SLOW-BURN JOURNAL: IN THE TENDERLOIN

BOOK II

July 4 – Sept. 3, 1993

Sunday, July 4, 1993

Early afternoon, reading the journal. I was on another wavelength with the typewriter having run out of ribbon. It seemed like a good way to stop the journal. It was becoming redundant and required a lot of work. Having to edit all those pages might discourage me from piling up more manuscripts. The journal is eclectic, having an expanded or exploded awareness, and it barely holds together - like chunks of concrete loosely strung together with a cable.

I've been reading a journalist with a neurotic background in psychoanalysis (Janet Malcolm). She mentioned someone who felt betrayed by a reporter who remained in the shadows. It made me think twice about flinging more words on the page. I'm not sure who reveals more of themselves, or puts more of their soul on the line, a journalist or an artist, given the increasing subjectivity of the former and the character-revealing words that he or she leaves behind. An artist often hides behind work that is machine-produced.

I went out feeling like a typewriter addict. It's how I get a fix on my location and locution (it is not exactly a vocation, but I wouldn't call it a vacation either). I was without a ribbon on a Sunday afternoon, and tomorrow is a holiday. I had to take a bus

out to the avenues for a place that was open. I got there when it was a minute past closing time, but the door was open.

When I was typewriter-ready[1] I walked to the cliffs half a mile away. There were not many people left, and it was warm, a little windy. I walked up the beach near a huge sand dune with cypress trees and lay out a towel. A lot of white sand with a couple of topless women in the distance. Several men and women cavorted naked in the waves. An airliner drifted overhead, with people gravitating to a primordial state.

One of the women was leaning on her elbow with no shirt on. Small breasts with a nice curve. There was something about her, wearing white lace briefs with her black hair tied in a long braid. She later put on a dark heavy skirt. I walked down to the water in a swimsuit, went up to my knees in ice water, and froze. The urge to dive in diminished by the minute as my feet were sinking into the sand.

A couple of girls were enjoying themselves, falling backwards into the water. They had no problem with it being cold, and gravitated in my direction, looking like I had no feet. In no time they were talking like I was a friend of theirs, saying it wasn't very cold. They were used to it since they live near Lake Tahoe. I think they were about ten and fourteen years old, sisters who were like a before-and-after of the effects of puberty. The younger was a little chubby and flat-chested. The other was fully formed and taller in a one-piece swimsuit which barely covered her top as she was bending over and splashing around. I found myself looking off to the horizon. We didn't have a lot to talk about outside of the motion of the ocean.

[1] It was a black-ribbon day.

They left reluctantly (their father wanted to leave). I remained implanted there with feet of sand. Then I went into motion, running up the beach to the rock formations, light-footed on the edges of a watery receding lace. I returned to the towel on a nearly deserted beach, and was there for a while. Then I put my clothes on, walked to the bus, and was home in half an hour.

There was a phone call from B., who called that morning. She wanted to see the air exploding on the waterfront.

8 p.m. I walked to her place with little bombs going off. We both have small apartments in old buildings near downtown, except she doesn't like my neighborhood. She looked nice in black silk pants and a revealing sleeveless blouse. Long dark hair pulled back, and lipstick. In the frenzy and confusion of her life she hired someone to help her get more organized. I think she has too much life in her to worry about being organized, but it worries her to no end. Some are thoroughly business-like in their methods, but their homes are like hotel rooms and their social life is vacant. Her life is a horn of plenty, it spills out a profusion, but it's rhyming with confusion. She is from New York and operates on a wavelength that I tune in like a missing chord, a shot in the arm.

We waited to the last minute, then took a cab to Fort Mason in my old neighborhood. We were walking across an open field when enormous sparks started falling out of the sky like weeping willows. It went on for half an hour, culminating in some massive atmospheric gunpowder blooms which sparkled in the night. There were sonic echoes which shook the entire county.

When those were done, we walked to Black Point Battery[2] overlooking the bay. The dark water was full of boats that started moving in the same direction with their turquoise running lights.

There was a trail that went around the cliff with the full moon coming into view through the branches. We made our way down to the harbor with a long curving esplanade. There were flashes and a few loud bangs. Both of us were in good spirits. No matter what we're doing, she keeps up a lively conversation if not a monologue with my attention fading in and out.

We were not sure where to go or what to do. There was someone blowing off quarter sticks of dynamite nearby.[3] She thinks I should move back when my apartment is rebuilt. I'm not so sure. It had a grip on me, but now that I am out – it took a four-alarm fire – I want to stay out.

A bus showed up and we got on. I felt a primal difference between us. She is like a restless socialite on amphetamines who has a hard time doing nothing, and consequently finds it hard to do something. B. knows she needs more discipline, especially if she wants to write a play. But she has her radar fixed on the next event or party on the horizon, crowding her life with so much arbitrary diversion. It's the equivalent of busy-work, or busy-socializing, which after a while is neither here nor there. It doesn't seem to be producing much in the way of substance.

One thing she eludes in this approach-avoidance, this need to stay in motion, is romance, and another thing is me. We get along, and then we walk away.

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[2] It was built in 1864 in response to the Civil War (which never came close to here). The best views are sometimes occupied by cannon. It is now defending us from Sausalito and its errant sailboats.

[3] Or whatever goes into an M-80.

We got off the bus and went into a hi-tech hamburger joint and had something to eat. Her gaze was fixed on a screen on the wall, the robotic monotony of a music video. It's paradoxical, projecting a big ego while you move like a puppet on the end of invisible sonic strings. When we left we walked towards the Civic Center. Her curiosity was getting the better of her. Having been in a cold wind, I would have preferred a hot tub and sauna to a gay and lesbian conference of reformed alcoholics. "Living sober."

We walked in with the main hall full of chairs and the stage set for speakers. She heard a few yesterday. There was supposed to be a dance. We followed the beat to a high-ceilinged room that was nearly empty. It was dark with a few couples in motion, the music shrill and mechanical. B. and I went to another room where the main crowd was, along with a corridor full of people milling about and drinking coffee. I felt out of place. There were men of every type, with mostly subdued appearances. The men were with other men, and the women were with other women, not mixing as far as I could tell. I was with a woman who claimed to be looking for someone she knew.

Talk about landing with a dull thud in the wrong place. The women, only about twenty percent of the crowd, were some of the most neutral or masculine women I've ever seen, and they put her off. She wonders why women with no interest in men assume that they should look like them.

I watched a couple of middle-aged gay men jerking awkwardly on the floor to some drone-hysteria of a sound machine. I wondered to what extent the sound was floating and projecting a cut-loose atmosphere, and if you turned off the sound the ambience would vanish.[4]

[4] I have a theory that the image of homosexuals as being over-sexed, where androgyny = more, is not the whole story. What if some people in the gay and lesbian community are sexless? I don't

There were small groups where five or six people had the combined life force you would normally find in one or two. Maybe I'm going against type here, the cliché of gay men being full of life or larger than life (depending on what sort of music, makeup, or drugs are involved). Some of them are, and some are smaller than life.

We went outside. There were people standing in front of the Civic Auditorium, including a few lesbians in black leather with metal studs, fetishing for a compliment. They seemed ordinary, neither feminine nor masculine, however much the latter look was being solicited. The idealization of homosexuals makes no more sense to me than their condemnation. I'm not prone to romanticizing madness or marriage, but I'm biased by my sexual orientation. I'll be writing about male-female relations and a song will come on the radio, something by The Ronettes, and my objectivity flies out the window.

So what is B.'s interest in all of this? Good question. I've been supporting her efforts to figure out the allure of other women. She may have pursued it more than she's letting on, but it isn't easy for her. She portrays it as a sociological curiosity on her part. We almost had to go back when she heard there was a piano lounge upstairs, but it was after midnight and it was over.

The two of us took a bus, then jumped on an empty streetcar that went two blocks and stopped. I walked her home with a full moon in the void. It was one of our spontaneous evenings which are so upbeat, though we end up with sore feet. It gets me how seductive she can be, embracing for a goodnight kiss that she insists on. I'm not sure if she means to keep me guessing or she can't help it. She is a naturally affectionate

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mean unclear on the concept, ending up with their own gender by accident or default, but neutral and/or anal retentive. It makes me wonder when a life style requires so much artificial stimulation and extravagant camouflage. Their lives are less mundane when there is drama.

woman, “nurturing” as she put it with a sigh of resignation, with a tendency for taking in stray dogs and writers.

I walked home.

Not to say she isn’t intoxicating, but the whole evening I only had one Guinness. Last night maybe two beers. The night before there was a long session on the typewriter which drained two-thirds of a bottle of wine. Normally during the week I have one beer a night or less, and no hard alcohol. The pot has become infrequent over the last few years. It’s been a couple of months since I had a hit off a joint at the Black and White Ball (I crashed it). I’m gravitating back and forth between a sober adjustment (living like a monk), and phases which involve women, vodka, marijuana, and cocaine.

I don’t want either extreme to control me or become a terminal dimension. The downside is when you straddle different worlds and you’re not making much headway or friends in either. The way I’m living you might think a big chill had arrived, though I wouldn’t jump to conclusions. If I thought that was the case, like an automatic reflex occurring after forty, I would gravitate out of its grip - assuming I was so inclined. That is all the more reason for keeping your mind open and the home fires burning with a typewriter.

It feels like I’m taking a break from passion. A break which could become the norm if I’m not careful. Anything you do can become a habit since we live on a repeating planet. Months or years later you’re surprised you’re still doing it. There is a cold freedom to living alone, especially if you have an obsession - in this case, the typewriter. It’s like attaching a motor to the boat of my solitude.

The Dionysian used to have more sway in my life, and seemed to coincide with a lack of sleep. Now I have second thoughts and third eye rumors pointing to the fourth dimension as a plane of non-diminishing returns where I am not exactly pleading the fifth. I have a sixth sense and I was in love with seven women who returned it over the last eight or nine years, and I am mortally in their debt.

I've made little effort to hook up with another woman, and probably won't until there have been some changes in my life. I have a form of writer's block, a tendency to remain anonymous with a low income while accumulating manuscripts that no one reads. My journal has some barbed wire in it when it comes to women, but I am as opposed to them as I am to breathing or talking.

I hear women talk about ambitions or changes they're going through and how it leaves them no time for being in love. There is a tendency to level out in its presence, but that sends the wrong message if you want to get anywhere - like out of the country. For most of my twenties I was having an affair with an older French-speaking woman, Simone, without whom I would have been more on edge. Most of my thirties were in the comfortable throes of love affairs.

2:20 a.m. A song on the radio with a guy yelling, "… THERE IS NO LOVE IN THIS WORLD ANYMORE…" (the Buzzcocks).

Monday, July 5, 1993

Late morning, I plugged in the phone. B. called, talking about the film *Orlando* (1992). She is preoccupied with gender twists, and told me about a twisted couple, the odd *ménage a deux*. I responded with a story of my old friend Jacques who lives in Paris.

A few years ago, a friend of his was on his way to becoming a surgical woman while living with a plain-looking lesbian. He was French and required a lot of drugs to float his dream of living as a woman. He lived down the street from Jacques, a block from Dolores Park. We dropped by one afternoon and it was a weird scene. Having spent a few thousand on a pair of tits he let his chemise slip off the shoulder. They were pale and perfect, but they weren't mercurial and changing shape with every position of the body. They just stood out. I've seen it at the beach, a woman lying on her back with silicone-injected boobs which stood up. I think his male equipment was intact. There was a white rat on his shoulder, while a sawed-off dyke was trying to play the guitar with not much aptitude.

B. wants to see *Orlando*. I'm reluctant, having read about it, including an interview with the woman director. There are warning signals when you read about a "smug" women's film where the original story has been altered so the director can insert a political spin of her own. It is a slow costume drama (and the drama of clothing does not do much for me). The director admitted as much, saying it's the clothes that matter when a woman portrays a man. Clothes make the man? I should be paying more attention to my wardrobe. There was the further conceit of passing the actress off as a man (Tilda Swinton) with little or no attempt at verisimilitude. She is coopting his attire and his role, there being nothing more to a man than what he wears and where he wears it. Orlando is transformed one morning, standing in front of a mirror and seeing a naked woman. The moral of the story is that he/she is the same person, but with a different body. The premise falls flat, because it was clearly a woman playing a man. The spirit remains the same, it is androgynous and gender-neutral. I don't know how that would go over with

radical lesbians and their “milk and blood” identification, or men who have been alienated by their own testosterone.

The director took the story more seriously than the woman who wrote it (Virginia Woolf). Pomposity has no gender. The film has less to do with the original story than the fact that modern women can wear whatever they want. It is a costume drama where a woman usurps the man, stepping into his clothes which are a symbol of a professional role that men have developed and occupied. It is done with a certain insouciance, like it was meant for women - like an insulated building when the negligible construction workers have finished and gone.

There was some mention of why the director hadn’t made more effort to convey a man, even with the features of the actress gazing at himself, the camera panning down. It wouldn’t be hard to give the impression of male body parts. B. noted a “double standard” where the male organ is usually hidden.

That reminded me of something. I told her about the bronze statue downtown in front of the old Federal Reserve building. It looks like a hollow man was sliced up by a sword and is barely holding together. Was it commissioned by the Society for Cutting Up Men? It shows what happens if you work in the financial district too long – like Greco-Roman statues which were found without a penis. I told her how the ancient Christians would go around knocking the cocks off marble statues with a hammer, and she thought that was funny.

She reiterated her notion of our collaborating on a play. She saw a women’s play called *Why We Have a Body* and liked it. She wants to include this business of women going into stores and trashing the *Playboys*. It would be about her and a certain actress in

Marin (Phoebe), a tour de force of missed communications and approach-avoidance. She thinks that Phoebe is self-preoccupied, with an undercurrent of bleeding-heart liberalism that she abhors.

I wasn't sure if she knew what she was getting into. Maybe it would be a lighthearted theater of the absurd, but there were probably some Sapphic implications.

There is a complaint from the women's movement that men have no respect for a woman's sex organs. They are either threatened or disgusted, while being in love with their own. What if this premise doesn't hold water, or is barely a half-truth? A straight man is more likely to have a picture of a woman on the wall than a picture of his cock. He is closer to a veneration of the yoni when he's looking at a picture, a movie, or the real thing in bed. Women are a little more circumspect when it comes to an adoration of the phallus. It is not often spoken of in respectful terms, being often used as an insult. "He's a dick." There are women who are put off by the sex organs of men. When it comes to being in love with one's own body parts, few men can hold a candle to women. Their pussies are luxuriated, pampered, and attended to with form-fitting lingerie, perfume, and a carefully coiffed bush. They need a lot of attention so they come off as the center of the universe, which is in fact an empty void so they might want to revise that.

It is even more twisted when men romanticize a woman's body, if only for enhancing the erectile function. Women view their own bodies from a more utilitarian angle (the low spark of high maintenance), and don't mind seeing men in that light, so who is objectifying whom? There are men who idealize a woman in order to get

interested, and women who reduce a man so he will fit into their world and is less threatening.

B. was talking in similar terms about her women friends, who inhabit a world of territorial conspiracies and emotional non-events with a libido for commodities. If x = Phoebe and z = B., then z has a fading crush on x who wants to know if one of z's ex-boyfriends is available; z considers that an invasion. She has no intention of doing anything with the ex-boyfriend, but he is her territory and it feels like x is nosing around her own backyard. The ex-boyfriend might be surprised to learn he isn't the autonomous individual he thought he was, what with women marking off their male territories like a deer or bear would with their scent. Meanwhile, z thinks x is using y as a spy to find out certain things, like whether she is moving back to New York, and y is suspicious that z is interested in her own ex-boyfriend who she sleeps with on occasion. z isn't, but…

I'm just scratching the surface of shifting intrigues in a space-time warp of ego and estrogen. I can see why B. and some of her friends feel compromised in terms of furthering their careers. How would they have any time or mental energy left with all this other stuff on their mind? Some women are so caught up in their complications they can't locate their own climax.

B. rattled off a few more angles of the social equation. Women she wasn't supposed to be friends with because x doesn't get along with them or were friends of a man who was a friend of a woman she had a falling out with a couple of years ago. B. was about to blow an afternoon shopping for a wedding present for someone, but it would prove difficult and time-consuming because the stores were crowded and she doesn't like

the woman's taste. The items were already picked out. These women don't leave much to chance.

Is it any wonder she never got around to reading Proust or learning the guitar? Some women think that men are unaware of psychological webs in the air, which are as finely spun as glances, though they carry a sticky weight. For many men it isn't that they're unaware, they are uninterested or repelled.

B. has little patience with anti-male conceits. She mentioned one of the men who carry a torch for her - the one who went berserk at his birthday party last month, throwing glasses and bottles into the kitchen. He was bemoaning the fact that his sperm isn't good enough for her. She said he is going to give her a poem. I said, "What rhymes with sperm?"

"Germ!"

Meanwhile, I was typing in the afternoon and not much else. Once in a blue moon I watch the news with commercial interruptions (which put the news into perspective).

6 p.m. *The Macneil/Lehrer News Hour*. Latinos have downgraded English in Miami. Some of the non-Hispanic whites want English as the official language. That is supposedly imperialistic, like the French insisting on French as the official language of their country. The French also assume that people know how to read, another imperialistic bias which they burden their citizens with, and which the U.S. tries not to since illiterate people are easier to control. Some of the English-speakers in Miami object to feeling like strangers in their own city. It seems that when people speak another language they're excluding others, and the others think it's rude.

I think those English-speakers live in a time-warp when this was a country and not an empire. There's a world of difference. It is hard to get sentimental about an empire, and the feeling is mutual.

My parents thought minorities should be welcomed with open arms, assuming they wanted to sit at the same table, so to speak. In my time the perception shifted, with people from minority groups wanting their own table - one that's close to the window of opportunity, but further away from white people.

There was a letter to the editor in response to a letter from a man with the temerity to say the British had a hand in settling and building this country. "America's greatest strength is and has been our diversity and unique capacity for self-renewal through those who come here to build a better life." So diversity is strength. What are other countries supposed to think which are more homogenous and don't consider themselves weak? They might look on diversity as more nuanced than the category of race. It's a flimsy self-congratulatory half-truth, since one could make the argument that homogeneity is a strength (look at Germany, England, and Japan, for example). There is evidence that the more diversity you have the more diluted and fragmented the culture is. It is harder to find a common ground, with the common denominators being lowered (along with the literacy rate) in order to accommodate a wider selection of people. The definition of a citizen is generalized to the point it evaporates, or is downgraded to "consumer." The country is weakened by the friction between its burgeoning diversities, and though the population is expanding it feels like you are in a smaller country when other cultures make their presence felt and you are not a part of those.

Maybe I have a distorted view, having lived in San Francisco for half of my life. When you break it up into its various factions, with people speaking languages I don't know two words of, the cultural domain that I inhabit is smaller than it would appear. At the same time, I wouldn't feel at home in a homogenous culture – I am used to food and music, books and movies, not to mention men and women, from around the world.

There was a sketch on *Saturday Night Live* with a black mother and her teenage son. She says she will always love him, no matter what he does, however many crimes. He keeps giving disturbing examples and she won't back down. He finally says,

> "Well, what if I marry a white girl?"
> "Don't make me hurt you!"

This doesn't play as well in reverse, or maybe it's not allowed.

It reminds me of when I lived in San Pedro during my second year of college. A friend of mixed race took me to visit a black drummer in Venice (Charlie Blue). I picked up an electric guitar near the drums and we took off on a wonderful jam. Later we helped transport his drums to a club near Watts. I was stopped at the door by a black man who said no whites were allowed. "We're trying to raise the consciousness of the folks inside." The point is not that I wasn't allowed in the club, but that homogeneity was considered a strength. It's the same thing when you hear that black people learn better without white people around (so much for integration), or that girls learn more when separated from boys. Those perspectives undermine the whole concept of "diversity is strength."

In high school I had a Latino friend who lived down the street. We were on the same tennis team and had the same classes, but when he went to his La Raza meeting ("The Race") I wasn't invited. There was nothing I did that he couldn't be a part of, but

that isn't the point – it's that a group of people were focused on their racial homogeneity as a source of strength. What a concept.

The "… unique capacity for self-renewal through those who come here to build a better life…." Again, what is the implication? Countries which don't have a lot of immigrants are not renewed? They're incapable of renewing themselves by their intelligence and ensuing generations (assuming they know how to propagate)? The assumption is we lack the energy and the spark for rejuvenation, and our offspring are video deadweights, so that leaves the ever-resourceful immigrants. You wonder how it is "our" self-renewal if it is "through those who come here." How can we take credit for it as lifeless locals who depend on immigrants to show us how to live?

"It doesn't matter which boat we took…." U-boat, show boat, Queen Victoria, canoe… He makes it sound like everyone in this country is fresh off the boat. That is too close for comfort to the diluting attitude that we are tourists in our own country, merely half-assed visitors without a clue who're passing through. It plays into the hands of the authorities who want to tell us where to go and what to do. The population is made to feel like immigrants and tourists who may not have their feet on the ground, and so they're easier to manage. They are out to sea about who is running things. As an immigrant or tourist you might be reluctant to criticize, and uncertain about your rights. You have no roots here, and you're grateful for a clean bathroom. Health insurance and vacations are for Europeans.

I had a teacher in high school who went to Paris with her husband in their younger days (the 1950's). She taught literature and he taught art. I'm not saying they were beatniks, but they leaned in that direction. They returned to the States, however, and one

of her reasons was the bathrooms are better here. It's a shame that people like Sartre and Picasso had to struggle with bleak facilities (which probably affected their worldview and added to Sartre's despair). Imagine what they could have accomplished with padded toilet seats and baby-soft four-ply tissue with cute commercials to complete their toilet training. This is a country that knows how, and it will not take criticism sitting down.

Where was I? The news with a debate on immigration reform. When a Chinese freighter washes up a mile away from where you live, it makes you wonder who is guarding the coastline.

Note: The territory which is now Mexico was a colony of Spain for several centuries. The Republic of Mexico was established in 1824 (having gained its independence in 1821). The U.S. took California in 1846 (it became a state in 1850), which means that Mexico only had jurisdiction over California for twenty-some years. This was during a time of horse-drawn carriages when transportation was slow and Mexico City was thousands of miles away. It would seem its claim to California is a little weak. The land around the current border was uninhabited, being mostly desert. For that matter, how legitimate was Spain's claim to this territory? It took it as an imperialistic power from another continent. If it had no inherent right to these lands (with native tribes along the coast), why would Mexico?[5]

Also on the *McNeil/Lehrer News Hour* was the poet laureate, Rita Dove. She was interviewed by another black woman, a reporter with not much literary background. I have read some of her work and don't have anything against her. You might want more from a poet laureate of the United States than a discussion about "good rap" and "bad

[5] If the claim is based on the missions established up and down the coast, then California belongs to the Catholic Church, or it would if we didn't have a separation of church and state.

rap," but what the hell, it's a politically correct symbolic appointment. The Clinton administration is known for its vacant appointments, either leaving the positions empty or appointing the ordinary and the nondescript, from the Attorney General to the person in charge of AIDS. They are consistently underwhelming - did I mention the Secretary of State? I wonder how intentional it is, if the President is making sure there is no one around him who might overshadow the presence of his wife (while repaying political favors with appointments).

9 p.m. One of those rare nights with the TV on. Clive James (*Fame in the 20th Century*), the reporter and acerbic commentator with a vast knowledge of history (he is not American). He was talking about politicians around the time of World War II who were public relations men as much as anything else. I thought he pulled his punches as to how far the manipulation of the public went with respect to the "surprise" attack on Pearl Harbor. Churchill was an old hand at PR and private schemes. Charles de Gaulle was in England with a few supporters saying "I am France," while the French were occupied if not collaborating and a little too accommodating when it came to turning in Jews.

There was old footage of Englishmen who know the language. Noel Coward and Lawrence Olivier with a rapid clipped precision speech, closer to staccato than a drawl. I'm not sympathetic to either way of speaking, but you get the impression that the former requires or solicits a higher level of intelligence. There is the image of a fast-talking person who seems like a jabbering mechanical toy, a nervous person on amphetamines. A fast-talker is redolent of someone who is trying to pull a fast one - glib and not believable.

The slow-talker in this country tends to have more credibility, a down to earth believability, for better or worse, like Reagan imitating Will Rogers. But the "great communicator" is an example of form without content, a hollow tranquilizer, a placebo for the displaced. He relied on ghostwriters. The slow-talker may have the reputation of being unintelligent, like someone living in the backwoods, but it doesn't follow that slow = dumb any more than fast = intelligent. Think of Southern writers with a bourbon gravity in their voice who weren't exactly stupid.

This country is associated with velocity and accelerated lifestyles, a libido for the futuristic, but there is a slowing down if not a dumbing down of speech. When I listen to Noel Coward it feels like I'm a blues musician. A month ago I spoke with a client on the phone a few times. He is a Latino man and we had never met. When he showed up one day he looked surprised, and said he thought I was black from my voice. I don't think he cared one way or another.

There is the stereotype of black people talking slow, like John Lee Hooker on downers. On the other hand, there is someone like Bobby McFerrin who is so precise, making the language tap dance. Which is to say, stereotypes aren't worth much. Listen to Mexican radio where they talk like a machine gun, and there goes the stereotype of lazy Mexicans.

Late at night I was on the typewriter. I heard a woman yelling on the street. I finally went over to the window. Several black girls were having an argument at fifty paces. It stretched to half a block and they were still yelling. It happens a lot around here, and it gets me how people have no, can I say it, respect for others. They have no sense that other people live in these buildings, working people who are trying to sleep. No

sense of how their voices carry down the street, or maybe they don't care, having enough ego and ignorance to fill a city block. No sense of what is private and what is public. I wonder if they don't restrain themselves and hold it in because there is no "in" there. Anything that affects them ricochets back into the outside world.

The other night, 1:30 in the morning, I was typing and heard loud Mexican music coming from a boom box. There were the voices of five or six guys hanging out on the sidewalk and drinking beer. They could care less about disturbing the peace. Eventually a police car drove up with a spotlight. One of the officers questioned them, looked in a bag, and told them to be quiet. The radio was shut off. He went back to the car while they walked off laughing and jeering. Five minutes later they returned on the other side of the street, leaning against a parked car with the radio on as loud as before. After a while the police drove by again. The radio was turned off and they slowly dispersed, walking up the sidewalk and yelling.

Tuesday, July 6, 1993

Late morning, I went out for breakfast at the Vietnamese diner a block away. A corner place in an area where the derelicts are loitering. An apparition came around the corner, an alcoholic haggard-looking white woman with silicon implants which were incongruous.

I sat at the counter for a $1.95 breakfast (scrambled eggs, hash browns, sausage, and toast) which was edible. This time the woman had help – a couple of Vietnamese girls who were about fourteen. One of them was so bossy it was kind of cute. "Don't stick out your butt when I'm walking by" (she was behind the counter). Very sure of

herself and self-contained. Long black hair and a T-shirt which I found a little mystifying. It said LOVE WEAKENS RATIO. Not sure what it meant, maybe a bad translation.

I thought of Ming with her perspective on love and relationships where one has to consider the "cost-benefit ratio." My response to that, maybe in line with the T-shirt: if you're in love it weakens calculation.

Typing, then went to work.

6:30 p.m. No one in the office and I was finished with work. I put a new file together on a client, the son of an old friend of the Attorney who died a while back (he used to be a big-time bookie). His son is another story. Early thirties and out of control with a nasty temper. One of the perks of this job is reading the police reports, the account of an arrest in dry and understated terms. It is almost comical compared to the scene you can imagine unfolding. He was pulled over for speeding. He didn't want to say he was driving with a suspended license for a previous DUI, so he gave the name of a friend and said he forgot his license. The ticket was mailed to his friend. Eventually it was sorted out. He was found, and he responded with, "Fuck you pig… talk to my attorney." Or was that the following month when police were called to a disturbance in a home? He was drunk and beating up some guy. When he was brought in he resisted arrest, to put it lightly, with the usual sentiments, "Fuck you pig!" - yelling, swearing, kicking and hitting the police. It took several to restrain him. At some point he was strapped into a gurney, still struggling.

Some of these white men have no respect for the law. They are lazy and shiftless, wanting something for nothing, and they're promiscuous on top of that.

It was evening in the office and I noticed a pile of material in the corner by the window. Heavy manuscripts and books from the *Masson v. New Yorker* trial. There were transcripts of the original interview from which Malcolm put together her two-part article on Masson which was the basis of the lawsuit. I picked up the top copy with the first page open to viewing, sat down, and started reading.

I couldn't put it down. The rough-cut version was a form of cinema verite – the conversations were transcribed with every hesitation, clumsy diction, and verbal stumble intact. He sounded looser and more freewheeling than he did in the edited version that was published. I wondered if the original version would have gotten her off the hook if shown to the jury. They might have realized how much is required in terms of editing longwinded and meandering dialogues, and how much is smoothed over, including her own diction which was less than authoritative. At times the two of them were stumbling through their questions and responses like punch-drunk fighters who have smoked a joint.

Malcolm: What just struck me here is that, I mean, your emphasis, is, is, is, it really is a matter of emphasis, isn't it. Where you differ from everybody else, you, you stress the importance of accepting the idea that there are a lot of seductions.

Masson: Right.

Malcolm: Isn't that right?

Masson: That's true.

Malcolm: But what about, do you, do you also accept the idea that there are some cases where there are no seductions?

Masson: Of course.

Malcolm: Yeah.

Masson: Of course. Not everybody is seduced.

Malcolm: Yeah, I mean, I'm just wondering where the, where there is the, an, an analyst would – where, where is the, is the, the, the heart of the controversy - ?

Masson: Where is the heart of the controversy? Well, that's, in a sense, that's something you're gonna have to find out by – because it's not something I can answer. I, I did not expect this kind of response. I did not expect to be fired…

(tape volume 2 – side b)

I do not expect to be fired for reading this material, but I'm not sure how confidential or protected it is at this point.

I thought the jury would be impressed by the effort of distilling a coherent article from these wandering talks. Now and then I came come across a paragraph or sentence that went into the article. In a long discussion about his ex-wife Malcolm pulled a veil over some of it, concerning how careless the ex-wife was with money, blowing vast amounts, running around with other women and ignoring her child (which Masson wasn't criticizing). His own credibility might have been further called into question when hearing him go on about his ex-wife. You wonder if she really was the most intelligent woman on earth. Maybe so, but I would like to see some evidence of it. It is hard to swallow when someone has such an amazing cognizance they want nothing more do with the life of the mind, as he put it. I suppose it happens. There is a far-sighted intelligence that reaches such an esoteric high note that it sees through the futility of making an effort, or is alienated, not to mention disembodied, on that level of thought - in a country where singing toilets are the order of the day.

He talks about her having made some short films, and how she could have been the greatest filmmaker who ever lived. That sort of inflated rhetoric can backfire though.

There was some controversy as to whether he claimed to be the greatest analyst who ever lived.

There were statements on tape that were parallel in meaning to his disputed claim of bringing "sex, women, fun" to the Freud House. He is quoted as saying to a friend that they would pass women to each other and have parties in the Freud House. Malcolm left that out.

It was a curious experience reading transcripts of the original conversations, like being there with academics when they let their hair down. I'm familiar with the concept, having spent a lot of time after hours with my history professor. Masson talked about his ex-wife when they lived in Berkeley and she wanted them to drive to a café in San Francisco, "smoke grass," and stay up all night. He wanted to continue his research and writing and be in bed by midnight.

I walked home.

I'm reading *Operation Shylock* by Philip Roth, along with *The Journalist and the Murderer*, like I need more complications from cross-references. Roth lurks in the vicinity of non-fiction with a mirror of real identities including the writer himself. One of the plots in the book is him reporting on the trial of a murderer in Israel. He is preoccupied with the phenomenon of his own persona as it is externalized on the page.

Nearly midnight, B. called. Among other things, she said she rented two films that night. It sounded just like her. *The Way We Were* (1973) and *Damage* (1992), a before and after. The latter is about the psychological damage a woman goes through in growing up and how it makes her a femme fatale. It reminded me of Ming. She has a careless

detachment which makes her more alluring when she's turning up the heat, and a **c**hildhood which was comparatively loveless.

I talked about the movie and the diminishing returns of passion on the floor. There was some reference to twenty-one being the "carnivorous age."

1 a.m. Off the phone and on the typewriter for a couple of hours.

3 a.m. I was reading on the mattress in the hall and fell asleep.

Wednesday, July 7, 1993

This stream of consciousness is being fed by tributaries in the form of books and periodicals, along with the ongoing life in the neighborhood and interactions in the office and a-sordid conversations. A stream that is inspired by the Mississippi (which is currently overflowing its banks). It is known as the Big Muddy, though, which is not what you want when writing. In its earlier portions it is "narrow and shallow," and that doesn't sound good either. Later it is wide and deep and disappears into the Gulf of Mexico. I'm ready for a Caribbean vacation.

Morning with the information streaming through the windows.

Phone call from the Actress in Marin. I haven't talked to her in a few weeks, which she duly noted. How is everything? We talked for a while, then she had to check on something in the kitchen. She handed the phone to her nine-year-old daughter, Maya. Shifting gears, I talked with her for a few minutes. I treat her as a mature young woman - anything less and she would notice. She said there was something wrong with her stomach and her rat died (Betty the rat). How about a turtle? They die. A lizard? They die too. She's a morbid girl, or maybe she is realistic.

Back on the phone with her mother, I was invited up there this weekend.

Went to work.

In the office, talking with the ever-skeptical V. I mentioned the fireworks. She hadn't bothered to see them. "They're boring." I said they're pretty, and what about things exploding in mid-air?

"Boring."
"They chase away evil spirits."
"No they don't."

Anyhow she doesn't believe in evil spirits. She's a logical accountant in Chanel. I like to tweak her skepticism now and then - it is an automatic reflex on her part. A common refrain: "It's not real." That includes a lot of books and movies. In some respects, it is a healthy perspective on the swamp-gas propaganda we're immersed in. She has a firm grasp on what is real and relevant to her own immediate concerns. A neat desk. Her figure. An impending marriage. Her checking account. Doing the laundry. Going to church. If I want to engender her most sincere moments, I bring up the subject of checking accounts.

Every once in a while she drops her reticence and reserve. I'm getting glimpses of a satirical streak in her. A dutiful daughter who relieves the burden with some mischievous moods. At the moment it involved her boss, an attorney turning forty, and what to put on the card. When I suggested, "I hope your life is longer than my paycheck," she hesitated, then wrote it down while laughing. She knows that his appreciation of her goes beyond her secretarial skills. "I'm his PET," she said with a certain scorn, relishing the concept or the fact of being able to see through it. He is married with kids, and said to her:

"I feel old…"
"You should, you're over the hill."
"Don't you like older guys?"
"No."

She related this exchange with whatever implications it had on present company, but I'm used to it. She amuses the hell out of me sometimes. I asked her when women were over the hill in her opinion. "Oh, thirty or thirty-five." I said I had a few friends who might object to that. She shrugged. I'm not sure she ever defined what "over the hill" meant.

Later in the afternoon, one of the legal secretaries for the libel attorney was sitting two desks away – Gloria, the nineteen-year-old, married with a Filipina background, full of life and gorgeous. She is not without some cunning, and we have a few words once in a while. Most of the time I keep my distance and so does she. Lately, using a nearby typewriter or walking by, she will say something (must be the haircut). Today it was, "How do you abbreviate Oregon?" I almost said, "Organ… is that too long?" It would have been out of place.

Later she put on a big coat and said, "Look how fat I am in this… I'm a heifer…." She said it in a lovely voice with a knockout figure.

Reminds me of V. Her body is attended to in careful detail, and the slightest thing is magnified in her eyes, thinking she's a pound or two overweight or has "bad hair." Listening to some of the women in the office I can see how they arrive at a blunt criticism of men, because they do it to themselves. V. and Gloria have nothing to say to each other, but talking with them is a relief after dealing with a gruff old attorney who is 290 pounds.

I walked to the Tenderloin and went to a Vietnamese restaurant.

Returning home, I was hit up for change for the hundredth time. Hardly a day goes by that it doesn't happen, and nine times out of ten it's a black person. Not sure what mechanism inside me is deciding this - sometimes I give and sometimes I don't. I lean towards the latter when it's so common. I'm developing a hard exterior in this neighborhood.

There was an article in the paper quoting someone from the last century about beggars. You feel bad if you give to them and bad if you don't. I think there's more to it. We're talking about loose change. There is something in the confrontation which undermines good will. It can be a rude interruption. You're walking along, maybe talking with someone, and suddenly a stranger is talking to you - not because he wants to have a conversation, he just wants your money. How much can he make doing this? The panhandler must have other means of support, since he can't survive on a few coins.

The beggar is not always a dirty wasted alcoholic. Many of the black people on the street are in relatively good shape, compared to the white derelicts. What is depressing is a combination of things, beginning with a system that can't accommodate the destitute, and drifters who were abandoned by their own people. There is a blame-the-system mentality, but you wonder what a legendary sense of black community is all about if so many black men are cut adrift. Is it exaggerated, a myth, or what? From broken homes to tribal frictions (wrote fictions) which are wreaking havoc in black-run countries, black people divide and conquer themselves (while collaborating with the white man).

This is not to let the white man or the power structure off the hook so much as to demystify the power of an oppressor. If there are so many black men on the streets who

are abandoned, hustling, drinking, it is as much a shame of the black community as the system at large, particularly when it's not uncommon for cities across the country to have black mayors.

In the apartment in the evening. I live in a cluttered studio with a kitchen attached, mainly for making coffee. On the wall there is a photo of a wrought iron balcony in Mallorca (which I took in 1975).

4 a.m. On a mattress in the hall with a fold-down nightstand (an old phone nook). I'm used to it after nearly three months of living here.

I was leaning against the front door on a black pillow, a little uneasy, sensing that a door is not a wall. A wall is solid. A door is vulnerable. People walk through it like they don't do with walls. I have a sense of what's beyond it, and a passing thought of the door being kicked in. Nevertheless, I sleep well, being away from the street.

Thursday, July 8, 1993

I slept until noon, coming out of a dream with an erection that wouldn't quit – a common side-effect of the subconscious. The dream: a room somewhere in a bombed-out Paris. A young man and woman are there with a mirror on the door. The door is turning and I see her reflection in the mirror but not his. She is not wearing much and looks at me with a calm stare.

There was an envelope from Ming in the mail. I thought there would be photos of our desert trip, but there were photos of Alaska with her posing with a barren mountain in the background. A lush field of melting snow. A shot of her climbing up a steep incline

of snow and ice in her khaki shorts, climbing boots, and T-shirt. She looked good, her face a little fuller.

There was a short letter with her writing less jagged than before. She sounded more plaintive and subdued, close to the mountains which would seem to be the high point of her life.

> … I'm prone to restlessness again. Maybe I've got ants in my blood, can't stay still…" [She is envious of those who travel with their backpacks.] "Perhaps I'm homesick… whatever I do it feels like restlessness will follow… always knew I wasn't a very patient person… maybe I need to leave the States altogether… I've been burned (the past week), a little tired… probably the 14-hour days are getting to me… excuse my chain of thoughts – it is a strange, dark, melancholy day here in Anchorage. I miss you. I love you.

Went to work in the afternoon.[6] The Attorney left early. I had to redo the first and final account of executor since he didn't get it right the first time. Turned out he didn't get it right this time either, the figures in the estate don't add up (including oil wells in Kern County). I did what I could and left him a note. "What in god's name are you talking about?" He even messed up the attorney's fee.

7 p.m. I took a bus to the Museum of Modern Art, and walked by the Opera House.[7]

I levitated in a stainless-steel elevator with a mirror ceiling to the fourth floor, and was soon engulfed in the work of Carrie Mae Weems, a black woman photographer who lives in Oakland. Her photos filled up one whole wing of the museum. They were black and white in a documentary style. There was a down-home dignity coming through, maybe because many of the pictures were at home.

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[6] Kafka was tall and thin and worked in an office. He was nearly forty-one when he died.
[7] The Joffrey Ballet, using the songs of Prince to kick up their heels.

The *Chronicle* called it "a tough look at racial perceptions." Whose racial perceptions? It's a look at another race at home, but I'm not sure how tough or perceptive it is, showing pictures of her family or Spanish moss or funky houses or a woman reading at a table under an overhead light. It supposedly subverts the perceptions white people have of black people. I found it self-dramatizing and straightforward. Is it hard to imagine that black people have homes and parents and one brother rides a motorcycle and doesn't want to leave Seattle because his mother lives there, or the mother works in a factory making low wages while the father and her brother like to have a few drinks on occasion and are really close except for one argument when they both pulled guns on each other? The son wounded the father but he was sorry. The younger mother tries to carry on a conversation with her crazy kids in the kitchen.

Few if any of the pictures are "tough." It would be closer if they said it was a soft look, given the compositions and tones. The museum program had some puffed-up descriptions. "For over a decade, Oakland artist Carrie Mae Weems has challenged issues of identity, race, gender and class…." You could take a picture of any human being and say you're challenging issues of identity, race, gender, and class, if only because those "issues" are built into all of us. Maybe you're challenging issues of freeze-frame time and photogenic presence and mortality. For the life of me I couldn't see it. Maybe it wasn't visible, which is odd for a photo show. How are photographs of her family in their home challenging anything, except the scarcity of photos of black people in museums?

There were inscriptions on plates (not that I'm dishing her work) with homespun superstitions, folk tales, and remedies. For example, when a child has chicken pox you wave a chicken over his head. That sounds like a good way to lose a child, and maybe a

chicken as well. I have a problem with superstition. The same woman who puts it in a warm light has a Marxist awareness. In the last room were banners with quotes from Marx and Engels, Fanon, and Malcolm X. Marxism has no time for sorcery and superstition, which were thought to be holding people back as much as class disparities.

Here's the punch line: it is an exhibition steeped in the African-American experience, and yet she says, "That's not what my work's about… the issues I'm dealing with are much broader and more complex. Everything shouldn't be subsumed under the rubric of blackness… you don't see the museum describing Clyfford Still as a white painter." You don't see Clyfford Still painting pictures of white people, or any people at all, with the intention of challenging issues of race. He also doesn't have Marxist quotes when showing his work. The reference to Still is out of focus. Here she is, riding on a wave of domestic blackness, but tries to deny it because "that simplifies my work." She seems to imply that black people are simple, and she is interested in more complex things, her family being a springboard into those.

The article said, "She's bugged that the art world pegs her as a black woman artist," one with "'politically correct' credentials." This is so disingenuous it takes my breath away. Her work is being shown in a major art museum which gave her an entire wing, but she wants to hold onto an aura of suffering, so she uses race in the sense that her own should be invisible, though her show leans heavily on it.

There is a photo of her that takes up three-fourths of the front page of the culture section of the *Chronicle*. She is grinning with her arms folded, wearing a black sweater, and she has a crew cut (identity, gender, class), as if to say: I'm oppressed, I got an MFA

in 1982, I'm having my own show in one of the larger museums on the West Coast, and isn't it awful that there used to be salt shakers in the image of black people?

Meanwhile, a Thursday evening in the museum. Not many people, maybe twenty drifting through the rooms, and only one of them was black - an older man in a nice suit, impeccable in fact. It was mainly white viewers with oblivious Filipino guards in a stare-down with pictures of black people.

Her father alluded to her capacity for jive rhetorical double-talk, saying she can "talk that talk" with the white man.

The relative emptiness of images was brought home in the next gallery by way of experimental videos. "Thresholds and Enclosures… to explore broader philosophical and perceptual questions related to art and art-making." There is some duplicity when it's a tool for social change which also looks good in your living room. What if social change doesn't go with the curtains?

The video was deconstructing itself to the point that I was on a threshold of the void. An empty room (enclosure) was refreshing for the first few minutes, if one can speak of nothingness and fresh air. There were two video screens, both aimed at mirrors on opposing walls with small video cameras on top of each recording the reflection of anyone that passed before it. One camera had a slight delay. You stand there, your image frozen on the screen, then walk away and stop and watch, waiting for your reflection to walk away. In the long run, and a few short steps, it felt like an expensive nothingness.

The next piece: walk through a door into a short dark hall and then into a semi-dark room, catching a glimpse of something fading on the wall to your left as you walk into the room. It is your fading magnified video projection taken by a camera in the short

hall. As soon as you're in the room your image fades beyond the range of the light. You are sideswiped by the slippery solipsism of the cinematic for what it's worth, which is not much if you're not stoned.

The next couple of set-ups were anchored in current events, unless your own presence is a current event. There were two rows of TV screens turned on to different channels. Each screen had a phrase in black letters glued to it. The words were an ironic commentary on whatever program was in progress:

SEX PANIC. HOLDING CAGE. DEATH SQUAD BUDGET.

PUBLIC MEMORY. ETHNIC CLEANSING.

Sex panic across the face of a news moderator, Connie Chung, who was interviewing someone. Ethnic cleansing on the Chinese channel.

On the next wall were two large displays: blown-up photos of a pile of bodies over a television with an inane program on without the sound. Underneath the television was a picture of a cosmic spiral. It was effective, but I found myself wondering: 1) if the photos of the bodies in disheveled bloody clothing were staged or real, and 2) if it mattered, considering something like that occurred recently in El Salvador. The idea that people are dying in some parts of the world while others are watching TV is not original. Reminds me of Auden's poem about Icarus falling out of the sky and no one notices or cares.[8]

In the south gallery was Richard Prince with a "contentious body of work marked by his own distinctive brand of 'social science fiction'." He isolates images from ads without the words or message, and re-photographs them. It was weak, if not effete, the

[8] "Musee des Beaux Arts" (1940)

two-dimensional recycled. I wonder if he has an Oedipal complex in relation to the image. He wants to drain it of life and make love to it at the same time.

The east gallery was in disarray, being between shows. It could still pass for art, however. It wouldn't be more enigmatic or mundane than other forms of modern art.

9 p.m. I left, walking to Max's where the waiters cover what you ordered with an aria or a show tune. They sing with a piano, while you pick the wrong notes out like so much rotten lettuce.

Friday, July 9, 1993

Typing in the morning.

Work in the afternoon.

The pool in the evening.

Walked home and stayed up late (guitar, reading, typewriter).

Saturday, July 10, 1993

11:40 a.m. I caught an out-of-town bus to Larkspur, a forty-minute ride, like going to the country.

The Actress looked relaxed, being out of work. Her daughter, Maya, is about to go into the fifth grade. She is thin with long black tangled hair and light brown skin. Her divorced father is from Puerto Rico. He went to Princeton but is slacking, in her mother's opinion. He's a journalist and a Deadhead who dropped out and is behind on child support, having a part-time job as a gardener.

The mother invited me a couple of days ago. She thinks I'm a good influence on her daughter since we get along so well. I get down on the level of a nine-year-old and stay there with, according to the mother, suspicious ease - like a stage I never left entirely. She is not hard to get along with. Very bright, and mature in ways I'm not sure about. I can't imagine what she has absorbed from TV and movies, and neither can her mother. I let her come to me or be the aggressive one who sets the pace and comes up with the next routine or game. It wasn't my idea, in other words, to stand on a second-floor balcony with her on the ground throwing a single cherry back and forth, or fresh-picked blackberries, until we had red juice on our hands. She tried to catch one in her mouth, laughing and becoming giddy.

Later, having changed into her two-piece swimsuit, she brought me into her room. It was a mess with a girlish canopy bed, a white lace skirt on the floor, and a viola case. She showed me a rainbow of glitter she painted on the wall above her pillow. I said it was crooked. She said, "It sparkles." "How is it going with the viola?" Not so good. I took it out and played a few notes, though it had a broken string. She took it and showed me how it's done.

I wouldn't think a fifth grader would be coy or flirtatious, particularly with me, but women know better. A few admitted having crushes on an older man when they were girls. That is not necessarily the case here, but once in a while I had the sense that she was flirting. It would be interesting if she knew what she was doing, including the fact that she was too young. Part of the humor of her sprawling on the bed in curious poses in her swimsuit was that some day it would be effective, but not at the moment. She is skinny, about sixty pounds. How much of it comes from within, and how much is a

learned response from TV and movies? Imitating older girls who know how to get a man's attention by reclining a certain way.

There's an old question of what do women want, but I'm more interested in what they know. A mind is more subversive and amusing than assuming they don't have a brain. That would leave a man in the dark, operating with an illusion since they have a mind, and it is often more alert and calculating than many men realize. I remember visiting my friend Jacques near Dolores Park. His three-year-old daughter would invite me into her room as if I was a gentleman caller, showing me her dolls and flirting a bit. Her father said she does that now and then.

I accompanied the mother and daughter to the pool, the mother sitting with a couple of other women on lounges. I was in the pool with Maya. We're like slippery water buddies. The pool is no more than five feet deep. She had a snorkel and goggles and had it all figured out. She would swim along the surface looking down and I was supposed to swim along the bottom.

There were other variations, like diving for a quarter, or I'm a shark and she's a dolphin. I said, "Jellyfish," and she said, "Dolphin." I showed her how to straighten up on the side of the pool and dive in smoothly like an arrow, arms overhead, feet straight. Before she had been crouching like a frog. Soon she had it down and her mother was surprised, like catching one of those moments when a flower unfolds a little more.

We swam back and forth for a while. I showed her how to do it underwater, but she can't hold her breath very long. At some point a little girl who lives downstairs showed up. She is black, about six or seven, but doesn't know how to swim. There was a moment where it struck me like a dream, the light glittering on the water while I stood in

the shallow end with two girls who were coming into their own. A few minutes later in the hot tub the girl told us she had several boyfriends.

The fiancé, Michael, finally showed up,[9] and we drove to the tennis courts (at the College of Marin). There was a hot and nearly windless air that I don't experience very often. It was woodsy with a view of the hills and Mt. Tamalpais.

It was him and me for a good while, sweating and slamming it back and forth. He is more methodical than I am, and his arms are thicker. For that matter, he spent five years playing seriously every day. I had no problem holding my own when we were knocking it back and forth, but when we played a few points I realized how good he was, being accurate and strategic. I am fluid to a fault in that respect.

The mother and daughter watched for a minute, then went off to shoot some baskets. They returned with the mother further away and the daughter near the fence in a short skirt, sitting on a basketball and watching us intently (as her mother said later). She was on my side and taking it all in. Once in a while she gave me comments and suggestions. We finally stopped, and I felt the effects.

Drove back, picking up some root beer. It sometimes happens when the four of us are driving that the two who are engaged are being mushy and self-involved, leaving the two of us in the backseat to amuse ourselves and mock the lovebirds - her from the perspective of never having tried it, and me from the perspective of having tried it too often.

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[9] The mother and her fiancé were in the water with us in the shallow end. It made for an unfortunate moment, like the dynamics of everyone were suddenly too complicated. The mother floated into my arms and I was about to hand her off to one of the others while the daughter was diving for a coin that the fiancé had his foot on. She came up for air and banged her head on her mother's head as I was swinging her over to the fiancé. The daughter was on the verge of tears for a minute or two.

Earlier the mother remarked on how relaxed or in good spirits I was. Does that mean I have a girlfriend? No, it means I don't. It was partly my surroundings, though. Some people live in a lotus land of gentle heat waves with a low-intensity existence, succumbing to the call of the mild, while others live in the vicinity of violent gutters. My friends are compensating for the quiet with their homemade frictions, the occasional fights between the two of them, and some financial worries.

In the living room I was slung between a couple of chairs and relaxing. Maya thought it was funny. She lay on the sofa and we threw a pillow back and forth. It was edifying, going by her reactions, like the manifestation of a coordinated spark gap between two people.

After dinner we sat around for a while with soft music. Maya was sleepy and finally went to bed, saying goodnight. I talked with the other two for an hour. Michael is involved with a restaurant opening in North Beach, an elegant men's club with pole dancing. He has been coordinating the kitchen as a gourmet chef (and his poetry has fallen by the wayside).

11 p.m. I left, walking a few blocks to "downtown" Larkspur, which is like a movie set with a quiet small-town atmosphere. I nearly memorized it since I waited an hour for the bus. I strolled up and down the sidewalk, and passed a noisy bar. It was a glimpse of another culture, not a crowd that I would find at an industrial music concert, more like a beer commercial. I could walk into a bar in Spain or England and feel more at home. That may be another character defect. If I feel defective, I should probably defect to New York City.

1:30 a.m. Back in the city. It was a relief to be in my element, the cold density of it, with some typographic densities occurring in the home, and home is where you hang your consciousness.

Sunday, July 11, 1993

Typing in the morning. I had no intention of going out, but B. called twice concerning a party in the afternoon. I finally relented.

3:30 p.m. I was picked up in a white van with a purple padded interior. We drove through the Mission District and beyond. I said it was outer space. We arrived in a neighborhood where I immediately wondered how to get back.

There was a small house surrounded by trees and set back from the street, a comfortable set-up. It was the home of Molly, a buxom broad who is working on a novel. She comes across as a brazen woman with a loud laugh. B. likes her spirit, and it was a Sunday afternoon of conversation and cocaine.

Monday, July 12, 1993

8:30 a.m. A sleepless wreck. I was a little wired on the coke last night and woke up a couple of times. I was operating on four hours sleep.

I went to the place on the corner, feeling like a disheveled zombie. I told B. that sometimes I look like I belong in the Tenderloin. She said, “Don’t say that.” It was a warm morning and I’m almost never up at this hour, the long shadows from the angle of the light. I wonder if I’m missing some fresh triggers in the early morning.

I sat at the counter with the other human wreckage. Nearby was a two-year-old Vietnamese girl holding a bottle to an infant in a carriage. It is curious how demanding some of the people are who come here, people of every race. You might be on the low end of the economic scale, but you know how you want your eggs.

I took a bus to the Hall of Justice and went through the metal detector. Apparently I'm not the man of steel I was last night. I sat in the jury selection room which I remembered from ten years ago. It's like a waiting room in the U.N. There were variations of the Asian persuasion and not many blacks, maybe half a dozen out of 200 people.

I wasn't in the mood for this, and wasn't sure if being sleepless and nearly brain-dead was helping the time go by or making it harder. Things felt point-blank. I was combining the effects of a morning after with a Monday, while crashing into a cross-section of the local population. There is a sociological angle here which is not uninteresting if you're up to it, like my DUI classes last year. People from all walks of life who I don't usually meet.

I wonder if they choose people in commercials from a jury waiting room. There is a similar genetic variation with perceptual limitations and low ceilings (furnished by the government).

I waited, reading the paper,[10] from 9:30 to 11 when a list of names was read. Mine was mentioned. We were supposed to report to Dept. 13 on the second floor at 1:30 p.m. I went over to a chair on the side and started reading *Operation Shylock*.

[10] There was an article about a man who killed himself and his kids when his marriage fell apart. It's like he misinterpreted the phrase, "…'til death do you part."

> In that ingenuousness I found a kind of distillation of humanity. Their blindness and deafness, their obsessive preoccupation with themselves as an integral part of their ingenuousness.

He is talking about the Jews and how they were supposedly "deft, cunning, and sophisticated," and yet "… how easy it was to fool the Jews." Even with a train on the way.

I walked over to the window and picked up a magazine, *Natural Science*, with an article on the praying mantis. I was in a daze of delayed comprehension with my defenses down and had one of those moments where you look up from a page of copulating praying mantises and everything seems extra-real. I think the existence of a god is harder to deny when it comes to the intentionality of insects. There were a couple of praying mantises with the male on the back of a female who was larger and duller (at least in tone). They have hardly any brain, but manage to continue the species.

It turns out the praying mantis has one ear, so to speak, in its mid-abdomen (I thought of umbilical sound-waves). There was an explanation of how a praying mantis in flight uses evasive tactics when a bat approaches. It goes into a "stall" which produces a random downward spiral. A scientist checked with someone in the Air Force, who said the pilots use that method.

I looked up from the article in circumstances which were selfless. There is a sense of dislocation when you're pulled out of your normal routine and put into another context. I felt like an anonymous unit in the demographic selection process. Outside the window on the third floor was the curving architecture of a new jail. Its frosted windows are within spitting distance of an elevated freeway. There is a polarity here of stillness and motion. A billboard next to the freeway had a "revolutionary" message about

crossing the line. Something to do with a dark ultra-modern vehicle that Darth Vader might have bought for his mistress. There was the downtown skyline in the background, and the flags were flying while I sat in a large and nearly empty room with only a few people left. The stillness and inertia at the center of the legal system.

1:30 p.m. I returned to the courtroom on the second floor, the jury selection process for a DUI trial (right up my alley). I was in a holding cell in this building for the same violation a year ago, and we handle those cases in the office.

The selection process was a pain and wasn't over at four p.m. when they broke it off. Come back tomorrow for a high-noon showdown with the legal process. I was tired, so of course I decided to walk home, dragging it out by stopping in the Vision Gallery on Mission Street. Maybe I need some focus in my life, feeling uncomposed, which is better than decomposed.

I dropped in on a music store a few blocks further and plugged in a Gibson SG ('61) for $1000. I messed around a bit, but unfortunately the guy had plugged it into a bass amp. I put it back and went into the acoustic room and found an old Martin from 1968 for $3500, a beautiful sound. I was having a nice time with it when a guy walked in. He had a bicycle helmet on with a rearview mirror. Maybe fifty years old, stocky and outgoing. He picked up an acoustic and before you know it he wanted me to hear some old songs he wrote and asked if I would provide accompaniment. I was so out of it I did.

Even more odd, there was a "clinic" starting at 6:30 (Wolf Marshall). He has long tangled blond hair and can play anything he wants. It began with a talk about tuning and I walked out.

Fish and chips, the phone, and reading. No alcohol.

I was asleep by 11 p.m.

Tuesday, July 13, 1993

I have an old clock radio. It got me up yesterday at the all-too-human hour of 8 a.m. This morning after nine hours of sleep I tried to turn it on and got something unfamiliar. The Rush Limbaugh show. It was a shock, but I kept it on for a few minutes. Once in a while I tune in or read what other segments of the population are absorbing so I know where I live (and whether I should leave the country).

I want to know what sort of half-truths or phony belief systems are being thrown around with a conservative perspective. I want to know what causes a conservative. Progressives make excuses for some criminals - blaming their transgressions on society – and not for others. Conservatives are more exclusive, not excusive. I try to see things from their perspective. It's like putting on someone else's shoes and it's a tight fit. Not that their arguments are water-tight, but you see how insecurities and historical backgrounds generate opinions. They think the liberal agenda is up in the air. It's pulling the rug of private property from under the feet of those who want to feel planted, but they have a growing sense of dislocation. I wonder if the passage of time has anything to do with that.

However, Limbaugh blows it when he's being a buffoon. His "feminazi" routine is dumb and tasteless, and he talks in the manner of someone wielding a large wooden mallet with malice aforethought. Some people are tired of high-ceiling ambiguities and settle for low-ceiling certainties being hammered home. And home is what it's all about. Protect it with a gun (it's unambiguous), like a Bible written by Mickey Spillane.

The program was a commercialized unholy mixture of heavy-handed diatribes, legitimate questions, and/or quandaries about the current situation. A guy called in from somewhere on the North American continent, a white male in his twenties (a policeman I think). He wanted to talk about firemen who are called to a fire in a neighborhood with housing projects[11] and are assaulted or fired on by black people. He can't make sense of it. The firemen have to wait for police protection. They are unarmed. They are there to put out fires, to keep someone's house from burning down and the occupants in it. Why would anyone attack them? It's the lowest thing he could think of.

There was a weak response from the radio voice. The firemen represent the system, and therefore it's open season on them. I wondered if that relates to the incident in Somalia where two or three journalists were shot, beaten, and stoned to death by some of the locals. Journalists who you might suppose are broadcasting the plight of Somalia to the world, and are not supposed to be targets.

Typing for a while.

11:30 a.m. I waited for the bus while looking at a sign of a woman with HIV. Two lanes were blocked with flares, a trailer truck having hit the brakes at the intersection and part of its load of iron plates slid off. I was a few minutes late to the court.

I sat in the courtroom for nearly two hours, and was more alert, for what it's worth, continuing the jury selection process from yesterday. They were having difficulties. Beginning with fifty people they would go through all of them before settling on the chosen twelve, and still not have an alternate.

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[11] A few years ago I had a part-time job in a telex room downtown which was mostly black employees. One of them lived in a housing project near the Cow Palace and I went there for a party. The building was bleak, and the fire extinguishers were often stolen.

I started taking notes. The process was becoming interesting. The judge and the attorney for the people were women in their thirties. The attorney for the accused (a young Latino) was Latino, maybe thirty. He was indifferent about his hair, with a hooked nose, and something of a physical slouch. He reminded me of Groucho Marx and might have been half-Jewish. It seemed like he was slinking, but it may have been an optical illusion or bad posture, giving the impression of no backbone. Either he was more relaxed, or his attention was diverted from the body to the mind, which was all the more alert.

The judge ran through a list of questions for determining the opinions and biases of prospective jurors. Each attorney had ten challenges. "Prosecution thanks and excuses Juror No. 7…" who then returned to the main room. For a while I tried to guess their strategies, and picked a couple of people I thought the defense would remove and he did. People who never had a drink in their life (Asian), or had bad experiences with alcohol.[12] The dismissals by the prosecuting attorney were more mystifying. A couple of happy-go-lucky drinkers were dismissed, but so was a young woman who ran an aerobics studio. One woman dismissing another and for what reason? I tried to figure out the generalities and stereotypes, the educated guesses by attorneys when they gamble on who is more sympathetic to their cause. Why a relatively sober aerobics instructor? Did the attorney think she would be swayed by a good-looking defendant?

The defense was removing the most educated and articulate men. A young doctor who said that scientific instruments were not necessarily believable and had a margin of error, and an older retired man who was well spoken. As the Attorney I work for said

[12] Like when you buy a dry white wine for a fish dinner, but your girlfriend prefers a sweet white wine. Or when you're underage and no liquor store will sell it to you.

later, “Sometimes you want a jury of dumb sheep.” You don’t want someone who is too intelligent and outspoken who might push the others in the wrong direction. Do you believe scientific data and instruments are the last word in proving a defendant’s guilt? Do you know it’s not against the law to have a drink and get into a car? I think the defendant had a blood alcohol count over .08 and was trying to fight it. It would cost him an additional thousand or two and might be futile.

A few of the prospective jurors had their own readymade opinions and admitted biases, and some soapboxes were dragged out for the occasion. There were four black persons (out of a group of fifty), three of whom got themselves removed from the case (the judge said, “Try the civil court.”). One woman, late forties, nicely dressed with a hair-do, managed to be rude when they were calling attendance. She conveyed the most put-upon impatient attitude by the time she was in a chair and questions were directed at her. She was angry, but it was so subjective and unfocussed it bordered on the irrational. The court and the rest of us were supposed to fall back in sympathy for the fact she wasn’t sleeping well and there are tensions in her private life. There are a couple of sons in their twenties who may have been in trouble and in court before. Her experience of courts (and of children I suppose) was not very pleasant and she said as much, more or less refusing the whole situation of her being there. She could care less if a Mexican had gotten drunk, and doesn’t agree with prosecuting DUI’s. Finally the judge and the attorneys conferred. There was a mutual stipulation that she be sent back upstairs; maybe a civil case would be more to her liking.

A black man in his late twenties picked up on the theme and said he was biased about anyone being arrested for a DUI. He thought it wasn’t right and wouldn’t judge

someone on that basis. The judge tried to get the point across that personal opinions were secondary to the law as it exists. The law stood, and being a juror is a civic duty. That didn't have much effect and he was finally dismissed.

Another black woman, maybe forty, was shy as a truck and also brought her own emotional baggage into the courtroom. Her insulted and miffed condition was a broken record. Five years ago she was assaulted. The suspect eluded the police. Six months later he was caught in a worse assault (beating some guy over the head with a pipe). She was subpoenaed to testify. Somehow this meant she was being mistreated as a woman. The woman judge was painfully polite, trying to make sense of this and understand it. How had the legal system mistreated her as a woman? Well, because it hadn't reacted or done anything until one of the victims of the suspect was male. Nothing to do with the fact that the suspect had eluded arrest in her case, and the assault he was caught for was worse. The final mistreatment: she was subpoenaed (as anyone would be) instead of getting a personal phone call (and no limo to the court).

It turned out there are other problems in her life. She has custody of her grandson because her daughter was "MIA on crack cocaine." Meanwhile she is taking classes and has too much in her life – she almost said - to focus on some two-bit fool who had too many drinks.[13]

It is an overkill of jurisprudence, if not a theater of the absurd, when you consider the cost and effort of so many people who are pulled out of their private lives, not to say

[13] I was struck by the subjective anger of the black women, the force of their criticism directed outwards with a misdirected attitude. Maybe it's a form of anti-psychology, a reluctance to take responsibility or see a distinction between public and private situations. The court is sympathetic, but it isn't interested in your personal problems, except inasmuch as they might compromise your jury duty.

the two attorneys, judge, court reporter, Sheriff's deputy, and a couple of assistants. There are fifty prospective jurors, out of which twelve will be chosen to hear the case, dragging out over four or five days and all for what? A young man may have driven when he shouldn't have. Presumably he hadn't hurt anyone. There is only the concern that something might have gone wrong.

It's ironic when you consider that black people have complained for many years about not being included in the system – from voting rights to legal representation – but when it comes to jury duty it's, "What do you mean we, white man?"

There was a Jewish fellow in his late thirties who admitted in no uncertain terms that he had a problem sitting in judgment of someone when he didn't know the punishment (maybe sensing it was harsh). It was a moral thing. The judge told him it wasn't a juror's responsibility to worry about the punishment. A jury is about fact-finding and applying the law as the judge would present it to them. It decides if the law was broken. He said sorry, he had to know the punishment. If it's exorbitant (which it is) it would affect his judgment. He was sent to civil (which cases tend to be more drawn out).

