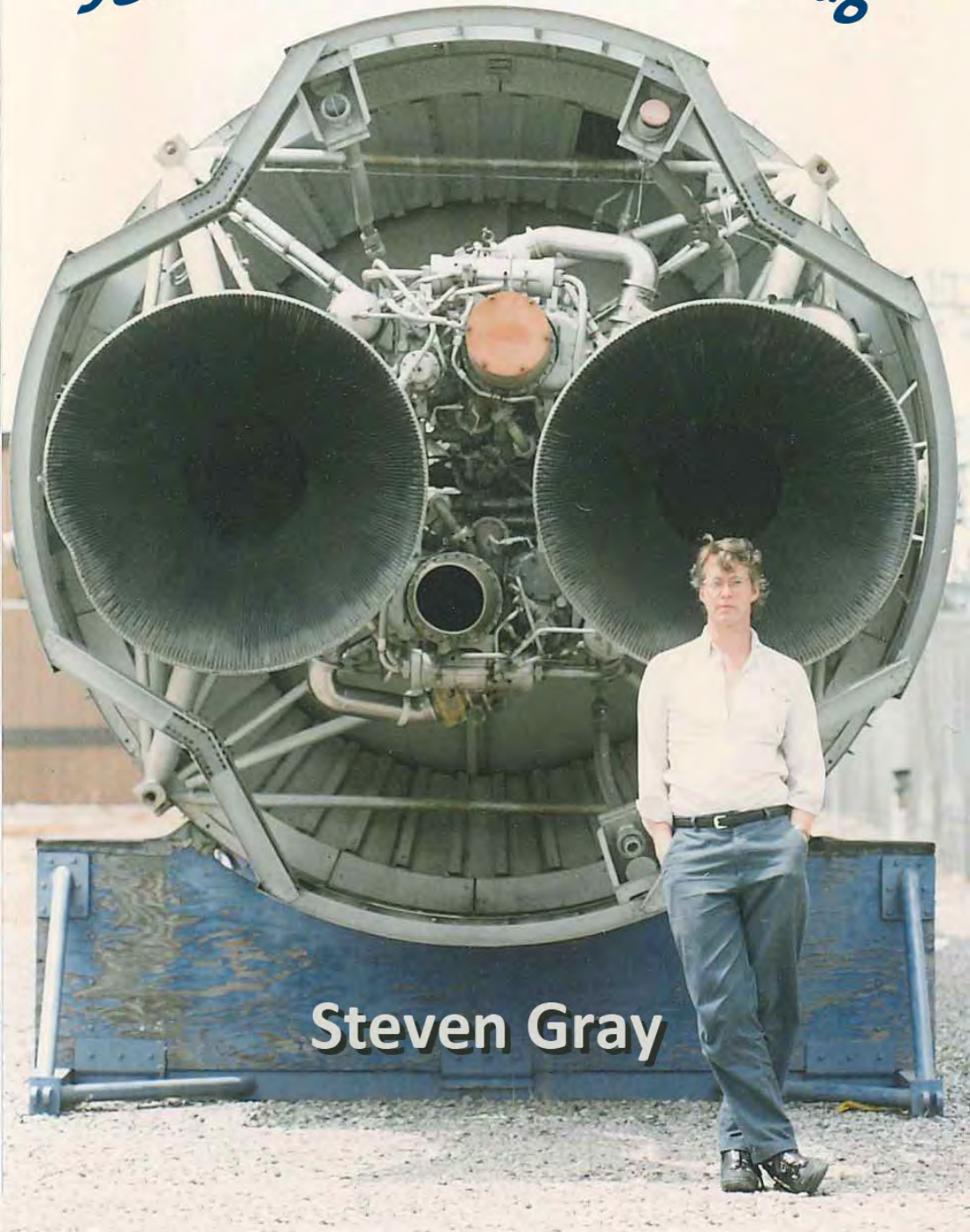
Jet Shock and Culture Lag



Steven Gray

JET SHOCK

and

CULTURE LAG

by

Steven Gray

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Cover photos: Kath Gray

Dedicated to my wife Sarah

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A CHEAP-SUIT INTELLECTUAL

A cheap-suit intellectual
flame-tempered and inured to fame,
the unearned and the burning. Meteors
are falling angels.

On a personal note: the intellect
is so impersonal.
                It could be worse,
it could be mired in blank verse.

I'm having a post-coital rendezvous
with a tune, Blue Rondo a la Turk.
You reconnoiter with a complicated timing
and avoid the social climbing

or the complicated taming of a poet
who is posing for a poem:
                "loser take all"
according to a man like Gore Vidal.

On the news: we're getting organs from
an animal, the Russian military
self-destructing, the suspense
is killing me.

The rugged vigil of an individual
in a provincial comfort zone,

monitoring the return of the screwed.
Beerly de-loved, we are gathered here…

A woman viewing life with all the
hidden “reveal codes” on display,
it’s complicating what she has to say.

Fragmentation follows when
expanding your awareness,
it’s a little careless, an exploded view,
the “slaughter on 10th Avenue”, is it you.

