SLOW-BURN JOURNAL: IN THE TENDERLOIN

BOOK IV

Nov. 1, 1993 – Jan. 11, 1994

Monday, Nov. 1, 1993

11 a.m. Phone call from B. I was functional, more or less. I should remember I can drink wine all night, but if I throw in whiskey and marijuana, it's trouble. She said, "Let's go to the beach," my sentiments exactly. She bemoaned the fact that she had missed a good party last night (I told her all about it).

I went to a place on Geary and Leavenworth for breakfast. We were going to meet there but an hour later she still hadn't showed up. I went out, a bus pulled up, and I got on automatically. I called her from a phone booth half a mile from the beach. She said she would meet me there, having been on the phone. It would be another hour and a half before she materialized, a slowly growing figure on the sand.

I walked to the beach and headed for the northern end where it's warmer. The cliffs form a cove there. I lay on the sand with just a few people around, the naked and the dedicated. A Latino man was hiding in the rocks with a towel over his head (it covered the binoculars).

It was warm out, nearly hot, with no wind. I was trying to ignore a slender naked Chinese woman who lay nearby. Maybe thirty, and I've seen her here before. Small breasts, narrow hips, and a black shock of pubic hair like it was full of electro-static. I went for a swim with my

swimsuit on. The water was not that cold until I was immersed, diving into a wave, and then it was numbing. How far do I want to swim out before the hypothermia sets in and I'm too numb to move? There was a riptide. I was swimming and then got out, walking along the sand. I couldn't resist and dove back in.

A naked white girl lying on her back and reading a book called *Love Medicine*.[1]

A full-breasted lesbian with long legs and short black hair kept a wary eye on her girlfriend who was topless and cavorting in the shallows.

A few naked men, mostly alone.

I took off my swimsuit and was lying there when B. walked up. She didn't mind my not having any clothes on and said she wouldn't look. It felt like a significant moment between us. I had a semi-erection which took a while to go to sleep. I hoped she wouldn't notice.

She had a lot on her mind and was talking nonstop while removing her clothes. She wore a bikini which revealed a flat well-modeled stomach. She pulled out a long list of propositions for the election tomorrow and wanted to go through each one. I wasn't in the mood, but finally got involved. When in doubt, say no.

She also had some Tarot cards based on Native American mythology. We each drew a card and she read a long-winded explanation from a book. She admitted it didn't make much sense, hers particularly (a dolphin). Mine was a dragonfly. It seemed like native kitsch according to a Stone Age culture in a catatonic trance. "Grandmother moon," etc. It's odd how native tribes

[1] Louise Erdrich, who is part Chippewa. In 1995 she left her husband (also part Native American), a writer and professor who suffered from depression. He killed himself a year or two later.

are close to nature, but often don't know how it works (scientifically). Human beings like to project their stunted fairy-tales on the world.[2]

I told her about a conversation from last night. We were talking about writers who struggle with a ruinous doubt – about themselves and everything around them. It's hard to avoid if you're a good writer. You don't come up with certain sentences or points of view unless you question and refuse a middle of the road philosophy. Many writers have a constant doubt which forces them to make an extra effort and not accept whatever floats up in their head as sufficient. They are living with an isometric tension.

4 p.m. I put my clothes on, kissed her, and left, walking a mile to the bus. It was after five when I arrived in the office with no one there. I left half an hour later.

At home I fell asleep early, then woke up in the middle of the night and typed for a while.

Tuesday, Nov. 2, 1993

12:30 p.m. With V. at Old St. Mary's Church. Piano and violin (with a Chinese woman on piano). "Sonata in B flat Major" by Mozart (1756-1791). "Waltz in E minor" by Chopin (1810-1849). During the Mozart piece I thought of the show last week with the Insaints. I'm polarized between the sacred and profane, and took notes. V. glanced over from her prayer book with a raised eyebrow. I reminded her that I'm a writer. She is unclear on the concept and wonders what's the point. The altar was covered with pictures of the saints, each with a flickering red flame in front of it - eternal rubies. Afterwards we walked up for a closer look, but kept off the steps. A few others walked directly to the altar, which met with her disapproval. "They must not be Catholic."

[2] In Cambodia the explanation for a lunar eclipse is a frog eating the moon. Such an eclipse occurred when the Khmer Rouge were riding in their tanks. They fired at the moon with their machine guns to scare away the frog. Then they went on murdering the educated.

We left the church to have some Mexican food (the burrito-Chopin hour), then walked back to the office with her slapping her behind and exclaiming, “MY BUTT!” She has a slight neurosis about her weight and is getting more blunt these days, complaining that her pants don’t fit. She looks in the mirror “… in my underwear,” and does not approve.

That reminds me, a couple of days later she had some time in the office and was flipping through an atlas of the human anatomy. The library in the office has some medical books for personal injury cases. She turned the pages slowly and looked at some gruesome illustrations where the skin is pulled away to reveal the organs (tightly packed). There were cross-sections of bone and muscle, tendons and veins. When the book was open to an illustration of the female pelvis, a close up with the legs spread, she didn’t blink or turn the page. The next few pages were the male version. I was impressed with her discretion, but she is nothing if not realistic.

Meanwhile, one of the women in the office was complaining and V. muttered, “What a bitch,” in that quiet voice of hers. She is aware of tendencies which don’t speak well of women (in her opinion), like their innuendos and their friction. She can’t believe how a couple of the women talk to her. The other day we were leaving the office and she was fuming. Someone said a problem with the Xerox was her fault. “She’s a BITCH!” V. thinks that she is too polite and it leaves her at a disadvantage when it comes to being vulgar or insulting. It is magnified in her mind, which has the effect of giving mundane situations a larger-than-life impact. They eclipse the truer magnitudes of history, thought, and music. That is where her religion comes in, I suppose, putting the ordinary in its place.

Walked home after work.

The Phantom of the sound-room called last night. I barely recognized his voice. He was tired, stoned, and had a cold, sounding discouraged and relieved that Ming was out of the

country for a few months. He has his old room back. He was getting spider bites from sleeping in the sound-room next to the garage. He asked if I had heard from her. I said no.

I was thinking the other day about the pain in her life, having grown up feeling unwanted. What if some of the pain is transferred to the men around her? By the age of twenty-three she has hurt a few men and not necessarily on purpose. Some people have a history that is jagged with some cutting edges. As the world turns and the days revolve those jagged people can't keep from hurting those who're close to them.

I should take it more seriously when a woman talks about her past and it sounds like difficulties and estrangement (and not a few men). There are some rough edges there and you can't assume that you're the one who would smooth things out.

I thought of the woman in August who let me know about her background, including the men she slept with who never called back. Having internalized that sort of thing she was not above operating in the same manner.

I had an affair last year which lasted six or seven months. The woman gave me plenty of signals that she hated men, but I was naïve, thinking this would be different. I wasn't worried, although more than one female friend said she was a spider woman. In retrospect I saw how she was bending towards a perspective that would confirm her belief that men are a letdown. I was added to the list like a foregone conclusion. I didn't do anything wrong so she had to come up with some petty excuses (like not cleaning my apartment well enough before she came over). I don't think I changed from the early months of the affair to the later months, and that forced her into a realm of the hypercritical (so close to hypocritical) in order to protect her negative view of men.

8 p.m. Phone call from Jon in St. Helena. He said he bought a video camera ($1100 on monthly payments). We discussed the possibilities, from an accelerated time-lapse of weather patterns to him in bed with a woman.

He wanted to get his microphone from the sound room. There was some mention of the Phantom and how he lives in a deteriorating time-warp. It's one of the downsides of being stoned all the time, where things are put on hold and sooner or later your life begins to resemble a country in North Africa. Notions of linear progress have evaporated or run aground. Maybe it's more relaxing, living in a desert, but there is a downside to it. For example, his van has an ignition problem. It's been months and he has been collecting parking tickets. All he can say about a day's accomplishment: "I moved my van to the other side of the street."

I don't know if arrested development is a side-effect of smoking pot, but it is known for inflating the moment and draining it of the past and future. You are kind of mindless when it comes to planning ahead (which is relaxing), but the future has a tendency to keep arriving whether or not you're ready for it. There are pros and cons to living in the eternal present.[3]

There was some mention of last weekend. I was talking like I was wired. Having lived in the Tenderloin for a while I can hear it in my voice, a certain acceleration. I told him about a couple of parties. Jon had a more subdued night. He put together a primitive disguise with nowhere to go, so he went into the vineyards on a full moon. Not sure if he was howling or not.

On the typewriter for a few hours.

1 a.m. A black man across the street was leaning against the building with a bottle and talking to himself. Unfortunately, it was more like yelling with the most awful vocal cords. It was getting to me and I wondered what the options were. The last thing I want to do is call the

[3] Allen Ginsberg took a photo of someone and referred to it as so-and-so in infinity. In other words, it's here and now. We're eternal for a while, the planet floating in the void.

police about a drunk guy who is disturbing the peace, but what about the people who live here? Most of them are working class. What right does he have to disturb their dreams?

I gave him an hour, hoping he would get tired of it or go away. A little after 2 a.m. he left. Suddenly it was quiet. I wonder what would have happened if I went outside and asked him to keep it down. An imperialistic white man who cannot appreciate the oral tradition of another race.

Wednesday, Nov. 3, 1993

Afternoon in the office. There was a woman in the conference room with the TV on. She looked concerned and motioned for me to come in. Some of Malibu[4] was burning. I think she was more concerned about the horses. Smoke was rising to 25,000 feet.

Turns out she is from Santa Monica, a Jewish woman in her early thirties. This is the one who bothers V. with her plainspoken manner and her shlumpy look - a swearing paralegal. We get along and have a couple of things in common. She is a breath of fresh air in some respects, and that includes her LA background. The factions are more provincial in this town than you might think. She has a sarcastic mind which is ready for any line I throw out, saying "I love you" when I mention the premature senility of the Attorney, or describe her and V. as "How can I miss you if you won't go away?" She misses wit. Most of the time in the office it's like bouncing a ball off padded walls, or the ball is semi-deflated.

[4] Malibu is where I first took LSD on a hot afternoon in 1969 with a Jewish girl who brought it (we met at a life-drawing class at Otis Art Institute). It was another version of Adam and Eve, where the woman hands the man a pill (orange sunshine) and instead of being kicked out of the garden, they get absorbed in it. I don't talk about it at work. What happens when much of your dimension and experience is outside the frame of reference of those around you? It leaves you feeling reduced.

I miss Los Angeles. If I was there I would miss this town. What if they're combined in the memory circuits of my mind?

I walked home after work. This journal blurs the particulars of my existence to the point it borders on a kind of fiction, but I'm caught up in the linear straitjacket of a journal method. My arms are tied to the typewriter.

8 p.m. A long workout on a wooden instrument with an old movie on the tube. *Chain Lightning* (1950). Humphrey Bogart and the under-rated Eleanor Parker. Co-starring: the decline of post-war aviation.

11:30 p.m. Phone call from the Actress. Her weekend was not so interesting. She went out with a woman in North Beach and didn't want to spend the evening talking with drunken men in bars (wrote bras, a Freudian slip), but that's what they did. And she had to explain her conceptual costume. She went as the L.A. fire. I suggested a few touches which would have made it more obvious, like tying a burned branch to her back and smoking a cigarette while wearing a MALIBU T-shirt with holes burned in it. I suppose she could have smeared ashes on herself and held a candle (but nothing holds a candle to a fire in Los Angeles).

Her other not-so-edifying event was spending time with the mothers of her daughter's friends who she doesn't get along with. She said one woman went door-to-door as a French maid with her boobs out.

The Actress is another person whose emotional states come with physiological side-effects. She broke up with her fiancé a month ago and only now can she sleep through the night. She said I sounded happy. Maybe it's situational and relative and comes from talking to a friend (the observer affecting the observed), or maybe it is evidence that the spirit is more buoyant than we realize. I live alone in the Tenderloin, but there is more to a man than you can shake a

shallow two-bit sociological description at. I told her she should think positive - her life at any given moment is better than being shot or in jail, and she agreed. The vanishing point of a bullet can put things in perspective.

There was some mention of ambiguities in the news. She avoids the newspaper, but is curious and well-informed. I am wary of how a reader is manipulated by the news, not to mention an arbitrary information overload. You can read or hear about a homicide on the other side of the world. At what point does the quality of life and the validity of where you stand become distracted or off-center from the news? What kind of megalomania assumes that you can monitor the fates of several billion human beings?

She said I should come up there this weekend.

Thursday, Nov. 4, 1993

10 a.m. I was lying in bed and listening to the jackhammers and the heavy equipment on the street. A big machine in the empty lot was screwing the dirt. The phone rang. It was B., suggesting we meet on a tennis court.

11:30 a.m. I walked nearly two miles to the courts on top of Russian Hill. It was warm out. She was half an hour late, arriving in her tennis outfit with a short skirt and apologized for being tangled up in her phone line again.

She was talking nonstop on the other side of the net, being upset with her girlfriend. I ran into her on the street the other day. She had plans to meet with Ilsa that night, saying they would probably have a “big discussion.”

“About what?”
“Oh you know, women can make a problem out of anything.”

It seems she put her foot in it again, trying to integrate a hardcore lesbian into her straight world. There was a party coming up and she asked if Ilsa would be discreet about their relationship. That didn't go over very well.

Even worse, it is still problematic when they're in bed. B. described a scene which she thought would be good for a sitcom or a play if it weren't happening to her in real life. She is normally discreet, but couldn't help herself. There is no one else to tell these things to. There was an "intimate moment," but one of the women had not responded "vocally" as desired or required. The other woman got up, heading for the shower (having to go to work). She pulled out a trusted phallic object from a drawer, threw it on the bed and said, "Here, use this."

There were a couple of guys on the next court for a while. Our conversation was not too explicit so I don't think they realized what we were talking about. It was like a transparent topic going back and forth across the net.

She said she heard of lesbians who would go to a straight bar and try to seduce a straight woman, or maybe it was a feigned seduction attempt. We were taking a break at that point, sitting on a bench. I said imagine their response if it was done to them – where straight men walk into a dyke bar and try to seduce one of the women. Her jaw dropped at the thought.

I ran a hyper-feminist concept by her, the one that claims menstruation is the source of all culture. She didn't get it.

She said her stomach hurt, being upset with the tension of having an affair with a woman. It affects her physically. "I'm not used to this… I can't fool her… women are too smart … always testing me… emotional flux times two…." She went on and on about it while were knocking the ball back and forth and asking what I thought (she hits rather well, and her mother played tennis). I said I don't have any sympathy for either one of them, which made her pause. I

thought that B. was trying to have her cake and eat it too, maintaining her reputation with her straight friends. That includes a few men she is keeping around as possible marriage prospects (wrote suspects), something she has admitted to. At the same time she is having an affair with a woman, and wonders why her life is so complicated. I said it was complicated already, seeing as how she couldn't focus on one man. On the other hand, maybe her girlfriend could lighten up and recognize where B. was coming from, being more or less in the closet. Would a little discretion be so hard, especially for a good-looking woman?

We were running and sweating for nearly two hours. We finally quit around 2 p.m. Sitting on the bench she had an almond cookie and some Calistoga water. She said she went to a Black Muslim bakery[5] and got into a discussion with the man behind the counter, wanting to know if Farrakhan really meant it about shooting white people.

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[5] The founder of Your Black Muslim Bakery was Yusuf Bey, a member of the Nation of Islam (an adulterated form of Islam which Malcolm X eventually denounced). In the 1970's, operating out of Oakland, it sold its natural products in 150 stores. Bey gave lectures about blacks being the "Original Man" while whites are the subhuman invention of a mad black scientist about 6,600 years ago. The bakery "had substantial influence in local politics," obtaining favors from the City of Oakland which enabled it to "avoid scrutiny from police." ("Muslim bakery head wielded political clout," *SF Chronicle*, Jan. 27, 2008)

In 1994, Bey's son Akbar was shot by a drug dealer (he was on heroin). Later Nedir and Abaz Bey were charged with assault, robbery, and false imprisonment (they tortured a Nigerian home-seller). Witnesses were afraid to talk so they only got 6 months of home detention. At the time they were members of the African-American Advisory Committee on Crime. (Chris Thompson, "The Sinister Side of Yusuf Bey's Empire," *East Bay Express*, November 13, 2002.) In 1996 the City of Oakland loaned the company over $1 million. It was never repaid. When Yusuf died in 2003 he was looking at rape and incest charges. Waajid Bey took over as CEO, but was killed the following year. Antar took over, but was killed the following year. Yusuf IV took over in 2005. He was later arrested for vandalizing liquor stores, using false credit information to buy a luxury Mercedes, and trying to run over three security guards after he was thrown out of a strip club.

The company filed for bankruptcy in 2006. There were major health code violations, including rats. In 2007 Yusuf IV and two others kidnapped a mother and daughter and tortured the latter (they wanted money). A few months later there was a double homicide near the bakery (one of the men was killed because he was white). An AK-47 used in the murders was found at the bakery. More women were kidnapped for ransom. A month later a respected black journalist, Chauncey Bailey, who was writing a story about the dubious finances of Your Black Muslim Bakery, was shot and killed. A young man who

We left with her jumping onto a passing streetcar. I walked down the hill and caught a bus to my neighborhood. Took a shower and went to work.

In the office there was not much going on. There was a phone call from one of our clients, a black woman. Her boyfriend was out on parole and stopped for questioning by the police. He beat up one of the cops and ran. That is usually not a good idea and he is back in jail. Her immediate concern however is that her fifteen-year-old son has been subpoenaed by the court to appear as a witness in a murder trial. She was worried. Could they ignore the subpoena? No. A cousin of hers was in a similar situation and was shot in the head for it. The suspects were capable of anything. She said she didn't want her son hurt, much less killed. It's a familiar story in the black community where a code of the street is not to inform on others, even if it has a ruinous effect on the community. They fear other black people, and won't help the police. At the same time there are complaints that the police are not attentive to black concerns.

In the office for an hour, then walked home.

10 p.m. I lay down for a minute. My plan to get up and go over to the typewriter was dissolving a minute before the rest of me did. I was unaware of it until I was coming to at two in the morning. I turned the lights off and went back to sleep.

It was another sober night. Two beers in four days.

Friday, Nov. 5, 1993

NOTES

A long article in the *New York Review of Books* on *Only Words* by Catharine Mackinnon. The reviewer was bending over backwards to give her the benefit of the doubt, but it was

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worked at the bakery got 25 years in prison for the murder. In 2011 Yusuf IV was convicted on three counts of murder and got life in prison.

like a spring he was bending which when slowly released pushed her arguments and neurotic two-dimensionalities off the page.

Beginning with a curious point: pornography is the "starkest possible expression of the idea feminists most loathe: that women exist principally to provide sexual service to men. Advertisements, soap operas, and popular fiction may actually do more to spread that idea in our culture, but…." Right off the bat something doesn't compute. Maybe "idea" is the key word, rather than an actuality. Women provide sexual service to men and men provide it to women, often at the same time. Whether women "exist principally" to do this is downright irrelevant. Most men assume that women have other things to do but lie around in bed all day (like going to work, for example) and what do they care if a woman has other things going on her life? Actually, they might prefer it. If her only role is to sleep with men, then chances are she would be having sex with other men.

Not many men think that women exist primarily to have sex with men (they are surrounded by women doing lots of other things besides having sex), and if they do they find out rather quickly that that isn't the case. There are a lot of men who sleep alone.

She claims that in pornographic films and magazines a man is being sexually serviced as if the woman isn't as well. I think in many porno films the woman ends up going through the ceiling (however simulated or contrived). She is being serviced, often in a glorified atmosphere as if her every little sensation is reaching to heaven. It's not very realistic, but it's also not entirely male-centered.

If the "idea" (of women as sex objects) is spread by advertising and soap operas I think there are other ideas being spread as well. For example, models selling a product. You might get the idea that women are in love with or want to have sex with the product itself, rather than with men. Or that men aren't worth bothering with unless they can afford said product. Who knows what twisted ideas are found in soap operas, but I doubt if women being easy is the main one. More like everyone in that stultifying atmosphere is caught between infantile paralysis and premature senility. It's an anal retentive mood which is funereal (complete with organ music), and it appeals to hermetic middle class women for whom everything becomes a problem. It is closer to the clinical than seductive, and it's really disconcerting if it's social realism.

"Like swastikas and burning crosses, pornography is deeply offensive in itself, whether or not it causes any other injustices or harm." That is a massively dumb and misdirected line. The whole point is whether it causes injustice and harm. If it doesn't then what's the problem? Some might be offended, but people are offended by existence and mortality and strange perfumes (and in the case of a certain sheik, the fact that the U.S. does not adhere to Islamic law). She has some gall referring to terrorism and the Third Reich, with those having had a slightly more negative impact on the world than pin-ups ever did.

Her argument that "pornography should be banned because it 'silences' women…" "Who listens to a woman with a penis in her mouth?" She goes on to characterize a woman who is "unlikely to have much to say about the issues of the day" because she is "laying

down… her body clenched against assault." That is so flimsy and fallacious it undermines her whole cause. Trying to make it a free speech issue – that women are silenced by a fuck film or a magazine - is too ludicrous for words. When it comes to making specious cause and effect arguments you could also say pornography was generated by the women's liberation movement. The two have thrived and flourished more or less simultaneously over the last twenty years or more, which fact alone would seem to undermine her point. When have women been more vocal, published, heard, seen, and broadcast then during a time when the laws have been relaxed about "dirty" books and movies. The reviewer notes: "It is… relevant that nations with the most permissive laws about pornography are among those with the least sexual crime."

So a woman giving a man a blow-job is not able to discuss the issues of the day because her mouth is full. However, she could when he is done, which would not take that long. She could pull his cock out of her mouth and have the rest of the day to discuss women's issues. For that matter, what issues of the day is a man prevented from discussing when he has his head between the legs of a woman? He is a man of few words for a while. Meanwhile, we are supposed to believe that all women are symbolically silenced because a woman in a sex film has a cock in her mouth. Are men symbolically silenced when a man is killed in a movie – an extremely common occurrence in mainstream films? What does "silenced" even mean in this context? What about when a man and woman are kissing in a movie? It's shocking how few words are coming out of her mouth when that is going on, with the implication that all women should be mute. Maybe they're at a loss for words when they're confronted with a love scene, and are further silenced by the fact that they are sitting in a theater and are not supposed to talk. And yet women manage to have books published and get national attention on the subject of how wordless they are. Because of pornography "you learn that language does not belong to you… you develop a self who is ingratiating and obsequious and imitative and aggressively passive and silent." Sounds like so many women I know, like approximately none.

You would think that men invented sex, which is giving them too much credit, or that a woman left to her own devices would never want to show off her figure. Since Mackinnon would never pose for a pin-up magazine you get the impression that no woman in her right mind would ever want to, and yet those magazines turn them away by the thousands. You might suppose that women these days, being liberated, are left to their own devices and those include a vanity which goes from here to eternity and back. It burns off clothing, social mores, and not a few men, and "penises slamming into vaginas" (don't expect the lyrical from a lawyer) is a small price to pay. I've heard that some women like it, even those who would use a different word like slumming or slimming.

She thinks that men who read pornography "are sexually habituated to its kick, a process that is largely unconscious and works as primitive conditioning, with pictures and words as sexual stimuli."[6] It produces erections, in other words. Anything that produces an

[6] Bodice rippers are a huge percentage of books being published and they're mostly for women. One of the plots used over and over is how to get your rapist to fall in love with you.

erection should be banned. What is she going to do about my bed? I'm habituated to the REM phase which occurs when I'm asleep.

Meanwhile, there are sexual stimuli everywhere. It goes along with being alive, and it might just be a woman walking down the street. Is she going to ban that? Will all images of women have to be censored since some of those have covert stimuli, the most obvious being lingerie ads? What about women in swim suits? Men are easily aroused, it's something they have to guard against (like women have to guard against becoming dormant). She presumes to know what goes on inside a man. Again there is this notion that a woman knows women as well as men, but men only know themselves (and sometimes not even that). Tell me about appropriation and imperious presumptions.

It's possible her mind has thoroughly absorbed a context of law libraries and classrooms where she has spent much of her life. A woman spreading her legs would be out of place or even disturbing in that context, and therefore wrong. She has a hermetic antiseptic view of an instinctual drive and maybe this would explain it. The world is a classroom, and guess who is giving the lecture?

If women are portrayed as being submissive in sex films, how does that affect equal opportunity employment in this country? "It works… insidiously to damage the standing and power of women within the community… picturing them as sexual or servile objects." I think there are a lot of films where men are portrayed as thieves and murderers, not to mention drunken slobs. Does that damage the reputation of the male gender in the community? In modern times the standing and power of women has never been greater and this has coincided with an explosion of pornography. When you work downtown you get the impression that few women are servile, or even sexual for that matter.

I think I'm taking her too seriously when you consider this is a woman whose "feminist colleague" is none other than Andrea Dworkin. The latter managed to come up with the revelation that all penetration is rape. It sounds like she is equalizing consensual and nonconsensual sex, in which case both would be legal or illegal, depending on who's making the laws. At any rate, it is politically incorrect to have a cock. It's odd how the two of them purport to speak for women, and yet the vast majority of women think otherwise. At the same time, Mackinnon lives with a man, an ex-psychoanalyst who is one of the looser scholars around – he is known for having slept with a thousand women. From Jeffrey Masson to Andrea Dworkin, I sense a contradiction here.

3 p.m. I walked into the office. V. looked up and said, "Go with me." She had to file something at City Hall and wanted me along for diversion and direction and protection. She has

no sense of direction, likes to have someone to talk to, and isn't comfortable walking by the addicts and the otherwise wasted near City Hall.

She was in her quick flurry mode. Her pass for the rapid transit was demagnetized by her purse, so she was running around the station. I said we should take her pulse and see if it is rapid as a bird. Her metabolism is an overheated mechanism and she admits that she is often tense and worried about one thing or another. On the other hand, she will go to church to pray and is a delight to be around.

Apropos of something she was talking about I asked her who is more romantic, Filipinos or Chinese. She gave me one of her incredulous looks with a raised eyebrow, so I said,

"Filipinos?"
"I think so!"

We levitated from the underground into the light and walked past a shallow fountain. There was a broken wheelchair in it. This is a town of wheelchair excess, and another vital café was shut down. Hundreds of people use it every day, but they're out of luck – the wheelchair lobby wasn't satisfied with the access.

We went through City Hall to the third floor and stood at the counter while she stamped papers with her thin determined wrists. We went to the law library on the fourth floor for something, looking over the ledge inside a Beaux-Arts building with a dome. She said she is afraid of heights.

It was a couple of blocks to the underground transit. The passengers are encased in metal which is pushed at a high rate of speed by a subterranean wind. We emerged in the financial district and it turned into a long walk, picking up a settlement check for $10,000. She complained about having to walk so far, but I like getting out of the office.

4:30 p.m. When we returned I realized I had a lot of work to do. Three hours non-stop, a solid effort.

8 p.m. I walked home. It's not uncommon for me to walk four or five miles a day. I know I'm getting close to my neighborhood when I see someone getting arrested.

There has been a shift in the angle of the sunlight, with not too many trees around to convey a dead leaf autumn (you have to go out of town for any real seasons). The trees here have cement shoes. The light in the afternoon is pale and wan, having broken the back of summer, and when I walk home it's dark.

A long night on the typewriter. Guitar and periodicals on the side. Coffee, cigarettes, and a Guinness.

Saturday, Nov. 6, 1993

Typing for hours.

In the afternoon I brought down a load of old newspapers and found a letter from my father. I went upstairs and opened it and was stunned. I had run my financial situation into the ground and was down to my last $2. It looked like I would have to borrow anywhere from $20 to $200, but it was a check for $2000. A couple of days ago he said they were sending an annual "dividend." It hit me from an unfamiliar angle. I was brought up with a stoic (wrote stock) Protestant attitude and had little or no support in college or since then. I was on my own. It was only in the last year or two (after turning forty) that they started distributing funds to the offspring, having inherited a fair amount from my maternal grandfather. They have a low overhead and a couple of incomes – my father has a semi-pension and my mother works at a university. They rent a room to a gardener which covers the low mortgage.

A check is abstract but it has a tangible cause and effect. The immediate future, not to say the coming year, shifted into a more plausible light. There was the continued possibility of working part-time and embellishing a low income with $100 a month. That's $1200. I could return $200 which was borrowed for the desert trip, and that left $400 to $600. I might even resume the monthly DUI payments.

I went out feeling a bit tenuous, not having eaten much. I deposited the check on California Street and commenced a meandering walk. I was looking for some place to have breakfast, though it was four in the afternoon. I drifted along, feeling semi-transparent while my radar picked up signals from the neighborhood. I was cut loose and hungry and must have considered half a dozen places (one was serving breakfast until four p.m., just missed it). I finally gravitated to a familiar cafe at Geary and Leavenworth. It was deserted. A blonde waitress said it was too late for breakfast. I walked out, stood on the corner, thought about it, and returned. "How about a turkey club?"

It felt preordained that I should end up there with a bored waitress and the place deserted. I ignored her while reading the paper. When I was finished she walked over, attentive with an accent. I asked her where she is from. "Russia… Moscow." In no time we were getting acquainted. Not to put too fine a point on it, but things were feeling pivotal and positive, as if from one hour to the next there was a Russian woman, $2000, and a turkey club.

She seemed to be a woman of substance with a foreign-historical dimension. Real in other words, which hits me from a nice angle. Sometimes it feels like I am living in a two-dimensional frontier exile, and women from the old world are a long-lost connection. It has happened many times, engaging a stranger from another country and we're on a common wavelength which is not easy to come by around here, at least in my experience.

In slow and careful English she told me she has been here for a year and didn't know anyone at first. She has a few friends now, but it's difficult finding work or continuing in college. There was some mention of Mills College in Oakland. She is grateful to have this job, but admitted it is near a rough neighborhood. This is someone with a degree in economics from a university in Moscow, but she said with a wry smile that it doesn't cut it in this country. Russian economics don't translate very well, even in their own country.

We were talking with her slipping in and out of her waitress role, becoming more familiar and relaxed. She said she is actually Lithuanian. Her parents were left behind in Moscow. I asked her what compelled her to come here. She said that was a hard question and required a long answer, but attempted a shorter version.

When I was leaving I gave her my phone number. It didn't seem too forward and she was quick to produce a piece of paper for it, and I went home.

6:30 p.m. I walked to B.'s place, a little late. She looked nice in a black silk skirt with sequins and stockings. We were going to a party near Coit Tower in North Beach. She admits she lives for parties.

I heard more about the doubts and tensions generated by an affair with a woman. She showed me a card which said, "crisis re-orientation," and said they were having more discussions. She wondered if it was worth it. Ambiguity, vibrators, and a lack of trust.
She also said a friend of hers was robbed in New York City.

We caught a cab and glided in a seated position through town, ending up between the docks and an expensive condo complex at the bottom of Telegraph Hill. The corridors were sterile and depressing, as if the views were meant to counteract a boring structure. The place was a few floors up with wood floors and balconies looking over the bay to the east. There was a long

suspension bridge connected to the horizon. We went up on the roof where a few people stood around with hors d'oeuvres and a grill. I brought some wine. The crowd tended to be professionals in their thirties and forties, though it took a while before we talked to anyone. We were having a nice time on our own with a lot of wine and Coit Tower looming overhead in its ghostly 1930's presence.[7]

Things finally loosened up and we talked to an old friend of hers, a Japanese woman in her forties. She is a photojournalist who was in Germany recently. The woman said the last time they saw each other, "We were naked!" (in the shower room). We talked with others for a while, but then B. had to leave, getting picked up by the girlfriend. I went out with her and waited on the sidewalk. We had been there for a couple of hours.[8]

A red and white convertible with black bucket seats pulled up. I got in back and was driven home. They were in a subdued mood. Ilsa said she was tired. B. has been alluding to a certain confusion and/or power struggle between them. They're not sure who is defining the relationship.

I was dropped off at home around ten, and got absorbed in a French film on public TV with Yves Montand (*Jean de Florette*). I have a weakness for the slow historical methodic genius of the French when it comes to films. It went on for hours, with or without my accompaniment on a wooden instrument.

1 a.m. Went out for a bottle of wine, and when I returned I wrote a coffee-and-wine-soaked communiqué to the woman in Vienna. It might be easier if I send her a few volumes of the journal entitled, "Life in California as Described to a Woman in Vienna." She sent a postcard

[7] It resembles the nozzle of a fire hose, and was funded by a wealthy cross-dressing socialite (Lillie Coit) who liked firemen. Someone said the dome at the Palace of Fine Arts resembles a roll-on deodorant, but it was probably not intentional.

[8] She said the man who lives here, and some of the others, found jobs for the mentally retarded.

last month after a long silence. It showed a modern sculpture of angel wings. “You’d like this girl.”

> Please write soon so I can mail a long long letter that explains why I cannot take the trip to the U.S. this year. It is quickly said: I don’t get any day off until Dec.

4 a.m. Went to sleep.

Sunday, Nov. 7, 1993

Not enough sleep by a long shot, with a morning erection picking up the slack. I tried to go back to sleep and couldn’t, and was resigned to being in a semi-brain-dead state. As tends to happen in that condition I had a workout on the wooden instrument. It was breaking through into realms of more facility which makes no sense under the circumstances, unless the nervous system is more present when the mind is not. That presence comes with (guitar) strings attached.

Noon. I went out, running an hour late, and sat in a coffee shop feeling the worse for wear and tear and late-night typing, a bit hung over. I stared at a four-tier wedding cake, and behind it in the window were some wasted derelicts and panhandlers.

I scribbled a few lines:

> One of those mornings where I’m having a Lucien Freud
> showdown with the bathroom mirror. It could be worse,
> it could be Francis Bacon or a Harold Lloyd
> encounter with the facts of life, are they perverse
> or what? The body in a negative direction,
> your awareness of the problem more acute,
> alone with the anomalies and an erection,
> it’s a die-hard. In the mirror is a deaf-mute.

I caught a bus to Marin, running away from my reflection. We stopped at a long suspension bridge[9] with the bus nearly empty. A father, grandmother, and a couple of kids got on. The latter were five or six years old. The little girl went into a loud whine, "I WANT THE WINDOW!", and wouldn't quit. I was not in the mood for this and wondered what was the problem. There were about twenty empty seats with available windows. The conciliatory father offered alternatives, like sitting next to him or the grandmother with a window of her own. The princess was uncompromising and windows were beside the point. She wanted her little brother to not have a window of his own, and to sit by her while she looked out the window. She wanted his seat, in other words, and he had to stay in the adjacent seat so her victory was complete.

I was thinking if she keeps on screaming I may have to launch into a vocalization of my own, maybe "Hound Dog", but the little boy relented and the shrill voice of female misery and oppression was finally quiet. She could now control what was seen in the window with a voice of phony innocence.

Half an hour later I walked through the door of my friends' apartment and found the mother and daughter on the floor. They had the world at their feet in the form of a game board. I sat on the floor, feeling like I left my mind in San Francisco, while the daughter patiently explained the rules. I was playing dumb, which wasn't hard at the moment.

An hour later we were walking on the main street of Larkspur, which was blocked off for a fair. After a while it felt like I was walking through the mock-up of a small town on a movie set, just one of the extras and I didn't know how to act. I lived in small towns when I was a kid, but had the feeling it is something you grow out of. If I am out of sync with much of Northern California, not to sound like a megalomaniac, it might be due to small town atmospheres. There

[9] 20,000 years ago the coastline was 27 miles to the west (where the Farallon Islands are). The San Francisco Bay was a dry valley with a few streams. When the Ice Age was thawing the ocean started to rise until it filled the bay about 8000 years ago.

is downtown San Francisco, but much of it is uninhabited at night as the commuters return to their bedroom communities.

There was a blue-grass combo starting up with one of the Actress's ex-boyfriends on bass. There were friendly people standing around with life insurance up the butt. A quietude with no resistance and they're used to it. A couple of country-fresh co-eds walked by, looking relaxed in tight T-shirts with nothing underneath.

We went to the firehouse to get some helium-filled balloons for Maya. A fireman handed me one and I gave it to her. We ended up with several balloons tied to a glittering wand. She experimented with the gravity of it. I was struck by the stock characters of a small town, being neighborly with the local fireman or policeman. There was a church bizarre (sic) with a few old ladies and a kindness in the air which I'm not used to. I felt like a hired assassin on his day off.

We walked back slowly and headed for the pool in back of their complex. It is near a creek with houseboats. The Actress was not about to touch the water, sitting on a lounge with the paper. I had walked with Maya to pick up the paper a few blocks away. She knew the ways and means, walking in a cotton dress with thin bare legs. She said she is now 66 pounds (about 4'4"), and has luxurious dark hair. She is more brown than her mother, being half-Latina, and has faint dark hairs on her arms and legs which she doesn't like. She told me how mean she is, more than me. I expressed some doubt, saying if she had a little sister she wouldn't be mean to her. She thought about it and said, "No."

On the way back Maya lay her hand on a Mercedes. She did it gingerly, the idea being to set off the alarm. She has a morbid sense of humor, so I said the cars are electrified and people often find a girl on the hood who has been fried. Their mothers say that's what they get. She was laughing, and then pointed out the car she wants, saying she knows how to drive.

We were flipping a quarter back and forth to each other while walking under trees which had a dying sunset in their dry and brittle leaves.

We went to the pool and were in our swimsuits, but it was icy cold. Maya threw a Frisbee into the water and wanted me to get it. I declined. We managed to get our feet wet, becoming numb, and headed for the hot tub (which was sunken into the ground). She showed me how far she could spit. I said something about spitting in the hot tub and she said, "At least I didn't pee!" We got involved in pulling each other back from an imaginary waterfall.

I went into the weight room and returned. Maya chased me around the pool and I dove in. It was kind of refreshing. "Nice dive," she said.

I sat on a lounge next to her mother who asked Maya if we could be alone for a while, she wanted to talk. Her daughter headed for the apartment with a reluctant air. The mother said, "I'm pregnant." I had a premonition a minute before from the look on her face. There was something serious on her mind. We talked for a few minutes, then went over to the hot tub (there was a chill in the air) and continued. She described herself in blunt terms as being forty years old, an out-of-work actress, and a single woman. What did she think she was doing having another kid? And yet she had wanted one for a while. It was three months along. Things fell apart with her fiance a month ago, but she was going ahead with it. She sent him a letter informing him of these developments.

I didn't know what to say. The misery of the last few weeks, not sleeping well and often crying, half-expecting him to call. She couldn't believe that he would walk away from this, and yet she had a hand in driving him away (which she admitted). It's that part which I don't understand, a woman who would take it hard when the man is gone, and yet who made it hard to be together, a connection she had worried and half-choked to death. I thought it was

circumstantial, like they had run aground on mundane circumstances which could be adjusted, or which should have been secondary to the fact of being in love. She had it made with him living in her apartment (where he felt marginalized) and quitting her job while he supported them with a grueling six-day work week. He would come home tired at night, and with no idea what mood she would be in – sometimes resentful if he didn't feel romantic.

He's a nice guy with a background as a poet and he works as a professional chef. Some women might have thought she drove away a good thing. I heard a little more about him. It's like in the law office when you realize your client isn't entirely innocent. He tends to drink and won't talk about some things. It could be worse, but there it is. He has a disturbing family history, for what it's worth. His parents divorced years ago. The father was an alcoholic who died six months ago in an institution. His step-father was abusive to the kids, and killed himself a few years ago.

It could be the two of them are too strong-headed or intense to get along in close circumstances, although they had been for a while. The sex was good, but sooner or later you have to get out of bed.

It was getting dark and we returned to her apartment. I sat on the sofa with Maya who had been watching "I Love Lucy" re-runs. She had her sketchpad out and we were making sketches of each other. Hers were not bad. It wasn't a close resemblance, but there was some attention to my hair, glasses, and eyes. I did one of her and left the face blank. She wanted to fill it in with my features. I did another one with her hand covering her eyes and one eye peering out. I messed up the hand, but she completed the drawing as a composite of the both of us, incorporating my position with my hand at my neck and a sketchy-looking torso. I looked like a mess, but was impressed with her idea of trying to combine the two of us in one figure.

We had a small dinner. There was no mention of a certain missing chef. At one point, talking about microscopes with Maya, I told her what I used to look at when I was a kid (fly wings). She said she had a microscope but couldn't find it. I said, "That's because it's microscopic." She said that was the worst joke she has heard in a long time.

Afterwards we played with a glider. Maya lay on the floor to be the runway. The plane swooped in and barely missed. Then I was on the floor. This segued into the balloons, with one of them headed for the high ceiling which angled upwards to a height of two stories (we retrieved it with a broom). We figured out how to float a pencil in mid-air with several helium balloons tied on. I had an idea involving a Styrofoam cup I had on the bus. I had drawn a hung-over alien on it, shooting himself with his finger. I punched three holes near the rim. She was onto the concept in a second and tied the three balloons to it like a little basket for a hot air balloon. We let it go. It hovered in the air and then rose slowly to the ceiling. For the next half hour we kept putting different lightweight objects in the cup, trying to get it to hover in mid-air. It finally did, with one dead leaf and a penny.

7 p.m. We went out, drove a few blocks, and rented a movie that all of us could watch. I suggested something by Monte Python, but we ended up with *Groundhog Day*.

It was okay, touching on my old preoccupation with time and repetition. A man finds he is living the same day over and over again with the same encounters and circumstances occurring no matter what he does. He can't get out of it, which is eventually depressing and claustrophobic. His efforts to kill himself don't work either, he keeps waking up with the same song on the radio. The point is there's a woman who thinks he is a jerk (she's a sentimental perfectionist) because he is ("Want to come over and help me with my pelvic tilt?"), but only in winning her love can he break out of the dreary cycle of a life on hold. It got sentimental at the end, but there was the

suggestion that some people's psychological states are from a repeating 24-hour cycle. They are cynical, bored, and act like they know what's coming next, or they don't care about the consequences of their actions since they will begin the next day all over again. Some are trapped in a phenomenological merry-go-round while others become saint-like. The repetition has worn them down like stones in a river, and they don't question their existence.

When it was over Maya made a last effort at collaborating on something. That reminds me, when I first arrived she brought me into her room with a pink bed and clutter and dolls everywhere. She used to have a rat named Betty, but it died. Now there is a small bird in a cage. Pretty with clipped wings. She carefully took it out of the cage while wearing purple gloves. She got it to stand on her hand, holding it down near her stomach and said I should pet it. The soft feathers of a nervous bird. I said we should let it walk on the floor. There was a flurry of wings, but it couldn't fly so it just stood there.

9:30 p.m. Maya had to go to sleep and was sulking a bit. I was out on the balcony with her mother having a cigarette, the first one in hours. The mother commented, "You're not smoking!" I said I was relaxed around them. There was a comment which I've heard before, that I seem happy. It's the oddest thing when you realize the weeks and months have been halfway buoyant and you're not sure why. It's like I'm in denial[10] or have gravitated to a deeper perspective. Given all the things that could be going wrong or which would constitute real misery I don't have much to complain about. The cup is half full instead of half empty (there's a dead leaf and a penny in it).

[10] Some people think I should be miserable from lacking certain commodities, including a car, while living on a low income in a lousy neighborhood. But having fewer possessions and no monthly payments is less of a burden on the spirit. When I'm close to the "unbearable lightness of being" there is always the leaden news and sand bags full of typographic letters for ballast.

Corollary: A review in the *New York Review of Books* on a memoir by the poet James Merrill, with some mention of writing as something you do without ulterior motives, or something you're caught up in because life is "so absorbing" – all the more so when you think about it, and I tend to think on a typewriter.

> A literary category much more common in Europe than in America depends on its unliterary charm. The author seems to take being a writer as a purely social phenomenon, without either the trouble of a sought-for vocation or the wish to make money by writing books. He writes as he might eat good food, wear good clothes, visit the right people and the right places. Sometimes a writer like Byron or Pushkin, who half despises the medium his genius compels him to work in, makes a nostalgic gesture towards the other sort of gentlemanly life he would half prefer to be living. "I hate a fellow who's all author," said Byron….
>
> The opposite attitude toward the literary vocation – or was it really quite the opposite? was taken by Robert Lowell when he spoke of himself in a poem as "one life, one writing." One suspects that what Lowell really meant was that his life was so absorbing to him – its ancestry, its relationships, its social detail….

I would change a few words, but that comes close to how I see it. I might visit the wrong people or wear the wrong clothes, but that doesn't interfere with the medium my pathological overdrive compels me to work in. As for the "gentlemanly life," I would rather be a musician.

Where was I. On a balcony and looking at a wooded hill with constellations overhead. The daughter returned a few minutes later, bare-legged in a long T-shirt and looking sleepy. She had a look which suggested she is counting the days until she has an apartment of her own and can entertain her gentleman callers without interruption and not have to stop at 9:30 p.m. When shutting the sliding door she said she could smell my smoke. I wasn't sure about that as her bed was a couple of rooms away and there were homes with fireplaces in the vicinity. I turned to her mother and said, "The princess and the pea?" "Exactly."

I left half an hour later, walking a few blocks to the bus stop. The street was quiet and deserted. The lingering heat was snapped off like a dry branch and now it's cold. I rode in a glass bus to the window city.

11 p.m. I walked home through the terminal gravity of the Tenderloin.

Monday, Nov. 8, 1993

Typing… went to work… walked home.

7:30 p.m. Phone call from B. We had a long conversation with most of it about her affair. The two of them are out of sync, with duplicities on both sides. They are used to being in control, and each of them is trying to control the agenda. Ilsa objects to B. "coming out" just because of her - she doesn't want to be responsible for that. More to the point, she is having second thoughts because, as B. put it so delicately, things are not working out in bed. Ilsa may be satisfied, but there is some reason to believe that B. isn't, who won't say the word orgasm or climax, but alludes to it like a missing chord. You would think it's her business, and no reason for the other woman to walk away. It would be like a man saying to a woman, "You don't come when we're having sex so I think we should break up."

We hear so much about the vagaries of female sexual response. B. said it isn't easy for her, especially when she doesn't feel at ease with someone. You would think another woman would understand this, or realize it might require some patience. She sees it as a negative comment on her lovemaking skills, and a sign of B.'s compromised involvement.

B. said she sympathizes with men, not having realized what they go through when having affairs with women. Now she knows what it's like. They sleep with someone who has X-ray intuition on the one hand and duplicities on the other. B. admits she wants to keep her options

open. I said it's not surprising if her girlfriend doubts her if she's keeping one foot out of the affair. Ilsa can sense if it isn't 100 percent. B. said she's not used to giving that to anyone.

She referred to some women I know whose affairs don't get off the ground unless they're in control. It leaves a man with a choice: either a controlling woman or nothing. Given a man's libido and whatever resemblance to love it has he might accept those terms. The determination of the woman might seem charming, but it doesn't stop until a man has no more say than a head on the wall. The downside for those women is when they end up with men who are weaker than they might want, but the stronger ones are harder to control. There are men who prefer a relationship without a lot of friction and competition in it. There are women who get off on arguments and drama. The man is a scratching post on which they can sharpen their claws. They're disappointed when a man won't fight and walks out, tired of the strife.

I read somewhere that Bette Davis had bad luck with men. There was a statement that none of them was "man enough" for her. She was known for being strong-willed and argumentative with a quick tongue. A lot of men aren't looking for that in a love affair. They want something more relaxing than a twelve-round bout or a midnight debate, but that is what some women want. Drama, sparks, someone to test their limits on, tired of their own amorphous flux.

In what sense was no one man enough for Bette Davis? Did she wear them down with her egomania? It may have been a turn-off. Were they not passionate enough? That could mean she had an endless capacity for making love, or didn't feel much and was hard to satisfy. What happens when she is alone with all the men "defeated" and there is no one man enough or childish enough for her temper? It sounds like an empty victory. From the imperious to the Pyrrhic with a few hysterics thrown in.

10 p.m. A documentary about World War II. A fast-moving synopsis with the Germans caught up in a Hitlerian momentum which got stuck in one gear and drove off a cliff. It was a French production with a different perspective on the war. There was footage I haven't seen before and some I have. It seems to be a limited supply. You would think there is more of it in the military archives of various countries, but too brutal for public viewing. And yet the concentration camps are shown.

The Nazis went through the French military like a knife through a croissant. When it comes to guns and butter the French opted for the latter. You wonder about their collaboration before the German invasion, there being so much of it after the fact. The military refused any involvement with tanks and planes. *Bonne idee*. There was a shot of Maurice Chevalier entertaining the troops, and maybe that was demoralizing. It is said that the French in World War II were prepared for World War I.

When Paris was liberated, De Gaulle walked in with an ego as big as the Arc de Triomphe and gave a speech about "eternal France," and how the French had struggled to drive out the foe. There was some mention that the Resistance numbered approximately 140,000 people (of whom 20,000 or 30,000 died). This in a country with 40,000,000 people (subtracting the Jews who were turned in by the thousands).[11] Not mentioned in the documentary was the French belief that the Americans took too long getting into the war and stayed too long when it was over. I remember hearing that when I was there in the 1970's.[12]

The casualty rate is hard to fathom. Troop losses in a few days on the Russian front were equal to the body count of American soldiers in Vietnam over a period of ten years.

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[11] See *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1969) by Marcel Ophuls, about French collaboration in World War II. It was banned in France for years.

[12] I may have overstayed my welcome since Simone and I were in Europe for a year.

It was fortunate the errors and the wrong turns Hitler made. He could have consolidated his gains and left the Soviet Union alone.[13] He would have controlled most of the territory from Morocco to Norway. He could have concentrated the enormous forces he threw at the Soviet Union on England which would have gone under. Or he could have left it in a highly compromised state which was forced to collaborate. He could have annexed portions of the Soviet Union. There were Russians who were sympathetic to the Germans, thinking they were being liberated from Stalin. It is hard to get the support of those you're lining up against the wall and shooting.[14]

He wanted the vast supply of raw materials in the Soviet Union, but when you control most of Europe you would have the means to purchase raw materials – and would need less of them if you slow down the war machine.

There was more footage of the concentration camps. A man of skin and bone was in hollow-eyed shock while being carefully led away by a liberating soldier. They dumped the dead into a pit. A bulldozer pushing a pile of bodies is more than offensive, but there was a reason for a quick burial. The bulldozer seemed like the brute force of the war machine itself. An image can hit you in the stomach and words like "pathos" or "disturbing" fall short. You're nothing but a mute witness to the fact of something which is outside your usual frame of reference. A man dragged a thin dead woman along the ground. Her lifeless bony legs were like a fallen marionette. Someone cut the strings of life. It's all the more elemental with her being naked at the edge of the pit and unceremoniously thrown into it, sliding down and landing amongst the other bodies, their arms and legs flung wide in a lifeless gesture. How fragile is the modesty of men and women when it comes to war.

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[13] I later learned the extent to which the Third Reich was funded by international banks to contain if not defeat the communist revolution in the Soviet Union. As such it had to invade, however risky it was.
[14] *Come and See* (1985), a war film from the Soviet Union.

Germany lost 1 in 10 of its people - approximately 3,000,000 soldiers and 300,000 civilians.[15]

Technological advances come about because of war, and some economies are rejuvenated in the process. Germany and Japan were bouncing back in the post-war years. It took a while, but they constructed an industrial base on the ruins of an atavistic power structure, while incorporating foreign investment with its own interest in seeing reformed versions of those countries come into their own. It was a huge benefit not having a defense budget.

Wars are business and that includes the use of mercenary soldiers,[16] a custom which is old as the hills. There are veterans panhandling on the streets of this country while El Salvador was given $100,000,000 a year for its military.[17]

Tuesday, Nov. 9, 1993

12:30 p.m. I met V. at the office. She didn't want to go to Old St. Mary's Church because there were opera singers on the program. They don't do much for her.

We ended up at a clean well-lighted place for bread. It turned into a sterile excursion. I would have preferred the opera and a burrito, but instead we got a lot of store windows. I accompanied her to a "petite" shop where I wasn't much help. It felt effete, wandering through a concrete structure shot through with escalators. We dropped into a place where a few young

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[15] I wonder if humans have absorbed the laws of nature which include the most ruinous earthquakes, fires, floods, and hurricanes, and if they have an unconscious urge to replicate that sort of thing by way of war. They are playing God, or maybe they're just close to nature (which has nothing to do with humanism). Vast forces are summoned which control life and death along with thunder and lightning bolts. In revenge for their mortality the humanoids control who lives and dies. Clouds of smoke move across the sky. There are fast-moving hot and cold fronts. Metaphors of the weather are used in a military context. A lightning strike. A rain of death. Storm troops. The dead go back to the land. The S.S. had a logo of a skull and a lightning bolt.

[16] Major General Smedley Butler, *War is a Racket* (1935)

[17] The black community could use that kind of funding. If used for scholarships it would mean 10,000 students getting $10,000 a year to go to school.

businessmen stood in futuristic modules wearing sci-fi headgear with tubes. They had stuck their heads into a virtual reality, like putting your head into a video game. One of them watched a screen with his hand on a ray gun. When the ray gun was lifted the one on the screen lifted in another dimension of computer-kitsch platforms in a void. You shoot at a robot until it explodes. The businessman was going through the motions of stalking his prey with an artificial stealth.

$5.00 for four minutes. I wasn't interested. The artificial gives me claustrophobia, particularly when it's strapped to your head. I would rather be in a church. The sunlight is filtered through stained-glass windows but it's real, and the music is infinitely better.

5 p.m. I left work and against my better judgment I headed for a department store near Union Square. It's like sticking your head into a plastic bag. After a few minutes there is a lack of oxygen going to the brain and you're communing with the mannequins. It can affect your judgment when you're trying on pants. The mirror rules in such an atmosphere. You see yourself reflected from different angles. It is tedious beyond belief, trying on clothes. And going by the men who work there, if you spend too much time in a department store it makes you homosexual.

"Steel blue" corduroys. A gray rayon shirt. A black leather shoulder bag. I left it all on hold and walked home.

Reading the paper. There was a controversy about jury selection. "Blacks and the elderly are systematically excluded from serving on San Mateo County juries, attorneys for three black murder defendants contended in court yesterday." Excluded or excused is a fine point here. "Virtually everyone 70 or older who asks for an excusal is given one as a matter of course." And five percent of the potential jurors should be black, but "only 3.6 percent of summoned jurors

were black." That doesn't seem like a lot of people, but here's the punch line: "The under-representation of blacks stems from a lack of response to mailed jury summons." How does that translate into "excluded" if people refuse to respond? I'm waiting for an accusation of discrimination.

Who are the good people who are challenging this unjust situation? The older defendant was "convicted of second-degree murder for stabbing an acquaintance." Would black and/or elderly jurors go lighter on such a defendant? I'm not sure about that. A lot of black people are sick to death of the crime in their neighborhoods (as well as the assumption that blacks and crime are a natural combination). The second defendant is a thirty-one-year-old woman "charged in a grand jury indictment with killing two people and attempting to kill a third during three separate robberies." And a twenty-year-old man is "charged with two drug-related killings and with raping and attempting to kill the girlfriend of one of the victims." If there were more blacks on the jury they might get off?[18]

The attorney for the convicted older man (who is paid by the State) was challenging the jury selection process and asked that his conviction and sentencing be overturned on that basis. "The jury composition challenge contends that the defendant's constitutional rights of due process are jeopardized by an unrepresentative jury pool." One reason for it being unrepresentative is that black people were ignoring their civic duty.

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[18] Years later I was on a jury for a case involving a fight between two black men. The defendant was charged with assault with intent to kill. He stabbed a man in the chest and it was close to the heart. We nearly had a hung jury with the deliberation going on for days. There were several black people on the jury and it was interesting to hear about their lives and why they thought the defendant was innocent or not. One by one they gradually came around to a decision of guilt, except for a woman who said she thought too many black men are in prison and she didn't want to send another one there. Never mind that the victim was black and nearly died. We broke for the weekend and when we reconvened on Monday she said she changed her mind. We were relieved and asked her why. She witnessed a stabbing in her neighborhood over the weekend and realized how bad it is to stab someone.

Wednesday, Nov. 10, 1993

Morning rain, with a further typographical downpour inside.

Phone call from B. We talked about cosmic orgasm, and some bargains on coats that I should look into.

Went to work in the afternoon.

We have a white client who lives in my old neighborhood (a few blocks from Alcatraz). He keeps a 9 mm pistol by his bed. He was cleaning it or putting in one round before he went to sleep and the gun went off. The bullet went through the wall and into the next apartment where his landlord lives. The landlord wasn't hit, but it got his attention - the hole in the wall, the bullet on the floor. The police were summoned. The defendant is thirty-two and was convicted of a felony twelve years before (assault with a deadly weapon – a broken beer bottle). He's an ex-felon with a gun. That's one charge. The other is reckless endangerment. He's looking at 120 days swap (picking up garbage and probation). He also has to pay $2000 a month in child support (three kids).

I walked home at night with the rain having let up. The streets were dark and wet and looked like volcanic glass. I was on Nob Hill and passed a "For Rent" sign. I thought I would have a look. A few minutes later I was standing in front of the manager's door. There were a few words underneath the peephole:

OCCUPANT IS ARMED

INTRUDERS WILL BE SHOT

Howdy neighbor and all of that. I stood against the wall with my hands where he could see them. A suspicious man in a T-shirt, thin and old, answered the door. The room had a murky atmosphere with a fish tank and a hidden wife. He realized I was there to look at an apartment

and he turned friendly. I get the impression that this country is polarized between Mickey Mouse and Mickey Spillane. Smile or die.

There was a notice in the hall: "How to survive in an apartment building." It was a younger guy who showed me the apartment - a studio. The place was built in 1907 (a year after the earthquake). I was figuring all the angles, especially the natural light, and had a waning interest. I like to have alternative floor plans floating in my head. My mind is full of empty rooms.

Thursday, Nov. 11, 1993 (Veterans Day)

Sometimes I experiment with my metabolism, getting lots of sleep. One beer in five days and hardly any coffee at night. The mornings are refreshing and relaxed, not having put a strain on the night before. The morning had an angle of light I'm not familiar with because it was so early. There was a streak of light on the white tile next to the kitchen sink. I have some prismatic disks on the windows, and they break up the light into spectral blurs which are thrown around the room. I read the lighting on the walls.

I have been here over half a year, during which time the position of the sun has shifted. One day it was coming through the windows from a different angle (wrote angel). I like the idea of a building which functions as a sun dial, if not a kind of Stonehenge. There are special effects that come with living here, illuminated side-effects which are a luxury. It is a dilapidated neighborhood, and yet inside a corner apartment sunlight redefines the objects from an angle of the precious. A cut-glass candelabra on the table throws off sparks like a diamond.[19]

[19] A man who makes chandeliers lives on the top floor of this building.

The shade was pulled down a little, but the wrist of someone on the typewriter was solarized, a white-hot sleight of hand. A thin blue smoke was rising from my cigarette while I lifted a glass of water with a flashing gesture. I thought there was lipstick on the coffee cup, but it was red light. How sublimated can you get?

Is it better to have one room with eight windows or eight rooms with one window?

Later in the afternoon the light was coming through a tree in front of the windows. It flickered when a breeze went through the tree. It is a breathing entity which is effective when I'm in a primal state. The sunlight, like a lysergic force field, turns ordinary objects into something scintillating and priceless. I prefer that to colonizing a room with expensive objects.

Meanwhile, I'm living in a tale of two construction sites. One is next door (under the kitchen window), and the other is across the street. It is a heavy-duty site with a boarded walkway and flatbed trucks which back in and unload a crane. FOUNDATION CONSTRUCTORS. The brace stands are pulled out. Another truck unloaded an extension of the crane that doubled its length, rising about six stories.

The heavy equipment is hard to ignore, especially when it pounds a forty-foot column into the ground. The column is carefully leaned into a metal contraption. A metal bar is shut on it and two men in hard hats with their arms around it guide this slowly swinging monstrosity to a hole. The crane lifts the long pounding device with the hole a few feet deep and begins pounding it slowly, a few inches at a time. Dust and smoke. Metal on metal. A pounding in my head. It clears my head by chasing away most thoughts and ideas.

I have an inordinate respect for this sort of thing and how it's done. The seemingly clumsy equipment is operated with the most fine-tuned calculations. Split-hair surveying tools

and measurements. A couple of days ago the dirt lot had a delicate look with a grid of floating string across it. It came down and the tonnage rolled in.

Now they're pounding a long column into the ground with a pile driver. I had a sinking feeling when another truck drove up with another load of those, like twenty more columns will be driven into the ground. They lifted one of them off the truck. It was tilting with one end up and a wrap-around cord. If it broke it would fall across the street, crushing a parked car and maybe a pedestrian. A hard hat wouldn't help.

There is another empty lot next door, and it has been cleared. The workmen have struggled for days with some broken concrete foundations which are partly buried (like Roman ruins, except they're not). There's a man in an iron mask with a blowtorch. The neighborhood is throwing off sparks. The empty lot was frequented by derelicts and junkies who were followed by construction workers. When they're done it will be crawling with children.

The evolution of heavy equipment like a process of natural selection. Monstrous and reptilian if not insect-like machines move around with a special function. That function is followed by a form with follow-ups of dirt and smoke. There are Darwinian variations. The machines have evolved outlandish claws or blades and armor. An older man, thick set, bandana around his balding head, cigar clenched in his teeth, was pushing the dirt around with a bulldozer by pulling the levers.[20] Half of the workmen have long hair and some have beards. If they didn't know what they were doing they wouldn't be here. They are black, Latino, Asian, white and maybe one is Native American with his hair in a long dark braid. I am struck by the sophisticated contributions that construction workers make to modern life, and yet they are looked down on.[21]

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[20] R. Crumb would have a field day if he hung around this neighborhood with a sketchpad. He could give da Vinci a run for his money when it comes to physiognomies.

[21] A few years ago I worked on the 22nd floor of a glass and steel tower in the financial district. There was a construction site nearby which I would pass on the way to work. It was a muddy and chaotic mess, out

Native Americans are known for being able to work in high-rise skeletal constructions without a fear of heights. They are also known for being close to the earth. Maybe they are close to the sky and grounded in themselves. I wonder how those other high-rise towers were built (not to mention the Golden Gate Bridge) if white men don't have a similar capacity for walking on air (assisted by a floating girder).

Closer to the ground a chubby prostitute was walking by a flatbed truck. OVER SIZE LOAD. She makes a living as a receptacle for semen, though it's modified by prophylactics. Her thighs rub together without a spark. The whores and hard hats in this neighborhood. The other night I was walking home and there were water department trucks on the street with the workmen standing around and staring at a hooker on the corner. She was strutting her stuff. "Great tits." She was more lyrical than a hole in the ground or sewer pipes.

A metallic pounding sound, and the radio with "Hotel California." Is November ringing hollow or is it California? (I've been reading Joan Didion.)

Typing for hours.

Phone call in the afternoon from the estranged fiancé of the Actress. He had just received her letter which was seven pages of venom directed at him. He is to blame for everything. She reinterpreted a number of things, including conversations, from this angle while absolving herself. He is the worst thing that ever happened to her. He is out of her life, but at the same time let him know that she is going to have his baby.

It was that part which he couldn't for the life of him understand. A month or two ago she requested money for an abortion and he gave it to her. They were sinking further into what looks

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of which a feat of engineering would emerge with every floor a clean well-lighted place. I mentioned this to some women in the office and they responded like a princess when confronted by a dirty worker. They were sitting pretty in an insulated office which he built, but acknowledging that was beneath them or beyond their comprehension.

like a terminal estrangement. Now he finds out she wants to have the child. He doesn't know who it will be worse for, her or him, and noted the very things that she acknowledged to me – her being forty, unemployed, and single with a ten-year-old daughter.

What has him worried is the suspicion of a set-up. His two sisters, mother, and a woman friend have stated in no uncertain terms that she is taking him for a ride and using him, like they know how other women operate and what they're capable of. A woman told him that most women don't get pregnant by accident, they know what they're doing. So how intentional is all of this? It's one thing if they're incompatible, with some inherent contradictions on both sides, but another if he has to support a child for the next twenty years, having had no decision in the matter.

Her letter absolved him of any responsibility, which is fine with him, but he thinks that after the child is born or in a couple of years he will receive a letter from the court. No matter what the circumstances are the biological father is still responsible financially, with the court considering the right of a child to be supported. It happened to a friend of his. A woman can sleep with a man and tell him she's on birth control, but with the intention of having a kid. She doesn't want the man around, just the court-ordered support payments every month.

He already sends money to a woman in Oregon (with a three-year old son). I said he should talk to an attorney and not get all worked up before the fact. Maybe she means it, that he is absolved from any involvement. He suggested that I talk to her. I said, "Do you have any idea what that would be like? A man suggesting to a pregnant woman who is intent on having the child, and has informed her daughter of the fact, that maybe she should think twice about it?"

We knocked it around a bit, looking at it from different angles. There was some mention of how "objective" I was being, but I'm not sure how he meant that. I'm walking a fine line here, having two friends who aren't speaking.

I was sitting on the bathroom floor with a pounding in my head, but it's quieter in there. A cigarette and a glass of apple juice on the white tile. He said he's moving to the city - his career is taking off and hers isn't.

This was holding my attention because the issues involved are fundamental. The electro-magnetic force of love is something to be reckoned with and not taken lightly. It has the power to wreck your life or recognize it. It can take months or longer to recover and get on with life, which she is doing by being pregnant. Human beings are born in worse circumstances, wanted or not. You could be in the middle of a war-torn country and there are kids running around or walking slowly.

I've been preoccupied for a long time with the lost and found of love. It transcends the law. One of the worst pains a man or woman can endure is a break up and you can't even sue. A love affair is like lysergic acid in its visionary transformation and disorientation and a come down which can leave you feeling drained. Many people enter into it with little training and less formality. I can see the point of older times when some formality went hand-in-hand with the process of a man and woman being together. It acknowledged the powerful currents they were engaging. The formality is a form of insulation for a high-voltage current and is meant to secure the connection. Otherwise, you end up with downed power lines lashing about and someone gets hurt.

I got off the phone and listened to the pounding metal like the heartbeat of the city. A shudder ran through the floor. I walked into the engine room study. All hell was breaking loose

with the pile driver going, the radio throbbing with some heavy metal, a jackhammer down the street, and the drone of earth-moving equipment (the kind my grandfather used to operate when he couldn't fly anymore). The hum of an electric typewriter was lost in the commotion. Blue smoke drifted by the window.

Late afternoon. I turned on the amplifier and plugged in the Strat. I thought I would have a slow beat which filled the neighborhood with an echoing rhythm, but they quit. I cut loose for a while.

Phone call from B. "What are you doing?" I tore off a riff on the guitar, then turned it off and we talked for a while. Her girlfriend sent her instructions on the methods of Tantric sex. She feels pressured, like this German woman is intent on producing a spark in her. She said, "You hit the nail on the head," with respect to a conversation we had the other day. I said maybe this is more about her girlfriend's ego. If B. is not going over the brink in bed the girlfriend takes it personally.

B. still bemoans that it was simpler being with a man. Her stomach hurts and she doesn't want to think about it. I said something about contemplating her navel. She said she would rather contemplate mine. I said she couldn't see it, and she said she could imagine.

We were supposed to meet on a tennis court this afternoon (nice weather, cool, some wind), but there were social complications with another person. "More stupid nonsense! How do I get myself into these things?!" I was going to tell her, but she sounded stressed already.

5:30 p.m. Instead of the news I went out for a typewriter ribbon, cigarette papers, and bread.

[More pounding while I'm writing this on Friday morning. Shudders running through my hair, which might explain the state of my hair. It reminds me of something I never had much

interest in: a quiet retreat for writers. A cottage in a sylvan glade… (the ribbon just ran out, but I had a premonition and have a backup)… where they're not distracted by life, and sit there while some lifeless muses rest gently on their shoulders. I don't operate like that. The muse in here is more like a winged lion with a metallic serpent's tail and when it has a grip on your shoulder you know it. When it's too quiet it feels like a retirement home, and squirrels are not a source of inspiration. I'm not sure other writers are either (I mean in person). The disembodied residue they leave behind might be. All things considered, I prefer working alone to a writers' commune. Consider the dark side of the commune.]

