SLOW-BURN JOURNAL: IN THE TENDERLOIN

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Thursday, March 18, 1993

I was walking through North Beach when I heard sirens. A fire truck went by in a hurry, and a column of smoke was rising from the other side of Russian Hill. I continued on my way home, and with every passing minute I was closer to the fire. I was becoming concerned. It looked like the source of the smoke was on my block. Arriving on my street I saw the smoke was coming from my building.

The street was blocked off and I would later count fifteen fire trucks in the area, with hoses everywhere and a crowd on the other side of the street. Firemen walked around giving or following orders, but they didn't seem to be in a hurry. There were two guys on extended ladders over the street with fire hoses aimed at the building, but they weren't on. Smoke was pouring over my windows on the top floor. I thought, could you turn the water on now?

This narrative, written two weeks later, does not convey the state of mind I was in, a mind with the windblown turbulence of the fire. I was tense and nervous, pacing, pausing now and then, viewing the conflagration from different angles, getting smoked, having a cigarette, leaning against a car, foot tapping for some reason, with a refrain running through my mind, "Please don't burn." Don't let everything I have, including piles of writing, along with photos and records, be reduced to nothing.

You are helpless in a situation like this, it's out of your hands. You're stunned by the magnitude of what is happening and the unthinkable consequences. If my apartment went up in flames it would erase years of work. I couldn't believe how close it was to that, and it wasn't over yet. The wind blew the smoke in furious swirls over my living room windows. The firemen next door were breaking windows. There was a fireman on the roof with a hose from a side street, which was a good sign. I found myself staring at an area above the living room for a glimpse of any diminishment in the smoke, looking for a hint of blue sky that would suggest the room wouldn't go up in flames. That is where most of my writing was.

A fire in a four-story building is partly concealed and you don't know how much is burning inside. I wondered why I left myself open to this with manuscripts that hadn't been copied. I had to assume the firemen knew what they were doing, but I couldn't believe how slow and methodic they were. Given the endless tangle of hoses on the street I suppose they had to take it one step at a time. Just parking all those fire trucks and official cars took some doing, and someone had to hold back the crowd of people, most of whom were not too concerned. It wasn't their home with an accumulation of fifteen years of living, love affairs, and writing on the verge of going up in smoke.

You learn about the destructive power of a fire, how quickly the most precious things of someone's life can be reduced to nothing, the energy contained in matter released in swirling smoke and flame - in case I needed a reminder of how ephemeral my writing is. I was polarized on this point. Is it a part of yourself, given the time you put into it? How closely do you want to identify with written reflections if you're standing on

the street in no immediate danger? And yet those manuscripts never seemed so valuable. The writing was given a renewed respect when close to being lost.

I was stunned by the timing. I almost never walk home at this hour. The fire was two days short of the spring equinox.

I paced on the sidewalk for nearly an hour before the fire seemed to be under control. The smoke was slowly diminishing over my front windows, looking like they wouldn't burn. I was breathing a little easier with a wary caution. On the corner a few occupants of the building looked dazed and worried, and a couple of women were weeping. I spoke with the manager (who sings in a heavy metal band), and the fire inspector asked a few questions. Someone from the Red Cross took my name. I ignored them. The last thing I wanted was tea and sympathy in their little truck. Later they came through in ways I hadn't expected.

Newsmen arrived with their slick microphones extended. There were television cameras. I walked around the block. I wanted to see the building from the back. Another TV truck was parked there with a twenty-foot-high aerial and the reporter Belva Davis stood on the sidewalk with a mic, talking to the camera with her image replicated on a screen inside the truck, my half-burned building in the background. It looked pretty bad from there. Apparently, the fire started in a back apartment, down the hall from mine and one floor down. That corner of the building looked like a bomb exploded and tore it off, leaving a blackened smoking ruins. Two entire apartments had vanished. The fire spread to the next building and another apartment or two were half-burned with walls or ceilings missing. A couple of apartments in my building were half burned. The halls and stairs on the top two floors were completely black, if not burned through, the railings reduced to

fragile ash, the ghost of their former selves. I later found the flames had gone all the way down the hall and stopped at my front door, which was blackened.

When the fire was under control, but I still couldn't go into the building, I walked over to Black Point Battery. It was a little cold with the sun going down. I sat under a tree, staring at the hills across the bay. Everything was business as usual, with people going home from work, their houses and apartments perfectly intact. I was struck by how arbitrary it was, like a missile landed on my building and no one else's. I was stunned by how my routine was interrupted and how quickly one is torn away from the familiar. One afternoon you're walking home from work, but won't arrive or spend the night or live there for a long time.

However tense I had been, I was also tired. When you walk two miles home, expecting to find a home to sit down in, and then you see it's on fire and you stand for another hour, your legs get tired. I wondered why I was taking this so calmly. Maybe calm is not the word, but not all that emotional. Some of the other occupants were relatively calm, as if they were in the eye of a storm. There is enough turbulence in the event and you don't need to add to it. What is required, what you're gravitating to, is keeping a hold on yourself. You're on high alert, seeing as how the situation requires some presence of mind. You're thrown into immediate practical concerns, like where to sleep tonight.

It reminded me of a few years ago on a freeway in Los Angeles. I drove my history professor's Chrysler, with him in the backseat and my girlfriend riding shotgun. We had gone sailing in the Long Beach Harbor and were on the way back to his place in Santa Monica. There was a long curving onramp for merging onto another freeway, and

zooming around the curve I found a line of cars had stopped. I slammed on the brakes and skidded, jerking the wheel in the direction of the skid and missing the car in front of me by inches, all in the most drop-dead calm because that is what is required at the moment, an automatic reflex when you're on the verge of disaster. You are thrown into a numb and stoic state.[1] That's all you have left since your energies are focused on the immediate crisis.[2]

7:00 p.m. I was told to come back in a couple of hours. The firemen were still attending to a smoldering half-sodden wreck of a building. I walked on Polk Street to a Chinese restaurant, but there was a line. I walked over to Johnny Love's on the corner of Broadway, with not many people there. I sat at a little table on the side with an Anchor Steam, not in the mood for glib professionals who want to get laid. The setting was therapeutic, given the sordid mess of my building.

9:00 p.m. I walked back, smelling the building from a block away. Most of the fire trucks were gone, but there was a lot to be done that night. A stricken semi-gutted building was sitting dead in the water. It had to be investigated and tended to, as well as guarded. Some people lost everything. Other apartments were relatively untouched (it's a 12-unit building), except for smoke and water. You wonder who would try to break in. It was hazardous enough being led upstairs by a fireman with a flashlight. If I was waiting for the other shoe to drop, watching the fire from the street, this was it. I had no idea how it looked inside.

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[1] The Professor was anything but calm.

[2] There is an easily triggered hysteria in secure and insulated neighborhoods, while people living near a war zone have more of a grip on themselves.

Returning to the source of the smoke, the shock was extreme. I had a hard time remembering what those hallways looked like that morning with their bone white walls. Now it was the opposite. The electricity was shut off. We made our way by flashlight up the dark and dripping ruined stairs to the top two floors. The walls and ceilings of the hall were black if not burned to ash, showing wooden beams with plaster torn away. When I looked towards the apartment at the end of the hall I was staring at the night outside. No walls or ceiling or apartment left. There was a mess on the floor which had burned from below. I read in the paper the next morning a fireman had fallen through the floor, sustaining minor injuries.

We picked our way carefully over the debris to the door of my apartment. It was slightly open. Walking through the blackened door I found my apartment more or less as I had left it that morning, except the kitchen was trashed. The back door was charred with the wall and half the ceiling burned or torn apart and there were broken windows. In the midst of the destruction was the head of a Roman statue staring at me (a photo on the wall). The floor was soaked, and there was evidence that the firemen were breaking dishes and stomping on a rug.

For someone who is preoccupied with opposing forces it left me with a lot to think about. The impact of the fire compared to not having lost very much (who cares about the kitchen?). The sudden necessity to move, like a slow hurricane of mundane effort versus the fact that I had wanted to move for a long time - feeling stuck as much by habit as financial concerns. There is nothing like a fire for burning through those real or imaginary restraints.

I threw a few clothes into an overnight bag with the aid of the flashlight, and the fireman showed me around, surveying the damage in the rest of the building. No, I shouldn't light a candle. He was proud and felt fulfilled in his occupation, showing off the damage from a real fire, none of that two-bit stuff. It was a four-alarm fire which they did a good job in putting out. He was impressed with the damage, and told me what a close call it was when flames were right outside the door and licking on the other side of the wall or coming through the kitchen ceiling. I was minutes away from losing everything.

The phone worked (it was shut off the next day), so I called my friend B. and got her phone machine. Then she picked it up, which was miraculous. I told her what happened and asked if I could sleep at her place. She was more than worried and hospitable.

I went outside and took a cab to her building near downtown.

When I walked in she went into motion like a concerned nurse, throwing together a meal and fussing over me, saying I would be surprised how many women love to be needed or leaned on in emergencies. I would later find out that Phoebe, a mutual friend, was a little put off that I hadn't called her for solace and/or sleeping arrangements, although she lives in Marin.[3] I caught a glimpse of the fire on the news.

B. is from Brooklyn, in her early thirties, and has a studio apartment which is overstuffed with furniture. I was on the sofa with a glass of wine and tired, but not too concerned. I don't know if this was from a terminal detachment or what. I hadn't lost any

[3] I spent the night there a few days later. It is remote, in the hills outside of Mill Valley, a lovely place she bought when her parents died. She is a little skittish about men, however, and let me know that she would lock her bedroom door. I was in the guest room and took my chances when I left the door unlocked. In the morning she wore the same clothes which she may have slept in.

writing or pictures and I wasn't hurt. Anything else was secondary. It was a massive inconvenience, and could be a ruinous break in my routine, but I was due for a change. To tell the truth, I didn't know what to think, the aftermath of all of this would be unfolding over the next few weeks.

I went to sleep.

Friday, March 19, 1993

In the morning a tall woman in a bra was putting on black pants and throwing on a shirt. I left around one, with hugs and kisses from her. On the way to work I stopped at the Chinatown gate, sitting there with coffee, cigarette, and the paper. There was a large photo of my burning building on the front page of the second section. I had a vague sense of people from out of town taking my picture, but they were interested in the gate. There were stone lions on either side of me.

I went to work, but left in a couple of hours and took a bus back to the place, realizing what an effort was required to move out. The building was crawling with inspectors, firemen, police, evicted tenants, moving men, etc.

When it was getting dark I left with a few more things and took a bus to a flat near the Haight. It is my friend Ming's old place, and her roommates were accommodating. The Phantom said I could have his room which he doesn't use very much. He often sleeps in the sound-room where we play music. He said he thought I was kidding at first, walking in and mentioning the fire while not acting disturbed.

Being calm is one thing, but detachment is a little disconcerting when it borders on the passive. I was brought up with the sort of religion which believes a low profile

helps if you want to go to heaven.[4] At the moment I felt the vertigo of having come so close to losing everything I owned. The piles of writing were nearly swept off a cliff, and I could be deluding myself about detachment. We were in the sound-room that night with the turbulence channeled through an electric guitar for several hours. It was not exactly unemotional.

Saturday, March 20, 1993

I returned to the burn in the afternoon with a couple of the roommates, rendezvousing with my parents, two sisters, and my four-year-old nephew. He was wide-eyed. The concept of destruction and fire was unknown to him, assuming the security of walls and buildings. He would later tell everyone he knew, in serious awed tones, about what happened to his uncle who didn't have a home anymore.

Oddly enough my parents had planned to visit and were staying with my sister in Mountain View. They drove to the city when I told them what happened, wanting to help. The situation seemed to call for their basic values, with my mother and sisters responding like this was something they were good at. The destruction of the home was understood on a fundamental level, and they were determined to get the upper hand on this ruin and disorder. My mother seemed to enjoy being back in the fray of being needed. Five kids grew up and moved away from home. She's sixty-four and has a lot of energy. I won't say she isn't relieved to be done with mothering, but the way she took to doing my laundry, all of those smoked shirts and pants, was something to behold. I carried most of it down to the place around the corner, but she was practically humming. The others were

[4] The low-profile mentality came naturally to my parents, who are Protestants from the Midwest.

putting things in boxes, categorizing, labeling, and being efficient. It is the sort of attitude that sometimes gets on my nerves, but now it was a godsend.

Towards the end of the afternoon we made a dash in a beat-up yellow van to the storage facility on Geary. It was just closing but they let us in. A load of boxes, mostly writing, was dumped into a prison cell, 5 x 6 x 10 feet high.

Returning to the burn, the roommates took off in the van. I drove with the family to the flat and dropped off a few more things. We went to a place on Haight Street for dinner. My father said he finally made it to the Haight Ashbury, and the human aberrations were out in force.

Sunday, March 21, 1993 (spring)

I took the day off. One of the roommates asked if I wanted to have dinner with a physicist who lives near Stanford University. I wasn't sure at first, but getting out of town sounded good.

Jon was driving and it took about half an hour. I wasn't sure what to expect. The physicist was his uncle, about seventy, whose wife was around sixty, and they were spry and intelligent. Some of their relatives showed up, Norwegians from the Midwest. I thought this would be an effort, but it wasn't, though we never got much physics into the conversation – sitting out back in a warm cactus garden.[5]

[5] I was thinking about the concept of a home, being without one at the moment. We moved to a long table in the dining room with an elaborate layout. Along with Indonesian food there was some wine and conversation, and we loosened up. The nice thing about older people, you can usually count on them to have some stories. They're from another dimension. I talked with someone who was in the armed forces moving across Europe in 1944.

I asked the physicist about his work. There was some mention of industrial spies. It turned out he works for a Japanese company. He said something about engineering computer chips with a

An hour or so later I left with Jon to show him *The Gates of Hell*,[6] which were exposed to the elements at Stanford. We thought *The Gates of Hell* were about finals week, with lots of falling failing students.

We drove back to the city around 8 p.m. It was a relaxing interlude, having attained a moment of perfect calm when sitting in the backyard with cacti, a glass of wine, and a UFO going by. It was coming in for a landing with the hypnotic force of something powerful bringing it all back home.

Jon is around twenty-eight and somewhat nervous with thinning hair, a good-looking guy from the open territories of North Dakota. There is a rifle on the wall in his room, and cow skulls and feathers in the living room (along with some demented album covers). There was a shotgun under the bed, a pistol in a safe, and all kinds of tools and equipment in the workroom. He has done a fair amount of acid, smokes marijuana every morning (a quick hit from a bong), and likes to put together polyhedrons (geometric crystals). It's a painstaking process.

He can hold his own on the drums and has a small drum collection, one or two of which he brought back from Thailand. He is not committed to drums or playing music, not like his roommate, an old friend from Nebraska. The Phantom is a longhaired sound technician who is stoned more often than not, and he can do the most laconic impression of a farmer.

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positive/negative switch at the atomic level. There was a curious dynamic with him and his wife. He is a slow methodic talker who was getting visibly impatient with his wife, who was chattering away about something. She didn't have much interest in physics. She even said, on the subject of industrial computer spies, "What could anyone find interesting about your work, dear?"

[6] A sculpture by Auguste Rodin (1840-1917)

Neither one of them is interested in girls from the Midwest, who they take for granted. The Phantom thought they overdo it with the dairy products. They're obsessed with Asian women, but it doesn't seem to be working out. The most recent evidence of that is Ming. She moved in nearly a year ago with a boyfriend and they broke up after a few months. After that she got the two roommates pretty twisted. It had been a relatively carefree household, but both of them fell for her. It was the sort of thing that would require some encouragement on her part, or else her very being is encouraging. She gravitates close to men to get to know them. I think she is psychologically nearsighted and has to get close to see what someone is made of. It might include going to bed with them, which doesn't necessarily mean anything. She slept with both of them on different occasions and for different reasons, and pulled back in both cases. It left a tangled mood in the house, even with the ex-boyfriend still coming around. That is one reason she went to Alaska.

Meanwhile, the Phantom wants to be her dog, while Jon is keeping to a sullen silence where she is concerned. I get along with both of them, but have more conversations with Jon. His father died a couple of years ago and he took it hard. He had his picture on the wall, a man who was a wild-life photographer who taught his son to hunt and take care of himself.

The two roommates were living in an Oakland warehouse when the earthquake hit in 1989. (They were near the elevated freeway which collapsed.) It shook them loose and they landed in this flat, where I have ended up because of a fire. I worked out a deal with the Phantom of the sound-room, splitting the rent with him to use his room. He is a nice

guy with long hair who likes to drink himself into oblivion (he has a lousy part-time job in the East Bay). He is twenty-nine and isn't making it as a sound technician.

Jon is more literate, and has an aptitude for being a mad inventor with an artistic side. He showed me pictures he had painted, incorporating a photo of himself naked and swimming through hallucinatory painted wavelengths. He is 80 percent drawn to women, and maybe 20 percent drawn to men. His older brother is homosexual, if that means anything. I was impressed with his execution of aesthetic ideas, having a lot of tools and equipment. I was taking a break from the written word and associating with people who are not inclined to write. They manifest their undercurrents and obsessions in other ways. Jon gets catalogues in the mail on transformers and resistors and other tools. He has a more applied mechanical approach than I do.

Neither one of them was impressed with my idea about mail-order brides from the Midwest for men on the West Coast.

Monday, March 22, 1993

I returned to the burn site, not going to work. My parents and one sister, the ex-sociologist, showed up.

More packing, with them throwing things into boxes. It was a mental effort on my part, with some haphazard supervising. I tried to fathom my possessions and arrange for their removal. It was nerve-wracking, going through piles of paper and writing, throwing away a lot of it, old notes which were crossed out, newspaper clippings, magazines. I tend to associate the written with substance, and have a hard time discarding it. I

stumbled through the archeological layers of papers and photos which I had forgotten and didn't want to lose.

It reminded me of how a fire can renew the woods, burning away a lot of underbrush. I was leaving behind a huge pile of stuff, and any future living arrangements would be different. The situation forced my hand, overriding the usual indecision. Why does one keep old magazines? *The New Yorker, Harpers*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Village Voice*, *The New York Review of Books*, even the *LA Weekly*. What is the point of keeping those around? Reference material? Maybe they will be interesting twenty years from now, like time capsules. *National Geographic* is good for cutting up and making collages, but how often do I do that?

It was a crash course in finding out how many things had accumulated over the years, much of which was dead weight in the apartment. It was stuff I hardly ever referred to or needed, it was just there, like an ontological ballast. When you focus on the necessities of life you realize how little you need to get by. I was hording things for various reasons, though often just careless or lazy. There were found objects which I thought I would use in photos, like a twisted bit of metal found in the gutter, or a Coleman lantern which was flattened by a truck.

Late afternoon we dropped off some things at the flat, then drove to Haight Street for dinner. My parents caught a plane to San Diego that evening. My father was turning sixty-five in a couple of days, which was a little obscured by all of this.

Tuesday, March 23, 1993

I was knocked out by a cold and didn't go to work. Someone thought the impact of the fire had something to do with it. I thought it had more to do with a couple of people coughing in the office last week. It managed to get a grip on my lungs for over a week, and I was coughing a lot. It took ten days until it was escorted out of my life on a smooth carpet of Robitussin.

Over the next couple of weeks I settled into this routine of temporary living arrangements. It was twice as far from work, but as they say, you can get used to anything. It is a saving grace, and an abysmal comment on the human race. I lived out of one room, which in no time was strewn with clothes and newspapers, a smoked typewriter on a couple of boxes, and some odds and ends in a box or two, reminders of the past which I had rescued from oblivion.

I realized how focused I had been, living alone in my apartment with a disciplined routine, gravitating around the typewriter. There was a metal typewriter in the morning and a metal typewriter at night. Whatever went on during the day was caught between those poles, with the polarized lines of force appearing on the page. Now I found it hard to concentrate. I wasn't used to living with roommates, walking into the kitchen and there are people there. It was distracting. At the same time, I was drifting. Your life is up in the air when things go up in smoke, and I was using the situation as a pivot. My old apartment had a hypnotic hold on me, having been there for a long time. I was cruising on automatic in ways I barely realized. When the building was rendered useless and deserted, I was on my own.

It was like a bomb went off and blew my private situation sky high. Hundreds of pieces would be falling and cohering into a working shadow of my former self over the next month or so, but not completely. Much of it was thrown to the wind.

One thing coming together in the near future was another apartment. Life was taking on a different shape, not to say location. It was almost mystical in that respect, sounding out a new neighborhood, the angles of exposure and light. It sounds so esoteric compared to the outcome. I found a place on the edge of the Tenderloin on Hyde and Ellis, the second or third place I looked at.[7] A large old building from 1926 with a lot of character. A studio on the third floor with wood floors, and a southern and eastern exposure with lots of sunlight.

There was a curious phenomenon. Having seen it once when I was shown around by the manager, a friendly older woman, I went back a week later to finalize it with a $200 deposit. I had thought long and hard about it, remembering the layout with lots of windows. I was thinking of the possibilities, mostly seen in passing on the street. It had a dramatic edge which was in keeping with how I felt about the fire. I wasn't in the mood for a quiet secure neighborhood reached by a long bus ride with little coffee shops nearby. I was reaching out in the midst of dire circumstances and touching the heart of the city, or the heart of darkness, depending what you think about that part of town. There are remnants of an old style, though some of the people are inglorious. It was more depressing than a threat, and finding something for a similar rent ($560) would not be easy.

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[7] I thought about the *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, with the latter a "murderous criminal" who would have been right at home in the Tenderloin. In 1880 the author of the book, Robert Louis Stevenson, was living on Bush Street a few blocks from where B. lives.

I thought about the place for several days, sketching a floor plan and wondering how much I could fit in there. It is a large studio with a kitchen on the side, and is half the size of my old place. It is more original than a modern box. When I returned with the deposit I was led upstairs on an iron elevator to see it again, and walking in I had a minor shock. After going there the first time the apartment had expanded in my mind (where apparently there is a lot of room) a good five feet in every direction. Seeing it again was a reality check, it was smaller than I remembered.

I returned to the neighborhood a week later after swimming. I wanted to see how it looked at night. It had more allure than during the day - fewer people on the streets, and the city lights had a strong effect. It was south of Geary and a short walk to the theater district (though a "theater of cruelty" in its own right). There were mystical-looking towers in the distance, and from one block to the next the atmosphere would alter. There were rich and poor segments of society within a few blocks of each other, and me with a floating mattress in the midst of it. I was moving to a part of town with higher buildings, daunting sightlines, and haunted residents. You walk a gauntlet of the social rejects. Here and there an idle hooker flaunts it like a fire sale.

You can live in a city for years, but your experience of it may be limited by where you work and where you live. Your routines will bend and form themselves around those circumstances. Move to another neighborhood and see the city all over again. It was ironic having fresh beginnings, like it's springtime in the Tenderloin.

But I wasn't there yet. I was holed up near the Haight for a month, and typing very little. I wrote a couple of long letters to Alaska, with Ming having called collect a number of times. Cold, wet, and lonely, but exuberant when she finally got there. There

were comments about our having trials by fire and ice. Having heard about the fire she was worried on the phone. “At least you weren’t hurt.” I heard that several times, but it never occurred to me. I had never been in danger. If I had gotten home an hour earlier, they would have had to drag me out with ropes, my arms full of old manuscripts and others thrown into the refrigerator.

Monday, April 5, 1993 (two weeks later)

In the evening I returned to the flat after work. Some of my things were piled up in the living room, including the record player. Someone told me the cat had knocked off the speaker and it didn’t work. Turned out the belt had come undone and we fixed it. Then there was a problem with the tone arm - the balance weight had disappeared. I found it and put it back on. A minute later we went from dysfunctional equipment to a fine guitar instrumental. One of the Phantom’s records, with John McLaughlin, Al Di Meola, and Paco de Lucia on acoustics. The musicians’ hands are quicker than the eye, and there are more notes than the mind can process - the amphetamine flurries of men with strings attached.

Tuesday, April 6, 1993

Early evening, Ming called from Homer, Alaska. She had called a few nights ago from a deserted phone booth. I assume it was deserted as during the conversation she announced she had to pee and couldn’t wait another minute. A few seconds later I heard the sound of water hitting the ground. Then she was back on the phone, “stuffing my situation” into layers of clothing.

She was talking fast, excited, in a pent-up rush. There were not many people to talk to, but she was relieved to be in Homer. Ming was not alone (there is a shortage of women up there). She could be dropped down almost anywhere and soon be meeting people. I am not so public in that respect, but those I connect with tend to last longer, for example in love affairs. She is more open when it comes to public encounters, but those connections don't go very deep. They are provisional or tied to the immediate circumstances.

Anyhow, her self-imposed ordeal of celibacy and isolation, which she had talked about, was not a matter of months or even weeks, but a few days. She met a couple of fellows at a hostel and was camping out with one of them, sharing a tent on the beach. They were woken at two in the morning by a high tide. He had a managerial job lined up in a couple of weeks, and could get her something if nothing else came up, working on a fishing boat. I think there was a trailer about five miles from Homer. They might have to hitchhike into town. She looked for a temporary waitress job and found one a couple of days later, wearing a blue uniform. The girl arrives in Alaska and in a few days has a job, a man, and some sort of housing lined up.

Maybe she's a magnet for the tangible and that can have a downside, as I've heard from her constant complaints. The tangible includes willing men, a job, nice clothes, and her own good looks. It also comes with hard knocks, physical problems, awful men, financial screw-ups, tension, and sore muscles. The intangibilities of love and music are eluding her.

I'm oversimplifying things according to my limitations, both perceptual and literary, and she's only twenty-three. I don't think an aptitude for music will materialize,

but other things might. Love is hard to pull into focus when you're drifting and experimental and confused by all the options. There was so much coming at her in the way of men. You see how clear and focused a man's life can be in that respect. The women don't come on to him like men will come on to women, and the latter is distracting. There are women who want some definition in their relationships, keeping track of who is who and what emotional frequency they're on. Ming's life is full of male attention and erotic variations, with as many different kinds of love as there is snow for Eskimos. It gets a little confusing when she says "I love you," and you're not sure of the nuance.

Meanwhile, she was weathering the clarities of the north, and found a provisional male companion who came with the territory as far as she was concerned. She has a package deal approach. A man is included with the background and the phase of her life and her financial situation. He might think that he's an individual, but she thinks in environmental terms. He is in for a few surprises, with the relationship more situational than personal (with "situation" being one of her favorite words).

Where was I, Tuesday night on the phone with her. She had spoken with one of the roommates. Jon was not talking to her. The Phantom was supposed to talk, having missed a couple of calls, but was being evasive.

An hour later, in my temporary room, I was reading the paper and he walked in looking disturbed. Did I want to hear about his ordeal last night? He seemed strung out, having gotten little sleep and then he went to work, a decent fellow who is preoccupied with music and perpetually broke. He spends a lot of time up the street with a few black men. An older fellow sits in his garage all day, watching people go by. The Phantom said

he used to be a pimp in Vallejo. He would listen to his stories, sharing a joint. In the same house was G., in his late thirties or early forties, on disability with a hurt leg from construction. He doesn't do much, a friendly drinker with a beat-up blue Cadillac. Another black man, Charles, forty-five, lives a couple of houses up. He is also on disability, a Vietnam vet who lives with his mother. He and the Phantom are drinking buddies. They remind me of Jim and Huckleberry Finn, with their friendship floating on a river of alcohol.

Charles has a younger half-brother, M., thirty-two, who is the scourge of the family – a con man and a hustler with an evil streak. There were often arguments and friction between them, although Charles was known for being a friendly guy who wouldn't hurt anyone. M. left, following an argument, or maybe he was shown the door. He returned with a baseball bat and attacked his half-brother. He didn't just threaten him or hit him once or twice, but whaled on him, head, back, shoulders, arms, legs, making sure to break or neutralize both arms so he couldn't defend himself. Charles could only crawl under the table, head bleeding, arms broken, back and shoulders thoroughly bruised.

This went on for fifteen or twenty minutes. There were a couple of women there, a sister and an ex-girlfriend, who were not sure what to do so they left. Then M. left. The police and ambulance were called, with M. on the run. The Phantom didn't know what to think. It didn't register in his mind how anyone could be so brutal, much less to a close relative. There was horror and disgust. He was worried sick that Charles might die or have permanent brain damage. The injured man would be laid up in bed for months with broken bones and bruises, including a concussion and a fractured skull.

Over the next day or two he would tell me things, how M. was on the loose and no one knew where he was, although he called his ex-girlfriend (who the Phantom knows) and said he would kill her if she talked. There was another brother living in town who the Phantom said wasn't scum, just rough. M. might prefer the police got him before that brother did. The police were another question, as in: what could they do? It's a classic dilemma when some black folks want nothing to do with the police, yet demand protection in their neighborhoods. It might require cooperating with the police and giving information, like where the bat boy is hiding.

The Phantom was gravitating in the direction of getting involved, like maybe he could find out where M. was. I said he better keep a low profile. If the guy was threatening his ex-girlfriend and willing to nearly kill his own half-brother, he wouldn't think twice about doing serious damage to a white man. The Phantom was puzzled by the lack of concern from the black neighbors who knew Charles, like G. for example. He was woken up that night by the Phantom and just went back to sleep. The next day he talked about it but was noncommittal, as if a natural force had struck like a tornado and there was nothing they could do about it. It seemed like a cold approach and the Phantom tried to understand it. Maybe G. didn't want to get involved. Maybe he figured that M. would get caught and there was not much he could do. Maybe he kept a tight grip on his own problems compared to those of others. I don't know. There was something here that I have heard and read about a number of times, the odd silence in the black community when it comes to black-on-black crime. You would think it was a symptom of bad weather – with the implication that there's nothing we can do, our own people don't know any better.

The flat I'm staying in is on the edge of a black neighborhood, a few blocks north of the Panhandle. It is indistinguishable from other old neighborhoods in this town, but there are regular reports of violent incidents. The drug dealers hang out at the bus stop at night. Around the block is a Zion Church, where people show up in their Sunday finest, a devout hard-working congregation.

Wednesday, April 7, 1993

I returned to the flat, early evening. In the communal kitchen I said I was going to the Exploratorium. It was open tonight, I hadn't been there in a year or two, and was getting restless in this place. A couple of the male roommates were interested but had other plans. The female roommate asked if she could go, a college student in her early twenties.

We took a bus through the Presidio woods, got out, and walked to the Palace of Fine Arts. She is half-Latina and a feminist who doesn't mind an occasional hit of pot.

It was a curious situation, sitting under a tree on a warm night with the scent of jasmine in the air. The columns holding up the open-air dome[8] were glowing as I opened a bottle of wine. It was a romantic setting with zero current between us. We were there for the science and went in after a few minutes. Ten minutes later I walked out alone, pulled out a half-joint, took a couple of hits under the dome, and went back in.

An hour later, closing time, we walked out feeling edified and diverted. Some experiments and exhibits were no longer there, including a stream of water falling in a

[8] It has an echo of the Greco-Roman and is tall as a fourteen-story building. It was part of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915 (though rebuilt since then).

black box. A strobe light broke the stream into drops of water which appeared to be levitating.

You're caught between your own subjective limitations and the objectivity of the exhibits. It reminds me of an interview with Gore Vidal. He referred to another writer as being "subjective and romantic," where he was more "objective and classical." I don't know if these distinctions are in high regard these days (Warhol said he didn't know what subjectivity meant, but he wanted to be a machine). I think it is a useful distinction, if only to pull you out of a subjective trance. It is a realm where you're the only authority and reference point. You go by your feelings, however shiftless and self-serving. Subjectivity is an opiate of the masses. It lures them from an objective outlook where, for example, there is evidence that would put the government in a bad light.

Some of this dovetailed with a conversation I had with the Phantom's roommate on Sunday afternoon when she struggled with a textbook. It was Kuhn on paradigms, the notion that knowledge and perception are limited by the cultural habits of one's milieu, the prevailing structures of thought and language. I said Foucault has written about it. She never heard of him. A few days later I read an article in *The New York Review of Books* about him (he died in 1984):

> … Foucault's concern with 'coupures' and his claim that new 'knowledges' or epistemes are brought into existence and imposed on us by a more or less political process very much resembled the project of T.S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

We left the Exploratorium and explored the surroundings, ending up by a plum tree near a pond. The huge rotunda was reflected in the water. A full moon hovered over the nearby houses. It was visible for a while before its reflection showed up in the water. Whatever we looked at had the reverb of a scientific experiment or display. The

wavelengths moving through the water. Glittering ripples. A little “shockwave” fanning out on both sides of a floating swan. The uncertainty principle of wooden branches. Three-dimensional columns. Diffraction and reflection. Constellations operating at the speed of light. Echoes. No wind. Smoke. The effect of wine on the neuro-psyche of a human being.

I leaned against a tree with the bottle, very relaxed. It wasn’t long before she wanted to leave. I was reluctant, but we walked under a dome of protected sound, an architectural vision with the moon suspended under an arch. We walked to a nearby street where a principle of physics was demonstrated by a vehicle in motion.

There was a bus stop in the Presidio woods. The hand-eye coordination of a driver pulling over when we showed up in his optic nerve. Floating in a seated position through the trees. Time was speeding up and slowing down, coming to a stop.

She said she preferred that some aspects of reality go unexplained. I’m not sure what those would be (she didn’t explain). I think that everything involving relationships has been dissected to the last quivering nuance, often by novelists and composers, but what do I know? Epistemological mysteries are found among the arbitrary epistemes and self-esteems. You lay it out on the page to find out what you know. In the process of writing you arrive at a further point.

Thursday, April 8, 1993

NOTES

> There was a metal object that floats in front of your eyes, looking solid, but you could put your fingers through it, clutching air. It was done with mirrors. There was an actual object, but it was not where you think it is.

A slide projector aimed an invisible beam at a black wall about six feet away. You don't see anything until you pick up a wand and wave it back and forth rapidly in front of the beam. The wand-blur is like a fan picking up the image being projected through the air. The image was the glowing dome outside.

A glass sphere full of gas. When it's heated you put your fingertip on the glass and the center shoots an erratic bolt of lightning. Hold it in both hands and you get the impression you are generating bolts of lightning between your hands.

A glass tank about chest high with tiny bubble trails in it. They slanted through the mist with subtle slow explosions or little sprays, like a particle colliding with something. I read the explanation a few times but missed some of the finer points. I think the alcohol fumes were heated and evaporating, then falling back and condensing. Cosmic rays were shooting through and leaving tiny bubble trails since they ionize with alcohol vapor. It was mesmerizing, all the more so in revealing a fact of life. Cosmic rays are flying through everything, including people, all the time.

I find revealed truths about the universe to be more absorbing and profound than old folk tales and superstitions. When the latter try to explain a lunar eclipse they fall short. Among the limitations of old myths is how much of the universe escapes their attention or ability to describe. Only the most obvious things are noticed and mythically explained. A frog is eating the moon, hence a lunar eclipse. We should scare it away with loud noises (the Khmer Rouge used their rifles), or throw a virgin off a cliff.

I thought a tank full of cosmic rays would make an interesting coffee table, with an electric cord to keep the alcohol vapor heated. I would put a glass of champagne on it.

There were many other displays in that "Museum of… Human Perception." Observe the electric signals generated by a nerve. Experiment with prisms and diffraction gratings. Electricity and magnetism are connected. An anti-gravity mirror. The momentum machine. Find out how a bouncing ball is like a population explosion. Experiment with echoes. Hear a friend whisper from forty feet away. Test your perception of weight and optical illusions. Move a 400-pound pendulum with a tiny magnet. Explore chaotic motion.

A dust tornado materializing like a water-spout and taller than a man.

The antenna of a moth as seen through an electron microscope. A lobster hooked up to wires with its nervous system giving off signals.

A ball suspended on a jet of air.

Smoking a joint is not uncalled for under the circumstances.

Tired in the office. I was up late the night before and nearly finished the wine, talking with Jon and the Phantom, then messing around with neo-poetic efforts on the typewriter.

6:30 p.m., the Attorney left, having arrived late. I almost decided against the pool, but he gave me a ride. It was a rejuvenating experience, not having been there in a few weeks. Slow going at first, but I managed to swim a mile. A few more laps, a couple of lengths underwater. It nearly took my breath away when I reached the shallow end and paused, glancing up. Two young women stood there in bikinis. Young and nubile, almost bouncing as they walked. Soon they were splashing around, and one was doing back-flips off the side and belly flopping.

There was a Chinese woman. I suppose you could say she was overweight, but sleek and with a certain grace. She wore a one-piece suit, large breasted with dark hair under her arms and swimming slowly. She was somewhat out of the norm, but conveyed more character than those norms are known for.

I left and took a hot shower. Passing a mirror it occurred to me I'm turning forty-one tomorrow.

Walking out into the night, refreshed, I went in the direction of where I will be living soon – down Sutter a few blocks, then left on Hyde a few more blocks with the neighborhood declining. I was intrigued by the views at night, which were more dramatic than I expected. A combination of the historical and the futuristic. 1926 colliding or colluding with 2026.

I walked a couple of blocks to Geary, where there was a theater letting out. I stood on the corner waiting for the bus. Two girls were hanging around a phone booth in their fuck-me outfits. There was a woman in a café who I saw a few days ago. She was having a meal with a man, both of them Latino. She was thin and bored, and seemed to be looking for someone, often staring away from him. He appeared to be having an earnest conversation with her, who was in her early twenties. He was in his late thirties or more. Who knows what they were discussing? He might have been a relative, a friend, if not a client. He might have been telling her to get off the streets, or conversely, to work harder. As a client he might have been trying to convince her to live with him.

I never liked the idea of going to a prostitute. It strikes me as cold-blooded and impersonal, and here I was surrounded by all kinds of them.

There was a conversation with Ming on how it's relatively easy for some women when it comes to getting laid, if that is all they're looking for and aren't too discriminating. She was an old hand at navigating the currents of male attention coming her way. It goes from men to women, and not so much the other way around (or if it does, it's more covert). A woman could stand up in a bar and announce she wants to go to bed with someone and chances are she will. A man could stand up in a bar and say the same thing all night long with no results. I said the equivalent for men is going to a prostitute and she agreed. In either case it is a one-night stand with a stranger, probably using condoms. Neither one is concerned about how many people the other has slept with. The transaction of the man and prostitute is cut and dry, with a clock for a chaperone, while the woman picking up a man might have all night and not have to pay for it. In either case, you never have to see that person again.

I took a bus back to the flat with a throbbing radio tower in the distance.

I finished the novel by De Lillo, *Mao II*. It ran out of steam, I thought, but it reminded me of J.G. Ballard at times. There was a conversation with a writer who has worked for years on a book which may never see the light of day. They are talking about another writer:

> "You admire her for doing work that often goes unseen. Work that describes a kind of mission, a dedication. Exactly what I've been urging you to do. Keep this book out of sight. Build on it. Use it to define an idea, a principle."
>
> "What principle?" Brita said.
>
> "That the withheld work of art is the only eloquence left."
>
> "This lamb is very nice," Bill said.

Friday, April 9, 1993

Woke up in the morning feeling rested and revived from the swim last night. No particular plans, except for not going to work. A holiday in honor of a desert prophet who was nailed to a tree around two thousand years ago. It was another disturbance in the Middle East. It coincided with the anniversary of my coming into existence. I wouldn't say the more years you're on earth the less significant they become. There are premonitions of mortality and how your time is limited, especially in terms of having your faculties intact and not too many soul-destroying compromises. I am more conscious now of time than when I was twenty. It felt like there were vast amounts of it to squander and it made me wander. I spread my nets as wide as possible, and later pulled them in for a closer look at what was caught in a net of interwoven months and years - thousands of glittering moments.

I used the occasion to stretch out on the typewriter, which I hadn't done over the last few weeks. I had it going in that crowded room for hours and it wouldn't quit. Sitting at the foot of the bed, cross-legged, the typewriter on a couple of boxes which held my clothes. Six or seven pages, single-spaced, a couple of thousand words.

Mid-afternoon, relaxing with the guitar. It's a hand-held rehabilitation when I'm worn out by the stress and strain of language.

The Phantom dropped by. We sat in the kitchen – I had cleaned a table. The female roommate was inhaling her usual bong hits. She was close to being an alcoholic, but quit a year or two ago. Now she smokes pot, and had some speed last week. I didn't want any. The male roommates get up in the morning, take a few hits off a bubbling bong, and go to work. No way I could do that. Jon uses it to calm his nerves, but maybe it makes him more on edge.

The windows were full of moving sunlit branches. There was half a ton of plants inside, a kitchen/living room with bizarre objects, pictures, and a few skull/feather fetish items. A large photo of the empty terrain of North Dakota. Strange old album covers on the wall. Almost all of it was there because of Jon, and he was in the process of moving out. He was headed for the wine country a couple of hours north of here (I wrote "her"), a town called St. Helena. He might rent a trailer on forty acres, and provide his own electricity. He is tired of the city and women. The character of the room was losing something with his things coming down.

The women were stoned and getting silly. The Phantom walked in and asked for a smoke. I was getting a contact high. One of them said, "You're no more than welcome."

Then they left. I was suddenly alone, late afternoon. I went across the street to a crowded market with a coffee shop. Fellini would have appreciated the profusion of life in there. I saw a mature black man, well dressed, playing the lottery.

Returning with a turkey club sandwich I watched the 5:30 news, like a glimpse of history interrupted by non-historic commercials. If people tend to be conservative and irrational (a fascist belief), it might explain commercials.

Jon arrived around 6:30, having driven back that afternoon from St. Helena. I had a gift certificate from my sister for a bookstore. Did he want to go? Sure. We drove to A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books near the Civic Center. I loitered for an hour, then decided on a couple of art books. Hieronymous Bosch and Frida Kahlo. He got something on Max Ernst, while hesitating over Man Ray.[9]

Books I want to read: *Culture of Complaint* by Robert Hughes. *Clockers* by Richard Price. *Kitchen* by Banana Yamamoto.

We returned to the flat around eight, sitting at the kitchen table. I opened a bottle of wine. He handed me the blue bong and the evening took off with a life of its own. I kept this birthday business under my hat and didn't say anything about it. Things were orchestrating themselves rather well, considering that two party girls were out of town, Ming and B., one in Mexico, the other in Alaska. I thought of the party last year when they were in the apartment, along with my girlfriend and some others. Now I had no girlfriend or apartment, but was feeling no pain.

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[9] I'm surprised he didn't show more interest in a man who made erotic photographs, as well as *Object to be Destroyed* (1933 version). "Cut out the eye from a photograph of one who has been loved but is seen no more. Attach the eye to the pendulum of a metronome and regulate the weight to suit the tempo desired. Keep going to the limit of endurance. With a hammer well-aimed, try to destroy the whole at a single blow." Emmanuel Radnitski, aka Man Ray.

Frida Kahlo (1907-1954): the self-portrait of her naked from the waist up, wearing a back brace, her skin torn open from her throat to her waist revealing a broken Roman column for a spine and nails in her flesh. That goes a long way **in supporting a** concept I'm ambivalent about, that beauty is pain.

How much did she suffer from the infidelities of Diego Rivera? Her injuries from a streetcar accident left her with a sore back and pelvis, and she was unable to bear children. Did that compromise their relationship? He was instrumental in supporting and promoting her artwork. His career was well on its way when he met her at twenty-one. At one point her own sister slept with him, but she held her own in terms of extramarital affairs, from Trotsky to Dolores del Rio (I think).

In family photos when she was around eighteen, a formality in the 1920's, she has her hair pulled back and is wearing men's clothes. Her father was a Hungarian Jew[10] who moved to Mexico and married a traditional woman of "mixed Spanish-Indian origin." Frida was closer to her father. She came to San Francisco around 1930 with Rivera, who painted a mural at the Art Institute.[11] It is over the hill from where I used to live, and shows him from behind, sitting on a scaffold with his paintbrush. There was a wonderful mural in Rockefeller Center which the owners destroyed because it had a picture of Lenin in it.[12]

The two of them had Communist sympathies, which is putting it lightly. Free enterprise didn't look so good during the Depression, and many were still optimistic

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[10] I found out later that she lied about her father. He was German and a Protestant, but the Third Reich gave Germans a bad reputation, so she may have wanted to hide where he came from.
[11] *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City* (1931)
[12] *Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future* (1932)

about Soviet communism. It was brutal though. Most people were supposedly in the dark about what was going on in the Soviet Union, but she was still in the mood for deifying Stalin in 1954. What did she think happened to Trotsky, an ice pick fell from heaven?

Her anti-Americanism was something which Diego Rivera had no time for. He was impressed with the realities of progress in the United States, while she recoiled into a neo-mythic realm that bordered on clichés, like the painting of herself on the border between the U.S. and Mexico in a pink dress. The former was conveyed as a cold industrial death from coast to coast (in the 1940's), as if the Rocky Mountains had been leveled for a parking lot. San Francisco couldn't have been too traumatizing in the 1930's. Her outlook doesn't hold water. She thought that Mexico was the embodiment of the forces of life, and yet death is a preoccupation there (see *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950) by Octavio Paz), and sugar skulls are the least of it. The native populations have been suppressed. Mexico has one of the more corrupt systems in the world. Four students were shot in this country during a demonstration (in 1970), while several hundred protesters were shot in Mexico City (in 1968). Frida Kahlo's hometown has some of the worst pollution in the world, though it wasn't as bad when she was alive.

Her paintings erase whatever I think of her political opinions. She included realistic glimpses of her life in a dream-like setting, like herself after a miscarriage. There are delirious images around her bed, with allegorical and scientific versions of what happened, along with blood. What woman, or man for that matter, ever painted the moment they emerged from between the legs of their mother? There are insinuations of a female orifice in some of her compositions, vulva forms which echo those of George O'Keefe.

If a man had painted those I wonder what the feminists would have said. What do you mean associating women with monkeys and lace and cunt-like flowers? Not to mention blood and milk, and those unfortunate allusions to a woman with undying love for a man (Rivera), to the extent his image appears on her forehead like an apparition.

Meanwhile, I was sitting around with Jon. There were books on Bosch and Ernst on the table. Bebop on the radio. Wine and smoke. We were talking as we sometimes do, having some historical/genetic parallels. His background is Norwegian. My mother's parents were born in Denmark and my father's background is English (with some Swedish and German). They're from the northern Midwest where I lived for a few years as a kid. I was not as isolated as him. Jon's father took it to an extreme. He was somewhat anti-social and would spend days in the wilderness, tracking or waiting for something to photograph. I said my father is the opposite. He is very social, and the concerns of society would sometimes overshadow those of his wife and kids. He is a minister (now semi-retired), and it wouldn't have worked if he avoided people.

The conversation was all over the place. Jon is good with machines. I asked him how electricity works, how it is generated by revolving magnets and a wire. He tried to explain it, but no light bulb showed up on my head.

We talked about the modern phenomenon of tons of metal hurtling through your life. It comes within feet or inches of you every day on the street. What effect does that have on your psyche? It has only occurred in the last half century. During the history of the human race we were confronted with nothing quicker than a horse running by or the occasional stampede.

We were talking about other things when a couple of people dropped by who I met before. They are in their late twenties. J. has long straight hair and is sort of gruff, loud, and not very tall. He is from what he calls the industrial white trash part of Michigan. He is stoned a lot and has some sort of financial job. His girlfriend is quiet and friendly from upstate New York. Dark hair, average looking, nubile in a low-cut blouse. Turns out she is diabetic, and shoots up several times a day.

After they left, Jon and I wondered where the Phantom was. We were supposed to be in the sound-room and it was nearly midnight. We went down there to see if we could figure out the switches and wires since he had it channeled through a soundboard. We found him sleeping on the floor, and he had been there for hours.

He woke up and Jon disappeared. He hooked up the equipment and I strapped on a Les Paul (a copy of a 1959 model, a flame-top – he paid $1500 for it a few years ago). I get along with it extremely well. Having it in my hands for the next two or three hours was the best present I could ask for. Talk about an amplified presence.

During our session the Phantom experimented with the vocals on the microphone, sounding dream-like, while I made like the survivor of a train wreck. The Phantom had arranged the tape equipment, but was having technical difficulties. He disappeared for a while, leaving me in that dismal room, but thoroughly wired on an electric guitar.

I finally quit, exhausted, nearly three in the morning with my fingers sore, and went upstairs. He went back down to sleep. I put the tape in a boom-box, turned it on and sat there with a little wine, a cigarette, and coffee. The pros and cons of stretching out without a drummer while you're under the influence. It was not-so-good recording equipment, sounding murky and clumsy at first, but it picked up. A continuum was

clarified, with sonic structures forming in mid-air. Sometimes it rarified itself, with swells of sound washing back and forth between the poles of heaven and earth. The nimble limbo of a moody mortal.

4:00 a.m., I turned on the tube. World War II, a man escorting an elephant across the Alps while being hunted by the Germans. It was similar to a mood I'm often in, between the deadly and the whimsical.

5:30 a.m., I went into the room, still not ready to call it a night. I read for a while until my birthday lost consciousness.

Saturday, April 10, 1993

Woke up at noon, and was something of a wreck from the night before.

2:00 p.m. I walked to the burned-out building by way of the Presidio woods. 3½ miles on a lovely afternoon. Curious how the old neighborhood seems vacant or uninteresting.

I sat in an overstuffed smoked chair in the front room. The place had an atmosphere of desolation, clutter and disruption like you wouldn't believe. Ashes to ashes. I read the paper, and then got down to it, a last-ditch effort to ransack the shelves and closet, going through piles of old papers and throwing out most of it. There was a refrain running through my head: not "all of me," but "all of it." Cut your losses, throw away your psycho-residential deadweight ballast.

I was there for several hours. Took a break and wandered through the building on the top floor. A dead abandoned structure with doors open to other apartments, whether burned or gutted. Piles of abandoned clutter and garbage. I urinated in someone's living

room on a broken mirror. The plumbing had been shut off. Someone had a closet full of books (the girl next door).

I left when it was getting dark, and could barely find my way down the stairs. The bus took me to the flat around eight. My shoulder bag was loaded with more odds and ends and papers, including a smoke-damaged map of New York City.

Tired. I had figured on a quiet evening, reading with the opera on.

The Czech woman called around nine. She lives in the Haight, so we're closer now. She said she was bored out of her mind, let's do something. Since we have contrary minds or spirits – one reason we never had a real affair – it took some doing to agree on something, especially since I wasn't in the mood for going out. I finally thought, what the hell, it's a nice night.

I went out about ten-thirty, walking six or seven blocks to the Haight and waited on a wooden bench. She arrived ten minutes later, looking like she had done herself up a little. It doesn't take much to bring out her finer points: a little eye shadow, some lipstick, with short hair, leather jacket, and jeans. Thirty-one and restless in her exile on Haight Street. There was some question of where to go. There were friends of hers at Café du Nord, so we got into a cab and suddenly were in motion in the back seat, a forward rush.

The club is near the Castro and cost two dollars each. You go down the stairs to an old-fashioned wood-lined room with mirrors. It was crowded with a semi-eccentric bunch of people. Off to the side against the wall were Lavay Smith & Her Red-Hot Skillet Lickers. Clarinet, bass, drums, piano, trombone, and sax, with her in a black dress, short black hair, and an easy-going manner from the south. A younger woman doing

Bessie Smith, “I want a little sugar in my bowl…,” or swinging and swaying through an instrumental, a smiling Lady Lavay.

I met up with the Czech woman’s friends against a mirror, not in the mood for seeing my reflection. I was acquainted with E., and we got along better than ever. She is a psychologist in her late thirties with a warm sardonic manner, reaching over for a kiss on the cheek which was soft and warm. E. has the memory of a European, a Jewish blonde from Sweden who speaks five languages and has lived in countries from Israel to Chile. She has a Chilean boyfriend, a “monster,” who wasn’t there tonight. She was there with a couple of Chilean women who were a little more bourgeois, one of them with a man. Half an hour later E. had him against the wall with her hand in his shirt. I think they knew each other. She knew what she was doing, though he looked a little uncertain.

The place was crowded, even the back room with lounges and a pool table. I stood for a while, leaning against the wall, having an Anchor Steam, my legs tired. The Czech woman was animated, talking to me, leaning close, excited, like she was happy to be there and not in her dreary basement. The sound was terrible, though Lavay Smith wasn’t far away. They took a break. It was an hour before we found a table, not far from the band. We sat down and the rest of the evening stood up. The band was doing old southern tunes, “St. Louie Blues,” with the shoulder of her dress slipping down.

We left around one in the morning, with E. driving her beat-up sedan, a woman with so much character she seems eccentric. The Czech woman too, for that matter, and I was in heaven with their accents. They dropped me off at the flat.

Sunday, April 11, 1993

Around noon I went out with my guitar in a case, a shoulder bag with photos of the burn, and took a bus to the Ferry Building. The downtown was semi-deserted.

I caught a ferry, sitting alone at the bow as it pulled away from the city, backing up and turning around and heading slowly towards the East Bay. It paused for a barge to go by, then turned north, hitting the acceleration for what turned out to be a quick ride to Larkspur. It was windy on the bow and after a while I was blown to the stern. I watched the city receding in the distance. Curving sails were leaning on the water. The occasional freighter in slow motion. Angel Island was calm, it is thick with trees and there are hidden coves.

An hypnotic swaying ride on the water. A couple of gulls followed the boat. The Richmond Bridge to the north with its girders in the air. We drifted past San Quentin, which isn't going anywhere. A day commemorating when a prophet rose from the tomb after rolling away the stone. The convicts would prefer their iron doors would open, maybe if they had the Holy Ghost on their side.

Docking with no pier pressure. I called Michael, who was cooking the entire meal. The Actress was singing somewhere for old people, and I caught a cab to their house in the hills.

I hung around with him in the kitchen. He was preoccupied, being a professional chef - also a good tennis player, about thirty-two. He had me do a few things I couldn't do much harm to, like peeling potatoes and breaking mushrooms.

The Actress came home and others started arriving, ten or fifteen in all. She acted like this was a play where the director stages a happy crowd or party scene and tells everyone to live it up. I don't mean she was pretending, but whatever she does is

informed and amplified by her time on stage. Like someone who writes every day, it has an effect on how they act.

Among the people there were Michael's brother, forty-two, and his female companion, a French woman who was ten years older than him. Both of them had a certain originality, with him a professional cellist (a year at Julliard) who paints and writes musicals. Michael thought he was brilliant, and felt overshadowed in his younger days. I thought I had a lot to talk about with his brother who was so preoccupied with abstract expression that his hair and clothes were generally ignored, but I didn't and I don't know why. I was a little at odds with the gathering. I knew a couple of the women, but the others were people the Actress knew from work. She used to hang out with a wilder crowd of actors and musicians, but that fell apart a year or two ago. She is fairly headstrong, and Canadian for what it's worth.

Meanwhile, she was mixing an odd drink, an interpretation of a gin fizz (wrote "fix"), which probably didn't help. I don't drink that sort of thing very often.

The meal was what you might expect from a professional with a light touch. There were ham and sliced potatoes, spinach in a sauce, asparagus with a raspberry vinaigrette, and a lemon tea cake which would have had one or two of the women proposing marriage if he wasn't engaged to the Actress. On arriving home and seeing everything he was doing, she said, "The ham isn't in yet?!"

However, she has loosened up after their last big falling out, and now lets him drink and have an occasional cigarette on the balcony. I spent more time out there than I should have, staring at the trees on a nearby hill. One of his sisters showed up, a big-boned blonde in a filmy outfit. It barely covered her breasts which were substantial.

Unfortunately, she had a headache, got a ticket on the way here, and wasn't in a good mood.

I had a few, mostly superficial, conversations. People started leaving around seven. A core bunch was left around the time I would have been more relaxed and playing guitar. The Actress, having had a few drinks, was in the mood for the blues, but one of the women driving back to the city was my ride and she was on her way out.

We hit some traffic on the way back, three miles from a long suspension bridge, which only lengthened the conversation. Brigid has an edge to her, and maybe a chip on her shoulder. A feminist rancor, quick to criticize, with an inherent discontent. There was some "trouble" finding a man. I think men have some trouble finding her, especially if they fall short of what she has in mind, or are put off by the intelligence of a woman from New York. Well educated with a good job and living alone, she is firmly or neurotically devoted to her own autonomy.

Her ancestors are Irish, her parents are intellectuals, and she studied Asian history. There were complaints about how much she spent in taxes ($13,000, about what I made last year), though she has a sense of humor and loves the blues. A short woman with short blonde hair and a good figure, but something is a little off in her life. That can happen when a woman sees through a lot of men, or is easily bored with them. She won't go to bed with just anyone. I didn't inquire as to the nature of her love life or the lack of it, or why she has so much resentment. She has more amenities and freedoms and inventions than women (or men) have had since Homo sapiens first evolved. It's hard to be a princess, and it's lonely at the top - living on the West Coast with Manhattan in the

back of her mind, but the latter is impossible and California doesn't cut it for some people. Who knows what evolution lurks in the hearts of women?

There was something we touched on in the conversation**.** It can be a minefield when you're talking with a business-like woman, but as far as I know I wasn't being offensive. She asked if I was going to the show on Thursday night. We talked about women having to guard their autonomy. Brigid seems to be a lonely guardian of her independence, like she has to horde it, even if it's choking off the life in it.

There are modern women who are martyrs to the cause. They are in their twenties, making $50,000 a year with a car, an apartment, birth control, and don't have to answer to any man. Throw in a vibrator and a dog and they're all set. And yet they have an attitude of being oppressed. It minimizes having to be grateful for the insulated comfort of their lives.

They worry their autonomy could vanish if they let their guard down by falling in love, but something in them is eroding and it feels like a hollow victory. It's only human, wanting to be with someone. You are vulnerable if you're in love, and they have been trained, I won't say brainwashed, to be invulnerable and live in a shell like a hermit crab. They are surrounded with glass, cement, and high-speed metal. They live alone with touchy intellects that move at a higher speed than the heart, so the two are often out of sync.

I was dropped off in the Presidio and caught a bus, returning to the flat around nine. No one was home, except for Jon. He was slumped in a chair in the kitchen, head down, passed out. His manic dog was barking when I walked in to make coffee. He finally came around, though acting a bit erratic. I thought he might be on something. It

turned out he had half a bottle of vodka (750 ml), beginning in the afternoon. He also had some wine. He was enthused that someone was there to talk to. He sloshed some vodka into a root beer mug, about four inches, with an inch of orange juice. I took a sip and decided to remix it.

It is something what a quintessential drunk he is. It reminds me of my ex-girlfriend, not just the slurred and difficult redundant conversations, or the wild enthusiasms - even jumping around - which fade. He was also getting chummy and confessional. He pulled his chair over and related with some relish his relations with an old girlfriend. I think the point of the story was how much he likes being abused by a woman – hit and slapped while in bed. A woman gave him a black eye.

He used to be a womanizer. Now he is bemoaning the old days when sex was easy to come by. There was not a risk of acquired immune deficiency syndrome. The big chill has been cramping his style, but getting older may have something to do with it.

He admitted the last five or six months have been one of the harder phases he has been through, being estranged from Ming. That was when their friendship as roommates heated up and then misfired. It left him walking around in a bad mood for months and not talking to her, who still lived in the next room. There was not a steady stream of men going in and out of her bedroom, but maybe a few.

I wouldn't say he is a victim if it takes two to tangle up a situation. He ran into her contradictions like a warm sweet buzzsaw of the discontinuous. I'm going by the after-effects. He never talks about her, and doesn't come to the phone when she calls from the frozen north.

Meanwhile, the Phantom walked in, vaguely amused at Jon's condition, though he's used to it. They go back a long way, and he is also known for drinking himself into oblivion. "He's plowed," he said. The Phantom fell for Ming as well, but managed to regain his equilibrium after a while. Part of the dynamic here is she is attuned to men and likes to be one of the guys. Her ratio of male-to-female friends is six to one. She tends to draw men in with an easy familiarity, ready to drink or jump on a motorcycle at the drop of a hat. At the same time, she exudes the qualities of a seductive woman: a knock-out figure, with curves and sensuality up the butt, as she would say, while being conversational and concerned about her friends. Some might think they stumbled on a rare hybrid, and she is learning how to cook.

There's a double whammy though. She can draw men in with a tomboy vibe, but doesn't mind using the opposite sex. When a man thinks it feels like love she pulls the rug out, like she only wanted to try him out.

A few days later I was on the phone with Tanya (one of her few woman friends) who was annoyed. Ming called her from Alaska and wanted her to check up on a couple of men to see how they were doing, as if wanting her to clean up some emotional messes she left behind. Tanya had no patience for it. She has gone six months or more with no sex, and hears Ming with her vows of celibacy and leading the pure uncomplicated life, which lasted about a week. Most of that time was on a bus, leaving behind an ex-boyfriend and two roommates who she slept with a few times. After a day or two in Anchorage she met some fellow in a hostel.

Tanya has been a close friend of hers for years (she is black and Swedish, with some Native American, and built like a linebacker with a powerful thirst for beer). She

either feels sorry for the men who fall for Ming or thinks they're fools. She also said, "Women are bitches," like it's something I should know by now. Some of them are fucking men on a mindless basis, maybe with a short attention span or multiple personalities, and switching gears so fast the men don't know what hit them or why the women aren't responding later on. An androgynous autonomy means never having to say you're sorry, and it's open season on men. I don't think that's anything new, especially when the men are seen as useful idiots. It's just that in recent times women have a wider range in which to operate, while excusing it as men getting their just due. If they hold onto an aura of suffering it justifies their using men for anything they can get.

This reasoning is lost on some guys, since very few have been oppressing women for centuries. Some are only in their twenties, in fact.

Where was I? Sunday night, not sure what Jon was going to do. There was some notion of going down to the sound-room, but he finally stumbled to his room and disappeared, having gone through a love-hate soliloquy with his dog.

10:00 p.m. I turned on the tube for a program on degenerate art according to the wholesome folks in the Third Reich.

Thursday, April 15, 1993

6:00 p.m. I took the bus up Nob Hill to the Fairmont Hotel and went in looking for a cocktail lounge with artificial rain (the Tonga Room). I rendezvoused with several women, including the Actress (who was quitting her job) and Brigid, who gave me a ride the other night.

I had a beer. Others were having frou-frou drinks, while Brigid had a serious vodka tonic. I said that with the rain and thunder and hokey statues there might be a virgin sacrifice. One of the women replied, “No virgins around here.” Brigid said, “Speak for yourself.”

We were there for the New Orleans Room and she was adamant about going early. The blues singer Charles Brown was appearing. We went upstairs and found the room almost empty. A dark luxurious bar with a black leather armrest. The women had more drinks. I waited, but eventually had an Irish coffee. Lined up at the bar there were four women talking nonstop in groups of two. I was the odd man out and remained that way, though a couple left before the music started.

Charles Brown walked in. Friendly, conversational, a tall black man with large hands, wearing a yachting cap and a jacket of metallic shiny turquoise. He was down-to-earth and mellow as molasses, talking with a guy a few seats down, an obsequious man who turned out to be a photographer.

I had been hesitant about staying, thinking this wasn’t my style, but something held me there. Brigid said he was getting old and how long would he be around, a living blues legend. He looked pretty good for a man of seventy.

8:00 p.m., the first set ($10 added to the tab). It went on for over an hour, by which time I was captivated. He did “Fool’s Paradise” and “Driftin’ Blues.” “Well I’m drifting and I’m drifting… like a ship out on the sea…I ain’t got nobody in this world to care for me.” There was something about bad whiskey and someone sinking in quicksand over a woman. This is the man who sang “Merry Christmas Baby,” a tune I sometimes have in my head when I’m feeling sonic and sardonic.

It was edifying and enjoyable. He played with such relish, sitting at the piano and turning towards the audience to croon into the mic, hardly looking at what his hands were doing on the keyboard. He would take his hands off the keys, then put them back on without looking. He could move up and down the keyboard at will. Some of this you might expect since he has been polishing his act for half a century. He would say, “I recorded this tune in 1946.” The room had filled up by then. It’s an intimate lounge, holding less than a hundred people.

The sidemen were not too shabby and included a woman. It was a reality check for those who are used to other forms of music, like a stoned twenty-year-old with a two-fisted three-chord grip, strumming madly and screaming. This was something else. A small blonde on standup bass was holding her own in a tuxedo, though the tunes were on the slow side. An older black man on drums. A middle-aged black man on tenor sax. A white man in his thirties on guitar who could do anything he wanted - light-fingered isn’t the word. After a while I felt, with respect to my guitar, like I should put more effort into singing.

The tunes were structured around the vocals, with the guitar going off on a quiet solo, followed by a well-spoken saxophone with nothing too wild. Towards the end a white man joined them, sitting in for a number with a small tenor sax, and when he hit his stride there was a little more velocity. I was in my usual quandary about a formless complicated music versus songs with a more defined structure. They often have more impact than a blur of notes. The emotional impact can be lost, being more abstract. Black men have generally led the way when it comes to blowing a blizzard of note progressions

through a European horn. You would think it would silence any white assumption that black people aren't complex.

They took a break. A black man in a suit was sitting next to me and we started talking. There was some mention of his being fifty, and speculating how old Charles Brown was, being in such good shape. He had a low regard for rap songs.[13] A few minutes later Charles Brown wandered over to the bar. I said we should ask him about his secret of self-preservation. I'm not sure how it happened but he was soon standing in front of me, talking with this man and directing some of it in my direction. He told stories and gave advice and held my arm to emphasize a point. Eventually I mentioned his being well-preserved, and he was more than willing to talk about it. He was never much for smoking or drinking, and he watched his diet (I was going to ask about "bad whiskey," but decided not to).

There was some mention of Billie Holiday. I wanted to ask about her. I was talking with a man who had known her, but someone distracted the conversation. You don't have Charles Brown all to yourself in a club. Anyone can walk up, say hello and pay their respects. An older black woman got him embroiled in a domestic conversation, maybe a relative, talking about who passed and who is still around. The people in his family live past eighty or ninety, although prone to some malady, I forget what.

Then who walked in but Miles Mellough, the white DJ with a show on KUSF, Be-Bop and Beyond. I've been listening to his show for years. He has a low raspy voice, and sounds like a drunk old beatnik with a potbelly and a beard, but he's in his mid-

[13] The lead guitarist for the Grateful Dead, Jerry Garcia, said it isn't music.

thirties, tall and gaunt and clean-shaven. He came right up and got the ear of Mr. Charles Brown. I think they have met before.

The two women I was with at the bar had been going head-to-head with a non-stop dialogue. One of them invited me here. They were not responsible for my having a good time, and maybe they were making sure I knew that, but imagine the situation in reverse. Two men sitting with a woman and they ignore her completely. Most men would include her in the conversation, though she might be bored to tears (and ready for the blues). They were diverted from their conversation when Charles Brown walked up.

I thought of the sweetness of the man, compared with Public Enemy, and wondered if they live in the same country. He has known far more in the way of segregation and hardship, having been born in 1922, and they made more money than he ever did. He was touring in the 1950's with an increasing lack of opportunities in clubs. His career was run off the road by rock and roll, and he ended up working for a while as a janitor. Rap music has the anger, and anger is an energy (as Johnny Rotten said), and energy sells. I should also consider what parts of the country they come from. It might have something to do with molding character, a small town in Texas versus New York City. A slow-paced time before the war compared with a post-war terror dome.

When the second set began the club wanted another $10. I finished my coffee and whiskey and walked out, feeling fine. I meandered through a luxurious lobby past the chair where Humphrey Bogart had a few words with a gunsel in *The Maltese Falcon*.

It was downhill from there, walking down to Geary. I stopped at a payphone to call B., who lives nearby, but there was no answer (she was still in Mexico). The whores were out in force. I walked a couple of blocks and waited on the corner for a bus. I

noticed two women across the street who lured the drivers with demure movements and a lot of leg. One was black, the other Latina. A few minutes later, one commenced to cross the street, coming up slowly behind me and asking in a low voice, "You want a date?" I turned to her and started singing, "I'm living in a fool's paradise…" (not really).

I had seen her coming, with a body poured into a tight white dress. She had thick black hair, a little on the sullen side or business-like, this being her business. I turned and said, "Thank you, but I'm going home. Maybe some other time." She drifted away. I had a sense of not wanting to offend her which is kind of odd, all things considered. It is common for a man to approach a woman with a similar suggestion and be cut dead. This was different, and the life she had was hard enough without adding to it.

I walked across the street to the bus-stop and the black woman walked past me. I was now a non-entity, having seen her friend get nowhere. Women who work on the street and stand there for hours have a fine-tuned radar for what's going on around them, making rapid character judgments as a survival instinct, and it's good for business – being able to recognize a man who's in the mood. They were in their fuck-me outfits which were meant to tantalize and show them off. On second glance, I had the feeling they were not so figuratively blessed - which is probably beside the point if you are looking for some quick relief.

I rode out to the flat, ready to tell someone I talked with Charles Brown, but no one was there.[14]

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[14] Reminds me of a night in 1971: a couple of friends drove from San Pedro to downtown Long Beach to pick me up. I was under the influence (mescaline) and had just seen Captain Beefheart in an old theater (I had gone with a friend, but he disappeared). They couldn't find me, but saw Little Richard getting into a limo and he waved, which made their night.

Friday, April 16, 1993

I went swimming after work. The usual workout, one mile. While waiting for the bus I was propositioned by a prostitute. I returned to the flat around nine. Jon was half drunk with the Phantom. It took a while for us to get to the sound-room.

The minute I have a Les Paul in my hands I'm in a jet stream. The others take breaks and stand around in the garage, but they leave me hooked up and continuing. I can't let go. It's the audio equivalent of vodka, cigarettes, and cocaine. I don't need anything else, and it went on for hours.

Saturday, April 17, 1993

Late afternoon, I drove to the studio on Hyde with Jon and the Phantom, unloading a few things.

I went to the corner store and bought a six-pack of Becks and we sat around for a couple of hours in a near-empty apartment, having hooked up the stereo. The Phantom was a little sarcastic about my wanting to live here instead of at his place, considering the neighborhood. It looked to him like a run-down inner-city situation with whores and derelicts everywhere. I think it's relative, and Jon liked it. He was enthusiastic, but then he has a sure-let's-jump-off-a-cliff mentality about some things, as long as it's a cliff of some interest or originality. They were both distracted by the streetwalkers, staring wide-eyed at a Filipino transvestite strutting his or her stuff in lurid makeup.

They hung out the window at one point, wanting to expose themselves, and noting the pretty Vietnamese girls who live in the neighborhood. The Phantom thought he saw a half-naked woman in a nearby window, but it turned out to be a man. He also asked if I would change the opera to something else, so I found some old rhythm and blues, and we hung around talking. I was trying to get used to the place, the feel of it. They bought more beer, which they drink like water.

We left around eight or nine and drove back to the flat. Some people came over, including J., who joins us in the sound-room once in a while, usually stoned or drunk, and his younger brother who was larger with a blunt presence, another hard drinker. At the moment it was cheap beer and wine, which I never understood the point of. He had a girlfriend who was touching him all night, sitting on his leg with her arm around his neck, feeling his stubble. She was thin and had a look of privilege to her, very smooth, with a perfect appearance in a sweatshirt. Turned out she grew up in Palm Springs – her name was Summer – and they were students at an exclusive acting school in Los Angeles. She was seventeen. I had the feeling she could talk, and we had a few words, but the conversation was run off the road by him and the others.

We finally went down to the sound-room where we had a small audience. When I'm plugged in I forget about everything. Eventually I handed the guitar to the Phantom so the actor could hear him play. He used to live with his brother downstairs. They would wrestle and people could hear them crashing around on the floor below. The Phantom made a half-hearted attempt to stir up some spirits in the amplifier. He can do a good rendition of rock and roll overkill with a little bombast, rhyming with a bomb blast, but he's more inclined to an electric soft impressionism when he isn't too drunk to hold an

instrument. He thinks I play like Johnny Winter, not that Johnny Winter has anything to worry about.

1:00 a.m. I went upstairs. People were hanging around, but I retired for the evening.

Sunday, April 18, 1993

There was a play in Berkeley at two in the afternoon, *In the Best Interest of Anna Freud* (by Richard Katz). My old friend the Actress was playing the lesbian companion of Anna Freud (I wrote "Fraud", a Freudian slip), a childless and apparently uncredentialed expert on child psychology. She thought children should be put through analysis, making them neurotic and self-conscious as soon as possible, either brainwashed or with broken spirits. At any rate, with her in control. She took over the children of Dorothy Tiffany Burlingham (played by my friend) in the 1920's, whose husband was left behind. He was given no visitation rights for his kids, and eventually killed himself. The two oldest kids killed themselves when they were thirty or forty.

The author had an agenda here, having been refused visitation of his son between the ages of six and twelve (a male judge). It was said to be in the "best interest" of the boy. He wanted to trace that insidious mentality which puts dubious experts ahead of the parent and in some respects the court itself. It was bowing to a new science which didn't have to show any proof for its findings. When you deal with the psyche there is often not much in the way of tangible evidence.

I got there a few minutes late. It felt like getting to Berkeley from the Haight was an obstacle course. Running down the BART steps and jumping on a train, not sure if it's

going in the right direction, and change trains in Oakland. I walked the last few blocks to the Berkeley City Club (built in 1927 with Julia Morgan the architect). Old wood, high ceilings, a luxurious layout. A man took tickets at the door and ushered me in. I said I was a friend of the Actress, and he turned out to be the playwright.

At first I was not connecting with the play. A weak scene with several women on stage. The more heavyweight roles and dialogue occurred with the men, including the ghost of Freud. Things picked up when he appeared, looking dapper, unconcerned, and sure of himself. He took regular injections of a cocaine solution. There was some suggestion that his theories were the result of a coke delirium, and the preoccupations of Anna Freud may have stemmed from being molested as a girl. She turned into a cold dogmatic person. (The Russian novelist, Vladimir Nabokov, referred to Freud as the witch doctor from Vienna.)

During the intermission of this "play in three acts about family values," I met up with Michael, his older brother, and the Actress' daughter, Maya, who is pushing ten. I sat in the back with them for the last part. Maya was squirming, and admitted later she was bored. I gave her half a cookie which seemed to help. The young girl watched her mother onstage. I think she's used to it by now and seemed disinterested. The lesbian undercurrent was muted. The word "penis" came up a few times, but most of it was lost on a nine-year-old realist who watches MTV and soap operas, and only absorbs the information she can use or handle at the time.

I thought of the summer before last when the three of us went to Muir Beach. There is a quiet cove on the far end which is clothing optional. The Actress likes to go there, wearing nothing, and thought her daughter should be exposed to that sort of thing

and understand that bodies are a natural phenomenon (I wrote “phone”). Out of deference to her daughter I kept my swimsuit on, and the Actress was topless. Other people wore nothing. Maya kept her sweater on and thought it was strange that grown men and women were walking around naked. Being half their size made it all the more uncomfortable. After a couple of excursions, the Actress decided to hold off on this portion of her daughter’s education.

She is a dutiful mother, though, and wonders how to protect her daughter from the television. For tonight she instructed Michael to take Maya out of the theater for the next-to-last scene when the half-crazed Mabbie tears off her dress, coming on to Anna Freud and saying things like, “Does this make your nipples hard?!” Unfortunately, Michael didn’t follow the instructions. He led Maya to the aisle (who saw no reason to leave) and had her turn her back, which the Actress said does a lot of good if the dialogue is audible. She was annoyed when the play was over, and had a private argument with Michael.

In the meantime, I talked with his older brother who I met before but hadn’t connected with. This time we got along rather well. I kept throwing off lines and he kept responding. One thing we have in common: a dislike of certitude. We are suspicious of people who conduct themselves with a dogmatic certainty, experimenting with the equilibrium of other human beings. It drives me nuts – I mentioned the Attorney I work for – when this confidence is a pose and there is not much to back it up. If it turns out they were wrong it doesn’t matter. Lives were ruined, but it paid the rent for a while.

I went up on the empty stage with Maya, who was momentarily stage struck. We sat down at the piano and played a duet, with her instructing me on how to do it. The actress who played the half-crazed Mabbie walked by and smiled.

It was late afternoon when we left, walking to the car in a quiet neighborhood, where shady means a lot of trees, not criminals. We took the older brother to his place, then drove to a small house in the Berkeley hills for the cast party. It went on for hours and there was a feast, including barbecued haddock and other delicacies, desserts, and lots of wine (no coffee). The backyard was an oasis of plants and flowers. I wondered why I don't live like this.

A lot of random conversations with mercurial groups of people, mostly actors and the playwright. He looked like a Jewish cowboy in his hat and boots, and was drinking a fair amount. Mid-forties, graduate studies at U.C. Berkeley. "After working as a biochemist and operating a trucking business, Mr. Katz wrote six stage plays…." Now he manages a computer rental business and sounds eclectic. He brought up some Jewish themes in the play, slamming the frauds in ways a Gentile might not get away with. There was something about psychoanalysis being derived from stigmas of the Jewish mother.

Monday, April 19, 1993

10:30 a.m., I showed up at the burned-out building. The neighborhood seems lightweight now, like it's made of dream material – not only because it is receding in the past, but compared to where I'm going. The Tenderloin has more weight and density, along with ex-convicts.

