Hikaru FUJI

Where the Tide Rises and Ebbs: Power, Becoming, and "America" in Steve Erickson's *Rubicon Beach*

Introduction: To the Other Side

In *Rubicon Beach*, Steve Erickson's second novel, a motif of the journey beyond the spatiotemporal order takes a distinct course—the inquiry into "America." Among his expanding oeuvre, the 1986 novel occupies an indispensable place in which the distinction between dream and reality, life and death, and the boundaries of space and time dissolve into the vast continuum of "America," the site of encounter between all forces. This fluid landscape in the novel puts the movement of variation in motion—Erickson's subsequent texts take over this continuum with various degrees of metamorphosis, unveiling subterranean forces that keep moving beyond the grasp of history. This radiant work is a lodestar in the writer's voyage.

The novel consists of three parts that intertwine with one another, mapping the characters' quests for "America," which necessarily lead to the question of power. Each quest becomes an incessant tug-of-war between a power relationship and efforts to escape from it. Power as an apparatus of capture operates everywhere—in *Rubicon Beach*, the subject and identity are the means of power relations, "the two present forms of subjection, the one consisting of individuating ourselves on the basis of constraints of power, the other of attracting each individual to a known and recognized identity" (Deleuze, *Foucault* 105–6). The act of naming and the machinery of face make them visible as individuals. The characters, in turn, continually try to reject the

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identities given to them and become clandestine: Cale becomes a flow, approaching the beach where he will be decapitated; Catherine struggles to escape from the tyranny of the face and Llewellyn hauls himself into the movement of writing; Lake is drawn into the realm of impersonal music. In short, "America" emerges as a zone of "in-between" where power relations strive to seize the characters who nevertheless attempt "to pass to the other side" (Foucault, "Lives" 161) that lies in themselves. For the male "American" characters, passion unlocks the passage to "the point of no return"—a quest that leads to a landscape which the continuum fatally infolds in itself.

I: Feeling Myself Disintegrate—Cale

The novel begins when Cale, the first-person narrator, is released from prison and starts to work in a library tower in Los Angeles. Set in the futuristic city, this part presents the basic principle of the novel, the interwoven struggle between the operation of power and the movement that keeps escaping from it. The city is in a continual state of collapse, and in this site Cale is caught in a power relationship with the police. Power collides with him by the act of naming, assigning to him an identity or a "side," to which Cale displays an explicit antipathy. He gradually becomes aware of an unknown realm of flow, in which he begins an escape from power and its order. Still, the sense of guilt is the crucial knot of his individuation, a thorn in his flesh, which is evoked in a haunting image of a man decapitated by a girl. In search of the girl, however, Cale is told that the headless man is himself, a fact that accelerates his movement into the internal zone of impersonality.

His name, "Cale," works as a sign that constitutes his identity in his relationship with Wade, a detective in Los Angeles: "someone in a brown suit walked up to me and said, Are you Cale?" (10). The narrator's identity as "Cale" begins with this address from outside. This "interpellation" by the police is repeated throughout the first part of the novel. The act of naming renders the protagonist the subject—"The act of recognition becomes an act of constitution: the address animates the subject into existence" (Butler 25). In other words, by Wade's utterance of the name, the man is constituted as "Cale." The protagonist's identity, in this sense, is the product of his power relationship with the police.

However, movement or flow always points to a realm of intermediacy,
where the operation of power loosens its grip—while it operates by the function of fixation, the world continually metamorphoses into a flow. The city on the beach appears as the site of chaotic disorientation, in the middle of the process of a slow collapse. The sea causes this disintegration, making “music” ring on the streets:

I noticed that music was everywhere. . . . It came out of the buildings, a distinct and different melody out of each one. . . . The sea, the sound was the sea, seeping in under the city and forming subterranean wells and rivers. The rivers made a sound that came up through the empty buildings, and the echoes of the buildings made a music that came out into the streets. (13)

The city in movement: it is not a solid realm on the beach but in an incessant process of breakdown. The undercurrent increasingly erodes the city, causing a melody that designates the disintegration. The beach, the territory governed by power, is now becoming-flow.

