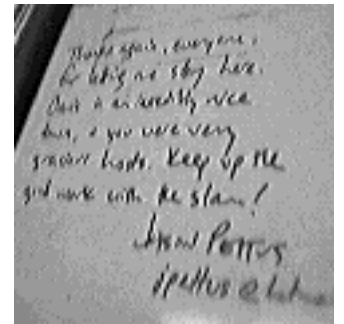




PORN STORES ARE SCARY



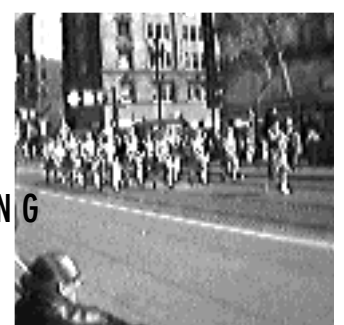
california tour diary 2001

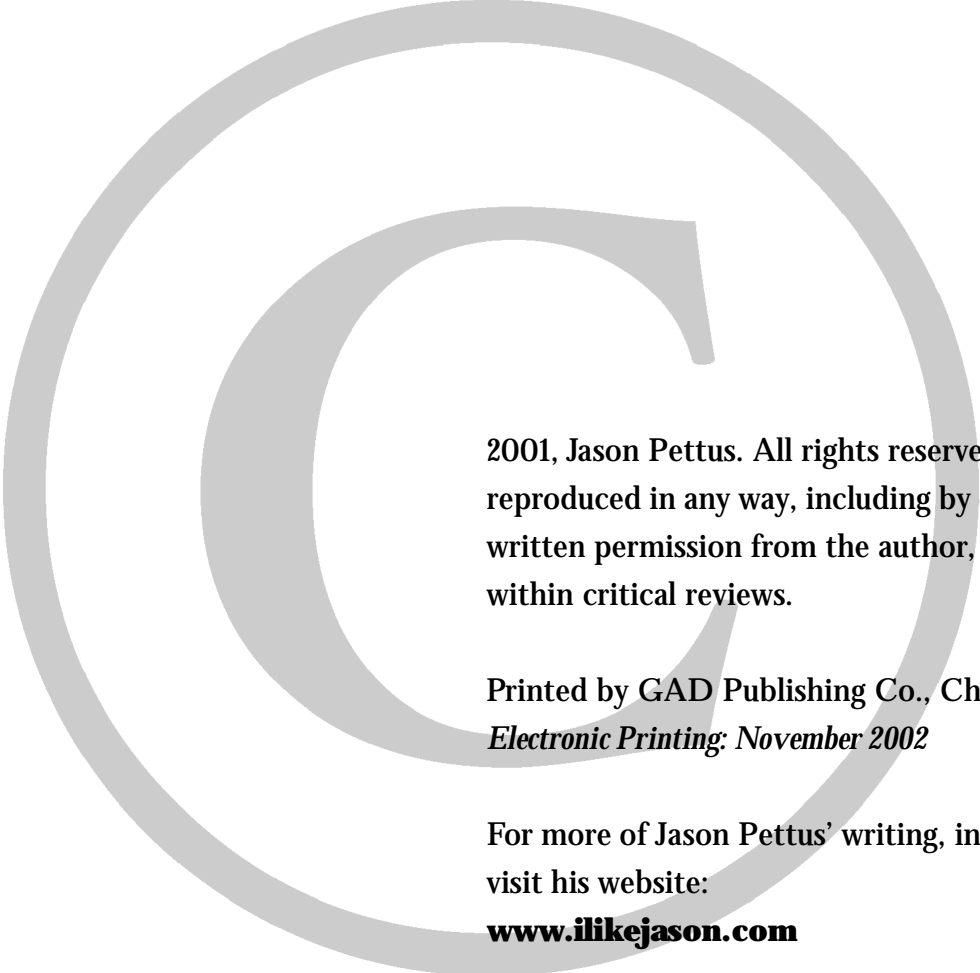


JASON PETTUS



G A D
PUBLISHING
COMPANY
CHICAGO
U S A





2001, Jason Pettus. All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced in any way, including by electronic transmission, without written permission from the author, barring small excerpts embedded within critical reviews.

Printed by GAD Publishing Co., Chicago USA.

Electronic Printing: November 2002

For more of Jason Pettus' writing, including a daily journal, please visit his website:

www.ilikejason.com

or read through your mobile device via AvantGo, a web portal for PDAs:

www.avantgo.com

**Jason Pettus
California tour
March 10-19, 2001**

**Sunday, March 11
Poetry Above Paradise
San Francisco**

**Monday, March 12
Davis Open Slam
Davis**

**Tuesday, March 13
Silicon Valley Poetry Slam
San Jose**

**Wednesday, March 14
Berzerkeley Poetry Slam
Berkeley**

**Thursday, March 15
Slam On It!
Oakland**

**Friday, March 16
Wicked Awesome
San Francisco**

**Sunday, March 18
Wordfuck
San Francisco**

**All photos in this book
taken with the
Casio wristwatch digital camera**

SATURDAY MARCH 10

So. I've now been to a sex club.

How was it? It was okay.

Did I have sex? No, I didn't.

Did I see other people have sex? Kinda.

Was it worth it? Well, it depends on what you mean by 'worth it.'

The trip from Chicago to California was blissfully smooth, by the way. I rode on ATA for the first time, which was a whole new experience. They had television sets in their aisles! We watched cable and network television reruns for four and a half hours - "Friends," "Dharma and Greg," a documentary on Martin Scorsese produced by "E!" The usual. It was this very laid-back flight - almost as if we all realized that we were going to be trapped on this big tin flying machine all afternoon, so we might as well sit back and enjoy it.

Got into the San Francisco airport, walked right out the front door, and there was the shuttle waiting to take me to the Caltrain (a public transit train that goes all the way up and down northern California). The Caltrain showed up ten minutes after the shuttle let us off; I was in San Jose literally an hour and a half after I got into town. Nice! *Eve was right there at the station, waiting to pick me up. We had a late dinner at this microbrewery that's across the street from the Adobe headquarters - fish and chips and a pint of stout for me, veggie burger and a wheat beer for Eve.

So, anyway, the sex club - I know you're reading 'cause you want to hear

about the sex club. The sex club was...actually, a lot classier than I was expecting it to be. You know, I had been to the website and I had seen the photos there and I thought it was going to be this really sorta weld-and-spit kind of place - but it was actually nice and homey. It was basically a large private home that had been bought and turned into a private club - kinda like one of those apartments in a collegetown that seven or eight people live in at once, except the entire thing was for public consumption.

I cannot begin to tell you how nice the hosts of the club were - they greeted us the moment we walked in the door, gave us an entire private tour of the place, sort of massaged our fears and made us feel a lot better about being there. The place was...well. I'm not sure what to say - I'm writing this at three in the morning, just after getting back, and I'm still doing a lot of heavy-duty "processing," as my friend Michelle would say.

Okay, where do I start? Well, the people, I guess. There were officially 18 couples in attendance at the club tonight, which was apparently really freaking the regulars out - "Where is everybody? Why is it so dead tonight? Holy shit, just two weeks ago we had 49 couples here!" Great, that's exactly what I want to hear. The couples were exactly...exactly what you would expect them to be - generally late-thirties to early-forties, a little suburban, a little trashy but in this very earnest way. Like, guys were there wearing those button down shirts that were popular in the early eighties, without the collars, you know what I mean? And the women were wearing these sorta "hot as long as you realize it was bought in a mall" kinda outfits. And there were some guys with ponytails, and some guys with mullets, and some guys with weird rockabilly haircuts as well. Let's just say this - I was probably the most urban looking guy there, and considering that I'm from out of town, that's saying something.



We got there about 10:30 - an hour and a half after the doors opened. There was nothing going on - we were maybe the third couple that was even there. The hosts told us, "Well, people usually start piling in around 11, and then by 1 or so people start slipping off into the back rooms." So, we waited. We waited, and we drank. And we drank and we waited and we sat on a couch and made jokes to each other, and we drank some more and waited some more and I swear to God, if I hadn't just paid 50 bucks to get in the damn place, we very well might have left around midnight, it was that slow.

But then around midnight they started getting some dancers onto the main floor of the club. Right, professional dancers, which actually turned into this nice catalyst - I mean, they were working their shit, but unlike a strip club they were working their shit for no other reason than to get all these couples in the mood, you know? And God help us, it started working. These couples started getting into watching these dancers, and then they were dancing, and then they were making out, and don't you know it, people start disappearing.

For what it's worth, I did finally have a revelation around 12:30 last night - "Hey, wait a minute. I'm sitting here in this house in northern California and there's this totally hot woman completely nude, about a foot away from me, rolling around on the floor and showing us all her vagina. Holy shit, I'm on vacation!" And then things started getting much better.

Eve and I had been eyeing this hot tub in the other room ever since we got there. Now, those of you who know me just even a little bit know how much trouble I have taking my clothes off in front of other people. But I don't know, there's something about having these women giving you private all-nude strip dances, plus other couples starting to sneak off in the other room to get nasty, plus three bourbons and cokes in my belly, plus an entire stressful day of travelling halfway across the country, that finally got to me and made me say, "Ahhhh...fuck it." And the next thing I know, I'm completely naked and sitting in this giant, giant hot tub. And how was it? Heaven, my friends, heaven. I have never in my entire life sat naked in a hot tub. I have certainly never sat naked in a hot tub while all these random strangers are walking by and having themselves a good ol' look at me naked sitting in a hot tub. Hello, everyone! Yes, this is my tattoo. Yes, this is my penis. Please don't make fun of me.

So, a half hour in the hot tub and a bourbon and coke later, and I'm feeling a little loosey-goosey. "Hey...should we go in the back room and see what's going on?" "Um...yeah! Sure!" So we get up, and we get out, and we get dry, and we get dressed. And we get back into the back rooms. And guess what we found? Almost everyone had left the fuckin' club while we were busy being wet hedonists! Fuck! The back rooms were like this - there was this one room with only one bed in it, with these big saharan mosquito mesh nets over it. There was a second room that was strictly public - four mattresses, placed on gently-rising tiers, with benches ringing the walls so people can sit and watch. There was a third room that was much like the second, but with two mattresses instead of four, and the lights turned down a little lower. And then there was a fourth room, that had only two mattresses, and dark sheets hanging over all four sides so that the people in the bed itself had all this privacy.

So where was every single person left in the club? In the room with all the sheets, of course. Correct me if I'm wrong, but if the only thing you're interested in is having sex with your committed partner, why the fuck are you paying 50 bucks and going to a sex club, just to get undressed and hop into a bed with these big giant curtains all the way around it and have sex with your partner? Stay home, put on a sexy video, and save yourself all the fuss. This, my friends, was the biggest disappointment of the entire evening - there was no group sex. There were no erotic propositions from people we didn't know. It was boy girl, boy girl, boy girl, the same goddamn people who had shown up together, and were going to leave together, all being exclusively sexual with

each other in this room where you couldn't even see what was going on. And really, like I said...what's the fuckin' point?

So, we left the rooms, and had another drink, and talked to the hosts some more. And before we finally gave up for good, we were like, "You think we should go back again just in case something different has happened?" So, we did. And yes, things had changed a bit - now a number of couples had moved into the main room, with the four mattresses and all the benches. Eve and I sat and watched for a bit - I watched three men get blowjobs from their girlfriends. And the funny thing is (or maybe not so funny if you think about it) - it was completely, utterly unerotic to watch. And I'm not sure what it was that made it so unerotic - like I said, I'm processing this entire experience even as I'm writing this front page to you right now. It was like...it was like...it was like they were putting on a show for us. It wasn't a couple really into each other and really into making love to each other for an audience - it was more like, "All these people are here to see us act like porn stars to each other, so that's what we'll do - we'll act like porn stars to each other." And with God as my witness, it just wasn't that much fun to watch two normal people go at it like porn stars. I know - I would never expect that to come from my mouth in a million years either. But it just wasn't. It looked forced, and mechanical, and like the couples just weren't enjoying it. You know what I mean? They just weren't enjoying it.

