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DOUBLE RAINBOW

Brandon Brown

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*“As Rabbi ben Ezra said, ‘why bother to tell a story
if you aren’t going to include the meaning of your life?’”*

—Robert Glück

I have a lot of good stories, but this is not one of them.

The campus I worked at for a few years closed for the week between Christmas and New Year's Day and its workers were given reprieve from labor. Since Alli and I went down to visit her family in Los Angeles every year for the holidays, the week off became an annual point of deliberation. The scarcity economy of time off made the stakes quite high for both of us. To waste the week would be a disaster. Some years we would travel, to see new cities or visit old friends; sometimes reserve the days to work on our writing, incorporating discipline into the leisure of the staycation form.

One year, we decided to drive up to Oakland from LA but take our time, stopping along the way at several sites we'd been eager to see. The first was the Carizzo Plain, a couple hours north of the San Fernando Valley. From there, we made our way to Paso Robles, where we visited a few of their famous wineries, before checking in at a Motel 6 off the highway. Alli started feeling sick over dinner. This was a cause for alarm, as for several years running one or both of us had acquired short-lived, but brutal, intestinal bugs after Christmas, which I blamed on all the wonderful squealing children running around spreading their intestinal bugs and holiday cheer. We both braced ourselves—Alli for a night of god knows what vomit and fever, me for the inevitable appearance of these symptoms in my own body.

In the end, it wasn't so bad. Alli was knocked out for a day or two but it never became dire. She slept, and I spent my mornings and afternoons in the Starbucks by the gas station. At night we'd watch movies and I'd drink beers from the gas station, somehow impervious to the virus which raged inside her.

Our next stop was Pinnacles National Park, a park famous for its old rock formations, volcanic crags which moved two hundred miles due to a huge prehistoric earthquake on the San Andreas Fault. Alli made the drive, but was exhausted. We sat in the car debating what we ought to do. Finally we decided that I would go into the park alone, and Alli would try to take a little nap in the car. This was a disappointing compromise, as we had long anticipated making this particular hike together. She reclined the seat, I grabbed a flashlight and an umbrella, and began my walk. A few minutes in I realized what that odd feeling was—I had never done anything like this, a solitary walk in a massive and empty volcano. I stuck to the path, remarking on the stunning vistas in silence, a few stray *wowws* slipped out, the only other noise but little murmurs of delight and wonder as I made my way through the sometimes-thorny trail up and over.

At one crucial point of the hike, you have to crawl through a cave, narrow, anguished and almost totally dark. I stood there in front of the entrance to the cave, looking dumbly at my flashlight as if it would give me courage. Maybe you like to crawl through tight wet dark caves but I'd rather do almost anything else. Oh how I wished I found myself instead splayed on a bench in the Parc d'Belleville, tripping on how the trees reflected in the pool there were upside down like a goddamn *Manet* painting come to life. But to complete the loop of my walk, I had to crawl through this cave and get back to the car, so in I went.

When I emerged, too proud of myself and my newfound prowess in spelunking, I was rewarded with a wondrous sight. To the side of the trail, water from recent rain rushed down the rocks, one of which protruded like a little lower lip, the stream pouring through it into a pool below. It was a functional shower in the middle of a volcanic landscape that looked like Saturn, or, I dunno, Iceland. I couldn't resist. Putting my shoes to the side and rolling up my pant legs, I gingerly stepped into the stream. The water was so fucking cold, and as I splashed it all over my head and neck and mouth and body, I made little whimpering sounds. A cadenced soundtrack to a totally private pleasure. I

felt like I was being cleaned by a God, the rivulet of water a wet harbinger of divine intention that selected me as the solitary recipient of its nourishing gift.

Walking back to the car, wet and freezing but also a little high, *exhilarated*, I thought with delight how surprised Alli would be to hear about this. *It was some Gary Snyder Dharma Bums shit up there*, I fantasized saying. And then when I got to the car, I did say it. And she *was* surprised! “You took a shower in a mountain stream?” she asked incredulously, as if she expected me to have instead sought out some Satanic method of quenching it and all other waters as an expression of my deep resentment of the world.

I had an unforgettable experience, all alone up there, one I wish I could have shared with all of you, if there were some way to all gather in that little crevasse in cold December 2012 and feel the bracing water on our hair and heads and necks and nipples and toes and yet still all be alone, bathers in the Icelandic steppes unto ourselves. But aside from these reflections on my experience and character, there really isn’t that much to this story, is there? Only by flexing language in that “poem” way can I keep you interested in the tactile particulars of my mountain bath, and only thanks to gossipy digressions would you consent to continue watching me watch myself in that stream.

This story that isn’t a good story recalls to me certain other kinds of experiences that people proverbially hate to hear about. Like dreams, especially.¹ And drug trips. These are two genres of story which I personally adore, with the caveat that I have to trust my narrators to pick good dreams and drug stories to tell me. I know that some people claim a sort of irresistible boredom that overtakes them in the encounter with these kinds of tales, which I may have just caused with my story about that tremendous mountain bath. Sorry!

Another occasion for punishing boredom will be well-known to you—it is this. We’re having a conversation and one of us, probably me, makes a reference to a video on YouTube. I ask

¹ As Henry James said, “tell a dream, lose a reader.”

if you've seen it. You haven't. At this point, I have to make a decision. Do I insist that we watch it together, making you subservient to my interest in some random piece of media, or do we let it go and preserve your autonomy? Well, let's hope that in most cases we decide on the latter. But for now, I'd like to invite you to watch television with me. Let's watch the "Double Rainbow video."

It's not actually called "Double Rainbow video." You know how the Beatles album *Beatles* is always called, erroneously, *The White Album*? Similarly, the true title of the "Double Rainbow Video" is *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10*. In it, a handheld video camera films a splendid double rainbow in the distance. It was posted to YouTube on January 8, 2010 by user Yosemitebear62, or "Double Rainbow Guy," and has since been viewed over 43,000,000 times.² It is a canonized viral video, a work of art made to live on the Internet and reliant on the swift, hypernimble pathways of social media to spread and thrive. A few months after the video appeared on YouTube, late night talk show host and regulation dingleberry Jimmy Kimmel lauded it as "the funniest video in the world," initiating a clicking frenzy which made it, and Yosemitebear62, slightly famous.

