



Keith Ekiss

Open Letter

San Francisco was where the missing children were gathering . . .
—Joan Didion

Joan, it's too late the essay never gets it.
Better the teenage acid hippie, better the Malakoff Diggins.
Better the unwed outlaw untuned chord.
You were intelligent in print
behind your chic aviators but you never read
Frank City, Goodbye by Joe Cottonwood

who's still holed up down the coast where it's 1968
every day in his brain and I didn't get the movement
until Reagan's second term, never flashed
on how many times I passed the porticoed mansion
of the Jefferson Airplane straight off the park
before Cynthia pressed *Frank City* on me in 1986.
It's a beautiful book and utterly false
about Sunshine and her baby as Kennedy's death
killed everyone's hopes. I missed the LSD ritual
and the Blue Unicorn but still
when I lived here in the early 1990s every third person
was a fifth column you could handle
with a butterfly net. There is no accuracy,
there's only vision and ours is sorely lacking.
Be careful Joan the drones are listening
through your toaster, the rationale for reason
grows smaller every day it's a white rabbit
hole I'm crawling down let's go down together,
Joan.

Instant City

One morning, the city burned.

Taverns and barbershops, groceries and gambling dens, crooked in flames. Banks
burned, loose bills erupted, floating black feathers. Of the tallest buildings,
nothing remained but steel frames. Before the embers cooled or the last of the
ashes were swept, blueprints for a new city replaced what had not yet passed
away.

In this manner, the city became, not a city of accidents and brothels, opera houses
and men balanced on ladders, streetcars ferrying lovers to discreet locations, but
an idea, an imitation. Once the city was built, it no longer existed.

—after Borges

Keith Ekiss is author of *Pima Road Notebook* and translator of the poetry of Eunice Odio, of
Costa Rica: her long poem *The Fire's Journey* and a selection of her poetry, *Territory of Dawn*.
He teaches creative writing at Stanford University.