And that was that. Nobody fucked - there were all these half-hearted blowjobs, and none of them were finished to climax, then everybody put their clothes on and left. And there was Eve and I, still sitting there in an empty room all of a sudden. And we were like, "Should we get out of here?" "Yeah. Yeah, we should get out of here." And so we did. And now I just feel...ugh. Like I never want to touch another person as long as I live. Ugh!

So anyway, welcome to California. Am I glad I went to the club? You bet your sweet ass I am. If nothing else, I have once and for all completely burned the desire to go to a sex club out of my system for the rest of my life. I have been, I have seen...and I never want to go back.

A surprise - My San Jose show has been chosen as the "pick of the week" by Metro, Silicon Valley's weekly arts newspaper. There's also this giant ad for my show in the paper, with my full bio and five photos of me! Holy shit, I'm a fuckin' rock star! Tomorrow - lunch and shopping in San Francisco with Thea Hillman and Daphne Gottlieb, then my first show of the tour, at the Paradise in the Mission. Wish me luck.

SUNDAY MARCH 11



So I woke up at *Eve's around 8:00 in the morning - bad, considering that I had just gotten to bed at four, but typical for me when I'm on the road. I just have a hard time sleeping in other people's apartments, you know? I'm pretty lucky to get four hours of sleep a night when I'm on tour. Eve gave me a little tour of downtown San Jose ("Did that building just say eBay?" "Oh, yeah, that's eBay's corporate headquarters") and then she took me to Frye's! Oh, man, what a place - Frye's is a chain of electronics stores out in Silicon Valley. It's a lot like Microcenter in Chicago, except even bigger and geekier - they have an entire section just of raw circuits and welding equipment, and an entire other section just of junk food. If you've ever read Douglas Coupland's novel *Microserfs*, Frye's is that store where all the main characters are constantly hanging out in the second half of the book. Plus, each store is themed! The one we went to was the 'Egyptian' store, complete with giant pyramid and plaster mummies holding the latest releases from Microsoft.

I said goodbye to Eve (for now, anyway - I'll see her again at my Tuesday show) and boarded BART (San Francisco's rapid transit system) at Fremont, all the way at the end of the line. BART is odd - the trains are carpeted. I can't even imagine something like that on the trains in Chicago. It was a long trip into San Francisco, about an hour after my transfer. I spent the time listening

to my Walkman and just...contemplating things from the night before.

Finally - the city. BART brings you into San Francisco underground, so you haven't really seen any of the city while riding in. I got off at the Powell station, right in the heart of the touristy section, climbed up the stairs, and...shit! I am surrounded by a thousand people, doing every which thing in every which direction - tourists with kids wandering amok, homeless guys trying to flag down cabs for people to get tips, dirty punk-rock teenage girls, hawking bracelets on makeshift tables. Tall, Victorian buildings just loom all around me. Everyone is going a million directions at once. Shit! Shit! Is this what San Francisco is like? I'm freaking out!



Little did I know that the city just happened to be holding their St. Patrick's Day parade yesterday, and that I had just happened to pop into the city right at the heart of the parade route right at the moment it was about to begin. I'm tellin' ya, it was a little unnerving! Anyway, once I finally figured it out, I was able to step a block back from the parade, take a deep breath and get my bearings straight again. I called Daphne - she and Thea both had errands to run, they weren't going to be able to meet up until 3:00. Daph gave me directions to a coffeehouse in the Mission for me to meet her at, and suddenly I had...well, about three hours to kill. Just me, a visitor's guide street map, and every bit of my belongings strapped to my back. Hmm.



I noticed that I was about two blocks from Metreon, so I decided to start by heading over there. Metreon, for those who don't know, is this entire touristy "total consumer environment" mall-type place, but all centered around a high-tech theme - Sony, Microsoft, a virtual-reality videogame arcade, etc etc. Just another one of those stupid touristy things I wanted to see while I was out here, but didn't want to drag any of my friends to because I knew they'd hate me for it. (Chicagoans, imagine your friends dragging you to Navy Pier for the whole afternoon. Right, you're seeing what I'm saying now.)



Metreon was...exactly as I imagined it would be. Bright, focus-grouped to death, and expensive. The Microsoft store was pretty cool, though. They have monitors with digital cameras set up all over the place, hard-wired to the internet. You can take a picture of yourself and with a click of a button email it to anyone in the world right from the store (which I did). They also have a bank of computers in the back of the store where you can check your email for free - but there was a big line of people waiting to use them, so I skipped that part.

Okay, that was enough - goodbye Metreon. I started walking down Market in the direction of this Mission cafe, about two miles away. I kept saying to myself, "Pretty soon I'll jump on the train and make the rest of the trip," but

you know how it is in a new city - there's so much to see and to take in that the next thing you know you've just walked the entire two-mile distance. Downtown San Francisco is just fascinating. The buildings are huge, much bigger than I was expecting, and all old and Victorian and beautiful. Hunched at the bottom of all these buildings, however, is the largest collection of crazy homeless people I have ever seen in my entire life. I'm serious - there must have been a dozen people on every block, sleeping in abandoned doorways, talking to themselves, screaming incoherent threats at me because I won't give them any money. It is...well, it is definitely something that takes a little time to get used to.



I turned off Market at Valencia and...ah, well, here we go, the Mission. You just get this very immediate sense of when you've hit the Mission - traffic falls away all of a sudden, the entire nature of the buildings change, and the entire look of the people on the sidewalk as well. For me it was this very lovely, very natural change - "Of course! I'm home." You can just tell that it's where the artists hang out, which suddenly gave me a feeling of comfort that I was desperately needing in an afternoon of freaking out around every corner.

To me the Mission is much like how Wicker Park seems to my out-of-town friends when they visit Chicago - yes, it's getting gentrified, and you can see with your own eyes the frou-frou restaurants slowly creeping in between the shitty burrito joints and tacky thrift stores. But it's fine when you're from out of town, because everything's new to you and it's all fuckin' cool. The Mission is filled with these funky little shops - psychotronic video stores, zine places, alternative art gallery/collectives - all of them manned by beautiful, sullen punk rockers in their thirties. All right!

As I was walking around the Mission I thought to myself, "You know, if I cruise the sidewalks around here long enough, I bet there's a chance I'll actually run into someone I know." And sure enough, five minutes later I hear someone behind me yell, "Pettus? Pettus, is that you?" Hey, it's Bucky Sinister! "What are you doing?" "Ah, just having brunch with my girlfriend in there. What the fuck are you doing?" "Killing time before meeting Daphne at Muddy Waters." "Right on!" Bucky and I hung around for about an hour, just shooting the shit - he's unemployed and loving it right now, living in Oakland and kicking ass. Bucky also finally took me somewhere where I could get a pair of sunglasses, thank God. (Did I mention that it was 75 degrees here yesterday? Holy shit, what a glorious day. I felt like a mole in that fuckin' sun, though - seven hours of squinting my eyes until finally running into Bucky.)

Bucky came with me to Muddy Waters to meet Daphne. Daph's looking fan-

fuckin-tastic, by the way. While we were sitting there having coffee who should walk by but Michelle Tea, my friend who's set up this Friday show at the Bearded Lady. Of course! I felt like a native already.



Daph and I hiked over to Thea's place, a couple of blocks from the San Francisco mint, and then started making the long, twisted trek to the Haight. You ever have one of those moments of quiet, beautiful clarity on vacation? We're sitting there, waiting for our bus that's twenty minutes late. I'm exhausted, so I'm slumped against a building, smoking a cigarette and watching everything going on around me. And Daph and Thea are standing there, both beautiful, both dressed in natty thrift clothes, both having this incredibly animated discussion about literary works and being writers and their upcoming tours and their upcoming books, laughing and smoking and really being one with the city. And I looked up and thought, "Goddamn, I am so glad to be a writer. There's literally nothing better I could be doing with my life."



Anyway. The Haight is a trip - imagine the corner of Belmont and Clark, but extended to about twelve blocks and with easily ten times the amount of people. Punk rock trust-fund teenagers rule the Haight, with their \$100 shoes and ripped combat pants and cute little mohawks. Daph and Thea were on a shoe quest yesterday, which was just fine with me - it was several hours of popping in and out of stores, watching beautiful women every ten feet, just sitting and walking and absorbing it all and really feeling one with the city. Fantastic. Then it was back to Thea's, to chill out for a bit and to help her pick out the publicity photo she'll be using for her tour this summer.

Finally it was time for my first show of the tour, at SoMa's Paradise Lounge. Can I just say this? The Paradise show was one of the most amazing fucking performance experiences I've had in my entire career. The place was small, which meant that the large crowd looked even more packed, and the energy in the air was so thick you could cut it with a knife. My co-feature was Jeff McDaniel, another old-school performer like myself from Los Angeles, and the co-bill of him and me was enough to get every old-school performer in the Bay area out to the show - Daph and Thea, of course, Bucky, Tarin Towers, Beth Lisick, Juliette Torrez, oh, the list just goes on and on. Vadim, the host of the San Jose slam where I'll be on Tuesday, made the hour-long trip up to Paradise with his friends just to see me, which was great.

The performance was...amazing. People were just going along with me on the ride, no matter where I took them, following every line I was reading and reacting to my performance like I was a fuckin' rock star or something. I sold thirteen books! Shit, I never sell thirteen books! People were clapping me on

the back after the show, talking on and on about what an amazing night it was, how the scene in SF has been quiet recently and that they all had really been needing to have an evening like this. It's a really amazing thing to hear when you're a touring performer.

And I finally got to hang out with Jen Joseph, who was not only the organizer of the show but is the founder of Manic D Press, one of the premiere small presses in the U.S. right now. Jen and I got along great almost from the moment we met, which relieved the hell out of me because I've heard stories about how hard it can sometimes be to interact with her when you catch her on a bad night. Jen's just this really fascinating woman - we ended up getting into this long-ass conversation about how she ended up in San Francisco in the first place, how she had moved into the Haight in 1973 right when things were at their craziest point down there. Jen said, "And you know what? It's 2001 and I still constantly feel that excitement here. I've been all over the world now and I still just adore San Francisco. I can't possibly imagine ever living somewhere else." Jen, you're the fuckin' coolest!

Beth Lisick, the woman I stayed with last night, had a car and so ended up driving a whole gaggle of people home. She and Bucky and I made the long trip back to the East Bay, shooting the shit and having a grand ol' time. Beth lives with two other people in this giant house in Berkeley - in fact, I'm writing this front page there right now. It's one of those really homey, comfortable environments, and a really grounded place for me to be in right now. Beth and I sat up even longer last night after getting back, waiting for her boyfriend to get done with some music engineering stuff in the basement. We sat around and talked about...oh, well, this that and the other thing, you know? Poetry gossip...I can't really mention it here at the site. I got six hours of sleep last night, which is pretty good for me. I'm feeling rested and ready to go.

So what's on tap for today? A leisurely morning in Berkeley, wandering around and just sticking my head into places. Then I hop on the Amtrak at 3 pm and start making my way up to Davis, a small collegetown about two hours north of San Francisco, for my second show of the tour. Everyone keeps telling me the same thing about Davis - "God, Pettus, the kids up there are just gonna eat you up. It's going to be such a great show for you." I hope so - it'd be nice to continue this wonderful streak that started with the Paradise.

Holy shit, I'm having such a great time! I'm so, so, so, so glad I made it out here.

P.S. California pot gets you completely wrecked. And guess who finally has a bag of it? No, I'm not telling you who gave it to me!



MONDAY MARCH 12



After finishing up yesterday's front page at Beth Lisick's house in Berkeley, she and I headed out for some brunch before parting ways. Can I just say this? Beth really is one of the coolest people I know. She always seems to be taking things in such stride when I'm around her, and she always seems to be in a good mood. Obviously she's probably not like that all the time, 24/7, but it's always a great experience when I'm hanging around her. Beth has started getting into the acting business, it turns out - she's gotten the lead in this fully-financed indie film that will be shooting later this year, one of those ones that has major industry money behind it and may very well break through into a mainstream hit. Right on, Beth.