Yosemitebear62 is the handle of Paul "Bear" Vasquez, now an extremely minor celebrity thanks to the video's success. Vasquez was born in Los Angeles in 1962. He worked as a firefighter as a young man, and then worked odd jobs sporadically after buying land in Yosemite in 1985. Employed as a truck driver for a few years, the sedentary lifestyle of long-distance driving caused him to gain 200 pounds. In an effort to get in shape, Vasquez endeavored to become a professional MMA fighter, fighting, and losing, one thirty second cage match.

Since the explosive interest in *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10*, Vasquez has appeared on late night talk

²For context, the most viewed video on YouTube is Psy's epic 2010 hit "Gangnam Style," which has been viewed over 2.5 billion times, a billion times more than its closest contender. *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10* has, however, been viewed many millions more times than a clip from *Wizard of Oz* (1939, dir. Victor Fleming) showing Judy Garland sing the film's great hit, "Somewhere Over The Rainbow."

shows and a Jennifer Aniston commercial for Smart Water. An extended reference to *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10* opens *We're The Millers* (2013, dir. Rawson Marshall Thurber), a quasi-stoner comedy also starring Aniston. There's a "Double Rainbow" app, parody videos, documentary shorts about Vasquez and his success made for (where else?) YouTube. It has also generated many sequels, including *Double Rainbow Explained* and *Yosemitebear Mountain Triple Rainbow 11 11*. Vasquez is still around. He recently made a brief appearance with Snoop Dogg at a YouTube event in Los Angeles.

Seeing *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10* is an experience I recommend you all have on your own! But in the interest of easy reference, I have transcribed the text of what Vasquez says for the video's 3:29 duration. The video starts *in media res*, the full rainbow already in sight. After a short beat, we hear Vasquez speak:

Woah...that's a full rainbow...all the way...double rainbow...
oh my god...it's a double rainbow all the way...woah...that's
so intense...woah man...(grunting sounds)...woah...woah...
woooah....woo-o-o-o-o-ah oh my god oh my god oh my
god oh! my! god!...(laughing)...woooo!!!!...oooooh wow!...
woo!...woo!...yeah!...oh my...oh my...oh my god look at that...
it's starting to look like a triple rainbow...oh my god it's full
on double rainbow across the sky...oh my god...(sobbing)...
oh my god...oh god...what does this mean?...ahhh...oh my
god...oh!...oh god!....it's so bright oh my god it's so bright
and vivid...ah!!!!...ah!!!!...ah! ah! ah!....it's so beautiful...
(sobbing)...(sobbing)...(sobbing)...(sobbing)...(sobbing)...
(sobbing)...oh my god...oh my god...oh my god it's a double
complete rainbow in my front yard...(sobbing)..oh my
god...oh my god what does it mean, tell me....(sobbing)...
(sobbing)...too much...I don't know what it means....
(panting)...oh my god it's so intense...(panting)...ah...
(grunting)...oh my god.

The video ends at 3:29, just as abruptly as it began. No climax or postscript; the final words of the video express the ordinary

ambiguity of “omg” in English: “oh my god” the exclamatory form of wonder and “o my god,” the address to the deity responsible for said wonder.

There are all different kinds of videos that go viral, but one potentially useful distinction is that between intentional, performative videos made by aspiring auteurs and the candid video of something remarkable caught accidentally. This difference in form can be mapped onto two ancestors of the viral video form: *Candid Camera* and *America’s Funniest Home Videos*.

Candid Camera was on television in a few different guises, but appeared almost without pause from 1948 until the early part of this century, making it one of the longest-running programs in the history of television. The premise was simple: the show’s producers fabricated and staged unusual events and secretly filmed unwitting actors as they encountered these strange scenarios. When the people reacted to these situations with surprise, outrage, excitement, or disgust, the *deus* would descend from the *machina* and the victims would hear those five words nobody wants to hear: *smile you’re on Candid Camera*.

Occasionally, *Candid Camera* creator Allen Funt performed a variation on the theme. Instead of arranging for a surprising or unusual experience to beset an ordinary person going about their day, he captured “candid” moments of ordinary people making unusual or weird observations. This dimension of *Candid Camera*, where a camera *just happens* to be around a normal person doing or saying something super strange, recalls *America’s Funniest Home Videos*, a serial collection of supposedly candid video shots which *just happen* to catch incredible moments.

America’s Funniest Home Videos, while forcing the famous smile in *Candid Camera* into a full laugh, used a different logic for arranging the content of their programs. Where *Candid Camera* foregrounded the orchestrated gag which their unwitting victims would soon find themselves living inside, *America’s Funniest Home Videos*, directly adumbrating YouTube, relied on viewers (users) to deliver their content for free.³ This

³ Videos were judged by the studio audience and the winners from each episode

content was premised on authenticity; that is, the producers of the show were looking for video which captured accidents, funny or unusual outbursts or conversations, witty juxtapositions of imagery (not composed but discovered), and hilarious mishaps.

Of course, the success of both shows is rooted in Schadenfreude. A typical *America's Funniest Home Videos* video might go like this: mom is filming something banal and uninteresting: dad building a treehouse in the backyard. Dad has a 2x4 propped on top of a rock at the base of the tree, near which he reaches up into the bowels of the nascent foundation in branches, tightening a screw or whatever, when all of a sudden the family dog, let's call the dog Jack, bursts from the back door, chasing after a neighboring cat perched innocently on top of the fence between Mom and Dad's backyard and the neighbor's backyard. Jack in his fury leaps onto the high end of the 2x4 and Dad, focused on the tightening of the screw, receives the other end in his nuts, doubling over in pain while we at home laugh—because it's funny?

These two forms, the staged scenario for the everyperson of *Candid Camera*, and the user-generated reality scenes of *America's Funniest Home Videos*, both resonate in *Yosemitebear Mountain 1-8-10*. While Vasquez couldn't have arranged for the three key elements of the piece (the rainbow, the video camera, his emotional state) in advance, necessarily, his prolific use of the camera and YouTube practically make his life a 24-hour *Candid Camera*, mostly very boring.⁴ But the premise of authenticity, and the Schadenfreude, which viewers obviously experience in watching Vasquez watch a double rainbow, place the video in the *America's Funniest Home Videos* tradition of painful videos which make millions of viewers, paradoxically, laugh.

