed** died in late November 2021. He'd just turned 89 in October. We did the **Kentucky Book Festival** in Lexington on November 6, which turned out to be both 1. our first public appearance to promote **JUANITA** together and 2. **Ed's** last public appearance before he died. So, for people that don't know **Ed's** work or story, a native Kentuckian, he ended up out at **Stanford** in California in the 1960s. You could call **Ed** a "hippie" but he

was actually part of the wave of baby beatniks who were experimenting with LSD and other mind-bending drugs when they were still legal. **Ed** befriended **Ken Kesey** and was part of the **Merry Pranksters** crew.

One of my favorite stories that **Ed** told me was how a van full of people on peyote drove into San Francisco and caught **Lenny Bruce** and **John Coltrane** on the same night, however novelist **Robert Stone** fled the **Coltrane** show and didn't make it to **Bruce** because the peyote got him on a bad trip. All that aside, **Ed** was also a great comics fan and a serious doodler of cartoony drawings himself, and I even got **Ed** his first exhibition of art, drawings of cartoony hands ("*the McClanahands*") he did stoned in the mid-60s, which is a whole other yarn I won't spin now, but I will say that **Ed** told me when **Ed** saw those drawings he said, "*Tsk, tsk. Look what dope has done to perfectly respectable writer.*" Ha!

But **Ed** was absorbing **Underground Comix** as they were coming out as new items, so he was influenced by them. Later, he got **Crumb** to do the cover art for his book, "*Famous People I Have Known*" (*a bit of ironic title because the stories in it are not really about famous people*), and **Ed** had the original art hanging on the wall which he purchased directly from **Crumb**, which he picked up from him at his house. More recently than that, **Ralph Steadman** did the cover for his "*O Clear the Moment*" book. **Steadman** has some Kentucky connections, **Hunter S. Thompson** being a native to the side, and I even met **Steadman** briefly, in Lexington.

Ed was also great pals with **S. Clay Wilson**. An illustrated letter from him hung on **Ed's** wall. **Ed** even had pitched the idea for **Wilson** to do something with his "*Juanita*" story in comics, but that was literally when they were visiting a couple of week before **Wilson's** accident that left him brain damaged for the remainder of his years. **Ed** let his notion to do that up as comics go dormant until I entered the picture. And we did collectively--*along with Bob Levin who wrote an intro for the book*--dedicate "*Juanita and the Frog Prince*" to **S. Clay Wilson**, so I was glad we got to do that before not after **Wilson** died.

Ed and I talked about how the **Undergrounds** that really flipped his lid at the time they first appeared were **Justin Green's** "*Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*." and **Greg Irons** and **Tom Veitch's** "*Legion of Charlies*." I was also a fan of both, although for me these were artifacts of previous era I dug up after-the-fact. I further flipped **Ed's** lid in letting him know that I not only knew of these works and the artists behind them, but I'd actually met **Justin** and sang "*happy birthday*" to him at his home with **Carol Tyler** when **Caitlin McGurk** and I just happened to visit them on **Justin's** 70th birthday. **Greg Irons's** art had a big impact on me...I was on "*spiritual journey*" to track down **Patrick Rosenkranz's** book of **Greg Irons** art and comics for **Fantagraphics**.

Tattoo art devotees snatched that up and it went out of print way quicker than I expected, and for whatever reason or set of reasons, **Fanta** never did any additional printings, and the price to get one went way up. I even had **Patrick Rosenkranz** himself trying to dig up an affordable copy for me, but no dice even enlisting the author of the book of **Greg Irons** work. Big props to Ohio-based artist **Matt Kish**, as we were at the **SPACE** comics show in Columbus together, and he happened to notice that a retailer there had a copy for sale basically at the cover price, and knew that I desperately wanted it, so thanks to **Matt** and his eagle-eye looking out for a pal.

Of course, **Greg Irons** died many years ago, before my time. Sadly, **Tom Veitch** died recently, although I did send him fan message via social media, to which he briefly and politely responded. **Tom Veitch** was of course **Rick Veitch's** brother, and **Rick** was and is a great friend and collaborator of **Steve's**, to tie this back to **Bissette**. Furthermore, **Steve** considers **Greg Irons** a tremendous influence upon him, and he even snuck allusions to **Irons's** art in the **Moore-era *Swamp Thing*** pages. I bet you thought I lost the thread, hahaha, but here we are back with **Steve** where we started!

SKREE: What are your film watching habits these days? I have a complicated relationship with the ease of availability to so many movies that used to be hard to track down. Among the countless streaming services and boutique DVD/BLU-RAY/ULTRA 4K distributors it has become easier and easier to get your eyes and hands on obscure, cult, and weird films just by pressing a button. It's great in a way but it's also a bit disappointing. Just the other day I streamed the notorious *Last House On Dead End Street (AKA The Fun House)* on Tubi. Which was cool but I couldn't help but feel the old man in me thinking, "things were cooler back in my day".

Are you also being sucked into the 100s of prestige tv shows the streaming services are putting out like the lives of their children depended on it? I've seen so many great shows but there are too many of them to keep up with and to retain! It's weird to me that these high caliber shows feel disposable and almost immediately forgettable.

J.T. D: Prestige tv. Tastes great, less filling. Where's the beef? I say that, and I eat a vegetarian diet. I mean, I'm the same as anybody else. I put my pants on one leg at a time, so I absorb more fair share of television, now that television is largely cable tv turned streaming from the internet, and it's not one pipeline flooding the screens at home but several platforms all begging you to pay for playing.

The lady at home enjoys her true crime, or "*murder shows*" as she prefers to say, so I see quite a bit of that. One form that's really seemed to benefit from the streaming model is the documentary, so that now there's a whole "*docuseries*" genre. I mean, I don't remember that term being common in years, decades past. Doing a documentary that has time to evolve and unravel over several episodes allows the televisual format to mimic more the breadth of a nonfiction book. The **Netflix** docuseries about the **Son of Sam** I thought really fascinating, and, speaking of **Andy Warhol**, I enjoyed the recent series they did based on his diaries.

And then what's truly "*prestige*," say a filmmaker like **Errol Morris** doing his **Wormwood** documentary series I found not only memorable but have watched it all twice if not three times. And both **Wormwood** and the **Son of Sam** docs, uh "*docuserieses*"(?), fold into in several strands to the book "**Chaos: Charles Manson, the CIA, and the Secret History of the Sixties**" by **Tom O' Niell** I found fascinating, which I also understand **Amazon Prime** is developing as a documentary or docuseries, but that would be a subject, or subjects, that would take some time to explain. Which also connects to another book I read, "**Poisoner in Chief: Sidney Gottlieb and the CIA Search for Mind Control**" by **Stephen Kinzer**, not to inspire paranoia here, ha. I have no idea if **Kinzer's** book is being developed into a documentary, but consider the mentions of these books a tip from your uncle **Jesse** if no **Larry** (*the J in JT stands for Jesse*).

I guess at this point it's already a decade or more old, but I really dug **Mark Cousins's** "**The Story of Film: An Odyssey**." And that's a case of a documentary adapting a nonfiction book by **Cousins**. I think that

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started out as broadcast television in the UK, but I experienced it or perceived it as something made for islands in the streaming. I also just noticed he did a sequel book/series to that, so I'm looking forward to that. I like his voice, both literally and figuratively his voice as a writer.

I saw a more recent movie-length doc from 2017 he did via **the Criterion Channel**, "**The Eyes of Orson Welles**," although I'm not sure if it was done for **Criterion Channel** or simply available there. I had some minor issues with how the voice of **Welles** was handled (*I mean, there's no point in getting an actor to try and speak, to do an impersonation, as if he is Welles, that voice was just too distinctively singular*), but as far as the content and the approach of looking at **Welles** through his two-dimensional drawings and paintings really worked for me. In fact, it opened my eyes...while I knew **Orson** was a doodler, I had no idea how much art he actually made, and it doesn't seem like it was actually all that easy for **Cousins** to track it down, as what exists is stored in several places the world over, so it captured something for me that actually made me see **Welles** a bit differently.

I have the same experience as you in that a lot of things come in, and they may be, ya know entertaining, but the shows don't stick to the ribs. Do they not stick because we have too much? I'm hard-pressed to even think of things that have truly knocked my socks off. Plenty of stuff I've experienced as interesting or pleasant and a solid way to waste time, but my socks have remained firmly on my feet. I'd say there's a few basic problems with the scene as it is now. You and I are using the word "*prestige*" but it's more like a ubiquitous glut, right? I find that with many of the tv shows that have attracted me, I see a pattern in that the premise and the first few episodes that the narrative may engage with enigma and atmosphere but almost without fail the story will inevitably unfold towards the mundane, some combination of logic and melodrama, even if melodrama is not a dirty word for me at all, but I guess I mean that more like melodrama veering into soap opera--in the worst sense of soap opera--as the narrative reveals itself.

Often, I get a sense that even if shows start strong, the people behind the creative aspect of the shows aren't thinking much beyond the initial concept or the first season, so inevitably there's some meandering decline once shows get into subsequent seasons. Funny, I think of the original **Twin Peaks**, which was basically a pilot and half a season replacement, right? What's unique to me about that as television was and is that it's as if **Frost** and **Lynch** got away with something, like pulling off a heist and making something personal and focused in in the television medium, and the network accidentally allowed something enigmatic to get broadcast to the millions.

Speaking of soap opera, the motif of the soap opera within **Twin Peaks**, "**Invitation to Love**," I think is what it was called, going on in the background of that first half-a-season, largely dropped or forgotten in the second season. How does one forget a motif? Problems of creating by committee. That second season had its charms with memorable bits, but even the mighty **Twin Peaks** seemed to meander. The "*real*" second season, the sequel even if a prequel, was the **Fire Walk With Me** movie. And I guess the most recent season could just be seen as **David Lynch** doing a season of tv as a sequence of experiments riffing on **Twin Peaks**. Props to **Lynch** to use a season of a television show for actual experimentation. I only watched that once, week to week as it was coming out, so I hardly know what I think about it. Would need to watch again.

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To go from one director to another, I noted a comment by **David Cronenberg** in an interview promoting "*Crimes of the Future*," and he states that they did approach some of the streaming platforms, such as **Netflix** and **Amazon**, but it interested me that he said that at this point those big platforms have become the major studios, that they have the most money to finance projects, but what follows with holding the most money to develop standalone movies or a series is those platforms also have a conservative disposition. And he didn't mean that politically, but that they are actually less willing to support the truly daring or outrageous or willing to make an audience truly uncomfortable. I have not seen the new **Cronenberg** yet, but he seemed to be saying what he wanted to do was too much for streaming-platforms-as-movie-studios out there.

Reflecting on this, it kind of popped for me that a lot of the movies and series I see, even if I like aspects of them very much, it goes back to what I was saying about narratives that have interesting bits tend to pull back and land somewhere less interesting. Like the weird is just a ploy to bring viewers in, but then the tactic is to turn the weird back to normal. But I am somebody that likes to be challenged by art, in any form, or I guess you might say I am entertained by encountering art that challenges me, or in some way confronts me to see, or look at, or hear, have an experience that changes or even just disrupts me in some way. I am not saying the past was better than the present, but I also think that we're sort of in some kind of zone in which a lot of what we get as audiences is the subversive is marketed as subversive, whereas in the past the subversive was regarded as not as "*marketable*" as it is now, in which all interests seem to have a scientifically isolated niche demographic. It's created by committee with money behind it, so what we get as an audience is "*subversion-lite*."