After brunch Beth dropped me off near the UC-Berkeley campus, over on Telegraph Road, where I could loiter and bum around for a few hours before getting on the train to Davis. Ah, Berkeley! The hotbed of liberal political activism, it turns out, is also simply this cool, friendly, interesting collegetown as well. I stopped in a head shop and picked up a one-hitter for this little bag of pot someone gave me earlier in the week. Then I stopped in a used-record

store and picked up some CDs, just because I'm so sick right now of the ones I brought - I got the Beastie Boys, Luscious Jackson (totally kick-ass), an old Bob Mould album and a new CD version of the Police's "Ghost in the Machine," which has recently been re-mixed from the original studio masters. I also stopped in this absolutely fantastic comic book store called "Comic Relief" over by campus. They're almost as big as Quimby's! I got into a conversation with the owner, who ended up buying five copies of my book "The Tao of Now" outright, paying cash and everything. Pretty cool, I gotta admit. You know, Adrian Tomine (who writes the comic book "Optic Nerve") and Dan Clowes (who does "Eightball") both live in Berkeley. I'm dying to know if "Comic Relief" is the store where they always hang out in search of new titles.

Around 3 pm I got high in a back stairway on the Berkeley campus, then made my way to the BART end of the line, to catch my Amtrak. Richmond, California (at the end of the BART line) is a strange little town - of course, it doesn't really count when you only see the part of a city that's by the train tracks. You know what I mean - nobody wants to be near all those trains, so they always stick the government offices and the liquor stores and the public hospital down by it. The Amtrak was great! There's a special line that just runs up and down the Bay area, and their train is wonderfully luxurious - little individual seats, a dining car with cute little frosted-glass lamps on every table. The ride took less time than I thought (only an hour and ten minutes) and also costs less than I thought (\$12 - how can you beat that?). I sat around listening to music and reading through this zine I picked up in the Mission - "The Probe," put out by this kid in the Bay area. The whole hook is that he writes about all these punk bands, and convinces the members to pose naked in his magazine. Holy shit, what a great idea!

I pulled into Davis around 5 pm, with my show set to start at 8:00. Man oh man, Davis is one beautiful town. It's just this collegetown - this small, quiet collegetown out in the middle of nowhere. The streets are pristine and beautiful, and everyone's yards are perfect. All the phone booths have actual telephone books still strapped to them, and you can't find a cigarette butt on the sidewalk to save your life. I just sort of walked around for about two hours, seeing if I could find some cool little slacker stores (I couldn't) and then to find



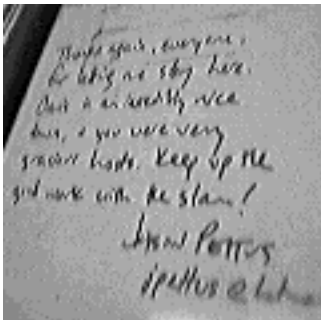
a place to buy another pack of cigarettes (much harder than it sounds in Davis, by the way). Then I went up to their campus, got high again in yet another shadowy back hallway, and sat in their quadrangle watching all the beautiful California alternative co-eds walk by me and give me intriguing little looks, like, "Hey, I haven't seen that guy on campus before. He's got a 70s leather jacket on!" Two college campuses in one day - I'm really starting to feel like an actual touring performer.

Headed over to Cafe Roma, my performance venue, about 7:00 and drank entirely way too much caffeine. Michael, the show's organizer, finally showed up around 7:55 or so. Michael is this very, very pleasant young man who acts very typical of the new slam person - all excited, all optimistic about the possibilities of slam, carrying around books of poetry and wearing a tasteful black outfit. The rest of the crowd was very similar - young-skewing, as you could expect, very earnest, very intellectual and polite and really into poetry.

I went up before the slam. The show went great! It turns out there was this huge contingent of high school students in the audience, there with their liberal English teacher as an extra-credit project, that I had no idea about. I on the other hand was high and had nothing to lose, so I kept doing all of my outrageous pieces and buffering them with little stories about getting high in Davis and walking around. Shit, no wonder the kids ate it up! I almost got a standing ovation on "You fuck like Sleater-Kinney," and almost got one again on "The tao of Van Halen" which I closed with. I did a full half-hour, which sounds great before you actually go up but starts sounding like a life sentence about twenty minutes into the show. "Shit, I gotta do another piece. Shit! I gotta do, like, three more pieces!"

Unfortunately it's finals week here at UC-Davis, so almost the entire audience vamoosed the minute the show was over. Michael and his girlfriend and I headed over to a local bar called the G Street Pub (all the cross streets near campus are simply named "A" through "G," with the intersecting streets numbered in a row). It was Karaoke Night at the G Street Pub! Argh! Actually, it was pretty fun - we watched the big, burly doorman get up and do a dead-on, note-for-note version of "Sweet Transvestite." The two of them grilled me for awhile about Chicago, the slam, the national tournament, why writers write

and why performers perform. An interesting and fun conversation.



I slept at their place last night - one of those big, giant, semi-dilapidated spaces that undergraduates seem to have a sixth sense about finding. Three days, three futons, my friend. Michael owns this bigass wolf-looking dog, but luckily they kept him locked up in their room last night. Seven hours of sleep! I amaze myself sometimes. The two of them both had jobs and classes to get to in the morning, so they've left the place to me today. (I'm writing my front page on their computer as we speak.) They've given me full run of the kitchen, but I think I'm just going to head downtown and pick something up instead - no point in eating up the kitchen of people just after they were kind enough to let you stay at their place and then leave you there unattended.

So today, today, hmm. Well, I get back on the Amtrak at 11 this morning and make my way all the way down to San Jose, about two hours south of San Francisco. The plan is to walk to the Apple headquarters, to check out the company store and get a picture of myself in front of the big Apple logo in the front of their campus. But the Apple campus is three miles from my train stop, and unless I really luck out and find a bus or something I think I might just have to bite the bullet and walk it. (There are no cabs in northern California - not outside of San Francisco, anyway.) I may or may not be meeting up with Andi Strickland after that, who actually now lives here in Silicon Valley and works for the computer industry. If I do, I'll have dinner with her and ride over to the venue; if not, it's the three-mile walk again, back on the train to the next town. I'm very excited about tonight's show, the Silicon Valley poetry slam - this is the one they ran the giant half-page ad for, and the one chosen as "Pick of the Week" in the San Jose arts paper. Plus, as you can imagine, a lot of the people who read the AvantGo version of my site all work in the computer industry, so I know of a number of Silicon Valley employees who will be coming out to the show tonight as well. I really hope it goes well - Silicon Valley has been this sort of "geek Mecca" for me ever since I was a teenager, and it's going to be a real thrill for me to actually perform there.

Congratulate me - it's been three days and I haven't spent a penny at Kinko's yet.

TUESDAY MARCH 13

(Tips For Travelers When They Get Lost) I've been on a train a total of nine times so far this week, out here in northern California. You're bound to learn a couple of lessons about trains in that time. Like, you become an expert at killing exactly a half hour. You learn to go to the station first, get your ticket, find out if the train is running early or late, then go get some lunch. The most important lesson you learn, though, is to leave for the train early - the earlier, the better, as a matter of fact. What's the benefit of doing this? There can be no better example than the events of yesterday.



I got lost in Davis. Holy shit, I got ass-*backwards* lost in Davis yesterday, trying to find my way back to the train station from my host's house. "It's a col-legetown," I thought. "I'll just wander around until I find something I recognize. Just how big can Davis be?" Pretty damn big, it turns out. My first reaction, naturally, was to panic. "Holy shit, I'm lost, I'm completely lost, and I'm going to miss my train, which means I'll have to wait four hours for the next one and be late for my own feature in San Jose tonight, shit shit shit." But then I took a deep breath and realized - I had left for my train two hours early. I'd only been lost for half an hour. I still had an hour and a half to find my way again. And shit, if I can't find the train station in an hour and a half, I deserve to miss my train.

With this new attitude in mind, I discovered a wonderful side effect of getting lost - you have the perfect excuse to go up to gaggles of cute punk-rock

undergraduate girls and talk to them. "Excuse me - I'm lost. Can you possibly tell me where 2nd and G is?" "Sure, it's that way. What, are you from out of town?" "Yeah, I'm a writer, actually. I just had this show last night at..." blah blah, Jason being a rock star all over again, hooray! If I had been running late for my train, the panic would've been fully on and I wouldn't have been able to enjoy my meanderings about town that morning. As it stood, though, I ended up having this pretty incredible morning - ran into Cafe Roma again, where the show was the night before, had an iced coffee and coffeecake, loitered and read and smoked for awhile. Nice!

Yesterday, in fact, was a whole series of events that didn't come out quite as expected, with me sorta rolling with the punches and being rewarded as a result. For example, the train from Davis to San Jose - I thought that it just right through in a non-stop projectory. But during the afternoon, they actually stop the train at Oakland and you take a shuttle bus the rest of the way. A logistical nightmare, I thought, until I actually experienced it - the train drops you off five feet from the shuttle, which is basically just this big-ass van with this very friendly Latino driver standing outside of it, saying, "You going to San Jose? I take you to San Jose, no problem!" And thus I got almost chartered car service for over half my trip yesterday. Right on, right on.

* * *

So I made it to the Apple Computer headquarters yesterday afternoon. God almighty, I made it to Apple. My cab turned a corner and there was this big minimalist sign announcing "1 Infinite Loop," Garamond Narrow font and everything. It was...stunning to finally be at the Geek Mecca. The main campus is a series of six buildings, strung in a circle with a circular drive going all the way around (thus, the "Infinite Loop"). The buildings are all connected inside the circle through a beautiful little courtyard, but you're not allowed in there without an employee tag so I walked around the outside instead. I just walked and smoked, smoked and walked, looked at all the goofy shit employees had put in their windows. You can definitely tell which is the programmers' building and which is the executives' building, just by the density of cardboard standup displays of Star Trek characters looming out office windows.

The lobby of 1 Infinite Loop is less like an office building and more like a small art museum. Impressive, I tells ya. I took a peek into the courtyard/employee break room while I was there. Programmers were out there, juggling and playing hackysack. I swear to God, they were - it was like something out of a cliched Generation X movie, I swear. Then I went to the store, which was cool but nothing out of the ordinary - just a store like any other, but filled with expensive little Apple equipment. The selection was a little disappointing - most of the merchandise is geared towards the executive with too much money and not enough to do with it. Like, silver Apple swiss army knives for \$75, that kind of thing. I did, however, pick up this cool black





t-shirt with the Apple logo in white right in the middle of the breast, small and iconic like a shirt for a danceclub. (I picked one up for Erik as well - I hope Large was okay, Erik.)

Made a big mistake after Apple - decided to walk it back to the train station instead of calling for a cab. Four miles seems like such a little number when you're standing on a sidewalk, refreshed and ready to roam. Two hours and three blisters later, of course, you're asking yourself just what the fuck you were thinking. Cupertino and Sunnyvale are...well, they're not pretty cities, that's for sure. They reminded me a lot of certain sections of St. Charles, Missouri, where I grew up - long, busy streets populated only by condos and strip malls and stores you would never want to go into. I apparently am also the only person in both cities yesterday who was traveling by foot - did you see me? I was that guy in the leather jacket, actually walking. Oh well - who would ever guess that Mecca would be so boring?

* * *

Made it to my venue in San Jose (Waves Saloon) about an hour and a half before the show - Vadim, the organizer, was already there, numbering xeroxes of the rules sheet so they could find their random judges later in the evening. About five minutes later, Andi Strickland showed up - Andi, for those who don't know, is a good friend of mine who lived in Chicago for many years and now lives out here in the Bay area. Or, at least, does at this moment - she's moving back to Chicago in about two weeks, going to stay there for a couple of months before her poetry group "The Morrigan" head off for their annual national tour. Andi and I have had a very cantankerous relationship in the past, so I'm eternally grateful that we're getting along so well right now and can actually interact with each other in a way that's divorced from all the ugly shit that's gone down between us in the past.

Vadim was an incredibly gracious sponsor for me - he got me a whole handful of drink tickets, paid me \$50 for my performance plus 50 cents for each person who showed up. The place was packed! The Silicon Valley slam is this really popular venue, filled with regulars who support the scene and really make the space a micro-literary community. Reminded me a lot of Mad Bar, in fact. A number of the San Jose people made a road trip last Sunday to SF to see my Paradise show, and unbeknownst to me they've been telling all their friends this week about how incredible it was and how if they saw any poetry show this year it had to be this one. Right on! There was this definite sense of excited energy in the air last night - people were geared up, ready for a great fuckin' night.