I could do with a little less pounding however. External construction vs. my internal deconstruction. Not that I am falling apart in here.

Thursday evening took an interesting turn, having weathered an hour of vaguely tense depression. I was feeling the isolation, and not sure what direction the evening would take. Late afternoon is transitional and you're up in the air. I usually drift right through it, being in the office or walking home. I had the day off though and was confronted with it. I went out and brought home something for dinner. That altered things. I was then confronted with plans for the evening. Tearing loose in a loud primordial sound-room with a friend or drifting into a finer-tuned and introspective concentration via *The New York Review of Books*.

I opted for the latter. It turned into one of those rarified interludes where I'm caught up in the mental force field of what I'm reading and there is hardly any need for coffee and cigarettes. It went on for a couple of hours, which is saying something. Lately my attention span has been falling short. I was engaging the gears of esoteric subjects, and found a long article on the man

who introduced Coleridge to laughing gas: the chemist Humphrey Davy.[22] It was 1799 and Davy altered his consciousness with large amounts of nitrous oxide.

The *Review* has an eclectic range. It stretches your mind in unforeseen directions, with the underlying assumption that nothing human is foreign to you. I wandered from the history of California to Genet, *Ulysses*, and tunnels in Chicago in a previous issue. This time around there was chemistry in the 1700's, Jewish theology, the poet James Merrill, and Gore Vidal on Edmund Wilson. I was stretching my cerebral luck.

Friday, Nov. 12, 1993

I woke up so early there was practically a prehistoric light in the window, like the dawn of man. I felt primitive, and it's alarming when it comes naturally. 7:30 in the morning is a new frontier for me.

Typing for hours.

I called V. in the office to verify our usual Friday lunch. The last time I did this I got Maria who said,

> "You know who this is?"
> "Of course."
> "What will you give me if I put her on?"
> "Anything you want."
> "A simple thank you will do."

I was talking with V. who has a lot of virtues, but patience isn't one of them. I have suggested we take her pulse and find out how fast her heart beats. It might be like a little bird. She does not like being compared to a sparrow. (I could feel her pulse, but that would have other connotations.) She does know her blood pressure. Anyhow she said, "Come here now! Go with

[22] Oliver Sacks, "The Poet of Chemistry," *The New York Review of Books* (Nov. 4, 1993)

me to Oakland." She doesn't beat around the bush. "If you're not here by 12 I'll leave you." It was 11:15 a.m., but I was tired of the pounding and didn't mind vacating the premises.

It occurred to me for the hundredth time that there is an unwritten rule. You can hurry a man but you can't hurry a woman. What's that old line – a man takes five minutes and a woman takes forever.

Shower, shave, put on some basic slacks and shirt and I'm out the door. I was walking behind some guy in a black leather jacket with white script saying MOVING GODS. Not sure what he meant by that, a white man with short hair in his twenties. A minute later there was a girl/woman with her bosom swinging in a T-shirt which said BODY EQUAL. What would happen if the two collided? Do moving bodies equal god?

In the back of the bus I glanced out the window. There was a street nomad looking like an extra from a movie showing only in his head. I think it was a sci-fi end-of-the-world film, where destitution is a virtue and delirium is the better part of valor. He wore a black football helmet pushed back on his head with a metal face guard and blue futuristic sunglasses. A thick dirty matted beard, army fatigues, a rope tied around his legs, and clumsy makeshift boots. He was pushing a shopping cart down the sidewalk. Who knows what post-hallucinogenic desert he is walking in, like he got too close to the sun and it burned his links to cause and effect and any education he may have had.

Noon. I arrived in the office and was impressed that I was on time. Turned out she wasn't ready. I hung around for an hour, reading the paper[23] and giving her a hand with the complaint against the City of Oakland (a man was jumped by security guards at a baseball game). She has

[23] An article about women in college. They now outnumber men 7,500,000 to 6,200,000. A fair amount of social engineering and affirmative action went into "correcting" the imbalance when men outnumbered women in college. What are they going to do now? When are they going to correct the imbalance of men in prison, men who live on the streets, and women who live longer than men?

no confidence in her writing skills, but will tell me how much she likes to talk, moving her fingers like a rapid mouth and making a bird sound. She laughs at herself sometimes, even when it comes to nagging her boyfriend.

Speaking of women who are pressed for time, the other day there was a baby in the office. I said something about how interested the women were, like they all wanted one. She said, "Of course," and her as well. She made a motion with her finger like a minute hand going around and said, "Tick… tick… tick…." I have a hard time taking her seriously about how old she feels, having just turned twenty-six, but I suppose it's relative and related to giving birth.

Finally we were out of there, with her apologizing. Her desk was covered with files and projects. "I'm… going… crazy!" Not only that, her wisdom tooth hurts. I don't know if that had anything to do with her being more familiar, but it seemed to be eroding her defenses. We were getting along like a couple of long-lost friends.

We dropped into a place for a quick lunch. I mentioned the trial in the paper. I like to get her perspective on things, not only as a woman but someone who finds this country odd and generally avoids the news. A few days ago I asked her what she thought of fourteen-year-old girls who sleep with a man because they thought he was from outer space. She had no sympathy for them. I ran a censored version by the ten-year-old daughter of the Actress, asking her what she thought of a fourteen-year-old girl who meets a man who tells her he's from outer space and she believes it. "That's so dumb." V. was not impressed with the women suing the weight loss doctor for having induced or enticed, if not seduced, them. The amount - $140,000,000 - hardly registered on her senses (or mine).

She has an avid curiosity about the woman who cut off her husband's cock and threw it away. What I like about her (V., not the woman on the cutting edge of sanity), she's not

dogmatic and has a skeptical reaction to this sort of thing. She is not on either side. He was found not guilty by a jury of nine women and three men on charges of rape-related marital assault. The jury pointed out there was not much evidence. It was too circumstantial. If it was so traumatic as to warrant his mutilation how come there were no signs of a struggle, and no one heard anything next door? There were allegations that he had done the same thing a few days before. If that is true, then why was she still living with him? He might get the impression nothing is wrong. There was even a statement she gave that he didn't satisfy her sexually. I'm not sure how that fits in. She wasn't satisfied, so the sex was later redefined as assault?

It would hardly justify what she did. I am more interested in people's reactions to the case than this dreary couple. There is a knee-jerk tendency to see it as a valid cause and effect: whatever he did, her actions were justified. They were both on trial and looking at twenty-year sentences (that doesn't sound right), but it's a false equivalence. I read some harpy in the paper who approved of what this woman did. It was just a matter of removing an offensive object.

Imagine the trial:

"When did you first realize your husband was a jerk?"

"Did you cut it off because you were sexually frustrated and have the self-centered assumption that there couldn't be anything wrong with you because you are a goddess?

"Did anyone ever tell you that too much ego can make a woman frigid?"

"When you took it with you and drove away and threw it out the window, did you think you were destroying the evidence?"

"Are you really that dumb?"

"Did anyone tell you that you're not in Ecuador anymore?"

"Does your being good with a knife compensate for being a lousy judge of character?"

Where was I? We walked to the underground monorail and sat near a couple of babies in a stroller (twins). She had a comment about how much work it would be giving birth to those. “I would explode!” - and try to put one back.

There were her usual comments about the women in the office. Their ages range from eighteen to fifty-something, and they get on her nerves. I’m pretty solid with Ruth, the Jewish woman, but V. is shocked by her language, her moodiness, and her lack of respect for the attorney they work for. Ruth is sardonic, but she goes to the opposite extreme with her sentimental sympathies for horses and the homeless. V. asked me to go with her to City Hall, not comfortable with the bums, and the older woman reprimanded her. “They’re homeless, they’re not bums. Bums is derogatory.” I wasn’t sure about that. There is a wide spectrum of people on the streets, and “bums” would characterize some of them. I said that more than one woman has called me a bum, or said I looked like one (some of my clothes are old).

We glided through a tunnel underneath the bay and surfaced near the docks in Oakland. We left the train at 12th Street. We were still in the station and she remembered an old refrain between us. “Which way is north?” I said I had no idea since we were underground and Oakland has some messed-up city planning.

We were walking with long shadows in front of us. I said that west is behind us, that being where the sun will go down in an hour or so. She said, “Does it always set in the west?” I looked at her like was she out of her mind. No, sometimes it goes down somewhere else just to fool everyone and throw the entire planet off. She is so attuned to her immediate practical concerns, and thinks I am out of touch with reality since I don’t know how to iron and waste my time writing things without being paid, and yet she doesn’t know the sun goes down in the west. That’s along with having no sense of direction.

We walked a couple of blocks to the office of the city clerk. Neither one of us knew where we were going, but we got there. The building was pretty ordinary. Then we walked about six blocks to the courthouse, filing a settlement conference statement. That wasn't so edifying either.

I could see her point about feeling out of place in Oakland. It's not like when you cross the border into Mexico and realize you're in another dimension, linguistically and otherwise, but it is different. Most of the people we saw were black. Many of them are low income, but there are glass and steel towers downtown. They seemed to be out of sync, like a new Cadillac outside of a rundown house. I want to know more about the economic forces which affect the black community.[24]

My experience of this town is limited. I sometimes get lost over here, and have the feeling it's not all there. Every other day there is a homicide, the majority of which are black-on-black. There was a disturbing statistic that black people in this country kill more blacks every year then were ever lynched (approximately 6,000).[25] Like it isn't hard enough to catch a moving Eurocentric train, jumping on it from the ground. Not all of them are jumping on, and some fall off when they're around the bend.

Some of the hardship of being black is having other black people to worry about. That sounds presumptuous coming from a white man, but I don't know how else to put it, and the

[24] There was something in the air, maybe apathy and anomie, along with Public Enemy. The black professionals want to pull it together but it's a struggle. For one thing, there are gangs. The Democratic Party assumes it has the hearts and minds of black voters, but some of them are in love with thugs. From the threatening poses and the pompous yelling speeches to a certain anti-Semitism, you would think it's Mussolini time (he liked Fats Domino, but he bombed the Ethiopians).

[25] White people kill that many whites every year (approximately), but are a much larger portion of the population. In addition, blacks kill around 1200 whites every year, and whites kill 400 blacks. These proportions have been going on for a long time.

statistics bear it out, from the body counts to the paranoia. I don't think the bars on the windows are there to keep white people out.

I was wondering about the new construction. It has an imperial presence, but how else should it look? Reminds me of a black writer who was extolling the virtues of houses and buildings in the Caribbean, like it was a black thing (more human, less mechanical) to have buildings which look like they are about to fall down. They lean a little, from the ramshackle to eccentric, and don't conform to right angles (not wanting to exploit the Euclidean). He found that heartwarming, and maybe it is when the sun is shining, but it's heartbreaking when the houses collapse in heavy winds.

Where was I? Losing track of the woman I was with and getting lost in the narrative. When we were walking around Oakland she was worried I would lose her in the crowd and ran to catch up if I made a sudden turn, exhorting me to stay close to her.

We took the monorail out of there, gliding over old wooden houses like the 20th century over the 19th. We descended on a bullet train and shot across the bay, landing in a subterranean station in the city. V. and I got out and levitated on a moving staircase into a realm of airy logic and dying leaves.

In the office I had some work to do. She was in tight jeans with her girlish figure and was caught up in her work. She called me on the office phone. "Come here." Could I compose a letter for her? The attorney she works for was operating from his home in the suburbs and wouldn't let up, even though his father died the day before. As usual V. is caught between the pressures of the job and the egos of the women. Not sure which is worse, but at least she is remunerated for the former. And her wisdom tooth still hurt - she opened her mouth to show me.

5 p.m. Ruth was leaving and said, “Have a nice weekend.” I showed her an article in the paper, in case she was making plans. “WORLD ENDS SUNDAY.” This was according to a woman in jail in Kiev who “insisted that she is God in a videotape released yesterday.” She said they had “arrested the living God.” She doesn’t have a problem with low self-esteem. Maria Devi Khrystos (not her real name). Her husband Yuri “initially proclaimed himself to be God, but later gave that title to his wife.” Under what circumstances? They both couldn’t be God (a holy duality?) and she wasn’t about to have a lesser status so he said, okay you can be God. Or was it something to do with his being “wanted by Interpol on various charges, including embezzlement”? It’s hard to pull off an air of omnipresence when you’re in jail.

“The cult initially said the world would end November 24, then changed the date to Sunday. It said Khrystos would commit suicide this week and be resurrected by Sunday.” (She’s a former Communist youth organizer.)

I did some work on another dissolving marriage.

7 p.m. Walked to the pool. One mile in the water, slow and steady. Walked home.

Saturday, Nov. 13, 1993

Typing for a few hours.

1:30 p.m. The Czech woman came over in a daze from the night before, and two or three hours sleep. She had been doing speed which is not her usual thing, but it was there. Talking for hours with an old friend who told her confidentially he is HIV positive. We went out for breakfast. I was half-expecting to run into the Russian waitress but she wasn’t there.

There was a mirror on the wall and she sat with her back to it. I was using her to eclipse my reflection. I was sleepy and that’s the last thing I wanted to see. She showed me another book

by Rajneesh with pictures of shells, water on a leaf, white flowers, and his words arranged in a neo-poetic broken line format. There was more on love and sex, with the former coming out of the latter like a lotus flower in the mud, as he put it. There was some mention of a cosmic orgasm. There are two types, peak and valley. With the former you go to the peak and then you're drained and exhausted. I know the feeling. With the latter the man is inside the woman but hardly moving. As a Tantric fusion it is more subtle and lasts longer. (We returned to this subject back at my place. She said the neurotic pressure for a woman to have a climax can be counterproductive and make it more elusive.)

She also had a book of sayings and parables from a Sufi writer (with references to the radio, so it's modern). Curious what passes for humor or the wry wisdom of a marginal prophet-type. He said when his wife turns forty he will consider turning her in for two twenty-year-olds.

On the way back we dropped in on a second-hand junk store. The flotsam and debris washed up from the past. In the clutter in the back I found THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS (in paperback).

When we returned to the apartment I found a postcard from Hong Kong. It had a black border and a Chinese junk with an old sail like a bat wing.

> I have so much to tell you!! My trip so far has definitely had its ups & downs. Warm weather, beautiful skyline that blows SF away, luscious greenery, little old Chinese people full of life, awkward military presence, J.'s funky mood swings, my dad and I getting tired of being close to one another and going off on one another – and the rustic Buddhist temples situated on a mountainside, incense burning. Rural Hong Kong is strange because it's as though the fact stares me in the face that my world is so different even though we all look the same. Yesterday J. and I met a guy who after a few beers propositioned me to sleep with him & his wife, a Filipino maid!! Weird huh? I miss you and hope you're well. In 3 days I leave to Bangkok. Maybe I'll find some peace.

Ming has been gone for three weeks but it feels longer. I must be living in a mental fast-forward. That would explain the relative stasis of my living condition like a dull anchor in a rapid current.

It doesn't sound like she's giving the rest of China much of a chance. I kept telling her about Shanghai, but she wasn't interested. A woman of opposing forces will have her ups and downs, including with her father. One reason for her trip was to see her parents and impress her father with the money she made and give him some.

I mentioned to the Czech woman the belief amongst many Chinese that money is transcendental and useful in the after-life. No wonder it is worshipped in this life, from "lucky money" to gambling addictions. She couldn't believe it. The notion that you can't take it with you, or that money and the metaphysical don't mix, is engrained in Christian beliefs.[26] "… [I]t is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (Matthew 19:24)

She said it's like the Jews, but minus their humanism and Freudian psychology. There is evidence of an anti-psychological approach in Chinese customs, and it makes them all the more practical. People in the West are sentimental by comparison (and not impressed with government-sponsored famines). This is roughly how Ming sees it. She is surprised at how sentimental the white men are who fall in love with her, while she is unclear on the concept.

I don't know if anti-psychological is the right word, but there's a positive side to it.[27] I have known women of Chinese, Filipina, Vietnamese, and Japanese descent who had something in common when it comes to a detachment from Judeo-Christian neuroses. You would think that puberty lasts a long time in the West and a month in the East. They don't dwell on it. There is something to be said for a way of life which is not self-preoccupied and you don't question

[26] There are wealthy churches, but much of it comes from guilt-tripping the mortals who were conned into giving their possessions to the church before they died. The church stands at the portal of death like a pool attendant on whom people unload their clothes, wallets, and keys before going for a swim.
[27] There was a documentary on how the mentally ill are treated in communist China. It was considered therapeutic to divert them from the snake pit of self-centeredness and reconnect them to the mental health of the collective. I'm not sure how effective that is.

everything. Ming finds that boring and mundane, however, like her sisters' lives. They married young, had kids, and work.

I suppose her having brought a white man didn't help matters. Her father has a low opinion of anyone not Chinese, and thinks they are peripheral at best. That's in keeping with the custom of referring to white people or any foreigner as a ghost, as in white ghost or black ghost. If you're not Chinese you're not all there - in other words, not fully human.

Her traveling companion and possible business partner, the one she was with in Alaska, is having "mood swings." She isn't sleeping with him like she used to. She put her foot down and is keeping her knees together, having said it was utilitarian to begin with and was surprised to find it meant something to him.

As far as being propositioned in a nightclub I think she is surprised when this happens and has said as much, like it's the farthest thing from her mind. She has a knock-out figure, but doesn't flaunt it. If she did she would be propositioned every day. Ming doesn't think she is attractive, but her life is a tropical profusion of sexual opportunities, often rhyming with confusion, and it comes with clinging vines and tangled roots. All those male projections which are there if she wants them, though she's losing some respect for them. Meanwhile there are men, including a few she left behind, who live in a sexual desert. They look for an oasis in a territory of mirages.

For many women it isn't hard getting laid, but their satisfaction isn't guaranteed. With men it is the reverse. Getting laid is more elusive, but when it happens their relief is not that hard to come by.

Meanwhile, I was sitting around with the Czech woman. I went over to the bed, picked up the guitar and played for a while. She nearly fell asleep in the overstuffed chair. I don't mean it was deliberate, putting her to sleep so I could read the paper, but that's how it worked out. When she was coming to, semi-conscious, she said it was lovely. She is someone who will listen, whether it is words or music.[28] She had a Rolling Rock and was more revived. We went out around five and dropped into the Buddhist Temple for some incense. We continued to the library where I kissed her goodbye and went in.

6 p.m. I emerged with an odd assortment of books. It often happens that I stumble on some by accident and end up with others because the ones I want aren't there. *The Letters of Pietro Aretino* (1492-1556). *Moscow 2042,* by Vladimir Voinovich. *Sor Juana* (a Mexican woman poet of the 1600's)*,* by Octavio Paz. A couple of short plays by Alan Bennett (English playwright).

William Vollmann was unavailable. I put Edmund Wilson on reserve, *The Sixties: The Last Journal, 1960-1972,* and walked home.

8 p.m. I was driven out of house and home by hunger and headed for the place where the Russian waitress works. Then I turned around. She is friendly, but the food isn't that good, so I headed for the Cambodian place. The waitress is more aloof, but the Phnom Penh chicken curry is downright intimate.

The restaurant was deserted. Quiet music, white table clothes. It might have been awkward but I brought an English play and read that. I was ignoring the waitress (Ciport) in case she thought I had more on my mind than pineapple catfish soup. When I left I said "Thank you," and she said "Okay goodnight!" with more force than I expected.

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[28] Speaking of someone who changes her mind or forgets things, I asked about the cough she had two weeks ago and she barely recalled it.

Reading at home with the opera on, Boito's *Mefistofele* (1867). I was having a low-key evening with the highlights coming through the radio and the book, and possibly the typewriter, but I fell asleep before the latter kicked into gear. That is practically unheard of on a Saturday night. I have had two beers over the last seven days and a lot of sleep. I think a warm oblivion in the blankets has been too inviting. It's becoming a refuge and the only way I can relax, not having anyone to calm my nerves. It's getting to the point I'm either wired or unconscious.

Sunday, Nov. 14, 1993

NOTES

> Minority groups are not supposed to be criticized or even closely observed by white people, but it is open season on whites. I hear and read the most condescending critical pronouncements on an entire race of people (those of European descent). (Where does that leave the Russians? Are the Chinese nice? Ask the Tibetans or the Vietnamese.) They are playing hardball with white folks, who are supposed to respond with a beach ball.
>
> The former includes the suggestion that shooting a few of them once in a while is a good idea. It isn't rhetoric, it's a fatal *fait accompli* at this point. Blacks kill many more whites than the other way around. Blacks killing anyone is such a common occurrence it is hardly news. It is treated like a weather report. This is in a country where 35,000 are killed every year, along with 175,000 wounded. Anywhere else and that might qualify as a civil war.
>
> Meanwhile, over 40,000 die on the roads and highways every year, and millions are injured. It would be interesting if there is a connection between automotive deaths and the homicide rate. Does the frequency of dying on the road set a morbid precedent which the homicide rate is reaching for in the collective unconscious? Has something been eroded in people by the heavy metal zooming through their lives and neighborhoods? It always struck me (wrong phrase) how brutal it is, not to say a close call. The threat is adding to our tension. It has a coarsening effect on our lives when there is a one-ton hunk of metal going by at 60 miles per hour. It's more extreme if you're in one of the cars and going in the other direction, missing a collision by a foot or two. What effect does that have on the psyche? Is it becoming fatalistic, anti-social, morbid, or what?
>
> What was lost and what was gained with that mobility on wheels? It comes with workers being leveled on an anonymous assembly line. It might explain how adolescents lose respect for their parents when they have a similar power and mobility. You're an

immediate success the minute you're behind the wheel. You have arrived and you're going somewhere. There is an erosion of respect for human life when a human being would lose a confrontation with a 2000-pound vehicle, being slower and weaker.

Have bullets been trying to catch up with cars? The latter have led the way in generating a high-speed moral vacuum, and it is symbolic when someone shoots at a car. There are further connotations when it's a black woman shooting through the window of a car driven by a German tourist. The shortest distance between two points is demonstrated by a bullet and she caught up with him.

A review in the paper yesterday which I wanted to run by the Eastern European woman and get her perspective. It seemed to involve a vapid and recycled feminism, a book with the unassuming title of, *Fire With Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century*. It's by Naomi Wolf, who seems to specialize in clichés. She said she was brought up by "bohemian academics… it was normal in my family to be a radical feminist."[29]

That might explain why some of her opinions and perspectives have the dull thud of received opinion. Copping radical poses in an atmosphere of no resistance, massive attention, and bourgeois comforts. Her previous effort, *The Beauty Myth*, was discredited by Camille Paglia as being wrongheaded if not hypocritical. "Other feminists put her down for wearing makeup and fluffing up her hair for photographs. But Wolf remained true to herself: the photo on the new book jacket shows her hair long and full, her makeup perfectly applied." Such courage.

So we're back in the realm of a "new and improved feminism." "Wolf explores the new feminism versus the old [which is "victim feminism"] and why many women have become alienated from the feminist movement even though they have more power than ever before. One problem is that women are fearful of power and don't know how to embrace it she maintains." I think embracing power is different than wielding it. That said, women in this country are fearful of power like they're afraid of being on television or driving a car. It's like saying the Mercedes or the forklift is in the driveway, but they're afraid of getting behind the wheel of such a powerful machine. This is so dumb you wonder what her motives are. I have the feeling she is writing about herself, but with sufficient megalomania and cowardice to assume her own neuroses are those of all women. She speaks in broad generalities which don't apply, except perhaps to her. It was similar with *The Beauty Myth* where the author went through a bout of anorexic narcissism and decided to blame Western Civilization for it.

"The old feminism, or victim feminism, she explains, is the belief that women are naturally peace loving and nonaggressive. Wrong… Let's kill off the demons of

[29] I had her father, Leonard Wolf, for a literary course at San Francisco State. He had a dark beard, wrote about vampires, and asked us what our favorite word was. We were not in sync. That became clear when we turned in samples of our writing and the next day he read us a poem as an example of what he didn't like. It was mine (some meandering free verse). I found another class within a week.

> niceness." Oh yes, let's. The women's movement over the last twenty years has been as nonaggressive as a pit bull. I don't know where she got this conceit of "niceness" unless it is herself she's talking about, and using a wider forum of all women to represent herself. Is that a women's thing? Is it Jewish? Freud, for example, projected much of his own weird family history onto the rest of us. The fallacy of assuming the universality of his psychological problems was matched by the lack of evidence of his curing anyone.
>
> Meanwhile, "… the new feminism can be seen even in the surgically reconstructed body of Ivana Trump." Is there something about this country which can trivialize a movement until it's practically meaningless? Ivana Trump (the I.T. girl) has her approval. "Her acts of retribution through triumph led her to be seen in a positive light in the female popular imagination." What does that mean? Is it possible that Wolf is a bourgeois airhead? Of what caliber or depth is the "female popular imagination" if Ivana Trump is seen as a role model?

Woke up early and was typing for hours.

Workout on a wooden instrument with the game on.

In the late afternoon I was half-inclined to go out. I picked up the Sor Juana book and that took care of the next couple of hours. I drifted back into the 1600's via the prose of Mr. Paz. Sor Juana had a touch of Frida Kahlo – precious girls who cut their hair and wore men's clothes. Morbid and poetic women. Looking at a portrait of herself she sees "Deceit… a cunning counterfeit." Nothing but "… cadaver, ashes, shadow, void."

The author had some mention of romantic love as an "invention of our civilization." I'm still working on that one.

60 Minutes accompanied by guitar. I'm a sixty-minute man.

It was after nine when I realized this Sunday was going by without much effort and without the need for going out. When you burn through two or three-hour segments of concentration while reading, writing, and playing music, it can use up a whole day and part of the night. There is a tenuous balance when the mind is operating on all cylinders, the body is taken care of (except for sex), and the heart is full with a few good friends.

10 p.m. Phone call from the pregnant woman. During the conversation she broke down in tears. The Actress can't understand the silence of her ex-fiancé and it's hard on her. She asked, "You want to get married?" but I don't think she was serious. She said she can tell me things and we can talk, which didn't happen so much with him. I was struck with a paradox I've seen before. She was riding high when they were together. It made her extra confident. Her women friends were half-joking about waiting around for the crash to pick up the pieces. I could barely fathom what she was doing, being so critical and touchy. There's a dynamic here which is hard to figure out. One interpretation is that women have higher emotional peaks and lower valleys than men. A man is steadier (at least on the surface). She was magnified with him around, but without him she is deflated. The controlling factor is the presence of a man. Do women absorb it into themselves, not realizing how vicarious or borrowed some of their strength and confidence is? As an extra dimension it can be precarious (wrote precious). When they're so full of themselves, and on a self-made pedestal, they get a little careless and take the man for granted. It borders on domestic abuse and he is driven away. The woman feels like someone took away her drug.

There are women who prefer a life of domestic friction to the absence or the silence of a man, maybe assuming that the former is a part of life whether they like it or not. They might want some drama or romantic tension now and then. They are inured to caustic remarks, having been through it with their mothers or sisters, not realizing that most men are not used to a viper's tongue. You could even make the case for a psychobiological transference, where the "hostile environment" inside a woman is echoed in her head. But the worse thing is being alone, so many women will remain in a lousy relationship.

Weathering a break-up is hard enough, but it's worse if you're pregnant with the gone one's child – a condition which she said magnifies the situation. Her hormones are going crazy and she cries at the slightest thing. Not only is she faced with the burden of being pregnant, along with no job and no husband, but her condition makes her more sensitive to the pathos.

11 p.m. I went out for a meal, walking on a street with unknown characters in doorways. There were a few Latinos selling drugs with a low whisper. I got a wooden booth at Tommy's Joynt - pastrami on sourdough, bean and beer soup. I walked home and fell asleep around one in the morning.

3 a.m. I woke up with the phone ringing. It was her again. She couldn't sleep. In the earlier conversation I told her Michael had called. He hasn't called her in weeks, so it was a touchy subject. She wondered if what I said promoted her side of things. I've had a lot of practice with angry and accusatory clients on the phone at work so I'm used to winging it, choosing my words carefully. It was touch and go with a distraught woman on the other end of the line.

Monday, Nov. 15, 1993

Typing in the morning with the pounding from across the street. A construction site where they want to sink about forty columns into the ground a few inches at a time. If it hits bedrock the machine keeps pounding but it won't go any further.

Under the kitchen window a man operated a bulldozer with a back drill like the tail of a scorpion. It was very efficient. He looked like a roadie for ZZ Top, and I watched the process for a while. Someone tied a chain around a ten or twenty-foot length of concrete foundations which

they dug up and cut apart with a blow torch and a jackhammer. The other end of the chain was tied to the bulldozer which lifted it while backing up and dragging it across the dirt lot.

1:30 p.m. I went out, walking past a huge hole in the ground for the new library. Knowledge is deep.[30] I was ready for some visions at a gallery on Mission Street.

On the ground floor of the Vision Gallery was a show on the homeless (by Howard Schatz). The photos were black and white blow-ups with a black backdrop, something like Avedon's photos of accommodating commoners who are a far cry from fashion. It brought out the monumental aspects of the homeless, maybe because they hang around public monuments. Some of the photos came with comments or monologues by the person in the picture. I was impressed. It is something I want to do, talk to people living on the street and get their story.[31] How did you get here, how did things come to this? There wasn't much in the way of blaming the system. That approach is for liberals or the press, while this was getting it straight from the horse's mouth so to speak, with old drinkers and young runaways. They admitted that things fell apart because they drank too much or couldn't settle down and it was their fault or the fault of other human beings. Some of them don't want to be part of society, and it was more or less intentional their dropping out. "I'm a tramp."

There were a few photos from a previous show by Ruth Bernhardt. The naked back of a woman surrounded with derelicts who have been exposed to the elements of composition.

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[30] Flash forward a few years. There was a minor scandal when it turned out the new library doesn't have room for all the books of the old library, as if the architect was unclear on the concept and didn't want too many bookshelves blocking the windows. Thousands of books were discarded (but they kept the precious works of Danielle Steele, including her foreign translations).

[31] In 1972 I was living in San Pedro a few blocks from the Long Beach Harbor. I was walking on a sidewalk with a view of the channel and saw a bum on a bench. He seemed to be nodding out. As I passed by he fell off the end of the bench. I walked over to see if he was alright. He sat up eventually and we started talking. He had helped to build the harbor many years ago, but then the jobs dried up and he turned to alcohol.

I went upstairs to a gallery with a different atmosphere - pale women and filmy soft gauzes, all cream and bone (the photographer was a woman). One had the jawbone of a shark around her neck, as if to emphasize the vulnerability of a tit.

There was the work of Jan Saudek (a Czech photographer), hand-tinted exposures of erotic obsessions. There were morphological variations on a theme of well-endowed women (who could have been in a Fellini film). He is preoccupied with Eros and death and the passage of time. Well, who isn't? There were three photos of a woman taken from her early twenties to her early thirties, beginning thin and getting thicker over the years. He sees the Eros in everyone, though it might raise a few eyebrows (if not male appendages) when he is not particular about the age or weight of a woman. There was a couple shown with and without their clothes on. Their stares remained the same.

I went to work with the same expression in my eyes.

6 p.m. I walked home and spent the evening with the radio, typewriter, phone, guitar, and books.

Phone call from the pregnant woman. She is angry at her ex-boyfriend, along with her ex-husband. She sounded reasonably composed however and we talked about jobs. Then she said, "My daughter is tearing up the bathtub," and had to get off the phone. She called back a few minutes later, asking if I had heard from him.

Tuesday, Nov. 16, 1993

7:30 a.m. I was woken by the pounding across the street. There were shudders running through the building. Long columns were being slammed into the ground. Sometimes stability is

hard to come by. I tried to sleep and then by some miracle they stopped. I passed out and was coming to around 10:30 when the pounding resumed.

12:30 p.m. I arrived in the office and left with V., walking to Old St. Mary's. I was not sure what to expect, but we found a flute quartet which sounded a little effete at first, but I got used to it. Two women and two men played a "Quartet in D Major" from the early 1800's. It was better than a pile-driver.

In the office with the Attorney gone and not much work. Read the paper.

5 p.m. I was leaving when B. called and said she was going out tonight. On the way home I dropped by her place. She was in a hurry, getting ready, and suggested I go with her to an event for the Media Alliance. I was having a beer and not sure I wanted to go. She was nearly beside herself with other complications, pouring a whiskey and putting lipstick on. Every few minutes she would come over and shake me to emphasize the fact that she felt compromised, or was it duplicitous? It seems a man she met in Mexico a few months ago was passing through town on his motorcycle (an American in his mid-forties). He came by and she was now berating herself. She couldn't believe she fell for the old routine of a man expressing some concern about his being "impotent," and maybe she could be of some assistance.

She felt dishonest with respect to her girlfriend, and wondered if she should tell her. I said probably not. The guy is gone, it was a fleeting indiscretion, and she knows how she feels about it (bad). There is reason to believe her girlfriend is encouraging the overtures of a Brazilian woman.

I have a limited patience for listening to her problems. She apologized, but just can't help it. She won't tell her other straight friends and "my mother would die." She showed me a postcard of a Wagnerian grand dame and said there was some resemblance. B. is dying to tell

someone about what she is going through, but is one of the more discreet women I know. She gets around it by speaking in careful euphemisms so I get a rough idea. In the case of the male visitor that afternoon she hastened to add that she hadn't taken her clothes off. On the other hand (whose hand?) he had been satisfied.

There was some suggestion that the woman she was having an affair with had introduced foreign objects of a phallic nature into the proceedings. B. thought it was mechanical and it put her off. Meanwhile she was sipping whiskey and muttering about being late to the event. "Sure you don't want to go?" She shoved a card in my face from the other woman which said, "Sorry to cause angst."

Then she handed me a small lit pipe of marijuana - "Here, have some!" - knowing it would wear down my resistance and it did. Twenty minutes later we were in a cab on the way to Fort Mason for the Media Alliance Meritorious Achievement Awards.

A theater on the end of a pier at night. A crowd of people milling about. Hors d'oeuvres and drinks. I was slowly getting interested. It was an atmosphere of difference and familiarity. I hardly ever rub elbows with investigative journalists and radio people, but it's a consciousness I live and breathe. My father began as a journalist before becoming a minister with left-wing tendencies. I am preoccupied with newspapers and the news, but with some questions about objective reporting. Someone refused that conceit and referred to it as "socially involved, motivated reporting." I'm a wayward person who drifted over to these vectors of vindictive social realism.

We ended up near the front and the MC was Ben Fong Torres (from *Rolling Stone*). He was smooth, a bit sardonic, and ten feet tall from where we sat. There was a steady succession of awards for stories, investigations, and TV/radio programs on everything from the Oakland

murders to Latino incest. A radio call-in program, “Street Soldiers.” A black man and woman who were DJs accepted the award. The man had a lot to say and was well spoken. The woman had another approach. She wore a slinky dark dress, high heels, and her hair was done up in a rope while delivering a breathy contrived speech.

There was a black man connected with “Street Sheet,” a local publication given to thirty homeless people to sell on the street for $1. He had his spiel down. “Someone has to take a shot at Jordan” (he doesn’t like the mayor). He was stopping short of asking someone to shoot the mayor. Perhaps it was a euphemism for unseating him or publishing an expose. He made a long involved point about how this economic system requires a certain number of people to be without jobs or homes, therefore the system owes them something for their being rejected or marginalized – while implicating those who benefit from the system, like anyone with a job. And welfare payments to the down and out are not humane, more like a way of keeping them down and prolonging their misery.

I wasn’t sure about that. What percentage of people on the street are there for personal rather than systemic reasons? How does the country benefit when many on the street are alcoholic fuck-ups, borderline retarded, or prefer to drift? Would there be less deprivation in a communist country (I mean following the famines)?

Tom Tomorrow (political cartoonist). Carla Marinucci (a series in the *Examiner* on the exploitation of illegal immigrants). A woman who writes for the SF Mime Troupe. A woman who made a documentary on *Dialogues with Madwomen* (a few in the audience stood up for applause). The son of Ronald Takaki, who wrote *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (1993), accepting for his father (the son is half Japanese, half white). Someone accepted an award for Randy Shilts, who wrote *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS*

Epidemic (1987).[32] Freelance writing: Andrew Lam, son of a South Vietnamese army officer, about thirty. He was sardonic and said he was drunk. Humorous, polished, off the wall. At times I wasn't sure (being a little stoned) if he was being self-deprecating or accusatory about his immigrant charm with an accent, and to what extent Asians would soon own the West. Ha ha.

There were film clips and a song from three guys in the Mime Troupe with tuxedos and an out-of-tune acoustic guitar. They posed as rich guys who could give a damn about the rest of us. "We won." Shades of the socially conscious 1930's - I had a familiar sense of being with a lot of old lefties which really took me back. There were writers and journalists with a dry sense of humor and speaking so slowly I was hanging on every word. It had an inadvertent dramatic effect, as if they're not used to getting awards for what they do.

It dragged on a bit, but wasn't bad. When it was over we wandered into the lobby. B. exclaimed that she didn't recognize anyone (she's a member of the Media Alliance). We went outside near the end of the pier with a thousand points of light across the water, some galactic and some residential.

We left with a friend of hers, walking half a mile to a bus. The two of them are ex-New Yorkers from opposite ends of the spectrum. B. comes from private schools and a family with an historic house. Her friend, a TV journalist, is about thirty and had a rougher way of life which included getting beaten up by black men. They were blocking the sidewalk, which sounds familiar. She went on and on about it. I kept thinking, they beat up women? Does that mean they're not getting by on the content of their character?

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[32] He died a few months later of AIDS. He was forty-two. No one did more to promote the cause of gay people in this country (and his book was a best-seller), but he had enemies in his own community. He thought gay bathhouses should be closed down to slow the spread of AIDS. He was also accused of being an "assimilationist," like gay men have their own country, their own transportation system, their own bars… oh wait.

I could record the robberies and assaults (never mind the threats and insults) inflicted on friends and family and myself, but nearly all of them involve black men. Does it perpetuate a negative stereotype to report what happened?[33] Are those who actually do the crimes ever accused of that? What happens when the facts are not politically correct? There has been a lot of social engineering, and the result for white people is: if you can't say anything nice about black people, don't say anything at all. With black people it is the reverse: if you can't say anything bad about whites, don't say anything at all.

Meanwhile the conversation of the two women went into warp speed. They were amplifying each other, all the more so with B. being stoned and becoming a hyper version of herself. I wondered (not for the first time) what daughter-of-a-bitch started the myth about presumptuous men who dare to "interrupt" a woman when she's talking.

We waited for a bus in my old neighborhood which felt lifeless and ordinary. I'm having serious doubts about going back.

11 p.m. I arrived home and found a letter from Bangkok (having mailed a letter to the woman in Vienna that afternoon). Ming was describing her trip. It is "the weirdest I've ever been on." If character is fate, it might affect the journeys one takes. It sounded so much like her, with moments of stress and contradiction. From the beginning she was "at odds" with her traveling companion.

> This my friend was not as surprising as it has been a pain in the ass. From day one in Seoul we spoke of separation, going opposite directions… we decided we'd stick it out, wait for him to get a handle on the situation. See I've got to stop depending on words as much as I do and start thinking about real things like, well what is more real!! You knew

[33] Not long ago I dropped by B.'s apartment. She was on the phone with an old friend in New York City, a man in his seventies who lives on the Upper East Side. Recently a black man broke into his home, held a gun to his head, tied him up with a phone cord, and ransacked the place.

> this didn't you? … He actually admitted to lying to me about how he felt… I'm tired of those exact negotiations that you and I had talked about. No more negotiations, no more deals! Anyhow Korea was neat… we both liked the people and enjoyed our days. At night we were either miserably arguing or blasted and bullshitting. Did I ever tell you that men are moodier than women?

She mentioned some half-assed attempts at their fish egg business, but they were "unsuccessful for the most part." They stayed with her parents in the south of China. Her mother "still thinks that I should marry a Chinese man."

> We stayed there <u>way</u> too long, our nights were dull. I was tired and J. was horny – good thing he had his own room. Though once he had the guts to ask me that infamous question. Guess…. When I went off on him telling that I would not be compromised and resented his proposition he stopped and we were fucked up in the head for a few days….

They went out to eat, "… only to get <u>totally</u> gipped – <u>hard</u>! My dad went crazy – yelling, screaming, insulting me like he had never done before and I told them that J. and I were leaving, of course, among hectic sobs… I sapped in a serious way…."

They saw more of Hong Kong, "the temples and shrines are fab," but she said her trip will be shortened. She feels odd over there, misses home, and her ex-boyfriend is on her mind. "I feel like a twit kind of but anyhow… I miss you. Hopefully you're happy and safe. I love you. P.S. The beaches in Kosamui are calling…" I think she had a few drinks before writing this.

Meanwhile, I was thrown off by the evening and the smoke, but finally had something going on the typewriter.

Wednesday, Nov. 17, 1993

Not enough sleep. I live in an engine room between two construction sites.

Late in the morning the Czech woman dropped by. Things were relatively quiet. At this point a jackhammer or a bulldozer in the distance is nothing, it might as well be a sparrow. She was sitting there and remarking on the noise and how disturbing it is. I said it wasn't much, wait

until the pounding starts. It did a few minutes later and she nearly went cross-eyed. She dragged me out of there, and we walked down Hyde Street to a cheap place with booths for breakfast.

I mentioned the photos of nude women by Jan Saudek. She said the sister of a Czech friend of hers had posed for him. He is thought to have gotten overly familiar with his own daughter.

I ran a topic by her to get her opinion. I wonder about the limitations or diminishing returns of the multicultural, especially when other cultures consider themselves exclusive and/or hold me in contempt. It's like a society breaking up into various factions, in which case the multicultural is less of an enhancement (wrote enchantment) and more of a reduction. I asked her what she thought about the lip service given to diversity in this country. It is characterized as a demographic quilt, but that's an overview (I want to say a blanket judgment). Things are more fragmented on the street.

She said the walls and built-in limitations between people are there no matter what. In more homogenous countries, like where she's from, people have something in common which may or may not facilitate commiseration and communication, but the walls are still there. A homogenous population is boring in her opinion, but admitted her obsession with Latino men has had diminishing returns (like the one who killed himself).

I walked her to the open-air market, walked back, and read the paper.

The Tenderloin is often in the news. Last night around two in the morning, about two or three blocks from here, a few young black men set a white homeless man on fire - a forty-seven-year-old alcoholic. They poured rubbing alcohol on him and lit it. He was severely burned over thirty percent of his body. The neighbor witness, sixty-one, doesn't want his name used. "I've

been threatened many times by these people… recently one of them told me, “We’re going to get you, you white m…” (motherfucker). Heartwarming, as it must have been for the burned man.

There was an article which was understated, not to say behind the times, and buried on page ten: BLACK-ON-WHITE HATE CRIMES RISING. “45 percent increase in such killings.” No figures were given. It would seem that until recently blacks could do just about anything to a white person, including tossing the body in the bay after robbing, raping, and killing a woman (in Berkeley), and it wouldn’t be characterized as a “hate crime.” There had to be political symbols involved. Sometimes the kidnapping and execution of a person goes hand-in-hand with robbery. They don’t want any witnesses. It’s nothing personal, you understand, and it’s not a hate crime, we love white people, they’re such easy targets.

Two black women (thirty-three and seventeen) kidnapped an older white woman (in her late sixties) in San Rafael. They tied her up and drove around laughing. They robbed her bank machine and left her tied up in the truck for ten hours. This wouldn’t constitute a hate crime because they were laughing and it turns out the thirty-three-year-old woman had burglarized and set fire to the home of her own mother a couple of months ago. When she was on the verge of being apprehended she tied herself up and pretended she had been kidnapped by the younger woman and forced to go along with her plans.

I went to work with something going on at the Hilton a few blocks away. The streets were blocked off. Turned out the President of China is in town, Jiang Zemin. He was having

lunch with former Secretary of State George Schultz. A small motorcade went by with dark windows.[34]

In the office the Attorney was not generating much work. At the next desk Maria had a book, *Petals on the Wind*. She said, "It's about incest." Then she was on the phone with her sister on the other side of the room who thinks she is pregnant. They discussed it, with the younger one having had a baby. "The ESTROGEN is in your PEE…."

Yesterday V. was talking with Ruth. They have nothing in common except for some knowledge of soap operas. The latter is addicted to them and admits it is a substitute for not having a man and "no sex." They compared notes. She said how good an actor looked in tight jeans, not to mention with his shirt off. This is the same woman who stuck her head in the door and hissed, "You pigs!" when I was talking with an attorney about his trip to Europe and mentioned how friendly the women were in Spain.

I went home and read the Russian novel, *Moscow 2042*. It's cold in here. I lay down under the covers around ten, got too comfortable, and passed out.

I was woken around midnight by black women on the street. Their voices carry. I went back to sleep. The same voices woke me half an hour later and I couldn't go back to sleep. Normally I would have gotten up and had a session on the typewriter. Tonight there was a fine-tuned balance between the conscious and unconscious, so I lay there for an hour staring out the window through the tree, looking at the intersection, the corner store, and the whores.

One thing which prevented any possibility of sleep: a tall black man I've seen before. He wore a shirt with no jacket and seems to be mentally challenged. He is simple and direct and thoroughly annoying, like that's part of the routine of getting spare change - people would give

[34] Later when returning home I heard horns. A cop was stopping traffic which backed up for a couple of blocks until the motorcycles went by with blue lights flashing. They were followed by a motorcade. Now and then the powerful are close to home.

him something to make him go away. “Hey SIR, you got a QUOTA?” Maybe he’s from New York. He didn’t mind going up to a car pulled up to a red light and sticking his head in the window. I can imagine how the drivers felt, though probably relieved that he only wanted “a quota.”

Unfortunately, he had one of those broken-record shallow minds with a loud voice. A few minutes later I saw him sweeping the curb in front of the store. I thought he found a way to earn some change. I doubt if he was sweeping for more than five minutes, but he launched into a loud insistent harangue, pleading in the doorway with a Middle Eastern guy who was smaller, but he came out and pushed him, being fed up. “I CLEANED IT DUDE… I CLEANED IT UP DUDE… YOU OWE ME 3 DOLLAS… YOU OWE ME DUDE…” On and on, having gotten a soda for his troubles, but it was not enough, though he dropped his price to $2. He wouldn’t quit. He told anyone who came in or out of the store about this grave injustice. Most of them were black and not interested. Finally, an angry black man came around the corner, in his late twenties and shorter but with a heavier build, and started pushing him away (who was recoiling). “I’M GOING TO BREAK YOUR NECK MOTHERFUCKER I GOT TO WORK TOMORROW GET A JOB NIGGA…!!”

He walked back to his room upstairs. I could see him with his forty-ounce bottle going up and down. Things were a little quieter for a while, but the man on the street wouldn’t give up. I was thinking he could have established an arrangement with the store, doing odd jobs, but had blown that possibility, thinking only of the moment. They finally gave him another soda so he would go away.

2:30 a.m. Things quieted down and I went to sleep.

Thursday, Nov. 18, 1993

A nice morning with seagulls and bulldozers. Heavy equipment where you feel the earth move. The morning getting steamrolled with shudders running through the floor. Is this the flat earth society? The giant crane across the street was dismantling itself, lifting the sections onto a flatbed truck. It lifted itself onto the truck and left.

I called B. It was busy - the phone is her medium of expression. She is on it like I'm on the typewriter. I got through, but she couldn't play tennis. There is a cold coming on. Last night she was demonstrating with a woman friend at the Chinese Embassy about China having run over Tibetan culture with an iron tread. They were dressed as skeletons and got on the news. The President of China with a "stern tone" made an "oblique warning that Washington risks confrontation over issues such as human rights." While we were talking she said,

"What's that noise?"
"Where?"
"In your apartment."

Typing for hours, then went to work in the afternoon.

Yesterday on the way to work I dropped by a gallery with paintings by Nathan Oliveira, a California artist. An airy room full of life-size standing figures. A doorway of shifting perimeters. The air is full of shredded considerations. Any historical identification is blurred beyond recognition. An existential frame-up of intensely felt generalities. The N.O. man of Nathan Oliveira.

In this latest phase his figurines have drifted, not stumbled; the man is too elegant for that. They're in a long-legged trance and have gravitated to a certain or uncertain abstraction. Only one ("Untitled") adheres to his old approach. The others are framed by coffin-doorways

where they turn into a wavering silhouette. Not an improvement in some cases. Out of ten maybe six were worth looking at. I have a lot of nerve to say that.

I couldn't stop staring. I stood in an empty room surrounded with the stelae on the walls alluding to "the vertical nature of living energy."[35] I can live with that. There was some mention of Mayan time as being "additive" and not so linear or cyclical. All times exist at once, whether ancestral or the time of one's own lived experience which is stored in the sensory memory cells. A loose organic storage of past times with memories and impressions floating in a mind which forges a head in the present.

Is the additive addictive? You're addicted to the time of your life. All the ages you have ever been are stored in your nervous system (talk about multiple personality disorder). The evidence of the additive is everywhere, especially if you can't throw anything way, accumulating a psycho-neurological clutter in your room. It is full of memory-triggers if you want to avoid a pathological amnesia of the species. When you walk from one room to the next you pass through a kaleidoscope, a phase-shift of associations and fragmented recollections. I prefer it to those sterilized-by-the-present condos which lack imagination.

Meanwhile, the stelae (rhymes with touchy-feely, not with what the man was yelling at his wife in *A Streetcar Named Desire*). "A slab or pillar of stone usu. carved or inscribed and used for commemorative purposes (as to mark a grave)." "A monument in the form of a pillar." For people who are monumental in their four-dimensionality, and have a vertical energy to keep them from becoming mental.

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[35] I opened a dictionary looking for "stelae" and found an old 8 x 10 b/w photo of my kitchen in the other place. It showed a lamp, cactus, and a rum bottle on top of the refrigerator. The kitchen was severely burned in the fire earlier this year, and the back of the photo has smoke damage. What's it doing in the dictionary, other than free-associating and getting flattened by definitions?

The life of Nathan Oliveira (born in 1928, the same year as my father). At sixty-five he generates unprecedented atmospheres while incorporating the very fade he may be feeling, the long goodbye of an artist. It occurred to me that I'm a lowbrow compared to someone who contemplates Chinese vases in the morning. He spends an afternoon looking for an arrangement of "earth" tones and feeling his hand-eye coordination to the bone.

His doorways are open to interpretation. The duration of a door (for $70,000). The open-door policy of consciousness. I could have met him at a reception the other night, but instead I went to the Media Alliance on the docks. It's typical that I would be caught between investigative journalism and an artist.

OLIVEIRA IN OBLIVION

A silhouette is full of the uncertain, it's surrounded by a curtain
of a luminescent ragged psyche in a color-wounded field,
a discriminating haze of what you know and feel and can discern,
a self-incriminating craze, a smoky nuance in the air.

The figurine is undefined, the atmosphere is made of him exploded,
his identity a mere formality, he knows about submersion in the world,
his perception blending with the air. Unconsciously the man's an android.
Tragedy has torn the shadow of his self-respect.

Whatever's left is posing in a void, or standing in a random murk,
a darkness he was born with in the anonymity of ectoplasm,
his body occupying space. There is a busy reflection of his presence,
a side of the person never seen, a side without a face and time erased it.

Can he stand it, the unconscious in a furious effort of osmosis
struggles to attain the anthropomorphic, but his origins are smeared.
The costume may be all he has to go on, everything is gone or going,
he wears an echo of the madness like a neurologic uniform.

Where the random and the dignified are meeting during a storm at night,
the figurine with no decision is a residue of their collision
and collusion in the background of a man, he's made of their blown traces
in the air. The torn unknown has taken up its death and then it walks.

My living energy descended on an elevator of mechanical means and I walked downtown. In no time I was confronted with rectangles of steel and glass, a thousand windows in the air. It is a monumental business and a grave concern. You don't know if you're coming or going, and then you're gone.

That was yesterday. Today I went to work for an intensive couple of hours and left. On the way home I dropped by the pool but decided against it. I felt a vague depression coming on, like when your spirits go into a momentary slump (not only is the cup half empty, it is worn and obsolete). Now and then the logic and unconscious motivations of a writer leave him on a lonely promontory. There is a propensity to lower himself on the end of a written line into an empty well, or stand on the edge of a cliff. Sometimes the centrifugal forces of your life will leave you out there, a depressing isolation where you listen to Rimbaud like someone gravitating to a dark soul of the night.

The depression is a parachute on your forward motion. I have a lot of that, so the former is compelled to slow me down once in a while. I think the muses drive me to it while they drive away the possibilities of a normal comfortable life, knowing that a writer who is less protected will encounter clarities he wouldn't have otherwise.

Friday, Nov. 19, 1993

Last night I lay down around 10 p.m., got too comfortable, and passed out without a second thought. I came to around two in the morning, having dreamed about friends I haven't seen in over twenty years (Dream B).

I got up and was on the typewriter for a few hours. I went back to sleep around 5 a.m. and woke up at 8. I wasn't sure I could go back to sleep but I did, coming out of it around 10 a.m. with another dream. I lay there trying not to forget it (Dream A). It's like you're balancing a tenuous crystal arrangement on your head and only by committing each part to memory can you get up, make coffee, and write it down. The dream is preserved in mid-air by being transmuted into your memory. You let the dream dissolve when you have stored the particulars.

It was a preternaturally quiet morning with some eerie music on a radio station normally known for violent punk songs. The sudden quiet of the construction sites was making for a heightened consciousness, like when you wake up from a dream and still have one foot in the subconscious. Your nerve ends are on, and they practically tingle. There are chills (wrote child) going up the spine with little provocation, while you're feeling ultra-sensitive and empty-headed. Is there something feminine about a sense-surround of the subconscious? More power to it.

I called the station to find out what the music was. Crash Worship, and before that PGR ("Time/Amnesia" on Silent Records). Now with the Charlie Hunter Trio.

What happened last night to trigger dreams that I would remember in the morning? I would consider any explanation, including an astrological shift from the heavy-water clutch of Scorpio to the friendly fire of Sagittarius. Was it the vitamin C and a burrito last night? The interrupted sleep and typing until five in the morning, pushing my subconscious to the wall? I was also on the phone with my two sisters, which may have triggered some associations with the past. I feel like we exist in a web of invisible lines of force, like trip wires of association.

I weathered the isometric pressure of being depressed. When the going gets rough, some people smoke a joint or go to the movies.[36] In the process they are losing the capacity to pull

[36] The college station, KUSF, plays a short clip now and then of an exasperated drag queen saying, "Why don't you take a valium like a normal person?!"

themselves out of it. The subconscious will reward you for your efforts with a stoned movie of its own. It makes you wonder about the dream life of the stoic, if that would explain a certain glow in them. I'm thinking of the spiritual buoyancy of some women I have known.

DREAM A

I was with a few others near a port with mountains in the distance. We were going to have a race to the top of a mechanical structure, possibly a ship. The person orchestrating the race was Salvador Dali. I took off running with the others, passing a few, and ran up a spiral staircase. It was airy with a view. I was getting dizzy going up, passing people on the way, and speaking French for some reason. When I was near the top, with others falling behind, I realized our alleged leader – Dali – may have given us the slip. Maybe he planned all of this, knowing what we would find at the top of this ship-like structure. There was a small room of polished wood with windows. It had a deck and a gold bathtub with a dead woman in it. She was naked, floating on her back, and looked like Yoko Ono,[37] but with more of an implacable resolve in being deceased.

DREAM B

There is a gathering of people in a house. Most them are friends and schoolmates I haven't seen since I was fifteen (when I moved from a small town in the San Joaquin Valley to Los Angeles). I wouldn't say the occasion is a homecoming party, there's no special attention coming my way and no one else has gotten older. They have remained as I remembered them at fifteen, while I am forty.

The rooms in the house have an eerie party lighting and a layout incorporating a couple of houses I have lived in (including the one in the small town), but there is a lot of dream invention (and not enough bathrooms). It is not a sterile modern look. There is a young woman in a tight transparent outfit and her blouse has a few sequins. When looking at her I realize what a glittering artificial creature she is, not just the blouse but her whole torso is hollow and transparent. I think it was her who walked over to a toilet on the far end of the room and pulled a shower curtain around it for some privacy, except it was glittering and transparent with a mysterious light coming through it. She sat on the toilet and lifted her stiff skirt demurely while others stood nearby.[38] I saw an old friend who is half-Latino and went over and shook his hand.

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[37] In real life Dali is dead and Yoko Ono isn't. The room in this floating structure may have been taken from an old Liberty ship from World War II which was docked a few blocks from here and which I've been on. The body of the dead woman was inspired by the anatomy lab at a local university where I saw a dead Asian woman who seemed to be made of marble.

[38] In real life people go to the bathroom a few feet away from others, but there is a door and walls for privacy. Doors and walls don't always register in the subconscious.

12:30 p.m. I met V. in the office. She was in a flannel shirt and tight jeans with straight black hair falling over her face a little. It is down to her shoulders now. She has a natural glamour, though the lipstick doesn't hurt. V. is usually more formal so it was something to see her in a flannel shirt. It's like she found another way to be adorable, though she manages to keep a fine balance, leading her life with a business-like demeanor. Things between us have the timing of disinterested friends. I don't know if an effortless rapport means our souls are touching, but her guard was down.

Lunch at the Hunan place, with spicy smoked ham on rice. The service was lousy, with her throwing me looks of wonder and impatience, but the conversation was zipping right long. I mentioned the dreams last night without going into detail. She said she has dreamed of people she knew when she was a girl, but her dreams tend to be realistic and anchored in the present. She doesn't have dreams that are hallucinatory or off-the-wall. I've heard this from other women. It is further evidence that I'm not adhering to the ordinary. Some cling to it like an abalone on a rock or the financial district. They don't wander far afield, even in their dreams.

I almost never dream about my everyday routine or people I know. My subconscious comes up with scenarios which don't occur in real life. Some people have a firm grip on the rope tow of mundane existence and its practical concerns. I'm hanging by one hand from the chair lift (wrote life), or walking on the cable holding an umbrella for balance. I sometimes wonder if I'm missing something, waiting for the other shoe to drop, the one that means you have your feet on the ground.

It's an old theme of not feeling very solid, like there is a gulf in my head which questions everything, including myself. It can be disconcerting, though it makes for a continual spark gap

of thoughts and visions generated in a polarized void inside my mind. I am communing with the language which is something of a crutch. I have some difficulty tuning in a self-defined continuum. This journal is an attempt.

We walked back to the office on a clear November afternoon.

There was not much work. V. and Maria took it easy, the devout Catholic and the sex kitten. They were talking about the cuisine in the Philippines. Maria brought an odd concoction that her mother made. I think it was flour, sugar, rice, sugar, coconut milk, and sugar.

I got bored and went to a bookstore which was closing. Earlier I walked with V. past the old Customs building where the Post Office was closed for seismic repairs. Marble, polished wood, and frosted windows from the early part of the century. I don't know if the public sector had more integrity back then, but the buildings did. The Post Office was moved to a nondescript location with low ceilings and florescent lights. I mentioned this to V. and she said she preferred the new place. I thought of B.'s line about a friend, "I love her dearly, but…."

In the bookstore I started buying presents for the holidays, and returned to the office with a few things. V. and Maria looked them over. There was something for my feminist sister, a calendar on "The Medieval Woman," which didn't warrant a second glance. *The Orange Book* for my nephew was okay. The hardcover planner with photos by Herb Ritts got their attention. There was close scrutiny of this or that shot. V. was amused by the photos of half-naked women. Maria had an odd response to a shot of two young women sitting in a naked embrace. It was a lyrical study of entangled arms and legs and didn't show much. She said it was tasteless.

V. didn't care. She admits she has a thing for office gossip, but generally operates in a closed world of her own concerns and anything beyond that is not her business. She has a close-knit family and no more sense of exploration or curiosity than learning a new program on the

computer or finding a bargain on silk blouses. There is something healthy about that. She doesn't get diverted or neurotic from an information overload like those who're losing sleep about events on the other side of the world. Sometimes I wonder how I got into this frame of mind, with an allegedly wide-angle view of things. Why do I think about national issues like I was a special assistant to the President of the United States, keeping him informed and making suggestions or working on his speeches? It seems like an odd conceit, not to say a delusion of grandeur, when your frame of reference is so wide – here are my editorial opinions on U.S. foreign policy or feminism or what Nabokov had to say about Freud. And yet there is something to the notion of being an informed citizen. It's a civic duty to have a working knowledge of things (so you're not an empty-headed voter), and it follows that you might formulate some opinions. You might put your thoughts on paper in order to find your way through fact and fiction. Find out what you think and if it needs to be altered.

Anyhow, her and I are different.

V. and Maria don't like some of the older women who work here, and it sounds like Jews and Filipinos don't mix very well (at least in our office). They look on Ruth as being weird and pushy and complaining. She has taken to calling me honey though, so she can't be all bad. They criticize her sloppy clothes, but anyone who likes my sense of humor is okay in my book. And she knows about the cruelties of women when it comes to making quick judgments, saying, "Straight women are the worst…."

I was typing a letter for a DUI case and sending the police report to the breathalyzer expert. The fact that we handle DUI cases is "slimy" according to Ruth, a paralegal who doesn't understand that everyone is entitled to a fair trial. I'm not sure if our client has much of a case,

however. He claims he had a hole in his mouth from a knife wound and was using Listerine before he was arrested and given a breathalyzer test.

6 p.m. I walked to the pool. One mile in the water, and walked home.

10 p.m. I called the Phantom of the sound-room. We hadn't talked in a while and went on for an hour. He was in a good mood, not depressed or drunk or so stoned he couldn't talk. He said he had the 8-track tape recorder set up and one of these nights we should use it. I went off on a review of the low-down news, the more tabloid the better as far as he is concerned. I was bouncing some behavioral shockwaves off his stoner Nebraska head.

He works at a diner in Berkeley where a couple of years ago there was a controversial non-event concerning a man who read a *Playboy* magazine in the diner. By doing so he was oppressing women. The Phantom said there was a demonstration of high-minded feminists who carried cut-off hot dogs on plates with some bloody ketchup applied.

With respect to the knife act of Lorena, some of the women where he works were voicing their support. The Phantom wondered what kind of role model she is and said as much, and now they think he's unenlightened.

He was glad to hear that Ming's traveling companion in China was moody. Did she think he provided her a trailer and a job because he was impressed with her experience, which was very little? Would a man have gone to Alaska and been met with open arms and opportunities? Had it not occurred to her that he wanted her around to sleep with? She refused any further nocturnal relief and he is disappointed.

I got off the phone and on the typewriter.

Forgot to mention, I dropped by the café for a coffee and talked with the Russian waitress. Just to know her would be enough, someone with a background different than mine. I

don't want to overplay the theme of where she is from. The Czech woman used to say how tired she was of having to explain or be identified with the Iron Curtain. I remember being in Europe with a similar feeling when a Frenchman held me responsible for U.S. foreign policy (but then I have some doubts about Napoleon).

I was at the counter and kept it simple. "How are you?" That unleashed a response. You would think no one ever asked her, which is not implausible in that place. She said she was sleepy and tired. I mentioned the book I was reading and did she know the author, Voinovich? She has the book, *Moscow 2042*, which is popular in Russia.

I didn't say much else. She knows I'm here and has my phone number. If nothing happens I'll assume it's for a good reason, like she knows what she's doing, and she might be seeing someone. My ulterior motives often fade (now and then I'm realistic) as I get to know a woman. I find out who I'm dealing with and if we're not in sync. Sometimes the sound of her voice will do it.

Saturday, Nov. 20, 1993

NOTES

ORDER SUSPENDING CHILD

The pills are alive with the sound of music.

Mr. Rogue's neighborhood:

I was walking on Geary Street the other night when I heard someone running up behind me – a black man with a sense of purpose. He ran right by me. A minute later I turned the corner and saw him arguing with a strung-out white man over a shopping cart. The black man thought it was his. The white man wouldn't give in without a fight. They scuffled a bit and there were a few weak blows. When I passed them I heard the white man calling the police.

This was near the corner where a white man was set on fire by some black men.

I went out in the evening, walking to the corner, and passed a man being held on the ground by a couple of Guardian Angels. There were two policemen standing there while the guy on the ground was pleading his case.

On the way to work I walk up to the corner and turn right at the prostitute.

Late afternoon, I was walking to Polk Street and saw a post-operative who used to be a man. She was an exaggerated Marilyn Monroe pretender who was trying to walk and pose and fling her tresses at the same time. She ignored a man who pulled up to the curb, but then was bending over in the window and exchanging pleasantries about the cost of living. I walked by and a few seconds later they drove off together. Who's taking whom for a ride? The driver was a Jewish man in his thirties.

I was having a hamburger in a room of black tile and chrome (Sliders). There was a couple at a table who seemed to have a contrived arrangement. He was in a good suit, hair slicked back, pushing forty, a white man with the means to make ends meet. A bit stocky, maybe a businessman. She was more exotic with dark hair and cheekbones, lipstick, slender and refined, in her early twenties wearing a leather low-cut top with a push-up bra. When she got up she was wearing loose transparent pants with a black body suit cut high on the hip. Their conversation was muted, but it seemed inconsequential and stiff. I wondered if she was a mercenary escort, a cut or two above a streetwalker. Foot note: she had a sandal on the situation.

1)

A woman always on the phone,
she loves communication.
She can never be alone,
it's worse than menstruation.

2)

Another woman was accusing
him of being too mental.
He thought about it. "That's amusing,"
he said, "as you're too dental."

Typing in the afternoon.

I had part of an endurance bar. Looking for a handhold on a cliff or being a long-distance runner has something in common with being a writer. The vertigo of one, the "loneliness" of the

other, combining with “the pathos of distance” which I got from Nietzsche. The endurance that is required when you live alone. I’m “high in complex carbs.” I didn’t realize how effective they are until I went out at 4 p.m. on a few short errands. It turned into a two-hour trek, returning with a heavy load. I had correcting ribbon, writing pads, the newspaper and tobacco, and half a dozen Christmas presents. I was on a roll, a power stroll, with some idea of what I was looking for.

There’s a shop on Polk Street run by a friendly Indian man. It is crammed to the ceiling with imports, mostly from India, things you wouldn’t normally come across. Semi-precious stones, rough-cut amethyst, the occasional fossil, crystals, not to mention necklaces and bracelets, jaded elephants, and lazy Buddhas made of lapis lazuli. I have around fifteen people I’m getting presents for, half of whom are family. The others are women friends.

The things you stumble across when walking around, like an old periodical shop called The Magazine. It has back issues of *Life* magazine from the 1950’s, and some issues from the turn of the century. Half of the store is dirty magazines, including those which feature men. The guy behind the counter was telling someone they weren’t accepting those anymore. People bring them by the box load. Boxes full of girlie mags are lined against the wall, with vintage issues going back to the 1950’s. Some connoisseurs appreciate the restraint of a bygone era. They’re nostalgic for a time when they first discovered dirty magazines.

I found a *New York Times Magazine* from 1950 with an article by Reinhold Niebuhr (him with the good Niebuhr policy). “Is there a revival of religion?” Some things never end, but “…the evidences of a contemporary revival of religion are not conclusive.”

An article on the “Institute for Advanced Study,” with a photo of Albert Einstein, “now 71,” in his cluttered and cultured office with J. Robert Oppenheimer, the “46-year-old director of the Institute.” They were in front of Einstein’s blackboard with some complicated equations

(wrote questions) floating over his head. The article was written by a woman, and this was 1950. I thought it wasn't until Gloria Steinem manned the barricades that women were being published and shown respect, or was she crashing through an open window?

