

a novella by
JOSEPH GABRIEL



**AN
ACCOUNT OF
MR.
CONTA
GIOUS**

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**PART I
THE ISSUE**

A tale of delusion, disease, and sordid sacrifice

Joseph Gabriel

An Account of Mr. Contagious

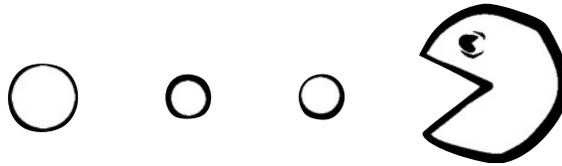
Illustrated by rGold



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PART I: THE ISSUE



An Introduction

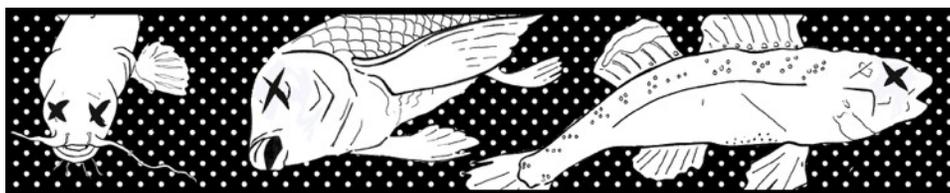
I think I can say with relative certainty that almost all my moral convictions derive from metaphors, analogies, and platitudes my mother used to say when I was growing up. When I wanted for something beyond my reach or when I wished something would be that could not, my mother, in her flat affect wisdom, would say, “Well wish in one hand and shit in the other.” Or where one thing or another didn’t seem to go my way or where I wouldn’t accept some bad news, she would reply axio-enigmatically, “Well it is what it is.”

And you know what? It is.

She sure knew how to shut me up, and any parent knows that’s a crucial skill to have when raising a child – you know, developmental psychology and all that jazz... She knew what she wanted, and she knew exactly what to say to affect her intent.

I admire that.

There was one specific instance where she compared all of life to the Missouri River, and for some unknown reason the analogy stuck. I don’t think she realized the prolific and insightful parallel she drew that day – at least to me. I can’t even remember what I said to invoke her wisdom, but she exhaled a drag from her cigarette and responded with something like, “Yeah, well life’s a river and it’s too goddamned dirty for the fish.”



Short, sweet, and succinct. That's why I love her. But unlike Mom, analogies never really were my gig.

I read into words too much.

But you know what? Life is like a river. And never has it told me what I was going to do, where I was going to go, and why, out of countless variables, I was going to act in a given way. No sir! *Life* affects us only subjectively, only indirectly – like gravity, and speaking of *past lives* is speaking only to the surreptitious recordation of perspectives – accounts on a malleable platform called history. In my case, history is a short, perhaps even fair, accounting as opposed to that of Napoleon, Washington, or the rhetorically infamous Hitler. The formidable ambiguity intertwined in all those *past lives* often makes me wonder if all the great names and acts which wear on in countless books and retellings are nothing but embellished misrepresentations. If not, then where are all the soon-to-be and up-and-coming historical icons? I've heard of no modern deeds worthy of a spot in the annals of history, next to the profound and murderous endeavors which consumed the forebears of the post-modern industrial age.

The age of information some call it rather pretentiously.

No, it would seem to me that heroes dried up right around the same time miracles dried up – when technology itself became the recorder of deeds, rather than, well... the Recorder of Deeds. No, a camera recording audio and video changed the playing field drastically. And, mind you, not the rules, or more accurately how the rules might be properly bent, but the playing field – the scene around the lines carved in the sand.

For better or worse politicians must now read from carefully molded scripts, mere puppets who must choose a party and who dare not walk too far from the chosen path; religious leaders who dare not declare the bleeding statue a divine miracle where they know scientists and skeptics will thereafter arrive to invalidate the claim, fearing that any anti-Galileo remarks would echo across modern media, relentlessly serving as a reaffirmation that the Church is antiquated and, in fact, self-serving; and criminals who dare not watch a video alongside an impaneled jury, shrug, and later testify, *yeah, I was stumbling around, and yeah, I fell into the officer on the way to pavement... but I swear I wasn't drunk*. It's often said that the video speaks for itself, but quite frankly the guilty pleas are more telling.