And then, disaster - the microphone breaks. Andi and I are both kind of drunk at this point (and I'm kinda high as well, having had made a little walk around the block twenty minutes previous). Vadim wants to know if it's okay if I do my feature without a mic. I hesitatingly say yes, with a lot of trepida-

tion. Andi and I are used to Chicago audience - where, if you don't have a mic, they will basically flip the performer the bird and go right into their conversations from the table in the middle of your set. I just assumed the same thing would happen out here, given the same circumstances. Fortunately for me, I was completely wrong - the San Jose crowd got into the show even more because of the microphone loss. It was like they were even more a part of the show than before, and they hung onto every word of every performer. Amazing.

I went on between the first and second rounds of the slam, and did a full half-hour again. Holy...fucking...shit. Every night, I tell myself "Well, that was just the best show of the tour. The audiences can't possibly get more enthusiastic and respectful than that." And every next night, I'm proven wrong again. The San Jose crowd was without a doubt the best audience I've had yet this week. They laughed at all my stupid jokes, hung onto every word I said, and gave me spontaneous rounds of applause in the middle of pieces that were so long I would actually have to stop performing and let everything calm down again. It just blew my fucking mind. Guess how many books I sold last night? Sixteen. That's right, sixteen, plus a bunch of the regulars took me out and got me so fuckin' high I couldn't feel my ass. The regulars there, by the way, are pretty incredible themselves. The San Jose slam team this year is going to be a really, really good one.

Andi took me out after the show to what is apparently the only dive bar in the entire Silicon Valley region - of course. All the people in there knew her by name - of course! Andi's new male friend joined us and soon we were doing shots and chasing them down with Rolling Rocks. Thank God - I haven't had a night yet this week to just sit down and get good ol' wrecked, so last night was good. I ended up at Andi's ex-boyfriend's place - you see, when Andi offered me her place a couple of months ago, they were still dating, and then they broke up and she moved to the suburbs with people she couldn't ask to let me stay. So she talked to her ex and he said, "I'll be out of town that night, anyway. He can stay at the place if he wants." So, I did - listened to a bunch of Luscious Jackson on the stereo, saw if his digital cable got porn (it didn't), and smoked even more weed. And then this morning Andi and her friend gave me a ride to Mountain View, a neighboring city, and I'm at the Global Village Cafe, writing this front page and waiting for my train into the city.

Tour statistics: Books sold (32), books given away (8), average sales per show (11), money made on tour so far (\$290), number of people who laugh when I mention my URL (all of them), number of times I've had sex (0), number of times I've masturbated (0, and it's starting to drive me a little crazy), number of times I've had diarrhea (2), number of times in Kinko's (still 0, thank God). Tonight - the Berkeley poetry slam, which promises to be the largest crowd of the tour. There's a chance of 200 people being at the show tonight. Should be really interesting.

WEDNESDAY MARCH 14

Did you notice that yesterday's diary entry was labeled "Wednesday" as well? Yeah, it's starting to become one of those weeks. There's just a certain magical point while you're on the road where you simply wake up one morning and realize - "Fuck, I don't know what day it is anymore." You start looking at time not in the traditional narrative manner but in terms of what show you're doing that night - "What day is it?" "It's Berkeley day." Which, don't get me wrong, is kind of nice in a way - it's pleasant to know that the workaday normal world means so little to my happiness this week that I can actually forget what day it is and it doesn't really matter. But it's also a little disconcerting - the days of the week are how we determine how our life is going and how we're feeling about any particular time ("Thank God it's Friday;" "I hate Mondays"). I feel very...disconnected right now.

So, let's see, how's the last 24 hours been? Oh, I should mention that the Global Village Cafe, where I posted yesterday's front page, is this really upscale restaurant that has this idea of providing internet service to their customers during meals. The price turned out to be about the same as if I went to a regular ol' internet cafe, but they made it a very different way than usual - my time on the computer was free, but I bought a slice of cake and an iced

tea, which came out to ten bucks! Anyway, they were very gracious in letting me sit at my table long after their lunch crowd had vamoosed - it was just me and the waiters by the time I was done, which I thought was very nice of them.



Anyway, back on the Caltrain after that and up to San Francisco again. Caltrain, the line that takes you up and down the Bay area, drops you off at 4th and King within SF, not too bad but maybe a little bit sketchy. I was four blocks from SF's new museum of modern art (the second largest in the country now) so I decided to wander up there and check it out. Why do I have this magical ability to hit art museums on the exact days they're closed? Argh! Anyway, so I went in and looked at the gift store for awhile. It was...it was a gift store, all right.

Now, I just mentioned this in passing yesterday, but the fact of the matter is that I haven't gotten a chance to masturbate since arriving in the Bay area five days ago. It's just how it is sometimes - you are in and out of strangers' apartments pretty quickly, you're in the middle of a living room when you're sleeping and you just don't really know when someone might be popping around the corner at any second. Anyway, it's starting to get me a little...anxious. Is that the right word? Just a little jumpy, so when I found myself on Market Street yesterday with about two hours to kill and no real plans in sight, I decided to go to one of these adult theatres. They're all over the place here in SF, and most of them are these big huge things with live dancers and video preview booths and whatnot. Hey, if nothing else, I thought it would be cool to say that I had been to an adult theatre in San Francisco, right?

Buyer beware! The first place I went into, I walked in the door and there were all these naked women standing right there, right at the edge of the door.

"Can I help you?" a thoroughly bruising-looking man with a heavy Russian accent asked me.

"Um, I..." I glance at the dancers. Ulp. "I was hoping to go upstairs to your video booths?"

"No upstairs, no more," he said as if I were a regular. "We change place now. You see the girls. Sixteen dollars. You go in there, watch the girls, find one you like, then two of you go upstairs, watch videos together."

"Um...okay. I'm gonna...I'm going to...go now." Exit stage left!

Okay, so maybe that was an aberration. I mean, there are adult theatres all over the place in that neighborhood. So, I go across the street and pop in the one there. Finally, it's looking a little more normal - videotapes and novelties

in the front, row of quarter booths in the back. I'm forced to spend \$3 minimum in tokens before going to the back, so I do. Grab the tokens, turn the corner...and there is this six and a half foot tall guy, looking completely whacked out of his mind on heroin or something, laying on the floor with shirt off and his pants around his ankles, jerking off in the middle of the hallway. No, I mean, you'd have to step on him to get back to the booths. I left. Quickly. And was so freaked out by my two adult theatre experiences that I decided not to go to one again for the rest of the time I'm out here. The Week Without an Orgasm will just have to continue, I guess. Sigh.

Anyway. What day is it? Oh yeah, Berkeley day. Make my way through BART at rush hour (just as much a nightmare here as it is in Chicago), get back to Shattuck Avenue, which I had just spent some time on a couple of days ago. My venue was at a place called The Starry Plough, which turned out to be way far away from the traditional downtown stuff I had been hanging out at the last time I was here. There's this whole section of Berkeley, it turns out, which is for the old-school hippies, the ones who were protesting in the 60s and now just living here, raising kids and owning homes. It's about a mile south of the BART station, and I think "funky" would be the right word for it - vegan cafes, artistic collectives, no streetlights.

I got to the venue about an hour early, decided to go take a walk around the block and get high. Reach into my pocket - shit! The little container my pot has been in has come undone - pot has spilled out everywhere and is completely lost. Man oh man - no more getting high this week for Jason. Let's all please have a moment of silence for the wasted THC. So I go back to the Plough and start putting away beers.

The Berkeley poetry slam is easily the largest regular poetry event I've seen in the nation, outside of the Green Mill in Chicago. There were 165 people in this place last night, squeezed into a venue that comfortably seats maybe 75. It was crazy! The crowd at the Starry Plough was one of the most frenzied, ecstatic poetry audiences I've ever seen. They had the first round of the slam first - man, the people who perform there are good, they're very good, what can I say? Berkeley's going to have this pretty amazing slam team in Seattle this year.

I was co-featuring with this woman whose name I can't remember. She went first and it was okay, even though not my personal cup of tea - kind of delicate and semi-obvious poems about a woman's right to choose and a man's ability

to fuck that up, that kind of stuff. I went on afterwards - had this really nice, really crazy crowd that supported the whole set. When I announced that the last piece was about Van Halen, I heard the bartender whoop out a big "YEE-HAW!" from the back of the room, and I knew I had just made a friend for the rest of the night.

I sold six books, which is above the average of my sales goal before I came out to the Bay. More importantly, Charles paid me this unbelievable fee, half of which came out of his own pocket, as the original incentive to get me on the road in the first place. How much? Let's say this - I am now one show away from actually turning a profit on this tour, which never, never, never, never, never happens to me. I can't believe I might end up back in Chicago with more cash in my pocket than I did when I left - and this after nine days of being a tourist, buying things whenever I felt like it and blowing some serious money on trains and liquor and seafood. Self-sufficient vacationing - now that's what I like!

What's on tap for today? San Francisco! Today's the day I do the most touristy of the touristy shit I want to do, before the weekend rolls around and those things get absolutely intolerable. I'm taking a cable car to Fisherman's Wharf, and maybe going to Alcatraz, and maybe going over to the Golden Gate Bridge as well. Then it's on the BART again to Oakland, which is where tonight's feature will be. I don't know a single thing about Oakland - how big it is, what kind of poetry they do there, what the hosts are like. I've been told that it's an Afrocentric show, though - I don't know if that's true or not. As always, it'll be an interesting evening. Happy Wednesday! Or, I mean, Thursday. I think.

Hey, John Davis! I'm supposed to be staying with you tonight! I don't have your phone number! I wrote to you last week but you never wrote back! If you don't contact me, I'm a-gonna be fuckin' homeless tonight! Please send me an email when you see this and let me know how to get in touch with you about tonight.

THURSDAY MARCH 15

(Jason Finally Has His First Bad Show.) So, let's see, where did I leave off yesterday? Oh, I had just written my diary entry at Charles Ellik's place in Berkeley. We went out to brunch after that, at this place by his house that he described as an "upscale greasy spoon." Great term - I'm going to have to remember that. Charles had me try the ricotta pancakes, a specialty at this place, and they were great. The two of us sat around for what must have been an hour, being gossipy ol' poetry women. Funny! I finally got the entire story of all the shit that went down in San Francisco's poetry scene in 1998, which I hadn't known before but knew enough to know that a bunch of people had become enemies out here because of it. I in turn told the whole inside story of the 1999 national poetry slam, which was in Chicago and was a lot closer to being a complete disaster than any out-of-towners actually realize.

It was interesting to talk to Charles for so long yesterday, which is something I've never really gotten a chance to do. He's a sort of pariah out here in the Bay area, a guy who many accuse of destroying a formerly cohesive and unified poetry community. Talking to him, I could see why he would rub some people the wrong way - in fact, he admits it himself. He's never hidden the fact that he wants to pay his bills by hosting, that the \$5 cover at his shows mostly goes towards paying a feature and then paying his own rent. The way he explains it

makes perfect sense, and makes you sit there and realize, "My God, he's totally right. Everyone should be doing this!" But discussions of money and profit and budgets are discussions that most poets don't want to have - or, at least, a lot of them want to pretend that money is not even an issue when it comes to something like poetry. I don't know - Charles is just a really, really interesting guy. As you can imagine, I tend to gravitate to people in the poetry scene who have a love/hate relationship with it all, who are loved by some and hated by just as many. (And gee, I wouldn't know anything about that, would I?) So, I think that's why Charles and I got along so well this week.



Anyway. Back on the BART, back into the city, around 12:30 pm or so. Yesterday we finally had one of those colder, drizzly days that San Francisco is famous for. Surprisingly enough, the weather really wasn't that bad, even with it being grey and chilly - it's all about humidity, my friends, which San Francisco doesn't have at all. Take the same kind of weather and put it in Chicago, now, and you got yourself one unpleasant day.