The fundamental imagery of water is significant in this regard. In the world of flow, the clear-cut definitions of things no longer hold. Cale is no exception in this movement: instead of adhering to his solid identity, he begins to liquidize himself. He gradually becomes aware of the indefinite aspect of himself that escapes the constitution by power. This sense of flow is intensified in his obsession with the blood-flow. “I once supposed I was bleeding in order to bleed myself dry; now I wonder if it was the flow I loved. Now I wonder if it was the spilling itself that held me speechless” (59, emphasis added). Instead of establishing himself as dry and therefore solid, Cale feels an attachment to the flow itself. As the logic of identity is maintained “through the attempted expulsion of the improper, the disarranging” (Grosz 201), the abjection of the indeterminate flow constitutes the boundary of the individual. Cale, inversely attracted to become the flow itself, rejects the notion of identity and border. From a fixed identity to an indeterminate flow: this shift inevitably resists the category of belonging. “I had never been one of anything,” Cale says. “I distrusted being one of something; I knew it wasn’t real, I knew the only oneness that was real was my own, being one of me” (40). The idea of belonging to some category or identity is refuted in favor of his singularity that cannot be defined by other terms.
This attitude causes a political problem, for power is preoccupied with deciding to which side Cale belongs. The duality of "America One" and "America Two" appears in this context, in which Wade questions Cale; "Where were you born, Cale? 'America.' 'As I thought. America One or America Two?'" (28-9). Cale's answer—"'I never could get straight on that. I think it must have been somewhere in between'" (29, emphasis added)—therefore subverts the duality machine.¹ In the city that becomes a gigantic flow, the authority machine seeks to operate by deciding sides, thus fixing the state of things by the logic of identity. Resisting this logic, Cale positions himself "in-between." In this sense, he is in a constant negotiation with power, and still escapes its mooring line. "The only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between, to pass between, the intermezzo" (Deleuze and Guattari 277). To become a flow assumes, therefore, a politically subversive character. The machinery of power tries to fix him to his identity, to constitute his identity as "Cale." Cale, in his turn, increasingly escapes the effect of power by becoming-flow.

In the process of mutation, his guilt of the past is nevertheless evoked, which defies his transformation. In prison, Cale struggles with authority over the identity of Ben Jarry, the leader of a political movement. "In the questioning I did not identify Ben Jarry" (41), he says. As long as Cale refuses to identify him, power cannot decide who Jarry is: "They knew Jarry was their man but they couldn't pin him down" (41). However, by his unconscious providing of the crucial clue, Jarry is recognized and hanged immediately, while Cale is released. The fact that Cale has benefited the manhunt, despite his antipathy toward "sides," in turn designates him on the side of authority. Even though he resists the classification, the sense of guilt continues to haunt him with the resultant individuality. Therefore, "he must rescue himself from being the victim of his memories, his guilt" (Kincaid 33).

Thus the image of a man beheaded by a girl, which is repeated throughout the first part, becomes dominant. Walking near the canal, Cale sees the image on the beach ahead: "I saw it in her hand, the source of the flash, a two-foot-long blade that had . . . very efficiently separated the head she held in her hand from the rest of the man's body" (22). The second time the image comes to him, even though Cale tries to deny its reality, it leaves blood on the floor of the library. Then he seeks to identify the murdered man—"'His name is Ben
Jarry,' I said" (37). The image of a headless man for him represents his own guilt of betrayal. The scene hauntingly points to his identity as Cale-the-betrayer. For him, the image functions as an interpellation, by which he is named as the guilty subject. After the third murder that leaves a headless body, however, Wade tells Cale that the dead man is Cale *himself*:

The prints and the blood, we went over it and over it. Didn't that corpse look just a little familiar? All those times you got a look at it? You decided it was the object of your guilt, but you know it is a little more familiar than that. Because it's your body. (85)

Thus a paradoxical situation arises: Cale is already dead, but still alive. The murder has taken place three times, and at the same time it is yet to come. This is the absolute state of "in-between," where he is neither on the side of the living nor the dead. He is situated in "a zone of indistinction" (Agamben 255). Death and life cannot be separated but intermingle with each other, desubjectifying him into the state of indeterminacy. "I had this ridiculous sense of being in control of everything" (76)—this illusion of autonomy is replaced by the feeling of nausea and weakness. Neither the subject nor mere absence of life, Cale becomes an anonymous life that is unmoored from his identity. "Between his life and his death, there is a moment that is only that of a life playing with death" (Deleuze, "Immanence" 28).