Often in the rush to cultivate the "*new and improved*" what's good about the past gets jettisoned. I just wish reality could be a little more engaged in not only tossing what sucked about the past but also keeping what was good in the past instead of a categoric lust for novelty. Granted, sometimes one doesn't know what was good until it's gone, like 1000 love songs have said, heh. The diminishment of the physical artifact is a bummer, whether that's home video or music. But then, we've seen a comeback of interest in VHS and album art. And, *cough*, an interest in zines as opposed to blogs and content on the screen via the internet. At this point it's been a decade ago, but I remember when I was in my early 30s, people in their early 20s would get really excited that I made zines in the 90s. It was like, "*Oh, wow, you made art and writing that you self-published on...paper? I want to do that!*"

I keep thinking, speaking of **Cronenberg**, to the experience of renting **Videodrome** on VHS from a rural video store. From staring at the cover in the store and then taking it home and putting in the VCR, it struck me as almost dangerous as a kid, like something I shouldn't be watching. I can still remember seeing just the trailer for **Scanners**, and it seemed subversive, like the movie might actually do me damage. **Videodrome** didn't answer questions so much as begged questions and left me thinking. And I've been thinking about that movie for years, decades, ever since. Still think about it today.

The reason I think it inspires that is that **Cronenberg** had an idea, and even if he'd made several movies at that point and was seen as a money-maker within the horror genre, he was still operating outside of the studio system, with a relatively low budget, and, again, "*getting away*" up in Canada with putting this unique idea or several ideas, along with his collaborators, actors, and producers on the screen. Also, in some ways, maybe I think of **Videodrome** because we're living the movie these

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days. Anyway, long live the new flesh.

People can make movies and put them online for cheap. But it doesn't seem like that's truly exploded actual, literal independent moviemaking, as how does one attract an audience or make it profitable to pursue narrative movies as a life's work? And if you do, the process of getting gobbled up by money seems to be fast-tracked. Directors either leapfrog directly to some huge franchise or they seem to disappear. I'd have to talk to filmmakers, as that's not really my area of expertise. As a cartoonist, I feel like I'm basically following a "*small press poet*" status as a "*career*." I mean, would I like to be more well known, and by more well known mean I could live off my art? Sure, but I make things to make things and anything else has been or will be just gravy. I like to joke that I'm an *artists'-artist's artist*. If an *artists' artist* is an *artist* that other *artists* follow, then I'm the kind of *artist* that *artists' artists* know about, hahaha. Three layers down the hole, **Alice**.

I think about all the 70s, 80s, and 90s independent movies that played the midnight/art house circuit and survived and slowly thrived, creating an audience by this slow evolution. Just recently I was watching a bonus feature about **Susan Seidelman** making her "*Smithereens*" movie, and how she basically put it together in NYC and then when finished had the thought, "*Okay, so what do I do with this movie now that I've made it?*" Back to **Lynch**, I think of him spending years making *Eraserhead* and then it getting out and hitting the midnight movie circuit and through this very idiosyncratic labyrinth he gets a career as a maker of movies.

Granted, in a sense, the streaming platforms do buy rights to independently produced things, but that just does not seem the same thing as old theatrical distribution in which there was a burden on the distributor to then to actually try and make the movie successful, even if just an indie level. I am flashing back to all those American trailers for foreign art movies that **Joe Dante** edited for **Roger Corman/AIP**. Now it seems like platforms--*when not producing their own stuff*--buy up or lease "x" amount of "*product*" and then what hits subsidizes the remainder of the "*content*." I guess just as with old fashioned publishing of books and the theatrical model the hits subsidize the flops, but, I don't know: it feels different now, like with everything accessible, truly unique movies and shows are more at a distance.

I don't like to tear down stuff, as I'd rather promote what I enjoy than throw shade on what I don't, but I think of *Stranger Things* as an example of some of what isn't working for me, and it's not like my comments on it in an interview is going to "*hurt*" the *Stranger Things* franchise, ha. Actually, a writer the same age as me that I grew up with, **Gwenda Bond**, wrote a novel for them that hit the NY Times Bestseller list, so good for her, for them. I am glad for that. However, before that novel for **Gwenda** ever came to be, I checked out the first season. It pulled me in, but by the time I got to the end of the first season, I felt like it stretched itself too thin on the narrative tip and otherwise was leaning too much on simply signifying pop cultural references.

Actually, I can tie this back to **Bissette** again, as I was commenting on a **Facebook** post of his, and I remember I was one of if not the only dissenting voice on *Stranger Things*, as it were. I don't know what he was writing, for what or where, but I recall him asking me permission to quote me in something he was writing about *Stranger Things*, to represent the "*dissenting voice*" out there. When I found out the first season was originally pitched as a movie, but then **Netflix** said, "*Hey, we won't make the movie of*

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this, but if you could make this into a series, we're down," and that made sense to me. It's like I could sense this two-hour movie that I would have enjoyed that was hiding into a season of stretched too thin narrative that just played altogether too dilute for my tastes. That's just me. I don't really get off on dictating taste. I have plenty of things I love that other people find dumber than paint.

But to me lazy signifying of pop culture is bit of plague these days, even when the references are relatively obscure. I see way too much of: here's a reference to this thing or that thing, and then filmmakers kind of winking/nodding, "*Look, here's that thing you love, we love it, too, now love this that you're watching, right?!*" And then viewers seem real quick to go, "*Oooooo, I love this thing and then they just referenced that thing, so now I must love this thing that has my thing in it.*" That all feels a bit too much like sugar water in a sippy cup, a rat's reward for pushing the right button in the lab.

I'm all for homage, and I see all art as being a kind of collage. **Guillermo del Toro** was talking about how artists are magpies, picking up bits of things from everywhere and then making something of their own from that collection of bits. This gets back to the "*marketing*" angle of I think there's too much of, "*If we stick in an homage to **Evil Dead** then all the people that love **Evil Dead** will love it.*" Or insert any movie/anything into that **Evil Dead** slot and keep the logic. That doesn't really go anywhere. That's less artists being artists and something at best more superficial and at worst actively cynical.

A movie that I think was produced independently but **Netflix** picked up, or they could have acted as financing studio in whole or part was, **Jeremy Saulnier's *Hold the Dark***. I enjoyed **Saulnier's *Blue Ruin*** as just a solid hunk of character-driven neo-exploitation/action revenge drama but sophisticated in revealing revenge as empty. A movie that either by design or by limitation never flinched. An "*action*" movie sharp as a tack, harkening back to 70s movies. I was looking forward to ***Green Room*** as a follow up to ***Blue Ruin***, but it didn't land as much with me. Enjoyed it but was not moved by it. But then ***Hold the Dark*** again landed big time with me, but I don't know if I'm just hanging out with the wrong crowd or whatever, heh, but I feel like I never notice anybody talking about ***Hold the Dark***, which I could watch again, right now. I was into it enough that I read the source novel and enjoyed that, too. Is ***Hold the Dark*** a horror film? I think it is, even as it's all tied up in mythological mystery, a quiet vibe that then will erupt in serious violence, and a kind of lament at the same time. Hard to pinpoint, but I'm a big fan of horror that allows for ambiguity, that can be all about atmosphere. I don't need to have questions answered for me if art can ask questions that leave me terrified or even just beguiled.

I guess some more esoteric points of view I have as man of a certain vintage who lived in a time when actual film was projected in theaters and tv had not moved to the internet, but still absorbing the new of the now, these past few years...I'm not against digital cameras. It's sort of like with comics, as much as I can be a snob about using actual brushes and nibs and India ink, if you're drawing them with a felt tip disposable magic marker, what matters is the result on the page and how the artist arrives at that page, if it works, is not a consideration. On one level, the basic standard of cinematography is much more solid. Basic tv shows seem like they were shot the way big budget movies were shot. It's not that long ago that tv shows that appeared to be photographed on a "*cinematic*" level were considered rare birds. So, what I'm getting at is the look of digital photography, even as a way to increase the standard quality of the camera work in movies and shows, is not my issue. A subtle thing that's happened is that I think the disappearance of film has lowered the stakes of performing for the camera. Now a director can allow a scene to go on, relatively speaking, forever.

Back to **Lynch**, I had a making of doc of *Eraserhead* on for background when I was drawing the other day, and cinematographer **Fred Elmes** was talking about working at the same time with **Cassavetes** on *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, and he was remarking on how, in contrast to **Lynch**, **Cassavetes** wanted the camera-work to seem hand-held and fluid, as if the camera was a character observing or part of the action. To the extent that he noted that **Cassavetes** would sometimes literally bump him on the elbow during the shooting of a scene to shake up the camera, maybe even to keep the cameraman on his toes, to shoot as if he doesn't know what's coming next.

Elmes pointed out that this was in some ways the opposite of working with **Lynch** who desired a static camera, with all the work of what was being shot coming from the effort that was put into designing what was to be on screen. More a painter who was filming paintings that move, which as **Lynch** has said was the whole reason he moved from painting to film: he wanted to make paintings that moved. But all that together had me thinking about how film cost real money as opposed to now when once the camera has arrived, there really is no such thing as a cost for the photography to become digital information as opposed to physical film. So, if **Cassavetes** bumped **Elmes**'s elbow, that's a commitment to actual experimentation. To intentionally fuck someone up and see what the result is after the fact cost money. And **Elmes** also mentioned that on *Eraserhead*, when they were low on money, buying film was in issue. He noted that they were getting lots of unused bits and pieces of black and white film from **Bogdanovich**'s *Paper Moon* via the **AFI** connection.

What I'm getting at here is that with an inability for cameras to roll beyond a few minutes and with the actual cost of physical film, while digital cameras allow for a certain freedom, I also think there's come a change--*not necessarily better or worse*--in performances. The stakes for the actors and for the director when the camera was rolling was that "*this has to work now.*" I've given this some thought, and I think of how when a musician or band is performing live, or an actor is performing on a stage, the actual atmosphere alters. It's a do or die thing. And I've been thinking about how movies, good, bad or ugly, from before the advent of digital photography, even if acting for the camera was always different than for the stage, you watch actors in pre-digital movies and the performances have a different quality. You could even say some actors acted as if they weren't performing for the cost of film, as if they didn't need to nail it, or perhaps were even directed to not consider that film running through a camera cost money. Obviously, one can't imagine **Brando** giving a hoot in hell how many takes it took to get an authentic take. But also with being able to let digital cameras run for long periods of time, it removes, I think some of what I'm calling ritualistic focus. This is sort of a subtle thing to relate, an almost alchemical, metaphysical point of view, but I guess others can tell me if I'm loony tunes on this point.

I guess I would say to anybody reading this is just think about what I'm saying and compare the way performances within scenes play between movies shot digitally versus those shot with physical film. It's not like I'm saying "*performances suck now*" but, again, it's sort of a lowered stakes and less do or die, a sort of lessening of ritual focus. Or maybe I'm just crazy as cat-shit. One more pet peeve I'll add is the bird's eye drone shot. It's over-done, everybody uses it. Now when I see that, I'm just looking at the screen thinking, "*well, okay, that's a drone shot,*" I'm not actually watching what I'm watching. If I was making a movie or show of some sort, I'd make sure to avoid it. And while I'm unloading pet peeves, movies and shows are all just too long. If a director wants me to sit in one spot for two hours, the movie

better earn being more than two hours. Now everything is, like me, long in the wind.

Otherwise, I was just thinking about professional moving image making. Maybe that's my main problem. So much of what's being done now looks like it was made by professionals that were educated and trained and are comfortable with having a profession. Not quite the same as someone whose primary ambition is to tell stories through sound, image, acting, words by any means necessary and a profession or professionalism existing only as side effect of the desire to make something happen.