An article on a "selective sequence calculator" made by IBM, an early version of the computer. It fills a room. "The persons shown are inside the machine." Its dimensions have been etherealized and reduced to the level of molecules for switching the + and - while its capabilities have expanded to the horizon. Some people are so absorbed by computers you could say they are inside the machine. Or rather, a machine with its behavioral modification is inside the person.

Sharkskin suits for women with "pale pastels" to give it "a new and feminine softness."

Another article by a woman who has "written frequently on professional and career women." It begins with a quote: "Any man that walks over me is going to know he's travelling." Again, this is 1950, an allegedly unfeminist time when women were seen and not heard. Given the writer's background you might suppose the 1940's are implicated too.

An article entitled "Lull in Union Square." "Its communist proselytizers are muted by the embarrassing news from Korea." There is a picture of protesting women, "END ATOM BOMB…"

Ads for toothpaste and bras. Nowadays the bras are less unwieldy and more worldly.

Luggage, orange liqueur, and overcoats.

Shirts: $3.95.

SUPER BUICK DYNAFLOW with "Hi-Poise mounting" and "wide-angle visibility." The "hushed and silken smoothness of an engine that pours out its horsepower with the silent swoop of a Swiss on skis." A man and woman in the car. It's big and solid with a chrome bumper. The woman is driving.

I continued with the article on career women. “Show me a woman as good at her job as the best man in it and I will bring a cloud of witnesses, largely men, who admire her capacity and respect her judgment.”

More ads for women’s clothing. It is demure, not to say buttoned up and unrevealing. You would think the feminists were behind it.

Smoked turkey and imported port and chronographic watches.

An article by a woman quoting the Chief of the Bureau of Child Development and Parent Education (who is a woman). It begins with quotes from a research psychologist, a woman, to the effect that “Parents of today represent a transition generation.” What if things are always in transition or in transit or a trance? I was on the verge of transitioning from non-existence into existence in 1952. My parents got married around the time this issue came out.

An ad for a “young people’s record club,” with records like “Little Gray Ponies,” “Sing-along,” and “Said the Piano to the Harpsichord.” This shows a cultural deficiency of the late 1940’s and early 1950’s in this country. They didn’t have songs like “Insane in the Brain,” or “Jack U Off.”

An article by a woman about modern household items at the Museum of Modern Art.

An article about smart outfits of “adaptable sheer wool” which are well below the knee. I think even Catherine Mackinnon would approve.

An article by a woman on turkey recipes.

The majority of the ads feature women.

In the “personalities” section is a shot of Princeton undergraduates in coats and ties. They’re standing around Bertrand Russell who “received the 1950 Nobel Prize for literature.” That makes him nearly as good as Toni Morrison.

A shot of Paul Robeson. “The noted singer towers among guests at the Soviet Embassy’s reception in Washington celebrating the thirty-third anniversary of the Revolution in Russia.”

A shot of Picasso in London as “one of the few prominent leftists admitted to England for the Communist-sponsored Peace Congress….”

A shot of Joe DiMaggio demonstrating his “batting technique” in Tokyo.

Surreal ad: “I dreamed I lived on the moon in my Maidenform bra.” It has an “out of this world fit.” It comes with futuristic cones, and they look like robot tits.

A small ad in the back pages with a familiar face: Ronald Reagan selling “the original stormcoat.” “Ronald Reagan, Ruth Hussey, Piper Laurie and Jimmy Hunt, the lovable… family in *Louisa* tell you, ‘Sno Fo Original Stormcoats are great for everyone in every family’.”[39]

An ad for “the world’s only reflex-action bra.” It comes with “curve-conforming action.” If you want some action wear this.

On the back page is an ad for men’s suits. A man is trying on a brown suit and a woman sits nearby with a look of admiration. It is the only ad in the entire magazine where there is a suggestion of a woman looking up to a man, and that is not exactly the current approach. I remember talking with my history professor who is now in his late fifties. He would have been around fifteen when the magazine came out. I asked him about old-fashioned ads where women look at men with something like respect. I’m not familiar with that sort of thing. He said it was true back then, but “You couldn’t get laid to save your life.”

An ad for health insurance which included a HOSPITAL ROOM for as many as 60 days at $3 per day.[40]

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[39] Many years later Piper Laurie played a repressive mentally unstable mother in a horror film, and Reagan played a mentally unstable President.

[40] Flash forward to a night in 2009 when I was lying unconscious on a road in the Presidio woods. My bicycle lay nearby. I was taken to SF General Hospital where I stayed for two days. The bill was $32,000.

An ad from the oil industry information committee: “Thousands of oil companies mean competition… competition means progress….” Ha.

Letters to the editor. Nearly half are from women.

Big ad for men’s zippers.

There was an article on Eastern philosophy (the 1950’s were crass and materialistic, not like today). “The mind that still eludes our grasp…. The Eastern philosophy of fatalism and withdrawal, which regards the world as an illusion, lies in the back of every Eastern mind.”[41] It is a carefully worded article which admits the generalities and weaknesses of defining Easterner as “east of Suez and west of Vladivostok.” The writer makes the point that an Easterner would be “much less ignorant about” the Western world than the other way around.

> The orderliness of a Western street would strike him as an irritating regimentation, the buildings would seem monotonous, the dress drab and uniform, and the food tasteless. He would be revolted by such habits as washing in a bath and not under running water, and… he would be surprised by the excessive indulgence in tobacco and alcohol. But his main interest would be to find out why the West is powerful, and to obtain for himself a little of its power.

Regimentation lends itself to power. There was some mention of “ancient patterns we do not understand.”

An article on “Strategists at the United Nations,” with a shot of three women talking (from India, Denmark, and the U.S.).

An article on the Gettysburg Address (by R.L. Duffus) which “foreshadowed the struggle which continues in 1950.” Said speech was “fourscore and seven years” before 1950.

The room was $6,000 a night (and I had to share it). I had insurance or they would have left me lying in the road. Actually that isn’t true, they would have shoved me off the road so I wouldn’t be in the way of people driving to work in the morning.

[41] It was written by Lionel Fielden, a League of Nations aide in the Levant, controller of Broadcasting in India (1935-40) and Indian Editor of the BBC.

The cover incidentally (though not so incidental to them) was: CHINESE PRISONERS IN KOREA.

I was born into some variation of this milieu in 1952, and will get an old *Life* magazine for my father.

Odd that any mention of professional women, Eastern philosophy, and leftist politics would occur in a weekly mainstream magazine well before the late 1960's. If there was so much male domination in 1950 what are all these women doing in the *New York Times*? Furthermore, I'm not sure when I've seen women presented in such a respectable light. The formalities are part of this male domination, and it doesn't look so bad. There is a favorable comparison to the present when the liberation of women has had some desultory side-effects, like the Great White Whore, single mothers, and widespread abortion, to name a few. Such progress boggles the mind, and the murder rate was lower in those backward times.

I returned to my place around 6 p.m. I glanced down a street of old buildings and was surprised to see one with an array of Christmas lights. I didn't expect that in this neighborhood.

Reading the paper. It was a rude shock going from 1950 to the news in 1993. Were sex and crime a little more restrained back then, or was it the coverage? That reminds me, when it comes to undermining the presumptions of the present, I found an article on hallucinogenic mushrooms in *Life* magazine from the late 1950's. A professor went to Mexico, tried them out, and lived to tell about it with a good deal of respect.

8 p.m. I had the opera on (*Manon* by Massenet) and was relaxing on the bed. Being horizontal with an aria in the air compensates for living alone. Lately it's been getting to me. I

don't know if winter closing in has anything to do with it, like a big chill that occurs at forty-one isn't enough. I've been expanding the parameters of platonic love more than I ever did before.

I remember something the Professor said. (We still talk occasionally. It would be more often if that spider woman didn't have a death grip on him.) He was noting the young women in my life, including a nineteen-year-old girlfriend when I was thirty-six. He said wait until you're forty or so, they won't be coming around. For much of last year I was with a woman who was one year older and still is, may she wander in a limbo of her own disquieting libido.

Getting older means you're closing in on being obsolete. The culture is geared to the new and improved (as a selling point), looking down on anyone with too much history, like they've been defiled by it.[42] History implies depth, which undermines the two-dimensionality of propaganda. Maybe I don't have anything to complain about, being on close terms with women in their twenties and thirties, but I'm not sleeping with any of them. One is engaged, one just had a broken engagement, one is sleeping with a woman, one doesn't know who to sleep with, and one is a heavy drinker and prefers Latinos.

There has been a backlash of transmitted diseases and conservatism, or maybe it's me. My modus operandi needs an overhaul. You can have an open-minded literary drift when you're younger, but at forty you're supposed to have something to show for yourself from a practical standpoint and I don't. I keep forgetting this is a utilitarian country, and the sort of "air-conditioned nightmare" which drove Henry Miller to Europe.

That reminds me, speaking of the woman I consigned to limbo, I have less resentment for her than the one from this September. She was no September morn, more like a porno film that doesn't last very long. Someone who walks into your life as if it was a department store, handles

[42] The power structure on the other hand is full of old men who're playing God (and can't be counted on to answer your prayers).

some of the objects, reads the fine print and descriptions, tries on a few poses, undressing in the process, then walks out without a word. There's nothing you can do about it. She's a heavy drinker, and so loose she lost custody of her daughter. The other woman (a non-drinker) has a New Age foreground and a bitter background – a combination I wouldn't wish on anyone.

Maybe it's my fault for living in a threatening neighborhood where I'm addicted to the written word. Some women have a radar which can sense if they're competing with the muses.

Meanwhile, I was getting restless on a Saturday night. The isometrics of a certain isolation were getting on my nerves. I went out against my better judgment. I never go to the movies alone, but it was recommended by a couple of friends and the theater is a few blocks away.

Like Water for Chocolate. It's from Mexico. Going to a foreign film was the main allure at the moment – I wanted to get out of the country. What I hadn't counted on, or was unconsciously resisting, hesitating to the last minute, was that it would unlock more emotions than I wanted to deal with. It was a warm bath, but I'm in no position to dissolve. I feel more like a switchblade.

An hour or more into the film there was a scene after a long romantic build-up where a man and woman walk into a wooden house. It is empty but for a brass bed and the walls are covered with burning candles. The bed is surrounded with small flames. I was getting watery-eyed for a minute, as that is something I would have done. It was reminiscent of encounters in the past, and those aren't happening these days so it was painful to watch. When it was over I went outside, walking back and forth, smoking a cigarette on a surprisingly cold night. I had the usual mixed impressions of a film, including a recoil from the psycho-sociology of going to a movie in the first place. It is engineered to produce a certain emotional response.

It is vicarious when you're glomming onto someone else's way of life. It is wrapped in celluloid and sold like a commodity. One night you walk into a building and sit in a dark room while unfolding before you is a hot afternoon in rural Mexico around 1910. The camera pans lovingly across the table settings and the women in their long heavy fabrics with a nostalgia for the old formalities. A room full of strangers watch while some actors pretend to have an interesting life.

The contrast gives me whiplash when I walk outside and it isn't 1910 and I am not in Mexico anymore. It was rather morbid with people dying all the way through it. The sweet main character (the film is based on a novel by a woman) manages to give her sister a slow-acting poison in a meal she made for her, causing her sister to alienate her husband (who this sister wants) with bad breath, "flatulence," digestive problems, and to eventually die of those.

Many women think there is not enough of a woman's point of view in movies, and if there was more of that it would show women in a better light. Here is a film with a woman's point of view where women are associated with food, spells, and superstition. If a man had written this you might hear complaints about how women are portrayed, the sweet main character for example: a wet nurse by spontaneous combustion who is obsessed with food and believes her own breasts are nothing but "lumps of dough" if they're untouched and untransformed by the look of love (the camera looking down her blouse). She is unable to decide between two men, and one of them is married to her sister who she condemns to a slow death.

Her mother is a stern authoritarian who manages to get some fundamental things wrong, including that the Mexican revolution is nothing to worry about. She is eventually killed by a marauding band of men.

For that matter, the preparation of green peppers is more important than the revolution, which like other matters of life and death is pushed to the periphery or blurred over with a warm-hearted slant of the romantic. Looking back, you realize what awful things were going on. There is death and destruction, not to mention years of monotonous housework and unrequited love, but let's focus on the linen.

Speaking of which, there was a nice touch which was rather subtle. I mentioned it to B. who saw the film not long ago but hadn't noticed it. The young Mexican man (with some resemblance to a Greek god) is on his wedding night with Tita's sister. He had prolonged it for a few months because he wanted Tita. The bride is getting restless, aching for the consummation and arranging herself beneath a sheet and pulling up her nightgown. You see the outline of her legs spread underneath the sheet with an embroidered slit for the man to stick it through. Some aspects of formality go too far.

A woman is unable to choose between two men. One has a passionate allure (not sure what he does for a living), while the other is more orderly, calm, and secure (a doctor). It is Dionysus vs. Apollo, and events unfold along those lines when twenty years later (in the 1930's), they're around forty, the wife has died, and the sister finally gets together with her old flame. In true Dionysian excess it is Eros unto death. The naked couple is consumed in the flames of a burning bedroom.

Things occur which could be plausible everyday disasters, but which are seen as supernatural occurrences – anything to dramatize a dull existence in the country. For example, men are getting drunk around the fire. They are singing and one of them is suddenly on fire. He may have spilled some alcohol on his leg and got too close to the flames, but it is given another interpretation: the dead mother of the woman he loves did it.

One of the revolutionaries is in a skirmish with the Federales. He suddenly rides off, somehow knowing there is a young woman in the vicinity who is running naked through the rough terrain. He runs her down on his horse, picks her up, and carries her off. It turns into love at first sight, following an interlude of her in a brothel on the border. Naturally she has a stunning figure (speaking of magical realism). You get the feeling that women are physical and emotional, existing in an alternate reality which is not all that historical. It is anti-historical and so is the movie, using the poetic license of the medium and it borders on a lie. I wasn't seeing eye-to-eye with it.

The medium is taking liberties with space and time. A godlike omnipresence is afforded to the viewers in the audience who follow the camera and end up seeing all and knowing all. They pass through walls and closed doors. They are capable of being several places at once, or they hover in a dimension where months and years are condensed and telescoped. It may be necessary to tell a story, but they're missing something. The monotonous repetition, the years of frustrated love. It seems like Tita didn't have sex for many years, until the culminating moment with her old flame and no wonder she is pent up. For that matter, there is the not-too-feminist suggestion that with a man having died in bed she would follow him out of this life, swallowing matches to ignite her inner mythic phosphorus. It reminded me of women in India who used to throw themselves on their husband's funeral pyre.[43]

There are women in this country who have all the sensuality and instincts of Lysol and a credit rating. To see a Mexican film where the women are more sensual than political, who approach life from the standpoint of it being delicious, scented, and discreet, left me sorry I don't have a Mexican wife.

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[43] There is some question as to how voluntary it was. The custom was outlawed by the British in 1829.

Sitting at the bar at Max's Opera Café, drowning my tears in sauerkraut (I'm kidding about the tears).

I walked home, and was typing for a couple of hours. A long poem, three pages. Twenty-four rhyming quatrains. It had nothing to do with Mexico, being a satire on Rimbaud in North Africa in the 19th century.

> Rimbaud became a travel agent
> provocateur on guided tours.
> The tourists wondered, off on a tangent,
> where they were. He said, "Up yours."

3 a.m. Went to bed. I heard a familiar voice on the street. "Hey SIR, you got a QUOTA?!" He accosted me earlier in the evening when I was walking home. It is not a cost-effective approach. I wonder how much he gets and whether it's worth it. If one is relentless with the IQ of a ten-year-old it makes it easier to be a broken record. He is on the corner and runs up to any car that stops at a red light, putting his face in the window on the driver's side, "You got a QUOTA," holding one out in case they don't know what he meant. I think some drivers would be annoyed if not a little paranoid. He didn't seem to be getting any change. I watched from the window next to my bed, looking through the tree branches since I couldn't sleep. Going up to one car he suddenly backed away as if the driver (I couldn't see him) had pulled a gun and calmly pointed it in his direction and he backed off.

He is a tall man in his late twenties who might be harmless. I wondered to what extent his own mind (or lack of it) had something to do with his situation. He is not getting much sympathy from other black people from what I can tell. They either ignore him or threaten him, knowing he is something of a halfwit. It would be hard to find a job or hold onto a job if he is dumb and restless and undisciplined.

Sunday, Nov. 21, 1993

Typing on a dreary afternoon.

Workout on a wooden instrument while looking at a documentary about an assassination. There was old footage of a thin assassin handcuffed with an escort. He allegedly was yelling "Police brutality!... Is this America?" when he was arrested in a theater[44] after a short scuffle. Oswald was a small man, but it took seven policemen to restrain him and put the handcuffs on. You hear about this when a black man is arrested and if more than one policeman is involved they are accused of using too much force. Putting handcuffs on a struggling man is not easy. If there are more police involved, they are less likely to get hurt and it doesn't take as long.

He might not have been caught if he had the price of a theater ticket on him, since he allegedly snuck in without paying and someone reported it.

Late afternoon, the radio (KUSF) with a long program on Tom Verlaine and Television.

6 p.m. B. called and said there was a party and I should come over. I took a shower, put on some halfway decent clothes and went out, walking in a heavy mist with an umbrella.

The party was a few blocks from her place, near the top of Nob Hill. It was a small affair, maybe ten or twelve people. We walked in not knowing anyone. It was quiet, and I had a momentary panic at the thought of being stuck there for a couple of hours. This has happened before and I usually get over it. Things begin to loosen up, you get familiar with the men and women, and the wine is flowing.

There were pitchers full of margaritas but I wasn't having any. There was music and *mirabile dictu* an ashtray near an open window. The people were on the clean-cut side and as the

[44] Not the first time that a movie theater was the cause of someone's arrested development.

evening unfolded I didn't have much to do with most of them. I was talking with B. who is a party connoisseur. I think it is her medium of expression if you don't include the phone, which is how she hears about so many parties (it's the party line). We were getting into the hors d'oeuvres and she helped with the rice.

Dinner with informal seating. Spiced hot rice and enchiladas.

At some point I was talking with a black man who was smooth and friendly, thirty-two. He had been to Paris a couple of times. As usual my wariness was fading as I spoke with someone who didn't think I'm there to hustle or to hate. He had integrity in other words.

At some point in the conversation B. joined in. She had a low opinion of Buttafuoco getting "only" six months in prison for screwing a sixteen-year-old female. I thought it was five months and three weeks too much (the average age of consent in this country – as well as in Europe – is sixteen). Why it's more than a DUI is beyond me, especially when the person involved was not a virginal type whose innocence he ruined and whose reputation he destroyed. She was a part-time prostitute, and didn't mind shooting a woman in the face (Buttafuoco's wife).

The man we were talking with said she was too young. The youngest woman he ever slept with was twenty-one. He said she was mature and French and knew what her pleasure was. A minute later B. walked away, distracted by someone, and he continued. "And the youngest man I slept with was twenty-three…." I think I may have blinked but that was about it, and we continued the conversation with that bit of information having slightly altered the atmosphere.

There was some mention of the renovated Louvre, now with twice as much room. I couldn't imagine that. I spent a lot of time there wandering through the centuries of glorified humanism. Like someone from my neighborhood there was a sleeping hermaphrodite (a marble

statue), and not exactly from my neighborhood there was an angel of victory (*La Victoire de Samothrace*). I remember thinking that the *Venus de Milo* has big feet.

We were there for over two hours and things were raging at some point. I had more wine than I counted on, and B. was pouring down the margaritas.

9:30 p.m. We left, walking down the hill. Then I walked back up alone, retrieving the purse and keys she had forgotten.

Back at her place with some wine and coffee. We lounged around with her resuming a discussion from earlier - the ongoing dilemma with the other woman (a subject in which I'm reaching the saturation point). In order to talk about it on a realistic level it forces her to be candid. She will beat around the bush (or should that be plural) when referring to their time in bed, but has a point-blank honesty when it comes to their contradictions. The gender roles are not so readily defined, but the other woman is more masculine in her behavior. It is demeaning when her paramour is giving her mixed signals while arranging for another woman to fall back on in case it doesn't work out with B.

I said one problem is when women are more socialized than men, and the men are loners. The latter would leave them in a more defined state, where the former wouldn't. One's being-in-the-world is more diffused into a background noise of other people, and since both women are very social it's hard to pull each other into focus long enough to have a full-blown relationship.

Ilsa says one thing one minute and something else a minute later. It's possible she is testing B., throwing out lines to see how B. reacts. B. doesn't like being in that position. It's okay if she does it to someone else (like a man), but not okay if it's done to her. That reminds me, we were talking earlier about something and I mentioned a woman who is full of dirty jokes and

innuendos in the office, but who would probably complain if a man did the same thing. B. nodded, she knows the type. There are many one-way women in the world.

Meanwhile, she got the impression from my comments that I was at odds with the wonderful world of women. She walked over and took me by the shoulder and started shaking. "Don't you dare start to hate women… just because you run into a few tarantulas…."

I kept trying to steer the conversation in a different direction, but she would bring it back. Ilsa said to her, "I don't know what I want from you… I'm thinking maybe I should throw in the towel." B. wanted to know how I would interpret that. I thought the first line was pretty lame, like wondering out loud: "I don't know why we are together." Curious that "I want" would be the governing concern here. I'm not sure why two women couldn't figure out what being in love is all about, or maybe they're so busy protecting themselves and keeping their options open they forget they're having an affair.

During all of this B. was shoving postcards at me from the other woman and showing photos of their weekend on the Russian River (an all-women convention). There was a nice shot in a hotel room with B. standing in a glittering gold lame blouse, looking pale with long dark hair. Her girlfriend was next to her with her shirt off, looking tanned with bleach-blonde hair, small breasts, and a hard body.

She told me the woman gave her a copy of *The Little Prince* and B. made a comment about Machiavelli. I said, "That's *The Prince*." "Oh."

Earlier I fixed a broken string on her guitar, putting on a new one and tuning it. It's a classical guitar which she bought a year or two ago and has barely touched. I played it for a while as she was talking. My interest in the language drops when I have a guitar in my hands. I finally put it down. When I was holding the guitar I wasn't holding up my end of the

conversation and there was a mutual friend of ours on the phone – Phoebe, one of the actresses in Marin. She was ready to be in tears over a recent affair which isn't working out. B. has a limited patience for that sort of thing, so she handed me the phone and Phoebe shifted gears. We used to talk more often until I burned out on her self-preoccupation. At the moment we were conversing rather nicely.

1 a.m. B. and I were fading and I headed for the door. I held her close, pressing her body against mine. There was a quick kiss and I was gone, walking through the deserted streets at night in a light rain.

For some reason an energy current was still going when I got home. Around two in the morning I opened the kitchen window and dragged the dead tree out onto a white iron fire escape on the third floor. I heaved it into the dirt lot below, and it landed in an array of dead leaves. That left me fixing up the kitchen which now looked different. The tree (cut by the trimmers a while back) went from floor to ceiling and took up more room than I realized. Now I had half a room to use, and replaced the dead tree with a map of the world.

I was doing other things past three in the morning. It felt like I was still moving in. Maybe you keep moving into where you live, making occasional adjustments. You settle in like the ground settles, and for all I know it functions as a springboard when I want to leave. I like it here, but there are limitations and it feels like a domestic amputation.

4 a.m. Went to sleep.

Monday, Nov. 22, 1993

9:30 a.m. Not enough sleep. The usual morning litany was running through my mind: Where am I? What day is it? What am I doing? It took a while to get something going on the typewriter.

There was a phone call from B. who is arranging for us to have a Thanksgiving meal with friends of hers, and she mentioned champagne. It sounded better than my having a cold turkey sandwich in a cheap diner in the Tenderloin, sitting next to an old alcoholic. She was orchestrating some complicated plans for getting there (it's out of town), and was half-serious about a scheme involving my sister's car (who lives in that town). It would have been problematic and prone to things going wrong, so I couldn't take it seriously – like picking up the car at the airport.

Phone call from Ming's ex-boyfriend. He works in an oyster joint and we get along. He is being revived as her boyfriend, her having come to her senses in that respect. We compared notes on the letters we received about her travels in Korea, China, Hong Kong, and now Thailand. He has been through a lot, hanging on as an ex-boyfriend. He is patient, but it's been hard and he is starting to realize who or what he's dealing with.

A postcard from Bangkok arrived a couple of days ago. It showed an ornate traditional building coming to a high point with the woodwork in stylized flames. The Temple of the Reclining Buddha. Wat Pho. I would rather see the Buddha than the building. "I want to go there." "Wat Pho?"

> I can't fathom that there are people in this world that actually understand me less than you do… even though I try to make sense (at least with you my grammar is fair). Language barriers are the strangest things but all in all it feels good to be here. I finally made it into Thailand. I'm anxious and restless and in awe – I'm ready to immerse as I'm surrounded by funky bohemian-looking westerners. I hope you're well. Love,

Anxious and restless are her middle names.

2:30 p.m. I went out on the way to work. A nice afternoon with a slight chill in the air. I was barely out the door and walking up the sidewalk in a fairly good mood when I heard a splashing sound. A Latino/Native American guy with long black hair was standing on the curb and throwing up in the gutter. There was another splashing sound as I walked by. Everything is out in the open in this neighborhood.

I turned the corner and walked a block and waited for the light. Across the street was a young black prostitute in a see-through lace blouse who was silicon-enhanced, her original gender unknown. She was leaning over and flirting with whatever driver pulled up to a red light. It's a red-light district in that respect.

I walked to the bus stop. A white man in his thirties who was a little out of his mind and down on his luck approached me, talking to himself. "I don't need help…." Then he offered to sell someone a toilet seat cover for fifty cents.

The bus pulled up. I got on and it went into motion. I wondered why I like this neighborhood. There is a medieval assortment of the weird and the dysfunctional, reminding me at times of a Breughel painting or something by Hieronymus Bosch. A simultaneity of the mentally disturbed, the wanton and the drunk, the ex-cons and the thieves and someone getting sick in the gutter. Not to mention a misfit writer in a pink shirt, black and white tie, steel blue corduroys, and a purple jacket who walks out of a 1926 building on his way to a law office. He is trailing mental follow-ups like an invisible heat wave or transparent literary warp after spending hours on a typewriter. He leaves behind a journal of love-death rumors like a mural in the alley.

In the office, working for a couple of hours. A dissolution of marriage, personal injuries, and domestic violence. The latter involved a complaint being brought by an old client who stomped in, a two-hundred-pound floozy who, true to her nature, was yelling in the Attorney's

office (with the door closed) and disturbing a young attorney in the next room. She came out at one point and walked over to my desk having removed her jacket, her big boobs in a semi-transparent blouse-and-bra conglomeration.

Over a year ago she wanted us to file a rape charge on a man, which is no small thing considering the prison time he might be looking at and how that would disrupt his life. Her life was not disrupted by a stranger who broke in and assaulted her. He is a married man who she was having a long affair with. He came over for one of their afternoon sessions, except on this occasion she said no or wasn't in the mood but he went forward with it anyway. No weapon, no evidence of a struggle, and she outweighs him, but it still might have happened. Her credibility is not good, however, and the Attorney dreads having to put her on a witness stand. For one thing, following the allegedly traumatic event she put off going to the police because she had a meeting to go to.

There were other things to consider, like how her character would play to a jury. The analysis of the sheet showed the dried seminal evidence of other men who had been there recently. That may not be a factor, but after a while it doesn't look like an airtight case. At any rate, we instigated the proceedings. She is paranoid about his being Italian with some shady connections, so we put a police restraining order on him.

A few months later we got a call from her. She wanted us to drop the restraining order so he didn't have to stay a hundred feet away from her. It's hard to have sex when you're that far apart, and now they're back together. Never mind.

Since then there were other half-assed cases. An alleged wrongful eviction, a dubious worker's comp attempt, and something about a baby girl she gave up for adoption twenty years

ago. The girl had grown up and located her biological mother and wants to meet her. From her profile the daughter sounds sober and wholesome, pretty much the opposite of her mother.

The latest development: she wants to bring a domestic violence action against the same married man that she has been having an affair with. No bruises, but maybe it was mental cruelty. I wondered what his wife would think, like maybe she deserved it, having been assaulting another woman's domestic tranquility by humping her husband. Is adultery a form of domestic abuse?

5:30 p.m. I left and took a bus to the sound-room flat. It's in a neighborhood of smaller wooden magnitudes than where I live. On a nearby hill is Sutro Tower with its red lights pulsing on a cold night.

An hour later we were in the sound-room. The Phantom was in a blue trench coat with his long hair tied back. Having had the day off he was around the bend with his trusty 40-ounce bottle. He was functional though, and fooling around with his new 8-track tape recorder with a friend. The Les Paul had a broken string (high E) but he thought I could make do with that. I said no way, and got the customized Mega-zone.

We launched into something with his friend on bass and him on drums. A twenty-minute improvisation or jam-flux, having warmed up for a while. They got it on tape. They wanted to mess around with what was recorded, as if generating the sounds or music was a preliminary step, then it's modified and purified and overdubbed, turning what was crude oil into something more refined.

He played a tape of something he did with the roommate last week, a somewhat polished effort - I mean polished after the fact. I was struck by the sounds being produced and how much can be done by way of the equipment. You realize how many records lean heavily on the

recording equipment. It is something I am not so focused on, the editing process, which I can't even get going with the writing. It can produce some nice results when the caliber of what you've done is jacked up by the machinery.

Meanwhile, I wanted to play. There was not much to do if they were fooling around with other tracks, so I went out through the garage and upstairs and watched the game for a while. It was a blow-out by that time, 42 – 0. The roommate with the raspy voice was there. He has a concrete-manic presence and was talking about dreary Dutch Calvinists (he's from Michigan) and how he likes Charles Bukowski. He flipped through a book, *The Maverick Poets*. He fills a black book with an endless tiny scrawl. There was a nearly empty fifth of gin on the table, and he kept inhaling a bong. He offered some but I declined.

I finally went back down to the sound room. It was nearly ten by then. I found them still working with the tracks we had laid down earlier. He had overdubbed some spaced-out sound effects and it sounded better. The guy from downstairs showed up, the rough-cut fellow in his late twenties who is a kick-ass drummer. He has a fast-forward rhythm and power. We have jammed before and hit it off without a second thought. One of the interesting things about music is when strangers rendezvous in a recording studio, coming from different walks of life, and lock into a syncopated undercurrent.

And we did. It was one of the better sessions we have had. A good drummer makes all the difference in the world, forcing your timing into a further dimension where you transcend your limits. He didn't undermine our efforts with some clumsy drumming, throwing our timing off. The Phantom had been messing with the dials and switches and got a good loud sound from the guitar with him on jump bass jumping around (not much room in that black-walled dungeon), doing his thumb-slamming routine.

The sound I had over the next hour went from hard metallic to something with a screaming reverb where at some point (this is hard to describe) I slowed down. Rather than a constant flurry of notes and wandering all over the neck I made it slow and painful, making it scream and moan while the other two were holding their own.

It went on like that, the music swelling and subsiding, crashing into sudden velocities and change-ups giving us whiplash. A trio has a mind of its own. It is eerie how you can be in sync, making telepathic adjustments and responses from one second to the next, like it isn't three individuals but one expanded entity with three instruments in operation. It takes you out of yourself. You come up with things you wouldn't have otherwise. It can drag you down to a lower level or leave you going through the ceiling with an amplified feeling.

There were lulls and spontaneous combustion, but the drummer was exhausted and we finally quit. We only had a few minutes on tape because it ran out. Playing it back I was struck with the quality of the sound and what we were doing. Drums, bass, guitar, sounding at times like they were brawling, and then it fuses into what the Phantom said was "good musicianship." A combination of John Zorn and Television with a little grunge. Moody interludes with what he calls my "Johnny Winter licks" (wishful thinking).

11 p.m. I walked out of the sound room and into the garage feeling drained and at ease. I sat there with a German beer in the midst of motorcycle squalor. There were ten or eleven bikes half torn apart, and I was staring at a rear tire.

11:30 p.m. I left, walking a few blocks to the bus stop. It was cold. I caught a bus back to the neighborhood. I know I'm close to home when I see the blue neon sign of the NIGHTSPOT with a lunar crescent.

12:30 a.m. The phone rang. It was the Czech woman and we talked for half an hour. She wondered where I had been as she was trying to get ahold of me. “How was your weekend?” She went to Santa Cruz to get away from it all and spent the night in a roadside motel. It was not as peaceful as she expected. She could hear the road, and in the adjoining room people were “screwing all night.” The rhythmic moaning from a feminine throat can be nice, she said, but this was more like a disgusting older man who she suspected had a hooker. There were doors slamming at four in the morning.

She recommended *Farewell My Concubine* and said, “I’m getting so fat… let’s get together soon.”

I wasn’t tired so I made coffee and was on the typewriter for a while.

3 a.m. I went to bed and was about to fall asleep when I heard a clicking sound, like someone hammering on metal. I sat up and looked out the window. There was a black guy with the frame of a bicycle, no wheels or handlebars. He was hitting it with a small hammer. I’m not sure why he was doing this at three in the morning, or why he didn’t care that there were people sleeping in this building a few feet away.

There was a curious scene across the street from him. A hooker was leaning on a one-way sign with sagging cleavage and a short skirt. There were a few characters standing around, mostly black, with her a Latina. She is not a surgical alteration, but her features are hard as a man’s. I thought about the diplomatic immunity of prostitutes in the community. Maybe she is left alone and not harassed because the men don’t want to drive her away. Maybe they think she brightens up the neighborhood. It might be she’s protected by a pimp, but baby it’s cold outside.

I wondered how I could get him to stop hammering without getting into a fight, but he either stopped or I passed out.

Tuesday, Nov. 23, 1993

Woke up with an erection – some of us have an automatic direction in life – and went back to sleep.

11 a.m. I was coming to on a sunny morning with the light coming through the bamboo blinds. Things were feeling peaceful and quiet. Suddenly there was the sound of screeching brakes and the crunch of metal with two cars colliding. A minute later a jackhammer started up beneath the window. It's like aiming a machine gun at the sidewalk.

I got up and made coffee and was in the mood for a string quartet in an old church downtown. I called V. in the office but she couldn't make it.

Typing for hours.

2:30 p.m. Went to work. It was a solid four-hour session in the office with files and documents all over my desk. Everything from a restraining order to a dissolution of marriage (status only) sent to the petitioner in prison (the one who killed his girlfriend).

There was one of those phone calls I get now and then which don't leave me in a good mood. I can be calm, but someone's poison is coming through as if by osmosis and the sound of their voice. In this case it was a woman of Japanese descent who is having an awful dissolution of marriage from a man of Chinese descent. It has taken two years and I've become acquainted with her in the process. She is around thirty, with two little girls who're very sweet. The mother, as I was slow in finding out, is something else. There is a tendency to give your client the benefit of the doubt, maybe assuming they are justified and you are on their side. Then you start to read or hear things. She disrupted a counseling session and was difficult. There was some duplicity about property arrangements. She met an appraiser at the door by throwing a fit and screaming.

The attorney who represents the estranged husband is a woman who sent a letter warning us to restrain our client.

It's the old routine about relative points of view. I have been getting one side of the story, mainly hers. The law has an X-ray realism in which people's facades fall away. Generalities and pretensions based on gender, race or income level are gone with the wind, and you are dealing with individuals who are capable of anything.

In this case, a vixen with an ego which could stop a truck. It reminds me of Norman Mailer's line that you don't know a woman until you have seen her in court. Just what I need, more negative examples of the fair sex.

The worst part is I don't know the whole story. A woman has a couple of kids with a man and maybe that is all she wants from him. She commences to slowly drive him out of his mind and out of the marriage (and the house). As easily as turning on the charm she can turn it off, switching to another persona. Many women have the ability to attract a man, but you hear less about their ability to drive him away. Whether it is conscious or not is another question. In this case, she has the kids and he is gone and she can drain him for child support and other monetary arrangements including the division of property. I don't know if that is her main motivation, but she has her litigious claws into every dollar and cent dimension of the man's existence.

For all I know the husband is a jerk. Her attorney is a giant slug. One thing she was yelling about was a letter to opposing counsel which he has been promising to write for the last two weeks. It set out her demands and there is a pre-trial conference coming up next week. The Attorney was in the conference room with new clients and I said as much. She demanded that I interrupt him to talk to her. I went in and told him she was on the phone. He said he couldn't talk now and hadn't written the letter yet. I went back to her on the phone and relayed the message.

She would not accept it and was screaming and being condescending, and threatened to get another attorney and to bring an action against this one. I said she would have to stand in line.

It went on like that for a while. I don't respond very well to women giving me orders, and with the Attorney and her I was caught between a rock and a hard place, or rather a slug and a viper. She finally said she would get another attorney. I said, "Okay," and she hung up. The client called the receptionist back, trying to go through her. I went into the conference room and let him know the situation. He went into his office and I shut the door as he was already yelling on the phone.

One of the enigmas of this business is when you have demanding and impatient clients who may not know the law is slow and their attorney is even slower. He also has other clients. Some of those clients aren't paying or the attorney's fees are locked up in a future settlement. I don't know how he will calculate the hours he has spent on her. She weaseled her way into his good graces, being on friendly terms but using his time. He is reluctant to charge her for it and she knows it.

7:30 p.m. I walked home on a cold night.

9 p.m. A documentary on Channel 9, one of those nature shows I can't resist because "truth is stranger than fiction." It was about animal reproduction: mating rites and sex contracts with overt parallels to human beings. There was a warning that the following is adult in nature, parental guidance required, because you might see one monkey humping another for about two seconds.

There was an emphasis on how females "set the guidelines of the sex contract," tell me about it, because they invest more of themselves in the presumed results – the offspring. With

humans however, sex is not for reproduction most of the time, and that lessens the female prerogative for setting guidelines.

There was a theme of passive and implacable females whose worth is automatic and assumed and for whom the males compete. They "try to outdo other males for access to the female." They establish a home, if not a territory, that will attract a female – assuming they get to have any females who wander into their realm.

It occurred to me I'm doing the opposite by living in this neighborhood. If I wanted to live somewhere that would repel women I did a good job. There was some mention that a man's property and possessions are part of his attraction for many women - not that that objectifies men, of course.

Male competition: they put on extravagant displays because it is hard to impress or even get the attention of those dull-minded females. It drives the males to extremes of behavior and home building. This goes back to the origins of civilization when the motivation was to build a nest a woman might be comfortable with. Compare it to the claim that civilization had its origins in menstruation. I have also heard that beer along the Nile had something to do with it.

What if some females operate on an obtuse surface level? They are not a good judge of character, in other words, if they go with whoever wins. It was noted that certain female birds (along with monkeys and insects) are available to the sneakiest suitor. When two male birds or bugs are fighting, another one sneaks up while they're distracted and mounts the female who acts like nothing happened.

With many species the females are choosy and hard to impress. Someone who is hard to impress is either dumb as a fence-post or stuck up (to paraphrase a line by Salvador Dali, a young woman auto-sodomized by her own conceit). After all this choosiness, however, there was

reference to a species where – here comes the magic word – equality reigns. We're talking about hermaphroditic banana slugs. They do a 69 of mutual conception and then "chew off each other's penises."

The male praying mantis approaches the larger and somewhat vicious female very carefully. He has two main sensory points, the head and reproductive organs. The former tells him one thing (be careful, don't go near her) while the latter push him on. The female takes care of the dilemma by biting his head off. Having devoured that there is no one to contradict her opinions and she can avail herself of his still-quivering reproductive organs.

There was a nice point about how provisional or arbitrary some "sex contracts" are. Three percent of animals are monogamous. A lot of birds are, mainly because the young require so much care. There was some mention of lily trotters which require four or five males around, it being a "stressful" life with uncertain weather conditions. The female has to lay a lot of eggs and needs more males to watch them.

Many males of various species are loners on the periphery of things, having to fight and compete and if they don't or they lose they won't be mating at all. Fur seals (the young males) with no territory or harem have a pent-up fury and will kill a baby seal. The females are hogged by an old bull seal who nearly kills himself defending his territory.

It's odd how people extoll a back-to-nature or get-close-to-nature philosophy. How close is the question. They usually won't admit that nature is unsentimental. It has hierarchical arrangements to the extent that one could say aristocrats are close to nature, including the fact that they got to be aristocratic because their ancestors managed to hold onto a lot of territory and defend it by whatever brutal means. An aristocracy is close to nature with its built-in cruelty and extravagant visual displays.

For a while I had the radio on, making for a juxtaposition of old blues songs with a documentary on what males go through to get laid. The radio had an old black guy who was slowly responding to a question about what are the blues. He said they are caused by "womens." A man will love a woman with all his heart, but "she's a crook," gives him the runaround, and goes off with another man. He is alone and sad and turns to the blues.

I've heard it happens the other way around as well. For most of the time I was on a wooden instrument, nearly two hours, as if watching a couple of male snakes wrestle on the ground was inspiring.

11:30 p.m. On the typewriter. I thought about sex roles and contracts and how they are provisional, adapting to prevailing conditions and which way the wind blows.

Wednesday, Nov. 24, 1993

NOTES

> Another controversy: the election of a white woman governor in New Jersey. She won by 30,000 or 40,000 votes. Was the election fixed or tainted (like advertising wouldn't taint the process) by Republicans when they used $500,000 of "walking around" money? It was dispersed on a grass roots basis, an old method of Democrats for getting people to the polls (though not buying votes). In this case it was less overt. They were not keeping black people from voting, but made contributions to black preachers if they would refrain from proselytizing from the pulpit, and if some activists would stay home rather than encouraging people to vote.
>
> The issue is a stink bomb and no one comes off looking good. What does it say about the black community if they can't figure out what voting is for without being cajoled and remunerated for their efforts? What does it say about churches if they mix in local politics? What if a preacher doesn't say anything? Some would say that's how it should be if there is a separation of church and state.
>
> What happened to the $500,000? A black woman columnist in the *Chronicle* said "Either way, it's dirty money." This tradition of walking around money "always has smacked of corruption." I think she is implying the corruption of Democrats in a black context, heaven forbid.

There was a shot of Reverend Al and Jesse Jackson frowning and looking concerned. Either it didn't happen or it did, in which case they might want to focus on those in the community who took the money. However, that implies that black people are responsible for their actions, a controversial topic in its own right.

Cover story in *Newsweek* on the "hidden rage" of middle-class black professionals. THE RAGE BEHIND SUCCESS and "The large and small indignities to African-Americans." I wonder if one has arrived when one's main concerns are a controversial non-event which makes the cover of *Newsweek.* The appearance of this story undermines the premise that blacks haven't made it and still have problems. They are continually dividing in half the distance to the goal, in which case one never arrives. The distance – and complaints – just get smaller and smaller.

I don't mean to put them down, whatever raging success they're not comfortable with. It must be hard when money can't buy happiness, especially if you spent your whole life blaming the white man for your problems. Things go through a sea-change when you graduate from the excluded and the destitute, and have the less than earthshaking problems of those who ride the system for all it's worth. There is the indignity of having to admit your quality of life leans heavily on the customs and inventions of another race.

One of the time-honored customs for the middle class is to cop a pose of being put upon. There is an attitude of the arriviste, with white Americans having written the book as far as that goes. The pretensions and effete complaints of ex-peasants have reached legendary proportions - just ask the people who have to wait on them.

Some of the frictions lead to anger behind a mask, as the magazine cover suggests. There are not a few white people who have suffered "large and small indignities" at the hands of blacks. Not housing discrimination so much as breaking and entering, or assault and robbery. Not insensitive or condescending remarks in the workplace but in the culture at large, along with threats on the street.

There was some mention of the white truck driver who was beat up during the L.A. riot, and "Don't blame all blacks for black crime." I don't, but white people are blamed for crimes by white men which occurred centuries ago. I have worked in offices downtown where there were black people and maybe this is taking it too literally, but I don't recall anyone ever blaming them for the latest black-on-white homicide. Like a categorical feminist denunciation, "All men are rapists," there is the assumption that all whites are racist. According to this logic I am condemned in advance as a racist and can never hope to be otherwise. This is partly for the European slave trade of a couple of centuries ago, where I am theoretically or is it rhetorically being held responsible. Never mind that my maternal grandparents were born in Denmark and never went near the south. I don't think my other grandparents ever saw a black person in their life (they were culturally deprived).

Also mentioned was the election in New York, where it was thought to be oppressive and unfair that 80 percent of whites voted against the black incumbent. Never mind that he was incompetent or that he got there in the first place by garnering a large percentage of the white/Jewish vote. Never mind that blacks are known for voting in massive blocs, like 90 percent or more.

1)

She thinks I'm living like a savage monk,
which in her opinion isn't good.
I'm in a country full of cyber-junk,
and living in a jackhammer neighborhood

with "super sex" according to the signs.
Maybe the signs are having sex, I wouldn't
know. I thought the semiotic couldn't
reproduce itself, and yet the signs
are there. You're caught between a semi-erotic
woman and a world of the neurotic,
while encountering the slippery perils
of the naked and the dear. The pills
are alive with the sound of music, an over-
load of info turning off the lovers.

2)

Maybe it is time for an ascension,
levitating through the fourth dimension,
taking time, and time is esoteric,
even though you feel like a generic
person with the images in orbit
and your character a found collage.
The random information you absorb
becomes another form of camouflage.

In the morning I was coming out of a dream and listening to a garbage truck. The drone of a machine and someone shoveling dirt and rocks.

I got up and made coffee, looking out the window. There was a man getting arrested at 8:30 in the morning. A white derelict was led away in handcuffs. There was also a beat-up sedan

with a black driver. He was handcuffed in the backseat while the police went through the car looking for something. They finally let him go.

9:30 a.m. Phone call from B. She talked about tomorrow and her present dilemma with her girlfriend. She can't tolerate being tested and jerked around. She mentioned the latest maneuver or manipulation. Ilsa was vague about getting together in a few days, like she is keeping her options open (why does that sound familiar). Then B. said, "I've done it myself a million times to men." Ilsa called her at the last minute, dying to get together and missing her so much. B. admits that she doesn't treat men very well, and doesn't like being on the receiving end of what she considers to be feminine bullshit.

I mentioned the article in the paper about lesbians requiring special health care. She thought it was absurd.[45]

Got off the phone and went out in the cool morning light, a meandering walk around the block. I thought I was headed for the library to pick up Edmund Wilson's *The Last Journal* but forgot my library card. The Magazine wasn't open yet so I bought some water and tobacco and walked home with a tune in my head from *Hair*. I changed one of the words. "This is the dawning of the age of vicarious…."

12:30 p.m. I arrived in the office and left with V. We were headed for a granite ledge. She cut her hair again, having luxurious straight black hair nearly to her shoulders, but she wanted bangs. Apparently they make her look younger. That is something she is concerned with having attained the ripe old age of twenty-six.

We sat on the polished granite of some architect's conception of a public space which didn't want to pander to the anthropomorphic. I was eating a small burrito when a raspy-voiced

[45] I read somewhere that members of Warhol's crowd in the 1960's did not like the concept of homosexual communities or self-ghettoizing gays.

bum walked up. He stood close, bending over, and wanted to know where I got it and how much was it. He only had a quarter. Could he have some? How about the hot sauce? He had a similar routine with others who were sitting nearby. One guy got up and walked away (a few minutes later he returned). I'm getting thick-skinned and a bit cold when it comes to panhandlers. If they're in my face I'm right back in theirs, whether or not I have any change. I have an idealistic assumption, maybe the last shreds of white male imperialism in my blood, that the streets belong to everyone and I have the right to be here. It has gotten me into trouble before with territorial jerk-offs who assume that if they spend a lot of time on the street it belongs to them and the rest of us should stay home.

Corollary: There is a natural tendency for whatever you're doing to become a norm. Living in this neighborhood for seven months I have slowly taken on its desultory coordinates and delirium as a norm. Other parts of town seem airy and lightweight by comparison, and it seems like something is missing. There are no whores on the corner, no one getting arrested, and no seedy characters at the end of their rope.

A couple of months ago I mentioned to a woman how clean and fresh her neighborhood is (Noe Valley). It felt like I was being pulled from the rancid depths when I visited her, and said something about there being no prostitutes. I wonder if she took it the wrong way, like I wanted one. I wouldn't put it past her. I need to be more careful with women whose intelligence is compromised. You're being misinterpreted if not reduced to a level they can understand.

For as long as I can remember (not that I have been entirely consistent) I have preferred women with a full-blown intelligence. You know where you are with them, you're being seen and experienced in the light of an expanded comprehension. The odds are better that your thoughts will be appreciated, and maybe even your jokes. It's inspiring when you talk with

someone who might have (let's pause for a moment to relish the concept) a handle on her limitations, while viewing a man as something more than the enemy, a tool, a means to an end, a trophy of the status quo.

Where was I, talking with V. I asked her where I could get some Christmas lights. She knew immediately and we walked there, a drugstore. While looking through the selection she said an artificial tree is better than a real one which is "messy," dropping needles. She doesn't like real flowers because "they die." One reason I spend time with her is to understand how far apart we are. It would be easier if she wouldn't insist on being so lovable.

In the office I walked past Maria, the filing clerk at the next desk. I sat down, looked over, and said good morning. She turned around with a big smile and exclaimed, "He said hello to me first!" I didn't know that was a big deal. I think her immediate circumstances fill up the foreground and other things are relegated to the background (culture, news, you name it). She is involved in the ongoing stage production of her life, which includes the casting and the acting. It leaves her with a heightened awareness of every moment (for better or worse).

I did some work and then went out for something. I ran into one of the legal secretaries, Aisha, who used to be the receptionist. We are friendly with each other. She has a reputation for sleeping around, and had a small package from Victoria's Secret. I said, "What's in the bag?" and she said coyly, "Wouldn't you like to know?"

Later I was putting together a file on a new case. Life goes on and so does crime. It involves a Latino male juvenile (seventeen) in one of the local communities. He was bored out of his mind perhaps, but saw a couple of Latino guys in the process of being arrested for having stolen something from a corner store. It was not much, but the police asked the store people if they wanted to press charges and they did. Our client walked up and said, "What's going on…

fuck you…," and the next minute was slugging a cop. One suspect got away. A small crowd of angry Latinos gathered. A ten-speed bicycle was thrown into the air and landed on the patrol car.

Our client was charged with "lynching," among other things: the act of aiding the unlawful release of a suspect from the custody of the police. He has some prior convictions (four misdemeanors, one felony). There are photos in the file of a bruise on his arm and one on his leg (police baton). I think there is an accusation of police brutality. From the sounds of it, anything short of letting him go would constitute brutality.

I went home after work. Later that night there was a long phone call with Rima, Jon's roommate in the wine country. We have a conversational rapport.

Typing for hours.

3 a.m. Went to sleep.

Thursday, Nov. 25, 1993

NOTES

> A review in the lit section of the *Bay Guardian* which I want to take apart line by line. There are stretches where almost every line is a non sequitur, a lie, or makes no sense. The woman was reviewing a book by Judy Grahn called *BLOOD, BREAD, AND ROSES: HOW MENSTRUATION CREATED THE WORLD*. Another humble unassuming title by a woman and already I'm on alert. The rhetoric of being equal to men was a smokescreen, a brief intermission for those who want to establish their superiority. It wasn't even men and women, or women and men, who had a hand in the evolution of the species, it was women and their blood stream. The men are washed out of the picture by a tidal wave of female self-preoccupation.
>
> She begins by setting up a false premise, a fallacy, which she then shoots down. Good aim, what a shot, it was her own unmoving homemade target. "Whereas before women could be denigrated for being 'on the rag,' whether or not they were actually menstruating, they can now be written off as insane…." I don't know what barnyard she was brought up in, but denigrating women for being 'on the rag' is not a widespread custom, especially in any sort of polite society. The phrase is not as common as she thinks, and it is hard to believe that wives and mothers and sisters are being 'denigrated' every month by husbands, sons, and brothers. Even worse, she fails to mention how the

topic of PMS, not to mention menstruation, has been spread across the country primarily by women and from different angles, like being for and against the PMS defense. There was a women's panel discussion on Channel 9 the other night. They were all talking at once at some point about their periods. A black woman journalist objected to the whole subject, and another woman pointed out that the topic is being kept in the spotlight by women.

"Far from being an implacable construct imposed from without, hostile to women in general and their blood in particular, culture…." What? Is Camille Paglia rendered helpless with laughter at this point? CP cuts through the hypocrisy and revolutionary role-playing and says that culture is women's best friend, offering so much in the way of shelter and protection and laws and choices, not to mention everything from hair driers to piano recitals. But you see how women come off looking heroic if you put across the notion that civilization is "hostile" to women. How courageous they are when braving the vicissitudes of grocery stores and dressing rooms and restaurants, not to mention air-conditioned high-rise buildings with quiet elevators and cushioned chairs.

There are a few men who might believe that civilization is hostile to men and their blood, what with all the men who have suffered from the wars (and prisons) that civilizations tend to generate. But what is that compared to cramps? The title of the review: "Written in Blood. Did Cramps Give Rise to Culture?" Or does culture give you cramps?

So how is civilization hostile to women? Are they better off without it? When women are on their periods the authorities send hired thugs to beat them up. The packaging, distribution, and sale of feminine hygiene products is forbidden. When women go into a store to buy those they are chased out by an angry man with a stick. If none of this occurs, then what is she talking about?

Continuing the sentence: "… culture is seen to issue from within, out of the rise and fall of the menstrual waves." Maybe there's a limitation of the language or I'm missing something. There is a joke about Moses parting the Red Sea, but that is still giving men too much credit (and in fact it never happened). Did the empires of the ancient Persians and Egyptians develop because of menstruation? I was under the impression that women were not in the forefront of most cultures. That is one of the complaints of feminists, that women were held back. They tended to be uneducated and subservient and stuck with the kids. Never mind that most of the men were subservient too. You would think that for thousands of years all men had property and the right to vote. A little class analysis goes a long way in cutting through a feminist-warped perspective. You would think that civilizations were constructed to counteract "a raise and fall of the menstrual waves," establishing a solid foundation so everyone isn't seasick.

"In Grahn's versions of the genesis of humanity…" (wait until she hears my version), "…it was the synchronicity of women's menstrual cycles with the phases of the moon – and most importantly, women's own grasp of this remarkable coincidence." Sounds like a remarkable grasp of the obvious. How synchronized is it, like all women have their periods on the full moon or the new moon? She fails to mention, or maybe doesn't grasp,

the remarkable coincidence of the synchronicity of many men, where the daily cycle of losing and gaining consciousness is synchronized with the cycle of night and day. That is, with the orbit of the earth around the sun. It is not something I like to brag about, but maybe I should, all things considered.

It went from the synchronicity of women's cycles to synchronize your watches. Who invented those?

Where was I? Women were grasping or gasping, "…and then there was the subsequent elaboration of ritual to communicate their findings to the non-menstruants (i.e. men)…that gave birth to human consciousness and culture." Just like that. Men had nothing to communicate. They weren't conscious of anything until they saw some women sitting in a circle.

It went something like this. One of the women said, "Would you go down to the corner store and pick up some maxi-pads for me? Industrial strength." The men got together and knocked around the concept. What's a corner? What's a store? What's a maxi anything? What are the principles of supply and demand which determine the price of something, including maxi-pads? What is money? They had to invent all of those things, from Euclidean corners to the idiotic euphemisms used in conveying feminine hygiene products (EVE'S NEW DAWN), and in the process civilization as we know it came into being.

There is a blurb for visiting authors in Berkeley which mentions the author and her book. Grahn "… reveals the connections between ancient menstrual rites and the origins of agriculture, mathematics, geometry, writing, calendars, architecture, and many other realms of knowledge." They left out nuclear physics, baseball, and car repair. "She blends archeology, personal memory, ethnography, and myth to show that menstruation is what made us human." It would seem her argument is compromised and suspect if she is going by personal memory and myth, and ethnography can be a little sketchy.

Also, it was not uncommon among some tribes in the Stone Age for women on their periods to go off into the woods for a few days. They were quarantined, set apart, and in some cases thought to be unclean, or maybe the tribe didn't want to be around them. For some reason there was no explosion of architecture, writing, or geometry.

Maybe this theory would explain Mayan culture with its calendar and pyramids. Also a game which involved a stone ring on the side of a wall, which male-biased males assumed was for a ball. In fact it was for throwing a tampon through. The calendar was invented so women would know when their period was coming, but I'm not sure why that's necessary if they're synchronized with a dead satellite floating in the void. The connection with the pyramids escapes me at the moment, but the imperialism of perceptual limitations in a man is a well-known phenomenon so I shouldn't oppress the reader with any further evidence of my shortsighted insights. Maybe women got over their cramps by climbing up and down the pyramid steps. What other purpose did those steps have since they don't lead to anywhere? Probably just an exercise machine, an

ancient version of a Stairmaster so women could lose weight, but men took it over for their own bloody purposes.

9 a.m. Phone call from B. Change of plans, wants me to come over earlier.

11 a.m. I walked to her place, then left with her and J., a mutual friend. We took a cab to the train station. An hour on the train. J. is a recovering alcoholic in his mid-thirties, and works for a Japanese import company. When they were going over his resume, they found his education included a "Japanese minor." I asked him what her name was.

I pulled out the paper. B. feels it is a civic duty to keep up with the news, and yet can't find the time to read the paper. It doesn't require any planning on my part, I just do it, like I do a lot of things – to her amazement – with a more or less direct intention. It is nothing to write home about, but compared to her evasive complications it works.

J. noticed the train had a pipe near the steel wheels for spraying some fine sand on the rails for traction.

She was gratified to learn that the black men who set a homeless man on fire in my neighborhood were caught. "They thought it would be funny to light someone on fire…There were second and third degree burns over 30 percent of his body, including his groin, legs, back, and stomach." They are charged with "attempted first-degree murder, torture, aggravated mayhem, and two counts of felonious assault." One is nineteen and another seventeen. The latter "also had a prior warrant out for his arrest on attempted murder and torture charges."

The legal system thought it would be funny to run an electric current of a few thousand volts through someone who tried to burn a man to death (I'm speculating here).

We were picked up at the station and driven to the back hills of Portola Valley, an idyll of dying leaves (wrote lives) in a brittle explosion of the dry and flame-like. It was autumn in the vicinity of high-priced homes.

I was here last year with them, but continued to my sister's place. The memory circuits are overloaded with all that went on in the last twelve months, but I was floating through the afternoon in an atmosphere of familiar coordinates. The man and woman who live here are in their mid-to-late thirties, with him an attorney (he has an office in New York, returning once a month). She is taking a writing class. The law and writing were subjects which were avoided for most of the afternoon, along with topics in the news. They didn't want to detract from the meal with anything serious or disturbing. That was left for the early evening, as if the occasion was an interlude of fine-tuned dishes. However, I have a limited capacity for discussing how the sweet potatoes were or how full I am.

There were about ten of us sitting around a long table with windows in the back. There were candles and champagne with bubbles rising to the occasion. The man of the house was not holding back, with the two of us peeling potatoes earlier and his wife in the kitchen giving orders. He poured champagne in a long glass. The table was covered with fragile glasses and he was about to open another bottle. I suggested he do it in the other room and so did his wife. He was not concerned. The cork exploded out of the bottle, ricocheting off the ceiling and hitting the table. It bounced through the crystal without hitting or breaking anything and I caught it. His wife expressed some doubts as to his judgment.[46]

There was a couple from Boston in their early thirties, with the man working for a financial company. His wife is a slender woman of substance with an infant son. I had the feeling

[46] In 1975 I was walking on the promenade in Nice. The beach was about ten feet lower. Someone opened a bottle of champagne on the beach and the cork went flying in a high arc. I caught it and threw it back to some applause.

some of these people live in the real world (East Coast version). Their lives are well-defined, at least from my perspective, and with solid foundations. I don't mean that as a put-down, rather as something that can weather the flux, not to say the storms, of economics or emotions. They seem to have a grip on the concept of a significant other, a long career, and where they live. The continuum is a serious matter. Having their lives torn asunder on a regular basis is not part of the program.

We were communing in the amenities of home and office, with the former compensating with a scintillating lyrical dimension for having to work.

A celery consume. A delicate confection in a thick berry/port sauce. Brussels sprouts cooked with grapes. String beans with water chestnuts. A cranberry concoction with a horse radish contradiction. I had a dry Bordeaux in the know, along with turkey.

There was a couple in their late twenties, him with his hair down to his shoulders and tied back. He had a tendency to get a death grip on the conversation with mechanical instructive monologues about, for example, his bicycle. In the early evening when I was messing around with the fire he walked up and told me how to do it.

The people who live here have a two-year-old son with the look and attitude of being born into a well-cushioned privilege. Maybe that is an assumption which all infants have, but most of them find out sooner or later that the circumstances are otherwise.

Late afternoon we went for a walk in a wan light. The air was cool on a road which had some views. More trees than I see in a month in the city.

The financial loan adviser had his baby in a backpack. He seemed to be over-attentive. These are people who have made a domestic stand: man, woman, child, job and mortgage. It sounds normal, but it hits me from a familiar/unfamiliar angle. The former is how my parents did

it, and the latter because I'm doing something else. Lingering on the edges where you come undone and then are reconstructed with a typewriter. You're up in the air and barely there at times. Your mind is like a satellite dish which was built to listen and pick up signals. It's not the same as having solid foundations.

An eternal return to the dinner table where I lit a candle. There was a wood fire in the next room with a high ceiling and high glass windows. There were several kinds of pie and whipped cream from the man of the house, along with a cold and golden Muscat. It's a stronger wine than I'm used to. I felt like a boa constrictor which has swallowed a large meal. Rather constricting, not to say a drug. It pacifies your IQ, which is dropping. I don't do this very often, but was fairly restrained with the drinks that were going around.

Coffee, and we broke up into smaller conversations. It was now okay if the talk became more topical. I was so indifferent for a while that I watched a couple of kids, one of them wobbly on his feet.[47]

7:45 p.m. We were running out of time if we were to catch the 8 o'clock train. We were driven to the station by the financial guy, arriving with a couple of minutes to spare.

We then waited for nearly half an hour with the train delayed. Someone had thrown something on the tracks, damaging the train (the vacuum equipment). We stood there on a cold night with the lines of steel disappearing to the horizon. There were just a few people waiting. We were panhandled by a black man who was throwing it out there for what it's worth, wanting ten bucks. Another black man walked up in a long coat and a polished hustle. He needed $1 to get back to the city. "No no, I'm serious…," as if we should get with the urgency of the program

[47] I have mixed feelings about infants and toddlers, maybe because I'm not one. I don't mind being on their level – on the floor – and playing with them (if they're in the mood), but I sometimes feel uneasy around them. I think I pick up their uneasiness with their own existence. It is thoroughly compromised when you are one or two years old - helpless, uncoordinated, and unable to communicate while sitting in a urine-soaked rag.

and forget about what we were talking about before he interrupted the conversation. You might wonder why he would be at the station without the fare and the train due to arrive any minute. He was a bit drunk, but with nowhere near the look of a derelict (later I saw him on the train). I was feeling no pain and gave him some change and the rest of my cigarette (he thought it was a joint). The other two, B. and J., resented the hustle or intrusion, being used to it in the city but this was Menlo Park. Part of the resentment for being approached by a black man on the street is you know it's not because you're a human being worth talking to. That happens one out of a hundred times. You're a walking ATM machine, and it doesn't go both ways. You wouldn't want to ask a black man for change, or walk up to some black people who were talking and interrupt them. See what sort of response you get.

9 p.m. A train pulled up, but it was going in the wrong direction. A minute later the northbound train arrived. It was a sleepy ride back to the city. J. was nodding off across the aisle. I sat next to B. whose lower back bothered her. She was going on in hushed tones about the other woman. Ilsa is an opportunist and is leaving B. with some doubts. One of them pretends to be in love and the other pretends in bed.

In the city we took a bus to her neighborhood. I walked her to her door with a kiss goodnight and walked home.

11:30 p.m. I sat around, not sure what the next move was, having coffee and a beer. The phone rang. It was Ming in Hong Kong. She sounded like she could be calling from down the street, instead of halfway around the world. I haven't heard her voice in over a month.

She doesn't trust Chinese people. There are travelers in China who will negotiate the price of a long bus ride only to find out the driver doubled it along the way. If they don't have it they are dropped off in the middle of nowhere. She has already been the victim of price-gouging

in a rip-off café. She doesn't want any more tension, having had a fair amount of stress with her companion and her father. The latter's second home is across the border in China. It sounded cold with its marble and rosewood, seemingly void of what makes a house a home.

She wishes she had read up on China before she went there. I mentioned the material I accumulated for her which had gone ignored. Meanwhile, she spent nearly two weeks in Thailand. Bangkok was "the pits." Heavy car pollution with the traffic unbelievable. There was some mention of what happens when otherwise calm Asians get behind the wheel of a car.

Since she wasn't there for the sex district, she went on a 13-hour bus ride down the coast. Then a two-hour boat ride to an island where she had some semblance of a relaxing vacation. There were bungalows on the beach. Fresh cheap seafood along with coconuts and pineapple. Friendly Thai people. There were some language problems, but other than that she got along.

Ming went to a nightclub one night. There were more Westerners than she might have wanted, including some idle stoners. It was something of a disco. She slowly realized the atmosphere was that of a mercenary pickup joint. There were a lot of white men with Thai women who she thought were probably for hire, and a few large bouncers. She was stoned and didn't care. Her companion didn't like the place, but she had a nice time and said she was mistaken for a Thai woman. It sounded like she managed to get picked up, but was being circumspect, speaking from her mother's kitchen in Hong Kong.

There was another trip where they headed north from Bangkok. It was a day or two on the bus, then hiking with a small group on a "trek" which involved cross-cultural contacts with a village in the backcountry. One night the two groups sat there facing each other under the moon. She was stoned again and made a polite refusal of the opium.

She is ready to come home. I don't know if the culture shock or emotional strain was getting to her, having never been out of the country for any length of time. It sounded like a reality check where a leftwing ethnic person returns to the land of their origin and have a rude awakening. It was idealized from a distance, while not realizing the special effects of being a minority in this country. As a Chinese woman in the midst of a billion Chinese she didn't feel very special. She felt worse than ordinary, being in a country where women have fewer rights, and a woman traveling alone (as she did at times) is regarded with suspicion.

I thought she should see more of China before the disillusionment took over. I didn't want to say she hadn't been gone long enough, trying to be tactful, but said she isn't there very often. It was right across the border from Hong Kong and how could she resist? She might fly back in a week or two, and told me what great photos she took. I said, "Who loaded the film?"

Friday, Nov. 26, 1993

11 a.m. I went out for a few things, from a typewriter ribbon to *The Last Journal*, but the library was closed. I returned and read the paper. In the last two days Anthony Burgess and Albert Collins died. Seventy-six and sixty-one respectively (the latter from lung cancer). The iceman won't come around anymore. I saw him at Slims not long ago. During one song he walked out the front door of the club while playing an intense solo, hitting the night air with the blues and surprising a few people walking by.

I haven't read enough of Burgess. He wrote more than fifty novels, all but one of which were published after he was my age (he was born in 1917). I have read *A Clockwork Orange*, one or two of the Enderbys, *Earthly Powers*, and a couple of others. "He spent his last years working systematically from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., drinking strong tea, chain-smoking small cigars and

producing 1000 words a day at a large architect's table on a word processor for his journalism and on a typewriter for his fiction." He was "a tall thin man" who "always wondered whether he should have pursued his other keen interest – music."

It is one of the great stories about how a writer comes into his own, not to say a method for dissolving writer's block. When he was thirty-nine he was told he had one year to live (brain tumor). He started cranking out novels as fast as he could, "… so that the royalties could support his wife." "When doctors found the tumor was no longer there, he continued his steady pace." The mind can keep you well.

There was a recent letter to the editor in the *Chronicle* – more doubts about the Nobel Prize for literature going to Toni Morrison. People wonder if it was an affirmative action award. The letter writer noted that it hasn't gone to Anthony Burgess or Gore Vidal or Henry Miller or Philip Roth. Since it couldn't have gone to her because she is "black and a woman," he had to conclude that she is a better writer than any of those.