For all its potential evil technology rid us of whole categories of bullshit overnight – and yet the cunning of man persists.

Que sera sera.

In realizing the profundity of Mom's axiom, and in contemplation of my own mortality, it's time I lay down my own testament, my own miserable account, from my own miserable perspective – and also from the perspective of a cumulative disease that gradually ate my fingers away until there was nothing left but cliché.

Who knows: maybe in consideration of this accounting I'll be that modern historical icon and my deeds will morph into a tale greater than truth. Perhaps I'll conceal myself from the limelight and make my own history.

Perhaps I'm the hero of the modern age.

Yes sir, rivers made of liquid gold and immutable motives act as part of a seemingly endless cycle necessary for life as we know it, life where lives in being are easily compared to, and linearly described as, *getting from point A to point B*.

Perhaps Mom was wrong, and I'm the only man whose characteristics could fairly be analogized to that of a fish; and perhaps that justifies why I'm to be the hero of the modern age. Or perhaps it's something completely different... I'll never know.

Birth to death. *Ist einfach so*, I guess.

But I'll quit filling you with all this pump bullshit and cut to the chase.

My Praxis and My Obsession

The circumstances of contracting such a peculiar disease are in fact singular and easy enough to explain: I was born. There's no fault to be thrown about in this instance, unless fault may be leveraged against nature, or the putative father of all creation. No, it wasn't a question of fault that baffled me so much as the philosophical, and sadly indeterminable, *why* of it all.

For some reason whenever I thought about my plight I often imagined a middle-aged black woman with 1950's style eyeglasses, begrudgingly shaking her fist at the sky in a flowery blue and white knee-high dress, sometimes with a rolling pin gripped in that coal black tense fist of hers, shouting out to her own abstractions: "Oh, why Lawd?! Why?"



Most times I just shrugged it off as implicit racism.

But was it because I made the wrong decisions in a prior existence? Or was I in the wrong womb for the wrong gestational period? Did I roll loaded dice before first light? Or was my plight the product of parental participation in some subversive perversion like black magic or praying to the devil?