I met two fellows with a pickup truck who were paid by the Red Cross for a move. An older black man, Mr. Ellis, and a younger man who called him "Granddad." He was known as "Bro." I figured they were about twenty and sixty. The younger man was sullen and bored, though respectful and responding to his grandfather. I was pretty

much out of his range or beneath him when it came to acknowledging my existence. It is hard not to when someone is carrying the other end of a piece of furniture. I was moving and lifting as much as they were, except when they used the dolly. Having to get his hands on my furniture may have been more acknowledgment than he cared for. He had a nearly shaved head with a small tuft in the back, and the requisite baggy outfit with torn jeans hanging off his behind. He would mumble in a low voice so the conversation didn't go very far and I didn't make much effort.

His attention picked up, and he actually floated a coherent sentence in my direction, when he noticed some objects, including an old television, in the garage. I figured the stuff was abandoned and said anyone could probably claim it tomorrow. He drifted over to some objects, but his grandfather wouldn't have it. The older man was pretty laid back, with a low voice, but he didn't hate my guts or think he came from a superior race (he hid it pretty well if that is what he thought). The young man may have been in a sullen state because a lot of young men are, or maybe he doesn't like to work. I asked him how often he did this and he said every couple of weeks.

We liberated the last of the larger objects from the wrecked building. It's odd that I didn't have a plan or a list. I would walk around trying to think backward and forward – back to a previous time when I used or didn't use this stuff, and into the future, wondering how much room I will have. Did I want to continue with this clutter or start over? I was in rooms where there wasn't much order and I think that affects my mind. It seems to be reflective, and not necessarily in a good way if it reflects whatever is around it. A room in complete ruins makes it hard to focus and make plans.

We filled half of the truck with bare necessities: a single mattress and springs, a kitchen table, two or three chairs, a black bag filled with drawings and paintings, and a four-foot bamboo fan.

We drove to the storage place, with Bro sitting on the stuff in back while I had a conversation with his grandfather. Arriving there, we went into that prison for possessions, unlocked the 5 x 6 cell, and took out more than I should have, loading boxes full of manuscripts, along with records, dishes, and the paraphernalia of a random mandatory existence. I felt a little better having seen what Jon was moving to St. Helena - some of the most eccentric junk, including bones, transistors, and useless circuit panels. My possessions were not so mechanical or psychotic, I leave that for the writing. When I get around to objects it is on a more restrained level. Some wouldn't think so, but he is living proof. I think that we respect each other's modes of operation.

That reminds me, on Sunday night when I found him so far gone on vodka, he pulled a heavy plastic-covered bundle out of the freezer and said, "You want to see a dead deer?" It was the hide, carefully wrapped. He shot it himself.

Maybe this is relevant here. He pulled his chair over and said he wanted to tell me something. He couldn't find the words, which was not surprising, considering how drunk he was. The farthest he got was something about how sane I was, compared to others and maybe him. I had two thoughts: 1) What if he's right? 2) What if he isn't? I think he meant it as a compliment, that I was more or less detached from the flat. It was similar to something my old history professor in Los Angeles said years ago. His life was generating its usual tensions (and it turned out he was manic-depressive). At some point in his *sturm und drang* he looked at me with an accusatory wonder, saying, "You're so

sane." It never occurred to me. These things are relative, and a few ex-girlfriends might think otherwise. I wondered if the writing had anything to do with it as a linguistic anchor or a steadying force. It is an outlet where the less-than-sane can hit the page without disturbing the neighbors or causing my arrest.

I think Jon wanted to convey more. He's had some brief relations with a man or two. It may have been an observation that we have a lot in common. We're on a similar wavelength with our homemade radio tapes and an undying respect for ancient civilizations. We live in an atmosphere of work commuters who are only halfway here. It adds to a sense of something missing. I have found people more real and open in Los Angeles and New York City, but that is not surprising in a city full of interest groups and one of them is tourists. Half of the working population lives in the suburbs, and scenic views do not require much in the way of character. You wonder if people are distracted by the views and growing vacant.

Where was I? You see what happens when you go through old stuff in a burned-out building. It unlocks all sorts of associations.

The pickup at the storage place was loaded to the breaking point and it was tied down with ropes. We drove to the Tenderloin, this time with Bro riding between us which negated any conversation and he turned on the radio. I thought of things I might say to him but they sounded dumb, so I didn't. When we pulled up to a stop a black woman with a small child walked by. She wore a white sweater with a large protruding bust and I didn't say anything.

We arrived in front of the building on Hyde with a hooker across the street. A massive job of unloading stuff into the old lobby, with its marble, wood, and crystal chandeliers, then into the iron elevator, up to the third floor and into a corner studio lined with windows. It's a lookout in the Tenderloin, about the height of Montaigne's tower.

When we finished my arms were tired. I shook hands with the two of them and they left. I sat there in a daze. A clutter of boxes and disorder. Not sure I was doing the right thing, moving here. I was going out on a limb, not exactly on a whim, but not the most careful thing I ever did. It was one of those things you feel compelled to do and don't know if it was a good idea until you do it. That is a hell of a thing when you're talking about where you live. I have a tendency to echo certain twists of fate, making them worse at times, but at least it was my doing. Like the fire – it wasn't my doing, but now I have a hand in the drastic event by making a drastic choice of where to live.

The cause of the fire: When the firemen were putting away their hoses I saw a young woman standing with a few others on the sidewalk, looking stricken. Her apartment was in the back and she lost everything.[15] Other people lost everything as well, but the fire was her fault. When the sun came through her windows in the late afternoon it hit a pile of oily rags and those eventually ignited. She was warned by the landlord not to leave those rags lying around (she was stripping the paint off chairs), but she didn't listen. I don't know if she was ever subjected to a lawsuit.

I started putting the place together with a half-hearted attempt at order. I laid a black wooden door over two filing cabinets, which made a desk. I put the four-foot fan on

[15] Over the years there was an occasional vacancy in back where the apartments have a view of the sun going down over the Golden Gate Bridge. I preferred having the sun come through my eastern-facing windows in the morning. I liked the view of Russian Hill with airliners going by in their ascending flights. The western exposure was nice, but I could always go up on the roof. If I had changed apartments, opting for a sentimental scenic view, I would have lost everything.

the desk and leaned it against a window. I moved boxes, lay down the mattress, and hung up some clothes.

I realized how tired and hungry I was and took a bus back to the flat, picking up a beer and a sandwich. A couple of the roommates were watching *Star Trek* in the kitchen. It was the sort of thing I wanted to avoid. A fuller comprehension of the muse will not unfold except in isolation. Those hypnotic TV rays are like an albatross around your neck.

I drove with the Phantom to the burn, picking up a round iron table. We brought a few things that I had stored in his garage, like a six-foot photo of London (on poster board), a curving mirror, and a wooden chair. We drove to the place on Hyde and unloaded the stuff around 9 p.m. He was on alert for local apparitions, like the tall blonde hooker in a mini-skirt who I think was a man. When we were done I went across the street to the ubiquitous liquor store for a six-pack of Becks. As usual, I had one or two while he had four or five.

For some reason we sat around talking until one in the morning. I had the radio on an R & B station, "Heart and soul…," and he was going on about Ming. He has his own interpretation of events a few months ago which nearly ruined things between him and one of his oldest friends. He has a dry outlook, though she put him through a lot. He is calm these days, what with her being several thousand miles away, but he worries about her hitchhiking. He doesn't trust men.

He knows she likes to keep a few men in orbit around her for orchestrating evenings or events. He usually goes along, what with her being headstrong and he likes to be with her. There is an undercurrent of sexual allure. It leads to an experimental

skirmish now and then. He spoke in a careful manner, not sure of what he could admit to himself, much less to me. I listened, but finally turned the radio down and picked up the guitar, picking and strumming while he talked.

She is something of a puzzle to him (as well as to herself), and he was compelled to talk about her. I could see it was hard, with his not wanting to pry or gossip, but wondering how long I have known her and how we met. He saw a Chinese box full of condoms in the clutter. I said she gave them to me, and sensing his alarm I said she was concerned for what I did with other women.

I think there is a tendency of men to protect a woman's privacy, to not discuss her in intimate detail with someone else, being suspicious of other men. My women friends have little hesitation when it comes to talking about the men they're with, including how they are in bed.

Meanwhile, I didn't say much. He thought it wasn't entirely her fault for leaving a trail of twisted men, being in her prime. He assumed it wouldn't last, and in a few years she would be a different person – he has met her mother – and put on weight. I never liked the notion that one's prime is fleeting and over at a young age. For a writer it can take many years. There are women who turn eighteen or twenty like they're stepping onstage and have to cram it all in, every sort of experience, sensing they don't have much time and in a few years their charm, if not their figure, will be nothing to write home about.

Ming has talked about this, having the nervous enthusiasm of a girl who senses she is at her most alluring and wonders what to do about it. At the same time, she refuses

to believe she's in her prime when her existence is a headache with a boring job and technical difficulties.

We talked about other things, including the possibility of my buying his beat-up Stratocaster for $100, and what sort of amplifier I should get. He knows more about sound equipment than I do.

He left around 1 a.m., and I was on the verge of a hellish night. I had the mattress and box springs with blankets next to a wall of continual windows on the street. I turned off the lights and tried to go to sleep. An hour later a slight horror was setting in. What had I done, moving here? The worse thing is renting a place – with a six-month lease – that you can't sleep in. I hadn't realized how the sounds of the street came through the walls and windows. I need a quiet setting to fall asleep, having a magnified sense of hearing. It wasn't just the drone of cars going by. It was the irregular and penetrating noises, the occasional siren and horns, along with voices. After two in the morning the bars let out. Voices carry and people are loud, yelling down the street at someone. At one point the prostitutes were yelling on the corner, one of them walking by in high heels and the sound echoed in my head. Then a male whore in women's clothes walked by, calling to a man on the other side of the street, "GOT FORTY?!"

In my old apartment I slept in the back room with closed double doors which muted the sounds of the street. The neighborhood was not very noisy anyhow. Now I had a studio with many windows on the street. There was no way to get away from it, unless I slept in the kitchen or the hall by the door.

I was haunted by the room I left behind in the flat near the Haight. It was quiet with no windows and I never slept better. Given the difficulties of moving here, I

couldn't believe I gave up such a comfortable set-up, and it cost less. $315 a month, compared to $560. It would have been more practical, and I could have saved up for a trip to Paris. I nearly wore out my head comparing the two places, weighing the pros and cons of either one, and still I couldn't figure it out. Anywhere that I could fall asleep would be good.

Some of these considerations were drawn out to a semi-neurotic detail that was hard to untangle. The flat had roommates, which is compromising, and the room was cramping my style. The commute is twice as long, and no way I could walk it. On the other hand, it's quiet, with a backyard and a store across the street which filled my head with visions of splendor compared to the stores around here. And what about Ming? I didn't want to be caught up in her backwash of conquered men. What if I settled in and she returned in a few months? I'm not sure we could live together. The apartment has some undercurrents running through it, not just heavy drinking and a lot of pot, but personality differences which caused some friction. J. had so much tension when he returned from work one night he slugged my filing cabinet and left a dent.

I think there is another entity riding on my shoulder, an invisible muse which makes these decisions. It puts ideas into my head, controlling the intuitive impulse. When looking at an apartment it senses if the writing could unfold there with a further dynamic, even if I'm being put through the grinder. The invisible muse can orchestrate where I live and what I do with women on a similar basis - having not so much my peace of mind as the main concern, but what it takes to generate a further dimension in the writing.

"Character is fate."[16] I can't blame the system or my parents for my lot in life. Recent events were on the level of a seismic adjustment, and I have arrived at a stripped-down version of myself. I operate on less these days, following a succession of shocks – a couple of love affairs disintegrate, I get arrested for a DUI, the car dies, and I lose my home because of a fire. Now I live in the Tenderloin.

How come it feels so liberating amidst the difficulties and disturbances? It's not like I've hit bottom, though the Tenderloin is close to it. It's right outside the door, and full of surprises. I wouldn't say it is dysfunctional and dangerous, more like a motor when it isn't hitting on all cylinders, and there are moments … but I'm getting ahead of myself.

I was going through a rehabilitation of the fundamental things in life, like appreciating what a precious thing is silence. Could I sleep with earphones on, tuning in the sound of outer space? How could I fall for an apartment with its optical location and forget about the audio? Subconsciously I must have sensed a humming engine room with sunlight and a view of the intensity. I felt the energy of the place, while thinking it would translate into the writing or my being, which could use a kick. It's too bad I can't sleep here.

Finally, after three in the morning, I must have passed out. Around seven there was a garbage truck under the window with a waterfall of breaking glass. I had about four hours sleep. I lay there for a while, and then gave up.

Tuesday, April 20, 1993

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[16] Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1885)

I went out around nine-thirty and walked to a diner on the corner. It's run by Vietnamese. I had a simple breakfast while reading about a cult inferno on the front page of the paper. A lot of people died in Waco, Texas. The FBI assaulted a religious commune. It sounded like a mass suicide, but the authorities have the finesse of a tank. Fortunately, the Attorney General is a woman so this kind of thing was handled with more sensitivity. How many women and children died in the assault?

This neighborhood could be seen as a drop-dead accusation of the times we're living in, but it ain't necessarily so. Walking down the street you might see an alcoholic or a junkie. There are prostitutes and destitute non-entities and strung-out mental cases. There are people using a chain-link fence to hang a line of shirts. The police come by on foot for a gentle roust. They leave and other vendors set up shop an hour later.

In the midst of the most rancid street life is a Vietnamese family with the kids looking fresh and positive. There are a number of Vietnamese places around here. Down the street is the 4 FACES BUDDHIST TEMPLE. It's near MISS PEARL'S JAM HOUSE. Walking in another direction for a block or two there is a density of different cultures. TAJ MAJAL INDIAN GROCERIES. The KUM BAK CLUB. Not to mention HOTEL SENATOR. For that matter, I am four blocks from the main library.

I returned to the place, not feeling very energetic, and had the typewriter going for a while. I couldn't hear if it was on, its humming mechanism overshadowed by the noise on the street. If I have gravitated to a stripped-down version of my life, with less in the way of quiet and possessions, there is more of an erotic energy. It is overt in the form of women who loiter on the corners, but I'm getting used to it. It feels like a Fellini movie (not *La Dolce Vita*).

Early afternoon, getting ready for work. No shower curtain yet, but it's a good shower.

A lot of work in the office, but I'm never there for more than a few hours. I walked home on a warm night, about two miles.

Went out around nine, looking for a deli and ended up exploring the neighborhood. It seems to alter as you walk around. When I approached this corner from another direction with old buildings and a few trees it had a certain style. I found a Cambodian café a couple of blocks away.

A young hustler walked up and tried to sell me a gold butane lighter for $1.50. I probably should have bought it.

A hooker on the corner turning slowly like a weather vane, wondering which way the wind was blowing tonight. She had large breasts in a black bra and a short tight skirt. Long black hair, big lips, and a vacant expression which is not surprising if she stood there for hours. I wondered if she has a low IQ which makes this line of work more plausible. Now and then a stranger comes along, breaking the monotony with his anonymous money. It's a change of pace. Some are so dull inside that being picked up by a stranger is a welcome diversion. If the body is a known commodity, and people only vary in terms of their looks, then having sex is no big deal. The hard-ons are as common as appliances or plant life.

I was talking with Jon and the Phantom the other night. We were not sure about the business end of it, but figured it was fifty or a hundred dollars. Is that per hour or per sex act? What if you can manage two or three acts in an hour? Do you bring her to your place or somewhere else? How much do they make? They could make a decent living

and with little effort, other than standing around for hours. If a woman averages one $50 customer a night and pulls in $1500 a month (no taxes), that's a good deal more than I make (with a part-time job). It wouldn't be hard to live on that amount. Some of them are moonlighting, and others are on public assistance.

I thought of what else I could do with $50. That's seven or eight movies. Five bottles of wine. A pair of shoes which would last a lot longer than a furtive copulation. I don't go to prostitutes. Lonely writers have used their services for centuries and thought nothing of it (I wonder if brothels are defunct). Some men view it as a power trip, but it is no accomplishment to pay a woman for sex. The men are being used as much as they are using someone else, and often are regarded with as much disdain (it comes with disdained sheets). Some think the men should be prosecuted like the hookers are. One argument against that: a man might pay a woman once a week, but she engages in the transaction several times a day.[17]

I went into the Buddhist temple with an old Chinese woman in back. There were altars with offerings of fruit, along with pillows and incense and little Buddhas for sale. There were electric lights in concentric circles behind the head of Buddha. It reminded me of when I was in Rome and saw a statue of the Virgin Mary with AVE MARIA in blue neon over her head.

[17] Some women wish there were more prostitutes so men wouldn't bother them with their urges. The feminists see it as empowering when a woman controls the situation with detachment and remuneration while getting some fresh air. She isn't chained to a domestic routine (the women's movement used to say that housewives are no better than prostitutes, an insulting and obtuse comparison). I knew a woman who thought that hookers are mentally disturbed. Others don't think about it, it's not part of their world. If prostitution puts men in a bad light, it also reveals something about women: a capacity for pretending with ulterior motives. Their passive physicality embraces the status quo, like a cross between a flower and a suction pump.

I walked around but couldn't find anything appetizing. I went into the corner store across the street with a Middle Eastern fellow behind the counter. He assumes that anyone who walks in is negligible. There seems to be a common attitude amongst these liquor store proprietors – and I have heard this from others – that they are descended from royalty in their lands of origin. Are they practicing Muslims? Maybe they assume that others are inferior, and a country where the women are exposed in dirty magazines (they had a few) is a low-down place. The people aren't worth giving the time of day to, being worthless infidels. I was a non-person standing at the counter with a few things. He was on the phone, speaking in a foreign tongue as he rang up the items. I had to get his attention, saying "Sorry if I'm interrupting… hello… could I have some cigarette papers?" Earlier I asked for candles and had to explain what a candle was. He still wasn't sure.[18]

Walking down the street there was a black man talking to himself, pulling a small cart with a license plate in back. Two black transvestite hookers went by, talking about money with loud voices.

> The silver lining of the Tenderloin
> a chain-link fence, if not some dirty coins.
>
> A tree is nearly torn up by the roots,
> a storm is passing through, and someone shoots.[19]

I feel like I'm in another country, or several overlapping countries at once. I walked by a Vietnamese man with his wife and child. They were sitting in a chair on the sidewalk, relaxing in the evening.

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[18] The corner store where I used to live is run by a Korean couple. One day the man was putting some things I bought into a brown paper bag and the bottom fell out. Without hesitating he said, "Made in China."

[19] Excerpt from one of my poems.

10:00 p.m., back in the apartment. I turned on the tube to the public station. *Frontline* had something on the concentration camps in World War II. Old British footage, narrated by Trevor Howard. I was hungry, but this was like getting punched in the stomach. I was compelled to watch it, with footage I have never seen before. Why is it the British are more realistic? It showed what went on when soldiers liberated the camps, taking care of the weak and infirm with some beyond help. There was an eerie situation when the SS guards were forced to deal with all those pale thin bodies, dragging them to a mass grave. I saw a man pulling the thin corpse of a naked woman, one arm over his shoulder like he was dragging a marionette and someone cut the strings, head banging on his back with a blank stare. It was summarily dumped over the side of a pit, sliding down and landing in a tangle with a few hundred other bodies.

Typing for a couple of hours.

One or two in the morning, I turned on the black and white portable and watched a documentary on swans. There were a couple of them on a pond. Before mating they dip their heads in the water. A night of swans and concentration camps.

I had to figure out a way to sleep. I pulled the mattress into the hallway by the front door. It just fit. The hall leads to the kitchen and a window with a futuristic-looking tower in the distance. I lay on a pile of blankets reading something by Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*.

Wednesday, April 21, 1993

9:30 a.m. Woke up after a good seven hours sleep. I was relieved that it worked, albeit on a mattress in the hall. There is an old phone stand in the wall with a little seat

which folds down. I put a glass of water and an ashtray on it. It was provisional and warm and relatively quiet. Further evidence of the typewriter taking over, with the main room its domain. It can handle the energy on the street.

I think I took the hard road by moving here. I miss the quiet of the flat, shut off in a room. Last night I went through some changes. There were painful adjustments as my worldview hardened. Maybe that is part of the reason I took this place, it constitutes a missing chord. I read the lease to see if I could get out of it, but I am stuck here with my trapped attention.

Typing for a few hours in the morning. No problem with that.

2:30 p.m. I walked to work, two miles in half an hour. It was invigorating. I approached the downtown from a different angle and a sense of something changing block by block. However, a law office doesn't change. No matter what is going on in my life, like where I'm living or with whom, the job remains the same and so does the pay.

V. at the next desk was in one of her voluble moods. She flipped through an orthopedic medical book for use in personal injury cases. A look of curiosity, then worry and concern on her face. She showed me a little girl with deformed legs. She wants to go back to school and be a nurse, or an assistant to a radio-something. I said,

"Radio therapist? You listen to the radio and feel better?"
"No."
"Radiologist?"
"That's it."

I said I finally got a good night's sleep and told her about the mattress in the hall. She said, "That's dumb." We talked about operations, anesthesia, and cesareans. She made a demure gesture on herself, showing where a cesarean cut would go. Actually, she wasn't sure.

She is Filipina, with a blend of Spanish and Chinese. After a couple of years in school she could make $30,000 a year, which would make her "stable." I said, "Emotionally?" She gave me one of her looks, and went on looking at deformities. There was some mention of those existing at the time of Christ and how he would have cured them. She is a devout Catholic, so I didn't say anything, except that it's hard to do. She said "Religion is hard to explain," and I replied, "Especially from the medical standpoint."

V. is shy and realistic and determined. I'm a little in love with her. It hits me from an unfamiliar angle, out of left field where love is known to roam, engulfing the unwary before they know it. It's the oddest thing, considering how little we have in common. A woman who seems to exist in a state of grace who reads detective novels and likes to look at horror films.

One thing I find alluring and endearing about her, she is not like women with a short attention span whose spirituality ceases from the waist down or the neck down. She is imbued with it from head to foot, which is to say if she is with a man she locks into it with all of her continuum. It is a quality that keeps us at arm's length because she is engaged. V. admitted that he's boring, but she wants her babies to look like her - he has a similar ethnic background.

Next month she will be in Hawaii and doesn't know how to swim. She might get a new swimsuit, but will still wear shorts. How come? Something about being fat. I said that was the silliest thing I've heard today. She smiled. What do men know about the subtleties of pounds and inches? She was gratified that I don't think she needs to lose weight. I remember a while back when I quoted something from the paper to her. Did she

agree that Libras are the most attractive? She gave me a look that was almost scornful. "Of course." It is self-evident. For all of her discipline and religious feelings, she is a stylish woman.

At five feet nothing with those big dark eyes she sees the world from a magnified perspective – it could be the number of minutes before she leaves for the day, the number of pounds she wants to lose, or how "brown" she thinks she is. It is hardly more than me, but she doesn't want to push it and avoids the sun.

I worked for several hours, and then left. One of the advantages of living here, I don't have to take a bus – which is passive and crowded. On foot the city is alive. I found an overpriced Jewish deli and had some borscht with sour cream at the counter.

I walked to a coffee shop. There were a couple of young prostitutes at a table, talking with an older one who looked like she had been through the mill, worn out and putting on weight. The younger women were in baby doll sundresses with bare legs, even though it was a cool night. I was in a jacket with a scarf. I've seen them a few times, neighborhood fixtures I suppose.

At home. I haven't settled in completely and am weathering the adjustment. It feels like I've been through a car wreck. I read *The New Yorker* for a couple of hours, lying in the hall with my feet up on the wall. I was getting sleepy around nine or ten and figured I should not ignore it, it's a precious commodity around here. Passed out in the covers.

The phone rang around midnight in the kitchen, a wake-up call from Ming. I hadn't talked to her in a couple of weeks. She sounded like she was calling from across town, with a tendency to go into a fast monologue about her recent life up there. After

explaining it to others it becomes a fixed routine. The Phantom wondered about a letter he received from her, suspecting it was a form letter sent to her friends with the usual love you/miss you routine.

I told her about the place. She sounded enthusiastic and thought I would be "sleeping like a baby" when I got used to it. I'll wake up every two hours and want some milk? She wants to see the place and misses her friends and me. I couldn't tell how things are going in Alaska. It sounded varied and ambiguous. She could say she was having a good time, with lovely mountains in the dawn, but there were other forces operating on her life, like having to work. She shifted her original plan of working on a fishing boat or cannery for several months and coming home with a few thousand dollars. It was not happening. The fishing industry is not what she thought. She is more in the mood to travel, with or without her male companion, the "gentleman" she met at a hostel. She quit the waitress job. The older woman who ran the place was an alcoholic, used to run a brothel, and wanted her to wear a tight blouse. That is not her style. Ming is self-conscious about flaunting her figure in public and won't do it. She has been working at the front desk of a resort and sleeps in a tent or someone's boat with her companion. He could fall in love, but she can take it or leave it.

Half an hour on the phone, reviving the old wavelength of a quick rapport. She said I shouldn't let the hookers come into my apartment. I said I would need a haircut soon and didn't trust anyone else with my hair. "Good." I have no idea if she will be back in one month or four months or what. She is feeling her way in that empirical way of hers. She received both of my letters, and yes they were coherent. There is a second "running" letter she will mail someday. No, she wasn't hitchhiking alone, except maybe

once. Getting around was difficult, and it was still cold. I thought of how I began the letters: Dear Muscle-Bound Lotus Blossom of the Far North. Dear Coquette of the Yukon. And the next one: Dear Sleeping Bag Lady.

Then she said, “I have to pee. I love you.” “Love you too,” I said, and she was gone, an emotional tone in her voice. I thought of what the Phantom said about one of her phone calls, learning about the fire and what I was going through. It was the first time he ever heard her cry. He said she was “bawling on the phone,” being so concerned about my situation. It was a week after she left. He hadn’t missed her very much, but that changed his mind.

I went over to the typewriter and had it going for a couple of hours with the radio on. Coffee, cigarettes, and a Guinness Stout.

2:30 a.m. On the mattress in the hallway where I finished *A Room of One’s Own*.

Thursday, April 22, 1993

NOTES

> The documentary on concentration camps was relentless with a dry narrative, showing healthy German women who had worked and even volunteered in a camp, like it was just a job. Two of them dragged the corpse of a woman along the ground, face down, by her foot. Extraordinary footage and it wouldn’t quit, beginning in Belson. A mass grave with 800 or 1000 buried there with bulldozers pushing the dirt over them, going back to the land in a bucolic setting. What’s going on in those anonymous buildings in the distance, the ones with the chimneys? The narrator had no sympathy for the Germans who claimed they didn’t know what was going on. A more complicated point: it is easy to condemn civilians for doing nothing. Given the reputation of the SS, not to say the Nazis in general, when civil rights were suspended and anyone could disappear for questioning the government, how many people here would have spoken up? There is the possibility of a knock on the door, if not an iron boot, and you are gone. When a government is run by assassins, most of the people are quiet. It wasn’t only Jews in those pits.

> They went from one camp to another, including Auschwitz, showing footage of the liberating armies and what they stumbled upon. Some question if the Allies could have ended it a year earlier by bombing the rail lines. How many were dying in those camps on a daily basis (one had a quota of 600 a day). Often as not the SS men and women didn't think they had done anything wrong. Having a sense of guilt or shame can be a civilizing factor. The lack of it produces monsters, though they look like ordinary human beings. Following orders, fitting in, succumbing to the lure of having no responsibility for what you're doing. It gets in the way of efficiency.

Typing for hours.

I went out, walking five or six blocks. There are different walking routes fanning out in all directions from my studio. I dropped into the Red Cross and was reimbursed for the first month's rent, plus a voucher for replacing kitchen stuff. Their investigator listed my kitchen as "totaled."

Post office, change of address, and picked up my mail. A letter from the woman in Vienna. I read her letter in the office. I hadn't heard from her in a while.

> Dear S.,
> Maybe a shock helps me to mail a letter to you. So let me start with the shock. As you may know I separated from Karl, and for about a year I have shared my life with a beautiful, or gorgeous, or any maximum expression for young, strong, male. And we took a trip to Italy (Firenze) (Florence), and there was something in my questioning that made him admit that he had no less than 5 (FIVE) affairs during our first year of being together. I must write it down, and I believe it is not the first time that I started something with dear s. only to be able to cry. Crying is good for your health, I read many times. I think I didn't cry in a year because I was so happy. So it is about time. It is not true. I did cry before, but not for a man, during this year. Some people are able to keep all their feelings inside. The maximum you get from their emotions are expressive glances, but they won't ever say a word, or explode, or cry excessively in public. But I am not like them. To cry on my own, I need at least your audience. I thought of you, not only because I think of you often, but in particular because you are one of those men (and I have got several male FRIENDS who all tell me that they are made that way) who are the same. And you know like me that men are the same. No matter here or elsewhere. I wish my sexuality was not so exclusive. It is exclusive because it is so easily hurt. When I heard what he told me my mind went up in flames with sexual desire for revenge. I have been faithful all the time – he was the one…

Here it broke off. I think she cut the paper, not wanting to say more. She scribbled in the margin, "Must go mail this. Please write immediately. Love, P." She also drew a few tears on the side.

I wondered what kind of fool would be so careless with a woman like her. She is twenty-eight, attractive, and usually involved in a romance. We have been writing off and on since 1985, having met at the cliffs when she was on vacation with an Austrian boyfriend. We ran around for a week or so and became so close they would start talking to me in German. She was twenty and continuing her education, being interested in translation. She comes from a good family, but is a little on the wild side – they took mescaline in Mexico before coming to California, and wanted to do acid with me. I took them to Muir Beach in Marin (it's clothing optional).

She included a card she wrote several months ago but never sent. GREETINGS FROM CROATIA (a picture of women and children being loaded onto a truck). On the back: CAN YOU SLEEP WELL?

> Dear S., thank you so much for your letter. You know that I love your letters. I've got a letter for you, but it is always the problem with mailing it. This card here will be mailed because it is quite unique. I sleep well, and nightmares occur only when I watch the news or read reports on torture, killing and rape. But you've got that situation too, down in Central America. It hurts to be that close, and I am scared. I've ALWAYS got the money for a flyaway ticket under my pillow. It consists of several currencies and a few valuable coins. We get used to it. It is just weird that they let war criminals in the US all of a sudden. For peace talks!
> Letter follows… to be continued… love P.

There was a lot of work in the office, but I left around six-thirty and took a bus to the Museum of Modern Art. I walked into a high-ceilinged room with architectural

models and blueprints. The architect is Japanese, but will remain anonymous as the structures he envisioned. Abstract futurism, or what he calls "ether planning." It looked like the headquarters of a warrior robot. There were videos with the camera moving through a three-dimensional mockup of a building, and esoteric speculations of a city in the future. I think that "planned" cities have an airless or hermetic perfection, a totalitarian setup in control of every little thing. It might look good on the screen, but human beings aren't commuters in a computer.[20]

It reminded me of Le Corbusier. He wanted to level most of central Paris and replace it with identical steel and glass towers. A "sterile hybrid" according to the historian Lewis Mumford,[21] if not "a frigid megalomaniacally scaled negation of the familiar urban ambient."[22] I don't think our city planners should be frigid megalomaniacs.

Clyfford Still: there were paintings from his whole career, which much ado about the torn-off wallpaper look. I prefer his work from the 1940's. The show included one of his quotes:

> I held it imperative to evolve an instrument of thought which would aid in cutting through all the cultural opiates, past and present, so that a direct and immediate, and truly free vision could be achieved, and an idea be revealed with clarity.

In a side room was a book signing and reception for the film director, Gus Van Sant. He looked smaller than life, maybe because he was sitting down and had to engage

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[20] I think there is place in hell for architects and city planners who inflict their inhuman designs on the public. They are so enchanted with the modern and the futuristic they forget that human beings will have to live and work in those environments. People sit on granite slabs downtown, which are hardly fit for pigeons, because a wooden bench is a thing of the past.

[21] My old professor assigned his book, *The City in History* (1961) for one of my classes. He met Mumford, who he much admired, and asked him a city-related question. Mumford said he had been pondering that for twenty years.

[22] Norma Evenson, *Le Corbusier: The Machine and the Grand Design* (1969)

in small talk with a line of strangers. He has directed films which reflect a certain originality and vision, like *Drugstore Cowboy* and *My Own Private Idaho* (with young male hustlers). He looked ordinary and vulnerable. However, while signing a book on a black page in white ink he dashed off something in a stylish script. A minute later he shot me a sidelong glance which hit me out of left field. There is more to him than meets the eye.

It was a book of photos, mainly of people he met on and off the set. Black and white Polaroids of the famous and obscure. They were head and shoulder photos (stardom or bust), staring into the camera like real people in an ambiguous moment. "They all embody huge potentials for success or failure, for nervousness or calm, for sainthood or deviltry…" Him too, I suppose.

When I left, the night was a relief and revelation of the real world, looking expansive with a lit-up dome of City Hall across the street. I sat there having a cigarette and feeling faint. I walked to Max's Opera Café and had some Russian cabbage soup with golden raisins, bits of meat, and bread on the side. There was a waiter singing next to the piano, and a singer waiting on a table.

I went into the bookstore, looking for a book by Roberto Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*. "A remarkable peregrination through Greek mythology." There was something about his style of writing which made me lose interest, but that reflects more on me, I suppose. I also had a look at *Operation Shylock*, by Philip Roth.

Walked home, turning down Ellis Street with a view of an illuminated old dome. There are trees and some deterioration. In the distance is a high-rise with a futuristic air. A hotel sign was missing a letter from the word Essex, saying HOTELE SEX.

11:00 p.m., phone call from Jon in Calistoga. He is in the process of moving into a place in the wine country. We covered a lot of ground, from Mexico to North Dakota and back to here, where the Phantom had gotten "plastered" a few nights ago. He ended up writing a disjointed semi-delirious screed on the wall to his old friend Jon about not betraying a friend. The two of them had nearly lost their friendship over a woman of Chinese descent. The Phantom threw some glasses against the wall to emphasize a point.

Typing for a couple of hours (half of a bottle of wine).

Slept in the hall.

Friday, April 23, 1993

Went out in the morning to the diner run by Vietnamese. There was a woman with her baby behind the counter and some run-down clientele. When I approached there were a few Vietnamese kids walking by about two feet high. When I left, half an hour later, there was an older white woman with an open jacket and a see-through blouse (not that I wanted to see through it). In a neighborhood of aging alcoholics and destitute men, the Asian kids are all the more alive and optimistic.

Typing for a while, a little tired.

I walked to work. It was busy in the office, with some last-minute thing the Attorney had forgotten to do, Answers to Request for Production of Documents. He dumped it all on me and left.

Talking with the receptionist. I brought a book on Frida Kahlo and stood there while she flipped through it, wondering how she would respond. She was open-minded and intrigued, but found it "sad and morbid." I said whatever pain was being expressed, it

was an accomplishment to have such paintings. Their existence isn't sad with so much life in the compositions.

She is a woman of French-Vietnamese background who is kind of suburban, but she took it well. Looking at a self-portrait she said, "This is a scary woman." Does it take a woman to recognize the witch in another?

Later on I showed it to V., who was interested. Looking through it before she left, she asked if I would leave it. She has a wide expressive mouth, and grimaced at one or two pictures. She showed me the one of Frida with iron corset straps, bare-breasted with her front torn open and a broken column for a backbone and small nails in her skin. I said something about conveying her pain (a spinal/pelvic injury from a streetcar collision at fifteen). V. has occasional backaches, but nothing like this.

I left at 7 p.m. and walked to the pool. I was tired, up late last night with the typing, and the wine didn't help. It was late and I was supposed to meet the Phantom at the flat near the Haight, so I forgot about working out and took a bus in a drizzle.

Jon was there, nearly moved out, with just a few things left in his room. I sat there at an old desk, talking. The Phantom materialized, drifting in on a cloud if not a sluggish current of all the alcohol he had absorbed on his day off, drinking slowly all day. He will have a quart of beer for breakfast. By now he was at the stage where I wondered if he was on something, having trouble with words like "minimal" and "unorthodox," patiently trying to get the words out. He was wobbly, in a semi-stunned condition, but with a faint smile.

Another fellow showed up, J., looking slovenly and talking worse, though intelligent. He was also around the bend, producing a pipe with some stunning smoke. I had a couple of hits and a glass of wine.

I got distracted by the things in Jon's room. A shotgun in a cover. The skull of a buffalo. Some handmade arrows. A model of a polyhedron. A robot construction. Piles of tapes, on some of which he used a high-powered microphone to pick up the sound of rain or bees. He combined the sounds with someone (his mother) doing dreamy vocal sound-effects over his synthesizer. He is better on that than the drums. Where I'm inclined to go off on a tangent using words, he uses tools. I don't know if that means he operates in the real world more than I do. If language and ideas are not included in the real world, I'm a lost cause. However, I'm not sure it made him more stable, having so much nervous energy, perhaps from inner contradictions.

I was looking at an arrow, how its feathered form follows function. Then I noticed a heavy book called *PUNCHES AND DIES*. It was not about a boxer, though - machine tools. I opened it at random and got absorbed. Probably the last book I would check out of the library (short of something in Russian). The writer was able to go on for over 400 pages in the most minute detail about punches and dies, complete with complicated diagrams. The writing had a drop-dead logic. I checked the front of the book and sure enough, it was old (1919).[23]

Meanwhile, the others wandered in. I showed the book to Jon and said it reminded me of Proust. They weren't sure how to respond to that. J. said maybe this is all he knew or talked about and bored his wife to death, where she would say something romantic and

[23] Frank A. Stanley

he would respond with, “Locating holes in die work… precision drilling machine… die reamers… difference in hardness of various areas… hardness lines on die face….”

You wonder to what extent a writer’s subject determines the form and quality of the writing. There is nothing like precision tools for requiring some precision in their written description:

> The die shown in fig. 454 was made for producing the shot seat A, fig. 455, for an air rifle. Brass tubing is used ¼ in. outside, a little under 3/16 bore and the washer hole is made slightly over ¼ in. with a circular saw the tubing is cut 37/64 in. long and then the pieces are tumbled. As can be seen from fig. 454, the die upsets the wall of the tube, increases and tapers the outside diameter, and forms a choke bore about 11/64 in., leaving the outer end tapered to hold the shot; besides throwing up a bead at B and turning over the lower end, thus securely seating the tube in the washer.

A riveting prose. I think Pound would have approved, what with his concerns about unclear writing and an unintelligent fungus growing on the language.

We got distracted by the buffalo skull. It was two feet long and nearly as wide at the horns. It had the old patina of a bone which was buried for a while. He thought it could be 200 years old or more, having found it in the dry sands of North Dakota.

The Phantom picked it up and stood there, lifting the skull to cover his head while speaking through it. One of those moments when the phenomenological slides into a perfect photo op and there’s no camera. A pale and fragile umbrella covered the ceiling light, with him in a grey sport coat.

The skull said something about getting more wine and going down to the sound-room, which we did around ten-thirty. We stood around in the garage for a few minutes while the Phantom hooked up the equipment. J. was staring at my things in the back of the garage (rescued from the fire-damaged building). There was a three-foot-high wooden piece of cake, and the twisted limb of a tree about seven feet long. He wondered why it

was different from any other branch to the extent that I would want to hold onto it. I said it looked good on my desk. “Oh.” Forgot to mention its resemblance to a lightning bolt, while conveying an organic torque.

We went into the sound-room with dim lighting and low ceilings. I said to the Phantom, “You know what Jim Morrison’s problem was? Bad metaphors.” He stumbled around in a mess of wires and a complicated soundboard with its lights and frequency modulators. I was hooked up to the Les Paul. J. was on the mic and Jon was on the drums in back. He didn’t have a lot of rhythm, but could keep it going for a while. I had a glorious sound which filled the room, almost knocking down the walls, which the Phantom adjusted several times with his switches. We had something going, with J. not bad on vocals. He was improvising from a notebook of his writings which he would intone into the mic, while I was reaching for a mean and basic rock and roll progression. Eventually the Phantom was on the mic, the two of them worked it up into a howling crescendo with some echo.

Then he disappeared as he tends to do, probably for a cigarette and a drink (or buying drugs on Haight Street). I got into something moody with J. reading from his notes.

After a while the drummer needed a cigarette and a drink. He sat in the garage for the rest of the session while J. went over to the drums. He has more range and modulation. I fell into an arrhythmic spontaneous combustion which was all over the neck, then backed off and followed the drummer for a while. There was the usual sense of how the instruments are synthesizing into something greater than the sum of the parts.

With the right equipment and some voltage you are riding on a wave that you are generating.

He may have taken one break. I usually don't. Put a good guitar in my hands and I can't let go. It's like holding a bare wire with a current running through it. You're caught up in the grip of those momentums, a reverberating sonic dimension, like your soul expands to fill the room with rhythms and erratic note progressions which it channels with a manual dexterity. An amplified guitar is like an electrocardiogram, it measures the electrical impulses in the heart.

A good workout, and around midnight the Phantom stumbled in and turned it off. He mumbled some apologies about it being late, although it wasn't. We went outside. Fresh air and quiet. Ethereal vapors moving through the night. A few stars showed through. I went to the liquor store for wine and was hit up for change on the corner.

Walked back and sat in the kitchen with Jon and the Phantom. I noticed how they shift gears when there are no women present. They have no problem being deferential and polite, but when no women are around and they're a little wasted they slide into a vulgar routine, seeing how gross and shocking they can be. The Phantom was good at it. Picking up the black hairy mutt of his roommate he said, "Hey Jon, can I fuck your dog?" Earlier in Jon's room the Phantom stood in the doorway, swaying, apropos of what I don't remember, but he blurted out, "If you give me a blow-job I'll do it." Jon was sitting on the bed and lunged for him as the Phantom backed off, laughing.[24]

[24] There was some motorcycle humor: What's the difference between a Harley and a vacuum cleaner? The location of the dirt bag.

They have a ruinous capacity for getting wasted with a hardcore overdrive. There is another current operating here, a male dynamic that I've gotten away from lately. I've been something of a loner, preoccupied with women and writing. Lounging around with the boys doesn't happen very often. (A close friend moved to Paris a couple of years ago, and another old friend, the Professor, is sequestered in Los Angeles with a high-tension harpy.) It has been a relief, a breath of fresh air (shot through with smoke and alcoholic vapors and screaming volumes), if not a return to my roots. A flashback to years ago when I took it for granted having male friends, especially when playing music. Jon and the Phantom come from the Midwest with stories about having to watch out for drunken farm boys and brutal accidents involving farm equipment. There were hard winters and easy white girls who neither of them are interested in. They like women of the Asian persuasion.

We got acquainted over the last six months in a transitional phase. It's like I was evicted on one level and found another with foundations or identifications I had nearly forgotten about. The pros and cons of being stuck in a lone male routine with a typewriter, or spending time with friends and amplifiers.

A few years ago, the Professor observed with some envy the women in my life. He said wait until you're forty, the women won't be coming around. He was good at inspiring confidence. Who cares about subjective ruminations in a poetic form, or something to that effect, and he had a point.[25]

My friends are not getting laid and they are only twenty-eight. Jon's social life is dead in the water, coinciding with a falling out with Ming a few months ago. There may

[25] Another professor read one of my essays and said I should get out of my inner monologue. Apparently, I didn't listen to him.

be other things operating here if twenty-eight involves a life-changing slowdown. He burned out on his old routine, having slept around in his younger days.

He is headed for some isolation in the wine country, two hours north of here. The city has been driving him nuts. He hates everyone on the street, from lousy drivers to the ill-mannered black people. They are not nice to each other, what with the yelling and occasional gunshots. I'm not sure that moving to the country means he will level out and drink less. He invited me up there, staying in a trailer on some land he wants to explore on mushrooms.

He went off to sleep. I was in the mood for the same thing, but the Phantom went on mumbling and stumbling, keeping up a wayward train of thought. It included his obsession with electric guitars, dragging out a book on rare models from 1958. He talked about how many guitars someone had, like the guy in Cheap Trick who has several hundred, or the fellow in ZZ Top who he met. He knew someone who collected the most expensive rare models, but he couldn't play very well.

He showed me a poster of a band he was in when he was twenty, touring around North Dakota in 1984. The Deceivers, they opened for Golden Earring. He looked clean-cut and serious with short hair. Now his hair is past his shoulders. He was gung-ho about being in a band. They weren't bad, but it didn't last. I think the lead singer suffered from depression (I'm not sure if that was before or after the band broke up). Now he works in a hospital where he collects blood from sleeping patients at night.

The Phantom could have made an effort to get something going on the West Coast, even with Jon, but it never came together. They had a kick-ass drummer from

Norway who was deported (he couldn't get a green card). All of which led to his drinking more and smoking his consolation pot, eclipsing any concentration on the music.

Around two in the morning he went downstairs to sleep in the sound-room.

Saturday, April 24, 1993

I woke up in a quiet back room with not enough sleep. This is not a place where I come into my own, so to speak, like the place on Hyde – which comes with a nasty reverb. I went out for breakfast at a local diner. When I returned I sat on the steps with Jon, waiting for the Phantom to come to his senses. We were supposed to move the last of Jon's things.

For an hour or so we carried heavy boxes and objects along with an entire desk down a flight of stairs and into the van. Jon had a certain momentum and was running back up the stairs until he was sweating profusely.

Finally, we had it loaded. The two of them were going to drive to St. Helena, drop it off in storage, and drive back. Jon would catch a plane that night for a week in Mexico. He is going alone to Cancun with a small pack and snorkeling gear. I wonder why I don't do that. I never travel alone. A lot of people do, including women. B. went to Puerto Vallarta on her own, although she wanted me to go. Ming went to Alaska and met a guy on her second day in Anchorage. I would imagine B. has met some people which prolonged her stay, now looking like a month. One reason I don't travel alone is I would probably remain alone. I don't hook up with strangers very easily. The writing leaves me on a short leash, while unleashing some long sentences. It's like a metal straitjacket of typographic restraints.

B. goes out in public as if everyone is dying to talk to her. I don't want to belabor the stigma of the writer - what the hell, beat it to death - but neither one of them has anything to do with writing. They were moaning and groaning when they had to write something. B. wants to write a play about her life, but has a hard time being alone and focused, so she wants me to write it. I had some late nights with Ming, helping her write some essays for school. People get their energy from different sources. If it's a public source it would suggest they have a lack of energy in private. That is how I feel when I'm in public too long. It's worse when I am in a store and feeling drained and listless.

Reminds me of a couple of women in the office. V. admitted she has little to do with writing and hated it in school. She couldn't think of anything to write, and is a little hesitant in talking. The receptionist, Renee, can speak and write like a breeze (and she is headed for law school). V. is more sensual, however.

I think about it now and then when I'm surrounded by women, having close encounters which evaporate because I didn't follow through or make much of an effort. I end up sleeping alone and wonder if the writing has anything to do with it. It generates a certain distance between myself and others, as if mentally pulling back to see them better. Other people don't generate a gulf. They gravitate into a liaison, however temporary, with the ease of picking up something in a store. The writing leaves me unaffiliated, which serves the purposes of writing. I'm not a joiner with a knee-jerk group identification. There's a muse on my back who wants me for herself. I am addicted to a typographic metal fix, although it doesn't leave me numb. If anything, I'm magnified, increasing my libido or the mere awareness of it.

As far as getting along with guys in their late twenties, I wondered if a house or an apartment freezes your age around the time you move in. It generates a psychosomatic architectural holding pattern. Maybe I've been stuck at twenty-six for all these years (the age I was when moving into the old apartment). That would explain a few things. And then there was a liberating fire. Moving out is all the more disturbing if you move into another place where you are suddenly much older.

Where was I? They dropped me off in the Tenderloin with a few old plants which survived the smoke.

5 p.m., worn out from the night before, and not enough sleep. I had to run an errand in a mundane vein. Normally I would lay in the sunlight coming through the window and pass out for a couple of hours, coming to in time for the opera and hit the typewriter with Wagnerian undercurrents in the room. But no, I had to go to a department store. I had a $400 voucher from the Red Cross for kitchen appliances and a dinette, but I wasn't interested. I walked there, being something of a wreck. How long before I look like I belong in this neighborhood? An hour? I misheard a person saying, "We'll take the sadness to the airport."

I didn't get back until eight, my head swirling with variations on a theme of "frying pan" or "kitchen chair." It would have been easier to focus on the Platonic ideal of a chair, which transcends a thousand versions, but they didn't carry it.

There were pans with a "euro grip." Americans are losing their grip.

Not a wide choice of tables. I settled for a round heavy wooden table, 40 inches in diameter, for when we're having diametrically opposed conversations. I felt subversive in

a lifeless and hermetic store. That sounds heretical in a land of glittering commodities that want to be adopted, taken home, and adapted to.

I turned on the opera. A man was condemned to be out to sea until he found a woman who would love him. How long have I been out to sea with this journal?

Fell asleep around eleven.

Sunday, April 25, 1993

NOTES

More on the machine tool book:

> It was further evidence of a decline of literacy, along with my own limitations while floating in a marijuana stupor nearly three-fourths of a century later. I was struck that someone could write so well in long well-balanced sentences while sticking strictly to the subject. The man was wound tight, though the lines were supple. It put to shame some college textbooks, not to say a lot of video-diluted brains. His long sentences reminded me of Proust. It was a similar time (Proust died in 1922), though their lifestyles were a little different. A mechanical engineer and editorial rep. of *American Machinist*, compared to a high society homosexual in France. Every nuance of shop equipment was laid out in longwinded detail, and the table of contents was a tour de force. I had no idea what some of it meant, like "swaging a small bushing."
>
> I wondered if the literacy back then was finer tuned and less available to the masses, less diluted or taken for granted. Maybe there were fewer distractions in those days, with a slower pace of life where one is inclined to absorb things more deeply. Did he operate with a certain confidence as an undead white male? It would be interesting if questioning everything, including yourself down to your atoms, does not necessarily result in more knowledge. Those questions come with uncertainties and other diversions which when set in motion tend to stay in motion, becoming a way of life. You wonder if the modern habit of deconstruction has led to people who are more intelligent than this man.
>
> I don't mean to say there aren't people with an encyclopedic knowledge of some discipline or subject. Take computers, for example. But look at how computer manuals are written. I don't think Ezra Pound would go near one.
>
> > The class of shop equipment commonly known as press tools or punches and dies, is becoming extended into so many lines of manufacture and in

> those lines assuming such constantly increasing aspects of importance, that no one responsible for factory output or in any way connected with design, manufacture, or tool department activities can afford at the present time to remain uninformed in respect to the details of construction and application of these tools if the product of the plan is of such character as to admit of the utilization of sheet metal working apparatus. And, it may be added, there are today very few lines of metal manufacture where such tools cannot be employed to advantage, even though in many instances their complete possibilities are not recognized and appreciated until a detail study has been made of existing methods in the plant, and a comparative analysis is drawn up to determine what parts may be converted with economy into press manufactured material.

I want to find the opening lines of "Swann's Way," from *A Remembrance of Things Past*, and compare them to this mechanical remembrance.

Woke up early and refreshed. A lot of sleep. No coffee, cigarettes, alcohol or dinner the night before.

Typing for hours.

Made an effort during the afternoon to put things away and get rid of boxes, tearing them apart with my bare hands. The place is livable, like I am finally accepting the fact, however much static and resistance I get from the street.

7:00 p.m. *60 Minutes*. Homosexuals in foreign armies, and self-segregating black students. Shelby Steele, the black professor from San Jose, was on the program. I've read some of his articles in *Harpers*. He is critical of a civil rights movement which worked so hard to gain access to institutions, only to have black students turn their backs on others once they got there. It seems like a non-event in some respects. Who cares if they want to keep to themselves, and have their own racially-exclusive clubs and housing arrangements? Some of the white students resent it (especially when Public Enemy had a concert), since they're not allowed to do the same. Some of them believe in integration,

thinking we're all brothers under the skin, but it is more like: "What do you mean we, white man?"

Mr. Steele looked askance at a black woman student who said she couldn't stand to be around whites. As if to say, we don't want you, we just want everything you invented, built, or founded. Some black students are deluding themselves, even more than those who think literacy is a white thing, when they speak of themselves as being oppressed. They use the old rhetoric of oppression which he found not only counter-productive, but self-inflating and not true. He said they attend one of the better universities in the country (Duke), where chances are the school is bending over backward to include them. To use the same rhetoric as blacks who were kept out of institutions, who had really known oppression, is in poor taste.

It's like a black film director who gets $30 million to direct a movie about Malcolm X and then refers to Hollywood as a plantation - as if the slaves working in the fields got millions of dollars for their work and time off for screen tests while maintaining a home in New York City. It's kind of twisted to retain the aura of victims who went through far worse than you did while glomming onto the amenities of a rich and powerful country.[26]

You can study the historical without assuming you were there. You can lose track of the present if you fill your head with the oppression of people over several centuries. Then get into your sedan, stop off at the ATM on the way to the gym, check your phone machine for any messages, and all with the presumption of being oppressed and held back from your infinite potential.

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[26] Flash forward a year or two: a black musician who's a famous multi-millionaire is having a dispute with his record company, so he writes the word "slave" on his face. Slavery wasn't so bad, in other words, if all they had to worry about was bad recording contracts.

People can be held back by the rhetoric of oppression. They lose a sense of proportion, which was Mr. Steele's point. Maybe it doesn't matter what inflates the poses and neuroses of people. They are free to think whatever they want. Ego minus zero, no limit. In a wider context of suffering in the world, however, they're losing credibility. It's like someone who turns on the oven and smells gas, exclaiming "It's the Holocaust!" Out of respect for those who died you want to spit on their shoes.

10:00 p.m. Phone call. I thought it was my sister, the ex-sociologist, who had left a message. It was the French-speaking Belgian woman. We were on the phone for a couple of hours. For a while she described a lecture she went to. It was given by a man from India in his late sixties, Dr. Naravane, one of the more polished, erudite, and humble men she ever heard, with a vast knowledge of literature and the history of India. He talked about an ancient epic poem, *The Mahabharata*, which I know very little about. There is another lecture on Sunday morning.

We talked about other things, from British footage of the concentration camps to my present living conditions.

I asked about her family in Belgium. No matter where I live there remains in the back of my mind the year we spent in Europe (1975-1976). We stayed in her parents' home in Ostend for a while. She comes from an old family, tracing their lineage back to the 1200's.

There was some mention of her youngest brother who is in his late thirties (she is forty-nine). Their father was a retired diplomat. He had a debilitating muscle condition brought on by a car crash many years ago. The son became his mother's favorite and never had much to do with women or girls. There was an early engagement, more of an

arranged formality, which eventually dissolved. He was known for his disappearances, even when we traveled with her parents to Mallorca. This was on my last trip there in 1981. I mentioned the possibility of his being homosexual. I figured he was cruising when he disappeared, but she refused the concept. A few years later he confirmed his orientation to his older brother and two sisters, but not to his mother. He had lived with a man for years and missed a holiday with his mother to be with the man's family. The mother was miffed and said he treated the other man like his bride. Things had been deteriorating between them, partly from the son's resentment at having to hide his sexuality. He finally let her know and it was devastating. She spends more time now with the children of her other son.

She is one of the more sophisticated women I have known. If she took it hard, her daughter thought it might involve other things. The ambiguities of a mother's love for her son come close to being "in love." Not that anything came of it, in her opinion. It was not another *Murmur of the Heart.*[27] It may have been the realization that no grandchildren would come from him.

I got off the phone with the TV on and the sound off. During our conversation a ballet was on, and then a juggler with an erudite routine. My head is a multi-channel receiver and in the course of an evening I'm absorbing conversations, television, music on the radio, along with street noise and whatever I've been reading. The journal bears witness to an information overload, and one can be eclectic to a fault. It's like the real terrain that one inhabits is made of intersecting planes. One of them is where you live, but other planes are slanting off in different directions in your mind. They convey whatever

[27] Louis Malle (1971)

you hear or read or talk about on any given day. Those preoccupations are as real and tangible in your life as sitting in a room and looking out the window.

For hours you're on elevated thoroughfares which are invisible, but they hold your attention and come with valid forms of information. My mind is playing three-dimensional chess with an unknown entity.

12:30 at night, I went out walking on a sinister-looking street. A few shady characters were lurking here and there, but "lurking" is conjectural. Maybe they had nothing to do, and were only "shady" because it was dark out. I kept walking with nothing looking too inviting or even open. I ended up at Tommy's Joynt on the main drag, emerging from a neighborhood with signs of destitution and feeling faint from hunger. I stumbled on an oasis of wooden booths in a high-ceiling room in which there was a succulent array of pastrami, roast beef, bean soup, and every beer known to man.

I had a fine meal in a booth in back. There was a rodeo on the television, where men come out of the gate on a wildly bucking horse. It wants to give them permanent whiplash, break their back, and it was not what I wanted to see when having dinner. It occurred to me (again) how people in Texas think there are lunatics in California, but here was someone sitting on a furious bull that didn't want anything to do with him. Maybe he is not insane, but it wasn't in California where a 900-foot Jesus was seen, or where a cult flamed out in a (government-assisted) mass suicide.[28]

[28] Flash forward a few years: A man had a homosexual affair and his marriage fell apart. A cult formed around him which was anti-physical (and anti-life as it turned out). He and a few others had themselves surgically castrated. The next step was to cut off any connection with the earth. Thirty-nine people took an extraterrestrial form of transit known as phenobarbital. The plan was to meet up on an alien spaceship which was following a comet. The comet was real, but the spaceship wasn't. I'm sorry to say that it occurred in California.

1:30 in the morning, I walked back to my place. The neighborhood looks lived in. There are hardly any tourists, and the occasional hooker lends her weight to the gravity of the Tenderloin. The fundamentals of sex and death are out in force, and you see more families, mainly Vietnamese immigrants. There are more signs of life than where I used to live, more signs of existential rot as well.

Monday, April 26, 1993

I was on the typewriter by nine, the room flooded with morning light. The desk sits along the windows facing east. I would have sunlight in my eyes if I hadn't put a four-foot bamboo fan in the window behind the typewriter. It mimics the morning rays on the horizon with the slats fanning out from a vanishing point. The light was coming through a luminescent fan and getting into my hair. I stuck an Ace of Hearts in the fan, the back of it with a woman in a transparent nightgown.

Another window has a view of a brick building about eight stories high. There is a line of vertical window holes which looks like a strip of film. There is a tall pine tree on the side, next to a twenty-story apartment building. All of these buildings, including mine, are on the edge of a vacant lot.

There is a chain-link fence along the sidewalk across the street and a building set back from the street, a BODY SHOP. Street vendors sell used clothing on the fence. Ordinary objects are spread out on a blanket on the sidewalk. Some have so little you wonder what's the point. There was a worn-out white man with a few things on display, a half-hearted attempt to make a few bucks. I wondered if it was a front, if he was selling

something else, with the money being exchanged for controlled substances and the customer gets a free shirt - a consolation prize for an addict.

A line of shirts hung on the chain-link fence, watched over by a black man. When the wind blows the shirts are caught up in a frantic surrender, waving their empty arms and pleading for their lives.

I don't care if the vendors are there, but it is technically illegal. They need the fence to hang their shirts on. For every man with his wares in the air, another three or four will congregate and help him idle away the time. Their voices carry, but I'm getting used to it. The police keep a low profile. It is not a high priority if there are shirts on a fence. You wonder if the local residents complain about it. They far outnumber those on the sidewalk. They're a silent majority, except for the coughing occupant in this building.

A typical morning. The vendors with their livelihoods up in the air. One had his stuff up at three in the morning. I wondered how much one could make with this approach. Maybe they're on public assistance and this is an embellishment. Maybe it gives a man a sense of purpose. A couple of them arrive in a car, hang up their shirts, lay out their wares, and stand there. One man is strong and muscular in normal clothes. He has a look of serious intentions. For all I know he is dumb as wood. All he's doing is standing there with a few shirts on a fence.

The police came by, very casual. They do this once a day, maybe less. As soon as they show up people know it's time to start taking their stuff down. They're not losing their shirts. A policeman says they will be back in half an hour to make sure the sidewalk is cleared. A couple of vendors move as slow as possible, removing one shirt per minute. The strong one never removed anything. He had a woman doing the work and she only

went through the motions. They never left. Another guy removed his things but was back in half an hour and laid it all out again. It was two or three hours later (mid-afternoon) when a few police came by, this time on bicycles with helmets. They waited until everyone had gone. The same ones returned the next morning.

A few days ago, when I was reading *A Room of One's Own*, I walked by the vendors. On the ground was a used biography of Virginia Woolf. We're a far cry from Bloomsbury.

Meanwhile, I was typing with the light streaming in. It slanted across the walls, hitting portions of the desk and bouncing off of various objects. There were prismatic streaks on the floor and walls which came from a few flat prisms which I stuck on the windows (a present from Jon).

One can be remolded by a neighborhood, not to say one's living quarters. Your psychic space is redefined. I was used to my old neighborhood, and now I was being cut and chopped and maybe lowered like when someone customizes a motorcycle. There is a hard edge to this occupancy. It is harder to remove yourself from the outside world, and for someone with a tendency to go off in his head that isn't necessarily bad. I'm getting psyched up to go public with my writing, most of it in boxes at the moment.

Technically this is not a bad neighborhood, building-wise. Most of the structures are not decrepit or falling down. When you walk through late at night and the streets are deserted you can imagine a whole other atmosphere. It changes according to who is on the street, whether it's a clean and neat Vietnamese couple with their kids, an old white bum who drinks too much, a UFO (unidentified felonious other), a friendly black man who would sell you the shirt off his back, a transvestite in heels and a tight skirt, or a

white man in a suit stepping out of a silver-grey Mercedes (the manager of the building I live in). The mood of the neighborhood changes when a few schoolgirls walk by, compared to a dirty drifter, or when the police show up with their revolvers and revolving lights and the mood is one of arrested development.

Another thing: the relativity of who or what is rancid and suspicious, even threatening. Some people come here from a poor country and it feels like an improvement. I've known Europeans who were shocked at what a dirty town this is, as if the Tenderloin has grown beyond its borders. There are those who live in upscale neighborhoods, born with a silver remote control in their hand, who would never come here. I have heard one or two speak of this area like it was infested with some kind of low-life, the human version of rats and roaches. The furtive thief or junkie in the shadows who scurries away from a spotlight of the law.

The other afternoon I walked a block and waited for the bus. A tall Latina woman walked by. I think she was in a bad mood. I had seen her before, arguing with a black man who was possibly her boyfriend or handler. At the moment she wore skintight shorts and a white halter top. I looked for the bus and gave her a passing glance. She took it as an affront, saying, "WHAT'S UP DUDE… GET OUT OF MY…" something. I looked away (still no bus).

I have a tendency to stare. It is hard to see things if you don't, much less write about them later. The other night when I was approached by a hooker from across the street I thought about how those women spend their time, staring and being stared at, gauging the caliber of someone from a fleeting glimpse. They are tuned in to the

sightlines for their own protection, scanning the streets and drivers with a penetrating 20-20 vision, and I don't mean twenty-dollar bills.

You might suppose a hooker is sensitive to sightlines, where a man's gaze has the tangibility of a cattle prod. I think this is the case with most women, and a lot of men (including myself) don't realize how obvious the angle of a passing glance is to a woman. It's ephemeral and maybe not uncalled for, given a low-cut blouse or a short skirt, but the woman sees the angle of the look. It's something I forget at times, since I'm always scanning things around me, like there is some hidden recording equipment in my head. I might be looking at the stars, an iron gate, or seeing signs – which is how I noticed the HUNG PHAT COFFEE SHOP.

What's curious though, getting back to the hooker with an attitude, is if she makes her living with a constant public exposure and gets tired of it. Maybe she was off work and tired of the eyes of men. Either that or things are communicated through my eyes that I am barely aware of. You can have a look or expression where you're thinking of something else, like where's the damn bus, I'm tired, my back is sore from sleeping on the floor. Sometimes those feelings blend with your gaze. You don't realize it, but someone else might. I've gotten into trouble a few times, assuming that my private thoughts or mute gaze were my own concern and not hurting anyone. But others may react. I remember being in the DNA Lounge a while back. I arrived with someone and stood near the dance floor. A short guy who thought he was the life of the club went by, a Filipino or Latino. I glanced at him, not saying a word, but he bristled, backing up and ready to fight while saying something. I think he led his life on surface impressions, and his deepest moment will occur when he is six feet under.

It happened to me in the sixth grade when I was walking back to my desk, having had a disappointing talk with the teacher, a stern older woman. When I sat down at my desk,[29] I didn't realize my feelings were visible on my face. She hit me with a verbal admonition, saying if I didn't like it, blah blah blah. I was stunned. I hadn't said a word, but my expression gave me away. After years of this you start to think you are transparent.

There have been occasions with a few girlfriends where a look or a glance had side-effects I hadn't counted on, both positive and negative. They might be ultra-sensitive, or maybe I have a lot of optic nerve. I could project it on the silver screen, except that I'm a lousy actor. I can't even act my age.

Where was I? Monday… typing in the morning… then walked to work.

V. has gotten to the point of carrying on a running conversation from the next desk. She used to be shy. Talking with her I forget where I am, until I am reminded by an irascible 290-pound attorney of German descent.

I was working on the case involving the Latino man who killed his girlfriend. He was our client during a wicked divorce proceeding which the Attorney took forever to resolve. In the meantime, our client lived with his girlfriend who gave birth to their child. Two weeks later they had a drunken argument, during which she blurted out, "THE CHILD ISN'T YOURS!" He went berserk and stabbed her with a knife (they were in the kitchen). I had met her, a friendly woman who no longer exists. He wanted a lighter sentence based on a "heat of the moment" situation, with a further consideration of being in an altered state – half out of his mind on drugs and alcohol. He got ten years in prison.

[29] It was a simple wooden desk which would protect me if an atom bomb went off ("Duck and cover"). It could not protect me from the teacher though.

The family of the deceased woman absconded with a few of his possessions, including hand tools and a pickup. He used to drive a cement truck.

Around seven I walked to a small Cambodian place near my apartment. White cloth tables and a menu more original and fresh than most. It turned out they were out of trout with ginger, oranges, and garlic, so I had the pineapple catfish soup with green onions, prawns, and steamed rice. It was worth writing home about.

I walked home past the same dark-haired woman on the corner (under the HOTELE SEX sign), this time in a bra with her low-slung breasts – one of them with ink injections. I felt at home, as if the logic or logistics of my situation require that I eat out every night - given the limitations of my cooking repertoire, my lack of kitchen supplies, and the need to have an earlier dinnertime than two in the morning.

9:30 p.m. My sister called. It was a long conversation from Portola Valley to the Tenderloin. She told me her sociological view of prostitution. I said it sounded very Protestant. She had to admit that other studies have said some women find it alluring. It gives them a sense of power, not to say more money in a week than they would usually make in a month. There is a fundamental sense of being in demand, of doing something with a simple purpose. Some of them hate men and this is how they show their contempt. The man is reduced to an organ which is readily drained. He is forced to cough up fifty or a hundred bucks for something that took little effort on her part.

My sister mentioned a woman sociologist who did some research on the subject. She hung out with prostitutes for several months, looking the part, but not living the life. She had a husband, but had to undergo therapy or deprogramming, having felt the lure and found she didn't want to leave.

This was followed by a monologue, and after a while I said, “Speaking of dated arguments, I read *A Room of One’s Own*.”

There is a man she likes who said he tends to walk out when a woman gets too close. Our views are skewed by our experiences. I’ve known some women who were sugarcoated bulldozers. One told me she starts to lose respect for a man as soon as they have sex. I described the modus operandi of some women, undermining her assumption that they are inherently ethical and nurturing.

She said she was a little new at this (the real world?) at thirty-seven, having been married for years and absorbed in academia. She thinks in terms of helpless women who are oppressed by a male-dominated society. In the real world, operating beyond the reach of many textbooks, it is not uncommon to encounter a buzz-saw in a skirt.

She admitted that women have a lot of practice separating love and sex. For centuries it was built into their survival methods, and when they choose a man there are more ulterior motives than you can shake a tube of lipstick at. A woman had to think in terms of protection and an income. There is a lot of commentary about women being treated as objects, but it is common for a woman to marry a man for his money, to fall for him according to objectifying criteria like his occupation, home, appearance, car, or height. He is objectified to within an inch (or six) of his life.

She said women have always had to be practical, so it’s often the men who end up being more romantic. A man will come on to a woman with flowers and try to get her into bed while meeting some resistance. There are other things a woman has to deal with, like not getting pregnant for example. He can have an idealized view of the situation

while she has to think in terms of spermicidal jelly, or how to tell him she believes in true love but not at his income level, or maybe if he was taller, younger, older, etc.

All of which can make it harder for women to get in the mood. They have some practical issues to get over before they can allow themselves to be seduced. For those with a prosaic stick-in-the-mud nature it can take some effort to get them in the mood – the hypnotic suggestion of a Frank Sinatra record being the least of it.

And women objectify themselves. It involves minute considerations of skin and hair and weight and clothing which are beyond the scope or concern of most men. The women have a psychologically-magnified view of themselves, and stressing about their bodies is a way to keep themselves at the center of attention. The discussion is still about them, however self-critical it sounds. Besides, they can blame this neurotic self-preoccupation on *Vogue* magazine, or society in general, rather than admitting to a level of narcissism that is downright morbid. If they let the propaganda of clothing interfere with their lives, it means they are not only vain, but shallow.

There are pros and cons to having a magnified view of things. A flower is all the more intense, but so is a line of ants on the floor. It's like their eyes are larger, and this orientation is underlined with eyeliner. There is a further magnification if a woman lives in a subjective bubble (hopefully not *The Bell Jar*).[30] Or maybe she's a wide-eyed brittle coward who leans on objects like a life preserver, allowing her to float on the surface.

Speaking of women with an intensified optic nerve, it might explain their legendary tendency for tuning up their own appearance while their home looks like the photographer from *House Beautiful* has been there. When one of the senses is heightened,

[30] Sylvia Plath (1963)

another may become dormant - like hearing, for instance. I have been around women who were dressed to kill, but had no taste in music or their voices were a turn-off - thin and shrill, a kind of audio spermicide.

Similarly, there are intellectuals who are focused on their books while neglecting the housework. My sister said wherever she lives or works it looks like a storm passed through, scattering books and papers and clothes everywhere. It drove my other sister nuts (a businesswoman) when they tried to live together in college. They were quite the odd couple, and they still go through phases where they're not speaking.

Both of them have a diminished sense of music. There are many people for whom a sense of music is nonexistent or middle of the road. When I was in high school I arrived in Los Angeles around the same time that underground FM did, in 1967. I listened to it on the stereo in the living room. Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, while my patient father read the paper. My sisters couldn't see or hear beyond Top 40 AM radio, and one of them (the sociologist) was a homecoming queen.

With respect to a reduced sense of hearing, I have wasted some well-worded arguments on women who wouldn't listen. And there are times when I look decent in the harmonic convergence of a random wardrobe and find that women are more friendly and open. After a while you get the impression you could be a little dim, but if you look a certain way they like you. That might explain why some of them fall for a clothes dummy who is going through the motions. "Smart women, poor choices" might occur if they succumb to the visual, which is to say a surface impression. It makes you wonder how smart they were in the first place. How come their legendary intuition isn't functioning when it comes to those poor choices? A woman friend, rather blunt, says it shuts off

when they're "thinking with their cunts." Their intuition may be compromised by sightlines which imply that everything is fine according to a haircut and the clean lines of a new car.[31]

That might explain the old saying that every woman loves a man in uniform. (Sylvia Plath said, "Every woman adores a Fascist.")[32] It doesn't matter what the man does, as long as a uniform is involved. The Fascists had wives and girlfriends who didn't question what their men were doing as long as there was uniformity involved.

Corollary: what if prostitutes have an acute sense of surveillance and appearance, but their sense of hearing is diminished? They could be practically deaf, which would make it easier to be on the street for hours with the sound of traffic and the occasional catcall. When they're with a man they might prefer not to hear him.

Speaking of prostitutes, there was an article in *The New Yorker* about a woman who tried to help them. She found that nearly four-fifths of them had sex by the time they were fourteen. If they were traumatized, one way of dealing with it was to revisit the scene of the crime – their bodies – with any available man. They make the act so ordinary, the orifice so numb and common, that after a few hundred times it redefines the original transgression as being relatively insignificant (diluting it with body fluids). If they can make sex into a forgettable experience, maybe they can forget what happened to them. They have deflated the original trauma, having pulled the rug of painful significance out from under it, though it took a while.

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[31] There's an old film, *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952), in which a writer is supposed to write a book. His wife arranges his desk so it is clean and neat, but that is not how he works. He knows that "A clean desk is the sign of a sick mind." It is a form of writer's block, and corresponds to the flat-line in a heart monitor. A messy desk is full of life.

[32] "Daddy" (1960) The adoration has its limits: "Daddy, I have had to kill you…" And yet, "At twenty I tried to die / And get back, back, back to you. / I thought even the bones would do."

11:30 p.m. I got off the phone with my sister and went over to the typewriter for a couple of hours.

1:30 a.m. Went out for some apple juice. The street is haunted.

2:30 a.m. I arranged the bedding in the hall. The mattress leans against the wall. I drop it down and it covers the floor. When the door to the kitchen is shut, it's like a prison cell, about 4 x 8 feet with a small bathroom attached. The front door has a frosted glass window about one-foot square (it used to have bars). There is an old iron elevator crashing shut whenever I use it. There are ex-cons in the neighborhood – small-time hoods, felonious conspirators, the warranted and the unwarranted who promenade along with other oddities of human nature.

I was lying in the dark, thinking what a quiet night it was, when suddenly it wasn't. Someone yelled on the street. Not unusual, but it continued. I got up and walked into the front room with all of its windows. The yelling was from a man who was getting beaten up or robbed and was calling for help. He was a cab driver who was on the sidewalk with a black man over him (apparently unarmed, or the yelling wouldn't have gone on so long). Another cab pulled up. I wondered if that one called the police. They are never far away - the station is a few blocks from here.

A black and white pulled up and the man took off running, all heels and elbows in a loping stride in my direction. He was across the street and ran past the window while a cop knelt down with his gun drawn in the classic position, aiming at the man and yelling "FREEZE!" - I froze - and just for emphasis, if not a legal sobriquet, he added "MOTHERFUCKER!" in case the guy didn't know he was serious. I had a momentary sinking feeling the cop might shoot. It was a clear shot on a deserted street with enough

light to see. He must have thought the better of it though, realizing there was no need to, however tempting it was – it's pretty lowdown to assault a cab driver. There would have been a storm of paperwork and hearings if he were to put a government-funded bullet through a fleeing suspect, especially if the fellow died.

They expended a little gas, jumping into the patrol car. It had a good acceleration, zooming past my window to the corner about the time the fleeing suspect turned the corner, followed by another patrol car. They caught up to him, blocking or impeding his forward progress, and got his attention with their weapons drawn on the next block. A few minutes later I heard a policeman walking back. "We got him." The cab driver was attended to, more shaken up than injured.

I wondered if the suspect was an addict, or mentally disturbed. To assault a taxi driver while unarmed is not a well-thought-out plan, and neither is running when a policeman crouches down and has you dead to rights, less than half a block away on an empty street. What are the odds the state will expend the cost of several college educations on this suspect to go to trial and then to prison for a few years (especially if he has some prior convictions)?

It occurred to me that an hour ago I would have been in the line of fire, going into the corner store for some apple juice. However, that is idle speculation. It is not uncommon to walk on a sidewalk where a shooting occurred the night before. And there are fatal car wrecks which you never see or hear about.

A fleeing suspect, an arrest, the crime itself a fleeting moment in the city and a few minutes later there is no sign of it. The collisions take a little longer to clean up. Law and order with a side-effect of amnesia and an illusion of security. In some towns in

Europe there is a bronze plaque commemorating that members of the Resistance were shot against this wall by the Nazis. I'm not sure what the equivalent would be here. If you put up a plaque for every homicide and serious car wreck you would end up with some neighborhoods cast in bronze.

Tuesday, April 27, 1993

NOTES

From *A Room of One's Own*:

> … Nature seems, very oddly, to have provided us with an inner light by which to judge of the novelist's integrity or disintegrity. Or perhaps it is rather that Nature, in her most irrational mood, has traced in invisible ink on the walls of the mind a premonition which these great artists confirm; a sketch which only needs to be held to the fire of genius to become visible.

Reminds me of a line in *The Heart Was a Lonely Hunter* (by Carson McCullers). It said a certain truth is written in a man or woman in invisible ink, and it takes the firelight of whiskey to make it visible.

> Yet it is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are 'important'; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes 'trivial'…. This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room. A scene in a battlefield is more important than a scene in a shop – everywhere and much more subtly the difference of value persists.

Three-fourths of a century later this doesn't hold up. It's more like: this is an important book because it's on the best-seller list – and it could be about anything, including the feelings of women in a drawing-room or a bondage club. If we're talking about prevailing values, what about the vast exposure given to supermarket romance novels which are written mainly by women for other women?

Considering the time she was writing, not long after World War I, you might suppose the subject of war had some importance. You might think a scene on a battlefield would be more serious than a scene in a shop, where there are probably less people and things are not quite so hectic (unless there is a sale). On the other hand, she has a point if she is talking about literary quality.

Similarly, the painting of an important battle scene might have nowhere near the aesthetic force of a woman pouring milk (a la Vermeer), especially if the latter is more realistic. War is often rendered in romanticized tones which border on the kitsch, if not an outright lie.

The publishing industry is awash in the feelings of women these days. They are not overshadowed by geo-political subjects – especially when the women divert attention from the miserable conditions in the world.