1:30 p.m. I was headed for the typewriter when the phone rang. The Actress was on her way over. Things were thrown into fast forward as I straightened up the place.

Then she was here, having spent the night in town. There were a couple of parties and a lot of drinking last night. When we were seated at the round wooden table she said, "You have a beer?" and proceeded to get down to business. "Want to hear the gory details?" A week or two ago she was unemployed and pregnant, but now it was reversed. She found a job at a glass factory in Oakland (working as an accountant), and went to the hospital last week, having an abortion a few days before Thanksgiving. There was no way she could have another child.

The ex-fiancé had been responding in a perfunctory manner, but now was incommunicado which was driving her up the wall. It was a theme that we would return to over

the next 24 hours (I ended up spending the night at her place). I looked for an explanation for him remaining cold and distant, but it sounded like I was making excuses for him and she didn't want to hear it. For that matter, apropos an earlier conversation, I said "Character is fate." Given the desultory patterns unfolding in his life, with her being the latest victim, she thought it applied to him but not to her. I later saw a note on the wall in her room: "Character is NOT fate."

We knocked it around for a while, her with the honesty of a woman feeling deflated. She admitted she was boring her friends with her neurotic preoccupations and is having "anxiety attacks" in his absence. She was falling into a vacuum, and kept thinking he would call. The worst thing is when someone you've been close to drops all lines of communication. I said I knew the feeling, having been with a couple of women who did the same thing. She couldn't figure it out. How could anyone do that? Were they self-centered and obtuse or just cowards? Did they put their life into ironclad compartments and if you got stuck in the out-box too bad for you? It didn't seem civilized to her.

It was strange to hear a woman admitting that she needed a man and missed him. There was a discrepancy that didn't compute. She was so confident when they were together, treating him in a reckless manner and being quick to criticize. When a man is there she is on her high horse, and when it's over she is stranded.

The Actress would prefer anything to his absence – the arguments and fights, whatever. There had been some efforts at behavioral modification, but to have him vanish was unfair and depressing. He couldn't take it. She said she would listen to his problems for hours but he wouldn't listen to hers. There was something out of sync here. If they had a close rapport that wouldn't be a problem. Perhaps they weren't meant for each other. Her topics of conversation were staged and more structured than his. He kept missing his cue. He is not an actor and he

doesn't have much interest in her somewhat New Age brittle concerns. His time is a heavily structured burden, working long hours while she was at home. I would have suggested she lighten up since he was the one who had to work. However, her emotional needs were not concerned with the means of production or the distribution of labor.

3:30 p.m. We drove to Land's End on a dreary overcast afternoon. We walked along the cliffs, then went down towards the rocks and wandered around the ruins of the baths. I was thinking of the Roman baths in Ostia from 2000 years ago, but these are less than a hundred years old.

I rode with her across a long suspension bridge on the way to Marin. I told her about a theory I had concerning the mass psychology of heavy metal, the fast-moving tonnage on the streets and in our neighborhoods. It is a widespread phenomenon. What are the effects on the subconscious of civilians who're subjected to it on a daily basis? What inner transformations or mutations occur in order for them to weather such a brutalizing and impersonal effect? The egos of men and women take on the megalomaniac dimensions of a car or truck. I wonder if there is any relation to the murder rate in this country, with the latter trying to keep up with the casualty rate on the highways.

She lives on the outskirts of a small town in Marin with a heavily wooded hill nearby. I made a fire using a hammer and a screwdriver to get some kindling from a log. Her efforts at making a fire didn't work, trying to light a log with a match. I wanted to say I've always depended on the kindling of strangers.

The Actress said it was a problem going out with a man while on the rebound from another. A woman knows the current man is not the previous one, but unconsciously they tend to get blurred together if she doesn't leave an interlude between them. She found herself carrying

over the resentment from one man to the next, and the latter didn't know what hit him. An ex-boyfriend had been calling after she let him know her engagement was off. She admits that it is easier for a woman to get laid as there are male forces coming at her. It is also easier for a woman to get confused or compromised if she lets someone in at a weak moment.

5:30 p.m. Her daughter, Maya, was dropped off by the ex-husband who didn't show his face. We sat by the fire and she ran a telepathic numerical magic trick by us, but it didn't work. Turned out she was saying divide by five but meant subtract. She was getting frustrated and as her mother said later she doesn't like admitting she's wrong. Maya went to her room for a while at the suggestion of her mother.

Not long after I heard the soft notes of her electric synthesizer. I walked in and she was on the floor making music like the last half hour hadn't happened. The evening had begun on the wrong note, but we found the missing chord. She showed me how she could make sounds – everything from a machine gun to a snare drum ocean. She gave me the top third of the keyboard and I played along.

Then we were ready to leave. Her mother was in a long dress and putting on makeup. There had been some mention of a message from a previous boyfriend and Maya in a quiet voice told me she likes some of her mother's clothes which she could wear when she is big enough, but they definitely have a different taste in men. She generally doesn't like her mother's boyfriends and certainly not that one.

Her mother told me how special it is that her daughter gets along with one of her men friends, meaning me. Others made the attempt at being friends with her, but it didn't work. There was not much effort on my part, one reason it worked I suppose. She said the thin-skinned radar of a girl in the fifth grade is a wonder to behold, especially one who admits to being "mean."

Something we touched on in our conversations is the women I have known who were articulate, refined, and self-aware. How to explain their tendency for choosing the wrong man? She said emotions make you dumb.

7 p.m. We drove to a local theater in Mill Valley with her and her daughter being ushers (so they wouldn't have to pay the $24 tickets). I was included in the effort and stood at the door handing out programs and showing people to their seats. *Inspecting Carol*, a farce about the theater. There was a stage and seats onstage - the telescoping stages of pretending in public.

I was nearly as preoccupied with the audience as the actors. It was a different crowd than I'm used to, coming from the bedroom communities of the prematurely enlightened. Gentle-suburban and refined by life insurance. It occurred to me that our lives are padded by the theatrical, and theater is a padded cell.

Afterward we returned to their place with some Mexican food and a beer. I got the fire going and the mother put in a video of *The Producers*. "Springtime for Hitler and Germany…." I was on one end of the sofa with the daughter on the other under a blanket and rubbing her foot on my leg. It was not long before she fell asleep. When it was over the daughter was sleeping in her mother's room and we were sitting by the fire. Her mood was switching channels, going from the social distraction of the theater to a deeper undercurrent of depression and her endless analyzing of a failed affair.

We went around and around with it. She noted that she's wearing out the patience of her friends, and how good it was having someone here for the night who could make a fire. We were having brandy-laced eggnog and talking about failed communications with her ex-fiance. In the end she was left with no communication at all. She was getting miffed – "How can you be so objective and detached?" – when I suggested that she wanted something from him which she got

from her women friends. Lots of men are not inclined to wallow in a warm communion of mutual problems. She said he would respond by trying to solve them or would lose interest. The implication is that a woman's approach is like a broken record and he was tired of it. Working long hours in the city didn't help. I said relations between men and women were more formalized in the past, and maybe the genders were less confused about what they could expect from each other, including that a man should have the emotionality of a woman. At the same time the woman wants a male strength which her girlfriends may not have.[48]

There was a sense of overloading a romantic connection with too much. It could have been a done deal, a *fait accompli*, but it fell apart. She was implying that relationships are all the more important if one can't lean on religion, but I thought that was misguided. Expecting love and romance to bear the weight of religion is a bit much, especially if you want to engineer the results, not letting it occur of its own accord.

A couple of hours of this with a nearly full moon over the hills, dim vapors in the night, and we were fading after two in the morning.

I asked if she had a blanket, assuming I was on the sofa. She said, "You're in Maya's room." A bed is a bed, but it's a little odd when there is a lacy pink canopy over it, and dolls staring at you with a blank look and stars glowing on the ceiling. I managed to fall asleep.

Saturday, Nov. 27, 1993

10:30 a.m. I woke up in a white thermal shirt, put on my steel blue cords, and walked out sleepy into a quiet house. I found Maya in the front room sitting with her organ on the floor.

[48] I caught a line from *An American in Paris* (1951) while I was there. "Women act like men and want to be treated like women."

“Did I wake you up?” There was some mention of a “bed-head.” Her mother was on a breakfast date with a previous boyfriend.

The daughter was attentive and rising to the occasion of breakfast, but I had to go along with the program. I sat at the table while she slowly wrote out a menu. “How do you spell choice?” (as in, sorry you don’t have much choice). “How do you spell restaurant?” She taped a sign to the front door. I had to go out on a cool morning and come back in. I was led to the table and given the menu with a nice setting and a folded napkin while she took my order.

She bustled around in the kitchen, showing what she could do. Scrambled eggs with a couple of waffles that you put in a toaster. Also toast. She scratched out “orange juice,” saying her mother drank it. The menu said, “Please come again.” She made some for herself, and said mine would be 50 cents. Call it 60 with a tip. I found some change and gave it to her. She put it in a box and carefully noted her accumulating assets.

Considering her intelligence and what she has absorbed as the only offspring of her mother, not to say what she has seen on television, I have to assume she is more aware than I realize. That would be in keeping with the feminist notion of a ten-year-old woman. That’s pretty much how she views herself, who isn’t much for the false sincerities of adult-to-child relations. She is sarcastic and relishes an exchange of minor insults. Once in a while she will say “You’re weird,” depending on what I’m talking about, but the next minute will say she’s weird too.

Maya is precocious and informed about male-female relations, only too aware of this business of boyfriends and divorce, but she is leery of people with their clothes off. In the lobby of the theater last night was a painting of a naked woman which she said was “gross.” However, her favorite scene in the play, which she mentioned several times, was when the maid jumped up

from behind the sofa with someone standing on her dress and she ripped right out of it, standing there in mock shock and black lingerie. That amused and intrigued her to no end.

For that matter, her mother brought her with us to Muir Beach last year. There is a lovely cove which is clothing optional. I kept my swimsuit on with Maya there, and her mother was topless, but she wasn't all that comfortable with the situation. I think she kept her sweater on and her mother realized that she was pushing it, wanting her daughter to be relaxed with her body, but there were grown men who were twice her size walking around with no clothes on.

Some background to the fact that she was wearing a long T-shirt with nothing underneath it and seemed to be at ease, if not a little ambiguous at times. She sat there with it stretched over her knees like she was trying to get out of it. Once in a while it seemed like she was testing me to see if I looked. I remember a year ago when we were playing and she had to climb up a ladder in a short skirt. She warned me not to look up her dress. Maya is aware of these things. I wasn't sure if this was her version of teasing or testing a man, and I ignored it. It's like kids who use a swear word, but calling attention to it makes it worse. They realize they have hit on something which bothers adults.

It was a tour de force with what you can do with a T-shirt. Most of the time she was quick and adept about keeping it pulled down. We went into her room where she took her bird out of the cage. We sat carefully on the floor, facing each other. She had purple gloves on while she held a quivering parakeet close to her, then let it go on the floor. There were occasional flurries about a foot into the air with clipped wings. She picked it up and handed it to me. A bird in the hand is worth two minutes of your time.

12:30 p.m. We went into the front room and I was about to make a fire with a screwdriver when her mother returned, having been gone for a couple of hours. Things continued at a slow

pace in the afternoon. It was overcast and dreary outside. Her mother was in her room thinking about things while the two of us flipped cards into a hat. Maya showed me her card tricks, and said she likes knowing more about something than others do.

3:30 p.m. We drove to the Marin headlands where the mother knows someone who lives and works at a youth hostel. He was practicing on his saxophone in the basement. Eventually the four of us were walking on a trail which took us over the hill to a view of the ocean and a long suspension bridge which ends in the city. We walked back along the road, a long circuitous route which took us past abandoned World War II bunkers. Maya didn't understand the reason for the gun emplacements. The road curved past a fenced-in area, and I told her there were underground missiles there but she didn't believe me. She was also skeptical about whether a hawk could see her pink tights from a mile away.

The rolling hills, a cold wind in the fading light, a floating hawk. We returned to the wooden hostel with the mother talking to her friend. Maya and I were more interested in the game room and tried out a few, including ping pong (she wasn't bad) and pool, which she didn't know anything about. She is easily discouraged if she isn't good at something. I showed her how to hold a cue stick and hit the ball, and there was a slowly growing interest. Her impatience is deflecting some pursuits, including the viola.

We drove into the city in the dark. It was raining a little, and I was in the backseat with Maya. She was in a teasing roughhouse mode, so I threw a black sweater over her head and rearranged her face. When I pulled it off she looked deliberately deformed and laughed.[49] We had a contest of holding our breath, starting at the next stoplight, but it turned out she was pretending. Given the topics and the problems of her mother, not to mention my own, it was a

[49] Later she was demonstrating the hand signals for "2 Legit 2 Quit." Message to MC Hammer: ten-year-old girls are onto your stuff.

relief spending time with Maya. Earlier she was characterizing the two of us, associating me with pickles and her with roses.

We stopped at a hamburger joint on Polk Street in the rain, then went to my place. Maya has never been here and didn't want to leave. I turned on the Christmas lights and she checked out my stuff, from a wind-up harlequin and fossil to the binoculars. She took the latter to the window and tried to find someone in another apartment. She said there was a naked woman in her kitchen. Her mother walked over. "Just kidding." She kneeled on the bed with the binoculars aimed at the windows across the street.

They were here for an hour, then I walked them down to the car with the rain having stopped. The mother threw her arms around me and walked to the driver's side of the car. Her daughter was getting in on the passenger side when her mother said, "What, no hug?" She thought it was appropriate, but neither one of us is into that mushy stuff. I waved, the car pulled away, and I was back in the Tenderloin.

10 p.m. I lay down for a minute and was slowly engulfed.

2 a.m. I woke up and lay there thinking about it. It was nearly a full moon so I got up. On the typewriter for two or three hours with coffee, cigarettes, and a Guinness.

Maya doesn't approve of cigarettes, but her mother recently took up smoking again. We were on the balcony of their apartment and she showed me a couple of flower pots with snuffed-out filters sticking in the dirt. I said they grow on trees. That's what they mean when they say the light filters through the trees.

5:30 a.m. In bed, reviewing the journal from last January. A sketchy rough draft of the past. There was a string of white lights over the windows like headlights in the distance.

Sunday, Nov. 28, 1993

Typing for a few hours while it rained outside.

On a wooden instrument for a couple of hours with the game on.

Cleaned the kitchen.

Restless in the evening, then I got absorbed reading an old manuscript. Joe Lunar keeps a journal, so to speak.

9:30 p.m. I put it down having remembered there was a lunar eclipse tonight. It was raining off and on all afternoon, and then was overcast. I figured I would miss it. Looking out the window I saw the clouds were breaking up. There were a few stars. I went over to the walk-in closet with a big window and saw the moon overhead with an eclipse in progress. More than half of it was covered by the shadow of the earth. I lay on the bed and opened the window and looked through the binoculars for twenty minutes. There wasn't much left of the moon but a thin bright curve. It was on the verge of being overshadowed when it was eclipsed by the fog.

I got too comfortable and another eclipse occurred when I fell asleep.

2 a.m. I woke up and was on the typewriter for a couple of hours (coffee and a Guinness).

Monday, Nov. 29, 1993

NOTES

> Yesterday afternoon I switched channels from a documentary on the mating rites of animals to a discussion about forming "loving relationships." Talk about mixed messages.
>
> According to the documentary the propagation of a species doesn't care how it's done or on what terms the males and females are relating. The norms are so varied they hardly exist as norms. This applies to animals, insects, fish, birds, and humans to some extent, although many of the latter are in denial about their animal roots.

The determination of gender is rather arbitrary. If an alligator lays its eggs in warmer sand they turn out male (which associates the female with cold sand).

A female worm in the ocean will give birth to male and female larvae. It then swallows the males, using their sperm to fertilize the next batch (not sure I got that right).

The penis of the fruit fly: a long appendage, complete with a device for removing a previous male's sperm from the female fly.

Copulating seahorses: the fertilized eggs are stored in the male. Later he ejaculates the tiny semi-transparent seahorses into the water.

According to nature there are no norms concerning how a species reproduces and/or cares for its young. Whatever works. There are bizarre variations and slow evolving adjustments in how human beings navigate their mating rites and reproduce. There is nothing which says that men and women have to get along or stay together, especially now when women are less dependent on men (as long as they can use whatever men have invented or built).

The downside of following nature too closely: copulation is not a year-round activity. Humans are the only species that cares about that. In nature there are brief periods when the female is ready for the male, but he still has to jump through hoops to get her attention.

The male tarantula has to be so careful with the female it evolved a method of handing over its sperm package with a long arm (while hiding its eyes I suppose), inserting it in her body and quickly backing off.

There are slippery grunion orgies in the wet sand, a lot of fish flopping around.

Humans are the only species where the females have permanently "swollen breasts" to get the attention of the male. We are the only species which doesn't give an outward sign of being ready to copulate (don't say lipstick). It keeps the men guessing.

With visions of copulating frogs in my head I turned to the program on "loving relationships." It seemed to involve middle class married couples and from the sounds of it a man is supposed to jump through hoops and make his way through the labyrinth of a woman's shifting psychological vagaries while providing her with some security. He has to figure out that when his wife says, "Get out of here," she really means "Stay." That sounds like, "When a woman says no, she means maybe."

Her touchy psycho-nervous system is slow to act and quick to react. She can easily lose her temper but it takes some effort getting in the mood. This might apply more to insulated women on a frigid plane of egotism who are hooked on spermicidal soap operas. Consider the equation: getting a woman in the mood requires security,

romanticism, and communication. I've known women who had less requirements, and it wouldn't apply to certain college girls, unless humping the bass player is a form of communication.

With respect to the Actress, before she broke up with Michael the continual force that held them together was sex, even when she complained about how they couldn't talk, his job was a turn-off, and their future was not secure.

The program was a bit too arid so I turned the channel to a Hollywood production from the 1940's with a choreography of love lost.

A column in the paper (*SF Chronicle*): Jury awards $178,000 in damages to a woman who sued her former fiancé for breaking their 7-week engagement." The woman columnist wrote about it with scorn and disapproval. "Something wrong with this country." The man and woman involved are both fifty, with her divorced three times and him once. She is the one who "brought up marriage." She's in Chicago and he is a "well to do Oregon rancher." They were "two months into their long-distance relationship."

During which he gave her $24,000 in gifts, then broke it off. He said she could keep the $19,000 engagement ring and have $10,000 in his account. However, "She sued on the grounds that after the breakup she was deeply depressed and had trouble working and talking. She did concede in court, however, that after the breakup… she vacationed in New England, took a cruise with her family, and bought a $125,000 home."

The male attorney for the woman said this proves "we're past gender-bias," it being a jury of seven men and one woman (U.S. District Court). The columnist said, "*au contraire*," it is sexist, making the woman out to be a helpless fragile thing. "If a male employer today said that he wouldn't want to hire a woman because women fall apart when their love lives go awry, feminists would be up in arms." The jury's award was for "heartache, distraction, and therapy." $93,000 for pain and suffering, $60,000 for loss of income (she had a legal practice), and $25,000 for psychiatric counseling. Even then it's half of what she sued for - $365,000. "The childish woman does get money… it is he who must pay." "It is a sad day in court when a female attorney… publicly demeans herself by flouting her faithfulness to the same derogatory stereotype in an attempt to cash in."

I'm mystified by these figures. Can a man sue a woman for heartache, distraction, and therapy? I think a few men have incurred those from women.[50] What about the hybrid modern woman who has all of the assumptions of equality but still wants deferential treatment? The self-importance leads to some exaggerated claims of what a woman's time and/or emotional distress are worth (see above) if a man leaves her. If a woman leaves a man it is too bad for him. He should take it like a man (meaning he gets nothing), while she can sue and be remunerated like a princess.

[50] A man lost a "breach of contract" after having been with a woman "who never loved him." They were together for twelve years.

Hell hath no fury, or mercenary inclinations, like a woman scorned.

Same columnist (Saunders), different subject: "Thought police, diversity patrol." She is writing about the "wild-eyed conviction that quality and diversity in higher education are inextricably linked together." She points out contrary examples, like women who do better in all-women colleges. What about black colleges? Not to mention those students in countries where the population is more homogenous like Germany or Japan – which are far behind the academic standards of the U.S. (not). There is evidence that diversity diverges from the qualitative when it lowers the standards to allow more people in. That is something my parents found out when they put my younger brothers into one of the most integrated schools in the country (in Los Angeles). They had to weather constant harassment and threats along with a dumbed-down curriculum.

The columnist quotes someone from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. "No matter what the discipline, it is vital that faculty, in their teaching, be aware of and respond to the differing experiences and perspectives of students and the varying interests and learning styles of students." To which she responds, "What drivel." "As a college student I discovered that the less teachers tried to understand me and the more I tried to understand them, the more I learned."

I'm intrigued with how teachers are supposed to adapt to a roomful of students who're all different, including their "learning styles." Talk about wrongheaded. Imagine thirty variations of this:

> I have no interest in history and my learning style requires that I have a radio on in the classroom and very little homework so as not to interfere with my lifestyle, which is equally if not more important than school. My experiences are different from people in 1776 or 1941 and don't include much in the way of literary references. In order to maintain my self-esteem I operate from the perspective of being at the center of the universe. Please take note and conform your curriculum accordingly. I don't need a curve ball from Galileo, as far as I'm concerned it is a dead man's curve. I have varying interests which change from week to week. At the moment it is rough sex with a cheerleader. I have no interest in mathematics (except for increasing the amount of my scholarship) so we can dispense with that. I have a lot of self-worth and little discipline, but I'm sure it balances out. I learned that somewhere. I'm more open to learning when I'm getting high, with audio-visual stimulation like an electric wire on a dead frog's leg.[51]

I went out the other day walking on the street. There was a thin young man with an exaggerated Filipino pompadour and black jacket with some words on the back. I

[51] I have to admit this passage isn't very realistic. As the Professor has observed, the literacy rate of students is declining, so this paragraph should have spelling errors and other mistakes. "I hav no intrest in hisstorie & my leerning stile rekwires radio in the klas ruum."

wondered what they meant and what the odds were they didn't mean anything. They were cool words in English, though not too humble:

MAGNIFIED UNRIVALLED

INTENSITY

CODE ZERO

It reminded me of when the Professor was providing immigration advice as a community service. An old Mexican man showed up. He barely spoke English and wore a baseball cap which said, "GIVE ME HEAD UNTIL I'M DEAD." The Professor wondered if he knew what it meant.

A heavy downpour, but the workmen are out there slogging around in the mud. Men have it so easy. I was typing, but it was slow going for a while. I don't know if it was the ions in the air because of the rain, or Monday arriving like a cement truck.

2 p.m. Went to work.

5 p.m. On the way home I dropped into a bookstore and found a biography of Dali. I read about the warped connection he had with his Russian wife Gala. His tendencies were in the direction of the autoerotic/impotent, while she leaned towards gigolos and goldbricking. It was more edifying than reading about a Hollywood madam.

Which was civilized compared to a novel about juvenile delinquents in Oakland. The writer had a good ear for rendering how they talk, but it was a bumpy vulgar ride. You wonder what sort of thick broken mental circuits they are operating with and how it affects their language. I scanned some of the dialogue. It sounded like a toxic Amos and Andy routine. The author wrote *Rats in the Trees* (Jess Mowry).

I walked home with a black umbrella in the rain. Fish and chips. There was an article in the paper about Asian poachers in Northern California. The penis of a seal, the gall bladder of a bear. When a man is out of sorts an animal has to die.

Phone call from my old history professor in Los Angeles. He was calling from his office. There was some mention of natural disasters: the fire, immigration, and his wife. He had a good view of the fire from where he lives in Santa Monica. He also has a good view of the other two, whether he likes it or not. It's adding to his disillusionment. He thinks Los Angeles has too many people, and many of them come from Mexico. Do people in one country have the right to flood into another country just because it's next door? It hasn't been a part of Mexico since the 1840's, so he isn't sure why they think it belongs to them.[52] L.A. is getting crowded, and Latino chauvinism makes him feel like a foreigner.

The Professor has a Marxist view of the trade agreement with the corrupt government of Mexico. He figures everyone will lose except the banks and corporations.

On the subject of immigration, I read that the laws are "criminalizing" people. You could say that about any law, whether running a red light, selling drugs, not paying child support, or killing someone. You wouldn't be criminalized if there were no laws. You also might not live long.

He was giving me a leftist perspective on all of this, where workers have a right to assume the sovereignty of their borders (as Mexico does, especially with its southern border) when it comes to protecting their jobs and wages. That means people who work for less are not allowed in, and jobs are not exported. The border should have some integrity when it comes to containing corporations which put their money in offshore accounts and transfer jobs to other countries.

There was some mention of the lunacy of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution (ratified in 1868), the part which says that anyone born here is automatically a citizen. It doesn't

[52] Mexico only had jurisdiction over California for twenty-some years. Spain had jurisdiction over both for 300 years (with God on its side).

matter if the parents are here illegally. He said no other country on earth has that policy. An infant born here would need his mother and she might need her husband and you don't want to break up the family and before you know it a single infant = half a dozen people. More to the point: the population of the U.S. in 1860 was 31,000,000. In 1990 it was 259,000,000. That would seem to justify a slower rate of population growth in modern times.

We talked about his disillusionment with Clinton. The Professor characterized him as having secured his own financial future. There is a cynical and not unrealistic notion that many use a high political position to make their fortune. Once they're out of office they can make a million a year (consulting, giving speeches), along with a lifetime pension. Clinton has shown himself to be a friend of big business (it's hard to get elected if you're not). Hence NAFTA. The Professor thinks that Clinton is not as intelligent as he is made out to be, and was compromised by having been funded by Averill Harriman's wife (the Harriman family is one of the richest in the country).

On the home front: the Professor broke his foot or ankle and is on crutches. It may have been related to a fight with his harpy of a wife. He has yet to come up here and see his only grandson who is now a year old. His wife will make his life miserable if he tries to visit his own daughter. The situation does not speak well of either one of them.

There was some mention of my living in a bad neighborhood. He can't figure out why I like it, thinking it must be depressing or a security risk. This is someone who studied "the city in history." I said something about the historical magnitudes of the neighborhood with its old brick buildings going back to the 1920's and before. I forgot to mention that at night with a few trees, an eerie streetlight, and prostitutes, it looks like a European setting.

I got off the phone and had a long workout on a wooden stringed instrument. The tube was on and I was switching channels. There was a documentary on the goddess movement, referring to the history of "witches," the misconceptions and the persecution. It went on for hours. I don't have anything against it, particularly the benign view of women with "a reverence for the earth." That's hard to argue with, even if it is a half-truth. Much of Western civilization is a goddess-ripper.

When you look at spells and potions, or rituals and remedies according to the moonstruck, there seems to be a general recipe:1 part theater. 1 part snake oil or placebo. 2 parts the hit or miss of actual herbs. The shaman as a charlatan is not exactly news, and whether it is medicine men or witches there are those who would prefer more logic in their lives.

And yet witches in the Middle Ages knew about beneficial potions and methods of childbirth, working as midwives. When they were suppressed by the church what happened to the infant mortality rate? I would have liked to hear what sort of spells they had. Someone said that when you dabble in that sort of thing you're in a realm of social paranoia, that being part of the power of a witch or medicine man. The paranoia can have a backlash. Not long ago in Kenya some old women suspected of being witches were hauled out of their homes and burned alive.

The cult of the goddess lost its Mesolithic magic after 25,000 years. People wanted something different, a change of pace. There are many goddesses around the world, and the statues in their honor would imply a respect for women. However, while they don't burn witches in India, they burn a few low-income brides. There was even a segment on the African version, a warm and anti-scientific goddess-witch continuum complete with folk tales (no one ever thought of that before) in which there is a respect for the eternal feminine, and yet it co-exists with the

custom of female genital mutilation. 50 to 100 million women and girls have gone under the knife. A little science wouldn't hurt in that respect.

There is an assumption that the Catholic Church was the enemy of the eternal feminine because it persecuted witches. Does woman = witch? It's a flimsy half-truth, especially as a few men were persecuted along the way, for example during the Inquisition. And what is the cult of the Virgin all about? A glorification of mother and child, the likes of which were a spiritual wet dream for the pagans. There is some evidence of women wanting to have it both ways, to assume their victimization and the suppression of the goddess while at the same time saying, "Look she's everywhere."

Ironic when you consider how many women have embraced the church. It was not uncommon for there to be mostly women in church on Sunday morning. They may have known it was protecting them as far as exalting home and family and condemning wayward husbands.

The documentary was verging on a kind of sing-song soft-voiced propaganda, presenting its case with a melodic plaintive female voice in the background. It was a soft-focus presentation which drifted all over the place, incorporating if not co-opting images from around the world, including Stonehenge (which was not built by women) and prehistoric burial mounds in England.

The point was made that the church discouraged or actively suppressed the use of midwives in childbirth because women were supposed to suffer. Men added to the pain of women. What you don't hear about is all that science and medicine (which were mostly the work of men) have done to alleviate the pain and suffering of women.

It is on this point that I lose sympathy with the pious hypocrisy of modern women in the documentary. They have all the insulation and comfort of their man-made middle-class existence. They are floating in the most effete security. They're not living in tents during a

northern winter. And yet with a dreamy inauthentic nostalgia for the good old days of the Stone Age, they denigrate the comfortable ground they're standing on. It is a culture which invented movies which are used for putting down men.

They believe in the superiority of the eternal feminine according to some prehistoric rituals of those who lived off the land, but their experience of that sort of thing amounts to driving to the woods on the weekend and holding hands in the trees. The respect given to the earth goddess had something to do with women being involved in domestic pursuits including childbirth. There were not many options compared to today when women dissociate themselves from being maternal or close to the earth or chained to the kitchen. All fine and good, but then they wonder where the old respect for the earth goddess went.

There was some mention of women's "magic." The concept has something in common with the church when it requires blind faith and a lot of perfume.

If the goddess is part of the scintillating experience of being female, why are so many women not interested? The weak music of old matriarchs doesn't do much for them. The documentary undermined itself when it was verging (with a virginal urge) on the sentimental purities of a feminine hygiene commercial with a meandering soprano in the background. There was a flimsy folk song about the earth. It's another reason why some countries left behind a cult of the goddess: people were bored out of their minds.

It would be ironic if there is more resistance amongst women to the concept of the goddess than there is from men, who would consider themselves fortunate if they met a woman of goddess-like dimension and capacities (a radiant kindness, understanding, and a healthy libido). They might prefer that to a short-tempered creature with the intuition of a credit card. It would be something if the goddess tendencies of women were less a myth and more an actuality.

Meanwhile, continuing these fallacious self-congratulations: “Intuition, dreams, and prophecies” are a special capacity of women. Apparently, there have been no male prophets in the history of the species, and men have nothing to do with dreams or their interpretation. They don’t dream.

Re intuition: it is not unknown to men who are musicians, poets, painters, not to mention those who want to transcend rational thought with meditation. I’m not sure how this is an exclusive capacity of women. Casting further doubt on this conceit are the women I have known or heard about who stumble through their life and love affairs on a non-intuitive level, or to paraphrase: unintuitive women, poor choices. How can one be intuitive and a lousy judge of character? How much intuition is involved when a man is being judged according to his haircut, clothes, and income level? If they’re so intuitive, how can they soak up trashy novels and mediocre music by the truckload? What good is intuition if you still have a tin ear and a fear of flying?

Note: the women’s movement went a long way in refusing the assumption that women operate on levels other than rational thought. Feminists wanted to get away from the notion that women arrive at their beliefs by a subjective process they can’t explain. Try having a conversation, much less an argument, with someone who has the presumption of “innate knowledge.” They feel it in their bones, so of course they must be right. I think the capacity for rational thought – and intuition – is available to either gender.

Tuesday, Nov. 30, 1993

NOTES

> There was a young woman who thought that men have it easy. In order to find out what it was like she made herself look like a man and walked around downtown, expecting some

sort of power trip. It was like she had stepped behind a wall. The women were not giving her the friendly signals she was used to, and there were no smiles from the men. It left her feeling lonely and ignored.

What if the security that some women want from a man includes his being a known quantity? They will turn him into that by careful questioning or reducing him so he fits into a categorical pigeonhole. I'm not helping matters when I don't project a more identifiable profile that a woman would be comfortable with, knowing where to attach the strings and hooks.

Corollary: encounters which amount to nothing but which would have had more substance if I lived somewhere else. There is a greater frequency in this town of encounters with women who turn out to be drifting semi-alcoholic users or neo-lesbians or caught up in a different cultural time warp. There were half a dozen encounters over the last year or two where the rapport was there but something prevented a follow-through. Iranian, Latina, Filipina, Jewish, and Chinese, not to mention a few white women. One was leaving town, several preferred women, one or two had racial preferences which didn't include mine. This in a context where many are preoccupied with their careers and cautious about STD's and/or consider men a lower life form. Add to that my own shortcomings as a low-income smoker who is forty-one and reluctant to jump through feminine hoops, and you have a plausible explanation for the fact I'm sleeping alone.

An article in the *SF Weekly* about a girl band. "Dyke rock" with a heavy dose of subjectivity and egomania. They have songs like "Dead Clothed Boys" (as opposed to live naked girls in a strip club). That was kind of funny, but the guitarist said, "When I first started to play music all the boys would stand there and stare and feel really weird that women were playing." They might say something "patronizing, but they wouldn't dance or outwardly show support." They're barely twenty-one, a punk-thrash band more or less. I would imagine if the boys in the audience were staring and not dancing it could be that she wasn't very good and not much to listen to. I don't know how she knows what they were feeling, as in "really weird," but one reason you might feel weird is when you're listening to garbage. Especially with the conceit about it being a breakthrough for women to play music onstage with instruments. It's been done to death. Meanwhile there were "queers at the shows," she said. "They even fought over who was going to suck Lynn's dildo."

An article in the paper about a girl in high school who was on the boys' football team (it was short of players). "Sure the hip pads didn't fit and the shoulder pads bit into her neck, but she got over that. She couldn't say the same for the other players, some of whom never managed to shake the terrible thought that an actual girl was on the football field. Why, an amateur psychologist might think they were threatened somehow." There's that word again. One might think the women's movement has too many amateur psychologists and journalists. In what way would the boys be threatened? They might be

a little confused, having been brought up with the rule that you're not supposed to hit a girl and now they can block and run right over one. They might be hesitant if they were told you're not supposed to have your hands on a girl, which would make it hard to tackle her.

It's possible that high school boys would be a little up in the air sexually, and asking them to be indifferent about the gender of someone on the field is a bit much. Oddly enough, at a meeting on the subject, the father of a high school boy asked if this meant his son could be on the girls' volleyball team. This was seen as a cynical question, but why wouldn't it go both ways? The girls wouldn't be comfortable with him around? They might feel threatened? They prefer the confidence and communion they have with their own gender? Why is that okay for females and not for males?

Yesterday in the office there was a storm outside and some thunder, which is unusual around here. Two women had different reactions. V. hardly raised an eyebrow. She is careful and reserved when it comes to men and weighs about a hundred pounds. Aisha is much heavier and not careful or reserved with men (having had numerous affairs and a few abortions) and was worried about the thunder. She said she wanted to go home, but couldn't because of the storm.

I was talking with Ruth, the Jewish paralegal in her early thirties from Los Angeles. She told me she has seen *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* 173 times. That took a minute for me to comprehend. Actually, I still can't. Only if your life is a broken record can you see a film that many times.

Last night at three in the morning there was an acoustic guitar tune on the radio with a lyric about being in the country when the sun comes up. It triggered an old recollection (something of an acid flash-back). When I was eighteen I was on the Yuba River (in the hills of Northern California) having been up all night with a few others on acid. It was an atmosphere with a medieval reverb, what with scruffy people camping on the banks of the river and standing around their fires. I remember a candle stuck in the intensely green moss of a riverbank. It had the glitter of an emerald, and when I hallucinated there were geometric forms made of green laser beams.

Eventually I walked out on a bridge with a girl I met on the river a few days before when she was naked and on acid, splashing around in the water.[53] The sun was coming up. It was a warm morning with the river winding down from the hills and glittering in the sunlight. We stood on the bridge for a while, facing the sunrise, then walked to the other side. A sports car was parked there. After a few minutes someone stirred inside. A

[53] A few years later, around 1977, I walked into a punk club in North Beach and a woman called my name. It was her, De Detroit (where she was from). She was singing (or yelling) with a band called UXA. A few months later her boyfriend, some kind of poet, died from a heroin overdose. By the time she was forty she had found religion in Los Angeles.

woman emerged. She had long thick tangled hair and a parrot. She brought out a few delicacies that she shared with us. It was an elegant impromptu breakfast.[54]

Does this sort of thing happen anymore? More to the point, how come I don't do it anymore?

Walking home I went into a shop near Powell Street with some strange and customized expensive items. There was something which said, "This frame is made of crystallized steel. As with all metal it will age over time." The next line (slightly modified):

> Any irregularities in the (behavioral) patterns
> are considered part of the over-all design.

If I ever have a calling card I will put that on it.

12:30 p.m. Last night I walked home in a heavy downpour. Today there is not a cloud in the sky, and I walked with V. to Old St. Mary's church.

A classical guitarist in front of the altar. We were in an altared state, and it was almost too quiet. She likes to sit in the back on the side. I watched his hands, the fingers stretching for a quiet chord up and down the neck. His other hand produced a steady progression of sounds, a subdued flurry-drone of notes while his fingers on the neck had the agility of a spider on a web. Tenuous and graceful at the same time. A large man with long hair tied back.[55] There were two sonatas: one by Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757) (composed in Madrid), and the "Sonata, Opus 15" by Mauro Giulani (1781-1829) - the latter with an *allegro con spirito* and then a slower quiet section, an *adagio con grande espressione*. We left before the finale and missed the "Tarantella" by Mario Castelnuevo-Tedesco (1895-1968). He was "…born into a wealthy Florentine family

[54] A year before this, around 1969, I was up all night with a girl on mescaline. We took it around midnight in a children's playground on the edge of a small town in the San Joaquin Valley. The hours drifted by on a warm summer night. I was in such a trance that when it dawned on us I was amazed. We walked over to some railroad tracks on the edge of a farm and sat there back-to-back as the sun came up and the rails were cracking in the heat. She was my girlfriend (of Portuguese descent) before I moved to Los Angeles in 1967.

[55] Joel Mahan.

of Spanish Sephardic descent… in 1932 he met Andres Segovia who asked him to write for the guitar."

V. was a little bored, although I think she liked the adagio. Music is not her forte. She asked for the program and then proceeded to fan herself with it. She leaned over and said, "Stiff, do you like…," mentioning a singer of vapid commercial fame. I want to protect the lady's honor by not mentioning the name of someone I wouldn't want in my journal. What do you do when you're with a woman who, depending on her mood and the angle of her glance, can ask you something with a look that stops time and leaves you defenseless? She is open and unguarded, as if her soul is in that look, a spirit balanced on a fine-tuned pivot.

That reminds me, on the way to the church she was singing softly a line or two of a Christmas song. That was followed with, "I have to pee."

Back in the office working for a couple of hours. She called me to look at a letter she wrote, saying "Hurry up before the attorney sees me." Maria leaned over the desk in a low-cut black dress which V. thought belongs in a nightclub. When she walked away V. was gritting her teeth, but controlling herself. "I'm being patient… I'm not going to say anything…." What was the horrible thing she could barely restrain herself from saying to Maria? "You're… so… lazy!"

Maria said her six-month-old son likes books, but only to chew on. She bought him some which were made for that and showed me one. It had a soft cover. It's the sort of book you could sink your teeth into. He has good taste in literature, and I wanted to ask if he moves his lips when he's reading.

5 p.m. I walked to the transit station with V. who was giving off flashes of temper about the lazy filing clerk. "She's a flirt!" V. is dying to have a baby, so I asked if Maria could show

her how. V. said, “I already know how. It’s like this.” She took the position of falling back a little, like someone lying on her back.

I walked home, and reviewed the journal from nearly a year ago. Once in a while I get into a force field of reading where I hardly touch my coffee or a cigarette. Same thing when I’m on a wooden instrument for an hour or two.

There was a typical scene on the street. A streetwalker in a miniskirt strolled past an ambulance with flashing lights. Behind her was a black guy who was drunk and yelling incoherent things. He may have wanted a rear-end collusion, but she was walking too fast.

10 p.m. I lay down for a minute with no intention of passing out. There were slow and successive levels of adjustment in the mind and body, like terraced steps going down. Each one was a further decline in consciousness until there was one too many.

I woke up around 1 or 2 a.m. Pulled the plug on two strings of lights, turned off three lamps and the radio, and went back to sleep.

Wednesday, Dec. 1, 1993

Woke up early, and was on the typewriter for a few hours.

There were shudders running through the building from the heavy equipment next door and across the street. Two construction sites. My studio on the corner of the third floor with windows all around was like a throbbing engine room. I had the radio on with a fire engine going by. The constant drone of machinery. It was moving the dirt around while the earth is turning and I was typing. Everything was fusing at a certain intensity level. Memories were exhumed and hitting the page with a typographic momentum. There was a sonic simultaneity of room and street. I was relying on hand-eye coordination in a lost and found of the mind.

A forty-foot metal drill swung slowly past the window like a prehistoric reptile.

The vacant lot next door is a muddy mess and they're slogging around, drilling holes and putting metal canisters and twenty-foot-long supporting rods into each hole. Then they fill it with cement. The preparation of the ground before anything is built.

Across the street the dirt lot looks like a war zone. There are craters everywhere and small mounds of dirt. I don't understand the process, but those forty-foot lengths of one foot-square columns were hammered into the ground inch by inch. They dug the dirt out around each one to a depth of four or five feet. There were guys in there with jackhammers and welding torches cutting off the last few feet of each piling. Then a bulldozer filled in the holes.

Phone call from B. I was not in the mood for those mundane complications which she seems to thrive on. After half an hour I agreed to meet her tomorrow, something about picking up a car.

I walked to the library and dropped off a few books, a couple of which had died on me part way through. I walked out with another odd assortment. *The Sixties: The Last Journal, 1960-1972* by Edmund Wilson, the poems of John Reed (a journalist and a socialist who wrote about the Bolshevik revolution), and a couple of plays by John Guare. I put *Picasso and Dora* on reserve again, and went to work.

The Attorney never showed up, and there was not much going on. I was there for an hour and a half.

V. called around five and said, "Are you leaving? Wait for me!" Some last-minute problem with a court document and exhibits. She flipped through it, muttering to herself in a dark mood and nearly fuming. "I hate him," (the attorney she works for). Not sure if she had put it together wrong or what, but still, "I hate him…." It was fresh and immediate as her other

moods – boredom, amusement, skepticism. There is also her anger. She recently said the phrase "small and terrible" would apply to her.

5:30 p.m. I walked with her to the station and then headed for home, picking up some blank tapes for the sound-room.

I read the paper for a while. DOCTOR BEATEN ON MUNI BUS. It sounded all the worse for his being a doctor, a French-Swiss anesthesiologist. The beating was uncalled for. "He was lucky; only a broken nose, a broken facial bone and a lot of stitches." He was on his way to SF General Hospital. What brought on the attack? A couple of juveniles on the bus (no mention of race) were annoying other passengers, throwing pennies at them, etc. "The doctor had politely asked them to stop." That was his mistake, assuming he was in a civilized country where strangers might ask you to stop if you're harassing others. By doing so he was acknowledging the existence of a couple of evolutionary throwbacks who were infuriated by such temerity. One of them walked by him, turned and left him with "his glasses smashed and his face covered with blood." I don't understand how the worthless jerk got away. There was no one on the bus to stop him?[56]

[56] The passengers are passive and they have slow reflexes on a slow bus. They're not expecting a criminal situation. Some years after this occurred I was on a bus which pulled up to Washington Square in North Beach – a popular area in a nice neighborhood. I was sitting near the back door, but with my back to it, and when the bus stopped I heard a scream behind me and some commotion. I turned around and saw two young black guys running out the door. I was one or two seconds too late to stick my leg out, with the risk of being sued for tripping a person of a different race. One of them had grabbed a cell-phone out of the hands of a Chinese woman, and they ran across the grass in the direction of the church, or the projects a few blocks past it. I often rode the buses in San Francisco, but didn't witness a lot of crime on them. There was a white man beating on the door one night and cracking the glass while his girlfriend hurried to the back of the bus, but the police were nearby and put him under arrest. There was an older man who fell out of his seat and died, but dying in public is not a crime (he exited the bus).

I spent a couple of hours in the 1960's, caught up in the intelligent slipstream of Edmund Wilson and couldn't put it down. He met a delegation of Russian writers in 1963 and spoke with one of them.

> After lunch, I gave him my line about the U.S. and U.S.S.R. being not really capitalist and Communist societies, but being run by bureaucrats and the armed services… they took it without protest, and he said, "Perhaps."
>
> It had been arranged by their management for them to go to see Robert Frost in the hospital, and I told him emphatically that I considered him 'samyi skuchnyi pisatel v Amerike' [the most boring writer in America]. This made him laugh, and he said, "This is a real conversation."

He visited Lillian Hellman who was in her late sixties.

> I think that Lillian is a real case of a Jewish writer whose work suffers from the characters not being Jews. It is always the same jarring and jibing family.

I think that would apply to some Jewish sitcom writers in Hollywood.

He was not impressed with Antonioni or Pinter (whose work he found empty), not *Blow-Up* or *The Homecoming* or even *The Caretaker*. I'll take that with a grain of literary salt – that he was so immersed in writing that the mediums of theater or film had to be extremely good to hold his interest. He was friends with Mike Nichols and Elaine May. He was falling in love with her but restrained himself, being all too aware that he was seventy at the time.

He knocks Norman (wrote Normal) Podhoretz around with little effort, along with his book *Making It.* "It told how Norman had now no accent, had been accepted, entertained, toasted and feted by all the elite of New York – who were Lillian, ourselves, Jackie Kennedy and everybody that everybody saw without anybody else's regarding it as a sign of having made it." There was much ado about the Jews and the presumption that they cornered the market on suffering and weren't about to relinquish it to black people. Wilson was caught between James Baldwin and Podhoretz, with the former a good writer and the latter not so much.

Anais Nin came for a visit with their having reconciled after fifteen years. Some mention of her diaries as a "thin slice" which could stand to be more comprehensible. He can't understand her long relationship with her husband who is her financier and backup support, while she floats around as a free spirit who sleeps with anyone she wants to. He points out the husband was not given any mention in the first volume, and barely in the second. She said even that was too much.

Note: Nin and Hellman have a legendary capacity for lying (according to Gore Vidal and Mary McCarthy, among others), while Podhoretz is a rightwing Zionist.[57]

10 p.m. I took a break and went out for some cigarette papers. There were a couple of hookers across the street. Walking back from the store I noticed one of them had pulled down her low-cut blouse so a breast was exposed. I sup

pose it makes sense. How would you know that she's for hire if it's not uncommon for women to dress like that? Her skirt was so short it barely covered her behind, and there was something unambiguous about a boob laid bare. You know what she is there for, and that's what it takes to get the attention of the men behind their steering wheels.

I took the iron elevator back to my floor and a minute later I saw her walking this way with a confident stroll. It was not the exaggerated swagger of a surgically-altered she-male. Her right breast was still exposed, taking the evening air, and she passed under my windows with a customer. He was a younger white male, clean-cut, and could have been a college student. He

[57] "Over the years, Poddy has… moved from those liberal positions traditionally occupied by American Jews (and me) to the far right of American politics. The reason for that is simple. In order to get Treasury money for Israel (last year $5 billion), pro-Israel lobbyists must see to it that America's "the Russians are coming" squads are in place so that they can continue to frighten the American people into spending enormous sums for "defense," which also means the support of Israel in its never-ending wars against just about everyone." Gore Vidal, "The Empire Lovers Strike Back," *The Nation* (1986)

stayed an arm's length from her. They continued down the block and around the corner. Maybe she has a room of her own.

She may have pulled her top down to distinguish herself from the silicone-injected ex-males who are sometimes on that corner. As if to say, this is the breast of a real woman. It isn't artificially inflated, but soft and sagging. She has the rounded hips and legs of a woman, but her face is hard. I found myself in the corner store one night standing next to her at the counter. Thick dark nipples were poking through her fishnet blouse. "World weary" would describe her attitude, worn down in her late thirties by the hours of passing headlights (where other women have spotlights or flashbulbs). I felt a momentary sexual heat of the woman, but it wasn't hard to resist.[58]

It's ironic that I'm going through a bleak phase of not sleeping with women. I have never gone this long without a girlfriend, but I'm surrounded with prostitutes. It would be interesting if the latter has anything to do with the former. It wouldn't be the first time that I found myself in the vicinity of women who were keeping other women at a distance - even when they were women friends who had no intention of getting romantic (neither do prostitutes). They still had territorial claims on me by whatever subtle means, knowing that if I getting romantic with a woman I wouldn't be so available – especially if I lived with someone who wants to know who those women are who call and talk for hours.

I'm not sure what I'm running on, and what love is getting through like a fundamental element distilled from what – a few friends? Thin air? The spirit? The past is loaded with it, and is giving off the echoes and the heat waves of some loving women. I don't know why I'm not

[58] One of the regulars out there, a Latina I think. What happens when a prostitute is unable to hide how she feels about her work? She is bored and has a certain contempt for men. She knows how easy it is to separate them from their hard-earned cash. A few minutes of pneumatic rubber motion in a common orifice and adios.

collapsing. There is the notion that you can get used to anything, and your character is malleable (for better or worse, from situation ethics to the "banality of evil"). It reminds me of Darwinian adaptation, like the techniques of plants and animals when it comes to finding just enough light and water to survive. I find just enough emotional sustenance from women to get by on. It's like those animals that don't have water but they get it by chewing leaves. I absorb a life-enhancing spirit through conversations with women friends. I don't know how distilled or etherealized I want to get with this, especially if it's headed in the direction of the disembodied, which is not my cup of tea.

Given the men out there who're being put through the calculating meat-grinder of a woman's outlook or agenda, I don't have much to complain about.

11 p.m. I took a break from the typographic current on a male-dominated typewriter and turned on the tube. Channel 9, a rerun of the eternal feminine program (I missed the first half hour).

There was more information with some pious doublethink and a chip on their shoulder as big as a hair-dryer. For example, for the last 3500 or 6000 years (accounts vary, the last earth goddess culture – of Minoan Crete – dissolved around 1500 BC), the earth and the female perspective have been ignored. I'm quoting here. You would think the process of covering the earth with concrete highways and cities of steel and glass had been going on for thousands of years. You would think there is no consideration for the land these days, which is why farms died out centuries ago and we have no food. Similar to a lack of respect for the earth there is a lack of respect for women, including farmer's daughters I suppose.

I can drive a few miles to the cliffs or across the bridge to the Marin headlands and find some well-respected land. I can walk a couple of blocks and find more of it overlooking the bay.

You might think that if the women's point of view has been ignored for centuries you wouldn't see them gathering in someone's home (built by men) and filming it (with man-made equipment) for television (invented by men). "Women have always gathered together." What a concept. No one else ever did that – not men or fish or dogs or children.

More to the point, there is something here which is at odds with the women's movement. We're not supposed to associate women with a primal force of nature, or see them as milk-producing childbearing creatures, even if men don't consider that a putdown and find it wonderful in fact. It is seen as a ploy to keep them barefoot and pregnant. Oddly enough, that is an image which the goddess cult worships and adores and holds up as something to venerate, like the Neolithic statues of women who are not only barefoot and pregnant but naked (and sometimes without a head).

You could make a point with more credibility than these flimsy long-distance assumptions about life 10,000 years ago, that men have worked hard to maintain a cult of the earth goddess, from Greco-Roman statues of Venus to Titian's reclining full-bodied nudes and modern-day pin-ups. How about a picture of a woman with her top pulled down revealing her breasts while she holds a couple of snakes in the air? It's the sort of image which the more censorious feminists want to do away with, and yet it is a description of the Minoan snake goddess. It is purified by being ancient. Topless images of women are okay as long as they're from several thousand years ago.

Much is made of the Minoan civilization on Crete, an island in the Mediterranean, where men and women were relatively equal in an agricultural setting. There was a dumb question: Why isn't a modern country run by the military-industrial complex more like Minoan Crete 4000

years ago when life was more simple? Maybe because the population was far smaller, more rural and homogenous, and not warped by the Bible.

There were further generalities where their slip was showing (as in slipshod). One minute I hear that Greek civilization commenced the long process of making women second-class citizens. Then I hear it being blamed on the Old Testament. I'm not sure if the ancient Greeks and Hebrews were comparing notes in that respect, or that other cultures didn't operate on a similar basis. The soft-focus generalities have a mythical aura. We are told that the goddess occurred in cultures all over the world with different names. Most cultures have a tendency to postulate deities in more or less idealized human form, and you have two choices: male or female. The mythical goddess was given empirical attributes. She invented numbers and the stylus for writing. No mention of how or where or when, and I'm not sure what numerical system they're referring to. Maybe she invented numbers so she could count the minutes while a man is making love to her.

Numbers didn't make much headway in sub-Saharan Africa. There was a black woman in the documentary with an accomplished theological pronouncement, saying she "couldn't hang with" the white guy in the sky. She extolled the warm and beneficial attributes of goddess worship in Africa where women are treated so well.

There were more erroneous sentiments about living conditions and social structures in a Neolithic tribal state – saying they were non-hierarchical. Anthropologists have found out otherwise. What they thought was a life of gentle hammocks under the palm trees with shared chores turned out to have some "complex" social structures, including hierarchies, gender roles, and the occasional tribal war. It reminds me of Margaret Mead, whose over-heated fantasies about cultures in the South Pacific were discredited long ago.

You could make the case that women in this country have fewer social restrictions than they did in the Stone Age, given the fact that they can move around at will, choose their profession, choose not to marry or have kids, and say and do what they want. There is not much in the way of tribal taboos or manual labor in the fields. Back then it wasn't all dancing around holding hands and blowing flutes at sunset. Try pounding cornmeal for a few hours (every day).

The documentary had more about this civilization being patriarchal. It is built on fear and the need for order against chaotic nature (like a house with a roof, for example). Chaotic nature is associated with women, including their sexuality (as if men are not animalistic). It is politically incorrect to name hurricanes after women, but given the goddess perspective there should be more of this, with volcanoes, earthquakes, floods, and fires being named after women. Also deserts and glaciers. There are women who want security and a higher standard of living, though, and those have something to do with fear and the need for order.

One of the falsehoods of the modern goddess cult is when it associates order as being man-made and repressive and no benefit to women – as if women like it when conditions are dirty, chaotic, and unsafe. Camille Paglia has slammed these hypocrisies in no uncertain terms, pointing out that civilization has done more to protect, project, and educate women than uncivilized conditions ever did.

You might suppose that patriarchal civilization had a reason for coming into being. People were tired of camping out for 25,000 years (a rough estimate). It is puerile to extoll the warm bosom of kind and loving nature from the vantage of homes with central heating, running water, telephones, and no wild animals (outside of a few men). Things had a different slant 10,000 years ago when one's close communion with nature included living in homemade shelters through any kind of weather. Even if those shelters managed to hold some heat in the northern

climates, you couldn't leave for weeks or months on end. Depending on the latitudes you were vulnerable to snakes and insects, not to mention what happens when there is a bad year agriculturally. Next thing you know they're planting bodies which are close to the earth.

I don't know how many of these modern women who fly to London, book a room, and drive out to Stonehenge for an admiring look (dreaming about the good old days) would want to spend the winter with those enormous stones, sleeping on the ground with no electrical outlets.

Nevertheless, it is men who are stuck with the stigma of fear, of being afraid of the elements,[59] which, if I follow the logic here, is why they invented chain motels. Women prefer to sleep on the side of the road underneath the stars, roughing it in ways that men never thought of while they stay indoors **and sew** paranoiac grid-like patterns out of fear and the need for order. What a bunch of anal-retentive cowards. When they see a naked woman they run away. No veneration of the yoni here. Show them a statue of a woman with her legs spread and they tie themselves to the nearest tree like Ulysses with the sirens so they won't be sucked into a whirlpool of superior woman-flesh.

It sounds like another movement where people use a belief system to pat themselves on the back. They push it so far they sprain the language, and the masturbatory rhetoric makes you wonder why they don't keep it to themselves. Part of the turn-on is to do it in public.

Thursday, Dec. 2, 1993

8:30 a.m. I was woken by heavy equipment outside, the sound of civilization starting its engines.

Typing for hours, and went to work in the afternoon.

[59] If you want to avoid something it doesn't mean you're afraid of it. If you don't want to sleep outside in the rain it's because you prefer being dry and comfortable, not because you're afraid of water.

I walked to the post office on a break. There were eight women in the line and two behind the counter. There was one man behind the counter and one man in line (me). I think you have to live in Saudi Arabia before you can say it's a man's world.

6 p.m. I took a bus to the sound-room flat.

It was 8:30 before we went down to the sound-room. The Phantom with some smoke in his head and beer in the rest was not all there. It takes a lot of recording equipment to pull him into focus and it did, more or less, but he was operating with a delay and some distraction what with all the switches, wires, and lights on the sound board. I stood there with the Les Paul hanging around my neck and the drummer from downstairs who was not used to this and not so patient. I'm not sure what opposing forces are inside him, but they generate something when he's on the drums. He is kind to women and has a syncopated sleight of hand on the drums, but another side of him is like a menacing thug. He nearly exploded with the Phantom's prevarications and momentary confusions, messing around with the sound of the guitar, losing it, not seeming to understand that what the drummer and I wanted was some volume with a cutting edge. Finally it was there and I had warmed up a little. The Phantom turned and said, "Can I have a cigarette?" Meaning I'm supposed to drop everything, pull out the tobacco and papers and roll him one. The drummer was yelling with a loud refusal of any more interruptions. I handed the tobacco to him and he started the tape. The drummer had us going from zero to sixty in about two seconds.

It turned into one of those provisional psycho-jams, a stream of consciousness with a few change-ups over the course of twenty minutes or half an hour. High speed and murky moods, taking this machine through its paces, shifting through every gear except reverse (the tape does that).

I brought a couple of blank tapes, 60 minutes each. You might think there was a potential of two hours of recorded material, but using one to make a copy, so sixty minutes. However, the 8-track records at twice the speed, so a 30-minute side goes by in 15 minutes and you can't use the other side. Which is to say, the damn thing stopped after 15 minutes while we continued in a sonic overdrive.

We finally stopped, the drummer had to leave and we shook hands. "I'm outta here." The Phantom had disappeared for most of this (looking for drugs on Haight Street?). He could have noticed the tape had run out and put in the other one. Returning with another beer he played it back and liked it. He wanted me to add some bass. We rewound it with the tape coming through the speakers and I played along, providing some bottom feeder bass. I have a tendency to slip into a walking bass style. As he said later, it's like adding another lead but on the low end.

By then I was tired. Not enough sleep last night and this was exhausting. I walked out of the dungeon of the sound-room into the garage and collapsed in an old chair surrounded with the torn apart skeletons of a couple of motorcycles. There were another eight or ten bikes in the garage with tools and equipment and a calendar of an earth goddess showing her readiness to procreate. I had a cigarette and a beer (the second one for the evening), having realized a long time ago these sessions work better on one beer and no smoke. The latter messes up my timing, which is to music what hand-eye coordination is to a painter.

The Phantom was in the sound-room messing around with the mix. It sounded okay, although I was not so good on bass. He considers it raw material, like a crude oil which he can refine with some balance here, echo there, etc.

Eventually he came out and was sitting amongst the bones and tendons of dead bikes. He got on the subject of Ming, who is still in China. He is insulted that she hasn't written him. It is

not surprising, considering that he told her that her letters were boring. He also told her that he tried to get her pregnant last winter, and then asked how her friend in Alaska was in bed. In other words, he has pretty much blown it with her. “I fucked up.”

I left around midnight.

1 a.m. In the apartment, not in the mood for going out but I wanted some apple juice. I walked across the street. I was at the counter when a black prostitute I saw on the corner walked into the store. In her mid-twenties with a tight skirt barely covering her butt. She might have been considered good looking in other circumstances. At the moment she was the embodiment of low-down friction in a bad mood. She was rude as the night is long, yelling and swearing at the Middle Eastern guy behind the counter. He is used to this, with her going on about wanting to rob the place. That was followed with more screaming and vulgarities and she finally left. He was nodding and I said, “Friend of yours?”

Returned to the studio and read *The Last Journal* for a while. Curious how the journal method keeps you turning the pages for what happens next – not according to a plot but life on a turning planet. I suppose it makes a difference if the life in question has his caliber and acquaintances. Turn the page and you could run into anyone from Anais Nin to Auden, or the author’s own organ of reproduction. It is worthy of mention because it exists and he does not mind using it. I thought of Montaigne who could make an essay out of kidney stones. Edmund Wilson, stepping more lightly, gets thoughtful for a paragraph or two, then moves on with an edited fast forward of his crowded life.

He wrote a sonnet to Auden, collaborating with Stephen Spender who did the first line, Wilson the second, and so on.

> What matters most is hanging around words
> to watch them crystallize, coagulate,

mean what they say, yet keep their separate state,
though sometimes as irrational as surds.
They are the slaves of thought and yet the lords;
they skim like sloops yet load stupendous freight;
they are the mass whose meaning is its weight,
the plodding pulse that flies away like birds.
You wed cold thoughts to the hard density,
with complicated patterns featly traced,
where logic, God and nature are all witty,
all cloudily yet elegantly laced, -
interpreter of dreams that make a city,
great libertine, incongruously chaste.

He also wrote:

Henry James
was no good at games:
he just sat indoors
with a couple of whores.

Friday, Dec. 3, 1993

I was woken before nine by heavy equipment and someone on the phone. It was B. She has a way of getting herself tangled in mundane complications, and was in need of some assistance. Could I drop everything (writing, reading) and help her pick up a car, some old clunker she bought. There are several men connected with this project of hers. She likes to keep various men on hold for this sort of thing (they come in handy once in a while). Unfortunately, one of them was getting moody in his unrequited state, so she thought it might be better if she got the car away from him. He has been holding it for her and fixing the engine.

There was an ex-boyfriend. She wanted to put the car on his insurance since hers would be expensive, never having driven before. He was being ambiguous and having second thoughts. There was another male friend who she said would be too nervous and overbearing if he rode

with her so she called me, what with my drop-dead calm or something to that effect - my fatalism and good manners around women.

No way out of this one. I made coffee, took a shower, and got ready as if going to work. I walked a few blocks to the underground transit station, passing the excavation for the new library. There was a pile of dirt with the dome of City Hall on the other side, not a bad shot. I went underground and found a concrete tunnel with a lethal high-voltage rail. It is futuristic to a fault. I had a line a few days ago about the present being sterilized by the futuristic.

Read the paper while gliding in a seated position for a few miles underground - an article about the capture of a cold-blooded killer. I wondered if along with jury duty we should have firing squad duty. In many cases (like this one) there would be a long line of volunteers. If not all of them are good shots so much the worse for him.

I surfaced in an old wooden neighborhood on the outskirts of town. Hilly and quiet except for a jackhammer around the corner. I walked to the building and met B.

Then we're in a 1970 Duster with black interior. It was dusty and torn a little. She apologized, but the thing runs okay. She got it for $500.[60] Within a block or two B. admitted she hadn't driven the car very much and is not familiar with the steering which seemed too loose. Also, the brakes were soft and here comes a cement truck. I sat there, smoking quietly.

"How was the vibrato shop?" She went to Good Vibrations on my suggestion to see the photos by Saudek. She has been there before, and said it had some horrible-looking dildos. Larger than life, apparently, but so are women, some of whom are prehistoric legends in their own minds.

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[60] I used to drive the worst-looking car on the road – a 1974 Volvo with a rusting exterior. The inside looked like someone had a knife fight. I drove in this hilly town with no reverse for many months. The exhaust pipe fell off. Other things didn't work or were missing. No windshield wipers or turn signals. I couldn't see the speedometer. Most of the time it started, and it had a powerful sound system with speakers in back and front. It gave up the ghost last year, but not before I got a DUI.

We made it downtown to her neighborhood with no problems.

"What happened to the lane?!"
"You're on the sidewalk… someone's under the car…."

It was impossible to park, so of course she wanted to. She drove by a parking place and didn't see it but I did. It was on the incline. I jumped out and guided her in which made her day. We walked downtown. One reason all of this was early and hurried, she had a hair appointment. I said,

"What's wrong with your hair?"
"Oh you know how women are always fussing with themselves."

I kissed her on Maiden Lane and left. I had an hour before work and went to an Italian men's shop which was going out of business.

I walked in and looked around. No idea what I was doing there (B. suggested it), but one of the men who worked there was willing to help me focus. Very polite, but I nearly walked out. Then I didn't. Some material with an anthropomorphic silhouette and a nice cut caught my eye.

It was a curious situation. The guy was in his twenties, tall, slender, one of the darkest black men I have seen, and with an accent. He said something about having a French background. There were a couple of things here which have happened to me before. Getting acquainted with an individual can cut through some of the generalities about a group of people, especially when it comes to racial politics. I tend to be on better footing with black people from other countries. You get a little wary after a while when you keep running into a black version of the Ugly American. Then you meet someone from Africa or the West Indies who doesn't think being polite is a weakness. My respect for him was increasing by the minute.

His name was Omar and he wore a snappy dark suit. Later I was talking about nightclubs with a black woman who worked there (an American).

I found a black and purple sweater I could live with, "Romano mode," and a dapper suit of dark material (salt and pepper) which he noticed I had a hard time resisting. It was a change of pace. I used to have a blue sharkskin suit with a saxophone pin in the lapel.[61] It was not bad for the clubs, but it had a transitory existence.

Omar was at the counter with a couple of Italian guys with some authority and a nice appearance. I could learn something here, if only trying on clothes wasn't a crushing bore. They took my hesitation or absentminded disinterest as a bargaining challenge and were whispering to each other. They took another $20 off the suit (originally it was $200 something, cut to $80 or $90). The sweater was $95, now $25. What the hell, you only live twice. It was a suit I could be buried in.

There was a high noon showdown with an altered silhouette of myself in a mirror. I walked out (I'll pick up the clothes later) and headed for the Contemporary Realist Gallery, feeling realistic and contemporary at the moment.

Small paintings, less then one foot square, which were semi-surreal or was it allegorical? $10,000 each. All but two were sold. In another room there was a "LIMBLESS IMPASSE." I wonder what temporary realism would look like. There were two or three realistic-looking women who worked there. They were talking and ignored me entirely. I responded in kind, and left for work.

12:30 p.m. V. and I went to the Hunan place as prearranged with our preconceptions about prepared dishes. Smoked ham on rice, hot and spicy. She had oyster beef. At one point I related the plot of *Like Water for Chocolate*. She ate it up, so to speak, then said she wouldn't see

[61] A few years later I bought a double-breasted suit of thin grey material and wore it to the office. The Attorney said, "You look like a pimp."

it. She doesn't like romantic movies (preferring horror). There was some mention of hot tubs and I said, "Are you shy?" "No."

We walked back to the office talking about the penalties for rape. I said a woman friend of mine would have a man killed if he did that to her. V. was in a momentary quandary as a law-abiding citizen, not to say a good Catholic. She knows she is not supposed to take the law into her own hands. On the other hand, her gut feeling was that he deserved to die. Again, there was the connotation that the sexual violation of a woman is worth a man's life. What does that say about the self-importance of women, that X number of years in prison would not be sufficient, and while she would go on living, he should not. We were being a little circumspect about it. There was also some mention of women who sleep around without a second thought, which is beyond her comprehension.

Working in the afternoon. The Attorney left early for the court (as in tennis). On his way out I mentioned my not having been paid (it's a few days late), but he said he didn't have it. After work I went downtown with Christmas lights everywhere. Picked up the suit and headed for the pool. A slow mile in the water and walked home.