I guess I'll wind up the rambling and answering way more than what the question was asking of me by saying one of the things that I'd never seen before that was made for television, albeit in Sweden in 1969, was **Ingmar Bergman's "The Rite."** It's a lean 70 some minutes long kick in the pants. Avant-garde, enigmatic, and for my money, as frightening as a bit of business as any explicitly horror genre film. Does that make me some pretentious faux-hip dirt bag to get asked about, ya know, new television shows, and I bring up a Swedish made for tv movie by one of the *Big Names* of art house? Whatever, so be it. Give me the high or give me the low, it's the middle brow that makes me want to puke. What "**The Rite**" did do was knock my socks off. I had nothing on my feet after the last scene, heh. Also, speaking of money, the thing looks like it was made for next to nothing yet that low budget aspect was made by its makers to work for the show not against it. I mean, **Bergman** is canonized now but he was not always. At one point, he was just another guy making stuff.

Hip hop interlude.

Collaborations, slight return. I've got a decade plus collaborative relationship with my pal **Hendrick**, aka **Sheisty Khrist**. I may not project a hip hop vibe particularly, but I cut my teeth on not just metal but hip hop. My total fluency in keeping up with hip hop drops out by the mid-90s, but I defer to checking out new stuff or discovering old school stuff that I missed by relying on friends who are experts in all things hip that go hop. For me, as a rural Kentucky kid of the 80s, the culture of metal and of hip hop both seeped through my skin as exotic, both unrelated to the country cousin lifestyle of my raising. I can still remember sitting in class in the 3rd grade and looking at the cassettes this kid Jimmy brought to school. I wasn't listening to anything, just looking. He had a copy of **Whodini's "Escape"** album. I still have total recall of the enigma of it all. "*What is this? What does it sound like? Why do they spell 'Houdini' that way?*" It seems like five minutes later I caught the video for "**Freaks Come Out at Night**" and at least the riddle was partially solved. A friend of mine who grew up as Black in America and as a kid in NYC who was out holding a boom box while her brother and his friends were break dancing in the street questioned a honky-cracker like me being fluent in hip hop in Kentucky of the 1980s. I joked that, at least once it got going on the network in '87, we had the same **Fab 5 Freddy** on tv that they had on the streets of NYC and the same **MTV** on the air. One of my quips is to say that I "*invented*" wearing old school hats in the 90s, although past couple or three years I've backed off on wearing formal men's hats because seemingly everybody and their siblings are sporting them, but I was influenced in my hatwear choices seemingly by both my grandfather and **RUN DMC**. Especially **Stetson** hats, but not the cowboy hats, just the old school dress hats. As I say: good enough for **RUN DMC** and grandpa? Good enough for me.

Flash forward to a few years ago, and then I befriended **Hendrick** in Lexington, KY. We were always talking art and comics and music and hip hop (*and still art to this day*) and we'd agreed we needed to collaborate on something at some point. **Sheisty** is an emcee on his own terms, but also known for

collaborating with folks in orbit around the **CunninLynguists** crew, who have their roots in Kentucky soil. Our conversations around collaborating resulted first with the "**Superman 75**" cassette single, printed with a comic with two different covers, a comics adaptation of the two songs from the cassette, meeting in the middle. The single was emanating from the "**Cold Winter**" album by **Sheisty Khrist** and his partner **LoFidel**. I "*sampled*" imagery from the outsider artist, **Charles Williams**. **Williams** died from **AIDS** in the 90s, but he was a self-taught artist who generated his own comics that got printed in rural Kentucky newspapers featuring Black superheroes. Kind of amazing that **Williams** was predating both **Underground Comix** and **Blaxploitation** with his early sixties comics, and doing so in Kentucky.

The next thing I did with **Hendrick** was drawing/designing the package for their 7" "**Havanna Nights**" single on red vinyl of remixes from the "**Cold Winter**" album by **Kno** and **J-Live**, with some bonus **Natti** flow. I think they used some of the art for a bonus cassette version with that same material, too. Sometimes they take my art and run with it, and I don't even end up with actual copies of the stuff myself, especially if it's limited editions. "*Oh, you guys did that with my art, too? Cool.*" But we have an easy-greasy relationship on that point. I'm always glad to see my art in the context of anything/everything when it comes to the **Sheisty** underground hip hop universe.

More recently, my art/logo was used for the cover of the new **Gem Rats** album (*compact disc, cassette, and digital*) release, "**Hidden Gems**" (gemrats.bandcamp.com). **Gem Rats** was a collaborative project between **Hendrick** and **JustMe** that they'd let slide into an unfinished drawer for years and then resurrected to decide to release it. Looks like they made up some cool stickers featuring my art, too. For a project with a dormant album in the drawer, once they activated the **Gem Rats** gland, I did the art for another album, a remix of the **Gem Rats** by **IAM1AM** that reimagines the work through the lens/ears of the influence of and a tribute to the late **MF DOOM**, as "**Gem Rats: DOOMSDAY.**" And then I just did some art based on the old **N.W.L.** album by **Sheisty/Hendrick** and **Deacon** from the **CunninLynguists**, basically doing my own "*cover version*" of the cover art by Lexington-based painter, **Lina Tharsing** (*and old pal of mine*). That's also something that's not been used yet, so I'll keep mum and be coy by referencing it but not precise details other than what I've just said. It's easy enough for anybody reading this interview to get onto **Youtube** and search "**Sheisty Khrist**" and check out all sorts of music videos he and his collaborators have released to the ether, besides all the various **Bandcamp** spots to listen/download/buy music. I always tell **Hendrick** it's a pleasure to get up with him on any given project. As I say: it keeps my underground hip hop muscles from atrophying.

SKREE: You've mentioned quite a few authors already and I'm curious about your reading habits starting a youngster and heading into your 50s.

J.T. D: Well, at the present moment, I'm 46 years old going on 47, **Corey**, so don't push me too quickly towards 50. Let me remain "*in my 40s*" while I still can. Ha, that aside...I find myself thinking about how wanting to talk about writers begs me also wanting to talk about art and artists and movies and moviemakers and comics as well. I guess one defining thing about me is that I'm sort of equally interested in all of these things. Not that it's all the unique to be wired that way, but I'm not narrow in my interests and habits, or at least, you might say, I get narrow under a big umbrella. "*Narrow under a big umbrella*" sounds like a title for something.

So... when I was a kid, I wasn't that great of a reader of prose. I had a lot of patience for reading comics. I read some horror and science fiction but not that dedicated a reader of fiction, or nonfiction,

for that matter. I remember I was a fan of "*choose your own adventure*" books as a youngster, but the titles are lost to time in my memory. My aforementioned buddy **Ed**--*I think I mentioned him*--who was three years my senior so that when I was about 12 or 13 and we started to become better pals: he was an influence. **Ed** rocked this kind of OCD or autistic vibe, and I say this not causally or disrespectful to those with variations of either diagnosis.

Saying that to say this: **Ed** kept notebooks and he'd maintain a list of all the books he'd read, divided by year, and with a note on of the dates started and completed on every book. In addition to that I remember he kept in his notebooks track of University of Kentucky college basketball, uh: statistics? I'm not now nor have I ever been a big sports guy, although college basketball is huge in KY. I have no idea what **Ed** was keeping track of in terms of basketball. The list-making of books he'd read, in which he also kept track of the number of pages of each book. And we're talking like, 20-30 or more books a year this guy was reading.

That lit a literary fire. Like, "*I can't keep mucking about...I think of myself as literate, but I'm a ding-dang dilettante as reader in comparison to Ed.*" I can't discount **Ed**'s influence, as he was **H.P. Lovecraft** obsessed, and that got me going with **Lovecraft**. **Ed**'s father was a successful attorney, in rural terms, so he lived a more affluent lifestyle, speaking of relativity, than I did, which as the son of public-school teachers in the county of our raising, I was living more well-off than most everybody else. You gotta remember I grew up, statistically, speaking of statistics, in one if not the poorest regions of the United States. But I'm saying this to say that **Ed** had more stuff, which included books. So, I can still remember checking out those deluxe, hardcover **Lovecraft Arkham House** editions **Ed** had amassed. Books to me were mass market paperbacks, which I love, but exposure to **Ed**'s collection of **Arkham House** books planted the seed in my mind of books that were also art-objects, finely printed and bound, and got me going with an appreciation for books as art objects.

If I were to define my 80s into very early 90s reading, late pre-teen through teen years, I was more a horror-head, and my **DESPAIR** series in some ways is the closest I've arrived at walking around in the skin of the genre, but it indirectly informs me even if I'm drawing funny animal comics. I also had an interest not just in **Stephen King**, but I guess I was the kind of nerd that in a way more than **King**'s fiction, his writing about horror, such as **Danse Macabre**, which I bought and read when I was maybe 11, but certainly no later than age 13 and a book collection of interviews with **King**, **Bare Bones**, had as much an influence on me as his own fiction, but that, too. It was **King**'s esteem of the Brit horror scribe **James Herbert** that got me reading whatever **Herbert** books I could find. I remember reading **The Rats** and **The Fog**, a little vague on others, but I know I read more than that. And then **Clive Barker** coming on the scene, along with **King**'s "*I have seen the future of horror*" endorsement, both with his **Hellraiser** movie and the **Books of Blood**...I had all three of those volumes in paperback editions. **Ed** was a big **Ramsey Campbell**-head, so that spilled over to me, and then he got into **Thomas Ligotti** big time...I was interested in **Ligotti**, but at least now all I really can remember now with many years having obscured my past is that I read his first book of stories, "**Songs of a Dead Dreamer**," and it made an impact on me.

In saying that, I am now looking at the intewebs which tell me on one of these new-fangled websites they got that in 2015, **Penguin Classics** (?) reprinted that and his second book of stories, "**Grimscribe**," into one volume. Not only that but they used **Chris Mars**, as in of the **Replacements**, art for the

cover? It's a strange world. I thought **Ligotti** was obscure and only somebody maybe 80s/90s horror-heads would remember, didn't realize the **Ligotti** cult was running at least **Penguin Classics** strong. I may need to get that **Penguin** edition and revisit his works...who knows, I may have read "**Grimscribe**," too when it was new, I certainly remember the cover of the original version of it. I don't know if I ever owned either, but if I didn't, I certainly would have borrowed **Ed**'s copies.

Which actually sparks another writer I definitely read in the early 90s that this conversation got me remembering, even if I hadn't thought of her in while, and that's **Kathe Koja**. I no longer have my copies of the **Dell Abyss** imprint paperbacks by her of **The Cipher** and **Bad Brains**. If I read anything beyond those two books, I don't recall, but what I remember is the sense of horror moving into a realm a few steps beyond what one usually encountered in the 80s. Between **Gibson's "cyberpunk"** on the sci fi side of the fence, the horror of **Koja** seemed knowing, urban and arty. Like an art gallery on the bad side of town. **Koja's** two books read as post punk, as industrial to me. Connected more to the **Burroughs** I was reading or even, for a cinematic parallel, to **Richard Stanlely's "Hardware"** which I would have seen on VHS around the time same time I read **The Cipher**. Like **Ligotti**, as I "recovered" the memory of **Koja's** books when thinking about my life in reading writers, I didn't realize the cult of **Koja** had grown considerably relatively recently. From what I gather, while I'm aware of the book I don't have it, but **Grady Hendrix's "Paperbacks from Hell: The Twisted History of '70s and '80s Horror Fiction"** apparently stoked more recent interest, which I can imagine is true, even if her **Dell Abyss** books were early 90s not 80s, but that cover art was as memorable as **Koja's** prose. Now those books that I let slip through my fingers are fetching collector prices. But then, if I still had 'em, I probably would want to keep 'em. So it goes.

