

# ZAZEN

## Chapter 6—Aerial Map of the Carnage

On the site of the blackberry massacre where the box-mall-church now sits there is no plaque or sculpture of tangled metal and thorns like there should be. Riding the bus out there, I counted rings of urban renewal. Clouds burned off and new streets ticked by on my right, Car Parts Lane, Value Town Outlet Parkway, Pay Day Loan Road, Bank of Nations Plaza and Paul of Damascus Court. On my left was the long and windowless side of the box-mall-church.

I'd promised Credence and Annette I wouldn't go out to the box-mall-church. Last time I did I got lost in a field behind Target. I was trying to prove there's an end to all this but there isn't. I reminded myself that I was there for one reason only, to make an Aerial Map of the Carnage.

Wal-Mart had already broken ground when we started. Credence's strategy was to organize around the traffic impact and slow down the permit process. Meanwhile, we would educate the community (70,000 ex-loggers watch as Credence and Della go door-to-door to force discussion of worker dignity and the price of neo-liberalism out of a traffic light). I had just come back after defending my dissertation at UC Davis and my plans were shaky. I had been told to avoid anything stressful, to volunteer somewhere. Or get a dog. Credence decided getting involved in a cause would be better. He thought the Wal-Mart campaign would be perfect for me but I didn't find the decimation of local economies all that relaxing. I tried to see the beauty in the flash of consciousness that passes over peoples faces right before the total absence of light, but somehow I couldn't.

We pulled in to the transit island. Russian and Vietnamese swing shift workers crammed up by the doors. Everyone else was staying on and had a bus pass pinned to their shirt, wet brains and chatty paranoiacs talking about the gold standard. In the back row some high-functioning retarded teenagers were flirting with each other. I thought the one girl was going to take her dress off.

Walking into the box-mall-church always feels the same. Like something really bad has happened and no one inside knows. I entered on the side by the Cineplex. A kid ran in front of me pretending to be a commando. He hid behind a fake tree and took cover from an imaginary bomb blast. His parents were holding his ice cream and laughing while he ducked and dived through the indoor jungle. Chocolate ice cream trickled down in between his mother's fingers and she licked the back of her hand.

"Have you signed up for our raffle?"

It was a girl with lip-gloss. I could smell the alcohol in her perfume. She turned and pointed to a shiny red truck about forty yards away. Big as a tank, raised dais and penned in by velvet ropes. Under its great wheels, long plastic fronds of coastal grass were matted flat.

I decided to start in the parking lot. It might be the center of the formation and the box-mall-church, only a calcification or a reef built up on all sides of a cement lake. It may also have been that I couldn't take the glossy-lipped girls with the clipboards, the graduating class of *None of Us Are Getting There Anyway*, milling and spraying themselves with tester bottles off the cosmetic counters because nothing masks the blood and fear like *Jubilant Day and Rapture*, each with proprietary blends of torrential oils and myrrh. I went straight out the side door into the west lot and started mapping it in my field journal, walking it in ten-foot sections.

## **Map of Carnage**

### **Notes on the Geomorphology of the West Parking Lot**

The west parking lot stretches from the foothills of the box-mall-church to the edge of the Batholith, Wal-Mart. It is an arid basin shaped like a T and dotted with express banks. Across from the basin is a range of ancillary sub-malls. The cultural micro-ecology of the lot itself is clear: mobility through nuclear isolation, oil wars, climate control, our primary method of civic discourse—the bumper sticker—are all factors in its evolution.

## **Lithography of the West Lot Basin: An Analysis of Sections**

### *1) What Would Scooby Do?*

A social-cultural lacolith of sanitized pot-smoking van kids, intruding laterally and prying apart two planes--a narrative mythologizing California beach life in the wake of the pill (below) and the Jesus freak movement the early 70s which applied trends toward communism and anti-war sentiments to a model of first century Christianity (above).

### *2) Sure You Can Trust the Government, Just Ask An Indian:*

The statement then refers to a revised history that aligns “The Land / Noble Savage” with the values of the “Frontier / Frontiersman” creating a platform from which to promote the sale of semi-automatic weapons and assault rifles—

I tore out a sheet of paper and started over. At that very moment a bomb went off downtown. A real bomb, in real time, that everybody heard. It decimated the executive bathroom of the New Land Trust building. The whole area was evacuated. I knew nothing about it.

Maybe the box-mall-church is the Piazza?

Maybe that road to Wal-Mart is the grand avenue leading to the gates of the castle. A new city set upon a new hill. We had tried to stop it and failed and now crickets have overrun the earth. The land came alive with snapping sounds.

Miles away the first responders were surrounding the New Land Trust Building. Fire engines like posies at its base. There were no casualties. Security measures were being implemented. Public transit switched to snow routes and on every TV screen in the country smoke from the executive bathroom curled up and out of the frame.

When they told me on the bus, I felt like my spine was a seismograph. Maybe because it was in Redbird Square and I had just been there. Or maybe that didn't matter. I couldn't breathe and I think I might have screamed something. Someone handed me an inhaler. Someone else told me to shut up.

I took deep breaths and thought of marine deposits. Everything falls silently to the seafloor.

It's nothing personal at all.

Earlier that day I'd been to the yoga studio and taken my place in the realm of rising home equity. It was so full I could barely move. The flower of gentrification, lotus spinning downstream. Raina walked to the front of the room.

She stood for a second by the window with the sun coming in on her, turning her face gold and her hair auburn. And in that stream of light I watched a million particles of fiber unwoven and unmeshed, freed from what we'd made of them—cars, rubber bands, backpacks, bombs and baby teeth—a gilded dust in a quiet room they floated weightless. She reached behind her head, twisted her hair into a bun and clipped it at the nape of her neck.

“Let's take a moment to come into our bodies,” she said.

She seated herself and took several deep breaths.

“Breathing out the day as we've known it until now and creating space for something new to arise. I invite you to let go of the expectations you came with and open to the experience of your body on the mat. Imagine a golden light coming in through the crown of your head, with each breath, drawing it deeper into you and letting it go on the out breath.”

My shoulders quivered. I saw Credence sitting in a field surrounded by Katydid. They looked like leaves but when I ran over to him they all flew away. I thought this must be how it feels to speak in tongues. Right before, when no one knew you were about to.

“Letting it fill up each place that speaks to you.”

Like abandoned airfields broken by weeds and baking in the sun.

“And bring special attention to those areas that may need noticing. Your hips, or your belly, or maybe a part of you that needs forgiving, that part of you that needs gentleness. And create a space for that gentleness to come in with your breath.”

Mom used to say you have to look sadness right in the eye but I'm done with that. My body came alive. My fingers tingled and I could taste the salt in the air. I held my arm up and where once a sharp outline delineated me from

the rest of the world there was a gradation. I was still myself, but my edges faded and when I moved I felt the Black Ocean give.