Typing for a few hours.

3 a.m. Went to sleep. I woke up a couple of hours later with a hard-on from the REM phase and had to urinate, which is easier said than done in that condition.

Saturday, Dec. 4, 1993

10 a.m. Woke up, made coffee, threw a few things together in a bag, and went out.

11:30 a.m. I was on a ferry pulling away from Pier 41. The wooden slips for small boats were covered with lazy seals. We were headed for Vallejo. It's an hour ride, going north and a

little to the east. I was on a bench on the top deck and the air was clear (following a rain). I was **awake above the** widening wake of the boat and wondered how it works, why it lingers while the boat moves on. It fans out for half a mile. What keeps it going like a force set in motion through liquid which is closer to a solid than you might suppose?[62] It holds a v-form stirred up by a boat like a migrating current.

I was compelled to move when five or ten black kids with a few adults appeared. They crowded around where I was sitting. One kid wanted me to move over so he could sit there, along with a friend of his (a short bench). All of this was conducted with loud voices and I was the invisible white man. I moved to a bench in the front with Angel Island sliding past, or rather we were sliding past the island. I looked back at the receding skyline of the city with the boat leaving a trail of diamonds in the water.

There was a black woman who was overweight and under-educated and didn't know what she was talking about so of course she broadcasted it in a shrill voice, which also meant it was worth repeating. The San Rafael Bridge was coming up and she kept saying, "THAT'S THE SAN MATEO BRIDGE… THAT'S THE SAN MATEO BRIDGE… THAT ISN'T THE SAN RAFAEL BRIDGE… THAT ISN'T… OH IT IS?" There was also some discussion as we passed the abandoned buildings on the edge of Angel Island (which were used for immigration) that it might be San Quentin.

Eventually the cool air and the wind blew them to a lower more protected deck. For the last half hour there was no one else up there, just empty benches drifting over the water. I went to the stern with my hair blown beyond recognition. I thought of someone flying over the water

[62] Especially when you jump off a bridge.

in a standing position but without a boat. The force of his momentum is churning up the water (the megalomania of a bored commuter).

Hard to tell after an hour of this which is more blown, your hair or your mind. I'm easily amused. Sometimes all it takes is getting out of town and drifting past a defunct Naval base. When we disembarked, I hung around for twenty minutes until Jon showed up.

We drove to St. Helena on the Silverado Trail, which is a road less traveled and it's gorgeous. It was an hour's drive through the vineyards surrounded with low hills. I wasn't sure what he had in mind for the evening but we picked up two bottles of wine, one bottle of champagne, and four or five beers. He didn't think it was enough, wanting another bottle of champagne and some vodka.

He lives in a one-story house about a block from the vineyards. They stretch out across the narrow valley, a thin tangle of branches coming out of the heavier gnarled bases. The thinner branches would be cut, growing back next year with more thirst-quenching grapes. We sat on a wooden porch with the rays of sunlight coming through. I was having coffee and a cigarette. He had a beer and was messing with his marijuana pipe.

Then we're in the front room. His roommate Elmo looked glum. He was watching a video of Guns and Roses which was overblown, a symphonic pompous production with some tedious-sounding music ("November Rain"). Self-important L.A. kitsch. The lead singer wore a Charlie Manson T-shirt. Elmo turned it off and put a tape in. A guy strumming an acoustic guitar and singing. I said,

"Who's that?"
"Charlie Manson."

It was from the old days when he had some connection with the Beach Boys.[63]

Having been focused on their musical equipment I forgot that Jon had bought a video camera. When he faxed me he said, "I have been making silly short films." It was a small expensive state-of-the-art machine with the image of what is being taped showing in the back viewer. You hold the box-like device in front of you and watch the back. He showed it to me in the kitchen and said I should shoot myself, so I did, holding it up and aiming it at my head, turning around and saying, "What did you put in that drink?" The room was spinning.

I sat on the piano bench with a nylon string guitar and he taped a few minutes of acoustic sleight-of-hand.

We went for a walk on a small road through the vineyards, less than a mile, past a few old houses nearly hidden in the trees. The sun had gone down but there was some light. Surprised at how cold it was. We reached the end of the road where the hills began and sat under a large oak tree. It felt warmer there, as if the tree was giving off heat.

I referred to the goddess program with the worship of female forms occurring in nature, and he started getting familiar with the mossy crotch of the tree, a parting of the limbs. He mentioned the Korean woman, saying things are on hold and evaporating. He found her too artificial for one thing, and something of a neurotic princess. She is more comfortable in a sterile condo with plastic plants than walking through the hills and woods. Walking is unnecessary, in her opinion, and he is nothing if not an outdoorsman. We walked back in near darkness with the constellations coming out. I could barely see the road.

Back in the wooden house with his roommates, including Elmo's girlfriend, Rima. I talked to her last week for two hours on the phone. She is articulate, a photographer, and nice

[63] I was in high school in Los Angeles in 1969, and the principal told us (at an assembly) that the boys are not allowed to have long hair because it reminds people of Charlie Manson.

looking with smooth features. Her long dark hair was hidden in a dark cap at the moment. Black jeans, a heavy shirt – she tends to have an attitude of being one of the boys. Not shy, and will talk about anything.

Eventually we had something going in the front room. We set up the video camera at an angle so we could see what we're doing on a nearby television. If the TV is boring, do it yourself. I sat there with a conga drum. Rima was not sure what to do. I suggested she pick up one of the animal skulls and put it on. That went on for a while, improvising dialogue.

It's odd to see and hear yourself on camera. You are there as someone else might see you. I have experienced very little of this and it felt like an out-of-the-body experience. It was vaguely constricting, like you are unconsciously conforming to it. It could make you self-conscious in the sense that everything you do is being recorded.

Early evening, Jon and I were well along with the wine. Elmo was in his room doing something with his sound-recording equipment. Jon was showing some recent footage like home movies and I finally said, "Let's do an interview. I'll be the interviewer, and you can be a weird eccentric film director." He set up the camera angle, aiming at two chairs. I had a conga drum on which I put my glass of wine (and later a microscope when it turned into a momentary science program where I demonstrated the art of microscopic conga drumming).

All of this was on the television so we had an idea how it looked. I adopted a mock pedantic attitude and made it up as we went along. I'm getting better at that from working in a law office where calls are put through and it could be anyone from a manic-depressive client to a judge or someone who wants to know how their case is going. In a couple of seconds I have to come up with something plausible or string my words along in such a way as to sound coherent

while I'm trying to think of a response. It's an esoteric bullshit method which works for a mock-interview.

Jon was in a certain frame of mind having gotten into the champagne, but he was outdoing himself. It was a tour de force of manic spontaneities, touching on moments that were sublime in their lunacy. He would be carrying on or laughing like a madman with his face close to the camera, then drop out of sight while I sat there unmoved and hitting him with another calm and off-the-wall question. His head would pop back into the picture, going off on yet another tangent - for example in response to a question about the phases of the moon. "When the moon is small… I'M SMALL…when the moon is big… I'M BIG…."

For a while I had a hard time keeping a straight face, but then I was getting into it like a character was forming in mid-air. Both of us were reaching further into these spontaneous roles. When you wing it everything around you is a potential prop or idea. I noticed a hand-drill on the wall, walked over and incorporated it into the interview with some question about its symbolic relevance in his latest movie, *Screw… Me.* He put the point of the screw to his forehead and was turning the handle while we talked about extracting memories and ideas from an actor's brain.

It went on in that vein, through the microscope segment and a commercial for a small bottle of aspirin. When I finished I tossed it over my shoulder and continued with the questioning. He had gone through a number of half-mad if not salacious responses, snapping back to normal and going off again with the next question. Eventually he was complaining about so many questions while staying in character. "Who is this guy… who is this guy… asking so many questions!?" and holding his head like it was driving him mad. I said, "I'm an out-of-work musician" and started hitting the conga drum which functioned as my interviewer's desk.

It finally ended after half an hour when I went over to the piano. And on that note….

I don't recall every minute of the evening or how one thing led to another, but not long after we were in Elmo's room. I had his Fender around my neck and there was an automatic drum beat going. Rima was humming into the mic. I wasn't overwhelmed with the sound he had for me, a quiet reverb, but it was okay. During the session Jon disappeared.

Then Elmo had to go to sleep, having to go to work at 5 a.m. (in Berkeley, a long commute). I said goodnight and went into the front room. I found some bedding on a futon next to the wooden upright piano. Jon had passed out in his room. It was barely 11 p.m. on a Saturday night and I was not sure what to do. I couldn't believe that this was it, just me with a few skulls and bones and a half moon clearing the hills.

Went to sleep an hour later. It may have been the Mexican food I heated up, or reading about the history of North Dakota which did it.

Sunday, Dec. 5, 1993

8 a.m. I woke up with no one around. Jon was still asleep. I went outside in what felt like the dawn's early light and went for a walk on a small beat-up road through the vineyards. I reached a point where everywhere I looked was intensely fresh and quiet, the bare branches of a walnut tree on the side of the road, the dew on the vines, the long shadows from the slanting light, the cold air. I was barely heated by the sun. This is not the sort of thing I do every morning. When I do go out it is not the wine country stretching to the horizon, more like a wino stretched out on the sidewalk.

I returned to the house. Jon was stirring. We walked about a quarter mile to a diner run by old ladies with weird hairdos and had breakfast. He apologized for the evening having ended so

early last night. Something about his having been drinking a lot the last few days and it finally hit him. He must have had most of those bottles since I wasn't feeling any morning-after effects.

While in the diner he mentioned the small company he works for. I want to use one of their products, the blue photo-sensitive paper. You lay it in the sun with something on it, a feather or a metal coil, and its silhouette turns white and remains on the page. Jon likes working there, a block or two from where he lives. They have had problems with black workers, and his boss is reluctant to hire any more, but he said Latinos are okay.

We walked back, crossing the train tracks. A wine train went by slowly with dining cars, going from one winery to another. As we approached the house we could hear voices inside and Rima laughing. We went inside and found her watching what we taped last night. She found it amusing so we rewound it and watched the whole thing and were more or less floored. I thought Jon had some inspired moments. I forgot to mention his look, wearing a sheepskin cap and a fur vest over a bare hairy chest.

He said he had been getting more into the lunatic role than he was comfortable with in retrospect. These things have vague connections with who you are in real life. There are connotations when he's acting like a salacious wolf man, and me with the detachment of a sadistic intellectual. Anyhow, the woman was delighted and we were satisfied. He might edit it before he shows it to his mother.

Then we're in the backyard with bare branches and the garden with his red peppers. Most of it was frozen when the temperature went below freezing one night. They were playing with the dog and cat, giving the latter catnip. Rima was coaxing the feline and exuding some concern and sensuality. Sometimes when we talk about others there are parallel implications of her and me. I'm not sure how deliberate that is. She took a shower that morning and her hair was down.

When we were going to look at photos (hers and mine) she brought a piano bench out back in the sunlight and covered it with a black satin nightgown.

We went through some photos I brought, black and white 8 x 10's, along with some desert shots which she responded to with a real interest. She brought out hers in a portfolio and pulled them out one by one. It was the work of someone who knows how to use a dark room, messing with the negatives and exposures, things I don't know much about and am not sure I want to. I may have had more conceptual-symbolic compositions, while she had more shots of herself, often with nothing on. She is not self-conscious about using herself as a model, you just need a self-timer. There was a blue-tinted series of her sitting on the toilet wearing a hat which she thought was amusing. The people in her photography class didn't know what to think. There was a shot of her standing naked in the bathtub from an odd angle with her head bent. She has an instinctive sense of composition. The image was surrounded with pictures of a man peering through a torn hole in the wall (her boyfriend at the time), unshaven, looking like a criminal. She said she was being stalked back then.

There was a photo of an old car wreck with her lying naked on the ground in front of it with her back to the camera. Rima pulled her car over when she saw the wreck, got out, set up the camera, took her clothes off, and lay on the ground. It was in the country, but she didn't want to be lying on the ground very long. She has a nice figure, and likes to use multiple exposures like dream-fade images.

Later in the front room I was on the nylon string guitar, still in the mood for some music. They came in and were sitting around. She noticed one of Jon's books on the shelf, the *FEMINA LIBIDO (LIMINA) SEXUALIS* and pulled it out. "What's this?" She sat on the futon in between Jon and me and proceeded to flip through it carefully with an avid interest in its faux-

documentary classifications, like the breast formations of girls from Sicily and Morocco, or the morphological variations of the vulva among different races. She was exclaiming over some of the pictures, and not put off, while laughing at the more obvious poses which weren't too scientific. She wasn't laughing at the section on young women who have suffered genital mutilation.

It was a curious situation. Two men and one woman on a lazy afternoon, not doing much of anything, and all of them with pent-up sexual forces and curiosities (things aren't going well with her boyfriend, who at any rate was gone). She stared at vulvas in an open book while sitting on the bedding where I slept last night.

Rima expressed an admiration for some of the women which sounded like an admission of liking women. Jon has alluded to the possibility, however experimental or peripheral in her life. I thought it would make sense, not to say that women who are casual about their nakedness have lesbian tendencies, but that's been the case with some women I have known, especially when a tomboy attitude is thrown in.

While she looked through the book and made comments, I kept the music going with a quiet fingering. When she was through she got up and announced she was going to check on the classification of her breasts – spherical, protruding, conical, or pendent. (Other classifications might include comical or pending.) She is an open-minded Pisces with financial problems and a sensual current running through her body from her hair to her toes.

2:30 p.m. We left for the ferry. I shook hands with Rima on the back porch. There is some kind of connection here, though I'm not sure what. In the kitchen she said sex between friends is usually not a good idea, but there may have been a hidden intention in the mention of

it. Jon and I were about to get into the car when we heard something and turned around. Rima was hanging off the rail upside down and nearly fell off. She had been trying to slide down it.

We drove to Vallejo in an hour (he forgot his license). He said he is flying to New Orleans tomorrow on business.

3:40 p.m. I was on the deck of the boat. It pulled away slowly and moved down the channel, picking up speed as we went into the San Pablo Bay. I rode some of the way inside. With less resistance from the wind and cold the trip seemed smoother and shorter. For the last fifteen minutes I was on the deck with the sun going down and the skyline of the city looming in an atmospheric arrival.

Monday, Dec. 6, 1993

Fell asleep early last night (no beer), so the heavy equipment starting up at 7 a.m. wasn't too disturbing. I went back to sleep and woke up from a dream about snow and women.

Last night I read a couple of short plays by John Guare which were not bad, and *A Life in the Theater* by David Mamet. Short and simple lines of dialogue, but they're oblique. It pulls its punches and relies on the actor to invest the spoken line with a menacing suggestive air. I was impressed with that technique. The few times I have tried to write plays or dialogue there was a tendency to overwrite, not realizing what an actor is bringing to it.

I read more of *The Last Journal*. From 1968: "*The New Yorker* is terrified of libel suits now: people think they are rich and are constantly threatening them…."

From 1969 (closer to home and maybe too close for comfort - he's in California, staying in Santa Barbara):

> The placid sea that never reaches a climax, monotonous pouring rains, no sense of divisions of time, people languidly amusing themselves… All the days exactly alike… if

> you stayed out here very long, you would probably cease to write anything, because you would cease to think – it isn't necessary out here and the natives regard it as morbid.

He referred to his impressions when he was on the West Coast in 1928: The "peculiar footlessness of ideas that pass through my head here – importance of being somewhere where people are doing something. Otherwise, just nature, nothing."

Well yes, no, and maybe. I can't stop writing, but I was born here and have lived the greater portion of my life on the West Coast. The comment on the morbid was ringing true. It's possible that much of what I write lacks definition, but I can't blame it on the proximity of an infinite dissolving ocean. I can tell the days apart, it's just more subtle. The weather may have few divisions, but society does.[64]

I would hazard a guess that the comparative literacy or intellectual frequencies of the two coasts have grown closer together, maybe increasing here and diminishing there. Regional distinctions around the country are becoming more homogenized if not flattened by mass information and mobility.

His comment on having to be in a place where people are doing something – I wouldn't disagree with that, although I've wondered about it. What sort of power and motivation do you derive from people around you? The more you see how people operate the more you realize the energy and support they get from others. Most of us are conduits of what is going on around us, picking up signals which are subsequently warped by who we are.

He had a home in the country. Nature wasn't nothing to him, but it also wasn't the ultimate.

I don't know when I'll get around to editing and packaging those manuscripts with their monotonous downpour of words and no beginning or end. I languidly amuse myself with morbid

[64] As for the days being alike he sounds like Janis Joplin: "Tomorrow never happens, man, it's all the same fucking day…." (Live version of "Ball and Chain" (1968))

thoughts. I wouldn't say I'm pushing the envelope of nothingness and being out here (it's been done), but a distillation of it hits the page, forming into phrases like invisible vapors which turn into rain. I'm caught between the footnotes and the footloose. I walk and talk a lot, soliciting a psycho-acoustic breakdown.

It was slow going in the morning. I couldn't get started on the typewriter, and it was a dreary Monday outside. Because of the weekend I had gravitated away from the written. I lacked the discipline and focus of a critical outlook. I went out for apple juice and the paper. The news was depressing. The girl who was missing for months was found dead.

Frank Zappa dead at fifty-two.

I finally had something going on the typewriter. Sometimes a day arranges its momentum and perspective on a telescopic basis. Sections of it unfold over the hours until the last few hours of the evening are wide open.

12:30 p.m. Phone call from B. Would I like to go with her to have her car smogged, all the way to Army Street? Not really. There was some further mention, having called last night, of the deteriorating relations with the other woman. Saturday night was more or less horrendous. They were out on the town and doing the clubs and drinking too much. B. admitted in her pushy-social momentum she may have missed some signals from Ilsa. The latter wanted to go home, while B. insisted they spend the night together, maybe sensing this parting of ways was a bad omen.

I told her I was impressed with how they have a careful awareness of every little nuance concerning the moods and emotions passing between them. There were constant little notes and flowers. If they're so acute then how do things become obtuse, or is that deliberate? They shut off their finesse with near-ruinous results. I said she is used to easy men, but now is with a

difficult woman. It probably wasn't a good idea insisting on their going to the apartment of a couple of guys they met in a bar, especially if Ilsa didn't want to.

I went to work in the afternoon for a couple of hours, and walked home.

7:30 p.m. The Czech woman dropped by with some pastries from her work. Her hair has been altered again. It's very short with a violet tint. I've seen her go from black to silver hair. We sat around talking. I played the tape from the sound-room. She liked it, a raging guitar in the kitchen. There's nothing like having a good drummer behind you. She was amused now and then when it got erratic.

The conversation gravitated to a depressing subject. She referred to a recent article in the newspaper. A couple of young Latinos with two infants were living in an abandoned truck. It was parked somewhere south of Market. There was a fire from the cooking stove. The man got out with second and third-degree burns (clutching one of the babies). The woman, along with the other baby, didn't make it. I thought it sounded like the guy that the Czech woman had been seeing who lives on the street. Turns out it was his brother and his brother's wife – who was nineteen and probably "illegal." They came here from Mexico nearly a year ago. The Czech woman had met her, saying how pretty she was with dark hair and green eyes and a deferential attitude to her husband. The Czech woman had criticized her for being so careless with the living conditions. They were slovenly, with a dog pissing anywhere it wanted. She said the guy had an income from painting and construction, but she wasn't sure about his legal status. Now he's in the hospital.

She said when she visited the truck she was vaguely worried. She could see how it would go up in flames from a cooking fire, a gas explosion spreading quickly to the bedding. The man

grabbed the nearest child and dove out the front door. The woman retreated to the back which was a dead end.

The Czech woman said the brother of the injured man had called last week (before the fire). He was drunk and said, “I want to fuck you… and my brother does too….” Not that she doesn’t appreciate the direct approach, but she has had enough of him. He came around in the morning and she kicked him out. There was some mention of the dead woman’s cooking pots. She had one or two and threw them out, feeling strange about it now.

She left an hour later. I was on a wooden guitar for a long time with the tube on, switching through the channels. There was a lecture on menopause, a homicidal hooker with dual personalities, and news of the dead girl.

I wonder if Channel 9 is run by women what with the recent programming. Mating rites in nature, the goddess, and a lot of cooking shows. Not to **mention Barry Manilow, whose** popularity is a refutation of the propaganda on how much women know.

10:30 p.m. Phone call from B. at Max’s. She sounded shaken as if torn between tears and anger and was speaking bluntly, trying to hold onto some logic or negotiating position though there isn’t any when the other party is pulling away. I don’t think I’ve ever heard her so upset. She had to admit she had blown it on Saturday night, but was trying to justify her position and put it into perspective. It didn’t matter, the other woman was recoiling. They had just been on the phone. The one thing Ilsa can’t bear is someone being pushy and overbearing. When B. insisted they go to the apartment of two men they met in a bar for a drink or a joint it was a major faux pas. I said as much. She barely understood it and was worried that Ilsa (who may be looking for a way out) would use it as an excuse to call it quits.

B. couldn't believe she would be so cold about it. I said welcome to the wonderful world of women, where in order to psyche themselves up for something like a break up they cut you dead and leave you twisting in the wind for days or weeks and maybe forever. It probably goes both ways, it's just that in my experience (and now hers) we're talking about women.

She was around the corner from Ilsa's apartment and on the verge of going up there and demanding to be heard. She wanted to argue her case and ask her to be reasonable, having sent her a large bouquet of flowers with a note saying "I'm sorry" (that was my suggestion, though not too original). The other woman said her weekend had been ruined. B. doesn't want Ilsa to treat her like a man, i.e., like someone who is disposable.

She kept asking what she should do. There was no one else she could talk to. None of her other straight friends could be trusted with the subject. There is her old friend Phoebe who she told some of this to and is sorry she did. Phoebe has been calling her and fishing for details, though at the moment she is caught up in her own heart failures. There is an on and off again affair with a man (now off).

All I could say was don't push her. If neither one of them is in a good mood it will make things worse. I should have known B. wouldn't leave it alone and would worry it to death. She went to Ilsa's apartment (telling me about it the next day) in an attempt to have it out. She ended up leaving and walked home. Ilsa jumped in her car and met her there, a mile away. More talk. B. wants security and commitment, but her girlfriend is a live wire with a lot of friends. A Brazilian divorcee is breathing down her neck.

I said good luck, got off the phone, and was typing for a couple of hours.

2 p.m. Reading *The Last Journal*. In two sentences he can refer to Nembutal and the Bible. Then he's talking with the wife of his dentist. He is seventy-five, and she is in her sixties.

"I invited her to do fellatio, but she said, 'I'm a lady'." However, "She told me that she liked to touch people and allowed me to feel her all over…."

From the introduction:

> [His] genius is shown not only in his well-controlled and steadily advancing prose but in his avoidance of generalizations, his economizing of abstract analysis, his sticking to concrete events. Each incident, each episode is different, each is particularized, each is presented, when possible, in sharply realistic detail, no matter how absurd or how homely.[65]

The intro continues. "Probing in its observation, uncomfortably familiar, *The Sixties* makes us all players on the stage of our daily lives, elevating the isolated individual struggle to the heroic." He mentions a tradition going back through Yeats' lyrics to Helen and Paris in *The Iliad*, on whom "Zeus set a vile destiny, so that hereafter we shall be made into things of song for the men of the future."

I don't know about heroic, I don't think that was what Wilson had in mind. If it looks heroic in retrospect that is not his concern. It might look otherwise, depending on shifting trends and perspectives.

The first quote is something to shoot for, however. I may be steadily advancing and semi-controlled, but have a tendency for lapsing into generalization. It is hard to avoid if you're reaching for a certain scope. The generalizations of a James Baldwin are enough to take your breath away, but he had an oratorical topspin to pull it off. I could economize the analysis a little more. As for concrete events, they're going on beneath my window with the men in hard hats pouring cement.

My journal is episodic and it slides into the realistic on a regular basis. Things gravitate to the homely or absurd, whether I'm at home or on the streets. The isolated individual struggles

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[65] Lewis Dabney

with his laundry and the dirty dishes. Then he wrestles with the angels of love and life and death. The line about a vile destiny struck a nerve, if not a hidden chord.

I lay *The Sixties* down and fell asleep in the Nineties.

Tuesday, Dec. 7, 1993

For the last couple of days I've been hearing old Frank Zappa tunes on the radio. "Hot Rats" while I'm in the shower, followed by "Willie the Pimp" (with Captain Beefheart). I saw him at Winterland in 1973. I first got wind that there was something called the Mothers of Invention when they recorded *Freak Out* in 1965. I was thirteen or so, which is to say a long way from guys in their twenties with a deliberate delirium. I was lucky if I could pick out "Day Tripper" on the guitar, and couldn't drive for that matter. An older acquaintance, who I took to be a cynical rake, had the album (looking back I realize he was still in high school).

My family moved to Los Angeles in 1967, just in time for underground FM radio. I had to fend off my two younger sisters so I could listen to it on the living room stereo (their tastes ran to Top 40). I found a station which played extended songs like "Suzy Creamcheese." My father read the paper nearby, not even blinking. I think it was background noise to him (he preferred jazz, and I didn't turn it up too loud).

Zappa and Beefheart (who I saw in an old theater in Long Beach in 1971) were extremely different, but there was an eccentric L.A. mojo in their unusual sensibilities. It is a dimension which is sorely missing here, or maybe it was the time.

Went to work, passing the WING FAT TRAVEL AGENCY.

12:30 p.m. I met V. downtown and we walked to the old church on California. I wore the suit jacket (a dark rough material) with a white shirt, turquoise tie, and brown slacks. I like to

alter my appearance once in a while. Maybe it's just a coincidence, but there were more friendly conversations going on with women in the office.

There was a pianist in the church. We walked in during a Chopinic Scherzo ("Opus 31, No. 2 in B-flat minor"). It left me feeling scherzophrenic. We missed a piece by Franz Liszt, so my afternoon was Lisztless. We were sitting in a pew with her looking gentle, precious, and a little bored. She is matter-of-fact about her characteristics, as if they're set in concrete, and readily admits she has a temper, "… because I'm a woman." That was said with a certain relish.

There was an atonal piece which touched on some original coordinates in a space-time dimension that was summoned by the piano. It was stretching my attention span. There was a composition by the pianist which was off-the-cuff and mercifully short.

The "*L'Isle Joyeuse*," by Debussy, with V. looking at her watch and whispering we had to go. I said, "Isn't this pretty?" "No." I think she measures out her life in passing one-minute spans. In lieu of leaving she showed me her new shoes.

I whispered that it's almost over and then a few minutes later it was. I wanted to say hello to a woman sitting a few rows in front of us, my neighbor from when I used to live near Russian Hill. She lived across the hall but moved out a few weeks before the fire. I haven't seen her in nine months or more, but walked over and we shook hands, talking for a few minutes. She works as a financial analyst at the American Institute of Architects (and has a doctorate in demographics). I respected her for that, and for having spent some time in Iran. Her apartment had a lot of rugs and pillows from there.

In her mid-to-late thirties, she looked like a thin unmarried librarian, but appearances can be misleading. She is light-hearted with a tried-and-true intelligence which is a delight, and which I should be gravitating in the direction of.

She had shown some interest a while back, however guarded, when we were living next to each other with identical floor plans in reverse. I recall her knocking on the door more than once in men's pajamas. One night she wanted me to help her move her refrigerator and was not too concerned about bending over with her breasts moving freely in her pajama shirt. Normally she doesn't cultivate a sensual look. In the church she wore a pants suit and her hair was casual, straight to her shoulders, graying and tangled a bit, like a woman with more on her mind than hair. It was sort of endearing. I can hardly be bothered to comb my hair myself.

V. was in a back pew and when I returned she was curious about who I was talking to, and said she was pretty. V. noticed that I gave her my phone number and thought I should pursue her.

We had burritos while sitting on a polished granite ledge not fit for humans.

Back in the office I was in the front at the receptionist's desk, checking for messages. One of the Filipina sisters was sitting there, who is nineteen, married, and trying like hell to conceive. "Trying every night," V. said. She has a reputation for being critical and aloof, and for a long time we had nothing to say to each other. V. doesn't like her. I get along with her younger sister, Maria, who was hired two months ago, and she was warming up a little. I think she is suspicious of men, and is smart as a whip in the office.

We talked for half an hour with her showing an avid interest in one of our cases (rape/domestic violence). Then I was flipping through the paper and a couple of attorneys walked by. I was looking at an ad for *Attack of the 50-Foot Woman*. She is up on the latest Hollywood gossip, and agrees with my theory that blondes are overrated. She asked the attorneys what their opinion was of "blondes… you know, with breasts," or "breasteds" as she put it with a smile.

This Tuesday had some pivotal or breakthrough aspects, like maybe I have worn out my negativity with women. There seem to be prospects all over the place (to varying degrees), and it appears that Ming will return in a couple of days.

A new receptionist was hired yesterday. She seemed to know who I was, relaying a message on the phone. When I walked by her desk I found a young and stunning woman with dark eyes from India. We shook hands. She is thin-boned with delicate fingers and a soft grip. Her name is Ami. It rhymes with pastrami, but I decided not to mention that. We hit it off almost immediately. This afternoon I was picking up messages and there was some discussion about one of our clients, the floozy with the bruises. Ami said she wants to go into criminal law, which impressed me as much as her looks.

I'm conventional when it comes to falling for receptionists and waitresses (or is conventional the same as gullible). But those are arbitrary and provisional labels for those women who have more to them than a day-job description. I'm also conventional in the sense of liking holidays (some people don't).

Meanwhile, I worked on a Waiver of Accounting and Petition for Final Distribution for the deceased.

5 p.m. I was talking with Ami when V. stuck her head through the door, "Let's go." I walked home in the mist.

9 p.m. I called Ming's ex-boyfriend, who has been exhumed if not resumed from the past and brought into the present of her long-distance tension. He waited for most of this year while she was in Alaska and then the Far East, fighting off bouts of depression, indifference, and "insane jealousy." Her traveling companion took a hike and went to Indonesia while she went back to Thailand, staying on an island which was somewhat Westernized. I was a little mystified

at her giving so little attention to China, having been on the border. He said it turns out she doesn't like the Chinese, finding them rude and loud. Maybe she was in a bad mood when talking to him, or was overwhelmed by so many Chinese, and underwhelmed by the strange experience of not feeling special or different like she does in this country where her friends (and most of the population) are not Chinese.

Someone from an ethnic minority develops an idealized nostalgia for the country of their origins where everyone is the same race. (Only non-whites can speak of this as being positive. It would be like me saying I would love to live in a racially exclusive country. I wouldn't, but that's another story.) When they arrive on the foreign shores where their parents or ancestors were born they are in for some culture shock. It's a double whammy - not only are they not so special and not a minority any more, but chances are they're looked at as a foreigner to hustle and exploit. In Ming's case, she had to deal with the stigma of traveling as a lone woman. It's looked down on over there.

He said she returned alone to the beaches of Thailand "to write in her journal and collect herself," and plan her strategy for the coming year. There has been some disillusionment vis a vis ethnicity, men, and business. She wants him to fall back on.

I also heard about his younger sister. She just turned eighteen. There was a party last weekend with him acting as a bouncer for the unruly adolescent males (there was a keg). His sister, who I've met, is a slender dark-haired girl with some literary potential or inclinations, but he said in her milieu it isn't cool to use your mind. I said something to the effect of, "Don't let her waste it." He said a further difficulty is her being dyslexic. A sequence of words gets turned around, and it undermines her reading comprehension.

He said Ming called last week and was a little vague as to when she is coming back. It sounded like this week.

I was on a wooden instrument for a while, running through some songs, then on the typewriter for a few hours.

Wednesday, Dec. 8, 1993

NOTES

> Yesterday morning I was woken by heavy equipment and was looking out the window. The hard hats stood around a hole in the ground. Roughly speaking: a Latino, black man, a couple of white guys, and an Asian with a clipboard. Some were watching as the racially neutral cement was pouring into a hole with iron supporting rods already installed. I was thinking how their race is no more an issue than their religion. What matters is if they know what they're doing.
>
> A big drill on the back of a truck with iron support legs which slide out. The yellow metal girder angles up to a vertical position with a big screw on the end. A man in a bucket seat is attached to the side with about ten levers he manipulates with some finesse. The screw descends and then is pulling up a lot of dirt. He revolves the machine to the side a few feet and hits the rapid spin lever, spinning off the dirt. Then he moves it back over the hole and drops it in, digging deeper. Spin control. I'm mystified by the process. They have been digging so many of those narrow holes in that empty lot along the outer perimeter where the building will go. It's a foundation of some sort. A couple of guys wrap wires around the supporting rods which are lifted by a smaller crane (a black operator at the controls) and dropped into the hole. Fill it up with cement. Move on to the next one.
>
> The lot across the street where they pounded forty-foot-long columns into the ground, cut off the tops, and covered it all with dirt again now looks like it did before, just flat pounded dirt.
>
> I thought if construction workers are half as dumb as some people like to think, the buildings would be crooked as the politicians (rim shot). It's hard work out there in any weather, a necessity of civilization. It benefits the women who are condescending to working men, supposedly because they whistle when a woman walks by (who probably looks better than a bulldozer).
>
> I remember looking at an enormous complicated construction site downtown with a woman. I mentioned the respect I had for the process, like they're summoning a polished geometric miracle from a hole in the ground. She looked at me, sort of aghast, with the

assumption of a middle-class princess who couldn't imagine being near the dirty pits and lower life forms of construction. A few minutes later she was on elevator to an upper floor of warm and insulated comforts brought to us by those workmen.

A quote in the paper which suggested that when a black man is walking alone at night and hears running steps behind him he is relieved on turning around to see a white man. The latter is nowhere near the threat that a black man would be when it comes to being robbed or worse. It would be controversial if a white man had this opinion, but it was Jesse Jackson. It pained him to admit it, but he was being honest, talking about black-on-black crime as undermining the cause of black people. He was addressing the issue rather than looking elsewhere – like someone drops a coin on one corner and looks for it on another corner where the light is better. In this case, black people look for it on a corner where they're seen in a better light, and yet they lost it in the shadows of their own community.

A short article with quotes by Toni Morrison from the *Paris Review*. She "complains about the time interviewer Bill Moyers asked her when she was going to write about white people." Right off the bat you figure something is askew, like Moyers of all people is going to pull some thickheaded racial browbeating on her. That is more her way of thinking. "You can only ask that question from the center of the world!... I mean he's a white male. He's asking a marginal person, 'When are you going to get to the center? When are you going to write about white people?' The point is that he's patronizing, he saying… you could come on into the center if you wanted to… yeah, well I'm going to stay out here on the margin, and let the center look for me."

So brave, the stalwart pose out there on the lonely windswept margins of society like she's in exile or some sort of street person. She is glomming onto every nuance of the pose, and yet with the advantages of being established for years as a well-paid published author and professor for whom the "center" came holding out a bouquet of a few hundred thousand dollars (Nobel Prize), which ironically is white people rewarding a black woman for writing about black people. You might suppose that Moyers had a point, or was just curious if she considered writing about someone else.

I am speaking of course as someone at the center of the world. I think it has something to do with centralized heating and indoor plumbing (which I assume Toni Morrison has no use for).

Article in the paper a week ago. COUPLE BEATEN AT NORTH BERKELEY BART. "Four people punched, kicked, and beat a couple…." (The husband and wife are white, the attackers are black). 11:30 p.m. The woman was parked outside the station waiting to pick up her husband. "Two men and two women in their early 20's made a U-turn and stopped directly behind" her car. The rest of the road was empty. When the husband walked up "he heard one of the occupants of the car behind yell at him – in a hostile

voice and with obscenities and a reference to his ethnicity – to move his car." The white couple might have gotten away if they had taken the position of bowing down to blacks, whatever they say or do, but the husband had the imperialistic nerve to say they would move the car when he was ready.

Again there is this business of white people who're an affront to the enormous sensitivities of black people if they're not mute or invisible. The blacks pile out of their car including a woman wielding "a long wooden handle, approaching with the woman screaming, "I'm going to kill you, you white bitch." Slightly overwrought. Was it cocaine or just some Afrocentric vapors going to their head? "The woman began hitting his wife so hard… that the stick broke in two."

BART spokesman: "It's awfully hard to say what this was all about… to call it a hate crime – who knows?" That's true, it might have been a gesture of love and understanding.

Article by a black woman columnist on the "root causes" explanation. It "is exposed as insufficient by facts impossible to deny: black violence has risen even as racism has receded and black wealth has grown. In the 1920's and 1930's when much of black America was desperately poor and dogged by life-threatening racism, rates of black-on-black homicide were much lower."

She points out that homicide is the leading cause of death for black men (sixteen to twenty-four). From 1978 to 1987 20,315 black males were murdered, "mostly by other black men." This pose about being hunted by white people in a white-dominated society is starting to wear thin when it is much more likely (and statistically proven) that they hunt each other.

It's like a totalitarian presence is lifting and the old tribal conflicts are coming out.

A black woman DJ on the radio with a breezy pompous manner, skipping through the news items with little asides which were heavy on the diction and condescending attitude and light on content. She was musing for a second about some relation of NASA to Nazi, I suppose because they sound similar. No mention of German rocket scientists.

A black boxer quoted in the paper about having married and divorced a couple of women who were good housekeepers. "They kept the house."

A white woman who wears clothes for a living, one of the more famous ones. She said, "I live fashion 24 hours a day," but "I'm not obsessed with it."

Woke up in the morning but with something missing, not hitting on all cylinders. Slow going with a mute inglorious mind and it was raining, but I finally had something going on the typewriter.

11:30 a.m., the phone rang. The Professor in Los Angeles was calling from his office. He said the American Historical Association is having a convention here later this month. I went to it with him a few years ago. It was at the Hilton which is only a few blocks from here. We heard lectures and panel discussions on the most esoteric historical topics. Some of the speakers were such virtuosos you could barely understand what they were saying. The Professor has a limited patience for that sort of thing, especially when it ventures into the hard-to-fathom rhetoric of the deconstructionists. He finds it affected and counter-productive, but he labors under the assumption that an intellectual should be able to communicate. Someone's specialty becomes an instrument of discourse on which they play the most remote compositions, hitting high notes which most human beings can't even hear.

There was some reference to the semi-literacy of his students, their lack of interest in reading and ideas and any history which pre-dates their own incredibly significant existence. Reading and writing are considered passive because the medium isn't jumping up and down, but when you watch a show with a wire up its ass it's not seen as passive or conforming, even though you're just sitting there and your involvement is vicarious. You are lobotomized by the spectacle. It's all being done for you and you lose yourself in the crowd. How's this for special effects: a stadium full of noise and power lined with powerful spotlights aiming straight up into the void.[66]

[66] As conceived by Albert Speer in the 1930's. He was the Commissioner for the Artistic and Technical Presentation of Party Rallies and Demonstrations for the Nazi Party.

I told him I was reading *The Last Journal* of Edmund Wilson. He mentioned Gore Vidal's comment that alcohol ruined (or diluted and compromised) so many writers, but not Wilson. The Professor has a huge respect for Wilson's leftwing perspective, though some of the essays are in obscurity, like "Cold War and the Income Tax."

We talked about the recent deaths of Albert Collins and Frank Zappa. His own medical condition is not so good as an insulin-dependent diabetic (adult onset, probably due to stress). He can look forward to one organ after another becoming worse or dysfunctional. He said his immune system is attacking itself, which sounds like him for some reason.

If it's not his immune system it's his wife who is attacking him. He is not sure he can make it up here for the historical convention, because she will make his life miserable if he does. It's a male-dominated world, but on the home front there are many men with one hand tied behind their back. She will use nonstop friction and arguments until he bends to her will to avoid the awful sound of her voice. It is a form of domestic abuse when a woman constantly insults a man, but you don't hear much about that. It is another example of a woman who clawed and nagged her way into some kind of dominant position while the man is worn out by his occupation. She perches on his chest like a watchful bird of prey with claws picking at his heart and liver. Over the years he looks more and more drained, while the wife is full of energy.

There was some mention of his reading Norman Mailer on the CIA (*Harlot's Ghost*). There is an illusion of declassified information with the government not giving much away. The sheer pretense of being open, with the head of the CIA appearing on the Larry King show as if that revealed anything more than what he looks like and that he knows how to tie a tie. Even the budget of the CIA is secret.

I got ready for work, tying a tie as well as the head of the CIA.

2:30 p.m. I went out in a drizzle. The prostitutes with their umbrellas keep a dry leg for the fellas.

A couple of hours in the office, then walked home in the rain.

I called my sister, the ex-sociology professor and relentless feminist. She may have lightened up a little or is more relaxed, being in a relationship with a man – a rocket scientist who thinks she is a pretty good shortstop. I told her about the historical convention up here and she has some interest, having none at all in sociological conventions. I went to one with her at the Claremont Hotel in the Oakland hills.[67]

I ran a few topics by her, from the goddess cult to those who're running with Naomi Wolf. There are feminists who want little to do with the body-earth associations of a goddess. No biological determinism for them. She said one finds it more often in lesbian feminist bookstores. I had a friend who was affiliated with a radical lesbian group called Milk and Blood.

Naomi Wolf is usually good for some vacant non sequiturs. Even worse, she describes waif-like models as having "the concentration camp look." That is tasteless, especially for a Jew. Maybe she should say that while clutching a barbed wire fence. She also said the previous look of larger-bosomed models (like it's going out of style) is "threatening to men." Even my sister was askance. "Men are afraid of boobs?" There is a subtext here of wishful thinking: "I dreamed the men ran away when I swung my double-D's around."

My sister would barely admit that the qualities of a goddess – beautiful, erotic, milk-producing – have a lot in common with a pin-up model. I'm more informed about this stuff than she is, and I noted some related books by women.

[67] It was built in 1915.

She said she might give up on getting her teaching credential in California (high school level). This is someone who was a professor at a private university in New Jersey, but teaching high school requires taking classes in how to teach students, or maybe how to reach them. Turns out she doesn't have enough history or literature courses in her background. It was a narrow (and statistical) path her doctorate in sociology put her on.

I got off the phone and read for a while.

9 p.m. I lay down for a minute.

1:30 a.m. I woke up. I'll never learn. Oblivion is lurking in the warm covers on a mattress. It begins to pull you in the minute you are horizontal and your guard is down. That is half the point of lying down in the first place, to relax your guard.

Slowly coming to my senses. Did the situation warrant a late-night session on the typewriter? I thought it did. I went to the corner store for cigarette papers. The dark wet streets with the lurid locals hanging out. Walking at night in this neighborhood is like a cold shot of coffee.

On the typewriter until five in the morning with the radio getting eerie.

Thursday, Dec. 9, 1993

NOTES

> A review of a black man's book by the woman who wrote *Volunteer Slavery*. "Confused Advice to Black People." He wrote *Why Black People Tend to Shout* and here is the unequal sequel: *What Black People Should Do Now* (is Lenin in the house?).
>
> In the first book his commentaries on this country were from a "distinctly" black male perspective. I have my own theories about why black people tend to shout, at least in my neighborhood. The hot air builds up inside a hollow head which acts as an amplifying sound box. The more intelligent black people don't need to shout. If they do it is because other black people are shouting (which is mistaken for singing in some forms of music,

and has variations such as yelling and caterwauling). There is not a lot of nuance when the importance of what you're saying is conveyed by making it loud.

It could be the noisy arrival of an arriviste, especially if they're coming from a background where they lacked a voice. They're making sure they're seen, if not obscene, and heard for blocks around if not from one end of the country to the other. Shouting is part of the rich oral tradition. It fills a vacuum left by other people who are more quiet.

Why be sublimated if you can make a splash? I'm loud, therefore I exist.

It's a way of scaring away the evil spirits (like the Chinese do with fire crackers) and your own self-doubts. It is similar to people who stumble onto an empty house which is haunted by a white ghost (which built the house). They feel self-conscious and they're talking loud because they're nervous.

They were brought up with the television on. The loud canned voices are known for erasing thought and promoting, if not instilling, an amplified discourse.

The woman reviewer was sorry to say his second book doesn't cut it. The reader finishes the book "not only without a clue as to what black people should do, but with scarcely a hint as to what they should think about doing." 374 pages for that. She says that he's a good writer (who collaborated with Spike Lee) and "Lord knows he's intelligent," it's just that "these elements seldom come together" in his latest book. With respect to her reference to the Lord, is the writer still intelligent if God does not exist? She makes some observations which put it in a doubtful light. Maybe the book was a hastily written rip-off, giving him the benefit of the doubt intelligence-wise.

Nevertheless, the photo of the author shows how serious he is, staring intently with his hands in front of him and showing he can make his fingertips touch without looking. It alludes to a writer who knows how to make a point. It is an allusion to a field sobriety test. He makes the sign of a yoni while praying that you buy his book.

An article on the "Biophilia Hypothesis," where Homo sapiens have a "deep, genetically based emotional need to affiliate with the rest of the living world." No shit. The "need for nature may be in our genes," or jeans as the case may be. I don't know if this is a remarkable grasp of the obvious, or an esoteric weak attempt to justify the preservation of woods and deserts, like we wouldn't know that without an evolutionary biologist to point it out.

Slowly the point was sinking in, that "the characteristic becomes fragile" in artificial environments. What happens when people are cut off from the ocean or the mountains and the "learned responses" one has from living in the wild or anywhere near it? There is an "emotional need" to go somewhere with a low population density. There is an effect on the mind from an "interaction with nature."

It keeps you on your mortal toes when you're in the desert, for example, and your anthropomorphic dimensions are not being catered to. There are no steps or railings which fit the proportions of a humanoid. You have to improvise and that requires an intensified awareness of your surroundings, rather than sleepwalking in predictable terrain.

There was something about living in cities where one learns how to "recognize potentially lethal threats" – they should come to the Tenderloin – and the "desirability of partly open spaces" (not to mention parking places). There are heightened perceptions in the less secure parts of town. It is further evidence that insecurity powers evolution.[68]

An essay on California by Joan Didion in the *New York Review of Books*. She touches on some disconcerting points with respect to what Edmund Wilson had to say about this part of world. It's a nice place to visit but he couldn't think. How many people who live here feel like they're just visiting and never really arrive?

Apparently, there is too much nature. It is so grandiloquent the eloquence of human beings pales by comparison. So why bother? The natural surroundings of London, Paris, New York City, and Berlin are fairly subdued, and according to this logic those cities developed because the minds of individuals stood out more. They reach for magnitudes and beauty which in other places are already there.

She quotes Josiah Royce in 1879, saying he would pursue his philosophical inquiries

> …independently, because I am a Californian, as little bound to follow mere tradition as I am liable to find an audience by preaching in this wilderness; reverently, because I am thinking and writing face to face with a mighty and lovely Nature, by the side of whose greatness I am but as a worm.[69]

She says, "This is interesting, a quite naked expression of what has been the California conundrum, where 'scaled against' the… great terrain, 'trembling on its tectonic plates' their 'heroic imperatives' were futile, 'their philosophical inquiries absurd'." So let's go surfing.

Didion quotes him as he tried to figure out what community meant out here. He "invented an idealized California," and yet, "the community most deeply recalled by the author of this system was what he acknowledged to have been a 'community of irresponsible strangers'." In another reference it is "a blind and stupid and homeless generation of selfish wanderers," a community not of the "loyal," but of "men who have left homes and families, who have fled from before the word of the Lord, and have sought safety from

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[68] Many women are alert as nervous birds in public, having learned from a young age that they are vulnerable. The question is if being constantly on alert expands their learning ability.

[69] "I am the earthworm / I live underground /… I live off decay /… and no one sees me / ever… / you waste your time running from one book to the next…." "Earthworm" (1979) by Flipper. I saw them open for Public Image Ltd. in San Francisco in 1980 (the beer cans were flying).

> their old vexatious duties in a golden paradise." It has a silver lining of the silver screen. They screen their opportunities and duties, including child support payments. They have fled from the word itself (and the smoke of their neighbors' opinions), but it follows them in the form of words on a billboard and computer talk.
>
> A hundred years ago, "Royce allowed that 'a general sense of social irresponsibility is, even today, the average Californian's easiest failing'."
>
> She says, "The life I was raised to admire was entirely the product of this isolation, infinitely romantic, but in a kind of vacuum, its only antecedent aesthetic, and the aesthetic only the determined 'Bohemianism' of nineteenth-century San Francisco." There were post-war updates and revisions by the decade, much of which were brought about by people from the East Coast (including some of the Beat writers). They came here with their energetic minds and a tendency to leave before the big dissolve was setting in.[70]

Typing in the morning. A hollow cylinder on the end of a chain was moving by the window, along with a giant crane.

Work out on a wooden instrument, it is a counter-balance to a typewriter.

2:30 p.m. I got on a Muni bus and was sitting near the back with half a dozen high school students. There were a few Latino males and a couple of light-skinned black females. They know each other and it's after school. A rich oral tradition connected to the gentle sentiments of the young was filling the bus.

"YOU FUCKIN' NIGGERS HATE EVERYONE WHO LOOKS MEXICAN!" One of the girls responded with, "FUCKIN' CHINK!" There was some ambiguity here as to the racial mixture. A Latino guy said, "At least I'm not white." There were girlish screams and shouts. When one of the girls got off the bus she was whacked on the "booty" by someone's book. More laughing. All of this was normal conversation, though you're half-expecting broken windows

[70] Also: "The distress in which California now finds itself has as its proximate cause the withdrawal of the federal money that kept the defense industry afloat."

and worse. If there was any vandalism it had to do with the effect of their voices on our ears. It went on while I read the paper, an article on the "INS AND OUTS OF BODY PIERCING AMONG THE YOUNG." They could use their voices when it comes to ear piercing.

In the office I talked with the new receptionist, then worked for a couple of hours.

I walked home on a long meandering trek, dropping into the bookstore where I found another article on Lucien Freud in the *New York Review of Books*. It was written by a woman who posed for him many years ago. I read everything I can find on him, including articles in *The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair*. The latter had some of his lesser works and a short interview with him. He responded to one question – "What would you save in your studio if there was a fire?" - with "Yawn, yawn." He also referred to an analysis of his work in the same magazine as "rancid turds." This shows how language can deteriorate in someone who is absorbed with the visual.

I drifted around the latest publications, read something by Naomi Wolf for a while, then put it down. I was amazed at her self-absorption in a context of strategies for women. She has the effect of a big soft cloud, a Naomi-scented word-mist. One problem she had to overcome (by going to an analyst) was how to feel good about herself for having so much money.

As an antidote I looked at the biophilia book. There was a lot more there than meets a book review. I found a line, "the vicarious acquisition of adaptive responses," which sounded like the Wolf woman.

I looked at the book by Ralph Wiley, *What Black People Should Do Now: Dispatches from Near the Vanguard*. The writer, Jill Nelson, gave it a poor review, while the blurbs on the back cover were practically screaming. Malveaux sounds like she can barely control her natural functions, saying how she howled and moaned and cried and laughed. She seems to be under a lot of pressure.

His prose style is nothing to write home about. It reminded me of children's building blocks. It has that sort of wooden simplicity with gaping spaces or credibility gaps – what Nelson referred to as something missing. Maybe they were filled by his ego. One example of a clunky follow-through is when he questions how learning and books got characterized as a "white thing." There are some pretty old universities in Europe and the printing press was invented in Germany in the 1400's, so that might have something to do with it. He would prefer that books and learning would be a black thing, but that would require more black students spending time with books and not using the excuse that reading is for whites (being mental and effete).

I went to Max's, got a sandwich to go with pastrami and sauerkraut, and walked home. My legs were getting a minor workout this evening.

I read the paper and reviewed old manuscripts – the editing is endless.

9 p.m. I was about to call one or two women when the phone rang. It was B., eclipsing my intended conversations with the subject of her and the other woman. Their argumentative estrangement is a wonder to behold. It is so bad that B. is considering a way out. The ego of the other woman is insufferable. She magnifies and won't let go of the most trivial things and keeps bringing up B.'s faults, especially pertaining to Saturday night.

One less-than-endearing trait of B. is when things are going wrong she will walk me through it, step by step, hour by hour, and then this and THEN THAT, with her sounding like a man who is looking askance (with mounting distaste) at a woman's overblown reactions. It's a self-dramatizing friction which Ilsa can fall back on after some pleasant interludes. She is showing her hand as to the self-important dimension she inhabits and B. is not impressed. "Listen, lady…." B. feels like she has to keep apologizing over and over for the same thing, and

there have been some withering comments as to her being a dummy who doesn't know who she is or what she is doing.

All of this has to do with her having blown a few signals when they were out on Saturday night. She wasn't conforming to the other woman's wishes about leaving. B. is still unclear on the concept that socializing with a couple of men would have bothered her lesbian partner.

She kept running this by me, sounding disturbed and angry, which is to say she was venting her anger in ways she couldn't with Ilsa. I said, "I can't tell you how familiar this is. You're going through some situations that many men have gone through with a woman." Her sympathies for men are increasing. It felt rotten, the condescension and manipulation, the constant arguing over nothing, the fact that Ilsa wouldn't let it go. They would arrive on a tenuous plane of some resolve with the woman coming over to spend the night and the next day she was right back into it. One of the young men phoned Ilsa. "YOU GAVE THEM MY PHONE NUMBER??!!"

Ilsa has a mean streak. I said it went with the territory. I sensed it when I met her, thinking she was hard as a prostitute (if not a divorcee from Florida). It is a hardness and determination that B. respects, being more flighty and disorganized or prone to floating. Softer in fact, which is ironic, since B. seems to be in the male role, wondering when this woman's emotional broken record will subside.

I said something about those who have a solid presence in the world. They are empirical to a fault, or maybe just materialistic. It often makes them mean. Their foot-on-the-ground solidity provides a certain traction, but the stumbling blocks appear when one is not so buoyant. She thinks that Ilsa wants to keep the affair going, but B.'s shortcomings will always be there. She mentioned how relatively easy it had been with men. I said,

"Just kiss them and they're happy."
"YES!"

It was odd to see these women with their fine-tuned social skills which are sometimes lacking or deficient in men, and yet it seemed that being attuned to every little nuance is making them neurotic.[71] It reminds me of something I read in the *Bay Guardian* this week, a letter to an advice columnist. A young woman said she is in a relationship with a man who is everything a woman could hope for – handsome, good in bed, and they get along fine. However, there is something which is becoming a problem for her and she isn't sure how to tell him. He has a mole on his chin.

I got off the phone an hour and a half later with her apologizing for "yammering on" about this, and repeating her belief that there is no one else to talk to. She can't make plans for the holidays with Ilsa because she isn't sure they will be together for any length of time. I've been to the gates of hell with more than one woman, but my life is pretty simple these days. I save the complications for the writing, which works better if I'm not under a lot of stress.

There are times I miss being with a woman, but there are more times when I don't, or don't think about it, considering what I hear from people who are struggling with relationships. B. is so stressed out she is having stomach problems. We wondered if her girlfriend envies B.'s comparatively easy life and is compelled to share her tension to correct the imbalance. You never know what you might be getting from someone else, and it's another reason for being wary. You could end up inhaling their worldview, and months or years later you realize what an arbitrary warp it was, dragging you down into a scented malaise.

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[71] Some women have an enlarged view of the present. It magnifies their own presence, and not without some positive effects, but there's a downside when they blow things out of proportion and all they can see are the faults and the dirt. Those are not uncommon in life, so they end up in a constant state of critical tension and deflated romanticism.

Speaking of which: Ilsa asked B. if she would pick up some perfume as a present for a third woman who B. has reason to believe is intent on coming between them. It seemed manipulative, like Ilsa is lining up her next affair. It is something B. could recognize, having that capacity herself, and she didn't like being on this end of it.

It was eleven before I got around to calling my ex-neighbor who I met in the church the other day. She was polite, but let me know it was a bit late. We made some vague plans for lunch next week.

On the typewriter for a while.

Friday, Dec. 10, 1993

I arrived at the office for a rendezvous with V. She was at the computer with her big glasses on, but removed them for lunch and we walked to the Hunan place. Sweet and sour chicken with garlic and ginger.

When it's just the two of us, sitting at a small table, it's a breeze. The laconic candor of the woman is all the more charming when you consider the disparity of our backgrounds. It's a wonder we get along or ever met. She is careful not to give me the wrong idea, being engaged and all of that, but she can be emphatic about me walking her to the transit station or asking if we're having lunch tomorrow. I've also noticed that her hair is as good a topic of conversation as anything else, and it eclipses the news.

At some point we were on the subject of her having babies. It is constantly on her mind. She is normally discreet but is more open on this topic, it being on the utilitarian side. We talked about the after-effects of being pregnant and giving birth. She said a woman is torn and has to heal. There was some mention of stretch marks which she thought had something to do with

women scratching themselves. She said it itches when you're pregnant and women rub their stomach. I said, "What about when stretch marks occur in the breasts?" She had to think about it.

We walked back slowly for once. The lobby was full of poinsettias. She said she has a plastic one. I said, "Jesus wasn't born on plastic straw." She replied with exasperated patience, thinking I might be on the verge of blasphemy, "Shut…up."

I worked for a couple of hours in the office, then read the paper.

5 p.m. We left together. She insisted it was going to rain. How did she know? She heard it on the news. She prides herself on being prepared, and is practical to a fault. At lunch she wondered how come I don't work longer hours, I would have more money. I said there's more to life, and I don't sleep all day at home. I read and write and play guitar. She seems to think I'm lazy or deluded, which is possible, especially when it comes to propagating.

I walked to the pool, and swam a mile. Paused for a few minutes, then swam underwater for 110 feet. I almost never go beyond that since I run out of air. Paused for a few minutes, then swim two lengths as fast as I could. Thirty seconds. It's my usual routine. The workout went smoothly and I wasn't breathing hard a minute later. Last night I had half a beer, not much coffee, and a lot of sleep.

There was a woman in the next lane who was on the plain side but with a buoyant floating bosom. It swayed from side to side in a mercurial swimsuit when she was on her back. She couldn't swim very well, as if her body is unwieldy, either a burden or an arbitrary dimension (I read another article on Lucien Freud).

One more length underwater, then I climbed out. A hot shower. The men's locker room has a couple of hazards: a slippery floor and a mirror on the wall.

Both of them allude to the fall. I thought of the mortal coordinates of Lucien Freud. The coordination of a living being who is "subject to death." His compositions hit close to home (all the way from London), with the suggestion of the body as an arbitrary burden. How it looks as you're getting older, which I am. The cold realism of a model in a torqued position. The flesh tones remind me of late Rembrandt, his self-portraits. There was some mention of Lucien Freud being influenced by Degas, Velasquez, and even Ingres (using a pale and naked overweight man as seen from behind). It was a brush stroke of genius considering how many postwar artists got their inspiration from a soup can or some drips.

I walked home in the night, with fresh air and no rain.

Later at home I was changing my clothes and happened to walk in front of a full-length mirror with nothing on. It was a reality check, pausing to reflect. It might explain why there are not more women in my life. Concentrating on the mind is probably a good idea. Lucien Freud has a painting of himself standing naked in his late sixties. He is not in bad condition, all things considered, but still.

The article by John Richardson (in *The New Yorker*) had some background to it. "I first met Lucien Freud a little over 50 years ago…." His roots are "for the most part, in German art." I was thinking of Egon Schiele[72] as fleshed out by someone under the influence of a contorted Rodin. Freud was inspired for his "spikier studies" by Albrecht Durer (who died in 1528), and was friends with Francis Bacon.

> They shared certain characteristics: a Baudelairean dandyism in intellect and manner; a very cool and mordant wit; a keen ear for fine writing and an irreverent eye for fine painting; a total rejection of middle-class values in favor of very low and, on occasion, rather high life….

[72] He has a self-portrait called *Eros* (1911) where he has an erection (he was twenty-one). The phallic doesn't stick its nose into European fine art very often, but Odd Nerdrum revealed an upwardly noble hard-on with the realism of a Rembrandt (*Self-Portrait in Golden Cape* (1997)) when he was fifty-three.

They drifted apart twenty years ago. Freud thought Bacon was losing it, a failing inspiration (diluted by alcohol), while picking up the slack with a "rigid belief" that he wasn't and didn't want to hear it.[73] Freud was all too honest and plainspoken. For his part, Bacon thought Freud was "too careful." I'm not all that moved by his detailed paintings of a backyard in London, but the reviewer points out a curious development. His brushwork and compositions loosened up as an aging painter with "an inability to focus sharply on nearby objects." "This refractive failing can be a blessing in disguise," citing Rembrandt and Cezanne in their later years.

He was characterized in his early years as "a gentleman standing at a slight angle to the universe." The angle makes for a critical edge and some estrangement, with an individual perspective. The angle is what he keeps stumbling on. It reminds me of the uneven cobblestone which triggered a flood of memories for Proust.

Freud had the contrary angle of his German Jewish background, living most of the time in London and pursuing a cold-water realism, not to say the figurative, during a time when many painters were caught between primordial chaos and commercial art. He is from the "Don't complain, don't explain" school - a man of few words. His preoccupation with the body is a way of eluding words and psychoanalysis as well. He told a photographer that, "Anything he says about his work is as relevant to the final result as the grunts that tennis players emit when making their shots."

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[73] Flash forward to 2006: I was in London for a few days and looked up a singer who used to record with a theater group I worked with in San Francisco (I was their photographer). She was an attractive and eccentric woman who liked mescaline and had connections, including with the Colony Room, which she brought me to. It was a private club in Soho with green walls hung with lots of pictures. London is cramped for space and this was no exception. It was a famous hangout for hard-drinking painters like Francis Bacon and Lucien Freud (ironically, I wasn't drinking in those days). Two years later the club was no more (it began in 1948).

His work is focused on inhabited bodies, those Lucien islands of inherited flesh. There are others in this vein who have a lot of nerve, like Philip Pearlstein and Stanley Spencer, an Englishman in the 1940's who made realistic portraits of naked people who're a far cry from the physical ideal, including himself. Freud put more into the surroundings, like a luscious fabric near the slack pale skin of an ordinary person. It reminds me of a Larry Rivers painting of his aging naked mother-in-law. There is an additional point to this. We are inundated with the propaganda of the perfect body, and the connotation that perfection is a commodity. Some painters have responded with a mortification of the flesh.

He mentioned why he prefers ordinary people as his models. The flesh and poses are more real. It is similar to film directors who use people who're not professional actors, soliciting the awkward presence of an amateur (who may be in the film because of his or her physiognomy). In Freud's case the models are caught between the qualified and the unqualified, with the polarity resolved in paint.

"Evening in the Studio," his latest. I was staring at a reproduction in the magazine and taking notes on the side (whatever happened to Eric Fischl with his psychosexually suggestive scenes?). Roughly speaking, a fat woman sprawls naked on the floor in the foreground of a bare room. She is lying at the foot of a narrow iron bed. There is a small dog on the bed which is next to a prim and proper woman in a chair. The embroidered cloth in her lap is spilling down in a profusion of stylized plant forms which lead you to the fat woman and you're floored.

There are other things I'm picking up by way of poetic license or the "audacity and insolence" that he was known for and which lurk in the composition, permeating his work, even as "Paddington permeates (his) painting." "The funkiness of the place, as of an unmade bed, and

its slightly shabby light seep into virtually all of his work and Londonize it." It makes me wonder if my surroundings permeate my writing. You want to be careful where you live.

I think the large woman spreading her legs in the foreground represents the impact of a foreground, being up close and personal. The thin woman in the chair represents a distant background where things are smaller and safe, being further away. She is doing her best to ignore the specter of "womanflesh" by concentrating on her sleight-of-hand with the fabric. It echoes the painter's sleight-of-hand on the canvas.

From needlepoint to pointless speculation which he doesn't suffer gladly, but the medium made me do it. There is "a sumptuous rhetorical scale" of "pictorial information." Where is Lucien Freud in all of this? Does he correspond to the whippet on the iron bed? He thinks of life as a "disease" and may be ill at ease with being mortal, but he gets around it with a composition of unblinking gaze. The best revenge is bearing witness, using the eye-hand coordination of a painter to look at things more carefully, to stare for hours at things you won't survive. It has the intensity of someone reaching for a brush-like branch to impede his fall. He stops time with a composition and it generates a meditation on life (it practically requires it). Caught on canvas is the integrity of the observer and observed.

The writhing of those plant forms represents the inner complexity of the women, or so I like to think.

I lay down around ten, tempted by the horizontal with the radio washing over me like a blanket of sound. Coming to a little after midnight, which led to coffee and typing.

4 a.m. I went back to bed, a storm-tossed tree outside the window not far from my head.

Saturday, Dec. 11, 1993

Typing for a few hours.

A flooded muddy construction site outside the window with heavy equipment sitting there. A lot of holes filled with cement and iron supporting rods. There was a grid of string tied to stakes. It floated over the dirt in straight lines. Order was imposed on chaos. On the other side of the chain link fence there was a loud argument going on. A thin and haggard white woman berated a black man with a loud and raspy voice. “YOU’RE WRONG!”

I had a reproduction of “Evening in the Studio” propped up next to the typewriter, finding more in it the more I looked, or was I finding more responses in my head according to a mute composition?

2:30 p.m. I had just finished on the typewriter when the phone rang. It was Ming. She flew back from Hong Kong last night and sounded excited. “Let’s hang out!” She was coming right over which threw the situation into fast-forward. The only way I can get motivated to straighten up the place is when someone is coming over, but it took her a while. I was on the wooden instrument and caught the last quarter of the 49ers game (a letdown).

4:30 p.m. She walked through the door and there were kisses and a long embrace like neither one of us wanted to let go. She was in a white shirt and big shorts, her black hair was longer, and she had a tan from the Gulf of Thailand. For a couple of hours we sat close together under a lamp with her showing me her photos from Korea, Hong Kong, her parents’ home, Bangkok, and an island off the cost of Thailand. Also Chiang Mai in the north of Thailand where she went on a trek with a few others, communing with the local villagers.

One thing which threw her off was how rude the Chinese were that she encountered in Hong Kong. She is still trying to figure it out or rationalize it. The last people she wants to be

around in Asia are the Chinese, with the additional concern of being ripped off – not only hearing stories but having had the experience.

There are many Buddhas in Thailand. She said the young men are expected to be monks for varying lengths of time. It's a national duty, like being conscripted into the army, except there is a qualitative difference. And the royal couple of Thailand have his and her temples with a space-age Buddhist look.

Bangkok is not her cup of dense polluted tea. She finally took a long bus ride (12 hours), going south along the coast, and then a two-hour boat ride to an island. It was tropical with palm trees everywhere and small huts along the beach ($4 a night or less). The resort was frequented by Westerners. She got a topless massage on the beach from an older woman. One night she went to a disco club on the other side of the island with her white male companion. Their relations were a bit off since she wasn't sleeping with him. It turned out the club was full of pretty Thai women with white men and she may have been seen as a hired escort, if not a prostitute, being an Asian woman with a white man.

She got stoned a few times among the old and new temples. Buddha sitting or reclining in a calm state. Some variations had an ancient aura and a few were modern.

A stone wall with a perfect circle to walk through.

A village on stilts on the edge of the water (near Hong Kong) where long boats were outfitted with car engines. They were bolted to the stern with a long drive shaft angled into the water with a propeller on the end of it.

A photo of her parents in their home. A small harbor just across the border of China. They are retired, in their late sixties. Her father made his money in the U.S. and went back. She grew up hating him – an overbearing patriarch. He seems to measure everything in terms of

money. A common sight over there is people burning paper money so the ancestors will have sufficient funds in the after-life. That is different from Christians who don't believe that money is required for the after-life, or a spiritual state in general (forgetting for the moment that the Catholic church was selling seats in heaven).

She loves her mother, a passive woman, but admits she takes after her father in the sense of being bull-headed and ambitious, not passive or domestic. They were banging heads when she was there, and had a huge fight which left her in tears.

There were comments about some of the apartments in Hong Kong with balconies and windows like cages. She said the Chinese don't trust anyone, even though the crime rate is relatively low. Ming only went a few minutes across the border into mainland communist China. If she goes back it will be in the northern part around Beijing.