It is possible that knowing the severity of the punishment might bring out the sadist in some people. There was an experiment at Yale in 1963 that showed how ordinary men and women will follow orders no matter how sadistic.[14] They could be your neighbors, and they vote and sit on juries.

To show the stereotypes were breaking down, with the law transcending race and gender, a black woman ended up on the jury. She was quiet, didn't drink, and had no

[14] The experiment was conducted by Stanley Milgrim, a psychologist. He had a "learner" hooked up to electrodes and a "teacher" in the next room with an electric shock generator. When the "learner" (who did not actually feel the shocks) got a wrong answer, the "teacher" was told to administer a shock. If he hesitated the supervisor would give him an order to continue. Two-thirds of the volunteers went on to inflict the highest level, 450 volts ("danger – severe shock").

problem with the whole procedure. She was followed by a white woman who looked normal and conservative and slammed the whole process point-by-point and very calmly:

1. Scientific data doesn't count.
2. She has a problem being impartial to police testimony, and thought the police are "rude, arrogant, brutal, and sadistic."
3. She can't follow rules, including jury rules.
4. She has a problem judging another person. "It is not for me to do it."

She didn't last long.

There were a couple of young Chinese women and we got a vague profile of their lives, living at home with their parents, single, and working. Very sober and conscientious. They were soft-spoken, but it wasn't like they didn't have a mind of their own. A quiet voice: "I don't think all the data is accurate… sort of doubt scientific instruments."

A Chinese woman in her seventies. She has been here for forty years and can barely speak English. They finally gave up on her.

Old white man, nearly deaf. He walked up closer to the judge and was standing ten feet away.

> "Did you hear all the rules and questions we've been talking about for two days?"
> "What?"

A tiny old Latina woman with some language problems. Both attorneys kept her on. Maybe the defense was looking for Latino sympathy, while the prosecution was relying on an older woman's disapproval of drunk driving. On the second day she raised her hand and told the judge she had to go to a funeral in Monterey the next morning. The judge said, "Fine, as long as you're back here by two."

Given the friction and resistance from the jury pool, it was like trying to get jurors from a bunch of anarcho-subjectivists. The contradiction of enforcing a sense of civic

duty in a culture of rampant individualism. Many people have their own opinions of the law, and it is all the more controversial with a DUI case. You get a glimpse of the legal system as a working compromise backed up with an iron conformity.

A homosexual man with short hair, earrings, flowery shirt, reading a book on Chez Panisse. Articulate, in his thirties, a little tenuous and concerned, but sticking to his position. “I live with my lover,” like that was anyone’s concern. He came off as an intolerant sissy. He thought it was irresponsible for anyone to take one drink and get behind the wheel of a car, so he was biased against the defendant. Finally dismissed.

A young white man, late twenties, wearing shorts and a T-shirt on the first day. He was reading a computer book, a drummer who used to live in the Tenderloin and not exactly impartial to the police. He saw from his window the police beating up a drunk. On the other hand, they “saved my life.” People were supposed to say if they had been victims of crimes, and if they had any resentments as to how the police handled it. There was a lot of testimony since many people had been victimized. A car broken into five times, burglary, assault, date rape, a relative murdered, etc. I forgot to mention how many had friends or relatives who were alcoholics, and a few were themselves.

A man was in his office and there was a man in the hall with a gun. The police arrived and tried to shoot him in the leg, but he had a wooden leg so they had to kill him.

After a while the stories were becoming more interesting than the case at hand. Capsule histories of people. There were older women with grown children who were widowed or divorced. A couple of women whose marriages dissolved because their husbands were alcoholics. They gave the occupations of their offspring. Unemployed

welder. A soldier in the Army. There was another son, but "I don't know where he is, maybe in jail."

The rows of prospective jurors were becoming depleted. The court assistant was picking names at random from slips in a container. Out of fifty people we were down to ten, then four, and I hadn't been called. They still hadn't finalized a jury. Then with two of us left they thought they had a jury, but needed an alternate. The prosecution wanted two, but the judge denied it. "Pass for cause." "Denied." One woman to another.

I had gotten used to sitting on the side and listening and taking notes. Then my name was called and I had to go up and take a seat on the end of the jury section. Suddenly things were different (like Roth quoting Dostoevsky, "This changes everything.") I was thinking what a comfortable seat it was and how claustrophobic this windowless room felt. I was now the focus of the judge's attention. I won't say I was being power-beamed by her Honor, as a New Age superstition would put it, but it was disconcerting. You wonder what's off balance here, and whether part of the strategy is to catch you off guard, giving personal information in impersonal circumstances as you're talking to a room full of strangers. You fall back on what you know, your past, which is what they want to find out about.

It felt like my words were falling into a vacuum. My sense of sentence structure was undermined since I'm not used to public speaking or having to talk without the support of another person in a conversation. It is a shaky prospect being asked to summarize your entire history. I can be longwinded, so I wasn't sure how much detail they wanted and felt short of wind anyhow. I wanted to say, "How much time do you have?" when asked about crime and alcohol and biases against the police.

I could see why many prospective jurors when put on the spot responded briefly and with a low voice. “Could you speak up?” A few others were more vociferous and vocally strong. They pulled it off because they had their own agenda, more or less refusing that of the court. Maybe they had a tunnel vision of being unconcerned about others. It hardly mattered who they were talking to - it could be their next-door neighbor, a courtroom full of people, or a reporter with a camera connected to a million viewers.

I’m used to winging it in different situations and I did okay, a little wobbly at first. It went on for a while. For one thing, the judge brightened up on hearing I worked in a law office. She asked what attorney, but didn’t know him. I went on about having had a DUI. Did I think I was treated fairly? Well, the holding cell was not very comfortable, and I thought the field sobriety test was fabricated, which got no comment. I said I was familiar with the process. We had some DUI cases and there wasn’t an automatic sympathy with the client. You try to get them off while understanding the instruments have a margin of error (plus or minus .02). Right there I thought I may have said too much as far as the defense was concerned. She didn’t go into my life of crime (as a victim). I could have gone on at length about friends and relatives who have been assaulted, robbed, etc. I mentioned a couple of friends who were borderline alcoholics.

All of this for an alternate (like I’m an alternate reality), and each attorney had an additional challenge. The prosecution seemed to think I was fine (maybe because I work in a law office). The defense didn’t, excusing Mr. Gray. Suddenly I was walking out and feeling rejected. It goes with the territory, but I was mystified at the reason. Since I had a DUI you might think the defense attorney would want me on the jury, I had some

sympathy for the situation. The prosecution dismissed a ship fitter in his fifties who had a DUI.

I was supposed to call the court for further instructions. I took a bus to the Tenderloin around 3 p.m. and got out near the Planned Parenthood facility to check on the results of an HIV test. I had the impression I was walking on thin ice, with the ground beneath my feet giving way. You're going along in your usual routine and arrive at a moment where it's possible that everything could change for the worse. It's like standing near the edge of a cliff or stepping off the curb and here comes a truck. All you have to do is take a step back, but the possibility is there that it could change the rest of your life – spending it as a cripple.

In this case, the psychology of the situation was more relevant than the facts. Just because a remote possibility exists you find yourself preparing for the worst. What if it turns out to be positive? An indeterminate death sentence arrived at so casually, like picking up the mail and there's a letter saying you will be evicted from your life at a date to be determined. That would put a damper on things.

Maybe I'm not the existentialist I thought I was, when that philosophy assumes that you could die tomorrow. You can't expect to live forever or another ten years – one reason I am not good at planning ahead financially or when it comes to social events and who to go out with next week. I live in the present, for better or worse.

I waited a few minutes, then went into a small room and the door shut. There was the same Latina woman as before with long black hair, friendly and composed. Part of her job is to tell someone when their test is positive. She pulled out a card in an envelope and after a few words said, "Your test was negative." I smiled. The odds of it being

positive were remote, and yet that wasn't reassuring in my case. I have sensed for a long time that being hit by lightning wouldn't be surprising, given the long-range odds of other occurrences in my life, with some illuminating and others not.

It would be a cosmic joke if everyone thought they were the only one for whom the random might have mortal consequences. You wonder if it's engrained in us at birth, the original one-in-a-million shot, or is it the shock of conception? It's a common occurrence and yet involves a genetic roulette.

I went on talking with her for a few minutes, listening to her calm explanations. She told me to beware of vaginal fluids and cuts on the penis. It is not impossible to be infected through "the shaft." The vagina and penis are formed differently, and yet… I wasn't clear on what happens when a woman swallows infected semen. It doesn't necessarily get into her bloodstream; it's broken down by enzymes in the stomach.

She had the impression I was socially responsible for having the test, and said that many aren't. They don't want to know, even when they are infected and they're spreading the disease. I like to know where I stand, whether or not it's to my benefit or peace of mind. When I was arrested and taken to the jail I opted for the blood test, which is more accurate and harder to challenge. The alcohol count was higher on it. The truth hurts.

I left, walking on air a little. I had been tensing for the worst. It sounds a bit much, in retrospect, but the circumstances put you in that mood.

My next concern was whether it was inappropriate – having been talking about vaginas, penises, and oral sex - to ask her to lunch. Talk about a delicate situation, and her with such an earthy-sensitive composure. Maybe I should drop her a note.

Wednesday, July 14, 1993

No jury duty.

Last night there was a documentary on the Nile. It went from the source to Cairo and the Mediterranean. The various peoples and tribes along the way, from black people wearing next to nothing to Egyptian women who were covered except for their eyes.

There was a tribe, south of the Dinka, living in thatched huts. They put ostrich feathers on for a fight with their neighbors. They have a mythical belief that everything in the world belongs to them – all the women and cattle, for example – and they will grab whatever they can. Looting is a time-honored custom. It leads to regular conflicts with other tribes, like territorial gang wars that don't amount to much since they don't have the equipment for wreaking massive damage and fatalities on each other. Another custom is where a man has multiple wives who work like hell producing lots of kids.

Stealing, the abuse of women, and the urge to fight. How universal can you get?

I think we have a whitewashed view of sub-Saharan Africa by way of black nationalists in the U.S., and their "wholesale repudiation of white culture and celebration of Africa and things African." Is that hypocrisy, or just a common duality with a hustle thrown in? They repudiate a culture in which they're glomming onto every invention and amenity and legal right associated with that culture, while celebrating another culture from a safe distance, having to weather none of its negative aspects while magnifying the positive aspects into an idealized mirage if not a narcissistic wet-dream that the people who live there wouldn't recognize.

At any rate, not many black nationalists follow through on it. They don't relocate to another continent, or subsist on cow's milk with urine in it (as the Dinka do), or drink the blood spurting from a camel's neck and sleep naked in "dung and ashes." Actually, there are plenty of black Africans who have more modern tastes, but women are still bought and sold with not much choice as to their lot in life (along with the custom of female genital mutilation). However, that's okay because the circumstances are racially homogenous.

When it comes to the Nuba (in the Sudan) and Arab peoples in the desert, I admire the fortitude and ingenuities of how they survive in such conditions.[15] However, you wonder if one of those harsh conditions is their own backwardness. I don't know what else to call it if they're still using tools and methods from 3000 years ago which haven't been improved on since. How much are the terrain and weather holding them back? In the sub-Sahara the land is often rich and fertile. An English farmer emigrates to Kenya and operates a productive farm. How is this possible since we all know the white man isn't as close to the land as people of color are? That is one of the sentiments or conceits being thrown around.

On a side note: Look how many people around the world venerate animal traits and characteristics in themselves, coveting a life style characterized by hair and nails and leisure time and foot speed, not to mention territorial capacities and predatory instincts.

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[15] I wonder if blacks were accused of laziness because they were associated with the languor of the South (and were reluctant to follow orders as a slave, which is understandable). It hardly applies to the NBA. What if the roots of that stereotype go back to the assumption that anyone who hung around the Stone Age or the Iron Age for so long was unambitious to a fault? Depending on the circumstances, "lazy" is relative. It's a good thing when it's seen as a refusal to join the rat race and its status competition, and I've been accused of being lazy.

There are fundamental concerns about survival, copulation, giving birth, and dying. All of those are animalistic, whether you're a member of the House of Lords or scratching out a living in the desert.

The Dinka don't think it is an insult. They identify closely with their cattle, deriving their names from descriptions of cattle and other animals. So what am I getting at? The duplicitous twists and turns of what is often considered an insult – people compared to animals – and yet it's common for people to identify with animals or birds, to emulate their savagery and wear their skins and feathers.

For any race or ethnic group to refer to another as "animals" is like the pot calling the kettle black. It is not just a racial putdown. It is used on anyone, affording an automatic condescension by dehumanizing them. It makes it easier to kill or exploit them. The enemy are running dogs, and yet "If dogs run free, why not me / Across the swooping plain?"[16]

With some duplicity and mixed feelings, men have postulated the animal nature of women, finding it seductive, or low and common. You would think it didn't apply to them, who were born of women.[17]

On the radio the other morning was the Rush-to-judgment show. Talk about a rude awakening. One of the subjects was inner city male juveniles and the practice of "whirl-pooling." They form a circle around an unfortunate girl who is molested in the process. One of the fourteen-year-old suspects responding to questions and criticism made it sound like a close-to-nature routine. "We're like dogs… you know how they are -

[16] "If Dogs Run Free" (1970) Bob Dylan

[17] There was a letter to a writer in the *Bay Guardian*, the advice columnist Isadora. A woman wanted to know if having sex with her dog was bad because it was becoming a habit. The response: whatever turns you on, but you should realize you might lose your social skills if you're only interacting with an animal, and the dog might have to see a psychologist.

one bitch, twenty males, get off our case." They were validated by the animal comparison, end of argument. Some women in the Dinkins administration (in New York City) said it wasn't nice, but "this sort of thing has been going on since time immemorial."

I read an article in the paper about out-of-wedlock births. In 1962 the national average was about 5 percent. Now it's 25 or 30 percent. Black people have an illegitimacy rate which is twice that of Hispanics, four times that of whites, and nine times that of Asians (67, 33, 15, and 7 percent respectively, if not respectfully). The laissez-faire does not necessarily make for a lot of respect. I thought of Farrakhan's line to women: "Don't lay down with a man who doesn't respect you!" How many of these women were abandoned by their men? Single mothers tend to end up (or remain) on the low end of the economic scale.

A woman tried to put a liberal smokescreen on it, so no one has to get judgmental about the careless custom of bringing a kid into the world with one or two strikes against him or her. She said this is a "value-free" phenomenon. Curious phrase. Is that like germ-free, meaning no germs? Value-free implies no values. Is that supposed to be progressive? Is "free" the operative word here? You can add it to any weak sociological excuse, and it is somehow positive and not oppressive. Hi, I'm thought-free, how are you?[18]

[18] A phrase in the men's room of the DNA Lounge: SCHOOL-FREE DRUG ZONE.

Speaking of the vagaries of racial condescension or insult, some years ago a white high-level official[19] made a dumb joke in a conversation on a plane. He lost his job because of that. People were upset and it was politically expedient. He said, "I'll tell you what coloreds want. It's three things: first, a tight pussy; second, loose shoes; and third, a warm place to shit. That's all!" What struck me at the time was a certain hypocrisy around this. I wouldn't be surprised to hear a black comedian say it. I've definitely heard worse. Was the official suggesting that he or white people prefer otherwise? He would rather have tight shoes and a cold toilet? What is the insult then? It is not so much the line itself – which would apply to just about anyone, but the implication that that's all a certain group of people think about or want. If they have those three things they're content. It sounds like he is mocking a condition that he envies, a life of simple contentment. There's a good chance that his life was full of complication, discontent, and lonely nights.

More recently there was a man in a public institution who rather than telling a joke in a private conversation delivered his vitriol in a lecture to college students. You would think it was a more damaging context for putting down other races while extolling his own. His anti-Semitism was extreme, and it goes without saying that the white man was thoroughly slandered. And yet, because the man is black and something of a cultural nationalist (Leonard Jeffries), he is untouchable. The school attempted to have him removed (low academic standards was one of the charges). However, he won a settlement of $400,000 plus reinstatement as head of the Black Studies Department.

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[19] Earl Butz, Secretary of Agriculture, in 1976. He was explaining to John Dean (just out of prison after Watergate) why the Republican Party didn't attract more black people. Another reason is that people like him are Republicans.

Went to work in the afternoon.

Talking with V. at the next desk, who was smoldering because her fiancé won't pick her up at the monorail station. She exclaimed, "He's an asshole!" several times under her breath. This is one of the more discreet and proper women I know.

I talked with the older woman on the other side of her desk, who is as outspoken as V. isn't, and who I have to be diplomatic with. She is touchy on the subject of women, but doesn't mind lobbing putdowns of men or facetious insults in my direction like a mortar over V.'s head. I read something in the paper and told V. about it, trying to be delicate and letting her know the subject, but she was curious so I gave her a rough outline. It involved a young married couple. The man (twenty-six) was asleep and the wife decided to cut off his penis with a knife (having been sexually mistreated by him). She drove off with it in a car and threw it out the window. It was retrieved by the police (picking up body parts along the side of the road is part of the job). The man went to the hospital and underwent a long operation. It was sewn back on and is expected to be semi-functional in a year or so.

V. barely believed me, so the next day I put an 8 x 2-inch column about a penis in her in-box. She read it with a look of scorn and wonder, saying "How dumb," and then remarking with a child-like laugh that it was "packed in ice."

I wasn't sure what was worse, a woman using a knife on a sleeping man, or that she would throw away a body part with a good chance it would never be recovered. V. showed the article to the older woman and her response was chilling, so subjectively limited it was hardly worth responding to. She read the article and exclaimed, "Well so what? Look what she went through, spousal rape and everything." Her sense of

proportion was out of whack. There was no distinction made between a woman having sex with her husband when she is not in the mood, and a complete stranger forcing her into the act, not to mention the assumption that her husband deserved to be mutilated.

The woman in the office said maybe she'll get off or he'll be charged with something. A few minutes later, with complete silence coming from my desk, she made a lighthearted remark which showed how some women barely regard men as human beings (further evidence of their perceptual limitations). She sounded like a castrating bitch - not so much in the literal sense, but seeing her own biological form as the norm, and whatever she doesn't have doesn't matter.

Walking home in the evening I thought of the forces moving through society, tearing apart families and couples. In the past, people had to stay together as families or tribes or married couples out of necessity, bound together in order to survive. There were financial constraints. What if those necessities have loosened up, and the forces contained in those roped-together situations are bursting out by centrifugal force in our accelerated world with more and more options available for women and men?

I'm not sure if it's the neighborhood or what, but I'm getting harder. I'm confronted every day by strangers for whom I only exist as a walking ATM machine. Most of the time I don't stop. Lately I have been experimenting with a phenomenon I stumbled on by accident - the impact of looking at someone. So far it's been mainly black people who act like I flashed a knife or something. It's the oddest thing. Do they object to seeing themselves, like a gaze that is reflecting them? Do they object to a white man looking them in the eye, rather than being more deferential? Is something communicated

through the eyes which I am barely aware of? It is strange how those with an audio discernment on the level of banging on a garbage can would be so visually sensitive.

I was walking on Post Street and a black man up ahead was about to approach. I walked right by him but I did so with a fixed gaze, eye-to-eye. I don't think it was that intense, and I don't have the meanest-looking face in town, but the reaction was immediate. He was practically recoiling, and it left him muttering to himself.

A few minutes later, in my own more dingy neighborhood, a car pulled up. A young and upscale antiseptic white woman stuck her head out with a big smile which doesn't mean a thing except that privilege is her middle name. She called to a man nearby, "Where's Bush Street?" I thought, between your legs.

Which is to say that I'm becoming a little cold. If analyzing dreams is useful, so is analyzing moods and passing thoughts. It can let you know if you're becoming tense, and should lighten up before you turn into a sadistic loner.

That would be a subject for investigative hands-on journalism, finding out the causes of sadistic loners by becoming one yourself, or sinking into the conditions that produce such people. You can experiment on your own resilience when it comes to bouncing out of solitude and pessimism and your buoyancy is thrown into relief, having over-estimated its durability.

At home there was a glowing apparition of the Dalai Lama, his enlightenment projected through a TV screen.

Thursday, July 15, 1993

10:30 a.m. I arrived at the Hall of Justice and walked through the metal detector. I went to Room 307 and was there for an hour and a half with a few others. I sat near the back for a while and read the paper. TWENTY-SOMETHING GENERATION DECLARES ITSELF A POLITICAL FORCE. Whoa, stand back. "The task of lobbying for the future has fallen on our shoulders," said the twenty-six-year-old son of the late Robert F. Kennedy. If no one lobbies for the future it won't show up? No one else is concerned about the future, only the young. And yet the endless possibilities have a way of conforming to the facts and limitations of life. Their organization has the humble name of Third Millennium.

I was in a large waiting room with the low drone of a TV in the corner. A few people watched a commercial about the discomfort of vaginal dryness. I finally moved to the other side of the room and picked up a magazine, an NRA[20] publication. Guns and dry vaginas… don't you love this country?

High noon and we were dismissed. Call back Monday. I went out and took a bus to SF Camerawork. I hadn't been there in a long time. There was much ado about gender verification. The assumption is that self-documentation is an art and worth putting on a wall. If nothing else it is a sociological statement to whom it may concern.

A black lesbian put a photo of herself on the wall with a handwritten plaintive comment about white lesbians who come onto her as something "dangerous" or "exotic" and she doesn't like it. There are women who try to look exotic, but she would rather be considered safe and ordinary – which she probably is to herself, being a known quantity in that respect.

[20] National Rifle Association ("…founded in 1871 to advance rifle marksmanship…").

A wall of pictures on the polymorphous perversity of the body, where a fold of skin or some hair is seen up close and you don't know where you are in terms of the body, but it looks erogenous.

Some romantic magazine ads were altered by a Vietnamese man, putting himself in the ad as the main character with a feminine soft focus. It seemed vain or self-dramatizing, like he wanted to see himself in such a format, but it came with a statement explaining his intention. Putting himself into the picture was beside the point, he was deconstructing and/or analyzing the racial/gender bias of commercial iconography, or something to that effect. As if to say: I'm so oppressed, there aren't any homosexual Vietnamese men in Chanel ads.

The flier for the show, HYPOTHALAMIC IN/QUEER/IES, showed forceps pulling apart an orange which was suggestively slit.

A photo sequence with a narrative by a woman and a nice technique. A series on "Madam and Eve in the garden," also called "tit for twat." It addressed "the religious right's naturalization of heterosexuality through constant references to the Genesis story." I like that, the "naturalization of heterosexuality…," as if there was anything natural about male-female relations, much less human reproduction which tends to involve a male-female collaboration. It's probably an artificial construct that was invented by this country. Even worse is the notion that heterosexuality is validated by a superstitious patriarchal desert tribe from thousands of years ago.

There were a couple of primordial Venuses. You're walking in the desert near Palm Springs and come across a naked 200-pound dyke with short hair and a nipple ring who thinks she is Eve, the original woman. Here comes her mate, a black woman of

mixed race with a heavy behind and breasts which point straight down, a big bush, thick legs, and you say, "Good morning."

Went to work.

7 p.m. Walked home.

Reading *Et Tu, Babe*, which I got from the library. I had the impression that Lautreamont[21] was writing for the *National Lampoon*. I thought of Donald Barthelme, then saw him referred to on the jacket copy which called the book a "zeitgeist frappe." A manic diversion with an off-the-cuff quickness which eventually gets annoying. It makes for an easy exit from the book, providing its own antidote as it were. There were semi-delirious anecdotes when he finally dropped any pretense of a continual narrative. Another writer with a lot of short pieces who throws them between two covers and calls it a book (like *Naked Lunch* by William Burroughs). I'm not sure how much cocaine and marijuana went into this book, and if he went to medical school, but there is nothing like a delirious intellect to wipe out the effects of other books which have no claim to delirium or intelligence.

9:30 p.m. I went out on a last-minute whim. It's a wonder I go out at all, given the barricade of complications I live behind, with coincidence and four-dimensional considerations thrown in along with the kitchen sink. It is a way of resisting what is out there. I don't want to be sucked out of my home by the relentless lure of entertainment or I would be out every night.

[21] French writer (1846-1870), an early surrealist. When Andre Gide came across his book, *Les Chants de Maldoror*, he said "Here is something that excites me to the point of delirium."

I also have a book resistance, though a few get through. I operate with the caution of the impressionable and the reluctance of the susceptible. I'm like that with everything from books and periodicals to song, women, and wine. A little goes a long way these days. Everything has an impact, and I'm reluctant to put myself at the mercy of a power-mad movie or some other vicarious diversion.

There's a combination lock on my social life. There has to be a combination of factors to unlock an evening out. Not just the event itself, but how it fits into my mood which I won't know about until it is an hour before the event. It makes it hard to plan ahead, and is a strategy of the muses to keep me near the typewriter.

I figured I should lighten up. The strain of how I'm living is going to my brain. I've been experimenting with unidentified or even violent thoughts appearing in my mind, and I want to figure out their causes and effects, like the scientist experimenting on himself in *Altered States*.[22] He used a sensory deprivation chamber to unravel or transcend his socially polite persona.

Look how long it took me to say I went to the DNA Lounge and had a few drinks. For those who have been there it might be enough. For those who haven't, what can I say? You had to be there.

There was a party for a magazine. A couple of bands and some burlesque. A multi-media loud reverberating scintillating atmosphere shot through with smoky light beams from a revolving mirrored sphere. "Urban psychosis as a defense."

The first band was okay, like disaffected spastic drones. A girl in black leather with two fingers on a synthesizer. Mechanical emoting. I was upstairs by a railing

[22] Directed by Ken Russell (1980).

overlooking the stage and having a beer. Sitting on a lounge in the shadows, having rolled the remnants of a small joint into half a cigarette with some tobacco thrown in which I thought would conceal the smell of it. All it did was conceal it from me. A woman standing nearby noticed and smiled. I inhaled the whole thing, forgetting it was good stuff, and it hit me like an altered state.

I leaned against the rail and looked down. A woman in a leather miniskirt which barely cleared her behind. I think she was half black with her stockings held up with garter belts and wearing heels, probably one of the strippers. An anthropomorphic amplifier for the music and it needed it.

There was a break. I went downstairs and ended up at a luminescent otherworldly bar that glowed in the dark. I had a coffee and whiskey, water, and smoked too many cigarettes while staring at a screen behind the stage. Some of the better videos I have seen in a long time, especially at a club.[23] Hallucinatory advanced computer animations. Emotionally speaking they were cold as a witch's tit. A robotic kiss-off in a disembodied mental state. I'm wary of it taking over, but people with a lot of equipment can't resist it. Full steam ahead.

Then it was Naked Mind, a band that went through some changes onstage. Conga drums, the lead guitar in shades producing some suggestive sound effects, and eventually a singer. He went up to the microphone with long hair, in his twenties, and tour de force vocals with some manic interludes of spoken word poetry. An expert screamer. There were interludes with several guys on the floor making Tibetan Buddhist droning low notes through long tubes. The group was eclectic, with the vocalist stretching out again.

[23] In 1985 I saw Foetus at the I-Beam on Haight Street, and there were disturbing torture films being shown.

"Where did you go Joe…." It sounded like refrains which came to him on acid. We were hearing what ran through his mind in that state. I thought of Jim Morrison and Peruvian-Hindu music. Maybe they're from Berkeley. When I go to clubs I find out what other people are doing, people I never knew existed who live in different time warps, not just from another generation or another town.

The coffee and whiskey had a good effect, rounding off a nervous edge of marijuana. It has a minimal presence in my life these days. If pot makes you dumb, at least it has a positive spin, rather than the downward pull of hatred. There's a qualitative difference. The computer androids on the screen were replaced by porno films.

Then it was time for the burlesque. Being a magazine party with eccentric people it was verging on a neo-Dada event. There were long pauses when the equipment didn't work. An evening that was brilliant, dumb, intriguing, and a letdown. The club was barely half full. Some of the women were in fuck-me outfits. I think they were part of the show, but you never know. One poser after another, and then a weak finale of professional strippers with background music, but they went no further than a G-string and a bra. I figured that would be the case since the club doesn't have a license for strippers when alcohol is being served. If that's what you want you don't go to the DNA Lounge. The films were semi-artistic with an approach-avoidance of the X-rated. Narcissistic women who want to show what they're made of.

The show was slanted in the direction of women subjugating a man, a kind of S & M with him on the receiving end. There were strap-on dildos, like he's being punished because they don't have a cock. If these women were any more liberated, masculine, and power hungry they would be in the Army. Their leader was a woman in her twenties, thin

and not too shy, telling the audience to make sure they don't miss the "foot-fucking" scene in the film. It had already gone by with no great effect.

1 a.m. I left, walking half a block on the way home. Then I wondered what I was doing, it's a mile and a half and I was not in the mood. I caught a cab and it was like riding on air or floating in fast forward, and it came with a lecture on Buddhism on the radio - a woman saying men are not androgynous enough.

Many years ago I had a poem in **a** magazine called Vanishing Cab. At the moment I was undergoing a sudden relocation on the verge of dislocation, though the marijuana may have had something to do with that. It has a reverb of the self-conscious.

At home I sat around in a daze with a Symphony No. 9 in D-minor by someone in 1887.[24] Eventually I was on the typewriter with some coffee and another beer, riffing off a found phrase: "Evincing a taut sexuality…."

4 a.m. Went to bed… and what is an erection doing there?

Friday, July 16, 1993

Went to work in the afternoon.

Evening in the pool, a slow mile.

I was pausing in the shallow end when a Chinese woman in her twenties appeared. She had a nice figure in a one-piece swimsuit. She got in slowly with a shiver and a comment about it being cold. Later when she left I noticed how she quivered when she walked. The minor undulation of a soft-bodied woman.

Hot shower and walked home.

[24] Anton Bruckner. The first movement is "misterioso" and the fourth is unfinished.

Reading and writing until three or four in the morning.

Saturday, July 17, 1993

I ran out of typewriter ribbon again. It is a little disconcerting, the accelerated output. I never thought that quantity is close to quality. The ribbon lasted twelve days and I missed a day or two. I walked to Polk Street and picked up a ribbon in a neighborhood with male prostitutes hanging out in the doorways.

Typing in the afternoon. It was nonstop, going over the falls. Six long pages single-spaced, which can drain you. It's exhausting, and you need the energy to pull it off. The mind jumps and the reflexes have to be there, typing for hours. With the long walks and the workouts in the pool, my body is keeping up with my mind (they're running neck and neck), but my mind isn't keeping up with itself. I can't pursue all the tangents and ideas which are generated in the process of reading and writing, much less keep up with everyday occurrences which for some pathological reason require a written acknowledgment. And who has time for editing?

I wonder if what Capote said of Kerouac would apply. "This isn't writing, this is typing."

Not having time to pursue every idea can be a blessing in disguise, a pre-emptive editing process. For example, I wanted to write something about "the emotional exhaustion of Sinead O'Connor," but never got around to it.

Late afternoon, coming back to my senses. I leveled off on the guitar.

Split pea soup with ham, onion and vinegar potato chips, tuna fish sandwich, and apple juice.

Finished reading *Et Tu Babe* (1992). It wore out its welcome, as if it was written in a room full of pinball machines by someone with an egomaniacal pose (Mark Leyner). It got a little tiresome, however much of a send-up. At times it reminded me of the main character in *American Psycho*. However, he can turn a phrase:

> Holographic images of celebrities… mistakenly transmitted into my home, bang against the closed windows like trapped flies oriented toward the transparency of glass but ignorant of its materiality.
>
> Remember… poet Anne Sexton's psychiatrist who first persuaded Anne to write down her feelings and add line breaks?
>
> How profoundly sad that he considered these often chemically dependent nocturnal nomads his public…. How profoundly sad that during his lifetime only isolated and ineffectual academics would apprehend the preternatural vivacity and divine fabric of his mind.
>
> A tiny leak of neurotransmitters, perhaps. An infinitesimal burst gasket in the lattice work of cerebral piping. But the densely packed, intricately knotted ribbons of self-congratulatory cognition writhe into perpetuity… into the perpetuity of night.
>
> When telling your husband that he's "a delusional, narcissistic sadist with deep-seated, unresolved issues about his mother" just isn't enough anymore: my seven turbulent years as the wife of cult author Mark Leyner.

7:30 p.m. Lying on the mattress by the window I pulled the Mexican blanket over my head, relaxing for a minute. Two hours later I was coming to, a little disoriented. It was night, one of those rare occasions when I pass out during the day. It has an odd effect, like a tranquilizer mixed with a little cocaine.[25]

I was just in time for a movie on Channel 9, *Breaker Morant*. I only had a passing interest in it, but it slowly had a hypnotic hold on me. I felt the pathos of a lost time with an English accent (1901). The British and Australians fought the guerilla-ragged Boers in

[25] Not sure if this is what woke me up, but there was a collision in the intersection. It was a multicultural experience involving a Chinese man and two black women.

South Africa. The film was so articulate, the quick speech in a dry mode, and hardly any musical track to speak of.

When it was over I picked up the guitar and took off on a quasi-improvisation which went on for an hour or more. Having passed out earlier it was like having the wind at my back, if one can speak of emotional breakthroughs on a wooden instrument. It might have something to do with another shift in the year, along with some additional dexterity if not a certain pain that's sinking in. I'm learning to live with it.

Somewhere past midnight I stopped, collapsing on the mattress. I felt like a long-distance runner who has run a course which includes the long jump and the hurdles and the javelin throw. Not sure how it would sound to someone else, but I'm getting to where that doesn't matter so much. You have to find your own style and allow it to develop, which it has been doing for a long time. One of the strange things about music, there are technicians and studio musicians who crank out reasonable facsimiles, but it's another thing if it is more original with a broken-field pathology. When you look at what painters get away with it is often incoherent. I summon or succumb to an improvisation like I want to be Kandinsky (depending on the mood and my dexterity).

1 a.m. I went out for a hamburger at the hi-tech place with insufferable videos on the wall. I was thinking this is the way the world ends, not with a bang but with a synthesizer. Not with a bang, but with the Pet Shop Boys.

Picked up a bottle of pinot noire, making a long walk to California Street and back. My legs have a mind of their own. The leg muscles have a grip that wants to ambulate.

2 a.m. Typing for a while.

3 a.m. The phone rang, it was Jon in St. Helena. He was sitting out back on a warm night in the vine country with a fire. Dreamy music in the background.

5 a.m. I got off the phone and couldn't believe it, two hours. We covered a lot of ground, from here to North Dakota, his old stomping grounds. He has a firm foundation in the natural sciences. We talked about shifting sand bars in the Missouri river, and running naked through the woods on acid, and swimming in a lake in an altered state, getting so primal he wanted to prey on the ducks.

We have a different approach to things. I told him about backpacking in the high country of the Sierra Nevada with a friend when I was nineteen. We took acid on the edge of a mountain lake where we had spent the night. At some point I was kneeling at the edge of that crystalline water and laying the palm of my hand on the surface. It was like communicating with another world. A trout swam under my palm and there were diamonds at my fingertips and energy currents radiating from my hand. Not far away my friend was doing a cannonball off a rock into an element that I could barely touch and didn't want to disturb.

Jon is more like him. He doesn't bother himself with some of the things I'm concerned with, like writing, though he has his own obsessions. The reality he inhabits is on a level of nuts and bolts. He lives in an old wooden house on three-fourths of an acre on the edge of town. He dug holes and strung a fence for his dog. He dug and planted a garden (50 x 50 feet) with all kinds of things. Bought a used washing machine and drier and hooked them up, along with a beat-up piano. He wants to get some chickens which he knows how to slaughter and cook. He has conga drums and a broken amplifier. Last weekend he took half a hit of acid and walked around looking at the trees and flowers.

I mentioned jury duty. He had it last year and took acid around 3 a.m. on the night before. He showed up in the court while feeling the effects.

He makes odd sculptures out of bones and feathers and discarded machine parts, and used to be a slut (according to him).

A writer is caught up in how his mind works, and the side-effects of being preoccupied with books and ideas. After a while you are aware that other people's minds are constructed differently, as if the circuitry is wound a different way with thicker or thinner wires. Jon is not distracted by the mental projections of writing, he prefers a hands-on approach. He can do a lot as someone who is mechanical and grounded and incapable of being with a woman for any length of time.

We're a little envious of the qualities and traits of each other. He said once, after having gone through a bottle of vodka on a Sunday afternoon (so "said" should be in quotes), that he thought I have my feet on the ground and I am stable. More than he is, in other words, which surprised me. From another angle I could have said the same about him.

I was reminded of the Philip Roth novel, *Operation Shylock*, where he encounters another Philip Roth who is in some respects himself, or how he would be if he didn't have a time-consuming obsession with writing. It is something which can haunt you to no end. The loneliness of the long-distance writer. Think of all the things he could be doing if he didn't have a cold abstract addiction to the word. You wonder about the road not taken, and who or where you would be on it. It's a contradiction in the human condition, having a mind that is aware of other options, but a body which can't be two places at once. It wreaks havoc on romantic situations as well.

We talked about my going up there some weekend. I can't mentally project myself to the wine country, so I'll have to use the physical plane.

He said he might take a ceramics class (he wants to build a fountain) because he isn't meeting any women. There were connotations of an ancient scene, the woman at the well. He is going through a womanless phase which is worse than mine, but with similar doubts and questions. He wondered if it is him or the times, a big chill moving through the culture with its sexually transmitted diseases and conservative trends and who knows what else. There are men and women operating on a basis of "Once bitten, twice shy."

I got off the phone and was on the typewriter for an hour or so. There was another neo-poetic effort, riffing off some arbitrary initials (MTV).

6:30 a.m. I didn't fall asleep until it was light out and there was a fight outside. My body was lying down, but my mind was coming up with more lines.

Sunday, July 18, 1993

1 p.m. Coming to and typing for a few hours.

4 p.m. Phone call from the Actress in Marin. Was it okay to come over? If so, she would leave now.

That threw me into motion. Sometimes the only motivation for straightening up the place is when someone visits – one of those discerning women with a sharped-eyed focus. Not that I don't appreciate the motivation, I get tired of living in this white-collar squalor.

I thought I'm sunk if she's here in half an hour. Maybe she won't be able to find a parking place. It seems like I am playing hard to get by living in this neighborhood. I

spent nearly an hour on an intensive renovation of the place. There was a lot to do and I did it. It's too mundane unless I'm under pressure. I even managed to shave, and was in the shower when she arrived.

She walked into the main room (not having been here before) and called out:

"I love you!"
"Why?"
"Your place is a poem!"

It has an acid-head carelessness, a relativity of things which might be worthless or of value, but they mean something to the occupant aesthetically and otherwise.

By the time I was out of the shower and walked out with my pants on she had managed to uncover some papers on my desk, find a copy of a letter to a woman (Ming), and open the top drawer of a dresser in the closet and find an old deck of pornographic playing cards which I never use (a present from a friend years ago). She also noted a couple of new shirts that I haven't opened yet. All the while she was absorbing the atmosphere and layout of the place and pronouncing it to her liking, an old building with some style. She touched a fossil and asked about a small diamond ring. Not sure how she found that, but I assume that I'm transparent to some women. I'm used to their having a microscopic eye for surface detail, picking up everything from dirt to diamonds. Not to mention their prerogative to go through your stuff with impunity because you have no secrets. If there is a tendency for women to be a mystery to men (which is as much the men's fault), the women have a tendency to look on men as a known quantity. It's true we're old friends, but I have never walked into a woman's home and headed for her dresser and gone through her papers. Maybe there's a reason some men hide their feelings (the ones who don't become actors).

It isn't like she isn't candid, especially about her emotional state and – as the subject came up later – her sexual practices. She said it's not uncommon for young women to wonder what's wrong with them or the men they're with if they're not having an orgasm (she was nineteen at the time).

That warranted a long discussion with tangents and references. However, what I half suspected, there was a reason for the visit. We sat at the round wooden table which was cleared off like it hasn't been in weeks. I opened a couple of beers she brought and she got down to it. The marriage is off. On Sunday morning her and Michael (his one day off) had another argument. They reached the conclusion that with the continual friction between them a wedding in two months is not a good idea. "Fine, I never wanted to marry you anyway." Now she was here and on the verge of tears.

She honestly didn't think it was her fault. Later she said she is her own worst critic. He has a good reputation with other women and she admitted what a nice guy he is. How come they can't get along? Why does he have to work such long hours and leave her sitting at home in need of attention and affection? He would drag in late at night and not exactly in the mood. He wonders why she isn't more relaxed, having been at home all day because she quit her job. She is a dramatic person with a temper and seven years older and vaguely aware that they depend on his income. However, she senses some diminishing returns in the old romantic feeling they used to have (they met in a bar).

Okay, it's true she is argumentative but so is he, and he hides his feelings. He is either tired or angry during the week (from working hard and missing out on other things). If they're going through all this friction now, what will happen when they're married?

I don't know if it helped, but I said I went through it with Simone, where the arguments bordered on the operatic (including the length) (more wrong notes however). That was towards the end of a cohabitation which went on for nine years or more, during which the poems never stopped. She looked miserable and said the fights may have been worse, but the poems have stopped coming, along with flowers, and they have only been together for nine months.

Maybe the comparison is not so useful, but she is also an older woman, thirty-nine to his thirty-two when they began, compared to thirty-one and twenty-two in my case. Both women speak French (the Actress is from Quebec), and both had a child from a previous marriage. Both of them are touchy about their intellects, so they won't be deferential to a lover and will argue the most irrelevant academic points to death.

Where is the love when there is so much else going on, the struggle to be in control, the need for drama and constant verification? Her and Michael couldn't focus on a practical continuum with some formalities, a more traditional way of living together which would carry them through these rough spots. In the old days she wouldn't compare him to her girlfriend and be disappointed when he didn't have the same sort of conscientious listening capacity. I said her girlfriend might not either if she came home late at night, tense and tired from a long day at work.

There were other complications, including his having a son by another woman who lives out of state, and his sisters are not exactly on her side. There is the fact of her being older with a history and a few resentments. Having a love affair can be more complicated when you're older. It's like two space stations trying to dock while in orbit with mechanical encumbrances and evasive tactics while feeling the pull of other planets.

The maneuvers require a patient calculus. When you're twenty it requires something on the level of 1+1 = together (a simplicity which lends itself to love songs).

So you have a man and woman moving at different speeds and their momentums have a physics of antipathy. It was something we touched on, along with the fact that men have one strike against them for being men. She admitted the occasional resentment a woman has for men who have it easy, especially in bed. I mentioned the woman I was with last year who she met and thought was uptight or neurotic and who resented men. I was included in the generality, especially when I seemed to have an easy life. She made three or four times as much money, but worked long hours, under pressure, and had little time for her photography. She thought I was too relaxed, having a lot of time, and adding insult to injury (or injustice), making love was not the long and sometimes futile experience that it was for her. This was an imbalance in the nature of things (the last straw being that I am on friendly terms with my mother – she doesn't get along with hers). It was her duty as a feminist to make life miserable for me to balance things out.

8 p.m. We walked to the Cambodian restaurant. A pale blue room with white lace in the windows. I had pineapple catfish soup, and she had prawn curry with coconut milk. It took a while.

We walked back to the studio and sat around for a couple of hours, having another beer. The conversation was by no means stuck on this one subject, but towards the end of the evening it returned and my interest was fading with not much left to say about it. Some women magnify their situations for better or worse. The nice things are magnified, from flowers to a fine caress, but any problems are magnified as well. They become immersed in them, and all they can do is swim around, making aimless turns.

The HIV test came up. I described the process and she looked amazed. “You’re so sanguine.” She has mentioned that before, one more reason to resent men. If she or her women friends go through hell and high water when it comes to making a decision, men should too, and if their lives are operating with a dry and logical smoothness then the women are compelled to disturb it. My having taken the test at all was the act of an impossibly calm if not cold-blooded person. She would never be able to stand the tension, waiting two weeks for the results, and in fact doesn’t want to know. Okay, she slept around a bit a while back, but still….

On the other hand, it isn’t like she doesn’t have a lot of character and backbone. She used to live in New York City, which made her coming to the Tenderloin more plausible. While we talked the neighborhood was coming up with its usual incidents. She noticed a man hanging from a ledge. It was on a building next to the empty lot. He dropped about ten feet to the next level. We watched as he walked across the flat roof to where it ended with a thirty-foot drop. He knocked on someone’s window, as if wanting to be let in. I turned away to make some coffee. When we glanced out the window a few minutes later we saw him lying in the dirt and not moving. After a while he rolled over on his back. His face was bloody. In no time there were sirens with police arriving and eventually an ambulance. There were seven or eight policemen walking across the empty lot and a couple of guys with a stretcher.

Later in the evening she was sitting on the mattress by the window when there was a white flash outside, followed a second later by the loudest explosion I have heard around here. It was louder than an M-80 and nearly broke the windows.

Around midnight I walked her to her car a block away. Walking back I suddenly had company – an effeminate black transvestite was walking beside me, asking what time it was and where I'm going and where I live. He seemed friendly enough and I was in a good mood, or at least a civil one. I said, "I live here… good night." As a parting gesture he brushed his hand across my private parts, which was rather careless. The only thing that levitated a minute later was the elevator. That's the second time a local denizen was making with the hands-on approach.

Typing until three or four in the morning.

4 a.m. Lying on the mattress in the hall reading a collection of pieces by Janet Malcolm, *The Purloined Clinic*. A review of Freudian transference, whereby the relations one has with others (especially romantic) are echoes of your relations as a child with parents or siblings.[26] "The Patient is Always Right," and that's not all she wrote. "Freud's clear-sightedness about the profound impersonality of romantic passion was not an original insight…," and she mentions poets. He "shrewdly surmised" that when women patients tended to fall in love with him it wasn't "the charms of my person" that were causing the disturbance. They were ready to fall in love, "and he was simply Bottom to their Titania." Love can make you Bottom out.

"His extension of the metaphor of unseeing, solipsistic passion to the whole of human interaction. It began to dawn on Freud that it is not only love that is blind – all our feelings toward and ideas about one another are marked by a magnificent obliviousness to reality." That's a little broad. What reality concerning others are we blind to? That we

[26] Or not.

won't all be in heaven some day? That we're earthbound animals whose days are numbered?

Meanwhile, the behavioral patterns from years before go on repeating themselves. "'It is the analyst's task constantly to tear the patient out of his menacing illusion and show him again and again that what he takes to be new life is a reflection of the past,' Freud wrote in 1938 in *The Outline of Psychoanalysis*…." That rings a bell. It suggests the possibility of a person never growing up, never graduating as it were. One could be stuck in a perpetual adolescence, a sophomore forever, especially when there aren't many rites of passage (graduation being one, marriage another) where one is shifting gears onto a higher plane (if it's a lower plane it might be grounds for divorce). The notion of arrival is ephemeral, if not elusive. When does one turn the corner on this amateur existence and become a pro?[27]

Meanwhile, there were words like "misprision" and "iatrogenic." I checked the dictionary, turning to a page of monkeys. Then marijuana… midwife… misbegotten.

Misprision: A misunderstanding in which one thing is taken for another.

Iatrogenic: Induced by a physician – used chiefly of imagined ailments induced in a patient by autosuggestion based on a physician's words or actions during examination.

Monday, July 19, 1993

7:30 a.m. Having gotten three or four hours sleep I woke up from a dream with a lingering hard-on from the REM phase. Went back to sleep.

11 a.m. Typing for hours.

[27] Reminds me of a quote by Kurt Vonnegut, "True terror is to wake up one morning and discover that your high school class is running the country."

3 p.m. Went to work.

Walking home in the evening, I passed a black man on the sidewalk. He was next to the curb, a Bedouin on cement with his cardboard and rags, wearing a blanket with a shaved head and bare chest. He was muscular, in his thirties I think, and sleeping on his cardboard next to a parking meter. He was curbing the subconscious. I've seen him there before. I don't know how he can sleep with people walking by a foot or two away and cars going by. There are more discreet locations, not to mention softer ground, where he wouldn't be bothered.

Then I thought, maybe he wants to be bothered, or for others to be bothered by him. He has no sense of privacy, and rather than going to a shelter he wants his predicament out in the open for everyone to see. He might think that being near the financial district will be of some financial benefit, if only by osmosis.[28]

There are others downtown who camp out in doorways, huddled in their dirty bedding with a few possessions. There is often no attempt to panhandle. What's the point of being downtown? The ground is hard. Is it because the neighborhood is more or less deserted at night? Few people live amongst the high-rise towers of business, so the gutter nomads haunt the area with relative impunity. They camp out beside a stream of glittering loose change which comes from those who walk by in the morning.

Walked home, picking up fish and chips.

In the paper was more desultory evidence of how some people in the black community help themselves. An office for building homes was set up in Hunters Point

[28] When the bank robber Willie Sutton was asked why he robs banks he said, "Because that's where the money is."

(Habitat for Humanity). It was broken into and robbed of nearly everything it had, practically gutted – phones, fax, computers.

I had a *Time* magazine from the office, and read a review of a book that left me thinking about non sequiturs and rhetoric and conjectural attitudes. Is there an automatic authority that comes with forming a complete sentence? Is a hypocritical conceit a form of therapy? As long as the author feels good about herself and has a smiling picture in *Time* does it matter how she got there, leaving a wake of diminishing credibility?

Beginning with the title: *VOLUNTEER SLAVERY: MY AUTHENTIC NEGRO EXPERIENCE*. Apparently, I've been laboring under the misapprehension that slavery was a serious matter and not to be made light of. It is hardly to be compared with making $50,000 a year as a reporter with her own apartment and a car. It's like a Jewish person having a bad day at the office and saying, "Mondays are a Holocaust around here."

And what does "my authentic Negro experience" imply, while dripping with sardonic condescension? She felt token or different as a black person hired to work for a large newspaper. When it comes to hiring black people, the editors are damned if they do and damned if they don't.

First line of the review: "If black men have been invisible in America, as Ralph Ellison argued…" Since when? Ellison was born in 1913 and his book came out in 1952. A few things have changed since then, with the visibility of black men and women having gone from the equivalent of a Model T to a Cadillac (and no one ever accused them of being inaudible).

Her tale of suffering, of breaking through the silence, is more like crashing through open doors. She was so oppressed she went from being a free-lance reporter for the *Village Voice* to working for the *Washington Post* (for four years). That's a fortunate step up. She encountered and wrote an "indictment" of the legendary "self-absorption and self-delusion" of the corporate male (there may have been some job delusion involved). There is something here which smacks of a two-dimensional provincial put-down, where the outsider arrives in a situation, doesn't get it or it doesn't work out, and leaves. There are incredulous self-imbued comments, like she went to work in an accounting firm and found all these people obsessed with numbers! So boring. Or she went to Paris and found all these people speaking another language she didn't understand! Right in front of her! They couldn't talk simple English, can you imagine?

The hot air of self-esteem - she has enough to inflate a weather balloon. Maybe she could report on the weather, throwing in her own opinions and then quitting in a huff when the weather wasn't corresponding to her expectations, not to say predictions. Meteorological conditions have a tendency to ignore the Afrocentric.

She was ready to perform the "standard Negro balancing act when it comes to dealing with white folks, which involves sufficiently blurring the edges of my being enough so that they don't feel intimidated, while simultaneously holding on to my integrity" (at $50,000 a year). I think most people are adept at blurring or blunting the edges of their being when they deal with others of whatever race. It's called being polite. Is "intimidated" the right word here? There is the connotation of an all-powerful black person holding back so the weaklings around her aren't threatened, perhaps falling out of their swivel chairs in awe of her tremendous presence. A superior being, if you will, and

what are these intimidating edges of her being which have been so graciously blurred? Loud? Outspoken? Pushy? Rude? Or simply too intelligent for white mortals to be around, having to tone down the inner blaze of her innate brilliance so other people in the office won't be blinded. Is she talking about having to turn down her boom box? Is she assuming no one else has to blur the edges of their being in order for things to run more smoothly when people work together?

Imagine a white man saying: I was ready to perform the standard Caucasian balancing act when it comes to dealing with black folks, which involves blurring the edges of my intellect while simultaneously holding onto my integrity and my wallet.

She was a free-lance reporter for the *Voice* with whatever politically correct opinionated soapbox that provided, and went from that to being a reporter for the *Post* with a lot more money and exposure, but less of a soapbox. She was given reporting assignments where she was supposed to blur the edges of her being even more, that being part of the job of journalism. It turns out "she could not blend her need to write from a black perspective with the ostensibly objective stance of a conventional daily." Is that the fault of the paper? How many free-lance reporters are hired and automatically given special assignments with an opinionated byline in a major newspaper?

She "veered toward an emotional breakdown," becoming so emotional she "forged the initials of a supervisor on a travel voucher." There are "graphic revelations" about her "frantic sex life" (hurry up I have a deadline) and "drug abuse." Objectivity is numb and powerful and has a price, something like cocaine.

I'm not sure if the *Washington Post* is the same as "the white corporate world," or how she was more oppressed than black women in Africa – like they're well-paid

reporters with no editorial supervision. For that matter, if I was hired as a reporter for the *Post* I would run into similar difficulties, being opinionated myself, and under editorial pressure to tone it down and be more objective. I could then have a frantic sex life, do drugs and after a few years come out with a book which *Time* magazine would give immediate attention to: VOLUNTEER OBJECTIVITY: MY AUTHENTIC CAUCASIAN EXPERIENCE.

It turns out this business of her slavery (the *Post* paid her nothing, kept her in chains, and sold her children) is not the main thrust of the book, but rather "biracial sexism." It seems that "black males would join with white ones to push her off the tightrope…" of a Negro balancing act. That is mystifying. Other Negroes imbalanced her balancing act? I wonder if she can balance a checkbook. "Male condescension outranked racial solidarity." What do you know? Given that her and the book are more soaked with condescension than a tree in the south is covered in Spanish moss, could it be she had the attitude before? How does her father come into it? He's a "prosperous dentist." By all means let's put him down too, he had nothing to do with her success. Or the executive editor of the *Post*, Ben Bradlee, who is chopped liver. "A short, gray, wrinkled gnome," which has a lot to do with his editorial capacity. For that matter, if one is hired who cares about his interviewing technique? It "consisted of droning on about himself…," instead of talking about her. Imagine that, the insult to a free-lance reporter without a job who is far more important than the executive editor of the *Washington Post*, who talked about himself with good reason since that is who she would have to deal with at the paper. He didn't have to conform to her authority and experience if she were hired. When a black

male reporter went behind her back to kill a story she was working on, it was a further indictment of the "white corporate world."

I still don't see how these are "devastating caricatures of male pomposity… black and white." It makes you wonder how good her reporting is if she sees people as pompous caricatures. No wonder her sex life was "frantic."

For that matter, who let down the cause – the newspaper that hired her, or someone whose ego has a wider circulation?

Later that night, typing, phone call. I finished reading Malcolm's essay on transference.

> … [T]here is plenty of support… for the theory that a woman's unconscious life is beset by a profound sense of powerlessness, a gnawing dissatisfaction – a feeling for which the term "penis envy" is thoroughly inadequate….
>
> … one cannot but recall the famous last section of Freud's "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," in which he holds up what he sees as the two most troublesome complaints of patients ("… in the female, an envy for the penis – a positive striving to possess a male genital – and in the male, a struggle against his passive or feminine attitude to another male."). He confesses his pessimism about the power of analysis to cure them….

Having arrived at those complaints, "… we have penetrated through all the psychological strata and have reached bedrock, and… thus our activities are at an end."

What if "penis" is not the point, and it is not a smoking gun? There is a seminal inner force, in which case testicle envy might be closer. Not so much that women want external reproductive organs, but the energy of testosterone and sperm, if those have anything to do with the creativity of men. They also generate the anti-social tendencies of many men. Those are not entirely the fault of social constructs, as Camille Paglia has pointed out.

This sense of "powerlessness" among women is occurring when the average middle-class woman in this country is socio-economically not far removed from the average middle-class man. There are women working in an office making $40,000 a year, living on their own, driving high-powered automobiles, making their own decisions and sleeping with whoever they want. If there is "plenty of support" from mythology and literature as to a "profound sense of powerlessness," it would seem it is transcending someone's income level. However much women are going through the motions of an independent life there is a vague dissatisfaction or a disappointment (an elusive climax being part of that). They feel less powerful than they thought they would.

It's like a woman who finally got a room of her own with sufficient time and income, setting up a writing room with all the pencils arranged on the desk and the computer plugged in and she sits there having acquired all the external forms of what she took to be a man's privilege, or the sources of his creativity and motivation, and having set it up she finds her inspiration is dead in the water, so to speak.

I've known women who bought a guitar and never played it, or having to write an essay for school they would procrastinate and finally get a man to help them, women who assume an aura of independence while they lean on men in various ways.

If some women feel a "profound sense of powerlessness," the question of gender might obscure the issue. It could have as much to do with existential notions of futility and emptiness where anyone is relatively powerless when it comes to be swept along the stream of life like a leaf. Why wouldn't women feel this as much as men, who are usually the ones giving voice to this condition? Penis envy would have nothing do to with it, more like an envy of the gods for being immortal. Talk about eternal dissatisfaction.

Actually, it isn't eternal. Your dissatisfaction dies with you. When you consider how many women believe in reincarnation, you might wonder if mortality is the fly in their ointment and the hair up their ass. I don't know if immortality is the answer to the question, "What do women want?" but given the endless complaints, the lip-service to the goddess, and the propaganda for anti-aging products on a level beyond the comprehension of most men and far beyond what society requires of anyone, it would seem to support this view. With a clear skin you can see forever.

Tuesday, July 20, 1993

Last night I was sitting at the typewriter when B. called and we talked for an hour or so. She wants to collaborate on writing something. I had suggested a remake of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, her being preoccupied with sexual confusion, unrequited love, and the like. Now she wants me to write it.

She finally decided to write a Dear John letter to the terminally nice guy she went out with for a couple of years. She has no intention of going any further, and here he is making plans for the wedding. What is it about these men who take a woman seriously? It left her in a quandary, and I kept hearing about it. I said, "If you can't tell him in person, write a letter." She wanted suggestions on what to say. How about:

> As my heart flutters gently in my breast,
> I realized that you're no better than the rest.
> It took a while for me to come to that conclusion,
> I'm a little slow and love is an illusion.
> We're all through and the relationship is dormant.
> You are nice, but I don't need another doormat.

She is unable to focus on one person. She likes to keep a few acquaintances in orbit with a swirl of possibilities and future invitations, but hardly ever touching ground

or touching her (in bed). There is also her preoccupation with women which is at an impasse.

I told her I ran into Phoebe the other day while walking to work. She looked thin and pale with long blonde hair. She accompanied me to the office to use the phone. How does she stay so slender? Coffee and a lack of sleep. B. said Phoebe is over her obsession with the duplicitous poet (an ex-convict). The realization she is getting older may have shocked her out of her platonic slipstream. I don't know if she went very far with him, but anything would have been a change. When I walked her to the elevator she turned and threw her arms round me, which was surprising. I've known her for several years, but in all that time we didn't so much as shake hands. We don't talk very often since I burned out on her neurotic monologues, hearing that her acting is going nowhere and the endless self-analysis.

B. has an enigmatic obsession with Phoebe, but the friendship has diminishing returns and she is at the point of dropping it. She was dying to know if Phoebe had any response when I mentioned her. I said, "Not much," and she said, "That figures." I had mentioned the play to her, *Why We Have a Body* (which B. liked), but Phoebe wasn't interested. She said she knows why she has a body, it's a "temple for acting." She used to be a model and has skin like milk and no muscles. There is a low-slung bosom which she keeps hidden.

12:30 p.m. I showed up at the office, having lunch with V. She was angry that I missed the last lunch date, but we're back on track. Yesterday, late afternoon, the attorney she works for was gone. She sat there talking at the next desk. I don't know that I could live in her world, it might be claustrophobic, but there's something refreshing

about it. It doesn't hurt that she is so… I want to say precious, but it's precious with her feet on the ground. Demure without being neurotic. She finds amusing or irrelevant so many things in the current zeitgeist. She has a firm grip on men and women having their own worlds. *Vive la difference*, and the deference a woman deserves. She soaks it up, while being almost humble with the authorities or the church.

She was talking about her clothes yesterday, why she needs so many pairs of black slacks and outfits for every mood. I said, "Ten pairs of shoes." She looked at me like I was hopelessly naïve. That isn't enough. On the other hand, she drops in at a church in Chinatown occasionally. I mentioned a larger one in North Beach. She said it was too far to walk. I said, "Jesus walked a lot," and she suddenly had a look of worried wonder. "Don't make me feel guilty."

Turns out she loves swing music, big band, and asked me with that careful accent of hers if I had ever heard of Glenn Miller. She also likes disco from the late 70's. I said I was listening to the Sex Pistols back then. She never heard of them.

Now and then she tells me about her childhood in Manila, the heat and the humidity, taking three showers a day. She is something of a middle-class consumer in this country. She loves to go shopping, spending her money on clothing and CDs (and car insurance). She is five feet tall with straight black hair nearly to her shoulders, and her wide lips are expressive. When we walked out she said, "We're having Chinese." We ended up near North Beach on the edge of Chinatown, a Hunan place which turned out to be good. It was one of those moments which remind me of her, the Buddhist splendor of a life full of simple things. Thin strips of smoked ham, carrots and bamboo shoots over rice with onion cakes, thick sour soup, and tea.

She mentioned a couple of young Filipina women in the office. Do I think they're pretty? Both are vain, and she has nothing to say to them. She thinks the younger one is a flirt, wearing outfits which are for going out at night and not the office. The other one is gorgeous, but she thought her legs are a little big.

V. said she went to some parties recently, in case I thought she was too domestic. She went with girlfriends in their mid-twenties. A couple of them wanted to meet some guys. I said, "What if you go out with them and the men are drawn to you?" "That's okay. I can flirt." Then she said no, she has a boyfriend. They were looking for men between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, certainly no older than thirty-five. Forty is unthinkable. "No offense."

Meanwhile, my mouth was on fire from the hot spices. She mentioned the church in Chinatown with the mid-day concerts. Do I want to go? It turned out we didn't have time. She is conscientious when it comes to not being late. I walked her to the office and left, having another bout of jury duty at the Hall of Justice.

2 p.m. In the jury waiting room with hundreds of other people. Half an hour later names were called, including mine. I walked to Dept. 21 down the hall and sat in a wooden pew with fifty others. The courtroom had a low-rent look to it, and we were cut off from the front by a glass partition with wire mesh on top. When the judge appeared, he said it was for a high security trial some twenty years ago and never removed. Maybe it was meant to protect the public from him.

This time the defense attorney was a woman and the prosecutor a man. A Superior Court case involving felonious assault, robbery, burglary, and false

imprisonment. There were deadly weapons (a knife and a gun). The defendant was a young Vietnamese man with an interpreter. The main victim was a Vietnamese woman. The witnesses were Chinese and Vietnamese.

As the arduous process of jury selection proceeded, picking twelve people out of fifty or more, I thought the defense strategy was to claim they had the wrong man. He might not testify, which often seems suspicious. His attorney had a flustered and distracted air, stepping on her own lines and relying on hand gestures which didn't convey much. She asked potential jurors if they understood the concept that her client was not guilty (objection) or rather was innocent until proven guilty, that the prosecution had to prove it. The defense didn't have to do anything. It was not an approach that inspired confidence. It seemed like she was not all there, and even showed up late the next morning, saying something about the parking lot, and with no interpreter. And yet she was more there than most, being a little on the heavy side, wearing a long skirt and brushing her graying hair back (in her early forties). I was struck by the formal presence of the men in these last two trials compared to the more informal women, including a woman judge, as if intellectually the men are using knives and the women spoons.

The judge in this case was business-like and witty on occasion, while the woman judge in the last case was neither one. With the possible exception of the woman prosecutor in the last case, the women seemed to wallow in their roles while the men stood in theirs. The woman prosecutor had another problem – at least for me. Some women in a position of authority are undermined by their voice, not only when the language is indirect, but the sound of it - a thin and higher sound, sometimes shrill and grating on the ear (like the female defense attorney). You could feel and hear how the

proceedings took a leap forward when a man was talking, the judge or the prosecutor. The latter was a slick machine of jurisprudence and locution in a dark suit.

Through the afternoon and into the following morning the selection process was a sociologic comedy of errors. Three or four older Asians and an older Latina woman were excused for language problems, and they were not exactly fresh off the boat. Two of the women have been here thirteen years, and a man has been here fifty years. A few more were dismissed (jury duty postponed) because of travel plans (the trial is expected to last a week). There was a woman on the jury who decided the following morning she couldn't go through with it, saying she is prone to anxiety and depression, and the subject matter is disturbing.

This is something which the questions of the judge were trying to bring out. Like the DUI trial – do you have any experience with alcohol? Now they were asking if anyone had been a victim of a crime. Half of the people there had stories to relate, a long list of cars stolen, homes broken into, and muggings. (Come to America where the streets are paved with court forms and police reports.) Would these experiences leave you biased in any way towards the defendant? Can you put it behind you? Can you be impartial with police testimony or a Vietnamese man accused of assault?

Earlier in the waiting room I read the paper about the local suicide rate. Apparently, it's going down. In the late 1960's during and following the "Summer of Love" it reached its peak: 36.4 out of 100,000 residents killed themselves every year. "Since 1970… when SF registered suicide rates twice as high as the state average and more than three times the national rate…." The white suicide rate is higher than any other

(the median age here in 1990 was thirty-six). The Suicide Prevention Center received more than 80,000 calls last year (more than 200 a day). The marriage rate has dropped to 37.9 percent. “Single status is one more factor that correlates with increased suicide levels.” Is that a fact? The rate goes up the older you get. It would seem I’m in a high-risk group, being single, white, and getting older. I’m also part of a despised minority known as straight white males, but taking my life would seem like the worst form of self-abuse.