Besides, a woman trying on silk blouses in a shop and having some difficulty finding one the right size because the sizing varies and she has put on a few pounds due to fluctuations in her self-esteem is more interesting than a few hundred soldiers getting torn to pieces for no good reason. In this respect, a woman is worth an army of anonymous men. As Rick said to Ilsa in *Casablanca*, "The Germans wore grey, you wore blue."

From the introduction:

> Genius needs freedom; it cannot flower if it is encumbered by fear, or rancor, or dependency, and without money freedom is impossible. And the money cannot be earned; it must come to the writer in the form of a windfall or a legacy, or it will bring with it attachments, obligations.

Welcome to the real world, Virginia, where people like Poe, Rimbaud, and Dostoyevsky might have amounted to something if they were given a lot of money with no strings attached, and if no rancor was lurking in the vicinity. No one ever wrote in prison I suppose, though Genet and the Marquis de Sade took notes. I'm sure the only reason Solzhenitsyn wrote his novels, which don't have much in the way of shopping, is the state supported him every step of the way.

Moving right along on this pedestrian level of prose, there was a recent march on Washington - approximately half a million homosexual men and women. Some were criticizing a recent study. It said that rather than their representing ten percent of the population, it was more like one or two percent.

I'm on thin ice here, speaking as an outsider. There are studies showing that homosexual men have a higher standard of living, with more spendable income, than most other groups. The couples usually have two incomes and no children to worry about. And it isn't that homosexuals don't have any power. The demand is to have it openly, which is different than saying you've been left out completely and discriminated against and can barely make a living.

I may be getting tangled in the relativities of oppression, but there was a lesbian with a sign saying I DEMAND THE RIGHT TO DIE FOR MY COUNTRY.

> Shall we start a war so she can live out her death wish? It is a weird mix of progressive and reactionary feelings. You would think that sort of thing isn't necessary anymore and hasn't been for a long time. Dying for this country usually means dying for the corporate state and probably on foreign soil where chances are you shouldn't be in the first place. Would the war in Vietnam have been more noble if women were on the front lines, meeting the Tet Offensive and getting torn apart in the jungle? Would they have been any less invaders without a cause while having an unspeakable effect on a foreign country?
>
> It is so off-the-wall, her demand to be given the "right" to die in a uniform with her hands on a smoking hot automatic weapon that you wonder if there is something here along the lines of a psychosexual fantasy ("I dreamed I died for my country in my Maidenform bra.") It is a readymade role that she could step into with all of the drama and self-importance that men have availed themselves of, except that she would kiss a woman at the door and say, "Well honey, I'm off to fight for our country." Which at this point is like saying, "Well honey, I'm off to mow down some peasants to verify my lesbian self as a good citizen." With psychology being a bottomless pit of subconscious motivation, it might include a remote self-hatred hidden by a uniform.

Typing… went to work in the afternoon.

6:30 p.m. I walked to Market Street. It's out of the way, but I'm still dealing with department stores. On the street, and echoing for a block or more, was a weathered-looking white man with a short beard who was around thirty. He seemed like a drifter, with an old electric guitar hooked up to a small amp and doing some solid blues which got my attention. So did the young black woman on bass. After a while she sang into a mic. I had the feeling he was someone who plays guitar all day, learning the structures and working on them until he was good. I listened for a while and lost interest in the store and went home.

I've been here for a week. It's starting to feel like home. At night I hear the occasional sound of breaking glass, a yell, and someone running - the circumstantial evidence of a bad neighborhood. One thing might have nothing to do with another, but

you get a little jumpy. I was on the bus the other day when it stopped. A young man jumped off the bus, running, with the bus driver honking the horn. I thought something was wrong, but it turned out he was running for another bus.

I think that was a gunshot in the distance.

The crimes are filtered through a tree outside my window. I'm on the third floor. The tree is four or five stories high, waving slowly in front of my windows. It is lit from underneath at night, putting the leaves in a dramatic light. The riot lights give the street an eerie glow – an air of inner-city jaundice. The street is contradicted by the tree in the window. The leaves are close enough to see their veins. I look at derelicts and delinquents through the tree, a leafy counterpoint to misdemeanors in the night.

Wednesday, April 28, 1993

Woke up early, no alcohol and not much coffee last night.

Typing for hours.

12:30 p.m. I showed up in the office, having lunch with V. She was in a white silk blouse, black slacks, and pumps, with straight black hair barely to her shoulders. She is getting more familiar by the week. I let things progress at their own speed, which is to say hers. One day I went to work and found that we were closer. A previous distance melted away the night before or over the weekend. She seems to respond to things on the basis of their familiarity. This can be limiting, and the only reason I am in her circle of familiarity is I work at the next desk. Over the past few months I have gradually been

included. She embraces the familiar. At the center is "love minus zero/no limit."[33] Not that I have come that close.

If I ever did, it would be a natural thing for her to be a source of heat and light. I am intrigued by someone who functions like that. Her relations with other people have an organic quality, not easily connecting and not so readily discarded. You run the risk of falling in love with someone who would stay in love for years on end, but there are worse things that could happen.

The last time I knew someone like that, or felt such a current, was another foreign woman with dark hair who was technical and sensual and discreet, the French-speaking Belgian woman. She had a Catholic background and was somewhat guarded. When she fell in love it was no holds barred. She was temperamental (both of them are Libras, for what it's worth). The Belgian woman is nine years older than me, and her late father was the consul to Finland.

V.'s father runs the parking garage downstairs. It is purely conjectural if I will ever be romantic with V., but if I am I will be moving up in the world. I'm levitated in her presence. She has an alluring quality of not getting tangled in the news like many others do, including myself. She constitutes a clearing in her own right, and not in terms of being vacant. It's like someone who doesn't want newspaper ink on their soul.

Thursday, April 29, 1993

[33] Bob Dylan (1965)

I walked to the pool after work. It was crowded, so I sat on the side until the wait became a weight, which materialized when I headed for the weight room. I worked out for half an hour on some heavy metal torture machines.

Returned to the pool and got a lane. One mile, a bit slow. Muscles with a hint of iron in them. My time is not improving. On the other hand, swimming underwater is a breeze. One length is nothing. I've done 1½ lengths, about a hundred feet.

Walked home. Almost every night there is someone yelling, running, breaking glass, or slamming on the brakes. Here come the sirens. The flashing lights are generated by the friction between the legal system and the street.

Friday, April 30, 1993

I was up late the night before. Woken in the morning around eleven by the phone. It was V. in the office with that shy and practical voice of hers. Did I want to go to lunch? Surprised she would call me at home, which is not a bad sign.

I went to lunch with the receptionist yesterday (Renee). Our conversations have taken on an hour-long intensity with some depth. She lives with her boyfriend. Maybe "boyfriend" should be in quotes, considering how she speaks of him. She doesn't like him to touch her for one thing.

Slow afternoon in the office. Among the not-so-edifying considerations and complications: what do you do when a man and woman live together, but one night during an argument he kills her? He is now in prison and her family took over his possessions. His family wants them back. Two young men approached the father of the

accused, who was parking his pickup truck, and said, “Your son killed our cousin.” They took the truck in compensation.

Around eight I arrived at the flat near the Haight with the Phantom there. He took over Jon’s room who is in Mexico for a week. I realized later he was holding it for Ming, maybe as a domestic shrine. We sat around talking about smoking heroin and ordering an amplifier in the mail. He wasn’t a wreck tonight. We went down to the sonic dungeon around ten-thirty. I hooked up the Les Paul with the Phantom on drums. He has a shifting or mercurial syncopation when he wants. We had something going a few times.

I tested the mic with a few songs. They force you to adhere to some semblance of a structure. It would be good if I could remember the lyrics more often. Or remember the words and not forget the chords. Or remember both, and not lose the rhythm. Usually it worked, though a song or two got mangled in the process. He talked about recording equipment, and a $4000 8-track. He has the know-how, but the motivation is a little warped if not diluted by a river of beer running through his life. It is eroding his foundations.

We stopped around midnight or 1 a.m. and went upstairs. I had the usual sense of reaching for something in the music and not necessarily finding it. I’m up against a ceiling of my own limitations. However, after warming up for an hour there was a loose facility with something extra and I’m not sure where it came from.

There were two bottles of wine between us. I had half a bottle. Around two in the morning I went to sleep in his old room. A complete shambles, like a human garage. I put a futon on the floor and slept hard, but it was quiet.

Saturday, May 1, 1993

In the morning I felt like I had slept on the floor. Not enough sleep. I couldn't shake the feeling of fatigue for most of the day. Not sure why, considering we didn't have a smoke last night. I went out for breakfast at the diner, sitting at the counter. When I returned, I sat in the kitchen for an hour or two, feeling drained and talking with the female roommate who was making apple crisp. There was some discussion of her textbook, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. She loaned it to me. Brother can you paradigm?

There was a frank discussion which I don't think I instigated. It was about two friends of hers who are strippers and how they got into it. It made her realize some women are whores and strippers for reasons of their own.[34]

In the afternoon I walked to Reckless Records on Haight Street and bought a ticket for EINSTURZEN NEUBAUTEN. They're at the Bridge next Saturday night. Went home, then walked to the library, returning a few books. Mechanical drawings and DeLillo. I couldn't find several books, with a couple not even in the computer (*Culture of Complaint* and *Kitchen*). Considering the amount of nondescript middlebrow novels they have it was a little odd. Another public institution falling on hard times. Since the earthquake in '89 the shelves still have wooden sticks over the top for support. I finally said, you don't have such and such… do you have *Sex* by Madonna? Of course. This is the city that knows how.

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[34] In 1972 I lived in a large studio in Project Artaud (in the Mission District). A young woman asked me to go with her to a burlesque show a few blocks away (at the Victoria Theater) to see about working there. We got a free show and watched a woman have a climax onstage. My friend (an artist trying to pay the rent on her studio) was transformed into Mona Mandrake. It turned out she liked show-biz, and the hold she had on an audience as a stripper.

I flipped through it, underwhelmed. The most slippery thing about it was the alter ego, like it wasn't her, it was another persona which was feigning all of this. She can take credit for the comments if they're taken seriously, but otherwise it is her alter ego speaking. "My pussy has nine lives." There was something about how she wouldn't want a penis, it would get in the way, and anyhow doesn't need one. "I have a penis in my brain." Thinking is hard for her?

When I was in the flat and talking with the female roommate, I told her that Madonna wanted to play the role of Frida Kahlo in a film. She was trying to option the rights to her life story. The roommate was horrified that such a lousy actress would co-opt the integrity of a real artist. Madonna is vicarious when it comes to taking on the authenticity of others. She uses someone else's aura as her own perfume. Consider the movie roles she has tried to inhabit, based on historical women. She would glom on to their reputation and drain it, so it's dead-on-arrival on the silver screen. It's the equivalent of wearing someone's spirit like an outfit you look good in, whether Frida Kahlo or Joan of Arc.[35]

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[35] I can see it now with Frida in a torture scene, wearing a back-brace setting off her breasts to good effect. Then she stares into a mirror (something she is good at) while gesturing at a canvas with a paintbrush. In the evening she seduces a revolutionary, and pretends to love the masses (a la Eva Peron).

Joan of Arc: the film with Antonin Artaud will be hard to improve upon (*The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) by Carl Theodor Dreyer), but that's not the point. She can do her empowered woman routine, cutting down movie extras with a sword on the battlefield and then become a martyred woman with a little skin and bondage, tied to a stake with a torn garment clinging to a tit as she manages to stare toward heaven. Heat-waves fill the screen as the flames of fame burn her clothes off and she goes up in smoke while the soldiers are in tears or jacking off. Her pure and naked spirit rises above it all in a pose from a famous pin-up.

The whole thing arrives on the consciousness with a dull thud, like you just watched a 90-minute shampoo commercial.

I went upstairs to the third floor reading room with a high ceiling of wooden beams. I missed a story by T.C. Boyle in *Harpers* last month ("Top of the Food Chain"). It's a send-up of the white men who would meddle in the subtle cause and effective web of nature. They want to remove a certain insect species in a tropical setting. When they spray the flies there is a gradual chain reaction of the natural order coming undone. The flies are all over the ground. The lizards which are normally quick and hungry devour them in unprecedented quantities, becoming fat and lazy. Now they are easy prey for cats which fill up on the lizards and then start dying from absorbing a chemical in the spray that killed the flies. The local natives are disturbed. Not only are their cats dying but the rat population is exploding. Was it the flies or some other neutralized species which controlled an organism in the thatched roofs? It now has no predator and is chewing through the roofs which start collapsing during the rainy season. The ever-resourceful and accommodating white men give tin roofs to the natives, who complain about how loud the rain is on a tin roof and they can't sleep. You wonder if the natives thought, "Get out of here, we'd rather have malaria."

I left when the library was closing. I was tired and semi brain-dead so I went to the department store to get it over with. I took care of the voucher for kitchen supplies. Most of it went for a round wooden table and a few black padded folding chairs, a frying pan, and a couple of glasses. I was led to a monolithic alley out back and waited for a cab.

Home around nine and turned on the opera, ignoring the things I bought. The table was in a box for several days. It occurred to me that a round table in a flat box

would imply my having to put it together. I caught the last hour or so of *La Traviata* turned up loud.

Typing until two in the morning.

Sunday, May 2, 1993

11:00 a.m. Phone call from my parents with both of them on the line. They will drive up from El Cajon in a couple of weeks, my mother with her practical questions and concerns. I went off on a theological tangent with my father (a subject she has little interest in). He went to a debate of scientists and religious fundamentalists on the subject of evolution (he is on the side of science). He is in a study group of scientists and open-minded theologians who knock around universal concepts, but he thought the debate was futile. The fundamentalists tried to make a pseudo-scientific point.

The facts of life are not necessarily humanistic, and our comprehension of them is provisional, according to *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. If pseudo-science is the way to go you might as well believe the earth is sitting on blue elephants or cosmic turtles and leave it at that. People are irrational and conservative according to the fascists - like a businessman who thinks there is a place for him in heaven where he will live for all eternity.

My father said one of the scientists figured out that if Jesus was ascending from the earth at the speed of light from the time he "died," he still wouldn't have left the Milky Way.

Typing for hours in the afternoon. No other plans, no need to leave.

On a wooden instrument, relaxing, letting the words dissolve in a sonic trance.

Late afternoon, the tree close to the window was moving back and forth. I like to think it does it of its own accord, but it was windy. In the distance is a metallic high-rise with a band of white light around the top. It looks like a monolith of frozen sperm.

Early evening, *60 Minutes*. Ghana, the Dominican Republic, and the dubious administrator of a university who said, "We live in the interim." From summer to the winterim.

An old Englishman was made the honorary chief of a tribe in Ghana. He respects the local customs, but notes that prisoners taken in tribal wars are often killed or sold as slaves. You would think that those who sell people are as bad as those who buy people. A side-effect of that perspective: it reduces the omnipotence of the white man as someone who could sail down the coast of an unknown continent in wooden boats and grab the natives at will, though vastly outnumbered. It wasn't necessary. The Europeans bought or traded goods for the condemned, another example of the "banality of evil." The logic in that area of West Africa: if you sell your neighbors you can afford to buy more wives.

The Dominican Republic: a lot of immigrants are coming to New York City. A community spokesman says they have a right to be here, and it doesn't matter if they are undocumented. I wasn't clear about his reasoning. He said a country has no right to its borders and anyone can flood into a country from other parts of the world. In what other countries is that the case? The Dominicans who are here might object, feeling crowded and concerned about a governmental system which is straining to accommodate so many low-income people.

There were recent riots in Washington Heights when police shot a young man. He was an undocumented dealer involved in a massive drug trade. What struck me, and

was mentioned almost in passing, the Dominicans in the U.S. send $600,000,000 a year to their country. That is good for the Dominican Republic, which would sink without it, being half dead in the water, but you wonder what $600,000,000 a year would do if it stayed in those immigrant neighborhoods of New York City.[36]

Monday, May 3, 1993

Phone call from the Actress. The conversation went from a child support hearing to the lesbians on the Russian River (she went there with her boyfriend).

Having quit her job and being out of work as an actress she is bored out of her mind. She wanted to know how I'm doing and how I come by this relative peace of mind. It is something she can't hold onto for the life of her. She said I lead the life of a 19th century dilettante. I thought that had a negative connotation, but she wasn't being mean. According to her someone who only works three or four hours a day, leaving time for reading, writing and music, is a throwback to another era (I wrote "ear"). There is a line by Rimbaud (born in 1854) that "One must be absolutely modern," but that doesn't mean you have to turn into a rock video.

Twenty years ago in Los Angeles, a close woman friend from New York City, tall, intelligent, and Jewish, said I should get out of the 19th century (she then moved to Holland and studied classical flute).

The Actress thinks the writing gives me continuity or discipline, and keeps the mundane entanglements of life at arm's length. I slash at those compromises with a steel-stringed instrument. It might look like a discipline, but it is more of an obsession, a way

[36] Twenty years later the remittances were over $4 billion a year – in a country where child labor and slavery are not uncommon.

of life. There was some discussion about mediums of expression and their side-effects. She thought some people can't stand to work alone for any amount of time, including herself. Acting is public and requires having people around. I pointed out a side-effect of writing where you sink into obscurity and disappear.

I'm not sure how much "peace of mind" I have, considering where I live, and how much *sturm und drang* is sublimated into hammered paragraphs, but it is easier to come by when you don't have kids. She said that she has been a lousy mother lately, and asked if I was seeing any women. I said I see all kinds of women, I just don't touch them. I live in a state of isometric tension, being careful and unmotivated by anything less than an affair of operatic proportions. It's a problem when that is what you're used to.

There was some mention of the streetwalkers in the neighborhood. She thought a few of them were men in disguise and wasn't sure it mattered to a hard-up guy who's had a few drinks. She said she made a boyfriend angry when she quipped, "It doesn't matter who is going down on you," and laughed.

Meanwhile, she wants to visit and have dinner at the Cambodian place.

3:00 p.m. Went to work, a little late. When I walked into his office the Attorney said, "Shut the door." I was not sure what to expect, having left a memo letting him know he was remiss in my not having a raise in two years. I was underpaid. There were added comments like, "It's hard enough working for a gross German…" Anyhow, he was accommodating, slightly shamed perhaps, and muttered something about his bills.[37] Then he said, "Okay." An extra hundred a month which will vanish like the rest of it.

[37] He is in his sixties, well read, and sociable, but somewhere along the way his wife left him (a shrill woman who is hard to listen to on the phone). He is drinking more, and getting careless with his practice. Before I started working here he lost a notice from the court on his desk and failed to file a motion on time, resulting in his client losing his case. The client sued the Attorney

6:30 p.m. I walked home from work. A storm that morning was breaking up. A block or two from my place I stood on the corner, waiting to cross. A woman on the other corner was already in motion. I thought she would sprain her back from posing so hard, like an ingénue in the mood. She made a gesture, lifting her sweater to a small breast, and nearly tripped me as I walked by. Slender, on the tall side, a Latina in her early twenties who I've seen a couple of times and is temperamental from what I can tell.

I dropped in on the Cambodian place with its pale blue walls and lace curtains. Quiet piano music, as if one note at a time was dropping into the atmosphere and causing an expanding circle of contentment in the minds of everyone. There was a conductor and his friends at a nearby table. I wanted the pineapple catfish soup, but settled for prawns stir-fried in peanut sauce and garlic with lemongrass.

Walked home, about one block, and read the paper. It was an unrewarding experience, like it's fit for the bus or at work. I had a workout on the guitar while the tube was on without the sound.

10:00 p.m. Things were going well with a wooden stringed instrument. A three-quarter moon in the window. The phone rang on a blue metal ironing board which supports a six-foot-high photo of Trafalgar Square in London (I don't have an iron).[38]

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for malpractice and was awarded what the case was worth, around $60,000. That left the Attorney in a state of perpetual debt and money problems. A businessman he owed money to would call periodically and swear a blue streak on the phone, using curses I never heard before (I would quote him in memos to the Attorney). When he died (a heart attack I think), it made me wonder what all the fuss was about, and if it hastened his demise.

[38] It featured Lord Nelson on top of a 160-foot-high column. It's the highest honor, but you can hardly see who is up there. He defeated the French and Spanish fleets off the coast of Spain in 1805, but died in the process. The warships would sail rather close, and there were marksmen in the rigging, picking off whoever they could – in this case a man "wearing his full dress uniform and all his medals." It was suicidal to be pacing the deck in such attire.

It was the ex-girlfriend calling from Olympic Valley, near Lake Tahoe, where she lives now. Unfortunately, her slurring grew worse over a two-hour conversation. She must have beer in her blood by now. She asked how I was and I told her about the place.

She said she wanted to tell me something. I could see it coming from a mile away. "I'm getting married." For one thing, the last time she called, two or three weeks ago, she informed me of her living arrangements with a German-speaking fellow who works at a ski resort. She pays no rent and lives in a big place with a deck and a few roommates who are snow boarders. She regards them as a low life form. At any rate, they weren't there, hence her invitation to come and stay with the two of them, which I politely declined.

She met him within a week of arriving there last November. It didn't take long for things to happen and for her to move in. Now they're getting married in the fall. He's forty-two. She just turned twenty-four. He is nearly a world-class skier or used to be. Shorter than her, which hardly matters (she is 5'9"), and built like a tree trunk she said. He comes from Austria where his family owns a whole town, or something to that effect. They will fly there at the end of the month for a few weeks – her first time in Europe.

Through the course of the conversation several themes kept coming up. She repeated them, forgetting she had mentioned them already. There is nothing like drinking beer for amnesia and getting sentimental. One theme or undercurrent was how much she loved me, and how happy she was with him. What did she do to deserve him, or me either, for that matter? How to fathom time and its developments and the past,[39] things

[39] A few years ago we were outside the Exploratorium having a smoke amongst the columns with their Greco-Roman implications. An older woman walked up to the ex, who was around twenty, and started getting sentimental about her own lost youth and how one should appreciate being young. I think she was an aging hippie. The ex was a little creeped out.

she never wanted to forget, including those evenings when we sat around a mirrored coffee table with a bottle of wine, a joint, and a record playing while we talked for hours.

After a while she admitted it was odd hearing all of this, like a summoning of accounts, looking back on where she has been with some of it lost in a haze of smoke and alcohol. Now she was getting married which surprised her to no end. It was the last thing she expected when moving to the mountains. She wanted to remember those phases in which the two of us figured so prominently as she put it. She even said, "You taught me how to love." I said that she was no slouch in that respect. The themes were slowly revolving in her conversation. I had the feeling I was supposed to give my blessing, no hard feelings, all water under the Golden Gate Bridge, and greetings from the Tenderloin.

It wasn't long before I went from feeling neutral, or absurd, to thinking it was a good thing and she could have done worse. I said I wouldn't have to worry about her now as I occasionally did and she took that as an admission that I still had some feelings for her. I suppose it's true, or maybe it was just a habit. Some things hit you deep, especially when you're with a woman for several years and know her through some turbulent phases. There was a tenuous truce for a year or so. You don't just write a person off completely, especially her, who got away with a lot in being young. We were living together when she was eighteen.

There were comments about how strange it felt to be having this conversation. She said that deep inside her was an old assumption that we would have gotten married at some point. Good thing we didn't, considering how things turned out. However, if the possibility was there you can be haunted by it for a long time. And don't I feel sad right

now, how come she does? During the last hour she broke down in tears several times. I didn't, but I rarely do. The last time was when Lennon died.

She said she wanted to see me before she went to Austria (a line repeated half a dozen times), and would fly to San Francisco if I could stand it. She wants me to meet him. Technically I didn't see anything wrong with this. Our situation was blown out of the water a couple of years ago and I have been with other women since then. He sounded interesting, and I finally told her what a good choice she made. It was a fortunate situation she had stumbled into. I said a young athletic woman, the consummate party girl, shows up at a ski resort in the mountains. It's not surprising if she would be a magnet for the men up there, including a man she never would have expected. He is Austrian, and her with a capacity for beer and beer halls, though he doesn't know anything about baseball.

I have gravitated in a different direction, deeper into the city with a relative isolation. She chose the mountains, wanting to get out of town. Both of us know the rarest form of love is when it falls on you from an unforeseen angle.

She mentioned (several times) that she retrieved an old box of things from her mother and came across her "stash," old poems and sketches I had given her. She was holding onto them as something precious. It was the last thing on her mind when she was running wild or her life was at loose ends, but now it was important with her on the verge of marrying someone else. I think that being in love was putting her in a frame of mind that had familiar echoes of when we were together. At twenty-four she has a history and she finds that amazing.

These changes are like weathering a seismic force, a continental shift. A massive part of your life is breaking off and you're concerned about who or what is growing distant. Welcome to the real world of disruption and discontinuity. She wanted me to come to the wedding in the fall. I said I would think about it, having no intention of going.

She reminisced about what we used to have, and wallowed in it for a while with tears. And yet it fell apart. There were psychologically brutal moments. Now I'm blessing her impending wedding. I admit she dragged it out of me, but why not? It didn't cost me anything, she's still a few hundred miles away, and I've been fairly neutral about her for a long time. I'm getting neutral about women in ways that are disconcerting, though the peace of mind is worth it. It occurred to me that this was a load, however minor, off my mind. A call about a wedding is better than a call from jail.[40]

I haven't seen her since last October, under dubious circumstances. She managed to fly in for the opening game a week or two ago and fly out without a word. Which is fine with me, but why this sentimental mood all of a sudden? Was it a phase of the moon? A self-generated role that would evaporate by the morning? I mentioned the loan. Oh yes, undying gratitude and she would always remember me for that, a few hundred bucks when the collectors were on her tail. That was last year and I haven't seen a dime.

It reminds me how her bosom buddy Ming went to Alaska, swearing off men and making a claim to independence and self-reliance. She met a guy on her first day in Anchorage who is very useful. The ex wants me to get in touch with Ming. They have been friends since high school, and she wants to have her in the wedding. I wasn't sure

[40] Her older brother was in and out of jail a few times, an alcoholic fuck-up who was not on good terms with the authorities. He died in a drunken car crash in Texas when her and I were still together. The shock of that contributed to our eventual estrangement.

what undercurrents were operating here, considering their volatile relations. There may have been an element of competition, with one woman flaunting her prize in front of another. You think you're a femme fatale, but look what I have.

My detachment is something of an illusion as I just wrote nearly five pages single-spaced in one sitting. It's 2:30 a.m. That woman always hit a vein, if not a nerve, an underground river, possibly the spinal cord. She mentioned a friend of hers in the mountains who broke his back and now is mostly paralyzed. He was careless with the magnitudes.

Tuesday, May 4, 1993

10:00 a.m. Collect phone call from Alaska. We talked for an hour. "Should I stay or should I go?" She insisted that whatever Tanya thought about her using men there was no emotional commitment with the new one. He had known where he stood from day one. That included lying down with her and sharing a tent. It was unconsummated, though he tried. He would do anything for her, and was buying a used truck and trailer they could move around in and live in. He had a job in Anchorage and would train her as a "salmon roe technician." I said that sounded just like her. She could work for a few months, paying little or no rent, and save up a few thousand.

I mentioned the ex wanting her to call. She said they have been out of touch since a couple of years ago when she took it upon herself to question her drinking. The ex recoils at any criticism of her methods. I think that people are constructed differently when it comes to rubbing them the wrong way. They have different combinations of a sweet-and-sour psychology. Ming is temperamental and argumentative where the ex is

calm in that respect – it seems mature, if not disinterested. But Ming can take constructive criticism of her essay writing (especially when I did a lot of it), where the ex couldn't, much less any comments on her drinking. I remember last year, one of those occasions when the old affair was coming back to haunt us and we slept together now and then. She was approximately sloshed and it floated her into a passionate mood. Afterward I made the observation that her breath was knocking me over. She was so insulted that she nearly left.

I asked Ming if she was maintaining her intellectual development. She hesitated, then said she occasionally reads the *Anchorage Times.*

She is torn about staying there until September. She knows she left behind some romantic turbulence involving a few men, but refuses to take the blame. Maybe a little. One reason she wanted to leave town was to get away from those complications. Men are so emotional and demanding, you sleep with them and they think it means something.

She asked how I was doing. I said it's morning in the Tenderloin. I'm doing better than expected and I'm always on. I absorb more of the city living here, it has me in its grip. It occurred to me that when I lived out there (now it's "out there," meaning a few blocks from Alcatraz) I was stranded and remote, like the gears of my life were not meshing with those of the city. Now those gears have locked into place.

While talking with her I thought she sounded a little different. Tanya mentioned the same thing. Not surprising for someone who is open to social osmosis, which is part of her allure. There was some behavioral modification in a new environment. She is surrounded with drifters, mostly men, who are refugees from the lower forty-eight. Some

don't know who or what they are. A lot of alcoholism in a purified terrain. She has seals where I have hookers, and neither one of us touches them.

She gave me an address where she might work, a place called Great Northern Sea Products. My next letter will start with, "Dear Sea Product."

Typing for a couple of hours.

1 p.m. The Czech woman called. I said the ex was getting married to a forty-two-year-old Austrian. She had nothing good to say about Austrians, but apologized for having assumed in the past that I was a little old for her.

Went to work.

The Attorney was embroiled in some Special Interrogatories (160 questions going on for 42 pages). He had to answer them with the help of his client who bought a small company and found the records were amiss and has to deal with the FAA (the Federal Aviation Administration). When it comes to writing the Attorney dictates with an off-the-cuff and hit-or-miss approach, operating in a fog with sentences left twisting in midair. I made notes about what sounded lame or made no sense. If the client is supposed to verify the medical side-effects, shouldn't he be more specific? The client thought so too. It was like using a bean-bag to hammer a nail. I think he likes having an assistant with whom he can relax, being as blunt as he wants, instead of a woman who would be in tears or filing a lawsuit for rubbing her self-esteem the wrong way. When he referred to a form on the tape I had no idea what form or where it was. I went into his office and brought it to his attention. Turns out he neglected to bring it out, and had to look for several minutes in the slush pile on his desk. He found it, right in plain sight, and said, "Get the fuck out of

here." That's what passes for humor in the office, and he will not go gentle into the bankrupt golden years.

Meanwhile, the receptionist was glowing, her eyes glittering. She said her male companion finally agreed to move out. An hour later I found her looking morose and depressed with a sudden headache. He changed his mind.

V. showed me a book she was reading about the life of Jesus. We are on different wavelengths. I don't fall for religious women very often, but I have a diabolic respect for dialectics, and I know that opposites attract. It would be a classic situation, an atheist of forty-one and a religious woman of twenty-five, not much in common, and yet it's like they have the same pulse.

She is quick to qualify some statements about the church, and doesn't seem to be dogmatic or proselytizing. There is an intelligence there which allows for other opinions and doubts. When we were talking the next day I mentioned *The Last Temptation of Christ*, a film which was picketed by the devout and which my father recommended.[41] Had she seen it? No. She knew about it. The priest told them to avoid it because it was obscene or human or both.

I found out she doesn't like olives (and I do), so I'll remind her of the Mount of Olives.

6:30 p.m. I took a bus to A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books. There was something called "THE NEW EROTICISM" on the cover of *New Age*. A naked couple shown from the waist up in a half-hearted embrace. They are about to kiss, but their lips aren't touching. I wracked my brains to figure out what is new about this and why it's on

[41] Directed by Martin Scorsese (1988).

a magazine cover. It's new if one has been asleep for half a century. Is it new because it is the first time this magazine covered the subject and made an issue of it, so to speak? Is it a new form of kissing where you pause with your lips a little apart and don't go any closer? Is THE NEW EROTICISM new because each generation has to learn it all over again, like a bunch of simian neophytes? The latest innovation is you share your bedroom with a photographer.

Not to throw a monkey wrench into this, but I think that Eros is a force which transcends the generations. I don't mean sex between younger and older people, although it happens now and then, but a current which has been running strong from Greek statues to the latest pin-up. The value and the valor of the body erotic have been shifting gears according to historical conditions,[42] but the urge is steady as a lighthouse.

An enlightened outlook doesn't reach everyone at the same time. That's like defining an age in terms of its writers and poets, who were probably the exception to the rule - like saying there was an Age of Rimbaud and everyone thought like him. They would just as soon have run him out of town, except he was walking under his own two-legged power, building up a head of steam while catching a glimpse of a squatting girl. He "…watched a mawkish thread of urine / Escape from her tight pink nether lips."[43] In other words, if the fundamentals alter because of historical conditions, how could someone in the 20th century understand the thoughts and feelings of someone living 120 years ago, much less 2000?

I think of Eros in terms of something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue.

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[42] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (1976)
[43] Arthur Rimbaud, "Remembrances of an Old Idiot" (1872)

It is disconcerting to think that any generation could redefine the fundamentals. Including what – the new breastfeeding? The new urination?[44] Maybe it happens when something is lost in translation or diffracted from one generation to the next. The same holds true from one person to the next, or within a person from one day to the next. There are women who said a new eroticism occurred the minute I walked into the room (just kidding).

7:30 p.m. I drifted to the back room. It was crowded, all the seats were taken. A columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle* was introduced by another: Adair Lara lying down the palm branches for Jon Carroll. It was a curious shift in my perspective, seeing the man behind the writing, and the woman too. A still-life photo is misleading and it doesn't include the voice. Hers had more of a modulated weight than I would have thought, being small and spritely, with her column floating in ways her voice did not.

He, on the other hand, was a lighter presence than I had expected. I've been reading him for years and had the image of a man of substantial bearing, tall and wide, well over two hundred pounds, a jovial sort who could get serious in a California minute. I had this preconception because of his authorial presence or assumed right of way, an assumption of his own worth - which I associate with larger epicurean persons. That may have existed in his mind, being a daily columnist for the biggest newspaper in town. He has a boarding school background, and twenty or thirty years of media experience which was tearing down and building up his confidence, becoming over the years a multi-splendored thing.

[44] What might be new is if there are public urinals for men and women.

He came up to the mic, a mercurial man with a friendly approach-avoidance of the status quo, and read a line, “We are the people our parents wanted us to be.” A rueful check and balance for someone who has waltzed along the edgy by-ways of a counter-culture for a long time. He has a pony-tail with thinning hair and a short beard. He grew up with *The New Yorker* in his mouth, or in his face, and that would explain a few things - why I like him, for one thing.

A mixed crowd, which is not a bad sign. He read a few columns collected into a book, *Near-Life Experiences*. There was one about driving a jar of sperm around town. He has a writing job, a wife and daughters, and a home in Oakland. I don’t have any of those. He’s pushing fifty, though, so maybe there’s time. Maybe I don’t want those, and my life has a mind of its own. Every once in a while it gets around to letting me in on the program.

Then he answered questions. Leaning against the novel section, tired, I wanted to ask him about a recent column, but forgot which one. Something about racial politics, where I thought he was onto something but ran out of room or pulled his punches. He is not a knee-jerk liberal, and has dared to mention things that aren’t politically correct.

He signed books - thanks for the near-life memories. I walked over to Max’s and had some Russian cabbage soup with a thick rough bread. A waitress stood in front of the piano and sang an aria from *Romeo and Juliet*. A few young women walked in and took a nearby table, looking fresh and alive. One of them ordered a large banana split. It seemed about a foot high, and there I was with bread and soup.

I thought about the crowd at the reading, how many of them looked good in one way or another - and not necessarily based on age. The inner glow of those who’re not

alone. When I pass in front of a mirror I'm surprised that I have substance and am halfway presentable (the hair a lost cause). I feel like a cousin of Lautreamont,[45] more a specter than a spectator. If you took a picture of a writer's soul (depending on the circumstances) it might look like one of those monkeys in a laboratory cage, wide-eyed and withdrawn, if not in shock from being experimented on.

I walked home, thinking of a book title: *A Fire in the Mind*. I changed it to *A Mire in the Found*. Another phrase was lurking in the background, "The slough of despond… has a black piano and some lovely waitresses." I must have encountered some depression in the bookstore. My spirits picked up when I got off the main drag. The street slopes downward a few blocks to my neighborhood which is implanted in my brain as having the comfort of an old hammock slung between the futuristic towers.

> You found your depth and now you have to lay in it,
> relentless meanings are occurring by the minute.
>
> The phenomena contain a magnitude
> of the historical… is that a little crude?
>
> How to tell the consequences from the truth,
> the past is looming, the present fits into a phone booth.
>
> What you are is what you better not forget,
> you learn it when alone, and love an old vignette.

11:00 p.m. I was pulling out of a mood when the phone rang. It was Jon in Calistoga, back from Mexico and telling me about it. He flew to Cancun and was there for about four hours, leaving as soon as he could. It's only good as a pivot to somewhere else. He took a bus for six hours to the border, got on a small plane and flew 200 miles to

[45] His real name was Isidore Ducasse (1846-1870), a French writer who was "a major influence on the Surrealists." He wrote *Les Chants de Maldoror*, in which is the famous line: "…beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella." I was introduced to him by one of my professors, the Greek surrealist poet, Nanos Valaoritis.

Belize ($20). Spent a few days in Ambergris Caye (San Pedro) with his diving mask and breathing tube. He was touching four-foot barracudas in the Caribbean while I was not touching anything in the Caribbean.

He said he nearly got caught in an underwater cave, running out of air. Went diving at night, taking a boat out to the reef about a quarter mile from shore. He found some half-buried ruins, and said Belize City is kind of sleazy. There were local men coming on to him, who has enough good-looking ambiguity to make it plausible. Jon exists in the real world in ways that I don't. We are both exposed to transitory phenomena and evaporating trips, but he is more physical. I exist in the mind in ways that he doesn't, but who is more present in the everlasting moment?

He talked about Mayan women, the Yucatan, and the wine country where he's staying. I talked about German industrial music and the Tenderloin. Jon wants me to drive up there with him (he works for Solar Graphics). I have had a couple of male friends whose sexuality was ambiguous or inclined towards men. It's been a long time, but he would seem to be another. It's an open question and as simple as a road not taken.

The closest I have come were a couple of incidents when I moved here from Los Angeles in the early 70's. I was doing poetry readings around town. One of the regular venues, Minnie's Can-Do Club on Fillmore, had an open mic run by the Beat poet, ruth weiss. Minnie was a warm and friendly black woman. One night I read a few poems and a poet invited me to his apartment up the street. He was in his thirties and well known in the local scene. I thought he wanted to have a drink and talk, maybe show me his work. Turned out he had other ideas which I realized when he made some overtures. He was more overt when I sat on the edge of the bed (which was near the door) and he took off

his pants. He was infuriated when he realized I wasn't interested. I thought it was a good time to leave, but he followed me back to Minnie's, still angry and demanding that I leave the club.

There was another man around the same time, an older connoisseur if not aesthete, who was Irish and refined. He approached me in the Museum of Modern Art. I was there with my girlfriend who he barely acknowledged. We were acquaintances for a while. He seemed to have an elitist perspective, like someone who notes your skull and bone structure. I never felt any pressure or insistence on his part. We talked about art and writers. He said that Allen Ginsberg slept with boys and their mothers didn't mind because he was famous. I'm not sure about that last part. One afternoon there was an odd occurrence. Leaving Café Trieste in North Beach we walked up Grant, about to go our separate ways. He leaned over and kissed me, which was the only time he did that and nothing to write home about. Suddenly two men in their twenties walked up, like undercover morality cops (I never figured that out), announcing that they had their eye on him and he was on the verge of being hit with a morals charge and he took off, walking fast. I never saw him again.

As for a couple of friends, the question of who they slept with was irrelevant and up to them. It didn't have anything to do with the business at hand, like literary discussions with a fellow I used to work with[46] – a classical scholar with a beard who smoked cigars and was usually broke. He loved poetry (James Merrill, for example), and

[46] A telex room downtown in the early 1980's. It was run by a black woman and everyone there was black, except for me and him. We all got along, except for when he would argue with the black girls (that's the term they preferred) about the radio (he wanted equal time for classical music, which one of them referred to as "scary movie music").

would say I was condemned to prose. He also said his boyfriend was a whore. I don't know if he, much less the boyfriend, survived the AIDS epidemic.

There was a young man in a depressing high school in Los Angeles who asked a writing teacher (a divorcee named Miss Funk who drove a hot Corvette) if there were any students he might have something in common with and she mentioned me. He played piano and wrote and drew pictures. I played guitar and wrote and drew pictures. His parents let us use their home for playing music, and his mother found me in the living room one morning, having been up all night on acid.[47]

Wednesday, May 5, 1993

NOTES

> Article in the paper: a man earned his doctorate in theology from Boston University in 1955. In 1964 he sent a letter to the university, naming it as the repository of his "correspondence, manuscripts, and other papers" which would become the "absolute property" of the school when he died. "He left no will," and it's admitted that he never told the university that he changed his mind. He never expressed a change of heart in writing.
>
> His widow wants the papers back for an institution in the city she lives in (he died in 1968). 83,000 documents which account for one-third of his life's work. He was an important man. She won't accept photocopies and/or "a rotating exhibit of some original papers." As far as this being what he wanted, there's no evidence and nothing he put in writing. "I could know what he was thinking," she said. "I read him." That should go a long way in a court of law.
>
> How is the jury supposed to decide that the widow of a man could read his mind, and why is it more significant than anything he put in writing? Ironic, since that is what they're fighting over, his writing. It's odd that photocopies wouldn't suffice. There are biblical scholars who make do with those for studying the Dead Sea Scrolls.

[47] He went to Tijuana where he bought a kilo of marijuana, a "brick." He was on his way home in the San Diego airport, but had run out of money so he panhandled. This was in the late 1960's. The cops arrived. One of them lifted his guitar and thought it was a little heavy. They found the brick inside and he was busted. Fortunately, he was a minor, but there were attorney's fees and court appearances for quite a while.

We're talking about the late Martin Luther King, Jr. and his widow. This is a man who thought he wouldn't live long and it is reflected in his speeches. He knew his life was in danger,[48] yet he never left a will.

"The papers should be (in Atlanta), where the history unfolded." I thought the history unfolded all over the place. The center for Nonviolent Social Change has the rest of his papers. If there is something wrong with Dr. King's papers residing in a "predominantly white institution," perhaps they could engage in some historical revisionism and erase the fact that Dr. King attended said institution and that white people were helpful to the cause.

I thought of an occurrence a couple of years ago. One of the founding members of the Black Panther Party, Eldridge Cleaver, had the archives of the Party in storage, but things weren't going well. He couldn't pay the storage bill. I think it was under a thousand dollars. The papers were about to be put up for auction or lost. He finally made a deal with UC Berkeley to take them. I wondered why the black community didn't step up. There were plenty of black musicians, actors, businessmen, and athletes for whom $1000 was not hard to come by. A thousand people could have forked out one dollar each. But no one came forward to rescue the archives of the Black Panthers. In a few years someone will object to the archives being in an institution that is not sufficiently Afrocentric.

Article in the paper, the non-event of the year: DEAD PIG IN WOMAN'S CASKET. It was the remains of a dissected fetal pig in a plastic bag. You figure that wouldn't amount to much. I think the occupant of the coffin wasn't too concerned about it. The body was shipped back to the mainland from Hawaii where the dissected remnants were accidently put in the coffin.

I thought there would be formal apologies from the funeral home which would reimburse the family for the cost of the funeral, including the plane trip. Fair enough. Throw in $10,000, which is not chopped liver, for any connotation of it being an insult to the god-like deceased.

But no. The family which barely managed to survive this traumatic incident, was given a $750,000 settlement in court. That isn't a settlement, it's megalomania on a level of greed which boggles the mind. As if to say, someone was so traumatized by this event (involving a dead person), they deserve to be given $25,000 a year for the next thirty years. Or a married couple is given $50,000 a year and they don't have to work for the next fifteen years. By which time, not having had to work at all, they will have managed to recover their self-esteem.

[48] It is hard to imagine what it was like to challenge the mad-dog racists on their home turf, and to do it unarmed. It took an otherworldly courage. Given the lies and the anomalies in the official explanation of his shooting, it's clear some elements in the government were responsible, and they used James Earl Ray as a patsy.

The dead person was eighty-nine years old and Jewish. The incident was considered "a defilement," because "Jewish religious law forbids the consumption of pork." The consumption of anything is not in question with the woman being dead. The ban of pork "is considered by religious Jews to be a divine requirement needing no explanation." I like that. It has something to do with pigs being unclean or diseased, "particularly in hot climates." Fine. The late Mrs. Somebody was beyond any concern for that, and wouldn't $20,000 ease the emotional distress of the family? It would provide them with round-trip airfare for a week in Israel complete with bodyguards while they visit the holy places in order to cleanse themselves of the memory of this incident – assuming they were spiritually immaculate to begin with.

How is a $20,000 settlement nothing? That's what the average person makes in a year. A jury, I'm assuming it was a jury, felt compelled to award three-fourths of a million dollars. Are they jacking up their own importance in the process of coming up with such a large award? Overblown is not the word. I'm not making light of the incident, I just don't see how $20,000 wouldn't be sufficient, especially when there was no physical injury to anyone. If it was a religious defilement, it is odd that a profane if not obscenely large amount of money is seen as kosher.

Twisting the knife even further, the funeral home has to bow and prostrate itself before the sacred image of the Jewish people. $750,000 isn't enough. It has to "make a financial donation to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, with a memorial plaque to…" the deceased woman. I'm not making this up. Not only that, "The defendants are also required to print an apology in the leading West Coast dailies." And what else, the owner of the funeral home has to convert to Zionism and shoot a few Palestinians to show how much he likes Jewish people?

I wonder how orthodox the family was.[49] I hope they weren't violating any ancient Jewish laws in their current life. For some reason, the location is irrelevant. Maybe a pig is not so awful to Hawaiians. For that alone the settlement should be cut in half, acknowledging a cultural context where the Jews are not indigenous (and may have violated ancient Hawaiian laws by being there).

If ancient religious laws are holding up in court, why aren't ancient Hawaiian laws and customs taken seriously? The locals are offended by outsiders, and they have the added trauma of having to see and hear them since they are alive. Meanwhile, someone is going whole hog on the settlement and pigging out on their ill-gotten gains.

[49] In Judaism there is the belief that when the Messiah returns, dead Jews will rise out of the ground. Cremation is a no-no.

2:30 p.m. I dropped into a gallery on the way to work to see photos of body parts arranged in interesting ways, sometimes as a takeoff on art history. I've seen most of Joel-Peter Witkin's work and never get tired of it. Sometimes he uses damaged negatives, as if to say one's mental vision is scratched.

1. Three Kinds of Woman, Mexico City (1992)

   I was thrown off by the relative normality of the composition, with women posing naked in a gallery with a mural on the wall (Diego Rivera). One with her back turned, one standing and facing the viewer, and one sitting at an angle. Many of his compositions involve a deformed or reimagined human entity in a cruel if not demented art historical disguise. I was waiting for the other shoe to drop, like the suspense in a horror movie when nothing happens. They were all wearing black ribbons over their eyes. I finally asked the woman at the front desk. She said the image was taken from a pose of three women in a Seurat painting (she showed it to me). The one with her back turned was a transsexual (pre-op), the one standing a heterosexual, and the one with a side view a lesbian.

2. Still Life, Marseilles (1992)

   I have seen it before, one of his homages to the Dutch still life. It is carefully arranged, invoking a horn of plenty with strange fishes and the decapitated head of a man, eyes tightly shut, mouth in a grimace. Half of the skull was removed with some white orchids coming out against a black background.

3. La Serpentine, Marseilles (1992)

   A woman standing naked except for briefs and covered with ash. She was leaning on one leg, the other without a foot, the leg ending in a stump which looked like it was burned off. One arm ended in a cone-like object and there was an odd contraption on her head. She was nowhere near a model's proportions, and had all the more character for it.

4. Man Without a Head (1993)

   That about says it, except to wonder where he gets these body parts, not to mention entire corpses, which he can pose in a studio. A pale and hairless overweight man in his socks, slumped a little in a chair, and without a head. I thought of the photos we took at the Anatomy Lab a couple of years ago.

5. Still Life, Mexico City (1992)

Still life taken from a centuries-old composition with an amputated foot and a dead fish. The limitations of a limb, the limbo of imitation.

6. Satiro, Mexico City (1992)

A Mexican man looking like a satyr, complete with horns, hairy hoof legs, and no arms. Attached to each shoulder was a crown of thorns.

(Standing in the gallery were a couple of women with the poise and bearing of foreigners, and one of them carried an infant. They were giving careful attention to every composition, pausing at this one with comments on how beautiful it was.)

7. Cupid and Centaur in the Museum of Love, Marseilles (1992)

I couldn't pull away from this one, like a perfect moment where you're at a loss for words. It had a remote refinement with the diabolic rhyming with the delicate. I would include it in my private psychosomatic museum where the works of art are memorized because I can't afford to buy them.

Against a black background is the skeleton of a headless ostrich. The neck bones segue into the spinal cord of a human skeleton with a ribcage, outstretched boney arms, and a skull. The bones of a reimagined centaur. Riding on the back of it is the skeleton of a monkey with wings, possibly in the act of coitus. Boning a myth.

I went to work in a different frame of mind than I'd been an hour before. I told the receptionist I saw a show of wondrous compositions, but she would hate it.

Over the last week or two she's been planning a trip to Mexico, very methodic and making lists. She is almost embarrassed by it. "Okay, I'm anal, I know it…" But it would have meant going with her boyfriend, who was fading out of the picture and out of her apartment. Having said I was going to San Diego about the same time next month we started talking about it. We're now thinking of going together. She would be doing me a favor, having a driver's license. We could drive out to the desert, and I wouldn't have to lounge around a black-bottom pool alone.

I see her every day in the office, but in formal circumstances. If she insists on lying around in a bikini for hours (and she would), I'd be okay with that. However, she prefers being treated as one of the guys, so we could throw a ball back and forth.

6:30 p.m. Walked home on a different route. I turned down Hyde and was within a block or two of my building before seeing signs of decline. It is hard to ignore, and sometimes it is more the people than the buildings. The atmosphere fluctuates, depending who is around. It is often those who're worse off who are the most visible. The hookers are visible for another reason. I saw the same one on the corner, a slender Latina who is unstable or a druggie or both. There were a couple of streetwalkers on another corner who were quiet and accommodating, like two white dumplings curbing their cleavage. They were not disturbed by anything it would seem. They have cornered a fundamental role, and sit on that role with the complacency of the dumb in the proximity of an absolute.

There was a fish and chips place with a sign that signified it was an authentic establishment. I went in and found a greasy dive with two tables and a bored Chinese woman smoking a cigarette. I brought it home in a newspaper, passing a strip-joint called The Century. You can get anything in this neighborhood.

Sitting at the round wooden table in the front room, facing the view through six windows. It feels like an observation deck. On the horizon is a high-rise with a full moon rising, and a few dark vapors passing by.

I put the table together last night. It was around the time that Jon called, who is more inclined towards that sort of thing. It took me longer than I care to admit, using a hex wrench on a female screw, but finally, almost unexpectedly, there was a solid round

object standing there (it's made of beech wood). For a while I wasn't sure how I would use it, but it was soon covered with the phone, books and papers, a small boom-box, a turquoise placemat, an open newspaper full of fish and chips.

A table holding up the air. A round expectancy, a wooden importance with a certain gravity. A radial wood. A magnet for loose objects, and a pedestal for the discardable. It supports my elbow.

I was feeling right at home when the phone rang, the Phantom. We talked for half an hour, a long time for him. Among other things, our Friday night session in the sound-room will have to be on Sunday afternoon. He has another part-time job. The conversation went from Stratocasters to whether his old friend Jon is self-destructive.

Sitting at the table, feeling moonstruck and well-rounded. My nights have simple foundations – a book, a cup - and quiet endings. There was a lace curtain waving in the window of the cliff dwellers across the street. A hand with chopsticks. A girl crawling into bed in her pajamas. A kid peering through the blinds. Fleeting glimpses of an occupant, like a fish that comes to the surface in a murky pond and sinks from view.

The city has me in its grip. I had a grip on the language for a couple of hours. When it was two in the morning I was winding down and it was quiet. Then the bars were letting out. People have a pressurized tension, but the bar absorbs it. Now they're hitting the streets. There is an urge to yell, as if it hurts to be outside. It's a shock for an alcoholic, and they pick a fight to make it plausible and blow off steam.

A black woman walking down the sidewalk, erratic and screaming at someone. Maybe a boyfriend who said or did the wrong thing. He is thirty or forty feet behind her, but worried since she is in the street now, hurling herself in front of cars. There is a lot of

honking. He is yelling and pleading. She throws her leather jacket down. He is white and they are in their late twenties. She turns the corner up Hyde and a minute later several police cars drive up. One of them turns in that direction, so they must have seen her.

One thing to remember: you can be stopped and questioned, maybe brought in, if you're acting too erratic, running in front of cars which could hit you or veer into another car. You can be arrested or questioned for being a public disturbance at two in the morning, yelling at the top of your lungs which is not uncommon around here. If you are out of control the law can step in. It might require some diplomacy and finesse, backed up with a gun. Some people are extremely emotional and it doesn't take much for them to fly off the handle. They are under pressure from existence, trying to survive, and things get operatic in no time (although the orchestration leaves something to be desired).

It was quiet again. I was nearly asleep in the hall like a white cell with heavy blankets. Suddenly there was the apocalyptic flush of a toilet in the dead of night as "…waterfalls of pity roar…."[50]

Thursday, May 6, 1993

Typing for hours.

1:00 p.m. I met Renee for lunch and we had another one of our long talks. She has a fine-tuned intelligence, a quick awareness of every little nuance (sardonic at times). We covered a lot of ground in an hour.

She told me about leaving Vietnam with her family in 1975.[51] The corrupt regime[52] in South Vietnam was collapsing as the forces of Ho Chi Minh took over and

[50] Bob Dylan, "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" (1965)

the U.S. war machine took a break. She was six or seven. The circumstances were hectic and her memory is blurred. There was a rope net between the dock and the boat. Climbing on it her mother had to throw her baby brother and someone caught him (he is now on a camping trip in the Sierras). There were vague memories of coming to California and swimming a lot. She said they must have had a wealthy sponsor. There is a sense of the Vietnamese community as a rising ethnic group, but it still has far to go. Her mother warned her about other Vietnamese, like they can't be trusted. She is worried about theft and other crimes. The immigrants are not too clear about their rights and whether they can trust the local authorities.

Her parents speak French and Vietnamese at home. They never told her much about the history of Vietnam before the war. I filled her in a little, but I'm not well informed. She knows about the ancient enmity between the Vietnamese and China, the destroyer of Tibetan monasteries.

She said her last name is uncommon. There is some connection through one of her parents to a well-situated, if not royal, family. I could believe it, though I didn't call her a princess. She has fine features and a certain confidence. "I'm mean, you know." I didn't, but I haven't done anything to incur her wrath. She went to UC Berkeley, and lets me know when one of our clients is being a "dick," or when she is "hella bored." Renee

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[51] The former Prime Minister and Vice President of South Vietnam, Nguyen Cao Ky (who came to power through a governmental coup orchestrated by the U.S.), ended up running a liquor store in Southern California (Huntington Beach, where one of my brothers lived for a while). I could have bought a bottle of wine and talked about how close I came to being drafted into the war. He went bankrupt in a few years, but later returned to Vietnam in a "reparative effort," saying the war was "brothers killing each other under the arrangements by foreign countries."

[52] Madame Nhu, considered the First Lady of South Vietnam in the early 1960's, in response to Buddhist monks who set themselves on fire to protest the regime: "I would clap hands at seeing another monk barbecue show…."

will go to law school in the fall (back east, unfortunately), and told me she bought a sports bra. There was no way to respond to that.

I worked for a few hours. Given the condition of the Attorney's practice, it's like bailing water in a boat that is swamped.

7:00 p.m. I left, walking to a department store near Union Square. Some of my women friends want to take me shopping, like they have an aptitude for it. It is very low on the list of things I want to do. I had a voucher from the Red Cross for replacing smoked-out clothes - over $200 and I still couldn't get motivated.

I finally took the plunge. I was tired and that seemed to help. Being semi-braindead I can handle the commodities in a lifeless setting, and have less resistance from my mind. I bought a burgundy silk shirt, among other things, but there was a problem with the voucher. The department store had financial problems a while back and was bought out by General Electric, a not-so-nice corporation which decided it wants nothing to do with the Red Cross.

I sat in Union Square having a cigarette. Not many derelicts around. Workmen repaired the street in front of a clothing store, the mannequins watching with a blank stare. A black man on the next bench was talking to himself. I was talking to myself in my head.

On the way home I stopped at Tommy's Joynt, which was a mistake. I'm gravitating away from meat, and that includes burgundy beef on rice. I was worn out, and the place was getting on my nerves with people talking loudly.

It took me a while to recover at home. Typing with one beer.

Friday, May 7, 19983

Four loads of laundry in the morning, hauling it down to the laundry room. It opens on a driveway next to the vacant lot under my kitchen window. There is a makeshift encampment in the bushes across the lot. Some plywood propped up about waist high with a couple of shopping carts covered with a blanket. I saw two people emerge from it and walk away. A black man who might be in his fifties, but not showing his age, and a wiry white woman, possibly the same age, but showing it. Thin and boyish with stringy hair and hag-like. Those living conditions don't do good things for your hair. He isn't anywhere near the wreck she is.

They returned by climbing through the fence along the sidewalk and crossing an expanse of dirt. I had seen her leaving the bushes, pulling her pants up. When he was walking back to their encampment, twenty or thirty feet away, he whipped it out and emitted a stream while he walked. I don't know if it was that or the way she squatted in the shadows or their living conditions, but the theory of evolution came to mind. Maybe we are intelligent monkeys who're pretending to be human, not to say immortal. Some of us are foraging and gathering junk and going to a soup kitchen while on public assistance.

Given the number of homeless drifters in this town, not to mention the rest of us, I wonder why there aren't more public toilets. The authorities don't want to encourage the homeless to live here? They do anyhow. The mannequins in the stores are well provided for, the homeless not so much.

Look at the bus-stop shelters. The "benches" are hardly fit for human beings. They are meant to discourage any bums from sitting or lying on them. Instead of a wooden bench we have narrow rubber slats, barely half a seat, which flip up. You don't

want the public to get too comfortable, they might think they belong here. The shelter is glass and steel with a large ad staring you in the face while you wait for a bus. The whole contraption costs $10,000.

I walked through the lobby with a chandelier and a wall of brass mailboxes. The manager said I had some mail. Letters from Paris and Vienna, and a postcard from Belize. The one from Vienna left me floating the rest of the day.

> Dear S.,
>
> …. I am sorry to hear about the fire. It reminds me of the Waco fire I watched on CNN…
>
> All that I am writing now must sound pretty clumsy as I browse through the dictionary to find a proper word for *holzern*, which actually means made of wood, and means dry or something. I come across *himmelschreiend*, screaming to the heavens.
>
> But what I really would like to say is something totally different, relating to the last words in your letter. Does "wish you were here" mean that I should pay a visit? You know, I would like to. And a plan is emerging to do so. If you would like to know more about it, please write soon if not… immediately. I am sorry, I am so tired of this Sunday, I must go to bed now. But I will mail this – I just discovered the post office nearest to my new working place. I am finally in the writing branch, I work for the municipality's employee publication, it comes biweekly and looks a bit boring. But for me it is great. Also I discover a totally new Vienna. Now the city belongs to me, because I belong to it. All apart from the emerging plan mentioned above I have wanted to invite you to come for a while. The main problem was always that I was living under circumstances that would not allow the putting up of a friend. But now I've got my apartment which is a temporary solution for maybe a year – and it is small but not too tiny. So please take advantage of this before I have to move into another mouse-hole.
>
> You would be welcomed in a mouse-hole, too. Time to go to sleep. Thank you again for the letter. Love, P.

There were some curious parallels here. Both of us had affairs which ended abruptly (mine about six months ago). Both of us moved to different apartments with a new perspective on the cities we live in. Both of us want to visit the other.

Her letter was like walking down the street and picking up a scent of jasmine in the air. I haven't seen her since we met near the bridge and spent a few days together (her and her boyfriend) before they returned to Austria. A few months later she wrote me a letter out of the blue. I was a bit morose when we met, with a long affair having ended. Now she knew the feeling with some romantic situation having dissolved. I wrote back and she liked what I had to say. It started a remote conversation between Austria and California which continued to the present. The journal started not long after, in the late-1980's, like a continuation of my letters to Vienna.

There were long pauses in the correspondence going on for months at a time. The longest was the most recent, lasting until a couple of weeks ago when she was in shock over an affair which fell apart (his five affairs). I would get reports on the warm and cold moving fronts of love and romance in Vienna and Berlin (where she lived for a while). She is a lovely woman, with blonde straight hair, maybe 5'4", who was a courageous tomboy when I met her. And yet there was a background of Germanic formalities involving her continuing education. She was thinking of a career in translation, and lived with an artist for a long time.

We had a sense of talking to each other late at night, like tuning in a special shortwave frequency or bouncing a signal off the moon, writing letters which were probably more open in our being far apart.

During that time a five-year love affair came and went. There was a year of close encounters of the ambiguous kind. A six-month relationship with the Spider Woman. The last six months of socializing, fire, and sleeping alone. (Suddenly the radio changed direction with "Maybe" by Martha and the Vandellas. It took a few minutes to compose

myself.) The affairs were varied in how they worked themselves out. It seems like every woman is a different planet with her own atmosphere and gravity. The sex and love arrange themselves in different ways. (The next song: “I Wanna Destroy You” by the Soft Boys.) I didn’t tell her everything, but close enough.

Went to work in the afternoon.

8:00 p.m. I was swimming in the pool, but was diverted by a young woman in the next lane who could barely swim. She stretched out with a small board in front of her and kicked in the shallow end. I paused once or twice, and before you know it we started talking. She was around twenty, from India I think, with dusky skin, black hair, and pretty in a one-piece black swimsuit. She was open-minded and unsure of herself as far as swimming goes, and had her first lesson that night. She asked if I would watch her while she tried kicking with the board, like she might drown in three feet of water.

Then I pulled her through the water, holding one end of the board while she held the other. I wasn’t going to suspend her in the water with her belly lying on my hands, but it occurred to me. I thought of a man leaning back with his arms holding a tablet (like half of the Ten Commandments), while a woman holds onto the other end, her arms outstretched and her body flowing horizontally behind her. What if there wasn’t any water and she floated in the wind like a weightless spirit?

I was in her lane, which started to feel a bit familiar. I returned to mine and finished the mile, during which she got out of the pool, saying she had been there since seven (it was nearly nine - she was determined to learn how to swim). I saw what a full figure she had, having seemed girlish in the water. The odds are that I’ll never see her again.

I swam a lap as fast as I could, going for a hydrofoil effect where it feels like you rise above the water a little - further evidence of a tendency for self-delusion. Then I tried for two lengths underwater. I managed 1½, or a hundred feet. I spend a lot of time confronting my limits, including the limits of my lungs. I must have a lot of limitations if I'm always up against them, intellectually and otherwise. On the other hand, you can't grow if you're not pushing the envelope.

Walked home feeling tired, but in a good way.

Bebop on the radio that evening. I wrote to the woman in Vienna and suggested that she fly here, stay as long as she wants, then we fly to Paris and eventually to Vienna. I haven't been out of the country, except for crossing the Mexican border a couple of times, since 1981.

Midnight with the radio shifting gears. During the letter to a German-speaking woman there was a flurry of old romantic tunes, except they were in German. It was unusual and not just with the Beatles ("*Komm Gib Mir Deine Hand*"), but the Beach Boys singing "In My Room" ("*In meinem Zimmer…in meinem Zimmer*….") and some R & B numbers by the original artists, including "*Mein Girl*."

On the radio at the moment: "Blank Generation," and I was back at CBGB's on the Lower East Side around 1979 or 1981, watching Richard Hell and the Voidoids. He was pulling out his hair onstage he was so wired.

Saturday, May 8, 1993

Tired in the afternoon, with a mental block that was mainly physical.

Staring out the window I noticed something which made me smile. A black man who was not so young, and hardly feminine, but he wore a dress. A red strapless baby-doll dress with ruffles, and him with bare legs that didn't look so good. There were awkward heels and a large wig of red hair with curls hanging down. No one paid him any mind as he walked by the street vendors, pausing to examine something. What becomes a legend?

A minute later, a bearded white dwarf on crutches.

Then there was a black couple having a loud argument, one walking away, then back, and then away again. They were nearly half a block apart and all the people on the street (and in the apartments lining the street) could just as well have not existed for all they cared. I've run into this a number of times, and since the parties involved tend to be black I have to be careful not to leap to conclusions. It is rude as hell, especially on a bus. Someone might say that black people don't repress their feelings, but you wish they would now and then. Whites are sometimes criticized for appearing aloof or reserved, and Asians are known for being self-controlled in public. For some reason it is not considered rude, at least by some black people, to yell and swear in public. It could be a busy sidewalk, a crowded bus, it doesn't matter. Other people have to put up with it, though they probably don't want to hear the verbal equivalent of someone banging on a trash can.

It reminds me of something last month when staying in the flat near the Haight. I was returning from work on the bus, and was in back with a lot of subdued and tired working people. Two young black women got on, walking to the back and sitting apart from each other (the only seats available), while dragging a couple of kids. One of them

was distraught and upset, a man hadn't treated her very well and things had nearly come to blows. There were tears of anger as she wallowed in the most subjective shallows like a puddle, flinging mud in every direction. It was amazing how the whole bus, or that part of it, had to listen to her carrying on a loud account with her friend across the aisle and back a few rows (I was in between). There were quiet Chinese people looking even more stone-faced or stoic, like if they concentrated on some point in the distance the disturbance would go away, having to listen to every "shit" and "motherfucker" like a bad stereotype of a black woman. Everyone on the bus might as well have been made of wood or nonexistent. This woman was so wrapped up in her own world, not just waving her dirty linen in public, but with an attitude that her emotional state took precedence over everything, like she was having some righteous feelings here and had to let go and if that meant pissing on a bunch of strangers then so be it.

Some would argue that black people were held in a state of mute reduction in this country for a long time (see *Invisible Man*),[53] so it's not surprising if sometimes they're loud and grab attention in order to counteract that reduction. However, most of those were not around a century ago. And it isn't attention-grabbing with the intent of opening the doors of communication for a rich and multicultural experience. It is more like slamming people over the head with some loud vulgarities and walking away laughing.

Corollary: jumping ahead to Saturday night. I was on the way home from the concert at the Bridge, 3 a.m., walking up 4th Street past a massive construction site. I was in a musically distracted mood and passed a black man on the sidewalk who was turning, zipping up his pants. I glanced at the sidewalk and saw it was wet and kept walking. He

[53] Ralph Ellison (1952)

took issue with that - my having the temerity to look at a public sidewalk he had just pissed on while I walked by, a glance lasting a second or two - and said, “WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU LOOKING AT?!” He then muttered some vaguely threatening things, like I was supposed to avert my eyes when passing a black man out of deference to a local god, but not look at the public sidewalk he had urinated on. It was such a stock response. I don’t think that black men look the same, but some are doing their damnedest, know what I’m saying, to sound the same.

I had a passing thought, like a dream, of living in a country where strangers are not so suspicious, and if you pass a man who just took a leak and was zipping up his pants he might have the presence of mind or character to respond differently. He might smile, a little embarrassed, and shrug it off. He might say, “3 o’clock in the morning and all’s well!” I don’t know if this requires a more homogenous population or not, but I’m sick of the rude and stupid attitude behind “WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU LOOKING AT?!” For one thing, it undermines the old conceit of the (racially) invisible man. Welcome to the real world of visibility, which comes with some responsibility and an awareness of others, especially if you’re a weasel. No reason he couldn’t have walked ten feet out of his way to piss in the alley or some bushes across the street. The assumption is that it’s okay to urinate on a sidewalk or swear at a stranger, but I’m the one who is intrusive because of the momentary angle of my gaze.

I nearly snapped. Not sure what would have happened if I hadn’t been in a good mood and in forward motion, where I’m ten feet past him before it sinks in what an unfortunate encounter it was, and another ten or twenty feet as I wonder how to respond. Is it worth it to confront a person with no character at three in the morning? Has he gotten

used to mouthing off because no one wants to tangle with him? What if I lived a couple of hundred years ago? We could pull our swords and have a few words or have it out. In which case, there is not only urine but blood on the sidewalk and not necessarily his. However, if I lived back then I wouldn't have run into a black man (there were very few in Denmark and England). I might have encountered a violent white man though, and one of us would not have made it home.

Where was I? Tired on a Saturday afternoon. Sleeping on a mattress on the floor has been a compromise. It is often a disturbed sleep and it comes with an unconscious turbulence. There are sudden noises at any hour of the night. It took a long time getting something going on the typewriter. Staring at the tree in the window, its branches almost touching the window, was more my speed.

Typing for hours, followed by the guitar.

6:00 p.m. I thought I would try to get some sleep before EINSTURZEN NEUBAUTEN that night. I was on the verge of passing out when the phone rang. The Czech woman. She had gone to a matinee of *Damage* (an older man falls for a young woman who is "damaged"). We talked about my place, which she hasn't seen yet. She mentioned the prostitutes. I said I found them easy to resist. She thought it was impersonal to pull out your dick and stick it in a stranger, which is how she put it.[54] Another woman with a blunt if not utilitarian view of things. It requires a heat-wave of love to float her over that attitude.

[54] "Sex: The pleasure is momentary, the position ridiculous, and the expense damnable." Philip Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield (1694-1773)

We went off on a tangent. She read another book by the Bhagwan Ragneesh,[55] and talked about the *kundulini*, the serpent force at the base of the spine. How to unlock it, and the levels of dynamic meditation. She went on in this vein for half an hour. I didn't add much, being sleepy.

I fell asleep for a couple of hours.

8:30 p.m. Coming to. The light outside was growing dim. I checked the phone cord, adjusted it, and got a dial tone. A few seconds later it rang. Her again. She was calling back so I wouldn't sleep too long and miss the show.

9:30 p.m. On the street in a daze, having recently been unconscious. Not tired though. I jumped in a cab for the sudden forward motion, and stopped at a bank machine with a bum passed out on the side. We zoomed to 4th and Bryant while I gave directions, the driver a disinterested man from the Middle East. There was a line stretching a block long. I hesitated, walking around, looking for a liquor store. Nothing. I finally stood in line.

An hour later I was still in line. It was like an event where you see how slowly you can walk one block with a lot of others. Every five minutes you take a couple of steps. I wasn't used to this, and wouldn't have the patience if I wasn't in a becalmed state having recently been asleep and with hardly any coffee. It was something how patient everybody was, but a few were getting restless and wondering what the hell was going on.

[55] He had a large commune in Oregon with nearly a hundred Rolls Royce cars. He's all about a smooth ride.

I had never been to the Bridge. It's around the corner from the Hotel Utah, and close to where I was pulled off the freeway for a DUI last year, coming off the ramp with the jail a few blocks away. How convenient.

I moved along slowly, with the line behind me still long, and only then did whoever runs the club condescend to let us know what the problem was. Some guy walked down the street yelling, "The Bridge apologizes… there was a two-hour delay in the sound check…" It would amount to a two-hour delay in the show. I don't know whose fault it was, but the people were treated like cattle. There was no further explanation from the management, much less a free drink.

I had advanced to an alley on the edge of the club when a cab pulled up. The line parted and it drove through to a side door. A couple of guys walked out and into the cab, which drove away. One of them was Blixa Bargeld, the singer for Neubauten. He looked a little older, not as thin and gaunt as a few years ago. He wore a cheap black suit with stringy hair pushed back, not very long.

Some background: one of the radio montage tapes I made a few years ago has a manic interlude by Neubauten. When they came here two or three years ago I missed them, but went to a gallery on Folsom Street which had an exhibition on the history of the group. There were videotapes of old performances - a controlled chaos of industrial scrap metal instruments which were amplified while the singer yelled and talked in German. There was a room full of their instruments, including the pipes or metal contraptions they beat on with hammers. The electric guitars were less unusual.

Finally, I was in the club and headed for the bar and got a beer. They were offering "smart drinks," but if I was smart I wouldn't be here under the circumstances.

The bartender was wired. He saw someone he knew and cursed the long delay, having to keep everyone in the bar during the sound check. That's why the line wasn't moving I suppose.

I wandered into the main room where everyone can stand in mute admiration of the sound equipment. The cattle comparison holds up. We were herded in and ignored, prodded with electro-shock devices by way of the sound system. I saw one black person (a woman) the whole night, but the sound system was all rap. I don't mind it once in a while, but as a totalitarian thing it got on my nerves. The crowd had a similar reaction, like it's another form of abuse. In between the pre-recorded tunes, and after another half hour of waiting, people started yelling. The concert was supposed to start around 9:30.

The first band didn't come on until 11:30, which finally mollified the crowd. They were at the point of throwing bottles. I was sitting on the side on some band equipment boxes with a longhaired German. He was in strange attire and making odd gesticulations. I think he was on acid. I felt like a zombie, projected further into that state by the droning beat and the wait. All of this sound and fury signified nothing so far. I was resigned to the evening being a disaster after the bone-crushing wait outside. However, it wasn't as bad as being arrested or shot. What a hurry-up-and-wait it was, taking a fast cab to a slow line. There were lines and sentences floating to the surface (like a human eight-ball) and I didn't have a pen. I hadn't eaten much, with all of this accumulating into a vortex that the headliners would be working with. It would hit me and some others with the added force of feeling faint, if not out on a limb. Most of these people had stood for hours before the music started.

MIRANDA SEX GARDEN: A curious choice to open for Neubauten, who're a German male force with some of the more jarring sounds around. There were female voices and violins, backed up by three guys who could pound it out on drums, bass, and sound-effect guitar. One violin was a metallic contraption wired on the pale arm of a woman with short black hair, wearing a black crushed velvet pantsuit with boots up to her knees. There were harmonies caroming through a composition, holding one hand to an ear, a bit dreamy, beginning with an a cappella repetition of "In heaven… everything is… fine…."

They're from London. I wondered what demented music school they graduated from. I had the feeling they haven't known hard times. A good third of the crowd had no interest, sitting or standing upstairs in a lounge with windows overlooking the stage. A couple of women thought the group was terrible. I was so-so for a while, then wandered upstairs, sitting on the floor with a number of others waiting for the group to get off. It seemed to be a long set. There were numbers without a lot of differentiation, especially with a feminine flowing sound which doesn't cut it for a lot of people.

I looked at others with a detached gaze, drinking coffee and whisky, just what the doctor ordered. The crowd was more varied than you might expect. A man walked by, tall with short black hair, black suit, white shirt, black tie, who turned out to be the bass player. A few women in black leather dominatrix outfits with silver studded back-straps, and one with a leather motorcycle hat. It was like wearing chromium gun-belts from Tiffany's.

After Miranda Sex Garden left the stage (with their sound machines still running) there was a half-hour wait, setting up the equipment for Collapsing New Buildings (what their name means in English).

EINSTURZEN NEUBAUTEN: They finally walked onstage. People gravitated to the windows. I didn't want them under glass so I walked down the side stairs. People lined the wall. I saw the crowd pressed to the foot of the stage and stayed on the staircase where it ran along one side of the stage. It turned out to be a close position with a near perfect view. I could have reached down and pulled the hair of one of the sound technicians for the club, working his control panel with a few hundred buttons. Blixa and the boys were ten feet away. Now and then there were angry looks from Blixa in the direction of the sound tech. In the midst of a furious number he would pull himself up into the most indignant pose, gesticulating with an arm pointing emphatically to his mic or someone else's, wanting more volume. In the middle of one number he just stopped, saying in English, exasperated, how fortunate they didn't have to do the whole tour with this guy.

Meanwhile, from the first notes I was in the grip of it and captivated. *Tour de force* might be a worn-out phrase, but his eerie vocals were something, nearly a cappella. Through the whole set they went back and forth, with stretches of uncontrolled metal banging fury, a tornado in a junkyard, which was all the more effective with their using sudden stops and silence, the machine-gun syncopation of someone banging on a metal cylinder with a hammer or another home-made instrument, a metal plate stretched across a framework with a couple of heavy wire cords which were also banged on, making for a more reptilian metallic sound with a microphone next to it.

Blixa is a baritone, but he's all over the register, given the range of his voice and how he uses it. The industrial tools were being used from time to time, electric drills applied to sheet metal or a motor that he held up to a microphone. It reminded me of other bands, like the Beatnigs (who used a buzz-saw with a shower of sparks when it cut through metal), or Captain Beefheart, and early Iggy, but maybe that's because I've seen all of them. Blixa has a steady grip on what he's doing, like he's in it for the long haul, having been anchored in industrial noise. I thought of Artaud and his Theater of Cruelty,[56] but Blixa is made of sterner stuff.

He is strengthened, and going on at length, by having more political substance then you might realize since most of it is in German. It doesn't interfere with the overall impact, and probably enhances it. With many bands you can't hear the words, it's like an opera where you don't know what's going on. I read a review in the *Guardian* which elucidated this a bit:

> Everything that Germany's most important band has previously done piecemeal comes together grandly on Tabula Rasa. Compared to the bloody Bayeux tapestries of battle sounds and lamentations presented in "Sie" and "Die Interimsliebenden," Strategies Against Architecture's rhythmic hooky cameos … of deconstructed song progressions feel like preparatory sketches. The hollow signs and emotional hunger of "Zebulon" and "Wuste" vastly extend and complete Haus der Luge's perversely melodic vignettes of cadavered souls bumping through evil structures. To you as an almost 21st century American living aeons away from the Dantean hell that was Germany's Europe for most of the last 90 years, E.N.'s mournful bombast about lovers clinging to each other during the interims between Semtex and Utopia or between (good) times and on the seafloor… may feel like overkill: Can lives really be this damned?
>
> Yes, says "Sie," a three-voice verse and rhythm staging of the entire sad history of modern Berlin's enduring one absolutist fantasy after another – from storm troopers to red flags waving to the breaking of the Berlin Wall to the continuing saga (as the band sees it) of violent ideals more justified (and more disappointed) than ever.