There is a key difference, however, between *Yosemitebear Mountain 1-8-10* and the kind of videos popularized on these

received \$10,000 in prize money, as well as the chance to compete for the \$100,000 grand prize given out at the end of each season.

⁴ Vasquez posts videos to YouTube nearly every day—he has uploaded almost 3,000 as of the writing of this essay.

two television shows. While the filmmakers in both shows occasionally irrupt into the scene. The *entire* experience of viewing *Yosemitebear Mountain 1-8-10* involves looking at Paul Vasquez look at a rainbow.⁵ The rainbow is obviously splendid, but without his response, it would have never been remembered. And indeed, the tedium of follow up videos like *Yosemitebear Mountain Triple Rainbow 11 11*, despite the suggestion that an added rainbow might promise added affect, recalls that the tale of someone seeing a rainbow would not typically be a very good story. “I saw a rainbow this morning,” I can imagine myself saying while you all snooze, “a full on rainbow across the sky.” What is truly wondrous about *Yosemitebear Mountain 1-8-10* is less the object filmed than the poem Vasquez improvises in the lived encounter.

To return, mercifully in brief, to my story about bathing in the mountain stream at Pinnacles, my friends would probably say that story was a mild success compared to the tremendous number of not very good stories I tell them. As someone who likes to tell stories, they are bound to fail sometimes I guess. I promise to try and be better. At least with the Pinnacles story, those who know and love me might reflect with pleasure how great water is, my show of self-deprecation in being a bad spelunker, or perhaps indulge in their own emerald narcissism and recall some hike they once took but had the decency to keep to themselves.

Frequently I am really telling stories so not good they are almost not stories. The other day I started to tell Steve and Lindsey about an awkward moment in Chicago one morning at Jen’s place. Dana and I had stayed over and were having coffee with Jen and Joshua, and I was wearing my beloved red YMCMB shirt. Jen asked me, “what does YMCMB stand for?” I said, “Young Money Cash Money.” But what about that B? we all realized, and Jen asked.

Now I was in a bind. For I didn’t actually know what the “B” stood for in “YMCMB.” But why not? I had bought a shirt with five letters on the front of it, you would think I would

⁵ Sianne Ngai makes this point about *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10* in the introduction to her book *Our Aesthetic Categories*.

know. And indeed I realized in this moment that if I had to guess, which I now did have to guess, I'd have thought that YMCMB might stand for "Young Money Cash Money, *Bitch*" and if that were true, why had I bought this shirt? If I couldn't even bring myself to say the word to Jen, what business did I have brandishing the acronym on my chest? Dana saved the day—"billionaires." Thank you Dana. It was not only a relief to know the meaning of the big B on my chest, it was contrafactually redemptive.

When I began to recount this anecdote, however, to Lindsey and Steve, the original awkwardness intervened from the past and I found myself suddenly unwilling to explain what I am writing about now. "I thought it meant *bitch*," I imagined myself saying to the two of them, "and yet I bought that shirt and wore it everywhere." Instead of following this narrative into the crevasse in which I would appear at best an oaf and at worst a villain, I trailed off with Jen's question. Silence stretched across our conversation. "Good story Brandon," Steve said, fucking with me. It wasn't the first time.

Perhaps it is still not a very good story, but at least it's sort of a poem now, like *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10*. Vasquez disavows responsibility for the words and sounds he utters in the piece, suggesting that he is a vessel for a message from God.⁶ This poetics, if you'll permit me to use the term, situates Vasquez in a long line that stretches from Homer invoking the muses to sing a poem through his mouth, to Emily Dickinson's burning head, to Spicer's Martians.⁷

But moreover, the text has the formal properties of a poem. While the vocabulary of *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10* is sparse and fairly simple, its expansive vision expressed in minimal units recalls the classic association of poetry with

⁶Ironically, while Vasquez seems to refer to the God of the Israelites, the Greek God of rainbows, Iris, is probably a better model, in her function as messenger between mortals and the Gods who used the rainbow as a direct line between the two groups, kind of like the string between two cans.

⁷ Another coincidence is that Vasquez describes the rainbow as "the big eye of God" in *Double Rainbow Explained*, irresistibly recalling Spicer's line in *Imaginary Elegies* about the poet and the big eye of God.

“economy.” This economy, marked by repetition and a limited vocabulary, also includes a “Volta,” the name of the “turning point” in a sonnet, the moment when the poem’s argument or line of thought makes an abrupt shift. At almost exactly the midpoint of *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10*, the line “it’s so beautiful” transitions an exclamation of admiration and pleasure to a comparatively long period of sustained sobbing.

In this way, Vasquez’s text also hearkens to one of the oldest forms of poetry in the West: the rhythmic plaint. In the introduction to Anne Carson’s translation of Sophocles’ play *Elektra*, “Screaming in Translation,” Carson addresses the difficulty of translating the long passages in *Elektra* which are simply screaming sounds. Or, rather, not “simply.”

Let us consider how Electra constructs her screams. It should be noted at the outset that none of them occur extra metrum: they scan, and are to be taken as integral to the rhythmic and musical economy of her utterance. As units of sound they employ the usual features of ritual lament (assonance, alliteration, internal rhyme, balance, symmetry, repetition) in unusual ways.⁸

If Vasquez’s words have a cadence and formal shape, his tone preserves the experience as one inflamed with transcendent wonder. For those of us who have seen rainbows and not lost our shit in an improvised measure of wild feeling, his response may strike us as hyperbolic. That’s the move poems make all the time, to regard the normal in the language of apocalypse. It’s like what drugs do too.

Many of the millions of people who have seen *Yosemitebear Mountain 1-8-10* assume that Vasquez is high.⁹ That, perhaps,

⁸ *Elektra*, Anne Carson p. 42-43

⁹ Vasquez strenuously objects to this theory. As if to bolster his credibility, he freely admits to smoking weed, and even cultivates a special strain of cannabis (you can probably guess what it’s called.) But for all his proclivity for the pipe in general, he insists in several commentaries on the video that he was not high that morning.

explains what makes it a “funny” video to watch. I find that people have different tolerances and attractions to being in the presence of high people. That is, like dream literature and encounters with tremendous but eventless features in nature, drug trips are almost quintessentially not very good stories. “I was so high that it was awesome,” I could imagine telling you as you flirt with REM sleep.