The beautiful thing about it being so cold and grey yesterday was that it kept all the tourists at home, and yesterday just happened to be the day I decided to do all my touristy stuff of the week. (Get it done before the weekend, you know?) It was great! The cable car track, for example, starts right at the Powell BART station, and usually when I've walked by there this week there's constantly been a line of 50 to 100 tourists waiting to get on it. Yesterday, though, there were maybe 10 people there - I walked right up and got right on a cable car just as it arrived at the station.



Now, I had the same attitude as a lot of slackers before I came out here - "Cable cars? How fuckin' touristy. I ain't gonna do that." But let me tell you something - riding the cable cars out here is this legitimately great, moving experience, and now that I've done it I feel the need to encourage everyone to do so at least once if they ever find themselves here. In fact, riding the cable car yesterday actually provided me a great metaphor for how I feel about the city in general this week. Let me explain - for those who don't know, the cable cars in San Francisco are open vehicles - there aren't any walls to the thing, and people just jump on and off it as it makes its way across the city. Now, you see these things in commercials and television shows and it looks like this fun little experience - "Hey, look, all those people are hanging off the side of the cable car, gripping these handbars." But man, riding on the outside of the cable car is fuckin' scary! Those things can get going up to 25 miles an hour or so, and every time they pass another cable car going the opposite way the two cars only miss each other by an inch or two.



I was thinking to myself as I was riding it, "God, the liability factor for these things must be through the roof. It would be so easy to just fall off these damn things, go tumbling down the street or run smack dab into the opposite-traveling car. How can the city of San Francisco possibly put their stamp of approval on something so dangerous?" But that's the thing - San Francisco does, and the fact that they do says something pretty profound about this place. The fact is that you are on your own in this city - you and only you are responsible for your safety and well-being here, and ain't nobody here gonna help you out if you're in trouble - not the citizens, not the cops, not anyone. If you fall, you fall, and it was because you were a dumb shit who wasn't paying attention.

The city of San Francisco, for as pretty and pristine as it is, is laced with danger and menace, everywhere. The crazy homeless people here have absolutely no sense of personal space - they will literally walk right into you here, follow you down the street, yell at you if you don't give them money. I've been to New York four or five times now, and I've lived in Chicago for seven years, and I have never felt this sense of edginess and danger in either of those cities in the way I've felt it out here. This is the ultimate city in which to be self-empowered - because, believe me, if you don't get tough and strong here, the city will eat you alive and spit you back out on the sidewalk. It's so deceptive - I mean, San Francisco! You know, where all the hippies and gay people go. Haight, Grateful Dead, etc etc etc. But the fact of the matter is that, of all the places I've now visited in my life, San Francisco is easily the toughest, weirdest, scariest place I've ever been. (And just in case you're tempted to misinterpret me, let me just say that I love it. I absolutely love it.)



So, the cable car dropped me off at Fisherman's Wharf, up on the far north side of the city. Fisherman's Wharf was...well, it was exactly what I was expecting it to be - a great view of the Bay, surrounded by hundreds upon hundreds of crappy tourist-trap stores. Can I just ask this? What is the American tourist's obsession with going to chain stores while they're on vacation? I mean, GAP clothes are GAP clothes, no matter where the hell in the world you go. The Disney Store is still selling little stuffed Mickey Mouse dolls, whether that's in San Francisco or Chicago or New York. Yet, just like every other tourist spot I've been at in my life, Fisherman's Wharf is fucking filled with stores like this, and every single one of them was packed with pasty white people, sun visors on head and "INMATE OF ALCATRAZ" t-shirts across their chest. Jesus, no wonder most Europeans hate touring Americans! A half-hour at Fisherman's Wharf and even I was ready to renounce my citizenship.

I was going to ride the cable car back to Market Street, but there was a big long line so I was like, "Fuck it, I think I'll just walk back and take in some sights." Holy shit, I'm so glad I did. Guess where I accidentally wandered into? North Beach! Right, where all the beat poets used to hang out. And guess what I came across in North Beach? City Lights Bookstore! Right, the place that Lawrence Ferlinghetti started and which sorta became "Beat Generation Central" during the 50s and 60s. Can you be a writer and NOT go to City Lights while in San Francisco? Well, I suppose you could, but then you'd suck.



I met up with Eric while I was there, the guy who's in charge of consignment and chapbook sales. He and I have had a semi-regular correspondence for the last couple of months, talking about chapbooks and whether City Lights was going to carry mine or not. Turns out he's this great punk kid, really enthusiastic and totally supportive of the local literary community. Right on - he'd take to Quimby's in Chicago like a duck to water, if he ever came to visit. He actually lives a block away from the place where I'm performing tonight, so I'm going to get a chance to hang out with him some more. Also, he ended up buying five copies of "The Tao of Now" from me, making me officially sold out of all the books I brought with me on tour. Right on! Oh, and fuckin' check this out - I was up at the front desk, talking to some of the employees, getting some directions for getting back to the BART, and this really nice older man with a white beard was sitting there taking part of the conversation. Later in the afternoon (see below) I was looking through some photos of the famous writers from the Beat generation and...and...holy shit, I got directions to Market Street from Lawrence Fucking Ferlinghetti! It's still hard to believe, my friend.



So, after City Lights I stopped across the street at a place called Vesuvio. This is the bar, as some of you know, where Kerouac and Ginsberg and Burroughs and Corso and Cassady and Bob Dylan and all the rest of them used to go get trashed after an evening at City Lights. Once again, just one of those things you have to do, like a Muslim going to Mecca or something. Vesuvio was great! It's this shitty, dilapidated bar, still covered with the same artwork that was up when the Beats were hanging out (and, I'm pretty sure, still with the same rickety tables and chairs as well). I'll tell you what was weird, though - in the ensuing decades North Beach has become completely and utterly gentrified, so while I was in there it was me and 25 yuppies all off work early and sitting around getting tanked at three in the afternoon. And, I mean, these were yuppie yuppies - cellphones in hand, Old Navy on hips, standing in the middle of the bar like they own the world and it's your fuckin' job to get out of their

way, damnit. As you can imagine, the barstaff of Vesuvio adored me, in that I was the only guy in the whole place not like that. I sat at the bar and talked to the two attractive female bartenders, telling them all about my tour and my writing and what Chicago is like and what I've thought of San Francisco so far. Damnit, it is possible to find engaging, friendly SF citizens - I knew it!

I had two beers at Vesuvio, which actually got me kind of drunk, to tell the truth. After that it was to the BART again, to make my way out to Oakland for last night's feature. So, like I mentioned at the beginning of this entry, it didn't go very well. ...Oh, hell, it was a fucking train wreck, let's just admit it. I was going to sit here and tell you all about it, all the details and what exactly happened that made it go so badly...but fuck that. I'm out here to have a good time and sell books, not to dwell on any bad experiences I have. My whole attitude is, if you do seven shows in nine days in another state, you're bound to have at least one clunker somewhere in there. And let's face it, the rest of the tour has been so much more amazingly than I ever, ever expected it to go. I had been hoping to sell 35 books in seven shows, and I had already sold 50 in four shows, so I could easily afford to have a bad night. I mean, thank God they haven't all been like that, right? I could've spent all this money and had seven bad shows in a row. That hasn't happened, so in the end I'm grateful.

But, you know, I will say this about the Oakland show, because there's actually a really good point to be made in my experience. As some of you know, my regular weekly show in Chicago is at this place called Mad Bar. It's co-hosted by one person from a slam background and one person from a hiphop background, so the evening always turns out to be this really nice mix - half black and half white audience, an intriguing blend of traditional poetry and slam work and straight-up hiphop and freestyle. But here's the thing I never realized - the hiphop audience in Chicago is amazingly tolerant and enthusiastic about work that's not hiphop. And I guess I just never realized how unusual this is in the world of hiphop - I mean, you shoulda seen this fuckin' audience last night. If I wasn't performing memorized and rhyming work, they just didn't want anything to do with it. Which is a real fuckin' shame, because there are so many things you can learn about your own writing and performance qualities by being open to people who do different work than you. In Chicago, this works great - hiphop poets are a lot more literate and with a finer sense of metaphor than the usual hiphop artist, while the traditional poets have this great sense of rhythm and balance and tempo and beat that you just do not see in a lot of other traditional poetry scenes. The Mad Bar audience is not just an

audience but a community - a group of people who get together weekly to entertain each other, to teach each other and to learn from each other. And I guess this just never hit me in this really profound way until going to Oakland last night and seeing an audience that doesn't do this. It makes me miss Mad Bar! Oh, look at me, I'm getting all fuckin' sad at this internet cafe right now!

Anyway, enough of that. The show in Oakland didn't even get started until 10:30 pm, and I wasn't up on stage until 11:45, which means that I missed the last BART into SF. Had to take a cab - \$35. Yeah, that's right, thirty-five fuckin' dollars, which the hosts didn't offer to pay for. Whatever. I got back to the apartment of John Davis, a guy who used to be a big part of the Chicago poetry scene and now lives in San Francisco. His brother, his brother's roommate, and both of their girlfriends are also in town right now for spring break, and they're staying in John's apartment as well, so it was kind of like a flophouse last night. Not that I'm complaining - I just stuck on my Walkman and fell asleep ten minutes after hitting the couch. I'm staying with him tonight as well, so I think I'll wait until tomorrow to tell you more about him and his apartment and what we did last night after my Oakland show.

What's on tap for today? Well, if I can figure out how to get there, I think today's the day I walk across the Golden Gate Bridge. Or, I mean, halfway across the bridge, then turn around and come back - I have no reason to go to Marin County. And I don't know what else I'm going to do today - it's 10:30 a.m. as I write this, and the whole rest of the day stretches out before me like a...well, like a thing that stretches out before you, I don't know, I'm all out of metaphors today. Then tonight, my sixth show of the tour - Michelle Tea's show at the Bearded Lady in the Mission. This is the one that I'm incredibly excited about, not only because a bunch of my Sister Spit friends are going to be there, but also because I'm performing with Carol Queen, a fairly famous sex columnist who I've been a fan of for years. (And kinda have a crush on, too, to be perfectly frank.) It promises to be one amazing show tonight - if you're here in the Bay area, I highly encourage you to get out and see it.

Hey, Chicago people - I miss you. Thanks for sending me all the emails you have this week - they've made me smile and feel not so entirely far away from home. I'm starting to hit that wall - you know, that "I've been on the road too long and I really fucking need to be back in my own apartment soon" wall. Don't get me wrong, it's great to be out here and I'm still really loving it - but I'm just starting to miss Chicago, miss my apartment, miss being able to close the door and know that nobody else is coming in. Anyway, I'll talk to you again tomorrow.

FRIDAY MARCH 16

I should mention that I've been writing my journal for the last couple of days at this place called Cafe.com. It's on Market Street, down by all the scary porn stores - ask me how cool it is to go to an internet cafe in a scary neighborhood! The place is run by this very friendly Mediterranean guy, who's been getting into the habit of knocking off a big portion of my bill because I'm in here every day and have been spending so much money on coffee and food anyway. Cheap internet access abounds in San Francisco, as you can well expect - the California Office of Tourism, for example, has terminals in their visitors office (next door to the Powell BART station) where you can check your email for a buck. I found a place in the Mission that charges \$5 for an entire hour, plus all the prints you want for free. Hell, even the McDonald's in Union Square has these internet kiosks set up next to the tellers where you can check your email for free. The dot com economy may be slowing down (and ask me how weird it's been to be out here while the NASDAQ crashed last week), but the online influence can still be profoundly felt in all sectors of this city.



So. After filing my journal entry yesterday, I decided to finally head over to the new San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA). The city just put together a new building for the museum a couple of years ago, and it is now the second largest contemporary art museum in the US. Hey, I'm all into that

- I'm so there. Interestingly enough, the actual permanent collection at SFMOMA is wildly inconsistent. They had this pretty big overview of 20th century work there right now, for example, and the show was just not impressive at all - most major artists were represented, but they were all minor works of the artists, pieces from their formative years and not when they had hit their stride. And the artist omissions were pretty glaring as well - where's the Helen Frankenthaler? Where was the entire Dada movement? If this was a survey of the entire century, why was there only one major artist from the 80s (Cindy Sherman) in the show? On review, though, you kinda have to give SFMOMA a break for now - after all, they just spent a lot of fuckin' money just to get this museum built. The permanent collection will eventually get better, I'm sure.