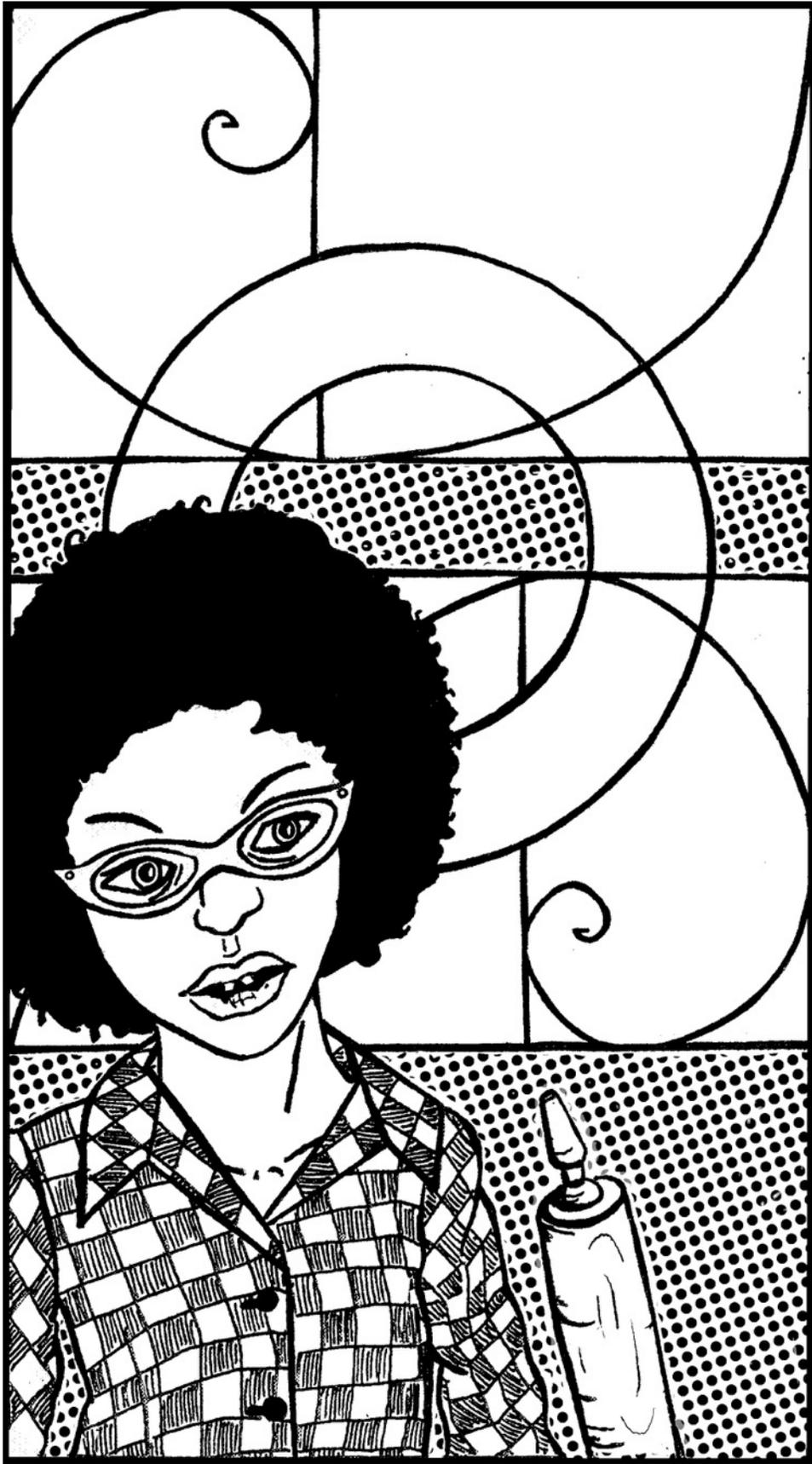
People always want to blame the parents...

Sure enough, it always began with a *ring-a-bing-bing-bing!* And there I would be, lying in bed, most often already awake in anticipation, striking the top of the old spring-driven alarm clock and sitting up.

In the silence thereafter was the beginning of tomorrow.

Mom gave me the clock at some point in my early teens so I'd get up and get out to the bus on time. Other, less poignant, digital alarms had proven ineffective, and she hated having to drive me in. Oddly, from the loud, chaotic tolling of the bells there emerged a tradition, and, sometime thereafter, necessity.

Every morning began with a *ring-a-bing-bing-bing*, and I knew that if it didn't tomorrow would never come.



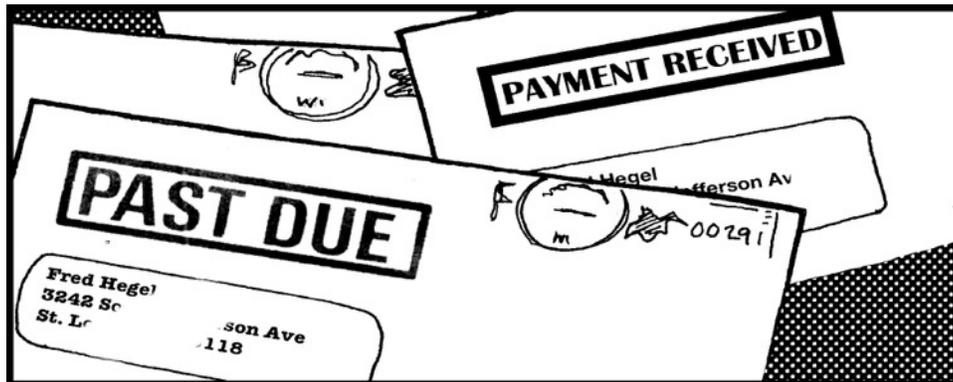
Certainly, there are many others jobs that wouldn't have bode well with my somewhat unique degenerative disease, but it wasn't solely my *job* that began the great duel among the greatest of dualisms, the showdown between a slow denigration of body and a third-party preservation of mind.