But back to **Ligotti**, as **Ed** reading **Ligotti** also got me on the case of **Bruno Schulz**, who **Ligotti** mentions as an influence. **Schulz** is a writer I've meant to read more than I've read...in fact, got a book of his writing on the shelf, and I have read an actual biography of the man, but it was really seeing **Ed's** book of the drawings of **Schulz** and his work as a visualist that influenced me, and I'm jumping ahead in time here as I know I wouldn't have seen that book until my very late teens or early twenties. **Schulz** was a strange artist and writer who died in World War II, and in saying he died I mean he was murdered by a Nazi. The story is complicated, in that a Nazi officer who admired his art had basically taken **Schulz** into his home as his "*personal jew artist*," but then another Nazi officer who was pissed off that the "*owner*" of **Schulz** had killed "*his jew*," shot **Bruno Schulz** in the head in the street. He painted a mural in the Nazi officer's home which was actually discovered and uncovered in 2001 or thereabouts. It was a kitschy, **Disney-fied** kind of forced fascist happiness painting. I can't imagine an artist of **Schulz's** stature being forced to create corn-ball bullshit as a way to survive the Holocaust, but then not even surviving. Quite a bit of **Schulz's** writing and art didn't survive. Art went missing and a novel he was known to have been working on didn't survive. There's one book of his art, all drawings, and that's all that made it out of World War II. Some may have seen the **Quay Brothers** stop motion animation adaptation of **Schulz's "Street of Crocodiles."** Actually, this all loops around again, as the first time I saw it was **Steve Bissette** showing it in Vermont (*and then I showed Steve my copy of the drawings of Schulz, which he had not seen before, so there's another circle within a circle*). I was aware of the **Quays** but I had missed the memo that they adapted **Schulz** in 1986.

To move abruptly away from, ya know, one of the great horrors of the twentieth century in the guise of the Holocaust--**Nazi punks, fuck off**--**Schulz** makes me think of **Kafka**, also a Jewish cat, but while he lived

through WWI he died in 1924. I'm not sure what roads led me to **Kafka**. There was that video piece from "**Metamorphosis**" with **Aidan Quinn** narrating I saw on **MTV**. I know I saw **Soderbergh's** 1991 "**Kafka**" movie, not when it was in theatrical release, but pretty soon after it came out on VHS. **Soderbergh** riffed on the life and fiction of **Franz Kafka** to make a kind of hybrid-pastiche-thing that doesn't directly adapt any particular piece of writing, nor does it try and relate the man in any literal, biopic way, but basically is **Soderbergh's** version of making a "**Kafkaesque**" film.

Although I don't remember how funny it was, wouldn't mind rewatching that one. My point being that that I think readers, however casual or focused, often miss the humor at work in **Kafka**. Maybe it's a dark humor, but he's funny, like pushing the absurd. Being that **Kafka** did make drawings as well, I could picture him operating as a cartoonist, maybe he was born too early. But another writer that I admire that often gets painted as bleak would be **Samuel Beckett**. If he's not exactly funny, it's almost like his language operates in a kind of zone that if it was nudged this way or that way a little bit, the absurdity becomes humor. It's not for nothing that **Beckett's "Film"** stars **Buster Keaton**.

I was aware of **Beckett** when I was younger, but don't remember reading much **Beckett** until the past few years. I've been reading on repeat his short, later novellas, such as "**Worstward Ho**." I have an image in my head that some of those sparse monologues/disembodied voices would be interesting as adapted to comics. Not sure if **Beckett** is in the public domain, but maybe I might try an excerpt as an experiment sometime, perhaps it'd work under the banner of fair use, although I've noticed the main thing that will get one sued over copyright is if it seems like one is making money off the copyrighted material. One also has to get on the radar of the copyright holder, too. I'll refer sports fans reading this over to **Bob Levin's** book, "**The Pirates and the Mouse: Disney's War Against The Counterculture**."

With good ol' **Franz**, I've been recently revisiting some of the works, and reflecting on how his posthumously published diaries remind me as much of personal /diary zines of the 90s (*although of more literary quality than most zines in that genre*) as anything else, so it makes sense to me in hindsight that I was reading this material at the same time I was seeking out weird zines backinnday. I was doing that a bit before, in little bursts. I used a **Kafka** caricature and a quote to kick off **DESPAIR vol. 2** and more recently I stumbled over a lecture online about **Kafka's "Parables and Paradoxes,"** one of which I quote in this comics work in progress I have cooking on the Mexican muralist, **Jose Clemente Orozco**. One might not think of pairing a Mexican painter in the context of his work in the United States in the early 30s and a European Jew's language from the previous decade with imagery from pre-Columbian Mesoamerican art, but, you'll just have to trust me on this, it goes well with my take on **Orozco's** mural at **Dartmouth**, "**The Epic of American Civilization**." But I finally got around to checking out **Orson Welles's** adaptation of **The Trial**, and that's sent me back to my own copy of **The Trial**, the same version of the book that I've had since I was a teenager.

In another digression on top of a digression, and to bring **Cronenberg** back up, I was thinking how he did a similar thing that **Soderbergh** did with **Kafka** in his take on **Naked Lunch**, where it's not really any literal version of the novel, nor is it literally a biopic. This rubs some viewers the wrong way, but I'd argue that if you've read enough **Burroughs**, you realize he's pulling from several books. I think **Cronenberg** has said in interviews that if he'd literally adapted **Naked Lunch** to the screen it'd be the most expensive movie of all time and banned in every country in the world, which makes me laugh and, I also think he's quite accurate.

Anyway, what **Cronenberg** has said is that he basically made a movie about what it might be like to be the person who would write the novel. I still think it's one of the more interesting movies about the creative process, and unlike **Soderbergh's** movie, I saw **Naked Lunch** in its original theatrical run. I think it played for a week or two in Lexington. Funny, I can still remember **Roger Ebert's** not-exactly-positive review of it being printed in syndication in the local newspaper for its brief local theatrical run. Oddly, it came out the same year, 1991, as the **Kafka** movie with Jeremy Irons, who I still associate with **Cronenberg** from **Dead Ringers**, especially I would have in the early 1990s.

I still can't quite shake the experience I had of renting **Videodrome** on VHS and that having the same impact of reading **Burroughs** later but before his **Naked Lunch** movie, even if now both are long incorporated into my consciousness. The original experience of encountering art that I remember seeming as dangerous for the consumer, me the viewer or reader, as it did for the characters in the narrative. And with **Burroughs's Naked Lunch**, there's not even characters in a conventional sense to hang on to for a thread to pull the reader through the book; it's more like the reader and the author are the "characters" and the narrative an experience the reader has because the writer has put the reader into it. Picking up **Videodrome** off the VHS rental shelves or a copy of **Naked Lunch** to read is as dangerous as **Max Renn** to become exposed to **Videodrome**. It rearranges the molecules.

I forgot what the hell I was talking about. Well, if I go back to that pivotal moment in the very late eighties and very early nineties when an interest in **The Doors** led to discovering the **Velvet Underground**. Reading about **Jimbo's** reading habits led both **Ed** and I, separately and as a dynamic duo of nerd-dudes obsessed with the weird, to seek out **Beat** writers. I just reminded myself that **Oliver Stone's** hot-house **Doors** movie came out, like **Naked Lunch** and **Kafka**, in 1991. Which is weird because in my memory it seems like watching the **Doors** movie in the theater happened some time before seeing the **Naked Lunch** movie, but maybe it's because I've since revisited the **Cronenberg** and his movie has continued aging with me, whereas the **Stone** I think of as an artifact sealed in amber, a movie that I enjoyed when it was new, but I don't think about much anymore. I was reflecting on how my interest in **The Doors** led to seeking out **Rimbaud**, **Artaud**, and **Aldous Huxley's "Doors of Perception."** Not shabby things for a teenager to be sparked to find. Thanks, again, **Jimbo**.

Funny, going on the this "talking cure" journey into the habits of a young honky (*speaking*), I was looking up what **Lester Bangs** had to say about **The Doors** in a piece he wrote from 1981, trying to grapple with young people at the time being interested in **The Doors** rather than new music of the time. He mentions that a decade before it happened, there was talk of making a **Doors** movie, and that **Travolta** was being considered for the role of **Morrison**. Imagine that! I like how Bangs both admires **The Doors** and takes the piss with their excesses, casting **Jim** as a "**Bozo**" but a **Bozo** capable of brilliant flashes. Which, if you read **Nick Tosches's** obit, he more or less characterizes **Bangs** as a **Bozo** capable of brilliant flashes, heh.

Anywho, it may have been **Lou Reed** that led to **Hubert Selby, Jr.** Reading **Hubert Selby, Jr.'s "Last Exit to Brooklyn"** warped my head, was another experience that altered my DNA. I'd end up interviewing **Selby** in 1998, or it was published in 98, which I think I mentioned when I was talking about **Nick Tosches**? Speaking of nearing 50, one's memory starts to get all vague and folds in on itself as the years and the beers accumulate. But I don't think I mentioned in the early 2000s, I got the opportunity to visit

Cubby. The one and only time I have been in California, I got to connect the dots with **Selby** as a side effect of being near his West Hollywood home.

I got him to sign the three first editions of his I owned, *Last Exit, Requiem for a Dream*, and *The Room*. All three of those I should mention I just got lucky in finding in used bookstores in the 90s, speaking of an age (*mostly*) before the internet. Anyway, that's one of the good memories of this life I'll take to the grave. Going from reading **Selby** as a teenager to interviewing him in my late teens (*I want to say I was 19 or 20 when I interviewed him as I turned 21 in 98, the year the interview was published*), but it took a while for that interview to get published because my buddy never made the next issue of the zine that I interviewed for him originally. Because I was sitting on this interview led me to ask **Johnny Brewton** if he was interested in publishing it in his *X-Ray zine*. And the interview led to the fact that I would correspond with **Cubby**, so I have letters from him that are among my prized possessions, even if the content is mostly just chit-chat by mail. And then to go from the interview and correspondence to getting to spend an afternoon with the guy. Not bad for a country bumpkin from rural Kentucky.

As I paint myself as having become a **Dennis Eichorn REAL STUFF** character, or a **Zelig** or **Gump**, I should also mention I did meet **Allen Ginsberg** once, when **Burroughs** was also still alive. I started to talk about **Beat** writers and then took the exit to Brooklyn to talk about **Selby**. I read **Ginsberg** in the rush to read **Beat** lit, but I was more a **Burroughs** fan. I mean, I dug **Kerouac**, but there's a certain type of postmodern post punk soul that **Burroughs** is our poet laureate, so to speak. It hits me I should say "*post poet laureate*." And **Burroughs** was never a poet, so I'm using the term loosely. And I've read some of the less well known **Beats** other than the "*holy trinity*" of **Ginsberg/Kerouac/Burroughs**, but I'll leave it at that. **Kerouac** seems to have had more of an impact on hippies and proto-hippies, and I've noticed these days he's become more obscure as a writer--more obscure than Ginsberg or Burroughs--to younger people, it seems, if my interactions with younger people is a reliable survey of today's youth.

Also, it's not like I ran into **Ginsberg** at a bar or backyard barbecue. He gave a reading at the University of Kentucky when I was 16. I was too naive to consider it at the time, but I realize now I was totally **Ginsberg's "type"**. A teenage boy! I only say that to say, despite the fact that it was well attended and there was a long line to be able to give the guy the glad-hand and ask for his autograph, when I rolled up to my turn and had him sign his basic in print *City Lights* pocket edition of *HOWL*, he took a few moments to engage with me conversationally. Maybe my "*male beauty*" in its youthful blooming got me those unearned extra few minutes, hahaha. Or maybe he just found my questions engaging. I asked him about **Burroughs**.