[56] Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) wanted a theater which would assault the senses of the audience, unlocking unconscious forces which would be revitalizing.

> … he curses the field of graves he lives among and the hunger for a lover he's forced to endure…

You get the idea. The sound-effects and lyrics are informed by historical intensities which few of us have known and which don't go away from one record to the next.

The reviewer (Michael Freedburg) said the percussionist, "…short, squat, and as muscular as a concentration camp sadist, tortures cylinder wheels and beats blocks of wood and hollow drums to a swollen pulp." Another member of the band, "as slim and manicured as a Gestapo desk clerk, slivers a metal bar and a flexed wire into electronic melodic…" This is pretty bad, especially from a Jewish reviewer.

Where was I, off to the side, in full view of the stage, including the guitarist. Most of the time he kept turning to his amp and other equipment, adjusting things. Not a lead guitarist so much as doing sound-effects or pounding full force, but with more structures in a sonic composition than you might imagine. They could bring the most chaotic composition to stop on a dime, if not a Deutsche mark. He was the only one with long hair hanging to his shoulders, half over his face, in jeans and a T-shirt which he later removed, sweating.

There were solo vocals, like a German chant with two guys pounding the stage with long hollow pipes and microphones at their feet.

Occasionally I would watch the crowd, with people crammed to the edge of the stage about waist high. When the lights hit the crowd I saw their glazed expressions in a sweaty semi-transport. Down in front were several women who were going into trance-like states. One of them tried to wiggle out of a tight black dress with thin straps. A pale and bosomy blonde, maybe German. One strap or the other kept falling and there were

half-hearted attempts to pull them up while she shook and writhed and shivered at the feet of Blixa, the dress barely clinging to the end of her breast. At one point she leaned over the edge of the stage and held her breast out, pulling at the nipple. Where have I seen that look and gesture before? A Gypsy woman in the south of Spain, holding a baby in one arm while baring a breast and gesturing to it with a look of pleading. In this case, the begging and the breast had more to do with offering it to the singer.

He wasn't biting, and eventually she pulled her straps up and smoked a cigarette. It was post-cathartic and near the end she disappeared, maybe to meet him backstage, although I don't think he's in it for the front row tits.

Meanwhile, the crowd was berserk and stunned and suitably impressed, especially towards the end when there were more crescendos and whiplash silences pierced by sudden screams in German.

They left the stage. The crowd was stomping and howling. The band returned for an encore. They had some corrugated metal with a stick figure painted on it (their symbol). The stocky fellow poured buckets of gravel on a sheet of metal with a microphone next to it while someone on a scaffold was dripping flaming bits of wax. There were a couple of other numbers, ending with some modulated quiet vocals, a two-part harmony. He managed a few smiles.

I felt like one of those electric smoke beams in the room, edified and satisfied and blown away. The hammer blow machine gun modulation of a group in control of collapsing structures. "Fall mountains, just don't fall on me…"[57] I drifted upstairs in the

[57] Jimi Hendrix, "If 6 was 9" (1967)

after-shock. A girl behind the counter told me it was 2:40 a.m. and no, she didn't know the capacity of the club.

I went outside with the others in slow motion, like walking ghosts who weathered an hour and a half in a German historical engine room. The sense of a bleak futurism blending with a prehistoric tribalism, using whatever it can throw together with a blowtorch to bang on. The percussion rhyming with concussion.

On the sidewalk people stood around in an anti-climax of fresh air. It was a surprisingly warm night. I recognized a girl, but didn't say anything. Someone wanted a ride to Sacramento. I had my jacket off and started walking towards the downtown skyline, going up 4th Street under my own power or the power of the occasion. I walked two miles and it was a breeze, passing by some monolithic buildings under construction. They were not collapsing, but I would be soon.

On deserted streets at three in the morning in the Tenderloin. I passed a woman in a low-cut blouse negotiating with someone in a car. Back home I sat down with some coffee, beer, a cigarette, and a vast relief. I wondered if the evening and its sound-effects were magnified by the physical effort, where you're wiped out and it intensifies the situation.

I noticed a window in an old brick building a block away with the silhouettes of people moving and gesticulating to music I couldn't hear, a partly eroded moon overhead.

I liked the idea of Neubauten listening to chamber music in their leisure time.[58] I turned on the radio, expecting the heavy metal program on KUSF. I forgot I left it on the

[58] When Public Image Ltd. first played in San Francisco (1980) it was in a warehouse next to an elevated freeway. Flipper opened (and beer cans were thrown). During the intermission the sound

classical station, having listened to an opera. I kept it on. Still stunned (and tuned up), I took a few notes while listening to the Rotterdam Philharmonic. That was followed by a piano concerto by Beethoven, and on that note I gave up the ghost.

Sunday, May 9, 1993

Six hours sleep. The afternoon was the hottest May 9 on record, hitting 90 degrees. I stayed in, spending a few hours on the typewriter. The writing went over the falls, nearly seven pages single-spaced, and mainly to do with last night.

I wonder about my obsessions and preoccupations when the beach is an alluring prospect. So much word and thought dissolves out there. You can spend your time dissolving or solving. I've had massive doses of the former. If you live on the West Coast you are partially dissolved and half-asleep (according to some people), so I try not to make it worse.

Also, this area has a hold on me, and I'm less likely to go out to the cliffs. They are further away from here. I'm not in the mood for the crowds on Sunday, and the erotic presence of the women at the beach is not something I take lightly these days.

Typing with a heat wave on the streets, followed by a work-out on the guitar, and I caught the last half of the Lakers game.

Threw together a meal. Ling cod, green peppers, rice. Not something I do very often. Does cooking make a house a home? Living here is forcing me into some different habits and routines. Every place has its own hardships or resistances, with compensations in your day-to-day routine. In this case, I eat out more often.

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system came on with "No Future" by Johnny Rotten's old band, the Sex Pistols. The crowd erupted. A minute later the song switched to a string quartet, leaving a few people up in the air. It was a typical Rotten trick.

I sat in an easy chair with some coffee. The sun was going down. The dying rays hit a fifteen-story building a block away, with cement boxes in which the cave dwellers live in close proximity. It was mostly curtains and dark spaces, but there seemed to be a disturbed individual living there.[59] Earlier in the afternoon I noticed a thin naked man who kept flitting back and forth behind a glass sliding door. I don't know if he was cooling off or what. Now I saw him with his clothes on pacing back and forth in an empty room, maybe walking in circles, symptomatic of the mentally disturbed.

8:00 p.m. I went out and took a bus to the flat near the Haight. Walking down the street I passed an open garage a few doors from the flat. The Phantom was sitting with a black man in his forties. I was introduced, shook hands, and took a seat. He was a man of polite dignity and bearing, and here was the Phantom, a longhaired pothead who was kind of sloshed and it showed in the conversation. He had called around four, getting off work, so I figured he had downed some bottles in the last few hours. I think there is a slower pace that's reminiscent of the Midwest when he hangs out in an open garage, shooting the breeze for hours with this man. The Phantom has little interest in the minefields of race and gender. He figures people are friendly or they're not, and acts accordingly.

He borrowed $5 for some wine and went off. I sat there talking with his friend who was not drinking. He was concerned that the Phantom drinks too much, though careful not to interfere with someone's business. He said he had to go upstairs and see to his mother, but an interesting conversation ensued, during which the Phantom returned. It was about his growing up in Texas and how discrimination was a real thing in the 50's and 60's. I said I was talking with Mr. Charles Brown a few weeks ago, also from Texas,

[59] Flash forward: one year later (in May of '94), I met a woman who lived in that building, a writer from Baton Rouge, and we would be together for many years. At the moment I was staring at the apartments on the upper floors, with her inhabiting one of those.

though older, and who also would have "come up hard." He brightened to the reference to Mr. Brown, having been acquainted or run into him in Texas. In those early years people like Lightning Hopkins would come to the house. You would hear him walking along the road and strumming his guitar. This man heard the blues from people he didn't consider living legends at the time, more like friends of the family.

I asked if he thought Lightning Hopkins was sad or not. He thought about it and said both. In his later years, things were better for him. The man I was talking with, Mr. Taylor, seemed to have the same attitude that Charles Brown had. He was confronted with a system of discrimination but he didn't let it get to him. He could figure out a way around it. Things were kind of twisted in the culture, and letting himself get twisted would be giving into it.

And here's the kicker. He was a wide receiver for the LA Rams during the 1970's. There was some mention of what it's like going up for a pass and knowing you're going to get slammed. He would be so tense or nervous before a game he couldn't eat. The Phantom said his father would like to meet a man who rubbed elbows with some legends on the field, while his own mind was blown by the thought of having Lightning Hopkins drop by the house.

When we left, shaking hands, the Phantom said he had found a job for him. Doing what? Washing dishes. That shook me a bit. He said, "$8.50 an hour," like that was good. While sitting in the garage I thought about racial generalities. The people I meet who are the most hospitable and relaxed are often black, and so are the worst offenders on the street.[60]

[60] Not sure if this is related, but a while back there was a long article in *The New York Review of Books* about the genetics of black people. Apparently, they have more genetic variation than other

Note: on the wall of the garage was a calendar of black women in swimsuits. There was also a pin-up of a naked white woman. I thought that was amusing. I had a black friend years ago who made his own comic books called “White Whore Funnies.” Then someone on the floor below him was freebasing and caught the building on fire. He lost everything, including his comic book collection.

We were in the sound-room in the back of the garage by 10 p.m. I hooked up the Les Paul while the Phantom messed around with the soundboard. A lot of buttons and wires, getting the sound he wanted from the mic while I said a few words or hummed a tune. Then he disappeared for a while, saying he was hungry.

I slowly cut loose for a while. Whatever I get from a wooden stringed instrument I get with the amplified version. It’s like being immersed in a force field where you don’t need anything else. I go for hours without a cigarette, coffee, alcohol, or even water. In some respects, it is an antidote for women (or the lack of one).

I tried out a few songs. The instrumentals were stretching out, and then began to tighten up. After an hour or so the Phantom returned and sat on the floor, getting relaxed. Actually, he passed out. I thought he might have gone upstairs and finished the wine, but he hadn’t touched it. He may have walked to Haight Street and scored something. I continued with an otherworldly (wrote “underworldly”) momentum of the amplified. The amplifier was four feet from his head. He later said he never heard a thing. I did, however, with some shifts in the distortion. His leg was lying on the floor switch, and even when unconscious he would adjust the sound once in a while and somewhat arbitrarily, I thought.

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people, for better or worse. I think it makes it harder to organize and stay together, but at the same time it overwhelms the stereotypes. Variety is too elusive for those.

Lately I'm more focused on the vocals. The voice constitutes a missing chord that some are looking for. You can have the most accomplished lead guitarist playing second fiddle to a voice if vocals are more human. I've always done both, but for years the emphasis was on the instrument. You're feeling in the dark for a note progression which can hit a nerve, the musical equivalent of a hard massage – the pain is delicious.

I was reaching for it on a steel-stringed instrument. The voice can hit it in a minute, cutting to the quick. Your voice is glorified and altered and improved when channeled through an amplifier. There are voices which are given the equivalent of a make-over by recording equipment. I went on for 2 ½ hours. The guitar was heavy. I finally stopped, figuring it was getting late. I turned off the equipment and left the Phantom lying on the floor unconscious. I put the guitar in its coffin-like case and walked through the grungy garage and up into the flat. It was nearly one in the morning.

I lay in his room with coffee, cigarette, and a little wine, flipping through an issue of *Guitar Player*. He has every issue going back for years. I'm not much for the technical approach, like those photo magazines where a photo is accompanied by an explanation of shutter speed, lens aperture, and the equipment used, as if the main thing is to wallow in the calibrated and mechanical. You wonder how they express anything.

2:00 a.m. Went to sleep.

Monday, May 10, 1993

In the morning I went out for breakfast at a local diner, sitting at the counter. I read the paper, like I don't have enough to be concerned about already.

I returned to the flat with some coffee in a semi-large cup. The Phantom wandered in, looking disheveled. Not a word about his passing out last night, like it was perfectly normal to drink himself into oblivion. I offered him the coffee. I had been sipping it and took half an hour to lower the contents an inch or two. He gulped the rest down in a few seconds. I'm beginning to think I'm not constructed like other people.

I left around l1:30 for a rendezvous with the Czech woman at the beach. It was a long bus ride, and I walked the rest of the way to Baker Beach. It was nearly deserted on a windy afternoon. I walked to a cove on the north end of the beach where it is warmer and protected from the wind. There were more people there, a colony of naked humans, so laconic on location.

I took off my clothes and lay on a towel. It was my first time at the beach this year, having a close encounter with a clothing optional coastline. I'm ambiguous about it. It leaves me in a mindless state, my IQ dropping with every minute of lying on the sand. It isn't the sands of time that are running out, but my intelligence in the hot sand. It adds to the magnification. It is similar to when you're stoned, a hypnotic languor where you end up staring at the horizon, a passing gull, a cloud above the hills to the north.

That doesn't mean the minimalism isn't a relief, or that I'm not inclined to look at some of the women. Passing glances are okay. It's a satire of the social norms which govern our discretion. Women are careful when they are in public, and wonder if their blouse is too revealing or their skirt is too short. The variations on a theme of fashion with its optical approach-avoidance like an endless tease. And then to see these women who don't care - they take it off and walk around with their tits swaying or they're sprawling in the sand, assuming that all bets are off when they are naked and they have

immunity in this environment. The usual methods of discretion have become irrelevant, and women who sit with their knees together when they wear a skirt will lay back with their knees spread when they're wearing nothing, taking the air.

There was an earth mother type with low-swinging breasts, looking like she has had more than one kid, who was running all over the place. At one point she was on her hands and knees in the sand, about ten feet away, with the business end of her pointing in my direction. Some guys go to strip joints for this sort of thing, and don't even get the fresh air and the seagulls.

The Czech woman had arrived by then. She was here yesterday and thought it was too windy to expose herself. I was in a swimsuit having gone down to the water, thinking I would dive in. I had second thoughts when I put my foot in for a few seconds and lost the feeling in it. Ice water from here to the horizon.

Walking back I ran into an acquaintance in a swimsuit, a black man in his late thirties. We were getting along, talking about this and that, and wondered if that was a submarine out there. While we talked a woman arrived a few feet in front of us. She took off her clothes and lay down parallel to the horizon. She provided another horizon with her contours, being small and brown-skinned with dark hair and a hard body.

I had a cigarette while sitting on a towel. One thing about this beach, there are a lot of body types with racial variations. A young woman, a blonde Nordic type with a good figure, stretched out in the sand not far away. To my left, a woman with a longhaired guy who I think was in a band. I heard someone mention the White Trash Debutantes. She was a Mediterranean type, short with black hair and anti-gravity tits, but only topless. People here are not dogmatic about what is worn or not worn. Now and then

there are Latino guys who walk by in their street shoes like they're on Mission Street and stumbled on some women lying on the sidewalk.

Men have a tendency to stare at women, but it seems more common in Latino culture – the sense of what is profound about a woman's body. They're a little mystified when people are so casual at the beach. They hover nearby like not-so-innocent bystanders, leaving empty Corona bottles on the rocks. The women show their bodies and the men just lay there, staring out to sea. The self-control of people on the beach is hard to fathom, but is probably a fate worse than death.

One of the diversions on the edge of the continent is picking up an echo of artistic poses. Women re-enact the history of the nude with their positions. There are poses which are reminiscent of an Ingres, a Degas, Picasso, or Matisse. A random position reminds me of a composition from a century ago. The woman lying a body's length away, a little behind me, was athletic with long legs and little tits that jutted out from her chest. She was reclining, rolling over on one hip, and her contours were colluding with the sightlines of another person. I have heard that women are holistic, being greater than the sum of their parts. They're polymorphous and perverse in ways so subtle that it barely qualifies as such, seeing the body as a whole (and not a hole). When they are naked on the beach they are no more concerned about their vulva than an elbow or a knee. There's something healthy about that attitude, it's charming and disarming. And when people have no clothes on they retain a sense of manners to replace the veil of clothing.[61]

[61] I should mention that there weren't only women at the beach. There were men there, but I don't feel like giving them equal time. Maybe I will attain a more balanced point of view when I have a girlfriend. I'm hardwired as a heterosexual, and it affects my reportorial outlook.

True to form, or is it function: a slender and small-breasted woman with thick black hair between her legs. I like to think it is a sign of independence, but who knows? I never thought that women have to shave down there.

A curious moment: the earth mother arrived with another woman and a girl about eight or ten years old. One woman took off her clothes, while the other was in a bikini with the top off. They stretched a towel between them, hiding the little girl as she changed into a swimsuit.

There was a young black man from Brazil. According to the Czech woman he comes here often. He sat near those women. The topless one walked over and shook his hand. He was naked and so was the earth mother who proceeded to give him a back rub. She straddled him and really went at it. The Czech woman thought he had a nice body, and mentioned that to a Brazilian man who didn't have that sort of build (and wasn't black). Apparently, he was offended.

There was some mention of her paralyzing paradoxes, being spiritually minded and particular about the men in her life, and yet is drawn to someone on a purely physical basis. When that's the case she doesn't know what moves to make. She said a lot of women prefer to be on the receiving end of adulation and attention. They are more in control that way, even if it means they're not with the one they want.

She has some checks and balances which border on the self-deluding. She will start off talking about some guy at work (being stuck on Latinos). A minute later she will check herself and say, "I don't care." Then reverse direction again. I said something about delusional zigzags, and how I have been hearing about this guy for six months or more, and would expect to hear about him years from now and with the qualifier of "I

don’t care.” It sounds like she is worried about being rejected. She was taken aback for a second, but admitted it.

When sober she is painfully polite. When drinking she can be cruel and cutting, like a side of her that is repressed, and she said as much. I told her I experienced it before. She looked surprised, like she had forgotten. I didn’t mention the time we were in bed and I was bitten harder than I’ve ever been.

She is puzzled with herself. The other night at the El Rio she was with a Brazilian woman and started feeling like this was her date and wanted her to herself, acting jealous. Usually I hold off on any negative comments. She went through a brutal transformation a couple of years ago when her Latino boyfriend killed himself. Their relationship was off and on, and he couldn’t handle the latest estrangement. He was something of a poet, and I didn’t know him very well. He seemed to be unsure of himself and lived with his mother, who found him after he overdosed (not sure on what). I thought that was pretty low, to let his mother find him like that, not to mention what it did to the Czech woman. Her confidence was given such a body blow that it has taken years for her to get over it.

I walked down to the water, went up to my knees, and decided against it.

2:00 p.m. Put my clothes on, kissed her goodbye, and walked along the beach.

3:00 p.m. At home with a hot shower, and getting ready for work. There was a phone call from my brother in Los Angeles with his one-year-old son making incidental noises near the phone. His wife is from Mexico, but they don’t speak Spanish very often.

4:30 p.m. Went to work, two hours late. There was a Filipino immigration problem, much of which consisted of the Attorney having ignored it for so long. A mother with two sons here and two in the Philippines who married an American a few

years ago. The Attorney dashed off one of his off-the-cuff attempts at a declaration and an affidavit which was faulty. By the time I figured that out he was gone, and I was left with a distraught woman.

I wrote him a memo to the effect his own incompetence was making a lot of people miserable, and the State Bar might declare him a public nuisance, like an old freighter which has become a danger to shipping. It has drifted on an old momentum for so long it doesn't know how slow it has become.

7 p.m. I walked home, picking up some fish and chips on the way. The tube on the wall was showing *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome.* The Century is down the street, a somewhat polished strip joint. I don't know how polished the women are, but they have an act to grind - things that go bump in the night.

I returned to my building. Across the street there was a bust in progress, if you can call it progress. There were a couple of undercover men in low-life attire. They had switched personas as two men were handcuffed and pointed against the wall. A black policewoman in uniform stood nearby.

At home I was subjected to a delayed erotic force field from the beach.

There was a letter from Ming:

> I'm somewhere in between Turnagain Pass and Gainville. The trailer broke down, J. hitched into town (25 miles away) but it's not so bad… there's a valley surrounding me, the puddles on the ground are filling up with rainwater and the grass that is just turning green looks alive and eager to grow – the trees, black spruce trees are thin and need some heat to nourish their cones. The mountains here are full of snow and the mist shrouds the tops of them. It looks cold out there but I want to put on my raingear and run, run until I sweat out all of my thoughts. My mind is clouded and this afternoon of driving and then here waiting has been good for me – to be alone once again and think about my existence. The tops of the mountains to my right fade away and reappear for me…

She went on about how peaceful it was and how she feels the pain of those who live in cities, especially the down and out. She thinks they should move to the country or Alaska.

They went out on a boat, with "orgies of starfish, the two-inch barnacles, the 30 otters in the water." She met a woman who was good for her to connect with. It had been a while, she said. Her old friend Tanya had gone with her, but turned back at Vancouver. Things have been deteriorating between them, and they're hardly speaking at the moment. When they were driving north, "… I had to escape and put myself in another time frame, space frame – have analytical conversations in my head while looking out the window… I hope she's ok and hasn't manufactured too much funky things about women in her mind. I know she's always been a little weary of how she thinks I deal with men in my life…."

Weary or wary? Speaking of her male companion, a "hard worker and a diehard dreamer..., I am a little weary of him and his need to attach to someone, but I am clear about my intentions and desires and he understands." She has been refusing his advances and he shrugs it off. They travel together. I think he bought a truck for this purpose, and will get her a job in Anchorage as a fish egg technician.

"I want to stay away until [the Phantom and her ex] mellow out. Do you think September will be long enough? Just kidding!!... Mexico or the desert sounds good right about now" – something we talked about. "You are a good friend, second to none and I miss you."

She included a card, MOON RISE, and wrote: "I miss you and have good thoughts about you. Make up any new lyrics lately? Maybe you could send me a tape of acoustic guitar playing and singing. Let's hear that <u>great</u> voice of yours."

It was her second letter after being gone for two months. The paradox of someone putting their thoughts on paper and you feel closer to them as a result, except they're thousands of miles away. At times it sounded like a woman talking to herself and then mailing it. We have been outside of each other's influence for a while, so we're writing to the memory we have of each other. A letter can be dashed off in any mood and mailed. Some people don't write very well, or they put things into words which aren't exactly how they're feeling. I wouldn't want my friends to judge me by one letter, considering I am often under the influence of a mood, a moment, free associating in a less than coherent manner (it's been known to happen). A letter is intimate, but it can also be misleading. We can't all write like Stendhal.

By way of introduction to a phone call from the Phantom that night. He received a letter from Ming and didn't like it. He is one of those who she hoped would mellow out. It was something how offended or disgusted he was. It was one of those letters where the loved one tells the one who wants her to get on with his life and not wait for her. He found that condescending and insulting, mainly because they had discussed it "a million times" before. She wasn't calling him, she was expressing herself in a format he couldn't respond to. He is not much of a letter writer (I think he is dyslexic).

He went on and on about it, like he was obsessed with her. The Phantom would settle for any sort of connection, like a doormat companion who will do anything for her, but he doesn't need a formal letter of advice. He started describing their relationship. It was a little different than how she had presented it. She had finally gone to bed with him so he would get over it, or see how "ordinary" it was. No big deal. Maybe it was ordinary for her, but for him it meant a lot. He was in her bed on frequent occasions, more or less

begging for it. She didn't mind the cuddling, but nothing more. She would sleep without a shirt on, though. He figured a topless woman is a half-hearted yes, especially with her being so bosomy. One night in January she relented. He admitted he didn't do very well, but it continued on a weekly basis for a month or two.

He wondered if she was getting some revenge on the other roommate, Jon, whose room was next to hers. She had a brief affair with him as well. In the meantime, she was negotiating with an ex-boyfriend who still came around, not to mention those nights when I would sleep over. It wasn't like there was a steady stream of men in and out of her room**.** There was a guy who eventually sublet her room who would come over and spend the night, a casual friend, but it wasn't very often. The Phantom, observing this the following morning, told her he should take a ticket and stand in line. He said he was punished and on probation for a week or two after saying that.

I was getting less and less interested in all of this, with him sounding like a broken record. I suppose it was another reality check on how people operate, especially on the level of provisional love and sex. She is a physical magnet to men, relishing their presence and attention while unclear about the effect she has on them. She was going by whatever felt good at the moment, like someone rubbing almond oil on her breasts. It felt good, it was therapeutic, and that's all there was to it.

I couldn't fault her though. The men were useful and available. She is a feminist who relies on men, and her life is getting complicated. Tanya thinks she uses men, as if women's liberation meant a woman doesn't have to depend on one man, she can lean on several at the same time. If an affair was getting serious, Ming would feel things closing in because it shut out other men.

One problem here, if she gravitates to sensitive or weaker men it leaves her more in control. When she walks out or things fall apart it leaves them twisting in the wind like tortured souls. She doesn't want to leave that impression, and is forced into counseling and negotiation. If she gravitated to stronger men they wouldn't turn into the walking wounded, but she would be less in control.

She admitted to the Phantom that she was an "accidental flirt." What struck me was this concept of a man who's begging for it. It's not uncommon when you get down to it, and there are plenty of songs to that effect - the heart-wrenching rhetoric of a singer with an amplified sex drive who begs for it at the top of his lungs. I'm not inclined to that approach, and it isn't necessary when you're with a woman for a long time. If a woman likes a man he doesn't have to beg, in fact she is the one who's making overtures or dropping hints. There were a few occasions when merely bringing up the subject would have ignited some affairs, or one-night stands at least, especially when I was in college. I was under the influence of a religious upbringing where you don't say, "I want to fuck you." That approach would have had results with a few women, or cleared the air, but it might have put off a few others.

Meanwhile, this was starting to remind me of *The Alexandria Quartet,*[62] where you have the perspectives of four different people on a situation. The woman. The man in love with her. The woman's female friend. The woman's male friend (who is typing this). For all the time she spends with men, she may not know them very well. The Phantom thinks she is a tomboy with zero intuition. She is surprised at her effect on men. What if she is one of those women who are wrapped up in herself and her coordinates? It's part of

[62] Lawrence Durrell (1957)

the allure. She is so used to having a pussy that she finds it ordinary, and assumes that everyone thinks the same. It is similar to her view of fucking, that it feels good sometimes, but it's no big deal, being used to her body and the men not doing much for her.

The men can sentimentalize from a distance what a woman has between her legs, but for her it comes with maintenance and pain and caution. It is not surprising if she looks down on men who are obsessed with it, like I would look askance at someone obsessing on my foot or elbow. Some women have more feeling in their foot than between their legs. There's a downside to the polymorphous diffusion of sensation.

There was something more here, adding to the crossed signals and romantic breakdowns. She was brought up in a Chinese household which was "loveless," in her opinion. Her father bought her mother in the south of China. Their daughter is unclear on the concept of romantic love, like it's a sentimental western notion. It is one of her traits which a few men found out the hard way. What she values is her friends and companions, who are more or less platonic. They last longer than her fuck-buddies.

I didn't get off the phone until after midnight, and was on the typewriter for a while. There was a delayed effect of going to the beach this afternoon. Like a fool I had refused a woman's baby oil, and my skin is doing a slow burn.

There was also an erotic undercurrent which snuck up on me. An occurrence or event will soak into your cells and send back signals hours later with a force you didn't feel at the time. When you are there you are distracted by a lot of things, and hopefully have some self-control. I talked with people, stared at the ocean, and walked around.

However, the subconscious absorbs the presence of the women lounging in the heat-waves for a couple of hours. The delayed sensation leaves you burning hours later.

It may have something to do with women who're idealized in retrospect. They are seen and filtered through your memory. Neurologically speaking, they go to your head. The nerve ends fuse and you remember something. A woman whose contours are in line with a marble statue, an ancient prototype, and it unlocks a racial memory.

And yet I'm not impressed with having a heightened sense of things in retrospect, as if they're seen in a rear-view mirror. I suppose it's better than never having a heightened sense of things, but a heightened sense in the immediate present would be nice. I couldn't go to the beach, however, because I would have an erection. When I'm at home and think about it, it's okay. I wouldn't write much if I lived in an eternal present where whatever is not in front of me is fading into irrelevance. I wouldn't remember much in other words, or any words, living from one significant moment to the next, and one significant other to the next. Reminds me of some women I have known, and don't know any longer.

Tuesday, May 11, 1993

In the morning I had a premonition of V. calling. The phone rang and it was her, with a quick and shy suggestion of having lunch.

12:30 p.m. Rendezvous with V. An hour later I walked her back to work, and then went to a gallery for some paintings by Deborah Oropallo. I like her work, though a little less this time around. She still has the touch in my unprofessional opinion. There was

something with hands gesticulating at the top of the canvas. Along the bottom were handcuffs and not much in between. $30,000.

I went into the gallery next door and was pleasantly surrealized. A group show with some off-the-wall and unpredictable objects:

1. A three-inch video screen in a glass, showing an eyeball that nervously shifted its glance.

2. Half a man: just the pant legs, cut off at the waist, and standing.

3. A pile of heavy rubber bands. Each one had a word that was repeated around it: SPERM. EYE. LEG. CLITORIS. An elastic language that stretches the truth on a loop.

4. A lead music sheet on an iron stand with a plastic tube connected to the rough-hewn wooden head of a man on the wall. It was called "The Artist."

5. A candle in a pale wax base with a number of dark human hairs inserted in it.

6. Two life-size photos of a man and woman standing in gender-biased poses. Him with a bat, her with a hand mirror. They were both naked, but their private parts were airbrushed out of existence like dolls. It was disconcerting.

I returned to the law office.

6:30 p.m. Walked home.

8:30 p.m. The Phantom dropped by. I half-expected it. What I didn't expect was that he would be here for the next six hours, more than half of which he was going on and on about Ming. He got progressively inebriated as the night wore on. He brought a six-pack and finished it while I had one Guinness. He admitted having had as much earlier, so that's twelve beers. Later we walked out and bought a bottle of wine. I had one-fourth and he had the rest. His monologue by then was almost funny, a driven broken record of someone who would go on talking no matter what I was doing in the other room. Now and then the subject veered off into other things, like cursing his current roommates.

For some of the time, realizing what I was in for, I used the time to straighten up the place. Then I worked out on the guitar, while saying something every now and then and he would continue.

The main preoccupation was Ming. There was the slowly dawning realization that some people thought he was a little dim. He might be easygoing, he couldn't help that, but he wasn't so obtuse he didn't know what was going on. He had a point. I thought he was perceptive about himself and her and where they stood and what he could expect (not much). He admitted that he offered to be her dog, fully aware of other men in her life, and he could live with that. He took responsibility for having instigated the situation, begging her for so long to sleep with him that she finally consented, if only to shut him up. He was aware of the condescending glances of Tanya, who thought the men who fell for Ming were pitiful.

He was conscious of another thing. He hadn't told anyone about what went on between them, but she was not so private. She had talked to Tanya, for example, but women are known for sharing information about men. I think that men are more reticent. They don't want to put the image of their naked girlfriend in the mind of another man. He figured it would be okay to talk to me since her and I are old friends with hardly any secrets. He has seen how candid we are with each other. Even then I didn't expect him to go on at such length. It was not exactly a blow-by-blow account of every time he was in bed with her, but also not something you could put in a family newspaper. The references were getting carnal, even though he was self-deprecating. He put their situation in a dry light, as if their encounters occurred in the Edward Hopper Hotel.

At times he sounded like a farm boy who finally laid a Chinese girl and had to tell someone about it. He caught himself at one point, thinking he had said too much. I was about to agree when he said she talks about him to others. I was not sure which way to go on this. I held onto the guitar which didn't distract him very much, except to wonder where I got those "Johnny Winter licks."

Some men have a blunt perspective and it takes a lot of alcohol to float them into lyrical terrain. It sounded like he grew up reading *Hustler*, *High Times*, and *Popular Mechanics*. There was a time when a man in love was less inclined to speak in terms of "lubrication," or the lack of it. He spent more time on the psychological dynamic between a woman and himself. Considering how often the Phantom mentioned being punished for this or that, it sounded like an S & M routine involving the Dragon Lady and the Farm Boy. If I didn't know them better I might have believed it.

So the Phantom spilled his guts for a few hours and I made a salad. It was one in the morning. He wanted me to write her a note and tell her what was going on, that he would accept anything, but not this condescending cut-off of communications. If I would do that I could have the Strat for nothing. I said we would talk about it later. $100 wasn't much, it's a beat-up guitar, but I use the rest of his equipment almost every week and thought I should contribute something.

It got me how someone could be so obsessed,[63] and remain on one level for hours on end. A number of times I tried to change the subject or steer it in another direction, which he ignored or gave some half-hearted attention to, snapping back a minute later.

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[63] He thought it was "God's revenge" for all the times he left some girl in the lurch, the ones he used to "poke" and walk away from.

You think you've been through the grinder of love lost and then you hear what someone else is going through. It's like you're on a windy deck but he is in the hold, his view so limited he can't see anything else.

2:30 a.m. He was on his way out, slowly. The Phantom has the passive cunning of someone who's been thwarted in life and is convinced of his own intuition. He sensed that he had probably exhausted the subject and the hour was getting late. He paused in the doorway to reflect some more, saying how miserable he would have been if he hadn't been able to talk to someone and for that alone the Strat was mine.

When he was gone I sat there in a daze. He was gratified I didn't tell him to forget her like others had. Amnesia is a refuge for the weak. He was in it for the long haul and he had a plan. He would wait until she got fat, and then he might look good to her, having no other prospects. It was something she worried about, being a large-boned girl and very buxom. Her legs and butt are tight, but she could make herself a nervous wreck imagining the future in the form of her mother. I doubt that she will put much weight on in the next ten years, but it won't change her opinion where he is concerned. If she ends up with the Phantom it will be because he is a masochist with a van (just kidding).

Wednesday, May 12, 1993

Typing in the morning, then went to work.

7:00 p.m. I left the office and took a bus to the War Memorial Building across the street from City Hall. In the lobby was a line of people waiting for tickets or cancellations for a sold-out lecture. I should have jumped on this a month ago. Robert Hughes, a

lecture on his book, *CULTURE OF COMPLAINT, The Fraying of America*. No mercy for the PC-whipped.

There were ten or twelve of us in line, most assuming they wouldn't be shut out and most were wrong. Two women who were behind me got tickets, but they knew the guy in the window. A few others got in, last minute, and that was it. I walked over to Max's and had some Russian soup and heavy bread, while a waiter sang a sad aria.

I went home wondering why I don't plan ahead. Is an existentialist by definition someone without a future, a man without reservations?

Working late on the typewriter.

Thursday, May 13, 1993

In the office. Renee said I had a couple of calls from a woman named Yolanda and gave me a knowing look. Later she got through to me and wondered if I remembered her. I may have sounded hesitant for a second. Her voice sounded soft and open, like the voice of a woman who likes you. She used to work in this office and left a year ago to have a baby. Her general demeanor, at least where I was concerned, was not too subtle. She would walk over and plant herself in front of my desk and demand to know when I was going to take her out. A black woman in her late twenties who thought I had an active social life, and said if I wasn't careful my "ding-a-ling" would fall off. She sat a couple of desks away. One time she grabbed her breasts with both hands and stuck her tongue out when our eyes met. She would often poke me in the side when walking by.

Yolanda sounded shy on the phone, however. In a minute or two, to make sure I knew who it was, she reverted to that glib persona. It was hiding a more sensitive soul

than I realized. Sometimes I fall for how a woman presents herself. We had gotten along when she was here, but I hadn't followed up on it.[64] Another lame tendency I have, the midsummer night's dream syndrome, where I stare into the distance looking for love and it is standing right behind me. This has happened before. When I was nineteen I was in between girlfriends and feeling sorry for myself. I remembered that a woman made some overtures a week or two before and I hadn't responded. It was far-fetched, being the mother of a girl I knew in high school. I used to hang out at their place and swim in the pool and drink their wine. Her overtures were coming from an angle which I wasn't used to, being outside my frame of reference.

That frame of reference was in need of being expanded, and my skinny-dipping in her pool may have helped. We had an affair, a woman who was a year or two younger than I am now. You can trap yourself in a lonely corner with your own perceptual limitations, but some kind of love is coming from an unexpected direction with a realigned erection. I have been dense at times, if not disinterested. There were invitations sitting or lying right in front of me, half-naked women in their early twenties, and I didn't do anything (this was years ago). My only excuse for those evasions was the chemistry. It makes a difference, and a lack of it can throw me off.

I was on the phone with Yolanda, who worked in another law office as a litigation secretary making twice as much as me. She wanted me to look up something in a

[64] In the mid-1980's I worked in an office downtown. A slender black woman who worked there was leaving town (she was from Texas). When we hugged and I kissed her on her soft cheek and saw the look she gave me, I realized what could have been if only I had been more attentive.

reference book. In no time we were making plans to have lunch. I gave her my home phone number.[65]

Meanwhile, working late. A client going bankrupt in a small town was not getting much attention from the Attorney. He walked into the office wearing shorts, his stomach hanging out, 300 pounds, with a loaded handgun in his briefcase (he showed it to me). The Attorney, blithe spirit that he is, left me with the client to hammer out a shaky response.

8:00 p.m. I walked to the pool, using an apple as a pivot from the office to a workout. I didn't think it was enough, but I was lighter in the water. I cut a minute off my time. I rested in the shallow end, then went for two lengths underwater. After one and three-fourths I ran out of air, coming to the surface with my lungs breaking.

10:00 p.m. Walked home, tired and invigorated at the same time, and was up late on the typewriter.

Friday, May 14, 1993

A couple of phone calls in the morning. The first one was the Phantom. His storm and stress were over for the time being, having received a phone call from Alaska. The second call was from Tanya, the absent woman's friend. Could I ask the Phantom to stop calling her about Ming? She isn't political or dogmatic, much less concerned with the finer points of feminism, but she found it strange that her friend supported women being independent and men not using women for sex, while leaning more on men than anyone

[65] My relations with black people vary a lot (as they do with any other race, including my own). I get entangled in the barbed wire fence of racial politics, if not estranged, like someone who reads the paper too much. I've never had a problem being friends with a black man or woman, so it may have something to do with reflecting the respect. If it isn't there, then I'm not either.

she knew and using them for sex. I think a lot of men would volunteer to be used in such a manner. What made her angry, though, her friend was using men who were in love with her, and stringing them along in the worst way.

If a man acted like that it wouldn't sound very good. The man says: I broke it off with Dolores and she's suffering, but I still fuck her now and then because I like the sex. I have no intention of going back to her and she will have to understand I'm going out with others. I also sleep with one of my roommates who is in love with me. She's not so good in bed, but she'll do anything I want, like rub my back and sleep on the floor. Sometimes I let her go down on me, know what I mean? It makes her feel better and maybe she'll get over it. It must hurt to see other women spend the night, but I have found that women are more manageable if they're in love with me.

12:30 p.m. I went out and walked to the corner. A bus pulled up and I got on. I was halfway to the office when it stopped. After a while I realized it was still stopped. I finally went to the front. The driver couldn't be bothered to tell the passengers he wouldn't be continuing – a truck had hit his rearview mirror and knocked it loose.

1:00 p.m. I met Renee and went to the usual place. We talked for an hour, but there was a slight chill in the air. Having been interested in going to San Diego she was now not going. She let me know with an offhanded remark, like she changed her mind a few days ago and never told me. For all I know the original plan was something she floated in the air, seeing how it sounded. It was like she had to go through the motions, like a new role to test the plausibility and how I would react, but never took it seriously. Seems I've been here before. I can understand her being reticent about leaving town and

staying with someone's parents who you don't know from the man in the moon, but that was known from the beginning.

Reminds me of women who will sleep with a man or slip into a provisional role with him to see how it feels and if it does good things for them, like trying on a new blouse, except it's someone else's life. If it isn't what they had in mind they change direction, leaving the man up in the air and wondering what he did wrong.

She has more or less said she's not comfortable with sex, either as a topic of conversation or something that a boyfriend might expect. I avoid the subject or am circumspect about it. You would think our dialogues were from an old movie with guidelines about which subjects to steer clear of.

However, any reference to the body from a practical angle is okay. If she has to urinate she will say so, and describe how she walked in and dropped her pants. In a similar manner she would never allude to her breasts in terms of lingerie, but saying she bought a sports bra is okay because it's practical. Meanwhile, she had a physical for law school and complained about it. It is not something she has done very often. She told me she was "poked and prodded" (by a woman doctor) and how undignified it was. There was some mention of cold stirrups.

She thought it was an unfair imposition, and was burning with resentment that women have more complicated concerns "down there" than men do. She holds that against men. I was going to say no woman had to spread her legs in a doctor's office on my account. She went on about men having it easy compared to women. I finally said, trying to be tactful, they might have a few stigmas or pressures on them. Like what? Like having to perform, for example. That made her pause, the gears turning in her head.

Should she pursue this line of thought or not, considering she was trying to make a point. She continued, saying maybe so, but so do women. I said, "Like what, having to lie down?" She said, "No," while glaring and then becoming vague. Not sure how graphic or sophomoric she wanted this to get. She mentioned a stigma about their responses and we left it at that.[66]

Some of her resentment against men is based on biological differences which men had nothing to do with. In order to balance things she wants to make it hard for men to come anywhere near her body. I think some feminists would tell her to be quiet. It undermines the feminist position if one argues that life is unfair on the basis of biology, considering how men have been unfair. You let them off the hook if you complain about conditions they had nothing to do with.

How can a woman assume she knows what it's like to be a man while refusing any possibility of the reverse? Maybe she has sunk so far into her own existence that it fills up the foreground, magnifying every little discomfort and reducing a man to a level where he is more manageable, while thinking that men have it easy. There are far more men in prison or dying violent deaths or wasting away from drug and alcohol addiction. I wonder if that would constitute a burden, and if it might involve their biological circumstances, including a sex-drive which is constantly putting the pressure on. There are women who're unclear on the concept of a sex-drive, and that alone would undermine a sense of knowing what it's like to be a man.

[66] Reminds me of something in the paper. A woman said, "How come yours takes five minutes and mine takes forever?" Someone wrote in: "Was she talking about hair coloring?"

6:00 p.m. I walked home, and lay around for a while, reading the paper. I was at a low ebb. I may be living in the present more than I realized. Those who live by the moment, die by the moment.

I felt like crashing THE BLACK AND WHITE BALL. It was tonight and only a few blocks away, but I hadn't made arrangements to go with someone. It snuck up on me, vaguely cognizant of its approach a week or two ago. A couple of women were out of town (Mexico and Alaska) who I could have gone with. It takes a certain kind of woman to crash a formal event. I wasn't sure about Renee, and didn't bring it up until the day of the event. She had other plans, but let me know I might have asked her sooner.

Some of my ambivalence was generated from the writing. The muse is wreaking havoc on my social life. It wants me all to itself, knowing that – as it turned out – if I go alone I might take notes, turning the event into a reportorial excursion with a limited sartorial presence. The evening slowly improved, like you have to bottom out a little, let a subway of depression pass or the pendulum move in that direction with the rest of the evening on the upswing.

I was getting into the mood with every adjustment of appearance, which took about ten minutes. You're an infiltrator when you crash an event. The tickets were $300 per couple or $180 per person.[67] It helps if you look like you belong there. I had a tuxedo bow-tie which went a long way in that respect, a white shirt, a serious suit jacket, and dark slacks. Not a regulation tux, but close enough under the circumstances, keeping to the semblance of a formal silhouette.

[67] It's a benefit for the San Francisco Symphony.

I went out around 11 p.m. with a beat-up leather shoulder bag which contained a bottle of merlot, a small glass, and half a joint. I walked about five blocks to the Civic Center. There were neo-classical Beaux Arts buildings, while Davies Symphony Hall and the State Building are more modern. Each one had its own music and drinks and party going on inside and spilling out into the streets. People milled about under a revolving disco ball. When hit with a spotlight it would generate a thousand points of light moving across the ground beneath your feet, like telepathic points of energy swirling through a crowd.

I made the rounds, casing the layout as it were. I noted a police presence here and there, and a huge crab on top of the Civic Auditorium.

Some might ask: who wants to rub shoulders with a lot of stuffed shirts and their wives or girlfriends with low-cut necklines? However, I like it when the streets are blocked off and people take the city back from an occupying army of internal combustion engines. There is a sense of what it used to be like when there weren't any cars. It's like the Renaissance belief that a human being is the measure of all things. That distinction has been given to the automotive which the suburbs are built to accommodate, and humans are a secondary concern.

Near the entrance of City Hall I had a couple of hits off a joint, which was stronger than I remembered. I smoke so little these days. I poured a glass of wine and walked around with others. It's curious how so many women with a middle-class discretion want to show off their figure. There were a lot of strapless gowns and plunging shadows.

I wandered over to the Symphony Hall and stood near a Henry Moore sculpture.[68] A band had kicked into gear - Mitch Woods and the Rockin' 88's, with him on piano. The vocals were not bad. I watched the guitarist with his slicked back hair, wearing something like a zoot suit. His technique was structured and methodical, as if in his spare time he works on cars. I have the technique of someone who chases ghosts.

That went on for a while with people dancing in the street in front of the curving windows of the Symphony Hall, which was full of people looking out. I realized something. Not only was it 20 percent under-attended (as was reported later, blame it on the recession), but no attempt was made to block off the streets from ordinary pedestrians. There were a few bums walking around.

Midnight. I was sitting on the steps of the opera building with a few others. There was a big diversion, heavy on the kitsch. Some of this was only interesting if you're stoned. Surreptitiously I took a few notes. It occurred to me that pulling out a pen in this milieu would be as welcome as a cigarette or a gun - one of those passing thoughts which float up when the pot has knocked your mind off course. It was a change of pace, and if it comes with a drop in your IQ you can still admire the view from there. I've heard that every now and then you should do things with your left hand just to shake up your routine.

I had a recollection of the last Black and White Ball in 1991. That threw me a little, remembering an event two years ago, considering how much has happened since then. If you remember something so well does that imply your life is a flat terrain in which you can discern the occasional high point? Maybe my powers of recollection are

[68] "Large Four Piece Reclining Figure" (1973) by one of my favorite sculptors, the son of an English coal miner.

getting stronger from writing so much. I was here with the ex in ’87 and ’89 (always crashing the occasion).

There was a stage with music on the corner of City Hall, and cacophony and discord from another direction. A college marching band came down the street on a collision course with the other music. It was like being in a party and suddenly a marching band comes through the door.

They just evaporated. It was followed by a small explosion on the edge of a building, maybe six stories high. The smoke cleared, and in the spotlight with the music mounting was Elvis. Another Elvis appeared in a puff of smoke on top of the opera building. There was another Elvis in a cage hanging from a crane. He gesticulated like a rockabilly singer in Las Vegas. Then he dove off and a woman screamed. The bungee cord attached to his feet kept him from smashing into the street.

A wooden structure went off in pinwheels and fireworks, and a choral group did a number which ruined the mood.

Finally it was over. I got up and started walking, thinking it was high time to do something. Not sure what. I found myself at the State building on the next corner with its wide steps and semi-circular form. A few people were leaving the event. I decided if I was crashing this I’d do it in style and not ask for someone’s ID bracelet. I waited, watching the tuxedos and gowns walking into the courtyard past the guards at the roped-off entrance. I figured the guards had seen so many people their eyes were glazing over, tired of looking at wrists. I walked in behind a few others, made a gesture with my arm like I was showing a wrist band, and no one said a word.

Now I was in. Unfortunately, it wasn't where I wanted to be. I would have preferred a live band in a country-western rocking mode. But there was Mexican food and piles of fruit and cheese, white wine, and coffee. The last time I was at this event there were women going into the men's room. It was in the Civic Auditorium. Every urinal was occupied by a man, and some of them were surprised to see the gowns walk in, but they were being mature about it as the women lined up for a stall. Formality has a way of subverting the suburban.

I hung around for a while and then got tired of it. Walked out, not caring if I got back in. I sat on the steps with a view of City Hall stretching along the next block. A man walked up in a perfect tux, immaculate, blasé, a little drunk. The quintessential jaded blade or gentleman of leisure. He asked if I had a light and a rolling paper and proceeded to mix a little tobacco with a lot of marijuana which he pulled out of a small box. I said something about the event two years ago, and he said he only remembered that he was completely drunk.

A wandering female photographer appeared, talking to the two of us like old friends. He offered the joint and she didn't hesitate, cupping it in her hand like a handmade bong. She said she learned that in Morocco. I noticed two policemen who had walked up the stairs and were standing nearby. I thought it was rude of them to wreck the mood and motioned with my head. The other two noticed and being rather careless the man walked away with the joint, so I never had any. It was just as well, like the screwdriver I left on a table (the man wanted $4). The woman lingered, asking if the two of us were homosexuals. I said no, I just met the fellow. I think she wanted him, which was just as well because I didn't want her.

I sat there with some wine, then went back in. No sweat. It was a little after 2 a.m. The drinks were gone. I left with a third of a bottle of wine in my bag and walked over to the circus tents in front of the Civic Auditorium. There was a slow-moving lightshow out front. I think it was meant to hypnotize the alcoholics. There was more security and a narrow door with less people going in. A guard examined their wrists. I hesitated, then walked in behind a couple of others, going through the motion of raising my arm and showing a non-existent bracelet. I was like a ghost walking through a wall. The guard had turned his head away the moment I went by.

Something occurred to me when I was in the auditorium. It often feels like I'm invisible in this town, which has its advantages now and then. I thought I was invisible to the police for many years, taking all kinds of risks, until I got arrested last year. I was in a beat-up Volvo which was visible.

An assumption of invisibility is the stuff that dreams are made of, but I feel invisible in Chinatown (as a "white ghost"), or when I'm lost in thought, thinking about things which others can't see. Being distracted can obscure your visibility. So can an undefined presence. If people don't see what they are looking for in someone, like a socio-economic silhouette of known responses, then you are just a blur, somewhere between irrelevant and suspicious.

I went upstairs to the balcony which was nearly empty. The dance floor was nearly full. The Elvin Bishop Band was onstage and highly visible with a spherical screen hung from the ceiling - Elvin in a hi-tech fishbowl. He was "Fishin'," and I remembered the same song from two years ago. You don't go to the Black and White Ball looking for the Butthole Surfers (last seen at the Fillmore in 1987), but I'm okay with Elvin. I sat

back in the seat and poured some wine. I wondered what it is about rock and roll and its endless mutations which turn people into clowns. Maybe it was the occasion or the crowd. I thought about his days with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band.

There was a break. I drifted into an empty men's room with mirrors on opposing walls and spread my arms to infinity. It looked like a diminishing echo of repeated rooms. The last group of the night: Dick Bright SRO. An odd revue, highly polished, and a bit absurd. It could have been worse. It was nearly 4 a.m. when it was over. A few people wandered around in a daze in their disheveled tuxes.

I walked home, found a beer in the refrigerator, and had some coffee. A little far gone for prose, but I tried to hammer out some neo-poetic stuff while in this state. I had a few ideas for a poem, "I travel light," and thought about how the event was giving off opposing signals of what was hollow and substantial about it.

5:30 a.m. Birds are singing in the Tenderloin, here comes the dawn. I went to sleep.

Saturday, May 15, 1993

NOTES

> Sometimes I wonder what I'm getting by on, love-wise. What sort of love is holding me together these days? One of the strange things about getting older, especially if you live alone, is when instead of falling apart (like you might expect) you fall together. It's like a *Journey to the Center of the Earth* effect.[69] The people in the exploration party find as they go further and further underground that the air is breathable. The climate is user-friendly with things that will sustain them along the way. (I admit there were some hazards, like confusing tunnels and big reptiles, not to mention the fact that it wasn't real.)

[69] Jules Verne (1864). *Notes from Underground,* by Dostoevsky, was published the same year and is completely different. So is *The Subterraneans*, by Jack Kerouac, which came out in 1958.

I'm trying to fathom it without getting too metaphysical. Maybe you don't need a significant other to survive. A revelation I am learning rather late in life, having usually had a girlfriend since I was in high school. I got used to that, thinking life would be a drag without a woman. Am I getting by on thought, willpower, or what? Would it include an after-glow of past love affairs which still support me in the present? Sounds far-fetched, unless you word it differently. Suppose you have a good memory, and things which happened years ago are fresh in your mind, not to say your neurons. Suppose there are solid foundations in a past that is locked in your nerves and it sustains the present. I don't know if I want to investigate the bio-neurological explanation of why true love never dies, but old sentiments have a ring of truth to them. You find that out by living it. It stays with you a few more orbits around the sun than you may have counted on. True love has a radioactive half-life of many years. It gives off signals of support.[70]

Actually, I'm surrounded with women, I'm just not sleeping with them. Their company is keeping me afloat.

What if I am sustained by an underground current of daily thought and language running through my mind and refreshing it, however disturbing the content? It **changes the neurological sheets.**

I'm leaning on a steady income in a civilized city, while developing a thicker skin because of repetition which is part of the continuum. Your continuity relying on a flywheel of the cosmic and mundane, which is built into the human condition. "Before enlightenment, chopping wood and carrying water. After enlightenment, chopping wood and carrying water."[71]

Your continuity has a mind of its own, a momentum built up over the years. Entire love affairs can blow away, your building have a fire and you lose your home, you get arrested for a dubious DUI and lose your license, then your car, and take it all in stride. Maybe I'm pedestrian, or I have gravitated to a polarity of nothingness and being. Either I'm alive or not. I'm in jail or not.

[FLASHBACK – Feb. 17, 1993]

It was dreary outside, with the rain turning into more rain, while there was a typographic downpour in the apartment.

1:30 p.m. Phone call from the Actress. She called last week and said things were falling apart with the boyfriend, with him drunk in the morning and breaking things. Now it sounds like their rapport is more or less repaired.

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[70] The memories are buried in a desert of your isolation like ostrich eggs full of water (an aborigine custom).

[71] Zen Buddhist proverb.

Guitar and reading the paper (no work).

5:00 p.m. Phone call from the Czech woman, who said she was nearby. Half an hour later she walked in with a small bottle of whiskey and a book of *Theologica Mystica* (by Bhagwan Rajneesh). It was nice to see her. I must be getting sensitive to the presence of a woman, how it seems to fill a room (not that she is large) and alter an atmosphere of isolated words. She changed her look again, with her blonde hair chopped short, a black leather jacket over a dark sweater, faded jeans with a wide black belt and big blue boots (from Romania). She was looking a little butch, in other words, and said it is to discourage unwanted attention from men on the street. She is something of a tomboy, and is getting by on not much of an income.

She poured herself some whiskey, and offered it. To be polite I poured some rum into my coffee, which I never do at that hour, having a habit of no alcohol before 10 or 10:30 p.m. (though I might be up until three in the morning). I hadn't had anything close to hard stuff in a long time. There has been a bottle of vodka in the refrigerator for nearly a year. I may have lost interest, since vodka was involved when I was arrested last year. Meanwhile, having a small amount of rum and coffee was having an effect that everyone who has an evening cocktail knows about. It rounds off the transition from afternoon to night – the alcohol is in a sympathetic conjunction with the sun going down.

She had a few sips of whiskey with a cigarette. I'm not sure how the conversation bent in this direction, but there was some mention of her old boyfriend, the Latino alcoholic poet who killed himself because of her. He wanted to hurt her and he did – more than he will ever know. I dislike him for that alone (it was nearly two years ago). They had broken up before and tried again, but she hadn't expected that reaction. It hit her with the force of a truck. I had known her for a few months before it happened, and had some knowledge of what she was talking about - how it changed her. Something died in her when he killed himself, and it left her feeling old and apathetic. It seemed to me her previous confidence was gone. When I first met her she was friendly, proud, and wary with an accent which made me feel like I had left the country.

They were separated when we met, with him in another town, resigned to it being impossible with her. There were too many drunken fights, and he would get a little rough. One night he was stabbing a knife around her head and shoulders, stabbing into the bed and just missing her, then touching her breast with the knife. A few times she had to call the police. She finally broke it off. Then we met. We were getting more familiar, and I went to her miserable basement apartment in the Haight a couple of times. There was something in the wind, like we could be more than friends. It may have triggered some memories of what it's like to be with someone, but for whatever reason she decided to call him up and revive the affair. He came to town, and within a month or two it fell apart again. He went

back to his mother's house in Stockton and committed suicide (letting his mother find the body).

Now she is thirty and feeling even older, trying to make ends meet with a ten-year-old son from a man in Prague. The impact of the suicide reduced her, like someone recovering from a lingering illness, and even when it feels like you are relatively back to normal you're not all the way back, and never will be. That's how she looks at it, as if her life went through a sudden telescoping phase, with a larger section ending and a smaller section beginning.

I was lying on the bed with black sheets. She walked over after a while and lay down on the other side, getting comfortable with her glass of whiskey and a cigarette. She just wanted to relax, leaning on one elbow and looking over, talking about things – everything from her job to mine. We got on the subject of the Latino client who killed his girlfriend, which wasn't very tactful, but she is nothing if not realistic and was interested.

We have a curious close connection. We have lain naked on beaches, and were making love one night where she was lying at the moment. Glancing at her I was struck by her features, a woman with the profile of a Greek goddess as interpreted by a fair-skinned Slavic woman. High cheekbones, light blue eyes, pale violet lipstick, and a semi-tough demeanor. Having more or less abandoned photography a couple of years ago, I'm thinking she could trigger a….

[THE TYPEWRITER BROKE… ROTATOR CORD, $115)

8:00 p.m. I went out with her, walking half a mile to the bus on Fillmore. We waited for the bus, looking through her *Theologica Mystica* book with some curious comments in it. "What do you call an Indian with half a brain?" "Lucky."

I was halfway to the old world in her presence, which was further graced with a kiss when the bus drove up. If that was one step forward, the next moment was two steps back, an all-too-common reminder of where I live. A black man in his twenties with a Public Enemy get-up was slurping on a large Coke. He stepped onto the bus, finished the Coke, and flung the large plastic container out the door. It landed on the sidewalk, practically at my feet, and the door closed.

I stood there for a minute thinking, "What a slob," or was he just a spoiled consumer, a local version of the Ugly American. I walked home along the water, passing the plum tree blossoms.

Later that night I was typing up a storm, with coffee and a glass of pinot noire. As soon as I hit the word "trigger," as in "she could trigger…," the typewriter broke with a quiet click. The rotator cord had snapped. I took it in stride, although the typewriter would be in the shop for over a week.

3:00 p.m., coming to. Nearly nine hours sleep. It threw off my usual routine, like I had missed the train of muses pulling out around ten or eleven in the morning. By mid-to-late afternoon I am arriving at an empty station, and then what? I read the paper, and then was on the phone. A low ebb, as if there is a fixed amount of energy in any 48-hour period, and having used one and a half times the usual amount for yesterday I only had 50 percent for today and it showed.

On the classical station: Yo-Yo Ma with the "E-Minor Sonata for Piano and Cello" (Brahms).

8:00 p.m. Typing with the opera on.

10:00 p.m. Old movie on Channel 9, *Love Crazy* (1941), with William Powell and Myrna Loy. I didn't think much of it, but its presence in the room was an antidote for a few things. It was followed by a short documentary on Myrna Loy with Kathleen Turner, who seemed a bit off. The fallacy of presenting an actress like she wrote her own lines and made up the roles in films she directed herself.

1:00 a.m. Typing.

2:00 a.m. The heavy metal show - radio adrenaline for the over-extended.

3:00 a.m. Gave up the ghost.

Sunday, May 16, 1993

11:00 a.m. I was standing on the corner with some coffee, waiting for a bus out of town. An hour later I arrived in "downtown" Larkspur. I had to sit down and have a cigarette, slightly stunned, like I went too fast from the Tenderloin to Marin County and

had to get used to it. I was dragged up from the abrasive depths to a quaint little town. My first thought: where are the seedy-looking whores?

I called the Actress. She said Michael and Maya were at the market. I found it and walked in. They were in the aisle, her fiancé (about thirty-two), and her daughter (nine and a half), picking up supplies for an afternoon on the Russian River.

Back in their apartment I sat next to a white rat in a cage. The dog was lying on its back in front of a fan with the connotation of a bitch in heat. I gave her a poem I threw together a couple of days ago, a sonnet to fit the occasion or the person, and a present for someone who is turning forty and headed for the river: an official Frisbee.

It was nearly two when we left, with him driving and her in front. The two of them were using the occasion to be alone. He works six days a week and comes home late. The two of us in the backseat were being ignored, so we amused ourselves. We're old friends at this point. Every time I come here the mother remarks how well I get along with Maya. It isn't hard, and it helps that she is so quick. It's disconcerting at times, talking about this and that with an intelligent female and then catching myself, remembering that she's barely out of the 4th grade. If we are on a familiar wavelength, does that imply that she is mature beyond her years, or I'm a little behind?

I was careful with the subject matter, but then would hear her talk about what she saw on MTV, like Madonna (say no more). She rattled off a few of her favorite acts. She reads well. In the checkout line she grabbed a sleazy tabloid – *News of the World* – and flipped through it, reading off the weird headlines. (Michael later said he wasn't that quick in college). Looking for the bizarre stuff, like the 500-pound man who was part jellyfish, and ignoring headlines like, "HOUSEWIFE HAS LOVE AFFAIR WITH

DAUGHTER'S BOYFRIEND." She had no interest in that, although she talks with her girlfriends about whose parents are divorced and whose mother is seeing what man. A little blasé, like they're discussing the weather.

After we were on the road a while, she became impatient with her mother who was ignoring her. She felt put off and was aware of the mushy situation in the front seat (with occasional kissing). I said, "You know they don't see each other very often. When he gets home they just go to sleep." She said, "Yeah right," and rolled her eyes.

There was some mention of funds she has set aside for college, maybe Princeton where her father went (a journalist from Puerto Rico). She wants to be an artist but, "I suck at drawing boys."

We also discussed her hierarchy of friends, including her best friend, a girl with a Chinese name. The mother later said she hadn't seen her in four years, since pre-school, and hardly responded to her letters. Another girl was sort of a friend, but outweighed Maya by twenty pounds (eighty-five to sixty-five). The girl is emotional and temperamental and knows the daughter of Mitch Woods, the musician. She is on the verge of puberty at ten years old, and stepped on a nail the other night. Maya was there.

"She's like, oh I stepped on a nail."
"Did she cry?"
"She was screaming."

Maya showed me a small booklet of poems from her writing class, each kid with a few poems. I turned to her page.

Meanwhile, the drive was longer than expected. Turned out he was lost and missed the turn for River Road in Guerneville. We were on another road which I didn't mind. It was gorgeous country with manicured vineyards. After a while we were winding

through pine-covered hills until I caught a glimpse of a metal bridge over a ravine with a river at the bottom. We found a place under the trees with a grill near the water.

On a little beach, the four of us with towels. It was nearly hot out. It took a few minutes to get used to the water. I finally dove in and swam to the other side. Supposedly it is thirty feet deep. It was a hundred feet across, maybe less. I got out beside a huge boulder which Michael said he jumped off before. I climbed it and appeared on top. A ten-foot dive. Michael followed, climbing up behind me. Mother and daughter on the other side of the river watched and waited. Maya yelled, "One, two, three!" I dove into the air and eventually hit the water. Not a bad dive, which is to say it didn't hurt. Not sure how it looked, but the females were applauding.

Michael dove in, a little clumsy. He thought he got less applause. We climbed out on the rock again and stood there a few minutes with the Actress in the river, swimming with her head up and wearing dark glasses. She didn't want to get her hair wet. I dove off the rock and swam to the other side where Maya was in the shallows and not sure how far to go in. She was worried about leeches for one thing, especially when I mentioned the kind that fly. She watched some other kids who were splashing around and figured she could do it if I stood there, waist deep or chest deep, and she would come to me, holding out my hand for her to grab. We did it a few times. Then I led her around, not too deep, with her little hands holding on.

Did I mention how thin she is? Very gangly in the backseat of the car. She is half-Latina with long dark curly hair. Her skin is slightly darker than her mother's, and she has big eyes, full lips, and slightly hairy arms which I think is charming, but didn't mention since a lot of girls don't think so.

Eventually I was back on the towel, having a beer and tortilla chips. Shadows from the trees stretched across the river and approached our feet. We moved once, and then again. For some reason Maya remained where she was. After a while I walked back, and we sat there talking while she threw little rocks in the direction of the love birds, trying to get their attention. I think she felt rejected. For one thing, she mentioned it. I warned her about her mother's temper. "Tell me about it."

We had been there an hour and a half or more when Michael went back to the campsite to start some mesquite coals. I walked down the beach to the water's edge. The light was hitting the water upstream and I couldn't resist. I went in up to my knees, a little cool, when Maya walked up having left her mother behind. She said she wanted her mother to feel rejection.

I dove in, swimming for the other shore with a canoe on the sand. There were a few old wooden structures on stilts and a heavily wooded hillside. I found out a few things about the river. The current was strong, though looking almost still if you stood on the shore. I found out that I wasn't making any progress when swimming against the current. A little further across the river it wasn't deep and I walked the rest of the way, going from chest to waist deep. Further upstream it was below my knees, not that you could tell from a distance. To someone on the shore it looked like I was walking on the water.

I continued upstream, diving in and swimming across to a sandy shore. I got out and stood on the hot sand watching the glitter on the river where it went around a slow bend. A couple floated by in a canoe and said hello.

I dove back in and swam, the current not so strong. Then I stood waist deep and looked upstream, the river coming around a bend with the trees reflected in the water. I don't find myself in this situation very often and soaked it in for all it's worth. After a while I floated down the river. It felt like I could have gone for miles. I finally got out, dried off, and put a shirt on. I had a metal bracelet, but it disappeared in the sand.

I walked back to the campsite with the mesquite grill and some meat on it. Pork chops, salmon, and chicken legs. I could see the river through the trees. It was a provisional feast with warm French bread and half-cooked garlic. The potatoes didn't turn out too well. Having brought all this stuff, they forgot plates and forks and glasses and utensils of any kind. There was a gateau or peach/pear tart. He said it was my idea, with four little candles in it. Having the dramatic mood swings of a trained actress she took it rather well, turning forty.

Her and I talked for a while. The other two were playing. Very relaxed, with the air still and quiet. I told her one of the attorneys in the office had a libel case which was getting a lot of publicity. Jeffrey Masson versus *The New Yorker*. He had been the head of the Freud Archives until he was fired by Anna Freud. There was a long article in *The New Yorker* by Janet Malcolm and he was suing the magazine (deep pockets) to the tune of $7,000,000. I saw him in the office all the time, sometimes with his fiancée, the prudish feminist, Catherine MacKinnon.

The Actress was in a play, *In the Best Interest of Anna Freud* (by Richard Katz), and I thought it might be of interest to Masson. He was something of an anti-Freudian at this point, and wanted to blow the lid off psychoanalysis as a pseudo-science and a sterile dead-end. It turned out she was aware of the trial, and said Katz had tried to contact

Masson with no luck. I thought if she gave me a copy of the play I could slip it to Masson.

The playwright had a hell of an upbringing. His parents were Jewish, but they had some odd spiritual pursuits which resulted in having a guru live with them. He might have gotten overly familiar with the boy. His mother took it into her head that one can live on fasting alone and eventually wasted away until committing suicide.

The light was moving towards night when we packed up everything and drove slowly through the grounds, passing something in a wall of logs which was pretty artificial: several video machines in use. Maya thought it was cool.

We headed towards the freeway, this time on the right road, emerging from the hills and woods into open country and fields. I was sleepy in the backseat. It was dark with nothing to see. The others decided it was a good time to sing songs, but I was not in the mood. I heard a few by Maya who had memorized whatever little tunes she learned in school. The driver was on a harmonica for a while.

For the hour-long drive I was barely there. So relaxed, a river can do that to you. When you're tired of the derivative a river shows you how to live. When the sun is going down I tend to be at a low ebb. There's a pivotal change, like someone switching to a different persona for the night. It didn't affect the couple in the front seat, but they had each other. Another thing I felt, hitting close to home, was their home life. It was everything I didn't have at the moment. It wears on me sometimes, the relative isolation.

The Actress said Michael wasn't doing much with his poetry, and she was not getting much acting work. I thought of an old friend of mine, with both of us a little envious of what the other had. He envisioned all the time and concentration I had for

writing, which for him was hard to come by. On the other hand, he had a woman, a small daughter, and a flat in the Mission with the garden of Eden in back. Then he moved to Paris.

We arrived in Larkspur and unloaded the car. I said goodbye to the other two, and the Actress drove me to the bus-stop. She waited on the bench until the bus drove up. I rode back to the city, an electric skyline floating in a black void.

From the Russian River – it's a current event – to one of the worst parts of town.

Monday, May 17, 1993

11 a.m. I walked to the Federal Building a few blocks away, past the Sing Sing Restaurant and the usual schizophrenic anonymities and derelicts. Having cased the joint a few days ago when I arrived late, the trial over for the day, I knew where to go. I lay my shoulder bag on a conveyor belt and walked through a democratic metal detector, glancing at a glowing X-ray of my bag. There's nothing like an X-ray for finding out where you left the corkscrew.

I levitated to the 17th floor and took a wide corridor to Courtroom 4 of Judge Lynch (no comment). Went in, the trial in progress, with six rows of wooden pews on either side of the aisle. It was packed. I stood for a while, then found a seat, a courtroom with a modern ambience and a lot of wood. It was a large room with high ceilings and a skylight. There was natural light, but the Judge still looked cadaverous.

He had a god-like overview of the proceedings, and his chair was amplified. Every little shift in his position had an audio effect. I hate to think if he burped or something. Often as not he was leaning back in his chair and looking craggy and bored

while he listened. On the floor in front of him were two long tables piled with the books and tape equipment of opposing counsel. He would do an amplified swivel from time to time, from the witness to his left to an attorney who objected, "Argumentative" or "Calls for speculation." The Judge responded with, "Sustained" or "Over-ruled," or suggested that the cross-examining attorney reword his question.

The word is on trial, the fallibility of memory and language and intentions. There are ambiguities inherent in communication. There is nothing like a courtroom for being focused on every little word to make a point or verify a fact, all the more so in a case of alleged defamation. The magazine is known for being beyond reproach when it comes to fact checking.

Masson v. New Yorker Magazine, Inc. The writer of the article, Janet Malcolm, was being cross-examined by the attorney for the plaintiff. I have seen Masson in the office and heard his gravelly voice. I wasn't sure what to think of his fiancee.[72]

Charles Morgan, the plaintiff's attorney, is a gentleman in his early seventies. Serious and well-dressed, polite, well modulated. The questioning was relentless. Now and then he was emphatic, arm pointing directly to a screen with some projected notes. One of the bones of contention was the authenticity of her notes. How could she include a phrase like "intellectual gigolo" (supposedly quoting Masson who was quoting someone in the Freud Archives)? Is it really true he wanted to turn the Archives into a place of "sex, women, fun"?

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[72] Mackinnon has a strident stance against pornography. One of her allies in the cause is a woman who wrote a book called *Intercourse,* which promotes the idea that "violation is a synonym for intercourse." Whenever a man and woman make love, however consensual and loving, the woman is being violated. I wonder how many women would agree with that assessment.

Right off the bat I had a problem. There was a taped conversation where he was talking to another psychoanalyst, saying they could pass women back and forth and have a good time at the Archives. He has a reputation for sleeping with a thousand women (by his own admission), which may be immaterial in a courtroom or for that matter to his fiancée. I wasn't necessarily on his side.[73]

I didn't think he had a strong case. He overstated the purity of his motives and there was some duplicity. As was mentioned in the paper, it took his "4th amended complaint" to focus on the phrase "intellectual gigolo" as being of any concern. He had to take back a number of objections to statements which turned out to be true since they were on tape. Then there was the question of proving malicious intent on the part of Malcolm, and that her article had damaged his career.

With respect to Malcolm, I was sympathetic as someone who writes about real people. However, she was not someone you warm to. An article mentioned her attorney's description of her as a "professional interviewer." Not much of a presence, more of an "absence." An interview is conducted by someone with a self-effacing presence. It lulls the person being interviewed into being less guarded in his remarks, as if he is talking to himself.

That absence filled the courtroom at times. A trial can have the tedium of a movie set where it seems like nothing is happening. It's not just that the minutes crawl, but a block of granite the size of the Federal Building has fallen on them. She was careful with her responses, no matter how ordinary. You could almost see the gears turning in her

[73] I sympathized with some of his anti-Freudian views. He questioned Freud's assumption that women had a form of hysteria when they said they were molested by a family member. Freud didn't think the fine citizens of old Vienna would do such a thing, so he confused the hell out of some women by saying it never happened and they must be fantasizing.

head. The opposing counsel would hit her with a question and there would be silence, time coming to a standstill, and then, "I don't understand the question." Staring with the careful gaze of a woman in bug-eyed glasses who gives the impression of never having had a spontaneous moment in her life. For all I know it made her a better writer.

Another bone of contention: a journalistic form of poetic license. She has a habit of "condensing interviews into one conversation or monologue." It's not as bad as it sounds. Any person being interviewed is going to be diffracted through the interviewer's perceptions and intelligence, with biases both conscious and unconscious. It isn't like she's writing a novel, complete with the most realistic detail about this man and their encounters. She is smoothing over a lot of things in order to fit them into a two-part article – something he was aware of and consented to from the beginning. If you're uneasy with a reporter and how you will be represented you should avoid being profiled in a national magazine. But then you would miss out on the aura of publicity and importance accorded by *The New Yorker*.

A missing chord, in his opinion. He either talked too much, with his own mouth (not to say his actions) damaging his reputation, or he ran into a woman who was not so easily swayed and sweet-talked into giving him the benefit of the doubt. She had more sympathy with psychoanalysis than he did, for one thing. Opposing counsel stressed the point of her being on close terms with "many psychoanalysts" in New York. She published quotes about Masson being a loose cannon in Vienna. She may have heard things, even from him, while observing him at close range for a while (I think they went to a nude beach together – he lives in Berkeley). The question is if she printed things that

were irrelevant and damaging to his profile, like writing about a scientist and his work and throwing in that he goes to strip joints on the weekend.

Had he opened any doors or laid the foundations for her to mention such things? In his opinion he hadn't. In her opinion he had. Unfortunately, the interviews were not all on tape.

They took a break at noon and I walked home, thinking about the jury. The Achilles heel of the court system in this country is the jury. I'm not sure a jury should decide a case like this. It would be like two professors or scientists having a dispute about their research. They rely on a jury of amateurs who are uninformed and uninterested to decide the issue. When lawyers try to find jurors who are not "tainted" by exposure to information about a trial they end up with people who live their lives under a rock, avoiding information and the news. Apparently, none of the jurors ever heard of *The New Yorker*. In other words, some dim bulbs were on the jury, a couple of whom resembled felons.

There were seven women and one man, with two substitutes. Half of them looked bored out of their minds or detached, not taking notes (it was not allowed). There were highly educated professionals with a detailed analysis, along with spectators and reporters, so we're talking attorneys, legal students, people in the psychoanalytic profession, and a long involved case which brought a close examination to every little nuance of the word. They lay before the jury a lot of diamond-cutting techniques for people who think in terms of coal.

For the attorneys it is just a job. They are not necessarily close to their clients, having more in common with opposing counsel who they might play tennis with on the

weekend (I'm thinking of the Attorney I work for). Then there are the ambiguous motives of the plaintiff, who is not as innocent as he presents himself. There were moments in this odd gathering of people coming together in a courtroom when it all seemed to dissolve into long moments of silence. I was waiting for the Judge to say, "This is too arbitrary, we all have better things to do. In the final analysis, to quote Voltaire, *'Excolere nostris hortis nobis.'*[74] Case dismissed."

The courtroom has a church-like atmosphere. The influence of the church has waned, but the interest in courtrooms has been picking up the slack. The courts are full of sinners and the guilty. Every day of the work week is Judgment Day. The man in robes who sits in front (sometimes a woman) is assumed to be in contact with a higher realm of truth and justice, like a minister or a priest. A person of legal insight who has absorbed a fair amount of Latin and a lot of old books. He can determine how many angels, or jurisprudent angles, can dance on the head of a defendant.

A courtroom can be magisterial with the "congregation" in the wooden pews. A small mute choir in the jury box. The lower-level priests conduct the service, and one alleged sinner is testifying,[75] baring his or her soul, "… so help you God." There is a quiet and respectful atmosphere that one expects to find in church. It is a place where questions of morality and sin are decided. The truth shall set you free or put you in prison. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, my attorney is with me, and I shall fear no litigation. The truth and nothing but the truth, for ever and ever, or ten to life, amen, if not another amended complaint.

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[74] "We must cultivate our own garden." *Candide* (1759)

[75] There are rumors about this, going back to ancient Roman times, but you don't need testicles to testify.

As a church it has a Protestant appearance, rather bare and stark. There are no pictures of someone dripping blood with a mournful stare and tears of redemption. No body on an instrument of torture. You would never know who's been condemned to death in this reverberating inner sanctum of profoundly secular acoustics. Speaking of a crucifixion, did I mention the cross-examination?