Well, not my entire mind, if such a thing really exists, but arguably the most important idea in my mind: my *praxis*.

My job – I mean, the way I earned a bi-weekly check and survived – consisted of sitting in a small cubicle in the middle of a large building, dealing with the day-to-day complaints of consumers against a major corporation – my benefactor – selling liquid dreams and belligerent screams to all men of the modern world.

Boozkamisich Brewing Company.

The work, if you consider it such, was data entry and telephonic masturbation proffered from one of several given scripts. But while I was there from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, and while numbers toiled up and down in my bank account as a result, it wasn't my job so much as it was modern economic freedom: the American Dream, a recycled euphemism for slavery.



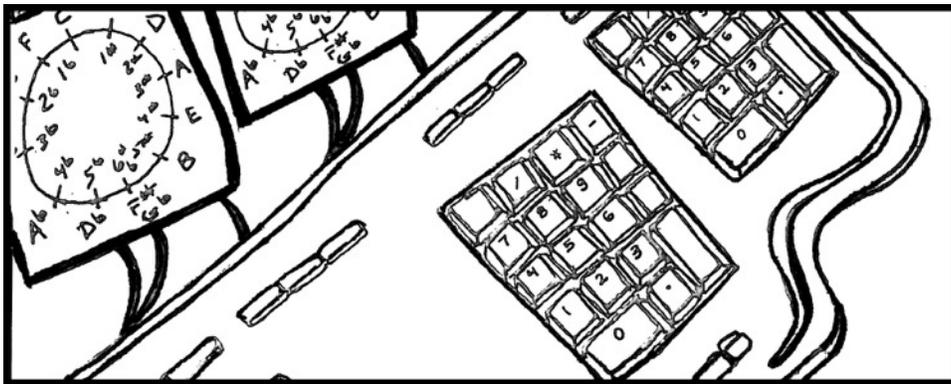
The word changed but the concept didn't: freedom and affordability are mutually exclusive concepts, and for that matter so are freedom and rule of law.

If you don't believe me go out and ask someone with a last name of "Jackson," "Washington," "Jefferson," or "Johnson." You'll either be speaking to a dead president or a black urbanite, but both can confirm how the world works.

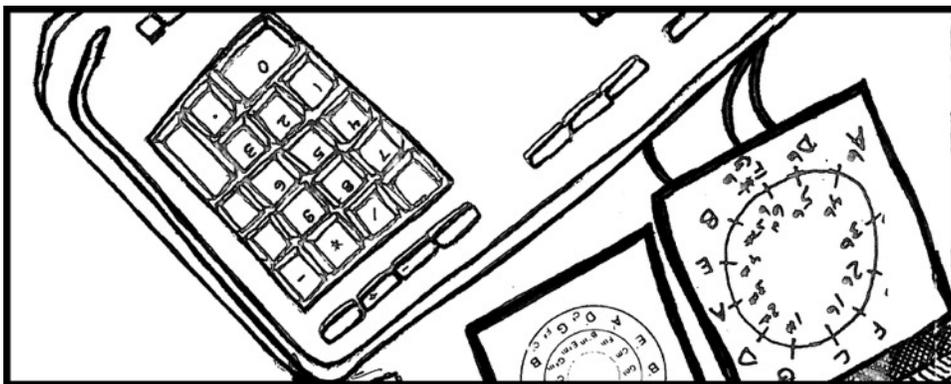
Sometimes I'd sit in that cubicle staring at the monitor and the keyboard and the phone and all my little hanging notes, and my vision would distort – waiting... waiting for that phone to ring so that one more consumer could be made a fool by my artificial colloquy.



As I waited, sometimes the keyboard and desk would begin to melt, sort of like those clocks Dali painted, and I'd begin seeing a reflection image of everything creeping down onto my legs.



I often wondered if it wasn't some subconscious instinctual calling all its own, similar to fight-or-flight, attempting to warn me that my thoughts and creativity were slowly dying in that cubicle, just like my body.



