

# INTERVAL

## THE PHILOSOPHER'S BONG

To Bennett

Never compose anything unless the not composing of it becomes a positive nuisance to you.

Gustav Holst<sup>1</sup>

Kyoto, 2002

I think I am writing a book. I'm not sure about this, I would like to be more definite on the matter, but I believe I am writing a book, though I don't feel 100 percent in control of the situation - more like I am watching events unfold, watching the book being written. Of course, I am not channelling like David Icke or any of those weirdoes my Granny used to climb holy mountains with. No, this work is mine, though the **me** who owns the 'mine' may be different to the **me** with which I am familiar. That **me** certainly has a poor command of grammar, writing serpentine arguments punctuated at will and wriggling with digressions. Anyway, I never set out to write a book, I wanted to be a fireman. One of my friends has a talent for bullying me into editing my scrawls. Blame Bennett, and don't blame me.

This has been going on for a few years now, irregularly, but with a discernible pattern. The potential book employs a subtle strategy. I have always been an insomniac, which I suspect is part of the conspiracy of **me** against **me**. For years, when I was an insomniac school teacher getting up at a dreadful time in the morning, I was unhappy about the state of affairs, and I experimented with soporific teas and relaxation techniques. Now, my jobs tend to start at midday, which suits me (and **me**) very well. I can sit up all night, with my computer in front of me,

my wife softly snoring behind me, bong at my left hand and peanuts at my right, and if I choose to phone home at 4am, my friends in England are just getting home from work.

Some nights when I can't sleep, I potter around, reading, surfing the net, doing nothing constructive, and then suddenly I notice something glaringly obvious about the world, and need to write it down. I call it a secret, though it is not actually secret; 'secret' is just a name which stuck (but then, aren't all names just names which stuck?) I write as I think, with anarchic grammar, half-page sentences illustrated with ugly scrawls (generally pictures of sine waves). The secrets don't take very long, usually twenty minutes or so, and as the subject winds around to a conclusion, I become very sleepy indeed. This is quite out of character. Sleeping is usually a matter of will for me, not because I am tired, but because I really should go to sleep and I have run out of peanuts. In the morning, I find one of three things. It may be an angry rant about the police, with not much depth to it, a form of therapy perhaps. Often I am left with a laboriously explored platitude: 'the universe is' or 'life is nice' or something, and again there is not much I can do with it. Other times I have something workable. I never select a subject, but it is nearly always some aspect of the Tao, the abstract world, something about non-action or awareness, or the end of time.

The secrets don't just come at night, but they rarely come without a bong. My entire corpus is a stoned corpus. Secrets come into mind and melt away if I don't write them down, so they have been scrawled on napkins, fliers, and the backs of envelopes, on my students' homework and punched into my mobile phone. Tucking into lunch at my boss's house, an entire secret may pass before the green tea is served and I can run for a pen without being rude. They come at ridiculous times. I scrawled one at the reception of a wedding in Tokyo. I wrote a kabbalistic analysis of *2001: A Space Odyssey* whilst having sex (she didn't seem to mind, but the writing went a bit wobbly around Binah). I have moonlighted sitting in the office, writing reams about Napoleon whilst my co-workers do data entry.

If I get stoned all the time, the secrets stop coming, which doesn't bother me, but it does tally with the Shaiva and traditional Rasta idea that herb is to be reserved for spiritual and artistic purposes. Perhaps one day I will develop some self-restraint, who knows? Another confession is that this whole creative (or therapeutic) period of my life began when I stopped meditating. I struggled daily for five years until coming across Allan Watts' description of obsessive meditation as 'aching legs Zen', and decided that my tired dedication was just a habit, and not a habit I was enjoying.

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Now I meditate when the mood takes me, and it is almost hedonistic when I do. I also watch myself write rather than make myself write. The scrappy secrets go into an envelope, and some of them get cleaned up later and typed into my computer as a second draft, which is still unreadable. This job takes care of my less inspired insomniac moments. A few times a year, when Bennett's website goes out, I look through the second drafts and work them into permutations which readers might enjoy, and seem to deal with what I think *me* is trying to say. This job is testing, something like tying spaghetti together, but I have been surprised to find a semblance of order, a number of interrelated themes, and some kind of an argument. I have no idea why one theme (for example 'processes rather than objects') should be mixed with unrelated ideas and spread across three secrets, making it necessary to splice about like an endonuclease trying tease sense from nonsense.

There is the metaphor I was looking for - the obscure *me*, the source of the ideas is the DNA, Bennett is a hormone demanding expression, the secrets are the messenger RNA emerging from the dark and tangled nucleus, leaving me, this me, as the ribosome, splicing, translating, and arranging. Let's hope I can whip up some viable protein, and not an eggy mess.

Post Scripiter's postscript (August 2006): Surprisingly, I developed some self-restraint during a cathartic weekend eating iboga, and I am stoned far less these days. The Bwiti showed me another method of opening doors, and also left me thinking that I'm not so far from granny's holy mountains.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Music Quotation Book* - Joyce and Maurice Lindsay eds. (London, 1988) p. 76