It is at this point that power desperately tries to nail him onto a definite place—Cale is put under house arrest. The zone of indistinction in which Cale finds himself is a kind of threshold: this is where the effort of power to organize him into a recognizable subject, and, at the same time, the process of becoming-flow manifests itself intensively. He commences his movement, plunging himself further into the flow:

I cast myself in flight for the decapitation of my own guilt, to live where I once died, to resurrect my passion, my integrity, my courage from out of my own grave. . . . By the plain form of my delirium I will blast the obstruction of every form around me into something barely called shadow. I sail. I swim to you. I know the water. (89-90)

It is by escaping from the sense of guilt that subjects Cale—"the decapitation of my own guilt"—and instead by placing himself in the zone of indistinction
—"to live where I once died"—that he tries to reach the girl, through the flow, in order to be decapitated, "to get free of oneself" (Foucault, Pleasure 8) by reaching a state where his identity cannot hold. The movement does not lie outside his existence. Cale discovers he is always already in the tide, despite the effort of power to anchor his identity. "The other side" is to be found within himself.

Cale’s becoming-flow involves the girl, who points to a realm of invisibility within “America.” Recollecting the second murder, Cale realizes that the girl with the knife has been present at the scene of the murder: “She was there all along, right in front of us... I thought, How could we have not seen her? Cops all over the room and she was right there in the corner; how could we have not seen her?” (57-8). Cale, who is in the process of de-subjectification, becomes aware of “the invisible in the visible” (Blanchot 134). The girl escapes the recognition of the police in spite of her undeniable existence. Relations of power construct a “real,” whereas the girl exists in a world of intermediary among the real, where power becomes inoperative—"The multiplicity of the possible is here, it is now. It is intermediary between the phenomena, it rustles in the midst of the forms" (Serres 23-24). At the end of the first part, the girl and the blind people on the boat repeatedly appear: they haunt the city, always moving, like a black hole in the real. This is why “The town was terrorized by her. America was terrorized by her, by the mere fact of her being” (87-8). Confronted with this omnipresent exteriority within order, “America” becomes silent in terror, while the disintegrating city goes “crazy with sound” (88). As Cale discovers the flow within himself, “America” includes the nameless exteriority that escapes the trap of power.

II: The Girl Imperceptible—Catherine and Llewellyn

In Rubicon Beach, the girl’s quest that is finally confronted with contemporary “America” as the apparatus of capture displays an inversed image of other characters’ voyages. Along with the act of naming, the face is presented as the main machinery of power that animates the function of the individual and the subject. Catherine, the girl who is “unconscious of its existence” (158), is nevertheless individuated by her face with the arrival of a sailor from outside. In Los Angeles, where she comes to live in the house of Llewellyn Edgar, her
face has a double effect: it causes Llewellyn’s becoming-flow, and at the same time she is trapped by the individuating function of the face. The voyage of Cale also reiterates this antinomy of passion. Her struggle reveals “America” as the place of collisions between the forces of capture and escape, which manifests itself everywhere in the “country of face-worship” (299).

The act of naming appears in the beginning of the second part, in which her name “Catherine” is mentioned: “Actually her name was not Catherine. She would be given the name of Catherine later, in America” (95). Her original name, instead, indicates a multiplicity—“Her actual name was an impossible sound, a mutation of Spanish, Portuguese and an Indian dialect” (95)—which is not reduced to a coherent identity. This plurality, a supple constitution insofar as it is a name, makes a sharp contrast with “Catherine,” which represents a role or function in Llewellyn’s household, and the girl is individualized by that function. As Cale’s relationship with the police, the name works as interpellation from outside that constitutes the girl’s identity.

This contrast is seen in the motif of the face. In her life with the Crowd in South America, the girl’s face is presented as independent of her being: “for the first time, she saw her own face. She thought that it was a strange and marvelous watercreature” (97). Others in the Crowd also understand her face as an aggregation that disperses into every direction:

They took her eyes to be the large fiery insects that buzzed among the reeds of the river. They took her mouth to be the red wound left by hunted animals or perhaps their own women each month. They took her chin to be the bend of a bough and her hair to be the night when there was no moon. (98)

The face, in other words, does not constitute her as a coherent individual. It forms a multiplicity with heterogeneous elements. However, “a light coming from elsewhere” (Foucault, “Lives” 161) in the figure of a European sailor, Coba, arrives. He brings the notion of value into the Crowd: a different power relation sets in. The girl is individualized by her face, which she perceives as outside of her being. She is plucked out of the Crowd and given a new identity. In this sense, the face is indeed a traitor to her.²