Oh, why Lawd?! Why? my body rhetorically begged as a third of my life wasted away on nothing.

A river becomes a stream, becomes a creek, becomes a brook, becomes a dustbowl...

No, getting back to my point, slaving at that monotonous position was not a job but a mere perquisite: an enabler. The Work required it and modern society compelled it, so I did it.

It is what it is. Or as the Romans put it, *est quod est.*

The Work began during a last-ditch effort to salvage my college education – before major reclusive tendencies overcame any sway their minor social counterparts may have had. As an animal caught in the undertow, I was drowning in the failed socialization enveloping me.

And they expected me to tread water for at least four years!

I realized my youthful ambitions would never come to fruition after I endured alcohol poisoning at the first and last house party I ever attended. It wasn't a pleasant experience, and I knew I'd never fit in to any paradigm wrought from a professional degree.

In the end, college just wasn't my gig...

My past, however, is irrelevant for the purposes of conveying the Work to you – my *praxis*. At this point you must be wondering, what the hell did he do that was so great?

Well sir, I composed and recorded and perfected a natural piece of music. That's what I did.

The Work, which I faithfully labored at every night for anywhere from eight-to-twelve hours, was to enlighten and invigorate the dulled ears of every human being that walked the earth; the Work would pull people away, if only for a moment, from their routinized lifestyles such that they might once again enjoy and appreciate, if only for a moment, the virtuoso cellist posing as a bum in the subway, such that they might once again hear and recognize life in the most dynamic of auralities – the ebb and flow of clandestine wavelengths, the very river of our existence.

It was quite a bit more ambitious than attaining an undergrad degree.

Now let me tell you a little more specifically about my other half. No, not my spouse, my genius – my *praxis*, if you will: a song of seven minutes, six seconds which I worked on for about seven years, and which, at least to my fine aural sense, approached an epic.

Let me explain. An axio-enigmatic way to describe it, if you'll suffer that portmanteau once again, is that the wavelengths and their respective

dynamic qualities were systematically perfected through the manipulation and recordation of specific hands-on instrumentalities as well as modern digital monstrosities created for exacting specific wavelengths, specific frequencies as they are often digitally and numerically referenced. These aural recordations were then ran through dozens of self-made digital filters calibrated to target specific ranges of frequencies, in some cases ranges smaller than one thousandth of a hertz. These audio signals, once exacted to a specific range, were then normalized and amplified to the appropriate volume with some parts being the softest dynamic audible and others being the loudest loud – the summit before distortion.

This was all possible through the use of several computers utilizing twenty-two core processors, collectively.

Once the notes were perfectly pitched and exacted, those notes were then compressed and given the widest dynamic range possible over the course of the piece – you know, considering the limitations of the human ear, of course. Seven minutes, six seconds was enough time to showcase every audible dynamic potential for the human ear, and it was also enough time to digest most modern instruments in western culture, and then some. I also created dozens of digital sounds for the piece that couldn't be recreated with real world, physical instrumentalities. Noises and hisses were completely eliminated, excepting those spots where such things were intended, and each individual instrument was equalized and optimized for its own unique brand of sound.

There was even a didgeridoo breathing ambience in a couple spots. Even the oft overlooked Aborigines had a home in my piece!

The Epic, as I coined it, was clean... so very, very clean. And I'm firm enough in my conviction of the same to declare it the finest, cleanest piece of music ever made. It proffered all the freedom that I and everyone else around me could afford.

Multiple instruments were honed for their sounds in the amalgam, and some of the most perfect, most pleasurable harmonies were created – and all for the amusement of modern man with his modern ear. People would concentrate to hear a quiet background lullaby within seven minutes, six seconds; they would lose their breath when the tympani demanded a new rhythm within seven minutes, six seconds; their bodies would shutter at the growls of the bass operating in a guise of metallic overtones within seven minutes, six seconds; and the hair cells of Corti's organ would recoil at a burst of clarity from the brass – and all within seven minutes, six seconds.