A medical examiner gave a reason for the local jump-off rate. “SF is kind of the end of the rainbow for a lot of people.” Why a medical examiner is talking about rainbows I don’t know. I thought of my apartment in the morning with the light coming through the disks in the windows and throwing prismatic streaks of light across the floor.

Some intriguing questions here. If the West Coast is the end of the line, the jumping off point into eternity for many people (over 900 have jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge since it was built in 1937), why wouldn’t Los Angeles have a higher rate? That town is more depressing, and there is the old line that if you tip the country everything loose will fall into Los Angeles. Also, the standard of living here, along with a relaxed morality, is better than other parts of the country. You would think the suicide rate would be lower. Is the bridge a magnet for those who want to leave this world, a bridge to the next dimension? It is too inviting a departure point, and there is nothing comparable in LA. Jumping off the Santa Monica Pier doesn’t have the same grandeur, and would not be as effective.[29] Besides which, Los Angeles is a behavioral swamp with a desert climate, and that doesn’t lend itself to making changes in your life.

[29] There is a bridge in San Pedro which crosses over the port into Long Beach, but it’s not very inviting for the morbid. The last thing they saw would be a container ship or an oil tank.

There may be something about this town, an elusive empty quality. It can be - the views and liberal mojo notwithstanding – a cold impersonal place. The pretty views are like a placebo. Man can't live on views alone. They are a vacancy in which you might be falling forward (and eventually off a bridge). They are not a substitute for human contact, which is harder to come by in this city than you might think. For one thing, there are interest groups which tend to be exclusive. If you're not a homosexual, Chinese, an out-of-town commuter, or a seagull then you might be on your own.

There are other factors operating here. There are the geographical circumstances, being on the hard end of a peninsula and cut off from the smell of the earth on the mainland. There is a sense that home is elsewhere, maybe in the bedroom communities where the commuters live. When they leave town every night it leaves a vacuum.

The life here is not wound too tight. Some customs and traditions are not nailed down (including the tradition of staying alive). In that looseness and/or self-indulgence there are some who leap off stages, using their imagination and leaping to conclusions. It opens a door to the void, and given the apocalyptic worldviews it is not surprising if a few go over the edge. They have gone a bridge too far. I wouldn't be surprised if some of them thought they could fly.

In addition, what if things are more defined in this town of geographical limits, including suicide? The lone jumper is more socially responsible (not taking others with him) and aesthetic (jumping into the view). There may be higher rates of suicide in other parts of the country, but the circumstances are ambiguous or sloppy and amorphous. How many of those fatal car wrecks or shootouts with the police or shootouts with civilians have an underlying self-destructive urge? It lacks a certain focus though, and

some will not admit that suicide was the intention. Maybe they didn't have a famous bridge to jump off, or their self-destruction had ulterior motives. If you commit an armed robbery it could leave you in prison, a slow death in itself. Alcoholics drink themselves to death, and overdoses aren't all accidental.

The worst thing is when the self-destructive want to bring others with them. I wish there was a hell so there would be a special place for them. The man whose wife informs him that she's seeing another man and wants a divorce. They have two young kids. He shoots them both and then himself, like they were his to do with as he pleased. Possession is 9/10ths of the law. There was a forty-nine-year-old grandmother with a couple of kids. The father won custody so she killed them rather then let them fall into the hands of their father (who is black). A Japanese woman in Los Angeles was distraught and tried to walk into the ocean with her two young kids. They do everything together.

Speaking of the suicidal man, his wife was surprised that he took it seriously and was so emotional. There were warnings weeks in advance that he was shaken to the core by her wanting to leave him. She didn't know what a weakling he was, that he would take the kids with him just to hurt her. She was immersed in the two-dimensional propaganda that only women are emotional or concerned with love. That sets up a double whammy against the man. It shouldn't bother him if his wife walks out, he can get over it, go to a ballgame or something. Even worse, the woman is in charge of love, having the prerogative to follow it wherever it leads, in this case to another man. Sorry, this chapter of my life is finished. Having been dictating the boundaries and frequency of sex, she assumes a similar command of love.

I've been through this a couple of times, where a woman with little or no warning announced it was over. She controlled the affair according to her own agenda. I thought there were two people involved, but I was wrong. The ex-girlfriend from a couple of years ago walked out on a five-year relationship.[30] She later admitted the only way she could pull it off was to be as cold as possible, not looking back. It would have been unthinkable if done to her, but a man should be able to take it. When it's done to a woman it's a crime against life and there should be a law against it.

I realize I'm speaking from a limited perspective and that men walk out on women all the time. Most divorces are instigated by women though, and men are more likely to kill themselves in the aftermath. Maybe they have a harder time pretending.

Where was I? Leaving the Hall of Justice around 5 p.m. I went to work for a couple of hours.

At home in the evening, I lay on the mattress under the window with embroidered cushions, a Mexican blanket, bamboo shades, and passed out. I am trying to get used to sleeping there, and went without the late-night strain of typing, cigarettes, and coffee. An unconscious motivation to begin the day from another angle when the sun is coming up.

Wednesday, July 21, 1993

6 a.m. Coming to at an unheard-of hour. I moved back to the hall in the middle of the night and slept there (it's quieter). I felt more alert, having made a detour through oblivion, and avoided my usual routine last night.

[30] She walked back in a month or two later, thinking it was a mistake and getting teary-eyed, but it broke the back of our affair. We continued as friends who sometimes slept together, but it wasn't the same – and we were growing apart, the original reason for her leaving.

Typing for a while.

9:30 a.m. I showed up in the courtroom of the Hall of Justice a few minutes late. More jury selection. I decided I didn't want to be stuck on the jury for this trial. It would drag on for five days with interpreters and listening to the female defense attorney was uninspiring. How to get out of it? So far, my name hadn't been called. I was sitting in back and they were down to the last fourteen people. Then someone was excused and my name was called. I had figured out who were being dismissed by the defense – legal types and Asians. Maybe anyone who has been in an armed robbery.

The judge directed the same line of inquiry in my direction. It turned out I had something to say on a number of angles and wasn't being dishonest, just emphasizing certain points. I figured one attorney or the other would want me knocked off the jury – either for working in a law office, or having some reason to doubt police testimony (vis a vis my DUI arrest and the falsified sobriety test). I also have close friends and family who have been victimized in some manner – assaulted, robbed, shot (and all the suspects were black). I mentioned my brother working in a hotel in Hollywood and being held to the floor with a gun to his head.

I was cross-examined by both attorneys who wanted to clarify a few points. Could I be impartial in this case involving armed robbery and police testimony? I said I would try, given a preponderance of the evidence. However, if you're articulate and outspoken there's a good chance you will be removed. They want a jury of sheep.

I figured I had raised a few doubts. The prosecutor asked if working in a law office would affect my view of the case. I said I had some knowledge of how attorneys operate, but whether that was positive or negative I couldn't say, and he smiled. A few

minutes later when they were taking turns dismissing jurors (each has ten dismissals), I took someone's seat in the front row, but the prosecution excused me a second later.

I walked out with a vast relief and headed for the men's room, having to take a leak. When I left the building a weight had lifted off my shoulders and I was almost walking on air. The tune of "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" was running through my head for some reason. That was followed by an aria from *Tosca*, *"E lucevan le stelle"* (the stars were shining). It is sung by a man looking through a prison window while awaiting execution. I wouldn't have to sit for five days in a stale courtroom. That prospect had vanished along with any further jury duty.

I returned home and read the paper.

The Deputy White House counsel, a close friend of the President's wife, shot himself. He was forty-eight.[31] Things aren't going well with the Clinton administration.

"Warhol's estate worth $220 million." The man was something of a skinflint and a tightwad, keeping records of what he spent on lunch or a cab. Hard to figure, given the luxurious crowd he hung out with. Maybe it helped to keep things in perspective. His life took off into the wild blue yonder of socio-economic warps, but he held onto the vanishing point in the form of dollars and cents (which was probably an old habit). He was like a man with a circus tent full of unimaginable things who is preoccupied with counting ticket stubs. He holds onto those for dear life, otherwise the show might consume him.

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[31] Vince Foster. A perfectionist who suffered from depression (and he had a degree in psychology). He was in Washington DC for less than a year, but the pressure got to him, working for the less-than-perfect Clintons. Note: over the ensuing years there were increasing doubts that he killed himself, given the anomalies in the story and the shadiness of the Clintons.

Those who handled the estate after his death were going to the opposite extreme. The attorney claimed $14,000,000 in fees, but may have to settle for less than $5,000,000. The executor, Fred Hughes, will get a fee of $5,200,000, although "fee" is maybe not the word. It has a connotation of payment for services rendered, and what could those men have done for the estate which would be worth $10,000,000? We handle probate cases in the office on a smaller scale, otherwise the attorney could retire tomorrow. You would think that Warhol's lawyer worked every day for twenty years to earn that much.

He gets two percent of the worth of the estate, no matter how brief his effort. We have had executors who were that in name only, signing papers that were sent to them. They showed up once in a while for a hearing, that was it. The Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts now has a $10,000,000 bite taken out of it. There was some controversy over the worth of the estate. The attorney claimed it was worth three times as much, so he gets more. Much of the estate consisted of paintings, but how does one put a value on those? The art world is arbitrary in that respect, especially with someone who erased his presence with a silk-screen. Also, there has been a "plunge" of prices.

Thursday, July 22, 1993

NOTES

> Crown Heights, New York City. It's a good thing there was a black man as the mayor of the biggest city in the country, so when there was an accident (a car in a Jewish motorcade ran over a black kid) not only was he right there dealing with a heated racial situation in ways a white man never could, but the black community looked up to him as a role model and refused to riot. Guess again.
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> It was the worst riot in New York City in twenty years (August, 1991). It went on for four days. A "comprehensive state report" now points out that Dinkins "failed

to act in a timely and decisive manner," which is putting it lightly. He showed up on the third day, bottles were thrown at him and he retreated. The wonderful logic of a riot. There is a fatal accident, and it justifies a situation where "bands of black youths were stoning homes and assaulting residents." A twenty-nine-year-old Hasidic scholar was stabbed four times and died. A young black man was arrested and later acquitted.

Now we're in Oakland with the black ex-mayor, Lionel Wilson (who was mayor for many years). It seems his youngest son (forty-seven) had an income of nearly $900,000 over three years when his father was mayor (1986-88). He filed false tax returns, evading more than $242,000 in federal income taxes.

It turns out he was a "beeper carrying, Corvette-driving drug dealer… a participant in a worldwide cocaine trafficking conspiracy." Agents raided his home in 1988 and found $276,000 in a case and a money-counting machine. Here's the kicker. The former mayor "has previously said that he thought his son's wealth was accumulated through real estate investments." The former mayor had it backwards. The real estate was paid for with his ill-gotten gains.

Maybe it's not uncommon, making $300,000 a year in Oakland real estate, but you wonder about the intelligence of the former mayor if this was going on without his knowledge. If he was dishonest or obtuse it would explain a few things.

There has been a series of corrupt or ineffective black mayors in cities across the country, but you wonder if it is their fault. It reminds me of the parable of someone driving through China and his car breaks down. There is a hole in the engine, so he brings it to a shop to have a new engine put in. When it's fixed he drives away and it breaks down again. The engine was replicated to perfection, right down to the hole in it.

Black people have been gaining autonomy and status in a system which is full of holes. It is shot through with corruption, and conforming to the system may include conforming to corruption.

That is giving some mayors the benefit of the doubt. The ineffectiveness of a poseur in power is another question. You would think it was a cargo cult of representational politics with people going through the motions. It's like the natives in New Guinea who saw a plane and made a mock-up from bamboo which never got off the ground. But who is to say the white man isn't operating on that basis with his hollow wooden poses? The form can be inherited, but there's no guarantee of substance.

Meanwhile, the present black mayor of Oakland was on a radio show. He referred to a member of the City Council who was being dismissed, saying just because

there's one less "monkey" doesn't mean the circus in City Hall won't continue. Some people objected to the term. He later said, "It's a good thing I'm not a white man saying that."

Would it matter who said it since it's hardly literal? Was it any more derogatory for a sportscaster to blurt it out when a halfback was making a good run? Do words have a different meaning according to who is speaking them? Some years ago a friend of mine, a black man, referred to the black women in the office as being so dumb it hurts. If I had said it would it be less accurate?

Getting back to the former mayor's son. What was his excuse? There is some evidence that cocaine and heroin are not good for the black community. Can he claim that he was poor and didn't have any role models when his father was the mayor of Oakland? Did the mayor never see him with his beeper? It goes off and he says to his father, "Have to go dad. I have an urgent real estate matter. Can you hold onto this suitcase full of twenties for me?"

There was an article on Afrocentric rites of passage for young people in Oakland. Getting arrested is a rite of passage for some juveniles, but these rituals are meant to replace that. They instill black youth with confidence and self esteem (like that is lacking).[32]

Walking home one night near Union Square. A young black man who is often there was standing on a small box and frozen in a bent position like a broken marionette and moving with mechanical-jerky gestures. Given the cliché that the white man is a cold robot, it is odd how good some black people are at conveying the robotic (sometimes with the aid of music).

It was white writers with their nostalgia for the free and easy "primitive" life who thought that people living in the tropics were spontaneous as the breezes in a warm climate. Some anthropologists found it ain't necessarily so. The natives had rigid patterns of behavior, and hierarchical arrangements in the tribe. It didn't leave much room for inventing things or getting out of the Stone Age.

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[32] Self-esteem is a cheap trick when people need something of substance, like schools and jobs. It's like a sugar rush when real nutrients are needed. At this point it's like bringing water to Niagara Falls. Not just in the obvious sense of black people in show-biz (who're not too shy), but the ones with too much self-esteem to go to school or open a book or show respect (it's a two-way street). There's a reason the front of the building I used to live in has a gated entry. It didn't before, but a few black students from the high school down the street were using the entryway as a private lounge and garbage can at lunchtime. They would sprawl in front of the door and not bother to move when someone wanted to enter or leave. One guy said "My foot" when I was stepping over him to leave the building and accidentally brushed against his highly esteemed lower extremity. They left something to remember them by: their trash. Speaking of memories, another black student with low self-esteem went to that school: OJ.

Article in the paper with a big headline. The provincial minimalism in this area is something else. A three-year old black boy was abandoned by his parents. They left him at a government facility for mental illness. It's not uncommon in the black community to assume the government will take care of their kids. Many black men don't stick around, knowing the government will foot the bills for whatever kids they fathered. There is some discrepancy here. The same government is accused of being anti-life, or bent on destroying black people, even while it functions as a surrogate parent providing support.

There's more evidence of that support (including billions of dollars spent on welfare) than efforts to eradicate black people. The latter kill each other at a rate of 6000 a year,[33] so they're way ahead of the government in that respect. If the government has been trying to reduce the black population it is more inept than we thought. The original 400,000 black people who were brought as slaves to what became the United States are now over 30,000,000 and counting. That's a curious form of genocide.

My preoccupation with racial politics is often about the language being used and abused. The rhetoric of oppression, throwing words like "genocide" around until the meaning is diluted. Billboards advertising beer in the black community are said to be genocidal. I've noticed black men on the corner buying 40-ounce bottles of Colt 45 or Old English 800. There are no signs for beer around here, so they must have come up with the idea on their own. If black people are susceptible to billboards, then put up a few saying STAY IN SCHOOL.

Am I focusing on the negative too much? Say a black man comes into a clinic with a broken leg, but the doctor doesn't want to interrupt the reverie of his self-esteem by telling him there's something wrong, so he unrolls a map of Africa on the wall and turns on a drum machine. The leg remains broken.

Speaking of rhetoric and language, I often listen to KPOO on the radio. Sometimes there are strident speeches by Farrakhan with a beat superimposed. The other day I heard him say, "I'm black because I am the original man."

Meanwhile, the most brutal attacks in recent memory were in the Mission District among Latino businesses and restaurants. There have been several robberies, late at night, by a group of young black men with guns (not very original). They appear in a café and everyone is forced to hit the floor where they are roughed up and robbed. Some of the women have been sexually molested and one was raped. In the last incident there were two wounded, one dead.

[33] The leading cause of death of young black males is other black males.

7 a.m. Woke up early after the second night of falling asleep early with no coffee, beer, or typing. I was on the typewriter for a few hours.

2:30 p.m. Went to work from a different angle, having woken up so early. It doesn't sound like much, but twenty-four hours is all we have to work with and it's relevant how you approach it. The day is different when you get up earlier. I'm more in sync with the rest of the population for one thing.

The Attorney was in the conference room with a new client. I went in and we had our usual sardonic exchange. He said he dictated something on tape. I asked him if he really did it or just thought he did. It is a constant thing with him. He turned to the woman and said, "We hate each other," not without some humor. It struck me as a succinct way of putting it. The client is twenty-two and was arrested for driving under the influence. She wants to fight it. He later said her breath test was .15, which is hard to argue with when .08 is the legal limit.

There is a new receptionist at the front desk, a black woman in her mid-twenties. Not shy at all, and with a nice sense of humor. She took over when the French-Vietnamese woman left. Walking in I noticed a sketch on her desk. It was a drawing of a model with perfect slender legs in a tennis skirt. Turns out she used to be on the tennis circuit, but burned out under the strain of competition and being pushed by her parents. She is not slender anymore, but we might play sometime.

6:30 p.m. I left the building and walked to City Lights bookstore. This is how I used to go home before the fire, walking through North Beach. It seemed like my steps were overlapping on a previous way of life. I was spaced out in the bookstore, drifting in and out of a few books and periodicals. More déjà vu: there was a poetry anthology from

1981, half of which was devoted to the poems (and an interview) of Gregory Corso. I met him in 1975 in Paris. I was spending a year in Europe with Simone. One of my professors (the Greek surrealist poet, Nanos Valaoritis) was on sabbatical and had an apartment in Montmartre. We were staying in a cheap hotel near the Sorbonne and would visit him. One day he said, "You want to meet Gregory Corso?" – who was one of my favorite Beat poets and an old friend of his.

He warned me about Corso, saying that he tries to hustle everyone.[34] We went to see him in a small apartment he was staying in with a New York junkie heiress. I think they were waiting for her inheritance to kick in. There were photos of themselves when they were younger and looked better. We went to the screening of some footage[35] by the film director Philippe Garrel, a man in his late twenties with long hair and a distracted air. I think he was doing acid in those days. Afterward there was a dinner at La Coupole. The actress Jean Seberg[36] sat at the end of the table. There were seven or eight people, including Nanos, Garrel, the French intellectual Alain Jouffroy, Simone, and Corso. He drew the Sorrow of Saturn on a napkin, then leaned across the table with a gleam in his

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[34] Corso informed me that while he was in the major league, poetry-wise, Nanos was in the minors.

[35] The silent footage was of Nico and Dominique Sanda, with a lot of quiet staring. Nico picked up a gun and pretended to shoot herself in the head. She used to sing with the Velvet Underground. I saw her in a punk club in San Francisco around 1980, performing with a harmonium. Dominique Sanda I knew from *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, the 1970 film about fascism in Italy (directed by Vittorio de Sica). Nanos met her at some gathering and didn't know who she was so he didn't treat her like a movie star and she liked that. I could have gone with him that day, but we were doing something else.

[36] When we were watching the silent footage Corso thought it was boring and said so. Jean hushed him up, saying in rather pious tones that this was the work of an artist. I only knew her from *Breathless*, the 1960 film by Jean-Luc Godard. She killed herself in Paris in 1979 (a barbiturate overdose). She was only forty. I found out later she had been hounded by the FBI for years – stalking, surveillance, break-ins, along with defamatory articles in the press. The main reason was her involvement with the Black Panther Party (including financial support).

eye and said that Jean will give him money for the dentist, but he wants to put those funds to better use. Then he dashed out the door to meet his connection.

Meanwhile, I found a book by Alexander Trocchi, a postwar Scottish junkie writer. I tried to read him a long time ago, but it didn't work. You don't have to listen to a whole symphony to know it's elevator music, and it doesn't take too many lines to realize a novel is not well written. It wasn't that however, I just wasn't ready for it. The blurbs on the cover threw me off. You're led to expect Rimbaud and William Burroughs multiplied by heroin (or is that like multiplying something by zero?).

I went upstairs for more poetry, and looked out the back window at some old brick tenements. There was a clothesline with a few tiny shirts slung across a view of the financial district. Irving Layton, a Jewish Canadian poet, was mentioned in a review of Leonard Cohen in *The New Yorker*. The reviewer said it was unfathomable why he wasn't known here, but I fathomed it in a minute.

I went out, the waning light hitting the empty towers of finance, and walked home.

Friday, July 23, 1993

Morning on the phone with B. who wanted to go to the beach. I walked to her place, and we took a bus out towards the ocean, talking all the way. Got off at 25th Street, walked north about half a mile to Baker Beach, and then along the water to the clothing optional beach. She wore a one-piece swimsuit.

There were not many people on a stunning afternoon with a breeze. The water looked cold. A woman arrived half an hour later. She lay her stuff down nearby and took off her clothes. In her twenties with short black hair and creamy pale skin, a boyish haircut and a buoyant figure.

B. was talking nonstop, mainly about the play she wants to write. She invited another fellow here, the dramatic one who was breaking bottles at his party a while back. He has some experience with the theater. Her approach to writing a play is to do it by committee. It is analogous to stone soup - she stirs it while everyone else is adding something. It's the opposite of how I would do it. She can't do it on her own, having neither the focus or the discipline, and few ideas, but that doesn't stop her. She brought a copy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and was quoting from it on a midsummer afternoon. I have no interest in pursuing it, but it was a nice interlude with 400-year-old thoughts evaporating in the air.

I threw in a few suggestions, given her preoccupation with the theme of sexual confusion. "How about a butch Bottom?" She mentioned a play by a local man called *Moisture Seekers*. "Are we wet yet?"

Earlier she was talking about a three-story house downtown on Powell. It was empty and she wondered what it would cost to rent it.

"It has a cute little attic."
"It comes with a drug addict?"

The drama prince showed up. M. is hairy, short, and stocky with a short beard, a blend of black and Swedish. A sardonic fellow of thirty-seven, unemployed at the moment, and quick-witted. His suggestions as she pulled him into the vortex of her

thoughts were veering off in other directions, sounding like a sadomasochistic musical, an idiotic who-done-it.

B. pointed out a naked man who walked over to a woman sitting in a one-piece swimsuit. He stood there talking to her with his hand on his hip, as if to say, "You like my cock?"

I went for a swim with the ocean cold but not impossible. I started out by running to a narrow rocky ravine. It is usually filled with surging waves, but now was filled with tons of sand. I ran back. There is something about going barefoot on the wet sand that makes for a winged heels effect. I dove into an icy wave. Numb and refreshing. Stood in knee-deep water for a while, then went back in, swimming out a ways.

I returned to the shore, but couldn't tear myself away. Two women arrived and took off their clothes. One of them ran by me with her little tits bouncing. She stopped when her feet went numb, but a minute later she dove into a breaking wave. I went in again, swimming out further and not feeling the cold. The waves kept changing shape, the morphological variations of water in motion. I caught a wave and rode it, which was surprising. So was the wipeout.

I dragged myself out of the ocean, headed for the towel, and dried off. B. was down the beach, headed for the ladies' room. It was nearly 4 p.m. and I was late to work. I put on my shirt and pants and left.

5 p.m. in the office. Not much to do with the attorney gone.

I called Michael at his place of work. He used to work in Sonoma, but now he's four or five blocks away on Broadway, a high-tone men's club with bare-breasted

dancers. It opens in a week and he is the head chef. I walked over to the place and went in. There was a large mural of lounging lazy nymphs. A runway of polished wood with brass poles for some not-so-lazy nymphs. Men can have their drinks at the foot of the stage with a writhing torso for a chaser. The place was in disarray, like a theater before a show, hammering on this and fixing that. A black guy in the control booth tested the music.

I ended up sitting at a long and beautiful bar with Michael and a couple of others (the mirror was lined with neon). They were testing a wine they might use, a pinot noire for $38 a bottle. I had a glass, one of the better wines I've ever had. There was a Frenchman there in his early forties, the manager, who also thought it was good. A British fellow behind the counter said he wouldn't use it, and a woman sitting a couple of stools over voiced some disapproval. She knew her wines, or she knew what she liked which is a little different. Turned out she was the head bartender, in her thirties, and a physical therapist. There was some mention of power tennis. We hit it off for some reason, with Michael disappearing for a while. He had to call his angry fiancée. The others were walking in and out, so the two of us were left with the bottle. She poured me another full glass, and I felt like I had walked into an idyllic situation.

I'm not sure how we got on the subject, related to the cuisine perhaps, but I mentioned a line I heard in the south of France. The wealthy grandmother of my girlfriend tasted a juicy endive at dinner and said, "Le petit Jesus pisse dans ma bouche!" (The baby Jesus pissed in my mouth.)[37] A high compliment. She loved it, and thought I should tell the Frenchman who had walked up. I did, but he was not amused.

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[37] The French are so poetic, if not religious. "Mettre le petit Jesus dans la crèche," is a euphemism for having sex (put the baby Jesus in the manger).

A couple of women there were mercenary beauties. The place has something of a Playboy Club atmosphere, and I wasn't sure if it would get off the ground in this town, though it has done well in other parts of the country.

Michael returned from his phone call. The British fellow was something of a rake, but with a hard edge of the practical, and talking about the necessity of a $15 cover charge. He doesn't want the "bad elements" in here watching the girls, and he doesn't want the "south of Market crowd," whatever that means (while joking that he would use Michael's office for an occasional tryst). It's not a place that I would frequent except for Michael, who was a little embarrassed by all of this. It is a good career move for him, being responsible for the kitchen and cuisine, but the floorshow is none of his concern. He can't see it from the kitchen, and he has a girlfriend (which is tentative).

He is on the shy side, used to be a poet (no time anymore), and has a bad haircut. He is not too concerned about his looks or clothes. He was talking about the Actress and how much friction there is between them. Even now on the phone there was her sarcastic anger. He was a little late returning home yesterday, so she stayed out all night. He is depressed and puzzled by all of this. Their connection is like a downed power line whipping around. Her temper is a wonder to behold, which she has admitted. He is the good man who is hard to find. Loyal, hardworking, and a fine cook. There was the vortex of her emotional needs which may have involved the ego of an out-of-work actress. If she isn't being stroked on a daily basis it is hell to pay. He comes home tired from their only source of income and is barely in the mood for romance, much less arguments.

He said the sex continues with a life of its own, but the other night he was stunned into silence (she hates it when he acts removed). They were making love and then lying

close together. She mentioned an old boyfriend from college who she ran into who still looks nineteen (she is forty). Michael was a little put off, knowing how she would have reacted if he referred to an old girlfriend like that, the house on fire with her fury.

During the conversation the woman I had been talking to returned, extended her hand for a soft handshake, and said, "You're a sweetie." There was some mention of our meeting on a tennis court sometime, although I forgot to ask her name. She wore a loose sweater hanging off one shoulder and revealing something which made me pause: the ink impression of a black widow spider on her shoulder blade (I later heard that she was fired).

Talking with Michael and having more wine. He apologized and said he had to go back to Marin for further negotiations. The wedding is on hold, if not dead in the water. We went out to the alley and his BMW motorcycle (his father died and left it to him). There were a few other cars (two parking tickets), including a Rolls Royce belonging to the boss.

There was a pickup blocking the alley. We went back in and he looked for the driver while I stood around with a few people attending to last-minute touches. I noticed a platinum-haired woman with a hard edge. She was looking at videos – the audition tapes of dancers. Michael said it had been going on every night that week. She stared intently at the tape of a woman wearing a G-string and climbing a pole. The polarized woman was not too shy about it. It looked like she wanted to be impregnated by a brass pole while showing off her tits from every possible angle. They were not so big or loose that they would get in the way when throwing herself around. She had a dancer's body,

and the woman called another woman over to review the tape, discussing her coordination.

Michael returned and we went outside. He rode off on his dead father's motorcycle, headed for a temperamental woman.

I walked home, feeling the buoyancy and ease of living alone without a woman. I wouldn't say that I've outgrown the storm and stress of romance, but the time has gone by pretty smoothly in the last few months, and what he talked about sounded familiar. I was having a déjà vu of dumb maelstroms[38] which a man and woman generate between them. I related similar situations I had been in and he looked surprised. It was almost the same with him - he had said the same things to her. Have you been pretending during these stretches of time when everything is fine… do you store up things for when you're in the mood for a fight… is it drama that you're craving? How come your anger is so out of proportion to the current circumstances? Am I paying for your resentment of men, or a previous affair that fell apart?

The only way some women can tell if they have a hold on a man is when they make him lose control. Drive him over the brink by whatever means, like endless arguments and nagging, late-night fights, until he loses his temper. Having found his limits and ascertained what buttons to push and levers to pull, it's just a matter of ducking a slap or putting up with his sullen restrained silence. He may not trust himself to let the anger out. In the 1950's a celebrity named Zha Zha Gabor was proudly sporting a black eye, telling the press that's how she knew a man loved her. It is not the right approach these days, but that doesn't mean that Zha Zha is the only woman who ever thought like

[38] According to the dictionary: "… a body of swirling water produced by the meeting of opposing currents." "A situation in which there are a lot of confused activities, emotions, etc." A dangerous area that moves in a circular argument and drags you down.

that. Who knows what murky sadomasochistic tendencies are lurking in the hearts of women?[39]

There was something else Michael said. He took the Actress to visit his mother in Modesto and she hardly said a word (they spent the night). Now his mother and his two sisters think she is imperious and condescending.

After leaving the men's club I walked through Chinatown. It was a cushioned walk, probably from the wine. I headed for the pool, and sat in the lobby of the hotel (converted from an old YMCA). Not sure if I was in the mood, but I looked through a window at the pool and saw an empty lane.

One mile, followed by some underwater swimming.

10 p.m. I took a shower in the locker room. A young lifeguard was on his way out with a black companion. The lifeguard was tired of predictable sex with a certain woman. "I do her every night." Sometimes he prefers the unexpected, assuming it doesn't lead to nothing or worse. I wonder if wedding vows have taken on another meaning, like "I do him," or "I do her," and you end up with, "To do is to be."[40]

On the way home I noticed a woman on the corner had turned and was walking in my direction. An hourglass figure poured into a tight black dress. Pale skin, blonde, lipstick. It's another strategy to get a man's attention, walking right at him and veering off at the last second. It's a close encounter of the lurid kind, with a scent of perfume

[39] In the mid-1980's there was a young woman where I worked who was a feminist, though a bit conservative. She said the couple in the next apartment had a loud argument the night before, if not a fight. It sounded so bad she called the police, thinking the woman might get hurt. The police arrived and took the man away. The next morning my friend was in the parking lot, leaving for work, and the woman she was worried about walked up and said, "Are you the bitch who called the police on us?!"

[40] Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

washing over him like a heat-wave. If he wasn't thinking of sex a minute before, he is now.

When I reached the corner and turned around she was walking back, passing with an insouciant air like it was the furthest thing from her mind. The ploys of those who ply their trade on the street. A prostitute is so pedestrian, a sidewalk vendor, a licentious woman without a license. Her presence is supposed to knock your socks off, telling time according to the cocks (and not the soft clocks of unconscious desire). She is as much a part of the neighborhood[41] as derelicts and sirens and the corner store. A corner whore[42] for those who want more, or maybe even four on the floor. You wash up on a foreign shore.

In the last few days, I've been passing a thin dark-haired young woman in white hot-pants. She has a quiet voice. "Want a date?" I should take her up on it and suggest we go to the movies. I'll buy the popcorn. There are women whose clothes are shrinking with a plunging neckline and a rising hemline. There was a black woman with one dark nipple exposed. I assume it was intentional and she could feel the breeze. Her look could be adjusted if the police went by. There are a couple of girls on the corner in tight shorts over large behinds who will turn and walk off slowly when a police car passes.

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[41] When I was in my early twenties I was in Nice with Simone. I was walking alone downtown with a post office and a grocery store across the street. Leaning against the wall outside the store were a couple of sexy young prostitutes, like gracing the neighborhood was part of the job. I had never seen this before and was staring as I sometimes do and walked into a pole. It hit me right in the forehead, but it was a clean blow and I went on walking, though a little more careful since I was in a foreign country where the poles are not where you expect. In retrospect, I should have collapsed and waited for those women to revive me with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation (I'm an optimist).

[42] When I was in London I walked by a sweet-looking young woman and was surprised to hear her say, "Hi love, want to go?" I didn't know she was a prostitute. My girlfriend was on the other side of the English Channel, but I only had two pounds on me. I should have invited her to have some tea, but I politely declined and walked back to my lonely room.

You hear about women who are traumatized by body standards. On the street the women who use their bodies as a commodity come in every shape and size. I assume they get attention or they wouldn't be out there. There is no primary body type. The variations are Darwinian, with a natural or unnatural selection being provided to the automotive men behind their steering wheels. You could have two hundred pounds of female pulchritude spilling out of a corset, or a woman who weighs a hundred pounds in a cotton dress. Every known brassiere is being utilized, or maybe none, a hidden hard-on going by.

There is a young punk, part Asian, with overalls and a black lace bra. I'm not sure how business is, or even if she's in the business when some women look like streetwalkers and they're not wound too tight. She might have a mercenary outlook on life. It blurs the distinction of who's a whore and who isn't. There are women who moonlight, supplementing their income with an incoming man. When commodities are God they will do anything to get them – like the woman back east who sold her baby for $1400 (the down payment on a trailer).

Home… reading the paper.

An article on the Transbay bus terminal, a nice old building with wooden benches on Mission and Second. It is on the edge of the financial district. According to the city that doesn't know how, the homeless have been allowed to take it over. That is not to say they block the doors from thousands of daily commuters, they simply lie on the benches. At night there are three or four hundred people sleeping there, even in the bathrooms. There was a black woman "… bedding down in the last stall on the left. She called it her

residence. ‘Rich people have their place to live and I have mine’.” Not sure that’s how it works, like squatting on public property makes it yours. She was so gracious as to let someone use the stall. “’Sure I let ‘em use it,’ she said. ‘I step out and wait. We all have to help each other’.” How is she helping? Lending the use of a public ladies’ room to other women? How is it hers to lend?

What’s wrong with this picture? When everything is private property, the public sector is allowed to deteriorate. The working public has a right to assume a bus terminal is not a terminal for the homeless and that, as the article points out, they don’t have to be escorted in groups “for their own safety… including tourists….” They have a right to assume the bathroom floors aren’t lined with people. One train line, Amtrak, pulled out of the terminal it got so bad. It was worried about its passengers. One of the derelicts was waving a gun around last month (shot by police). There’s something wrong here on both sides. The homeless have no inherent right to live there. One guy said, “If they lock the doors at night we’ll just walk around and come back and sleep on the benches during the day.” How can he assume that in having nothing he not only inherits public property, but prime real estate in an expensive city?

Why is the city so impotent it can’t deal with the situation? It can’t make a distinction between people commuting to work and those sleeping in the bus station. Even worse, it can’t focus on the homeless who are blurred into the general public, which then gets to deal with them on a daily basis. More focus on the down and out might involve a double-edged response: 1) They have no automatic claim to bus stations, libraries, or parks. 2) They deserve shelter and accommodations. A lack of the latter may force them into the former.

Here is where it gets tricky. The homeless are a varied crowd. Alcoholics, drug addicts, mental cases, the unemployed, bums and drifters, ex-cons, and veterans of foreign wars. They are mostly men, which is odd when you consider the accusation that this country favors men. There are poor people whose families don't want them or who don't want their families. Has the city done its duty if it provides hundreds of beds in an Army barracks or a warehouse (when hundreds are turned away at night from shelters), along with meals and showers? Then what? Do the homeless hang around the facility, wander around town, or what? What if it's on the edge of town or in the East Bay? Between a warehouse and a million-dollar apartment building, what is to be done (as Lenin said)?

I have read interviews where someone living on the streets said he preferred it to a shelter which is boring. He would rather be downtown, and anyhow he doesn't like being around other homeless people. So working people get to be around the bums who don't want to be around the homeless. If warehouse facilities were provided (or tent cabins which were used after the earthquake in 1906), would they still claim any bench or sidewalk as theirs? What if they're from out of town?

It's part of the decline of the public sector (including schools). The conservatives have a private profit motive, and the liberals are so weak they let a park across the street from City Hall become a crowded squatters' camp a few years ago. People lived there with makeshift tents and bedding for a year or two. Working people couldn't use the park, and kids who wanted to use the library had to walk a gauntlet of winos and addicts. I don't know if the government was paralyzed by political correctitude or what. It seems

to hold the public domain in low repute, allowing it to go to waste with some of the dirtiest streets and sidewalks in the country, and not only in this neighborhood.

Saturday, July 24, 1993

Typing in the afternoon.

4:30 p.m. At the main library, walking up the glorified staircase. The grandeur of the architecture with high ceilings, while so many of the books are small-minded. Talk about small print. Hovering in a high arch from invisible wires was a sign: INFORMATION. It informed the air.

Looking through the stacks I found *The Butcher's Wife* by a Chinese writer, Li Ang. Some books fall into my arms with their knives drawn.

In the periodical room I read articles on the singer K.D. Lang and the poet Frank O'Hara. My respect for her went up a little (while for him it waned), even with her comment, "I have a little penis envy. They're ridiculous, but they're cool." Ridiculous is not the word I would have used, but maybe I'm biased (she's a lesbian, for what it's worth).[43]

Frank O'Hara didn't think they were ridiculous and he should know, having tried a few. His exhaustive biography just came out (1926-1966). If he had lived a few more years and come to San Francisco in 1972 I could have heard him give a reading. It's probably my fault. I lived in Manhattan in 1961 when he was there, and I didn't have the

[43] Imagine a gay man describing a vagina in those terms. They're ridiculous, but they're cool. Actually, I've heard worse from gay men.

foresight or the means to look him up. I was nine at the time, but still. He liked kids. I didn't know he was alive, and didn't know he wouldn't be a few years later.

Curious, what a lighthearted spirit he was, it comes out in his writing. Some of the literary critics thought he was glib or off the cuff when he jotted down his idle thoughts with line breaks. He soaked up and embodied an essence of the 1950's in New York. A wizard of osmosis on his toes, from the jazz clubs to abstract expressionism (a curator at the Museum of Modern Art). He sensed the weather shifting in the direction of the 1960's and what that came to mean, with the specter of Andy Commercial Warhol who he didn't like. He thought that Warhol was a prophet of doom for everything he stood for and respected.

O'Hara was on his way to becoming an alcoholic, what with bourbon in the morning (like a sunset following a sun rise). He was having sex all over town, with love a little more elusive or just heartbreaking when it didn't work. One night he walked with a younger man on the beach and was caught like a deer in the headlights of a dune buggy and too drunk to move. The others got out of the way. He didn't and his life was over.

By then the poems were reduced to a trickle. The article mentioned that his work was "analyzed in relation to polysemy, differential valorization, and French gynocriticism." There is a photo of him in profile with a broken nose and large forehead. A head bursting with thought, it pushes back the hairline. A little too gentle for my nervous system.

I reserved a book by the painter Larry Rivers, *What Did I Do?: The Unauthorized Autobiography*, and something by Mark Leyner, *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist*. A

woman checked out a feminist book of mythology, which sounds like smoke and mirrors when you want to be grounded in the factual.

I walked home on a dirty sidewalk and considered the immaculate conception of a book.

6:30 p.m. Phone call from the Phantom, making plans for the sound-room tomorrow night.

7:30 p.m. I was reading the Chinese book, allegedly a feminist work, when the Czech woman called. She dropped by Thursday night, but I wasn't home. Last night she was in some bars in the Mission, including Café Babar with a barbaric (from the sounds of it) open mic. It's for those who're drunk on a fermented version of the language (making for some rotten poems). She drank someone's homemade blackberry wine and a few too many margaritas and should have known about the effect. She left after 2 a.m., meaning to walk to the Haight where she lives, but sat in a doorway, being tired and wanting to rest for a minute. She passed out and woke up when it was light out, a little shocked with herself, not to say disoriented. Maybe it was fortunate she wore men's clothes.

She wanted to do something tonight, but more on the relaxing side. We settled on a hot tub and sauna.

8:30 p.m. She arrived, wheeling her mountain bike into the room. We went out, walking up Polk Street past the male prostitutes. It was a mile or so to the black-tiled hot tub place near Broadway.

We got a room with a sauna, hot tub, shower, mattress, and took off our clothes. I opened the wine and we were in hot water in a minute. She was waist deep in a flickering

light with the steam rising. Ethereal skin and Slavic cheekbones, pale blue eyes and short white hair. She kept getting out of the tub, not used to the heat. Small breasted, not very tall, and well proportioned. Strong legs and a flat stomach, which I mention because she called attention to it, wondering if she put on weight. I thought she looked as good as she did a year ago.

I was throwing her some offhand compliments. We slept together once, and things are not that enigmatic between us. She went back to the Latino poet, but things were even more dysfunctional that time around. She broke it off and he killed himself in his mother's home (leaving his mother to find the body). That knocked her out of commission, socially and otherwise, for a long time.

She is making a comeback and going out with men a little more often. Walking to the hot tubs she told me about the latest situation, and I responded with a few unsympathetic comments. It sounded dumb and contradictory, and involved the manager of the coffee shop where she works. She liked him at first, and then didn't after they went out a few times, including a weekend trip. It turns out he is boring and self-centered. The Czech woman said she has a short attention span, and admitted that for all of her books on spiritual and philosophical concerns, soaking up a Jungian point of view, she will fall for a man based on his looks and not much else. She has a fixation on Latinos. Nothing wrong with that, but it feels unfinished with the one who is no longer living. She is getting nowhere on this basis, which is not surprising. There is more to a man than his looks.

One morning, a few weeks ago, she met a guy on the street. Maybe she was tired, lonely, who knows, but he charmed her. Within a few hours they had some beer and

tequila, went back to her place, took a shower, and made love. The shower was necessary since he lived in a van or truck, an illegal immigrant from Mexico with a nice smile. The chemistry was good, however, and for her that's saying something. Having known him a few days she was falling hard, but with a few questions in her mind, knowing little about his background. He doesn't have a home, and there was a vague awareness that he might be using her and want to "fuck a white bitch" who has a shower. When he admitted that he lied to her and has a girlfriend she got on her high horse and kicked him out.

Now she wishes she hadn't, and is looking for him on the streets. This hit me the wrong way, and I had some punishing observations which she took well. It reminded me of women with their quick and cutting judgments, like a pompous guillotine. You would think their spirits fluctuate so much the only way to get a fix on things is with a knee-jerk cut-off.

In her case it didn't make sense. What did she expect, getting picked up by a stranger and they're half drunk and fucking on the same morning? Where does she get off meeting someone on a loose and random basis, and then want to apply the proper rules of conduct? He lied about other things, like his name and how long he has been there, but if she liked him so much why would she kick him out and then regret it? It sounds like an approach-avoidance of men and love. I've heard similar stories from women who will balance an allegedly soft heart with a meat cleaver.

Meanwhile, we were naked. I wondered if a certain male organ would behave itself. It threatened an erection when we took our clothes off, but some of what we talked about was like a cold shower, and the hot water was relaxing. After a while I forgot about

it. Not that it would have bothered her, but neither one of us needs more ambiguities at this point.

We function okay as friends, but otherwise we are a little out of sync - and yet we were sitting in a hot tub in a watery light. I may have things figured out on a conscious level, but unconsciously I was absorbing an erotic current. I sat next to a water jet with tiny bubbles surrounding my cock. It felt like I was being fondled by champagne. She said when she was ten she would get familiar with the faucet in the bathtub, running the water directly on her "kli-toriss" to good effect. I said I didn't know that young girls could do that. "Of course," she said. She was worried that it was a strange private practice, and it wasn't until years later, coming to this country, that she read about it in the newspaper as a common thing.

A minute later – I believe at my suggestion, though we both have a scientific curiosity – she turned towards the underwater jet. She was waist deep in the water, so the current hit her between the legs. She shrugged and smiled, "It feels like oral sex," and turned away.

We went into the sauna which was so hot your hair could fall out. It penetrated to the bone. We sat shoulder-to-shoulder on towels, the circumstances feeling mystic in the misted steam, the flesh becoming one, including sweat. I don't mean her sweat was coming out of me, but it might as well have been.

She suggested a back rub later at my place, but we never got around to it. Not that she doesn't trust me, but maybe doesn't trust herself (a Pisces, for what it's worth).

Both of us took a cold shower and then I was back in the hot tub with a cigarette and the wine. She climbed out of the tub and stood on the tile floor with a demure tuft of

blonde pubic hair. It wasn't concealing much. I didn't say how I feel about blondes these days. She turned around and commenced to wash herself in the shower, showing a strong back and firm behind, the resolute stance of a woman looking down while washing her private parts.

We dried off and put our clothes on. An hour turns to steam and evaporates in that room. Then we were in the cool night air.

We walked to the Tenderloin, stopping to pick up some fish and chips. There was a tall male transvestite who she thought had nice legs. He was followed by a hooker in a tight dress. I said,

"How's her legs?"
"Fat."

Back at the apartment having a meal. She asked about the woman in Alaska (Ming), "the one you're secretly in love with." That's a loaded phrase. I said I wasn't sure about "in love with," and anyhow it isn't a secret. We say we love each other, but it's one of the limitations of the language when love, like snow, has many variations (according to indigenous snowbound people). It means something coming from her, and me too for that matter, but that doesn't mean it's well defined or we know where it's going.

Around midnight I was tired of talking. I picked up a wooden stringed instrument, the sort of thing she likes to listen to (hers was out of tune again). She went over to the mattress by the window and slowly fell asleep. That was fine with me. I was preoccupied with what effect a hot tub had on the guitar. When we were walking back she had a quiet and distracted air about her. I thought it was because of the sauna, then wondered if it was from my comments. They were like a massage which can hurt a little, going to the

sore spots and trying to release the tension. Walking along she said something, very quietly, about what it did for her getting someone else's perspective on things.

Anyhow, a homemade instrumental. I put it down around one in the morning and went back to *The Butcher's Wife*. I was relaxed with her asleep.

2 a.m. I was fading. I went over and lay down next to her. There was not much room on a narrow bed. She woke up after a while. Eventually she got up, thinking she should leave, but was sleepy so we settled on her sleeping on the floor, which she preferred. I gave her some blankets.

Sunday, July 25, 1993

10 a.m. Coming to. I could see her point about the bed being soft. I'm used to a single mattress on the floor in the hall, and this left me feeling stiff. She was gone an hour later, wheeling her mountain bike out the door. I helped her into the elevator, a descending cage. There was a gentle kiss, and the iron bars were slamming shut.

Back in the room I thought about her contradictions. There's a hard edge to her, and the softest lips I've kissed in a long time. Something else struck me while we walked to the hot tubs. In her jeans and sneakers, flannel shirt, short hair, she seemed like a tomboy. It's the oddest thing. You would think I would be used to the mercurial changes of some people, especially women, according to what they're wearing. She can seem mature and deadly at thirty-one, or downright boyish. Maybe it comes from living with her ten-year-old son. I wonder if something about him rubs off on her, or she's shaking off the role of a responsible mother once in a while.

Meanwhile, an active if not high-powered Sunday was in progress. Typing for a couple of hours.

3 p.m. My sister Diane arrived from Portola Valley, the ex-sociology professor. I showed her around the place, which didn't take very long, being a studio with a kitchen on the side. She had a look of wonder and a wary approval, with comments as to what a quiet and secure neighborhood she lives in. Maybe it's too quiet. There are deer outside her home, while I have junkies and psychotics.

B. arrived. They have met before (Diane is thirty-seven and B. is thirty-two). I thought we might play tennis, but instead we sat around for a couple of hours, talking and having lunch (my sister brought organic soup). I was being halfway adequate as a host, and washing glasses while they talked. The comparison and contrast: B. is tall and cosmopolitan, a fine figure of a woman and not much in the way of intellectual credentials. Diane is thin and shorter with a PhD, and more of an ethical feminist. B. assumes that men were put on earth as a floating escort pool to pick and choose from when she's in the mood. Every now and then they have a tendency to fall in love with her and want a long commitment, but she manages to squirm out of those tedious situations.

Oddly enough, based on the stories I have heard, most of their run-ins and infuriating conflicts are with other women, beginning with their own sisters. I was hearing more from Diane about what she went through, the pressure and the disillusionment, while teaching at an old private university in New Jersey. It was a snake pit of academic competition and suspicion. Other women were put on alert when she made the mistake of getting romantic with the head of the Sociology department. Eventually they lived together (he is a birder and a baseball fan). She didn't realize how it

looked to others or how they would react. She attended the childbirth of a woman professor who would later turn against her, competing for tenure. During a leave of absence, Diane found out the school had hired a woman temporarily who acted like the head of the department, pushing the actual head to force my sister to finalize her plans since she wanted her office. Pushy and presumptuous, and there was still a question about her qualifications.

Diane did part-time work for the *Princeton Review*, and had some problems with a mother superior of a supervisor who B. thought was a "witch" (the bad kind - she has had similar encounters). My sister wrote a note:

> I have decided that you and I can no longer work together. I was appalled by your lack of professionalism in dealing with me. You were gratuitously abrasive in making a modest point of dubious merit. I found your tactic of threatening me with my job to be repugnant. Your use of threats and insults shows that you cannot conduct business in a dignified manner…You have created an environment in which open communication cannot take place and the result is that misinformation is disseminated and hence predictably there are problems in resolving scheduling conflicts that arise…Your hardworking staff has always been very helpful and professional in their dealings with me. You would be well-advised to emulate them in your future dealings with other colleagues.

(There were copies sent to three other women on the staff).

Most of the women I know are having stressed-out conflicts with other women, and it occurs in a context of their being autonomous persons with their own homes and jobs. Maybe that makes it harder to get along. Simone (who works as a research librarian) said that women are the worst bitches, having had some run-ins with the unfair sex. I think she was referring to women in this country.

Like the bad blood dramas that occur between mothers and daughters, much of this is unknown to men. They're like trees which the women hide behind or run through while throwing knives at each other (some of which end up in the trees).

Meanwhile, Diane and B. were discussing job prospects and unemployment benefits. B. gave her blessing of my living quarters, exclaiming at the number of windows in my Tenderloin observatory. She then involved us in a discussion of the play she's trying to manufacture out of thin air. Diane has an academic background and is not familiar with the concept of sound-altered gender, but found it amusing.

5:30 p.m. We drove B. home and headed to the cliffs near the bridge. We took a long steep trail to the beach and walked along the edge of the water with the sunlight breaking through a gloomy overcast. We sat amongst the rocks, talking for an hour or two. She said that for the first time in her life she is looking for a man, and any suggestions would be duly considered.

I told her this was the beach where I wiped out in a heavy surf last year. I was caught in a riptide and couldn't get out. A wave threw me into a submerged rock. I finally dragged myself out of the water with blood running down my lower leg. I still have a scar. She thinks I'm self-destructive – like it was my fault and not the ocean's.[44] We were barefoot and walked up a meandering trail, passing a defunct machine gun nest. It is close to where a long suspension bridge meets the land with a lot of wind and steel.

We drove to the flat with the sound-room to pick up my brother's old computer that I stored there. A couple of the roommates were sitting around with a bong. We talked with the Phantom who was just back from work, a little stoned and sort of nervous.

Then we were back on the street and it was getting dark. I gave her directions to the freeway, and she mentioned in passing that she was going to her 20th high school reunion. It's in Los Angeles and is the sort of thing that hardly registers in my frame of

[44] I left out the part about the woman I was with. She was lying naked on a towel and when I limped back with a bloody leg and the effects of hypothermia and exhaustion, she wanted to have sex. It was all about her. I did what I could.

reference. Last year she went with my other sister (who is one year older) to her reunion at the same school. A woman approached her and asked about me. She had an odd name, it sounded like… "Cookie?" I asked. Yes. Blonde curly hair. I was standing in a windblown twilight zone and going back a good twenty years or more to a nice-looking girl who was something of a tomboy (she got in trouble for stealing a bike). We were friends back then, but I was distracted in those days with music, life, and other girls, and probably not the most discerning person when it came to social relationships. She came to the old wooden house where I lived in San Francisco when I was in college, but I wasn't home. Cookie left a note, but that was the last I heard from her. We lost track of each other – a girl who came to see me when I played a concert at the school, returning with an acoustic guitar at nineteen.

One reason it struck a chord, if not a missing nerve, I've been preoccupied with the phenomenon of losing touch with people over the years. This country is enormous and you would think it's possible to have a lot friends and acquaintances. I have a threadbare version of that, a pale echo, and it is partly my fault. I have a tendency for going into exile as it were. I left Los Angeles when I was twenty. If I had stayed it would have been a hot bed of connections, the sort of place where one is immersed (however high or low the caliber of immersion). Here you're on the edge. It's not a warm desert of familiarities, but the end of a windblown peninsula. There is a difference, and it shows in your social life.

I asked why my wonderful sisters hadn't told me about my long-lost friend a year ago. She thought one of them had. There was some mention of my having ignored them in high school, while not introducing them to my male friends.

Then she was gone and I was back inside. The Phantom was coming around by some miracle. We went downstairs through the garage with motorcycle debris and objects from my previous life in storage. He spoke in hushed tones about the other roommate, J., who sometimes sings or yells in the sound room. I had noticed one of my metal filing cabinets had a dent in the front. I thought it gave it some character (if character = damage), but I was curious. He said the other night J. came home after a bad day at work (a young man from Michigan who works in a bank downtown). He was drinking heavily and went on a rampage. A door was now being repaired, other things were broken, and he put a dent in the filing cabinet. The Phantom kept his distance, saying how "calm" he was several times (he broke a few windows last year with respect to Ming sleeping with another roommate). It was only when J. was banging his head against the wall – I noticed some cuts and bruises on his forehead - that the Phantom stepped in.

It turned out the Les Paul had a broken string. We switched to an old electric guitar, custom-made with a wooden body that he constructed years ago. He tuned it while I messed around on the drums.

11 p.m. We sat on the steps on a cool night having a cigarette and a beer, feeling relaxed after a high voltage session. He apologized for quitting early, then told me about a recent visit to his hometown in Nebraska. He screwed a black woman on a dirt road in the country one night. It was another version of "on the road."

I took a bus back to the Tenderloin.

I finished reading *The Butcher's Wife*, an easy read. It was written by a Chinese woman in Taiwan. She read about a woman who killed her husband in Shanghai in the

1930's and wanted to novelize it from a feminist point of view, while switching the location to Taiwan.[45]

It's curious that a feminist writer would show women in such an awful light. The husband, of course, is a dull and pompous jerk who adds injury to insult. A peasant who is not more lyrical from living close to the land. He's a pig butcher. The equation working itself out here is that men are pigs, and he is knifed and gutted while he is asleep. The wife has gone off the deep end from the man's neglect and abuse, not to mention his abysmal capacity for conversation. His method of foreplay is to kick her.

There are hardly any lines worth quoting (maybe there was something lost in the translation), but I was captivated. "Her alienation is made complete by the perverse moralizing of the village women who gather around the town's spirit-inhabited well to gossip and to question the virtue of young wives…." The women are meddling and insufferable. They embody the hard life and low ceilings of a village. It seems to be an honest description. There are city dwellers who are nostalgic for the simple life. There is fresh air in the country, but many of the people have a tightly wound psychology of small-minded cruelties and prejudices. The earth is not so easy to scratch a living from, however nice it looks from a distance.

A hard materialism co-exists with ghosts and spirits in the air. It is a book that dispels the myth of the Chinese being more civilized and refined than other cultures. People see a vase from the 1500's and assume this was the rule and not the exception. The vast majority of the population were peasants with a hard life. It was nothing to write

[45] There is a Japanese film, *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976), which is based on an incident in the 1930's. A woman killed a man she was having an affair with, but the circumstances were far more romantic and erotic than the book I just read.

home about, including how the women were treated. Sadomasochism under the cherry blossoms, and the moon is rising with some vicious rumors.

Then there is the lunacy of preferring boys and underestimating girls, using sound-waves to determine the gender of a fetus, and instead of drowning babies in a pond there is abortion. Things are out of balance. There are too many men, and their status is downgraded as a result, especially for those who can't find a wife (and end up in the army).

Meanwhile, you would think they're drinking vinegar instead of wine. The men and women yell, "You cunt!" I'm not sure in what sense it is a shame-based culture, but they know how to kill a pig.

Monday, July 26, 29913

I went to work in the afternoon and heard about the Attorney. He's in intensive care at Marin General for a ruptured appendix. There were some loose ends in the office, so I was on the phone a while, postponing something with the U.S. Attorney.

6 p.m. Head for home, picking up a few supplies. I dropped into a video store. I've been in one of those maybe twice in my life. B. talked about renting a movie and this one looked like it had a large selection. I assumed it would include old vintage films, but what do I know? Turned out half of the selection was pornography. I stood there for a minute staring at generic fuck films with little variation. I held a gallon of water that was getting heavy, but it felt symbolic for some reason.

A young Chinese woman, slender and delicate, in *ANAL RAMPAGE*. I never rent that sort of thing - no VCR - and I don't watch movies very often. They're too vicarious,

especially with a cut-and-splice seduction. I don't have anything against them, but it would be pathetic as a regular diversion. Like the advice columnist said to a woman who was getting down with her dog, your social skills might atrophy.

At home I returned a call from Simone. She is now in her late forties and applying to a university in Paris for library research.

She said her oldest son, Wolfgang (who is twenty-nine), managed to get accepted at a law school in New York City. He drifted for the last few years, trying every drug and dealing smoke on the side. There was a long period where he was preoccupied with chess. The writing never got off the ground, even with a computer. He is tall and gaunt with dark straight hair, half-Jewish, and has distinctive features. I could see him playing bass guitar. He has a laconic gravity, and a drastic outlook on life which is amplified by hardcore mediums of expression.[46] I remember watching *The Last of England* (1988) with him in the flat he rented in the Mission.

A couple of years ago I arranged for us to visit the anatomy lab at San Francisco State (my girlfriend knew the teaching assistant) and film the cadavers. I never saw the footage though, it must have hit a dead end.

He is moving out of the flat (where Jacques used to live before he moved to Paris) and had a garage sale. His mother asked if it was unreasonable to question the fact that he sold her records, the ones he borrowed from her – old, eclectic, hard-to-find records which I had a hand in accumulating. What did he get, $30 or $40? She's lucky he didn't sell her furniture and rugs, though he might let her buy his if he can find the time to let her come over.

[46] His father is a radiologist in Los Angeles who works with dying cancer patients.

He did allow her to hold onto his drugs for him. There was a difference of opinion with one of his roommates over $200 and the guy threatened to turn him in to the police. I suggested she get the drugs off the premises and bury them somewhere. He also wants her to take over the lease. In other words, to be responsible for the rents of three different people so he will have a foot in the door if he decides to come back after several years of law school. She has seen his closest friend and roommate only once and that was recently, a Lebanese fellow with one hand.

I got off the phone and read for a while. Then the Czech woman called. She had been riding around town on her mountain bike, discovering new neighborhoods and waterfronts. She was looking for the fellow she kicked out with that temper of hers. In Dolores Park a couple of Latina girls were fighting over a man – pulling hair, kicking and scratching.

10:30 p.m. I was on the guitar with a mute documentary on the tube, something about the Barrier Reef and life becoming limestone. A seahorse which looks like seaweed. The delirious suggestibility of natural selection.

It was interrupted by a phone call from the brand-ex girlfriend, wanting to hear my voice and dying to know how I'm doing. It was a little suspect, and taken with a brain of salt. She has a disingenuous fresh approach no matter what she left in her wake. Men are detachable appliances in her life. Unplug one, plug in another, use them as long as they make you glow. She's very bright.

I felt neutral at the moment and was not uncivil, but didn't have much to say. That was okay since she did, being fairly sober for a change. Sorry she hadn't called, but they were in the process of moving. They bought a house, which is to say, he did.

$100,000 or more, a few miles from Squaw Valley. I think I was supposed to congratulate her on her good fortune. Last year she never would have thought that she would be married and buying a house in the mountains, having been a loose end in the city for a while.

They had a three-week trip to Austria and visited his hometown in the Alps where he knew everyone. There were homemade houses which were well built, and an effusive hospitality. They were constantly invited in for beer and sausages and schnapps. She stumbled across a 150-proof version, or maybe the stumbling came after, and picked up a few German phrases.

I asked if she would like to live there since it sounded positive and got an immediate no. It is homogenous and limited, if not provincial, which is why her fiancé left. He is forty-two, she's twenty-four, and knows which side her bread is buttered when it comes to men, tending to the older ones. I wouldn't say it isn't sincere.

There was some mention of the wedding in October. A hundred guests, which surprised her - they're doing the whole routine. The bridesmaids will have specially made gowns. Our mutual friend in Alaska will be back by then and fitted into one of those "tight bodice" wonders. She is probably a bodice ripper. The ex wants me to be there and talked in a lighthearted vein as if I want to come within a hundred miles of it. I am beginning to wonder if some people are never more than waist-deep in a love affair. That makes it easier to step out of one and into another.

I was at a loss for words. She said she would understand if I didn't want to - and what have I been doing lately? It's a question which is hard to answer short of mailing

her the last hundred pages of the journal. I mentioned going to San Diego, and our lesbian friend from Nicaragua marching down the street in a G-string.

At some point, "not to sound mundane, but…" I mentioned the loan. It was not that much, $240. I wouldn't bother if she was struggling, but if she went to Europe and is buying a house, I thought she could afford it. It was supposed to be paid off in six months. It has been nine months and I haven't seen a dime. There was a pause, collecting her wits. She admitted that it slipped her mind (it's slippery up there), and had to revise the whole picture of their idyllic life. Things are tight financially, they need two incomes and she still doesn't have a job. I took it calmly and made a couple of suggestions. I wasn't pushing, but she suddenly had to get off the phone, saying she would call back soon. It was not a downer for the evening, more like a sobering moment, and I headed for the typewriter.

Tuesday, July 27, 1993

11 a.m. Phone call from V. in the office with her small and practical phone voice. She was leaving early, not feeling well. We'll have to postpone the concert.

11:30 a.m. I was reviewing the journal from last year when the phone rang. My old history professor in Los Angeles.[47] He sounded okay, and said he was coming here to visit his eight-month-old grandson for the first time. It will cost him, of course, and not just the airfare. His wife inflicts a psychological extortion if he visits old friends or even his daughters (who hate her).

[47] He likes to think that history and Los Angeles are antithetical. However, I took a photo of him sticking his tongue into the ear of Herodotus, who lived in Greece in the fifth century BC. The marble bust of the "father of history" is in a villa in Malibu which ancient Romans would have liked. (The Professor had a bust, but it was marijuana-related. The police caught him with a joint a few years ago. He was wearing a T-shirt which said, SCHOOL'S OUT.)

I mentioned the ruptured Attorney. He knows about the process, the appendix collecting waste and if it ruptures the poison gets into your system.

It isn't like he needs an excuse to get historical, but I said if Mexico broke from Spain in 1821 and California got away from Mexico in 1846, it would seem it wasn't a part of Mexico for very long. For that matter, what inherent right did Spain have to this territory? What is this exaggerated mythic claim to it that many Mexicans have? That hit a nerve, with him living in Santa Monica and driving to a public university on crowded freeways. He thinks there are immigration problems in a city inundated with people, including Latinos, and he's a lefty from way back. He mentioned the attitude he gets from some of the Latino students. He wants to say if Mexico is so great and this country isn't, wouldn't you rather be there? Why put yourself through the torture of a compromised identity while having to exist in the vicinity of non-Hispanics?

Maybe he was blowing off steam. As a professor working for the state there are things he can't talk about in class, being subject to a politically correct censorship. We also talked about black migration in this country, leaving the south and heading for northern cities. It was during World War II when many black people arrived in the Bay Area. It was part of an industrialization process, with people moving from the country to the city. What with the war, and lots of white men leaving jobs behind, there was more work in manufacturing and the shipyards.

I threw him a line, "Blacks built this country." How would he interpret that? Just the facts, sir. They can dispel a myth, like what happens in a courtroom. The facts are not aligned with any particular faction, and they're a good way to get your bearings. I want to

steer by them as one would the North Star, putting my own biases into perspective, and relieving us of false assumptions and the foolishness that often engenders.

He said it's grossly oversimplified and more pertinent to a certain historical period. The implication that blacks were the primary force that built this country from coast-to-coast is too silly for words. They were involved in the main export of the South – cotton – as an unpaid source of labor. That export brought a lot of money to the South which used it to buy things from the North and it helped the economy. In that sense, blacks were involved in the economic build-up of this country, but it was mostly east of the Mississippi. To say that blacks built this country is to leave out everyone else, the majority of the population. It gives the impression of effete white men sipping mint juleps while black men constructed everything from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Empire State Building, although few of them were architects and engineers (and they invented cars in order to get to work).[48] It's odd to think they built this country when they were slaves, but slavery ended in the South in 1865, and was abolished in the Northern states between 1777 and 1804. Consider how much has been invented and constructed since then.

Because of the Civil War (1861-65), much of the economic benefit of slavery was wiped out. The South was in ruins and the war was enormously expensive for the whole country (along with the loss of more than 620,000 lives). Meanwhile, the country was expanding westward and the railroads were an industrial job provider, generating steel for rails. I said we need more trains and all the jobs that would provide. It would give new meaning to the phrase "job training."