She was getting excited again, talking fast like it was all coming back to her and there was so much to relate. She brought me a couple of things: a kimono-like men's robe of thin material, and a stylish cigarette lighter which seemed to be made of shell and and brass. I thought it said MIND PROOF SYSTEM, but it was "wind proof"[74] with the logo: VISIBLE. If I had an invisible lighter I would lose it in no time. Made in China - the fluid ran out in the course of the evening.[75]

She still thought her estranged companion and her could work together, selling roe in Alaska. Having returned to San Francisco she is not sure whether it is home or not, and doesn't

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[74] When I was nineteen or twenty I lived in San Pedro. I knew a long-haired fellow with a wall of marijuana kilos in a shack. He bought an old school bus and converted it to fit his lifestyle. He asked me and a friend of mine to paint the word WINDFUCKER in black gothic letters along the side. We did, but the W looked like an M.

[75] A few years later I was getting some things at the corner store in my old neighborhood. It is run by a Korean couple. The man put the items in a brown paper bag. I picked it up and the bottom fell out. Without hesitating he said, "Made in China" (which supported North Korea during the Korean War in the 1950's).

feel she has a “niche” here, especially in terms of employment. She revived a dormant situation with the ex-boyfriend (the guy is patient to the point of masochism), but doesn’t know if they should live together. They might have to if she wants to put away a thousand dollars a month. She knows her capacity for getting “restless, bored, and…” something else. I started adding to the list until she objected.

She doesn’t want to hurt him again, although in the next breath she said she could bring him to Alaska as if he and her business partner would get along. She is unclear on the concept that they hate each other.

Ming is in her twenties and a center of attention. The men around her are accommodating. She admits that what she has put some of them through she would never tolerate herself. The subject shifted to me and my supposedly self-sufficient isolation with a fixed routine of writing and music. She thought my unwillingness to conform is refreshing for women who get tired of easy men. I wasn’t sure about that. I’m not making much effort or going out of my way to be whatever women want, but I wouldn’t say they find it admirable. They’re not exactly beating down my door.

I’m going out on a (literary) limb with this way of life, living in an engine room with high intensity levels which could leave me out of sync with other people. I have gravitated to a point where having a continual concentration on a medium of expression is a value in itself.

She admits that she would rather deal with men instead of women, and commiserates with men in that respect. The most difficult people in her life have been women for the most part (except for her father). There was some mention of our mutual acquaintance in St. Helena and the Phantom of the sound-room. Both of them used to be her roommates and she slept with them on different occasions. It managed to wreck one connection and compromise the other. I was

thinking of Rima, one of Jon's roommates in St. Helena, who gives the impression that the very air she breathes is sexual. She has been in bed with the Phantom before, though living with her boyfriend at the time.

Ming will talk about what is "between my legs" as having some power or influence over men. It reminds me of a book I was looking at the other day on the erotic life of Anais Nin. At this point, having read some of her writing, it is not too secret. One method of engaging the world and knowing men is by a litmus test between her legs. She has managed to sleep with friends and associates, other writers, her analyst, and her father when she was a grown woman. She did it with the financial and domestic support of her husband, a banker who hardly warrants any mention in her books in which she is a free spirit, wandering through the bedrooms of the world.

8 p.m. We went out, walking to Max's Opera Café. I had some Russian soup which grossed her out (it has meat and golden raisins). She had a salad and a glass of wine. We split an apple pie a la mode and stayed a while. The conversation had a commiserating spark gap and wouldn't quit. Once or twice I could sense her hesitating, not sure whether to take offense at something I said. I was playing fast and loose with some of her assumptions.

On the way back we picked up two bottles of wine (we would finish one of them). The usual shady characters were out in force.

10 p.m. Relaxing with the wine and coffee, playing tapes and talking with the mood becoming more subdued. A certain gravity was setting in. We talked about women who view relations with a man in terms of power and control. Maybe they were brought up to think in those terms and it's for their own protection, not to say advancement, but I'm not used to that. I

don't think of power and control when it comes to a love affair, and chances are I'm leaving those concepts behind while a woman brings them into focus.

There was some mention of men who are treated like stepping-stones. You're with one until someone better comes along. She blinked and said, "What's wrong with that?"

I should be careful in attributing a mood to who I'm with at the moment. If I feel thrown off and talk about things in a negative light that doesn't mean it's her fault. It's circumstantial. Her visit interrupted a routine which has been holding me together, not to mention talking for nearly eight hours with not enough to eat. I was distracted by a party I was missing (at the Artist Registry) and who knows what else. No moon, and things were compromised between us. She returned to the ex-boyfriend, so we're using more discretion and she won't be spending the night.

12:30 a.m. I called a cab and walked her to the lobby. A hug and a kiss. "Call you tomorrow." I was on a wooden stringed instrument for over an hour. Good workout with some pent-up tension.

2 a.m. Metal and blues on the radio, along with Zappa. The evening wouldn't quit. I was on the typewriter for a while, a neo-poetic effort – "ghost writers of the merger."

4 a.m. Went to sleep, though it took a while.

Sunday, Dec. 12, 1993

A cold morning with not enough sleep. I was closing the refrigerator softly when a rock fell off and hit the floor. It sounded like a gunshot. It knocked over a picture of an old church in Rome which was leaning against the wall. I suddenly came to my senses, looking at the stuff on top of the refrigerator. It had the effect of being hit with a stick by a Buddhist monk – whatever it

takes to interrupt the mental currents and preoccupations which can stand in the way of enlightenment.

On top of the refrigerator: some guitar strings wrapped around a burned branch. A piece of driftwood from Alaska. A plastic sci-fi toy. A rabbit skull. Part of the jawbone of a dog. Some tiny silver spoons. A few rocks from the desert and the dried remnant of a cactus. An antelope horn. A photo I took of a railroad car. A shell dish for holding a candle. An endurance bar. A nickel. My keys on a crystal.

Coffee and typing for a few hours.

1 p.m. Phone call from B. She was heading to the Kabuki hot baths (women only) and running by the events of the last few days. Words like "chaos… fuming… bullshit…" were coming up. Still at odds with the other woman. Disenchanted and suspicious at this point. Ilsa has been sending her notes full of high-flown sentiments and semi-precious phrases which seem to be lifted out of relationship manuals, and come from a woman who was good at cutting her to pieces. In her opinion it was a lot of flowery "nonsense and hoopla." She can barely sympathize with women who are bored with their lives and manufacture dramas out of thin air while vacillating all over the place. That includes Phoebe, who called her with some pointless storm and stress over a failing relationship.

Meanwhile, did I want to go to a couple of parties later on? She didn't go last night because she was tired from working in a department store. It was "insane." A hot tub sounded nice.

2:30 p.m. A long workout on the guitar with the tube on (football). When I first turned it on I found newsreel footage from the 1940's (with perky music) about the liberation of Manila, "room by room." Flame-throwers, burning flesh, lots of dead people. It showed them cutting a

supply road through the jungle of Burma towards China. The commentator said they wanted to "conquer nature and then conquer the Japanese."

The wooden instrument wouldn't quit. I gravitated into a passive-aggressive state of more or less continual guitar, leaning back on the bed with cushions and distracted by a film about organized crime. Killing, kissing, crying, and collaborating.

I lay the guitar down and found some country music on the radio (KUSF). A guy picks up Jesus on the side of the road with a halo who wants to take him to heaven. Then he pulls a gun and puts it to his head. "The theological implications alone are staggering."[76] There was another tune with the line, "…it made no sense committing suicide in self-defense." The refrain: "You're just a wave, you're not the water."[77]

Towards the end of the afternoon I felt a certain sadness and wondered if the country music had anything to do with it, the plaintive notes. Or was it the scene in the movie where the girl has recovered her eyesight and her mother and they're all hugging along with the investigative reporter who is in love with her and barely survived her lethal family and they're in a witness protection program. I felt left out.

I'm an unprotected witness who recovered his eyesight by investigating vision and the odd epistemology of our psychology. The mind can keep you well, but I was thinking of those infants who die from a lack of touch. Years ago I made a collage of a laboratory monkey in a cage of sensory deprivation. It looked worried and wide-eyed. I surrounded it with emerald lightning bolts. Not necessarily a self-portrait.

6 p.m. I took a shower, changed, and went out. B. had called twice, making sure I was going with her to North Beach. I was at a low ebb, sleep-wise, and felt subdued. I'm tenuously

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[76] Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*
[77] Jimmy Dale Gilmore, "Just a Wave, Not the Water" (1988)

balanced on whether the cup is half full or half empty (it was the latter at the moment). However, I came out of it as I walked to her place, noticing the strings of Christmas lights hung from the windows and balconies of heavy old buildings.

She looked nice and insisted on running a comb through my hair a few times. We walked down Bush Street a few blocks and caught a cab. A few minutes later we were on Telegraph Hill near Coit Tower. The streets drop off into long-distance views of a suspension bridge.

We walked into the apartment, which was up a couple of flights. I was here two years ago. The place is restrained, but it was renovated with wood and there are views. There was a marble shower (full of ice and beer). I felt a letdown, like we walked into a gathering of strangers having quiet conversations with no music and it's dead in the water. My immediate impulse was to leave. I wondered how long we would be stuck here. That is not how she operates, however, with her antenna out and her libido for socializing. We sat in the corner having a beer and something on a plate. I was next to a telescope, ready to see my way out of here. She pointed out one or two men she knows. It was a gathering of older professionals who happen to live in North Beach. There was a psychologist who she said is a jerk. The man who lives here is compulsively neat. He works in a hospital as a chemist. I want to ask him about the chemistry which occurs between me and certain women.

She pointed out a man with a beard and said he was Chet Helms. He runs an art gallery across the street from where she lives and they're acquainted, but I know more about him. One of the more prominent names floating around this town in the 1960's was Chet Helms and the Family Dog (a hippie commune).

A few minutes later she cornered him in the bedroom. I think he was leaving, but I was drawn into the conversation. He is a kind and friendly man whose eyes are magnified behind

thick glasses. Thinning hair, a greying beard. He has a scintillating history as the first producer of psychedelic rock shows at the Fillmore and the Avalon Ballroom. He and his friends were on the ground floor of the counterculture in this town, but he was driven out of business by a hard-driving German-Jewish businessman named Wulf Grajonca (Bill Graham).[78] Helms mentioned the archives of Bill Graham which were destroyed in a fire and talked about the problems of consolidating any archives from that era. There was some mention of weak music awards and Graham's self-glorification. Someone produced an old flyer from one of the last shows Chet Helms put on (in 1978): Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Canned Heat, Big Brother and the Holding Company (when they were getting started he introduced them to a friend of his from Texas - Janis Joplin – who was unknown at the time).

During the conversation I mentioned R. Crumb. He said he is close friends with his ex-wife and that his stuff is selling in New York - original covers of *Zap Comix*. I asked him about Nathan Oliveira. He thought of him as an artist who has settled into a predictable style, like he's just doing one thing. That's pretty common with artists, but less so with Oliveira I think. There was some reference to Manuel Neri and his half-formed figures emerging from marble, something Michelangelo was known for. Much of this was news to B., and things were loosening up. Others walked up and were getting into the conversation, like a doctor in his late forties who is writing a book.

Chet Helms left, but talking with him had made my night. I wandered over to the kitchen with a counter covered with booze. I was on my second Becks and looking over an array of

[78] Graham was born in Berlin and barely escaped the Holocaust. He was older than Helms, had a business degree, and became a successful rock promoter. He was ruthless and caring with a multicultural taste in music and managed to monopolize the promotion of rock concerts in the Bay Area. I went to see the Clash at the Berkeley Community Theater (around 1980), put on by Bill Graham Presents, and there was a stern crowd control in effect. He had some enemies. He and the columnist Herb Caen (who was also Jewish) hated each other. A couple of years ago he left a concert in a helicopter during a storm. It hit a power pole and exploded. He was sixty.

bottles. There was a Latino man on the other side of the bar with greying long hair tied back and a moustache. He was fifty-four years old with broad features. Earlier he provided some musical background on an acoustic guitar, mostly flamenco. We got acquainted, a serious-looking man but friendly with a sense of humor. He was definitely interested in a large green bottle of liqueur from Czechoslovakia which someone warned us to be careful with, saying we should try a small amount. I had a little and it went down slowly like it permeated my whole being. Very smooth and not too sweet, a powerful drug. 175.00 on the cap.

B. wanted some, then said I hadn't poured enough. I was getting along with the musician, Freddie Mejia, who gave me his card. He works at a guitar shop in Berkeley, building and repairing guitars. There were three in the corner in the $900 to $1600 range. He said he has lived in North Beach for most of his life. Freddie used to be in a Mexican gang when he was young. He said he was a "pachuco…. WPLJ." It sounds like a radio station, but he said, "White port and lemon juice." I know that phrase from an old song.[79] There was an older fellow there with a distinctive profile, a black beret, and a large black cape with a high collar (shades of Dracula). White hair, late sixties. He took Freddie off the streets a long time ago.

A woman wandered up to the counter a little around the bend. Earlier she was in the corner with the guitar player. Turns out they live together. Late thirties, slender, in a tight miniskirt with nice legs, a lacy blouse, hair in a disheveled mess. I used to know her, and wasn't sure if she wanted to revive the acquaintance. It was nearly twenty years go when I first came here from Los Angeles and was doing poetry readings around town. I got to know one of the North Beach poets, Jack Hirschman (himself a recent transplant from down south where he

[79] "W-P-L-J" by the Four Deuces in the 1950's. It was later covered by Frank Zappa.

taught at UCLA before he was fired).[80] She was with him at the time and made woodcut portraits. When the poet Bob Kaufman died in 1986 a poem I wrote was included in a book which Hirschman edited (*Would You Wear My Eyes?A tribute to Bob Kaufman* (1989)) and this woman, Kristen, had a woodcut of Kaufman in it. When the book came out we had a reading at City Lights.

> Cut across country in the categories
> and you stumble on some stories,
> they're compressed into a coded monologue.
> Nerve endings in his brain were bouncing it around,
> the impulse of communication in a spark gap,
> the delivery was a little shredded.
> I used to see him walking on whatever sidewalk was available
> it seemed like he was listening to a voice,
> a nervous twitch,
> and something kept the fingers moving, a frenetic
> inner bop
> and looking like a burn-out,
> he had undergone shock treatment,
> the electrocuted poet
> who had gotten up and walked away and gone on
> walking, like the man they couldn't hang.

"KAUFMAN" (excerpt)

Kristen was looking for more scotch, and then we talked. She was vaguely aware that she knew me but was not sure from where. I told her when and where and mentioned my name. It was like the dawning of an old memory from a good time in her life, and a wave of warmth and recognition was coming out of her.

After a while I was over by an open window with a cigarette, a glass of wine, and looking over the city towards the west. Coit Tower was half a block away. Some people had gone, but things were getting more relaxed. B. put a tape in and stood next to me talking with the host. My

[80] He was the Poet Laureate of San Francisco in 2006, and a founder of the Revolutionary Poets Brigade. We have had many discussions at Specs, a bar in North Beach, with his vodka solidarity intoning on the evils of capitalism, the defeat of Hitler by the Soviet army, and the exploitation of the Holocaust. Also: baseball, Brooklyn, and Bukowski, when he wasn't singing "Nature Boy."

attention was drifting and she was worried, like I was going to float out the window, being out of small talk. She mentioned to Freddie that I play guitar. He was very accommodating so I walked over to the instruments, they turned off the music, and I picked up a fine old classical guitar, slightly beat up, which he bought for nearly $1000 (he changes the strings every week). The sound of it was irresistible. He picked up another guitar and said he would follow, and we felt our way around with the sound and gradually it took off.

I don't always use a pick and can get the fingers on my right hand moving. I don't know any flamenco techniques, but we were in sync. We stopped for a few minutes and then took off with a slower chord progression, taking turns with rhythm and lead. When he was doing more flamenco chords I did some counterpoint up and down the neck and then some rapid fingerpicking along the same progression. At times the effect was sublime and his girlfriend Kristen was sitting next to me and bless her soul responding as if the notes resounding in the guitars resounded in her. She was clutching my arm at one point and practically swaying and muttering low exclamations in Spanish (she spent some time in Nicaragua), so I think we were getting to her in a nice way.

The others stood around and talked. After each of these improvisations we shook hands, him with a big smile, it being one of those lovely and intense collaborations. I took a break for a cigarette and more wine. We found the green bottle of Czech medicine was empty, to his dismay. I said, "B. drank it all." She said, "What do you take me for?!" A few minutes later the host produced another bottle.

The evening drifted. It was supposedly ending at 10 p.m. (having begun in the afternoon), but there were still eight or nine of us there at eleven. The conversations were increasingly under the influence. I sat with Freddie and he talked about how he hates religion, how people are

diverted from the god within themselves by believing in some other distant god. I said something about a TV tower pulsing in the distance like a heartbeat and he liked that. We got on the subject of writers and poets I used to run into in North Beach years ago, and I mentioned Gregory Corso. He called out the name to Kristen who was behind the counter and fairly drunk at that point. She went into a semi-coherent routine, doing a Corso impersonation which wouldn't quit. It was like a woman hearing voices or picking up signals from the past, if not old memory tapes. We thought it was like the computer in *2001* when it comes unraveled.

He was used to this apparently, amused and patient, though he gets a little exasperated. All we wanted to know was how Corso was doing these days and where he was. She didn't know. Earlier I discussed with Freddie how all the ages we have been are still there, having an affect on our lives, however remote. We're not strung out on a diminishing timeline. He agreed. The conversations went on for a while, becoming more off the wall. Kristen was verging on alcoholic mood swings which can be a little treacherous. They went outside for a few minutes.

Then we were sitting together and I said I used to know a mistress of Segovia. The woman taught classical guitar and claimed to drink a pint of bourbon every day. He said Segovia died a few years ago, a man who thought flamenco was awful and wanted to "eradicate it." I didn't know that. There was some speculation about his relations with the dictator Franco.[81]

We were on the verge of leaving when I picked up the guitar for some parting notes. Freddie picked up his and we were off again, this time with variations on a rapid chord progression, a basic A-minor, G, F, E. Earlier he said I was doing something with minor chords which corresponded to a tarantella. He also said the earth is in E-major.

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[81] Andres Segovia was born in Spain in 1893. The guitar was at a low ebb when he was growing up, but he turned it into a concert instrument on the level of the violin and piano. He left Spain during the civil war in the 1930's, but he returned now and then, dictator or no dictator, because "I need to touch the earth of my homeland periodically to receive new energy." (*New York Time*s, June 4, 1987) When he was sixty-eight he married one of his students who was twenty-two.

Incidentally, on a high shelf in this bare and modern place there was a human skull. We wondered where he got it. Someone said, “Ex-girlfriend.”

We walked them to their place down the street, and I carried one of the guitars in a case. It was after midnight and we were feeling no pain. There was an earlier discussion with Freddie on the need for pain and negativity. They provide traction and perspective, and keep you from becoming an airhead. We walked in the middle of the street and I followed the yellow lines. Their apartment was several flights up and surprisingly rundown. It was dark and crowded. She has been there for fifteen years. The hallway has floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, I think from when Hirschman used to live there.

There was a small cramped room which is Freddie’s. A narrow bed and a work table with a sign over it: *FABRICANTE DE GUITARRAS*, from when he used to live in Spain. There were unstrung wooden guitar bodies hanging around. A stack of tapes, most of them flamenco, including one where he played at the Mill Valley festival last year. Pictures and photos on the wall. He asked if I would like a smoke but I declined, saying it would get me wired.

Her workroom was next to his. She had momentarily shut the door, disturbed about the clutter and the mess with her woodcut prints on the walls. Kristen makes a portrait out of a lot of crisscrossing black lines. They seem to be crossing out the person as much as they resemble him or her. B. was showing what she’s made of and took it all in stride. The two women hit it off. B. likes to drink and has a certain respect for high-spirited women who are loud and dramatic. She was impressed with the woodcuts, and aware of some alcoholic friction between the man and woman who live here.

We were walking out of Kristen’s room, about to leave, when I noticed in the mess of books in the hallway the anthology of poems in memory of Bob Kaufman, *Would You Wear My*

Eyes? (1989). I pulled it out and handed it to Kristen, saying I had something in it. As sometimes happens with drunk people, everything has to stop while they say something. In this case she wanted to do justice to the memory and the life of Bob Kaufman. It was mainly for the benefit of B. and the guy who was driving us home because they never heard of him. One of the early Beat poets who wrote *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness* (1965), not to mention the "Abominist Manifesto." A short man, black and Jewish, who in his later years walked around North Beach not saying anything while making motions with his fingers. This was after the shock treatments, which I think were authorized by his wife. Apparently, Kristen had stayed in touch with him. My poem referred to one morning in 1977 when I was staying in a cheap hotel in the neighborhood and ran into Corso. We had gotten acquainted in Paris the year before. He said he would introduce me to Kaufman and I ended up buying them breakfast, which is to say two screwdrivers at the Saloon. Corso was getting off a decade of word-dissolving heroin and drinking a lot. Kaufman was talking more by then, having returned to the realm of the spoken word before he died. People would ask Corso what these two old poets would talk about when they were together. It wasn't much. "Hi Bob, want a drink?"

Anyhow, Kristen was about to deliver a eulogy and went on for a stumbling minute or two. Freddie said goodnight and closed his door, getting a little impatient with her. We floated out the door and down the flights of stairs and walked up the street. I was filling B. in on some of the background of the poets. We found the car in a side street near the top of Telegraph Hill. There were views in every direction, while the apartment we had left was dark and claustrophobic. What does that say about the public and the private?

B.'s friend drove us home, dropping her off first. I later heard he wanted to drop me off first but she declined. He was casual, some kind of a stockbroker in his early forties, wearing a

black sweater and jeans, and very tall. He left me on Geary, two blocks from home (which was my idea), and I walked home. A few minutes later the phone rang. It was B. She wanted to know if I was driven to the door so I wasn't "murdered." More particularly, she wanted to know if he had said anything about her.

"No."
"Nothing?"
"Well, he wanted to know what you look like naked and I told him."
"You didn't."
"No."

Curious how her taste in men runs to the more clunky types. There was some mention of her girlfriend leaving her messages with the usual duplicity and "phony" sentiments.

1:30 a.m. I sat around for a while with some coffee.

Monday, Dec. 13, 1993

Not enough sleep, maybe five hours. I was a wreck for a while. Slow going in the morning, being a bit hung over. I looked out the window and watched a waterfall of wet cement disappearing into the ground. There were two cement trucks, one with a Christmas wreath on the front. Eventually I had something going on the typewriter. It felt like I was operating in an altered state.

I went to work in the afternoon. Being semi-brain dead with fewer defenses I was more at home with the others. Sometimes that's what it takes to be more present. I was less preoccupied since my mind wasn't functioning like it usually does.

I walked home after work, and sometime after ten I pulled the phone out and gave up the ghost.

Tuesday, Dec. 14, 1993

I was dreaming about a pile of skulls when I woke up. Almost too much sleep. No coffee, alcohol, or typing last night. Big fluffy clouds floated above the bump and grind of a construction site.

I went out for some apple juice. When I returned the manager, a kind woman in her sixties, was in the lobby and the Christmas tree was gone. Someone stole it from the lobby last night. She followed a trail of broken ornaments and pine needles out the door, up the sidewalk, and into another building. She called the police, but they were busy.

There is something rude and crude about theft, and it hasn't happened to me very often. A Christmas tree is not a matter of life or death, but it used to be when property that someone depended on was stolen, like a horse, the perpetrators would be hung without a second thought. It was not just a transgression of private property, but a betrayal of the community. It demonstrated a low-down character and other people felt the repercussions. They lived in a community where character was necessary, and someone with the integrity of a weasel or a cockroach was too disturbing to live.

Typing for an hour or two.

I went to work around noon, wearing the dark suit jacket and brown slacks. I met V. and we walked somewhere for lunch. She was angry at Maria, who is giving female vanity a bad name. I often hear women being dismissed by other women. The older one in the office is eccentric and outspoken and some of the younger women don't like her. They operate with a narrow behavioral guidance system and anyone who deviates is not their friend. Maybe it is magnified if they are in the office all day. Slight behavioral aberrations are blown out of proportion. That is disconcerting when you consider what I talk about or how I look. A middle-

of-the-road conformity is enforced by narrow-minded women. Often their ideal of men is not very deep.[82]

Meanwhile, V. was being her usual refreshing self, and we talked about hysterectomies and menopause. She said they interrupt a woman's hormonal process, making her "dry." I wasn't sure how to respond to that. We both agreed that she is still young and doesn't have to worry about it.

We walked back to the office, and it was a long slow afternoon with the Attorney not functioning very well. He keeps losing files, which is not hard to do in his office. He is two weeks late with my paycheck, but doesn't let it bother him. Someone showed me an issue of *California Lawyer* and I turned to the back section where the Attorney was mentioned. He was on a list of those who have been disbarred or put on probation.

I had a cigarette on the balcony of the 14th floor. The high clouds from a storm were floating by and breaking up. Rays of sunlight hit a freighter in the bay. A wide prismatic effect in the atmosphere was curving down to the horizon. It looked like the end of the rainbow is in Vallejo.

The receptionist is beautiful and anchored to the status quo. If I was getting close to women like her it would be like putting my head in a plastic bag. At the same time, I barely register in their frame of reference. I'm an unknown quantity who works part-time and needs a haircut. I'm also forty-one, as in forget it.

It occurred to me during the recent party in North Beach that I'm spending too much time with people I have little in common with. Maybe it's expanding my horizons. It could also be

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[82] I called my sister that night, the businesswoman, and said I bought a suit. During the conversation she said, "It's sad but true, with a lot of women it's a waste of time improving your mind. If you just get a haircut and a suit, you're halfway there with them."

diluting my connections while contracting my horizons. When you have a foot in one world and a foot in another, you end up with a half-life where the people are not all there.

It reminds me of my history professor. Years ago he said if you're not adhering to an archetypal role you'll be torn apart. That's one reason so many call themselves "Musician" or "Poet" before they have done much in either medium. They're assuming the desired attributes will home in on them if they wear their identification on their sleeve. And when you have an occupation there's an automatic self-definition. "I'm a Lawyer." "I'm a Teacher." "I'm a Hit Man for the Mob." I tend to resist that sort of thing. It's often to my own detriment, but it makes me claustrophobic. It's like you're being typecast, or put into a sociological straitjacket. If character is fate it's not surprising if mine is ambiguous, anonymous, and mental.

5 p.m. I left with V. who was gratified that it was raining - "See, I told you" - and shared her umbrella. It was a passing cloud and stopped in a few minutes.

I walked home on California Street, going over Nob Hill. It's like a built-in exercise machine. There were white Christmas lights appearing at that higher elevation like ice forming. I went into the Fairmont Hotel to see who was in the New Orleans Room, and it made for a curious moment. The room was nearly empty, but there was a television with the news on. Men were manning the barricades and throwing things at the police. Who's in the New Orleans Room? Angry French farmers. They riot when they know they're getting screwed, and more of us should learn to speak their language.

I went out, walking under some small trees strewn with lights. My immediate impression: it's a wonder no one steals them. In a multicultural society, things tend to disappear if they're not nailed down (the statistics for robbery and theft in this country are unbelievable). I walked into a

a gothic structure with high ceilings. It was empty except for a well-dressed black man kneeling at the railing in front and praying.

The phone was ringing when I got home. Ming said she had an appointment tomorrow to check her hormones, or something to that effect. It will take two hours. There was the connotation that she takes longer, or they will find her hormones so unusual that they'll invite some specialists to have a look. She said she will drop by afterward.

I told her about the party. She said she is moving out of the sound-room flat and staying with the ex-boyfriend who is becoming less ex-rated. I said one of her old roommates is still carrying a torch. He called me this morning and sounded depressed about her leaving. She is at the end of her rope as far as negotiating with him. The presence of the Phantom in her life is more difficult than it's worth.

I called Jon in St. Helena, who was back from New Orleans. He mentioned how historical the buildings were, especially in the French Quarter, and referred to the War of 1812. It culminated in the Battle of New Orleans when a British invasion was repulsed.[83] We talked about the first submarine in the Civil War. It was known for drowning its own crews. Trial and error and a few more bodies bit the dust – or water in this case.

He said the video we made was holding up, and he made a few edits. Two minutes were accidentally taped over by his roommate, Rima. He suspects that she has been spending the night with the Korean woman. His connection with the latter is not something he is putting much effort into. The sexual twists and turns in a laissez-faire society are enough to turn your stomach.

He said he can't wait until Christmas is over.

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[83] The British referred to the Americans as "dirty shirts." You don't have to do the laundry when you have an earthen wall, a lot of men with rifles, and some cannon. The Red Coats turned into the blood coats.

The Actress called (I left a message). After a few minutes she was compelled to comment on my sounding like I was in a good mood. Situational optimism I suppose. It depends on what I'm doing and who I'm talking to. Whether that's a natural buoyancy or evidence of someone in denial I'm not sure.

I said I've been reading the plays of John Guare. It turns out she auditions with a monologue from *Landscape of the Body* (and her daughter said to say hello). She went to a lousy party in Berkeley and said it was a good thing she couldn't get ahold of me, it never got off the ground. She is in rehearsals and wants to do something Thursday night.

11 p.m. Typing for a couple of hours.

1:30 a.m. I can't look for a word in the dictionary (wrote directionary) without setting off a word progression, a stream of consciousness, an arbitrary free association. I was looking for "occluded" and came up with: nightshade… odd… Odyssey... occupational neurosis.

A pedestrian mild psychosis
of the people on the bus.
When you're going by appearance
with a momentary glance

it is a zoo of physiognomy,
you don't know who, the infamy
of it and me included,
like a cult of the occluded.

2 a.m. I went to bed, turning off a string of lights over the window, a couple of amps, the radio, and lay down with my mind relaxing and a few phrases floating up until I was compelled to write them down. Another writer scribbling in the dark. Some phonetic loose associations from a deconstructed word. "Steer vague, my kill."

I went to sleep.

3:30 or 4 a.m. I was woken from a dream by noises on the street. Loud semi-coherent voices. There were shadowy figures drifting across the street, I think they were Latinos. A couple of them were as intense and focused as the others were detached and unconcerned. The former were in the process of berating and beating someone who was pinned against a parked car and getting pounded, not to say insulted. A car drove by, slowing down, and he yelled, "CALL THE POLICE!" A patrol car showed up a minute later. Oddly enough, no one tried to get away. There had been a loud reference to "MONEY!" so maybe the guy had ripped them off, hence their fury and no attempt to hit and run, assuming they were in the right.

Went back to sleep.

Wednesday, Dec. 15, 1993

NOTES

Sublimating rites.

Consider a band called The Crippled Spirits.

There's a woman on the other
side of the wall. I'm in a studio,
it's amputating the
dimension of the radio.

I ran out of milk and typewriter ribbon.

A preoccupation with the written word can eclipse the rest of your life.

Recycled brain-waves.

He took the Fred Astaire way to heaven.

I walked by the Godeau Funeral Home and waited for the light.

She's a pillow of the community.

The prose equivalent of a drift net - talk about fishing for complements.

Dream: I'm in the marble kitchen of an old house with a couple of women from the law office, including the oblivious sex kitten (Maria). At some point she thought she would test the sharpness of a knife by drawing it lightly over the skin on my face. The skin was slightly cut. I yelled and she was taken aback. "You don't have to yell…."

There was a disjointed dream with various episodes in a town. It included a vehicle rigged up with a sail like a wind-surfer. It was unwieldy coming down the street, swerving and running into things.

overtime. original twist.
old truck. other thumb.
ominous timing. opera town.
odd throb. optional topspin.
orange torque. ontological torment.
orbit of the thrown. obtuse twosome.
ornithological theology. Ophelia in a trance.
osmosis talk. ode to thought.

At the party in North Beach with the flamenco guitarist and his girlfriend. She said they were both Geminis. I said that rather than the two becoming one, there were four of them (and four heads nodded in agreement). There was some mention of exchanging their male and female sides, although she said she sometimes threw away the male parts. I said, "That sounds like Lorena Bobbitt."

Talking with Ming about her trip to Hong Kong. She said something about Asian models who are under the influence of a European look, even though there is no love lost on white people over there. Often as not there is a condescending attitude. Her point is that the ordinary Asian look is not often used by models. I said, "The ordinary white look isn't either." "Oh right."

The President had a comment about Haiti and why it's necessary for the U.S. to do something about the abysmal situation there because it is "in our backyard." There must be other reasons which are more valid. If the U.S. wants to maintain the sovereignty of its borders with respect to incoming immigrants it should also respect those borders when it comes to its outgoing inclinations. In other words, intensify its attentions within those borders and lighten up outside of them. The backyard of the U.S. is Nevada, not some country in the Caribbean. Reagan had a similar excuse for interfering with Nicaragua. "Backyard" implies it is your property.

8 a.m. I woke up to the sounds of hammering and the drone of heavy equipment. Come to in the engine room of life, and ingenuity follows with a hard edge. You are cutting or disturbing to the extent that you have been disturbed by machines. There was coffee with the radio on (KUSF), some edifying noise. Ice-T was mouthing off about "a trigger nigga", and 7 Year Bitch was doing "Dead Men Don't Rape." It was not exactly "Moonlight in Vermont."

Typing, with a few phone calls coming in. The woman I talked to at the church called, talking about violas and arbitration. Lunch tomorrow.

B. called, asking if I want to ride a 10-speed bicycle built for one. It made me wonder if my life has ten speeds (and good brakes).

11:30 a.m. Ming and the ex-boyfriend dropped by, fresh from her examination at the Family Planning Center. She said something about being under a heat lamp with a cold speculum inside her. We hung out for a while, then went out for breakfast at a cheap place in the neighborhood (the Lafayette Café) with hard booths and a dim light. It's across the street from the FOUR FACE BUDDHIST TEMPLE. It was a nice dynamic with the three of us, but there is a potentially damaging side-effect when her and I are together. We have a good connection with a quick capacity for off-the-wall dialogues. If either one of us has a significant other in the room they might wonder what it's all about, and why they don't have that themselves.

We returned to my place where she gave me a haircut. I sat in a chair with my shirt off, wearing a towel and feeling a bit nervous about her quick gestures with the scissors. The ex-boyfriend read an article about a Korean airliner shot down over Russian territory.

It was a lazy afternoon with a lot of sunlight. The Attorney called and said, "Don't come in." He will be in court and has nothing for me to work on. I was suddenly released for the afternoon. Ming was staring out the window at a small bulldozer. She thought it was cute and

wanted to operate it. A few minutes later she walked into the room with him on her back. She struggled over to the bed and stood next to it. I walked over and gently pushed them, falling backwards on the bed. She said, "Jump on," not realizing that I would. I did a handstand on top of the pile with the ex-boyfriend on the bottom.

The conversation was spontaneous. I was being facetious, saying something about the morphological aberrations of women and she gave me a blank look, having no idea what to do with that. Then we laughed. Sometimes it is telepathic and we touch each other mentally.

"You're touched in the head."
"You are."

The two of them were lounging on the bed like young lovers on their honeymoon. You wouldn't know what he has been through after a year with her and a year without.

We talked about going out to the cliffs. Then someone wanted to hear the Strat so I plugged it in and sat there fooling with the dials and switches. I had a nice sound and was stretching out for a while. She said she liked it and proceeded to fall asleep. The ex-boyfriend was glancing at me with a look of wonder, what with her in a relaxed repose, oblivious to the amplifier. The moment hit a deeper chord inside her, being in the company of her two favorite men (currently) – one of them beside her, and the other playing an erratic serenade with some distortion.

4:30 p.m. We finally left, took a bus to 25th Avenue, and walked towards the cliffs. It was getting dark, so we headed for Vista Point near the Legion of Honor, walking through the neighborhood of Seacliff. There was a trail and then a bench with a view of the ocean far below with eroded coves and a high voltage bridge in the distance. It was growing darker by the minute and we opened a bottle of wine.

A lot of constellations and a few freighters were coming out. The UFO's were coming in, approaching from over the headlands to the north, the high beam of their lights reflected on the water. The cove at China Beach was illuminated by a police searchlight. The conversation bounced around as we made short work of the wine. She mentioned her problems being left-handed in a right-handed world. Clumsy, maladjusted, out of sync. For a while the two men kept referring to left-handed wine bottles, glasses, screwdrivers, urinals.

That reminds me, when we were talking about Hong Kong and China last week, she had a photo of herself squatting discreetly in a short skirt on their version of a toilet. It's like a urinal set sideways into the floor which a man or woman straddles (nothing to sit on). It is not much more evolved than what I encountered in Spain and France, the "Arab toilet," which is more or less a hole in the floor with foot grips on either side. She said some facilities were primitive – three toilets in a row with an open sluice running underneath and carrying the contents from the toilets in the next room. It was not her cup of tea.

We were out there for over an hour, during which time a sliver of a moon descended over the bare branches and the temperature was dropping more than we expected. It was in the low forties and my hands were cold. We returned to the trail and walked to a wooden platform with a view on a dark night. There was a rain puddle on the trail with a planet reflected in it, probably Venus. I turned and stood on the edge of it, producing an "arc of transcendence." The ex-boyfriend walked back to where I was, thinking this was a good idea, and we were in momentary unison. Not to be outdone she wanted to do it too, squatting on the edge of the puddle. She is usually good for a sudden stream but there was nothing. She had some comment about the cold, or maybe it was our presence, so we turned our backs and walked away but it didn't help.

A long walk to a Mexican place but it was closed. More walking, then we caught a cab for a couple of miles to another Mexican place, also closed. We gave up and walked all the way to the Haight, picking up a few things, and ended up at his place having swordfish tacos and more wine.

It took a while. It's a small place which he shares with a fellow in his twenties. The roommate is half-black and a musician with a lot of recording equipment. He was lounging in his room with a young black woman, his girlfriend, watching television. We hardly spoke with them during the evening, it's like they were hypnotized by the TV.

His room is small but with some atmosphere. High ceilings with old beams, a Chinese rice paper lamp, and a couple of rough-hewn woven fabrics from a reservation in New Mexico (reddish with white parallel lines). He said they were over a hundred years old and worth a couple of thousand. There was a string of orange lights in the form of chili peppers, three surfboards, a wetsuit, and bunch of CD's. He put in Ministry, the one I like with "Jesus Built My Hotrod".

His twin sister came over. She is not very shy and talked about some fellow she's been seeing, a jazz drummer. "I'm sorry, but I'm going to break his balls if…."

I sat in the kitchen, a little bored, and picked up *Another Country* which the ex-boyfriend was reading. I read it a long time ago. I found more Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, and got absorbed in his encounter with Elijah Muhammad. He gave the Black Muslim leader more respect than he deserved, and quoted some of his lines with little or no comment, much less criticism. The white man is the devil and the black man used to be perfect. Might be some credibility issues here. Baldwin had no intention of joining the Black Muslims and he questioned some of their methods. I think the white devil routine makes the white man look omnipotent, and

it provides an excuse, as in "The devil made me do it," or "The devil invented liquor and drugs." I have to remember it was 1962, but it sounds like the stereotype of a wide-eyed black man getting spooked by a ghost.[84]

I went outside with Ming for a cigarette. We had a long talk with her acknowledging that she is unclear on the concept of having a boyfriend and doesn't know how to do it. She knows how men can be useful and what they're good for, including sex, but as far as focusing on one man, even one who has been laying out his life for her like a red carpet, she still doesn't get it. Earlier she was on the phone with the Phantom and said, "Sure let's hang out tomorrow afternoon." I could feel the mood shift in the ex-boyfriend who was standing there and cooking, having taken the week off from work so they could spend time together, including going out of town and camping for a couple of days. I told her it didn't set very well with him, which she realized too late. She is treating him like one of the guys, while availing herself of everything he has to offer as a boyfriend.

She related an experience she had on her flight to Korea. She met a Korean woman on the plane and over the course of seven hours they unburdened their souls. The woman was about thirty-seven, married with two kids, and depressed almost to the point of suicide. Her husband is everything that Ming wants to avoid: a patriarchal Asian man who is practical and doesn't talk much. He is dull to the point of not sleeping or having sex with his wife, or not very often. Divorce is not common in Korea. She said in terms of relations between men and women it is ten or twenty years behind Japan.

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[84] I have enormous respect for Malcolm X, who parted ways with Black Muslims when he realized that Islam is not about race (or science fiction for that matter). They believe that white people were created by a mad black scientist 6,600 years ago. When some of them tried to rejoin the black race they turned into monkeys. Malcolm X (who was one-fourth white) criticized Elijah Muhammad for "religious fakery" and fathering illegitimate children. He was shot to death by several Black Muslims at a rally for the Organization of Afro-American Unity.

I said the situation involves people of color so she can't criticize or find fault, especially when they know everything there is to know about life so lesser mortals like us (or me at any rate, who as a white ghost is a pale excuse for a human being and not much compared to the original race from the equator of perfection) can only fall back in awe and respect for these foreign customs, and if they manifest themselves in real life situations of the most cruel and stupid sort it is only one's perceptual limitations speaking as derived from the inherent bias of an historically determined social construct.[85]

She said "I'm a person of color," and I said I wasn't being entirely serious. She went on to say the woman offered her a job teaching English. The pay was so-so and required a one-year commitment to live in Seoul so she wasn't sure if it was worth it.

Her main concern is finding some focus in her life that will keep her on a steady track, especially in regards to the ex-boyfriend. I said some women have nothing better to do in life than have affairs with men. It's their medium of expression. Each affair is like a movie or a play (and that's what is meant when a man says, "I'll make a play for her."). It has a dramatic arc with an introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. The women get tired or bored and move on to someone else, having not much in the way of talent or intelligence to occupy their minds or provide a new horizon. It comes in the form of the next man.

That is something she has a horror of, knowing her proclivity for being bored and restless with a short attention span, and with no particular discipline or academic course of study at the moment. Even worse is when she burdens her relations with a man with serious expectations. It can run an affair into the ground. If you're absorbed by your career, the presence of another person is the icing on the cake.

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[85] Or words to that effect.

It was after eleven when I finally left. The two of them walked me to the streetcar they refer to as the N-Buddha.[86] I rode to the Civic Center and got out around midnight, walking past a shallow fountain in front of City Hall. There were aimless men milling about.

Thursday, Dec. 16, 1993

11 a.m. Phone call from the Professor in Los Angeles. It went on for an hour and covered a lot of ground. He was dwelling on his usual depressing themes – students without a mind, a wife with no character, and he's getting older. If I divert him to a topic of historical interest his mood improves, so I mentioned Chet Helms and the question of archiving material from the 1960's in this town. As an historian he knew what was involved.

His students fill him with despair. It's like they don't know what he is there for. Some won't ask questions if they don't know something, like the meaning of a word, because they don't want to appear ignorant (appearances are everything). Having a know-it-all façade is the wrong approach if you're going to learn anything. There is rhetoric about increasing the self-esteem of students so they will be more disposed to learn, but it often has the opposite effect. Students who have so much self-esteem they think they know enough already or can't stand anyone telling them what's what and don't want to waste their precious time on homework. Those who went through the rigors of a fine education like he did know they weren't the equals of the professors. Anyone learning a discipline – musician, writer, construction worker – starts with the assumption that they don't know much. If they're not aware of that there will be someone who is older and more adept who will inform them of this fact and relieve them of the conceit of thinking otherwise.

[86] It's the N-Judah.

He mentioned a few words that his students hadn't known, like "monolithic" and "belligerent" (some of them were belligerent) and "except." They were unclear on the concept of multiple choice and choosing whatever they wanted, "except" for the ones he underlined.

He couldn't believe it. We knocked it around, wondering if television and movies have something to do with it. The worst thing about TV is what it does to your time, the things you're not doing while caught in that hypnotic beam for hours. You're not reading or using your mind and it becomes a habit. The lack of intellectual curiosity is astounding to him, like the students are pompous and passive at the same time. He noted one exception where Spanish-speaking students from countries other than Mexico (Cuba, South America, etc.) had more interest or willingness to learn and would ask questions – primarily he thought because they were here to stay. He wasn't sure about the students from Mexico.

Meanwhile, he is trying to figure out some way to come up here (the historical convention was moved to January). One of his daughters is flying in from London (the ex-model). He hasn't seen her in six years. He could do it but will have to pay the price. His wife will make his life miserable. She goes berserk if he has anything to do with old friends or his daughters, anyone from a period in his life before he met her (about ten years ago). She is twenty years younger, in her late thirties, and never made much of her life, being a neurotic insulated bitch from Manhattan Beach (according to him). She holds it against him (by some logic he can't fathom) that he made something of his life. This is a woman who is not exactly without means, getting $1500 a month from renting out a beach house she inherited (her grandmother was a silent movie actress).

He mentioned the aging process and said he looks older. I said there was a rumor flying around that we're mortal. It is disconcerting or depressing at times, but it relieves you of the

burden of having to argue with it. You can't. A man may not go gentle into that good void, but acknowledging the facts of life has a calming effect.

1 p.m. I showed up downtown and was sitting at a black iron table reading the paper and waiting for my friend who likes pajamas. When she was ten minutes late I wondered if I was in the right place. I looked up the street and saw a sign where she had said to meet. I had described this place, but she was going by the sign.

I walked to the next block and there she was in a friendly mood. The café was in a glass and metal arcade. I had a Mexican dish. The conversation was an informative breeze and I wondered why I hadn't spoken with her more often when she lived across the hall from me. She is independent, has a PhD, and shares a large flat with a male roommate in a building with three floors. Turns out she owns it, and plays the viola. She likes Foure from the turn of the century (a French Romantic composer) and a few others I don't remember. I said, "Vivaldi?" "Yes… and Ravel," except for "Bolero."

The conversation was never lagging. At two we walked a few blocks and parted ways with her asking for my work number. I went to work on a cold and dreary afternoon. There was not much going on.[87] The office was subdued, especially with V. not there, having gone home early.

5 p.m. I walked to a travel agency in a building I used to work in years ago (part-time), having to get a plane ticket. I used to know a woman who worked there. Someone said she was back in school and working as a waitress. We had some potential but I was sidetracked with someone else (the ex). She had cultivated a look which I guessed in a minute and she seemed

[87] Phone call from the Actress with a lawyer joke: "What do lawyers and sperms have in common? You have to go through thousands to get a human."

surprised and gratified when I said, "Louise Brooks?"[88] It was like guessing an intimate secret or an alter-ego.

I walked home with a plane ticket for San Diego.

I straightened up the place, wrapped a couple of presents, and was on a wooden instrument for an hour. The Actress was late. She showed up around nine, apologizing and looking nice. She handed me a present and said I should open it. Watercolor paints and heavy paper. She hung some mistletoe which led to another kiss. My presents for her and her daughter: a necklace of polished stones, and the light-sensitive paper for making silhouettes from the sunlight.

I showed her a special effect I threw together. It involved a floor-standing candelabra made of iron which is nearly three feet tall. It was hung with tinsel and standing next to an open window. I lit two candles along with one in a bottle in front of the tinsel which reflected the flames. I turned the lights off and there was a glittering spectacle with the flames being blown around by the air coming in.

Years ago I had a studio in an old converted factory with twenty-foot ceilings (Project Artaud in 1974). One entire wall was windows with a southern exposure. I was living with my girlfriend from Colorado and we had hardly any funds for Christmas. We managed to get a small tree (about two-feet high), a lot of tinsel, and some candles. I put the tree by an open window, covered it with tinsel, and surrounded it with burning candles. I turned off the lights. The wind

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[88] An uninhibited flapper with a bobbed haircut who was in silent films, including *Pandora's Box* (1929). "When I am dead, I believe that film writers will fasten on the story that I am a lesbian... I have done lots to make it believable [...] All my women friends have been lesbians. But that is one point upon which I agree positively with [Christopher] Isherwood: There is no such thing as bisexuality. Ordinary people, although they may accommodate themselves, for reasons of whoring or marriage, are one-sexed. Out of curiosity, I had two affairs with girls – they did nothing for me." Barry Paris, *Louise Brooks* (1989)

coming through the window put it into motion with the tinsel exploding into silver-shredded light and sparks.

We split a beer and talked for a while with her in a good mood – quick, sardonic, and engaging. She said her latest role is a no-nonsense nurse, very disciplinary. She will use some of her experience as a mother. Then she was flipping through *Bosoms and Neglect*[89] and found a monologue for a friend to use for an audition. The Actress said her daughter Maya knows the personalized license plate she wants when she is old enough to have a car: BADGIRL or CRYBABY. (Some women live in a present which they planned for in advance.) Her mother wonders how she will turn out.

We drove in her car to Max's Opera Café and sat at a dark granite bar with red neon overhead. It was a noisy atmosphere and she was distracted, watching people who she doesn't see very often – a level of intensity or eccentricity which is hard to come by in the bedroom community where she lives. I was a little tense earlier (which she noted), but was starting to relax.

She drove me home around 12:30 a.m.

Friday, Dec. 17, 1993

I don't report it every time I see a whore at night, or have a hard-on in the morning.

Typing for a few hours.

2 p.m. I walked to the library on a cold afternoon and picked up a couple of books on reserve: *Picasso & Dora* by James Lord, and *Elvis* by Albert Goldman (my choices were limited by what's available).

[89] John Guare (1979)

I caught a bus on the way downtown, and was getting on when some minor friction broke out. A black woman with two young kids had gotten on the bus before me. If I had any doubts about her being crude and egotistical they were dispelled when she made some imperious comments to an elderly white woman sitting in the section for the old and handicapped. Apparently one of the kids had jumped into one of those seats and stomped on her foot in the process. Whatever response the old woman had it couldn't have been much since I was standing a few feet away and didn't hear anything. However, I heard the black woman. Her loud remarks were not directed to her kid of course, who could do no wrong, but at the old woman for having the temerity to say anything at all. "DON'T YOU TALK TO MY KID LIKE THAT, HE'S JUST A CHILD!" The poor woman looked browbeaten and confused, as if over the years someone changed the code of manners and behavior or threw it out the window, and she didn't know where she stood or sat. Most mothers would not yell in the face of a soft-spoken old woman, and might even apologize for their kid if he steps on someone's foot. Not that they were bad kids, but what will happen ten or fifteen years from now, having a mother who lets them run wild and they are glowing with confidence and maybe some jail time which is not their fault, just blame it on the system.

I read the paper. Police in Oakland went to a man's house. There were complaints about his pit bull which had bit someone. The guy refused to cooperate. A struggle ensued and he ran into the house pursued by a policeman (who was on the verge of retirement). The policeman was blown away by the guy holding a shotgun which he kept inside the door. One way to get the police to pull their guns and start shooting in your direction is to appear with a shotgun and kill one of them. So they did and the suspect died, along with his father who was in a wheelchair behind the door.

How is this the fault of the police, except for letting the suspect break loose and run into the house for his gun? Which is to say, they weren't heavy-handed enough to begin with. The mother of the suspect is white and his girlfriend is black. They blame the cops like it wouldn't have happened if the police had not shown up. That's interesting in light of accusations that the police do not respond enough to crimes in the black community. There is no finding fault with the son (he was twenty-one) whose bright idea it was to open fire on the police – and kill one – over a dog. He's not accountable for his actions in a no-fault value-free society. If he's not responsible for what he does that puts him on the level of children and the insane.

In the office the attorney was in the conference room with some young Latino delinquents. I put the file together, looking at the Marin County Task Force PROPERTY RECORD ("seized by search warrant, Dec. 15"). It listed the items and where they were found (inside the safe, next to the bed, etc.).

a scale
plastic bag containing small amount of marijuana
Uzi pistol .9mm
12-gauge shotgun w/5 rounds
stash can
black leather bag containing misc. ammunition
duffel bag containing ski masks/rope/tape
side handle baton (next to bed)
wood billy club
.380 cal. pistol
cannabis found in paper bag
marijuana from heater closet
'bong' cannabis smoking paraphernalia (kitchen)
"blunt" logo baseball hat

Also a wallet with indicia and ID which implicated our clients.

It looks a little incriminating, although it could be argued that guns and marijuana are the American way, and so is wearing a mask. If police had raided the sound-room flat near the Haight last year they would have come up with a similar list. One of the roommates (Jon in St.

Helena) had a hunting rifle on the wall and a pistol in his safe. They were growing marijuana in a dark closet with special lighting. It is common to find a "bag containing a small amount of marijuana" around the house, not to mention a bong in the kitchen. The police might have found rope or tape, but no ski masks (I have ski goggles, but I don't live there). Not sure what they would think of the skulls.

I worked for a couple of hours, then had a meeting with the Attorney in his office. He is listed in the *California Lawyer* magazine under State Bar Releases Reports of Attorney Discipline Cases. A few were disbarred, and more were given suspension/probation. His age is mentioned (sixty-five). "Two years' suspension, stayed; four years' probation concurrent to probation imposed in a prior disciplinary matter." He thought he was above the law (maybe like a butcher thinks he is above meat). The presumption is hard to avoid when the pomposity and hot-air levels have a helium-like effect. He is not the oldest attorney in trouble (the youngest was disbarred at thirty-eight). There was a seventy-three-year-old woman who had her probation revoked and "3 years actual suspension… until, at hearing pursuant to standard 1.4(c)(ii), she proves her rehabilitation, fitness to practice, and learning and ability in general law." A man of sixty-eight was also mentioned.

The Attorney was talking to me about some more illegal actions on his part. I am supposed to be paid every two weeks and he has missed the last two payments. I haven't been paid in over a month. He was apologetic, but that's just how it is. Clients haven't been coming through with their payments. I'm fairly sure he has taken care of some of his own bills (house payment, the interest payment on a loan) which is illegal if you haven't paid your employee(s),

and there was some mention of the cost of his son's wedding this weekend.[90] Of course it's Christmas and he will enjoy himself. For all he knows I could be on the verge of being evicted for failure to pay rent.[91]

I took it in stride with little or no reaction, mainly in having some funds to fall back on. I had him sign an IOU which said in the unfortunate event of his being hit by a truck in the next few days….

5 p.m. I went out with V. and waited for her ride for nearly half an hour, her being an antidote to the Attorney. She was in one of her carefree conversational moods and chattering away. It may have been the haircut. I was more in alignment with what she looks for in a man, whose character profile would include his hair as much as anything else. She said the latest offer from her attorney to keep her here was a good raise and a month off (otherwise she will go back to school). She hasn't told anyone else. "For sure they would be jealous."

I went back upstairs, levitating in an elevator to the leveling process of a lot of loveless litigation.

6:30 p.m. Walked to the pool, where I ended up swimming alone. One mile. Two lengths underwater (almost). Full speed on top of the water for two lengths. One length underwater without using my feet. I got out using my feet, and had a hot shower.

On the way home I came across a collision. A small crowd stood around a beat-up dented van which was being hauled away on the back of a trailer truck. There was a small sedan with the side crumpled. The liquor store on the corner was missing an entire wall of glass. One of the vehicles had been making a turn and was sideswiped - there were skid-marks on the sidewall –

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[90] The Attorney's son was in a bar a while back and got into an argument with a woman. He slugged her and knocked her off the bar stool and was arrested. When I saw the police report I asked the Attorney about it. He shrugged and said, "He has a good right hook."

[91] A lawyer joke: What do you have when you have ten lawyers up to their necks in cement? Not enough cement.

and it smashed into the liquor store. There was broken glass everywhere and cans of vodka/martini mix on the sidewalk. A stand containing products was overturned and it was a mess inside. Fortunately, the checkout counter was against the other wall. A young Asian guy worked there and he looked shaken or in a state of wonder. How often does a vehicle come crashing through the window of his store? I stood there for a few minutes and noticed a string of Christmas lights in the rubble. They were blinking, but only the green ones still worked.

I walked to the black tile joint for something to eat. When I left I heard sirens. There was someone in a shaky state being escorted out of a club and into an ambulance. An overdose, or maybe the drinks were too strong.

10 p.m. I read the ELVIS book for a couple of hours. I have a grudging respect for Albert Goldman, a professor of English and Comparative Lit at Columbia College. He's a music critic, and is known for his "cultural journalism." He's not chopped liver in other words, and brought an exhaustive method to his book. Three years of research, 600 interviews. The text is dense, informative, and detailed. He is something of a cultural iconoclast, a muckraker with a range that stretches from the Hebraic to the gutter. There are times he shows his hand, or his intellectual slip is showing, as a professor with a bookish life who is recoiling from the not-so-cultured. I think he finds the girls who lurk in the shadows and the shallows of rock and roll to be mouth-watering, and it shows in his overheated prose.

It is a sad and sickening account, and as much about the context Elvis operated in as it is about him. That makes the book more interesting as a cultural history, but the author is still a Jewish nonbeliever who is deconstructing an idol of the goyim. I couldn't put it down.

I was on the typewriter for a few hours, then lay on the bed, reading the book again. He says this country is preoccupied with its own inflated royalty.

Saturday, Dec. 18, 1993

11:30 a.m. I woke up, plugged the phone in, and was typing for a couple of hours. There was a phone call from Ming – she wants to go to Chinatown. I had a few presents to get so I said I would.

3 p.m. I walked to Union Square, which took about ten minutes. There was a crowded Christmas madness in effect. I waited on the corner with a Peruvian combo across the street. I stood there for a while and then someone took my arm. It was her, looking like she couldn't believe this was her idea. There were too many people, it was the first day of her period, and she was in her humbug mood. I don't think she likes Christmas.

We walked to Chinatown with her in black jeans, a purple sweatshirt, and clinging to my arm. She was looking for small gifts for her family which she could pretend she brought back from China. We kept running into variations on a theme of tiny Chinese figurines which were copulating or sucking little penises. She wondered about the connotation, like Chinese do it all the time.

I said there was a better place further up Grant Street. We went there and were swallowed up for the next hour. It's a big bazaar on several levels with more authentic objects, including wooden statues from Indonesia. When we finally left – having reached my limit for looking at objects – it was dark out. There was a momentary hesitation, then we headed for a Chinese restaurant.

Sweet and sour rock cod, hot and sour soup, and tea. The conversation wandered all over the place.

7 p.m. We walked towards Union Square with her saying she had to go home. She felt "funky" and wanted a hot shower. Ming was thrown off by the hormonal shift and cramps. I should have asked if she felt more civilized (according to the goddess cult our civilization arose from menstruation). There was a curious sequence, like someone who doesn't have her mind in sync with what she is doing at any given moment. We were close to the underground station on Market and she announced she had to pee. A minute later she wanted a beer. We walked to a place where she could use the facilities.

It was crowded so we went to the Mason Street Wine Bar. We took a seat but it was too early for the jazz band (Lounge Lizard). We decided that a good bottle of wine at my place would be more interesting. We took a crowded bus to my neighborhood and picked up a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon and cigarette papers. She bought some ice cream, tore it open, and we were trading licks as we walked along.

8 p.m. In my place with a string of lights in the window. She flipped through the paper, with idle comments about abysmal current events. There was some discussion on a topic I've been thinking about: the assumption that there is a common denominator of human reason, as if we all have similar circuits and wiring in our brains and nervous systems. I think it is otherwise, but most governments would prefer not to acknowledge that. It is disconcerting to suppose that problems of maladjustment, warped communication, anti-social tendencies, and crime are just as likely to be generated from internal causes as from social causes. There are social corrections but those problems still persist. Human beings are constructed with more variation than meets a Marxist eye. They're capable of anything.[92]

[92] People inhabit levels from the Stone Age to the future though you may not know it. It isn't hard to walk around in normal-looking attire – jeans and a sweatshirt for example (glancing at her) - but with a worldview and metaphysics from another century. The leveling process when you co-exist with people in

There are external manifestations of the warped dimensions in a human being. Just look at where they live, how their rooms are put together, and what sort of psychosis is pretending to be decoration. The question of why can't Johnny read, or why did Johnny shoot himself, or what does Joanie want, is harder to answer when the soul is more significant than social conditions.

We knocked that around with her tending to agree. She is in an odd position, having visited the country of her origin and it left her disillusioned. Her perspective is wider and deeper than it was before. She is not so automatic with the politics of race and gender, and said most women in this country are not as oppressed as women in Asian countries. If women in this country were second-class citizens they would be subject to a different set of laws, not allowed to vote, not allowed in various public places, not allowed to talk back to men or marry who they want, etc.

The claim of oppression undermines itself by loosely defined and opportunistic stances. A group like the L.A. 4 see themselves as political prisoners, as if they were just expressing themselves when beating and robbing people during a riot (in which case, assault = free speech). On the subject of trans-racial adoption, a black group says it is "genocidal" for whites to take care of black kids and adopt them (never mind that the kids were abandoned by their parents). The implication is that the kids are being killed by their white foster parents, which is unlikely. You don't eradicate a race of people by taking care of their kids.

She couldn't believe how warped it is, not only what it's doing to the language but the society we live in. With the language breaking down we decided to paint something. We sat at the round wooden table with the watercolors, coffee, and a bottle of wine. She finds it relaxing and has a certain flair with a brush. There were spontaneous organic forms, like one-celled

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a city, and the belief that everyone is basically alike, "We're all human," blur the evidence of differences which would take your breath away.

organisms in a primordial sea. I may have called her that (a one-celled organism). We took turns with the composition, giving each other the brush off.

There was a phone call from my parents. They went to Puerto Vallarta on a cruise last week, which is pretty unusual. My father is a stoic minister with leftwing tendencies and more likely to be smuggling bread into Mexico. (It's frowned upon by the Mexican government, because that would imply that the authorities don't take care of their own people – which they don't, or there wouldn't be so many heading north.) However, my mother put her foot down, wanting a real vacation, and they were walking on water so to speak.

I was on the guitar for a while, throwing notes into the night.

We took a break and she turned the conversation in a sexual direction with her own undying curiosities. She admits to having a kind of penis envy, assuming it's more convenient than what she has to deal with. There was the implication that she is not so easy to satisfy. She said some women can't assume it will happen when they masturbate, but most men can. Ming likes to speculate about having a cock, and was going on about how it works.

"How big?"
"Eight inches."

She thought that one could build up pressure like a pump with a prolonged masturbation and it would ejaculate further. I said that was wishful thinking. She wondered what would happen if I lay on the bed with my head on the windowsill with an ever-ready hard-on and jacked off. Could I make it shoot over my shoulder and through the window?[93] I said it would more likely end up all over me.

She is aware of how erections vary, having experienced a few, but I'm not sure she realizes the extent of it. From the chemistry I have with a woman to how much pot I smoked that

[93] I wrote "widow," a Freudian slip of some note.

evening there are factors which can underline or undermine a boner. Some women are subject to variables which push their satisfaction out of reach. I thought of a German magazine on the newsstand (*Stern*). On the cover was a sequence of twelve shots of a woman's face looking calm and then with her expression changing as she went through the stages of a climax and back to calm. Inside the magazine was a similar sequence of a man. There was no time notation with the shots and no way of knowing how long it took for those reactions to occur. Ming has alluded to the fact that it takes her a while, and it is not surprising if she is tense and pent-up now and then.

She feels free to ask me about my love life or the last time I had sex. We talked about the extent to which I lead an isolated sublimated existence. She thinks that I am self-sufficient, but appearances can be deceiving. At some point she brought up her concern with being too soft. She stood up and unbuttoned her jeans, pulling them down a bit and lifting up her shirt. She stood sideways, poking her belly out which she thought was too ample. "See?" I'm not sure if that was supposed to be a turn-on or not.

Anyone else might have thought this was leading to something, but I know her too well. It continued with a spark gap of detachment, and a certain sarcasm in the air. It's like one of us jumps on the other and we fall into our childhood.

It was nearly midnight when she remembered she had to leave and went over to the phone and called a cab. She took it into the bathroom with the door open, sitting on the toilet with the phone. A few minutes later I walked her outside. There was a big kiss and she disappeared.

Sunday, Dec. 19, 1993

A typewriter, a wooden instrument, and a long biography.

Phone call from Ming. There was some mention of getting together before I flew to San Diego. She told me when her boyfriend returned from his job at the oyster bar last night he went to sleep. She lay there aching for an argument with her hormones being out of sync. There is a temporary job tomorrow, working for her brother. It's secretarial, but she would rather drive a forklift. We had a typical exchange. I said,

"Your skepticism is biologically determined."
"No it isn't."
"Yes it is."
"I know what you're thinking about - my hostile environment."
"That's right, you refrigerator magnet."
"What!?"

Early evening, I went out for something to eat, walking through the numb lights of Christmas. There was a flier in the neighborhood: 21-DAY OUTPATIENT METHADONE DETOXIFICATION.

At home I read for hours. The biography of Elvis was a little depressing. It seemed to be an anthropological analysis of the time and place that he inhabited. Now and then the writer showed his hand with a condescending attitude.

Monday, Dec. 20, 1993

Typing in the morning.

Went to work in the afternoon, and walked home a few hours later.

8 p.m. B. dropped by for her present (there was a comment about holding onto her purse in this part of town). She opened it – a precious object I put into a small cardboard box with a white bow: a round container of bone and brass. It took her by surprise. There was the forward momentum of things on her mind, with the conversation moving right along, but she kept

coming back to it or glancing at it, with comments on what a nice object it was. I said, “It’s not too feminine?” and she gave me a look.

She has been working temporarily at a perfume counter in Macy’s, and reeked of it when she walked in. Whatever else we might have talked about was side-lined when she went off on a tangent - and she punctuates the drama of her story by grabbing my arm and shaking it while exclaiming, “CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?!” It concerned one of her arch-enemies (who tend to be women) who she had been through an awful lawsuit with. It went on for months, and the woman used to live in her building. There was a wrongful attempted eviction with the woman acting like a manager and trying to evict her, but she wasn’t the manager and just wanted B.’s apartment. Anyhow, B. saw the woman working at another perfume counter and nearly died.

There was also some mention of her friend Laverne, the flat-chested ex-model with an intense emotional life, but I didn’t catch all of it. There was some mention of her being on general assistance and doing heroin while riding in a limo… and she might go live with her mother in Colorado.

An hour or so later she left on her way to her girlfriend’s place, noting I was midway between the two of them. “Ha ha, isn’t that ironic?” I said I would walk her to the main drag and went out, crossing the street and passing one of the corner regulars (a haughty and imposing prostitute) in a low-cut outfit on a cold night. B. shuddered and said, “She must have the self-esteem of an ant.”

I ended up walking her to the condo complex near Max’s. It’s hard to leave a woman when she’s holding onto your arm. B. called from downstairs and got an answering machine. The building was cold and modern as her girlfriend (with sharp angles and pre-recorded answers),

though harder to get into. B. had her own key, hesitated, then said she would go in and said good night. I walked home.

On the typewriter.

Switching books in mid-stream – I'm now with Picasso and Dora. The writing is kind of precious, in the positive and negative connotations of the word, and a breath of fresh air after wallowing in a biographical autopsy of Elvis. He was depicted as being trashy, bloated, and gross. I had a sense of going from the worst of what this country has to offer to the finer minds of Paris. From the crude to the more refined, though the Spaniard could be crude, and the truck driver from Mississippi had a lyrical bent. The dependencies of Elvis and the independence of Picasso, who lived more than twice as long while the other dissolved into a Vegas wet dream.

3 or 4 in the morning, I threw a few things into a travel bag, including the gifts.

Tuesday, Dec. 21, 1993

The sound of heavy equipment in the morning.

Looking out the window at the street: an old man hunched over in a wheelchair, moving it slowly with his feet while crossing the street. A couple of suits with the blueprints for one of the construction sites. The tall and bearded spaced-out derelict, thirty-something, making the rounds. I suppose that is better than standing in the empty lot under my window, staring at the ground.

12:30 p.m. I showed up at the law office with the black leather shoulder bag and a travel bag, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, blue tie, with a recent haircut which got some positive reactions from a few women.

Went to lunch with V., walking to the Hunan place. She looked nicer than usual in a formal black outfit, a loose pantsuit, and asked what I had in the small sack, a present for her? She was delighted, and refused to open it until Christmas. There was some mention of having gotten me a present, and she opened the handmade card ("In Virna Veritas").

