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Timothy W. Gerken

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Cover Page Footnote

Written for SU's Veterans' Writing Group



Gerken: A

A

Timothy W. Gerken

In 1985 David Bowie sang “this is not America”;
mesmerized and ravaged the storms blew through, downing antenna,
drowning all signals: an engulfing, collective amnesia
and the moral loss that follows. Gathering the scattered arcana,
the desolate and determined head for arcadia
free from the epidemics of dislocation and discrimination. Our aha

moment: Ryan White locked out of school, a denial agenda
pushed by Reagan who finally addresses AIDS in America
with thousands already dead. How did we come to believe this could be arcadia?
Was it commercial free cable with all its channels? Dads free from rooftop antenna.
Remote controls keeping everyone seated and content: the definitive ana
of suburbia, leaving our neighbors misunderstood and mysterious and encouraging extensive
drifts toward ignorance, misinformation, and amnesia.

Reruns and replays reminding us of what we already know. Cultural aphasia

numbs us into a nation of nodding uh huh, uh huh, but never achieving aha.
The show ends, and we start all over; the sitcom as our own arcana.
The Huxtables freeing us from the guilt of segregated schools and neighborhoods. There are
too many Americas in America.
Philadelphia police bomb the MOVE compound killing 11, destroying 58 homes. No one
charged; the antenna,
channels, and telescopes focus on other worlds we hope might actually be arcadia.

The Hubble ready for space; the Army tests me for AIDS, negative, alleluia.
I'm safe and the secret stays secret but mostly a whisper to me. Drinking to blackouts, my
own attempts at amnesia
a crushing feeling, unattractive and unsafe, and fucking with my gaydar, a secret antenna
to the world. I am between worlds in Fort Polk, Louisiana—a state of black and white—lost
like the singer in A-ha.
Escapes to Houston, Baton Rouge, Galveston, New Orleans the Deep South of America
and far enough away from base, where I study how to follow eyes, and learn the feel of fingers
tracing down a forearm, an arcana

of the physical world, of men and danger. The Moral Majority promises love but instigates menace.
A conservative algolagnia
impacting us all, but sexual gratification—a straight male privilege, especially within the parish of
Acadia—
is not a miracle. Desire's remarkable reach passes through all of America,
an armada too often adrift due to bigotry, floating through the intricacies of a country with amnesia.
Channeling Baldwin and Lorde I reaffirm our right to gaze into another's eyes: love's aha.
I see you. I believe in you. I need you in my life. The mysterious antenna

sending out and receiving signals, an aura some scientists now believe may linger in bacteria
and our aroma.
We don't need to know the reasons for those flashes, that arrhythmia, our personal ana
of attraction, but we must regard hope and be open to the abracadabra, the aha,
the wonder when the rabbit appears, when the hand reaches for ours: the real magic of arcadia.
Here, we condemn trickle down hatred, economic asthma, police violence, and conservative
political amnesia;
we remember to care and to support justice and community, for otherwise, "this is not America."
We try with Live Aid, from both England and America, to help the starving in Africa; the music
an antenna
against the violence and amnesia that cultivates, conditions, and becomes the cultural arcana
of wars, dictators, and capitalism. It must be more than a dream, Arcadia, more than a fleeting aha.