Speaking of being *so high*, a couple of years ago some friends and I did mushrooms at a house in the country, rented for just this occasion. It had been a long time since I had fucked with drugs of that caliber and depth, and the trip was remarkable, transcendent and difficult. I kept forgetting that I had done drugs, and was forced to reconcile the extremity of my perceptions and feelings with a smug reasonableness, trying to remind myself that my reaction to what was suddenly so stimulating was normal under the circumstances. I walked from room to room in the little house, remembering and then forgetting again the reason for my new design. The carpets in the house lit up with tremendous, internal, moving iridescence, colors chasing each other like Pac Man hungry for white dots. At some point I was like talking into my shoe?

The trip caused me to reflect, in anticipation and considering it all later, on the special case in which a *very high* person confronts a *very heavy* event. I had hoped to put myself in the position Paul Vasquez found himself on January 8th. I started by trying to listen to a Beethoven piano concerto. That lasted about ten seconds. I made it through an entire Beach Boys song after that, but the experience of these works of art while being so high was one of intolerable duress. Encountering them caused actual discomfort and pain. Perhaps, because I was using headphones, the sound was simply too immense, I couldn't find a way to delight in it. I know, it's just not a very good story.

In the end, I didn't need to introduce a wondrous spectacle of optics or aural to facilitate an extraordinary interior sublime: the molecules of the mushrooms did that for me. Beholding a tree branch, reflecting and refracting white light off its deep green leaves, shifting slightly when the breeze stirred it into a jiggle or wave, was more than enough to enchant and satisfy my

curiosity about the world, my soul, the great meanings. It was an excellent day.

Finally starting to come down, it fell within my powers to think about trying to smoke a cigarette. The property we had rented was a couple hundred yards behind the 101, accessed via a long driveway, flanked by tall trees on both sides. The owners had a strict policy against smoking, exiling masochists like myself to the side of the highway. As my friends loudly tried to dissuade me from walking down the driveway to the property's edge, claiming that it was far too much to do and even slightly insane, I slowly descended the stairs from the deck and set off.

They were right to dissuade me, it was *far* too soon. The hundred yards between the house and the highway, normally, would not have even given me a second thought. But the walk seemed to take forever, the trees less beautiful and soothing than menacing, drooping down to graze me when strong winds blew. The highway was even worse. On the other side, land dropped off abruptly into a tumultuous bay, waves breaking just feet from where cars whizzed by at drastic speeds. The sounds of their motors, the rippling of air around me as they passed, even the looks on their faces, became an intolerable symphony of negative feeling, gathered in the air above the highway and centered on me in my stupor. I took a drag or two before giving up and slowly walking back to the house.

Something else occurred, however, on that brief journey to the highway and back. Being there triggered a powerful memory of an event that I hadn't recalled or thought about in decades. The event is not clearly defined in my mind even now, but this is more or less what happened: my sister Ashley and I were playing in the driveway of my parents' house. A van with no windows took a hard turn around the corner and stopped in front of us. The door slid open, and I saw a man behind the driving wheel and another man in the body of the van with a video camera. He was filming us and asked us to come closer to him and get in the van. I was, I would guess, six years old, Ashley 11 months younger. I can't remember if or how much we considered going into the van, but before anything else could

happen, my mom stepped out of the front door frantically yelling at us to stay where we were. The man slid the door closed, and the van sped off.

Neither of these are very good stories, the tale of druggy confusion or the anecdote of my near-kidnapping as a child. But they are not very good in different ways and for different reasons. The story about getting high in the country isn't that good because I'm writing in prose, electing to discursively report a set of remembered feelings that would need to be told in the dazzling rhythmic agate of intense poetry to affect you, my reader, with even a smidge of what I felt that day. And then I don't name the people involved, which might give you the whiff of scandal and titillate your love of gossip. It's not good because while I was experiencing a universe of new feelings and visionary translations of ordinary carpets, there is almost nothing I experienced that day that's going to change your life for the better or worse. You probably read it impatiently, jogging your foot while holding your phone.

The second one is a "better" story, although it is obviously not "good" in any way. It is so anti-climactic. I mean, thank God! Ugh! And while I am immensely grateful that there is no "and then..." to this anecdote of a close call, I agree that it merely sets you up for an extraordinary story only to digress into something banal. It might be that the fact that my story comes so close to being a good story only to be a not very good story makes it all the more annoying. That is, it presents as an extremely *heavy* story which suddenly turns out to be light: "I was almost kidnapped by child murderers...and then ended up playing Nintendo and farting in the family room all afternoon."

The day itself ended up being a blend of heavy and light. After experiencing this forgotten memory, I fell onto the couch with deep existential angst: *right at that moment* I felt compelled to reckon *all of life* before the drugs wore off, there was a *secret meaning* I was *so close* to finding. *What does it mean?* This terror was in contrast to the fact that an hour earlier I was speaking with my shoe. Maybe that's a sure sign of a not very good story, the too easy conflation of the heavy and the light. A story

about encountering something heavy prepares readers for the sublime, as the “sublime” is itself a word derived from a measure-metaphor.

I saw *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10* for the first time comparatively late, in a show at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco called “Night Begins The Day: Rethinking Space, Time, and Beauty,” curated by Renny Pritikin and Lily Siegel in 2015.

“Night Begins The Day,” according to the curators’ statement, is derived from the ancient Jewish concept that “the day goes after the night.” Claiming to be interested in “new expressions of awe and fear,” the curators contextualized their arrangement of materials in the show with regards to the 18th century concept of the sublime, “due to an increasing interest in the aesthetics of science.” Their question is finally “how we existentially resolve our psychology and spirituality” with the new information made possible by scientific discovery, whether 18th century rationalist renaissance or last month’s Silicon Valley science fair.

“Night Begins The Day” collected contemporary artists whose work Pritikin and Siegel assessed under the rubric of the sublime, from artistic engagements with scientific discovery to “new expressions of awe and fear.” The result was a wide array of media, concepts, and vantage points. Lisa Blatt’s video work “clearest lake in the world” from 2012, filmed in a remote Patagonian lake so unpolluted and remote that it can reflect the Milky Way, articulates in the idiom of beauty the obvious anxiety of disintegrating ecosystems. Peter Alexander’s piece *PA & PE* (1990) shows a limelit Los Angeles from above, the lavish swimming pools becoming obscure splotches in great repetition over the landscape. Alongside these works, by fine artists making their work in a fine art milieu, Pritikin and Siegel mounted a small screen with headphones, and played *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10* on a loop.