Now, on the other hand, their curated shows of new and upcoming work were absolutely stunning, probably the best major contemporary shows I've seen and certainly much better than anything I've seen at Chicago's MCA. They had a major show going on called "010101: Art in Technological Times," that's been getting a lot of press here lately. And it's easy to see why! My first thought when hearing about the show was, "Great, another floor filled with bad Photoshop montages and clunky 'interactive' bullshit." Boy, was I wrong. The show, at its heart, attempts to show how the most sophisticated and talented of current artists are using all kinds of technology to interact with their audience. The idea is sorta, "Hey, computers have been with us for 20 years now. This is long enough to really have a profound influence on how we view the arts. Why don't we all take a look together at what's going on?"

Holy shit, the stuff they had in this show! One guy took a cheap video of a 747 flying across the sky, went into FinalCut Pro and duplicated the plane so that it looks like you're watching two 747s literally flying on top of each other, making love while soaring across the sky. Very erotic and very creepy. Another person used medical imaging software to construct perfect 1:10 ratio, three-dimensional sculptures of her friends, down to the very last detail. Yet another group of people, an artist collective with the same sense of whimsy as the old Fluxus movement, built this giant box full of keyboards and lightbulbs and electric mixers, that did something different every time a UPC barcode was held in front of its scanner. I was standing there, thinking, "Wow, I wonder if I have anything on me with a barcode to scan," and before I knew it I realized that I had half a dozen things on me with barcodes. Which then just totally fuckin' creeped me out - Jesus, have you ever really stopped and thought about all the things we own that have UPC barcodes on them? A very effective piece!

Anyway, I'm not going to go on about it anymore - why don't you just go check out the entire exhibit yourself?



After the museum, I hiked up to the Union Square Borders to meet up with my host John Davis, who works there. John is this guy who was pretty heavily involved with the Chicago poetry scene the last couple of years, while he was a student there. He's this incredibly earnest, incredibly nice guy who automatically pitches in whenever there's something he can help with - for example, he designed and laid out the Chicago Mad Bar slam team chapbook the other year, and did a fantastic job. When I mentioned three months ago that I was going to be doing this California tour, he was the very first person to write back and offer me his place. What a nice guy!

John lives near Union Square, which is kinda like the Magnificent Mile of San Francisco - you know, where the Virgin Superstore is, and the GAP Superstore, and the Borders Superstore, and the Nordstroms Superstore. You get the idea. Man, what a change of pace! All the rest of my SF friends live in the Mission, which is kinda like Wicker Park five years ago - shitty, dilapidated, ethnic, and full of funky little bohemian shops. John, on the other hand, lives in the middle of all these high-priced hotels, bistros I can't afford, and stores where I never shop. His building is like a fuckin' hotel! They have an exercise room for the tenants, and a computer internet center, and a concierge, and free coffee in the lobby every morning. Fucking nice! I've been there for two days, and let me just tell you something, it's been the most pleasant sleeping experience of the entire week.



I've been rapidly getting finished with everything I wanted to do in San Francisco, and I found myself after Borders with a whole lot of time on my hands and no real destination in mind. Hmm, hmm...oh, I think I'll go to Nob Hill! Nob Hill, for those who don't know, is one of the highest urban points in San Francisco. Decades ago, a number of luxury hotels opened up shop at the top of the hill, and now the whole area is famous for its frou-frouness and extremely beautiful views of the city. I started my way up the hill - but you know what? Instead of "Nob Hill" they really should rename the neighborhood "Smoker's Nightmare." I only got about halfway up the hill when I realized that, if I kept going, there was a very real chance of me having a heart attack. "Huff, huff, huff - shit, the view right here's pretty good - huff, huff, huff - I don't think I need to - huff, huff, huff - go up any farther." Shit!



Okay, so there I was, still with three hours to kill, going through my SF checklist in my head. Fisherman's Wharf...yeah, did that. Cable cars...did that too. City Lights, Vesuvio, Mission, Financial District, SoMa, Good

Vibrations...wait a minute. Wait just a darn-tootin' minute! Good Vibrations! Of course! I hadn't been there yet! I made my way to the BART and started heading over to the Mission again.

Good Vibrations, for those who don't know (and if you like my writing, there's a very good chance you already do know) is an adult store and mail-order service that's owned and operated by a group of women. The whole idea when they started up was to single-handedly change the way that females interact with adult material - to really bring smut out of the dirty, dark places (like those really nasty porn stores I went to earlier this week) and present them in a women-friendly, bright, non-threatening venue. They have two stores in the Bay area which are really popular, but what's really made them world famous is their mail-order service. They stock a whole lot of shit that you simply can't find unless you live in a major urban area...and even then, there are a whole lot of women out there who don't want to go into the places you're usually forced to go into to purchase this stuff anyway. And they've wildly succeeded in their goal - tens of thousands of women around the planet now have a much better, much healthier understanding of their bodies and their sexuality, all as a result of Good Vibrations. And speaking as a person who has sex with women, how can you not love that?

The store is really amazing - bright, clean, friendly, yet filled with some of the dirtiest, filthiest fuckin' porn I've ever seen in my life. The place was like a melting pot for sexuality - in that corner, a straight couple looking at "how-to" books together; in that corner, a dyke couple testing out strap-ons and giggling like schoolgirls; in that corner, a dirty old man poring over the video and DVD collection. One of the women behind the counter grabbed me right when I got in and was just so enthusiastic about helping me! She made me feel like I was the most special customer in the entire history of the store - it was so charming.

So did I buy something? Of course I bought something. There's this woman I know, named Tristan Taormino, who wrote a book a couple of years ago called "The Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Women." What can I say - she's a little obsessive about the subject. Anyway, it's this incredibly insightful and entertaining book that's become a pretty big seller among a certain crowd. And part of that crowd is the actual adult video industry down in southern California, the members of which apparently just adore both Tristan and the no-apology tone of the book. So apparently an adult video company approached Tristan a couple of years ago about the idea of doing a movie version of her book - according to what I've heard, there were a dozen major adult

film stars just lining up to be in it. So she said yes! And what came out was a two-cassette, four-hour epic adult film about the intricacies of anal sex - how to do it, how not to do it, every little last detail you will ever need to know about how to take it up the ass and have the best orgasm you've ever had in your life.

So the whole kicker to the thing is that Tristan herself decided to be in the video - she's the star of the last scene, and ends up getting fucked in the ass by three different people in a row. And, I mean, I know Tristan, you know? And pardon my French, but she's fuckin' hot, in this great nerdy punk-rock way. So do I want to see her get fucked in the ass three times in a row? God forgive me, I do. I really do. It goes without saying, of course, that I haven't ever been able to find a copy in the two years I've been looking for it. It also goes without saying, of course, that Good Vibrations had a whole stack of them, and that the employee helping me knew exactly what I was talking about the moment I mentioned it. ("Tristan's video? Holy shit, have you seen it yet? It's so hot.") I also picked up a book called "Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual people speak out," a sorta loose oral history of the bisexuality movement and the unique struggles it has gone through both in the straight world and the gay one. (The employee helping me, God bless her soul, was all into this purchase as well - "Bi Any Other Name! Oh, this is such a great book! More power to you, my bi brother!" Then she gave me a high five!) Ah, Good Vibrations, I loves ya! I would almost move to San Francisco just so I could go to your store every week.

Back to John's after that, to veg out for a bit and watch "The Simpsons." Then - finally - it was time for my show at The Bearded Lady Truckstop Cafe in the Mission. This was the show set up by my friend Michelle Tea, who's easily the most famous writer I know. (Or, let's say this - she's the only person I know whose book has been reviewed by the Village Voice - and they loved it!) Michelle is this sorta pixieish girl who just so happens to be the most hardcore fuckin' woman I've known in my entire life; I just adore it every time I get to spend time with her. She set up this show last night just so I'd have a place in the Mission to perform and make some money! God, I love her.

Now, I had never been to the Bearded Lady before, although I'd been hearing about it for years. This is also the show, by the way, that I had announced on The Squid List, this arts-event mass emailing list that goes out to 6,000 Bay citizens every day. So imagine my surprise when I show up and realize - "Holy shit, this place can hold maybe 25 people." I mean, the place is tiny, probably the same size as my studio apartment back in Chicago. And, I mean, this was

a big show - me, Bucky Sinister, Alvin Orloff, and this pretty famous sex columnist named Carol Queen, among others. I wondered what was going to happen.



Everyone slowly started filtering in. Beth Lisick showed up again, and I hadn't seen her since I stayed with her earlier in the week, so that was great. Beth was like, "Excuse me a minute - I'm going to go get a beer." "Beer? We can bring beer in here?" "Oh yeah!" So off to the liquor store - I bought a 40 of malt liquor! Holy shit, I'm fuckin' hardcore! We get back from the liquor store, and...oh. My. God. There are 75 people at the Bearded Lady. And more still trying to squeeze in. And a big huge crowd just milling around on the sidewalk in front of the place, smoking and laughing and trading punk-show flyers. Holy shit. No, I mean - holy shit! Can I say this without being offensive? Pasty punk-rock girls are the sexiest women in the entire history of the human race. AND THERE WAS 75 OF THEM IN THE AUDIENCE LAST NIGHT. I thought I was going to have a heart attack, I swear to God. I cracked open that 40 as quickly as I could and started getting it into my belly.

How did the show go? How the fuck do you think the show went? It was amazing! It was fantastic! It was one of the most entertaining spoken-word events I've ever attended, at any time and in any city. The crowd was just...oh my God. Have you ever been to one of those little tiny shows that everyone had to squeeze into to fit? And at a certain point you realize that there's something special going on that night? Just this really amazing, almost historic event, a night that people will still be talking about years later when they're reminiscing on the best live shows they've ever seen? God, yeah, it was like that. Every single performer was right on, just totally dead on target. The crowd was eating it up. Michelle was getting more and more animated with each new introduction. The crowd was clapping more and more. Man...oh...man.

Finally, it was time for me to take the stage. I swaggered up with my now half-empty 40 of Old English. The first piece I did was "1984." The crowd broke into "end of piece" type of applause before I had even finished the story. Then I did "You fuck like Sleater-Kinney." I thought the fuckin' roof was going to cave in, they made so much noise. And then I finished with "The tao of Van Halen," and I literally thought a riot was going to start, people were so fuckin' into the piece. I just...well. I'm finding it really hard to describe how much that show meant to me, how just absolutely amazing the audience was and what a thrill it was to perform in that kind of atmosphere. Jesus, I'm about this close to breaking into tears right now, sitting at this internet cafe and recollecting

the story to you. Without a doubt, it will be one of the performance highlights of my entire life, and I will go to the grave still remembering what a fantastic night it was.

Michelle and a bunch of the ladies took me to a leather biker bar after the show - finally, a little taste of the Mission! And, I'm not positive, but I think I officially got hit on for the first time in this entire tour. This woman who lives in Los Angeles, who's the aunt of one of the performers that night, who drove up just to see the show. She's a massage therapist but has been a lot of other things in her life as well, including a personal assistant to Jennifer Jason Leigh. Yeah, I know! I think she's straight (although I'm not guaranteeing that) and I think that our very engaging conversation last night was maybe just a little bit more than simply talking to each other (although I'm not guaranteeing that either). Leave it to Jason Pettus to get hit on for the first time all week after a lesbian show at a lesbian coffeehouse. Will wonders never cease? And then it turned midnight and my carriage turned back into a pumpkin - John had to work today, so I needed to be back to his place by 12:30 so he could get a decent night's sleep.

Oh shit, I almost forgot to mention the best thing about the entire night - Carol Queen loved me! She was the very first person to buy my book, even before the show had ended, and she just had these really incredible things to say about my writing. I, of course, had an entire 40 of malt liquor in me at that point, so I did my patented starry-eyed routine that I do every time I meet someone I really admire - "Oh, God, Carol, I've been reading your work for years, and you're so great, and I wish I was half the writer that you are, and God, you're just so great! Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." Never let it be said that Jason Pettus will ever get too big to stop making a fool out of himself in front of other artists.