Pick up the guitar and hit a chord
reverberating into focus
all the precious objects in the room.

SEARCH AND DESTROY

A searchlight on a self-destructive singer
yelling on a stage, no one understands
a word, it amplifies the pathos
of distance while the walls are throbbing and the
jobless stand around in their nostalgia
for an engine room. Eight hours in a
steel mill are compressed into an hour
of recorded noise. The underworld
is filling with a sonic overdrive,
hypnotic thoughts will neutralize your loneliness.
We used to turn to stone, but now
we turn to metal, waiting for the next
connecting humanoid to humanize us.
In the meantime you can sit inside
a shadow drum, a human side-effect,
your mind unsound and so you're grounded in
the sound. The ineffective are absorbing
sound-effects, a metal echo, a
vibration strong enough to tear up your
religion. You are lost in time, a century
moans, a man replying with a microphone,
a microcosm in the moment.

SUBWAY HUMAN

It was an ambience a zombie could
incorporate into his weltanschauung
of metal and cement and not much wood,
the subway station like an iron lung.

You stand among unusual commuters,
never before has moving underground
been such a breeze, departing like a looter
from the past, an eerie metal sound.

It's windy underground, a bullet train
preceded by a force field, I can feel it
in my hair. A subway on the brain
will make you modern, you're a man of steel

inside of a machine. I hear it howling
in the dark, I'm getting tunnel vision,
there's a third rail in the here and now,
an undercurrent, with your indecision

overridden by a power-glide
beneath the graveyards and pedestrians,
a man of the world and you're along for the ride,
it is a close encounter with a train.

The iron tracks, a certain science fiction,
a mundanity so hard it cut
through solid rock, is it a contradiction
when the powerful are in a rut.

I'm sitting down, a firm gymnastic thigh
nearby, it's like we're being introduced
by public transportation, eye-to-eye
if only for a moment, and seduced.

It may be circumstantial evidence,
encounters are inevitable in crowded
cities. There's a momentary sequence
and she's gone. Everything is allowed

if you can stand it, but a close encounter
of the simple kind is hard to come by.
We need wooden benches and a fountain,
not to mention plants, or would they die

in dim-lit subterranean circumstances,
a deliberately negative
aesthetic, where the sane would take their chances
if they lingered very long. You give

a lot and register diminishing
returns. The public domain has been constructed
to deflect us – I'll be finishing
in just a moment - men have been instructed

to design the future, making it
impersonal. It's there to move the products

and consumers, some are faking it,
others want to know about the air-ducts

and the derelicts. If you're a humanist
you have become a living relic
or a nervous wreck. You can assume
the worst. I wouldn't do a psychedelic

in a dirty Civic Center station
like a buried child, but I am seeing
things: a skull and insect combination
on somebody's skin. The train is fleeing,

"THX1138"
almost, I'm escalating to the surface.
It is hard to be alone and wait,
composing my implicit curving verses

and reclining on a monorail
of some monotony. A street car named
Desire doesn't come through here, I fail
to see how this is Paris. Can I blame

the bureaucrats, the purely practical,
a subway tubular, intestinal,
with nice track lighting. Is it tactical,
a destination or a destiny.

I slide into ensuing modern moments
with a monolithic and vicarious
demeanor, an unearned momentum.
I would care more but I'm getting careless.

More like Edward Hopper than a Goya,
you're in public, don't let your defenses
down, there is a built-in paranoia
in a country full of differences.

The passengers are in a rapid trance
and it becomes habitual. The gun-barrel
engineering, and you take your chances
with the infrastructure. Parallels

are bringing it all back home. The worker moles
emerge from a mechanical immersion
and their eyes are compromised. Their souls
are undercover, dreaming of subversion.

HOW ORIGINAL IS MY REFRIGERATOR

I have an original de Kooning,
it is held up by refrigerator
magnets on the front
of my refrigerator. People
wonder how original is it
if I cut it out of the newspaper,
and it's true I didn't originate
the custom of hanging pictures
in the kitchen, but who knows
how much is triggered by an image.
What if the originality
of my mind is compensating
for the fact that it's a humble
reproduction, would it make it
more original if I paid
a hundred thousand for it. What if
the originality of a
work of art is lost on someone
who is not original,
who is a shallow reproduction
of a human being, more
derivative than native.
I have
stolen paintings with my eyes,

I memorized a Lucien Freud
and no one now can take it away,
immersed in all my other thoughts
the painting has been taking on
a life of my own. It's gravitating
to a greater depth according
to the being of the viewer.

On the other hand, I wouldn't
want a paper moon, it's made of
rock and every month it rocks
my world with forces as important
as the origins of life.

Steven Gray has been living in San Francisco since 1849 and has rent control. Self control is another matter.

Inflicted with the Narrative Imperative at a young age, he deflects it in the direction of a warped poetics.

In 2006 he returned to open-minded mic, having languished for a long time in the soundless realm of the paper tiger.

In 2011 he published a book of poems, "Shadow on the Rocks".

He is the Co-Editor of Out of Our, a literary magazine founded by Sarah Page, and is a member of the Revolutionary Poets Brigade.