Smoked ham and garlic over rice with hot and sour soup. It was an effortless situation, being in her company, although she may leave at the end of December. I wasn't pushing her on this, but wondered why. She wants to take a break and maybe take some classes, thinking she will work for many years and has to consider the carpal tunnel in her thin wrists.

In the office I worked for a couple of hours, and then was killing time with the receptionist.

4:45 p.m. I went out with two bags and waited out front. A few minutes later a blue shuttle van pulled up, and I rode to the airport. As a pedestrian often taking cabs, I was astounded by the traffic backed up for several miles (fortunately it was northbound, bumper to bumper on the way to the Bay Bridge). The airport was not crowded and my luggage was X-rayed. I'm a transparent traveler. Then a long walk to the terminal where there was a delay. A few planes were unable to land, the landing lights having gone out.

I read the paper: "Man slain trying to stop robbery." A shortage of beds for the homeless with winter setting in. The restoration of the Sistine Chapel (built in 1541).I wondered how hard it would be to get 4000 beds – army cots and navy blankets – which the military may have in a warehouse. If it was $50 a cot that would be $200,000. More is spent on the removal of graffiti here. Where to put the beds? A city forced to provide shelter for thousands of people may have to think in terms of tent-cabins or empty barracks.

A few relatives arrived: my two sisters (in their late thirties) - the business woman whose son is five, and the ex-sociology professor with a man she has been with for a few months. He is friendly, works with aeronautic mathematics, and has a belly, a mustache, and a familiarity with my sister which threw me off for a while (most of the trip, actually). A little kid ran into my arms in the terminal. I carried him around, looking for planes (not hard to find in an airport). We had early boarding because of him, with seats in front, facing each other, and took off around 6:45 p.m.

We drifted at 30,000 feet along the coast of California, passing over what looked like colonies in outer space, including the vast electrified plain of greater Los Angeles. It seemed to be made of copper computer circuits spreading to the horizon. The commuters circulated in that complicated terrain.

The plane landed in San Diego.

My father and brother met us, the latter with a beard. He is thirty-one, a physical therapist who is going for his doctorate and not connecting with women at the moment, though he'd like to. We drove out to their home on the edge of the desert hills, a working-class neighborhood in El Cajon.

I went out back and sat at a table near the black-bottom pool. There was a peach tree nearby, its bare branches strewn with tiny lights on a cold night.

I had a fold-up bed in the sunken den which opens to the back, half surrounded with windows. Their living arrangements tend to leave me cold, and when I'm with the family it's like I'm on foreign territory. My mother has a propensity for getting rid of nice old things, as if they are in the way. My parents are not a magnet for objects. They had an old German hi-fi of polished wood which "we weren't using," so it's gone (one of my sisters). They're getting rid of

a “great books” series which was an introduction to some of the heavyweights when I was growing up, from Aristotle to Nietzsche (I rescued a couple – Jonathan Swift and Gibbon). Accumulating a diverting insulation of old books and furniture and rugs is not how they operate.

What they finally hit upon, however, when they moved here twenty years ago, was compensating for an ordinary home with a beautiful landscape. Which is to say I spend a lot of time out back – it was constructed by an eccentric landscaper who lived here before them.

Wednesday, Dec. 22, 1993

My usual routine was put on hold, so I was in a daze. It’s something how it altered with respect to what was hard and easy about my life in San Francisco, compared to what was easy and hard about my being here. I went from one extreme to another, from a cold isolation up north to a crowded house an hour from the Mexican border, where the afternoons are in the 70’s. I was surrounded with people who are not exactly strangers, but can get on my nerves. My mother admitted in a wry moment that she had some affinity for the desert, and there was my sister’s comment that perhaps I belonged there since it is uninhabited. I had been a little edgy, especially in the morning, walking into a kitchen full of people, including a relentless five-year-old. He was a live-wire of a kid, not unintelligent, but with the assumption that no conversation should go on unless he was involved.

My patience was wearing thin after a few days of that, and I wondered at what point do you stop making excuses that’s he’s just a kid and put your foot down. His mother did, in fact, and I tend to be impressed with how she handles him. She is divorced from an attorney, as is my other sister (the law works in mysterious ways). There is the mind-numbing effort of daily lectures or negotiations – not to say unending supervision, along with his mood swings. They can

go from a state of carefree amusement, like he's aware of how absurd and easy life can be (in his case), but a minute later his mood is on thin ice and he is grumpy and petulant.

The house was like a stage where people came and went or sat around having conversations in a relaxed mode. All these characters were cut off from their normal lives while floating in an atmosphere of my parents' home (who're sixty-five). It's like I landed in another country with less gravity than I'm used to. The gravity of my parents can be subtle, being grandparents who have been together over forty years. Some people in their sixties and beyond may feel enlightened, having an increased awareness of mortality and what is secondary about material possessions.

I whiled away the afternoon and evening, falling back on a book I brought. It was a good diversion, but there was a negative side-effect. When you're absorbed in the living arrangements of Picasso in Paris or the south of France and look around, it's not a good comparison.

Later that night I went out back with coffee, cigarette, and a Guinness. I walked to the other side of the pool near the deep end and looked towards the shallow end, beyond which there was a stretch of cemented patio, a retaining wall, a few fruit trees on top, the hill rising from there, an electric white star on top of the hill, and the constellations out in force in a black void. There was an outdoor light on the edge of the roof behind me and it threw my shadow like a specter of my magnified presence, stretching for forty or fifty feet to the retaining wall with the shadow of my head in the bare branches of a tree. The light reflected off the pool, which caused some wavering parallels on the retaining wall and pine trees above it. It was a ghostly force field emanating from my head, its mythical projection in a private domain.

More particularly, the long shadow was projected by a light which hung over my parents' bedroom where they lay asleep, as if they were dreaming up their offspring, magnifying his

importance, or the offspring was a product of their combined subconscious (for better or worse). The closer to the source of the light, the larger the shadow. I stood there for a while. Everywhere I looked was scintillating and absorbing. There was a three-quarter moon low in the sky, with Orion floating over a black-bottom pool, and the lights of the town in the distance at a lower elevation.

I walked to the edge of the pool, knelt down, and passed one hand through the water. White parallels of light moved along the bottom in a mercurial succession, changing shape by the second while wavelengths reverberated off the side and overlapped themselves. The wavy parallels were echoed in the trees on the hill. There are subtleties in the country which can be so gentle that some people respond with chainsaws and pickup trucks.

Thursday, Dec. 23, 1993

In the afternoon there was a long workout on a tennis court with my brother at a high school a mile or two away. It was windy, but we went on until both of us were worn out. It's been a while. Afterwards he insisted on dropping by a complex which had everything from video games to go-carts. I would have preferred rock climbing in the desert, but he thought I needed some fun in my life.

Or more of the absurd, that being how I felt when getting into one of those motorized vehicles with bumpers. Two pedals for gas and brakes. You drive around a winding track with eight or ten others and it's hard to pass the other drivers, though someone kept bumping me from behind on the curves – nearly sliding sideways at one point, but he didn't get around me. I thought it was my brother, but found out otherwise when the yellow caution light turned to red and the go-carts were directed to the side, coming to a stop in two rows, single file. I pulled up

behind one and stopped and a second later was hit hard from behind and it hurt. It gashed my shinbones from the impact. I was not in the mood for this. It was stupid, not to say intentional. I got out of the low-down seat, took a couple of steps, and had a few words with the unapologetic twenty-year-old jerk sitting in his go-cart. I suggested the attendant (who had walked up) show him how to drive. The young guy looked like he was ready to fight, being unclear on the concept of being imperfect or responsible for his actions.

I moved to the side and my brother walked up, saying his vehicle had been slow and several guys had been on my tail around the track. I sat there with each leg bruised and bleeding, while the female attendant was not much help or showing any concern. Limping a little I followed him to a video game (computerized road race). It reminded me of how I don't have much to do with games, and how I tend to get beat up when I come down here (I had a broken blister on my hand from tennis).

When the sun went down the wind picked up. The Santa Ana winds came off the desert to the east with furious gusts that are a wonder to behold. I stood in the midst of them and felt the forces. An enormous pepper tree was shaken to the roots, and the leaves were streaming off a Chinese elm. Two little birds held on for dear life to an upper branch. The wind blew over several chairs in back, and another big pepper tree was creaking to the point of something breaking. A Christmas tree they planted a couple of years ago, now about six feet high, had blown over so we pounded an iron rod beside it, tied a rope to hold it up, and it survived.

Later that night I was back outside while the others sat around the dinner table. I had walked in and walked out - the situation hit me from the wrong angle. Noisy, crowded, and it wasn't like they put a lot of effort into the meal, which was nothing to write home about. My parents function on a different plane (and the siblings also to some extent), being easy-going and

politically correct. They give presents to their offspring in the form of donations to a poor village in Africa.

Their financial situation, aided by a recent inheritance and their policy of less is more, has arrived at a point where there are extra funds. There was some mention of a cruise to Puerto Vallarta and other ports a couple of weeks ago. It was 80 degrees, and was my mother's idea.

They showed me a photo of some people they shared a table with on the cruise – a couple in their fifties with their grown daughter. She had dark hair and was a little butch - her girlfriend had an airy-feminine look. The mother seemed like a friendly bulldozer, and the father had a look of weakened compromise. There were some comments with my father who is conscious of being politically correct most of the time, but he said, "How often do I have breakfast with lesbians?" My mother jumped all over that remark, like it was discriminating or insulting. I asked her where in that line was something awful being said? What if you reverse it, with a lesbian saying, "How often do I have breakfast with straight men?" If that's the worst she had to say about men, it would be a blessing.[94]

During a discussion out back with my parents and my sister there was some mention of my ex-girlfriend. My sister suggested that my not-so-positive comments were subjective. I said there were objective facts which didn't put her in a good light, regardless of my own opinion (and the perceptual limitations of my gender).

At some point we were talking about an old guideline for women: it's as easy to marry a rich man as a poor one. My father thought that was not far removed from a form of prostitution. My mother took issue with that, and may have thought we called my ex a prostitute, which we didn't. There is something revealing about that line when women don't see anything wrong with

[94] I was brought up with the understanding that everyone has a soul. However, there are those who think if you're a straight white male it's three strikes and you're out. That leaves me subject to a two-bit condescension.

it. It would be "just as easy" if they assume that men are more or less alike. If men are seen as blurred generalities, without much in the way of feelings or identity, then how to distinguish them except by an objectifying means of their possessions and position in the world – the hard-edged glitter which would constitute a missing chord for women who assume they're life itself.

Later in the evening I was drawn into an arbitrary game-board situation around the kitchen table. It is the sort of thing I never do, but it provides some close communing for the players. It seems to be an empty pursuit, but there are valid side-effects, like the relief of concentrating on something other than the usual concerns.

Midnight or one in the morning, with everyone asleep. I went up on the hill beyond the apple and orange trees, the lone pine, and lay down in my usual spot with a rock as a pillow. It was not too cold and I looked up at the stars. A three-quarter moon on the left illuminated the hill rising to the right.

Silent night… all is calm….

Friday, Dec. 24, 1993

Slow going in the morning. I was out of sync and a little edgy, not used to walking into a kitchen and finding a lot of people talking at once, including the five-year-old who never shuts up. I felt like W.C. Fields around him. My sister implied there is a reason I live alone.

No one wants to go to the desert, so I cleared the dead leaves out of the pool.

A discussion with my father and a couple of others on the subject of angels. There was a cover story in *Time* this week, and a similar article in *Newsweek* (a divine coincidence). As a Protestant minister who drifted from the established church while dealing with social problems on the border (and building homes in Tijuana), he was surprised at a survey saying 69 percent of

Americans believe in the existence of angels. Nearly half assume they have their own guardian angel (the one that protects their marriages I suppose). He has a high regard for science, and wonders why so many fall back on retrograde beliefs. Similarly, some people are surprised when others fall back on fascism, like they're supposed to know better or learn from history. Whether it's angels or dictators, my father has a rational view of human beings, and can barely fathom how the minds of holy reactionaries work.

I'm more pessimistic, so it doesn't surprise me. I think it's an illusion, or a generalized assumption, that humans are benevolent. Just because some voices of reason exist, it doesn't follow that everyone reads the *New York Review of Books*. It doesn't follow that given certain conditions another generation won't succumb to a blind faith in a power structure. Especially in a modern context where, as the poet Robert Lowell put it, "a savage servility slides by on grease."

We knocked the concept of angels around, and I mentioned the fascist assumption that most people are conservative and irrational. Give them angels and police and tranquilizers and anything could happen, including my incarceration for doubting their humanity.

In the afternoon my other brother arrived from Los Angeles with his Latina wife and two-year-old son, with her expecting a child in January (they are in their mid-thirties).

5 p.m. Half of the people left for a church service. I didn't go.

7 p.m. A big dinner, though not much work was involved since they ordered out.

8 p.m. Everyone was in the living room distributing the presents, including the small pile I brought. I got a used answering machine from my parents, a scented candle and a picture of herself from my feminist sister. I think I was supposed to burn the candle in front of the picture. I also got some shirts and a calendar. Complete chaos with the wrapping on the floor. The two-

year-old, a little wobbly on his feet, was determined to stuff it into a box, then dump the box out and start all over again (as if coming to grips with a Sisyphean concept of litter).

My father liked the *New York Times* magazine from 1950 with an article by the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr.[95] He was one reason my father took a year off from being a minister in a small town in Wisconsin and moved to Manhattan (after which we headed to California). He wanted to attend Union Seminary, where Niebuhr taught, the most progressive theological school in the country.[96]

The two-year-old, having been a little shy at first, was warming up and for some reason he took to me. Apparently, he doesn't let many people come close, but we got along. He had a pile of toys that he would try to play with all at once, gathering them on the floor. There was determination and awareness, like he knew what he was doing. He was patient when an older person didn't, who might move a little truck from its line-up with the other cars and he would put it back. He doesn't say much, but knows what you're saying. His mother suggested he take his shoes off and he immediately sat down and struggled with the laces and removed his little Nikes.

Eventually he got me to carry him out the door, pointing which way he wanted to go, dazzled by the strings of lights on other houses. We ended up walking a block or two past homes that glowed in the dark, with him pointing when he wanted to get closer and me holding up my end of the conversation.

When we returned I stood in front of a tree, the bare branches strewn with lights. He had a look of wonder, reaching for a light, and then we went inside. I was struck with how much a two-year-old knows. I could almost believe in the homunculus at this point, with human beings

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[95] "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary."

[96] I rode the subway on my own, living on the 19th floor on the edge of Harlem, and all of my friends were black (I went to PS 129). It was 1961 and I was nine years old. There was the worst snowstorm in years, blue lightning in a subway tunnel, and no bad memories.

born as mini-adults who're more or less aware, just taking a while to learn the language and get used to the customs. Once they figure out who's who, the toilet, and the ambulatory, they are on their way.

Earlier he took his shoes off and put them on the pile of presents. He helped me remove my shoes and carried them one by one and put them by his. Then with his image recognition he pointed to a picture of a Christmas tree and the real one in the room. What a concept, the likeness of real things and real people. It filled him with such a paroxysm of delight he could hardly contain himself, falling over backwards and lying on his back with a big smile on his face.

I know the feeling, but it's been a while.

He also has a working knowledge of VCR's and microwave ovens, things I'm still not good at, and pointed me to the equipment, pushing buttons at random. He had his own video, *Aladdin*, which someone put on and he pointed to the image on the box (a genii) and then at the screen. I thought of a genii coming out of the television.

Later that night my two brothers stayed up with everyone asleep. The one from Los Angeles went through a box of his old photos, which led to one of those moments when the past is getting to me. Early 1989 with a young woman, the ex. It looked like we were in love at his wedding reception. You build up defenses for pictures you have seen, but I hadn't seen these before. It was further evidence of a fluctuating life. A previous tangent is left high and dry when you go off in another direction. Maybe the past is easier to remember when that happens.

If the zig-zags in your life expand your memory and awareness, and if the latter are useful for a writer, you might be in for a lifetime of changes, altered locations, and/or discontinued relationships, whether intentional or not. The things you have touched on, when abandoned or taken away, leave an echoing recollection in the air, and attain more definition

from a distance. It is disconcerting, and I don't like the idea that a writer's rearview mirror is where he sees things more accurately, meaning he will have to leave people and places in order to see them more clearly. How long can you do that until you end up living alone in a bare room in the Tenderloin?

There is an unconscious motivation of those who find their memories heightened when they're on the verge of dying, maybe even courting death, looking for those angles of experience which are like the witching hour. A pivotal moment of increased engagement and surprise. And what, for that matter, is more pivotal than an eyeball?

I could be another writer who ends up living like a monk, where the cutbacks and the losses occurring over the years because of his detachment leave him in ascetic conditions. My life has been chopped and bored and lowered like a motorcycle. Not that I'm a bodhisattva on a chopper.

Where was I? Grating sticks of cinnamon into a rum-soaked eggnog. My brothers were soliciting an extra focus by way of a gameboard which looked like a headlock and I went out back. Orion floated in the void like a second cousin. A string of lights across a black-bottom pool, looking like a constellation in outer space. The wavy lines of a reflection moving across a wall of concrete bricks and an orange tree.

I touched the water and it sent a reverberation going all the way back to 1971: a mountain lake in the high Sierras, past the tree-line. I was on acid and touched the surface of the water with the care and wonder of a two-year-old. A trout swam under my hand which was lined with diamonds.

I stood on the side of the pool, casting a long shadow part way up the hill, then turned around and looked into a half-sunken room with a lamp and my bed.

Saturday, Dec. 25, 1993

The L.A. people left in the morning, with the two-year-old not in a good mood. He sensed the departure and realized something was on the verge of being lost. He was aware of his mother's swollen belly, and familiar with an ultra-sound machine, moving his hand over her lower stomach and making a humming sound.

I thought of when my brother was in college and working as a night clerk in a Hollywood hotel. A black man held him on the floor with a gun to his head (it was a robbery). If he had pulled the trigger it would have ended my brother's life, and two children would never have existed.

Idle hours in the home before leaving for a 5:20 flight. My parents and two sisters had one of their serious-liberal discussions. It was on bisexuality for some reason. I was more interested in a video which had been left on, and caught the last half hour of *Aladdin*.

It's something how people in their thirties and forties return to their parents' home and fall back into juvenile moods and attitudes, that being how they knew each other originally. Their adult lives have been put on hold as they while away the hours in the atmosphere of their parents' home. And being in the company of little kids can bring you back in no time. It is difficult for them to operate on your level, so you gravitate to theirs, playing with the toys on the floor and looking at things like you'd never seen them before.

I forgot to mention, yesterday, late afternoon, there was a photo op with everyone in semi-formal attire (just before they went to church). We went up on the hill where the light was

intensified from a low angle. I wore the dark Italian suit, white shirt, and tie. There were shots near a clump of pear cactus, and the three (unsmiling) brothers in front of a tree laden with oranges. Photographing our mortality, if not our similarities.

In the afternoon I packed my bags, folded up the bed, and availed myself of the hot tub for a while with its pushbutton jets.

It was a half-hour drive to the airport in San Diego and we went in two cars. I rode with my youngest brother and the five-year-old, relations with whom had been deteriorating. I had gravitated to an unamused adult position, tired of his spoiled kid routine. I said goodbye to my father and brother on a crowded curb with a mechanical disembodied voice in the air, and walked through the terminal. There was an X-ray of my presents. I made it to the departure gate and waited.

My presence over the last couple of days was not entirely smooth or easy to handle, and more disconcerting was the fact that I couldn't help it or it's what I'm made of. I have absorbed a lot of tension from where I live.

It was nearly dark when the plane took off, the lights of San Diego sliding away and revealing the coastline. The plan banked to the north and twenty minutes later drifted past Los Angeles. I was able to view old neighborhoods below, according to the configurations of San Pedro, Long Beach Harbor, and Santa Monica (along with the fire-darkened area of the Malibu hills). It was a peripheral glitter to my sister, but her focus is closer to home. The offspring had the window seat, and I sat next to him. All of the cities we flew over were Mountain View to him. There was some discussion on that point. He is used to wallowing in his opinions and conceits, but I figured it wouldn't do him any good in the long run if adults are patronizing,

going along with whatever he wants to believe. He was unclear on the concept that he might be wrong. I said those cities were not all Mountain View.

It was a stand-off which led to an interesting shift. He wanted a pen to draw with. His mother handed him a ballpoint which he got tired of in no time, insulting her with continual admonitions. He wanted a colored pen or felt tip. I had a purple one in my pocket and didn't say anything. I finally told him I had one. He said, rather carefully, "Can I have it?" "No." He thought about it. "I'll say I'm sorry." I let him think about it for a minute, then handed it over and he was nicer after that, realizing how I might be useful. You get the purple ink when you are more respectful.

And yet, approaching the airport he kept pointing out where the runway was (we were miles away). I said, "If that's the runway we just missed it." He had to revise his comments, including the suggestion that he tell the pilot to turn around. We landed with a bump and grind. Walking through the terminal I said goodbye to everyone and he jumped into my arms.

A blue shuttle van into the city with a grey metallic skyline and streams of slow-moving lights coming and going. I was dropped off at my place and found it depressing. Who lives here? The transition was a little hard to take. I changed from the suit into something more fitting for the Tenderloin and went out for a meal. It was cold and dreary and a little threatening.

Walking back to my apartment I was nearly home when there were two Latino guys walking in my direction. As we passed on the sidewalk, I heard a metallic click as a switchblade appeared in the hand of one of them. I moved slightly to the side and continued with the two of them in the corner of my eye, sensing that no one was lunging in my direction. Since the knife was near the wall and I was near the curb I had some room to move in case it was anything more

than a passing gesture. It was not too friendly, and not what you might expect on Christmas night, but they showed an admirable restraint in not stabbing someone.

Back inside I was a little tense for a while. Welcome home and all of that.

Sunday, Dec. 26, 1993

Typing in the morning.

I called Ming around noon. It turned out we missed each other last night with phone calls, and there was a plan for her to come over later on. More typing and a wooden instrument.

3:30 p.m. I went out for a few things. Overcast, a light drizzle. On the way back I saw her arrive at the door and pick up the phone in front. She turned around as I walked up. She is cultivating an old look of hers, which is more womanly. Not that I don't like her in overalls and army boots, but she can fill out a dress like no one's business. It was dark green with small white flowers, along with a brown leather jacket and lipstick. Big hug and a kiss and we went inside.

We were there for eight hours. I'm not sure how, though it was broken into phases and the fact that we operate with a spontaneous combustion like we fuel each other (fool as well). She had a small bottle of rum and a few lemons, heated some water with honey, and made us drinks which deserved an encore. Talking for a couple of hours while the radio had a program on the history of the Velvet Underground (KUSF).

There was an interlude where she passed a brush over paper, a fluid abstraction, while I was on a wooden guitar. It had a sensuality which eludes definition, something like her. I'm generally impressed with her stream of conscious efforts, the abrupt changes and unpredictable forms – not unlike her conversation.

Phone out for a pizza, with the radio on a different station. “Heroin” was replaced by swing music.

8 p.m. Gunshots not far from here.

10 p.m. Eggnog and brandy and coffee. Our provisional plans for going out were slowly being revised as the hours passed. We were enjoying ourselves just sitting around, having had some notion of a nightclub, or the hot tub and sauna place, but we never went anywhere. The last hour or so we were lounging on the bed with its thick cover and pillows, leaning against the windows overlooking the street.

Around midnight I called a cab and walked her outside. A big kiss and a hug.

Some of the topics touched on in a conversation which wandered all over the place - free associating, silly, serious, and sardonic, maybe even stereophonic. In no particular order:

I said maybe she has no feeling in her mouth (apropos of some other comments). “Fish lips.”

She will never take a sociology or women’s studies class again.

Cross-cultural situations full of gullibility, guilt, and hustlers. A white friend of hers fell for a smooth-talking Native American man, supposedly a “spiritual” sort who was politically committed. Turned out he had a reputation for womanizing and was in and out of many beds. He was with a faction which had caused some friction on the subject of which Indians are real enough to represent the cause. There was a good chance the faction he worked for, headed by an Indian woman, was supported by reactionary forces in the government which wanted to divide the Native American movement. Call him Johnny Snake-in-the-Grass.

On the allegation that Christianity oppresses women, who apparently have not had an orgasm since the goddess faded out centuries ago. Or did she? Like energy or water the goddess cannot be destroyed, she just takes on another form (including the Cult of the Virgin). In other words, women were oppressed and the goddess was denied, except when they weren't and she wasn't.

Looked at from another angle, there are churches where the congregation is mostly women. Why do so many take to the church if it is bad for them? It enforces moral codes which discourage their husbands from running around. It extolls the sober life and the home, not to say the sanctity of motherhood. Sounds anti-female to me.

The Catholic Church was known for having an eroticizing effect with its repressive atmosphere. If it was suppressing sexuality, the men bore the brunt of it. Women were restrained from sleeping with hundreds of men, but Ming admitted this is not exclusive to Christians. It occurs in other cultures. American women might feel sorry for women who're sequestered with limited freedoms, for example in Islamic countries. Then you hear the comments of Islamic women who feel sorry for the women in this country who are less protected, like they're on the backlot of a dirty movie studio run by drunken louts.

There was some mention of Alice Walker and her book on female genital mutilation in the land of the living goddess, where the people are so full of life that female circumcision is a common custom. The collision here of international feminism (which is against it) versus the assumption that indigenous customs are automatically valid and wonderful (as long as white people aren't involved). I mentioned an article where a couple of educated African women took issue with Alice Walker, like she was a busybody and should mind her own business. How many black women in this country who put down white people while extolling the Afrocentric would

take it to its logical conclusion, identifying with their African sisters by subjecting themselves to a dull knife of the motherland? Alice Walker said, “Torture is not culture.” I have a lot of respect for her work, but I would disagree with that line.

Ming was trying to fathom the phenomenon of a young woman being “sewn up,” much less mutilated.

With respect to the room she is leaving in a flat near the Haight, there is a possible renter but he might not be a good prospect – a heterosexual cross-dresser with a whip who would practice S&M in his room. In their first conversation he told her how his penis works or doesn’t work when it comes to urinating. Something about no pressure, and so much for the “arc of transcendence.”

Then she wanted to know if I would drink champagne from a woman’s shoe. Some years ago she had a boyfriend who did that and she thought it was romantic. I said, “I thought you weren’t romantic.” “I wasn’t… maybe a little, but don’t tell anyone.” She couldn’t believe I wasn’t interested in drinking from a woman’s shoe. It would only deserve bad champagne, which I wouldn’t touch. The good stuff would require a glass. Anyhow, her shoe would be all wet, and it isn’t like it would be reciprocal – a woman drinking champagne from a man’s shoe. “Of course not,” she said drily. “Men’s feet smell.”

We drifted into one of our speculative discussions about sex. Earlier I said I was getting stubborn. She paused with a look of wonder. “Getting?”

Monday, Dec. 27, 1993

Typing.

Went to work in the afternoon.

I found a card from the French-Vietnamese receptionist who used to work in the law office. The last I heard she was on her way to law school on the East Coast. We had been on good terms, and nearly went to the desert together.

> Hi ya! It's been awhile… I know.
> Law school has been keeping me too busy.
> The workload is a pain in the ass. So
> finally G. is completely out of my life…
> no more stress!!! He was a lunatic. Anyways,
> how are things going? The attorney still driving
> you mad? Is _____ asking about me?[97] Ha ha.
> Did ya move back into your old apt (one that burned down)?
> Any gossip to tell? Goodness, it's obvious that I do miss
> chatting with you. Going thru finals, so gotta jam.
> God bless,
> Write me.

I worked for a few hours. There was a lot to do – it accumulates while I'm gone. He doesn't hire a replacement.

6:30 p.m. I ran out of typewriter ribbon and walked home.

Read the paper, and then *Picasso and Dora* with my interest waning. I've been reading fast before the book dies on me. I have an accelerated attention span, and often leave books half finished.

Fell asleep early.

Tuesday, Dec. 28, 1993

Typing in the morning.

Ming came over around noon. I was sitting at the typewriter in a pivotal chair. She looked nice, though admitted she was wearing mostly men's clothes: a dark green sport coat, dark wool slacks, black men's shoes, with long black hair and lipstick. She was looking for a job and

[97]A manic-depressive client of ours who was in and out of jails around the country, depending on whether he took his lithium or not.

needed help with her resume. I let her do the typing, which went something like this: tap tap tap "Fuck!" click click tap.

I was surprised at how many jobs she has had, though barely twenty-four. Being so androgynous, or is it gender-neutral, she wouldn't mind operating that cute little bulldozer in the lot next door. Meanwhile, she was acting nervous. I said, "You want a banana?"

"What, I'm going to stuck it up my butt?!"

I took a shower and got ready for work. We left around two and took a short bus ride downtown. There was a gallery which I read about the other day, a women's show.

We took an elevator to the third floor and walked into "FEMALIA." Pencil sketches on a theme of woman-to-woman eroticism. The works of five or six women, but only one of them was worth looking at and she was from England (Nicola Tyson). The Americans were a poor comparison, like psychotic amateurs or schoolgirls with their dirty doodles. It was sloppy second-rate material which evoked a different sense of time and concentration, like they didn't have much. There was an erratic contour of a woman on her knees with a phallic object that must have taken several minutes out of her busy life.

On the other hand, the English woman inhabited the medium she worked in, spending minutely-concentrated hours on it. There were pencil compositions on a small scale, one-foot square or less, with a surreal finesse. How to evoke the vulva of a figurine without any legs? An armless entity in a suit coat with her breasts coming through it, lounging on a loveseat in a finely drawn room. It could have been the work of Hans Bellmer's daughter, it was that well done.

The others were what you might find on the wall of a women's locker room. There were brutal scenes with strap-on attachments and appendages like a fake leg (stuck in a girl butt) - the aesthetics of prosthetics. You would think there was an element of self-hate here, except the

artists are highly evolved (according to their P.R.). One of the books had some hectic scenes where a small mob of women were cutting off the dicks of captured men (tied up and prostrate), and using them to their own ends.

We left, with both of us mildly impressed, and found a copy shop further on for her resume. A lone man operated the machines.

I walked her to the underground monorail (applying for a job at a diner in Berkeley where the Phantom washes dishes). She had a crisis of confidence on the way, like having none. It makes you wonder if a fear of rejection implies a big ego. She expressed some concern about being unemployed and not having a structured routine in her life and being a kept woman. Relying on her boyfriend rubs her the wrong way. A kiss and she was gone.

In the office a black woman with her neck in a brace was talking with the Attorney. I worked a few hours and then left. There was a vague plan of going swimming, but I hadn't heard from her so I went home.

8 p.m. Ming called. The interview hadn't gone well, the manager had no time, and her ex-roommate (the Phantom) was being weird. "He's a strange-oid." Some men just don't get it – you have sex with them and they think it means something. Even worse, they start to like you. I was on an energy current for some reason, and we had a conversation which bounced back and forth for over an hour with a few interruptions, like call waiting. She said she called me six times that night. There was a question of whether or not she is elusive. I said, "You're elusive as a forklift."

There was some mention of a black man she used to know in Oakland. He had some spiritual leanings, but undermined the pose by offering to hurt any man she asked him to. I remember when she mentioned that with a self-satisfied air. I thought it didn't fit with the

feminist agenda, or the humanist one either (they are known to overlap). She stopped seeing him eventually. It was hard to ignore a "sleazy" aspect of the man when it came to women (I think he was married for one thing). Anyhow, we were talking about Buddha and she said the man (who drove an Afrocentric BMW) told her that Buddha was a black man. I said that sounded like cultural appropriation if he meant that Buddha was somehow related to him. People in India have dark skin, but I don't think that's what he meant. There are centuries of paintings and sculptures of Buddha and they don't look like he's from a sub-Saharan country.

She mentioned one of her preoccupations, wanting to watch someone masturbating or having sex. She is not sure how to get around the feeling of being a voyeur, but her curiosity is getting the best of her. I said there is a natural tendency for observing other people. I know I have an observational overdrive related to the writing, but it feels like voyeurism if naked people are involved. The main thing, she said, was to be up front about it. It's not like you're doing anything shameful.

There was some mention of how she likes veins in people, not having many which are visible. That led to some discussion of an area in a man where bulging veins are not uncommon – the erect male organ. "Mine looks like a road map." She said, "Not all men are like that."

We got off the phone and I fell asleep early that night.[98] It's a method for eluding coffee, beer, and cigarettes, and thinking at so many typographic words per minute. Having a warm bed is an antidote, and that's all he wrote.

Wednesday, Dec. 29, 1993

Woke up early with the sun barely clearing the buildings.

[98] The Czech woman called around midnight. It was a sleepy conversation, maybe fifteen minutes. She is feeling discouraged and wants to leave the country.

My desk[99] and typewriter are against the windows facing the dawn with the shades half-drawn, so I was in the shadows with a streak of light on my hands while typing. Blue smoke swirled in the air.

10 a.m. Ming called. She was putting a few things in a blender and said, “Mix, puree, or whip?” I said, “I don’t want to hear about your sex life.” She said more than one man is waiting for her to become fat and lonely, at which point he will be there. She is not impressed with that approach. I said, “What if you become like a pillow?” “Don’t say that.” “Pillow pillow.” There was a plan to meet at the pool this evening.

11:30 a.m. I called the office and found V. was out sick for the third day in a row. I called her at home and we talked for half an hour. I had a sense of when someone is bedridden and their defenses or façade is down. It was a reconnoiter with another side of her – more real, lying in bed, relaxed and petulant since her head hurt, coughing once in a while, and not taking any of my suggestions for a remedy. I recommended a hot medicated tea. “I don’t like it.” She wanted lemonade.

Then she said in her quiet voice how she liked the stone inlaid box I gave her. She thought it was heavy and could put her jewelry in it. We talked about whether she should take a hot bath or shower and how she doesn’t have an appetite. I was ready to go clear across town and bring her some soup. She mentioned our having lunch next week – her final date for leaving is next month.

I got off the phone and B. called. “You’ve been talking for hours.” She wanted to meet at a café on Post.

[99] A black door lying on two sawhorses.

2 p.m. I walked there, a few blocks, wearing a dark suit coat, brown slacks, pink shirt, and a blue and white striped tie. She thought I was improving or evolving and maybe there is hope. Then proceeded to give me a present which turned out to be a tie I wouldn't be caught dead in.

I kissed her anyway. She showed me the bracelet and earrings from her girlfriend – finely wrought, expensive blue stones. She is being drawn further into the affair, like they're going steady and she is becoming more absorbed in a lesbian milieu or the other woman's worldview, something she has been resisting. In recent weeks she has put me through her doubt and anger about this woman, making it sound like things were falling apart, but they're not.

Then she pulled out a newspaper and party lists for tomorrow night. Everything from a druggy party on the edge of town to crashing the big hotels. Even a nightclub like DV8, though probably too crowded.

I noticed a *Vogue* lying on the wooden bench and picked it up and opened to an article on Lucien Freud. There was one of his paintings, "And the Bridegroom" (1993), with a man and woman lying naked on a nondescript iron bed. He was on his back and she was on her side with her back to him, very thin and small. He was bald and barrel chested (a homosexual in real life – the composition implies a horizontal standoff). The magazine showed the man and woman lying on an iron bed from a different angle than the painting. The man had a thick male organ which was airbrushed out of existence by the editors of *Vogue*, though it showed up on the canvas by a Freudian stroke of luck.

I was struck by how his quirky poses work, or maybe it is his perspective with an angular lens of realism. The hipbone of the woman is a tour de force, with a slightly sagging stomach. She is in the foreground, with the man behind. The horizon of his body is against a black screen

with one knee up. Another leg is flung out. Her legs are bent, extending his presence even further in the composition. A diagonal leg is another line of force. She has one foot on his leg, a nice touch. The effect is a flurry of curving arms and multiple legs and lines of force which lead to or quote the man's cock. In other words, an organ framed by legs, and yet the pale glowing center of the composition is a little to the right, being her hipbone rising in the air. The lyrical interaction of mutual limbs and torsos, with her curled up on the side of the larger man, both feet on his leg. It was reminiscent of Adam and Eve, the myth of a woman coming from the rib of a man, which is not politically (or even biologically) correct, but there it is, in the flesh.

The models, or rather the people modeling, are smoother and creamier in real life. Lucien seems to carve them (wrote crave) into existence with brush strokes. I don't know if Lucien is a master of illusion, rather than of flesh, but the magazine is opting for the latter, being dedicated to skin and hair and bodies hung with clothing. He made the woman bonier than she is.

Their unconscious repose is set off by the glowing folds of a heavy old blanket they lay on, which seemed to wash onto the floor like a receding wave. Her head in the crook of her arm, and him in a similar situation turned away. Curves and angles on a swirl of cloth which symbolizes the canvas this was painted on. The man's leg stretches the canvas towards the bottom left-hand corner.

Where was I, sitting in a small café with B. I showed her the article, and noted something about the breast of his wife being "ex-posed." When we left I took it with me. We parted on the corner and I walked to work.

In the office there was another divorce, something to do with "irreconcilable differences." I worked for a few hours.

7 p.m. Walked to the pool. Ming was in the lobby, which had a lush embellishment for the holidays. She looked tired, in a plain and unembellished mode, hoping the pool would revive her outlook on life. She may be out of work, but at least she's in the water. I had a cigarette, then headed for the pool downstairs. The locker rooms for men and women are separate, which doesn't make much sense to us. I met her a few minutes later on the steps to the pool. She wore a one-piece swimsuit, very sheer, with her dark protruding nipples (it was a little cold).

We had the pool to ourselves for most of the swim and were in adjoining lanes. At first she wanted to swim in mine and tried to keep up with me. I said she could do it just as well in the next lane and she did fine, considering she doesn't swim very often. A strong woman who goes through phases of running or working out, then drops it for a few months until she thinks her body is "too soft." I did the usual mile, 80 lengths in a little over half an hour, and she did about 60 before she got out of the pool and wrapped herself in a couple of towels, saying she was cold. I did a few more laps with her sitting near the deep end.

We headed for the locker rooms. We have showered together before, but not here. We should have, as it turned out there was no hot water in the women's locker room.[100]

The cool night air felt good. There was a comment about what happens when she makes the muscles grip in her leg. "Nothing." We picked up a couple of burritos and walked to my place.

Ming and I sat around having a beer and relaxing. At some point she was talking about how she wanted to watch someone masturbate and mentioned one of her classes in college (Human Sexuality 101, or was it one-on-one). They watched a film where "lots of people" were

[100] One time I was taking a shower in the locker room with a six or eight-year-old girl in the next shower, the daughter of a friendly German man who stood nearby. She eyed me warily, but otherwise was unconcerned. Many years later I was at a hot springs in Northern California with two outdoor showers. A statuesque black woman was taking a shower next to me. It was a lovely stand-off.

masturbating. “All at once?” “No, one at a time.” Young and old, male and female, just to show how it’s done and that you don’t have to be attractive to be sexual.

I wondered if there was an underlying suggestion here, like she wouldn’t mind if I pulled it out and started getting familiar with myself. It’s hard to tell with her, who can be subtle when it comes to setting the agenda while maintaining a covert involvement so she isn’t seen as instigating something. She has told me before that two or three fellows were inspired (not at the same time) to jack off in her presence (she didn’t mind). Maybe she was being suggestive, or suggested it in fact.

Not that she’s an exhibitionist, but she is frank about herself, talking about how shameful it felt when she first masturbated. It didn’t work the first few times, and wasn’t sure what it was supposed to feel like until she finally had sex and eventually, after more attempts, some kind of sensation. One of the more direct people I know, but something as fundamental as a climax is elusive for her. Maybe that has turned her against the very concept of elusiveness.

We were lounging on the bed with the covers and pillows, leaning against the window with her getting sleepy. There had been a discussion about women who live on the surface like a deliberate way of life, or an avoidance of philosophy. Not unintelligent or unaware, but more in line with Andy Warhol’s outlook on things (which he probably got from women).

We lay there and she told me to feel her hand, how soft it was. I assume that anything physical between us has no further connotation. Not only does it make things easier, there is a 60-40 chance of it being true. Make that 80-20.

Then she was all over me, except my back was turned and we were peering out the window at the blinking lights of another arrest. Three police cars with a spotlight trained on a car

pulled over with the doors open. There were several officers (two plainclothes) going through it carefully, looking for something. Never a dull moment around here.

She made an awful concoction of brandy, eggnog, and coffee, and mentioned having nowhere to hang her clothes at home. She checked out my closet since I have room, and said she might bring them over. If I had a girlfriend, she could wear them if Ming liked her. I said, "Your size?" which came out wrong.

11 p.m. I walked her to the underground station a few blocks away, escorting her out of the Tenderloin. On the way back I passed a huge construction site (the new library), an excavation under a filmy full moon. It's like the coming year is under construction. A useful metaphor if I've been living in a hole with some suggestion of pouring new foundations. I could find the moonstruck silver lining in a prison cell, and have.

Typing for hours.

3 a.m. Went to sleep.

Thursday, Dec. 30, 1993

Not enough sleep, and there were men pounding nails nearby. I had some coffee and looked out the window. Even with an idle glance I see the tall distracted derelict on his morning rounds (wrote mourning).

A black man in a long pink bathrobe, or was it a tight dress slit up the leg, head wrapped in a pink towel. One of the surgically-altered I think, and with a masculine-ugly look to him. I would suggest a pink paper bag over his head.

Reading the paper. DEADLY GUNBATTLE SHOCKS STREET-WISE TENDERLOIN RESIDENTS. It was Sunday evening when Ming was here and we didn't hear the gunshots

barely two blocks away on Hyde and Geary. A young Latino walked by a black man on the pay phone (a street dealer hangout). One or both of them said the wrong thing, pulled semi-automatic pistols and fired at the same time. “Both men staggered away before collapsing, face down, along sidewalk curbs on opposite sides of Geary.” The black man made it to twenty-three, his girlfriend “crying and banging her hands on the telephone.” The Latino was nineteen.

There was some mention that “the blacks don’t like it that Latinos are moving in.” Someone should tell them that people of color are inherently more human and know what life is all about and that diversity is strength. “Drug dealers from Los Angeles have recently moved into the neighborhood, igniting a turf war.” How nice. “The telephones… act as magnets for drug dealers.” Reach out and hook someone.

In other news: a man and woman had a fight on Christmas morning. He didn’t live there, but she wanted him to clean the house. I think he declined, which led to an argument. He hit her a few times, so she stabbed him in the chest “with a kitchen knife she was using to prepare Christmas dinner.” He died under the tree like an empty package. Here’s the punch line: “No charges filed in fatal domestic fight.” Hit a woman and it’s worth your life.

Another article: a woman bailed her boyfriend out of jail. They went for a ride with a woman friend of hers. They stopped at a convenience store. It was not convenient for him, however. The woman “walked up to the open car window and shot him twice in the head.” A feminist spokeswoman said a “murder charge is inappropriate.” Maybe they should just charge her with messing up his hair or disturbing the peace. They were in their early thirties, have a fifteen-year-old daughter, and there was a history of abuse on his part. If that’s the case, how come he was still around? How come they “tried to reunite” two months ago? She never learned? Breaking up is hard to do unless you have a gun? It takes a bullet to say goodbye.

It would help if restraining orders on abusive men were more effective, or banishment of some sort, but then you need to track them. A man could be exiled or not allowed in the same county. If he's found there, he is thrown in jail. Unfortunately, the legal mechanism for providing the surveillance and incarceration would be aiding and abetting a police state. Curious how a relaxed morality and no religion would lead to that.

Went to work in the afternoon.

There were piles of files on my desk, a lot of work. Floating past the window were thousands of pieces of paper. It's the end of the year and calendars were being torn up and released like flocks of birds.

8 p.m. On the way home I walked past the surgically-altered streetwalkers – Latino, black, and Asian (maybe one was white). Another rich multicultural experience. A few of them disported themselves on the corner, a tight miniskirt on narrow hips, sticking out their butts and being coy. Grown men acting like girls in high school.

Every night I walk past the corner where those two shot each other, though never on a Sunday. The same phone booth was in use.

Tired, reading for a while.

Phone call from Jon in the wine country. He is relieved the holidays are nearly over and will come here tomorrow for New Year's Eve. There was some reference to his Norwegian background. He had a relative who went with Amundsen to the South Pole. I mentioned Ted Sorensen, the speechwriter for John F. Kennedy. I'm not sure if genetic background is a foundation or a limitation, depending which side of the family you have more in common with. It has a tenuous relevance since I live a couple of thousand miles away from most of the

relatives,[101] and in a country which is not exactly bound by tradition. Bound for glory, maybe, if you have a good agent.

Midnight, hit the typewriter from a tired passive-aggressive angle.

2:30 a.m. Lay down and went through some smoked poems which survived the fire. Some of them were from ten years ago, which provides an objective distance on subjective doggerel.

Friday, Dec. 31, 1993

In the morning it felt like someone pounding nails in my head and I was still in bed. I thought of a horror movie with St. Sebastian. Living next to a construction site can expand your consciousness and hurt your concentration.

Phone call from B., talking about her strategies on how to rendezvous tonight. Figuring out the transportation, destinations, and negotiations. Around eleven or so she will disengage from her relatively straight friends and show up across town at a "women only" affair, and consequently was considering a more risqué look. I didn't discourage her.

Typing for a couple of hours.

1 p.m. Went out, making the rounds on Polk Street, picking up a typewriter ribbon, a bottle of wine, and candles. I returned home and a minute later the phone rang from downstairs.

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[101] In 1997 I went to a gathering of the Sorensen clan in a small town in Nebraska. This side of the family is more professional than my father's side, and the conversations were non-stop and engaging. We took a bus to an old graveyard in the country and walked among the headstones while someone checked the family tree on a laptop. Ted Sorensen was a corporate attorney in Manhattan for many years, but was down to earth and easy-going. (In his autobiography he managed to insinuate with diplomatic finesse that JFK's assassination was a set-up.) The repartee between him and his brother Robert was amusing, and I visited the latter ten years later (and was sorry I waited so long). He lived in a huge apartment on the Upper East Side. We got along so well, talking all afternoon, that I stayed for dinner (on hearing about my life in California he said it sounded like I'm in a "velvet rut"). He had a PhD in sociology, and at some point was Director of Audience Research and Analysis for Radio Free Europe in Munich, Germany.

The Czech woman, who had dyed her hair from purple to dark brown (it was platinum blonde a few months ago). For the first time I saw what she meant about putting on weight. She said, "I have big bones."

She was here for an hour and a half, and told me about wanting to go back to Prague where she has some friends. She is discouraged with her life here, economically and otherwise, and thinks this country is strange.

We exchanged presents. I like giving someone a gift, it tests the psychological accuracy of what you know about that person. You avoid the more generic presents and look for something which will reverberate an inner sympathy. I hit pretty close with this one – a clam shell with metal work converted into a hinged jewelry box with an interior of purple felt.

She gave me a paperback book called "MY WIFE IN BANGKOK," with a lot of "photojournalist" pictures. There was a sign denoting the varieties of entertainment there: PUSSY SMOKE CIGARETTE SHOW. PUSSY WITH PING PONG BALL SHOW.

There was some mention that she is not going for casual sexual encounters these days. If there is not some love involved she isn't interested, unlike her early twenties when she drifted in and out of the beds of various men. She was unconcerned about her effect on men or how they felt about it. She now thinks that women manipulate their feelings and those of others while not being very deep to begin with, and they recover more easily from a breakup because they are more socialized. Men tend to be more isolated, what with the lone male syndrome, and it can hit them hard when a relationship falls apart (which is reflected in a higher suicide rate).

There is some evidence that women are more integrated in themselves. Not just that their organs have an equal significance, but their public (wrote pubic, a Freudian slip) and private personas leave them in a state of fine-tuned compromise. It's a healthy balance, but sometimes

the inner circuits of a woman are so integrated they affect each other, to the point that an emotional state can make her physically ill. Inhabiting an interwoven tangle of heart and mind and body and the public, a woman may be hard pressed to "isolate" or define certain feelings, up to and including a climax. There are some who barely notice their sex organs in the psycho-social tangle of themselves, and require a manual of instructions in order to jack off.

She left around four and I had some time for a few phone calls and to straighten up the place, with Ming coming over and Jon driving in from St. Helena.

6 p.m. She arrived carrying a heavy woven bag with her evening outfit in it. I played a tape she brought with strange sound effects, like tribal disco with a little girl voice. She bought it in Bangkok. A few minutes later she was sitting on the floor in front of a floor-length mirror, putting on makeup and lipstick. She kissed the back of my hand, leaving an echo of her lips.

We sat at the wooden table where she opened her presents, which she tends to do in a mad rush, tearing them apart. The artifacts from India came to light with surprised comments that I would have gone in that direction. A couple were on the more "shimmering" side, and not utilitarian except for the embroidered lipstick case (she thought they used a guitar string). There was a small elephant of embroidered material, and a conglomeration of beads that she tried wearing in her hair but it didn't work. She seemed to like the stuff, including the little bird covered with tiny mirrors. I think it hit her from an edifying unpredictable angle, which is how we operate with each other.

We went to a Vietnamese place and got something to go. I was out of sync for a while, a bit wired in the afternoon but slowly coming around. When we returned to the studio I decided to make a more formal occasion of it. Took a shower, walked out with a towel around my waist,

and found her in a black lacy pant and blouse outfit. I put on a dark suit with a white shirt and a black tuxedo bow tie.

Dinner by candlelight with fragile blue stem glasses full of wine. There were Christmas lights over the windows and her presents glittering on the table. Once again, I was struck by her beauty, especially when she makes the slightest effort in that direction. She can look so different, depending on her moods, from a thrasher tomboy to a glamorous woman. I had imperial rolls and shrimp fried rice, while she had brown noodles and something spicy hot, which doesn't seem to bother her. There were further comments as to whether she has any feeling in her mouth.

8 p.m. Jon arrived from St. Helena (a two-hour drive) with his stuff (a sleeping bag and a change of clothes). He wore a tie and sport coat. It was a little awkward at first between the two of them, although I was at ease. A cabernet among the comrades and I was accommodated, and she found an oldies station on the radio.

They hadn't seen each other in nearly a year. He was one of the roommates in the sound-room flat who had come too close and gotten hurt. The two of them had a long slow build up, being friends who shared a flat, and he would give her rides to school. There was a night or two of sexual experimentation that turned into a crash and burn. He took it hard and didn't talk to anyone for weeks, finally moving to the wine country.

He was hesitant about coming, but the situation was floated with a lot of champagne and the smoke he brought, which was strong and refined. Ming and I had a little, and he smoked half of it. One of the side effects, I should have known, was dissolving any caution when it comes to how much I'm drinking. For a while she had a watercolor pad on the table and worked on one of her organic abstractions. I said it looked like her insides but stylized, with interacting blobs of

intensity. This one represented her liver, that one her appendix, and this long red streak had menstrual connotations, which brought a reaction.

A heartthrob from the 1950's came on the radio. I turned it full blast and things took off. This was followed by my radio montage tapes with shifting and intensive atmospheres, from metal to Chopin. The conversation was nonstop, but we were almost too well situated considering it was New Year's Eve and we were supposed to go out.

When B. came by with a ride to a party, around 9:30 p.m., they weren't in the mood, having another party in mind in the Haight. I didn't care one way or the other, so I went downstairs and talked to B. and her designated driver for a few minutes. She exclaimed how I looked in a suit, stepping back for the full effect and nearly got run over. She looked delectable in fishnet stockings, a short dark dress (low cut), with a tuxedo jacket and a black bow-tie around her neck. There were hugs and kisses, and some notion of a reconnoiter later on.

Back upstairs with brandy poured into the champagne, a deadly combination. Ming's painting had developed some dark shadows. The conversation bounced around, then settled for a while on a couple of recent articles in the paper about women who kill the men they're with. The men were abusive, but it would seem an over-reaction. She had some comments about her older sisters who were "made to think" they have to stay with a man and put up with his bad moods and abuse. I took issue with this "made to think" routine, like what, they're brainwashed by the system or their family? They're not rational human beings who can think for themselves (and presumably vote)? The old argument of being financially helpless and dependent on a man is less relevant these days, there being more women in college and the work force than men.

11 p.m. We went out, saw a cab letting out some people across the street and ran for it, passing some whoring regulars on the corner. The driver took us to a quiet street in the Haight

with fine old houses and a lot of trees. We found a dark Victorian with a forbidding atmosphere and went in through the bottom floor apartment, then out back and up the stairs into a long flat which was a tour de force of expensive restraint and dark wood. There were cloth-covered walls, a table with a lot of food laid out, a refrigerator full of champagne and beer, and a liquor cabinet with everything you could have wanted, including Pinot Noir. There were people standing around, but it wasn't crowded.

It was a Brazilian party, with Jon being "married" to a Brazilian woman (who lives downstairs) for immigration purposes and who, I had imagined, was a loose young woman. It turned out she is in her early thirties and on the tall side with a lot of poise. We drifted to the far end with two rooms adjoining, one nearly empty for dancing, the other with a conversation area next to a fireplace and a Christmas tree with white lights. Whoever lived here had a distilled refinement which went well with our altered state. We were on the verge of dancing when an older man started doing card tricks. It was hard to believe what we were seeing, being a little around the bend.

Midnight found us in the backyard with enormous trees and flaming torches, looking at the back of a church with a partly eroded moon overhead. The hour and the minute arrived, somewhat understated, and I didn't have a watch. Ming and I were caught up in some celebratory (not to say celibate) kissing and crushing hugs which lingered for a while, her being in one of those moods where you can tell she's had a few drinks and is affectionate, resting her head on my chest or shoulder.

Someone hung a firework from a branch. I lit the fuse with my lighter and took a few steps back while it spun around and threw off sparks (a bird in a cage). The last time I was around fireworks I was on the roof of my building near the water in a party atmosphere and

someone handed me something to light. It turned out to be an M-80, and there was a ringing in my ears for a while (not to mention an angry manager running up the stairs and threatening to call the police).

12:30 a.m. Ming had to go, something about meeting her boyfriend who was getting off work and would ostensibly return, or maybe I was supposed to call. At any rate she never came back. I walked her down the street where we stopped a passing cab and kissed in the open door until I think the driver wondered what was going on. These occasional situations are the only time we let go with each other.

I walked back to the party and hung out on the front steps for a while, having a cigarette and a glass of wine. I felt fine, floating with the circumstances, though I never did talk with more than two or three people there. For one thing, around 1 a.m. the Actress from Marin showed up with a male companion. I had told her about the party, and it was a good omen. We have had an ongoing thing of being together on New Year's Eve for several years now, her being good at parties - a Canadian woman who does improv and doesn't hold back.

This part of the evening, the last few hours, is a little hard to remember. There is a dim recollection, like remembering a dream, of the Actress and me getting familiar, standing in a lingering embrace and kissing. It was corroborated the next day by Jon who thought we were at it for half an hour and was amused, considering she had come with someone else. I remember running my fingers lightly down her bare back while she sat at the piano.

I have a vague recollection of looking for coffee (there wasn't any), and young women sitting by the fire. The atmosphere was a little subdued, which Jon observed while we were there. Things would have been turned around if more of my contingent had arrived – B. and company, Ming, etc. On the other hand, I don't recall being bored.

The Actress and her male companion left after 3 a.m. and when Jon and I went out, sometime after four, there were still a few people left. We walked over to Haight Street, which was deserted, and found a cab (a minor miracle) and rode back to my place. He had taken a large cup of vodka, enough to kill a small animal. I had gotten to the point where my head started to spin, so I compensated with soda water, bread and olives, and gradually had some equilibrium. I didn't want another drop of alcohol for several days at least.

Back in the apartment he opened a beer and we sat around. Sometime after five in the morning I lay some cushions on the floor and he put his sleeping bag on them. We passed out with all the lights on.

Saturday, Jan. 1, 1994

It was not the most solid sleep, coming to around 11 a.m. Neither one of us had enough sleep, with him even less since he isn't used to street noise. He is accustomed to vineyards which are pretty quiet.

Hungry, faint, a little dizzy, empty-headed. When half of your brain is put on hold, you're focused on your immediate existence, a relief for some of us. We went out for breakfast and ended up walking half a mile to a crowded café on the corner with a lot of plants. It was across the street from where a truck crashed into a liquor store.

When we walked back I felt tenuous, not null and void, but not all there. Half an hour later we were downtown at an Italian men's store which was going out of business (50 percent off). Jon wanted a suit. I stood around, not looking for anything in particular, but was curious about a linen sport coat which was sky blue with white pinstripes. One of the salesmen noticed and was insistent, saying he could make me look Italian. That didn't seem like a bad idea at the

moment, since I didn't look like much of anything. Jon wasn't impressed, being close to his Norwegian background.

I ended up with the coat, and he found a brown suit. I nearly bought an $80 Italian silk tie which was a bit loud and geometric for $25, but I only wear thin ties. We walked back home with our well-suited silhouettes slung over the shoulder.

He left around 3 p.m., carrying down the heavy bass amp. I read for a while, though still in a primal state. Solid, dumb, and carnal with an ebb and tide of my abilities for doing something at the moment. I took a hot shower, and fell asleep around 5 p.m.

9:30 p.m. Came to, somewhat revived. I walked to a place for a takeout meal and stood behind a male whore in a black leather outfit. When I got back I read some of the Bangkok book (it didn't make me want to go there), and followed it with a wooden instrument.

2 a.m. Went to sleep.

Sunday, Jan. 2, 1994

More or less rejuvenated in the morning, and was typing for hours.

1:30 p.m. Phone call from my parents. I talked with my father about when he was at Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1961, and listening to theologians like Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr. He thinks the relevance of the church begins to fade the further it gets from the poor. In other words, it should not be for "God's frozen people."

I called Ming, who answered the phone with such a low depressed voice I had to shift gears so we could talk. It was one of those moments where you feel buoyant compared to someone who is down in the dumps. Part of her allure is having a tangible presence with a certain momentum, but at times (all too often in fact), this solidity and how she views the world

can run into stumbling blocks and obstacles, like someone living on the material plane where there are consequences, including everything that can go wrong with the body. I think her body is as much a source of tension and problems as it is of pleasure.

She was miserable and yesterday was one of the worst days she has had in a long time. When she left the party on New Year's Eve she was flying high and everything was fine, planning to return with her boyfriend who had just gotten off work. However, when she got to his place she was sick a few minutes later. She couldn't believe it. Normally she can tell if she is drinking too much. Maybe she lost track because of the joint, or there was tension coming from several directions. Jon's being there had made her tense, and meeting her recycled boyfriend may have turned her stomach. He had a miserable New Year's Eve at any rate, having a glass of champagne while she was "hugging the toilet."

The next day he was in a bad mood and she felt lousy. Also, she had nearly rented out her room in the sound-room flat, but the young woman backed out. "Stupid bitch." So she was depressed and wanted to cry and didn't want to hear anything about a happy new year and doesn't like the holidays anyhow. They come with idealistic expectations which don't materialize (in her experience).

I got off the phone and was on a wooden instrument for a long time with a football game on the tube.

5 p.m. The phone rang. It was her again, sounding better, but in a cynical and wired mood. We talked about various things. I mentioned being hung-over yesterday and finding myself in an Italian men's store and being sold a sport coat when I wasn't in my right mind. I described it to her and it sounded worse than it was, though I haven't taken it out of its black wrapping. She thought it sounded awful, but there are lots of things I like which put her off, from

honey and raisins to Russian cabbage soup. It's in keeping with the dynamic between us, a scintillating dialectic. We consider each other to be strange, probably from another planet, and part of the oddness is we get along. I would say it is because of my patience and understanding, not to mention penetrating insight into the murky convoluted depths of her being, but when I talk like that it leaves her skepticism rising to the surface like gas.

Anyhow, she had made some resolutions – everything from getting a job to finding a "creative outlet" for her tension, and something about going to South America on a bicycle.

I said if her tension could be hooked up to a public utility station it would light up the entire town - in case she wants to be a useful member of society. This is another person who is not impressed with my ideas. We talked for over an hour, and then she had to show her room at the flat to some people - and called back a few minutes later, out on the street. She had left the keys to the sound-room flat over here, along with her bag of clothes and presents. Could I meet her at the underground station in ten minutes? "This is so inconvenient for me," she said. "For me too," I replied.

I finished the beef soup and went out. Because of her I was walking down Hyde Street at night with some shady characters standing around. I met her walking in my direction on the last block with a determined almost angry stride, feeling like everything was going wrong. There had been a rude encounter with "a couple of Mexicans" who were coming on to her - even though she wore an army jacket, jeans, a flannel shirt, boots, and no makeup (like basic training, or "Hello men, drop dead."). We walked a few blocks to a clean well-lighted bus stop and waited for a while. I don't know if she expected me to go along or not, but I didn't. She is used to men who're caught up in her slipstream, going along for the ride (and here I am writing about her). Part of the allure is being in the company of a headstrong driven woman, where you don't have

to make decisions or be alone. It is seductive, especially for men who lack direction in their lives. However, it left her with a certain scorn for what she considers weak or clinging men.

I kissed her when the bus pulled up and walked away, dropping into the bookstore for a while. The French novelist George Perec, *Nose* magazine, Lucien Freud, the literary magazine called *Zyzzyva*. I had a "moment of doubt and shame" about the mundane level of my writing compared to a well-constructed fiction.

I walked home and read about the life and death of Elvis for a couple of hours, skipping around towards the end. The writer analyzes him as if it was a case of arrested development. The stasis of his southern status. I have a theory that dumb lyrics are a problem, mentally and otherwise, but that would apply to many singers. It is not just the presence of all those memorized songs in their heads, but the intensity of inhabiting those songs in front of a live audience night after night. The pressure forces the lyrics (along with their vacancy and sadness and occasional incoherency) into the bloodstream of a singer and it circulates through the brain, resulting in a heavy burden of drug and alcohol abuse in order to get his feet on the ground after years of being floated by inflated song balloons.[102] Even if the lyrics have some substance, they still occupy a huge part of a singer's being, and hold off the internalization of other forms of knowledge. And a singer has to cope with the repeated sameness of a song – Mick Jagger in his twenties said he didn't want to be singing "Satisfaction" in his forties, but guess what. The world keeps turning, and repetition comes with the territory. Singing the same chorus a thousand times can lead to brain damage or a form of sonic hypnosis. He seems to have weathered that, but then he takes long breaks from show biz, doesn't listen to his own music, and has the fortitude of a

[102] Hound Dog Cocaine. Blue Hawaii Morphine. Love Me Tender Demerol.

people who used to rule the world.[103] Dylan is so addle-brained from constant touring he can't remember his melodies, much to the consternation of people in the audience who can't tell what song it is until it's half over. But I digress.

11:30 p.m. I lay down and was on the verge of passing out when the phone rang. It was Jon in St. Helena. We had a long conversation until nearly 1 a.m., and it wandered all over the place. One of those free-wheeling dialogues:

> Immigration… bass guitar… fossils in the Badlands…
> personification of trees… New York City… memory…
> dreams… why does he identify with dogs…
> sleeping with an angel… condoms… succubus…

1 a.m. On the typewriter.

Monday, Jan. 3, 1994

NOTES

The truth shall:

set you free
sit on your face
smoke your folks
situate your future
stop your fantasies
sentence the usual felons
startle your father
strip your fears
seduce a young female
solicit yesterday's facts
stylize a used fiction
sodomize a useless philosopher

A homosexual version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

I'm not sure about the shirt,
I'm taking chances with the pants,

[103] Elvis came from a defeated country. It's called the South.

the slacks adhering to the facts
of life, the tie another lie.

A suit and so I'm not ill-suited,
a loser in his comeback shoes,
you leave behind a sense of dread
when you think about your threads.

My guitar is a mad dog.

Drug testing: someone asked if it was multiple choice.

CAIRO GUNMAN HAD PSYCHIATRIC RECORD

2-TON PIECE OF CHINESE SATELLITE TO CRASH TODAY

VOLCANOES MAY HAVE STOLEN DINOSAURS' OXYGEN SUPPLY

"Oxygen levels in the ancient atmosphere…" The lush proliferation of life had something to do with an oxygen level of 35 percent, compared to the "current atmospheric oxygen level of 21 percent."

It would be interesting if a search for the missing chord, feeling a lack of fulfillment, has anything to do with oxygen levels.[104] I used to think when I was a sullen juvenile that someone was standing on my oxygen hose (a Protestant upbringing had something to do with that).

DRUG LABEL WARNINGS NEED NOT BE MULTILINGUAL, COURT RULES.

The odd thing is that one could sue an aspirin company in this country for the warnings not being in Spanish.

A distant and accomplished relative surmised that I am living in a velvet rut – like I listen to a record by the Velvet Underground over and over (the one with "Heroin" on it). He thought I am too comfortable in California, and my life isn't going anywhere (although I was talking with him in Manhattan at the time). I must have been doing the same things all the time since I am not young and don't have much to show for it (except for a lot of manuscripts). I'm stuck in a rut, but maybe I am polishing my act and getting better at whatever I do from day to day on a planet which keeps turning as it orbits around a star. The repetition is hard to avoid, an echo of which is heard in the repeated chants of holy men. It is visible in the growth rings in a tree, the waves washing up on shore, and the

[104] It might have more to do with the phases of the moon. It's like we're passing in and out of fulfillment as emphasized by a full moon.

persistence of your own identity. You bear a close resemblance to the person you were the day before, it is repeated, and if it wasn't you couldn't hold onto a significant other.

The earth is swinging in a groove, and it sets a precedent for repetitious behavioral patterns. I've been in the same apartment for many years, but that has something to do with rent control and the position of the building with respect to the sun and the proximity of the ocean. It is hard to go on living and not repeat yourself. A velvet rut is defined as "Any locale, especially a smaller city, with few opportunities for career advancement that traps its inhabitants with its laidback lifestyle." That sounds like San Francisco, where you're stuck on the end of a peninsula with lethal waters on three sides. I have referred to this town as a laidback cul-de-sac, and gravitated to a way of life where there are few opportunities for any advancement which would interfere with the writing. I am philosophically opposed to the concept, or lazy, and prefer a Mediterranean comfort zone with a wine chaser. Life is too short to squander it on competition and cold weather, and having leisure time is more civilized.[105]

However, you don't want to be like the guys in the Fellini film (*I Vitelloni*) who grew up in a small town and never made it out. It drives some people to drink, and they end up in a Black Velvet rut, sipping the same old whisky like a smooth excuse for going nowhere – a euphemism for feeling right at home.

Letter from the woman in Vienna (who is twenty-nine):[106]

Dear S.

Thank you for writing. I was afraid to lose track – which is so easy and has happened to me at least twice with people I miss now. In these cases I was careless & neglecting only for a short period of time – I still can't figure out how come that your new address disappeared… because it was none of these careless times, at least I was not aware of it. But sometimes I feel like I was not aware of anything, like I would remember that I

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[105] If you live around the same coordinates of town and country for your whole life, then chances are you won't be able to see beyond them. You've been hypnotized into accepting the immediate circumstances as the horizon of your life. It lends itself to mental habits and provincial dependencies. A way of looking at the world becomes locked into place – and that is known as stability. The radar of your being is under the sway of your surroundings, though you may not realize it until you leave, and the configurations in your mind have shifted. If you don't know what you have until you lose it, you may look for loss and exile to increase your knowledge.