There were moments when the Judge and the attorneys would gather to the side of his amplified chair and have a little prayer session. The two attorneys with their heads bowed in devout concentration, praying for divine guidance or a little coherency, if not judicial mercy. There were other moments when they might as well have been speaking Latin (not uncommon in the legal profession), while an incoherent witness spoke in tongues.

No one carries weapons into a church, and here there is a metal detector making sure a similar custom is observed. A ritualized if not theatrical exaggeration of respect is in the air. The courtroom is a museum of old-fashioned manners preserved in a glacial atmosphere of jurisprudent formaldehyde (sorry, your Honor). There is a timelessness to these proceedings, some would say a time warp, and the participants are losing track of time (one reason trials go on so long). Things were being discussed which occurred ten years ago as if it was yesterday, and some of the methods go back to Cicero.[76]

In a church, everyone is presumed guilty. In a courtroom there is one person who is presumed innocent until further notice. His innocence depends on how cunning his attorney is, how gullible the jury, and what loopholes are available.

[76] Roman lawyer, 106-43 BC

Tuesday, May 18, 1993

Typing for hours. I went to the Federal Building in the afternoon and found them breaking up for the day. One of Masson's associates, an attorney I think, with long hair pulled back in a pony-tail, told me the trial schedule.

Went to work.

Home in the evening. I had the tube on for a while, switching channels between an interview with Vikrem Seth and a song by Chris Isaac. One of those symbolic polarities, as far as it goes, which is not that far - like a mirror of my own preoccupations. However, they're on television and I'm not. Vikrem Seth just published one of the longer novels around, over 1300 pages, about life in post-war India. Hearing him talk I had a renewed respect. He wrote a book-length poem of neo-sonnets about life in California a while back. I had a look, but thought it was lightweight.

Typing for hours.

Wednesday, May 19, 1993

11:00 a.m. I showed up at the Federal Building like a roving rogue reporter for the *Tenderloin Times*. I'm getting used to having my shoulder bag X-rayed in the morning. It looks like a diaphanous one-celled creature with a shadowy form which swallowed a pair of shoes. They look ghostly except for the metal.

A witness on the stand, Gardner Botsford, seventy-five, an editor at *The New Yorker*. He has been married to Janet Malcolm for seventeen years. He defended her, and not without a sense of humor. They broke for lunch and I went home.

I returned after 1:30 p.m. The editor was on for a while and then was done. Walking back to the row of seats that I was in he looked diminished, as if one is magnified on the witness stand by the stares of everyone (and by the microphone as well).

The next witness for the defense was Nancy Franklin, who worked there as a fact checker, beginning in 1980. She was just out of Smith and is now an editor. A fine-boned woman with a well-articulated tone of voice. She could check my facts any time. The sort of woman you might associate with having been through a few sophisticated New York winters. When returning from the witness stand she also seemed reduced or diminished, although she wasn't very large. When they ended for the day (2:30 p.m.), I went out in the hall. I saw her wandering, a bit lost, and then headed for the ladies' room, the facts of life ever on her mind. One of the defense attorneys made a slight error when speaking to her and she corrected him. He said, "You checked me."

Few people speak as smoothly as the monologues that wind up in print. Their diction is corrected and their hesitations, false starts, and mumblings are erased. The question of altering intent or content gets more complicated when some people (like Masson, for example) speak in a wide-ranging manner, covering a lot of topics. He might assume that some things are off the record or minor asides on the level of a dirty joke, but the interviewer is a vacuum cleaner taking in everything. It reminds me of a disagreement between a man and woman where she takes literally what a man said and holds him to it, while he thought she knew when he is being euphemistic or facetious. In the trial he simply denied he said it. The tape proved him wrong in several instances.

I walked out. Waiting for a bus near the library (I put *Culture of Complaint* on reserve), I thought about the jury and what it means to have a jury of your peers. Does it mean anything besides a human being with a pulse? The racial angle has been controversial, and what of the peerless defendant? Why wouldn't the peers in this case be more educated, given the people involved, or would that be harder on the attorneys?

Went to work.

6:30 p.m. I left, walking to Market Street. I hesitated, then descended on an escalator and disappeared from sight. I don't like going from one location to another underground. It gives me tunnel vision and it limits what there is to look at. No natural light, it feels like a crypt, the station nondescript. But I thought I should modernize my methods and I was running late.

I levitated into the sky at 16th and Mission. That corner is a hangout for the down and out. I walked to the theater a couple of blocks away and bought a ticket, then went across the street to the Picarro Café and had red snapper and rice with an Anchor Steam. I was sitting at a small wooden table with a journal of poetry reviews. I read it, but it's irritating.

8 p.m. FEMALE MISBEHAVIOR at the Roxie - four short films by Monika Treut: *DR. PAGLIA. BONDAGE. ANNIE. MAX.*

DR. PAGLIA. Twenty-three minutes of Camille talking a mile a minute, a velocity exceeding almost anyone I've ever heard, and very cut and dry. The expression on her face was almost impish, raising an eyebrow in a relaxed mood. She ran through her usual schtick, and stuck it to the feminists who block the road as mentally constipated sandbags of self-righteousness. In her opinion they reduce the character of women by insisting on

their victimization, a weak and overly generalized view of women being helpless and oppressed for thousands of years. She has a profound knowledge of history, better than most, and it provides her with ammunition to refute the misandry of the women's movement (which varies from wave to wave).

She characterized herself as a cat, a "butch bottom" feline who tends to be solitary. If there is a sexual encounter she will claw whoever tries to mate with her (it's usually a woman). She reminds me of one of those smart little dogs herding the cows by snapping at their heels, running circles around them while they chew the cud of their regurgitated victimology.

I wondered if she is becoming a caricature of herself now that she is in the mainstream culture. She has been popping up all over the place. The audience was two-thirds women, many of whom were not at ease with her. They would laugh when she referred to her "crushing intellect." It was a way of dismissing her cogent and disturbing opinions. She can speak in a rapid stream of consciousness, connecting ten points where others are connecting one or two. She is familiar with these topics, and has been through them many times.

I had the feeling she was operating a fast-talking doll of herself with one hand, while the other reached behind the women in the audience who were laughing, caught off guard, and undid their straps. They felt a refreshing breeze of Camille, which is to say their pompous dogmas were being stripped. She wants to breathe some life into the women's movement, using a form of CPR: Camille Paglia Resuscitation. The movement is bloated and diluted in her opinion. Most men do not condone rape, as she pointed out

(and they are usually the ones who catch and prosecute and jail a rapist). She got a big applause at the end.

BONDAGE. As I expected, the level of discourse declined after her. She is a hard act to follow. A woman in leather straps talked slowly about bondage and why she feels secure when tied up and how she loves her breasts and thinks women should "flash a tit" to each other. She proceeded to expose one. She extolled the finer points of "tit torture," and demonstrated with a little microphone clamped to her leather vest, removing it and gently putting the clamp on a nipple she had rubbed to make it more alert. She fingered the other one, saying this was her dead one (it is slow to respond). I remember a girlfriend saying something similar.

ANNIE. Ms. Sprinkle, the alter ego of Ellen Steinberg. The focus was below the waist while making her elongated boobs swing back and forth. A stripper and a call girl who has "legitimized" her notoriety in a more lighthearted vein. While talking she leans back, inserts a speculum, and invites someone with a flashlight to view her cervix. "Isn't it beautiful?" That's not the word I would have used, but not the worst thing I have seen. She does this in an auditorium - cervix with a smile.

MAX. I was a little bored by then and not sure if I was interested in this film. It turned out to be intriguing. A situation full of clues about the hormonally-derived and arbitrary vagaries of gender. A woman who was half-Native American and a lesbian. She figured out she liked women because she was, at heart, a straight man. She was in the process of becoming one, and after months of taking muscle injections and male hormones he was now talking into the camera, looking and sounding like a man. It was a little strange, considering that he still had the body of a woman, which the filmmaker

with considerable restraint never showed. Or maybe it was his idea. His breasts were strapped down, and will be surgically removed in the near future. Later he will undergo a procedure which will leave him with a halfway plausible penis.

He was surprised when the male hormones kicked in. He was now on the other side and amazed at how much energy he had, not to mention how much sex was on his mind. It now made sense the things men do, being preoccupied with pin-ups and seducing women. His old routine of wallowing in an emotional release of tears (as a female) had dried up. He didn't cry anymore. When men are emotional they are more likely to fight or fuck or sublimate it, like it isn't them but their guitar which "gently weeps" and wails and throws things at the wall.[77]

Max Valerio, I wouldn't call him Mad Max, sounded logical and normal. He was in a blurred transitional stage between female and male. It would seem that female hormones are more graceful, and biology is not completely divorced from gender. It undermines those nature versus nurture arguments where nature is downgraded, if not dismissed. Camille Paglia is not against biology. It's like a generation of feminists discovered some bad things about men and assumed it was the fault of the culture, a social construct, practically admitting they are socially constructed cut-out dolls and men can be as well. They can be altered. All they need is some correctional legislation and a

[77] There was a young woman who thought that men have it easy. She wanted to find out what it's like walking around town as a man, expecting a power rush of male prerogative and independence, so she went out looking like a man. What she hadn't counted on was how lonely it felt. She wasn't getting the attention from men that she was used to (and was tired of), and wasn't getting it from women either, since they thought she was a man and gave her the cold shoulder.

few months in a re-education camp. If you remove the pin-ups and put the men on medication they will stop being turned on by women.[78]

When the film was over, I went outside and had a cigarette. It was a warm night and I walked home in my shirtsleeves, which is not very common around here. In Los Angeles the nights are warm and sultry, but walking home from an event is hard to do.

11 p.m. I was reading *Wild Palms*[79] when the phone rang. It was Ming in Anchorage. We were on the phone for nearly two hours, more or less renewing or reviving an old wavelength, bringing it forward into the present with her planning on returning in September. She is 3000 miles from here, but her voice was in my head like she was calling from across town. It dissolved the distance and the time she has been gone. I have seen a darker side of her from listening to others, and I wonder if she is someone who gets by on her presence which diverts attention from her actual motives.

She told me about her life up there, shacking up with someone in his trailer. She has kept him at arm's length while working in a factory with the salmon roe. The working girl might save enough to go to China since she pays no rent.

Ming admitted she was sexually frustrated and said something about masturbation (it doesn't work very well). She went on to say she found a new way of relieving stress. I thought she meant a way to pleasure herself, but it turned out it was driving a forklift. That was so much like her I couldn't stand it, and I don't mean driving a forklift with a

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[78] Something which bothers me about the blanket condemnation of a group of people is the assumption that how they act is arbitrarily arrived at (which says something about the critic) and hence can be changed. There are some shallow aspects to behavioral engineering. It is reluctant to admit that some things are deeply rooted in us. The attempts to change human nature - to make a New Man or Woman - have often required mass indoctrination and brainwashing, from the Soviet Union to *Clockwork Orange*. The results have been decidedly mixed, and now may come with surgical alterations.

[79] William Faulkner (1939)

naked man on the prongs. I think that *Cosmopolitan* should be alerted to this new uplifting method.

Other topics: the future is a quandary and what to do with her life.

I told her about the last couple of weeks, from a German industrial band to the Black and White Ball, and from the women in the office to Camille Paglia. Regarding the former, I said I was getting tired of some women and their fake personas. She mentioned the emotional entanglements she left behind. We talked about mountains and bears, the odd forms of conservatism she has encountered, and how much she likes my letters. What was I doing in September? I said I didn't know what I was doing next week.

We discussed the possibility of her starting another revolution in China, or getting kicked out of the country for being herself. It was a little hard to end the conversation and say goodbye.

1:00 a.m. Typing for a few hours. Coffee. Three-fourths of a bottle of wine.

At one point I heard voices on the street and looked out. A young black man and I suppose his girlfriend were having one of those arguments which they assume the whole neighborhood wants to hear. The sound of those two was astounding, with her on the defensive and him beside himself with fury, almost having an epileptic fit, like that's the only way to show he meant it. Maybe he had a limited vocabulary, with no other way to convey his feelings except by screaming in her face and coming this close to slugging her.

They finally took their act for a walk. They seemed to have erased the difference of the public and the private, like their boundaries weren't very distinct. I've seen that occurring with black people, but it may have more do with those on the lower rungs of

society. Not only fighting and arguing on the street, but viewing it as a stage where life unfolds. Some make the jump from anonymity into the public eye (or ear) like it wasn't a big stretch. The confident composure of some people on TV may come from having been onstage all their lives, not feeling a distinction of the private and the public (or they grew up watching television).

I'm speculating here. Is getting arrested a public thing? Is being supported by the government? There is not a lot of respect for private boundaries when those are transgressed with bullets. Maybe everyone dies alone, but there is no more public figure than a dead person. Suddenly you're taken care of by the authorities and your name is in the paper.

Thursday, May 20, 1993

NOTES

The front page of the paper with a headline and photo:

> PANEL TOLD THAT LIFTING BAN WOULD COST LIVES
>
> Senators John Warner and Sam Nunn talked to men in their bunks aboard the nuclear attack submarine Montpelier.

The photo is priceless. Each senator is down on one knee in the cramped quarters of a sub. Each one has a forearm resting on a serious heterosexual knee. They have near-identical ties, except the diagonals of one lean a different way. Could be a code. They listen intently to three sailors who are lying in their bunks with overhead compartments nearly touching their heads, up on their elbows and staring over their pillows, having a pillow talk with representatives of Congress.

One sailor is talking with his hand out in a gesture of, I don't know, how a homosexual holds a hand grenade. This would undermine national security. Apparently, the ban on homosexuals serving openly in the military is getting "strong testimonials of support." They would never be accepted as "part of the team." They are "trying to use the government to legitimize their lifestyle." I thought that was a bit much, like the lifestyle of anyone would be enhanced by

spending months at sea in one of those tin-can subs. The "lifestyle" is legal, so who needs further legitimization? When it comes to that, the legitimacy of military interventions should be questioned. And there are religious people who are trying to use the government to legitimize their anti-humanism.

The article quotes a "Force Master Chief" on the disruption of homosexuals serving openly, like they cruise on the deck of a cruiser at night. It would "cost blood and money." Like the military industrial complex never costs blood and money (end of argument). He goes on, however: "War, or the deck of any aircraft carrier, are not politically correct… lose the attention to detail and we will lose lives." I'm trying to figure that out. One's sexual orientation is of secondary concern on the deck of an aircraft carrier. You would think the guy who waves a jet in to make a precarious (wrote "precious") landing does it with limp-wristed gestures. The pilot trying to land keeps missing the boat because he's playing with his joystick, thinking about last night in the shower room.

I've known some die-hard heterosexuals who were in the Navy, serving on a boat, who smoked pot and tripped on acid on a regular basis. Put that in your pipe of national security and smoke it.

So how is the presence of homosexuals endangering lives? (I think the presence of the U.S. Navy is endangering lives, foreign and domestic.) They are known for having an attention to detail and have an ingrown sense of being careful. What about civilian life where there are pilots, air traffic controllers, police with loaded weapons, or simply – get this – practicing homosexuals who drive on the freeway with the rest of us. There are surgeons who try to sew up their patients while a male nurse is popping amyl nitrates under their nose and the operating room has an Ethel Merman record going, forcing the surgeon's forearms to make histrionic gestures with a scalpel.

12:30 p.m. Went to work early (not enough sleep), having lunch with V. She is leaving in a few months and reminds me every now and then how much I'll miss her.

I worked for a few hours. There was a message from B. She is back after six weeks in Mexico, and there was a plan to get together this evening.

6:00 p.m. I was dropped off by the Attorney at the pool. I was in the lobby when she walked in, fresh from a swim. My coat and tie met with her approval. We walked to an Italian place and were there a couple of hours. Fettuccine, spinach salad, garlic bread,

a half carafe of red wine, and talking nonstop. There were a few things to catch up on, and I heard about Puerto Vallarta. She was there for two weeks, then took a boat along the coast to a small ex-patriot settlement - a group of international artists, writers, and other eccentrics who lived in thatched huts. You need a net over the bed to protect you from scorpions. The beach is out the front door with the jungle in back. She stayed a couple of weeks, renting a small house for $75 a week.

She was tan, but not as much as you might think, and lifted her shirt a little to show how pale her stomach was. She wore a one-piece suit the whole time and got acquainted with people, especially women, in a New York minute.

There were rumors of a security guard in the hotel who sexually assaulted foreign women. B. didn't stay in the hotel very long, but her sense of justice was outraged. She sent a letter to the local ex-patriot English-language paper which printed it. There was a calm reply from the Mexican editor that women who feel threatened can contact the consulate, but he was otherwise evasive - as if to say this was no special problem in Mexico. Rape occurs in other countries, and other cultures have a different view of women who travel alone. Like what, they're asking for it?

There was an advice column by a local Mexican woman in another small publication, practical and to the point, dealing with everything from diarrhea and scorpion bites to "Latin lovers." She noted it was not uncommon for white women tourists to come here wanting to get laid by a Mexican beach boy (like Ava Gardner in *Night of the Iguana*). The local men have reason to believe that some of the foreign women have ulterior motives when they come to Puerto Vallarta. With respect to the woman who was recently assaulted in the hotel, B. said that she was out on the town and

getting drunk and drew the attention of some men. One of them followed her to the hotel and apparently the guard joined in. There was some question of whether she filed charges or not. There are cross-cultural breakdowns in communication, where one culture might assume that actions speak louder than words. The other culture might assume the opposite, that words speak louder than actions, while taking no responsibility for the latter. A woman flirting with the local men and flaunting herself, and then assuming a simple no will be enough.

It is unfortunate for women who travel alone and find themselves in an ambiguous situation. They may not have a good reputation among the locals who have seen some drunken floozies passing through. The local police might turn the other way as long as it isn't a Mexican woman being assaulted or seduced. The ex-patriot community is reluctant to pursue the matter of a less-than-ethical security guard, not wanting to stir up local politics. The women tourists are transitory, filing their useless charges or not.

There is a further problem of Mexican voyeurs, peering through thatched walls or windows at the foreign women when they take off their swimsuits. A strict Catholicism is in effect. Many are poor and repressed, and they're confronted with women in bikinis who glisten from an aerosol of expense-account spray.

The subject of *Night of the Iguana* segued into *Suddenly Last Summer.* I told her about the trial involving Masson and *The New Yorker* and she wants to go. We finally left, walking to her place and sitting around for an hour or two, having another glass of wine. She put on one of her Annie Lennox tapes (we have a different taste in music, but agree on the B-52's).

There was some mention of Phoebe who she was miffed at again, like that's surprising. Their approach-avoidance of each other is as regular as the tides. In this case, she returned from being in Mexico for six weeks and all Phoebe could talk about is the new play she's in. It might carry a little more weight if the productions she gets involved in weren't so minor. She is obsessed, however, and it worries B. to no end. Something about Phoebe has a grip on B. The self-obsession which puts her off is a trait which B. is missing in herself, who admits to being sociable and outgoing to a fault. She wants to find some focus in her life at thirty-two, but it's difficult when her modus operandi is like doing things by committee. She tends to operate on that basis until she feels scatterbrained. There are constant attempts at being organized (I think she hired someone to organize her studio apartment). I wonder if she would be as loveable and contradictory if she was more organized.[80]

A number of men might not think so, but that's another problem - her proclivity for leading them on and keeping several in orbit around her. Returning to her place she took my arm, exclaiming about having to see how her men were doing. Once in a while she has a guilty conscience, but it passes, having the assumption that men are useful idiots for a lady to use in any way she can. If it requires turning on the charm to hold their attention and to keep them in a state of wishful thinking, so be it. In the meantime, she leans on them for whatever they can provide, like driving her places, lifting heavy things, being an escort, buying dinner, etc. They could also provide some sensual comfort, but that is where she leaves them up in the air. When it comes to the physical she'd rather go dancing.

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[80] When I lived with the French-speaking Belgian woman, another disorganized Libra, I once found a scissors in the bed. I thought that was careless, unless she was sending a message.

Meanwhile, she was nearly beside herself, looking for the Puerto Vallarta newspaper with her letter in it. She wanted to show me, couldn't find it, thought she lost it, wandered around the place, then slammed herself down on a love seat. "How can I be so dumb?!" A minute later, what I half expected, in order to convey her frustration with herself she would hit me or pull my leg, shaking me in order to get her point across.

Then she found it in a pile of papers and I read it, flipping through the paper. I realize it's not the same as being there, but it helped. There was another week in Guadalajara, and a couple of small towns which she enjoyed, running into foreign travelers. She was sick for a day or two. I wasn't sure if her casual mention of it meant it wasn't so bad, or was her usual discretion with anything below the waist.

B. took my picture lounging on the white sofa. She couldn't get over the coat and tie, and said her mother would approve (a tennis-playing socialite with an historic home in Brooklyn).

11:30 p.m. I was on the verge of leaving but she smelled smoke. We stuck our heads out the window and didn't see anything, but smelled a building on fire. We went outside. Coming down Bush Street was a smoky fog and the stench was stronger. We walked a block, which was far enough. Hugs and kisses.

I continued a few blocks. In the distance was a hellish apparition of smoke pulsing with red lights. It floated down the street and made it hard to breathe. I turned down a side street, walked another block, then up to the corner. There were a few fire trucks with thick clouds of greasy smoke pouring from the roof of a building. The silhouette of a fireman on the roof who disappeared. I walked down Hyde to my place.

1:00 a.m. On the typewriter for an hour or two. More wine and coffee. Not in the mood for prose, and ended up with a neo-poetic effort.

> My experience doesn't agree with your experience,
> your historical variance,
> with the language smoothing out our differences
> like poured cement. Prefabricated understandings
> are a freeway. There are times it makes no sense,
> but the senses generate another sequence,
> with a man or woman landing
> on another planet. It's the same old Earth.

Friday, May 21, 1993

Woke up and plugged in the phone. It rang a few minutes later. I will meet her on the courts on Russian Hill.

I went out for breakfast at a greasy spoon down the street. I was sitting at the counter when a black woman walked in with a man. Her voice took over the whole place. The Vietnamese waitress may have known her but was annoyed, the woman changing her order ten times. Overbearing, rude, and droning on about her daughter turning three today, although the daughter is not in her custody. She observed that she could have had another baby, "… if I hadn't done crack in the alley." She said she could have had seven kids instead of four, and yet with a coke-head detachment from motherhood, as if babies fall out of her now and then, and someone else has to take care of them (the genocidal white power structure, I suppose).

I walked to Russian Hill, making a detour to my old neighborhood on Polk Street. I wanted some super-natural granola at the health food store. At the counter was a woman who ignited in a glance some old feelings. Not to say I'm over-read, but maybe I read too

much into a look. I have seen her there a number of times, but she leaves me at a loss for words. I'm not sure if that's a sign I should avoid her or should try to get to know her.

It's hard to have a conversation at a checkout counter with people in line behind you. She's a modern version of a beatnik from the country whose gender has been deconstructed. She used to have long and thick red hair, but a few months ago I saw her with a shaved head and a ring through her nose. Very smooth skin, freckles, thin arms, full lips, and a heavy bosom which she tends to keep hidden. There is some ambiguity in her presence. I've sensed in her a certain honesty or confidence in army boots and jeans and a T-shirt. At other times there is a feminine hesitation which is downright fragile. Shy I suppose. It sounds a little vague, but I don't have much to go on at this point.

If I was writing a novel she would say, "Kind stranger, who for all I know is an eccentric loner or is married, when are you going to clarify this stand-off? It's a little too rarified to breathe the air, however much you think I'm one of the gentle muses in my army boots. No one wants to lead a life of quiet desperation. What do you want? I'm open to suggestion."

I walked up the hill to the courts and met B. on a warm afternoon. The courts were deserted. In the distance was an island with an empty prison. I haven't played in months. Not only does she have a strong forearm, she likes to keep up a running conversation from the other side of the net.

Much of it had to do with her guilty conscience regarding a couple of men. Should she tell them she wasn't interested? In the final analysis, they weren't ringing her bells, much less wedding bells. In fact, they were wasting their time, but she is reluctant to cut them off because she might want one or two of them to fall back on, to hold in

reserve as it were. “I’m awful.” She is candid about this, admitting the female tricks and strategies of stringing men along, of juggling several interested parties and how complicated it gets, forgetting what lie she told to which man and how long will so-and-so hold out or be patient, considering how little he gets from her by way of physical attention, and she doesn’t want to meet his mother. On the other hand, he’s good for dinner and the theater now and then. Shouldn’t men realize what’s going on? It’s their fault if they let themselves be strung along for months or years. She asked me what I thought about it.

I slammed one from the net which eluded her and said whatever came to mind. Since she asked me several times, I had varied responses. If men are gullible that’s their problem… men were put on earth to make women more comfortable… they should be content to be in the presence of a lady. After one shot, and short of breath, I agreed that she should feel guilty. “I thought you were on my side,” she said.

I was reminded of Ming when she said, “I love men.” It was more revealing than I thought, compared to saying she loved a certain man. One is not enough, and four or five are a complicated situation.

She wondered what I was doing with women these days. I said for the longest time I thought that life was not complete without a woman, but that is not necessarily the case. And music is an antidote for isolation. She was under the impression that it’s okay for a woman to waste a man’s time, but not the other way around since women have a biological clock. I was going to say I have a biological cock and it is ticking, but decided not to.

She is frustrated with her life, being over thirty and with no career. She met a woman while traveling who retired at thirty-six (with a background in engineering). It turned out she is working on an MBA, is overweight, and has a drinking problem. I said,

"Count your blessings."
"Like what?"
"Like you're on a tennis court with me and have a nice figure."
"Oh."

We were out there sweating for an hour and a half. Lost a couple of balls over the fence and finally quit. We walked to a corner store on Hyde Street which is very different in this part of the town, being low on crime and high in rent.

Sometimes I think she wants a little more from me, the way she crushes her bosom against my chest and kisses me on the lips – by way of saying, "See you later." Not to mention her candor about the men in her life and how they're falling short. However, I've been fooled before, and it is not her fault if human beings have one body and one pair of lips with which to convey so many different things. It's not surprising if there are mixed signals now and then. She said she prefers the company of artists and writers, even though they tend to be disorganized and broke as her. She figured she would end up getting married to a dull and steady type, if only to balance her own neurotic flights of nervous energy.

I walked down to Polk Street and caught a bus to the Tenderloin. Went home, took a shower, and went to work.

Two hours in the office, then walked to the pool. One mile, followed by nearly two lengths underwater.

I was swimming laps in a lane with a young woman, each of us going back and forth and keeping to our respective sides of the lane. A woman got into our lane, older,

rather heavy, and a little on the pompous side. She could have shared the next lane which only had one person. I saw her coming and moved into the next lane. The girl in the first lane asked her if she could stay on one side. Well no, something about her kick or having to take up the whole lane. She continued on another slow lap. The girl looked at me and laughed and moved to another lane.

I walked home, which made for four miles of walking, 1½ hours of tennis, and a mile swim today.

I was up late on the typewriter. I wonder if you can wear out your arms with tennis, swimming, typing, and guitar. It reminded me of a men's room at the Civic Center (during the Black and White Ball), a half-finished drink on every other urinal. I walked over to the sink. There were mirrors on opposing walls which echoed my diminishing reflection into infinity. I stuck my arms out (I was a little stoned). It looked like one of those Hindu gods with many arms, but it was closer to an optical illusion than a spiritual revelation.[81]

2:30 a.m. I lay on the mattress in the hall, reading about false accusations of satanic ritual abuse.[82] Sweet dreams.

Saturday, May 22, 1993

In the morning I sat in a vaguely smoked easy chair in a room full of light. From the depths of the subconscious, a long night of dreams, I found a warm afternoon in progress. It was flying the banners of nothingness and being. A big tree in the window

[81] Martin Luther had a revelation on the toilet, which the Catholics thought is where it belonged.
[82] *The New Yorker* has become more lurid with a woman editor.

moved slightly, the deflected sunlight coming through it. I was stunned from the workout yesterday and having gotten enough sleep, all of which may have triggered the dreams.

I heard the hustlers on the street and the birds in the tree. The sirens of municipal emergency (it often is an overdose). The urgencies of our existence. There is nothing like this area to convey "The shock of each moment of being alive."[83] I used to think the neighborhood was quoting Fellini, now it's quoting Tennessee Williams and others I don't know about in other languages.

I sat there with some coffee, taking notes. Slow incoming returns. Things I had forgotten about or recent conversations. I don't know if writing gives you a sense of purpose. If so, it is an arbitrary sense of purpose, like the preoccupations of the mentally ill. It's like someone who gets up every morning and looks forward to another day in which (after he makes coffee) he will count the dead flies on his windowsill.

Do human beings orchestrate events in order to generate a role for them? The moral or immoral aspects are of secondary concern, like those who would interpret history in a way that provides a uniform they look good in. (The phone rang once and stopped. Ask not for whom the telephone rings once - it may have been a signal from the gods that I made a good point.)

From someone in a corporation counting pennies to a man who counts dead flies, both of them intent on what they're doing. Much of what we do is generating urgencies of purpose and forward motion. Have I gravitated to a marginal existence in order to bring the concept of arbitrary purpose into focus? Does having a thin excuse for being

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[83] Tennessee Williams, *Boom* (1968)

make your life more transparent? Meaning what, more light is coming through? You're seeing more? Is it surprising that financially I'm on thin ice?

Typing for hours on a warm afternoon, and then I read the paper.

6:30 p.m. Went out. There were a few young whorelets, as Nabokov might put it. They flirt with any car that turns the corner slow enough to get the attention of those who rent out their erogenous zones. I don't know if they're old enough to drink in public. I want to ask them why they're not in school. Should I refer to them as girls or women? What happens if a lot of women use the term "girls"? There was a column in a local weekly where a woman objected to the phrase, "girl bands." She said – in the smallest print – "We are women, or womyn, hear us fucking roar." Sort of anti-climactic, like "Hear me make a lot of noise on man-made amps." Anyhow, I have a line about "girls before swine," which I can't use if "women" is the only term.

I took the bus to the flat near the Haight, ready for the sound-room. The Phantom wasn't there, but one of the roommates was. I sat around with him for a while. D. has long hair, in his early forties. He went back to college, studying music.[84] We talked about guitars and equipment. He showed me a catalogue of accessories and stuff, more than I ever knew existed or could afford. Should I buy a beat-up Stratocaster downstairs, or get a new one for a few hundred? We talked about his, which he got for $600, a Fender Stratocaster Plus Deluxe with everything, including Fender lace sensor pickups (state of the art). He finally said, "You want to try it?"

He didn't have to twist my arm. I went into his room with a view of Sutro Tower and its pulsing rubies in the fog. I picked up a highly polished perfect pearl blue

[84] He used to live in New Jersey where he had short hair, wore a suit, and drank too much. He had some shady friends. One of them knocked on his door one night and said he needed help in disposing a dead body. He decided it was time to move to California and change his life.

instrument with a graphite body. He had a 60-watt tube amp ($450) which had broken down. I hooked up to a 25 with a couple of pedals on the floor for reverb and extra chorus distortion. I fooled around, getting used to the long neck with thinner gauge strings than the ones I use, and then I had a handle on it. Over the next hour it was a marriage made in heaven. Particularly when he adjusted the reverb pedal, "plate" mode, for a ringing metallic reverb instead of a wobbly vibrato. It had a fine cutting edge. He disappeared while I serenaded Sutro Tower in the distance, running through something which was half blues, half stream of consciousness.

He walked back twenty minutes later and said, "You have your own sound." I said I was not too good with structures. Who knows what you pick up or absorb from listening to others, though neither one of us could figure out who exactly. He thought it wasn't so good to copy others. I thought I could use more of it.

He had "Unchained Melody" on the music stand and I played it. E minor 7, G major 7. I couldn't remember D6. He's taking lessons and showed me a complicated chord chart. He wondered how I come by the notes I throw in around a chord progression. I said, "I don't know, I just do it." Let your fingers do the walking and the talking. The reverberating metal strings can open old wounds and sew them up again, like you're simultaneously hurt and held together by high voltage wires.

When you struggle with a steel string acoustic it's like you're swimming upstream. With an electric guitar you have the wind at your back, the ease of producing a sound which extends time and space, and you find yourself playing things you wouldn't have before. It generates a further momentum with a slash and burn expressionism. The

sound effects give the melody whiplash. Sonic lightning bolts in tune with a nervous reflex run the length of the apartment.

I put it back on its stand with some reluctance and turned off the current. D. was on his way to a blues club on his motorcycle. While I was caught up in the current the Phantom arrived, looking tired, and said he would take a "power snooze" for an hour. Then we would go down to the sound-room. He was up all night the night before and working early in the morning, so I figured he wouldn't wake up.

I was not in the mood for a blues club on Valencia, so I hung out in the living room. Turned on the tube, the public channel, and caught the last half hour of *Mame*, during which the female roommate returned and we talked for a while (the one who was a vegetarian feminist in college). She said I could hold onto *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* for a while. We get along, but she has a feminist chip on her shoulder that the Phantom finds annoying. He doesn't have much patience with dogmatic categories. He assumes that people of any gender or nationality can be assholes and that's about it. She gets a little pious about female bonding, and would never let a man come between her and another woman. She has a skewed view of things where women are given the benefit of the doubt, and men never are. When we talked about the Black and White Ball I said that many of the women wear strapless gowns. She thought the men insist their women dress like that so they can show them off like a trophy with cleavage. As if to say, no woman in her right mind would want to look glamorous on a festive occasion and flaunt herself. How can someone call herself a feminist and not know women very well? What planet does she live on? It was hard to imagine those men being so involved in what their wives or girlfriends wore, including the determination of their necklines. "Lower darling,

I want my associates at the firm to see what fine tits you have. I might get a raise." And how to explain the single women who were there? They were not exactly wearing overalls.

I left around midnight and took a bus to the Tenderloin. It would have been more edifying if I walked (it's about two miles). Before going home I went into the liquor store across the street. I was pulling out a Becks when one of the hookers walked in. It was like seeing a topless woman in a mini-skirt. Her leather vest was open, with dark nipples poking through a fishnet blouse. There was garish make-up on a hard-looking face. She has probably been doing this for years, a Latina who is over forty, somewhat heavy in the hips, and bored to death. She looks the part because it attracts attention and a spurt of currency in her direction.

It reminded me of the film *La Strada*,[85] the Anthony Quinn role, where you see him touring as a sideshow muscle man who bends an iron rod. Then you see him years later, still going through the same tired act for small crowds of people who may not be impressed, but the mere diversion with its echo of a prototype is enough.

Maybe she puts the iron back into a rod. I got hard while standing next to her, but I was caught off guard and pressing against the ice cream cooler to be less conspicuous. I wonder what the Middle Eastern guys who work behind the counter think of this country.

Sunday, May 23, 1993

Typing in the afternoon for a few hours. A little overcast.

[85] Fellini (1954)

Phone call from the Phantom at work, apologizing for having passed out last night. He hadn't gotten any sleep the night before, having gone to a low dive on Market Street across from a strip joint for the downwardly mobile. He was sitting at the bar and minding his own business when a woman started talking to him. They got acquainted. Lisa or Michelle, he isn't sure. A nutty dimwit who worked as a dancer, or was it a "lap dancer," in the burlesque club. Early twenties from Michigan and white, which isn't much of a recommendation in his opinion. As the conversation unfolded he found out a few things about where she worked. The main attraction at the moment is Crystal Storm, who won the "booby prize" with some unlikely measurements. Lisa or Michelle admitted that she wanted to get it on with her, insisting she had never thought of being with a woman (she said she was shy), but this was so much of a woman. There was some mention that the Phantom might get a backstage pass and rub elbows with the talent.

She told him one of the girls had gotten upset, having been gyrating on the leg of a customer and he liquidated on her assets. The dancer was unclear on the concept of cause and effect. He said she went home with him and spent the night. "I didn't poke her or anything." On the other hand, she left her bra to mark her place, or maybe as a souvenir. She gave him a show, being a pro at taking off her clothes. He thought she could go all the way, since minimalism has been reaching new heights in this country.

There was something about having her sit in with us during a music session in the sound room, with her on drums. Does she play drums? Well no, but she wants to learn. I thought if nothing else she could be a go-go dancer (for rehearsals in a garage), unless she's calling the tunes. It's good enough for the Butthole Surfers - all we need is dry-ice smoke and a surgical film in the background.

I went out later, feeling faint. It seems like every other time I go out I am confronted with an enigmatic or dramatic situation, frozen in a glance. There is the sweet and sour air of corruption, like you find in Toulouse Lautrec, Picasso, Henry Miller. I walk through a sideshow with a shifting cast of characters. There are hidden lines of force and interconnection running between them, lines that you could trip on if you're not careful.

A man on the corner with a dark patch over one eye and his arm in a sling.

Across the street, a skinny worn-out woman leaning on a lamppost with a small tattoo on her thigh. Low-slung tits in an open shirt. I haven't seen her there before.

A police car on Hyde Street with the officers emerging from a building. Their car was facing a cab with a dilapidated driver.

A tall male prostitute in a white miniskirt with long legs, trying to look like Kim Novak.

I went into the store with a tasteless dating program on the tube. Some hair-sprayed video object of a woman with a kitsch conceit described how her blind date went. The moderator was asking leading questions. Mr. Cloying talking to Miss Coy who has the mind of a kitchen appliance. She said her date was "no Adonis…." She had him bend over so she could check out his butt.

Nearly forgot what I had come in for. One of the Middle-Eastern guys had a book open on the counter. It looked like algebra, and he is not bad with an adding machine.

A Sunday afternoon. I sat in the armchair having violent thoughts. The tree was being tossed around in the window. I noticed a window across the street with a woman leaning out and putting something on the ledge: a couple of oranges and a little sign in

Vietnamese - an offering for ancestral spirits. For a minute I wasn't having violent thoughts.

Long workout on a steel-string wooden instrument.

Sunday night. I've been editorializing too much. I went back to cleaning the place, assuming my parents would arrive tomorrow.

9:30 p.m. Phone call from Mountain View, they aren't coming. My father is having problems with his back, having driven to Pismo Beach and spent a couple of days. We used to go clamming and camping there in the summer. It's where I spent the first year of my life while my father was in the Army. I was so used to the sand I wouldn't walk on grass. My parents had a tiny house not far from the ocean. The backyard was close to the railroad tracks. My mother was hanging laundry on a clothesline when a freight train went by slowly. There was a hobo in one of the cars. He saw her with the diapers and yelled, "That's what you get for playing whoopee!"

My back is okay, it's my background which hurts now and then, or my back pages, making it hard to lift the present off the ground. My father hurt his back when he lifted a battery out of a car. It was 1961 and we lived on the edge of Harlem. It didn't help when there was an elevator strike and our apartment was on the 19th floor.[86]

I told my sociological sister about the trial, describing the ex-Freudian plaintiff suing *The New Yorker*. I said he slept with a thousand women. Her immediate reaction, "He's a slime." I said he was engaged to a feminist who she respected. "No way, what's she doing with him?"

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[86] We moved there from a small town in Wisconsin where my father had a church. He took a year off to go to Union Seminary and read some radical theology. I went to PS 129. The entire school was black, except for two white kids who I must have avoided since my only friends were black. I was in the third grade and there were no problems. I rode the subway by myself to Central Park to play tennis. Bob Dylan arrived at the same time (from a small town in Minnesota).

My four-year-old nephew was on the phone. He still associates me with a burned-out building. He went around for days telling everyone about the fire. The home means a lot to him. He wanted to know if it was fixed yet. "You have a new house?" My father said they brought my nephew to Pismo Beach and he didn't want to leave, being interested in every little thing. It's a state of mind associated with enlightenment, with everything appearing fresh and original.[87]

10:30 p.m. On the typewriter for a few hours. Coffee. Two beers. Earlier I felt the strain of having been alone all day. I hadn't gone anywhere to speak of, only the unspeakable liquor store across the street. It wasn't like I was bored. I live alone, but I don't have the capacity for solitude that others do.

3:00 a.m. Unconscious.

Monday, May 24, 1993

NOTES

> *60 Minutes*, in case I am in danger of becoming optimistic. Who shot down a DC-9 off the coast of Italy in 1980? The U.S. government isn't talking.
>
> If you inject the cells of unborn lambs you can attain "the fountain of youth."
>
> Female government agents are harassed by bureaucrats of the ATF (the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives - the same agency that instigated the raid in Waco). A woman agent said she wants to be accepted as "one of the boys."
>
> There is a low-budget documentary called *Thank God I'm a Lesbian*. I had a few thoughts:
>
> 1. What if there's no god?

[87] Acid flash-back: in 1970 I lived in Los Angeles and drove up the coast with some friends to a protest march in San Francisco (Nixon was bombing Cambodia). It was four days after the Kent State shooting. We took acid on the way. The van stopped at Pismo Beach and we flew out, running across the sand in the wind and light.

2. To paraphrase a Dalinian line, “Young woman auto-sodomized by her smug exclusive group identification.”
3. If a film came out with the title, *Thank God I’m Straight*, it would get some flak. Or is that the subtext of a lot of romantic flicks, however godless and profane?

Sex by Madonna

There were a few shots with a glimmer of interest or good intentions and a certain style. It pulled its punches, though, as if it wants to stay in the realm of a coffee table book. She wallows in a genre like S & M while mocking it at the same time. Suck the essence out of something and spit it out. Demythify the drama and the real delirium of those situations which are turned into a photo op for shocking models. She deflates whatever she touches. There is not much in the way of transformation. She gives lip service to some inclinations which are closer to the simulated than the stimulating. It is vain and feigned. It’s what you might expect from a successful businesswoman and her fantasies.

The water fountain symbolism. Mock decadence. A touch of Hollywood. Tuxedo blow-job of the damned, except the damned have a union and it’s only suggested. See her practicing her sleight of hand. The camera catches a knowing look out of a thousand shots, or is it a knowing hand, a sleight of look. See her with her polished figure rolling around with a couple of shaved-head lesbians who at least look real. Their limp little tits are stuck on like an afterthought. It shows they’re technically female, or that it doesn’t matter, they like each other and, for a photographic split-second, her.

None of the women spread their legs without a demure hand to protect them. The men are exposed once or twice. The photographer’s idea or hers?

There is an exploration of the aesthetic possibilities of a rape scene. Women are assaulted in an alley, with their clothes torn off, but the main concern is how she looks. When a model having her picture taken runs out of ideas she has to lean on some transgression like a prop. When she is nearly naked on her hands and knees above a female dog on its back and the dog is spreading its legs, the smile on her face is saying: here’s a pose that no one ever thought of.

8:30 a.m. The phone rang. I was coming out of a pleasant turbulence in the subconscious, something like a neurological wish fulfillment. There are not that many dreams I have which are the equivalent of a dream come true – with a few exceptions,

like when I was making love to a black woman on top of a telephone pole amongst the wires and transformers, and we were naked.

B. was on the phone, sounding like she just woke up. She said she couldn't make it to the trial. I said I go at 9:30. She thought they wouldn't let you in if you're late, and went on to describe her weekend. On Saturday there was a sudden opportunity to fly to Catalina in a small plane. The pilot was going out with one of her women friends, but they were in the process of breaking up. Her friend was not inclined to spend the night with him in Catalina, so B. took her place. When they were up in the air she realized it wasn't an airliner going 500 miles per hour, more like 120, and it took about four hours. It was late afternoon when they arrived. They barely had time to run around Avalon, have dinner, and fly back. Another four hours (stopping to refuel in Oxnard). This sounded just like her. An exhilarating diversion with romantic ambiguities that come to nothing.

She flew back from Mexico a few days ago and is flying to New York in a week or two. Meanwhile, she is trying to keep a couple of significant others in her life from knowing about each other.

I had some coffee and took a few notes. Incoming returns, and possible leads on this or that. For example: there are phases in your life which come with evaporating motives for having gotten into that phase in the first place. Looking back, you wonder what on earth you had in mind, living in this place, working in that job, being with that person. Having lost sight of the original motivation for doing something, you may not understand it later. The reason for it has dissolved, or was satisfied by going down that road for a while.

I thought of this, looking around the place and out the windows, fathoming the neighborhood. Sometime in the future I may wonder what I ever saw in this area - why it felt so vibrant, but later not so much. Maybe being here has something to do with it. You invest a locale with your presence, and some of the interest in that locale is diminished when you leave. Or does the diminishment have something to do with having absorbed enough of it? For some of us it could take years. For those who wear out a situation in a few months or less - a location, a job, a love - it might reveal their limitations. Maybe they're a little obtuse in a world where some of the life-enhancing vitamins are in the fine print as it were, the subtleties (which can be found in many books). You ignore them at your peril.

11:00 a.m. I walked to the Federal Building, passing a slender young Latina woman under an umbrella. She stood there with a look that was innocent, a little coy, and probably for hire. Money is the silver lining on a clouded mind.

I passed through the revolving doors of the government. Every time I'm here it hits me like a shot of cold coffee. The X-ray machine near the elevator is a metaphor of what happens when you're in court. A trial by X-ray. Justice may be blind, but the law can see right through you, or it will by the time you've been interrogated, cross-examined, and betrayed by a witness.

I barely found a seat, and then there was a break. I took a few notes:

I solemnly swear at you: *cogito ergo sum*.

Variations on the Judge's name (the Hon. Eugene Lynch), respectfully submitted: Eugenic Lynch. Genetic Lurch. Gun Launch. Gin Lunch.

An article in the paper, which was not what I needed on a Monday morning. The man in Baton Rouge (a meat manager), who shot and killed a Japanese exchange student, was acquitted. The student had the nerve to knock on his door to ask for

directions. Talk about a life-threatening situation. The paranoid meat-head said, "This way to the cemetery" and pointed his gun (I'm speculating here).[88]

The trial resumed in an understated ordinary manner. An ex-girlfriend of the plaintiff was on the stand (Ms. Weinstein) with a soft voice. The intelligent aura of a woman who wasn't there in a professional capacity. She wasn't exposed to much of the original interview, she just happened to be his girlfriend then. No, she never saw Ms. Malcolm taking notes, and sounded a little vacant when she couldn't produce much information. She said the article hurt her feelings concerning what Masson implied about her (they have only spoken two or three times in the last six years). She later realized, after listening to the tapes, it might have been taken out of context and felt betrayed by the journalist, Malcolm, who sat at the defendant's table with little or no expression. She was asked to remember and describe in semantic detail whether Masson on a phone call in 1983 was "irritated" or "angry."

Noon, a two-hour break. I walked back to the apartment in the rain, and went into the kitchen and paused, the rain having subsided. I noticed two of the homeless who I see now and then on the other side of the vacant lot. A black man in his fifties and a small wiry white woman who is just as old. Upon reaching their camp, she grabbed some toilet paper and crouched behind a three-foot-high piece of plywood. It leaned on a bush. The man stood in front of it, taking a leak. He then pulled up a wire contraption like a broken chair, threw an old blanket over it and covered the entrance to their enclosure, hiding himself as well - what I thought of as their little outhouse. A minute later I saw a flame

[88] The sequence of events was a little more insidious as I later learned. The man was sitting in the living room when his wife alerted him to an intruder with an urgent tone in her voice. It was misleading, but that's why he answered the door with a gun in his hand. It reminds me of when the police are given an urgent alert to investigate something and they show up with that in mind, however misleading it is. They are primed for the worst, and it comes with a hair-trigger reflex.

which persisted for a while. Smoking crack or shooting up. There was a sign on a pole outside my building about a 21-day Methadone detoxification. STRUNG OUT? The woman is hard to look at. I've seen her panhandling in the financial district (that's where the money is).

I saw how low some people sink, and probably against their will. There are rudimentary ingenuities which might survive, but on the level of someone in the Stone Age. I had been in a courtroom with some of the more educated people in the country. It was like going from Olympus to the gutter in a few minutes and a few blocks.

Read the paper, took a shower, and had some soup and bread.

2:00 p.m. I returned to the Federal Building in a downpour with the umbrella.

This time I could only find a seat on the right side with the witness stand obscured by a screen. Everyone stood up for the Judge, but it wasn't him. False alarm. We sat down. A minute later a few stood up again. The Judge was already in his chair and things proceeded as if there was no break at all. They finished with the ex-girlfriend in half an hour.

Next witness for the prosecution: a woman who knew her stuff - a professor of anthropology (cultural and medical) at UC Berkeley. Plaintiff's attorney Morgan asked her to describe her background and establish her credentials to impress the hell out of the jury. The defense attorneys jumped up and objected. Then he asked her to explain what "anthropology" is. There were some low laughs from the crowd. He was doing it for the jury, who are some of the least educated people in the room.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes. She was an integral presence to reckon with and something of a comic relief, being a little unclear on the concept of how a courtroom

works. She was the peer in age and intellect of these attorneys and the Judge himself, so she didn't take it lightly, the suggestions and requests - and finally demands - that she be quiet and answer the questions as they were directed to her, especially if they only required a yes or no answer, and please don't veer off into territories of her own devising. She was not there as an expert and was not to offer information. She had the mistaken assumption that the truth comes out in a court of law, and said that she was on the side of truth, but as I said that isn't how a courtroom works. It has its own methods.

She was a witness for the prosecution and admitted she wasn't sympathetic with the writer (Malcolm). The defense attorneys jumped up again, objecting to "hearsay" when she went off on a tangent describing what someone said. She leaned into the microphone, assuming she had the right to speak at will, which she didn't, while the Judge conferred with a defense attorney. She said, "Can I volunteer some information, it's terribly relevant and very important…." The spectators laughed. The attorney said in no uncertain terms, "No, you may not."

She was testifying on how the article may have damaged Masson's professional reputation to the point of being refused positions or lectures. When she suggested him to a group of feminist women for something they "laughed" and made derisive remarks. That's curious, since Masson supports the women's movement when he says that Freud was wrong about a few things involving women. Masson is also engaged to one of the most strident feminist law professors in the country.

Ms. Scheper-Hughes said a graduate student submitted a thesis about Masson which she found libelous, entitled "The Don Juan [something…], Masson's Affair with Psychoanalysis." It was further evidence of the article having lowered his reputation (like

his actions hadn't already). When I read the interview that night and the next it seemed that Malcolm was off the hook. I don't think he'll be sending her any Christmas cards (plus he's Jewish), but the so-called damaging quotes are a tiny portion of a two-part article which is 48,500 words long. It's like objecting to a flea when there's a hundred-pound boulder on your back and one that she has every right as a writer to put there. Even worse, a defense attorney read from a deposition (to the jury in their sullen blank repose) that the article hadn't hurt his book sales.

The only other person in the court who had some difficulty with her, besides the defense attorney, was the court reporter. She was on the next level down from the Judge and close to the witness stand, and gave the impression of a woman staring into space while her busy hands were knitting something in her lap. Once in a while she would frown and turn towards the witness who had just said *Journal of Psychoanalytic Anthropology* real fast, or the long name of a Greek professor in a blur.

A little after 3 p.m. there was a break. I took a bus downtown to the office. The Attorney was gone, but I had to work late. I found two old copies of *The New Yorker,* Dec. 5 and 12, 1983, and xeroxed the entire article by Janet Malcolm.

8:00 p.m. Walked home, picking up fish and chips.

9:30 p.m. On the phone with my sister, the feminist ex-sociology professor who likes to argue. We talked about Catherine MacKinnon's efforts to ban pornography because it is demeaning to women. I thought that was a half-truth. It also glorifies women. The men in X-rated movies are just as exposed as the women, and are not there for their intelligence. The movies are gynecological and phallocentric. A camera comes

in for a close-up of the act, the old in-out. I'm not sure that it favors one gender or another when the two are going at it.

There is something she doesn't get: the aesthetics of a pin-up. There are women who refuse to admit that men appreciate the beauty of women. The pin-ups with demure and semi-classical poses are a modern version of Greek statues – a cult of beauty with erotic side-effects (which come with the human condition).

My other sister, a divorced mother with an MBA, couldn't care less. If other women want to show off in a magazine, she figures that's their business. There are thousands who are more than willing to pose, with more of them arriving every year, not to mention the simultaneous waves of teenage boys who're coming of age and driven out of their minds by the allure of women. Men are burdened with a biological overdrive, and very few women know what it's like to be a man.

Work out on the guitar.

I read half of the article by Malcolm, "ANNALS OF SCHOLARSHIP – TROUBLE IN THE ARCHIVES." It was thoroughly absorbing.

1:00 a.m. On the typewriter for a couple of hours. There were mental intensities from the trial, like the courtroom is an amplifier. It felt like one of those Renaissance surges over the last week, with ideas and associations coming at me at every turn. The minute I think of surges though, I wonder if I said this on the full moon last month. There is nothing like the presence of professionals (attorneys and professors and the like) to make you realize your limitations. I have shied away from institutions, and avoided a full-time occupation (probably for good reason).

I recall the horror stories of academia, how bureaucratic and creatively diluted it can be. I've been getting calls from my history professor for many years and hearing about his bitter disillusionment. Masson refers to an institution which, upon arriving, he thought was the most wonderful place on earth. He later considered it a "rat hole." One of my sisters is an ex-professor for a reason (for example, there was backstabbing in the sociology department and women were involved). It is hard to avoid the compromises. If you want the time to write and don't have a trust fund, you end up with a humble form of employment (without resorting to crime – it's pretty humbling to be sitting in a prison cell). You want a job that requires a minimum of your time and effort, working part-time in the afternoon, and taking six months or a year off now and then - a routine I've followed roughly for the last ten years.

The company of other writers might be reassuring, but I drifted away from them a long time ago. I have a tendency to wallow in a cross-section of society. Maybe I have those contradictions in myself, the hybrid-ambiguities of class and education. I don't trust any particular point of view and its milieu. I like an eclectic atmosphere with anarchy in the air, like the audience for a Lenny Bruce show.

What I meant to say, if the courtroom was magnetic it had something to do with the presence of people who are civilized, when it seems like civilization is heading full steam into the Middle Ages (as the saying goes). When it comes to intellectual accomplishment this culture likes to pretend it's anti-elitist – even while it worships an exclusive aura of the rich and famous. The system sells diluted fragments of that aura. You can be elite and special if you drink this and drive that and own this and bone that.

Reminds me of a line I heard from the Professor:

"We've come from the Many to join the Few."
"You can't, there's too many."

The trial is a gathering of refined minds with a jury of amateurs. I realize it's one of the checks and balances of the legal system and I don't know the jurors. But none of them has heard of *The New Yorker*, and a few appear to have low ceilings in a trial that is erecting a Gothic cathedral for the truth and consequences of a case.

Maybe I'm not doing justice to the jurors, but I was struck by certain parallels with communism. A representative of the "common man" was present for a meeting or a group discussion, and he or she might live with you. They walk through the living room and all talk ceases until they're gone. It's what a dictatorship of the proletariat requires. What if there's a dictatorship of the uninformed consumer? A jury is selected on the basis of knowing very little so as to not be "biased" by news of the case or news of anything. It's like they're purified by ignorance, which constitutes a bias in its own right when it comes to semantic disputes in the world of psychoanalysis.

The professionals lay the complexities of their learning and the lawsuit at the feet of the workingman, or seven women and one man. They are supposed to come to a decision, and none of them are taking notes.

Where was I? Late at night. This morning I lay half asleep in the hall. I heard someone knocking on the door of an apartment and announcing in a civil tone that he was from the Sheriff's Department and here is your eviction notice. There's a Monday morning for you.

There were the usual sounds on the street. When I was talking with my sister there was someone smashing a windshield. I wonder if there is an archetypal urge to walk through town in the middle of the night while shouting things at the top of your lungs.

3:00 a.m. Went to bed, then scribbled a few incoming lines - a poem about intellectuals.

> The scholar is an extrovert,
> he's going out of his mind,
> an exo-skeleton of certainties,
> whatever he can find.
>
> A scholar being outer-directed,
> pulling in the information,
> he is probably indebted
> to the Protestant Reformation.
>
> Masson says he doesn't think,
> he's better at doing research,
> everything and the kitchen sink.
> A scholar will destroy a church
>
> to look at the foundations while
> refusing to pretend
> the bone fragment of a saint is holy,
> it is not the living end.
>
> He's a magnet for the filings
> made of iron fact,
> a force field which can hurt your feelings,
> while the world remains intact.
>
> A scholar then is not a hollow
> body instrument,
> but rather sturdy and can swallow
> analyzing excrement
>
> and come up smelling like a rose.
> Some would say, "Oh rose you are sick…
> your objectivity is a pose,
> and we are non-historic."
>
> The scholar in response, "You were

still-born yesterday.
There are other ways to purity
than throwing your mind away."

Tuesday, May 25, 1993

11:00 a.m. I walked to the Federal Building. I'm evolving through revolving doors. There was a metal detector. My umbrella was X-rayed and I went through the ceiling, rising to the 17th floor and Courtroom 4. I found a seat on the right. The screen for slides obscured my view of the witness stand, but I could hear the witness. He was the plaintiff's first attorney in this matter (ten years ago), and provided a heavy dose of erudition. Or rather, being literate and civilized, it wasn't heavy at all. A ponderous courtroom is.

I wondered why the screen was there when they weren't using it. Maybe it's a sail for catching any breeze of verisimilitude to move the case along.

They broke for lunch at noon, so I went home, walking through the human wreckage as they mingle with the rest of us. I rode the iron elevator to the third floor and walked past a door where an old man lives. There were Wagnerian currents coming through the wall, the *Ride of the Valkyries.*[89]

2:00 p.m. I returned to the courtroom, and thought about how I fell under the influence of this trial. I was burned out of my home and moved into a place a few blocks from the Federal Building (and I work in the office of the attorney who represents the plaintiff). On the bench reserved for reporters was a woman in her mid-to-late twenties with dark hair in a ponytail and an open friendly presence. She had a note pad for

[89] In Norse mythology, the Valkyries were supernatural women who would fly around a battlefield and choose who lives or dies.

interviewing people. I had the impression she worked for *The New York Times*. I never talked to her. I was under the influence of the formality of the court and didn't view it as a social occasion, which was sophomoric on my part as people were talking during the breaks. I assumed she was working and would wonder who this guy is talking to her when she is supposed to interview someone in the trial. There were opportunities in the corridor, but I was uncoordinated. I know what it's like to have a conversation with a woman and never see her again.

I have more checks and balances than the legal system.

I'm different from a man who slept with a thousand women. There was nothing holding him back. He was not concerned about the woman of the moment or the future of a liaison or anything other than how to get her into bed. A lot of small talk goes along with those seductions. He admitted he is not a thinker, he likes to poke around the archives, doing research. Everyone who met him seems to regard him as a friendly con-man who was not bad looking, all of which is perfect for seducing women. Especially if "seducing" is an old-fashioned term. Modern women aren't seduced, they participate in the process. He is hyperactive and neurotic. He went into analysis when it became apparent he was going through women like some men go through socks and couldn't stop. For all I know it's something which a lot of women found appealing. Maybe it was close to how they operate – with superficial levels of pretending and affection while they're looking for immediate gratification.

"Copulation is the lyricism of the masses," according to Baudelaire (and I'm beginning to think he wasn't very good at it). It's similar for men who spend months

doing research, poring over an old text in a sexless room. They're feeling disembodied, but a woman brings them to their senses. Her legs are lyrical compared to footnotes.

Masson has a dry and grating voice. I first heard it in the office. He was talking with his attorney, going on and on about something, and I wanted to shut the door. The word "whining" has been applied to him a few times, but I wouldn't call it that. More like the opposite of "Don't complain, don't explain," and maybe that's a Jewish custom. He's an overbearing presence, while an interviewer cultivates an air of absence. It was often stated that if he is not the center of attention he is bored. It was a classic showdown in the context of a so-called Jewish pseudo-science (if that's the word) of psychoanalysis. He wanted to undermine it, although Malcolm respects it, as was brought out by the prosecution. She was known for having analysts come to dinner in her home in Manhattan.[90]

The plaintiff has a loose tongue. Maybe those years as a womanizer left him with a proclivity for bullshit and bragging. As someone with a PhD in Sanskrit (I wrote "Sans skirt", a Freudian slip), the man was so imbued with ancient script and academic texts that the immediate spoken word was not taken seriously. He might have been unclear on the concept of journalism, even as the professor on the witness stand was unclear on how a courtroom works, having its own rules and methods of collecting evidence. The journalist was similar to an analyst who listens, taking notes with a patient on the couch

[90] I wonder if she would slip them a mickey, knocking them into dreamland. A cuisine of free association while discussing the Seduction Theory over oysters, chicken breasts, and testicles, followed by flaming cherries. In honor of Freud's belief that women who have been molested were making it up, the food is burned but everyone pretends it isn't.

whose every utterance, no matter how prosaic or profane, is loaded with significance and duly noted.

Meanwhile, back at the trial, Masson sat in the front row with his mother, daughter, and fiancée, looking completely at ease like he enjoyed being the center of attention. The circumstances were of secondary concern, a trial in which his character and private conversations were dragged into a public venue and not in a good light. I thought it was weak to focus on a few quotes as being defamatory. It diverted attention from an article of legitimate journalistic means which provided a chorus of voices, including his own, which did more damage to his reputation than those five little quotes. The prosecution is grabbing at straws.

He is basking in the courtroom lighting as if there is no such thing as bad publicity. Years ago he gave an interview to *The New York Times* where he voiced his anti-Freudian views. That got him fired from his position as the recently appointed head of the Freud Archives. It seems like getting attention is important to him, whatever the consequences. It is hard to imagine how obscure or erased it feels to be an academic in the backroom of a library on the trail of other people's work, or caught up in the slipstream of a dead man's thought. It might require a thousand women (they add up over the years of arid research) to verify your physical existence.

He gained recognition and consorted with the famous. He gave a dinner party. A phone call from a famous psychoanalyst, Dr. Kurt Eissler, was announced. The guests were impressed and he was nearly fainting with pride. He asked if the caller would call back later.[91]

[91] My reactions to his self-promotion are mixed. I was brought up with a different approach by self-effacing Protestants. It reminds me of something I read about a Jewish family where an

In those long freewheeling conversations with Janet Malcolm, he didn't realize how revealing he was, or that she would focus on a phrase or sentence "taken out of context," which is to say, removed from the forgiving surroundings that the conversation occurred in. The speaker is surprised to read what he sounds like in a warm café when the café is taken away, or at home with his girlfriend, sleepy in the kitchen, but his words are slightly rearranged and thrown into the merciless cold print of an East Coast publication.

Maybe sleeping with all those women took its toll[92] when it comes to a loss of vital essence. It is not the sex, however, but the superficial circumstances and the small talk which can leave you addle-brained until you don't know what you're saying anymore. For a long time his main pastimes were reading and women (by his own admission). This would have covered the years from 1958 to 1978, encompassing the "sexual revolution" on the East Coast. It is hard to say if he was particularly seductive, or a lot of women were loosening up and he was there. His methods were a far cry from the man in *Diary of a Seducer*, a connoisseur of long seductive courtships. When it was finally consummated the affair was over, in his opinion. Kierkegaard did not think highly of that approach, and Masson wouldn't waste his time. Some women appreciate a man who doesn't beat around the bush. There is nothing like psychology for slowing down the process of getting laid.

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adolescent boy got his first erection. He ran around the house showing it off, even to his sisters. That is light years away from how I was raised. I thought it was a microcosm of what I'm up against when it comes to self-promotion.

[92] The quantity is not implausible when you break it down over a twenty-year period, for example from twenty to forty (he is now fifty-two). That's approximately one woman per week. It doesn't mean he's having more sex than others, and it isn't necessarily better sex when you consider what a man and woman are like when they have gotten to know each other.

Where was I? In the courtroom, listening to a mild-mannered attorney in a red bow tie who worked in the legal department of *The New Yorker*. He tried to remember when he first received a call, ten years ago, which was the magazine's first hint that the article was not well received by the subject. Masson objected to a profile which put his reputation through an X-ray machine and then into an elevator which was going down, unfortunately – with the weight of evidence against him.

3:00 p.m. I left and went to work in a law office.

I was flipping through a *National Geographic* article on the 4000-year-old Ice Man found in a glacier in the Italian Alps, his mummified remains. I said, "Gross," which got V.'s attention at a nearby desk. I showed it to her and she was intrigued. She is deferential when it comes to authority, and is surprised at how I talk to the Attorney I work for. At the same time, she can watch the most horrifying movies. Not just *The Thing*, but the remake of it, which I wouldn't go near. I think she saw it three times and simply shrugged, no big deal. "It isn't real." She is practical and morbid while adhering to old-fashioned restraints of the feminine. V. went to a private Catholic girls' school, learned accounting, and has had the same boyfriend since she was nineteen. Who knows what has been repressed along the way? She finds an outlet in horror films that have little to do with her life. I get my horror from the morning paper.

She read some of the article about the frozen mummified remains and was amazed. Modern women are a little weird, in her opinion, and this was further proof. A number of women wrote in asking if the "frozen sperm" of the Ice Man was available and intact. They want to be impregnated by it. She couldn't believe it. It sounded pretty cold

for one thing. And it turned out the Ice Man was missing a portion of his male anatomy. When he was taken from the glacier someone stole his private parts.

A few minutes later we were talking about the animal parts that various cultures include in their cuisine, from raw monkey brains to cooked bull testicles.

7:00 p.m. I left work and started walking. The habit of making dinner at home has atrophied, and I headed for the Cambodian restaurant a block from where I live. The light blue walls and lace curtains are next to an alley. I stood on the sidewalk having a cigarette before I went in. A black man walked by, glancing at my hand-rolled cigarette. He sat down in a doorway about ten feet away. A minute later he called out, "WHAT ARE YOU DOING ON MY TURF?!" He repeated the sentiment. I turned my head, looking at him, and said, "Why?" It may have come out wrong since I was tired, or was it further evidence that my eyes are doing things I'm not aware of and can't control, like they shoot lightning bolts or something. I wouldn't think so, except for the reactions I get. He reacted like I had applied a wire with a current running through it to his leg. He stiffened, stood up, and strode over. A tall man in his late thirties with a couple of scars on his face, probably from fights. I was vaguely conscious of the fact that he was a street person who was prone to anger, and maybe not the most well-balanced person in the world. He was thin-skinned and abrasive, which is understandable if you live on the streets. I later wondered if he slept in the doorway.

I don't like people getting territorial about a public sidewalk like they own it. I was smoking a cigarette and hadn't been harassing him at all. I was momentarily thrown off since he made "turf" sound like "Turk" and I almost said Turk Street is a few blocks away. I finally said, like explaining something to a child, pulling the words up slowly,

that I was smoking a cigarette before I went into that restaurant over there. I was calm and staring him in the eye, like how you freeze in the vicinity of a half-mad wolf that's waiting for the slightest sign of weakness to tear an arm off.

He lightened up a little. "Why didn't you say so? They're alright. They give me food…" Then he gave me a stern warning that "why" is a fighting word. As he turned to walk back to his doorway[93] there was some mention of my cigarette looking like a joint, and that he would have called the police on me. I said, "You wouldn't do that." He said he would, muttering that other people would have done the same to him.

I finished my cigarette. Another pleasant encounter on the streets of San Francisco. I wondered if he took me for another street person. Maybe it's time I got the jacket dry-cleaned, or maybe it didn't matter. I was a human being on his "turf," and a white man to boot, who hadn't been sufficiently deferential to a black man.

In recording day-to-day events I'm sometimes in the realm of stereotypic situations. Most of the rude encounters on the street are with black people. I would prefer it was otherwise. If I lived in some other part of the country I might have threatening encounters with drunken white men in pickup trucks. What I get here is pompous black static like you wouldn't believe. No one else comes close. For that matter, there have been many felonies and misdemeanors against friends and family over the years, most of which were by black men. A few examples:

> A friend of my father, a liberal probation officer, was shot pointblank with a shotgun by one of his black probationers. He barely survived. There were years of painful recuperation, but he never fully recovered, he couldn't work, his marriage fell apart, and his life was shortened.

[93] Reminds me of the parable by Kafka, "Before the Law" (1915). A man encounters a closed gate and spends the rest of his life waiting for it to open.

My brother was held on the floor with a gun to his head when he worked at the front desk of a hotel in Hollywood (the place was being robbed by a black man). He went on to marry and have two kids, who came that close to never existing.

The Professor's daughter was listening to music in a club when a black man standing behind her started to feel her butt. She turned around to object and he slugged her, knocking her to the floor. While she lay there half-unconscious she was robbed. (The woman worked as a nurse, and had a child with a black man who left her as a single mother.)

The French-Belgian woman I used to live with (a mother of two and in her thirties at the time), was getting off a bus in Oakland one night. She was set upon by several young black males who threw her to the ground and tried to drag her into the bushes. They only dispersed when an older black man showed up, furious that those thugs would defile his town in this manner.[94] Oddly enough, she was headed for the library to research the African roots of music in the Caribbean.

Wednesday, May 26, 1993

11:00 a.m. I went to the Federal Building but there was no one in the courtroom. The witnesses and audience were gone, just the attorneys sitting around with the Judge (without his robe), talking it over. Descending to the ground floor I saw a sign about a government bookstore and went in. I want a poster of a Stealth fighter jet to put in my apartment, a reminder of what time it is historically.

I went outside with several options, being not in the mood for anything mundane. Dropped into a bookstore on Polk Street, an old place with some integrity. It is next to a Thai restaurant and two blocks from my place. The atmosphere can alter from one block

[94] I'm probably off base in mentioning or even remembering these things. Any assault on a white person is supposed to be deflected into an abstract realm where the pain and anger evaporate. It's not surprising if some black men think that picking off a stray white person now and then won't engender much response, because it doesn't. If there's a crime and the suspects are black the *SF Chronicle* won't reveal their race or give a description because it might constitute a "negative stereotype." If a white person is the perpetrator that fact is in the headlines and there is a righteous protest. If white people reacted in such a manner every time one of their own was shot in the head and thrown in the bay (or something to that effect), they would be marching through the streets of Oakland on a regular basis.

to the next, from the worn-out derelicts to a young woman behind the counter looking wan and pale. I found an old copy of *Dionysius in '69*.[95]

1:00 p.m. Lunch with Renee. We're familiar with each other at this point, with her preferring to remain buddies with a man. It keeps the problematic aspects of the romantic at arm's length, though I never raised the issue. She has told me she is "anal retentive" and doesn't want to be touched. We don't have much in common. She prefers an antiseptic world of complete security, and thinks that San Francisco is a dangerous place. I haven't told her about the Tenderloin. She doesn't have much interest in literature or music, a Pisces who is something of a princess, but I like her.

Now and then we have some close calls with a certain understanding or communion passing between us. She is very frank, and it diffuses any suggestion of the romantic. She will bring up PMS (it doesn't bother her), or call me a bum (for sleeping late), and says, "*Ciao* baby," when she's leaving work. She has a conservative controlled lifestyle, the likes of which I'm not familiar with. Renee avoids a lot of aspects of the culture, where I'm usually the opposite and not always better off for it. People like her exclude information, like they're building walls instead of windows and radar stations.

She reminds me of V. sometimes. I brought in a copy of *Poetry Flash* the other day to show V. an article on a Filipina writer who grew up in the U.S., Jessica Hagedorn. She was momentarily interested, then shrugged it off, saying the writer looked like a man, and wouldn't take it home. She thought it had no relevance in her life, and doesn't want to read *Dogeaters* either.

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[95] Richard Schechner (1968), a loose adaptation of Euripides' *The Bacchae*.

Meanwhile, I sat at a table with Renee and the conversation expanded to epic length, her having a quick and curious mind. I haven't figured out the boundaries of her discretion, being careful about some subjects, but she really likes Sharon Stone. I made an observation that her eyes were bloodshot, and she said it's true. She didn't get much sleep after negotiating with the ex-boyfriend. I mentioned how dark her irises were, like I was sinking into the void, and she didn't mind the description.

This is her last week at work, going to law school on the East Coast in the fall. The school sounded exclusive. She said she would write, and I think she will. She's conscientious about that sort of thing and has a lovely script. I said something about writing me a letter because I like her handwriting. She objected, was that all? No, we could discuss legal matters. She said I wasn't supposed to tell her what to write.

I worked in the office for a few hours. The next desk was empty. V. was on an airliner drifting towards Hawaii for a few days. She doesn't swim, and refuses to wear a swimsuit or will wear shorts over it because she doesn't want to get too dark. The woman is hardly overweight, and what's wrong with a tan?[96]

6:30 p.m. I walked a couple of miles to the bookstore next to Max's. There was a crowd, though not that many considering who was there - T. Coraghessan Boyle. A writer has an air of solitude. No matter how accomplished, it doesn't lend itself to large crowds. A screaming fool can fill a stadium with his antics on a manic sound-struck stage. Still, it is a little disconcerting. I went to a lecture at UC Berkeley by Michel Foucault (1926-1984) in the early 1980's. The presentation was understated. He walked out on stage and started talking, one of the more ponderous intellectual presences in the

[96] Her mother told her darker skin implies that one is a peasant who works in the fields. It is a common belief in the Philippines and elsewhere.

world at the time. A fender bender on the freeway would have gotten more attention in the newspaper.

I'm speaking from the paradoxical position of someone who has seen Michel Foucault (once) and the Ramones (twice). The polarities of modern life are something to write home about, unless they leave you paralyzed.

Anyhow, T.C. Boyle, who was thinner and older than I thought. Mid-forties, living for a long time in Los Angeles, but operating with his own New York intensity. He went through a session in the back of a bookstore like he had somewhere else to go. He read from his book, *The Road to Wellness*, with some off-the-cuff commentary, and then took questions which he answered in a quick manner, finally stopping (with one or two hands still up) so people could line up for him to sign books. The whole thing lasted three-fourths of an hour. I've read a lot of his work and have a good deal of respect for him. He comes up with characters and plots for novels and stories where my tendencies are in another vector. I feel like an eccentric reporter, a twisted essayist, for whom the *belles lettres* toll.

I walked up to the front for a closer look. I was struck by the mental forces of the man compared to his physical presence. I don't know why that surprises me. You can have an ocean in your head, which sometimes makes it hard to focus, while you're just another man on the street who occupies two shoes.

It is disturbing that one can spend so much time and effort on something as intangible as words on a page - a mental dimension which is easily lost or evaporating and might not register on the public consciousness. It is nothing like holding up a bank.

The immediate and the tangible are worshipped in this country of nuts and bolts and home-run statistics.

I went to Max's Opera Cafe and had a tangible Reuben with sauerkraut, and then walked home.

Thursday, May 27, 1993

I fell asleep early last night, no coffee or alcohol, and caught up on my sleep. It was a rested development.

10:30 a.m. I walked to the Federal Building for the closing arguments in the trial and couldn't get in. People were standing packed inside the door while Charles Morgan presented his case to the jury. I almost walked away, but decided to wait and see what happened. I sat on a bench in the corridor with a few others who couldn't get in. A few minutes later an old couple walked up, opened the door, and melted into the crowd. Someone else followed, and I decided to try it. I got through to the floor in front and sat down with a view of the proceedings. Morgan was just finishing.

There was a short break. I stood around, relieved to be inside and not about to leave. I could have talked to Masson who stood ten feet away in a rumpled white linen suit, but something held me back. He didn't look worried. I don't think he has led a difficult life. Even with something like this it wasn't a matter of life or death. He hasn't been destitute or forced into manual labor the last few years, and wasn't in danger of it now. It was a trial and tribulation on an esoteric plane, being polite and seemingly detached. There were enormous enmities and whole careers at stake (along with $7,000,000), and yet it had something in common with a chess match. Malcolm and

Masson were in the same room, and she walked right by him on the way to the defense table.

The defense attorney had his turn. Bostwick is in his mid-to-late forties (the other two defense attorneys were over sixty and about thirty). When he was finished, an hour and a half later, I was stunned and stoked, the logic and delivery covered every point and in a way that wasn't boring. Logic has a certain magnetism of its own. The well-hewn argument, the modulation of the voice, casual and careful, dropping to a low level towards the end which had a dramatic effect. He hit on some of the same points I would have, but I couldn't have laid it out in such a professional manner.

He even had posters called MASSON'S MEMORY (the man sitting right over there). His memory with its limitations and discrepancies was being X-rayed in front of everyone and found wanting. I thought it was devastating. When the plaintiff has the burden of proof to show by "a preponderance of the evidence" that a magazine has misquoted him and hurt his reputation it's an uphill climb. The main footing is his credibility, especially on this matter of remembrance. He insisted he hadn't said something, and just below was the quote along with what tape it was on and the date.

Malcolm produced a typed copy of notes some years ago which included the quote about an "intellectual gigolo." The prosecution claimed she threw it in because of the lawsuit, trying to show that he said it and she wrote it down, but the typed copy was produced before said phrase was an issue. Bostwick made one reasonable point after another. Why for example would she locate a couple of the controversial quotes at an interview where his girlfriend was in and out of the room, and not a phone conversation where it was just her word against his? Finally, could the plaintiff be trusted if, as shown

on these lists, he had been wrong before when demonstrating a selective recall of the facts? The case had been boiled down to five quotes because those were the only ones left that weren't on tape. Their absence constituted a legal loophole if not a noose that he was trying to put around her neck.

Masson thought the article had gotten it wrong, what he was all about and his fine character. And yet there was corroborating evidence with people saying he couldn't be trusted. There is a phenomenon where others don't see you as you see yourself. It can be a little off, and not necessarily for the worse. Others might see you in a better light than you see yourself. The academic viewed himself through a rose-tinted subjective lens. The journalist's view was unromantic. It threw him off, like when someone takes a lousy photograph of you. It's still you, technically, and your own fault if someone got your bad side and you don't photograph well in a certain light, but there it is.