The hippie dippie local literary figure who introduced **Ginsberg** talked about how he "*stood*" for "*love*." I asked **Ginsberg** if he agreed and if he did not, what he thought that he "*stood*" for as a poet. I dunno: I was 16, that was my question for the "**Master Poet**." But **Ginsberg** jumped in with the question. The introducer I can only remember by the name "**John**." I knew him because he worked at a Lexington independent bookstore that I frequented as a teenager when I'd come in from the provinces. Ginsberg said, "*That is what John said. If I were to say what I stand for, if anything, it's simply 'awareness'.*"

I didn't exactly want to say, "Well, **Mr. Ginsberg**, I'm really more a **Burroughs** guy, and that is who I want to talk to you about, not so much yourself," so I just mentioned that I was also a fan of **Burroughs** and if **Ginsberg** had any take on what he thought of as **Burroughs** representing, and his eyes lit up and he smiled, and said, "Oh, he stands for great awareness." My dopey teenage questioning aside, that was my moment with **Allen Ginsberg**, so I can't say I regret talking about **Burroughs** for a minute with **Allen Ginsberg**, when, as I said, they were both alive. And the kicker is that while we were talking, he drew an eyeball in the "O" of **HOWL**. I know he didn't do this for everybody, as my pal **Ed** was right behind me in line, and all **Ed** got was a basic signature. Speaking of youth, my dumb ass sold that autographed copy of **HOWL** when I was in my 20s to a collector in Italy. At the time it didn't retain much meaning for me, but of course now I realize I should have kept the thing. Oh well, the money I got for it was done spent on bubble gum and baseball cards...or, more accurately: beer. But beer is a good segue to **Bukowski**.

The way I came to **Bukowski** was actually by seeing the movie **Barfly**--from a script by **Bukowski** I say for the benefit of the uninitiated--broadcast late one night on television. I'd missed the start, so I had no idea what the hell I was watching when I was seeing this late one night as a teenager. "So...**Mickey Rourke** is playing, like a drunk bum who is a poet? And **Faye Dunaway** is in this too?" I can still remember the dialogue in that when **Dunaway** says she hates people and she asks the **Chinaski** character if he hates people and he replies, no, that he doesn't hate people, but, that he feels better when they're not around. And then that dialogue gets echoed when she says she hates cops and he quips he doesn't hate cops, but he feels better when they're not around.

I haven't covered in this interview how I've got a healthy or perverted, however you want to look at it, obsession with women's legs. And all the adornments. Stockings. Heels. Once those adornments are removed, I don't have much erotic use for the extras apart from a woman's legs, like **Ed Wood** lounging in, having use for his precious angora, not that there's anything wrong with that. But this is no secret. I've been in every issue of the **Ian Sundahl**-edited anthology art book/comic, **HEELAGE**, and I turned work in for the as of yet unpublished fourth installment. Oh wait, stop the press. I just got news on the wire that the fourth volume of **HEELAGE** has stepped out onto the tarmac. But that's to get that, even as a young lad, the scene in which **Dunaway** is flashing leg and **Rourke** says, "I could look at women's legs for hours," to which she replies, legs high and crossed, "I've got nothing but time," hit me where I lived. Even if I didn't quite realize where and how I'd want to live yet.

In speaking about, ya know, **THE PAST**, as I said, I didn't know what I was watching. I think it had a logo, and the intros and outros to commercial breaks let me know the movie was called **Barfly**. The big but indie (or is that big butt indie?) bookstore in Lexington where the poet worked who introduced **Ginsberg** to the main stage, I literally went to the movie section there, and, weeks if not months later after catching most but not all of **Barfly** on late night tv, looked up the "B" section and found **Roger Ebert's** review in a book of his reviews, probably packaged as a "home video guide," to bring up ol' **Ebert** again. This is the first time I encountered the name "**Charles Bukowski**." **Ebert** related the story that director **Barbet Schroeder** went into a meeting together with **Bukowski** with an electronic saw, plugged it in, threatened to amputate his own fingers, one at a time, until the deal was made and the demands met for making the movie. I remember thinking whatever writer named **Charles Bukowski** that this inspired in a movie director: I had to get on his books. And so, I started looking around for whatever **Bukowski** I

could find. And I'll remind those younger than me: **Bukowski** was very much still alive at that point in time.

For a kid coming out of a dry county in the bible belt like the black iron prison of Prohibition never ended, **Bukowski's** openness to portray humans/himself- **Chinaski** as drunk, angry, wounded, allow the raw nerve to hang out in public in front of the Goddess and Everybody represented, for me at least: a lightning bolt. In the modern scene, and as always, there's been a sort of "*Oh, Bukowski hates women*" vibe going. But then, in my experience, I've encountered many women who find **Bukowski's** approach to writing liberating. Like the women that "*get*" **Bukowski** realize he also gives "*permission*" to other people to tell their own unvarnished stories from alternate perspectives, including a female--*or any other*-- perspective. The same could be said about **R.Crumb**, and those two cats knew each other, even if they weren't great pals who hung out every day or whatever, and collaborated. I mean, I don't care if someone loves or hates **Crumb**.

Crumb influenced me, and any disdain I got personally for **Crumb** at this point grows more from more of striving to transcend an influence, kill-your-idols-style, moving out from under the shadow of a looming, luminary influence, and trying to both take from and also reject what one--*one me being me in this scenario*--wishes to disdain or transcend about the artistic influence, not from trying to cancel the baby as I toss out my bath waters. I know it hurt **Carol Tyler** that there was push-back and smack-talk when she mentioned **Crumb** as an influence in recent years, but, like **Bukowski** as a "*permission*"-giver, with him revealing his own unvarnished self, that also inspired women like **Carol Tyler** in the comics she has made. Do we get **Phoebe Gloeckner** or **Julie Doucet** or **Dori Seda** without **Crumb**? Probably not. And that's not to diminish **Aline Kominsky's** influence, who also serves both as a life partner and creative partner with old **Bob** (*RIP, Aline, who recently died, before this interview was completed*).

But, ya know, the young folks always think they've invented the world or were the first to rebel against it--*that's just a cycle*-- when in fact a lot of those divisions in comics or any other art form have always been there, and then there's the endless wheel in which we're all turning over on the wheel of what's fashionable and the norms that are always in flux. If someone hates **Bukowski** or **Crumb** or Whoever, I'm not disinterested in alternate perspectives. In the temperature of the culture now it seems like people take a statement as also being unwilling to listen or engage in conversation after a statement is made. I always intend most any "*statement*" I make, either conversationally or with art, to be an invitation to conversation, debate not argument, which is a form of collaborative engagement, speaking of collaboration. But the idea of conversation has atrophied to some degree, or folks think it's only conversation if the words exchanged exist as in an echo chamber. Thanks, social media. Thanks, cable news aka infotainment. One of the reasons I like listening to instrumental jazz is because the players are intently listening to and engaged with one another. You can quite literally have musicians who "*disagree*" with each other, but yet somehow find a way to make a congruent conversation, musically speaking. When the music is good/working, of course. It's all subjective. And it's not for nothing that actual live music made by musicians playing live and listening to each other has become studio music made in a can presented on stage as a reproduction, karaoke of the recording, at least in the mainstream. Whatever passes for "*mainstream*" two decades into this **Buck Rogers in the 21st century** we got going.

Crumb alienated his hippie fans by going more personal and less cute, but then he kept on and by the 90s instead of being an old hippie was regarded--with **Zwigoff's** 1995 doc a big part of cementing his rep

as the kind of zenith of it all (*a movie I saw in its original theatrical run*)--as instead of a boomer has-been hippie artifact regarded by the younger generation (*at the time*) as a kind of proto post punk truth-teller and influence. Now there's the push-back that he's racist and misogynistic as a person, rather than portraying racism and misogyny, but **Trina Robbins** gave voice to that pov in **Zwigoff's** movie, so it's not like it's a new pov. Interesting that **Robbins** perceived **S. Clay Wilson**, in all his own over-the-top comics (*and influence on **Crumb** to push further into the unfiltered outrageous*) to be a satirist and commentator, not an indulger of all the sexism or racism. At my age now, I'm with **Robbins** in that I'm more engaged with **Wilson's** work. However, I am not ignoring **Crumb** for the reasons that she disdains him, ha, rather: I've just been trying to move beyond **Crumb** as an early influence.

These things happen. I was just thinking about the fact that **S. Clay Wilson** and **Robert Williams** resented **Gary Panter** for aesthetic if not moral reasons, so much they did a parody comic, a flip book of **Yama Yama/Ugly Head**. Yet their parody of **Panter** I'd argue, instead of taking the piss, even if it took the piss, was actually a cool work of comics, regardless of their original motivations to pan **Panter**. And at this point, **Panter** just seems like a logical extension of the original wave of underground comix, and probably better and more in the spirit of **Wilson/Williams** than some of their own contemporaries who did not seem to irk them. Of course, **Panter's** apparent success and visibility and the fact that he was younger than them I'm sure sparked some of the bile. But, hey, go back and look at **Yama Yama/Ugly Head** now out of context and it just looks like bang-on art comics. I mean, maybe **Williams/Wilson** needed **Panter** to shake up their shit because their satire seemed to beget some electric eye-ball kicks.

And this veers back away from the boys to the women. It's to some degree lost history that there was a split in **Wimmen's Comix** that broke off and became **Twisted Sisters**. **Trina** in **Wimmen's** disdained **Crumb**, but then **Aline** was married to him. So between the personal, political, and aesthetic you had this splintering among women involved in **Underground Comix** into two different camps. I relate more to the cartoonists involved in **Twisted Sisters**, long before I understood the history or the split into camps. One of the nice things about life is I got to tell **Carol Tyler** the influence of **Twisted Sisters** to me was just on a level playing ground, nothing to do with men or women, that work simply shaped my conception of comics, in general. Oh, wait, I've drifted into talking about comics.

I remember the last time I saw **Tom Spurgeon**, former editor at **The Comics Journal**, of his own **Comics Reporter** fame, author of a few books and co-founder of the **Cartoon Crossroads Columbus** aka **CXC** festival in Ohio, which was at **Caitlin McGurk's** 30th birthday party a few years ago. I was telling him about the new lady in my life. **Tom** and I always talked as much about prose writers as much as we did about comics creators. But I was "explaining" the lady to him in that while she was fluent in comics, read comics, she also wasn't narrowly or obsessively consumed by them, they were just part of the tapestry of her awareness of things, and that she respected and was interested in the form, and **Tom** stopped me. "What you're telling me is...she's literate." I admired **Tom's** line in the sand, and it's been a reminder to me since he said it with his little quip that I totally got at the moment he interjected it to stop me from falling over myself to explain someone who might be a reader if not obsessively or narrowly so of comics. To be literate in comics is even on the playing field with being well-read in any form or genre.

Which reminds me, **Tom** told me some stories about hanging out with **Ralph Bakshi**, which were entertaining. And when I told **Tom** that I'd interviewed **Selby**, as a big **Selby** fan, he was jealous, exaggeratedly envious about that fact. He wrote about the conversation we had about me interviewing

Selby in a post he did for his **Comics Reporter** site, as I recall. In preparing for this interview, I stumbled across the fact that **Bakshi** was working on doing a live action adaptation of *Last Exit to Brooklyn* after he finished *Heavy Traffic* in the early 70s. And apparently **Robert De Niro** had agreed to play **Harry**, but the project fell apart, and **Bakshi** added that he and **Selby** continued to discuss a project to work on together over the years, but nothing ever materialized. How the flippin' hell could I have never known this until now?! I would love to go back in time and ask **Cubby** about **Bakshi** or ask **Tom** if he ever talked to **Bakshi** about working with **Selby**. I guess the only path I have now is to see if I could get to **Bakshi** and ask him about **Selby**.

What were we talking about? Words without pictures? **Bukowski**? I always remember **Sean Penn** describing **Bukowski** as embodying the American sitting hungover on the toilet, a person too weary to bother with anything but telling the truth. I read **Kerouac**, and I admire **Kerouac**, but I feel like **Bukowski** served for me the same function as **Kerouac** served for others. And for better or worse, it opened up the boozy floodgates, and sent me to seek drink with much enthusiasm to emulate my boozed out heroes, but our culture or me as an individual does not require **Bukowski** to inspire one to go sniff out alcohol, the culture does that with or without its drunk authors.