[106] We have been writing to each other off and on for years, like communiqués from the hot and cold fronts of our lives in Europe and California. We met around 1984 out at the cliffs. I was alone and a bit forlorn (having just broken up with Simone). Her and her boyfriend were college students from Austria who had taken acid in Bolivia and wanted to do it here. For a week or two I was their adopted companion, to the point they would talk to me in German, forgetting I didn't speak it. I had a hot car (on loan from my sister) and drove them to a clothing optional cove (Muir Beach), but we never did acid together. Months later she went through a difficult romantic breakup, so she was commiserating with how I felt when we first met. Our letters continued from that point on, and eventually this journal started. I had been attempting to describe my life in this country to an intelligent woman in Vienna.

intended to do a minute ago & find myself at a place without a memory of the purpose. So I often go shopping and return with all kinds of things except the very item that I went out for. I've got only one expl. for this: lack of holidays! I need vacation so badly! First opportunity for relaxing is Christmas: 3 weeks but it is no complete holiday because I have to study for the 5 exams in January. I guess I will stay in my bedroom for several days only leave it to get a cup of tea or sg. to eat. ME and the books on a holiday in my bed… I'm dreaming of it, getting up in the morning is so tough. We had snow here… for almost 2 weeks. Today it seems to melt & the sun shines a little bit.

It seems like you are a bit disillusioned about your new place and the area you live in. Your description reminds me of where I live. We call it "Multikulturell" or, with a somewhat disputed acronym, "Multi-Kulti." We have large scale migration of political and economic refugees here in Europe. In Austria due to several wars (former Yugoslavia, Curds and Turkish), poverty and dissolution of the Eastern-bloc countries (neighboring countries CSFR, Hungary, but as well Poland, Rumania, Albany). There are fewer Asian and African nationalities, but of course many Chinese with empty restaurants. 30 percent of pupils at Vienna schools are "foreigners." Vienna has a growing number of inhabitants since 1985, while the number of Austrian women giving birth is sinking. Some districts – like the "Second" one, where I live, have up to 30 percent foreign inhabitants. The street where I live is inhabited by mostly Arabs and Turks with about 15 or more children playing at the corner by the phone booth, where an Egyptian has a little sloppy "deli." A "Club" – where the adults meet (Muslim families) – is on the opposite street. In summer the men gather in groups on the street to smoke and talk. Most houses here are kept and cleaned by Yugoslav families who sometimes sell their sisters in an obviously charming way to the owners of the buildings, or at least they offer what they have when another cousin arrives safely from defecting some Yugoslav battlefield. We have no prostitution here in this part of the district, but the baby-hookers and their ugly older sisters work the streets out of sight. The part of the district where I live was the Jewish Ghetto before they got extinct. But somehow a very few of them seem to have survived, or immigrated later. I often see the little boys with the black hats and "baikeles." They are orthodox Jews, probably from Russia. I live very close – in fact just over the bridge – to the elegant first district with cafes and bars and galleries and expensive boutiques and boulevards which is nice. I like the variety.

> (This is the new design or prototype to something that might be called multi-media letter, as in pencil & PC & telepathy, or before & after you described it in your letter – nothing wrong with mailing a thought or 2.
>
> Here's a fact, sad but true: communication is much easier and much better with men. In spite of all the trouble… FOR ME!

Concerning holidays I am undecided. At least I've got a date, February. A friend said I should see Jamaica. She stays there for a few months. Do you think it could be a good idea to 'stop by' in SF for a weekend before going on to Montego Bay? I am not sure about it because I need to lay in the sand and think of nothing for at least a week.

You and women: the journal of an innocent man…

Are you sure that there is no way of being a partner for a woman and a friend or lover to others? I am after the solution of this too, but I am soooo jealous it won't work, and at the same time I find myself really not that interested in meeting men. Probably because it gets to that inevitable flirting behavior almost every time, except with very young men – under 25. Maybe they feel respect for me – and with "68ers" who have some kind of feminist education. I'll have dinner with one tomorrow, and I doubt if he has wrong expectations.

(He was much like I expected. I think this man is crazy about me, just as much as he is crazy about any woman that looks good and intelligent and smells nice.)

… but he is very intellectual too. But I love (Alex). And I'll not share my body – only the mind. We were talking about political correctness. He explained to me what that means, referring to an (all time) sold out theater piece "Oleanna" by D. Mamet, and to the fact that he was the NYC correspondent of the German press agency. So what. WRITE! (I discovered… domination…)

(Alex will soon be 25 – he is really somebody to stay with. He has only one weakness, that he tries to control while I try not to worry. I will mail this. Please write soon.)

Love…

Tuesday, Jan. 4, 1994

Phone call from B. in the morning, giving a blow-by-blow account of her weekend. It was another unsatisfying New Year's Eve for her, this one compromised by leaving or foregoing other parties to meet her girlfriend at a women-only event. Ilsa had been drinking since two in the afternoon. They stayed an hour and went home, which was a letdown for B. Even worse, her weekend ended on a depressing note as Ilsa can be insulting. B. isn't used to that (having rarely encountered it with men) and was surprised that I wasn't surprised. Her girlfriend has a hard edge to her, which isn't hard to figure out. B. acknowledged that when it comes to being a good judge of character, she is good at dancing.

That reminds me, there was an article in the paper on the gay and lesbian communities coming out of their own abusive closet. Women abusing women, for example, the sort of thing

that was kept hidden or not spoken of.[107] The frequency of it is similar to that of straight people and impossible to ignore. One woman assumed that women deal with each other from a highly evolved if not enlightened standpoint, but it ain't necessarily so. She learned the hard way, a few bruises and screaming arguments later. "I believed that women handled things differently than men did." Well, their phallic extension has an on/off switch.

The article had a "checklist" for determining domestic abuse. I thought of my old history professor and his younger wife in Los Angeles. She qualified for at least five out of six or seven negative behaviors on the list. It's interesting how many women are implicated under these terms and may not realize it, there being more to domestic abuse than bruises.

XXX	Does your partner constantly criticize you, blame you for things that are not your fault or verbally degrade you?
X	Has he or she ever pushed, slapped, kicked, bitten, restrained, thrown objects at, spit at or used a weapon against you because he or she was angry or upset?
XXX	Is he or she suspicious and jealous? Does he or she make it difficult for you to see friends and family, irrationally accuse you of having affairs or monitor your mail and phone calls?
X	Does he or she prevent you from getting or maintaining a job, control your shared resources or restrict your access to money?
	Has he or she ever forced you to have sex or caused you pain sexually without your consent?
XX	Has he or she ever threatened to harm you, your family, friends, children, pets or property? Has he or she threatened to blackmail or 'out' you if you leave?
?	Does he or she have a history of violence against former partners?

The one transgression that doesn't apply to her involves sex, primarily because she is frigid. However, when it does occur he has to pay for it one way or another, which is a pain of

[107] I went out with a college girl about nine years ago who volunteered for a lesbian abuse hotline.

another sort. As defined in these terms it would seem domestic abuse is not one-sided, and some male abuse is not unprovoked.

12:30 p.m. I rendezvoused with V. in the office and we walked to the Hunan place in a drizzle. We shared her umbrella, with her feeling gratified at having the foresight to bring one. "I watch the news!" Smoked ham and garlic over rice, and tea. Sometimes I ask her dumb questions about the Philippines to see how she responds.

Worked in the office for a couple of hours, then walked home.

7:30 p.m. Went out and took a bus to the Mission District, a last-minute decision. I left a couple of messages that I was going to the Elbo Room, but no one showed. Since I was in the area I dropped in at the Roxie, being in the mood for an off-the-wall diversion – in this case a Chinese film known as *Sex and Zen*.

A few minutes into it I had a sinking feeling. Not that my life is a Chinese sex farce, but I had seen it before. It was at the Great Star Theater in Chinatown several years ago with no publicity. I often walked by the theater on my way home from work and being curious about Chinese movies and figuring it wouldn't be a total loss if there was some sex in it I dropped by one night. Apparently, I left early and didn't see the whole thing. It had a proclivity for undermining an alluring moment by cutting to a non-alluring moment, including some "comical" interludes involving castration. There were scenes of romantic kitsch with feminine sighing and moaning voices, and then a dog running away with a man's bloody penis.

There was an episode where two powerful Chinese gods – male and female – were flying through the air and copulating madly, knocking down trees and causing a storm. It was pretty hectic, and the cries of the goddess were translated as, "So comfortable! So comfortable!"

It turns out I missed the last twenty minutes where it returns to a vaguely Buddhist theme (based on an erotic tale from 400 years ago), that men are better off adhering to a calm and peaceful life where sex and women are avoided.

9:30 p.m. I left the theater. When I was standing in line to buy a ticket I was panhandled by a black man, possibly drunk. “I’ll say this nicely,” as if it was an effort, and I should be impressed that he wasn’t emphasizing his authority with a knife or gun. Last night while walking home I was panhandled four times.

I walked to the Elbo Room, a block or so down Valencia. It was crowded and I went upstairs for the Charlie Hunter Trio. There was seating for less than half of the people there. Guitar, sax, drums (wrote sex, a Freudian slip I think). The guitarist made it sound like an organ or a bass and he had a rapid fluid jazz technique, utilizing his customized variations in a composition. The crowd got into it, mostly in their twenties and thirties. The combo opened for Primus last week, oddly enough (I saw them at The Stone four or five years ago).

One beer and I left when the set was over. No one I knew showed up. I caught a cab and floated home in a few minutes.

1 a.m. I wrote a letter to the woman in Vienna.

Wednesday, Jan. 5, 1994

11:30 a.m. Slow going in the morning, having some coffee with the sunlight streaming through the windows when the phone rang. It was Ming.

We had one of our epic conversations, going on for a couple of hours, beginning with the usual rim shots and disjointed repartee, then settling down into some straight-ahead topics. She had been to the open-air market a few blocks from here and would have called, but didn’t want

to wake me up. She felt wholesome walking around with fruits and vegetables, and said maybe she should always carry them around.

"Do you want to come over for lunch?"
"No… you can fondle your vegetables without me."
"What?!"

Some mention of the inherent turbulence of her life which she was currently bemoaning, but other times denies. I said, "My life is smooth as silk." "You're lying."

We went off on a long tangent about cross-cultural couples and to what extent the differences are deeper than some people realize (like the differences of male and female aren't a handful in themselves). There was a curious moment when I pointed out the difficulties with her (recycled) white boyfriend. She said, "I haven't had a hard time." "He did." "Oh right." He went through a year of estrangement while she experimented with other men. It was a revealing moment, as if her own life defined the relationship, and his miseries don't matter.

It is not uncommon for people of color to promote their own inherent differences which white people couldn't possibly comprehend or mix very well with. "It's a black thing, you wouldn't understand." So you're faced with the not-so-edifying situation of being around men and women with built-in walls who might tolerate your presence, but that's about it. And when it comes to interracial marriage, the intolerance I have seen has almost always come from minorities who want their babies to look like them. They want their identities as undiluted as possible. Filipino, Chinese, Jewish, black, Latino – just a few examples of the exclusionary customs of people I have encountered in this country. Ming said her parents didn't want her going out with men of other races, who were commonly referred to as "ghosts," as in "white ghost" or "black ghost." V. was always upfront about wanting her children to look Filipino. I watched a skit on TV where a black mother loved her son and would tolerate anything he did,

however criminal and disturbing, but had to draw the line when he suggested marrying a white girl. “Don’t make me hurt you.” I used to know a young woman who was heartbroken and drifting in her life because a romance with a Jewish man was ended by his parents. They threatened to cut him off financially if he married a goy.[108]

I was brought up with the assumption that all men are brothers, but found out otherwise with identity politics. If you ever forget that you’re a white person there is someone of another race to remind you (often from a negative angle). They protect their culture, while they’re glomming onto anything that people of European descent invented or built as if it’s universal or grows on trees.

We knocked that around for a while, including her disillusionment with her trip to China a while back. There was the rude surprise of not feeling special since everyone is the same race. There was some mention of nonwhite women in this country who gravitate towards white men because the men of their own ethnic background are not very “sensitive,” as she put it, being patriarchal jerks. I wasn’t sure how common it is, but she knows a young Chinese woman who assumes she will end up marrying a man of Chinese descent in order to have kids that look like her. In the meantime, she is “experimenting” with white men, who may or may not know they’re part of an experiment. How do you say, “So long, sucker,” in Chinese?

One reason we get along, our cynical and optimistic sides seem to complement each other with an ever-shifting counterpoint. Meanwhile, she is stressing out about getting soft and being unemployed.

2:30 p.m. Went to work.

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[108] She was unclear on the concept of being impure or an abomination. A non-Jewish woman is known as a *shiksa*, which means tainted meat. A rabbi said that Jews marrying Gentiles is “a second Holocaust.”

The Attorney withheld large amounts of my paycheck over the holiday season, and still owes me a couple of hundred. Nevertheless, he had instructions about mailing an interest payment on a private loan, which I ignored.

I wonder if there is something built into the legal profession whereby lawyers have a fraudulent air. Is it the assumption of being above or to the side of the law? Does it come from years of getting slippery with notions of guilt or innocence, the loopholes going to their head? The profession has accumulated complications which stand between the civilian and the court, and which attorneys navigate at great expense (having generated those complications themselves). It's like the established church in this respect, where people needed middle men to petition the Lord. Mundane legal matters don't necessarily require an attorney, whose influence with the court is overrated as many a client finds out on the losing end of a case. There is a built-in precedent of fraud inasmuch as an attorney is a paid pretender – saying, "My client is innocent," while often knowing otherwise, but he or she is paid to say it (like a hired mourner is paid to weep).

There is an assumption of one's own majesty (similar to doctors and professors) when an attorney works with amateurs – his own clients (not to mention the jury). "Write a letter to what's-his-name." And there is something ephemeral about the law itself. Because a law is on the books (however it got there), people should behave accordingly, and yet it exists in a gossamer state of words on paper which could be immoral, racist, dated, or ignored. There is an inherent fraudulence to fixed pay rates which often have little relation to the actual work performed. The automatic two percent a lawyer gets for handling an estate, for example, no matter the size of it. If it's worth a million and the hours he worked on it add up to a few weeks, he would still get $20,000 and then have to pretend he's worth it.

Walked home, and fell asleep around ten.

I woke up at one in the morning and couldn't go back to sleep. I was not sure if I should have a session on the typewriter, wanting to avoid coffee, beer, and cigarettes for a night. I lay there for over an hour, listening to the sounds of the street. I lifted my head and glanced out the window through the tree, with glimpses of two or three black men across the street, lighting and smoking something. They were quiet about it. With others you would think it is broad daylight and they don't care, yelling to each other halfway down the block at 2:30 in the morning. The local residents are trying to sleep. The same young black woman returned, who is heavy and walks with one arm swinging almost parallel to the ground. Loud and dumb and unconcerned about anyone or anything beyond her own immediate sphere of influence. She stood there with her usual routine, yelling up at a window at the top of her lungs. "R.B.!... R…B.!" (I think she was locked out). She heard someone responding from a block away and yelled back, "SHUT UP! FUCK YOU!... Oh how are you?" (seeing an acquaintance and walking over to have a few words while black guys drifted through the night).

Nearly three in the morning I gave up and turned on the light. I was in a tenuous state of insomnia. Your guard is down and it is merciless, not seeing yourself in a very good light and not because the lights are off. How you respond to it can show you what you're made of. As Sinatra said, "Whatever gets you through the night." If you lay there being beaten by an angel of withering criticism and you don't deflect it with a drink it has the effect of weathering a crisis. Having survived it you can stretch out in a calm mood.

In this case, *The New Yorker*. I read one article after another for a couple of hours. A story by Thomas McGuane about his father dying. "Why don't you just die?" "I'm doing the best I can," and he opens his eyes. There was an article on fishing for striped bass (I'll read anything

as long as it's well written, which might account for the eclecticism of my thought process). By then I felt okay, except for having been exposed to prose that punishes a reader with its exactitude. Some people work at it like a fine-tooled piece of metal and their sentences are polished. As Auden said about his mode of expression, "A poem is a verbal artifact which must be as skillfully and solidly constructed as a table or a motorcycle."

Thursday, Jan. 6, 1994

9 a.m. Woke up with the phone ringing. It was the Professor in Los Angeles. I said, "You and the bulldozers." He said the historical convention will begin tonight at the Hilton (which is four blocks away). He will fly up Saturday morning and we can rendezvous under a timeless chandelier representing the glittering facets of academic discourse, much of which is over my head. He read off a few lectures and panel discussions from his schedule: post-revolution in the late 1700's, something about the postmodern detachment of the French intellectual, and a talk on the archival which he wanted to hear.

He said he flew here on Christmas Eve and finally saw his grandson, along with his daughter and her twin sister who he hadn't seen in six years (a model in London who went into advertising). His daughter is moving out, having become estranged from the father of her one-year-old child, a black man who was "running around" with other women.

Also touched on in the conversation was the fact that neither one of us trusts women or the Mexican government.

Later in the morning I called his daughter, who works as a nurse. She picked up the phone and said "Hello" with a lack of enthusiasm. We talked for a while, and she confirmed something her father had mentioned, that he looked much older these days. It was a recent turn

for the worse, being in his late fifties and insulin-dependent (as a morbid-realistic nurse she could rattle off the side-effects of being a diabetic). She said he is prematurely thin. Adult-onset diabetes can occur when someone is under a lot of stress – which he is (and which his wife exacerbates whenever she can). When I was in college we would have late-night discussions at his place near the beach, drinking and smoking, and he would work himself into a fury when discussing something. It turned out he is borderline manic-depressive.

What is odd about an accelerated aging process (he went through a cocaine phase in the mid-80's which probably didn't help), you wouldn't know it over the phone. The voice is seemingly ageless when compared to one's appearance. The mind and voice go on, relatively coherent and intact when people are in their late sixties and beyond,[109] while their skin looks the worse for wear and tear. It makes you wonder about the body-mind duality if your voice is not determined (or undermined) by the body's condition. The notion of a gender neutrality of thought would also suggest a separation of mind and body.

Meanwhile, his daughter, a tall white woman (one-fourth Jewish), is twenty-nine and has led a racially integrated life. She was on the college basketball team with mostly black women – it was a school of hard knocks. There was an incident last year at a nightclub when a black man was careless with his hands. She had the temerity to turn around and look at him, an act of provocation. He slugged her in the face and walked away, leaving her on the floor and half-unconscious. She had violated his self-esteem by not swooning at the touch of his hand going up her skirt. So suave. While lying on the floor she was robbed.

Now the black man she was living with and had a child with is spending time with other women. That would seem to be a stereotype, except that racial stereotypes have no basis in

[109] I'm editing this in my late sixties.

reality. They are rumors being spread by unscrupulous white people, and in fact she slugged herself in the nightclub accidentally while dancing with abandon. Knock yourself out.

2 p.m. I walked to work, stopping on Bush Street to look at a couple of studio apartments – one was close to where Robert Louis Stevenson lived for a while in 1880. Maybe it would improve my prose if I lived there. It occurred to me how many writers associated with this town were not here very long, just passing through or passing out. From Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, and Stevenson, and later Dashiell Hammett, to Beat writers like Corso, Ginsberg, and Kerouac. You would think that would tell me something, that this transitory wind-blown trance on the end of a peninsula is rocky soil for a writer if he wants to put down roots.

The vacant studios had the opposite effect of what I intended. Rather than finding something which would take me out of here, they reinforced the notion that I have a good place. I am a little concerned about living here, as it has coincided with a bleak phase, sexually speaking. I'm going without while there are hookers on the corner every night. And yet my life is relatively smooth without a significant other. I don't know if this is a dimension I should explore and plumb the depths of (though I wouldn't call it monk-like), or I'm finding out how one is floated by the love and support of women friends.

In the office, working for a couple of hours: personal injury and immigration (or injured immigrants). The new receptionist from India has been here for a month and is diverting. She is a fine-boned woman with distinctive features and long dark hair. When we first met and shook hands lightly her hands seemed fragile, but her voice and attitude are pretty straightforward, swearing softly, "Goddamn it…," when something goes wrong. She wants to be a criminal lawyer some day and is bored with answering the phone. Once in a while we discuss clients or cases. She was summarizing a four-inch-thick deposition, speaking of boredom.

Ami is twenty with a friendly attitude. I sympathize with women who're a little hairy and have to put up with a dumb ideal of being hairless. She has a faint dark shadow on her upper lip and some tiny hairs on her fingers, which I thought was a nice touch. I associate it with the sensuality of someone, rather than assuming she should look like a doll.

Later in the afternoon V. called on the office phone. "Are you leaving at five?" She likes me to walk her to the underground station. Along the way she said, "Are we having lunch tomorrow?" and suggested a place. For that matter she called me at home on Monday morning, saying we weren't having lunch that day. I didn't know we were. She had to go somewhere. "Where?" "None of your business." I won't say she's flirtatious, but the relationship is sinking in a little more. She doesn't mind if we are touching as we walk along, and seems to relish our excursions twice a week for lunch.

In the office she walked past my desk with a conspiratorial wicked smile. I think being alive makes her excited.

I dropped by the Hilton on the way home, walking into a massive and luxurious lobby full of historians. It felt like I was casing the joint, scanning the layout and the whereabouts of the lectures. I looked for a schedule for tomorrow, but couldn't find one. I was around people of a mental caliber which was vaguely familiar, and there was an echo of a road not taken. If things had gone differently, I might have ended up in an academic dimension. Most of them seemed of gentle birth or worth, or maybe the constant act of reading has smoothed over some rough edges.

I took a "postmodern" escalator with the intellectuals who escalate the past. The convention did not have much publicity. Maybe they don't want to be noticed. It's just for themselves and there is limited seating in some of the rooms. Or maybe the historical is a non-

event in a country where the present is everything. A gathering of historians with an equal mix of men and women is getting less attention than a minor hold-up in the press.

If there was more attention to this event there might be protesters who're upset by the insidious suggestion that other people lived at other times, which they see as undermining their self-esteem in the present. And many of the people studied by historians are dead, so the implication is that history or historians = genocide. No one dies if there's no written record of it. Then there is the academic bias of historians who insist on using books to analyze the past and future, rather than killing chickens or pawing through the guts of a goat.

I walked home with half a mind to go to the sound-room, if only for the contrast.

I was reading with a dead phone. I called a woman last night, my old neighbor, who continues to hold my interest. She will speak of balance sheets and Ravel, and is not above the occasional earthy expression. There was something about a business being "bullshit," which surprised me. As mathematical as she is, I have to remember she's a woman,[110] and didn't mind knocking on my door one night in her pajamas.

I got absorbed in an article in *The New Yorker* on the future according to the head of Microsoft. It was about the alleged information highway coming at us like a tidal wave, or maybe an effete inflated non-event (except for the commercial impact).

I gave him the benefit of the doubt, but was slowly surprised at how bland or unnecessary it was, going by his carefully considered email thoughts. "If I had the information tools we are building today I would know a lot more and not have given up learning some things." I wonder how people ever learned in the past, and what if there is something inherent in these electronic "information tools" which undermine their effectiveness. There is an assumption that having TV

[110] That's an odd remark. The college woman I was with in the mid-1980's was studying calculus. Her background was Spanish-Greek. We met at the beach where she was topless and writing Greek letters in the wet sand. She experimented with phone sex and me as well.

and computers in schools will produce more geniuses, although you can't count on them to be literate.

It gets worse. "These tools will be really cool," and he goes on to list some of the benefits, like "meeting someone with similar interests to talk or take a trip together." What a concept, it probably took a computer to think of that. If it takes a computer to bring people together that's pathetic and suburban and I don't want any part of it. It's odd that there are more and more conveniences and yet a waning substance in people's lives. He would like to rearrange the world and run it through his equipment.

As far as meeting someone through a computer, what happens when you see them in person? There is nothing like a computer for blocking chemistry. "If you like to get outside you will find out a lot more about places that are not crowded and find good companions to go with." I suppose if I wanted to go to the beach I could look on the computer and see if it's foggy out there, or I could look out the window or call the Coast Guard station. I'm not sure I want to go to the beach with computerized strangers.

Friday, Jan. 7, 1994

NOTES

> An article in *Vogue* on young playwrights, including Han Ong (twenty-five, born in the Philippines of middle-class Chinese parents). He moved to Los Angeles at sixteen. "It's unbelievably easy to get away with bad writing if one is ethnic…."
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> It's not uncommon for a black comedian to mock white people. I haven't heard a white comedian mocking black people (which doesn't mean it doesn't happen, but they probably get less exposure). Ming admitted the discrepancy, but said that having been to Hong Kong she wouldn't mind more jokes about Chinese people.
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> I dropped into a corner store on the way home from work, picking up a Guinness and cigarette papers. The overhead TV had live coverage of a car wreck with a policeman peering into the wreckage and you could hear the voice of a young woman pinned inside.

Big Brother wants you to know that others have it worse than you. I've seen live coverage of a drug bust with the police breaking down doors, or a domestic violence scene with a woman screaming at a man who was handcuffed, but wouldn't get into the patrol car. The brutal mundane, with commercial breaks.

RED TAPE BLAMED FOR SOARING WELFARE COSTS. Good point – it isn't necessarily people receiving benefits who're driving up the cost. The federal administrative costs increased by 43 percent between 1987 and 1991 (from $3.4 billion to $4.9 billion). In that period the number of recipients of food stamps, Medicaid, and AFDC increased by 18 percent (from 53.5 million to 62.5 million). Those are disturbing figures. Nearly one-fourth of the U.S. is on some form of public assistance? There was some mention of an "overly complex and bloated bureaucracy."

Talking with Ming. She said a generality leveled against white people - which I shouldn't take personally - is when she hears a minority person complain about having to pay taxes. And yet the same people want government services and assistance. Some of them are immigrants who come here for various reasons and then complain about the local customs, like paying for schools and highways with taxes.

If women are known for being more adaptable than men, the downside is when they adapt to the shallow and immediate.

A woman whose conscience is harder to locate than her clit, which has as much feeling as an eraser on a pencil.

Thinking of the song, "P.S., I Love You," where P.S. = primordial soup.

"GLORIOUS EPIPHANY" – the not-so-objective reporting of a woman writing about Toni Morrison. In other words, a gender-racial puff piece.

People complain about the consequences of failure in this country while saying nothing about the consequences of failure in the land of their origins. It may look rosy from a distance, but failure there could be a matter of life or death, like when the crops fail. It reminds me of black women who complain about conditions here while extolling life in sub-Saharan Africa from a mythical distance, having never been there. And yet there is a good chance that Aid to Families with Dependent Children would be replaced with female genital mutilation.

From the article on computers: Whatever you get from a telephone or books would be transformed by this method of anemic interaction through a prophylactic screen. He mentions asking people what they think of a book before wasting his time reading it, like book reviews don't exist. It seems to be a slush fund of information, washing back and forth between amateurs who could be discussing lawn mowers, sex, or crime, but nothing you couldn't learn about by other means (a newspaper, for example).

The author of the article asked him about improving people's lives "by providing them with better tools for thinking and communicating." Thinking requires tools? What would McLuhan have to say about that, when "the medium is the message"? Is the information highway warping those who use it, especially if it's all they know? Will it lead to better writing? From the mechanical coding of a programmer to off-the-cuff emails, I don't think the authors of *Moby Dick* or *Remembrance of Things Past* have anything to worry about.

So what of art and literature? I'm not sure he has any business concerning himself with those, this computer programmer whose father is a corporate lawyer. One of his favorite books is *The Great Gatsby* (he even dressed the part on one occasion, the not-so-great Bill Gates), and he sees it from a positive angle with Gatsby as a "romantic figure." "It's also sort of about America but I think of it more in terms of the people." What?

Even worse, the schmuck has $6 billion or so and is having a house built outside Seattle (where he's from) for $35,000,000 "…with display screens scattered throughout the rooms and linked to a central data base containing hundreds of thousands of famous works of art in digital form." He won't buy an actual painting, in other words, he'll just have it reproduced digitally (talk about painting by numbers). That sounds like an artificial white man who recoils from the real, preferring plastic flowers and elevator music.

He speaks of having a "video-conference with my relatives."

He does have a moment of candor, regarding himself and the "pioneers of personal computers." "I don't think any of us will merit an entry in a history book." Maybe when he gets through there won't be any history books or anyone who reads them. They will be locked into a sterile dimension known as cyber-space.

The writer talks about an essay in *Wired* magazine by Paul Saffo, the director of the Institute For the Future - as opposed to the Institute For the Past, which doesn't sound so bad, all things considered. It's a think tank in Menlo Park, which I hope is not the future. The essay "argued that the information highway is going to cause a flowering of personal expression not seen in our society since the sixties, and that when this happens (maybe in five years) people who we now think of as computer nerds will have the same hipness that in retrospect we now assign to beatniks."

Or not. The "flowering of personal expression" may have had something to do with music and drugs, not to mention a lower cost of living, mass media, the free speech movement, and more free time. Personally, I think it's here to stay. People back then were not drained by computer screens. The Beats were not computerized, and their "hipness" is not something that has to be assigned in retrospect (and assigned by who?). It was there from the start, and they still exist.

I woke up in the morning with a forty-foot metallic praying mantis moving slowly by the window (I'm on the third floor). It sounded like a garbage truck humping a pickup. On second glance it was a contraption hooked up to a cement mixer which went way up, then down through a tube, the end of which was guided by hand into a series of wooden molds with iron supporting rods being filled with cement.

One of the construction workers was a young woman in her twenties with a blonde ponytail, a hardhat, heavy tool belt, and a hammer hanging from her waist. During a morning break she had a cigarette with the other men. One of the hardhat supervisors is a woman in her fifties.

12:30 p.m. I met V. at the office and we walked to the Hunan place, talking about various things. She mentioned the couple recently in the news, "You know, where the woman cut off his…." She was curious when it happened, though she didn't approve. Apparently, they're back together. We wondered how that could be, if men are reluctant to go out with her, knowing what she did, and women are avoiding someone with a compromised organ. They only have each other. It would have been poetic justice if she cut it off and threw it away, but had to stay married to him in that condition.

You wonder if men and women would treat each other better if the other is harder to get rid of, and consequently would be less inclined to piss in their own bath, so to speak.

At the Chinese restaurant I had what she often has, oyster beef, rice, and tea. It was another diverting hour with a woman who is getting more candid, talking about how she and her fiancé have been together for seven years. The first three weren't so good and she was often crying, what with him being a jerk who didn't pay much attention to her. Now she said with a certain pride and determination that he's the one who calls and she is feeling stronger.

We walked back to the office with her usual quick directions. “Come on… let’s go!” I think she likes to give orders.

I worked for a couple of hours, the Attorney having left early, then walked home (passing a guy with a T-shirt: STOP PLATE TECTONICS). I didn’t go to the pool, having a vague sense of a cold coming on or lurking in the wings. We are subjected to some subtle forces, in this case the microscopic cellular changes of a virus growing in our bodies. V. was coughing on me a few days ago, and later I was walking in a drizzle.

That night I was reading and writing until two in the morning.

Saturday, Jan. 8, 1994

11:30 a.m. Phone call from the Professor. He had flown in from Los Angeles and was at the Hilton a few blocks away. I walked over around one and met him in the lobby. There were chandeliers and idle professorial types, the historians killing time in a modern building. He was sitting in the bar at a table. I ordered a coffee and he had a second beer. I hadn’t seen him in maybe a year. The reports of his aging were exaggerated, but he is weaker and has a slight limp, having sprained his ankle recently. He said diabetics take longer to heal.

I showed him old photos of a sunlit afternoon a few years ago when he had a sailboat and I had a girlfriend. We were cruising around the Long Beach harbor. There were shots of old rusty freighters which we sailed alongside of with him at the tiller, and a shot of my ex-girlfriend on the deck while we passed a freighter from China called EVER GENTLE, the words floating above her like a monolithic misnomer.

He said his wife had nagged him for a long time to sell the boat and put the money into some land near Malibu (talk about being grounded). He finally did it, just to have some peace.

Not only did it not bring him peace at home, the land was caught in the Malibu fire. There was some problem with their finances, and I think they lost the down payment ($50,000), which is hard to fathom, and he has no boat anymore. It had been his primary means of getting away from her and the behavioral swamp of Los Angeles.

He showed me the schedule of sessions (we attended the convention here a few years ago). I looked at the afternoon lectures in various ballrooms. A smorgasbord of esoteric topics, and we narrowed it down to two or three choices. FASCISM: A FIFTY-YEAR PERSPECTIVE, which he was interested in. GOVERNMENTS, THE PRESS, AND THE MANIPULATION OF DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC OPINION IN WAR AND PEACE, 1919-1945. Not to mention, COLLABORATION AND RESISTANCE IN WARTIME SHANGHAI.

We went to the latter first, arriving late in a small room, and heard a paper on Chinese capitalists and the Japanese, which was rather dry. The next talk was given by a young Chinese professor, enthusiastic with a heavy accent, STRUGGLE TO ENTERTAIN: THE IDEOLOGICAL AMBIVALENCE OF THE WARTIME SHANGHAI FILM INDUSTRY, 1942-1945.

The two of us walked out with an hour left and dropped in on THE MANIPULATION OF PUBLIC OPINION, but it was packed (in a medium-sized room). A woman in front spoke with a thin quiet voice and no microphone, so we headed for the main discussion on FASCISM, walking into a huge ballroom with a lot of chairs and only one-fourth full. We caught much of the last paper. Generally, three are given with a commentator afterwards. FASCISM AND CATHOLICISM: A RECONSIDERATION, discussing how the church was not as passive as some have thought. There was a commentary on all three papers by an older woman, a tactful discussion of various points raised by the papers.

It was then open to questions from the audience. One of the more interesting things about this event is that the audience members are often as learned as those on the panel, not to say well spoken, with a tendency to deliver a mini-lecture when standing up to ask a question or make a comment. It was a touchy subject, especially with the second paper, REASSESSING FASCIST DIPLOMACY AND MILITARY POLICY (by James J. Sadkovich). He had a neatly trimmed short beard and a manner of speaking which was erudite, though in replying to some comments he managed to stir up more controversy. A man near us stood up and delivered a rousing condemnation of the whole premise, saying fascism is "inherently evil," and he didn't like the objective detachment which Sadkovich tried to bring to the subject. The latter had a good point - how else can you study something except by looking at what actually occurred? Some found that disturbing since certain democracies, including the United States, have been known to throw their metallic weight around as much or more than fascist Italy ever did. That was part of his point, that our perspective is skewed by the labels we put on countries or systems, and it's better to look at what occurred before labeling it. The slaughter of foreign peoples is not rendered more tenable or excusable if it's at the hands of a so-called democracy, rather than a more overtly fascist power.

In replying to this, with a dry almost sardonic manner, he said something about Holocaust studies being bankrupt – his point being that with so much emphasis on the Holocaust it renders what occurs on a smaller scale practically acceptable, having in mind recent events in Bosnia. In his opinion the relatively mute response and/or inaction of intellectuals and historians is a problem. This brought a few people striding up to the podium to deliver emotional objections. Others stood and replied, more or less in agreement with his original premise.

When it was over we went up to the stage. I wanted a copy of his paper. The Professor went off on a tangent about Giovanni Gentile, the "philosopher of fascism," an old preoccupation of his.[111]

Earlier there was a discussion on the social pathology of fascism – I should have brought up *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* by Wilhelm Reich - as a reaction to old ways of life which seemed to be falling apart in modern times. It was an attempt to form a bond, a "fasces," where society was unified (too tightly as it turned out). According to the fascist-minded, that required a corporate state with a heavy military presence (with the military even more organized). Historians should be able to analyze why this was attractive to large segments of the population (the trains run on time, though some of them are headed for a prison) and how it developed, rather than simply saying it's evil and it came from hell. It came from ordinary human beings in historical conditions which could return, if they haven't already (either here or in other parts of the world). There is a problem when one locates evil elsewhere and doesn't notice something similar in one's own country – the U.S. for example, which was pointed out as being imperialistic in its own right. It glorifies war and futurism which prefers velocity and machines and puts down women, all aspects of a fascist mentality.

We headed for a book exhibit on another floor. He didn't have his nametag, but we slipped by a guard at the door and drifted through the aisles of publishers with their latest textbooks. One offered a good red wine so we had some, and eventually found the exhibit of a

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[111] Gentile, born in 1875, studied Marx and Hegel, but managed to formulate a worldview which had no time for dialectics. "His philosophical basis for fascism was rooted in his understanding of ontology and epistemology, in which he found vindication for the rejection of individualism, and acceptance of collectivism, with the state as the ultimate location of authority and loyalty outside of which individuality had no meaning (and which in turn helped justify the totalitarian dimension of fascism)." (Wikipedia, referring to "The Doctrine of Fascism" (1932) by Mussolini, co-written by Gentile. The latter was assassinated by anti-fascist partisans in 1944.

book he had contributed some research for. He knew one of the women there and talked with her while I flipped through the history of civilization. I said I was brushing up. We then headed to a nearby table for another glass of wine.

6 p.m. We left and walked to my place, which he hadn't seen before and was a little taken aback.

I forgot to mention, just before we left he was on the phone in the lobby with his wife (and all those lobbyists walking by), explaining how he couldn't make his 7 o'clock flight and will spend the night. It was not something she allowed, so he was yelling, veins bulging in his head, exactly the wrong thing for an insulin-dependent man in fragile health and she knew it.

Fortunately, he was able to talk about other things besides what a misery she is. I've been hearing that off and on for nearly ten years. I looked through the schedule of papers:

> WITCHHUNTING IN EARLY AMERICA: MULTICULTURAL DIMENSIONS.
>
> THE MEXICAN AMERICAN BORDER AND THE FORMATION OF IDENTITY.
>
> JUSTICE, DEVIANCE, AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR IN EARLY MODERN ITALY.
>
> There was one he could barely fathom: HEARING VOICES, SPEAKING TONGUES: VOICES FROM THE BEYOND AND FEMALE AGENCY IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE.
>
> DECONSTRUCTING AND RECONSTRUCTING THE ENLIGHTENMENT.
>
> THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF PROSTITUTION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE (with some mention of "degenerate or degendered….")
>
> WAS THERE AN ECONOMIC DEPRESSION IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES AND THE RENAISSANCE?
>
> THE HISTORY OF READING AND THE READING OF HISTORY.
>
> ACADEMIC LARCENY: PLAGIARISM, MISUSE, AND DERIVATION IN HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP.
>
> INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZING AMONG WOMEN: THE FIRST WAVE.

A few we missed on Friday:

TRANSCENDENTALIST RACIAL THEORY.

THE ETHNIC DIMENSIONS OF GENDER IDENTITY IN MODERN CHINA.

THE GENDERIZING OF THE SENSES IN ANTIQUITY.

PURSUING THE PH.D. IN AN AGE OF LIMITS – IS THERE A BETTER WAY?

There was a diversity of subjects – from nuclear power to show biz and Hitler, not to mention THE POLITICAL AMBIGUITY OF CONTEMPORARY FRENCH ANTI-UTILITARIANISM. We talked for a couple of hours, and I returned a call from Ming. She is interested in going to a session tomorrow. He wanted to hear the Stratocaster in action, so I plugged it in and cut loose for a while.

9 p.m. We walked over to the Cambodian place, passing by a couple of prostitutes, one in a short tight skirt bending over with her head in the window of someone's car. Phnom Penh curry and Chinese beer (he had two). I had to remind him to check his blood sugar count. There was a large Cambodian family with several tables pushed together and the remains of a banquet with champagne bottles and video cameras on stand-by. More talking, with his tendency to slip into a lecture mode.

We walked back, picking up a bottle of wine. The conversation loosened up. It was something we used to do during my first two years of college in Los Angeles (the second two years were in San Francisco), staying up half the night with marijuana, wine, and coffee. It was an endless brainstorm, though I sometimes had to weather his fury and impatience, working himself into an angry state. I would get the occasional lecture when I didn't know something about American history, but it was worth it. I could bounce questions and comments off his head and get a response. We both had eclectic record collections, but his was more so since his ex-

wife had a radio show on KPFA. During the course of an evening we would go from Russian choral music of the 1700's to the Bonzo Dog Band, or from Albinoni's Adagio to "Blue Monday Hangover" by Albert Collins. There were Judy Garland, Junior Walker and the All Stars, and the flute sonatas of Bach.

Between his diabetes and his wife this sort of thing has been curtailed. We were up until two in the morning and the conversation wandered. We finished the wine. He isn't supposed to drink, but he kept track of his blood sugar with a small instrument. In the kitchen with a piece of bread he would prick his finger and put a drop of blood on a chemical strip sticking out of the instrument. There was a thirty-second countdown and a number was produced. He also had his needles and a small bottle of insulin.

12:30 or 1 a.m., there was a phone call from Jon in St. Helena and we talked for a while. I told him my history professor was here and there was blood and bread in the kitchen. The Professor said, "I'm not Jesus." Jon said he had been doing more things with the musical equipment and video. He also had a dream where I stole a Rolls Royce and we went to a party.[112]

I got off the phone. The Czech woman called earlier, having come by with a woman friend, and I was sorry I missed them. For that matter, Ming wanted to go to a sauna that afternoon. What's more important, listening to lecturers or lounging with a woman?

I picked up the wooden instrument for a while and tried to read the paper on fascist diplomacy, but was getting nowhere while strumming. My reading comprehension returned when I put the instrument down (he was shooting up in the kitchen). When he walked in I said, "Playing guitar makes you dumb." It is the sort of thing he likes to refute as an absurd non sequitur (another is, "Mexican food makes you stupid"). I said there is empirical evidence of my

[112] In the dream he wore a pair of gloves with the insignia of R.R. on them and someone noticed. "You're the guys who stole the Rolls Royce!" When we left the party, I managed to fall off a cliff, but landed in the water and was able to swim ashore.

IQ going down when I am on the guitar. He said it's more like my attention is diverted. I said, "There are dumb musicians in the world," and he admitted that is true.

2 a.m. I pulled the mattress off the box springs and let him use it with some blankets.

Sunday, Jan. 9, 1994

7 a.m. He was up and ready to go, having to catch a 9 a.m. plane back to Los Angeles. Foremost on his mind was what he will face when he gets back. Muttering over and over to himself how she will make his life a living hell. He will have to pay for this, for disobeying as it were. He said people don't know how duplicitous she is, capable of being one thing in public – phony polite and following the status quo – while in private she is one of the worst screaming harpies he has ever met, having status anxiety and a sense of having wasted her life, for which he is somehow to blame.

Then he was gone and I went back to sleep. A couple of hours later I got up and went out for a few things. A sign at an auto repair shop: IF YOU THINK EDUCATION IS EXPENSIVE, TRY IGNORANCE.

Ming came over around noon wearing a long green dress with little white flowers and carrying a potted plant she picked up for me. I had some coffee and showed her the schedule of sessions from 1 to 3 p.m. We missed the morning ones, which included a session I would have gone to: LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY IN THE ERA OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION. It included a paper, the title of which the Professor and I tried to figure out: THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE SENTENCE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF GERMAN IDENTITY. I wondered if it had something to do with the complexities of the German language, and if those require a more exacting mentality. I asked if French is an older

language, having Latin roots, but he said, "*Au contraire*, German is."[113] It developed in a more isolated state at some remove from the Roman influence. The language came into modern times retaining some guttural pagan sounds.

I would have gone to the early sessions since they were chaired by a professor from U.C. Berkeley, Martin Jay, who I heard give a paper a few years ago. He has a powerful articulate comprehension with his mind working like the gears of a fine machine. I remember his succinct response when someone asked why socialism isn't more efficient than capitalism. He said it is more about justice than making money.

We walked to the Hilton around one, having decided on a few possibilities. AESTHETICISM AS POLITICS IN CENTRAL EUROPE. Ming had some interest in EPISODES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF CHINA: MISSIONARIES, MANDARINS, IMPERIALISTS, SINOLOGISTS, AND THEIR TEXTS. Both of us were interested in THE CHAOS OF HISTORY: THE SCIENCE OF CHAOS AND THE NATURE OF HISTORY.

We first went to WAR FINANCE, EXPENDITURE, AND PUBLIC OPINION IN TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICA. It was in a medium-sized room (half full) and we heard the first paper, an informative attempt at tabulating the "real costs" of 20th century wars involving the U.S., and graphs were handed out. An historian should be good at economics to know what's going on. I took a few notes on the British Empire at its height, 1870-1914. 2.34 percent of the Gross National Product was spent on national security. It was about the same percentage for the U.S. military budget in the peacetime year of 1940. The casualty rate for American soldiers was about 2.5 percent in WWI (half of which were from disease) and 1.8 percent in WWII. In the Korean war it was 2 percent, and in Vietnam it was 1.7 percent.

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[113] *C'est discutable*.

We waited for the next speaker to hand out leaflets on the relation of defense spending to public opinion, the latter a "powerful predictor of U.S. defense spending," then left. I walked her to a room where we split up with plans to meet in the CHAOS session. I went to the AESTHETICISM room and heard the last half of IMAGINED RESTORATIONS: LEO STRAUSS AND ERNST KANTOROWICZ IN WEIMAR INTELLECTUAL LIFE, with Martin Jay in the audience. There was some mention of Strauss looking for a philosophy which would be universal, but with Jewish roots.

This was in a hotel across the street. I walked back to the Hilton and found the CHAOS in a small and crowded room on the 6th floor. There were a few people on the floor. It was airless and the speaker was droning on in an uninteresting manner. I stood in the doorway and Ming arrived a minute later. We found a couple of seats when someone left.

It turned into one of the more vital and prolonged discussions I heard, during which I took some fragmented notes, having caught the end of IF HISTORICAL EXPLANATION IS THE PROBLEM, CAN CHAOS THEORY BE THE ANSWER? Apparently not, according to the speaker (Roth). Then we heard IS HISTORY CHAOTIC? by Reisch, who seemed to think it is, and his talk had a smooth clarity. One of his points concerned the dynamical versus the phenomenological approach to the chaotic. The latter involves the assumption that what you see is what it is - whether or not you come up with a working model to explain it. He pointed out that Galileo refuted Aristotle's contention that objects of a different weight fall at different speeds. He couldn't explain it, but he could observe it.

When it comes to phenomenological narratives versus dynamic models, the former fail to offer epistemic access (a lack of knowledge, in other words). It is an accusation against chaos theory, whose proponent replied, "Phenomenological chaos is not so epistemically anemic."

There is some question as to how chaos is defined, with features which are observable. The underlying dynamics are there, with "differential equations driving the system." There were objections to "horse-kick randomness," and questions of how to be cognitive of the chaos of history without losing any "sensitivities to its initial conditions."

There was some mention of having empirical access to dynamical models, and history's dynamics versus appearance. Chaos theory has something in common with physics when it comes to explaining rather than discerning hidden forces. There was a reference to path-dependent non-linear dynamics which lost me.

What blew the discussion wide open was when there were questions from the audience and we heard from a fellow in the front. I don't think he was an historian (no nametag), but was in his early thirties with straggly hair and a few books, like *Origins of Order*. He had a lot of confidence and proceeded to take apart the whole discussion. In his opinion, a well-considered critical perspective, it was almost behind the times. Chaos theory has been operating in other fields, like neurobiology and sub-atomics. How come historians are lagging? It's not a question of whether chaos exists, but rather finding the mathematical equation, the working chaotic models which are being attempted by him in relation to neurobiological evolution. He mentioned non-linear fractals, bifurcation, the "origins of order," repetition, emerging fractal structures, a stream of tradition, emerging complexities, and pneumonic narrative. He was well grounded in the subject and went on at length. As to the papers of the two speakers who refuted chaos theory, they were practically extinct or would be soon.

All of this was moderated by a smooth talker whose paper I missed, THE CHAOS OF HISTORY: ON A CHAOTIC MODEL THAT REPRESENTS THE ROLE OF CONTINGENCY AND NECESSITY IN HISTORICAL SEQUENCES (Michael Shermer).

There were other comments and questions from the small audience. An older man kept trying to inject the notion of human nature and morality into the discussion, and nearly ran the whole thing aground in a debate of determinism versus free will, saying if it's all caused by abstract forces then moral outrage – like for a Hitler – is impossible. We're studying human nature, not mathematical models of history.

A younger guy with sideburns and a ducktail haircut, oddly enough, tall and gaunt, moved as he spoke and used his hands. He had a certain precision, and asked how we can speak of historical events as if they are "discreet individuated entities." What is an event or sequence? There is a problem which historians have with narratives, telling a story which is not exactly scientific. Someone mentioned the analogy of gas (more chaotic), liquid (human beings), and solid (structures). Historians have to be learned in other fields, from psycholinguistics to mathematic model formation.

I wanted to talk about entropy, the notion that systems or structures tend to fall apart. I hadn't heard any mention of it, but something held me back. Either the discussion was interesting and I didn't want to interrupt, or I wasn't on the same level as the speakers.

I also wanted to bring up chaos theory versus Hegel and historical determinism.[114]

4 p.m. We drifted away, with Ming having gotten a lot out of it, and left the hotel, heading for a 1950's jukebox joint with a red vinyl booth. After that we went to my apartment, passing by the search and arrest of a couple by plainclothes detectives.

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[114] Earlier there was some mention of media-driven phenomena – a feedback loop where the engine driving it is the rate of information. Also "tuning parameters," citing the example of a recent trend involving suppressed buried memory syndrome. A female demographer objected to the suggestion that this occurred mostly with women.

We sat around talking for a couple of hours, feeling comfortable, if not lethargic. She wanted to go to a sauna, but also a used bookstore (it was closed) and maybe the cliffs. I said something about her teaching English as a second language and a light went on over her head.

7 p.m. Ming and I walked to A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books and were there for a couple of hours, what with her capacity for browsing and sitting on the floor. She objected to my being skeptical about how bookish she is. I learned that she has never heard of Aubrey Beardsley or even Giger (two extremely different artists - the biomechanoids of Giger are like robots with oil-slick erections.) We looked at Lucien Freud and Egon Schiele - his pencil sketch of a girl masturbating - then drifted apart. I ended up in the periodicals, then walked back and found her looking at something about the Eros of the ugly – deformities, freaks, and hermaphrodites. She has a physical curiosity, and was staring at "misshapen" labia, penises, and bodies in general.

Sitting with her I found a book which I got absorbed in for a while – essays by a black writer for the *Village Voice* who I used to take issue with. A good writer with something of a rim-shot journalism, using the vernacular and attitude to good effect while customizing his opinions with an angry prose. He wasn't only there to blow hot air into a black balloon. He mentioned the misogyny of Public Enemy and discussed it with his girlfriend, who thought it comes from LOP, "lack of pussy." The connotation seemed to be that pussy is the defining principle of women, and you couldn't like or dislike them for any other reason.

Flyboy in the Buttermilk, by Greg Tate. He was posing on the back cover like he's great and doesn't want to integrate, except on his own terms and the going rate. He also voiced some disappointment with the latest writings of Amiri Baraka, the diminishing returns of the polemical.

When we left, we walked past the dome of City Hall, its aura of constitutional protections glowing in the dark. She still wanted a sauna, so we walked to the nearby Grand Central Hot Tubs and Sauna. There were a few shady characters hanging around, and a black man sitting on the sidewalk. As we passed, he muttered something nasty in a raspy voice, to which she took offense. I'm used to it, but the intimidation (not to say the insults) are becoming tiresome to her. This is someone who defied her parents by believing in a universal brotherhood of people, but found out the hard way that not everybody thinks like that.

She mentioned an incident when she was thirteen with her sister in Chinatown and they missed the bus one night. They had to walk home, and found themselves passing by a public housing project. They were yelled at and threatened by black people: "Chinks!" "Go back to your own neighborhood!" and so forth.[115]

In the hot tub place we got a wood-lined room with a sheet-covered mattress. We hadn't found an open liquor store and had no alcohol, but that may have heightened the experience. We took off our clothes and a minute later were in hot water, sitting in a wooden tub and being embraced by a warm and turbulent vortex. You don't realize how much tension you have until you're in a relaxed setting. I was on an underwater bench, stretching my legs out and touching the other side with one foot on either side of her.

After a while she stood up about waist deep and scratched her back or tried to, complaining about how her skin itched. I started running my fingers down her back, lightly scratching the skin, which she took to like a cat. We ended up with her standing in the middle of the tub while I got a grip on her with my legs and did a thorough back rub and massage from her neck to her legs, including her butt which she said was tense and likes to be massaged.

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[115] In the late 1990's there were Vietnamese immigrants in the same housing projects as black people. They were subjected to harassment, robberies, and assaults. The issue was ignored by the black mayor, Willie Brown, since it didn't fit the dominant narrative of black people as warm-hearted victims.

Having gotten out of the water and tested the sauna a couple of times, throwing water on the rocks, we finally tried it. It wasn't hot enough, but we had already been there twenty minutes. We sat next to each other on the top bench, the heat slowly getting to us, though not quite to the point where your hair is on fire.

We were sweating and she leaned back with her boobs lying on her chest and said they are too soft, while she smoothed out her straight black pubic hair. She complained about her stomach too, a big-boned woman with slender hips. That led to more scratching with her leaning back and me asking how it felt, getting positive responses, so I went lightly down the front of her neck to her waist and thighs, across her breasts, lifting one and then the other and scratching along the underside and over the top, a procedure she seemed to like, and across her lower belly. It was easier with her skin more sweaty, and she lifted her arm for me to lick it. I had gotten to the edge of her bush when she sat up.

She returned the gesture, saying, "Hold out your arms," and lightly scratched the skin on my inner forearms and hands, which sent a faint chill down my back in the midst of all that suffocating heat. She asked if there was anything else she could do, and I couldn't think of anything – the downside of becoming too relaxed. (That reminds me, she keeps using the word "asphyxiated" when she means "fixated.") She gripped my arm until the veins were bulging.

We got out, took a cold shower, and returned to the sauna. The phallus was behaving itself, having risen to the occasion in the hot tub when I held her with my legs and massaged her butt, but it was underwater and her back was turned. It went straight up and then subsided like it was a false alarm.

With ten minutes left I took a soapy shower. She lay on her back on the sheet, looking too inviting. I walked over from the shower with a mouthful of cold water and sprayed her. Earlier in

the tub she had some ice in her mouth from her Calistoga water. She tried to spit it into my mouth, missing about ten times, but got one. I dried off while she took a shower, standing with her back to me with that determined stance a woman has when, head down, she washes her pussy with her legs apart. Then she dried off, wrapped in a towel, and didn't want to put her clothes on, but finally struggled with a bra and a long dress.

We walked into the lobby and sat on the lounge, surprised at how sleepy we were, and wondered if this was more effective without alcohol.

It was after eleven on a Sunday night, with most places closed. We walked to Market Street and up a block where there are trees and eerie lighting. I prefer that to an avenue of future shock. We waited for the bus, with her having an orange, completely at ease, and saying how good she felt. She brought up the subject of the New Year's Eve party, and said if she hadn't left I wouldn't have been kissing that other woman later on. I said, "If you hadn't left, maybe you wouldn't have thrown up," which struck us as funny for some reason. The bus showed up, there was a kiss and a hug and I walked away.

A block away from home I headed for a corner store. There was a black man selling his Street Sheet for $1, and coming on like I was his oldest friend and he would be waiting for a contribution when I came out. When I emerged a minute later he was there, still with the act, and said, "I'm homeless and my wife is pregnant." I didn't want a paper, but gave him my change (60 cents). Having the change in hand the act stopped like someone turning off the light. He turned away without a word.

I returned to the apartment around midnight. It was another occasion where we were together for a solid eight hours, or in this case nearly twelve, and it was relatively effortless. We hardly ever talk about this, but she wondered how it would be if we ever lived together, if we

would get on each other's nerves. She has a propensity for getting into arguments and twisted situations with men, but said her and I never argue. I was about to differ, but she said, "We debate." There's a difference. True enough and *vive la difference*.

Monday, Jan. 10, 1994

I called B. in the morning, with her having left a few messages yesterday (I was avoiding her calls). She was depressed with things not going well with the other woman. I was reluctant to hear it all again, but we got into it for a while. Then she suggested meeting on the courts on Russian Hill.

I got there around 11:30 a.m. It was nice out and there was an empty court. She arrived a few minutes later and we had a good workout, over an hour, working up a sweat with her slamming some hard low forehands, taking out her frustrations with her girlfriend. She kept up a running monologue about her problems with Ilsa, being somewhat circumspect, but anyone listening could have figured it out. An older man on the next court finally said to me, "Is she a writer?" – as she was going into novelistic detail about a relationship.

It continued for a while. We rested on the bench and she gave me a biographical sketch of the woman as if looking for a clue that might explain her behavior. She is from Germany and her father was a Nazi. He moved to Florida and did well, then died in a suspicious car wreck when she was six or seven. She is now thirty-three, her mother is in Germany and hasn't seen her in ten years. Ilsa was married to a woman for years (who did dry wall and moonlighted as a stripper), and had a cocaine habit for a year or two, blowing her inheritance. The same-sex marriage fell apart – at one point one of them was holding a gun on the other – and recently she was in a *ménage a trois* with a Jewish couple.

There is a curious dynamic between them. Ilsa is wound tight, but able to cut loose in bed. From the sounds of it, B. is almost the opposite - to the point that Ilsa resents how freewheeling B. can be when socializing, drinking, and getting stoned. On the other hand, there is this little problem of B. not coming up with the desired response in bed. There was some reference to "pushing my buttons" and mechanical expectations. B. was hurt by the assumption that if she doesn't have a big O it means she doesn't like Ilsa as much as she says she does. Ilsa takes it personally. You'd think she is familiar with the elusive aspects of the female orgasm, but she acted like a man who doesn't get it.

B. would prefer a man in this situation. Being a woman, Ilsa felt she had the right to criticize or be insulting. She has a mean streak in her as plain as the lines in a road, but it still shocks B. Men are easy by comparison (in her experience), they're not fluctuating from one week to the next. The steadiness is boring for some women (especially if they want some drama), but she misses the reliability. She never knows what mood her girlfriend will be in, if the busy little gears in her will come up with more things to argue about, and it drives B. nuts.

We walked down the hill to Polk Street. I kissed her when the bus pulled up and went home.

3 p.m. I went to work. The Attorney was in his office, firm and semi-apologetic about having been behind on my pay through the holidays. It still continued, with the latest being a $500 check he gave me recently which bounced. Nevertheless, I had to realize that when it comes to available funds I'm third on the list behind his mortgage of $3000 a month, and interest payments on a massive loan from private parties ($700 a month). He needed the loan because he blew a case a few years ago (misplacing a document in his office and missing a filing date), so the client sued him for what the case was worth – between $50,000 and $100,000. It is illegal to

treat an employee like this, but that doesn't phase him, or my having to get by on other means when he comes up short.

Meanwhile, in the slush pile on his desk there was a letter from the authorities in Nevada concerning our manic-depressive client. He is wanted for felony arson. When he doesn't take his lithium he is capable of crossing state lines and burning things. They wanted documents from the psychiatrist to show that he is not responsible for his actions. This is the man who showed up a few months ago, normally a solid citizen with a job, but turned into a dirty derelict living on the streets. I took him out on the balcony (the receptionist complained about him) and we had a surreal conversation. His mental illness was getting to me after a while as he told me about bugs crawling under his skin. I realized how much I depend on the sanity of strangers. He managed to urinate on the floor of the ladies' room while there, and also in the elevator.

5 p.m. Walked home. I edited the journal from a few years ago, crossing out extraneous and redundant words and phrases with a heavy black pen.[116]

9 p.m. A long workout on a wooden instrument with something on Channel 9. A miniseries on the miseries of people in this town in 1976, a few of them living on Russian Hill: *Tales of the City* by Armistead Maupin. Oddly enough, it required a British production to bring it to the screen.

It was infused with a homosexual context or subtext, or subterfuge and refuge, but allowed for the co-existence of others. There were heteros with the temerity to get romantic. It was soapy with a lighthearted approach to real-life situations, and the author as the Enlightened

[116] I write like a rabbit on the run.
I edit like a tortoise.
Even worse, my literary
agent has rigor mortis.

Homosexual with a sense of humor and the right to be insulting. Like women writing about women, or blacks about black people, there were comments which if made by someone else would be dismissed as ill-founded slander.

This was hitting close to home, time-wise. In 1976 I returned from a year in Europe with Simone, and by 1977 I was living in North Beach and then on Russian Hill. There were some differences however. I didn't operate in a world of disco promiscuity (for what it's worth, Maupin wrote for the *Chronicle*). It was more like punk clubs and the Art Institute, with a certain writer not producing a serialized account of his life for the town newspaper, but rather some neo-poetic efforts and a broken-field prose.

The role of the landlady, Anna Madrigal (an anagram for "a man and a girl"), reminded me of when I moved here from Los Angeles in 1972. I found a room in an old two-story wooden house on a hill above Castro and Market (long since torn down). There were vines growing through the walls. The place was run by a woman in her fifties who taught classical guitar, drank bourbon every day, and was supposedly the ex-mistress of Segovia. She was not on good terms with two young lesbians who cavorted in the garden like sun-struck nymphs.

As for the serial in the newspaper, I never followed it. I wasn't nearly as preoccupied with the news back then as I am now.

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 1994

NOTES

> I read the paper on REASSESSING FASCIST DIPLOMACY AND MILITARY POLICY (43 pages, followed by 22 pages of footnotes).
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> Other topics from the historical convention:
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> SPECTACLES OF POVERTY IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE.

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES UNDER THE BOLSHEVIKS.

BRINGING MODERN MOTHERING TO THE PEOPLE: THE BOLSHEVIK "CIVILIZING MISSION."

SEX AND LOVE IN EARLY MODERN SPAIN.

FAMILIES, FLIRTS, AND FORNICATORS: TESTIMONY FROM THE CONFESSORS' MANUAL.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF HOMOSEXUALITY (along with gendered symbols and boundaries of difference).

BLACK WOMEN CREATING THEIR OWN WORLD – with a paper entitled ABYSSINIAN ROCKS IN A WEARY URBAN LAND.

An excerpt from THE DOCTRINE OF FASCISM (1932) by Benito Mussolini (co-written by Giovanni Gentile):

REJECTION OF INDIVIDUALISM AND THE IMPORTANCE

OF THE STATE

Fascism is therefore opposed to all individualistic abstractions based on eighteenth century materialism…. It does not believe in the possibility of "happiness" on earth as conceived by the economistic literature of the XVIIIth century, and it therefore rejects the theological notion that at some future time the human family will secure a final settlement of all its difficulties. This notion runs counter to experience which teaches that life is in continual flux and in process of evolution….

Anti-individualistic, the Fascist conception of life stresses the importance of the State and accepts the individual only in so far as his interests coincide with those of the State, which stands for the conscience and the universal, will of man as a historic entity. It is opposed to classical liberalism which arose as a reaction to absolutism and exhausted its historical function when the State became the expression of the conscience and will of the people. Liberalism denied the State in the name of the individual; Fascism reasserts the rights of the State as expressing the real essence of the individual. And if liberty is to be the attribute of living men and not of abstract dummies invented by individualistic liberalism, then Fascism stands for liberty, and for the only liberty worth having, the liberty of the State and of the individual within the State. The Fascist conception of the State is all embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value. Thus understood, Fascism, is totalitarian, and the Fascist State - a synthesis and a unit inclusive of all values - interprets, develops, and potentates the whole life of a people.

> No individuals or groups (political parties, cultural associations, economic unions, social classes) outside the State. Fascism is therefore opposed to Socialism to which unity within the State (which amalgamates classes into a single economic and ethical reality) is unknown, and which sees in history nothing but the class struggle. Fascism is likewise opposed to trade unionism as a class weapon. But when brought within the orbit of the State, Fascism recognizes the real needs which gave rise to socialism and trade unionism, giving them due weight in the guild or corporative system in which divergent interests are coordinated and harmonized in the unity of the State.
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> The right to national independence does not arise from any merely literary and idealistic form of self-consciousness; still less from a more or less passive and unconscious de facto situation, but from an active, self-conscious, political will expressing itself in action and ready to prove its rights. It arises, in short, from the existence, at least *in fieri*, of a State. Indeed, it is the State which, as the expression of a universal ethical will, creates the right to national independence.
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> Reformism, revolutionism, centrism, the very echo of that terminology is dead, while in the great river of Fascism one can trace currents which had their source in Sorel, Peguy, Lagardelle of the Movement Socialists, and in the cohort of Italian syndicalists who from 1904 to 1914 brought a new note into the Italian socialist environment - previously emasculated and chloroformed by fornicating with Giolitti's party….

12:30 p.m. Lunch with V., the conversation a tour de force. She talked about the Philippines (which she left at thirteen). Boys and girls were separated in school after the sixth grade, I think. Not a bad idea in her opinion, otherwise girls would be inclined to "flirt," and it would distract them from their studies.

I made some reference to the Japanese occupation in World War II, her parents having told her stories about it. Her father was born in 1944. His father was killed by the Japanese. We talked about the reluctance of the Japanese to admit they were the aggressor in World War II when they invaded China, the Philippines, Korea, and other countries in the Far East. The excuse that they were protecting their Asian neighbors from the white man didn't hold water, what with the massive piles of bodies they left behind. She gets angry thinking about what they did in the war. "Who do they think they are?"

More recently there have been Japanese products flooding this and other countries, but they won't let American rice into their country (it's cheaper).

Both of us had smoked ham and garlic over rice, hot sour soup, and tea. We walked back to the office with her in a carefree conversational mode.

I did some work. Aisha, one of the secretaries at a nearby desk, asked if she could file for bankruptcy to get rid of some debts. She is trying to get out of school loans and doctor bills - but had a humorous approach. During an affair with a man she blew a lot of money on him (a $500 black sapphire ring, and a few hundred on a banquet in a private room).

Meanwhile, V. was overworked and rushing around. She called me a couple of times, could I help her out with this or that, sitting at her desk and nearly pulling out her hair. "I'm going… craz-ee…!" There was some mention of a doll, or rather D.O.L. – date of loss.

5 p.m. She was working a few minutes late. "Wait for me!" I walked her to the station and then went home (one and a half miles).

I read reviews and articles from the *Village Voice* to the *Wall Street Journal* - mostly women reviewers who are not impressed with the latest by Naomi Wolf, *Fire With Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century*. "Some of the arguments in this book are tired and wrong. Others are on the mark, but many more are confused."[117] Sounds like three out of four points she tries to make are tired, wrong, or confusing. She "swallows whole the notion that the 1980's were a backlash against women, despite their phenomenal gains during that decade." (My two sisters could attest to the last part, as well as my mother.) She "persists in saying that women earn 66 percent of what men earn, though the correct figure is 71 percent and the disparity is much smaller for younger women." That disparity is further skewed by a small

[117] Karlyn Bowman, "Making the Transition to Power Feminism," *American Enterprise Institute*, Jan. 10, 1994

number of men who make obscene amounts of money. It also ignores those women who are supported by their husbands (whether dead or alive).

Wolf's view of the media "is a jumble." "She describes the media's portrayal of feminism as one of omission and ridicule, yet she says that without the women in the media the gender quake could not have happened." Consider that for a moment, "omission and ridicule." Like you hardly ever see women in magazines or on television, and the few times you do they're being ridiculed (instead of glorified by mass media exposure). I wonder if she would rather be a sci-fi writer, constructing a world where a Wonder Woman reigns in an atmosphere that doesn't bother with realism or cause and effect.

And yet she is shoring up a claim to verisimilitude when she "excoriates feminism for ignoring women's darker side," quoting statistics that "32 to 41 percent of women in prison are there for violent crime." That is misleading – there could be a hundred women in the whole country in prison, with thirty or forty having been violent. Also, "Women account for nearly 50 percent of the physical abuse of children." Men and women are equal in that respect.

Her book is disorganized, and "ideas ricochet off the pages, frequently colliding with one another." The underwhelmed reviewer in the *Village Voice* said the author admits to "blossoming" in the sun of men's "sexual attention." All fine and good for the Wolf-flower, but that sort of attention can be inconsistent, while turning her head in different directions (I thought she was married).

I think most men are not diverted by the overtures of women, for better or worse, and so they're able to concentrate on what they're doing. We can still blame men, however, for the inconsistencies of her prose. If like a flower she turns in the direction of their sunny attention, but three out of four of those men are tired, wrong, or confused, it might show up in her writing.

9 p.m. A long workout on a wooden instrument while watching the second night of *Tales of the City* (the former assures the latter is not a waste of time).