The plaintiff wondered why the interviewer didn't capture his character from the angle that he's used to. It's a cause for litigation. He may have played the interviewer like a violin, or tried to. He had nothing to lose, having been fired from the Archives and resigned a teaching position. He was disillusioned and bored with academia and the psychoanalytic profession where he had been making waves, so why not make a big splash in another context, that of the law, with a related attack on journalism? There is no such thing as bad publicity when it comes to selling books. He has written two or three, and a certain notoriety might help, whether or not he won the case. It had to be a big one though, and out of the ordinary. Not that many sue *The New Yorker*.

He thought he could refer to analysts as a boring bunch of poseurs and it would be left to stand or involve a witness stand. That would put him in the legal limelight. It went

to the Supreme Court a couple of years ago which said he had a right to continue, having one decision go against him.

There is a subtext here of the mercurial Jew with no known loyalties, a man with shifting allegiances. It may not sound so good, but it's more honest than those who lock into a dogmatic way of thinking - my country or my school of thought, right or wrong. The Jewish angle is not too prominent in this case, except when he brings it up in recorded statements. He remarked to Dr. Eissler: "Don't tell the goys." He is willing to be a fly in the ointment, the heretical non-believer. Maybe he has felt that way since his "misfit" days at Harvard, but it isn't necessarily a bad thing. The ointment might be beneficial or it might be phony.

I'm discussing his life as if I knew him, but he made his life and times a part of the public record. He brought a lawsuit, gave longwinded interviews, and wrote an autobiography. Most of us are fairly transparent, whether to our doctors, the authorities, or friends and family. We wear our psychiatric records, class background, and ethnic bonding on our sleeves (wrote "selves"). As you get older the evidence is mounting that you're not as original as you may have thought. Also not as isolated, which is a blessing. The currents and the motivations running through your life have been common ones. To some extent the misery and embarrassing poses of the young are from an illusion of being unique. They see a lot of older people who are eunuchs of conformity. But what is that conformity but knowing what you have in common with the human race? It has your medical records on file in case you don't believe it.

Meanwhile, I sat on the floor in a packed courtroom. I could see the plaintiff. He never sat with his lawyer as Malcolm sat with hers. His profile was juxtaposed with an attorney who was attacking his character.

A courtroom would be perfect for staging an opera. I don't know if that's been done, an opera based on defamation. With the Judge a basso profundo, the plaintiff a tenor, the attorneys a combination of alto, tenor, bass, and the defendant a soprano hitting some imperative high notes in defense of her work. A witness for the plaintiff (the professor of anthropology) would be another soprano who sings about the relevant things she has to say, with the defense attorneys jumping up and singing their objections with a bass note from the Judge, "SUS…TAINED…." The jury is a choir on the side, voicing its quiet common thoughts and reactions as one mind, including their restlessness and boredom. I don't know if it would have the dramatic force of an opera by Puccini, where someone usually dies. Maybe the defendant could have a heart attack defending her honor at the top of her lungs, and be found not guilty on her deathbed.

12:30 p.m. The defense rests. The specter of "lunch" caused a break in the proceedings as if there was an earthquake as people abandoned the building en masse. At the elevators I noticed the young woman reporter and like a fool I didn't say anything. The door of the freight elevator opened. There was an old guy sitting in a beat-up chair wearing a baseball cap which said SPEEDY.

I went home, read the paper, and relaxed. Coffee, cigarettes, soup and bread.

2:30 pm. I walked back to the Federal Building, just in time for the prosecuting attorney's forty-minute rebuttal. Morgan is an older man, his hair combed back with a dignified profile, but with less force to his argument and presence than the younger

Bostwick had. Maybe at this point he was playing catch-up, or he knew the defense had hit him broadside with points that weakened his position. He did what he could, and had some comments about how his Honor hadn't left him much time, while having to use some of it responding to false impressions left by the defense. He got a little pious, not quite pleading, with a careful use of his hands, gesticulating slowly as if lawyers can convey sincerity through hand signals[97] while speaking softly. There was not much in the way of thunderous oratory here. It left the court reporter leaning forward, straining to hear, and requesting once or twice that he speak up. During the rebuttal the defense attorney stood up with a formal objection, claiming the false representation of something.

Then it was over. A five-minute break, which was more like fifteen. The Judge returned, giving the jury instructions with a brief outline of the points in the case, telling them the burden of proof was on the plaintiff. You would think *The New Yorker* would be off the hook, it being anything but "reckless."

4:30 p.m. I showed up late to work, and told the attorney where I had been. He was curious about the case, but we didn't talk much about it. He has a tendency for nodding off, even on the phone. One of my resentments here is that having a conversation is difficult. It's like talking to a narcoleptic with a lot of distractions and the knee-jerk temper of a narcissist.

The two young secretaries for Morgan wanted to hear about the trial. They never made it there so we discussed it. They have an inside track on this, but their opinions are biased and they never read the article. The nineteen-year-old exclaimed that *The New Yorker* is dull, a magazine for nerds, almost like *Readers Digest* (her friend said, "I like

[97] When my sociological sister was working on her doctorate, she met a graduate student whose thesis involved the body language of judges.

Reader's Digest."). She was unclear about a few other things, and said about the defendant, "She's gonna fry."

I spoke with someone else who worked for Morgan and said I solved the case: they should call it a draw, but *The New Yorker* has to publish something Masson wrote and pay him for it. It could be a profile of the woman who interviewed him long ago, but not as long (and with no guarantee that she would consent to being interviewed).

I went out for a few things after five, including a *New Yorker*. Walking back I saw Masson on the sidewalk carrying the screen equipment and a box. I opened the door and held the elevator for him. He recognized me from the office and the courtroom, just a neutral observer, and was friendly. We talked about the case as we levitated to the 13th floor. I mentioned this problem of the jury having so much convoluted esoteric information and they couldn't take notes. They were supposed to absorb it all, people who were not well-informed to begin with, and not open to being well-informed. There were waves of courtroom information washing up on closed minds.

There is an illusion of the honest and unbiased common man. It would seem to be a stereotype as much as the noble savage or the white man's burden. Verdicts from a jury of the uninformed are not necessarily more justified than verdicts from a few tribunal judges. Look at the Dan White trial.[98] Recently a man was awarded $1,000,000 in a harassment case against a woman supervisor who kissed him behind closed doors. I think the uninformed are more easily swayed by smooth-talking professionals, and their sense

[98] A man broke into City Hall through a basement window, thus avoiding the metal detector. He was a war veteran with a hand gun and ten bullets. He shot the mayor and a supervisor (later admitting he was after two more politicians). He got seven years for voluntary manslaughter and was out in five. A year or so later he was back in San Francisco. He did not feel welcome and within a few months he died of carbon monoxide poisoning in his garage.

of proportion is off when it comes to monetary awards. Maybe they can't count. How else to justify an award which functions on the level of a gross lottery?

For that matter, what kind of mindless jury acquitted the man in Louisiana for shooting a student from Japan for standing in his yard and asking for directions?

The jury system is like *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal* having to defer to *The National Enquirer* when it comes to verifying a story. Or an operating room where the doctors hand the surgical instruments to someone who a week or two before had never held a scalpel. They stand on the side and pretend not to look.

6:30 p.m. I walked home from work, and thought about a certain woman, seeing her in a different light. One thing about a sport coat, it is good for hiding an erection when you're in public. There are mental signals which make their presence felt. It is further evidence of how a mental state affects the body. I am too impressionable, but it wasn't like it made me stumble. Maybe a physical state was generating those thoughts in the first place. Which came first, the body or the mind? I'm leaning (wrote "learning") towards the former. "Existence precedes essence,"[99] in my humble opinion.

I picked up some fish and chips, walking past a cornered whore.

I read the paper at home. There was a phone call from the Phantom about amplifiers and the sound-room on Saturday night.

This afternoon there was call from Tanya (Ming's friend). She inhaled a bong and said, "I want someone like Van Damme[100] to screw me and have babies with." She hasn't gotten laid in a year or so, and not much in high school either. I find that odd, but her

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[99] Jean-Paul Sartre

[100] Jean-Claude Van Damme, "the muscles from Brussels," a kickboxer who made movies like *No Retreat No Surrender.*

requirements of a man are a bit much, like nothing short of a movie star. He also has to be intelligent with good manners, and not much body hair.

She talked about the kids she takes care of, including a couple of eight or nine-year-olds. In her opinion, girls are the worst. They're scheming almost from the day they were born (I wouldn't go that far, maybe from when they learn to walk). One reason they're ahead of boys a few years later: they have been rehearsing their strategic tea parties and behavioral engineering using (voodoo) dolls. Meanwhile the boys have been rehearsing the physics of a thrown rock. It might be useful in some context, but not so much when it comes to interpersonal relations. Take their rocks away, and they are dummies for a woman who's been pulling psychological strings for most of her life.

Tanya thinks a lot of women are manipulating bitches, and any man is a fool to trust them. I don't know if she is being blunt and honest, but it sounds like she encountered some cunts in high school with discriminating attitudes – her being somewhat heavy, muscular, and of mixed race (the black girls were hard on her). She is pretty straightforward compared to other girls with their duplicity up the butt. One of her horrors (and Ming's as well) is to have a daughter who is a frou-frou type.

At the moment she is getting along with Ming (who's far away), but something she said about her friend not knowing her effect on men reminded me of the anti-psychological. The Phantom said that Ming has little or no intuition, and she admitted as much. It would explain a few things. Her family seems to have an anti-psychological approach. They're practical with not much love, in her opinion. Having a soul is secondary and irrelevant (especially if you're a woman).

I'm speculating here. A culture that wallows in the psychological is going to have problems as well. I saw a documentary on the People's Republic of China that focused on its anti-Freudian aspects. The romantic tortured soul is not valued very highly over there. It's more prevalent in the West where people get pretty juvenile about it. The documentary showed how those who are considered mentally ill are put in "re-education" camps, like intellectuals and others who have divagated from the party line. They are given the teachings of Mao to contemplate. Mental health is interpreted as being adjusted to collective life. It provides a common base for men and women to commune with, getting out of themselves and their inner disturbances.

Another method for curing psychological problems is a bullet in the back of the head. That's how they got rid of thousands of opium addicts (an offshoot of British business practices).

There is a stereotype of Asians being like automatons. The French-Vietnamese receptionist told me that Vietnamese aren't very emotional. She was explaining why her Filipino boyfriend thought she was an ice cube. I wonder if that goes along with an anti-psychological view of things. Maybe they are less inclined to wear their feelings on their sleeve. If you don't know the language of another people, they will seem more distant when you're left out of the discourse.

This country was drenched in Christianity with its psychological burden of guilt and original sin. Non-Christian Asians have eluded that. The lack of guilt would seem to make them less neurotic. Japan, for example, has a tiny fraction of the lawyers, psychiatrists, and homicides that we have in this country.

Meanwhile, Ming. She will spend hours counseling some fellow she was close to, maybe sleeping with for a while, but which for her was not romantic. More like comrades who relieve each other's tension. I remember a line she had about considering the "cost-benefit ratio" of a relationship. That is not the stuff of great poetry, although it rhymes with "no show."

I'm probably too psychological. It's something I drag around behind me like a parachute on lines. It holds me back and probably scares off a few women. What's that billowing behind you? That is my inflated psychological interpretation of everything. Sometimes it's a drag.

Where was I? Thursday night. I called B. She was sorry she missed the trial. Her life is in its usual swirl of distractions. There is so much orbiting around her that she loses track of what is superficial and what is worthwhile. She said there was a party Sunday night.

I was on the typewriter for an extended non-stop session. There was a lot on my mind, given the trial and other things. It was a downpour of a couple of thousand words. Coffee and cigarettes. A bottle of wine went from full to empty. You wrestle with the typographic ghost of language, getting a head lock on a stream of consciousness. It throws you off. Is the mind wrestling with itself, an isometric struggle? It's a dialogue of opposing forces, forcing out the poses while a synthesis is hitting the page. The physical strain of such an effort is one reason I go to the pool. It takes some stamina to type for several hours at a stretch.

I should mention that while typing, around midnight, there was a phone call from the ex in Olympic Valley near Lake Tahoe. There was a slight delay in her manner of

speaking, a little slurred. I can't remember the last time I spoke with her sober. She asked how I was doing. I mentioned the trial which got her attention, but it was futile going into it. She thanked me for sending her mail, and was apologetic about not coming for a visit before she went to Europe. She is leaving Monday with her forty-two-year-old fiancé from Austria. She also apologized for not returning any of the loan from seven months ago (a few hundred). She said she wasn't working. Then hesitating, she asked again about sending me an invitation to the wedding. I said it's hard for me to plan ahead.

4:00 a.m. I was about to go to sleep when I heard a DJ on the radio (KUSF). He said something about tickets to the Bridge. I called and got through. Turned out it was for Bondage-A-Go-Go. I should have said I couldn't go, I'm all tied up. Too bad the ex won't be in town. I could take her there and leave her handcuffed to the bar. However, she might like it.

Friday, May 28, 1993

NOTES

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION BY A JUDGE

The fellow received a Ph.D.
from somewhere in psychology
and then, perhaps in deference to
a change in income, he decided
to study law. Eventually
he published something in a legal
review concerning the pressing issue
of nonverbal communication
on the part of judges, which I
took to mean a firm vocabulary
of the gavel.
I was
mystified and drinking Chinese
beer at a very verbal dinner

party and hardly spoke to him.
He didn't go into it, except
to say his theories had been proven
and if prosecuting and
defense attorneys wanted to know
which way the legal wind was blowing
they could check his findings on
the trial-and-error connotations
of his Honor's posture and the
various points that he's connecting
with his educated limbs,
the fine points of the law.
You know that,
for example, if he brings
a finger to his neck and jerks it
across, the case may not be going
well.
A gesture of the fist
in which the thumb is pointing down
can also be interpreted.
And during a long involvement with
forensic psychiatry if he should
point a finger at his temple,
make a revolving motion with the
said alleged digit of his
dignity and then direct it
towards the accused, one is in
the presence of a communicated
judgment. The question is if it's
involuntary. What is the
interpretation if the judge
has fallen asleep? And has the legal
system really become so deep,
or should I say insidious, that
a lawyer's inside information
has to do with getting inside
a judge's robes?
Your Honor I
respectfully submit that in the
interests of my client and
if it would please the court that any
movement of your Honor's hand
inside his state-appointed robe
be verified as evidence for a
mistrial.
Motion denied.

The very
impartiality of a judge,
in light of which he figuratively
has a blindfold on, would then
imply that he's beyond the scrutiny
of a beady-eyed attorney
or he should be. Is the judge a
legal windsock, with the allegations
of an illegality
blowing through his robes in one
direction or another, depending
on his own opinion, which
can tell a dim attorney if he should
bring his case in for a landing
or to circle the field and hope
the weather changes?
Will they have to
put a judge behind a one-way
window or a two-way mirror,
implying the attorneys should
reflect on their position? They have
already gotten to the jury
whose selection is a matter of
market research, looking for a
gullible audience, weeding out the
biased on the basis of a
haircut, economic background,
and the use of high-paid specialists
who can determine what the
body language of a civilian
may foretell.
It doesn't strike
a legal bell, or even a
democratic one. Has jurisprudence
turned into a lurid impudence,
and having choked communication
in its legal jargon
is it looking into methods
of nonverbal communication,
and to signal for a recess
would require semaphore?

The legal hand-off has been getting
out of hand. Will they bring
a palm reader in for help in jury
selection, with the legal system

giving the back of its hand to all of us
peers of the realm? The long arm of
the law with nothing on the end of it
but the judgment of a palmist
and a Psalm.

I was something of a wreck in the morning. Not enough sleep, maybe five hours. Whole waterfalls of language have been pouring through the ceiling these days. I can barely keep up with my own mind. No wonder the place looks neglected, like a room in the Sturm Und Drang Hotel.

Breakfast at a greasy spoon on the corner. The Vietnamese who run it are friendly and polite, but it barely compensates for the clientele. I read the goofball newspaper. It leaves me in a state comparable to a shot of coke and heroin (I'm speculating here).

3:00 p.m. Went to work, and was sleepy in the office. I worked on someone's Last Will and Testament. "Being of sound mind and memory…."

I was in the lobby when Masson walked in, acting like a happy-go-lucky academic.[101] We had a few words about the trial. The jury was still out, so that was a good sign. They hadn't come to an immediate decision against him (a decision for him has to be unanimous). I wanted to ask a few questions. He mentioned getting the courtroom posters from his attorney. I asked him if he wanted the ones from the other

[101] Wanting to get my feet on the ground, and to counteract a wandering mind, I shied away from academia. There can be a false consciousness in an institution that reeks of security and self-importance. It is rarified in ways that seem hermetic and effete, and yet the results of being institutionalized are like a hydrofoil attached to your career. Your income and connections are accelerated. The intangible occupation comes with tangible results: a Porsche in the driveway and a Portia in your arms. [Note: As most academics would point out, my sense of proportion (vis a vis the spoils of academia) was warped when I wrote this. Years later it sounds like a sick joke, seeing as how professors have been downgraded and degraded by the system.]

side concerning “Masson’s memory,” or the lack of it. He smiled and said something about how he did it to himself.

I did some more work and then talked with the receptionist. This is her last day in the office. As I walked away she said, “I’ll call you.”

6:30 p.m. I walked to the pool. It’s in an international hotel that used to be the Y, which is why I run into so many foreigners there. I have seen Frenchmen who were unclear on the concept of regulated lanes, as they dove or jumped from one to another. There was a German fellow who brought his six-year-old daughter into the locker room. She took the shower next to mine and eyed me warily.

The lanes were full so I went into the weight room and worked out for a while. Returned to the pool. Compared to a weight machine the water is easy and I’m weightless. Towards the end there were two women speaking Japanese in the shallow end. We had a few words.

I did a few wind sprints in the water, then took a hot shower.

Walked out on a cool night, feeling fine - until I was on Hyde Street, walking across the street on a green light. A car pulled up, blocking the crosswalk though he had a red light. He was halfway into the intersection. I stood there by the driver’s window. According to him he had the right of way and I might as well have been invisible. Not inaudible, however, though his window was mostly shut. I said something about getting the fuck out of the way. A thin young Asian male who looked smug and complacent. I thought - maybe I was tired - of a lizard when it swallows a fly. Not reacting in the slightest, much less backing up. He moved forward into a right turn and could have run over my foot for all he cared, so I kicked the rear end as he passed. It is something I am

more inclined to do considering how often I am sideswiped by cars turning the corner. He slammed on the brakes about ten feet way, which was supposed to be threatening, then drove off slowly.

The last four or five times I've been sideswiped or nearly run over by cars turning the corner when I had the light the drivers were women - usually the bourgeois self-absorbed kind who glide up to a stop and look left, about to make a right turn, while I'm standing there about to cross since I have the light, and jump back or see how close the oblivious bitch will come to hitting me. Maybe I'm over-sensitive since I walk so much. One of these days someone is going to come too close or glide too far into the crosswalk and I'm going to leap forward and roll across the hood and windshield, landing on my feet on the other side, having shocked the driver who hopefully isn't armed.

Another night of bebop journalism.

2:00 a.m. Went to sleep.

Saturday, May 29, 1993

Finally had a good night's sleep. Typing for hours.

Read the paper. I have a pathological preoccupation with the written word. You lock into the current – it's the only way to make it work – but on that plane it's like you're standing ten or twenty feet above the rest of your life in its ongoing maintenance. You can see the place is a mess, the garbage in the kitchen, and you know you need a shower curtain, maybe a broom. But you're not motivated, you inhabit another plane of mental motivations and you're less inclined to tangle with mundane concerns.

I wonder if the medium has a built-in tendency for being removed, if not remote from daily life. There are notions of the writer in his ivory tower, or what a friend last year referred to as my "self-made pedestal," as in, "I want to knock you off of your…." Sometimes it feels like I walk around on literary stilts with the precarious balance of a writer. It would explain a few things. If one is on mental stilts it makes it harder to pick up something off the floor or take out the garbage.

Some of us are sustained and entertained by living with a jet stream of incoming information via the written word. It can heighten your existence with the fuel injection of a carburetor brain.

I sat at the typewriter while a few white clouds floated over the desk. A gull careened past the window. The radio changes direction on its own.

A writer keeps the ordinary in the corner of his eye. I've heard that things are seen more clearly at a slant. I'm having close encounters with the common denominators in the Tenderloin.

I think of people who are physical first and mental second. Others who are mental first and physical second. If I was stuck in the latter category or persuasion, would I be out of sync with those in the first? A speculation by a man with too much time on his hands, or not enough hands to follow up on what he has in mind.

4:30 p.m. I lay down on the mattress under the window and pulled the old Mexican blanket over my head. *Mirabile dictu*, I fell asleep. Not that I wanted to blow the next two hours, but the mattress is next to the window on a noisy street, one reason I sleep in the hall.

6:30 p.m. Coming to with an otherworldly calm, the after-effects of a deep dream. It felt like my metabolism had put its foot down, trying to move in further and relax as if there was a woman here. Maybe I am married to oblivion or the subconscious. I thought I would head over to the sound-room, but as the evening wore on I was less and less inclined. Feeling right at home, my mind more clear than it has been for a while.

I called the Actress. A long conversation, over an hour. Talking about the trial and some related tangents, from false memory to the seduction theory. There was some discussion of whether inviting exes to your wedding is in poor taste. She plans to interrogate whatever women her fiance invites to theirs in September.

I mentioned B.'s trip to Mexico and her letter in a local paper. How do other cultures respond to a "lone woman traveler"? She mentioned a mutual acquaintance, and said some women go to Cabo San Lucas with the intention of getting laid by one of the locals, like a muscular young man on Gigolo Beach, a Latin lover who they treat like a walking vibrator. But only men objectify the opposite sex. Maybe the locals have been getting some ambiguous signals.

She was on a beach in Mexico and met some eighteen-year-old males with full-grown bodies. They were half her age and it was absurd in her opinion. Not that she was above a rendezvous on a moonlit beach, but he never showed up.

Sometime after eight I turned down the opera (*Salome*) and had a long workout on a wooden stringed instrument. Further evidence of being in a special state of mind.

10:00 p.m. On a whim I turned on the tube, Channel 9, *Hot Summer Wind*, an hour-long film of Japanese working on their own farm in California in 1934. My initial lack of interest faded in a few minutes.

11:30 p.m. On the typewriter for a few hours. Coffee. One or two beers. I'm verging on a gridlock of subjects and ideas in my head. I'm not sure if it's a side-effect of an expanded awareness, or if it qualifies as such. Does an expanded awareness mean you spread yourself too thin? Am I "condemned to prose" in order to cover it all? I'm not in the "have it all" category. Sometimes I want to know it all, but I have bitten off more than I can choose. Sitting at the typewriter and exchanging right hooks and left jabs with a high-powered subject.

You see what happens when you gravitate to a dimension where the articles in the news are loaded with significance and things are so damned interesting. The proliferation of this tendency is getting out of hand. It snowballs, and I go to work in the afternoon to get my mind off writing.

I haven't mentioned Ming's letter from Anchorage, an edifying side-effect of Saturday. She finally called the ex in Squaw Valley and heard about her wedding in October, a subject she was damning with faint mention. There was a lot more attention to the mountains levitating in shrouds of mist, and she was sliding on her butt down "virgin snow." She covered five sides of yellow legal paper, handwritten.

She had a lot to say, going through some soul searching near the Arctic Circle. A constant preoccupation with getting focused, and wasn't sure if it requires such dorky things as "better self-management." Ever hear of "self-talk"? No, tell me about it. All of this in a letter where she talked about walking barefoot through moss and lichens, squishing berries, and picking flowers. There was something about burning fish lips (which you light as candles). Maybe she will catch a 45-pound King salmon. She met "an Eskimo from Iliak named Mabel," and they discussed "native living."

The woman is richly imbued with her being in the world, and close to nature or a sensual existence. Nature can leave you swamped. It is known for its cruelty and camouflage. It is enough to make someone find refuge in "positive internal programming." Some women gravitate to artificial guidelines, because they have an urge to wallow in a warm amoeba-like continuum of physical sensation. It might explain those women who barely conceal their scorn for those who let themselves go, whether they are forty pounds overweight or sleeping with whoever is available. When I hear a woman referred to as a cow, it's usually another woman saying it.

In reference to the ex: "Marriage is such a drastic step, one that I couldn't even dream of… How does this feel for you?" Her feelings in general are so "tied together that many become consequently convoluted, messy and confusing." She ended with "I love you."

Another page was added on, talking about how strange it was to be in the constant presence of a celibate male companion who got her a job. They live in a trailer. When she was here she could choose whoever she wanted to hang out with, and there she can't. Even worse, he is "completely different" from her. "Man, it's different… I'm learning a lot about myself. Did you know that I'm not terribly patient?" No. I also didn't know the earth is round.

With respect to her mixed feelings: she is pushing twenty-four, old friends are getting married, and how come she is not inclined or finds it so impossible? She is reluctant to see my ex-girlfriend in a realistic light when it comes to using men. Not that the ex doesn't like them, but it makes you wonder when it requires copious amounts of

beer to float her seemingly authentic affections. “I hope you can be happy for her too.” I’m happy that she lives a few hundred miles away.

While Ming has messed up more men than the ex has, it’s their fault for not adhering to the male stereotype of being cold-blooded. I heard a young woman say it doesn’t matter what she does to men because they have no feelings. For that matter, I walked by a couple of high school students (near my old apartment) with the girl taunting the boy and saying, “I can touch you, but you can’t touch me!”

I was up until the dawn, and encountered *That Uncertain Feeling* along the way, a satire on psychoanalysis.[102]

Sunday, May 30, 1993

NOTES

On the ex, how it used to be (an excerpt):

Wine and spirits, being hers and mine,
a free delivery of the spoken line
and the unspoken is another thing.
The energy coming through her face in its
entirety and he is having fits
when he listens to a German singing
with a synthesizer and it’s tearing
off his insulation. It accumulated
through the months of not even caring
if he was alone, and now the room
is feeling radio-active. When you fall
in love a lot of songs are on your side
and offering sound advice if you could call
it that. They later took their love outside.

A session of communicating thighs,
where both of them attain another size
and more than a rehearsal of the senses

[102] Ernst Lubitsch (1941)

or an exercising of their own
capacity for living. It commences
with a warm collision and a flown
resistance. Taking several minutes just
to come in from the door, although they must,
and their collusion can facilitate
a fusion of their sympathetic weight,
and in the course of several hours making
love as many times or maybe more.
It's indefinable as they are taking
liberties by the minute, bed, and floor.

1:00 p.m. Ran out of ribbon last night when I was typing, "I wouldn't say you outgrow love…" It faded on the word "love." I was looking at a Sunday afternoon without the use of the typewriter.

I walked to some Latino madness on Mission Street. Floats and feathers and hallucinatory kitsch. The walk itself was a revelation of what is out there. On 9th Street you can find erotic cakes, the Climate Theater, and musical instruments.

I arrived at the end of the parade route. I had missed a lot, but it kept on coming. Samba zombies. Women whose inhibitions have been customized by the percussion. Bursting into view were women looking like Las Vegas showgirls strutting down 14th Street with a heavy drum beat. They wanted to make their presence felt, and to punctuate the impact of their being in the world, or being here at any rate.

Women in G-strings. They walk around with a few wispy flourishes of discretion and floral cups which barely manage to cup a breast. Some women are tired of having to restrain themselves in public, and here was an occasion where they didn't have to. They were living out a fantasy complete with feathers growing out of their heads while strutting down the middle of the street, half-naked and shaking their boobs, doing a

shimmy with their bare behinds and no one bothered them or made advances. They were celebrating their immunity which lasts for several hours.

Women of all races, but with most of them Latina. I wouldn't say it was a loosening of morals, but a loosening of notions of the ideal body type. They are wives and mothers and daughters who were reenacting a ritual that goes back to the prehistoric. It is simple and effective: the women of the tribe wear feathers and glitter and shake their butts while promenading with percussion.

There was more to this than female pulchritude on Mission Street. There were plenty of men in the parade, beating drums or doing Aztec dances. There were wacko floats, in case you wondered if hallucinogens were common in the community. The factions kept on coming with the stoic air of those who look bizarre or dignified, like the Peruvian contingent. There was a float that floated all the way from Brazil.

It was ironic. My typewriter breaks down and I'm communing with the body psychotic, going from the private to the extremely public. The parade stops here, and some of the participants were standing around. A row of girls leaned against the wall, dark-haired women with a Polynesian theme. Grass skirts and nothing above the waist except for two coconut shells on their chest.

I walked a couple of blocks to the booths. There was a large crowd with fumes of cooking and a Mexican band onstage with an endless salsa tune. I used to live in an old factory which was converted into studios with huge windows and high ceilings. It loomed a block away, Project Artaud. There was another factory on the corner, but now it's an empty lot. I noticed a short dark-haired young woman with a lot of style: a Spanish-

looking hat, short jacket, boots, and a see-through chiffon skirt with a G-string under it. The contours of her bottom were visible and in motion.

I left the area, walking to the Guitar Center on Mission and Ninth. It was chaos in the store, like everyone was talking at once, except it was half a dozen guys testing out electric guitars at the same time. One or two of them had the heavy metal formulas down. I pulled a guitar off the wall, a used Fender Telecaster. It was something, especially when plugged into a Marshall amp. Turned out to be an original '69 with Humbucker pickups for $1600.

An electric guitar (wrote "eclectic") is more than just a guitar, like a word processor has more to it than a typewriter. Some guys know that instinctively and play its sound effects as much as the instrument itself. I may have to fall back on singing. I tried an SRV (Stevie Ray Vaughn) Fender with a metallic sound, not bad.

Took a bus to the Haight and picked up a typewriter ribbon. I went to All You Knead and had some lousy French onion soup, then walked to the flat around 5:30, thinking of the sound-room. The Phantom wasn't there, and when he did show up he was tired. The two other roommates had rented a movie. I ended up watching *Article 99* about a Veterans Administration hospital. Who needs nightmares?

A scene in the X-ray room, a young male doctor and female psychiatrist have been warming to each other after some initial friction. He invited her there for a drink and said, "Anything else I can get you?" She said, "Yes, I need to get laid," and started to unbutton her shirt. Then she paused, surprised, because he was hesitating. Maybe it was unexpected, or he was thinking of something more romantic, rather than some quick physical therapy and back to work, which is all she had in mind.

Some women can do that when the current is coming in their direction. All they have to do is start unbuttoning their shirt while expecting something to happen. Most men can unbutton their shirts all day long in front of women who would stare blankly, if not walk away, when a man said something witty like, "I need to get laid." More than once I have resisted a woman. I lived to regret it later when I was alone and remembered when there was a woman lying there without her shirt on and I sat there talking or went to sleep. We were probably out of sync, like I didn't know her very well or like her that much, which seems to put the damper on making love.

If there is a naked woman lying in front of you, you're not supposed to care about the chemistry. That's good for short-term situations, but I'm going long. It is the equivalent of someone who can run a mile, but not the hundred-yard dash. Those who're geared to the dash can't run a mile to save their lives. They get worn out and distracted.

8:00 p.m. I took a bus to the Tenderloin in a light rain.

10:00 p.m. On the typewriter, and not in the mood for going out. Then B. called from the party she mentioned before. She said it was a good one and I should be there. I thought about it. There was the usual resistance to anything that would divert me from the typewriter. It was raining and the party was across town, somewhere south of Army Street. I didn't get much sleep last night, and so forth. A few minutes later I had changed my shirt, put on a half-decent coat and was out the door. It occurred to me that I've been writing overtime, and there have been precious few parties lately. Also, she said the French anesthesiologist was there, back from a year in Paris.

I took a cab and floated across town in the backseat. There are advantages to a cab compared to having a car. You don't have to worry about parking, and for the cost of a

car you could take cabs every day. I was dropped off on a shady tree-lined street with old houses. The fellow whose birthday it was came to the door in a tux of some kind. He thought I was someone else, but we are acquainted. He is in B.'s entourage and carries a torch for her. A complex fellow who is short, barrel chested, melodramatic, and good with motorcycles. I think he is black and Russian.

It was one of those evenings, beginning with the cab, where everything falls into your lap. Things are clicking, running smoothly, like you walked into a horn of plenty. When we went up the wooden stairs outside, he said they were having trouble getting rid of all the wine and liquor. There were some lightweights there. I said I would do what I can to help out.

And there she was, the French anesthesiologist sitting on the porch, talking with a woman. I went right past her into a dark room with music and some dancing. B. was hovering around the records as she often does. I found some wine and cased the joint, a long flat with polished wood, a piano in the front room, and pictures. A lot of style, but not stuffy. It felt like I was in another country. I walked back out, talking with some fellow I know, and caught the eye of the French woman who was sitting there. She stood up with an air of recognition and our conversational close encounter went on for quite a while as we ignored the rest of the party. She leaned against the wall with a glass of white wine. The lower half of her was slanting out in an insouciant manner, a slender woman with straight black hair, a wide mouth, and the humorous ease of a professional. She wore black jeans and a dark shirt with antique buttons.

I think she is about thirty or thirty-two. She said she had been in school for nearly ten years, becoming an anesthesiologist at UCSF. She is back here "forever," and we

were reacquainted in a minute. Science versus writing and music. I'm impressed with those who study science, although she said that scientific writing is boring (including her own). I remember her telling me what a logical mind she had. She also said she's not a good cook and was a little drunk.

That may have added to her familiarity, and she asked about my writing. She is a little mystified at 1) the medium itself, the motivation, and 2) how come I wasn't doing anything with it. Those are questions that leave me mystified as well. Maybe I'm a mystery writer, with the mystery being: what's the point? At some point, apropos of what I don't remember, we were free-associating. She has the finest mental circuits and a low voice, but she never heard of Marcel Duchamp. A French woman, no less. That took me a while to process.

We had our glasses filled a couple of times by the host, who was on his way to getting well-oiled and increasingly melodramatic. He was turning thirty-seven. We sat on the porch in the warm night air with wet branches. There were a few others, including for a while the guy she came with. I'm not sure of their relation. She seems detached from him, who is possibly a doctor. Polite, sardonic, and well educated, but he seems to have an unrealized potential - like a dilettante who never produces anything, he just thinks about it. By comparison I've been in the coal mines of literary production for years.

B. joined us with her usual exuberance, a woman who loves parties and seems to orchestrate her life to make sure she knows when and where a party is going on. They correspond to how her mind works, a chaotic whirl where the fountains of wine and music, conversation and affection, flow into the night. She likes to keep it light, however, whether the music or the conversation, and is sometimes at odds or out of sync with her

friends. One woman, D., had kneeled on the floor and stopped the chatter in order to say something profound to the host. She traced her fingers on his chest, saying something about pulling his heart out and what would she find. B. was not in the mood for this, much less having to be quiet while another woman talked. D. is a blonde Hungarian with an accent. She wore a long red dress with a tight waist, in her mid-to-late thirties with a low voice, and was dramatic as the hard-drinking host.

He was annoyed at B. for interrupting D. (he might prefer some B & D). When they first met (at a party a while back), she said to B., "You look like you haven't had an orgasm in a long time."

The French woman was amused by all of this, the host having been moaning and yelling things. He didn't care if he lived another day, and being a little odd the only woman who would ever like him would have to be pretty strange herself. He managed to maintain a drunken weird formality.

D. turned to the French woman, apropos of something in this vein, and said, "What do you call a woman without an asshole?" She then repeated it, with the French woman not sure she understood the question. The answer being: "Single." Not sure she understood the answer either.

12:30 a.m. She was leaving with her escort, and we kissed each other on both cheeks. Then she was gone. I gravitated to the dark room. B. can dance all night, but had some trouble finding the right music. I went through the records and pulled out a couple which got her approval, like David Bowie's greatest hits (from "Space Oddity" to "Suffragette City") and moved around with a glass of wine in my hand. Speaking of anesthetics, I was feeling no pain.

Everything was hunky dory until around one or so when the self-obsessed and celibate actress (Phoebe) arrived with a male escort who may not know what he's in for. B. has a crush on her, but is continually rebuffed. She said hello to everyone, then grabbed the host, I suppose to say happy birthday. He said something (I heard later) about his sperm not being good enough for B. We don't know what Phoebe said in response, but a minute later the host walked calmly over to a table in the room where we were dancing, picked up one bottle or glass after another and started throwing them end-over-end through a wide doorway into the kitchen. The bottles and glasses went crashing into the far corner, making quite a racket. B. was so bothered that she got her coat and wanted to leave.

He quit after a while and disappeared. I took it all in stride. I am not unfamiliar with the sentiments. He punctuated the occasion of his being a year older and women looking more impossible than ever. I went into the kitchen, careful with the broken glass and alcohol all over the floor, and found a bottle of rum. It was half full on the counter, sitting amongst the debris. I poured a glass and sat down at a table, surveying the damage with a certain satisfaction. A woman roommate walked in, looking pretty calm herself in a tight mini-dress. It was a propitious moment. I was surrounded by the wreckage of someone else's nervous breakdown while sipping rum.

I should have gotten to know her, but my ride was leaving. I went out. The host was on the sidewalk, acting like nothing happened. I walked to the car, a white Cadillac, and got in the front seat - the driver in his fifties and distinguished looking, an inveterate party-goer who lives in Oakland. B. was in the backseat with her male escort. I forgot to

mention him, one of the men she has been stringing along with as much guilt as eye shadow.

We dropped off her escort in the Mission, then drove to my place. It is not far from hers, but I'm in a much worse area. The driver pulled up to the corner and let me out within spitting distance of a couple of hookers, one of them the man who looks like Kim Novak, or would if you were drunk enough.

Monday, May 31, 1993

Memorial Day. No work (the dead don't work). A lot of veterans are out of work. I was feeling the after-effects from last night and not enough sleep. I read the paper and typed for a while. Caught the last quarter of the Chicago game, with Michael Jordan on his way to scoring 54.

4:00 p.m. I realized a warm afternoon was in progress, and the clouds were evaporating. I thought I would go to the sound-room by way of the ocean. I took a bus to 25th Avenue, then walked half a mile to the beach.

If I took the beach more seriously, I might go earlier. At this hour most of the people have gone. I walked to the far end where the cliffs touch the water, exposing some wave-polished rocks at the water's edge. It's less windy there. There were a few people, more men than women, with open sand and coastal views. A few clouds over the Marin headlands to the north. Everything was clear and magnified, whether a freighter headed out to sea or a woman going nowhere.

I lay on a towel for a while, then walked down to the water in a swimsuit. I don't mind the local custom of a clothing-optional beach, but I don't walk around like that

when I'm alone. I tried running without a swimsuit here, thinking of the ancient Olympics and wondering what it was like. My cock was bouncing back and forth against my legs and starting to get aroused, if only to resist the abuse. I had to walk back to my towel and wait for things to subside.

I ran on wet sand down the beach and back, feeling a release, like there were anti-gravity wings on my heels. The water was cold. It took me a while, standing knee-deep in the infinite, before I dove into a wave. A minute later, floating on my back and admiring the view, I realized a large wave was on the verge of falling on me. They break steep on this beach with a disconcerting riptide. I dove under it at the last second.

A few minutes later I swam back to shore, feeling the undertow trying to pull me out to sea, and lay on the towel with no hypothermia to speak of. I had some pineapple-coconut juice and trail mix, followed by a cigarette.

I noticed two people sitting near the water with their backs to me. A young man and woman. He was bareback with a short boyish haircut and long pants. Then he turned to the side and I saw a low-slung breast. Turned out they were a lesbian couple. The one with a boy's haircut was sitting while the feminine woman with long hair and lingerie went for a swim. When she returned, she struggled to remove her top underneath a towel, being circumspect while her companion had her shirt off like a man would.

Late in the day with not many people left. Two women arrived, walking close to the cliff. One was a light-skinned black woman, the other pale and Rubenesque. The black woman took off her clothes and lay on her back, a full-figured woman in her twenties. This was too much for a black man who had been standing by the rocks with a couple of his buddies in street clothes. He approached her, kneeling rather close, and God

knows what his line was, but she didn't move a muscle. I'm not even sure she opened her eyes while lying there. He finally went away, joining his friends who were leaving. One of them was looking back with binoculars.

I had had enough. Two hours is my limit. I put my clothes on, walked over to the rocks where the waves were being shattered into airborne droplets. There was a ridge about eight feet high running down to the water. On the other side was a ravine full of raging currents. At other times of the year it is full of sand and you can walk across it. I'm not sure how the waves replace the sand. There were a few Latino guys in their street clothes sitting on the rocks with their beer and leaving the empties. They stare at women like they're at the scene of an accident. A woman's body is profound and not to be taken lightly, much less ignored, when lying on the beach.[103]

I stood on the rocks and was hit by the wind. It blew me down the beach and up to the road and all the way to Geary where I caught a bus to the flat with the sound-room.

7:00 p.m. The Phantom was there, hauling in a bass amp. He hooked it up to a beat-up Strat, having replaced a string. Not a bad sound. I went from the ocean to sound waves, and worked out on the guitar for an hour.

He was helping a friend of his move into one of the rooms. Later we went downstairs into the garage and the sound-room. I thought it was to hook up the equipment, but he wanted to hear an old tape he made. Erratic and experimental with meandering guitar notes and loony incoherent vocals. The sort of thing you drift in and out of, or maybe the music drifted in and out of its reason for being. One minute it sounds like Quicksilver Messenger Service, and the next you're wondering how long this will go

[103] There's a Mexican film (*Maria Candelaria*, 1944) which is set in an area "inhabited mostly by indigenous people" in 1909. A young woman (Dolores del Rio) is accused of posing nude for a painting and is stoned to death by the villagers.

on. We never got around to playing. He was downing beers, one after another, and was stoned. He needs to bottom out in a zombie state, and then he doesn't care what happens. I think he's trying to reproduce the effect of being on acid, reaching for it by way of beer and pot.

I left around 11 p.m. and returned home a little worn-out, if not brain-dead. Nothing like the beach and a sound-room to bring on that effect. A recording studio has built-in methods of killing time. Communing with the equipment is the reason for being there (according to some), while making music is of secondary concern. Sitting at a typewriter doesn't look very exciting, but some big and little gears are turning inside the writer's head. In other mediums, people stand around doing nothing for hours.

When I was listening to the Phantom's tape I wondered if psychosis is an end in itself, or a context for the down and out. It reminds me of the Tenderloin, where the less you have the more noise you need to verify your existence.

I ended up with a neo-poetic effort, "The mind is one of the finer shock absorbers known to mankind." Short lines in a disjointed format, which is more plausible when I'm tired.

This afternoon I was in a smoked chair, staring out the window at an apartment building a block away.[104] It's a high-rise made of concrete boxes, each with a balcony and a glass sliding door. I did a panning shot across the simultaneous lives of the occupants. There was a lot of junk on the balconies, and the place looks lived in.

1. A younger man walking back and forth in a bare white room, sometimes with nothing on.

[104] A year later I was sleeping with a woman in that building. I had moved back to my old place by then, but haunted the Tenderloin for several years while having an affair with a woman called Daytona Beach.

2. An older man with a big stomach and his shirt off, rearranging stuff on the balcony.

3. A dark-skinned little girl in a white dress doing twirls and spins and pirouettes.

4. The silhouette of someone on the seventh floor, leaning over the railing and looking down.

5. The silhouette of an occupant projected on the curtain and magnified, as if a shadow giant lives there.

6. A sliding door is open and a breeze parts the curtain.

I watched nothing in particular for a few minutes (it's better than television), until it felt vicarious, like when you concentrate on someone else's life instead of your own. It leaves you feeing drained. I don't think it's voyeurism if the windows are in plain sight and there isn't much to look at. I can imagine the neurotic pull of voyeurism, though, like someone who needs to be reminded of the "pathos of distance"[105] while seeing other people as an endless diversion.

During the year I spent in Europe with the French-speaking Belgian woman (1975-76), we had the use of an art deco apartment in Nice for a few weeks (belonging to her grandmother). It was on the Promenade des Anglais,[106] which ran along the beach. There was a man on the sidewalk who would spend hours scanning the windows of the apartments across the street. I think he was trying to catch a glimpse of someone half-undressed. He was so neurotically intent on this pursuit he had a crick in his neck, and yet behind him on the beach were women walking around topless.

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[105] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (1886)

[106] It was funded by the local English colony in 1822. I went into the British library one afternoon. There were two old Englishmen complaining about the present state of civilization and feeling relieved that they wouldn't be around much longer. I was on the Riviera in my early twenties and not ready to die.

In the German movie, *Wings of Desire*, the camera slowly zooms in through the windows of anonymous apartments, moving in and out of the lives of the occupants with the otherworldly physics and enlightenment of an angel. I haven't risen to that level yet.

Two nights later, around midnight, there were noises on the street. A woman was having a loud argument and swearing at someone. Fuck this and fuck that. I finally went to the window. Across the street was a white woman in a black skirt, nylons, and a bra. She was rather buxom, and held a black sweater which she had taken off and was swinging her purse at a black man with whom she was arguing. She hit him once or twice and stomped off. He followed, trying to calm a woman who was not only drunk or drugged, but angry and hysterical and not concerned about herself or anything. She wandered into the intersection like she didn't know where she was. Her emotions were taking up the whole street. They required both lanes, as well as the suspension of traffic laws when she walked up Hyde Street going the wrong direction on a one-way street. (It reminded me of a lingerie ad from the 1950's: "I dreamed I stopped traffic in my Maidenform bra.")

Tuesday, June 1, 1993

In the office, working on the DUI case of a guy in his twenties who was driving his father's car. He was going 80 miles per hour with a blood alcohol count of .19 (the legal limit is .08). I filled out an Application and Order In Support of Order to Show Cause.

Working a couple of desks away was Gloria, a secretary for another attorney. She is about nineteen, from the Philippines, and more alive than most, not to mention adept or

she wouldn't be here. Gloria was on the phone with her young husband. They were just married, and already having arguments or adjustment problems having to do with how he treats her in public. She had to go over this point with him. "You promise you won't tease me in front of your mother? You promise… say it. Come on. Say it." She was adorable in her concern and patience, with an undercurrent of maturity from the sounds of it. Behavioral engineering when the honeymoon is over.

Stendhal, one of the fathers of the psychological novel, admitted how much he learned from listening to women and observing how they operate.

The minute I start idealizing women I remember a phone call from Tanya, the reformed alcoholic who is half-black. She said she had been in a couple of high-speed chases. The police? No, that sort of thing was behind her. Some black girls in a car – she won't call them women since they don't deserve it. They thought she cut them off, and were screaming and swearing at her through the window, wanting to fight.

I was walking home the other night when a car full of black girls went by with "Sexual Healing" on loud. They were yelling things out the window. A young black woman was walking ahead of me and turned, the car already past, and said, "They didn't call me a bitch, did they? Disrespecting me like that… I'll fight those bitches…."

The masculine and feminine stereotypes are being deconstructed if not uninstructed as we wander in a wilderness of androgyny. What happens when the idealized roles are abandoned? A certain feminine ideal, whatever its other faults, might discourage women from engaging in high-speed chases while swearing and picking fights. They're like ex-virgins who are auto-sodomized by their own banality.

A couple of days ago a black man with two kids in a pickup, a girl of eight and a boy of five, made a wrong turn and drove into a white neighborhood. A couple of white delinquents yelled racial remarks and made threats. The driver had a few words and one of the delinquents pulled a gun and fired a few shots. The little boy was shot through the eye and is in critical condition. The girl had a bullet through her cheek but is expected to recover. The man was wounded, but will survive. You can imagine the protest demonstrations by the black community, with people marching on the street where it occurred.

There won't be any demonstration, however, because I reversed the races. The shooter was black and those in the pickup truck were white, which is to say it didn't get a lot of attention. There are no white people marching in protest through Richmond. For that matter, the only mention of it the next day (having caught the shooter, he's fifteen) was on the back page of the local news and editorials section, above the obituaries. They're not even sure this qualifies as a hate crime, and there was no mention of it in a follow-up article. Think of the mileage that someone like Al Sharpton would have gotten out of this if the shoe was on the other foot, but no use blaming him if white people aren't organized. They operate with the assumption that the government is all the organizing a community needs. Think again.

Last year 104 people were shot and 46 died in Richmond (a town north of Berkeley and east of San Quentin), compared to 74 shooting deaths in all of Japan. Maybe that's what happens when people are more extroverted, they are less inclined to hold it in or sublimate it. It doesn't require a lot of thought to shoot a five-year-old boy in the head. The least amount of thought might turn you away from such an act, but why

hold back on your feelings when you can practice a leaden self-projection and become a nine-millimeter master of life and death?

There was a similar event not long ago with white people turning down the wrong street in San Francisco. A German woman was pulled from her car and beaten and robbed.

Wednesday, June 2, 1993

NOTES

Yelling "Theater!" in a crowded fire.

The excommunication of the "worshippers of stone."

What would Ezra Pound have to say about a civilization losing track of the written word, or losing track in other words? Writers need to tighten their linguistic screws before they fly off into generality and dogma (as I sometimes do).

I live in an ivory-colored tower of Montaigne in the Tenderloin. Three stories up with lots of windows, though the view is not of a rural estate in France. On the other hand, he suffered from kidney stones (and wrote about it in painful detail).[107]

Consider the concept of French amnesia from the Proustian angle of a remembrance of things past. There is a reluctance to remember the extent of their collaboration during World War II. *The Sorrow and the Pity*[108] was banned because it didn't conform to how the French want to see themselves, while thousands of French Jews can't see themselves at all.

[FLASHBACK - Feb. 16, 1993]

3:00 p.m. Went to work. It was one of those days when it's maddening in the office. I was caught between an ex-con, a manic-depressive who has been in and out of mental hospitals, and a sodden lump of an Attorney, slumped in his chair

[107] The father of the personal essay (1533-1592).

[108] Documentary by Marcel Ophuls on the mythic aspects of the French Resistance (1969).

with the heavy-lidded stare of a rhino up to his neck in a swamp of his own practice.

The ex-con is older than the Attorney, maybe sixty-nine compared to sixty-four, but with the energy that comes from pacing in a prison cell for four years, planning his revenge against the step-daughter who turned him in and robbed him blind when his wife died – and him with shady connections to organized crime. He was pacing back and forth in front of my desk while talking about some aspect of his case, since he can hardly get the attention of the Attorney who was half-asleep on the phone.

I was sitting at the typewriter, turned around, and the receptionist was standing there. She tried to phone but I was on the line with the Public Utilities Commission (a collision with an airport shuttle). I was pleasantly surprised - usually I am standing and she's sitting behind the front desk. She stood there calmly, wearing a tight sweater with a good figure, and I said, "Well, what can I do with you… I mean for you?"

She said the manic-depressive bum client of ours who has been living on the streets was waiting in the lobby and perhaps I could talk to him. He was making her nervous. This is the one who pissed on the floor of the lady's room the last time he was here, and also in the elevator.

I went out in the lobby and said to him, "Let's have a cigarette on the balcony." We went out there with a view from the 13th floor, and he pulled out some torn-up butts. I lit one for him and got into one of the strangest conversations I have had in a long time. Ten minutes later, walking back into the office, I was momentarily disoriented. You don't realize how much you rely on the sanity of others for supporting a consensus of what is real or normal, and those guideposts weren't there for our conversation.

Even more odd, he was talking in a business-like manner, sounding sure of himself, and a little impatient when others didn't realize what was going on or what he knows. His delirious observations were delivered in the same business-like tone of voice with comments taken from real life as it were. He was talking about the Attorney and getting a check cashed and what his parents did (he's in his late fifties), information which I knew to be true from the file. He even mentioned how much weight he's lost, also true, and where he slept last night in the Mission District, or was it on Mission Street itself.

The next minute he was talking about dead bugs coming out of his skin. There are sores all over his arms, and they're the source of his problems, the dead bugs in his skin. He pointed out a mark on his thumb, "That's where they come out," and muttered some things I've heard before. His brother-in-law is out to kill him, and his ex-girlfriend isn't real. "She could be an alien… anyone over forty-six is an alien… how old are you?"

He spent nineteen days in a mental hospital in Reno, or was it twenty-one days in a mental hospital somewhere else (Louisiana?), where they took "twenty layers off my head," or tried to. The man was unshaven with his hair sticking up, and wearing a dirty old suit – a client I have known for a year or two, usually talking on the phone when he was sedated. He often had a low drone of a voice, sounding bored, but it may have been the lithium. He put on a lot of weight, and was pushing 300 pounds. The case we were handling for him involved his falling off someone's porch steps (poor lighting). After endless maneuvers he collected a few thousand. In recent months his condition took a turn for the worse, with him refusing the lithium. He squandered his life savings on half-mad excursions across the country. He would jump on a plane and find himself in a strange city, stay in the best hotels, blow all of his money, and end up on the street. Later he would be in jail or a mental hospital for observation.

The check he was picking up this afternoon was the residual for a song his mother wrote the lyrics for ("Your Feets Too Big"),[109] for which he receives $15,000 a year. His father worked in television, and directed a few episodes of a famous western.

Meanwhile, there was some question as to why he had been left to his own devices, not so much a threat to others as a threat to himself, including getting beaten up or robbed. Who knows how long that $7500 would last (he gets two checks per year) if he had easy access to it? Are you better off being half-insane with money, or sane with no money?

An hour later he drifted back into the office without the Attorney, having lost him at the bank. He wanted to give me $100 for my efforts (whatever those amounted to). I realized if I wasn't comfortable with the mob-connected ex-con giving me $50 on the side (who would have been insulted if I refused it), I'd be even less comfortable taking money from a manic-depressive, so I changed the subject. "Yeah, those bugs are a problem…."

Later I was talking with V. at the next desk, a dark-haired angel who was looking at ads for legal secretaries. She wants to be one to improve her skills. "What's a floater?" She handed me some ads and I looked through them. ARE YOU ORGANIZED… FLEXIBLE… HOW ARE YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS? Are there women who're disorganized, inflexible, and don't communicate very well?

5:00 p.m. I went to the front desk to get my messages and the receptionist punched me. She was getting ready to leave, and it was her way of punching out.

[109]It was recorded by Fats Waller in 1939. He added my favorite line in the song, "Your pedal extremities are colossal…." He didn't even make it to forty (pneumonia), which is hard to fathom (so are those residuals for some child-like lyrics). A normal life-span would have put him in the 1960's, imagine that.

There was some question if she gave me her headache, what with hers having vanished (big smile).

Last night around 1:30 a.m. I went to the corner store across the street. It is managed by some Middle Eastern guys. They can be condescending, which is not surprising when you consider what they confront across the counter every day. I respect their low-key attitude and relative calm. They take whatever comes like they have seen worse, and a store in the Tenderloin is not as rough as some might think. They were amused when a little Mexican guy with his shirt open, bare chested, wanted to fight, but not in an angry way. One of them walked out on the sidewalk with him and they sparred for a minute, while an older black man at the counter tried to con the fellow out of a dime. Add a grotesque-looking hooker buying a 7-Up ("You Like It, It Likes You") and these late-night scenes take on a certain atmosphere. Odd dramas that you stumble on while holding a quart of apple juice.

There is a potential for violence in this part of town, but it is usually avoided. The Middle Eastern guys have a center of gravity which is not prone to flying off the handle or becoming paranoid. I think when people are down and out they are less dogmatic, and can't afford much in the way of guns and get-away cars. I see people of all races and persuasions rubbing shoulders on the street and not coming to blows. The black men selling used shirts are co-existing with poor whites and anyone else walking by, from Latino drag queens to Vietnamese students.

Thursday, June 3, 1993

High noon and there's a showdown outside. The sound of two women having an argument. It happens every day around here. The closer you are to destitution, the less privacy you have. There is less respect for the distinction of public and private, and people air their dirty linen in public when they have no home. Most of the people walking by have somewhere to go. There's an old brick building next to the vacant lot, and someone flinging empty cans out a window.

I was a wreck this morning, having been up until 4 a.m. last night. Typing, too much coffee, two beers, and not enough sleep. Now I had a *Wall Street Journal* from the office, and read an article, "Alfred Brendel on Beethoven."

> No one missed the spirit of gentle parody he brought to the G Major Sonata (Opus 31, No. 1) – not after previously hearing the pianist comment that when he played the trill-laden Adagio movement at La Scala recently, he tried to imagine that he was Cecilia Bartoli, the Italian coloratura mezzo-soprano known for her exquisite Rossini... He sees the sonata as Beethoven 'spoofing Rossini opera.'

I heard the woman yelling and swearing across the street and it didn't stop. FUCK YOU… DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND ENGLISH? GET AWAY FROM ME! I walked to the window and there was an enigmatic scene: a young woman in a black leather jacket and jeans looking like a street dyke. She was pushing at another woman who was pudgy with a pastel suburban look. A collision of lifestyles. For a minute it looked like they might square dance, but there was more screaming and yelling, mostly from the leather woman, while a third party looked on calmly or like he didn't know what to do - a man with long hair, baseball cap, jeans, and a goatee. He pushed a baby in a carriage. Considering how the leather woman pushed it away, and the other ignored it, I thought the carriage was empty. Then I noticed a little foot sticking out of a blanket and kicking.

The two women were having it out and the man was stuck with the kid. He didn't seem to mind. After a while he pushed the carriage down the sidewalk with the other two walking along with occasional outbursts of friction. They went around the corner and walked out of my life forever. I had no idea what it was about, if the two women were lovers or sisters, or even whose baby it was and which one of them was with the guy. I could imagine a situation where a suburban woman is worried about her leather jacket sister with an attitude of, "It's my life and it's a free country and it's none of your business if I'm using dirty needles."

I went back to reading about Beethoven:

> He contrasted the magnificent organization of Beethoven's music with the chaos of the composer's life: "There was a chamber pot under his piano… music scattered around the rooms, and his handwriting often looks like that of a madman!"

I wouldn't call that chaos. Papers have a way of getting scattered, handwriting has a mind of its own, and the chamber pot was convenient.[110]

Friday, June 4, 1993

Last night about 1:30 a.m. there was a bust down the street. I heard voices and police yelling at a man to put his hands on his head. I looked out the window. Given all the flashing lights it was quite festive. There were three police cars with their headlights going on and off. They had pulled someone over and had him handcuffed and in the backseat in no time. Then they went through his car. One of the officers was a woman. A few minutes later they were gone, like nothing happened.

[110] Brian Wilson, one of the founders of the Beach Boys, had a sandbox under his piano.

Headline in the morning paper: PAROLE VIOLATORS CAUGHT IN SWEEP OF S.F. STREETS. More than fifty "… were rounded up yesterday in San Francisco's Tenderloin and Mission District… 26 teams of undercover officers… of the 3700 parolees in the city, authorities have lost track of as many as 700. They set out to find the 150 most violent offenders." I live in a neighborhood with hundreds of violent offenders.[111]

An article next to it twisted me the wrong way, regarding the shooting of the father and his two kids. The little boy died. The father issued a statement from the hospital which downplayed the racial angle of the shooting. The black adolescent male who was "arrested for investigation of attempted murder" may not even be charged. It seems there is a problem with witnesses coming forth from the black community.

> Even with eight detectives piecing together evidence… police are not prepared to seek charges against the boy. Police cannot hold him more than 48 hours without him being charged with the crime. "It appears likely he will be released pending further investigation…"

On the other hand (an article next to it), a black man of twenty-one may have been romantically involved with a woman. He found out she was reconciling with her estranged husband, so he came around and started shooting, killing her and one of her young sons and wounding another. The husband and another daughter managed to not get shot. This was in San Jose. The woman was thirty-two. I'm trying to figure this out. Does

[111] Speaking of rough neighborhoods, my father spent a week on Skid Row in Chicago. It was in the mid-1960's, and being a left-wing Lutheran minister he thought he should see what it was like. He wore old clothes from Army surplus and was dropped off with only a few bucks. The area was pretty rundown and there were men lying on the ground in a drunken stupor, if not injured, and some of them were veterans. He accompanied another man through the worst part of Skid Row one night, but the man only risked it because he thought my father was a tough Army sergeant. He wrote about the experience in the local newspaper (the *Visalia Times-Delta*).

wounded pride = someone has to die? Women and children first? Is there such a thing as having too much pride, especially when it makes you stupid?

A man is on the run for shooting a woman and children. The article in the paper noted he should be considered dangerous. Good idea. In this morning's paper: his car was recognized in another town and there was a chase. He got out on the road with his gun and was soon shot. We'll see if charges of police brutality are brought.

I went to work, having finally had a good night's sleep.

In the office I spoke with someone connected to Morgan's office. There was a front-page article along with inside information regarding *Masson v. The New Yorker*. It looks like they will declare a mistrial. The jury was stuck in a confusing deadlock. One attorney said the paper had it wrong and was surprised I bothered to read it, the law having complications which are too subtle for mainstream journalism.

It amounted to the jury finding the five quotes to be "false and defamatory," (which I thought was a bit much, given the rest of the article where the quotes were backed up). You wonder if seeing those quotes in print affected their opinion, but they only held the journalist responsible for two of them. The others were too ambiguous, or they gave her the benefit of the doubt in not realizing their defamatory aspect. They deadlocked on the damages, from nothing to nearly half of the $7,000,000 being asked, with the curious decision of letting the co-defendant (the magazine with deep pockets) off the hook.

All of this time and effort and the whole thing will be tried with another jury or the judgment will stand. The question of damages will have to be retried since the jury couldn't agree on an amount.

5:30 p.m. I left with the Attorney gone, leaving a toxic note about his methods of dictation, and walked to the pool in a hurry. I wanted to catch the second half of the Bulls game. Swimming on an empty stomach is a rush, which is not to say I turned into a hydrofoil. One mile, and then one and a half lengths underwater. My lungs won't stay under for two lengths (132 feet). Hot shower with a déjà vu of the first time I came here and how good it felt. I don't have sore muscles anymore, if that implies a watery progress.

Walked home, picking up fish and chips.

7:30 p.m. Watched the game. The Bulls pulled it out, with Jordan not shooting very well. He's only human, another angle of which was brought out recently. He has a gambling problem, if that's the word for it. It isn't a problem if you win or can afford it. He managed to lose around $1,250,000 last year, but he makes $2,000,000 a month (including endorsements). He blew a month's wages, but I don't think his children will be going hungry.

9:00 p.m. On the guitar for a while, with the evening moving right along. Then the phone rang. The sense of things clicking smoothly shifted into a higher gear. Two weeks ago, I dropped in on a health food store near my old apartment, and was across the counter from a woman I have seen there now and then. We never had more than a few words, but she lingered in the back of my mind. I sensed that she was worth knowing and we might get along. I also felt sophomoric for living in a city full of people and finding it hard to communicate at times. However, the last thing a woman behind the counter wants is a man with ulterior motives.

A week ago I took the old-fashioned step of writing her a note, care of the store. It wrote itself according to who it was going to. I thought a minimum of bullshit would be a good idea. One thing I like about her, though I'm not sure how I know this, she is someone who will keep you honest.

I laid out the circumstances, with some passing mention of having been burned out of my home and moving to another part of town and wouldn't be coming around for a while. I said it was hard to have a conversation at the checkout stand, and would she like to meet sometime. I gave a description of where I'm living and what I liked about it, saying the streets are like walking through a Fellini movie.

I half-expected no response. I included a Xerox of an old collage since I couldn't assume she knew who the note was from, considering all the people passing through the store. I thought it was a further way of communicating or testing someone. The collage had a Henry Moore head staring blankly with a white peacock bursting out of it while I leaned on an old car in the desert in a white shirt. That was next to a sequence of a naked man kicking his leg to the side (seen from behind).

Anyhow, not only was it her on the phone, she was downstairs. I was impressed and not well dressed. We agreed to meet in the lobby since she didn't know me very well.

I descended on the iron elevator with some coffee and there she was, smiling. I had a renewed appreciation of the lobby with intense chandeliers throwing exploded shadows across the ceiling (a chandelier-maker lives on the top floor). There were a few mirrors along with brass and wood. We sat on a sofa by the window, a good place for getting acquainted. I wasn't far off in thinking she was worth knowing. There was the larger question of my being someone she would want to spend time with. She admitted

her first impulse was to toss the letter without reading it. She was not in the mood for men across the counter having anything else on their mind but melons or bananas. Even today a man harassed her - he whistled, with some comment about her body.

Then she changed her mind and read the note (she said it was well written), and responded by coming here. She wanted to make sure who I was (the picture was faded). Her initial resistance felt "sexist" to her, automatically assuming the worst because it was from a man. She admitted that a woman gave her a note on the bus and she responded to it and things turned out okay. Anyhow, I touched on a few points that made her curious, including the mention of Fellini, who a friend of hers likes. She hasn't seen any of his films since she doesn't go to movies. We talked for nearly an hour without effort, finding some things in common: we are bored with movies… time is more important than possessions… working in public is a drag (she hates it). I think she lives in the upper Haight and has a low opinion of the Marina, another point of agreement. Working in a health food store doesn't guarantee that you are dealing with the most enlightened people.

So here was the situation. I was at ease, the conversation never at a loss for words. She was careful and inquisitive and had some courage, feeling challenged that in being an autonomous woman she should be capable of this sort of thing. She wore an oversize worn-out leather jacket, scarf, and Army boots. A few months ago she shaved her head, but her hair has grown back an inch or two. I was concentrating on her voice, what she said, her presence, having delicate features with clear skin and sensuous lips. She is in her early twenties and has a certain toughness, combined with an ultra-sensitivity. Maybe she is fragile and aware and some kind of feminist, though non-dogmatic. There was the

passing chance that she lived with a woman. It didn't make me any less interested, but then there was some mention of her being "practically married" to some guy.

You can sense the caliber of a possible connection by how you feel in their presence and what it brings out in you. We were on a similar wavelength and it didn't hurt that she liked where I lived. She mentioned some friends who were mugged in recent months, but in other parts of town. The woman lives in an "illegal" place which was found out, and will leave town for a few months.

We covered some ground, including the fire, writing, and so forth. She was not disappointed in having come here and said as much. When it was nearly ten she had to leave, getting up at six in the morning to go to work. I hesitated, considering the implications of walking her out of the Tenderloin. It turns out we both walk a lot. Last week both of us were in the ocean, but at different beaches and on different days, and with her not much of a swimmer. She said she would be okay, and no one would "fuck with" her.

We shook hands and parted company. I had the impression, if I'm not deluding myself, that this wasn't the worst experience in her life. Maybe not the most edifying either, but close enough this time around. I levitated to the third floor on the iron elevator and was out to sea for a while. I couldn't assume that anything would come from this.[112]

11:00 p.m. I was on the typewriter for a few hours with a full moon in progress the last few days, haunting the night with an expanded awareness.

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[112] A few years later I walked by her on the beach. She had no clothes on and was standing near the water with a man, so I didn't say anything (I wore a swimsuit, for what it's worth). She was slender and large-breasted, and probably wouldn't have minded if I said hello. Later we were cyber-friends on the computer, though I never saw her again. Fiona from Marin.

1:30 a.m. The sound of voices and breaking glass on the street. I looked out the window. The corner store with several Latino guys walking away. A couple of Middle Eastern guys who work there stood outside, watching. The Latino guys threw another bottle or two which shattered on a concrete empty lot and broke into a run. There seemed to be a breakdown in Latino/Middle Eastern relations.

I saw them running up the sidewalk on the other side of the street and disappearing. Then with perfect timing, appearing from where they vanished, was a hooker in a short tight dress. He was coming this way and slinking so hard I thought he would sprain something. No hips to speak of, and wearing stockings, a nylonic power stroll, a man (I've seen him before) with the incongruous profile of a Mayan.

People sometimes punctuate their evenings by throwing bottles and breaking glass, like they're christening the night with a shattered moment. One man's exuberance is another's flat tire.

Speaking of hookers, I walked home the other night in a light rain with an umbrella. About two blocks from home I saw a young white prostitute gracing the corner, as opposed to grossing out the sidewalk. She posed with a red parasol, tight shorts, and pale nylons. She wore high heels and her legs were tight and slightly muscular. You would think she worked out on her pubococcygeus muscle with an isometric flex routine in her spare time, clenching her permissive little hidden purse and making a living with her pelvic shock absorber. Not exactly a virgin spring.

I thought of songs that would go with this, like "Walk on By." Which reminds me, a while back I walked down lower Polk Street past a low dive full of homosexuals and the song coming out loud and clear was: "… YOU MAKE ME FEEL LIKE A

NATURAL WOMAN….” It occurred to me that when you don’t see any whores on the corner, it doesn’t mean they’re not working.

Saturday, June 5, 1993

NOTES

I feel like a stone skipping across a lake of true love, having close encounters with its potential. A reverberating kiss-off with the real thing, sounding the depths of women, or Woman, on a planet not geared to the human dimension.

The ballast of the human condition.

Streamlined by the word.

VCR = vicarious Caucasian rumors
void condition renewed
vulva cul-de-sac revisited
vintage corpse rewind

Venture into the poetic,
verging on the telekinetic,
a side effect, if not reward,
of being enlightened by the word
or merely stunned: a tree in the window,
it is holding sway in slo-mo,
a thousand points of leafy light,
the photosynthetic has the right
of way and so you can internalize
it, an eternal return,
the branches in your mind are swaying,
stop and listen to what they’re saying.

I read an article in *The New York Review of Books* about Freud and Egypt.[113] “Freud paid a price for his suppression of the truth about the androgynous pharaoh, a price not without its irony: in making Moses an Egyptian, he had ended by making Akhenaten a Jew.”

Moses is seen here as a highborn Egyptian nobleman, a member of Akhenaten’s “intellectual elite,” whose “victory over the superstition and darkness of Egyptian

[113] Carl E. Schorske, “To the Egyptian Dig: Freud’s Exploration in Western Cultures” (1991)

polytheism was swept away by a counter-reformation" after he died. In this "Gotterdammerung of Egypt," and "determined to rescue the pharaoh's cultural achievement from the counter-reformation, Moses chose as his vehicle the Jews, a poor alien people settled in a border province… in effect, Moses made Egyptians out of the Jews so that they might preserve the highest culture that his country had achieved. He gave them three Egyptian gifts: monotheism, the ethical code of the Aton cult, and the practice of circumcision."

> Demanding of the Jews renunciation of the instincts, Moses liberated the Jews not so much from Egyptian bondage as from their own instinctual drives. A father to the childish people, he transformed them into a father-people, exemplifying the victory of male abstraction, the central prerequisite of civilization, over female sensuality and materiality. Thanks to their intellectual and ethical strength, the Jews as Kulturvolk par excellence would always be attacked whenever repressed instinct broke loose in civilized society; thanks to the same masculine virtues, they would have the power to endure in adversity.

This is rather odd since there is no historical evidence of an exodus of Jews from Egypt, or that Moses ever existed.

There was something about "undermining the Judeo-Christian claim to primacy in creating our civilization."

Freud in Rome: "I found almost intolerable the lie of salvation which rears its head so proudly to heaven."

"They are people given to psychical epidemics, historical mass convulsions, and they haven't changed since…." He was talking about the French in the 19th century, although it applies to others.

The fallacy of thinking in terms of the English ego or the Parisian id, as if such things aren't found elsewhere.

Freud said, "… [M]y real teachers, all of them English or Scotch."

One of those lines which make you wonder (from Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society):

> It can be proven that Leonardo was acquainted with the vulture as symbol of motherliness… through his reading of Greek authors, who were thoroughly steeped in Egyptian culture.

11:00 a.m. Woke up, and eventually was sitting in a smoked easy chair with some coffee. I was in a robe and taking notes, the morning with incoming returns, including a dream.

On the typewriter in the afternoon.

4:00 p.m. I went out, headed for the storage facility on Masonic. Time has run out on the rest of my stuff. I got on the bus, a little crowded, and walked to the back. I stood there for a couple of stops. Someone got up near the back and I walked over to sit down, which apparently was an offensive and imperialistic act of white male presumption. A black woman who sat behind the seat had her foot on it and one of her two kids (a two-person seat) was by the window, also with a foot on it. I stood there, having walked up, and said, "Excuse me," going through the motions of a passenger who wants to sit in an empty seat. The temerity of some people. The woman scrunched up her face, looking really put out and practically hissing, "Say exCUSE me!" I said, "I already did," and she removed her foot reluctantly. I sat down and pulled out the paper.

I wondered what's the point of recording these inconsequential incidents, amounting to a thousand points of friction between myself and others. What I'm finding is that 90 percent of the time, conservative estimate, the negative encounters I have in public are with black men or women, and as far as I know I'm hardly ever the one who instigates the friction – except for the mere fact of existing.

I got out at the storage place and checked on the boxes in a prison cell, then walked to the sound-room flat a few blocks away. A long-haired guy pulled over in a

pickup yelling at the girl with him, "GET OUT OF MY TRUCK, I DON'T LOVE YOU I FUCKING HATE YOU!"[114]

I sat around with the roommates. Someone offered a bong and I declined. On the television was one of those programs with a gun in every other scene, as ubiquitous as a wristwatch. What time is it? Time to pull out my gun and threaten someone. People wonder if life imitates bad television, which imitates bad sociology. A gang of young toughs looked like it was put together by a UN committee compromise. One of them was black. There was a scene where he was running from a cool Native American undercover cop and about to get away. A long blue convertible pulled up as he ran out of the alley. The hood not only fell across the hood of the car, but the driver, a slender blonde in tight shorts, jumped out. There was a momentary stand-off which she resolved by a martial arts kick to his stomach. He was knocked flat on his back and handcuffed in no time, the white woman looking cool and calm as you might expect for a scene that was pretended and rehearsed. She didn't even mess up her nails.

I waited for the Phantom. It's not as bad as waiting for Godot, but it's close. He exists in a space-time warp which precedes him by an hour or two before he shows up, and lingers for an hour after he's gone. The female roommate walked in. Her college semester was over, but she had another class in the summer called "Contemporary Sexuality." She didn't like the title, and said there was some anatomy involved. Contemporary anatomy? Has the body been evolving? In reference to the biological, she said that many people don't know how the other gender is built or functions. "How do women function?" I asked. A pregnant pause, but she didn't go on.

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[114] In other words, "I love my truck, I hate fucking you!"

Reminds me of a woman I had an affair with. She was a student at the University of San Francisco with a Spanish-Greek background who was studying algebra and Latin - very intelligent with a good figure and the neuroses of a Catholic girl with some erotic urges running through her mind. She had a class in human sexuality which included a film of a young man masturbating. It was followed by a film of a woman masturbating, which she said was gross. The woman was overweight and lying in a bathtub (when the film was over, she appeared in person to answer questions).

The Phantom showed up after six. We drove in his beat-up yellow van to the storage place and hauled out a few remaining boxes filled with books and old manuscripts. There was a high wind blowing outside. We dropped by the flat and picked up the old Strat and the amplifier which weighed half a ton. Drove to my place and unloaded the van, piling things into the small iron elevator.

We sat around after eight, having transferred some of the local currency to him for beer and gas. I had a Becks and he had three, relatively restrained for him. His long hair was pulled back in a ponytail, giving the impression he's a hippie from Nebraska. He is not much for words, but can launch into monologues which are amusing. His worldview is different than mine. The Phantom is so grounded in the ordinary-mundane he has to be floating or spaced out so he can stand it. He finds a confirmation of his worldview in a sleazy bar, while I refer to a literary journal. We rendezvous around an amplifier, but now and then our alter-egos interfere with the music - like when he's drunk and I'm abstracted.

He spoke of girls he used to "poke" in the Midwest and how he didn't know he had it made. The Phantom has encounters with street people where he is polite to a fault

and I am not necessarily. His blunt confessions are like those of a dry comedian who is candid about his failures, and you recognize a passing echo of your own. I get so absorbed in thinking about gender, race, and alienation I forget that others have similar tensions and perplexities.

He said he was drifting away from the recording studio, having a lot of equipment and not doing much with it. He wants a $4000 multi-track recorder. He would be more productive if it wasn't for drinking and women, with the latter hard to come by and the drinking picking up the slack. He is obsessed with Asian women, which I thought was self-defeating – it left him open to being used. He probably wouldn't mind as long as his organ was being used as well. In keeping with an earthy view of things, he assumes that Japanese women are "tight." I think some women would object to that line of thought. There was a time I would have agreed with them, but not anymore. I've seen how women talk about men.

10:00 p.m. He left. I was in the kitchen with the light off, readjusting to a current which would follow through on the typewriter, shaking off his semi-literate influence. In the window a long dark cloud slowly drifted past the moon which gave it a white-hot lining. I was in a moonstruck calm when the phone rang - the Czech woman. We hadn't talked in a while, which was no reason to go on for two hours, but we did. She speaks in a well-modulated stream that doesn't want to be interrupted. It is a counterpoint to the limited perspective I have on other people, sometimes corroborating and sometimes not.

She thinks there is a constant friction between black people and everyone else. It tends to be more out in the open, with a tangibility that lends itself to prison cells and bad press. White people have their own criminality, but they tend to sublimate it more until

it's almost indistinguishable and harder to arrest – it blends into a corporate polite atmosphere. It is hard to put handcuffs on the anti-social machinations going on behind closed doors or in a hidden ledger book.[115]

I was ready to get off the phone an hour before we did. I thought it was winding down, but she got on the subject of one or two of my ex-girlfriends. I made the mistake of saying I don't believe women anymore, and she went off on a heated tangent with a similar account about the duplicities of men. She said this is a country where people don't do what they say or say what they mean. The polite brushoff, "I'll call you," is a coin of the realm. It was not like that in Prague, where people have a blunt response if they don't want to be with someone and it clears the air. They are also pretty direct if they like someone.