Speaking of **Bukowski** being alive at the time I was discovering his books, and the fact that **Bukowski** never did behave as "above" the small press world from which he originated, he continued to contribute to zines and such (*but he'd also make fun of the small press world, which is fair, even healthy, I'd argue, heh*). Which I bring up to say that when I was a young guy on the scene, I actually shared pages with things **Bukowski** had released to the wild but didn't see print before he died. Such that **Bukowski** had some unpublished bits in the *X-Ray zine* that printed my **Selby** interview. I remember the issue zine that I did that interview for originally but folded before the next issue that it would have printed had some art/writing/comics in it by yours unruly in but also the editor had acquired some unpublished **Buk** material, including drawings, that he secured for it. I feel like I'm forgetting something else, but the point being I was sort of waving goodbye to **Bukowski**--*and even sharing space with dangling bits appearing that he'd left behind*--as I was moving into a small press/zine culture as a young adult.

Drinking makes me think of not drinking. I had to put the sauce down for a period in which I was taking a medication for arthritis that was hard on the liver. I'd dabbled in **Philip K. Dick**, and I'd grown up on *Blader Runner* the movie, but **PKD** didn't really hit home with and for me until I was reading in this sober period. And I read a lot in that sober period. And now that I'm talking **PKD**, it actually reminds me that I read **Walter Tevis's** sci fi novel, the only other sci fi novel he wrote after *Man Who Fell to Earth*, which is *Mockingbird*. Oddly (*as in I didn't know it at the time, found out after reading it*), **Tevis** wrote as his first sober novel, the first thing he wrote since completing *Man Who Fell*, which was actually a fictionalization of his sense of losing himself to alcoholism. And we can sing about it being a small world after all, not only was **Tevis** a native Kentuckian, at the time of this conversation, I can walk to visit his grave, he's buried in the cemetery down the street from where I currently reside.

While **Dick's VALIS** is not about sobriety, it is about grappling with telling the story of psychedelic, hallucinatory vision, or series of visions, that the author...in the case of **VALIS** the author commenting on a fictional variation on himself...that the narrative, if a bit ironic, treats ultimately as an unveiling. And sobriety, if embraced, may be perceived also as a kind of unveiling. Late period **PKDick** really grabs me, even if I also love some of the books from his earlier periods of his sci fi, too.

Flipping back to teen years, I just recently happened to stumble across somebody sharing on the social unmediated the cover for **Kathy Acker's "Portrait of an Eye."** Brought on a Proustian rush of somehow coming across her books as a teenager. "**Blood and Guts in High School**" I remember as well as "**Portrait**," but it gets foggy after that on specifics. I remember having a few of her books, but then over the years I must have sold/traded/given them away. But it does remind me as one got into weirder stuff, how finding out about one writer or era or movement in writing would lead to finding another writer or group of writers. But in the pre-internet age, you could literally stumble over a book looking at shelves, maybe a blurb on the back by a writer you're into or just the book design, or maybe reading a few lines while standing in the store prompting you to gamble with your money and leave with it.

When I think of **Acker**, I think of what it was like as a teen to encounter the voices of **Patti Smith** on record and thinking of her as a poet, or at least poetic, or **Lydia Lunch**, pushing harder into **No Wave**, although I remember the latter more from spoken word albums than from reading published texts besides checking out **Teenage Jesus and the Jerks**. Some of my high school/teenage years fold over with my pal **Ed** already being in Lexington. I'd visit him and he was a University of Kentucky student and had access to the radio station **WRFL's** library as well as the record store **Cut Corner** which also had video rentals, so even when I was still living in the sticks and still in high school, **Ed** would be digging into things like the **Richard Kern** movies with **Lydia Lunch**. I'd see something like "**Fingered**," before I'd move myself to Lexington in 1994, and it was, like, "*Holy hell, it's art-post-punk-porn.*" Recently saw that **Beth B** directed doc, "**Lydia Lunch: The War Is Never Over**," which kind of pulled my early 90s memories of **Lunch** back to the surface, and filled in gaps in what I knew about her.

Somehow, I guess thinking about the influence of female creators, reminds me of being at a **Suckdog** performance in Lexington in the late 90s. There's actually video footage that someone put on **Youtube** from that night during the opening act's set in which a 90s **Dockery** may be spotted among the crowd. **Dame Darcy** was with **Lisa Carver** aka **Lisa Suckdog**. I was hanging out at the merch table before the show, and the two women engaged with me in conversation. I bought a print from **Darcy** that I got her to sign that was framed and on my wall for years, but then was stolen from me when a place I was living was robbed...that's a whole other story. And that performance itself never actually happened that night, a whole "*other-other*" story having to do with a shady promoter. But I was a reader of **Dame Darcy's Meat Cake** and, speaking of zines, **Suckdog's Rollerderby** was like a fact of being into zines in the 90s. Just to hang out with those two at the same time and share some chit chat made for a memory burned into the brain.

Those two got me reflecting on 90s weirdo, underground zine culture. I've often said that **Adam Parfrey** and his **Feral House** imprint created "*antibodies*" in me when it comes to conspiracy theory. **Apocalypse Culture** and its sequel, **The Cult Rapture** book. All of these were more like zines concerned with the fringe of the fringe and collecting them not as zines but as books. There's that material, but also the great oral biography of **Ed Wood** that **Feral House** published. A long list of influential tomes. Reading some of what **Parfrey** published in the 90s, you can really get a sense of the roots of some of the delusional, **Q-Anon** right-wing fantasies of now. It constantly amazes me that beliefs in the right wing cult can't see that the paranoid delusions of the left in the 60s and 70s often turned out not to be so paranoid, but it's like right wing mania now has co-opted some of the reality of the past, and even conspiracy theorizing of the past, simply because a significant number of people presume that equality in the public square of the United States means an attack on conservative, bible belt, white

dominance. Dorks. That does not mean that some dorks are not or can't be dangerous in the body of the nation-state. I digress.

For me, **Parfrey** "raised" me to be skeptical. To be interested in the extreme, but never to "buy into" some theory, but rather engage with a bonkers theory to see what one might learn about reality from a paranoid set of beliefs. Or even just admire the extent of such beliefs. But the point was never to be such a sucker that one becomes easily susceptible to belief. If one adopts a set of beliefs simply because that belief or beliefs presses all the buttons of one's biases...well, good luck with that. You're a sucker. And if the same people that believe that the libtard Dems are harvesting babies for sex and cannibalism out of pizza joints were to realize that the crazy ideas of now were all around in the pre-internet/social media 1980s and 90s, maybe there'd be less suckers in the world.

Anywho, I'm going to jump around here. Recently I was thinking about horror fiction prepping me for becoming an avant-garde/personal writing kind of reader. Reflecting on how most horror--and certainly anything "monster" related--presents a kind of mask-as-metaphor. I'm remembering my old pal **Jeffrey Scott Holland** had a bit of writing, a few lines that have stuck with me: "*We all aspire to be **Dracula**, but **Frankenstein's monster** is who we all really are,*" something like that, as I'm quoting from memory. What I'm saying, or trying to here, is that if the metaphors of horror are meant to shock and awaken the reader, it's a parallel to experimental writing, in which the language is the consciousness bomb more than the consciousness bombs of the horror genre, but a consciousness bomb works, if it works, explodes or expands the mind, the vision of the mind's eye no matter the form of its arrival. And I never shy away from genre writers. The best genre writers are always genre writers who manage to not be generic (*otherwise, I'd argue that those writers do not get remembered...reminds me in a literature class, my prof **Dr. Rahimzadeh** basically defined "literature" across the ages to being worthy of study in the now, as a examples of genre writing that do not conform to the genre that the works belong, such as **Shakespeare's Hamlet** as a revenge play that, as I frame it myself: rebels against the revenge play form, etc.*). To go from a writer like **Clive Barker** to **Burroughs**, in my rearview mirror, makes total sense to me (*apart from the fact that, yes, both were/are gay and both have last names that begin with "B"*).

I've lost the thread of where I meant to be in time. So, I'll talk about collecting paperbacks and getting into "hardboiled" writing, speaking of genres. For a span of my 20s I got into a "spiritual mission" to track down and see examples of film noir. I'd dabbled, but a few things sparked me further. I remember the painter **Joe Coleman** and the writer **Nick Tosches** both had mentioned **Nightmare Alley**, the movie, and in the case of **Tosches**, also mentioning the source novel by **Gresham**. You can't really dip your toes in the noir genre of film without getting into the writers that preceded it and influenced it. **Eddie Muller's Dark City** book became a kind of bible, or guidebook, for movies to seek and find. The other bible for me was **Lee Server's Encyclopedia of Pulp Fiction** writers. Paperback collecting and/or seeking out reprint books of writers of the same era included many genres, or, in the case of **Fredric Brown**, a writer that wrote in several genres. **Server's** book also got me on the case of **Harry Stephen Keeler**, and for those who may have encountered my **In Tongues Illustrated** book, I did a comics form bio of the writer in/for that work (*writer **Bob Levin** when he reviewed the book/interviewed me for **The Comics Journal** made the connection that the way I wrote about **Keeler** as a nonfiction element in a book of fictional vignettes reflected on my own approach to comics/narrative/fiction/storytelling in the rest of the book, quite astutely, I would say, as it was my intent to have those things bouncing off of each other*).

I could yammer on about things, but the end result is I was relatively obsessive about both paperback book collecting as well as seeking out noir movies. In retrospect, it seems like my interest in noir bled over into many noir films that had previously been out of print/hard to find into an era in which much of it started to get released on DVD. I'd go from having some title that the only copy of it was a VHS I'd taped off of **TCM** at some ungodly hour. I used to in the 90s version of the internet check out the monthly schedule for **TCM**, looking for titles to tape, but then many of those movies then became available on DVD. Of course, now we're in an era in which the disc/artifact/physical copy is going the way of the dodo, so one is reliant on streaming services, and if it's not streaming anywhere, then it's hit or miss in which older DVDs are cheap or command collector prices.

There's sort of a thesis bouncing around here about non-generic genre writers, and I'll use the case study of **Jim Thompson**. **Robert Polito's** biography of **Thompson--*Savage Art*--**had a big influence on me in all this, too. And then there's **Barry Gifford's *Black Lizard*** line of reissues keeping **Thompson** and other hardboiled/noir/pulp writers in print (*and I read Gifford, too, as Lynch's adaptation of Gifford's "Wild at Heart" novel landed like its own consciousness bomb in my neck of the woods, having seen it not in the theater, but at least upon in its initial home video release...not to mention Gifford's own book of essays/reviews of noir/noir related films...and I still have a copy of a Gifford short story he sent me in the mid-00s when I was working on a literary/art anthology which never got completed/abandoned, so that's another digression: getting in touch with Gifford directly*).