I appreciated several of the works in “Night Begins The Day,” although none had quite the impact on my life as *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10*. Still, I left wondering how the curators considered this video in terms of the “sublime.”

And when I don't know what something is, and I had no idea what the sublime was, I will typically start with a longer look into the word.

"Sublime" derives from Latin "sublimis," a word formed by adding the preposition "sub-" to "limos," the word for a line or limit. Curiously, as the meaning of *sublimis* was always something like "uplifted" or "exalted," the vantage point was always from below, from the perspective of one standing beneath something awesome. From its Latin origin, then, *sublimis* emphasized the *viewer* of the exalted thing, over the exalted thing itself. *Sublimis* in Latin, however, almost exclusively refers to questions of rank or caste, or the quality of a different historical period or milieu, rather than artworks or meteorological phenomena.

As a philosophical or aesthetic category, the concept of the sublime is usually thought to originate with the Greek critic Longinus. Longinus wrote a book in the 1st century C.E. called *Peri Hypsous*, which we translate as "On the Sublime," although *Hypsous* literally means "height" or "elevation." Longinus applies scale metaphorically to literature, and singles out passages of Greek literature in which he identifies grandeur and exaltation. But for Longinus, too, sublimity is not something inherent to an artwork as a stable sign of its greatness. Rather, sublimity exists in the space between the thing (in Longinus's book, a text or performance) and the viewer or reader. The sublime, for Longinus, is active, modular, and collaborative.

This initial inquiry led me to try and study the history of the "sublime" in Western philosophical thought. I read Edmund Burke's book about the sublime and the beautiful. I read Immanuel Kant's book where he critiques Burke's book about the sublime and the beautiful. I read part of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, where he develops a new, more complex and unique theory of the sublime, differentiating it into types. I read Sianne Ngai's chapter in *Ugly Feelings* innovating a theory of the "stuplime," regarding Kant and contemporary poetry which stuns by enervating repetition. I watched *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10* again and again.

And I read about rainbows. I learned that rainbows, according to us, are meteorological phenomena caused by reflection, refraction and dispersion of light in water droplets. Formed in mist, a spectrum of light appears in the sky in the form of a multicolored arc. In a “primary rainbow,” or single rainbow, the arc shows red on the outer part of the arc and violet on the inner side. These rainbows appear when light refracts in a droplet of water and then reflects inside on the back of the droplet as it leaves. A double rainbow is a mirror image of a primary rainbow, with the colors reversed.

I read about rainbows in early Western cave paintings, in Mesopotamian art and literature, in native cultures in Australia. I read about Iris, the Greek goddess of rainbows, who Socrates reminded readers was the daughter of *Thaumos*, personified god of Wonder. I read about the numerous books called *De Iride* that writers in antiquity wrote about rainbows, as rainbows strangely became one of the most enduring topics for the nascent field of philosophy. I ate cannabis gummi bears and watched *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10* over and over.

Aristotle’s theory of rainbows, which is wonderful but totally wrong,¹⁰ was a dominant theory of rainbows for centuries, and the rainbow remained a source of inquiry for philosophers even as a wider split became apparent between the disciplines of natural science and philosophy. Descartes and Spinoza both wrote treatises about rainbows. But even after Newton offered the “solution” to the rainbow which we still consider true, artists staked a claim to a share of rainbow studies. British painter John Constable’s work, for instance, blurs the edge between artwork and scientific inquiry. For Constable, making picturesque landscapes was subservient to his larger effort, to study and taxonomize meteorological phenomena, most notably clouds. Constable also painted several rainbows; in his mind, paintings added to a body of scientific literature which followed Newton’s explanation of the rainbow’s truth.

¹⁰ In his long, rambling lecture notes about weather, *Meteorologica*, Aristotle argues that the rainbow is caused by light reflected off a distant solid object, such as a cloud with thousands of tiny mirrors.

The Newtonian solution to the rainbow did not simply generate a “scientific” discipline of image-making, however. For contemporary poets, for instance, Newton’s work was sometimes understood as a ruinous attack on the essential mystery of the natural world, the rainbow once again allegorically representing nature as such. In John Keats’s poem “Lamia,” he writes a tight, rhyming screed against Newton and all “cold philosophers” groping after the icy rationality behind the brilliant arc.

...Do all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
in the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an Angel’s wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine--
Unweave a rainbow...

Keats’s poetic project strove to preserve the rainbow’s mystery, maintaining it as an object of astonishment to be reflected on but never understood. A negative capability light show in the sky. To “understand” the rainbow, to name what it means, would be to negate its brilliant fact and semiotic engagement between gods and mortals.

In many ways, this Romantic objection has triumphed: the Newtonian thesis on rainbows is universally accepted by scientists, but in culture the rainbow continues to be a symbol of transformation, mysterious power, and communication from elsewhere. Just think of “Somewhere Over The Rainbow,” probably the most famous piece of art about rainbows in our time, which pictures the arc of the rainbow not as a bridge but a border, limning two different worlds, one full of the “dull catalogue of common things” in Kansas, the other a place where the dreams you dreamed of really do come true.

Reading these books and essays about the sublime, the beautiful, the wondrous, and about rainbows and optical geometry and illusions, I originally wrote this essay as a long

survey of historical thoughts and feelings about rainbows and the sublime. God, it was terrible! There is practically nobody on earth who has less business writing about Kant and the sublime than I do. I'm your person when it comes to certain things (the vicissitudes of Ke\$ha, the hybrid I bought in Oakland called "Versace" which got my birthday party stoned, the silence of Ajax, competing ideas for making flaky pastry, a few other things I *guess*) but Kant is not one of them. At worst I would be mansplaining you an index of ideas you could Google in about five seconds and at best I would offend my academic friends for whom there is something at stake in real life about what Kant said and what other people have said about Kant.