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[48] "Blacks built this country." "Right. That's why it bears a close resemblance to Nigeria."

Speaking of migration, I mentioned the Philip Roth book with its premise that the Jews in Israel should migrate to Eastern Europe where their ancestors had lived for centuries. Poland needs them, and it would be a moral victory returning to the scene of the crime. Things are not going well in Israel, and the Arabs would help pay for the move. The U.S. has paid enough through Zionist embezzlement. He liked the idea, and he's half-Jewish.

He asked how I'm doing. I said I like living in the Tenderloin, but the prostitutes are kind of strange. He thought it was animalistic. I said maybe so, but it's well-defined, you know what they're about. That echoed an earlier speculation about having the fascists in this country out in the open so we can keep an eye on them. It's like a rattlesnake, you want to know where it is. It would cut through the illusion that a do-good hazy liberalism is what this country is about.

He asked if I was going back to the old place after the damage from the fire was repaired. I said I didn't want to. He mentioned the view on the roof, and wanting to sit there in a chair. How could I abandon that? I told him my suspicion of views, how they function as a vacant diversion with diminishing returns. Man can't live on views alone. They drain you, like a pretty nurse who distracts you from the hypodermic which is taking your blood.

I think he hit a nerve. In the Tenderloin my mind is bouncing off the walls, but usually to good effect. You need that rebound of returning angles like an existential sonar. Otherwise, it's like you're playing racket-ball in a room that's missing a wall. I mentioned the suicide rate in this town with people jumping into the view.

He said he has a weakness for expanded sight lines, and blamed it on Western civ. It's a Renaissance perspective, or maybe he wants to have a thousand-yard stare. I said he doesn't have much in the way of views down there. Then I remembered something I wrote about him when I was a student. We would hang out at his place near the beach and stay up half the night drinking, smoking, and talking. It was a satirical piece about pedantry and academics, and it referred to him staring out to sea through an empty wine bottle (held up like a telescope). He thought that was a devastating image and vowed revenge.[49]

There was a student in his office so we got off the phone.[50] I thought about what he's been through - the operations, the adult-onset diabetes (he is insulin-dependent), a cocaine habit in the mid-1980's, a mad-dog wife, and yet he's fifty-eight with his faculties intact.

I stood there for a minute staring out the window. The random mysteries of the Tenderloin were out in force. A prostitute was talking to a motorcycle cop while a water truck sprayed water into an alley, washing away the urine.

Halfway down the block something caught my attention. A tree about ten feet high was shaking. A black man climbed down, bending a large leafy limb, and broke it off. It lay on the sidewalk, leaving the tree with a gaping hole. I was trying to figure out what he was doing. No one walking by seemed to question it. I caught a glimpse of a

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[49] His own self-image is not much better. It was embodied in a wind-up toy he kept in his apartment: a worn-out rabbit pulling a large carrot.

[50] We were talking about the phenomenon of factuality. A man is nailed to wooden perpendiculars by pointed iron facts, but he knows where he stands. He thinks about the history of nail production and the symmetry of the human body, right angles, gravity, blood loss and the ironies of the legal system, the dynamics of an occupying army, the pros and cons of martyrdom, and the lack of good reporters when you need them. They would probably get it wrong and bend the facts and blame the Jews instead of the Italians.

bicycle wheel and frame he was struggling with. Eventually he had it upright, mounted it awkwardly and rode off on the sidewalk. It seemed to be an effort, like it was in low gear and he didn't know much about gears and was trying to hold onto a small radio. It was a clumsy getaway while riding on the sidewalk and he disappeared around the corner.

It was in front of an auto repair shop and I wondered if he stole it. Are there people who think that bicycles grow on trees? Not that they're dumb, they're just reluctant to give the white man any credit for improving their lives with useful inventions.

Meanwhile, I was typing in the afternoon. I glanced out one of the windows where a tree was moving. It filled a couple of windows with a profusion of photosynthesis and little white flowers. There was a man in the tree and he was cutting off branches. He had a support belt and was removing the top of the tree. It took some effort.

I was on the street in a minute. An older man with a pickup truck motioned me back, saying I should watch for falling branches, which is what I came to talk to him about. I was trying to be civil. He explained that the owner thought the tree should be trimmed back from the building and away from any fire escapes. He also thought it was too high. The person I was talking to was just doing his job. I had a few questions and comments, pointing out that there were no fire escapes in the vicinity, the branches had a couple of feet before they touched the wall, and even if they brushed against it lightly, so what. There are trees up the street which are entwined in the fire escapes. And what does "too high" have to do with anything? That's like saying there's too much life in something or it's too nice for this neighborhood, better cut it down. How was it his tree to

control in the first place if it's on a public sidewalk? Had a tenant complained, feeling threatened by the little white flowers?

I didn't go into all of that, and finally said something intelligent like, "Fuck the owner." I walked away. Then I walked back and asked if I could have one of those branches on the ground. He said, "Sure." I took the largest one, the top section. It was nine feet long, a massive array of leaves and branches. I carried it into the building, up a couple of flights of stairs (it wouldn't fit in the elevator) and stuck it in the kitchen with some difficulty since it didn't fit there either.

I found a pitcher, filled it with water (half a gallon), lifted the "tree" and put it in (later the pitcher was nearly empty). Not sure what this was going to accomplish or how long it would live. A lot of light comes through that window in the morning with an eastern exposure. I could still reach the amplifier and the radio, but not one end of the kitchen table. Guess who's coming to dinner: a dying tree.

I was pacing. There was still a man in the tree outside the window. He was going at the branches with his cutter blade. I was pissed off and mystified. It made no sense. The presumption of the owner – the white man strikes again. Too high? What does he think, it might fall down and bury a hooker in leaves? I'm on the third floor and it reaches or used to reach the fourth floor. It's a vertical tree, not spreading out so much. Is he someone who prefers low ceilings in a church and a denuded one at that?

I took a shower and put on some other clothes, having to avoid the window, and left. I didn't want to watch it. I wondered why it rubbed me the wrong way. I don't even know what kind it is, except that it's a glittering handsome specimen. Why does cutting

off the branches affect me like this? It hit a nerve which goes back to how I was brought up. A Protestant notion that less is more, a constant cutting back.

Maybe I prefer the leafy to beliefs. The old tree looked fine, and amputating half the branches was not an improvement. It blocked the view of the street in that part of the room. When I returned later from work I was dismayed, seeing how much had been removed. Bare limbs and sky where there used to be continual leaves in motion. It was a swaying semi-translucent shield for what was out there. It's kind of tenuous how I live, and losing those branches was depressing.

I don't like the thought of old growth forests being cut down, the destruction of a tree that has been there for centuries. Here comes a knee-jerk mercenary who doesn't care about the history of the tree or people in the future. In an hour or two those centuries of growth have bitten the dust. The man is standing on a stump like a lord of the rings.

There's not much in this country which is very old (except for fossils and a few Congressmen). There are many trees which are older than the country. I used to climb trees when I was a kid, and broke my arm when I was ten - I fell out of an oak tree in the San Joaquin Valley. If I was a better "tree hugger" I might not have fallen.[51] It's a curious phrase which conservatives use for putting down environmentalists. Maybe they would rather suck an exhaust pipe, and before long it is springtime in heaven with a choir of angels singing a commercial about eternal life.

I waited for the bus. There were two black women and the haggard white woman I have seen before – so ugly it hurts, an addict who I see now and then panhandling in the financial district. Sometimes they sleep in the bushes on the other side of the vacant lot

[51] I showed up on the first day of the fourth grade with my arm in a cast, having just moved to California from Manhattan.

with their cardboard and their crack-pipes (if that's what the flame is for). They were taking the bus downtown.

In the office with a vague miasma in the air. The sky was overcast and claustrophobic and I wasn't sitting in a church with V. and listening to a concert. I was on the phone with the Attorney in intensive care. Among other things he left up in the air, he is nearly two weeks behind on my paycheck, with the next one coming up.

Not much work, barely two hours. There were off-the-wall around-the-world concerns. A client busted for driving under the influence was completing his program in Harare, Zimbabwe. He called and said his father is ill, he has to go to Greece. Could he interrupt the program? I couldn't reach him with a return fax. It isn't easy getting through to Zimbabwe.

I called another client and spoke with his mother. He is suing the County of Los Angeles for having slipped in the men's room of a county fair. There were interrogatories he needed to answer. A request for production of documents was left unfinished. The disarray of the Attorney's office is offensive (not just aesthetically) when you consider where it leaves the client half the time. He even lost some documents related to the case.

Another woman called, a workers' comp case. She wants to change attorneys. She can't stand it anymore and said he's unreliable, while expressing some concern for his being in the hospital. She was worried about the operation with him being so big. I said they probably couldn't find his appendix.

6 p.m. Walked home, taking a long route to Mission Street, looking for a shoulder bag. My brown leather bag is worn and torn.

7:30 p.m. Arriving home I called the owner of the building. I wanted to hear what he had to say about the tree, and warn him about the trees in Golden Gate Park which are tall and have an obscene profusion of life-giving leaves. He'd better have them cut down to size. No answer.

Read the paper. Yesterday a cloud of sulfuric acid was blowing eastward at 9:45 a.m. in Richmond (less than twenty miles from here). There was a spill at the General Chemical plant (there's a generic name)[52] "… forcing more than 3,200 people to seek medical treatment and tens of thousands more to stay in their homes and alter their commutes." "The cloud corkscrewed at least 1000 feet into the air and extends about 4 miles wide…."

The situation is more twisted than that. Myth and science, paranoia, opportunism and the law converge in a massive pile-up. Here comes a white cloud over a predominantly black neighborhood. "Many who caught a whiff of the white acid cloud complained of vomiting, light-headedness and irritation of the eyes, nose, throat, and upper respiratory tract." Not a good time, but apparently that's the extent of it. Some are over-reacting. Imagine hundreds of people, thousands in fact (four hundred in one emergency room alone), who have varying degrees of trauma. The question is how much of it is warranted. The hospital gives the benefit of the doubt to anyone with symptoms, but the circumstances are open to abuse. The acid cloud was wrong, but not very strong. The doctors know most of the symptoms are exaggerated with a lawsuit in mind. "One doctor, surveying a crowded emergency room, said, "I think it's a profound over-reaction. I'm sure there are some burning eyes, but that's unreal."

[52] Reminds me of a band, Chemical Straitjacket.

There is evidence that the cloud was on the level of tear gas (someone mentioned Mace), but people have a right to be remunerated for having been traumatized. It is a form of mental cruelty, but much of this culture is a form of mental cruelty (and who do you sue for that?).

What got me was a remark from a black man who represents the other end of the spectrum from the doctor, saying "They're trying to kill us off, man." There is a conspiracy to eradicate the black population of this country. That's why the number of black people has been steadily increasing for centuries.[53]

Later in the evening B. called. Some women are not very private, at least when it comes to the men in their life. There is an immediate urge to share and discuss the secrets of those men. There was another letter from the man she jettisoned. He vowed his everlasting love. Apparently, he had planned to propose in a hot air balloon. She feels like a rat. "I'M SO BAD!" Her mother and sister in New York support the assessment. "Hi fart" - a message from her sister. Her mother said she will be an old maid. The aunt thinks she has "cold feet" (which would not be nice for anyone who sleeps with her).

After a while I sympathized with her, wondering what it's like for women when it's coming at them all the time – men with their overtures. It can confuse and complicate a woman's life, these invitations out of the blue. It's even worse if they are tempting. How distracting is it having to consider being supported for life? There is a question of

[53] There was an article in the *Smithsonian* with some inflated commentary. It was on "The glory that was [ancient] Nubia." Four hundred "followers and concubines" of a dead king "came willingly to be buried alive" in their best clothes. What could be more glorious than that? How does he know they were willing? I would have been reluctant, but then I'm under the influence of those dead white European males who believed in self-determination. They were reluctant to be buried alive, which is further proof that white men are alienated from the earth.

trying someone out to see what they're like and if you like them, if they reinvent you in a way which is opportune if not in tune with your own self-image. During this try-out the man might get the idea that you actually like him. She admitted she went along with it too long – nearly two years - with no intention of going all the way, by which time he was hearing wedding bells and she wasn't.

He continued to be kind while suffering in silence and it made her feel guilty. I should have taken that approach with the New Age spider woman from last year, or left her with an enigmatic silence. Her second letter was apologetic, but final nonetheless. I couldn't resist. She had given our connection a solid blow, followed with a weak one, and I blew it out of the water with a long reply, shooting from the hip.

I told B. she was being very civil, and didn't owe him any more than that. He had no claim on her, which didn't mean he wouldn't be stuck on her for years. Some guys carry a torch for a long time – meaning they're consistent and reliable, or inflexible and clueless. At any rate, they operate with a pathetic optimism[54] which some women find ridiculous, like a woman is going to change her mind about a chemistry that isn't working. It doesn't mean she won't string him along, in case she finds herself in her mid-forties with diminishing prospects.

B. was moaning and groaning, wondering where he got off planning all of this, projecting an entire future for the two of them without having consulted her about it. What if, when it comes to hot air balloons, she has a fear of heights and is prone to getting air-sick? What if wedding vows are hot air?

[54] I wonder if the need to believe that things are looking up has anything to do with the erectile function.

Wednesday, July 28, 1983

NOTES

B. told me about a playwriting class she is in. The instructor related a fantasy where he is onstage and doing a *pas de deux* with a mirror image of himself. There are angels in the audience. After a while I said, “Is he homosexual?” “Yes, how did you know?” I said something about homo kitsch, and she liked the term.

“cutting-edge puppetry”

I dropped into the corner store. On the counter, like someone left them behind, were a can of Old English 800 beer and a container of Band-Aids – for when you fall down after drinking the former.

A JURY OF THE CHOSEN

I was feeling like a Jew on jury duty.
It’s phonetic, maybe I should clarify it,
now and then the literary rarify it.
Living in a country which you think is duty-
free and suddenly a social consciousness.
The law is calling, you’re reporting to a court,
it’s secular, unchristian, with your hair a mess.
An intellectual jurisprudence, more or less

unsentimental in a showdown. Any courtroom
in a storm. Welcome to the *sturm und drang*,
and how much of our civilization was imported,
almost everything that happens is reported.
The accused, his mind is going for a song
and no original sin, so there is nothing wrong
with him. He’s innocent until the evidence
has been examined by the local residents.

A few dreams:

I was playing a bass guitar on stage. It was hooked up to a machine which looked like a large insect. There was a spider’s web between my instrument and the machine. There were tiny orange spiders on my arm. Then the dream zoomed in on a woman sitting on a wall in the distance. She wore a primitive mask. When she removed it there was another mask. She did this several times. Finally, her face came into view, but it was a blur.

I'm in a warehouse with a round pool of water. I'm standing on a high ledge and the pool is below me. I hold onto a bar and swing around the pool, then use my legs to push off from the wall and dive into the water. There is a good-looking woman nearby, the daughter of a famous writer or intellectual, and it's possible I'm doing this for her.

I'm in a house which is vacant. I'm waiting for the Chinese woman to return (my friend Ming) and I'm getting sleepy on the sofa. A couple of our friends are there (including my ex). When Ming walks in we have a warm embrace. She is a more evolved version of herself, alluring, womanly, and more sophisticated or mature. She whispers something in my ear.

An article on Zuni fetishes (stone carvings of animals). Some people "believe that the carvings embody the qualities of the animals they represent." "Black bear is imbued with reflectiveness and strength… eagle with the ability to see wholeness… badger with single-mindedness and control." Maybe if you're stoned.

Sounds like they're wallowing in the anthropomorphic fallacy, imparting human qualities to an animal or the inanimate, like "angry" weather, or "happy" flowers. A bear made of stone reminds people to be strong or reflective, but you could also use a crystal or rocks. A few religions apply themselves in this direction. I don't see how a bear is reflective unless it is covered with mirrors. When it's on the edge of a lake and staring into the water is it meditating on the meaning of life, or waiting to rip the guts out of a trout? It might be strong, but so are other animals. It seems arbitrary associating these characteristics with certain animals or plants (or gods). Why is a badger more single-minded and in control than a spider? Why wouldn't the qualities associated with a bear apply to a mountain lion? How does an eagle see wholeness? By hovering at a high altitude? At which height it is less concerned with wholeness than the movements of a small rodent.

Even more bizarre is the assumption that a stone effigy would contain those qualities. If you believe that, I have some pet rocks, magic sand, and profound pebbles which I'm selling for $10 to $200, depending on the gullibility of the buyer.[55] The sand embodies the qualities of time and the indestructible, along with any other connotations one can think of while free-associating over a pot of stone soup, such as seeing the universe in a grain of sand. Not bad for ten bucks. The pet rocks are a little harder to explain, but so is metaphysics. The pebbles are profound because they're round and their associations are elusive (like the truth). They don't look like anything except pebbles.

[55] The woman collector said the Zunis were originally reluctant to sell their fetishes. "Now, however, since the carvings have caught on, it looks as though the Indians are one step ahead of the white people." What does that mean?

Have the qualities of strength, reflectiveness, and control become so elusive it requires an over-rated paperweight to hold them down or summon their presence? Maybe so, given the comments in the article, most of them by women. They fluctuate between the erroneous and the effete. A professional woman collector said the fetishes are "gaining in popularity because in our white world we don't have any magic… in the dull, non-magical world in which we live [speak for yourself] we are very nostalgic for that sort of thing." Maybe in the dull world she inhabits while buying and selling those qualities carved in stone. Reminds me of a line from Baudelaire, "I am as lovely as a dream in stone."[56] I would rather have a small Greek marble statue that embodies the qualities of marble and the feminine form. Her comments have a reverse cultural bias and presumption. If there is nothing magical about the white world (a monstrous generality), how come people from all over the world want a piece of it? Is it the magic videos which embody certain fetishes and qualities? I guess she never heard of the Butthole Surfers or the Catholic Church (they both put on a good show).

People like her are playing both sides of the fence, remaining comfortably secure in their logical way of life with a few carvings on the desk. I think being in the presence of those animals would be more effective than a stone doll. If these women fall any further under its influence they might have to live in a tent. Their group includes a communications counselor, a Sonoma County bio-feedback worker, and a computer systems manager (in Silicon Valley) who says the fetishes "keep her in touch with her intuition… which she believes helps her to manage her firm's 65 computer work-stations with greater efficiency." "I ask them for help" (the fetishes).[57] I suppose there is a psychological explanation for this when people are wound so tight by their occupations that staring at a stone can relax the grip of their routine, which allows the mind to shift gears and come up with another solution to something. So would a glass of wine, which is also imbued with certain qualities.[58] Some people drink strong alcohol in order to feel strong, and they commune with an ungodly quality.

Another woman said the stone fetishes connect people to nature, "… and people are screaming for that connection." Is it so hard to come by in Northern California? An aesthetic object has a calming effect, but how calm would they be if a bear or eagle were in the same room with them? What if they are calm because those animals are cold and lifeless in the form of a statue? When something dies it allows for human qualities like reflectiveness and control to assert themselves.

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[56] "Beauty", *Flowers of Evil* (1857)

[57] There was a woman who would channel Barbie. You send her five bucks and a question and she goes into a trance and presents your question to a Barbie doll. I'm not sure if that includes questions about erectile function or the stock market.

[58] The ancient Romans thought that precious stones had qualities. An amethyst, for example, can cure drunkenness. When you buy one and see how much it cost it has a sobering effect.

Someone mentioned how "the idea of a fetish recognizes that all things are part of a network of life" (which includes bacteria). Networking with bears is not easy, so some settle for a stone bear with a bone stare. "Even quantum physics is closer in many ways to those aboriginal ideas about life…." Maybe so, but no aborigines have sent a machine around the moon (a large stone which is imbued with reflectiveness and wholeness). It sounds like these women spend too much time in the office, although every desk is inhabited by quantum physics.

That brings me to the subject of the rocks in my apartment. Most of them are smooth and rounded granite which fits in your hand (with an average size of four inches across). They have a thin vein of quartz running through them. I found them at the cliffs. I bring one home every time I go to the beach. It is a physical reminder of how many times I've been to the beach when I look at the rocks around the place.

Other associations: they're a form of ballast with respect to "the unbearable lightness of being,"[59] especially for a writer who spends a lot of time with the intangibilities of weightless thought. They are imbued with solidity and connotations of being stoned. A white line of quartz in a grey mass is analogous to writing. And there is the observation provided by my ex-girlfriend that I have rocks in my head.

I stopped collecting rocks when I had too many, including a few on my desk. A rock of ages as a paperweight. Something found in nature is more profound than the manufactured or the bought. I shouldn't say that, I have had profound encounters with the radio and the television. What is soothing about a rock is that it doesn't mean anything. The rocks on my desk are holding down a pile of newspapers.

Speaking of hard and heavy fetishes, I have an old iron doorknocker in the form of a hand clutching a ball. I got it in the south of Spain. It holds a book open while I knock on the door of someone's mind.

Woke up in the morning and noticed there were ants in my shoes.

I ran out of ribbon last night. This happens with alarming frequency. I went out in the morning and the first thing I saw was a prostitute alighting from a pickup truck at 10 in the morning with her hair disheveled. I don't know if she was out all night or

[59] Milan Kundera (1984)

what. I went into the liquor store to get a paper and she was at the counter, spreading her ill-gotten gains on the counter. I think it was $50, so it wasn't all night.

In the Vietnamese tobacco shop a white person was talking about the holy spirit. I walked out and heard an old woman on the sidewalk saying there used to be discipline, but "Now there isn't any." On the corner was a whore with beat-up legs.

I dropped into the foreign language store with German, French, and Italian books and magazines. I was having déjà vu and cultural disorientation, though it felt like an oasis - all the more so with a couple of women speaking French. Judging by the magazine covers, much of Europe is clothing-optional.

On a magazine rack the other day there was a German magazine with a report on underground nightclubs in post-Soviet Moscow. One club operated with a Russian overkill which came from an exaggerated view of clubs in the West. There were naked heavy-metal go-go girls. In the mid-1970's I was in Ostend, Belgium and watched a program on the BBC about clubs in San Francisco. It looked like a decadent future had arrived. It hadn't though, and things were relatively normal when I got back. You see how things are magnified from a distance through the narrow and intensifying focus of television. Forced into the tunnel vision of the TV news a program is accelerated by the false urgency of commercials.

I remember a French girl who came here thinking California is an ongoing party and her letdown was considerable, having enrolled in a boring college in a small town.

Often what we know of another culture is the exception, not the rule, like the writings of an author who transcended his surroundings. People who go to France having

read the poems of Rimbaud are caught off-guard by the hardcore presence of the bourgeoisie.

Reminds me of a line from the photo exhibit about black Africans who find the Afrocentric pretensions in this country laughable. People in the U.S. often have a warped impression of sub-Saharan Africa, whether they are black or white. Some idealize it in a way that hardly exists. I read how churches in West Africa tend to be quiet and subdued, while in black churches here the congregation is often going wild. Some black Americans are caricatures of what they think blackness is about, and sometimes those are self-defeating poses. The worst is the assumption that black means you don't have to know how to read, like books are a white thing. I was in a café in Paris near the Sorbonne when I met a French-speaking black man from a country in central Africa. He attended the university and planned to return to his country which needed all the help it could get. One way of helping was for him to be educated. We need a Peace Corps in reverse, where people like him come to the U.S. and teach in the schools. It might change a few minds if he said, "The way I measure self-esteem is how well you did your homework."

Where was I? In the foreign language store. I walked out and had a minor culture shock. It wasn't 1976 in Paris, it was 1993 in a bad neighborhood in California.

Went to work in the afternoon. Not much to do, dealing with a few loose ends and talking to the Attorney in the hospital. He was less coherent than he usually is, which is saying something. We had to postpone some hearings.

V. handed me some papers with a shrug which the older woman gave her. An official-looking document from the Superior Court of California (Person Division).

PETITION TO DESTROY WORTHLESS PERSON

1. I am the legal representative of this person.

2. The following person is worthless:

Name Reason

I ask leave to destroy this person and file an affidavit of destruction with the clerk.

_____

Petitioner

Signed and sworn to before me:

Notary public.

ORDER TO DESTROY WORTHLESS PERSON

The other document was a letter from the Trojan Condom Company. It let a man know that when it came to modeling their condoms he wasn't sufficiently endowed. The older woman thought this was amusing, but V. wasn't interested. Half the time she doesn't get this woman's jokes, and rarely utters a risqué remark. The prurient angle doesn't make sense to her. The reality of her body and that of a man's is taken for granted.

The older woman is from Texas, in her fifties, and seems to gravitate between dirty jokes and New Age sentiments, delivered in a cloying kitchen voice. There was an attorney in the office, about forty, with a woman in her mid-twenties. The older woman said men go out with younger women because it makes them feel younger, but who will take care of them when they're old and sick? I doubt if this one will stick around until he's old and sick. It is just as likely that she makes him feel old.

6 p.m. Went home.

Read the paper about the acid cloud the other day in Richmond. I thought I was being cynical about thousands of people with phony symptoms showing up in the emergency rooms. A potential lawsuit had clouded their minds. There were 3200 of them. Now I find it was 8000, and the next day it was revised to 10,000. A few days later it was over 20,000 people "… who had been exposed to the toxic cloud." The next line: "Six were admitted for treatment." What does that suggest? Either the hospital turned away 8000 people and only admitted six, or most of them were in little or no need of medical care unless it would verify the legal claims they wanted to make. There was some mention of it being illegal and unethical to have lawyers hanging around the emergency room, but they were doing just that. The real toxic cloud was the rumor that some money could be made from a victim hustle.

Workout on a wooden instrument, beginning slow and ending an hour later in another dimension with a flourish and a blue flight flashing down the street. So festive, the arrests around here.

I was reading old manuscripts when the phone rang next to my head. My sister Linda (the business woman) is driving to Los Angeles tomorrow. We talked about this and that, including my four-year-old nephew who saw her trying on earrings. He kept saying, "You want to be kissed?" She wondered where he gets this stuff. During the conversation I glanced out the window and noticed six police cars had pulled up near the corner store. A white suspect was handcuffed. They handled it so quietly. At other times I hear what sounds like a loud argument and something breaking, but it's just a couple of black guys talking and discarding their empties in the street.

2:30 a.m. Turn off the lights, except for a standing lamp with a silk scarf on it. I lay on the mattress by the window. No more lying on a mattress in the hall. I could see an eerie high-rise in the distance. There were flashbulbs going off on the top floor, a monolithic phallic symbol I suppose. Lying in the dark I felt like I was floating thirty feet above the street and could hear everything. It gives new meaning to the phrase, "collective unconscious."

I was not exactly in the dark - there were deflected headlights moving across the ceiling and a dim glow from the riot lights outside. We live in a land of preventative illumination. It's a rare night when there isn't someone howling, something breaking, the sound of burning rubber, sirens, or the sharp heels of a woman on cement. Her feet are up in the air so often that she compensates by slamming them on the ground.

Thursday, July 29, 1993

NOTES

> At forty-one I live alone in the Tenderloin with the temerity to think I'm hitting my stride.
>
> It used to be commies, now it's homosexuals under every bed. Maybe people should sleep on the floor and they won't worry anymore.
>
> Synthetic equality.
>
> A book by Zhang Xianliang: *Half of Man is Woman*.
>
> A couple of years ago, when I was still with the ex, I was talking with a black security guard who works in the building. He is in his twenties, a nice guy, and told me about a woman with the finest ass he'd seen in a while. It turned out that was the ex, who dropped by the office wearing tight pants. He lives in the Tenderloin and carries a gun for protection.
>
> An article about a man from Tokyo. He is making a documentary about death and needed some footage of dead bodies. He had to go to countries like Iraq, Somalia,

and Iran for the footage. The problem is that Japanese get upset if they see dead bodies which are Japanese. Others are okay.

The tree in the kitchen gives off an earthy-humid atmosphere. That is not surprising, considering how much water it guzzles. I fill up a half-gallon pitcher before I go to work. When I return a few hours later it's empty.

An article in the *Spectator* on inherited intelligence. We inherit a wind of epistemological confusion.

Article in the *Chronicle* on the front page. The attorney who runs our office is handling a case for the romance novelist, Danielle Steele. She is suing over an unauthorized biography which the writer has not finished writing. Apparently she has an unsavory past. A couple of ex-husbands were ex-cons, with one of them a drug dealer. Another was moving her furniture when they met.[60] If she comes to the office I should offer to get her a chair. I don't work for that attorney, so it won't happen. I would like to ask her some literary questions though. Is it true that with respect to the literary market, the bad drives out the good? How much in her books is false testimony or inadmissible hearsay?

An article on a white man about to be executed in San Quentin. He committed some brutal murders and admitted it. What got me was the testimony, including from his sister, that his parents were Christian fundamentalists with all the love and empathy of a corpse. He grew up in a sadistic atmosphere. His sister said their mother "…frightened and humiliated us at seemingly every opportunity… One of the most familiar phrases in our house was, 'You may be laughing now, but you're going to be crying soon'." The condemned man in San Quentin was told as a kid that he was unwanted. He was strapped to a table and beaten.

I thought about the religious angle. Why are some people enlightened and compassionate in how they comprehend religion, while others see it as an excuse for gloom and doom? They are focused on the coldness of a dead prophet. Your life should be funereal and spit upon because it isn't heaven. You don't want to confuse the two, so you make sure your life on earth (and the lives of others) are approximately hellish.

What got me was the typical denial by the inmate's parents who, "in court records denied abusing their son and said government counseling services failed him."

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[60] When a woman says, "I like how you move my furniture," it could mean a few things. There was a woman who lived across the hall from me before the fire, the girl next door. She knocked on my door one night and asked if I would move her refrigerator. We were friendly at that point, a highly-educated slender woman in her thirties. I didn't mind moving her refrigerator, but she wore pajamas with a loose top and whenever she leaned over her lovely breasts were in plain view. There may have been more to moving her furniture than I realized.

> Let that sink in for a moment. A kid with multiple suicide attempts, but it was counseling, the government in fact, which let him down and not his parents.

In the morning I called the office, talking to V.

"I just woke up."
"So? What do you want me to do about it?"
"Want to have lunch?"
"I brought my lunch. Okay."

12:30 p.m. In the office there were compliments for how I was put together, which means I don't look good on other days. It must have been an accident. White shirt, silk tie, tweed sport coat.

We walked to the Hunan place near North Beach. I think she leads a charmed life and I feel it when I'm with her. I could almost believe the notion that a woman's presence is enough. Our connection is ephemeral and careful since she is engaged and I'm too old for her to bother with.[61] And yet, for all of that, working in the same office, an original vibe is generated between us. It's like a plant turning to the light, no matter what the circumstances are.

Not to get too precious about it, but there is a subtle sustenance in this relationship. Some plants get by on very little light and water. More and more these days she walks close to me. Our circumstances have a built-in 19th century restraint. It is the sort of thing that Kierkegaard was operating with in *Diary of a Seducer*. It's about a connoisseur of every nuance in the slow unfolding of a woman's affection. The subtle is subversive in the brutal context of modernity.

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[61] Also too white. She wants her kids to look like her.

A dish of smoked ham and bamboo strips over rice, hot and spicy, with tea. At some point she wanted to know if I pray at night. I mean, precious isn't the word. She said she believes in praying and giving thanks for everything. I wonder if I'm in her prayers. I started out with, "Now I lay me down to sleep… if I should die before I wake…." She let me know that was for children. She is patient and impatient with me. We continued on this quasi-religious theme for a while, with her unclear on the concept of Protestants (my father is a leftwing minister).

"Do they go to confession?"
"No. Do you think I should?"
"You would be there a long time."
"And you?"
"I go to confession. Everyone has sins."

We talked about original sin, which was downright refreshing. Whether or not you like the side-effects of that belief, it has a certain verisimilitude compared with the assumption that there's nothing wrong with me, I am a product of the environment, I'm innocent, you'll never prove it, he shot himself and put the gun in my hand….

The realism of this woman, enhanced with Elixer by Clinique, admitting she has little thought crimes when she "covets" something. She said we can't help it, it's like wishing you had someone's Mercedes. What about someone else's husband? Very bad. Stealing someone's husband is one of the worst sins. Do those two young Filipina secretaries go to church? No. She hardly gives them the time of day.

Earlier, when leaving the office we went through the underground garage, dropping off something where her father works. He asked about the Attorney. "Is he dead yet?" I wondered if that's where she got her morbid sense of humor. She is delicate and

demure, and has weathered the most horrifying films, most of which I wouldn't go near. "So what, movies aren't real."

She asked if I thought she looked like her father (she thought she did). I said she is prettier. Her mother is half Chinese, with a Spanish surname. Her English has a slight accent. I want to say an accent on the positive, although she likes to remind me how old I am. She often feels old herself and says as much. Pushing twenty-six with aches and pains in her back and shoulders, often squirming in her chair and stretching.

V. shows her liking for a man with a humorous resistance, being coy and condescending, turning her back as it were, but sitting in close proximity. When I think of her it makes me smile, recalling an unguarded remark.

Walking back to work I talked about loaning her *The Butcher's Wife*. She was interested when I said it's about a woman who cuts up her husband. She loves a gory story.

Later in the office I said, "Do you rely on your good looks?" "No." It was a line from her horoscope (Libra) which I showed to her. She read it slowly, then said,

"It's not real."
"Yes it is."
"No it isn't."

She will act like she's busy, flipping through papers in a file with a rubber thing on her finger, but fully capable of sitting there (with her attorney gone) and talking. We have an odd rapport. I am a little in love with her, but it is left in an amorphous or unrealized state, and is ephemeral as perfume.

I can't assume how she feels. Giving me a cold hot dog with a bite out of it, the remains of her lunch the other day, is not exactly a sign of love. One would probably do

as much for a dog, but she continues our conversations, rendezvous, and lunches while gravitating to a closer state. She mentioned some guy who wanted to get romantic about six years ago, but said she didn't feel anything inside. I said, "No sparkle in your eye." "Right." He still calls her, wanting to know when she's going to break up with her fiancé. Further evidence that men don't get it, especially with a woman of a certain caliber. They lock into a current in her direction, though it is refused, like they home in on the worth of her.

Friday, July 30, 1993

Typing in the morning over the noise outside.

4 p.m. I arrived in the office, but there was not much going on. There was a phone call with the Attorney in the hospital.

Talking with V., her perfume floating in my direction. Now and then I throw a line at her to see how she responds with her automatic skepticism. I referred to a tabloid on a news rack – did she hear about the woman who had fifteen babies at once? "No, for real?" The subject is close to her heart. We were talking once about giving birth by various methods. She motioned with her hands and arms, spreading her knees a little, like something was coming out that way.

She recalled a branch of her family in the Philippines. Her grandmother's sister had thirteen kids (not all at once), and they were relatively poor.

5 p.m. I walked her to the underground station. She likes to take the lead when we're walking. "Come on… this way… hurry up."

Then I headed for the pool. One mile in the water. I think I can dispense with the notion that I'm anything but an average swimmer. I read in the paper about a man (forty-five) who routinely swims from Alcatraz to the shore in 48 minutes (1.2 miles), but slowed down for his dog. He can do 1½ miles in 32 minutes, and won the triathlon several times. It's good to know where I stand, or rather where I sink or swim.

It's clear that people are not created equal. Some are capable of doing things on a further plane than the one you inhabit. It is taken for granted that any women in the marathon will finish ten minutes or more after the first man.

You might suppose the same disparities occur with our brains. I am constantly up against the limits of my own intelligence when I'm writing. A hypnotic collusion occurs when you accept your level of awareness and cognition as the norm. It's like wearing blinders you don't even know are there, though you wonder why your life isn't operating on a more productive level.[62]

When I read old material there is evidence that my thought was operating at a lower level years ago. I'm leaving a disturbing paper trail in that respect. I had a hit and run coherency at twenty, and the mental laissez-faire of someone who was lazy.

Where was I? Walking home after swimming.

I stopped off at the hi-tech hamburger joint on Polk Street. After a while there was a misanthropic heat-wave coming over me. It wasn't the food or the people. I was glancing and then staring at a video on the wall. It was a surgically-enhanced Janet Jackson, a lip-synch poseur whose narcissism is a big production. She did a killer pussycat routine with a mechanical simulation. What if the culture is kind of phony, that

[62] "What you don't know can't hurt you." Tell that to the victims of the Black Death.

being the context which black people find themselves in and they have no choice but to follow suit? Or is it something more customary and endemic, on the level of an epidemic, where the posing and the imitation are in your blood? A refrain like "I'm for real" is emphasized because the opposite is often the case.

Her movie has been getting panned from *The New Yorker* to the *SF Weekly* - *Poetic Justice* by John Singleton (who's a good director). Talk about a fake-out on the silver screen. Why did the director fall for it? Did having a famous name bring the film more funding and attention? His first film was *Boyz n the Hood*, which was well done. This one is not about gangs. The film is "Feigning social concern and boasting a 'don't-bully-me' attitude… from a woman's perspective, no less." "The movie postures as a hip chronicle of urban experience." The director is being true to the context, but the context is kind of flimsy. Any substance is grounded in the vulgar, and the verisimilitude is derived by coming down hard on meaningful words like shit or fuck. "[T]ake away the menace and the inflammation and there isn't much left." The lovers communicate with all the sensitivity of people who are writers:

> "Fuck you."
> "Fuck you bitch."

On the soundtrack in the background is "N_____ don't give a fuck." Imagine if this film was written and directed by a white man. There were comments pointing out how conventional and Hollywood it is. Using Janet Jackson to represent a black poet is off the mark. Using the poems of Maya Angelou puts the sentimental thoughts of a much older woman into the mouth of an alleged poetess in her twenties. I can think of several other black women poets whose lines would have come across with more relevance and impact. Who was advising the director? There was a "gust of giggling in the theater when

Justice put on her best speaking voice… 'I'm a woman. Phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, that's me'."[63]

A good point was made by the reviewer for *The New Yorker*, Anthony Lane. Not only is there "nothing between the coarse and the highfalutin'," which sounds familiar, but there is an attitude which "makes poetry sound like drink, or crack – something to be sold for the quenching of an immediate need." The movie "proceeds on the dreary principle that the only possible cause of poetry is self-expression – the confessing of inward torment and the itch for better times." Welcome to the modern world of pseudo-poetics and inflated subjectivities. Some people think the personal is political, which doesn't do a lot for organizing in my opinion. Some people think the personal is poetic, which has similar diminishing returns. It's like throwing up with line breaks.

How's this for social realism: "I ain't seen so many black folks in one spot that there's no fighting." Or, "A man ain't nothing but a tool; you got to know when to take him out of the box."[64] This is spoken by a woman who has confidence without depth, as he puts it, while the poet has "depth without confidence." The former is practically the coin of the realm. An automatic shallow confidence is like a credit card – it's two dimensional and don't leave home without it. There is someone making self-assured pronouncements with no more credibility than a politician. Who cares, it's all an act.

Where was I? Trying to go home, a process which is impeded, not to say postponed, by endless editorials coming out of my fingers.

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[63] I used to go to Minnie's Can-Do Club in the Fillmore in 1973, reading poems at the open mic (run by the Beat poet ruth weiss). Minnie was a black woman and very nice to us. There was a lot of anticipation when her niece from a college on the East Coast was coming to give a reading. The usual crowd was there. She had a polished and attractive presence, but we nearly fell out of our chairs in the anticlimax, with her reciting poems like this (in its entirety): "Love… is."

[64] There is an accusation that men objectify women, but the reverse is so common you wonder why it isn't mentioned more often. Maybe it's too obvious, like saying women breathe air.

Typing in the evening. Half a bottle of wine.

Saturday, July 31, 1993

It's been dreary for the last week, but now there is a massive heat-wave in progress. I walked to Mission Street in the afternoon, took a bus to 18th, got out and walked to the flat near Dolores Park. I passed a steaming collision, a rear-ender. They couldn't separate the two vehicles.

I haven't been to the flat in over a year. My friend in Paris used to live there, and Wolfgang has been there for a few years. He is leaving for law school in New York. His rooms were a mess with much of his stuff sold or packed away. He looked thin in shorts, maybe 6'1", with shorter hair (I think he dyes it black). He said it was time for a move. He has been in the Mission or thereabouts for six years and thought he should make use of his mental faculties while he still has some.

I looked at a brochure from the law school, Fordham, near Lincoln Center. He plans on getting out in three years, maybe transferring to Columbia or NYU, while owing $50,000 or $60,000 - and that's with his divorced parents helping him out with money to live on. While we were talking a heavy old wooden desk bounced and floated out the door with some guys moving it.

I thought he had changed a bit. I get so caught up in the writing, not to mention my own life, I forget that other people are going through the aging process, especially if I don't see them for a while. It leaves me with a fixed and non-evolving image of someone based on the last time I saw them. With those I see on a regular basis the changes are too subtle to notice.

In *Remembrance of Things Past,* Proust writes about a man who abandoned high society. He returned years later and was surprised to see what time had done to people who were powerful and proud. He may have thought they were immortal, but a mortalizing wave was passing through them over the years. I don't know if writers are more sensitive to this, but maybe it catches them by surprise if they are working on a book for a long time. When it's done, they look around and find society has not been holding still. It's been in motion, water under the bridge, in constant flux, with signs of some erosion.

I have only seen Wolfgang a couple of times in the last two or three years. The late twenties are watershed years and some don't survive the passage. The momentum of the younger years is running aground or running out of breath, if not excuses. A number of rock musicians never made it past twenty-seven. There are covert alterations in one's character. I went through a transition around that time (1980) when I fell into a routine of regular employment, however sketchy and part-time, with six-month or year-long interruptions. I was twenty-eight and settled down in the sense of renting an apartment (with Simone) that I still inhabit, or would if I hadn't been evicted by the fire.

He used to have long hair, a slattern of a girlfriend,[65] and was dealing on the side. He was a culture vulture in the sense of being preoccupied with the morbid. Now he is a first-year law student looking clean-cut and wearing shorts. I mentioned some of our cases in the office. Speaking of historical warps, I met him when he was twelve and his parents were divorced. Somehow the father got custody of the two sons (he had a bigger television).

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[65] A Jewish woman who was domineering. He was supposed to wait for her while she went off to Mexico with another woman. She wanted to have a lesbian experience in the tropics, while a man waited in the background like a safety net.

Wolfgang was preoccupied with moving, so I talked for a while with his roommate. He is from New York City, went to Columbia, and has long black hair. Talking fast about his interests and concerns, from history to working as a counselor for abused kids. There was a bong on the table. We were in a room in back overlooking the garden, and both of us ignored the fact that his right hand is missing.

I went out back to look at the garden. I spent a lot of time there on regular visits when my French friends lived here. A purple bougainvillea was devouring the wooden stairs. The cactus plants were still there, but a tree was missing.

I left with Wolfgang, walking a few blocks. There was a sign on a garage: VISUALIZE BEING TOWED. We wondered if different cities have their own worldviews and conceits. I was surprised to hear he hasn't been to New York City very often. I would move there tomorrow if I could. So now what? I thought I would be moving stuff to his mother's place, but she couldn't get a truck, and Wolfgang was busy. I wasn't interested in his rug, and brought a towel in case there was time for the beach. I took a bus to 25th and walked about half a mile to the cliffs.

I continued on the beach through an area which is not clothing optional and you see more families. There was an ordinary-looking black man who was naked and walking along the edge of the water, oblivious to the fact that no one in the vicinity was nude. I ended up on the edge of the clothing optional area. It was not as crowded, with people sitting apart on the sand and some already leaving. It was hot out, over 90, with no wind. The ocean seemed to be subdued by the heat, like there was oil on it, the water smooth as a lake. Close to the water was a woman who was naked with a nearly shaved head, short and slender. She might have been Filipina, with a small behind and full breasts, one of

them with a ring through the end of it. Dark pubic hair, but faintly there, as if it was growing back. She was with a little girl and a woman who was fully dressed.

Not far from them were two naked women. One white and creamy with a dark bush. The other with brown skin and black hair in a long braid down her back. She was putting lotion on her breasts which were small and jutting out, bouncing back into position when her hand passed over them.

There were a number of topless women here and there. One of them leaned back on her hands like she was posing for a calendar. I went down to the water in a swimsuit to cool off. Half the people there were in swimsuits and the water was cold. I ran up the beach towards the rocks and passed a couple of women who were getting attention and probably didn't mind. Pale and naked with nice figures. One had short black hair and carried an exotic 19th century-looking parasol. She had a tattoo of four intricate directions around her navel with a Romanesque design. She turned around as I went by, a woman standing her ground with a dark bush glittering in the light. The other woman wore a flowered hat and nothing else.

At the far end of the beach there was sand in the ravine instead of water. There was a young woman in loose shorts with small breasts (she had no shirt on). Her and her friend had met a couple of guys and were exchanging names.[66] I ran back and went for a swim, diving into a wave. Then another wave. Then another wave. Diving through a falling wall of water and coming out the other side. It was surprisingly cold. I swam out a

[66] I came here in the late 1980's with a neighbor woman who liked to sunbathe nude. She fell asleep on the towel and I noticed a young woman about ten feet away – a slender blonde. She was reading *Soul On Ice* (by the Minister of Information for the Black Panther Party) and the only thing she wore were red sunglasses. We started talking with our voices floating over sand. I ended up giving her my phone number and she called the next day. She was in her last year of high school. We were in love for several years before she turned into the ex.

ways with no one there and it made me numb. When I returned to shore I couldn't tear myself away, so I went back in for a while.

It was nearly six when I left – two hours is enough. I am usually here with someone, and had a few regrets about remaining distant on the beach. There isn't a lot of interaction with people. It's a long beach and there are people in street clothes walking by. It's not like the beach in Marin with a secluded cove where the people are more friendly. Now and then there is a careful overture, a furtive attempt to meet someone. The naked woman with the shaved head and her clothed friend with a baby girl walked about twenty feet to a couple of black guys (one naked, the other in a swimsuit). They shook hands, exchanged names, and passed a small joint around. They talked for a while and said goodbye.

The two women nearby, with pale and brown skin, were visited by a couple of Asian guys in long pants and no shirts who got nowhere. One of the women had her back turned and they drifted away a few minutes later. Near the foot of a large sand dune with steps leading up to the road was a guy I've seen here before. Long hair, dark and tanned. He likes to walk around and talk to women while they're sitting on the sand. He stands there with his hand on his hip and his organ practically in their face. There was a half-naked woman with a mannish haircut who didn't seem to mind his company.

I never read at the beach. It would be like trying to read on acid. Now and then I try to read the people. With my pants rolled up a little, a white shirt, and barefoot, I walked away. I felt a certain relief. Being there was too diverting, leaving me distracted by the presence of so many women. I walked up to the road through the trees and continued all the way to California Street and caught a bus.

7:00 p.m. I walked into the apartment and the phone rang. It was B. “You’re finally home!” She had gone to Black Sand Beach in the Marin headlands, and said they would pick me up in an hour. They were going to Club 181.

9: p.m. I went out the door in brown slacks and a black shirt, and was not sure what to expect. I got into a white Cadillac with B. and a few others, all acquaintances from past parties. We drove to a renovated nightclub in the Tenderloin, a sleazy neighborhood with more derelicts. When we walked in there was a chandelier in the middle of a low-hanging black parachute over a bar in the form of an S. On a lower level was a dance floor and a small stage in the back with a jazz band which I hardly noticed.

It was one of those idyllic situations which you walk into as if it’s “Lights, camera, action!” You take it slowly, not sure what to expect as the evening unfolds. I walked to a small table and said hello to someone from B.’s entourage, a clean-cut guy in his mid-thirties. He has done a good deal of acid and sometimes it shows in his conversation (in B.’s opinion). He was in a good mood and wanted to buy me a drink. I didn’t object. I had a Bass on tap and was introduced to the woman he was with. He left for a while and I took his seat. The two of us got acquainted with no resistance at all.

This doesn’t happen very often, where I zoom in on someone and the circumstances are well-timed. The woman was curious and attentive. She’s from Poland and has been here for a year and loves it. Unfortunately, she has to go back in October to finish her degree (in economics) in Krakow, a university town. We shut everyone out for half an hour or more. I was vaguely aware that this was his date and I sort of stepped in, but maybe they just met. She was with another Polish woman who had come with a friend of his.

This woman had a more German-sounding name and black hair. Stunning dark eyes, very smooth pale skin, and the most mercurial mouth. It was easy to make her laugh and arouse her skepticism. She would give me the benefit of the doubt, but only up to a point. “I don’t believe…” No… you’re telling me a story.” “It’s a nice story, but….” I think that was in response to her question, “Where were you born?” I went off on a tangent involving Vandenberg Air Force Base down the coast. It is known for firing rockets which self-destruct in the atmosphere and make for beautiful sunsets. She looked at me, not sure if there was a language problem or what. Her English was not bad, but sometimes I had to define a word or be careful with the sentence construction. I told her I had been a government experiment. I was planted with a couple of nice people (my “parents”) while my father was in the Army.[67] I was born in an Army base (later taken over by the Air Force). For years the government monitored my mental progress, taking me out of class and running IQ tests on me. She didn’t believe any of it.

I got her side of things, and mentioned my friend from Prague and the Soviet occupation. She knew Prague, it’s a seven-hour drive from Krakow, and doesn’t like the Russians. The only thing they are good for, in her opinion, is vodka. There was some mention of how the Poles had actively resisted the Soviets, compared to the Czechs who had collaborated more. I asked about the big signs proclaiming the great love of the local people for the Soviets. Oh yes, she knew about those.

She was conversational, quick, and humorous, with a sense of history. Her being so alive made other people in the club seem two-dimensional. I wouldn’t say they were flat, as there were women who followed their cleavage into the club. The place was

[67] As an adolescent I had a different approach to aesthetics, and never understood how someone could have died for my sins, so we were clearly not related.

filling up and the atmosphere was changing. What I thought was a subdued jazz club was becoming a twenty-something pick-up joint with an increasingly annoying music.

My main concern with a woman is from the neck up. The rest will follow if she's in the mood. There were women arriving in their fuck-me outfits like they're on the prowl, but it leaves me incommunicado. I can hardly function on that level without a mental wavelength. The club was doing its best to make it hard to talk with the music getting louder and monotonous. I don't know what she looks like from the neck down. She wore a black outfit which might have been a short skirt, more concealing than revealing, and more alluring than the boob-job girls.[68]

It was a full moon in a hot club with some nudes on the wall. The dark red walls were partly covered with leather. Her escort for the evening drifted in and out of the conversation. He returned finally with some comments about our ears, which neither one of us got because, "You're talking so much." I went over to the bar for another drink and B. was there. She looked nice in a black spaghetti strap dress and glittering earrings.

"Are they real?"
"Sure, I wear 20,000 dollars worth of diamonds to a club."

It was getting crowded. Girls or women kept rubbing against my leg, which I assume was not intentional. A Chinese woman at the bar was throwing glances in my direction, but I wouldn't know where to begin. I thought of the Polish woman.

I forgot to mention Laverne, this being a party for her. She was turning thirty-three and used to be a model, thin and fine-boned with almost no figure, so of course she

[68] Mammary glands are not so good at holding up their end of the conversation. It disappears down the front of someone's dress, leaving you at a loss for words and underwhelmed**.** Her body is a consolation prize for there being no connection. Her mind is there, but it is non-historical, with more defenses and façade when you are face-to-face. I'm being hard on her. Some women make me hard, but they are hard to talk to when the act is so rehearsed.

wore a corset (black lace) with a black miniskirt. Bare shoulders with dangling earrings and a veil which was useful when she succumbed to a mood - much to B.'s concern who can't stand drama and emotional stuff, especially in a party situation. Her friends are constantly doing that sort of thing.

At some point Laverne was in tears behind her veil and acting like she was at a funeral. There were close negotiations with her boyfriend who sounded like a jerk, a younger fellow who hadn't bought her flowers or a present. I heard about it later as the guest of honor was having an emotional breakdown. One of the older women took her to the ladies' room and gave her a line of coke to straighten her out. It seemed to help. She went outside with the callow boyfriend to smoke a joint. B. was worried, thinking she was getting stoned in a dark alley in a bad neighborhood. She sent two people to look for her. One returned. It was one of those psychodramas which seem to hound and shadow B. in the throes of her social whirl.

I walked around the club and found a couple of pool tables and more lounges. It was crowded and not my scene, like an MTV crowd. Some human beings have evolved with an industrial-strength resistance to real music. They're a commercial-mutant form of life, like a new strain which has absorbed the past audio poisons. They're a harder breed, having developed a tin ear in order to survive, and a heart lined with credit cards. Two white guys did a monotonous incoherent rap which went on forever. That was followed by a drum machine and pounding bass. It was relentless, no change of pace, no rhythmic interlude or anything. You would think the music was designed by interior decorators, a generic lifeless high-tension background which muscles its way into the foreground. They leave it there all night as they would the curtains or the paint on the wall.

When it was midnight we had been there for several hours. I couldn't get a glass of wine from the bartender who was not in a good mood (B. didn't like him). When the Cadillac contingent was leaving I had to think for a minute, which was not easy under the circumstances. Earlier I told the Polish woman something about leaving and giving her my number, who seemed agreeable to the concept of our being friends. She had gone to the ladies' room, however, and the others were leaving. I left my number with her escort and walked out, wondering if he would give it to her.

Then I wondered what the hell I was leaving for. Sometimes I leave too soon, having a short attention span, but it is nearly as bad as coming late. There was a line of people waiting to get in. I didn't need a ride since I live four or five blocks up the street. I was dropped off in a Cadillac with white interior and B. kissed me goodnight. I was suddenly at home. It was only 12:30 a.m., which made no sense. I was mystified at what I was doing here. Sinking into a big chair, I realized I was tired. I had a glass of wine with coffee and a cigarette and sat there, thinking slowly.

In the club I talked with Molly the novelist. I went to her party last month, the one with smoke and cocaine. She had some comments about how many women were there, and how the men were one-night-stand brutes. One of the loveless men in B.'s entourage wondered if the breasts of the waitress were real. We thought they were.

1:15 a.m. The phone rang. It was the Phantom of the sound-room with his crude and warped view of things. We had an off-the-wall conversation for an hour, free associating with no holds barred, from whammy bars to women (not a bad name for a club - The Whammy Bar). There was some speculation as to whether marijuana wrecks the minds of musicians who end up making commercials. He brought it up, which was

odd, considering how much he smokes. We also wondered what would happen if all of our ex-girlfriends were in the same room together, as occurred in the Fellini film, *8 ½*.

2 a.m. I got off the phone and was on the typewriter with some metal on the radio. I got distracted and protracted by a neo-poetic effort:

Club One-Eighty-One:

Cunning orbit of the ectoplasmic occupants.
Cunnilingual opportunities and echoes for the odd.
Conversation is obliterated for the eerie and obtuse.
Collision of outlandish expectations in the open.

Sunday, Aug. 1, 1993

10 a.m. Woke up with a hard-on in the morning heat. I don't know which one pulled me out of oblivion, but I couldn't go back to sleep. I lay there with the usual after-effects of going to the beach. I don't mean things have more impact in retrospect, but the eroticism doesn't hit me until later. When you're at home you realize how alluring it was, a pale naked woman with a parasol. The morphological variety of women is more erotic than a skinny model, and it's realistic. Having the erotic and the realistic on the same page is encouraging. Throw away the scale and measuring tape as they divert attention and they limit the third dimension.

Slow going in the morning, not enough sleep, and there was a lethargic heat-wave. I sympathize with countries which are burdened (wrote burned) with relentless heat. Not sure I would have come up with a written language if I was sweating it out.

Typing for hours, and then there was a phone call from B., who was on her way to a concert in Stern Grove. That woman never slows down. Did I want to meet her

somewhere in a crowd and clear across town? Not really, though the French anesthesiologist would be there.

We talked about the party last night. There were more undercurrents than I realized – mundane intrigues, dysfunctional relationships, and peripheral static. She sighed, "One thing about women, they're such a pain." She told me about the latest emotional non-events and minor outbreaks of hysteria, meddling, territorial jealousies, and two-bit strategies that she can see through. The men are useful idiots who may not know what's going on behind the scenes or what part they play, if any. She referred to female-generated webs of gossip and control, networking in another sense.

She couldn't believe the scene last night with the guest of honor in tears and prefaced her comments with, "I love her dearly, but…." Like Phoebe driving from Marin County with a neurotic approach-avoidance. She was repelled by the club and the neighborhood, and drove back home without coming in. I pointed out that she was in a play in a low-dive theater a few blocks from there. B. said, "You're so logical, I should have reminded her of that." B. is resigned to the fact that Phoebe only has time for her when a relationship is falling apart or she is depressed with her "failed" acting career. B. never hears from her when she is doing okay.

Typing for hours, followed by a therapeutic workout on a wooden instrument.

5:30 p.m. I lay down, tired, not sure I would fall asleep. An hour later I was coming to with a reverberating voice in my head. I lay there for a minute, slowly making sense of it. "P.V. amp… P.V. amp…." I got up and looked out the window. A black woman with ropes coming out of her head, one of the sidewalk vendors. She had a few things on the sidewalk, including a small Peavey amplifier which was hooked up to a

microphone and was announcing its worth - $89, but it's going for $30. "Ladies and gentlemen…." She said this to two or three people standing there, her boring voice projected on the neighborhood.

She seemed to have the confidence of the dormant, and I wondered if she would project the same voice on national television. "89 dollars ladies and gentlemen…." When your mind is locked into the concrete, everything on your mind is relevant and tangible. It has a verisimilitude which turns into an automatic authority.

I turned on *60 Minutes* and found the Camille Paglia interview from last November which I missed (along with something on the early release of convicts). I made coffee with a fast-talking Camille in the room. Her head was on a wooden stool at the end of the bed. The documentary at the Roxie showed her to better effect, more relaxed and going on at length. Here there were rapid cuts. She was less at ease, which is not surprising with a *60 Minutes* camera crew in her face and a man asking questions about date rape. She said "No means no" about 25 percent of the time, which doesn't mean a man has the right to use force.[69] For better or worse, I have a tendency to take a woman at her word. One reason I practice critical reading (with a pen in hand for scribbling in the margins)[70] is to guard against my own gullibility.

Camille has criticized the puritanical branch of feminism, the hypocrisy of insulated middle-class women and their victimology. It does not send a strong message to women. She broke with doctrinaire feminism when it took on aspects of the Philistines.

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[69] A woman can change her mind at any time – being turned on or turned off. She could be half-naked with a man all over her and change her mind. It was the only way to test the waters, but the chemistry wasn't there. She puts on her blouse and leaves, much to the man's surprise. It happened to my friend in the wine country a while back. Some men assume that when a woman is kissing like mad she wants to go further, but it ain't necessarily so. She could change course in mid-stream, all the more so if it was pretended or experimental in the first place.

[70] I am marginalized.

This is a professor who found herself defending the Rolling Stones, and some feminists were furious, saying any music or art that doesn't put women in a positive light isn't art. For example, a song like "Under My Thumb." She thought they were presumptuous bitches with low ceilings, and told them they are not synonymous with art. It was too close for comfort to totalitarian countries where the art and music have a socio-political purpose. Whether or not the lyrics are unfortunate, it's still a good song,[71] and their censorious slip is showing.

Her intellectual career was a "disaster" in the 1980's before her book came out, *Sexual Personae* (1990).[72] She is estranged from the feminism of Gloria Steinem and company. She was given the cold shoulder by academic women in control of their departments in an institution. I have heard as much from the history professor in Los Angeles, and even from Diane - who is more in line with the anti-phallic highfalutin' fallacies of Susan Faludi[73] and friends.

In her relation to doctrinaire feminism, CP characterizes herself as one of those alert and quick little dogs which snap at the heels of a herd of slow-moving cows. They have the built-in authority of the bovine, chewing a cud of regurgitated dogma which she can barely swallow.

There was some mention of institutionalized feminists who tried to remove her book from the library. There was an interview with one of them, an older academic. If she is an example of what Camille is up against you can see why the fury has accumulated over the years. I thought the woman was on tranquilizers, having a

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[71] For what it's worth, I prefer "Paint It Black."

[72] B. referred to it the other day as Female Personae. I said, "You left the sexual out." She laughed and said, "Imagine that."

[73] The author of *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991)

monumental self-regard, and so much certitude and condescension she could barely move. She came across as a heavy presence that was slightly bothered by a pesky fly called Camille. Given the usual criticism of men not taking women's ideas seriously, it was strange how someone of the intellectual caliber of Ms. Paglia was written off by other women. Her ideas were hardly even addressed. It was enough to say that she isn't opposing feminism, "she is opposing women." As Camille has said before, was she opposing them when she was lying between their legs (doing research), or when she stood up and yelled for their independence? She opposes herself as well, which is why she is all over the place and wrote a long well-researched book about women down through the centuries which expanded the dimensions of said women, giving their reputations a more magnetic presence and depth (referring, for example, to Emily Dickinson as a lesbian vampire, and backing it up with a plausible analysis).

Camille has gone out on a limb and claimed there is nothing wrong with being a mother. For that she has been castigated as an adherent of "traditional values" (though she idolizes Keith Richards). Reminds me of the time a few years ago when the writer of *Fear of Flying* came to town for a women's conference. She had the nerve to read a poem extolling the joy and wonder of giving birth, having had a baby recently. For that she was booed and hissed.

CP was accused of suggesting that men needed to "subordinate women" in order for civilization to happen. She said that women benefit from civilization and won't admit it or don't even know it. The removal of its amenities, protections, and inventions would leave them screaming, if not thrown into a mute inglorious depression. Camille is so subordinate. A woman from *60 Minutes* went to a women's conference in New York with

Steinem and Faludi and others at a table onstage. She stood up, asking a question about Camille Paglia, and was more or less shouted down and thrown out. The whole subject of Camille was not allowed - again the hermetic exclusion. “We don’t give a shit what she thinks,” said Steinem into the microphone. She leaned back to applause, like it was a brave and witty statement.

8 p.m. A documentary about monkeys on an island off the coast of Puerto Rico. What if human characteristics can be traced back to monkeys? Talk about biological limits and determinants. What would women think of monkeys having a matrilineal arrangement? The females never leave home, remaining with one set of relatives for their whole life. Their “rank” in society (even monkeys have hierarchical tendencies) is determined by the level they are born on. The females are never alone.

The males, on the other hand, have to go through a classic rite of passage, gravitating from one family group to another. They survey the new group while enduring some marginality and exile. They figure out the rules of the new group, and only get into it at the bottom level. Their rank is not determined by who their mothers were, but how long they remain with said group.

A male goes from one group to another when he’s looking for a female to mate with. Once in a while a higher-ranking female will mate with a lower-ranking male if she prefers him, but they have to be cautious, keeping a careful eye out. The female sets it up, walking over to the male and positioning herself, or engaging in a “grooming,” messing with his hair. This grooming is relaxing and a form of bonding. The females sit around

for hours fooling with each other's hair (imagine that). Younger females or a grandmother try to "mother" someone's baby with or without the mother's approval.

The mating is nothing to write home about, lasting a few seconds. In some instances, they get into each other's hair and act relaxed for a while, getting into the mood. There is only one approach – from behind.

It sounds familiar. The males go through a phase of being alone. They're outsiders. One-fourth of them don't survive. There is no particular dominance over females, who seem to be the ones who do the choosing when it comes to being mounted. The main strength of the females is that they stick together in matriarchal family units which they never leave.

Meanwhile, I was alone on a Sunday night. It was warm out with no wind and I walked around the neighborhood. It's something how the climate makes you feel at home in your body, or not. The weather in this town has the effect of keeping one off balance. An evening like this is a rarity. Most of the time the weather changes by the hour, with the wind responding to the hot air rising further inland. In other words, it's leaving town, the opposite of feeling grounded. I returned in a calm state. It tends to happen when I pass out for an hour and come to in another time zone, though it's still the same day. The heat brought out a calm gravity in everything, and floating on the horizon was a lunar riot light.

11:30 p.m. Typing for a couple of hours.

3 a.m. Reading Roth, and went to sleep.

Monday, Aug. 2, 1993

I went out in the afternoon, walking a couple of blocks on Geary Street. There was a scrawny long-haired guy in a sleeveless T-shirt with a few tattoos, including two naked women with their hands on each other's breasts. Does that mean he was born to lose? Does it signify his respect for lesbians? He was talking with someone when a Chinese guy walked up and tried to sell them a troll doll with purple hair.

In the office I told V. about my weekend with a nightclub and the ocean, coordinates she hardly ever touches on.

"Do you know Club 181?"
"No, is that for old people?"

The older woman on the other side of her was getting sentimental about the Attorney being in the hospital. She gives him a lot of friction if he lights a cigar in his office.

"He has helped a lot of people," she said.
"He has screwed so many people you wouldn't believe it."
"Why do you work for him then?"
"You think it's easy changing jobs?"
"Well, no…."

This is someone who put a hex on the attorney she works for. She has a book on practicing witchcraft and spells in the office. She showed it to V., who didn't know what to think. She acts like her attorney is a slave driver. He spoke with me the other evening after hours. He said he knew about the hex, and feigned some pain or discomfort to make her feel good. "Do they breathe oxygen on her planet?"

I talked with the receptionist, Aisha. She is black and her hair is done in tight little ropes. We get along, and might be on a tennis court some day. She had to deal with several messages from one of our pushy clients – the loudmouth white floozy. The latter

brought rape charges against a man that she has been sleeping with for years (an Italian with some shady connections and a wife), but later dropped the charges so they could continue with their love affair. We had to cancel the restraining order, it being hard to make out at a distance of a hundred feet. I related some of that to the receptionist. Her immediate reaction: “Don’t I know it’s just like a woman to do something like that.”

I should listen to more women if I want to learn about women. On the other hand, I may have heard too much already.