The idea that **Jim Thompson** was an inventive, but relatively **Cain**-like writer does not do the man justice. If he's most remembered as the author of ***The Killer Inside Me***, which is a fine book, but the shock of it--*a first person/unreliable narrator/killer--*which seems to presage **Bloch/Hitchcock's *Pyscho*** and much else besides, almost unfairly when compared to contemporary sensibilities--*even my own circa 90s sensibilities--*because it had a big influence and/or just simply predated other works in its wake--it can almost read as "*normal*." And I love **Kubrick's *The Killing***, with a screenplay by **Thompson**, in which the dialogue and the surreal perverse flashes/perversity of the characters are vintage **Thompson**. But even that is not **Thompson** adapting **Thompson**, but **Thompson** putting his own flourish on **Kubrick's** source novel for the screenplay. Where I'm leading to with all of this is that with **Thompson** I think--*besides those dedicated to reading his works--*is that 1. he was a prolific writer who wrote to put bread on the table, so, like **Philip K. Dick** and other midcentury pulp writers: not all of his novels are all that great, but he wrote a lot, and the problem there is one can read the "*wrong*" **Thompson** (*the lesser novels*) or at least the wrong **Thomson** for the wrong reader (**Nick Tosches**, *in fact, despised Thompson, he loved Patricia Highsmith, in contrast*), and I couldn't talk him into giving him another chance, but he'd read ***The Alcoholics*** and thought it gutter trash, but that's a book that **Thompson** wrote trying to write a best-seller...**Thompson** (like **Tosches**) was not afraid of drinking, heh, and he had this notion that a book about alcoholics would be read by every drunk that ever drank, but he must have been drinking too much when he had this idea/wrote the book, as I'll agree with **Tosches**: one of **Thompson's** most forgettable efforts. And if you'll remember I was working towards: **& 2**. I would contend that the best of **Thompson--and what I like--**is the totally bonkers stuff. To say it's hardboiled is like saying that **Burroughs** is hardboiled. Sure, that lean sentence structure and sparse language is there, but novels like ***Hell of a Woman*--**which splits itself as the main character literally/figuratively seems to fracture as the language fractures, or ***Savage Night*** which seems to be about a disfigured hit man and his passion for a physically disabled woman, a kind of mockery of the hot house passions in say **James M. Cain**, and ultimately erupts into a psychedelic freak out including a cameo by the author

himself, the details of which I won't spoil for anybody who hasn't read it, but, it goes totally insane. **Sam Peckinpah** made a really interesting adaptation of *Getaway*, but his movie leaves out the original, hallucinatory ending in which the main characters escape...but seem to escape quite literally to hell. And then I think of **The Nothing Man**, a novel about a man who lost his genitals as a soldier, but becomes a killer of women, a sick puppy of a protagonist whose day job is as an alcoholic journalist (*apparently Thompson did some research on his own approach to drinking on that job*) and is quietly nursing a collection of verse titled "*Puke and Other Poems*," sounding like some proto-beatnik poetry. So **Thompson**, at his best to/for me, comes across as a very singular writer, postmodern before postmodernism and/or a modernist hiding out in the weeds of the pulp landscape. Since the **Thompson** books I most admire seem to start like conventional hardboiled writing but then get stranger and more twisted as the plot progresses, often makes me wonder if the editors/publishers even read beyond the opening chapters and the plot synopsis. One pauses to think: how did some of these books even get published in the 50s? Maybe these things were off the radar of the censors, as well. I know **Lion** books just let **Thompson** be **Thompson**, and it was in that era, for that publisher, that **Thompson** wrote most of what he's remembered for today.

Being that **Thompson** has a reputation now and is considered collectible and commands the big-ticket prices, I only have a single example in my collection of an original, first edition **Thompson**, of *Nothing Man*, not for **Lion**, but for **Dell** in the same period. I bring this up to get to the facts behind me getting it. I mentioned my pal **Jeffrey Scott Holland**, but an interesting bit of trivia there is **Jeff's** father, **RC Holland**, owned and operated the vintage paperback mail order business, **Books Are Everything**, out of their Richmond, KY home. Not only was the mail order business a business, it was also an 80s into the 90s zine, *Books Are Everything*, which both advertised what they had to sell, but also investigated the history of the form. **Miriam Linna** of **Norton Records/Kicks** zine fame, a paperback book fiend herself (*which one could argue culminated with the Norton line of Kicks paperback originals in a new time*) both bought books from and acknowledged the influence/help of **RC Holland** in her own paperback book quests/writings about books. I sort of slowly pieced the facts of all this together over time, because at first, I was just **Jeff's** pal. And when I'd pick him up/drop him off at his folks' house and met the parents, I realized they had this business, with a house full of books, arranged on custom shelves that lined the bottom floor of the house, all organized by publisher. So eventually I'd realize that **RC's Books Are Everything** was the largest mail order business of vintage paperbacks in the U.S. and later I'd realize they did a zine. With **Jeff**, it was his father, so like a lot of pals, it's not like we talked about his father all that much except in passing, and those anecdotes often had more to do with day-to-day life, not his business. Hell, I only became aware of the zine later, too. **RC** passed away relatively recently, and I lament his loss. But **Jeff** told me some anecdotes, such as the fact that when **Hal Wilner** was recording *Dead City Radio*, he bought his copy of the **Ace** original edition of *Junkie* from **RC** to have **Burroughs** sign. He told me that **Harlan Ellison** used to buy books from **RC**, often to track down editions of his own works he was missing, and that **Ellison** got into taking to **RC** on the phone regularly, just to chat, growing out of his conversations about tracking down books. After the catalog had moved online, I'd noticed that **RC** had an affordable copy of *The Nothing Man*. Plus, **Dell** books are known for having interesting covers and a cool design, so I figured if I could afford one **Thompson** original for the collection, that might be it and my only shot at owning one. The fact that **Jeff's** dad had it for sale was almost a coincidence. Plus, **RC** was famous, in an effort to keep his work and life separate (*in the same way that all the books were downstairs in the home but not upstairs*), for **NEVER** allowing anybody to come to the house to pick up books or look at books. So, when I placed my order online, I was just going to wait to

have it mailed to me like any other paying customer. I had heard about the rules, the fact that **RC** had people show up at his door and turned them away, so I expected nothing different for myself. When **Jeff** told me that his dad had noticed that I ordered a book, and he told him to tell me it was okay for me to pick it up at the house if I wanted, this information was conveyed to me with a certain gravitas, as if **Jeff** was truly gob smacked that **RC** would let me pick up a book from the house--which went against rules cast in iron at the **Holland** home, heh. I may in fact be the only person **RC** ever allowed to order a book, by mail or online, and then pick that book up from the house. But **Jeff** didn't drive in the era when we hung out most, and his dad was aware I drove **Jeff** around a lot, so his allowing me to pick up a book from the house could have been inspired by me saving him having to drive **Jeff** around, but who knows.

I've been re-reading **Richard Hell** lately in anticipation of him doing an event and reading in Lexington, KY. His memoir, "*I Dreamed I was a Very Clean Tramp*," and then not a re-read but a new purchase, his book of essays, published in various sources and collected as "*Massive Pissed Love*." **Hell** wrote an introduction to the book, "*Spud Crazy*," that I did with **Nick Tosches** in 2011. Which sounds like a brag, which it is, but to be fair to be my bragging, in the intro, **Richard** writes more about **Nick's** words; he devotes all of one sentence to my art/comics, heh. And then anticipation turned reality, and I got to sit front row for **Richard's** reading, got him to sign my archival copy of *Spud*, making that archival copy even more archival. And my old pal, photographer **Carey Neal/Gough** introduced him to the crowd, at the request of **Institute 193**, so it was a trip to watch somebody I met when she was a teenager and me in my early twenties introducing **MOTHERFUCKING RICHARD HELL** to the main stage, ha. What might shock, to an extent, those who are not already aware: **Richard's** a native of Lexington. This fact often shocks natives or residents of Lexington when they first realize it. It shocks non-Kentuckians, too. How could **Richard Hell** be from the bluegrass state? At least he was in Lexington during formative years until he turned himself into a teenage runaway who landed in NYC. In fact, my late friend **Charlie Whittington**, who owned a used bookstore before my time in Lexington, said **Richard** wandered into his store, chatted him up, and bought several books, back in the 90s when he brought himself to Lexington ostensibly to do some research for his first novel--a fiction based in autobiography--"*Go Now*." But speaking of the intersection of literature and comics, I noticed both in the *Tramp* book and his collection of essays, *Massive Pissed Love*, **Hell** gives props to **Tom Vietch's** poetry...I wonder if **Hell** is even aware of the **Underground Comics Vietch** did with **Greg Irons**? That makes another big circle as **Tom** is **Rick Veitch's** older brother, and **Steve Bisette** snuck in references to **Irons's** art in *Swamp Thing*. And then **Ed McClanahan**--as we were getting into working on what would become our comics collaboration with *Juanita and the Frog Prince*--was talking to me about **Veitch's Legion of Charlies** and **Justin Green's Binky Brown** as the two most memorable of the undergrounds from his perspective, reading them when they came out. But then this all reminds me that **McClanhan, Green** (*whom I met, sang happy birthday to on his 70th, in fact*), and **Tom Vietch** all have died in the past few years, since **Ed** and I had that conversation, so instead of weeping over the grim facts of mortality, I'll just keep on moving.

Anywho, there's hundreds of writers I could mention in the Naked City, I suppose. Is that an exaggeration? Maybe I read too much. I could take a picture of my shelves/stacks of books, but then that wouldn't cover books I've checked out from the library or got through inter-library loaned or borrowed from friends, much less books I once owned but ain't got now, so even taking pics of all my books wouldn't really tell my life story in/with reading. I mean, this reminds me that **Carl Jung's** books are an influence on me, especially the past decade, as me saying that I should take a picture of my books reminded me that **Sonu Shamdasani** did a book about **Jung** that's quite literally a coffee table book on

the subject of, with pictures of, **Jung's** library. And I don't have that book, in fact, so if anybody reading this was thinking of buying me a gift, I'll provide my mailing address. Just kidding. I'm reminded of when a few years my neighbor from Bali visited me and he saw my shelves, asking me, "*Did you read all these books?*" Well, for one thing, that reminded me how wealthy I am as even a poor American that I got a collection, an actual library in my residence, but I also had to answer, "*Well, ya know, **Putu**: I've read a lot more books than what I have in the house.*" I think **Putu** thought I had a mental disorder to be so addicted to books. And maybe I do, but I'm not the only one, as **John Lennon** once yodeled. Anyway, I didn't talk to ya about **Claude McKay**. Or **Henry Miller**. **Chester Himes**. **Flannery O' Connor**. Much less **Charles Olson** or **Guy Davenport** or *Frenchies* like **Louis-Ferdinand Celine** or **Batailles**. What's up Norway? As in: **Knut Hamsun**. Another Kentuckian like **Chris Offutt**, and it would be interesting to talk about him/reading him (*and his father, another story within a story*). And although I've talked about **Bob Levin**, I've not really talked about reading **Bob Levin**, who is a great writer in my estimation. I should give props to **Henry Rollins**, too, as influencing me as a young snot in my late teens/early twenties. But then I realize I've left out reading **Joe R. Landsdale** as a teenager. Which reminds me I've left out reading **Billy Childish** and **Sexton Ming**. The reading of **Ming** and listening to his albums led to me meeting the **Ming** and, speaking of books, we've made two of 'em together! But ya know, I've kept ya here rambling like a crazy person for long enough and if I keep going I'll just be talking about the influence of the fucking **Bible**, which is true. So I'll just close with a recent surprise, and maybe close some circles within more circles. I've talked about perceptions of writers being wrong, but what about my own wrong-headed perceptions? I ain't immune! I've gone most of my reading life being aware that the late **Toni Morrison** existed/her books exist. But I always figured to be so popular that it translated for/to/with me into an assumption that she must therefore be: painfully middlebrow. Certainly not literally. Well, I'm here to tell ya'll I'm one dumb duck of a dunce. I read her novel **Beloved**, finally, and it knocked me all the way out. The experience of reading it, although a totally different book in many ways, I can only really compare it to the experience of first reading **O' Connor's *Wise Blood*** or, come to think of it, like **Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn***. **Beloved's** damn near a horror genre book, but it does not fit into any neat genre confines. It's not a horror but it's about horror, and then it's almost like what it has to deal with can only be managed by allowing mystery into it, the mystery of magic realism or the supernatural, but one never feels that one is reading a conceit, just as if somehow what story had to be told with these characters unveils itself in the only ways it can be unveiled. Whatever I could say about, it's just fucking literature. It sings. It transcends. The damn thing could hurt a reader--*and it did hurt me in that hurt to heal kind of way*-- like **Kafka** said books should injure their audiences. Anyway, here's a book and a writer that I missed, and there she/the books were, hiding in plain sight in the popular consciousness and on bestseller lists and me keeping away from her because of my own misguided perceptions. **Beloved** really stabbed me in the heart and cracked my mind open, just amazing work.