But who cares, I wrote a bad essay, I told a bad story, I've done it a million times. Paul Vasquez didn't study the history of the sublime or do an exhaustive cultural anthropology of rainbows either. He went out onto his deck with an open heart, saw something astonishing, and had the courage to make an improvised poem and show it to millions of people.

Now I don't mean to infantilize or deny that Vasquez was a student, in his way, of rainbows. In fact, he was clearly fascinated by them. He had posted videos to YouTube about rainbows before. *Giant Intense Rainbow My Place 1-24-09* is perhaps the best example of Vasquez's interest in and affiliation with rainbows at his home, prior to January 8, 2010. In *Giant Intense Rainbow My Place 1-24-09*, however, Vasquez's experience is quite different. This time, he is with a male friend. They are, he revealed later, stoned, and about to leave for a party.¹¹ While Vasquez responds to the rainbow with great wonder and exuberance, he does not experience the deep spiritual crisis and physical response that we regard in *Yosemitebear Double Rainbow 1-8-10*.

According to later interviews and videos, Vasquez's fascination with rainbows was provoked by rainbows being interested in *him*. Prior to January 8, Vasquez claims that rainbows had been appearing with greater and greater frequency in the sky above his property. The frequency of the rainbows

¹¹ In the video the party is vaguely alluded to as "that thing" they are about to leave for.

challenged Vasquez's ability to rationalize their presence, and he began grasping for literary analogies to understand. On the morning he shot *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10*, Vasquez was writing an e-mail to a friend, in which he said that he felt like Noah, the biblical patriarch who was preserved by God from the great flood. Vasquez's identification with Noah is rooted not in his power to prophecy coming meteorological crisis, but "because of my organic garden, and my well." As soon as he pressed send on the e-mail, he saw the double rainbow in the sky and grabbed his camera.

By referring to himself as Noah, Vasquez situates his message in a basic Judeo-Christian narrative tradition, but one quite mysterious in its particulars. His identification with Noah is based on conjecture regarding the practical activities of Noah before the ark, as if Noah's gardening and green water systems are what people have in mind when they think "Noah." And yet, if we take Vasquez at his word, his experience *is* actually rather bizarre. Rainbows are by definition rather rare experiences, requiring very specific meteorological conditions and vantage points for viewing. I haven't seen one in fucking years. What about you?

In the popular commentary which opines that Vasquez was high when he made *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10*, he is often mocked for the plaintive wailing, *what does it mean?* The line recurs in his poem, first as a direct question and again as an imperative: "what does it mean, tell me." This moment, after repeated (and I mean *repeated*) viewings of this video, resound with great pathos for me. But Vasquez's stony affect underlines his agnosis, and the enduringly elusive significant of the rainbow guarantees that *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10* is not going to tell a good story.

If Vasquez did know what the appearance of the rainbow meant, he could have told us. It might have even been a good story, like the story of Noah and the ark, a story that includes prophetic communication with a furious God, the building of a ship, a procedural subplot with a raven and a twig, concluding with Noah fucking his own daughters while drunk. Lots happens.

But without meaning, recounting an experience of the sublime hardly ever makes for a very good story. Almost two years after his famous encounter, Vasquez posted *Yosemitebear Mountain Triple Rainbow 11 11*, a nine minute video in which he and his partner Sage see a triple rainbow. His response is much calmer. “I think there’s gonna be a rainbow today,” he says flatly. “This is the weather.” When it appears, he’s happy but even-keeled. “What does it mean?” he asks, with almost no emotion. He turns the camera on himself and says, matter of factly, “I am in my house, and I can see a rainbow.” Sage appears to jokingly nag him: “I’m in here doing dishes and you’re out here looking at rainbows.” He laughs. Meanwhile, in the background, a big ass triple rainbow, saying nothing, meaning nothing but itself.

The dismal *Yosemitebear Mountain Triple Rainbow 11 11* literally repeats some of the text of *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10*. But in the latter video, when Vasquez asks “what does it mean?” it feels merely derivative of his original experience. When he turns to the camera and shows his face, saying “I am in my house, and I can see a rainbow,” it feels flat and ordinary. When he suggests, “it’s cool. It’s not as big as the one last January, but it’s cool,” I doubt viewers are stirred to the excess of feeling which the original provokes. But perhaps that is the genius of *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10*: by expressing his sublime experience in a vatic lyric poem, Vasquez is able to transcend our usual demand for a good tale.

Still, given the overabundance of rainbows which had appeared to him just prior to January 8th, “what does it mean?” seems like a fair question. It reminds me of another not very good story. When Joseph and Kim were visiting over the weekend, Alli and I hosted a dinner in their honor. After dinner we sat on the back patio, in the chilly wind of summer by the Bay, smoking a tremendous joint. I started talking about, what else?, *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10* and my failed essay.

That led to Joseph and I having a conversation about dreams. After acknowledging how boring almost everybody finds the reportage of dreams, I began to report on one of my own, a

famous dream to me but one which is, of course, inevitably not a very good story for anybody else. Here's the story:

In waking life, I lived in a house in Cole Valley with five friends. One morning, I got up early to go to work at the café. Before leaving the house I went onto the fire escape to smoke a cigarette, when the fire alarm suddenly went off. At first I assumed that I had somehow set it off with cigarette smoke, feeling a tingle of self-pity and shame. But I had smoked hundreds of cigarettes on that fire escape without it ever once bursting into flames, that couldn't be it. I recalled then that my roommate had told me that the fire alarm had gone off a week or so before, instigating a scramble to figure out how to disarm it.

This was not a false alarm though. Looking up, I saw smoke streaming across the living room, and the first sign of something burning. I went around to each of my roommate's rooms, one by one. When I knocked on Dani's door, she bound up in bed, shouting still asleep *is it happening?* We scurried down the stairs, them in their pajamas and me in my work uniform. As soon as we hit the sidewalk I realized to my despair that all of my life's writing was in a box on the floor of my room. I ran back upstairs and into the burning apartment to grab my notebooks full of poems like a true heroic dumb ass. When I got back down to the sidewalk, I stood with my roommates across the street and watched the house burn. A little mist showered us where we stood. When the roof exploded I started to sob. It was Halloween.