Aisha was heading to a rendezvous, being ready to call it off with a man. They have been going out for two years and he still hasn’t said he loves her. He has bought her a lot of things, however. She, in turn, with the low income of a receptionist, spent $300 on a private dinner in a room for two, and gave him a $400 ring. Not to put it in a materialistic light, except that it was.

Once again I’m thinking what a warped perspective I have, with the mental in a close-up while I look at the materialistic through the wrong end of a telescope. With others it is the reverse, and to them I’m out of focus or irrelevant.

Some women are a mystery when you can’t figure out what their assumed superiority is based on, or how they come by their half-assed authority. Maybe it has something to do with shopping, where the customer is always right. They may have few discernible talents and an average intelligence, while their taste in art or music borders on the abysmal status quo (it’s mass-produced). They are receptacles of received opinion who admit to being anal retentive, like the previous receptionist who couldn’t even cook. She was supposedly a good judge of character, and yet her boyfriend was a jerk.

6 p.m. Walked home, picking up fish and chips.

Reading the paper. Yesterday there was a RECORD HEAT WAVE. “Downtown San Francisco reached 98 degrees, shattering 1987’s record of 88 degrees.” “Normally… a low-pressure center over the Central Valley causes the air to rise and cooler ocean air to come rushing in from the coastal region… in a case like this, the low-pressure center shifts westward (to the coast) so there’s no possibility for air to move in from the ocean.”

An article on the prison system. Since 1985 there are more than twice as many in prison in California. There are now 113,831 inmates. In 1980 the number was closer to 20,000. Progress, ever onward and upward. You can find fault with the system – not enough jobs, criminalizing drug users, etc., but most of the inmates should share the blame for being there. How can people be “street smart” and have a high arrest rate? Not many are in prison because they were stealing bread to feed their families. More likely they abandoned their families which are fed by the state and now they are too.

One of the side-effects of being in prison is the aging process. A number of the inmates have long sentences, and two percent of the prison population are men over fifty-five. One of the older ones, a black man of eighty-three, has a long sentence and will die in prison. When he was seventy-seven, he murdered his seventy-five-year-old girlfriend.

Further coverage of the acid cloud a week ago in Richmond. On Saturday the headline was: SKEPTICISM OVER SOME TOXIC CLOUD INJURY CLAIMS. What a surprise. There’s no underestimating the lure of a hustle. The first day or two, 3500 came in. It’s now 18,000 (and 20,000 by Tuesday). People read the paper and realize some financial benefits might be squeezed out of a lawsuit. You wonder how the symptoms would be verified after several days, not to say a week later. “Doctors say problems do not usually arise a day or two after the exposure.” “On each following day thousands

more lined up for care, some saying they heard that they could get money from General Chemical by getting documentation… rumors were rampant that a person could get $1000 from General Chemical by showing up… and signing away future claims against the company."

It seems that only a fraction of the claims are legitimate, and that includes the psychological trauma. What about the trauma of not qualifying for a monetary settlement? In the article on Tuesday, out of 20,000 people, "some – maybe a hundred or more, most with current respiratory ailments – may suffer long-term effects." "Since the spill, ten people have been hospitalized and all have since been released." This occurred in a predominantly black neighborhood. It reminds me of the boy who cried wolf. How phony do the claims have to be before they lose credibility?

For that matter, what does it do to the cause of legitimate political protest when you see a sign like FREE THE LA 4? It takes on the aura of political prisoners and activists who have engaged in the struggle, but who are we talking about? Black men who dragged a white man out of his truck, robbed him, and beat him half to death. Maybe they were expressing themselves (it was on video), and it comes under the protection of free speech.

I don't know if they're unclear on the concept of political activism, or it's a cynical empty move. They adopt an air of the noble innocent who should be freed this minute, while gutting the credibility of the cause more than outside forces ever could. Apparently, it is an injustice if a black person is arrested, no matter what he or she did. Float that proposition through the black community and see what the response is. Often

as not there are complaints that there isn't enough police protection from other blacks, which is to say not enough arrests.

The latest controversy in Oakland: a nineteen-year-old drug dealer (fully armed) tried to flee when the police approached. There was a chase, during which one of the policemen shot him and he's dead. You would think in a technologically advanced country like ours that a non-lethal stun gun could be developed for the police. They're not supposed to pass judgment on a suspect or render anything final, like a dead suspect, while chasing someone. Meanwhile, here's a dealer who was "carrying a .38 caliber semiautomatic pistol loaded with four bullets. Officers also recovered a loaded .357 Magnum from his right front pants pocket." He's on a dead run with the police chasing him. The man is armed, evading arrest, and constitutes a danger to the neighborhood. He is forfeiting his rights with every step. Anyone running down the street waving a gun is on thin ice, legally and otherwise. What's to stop the suspect from spinning around or ducking behind a telephone pole and getting off a shot in the direction of the police, and hitting a pedestrian in the process?

Much is made that he was shot in the back. You wonder under the circumstances what the cop should have done. Run around in front of an armed suspect in order to not shoot him in the back? Wait until he turns around with a gun in his hand? Or let him go, and people can complain how the police are ineffective when it comes to apprehending criminals in their neighborhoods.

What got me was the "witnesses" for whom the suspect was heroic. He was trying to elude arrest for selling heroin or crack to the hopelessly addicted (he was known as Rock Dog). "He was running for his life like a track star," said a fifteen-year-old boy who

declined to give his name. “When the cop went up… to check on him, I heard him say, ‘god’.” So there you have it. The man is transformed into a mythic figure, a track star who died so the black community could be on crack cocaine which is good for them. He was minding his own (drug) business when he was shot down by the ungodly police. “A bouquet of flowers marked the spot….”

Follow-up article: more flowers and placards, including: “Plaintiff: black community. Defendant: the cop who did the shooting.” They want him fired, along with an investigation and “increased sensitivity training.” The police chief and the mayor are black, but they’re not racially sensitive enough. I’m trying to figure out why this sensitivity is a one-way street, like someone with a .357 Magnum selling drugs is a sensitive person. There has to be an investigation to “satisfy the African-American citizens of Oakland that the shooting doesn’t represent another example of reckless indifference to the lives of young African-Americans by white police officers.”[74] How come we don’t hear about the reckless indifference of black people when it comes other blacks who’re shot down in the streets of Oakland every other day? It’s around 200 a year. It sounds like they are acutely sensitive when it comes to being shot by the police (at a far lesser rate), and oblivious when it comes to being shot by other blacks.

This is not to excuse the police and their policy of “deadly force.” You don’t get the death penalty for resisting arrest, and if the drug dealer who was running away was unarmed the police would have no excuse for shooting him. But he was armed, which brings a lethal ambiguity to the situation. The case against the police is not strengthened

[74] Not to be racially sensitive, but how is this about equality when the terms are biased? “African-American” is hyphenated, capitalized, and more specific than a generic lower-case word like “white.” If it’s no big deal, then why don’t we ever see the terminology reversed: European-Americans and blacks?

by letting the suspect off the hook – like he had nothing to do with what happened. In more civilized countries there are very few police shootings – but the population is more or less unarmed, the drug laws more humane,[75] and there is less poverty.

Technically they could have let him go (though it sends a message that you won't be arrested if you can outrun the police). They had the car the two suspects were sitting in, which might be traced to the other suspect or not. He is "still being sought," although he was "interviewed by a civil rights lawyer." And what does it do to the credibility of black people when their martyrs and heroes are low-lifes like Rock Dog or the LA Four? That's a far cry from Rosa Parks. Some segments of the black community are incriminating themselves. There are other voices, but we're not hearing them.

9 p.m. A documentary on the tube about a visit to Zimbabwe (which used to be Rhodesia). The black government is reluctant to kick out the white farmers and take their land. They generate income and jobs for the country. One family has been there for three generations, and what do you do if the white man is a better farmer? How is that possible since white people are supposedly not close to the earth? There is such a thing as being too close to the earth (as those who're dead and buried make the worst farmers), and some abstraction might be useful when it comes to understanding soil conservation, crop rotation, irrigation, or even a better plow.

In the modern city of Harare there are a couple of rappers with no interest in "traditional" instruments. Those are for the "grey hairs," and don't amount to much anyhow. It's odd that an exploding renaissance of black music took place in the U.S. and

[75] The writer Alexander Trocchi (1925-1984) was a registered addict on the National Health Service while living in London in the 1960's. In New York City in the late 1950's he sold heroin to a minor and left the country in order to avoid the death penalty.

less so on the African continent. It seems there was some interaction with a European-derived culture here, including instruments and musical forms not found in Africa. But no, the white man is "co-opting" black chord progressions.

There was a man whose job as a school teacher didn't work out, so he became a shaman or a witch doctor. He makes house calls, and a man paid him for an aphrodisiac. He also claimed to have a cure for AIDS - in a country which has been slow in getting around to the fact of AIDS (or admitting its existence). How many are infected, one in five? If he is an example of local attitudes the epidemic will only get worse. When it comes to the scientific method vs. myth, the latter is preferred. It's tedious being scientific when it comes to droughts and irrigation, just do a rain dance.

Or consult this fellow. Among his other folk wisdoms and cures: if you have a problem with gambling, like not winning for example, have sex with your thirteen-year-old daughter (or was it niece). I think it was men who came up with that "solution."

There was an interview with a young black woman who was educated and wearing modern clothing. She thought it perfectly normal to be bought and paid for by her husband. She is worth seven cows, plus extras. It remunerates her parents for the cost of her upbringing. Her husband operates a small business, and thought it was a heavy burden for a couple trying to get ahead in the world.

Another country with a chauvinist mythology. It has a benefit of the doubt so monumental you could drive a tribal slaughter through it, along with a government-generated famine. In Ethiopia Mengistu stayed in power at the cost of a million lives,[76] including a famine brought about by the civil war, until he went into exile in Zimbabwe.

[76] Approximately 400,000 black Africans were brought to the colonies which became the U.S. during two centuries of the transatlantic slave trade.

There is a civil war in Liberia with 150,000 or more dead. Marauding troops overran a refugee camp of women and children with machetes. Hundreds were killed (wrong tribe). Don't even mention Idi Amin in Uganda (old footage of him on the accordion). He was another black ruler who on gaining power (he used to be a sergeant in the Army) proceeded to wipe out hundreds of thousands of people.

Meanwhile, there are black Americans who denigrate this country, while extolling the Afrocentric from a well-fed and protected distance.[77]

10 p.m. Phone call from B. On the weekend she went to a beach in the Marin headlands with a German woman she just met (Ilsa). The woman is thirty-two and works in the personnel department of a nuclear facility. She is involved in a ménage a trois with a married Jewish couple. B. lay on the sand while the woman told her this and she could barely understand it. Sometimes two of them are going at it in front of the third. Ilsa claimed that she is far superior to the husband when it comes to making love to his wife (Ilsa was married to a woman for a couple of years). The women have more finesse, and a passive capacity for lasting longer. You would think the man could utilize their methods. The limitations of a phallus are beside the point since the German woman doesn't have one. I discussed this with B., whose curiosity got the better of her usual

[77] Flash forward a couple of years. Keith B. Richburg, a black journalist who was the Africa bureau chief for the *Washington Post* from 1991 to 1994, had a long article about that experience ("American in Africa," *Washington Post*, March 26, 1995). He witnessed so much in the way of corruption, tribal wars, and brutal bureaucratic inertia that he felt a deep-seated gratitude for whatever ancestors made it across the Atlantic in a slave ship. I later read his book, *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa*, which came out in 1997. (On a side note: one thing he found disconcerting was being a black man in a black country where he didn't "stand out in a crowd." He refers to a Japanese American friend with a fear of traveling to Japan. "I don't know what it would be like to be just another face in the crowd," she said…." It is the sort of letdown that my friend Ming experienced when she went to China.)

discretion. Is there more dexterity when a woman does a sexual massage for another woman, or just more patience?

And who was using whom? B. thought that Ilsa was being used by the couple. There has been some jealousy, along with arguments and estrangement. The German woman is on a power trip, having sex with two people while maintaining a certain detachment. B. wondered about the Jewish aspects of the arrangement.

The couple in question and their kid were lying further up the beach. She saw them (and might have been introduced). For all of this overheated background, she was not impressed with their looks, especially the woman. That is probably beside the point. Libido isn't connected to looks. That's a shallow assumption which tends to get it wrong, as if the plain and average-looking have no right to be over-sexed, or sexual at all - as used to be the assumption with the handicapped and the old. It's like none of those should be seen at the beach. The belief that good-looking men and women are more amorous is a joke. The phenomenon of the frigid model is not uncommon (she might be hungry, for one thing), and there are women with the soul of an adding machine or hermit crab inhabiting a pretty shell. There are male models who are amorous, but not with women.

B. was mystified as to the intentions of the German woman with the couple. She couldn't understand someone wanting sex that much, whether or not it's being used as a weapon or a foot in the door, a boob in the window. She said that Ilsa has a hard look, being thin and overly tanned, like someone spending too much time in the sun with nothing on. For the first time in her life, B. took her swimsuit off and went for a swim *au naturel*. Will wonders never cease? Her torso is pale, and she didn't apply the lotion very well, so it left her looking "splotchy."

She survived the experience, being naked to the seagulls and the waves and a few people walking by. Unfortunately, there was a man behind the rocks who was "jacking off, so to speak." Not only was he armed with baby powder and Vaseline, but Ilsa recognized him from last year as a self-abusing regular who haunts the area. He was trying to get a handle on the situation and not lose his grip, while being turned on by the pathos and allure of distance.

B. didn't want to ask Ilsa to put lotion on her back as it might sound like an invitation. Her own libido is hard to figure out.

Meanwhile she got a letter from her mother about how nice babies are, and telling her who just had one. We talked about test-tube babies, surrogate wombs, and how a woman's body responds to being pregnant as it goes into a bio-chemical altered state, especially when implanted with a fertilized egg. How would it respond if they put a golf ball in there? She laughed, and there was some reference to a hole in one.

11 p.m. Typing for hours.

2:30 a.m. Lying on the bed with a glowing monolithic structure in the distance. I read the paper: flooding, lingerie, and Mayan ruins.

Tuesday, Aug. 3, 1993

NOTES

> A review in *Photo Metro* of the Carrie Mae Weems show at the Museum of Modern Art. It combined a neutral objectivity with a puff piece. What to make of this?
>
> > Weems has set her sites [?] beyond the specialized audience of the art world. Her photographs carry the viewer past the genuine aesthetic pleasures (or terrors) that museums and galleries offer, to explore the

> large, unpredictable aspects of everyday life that so often elude representation.

It sounds like an excuse for putting home movies above a Rembrandt. You could turn it around and say someone's photographs carry the viewer past the genuine pleasures and terrors of everyday life to explore the unpredictable aspects of the aesthetic. In what sense does everyday life elude representation? We're drowning in it. Ever hear of a still life?

> Weems' dispassionate presentation only intensifies one's sense of trespass, of having heard or seen something common taboos guard against… Weems offers up stories far more intimate than one usually shares with strangers, and then implicitly calls attention to the factors that produce our estrangement.

What trespass and what taboos? You would think we're looking at her father and mother naked in bed, or some sort of incest, or her sister in the bathroom. What is she talking about? Has this woman reviewer ever seen other photo exhibits, much less a daytime talk show? The autobiographical documentary style is not a new thing. If it is utilized by a black woman who handles the camera like a pro, all fine and good, but that doesn't mean she invented it.

"The factors that produce our estrangement." Which are what exactly? The fact that we're flesh and blood and three-dimensional and the photos aren't? Is she assuming we're white and therefore estranged from black people and unfamiliar with black domestic situations?[78] From what I saw and read I didn't feel estrangement. The situations looked familiar. Black people have grandmothers and unruly daughters, women who talk in the kitchen, an uncle who doesn't like to work, a father who's a womanizer. I'm so estranged. You could knock me over with a Leonard Feather.[79]

> Weems' talent lies in being able to find wholly new ways to address issues of race which surround us, yet remain nearly impossible to talk about (in her series Colored People). Weems pursues a particularly subversive strategy, employing images of great beauty to expose a political problem.

What if that isn't true? For one thing, nothing is impossible to talk about these days, even on television. The images are not of great beauty in that series, they're just straightforward shots of black kids which are tinted blue or magenta. How subversive. How completely nonpolitical. Who is more effete, the reviewer or the photographer? "What color are colored people?" This seems to be a problem in

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[78] I lived on the edge of Harlem in 1961 when I was nine years old and went to PS 129. There were very few white kids in the school, and all my friends were black. I remember spending the night with one of them and playing with his collection of toy soldiers.

[79] Jazz critic for the *Los Angeles Times* for many years. He was born in London in 1914.

the black community, where her "art exposes the hierarchies of color and class within black culture… by making it an occasion of images with surprisingly traditional appeal." Maybe because they're traditional. I read about a custom of middle-class black people in Washington DC a while back. They don't invite anyone to their parties who is darker than a brown paper bag. It gets worse:

> These clear, simple compositions emphasize the pleasing sculptural quality of each portrait head. Individual features bestow alluring distinction on each composition… essential dignity in the human condition.

How astounding. You can say this about any photograph of a person, including the ones of your kid at home. The "pleasing sculptural quality" of someone's head - they're usually three-dimensional. The "alluring distinction" that comes with having a face. Pictures which "communicate the essential dignity in the human condition." I've seen as much in wanted posters in the Post Office. "Head-and-shoulders identification-style portraits" as she puts it. What a concept. I wonder if the reviewer never saw a photograph she didn't like, if she is so enamored of the genius of a camera.

She had a problem with the wordy part of the exhibit. "No one can read grand philosophical texts that shimmer far above eye level." I read them with no problem. I could reach up and touch them. "And the captions seem mostly sophomoric; for example, below the picture of a wooden rolling pin are the words, 'By Any Means Necessary'." Who says a wooden rolling pin isn't revolutionary? It revolves for one thing. Revolutions should fit in the hand and often start in the kitchen. They flatten any nuances or distinctions into a thin excuse for slaughter.

12:30 p.m. I arrived at the office and a few minutes later left with V. We walked to California Street where Chinatown collides with the financial district. Old St. Mary's Church (1854). Not many churches have a clock in front, being focused on allegedly timeless religious concepts. It attracts the gaze of people who then notice a quote beneath the clock. "SON, OBSERVE THE TIME / AND FLY FROM EVIL." The airline companies could probably use that line.

On the way there (get me to the church on time), her usual enthusiasm was a little subdued. She said she was tired and sleepy. I said it would be interesting if I had to carry

her into the church like an offering to the angels. As we approached the cathedral and passed a black man standing on the sidewalk, a mental derelict I think, he burst into crazy forced laughter and wouldn't quit. Another edifying moment in this town.

Walk in with the sound of a piano solo. Haydn, Chopin, Liszt. It was her idea, who goes to church on a regular basis, being a fairly devout Catholic. She led the way to the pews in a section on the left and halfway to the altar. The architecture was muted with a white vaulted ceiling and narrow stained-glass windows. The upper windows were more abstract with molecular-crystal forms. The altar was pale violet with three paintings behind it. There were a lot of levitating babies. An angel kneeled and handed a white lily to the Virgin Mary, who V. referred to as Mama Mary. In front of us, against the wall, was another statue of the virgin with her hands out.

I wondered if I would have the patience to sit quietly and listen to the music. Then the atmosphere took over and I was under its influence for a while. It went on for forty minutes. Subtle quiet notes and lightweight variations. It was a nice counterpoint to the after-life. The church is near the financial district, and it is an altered state compared to the profane if not inane numerical competition down the street. I wondered how it was when the main authority in people's lives was embodied in this building.

V. whispered how sleepy she was, having taken two pills – Advil or something. I looked puzzled and she said, as if patiently explaining something to a child, "For female problems." I said, "Good thing you're not operating heavy equipment," and she agreed.

I flipped through the hymnal for a few minutes. All of this was rather strange to me, not unfamiliar, but distantly remembered. I looked at the hymns and read the words, feeling like a foreign anthropologist who stumbles across some songs evoking a local

god. It could have been any religion. I don't know how objective I am, having drifted into a godless void (I went there for the view). Now my spirit was returning through the ceilings and the windows, coming through the piano and the shivering candles and the permanent gestures of an idol, coming through her perhaps, and accepting this for what it's worth or seeing it from another angle, the original reason for it. I have gone without it for a long time, while absorbing an "abysmal biopathy"[80] of the news. This was a different atmosphere.

I like Catholic churches with their strategy of making the immaterial more tangible. We are not platonic abstractions, as some Protestants would have it. We are beings with five senses and those are engaged by the church. People are involved in the process the minute they walk in. It registers on the senses which are hooked up to the memory which is part of the spirit.

Following the recital, we walked over to an altar on the side. The church was nearly empty, having been more than half full. There were small red flames and a statue. I was lacking sleep and quietly stunned by all of this, the haunted statue, the evocative object, a theology which is held down (I was going to say nailed down) by quasi-pagan effects. They might seem contrived, but so what, if that's what it takes for sensory beings to get in the mood and memorize it through a Proustian effect of the senses. It gives the religion more presence, like a flame that flickers in your eye. Is the metaphysical metaphoric? Does it evaporate for physical beings if it isn't kept in focus by physical

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[80] "Lenin failed to see the dangers of the new state bureaucracy. Apparently, he believed that the proletarian bureaucrats would not abuse their power, would stick to the truth, would teach the working people to be independent. He failed to take into account the abysmal biopathy of the human structure." Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933)

reminders and symbolic phenomena, including incense? The soul is shifting gears from an office to a holy place, and it could use some help.

I stood there for a minute while V. put some coins in a cup, lit a stick, and crossed herself with a demure motion, touching her lips.

We sat in one of the pews for a minute, talking about the paintings behind the altar. The angel with realistic-looking wings was visiting Mary on the right. On the left was a saint with a sword and the devil on the ground. I said "Saint Michael," and she nodded. I told her that's my middle name. She looked at me and said "Steven Michael," as if seeing me for the first time. I'm familiar with this belief system, having grown up in the church, but she was unclear on the concept of Lutherans being Christians since she only knows about Catholics. I said they are affiliated, and don't kill each other any more.

The central painting was a little mystifying. We figured it was Mary, this being Old St. Mary's Church. Not sure what all those flying babies were about. Mary's son was nowhere to be seen. V. said that people wanted to pray (a few older women) and we left. We had to go back to work and she was looking at her watch.

We walked through Chinatown and paused by a stand of UFO's (unidentified fruit objects), along with sea snails and dead ducks. An old Chinese man came out and said hello to her. We walked on. "You know him?" "No," she replied, while glancing at wedding dresses in a window.

Back in the office I was walking a fine line with my comments and questions. Her religion is real to her, so I tried not to be disturbing. I was curious if she trained as an accountant, but believes in angels. "Do you think angels are real?" She had to think for a minute, saying you can't see them. I said, "Do you have a guardian angel?" "Yes…

everyone does." We were interrupted, but I thought I would rather talk about angels than the interest rate. Later she said she has a vial of holy water from Lourdes, a town in France. I said, "What for?"

5 p.m. I walked home with a Spaten beer and a writing pad. I was having violent thoughts along the way, but figured I was tired.

In the evening I read a book from the office. The Attorney ordered several by Nabokov which I've read: *Lolita, Pnin,* and *Speak, Memory*. I've read other books of his, and some of the correspondence with Edmund Wilson, but never got around to *Pale Fire*. It took a while adjusting to his style. The book consists of a poem and its commentary. It is "fictional." Compared to such a novel my preoccupation with the newspaper is like someone obsessed with sewer drains.

There was a nice comment on girls who hide their naivete with an air of "sarcastic sophistication."

I went to the corner store a block away. It's operated by Latinos. They had a Spanish channel on the TV with a Mexican weather report. It showed the North American continent with broad sections labeled *"Caliente"* or *"Frio."* In the south: *"Tormentas."*

The store across the street from my place is run by Middle Eastern fellows. Down the street it's Vietnamese. Where I used to live, the corner store is Korean. This has never been a problem, linguistically or otherwise. The only people for whom it has been a problem, from what I have seen and heard, have been blacks – yelling, being rude, or stealing. Diversity has its pros and cons. You're cut off more than included, more shut

out than acknowledged as a fellow human being with something in common like roots and language. I am used to it, and that includes the rhetoric of how wonderful diversity is.

Maybe it's me. I should be more extroverted to connect across the counter with a man for whom I hardly register in his frame of reference, historically and otherwise, talking on the phone in Arabic while handing me some loose American change.

10 p.m. I lay down for a minute, tired. I was planning to get up in a few minutes. Things changed after a while. There were subtle shifts inside my head, like a sand dune edging closer to a cliff, and then I lost consciousness.

Wednesday, Aug. 4, 1993

No alcohol and hardly any coffee or cigarettes the night before. I would be healthier if I slept more.

Typing for hours. Considered doing the laundry, but read the paper instead.

A rocket blew up the other day, the Titan IV. It was launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base,[81] a $1 billion loss. They were trying to put some "solar-powered ocean-surveillance satellites" into orbit for the CIA which were "highly classified." The rocket cost $200 million, the rest was for the satellites. Surveillance is expensive. Each one was "made by hand to exacting specifications – like a two-ton Swiss watch." What time is it? Time to dissolve the CIA.

The rocket was built in "absolute secrecy," which added to the cost. They're buying silence. What's the reason for the surveillance and the secrecy?[82] The ocean might

[81] I was born there when it was known as Camp Cooke. My father was in the Army at the time, and we lived in Pismo Beach. I only cost $5.

[82] How often are these projects meant to be hidden from the public and hence their secrecy? It's like the budget of the CIA which is paid for by us, but we're not allowed to know how much it is.

be planning something. It could be landing on our shores in the middle of the night (here comes the red tide). Hordes of jellyfish are lurking out there waiting to invade.

The satellites are "to track foreign ships and listen to their communications," and maybe take photos. Do they expect another Pearl Harbor? I don't know why we need more satellites and so much secrecy. Someone could steal our secrets on how to make them? Who can afford them? "Satellites now under development… can cost up to 2 billion apiece." Maybe that's part of the strategy, to force our enemies into bankruptcy.

Is the military into voyeurism? What's the point of "the most expensive intelligence-gathering systems in the world"? What is the threat that would justify this sort of thing, and why aren't existing systems of surveillance sufficient?

Schools and universities are intelligence-gathering systems and would greatly benefit from $1 billion. One hundred universities would get $10,000,000 each for scholarships. Or a thousand high schools would get $1,000,000 each. The public sector is eroding while the most remote reaches of the military are covered in diamonds.

Late afternoon, on the way to work, I was standing at the bus stop. An older strung-out woman with bruises, a jerk on crutches, was complaining about her broken cigarettes. She saw a young girl waiting for the bus, maybe in junior high school, who was her opposite or an echo of what she used to be. She went up to the girl and asked, "How old are you… you're so pretty…" in a whining tone. The girl barely responded.

In the office I was on the phone with the Attorney in the hospital. He said he was getting out tomorrow and thinks he will be in the office soon. He doesn't plan on telling

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Our national security depends on the budget of the CIA remaining unknown. If the public found out it might want its money back.

the doctors. I got some instructions and told him what was in the mail. Out of the blue he asked how I was feeling. I said okay, but my appendix has been bothering me a little. He swore at me.

Phone call to my mother. What happened to the desert photos? Forgot, sorry. Talking for a while. My brother in Los Angeles is out of work with a second baby on the way. He is thirty-three. She went on with her usual routine – what would it take to get me motivated or kicked in the butt to do something with the writing, as in editing, agents, and publishing? It was hard to explain since I don't have an excuse. I'm stuck in a forward gear as far as the writing goes. Shifting into neutral or reverse and approaching from another angle is nearly impossible, particularly in the wired isolated state I'm living in where there is not much latitude or support – which might require a girlfriend. That is a concept which she barely understands, as if to say, what do you need a woman for?

She said, "You weren't publishing when you lived with a woman." I said I wasn't ready then, the writing wasn't up to it. Some of the poetry was, but she wasn't letting me off the hook, knowing little about the process, but knowing other things. I said that some of it touched on controversial issues and I might want to leave the country if it was published, or other people would prefer I did. That reminded her of, who's that guy, Salman Rushdie. Oh yes. Well, I hope it's not like that. Of course not. We live in a civilized country. People aren't shot for their ideas. They're shot for other reasons, like knocking on the wrong door at the wrong time.

Anyhow, she threatened to come up here and throw her weight around as far as organizing old manuscripts, which was a good motivation to deliver a finished book to an agent in a month or two.

I got off the phone. V. was staring at me. She said, "Your mom?" with an approving look. I explained to her about the writing, with her unclear on the concept. She said she doesn't like poetry and never reads it. Her fiancé never wrote her a poem. "Never?" "No." Now looking wistful. She asked what sort of book I was writing. Good question. "You could write a novel about that woman who… you know… cut off his…." Pausing with a sweet smile. I said a story, maybe. Not sure how I would get a whole novel out of it, or would even want to.

Earlier she shoved a paper in my hands and said, "Could you write a short note to a client saying we apologize for the mistake?" The attorney wanted her to write it. Assuming she wanted some embellishment I went off on a tangent:

> … we go down on our knees wringing our hands in despair and abject self-criticism for the unconscionable error which was made at the expense ($63) of our most revered and honored client who comes to us with a personal injury demanding full and righteous treatment under the laws of the State of California, and yet it is we who are personally injured by an oversight which we assure you from the rocky bottom of our hearts will never happen again as long as there is a jurisprudent breath in our awfully lawful bodies…

Or something to that effect. She said, "Just write it please."

She admits that in school and elsewhere she could hardly put a sentence together. It eludes her and she sits there with a blank mind. She sent me a postcard from Honolulu a while back with the most generic and impersonal lines on the back. I knew it was from her, and was able to translate it into something more personal.

6 p.m. Leaving work. She was staying until eight, and I almost thought I should wait for her. It wouldn't have been unreasonable in her opinion.

I walked home, where I flipped through an *SF Weekly* with a vaguely counter-culture feel to it. The letters to the editor. A black woman in Oakland objected to a

previous letter which supported gun control. She thought it was a misguided opinion. People need guns in order to protect themselves from other people, as well as the police. "The police are not there to protect you. I'm from Oakland; I've enough unanswered 911 calls to realize that the cops are not going to respond at all…."

Once again, I'm hearing a paradoxical message. Rather than there being too many police in the black community, there aren't enough. It's an odd thing, black people complaining that the so-called white establishment isn't doing enough to protect them from other black people.

"After the Rodney King trials… it amazes me that anyone would voluntarily be less well-armed than a cop… I want to be able to, shall we say, argue from a defensible position." Let me see if I understand this. The police routinely beat up black women with clubs. Considering how little it takes for racial incidents to produce inflammatory headlines this seems doubtful. Let's say she is drunk and leads the police on a high-speed chase which constitutes some danger to the public. She is finally pulled over and in the mood for resisting arrest. If she has the same weapons as the police and fires a couple of shots out the window to let them know it, they will go away? They won't respond in kind? She can argue her case from a position of six feet under, being deceased, which renders an automatic purity and righteousness to people who were far from it when alive.

"The government is not your friend" (I assume she was never on welfare). She mentions two assassinations, including one that was some years ago (the Black Panther Fred Hampton).[83] There were "… other unfortunate (but better concealed) victims." The government is a better friend than her own neighbors, if you consider who is killing

[83] The Black Panthers were not unarmed, but found it hard to guard against informants and the FBI. It was a political assassination, as were the shootings of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy the year before. In both cases there were patsies to take the blame.

whom and who is providing for their kids. It's more ambiguous when you consider how many mayors and police chiefs (including those in Oakland) are black. And yet, "It amazes me that anyone would voluntarily relinquish the only real voting power the ruling class recognizes." Guns? Who is voting with a gun? They're irrelevant when it comes to "the ruling class," one reason there are so many guns around. There are far more sophisticated methods for controlling this country and remaining in power. She can sit on her gun for all the ruling class cares. Does she think Ron Dellums got into Congress by breaking in and waving a pistol?

"The Second Amendment to the Constitution protects your right to overthrow a repressing government." Let me guess, her and a few others might take it upon themselves to overthrow the government. It's not the 18th century anymore. The government is repressive because it doesn't protect her from other black people, and yet black people have a right to resist arrest, no matter what for. You would think that Rodney King was being pursued for playing chess on the sidewalk. The government tries to silence black people, which is why we don't hear from them. And yet they're broadcast coast-to-coast on everything from daytime talk shows to a billion-dollar rap industry and Farrakhan's fiery speeches on the radio. So repressed.

She's going to shoot it out with the government. Good strategy. It makes the cause more credible if she's a delirious martyr. "Do we really wish to relinquish any means that we currently possess to defend ourselves from both criminals and tyrants?" The criminals are your own people it would seem, for which you are demanding more police presence from the very government which is a "tyrant." A little Afrocentric perspective might be useful here before the words lose their meaning. Idi Amin was a

tyrant. There are military dictators across the African continent who don't mind eliminating thousands of people with little press attention. It is warped to use the same word for this country. It shores up her revolutionary psychodrama, while manning the barricades of an industrial-strength ego. It's in bad taste, considering people who have to deal with marauding government troops and bodies in the streets. It reminds me of some white leftists in the late 60's or early 70's. They invited a couple of writers from the Soviet Union to speak at an event, and presented themselves as being similarly-oppressed comrades. The Russians, having come from an irrational police state where thousands disappeared without a trial, were looking askance at them.

Her final dig at the letter which supported gun control: "Convenience-addicted 'liberals' like him are merely the mirror image of Joseph Goebbels: when they hear talk of revolvers, they reach for their culture." If this means he is the opposite of Goebbels I'm not sure what's wrong with that, or why culture shouldn't take predominance over guns.

Next letter, same subject from (I think) a white male in San Francisco. He found the "opinions ominous" in the letter that supported gun control. Guns aren't ominous, opinions are. Leaving guns "… entirely in the hands of police and the military gives government a dangerous amount of power. Our Bill of Rights is all about limiting government…." It already has a dangerous amount of power. Wake up and smell the heavy water.

Thursday, Aug. 5, 1993

Typing in the morning, along with four loads of laundry (the machines are on the ground floor off the lobby).

In the paper: “Black leaders expressing bitter disappointment with the decision.” “We didn’t get the justice from this sentence.” Two policemen were given two and a half year sentences for the beating of Rodney King. “Many said that Koon (and Powell) would have received stiffer penalties if they were black.” King said if it was him he would have gotten ten or fifteen years. What’s wrong with this picture? We’re supposed to believe the system is against black people and there is no justice. Maybe it’s the political postures and the empty rhetoric, but I don’t trust anyone involved in this case – the police, the press, black leaders, or the noble suffering plaintiff who might be able to get on with his life if he is given fifty or sixty million dollars. That’s not too much to ask, is it? He refused an offer of two million dollars from the County of Los Angeles, which comes out to $100,000 a year for the next twenty years.

Seeing what benefits are coming his way, from having a few misdemeanors dismissed to a multi-million-dollar settlement, it’s hard to act like King is an oppressed black man for whom there is no justice and for whom the system isn’t responsive. It’s not like the trials were so obscure and anonymous that hardly anyone heard about them.

Putting two of the LAPD, including a police sergeant, in prison with two and a half year sentences is not nothing. The assumption that if they were black they would have received longer sentences doesn’t wash. Are we talking about if they were black civilians beating up white civilians? That is a lot more common than white police or white civilians beating up black people. What do they think the average sentence is these days for aggravated assault? That is, with no prior convictions. The only way King would

have gotten anywhere near ten or fifteen years is if he had a few priors which add to the sentence. There was a black man related to a client in the office recently who was barely forty. He had twenty convictions, everything from assault and burglary to rape. How long do you think those sentences were? How much time did he spend behind bars if he had twenty convictions and was still walking around free? How long have we been hearing about criminals being arrested and not doing any time, or being released early, and how many of those are black? The system is lucky if it can stick a ten-year sentence on someone for homicide.

The Rev. Cecil Williams: "We were shocked… the scale of justice is always imbalanced." An Oakland attorney, a black woman, "… said the sentences demonstrate the weaknesses in the justice system." "An indictment of the society… racism is endemic… the problem cannot be adequately addressed through the justice system." Is it adequately addressed if King receives from two to four million dollars and doesn't have to work for the rest of his life? The indignant posturing is so strained you would think they're going to sprain their credibility beyond repair. "Here lies justice, killed by society in the name of Rodney King… God help us all." Mock gravestone at the site of his arrest. Give me a break. It ignores both ends of the situation - that he had no small part in this, leading police on a high-speed drunken chase, endangering others and resisting arrest. Some cops have lost their jobs and gone through the mill of a legal proceeding. A couple are going to prison, and King is looking at millions of dollars coming his way. That isn't adequate compensation? He should also be elected mayor and given the keys to the city?

It's with all of that in mind that the rhetoric looks forced, if not inflated. Reminds me of the woman who complained about having to sit in the waiting room after the

hospital spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to save the life of the infant of a brain-dead mother (who she was related to). Have the postures and attitudes of condescending complaint and everlasting victimization become so automatic they are out of touch with reality?

Speaking of not-too-subtle poses which are embellished with bad metaphors and weak comparisons, there was some mention that the black community will be "keeping a close watch" on the trial of the LA Four. A "comparison of the sentencing … I think that could be a very big problem." An innocent man is pulled out of his truck and robbed and beaten to within an inch of his life and left in the street by several black men. This is the same thing as policemen trying to make an arrest? Instead of calling 911, dial the home phones of the LA Four. The truck driver is a lot worse off than King. Will he be compensated by the black community?

Professor Anita Hill was in town. She was the main speaker for the Civil Justice Foundation, a convention of trial lawyers, and she spoke about sexual harassment. There was a column the next day by a conservative woman, Saunders, who said, "I still don't believe Anita." I believe her up to the point where her own beliefs, or was it memories, fail. The whole thing was extremely overblown. Saunders noted that, "Her admirers gave an unwitting answer to the question posed frequently by her supporters in 1991 when they wondered aloud what Hill possibly could have to gain by accusing Clarence Thomas of sexually harassing her." How much does she get per speech, in other words, along with other perks.

I thought it took some nerve to continue with the aura of a victim for a few unseemly words spoken over ten years ago by a man who is not exactly a low-life, and who she continued to work with while he helped her career. She said she was speaking as a "client" or a victim rather than a lawyer, still milking this for all it's worth. And here's the kicker. She "…called on lawmakers to lift the limits on the financial compensation sexual harassment victims recover." She did it for the money? "Currently compensation ranges from $50,000 to $300,000 but is often inadequate because of high legal and medical fees, she said."

Sounds like a mercenary victim. How in the world would $50,000 to $300,000 be inadequate? Someone you're familiar with at work tells a dirty joke and you need $100,000 to get over it? What sort of medical treatment is required? Assuming the woman wasn't touched, which was the case with Anita Hill, where do medical bills come in? She needs a $2000 MRI scan in order to detect if her inner child was injured by someone's passing comments? Would weekly sessions with a psychiatrist or therapist at $100 an hour for ten or twenty weeks be sufficient? That's $1000 or $2000. Say the man is fined $10,000 for talking to a woman like he would talk to another man. Isn't that sufficient compensation for someone who wasn't harmed or threatened?[84]

A woman was subjected to a thought crime. The man floated a few indecent innuendos in her direction. If she was so sensitive and concerned she would have told him where to get off. Instead she kept quiet, using the man to further her prospects, and a decade later when he's no longer useful she tries to undermine his appointment to the

[84] I don't like big settlements in general. The Attorney thinks I'm a legal conservative in that respect. We have slip and fall cases that are sketchy and ridiculous – someone trips on a sidewalk and wants $5000.

Supreme Court. There is a statute of limitations to contend with, not to mention blurred memories and a lack of evidence.

On the next page was an article about the manicurist and why she cut off her husband's penis while he was sleeping. He had sexually forced himself on her. "He said he didn't care about my feelings," and went to sleep. "I pulled back the sheet and then I did it." She cut it off, then drove away and threw it out the window of her car. She wanted it gone forever – like that is the appropriate punishment for what occurred. It is only recently that surgical techniques have been able to re-attach a severed penis (in a compromised state). That would be a moot point if the organ was gone.

The assumption is that because of his violation of her body, which was not physically damaged, he should be permanently put out of commission – like someone who steals something and gets their hand cut off.

She said, "He wanted his own satisfaction and that's not fair." No, and she could have sued the pants off him in a divorce proceeding. How is physical mutilation fair? Having attained the status of Victim, she feels justified in her own mind and anything goes. There is no sense of proportion. The moment one feels qualified as a bona fide Victim one attains angelic status. You're ready for the talk shows (queen for a day) and a million-dollar cash award. It's like Rodney King. Once established as a Victim there is no end in sight to what he thinks he deserves in compensation – like $50,000,000. Legal awards are as bloated as the language being used. It's like the company where the actual damages were $16,000 but the court added $10,000,000 in punitive damages. Talk about jackpot jurisprudence.

So the manicurist cured her man with a knife. There is the implication that a woman's feelings are worth a man's life, or at least a pound of flesh. His life is put on hold in prison if nonconsensual sex (I wrote nonsensual) between a husband and wife is the same as rape. All of a sudden he is a stranger. Calling it rape, using the same word, diminishes the more damaging occurrence of a woman who is assaulted by a stranger – instead of her own husband wanting to do something they have done a thousand times before. It isn't right, it could be grounds for divorce, but it's not the same as being attacked by a stranger in circumstances which are probably more violent and traumatizing than her husband at home.

The particulars of my existence are a generic blur for some women, like this business of my spending time on a typewriter. For all they care I could be sitting for hours at a sewing machine, and they might prefer it. They could ask me to repair a blouse or sew a skirt. Maybe they don't hold it against me, this preoccupation with writing (beyond the fact that it distracts me and there's no money in it), but it is seen as irrelevant, and nothing compared to clothing, income, and physique. Imagine that, women objectifying men on those levels.

Having objectified the men, it doesn't take a big leap to assume their feelings are non-existent. That makes it easier to string them along or cut it off. All of the great novels, songs, and plays involving trauma and disturbances of the soul have been written by women. Not.

One of the drawbacks of women having a blurred generic view of men is when it makes them a lousy judge of character. When you go by surface impressions, someone's

character is hard to figure out. He is judged by arbitrary signifiers like his occupation or his looks. The manicurist may have chosen the wrong man for a husband. Was that because she was in love with him, or saw him as a status quo automaton who fit into her plans? Something tells me if you love a man you don't mutilate him when he is asleep. If she didn't love him, why was she living with him? Had this sort of thing happened before? If so, why was she still there? If it was the first time, couldn't she have cut him some slack, or walked out and sued him in court? I've heard from various women that they're not as dumb and innocent as men (or the courts) might think.

The two people in this domestic dispute are being treated like their transgressions were similar. Both of them were "released on an unsecured $5000 bond." A number of women have said he got what he deserved, like there was some parity involved. And yet "aggravated malicious wounding" is a felony, while spousal rape – which is harder to prove – is a misdemeanor. How are their cases similar in magnitude?

An article in *SF Weekly* on whether to make spousal rape a felony. Assemblyman Dick Mountjoy (curious name in this context) opposes it. So does the "religious right." The leftwing press with its freewheeling morals wants to bring the government into the bedroom. A felony involves a year or more in prison for something which, in this case, is ambiguous and hard to prove. The woman can leave her husband if that's how he behaves.[85] If she moves out and he follows her around, that is tangible evidence, violating a restraining order, and the law can intervene in no uncertain terms.

[85] Reminds me of one of our clients – the woman who was having an affair with a married man. He came over for one of their sessions, but she wasn't in the mood. He went through with it anyway, though she outweighs him (a buxom woman of two hundred pounds). She filed rape charges (I'm not sure if his wife ever got wind of this). Among other things, her bed sheet was

Late afternoon, went to work.

The Attorney was home from the hospital. He called the office, but I wasn't there. I was supposed to call him back, but he didn't leave his number. He was operating on the assumption that I would know it, but not having paid his phone bill for so long it was cut off. He had to arrange with the phone company to get an unlisted number. Not that I'm losing sleep over it.

A couple of hours in the office, then I walked to my neighborhood, picking up a bottle of wine. There were a few Latino drop-outs on the corner with the furtive offer of a controlled substance. A couple of hookers, then a panhandler, and a black man who said, "What's up?" The hookers are usually on the corner, but they were across the street, one of them showing her tongue to a car emerging from an alley. It leads to the biggest strip joint in town.[86]

10 p.m. I tried to call Ming in Alaska. A man answered and said she was on the line and would be working until five in the morning, so I left a message. There has been a prolonged silence from up north. I had a vague memory from our last phone call that I was supposed to call her and hadn't.

Typing for hours. Coffee, cigarettes, and most of a bottle of wine. It was more than I planned, and not having a decent meal I would feel it the next morning.

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brought in, showing evidence of other men's semen (which was technically irrelevant). The case was dropped after a couple of months when she forgave him.

[86] I live a few blocks from one of the more notorious strip joints in the country, The O'Farrell Theater, founded by the Mitchell Brothers in 1969. Hunter S. Thompson was a night manager (for more than one night). It is down the block from the Great American Music Hall (which I find more interesting). A couple of years ago one of the brothers shot the other and got voluntary manslaughter (six years in San Quentin, with time off for good behavior).

The journal mode was dead in the water at the moment. I was deflected in other directions. A two-page letter to my friend in Paris, who must be wondering what lead weights or chains are keeping me here. That was followed by a long and unexpected poetic effort. Three pages of rhyming quatrains for V. on a decent topic, the piano recital at Old St. Mary's Church. I was walking a fine line, introducing her to what a poem can do, while not writing something so vacant I couldn't stand it. Curious how the form is a refreshing change of pace.

4 a.m. Went to sleep.

Friday, Aug. 6, 1993

Slow going in the morning, slightly wrecked. Not enough sleep.

I dreamed that love is not a barely attainable thing on the horizon, but rather is so close you might overlook it. There was a woman who looked like she was in the mood, someone I knew when we were seventeen in Los Angeles - a pretty blonde with a nice figure. In real life we were singing together for a while (with me on guitar),[87] and played a high school concert in the auditorium. One afternoon we got into some serious kissing on her living room floor. She had two younger sisters with suggestive undercurrents. Like a fool I never pursued the situation (her, I mean).

I dragged myself to the corner café. One of those mornings when I look like I belong in the neighborhood.

There was a stereotypic situation of idle black men standing or sitting on the sidewalk. Some of them are getting on in years. What else are they going to do? The

[87] On stand-up bass there was an older black man who lived in the neighborhood. He smelled like coffee, which I liked, and we got along. He used to play with Count Basie (who died in 1984). The combo didn't last very long, unfortunately.

options are limited near the bottom of society. It bears some comparison to being at the bottom of the ocean. There is not much movement or fresh currents, just a murky pressing weight and it's dark. It's even worse if an organism is used to those slow-moving depths, and explodes when it is pulled up to the surface.[88]

3:30 p.m. Went to work. There was not much going on, and I was talking with Aisha at the front desk. She was bored. When she heard I was up late and tired she wondered who with. "Just fishing…." She said she answered a personal ad in the *Chronicle*, leaving her name and number for a man who has a black Ferrari. He is a generality, presumably with manners, two legs, and money that she could get used to. The main thing was getting into a Ferrari. I said, "They're low to the ground, you're practically on your back, or halfway there." She didn't seem to mind.

I read the latest issue of *California Lawyer,* the section that lists which attorneys have been suspended, fined, or disbarred that month. Some of their infractions sound familiar, like commingling funds and client abandonment. The Attorney has been known to dip into a client's trust fund when he's running short.

5:30 p.m. I walked to the pool and swam a slow mile. It was rejuvenating. There was a guy in the next lane, a serous swimmer with a cap and goggles and muscles. He was doing a methodic crawl back and forth with the momentum of a motorboat. A girl got into my lane in a thin and clinging one-piece suit. It was more edifying when she left (another lane was open).

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[88] An extreme example: a man who was in prison for many years (serving time for manslaughter and robbery) got an early release through the efforts of Norman Mailer and others. He was a good writer (Jack Abbott), but was pressurized in prison where he spent time in solitary confinement. He was only free for six weeks before he killed a man (a waiter).

Swimming underwater – anything past 110 feet is a miracle, in other words it is impossible. I have some limitations, from the physical to the perceptual, not to say financial. Are limitations anything like living on the edge? They define us. Do your limitations glow in the dark? Those are dreams.

On the way home I went into the hi-tech hamburger joint. More videos on the wall, including one by Prince. Someone put Valium in his Cognac and 7-Up. A million-dollar wet-dream stage. It seems like words are a prop for him, along with his body. He addressed a serious issue on the piano. The guys in the band were sitting around, taking a break from jacking off on high-priced call girls. He emoted through a phony five o'clock shadow with a dreamy chord progression – a nondescript tune about depression and unemployment. You know that because of the video footage going by. All I got from the lyrics was something about "money don't matter 2 night…," singing about the poor into a gold-plated microphone.

Went home and changed, had a cigarette, and left. I took a bus to the sound-room flat. By some miracle the Phantom was not only sober, he was ready for the sound-room the minute I got there. It turned into one of the better sessions we have had. I brought a high E-string for the Les Paul which he put on. I was on the drums for a while. He was using distortion and sounded like a manic tortured insect on the guitar. It's a good set of drums, the tom-toms with a deep reverberant sound. I worked out some variations in the syncopation.

Then he handed over the guitar. He was on the drums for a while, then took a break. I kept going like a river, and he adjusted the sound. It was loud with a cutting slight distortion. I didn't put it down until two and a half hours later, by which time he

had done some time on the drums and on his homemade electric Mega-zone, and then on bass, while taking the occasional cigarette break. I'm like someone holding onto a bare electric wire with a current running through it and I can't let go. The music ran through all the variations we could think of or feel our way to in the dark, from a spontaneous careful combustion or a dueling stream of consciousness to half a dozen tunes where I used a microphone. It makes your voice sound like it's purified, projected, and professional.

At some point my guitar was adjusted from an acid reverb to a mellow chord progression with a slight echo, while his guitar had a high-pitched wandering chaotic sound. It was a nice counterpoint, using a pedal for a pitch-shifter with some echo.

Guitar and bass. We took them for a walk and broke into some mutual rhythms like so many vines becoming intertwined and growing around themselves. It's one of the nicer things when you're warmed up, having a facility with an instrument and things take on a life of their own. There is an intuition in the music when it's halfway improvised. You hit a stride you didn't know existed within your range.

Sometime after midnight we stopped. I took off the Les Paul, which was heavy after standing there for hours with a strap over my shoulder. We left a claustrophobic room with black walls and went into the garage, collapsing in a beat-up chair next to half a dozen motorcycles with their spare parts strewn about. I was having the second beer of the evening, suddenly exhausted and drained. One reason the session worked so well is that he held off on the beer until the end. Then he polished off a forty-ounce before I finished a small one.

We walked to the corner where the drug dealers hang out waiting for the bus, which is to say business. I had just rolled him a cigarette when the bus pulled up. It took me to the Tenderloin.

2 a.m. I slid into oblivion as accommodating as a swamp to a reptile.

Saturday, Aug. 7, 1993

NOTES

> An article on prisons with a comment by the reporter that being in prison ages you ten years (especially if it's a ten-year sentence). One of our clients is a white ex-convict with underworld connections. He used to come to the office and talk to me after hours. He finally changed attorneys, being fed-up with this one. He was proof that prison can take a few years off your age and he admitted it. He was in his late sixties and had recently done four years. He came out more fit than when he went in.[89] He was lifting weights every day and not drinking, while keeping regular hours and not staying up late. It has some aspects of a sober monastic life (no smoking), but it isn't very quiet. I would rather have smoke and no noise.
>
> Corollary: there is a controversy with the Mexican government about Mexicans in prison in the U.S. who might be executed, which is not done in Mexico. They presume to have a more humanitarian approach, but it's the same government that shot hundreds of demonstrators in the late 1960's. Meanwhile, the U.S. wants Mexico to take back illegal immigrants who are in prison for various crimes, but Mexico is reluctant. The U.S. made the point that in California there are approximately 24,000 non-citizens in prison and they cost the state $500,000,000 a year.

> The neighborhood was mentioned in the *Bay Guardian*:
>
> "A CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN ACTION [or inaction]. You can see it for yourself at the Tenderloin Arts Festival. The Tenderloin has long labored under the perception that it is one of San Francisco's seediest districts, a dangerous, rundown part of town with few redeeming qualities. But neighborhoods are never in stasis in this town [What about Pacific Heights, it's practically petrified. On the other hand, the Mission District used to be Irish and German.], and a steady influx of Southeast Asian immigrants over the past decade has transformed much of the Tenderloin…."

[89] He told me the first thing he wanted when he got out was a steak dinner with a bottle of wine and a prostitute.

It was also noted in *The Tenderloin Times* (I'm so well-read) that it is the main stomping grounds for transsexuals (along with hookers and ex-convicts).

THE MAN ON THE STREET

He's living with the hideous and the haunted,
it's insidious and he likes to flaunt it,
down and out and there's another factor:
his chaotic common character.
He's flying off the handle every hour,
so he's not exactly wound too tight.
What is holding him together? A night out
on the town, or sleeping in a flower
bed, the bondage and the leaden weight
of living on the street. It feels like fate
for those who find it hard to focus, curbing
their disturbance and a dirty reverb
is a reason for being, I suppose,
a heavy debt if not an empty pose.

exile on Brain Street

A nearly automatic cushion of unconscious/metabolic adjustment.

I wonder if this journal would qualify as a form of naïve folk art with its skewed perspectives. The foreground or the background is arbitrarily magnified and the surroundings are described by someone who lacks credentials… [RAN OUT OF RIBBON]… overhearing his own conversations.

The suspect was comprehended.

"The subliminal world and its 'mute command'." (Nabokov, *Pale Fire*)

Looking for a word in the dictionary I turned to "secondary burial," and then to "overflowing."

Article in the paper: BRAIN-DEAD WOMAN GIVES BIRTH, THEN DIES. A black woman in Oakland was hooked up to a life-support system for months. There is some question of who pays for it (over $300,000) when you consider how she arrived at being brain-dead. She was shot in the head while robbing an old man in a wheelchair with a knife. She is twenty-eight and has several kids by several different men. You might say so what, the fetus deserves to live (one

month premature, under five pounds). It's another example of the genocidal white power structure with a reckless indifference to young black males (a baby boy). It would seem the mother had a reckless indifference if she was out there with a knife while pregnant.

Meanwhile, here's the punch line. The sister of the woman's longtime boyfriend was expressing her gratitude for medical services which went beyond the call of duty to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars in order to assure the eventual delivery of the baby by near-miraculous and non-Afrocentric means. The whole thing went on for over three months (105 days) and here is her response. "They sat around waiting for an hour in the hospital. I don't think that was right." Her relatives wanted to see the baby, but were turned away and not allowed in the delivery room. It was a touchy operation (a cesarean section on a brain-dead woman). The infant was premature and underweight. You might suppose some close observation was called for. You might even cut the doctors some slack, like maybe they know what they're doing. If they wanted to do the right thing, I suppose they should have given the brain-dead pregnant woman back to the relatives three months ago. Here, we would hate to think you were kept waiting for an hour, do it yourself.

An article in the paper: KENYA WITCH FRENZY – 44 BURNED ALIVE. "Hysterical village mobs attack homes… Most of those murdered were harmless elderly people…." Once in a while there is an urge to kill an old woman (a la *Crime and Punishment*). They don't repress it. It is superstition with an undercurrent of ulterior motives – most of the victims "have been incurring the jealousy of a family member or neighbor, local officials said." There is a hint of Western bias here, sounding a note of disapproval when it comes to the customs of another country. Maybe they weren't "hysterical" at all, it's just that when you want to rouse an old woman from bed and drag her to a field and burn her alive you have to get psyched up for it. Sometimes a human sacrifice is needed to alleviate the boredom, killing time as it were. It's for the good of the collective.

The President of Kenya "… appealed to Kisii residents to report suspected witches to the police… Anyone convicted of using black magic to cause fear or injury can be sentenced to as many as five years in prison." Nothing to fear but fear itself and a few old people. It's not like more modern countries don't get a lot of mileage out of fear and paranoia, and they have their own version of a witch hunt.[90]

A tribal elder (99 years old) said that in the old days, "Villagers had a foolproof method for determining guilt" of being a witch. "Smear herbs on the hands of the

[90] Now and then there is an hysterical bitch frenzy in this country when some women are suspected of an indefinable magic. They are attacked with flash bulbs, but no one burns. They burst into fame, the hot air warping their perspective. Some will burn out, but it takes a while.

> suspect and that of a second, innocent man." Both men put their hands into a pot of boiling water and come back in five days. "If the suspect was a witch, burns would appear on his hands… The innocent man's hands would remain unscarred… the witch would then be stoned to death." He says now, "They're killing people without knowing if the person is a witch or not." Like they used to know.
>
> There must be some way to blame the white man for this. The only angle I could come up with is that the incident was reported in a newspaper and those were invented by people of European descent. Some things are not "historical" or didn't happen if they're not reported. Does a tree fall in the forest if no one from the *New York Times* is there to write about it? There is a Western bias when it comes to the quantitative, as in body counts, how many were burned, how many ran away.

8 p.m. In the evening with the opera on, *The Barber of Seville* by Rossini. In a studious mood, no plans for going out.

Midnight: Phone call from the Czech woman. She sounded more lighthearted and relaxed than I have heard her in a long time. I figured she had gotten laid and maybe found her itinerant Latino friend, which was true. He was sleeping there at the moment. She may have been a little stoned, saying she felt more balanced and detached, realizing what a burden she was putting on things by demanding high standards of loyalty and ethics from someone she picked up on the street and went to bed with a few hours later.

For that matter, she was back in tune with the Jewish manager of the coffee shop where she works. So she has two boyfriends, or maybe four. A Frenchman and a young Brazilian guy. The last two were showing interest, but it didn't sound like she was sleeping with them. I generally don't ask her who she's having sex with. We talked for an hour. I was at a low ebb, a little subdued, feeling the effects of gravity and the night before. It's possible the quality of sleep has been affected by sleeping next to the window on the street. It is something I adjusted to, but I'm not sure of the unconscious effect. The

quality of sleep can vary. Who knows what kind of tension I absorb from passing noises on the street?

She suggested we go to a hot tub again. She can come by after work. I don't know if her immediate mood had anything to do with it, but she was talking about massages and "rolling around in the tub."

I asked her if she knew Krakow, thinking of the Polish woman last week. Of course, she has been there. A beautiful university town, not that far from Prague. I usually get along with European women, at least the few I have met. They tend to have more substance and historical awareness, affording something to hold onto or engage, even on a first meeting. The Czech woman thinks they have fewer walls than women here, but admitted she was generalizing and modified it to the country she is from. The mating rites might include a serious discussion with a man in a club, rather than inane deflections and come-ons. It makes you wonder if there are fewer walls between people in homogenous countries (for better or worse). The historical similarities provide a common ground, and that can help with communication.

Earlier in the evening I was on a high-strung instrument and glancing out the window. There was an erratic (not erotic) woman on the sidewalk. She was under the influence of the furies, coming down the street and flailing her arms, stumbling and weaving, in the throes of some unbearable news or maybe a drug. Over the next half hour she would collar one man or another, spilling her guts as it were, whether an idle black man leaning against a car (she was a light-skinned black woman), or someone older walking by, most of them wary and walking away. She continued across the street,

pulling at her shirt and acting like she would throw herself into a cyclone fence, gesticulating wildly and talking nonstop to whoever would listen.

It took her a while to go one block. She finally disappeared into the corner store run by the Middle Eastern guys. They have a drop-dead calm, which is useful in this neighborhood, but they will physically remove anyone from the store who causes trouble. I half-expected her to come flying out. She walked out under her own power, not having purchased anything. She went around the corner and appeared a minute later walking up the sidewalk and talking with a black man like a loose wire. I thought she was going to fling herself in front of a passing car or wander into the street, unaware of where she was. The man showed some interest. She was too slippery for him though, and eventually disappeared down Hyde Street.

1:30 a.m. Phone call from the Phantom of the sound-room. He was relatively sober and saying what a good session we had last night. A little rough at first when he was on drums, and then it picked up. He thought we should tape these sessions and wants to get an 8-track (he's a trained sound technician). He gave up on one that cost $4000 and is focused on one for $1200. He mentioned that an old friend from school has a CD out, and talked about his background in Nebraska. He has a dry sense of humor on that subject.

That reminds me, he went back last month for his sister's wedding, and related an episode where he and a black woman were having sex on a dirt road. It was a reverberating encounter in the middle of the country on a warm night, with him a downwardly mobile rock and roll casualty, and her a somewhat conservative woman with a good job. What was she doing with him? Turns out she is an old friend of him and his

sister, and had been to the wedding. She is in her early twenties and was afraid of him when he was eighteen and she was twelve. She isn't afraid anymore.

He refers to himself as Mr. Excitement, as in not. His laconic resignation to a flat existence. I'm not sure if that has anything to do with being from Nebraska.

2 a.m. On the typewriter for a while until the ribbon ran out.

Sunday, Aug. 8, 1993

12:30 p.m. I was meeting Linda, the businesswoman with a son. She was driving up from Mountain View to scope out the area for a business trip to Fisherman's Wharf. It's the last place I want to go on a Sunday or any other day. I went through a prolonged attempt to clean up the place. She was going to drive by and I would be on the corner waiting. There was a mix-up over the directions. I'm not sure why she couldn't pull over, ring the bell, or park nearby. There were places you could park a moving van. She circled the block for half an hour, then drove to Fisherman's Wharf and called.

2 p.m. I showed up, walking most of the way. She sat with her son who is four and a half. When he saw me he started running toward me. A tourist got in the way, cutting off the sightlines, and he was momentarily confused. Then we were together and I carried him, wanting to get away from there. We went out on a long pier with a submarine. He was intrigued by the next boat, a Liberty ship which was looming on the end of straining heavy ropes. Everyone is his friend, talking or waving to strangers, including the captain in his uniform.

We walked past the stern and sat near the end of the pier. The overcast had blown away, leaving a stunning afternoon. There were seals moving through the water like flexible torpedoes.

Linda left for a while and we sat there. He climbed up on my leg and situated himself, pulling out his 'monica and blowing on it. The idea was that it would make seals or dolphins appear. After a while he put it down, a little discouraged and sighed, "I guess they hate my music." I know the feeling. You give it all you've got and there are still no dolphins leaping through the floor, or women either.

We were on a wooden platform with an iron ring and a rope attached. He pretended he was "water-skiing," holding onto the rope and leaning back. I was supposed to know the signals. His mother returned and took him to the end of the pier to pee. When they returned there was some question of what the fish would think. She said they pee in the ocean too. He said, "Do they open their mouths?"

He climbed on my back and the two of us wandered over to the exit ramp of the Liberty ship[91] from World War II. On a whim I went up without paying. I realized we should have done this in the first place. He was stoked to be on the deck. It was higher than it looked with a good view and the equipment was something else. There was a stern-mounted 102 mm deck gun "for use against surfaced submarines." You're out of luck if they haven't surfaced. The boat was developed to replace those torpedoed by German U-boats. We manned the rear gun with him on the seat looking a bit uncertain. We wondered which sailboat we should blow out of the water. That led to an ethical discussion concerning the people on the sailboat.

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[91] The SS Jeremiah O'Brien, a cargo ship which could function as a troop transport (though not very well). It is 441 feet long and was built in less than two months. There are only two functioning Liberty ships left. This one survived D-Day.

We walked over to one of the machine guns, looking like something the Alien would have used. It had a long black air-cooled barrel with shoulder supports and site.

We went below deck, climbing down a ladder and finding more ladders on the way to the engine room. He was careful about going down the ladder and I was supposed to watch him. Then we were in the mechanical guts of the ship[92] with an enormous crankshaft and pistons, polished dials and gauges, tanks and cylinders, a metal floor and built-in claustrophobia. It was warm, but it didn't smell very good. Being down there when the ship was out to sea and rolling would have been awful.

The two of us went through another hatch, a long low tunnel along a shaft. I had to bend over, but he didn't, marching along and saying, "Cool dude… awesome!" We walked back, climbed the ladders, headed for the bow and made it to some higher levels, seeing more of the crew's quarters. We were back in the 1940's (it's a floating time machine). Small grey metal rooms with wood and brass fixtures, narrow bunks, and port holes. It reminded me of the post office in the old Customs Building, which has a turn-of-the-century integrity of marble, wood, and frosted glass (it is closed for seismic repairs).

When we left, I carried him down the gangplank with his mother wondering where we were. The three of us returned to the car and drove to my place.

He remembers that the building I used to live in had a fire. He was impressed by that since he can't imagine anyone losing their home. The iron elevator was unfamiliar though. I told him to push number three and lifted him up. He got a surprise when the elevator lurched into motion and we levitated.

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[92] The steam engine is 21 feet long and 19 feet high. It weighs 140 tons.

We hung out in the apartment for an hour or so. My sister had a matter-of-fact acceptance of the neighborhood, or maybe she assumed it was hopeless. After a while my nephew was getting restless or bored, so I threw him on the bed by the window. The only problem then was getting him to quit. There is nothing like rough-housing and he loves it. There was a pillow fight and some wrestling. I was struck by how self-aware he is. I opened a window over the street and he leaned out (his mother becoming concerned), but I was there. He would yell out the window and I would throw him on the bed. We did it over and over. One time I hesitated when he yelled. He turned around and explained the routine, that he would yell out the window and I would throw him, okay? At some point he did a stage dive and I caught him at the last second.