Whew! That's it. What a fucking night. So what about today? Nothing! It's my first evening off in an entire week. I have no idea what I'm going to do, either for the rest of the day or for this evening. Although, I think I remember Beth telling me that her boyfriend's band is playing at a club tonight - I should call her and get the details of that. I've got an entire apartment to myself for the next two nights - my friend Tarin went out of town and she's given me the keys to the place on the condition that I take care of her cats. No problem!

One show left, this Sunday, then it's finally back on a plane to Chicago. Jesus Fucking Christ, what a great week it's been.

SATURDAY MARCH 17



So, after finishing up yesterday's entry I headed to the Union Square Borders again, to meet up with my host John Davis and have lunch with him. His brother and his brother's girlfriend showed up as well, so we all went out to this 50s diner around the block. John's been working on some interesting web things, it turns out - he's sorta fallen into the Flash crowd out here (there's a lot of Flash people in SF - whatta surprise) and they've been doing some really interesting things. John's thinking of working on this weird "group writing - abacus" kind of dealie - you as the user put together these poems and stories in a linear fashion, where each word is a bead that line up on rows. And then at a certain point your lines get kicked out into a public area, where other users can then pick up the line of beads, rearrange them, stick them into their own pieces. It sounded complicated and I couldn't quite follow it - but it sure sounds cool, that's for sure. John's also thinking of putting this collaborative website together, matching up contemporary writers with Flash designers. He wanted to know if I'd like to be involved? Yes, please! Match me up with Hillman Curtis, please!

So, I finally reached the point where I have more shit than can fit into my suitcase. Had to go out and buy another bag to take back to Chicago with me - a cute little black overnighter for ten bucks, purchased in Chinatown. Right on. I finally got around to calling Kenne, who is the guy with the keys to Tarin's

apartment. Oh wait, I should explain this more - Tarin is a friend of mine from the poetry scene, who had to go out of town earlier this week, who said I could stay at her empty place as long as I took care of her cat. I can do that, sure. So, got directions to Kenne's place of work, a used furniture store called "Mickey's Monkey" over in the Lower Haight. He gave me directions to the place from Chinatown, and I headed out.

I should mention, by the way, that I thought the place was in the Upper Haight, which is actually quite a distance from the Lower Haight, so I ended up hopping off the bus up at Ashbury, a good mile and a half from his place. But that's okay - I'm all into excuses for walking around San Francisco, looking at everything. Man, the Lower Haight is one hot fuckin' place, probably my favorite neighborhood of everything I've seen out here this week. The Upper Haight is this crowded mall-type area, full of tourists every minute of the day and packed full of punk kids and head shops and crazy musicians hustling for change on the sidewalks. But all you have to do is walk down the hill and you're suddenly in a very different environment - no more tourists, no more street musicians, no more tacky "alternative" tourist shops. The Lower Haight, I've found, is the one place I've seen this week that I can't describe by comparing it to some other place outside of San Francisco - I have literally never been to a neighborhood like it before. It's full of these absolutely gorgeous Victorian buildings - not all gussied up and painted like the beginning of "Full House," but a little dilapidated and funky looking. There are all these cool looking bars and shops in the Lower Haight, kind of like the places my friends and I hang out at in upper Lakeview in Chicago (Gingerman, Long Room, Joyblue, places like that). Except it's not exactly like that - it's hard for me to describe. Just take my word for it - it's this incredibly cool neighborhood, and actually prompted my first pangs of the week for actually moving here.

Made it to Mickey's Monkey and got the keys from Kenne, as well as very detailed instructions on taking care of the cat. (Or cats? I think there may be two of them there, but I've only seen one so far.) Kenne gave me these really complicated instructions on taking a bus back to the Mission, but after heading out for a few minutes I realized I was only a ten minute walk from where I was going, so just hoofed it. On the way home I got my first glimpse of the Castro, the infamous gay neighborhood in San Francisco that is sort of a Gay Mecca for many when they visit. Yep, there it is, lots of rich, good-looking guys everywhere, rainbow flags from every streetlight, full of little cafes I can't afford and shops that don't look interesting to me. Hmm. Then, Tarin's place at 16th and Valencia. Tarin's got this really nice little one bedroom, right in the heart of the Mission where most of our friends can't afford to live anymore because of the rapid gentrification there. I had forgotten until I got there that Tarin actually works in the computer industry and makes quite a bit more



money than just about any of us in the poetry scene. Of course, once I was inside I saw computer books that she had written, plus a whole wall full of nametags from various dot com conventions - holy shit, there's a nametag for "Fray 4!" Dude, I totally forgot that Tarin knows all those people. (She once told me about getting shitfaced with Jeff Veen, who's the creator of Wired magazine's website and the author of a book about web design that I still use like a bible. Color me impressed!)

Tarin's apartment is really warm, but I don't know how to cool it down - I'm afraid of opening the windows, because I'm afraid the cat will get out, and I can't find any fans or air conditioners in the place. Oh well - I'm just grateful to have a private space for the very first time in eight days. Can I just say this? You get so used to not having any privacy when you do it for that long in a row. The lack of private time hadn't even occurred to me until I actually got into Tarin's apartment, locked the door and realized, "Hey - no one else is coming through that door for the rest of the weekend." Nice! Then all of a sudden it hit me how fucking exhausted I am from this weekend, how long and hard I've been pushing myself to make these dates happen and to deliver performances that would consistently impress a different audience every night. Shit - I'm fucking tired. I flopped down on the bed and literally just vegged out for about three hours, watching an endless series of "Simpsons" episodes that Tarin has videotaped over the years.

Finally I got up and got some dinner in me, at this coffeehouse on Valencia. I sat around and read Michelle Tea's book "Valencia" while there - talk about a weird experience. At a certain point in the book she starts talking about hanging out at this coffeehouse on Valencia, and as she's describing it I realize, "Holy shit, I'm sitting in the coffeehouse she's talking about." Michelle's book is really phenomenal, by the way, even better than her first book which is something I thought not possible. God, parts of it have just broken my heart. I was trying to explain this really heavy emotional response I have to Michelle's work to some other Bay area writers, but I started feeling stupid and gushing and just ended up closing my mouth.

So, last night was my very first evening off of the entire tour. What to do, what to do? Oh, I'll call Beth! Beth's boyfriend is in this band called the Roofies, playing last night at a club called El Rio, about two miles from where I'm staying. Do I want to meet up with them around 11? Of course I do. What to do before that? Pub crawl! My very own, private little pub crawl of the Mission, that is. I head out about 9:45, decide to just walk until I see a cool bar, stop in and have a drink, walk again until I find another cool bar, repeat until trashed. And don't get me wrong, I was three sheets to the wind by the time I got to El Rio. Unfortunately, most of the bars that looked cool from the outside turned out to be filled with dot com assholes on the inside. This is a

new slur I've learned from my Bay area friends, by the way - the phrase "dot com assholes" is used even more often in San Francisco than people in Chicago say "fucking Starbucks." And it's easy to see why out here - most of them really are assholes. Outside of San Francisco, we like to think of the dotcom as this loose collection of really cool, laid-back, computer-obsessed former nerds, all dressed up in leather outfits and swapping info across their Palm Pilots. The reality of the Bay area, unfortunately, is that most dotcom people are the same fuckin' frat boy assholes you were already sick of in college, stumbling out of their sports bars, hooting and hollering and yelling 'faggot' at the people like me trying to get by them. They're all out in San Francisco now, smoking cigars instead of Marlboro Lights, wearing Prada instead of backwards baseball caps. No wonder my friends are so angry about the gentrification of the Mission.

Anyway, the fourth bar I stopped into, I make my way to the bar when...well, look at that, it's Bucky Sinister. Of course it's Bucky! You can't spit in San Francisco without running into Bucky, thank God. He was there with his girlfriend and the two of them were so flabbergasted to see me that they just kept hugging me over and over. It was so charming! The three of us went on and on about the show at the Bearded Lady the night before, how fuckin' amazing it was and how we were all going to remember the evening for a long, long time. Then it was off for my last leg of my trip to El Rio. Close your eyes right now and imagine me stumbling down the sidewalk, dressed in my Apple t-shirt and leather jacket, listening to Sleater-Kinney as loud as my Walkman will go, as drunk as a poet on payday, thinking to myself, "God, I'm so hardcore - I'm wandering around the Mission by myself on a Saturday night." So pathetic!

El Rio turned out to actually be about three or four blocks south of 30th, which I didn't realize so ended up getting completely lost. The club is smack dab in the middle of the Latino section of the Mission - I was surrounded by all these cool-looking Mexicans with giant cowboy hats and pressed white shirts, all heading out for their own Saturday nights. I kept asking these guys for directions, but they could barely speak English and I speak not a word of Spanish - "Donde es El Rio?" "El Rio... (big long Spanish phrase)" "No, no, no habla Espanol!" "Oh! Ah...Taco Bell? Si?" "Si..." "One block past Taco Bell!" "Gracias!" The club, it turns out, is another Latino place, big beautiful Mexican murals on the walls, that happens to double as a punk-rock club on the weekends. Think Fireside Bowl and Empty Bottle added together, throw in a little CBGB's and stick it in the middle of nowhere. Yeah, you got it. This was the most indie rock crowd I've seen in my entire time out here - it was a little intimidating, to tell you the truth. The place was filled with jaded, tattooed ex college radio heads, really into their conversations with each other and not at all interested in having a conversation with some drunk shmuck

from Chicago with an Apple logo on his chest. Not that Beth didn't try - she kept running around, introducing me to everyone. I've said this before and I'll say this again - Beth really is the greatest.

The show started - the Roofies are absolutely insane. They have two female lead singers, who kept screaming at the top of their lungs for twenty and thirty seconds at a time, jumping around on stage and throwing shit on the audience. The audience was totally fuckin' into it, of course. The show itself was in the back room of the club, this little tiny space that holds less people than any other space in the entire bar. Who made this decision? I couldn't get into the room to save my life - not like I was even trying, 'cause you know the weird emotional issue I have with being in a cramped room full of people. I hung out in the patio outside, watching the band through the plate glass windows in the back of the room, having yet more liquor and wondering how I was possibly going to find Beth again after the show.

Eventually even the crowd outside the room got too much for me, and it was time for me to go. Went outside, couldn't find a cab to save my life - of course. Cabs are fucking impossible to get down in the Mission, man - travelers, definitely be aware of this before you come out. I wander down the streets a bit, wondering how I was going to get home, when a bus shows up! Right on! I drop my carcass on a seat and keep my eye out for 16th Street. And we're going...and we're going...and we're going. And none of the streets look even remotely familiar. Where are the numbers? All the cross streets have names, not numbers. God, I've been on this bus a long time. When am I finally going to hit 16th? And then suddenly the bus driver announces, "Daly City - end of the line!" and I look around and there's only two people left on the bus, including myself.

"Did I miss 16th Street?" I ask the bus driver.

"16th Street? We didn't even go past 16th Street. You wanted the other bus for that."

I got on the wrong bus? Fuck me! Where the fuck am I? I could be in an entirely different county by now, as far as I know. I mean, I've been riding this bus for 45 minutes, having it take me God only knows where. Shit, shit shit shit! I'm freaking out!

"Oh, don't worry about it," the bus driver says. "I'm turning the bus around right now. Just stay on here with mew and you'll get to 16th Street again."

And thus did Jason Pettus ride a San Francisco public transit bus for an hour and a half straight last night, feeling completely helpless and being so drunk that I kept falling asleep on the bus for thirty-second periods, waking in a complete panic, wondering if I had once again missed my stop. God, not a fun experience at all. And then, finally, three in the morning, I get back to 16th. Then up to Tarin's. And go to bed.

I'm feeling really fuckin' shaky today. I shouldn't have gotten so drunk last night - it's made me all emotional and exhausted and hungover and vulnerable today. I've realized today that the only reason I've had such a good tour so far this week, why I've been feeling really emotionally stable and on top of my game, is because I haven't been drinking very much at night, have been getting to bed around midnight every night and getting a decent, sober night's sleep. I mean, I knew that alcohol and late nights affect you emotionally, but it never quite hit me how profound this affectation is until today, feeling homesick and missing my friends in Chicago and wanting to cry every five minutes or so. But I can't complain, because it's completely my fault, right? And I'm leaving literally 24 hours from now to head back home, so at least there's that. At least I didn't have this experience the first night of the tour, setting a completely wrong tone for the week afterwards.