The five of us, who hadn't been that close before, were bonded by the trauma and decided to all find a place together, which we did with unprecedented ease. At the end of the year I went to Kansas City to visit my family for the holidays. On New Year's Eve, I spent the evening with Matthew. It was his birthday, and we celebrated by getting drunk in my mom's basement, catching up on all that had happened in the past few months. I told him about the fire of course. It wasn't a very good story—"our house burned down and we had to move"—but I told it with gusto.

That night, despite my drunkenness, I had a very vivid dream which I wrote down immediately upon waking up.

In the dream, my roommates were having a fancy cocktail party for New Year's Eve, when our new house caught on fire. Someone ingeniously erected a slide from the second floor to the sidewalk, inflatable yellow like the ones we all fear having to mount out of an airplane. Partygoers, one by one, slid to safety in their dresses and tuxedos, some still holding martini glasses. I viewed this scene from a slight distance. I was with Matthew. We were watching it together. Freaked out, I tried to approach the burning house but Dani said to me, cupping her mouth so I could hear her, "you're not allowed to come any further."

When I returned to San Francisco a couple of days later, I found Dani and Moe in the kitchen. Dropping off my bags, I joined to ask them how their holidays had been. Moe said, "well, the holidays were great until New Year's Eve." "What happened?" I asked, innocently, figuring I would be regaled with a tale of decadent overconsumption and perhaps the gossipy heaven of an ill-advised hook up--maybe even between roommates, wouldn't that be something! But no.

"On New Year's Eve we had an impromptu cocktail party," she told me. "Everybody came over in dresses and suits, and we made fancy cocktails. At some point, I smelled smoke. I went into my bedroom and found a duffel bag at the top of my closet squished against the light fixture, which I had left on. It had started to smolder! If we hadn't of caught it right then, the house might have burned down...again!" While this duffel bag kissed the light bulb, slowly rising in heat and starting to melt, I had been with Matthew, in Kansas City, "not allowed to come any further."

I told Joseph this story and we both paused in a grape cloud. "What does it mean?" I asked. Fuck, we didn't know. I proposed a tentative answer to my own impossible question. I suggested that perhaps the phenomenon of the prophetic dream, including the one I had just reported, was due to errors in human narrative continuity caused by time travelers. This event had been reported to me by Dani and Moe, and because of some epiphenomenal glitch in the movements of those who soar between eras like Iris sliding up and down the bow with important messages for mortals, it became available matter for

my dreaming brain. I bet such time travelers would have some terrific stories.

Well, anyway, that was my attempt at a hashish cosmology, trying to explain a rare and wondrous event. Vasquez has his own explanation for what occurred to him on January 8, 2010. *Double Rainbow Explained* is unique in his vast oeuvre of YouTube uploads for a couple of reasons. For one, Vasquez almost never appears in front of the camera; when he does, it is usually done by turning the camera around with his hand, selfie-style. Two, Vasquez is primarily interested in filming unusual phenomena and recording his visceral reaction. And while his reactions have never approached the glory of the famous video of January 8th, he is hardly ever as calm, collected, and discursively coherent as he is in *Double Rainbow Explained*.

This exegesis, Vasquez explains, is for the benefit of newcomers to *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10*. He starts by setting the scene, describing the e-mail about Noah I have already referred to. But then he offers a spiritual interpretation. He claims that this encounter with a rainbow was special; that the other rainbows he had been seeing with ever-increasing frequency had been building up to *this* moment, which was a direct encounter with the “big eye of God.” For reasons unknown to Vasquez, he had been chosen to receive a message from God. The message? *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10*. That is to say, not the double rainbow, but the *video*.

He goes on to speculate as to why he had been given this message. Just as a double rainbow is a mirror of itself, he explains, his *video* is a mirror into the soul of its *viewers*. Their, or our rather, response to the video *is* the spiritual exchange which God intended to bring about by showing Vasquez the rainbow and inspiring him to make the video. “What you see in my video is you,” he says. “Your comments are what’s in you.”

True to his claim about the meaning of the vision and message, Vasquez takes comments on *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10* quite seriously. Even though there are, by now, thousands of comments by dismissive or appreciate randos, he frequently appears in the threads, offering responses

and corrections. Recently a user named TridenRow commented, “defs high.” Vasquez replied with a link to *Double Rainbow Explained*, in which he reiterates his promise that he had not in fact been high on weed that day.

One of the more remarkable facts about the viral phenomenon of *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10* is that Vasquez has never monetized the video by allowing advertisements. While he has made a small amount of money from various commercials and licensing agreements, he could have made a fortune capitalizing on tens of millions of clicks, clicks which will continue to occur. When asked why he hadn’t taken economic advantage of such an obvious opportunity, he claims, “that video is sacred.”

Despite his fervid and earnest belief that what he experienced was an authentic encounter with God, who brought a message not just for Vasquez but for the millions of viewers who come to watch him receive it, Vasquez does not appear to aspire to be a cult leader. If anything, he is able to treat *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10* with surprising levity, lightly parodying himself in the Smart Water ad with Jennifer Aniston and clearly taking pleasure in his soft fame as “double rainbow guy.” But when I heard that there was a shrine devoted to Vasquez in Iceland, I had to find out for myself if it was true.

I found a last minute ticket from San Francisco to Reykjavik and, a week later, boarded a plane for Iceland. Guðrún met me at the airport in her SUV. I was tired, having barely slept on the plane and nervous with excitement to play a real journalist, seeking out what could clearly be an apocryphal tale amid Vasqueziana—but might not be. Guðrún dropped me off at the anarchist coop where her friends had an extra bed for me, and we made plans to have dinner later that night.

At dinner, I tried to deflect my excitement by asking Guðrún for gossip about the poetry scene in Reykjavik. I had always found her to be extremely beautiful and charming and tried to flirt, an effort which was tenderly and sweetly ignored. Finally, though, she couldn’t resist asking me for details about my spontaneous trip and what I hoped to accomplish. She knew all about *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10*, of course.

I told her that I had a reasonable lead that the shrine to Vasquez existed in a rural community outside of Laugar, a town famous for its geothermal baths in west central Iceland. If I could only get there, I was sure I could track down the shrine. She offered to drive.