After she outlives the struggle with Coba, the girl begins her journey for America, where she comes to live in Llewellyn’s house. When she reaches
America, the encounter triggers a twofold effect: Llewellyn is uprooted from his identity by the passion she stirs, while the girl is named, individualized and caught in the machinery of identity. He continues to turn away from her face—"I'm like a man who can't bring himself to love her" (191). However, he is caught in the passion that makes him abandon his identity as a screenwriter and try to become a poet: "I have this poem in my head. . . . Not the last poem but the poem after the last poem: I keep trying to find it" (198). The "last poem" does not finish the writing. Rather, writing appears as a movement toward "the poem of no return" (200)—it is a blind dive into the flow of passion. As he continues on writing, his house also goes through a strange mutation—"Llewellyn Edgar's house . . . with several walls missing, two new doors six feet off the ground, and a window erected out by the curb" (220). His transformation nevertheless exercises the power of the face inasmuch as the poems are "about a face that was ignorant of its own image" (197). Instead of subverting the face machine, Llewellyn continues to concentrate his passion on the face. In this sense, Llewellyn's flow is a restricted one that is anchored to the girl. Catherine, on the other hand, goes through the individuation by her face that aims to capture her entire being:

In the days and nights that followed, her face became more. Her eyes became more and her mouth became more. Her hair became more. Her beauty blossomed like the flower of a nightmare. . . . I'm caught in America, thought Catherine, where people knew their faces and wear them as though they own them. (183)

To liberate herself from this power of faciality: it is the struggle the girl sets out in "America." After she leaves Llewellyn, she achieves the state of sheer invisibility. The local police receive the calls that claim "a girl with black hair was staring through someone's window" (202), but when they arrive at the site, "There was no one at all. What they had taken to be her eyes were simply the large fiery insects that buzzed among the bushes. . . ." (204). The girl does not leave "America" but remains inside, and eludes full perception by the police apparatus: "to escape the face, to dismantle the face and facializations, to become imperceptible, to become clandestine" (Deleuze and Guattari 171). The face is perceived, only to be scattered into a multiplicity.
Her movement of escape, a becoming-clandestine, is again arrested by power. The catastrophic fire in the hotel occurs when the apparatus of capture forcibly tries to appropriate her. “Two men came up on each side of her and grasped her arms. She flinched and they held her firmly” (212). The following calamity is caused by a spark of the conflict between the two opposed forces of seizure and flight. The case demonstrates that, in the apparatus of the face, the event is finally attributed to the responsible subject as the cause. The girl is arrested, confined, named as “a Jane Doe” (218), charged with the crime, and investigated by Lieutenant Lowery. Thus she is surrounded by several layers of capture that strive to make her visible as the guilty subject.

Still, holes of escape are worn in the middle of these strata of power. Lowery dozes off beside her, and is called back to wakefulness—“Lieutenant?” (222)—by another officer. But Lowery falls asleep again and wakes up to find the girl gone. “He went to the open window. . . . After a moment his eyes narrowed. ‘There’s someone out there,’ he said” (223). The two phrases—“Lieutenant?” and “There’s someone out there”—are the effort of the apparatus that tries to block the flow of flight. Lowery is called back from the dream, but the girl escapes and reaches the beach. The face cannot seize her entire existence. In front of her appears Cale, who has sailed away from his power relationship with the police. Thus a new journey begins, toward “the world of speeds and slownesses without form, without subject, without a face” (Deleuze and Guattari 283).

Cale’s journey with the girl and the forest reveals the deadly aspect of passion, which can turn into an apparatus of capture at any moment. When Cale meets the girl on the beach, on “the other side,” the murder does not happen: “I looked at her and she finally said in her bad funny English, ‘It is you, but it is not you.’ I said, It’s me but it isn’t me” (266). In this exchange, they remain in the zone of impersonality. By both affirming and negating the address at once, the girl and Cale do not constitute themselves as individuals. The decapitation, in this sense, has already occurred in another form, in which the logic of interpellation—“It is you”—is replaced by a zone of indistinction: “It’s you, but it is not you.” The power of the name is suspended. It is in this state of indeterminacy that they start their escape from the police. Gradually they enter the realm where the distinction of memory and dream vanishes, where only difference returns, nullifying the logic of identity: “Every morning
when I woke up, we were somewhere else" (269). The other beach Cale reaches is not a finality where everything halts. Rather, through this threshold, movements are further intensified, not allowing the blockage of the flow.