Gradually, the parts were put together and refined. No two parts or phrases were alike; it was what musical theorists call a *through-composition*. Only a few other through-compositions have ever been attempted.

One could say it was an academic exercise in music composition but that wouldn't express the Hendixian aspects: the tears one would shed over the short trills three minutes in, or the fear and anticipation one would feel over the bass drum's quiet rumblings over the course of the introduction, or the relief one would feel when the overly ambitious strings offered a rebuttal later on, or the annoyance one would feel from the obnoxious declarations of digital melodies following a brief yet suspenseful interlude. No, this piece overcame and illuminated one's senses; the very essence, the very soul embedded in the piece caused people to lose control of their emotions.

Or at least it had done that to me on many occasions.

Over the course of almost seven years, it became the perfect aural idea. An aural epic. *The Epic*. The waves of sound would crash upon the river bank of life and ripple into eternity, just as the numbers of Pi march ever onward into never ending madness.

The Epic.

And beyond all else, especially this technical jargon I've now filled your mind with, *what was heard was what was intended*.

Est quod est.

Nothing more, nothing less; seven minutes, six seconds.

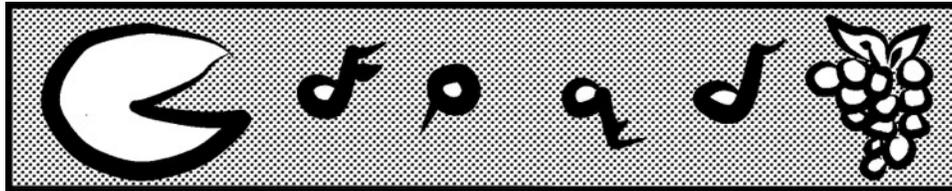
The Deaf Man's Reply

Recording the piece became my sole pleasure virtually overnight. My mother worried about me over the affair, since I devoted every free moment I had to work on it – even when she tried to visit. The fear in her voice first became apparent when I worked straight through one of her visits *uh-huhing* and *yesing* her social needs into submission.

“If a pleasurable job makes perfect work,” she said, “then you're up shit creek without a paddle.” She always brought it back to waterways and shit.

Why was that? Was she saying that the work would never be done – that it could never be done if I was seeking perfection? Indeed, no one can ever achieve perfection in an imperfect world.

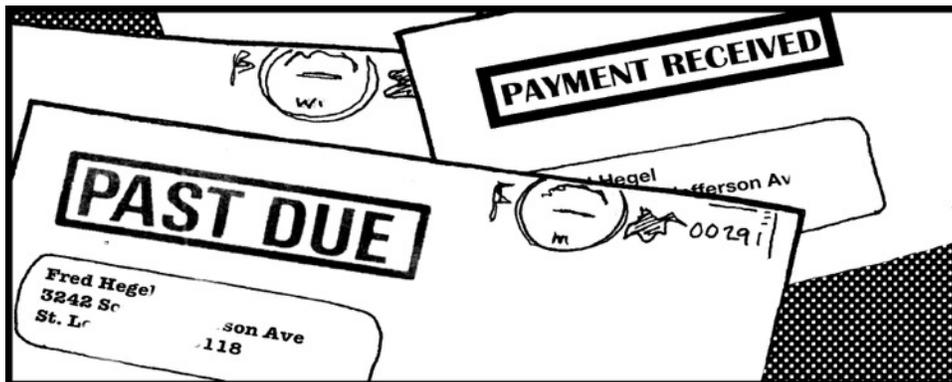
Other assholes sometimes said similar things as well. I didn't disagree, but the possibility didn't bother me as it bothered them. Sometimes, like getting a new high score by just a few points in Pac-Man, I could get a couple of notes, a bit of wavelength, a hair closer to perfection, or a conglomerative harmony a hair closer to that perfect harmony. And every miniscule notch of improvement gradually made the aural orgasm... that much more... orgasmic!



It didn't really matter what other people thought though. Very quickly I found myself happily alone, without the soft critiques and meaningless clamor of others. Within the first year of work, I began avoiding others who might have called me *friend*; they were mere distractions, and I didn't need nor want to hear their meaningless rhetoric any longer. I didn't care what the weather was like, and I had no desire to croon and drool over newborns.