5 p.m. She gave me a couple of lemons from her tree, and I walked them outside. He ran to the car and started kicking it.

When they were gone I was sitting in a daze and readjusting. When you get into the world of a four-year-old it leaves you scrambled. I was impressed all over again with what parents go through.

I forgot to mention she brought the album from her 20th high school reunion a year ago. A woman I knew in high school had been asking about me, and there she was in a photo twenty years later. When I moved up here from Los Angeles in 1972, after my second year of college, I lived in a ramshackle wooden house on top of a hill overlooking the Castro District.[93] I shared a room with a woman I met at Café Trieste in North Beach during my second week here. Returning home one afternoon I found a note on the door from Cookie who was passing through town.

[93] The manager was a woman who drank a fair amount of bourbon every day, and used to be Segovia's mistress (she taught classical guitar). There were vines coming through the walls and two young lesbians cavorting in the garden. The house was torn down years ago.

7 p.m. *60 Minutes*. It turned into a long night of the tube, accompanied by a stringed instrument. The tube distracts my mind, allowing unconscious forces to come out of the instrument. I ended up watching *Mississippi Burning*, since I have a weakness for movies about the South.

Monday, Aug. 9, 1993

In the morning I went out for a typewriter ribbon, walking to Polk Street with the usual derelicts, addicts, runaways, and male whores. I went into an old coffee shop, an anachronism of wood, and looked at brass and glass containers of dark coffee beans. I didn't see any French roast. I asked the woman and she showed me a large container which was right under my hand. I was tired, not enough sleep. She offered a mint for the sullen.

I dropped into a shop full of foreign language periodicals. I feel foreign periodically.

Typing for hours, and went to work in the afternoon.

The Attorney was still at home, and there was not much work. A phone call from a client. She has a workers' comp case (back injury) and is living with a woman. She used to be with the manic-depressive fellow. If he doesn't take his lithium[94] he loses it. He has been known to empty his bank account and end up in jail in another state a few days later. One time he was off his lithium and living on the streets. He showed up at the office and I took him out on the balcony so he wouldn't disturb the others, being a smelly wreck. He said there were bugs crawling underneath the skin of his hand and after a

[94] It's a mood stabilizer, and helps with acute mania. Don't ask about the side-effects.

while it was getting to me – like the opposite of a contact high. Anyhow, the client said her first husband shot himself (he was fifty-one).

I walked home after a couple of hours, picking up some fish and chips.

Read the paper. 4 U.S. SOLDIERS KILLED IN SOMALIA. A land mine activated by remote control.

I read about high-resolution satellites and life insurance.

8:30 p.m. Lay down for a while to relax and passed out.

11:30 p.m. When I regained consciousness, I called a number in Alaska but she wasn't there. Typing for a few hours.

1:45 a.m. Went to the corner store for cigarette papers. There were panhandlers out front, and a few ruined human beings at the counter. The store is what you might expect in the Tenderloin, with a TV showing an old movie (*Penny Serenade* with Cary Grant).

3 a.m. The phone rang. It was Ming (it's an hour earlier up north). I was almost out of coffee with the Guinness gone, just apple juice and water. It was good to hear her voice - we haven't talked in over a month. She launched into a spiel about how burned out she is, working long hours at a fish egg processing plant and shacking up with the same guy in his trailer. There are occasional side trips to the mountains. He is somewhat of a "jerk," whose romantic life was so awful (in his mid-twenties) it drained any sentiment from him. He is interested in her. She keeps him at arm's length, which is hard to do in a trailer, but will sleep with him once in a while, having "mediocre" sex to calm him down.

She talked about the mess she left behind here, involving one roommate and an ex-boyfriend. She is at the end of her rope with them. They won't let go and she can't believe how emotional and loving some of these men are. Can't they be more realistic? It gets redundant after a while. How they can be so stagnant in their lives? She doesn't want to be cruel, but one of them is morose and depressed on the phone or in his letters, suspecting that he may not figure very prominently in her future. She is amazed that some men think they can negotiate love, especially with someone like her who is unclear on the concept and doesn't feel it in the usual sense of the word.

She will return in mid-September with about $4000, hang around for a month or so, then go to China and visit her parents. There was some mention of how unfeminine she has become, but it's no big deal. The men up there are more about quantity than quality. She practically forgot how to wear a dress. Her hands are beat-up, she is tired from the long hours, feels like a brute, and smells like a fish.

I was becalmed on the phone as we talked for over an hour. She asked what I have been doing the last month. How to reply in 25,000 words or less? My responses picked up during the last half hour. She finally realized what she is in for being a bridesmaid at my ex-girlfriend's wedding in the mountains, and the weird-looking dress she might be stuck in. "Baby blue!?"

We said how much we missed each other, although one of the qualities that she appreciates is my detachment.

4 a.m. Typing for a while, then read *Pale Fire*.

> He had never visited New York before; but as many near-cretins, he was above novelty… and now, after checking the height of a few more buildings, he felt that he knew all there was to know.

> We can now go further and describe, to a doctor or to anybody else willing to listen to us, the condition of this primate's soul. He could read, write, and reckon, he was endowed with a modicum of self-awareness (with which he did not know what to do), some duration consciousness, and a good memory for faces, names, dates and the like. Spiritually he did not exist. Morally he was a dummy pursuing another dummy. The fact that his weapon was a real one, and his quarry a highly developed human being, this fact belongs to <u>our</u> world of events; in his, it had no meaning…We should add to this list of his personal parts the capacity of forming notions, mainly general notions… no amount of motive hunting and rational inquiry can ever <u>really</u> explain how and why anybody is capable of destroying a fellow creature… I would submit that if his human incompleteness be deemed insufficient to explain his idiotic journey across the Atlantic just to empty the magazine of his gun, we may concede, doctor, that our half-man was also half-mad.

I love Nabokov.

5:30 or 6 a.m. I turned off the lamp and lay in an eerie glow of the riot lights outside. There was a view in the window of the floating and the fixed. Vapors drifted past a stainless-steel tower and a star. A dome with a banner of undulating nationalism. Ephemeral vapors like evaporating conversations blowing away.

Tuesday, Aug.10, 1993

Woke up and a minute later, walking by the window overlooking the empty lot, I saw two people sleeping on their ragged bedding near a cyclone fence. A few minutes later I heard someone yelling as if in distress. The guy was having a hard time getting over the fence. He finally made it, dropping down the other side and stumbling up the sidewalk holding his arm. The woman had an awful-looking face with long bushy hair, wearing black shorts under a loose shirt which was half off the shoulder. Her legs were relatively smooth, and I think she hasn't been on the streets that long. Early twenties, and him with short hair. They seem like addicts, or were really hung-over and dumb as wood. Maybe junkies from the country, hard to tell.

She was struggling to pull her bag through a gap in the wire fence. The opening was narrow and it wouldn't go through. A man wearing shorts and carrying a cane removed it for her. She got into an animated conversation with him, like a long-lost friend, maybe explaining her plight. Her companion was up the street, watching and waiting. I figured she was hitting the stranger up for money. He seemed to be checking his pockets.

A few minutes later I was making coffee and heard the young guy yelling her name and sounding like a "near-cretin" with her having gone off with the stranger. He lay down on the sidewalk, curled up on his side and tried to sleep.

When the coffee was done I saw him sit up and look this way for his absent, or is it vacant, companion. I noticed her and the man with the cane returning from around the corner and crossing the street. I thought they may have gone to his bank machine. It's possible some other interaction was negotiated, ducking into an alley with the scent of urine for a morning blow job. I wondered if someone had reported it since they were followed by a police car. It pulled up and they called her over to the window. The man with the cane kept walking. The policeman was doing an on-the-spot interrogation and seemed to hold her hand or arm for a second (checking for needle marks?) while running a computer check.

The man with the cane dropped off her bag with the young guy, getting his attention, pointed to her, and walked away. The young guy got up, having a wonderful morning, and hesitated (seeing his companion with the police). He walked over to the police car with a firm resolve. She was waiting by the curb. He was making a nuisance of himself, bending over with his head almost in the police car. He backed off and a

uniformed arm came out and grabbed him by the shirt and pulled him back in no uncertain terms.

The police had nothing on them, closed the door and drove away. The young couple picked up their things and meandered up the sidewalk in the other direction. I think they were looking for a meal, the funds for which she had presumably just procured.

Earlier I was woken up by someone yelling, "YOU'RE DIRTY, YOU'RE HOMELESS, YOU NEED A SHOWER, YOU'RE AN ASSHOLE!" Looking out the window I saw a man in a white shirt and tie walking around.

12:30 p.m. I rendezvoused with V. at work, noted the presence of the Attorney in his office, and told him I wasn't there yet. We walked to Old St. Mary's Church for another recital, which was as much her idea as mine. A chamber orchestra with piano, violin, cello, bassoon, and clarinet. It was a "jazz-inspired" program. Solo piano on the first few numbers – Thelonious Monk and Duke Ellington.

We were listening to "Little Rootie Tootie" when she leaned over and whispered, "I'm going to pray," which is to say: do not disturb. She pulled out her prayer book and rosary beads. I sat there with dissonant piano notes bouncing around and felt like I was dissolving in her presence. I have no resistance or defenses for this sort of thing. Considering the pagan and profane women I have known, it hit me from an unfamiliar angle.

Ten minutes later she said something to let me know it's okay to talk. The ensemble was doing a longer piece from 1927,[95] a tour de force of music changing

[95] Bohuslav Martinu, a Czech composer (1890-1959)

directions in mid-air, and handled rather well by light-fingered virtuosos from a local symphony. The earlier number by Duke Ellington was called “Happy Go Lucky Local.”

When it was over we went up a few pews and sat there. I was not sure how the prayer beads worked, so I got a patient explanation. She opened her prayer book on the “mysteries” relating to the life of Christ and recited the text in silence with the Hail Mary beads. Psychological truths are embedded in religion like illuminated windows. There are psychological truths that don’t require the trappings of religion, and have been around for a long time.

One thing about a church, there is an architectural refutation of the profit motive. Candles flickered in front of a statue of Jesus. You drop in a coin and light a candle, say a prayer, or say a candle and light a prayer and do some mental projection. I asked her if I should do it. I only had a nickel. She said, “God doesn’t care how much, as long as your intentions are pure.” I walked over, feeling strange, dropped a nickel in, lit a candle and looked at the statue. The only thing I could think of was “God bless V.,” and I’m an atheist.

As we were leaving, she showed me a little chapel near the front door, dipping her fingertips into a small bowl of holy water and crossing herself quickly. One room had a container with a pushbutton tap over a glass bowl with black letters on it: HOLY WATER.

I told her about a church in Rome which had the phrase AVE MARIA in blue neon over the statue of a woman. There was some discussion of the architecture of gothic churches, having had a heavy dose of it when spending a year in Europe. My old quandary: do soaring cosmological structures require a dream of God in order to inspire

their construction, lifting high the roof beam? Given the organic and hallucinatory quality of those churches I can tolerate the theology, but I'm not sure if it would tolerate me.

Walking back to the office we picked up something to go. She told me to hurry up. The attorney she works for is on vacation, but she feels guilty if she's gone too long. Her plan to quit her job has been on and off. Now it's on - leaving at the end of September.

> One gets so accustomed to another life running alongside one's own that a sudden turn-off on the part of the parallel satellite causes in one a feeling of stupefaction, emptiness, and injustice.[96]

There will be an operation on her thin wrists for carpal tunnel syndrome. She has a white wristband on one of them. V. will return to the Philippines for a month or so towards the end of the year, not having been there since she was thirteen.

In the office I took the salad into the conference room where Aisha had closed the door. She was absorbed in one of her "soaps," so I wasn't supposed to talk. After a while we managed to have a conversation with her explaining the plot, such as it was. I had a comment about the predominance of blondes. They are overrated in my opinion, not to mention frigid-looking (at least the ones on the show). She thought that was a reasonable assessment. I listened to some prematurely senile and suburban storm-and-stress. The show was clean and hermetic as a plastic bag. The underlying premise: how to weather real life with a dry vagina. There were awkward situations, sentimental communications, and mixed signals. A female atmosphere with phony interludes between commercial interruptions. It was nearly enough to turn me off to women.

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[96] Nabokov, *Pale Fire*

We watched the last few minutes of vicarious living through "One Life to Live," with her explaining the situation. The blonde has a problem. Her husband suggested they go upstairs and get romantic. How to tell him they aren't married anymore? He has amnesia from a recent accident and has forgotten they are separated. Even worse, she is with someone else. There was a quintessential moment when she was draped around his neck with a phony smile and disturbing thoughts.

I'm struck with how old these people seem. They are mostly in their twenties and thirties, but it has the atmosphere of a funeral parlor or retirement home where everything is a problem. People whose lives have run aground, like they're beached on a middle-class island of practicality with no imagination. When it was over, I said my life is a breeze compared to them. Aisha said hers is complicated, and she wants to base a soap opera on it.

Later at the front desk she told me how it went with the personal ad. The man is thirty-eight and retired with a black Ferrari. When he called he sounded like – big surprise – a self-centered jerk. She was only interested in his car, so maybe it was poetic justice when he talked about his other cars and his high income. He lives in San Jose and thought they could meet halfway, which is not her idea of a good time (she was looking forward to sex in a foreign car).[97] She told him she is black, and he has no problem with that. However, he intimated they would have to think about it if they were to have children. By then she wanted nothing to do with him. He is materialistic, but so is she.[98]

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[97] There is not much room in a Ferrari, so she might have to settle for a handshake.

[98] A couple of years ago, when things were winding down with the ex, I met an attractive black woman in her twenties, Khadizha. She lived across the street from a hot singles club and would practice her saxophone on the roof. Since I played guitar, we had some notion of collaborating. Khadizha was not very tall and had a full bosom. When we hugged each other it was like two pillows on my chest. She had a vague arrangement with an older man who may have been paying

The Attorney left early, feeling tired. He has lost some weight from being in the hospital.

5 p.m. I walked V. to the underground monorail and headed for home. I ran into a movie being filmed. There was heavy equipment, a few trailer trucks, and a crowd. I walked over to the edge of the crowd, half of whom were extras. They were set in motion like wind-up humans, walking in both directions on both sides of the street. They were in the background, while a camera on tracks in the alley filmed a short scene with a heavy-set man in a red suit. He was buying a hot dog and walking towards the camera while spilling mustard on himself as someone shouted. They did it over and over. Each time the extras went into motion, showing off their life-like ambulatory skills. Then they stood around like a demographic cross-section of the local population.

I stood there for a few minutes, having edged over to the door of a gallery with windows. I was inside with a view of the filming process, so inane I thought it was a commercial. I asked a black couple who were extras. No, it's a movie. They had been doing this all day in locations around town. Something about it bothered me, like it was vaguely offensive. The monotonous routine of pedestrian extras. All the trouble and expense to reproduce an atmosphere of busy sidewalks. The pedestrians are here, so why do they need stand-ins or walk-ons? Maybe to assure they keep walking and don't stare at the camera in the alley, pointing at it.

When I walked out of the gallery I was insinuated in a group of extras. I looked more put together than usual and wondered if I would be in a scene, given the dramatic aspects of a coat and tie. Then I left, not having much patience for this sort of thing.

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her bills, but that didn't stop her from sleeping at my place one night (we were close, but no cigar). Her family was not well off, with the siblings fending for themselves as well as they could. One of her sisters was an addict and a prostitute.

Home in the evening, reading.

9 p.m. Phone call from B. She saw the German woman over the weekend, and still can't believe she was married to a woman. It lasted about two years, but there were irreconcilable differences (what with their being two separate people). B.'s curiosity was running wild. In some respects she doesn't know who to sleep with, so she doesn't sleep with anyone. Ilsa has a tight body and no room for doubt.

It was a nice conversation, bouncing around the various subjects. She said there is a big party this weekend, one of Tony Serra's bashes (a leftwing criminal defense attorney who likes to smoke pot). I've been to one or two of his parties. She is not sure where it is, but has a network of informants. She keeps me informed as to what party is happening where.

10 p.m. One of our mutual acquaintances called, the fellow who was at Club 181 last week. He had come with Joanna, the Polish woman, whose number I wanted. "…It's so hard to get on / and these visions of Johanna they kept me up past the dawn."[99] There was some tact required here, though it turned out he was not interested in her (I think the feeling was mutual). I didn't get around to asking until half an hour later, hearing about his AA meetings. He was going every day for ninety days, relating some of the stories. There were four hundred people there from all walks of life who had managed to bottom out. I get the impression that this country is a game of chutes and ladders with the upwardly mobile and descending alcoholics.

He is from Minnesota, a clean-cut fellow in his mid-thirties with a good job in imports. He said he was an alcoholic who was stoned and drunk too often. "Did you ever

[99] Bob Dylan, "Visions of Johana" (1966)

have a gin head?" "No, what's that?" He spent several days at a beach in Texas with friends, drinking gin and tonics all day. He went home with a "white noise" in his head. I asked if he could hear the ocean. No, just static.

Turned out he didn't have her number, but a friend of his did.

11 p.m. Typing for a few hours.

Wednesday, Aug. 11, 1993

He called me in the morning with her number, and I called her. She was working as an au pair in some outlying bedroom community. The connection was not like what we had in the club, but she is a woman of substance who meant what she said – including the assumption that if I was worth talking to for half an hour in a nightclub, I was worth seeing again. Not sure about this weekend, and she doesn't have a car. Maybe she could use the monorail.

12:30 p.m. Rendezvous with V. in the office. We walked to a dim sum place, which was her idea. I'm getting used to her departure in a month and a half, and she is arranging more rendezvous. She wants to go to those recitals every week. However marginal and platonic I am, she decided I have a firm position in her life, feeling secure in my detachment and acknowledgment of her engagement. The older woman in the office told her I was like an older brother. She thought that was a legitimate reason for our spending time together.

She said that after she quit her job we might continue to get together by way of the underground transit, saying I could come to Daly City. I said, "Does it stop in a graveyard?" There are cemeteries out there, all quiet in the suburbs. For that matter, she

could come into the city, having more time, and see the church I told her about in North Beach. That's the one she thought was too far. I said, "How far did Jesus walk?" and she had a guilty look.

The Hang Ah Tea Room, the oldest dim sum place in town. So-so cuisine and she didn't finish. "I'm on a diet… I'm too fat," while holding her waist on the side. She said she was discouraged when she looked in the mirror. I said she was out of her mind, but what do I know? I never feel discouraged when I look at her. We talked about soap operas, marriage, and Saint Augustine. She used to watch one of the soaps for a while, but found it boring and pointless. She assumes, when living with her eventual husband, that her parents will live downstairs. That alone would make me keep my distance.

We walked back to the office. I don't know if she considers me a lost soul or what, but I keep coming up with theological references which ring a bell with her, having gone to a private Catholic girls' school. She doesn't have much in the way of critical thinking, or maybe she saves it for the secular.

On the subject of Saint Augustine, whose name I couldn't remember for a while (drawing a blank as if it was eclipsed by the financial district). When the Attorney walked in I asked who was the guy who did such and such in the 4th century and he said his name. My father went to a seminary called Augustana. V. had to deal with Augustinian sisters, but wasn't familiar with him or his writings. He is the father of the neurotic custom of celibacy in the church, and was big on original sin (the Jews in their finite wisdom are not). Modern thinkers are at odds with some of his teachings, including my father, thinking he brought an anti-physical superstition into the religion. She was giving me a blank look on this topic. There are pathological European complications which

barely touch her, like this notion of being alienated from your own body (and its sexual urges). She would no more have thought in those terms than she would think of criticizing one of the saints.

There are innuendos and dirty jokes which the older woman in the office often throws in her direction, but half the time she doesn't get it and told me as much. V. is religious and engaged, and the woman makes remarks about her having other lovers.

5:30 p.m. I walked home thinking about women in the naked city.

A quiet evening. *Piano Concerto #2 in F-minor* by Chopin (1830), and I finished *Pale Fire*.

> Mere springs and coils produced the inward movements of our clockwork man. He might be termed a Puritan. One essential dislike, formidable in its simplicity, pervaded his dull soul: he disliked injustice and deception. He disliked their union – they were always together – with a wooden passion that neither had nor needed words to express itself. Such a dislike should have deserved praise had it not been a by-product of the man's hopeless stupidity. He called unjust and deceitful everything that surpassed his understanding. He worshipped general ideas and did so with pedantic aplomb. The generality was godly, the specific diabolical. If one person was poor and the other wealthy it did not matter what precisely had ruined one or made the other rich; the difference itself was unfair, and the poor man who did not denounce it was as wicked as the rich one who ignored it. People who knew too much, scientists, writers, mathematicians, crystallographers and so forth, were no better than kings or priests: they all held an unfair share of power of which others were cheated…a plain decent fellow should constantly be on the watch…

Or join the Khmer Rouge.

One of the nice things about Nabokov, he loves the erotic and disparages the Freudian. He has a pickpocket's sleight of hand when it comes to lifting a bit of Eros into the light like a rarified moth. A connoisseur of found delights with a polymorphous curiosity. The gentleman is not a Puritan.

He wonders about the shortcomings of Freud and Marx. In a conversation in *Pale Fire* the latter is thought to be worse, since communism came with secret police and countless casualties. On the Freudian: "The little cap of red velvet in the German version of Little Red Riding Hood is a symbol of menstruation." "… [W]hen a youth is all the time sticking his finger through his buttonhole… the analytic teacher knows that the appetite of the lustful one knows no limit in his phantasies." The teacher has no time for those who think that everything is a symbol, as if green leaves symbolize happiness. The leaves are chlorophyll-osophical. It's wrong to attribute human emotions to plants or the weather. "The clouds were angry." That is the foundation of a lot of superstition and misplaced sentiments. Clouds don't get angry. They are pushed around by natural circumstances.

There are people with some half-baked generalities hanging over their head. Nabokov blames Marx and Freud and mediocre schools. Bad sociology is even worse than bad metaphors when it comes to leading us astray. He had more respect for Einstein, but thought the theory of relativity does not belong in the living room. His everyday life was under the sway of the Newtonian. A table might be made of atoms which are mostly empty in their electromagnetic nothingness, but that doesn't mean if you swing your leg at the table it will pass right through it. No, it hurts. Your leg is solid and so is the table. Our solidity is painful. If you don't have a sense of proportion when it comes to Einstein you might think you're living in a space-time warp where everything is relative.[100] That might be true, like it's true we're made of atoms, but you can't go through life as an atomic-powered voidoid.

[100] As sometimes happens with scientific theories, they trickle down through the warp and woof of society like a wrong-way alchemy. It turns the theory of evolution into Social Darwinism.

10 p.m. I lay down for a minute on the bed by the window. You would think I would have learned by now. The next thing I knew it was three in the morning. I got up, changed into a bathrobe, went back to bed and couldn't sleep for a while. I had to stay up while a poem was passing through from the subconscious to a conscious hand-off onto the page. A half-moon floated over a rectangle in the window.

Thursday, Aug. 12, 1993

NOTES

> I saw a flyer for a young black woman named Inertia. I think she is a singer, but doesn't record very often. I wondered about the name, if she liked the sound of it or didn't know what it meant. Maybe her sister's name is Anomie.
>
> The story of Bernie Vertigo and Shirley Spermicide.
>
> Stop the typewriter I want to get off.
>
> "Doctored recollections…" and controlled dreams.
>
> Free associating, I noticed a sign saying DATA LASER and thought of the DALAI LAMA.
>
> Sometimes I generate an analytic negative mojo when it comes to women. It makes for an unconscious recoil which holds me back in ways I may not realize until it is too late. It takes a rare encounter to unlock the hold the analytic has on my mind.
>
> There was a letter in the *SF Weekly* complaining about a negative review last week of *Poetic Justice*. The letter was from a black woman and referred to "aspects of Black (capitalized as a statement) life." That's quite a statement. She objects to the description of a shallow vain Janet Jackson in front of the mirror. This is not "embarrassing objectification" or bad acting. "It has been my experience that a mirror can justify one's existence when no one or nothing else does." The director "does a phenomenal job of capturing a soul trying to validate itself…." I'm a narcissist, therefore I am.
>
> She refers to an "important scene… where elderly women are talking 'values' and 'morals'… it is this humorous and important scene where the African tradition of

handing down values is demonstrated." What will they think of next? Imagine that, they hand down values. How come non-Africans never thought of that? Is it because they don't have any values to hand down and they can't talk? All those white women, elderly or not, who sit around and talk may not realize this is an African tradition, along with walking. Putting one foot down and then the other, which has some value if you want to get somewhere.

As for the film, it "portrays the many nuances of Black life." From the not-so-good reviews I had the impression that it didn't. If it did, those nuances were nothing to write home about, like the subtle difference between "Fuck you" and "Fuck you bitch." There is the nuance of the main character's nose job, and how she is pale compared to other black people. The subtle nuance of her annual income.

An article in the PEOPLE section of the *Chronicle*. There were suspicious and/or sinister implications going off in all directions and defiling everything they touch, including the reader and the journalists.

The mother is a school psychologist. The father is home a lot, but he taught his daughter "about African American role models…" They live in a comfortable suburb and the daughter gets good grades in school.

Now the father is in San Quentin serving a life term. He is fifty-three. It seems that "nearly every day for 11 years," when his daughter went from five to sixteen, he "raped, sodomized or otherwise sexually abused her. He'd be waiting when she came home from school." 116 counts of child abuse. The mother, fortunately, is also doing time (seventeen years). She is not being treated as an innocent mindless pawn in the household, even though she tried it with the jury, having "an air of suffering martyrdom." Such a "baffled but loving mom," who "walked around the house naked except for a gun strapped to her hip." She was fully aware of what was happening to her daughter and told her to "deal with it." She was instrumental in turning the police and social workers away with her "faultless psychobabble" when they investigated charges brought by an older sister (who left home with her brother at seventeen - the abused daughter was twelve) and "denied everything."

Here we have a close-knit if not in-closet family with some contradictions that take your breath away. The father is a black man with a notion of role models, yet his own daughter was being used as a masturbation device. There is an assumption of a man owning his offspring, body and soul. He can do anything he wants to them, like the white man who killed himself and took his two young kids with him. Does it have to do with being inseparable, a little too close-knit? Some distance and detachment would have had a positive effect, giving the girl some breathing room.

The father wanted her to know about role models (while constituting one of the worst himself), but the daughter said, "He always told me I'd end up a whore." I wonder why he thought that. Another case of the observer affecting the observed. This is not to discount the civilizing factors of psychological training, African American role models, and a comfortable suburban existence, but the worst things still go on. The daughter grew up in a negative atmosphere and who knows how she will turn out? It's curious that at eighteen she is engaged to a man of forty-two.

Meanwhile, the coverage in the paper is like a lurid soap opera. The father is shown in prison cleaning his glasses and smiling with a glance to the side, in which direction is a photo of his daughter. That raises a few questions. Why was the anonymity of the daughter not protected? She is sitting in a semi-alluring pose with soft lighting, head cocked to the side, an enigmatic smile and practically in her underwear – a T-shirt tied below her breasts. She is in short white shorts with her legs bent underneath her. Unconsciously or not, she is in a position that leaves her knees spread, one arm crossing between her legs and holding one of them, as if to block it. The other hand is holding said forearm in place. Was this arranged by the woman photographer? The paper wants to make sure we get the picture.

An article in *The New Yorker* about Lady Ottoline Morrell (1873-1938), a patron of the arts and an associate of the Bloomsbury crowd who frequently offered the hospitality of her home to artists and writers. She had numerous love affairs, including one with Bertrand Russell, and was a pacifist during World War I (which John Reed referred to as "… a falling out among commercial rivals."). I would like her for that last point alone. She slept with a stonemason who was working on the statues in her garden and it inspired a novel.[101] Some of the literary set liked to mock her, and when her jaw was "destroyed by cancer" Virginia Woolf described her as being "tied up in a nose-bag like an old horse." Given the feminist sainthood of Woolf[102] it is odd to hear how "venomous" she was to other women, not to say condescending.[103] So who is afraid of Virginia Woolf? Anyone who isn't up to her frigid IQ.

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[101] *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) by D.H. Lawrence

[102] I wonder how a writer of the caliber of Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957) was eclipsed by the effete folks of Bloomsbury. I like Virginia Woolf, but her writing pales before *The Apes of God*.

[103] She could put down men as well, including a novel by one of her contemporaries. "An illiterate, underbred book it seems to me; the book of a self taught working man, and we all know how distressing they are, how egotistic, insistent, raw, striking, and ultimately nauseating… Being fairly normal myself I am soon ready for the classics again." The book left her "puzzled, bored, irritated, and disillusioned…." To be fair, this is from her diary (in 1922), but we're talking about *Ulysses* by James Joyce.

With respect to the "petty tragedy of the social whirl" in that time and place, the reviewer said it was "less merry than miserable,"[104] or "in the words of Alexander Pope":

> As Hags hold Sabbaths, less for joy than spite,
> So these their merry, miserable Night;
> Still round and round the Ghosts of
> Beauty glide,
> And haunt the places where their
> Honour died.

3 p.m. I went to work with the Attorney gone. V. continues coming close, as if her decision to quit her job is bringing us together. I remember her observation that it was only a number of months before she was gone and I would miss her. She reminded me of the fact in case I didn't realize it – like a woman in a nightclub which is closing soon and she notes the time in case the guy doesn't realize he's running out of time to make a move.

I'm not making any moves, what with her being engaged, and I don't think she wants that anyhow. It's more like a simulated close encounter, or it's real enough but on a platonic plane where she has room to move around and hold the attention of a man. The situation with her boyfriend has become predictable and practical, and she senses that her wedding next year will shut the door on this sort of friendship with a man.

So we're talking, I'm sitting down, and there's a typewriter between us (tell me about it), but she stood as close as she could. Maybe it's unconscious how some walls have been dissolving, with her more open and relaxed. At the moment she was a little

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[104] There was a merry moment in 1907 when Lytton Strachey (a fragile homosexual writer) walked into the room, noticed a stain on the dress of Virginia's sister and inquired, "Semen?" It was unheard of in those straitlaced times, but it broke the ice and they were laughing. "All barriers of reticence and reserve went down. A flood of sacred fluid seemed to overwhelm us. Sex permeated our conversation…." (from *Moments of Being* by Virginia Woolf).

perturbed. A woman client returned a letter from her attorney that she had mailed with "return envelope enclosed." The woman said it wasn't enclosed. V. is a perfectionist who is prone to dreaming, but said in a quiet voice, "What a bitch."

The other day she was in a back room at the computer putting together a list of the attorney's charges, noting every fifteen-minute effort. I stood there and she leaned back in her chair with her head thrown back, smiling and looking up. If I didn't know better, I would have thought it was a seductive pose.

This afternoon I was aware of what a difference a few feet make when she is within arm's length and I'm engulfed in her presence. She is careful not to touch someone, however, and maintains a certain decorum. I thought of the French-Vietnamese receptionist who would punch me when she felt like it.

V. showed me a list of plays, musicals, and concerts, noting which ones she is going to. We talked about *Miss Saigon* and *Madame Butterfly.* I said something about white men who compromise the honor of an Asian woman and she smiled. We looked through the theater section like we were looking for a play that both of us would want to see. Our tastes are worlds apart. She is finally coming around to opera, or romantic arias at least. She was attentive when I told her the story of *Phantom of the Opera*. Love lost and losing face. She doesn't like old movies if they're black and white.

V. is resigned to the notion that life is expensive (it isn't necessarily), assuming a month in Europe would cost $10,000. She has an aptitude for numbers, where I'm closer to geography. That is something which eludes her, so she was impressed. Most of what I know is outside the orbit of her interests.

5 p.m. I walked her to the underground. She gave me a crab apple from her sister's tree, and a tape by a Filipino musician on the saxophone. When I listened to it later, the first notes of a languid and suggestive music floating out, it felt like a further step, hearing the music that she listens to. I will not be giving her a tape of Motorhead. As we walked I asked her to translate the titles of a few old tunes, like "Someone to Watch Over Me" and "It Had to Be You."

"What is 'Kaibigan'?"
"Friend. You're my kaibigan."

I asked if she would hum a few bars of "Promises."

That reminds me, we talked about the soaps she used to watch. She couldn't believe how relationships between men and women were so transitory and short-lived. "Say you and me were married…" [there's a thought] "… and then next year we wouldn't be… we would be with someone else." She operates on the assumption of a loyal continuum. I think that some of the neuroses of people are from the disappearances of those they're close to – parents, friends, and significant others.

I returned to the office and was distracted from the work at hand, but there wasn't much.

7 p.m. On the way home I dropped in on the hi-tech hamburger joint, having a cigarette out front. There was a flyer stuck on a movie ad for *Rising Sun* – saying it was cancelled because it was racist. I kept reading the first line but it wouldn't compute. The movie "… distorts the image of Japanese (read: all Asians and Pacific Islanders)…." Since when is everyone from Chinese to Samoans the same as the Japanese? Those other cultures might be interested to know this. They all look alike? They all share in the profits of an island corporate state? I suppose they were friendly allies of the polite

Japanese soldiers in World War II – who invaded as many Asian countries as they could with the excuse of protecting them from the white man. For the local people it was more like: What do you mean we, sadistic intruders? Can we talk about the comfort women now?[105] The flyer went on to equate "Japan bashing" with the internment camps and 19th century immigration quotas.

Friday, Aug. 13, 1993

3 p.m. I went to work after typing for hours. The Attorney was gone and there was not much work. V. gave me her leftover lunch, then helped me with my voicemail which I never figured out. Turns out there were thirty messages backed up on it, including one from B. with the location of the party tonight.

5 p.m. I walked her to the underground station, then headed for the pool. One mile, 32 ½ minutes, kind of slow. Some people do this every day.

At home, reading the paper. The Pope was underneath a white umbrella in the Mile High City.

B. called from a friend's apartment. She said he got her stoned and there was a lot of wine. It was barely 8:30. She was a hyper-stoned version of her usual self, and mentioned a woman friend who left her a "patronizing" message on her phone machine. She played me the message and went into a high-voiced rapid caricature. Then she felt guilty. "I'll pay for this." I got off the phone and went back to reading *Culture of Complaint* (by Robert Hughes).

[105] The Japanese forced thousands of women in the countries it occupied, especially Korea, to be prostitutes for its army.

10 p.m. I walked half a mile to her place, which is closer to downtown. One thing I like about this city, your stomping grounds are right outside the door. I looked a little better than I had planned on. When I told V. about the party this afternoon she said, "Are you going like that?" - insinuating I looked like a bum. All I had to do, according to her instructions, was put on different pants, shirt, jacket, and shoes.

It was one of those situations where you walk in and it's full speed ahead. M. was there (the fellow who was smashing glasses at his own party). They had a head start and were trying to pull me into it, pushing a small metal pipe with some pot on me while she mixed a drink, Kahlua and coffee. M. was in a manic mode, burlesquing everything.

A couple of others arrived, Laverne and Stone. He is a large man with a ponytail who works in a hospital, repairing wheelchairs.[106] He doesn't have a lot to say, but has carried a heavy-duty torch for B. for years. She lets him drive her around. We drove to the waterfront. At the last minute he turned down a side road, ditching M. on his motorcycle. We lost him for a couple of hours.

We met the rest of the entourage in a cocktail lounge. I was a little stoned like I haven't been in a while, and was more interested in a long suspension bridge reflected on the water. It was visible through a window over a wooden bar. The place was nearly deserted except for their group which was kind of lifeless. Things were taking too long. A group excursion is worse than writing by committee. They finally went outside but were procrastinating so I took off, walking to the party at Pier 5.

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[106] Oddly enough he was a survivalist. His home was stocked with provisions and weapons for the coming apocalypse. His vision of the future was crowding out the present. A few years later he was camping at Clear Lake with friends. He got up to take a leak in the middle of the night, slipped on the rocks, and fell. They found him floating face down in the water the next morning.

Here is where it gets interesting, almost pre-ordained, like you pick up an unconscious signal and you're heading for it, breaking away from the others. I arrived at the place and it was crowded, not a pier (with a long empty warehouse), but one of the old pier fronts. It was being converted into law offices. Several floors were gutted with open stairs and empty rooms. The law offices of Tony Serra hadn't moved in yet. It was situated on the edge of a flickering dark void.

I stood around for a few minutes, then went in. Loud sounds from a band. Squeezing through the crowd I found a beer keg (all there was to drink) with a woman standing next to it under a palm tree like a little oasis. She was friendly, seemed to be alone, and was open to suggestion as it were. I was more interested in the beer at first, asking her how to work it. She filled my glass and hers. I said, "Are you a lawyer or a client?" She said, "A friend." I made some comment about the upper levels (the ceilings were three stories high) and we headed up there. It was hard to talk with the band so close.

The stairs were jammed but we finally made it to an empty room with windows overlooking the bay and a suspension bridge with white lights suspended in mid-air. I found myself alone with a striking woman who was propped against the wall, her legs out the window, and telling me the story of her life more or less. Tall with black hair, not very long, a few strands of it in her eyes. Pale smooth skin. She had a finely (wrote final) sculpted look. A definite presence. In the course of the conversation I learned she was twenty-nine, just out of college (late start), had a ten-year-old daughter, and had lived in New York City, Tokyo, and other places. She used to be married to a Japanese man. I think she left home at fourteen, had connections and acquaintances in various milieus,

including the music business, and sounded blasé about it. She hit on reverberating attitudes or psychological coordinates which were close to mine, and I was nearly taken aback by the coincidence. Her tendency to stand back from a scene while taking in the wider view. “Kind of writerly,” I said, but it tends to make her feel alone. She has had enough of randomness and floating. Something more structured and productive would be good. She said she is in an ambiguous phase, neither old nor young, and not connecting with either group very well. She does not want to be stratified by age. I know the feeling.

She kept touching on these common chords, and maybe I hit a few as well. We were getting along like a couple of long-lost friends. I may have been operating with a preternatural calm, slowed down and more open, what with the smoke and several drinks.

At one point I yelled out the window at a couple of women walking towards the building. She thought that was bold, “like an Aries.” I said I know them. B. materialized in the room a few minutes later. I introduced them, and some of the entourage showed up, including M. who was not too shy with his hip against hers, but he finally went away. I didn’t have any claims on her, it was a tenuous connection, but the substance of the woman was such that she wasn’t easily distracted. A couple of fellows walked up with an air of wanting to be introduced to this fine woman I was talking to. They lingered for a few minutes. I had the feeling it was deliberate, J. being the one whose date I moved in on a couple of weeks ago at Club 181. The other one told me earlier that I shouldn’t bother with the Polish woman. There was something about her being poisonous, or her “cultural timing” was off. If she was out of sync with him I thought that was to her credit. He was in his thirties and hitting the hard stuff, having some resentment as to unrequited love and lust.

I'm the opposite. A few drinks, not to mention a smoke – joints were being passed around like cigarettes – and I drift around like everybody's friend with not too many worries. I'm impressionable in that respect, or easily swayed.

Fortunately they disappeared. I asked if I could call her sometime. Her name is Sophie, and she wrote her number on something like it was a compliment for being asked. We had passed a joint or two between us, but people kept handing them to us. I rolled her a cigarette as she leaned against the window sill and looked at me. I wondered if men are intimidated by her. Not just her physical presence, but in being out of the ordinary. She went to college to learn things, rather than from mercenary motives. Some things that might have put off other men were the attributes I connected with. I tried to keep in mind that we had just met and the circumstances were idyllic. There was a symbolic portent with the empty rooms in a brand-new situation.

Turned out she was there with a woman, her roommate, and introduced me. They were leaving around 1 a.m. We made our way down through the crowd (more beer) and eventually went outside. She extended her hand. It was soft, and then she was gone. I only had a vague idea of her body, being focused on her face and what she talked about. She wore a skirt with a black shirt or sweater. I think she has nice legs. The clothing was concealing and loose-fitted. When you're focused on a woman's figure it is putting the cart before the horse. You can focus on her body, but what if there is no rapport?

I walked over to a narrow wooden pier with old street lamps reflecting in the water, having a cigarette in the cool air. There was a platform behind the building which was open to the water and the water was magnetic. It was an opportune arrangement since I had to take a leak. I held onto a scaffold with one arm and stood at the edge of the

platform looking at the water ten feet down. You haven't lived until you've peed off a pier. Talk about an "arc of transcendence."

An hour later I was out there for the fresh air and another glittering arc. I realized there was a couple on the old-fashioned pier leaning against the railing and kissing (he had his back to the water). I wondered if I was disturbing their romantic moment, but if she was in the mood she would have her eyes closed.

On one of those times out there I noticed an old ferryboat. It was moored at the next pier and had a party going on - I could hear the music. Through the windows I could see half-naked women walking back and forth and getting applause. It was a Brazilian club with a bikini contest, which I found out when I ran into B. and a couple of others who wanted to walk over and check it out. Any parties in the vicinity aroused her curiosity since the entourage was not connecting very well with this one. That figures, because I was. I don't connect with them that well.

The dark-haired woman was gone and I went inside. The band was raging. I went up the stairs to the next level and sat there for a while. A perfect view, stunned by the music. It was the Barry Melton Band - he used to be with Country Joe and the Fish. The last time I saw him was in the Woodstock film with the band onstage and him, considerably younger in 1969 with long curly hair, approaching the camera with a big smile and holding a joint. Then it was, "Gimme an F, gimme a U, gimme a C, gimme a K, WHAT'S THAT SPELL, WHAT'S THAT SPELL?" Half a million people yelling "FUCK!" Maybe you had to be there. I was seventeen at the time and on the West Coast (the band is from Berkeley). I always liked their music, with songs like "Not So Sweet

Martha Lorraine." The band had a wider range, and was better than a lot of people realized. I wondered how it all evaporated, fading on the airwaves.

Here was Barry Melton more than two decades later, a bit heavier, short hair, composed, and working as a lawyer. But he's with a kick-ass group of serious radical pot-heads and they know what for and how to do it. The music wasn't psychedelic, more like a whirling dervish on cocaine, with conga drums, electric violin, drums, a bassist with his fingers crawling all over the neck, and two electric guitars. He used a loud slide now and then. The guy on violin with long hair, in his mid-forties, was flying, reaching for those high-pitched momentums and hitting a frequency the lead guitar would echo like a sonic version of how things appear at the speed of light: an undulating electromagnetic field at rest.

Someone said I shouldn't be on the stairs with a thin wooden railing, leaning over, so I moved to the open floor until they were finished. I went outside and ran into B. and friends who wanted to see the ferryboat.

Walking back I noticed Barry Melton loading his stuff into a van. I was with a couple of women who never heard of Country Joe and the Fish. I thought they were disco victims and tried to explain who he was, just to give them some historical background. I may have overdone it as one of them approached him and wanted his autograph, which is not the sort of thing he does. She turned away momentarily and he vanished, up in smoke. Good move.

Back inside we went upstairs to an empty room overlooking the water with Stone, the big fellow who brought his own drinks (rum and something) and a fat joint. He took pictures with a small camera and a flash. When B. and Molly showed up it turned into a

photo session in front of the window with a bridge in the background where it hovered over a watery darkness. At some point I had my head on one of Molly's big tits, and she didn't mind. She sells cocaine and marijuana on the side, and was our main connection to Tony Serra, who wasn't there. He throws parties now and then for his friends and clients, some of whom are counter-culture druggies.

A curious interlude: we were in a nearly deserted empty room and the man with the camera went somewhere. I was with the two women and B. suddenly decided I look good. "Isn't he handsome?" I think it was the lighting, or my coat, or maybe she was stoned. I didn't offer much resistance, with Molly picking up the cue and agreeing. They started kissing me from both sides and I was caught between them, our arms around each other, the figures of two women pressing on me. B. said, "Again… another kiss," and I said, "Maybe we don't need what's-his-name." B. was slow in pulling her arm away and I was this close to turning up the heat and reciprocating, but I'm not sure if she meant it.

Or was that before the photos? The sequence is a little blurred. The man with the camera returned and we went into a room overlooking a glittering void. After a few flashbacks I walked out, ready for another arc of watery transcendence.

That was the last I saw of them. The evening wasn't over yet. It was nearly 3 a.m. and my attention was diverted. I went downstairs to the ground floor. Another band was playing. It was not so interesting, though they did "Paperback Writer." It was a night of curious rendezvous. I had seen a flier for the event which mentioned some of the lawyers who would have their offices here, including a woman named Nedra.[107] The memory circuits scanned back twenty years to an upper division literary course at San Francisco

[107] A few years later she was one of the attorneys in the trial of a man whose dog killed a woman living down the hall from him. One of her tactics in the courtroom was to get down on her hands and knees, reenacting the position of the dog. That raised a few eyebrows.

State which I was in for some reason. There was a Latina woman with the same name and one afternoon there was a gathering at her place. I wrote a poem about it which included some reference to clouds passing through her kitchen and gave it to her a few days later in class. She liked it, or the gesture at least, and kissed me on the cheek.

I got some beer and there was a woman standing around the kegs like she was involved in all of this. There was something familiar in her features. I finally asked if it was her and it was. I explained the situation over the music. There was a slowly dawning look of recognition on her face. She was surprised and amused. We talked for a while – she's a criminal defense attorney now, and writes on the side. She mentioned that she's married to another lawyer and they have a kid.

It was a remote connection, but I couldn't ignore the coincidence. I shook her hand and said, "Nice talking to you." Later I saw her on the dance floor, a small woman with wild long hair. I went outside and sat there for a few minutes, staring at the lights on the water and feeling at peace with the world, which is to say half-drunk and hypnotized.

When I returned B. and her friends were gone. It was after three and I left, walking to a plaza with a cubist fountain looking like an earthquake hit it. Another block or two, then I caught a cab. Suddenly I was sitting in the backseat. It was smooth and effortless. In no time I was home.

4 a.m. I was more stoned than I realized, and stared at photos of the desert. They were stunning at the moment. Coffee, cigarettes, and a Guinness. I was on the typewriter for a couple of hours. The evening wouldn't give up the ghost.

5 a.m. I glanced out the window across the street. Empty shirts were blowing and gesticulating from a cyclone fence, stretching out their arms. No one was around.

6 a.m. A disjointed neo-poetic effort going on for several pages. “When I fall in love it’s monolithic….” I was ready for oblivion. My resistance was disintegrating like a sand dune giving way.

6:30 a.m. Lights out. A faint glow in the eastern window. If I’m so tired what is an erection doing here? It has a mind of its own, along with an auxiliary energy source.

Saturday, Aug. 14, 1993

11:30 a.m. I woke up with someone yelling on the street. Less than five hours sleep, and I was at a low ebb. I went out to a place on Geary, walking uphill and seeing stars. Scrambled eggs, hash browns, sausages, toast, and water. I read in the paper that the President of the United States is in Oakland. I wouldn’t say that there’s no there there (and I don’t like Gertrude Stein).[108]

I walked home, picking up a few supplies. Things around me had a slow deliberate tangibility. Your existence has a larger portent when your brain has shrunken, like a lobotomy on the morning after. It’s an altered state, and I was walking on the dirtiest sidewalks in the country. What’s that line from *Culture of Complaint*? “Private opulence, public squalor.”

[108] Her insufferable prose with an unengaging infantile approach is bad enough, but it was combined with a self-centered pomposity that had her thinking she was equal or superior to James Joyce. Her contemporary, Robert McAlmon, compared her writing to “an elephant struggling in the mud.” Even worse, I later found out she remained in France during World War II and collaborated with the pro-Nazi Vichy government. As a well-funded Jewish woman she could have left. Another sour note: her lifelong companion, Alice B. Toklas, died in poverty.

Returning to my private opulence. It isn't so prosaic as to be in plain sight, it's more in the mind.[109] I made coffee and sank into an easy chair, reading for a couple of hours. You feel like another person or another version of yourself when you're hung over, exchanging some intelligence for gravity. You move at a slower pace and that includes the coffee and cigarettes. The solidity is a welcome interlude, although I won't be going near the typewriter - I'm too solid at the moment.

4:30 p.m. I lay down and went to sleep with the bamboo shades half-drawn because it's overcast outside, if that makes sense. I woke up several hours later and made split pea soup with ham and bread and apple juice. There was a hundred-year-old opera on, *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1890).

Reading *Culture of Complaint*, followed by *Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds: A Trocchi Reader* (1925-1984). He is a Beat writer from Scotland (half-Italian) who lived in Paris, New York, Venice (California), and London – some junkies get around. I was absorbing his material with a pointblank frame of mind.

When Robert Hughes read the under-valued histories of working people, he said it was like a view from a glass-bottom boat. It was good for cutting through the sociologic theory and the P.C. propaganda. He had a quote about equality, something I've been trying to say or reaching for in comparatively clumsy terms.

> Men will never establish any equality with which they will be contented…When inequality of condition is the common law of society, the most marked inequalities do not strike the eye; when everything is nearly on the same level, the slightest are marked enough to hurt it. Hence the desire for equality always becomes more insatiable in proportion as equality is more complete.

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[109] When someone says, "It's all in your mind," it has the connotation of being unreal. What if people take that seriously and neglect their minds? They confirm the reality of something by whether it can be bought or sold.

A timely message. There was another from de Tocqueville when he wrote *Democracy in America* (1835).

10 p.m. The long-silent phone was ringing - the Czech woman. She continues to be in a good mood, often laughing. I don't know if her income has improved, she is getting stoned more often, or is finally getting laid – holding off the ghost of a man who killed himself a couple of years ago.

Maybe she has lightened up, having given up on the notion of true love. She said she has known it and gone through it and can move on to other things. That is close to how I felt. Her attitude at the moment: who cares who is sleeping with whom as long as she has someone now and then. It's like we're all one flesh. I'm not sure how much marijuana it takes to hover in that point of view, which is relatively detached. She was calling from the home of a man, her manager at work, who was getting ready for a date with someone else. She was on her way to the Kennel Club with a woman friend and asked what I did last night. I told her. "How come you didn't call me? Just kidding."

Her itinerant Mexican fellow has a girlfriend, but sleeps with the Czech woman now and then. He said his younger brother, nineteen, is a virgin and would she do the honors. She was laughing on the phone when relating this. "How absurd." Not so much that she wouldn't, with some mention of his having a "beautiful hot cock" (I think she was stoned), but nineteen is hard to deal with and the situation was so arranged it left her cold. She would consider such an encounter if it was more spontaneous.

Got off the phone. A few minutes later it was ringing again. The Phantom wants to have a session in the sound-room tomorrow night. I told him about the party with the Barry Melton band. He knows a lot of musicians. It surprises me sometimes, pot-heads

with connections, but I have a pathological avoidance of that sort of thing. I'm not sure why, unless it is the writing, trying to isolate something on the page and I end up isolating myself. The Phantom is a friend of someone who knew or managed the late John Cipollina (1943-1989), lead guitarist for Quicksilver Messenger Service. He is still discussing the merits of an 8-track recording machine.

11:30 p.m. A ten-minute walk around the neighborhood at night is guaranteed to clear your head. It's like a shot of cold caffeine. The dregs of humanity with some of them on drugs… they're strung out on the lower rungs… the bottom feeders are without a leader.

A transsexual hooker on the corner with a Spanish accent. I crossed the street. A black man not far behind me was talking to himself and yelling things, not too coherent. Suddenly, halfway up the block, there was a crash – like someone kicking in a headlight or throwing a portable television out the window. There was broken glass in the gutter. The black man responded with, "A NEGATIVE REACTION DOESN'T FACILITATE A POSITIVE RESPONSE." I thought that was interesting, the line repeating in my head as I walked a few blocks to Polk Street.

The usual shady characters were out in force. Or is everyone a little shady in this neighborhood at night? I had gone half a block when a car in front of an alley backed up suddenly and hit the car behind it which was waiting to get into the alley. It was a multicultural fender-bender, with what appeared to be a dumb white girl with a black man riding shotgun. She backed into the front end of a Chinese man's car, and he was not amused. I went on walking on a night of loose ends and collisions. Passed a man and woman in a parked car who were in love, or maybe not, a mirage of convenience.

Picked up something at the corner store and walked back with the hookers lurking in the doorways. Across the street from my building there was a changing of the guard. A few more whores, and one of them with a look that was bound to get attention. A young woman in black shiny boots that reflected the headlights as "a savage servility slides by on grease…."[110] She had a leather jacket, miniskirt, and a white mane of hair which might have been artificial. It reminded me of a Chinese film I saw with a spirit-witch.

12:30 a.m. Workout on a wooden instrument, over an hour. I should have known with half my brain on hold that it would be responsive. After that I was on the typewriter for a couple of hours, something of an effort.

4 a.m. Pass out.

Sunday, Aug. 15, 1993

11:30 a.m. I slept okay, leaving behind yesterday's condition of primordial fatigue. So why do I want to stick a rifle out the window and knock a few pigeons in the empty lot out of existence? Does the sand want to be fired into? Maybe I'm tired in ways I don't realize. Maybe there's a reason for the random shootings in this country. In *Journey to the Center of the Earth* the explorers reach the center of our electromagnetic planet and their watches and rings fly off in a furious wind. What is the equivalent for people who have descended to the center of their being like a polarized moral vacuum and something is exploding? Often as not it is a gun, an externalized release. What do you find at the end of your rope? The weight of a gun, like a plumb line.

[110] Robert Lowell, "For the Union Dead" (1960)

It was the previous morning when I was tired and hung over that a phantom rifle made its presence felt. I don't like guns and was never close to owning one. They are associated with misanthropy and moral exhaustion, and are good for those who want immediate gratification. You pick up a gun and start firing out the window at anything that moves.

It's a warped echo of an ancient tendency in the species. How many cultures found renewal in a human sacrifice? It's like saying, "I'm tired and I'm bored, someone has to die."

I wouldn't blame it on the neighborhood, although there is an atmosphere of dissolution and disintegration. An impasse with no moon. At the bottom of society is broken glass, the smell of urine, and men and women yelling at each other. Surgically-altered mercenaries whore it on the corner with a few of them infected while the derelicts are drifting by. They're like sodden driftwood. Maybe they are dumb as wood, the mentally stillborn who're along for the ride and this is where it dropped them.

A violent static in my head, or is that the radio? What's the difference after a certain point? It's Sunday morning and I'm staring out the window, making coffee. I end up looking at the street a lot. It's hard to avoid when you have eight windows on the corner of the building and your bed is almost hovering over the street. When I pace back and forth I'm looking at it.

I noticed two white women, one older with not much of a figure, the other younger, looking worn and gaunt. Her legs were nice enough to flaunt them in a semi-transparent skirt. She had long straggly hair. Not sure what they were up to. A few minutes later there was a black man in his twenties who smiled and gave some bills to the

older woman. She handed him a couple of tiny objects which I think were rock cocaine, also known as crack. He left with the younger woman, walking under my window.

I called Diane. She had a nice time with her 20th high school reunion in Los Angeles. She visited my brother (the ultra-sound technician) and said his son (who is one and a half) could operate the remote control. He has his own video which he knows how to turn on, more or less. He wanted her to watch it but she got distracted. He reached over with his hand and directed her face back in the direction of the television.

Typing for hours in the afternoon.

I was in a state of bruised abstraction, and it leaves me out on a limb, not feeling very solid. It is not surprising that so many writers are alcoholics, like a cushion they can lie on after walking on a wire. Music takes the place of alcohol for some of us. It is a dimension beyond words where you can level out and be reconstituted. After a long session on the typewriter I reach for a wooden instrument with no words attached. The wounded mind is sewn up by the metal strings.

Do you kiss off the abyss with music? It eludes the bottle. When you have an instrument in your hands, going on for hours, you're not doing anything else. Your hands are busy, you're not reaching for a drink (at least in my case). I'm caught up in a dimension with a hold on my attention and with positive returns if I'm in tune. It is a tranquilizer, an intoxication. It releases tension and depression while transforming them into something else. The sound is like a warm magnetic field when you are used to a divisive analytic overdrive. The writer comes in from the cold, kissing off the morbid with a missing chord.

Bread and soup, and I finally made some effort in the vicinity of the kitchen sink.

An article in *The New Yorker* about truck drivers in East Africa. The local mythology says if you're HIV positive you can cure it by screwing a young virgin. Also, you catch it by using condoms past their expiration date. Let's hear it for the mythological approach. I think the scientific are closer to the earth (being grounded in the facts), while the mythological are not necessarily. Some have a condescending attitude concerning those who think in practical and cautious terms, as if to say: who wants to live like that, and where's our foreign aid? People die and women get possessed. What can you do? One man said more jobs will be available with the population thinning out. There are black people who don't care about other blacks. The constant civil wars and government-engineered famines are not entirely the fault of outsiders.[111]

The white journalist got to know the truck drivers and he rode with them. They were humanized and coming into focus as men who live in an African version of the modern world. They were capable and relatively well-informed.

7:30 p.m. I went out, walking in a wet and misty fog, and caught a bus to the neighborhood near the Haight. I showed up at the flat and no one answered the door. A minute later several people were converging. One of the roommates answered the door in a kind of stupor. An older black man wandered by. He urinated in the gutter, then walked over to the steps and started talking to us. Our conversation was interrupted and we stood there for a while. It would have been rude to turn away or go inside. We listened to a stumbling incoherent monologue with pauses. He repeated himself. I think what he was trying to say is he has been in the neighborhood for thirty years and things change. He

[111] In Rwanda the following year there were more black people wiped out in six or seven weeks than were brought to what became the U.S. during a couple of centuries of the slave trade.

had a couple of sons, one of whom had gone bad. He took forever to make a point, tending to fall back on gestures. Then the Phantom drove up in his beat-up yellow van. He walked over, knowing the man, and said hello. We were on the edge of a predominantly black neighborhood and the Phantom is neighborly. When the man had finally said his piece and walked away we went upstairs. “Did you understand what he was saying?” “No.” Apparently an alcoholic.

In the kitchen I noticed J., one of the roommates, had a black book with empty pages he was filling with small black handwriting. Half an hour later we were in the sound-room with the Phantom hooking up the equipment. I was on the Les Paul. He disappeared, making last-minute arrangements for a phony smog check. He was stoned and distracted.

The sound wasn’t what it could be. I made some adjustments, but the soundboard is complicated. The treble was muted with some distortion, but I like a more emphatic reverb on the treble. Things were not all there, which is typical of a no-moon phase or when it’s early in the evening. I am often uninspired around that time, but usually come alive after 10 p.m.

A string broke. I put down the Les Paul and picked up the homemade Mega-zone with a metallic sound and thinner strings. It weighs half a ton (solid wood in a geometric form), but it sounded better. The Phantom returned, making some adjustments on the soundboard, and I was finally in the current. He hooked up the microphone and got a reverberating sound from the amp where the voice is purified and monumental. Things took off. He was banging on the drums, a little out of sync. I held my own on the guitar, getting more used to vocals as a sound effect, if not another instrument, whether a

background sound or lyrics leaping to the foreground out of the speaker. Sometimes it leaves me at a loss for words.

11 p.m. We quit, having been there for a couple of hours (the first half hour was a little off). We sat on the concrete floor of the garage with the door open to the sound-room, surrounded with motorcycle parts and the fender of a truck lying on a chair. A greasy dungeon full of empty beer bottles. I had a cigarette and a beer. He put on Hendrix doing a song by Howling Wolf, "Killing Floor," and we talked about him for a while. My family moved to Los Angeles in 1967 when I was fifteen, and one of the first things I did was go to a Hendrix concert (to compensate for all the things I didn't like about L.A., including a conservative high school). Soft Machine opened. A few months later I was in the amplified presence of Eric Clapton, Jack Bruce, and Ginger Baker. You could say I've measured out my life with "Spoonful." It was instrumental in my development as a not very useful person.

12:30 a.m. The Phantom drove me home.

Monday, Aug. 16, 1993

Not enough sleep, a no-moon phase. I was at a low ebb which started to feel abrasive. Stop and smell the gutters (not a rose in sight). Brain damage in the Tenderloin. Reading the paper only made it worse. The local news was bringing it all back home on the edge of a malaise.

A young woman was visiting from Ireland with two other women. On Saturday night they were near Fisherman's Wharf. Some guy was yelling and being threatening. He was with two other males and wanted a quarter. The women ran. He caught one "and

held her while shooting her once in the back with a .45-caliber semi-automatic. After she fell to the ground, he stood over her and shot her again."

The police picked up three Latinos in a blue Chevy. They are twenty-three, nineteen, and the guy with the gun is sixteen. He was on a weekend home leave from the Contra Costa Boy's Ranch where he was "serving time for assault with a deadly weapon and auto theft." He got a weekend release because he had behaved well for "the last two weeks." He was a "known gang member" and a "sociopath." Turns out the three of them had been disturbing the neighborhood that evening.

This raises a few questions. What kind of two-bit human being shoots an unarmed woman in the back for 25 cents? What kind of legal system let him out – we're not even talking jail, it was a "ranch." If he was released to one or both parents, why did they let him out of their sight? Are they responsible for the actions of their minor son?

She barely survived, but could have been dead or paralyzed for life, having been shot twice in the back at close range. Good thing he's a lousy shot. The reputation of this country is getting worse. "Her mother pleaded with her, 'Don't come to America, it's too dangerous'." Maybe it was an affront to his self-esteem when she turned her back and ran. He might be pent-up when it comes to women, having been in custody, and his social skills would seem to lack finesse. He is unclear on the concept, and he's under the influence of bad metaphors. He wanted to pull his dick out and he got his signals crossed, pulling out a gun and it went off prematurely.

An article on another murder, so brutal and mindless you would think it comes from prehistoric times. There were sullen mug shots like a police report from the 1930's.

If there is an accelerated homicide rate these days,[112] it might have something to do with the weapons and the vehicles that are available to thugs, and whatever else has been accelerated by an increased population density.[113] The experts try to explain how a human being could do this. I think some people are homicidal because the earth is homicidal. The capacity is in the species (mainly men), but some have more restraint than others.

The two suspects are both eighteen, with "One recently paroled from prison" (for armed robbery), and the other "under indictment for armed robbery" and awaiting trial.

It wasn't well thought out. They came upon an older man sleeping in his car by the side of the road and shot him in the chest. If they had thought about it they might have realized his family and friends would miss him and he would prefer to go on living. They were putting their own lives in jeopardy with the odds of being caught and spending the next ten or twenty years in prison, and for what? "After dumping the body," (which was disrespectful, but so was shooting him) they "drove the Lexus to a wooded area… about 45 miles to the northeast, where they abandoned it three days later." (Others stripped it.) What did they get out of it, the use of a car for a few days? Along with some of the "personal belongings" of the dead man.

He was related to someone famous, which might be why we're hearing about it. Otherwise it would have been another two-inch column in the back pages. He was a black man, nearly fifty-seven, and the "father of one of the world's most wealthy and famous athletes." Apparently, the suspects were biological mutants with brains the size of

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[112] In 1991 there were 24,703 homicides in the U.S. Last year there were 2,589 homicides in Los Angeles, and 443 in Washington, D.C. (no politicians were hurt).

[113] Years later there were studies which linked the murder rate (partly) to the rate of lead exposure amongst children. It makes people more aggressive and less intelligent with a short attention span, while compromising their ability to reason or control their emotions.

walnuts. It's possible their minds were shut off. It was suggested that psychologically they were playing back tapes of all the homicides they saw on television, casual and coldblooded.

A man is sleeping in his luxury sedan with an open window. If you're bent on robbery all you have to do is carry him out of the car, lay him on the ground, and drive away. Maybe they thought he could identify them, who were easily caught from using his cell phone. It is not uncommon, someone dying so a suspect can protect his identity. They never heard of masks. The victim wore a death mask.

The suspects, one black and one white, were old friends. You wonder what undercurrents were being generated between them which led to a human sacrifice. Imagine a film like *The Defiant Ones* (1958) in a twisted relationship with *In Cold Blood* (1967). Imagine the racial protests if both were white, though the man would have been just as dead. Black people are far more likely to be killed by other blacks, but you can't get much political mileage out of that. It was a wash with both of them looking bad. You would think the black man would get some heat from the black community for killing the father of Michael Jordan, but there is a resounding silence when it comes to black-on-black crime.

There is always Oakland. Last week a black woman, nineteen (who is 5'2", 190 pounds) showed she had a temper. In a milieu of subjectivity-at-any-cost that means the force was with her. A mindless emotion was running through her and that is its own reason for being. You don't want to repress your feelings. Any intensity of feeling (in an otherwise dull life) is natural and instinctive. It's like people in primitive times (and what

could be more primitive than this incident?) who didn't know where their thoughts came from. When a thought would float up in their head they thought it was the voice of God telling them what to do.

Giving full vent to the emotional you end up with as many criminals as singers.

She had an argument with a woman smoking crack in the hallway of her building. There was a fight. The resident went back to her place and returned with a kitchen knife. The other woman ran. Why pursue her, much less with a knife? She had an emotional momentum and the crowd was on her side. They tripped the woman trying to get away. They were "kicking her, stomping her, and one hit her over the head with a bottle." Some of them are suspected of being drug dealers. The victim was on the ground when the infuriated resident "stabbed her three times in the chest area."

All because the victim said something "disrespectful" in the argument and deserved to die. Was it any worse than what some rappers say about each other on recordings? I don't know if those are insights into the lower echelons of the black community, or phony poses meant to sell more albums, like the menacing poses of big-time wrestling. The authentic anger of a rapper gets lost in the shuffle when there are so many crying wolf.

One of those rappers is the "leader of the largely rhetorical Intelligent Black Women's Coalition." The reviewer said one song is "the only time… (she) makes a gesture toward female solidarity."