However, the double effect of passion finally eliminates the journey. As is seen in Llewellyn's passion, it causes the flow to begin the movement within the man's being; on the other hand, the girl is named as the object of his attraction. The men in love are sailors in this sense: they approach the girl by the becoming-flow. For the girl, each of them is equally a light coming from elsewhere inasmuch as they try to capture her—"My life," she thinks resentfully, "it's nothing but sailors" (207). Passion, insofar as it is focused on the individual and the face, works as an apparatus of capture that threatens her faceless movement. This relation comes into existence in the journey of Cale and the girl. "I was in love with her. I had fallen in love with her long before, though I'm not sure when" (270), Cale recollects. As this attraction becomes obvious, his dream ends:

The closest we got was on one afternoon when I came back from exploring the landscape and there she was, out on a limb, looking into the water at the reflection of her face, as though she and that reflection were bound too. . . . And she looked at me sadly, and I turned and climbed to my place to sleep. (270–71, emphasis added)

His desire individualizes her: when passion induces the power relationship of capture into the multiplicity, when Cale, like Coba, becomes another sailor who desires to extract her from the forest, the girl disappears. "The next thing I knew, the cold sand was beneath me and I felt as though every bone were broken inside, as if I'd been thrown somewhere hard" (271). Thus Cale returns to "this side"—to the beach of the Old World in 1923.

"America" in the novel does not designate a specific regime, but appears as a multiplicity with two poles. On one hand, it is a land of the face, where power operates by subjection, individuation and the logic of identity. On the other hand, as Cale witnesses the disintegration of the entire city, and as Lowery falls into a dream in the course of investigation, "America" also implies numerous forces that escape the fixity of power. The two inclinations continually entangle and collide with each other, without dividing into such duality as
America One/America Two: “there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight” (Foucault, “Subject” 346). In the beginning of the last part emerges a continuum, which embraces the clash between the operation of power and the flight from it without any synthesis of space and time:

It is in the land of dreamers, it is in the land the dreamers dream that dreams of justice and desire are as certain as numbers. It is in the land of insomniacs that justice and desire are dismissed as merely dreams. I was born in the first land and returned to the second: they were one and the same. You know its name. (227)

One and the same land—“America.”

III: Journey into the End of Dream—Lake and the Girl

The last part of Rubicon Beach delineates the quest of John Lake, from his birth in 1913 to 1968. This part introduces number as another logic of power: just as the name and the face act as individuation, numbers divide the world into a definite, striated space. A genius in mathematics, Lake becomes aware of the realm of intermediacy, The Number, in the order of given numbers. “It was there between nine and ten. Not nine and a half or nine and nine-tenths, not the steroids of ten or nine’s missing moon, but a world of a number unto itself” (238). This zone of in-between finds its expression in “the music” and passion, both of which are connected to The Number. The music of The Number implies the event that the occurrence of “America” inevitably carries within itself: the clash between the two worlds, which repeats itself as the encounter between the sailor and the girl on the beach where “this side” and “the other side” become indistinguishable. At the point of the encounter called “America,” passion becomes the force of release and imprisonment at once—the voyage of Lake finally runs into the girl.

"There is a number for everything. There is a number for justice. There is a number for desire” (227). In this numbered view of the world, even the abstract notions of justice and desire are distributed into definite places. However, when passion enters this sectionalized world, the whole landscape suddenly changes. In his relationship with Leigh, Lake experiences the zone of indistinction—“What I felt for her was the new place beyond nine; when I
entered her I was on a far journey into what I was capable of being. I was the anarchist of passion in an age when passion was a country" (240). He thus becomes aware of the intermediary that escapes the grasp of numbers. Lake goes through this realm as the flow after Leigh leaves him: “To the tracks below, to the country beyond them, he called her name, and the hardness burst beneath him, the wet white of him rivering off into the beyond country; and he called her again” (242). When his act of addressing or interpellation fails to seize her, passion begins to flow into the territory that surpasses the border of the numbered individual.