Mom soon became the only other person I spoke with, and even she became an infrequent fixture in my life.

Seems to me the reason people shat on my endeavors and said things like *you'll never perfect it* is because most people didn't have anything real to put effort into, most people didn't have anything meaningful to love – and they secretly loathed that I did. Most people slave at their jobs not out of love but out of necessity.



And even where they're working from a passion, most people get to a point where they lose interest and just move on to the next fad.

“Good enough,” these half-hearted flim-flams say of their piss-poor still life image or their sour homebrew or their half-assed crooked flowerbed.

My ear became highly trained though over all those years, and my ear heard imperfections in everything. Your average individual, slammed by aural inaccuracies every day, to my chagrin, couldn't hear a bit of difference in the work I performed day-to-day. Hell, even after months of baby steps they still couldn't hear a bit of difference – and even when they did they were completely ambivalent as to what exactly was different. And since Mr. Average Joe Bubblegum's attention span was a grisly three-to-six seconds long, I knew that most people lost interest after, best case scenario, ten-to-fifteen seconds of listening; you can tell in their eyes when they *turn off*, so to speak.

Many others make it even more obvious by telling you how great it sounds after just a few seconds have passed. They *turn off* and unknowingly admit it. But at least at that point you know to disregard anything they may have to say.

Yes sir, complexity is a hard sell, and after half a minute without some catch phrase or some simple repetitive melody, I lost them to the idiotic emptiness inside their mind; to modern social media heuristics; to the gumdrops and lollipops of innocent apathy; and also to a reverent belief in aural agnosticism. Well, these are adults we're talking about, and my allusions are pejorative and admittedly stretch the truth of it all, probably due to my bias in such matters... but the bottom line is that I lost them to thoughts, desires, and acts of fucking and eating.

There's a good chance that no one understands and no one ever will, for the ability of another artist to accurately conceptualize someone else's work is a rarity, if not an outright impossibility; only the composer, if he truly knows what he needs to hear, can turn his conceptualization, his *praxis* – using the presumptuously well-defined twelve notes in western culture, and using only the spectrum of sound the human ear perceives and arguably appreciates – into something tangible, ordered, and purposeful.

Empathy is a fiction that has little, if any, bearing on the emotional and physical state of a given individual. And for that matter, the concept of *mind* means little, if anything, really, for what would exist of this presupposed *mind* without the bodily perceptions that inform and impact upon it? One simply cannot reconcile their own feelings with another's satiated pains and pleasures, regardless of how similar the facts of their cases appear to be.

True composers analyze their life in being and that being's intent as it relates to the aural. They then come to a diagnosis and they remedy their aural needs by recording, performing, teaching, learning, etc... not unlike how a doctor looks over symptoms presented and gives a proper, though often inaccurate, prognosis. The more thorough and experienced the doctor is though, the more accurate the prognosis. And in cases where the treatment has not yet been found there resides the greatest of doctors – the ones attempting to propose an explanation for the unknown: a conceptual reification not yet conceived by another yet based upon countless prior, perhaps more primitive, abstractions. Then using their explanation they develop a course of action, solidifying, and for all purposes proving, the veracity of their explanation.

A true hero, a Jonas Salk indeed!

The only difference between the medical/musical analogy is that some composers, myself included, look within for the answer to the riddle while modern medical practitioners only look to externalities and observations. I call this indescribable necessity in music the Hendrixian element. And while I'll admit that trial and error, and experience and observation has played a large role in discovering the intent buried within the original, more primitive, idea of the Work, I cannot deny that there's something else which shaped the composition long before the scientific method exacted its pound of flesh.

An idea that began blooming... not long after I failed out of college. If I remember right, not long after that house party where I was poisoned by the very trash I now help purvey.

I guess the point is that practitioners of medicine are able to put an amalgam of observations together piece-by-piece until knowledge is wrought. Then with that collective knowledge they can draw conclusions and create predictive models. *Boom!* A bit of the riddle is solved, and some asshole is saved from shitting their guts out or dying in the streets from pus-filled buboes.