There is an assumption that "Anger is an energy,"[114] and you want more energy (which is power) in a depressed neighborhood, so you pump up the anger until after a

[114] Public Image Limited, "Rise"

while it is an end in itself with an increasingly empty rhetoric. Getting pumped up over being oppressed by the white man is a tried-and-true method, but it might be wearing thin, and there are all those "hos and bitches" to consider, so you go around being angry and throwing off sparks which some women find exciting. The question is how long can it go on until the attitude is losing credibility. It has as much effect on the socio-economic circumstances as a witch doctor has on sickness or the weather. He might be putting on a good show, jumping around and shaking his fists, but the patient died and the drought went on.

When accused of promoting violence or the subjugation of women some rappers compare themselves to movie stars, saying "Hey, it's only show biz." What does that do to the pose of righteous anger? You would think that it was "… sound and fury, signifying nothing."[115] Reminds me of the Sex Pistols with their "cash from chaos." One rapper replied to criticism of his lyrics (which put down women while promoting the worst stereotypes of black people), saying it was okay as long as he and his friends made money.

Meanwhile, life and death in Oakland. One woman chases another with a knife. She was momentarily possessed and let it run its course. Now she is locked up.

What if she was a good citizen in the community and couldn't stand it anymore, seeing what was happening to her neighborhood with the low-life dealers and the addicts? The only time I read about dealers being lower than dogs who should be shot on sight, it was a black woman speaking. Her neighborhood was being dragged down and

[115] Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

she was sick of it. Large segments of the black population are not impressed with the negative stereotypes walking around, but there is a conspiracy of silence on the issue.

I went to work in the afternoon, waiting for the bus on Geary. A white man with long straggly hair and a black man without a shirt were lying on the sidewalk, down and out. The black man was reading *Esquire.*

6 p.m. I returned home and was tired, with not enough sleep last night. So how to explain my staying up until four in the morning? I managed to clear off a pile of papers and manuscripts on the desk, putting it into clamped bundles like rough drafts and instant books. It turned out to be a four-month stream of consciousness.

I started reading the Chinese novel, *Half of Man is Woman*, and couldn't put it down. Sometime after three in the morning I was reading the journal from 1989 when I was brought back to the present by screaming sirens. Half a dozen fire-trucks were down the block with their lights going. Maybe it was a rehearsal. A ladder was brought out, touching a fire escape, and then pulled back. It was a laying on of ladders, like a civic gesture.

Tuesday, Aug. 17, 1993

In the morning I called the woman from Krakow. Not sure what to expect, but she sounded friendly with a heavy accent. She is tired of being an au pair in the suburbs. Joanna is a student and is losing her memory in California. I said it happens to a lot of people. Maybe it's the climate, the eroding presence of a timeless ocean. Who knows? I

said something about anti-historical sentiments running through the general population. “No, I can’t agree.” She seems to be open to doing something this weekend.

12:30 p.m. Rendezvous with V. in the office. We went to Old St. Mary’s for a soprano and tenor. Old songs from Britain. V. had her feet up on the footrest with her knees together, wearing a cotton dress and holding a religious object – a tiny figure of the Virgin Mary - while dabbing her eyes now and then. She said she’s going through a difficult time. She is leaving work at the end of next month and was startled when she heard the sister of another secretary might interview for her position. It made her sad.

After a while she was okay. I showed her the program with lyrics to the Canticle II, Opus 51 (Benjamin Britten), followed by “folksongs of the British Isles” by a mezzo soprano and a tenor (with piano). She read it intently. I noticed her poise, her black hair brushing her shoulder.

When it was over we wondered if we should light a candle or run out for a taco, and opted for the latter. She didn’t have much time left. I think she likes to be rushed, it quickens her existence. We went out, picked up something to go, and sat near the plaza on California Street. At one point we were on a subject we don’t touch on very often. “Making love.” We then returned to the office with her telling me to go faster, “… Come on!”

5 p.m. Walked home.

Reading *Half of Man is Woman*. Things were getting poignant in a dreary re-education camp with a man who had never slept with a woman (he was thirty-nine). The point was that totalitarianism can make a man impotent. He finally met a woman, but it wasn’t working out.

6:30 p.m. Sophie called. I called her on Saturday and left a message. She tried last night, but I wasn't home. She called tonight and would call on Thursday morning and Friday afternoon at work – on top of other attempts when I wasn't home or was at work, saying I was hard to get a hold of. I'm impressed with that.

It's the first time we have talked since we were in an altered state at the party, being under the influence of the moment and you're not sure if there will be a follow-through. I have been in similar situations where I met a woman at a party, we were getting along like a house on fire, but it turned out she lives in the moment. The moment passed and I was a fading memory. Not with Sophie, though. The connection seems to be intact.

I mentioned the book I was reading. Her books are still in boxes from the move. There was some mention of getting together later in the week. Then someone came to her door. She said she would call back later, but it was one of those nights where I was inundated with phone conversations. The night before was a dry silence.

Reading for a while, then the phone rang. The Actress in Marin. She spent a week in Yosemite with her daughter and a couple of writers. She said I would have loved it. Maybe so, but I'm not sure I would have exchanged the week I had for the mountains. We talked for a while, then she handed the phone to her daughter, Maya, who is becoming more assured on the phone. We're buddies and we talked for a while about the mountains. Then her mother wanted the phone back and Maya objected, saying what a nice conversation we were having.

Things took a more serious turn. The Actress is wracked with doubts and insecurities concerning her live-in fiancé. He suggested they hold off on the wedding

plans until things were more settled and there was less friction between them. The postponement caused some friction in her. He works long hours in the city with her feeling dependent on him since she quit her job. She is less in control, and it feels like the romance has drained out of the situation. I was siding with him for a while, thinking she should cut him some slack if he is working and she isn't. It would seem to be to their mutual benefit.

Some men assume that when you have a girlfriend, much less a fiancée, you are locked into a fixed orbit. You don't have to be making constant adjustments to it, shoring up the situation as if it is a sandy riverbank. For some women, nothing is certain as the world turns. They require constant verification, as if for them it is a shaky orbit. That's another reason they think a relationship is "work." It is more work if they are pretending, or they have ulterior motives and are trying to change a man.

She mentioned having gone to where he works, the men's club that just opened on Broadway. There are nearly-naked women writhing in the vicinity of drinkers like a cocktail tease. He was interviewed in the *Chronicle* a couple of weeks ago, something about "A FANCY SCHMANCY STRIP JOINT."

> The gourmet cuisine is prepared by (Michael), a chef with legitimate credentials and some inner doubts about working "in a place my mother would never come into." "Given all the distraction, the food will have to be very flavorful and tantalizing," says (Michael), 33, who notes the irony in talking serious food while just behind him a show girl is practicing an upside-down twist on a brass fire pole.

What came through in the article is that it's more of a floorshow and less of a strip joint. There is an atmosphere of show girls mixing with the men at their tables, getting them to wear party hats. The Actress went with a woman friend during lunch. She is far from prudish, but was taken aback. There was some mention of getting together this weekend.

I read for a while, and then the phone rang, my friend in St. Helena. We talked for over an hour. It's so quiet at night he listens to the crickets, but it's lonely at times. He bought an old piano, and I heard some notes coming over the phone. Jon is growing things and had his amplifiers working. I'm trying to imagine sitting on a wooden porch on a warm night next to a vineyard, surrounded with the void and the smell of the earth.

He said the other night he heard something moaning softly in his basement and thought for a minute that two people were there. He wasn't about to go down for a look. We talked about other things. For someone who is given to a mechanical fix-it approach and roughing it in the wilderness, along with drumming, drugs, and dogs, he has a nervous quick intelligence. We were riffing off each other rather well, going with whatever tangent or subject came up.

I got off the phone after midnight and went over to the typewriter for a couple of hours. These blurred accounts of what occurs in conversations are so limited and removed they might as well be fiction.

Wednesday, Aug. 18, 1993

Typing.

Went to work.

Walked home.

Words and music.

Went to sleep.

Thursday, Aug. 19, 1993

8:20 a.m. The phone rang. Fortunately, I went to sleep early the night before and hadn't unplugged the phone. It was Sophie. Something about her keeps on being in the realm of a pleasant surprise, and she is open to invitations. I said,

"How about seven tonight in the lobby of the Museum of Modern Art?"
"Okay."

1:30 p.m. Walked out of the building and was confronted by a Chinese woman coming my way. She was wailing, practically hitting herself in the head and hardly looking where she was going. It's not uncommon in this neighborhood. Things are out in the open and the dramas unfold in plain view – despair, crying, yelling, anger.

Half an hour later I was at the dentist. I leaned back in a mechanical chair with a lamp on a metal arm like the alien weapon in *War of the Worlds*. A Chinese woman in her thirties with a firm hand took the x-rays. It was something of a non-event, a short click and you don't feel it, a radioactive current going through your jaw and leaving a ghostly image of your teeth on a screen.

This is where you run into the limits of your privacy and individualism. You surrender to an educated stranger who knows some part of you better than you do. Your mouth is not your own in that respect. He can fix it, you can't. You're at a loss for words with someone else's hand in your mouth, and feel like a known quantity. You are injected with an anesthetic and your mind is drifting into pleasant thoughts of women.

The dentist is a Chinese man in his forties. After a quick exam I had the feeling he was not impressed. He resorted to a pointed instrument and found a nerve or two. I was trying to remember that suffering builds character. Or is it suspense? I was on the edge of my seat. He poked around. Things are personal and impersonal when it comes to

metabolic maintenance. At one point he handed me a mirror for my mouth, but I wasn't interested.

When it was over I managed to walk to work.

The Attorney lost thirty or forty pounds from being in the hospital and was as grumpy and short-tempered as ever. I am still supposed to read his mind to know what he meant to say or should have said, including numbers and dates, rather than taking him on his word. At other times his word is law, so to speak.

A woman called, the girlfriend of the Latino fellow in San Quentin. She wants to know why his divorce proceedings have not been finalized. They were delayed when he killed his previous girlfriend, the one he was with while separated from his wife. Two weeks before he killed her she gave birth to their child. The problem is that he and his new girlfriend have to wait for the dissolution of marriage in order for her to marry him and have sexual visits in prison. There are real lives connected to this paper work.

The older woman on the other side of V. heard some of the phone call. She has a feminist chip on her shoulder. V. thinks that any woman who would marry a man in prison is out of her mind. I said in some respects a woman has him right where she wants him – in a cage with no other women around. She can visit him at her leisure and he's always happy to see her. The older woman heartily agreed. I think my standing with her went up with that remark.

Meanwhile, V. continues to amaze me, not to say amuse. It's a close call with the amorous, and has the characteristics of an old-world restraint. She will orchestrate conspiratorial plans for when she has to deliver a document to a law firm a few blocks away. V. will whisper, "Go with me!" and we will go on an excursion. We were in the

lobby of a law firm with a dark granite fountain and reflecting metal spheres. I said, "They turn slightly." She said, "No way." Each one commenced to turn slowly, refuting her skepticism. On the way back she said, "Let's have lunch tomorrow," and considered the possibilities.

6:30 p.m. I walked to Market Street and took a bus to the Civic Center, walking past an enormous gaping pit where the new library will be built. Higher learning starts with a hole in the ground.

I was in the lobby of the museum and a few minutes later Sophie arrived. We were seeing each other for the first time in a sober state, and I had come from the office in a coat and tie. She was more casual in a loose coat and slacks, wearing flats. She has a nice profile and cheekbones. I thought of the woman in *A Man and a Woman,* though they don't look alike. A woman of some refinement and dimension in her prime with one child, for whom the physical is as much a part of things as thinking. I think of her as being French, a compliment in my opinion, a real woman from a small town with artistic ambitions. She is not very dogmatic or politicized.

Ascending on a stainless-steel elevator we were going back in time. There were photo-montages from the 1930's in Berlin and Prague by John Heartfield (1891-1968). He was fleeing from the Nazis who he mocked and satirized.

The smoke trails of five rising war planes form a skeleton's hand.

Four bloody axes roped together form a swastika.

Most of these appeared on the front page of the *Workers' Illustrated Newspaper* (*Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung*). I learned about the technique. She knows something about the methods, how collages are re-photographed and touched up. I tend to look at pictures

at a different speed or rhythm than others, and have been known to get distracted or lose track of someone I went with. Not this time.

> He remained in Prague until 1938, when he fled to England and continued to produce work, yet it never achieved the same topicality or impact it had had before 1939. He returned to his homeland in 1950 and, after a severe illness, died in East Berlin in 1968.

We were jerked back to the present, having seen so many of his works in one wing.

Another wing was given over to one work. The walls were lined with AZT capsules about a foot long ("one year of AZT").[116] It is "the first drug to treat HIV infection, which causes AIDS."

We left, walking over to Max's Opera Café. We got a small table and were there for several hours (9 to 12 p.m.). She is another woman with torrents of thought and memories and dreams, talking about what happened at work the other day, past love affairs, her daughter – on the subject of which the conversation became more sexual. She is concerned with how her daughter will turn out, and wants to explain circumcision to her. We talked about what statues around town have penises. I mentioned a woman friend in her early twenties (Ming) who wants to have a temporary penis, maybe for one day, so she could play with it. She understood the sentiment and suggested a strap-on.

As the night progressed, she became more candid about her life, revealing more about her background. She was given up at birth and adopted a couple of weeks later. She thinks it affected her, the loss of a mother during the first few days of her life. She was brought up in a small town in California with a Mormon couple who adopted a couple of

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[116] There were "1825 plastic pills lining the gallery walls and five coffin-size pills occupying space on the floor." Another gallery had "a chilly installation of polystyrene slabs piled atop one another to resemble ice floes…illuminated by ice blue florescent lighting, the glacial installation is host to three stuffed baby (harp) seals." This "offers a richly ambiguous message." Or a bleak and weak diluted message. "The plastic pills are packed with visual appeal."

other kids. Nice people, but her worldview was different and so was her libido. She left home at fourteen, and took up with an older man at sixteen. Had a baby at eighteen.

Sophie is often out of sync with certain age groups. She is either young with older people or older with young people, and went back to college in her mid-twenties, hanging around with twenty-year-olds – which sounded familiar. There were diminishing returns, and the "compassion" was a one-way street. They were not aware of what she had gone through. Right now she has a secretarial job, and at some point was rewriting the personal ads that people phone in.

She made some attempts at writing, but for a year now has been making collages. She pulled out a large pile and I went through them, each one surprising in its delicacy. It was a tour de force of bright compositions, and there was a lot of sensual fruit. Clockwork oranges. Flowers with torn patterns in the background. There were off-the-wall juxtapositions and most of them had a good graphic sense, an erratic balance being struck with arbitrary images, like statues from the Middle Ages, Buddha, or a washing machine.

I figured I would hold off showing her the desert photos. I held up my end of the conversation, but it reminded me of women who complain about being interrupted by men. If they didn't, they wouldn't get a word in edgewise.

Two glasses of wine and an Irish coffee. She had three beers. When I said how lush or tropical her collages are she said, "I'm a lush" and laughed, ordering another beer. One waiter or waitress after another took their turn at the microphone, accompanied by a piano. There were strands of dark hair falling in her eyes. A loose and low-cut blouse. She was not worried about leaning over, like her breasts were there and get used to it. I

was looking at her hands, which seemed capable of hard work. She said she likes to work with her hands – long and pale, but not effete. Slightly rough, with short nails, no polish.

Her blue-grey eyes were something else again, and not so easy to look into. They weren't icy and fixed, but weren't like deer eyes either (like those of V). The equivalent of a vodka tonic. She would look at me directly, and then would stare off in another direction while she spoke. A woman with some paradoxes, like most people I suppose. When getting to know someone it rearranges your perceptions while adjusting to the jumble of planes and facets which make up a person. I think she saw herself as a tall and headstrong woman, and included in her profile the "…nurturing aspects of an earth sign. A single mother whose life has been a little erratic." As a Taurus with her fragile compositions she is like a bull in a china shop.

She has no time or patience for television, doesn't go to many movies, and seems to know a few musicians. She is hard and soft in ways I haven't figured out yet, though curious and receptive when I would say something from an angle she was not familiar with. She expressed some doubts about what she was doing, cutting out pictures like a marginal expressionist. It is not very practical. I said it was edifying from the standpoint of what she avoided while she did it.

Sophie has recurring dreams of being electrocuted. And one where she is a blade of grass pushing up from under the soil and into the light, long and tall, only to be withered by the hot sun. There was some discussion as to whether she is a shocking person, concerned with being burned out, or what. When she has a flying dream she manages to avoid the power lines. I told her about a dream I had where I was making

love to a black woman on top of a telephone pole. We had no clothes on and were lying on the wires and a transformer. High voltage communication with an element of danger.

In one of her dreams she combined the aspects of a white crane (the bird) and a large mechanical crane (from a construction site). It was an enormous winged crane rising slowly out of the ground. She was in awe and pointed it out to the man she was with, but he wasn't interested. There seems to be a theme of men who're not impressed with the same things she is.

In another dream she was thrown into the corner and the man she was breaking up with at the time was "peeing on me." A few weeks later she had a similar dream where he peed on her again. This time she grabbed his organ and (demonstrating the gesture) turned it back on him. Here, pee on yourself. She liked that.

12:30 a.m. We walked to her car, a small old Mazda, and Sophie drove me to my place a few blocks away. She pulled over at the corner where the hookers hang out. She turned the motor off and we talked for a few minutes. There was a tall white transvestite (the one who looks like Kim Novak) talking with a shorter black man in a suit. I thought at first he was a client, but she thought he might be a controller. I had one foot out the door, but leaned over and kissed her on the cheek, which she didn't seem to mind. I said goodnight and let's do this again in the near future. She agreed. I walked across the street into my building, rising in an iron elevator and thinking of what soft skin she had.

Friday, Aug. 20, 1993

12:30 pm. I went to the office for another rendezvous with V. We walked to the Hunan place in Chinatown. Spicy smoked ham. I don't know what's come over her. Our

relations are evolving, I suppose, and maybe she is breaking out of her shell. Our connection is unlikely, but the gulf when bridged can make it all the more scintillating. There are communicating glances in a sublimated office.

When she lets her guard down it feels like I am on the receiving end of a Roman candle. The sparks of life are shooting out with her enthusiasm for a menu or for being out with a man. Life becomes an endless wonder when you're subject to restraint and relish the simple things. Some women have a nervous system with inherent exclamation points, like the postcard she sent from Hawaii.

So we're having lunch, the place is crowded, and she leans over. "Want to hear some gossips?" Laughing at herself. Aisha has been making overtures to a tall white legal assistant who is politely resisting. V. listens to the confidential rumors and intrigues that people tell her about. "What they don't know is, I have a big mouth."

She has been bringing up the subject of love and sex more often. She is resigned to marrying someone in her ethnic group. And yet, like many women who are anchored in the ordinary, when the spirit moves her it is all the more powerful. She has a sensitive radar when it comes to a rapport with someone. We get into discussions about my past love life, and not because I talk about it very much. She asked me, "Did you ever have a Filipina girlfriend?" "Almost," I said, and then had to explain.

We returned to the office for an hour or two. Then she had to deliver a legal document a few blocks away. "Go with me." I went out first, so it didn't look like we're spending too much time together. While we walked, she said something about perfumed coffee. I said,

"It's for women."
"No, my boyfriend drinks it."

"Well, I don't want to say anything."

She slugged me in the arm with her tiny fist, which didn't hurt. She used to be careful not to touch me, no physical contact, but lately has been less concerned, like when we're sitting close together or walking and bumping into each other.

The law office was in a forty-story building next to some shops. V. wanted to look at things. It felt like we were a couple looking at diamond rings and leather shoulder bags. Mine was torn to hell, which didn't escape her attention. "You look like a bum." We went into a shop for "petite" women with her flipping through the silhouettes. She has expensive tastes. When we delivered the document in a luxurious office she remarked on how subdued our office is (I thought that she was all the luxury it needed).

Being around her is a contact high, a rehabilitation of concepts like love and honesty. This is not a jaded woman, in other words. There are values which are real to her. The dirty jokes and innuendos of the older woman wash right off her. Her discretion is that of a realistic woman on the fringes of a sex-crazed culture. Her comment on seeing *Basic Instincts*: "They do it four times," and shrugged.

Her purities are combined with a capacity for horror films. She has seen the worst and hardly blinked. Her response: "It isn't real." These are films I would have found disturbing and wouldn't go near. I also take an hour or two to finish a cup of coffee and she will down it in a few minutes. I pointed that out, but she didn't want to hear it. We walked back with her thinking of future places for us to have lunch.

After work I walked her to the underground transit station, then headed for the pool. One mile in the water, then walked home.

I read a long article about Sylvia Plath in *The New Yorker* (by Janet Malcolm). B. was going to a low-budget play a friend of ours was in, called "In Between Zones," but I wasn't in the mood.

Saturday, Aug. 21, 1993

Typing in the afternoon.

I called Sophie, whose daughter is visiting from out of town. She had just come in from looking for shelves. "It's hot out, I'm stripping." Is that a fact? During a later call she said she was building shelves.

"I don't hear any hammering."
"I'm screwing," she said and laughed.

There was a story about the Tenderloin in a conservative magazine from the office, *American Spectator*. I like to look at things from different angles, including the conservatives when their knee-jerk slip is showing. They think that being close-minded is a virtue, and hypocrisy is written into the social contract. You would think it gets a little claustrophobic, the diminishing returns of being anal retentive.

6:30 p.m. Phone call from Jon in St. Helena. An odd time for him to call, sounding blurred or out of sync. His timing was a little off, like someone who was stoned or drinking. He said it was 92 degrees up there.

There was some mention of women one has slept with who are no longer living. He found that strange. He has known one or two young women who killed themselves (ex-lovers), not necessarily because of him. I told him I was in high school in Los Angeles and going out with Miss Valdez, a sultry Mexican-American girl who wore green-tinted glasses. We had an art class together. Her best friend at the time was a tall

black girl who stood out in the crowd and had scars on her wrists. She would call me and threaten to kill herself if I didn't say I loved her.

Meanwhile, his past is catching up to him. He is nearly thirty and used to go to bed with a girl or woman and in the morning have to ask her what her name was or not even bother. Now he is more cautious and discerning, one reason he isn't getting laid. He is mystified by this, although he has a stubborn self-reliance. I think he is rearranging the priorities in his life. Technically he is married to a Brazilian woman. They went through the legal motions so she could stay in the country. They don't live together, but she has made some overtures. There is also a Korean woman, twenty-three, who was "dry humping" him a few weeks ago. Then she stopped and went to sleep. Turns out she is a virgin and lives with her parents. They are authoritarian and abusive and she wants to move out. He thinks she wants to do it by marrying him, but he isn't interested.

The reason he called is the Brazilian woman is driving there tomorrow from the city and could give me a ride if I want to spend some time in the country.

7 p.m. On the phone with Sophie. She asked if I wanted to see a Dr. Seuss movie with her and her daughter. I hesitated. She said, "You're hesitating." I said I was adjusting to a concept which was a little off the wall. I had just been talking to someone about women committing suicide. Then I thought, what the hell do I care, I just want to be with her. For all I know it was a test, a minor hurdle, which would show the resilience of a man. She said I could come over first and that did it.

I took a shower and left around eight, going without dinner. I picked up a bottle of wine and got a cab. Things were moving right along and the taxi ride was no exception, including the driver. It was one of those times where no matter what you're doing other

people make their presence felt. They're not just a "cab driver," but a real person with a history and a mind. In this case, a dark-skinned man with an accent and vaguely North African features. He had some opinions about why he thought this city was dying, the power and the money in the hands of a few. I mentioned the *Chronicle* and his contempt was coming out all over again. When we passed the projects in the Mission District there were young black guys standing around doing nothing. He shook his head, blaming them as much as anyone else. He's an educated man and said he doesn't need this job. He has a son somewhere by an English woman. It turned out he is from Malta, an island off the coast of Tunisia.

I was dropped off on Noe and walked a block to where she lives. When I leave my rundown neighborhood with not much in the way of gentility it's strange to see how other people live. There was an atmosphere of flowers and light. She opened the door. A good-sized flat on the second floor with a well-appointed living room. She shares it with a small and lively woman of about forty. One of the rooms is in a shambles, with Sophie moving in. She showed me the shelf unit she put together with her strong hands, but was not satisfied with the results.

We ended up in the kitchen, sitting around with everything clean and neat and kind of floral. I was out of my element, but was drawn into the conversation which transcended the immediate circumstances. I was talking with three unknown females, and opened a known wine. The daughter was well-mannered with long brown hair and an artistic bent. The two of them are companions who have weathered a lot as mother and daughter. When the girl went in the other room Sophie brought out a long blue bong for a

hit or two, and offered some. I wasn't in the mood, generally avoiding it these days, but had a hit. She said it was good and it was.

9 p.m. The three of us left and drove in her car to the Haight, going over the hill with a wide-angle view of the city at night. It was an unfamiliar route, a road less traveled, winding down into the Haight.

In the Red Vic we sat in back in chairs that rocked (she insisted on paying, I was her guest). An 80-minute program of "classic Dr. Seuss shorts," including "The Cat in the Hat," "Green Eggs & Ham," and "Star-Bellied Sneetches." Not "Horton Hears a Who," however. It took me twenty minutes to get into it, and twenty of being ready to walk out, but I finally got into the flow of allegories and morality tales. One thing which I found odd was the audience. The theater was nearly full and it was mostly adults. They were laughing at the dumbest things. I wondered what they were doing here without a kid with them. Maybe they were stoned or getting in touch with their lost childhoods.

When it was over we walked to a coffee house, Jammin' Java, on a warm night. No wind. I asked her what she said during one of the films. She said I remind her of the Cat in the Hat. I wasn't sure how to take that. She downed a large coffee and I lowered mine an inch or less. We were talking and relaxing. According to the genius of random events our third night together was shared with her daughter. It made for a certain restraint while bringing out another side of her. She had seemed like a young twenty-nine with a disturbing and erratic past as she described it. Now she was an older twenty-nine in the presence of her daughter, seeming calmer and more patient. It was a swing of five or six years in either direction, like she fluctuates between twenty-four and thirty-four.

Returning to the car she wondered if I wanted to go home. I said I wasn't tired. Neither was she.[117]

11:30 p.m. I was in the kitchen while she put her daughter to bed in her room. I had a momentary regret on that point. Then we sat in the kitchen and talked, having more wine and cigarettes and what was left of my coffee. The woman roommate showed up from a party downstairs, talking for a while. She's from Chicago with a leftwing view of things.

She went upstairs to her room and we were alone. It was 1 or 2 a.m. I told her to let me know if I should go. She gave me the impression that it wasn't late. After a while there was another hit off the bong and we wandered into the living room. I looked at her tapes, an eclectic mix, though generally more subdued than what I listen to. She had the Violent Femmes and Keith Jarrett. I suggested the former and she put on the latter.

I sat on the floor, leaning against the sofa she was lying on. The conversation unfolded with little effort and I kept my distance, more or less. Neither one of us were sure of what to make of this. A week ago I didn't know she existed. There were subtle adjustments as the night wore on. She turned the lights down low, saying they hurt her eyes. Then in gradual stages:

I was sitting on the other end of the sofa.

She mentioned two or three times that her leg hurt.

I massaged her leg, picking it up and laying it across mine, rubbing her calf and thigh.

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[117] When we were walking she said something about having an irregular heartbeat. I said like it's turning over sometimes? Yes. A six-foot woman with striking features and a certain fragility, which she admits. That's along with never having known her real parents. She has no history to lean on, just her bones to go on.

She mentioned, with her leg on mine, that she was “stealing heat” from me. She said a few times that she was cold.

I lay down next to her.

We were lying on the sofa, holding each other. She didn’t resist.

One thing led to another, taking our time with a solo piano in the background. The music was exploratory and improvisational. Things took their natural course. Our minds had gotten acquainted, now our bodies were familiarizing themselves with each other after the first few tentative kisses.

She was the one with exploratory hands, at least at first. Then I got to know the feel of her. She didn’t feel very strong, though slender and well-formed. I fumbled momentarily with her bra. I haven’t had to bother with one of those for a long time. The women I have known or lived with never wore one or they took it off before they lay down.

Having located the hard-on of her guest without much trouble and gently brought it out into the open I responded in kind, a woman in baggy trousers with nothing underneath. I found a hairy *raison d’etre* which was wet in about two seconds.

She seemed to have no inhibitions and I took it slowly, testing her reflexes and tasting her responses. Maybe too slow. The evening was progressing with the unfamiliar timing of each other. It’s like the gravitational pull of another planet, and it leaves you feeling different. With some women it’s like you’re on the moon with one-eighth of your normal weight. With others you’re so dense and heavy you’re immobilized.

It was a so-so version of an erection. If it hadn’t come back for an encore half an hour later I would have been worried. The situation had been compromised when it was

hard too long, like a premature erection. If I ignore it for half an hour while we're kissing and I'm not sure if we're going all the way, it might go back to sleep. Some erections have a different caliber than others. Depending on the circumstances a second or a third erection is hard, but you are dealing with a fluctuating metabolism. Being stoned doesn't help, and I was sleepy. Her presence was relaxing. It's something I have missed, living in semi-isolation. Lying with a woman is seductive.[118] Then you're kneeling with her long legs spread out in the shadows and you end up making love to the darkness.

Mentally I venture into the unknown (which is hard to avoid for those of us with a limited cognizance), but I have a libido for the known. It's another reason I tend to stay with one woman for months or years. This woman is an unknown quantity (and quality), even to herself in some respects. She is flexible in every sense of the word. Earlier when we had our clothes on she lifted her leg up to her head. She was stretching (the truth), but it sent another signal.

There was a second coming, so to speak (the condoms put a damper on the situation – I don't use them very often). The night was verging on the endless. A window started to lighten up. There was Sutro Tower with its pulsing red lights, our mechanical chaperone. I was caught up in an amorous drift. She had to get up, however. She didn't want her daughter to find her here in the morning.

6 or 7 a.m. I went to sleep under a thin soft cover, having pulled the sofa down into a bed some hours before.

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[118] When I was in high school I went to a party and got into a hot and steamy situation with a girl. I was shy and she was the aggressive one. After making out on a mattress we went to someone's car and I fell asleep on her shoulder. It was the beginning of an affair that lasted a year or more.

Sunday, Aug. 22, 1993

11 a.m. Coming to with her in the room, already up. I had about four hours sleep, her less. We were more or less functional, but I was nearly faint from hunger.

I took a shower, but we had to be restrained since her daughter was there. It was downright civilized. At some point I was on the floor with a globe and turning it, suggesting to the daughter that she find this or that country. She was eager to try it. We went from geography to arithmetic, determining the deepest part of the ocean in miles. Divide 5,280 feet into 36,000 something. Okay, 5,000 into 36,000. Knock off the zeroes. 5 into 36. The ocean is seven miles deep.

We finally went out for breakfast, and stood around waiting for a table in a French magazine café with a deli. I suggested going to the beach. They thought that was a good idea. We picked up something to go and drove out to the area of the Cliff House. She said she needed someone to direct her or to organize things, to put forth a concept like going to the beach and bringing towels and lotion. I think we had one towel.

We got a window table at Lou's with the ocean looking rough. It overlooked the ruins of a public pool from the early part of the century, the closest that we get to Roman baths around here. She thinks I drink too much coffee. She also said that she is non-judgmental to a fault. The blessed presence of a woman with (I'm paraphrasing) the aristocratic patience of someone who has weathered a crisis in her life. The stories I've been hearing from someone who left home at fourteen. She was picked up by the police and handcuffed. Her foster mother went to the police station and left her there.

Last Thursday night after dropping me off she had to go by the apartment of a drunken ex-boyfriend, something about a check.

We walked down a trail past the ruins and through a tunnel to the other side where the continent falls apart into the ocean. The water hits the boulders and explodes and it's been going on for millions of years, the longest running show in town. I wondered what symbolic dimensions we were touching on. The sequence of our getting acquainted seemed to have a life of its own. It took about a week to consummate it, and it has the unlimited potential of an afternoon at the beach.[119]

We walked up the trail and over to the Cliff House. There were mechanical contraptions from the turn of the century, including a LOVE METER. Test your sex potential. Very scientific. I put a quarter in and she held the handle. I thought it would run a small current through it, but the lights flashed up and down a list of descriptions and ended on MILD. I tried it with the flashing lights and it ended on SEXY. She concurred, as if to remind me of what she said last night. Other women have a different opinion, but I don't have to deal with them, just her at the moment. If she thinks I'm sexy I can live with that.

Not sure what to do next. I suggested Baker Beach near the cliffs. We drove there, picking up some apple juice, and pulled into a parking lot on the edge of the beach. We were there for a couple of hours, a relaxing drifting interlude. I don't know if lying there was grounding this connection or what, but it felt like it.

I slipped into a swimsuit while the girl was down by the water. She was having the time of her life, her mother with a lady-like refusal to get involved with the elements. She lay there in shorts and a shirt with a sweater over her skin, later saying she fell asleep for a while. There had been some tears, apropos of what I don't know, but she was

[119] So much for symbolism or the optimistic visions of a confused writer. It wasn't long before the affair evaporated like a wave when it is reaching for the moon. There is a moment of transparency, and then it vanishes into the sand.

humming and half-singing a song in Vietnamese. It had something to do with clouds that go by and people left behind and love lost.

Meanwhile I was at the edge of the water, getting used to it. The daughter and I were knee-deep in the numbing surf. She was laughing and screaming every time a wave came up (they weren't very big). Later she was digging in the wet sand, finding little sand crabs. I dove into a heavy breaking wave and swam out further. It was not so cold. The tide was stirred up by a white ocean liner which had just gone by, emerging from under a suspension bridge and heading for the horizon. A love boat and we missed it.

I returned to the one towel and her. We lay there for a long time with the daughter amusing herself and talking a lot while playing in the sand.

7 p.m. We drove back to their place. I felt the limitation of not having a driver's license[120] and her having to do the driving. We hung out for a while, then I said I should go. There was a gentle encounter in the kitchen with the daughter in the other room – she had been compromising our time together. Sophie walked me down the stairs to the door and we had a more emphatic embrace.

I headed for Mission Street half a mile away. I was walking on air, like when you have worn-out sneakers and you get new ones and they're cushioned with a spring in your step. It was like that, only more so. Affection is an insulation and another person is a cushion in your life, a shock absorber. It makes for a smoother ride.

It helps to have the insulation torn off now and then, especially for a writer. You feel like a bare wire. The signals are clearer and more direct, if not cold-blooded, but I have done it long enough, feeling the voltage of existence and the slow burn of

[120] I was arrested for a DUI last year.

loneliness. Also, I'm tired of looking at the dark side of people. Walking on the sunny side of the street is more practical. There are diminishing returns when you lurk in the shadows. Life is optimistic to the extent it keeps going. Death isn't. You can align yourself with the forces of death and dissolution in order to find out what they're all about, but it tends to put a damper on things. You get used to the downward mobility. You walk around scanning the gutters and the storm drains of existence and miss a lot of other things because you have a limited viewpoint.

There was an eerie fading light when I went underground on Mission and 24th. A minute later I was sitting in a deserted futuristic tunnel, feeling drained and claustrophobic. I wondered why I came down here. I don't like being cut off from the life on the street. I almost never take a subterranean train. Fifteen minutes and I was ready to bolt. I felt a breeze and heard a sound in the distance, with the wind being pushed out of a tunnel by an oncoming train. A gentle introduction to the streamlined metal sliding into the station. Then I was gone.

I emerged two miles away at the Civic Center. A lunar crescent at the top of the concrete stairs (and the homeless with their concrete stares). I walked past the library with some shady characters in the shadows, the demented and the down and out. A couple of Latino guys whispered, "Weed…pot," and followed me. There was some menace in the air. A block further, crossing the street, someone called my name. The Phantom was sitting at a bus stop. I walked over and waited with him. Long hair, unshaven, worn out, returning from an ordinary job in Berkeley. He said someone broke into his van last night and messed with the ignition. How was my weekend? I said I was

returning from a rendezvous with a woman which began about twenty-four hours ago. He thought that was positive. “Is she Asian?”

We talked about women and music, then the bus pulled up and he was gone and I walked home another few blocks, feeling the contrast of my neighborhood with anywhere else more civilized. I sat around for an hour or two, reading and thinking. Coffee and a cigarette. Floating in the slipstream of a woman.

11:30 p.m. Went to sleep.

Monday, Aug. 23, 1993

I was more or less useless in the morning. Couldn’t focus on much of anything, as thinking about her and the weekend left other things a blur. I was tired and felt the after-effects. It’s hard to tell if you unravel because of a woman or the circumstances or both. I felt like someone who has been walking into closed doors and empty rooms and suddenly the door is open and there’s a big warm feather bed.

I pulled myself together enough to call the Actress. Her daughter answered the phone and said she was washing dishes and taking calls. What’s her mother doing? Reading the paper. Maya sounded like a busy little woman and she held up her end of the conversation. She lowered her voice, a little conspiratorial, when telling me about a movie she saw about dinosaurs. Her mother wasn’t sure she should see it, but she went with her divorced father. Someone got eaten while “on the toilet” (a lawyer, oddly enough). I told her I used to look for fossils. The central valley in California was under the ocean a long time ago and I would dig up petrified clams and shark’s teeth. She was

curious about that. “How deep?” She said we could make a fossil of her when she died. “Just chop me up.” I said that wouldn’t be necessary.

We were talking for a while. Rumor has it that the fifth grade can be difficult but she figured if one was prepared, taking it one step at a time, it wouldn’t be so hard. She was reading something about vampires.

“What’s it called?”
“Vampire.”

Then she had to go and apologized. Her mother wanted to talk.

The Actress went to the Russian River with the boyfriend. It did him a world of good. She asked about my weekend. I told her about the woman I had been with, sounding a positive note. She was taken aback, not subdued necessarily, but used to my not being with someone. She may have romantic difficulties, but there was someone who is worse off or free of that. Now it looked like another woman was involved and she had to reassess things, not ready for this positive stuff when her own situation is a little rocky.

3 p.m. I walked to the office with a vague sense of having weathered a transformation over the weekend. There was a Henry Miller routine running through my mind, as if in having slept with a woman I was more at home with other women. It had something to do with a communion of the common cunt. I’m going off the deep end here. When I walked into the office I felt closer to the women. A lone male may feel distant, which can undermine his relations with the fair sex. When he’s with a woman the distance diminishes. She inhabits a dimension of closeness and it rubs off on him. Other women pick up on that. When you have a girlfriend there are other women on the horizon. When you’re alone you tend to stay alone.

Some women judge a man by the effect he has on other women. Before they were famous the Rolling Stones had a hard time getting laid (or so they said).

When I got to my desk V. turned around and asked, “How come you look so serious?” She continues to reduce the distance between us, until sooner or later it will be as thin as silk. She said she is leaving at the end of next month and reminded me of when her birthday is, letting me know that I could take her to lunch then. On her last day we’ll go somewhere after work. I said, “The Fairmont, we’ll take a cab.”

Later she was on the computer in the backroom. I walked by and she told me about her lip. She bit it the other day. Now there is a tiny cut and it bothers her, the inside of her lower lip. She touched it, complaining a little, then pulled it out to show me the cut. There was something so sensual about that, although I tend to interpret things in sensual terms (especially where she is concerned). You can’t assume that sensuality is meant for you, especially if it’s an element we’re all immersed in.

A couple of days later she was still calling attention to her lip and showing me. I was getting facetious about her having big lips and having bitten one.

“I don’t have big lips.”
“Yes you do… anyhow it’s not bad.”
“What do you mean?”
“Well,” (thinking fast) “… it’s a sign of beauty.”
“Who says?”
“I do” (walking away).

Later I had to bring some papers down for a client to sign – he was waiting in his car, a declaration for a DUI. When I was walking out the receptionist, who is something of a plainspoken flirt, asked if I would bring her some ice water from a nearby café. I returned with the water and handed it to her. She said, “I’m so special. It looks like you pissed in it.” I wasn’t sure how to respond to that.

I went home after work and was reading for a while.

9 p.m. Phone call from Sophie. I left a message earlier. She said she liked the sound of it and saved it. Something about having blown the morning sitting around and thinking about her. We talked for an hour. She comes across as independent and intelligent, like she may not need a man, but will drop a casual remark about saving a message I left on her machine like it meant something to her.

Tuesday, Aug. 24, 1993

12:30 p.m. I met V. at the office and we walked to Old St. Mary's. We were late, but heard a woman on cello and a man on violin. "Arrangements of Arias from Mozart's Magic Flute." For a while she had her prayer beads out. Afterward I asked if I could borrow a dime. We walked to an altar near the front with a saint overlooking the red flames. I lit a candle. God bless V. and Sophie. I turned and saw her kneeling at a pew, finishing a prayer, and waited for a minute. I thought she never looked so beautiful.

Ten minutes later we were having tacos next to the world headquarters of a bank, sitting on a slab of granite (benches are too humanistic for civilians). In the plaza was a large black stone, maybe ten feet high. It's known as the Bankers' Heart.

Back in the office she showed me a book she is reading, something with "butcher" in the title. Now and then I put a subtle pressure on her to read something of substance. She isn't used to anyone caring about her mind. Sometimes she resists and sometimes she doesn't, like a woman with a secret intelligence (and maybe she wants to keep it that way). I think she's telepathic. I'll be at the typewriter and look up as she walks by and says "What?"

5 p.m. We went down the elevator with one of the other secretaries. The two of them have nothing to say to each other. The younger one is married and exuberant and has a figure that would "make a bishop kick a hole in a stained-glass window."[121] When we arrived at the corner V. veered off, leaving her halfway across the street and more or less abandoned by us.

We spoke earlier about young women having babies. I said, "You think they ever do it to hold on to a man?" "Of course."

I walked home and read the paper. A big headline: KILLER PUT TO DEATH (in the gas chamber). Only the second execution in this state since 1967. I thought his parents should have done time considering how they raised him. They're sadistic fundamentalists. Some people protested the execution. Women held signs like, "Don't kill in my name," and "Are we safer now?" Like it has anything to do with them. That's like saying *"L'etat c'est moi"* (I am the State).[122] I'm not sure what security has to do with it. Has revenge become outmoded?

That was followed by a long article on Sylvia Plath.

The woman is perfected.
Her dead

Body wears the smile of accomplishment,
The illusion of a Greek necessity

Flows in the scrolls of her toga,
Her bare

Feet seem to be saying:
We have come so far, it is over,

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[121] Raymond Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940)
[122] Louis XIV (1638-1715)

Each dead child coiled…[123]

Wednesday, Aug. 25, 1993

1 p.m. Sophie called from where she works (Mega News), saying it was ironic that she is "media illiterate." She doesn't read the paper. We talked about the pain and suffering of others and those who read about it. She doesn't have much distance from those things. She has no way to channel it or do something with the information. A metal typewriter is a lightning rod for morbid voltage. I'm not shocked that often.

Late afternoon in the office. V. walked over and put a short letter on my typewriter. She is not sure if she got it right and wanted me to check it. I sent a six or seven-page fax to Mega News, a few old poems on request. She called me as soon as they were coming out of her machine.

That night there was the usual ebb and tide of energy and motivation. I'm often dragging in the early evening. Then things pick up. I read for a couple of hours and was on the guitar for a while. Midnight to two a.m. I was on the typewriter. Only then did I - almost mid-sentence – get up and start straightening up the place since she is coming over tomorrow night. The studio needs attention.

Two hours later, four in the morning, it was still not enough.

Thursday, Aug. 26, 1993

[123] Sylvia Plath, "Edge" (1960)

11:30 a.m. I woke up and plugged in the phone. It rang a few minutes later. B. wanted to meet on a tennis court on Russian Hill. An hour later I went out with a tennis racket, walking past the derelicts and Spanish-speaking drug dealers.

From the courts there is a view of an empty prison on an island. She showed up a few minutes later. We were playing and sweating for an hour and a half while she kept up a non-stop conversation that was closer to a monologue. Much of it was about the possibilities of a ménage a trois. It is intriguing and repellent to her, having met a woman who had done that with a Jewish couple.

When she heard about my having met someone there was her usual response. She doesn't want to lose a friend and "confidante" to another woman who would most likely (if she knows women) monopolize my time. Later she asked if I want to be a sperm donor. She is nearly thirty-three and running out of time without a man around. She said that artificial insemination is too artificial, and she doesn't approve of lesbian couples having a kid. I asked if there would be some liability along the lines of child support.

The woman she is obsessed with is bisexual and just had a lumpectomy. She studied journalism and psychology in school. I asked if this woman has figured her out yet. No, but she's trying - keep them guessing. I was going to say something about the mysteries of women, but I don't like to talk that much when we're on the court. We were slamming shots so hard and low a flame appeared along the top of the net, or was it my imagination.

We finally quit and sat on a bench. She had kiwi-peach soda, and mentioned having been naked at the beach for the first time in her life, and now has some odd tan

lines. Also her back hurt. When we started walking I stopped and rubbed her lower vertebrae.

3:30 p.m. At home I took a shower, put on slacks and a clean shirt, and went to work. V. was training her replacement, the younger sister of the Filipina secretary. This one is eighteen, just had a baby, and is soft-spoken in ways her sister isn't.

V. told me her lip hurts, though she put something on it. Yesterday I was calling clinics, but they wouldn't give advice over the phone. I said she should have an angel kiss it. She replied slowly with a patient air, "Shut… up."

Yesterday, along with the poems, I faxed an 8 x 10 photo to Sophie. It showed Simone from the waist down, wearing white pantyhose and standing demurely on a newspaper with the words *LE MONDE*, like Venus rising out of the crumpled news with gorgeous legs. I showed it to V. and said I took it. "You lie." Her automatic skepticism. I tease her with the truth.

Working for a couple of hours, including a Motion to Suppress Evidence. The police need to have a reasonable suspicion to pull you over and ask questions. Theoretically they could find a pound of cocaine and someone's head in your suitcase, but if they didn't have a good reason to stop you the evidence might be thrown out of court. The Fourth Amendment offers us protection from unreasonable search and seizure.

6 p.m. I went home.

7 p.m. More cleaning, straightening up, adjusting pictures, etc. I piled up old newspapers with torn-out articles I never got around to dissecting. The place looked okay, like the occupant was within spitting distance of being civilized.

9 p.m. Sophie called and said her car broke down, the clutch. The transmission was rebuilt two months ago. She was stuck across town and couldn't make it over here, but will call tomorrow. Tired of cars and their expensive problems. However, she did want to read a brief fax she didn't have time to send – a note referring to the poems as being mentally challenging. They made her sense her own intellectual decline, but it was an edifying effort. She signed it, "Kisses."

One of the poems was about Bob Kaufman (1925-1986), a Beat poet who lived in San Francisco. He was black and Jewish, and wrote a book called *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness* (1965).[124]

> One hot morning Gregory Corso introduced me to him
> and I bought him a drink,
> it was the least I could do
> for someone who makes you think,
> like brothers in a paralyzing vodka of the paranormal.
> Still unscrewing the bolts in our security-conscious coffin,
> a man who was married to the volts
> and carried away by language to the origin of its worth,
> the insulation on the meanings torn away
> by those "blue nocturnes of the void."

"KAUFMAN" (excerpt)

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[124] A few years later I met another black Beat poet from a similar time period, Ted Joans (1928 – 2003). There was a lot more interaction than I had with Kaufman, from readings and conversations to photos and a couple of postcards from him. He had a French girlfriend who was much younger and an artist. I wrote a poem for her ("The Hands of Laura"). The last verse:

Her lovely hands are in the open
as she listens to a man
relating what her late companion
meant to him, and his opinions
are his own. In other lands
the women may have similar hands,
a gesture is inherited,
unconscious, not unmerited.
The light is subtle by the window,
in the garments of a widow
and attended to by angels:
her own hands, they know the angles.

9:30 p.m. One minute I'm on the guitar and the next I'm talking to my Chinese friend in Anchorage. We talked for an hour. I told her about Sophie. She expressed some doubts about this new relationship, like it might diminish ours. Then she said, "How nice, an end of the summer love affair," like I'm preparing for the winter. I said when I fall in love it tends to be in the late summer or early fall (like going back to school). She found that amusing, that it might be seasonal, but falling in love is almost beyond her comprehension.

So is being feminine, and she said as much. There are cuts on her fingers and she put on weight. She is worn out, underpaid, and often angry. Also, her period is late, and she is more than ready to come home next month.

Ming is keeping to her modus operandi of relying heavily on men. The Phantom will give up his room for a month, no charge, and sleep in the sound-room. The fellow up north is furnishing a trailer and the job itself. Men figure strongly in her life, and she avails herself of everything they have to offer, including the occasional physical relief. She has been sleeping with the guy in the trailer and it's possible she is pregnant. For some reason - admitting it was dumb – they were not using condoms all the time. It was too much trouble, getting off work late and they're tired. She told him if she's pregnant it's her body and her business (like his sperm had nothing to do with it). All of this in a context of "I don't want any men in my life." I'm thinking fine, but what are they doing in your life then, not to say your bed.

She is bored and sickened with the tendency of men to form sentimental attachments, wanting to take care of her, from room and board to an abortion. It's so inconvenient when they have feelings. I recommended a couple of books from China,

including *The Butcher's Wife* – where a young wife is sold or given to a man whose idea of foreplay is to kick her. She said, "I'd shoot him," laughing. She doesn't want to read a romance. If this is a romance it doesn't say much for the Chinese. In the other book, *Half of Man is Woman*, a man has been in prison or labor camps for most of his adult life and never been with a woman. When it finally happens, he is impotent. Totalitarianism weakens the individual. She didn't buy it for a second, that he (or the author) blamed the system. If he couldn't get it up, he could improvise and not leave the woman staring at the ceiling. Ming is contrary to a fault. When she was in school her attitude had everything to do with blaming the system for the condition of women.

We talked about the Chinese custom of getting married and living with your parents, something I found hard to imagine. She said it's not uncommon. People take care of their parents rather than abandoning them, as often happens in this country. All fine and good, but I've known her over four years and one of the dominant themes has been how much she hated her father, a domineering and coldblooded man who bought her mother in the south of China in the 1950's. She wanted to kill him when she was a girl, feeling unloved. As a young woman with a part-time job she was expected to hand over some of her wages, like a time-honored custom. Her parents didn't need it. They have gone back to China where they have two homes. They never had much interest in being citizens or learning the language here. They were only here to make money, while trying to keep their offspring from consorting with black or white "ghosts." Ming is the only one who strayed.

Now she says if she got married she wouldn't mind living with her parents. I took that with a grain of salt since they're on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. The chances

of her getting married are even more remote, but not because she is undesirable. She doesn't have the temperament, and is touchy about her own autonomy - don't fence me in with your good intentions.

Meanwhile, she thought she was getting flabby. Not sure about wearing a tight dress at my ex-girlfriend's wedding, and is worried how it would look. I said, "You always look good in a dress, just don't take it off." She gasped. There was some reference to the Tenderloin and what she can look forward to. She wouldn't mind, it's boring where she is with no one getting arrested.

10:30 p.m. The guitar was going to extremes. An erratic virtuoso routine. I wondered if it was those organic power vitamins (a small dose).

11:30 p.m. The phone rang, the Czech woman, sounding quiet. Two cars collided on the street outside and a black man was yelling. I went over to the window. It wasn't much, a pickup truck in front of him had crossed into his lane. I didn't see much damage to the car, maybe on the side away from me. A silver sports car. Most people understand the concept of a minor accident. They pull out their IDs and exchange information. This was an Upwardly Mobile Black Man, however. Among other things, he didn't understand the concept of an accident or manners or insurance or your car is not yourself. He was bigger than the other driver, (who was white or Latino), around thirty, in shorts, and wouldn't stop yelling. "LOOK WHAT YOU DID TO MY CAR… YOU MOTHERFUCKER, YOU SON OF A BITCH…WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING, YOU'RE AN… I OUGHT TO…," screaming in his face. If the other driver hadn't been passive and polite, if he had made one wrong move, the guy would have pounded him. He was even yelling at the other driver's girlfriend, "YOU LOOK LIKE A

BITCH!" His own girlfriend was white, for what it's worth. It was another rich multi-cultural experience in the city that knows how. He went on yelling and swearing for a while – really not enough self-esteem. His late-model precious car was damaged. You would think it came from Africa. It's a boorish middle-class conceit, being a pompous arriviste. If he had as much class as he thinks he does, he wouldn't disturb the entire neighborhood over a fender bender.

Meanwhile, I was talking with the Czech woman who admitted there are contradictions in her love life. She is seeing the results. Things had fallen apart with the Israeli man where she works. It was an open arrangement and he would talk about other women he had been with. When she started talking about other men, like the Latino fellow, it was the beginning of the end. She thought it was an ego thing, though she said he might have worried about diseases if she was sleeping with a homeless man.

The latter lives in a van and still comes around. The sex is good, but she sounded bemused. If she had used her brain it would have been clear that fucking isn't enough. They don't have much in common and there is little to talk about. He came and went and she was stuck with an old familiar feeling. "Now what… is that all there is?" Her cunt was satisfied, but what about the rest of her? It isn't easy getting love and sex to coincide (it is a problem getting humans and sex to coincide). Some women say a woman is thinking with her pussy when she chooses the wrong man.

We talked about the woman I met. She wanted to know everything. Did I go to bed with her, how was it, etc. I was being circumspect. She went on talking while I started to fade, having been headed for the typewriter when she called.

12:30 a.m. I got off the phone and was on the typewriter for an hour or so. The night had a disturbing feel to it. There were men and women yelling at each other on the street.

Friday, Aug. 27, 1993

NOTES

> Article in the paper: A woman in Hollywood, twenty-seven-years old, ran a high-priced call girl operation. The girls got $1500, from which she took $400. She is the daughter of a well-off Jewish doctor. Heidi Fleiss (it gives new meaning to the Freud-Fleiss correspondence). She faces charges of "felony pandering" and possession of cocaine.
>
> The local chapter of the National Organization of Women is not denouncing her, but rather her prosecution. They "decry" the case. "It seems to be that if a person alleged to be a madam is being prosecuted, then law enforcement should be equally concerned with male customers… The LAPD will be watched intensely… to see if the arrest of men involved… matches the effort against Ms. Fleiss."
>
> Something doesn't add up. How is someone who is involved on a daily basis with a prostitution ring, who profits off of every encounter of every call girl, on the same level as a man who goes there once in a while? Whether or not he should be prosecuted, it is hardly the same. She is implicated in hundreds of call girl transactions every month, while the average customer is involved a handful of times.
>
> According to NOW it doesn't matter what your occupation is, you are no better than an operation which sells women along with cocaine. You might think Ms. Fleiss is exploiting those women if she takes over 25 percent of their earnings, one reason she lives in a $1.6 million mansion. You also might think (as happened) that any men involved in the operation would be arrested (including her ex-boyfriend).
>
> Maybe the National Organization of Women is uncomfortable with the fact that a young woman whose parents are well off and who could do any number of things would be sleeping with a Hollywood director at nineteen, and then want to be a hooker. She wasn't oppressed, unless her father sold her into prostitution in order to pay for the whips and chains with which he controls his wife.

The woman is still a victim – of unequal prosecution. She was a shy and trembling virgin named Heidi before she was ruined by men, and never mind her close resemblance to a greedy loud-mouthed mercenary.

The head of the Vice Unit made a good point. How are they supposed to arrest all the customers if names in a book are not sufficient evidence?

According to NOW, this "indicates a system that still doesn't get it…The case shows how Hollywood continues to treat women as inferiors… they only know how to hire a woman if she's represented by a madam." How is Hollywood at fault? Prostitution doesn't occur in any other city or country? Do the women getting $1100 a night feel inferior? Heidi Fleiss by night does not seem to have an inferiority complex. If Hollywood doesn't hire many women, then all those women in the movies must be men, or they were put there by a call girl operation? So it wasn't a stretch when Elizabeth Taylor was a prostitute in *BUtterfield 8* (1960).

An article yesterday in the *New York Times* – a big "harassment" trial in Philadelphia. A prominent conservative attorney, a forty-six-year-old black man, married, is being sued by a former co-worker, a white woman attorney who is forty-one and married. She "accuses him of promising to help her career in exchange for sex. The law firm is also a defendant… Ms. F. has told the court that she had sex with Mr. G. three times before breaking off their relationship in late 1989." She was later "denied work at the firm and dismissed." He contends it was because of "poor performance in her work at the law firm."

I would think she is already on thin ice, her credibility and innocence a little suspect, if she admits to sleeping with a man where she worked in order to further her career. You would think at that point all bets are off and any subsequent accusations of harassment and/or being exploited should be dropped, the whole thing having been consensual. It should only be an investigation into wrongful termination, i.e., did the firm have a legitimate reason to let her go.

Her attorney called the defendant a "predator… [the woman isn't?] …who had used his power to extract what he wanted with the male-dominated environment of a powerful law firm." Notice the build-up of terms that leave her looking like a helpless woman – a married lawyer who is allegedly out to sea or easily swayed in a "male-dominated environment" which is "powerful." There is usually a polite atmosphere in a law office, especially a prominent one. The implication that she was hypnotized by the maleness is a little hard to swallow (and how would she function as an attorney if that's the case?). She said she wanted to make more money, which her attorney says the defendant "respected and nurtured."

Since she had sex with him in order to make more money, it would seem she is bringing these charges to improve her financial standing. She wants

> "compensatory and punitive damages" (which are enormous) for "sexual harassment and discrimination, battery, defamation, and other offenses…." Interesting if harassment still pertains in a situation that was consensual, especially with her being a lawyer and not one of the secretaries. Her charges aren't defamatory?
>
> What lends the case an even more suspect air, her husband is a co-plaintiff. He is "suing for the loss of his wife's companionship caused by her affair." Why wouldn't he be suing her? How much loss are we talking about if she only had sex "three times" with the defendant over a period of 18 months?

12:30 p.m. I met V. in the office and we walked to the Hunan place on the edge of Chinatown. Smoked ham, bamboo shoots, rice with sour soup, onion cake. I had called her earlier.

> "Good morning."
> "I'm busy you know."
> "What are you doing?"
> "A lot… and don't be surprised if I'm not at my desk."

Her replacement was there who she thought is a bit loose, having had a baby a few months ago and there's no man in her life. We got on the subject of women who sleep around. It is unethical or crude, in her opinion. It is hard for her to imagine that some women go to bed with a man like a form of physical therapy. She shook her head. It seems impersonal and mundane to her. V. assumes that women are responsible for what they do if they're not complete morons. They get what they deserve, including (I'm not sure how we got on the subject) when their breast implants don't work out.

Our conversations are becoming less guarded. She even teased me about the receptionist. She told me her own weight, 105 pounds, and how she wants to lose five pounds, patting her lower stomach, saying it was flat at the moment.

When we returned to the office she said she saw the security guard in the lobby, a black man in his late twenties, being arrested and handcuffed yesterday. That made no sense to me. He's a friendly fellow, clean cut, conscientious, and often in his uniform. I don't mean that being a security guard was all he wanted out of life, but I never thought he would be arrested.

In the office I finished a Motion to Suppress Evidence with a Memorandum of Points and Authorities as to why the police didn't have a reasonable suspicion for a search. In front of my typewriter in her swivel chair was V.'s replacement, Maria. She is the sister of the nineteen-year-old and both of them are luscious. I think they have been practicing their social skills since they were three years old. Her sister talks nonstop no matter what she's doing, and was bustling around with her shoes off this afternoon. Maria is not as talkative. Her clothes are too sexy, according to V. Looking at a postcard from Hawaii on the wall, a woman in a bikini, Maria speculated on her being of "mixed race," and how she was "a little flat."

The sisters are intelligent, but they don't have much interest in literature or history. They are young and focused on immediate concerns, which might be why they seem so polished and alert. Books are irrelevant. Some women cultivate a confident persona. It is necessary when they are more vulnerable than men. They come off hyper-civilized in public, while in private anything goes. Who knows what they revert to? Actually I do, having lived with a few.

5 p.m. I left, walking V. to the underground on my way to the pool. She had a curious comment. "They're talking about us." I think the "us" got me. She shrugged it off - some office gossip as to how much time we spend together.

The pool was crowded so I waited in the lobby, reading a magazine. Gradually the people went away and I was in the pool. One mile. By the time I finished I was the only one there. I stood in the shallow end with quiet cello music and reverberating currents in the water, like the energy currents emanating from your body.

Hot shower and walked home.

I forgot to mention, late afternoon in the office, I called Sophie at work. She sounded like she was in a good mood, though a bit harried from her car breaking down. Not sure what that would do to the weekend. She was going out with a girlfriend after work for some "girl talk," and said she would call later (she didn't). Meanwhile, she will send her reply to the poems. One of the female attorneys brought it to me (no comment). There were black butterflies all over it and lines which were computer generated. The handwriting was at odd angles.

> I feel like a dizzy butterfly. Seeing your writing has made me realize the extent of my intellectual demise – scary!
>
> There's a lot of meat there. And since I've not been eating much lately, I wasn't able to take it all in at one sitting, but I've been piecing on it. A feast for my eyes; it's been delicious. Thank you.
>
> I'm running out the door at this moment because I've got to get to the bank before it closes and stuff… like that. I'll be trying to call you soon.
>
> Kisses from Sophie. Talk to you later.

At home in the evening, not in the mood for going out. I was restless. There were books and a wooden instrument, but I was on edge. I was on the typewriter around midnight, but it ran out of ribbon after half a page. I read a pile of neo-poetic efforts, like

fragmented interludes which I write and throw aside. Some were forgettable, but a few were worth keeping.

A quote from *Half of Man is Woman*: in communist China the songs on the radio were considered a lie, "the crying of false ghosts and demons." I thought that would apply to much of the radio in this country.

2 a.m. Collapsing on the mattress, with more phrases rising to the surface. I took notes. Beyond my black pillow is the street.

Saturday, Aug. 28, 1993

10:30 a.m. I woke up and had some muesli, coffee, and a cigarette. I sat in an old easy chair from the burned-out apartment. Smoky the chair. I was a bit tense from last night, and it had to do with her. I have the vague sense she's giving me the brush-off and I don't know why. It doesn't make sense, given how positive she's been. What makes it more tenuous is I haven't known her very long. You can't assume the lives of two people can intersect and their gears will mesh smoothly with no complications. We veered close for a week or so, but the background forces went into effect and we are being pulled in different directions.

I went out on a long walk. It was effortless; my legs are working well these days. Picked up a ribbon, paper, and water, with the usual mutants hanging out on Polk Street, and returned to the apartment. The paper mentioned a recent heat-wave, breaking the records for a century. 95 yesterday. In other news: POLICE REPORT ADMITS ERRORS AT MASSACRE.

I decided to call her and see what's happening, not only with her broken clutch. Knowing she doesn't usually answer the phone – she has a machine – I dialed her number and almost immediately a man answered and handed the phone to her (it's in her bedroom). This explained a few things and she sounded a bit off, caught by surprise, though all I was doing was asking about the car. She said something about it being fixed on Monday. As far as tonight, it was "tenuous," but by all means I should stay in touch. I said I would call later, but had no intention of doing so.

I got off the phone and it was slowly sinking in. The reality was hard to refute. I recalled a few things over the past week which, with hindsight, should have told me something. It wasn't like I had any claims on her, but why the big build-up? Hours and hours of talk, like you're hearing someone's life story, and then you're put on hold? Why the act? It was verging on the tender romantic, not to mention ending up in bed together. She might be surprised that I took it seriously. She could have said there was someone else instead of leading me on, or was it all provisional? She was testing me out and the only way to do that was to make it look real.

I was thinking I'm too old for this, it's practically high school stuff. There was an article in the paper about two people in their sixties. The woman shot him in the head because she thought he was about to leave her for another woman. It never quits, this sort of thing.

Then I'm thinking, what was that fax about, and all this positive conversation? I started to re-interpret everything in a colder and more realistic light. Since her daughter was visiting it constituted a slow weekend for her, so what the hell, invite me over. Returning from the beach that evening she pulled over at a curb where she would be

towed the next morning at 6 a.m. I pointed that out. Oh right. She moved the car half a block and left it in front of the house, but it was the same sign. She shrugged. Perhaps she had plans to go out after I left.

Little things like that. I think the other night she was going with some friends to the Elbo Room. It turned out she had the name of the band and the location wrong. I don't even know if her clutch is broken, though it's immaterial at this point. In the beginning she was calling me and planned to come over. Now there are these slow evasive tactics. One night you're being auditioned and you don't even know it. If I knew what was coming, I would have gotten more sleep the night before, and smoked less pot.

If our night together was not a letdown, and she meant it when she said she wanted something solid and lasting, what made her veer off? The writing I sent her which she seemed to like? I'm getting paranoid about writing and women, like one can run the other off the road. The dimension of writing is like a metal winged reptile perched on your shoulder that you're barely aware of, but it scares off the women.

Some respect it, but it has nothing do with what they want from a man. It might be a sign of intelligence, but that would challenge how they see themselves and make it harder to manipulate him.

She may have had an on-again, off-again affair with some guy and I walked into her life during one of those lulls. It's hard to know what you're getting into when you meet a stranger, but I know more now. She gave me a rundown of her life and times, which sounded kind of loose and soaked in alcohol. I wonder if that's how she lost custody of her daughter.

For the rest of the day and into the evening my mood was going up and down like swells in the ocean. It may have been a magnification of a wavelength I feel all the time, the oscillation of the positive and negative. Opposing forces are incorporated in every breath you take. I felt it more at the moment. When I rose above the circumstances it was followed by a sinking feeling. There was a workout on a wooden instrument which was emphatic, not to say prolonged.

2 p.m. I went out. I couldn't concentrate on a typewriter and it was another hot afternoon. Unfortunately, I hadn't made plans with anyone else.