Tonight? My very last performance of the tour - I'm reading two pieces at an erotic poetry show called "Wordfuck" at the Covered Wagon in SoMa tonight. It's a whole gaggle of writers tonight, all getting up and doing short, tight sets and getting off the stage again. It's a regular series run by a guy named m.i. blue who I originally met at the Albuquerque Poetry Festival a couple of years ago. I'm really looking forward to this show - the one I attended in Albuquerque was the most fun dirty poetry show I've ever been to. Then after that Bucky promised to take me to some Anime bar nearby - "Pettus, you're gonna fuckin' love this place," he told me last night while we were trashed. "All these cute little club kids wearing little robot outfits, with Asian cartoons fuckin' everywhere. Well, right on. And then after that, Bucky and I are going to stop by Paradise Lounge again, to see the show Jen Joseph runs there that I was the feature at last week. Jesus, was that really a week ago? It seems like I've been out here for six months. It's like my entire seven years in Chicago is one big blurry dream, that I'm going to get back on that plane tomorrow, show up for work on Tuesday, and my bosses are going to say, "Who are you? You don't work here. You must be mistaking us for someone else." Can you tell I'm feeling a little fucking ungrounded today?

So I take off for the airport at 9:00 tomorrow morning, and will be in transit all day long, so I doubt I'll be able to file a diary entry on Monday. This entry here (which I'm writing on Sunday) will most likely still be here when all you office workers come in and check the site. I'll make sure to tell you all about tonight's activities on Tuesday, plus wrap up my trip home and present a sort of "conclusion," if you will, to everything I've seen and learned and understood during my time out here. Oh, and I may or may not be at Mad Bar tomorrow - it all depends on how I'm feeling by the time Monday evening rolls around. See you later.

SUNDAY MARCH 18

So just when you thought nothing was left to say about my tour, there's something left to say. Sunday's events, instead of being the quiet wind-down to the tour like I thought they were going to be, actually turned out to be great fun, as well as catalysts to some other things that might be happening to me later in the year.

I actually didn't do very much that afternoon, after filing my diary entry from the day before - walked around San Francisco a little bit more, realizing it would probably be my last chance to really see the city, stopped by the Lower Haight again to get Kenne back his set of keys, then stopped in a little coffeehouse there and loitered for awhile. Man, what is it about hippies that make them such annoying fuckin' people? I mean, it's always hippies that are doing those things in coffeehouses that drive me crazy - whistling, slurping their coffee loudly, wiggling their foot over and over and over and over and over, right in the corner of my peripheral vision where it drives me batty. Seriously, what's the connection there?

Anyway. Around 4 pm it was time for me to make my way to SoMa for the "Wordfuck" erotic poetry show over at the Covered Wagon. SoMa stands for "South of Market (Street)," and the neighborhood has a weird history. Originally a sort of abandoned district of warehouses and other outdated industrial sites, the neighborhood made national news two years ago when a

flurry of startup computer-industry companies started moving in. The area simply didn't have the infrastructure to support such a crush of new people, and all these weird things started happening down there - giant traffic jams, weird wholesale displacement of former SoMa citizens, and the start of the now-famous housing crisis in the Bay area.

The irony of it all is that, now that the high-tech industry is starting to tank, SoMa is rapidly turning back into an abandoned warehouse district again - albeit, this time with the most beautiful, expensive abandoned warehouses you've ever seen. It is a truly surreal thing to walk around the SoMa neighborhood like I did on Sunday - the streets are unusually wide for San Francisco, and eerily quiet, like walking through a gentrified neighborhood that's suddenly become a ghost town. A number of the old citizens and hangouts are still there - and, I should mention, SoMa was originally this very sketchy neighborhood before the computer industry moved in. Even my San Franciscan friends were all like, "Man, there's streets down here that even I won't go down," and when I hear my little hardcore friends saying that then I know it's serious. Yet the computer industry definitely still lets itself be known - on the way to the bar I actually passed a Laundromat / bar / internet café rolled into one pretentious, over-designed mess.

I got completely, utterly lost in SoMa on Sunday - got myself all turned around backwards, completely lost track of the numbers on the buildings. Gah, what a mess. The fuckin' building numbers don't match up with the street numbers! Fuck me! You would think "917 Folsom" would be between 9th and 10th Streets, right? No - it's down by, like, 4th Street. Yeah, you got me. Finally, though, I made it there, and found out they had been delaying the show for 45 minutes just waiting for me to show up. How nice!

The Covered Wagon is this great pre-gentrification dive down on the east edge of SoMa, one of the rare places that flouts the law and lets you smoke indoors. The show was the smallest one I did of the entire tour, but it was a really great one! m.i. blue, the host, has been putting shows like this together for years, and he has this real knack of putting together these incredibly interesting rosters of performers for his erotic shows. Carol Queen showed up again - I wasn't expecting to see her, and she wasn't expecting to see me, so we had this nice little moment.

"Hey," she said, excited. "I read your whole book today, cover to cover!"

"Really?" I could feel myself going red.

"Yeah! I loved it! You're such a great writer!"

"Ah, well, shucks..." I haven't been able to handle Carol's embracing of my work this week, by the way. When you admire someone's work from afar for several years, watching their own career take off in these interesting, big direc-

tions, it never occurs to you that they might eventually become a fan of your work. When I first heard a couple of weeks ago that I was going to do a show with Carol at the Bearded Lady, I was simply thrilled to have a chance to see the woman perform - after all, her work has provided me a lot of guidance and inspiration when it comes to the subject of writing intelligent, well laid-out essays on sexuality. Maybe if I'm really lucky, I thought before going out to California, I'll get a chance to have a drink with her and say hello. But it never even entered my mind that she would actually like my work herself and in turn become a fan of mine. It was this surreal thing, and I'm still trying to come to grips with it.

However, I did have a couple of drinks in me, and not really anything to lose, so I said, "You know, one of the pieces I was going to do tonight is written for two voices, and I don't really have anyone to perform it with me. Would you...you know...like to get up on stage and read it with me?"

"What's the piece?" she asked.

"The Tao of Flirting. Actually, it's in that book you read today."

"Oh, right! Oh, I love that piece! Of course I'll go up and perform with you!"

And thus did I find myself up on a stage on Sunday, performing one of my own poems with a woman I've admired for years and literally thought I wasn't even going to get a chance to meet. And man, did that piece go over with the audience - Carol did this really amazing job, really hitting all the punches and pauses almost perfectly, and the audience responded in kind. A really, really nice experience to add to a week full of them.

After the show, I got introduced to Carol's partner, Robert - although I'm not sure if it was her romantic partner or professional one, or a little bit of both. I was never really given the information, and I thought it a little impolite to ask, you know?

"Hey," he said. "Carol came home last night and was just going on and on about you, so I checked out your website yesterday."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. I really enjoyed it - I love the way you have the text going down this thin little column in the middle of the page."

"Oh, right on. Thanks."

"Yeah, I was skimming around and I saw that you were having all these problems with sex clubs, right?"

"Yeah..."

"Are you going to happen to still be here on the 24th?"

"No, I leave tomorrow. Why?"

"Oh, that's a shame. Carol and I throw these parties about three times a year or so. It's just basically all of our friends. It's pretty simple - it's about 150 peo-

ple in a big room, all fucking each other."

Ulp!

"And we were talking about it, and we thought it would be so great if you could've come and joined us. There's just something criminal about someone having a bad sex club experience."

Carol heard him say this and burst out laughing. "Hey, we've got a list," she said. "We'll put you on it. I'm sure one of our parties will coincide with the next time you're in the Bay area. We'd love to have you come out to one of our events."

"Um...um...I don't know what to say! Thank you!" Holy shit, I'm freaking out even more - did I just get invited to a freakin' orgy by the most renowned expert on radical sexuality in America? No I didn't. That was just a figment of my imagination. No, wait a minute - I did! I really did! Carol's the fuckin' greatest!

Anyway, guess who else showed up to Wordfuck? That's right, Bucky Sinister! Ah, Bucky - the Shappy of the San Francisco poetry scene. Bucky took me out after the show, because he wanted me to see this bar around the corner called "Pow!" which is full of early 80s videogames and giant anime paintings all over the walls. Alas, Pow! was closed down - yet another victim of The Great Gentrification of San Francisco. So instead we headed over to the Paradise Lounge, down the street from the Covered Wagon and the site of my very first show of the tour. Alvin Orloff, this great Bay area author, was the feature at Paradise on Sunday night, which was cool because he had been yet another person at the Bearded Lady show on Friday. Not to mention, I actually met Alvin in Chicago, when he was doing a show at Quimby's for his novel. Greg and Shappy and I loved his work so much that we ended up dragging him out to all these other open mics in Chicago while he was here - so I had already had a little bonding experience with him before even getting into town.

To remind you, the Paradise show is the one run by Jen Joseph, the woman who started Manic D Press, and she seemed genuinely surprised and pleased to see me - right on. "Wow," she said, "you've had so many experiences since I saw you last, haven't you?" So she and I ended up sitting there for almost a half-hour, going over all the events of the past week, comparing notes about different shows, talking a little poetry gossip and spanking on some people we mutually dislike. Ah, the poetry spankings - how I love them! Michelle Tea had shown up to the show as well, so Bucky and I cornered her in the pool room and talked to her for awhile. Jen had me get up during the open mic and do another piece from my book - so, I technically ended up with eight performances under my belt by the end of the week, plus actually sold a couple more copies of my book right under the wire. Total sales for the tour - 68 books.



Fucking amazing.

A woman named Shauna was at the show, and I had actually run into her a number of times over the course of the week, so Bucky and I dragged her with us to the Uptown, this absolutely amazing dive bar at the edge of the Mission. Jesus, we got so drunk. And then Bucky started weaving his way back to Oakland, and I popped around the corner to Tarin's place again, wrinkled my nose at the cat smells, and sort of passed out on the bed.

* * *

The trip back to the airport on Monday was not bad at all. You know, it really is pretty easy and cheap to get to the airport in San Francisco - as long as you know what you're doing and leave in plenty of time, there's really no need to take a \$45 cab just to get there. In a nutshell - Mission BART to the Powell station, walk a few blocks to the Caltrain station, Caltrain to the Millbrae station, then a free five-minute shuttle over to the airport. Total cost? \$3.10.

The plane ride home was...quiet. Very quiet and restful. Basically I just sat there and read all the entries from my California tour, all in a row for the first time. Jesus fuckin' Christ, I wrote a lot last week. I can't even imagine now how I found all the time to do so. I just ran a word count of the diary in total, and you know how much it is? 22,000 words. Shit - that's a third of a small novel. In case I haven't mentioned it, by the way, people seemed to enjoy the tour diary so much that I've decided to release it as a chapbook - the text combined with the 75 wristwatch-camera photos I took while I was out there. (Yes, the photos will be going up at the website - as soon as I find the time to sit down and upload them all to my computer, file them correctly and program the pages.) I've even come up with a book title - "Porn Stores Are Scary: California tour diary 2001." I thought it would be this nice little gift for all the people who helped me put the tour together, as well as being a much easier way of reading 22,000 words than parked in front of a computer screen.

I stopped by Mad Bar on the way home last night, and I'm glad I did - I got this hero's welcome when I walked in the door. My friends, I swear to God - they made me cry last night. It was so fuckin' nice. Everyone wanted to know how the tour went - everyone's been reading my tour diary while I was away - everyone wanted to know all the really secret stories that I couldn't tell on the public journal. (In a nutshell - none.) *Mary was waiting for me at Mad Bar when I got there - nice. We had dinner together across the street and she kept leaning her body onto my shoulder at the most random moments. It felt really nice. And then, finally, off to bed. My own bed. My own bed in my own apartment, with my own keys and my own computer, and my own can of soda I forgot to throw away before leaving...oops. Nasty. And my own two weeks of piled-up mail, and my own pillows, and my own shower. Home. Finally.

JASON PETTUS

is a writer and performance poet based out of Chicago. This is his first tour diary.

www.ilikejason.com

END