It was a long drive, the distance from Oakland to Los Angeles. We chatted in the car, listening to Robyn records and admiring the landscape, which matched my fantasy about what the steppes of Saturn must look like to an abandoned astronaut. Arriving at Laugar, we stopped first at a restaurant for delicious bowls of lobster bisque with bottomless refills. It was there that I noticed a wall of pictures in frames. I guess they were mostly famous Icelanders who had visited the restaurant. There was Bjork of course; Johanna Sigurdardottir looking ministerial; some guys who could have been in Sigur Ros but could have easily been famous Icelandic berry farmers or sculptors. Among the photos of beaming, bisque-sated white people was a shot of Paul Vasquez.

“That’s him!” I said to Guðrún, full of wonder. “No way,” she said. “What does it mean?” I turned and saw our waiter leaning against the bar reading a newspaper. “Excuse me,” I interrupted him. “Do you know who this is?” I thought for a moment I had offended him by assuming he spoke English, before remembering that I had already ordered lobster bisque and a Brenavin (“watch out for Brenavin,” he warned me solemnly.) Finally, his face showed a slight tight-lipped recognition of what I was asking. “Double rainbow guy,” he muttered with a thick accent.

When I first mentioned the Vasquez shrine, he looked at me blankly, murmuring something to Guðrún in Icelandic. She translated. The waiter had never heard of the shrine, and anyway it was a dangerous place to visit. After several minutes and several hundred kroner, he finally gave me an address. It was only ten minutes away. She and I got back in the car and drove, dense autumnal darkness of the long Icelandic night draping down over the car.

Guðrún’s phone led us to a farmhouse, lined in that tin siding houses love to wear in Iceland. We stepped out of the car

and our feet sank slightly into the lawn as if it were a bog in a gloomy saga. The smell of sulfur was overpowering. That smell follows you in Iceland, wafting out with the water gushing out of the faucet and the stream of showerheads. Reeks in the tub, but it doesn't stick to your skin. Still, this was more intense than the regular nastiness of brushing your teeth. A thousand rotting eggs with a slight veneer of sweetness. Our eyes adjusted to the darkness as our olfactory systems adjusted to the bracing nastiness of the gas emanating from the ground. We went to the door and knocked.

The man who answered looked at me without saying a word for several seconds, and then said a couple of words in Icelandic. "What did he say?" I asked Guðrún, helplessly. She said, "he wants to know why you're here." I began an impassioned rant to him: about Paul Vasquez, the essay I was writing about *Yosemitebear Mountain Double Rainbow 1-8-10*, the lead I had received that I could find a shrine devoted to Vasquez and his video at this very farmhouse. The man looked at me, not reacting, the whole time, never even acknowledging Guðrún and her perfect Icelandic translation of my wild speech in real time. After a minute of silent deliberation, he shrugged and closed the door.

But then, a minute later, he reopened it! He was wearing a heavier coat, and motioned us to follow him through the back door and into the lava field behind his house. You could see practically every star in the sky, and I recalled the infamous and elusive "night rainbow," a sight so rare that almost no one has ever seen it. It *was* the weather for it. We walked for quite a while in silence, Guðrún occasionally offering me nervous looks. I started to feel more nervous too. I had expected my foray into journalism to be much more professional, maybe taking a guided tour from a happy bilingual Icelandic hippie who worked in town but knelt at the shrine for a few extra kroner. This was a weirder saga than that one.

Finally he stopped and pulled a heavy flashlight from under his coat, and directed the beam to a huge conical rock in the middle of the field. In the illuminated beam I could see streams

of sulfur rise up from the ground and float in front of the rock. On its face, a splendid iridescence: double rainbow. We stood in awed silence, the only sound the hissing fart of the earth which we could hardly smell anymore.

Before he could stop me, I grazed the rainbow with my fingers, and that's when everything went haywire. *Nei* he shouted, trying to bat my arm away, but it was too late. Contact with the rainbow caused the rock, which must have weighed a ton or more, to topple over. A large crack cleaved the earth and the three of us fell to the ground on our backs by the force of it falling. A huge effigy of Paul Vasquez rose out of the depths, surrounded by penumbral shadows of colored light, the nine hues of the rainbow stretching out in individual prisms and ribboning the sky, freaky northern lights at eye level above the ground. LeBron James, Donald Rumsfeld, and several rich poets emerged from the crevasse wearing robes and chanting, their voices Auto-tuned chant.

Guðrún didn't hesitate. Leaving the fallen farmer and the gloomy Illuminati weirdos, she grabbed me by the wrist and pulled me to a standing position. We ran for our lives. The light seemed to grow bigger at our back as we ran towards the farmhouse, which itself seemed to recede into the distance. But no. An optical illusion. A real rainbow. "Close your eyes!" she yelled. I did, and almost ran right into the passenger door of her SUV. We leapt into her car, and she gunned it down the pitch black rocky road towards Reykjavik. We were silent the entire trip home.

Okay, that didn't happen. But here's something that did.

The Grateful Dead played their last show in 2015 at the 49ers stadium in San Francisco. I have always been indifferent to the Dead, stemming from an original teenage disappointment that their music did not contain some secret druggie code that would make me high just by tuning in. But I get it. I'm in love with enough spectacular garbage to not ever pass judgment on someone's passions. The stadium was packed of course.

Actually, I could see Paul Vasquez being a Deadhead. He's about the right age, and with his folky greenwashed post-hippie

sensibility, his organic garden, his groovy openness to messages from the beyond and, well, that ageless Southern California dialect, he'd fit right in at a Dead show.

A friend of mine went to this show and told me a story about something wondrous that happened there. About an hour into the set, the band stopped between songs. At that moment, a massive double rainbow appeared in the sky. The entire crowd delivered an ahhh into the heavens, causing the band to stop and look up themselves.

Afterwards, inevitable conspiracy theorists came forward with claims that the Dead had themselves engineered this rainbow, with a show of light costing tens of thousands of dollars. But, honestly, who fucking cares. The crowd went batshit, transferring their wild enthusiasm and gratitude from the dudes in the Dead to the rainbow in the sky. The applause became so raucous and unstoppable that the show ground to a halt, creating an unplanned and long intermission as thousands of people suspended their disbelief and beheld the miracle above.

My friend was standing next to two guys in their fifties, limestone high and frozen in front of the apparition above them. "Woah," one said. "Double rainbow." The other nodded as if to agree that that was what they indeed beheld. "What does it mean?" the first friend asked. There was a moment of contemplative silence. "Hey man," his friend said. "This is the band that jams with God."

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