“The beyond country” of passion is also the realm of the music, which Lake begins to hear in his childhood. After Leigh is killed in her political activity, and his mother disappears, Lake ceases to hear the music. When he hears it again, the music looms as the state of in-between. In 1937, riding on a train, Lake comes to a river and dozes off on the beach. When he wakes up, he finds himself in the scene of the shipwreck, which is the earliest memory of Catherine in South America—“To the corpse at her feet the small child explained, Nothing swims in the dust” (94). Lake hears the girl’s voice, as if he were the corpse, and falls asleep again. He wakes up again and follows the girl’s steps to the river, where the music sings to him:

_I heard it again, the music I’d never heard before. . . . It was right there, coming from the other side of the river. . . . It occurred to me that this particular music was the music of The Number, the number and music of the black distant part of me beyond desire, beyond justice._ (248)

All boundaries dissolve into the music: dream and reality, life and death, and spatiotemporal divisions. In this in-between where the borders of numbers break down, Lake finds that The Number and its music is not the unreachable outside but the furthest interiority, the “black distant part” of himself. However, unlike Cale who willingly enters into this zone of indistinction, Lake cowers and flees from it.

Convinced as he is of the existence of the realm of The Number, it is denied from the perspective of order. In a secret organization in which Lake works during wartime, he reports The Number to his director, who simply tells him that “Of course there is no such number, Mr. Lake. We have all the numbers already” (250). By Lake’s response—“If that’s so, . . . then tell me why the
Old World came to the New” (250–1)—the vision of beaches and the inter-
mediary is extended to the relation between the two continents across the
gigantic flow of the Atlantic. In the figure of Lake, the two worlds intermingle
with each other: he bears the paternal name that leads back to the Old World,
while his mother’s name, Rae, is a substitute for “a Potawatomi name for
which there was no English sounds” (228). The music—“beyond the river that
stunned the fathers and uncles of America into incommunicable silence” (249)
—indicates the point at which the two worlds violently collide with each other.
For the sailors from the Old World, the music from “the other side” lures them
into the unknown, into a further westward movement; for the native inhabi-
tants, the movement is a wave of destruction that befalls them. Thus life and
death run against each other on the single land. The duality of the two worlds
melts into Lake, the son of the encounter between the two worlds.6 However,
after his father dies, Lake goes to the Old World in 1951, as if to follow the
paternal line away from the music and passion. In Penzance, “on the far
southwestern tip of England” (253), he meets the old Cale, who has returned
from his journey.

In a far-off lighthouse, Cale and Lake find the girl—“She had a face like
none he’d seen” (277). Thus passion for the girl also affects Lake. With the
death of the old man, she vanishes away. Lake, after fifteen years of fruitless
attempts to disprove the existence of “The Number of No Return” (284),
comes back to his native land. “I’m going back. . . . I don’t pretend to have the
passion my dreams once had. I don’t pretend I’ll hear the music I once heard or
that I’ll even reach the place where I heard it” (285). Nevertheless, after he has
failed to disavow the existence of the music, the quest into the heart of
“America” gradually approaches the huge river. Angeloak, the tree-station he
reaches by the train, stands alone in the river as the enormous center where his
movement is temporarily blocked. The train leaves him in the tree, forcing
Lake to stay for months.

In 1968, he resumes his movement on foot toward the other beach, following
the track until he reaches the girl. They make love, and it is not so much “the
fulfillment for both of them” (Kincaid 35) as a fatal collision between Lake’s
passion and girl, repeating the encounter that marks “America.” Lake’s
passion is revived, but it is accomplished by the appropriation of the girl: she
arranges her silent revolt against the sailor whose light captures and individu-
alizes her. Then comes the moment when Lake loses sight of her: "she wasn't there . . . as though she had slipped through the tracks into the black river far below, even as I felt her in my hands" (299). It is the sparkle of her knife that reflects his own light of passion and makes him turn away. At this moment, when his desire that captures her seems to open itself to the world, as if Lake drained himself into the country beyond—"I emptied myself in her; and maybe, for just a moment, I even fell asleep" (299)—the music comes to him again:

And then there's the sound, the sound I followed out onto these tracks: it's huge, the sound I can't bear to hear or disregard, . . . I realize the light's in her hand, loud and white and sharp, in her hand as though to sear her fingers with it, as though to extinguish it: and then almost faster than I can see it, it comes to me (300)

The decapitation approaches. In the very act of seizure by passion, when the flow and the imminent death void the subject, the music reappears. This zone is therefore the intermingling of power and escape: voices from the apparatus of capture break into this process of becoming-flow—"Lieutenant. Lieutenant?" and "There's someone out there" (300)—which are uttered by Lowery and his fellow officer. Thus the voices of power and the music of the flow are interwoven with each other, all in one and the same land called "America."