In this entire meandering monologue, I'm really talking about *the* two-and-a-half-thousand year old debate – the classic no-holds grudge match: Plato vs. Aristotle; subjective dreams and utopias vs. objective sensory perceptions and observation. It's all a real numb mind fuck, to be sure, only for those who actually enjoy the adversative process of logic coupled with interpreting physical evidence.

Thesis, antithesis, synthesis, and all that jazz...

You may want to put on a diaper before you delve into that smart-tongued dichotomy; such thought experiments require what seems to be an immeasurable period of undisturbed self-reflection. \

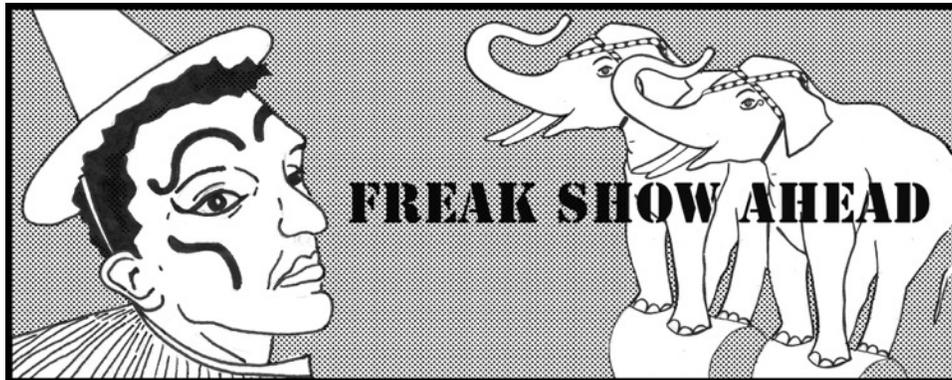
Well – that and you’ll shit your pants if you ever reach nirvana and figure out what it all means.

Personally, I opt for the Socratic Method. Socrates thought they were both full of it. “I’m wiser than this man,” he supposedly uttered. “...for neither of us appear to know anything great and good; but he fancies he knows something, although he knows nothing; whereas I don’t know anything, and I don’t fancy that I do. Thus, I appear to be wiser than he, because I don’t fancy I know that which I don’t.” It was at least something close to that anyway...

Est quod est, indeed!

Well sir, I’ve said what I need to say. And I’m sure you’re bored out of your mind at this point. But if you made it this far you’re in luck: this is where the story morphs from the tedious details of my musical obsession to a dark and amusing three-ringed circus wrought from the same.

And I’ll bet you’re ready to hear about the freak show, so please stay awhile and have a good laugh at my expense.





RGOLD & JOSEPH GABRIEL

"How do I know RGold is my soulmate, you might ask: she can beat Lemmy Koopa with a damn frog suit!"

- Joseph Gabriel



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www.modern gods.org

Fred is a musician, a composer, committed and obsessed, with seven minutes, six seconds, and its killing him - literally. The question is: what do you call a song when it takes on a life of its own, when it is the cause of an illness and the symptom of morbidity, when you can taste your own words take new meaning, and that meaning turns on you?



Originally, Nicholas Anthony and Joseph Gabriel wrote a mission statement to form a collective of artists based in Missouri and dedicated to creating something beautiful, something inspiring, something to share with the world.

...something that would leave a lasting impression.

Instead we drank Bourbon and Scotch, and dreamed up a monstrosity that threatens our very hold on reality. We called the plethora leviathans plaguing our lives "Modern Gods" and have since offered up our creative energies as a sacrifice to appease the foul beasts.

Creativity is a miraculous curse.

Visit www.modern gods.org to hear the songs and you will bear witness to these relentless yet playful gods as they develop through countless retellings. In the end, the art looks good on your fridge, the music is perfect for disturbing the peace, and the writings are great when you need to spend a hot minute on the toilet.

It's your choice: read or wipe -- but regardless, enjoy.

USE *modern gods* **STRINGS**