I took a bus to 25th Avenue and walked half a mile to the beach. I was there for a couple of hours, lying on the edge of the clothing optional area. The women were varied, with some in their street clothes and others sprawling naked in the sand. Not to say they left me cold, but a recent turn of events with a certain woman ran a cold chill through the afternoon. Eventually I went down to the water. It was cold. I ran to the rocks and back and went in, diving through a falling wall of water and coming out the other side. I swam out a ways, growing numb by the second.

I washed up on shore and walked back to my towel. There was an airliner drifting overhead, and a topless woman flopping around in the sand. She brushed the sand off her tits and made them bounce. There were women from China, India, and Mexico. No one looked like a model. It is vaguely subversive, all these people with no clothes on when the culture dramatizes some discretion in that respect.

5 p.m. I put on my clothes and left, walking barefoot on the beach. I stopped near a contorted open-air root formation (the rest of the tree cut down) and put my shoes on. Walked half a mile and caught a bus to my neighborhood.

6 p.m. I called the Phantom in Berkeley. There was some possibility of the sound-room tonight, and I was ready to give an amplifier whiplash.

I finished reading *Half of Man is Woman* with the opera on.

That reminds me, last night I wondered what was going on with her, and an old song came on the radio. “Tired of Waiting” by the Kinks. I wrote the words down and figured out the chords. It fit the occasion, even if the chord progression was a little off.

9 p.m. I lay down with the opera on, but I couldn’t relax. What got me up in a second was remembering I loaned her a book - my old copy of *Les Chants de Maldoror* by Lautreamont, with notes and doodles in the back when I was twenty-one and not wound too tight.

So now what? It probably wouldn’t help if I dropped her a note saying, MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING… THANK YOU FOR THE MEMORIES… PLEASE RETURN THE BOOK. For all I know, I’m over-reacting. Maybe I was over-reacting when I got to know her, falling for a polished routine that she has been rehearsing for years, the act of being herself.

10:30 p.m. On the typewriter with some coffee. I opened a bottle of wine, the one meant for her. V. in the office never looked so good, a woman with a constant heart. It’s becoming rare these days, and I don’t care if she leans on religion.

Someone threw a firecracker out of a window near the vacant lot. A descending trail of sparks, then a white light followed with a bang.

Around midnight the Phantom called. We'll be in the sound-room on Monday night. The conversation went on for over an hour, going from Berkeley to *The Panama Deception*.[125] There were sirens and flashing lights across the street.

2 a.m. Typing for hours. I was staying just a few words ahead of a gnawing feeling inside. Outside there was the sound of horns and skidding tires, the crunch of metal.

3:30 a.m. I was in bed reading an old manuscript (held open by a fossil) when someone fell out of a third-floor window. I heard the impact. I didn't know what it was. There were voices across the street. I rolled over, peering out the window. Some guy was lying on his back on the sidewalk. He was on the heavy side, tall, around two hundred pounds, white or Latino. A couple of black guys stood over him. One seemed to be going through his pockets. A white woman ran up with a voice which could cut through metal, yelling DON'T GO THROUGH HIS POCKETS! The man on his back couldn't move, but he was conscious and may have said a few words. The woman said he fell out of her third-floor apartment as more people (mostly black) were gathering – curious and concerned, or more like vultures.

I realized it was the window with half-drawn shades directly across from me. I had noticed it earlier in the evening. There were several people standing or walking around in the apartment, including a woman in a slip. Eventually there were sirens. A police car pulled up with the lights bouncing off the buildings. Two cops were pushing people away from the victim. A fire truck arrived with more red lights revolving. A paramedic truck. A few minutes later a second paramedic truck. I thought if you live

[125] A documentary from 1992 about the invasion in 1989 and its distorted portrayal in the news.

around here you get a lot of attention. The emergency lights were flashing. Four vehicles for a drunken halfwit (this is conjectural) who fell out of the window. He was stripped down to his underwear and strapped onto a stretcher.

Some people are ignored for most of their life, becoming semi-destitute, but the system responds with a benevolent overkill when there's an accident. Maybe it is not so benevolent - wait until he gets the bill. A taxi to the nearest hospital might run you $10. An ambulance will cost you $500 or $600. He got the attention of the system in having suddenly become a Victim. His victim status, lying on his back, is well-defined. It is not amorphous or ambiguous like his everyday identity. In a country where people are strangers to each other, coming from different cultural time zones, it is hard to find a common ground. There is a rush to compensate when someone comes into focus as a Victim. It doesn't matter if it's his fault. The equipment and attention are brought to bear for someone who is barely there. It has become a knee-jerk reflex in this country. More and more people want to qualify as victims, in which aura one is blameless, and maybe even king or queen for a day.

They took him away on a stretcher with some care, not knowing how he fell or landed. Who knows what is broken? He was lying there and maybe dying in the glow of riot lights and an old sign saying DRINK COCA COLA. He landed near a dusty black Chevy Bel Air (parked in front of a Vietnamese copy shop). Two guys got out of the Chevy. They had been sitting there when a man fell out of the sky. A few minutes later they were surrounded by three or four vehicles, including the police.

Never a dull moment in this neighborhood. Some dull or dead-end lives, perhaps, but the moments have a momentum of their own, in keeping with "Sensation over

sensibility." I turned the lights off. As the vehicles drove away, one with a paranoiac siren fading in the distance, there were patterns of light moving across the walls and ceiling. I stared at them like someone in a private emergency of isolation on a Saturday night.

Sunday, Aug. 29, 1993

I went to sleep around 4 a.m. after going through most of a bottle of wine, and woke up around nine. Lay there for an hour, then gave up on getting more sleep. Being sleepless and/or semi brain-dead is an altered state. Things are pointblank when your mental springs and shock absorbers are on hold. I made coffee and was back on the typewriter.

I went into the kitchen for some water, looked out the window and saw something in the vacant lot. A flurry on the other side where a tall building makes a corner with some brick apartments. There is a wall of bushes, trees, and vines. Next to the bushes are some bedding and windblown refuse. Now and then there is a couple sleeping in their clothes, and a steady stream of regulars who go behind the cardboard propped against the bushes and eventually emerge, having done crack or heroin.

The flurry was a manic woman with stringy dishwater hair sitting on the blankets and wailing, rocking back and forth, and clutching her stomach. She was throwing her head back, mouth open, and shaking her fists at the sky. I saw a man leaving the vacant lot a minute before, but it's conjectural to think he left her and she's throwing a fit.

It wouldn't quit. I went back to the typewriter, then noticed a man and woman walking across the vacant lot having come through a hole in the chain-link fence. They

headed for the bedding and the hysterical woman. I have seen them sleeping there the last few mornings. White, maybe thirty. If you saw them walking down the street you would think they looked normal. She wore a short white dress with a dark coat and sandals. Her long brown hair was brushed and she wore glasses. Kind of thin, and could have been a secretary.

They sat on the bedding next to the hysterical woman who went on rocking back and forth and crying. The other woman seemed to hesitate before approaching. The man took something out of his pocket. This is getting odd. I wanted to know what kind of drugs they were using, so I got the binoculars from the closet. Diane gave them to me for bird watching. There were some dirty birds outside the window.

The man with short hair and a mustache had a small package in his fingers. I thought it was crack for a second. Things were fairly clear through the binoculars. I sat at the kitchen table looking through the window. They were facing in this direction with him casting glances towards the street. There were comments to the hysterical woman next to them – like keep it down, we don't want to attract attention. A high noon situation in a vacant lot and out in the open, though protected from the police. You would see them coming well before they got to you, by which time you could throw the drugs in the bushes.

He appeared to roll a couple of thin joints. I'm not sure what was in them. Then he produced a needle and went through the motions – I'm learning a lot here – using a swab on his right forearm which either had a blurred tattoo or his veins are a mess. He put the hypodermic into a bottle, drawing something out. The woman in the miniskirt got up and kneeled beside him, holding both hands around his upper arm, making a

provisional tourniquet and he stuck the needle into his arm. All very casual. The process was repeated for her. I thought, what are you doing to yourself? I imagine she knew what she was doing. Swabbing her thin arm while the hysterical woman flung her hair around and cried, making wild gestures with her arms. At one point she had a hypodermic in her hand.

The couple got up and walked across the vacant lot to the chain-link fence with him rubbing his forearm a little and her looking like nothing had happened. They went through the fence next to a brown sedan with the front end crumpled and walked past my window where they mingled with their fellow citizens. Another Sunday morning in the Tenderloin, and on the radio was "I Can't Get Started."[126]

Meanwhile, the hysterical woman. After a few minutes I left the window and went over to the typewriter. When I returned I saw she had managed to stand up. She was doing a spastic routine of someone beseeching the heavens, face red from crying, shaking her fists and swaying. She looked older than she is, and for all I know is not all there mentally. Anyone who wants to romanticize madness or a disordering of the senses should see this.

She stumbled around, facing a white wall in a black bra with a white bandage around her stomach. Her dirty grey jeans were unbuttoned in front, with a glimpse of black lace underwear. They were unbuttoned because she was still swaying and having spasms with a hypodermic in her hand. She kept trying to shoot up while standing, looking like the needle was between her legs. I don't know if she couldn't find a vein or what, but it went on for a while, interrupted by her stumbling. Eventually she seemed to

[126] Ira Gershwin/Vernon Duke (1936)

calm down, lying on the ground. I was tired of her act and returned to the typewriter feeling like a reporter, one of the locals, a voyeur, an unconcerned citizen.

A few minutes later, walking by the window, I noticed the old black Chevy Bel Air was still there from last night. A thin woman was crouching by the rear bumper in between that car and the one behind it. There was not much room. She looked like she was thinking about something. Then there was a trickle underneath her. She stood and pulled up her loose pants and returned to the backseat of the Chevy with a blanket, looking like she might have spent the night there, and lit a cigarette.

I have seen men go behind a car and unzip, looking like they're going to screw the trunk.

1 p.m. I went across the street for milk and cigarette papers. On the corner was a black woman in a wheelchair. A couple of prostitutes up the street. A young Latino guy was bending his girlfriend over the hood of a car and strangling her, but she was laughing. There was a magazine in the store, HOT CREAMY THREE-WAY, showing a woman's pale behind with two dicks inserted. The guy behind the counter had an Arabic newspaper. I returned to my building, went up the iron elevator, and wondered what's going on with the weekend. It's being slammed by the forces.

Typing with a mechanical language.

Half an hour later I passed by the kitchen window, checking on the junkie birds. There was a change of personnel. The hysterical woman had nodded out, lying on a beat-up lampshade and a Coca-Cola sign ("It's the real thing"), her mouth half open. Ten feet away, in the shade of overhanging vines and bushes, a man with long grey hair, baseball cap, and a cowboy shirt was sitting cross-legged and messing with a hypodermic. He

tapped it, put it into a small bottle, and sucked the other end of it. Eventually he turned around with his back to me and the rest of the world and rolled up the sleeve on his right arm. I saw a length of white rope for a tourniquet, a vein endeavor.

Two more people, one of them a young woman with long blonde hair, were behind the cardboard partition doing something. It was leaning on the bushes. A third fellow, clean-cut, in his thirties, walked away from them and sat down in the shade with a two-foot length of cardboard. He pulled out a thin white object a few inches long. He lit it, a cigarette, then sat there staring and later passed out. The sunlight flickered on him through the leaves.

I wondered what's the occasion. I haven't seen this much activity before, especially so overt. The concept of "Never on Sunday" doesn't apply when you're on drugs. I still had the jazz station on. There was a commercial for STP – UNCLOG DIRTY INJECTORS FAST. The DJ said it was Charlie Parker's birthday. Maybe that explains it. Not to mention a nearly full moon in the Tenderloin (I've been here four months). Some people go for a drive in the country or go to church on Sunday. I sit around and watch the junkies. I'm more reluctant to turn the television on than some people are to inject themselves with heroin.

2 p.m. I turned off the typewriter, sitting in a stupor on the mattress with some coffee. The sunlight poured across the bed - the windows have a southern exposure. It didn't do that last month, it's a new development. If you have enough windows and the right exposure your building functions as a sundial, if not a minor Stonehenge. The angles of the light are slowly changing according to the orbit of the earth. "Watch the

light, you'll never be lonely," said the man who wrote and directed *Through a Glass Darkly*.[127]

Work out on a wooden instrument, accompanied by sirens. An ambulance stopped in the middle of the next block, possibly an overdose.

3 p.m. I went out, walking past the vacant lot where people get vacant. The hysterical woman wasn't there, meaning she's at large. Yesterday's headlines were swirling in the dust, and blown against a cyclone fence of public restraint. A black man across the street was being questioned by the police. He wore a T-shirt saying *Les Miserables*.

I sat at a counter a block away, having breakfast. The place is run by Vietnamese, and it's like you've walked into their home. Two sisters were behind the counter, idle and bored. The older one, maybe fourteen, with long black hair, was the bossy one. Her younger sister, maybe twelve, was more mischievous. Apparently, she had done something wrong, and the older sister kept reminding her.

"I'm tired of you."
"I'm tired of you too."
"Shut up."

The younger one was smiling though. The television on the counter is always on. I watched the game. A little kid ran around from behind the counter, climbed up on the stool, turned it off, climbed down, and ran back laughing.

4:00 p.m. Home. I pulled the shades and went to sleep. A few hours later I was more or less revived.

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[127] Ingmar Bergman

Monday, Aug. 30, 1993

A dreary overcast. So much for the heat-wave, it was nice while it lasted. Why does this remind me of my love life?

I made coffee in the kitchen. In the empty lot a couple of guys were shooting up – they were there yesterday. From what I've heard and read, the ritual is hypnotic and transfixing in itself. For those who lack focus in their life there is no sharper vanishing point than a needle. Not sure if I'm qualified to write about it, never having done it. I've never been to the moon or the White House, but I write about those as well, probably with limited effect. In this case, the observed would be affecting the observer if he got involved. Heroin has an anti-intellectual effect. When a writer opts for a needle instead of a pen his thought is shot into his veins. It's a solipsistic situation with a closed-circuit program and the page has blank look.

The only junkie I was acquainted with for any length of time[128] was the poet, Gregory Corso (born in 1930). I met him in Paris when he was in his mid-forties and near the end of a ten-year zone-out, an intravenous winter. His writing had more or less evaporated before the onslaught of the needle (it is known for taking the lead out of your pencil). He was living in a cheap room, and finding ways to distill opium from an over-the-counter drug.

[128] A few years after writing this we had a client who was slowly falling apart. He was a tall and gaunt painter with long black hair, a Palestinian named Omar who did not want to go back – even when he ended up on the streets. He had an attractive blonde girlfriend with lupus, but it was a volatile affair. When he threw a typewriter at her she was gone, that's all she wrote. He showed up in the office once on speed, like a nervous caricature of himself. Later, when we had an office near North Beach I would leave work, walk half a block, and find him with a blanket on the sidewalk in front of a store window full of lamps, like a living room window. He was on heroin and getting by on two $20 shots a day. I would give him a buck and he would tell me about his life – doing odd jobs for the clubs on Broadway, and avoiding the homeless who he didn't like.

A year or two later I ran into him in North Beach.[129] I was staying in a cheap hotel above the Café Trieste, and he was walking with the poet Bob Kaufman. He thought I should buy them screwdrivers at ten in the morning at the Saloon (one of the oldest bars in town), so I did. He had gone from being a junkie to an alcoholic. Kaufman had endured electroshock and poverty and years of alcohol abuse. He didn't talk much anymore. Corso said, "You know what it's like to see your blood every day?"

I've had a few friends and acquaintances who tested their reflexes with a needle. One died on the streets of New York before he was twenty.[130] Another's heart stopped several times on the way to the hospital. This is not to mention the musicians from Tim Buckley to Jim Morrison who should have known they're not immortal. I'm not either, and on top of that I am habitual, and so I keep my distance from a habit-forming drug.

Meanwhile, in the vacant lot the junkie brothers were sitting in the litter and the dirty bedding. A woman walked up and sat nearby, talking to someone in the cardboard lean-to. It blocked the view from the street, but they were in full view of my window across the lot. I picked up the binoculars to see what she was doing. Preparing a needle, flicking the tip. She was about forty with a thin and worn-out look in black tights with stringy brown hair and a black sweater. She leaned back with the needle held between her knees and rummaged through her purse. She injected herself in the upper thigh, right through her tights (I wrote rights).

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[129] There was another encounter – a wine-soaked poets' party in someone's apartment in North Beach. It started in the afternoon. By the time Gregory arrived I had had a lot of wine. He handed me a bottle of cognac and I took a slug. I later thought it was spiked, not sure with what. I made it to a tiny room with a toilet, locked the door, got sick and passed out on the floor. They had to take the door off the hinges to find me. I spent the next day or two recovering in a dismal room on Broadway with Simone looking after me.

[130] Ahab Murdstone Scudder, a poet friend from high school whose name is hard to forget.

There was more rummaging through her purse. Then she sat up, crossed her arms in front of her, and pulled off her sweater. She had pale hanging tits which looked like they were filled with silicone. She put on a thin sleeveless shirt and disappeared behind the cardboard with the needle.

A few minutes later she was sitting beside it with a gaunt face which was missing a few teeth. It reminded me of images from the Middle Ages of a death hag or a witch.[131] She pulled off her shirt again, maybe for the cool air on her artificial tits. They were swaying as she put on a grey shirt of thin material, then gathered up her things, including a pack of Kools, and walked across the dirt to the chain-link fence and the sidewalk, passing under my window. You've come a long way, baby.

Half an hour later I was on the typewriter and glanced out the window. There was another woman, a blonde, who disappeared behind the cardboard of equality. There is a gender neutrality that goes along with being a junkie. I turned the radio up loud for a song by Ministry, "Jesus Built My Hot-Rod." It was a high-volume morning, and it felt like hell's kitchen.

Walking past the empty lot were two Vietnamese kids holding hands. There was a civilian cleanup crew across the street, like misdemeanors with a broom. They ignored the lot with the litter strewn around. Some of it was thrown out the windows of the old brick building in back.

I wonder if heroin is a way to quit smoking or to quit living. Two junkies returned to the vacant lot, baring arms and brandishing their vanishing points. The perspective stops here. Given the urgency of the situation it was like an arms' race. With my

[131] As pagans they had a negative image with the Christians, who also looked down on snakes.

binoculars for birding, I watched the addicts. They have something in common with those who foul their nest. They look like vultures. A furtive sequence in the flora. They are wingless birds who fly in their minds, soliciting the angel of death. Some are jail birds.

One of the regulars returned. He sat down, rolled up his sleeve, and tied up his arm, bending over. I fix therefore I am. He was harassed by a white butterfly.

Three witches of addiction sat with their heroin, cigarettes, and cookies.

2:30 p.m. Getting ready for work I passed the kitchen window and saw a policeman walking across the lot. There were two women and one man near the bushes, but they didn't seem perturbed. The policeman's intent had more to do with litter. He yelled at someone in a window, telling them not to throw things out. What do you think this is, the Middle Ages? (He didn't say that.) Throwing garbage out the window is not one of the customs in this country. Maybe it is where you come from, but you're here now. Sorry if that sounds imperialistic.

He turned to the dirty bedding and the cardboard of the junkies and ordered its removal. One woman moved slowly, taking a while to put her shoes on. The man in a long coat was ingratiating, though he ran back to his stuff and went through it, possibly removing evidence or hiding something under the vines. It didn't seem to be a bust. The man hauled his things to a trash bin. The policeman, part of a two-man bicycle patrol, talked to his partner on the sidewalk with a collar mic. The partner was dealing with the vendors, their shirts in abject surrender on the fence. The vendors will return tomorrow, if not an hour later. One of the junkies was strolling down the sidewalk the next morning, looking like a tourist in shorts.

On the following morning (when I wrote this) I made coffee and looked out the kitchen window. There were three cops on bikes, one of them a woman. They stopped the same guy from yesterday and stared intently at a trash bin across the lot, then trudged over to it, pulling aside a cardboard shelter. One of the haggard women was sitting in it. They walked her to the sidewalk and she left. The policemen stood there for a minute, staring up at the old brick building. I wondered if someone had reported all those junkies in the dirt, or got tired of the mess.

The building is visible from my desk, and just now there was a quick motion from a third or fourth floor window. An arm projected out the window, dumping the remains of a coffee pot, a long black streak. It hit the foot of the building, which explains why that part is black and smudged.

I went to work, and was only there for two hours, with the Attorney gone, but it was a strain. The weekend was a grinding non-romantic reality check, with the office one more aspect of it.

There was a client on the phone with the fury of a woman scorned by her attorney. Her case was thrown out for failure to prosecute. He was barely able to revive it. She is preparing a malpractice suit with the State Bar, with whom he is well acquainted. She was cursing - where is that sorry-assed lazy so-and-so. After a couple of minutes – I was calm and agreeing with her – she said, “Alright baby doll, be good.”

I mentioned that to V. and she said, “You’re not her baby doll.”

5:00 p.m. I left and went to Polk Street, picking up coffee and a guitar string. The woman behind the counter said the coffee dust gets in her eyes. She was being more than friendly, although I think it goes with the job. She is small with benevolent curves and

passive in ways I'm not used to. I tend to be drawn to headstrong women [someone just yelled the name of an ex-girlfriend on the street] who are nothing if not a challenge or with whom there is an energy current and it's hard to tell if they're a collaborator, a worthy adversary, or worse.

The city generates a lot of masculine women. It is ambitious, hard, and transitory. When I talk with Diane in her bedroom community, she is amazed at the cold-blooded women who are found here. Her feminism is based on a more ethical and gentle type of educated woman (like herself) in a small town - who might like a man for his mind, and not have a constant turnover of men in her life. She doesn't live in a context (wrote contest) where relationships are intense, but don't last very long. She is used to a slow-moving river, which sounds good to me at this point.

Maybe it's not the fault of women in this country if they are becoming less feminine. It goes along with having an independent character, a car, and a career. The competition is dehumanizing for everyone.[132] That reminds me, in *Half of Man is Woman*, there is a Chinese saying: The more divorces a woman has the more "brassy" she gets. The more divorces a man goes through the more he is "cowed."

There was an article on semiotics in *Smithsonian* magazine by Marshall Blonsky. The writer spoke with an Italian man about Italian shoes, and "a softer, sweeter, more complacent life of Europe." In such an atmosphere the women can afford to be more feminine, and so can the men. It's in the air they breathe. We live in a comparatively rootless country with a futuristic bent (and futurism has no time for the eternal feminine).

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[132] If they're less feminine it might explain a lack of intuition when they make "poor choices." It comes from judging a man by his surface aspects (clothing, job, apartment). Then they are surprised when his character is something to contend with.

With disparate people rubbing elbows there's a need to zoom in on a common identification (WE'RE NUMBER ONE). They're subjected to the jet-stream media which combine the hypocritical and the hyper - just the thing for getting your bearings. The brassy and the cowed are subject to a rapid obsolescence.

Where was I, on the street and speculating again. A slender woman of some refinement locked me in a gaze in a health food store. I wondered if that's the sort of woman I should focus on. I like it when love comes out of left field in the form of someone unforeseen. You don't want to be limited by your preconceptions.

For that matter, the woman I was with the longest – ten years – isn't American at all, but a French-speaking Belgian who is nine years older and no stranger to refinement. You would think that would have told me something. When you're getting to know a woman the tide is in. The rocks and broken pilings of her past are hidden and you're floating on her presence. When it pulls back, the rocks and broken pilings of her past are exposed like an explanation for why it didn't work.

With respect to the last woman I slept with, there were things she told me about herself and I hardly blinked. Looking back I think she gave me adequate warning. It's like a sign, "Men have been swept to their deaths from these rocks." I try it anyway. She admitted to being a lush. She has known a lot of men and had a child, but lost custody. There was some friction with her previous roommates, not to mention a not-so-previous boyfriend who was drunk one night and called the police on her.

Those are slightly treacherous waters. It's a revisionary outlook though, and I don't look good from that angle either. She might have seen a writer with poetic license

who won't compromise himself with a full-time job. Now she sees a lazy dreamer in a lousy neighborhood without a driver's license.

I walked home past the low-lifes with some fish and chips. The phone rang the minute I plugged it in. I unplugged it this morning on the off chance she tried to call. It was B. There were complications and entanglements with jobs, men, and cars (no driver's license), and she thought I should hear about it while talking fast.

7:30 p.m. I took a bus to the sound-room flat, and was in the kitchen with the Phantom. One of his roommates was filling a black book full of blank pages with a cramped and tiny handwriting. It was some sort of journal. He's the one who had a bad day at work last month and tore up the apartment, banging his head against the wall.

We went downstairs through the garage and into the sound-room. I put a string on the Les Paul and was hooked up. There was some delay as the Phantom messed around with a borrowed four-track tape recorder which never did work.

We had the current on for the next two hours and it wouldn't quit. No quietude allowed. The roommate was on drums for a while, then disappeared. The Phantom was on bass for a while, and then went to the soundboard, adjusting the sound. I don't think I'm so relentless that I drive them away. I stopped at one point and said, "I'll follow you," but he gets discouraged, feeling like he's losing the thread. He doesn't practice and is too distracted, not to mention technical. The thread (wrote threat) of music is right up my alley.

The last half hour was subdued with different sound effects. I have some echo and reverb generated from the last few days, if not the neighborhood, and there are sirens in

the subconscious. I went through a few tunes on the microphone. It sounded like my vocals were dissolving the walls.

11:00 p.m. I lay the guitar down, feeling worn out. It's one of the more satisfying exhausted states I know of. We went outside, sitting on the steps with a full moon over the city. I had a cigarette and what remained of a Red Hook, "extra special bitter ale." The Phantom asked if I would roll him a cigarette. Then a bus showed up, turning the corner. I handed him mine and ran for the bus, losing a pen in the process.

I was sitting around at home, after midnight, when the phone rang. It was the Czech woman sounding very quiet. She went to a small gathering of her Czech friends. Two policemen came to the door with an inspector in plainclothes. The occupant of the apartment made the mistake of letting them in. I don't think they had a right to enter otherwise, but once they were in they took over the situation, having an intensive question session with her ten-year-old son and a friend of hers in his early thirties, P. They didn't ask for another room for the questions and practically ignored her.

It seems her friend P., who she has known for ten years and who used to be in love with her, had gone camping with the boy for a day or two with her knowledge and consent. Someone at the campsite reported that an older man and a young boy were… well, she didn't know what. Sleeping together in a tent? Enjoying each other's company? Was the minor boy being tickled? Whatever it was – too much affection? – it was suspicious for someone and they reported it. There were allegations of child abuse. She is "85 percent" certain there was nothing wrong. She had her own interrogation of her son later, who denied everything. P. threatened to sue the police because a contingent had swooped down on a group of his friends looking for him. They arrived in four patrol cars

and walked into the room of this other party. It did not do his reputation any good when people heard that he was wanted for questioning for "alleged child abuse."

There was a similar case in the paper a while back when some Europeans went to a beach in California. They made the mistake of being affectionate with their three-year-old child, kissing his or her bare bottom at some point. This was too much for one of the locals, a police-dependent puritan, who reported them. They had a hell of a time with the authorities who wanted to take their child away.

Something doesn't translate between cultures that view the body differently. Large segments of this population are constrained by iron bonds to a puritan background. I remember sitting in an open café on the edge of a beach in Majorca (an island in the Mediterranean). There was a group of German tourists. One of the women picked up her two-year-old daughter who was running around naked and carried her to a nearby bush. Holding the girl's legs apart she aimed her in the direction of the bush while the girl peed. It wasn't something I have seen in this country, but was normal in this context.

Some of the women were half-naked on the beach, and there was not much in the way of age stratification. Not only were there old people, but a pubescent girl – usually the most shy – took her swimsuit off. She toweled rather vigorously between her legs and put her pants on in front of everyone. It was no big deal. You would have thought she was mature or something.

A German magazine: An ad with two young boys in the pose of a *mannequin pis* (they were peeing together) – something you would not see here.

A Japanese TV commercial of little kids in a pool. There are little bubbles rising from behind one of them.

A contemporary Japanese novel: a mother washes and dries her infant son, then bends down and kisses his tiny penis.

European television (1975): I was in the home of Simon's parents in Belgium and watching television with her mother, the wife of a retired diplomat. We watched as a woman stood on a chair while a man put his head under her skirt. No comment.

So here is the Czech woman, brought up behind the Iron Curtain (she hates that phrase) with her country occupied by the Soviets. The phenomenon of heavy-handed police who break in and interrogate people based on a rumor or informer is all too real for her, while assuming it can't happen here. She is considering moving back to Prague.

Not long ago there was an outbreak of accusations involving satanic ritual child abuse. The stories were becoming so outlandish the police suspected they had little substance. Much of it occurred by suggestion or hypnosis, with a therapist leading the witness (a child), and forming visions in his or her mind of horrendous occurrences. There was a catch-22 of plausibility, where just because you don't remember having been a victim or a perpetrator doesn't mean it didn't happen. It might be proof that there was a transgression and you have a mental block. Amnesia is as much a part of someone as their memories are.

The accusations spread with paranoiac ease amongst the two-dimensional – especially when they were set up by a double whammy: 1) the concept of original sin, and 2) the anti-intellectual tendencies in this country. With the former you are conditioned to believe you're capable of evil. With the latter you are conditioned to not recognize the facts, and to doubt your own capacity to know what's real. That lends itself to a reactionary point of view. A government can get away with anything when people

have a hard time pulling the evidence into focus. A president was assassinated in broad daylight, and people are still not sure how it happened.[133]

The Czech woman didn't know what to think. The inspector hadn't told her very much, even what the allegations were, though he said she could call him the next day or come in. Maybe he would show her the report, although they had satisfied themselves that things were okay, having traumatized one man (and perhaps the boy) while damaging his reputation. They had no other way to locate him, having traced him through his car (the informant gave his license number). They went from that to someone he bought the car from who gave the address of his friends. I'm not sure why four patrol cars were necessary. It must have been a slow night in the suburbs.

She wondered about the American conceit of being innocent until proven guilty if one is found guilty in the press, and why the authorities aren't more subtle about it. This is a country where a seven-year-old boy was recently accused of child abuse – something to do with playing doctor with someone his own age. I have a feeling that is not uncommon. Imagine how it looked to him when he was "caught" and all that fuss was made. He might have thought he was onto something.

She wondered if I knew anything about the legal side of it. Were the police exceeding their bounds? What are the rights of the accused man? Her son denied it at the point of tears, but she knows he lies. What if the authorities or social agencies descend on

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[133] It was none other than Allen Ginsberg who said, "I don't think there is any truth. There are only points of view." There are facts like 2 + 2 = 4, and the earth orbits around the sun, and the number of bullets fired at Jack Kennedy. Those are not points of view, they are facts that can't be denied. Ginsberg was all about holding the government's feet to the fire, and to do that you need to confirm the existence of certain facts. It's even more odd that he would say there isn't any truth, when you consider what Burroughs meant by his title, *Naked Lunch* – "… a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork." Ginsberg may have wanted the truth to be amorphous because of his interest in under-age males.

her? Her basement apartment in the Haight is illegal, and she lives there with her son. It's crowded and he is alone at times. They might think she was an unfit mother. There was a more extreme example involving a young single mother with a baby. She called a free clinic with an ordinary question. Is it normal for women to feel sensations of arousal when breastfeeding? She left her question on an answering machine and it was misdirected to another agency and the whole thing was blown out of proportion. The wheels of bureaucracy went into action, and before she knew it the baby was taken from her and it took a year of effort and litigation to get her baby girl back – who must have suffered from being away from her mother for so long.

Tuesday, Aug. 31, 1993

Typing for hours in the morning.

3:00 p.m. I went to work. The Attorney was there, but there was nothing going on, except dead files piled on my desk. I typed up something yesterday for a flimsy discrimination case against the U.S. Post Office. The local branch has four black women behind the counter. The case is being brought by an older Filipina woman who is not wound too tight and has a monolithic ego. I have talked to her a few times on the phone, or rather listened. She goes on and on like a breathless airhead for whom every little thing is magnified, and so her job at the post office left her feeling persecuted.

The supervisors who were mentioned as discriminating against her were not only women, but one was black and another Latina. There were earthshaking allegations like: one day in 1986 she wasn't allowed to take five minutes off to wash her hands. I'm not making this up. She thought there was a conspiracy against her involving the EEO

(Economic Employment Opportunity), but the accusations are very thin. They sound like the rhetoric of a paranoiac and it puts the practice of filing such complaints in a bad light. Even worse, all of the named allegations occurred in 1986 with a weak statement saying those conditions have continued to the present.

Some of this is the Attorney's fault. The status conference statement is poorly written, an off-the-cuff dictation. Her fellow workers didn't get along with her very well, which is not surprising for someone who is quick to take offense and play the victim. How can she sue the government for not liking the women she worked with? Her personality is hyper-fragile, prone to complaining, and not too intelligent. I wondered if the Attorney was embarrassed to file such a dubious complaint, with copies going to the Assistant U.S. District Attorney, as well as to Washington, D.C.

3:30 p.m. He had nothing to work on and V. was leaving on an errand. I went with her and it turned into a long walk. She wasn't clear on the directions, but we finally found it. A computer office with a young Chinese woman behind the counter who V. decided was a bitch. She said as much a few minutes later, whispering under her breath to me. The woman was imperious and uncooperative. Thin and chic with lots of makeup. V. was steaming.

It was another example of how the world appears to her in a magnified close-up. A situation could be worrisome and threatening or full of pleasure – like flowers or a tea room. The pros and cons of living in a constant close-up, where her waistline seems bigger than it is, and social interactions are loaded with dramatic portent.

When we left I carried a box with six rolls of heavy paper back to the office. We took a different route and she was lost for a while. She admitted she has no sense of

direction. I said, “Where’s north?” She had no idea. I pointed it out (we were walking north). I said, “Where’s south?” She lifted her arm and confidently pointed her thumb behind her.

4:30 p.m. We returned to the office. Arriving at the front door she said, “Want me to carry the box?” I went in and the Attorney was upset. “Where the hell did you go?” Turns out he had an urgent letter to the State Bar which had to be typed – nearly three pages, single-spaced – and faxed to the local branch. Everything else was put on hold while he replied to yet another complaint from a client. It involved cases going back to the mid-1980’s and was a last-minute reply. It was a weak defense. He could barely remember the legal context of several cases, and admitted having misplaced a couple of files. I hammered it out and he signed it. I said it was so eloquent I had tears in my eyes, and he left.

It was after five with everyone gone except for V. who stayed late, having left early yesterday to see a band at the Warfield. There was not much comment about the show, except to say it was in the Tenderloin and she didn’t like the neighborhood. Then she motioned with her hand. I went into the office of the attorney she works for. Red leather sofa, wood paneling, a nice rug, and a barometer on the wall (for attorneys who are under pressure). I wasn’t sure what she was up to, bustling around with some files while saying she had spoken with her attorney at home and he asked if I was flirting with her. She seemed to relish the thought. She also said she felt lonely. She isn’t used to being in the office after hours. She is hardly ever alone, and lives with her parents.

A few minutes later she popped around the corner in a big leather jacket and said she was leaving, “Good night.”

7:00 p.m. I walked home. An hour later there was a phone call from the Phantom. We talked about eight-track recorders, his lack of an ignition, and a play tomorrow night.

9:00 p.m. Phone call from the Actress. We talked about Point Reyes and the lesbian strippers where her boyfriend works. She asked how it was going with the woman I met. I said it was on hold and probably dissolving by the hour. There seemed to be another man in her life which made my blood run cold. It turned me off so fast it may have made her head spin. The Actress was commiserating, but she finally said, "You're angry," and changed the subject.

Workout on a wooden instrument, followed by two or three hours on the typewriter. Coffee and one beer for the night. During the week I average four beers in five days.

2:30 a.m. Reading a book of modern British poets – Dylan Thomas, Philip Larkin, and Ted Hughes. Thomas was a boozer and didn't make it to forty. Larkin had a dead mouse in his tea, so to speak. He drank it carefully and smelled a rat. Hughes had a pagan tractor and it made him more attractive.

Dylan Thomas in a swirl of euphemism and idealized diffusion evoked a woman's private parts in 1946:

> And through the thighs of the engulfing bride,
> The woman breasted and the heaven headed
>
> Bird, he was brought low,
> Burning in the bride bed of love, in the whirl-
> Pool at the wanting centre, in the folds
> Of paradise, in the spun bud of the world.
> And she rose with him flowering in her melting snow.[134]

[134] "A Winter's Tale"

Larkin was a spy who didn't come in from the cold, living in a cold-water flat of the mind. Some lines ring true as a monkey-wrench hitting a pipe. They are the intellectual after-effects of an "imploded empire." The lines and phrases of these poets aren't afraid of structure, and they're finer tuned than most of what you find here these days. A vocal delivery might dilute it, and I tend to defend the page. It is in line with distillations which are practically unheard of anymore. You can absorb it at your own pace (and in your own place) as you let a line sink in and then re-read it. A poem can be seen as a whole or in parts. That's hard to do when someone is reciting, if not throwing their voice. They are given to the spoken word and end up with a conversational style with line breaks. It falls back on the lip-synch solipsism of I-feel-therefore-I'm-real, which lends itself to premature enlightenment.

Larkin, the "anti-Romantic." I like that. In 1954, when he was thirty-two, he wrote "Church Going." Here is the last verse:

> A serious house on serious earth it is,
> In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
> Are recognized, and robed as destinies.
> And that much never can be obsolete,
> Since someone will forever be surprising
> A hunger in himself to be more serious,
> And gravitating with it to this ground,
> Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
> If only that so many dead lie round.

He has had some post mortem vilification because of a few politically incorrect lines in private letters. He may have had some reactionary reflexes, which he generally kept to himself, but there is a gutter in the subconscious and it runs through all of us. He made a concerted effort to pull himself out of it in poems which were "restrained, anti-Romantic, formally controlled and emphasizing wit and good sense…."

Hughes had the wit and good sense to fall in love with Sylvia Plath. He was instrumental in fomenting her life as a poet, someone who had tried to kill herself before she met him. He left her after a few years and eventually she killed herself. The feminists put the blame on him. When the poet Adrienne Rich walked out on her husband in order to be with a woman, he killed himself. You don't hear much about that.[135]

3:00 a.m. A man and woman yelling at each other on the street. The spoken word, with parenthetic gutters. The woman with a shrill insistent voice, "I LOVE YOU, JULIO!" and Julio yelling something else. He didn't sound impressed.

I turned the lights out, and stood in the kitchen doorway looking at the room. Earlier with the lights on I did the same thing, viewing the array if not the disarray of a room and wondering what centrifugal forces had torn through here. It hits a full chord of something. There was light from outer space on the black pillows. I lay down with a full moon in the void above a decapitated tree. When the moon hovers over someone going to sleep, will it generate a dream of stone?[136]

Wednesday, Sept. 1, 1993

Woke up. Not enough sleep by a long shot. I passed out in the moonlight and was woken by a jackhammer, a heavy pointed weapon on the end of a small tractor for tearing up a parking lot. It sounded like a machine gun.

For the next two hours, with some intervals of quiet, I was a bit disoriented and things were put on hold. The noise of the machinery made it hard to think (it's anti-intellectual). Instead of being rested and able to concentrate, I was at a low ebb, feeling

[135] He was forty-six, a professor at Harvard, and not worth mentioning.
[136] This is scientific, not romantic.

like a disturbed individual. If you come too close to the industrial it can drive you out of your mind.

When the going gets tough, the tough go to the library. I finally had the typewriter going with the journal that wouldn't die.

I wrote a short note to the playwright, Amy Freed. In *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* by Camille Paglia, there is a chapter about Dickinson which presents her in a complex and formidable light. I wrote a ten-page poem where Emily replies to Camille. I thought I would show it to Ms. Freed who wrote a play about Dickinson. The Phantom knows an actress who works with Ms. Freed. Her latest play, *Poetomachia*[137] (which conjures up the likes of Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, Anne Sexton, and Robert Lowell) is at the Magic Theater.

That segued into a short letter to Sophie. The silence is starting to feel sophomoric. A year ago there was a standoff with a woman where I sent a flame-thrower of a letter and reduced any possibility of a rapprochement to ashes. Writing can make things better or worse with a woman. I had a girlfriend for whom my writing was tolerated as an eccentricity or a waste of time (with no money involved). I've gotten more respect from women for my parking skills than my writing, and now I don't even have a car.[138]

I was a tired wreck this morning, but writing from that standpoint can be useful. It's a little more honest and direct, with not much venom. Maybe it was under the surface, like a warm rock with a glimpse of a snake and the sound of a rattle. I finished

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[137] It means a poet fight. The title was later changed to *The Psychic Life of Savages*.

[138] Montaigne's wife and daughters threw his manuscripts on the floor, using them to start a fire.

with a simple request. When she is finished with my book by a 19th century French writer I would like to have it back.

Later in the office I was about to mail the letter. Going through a drawer I found some photos of the fire-gutted building where I used to live and included a few. A burned-out ceiling with a picture on the wall of a Roman god with an eternal stare. She responds to images, and these were like a metaphor of how I felt at the moment.

2:30 p.m. On the way to work I read about the East Coast being sideswiped by a hurricane.

6:30 p.m. I walked home, feeling tired. On the way I dropped into a shop full of used objects and felt objectified. Vintage stuff. The birthdays of half a dozen women are coming up next month. Mother, sister, one ex-girlfriend, two close women friends, and the daughter of the Actress. I walked out with a small cognac glass in which there was an oyster with a "real pearl" floating in a clear fluid. Not sure who to give it to.

I unplugged the phone at home. I don't want to talk to her or anyone else.

11:00 p.m. I lay down, looking out the window at a metallic monolith in the distance. It is twenty stories high and the nightclub on top was throwing off sparks in the dark. I eluded coffee, cigarettes, beer, and my usual typographic overdrive.

Thursday, Sept. 2, 1993

Woke up feeling rested and a bit slow, just before the jackhammers started up. The heavy equipment went into action, digging a trench across the street.

I sat at the kitchen table with a bowl of cereal and milk and sliced bananas. I was gazing out the window at the vacant lot. A black woman went under the fence and

trudged with a determined stride across the lot to the remnants of the dirty bedding. She was not that old, a little heavy in the hips, and proceeded to drop her pants to her knees and bend over. It seemed like she was marking her territory, though not pissing on the bedding. She straightened up and pulled her pants over a dark bush between her legs. She then rearranged the old blankets, lay down, and went to sleep.

Some people see deer and squirrels from their kitchen window.

A short while later, through one of the windows on the street, there was another black woman. She was a surveyor's assistant, standing with a pointed tri-pod on the sidewalk. She had a walky-talky in her back pocket and was adjusting the equipment.

2:00 p.m. I walked past a number of aimless derelicts on the way to a neo-classical building where great minds have left traces of their thought patterns. I found *Selected Poems* of Ted Hughes, and reserved *The Unauthorized Autobiography of Larry Rivers*. I looked through the computer for whatever I thought of on a whim. I've been avoiding science fiction for a long time, but nearly everything from William "Neuromancer" Gibson was "missing." I ended up with something by Philip K. Dick (*Valis*).

> This disorienting and bleakly funny work is about a schizophrenic hero… the hidden mysteries of Gnostic Christianity; and reality as revealed through a pink laser… a theological detective story…

I dropped the books off at home and went to work.

Later in the afternoon a client came in. I was working on her Declaration in Support of Motion to Suppress Evidence. The Attorney keeps getting it wrong. It involves her father's account of the incident. The two of them went out for dinner and were stopped by the police. He got a DUI which he is fighting.

There were faulty memories, the limited perceptions of the moment, and ulterior motives behind a point of view. We have the police account of the arrest, and his account as told to the Attorney about ten times and he still didn't get it right. That is partly from the client's vagaries and partly from the lawyer's desultory writing skills. I'm turning into a literary critic. This afternoon I returned an amended description saying it's vague and irrelevant, and he agreed.

The daughter came in to sign her own account of the arrest, an Italian woman in her mid-thirties. We worked on it together for a while. It felt like there was a heat-wave emanating from her, a tall full-bodied woman who was nice looking. At some point we were looking over the papers and she stood as close as she could, almost touching. Later when she left there was a look that was warmer than the situation called for, and she put her hand on my arm. It could be I'm imagining these things, or she can't help being friendly.

6:30 p.m. I was ready to leave with everyone gone. I went out on the balcony for a cigarette and forgot my tobacco. I walked back in and heard my phone ringing, but it stopped. A minute later it was ringing again. I picked it up and it was her (Sophie). She had just gotten home and found my letter – I had barely gotten it into the mail last night. She was sort of amazed and wanted to set things straight. It wasn't like that at all. I mentioned in the letter that I might be wrong, but that was how things appeared on this end – that we got acquainted, spent the night together, and that was it. It's like the night was an audition and since then she has been evasive.

She told me I was wrong on all accounts, saying the night we spent together was the "high point" of her August. I'm thinking it's September now. And far from being

evasive she assumed we had something which would hold up, her being busy and distracted, not to say tired these days. It sounded plausible – she was still in the process of moving in and having her clutch repaired and working full time. There was also an ambiguous hesitation in her life: she didn't know where she stood (or lay) with an ex-boyfriend. He is a messy situation and not well-defined.

I got the whole story on him. They had been together for a year and maybe she still loved him, but it's more or less impossible. He is practically an alcoholic and something of an asshole with no concern about making scenes in public or calling the police on her (which he doesn't remember, having had a black-out). He is the same age as her, twenty-nine, and she is trying to break away from the sounds of it. Recently she was roped into a counseling routine where friends and family contribute written statements – now feeling she betrayed a confidence – and then confront him about his drinking. I said he's not sixteen, he's almost thirty and he's holding down a job. She agreed, it was a little absurd. I said it could be worse, if he stopped drinking he might find something else. Well, it seems he already did that. He used to be a cocaine addict. One reason he stopped was when he was "pistol-whipped" and beaten by some people he met in an accelerated coke milieu. I assume we're talking about dealers and not just friends who think you're stepping on their lines.

He did quit smoking, however.

We were on the phone for nearly an hour, having a conversation like this in a deserted law office. A Chinese man named Tony walked by with a vacuum cleaner and no shirt on. Now and then he burst into an odd-sounding song.

She said it's often a woman's quandary when it comes to meeting a man, getting along, and then he disappears. The woman is left to wonder what is wrong with her or what's wrong with him - while not doing anything so "bold" as to write a letter. For one thing it might put off the man. She thinks of Taurus as being "nurturing" and non-judgmental (I said I've known some women who were the reverse), while Aries are impetuous if not a little forward. She might have more on her hands than she bargained for, but I've only known her for a few weeks.

I was fairly calm and subdued on the phone, and relieved that I was wrong about her. It didn't make sense that my original opinion was so far off. She is a woman of substance, and not interested in treating others like they're disposable.

For that matter, she recently opened the book I loaned her by Lautreamont. I could have picked a less disturbing book,[139] but I thought she would appreciate the description of something "… as beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table." She did say the people she likes – and doesn't want to change – tend to be weird or offbeat, and that includes me. I would rather be considered odd and within reach of her big warm heart than normal and out in the cold.

There was some mention of the weekend, although her daughter will be there. In case I wondered, she saved a couple of phone messages I left her. She likes the sound of my voice. I suppose that's a start. The way to a woman's heart is through her ears.

I got off the phone, feeling like someone who wandered onto the beautiful boat of her life, then was washed overboard and hauled back on. He finds himself in one of the

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[139] "It is not right that everyone should read the pages which follow; only a few will be able to savour this bitter fruit with impunity. Consequently, shrinking soul, turn on your heels and go back before penetrating further into such uncharted, perilous wastelands. Listen well to what I say: turn on your heels and go back…" Comte de Lautreamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1869)

compartments below deck, not sure where he is, but it's up to him to make his way to the figurehead of her on the bow. My letter was a shot across the bow.

7:30 p.m. I walked to the pool. It seemed to take one minute, not so much from walking on air - I'm on the ground with her and have some traction - but with the wind at my back. The pool was nearly deserted and I was in fast forward. One mile, followed by nearly two lengths underwater.

I was resting in the shallow end when a woman showed up. Nice form, maybe forty, with a heavy skirt and blouse over a one-piece swimsuit. It was a big production, complete with exclamations and hesitations. She found the water too cold, saying as she walked to the shallow end, "Maybe it's warmer on this end." Because I'm there? Her entire workout was four slow laps.

I took a hot shower and stood at the locker. A man started talking to me. He was slightly nervous and I wasn't. He asked how I liked the soap here. Not bad. How about the shampoo? I said I don't know much about shampoo, my girlfriend buys it.

On the way home I stopped at Slider's for a hamburger. Polk Street is a gutter in that neighborhood, but this place isn't bad, except for the videos. I sit against a wall of black tile so I can't see the screen, but I hear it. I now associate the Pet Shop Boys with ground meat. An innocuous fake-out with a neo-pompous lip-synch. So bland you figure it's for girls. They're like eunuchs in a theater of meaningless images.

I sat there trying to read the paper with the videos overhead. At the next table were some failed bikers. It left me feeling misanthropic.

Walking home I turned on Larkin for some close encounters of the street kind. A thin young man in a white lace outfit, white bra, no figure, with a strident swivel on the

sidewalk. A couple of black prostitutes on the corner, one of them born a male and now a not-so-original woman. She stood with one foot on the curb, adjusting her position like a model running through her poses. She wore a miniskirt with one leg thrust out and a leather jacket open to suggestion in the form of fake tits.

I walked past an expensive silver sedan which had pulled over. The driver was a thin executive type in his sixties who was calm and making friends. A tall Latino man/woman was bent over the window with a heavy accent and a high falsetto voice, saying "I have two girlfriends…." This block is a hangout for the surgically-altered who are proud and artificial, like a silicone sweater girl in hot pants. Look ma, no male organ. The bar on the corner, Mother Lode, is a refuge for the status anxiety of those who're in an altered state, complete with dream lighting.

10:30 p.m. At home, reading for hours in an easy chair. No typing, no beer, and not much coffee (one beer in three days). Mind and body tuned up by a swim, and the book was holding my attention. I spent a few hours in Manhattan in the 1950's. It was more interesting than Larry Rivers himself. His tin-ear thoughts were mundane, like someone operating with low ceilings. He is in his late sixties (born in 1925) and a far cry from Frank O'Hara, who rearranged some of his prose into a broken-line arrangement on the page. It landed with a dull thud. He sounds like someone for whom puberty and World War II coincided and he remained stuck in that stage. He portrays himself as a running dog who will lick his own dick or stick it anywhere, and he tried to hump his mother-in-law.

Him and O'Hara with experimental histrionics on a canvas. There were sonic forays on a saxophone, and heroin when he wanted to be alone. In the book he is

presented as a Jewish jerk-off who hangs out with a who's-who of creative people. He is not sure who he is,[140] but his paintings are a counter-balance to an erratic life.

Friday, Sept. 3, 1993

NOTES

EMILY AND CAMILLE – an excerpt

(Emily Dickinson in response to Camille Paglia
in *Sexual Personae*)

I live alone, a great pretender,
bending all the mirrors,
not that I'm a gender-bender,
I want other terrors.

Living like a born neurotic,
writing in a vacuum,
now and then the auto-erotic
breaks into my room.

Psycho-sexual to a fault,
it used to be unheard of,
so I'm living in a vault
and turn into a bird.

Nervous movements of the head
and things are magnified
in a slipstream of the dead,
my social life has died.

Like a bride of some abandon
it's an altered state,
the petrifying note I end on
while I'm tempting fate.

Imagining, you might suppose,
the one I might have wed,
and though it's sounding like a pose,

[140] His real name was Yitzroch Grossberg. For that matter, the rock promoter Bill Graham started out as Wulf Grajonca, Lenny Bruce was Leonard Schneider, and Joan Rivers was Joan Molinsky.

projecting in a bed.

Hermaphroditic in the mind,
hermetic as a rule,
a hermit if you'd be so kind,
her metaphor a tool.

Am I a tempest in a teapot
looking at the dregs?
Am I the soul a man forgot?
He only wanted legs.

I dreamed I killed a thousand in
my maiden-form bizarre
subconscious and it has no sin.
I live inside my skin.

A softer limit, the living end,
"My cactus – splits her Beard
To show her throat" and when I'm bending
over it's what I feared.

Reflected back into my self
with some formality,
and history leaves you on a shelf.
I love finality.

There was an article in the *SF Weekly* about the men's club where Michael works. The periodical sent a lesbian with a woman friend to review the place. Her review was condescending and conspiratorial. It noted the hidden "signals" of the strippers who are adherents of Sappho (they write short poems?). She was worried about being "ogled" by the men and of course she wasn't, unless staring at a pompous dyke is more interesting than a ball game or the floorshow. She referred to the crowd as "balding professional types" who looked like they had never seen a half-naked woman before. They were supposedly in awe with their mouths hanging open, waiting to lick the feet of a goddess bending over backwards. The men weren't fourteen though, closer to forty, and were calm – at least when I was there. One man was at the bar and watching a ball game when a dancer walked up. He wasn't interested.

The main thrust of the review was her interest in the women, and getting one of them to her table for a private strip show ($10). She described how the small tits of a woman were "two inches" from her face. It turns out the dancers aren't paid by the establishment. They pay a fee for the right to be there, and make their money on tips and private shows.

A column by George Will (there's a brutal segue). I get the information and the quotes where I find them. He refuted the "Holocaust deniers," noting that a "young reporter for a respected magazine" asked someone, "What proof do you include in your book that the Holocaust happened?" Ever hear of World War II? "That reporter passed through college unmarked by information about even the largest events of the century, but acquired the conventional skepticism of the empty-headed: When in doubt, doubt."

"People as ignorant as that reporter know nothing, so they doubt everything except how sophisticated they are when they assume that nothing is certain." He went on to say, "The vocabulary and mentality of literary 'deconstruction' seeps everywhere, relativizing everything, teaching that history is a 'text' with no meaning beyond what any individual reads into it."

From *Culture of Complaint,* by Robert Hughes, on the "fashion for judging art in political terms."

> People teach it because it is easy to teach. It revives the illusion that works of art carry social meaning the way trucks carry coal. It divides the sprawling republic of literature neatly into goodies and baddies, and relieves the student of the burden of imaginative empathy, the difficulties of aesthetic discrimination. It enables these scholars, with their tin ears, schematized minds, and tapioca prose, to henpeck dead writers for their lack of conformity to the current fashions in 'oppression studies' – and to fool themselves into thinking that they are all on the barricades.
>
> Yet when the Iranian mullahs pronounced their fatwa against a live writer, Salman Rushdie, for 'blasphemy' against Islam, fixing a price on his head for writing words they didn't like, academe hardly broke its silence. American academics failed to collectively protest this obscenity for two reasons. First, they feared their own campuses might become the targets of Islamic terrorists. Second, the more politically correct among them felt it was wrong to criticize a Muslim country, no matter what it did. At home in America, such folk knew it was the height of sexist impropriety to refer to a young female as a 'girl' instead of a 'woman.' Abroad in Teheran, however, it was more or less ok for a cabal of regressive theocratic bigots to insist on the chador, to cut off thieves' hands and put out the eyes of offenders on TV, and to murder novelists as State policy. Oppression is what we do in the West. What they do in the Middle East is 'their culture.'[141]

[141] Reminds me of some black people in this country with an Afrocentric view of things. The conditions of women in sub-Saharan Africa would seem a little harsh, particularly when they're

Typing in the morning.

Phone call from B. Half an hour later I was off the phone and stunned by the mundane complications she gets herself into. She would entangle me as well if she had her way, but I am too elusive.

I'm direct, or simple-minded, but I tend to operate on the basis of going to one place with one person and knowing how to get there. No problems and no time wasted. With her it's more like orchestrating five or ten people with different choices of what to do and where to go. It is further complicated with the logistics – the people involved are spread out and not everyone has a car. Often as not things are touchy between this man and that woman, or two men are carrying a torch for her (slow burning for months), so there is that to consider. Sometimes the whole thing is a non-event, not worth the trouble, a bland diversion.

She incurs a web of particulars in a New York minute and I often hear about it, as if talking like a minimalist on speed is how to escape from an arbitrary maze. There are messy diplomatic situations which occur when she knows her hold on a man and his willingness to be useful and objectified is based on a romantic overdrive which she has no intention of following through on. She had to scramble at the moment as one of those long-term fellows was losing patience, and an old car (waiting for when she learns how to drive) is stored at his place. "Do you have room for a bike?" she asked. There was a question of how to get it to me since she doesn't drive, having to use the services of an

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bought and sold, or subject to female circumcision. However, it is nothing compared to what black women in the U.S. go through when they don't see themselves in the pages of *Vogue*.

ex-boyfriend who lives out of town. There were other people with four different schedules to consider and I don't even want a bike.

2:30 p.m. I went to work, reading the paper on the bus. One thing about living here, you get to read about your neighborhood in the paper. There was a shoot-out in a massage parlor a block away. It sounds like a polarity of what is relaxing and what isn't.

In the office, talking with V. I loaned her *Half of Man is Woman*, but she is wary, like I might try to slip her some writing of substance. We talked about my checking account, a subject I'm not clear about. Having studied accounting, which she pointed out, she has a different perspective – mainly that she is in touch with reality and I'm not. I said I studied history – "What good is that?" – and literature. Same thing.

If some of your dimension falls outside a person's frame of reference there is a part of you they're not engaging. They are focused on a reduced version of you. It's almost funny hearing how they react to that reduction, a caricature with your name on it. I seem to fluctuate according to who I'm talking to. I bounce signals off of someone like a psychological sonar and rely on their being mentally stable.[142] Depending on the signals coming back I feel engaged or not all there.

Meanwhile, V. has been teaching the new girl her position. The two of them have been giggling and whispering. Her replacement, Maria, is already in love with a tall white legal assistant and V. is being pulled in the direction of the girlish. Maria has long thick black hair, braces, and faint stretch marks on her breasts which she doesn't try to hide, wearing low-cut blouses. She initially presented herself in a shy and dutiful manner, but her attorney saw her at a café with some friends and said she is anything but that.

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[142] I got into a conversation with a schizophrenic once, which was mostly him talking and me becoming a little disoriented after a few minutes. His sentences didn't connect or form a narrative in the usual sense, and it left me up in the air.

5 p.m. I left with V. Waiting for the elevator she said, “The end is near.” It was in reference to her leaving, in case I forgot. I’m not sure what I’m supposed to do about it. On the way to the underground I said, “Hey man…” and she said, bumping me, “I’m not a man you know. I’m a woman.”

I returned to the office and walked home an hour later, picking up some writing pads and a couple of beers.

A few minutes later I was making coffee with the place straightened up and the Actress arrived. We sat around talking for a couple of hours. One beer each. I was still in slacks, shirt, and a loosened tie. She wore a short dress and said her life is on hold, or rather her involvement in the acting profession. Not working, not much happening in the way of acting, but there is an ongoing tension with her fiancé. They live together but she wants to “read him the riot act” when it comes to spending more time together. He works six days a week at the men’s club in North Beach. She admits he might have a drinking problem. The job is stressful and he is surrounded with fountains of alcohol. I’ve been accumulating a resentment of alcohol and what it does to people.

She is ready to scream if she hears one more thing about sexual child abuse, particularly with the catch-22 of denial/not remembering. You’re grown up and you don’t remember if it happened, but the fact you don’t remember is a sign that you have blocked it out and might as well assume that something happened (cue the therapists and police). It is another way of keeping people off balance, unsure of their own minds and their ability to know what’s going on. She is a red-blooded Canadian who has lived in New York City, a headstrong woman with a daughter. She is tired of the prairie fires of

hysteria that sweep across this country, blown by mass communication for the shallow and impressionable.

I took a break to return B.'s call. She was in the bathtub, a nice background aura with splashing sounds. She had narrowed down the prospects for the evening to a sci-fi convention in a big hotel. The Actress and I were planning to have pineapple catfish soup at the Cambodian place, a dish which didn't register in her mind, but said we could meet her there. I was not sure where it was, then realized I could see it from the window.

It was nearly nine when we were done with dinner. The Actress had no problem with the neighborhood. The hookers were out in force, renting out their bodies. We walked to the hotel in a few minutes, a three-dimensional fortress full of two-dimensional name-tags. We wandered through the lobby and rose to the occasion on an escalator, running into people in strange outfits. They seemed like sci-fi aficionados from the Midwest. The atmosphere was sober and subdued.

The whole thing was falling flat. There were moments, but they generally didn't ignite. We strolled into a ballroom with eccentrics underneath the chandeliers (I wonder how an eccentric chandelier would look). We finally went into a lounge, sitting with the others, and had a glass of wine. The outfits were not so futuristic, closer to medieval, and didn't measure up to Halloween in the Castro District (nothing does).

We never found B., who was probably late and misdirected. After a while the Actress said her interest was diminishing by the second, so we left, walking to a 1950's diner. We got a red vinyl booth. The conversation was wide-ranging with a spontaneous combustion that kept me on my toes – her being an educated woman who does improv. Three young streetwalkers took the booth behind us, looking rather garish. The waitress

walked over and said the policy now was not to serve them. They got up in a huff with some comments about discrimination (they were white) and walked out. I thought they went with the décor, but the diner wants to keep its PG rating, and doesn't want to offend the tourists.

The conversation took a more serious turn with her saying she is not up on the news and what is this about a woman cutting off her husband's penis? We talked about it for a while. She didn't think a woman being coerced into having sex with a man she has slept with many times warranted his being mutilated. Then she called my attention to a black woman standing by the counter with chrome stools. She wore a red miniskirt and her behind was out there. It would seem the diner had a touchy problem on its hands. If it refused her service for being a prostitute (I've seen her on the corner) she could sue them for discrimination of another sort.

We left around midnight, walking a few blocks to her car. She calls me "Sweetie."

I walked back towards the sci-fi hotel, passing a couple of hookers, one slender and tall, the other short and wide. They had black hair and wore tight short outfits. The tall one was bending over at the window of a sedan. The guy was negotiating the cost of the two of them as a package deal. The woman got off a good line. "So what then, all your money has gone into your car?!" They walked off laughing, and there was a comment with the word "blow-job" in it.

I returned to the hotel, though I'm not sure why. It was a block or two from the Hilton where I crashed a history convention. There were high-powered papers being

delivered beneath the chandeliers of civilization. This event fell short of mental stimulation. Earlier we walked around, picking up desultory conversations. She asked,

"What was it you said about this?"
"It's a rich sociological experience."
"Right. Keep reminding me."

I made the rounds in a crowded elevator. There were various factions having "parties." I put it in quotes because they weren't. I wandered into an expensive suite on the 32nd floor. There was a man in a black rubber wet suit with a neon tube spiraling around him. There is a dull-normal side of sci-fi people, as if they lean on science fiction as a counterpoint to ordinary life. I was out of there in twenty minutes, returning to the main lounge. Two men walked in, one of them with long blonde hair, a short beard, and a hairy chest. He wore a red strapless dress with useless tiny cups and red pumps with hairy legs.

I went out, walking past a strip joint to Club 181. It's a rundown neighborhood, the Tenderloin at its worst (I'm on the other side of it). There was a line of people waiting to get into the club. It's a sonic vortex from which a few will emerge as couples who have weathered the frenzied mating rites. The down and out-of-their-minds were loitering across the street. They were out of line. A few police cars were protecting the nightclub from the zombies. Not sure what the fire engine was for. The urgencies if not emergencies were coinciding, but it looked like a stand-off.

I walked home, thinking I should broaden my horizons and sleep with hookers like a writer in the 1920's. True love is hard to come by. The women are elusive and the love amorphous. So am I at times. "The center cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed

upon the world… The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity."[143] Sounds like a strip club.

I read about the Marquis de Sade. I'm not as liberated as he was, but what good is being liberated if you're in prison? It is also counter-productive to be hurting women since it is a turn-off (speaking for myself), so there is that. I have lived with women for most of my adult life, but now I'm questioning the custom. It's my fault as much as theirs, but where does that leave me? Contemplating the immoral and its connection to the stormy mundane. I don't go to prostitutes, and hardly ever see a mainstream movie.

1:30 a.m. A glass of wine. Coffee. A list of sci-fi writers making local appearances. One of them materializes in a puff of smoke and warped air with static and lightning bolts which set the books on fire in the store. A hologram begins speaking with the transcendental confidence of someone with an agent.

The hollow grammatical author shoots a fine stream of blood from his eyes when he is disturbed. It's like a laser beam which passes through the listeners who hardly feel it. Their atoms are loosely put together. They're vacant, in other words. Their minds are full of anti-historical sentiments, hysteria, and hermetic fiction. They are cut adrift in the space of North America in the latter part of the 20th century. They read books which worship the end of the world and come with robot killers, void technology, and weird sound effects. Disembodied apparitions are beamed into the homes of the terminally compromised who are waiting to die.

> The author of HARDWIRED and ANGEL STATION signs his new virtual-reality novel… in this far-future a man who truly interfaces with technology can achieve kingly power in our world, and a taboo, godly power over worlds he

[143] William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming" (1919)

> invests in secret… riveting plots, charismatic misfits, attention to scientific detail, and his sexy leather-and-microchip imagination.

It is revenge for those who're stuck in a prosaic life and only go beyond it with a sci-fi ticket. You slip it into a slot, the wall slides open on the void, you step out and you're on the moon.

I could meet Yvonne Navarro at the "Abyss horror party." She wrote a "new vampire Armageddon splatter novel." Yvonne knows how to get it on. My interest in this sort of thing falls off after Burroughs, Ballard, and Jules Verne. Throw in H.G. Wells and William Gibson. It gives me vertigo to contemplate those sublimated fatalists.

3:00 a.m. On the typewriter with a neo-poetic effort. It was an attempt to sideswipe meaning while invoking the mojo of atonal music.

4:00 a.m. I went to sleep.