**Conclusion: And Beyond**

To cross the Rubicon: Rubicon Beach is an attempt to infuse the unceasing movement or multiplicity of forces into a name—"Cale," "Catherine," "Lake," and above all, "America." Each name implies conflicts between forces beyond it, so that the novel is not so much a representation of "America" as an expression of those battlefields. It does not advocate a future utopia nor a lost ideal of the past as "the other side." Rather, the novel opens up a continuum in which each part communicates with every other, obliterating the distinction of past, present, and future. "Memories, dreams, even worlds are only apparent relative circuits which depends on the variations of this Whole" (Deleuze, Cinema 2 81). Escape and capture presuppose each other, which inversely implies that every effect of power, the solid territory of the real or the individual, is always already inhabited by a flow. Passion leads the "American"
characters to the point of no return, the beach that yields the subject of appropriation and the dominated object. Everything exists on this interior beach called “America” where the tide rises and ebbs—the music, the sound of the city in collapse, the girl’s voice as well as the voices of capture. The beach is not confined to a particular place or date: as the encounter between the sailor and the girl, it is a “non-personal, non-subjective, and non-human” (Bourassa 70) event without beginning or end, repeating itself in every “American.”

Erickson’s œuvre revolves around the event: Rubicon Beach is itself a threshold, anticipating further mutations in the subsequent attempts at exploring the history of “America.” History carries its immanent exteriority, namely numerous collisions that have slipped away from its ordered realm. In Leap Year and Arc d’X, passion plays the fatal game of liberation and captivity beneath the recorded name—“Thomas Jefferson.” Succeeding these motifs and incorporating the opening passages of Rubicon Beach, Our Ecstatic Days displays the futuristic vision of the reversed ruler-ruled relations of power, which is inserted into the story of a mother’s quest for her lost son. These texts, among others, gather unhistorical forces of “America” that move around the space of visibility. “Always already passed and eternally yet to come” (Deleuze, Logic 189), the silent clamor of the event roars into each text, driving the writer’s work into the unknown—to cast the die.

Notes

1 The assassination of Robert Kennedy in 1968 is alluded to throughout Rubicon Beach. As Cale says, “The murdered man had been born in America One” (32), the idealism Kennedy embodied points to a certain duality of ideal and reality. With Kennedy’s death in Los Angeles, on the beach where the frontier ends, the duality vanishes: the “New Frontier” or a “newer world” ceases to imply the outward movement; the dream is inflected inward, into “America” where all the clear-cut boundaries break down. Cale modifies his conception of the Kennedys according to this vision, saying, “A whole family of murdered men... Not America One or America Two... Just America. They were born in America” (74).

2 When Cale meets her, the face-betrayal-subject connection is made explicit: “His eyes said... I never thought treachery was like a face. I never thought it was
something one wore whether he knew it or not” (222, emphasis added). As Cale is subjected by his identity as the consequence of his act of betrayal, the girl is also constituted as an individual by the face, from which she seeks to escape throughout the novel.

3 Cale, whose movement is more intensive than the poet’s, reads his pieces in the library and takes up composing “the next poem, the one that was to be written next” (79). The movement of writing is a transpersonal flow that exceeds the individuality of the writer: “to write is to renounce being in command of oneself or having any proper name” (Blanchot 121).

4 The journey of the two is marked by multiplicity, of which they are merely a part. “Our forest went with us, or rather we went with it” (270). In other words, they form a multiplicity with the forest—as the girl does in her life in the jungle—in which the individuality and identity no longer hold.

5 It is in this sense that signs are “lost” in the novel. “Only signs exist, with their referents missing” (Nagaoka 167, my translation). However, the lost signs, free from their referents, do not point to the emptiness. In the world that becomes a gigantic movement, language loses its static solidity and is plunged into the becoming-flow. The sign of “America” does not lack its referent but instead contains a movement that is beyond the boundary of the identical state of things. Thus the power of naming in the novel is unstable, ceaselessly overturned by itself. This is the task of Rubicon Beach—to create the flow within language.

6 “In the sense that she was the last to hear the music, [Lake] thought one day, my mother was the last American. In the sense that he must now survive never having heard the music at all . . . the last American was my father” (247). As an American after the last, his being is itself a movement, the site of the collision between the machinery of name and the impersonal zone of the music.

Works Cited
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