However, this country has better parades than the ones behind the Iron Curtain. She would rather see women's butts than a dreary march of workers showing their solidarity with the Soviet Union. We covered a lot of ground, from sections of the work force becoming obsolete to the high cost of an education.

Nearly 2 a.m., I walked to a liquor store a few blocks away for a bottle of wine. I walked back through the whores and bores and shady characters and juvenile delinquents. Crossing the street was a black prostitute with dyed hair and some style, not bad looking, practically snapping her fingers as she walked. She was followed by several men, her entourage, protection, who knows? She gave me the eye in passing and said, "Smile baby, it ain't that bad."

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[115] On the other hand, the consequences of the corporate state are extremely tangible when it comes to war, pollution, and the lack of jobs.

Returning home with the iron gate of the elevator crashing shut. For all I know her smile went along with her job. I was not in a good mood, being thrown off and compromised by the last eight hours. Too much idle conversation, caught up in the slipstream of other people's timing, and it was two in the morning before I got on the typewriter. There was blues and rhythm on the radio, from Johnny Ace to John Lee Hooker.

5:00 a.m. Went to sleep with the eastern sky a black and blue bruise.

Sunday, June 6, 1993

I woke up around eleven with not enough sleep. Barely remembered a couple of dreams in which there was an undercurrent of anger. It was an anger I went to sleep with, and which seemed to play itself out or generate dreams where one character or another was in an angry pose, saying something, the subconscious giving vent.

I was not impressed that I went through three-fourths of a bottle of wine last night. Even worse, I let it get the better of my train of thought, going off on a long tangent about race. Why don't I focus on something simple like the origins of the universe?

I was in a daze and heard the loud abrasive voice of a woman who has been on the streets too long. I thought it was one of the black women, whose voices carry from a block away. I glanced out the window and saw a worn-out white woman. It struck me how provisional and arbitrary stereotypes can be. If I encounter black people who are loud and abrasive it may come from being on the streets, and anyone in similar circumstances sounds like that. Reminds me of the news the other night, a black woman

being interviewed on the subject of buying houses. She was thoroughly middle class and insulated, not to say soft-spoken and polite.

A few minutes later, with coffee and a cigarette, I was staring out the window. People walked by and I thought I needed some milk when something caught my eye. A white prostitute coming down the sidewalk who I've seen too many times, a wide load in a tight black skirt which barely covered the business end of her, thighs rubbing together with her feet in sharp black heels. Her upper body was voluminous in an open jacket and her blonde hair flung around, wearing a see-through blouse with her tits like mere accessories, though not extending further than her stomach.

She walked up to the door of a green van that is always parked there, nearly under my window. She motioned to a man walking up and with a few discretionary glances they disappeared into the van. It occurred to me it's Sunday morning. In a minute or two the van was rocking. There was a pause, and then more shudders running through the shocks and springs. The whole thing took about five minutes. Then the man emerged from the front door on the passenger side, having been in the van for ten minutes, which was not enough time to remove their clothing.

He walked away without a second glance, a Latino man on the heavy side, about forty. The whole thing went so smoothly I figured they were familiar with the process and each other.

She emerged a minute later like nothing happened, and probably nothing had for her. A rubber-covered extension spends a few minutes in a rented orifice. She walked up the sidewalk, being friends with everyone. A couple of Latino guys were sitting on a car behind the van, an open suitcase on the ground.

I thought of her customer and what he had in mind. Was she the echo of a goddess who he wanted to demythify, her being all he could afford? A few minutes later a man was pissing on the front of a Toyota with some discretion.

I was on the typewriter in the afternoon with the wind finally blowing away the overcast.

7:00 p.m. The Phantom dropped by after work in Berkeley and promptly fell asleep. The Strat lay on the mattress under the window. He is often in a marginal state, getting by on little sleep. We were supposed to drive to the burned-out place and pick up a couple of things. I woke him up after midnight and started talking. He was not sure what happened and walked out the door. See you later.

It had been a curious evening, somewhat compromised by him sleeping. I didn't think I should be on the typewriter, and didn't realize how wound up I was until I went out around 8:30. I walked a mile, looking for a place I could trust the coffee, and ended up at the Opera Plaza. I went into the bookstore and read a review of the poet, John Ashbury. Some esoteric and refined obscurities, with the intention of eluding meaning whenever he can. The elusive approach-avoidance of a Mallarme, though using the everyday to find a way around the readily comprehended. He avoids the conceit of comprehension. It reminds me of someone gumming an apple.

I walked back, having been gone an hour. The Phantom was unconscious. I started going through boxes I had retrieved from storage (where the man behind the counter had a lock on the laconic). Old writing, manuscripts, the journal from four years ago, if not four months. I've been stuck in fast forward for so long it's hard to shift into a lower gear for editing the writing. Now for some reason I was able to and it went on for

hours, reading in the kitchen. I was held off from my usual routine, having to be quiet and avoiding the guitar and typewriter what with someone sleeping in the main room. Maybe I'm over-sensitive, but when you live alone you have the feeling it is all on your shoulders, holding up the ceiling as it were. With someone there, even unconscious, I could relax and do some editing.

I was only vaguely aware when I was writing all these pages that they would have to be edited at some point. I was fueled by coffee and cigarettes, and making work for my future self with every hour of caffeinated dexterity on a word machine.

I left a few minutes after the Phantom, walking to Tommy's Joynt. Along the way there was a woman walking down the sidewalk in my direction in a tight black dress. A pretty blonde who wouldn't mind talking to someone, and she hesitated when I passed. Some eye contact was the closest I came. Her perfume hit me as it lingered in her wake, and my resistance swayed a little. She looked more expensive than the ones I usually see around here. I thought of an encounter in another country:

THE GARDEN

Like a skein of loose silk blown against a wall
She walks by the railing of a path in Kensington Gardens,
And she is dying piece-meal
of a sort of emotional anemia.

And round about there is a rabble
Of the filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants of the very poor.
They shall inherit the earth.
In her is the end of breeding.
Her boredom is exquisite and excessive.

She would like someone to speak to her,
And is almost afraid that I
will commit that indiscretion.

(1916)[116]

I had a more edifying encounter with a pastrami on sourdough, along with beer and bean soup.

I walked home, passing a few tall pine trees holding their own amongst the old buildings. There were four prostitutes on the corner up ahead, loitering in the way they have. One of them came towards me who I often see on that corner – tall with short blonde hair, the man who looks like Kim Novak. He wore a low-cut blouse with breast implants and a miniskirt, and tried to incriminate the two of us with an insinuating swivel. There were a few words in passing, but I was noncommittal.

I kept walking, and then noticed another prostitute was walking towards me, or rather towards a car parked along the curb. The streets were deserted at that hour, with just a few cars because of street cleaning (2 – 6 a.m.). Hiking up her short skirt she made as if she had to pee and was squirming to pull her panty hose down while wearing a G-string. It was at that moment when I walked by with a passing glance, wondering what she was doing. Either the glance was enough or my presence was, but she turned and blocked my path. She was not exactly playing hard to get, coming close and saying something. I was aware of several things: the alcohol on her breath, the two hard points of her corset on my chest, the feel of her hand on my private parts, the fact of her being a raspy-voiced Latina with wild black hair, and the possibility of her having been a man at some point.

I took a step back with a polite refusal, but she kept coming for a moment. Her English was not so good, but it wasn't hard to get the message. I'm not inclined to offend

[116] Ezra Pound (1885-1972)

hookers since they have a hard life on the streets, exposing themselves to strangers – some of whom learned their manners in auto shop.

I walked past some short-skirted legs to the corner. Red light. I paused and looked back. The one I had a touching encounter with was squatting beside a parked car with her skirt around her waist, bare bottom, and emitting a heavy stream on the sidewalk while smiling at me. I was turning back to cross the street when a long-haired maniac yelled at me suddenly, just to get a reaction. The effect was like someone trying to bring you to your senses. Don't stare at the whores, you'll turn to salt. He walked on with a popsicle, ignoring the hookers and mumbling to himself.

A few minutes later I was home and having a cigarette, feeling touched with an eroded moon in the window.

Monday, June 7, 1993

Cold coffee. Reading the paper. One thing I like about this area, it is closer to the news when the news has a tendency for being lurid and immediate with sudden shocks and the sound of something breaking.

The Phantom came over around one. On the way out I found a letter from the woman in Vienna in the brass mailbox downstairs, a lightweight aerogramme. We drove to the burned-out building a few blocks from the water with the rooms haunted by smoke and destruction. That was three months ago, and nothing has been done in terms of rebuilding. My old apartment was open with a large pile of refuse still there, including old furniture and a pair of skis that someone gave me and I never used.

Not sure why I was doing this, but we hauled down an old desk, a mirror, a long coffee table, and some bamboo blinds. I abandoned the antique sofa in the garage, unique and now extinct.

We drove to the Haight where Tanya lives with her mother (a well-situated black woman who adopted her). The house is near the top of a steep road. Fortunately, she was there with a male friend. We talked for a few minutes in the front room. I was reminded of the drop-dead style and comfort of the place, having been to a few parties there. She was in her usual baggy shorts and T-shirt, which she lifted up to show me how much weight she has lost. I said she could lift it further, but she said she wasn't showing her boobs anymore. They hung loose in her shirt.[117] We unloaded the stuff in her garage and they left on their way to New Mexico.

We drove to my place. Whenever I leave the Tenderloin and go to other places I'm struck with how the intensity level drops. It feels like a retirement community.

4:00 p.m. Went to work with the Attorney gone.

I read the letter from Austria. I think she liked my last letter concerning her possible visit. "DU BIST EINFACH EIN SUPERLIEBER ECHTER FREUND!" Which means, "You are a super-lover and a real friend." I can live with that. She noted that having come out of a deep slump because of her last boyfriend ("… irritations"), she was back on track, "… that I consider right: a relationship is not a prison. Thank god I didn't

[117] A few years ago, she and my ex were posing topless in a home near the ocean. There had been a fair amount of wine and smoke and this was their idea. Their bosom buddy from high school, Ming, is large-breasted but a little shy, so her and I sketched the other two. Later they persuaded her to show her boobs as they were lounging by the fire like the three graces: half-black, white, and Chinese.

take revenge in anger… by the way, he tested HIV negative. So we don't need to talk about this anymore."

> There is another letter, 3 or 4 pages, from 'the darker side.' You know the more cynical or sarcastic or deeper looking kind that I write when it is late night and I am home alone…

There was some mention of how it's shaping up for her to come here, having three or four weeks off work and a friend in New York. "Pls keep me informed about your summer schedule!" Here today, here tomorrow, keeping a step ahead of sorrow.

I worked for a couple of hours, then went home.

Relaxing with a lot of boxes full of writing, more than I know what to do with. I wonder if I'm under the sway **of Neo-Platonic Christianity, where thinking** about a sinful act is as bad as doing it. Similarly, I often think about editing my manuscripts, but hardly ever do it. I'm not impressed with this state of mind - as if touching on the real world, a transitory and profane dominion, is untoward. You get to heaven by keeping a low profile and remaining detached while you're sliding under heaven's gate. What if it doesn't exist?

Fish and chips, along with olives, salami and cheese.

8:00 p.m. The phone rang. One of the new roommates at the sound-room flat. Did I want to come over and play music? The Phantom was in the mood, though I can never be sure with him. His approach-avoidance of his own equipment is a wonder to behold. Sometimes I have hours to behold it when he is procrastinating or has disappeared – he looks for drugs on Haight Street.

I went out and took the bus to Moronic Avenue, I mean Masonic. I was sitting there and looking out the window when a young woman sat next to me. Bumping a little,

she said, “Excuse me.” A few minutes later she asked, “How was your day?” in a high voice. I turned, a little surprised, and said “Fine… and yours?” I had nothing else to say and my stop was coming up. I got out, walking a few blocks and feeling lame for not saying much. I thought of a letter in the *Bay Guardian* from a woman who spent years on the “feminist training farm” (curious phrase, invoking or provoking cows).

> I don’t like men who take control at work, in conversation, or anywhere else – except in bed… I like men who take control once they know they are welcome to… sometimes I like to struggle, and what turns me on is knowing I’m going to lose. Do you think I have some sort of deep-seated feminine submissiveness that I should try to overcome?

Having referred to men who made her “scream and cry and tear the pillows….”

She has a retrograde libido with a few mixed signals. She wants part of someone and not the rest, “someone who can be in control,” but only in certain circumstances when she snaps her fingers, so to speak - in other words with her in control. I have encountered this from women with assumptions about their own holistic bearing, and yet they find the whole man inconvenient. The wholeness is beyond their grasp, or doesn’t apply to what they have in mind. Those further dimensions are not in their frame of reference, with the men reduced more often than seduced. Fasten a dildo to a doormat and you’ve got a date.

There are compensations if he’s feeling jerked around. She refers to a male acquaintance who knows that “… when he meets a confident, assertive woman it’s almost a certainty that she will love being bent over a piece of furniture and being ‘had at’ (by a man of her choosing, of course). From what I know of what women report to me, professionally and personally, he’s right.”

Where was I? On the way to the sound-room flat.

We hung out for an hour before we went downstairs into the garage where the motorcycles are being repaired. The back room has a low ceiling, black walls, and is full of sound equipment. With a Les Paul on my shoulder, the amps a few feet away, and some distortion, all I care about is momentum. The Phantom of the sound-room is elusive, though he's not particularly operatic. He often sleeps down there. His love life is in ruins, but he doesn't wear a mask. I'm not too sure about his mind. He said he has a low IQ. I think that half of his mind is going slack from alcohol, like someone's face when a nerve is cut.

The roommate from Michigan was there. J. has straight hair almost to his shoulders and a raspy voice with constant references to old TV shows. A blunt presence which can hold its own with a microphone. He makes up lyrics and maintains a vocal excursion while I provide the current. He claims he doesn't know how to sing, but that is not the point. You throw your voice at a song and hope it works. A lot of singers are just yelling anyhow.

The Phantom disappeared. J. went to find him to get the microphone hooked up, and I had a workout on the guitar. When they returned it was the three of us, with the Phantom on bass. He's not bad when he makes an effort. I wonder if the effort is too painful for him, being haunted by a band that fell apart years ago.

We quit around midnight, and went out front, sitting on the steps with the street deserted. A waning moon over head. A cigarette and a beer. There is an immense calm when you turn the amplifiers off, especially for someone who writes a lot and is strung out on endlessly divisive branches of thought. The music brings you to your senses, shutting off your mind for a while. Sonic healing, where the music is the missing chord

and I am friendly in those circumstances. I am less so when a typewriter is involved. When the amplifiers are turned on my hostility is coming out like an automatic weapon, a long metallic audio whip. Do that for an hour or two and you feel like someone who's been shooting the rapids (changing metaphors in mid-stream), only to end up in a quiet pool.

It occurred to me that going electric might electrocute some muses which have been abusing my duration for years. Electroshock therapy, but no such luck. The electric has been there for a long time. We had a garage band in high school in Los Angeles with a Navajo on bass (he brought back peyote from the reservation in New Mexico).[118] I'm getting histrionic with the sonic forces. Between sixteen and forty-one I went to a lot of concerts, from Jimi Hendrix to Einsturzen Neubauten, and saw a good many punk bands. During that time the writing was increasing and expanding. I don't mean to shock it out of existence, and I'm not sure I could. I just want to clear away some mental undergrowth.

I gravitate back and forth between the poles of writing and music, one lacking what the other has. I never respect the mind so much as when I'm caught up in a time-warp of musicians who are drunk or stoned. You can downshift so often you strip the gears in your psychological transmission.

A little after midnight I left with the Phantom, walking to the bus. He pulled out a newspaper clipping from the Examiner with something that disturbed him. He can be obsessive with his monologues. The article was about a band that was arrested at an

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[118] It was often just him and me, drinking cheap wine and pretending we were the next Hot Tuna. We only did peyote a couple of times, scraping the white fibers off the peyote buttons (thinking they had strychnine, but they don't), and mixing it with wine (it tasted awful). One night we took peyote and went to a drive-in movie in an old pickup truck to see *2001: A Space Odyssey.*

underground club he knew in Berkeley. The Insaints had managed to disturb some people, and the lead singer made no bones about it. She is into shocking exhibitionism, and the article said that she refused a police request to put her clothes on.

What disturbed him was that some halfwit in the audience called the police. The fellow was offended and the paper referred to him as having been a "Dead Kennedys punk rocker." The Phantom tried to figure out what that meant, like he had been in the band. Neither one of us recognized his name, but thought it was misleading and slanderous to the DK's, who went through an obscenity trial a few years ago. Something about penises on the album cover, wearing their hard-ons on their sleeve. Considering the porn in this country, you wonder why the Dead Kennedys were in court.

I caught a bus to the Tenderloin, and was typing for a while.

3:00 a.m. On the mattress in the hallway, my head leaning on a pillow against the door, reading an old journal from 1989. The prose style took some getting used to, or maybe I opened to a section at a low ebb. It seemed to run aground in a wordy mundane density, like someone feeling his way in the dark. The prose had to crawl through a torturous tunnel before emerging in a coherent clearing.

The writing went on at length with only a passing mention of the girlfriend I was living with (the ex). Our connection wasn't very mental, which was one of the nicer things about it, and allowed for our living together with relative ease. I had much longer conversations with Ming, there being a spark gap between us, but it was not all that romantic – no matter how many massages and backrubs she got from me.

I was reading about the past when I froze. There was someone knocking softly on one of the doors in the hall. Pause. Then knocking at the next door with no response,

though I heard someone stirring in the apartment next to mine. A low voice said, "There's a man standing out there." The next thing I knew, with my head against the door (because I sleep in the hall), there was a soft knocking. It was only two or three feet from the floor. A quiet almost scratching sound, but rather insistent. He tried three or four times, with pauses. I didn't make the slightest move or sound. I didn't want to encourage whoever was out there.

He finally went away and I went to sleep, another close encounter in a bad part of town.

Tuesday, June 8, 1993

Late morning, not enough sleep. I made coffee and the phone rang. It was Ming, calling from Anchorage. We talked for a while, then she asked if I would call her back. We were on the phone for an hour. Among other things, we talked about illegal Chinese immigrants. A small freighter sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge and ran aground on a beach about a mile from where I used to live. A few hundred Chinese made it to shore, and over fifty got away, running through the neighborhoods.

She talked about the impending marriage of my ex, and how she is worried about becoming weird. I'm more concerned about becoming wired. She is worried that I will turn into an eccentric loner who can't stop typing. Too late. Her main concern is that we not lose the wavelength that we tune each other in on, like something which might dissolve after six months of separation. She can adapt to any situation, but she runs the risk of losing track of herself. She often has mixed signals, and talks about the need for being focused.

I don't think we'll lose track of each other. Last night I read in the journal about how we got acquainted. She was nineteen and had just returned from a year at Humboldt State where she went through some intense changes. A love affair fell apart, and a young woman who came to visit her died in a car crash on the way back to San Francisco.

I read the section where she came over with a male friend. We were sitting with my girlfriend (the ex). I said I was an atheist and that piqued her interest.

Went to work in the afternoon.

7:00 p.m. Walked home.

8:00 p.m. *Amadeus* on the tube. I have seen most of it, and was switching back and forth between Mozart in Vienna and a documentary on human reproduction with little points of squirming light making their way upstream in a "hostile environment." I think he would have liked it.

Long workout on the guitar, going off the deep end.

Midnight: I wrote a long wine-soaked letter to Ming. She wondered how I felt about the impending and impetuous wedding. For me it is a non-event, like combing the tail of a dead horse.

I was mystified at the historical revisionism of the bride. I've heard from several women that it's not uncommon for a woman to want a clear conscience when entering into marriage. The ex wants to see our past in a positive light, making sure we're on good footing to provide her with a step up to the next phase of her life. In other words, could I hold steady (and not disturb her self-image) while the princess rises to the next level with a memory that is customized to fit her like a fitted dress.

The letter moved on to other things, picking up momentum.

Wednesday, June 9, 1993

Work in the afternoon.

I walked home, stopping at the music store, and bought an 18-foot cord and a turquoise satin strap for the white Stratocaster. Worked out in the back room on a $1400 acoustic-electric guitar, the amp providing a sound I want and can't afford.

At home I plugged in the Strat, using the old Standel bass amp until I get something else. The higher notes don't come across so well, but the low notes reverberate. Any twist in the cord and the amp has little explosions in it. I need better equipment and headphones for more volume.

I had the tube on to the Bulls game with a small black and white screen. I noticed a simultaneous flicker in a window half a block away with someone tuned into the same channel I was. It's a form of psychic communism. The rapid cut and splice of a commercial is identical in a distant window and in front of me. The communion of anonymous viewers. We are video brothers on the same vicarious wavelength. It's a cut-rate artificial brotherhood.

NOTES

An article in *The New Yorker* about the skinheads in Germany. I was struck by a couple of things.

1) How they're getting so worked up over skinhead homicides. There were 17 last year in all of Germany. That's less than a month of homicides in Oakland.

2) Racial separatists are found in every race, and not all of them are brutes.

The blacks in Crown Heights were yelling at the Jews about Hitler and the ovens. That was after a Jewish bystander was set upon and killed because a black child was run over by a Jewish motorcade.

A black spokesman for the community said they didn't know what they were saying and didn't know Hitler from a hole in the wall. They just knew the Jews would find it insulting. If that's the case, it would beg the question of black people having to suffer a Eurocentric curriculum in school, demanding more in the way of Afrocentric studies. How Eurocentric can their education be if they don't know what World War II was all about?

The article notes that there are 6000 rightest extremists in both Germanys. "…[N]o one really knows whether the skins are 'Germany' or a lunatic criminal fringe you could find in any Western country." Only a Western country would have a criminal fringe? There are no non-Western countries where a criminal fringe might include the government itself? That a few thousand creeps would represent the essence of an entire country seems insulting. Who were the hundreds of thousand of Germans who marched and demonstrated in protest of the skin assaults? What of the millions of Germans who don't assault foreigners? One might as well find 6000 members of the Flat Earth Society and wonder if they represent the real United States.

6 ½ million foreigners in Germany, but no laws about immigrants. You don't move to Germany and become a German. You're a citizen only by "blood."

Half a million refugees from nearly forty countries entered Germany last year demanding asylum. A quarter of a million the year before. "The state houses them and feeds them, and from the point of view of a young hardworking Turkish man, indulges them with a life of charity."

The indifference of millions of working-class people to the Nazis – he calls this indifference their *Deutscher Blick* – a gaze that is "really a disregard."

Program on *Frontline* involving interracial dialogues in the military. A dozen men sitting in a circle have a long session. A black man, dignified and educated, says he avoids anyone who uses the n-word, which would include whole segments of the black community.

Another black man baited a white man with a point-blank honesty. He related episodes from twenty years ago in the South where he felt discriminated against. The white man said he can't go into certain black neighborhoods. The black man said how did he know, did he ever try? No. Had he had any negative experiences at the hands of blacks? He couldn't think of any, mainly in having avoided or lived apart from them.

I thought it was a good point, and let's be literal and empirical here. If I was in that group I would have mentioned a number of crimes against friends and family, all of them by blacks. I don't blame all black people for those incidents, but there does seem to be a resounding silence when it comes to black people acknowledging the extent of black crime.

Chances are I'm not supposed to write or even think about what constitutes "blackness," much less the "collective fantasma of…" I'm overstepping my boundaries and it's none of my business. It's a subject only writers of the black persuasion can handle. The problem with that argument is that black writers don't have a moment's hesitation when it comes to deconstructing the white man with a dull knife. I assume it's a two-way street, given the fact I'm not blind, deaf and dumb.

They are playing hardball when it comes to criticizing white people, who are supposed to reply with a beach ball.

Reminds me of the woman I was with last year who lives on the edge of Oakland. She pulled up to a stop in her car, not realizing the young black man crossing the street was malevolent. He recognized her immediately – a white woman sitting alone in her car and vulnerable. He knew he could frighten her out of her wits, if not break into her car. He jumped on the hood, banging on the windows and clutching at the door handles like something out of *Night of the Living Dead*.

Sister Souljah: "If black people kill black people every day, why not have a week and kill white people?" It's been going on at a rate of twenty-four a week, so that's a useless comment.[119] She said this in an interview and was later invited to speak at Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition convention.

Wednesday, June 16, 1993 (after visiting my family for a week in El Cajon)

Woke up rested and revived, like it took an additional seven hours of sleep to complete my arrival. So tired last night, pushing the limits until 1:30 in the morning. Given the conveniences of modern life I saw no reason for being tired, except for not enough sleep the night before. I had woken up at eight and gone swimming in a pool at the foot of a desert hill. It's known for its cacti and coyotes. I was driven to the San Diego airport, flew to San Francisco, took a shuttle to the office, worked four hours and

[119] Last year black people killed 6903 blacks in this country, and 1272 whites. The number of blacks killed by whites was 410. These proportions have been fairly steady for many years.

walked home. Later I was on the typewriter. It shouldn't be exhausting. It isn't like the turbo engines drain my energy to keep the plane in the air. The office isn't manual labor. I hadn't flown long enough to give me jet lag, unless it happens when you move at 500 miles per hour, arriving ahead of yourself as it were.

Not sure how esoteric or fine-tuned to make this, but what if there's a torque of psychic adjustment when you go from Southern to Northern California (approximately 600 miles). You leave one geographical magnetic field and land in another with a different frequency. I am engulfed down south and more isolated here, living in an abstract stand-off with the local population. I'm not very grounded in this town. The ground is covered with cement on the end of a wind-blown peninsula surrounded on three sides by water and treacherous currents.

My arrival yesterday was something of a three-point crash landing, a rapid comedown when it came to: 1) Going to work. 2) Returning to a run-down part of town. 3) Reading the Last Will and Testament of my parents.

I went out for breakfast at the greasy spoon on the corner and read the paper: HOMELESS PROTEST… MYSTERY SICKNESSES APPEAR IN BAY AREA… NEW LAWYERS…. (I read it as: Mysterious lawyers appear in Bay Area).[120] An article made me sad, which doesn't occur that often when I read the paper. It reminded me of a story in *Time* magazine on prostitution around the world and the girls who are sold into it. The pathos of it hit me hard. I wonder if a reservoir of sadness has built up under the surface having to do with the mortality of my parents or my current living conditions. The sadness triggered by what I read reflects a sadness that was there already. It is the

[120] There are 136,320 lawyers in California.

sort of thing I read about all the time. I might be angry or disturbed, but not depressed, since that is something of a passive response. I think some articles are engineered to produce that response. You couldn't read the paper or watch the news if you get emotional about it. You would wallow in a swamp of *weltschmerz* which is kind of useless.

Walking back, I headed for the corner store, passing the multi-racial sidewalk vendors. A young black man with no shirt and his pants undone was messing with his belt while a priest approached. There was an older white derelict with a baseball cap with a big X on it. Halfway down the block I stopped in front of an empty lot with a billboard on the side of a building: a black woman smiling with straightened hair, ISOPLUS. In smaller print: THEY WANT TO BE US, BUT THEY JUST DON'T HAVE THE PLUS. Some kind of oily hair spray ("oil sheen in a can").

I was mystified by that, went into the store, got some apple juice and milk, and walked back to look at the sign (about twenty feet off the ground and rather imposing). I was stunned at the insidious vacant circular logic. Who are "they" and who are "us"? Is this a racial thing? "Us" would seem to refer to blacks (with straightened hair), but who are "they"? White people? If "they" are other blacks the connotations are divisive, like middle class blacks are looking down on lower class blacks (with unstraightened hair). When there is an us-and-them mentality with a black person on a billboard, "them" refers to whites. There are black people who think that everyone wants to be like them, reversing the old presumption that everyone wants to be like white people (who invented photography so they could be on billboards). It is hard to stomach the presumption, no matter who has it.

Black people have an extra something, hence "the plus," which in this case comes in a can and is meant to straighten their hair along Eurocentric lines. There are blacks who think they are original, and the white man is trying to coopt their culture. Meanwhile they're embedded in a force field of commodities, amenities, inventions, and language, most of which came from people of European descent – from the cars and radios to the engineering, movies, and the medical care, and maybe the concept of the individual as a touchy little god (for better or worse).

Meanwhile, I was trying to absorb the message on the billboard. It wouldn't compute, but maybe "It's a black thing, you wouldn't understand." I was distracted by a squat Latino couple who were having a disagreement. He lashed out, knocking her glasses into the street and she just stared at him as I went by. A minute later I was about to cross the street and was looking back at the billboard when a black man walked by. He said something in passing, like "What are you looking at… being curious… a nosy…" something or other. I ignored him, crossing the street to my building, but wondered what he was talking about. I hadn't looked at him at all. The Latino couple had walked away (separately). I don't know if he saw the guy hit her and thought I was staring, especially since he couldn't imagine anyone looking at a billboard.

You might wonder how it's any of his business or concern, like the angle of my silent gaze is more offensive than his mouth. There's another way to look at it though. If you're on the street you're supposed to wear blinders. As long as you're staring straight ahead, you're okay. The blinders are derived from the street itself, which is straight and lined with walls and blind corners. It is the sort of attitude that would let a neighborhood go to seed or worse. You mind your own business and don't let your gaze stray off the

concrete path. You might see the trash along the fence, the abuse of women, the desultory conditions of men who're out of work, the furtive hand-offs of a controlled substance.

What happens to the concept of the Invisible Man (where black people were ignored by whites) if you're not supposed to look at them? "What are you looking at?"

I should put a qualifier here: any generalities about black people or white people are provisional. It reminds me of an article on pimps in other countries and how relative that situation is. There is a stereotype of the black pimp, but given enough desperation, anyone from Russians to Hindus will do it. Some of them make the black pimp in this country look peaceful by comparison. Most of the time it is economic conditions which force people into unsavory pursuits, and those take on fallacious racial characteristics. The arbitrary nature of those characteristics is seen when conditions alter and you have a world where there are black scholars and vicious white pimps.

Typing for a few hours.

2:30 p.m. Walk a block and wait for the bus. Across the street there were a couple of hookers on the lookout, one of them turning as the cars would turn the corner. A young black woman, slender in black hot pants. The other was a white woman with a mane of reddish hair, black corset and tight purple pants, having a well-formed behind that looked like a plum.

The bus pulled up and I got on, a little crowded. I held onto a bar next to a young Latina woman with her hair pulled back. She was with two older black women in the window seats. They were looking out the window, watching the white hooker operate – who was bent over and talking to some guy who had pulled over to the curb. The Latina woman said, "Isn't that a shame!" several times, remarking how the woman seemed to be

soliciting a man who wasn't very interested. "If you hear some woman's dead you know who it is… no wonder men have no respect for women," glancing at me after she said that.

She started up a conversation with a black woman on the other side of me. I was caught between them with the stereotypes collapsing by the minute. She was soft-spoken and polite, on the slender side, and holding the hand of a little girl. They had been to the hospital where her best friend had a baby, with one of the parents black and the other Mexican. She said the baby looked Mexican.

More people got on. I made my way to the back where a man was speaking Russian to an Asian fellow. On the sidewalk were two women from India. I forgot to mention, while waiting for the bus there was a Chinese fellow in shorts and a T-shirt which said, TEXAS LONG GRAIN RICE.

The bus stop had a photo of Albert Camus in 1960. It was not connected to existentialism on a bus, but rather to Bass Ale (for what ales a stranger). "WHAT INSPIRES MEN TO ACTION?" Beer? The myth of Sisyphus?

In the office with a fair amount of work. After a while V. at the next desk was done and rather talkative. She noticed an *SF Weekly* I had picked up. There was a 300-pound woman on the cover with a huge sagging bosom. She put her finger on a breast and said, "Gross." Turning to the story she said, "… Looks like milk and tastes like milk… but it's beef?" I said, "The woman on the cover?" No, an ad.

She showed me a picture of three women taking a shower, each of them very heavy with rolls of gravity-stricken flesh and her with a look of horrified curiosity. She is not much over a hundred pounds and small breasted, so for her the "assets" of these

women were blown out of proportion. She said they were losing definition and you could hardly tell what was what. V. was wide-eyed and quoted someone's measurements. 54-46-82. I said now she could stop worrying about her hips or being two pounds "over." She said "No, I'm fat," and still wants to lose a few pounds.

In the office there were boxes of books and interview transcripts from the trial of *Masson v. The New Yorker*, including a few books written by Jeffrey Masson and Janet Malcolm. I looked through one of his, *My Father's Guru*, with photos from when he was growing up. Here I am in India, that sort of thing. I was struck by what a world citizen he is, with a Jewish background which had lapsed into the theosophical beliefs of his father who had a guru living with them for years. There was a photo of Madame Blavatsky (1831-1891), a "spirit medium" who was a co-founder of the Theosophical Society.[121]

So there is Masson as a boy in New York City, Nice, and Hollywood, and later attending Harvard. It makes you wonder if there are international jet streams more available to Jews, or which they are more likely to take advantage of, and all to their credit I think.

6:30 p.m. I went home on a warm night and caught the last half of the Chicago game. It was accompanied by a workout on a wooden instrument.

11:00 p.m. On the typewriter with symphonic sound effects on the radio. I thought it was Mahler. Turned out to be his Symphony #9 (1909). I was typing for a few hours. Coffee, cigarettes, and half a bottle of wine.

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[121] In *The Secret Doctrine* she wrote that Judaism is "a religion of hate and malice toward everyone and everything outside themselves."

I seem to be wound more tight these days. I don't know if it constitutes an iron discipline or a circumstantial tension, being isolated in a rougher neighborhood. I'm experimenting with the loveless like I used to experiment with love. When I'm not close to someone, other things are coming closer – like music and the language. I take them more seriously, and they're more tangible on the level of a life-line. It supports your weight and tunes your fate. I go to sleep and wake up with ideas.

A quiet night, with the occasional bottle breaking. 1 or 2 a.m., the sound of high heels on the sidewalk. Two prostitutes walking by, one black, the other white. Good looking, fire and ice.

The typewriter was going off the deep end.

4:00 a.m. On the mattress in the hall. I found an old manuscript of poems from the mid-1980's. The material can be "absolutely modern" (to quote Rimbaud), but it doesn't hurt to let it sit for a while, if not a few years. It's like allowing wine to age. In this case, it is my perspective which is being "cured." When I come across old poems, some are fresh and alive, and others are dead on the page.

Thursday, June 17, 1993

1:00 p.m. Woke up (a lot of sleep) with a heat wave in progress. It was breaking records. 90 degrees. I only had an hour or so before going to work. I made coffee and read old poems. Under my window on the third floor were a few Latino guys with their cheap beer and cheap laughter. The hideous laugh of someone which occurred like clockwork every minute. I wanted to read a transcript of what they said, to see what was so funny and what passed for wit amongst the idle Budweiser guys who're none the wiser

for some wasted hours sitting on the hood of a car. Maybe it constitutes arrival and it wasn't wasted. Heat and light and conversation, something to drink, and what else is there? The whores are practically within arm's reach, and no one wants to kill you. That alone would constitute a holiday.

Went to work, and had a conversation with V. She has a look of scornful disbelief when she is confronting things that make no sense to her. What makes those looks more poignant are the disparate realms in her life – a devout and sheltered Catholic woman who works in San Francisco. She grew up in the Philippines, and moved here at thirteen. There is enough of a foreign background for things to appear strange in this country, especially with her living at home with her parents. V. is orderly and disciplined. Not puritanical, but appreciates discretion. At times she has an air of mature impatience with so much around her - one reason she is feeling old a few months shy of twenty-six.

She used to make comments about how old I am, and some of her remarks are pretty direct. "You're late," or "Your shirt is wrinkled," or "You need a haircut." She will turn around with glistening straight black hair she washes every morning and say, "Long time, no see."

All of this in the context of a legal accountant who has seen a lot of horror films, most of which I wouldn't go near. She shrugs it off and says, "It's just a movie." She says the same thing about novels, "It's just a book" (which seems to justify her reading some second-rate bodice-rippers). An equilibrium with a kind of innocence. A woman with a lot of style who doesn't read the paper. She keeps to a close domestic situation, and is not athletic or adventurous. She will complain about having a few extra pounds but won't do much about it. I think some women complain about their weight when their lives are

comfortable with a set routine and they feel they should be at odds with something (a boyfriend or a husband is also good for that).

I will say something to get a skeptical look on her face, and she wonders if this guy is forty or four years old.

"Would I lie to you?"
"Yes."

It's better when I tell her something outlandish which turns out to be true. She has sensual full lips and dark eyes. A look that is almost childlike at times, and then a look of worldly boredom. The beauty of this woman with a calculator in her hands, and the unlikelihood of our ever having met. We have a tenuous close connection. She will call me at home about having lunch, but is careful to keep things in perspective since she is engaged to someone.

It feels like a gentle magnetic field between us. We're like opposite poles. Mentally she tends to be exclusive where I'm closer to inclusive, as the writing will attest. I throw in everything and the kitchen thinker. She refuses anything that isn't directly relevant to her. I show her things now and then, like an article in a poetry journal about a Filipina writer. She glanced at it and gave it back. I said, "You can take it home," but she didn't want it.

I am intrigued by her. I live with references coming through the walls and windows like so many tangled vines, and the clutter in my apartment is a pale echo of the mental one. I go from that to the space she inhabits which would seem to be a clean well-lighted place.

There is something here not far removed from *The Seducer's Diary* by Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), where he says a man hasn't lived who hasn't touched the mind

of a young woman. The man in the book is a connoisseur of subtle psychological currents that are stirred up between himself and a woman. There is an atmosphere of patient and discreet remove, which in our case is determined by her own discretion and the formalities of a law office. It's like we're operating with a 19th century restraint. In the book the man pursues a careful seduction until there is a night of surrender on the woman's part, at which point it is over for him. That is the sort of thing I never understood or liked.

Meanwhile, we were talking. I said the skin on my arm was transparent, moving the skin back and forth on my wrist, palm up. The tendons and the veins beneath the skin were visible. I asked if her skin was transparent. She checked and said no. She also didn't think her back ache or sore wrists were contagious.

I walked home with the heat wave hitting 95. Unheard of around here. There was a "strong offshore wind pattern…" Normally the cool air from the ocean is sucked in by the hot air rising further inland. For some reason the hot air was coming this way and for a few days we were included in the mainland climate.

Later I was typing when the ribbon ran out. I switched gears from a typographic prose to a neo-poetic effort done by sleight of hand.

3:00 a.m. Went to sleep.

A few hours later I was coming to in the early morning light. It was way too early. An erection pulled me out of oblivion where a dream had been occurring. The mind is affected by the metabolic, being part of it. In the dream I was sitting with some girls in various stages of adolescence, with a few standing and one sitting on the bench next to me. It may have been a girls' gym. No one was concerned about my being there, and no

one minded when two or three of them began to urinate. The dream was a little unclear as to what they were wearing, if anything. One girl stood up and peed. Another was sitting on the bench with her knees up and releasing an arcing stream.

I woke up having to take a leak and had the usual erection during the REM phase. When you're unconscious you are in a primal state. If you're a man it can inspire an erection which lasts for hours. You have the best erections of your life when you're asleep, so who needs macho tension? It's a little hard to urinate in that condition. As it wasn't going down anytime soon, I had to stand at one end of the bathtub and release an arc that nearly spanned the length of the tub.

I went into the main room. At that hour the prisms in the windows had an effect. The room was full of spectrums smeared across the wood floor, like things weren't scintillating enough with one foot in the subconscious. I was covered with prismatic bands of light. It isn't easy going back to sleep with an erection. Lying on your side it's like a kickstand and a little distracting. A dream-like state of mind was amplifying any feelings - all the more reason to give yourself a hand.

Went back to sleep.

Friday, June 18, 1993

10 a.m. Woke up from another dream, this one more vivid than the other. It was about V., the woman in the office, having gone to sleep with her on my mind. I made a mental note not to sleep too long since we were having lunch the next day.

The dream tapped into whatever conscious or unconscious romantic suspense exists between us. We were in a room in someone's house and talking. There was an

emotional breakthrough on the level of declaring your love for someone and you find you're on the same wavelength. We were suddenly in each other's arms, though it felt more spiritual than physical, a sense of being flooded with relief and light and love. Then I went into the kitchen to check on something in the oven, a radiant mixture of fruit and popcorn. I felt an urge to get back to her, like I missed her a lot just being in the other room, and I returned with a banana.

I made coffee and called her at work, verifying lunch. I said I had a dream about her. She was curious and said we could talk about it later.

12:30 p.m. We went to a salad place in a well-constructed alley, talking about various things with her in a good mood. I told her about the dream while leaving out the romantic atmosphere. I said we were at her house. She said, "You've never been to my house." Then suddenly, as if listening to something, she remembered a dream last night. Her deceased grandfather (Chinese) was talking to her. She has a cultural background where the spirits of the ancestors are venerated and people leave bowls of fruit and incense on someone's grave.

We returned to the office. Not much work. She wrote down some phrases in Tagalog for me (I hear her talking to her mother on the phone with a lilting tone of voice). Now I can say, "Good morning. You are a beautiful woman." *Magandang umaga. Ikaw ay isang magandang babae.*

4:30 p.m. With the attorney gone there was a phone call from a woman I have only met once, the sister of the Latino man who was convicted of second-degree homicide for killing his girlfriend. He had been our client for a long and complicated divorce. His sister had some questions about his pickup truck, but then it turned into a

long review of his situation, revisiting the killing and the aftermath. She had a lot on her mind.

She thought it was absurd that the divorce has taken so long. The Attorney has a "gentleman's" view of women. He prefers to think of them as ladies, including the woman who our client was trying like hell to get divorced from – a Latina live-wire who could not be trusted (according to the client). He wondered who his lawyer represented, him or her. The nerve of the Attorney to tell him she was "nice" and they should stay together. A man refuses to acknowledge the capacity of a woman for doing damage, and in the process he reduces her. It was on a patronizing level of patting the "little lady" on the head, who's smiling sweetly while she puts on a façade for the Attorney while the estranged husband is going out of his mind with the hypocrisy of her act, and even worse his own attorney is falling for it. The client knew what she was like at home and much of that was on the record, not to mention the police report.

Reminds me of my history professor when I used to visit him in Santa Monica. It's been a year or two. The last time I was there his girlfriend put on such an act of being friendly and hospitable it left him with a look of wonder on his face. He was stunned by the pretense, and later told me, "She isn't like this, it's an act." I knew enough about her methods to believe him, with her being instrumental in refusing visits from old friends and even from his daughters. One of them, a tall athletic nurse, would like to strangle her.

The sister of the Latino man in prison told me how distraught he was with the divorce dragging on. They lived apart, the wife was seeing someone else, and he had a girlfriend who was pregnant. I met her in the office, a Latina woman who was a legal secretary. During that time he was drinking more. I'm not sure why he had a child with

her so soon. Two weeks after the baby was born there was a drunken argument and he killed her.

One problem with the trial, he thought his lawyer (not this one) had blown it, deciding against any character witnesses which would "open the door" for the other side. If they had been allowed there would have been more attention to his condition at the time, having a diminished capacity from the drinking and the drugs. It never came out in trial, with the jury barely aware of his alcohol problems. He was summarily convicted of second-degree murder, instead of voluntary manslaughter with a lesser sentence.

She gave the name of his public defender, a woman who would work on his appeal. He is sitting in San Quentin and waiting to be transferred. He is considered a step above a hardened criminal, which he isn't. He is a mild and friendly man who was a truck driver, but it's hard to be sympathetic with someone who killed a woman.

There was a bone of contention - some things of his were left in the home of the deceased, including his pickup truck. Relatives of the late girlfriend stole it. It was found and taken back and sold, I think. It was included in their subsequent "wrongful death" suit. The mourning family can sue for damages over the loss of her and claim his possessions, including the truck.

I had thought of visiting him in prison, but she mentioned what it's like. Visitors feel like they are under suspicion for being related to a convict and they're treated like cattle. They are forced to wait for hours – 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. is not uncommon – and only a fixed number are allowed in. There are two visiting periods each day. If she finally got in after a long wait (being searched twice), she saw him on the other side of a thick window, talking through a telephone in a little room. He was led in handcuffed behind his

back, passing his hands through the bars to have them unlocked, and 45 minutes later they were locked again and he was led away.

I remember visiting a client in the city jail, a black man who had robbed a blood bank. He was about forty years old with twenty convictions. He couldn't believe I'd never been arrested (this was before the DUI last year).[122] We talked on a window phone, looking at each other through the thick glass with a worse connection than if I was talking to someone on the East Coast.

I've read instances where visitors were strip-searched, but it's not so common if there's no contact with the prisoner. Drugs have a way of getting into a prison, and women have been known to smuggle illegal substances in their body. The fellow in jail kept requesting $100 withdrawals from a small inheritance we were handling for him, but the money didn't last long. It was supposedly for shampoo. He must have really clean hair. I finally asked him if drugs were available in the jail. He said, "Oh sure, anything you want," and gave the prices – $20 for a hit of heroin, speed, or LSD. Not that he partook of course.[123]

The client's sister talked about the need to finalize the divorce so our client in prison could marry a woman who was divorcing her husband so she could marry a man behind bars. I assume she knew what he was in there for.

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[122] When I was nineteen, I was in a converted school bus which was pulled over by the police outside of Santa Barbara. It belonged to a longhaired pot dealer who had me and a friend paint the word WINDFUCKER on the side in black gothic letters. On the way to the police station people were frantically disposing of illegal substances. We were interrogated in the station (the police sergeant said "One of you has a chip on his shoulder," meaning me). Several under-age witches were taken into custody, but they let us go.

[123] I can't imagine doing speed in prison and bouncing off the walls. Maybe it makes the time go by more quickly. Heroin (which I've never tried) seems like it was made for prison life. It's good for staring blankly into space for hours. I first took LSD at the beach on a warm afternoon and it went well (I was with a young woman). A prison is the opposite of the beach.

One thing occurred to me with the Attorney. In order to function he has to have some distance from his clients and not get emotionally involved in their lives and problems. He has taken that to such an extent that he is barely aware of the repercussions of his actions or inaction. “As a direct and proximate result of which the defendant went through pain and suffering in an amount to be determined according to proof.” It was amazing his lack of concern, like someone’s life was just another file in the clutter on his desk, being ignored for months. Now and then I saw the results of this procrastination, besides a client making angry phone calls or complaining to the State Bar or insisting on a substitution of attorney. Now there was a man in prison waiting for a woman he can’t marry until the Attorney finalizes his divorce from someone else.

The other day there was a notification from the U.S. Embassy in Manila, an immigration case. Several years ago a woman came here with one or two sons and married a citizen, leaving two sons behind. In recent months she had been trying to file the paperwork to get one of her sons over here as he was on the verge of turning twenty-one, after which he doesn’t have an automatic right to come here. He has to take a number like everyone else. The Attorney took too long, the boy turned twenty-one, and the Embassy said he has to wait.

I’m caught between a rock and a hard place, meaning the Attorney and the client. The former is an irascible slow-moving egotist, up to his neck in financial problems, and the clients often as not want something for nothing. They get their clutches in him and won’t let go, getting hours of free legal advice. They assume that whatever is happening with their case the lawyer knows what he is doing, so they’ll wait for months or years, not even knowing they could change attorneys.

His casual old-world methods cut both ways, for him and against him. It's not uncommon for attorneys making anywhere from $150 to $400 an hour to bill for phone calls on a 10 or 15-minute basis. He can't be bothered with such details, like he's operating on a "gentleman's agreement." That leaves both sides losing track of the hours spent, and that benefits the client. The Attorney loses track of the months going by and that hurts the client.

I walked home and caught the last half of the Chicago game. That was followed by books and magazines, a typewriter and guitar, and bebop on the radio.

An article in *The New Yorker* by Harold Brodkey. "To My Readers." The first line was like getting hit in the stomach. "I have AIDS." A man so honest and direct, and yet he's been accused (rightly so in some cases) of literary dissembling. His complicated mental circuits cover all the bases, giving the impression of a shiftless and suspicious sort who has an eye on the window, one foot out the door, a hand on your pulse, the other on his heart, an eye on the clock, a third eye if he's so inclined, his mind on the fluctuation of his reputation, and a calculator in his pocket which is going all the time.

It's supposedly a sign of intelligence if you can juggle several contradictions at the same time. I think it applies here. With respect to his prose, I don't find it as affected as some do. If he requires half a dozen adjectives in order to navigate through a fine-tuned distinction I won't object. I've read some condescending remarks in left-wing alternative papers which found him tiresome and pretentious, and maybe even upper middle class. I think that reveals more about the reviewer who assumes a simple and direct approach is closer to the truth. Dog bites man. What if the truth is more

complicated? Dialogue bites man. He refuses to remain on a pedestrian level where 2 + 2 = 4. There is more to reality (and the news) than meets the eye of a bitten man.

Some prefer the social realism of a Mickey Spittoon, *My Organ is Quick*, where the good guys and the bad guys are well defined. You're either direct and to the point, or you're pointless. It's like going trout fishing with a two-by-four.

Brodkey practices a sleight of hand, the graceful arc of one of his lines like he is fly-casting with the prose. He seems to have a neurotic Jewish courage to go beyond, while keeping his feet on mortal ground. A few years ago I heard him speak in a bookstore. I asked a couple of questions and stood around afterwards, noting his patient curiosity while surrounded by a few young men. His "adventures in homosexuality" were "largely in the 1960's." He was larger then? He has a fragile integrity. I wonder if Jews are more evolved when it comes to the androgynous, or if they're given to an androgyny of the intellect.[124] Some of them, perhaps. Their curiosity wants to redefine the circumstantial evidence of their gender.

He has a quivering equivocating nervous system, putting its foot down on the edge of the grave. Qualifying every other statement, he is not a man without qualities.[125] His wife said Brodkey is "not an unknown quantity," meaning she knew what she was getting into when she took up with him. Is there a tendency for women to be bedfellows with the known? It doesn't keep them from the more exploratory modes like mountain

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[124] On the other hand, men and women are segregated at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, and "Women's efforts to pray (in the women's section) are often purposefully drowned out by the men who use loudspeakers to disrupt women's prayers, and ensure women's voices can literally not be heard." Sarah Wildman, "Israel's prime minister is keeping gender segregation at Judaism's holiest site," Vox.com, June 26, 2017

[125] One time I had to report for jury duty and was not in the mood. I brought a novel I was reading to the jury selection and made sure the attorneys could see the title, *The Man Without Qualities* (by Robert Musil). I was also wearing blue suede shoes to throw them off.

climbing or experimental prose. Brodkey took chances with his style, which apparently is not okay when it finds its way into *The New Yorker*. Some of those who put him down are burdened with low ceilings.

Now and then he seems to balance lines that ring true with lines that ring false. The last one, for example, "I can say nothing further at this point." Maybe he should have left it at that. He adds, "Pray for me," which seems out of character, or slightly hypocritical having (two paragraphs before) referred to having a "truly extensive terror, anchored in contempt for you and for life and for everything" (meaning his readers). What does prayer have to do with it, especially for a man who knows that everyone dies alone? I should qualify that if one has thousands of readers and a good woman by his side. He has accepted death and wonders what prayers from the general public have to do with anything. Is a prayer thought? Therefore, we should think of him. When I read an announcement of his having a fatal illness I'm already thinking about him.

It sounds like I am criticizing the prose of a dying man, or a momentary lapse in the pose. It threw me off a little, sounding like a convenient sign-off. For that matter, "To My Readers" sounds like Tomb I Read.

Saturday, June 19, 1993

The other night after work I walked to the Cambodian place in the Tenderloin. I stood outside having a cigarette and leaning against a pole. A black man walked up, maybe thirty, looking strong and fit and probably unemployed. I've gotten so used to this I hardly blink. I stood there while he was standing next to me, his head turning this way and that, but talking to me like it was surreptitious, muttering if he could only get $5 for

the night. He insinuated it was not so much a question of survival, but of feeling good. At any rate, could he have a cigarette? I produced the rolling papers and tobacco and he rolled one. Then he wanted to know what I was up to, like I was suspicious or had ulterior motives for standing on the sidewalk. I'm beginning to wonder if black men own the streets and sidewalks in this part of town, making inquiries or threats about my presence on what I thought was public property. It's like I walked into someone's front yard smoking a cigarette and someone walks out of the house and questions what I'm doing there. It's getting to the point where I want to reverse it and return the sentiments. Go up to a black man on the sidewalk and hit him with a mild interrogation. "What are you doing here?" The odds are he would take it as an invasion of privacy and I should mind my own business.

I'm often approached by black men on the street who begin with some idle conversation, but it's usually a hustle or a con of some sort. It is hardly ever someone being friendly or neighborly. I don't think I'm alone in this experience. At some point, people get tired of it and you hear black people say the white man is cold, he walks on by, how rude. Tell me about rude.

Maybe a third of the panhandlers are white gutter alcoholics and time-lapsed bikers, and I almost never stop for them. They are generally more strung out than the blacks. Few Latinos and no Asians bother to panhandle. It might have something to do with not being abandoned by their own people. At the same time, they have the intelligence or foresight to know what a dead-end street it is, standing on a corner for hours for a few coins.

Meanwhile, I finished the cigarette. The guy finally got around to asking if I could help him out with a couple of bucks. I said no and he left. Walking away he nodded to a black man in his twenties who walked up to me and in a low voice wanted to sell a controlled substance. “I’ve got big ones….” I expressed some disinterest and he said, “No really…”

I went into the Pnom Penh, a simple place with some style. One of the tables was occupied by a polite Cambodian man, the rest were empty. Spring rolls and pineapple catfish soup. The evening pivots on a bowl of soup into a finer direction.

There was a minor disturbance outside. A black man was roughly pushing a white woman down the alley. They went past the window with her complaining loudly that he was hurting her. He acted like a determined little jerk, but the woman wasn’t much better. She looked and sounded like she had been on the streets a long time. No one went outside to assist or inquire as to what was going on. The Cambodian man at the window had a look of wonder and concern. He was older with some manners and discretion, like he didn’t know how low Americans can sink.

Typing in the afternoon.

3:00 p.m. I considered going out to the cliffs, but it was windy with some fog on the horizon. It amounted to an edifying deflection as I ended up at the library. It’s in a sorry state nearly four years after the earthquake. The aisles of books are in some disarray, while the building and surrounding grounds have been allowed to go to seed. The area is a hangout for winos and derelicts. I had a few leads and tracked them down, from Masson to Dick (Philip K.). Still no *Culture of Complaint*.

I found an article in *The New Yorker* on a black professor at the City College of New York, Leonard Jeffries. His followers are trying to get an old black professor removed because, among other things, he has some character and is married to a white woman.

6:00 p.m. I left with a few books, including two by Janet Malcolm, *The Purloined Clinic* (collected articles) and *The Journalist and the Murderer*. I took a bus out near the Haight with the fog rolling in. I was reluctant, having plans to meet with the Phantom in the sound-room, but it was diametrically opposed to what I was in the mood for - namely the written with an opera in the background.

Another edifying deflection: he wasn't home. It turns out I missed him by a few minutes. I caught a bus to the Tenderloin. I sat behind a young woman, maybe Armenian, who had an alluring whorl of small dark hairs on the back of her neck which headed downward. If there is ever a hairy women's liberation front I will support the cause and effect. When she turned around I saw a moderately low-cut blouse with a heavy bandage covering her breast over the heart. No idea what that was about, and I didn't ask.

I read *The Purloined Clinic* with *Faust* on the radio. At first I thought she was a pinched and East Coast version of another writer (she was born in Czechoslovakia), but that doesn't do her justice. Writing for *The New Yorker* and *The New York Review of Books*, her credentials are not chopped liver. There was a long article on the magazine, *Art Forum*. One of the people she reviewed is Rene Ricard, which rang a small and not so edifying bell. On one of my trips to Europe with the French-Belgian woman we stopped in New York for a few days. I think it was 1981. I was in a small bookstore on the Upper East Side and found a slim volume of his poems (not sure how I knew his name).

Malcolm mentioned a comparison to Frank O'Hara in the latter's more casual moments, but that's like saying they both wore the same shoes. He couldn't tie the laces or intuit the places of O'Hara. I read a line where he was putting his mouth to a man's butt.

She spoke with someone who knew him and acknowledged his presence in the literary world, but said, "I find his significance elusive."

A review of Milan Kundera and his "*legerdemain"* (sleight of hand) in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Speaking of the character Franz, "the least vivid figure" in the book:

> Franz seems less close to his creator, less densely conceived, than the others; he is more abstract and schematic. His culminating 'heavy' action… seems to arise as much from his creator's sense of the fatuity of political activism as from any internal necessity of character.

It struck me how this sounded like a good description of an American, particularly in being "less densely conceived."

12:30 a.m. I had been typing for a while when the phone rang. Jon was talking from his home in the wine country. He is still getting the last of his things from the flat, which is now dead and empty to him. He took away most of what gave that place an original atmosphere, from the cow skulls and bizarre album covers to the weird mechanical inventions, a couple of rifles, and collages.

He went back to North Dakota for a week or two, re-did the floors in his mother's home, and returned. He is moving the small business he works for from Berkeley to St. Helena, where he found an old house with a porch on the edge of the vineyards.

We talked until 2 a.m. and touched on the subject of women. He lives in a small town and doesn't know anyone. His connections with women have been tailing off over the last year or so. I get so involved in my own suspense concerning women I forget that

other men have similar trial and error stand-offs and/or alienations. It was a little odd considering his reputation for having slept with women at the drop of a hat or blouse, and then moved on, but now he's reaping the whirlwind and is cautious. He knows what women put you through and what you put yourself through in relation to them. The whole thing seems more trouble than it's worth.

He is incommunicado in a land of strangers. You don't know who you might be talking to or where they're coming from, historically and otherwise. It is the age of communication, but it is diluted by a multicultural confusion.

Jon is cautious when talking to a strange woman. It is the vertigo of a man who goes out on a limb with a woman who is self-contained. Men are known for building bridges, projecting themselves into space, and getting shot down. There is an old concept of the "fallen woman," but there seems to be more evidence of fallen men. There should be signs like, WATCH FOR FALLING MEN. A lot of women would prefer that men would not go out on a limb in their direction.

He is kind of edgy, and is more at home in a workshop. I gravitate to books while he gravitates to equipment of every sort. It is just as natural for him to take apart a radio or fix a water heater as it is unnatural for me.

There was some mention of the Phantom and his aimless life. He isn't going anywhere with his music and is drinking too much. I said something about too much acid, but he deflected the notion, having done a fair amount himself. He said the Phantom called him a while back and said, "You're an angry young man," which made him a little… angry (they're the same age). It's true he can work himself into a tense fury in no time, being biting and sardonic about something. I wonder if we're friends because of

these parallels - you see a warped reflection of your moods in someone else. It puts things in perspective when you know that anger, unrequited love, and breakdowns in communication are not unknown to others.

Sunday, June 20, 1993

8:30 a.m. Not enough sleep by a long shot. An hour later I took a cab to the station and caught a train to Mountain View.

11 a.m. I stepped off the train into another climate zone of warm air. My sister was there to pick me up. She has gone from teaching at a private university in New Jersey to living in California without a job. She dropped out of the academic rat race, but her feminism is going strong. We have our back-and-forth debates and I learn a few things. The ex-professor has an academic-ethical view of women, but I think they're better and worse than that.

While we drove she talked about a book she had on the importance of establishing "boundaries" in a domestic relationship, or something to that effect. She has to read a book about learning how to fight. The instincts are so foreign that they have to be delineated with behavioral guidelines in a book.

I said one of the boundaries is the perceptual limitations of a woman (I was being provocative). It goes both ways, but I wasn't feeling diplomatic at the moment, being hauled up from the depths of the Tenderloin and deposited in the shallows of a bedroom community where someone had a book with a premise I found depressing. There are many books on behavioral engineering of one kind or another, and they're usually for

women. You wonder if they have a natural bone in their body if everything is a social construct.

I'm getting to the point where "what's inside a girl" (to quote the Cramps) is disheartening. It's curious that a relationship is threatening to a woman's self-definition. I always thought it was an enhancement (wrote "enchantment").

Recently she broke up with the head of the sociology department at the university in New Jersey. He was out here for ten days, and she said the connection wore thin from coast to coast. His tension and intensity were a problem (even though he was a birder and a baseball fan). It wore on her, having bailed out of academia with its pressurized corridors. The admonitions to "publish or perish" were getting to her. I thought it took some courage to abandon a career she found too dry and stressful. On the other hand, it seemed so California to deny that stress is a part of life, along with other harrowing things like intellectual arguments and secondhand smoke.

The intellect is divisive, as if in the process of dotting i's and crossing t's you cross someone out and poke someone else in the eye. The voice of an individual makes a heavy metal band seem harmonious, being a group effort in front of people who are hypnotized by the beat (the lyrics are disturbing but the words are blurred). The written defines what a writer has in mind, and in the process pushes someone else's opinion to the side. The temerity of putting your thoughts and opinions on the page is inherently provocative. It diverges from group-think. It adheres to a medium that is cool and abstract, compared to audio-visual heat-waves which (according to McLuhan) are soothing and inclusive. It was probably a writer who said that, "In the beginning was the

word…." I think the Big Bang was closer to the audio-visual,[126] and anyone who works with sound and image is dealing with pretensions to originality. The word is burdened with an aura of finality (if not the false authority of print).

Where was I? We arrived at a playground where my four-year-old nephew came running from a long way off, jumping into my arms. I carried him back and met my brother and his wife and one-year-old son who had traveled from Los Angeles by train. They were on their way to Seattle. I went from being a lone figure in the city to being surrounded with relatives. It is a world of difference interacting with a four-year-old, compared to an addict on the street. It might be different if I met the latter on a playground with a ball and bat.

Some of it was videotaped by my brother. (He studied film at UCLA, but the furthest he got in the movie industry was throwing mud on Rod Steiger from off camera.)[127] His wife was born in Mexico, and her capacity for love and romance is as big as a four-lane highway.[128] It means more to her than the evening news and gender politics. I'm so far removed from that approach it's like a foreign shore. It's always there, but some of us are caught up in the riptides of a zeitgeist where the human condition is being deconstructed.

Meanwhile, I was negotiating with the quick mercurial moods of those who're one and four years old. I walked back through the magnolia and jasmine carrying the one-year-old. He was undecided as to whether the trees were a viable substitute for his mother. We drove back to my other sister's house with the enormous mortgage. It looks

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[126] Except there is no sound in outer space, no living organs which could register such things as sight and sound.
[127] Not all of his movies had the caliber of *The Pawnbroker* or *In the Heat of the Night*.
[128] And just as domineering, as it turned out.

like an expanded hotel suite that hasn't been occupied yet. My place looks lived in, for better or worse. I'm not sure how original it is, but that is where I've been originating a journal with a heavy typewriter as a wishing weight.

There were variations on a theme of ball and bat, but on a level of little kids. I sat next to a small table with the one-year-old who was wide-eyed with a wandering attention span. He pointed to some cherries on the ground like I was supposed to pick them up. He demonstrated the will of an infant when I lay on the ground and he walked up, a little wobbly, and tried to roll me over and lift me up. He then pointed to what he had in mind, hoping I was not too dense to get the idea.

All of this under a tree loaded with heavy lemons. The four-year-old once thought that tennis balls grow on trees.

Saturday, June 26, 1993 (six days later)

A deflected Saturday. I woke up after a late night of typing and two-thirds of a bottle of pinot noire. I felt the effects of last night or yesterday in general, pushing myself to a state of exhaustion. Even with the swimming I'm beginning to wonder if a driven spirit can wear out the body.

I made coffee and was in a daze, planning my next move – the typewriter – when the phone rang. The Czech woman said she was a block away. A few minutes later she walked in. I had some momentary panic considering the condition of the place, although nothing like it was a few days ago. Fortunately, she is not concerned about those things. I don't know if that's how she is or it comes from growing up behind the Iron Curtain (a phrase she hates).

She has never been here, and kept remarking on the windows and the light. This area was bad in her opinion, but she loved the view. She lived around here a few years ago on first arriving from Czechoslovakia. I wonder if living here will lead to my departure from this country.

She looked better than I remembered. This is someone who cuts or dyes her hair every month. Her hair is very short, platinum blonde, which goes along with her fair-skinned Slavic features, pale blue eyes, a little glitter on her eyelids, and violet lipstick. Cheekbones and a profile with character. At thirty-one she is still something of a tomboy (and came here on her bike). She likes Rajneesh, and thinks Milan Kundera is a male chauvinist. Recently she was delivering packages and gardening. Strong muscular legs in tight pants with a sleeveless muscle shirt, half-unbuttoned. Her muscularity is extended to her butt, which curves out behind her.

She went into a long monologue. It made me wonder (again) if women who complain about being interrupted are not giving us the whole story, like maybe they were hogging the conversation.

We went to the corner store, a beer for her, some apple juice for me. When we returned she said she was tired, not getting much sleep. She just started working at a coffee shop. I showed her the book by Janet Malcolm (who was born in Prague).

The conversation drifted into sex. It wasn't me who brought it up, I think it's more revealing if it comes from the woman. Her approach-avoidance of it is a wonder to behold. She is honest about how she was in her early twenties in Prague, not too concerned about who she slept with, or the ones she left behind and may have hurt. Now she is careful to a fault. The difficult affair with a Latino poet ended with his death. It

took the wind out of her sails, and it has been a slow road back to some version of her former self.

She talked about how you never know where you are with American men and their "nice" facades. They keep their options open while a woman is twisting in the wind. I said that sounds familiar, having experienced it with a few women. She goes out now and then (for a long time she didn't), with the usual dilemma. There are men she isn't interested in, but if she meets someone she likes she has no idea how to approach him. She said it's sometimes hard to tell who is homosexual and who isn't, having been fooled more than once. I said the same holds true with women. Some of them are undercover lesbians, ambiguous bisexuals, or not sure if they're sexual at all.

She mentioned a column in a local weekly, the *Bay Guardian*, about something called "jack-off parties." It's one of those strange things Americans do, and she wasn't sure what to make of it. She wasn't sure if she would go to one out of curiosity. Would she have to participate, and how exactly? It sounded awkward. Do you walk into a room full of strangers, take off your clothes, and start touching yourself? She was mystified. I had the feeling there was a subtext here, with the conversation leading to something. This is someone who doesn't mind being naked at the beach, and we were lovers last year (for one night).

She talked about feeling old, and recently fended off the attentions of a nineteen-year-old Mexican boy (her term). He thought she needed to get laid. After a while she realized he might be right. It had been a good many months, so she relented and survived the experience. Her feelings were mixed – he was something of a dynamo in bed and knew all the right moves. Wore her out, in fact. On the other hand, it had all the

emotional depth or resonance of a workout at the gym. They didn't have much to talk about. He was rather matter of fact – "Okay, see you later." On another occasion, when he was drunk and sounded ignorant, she thought, what am I doing with this kid? She admitted that the experience "opened" her up and gave her a glow which communicated something to other men. She was getting more attention after that. I've noticed when I'm with a woman it puts me in a state that other women find amenable. When you're alone it sends a negative signal and the women keep their distance.

Meanwhile, he went back to Mexico. She talked about the boyfriend who killed himself. I wonder if she is drawn to Latino men because the situation with him was unresolved. She ended it (not for the first time), and that led to his giving up on life. She said he was a lousy lover the first six months they were together. I'm not sure why she stood for it (or lay for it), but being in love can make you patient. It surprised her, having no interest in him at first.

We only went to bed one time and it felt like I was being tested. We made love and I think she was underwhelmed. Twenty minutes later there was an encore that got her grudging respect. She mentioned some ex-girlfriends of mine, and how the vagaries of chemistry have a lot to do with how things go in bed. Better loving through chemistry.

I picked up the guitar while sitting on the mattress with a pile of clean laundry and an old manual typewriter. She fell asleep in the chair with an angelic expression. Half an hour later I was still playing when she woke up, walked over, cleared a space on the mattress, and lay down for a while.

4:00 p.m. We went to a Vietnamese place a few blocks away. It was not too greasy or prosaic. Prawns and asparagus over rice.

When we returned to the studio the plan was for her to cut my hair. I put a chair in the middle of the main room, took off my shirt, and draped an old shirt over my shoulders. She went to work with the scissors, snipping off tiny millimeters at first. I said go ahead and make a difference. Maybe that was too encouraging, because she did just that. It didn't look bad, but it's disconcerting getting a haircut. You wonder if some of your presence is extended through your hair, and what does that say about those with massive amounts of it being flung around?

She insisted I wash my hair and hurry up, she had to leave at six. I didn't want to, but was finally in the shower washing my hair ("Wash it twice!"). She walked in a couple of times to make sure. While I dried off she said she had to make a few adjustments on it, so I walked into the main room with a towel around my waist and sat down. She said she needed a towel, the hair wasn't dry enough. That left me sitting on a black folding chair with nothing on while an Eastern European woman was humming and making little motions around my head with a sharp pointed instrument. Stepping back, judging the results, and complimenting herself, while I stared out the window and leaned back, holding one knee – partly in being relaxed, and partly to avoid an erection which had been threatening since the shower.

There were a few moments when she held my head, pressing herself against my arm, when I wondered what it would take for her to stay a while. Some women can be talked into something, or led by the hand as it were. It's a way of not being responsible for what happens. They can be passive-aggressive and allow it to happen, assured of the fact that it was his idea and they're exonerated. They're like passive observers who reap the benefit of their senses. It won't happen without the man making some overt

suggestions. I don't operate like that unless I'm in a romance, and it has resulted in a few lonely nights. There have been occasions where a woman thought she had done everything she could to set the scene, waiting for me to make the final leap which she couldn't do because that wouldn't fit her image of herself, and where I didn't respond for various reasons (stoned, a lack of chemistry, not interested, who knows?). It is hard to know what the signals are in a permissive age, and with touchy feminists you can't assume anything, much less that a woman is in the mood just because she talks about blow-jobs while rubbing up against you or taking her shirt off.

Where was I? Sitting naked in a chair with a hair-trigger organ lying across one leg. I put some clothes on and walked her out.

8:30 p.m. I went to a movie, or rather the making of one a block away. I'm intrigued with the inertia of a movie set, the mechanical stasis. The director should yell, "STASIS EVERYONE!" instead of places. (Instead of status, I have stasis anxiety.) There was a lot of equipment. Yesterday I woke up with five or six moving vans in the empty lot under the kitchen window, and another half dozen trucks in the paved lot across the street. The crack-heads who sleep in the bushes under some cardboard must have wondered what's going on. There was nothing going on, so I went home.

I was reading with the opera on. It was an article by Janet Malcolm about the niece of Virginia Woolf, Angelica Garnett (born in 1918), an artist whose view of the Bloomsbury people was shown in the title of her memoir, *Deceived with Kindness*. As a young married woman she would have visitors. "'[S]eeing my life through their eyes, I built up an image of myself as the perfect young mother-housewife-hostess, and spent

much of my energy living up to it'."[129] This went a long way in explaining women who use others as a mirror, seeing their life through the eyes of others. How socialized can you get? It sounds a little hollow, and here is Malcolm's closing comment: "How much of the gaping hole of self at the book's center is due to the writer's insufficient grasp of the autobiographical form, and how much to her incomplete self-knowledge, can only be surmised."[130]

A woman looks into a man's eyes in order to see herself and will judge him according to how she is reflected. She is not stealing, but using his eyes, or to paraphrase a song by Dylan, I gave her my heart but she wanted my eyes ("Don't Think Twice, It's Alright"). The man remains unseen, a wooden silhouette supporting two mirrors meant for her. The woman lives up to an image of herself, and he is there to keep it going, however shortsighted on her part.

11:00 p.m. I went out to the corner. The film crew was between shots. There were a lot of people standing around, including me. I stood there for an hour across the street, watching the procedure. It seemed like an equation of modern times with people going through the motions which are memorized, their purpose wearing thin as film.

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[129] Janet Malcolm, "What Maisie Didn't Know," *The New York Review of Books*, Oct. 24, 1985

[130] Her mother, Vanessa Bell, was turned on by male homosexuals, with the obvious problem being they were not turned on by her, at least physically. While married to Clive Bell she managed to get impregnated by Duncan Grant, although Angelica didn't know that was her real father until she was seventeen. When her father's boyfriend, David Garnett, saw her as a baby he said, "I think of marrying it; when she is twenty I shall be 46 – will it be scandalous?" When Angelica was old enough she lost her virginity to him in the home of the man who wrote *The Wonderful Visit* and *The War of the Worlds*. They were married and had four daughters.

You wonder if there is something in the water when it comes to English mating rites (at least among the upper classes). Virginia Woolf, who by most accounts was frigid, mentally unstable, and a lesbian, but not all the time, married a "penniless Jew" who took care of her when not working on his endless autobiography. Being ultra-sensitive has a down side, and getting molested as an adolescent by her half-brother didn't help.

It is ephemeral, but it's anchored with a ton of equipment and a crew of film technicians with security and others doing little or nothing. Maybe they're related to an assistant producer. A couple of woman were professional echoes who would echo the director when he said, "Rehearsal," and they would say, "Standby for rehearsal!" I thought the star of the show was a piece of equipment on wheels that operated as a pivot with a camera and two chairs on one end, a weight on the other, like the tone arm of a record player (I had a vision of it spinning around and flipping the cameraman a block away).

It was a busy Saturday night with noise and fumes and they were trying to shoot a scene. The cops cooperated, directing traffic, and they altered the stoplight. Hollywood controls the signals. You walk out of a movie feeling accelerated or slowed down. There was a sense of overkill with all that effort and expense to shoot a few scenes which would last a minute or less in the film.

The scene was nothing to write home about (or write about at all). There were hip-hop slouches hanging out in front of a wall where some guy pretended to have spray-painted THE FUTURE. I saw an Asian assistant working on it earlier. A mother yelling to a girl to come in and do her studies. "I'm chillin'…" A lot of black people in the cast and crew, including the director, not to say security (for *Sister Act 2*). I was mystified as to why they needed to shoot on location, the camera seeming to focus on the group on the sidewalk, either side of which was blocked off. For all an audience would know, they could have been in a studio. Later there was a shot aimed down the street, however, with low-rider cars.

Which reminds me, is it only in the movies that the street gangs are integrated?

There was a store with a sign sticking out showing a shoe (that's shoe biz). I want a shoe sign. Maybe it signifies empty footage. Life is what happens when you're waiting to shoot a scene.

This neighborhood is more interesting than what was being filmed, even when they tried to replicate the local atmosphere with a few delinquents and some young whores on the corner. The real ones were a block away and walking by or standing around watching with me. It was a little odd, these candy-ass poseurs who want the authenticity of the Tenderloin to rub off on them. Maybe it's to compensate for a lousy script. From what I could tell, the director wasn't making any panning shots of old buildings, including one with a writer in the window.

I disappeared into one of those buildings around midnight, and was on the typewriter for a couple of hours.

2:00 a.m. Phone call from Jon in the wine country. He had been drinking and said he knew I would be awake. We talked for an hour, with some mention of my going up there sometime. It's 100 degrees and there are wineries.

He said he doesn't mind living alone, but it's lonely at times. He met a Korean girl who spent the night and was "dry-humping" him, but that's all it amounted to. She is twenty-three, and went home to spend the summer with her parents. He wonders how a woman can put on the brakes at any moment when it looks like they are going all the way. However, he said it was nice to have someone in his bed.

There was some reference to the Phantom who he is feeling estranged from. Not sure why, except that when the Chinese girl moved in (my friend Ming), things got tangled up. She broke up with her boyfriend, slept with both roommates at different

times, and the Phantom is still carrying a torch (must be hard to play guitar at the same time). She would seem to have come between them, and they're not making music anymore. Neither one of us were blaming her entirely. The Phantom was obsessed with her, it made him all the more absentminded and distracted.

3:00 a.m. I got off the phone and went outside, curious as to how long they would be shooting. I stood on the corner with a few others, including three girls wrapped in a blanket (a cold wind had returned) and some hip-hop fellows lounging on a low Impala. I walked across the street and realized I had been standing in the line of fire so to speak. They were extras who were supposed to pose on a corner like the real ones do, with the girls in hot pants and fishnet stockings.

They ran through the scene several times, setting the extras in motion like a programmed game board where the pieces move in this manner until someone yells cut. They return to their starting places to go through the motions again. For most of them it consisted of walking by an actor talking to someone. The hookers went into motion with their poses and the camera shooting up the street (having cleared away the equipment).

On the phone earlier I glanced out the window and saw a flickering light on a building as if it was on fire. Turned out to be a floodlight on a high crane with a bit of plastic in the wind. There were other floodlights and cranes further up the street. The film crew had incorporated the cops to stop traffic and suddenly it was quiet.

I stood in a small crowd and realized that more than half of them were extras who walked off when the scene was over. You never know who is an extra and who isn't, or who is real and who isn't. Reminds me of a film, *Invasion of the Body Extras*. Not to say they're programmed androids, but you almost have to be to stand this sort of thing.

Hitchcock said that actors are cattle. I felt sorry for the extras whose participation was repetitive and dull.