So hit me with another question, and I'll talk for another few hours into the tape recorder while you go mow the lawn.

SKREE: So, we've covered some large swaths of your past but what the SKREEDERS want to know is what projects you're currently working on?

J.T. D: In a weird way, we haven't talked all that much about comics, which is mostly what I do, or even what I do that's not comics has some connection to the form, but then again, I see the world as all flowing through the form of comics. But then comics is just a word. All of the arts are just branches on

a single tree, in my way of picturing shit. Speaking of funny books, I'm wanting to return to reviewing/writing **ABOUT** comics...now that blogging is dead, I'm thinking of firing up a review-blog, but more loosey in the goosey, so I'm hoping folks may look forward to my "**Diary of a Comix Junky**" (*tentative title*), coming soon to an internet near you, consult your search engine of choice in a future that might be more nearer than further. Anyways, if I don't eggsactly want to get my ducks in a row when I'm not all that partial to counting any given ospreys before they hatch, I'll allude to some irons in the fires. If I were to guess, the next thing I'll finish is **NEVER GAVE SUCK**. That's my future-past, mythopoeic funny-animal "*graphic novel*" I'm planning on releasing as five individual comics at one time, a "*complete run*" in one big kung fu kick. If a lot of my previous work has been big, oversized sumbucks, **SUCK** is going back to mini-comix/digest size zine style. I got the vision for this thing early in the pandemic shutdown and have been working on it ever since, sparked by that to just go more sparse, small and mean and lean if expansive at 144 pages in total--*there's specific reasons for me fitting it to a specific number, but that number includes covers/back covers--*and I'd say I'm a bit over the halfway mark. I've shared some flashes up its skirt on social media as I've been in my progressions. Other things are floating around in various states of completion that I'm putting further back on the burner, like my long-gestating attempt to do a book that deals in the story behind and the making of the mural **THE EPIC OF AMERICAN CIVILIZATION** by **José Clemente Orozco** that he finished at Dartmouth in 1934. But I solved the riddle of that particular sphinx in the past year or two, even though I started the project back in 2011/12 when living in WRJ, VT. Dartmouth was a short drive/bus ride away, and I spent a lot of time with my sketchbook copying the mural while sitting with it in the reading room of the **Baker library** and then doing a lot of research. That'll have to be oversize again (*as I'm working on it in the biggest sketchbook that Moleskine makes, a whopper*). I started with wanting to do a non-fiction comic, but then it turned more imaginative/symbolic, and I've deep dived into exploring a lot of Mesoamerican art, writing, symbolism, and mythology but allowing that to pass through my own nervous system, turning a non-fiction project into, in **Jungian** terms, a bit of "*active imagination*." I also got another project that will be another big comic book, **NOVA POLICE ACTION COMICS #1**. Got few pages done on that, basically have it all mapped out, but like the **Orozco** romp, I've got to finish **SUCK** before I loop back around to it. But that takes **Burroughs** as a character, **Agent Lee**. Set in 1968. Well, I could say more about it, but I'll leave it at that. It's really an excuse for me to make an "*adventure*" comic that's like a cross between **T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS** and Kirby's **KAMANDI** mixed with the western of the **RAWHIDE KID**. Yet employing the "*third mind*" techniques developed by **Burroughs** and **Gysin**, with **Gysin** as much as an influence as **Burroughs**, or, well, **Jack Kirby**. Other things I got going are some writing projects with illustration that might come to be books through **Aaron Lange** and **Jake Kelly's** new imprint, **Stone Church Press**. But being that who knows which direction we'll agree to go, I'll let it be at that: writing with my own illustrations rather than comic books that might become a chap book or novella sized book in the next year or two. I've got an article I'm researching that has to do with comics history that's probably going to take months of research to complete, and that has to do with revisiting what Black activist artists were doing simultaneous to the **Underground Comix** movement and how I see that as part of the **Undergrounds** rather than separate, as I see influence from that work seeping over into things folks like **Skip Williamson**, **Spain**, **Greg Irons** and **Ron Cobb** were doing...this idea recently came to me in the process of preparing a guest lecture on the history of comics (*more than 100 years in less than 50 minutes: GO!!!*) for a "*graphic*" novel course being taught for the first time in the English dept. at Eastern KY University. I also got a ding-dang novel sitting around too, an old manuscript that got abandoned/mulched and some of it became part of what I'd do in 2008 as

IN TONGUES ILLUSTRATED, but in the past two or three years I revisited that (*previously thought to be lost*) old manuscript, and I've rewritten/reimagined parts of it, and intend on illustrating it all with new works. One section of it is completed (*and even submitted as a stand-alone to a literary contest as yet undecided*), others are being edited and working on one new section, so who knows, maybe that'll be a thing someday, working title **UNDER THE BUCKLE**. I've got a script from my pal, British wild-man/lady **Sexton Ming** sitting here I'd like to turn into a comic book, a sort of "sequel" to our **KENTUCKY PUSSY book** (*started in 2004, revisited and then finished as a comic book in 2019*). I've got some other more collaborative projects, illustrations and book covers and such, but those are all too early to mention by name. But who knows when precisely any of these will get done. I'm definitely at a point creatively with some of these projects that are more "grand" in scope that I feel like if I seem like I'm less prolific now it's all because I'm basically a dung beetle slowly pushing a big shit-ball containing bits of longer works that take time/years. Most of my current solo-projects I'm working on now all started with research and ideas of doing a relatively anarchic if "factual" graphic novel about the historical **Christ**, which I thought of as having the title **AS PASSERS BY** (*one can "observe" me working out some of these ideas in real time in 2015 my conversation with Gary Panter ostensibly about Philip K. Dick originally published in DARLING SLEEPER but I've archived it online*). But then **Yeshua of Nazareth** He Whom The Hellenes Called **Jesus the Christ** proved to be such a slippery fish, that idea turned into what I was thinking of as a more expansive book set in both the remote past and a sci fi future that I was thinking of as **BOOK OF VISION**, but then that **BOOK OF VISION** splintered off into, basically: **NEVER GAVE SUCK**, the untitled **OROZCO** project and **NOVA POLICE ACTION COMICS**. I've still got this big trapper-keeper looking forward with all the notes, research, and thumbnails for **VISION** (*and then some of those notes/scraps are actually stored now with the portfolios of the other works in process*), but my old multi-compartment folder looks like some weird object/exegesis of a crazy person (*me*). So, it's been a long strange trip for me in the past decade, so I expect that all of a sudden, I'll have these completed works coming on in relative quick succession as the long-boiling pot begins to spill over. But, to quote my honky **William Butler**: *this also is sooth*.

SKREE: What would you tell the non-Kentuckian SKREEDERS are the greatest things about KY are and what are the worst things the Bluegrass State has to offer to its residents?

J.T. D: *"There's no answer to the state of Kentucky. Again, you're looking for an answer and there is none," as Harry Dean Stanton told Cal Fussman in a 2009 interview for Esquire. When I quoted this to the writer Nick Tosches in 2013, he replied "The guy is the fucking Buddha incarnate."* And if it's not clear, **HDS:** native Kentuckian (*come visit us in Lexington in the summer during Lucy Jones's annual Harry Dean Stanton Film Festival*). Kentucky has Louisville and Lexington, and like the People's Republic of Austin in Texas, cities/university towns in red states have a different vibe and are often more cosmopolitan than people who think there's LA and NYC and nothing else of note in between those two coastal ears of the USA. What sucks about Kentucky is the same bible-belt, Old Testament/materialist/oppressive malarkey that seeks a jealous and wrathful patriarch at the top of its pyramid that makes living in this country an odd experience for those of us engaged with expanding equality and civil rights as universal rights and not interested in confusing church with government for all its peoples or business with government. But...ya know: oppression breeds rebels, and I don't mean the rebel flag waving mouth breathers who think any suggestion of equality is an attack on white supremacy. I think that bible belt pressure cookers makes the freaks of Kentucky as top shelf as any

freak one may find anywhere out in the freakish world. But I've often not understood people dismissing anyone by geography. Someone might say "*I do not like the French.*" But, man, I love the **OUTSIDERS** of French culture. Give me a **Georges Bataille** or **Alice Ernestine Prin** aka **Kiki de Montparnasse** and consider me a Francophile. So, I say show me the outsiders of **ANY** given culture, and you're showing me my peoples. My sense of "*southern pride*" includes abolitionists and activists and not really any Confederates, even if I've got a soft spot for my distant cousin **Jesse James**, but he was psycho and on the wrong side of history, cousin or not. Also, people tend to forget that Kentucky was not a Confederate state. There were slave-owning, Confederate sympathizers, but the state was more Union than Confederate. The greatest "*southern*" writers are all outsiders, oddballs, freaks. I remember the writer/artist/Univ of KY prof **Guy Davenport** didn't like one bit being called a "*southern writer.*" But ya know, Kentucky as poet **Charles Olson** called America is: "*a collection of occasions.*" As your Bluegrass attorney, I advise you to pour a glass of good bourbon. Consider its world-class freaks from **Hunter S. Thompson** to **Henry** (*not to be confused with William*) **Faulkner** to **Sweet Evening Breeze**. Find yourself the 1923 recordings of **Clifford Hayes's Old Southern Jug Band** and think about how that music moved down rivers. Find a copy of a book by **Ada Limón**, the 24th Poet Laureate of the United States as of 2022, and the first Latina to be Poet Laureate, who has also been a resident of Lexington for many moons. Actually, while you're at it, stick a **bell hooks** book in that stack, too, maybe toss in some **Crystal Wilkinson** or **Frank X. Walker**. You're stack of books by native Kentuckians/Kentucky residents is going to get real tall real quick, especially once you add the **Wendell Berry Library of America** editions (*one of the few authors to get that distinction while still living*). Get yourself some **Robert Beatty** art to ponder before I remind you that **Will Oldham** aka **Bonnie Prince Billie** is both form and still lives in/hangs out in Louisville. Next to your stack of books get some **Hair Police** noise albums and **Tyler Childers** neo-country records to put in your music pile, and you should probably get that old **Laughing Hyenas** album (**LIFE OF CRIME**, 1990) that Lexingtonian cartoonist **Bill Widener** did the cover art (*that stack of rekkids is also gonna get real tall real quick. so let's meet over at Pops Resale Shop in Lexington and look at records, we might even run into Tyler Childers over there*). You can also get you some of the early **WALKING DEAD** comics by **Robert Kirkman** and **Tony Moore** and remember that the start of that original series by those Kentucky boys was set in Kentucky, not the Georgia of the tv show (*and then you might pause to think: "Didn't JT tell me that he first found out there was gonna be an AMC show of the DEAD before it was known to the public from Kirkman himself, who was eating in the cajun-creole place he was shift manager at for a few years?" And I can say: you are kee-rect*). Kentucky can be great, and it can be terrible, and one may meet both great and terrible people there/here. There's no answer to it. Like there's any answer to anywhere in the USA or otherwise. But it's got its own character and its own characters (*and the good Goddess knows that I am one*), that's shit for sure. Probably has something to do with the limestone water that goes in our the-disease-is-the-cure post Scottish/Irish whiskey. Relax and realize we're all part of the human family, even hillbillies like me.