I was leaning against the building when they changed the angle of a shot, bringing chairs and equipment over to this side. Suddenly I was surrounded with stuff. I asked someone if I should move, but he said, “It’s okay.” He was moving a video machine and chairs with names on the back to the other side of the street, and then a big soup container on wheels. A minute later a black man walked up, standing close. He said, “You with the crew?” I said, “No.” He wasn’t either, but was interested in the soup. Or would he get shot? There was a heavy police presence. One of them directing traffic should have been an actor, with his gun belt hanging low and motioning with impatient arms, the handle of his pistol leaning out.

I wonder if the Tenderloin is remunerated for the use of its ambience. All the world’s a movie set and the men and women merely extras. I don’t like the sound of that, and it was maddening, the long pauses. I don’t know how people can stand it. The medium of the written has a different sense of time, with less people and equipment involved. I felt like an aborigine watching how a film is made.

I thought the actors would have to be brain-dead to withstand the tedium. Part of their profession is being able to withstand the process of making a movie, to hold onto their humanity, not to mention role, through such a deadening process. They sit around for hours and then on cue portray a human being. Maintaining a hold on what is human is a challenge in modern times.

The shot was finished with a woman yelling, “BACK TO HOLDING!” All the extras headed in the direction of a Laundromat around the corner where they waited for instructions on the next shot.

4:00 a.m. I walked down the street like an invisible drama, disappeared into a building and went to sleep. Fade to black. Cut.

Sunday, June 27, 1993

10:00 a.m. I woke up listening to the drone of a big motor on the street. Not enough sleep. I finally got up and looked out the window. The lot was empty. All of the equipment and the moving vans had vanished, probably on their way back to Los Angeles.

I thought I would go to the gay and lesbian parade as long as I was up. A few hundred thousand people were gathering about six blocks from here. I had never seen the parade. I don’t usually go anywhere on a Sunday morning, much less get up early, and I used to live further away. People come from hundreds of miles away for this, but I was not so motivated. Standing on a crowded curb for hours as a deferential witness to a group of people with an exclusive self-definition is not that appealing. It’s like going to a party where you don’t know anyone. Do I want to feel peripheral while others are enjoying themselves?

I thought of what the marchers would say to the viewers and voyeurs:

> You’re not like us, we’re not like you,
> we’re special because there’s more of you
> pedestrian breeders, stay on the curb.
> We promenade, do not disturb.
>
> It is okay if you applaud

our visual impact and it's audible,
the lower intestine laudable.
Morality is a fraud.

11:00 a.m. I joined the crowd on Market Street. There were a few motorcycles disappearing in the distance. I thought I missed the dykes on bikes. I walked a couple of blocks, found an area where I had a view, then heard a distant thunder. I hadn't missed the main contingent. It's like in *Close Encounters* when a few little UFO's go by and you think that's it, until the enormous metal throbbing mother ship appears with an apocalyptic presence.

There were hundreds of dykes on bikes and they kept on coming, a parade of endless innuendos, riding two abreast in a line a few blocks long. Many had a woman on the back, "on our backs," and some of the bikes were full-blown hogs of the Harley-Davidson persuasion. There were women sitting low on a machine who were over two hundred pounds with a crew cut and black leather. A few had their tits out like accessories or too much fat to worry about.

Others were good looking and they flaunted it. Their boobs were out in force in every form and size you can imagine, defying gravity or not. A serious-looking woman leaning back behind a topless woman driver. There were others in lacy bras and thong bikinis, or leather outfits with studs and chains.

One biker rode with nipple rings, her milk glands were in chains. A woman rode behind and held a leash connected to the topless woman driving the bike. The leash was attached to a leather band around her mouth. Shut up bitch and drive - her punishment for being better looking. A later variation on a theme: two lesbians walking in cut-off jeans

and topless, one of them on a leash with her head wrapped in black leather. She walked carefully, the blind leading the unkind.

The psychosexual hybrids and mutations were out in force. The melodramatic poseurs were out for a stroll, redefining his and hers. I forgot to mention two women on a bike in bondage attire, the driver with a long rubber dick. The woman in back would reach around and wave it at the crowd and make it wiggle.

One lesson of the whole procession was how normal gays and lesbians are. It ran the full gamut, from sinister S & M dominators to those who could be your sister or your uncle, from leather jackets to light chiffon and flower children. Not to mention a disturbing contingent known as "Lesbian and Gay Employees of Wells Fargo Bank" in their matching corporate T-shirts (I wanted to yell, "I'm losing interest!").

I'm getting ahead of myself. The dykes on bikes were leaving the parade in the dust, although they kept stopping. Girls kissing and hugging on their motorcycles while the crowd was watching and cheering most of the time. They were reaching out to the converted, as many in the crowd have similar orientations and a reason to believe that being incommunicado is death. There was a sign about the necessity of being seen for those who are discriminated against - strategic visibility.

Some of the faces of the dykes would stop a truck-driver. There were lightweights and heavyweights, the ordinary rubbing shoulders with the stunning. Every race as far as I could tell. When they had finally passed there was a small group of women on bicycles picking up the rear which got some applause. They had a sign: BICYCLES ARE JUST AS QUEER.

My impressions of what followed are a three-hour blur. It amounted to a long review of the human condition from a homosexual perspective. They were demonstrating how far they have "infiltrated" into mainstream society, or rather how society has a lot of people who will not have traditional wedding ceremonies. I wondered if the orientation is more complicated than either side is willing to admit. It's hard to fit on a protest sign, beyond FUCK YOUR GENDER. There could be several reasons for someone who sleeps with their own gender.[131] An inherent biological proclivity is one, but in some cases it may be by default. If one has a sex drive, but finds it impossible to connect with the opposite sex, who does that leave? Some gays and lesbians have tried it with the opposite sex and didn't like it. Some lesbians are so plain or mannish that they wouldn't attract a man. Others have gorgeous bodies but their encounters with the opposite sex were disillusioning, with men just wanting to fuck them and they found it disturbing. Some women were abused by men at a young age. Some men were initiated at a young age by other boys or men. There are many routes by which they came to be marching on the main drag.

Some of them - which you hear from the hardcore community - are poseurs who glom on to a subversive role because they aren't so glamorous in the straight world. I know an actress (Phoebe) who bemoans the fact that she isn't attracted to women, saying she would have more coolness and theatrical contacts as a lesbian. I read an article which quoted a black lesbian in academia who was scornful of something she called LUGs (lesbian until graduation).

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[131] I'm not sure what is more bizarre, that some use an ancient book written by a superstitious tribe in the Middle East to condemn romantic feelings between men, or that the same book frowns on other customs which are common in modern times (including money-lending with interest) and no one says anything. Credibility is not an issue when dealing with a book that has a 900-year-old man fathering children.

There are endless variations on this. A Jewish friend of mine is bisexual (she works in computer graphics), and encountered some friction from lesbians who wanted more commitment and definition from her. She felt pigeonholed about her sexual preferences. This is not to mention one or two ex-girlfriends who experimented with other women. One wanted to find a straight woman who would go to bed with her.

Where was I? The sights and sounds in no particular order – I should have been taking notes, but was lucky to have a view and a tree to lean against. There were people viewing the procession from on top of a bus-stop shelter. The parade was orchestrated so the factions and the floats were spaced out, making for some curious juxtapositions. One of the more sinister (and not politically correct) was a diesel truck cab pulling a heavy wooden trailer piled with metal debris and old toilets on which a few bearded men were sitting as loud music played. They were sadomasochistic men holding onto an old style of homosexual as anti-social deviant. There was an outhouse on the trailer and a sign: WE RESERVE THE RIGHT TO SERVE REFUSE TO ANYONE. The Lone Star Saloon.

This was followed by a contingent of lighthearted suburban employees of a corporation who happen to be gay.

There were men and women in the police force and the fire department. The Sheriff in a convertible. The public utilities (someone yelled, “The check is in the mail!”). Lesbian grandmothers, distant relatives and neighbors of someone with HIV, a couple in Marin County with HIV. We applauded the afflicted. The carefree mood of a float with show-tunes in drag was followed by a small contingent with AIDS. It was like someone hands you a snow cone and then hits you in the arm.

The procession was polarized from the more extreme stereotypes to the non-stereotypic, from male fairies skipping along the street throwing flowers and kisses to a political representative (a congresswoman in a convertible, Nancy Pelosi, was topless) (I'm kidding). I think it would sprain my face to smile that long. There were signs about wanting a lesbian mayor. I don't care who the mayor is sleeping with as long as the city isn't going down the drain. Does the fact that the current mayor sleeps with a younger woman have anything to do with the job he's doing?

Gay cowboys doing a choreographed heel and toe number on the back of a long truck.

Pansy Division, a band, on the back of a truck while a boy with his shirt off gyrated on the rear bumper.

A lot of muscle men with well-oiled torsos. A surprising number of men and women with plain physiques. Now and then a flurry of toplessness and not just with the Lesbian Avengers. A heavy woman pushing fifty with her tits out. You see how breasts lose their form after a while, like they're tired of standing out and want to blend into the body. The younger women sometimes look like boys from behind. They are bareback with crew cuts and cut-off jeans. Their tits appear to be stuck on like an after-thought. It is incongruous. Women take off their shirts to proclaim their boobs are ordinary and "get used to it," and yet they want attention from a crowd. It is a little strange to see the attempts at demythifying. A lot of women prefer the myth, along with the aura and the tease, but here they treat it casually as they are walking down the street. They want the "imperial gaze" of men to lighten up.

A half-naked woman on stilts, wearing fabric around her hips and with her body painted. She bounced a little on her stilts with a big smile for everyone. That seemed to characterize the mood of this procession. You would think it was the rites of spring with fairies, satyrs, and flower children running around. A midsummer afternoon's dream (a nightmare for the conservatives) with a chain reaction of unrequited love. It isn't like homosexuals don't have similar problems of x likes y and y likes z and z is in love with him or herself. Bottoms up.

There were a few men in jockstraps. One fellow wore a penis and testicle sheath attached around his waist by a string. There was writing on his back about homo love.

A contingent of gay and lesbian parents who brought the kids.

A small group with a sign about breast cancer being overshadowed by AIDS funding, but more women are dying from it. "Women are more than their breasts." It included a courageous woman walking with a sign concerning disease and the body. She was tall and slender and wore a black leather outfit. Having had one breast removed, the leather was wrapped across that part of her chest, leaving her remaining breast hanging down. That had an effect on the crowd.

A few nuns (real ones) with a sign, NUNS AGAINST NUNN (a conservative senator).

A Jewish guy in nurse drag with a whip.

Bisexual descendants of the ancient Mayans.

A small contingent of African-American men and women. There was an article in the paper recently about how they don't get much approval or respect in their own community.

Homosexual paramedics.

The singer Holly Near in a convertible, so Near and yet so far away.

Homosexuals in the military. After a while I had the impression of passing editorials which were followed by a refutation. Many are against homosexuals going anywhere near the military. They are against war in general, and find the whole thing absurd. DROP SOAP, NOT BOMBS (a sign carried by a woman). HAIR CARE, NOT WARFARE. Something about preferring millinery to the military. JOIN THE MILITARY, THERE'S PLENTY OF CLOSET SPACE. What if there were more blow driers than guns?

A contingent of lesbians from the Philippines: PINAY PUSSY POWER. Asian gays and lesbians with leaves in their hair. Young Asian women who don't like being taken for exotic. EXOTICIZE MY FIST…. EXOTIC ORIENTAL NUBILE NOT. They demand the right to be seen as ordinary, like we all shop at the same chain drug store so get over it. Meanwhile, others in the parade were trying like hell to look special and exotic.

The float from Brazilian Airlines did a good job of it with the men in bird of paradise outfits gyrating to a beat.

Transexuals on the main drag.

LOVE YOUR BODY

A guy in a weird outfit carrying a cross with crucified spermatozoa. "No sperm is sacred."

Re abortion: I was leaning on a small tree with the crowd along the curb only two or three people deep. There were people passing behind me. A woman walked up and

handed me a flier. She was in her early twenties and naked from the waist up, very sincere, with small breasts and prominent dark nipples. She talked to me and someone else, handing out more fliers about blocking the efforts of an anti-abortion group. I thought she had a lot of courage, acting on her beliefs. There was another example of acting on one's beliefs, but on the opposite end of the political spectrum. I don't know if courage and belief are redefined or chemically altered in a reactionary context. That's a loaded question. She was assured that most of the crowd were sympathetic to her cause. There was a man in his late twenties who seemed to be a borderline lunatic under the circumstances. Otherwise he might have realized that this event is the largest in the world, with 20,000 in the parade (240 contingents), and over 200,000 people lining the streets, most of them sympathetic to the cause. He was by himself with a little sign, about one foot square, saying SHAMELESS HOMOSEXUALS / GO BACK TO YOUR CLOSETS. There was a momentary kick-fight scuffle with a black woman and I saw him a few minutes later down the street looking miffed, someone having broken his sign.

At some point in the long parade I began to feel like a spectator watching someone else's party, not knowing anyone, and then there was a minor shock of recognition: a Latina woman doing a samba-shimmy down the middle of the street and more or less alone. She wore a glittering gold-metallic bikini, the bottom of which was a thong. She was all smiles and legs and lovely butt with short black hair. Luna, the woman from Nicaragua.

I hadn't seen her in a year or two when she was twenty-five and going through a transitional phase. We met about six months earlier when I was living with the ex, who would have been around twenty-one. The ex brought her home, saying her mother kicked

her out for being a lesbian and could she stay at our place, at least for the night. I said okay. She exuded a kind of benevolence. Something about her was luscious, though she tended to a tomboy look and was learning to be a mechanic. Over the next few months I broke up with the girlfriend, but Luna and I became friends. She told me about living with a woman in Nicaragua. It sounded like a typical relationship, complete with arguments about who is drinking too much and who's a bore or staying out too late or not working. When I met her she was getting over a cocaine habit in New York City.

At some point she was having legal problems and wanted advice. A woman had stolen or was holding onto her immigration papers. I don't think I was much help, but the issue may have resolved itself. On another occasion she had a bad cut from a machine where she worked and wanted to sue - all of this while living at home. Her mother wouldn't tolerate her going out with women, and wouldn't allow phone calls from women. She was often on the verge of being kicked out.

On a couple of occasions she came over and things got a little ambiguous. I was living alone at that point, and had no intentions as far as she was concerned. I had no idea how to go about it for one thing, knowing her proclivities. We had conversations where we commiserated about the difficulties of being with a woman. One afternoon we were in the front room and she was talking about her figure, not sure how good it was, or if she could be a model. She proceeded to take off her clothes and stand in the middle of the room in sexy lingerie. Then she was turning slowly this way and that in front of a mirror, asking what I thought, were her hips and stomach okay? I said they were fine and not to worry about the skinny model look. She was too luxurious for the model business, but that was their loss.

On another occasion she came over and we walked down to the harbor for a while. Then we headed to the hot tub and sauna place, where it was more of a struggle to restrain myself. I think she was curious about men. In the sauna we sat cross-legged and facing each other. She reached over and gently lifted my cock, saying it looked like it was going to be hurt by my foot.

A few minutes later we were back in the hot tub and the phallus was acting up. It wanted to rise up out of the water, maybe because she touched it. At the moment she was standing waist-deep in the flickering light of a hot tub and saying I had feminine ways. It had something to do with being polite and not hounding her for sex. I was fully erect however, which was obvious when I stood up. Neither one of us knew what to do about it, so it was a standoff. The male organ relaxed after a while and then we were out of the hot tub. She was going on about her breasts, thinking they were lower than they should be. I walked over to where she sat and lifted them with both hands, as if weighing them, and said they were fine.

I don't know if we could have pursued this connection, having had such positive beginnings. Over the next few months we drifted apart, which was just as much my fault. There was an invitation to a Latino event, but I didn't go. Maybe she remembered that she preferred women. There had been some attraction with her trying to figure me out. She assumed men were overbearing and aggressive, and didn't want anything to do with them (except to learn about mechanics), but was comfortable with me. Maybe she was waiting for some forward moves and wouldn't mind. I was being careful, what with her being a lesbian. I put her in a category, which was kind of weak, but you can't assume a woman wants to go to bed with you just because she's naked.

She wasn't shy when we were together, calling attention to her body in ways which made me wonder. Is this about her body, or her body and mine in close proximity? When I have ambiguous encounters and the possibilities are unexplored, it's just as much my fault. I have a steady libido, but I'm too polite. If I had been more forward with one woman or another we might have slept together. On the other hand, if I was more blunt they might have avoided me in the first place.

I'm not sure how mercurial is someone's sexual orientation, and if those who're readily defined get more attention. There are women who are not so categorical. I've known a few who floated over those borders without much trouble, and found themselves in bed with a woman who reflected their interests. Which reminds me, there's a Warhol film from the 1960's where the men who prefer men thought it was absurd to ghettoize themselves with their own neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, the woman from Nicaragua. Maybe it was always about herself and her looks, and I was there to reflect her. At the moment she was soaking up the attention of thousands of people, half-dancing down Market Street and showing off her life force. She looked a little older and more in control of things than when I knew her. Maybe the circumstances had something to do with it, reveling in the music while communing with so many others. She was lovely, and might have been a good mechanic. I didn't see her with a woman though. The only people she was interacting with were a man with a whip and Zorro outfit, and a couple of sadomasochistic fairies who she may have just met.

I considered walking to the end to say hello. I walked a block in that direction and then turned around. Walking back I saw another woman I used to know across the street.

She was on top of a small structure with half a dozen other women under a banner saying IRANIAN DYKES (with Persian script).

She was cheering the parade and yelling, a good-looking woman in her mid-twenties who was a friend of Ming. We picked her up one afternoon last January and headed for a store. I was supposed to buy some clothes, but was not in the mood. They were going to force the issue. I ended up in a dressing room with the two of them, the Iranian woman and me trying on pants and getting acquainted in the process. She came over one afternoon and we talked for hours. We played tennis on Russian Hill and even went to dinner. Over the next month or two there were some conversations on the phone. She lived with a woman and slept with her (one bed). I figured out that she preferred women, saying what a pretty butt Ming has (who was not interested). It was a tenuous connection which didn't survive the fire.

Back to the parade. I had been standing for a solid 2 ½ hours with the interest draining through my legs. I was hungry and a little bored with the incessant procession. Part of the message was that gays and lesbians are ordinary working people, but that gets monotonous after a while. I finally turned away and went into a small restaurant. Sitting down was a relief, and my feet hurt. A young woman walked in with a button on her shirt: EAT PUSSY, NOT COWS.

Relaxing for a while, staring through the window at the crowd outside. Pedestrians in motion, walking back and forth and often not looking any different from those in the parade. I wondered if it was feeding itself like a tape loop, where the crowd of people along the sidewalk drift to the beginning point and are sucked into the

procession which empties out at the other end and they join the throngs along the curb. The endless enterprise of human beings watching other human beings going by.

I forgot to mention the enormous fabric being carried by a number of people for those on the curb to throw coins on.

I stood there for a few minutes with the end in sight. One of the final floats had a man with a bare butt in a long kiss with another man. They wore black ostrich feathers like two road warriors. It ended with half a dozen police on motorcycles, followed by pedestrians who wanted to suck up the aura of those who had preceded them. I walked home, thinking there should have been large paper mache heads of Rock Hudson and J. Edgar Hoover.

Half a block from my place I passed an older black man in good clothes, not a derelict. He was leaning against a car and pissing in the gutter, in case I didn't know that I was back in my neighborhood.

A few minutes later, in the kitchen, making coffee, I glanced out the window which looks up Ellis Street. A Latino man walked up to the chain-link fence on the vacant lot and stuck his dick through, releasing a stream of urine.

The view from here can be underwhelming. I hope it isn't undermining…what? My mind.

Late afternoon, relaxing with flashbacks of the long procession and a few questions. If we're all of one flesh, a common metaphysical notion, who cares who you sleep with? There were as many lesbians as gay men (not only with the dykes who're amplified by man-made motorcycles). The latter have been decimated by AIDS.

Where were the women from *ON OUR BACKS* magazine, including Suzie Bright? Maybe I missed her, who is not exactly self-effacing or low profile. They could have had an interesting float with a few women on their backs and kicking some hot-air balloons in the air.

Defiant girls. They get psyched up to walk down Main Street without their clothes on. It refers more to the past than the present, where you get the feeling their defiance is crashing through open doors. What are they defying? The adoring crowds, the air, a town where being homosexual is as controversial as being a vegetarian? Maybe it's a long-distance defiance, sending a signal from coast to coast that they are going to sleep with whoever they want. What happens to the stance if no one cares, except perhaps a few parents?

7:00 p.m. On *60 Minutes* were an unethical forensic pathologist, and an Islamic holy man held hostage by the Israelis.

There was a phone call from the Phantom. He can't do the sound-room tonight as the equipment is not hooked up. He had a couple of recent gigs, working as a soundman.

I called the daughter of my old history professor in Los Angeles. She sounded worn out. Nearly twenty-nine, a full-time nurse with an eight-month-old baby who was a 24-hour effort. She couldn't imagine having a kid without the father there – a black man who took care of the child when she was at work from 3 to 11 at night. He sounded like a nice guy on the phone.[132] I don't think they're married. She is mystified and bitter that her father hasn't made any effort to see his only grandson. I'm not sure if the bi-racial

[132] It wasn't long before he walked out on her.

aspect threw him (he's half-Jewish), or the woman he lives with was putting her foot down. She has been trying to cut him off from friends and family and doing a good job of it. His daughter can't stand her, saying he's "worse than pussy-whipped." I said I would write him a letter.

Monday, June 28, 1993

Typing last night and this morning. I could wear out my wrists and forearms at this rate.

An article in the paper on the parade. The description of it was bland and not exactly longwinded. That is one reason for my unaffiliated writings. I feel like a reporter for a nonexistent periodical. It struck me how much of what occurred yesterday would go unrecorded. That is odd in a time of mass communication where someone can burp on the other side of the world and you might hear about it. The written is an atavistic medium in a time of omnipresent video, but it provides a more thorough account of things, not to say analysis. A writer has some limitations, but don't assume the camera doesn't lie and news organizations don't leave anything out. It was something how little got through about the event. The evening news had a few passing shots, toned down for the general public. The article in the morning paper was perfunctory and ordinary, like sending a dim-witted reporter to an event which deserves the novelistic reaches of a Norman Mailer. I thought of what he wrote about the moon landing[133] and the march on the Pentagon.[134]

The worse thing is if we're given these snippets of information and think we've gotten the whole story. It's a placebo of the news, a pale echo of what occurred. Maybe

[133] *Of a Fire on the Moon* (1969)
[134] *The Armies of the Night* (1967)

you had to be there. Most of the people in the Bay Area weren't. Some got a glimpse of it on the news, or saw a photo of a man in a chiffon tutu with two cones strapped to his chest, like that summed up the event.

Then there are the limitations of being there. My friend B. showed up late, stayed for an hour, and left. How many viewers stayed for the whole parade and were not distracted by their friends while drinking beer? This is not to mention the pros and cons of being a participant. You are in the parade and feel the rush and power of attention. However, you are caught in your own segment and can't see who or what is in other parts of the parade.

What is written about an event is often two-dimensional and skewed. That has an insidious effect down the road when historical revisionists get into the act. I remember talking with the Professor who was an active leftist in the 1960's (with the SDS and LSD). He saw how an entire decade could be stereotyped by journalists who would characterize it in terms of trends and fads, including what was on the radio. There are people who know the Beat era by way of Maynard G. Krebs (on a watered-down sitcom) instead of the poet Gregory Corso. Even worse is the assumption that an era is over and done with, rather than a living current that continues to infiltrate the mainstream culture. A movement continues on more levels than you can shake a reductionist journalistic schtick at. The cultural experiments and upheavals of the 1960's are still with us.

Speaking of unrecorded histories, in the early 1970's I lived at Project Artaud in a large studio and spent a lot of time at the Art Institute. On one occasion a friend from

Holland[135] was planning a performance and I helped her. During the rehearsals I watched one of the actors motioning with his arms while I guided the cameraman. On the night of the performance, those motions involved pulling a live rabbit out of a box, clubbing it over the head, cutting the belly open with a knife, and laying the now-dead rabbit across the spread legs of my friend. The young man lay on her and the rabbit for a simulated rape scene while a David Bowie song was turned up loud, "FREAK OUT IN A MOONAGE DAYDREAM!" The cameraman hadn't expected this and nearly fell over while peering through the lens. The audience was stunned,[136] and so was the rabbit. Later that night we drove out to the beach and buried it.

The man's English girlfriend (he was Dutch) flipped out on hearing what that "witch" had gotten her boyfriend to do. Eventually he had second thoughts and erased the videotape. I had written an account of the performance which turned out to be the only record of the event, except the memories of those who were there that night. Memories have a tendency to blur and fade over the years.

2:00 p.m. B. called, talking for half an hour. She went to the parade, but from the sounds of it she hadn't seen much. I mentioned a few things until she recoiled in shock. A woman with another woman on a leash is not her cup of tea. She said she had been "ditzing" one of the men in her life. There are four men who would marry her tomorrow, only two of which she would consider or keep on hold in case they were needed.

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[135] She is a few years older than me, and saw the Beatles in Hamburg, Germany before they made it big in the U.S. At the Art Institute she made a film about Andy Warhol, and managed to include Ondine, one of the Factory motor-mouths (who seemed to have lost his spark).

[136] Some people objected to the sacrificial rabbit. She thought they were hypocritical since rabbits are killed by the thousands in the western U.S. A few months after the performance I met the French-Belgian woman who had a bedspread and a jacket of rabbit fur.

Meanwhile, she went to a women-only dance party. She had to have a few drinks to fortify herself, standing in the shadows and working up the nerve to dance with someone. She is not sure how far she wants to go with this, and not sure how much she wants to reveal. There is something unresolved in her life. Romantically she isn't connecting with men. She finds them useful or entertaining, but they tend to run into a wall beyond a good night kiss. There is an undercurrent of feelings for women and it holds her back with men. What makes it more complicated is a conservative upbringing (her mother belongs to the Daughters of the American Revolution). She has a fine figure, but is not sure what to do with it. She grew up in a household of women with no male presence, if that means anything. Some women would say it means she's lucky.

She managed to go out on the dance floor and got some attention (saying she went there for the music). Many of the women were deliberately plain and it put her off. There were not many bras. She is repulsed by women who act like they are drained of anything feminine.

I got off the phone. We might do something tomorrow. Now and then I'm in a misogynistic mood which may or may not be warranted, but I rarely have anything bad to say about lesbians. Our paths don't cross very often.

I took a shower and was hit with a few lines, trying to hold onto a thought with lots of water going by, a stream of consciousness. I thought about how the skin rejuvenates when it's wounded, the largest organ in the body. **I w**ent to work in my skin and clothes.

I half-expected a scene with the Attorney when I walked in. I left a memo on Friday which began, "Drunk two days in a row, and tennis on the third. The legend

continues….” It went on to point out the consequences, listing the errors on his last dictation. Every day there are omissions or miscalculations, and I mentioned how awful it was having to listen to his voice. The note was grounded in the irrefutable, so he couldn’t say much. The minute I walked in he said, “Why do you write these letters?” Another person who doesn’t appreciate my writing.

6:30 p.m. Walked home, picking up some fish and chips. I almost never cook these days.

I noticed a magazine in a store, *Essence,* with an earthshaking topic: “Black Women Explore SEXUALITY.” Is that a new thing? A woman writes in with exciting news of having discovered her breasts. Another has gone even further with news of something hairy lurking below the waist (she lives in the deep south). When you’re upwardly mobile, the most fundamental things are redefined (I don’t mean surgically altered) in another financial climate. You move into a neighborhood and explore a new version of yourself and your libido. There are middle class people who act like they discovered breastfeeding or the asshole.

They explore what it’s like to have articles about themselves in a glossy magazine. One of the amenities, or flimsy side-effects, of being middle class is when things are reinterpreted from a silly antiseptic angle (using TV commercials, for example). That is heavenly if you were poor and oppressed and now you’re doing better, but an arriviste is often burdened with a cranky ego.

At home there was a long workout on a wooden instrument. My mind was distracted with the tube on so I held onto the guitar for a couple of hours. There were

subconscious currents coming to the surface while my conscious mind was diverted by the mute flicker of a television.

11:00 p.m. Typing for a few hours.

2:00 a.m. Went to bed, reading about lightning bolts.

Tuesday, June 29, 1993

Woke up tired and I'm not sure why. If I lived in the Middle Ages I might think a vampire had drained my blood while I was asleep, or a succubus had sucked my semen out with some finesse.

Typing for a few hours.

2:30 p.m. I walked a few blocks to the Planned Parenthood facility. On the way there I passed a woman talking to someone. "My friends in New York say don't look at people, don't look at people, look at the ground." Further on there was a young couple on a bicycle, with him white and her Asian. She rode in back in tight shorts with her legs spread and seemed to enjoy the ride.

I arrived at the facility. It has a low-key front and you would hardly know it is there. A defensive strategy, I suppose, considering the lunatics who want to bomb it. There are other precautions. You enter through the ground floor, pass beneath a camera, take the elevator to the second floor, and go through another door.

I have a sense that being a woman in this country isn't a piece of cake. Not just when I hear about it, but see it for myself. It's similar to when I walk past some shady males who have the manners of a cockroach, and wonder if this is how a lot of women

feel. It's not surprising if it makes them wary and hard, and other men have to deal with that.

I walked up to the window. I was here a few years ago, picking up Ming from an appointment. I thought I was the only man in the place, then saw one in the waiting room, along with half a dozen women looking subdued. The woman took my name, gave me some info on HIV, and told me to sit in the waiting room. I read an article about Darlene Love.

Then I was called, returning to the window. Another woman was there, saying, "You're here for lab work?" I had a sudden image of cleaning out test tubes or being hooked up with wires like a monkey in a laboratory. I said, "AIDS test!" and she smiled. I guess they're supposed to speak in euphemisms, with the test being voluntary and anonymous. You could be spreading a fatal disease to other people, but don't let that stop you. We don't want to cramp your style, or infringe on the individuality of your sex drive, but if you come in for a test - at your convenience and only $5 - it is confidential and no one will know.

People are slammed for parking in a bus zone, not to mention driving with a little more alcohol in their blood than the government considers safe, but when it comes to the possibility of spreading a fatal disease the government keeps its hands off. I was arrested for a DUI, not because I hurt anyone, but because there was the possibility that something might go wrong. It's curious that this wouldn't apply to something like AIDS.

One might have the impression that I was inspired by the march on Sunday, but I made the appointment last week. The letter from the woman in Vienna might have had an

effect when she said her ex-boyfriend was tested for HIV and she might be coming here. The fact is I had been planning to do it for months.

It was a smooth and easy experience. I was led into a small room by a Latina woman with long black hair and a friendly manner. She was trained to handle patients and a needle. She said some counseling or questions were required, so we talked about whether I slept with men or women, and how many in the past year (precious few). I was talking to a woman I don't know about vaginal fluids, oral sex, and what happens if there are "cuts on the penis." I'd like to know how they got there.

She gave me a pack of condoms and talked about lubrication and ejaculation. I don't know which of us was putting the other at ease, but she was a trained professional and I was impressed. I liked her, whether or not it was an act. She seemed to have her feet on the ground, not deadly serious all the time, though I didn't ask any questions. "Any instances of unprotected oral sex?" The subject came up when showing me a thin piece of elastic rubber, stretching it in her fingers, saying you're supposed to use this in a cunnilingual situation. It didn't look too appetizing.

It struck me how calm and matter-of-fact she was in casual clothing with an attractive blouse. Her arms were slightly hairy, which I thought was nice. It occurred to me it wasn't the time or place to start getting ideas about a woman. There's a Lenny Bruce routine where a man is run over by a truck, lying half dead in the ambulance with a nurse leaning over him, and he makes a pass at her.

She did hold my hand, or rather arm, but it was for the purpose of tying a rubber strap around it and picking up a needle. I said something intelligent like, "Did you learn how to do this?" I was trying to ask how much training one has to have in order to inject

people. She said, “No, they let anyone come in here and poke around in someone’s arm with a needle until they find a vein.” We talked about veins and she hit one of mine. I hardly felt it as she extracted a vial of dark blood. I said she had good veins. With a lot of women you can hardly see them. She said, “That’s true. I do gymnastics. I’ve been an athlete since I was five.”

There was some mention of muscle ailments and different shades of blood. How was mine? Okay. With respect to the female condom, she was not impressed and touched on her own experiences. We talked about breaking condoms. I thought of Ming who has complained about it (she has broken a few hearts, along with the occasional condom). She said some men can’t put them on right, they do it in an embarrassed rush and it is only half on. Some guys lose their erection in the process (I know the feeling).

I rolled down my sleeve with a little Band-Aid over the puncture wound. I will return in two weeks. I walked out and waited for the bus, thinking how the place is run by women with an air of concerned benevolence for which they are sometimes treated like subversive commies. The government will allocate billions for a manned space station, but not much for family planning facilities. How long have women had the vote? If most women and a good many men could agree on the need for this, it might happen. It is more tangible than debating whether or not women are oppressed by *Vogue* magazine.

I went to work. The Attorney left early, having made a few more mistakes. It’s getting to where I can’t trust anything on tape or on the desk and said as much.

I talked with V. at the next desk, who was relaxing with the attorney she works for on vacation. She was reading another trashy romance novel. In the last one a twelve-year-old girl was having problems giving birth. Yesterday she wasn’t in the office when I

got there. A few minutes later she walked in and took about a second to notice my haircut, and said it was an improvement.

I spend less time on my appearance than my disappearance, when a typewriter can absorb entire evenings. It is something how a certain look gets different responses. Last week I had the impression that one of the secretaries, Gloria, would prefer I didn't exist. I don't enter into her frame of reference, however small and tight that is. We don't have much to say to each other, and there is even less between her and V., who has referred to her in a low voice as a tease or a bitch. Now I wonder if my haircut made a difference. She was pleasant this afternoon, even walking by my desk and asking me something, which she never does. It's good to know some women like you for your mind. Maybe if I had a frontal lobe cut, she would like me even more. I wouldn't threaten her intelligence, while having less resistance to those dumb amusement parks she frequents.

Meanwhile, the older woman at the desk on the other side of V. was making her usual comments about sex, which leave V. rolling her eyes in my direction. The woman said maybe I should write sex novels. I said, "I don't have enough experience." V. muttered, "Yeah right."

6:30 p.m. I left after barely two hours, and walking a mile or two to lower Polk Street left me in a bad mood. Given how thoughts and actions are often derived from a mood, and how arbitrary some moods are, you want to step back and wonder what's causing it. Why am I having violent thoughts, or a critical monologue running through my head? The analysis of moods, like dreams, can tell you how often they are caused by a metabolic condition – hungry, tired, etc. The worst thing is succumbing to a mood or

taking it too seriously, like thinking a dream is real or assuming that a thought in your head is the voice of God. More likely it's a chemical disturbance.

It's insidious how a mood can drift into a tangent like a blind alley. You're walking along and if you don't have some distance or self-awareness you might act out what you're feeling. That would explain some of the pointless violence in people. My nerves are strained by a workout in the pool, or walking a few miles after work, and it generates a mental tension. There was some minor violence done to my nervous system and the only way it can express it is with a negative monologue in my head. It helps if you recognize the circumstantial symptoms. I'm walking home and having violent thoughts, a turmoil stirred up by a workout.

I went into a health food store where people were benign in the vicinity of vitamins, and I felt like a sullen assassin.

I walked down the block and into the music store. Good place to let some tension out. I handed my shoulder bag to the longhaired guy behind the counter and he said, "Awesome." Bought a string for the Strat. Went into a backroom with a few electric steel-string acoustics. Plugged in a $1500 black Takamine, turned a few dials, gave it some reverb, and cut loose for a while. The equipment had a lot to do with it, but a mood can have a virtuosity of its own. It's a dynamo of stored-up energy, and when it's hooked up to a wired instrument the lightning bolts are coming out.

After twenty minutes I turned it off and walked out. I did that once in a music store and they asked me to keep playing (I think they were tired of the usual cacophony).

I dropped into Sliders, a hi-tech hamburger joint on the corner. Not sure what I wanted, but was stunned by a video on the wall. I finally ordered something, sitting on a black leather stool. It nearly turned my stomach, but I couldn't stop staring.

It was a Madonna concert in Europe. One big production number after the next, like a lousy Broadway musical with male dancers who function as her puppets. A million-dollar over-kill production with an enormous throbbing stage and yet, given the vacuous music and "singing," you would think the stage itself was the attraction and her a side-show. Her music, not to say her voice, is the equivalent of eating out of a can. I'm not sure what is worse, a cover girl who wants to have it all, or an audience which falls for it like wannabe sinners with their tin ears.

It's not that she defiles whatever she touches, more like everything she touches becomes artificial. She milks a genre or a style for all it's worth, while not taking it seriously. It was amazing how weak it was, and how reduced her character when everything was choreographed and programmed, including the little skits. What else are you going to do when the empress has no clothes?[137]

I walked home past the derelicts, delinquents, drunks, and dames. I wonder if that's affecting my mood. Forgot to get coffee. I went back out in a few minutes, heading for a place three blocks away. It is across the street from the Mitchell Brothers Theater. I

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[137] Most of the allure is from her having stumbled on a common American archetype, the Great White Whore, and she is the latest version – more *salope* than Salome. It is occurring in a country so provincial that the flash and trash can hypnotize the people long enough to take their money and run. Marilyn Monroe was operatic by comparison.

She co-opts any pose she wants, lying across a piano showing her legs and crooning into a microphone to no effect. I mean, clunk. Maybe that is what the throbbing lights are for, to divert attention from the fact there isn't much to listen to. It makes me wonder about some women when you get into their world and it's like putting your head into a plastic bag. I think if one gender has a potential for violence, the other has a potential for the dormant-artificial.

live near the best strip joint in town and have no desire to go. It would amplify in painful detail what is lacking in my life.

I returned with ground coffee and a gallon of Black Mountain spring water. This could be significant. I've gone three months without bottled water. I only wanted Black Mountain, while vaguely conscious that tap water was a come down. There was a Proustian effect from the spring water. The dark wings of the mood I was in dissolved in mid-air. The causes of a bad mood can sometimes be traced to what you were drinking or eating the night before. In this case, it may have been the water. I had an odd sense of being refreshed and revived, like returning to my old apartment before the fire. I felt like my old self, but "purified" with spring water. It's like finding a fresh spring in the middle of a desert or desultory neighborhood.

I read a review in the *Wall Street Journal* of Edmund Wilson (by Hilton Kramer) with respect to *The Sixties: The Last Journal, 1960-1972.* 968 pages. He was a literary critic and essayist who had the balls to work in autobiographical forms. Where Montaigne wrote about his kidney stones and other discomforts, Wilson would record his copulations, the literary rhyming with the hairy. He was

> … a curmudgeon who railed against the government, the academy and the fashions of intellectual life while remaining an unrepentant hedonist and unashamed highbrow in his own pursuits.
>
> … [I]n these copious and candid journals, Wilson's patrician impersonality gives way to a need to record every last detail of his personal experience, no matter how repulsive or demeaning.

He wasn't relegated to one genre and holding onto it for dear life. He worked with essays, poems, novels, and journals. What does it say about the context he operated in (a country H.L. Mencken was so fond of), when you have to apologize for gravitating in the

direction of the “highbrow”? Would that make sense in other countries? The unashamed intellectual who pursues the finer modes of thought and conversation and enjoys it while maintaining a left-wing perspective. A “critical intelligence” is a terrible thing to waste, and he didn’t.

If Wilson read Balzac and Tolstoy in the original, went to the opera, and got drunk with Auden, I would think the shame would fall on those who barely know how to read and write. Odd to think he died in 1972. I wonder what he thought of Beat poets or the Rolling Stones. In 1969 he talked with Auden. “We had our usual conversation about the current ignorance of the technique of verse.”

> I never have much conversation with Susan Sontag. Roger (Strauss) can’t quite forgive me because I am not impressed by her.

There was an article on men in prison who learn public speaking. It helps them to pass the time, and to come up with better arguments for an early release or improvements in their living conditions. 70 percent of convicts usually return. Out of eighty toastmasters who left the prison since 1986, only one has “been jailed again.” A convict notes, “If all the people in here spoke better… they wouldn’t be here.”

Ezra Pound worried about the worsening condition of the language and its consequences. Many in prison are illiterate, but I’m not sure how far I can take the implications. A lot of anger and resentment can be channeled through the language and the spoken word, but what happens if you’re a man of few words? Does it build up inside until you explode? It’s the sort of thing that can result in iron bars closing on your life for the next few years. There are many more men than women behind bars, and women tend to be more verbal. They communicate instead of being a deaf mute with a temper.

A man will spend a few years behind bars for one impulsive act. A man of action is inactive in a prison cell. There are many crimes which were not well thought out. Thought requires some facility with the language or you just keep thinking the same things over and over, like a broken record of dead-end phrases, and that could drive anyone mad - another reason for having a working knowledge of the language. It's a way out, a release, for those who are in prison.

I was up late, typing. Another one-Guinness night. No one would mistake me for Dylan Thomas.

Wednesday, June 30, 1993

8:30 a.m. Woke up with the phone ringing. My old history professor in Los Angeles. He heard about the fire from his daughter and was calling from his office. I told him about it with the disconcerting realization it was only three months ago. It seems like three years. There has been an insidious acceleration in my life.

I told him about living in the Tenderloin and went off on a tangent about the *New Yorker* trial. He wasn't surprised that Masson wanted to turn the Freud House into a place of "sex, women, fun." He may have tried to do that with the history department. When I was in my second year of college I was cutting a line of cocaine on the secretary's desk, having locked the door, with him smoking a joint.[138]

That was all behind him, twenty years ago. He had a class this morning, but said the doctors found a mass in his lungs (he's fifty-eight). I nearly said, you have a Catholic

[138] It didn't happen very often, and the coke was not very good (I got it from my roommate, an actor with a white convertible sports car. He was from New York, and had a small scene in the film *Oh, God*). The Professor had an affair with a student (which was mostly her idea), but he kept it off-campus. He was at odds with some of the professors in the history department, like the Jewish woman who couldn't read Roman numerals, but he respected his profession.

ceremony in your chest and incense in your lungs? You're hearing choirs? I didn't, since it sounded serious. He said it had been there for a few years. "I look at my 101 exams more closely than those radiologists look at their X-rays." It was most likely benign. If it wasn't he would be dead by now.

There was some mention of the depressing situation with his civil-law wife who is uncivil and without a swivel, maybe thirty-eight. She would make life difficult for him if he flew up here to see his daughter and grandson, so he won't. He also said that she was leading him towards financial ruin.

I wonder if people have a libido for the problematic, a need for everything to be a problem. Here they are with two incomes, or one and a half, with him having inherited some funds a few years ago (his family is well off). He has between $50,000 and $100,000 to mess around with or invest. She just came into an inheritance (her grandmother was a silent movie star, the parents alcoholics), including a big house in Manhattan Beach. Their financial situation compared to mine is like a four-story building compared to a beat-up pickup truck. And yet it seems like I'm the one who's getting by without a care in the world.

That might come from not being with a woman. He lives with one, and the misery ratio is a wonder to behold.

11:00 a.m. Phone call from the Czech woman. She mentioned why she has a low-income in this country, arriving a few years ago from Prague. There was a language problem and not many skills. She has a short attention span and a kid. She was barely getting by at times, financially and psychologically. Not long ago she went to a local coffee shop and was hired. The manager seemed to like her, which may have accelerated

the process - a forty-two-year-old Israeli. She was taken aback and being cautious, but he showed interest. Her preconceptions fell away, admitting that she liked Latino men, but that didn't mean that she connected with them very well. She grew up with some antisemitic sentiments in Prague, and here was an Israeli man she found attractive.

She sympathized with his predicament, having to be careful with an employee so it wouldn't come across as sexual harassment if he likes her. With respect to some of her women friends, "Those bitches fuck their bosses…."

She made a curious point, being worried she might fall in love with him. In doing so she would lose her power, as well as her perspective and detachment. I've heard variations on this theme before. It's a wonder that women fall in love at all, especially in a power-hungry country. A lot of them don't, and others are pretending. It is harder to come by when it's seen as a loss of power, especially when that seems to be all that matters. Who is on top? Combine that with the other thing I hear, that being in love and living with a man is "work." You have to work at a relationship, especially if you're trying to bend a man to your will and use behavioral engineering, and there still could be a loss of autonomy.

The Czech woman is worried that he might find her dull and unsophisticated, being a man of the world. I said if he's showing interest and calling her late at night, then chances are he likes her. She has some characteristics that stand out from other women, and said my talking to her was restoring her confidence. I thought of women who are iron maidens in public and mashed potatoes in private, and you can't do much with either one.

I got off the phone and looked out the window. A vacant lot with tall old buildings on two sides. It is mostly dirt, with a few bushes on the other side. A man has

been out there for the last few days. A derelict with dirty hair and beard, a gaunt figure in an old Army shirt with a red cloth wrapped around his waist and legs like a skirt. His feet are half out of sneakers that are too small for him. He stood in the middle of the empty lot, staring down with the sun beating on his head and wavering. It looked like the position of a man taking a leak or waiting for it. He stood there a long time, like he was trying to remember where he misplaced his life. It reminded me of someone on acid, staring intently in a trance while spending hours in a dirt lot that felt like the desert.

He is a homeless mental case and doesn't know where to turn. He has been sleeping in a blanket or a sleeping bag on the far side of the lot. The other day I saw a man and woman who have been sleeping there return from panhandling and set up their cardboard screen for smoking crack. They barely noticed him, standing nearby and swaying a little in the breeze.

A kid stuck a New Year's Eve horn out the window and blew it at him.

I have an old upholstered chair with rounded arms, embroidered cushion, and wood trim. It's a little smoked from the fire, and the springs are shot. I'm tired of it and thought I would bring it down to the vacant lot and dump it over the fence and see if he would use it. Maybe he would have no use for it if he is channeling a manic-depressive prophet in the desert. He's not that old, mid-thirties, and white. What if I dumped the chair over the fence and it landed upside-down? Being in a state of mind where form and function don't connect, he might not have the presence of mind to turn it over.

I went to work in the afternoon.

There was a conversation with V. and the older woman on the other side of her. The latter is sort of New Age, about fifty, with a Texas background and given to risqué

gossip. She was on the phone talking about her bloodstream in tones that everyone could hear. Then we talked about the distant past, most of which V. has no idea about – like when cars used to be started by turning a handle. "You're lying." I mentioned a few other things, testing her, then said there was a time when women used to be ladies. The older one took offense, as if to say that women will throw off the yoke of oppression and not have to hear things like that. A minute later she told a joke about a nun who gets raped and likes it. She even looked concerned as she related the incident. We didn't know it was a joke until the end when the rapist finishes and feels remorse. He says, "What will you tell the priest?" The nun says, "I'll just have to tell him I was raped once, or twice if you're not tired."

7:00 p.m. I walked home.

That night there was a phone call from Ming in Alaska. She was still at work, packing fish eggs. She said it was light out until midnight, and asked if I would call her back at 12:30. I was on the typewriter for an hour or two, then called her back. We talked for two hours. I should have known it would go on that long. Whatever magnetic field is generated between us requires a symphonic time-span to have its full effect.

We covered a lot of ground with mood shifts running from the serious to absurd. She was worn out and lonely, having no mental connection of any depth with anyone. No one knows her like I do (according to her), and she was going through some self-examination, not necessarily liking what she saw: an attractive buzz-saw who had left a trail of wounded men. She is a little surprised, having assumed that men were there to use and discard at will. Now that she thought about it, it looked awful.

I said it was an old story, and business as usual. She asked if I ever experienced that sort of thing. Oh no, and the sun doesn't set in the west. I heard a woman in her twenties say that men have no feelings, so it's okay to jerk them around. She didn't have a guilty conscience about leading them on and walking away. Only women have feelings. There is a further justification for this in the women's movement, and "the invention of women as a 'class.'"[139] It is a class that is oppressed by men, and if men are seen as the enemy (the generalities are so obtuse it makes your head spin) it doesn't matter how you treat them.

Meanwhile, she was getting letters from a couple of men, the ex-boyfriend for example, which were heartrending. She wondered if it was a bad move to go on sleeping with him after she broke up with him. I said if you reversed it and a man did that with a woman it wouldn't look very good. A man is with a woman who loves him, but he breaks up with her because he's bored or wants someone else. Now and then he goes back and fucks her when there is no one else, but he doesn't want to stay with her and plans on leaving the state. Some might think he was a jerk.

Men are tools. They work with tools. They don't have feelings or they don't show them, anyhow they should know better. It wasn't all her fault. Maybe love is an unfamiliar realm for many men and when it hits them they are out to sea and don't recover from the loss of it very easily. They turn into the walking wounded with their pent-up resentments and eventually explode. They are not so fluid or adaptable when it

[139] Joan Didion, *The White Album* (1979)

comes to love and communication. Men have a higher rate of suicide than women after a divorce (and most divorces are brought by women).[140]

There is the young man whose trailer she has been living in for a while. They are together constantly since she arrived there three months ago. He got her the job and has been instrumental in making things work for her in Alaska. She had sex with him a few times over the last month. It was "mediocre" and might be discontinued, looking at it like a muscle relaxer or a deep massage.

A man who worked there was making overtures. She said,

"He asphyxiated on me."
"Fixated?"
"Yeah."

Last night he called her. He was drinking, depressed about his life, divorced with kids, and felt like an outcast. He wanted her to be romantic, but she wasn't feeling it. The phone went dead. He was in a warehouse. People found it locked and bolted from within, the phone off the hook. She had a right to be angry, not to mention worried, with another man laying such dramatic stuff on her. One problem here is when she tends towards weaker men because they're easier and she is more in control. She then faces the consequences of their dependency. A stronger man could take care of himself, but then she would be less in control.

She mentioned her recent preoccupation with behavioral self-programming, along the lines of self-improvement, and said a line which sounded like it came from a fortune cookie. Ming implied that there is something in her which is sinister - not only capable of hurting men, but enjoying it. She grew up hating her father, a patriarchal Chinese jerk,

[140] If women are more resilient, why is that? Maybe it is easier for them to meet someone if they're more socialized. The abandoned men succumb to lone wolf syndrome and it isn't pretty.

and may have taken it out on white guys (she never goes out with Asian men). She quickly discarded the thought and changed the subject.

It amazes her how easy men are, doing something for nothing. She is focused on the *quid pro quo*, another woman with an adding machine in her head (I've heard this from other women). The candles and soft music are there to get them in the mood and neutralize the adding machine. She said something about not becoming weird, and we should keep each other in focus and not lose the frequency. I said, "You're incompatible." "Incompatible to what!?" It didn't make sense to say goodbye. She finally said,

> "I love you."
> "I love you too."

Thursday, July 1, 1993

NOTES

> Dry-humping a political ideal in a weekly publication.
>
> "To clear a sniper-infested road…" (a job I wouldn't want to have).
>
> A psycho-linguistic angle to a couple of words
> which sound alike, and what if there are nerve-ends in
> the mass psychology which manage to confuse them,
> namely: "to illuminate," compared with "to
> eliminate."
> There are strangers on the edge
> of town and what to do about them? They should be
> illuminated. If a wire in your head is
> wavering it might come out "eliminated."
>
> An outcast by centrifugal force,
> it makes it hard to find a lover
> on the outskirts, but you can
> recover with a record player.

What if humans and their social personas
are mass-produced? The women more polite
than men, more present in the sense of that
conformity, a socialization on
the level of communion. Some of them
are not so present when it comes knowing
who they are. Even if there are
conspiracies of being visible,
a survival mechanism for the
oppressed, that doesn't mean it's real for them,
and part of the allure of women is the
probability of having other
personas which they keep at home, and it's a
toss-up whether you're compatible.

As if it wasn't bad enough
prolonging adolescence,
look at how it goes along with
rapid obsolescence.

Strange bedfellows in the Tenderloin.

Anthropomorphic by association.

Everyone has a room of their own, it's called the vacuum.

A secular version of original sin.

The end of the word is near.

What if some of the romantic lyrics
were composed by one old Jewish fellow
in a cheap hotel room with a bottle of
bourbon, a thesaurus, and some dirty
magazines, along with a letter from his
agent?
Throw in some amphetamines
and needles and you have the number of a
Lenny Bruce,
who would solicit the
anonymous in order to rebound

into the full autonomous sound and fury
of the limelight. A room-nervous man
for whom the burning stages fell away,
and we are all a little Jewish having
heard so many comedy routines.

12:30 p.m. I walked to B.'s apartment on Bush, levitating to the sixth floor. She threw her arms around me, pressing close with a kiss on the lips.

She was in one of her how-can-I-be-so-stupid moods where she can fret herself into a state. If I look too calm she walks over and grabs my arm or leg and shakes me while exclaiming, "I'm so dumb! What am I going to do!?" I was supposed to think of something. The plot, for what it's worth: she's on unemployment and wants to continue it, but in the meantime has to pay off her credit cards (a couple of thousand). She thought she would get a temporary job under her sister's name who lives in New York and isn't working at the moment (a graduate of Skidmore or less). The problem is she couldn't keep it straight who she was. She went to agencies using her sister's name, but they knew her from the past.

We sorted it out, then called a cab and floated to the courts on Russian Hill. A long workout, sweating on a hot afternoon, and with her talking through most of it. She stays on the baseline while I go to the net a lot.

She is in a quandary over one of the men she has been stringing along. It's been over a year and he brought her home to meet his mother. There seems to be a marriage in the wind, although they haven't slept together. She couldn't believe his patience and manners, and thought he deserved a gold star. However, she has no intention of going further with him. In fact, she wants to break it off, but is not sure how to do it or what to

say, feeling mildly deceitful. Here was a decent man, the kind that women often accuse men of not being, and this is how she treats him. He might not be so nice with the next woman who comes along.

I wasn't sure how he would take it. There is the ambiguity of her sexual orientation (which he doesn't know about), along with the impossibility of settling into a routine of being married with kids. She said as much, having grown up in a "strange" family with no men, and her role models were askew (in her opinion). We have these conversations that refer obliquely to her feelings for women. I listen and stay on the level she prefers (detached, noncommittal). At some point she said, "Incidentally, did you see the article in *U.S. News & World Report* on passionate friendships?" They are known to occur between women.

She has some doubts and went off on a tangent. "What if a person liked a certain other person, where the bond or connection was uncanny and even knew that person in a previous life… but where said person is not responding to it…?"

With respect to her confusions and emotional non-events, it seems that she is given to the dizzy and absurd. If anyone is going to lose their bags flying coast to coast it's her. She has a lot on her mind at any given moment, constantly bemoaning the fact of being scattered and unfocused. Add to that the background of her socializing, a preference for lighthearted and amusing theater, a privileged upbringing, and these tempest-in-a-teapot situations and it sounds like a sitcom. I wonder if some prefer that. When many situations are a comedy of errors and misunderstandings in polite company it's like you're holding off a life of consequence and that includes the tragic. Can you gravitate into eternity by way of the inconsequential?

There are little tiffs with friends, the drama of the week, and the lack of any real passion. It's no surprise that she has had some experience as an actress. You have to be careful what mediums are informing and deforming your life. I think she is a step above living in a sitcom. As for me, there is the possibility I'm living in (or living out) a Dostoevsky novel, which is disconcerting.

We finally quit the court. It may have thrown her a bit, the reference to women being with women. I mentioned a friend of mine who went to bed with one of her female friends and had no intention of repeating it. What was strange for her was kissing a woman on the lips, even more than having a woman's head between her legs.

We walked a few blocks to an ice cream joint where she bought us something, and then took a bus that was headed for the Tenderloin. She got off on Bush with a quick kiss goodbye.

I returned to my place. It was 4 p.m. and I was late for work. I called the office, talking to V. She said they were watching the news and I should turn it on. Something about a shooting in the financial district. I took a shower and turned on the news. One of those moments where an occupant is naked as he listens to the news of the dead, the programming interrupted for an emergency in the community.

A man walked into a law office on the 34th floor of a round tower of glass and steel downtown (101 California), a few blocks from where I work. He had a .45 and two 9 mm. semi-automatic pistols with hundreds of rounds of ammunition in his briefcase. He wore a suit and opened fire. Nine dead, six wounded (though I didn't know it until later). The reporters were stumbling all over themselves to be on the cutting edge of late-breaking news, but half the time they didn't know any more than the rest of us. There

were half-assed conjectural reports that were falling short, if not contradicting themselves. I wasn't sure at first if there were two critically wounded and one dead gunman. On the way to work I glanced down the street at the scene of the shooting.

I worked for two hours and went home. An hour later I was at a Vietnamese place a block away with large fish tanks, and had a fish fillet with ginger and green onions over rice. I kept the menu, learning some phrases I could use in my next letter to Ming. Dear *muc chien don* (crunchy squid). Dear *xi muoi* (Chinese plum). Dear *ech chien bo* (frog with creamy butter). I'll sign it: love, *chuoi chien* (flaming fried banana), or love, *sup bo vien* (beef balls soup).[141]

I walked out, crossing the street with a hooker on the corner. She had just arrived, one of the regulars, a heavy-set Latina woman with a blank expression. She opened her jacket and arranged the exposure of her low-slung mammary glands, and then was turning like a weather vane as the cars went by.

One thing about this neighborhood, the necessities of life are within a block or two: Buddha, whores, a liquor store, and foreign soup (along with a copy shop).

A phone call that night from my sister, the ex-sociology professor. She was concerned about the shooting. It hadn't affected me that much. I read the paper every day with senseless shootings leaving someone even more senseless. They happen all the time, though not so often in the financial district where I work.

She noted there were "nine dead" according to the news and it finally hit me, the sickening magnitude of what had occurred. The gunman killed himself and we were left

[141] Possible band name: COMBO WANTON SOUP (or The Cucumber Combo).

with the aftermath, as if a lightning bolt struck the tower and there was no one left to put on trial or seek revenge and damages from. Can the survivors and relatives of the deceased sue his estate? There may not be much left of it. One of his grievances was that he lost $300,000 in a real estate deal. In some respects, he did the state a favor by saving a bullet for himself. It would have cost a lot arranging for an execution (after court costs and time on death row), or keeping him in prison for the rest of his life.

He thought he was conned in a business deal. Turns out he was a bit of a con-man himself, always hustling some venture, but at fifty-five he hadn't made a killing yet. Going by his letter he was unintelligent and egotistical. He felt victimized by economic forces and in keeping with the megalomania of a warped ego others have to pay for it. I'm unhappy so I'll shoot into a crowd of people. The law firm represented the other side in a deal that hurt him, so everyone in the office deserved to die.

He was emotional and expressed his feelings. He lost his sense of proportion, though, and like the line from Auden about a dictator, "… when he cried the little children died in the streets."[142] His reflection in the mirror filled the foreground and the people in the background were as small as ants. His bad mood is equal to the lives of other people, and they die accordingly.

You might wonder if individualism has overplayed its hand when people's egos are so inflated. Pump up the consumer who is further drained of character in an atmosphere of instant gratification, status competition, and the inherent right to feel no pain. If you do, it's not your fault, it's someone else's. Sooner or later, there are large segments of the population like someone in a commercial who is trivialized beyond

[142] "Epitaph on a Tyrant" (1940)

belief, with his or her immediate comfort as the main horizon and a patience which is drained in seconds.

Amplify those circumstances in a country full of easily acquired semi-automatic weapons. What a man. A man with a gun is thought to have a masculine phallic presence, but it's closer to exploding diarrhea.

In the paper the next morning there was counseling for the traumatized, and a look at mass murders in the past. It is one of the paradoxes of a country which is careless in allowing guns, but careful when it comes to counseling. The sentimentality of the impotent.

Speaking of generalities and blind rage, there was an incident a few years ago. A man thought his wife was sleeping with her boss, so he threatened to kill everyone in her office. Completely out of proportion and it made no sense (let's hear it for emotional responses). He ended up shooting a few people until the police got him. Was it this incident or a similar one where a man shot up an office where his wife worked? He wounded her and was shot by the police. The wife in question sued the city for the wrongful death of her dearly departed husband.

Maybe he just wanted to wipe out the image of the office itself. Anyone who happens to be there is collateral damage. His anger was more important than their lives, because when you're emotional you're next to God.[143]

Friday, July 2, 1993

[143] I miss the days when the Church had more authority along the lines of, "Vengeance is mine… sayeth the Lord." It undermines a homicidal ego by instilling a sense of humility.

I was supposed to have lunch with V. I left a message, didn't hear from her, and was distracted by the semi-finals of Wimbledon (Sampras versus Becker in three sets).

There's an argument that women tennis players should get the same money that men do, but on what basis? There's no comparison, including the length of the matches (for women it's two out of three sets, for men it's three out five), and the commercials account for much of the money involved. Steffi Graf was on and off the court in 37 minutes for a semi-final match. Men have been known to make a game or two last that long, with matches lasting three or four hours, and with a virtuosity that would blow any woman off the court. How does equal pay for equal work apply here?

Went to work, late afternoon.

V. was a little exasperated. "Where were you?" I said she didn't call. She said what mattered was whatever our last agreement on the subject was (yesterday I think). I was a little sorry as she is refreshing to be around.

7:00 p.m. I headed for the pool after working for a couple of hours.

I had swum half a mile when a woman arrived, asking if she could share the lane. I took one look and made room in the lane. She was poised on the ladder in a pink one-piece swimsuit that was semi-transparent over a lovely figure. Fair-skinned with long brown hair. Turned out she was from the south of Ireland, the town of Cork. I ignored her for a while, swimming laps. She moved so slowly in the water I wasn't sure she knew how to swim.

Eventually we were both at one end, taking a breather, and I started talking to her. She was open and friendly and I'm not sure why it doesn't happen more often – if it's me, the women, or some errant chemistry involving both, where these off-the-cuff

connections are elusive. She told me she has lived on Larkin for a year or more with the lifeguard who was sitting a few feet away, “reading me paper.” He was from Dublin, and I had the feeling he was slow and predictable, while she was curious with a spark of mischief in her. Before long the three of us were in a conversation with two of us hanging on the side of the pool. I asked him what a good time for a mile was. He wasn’t sure, but had done some distance swimming in the ocean and calculated the numbers. He said 30 to 40 minutes. I said I was doing 34. That’s kind of slow, but he seemed impressed. He said he did 7/10 of a mile in 20 minutes. That was humbling, but floating next to her was not. She thought if I went one or two lengths underwater it was with the intention of drowning. I continued swimming when she got out of the pool with a towel wrapped around her waist and left.

I was still in the pool when she returned in street clothes and for a while was sitting at the end of the lane. It seemed like I was swimming underwater the length of the pool in her direction, coming to the surface at her feet and out of breath. I had done a mile by then and got out, picked up a towel, and shook hands with both of them. Such civilized and pleasant people, in their mid-to-late twenties. I wonder why these encounters aren’t more common. I should meet more foreigners. Maybe it takes a full moon to float me over the usual hurdles and hesitations.

Hot shower and walked home. Sometimes after swimming it feels like wind burn on my face. When the Irish woman told me where she lived, I said I lived on Hyde (the next street over). She said,

> “Hyde and what?”
> “Ellis.”
> “Oh, way down there.”

Oui, la bas.

I felt the effects of a workout, where the body has a tune-up, and was typing for a few hours.

Midnight: phone call from Jon in St. Helena. He was sitting on the porch on a warm night and suggested that I come up for a visit. We talked about the shooting.[144]

He dug some postholes for a fence for his dog. He feels isolated in a small town but likes living there. Being caught up in my tenuous relations with women and spending time alone I forget what things are like for others. He is over $20,000 in debt (mostly from school), and is used to doing things alone. He is not nearly as depressed as many people in their twenties, including the Phantom – partly because of his own resourcefulness. We thought it was an awful time to be running on empty, feeling the boredom and futility, and all the worse if your backbone was eroded by a television.

We talked about the Phantom who has a hidden cunning, but is often "polluted." He doesn't know why they're drifting apart.

There was some mention of the parade on Sunday. His older brother in Minnesota is homosexual, and has a story about seeing Prince alone in a club before he hit the big time. Jon mentioned how tired he was of living in the sound-room flat with his room overlooking the street. He had to weather a rich oral tradition of the black guys on the street who hurt his ears and lowered his mind.

1:30 a.m. On the typewriter for a couple of hours.

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[144] My parents called while I was in the office. They wondered if I was okay, even though the shooting was several blocks away. It is every attorney's worst nightmare, considering the volatile situations they deal with. They are caught up in legal complications, and sometimes forget they are dealing with real people who are under pressure. The Attorney I work for seems to forget that there are mortal lives connected to the papers on his desk.

3:30 a.m. I went to bed and read for a while, *The Journalist and the Murderer* (1990) by Janet Malcolm. There were some parallels with the *New Yorker* trial. The murderer was misled by a journalist who fooled him into giving his story and thinking it would put him in a good light. The journalist had a mind of his own.

I talked with my sister last night and told her about an article I found in the office. It was in *S.F. Focus* and written by a woman about the trial. I read her a paragraph describing Masson's fiancée, Catharine MacKinnon, in court. I was at the same trial and found every other line to be fallacious or conjectural.

"Vividly present is a large contingent of Masson supporters – mostly women." I'm not unaware of women, but I didn't see a large contingent or anyone in particular who was "vividly present" and/or prescient. Maybe the reporter was overly present, being paid to be there. "… [C]hief among these is the prominent lawyer and feminist Catherine MacKinnon, who – along with her colleague-in-arms Andrea Dworkin – has led an anti-pornography crusade."[145] (Dworkin has the dubious distinction of having proclaimed consensual sex between a man and woman to be politically incorrect and a form of rape). "'Kitty' MacKinnon, as she's known to her friends…" (are we her friends now?) "… is Jeffrey Masson's fiancée. She is forty-six and very beautiful in a rather buck-toothed, patrician way" (one of the more backhanded compliments I've heard in a while). Women are more sensitive and discerning when it comes to writing about other women.

> She has lovely clothes and wears them with great style. The days grow long and she stretches, rests one foot on the short wooden wall that separates those of us in the gallery from the participants in the trial – one shoe dangles half off so the high arch of her foot shows only slightly. She lifts her waist-length hair – it's dark

[145] "The law of equality and the law of free speech are on a collision course in this country." (MacKinnon). Put that in your constitutional pipe and smoke it. People are being silenced in the name of equality.

> blonde with a streak of silver – and lets it slip over her arms, the ends combed through her fingers. One wonders if she is conscious of how seductive she seems.

One wonders what would happen if a man wrote this. A woman wrote it, which means she doesn't have the limited perceptions of a man, and would never describe a prominent lawyer and feminist as a buck-toothed odalisque who lounges in a seductive manner in a courtroom. It sounds like a commercial with a woman admiring how her waist-length hair turned out. "I dreamed I went to court with wonderful highlights in my hair, as clean and manageable as my fiancé who screwed a thousand woman but I'm the best he ever had, he told me so. I'm here to seduce the judge…." During the days I was there it never occurred to me that she was seductive or preoccupied with her hair. I wondered what she had written and where I could get a copy.

The next paragraph: "Masson has been quoted as saying that living with MacKinnon is like living with God," (she takes forever and requires the sacrifice of small animals?) "… and she does seem to serve him as a beacon of reality." This raises some interesting questions. How is God a beacon of reality if God does not exist? What is so realistic about heaven and angels? "He's erected a shrine to their love on the dashboard of his Suburu." Is the writer damning with faint praise and incomplete descriptions? What sort of shrine? A plastic Jesus with the face of his fiancée? Is "erected" the word she wants to use? How much can you put on a dashboard? Maybe an altar with some roadkill and a candle. "While he's testifying – he spent three full days on the stand – he looks anxiously after every answer not to the jury but to her, his eyes fixed in a way that seems to surpass devotion." This is the sort of thing that would be thrown out of a testimony as being too conjectural. It's laughable. What surpasses devotion? Could it be he's looking for a sign of having given the right answer, having practiced and rehearsed the night

before? Is it a look surpassing devotion, or a look that is ignoring the attorney who has drilled him for days? Anything for a friendly face in which he is presumed innocent.

Or not. Given the sophistication of the woman, she wouldn't have to think he was innocent (and few men are if you're a feminist). He wouldn't either, technically, to realize it's to their benefit if he can squeeze out a few million from the proceedings. Her feminism doesn't include much sympathy for the woman being sued – one of the better journalists in the country. Is that beside the point? Is feminism beside the point?[146]

My sister couldn't believe the paragraph on 'Kitty', and admitted that if a man wrote it he would be slammed. I don't know if that implicates the reporter so much as the women's movement when it assumes that female writers are more objective and intelligent. That reminds me, Dworkin got into hot water when she came out with a novel which was meant to show us how oppressive sex is, or something to that effect. There were passages lifted out of the book which were indistinguishable from a run-of-the-mill "dirty" book.

Back to the article in *S.F. Focus* which was out of focus. It began with a two-bit categorical imperative, slapping the most careless and inflated labels on the situation.

> It was the Analyst against the Journalist. The West Coast against the East. The Rebel against the Establishment. It was the most scandalous libel case in recent history….

Masson is more East Coast than West – he went to Harvard – and used to live in New York City (not to mention Europe). He has only lived in Berkeley for a few years. I'm not sure if Rebel and Establishment apply in this context. Her terminology is so

[146] Masson ultimately got nothing from the lawsuit and his engagement fell apart. I'm not sure if the former had anything to do with the latter.

derivative and clichéd you would think she wrote a fashion column. This season's West Coast Rebel look is… in.

Further on: "Masson smiles rarely these days, and when he does, it is at her." I don't know, he smiled at me in the office. Most of the times I saw him he was in a good mood. How would she know how often he smiles? She would almost have to be his fiancée to know that. "He wants a job in a university teaching the History of Science or Women's Studies." Is she kidding? Is he?

"While women can't seem to forgive Masson for his past indiscretions, journalists can't seem to forgive Malcolm for criticizing their craft." What does one have to do with the other? I thought she said that women were among his biggest supporters, including his feminist fiancée and seven women on the jury. How does she know that women don't forgive him? My sister thought he was a slime, but she is kind of puritanical.

The *SF Focus* writer really went to town on Masson's attorney, Charles Morgan. The Attorney I work for rents an office from him (and is behind on the rent). They're old buddies.[147] Morgan is dignified, well-tailored, calm, and not unhumorous. His profile is on the noble side, but she characterized it as a "mean and unfortunate face." What does that mean? He doesn't look like the attorney in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Gregory Peck)? "As he turns away from the jury all light in it goes out." He collapses, losing consciousness, and has to be revived on the floor. "His face closes down, its features moving inward toward an often mumbling mouth. This gesture makes him look as if he's in the constant act of swallowing himself. You wonder how a face got to be this way."

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[147] The Attorney might indulge in better reading material, but he has an undying respect for someone slightly older who was in World War II. "The Distinguished Flying Cross was awarded when the B-24 Mr. Morgan was on returned to its home field successfully despite receiving 220 flak holes, earning him a new nickname, 'Flak'."

Especially if it isn't that way. You wonder how a reporter can wander so far afield. I've seen this man nearly every day in the office for several years and I never had this impression. She makes it sound like he's so senile or corrupt his face is collapsing from a lack of inner fortitude. You wonder how such a man would ever be hired for a prominent case, much less get a favorable decision. She has a warped imagination, and should write for the supermarket romance crowd.

She castigates him for not pronouncing "Chez Panisse" correctly and for being careless with other words. "He… uses English with a certain discomfort," a rather damning thing to say about a lawyer. She puts out the theory that he's trying to come across as an "Ordinary Guy" who doesn't use big words. "Words like 'psychoanalysis' remain beyond his linguistic grasp." I wonder at what point this verges on slander. In the office his two female secretaries were commenting on the article and were not impressed. He shrugged it off, almost amused. He said it was the first time he's gotten such bad press, and thought it was because he hadn't given her much of an interview. "When I question Morgan as to why Masson doesn't sit up at the table with him, he says coldly, 'Why should he? He isn't on trial here. He didn't do anything.'" Morgan should have complimented her on her hair and run his fingers through it lightly while asking if she was conscious of how seductive she seemed. There was a fellow sitting next to Masson during the trial who I saw in the office a few times, a soft-spoken man with a ponytail. She thought he was an attorney on Morgan's team. I'm not sure about that as Morgan tends to work alone. She said he "… guards the end of Masson and MacKinnon's aisle," and "… like a member of the KGB, this man will not give his name, even when boldly asked." Maybe he doesn't like being boldly asked. It sounds like the observer is affecting

the observed. Anyone who doesn't give their name to a reporter is like someone gathering intelligence for the Soviet Union, in other words a communist.

She is not too subtle, and given her distortions (hamming up the story at the expense of the facts) it is not surprising if attorneys want to avoid her. They don't have much respect for the hot-air press.[148]

Meanwhile, Mr. Morgan poses as an Ordinary Guy (he doesn't dress like one). He is "Not like these rich Easterners, the elitists who not only subscribe to *The New Yorker*, but actually have the time to read it." As opposed to what, look at the pictures? You don't have to be rich to read *The New Yorker*. It costs the same as one or two beers, $1.95 per issue, with a political philosophy which the *American Spectator* considers radical-lib. I would say it has a well-balanced approach. If elitist refers to good prose then we're in trouble. As for only the idle rich having time to read it, that's another fallacy. Given the magazines and newspapers which are read by the general population on a weekly basis, much of it trash, it would appear a lot of people have time for reading, even if it's *Cosmopolitan* or the sports page. I don't think time is the issue, especially when the average TV viewing time is four to seven hours a day. She is wrong on all counts, that *The New Yorker* is beyond the means of the ordinary working person, and the latter doesn't have time to read it. It is only elitist in the sense that it is not for the illiterate.[149]

Meanwhile, near the beginning of the article she refers to the trial as "Charles, Camilla, and Di for the overeducated." Actually, it was none of that. As far as I know, Prince Charles is not a philandering Jew, and journalists don't have a lot in common with

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[148] In addition, the lawyer I work for said, "The police lie."

[149] Full disclosure: I am one of the idle rich and only work for the hell of it. I live in the Tenderloin because I am perverse. Or I live in the Tenderloin for the hell of it, and only work because I am perverse.

royal families from a foreign country. The prince was caught between two women, while the commoner had a thousand – there's a difference. And what does "overeducated" mean? You can be overheated, overdrawn, and even overbearing, but where do you draw the line when you're accumulating knowledge? It used to be that someone was considered overeducated if they had any books beside the Bible in their home.

"Much of this matters not the slightest bit to most people – the members of the jury, perhaps, or the woman who cuts my hair… so it may be hard for those who feel left out of the debate to understand the heat of passion." That's debatable. The atmosphere in the court was so dispassionate they could have been discussing the weather, or how to spell Czechoslovakia.

Saturday, July 3, 1993

I straightened up the place in the afternoon. It took nearly two hours. The disorder might imply disorder in the occupant or merely a detachment from the mundane. I don't want to interpret clutter like it is a Rorschach test. What if clutter is a side-effect of the chaotic interruptions in a man? Completion is a *bête noire* for some of us.

I moved boxes around, still putting things away. It's not easy given the limited space. I came across old manuscripts and a journal from two years ago. The lucidity was not exactly overwhelming. The lines are a net, and sometimes it is hauling in some weak psychology and two-bit generalities. The conversations are redundant, but some subjects never go away. The planet goes on turning and instills us with a sense of repetition. There is nothing like a journal for revealing the eternal return of thought, word, and deed. There is nothing like a journal. There is nothing like a journal for revealing the eternal

return. It varies from day-to-day. Warhol had a handle on it, showing seven identical headshots, but the skin tones vary.

How to account for paragraphs which have run into some turbulence? The words are like a line of ants when you drag a finger across their trail. Confusion going off in several directions, but eventually the words are back on course. These are rough drafts for rough times, a rocky stream of consciousness. It reveals the fluctuation of coherency and mood as serious topics buzz my head like fighter jets.

Who cares how many angles can cha-cha on the head of a writer? Few do, that's who. It helps to know the angles, though, especially in a world of artificial voices.

I was putting my typewriter on a black and white TV when there was a crash outside. I looked out the window. The locals approached from all directions. There was a truck in the intersection with its front bashed in. A small sedan on the sidewalk had caromed into a pole. Eventually the police showed up with an ambulance and a stretcher.

Phone call from the Czech woman inviting me to a party, followed by a phone call from the Phantom. He wants to make some sounds. I opted for the sound-room and took a bus around eight.

> I'm sitting on a boring bus
> with nothing to read and so I guess
> I'll read my mind, a succubus
> detector more or less.

When I arrived I had to weather a downshift from one medium to another. I was going from the written to the sonic, which is in another dimension. The Phantom was dazed on beer and marijuana, his mind a warped delay. It doesn't matter on the level he inhabits, it just took a while to hook up the equipment (having used it for a gig last week). For a while I was on the drums while he messed around with the Les Paul. A full moon

found me with some drumsticks, which doesn't happen very often. I had a syncopated rhythm going with some hand and foot coordination, a couple of tom-toms, and a cymbal with the sound of a Chinese gong.

He kept looking back, surprised at what he heard. "I didn't know you could play drums." I get by with a little help from my hands, but don't expect a Ginger Baker solo. He tried some other sound effects through the bass amp, but it didn't go anywhere. He likes to wallow in a muddy chaos. I think that he is where the music goes to die.

1:30 a.m. We went outside with a moon hovering in the void.

THE END